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Tracing the Tradition of Comic and Constructive Criticism by Jesters in Imperial Courts of India

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Abstract:

The historicity of the tradition of the comic criticism which has been an integral part of the Royal Courts in India, has been established through the works of many writers such as C.M. Naim and Beatrice K. Otto. The folk heroes of wit Birbal, Tenali Ram, GonuJha, and GopalBhand raise themselves from folks to the dignified courtiers by dint of their wit and clarity of linguistic expression. The researchpaper focuses on outlining the techniques through which these jesters tend the irrational and how their wits contribute to the good of all. The researcherhas classified six techniques through which the jesters tend the irrationality of the kings. It has been observed that the witty minds of Indian wisecrackers are never in haste to respond to anyone. Rather they take time in a premeditated manner to spin a strategy. Through this research paper, the researcher has sought to pose questions of contemporary relevance: In today's political scenario, do we have such fearless ministers who would care to critique the spendthrift political parties and governments? And equally important question: Do we have such rulers who give space to the truth-tellers?

Key Words: Comic criticism, constructive critic, imperial court, jester, jesterdom, *vidusaka*, clown, anecdote, fool, irrationality, cultural narrative, situational ambivalence, linguistic ambivalence, linguistic deftness, wit, wisecrack, power of laughter, repartee.

The comic character of courtier as constructive critic at imperial court in India appears to be the continuance of the rich Indian tradition of *Vidusaka* – a major character of Sanskrit Drama. The character of *Vidusaka* resembles to the character of court jester in terms of their relevance at the court. The celebrated work of classical Indian dramaturgy *Natyasastra* describes the court jesters as dwarfish and hunchbacked. For instance, we find several *Vidusakas* such as



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Ashtavakra and many more. Welsford comments on the presence of clowns at the court: "...fools of mental deficiency could have been kept partly to protect the king, to ward off the evil eye" (67). Welsford's assessment of Indian court jesters does not get any approval, as the anecdotes associated with these jesters reveal a different portrait all together. Looking at the anecdotes critically, one may propound that these jesters have been kept at the court not to protect the king from the evil eye. Rather they have been kept to keep the eyes of the king unbiased and open as these jesters have always stood to correct the follies of the kings.

Doran investigates the act of naming of these men of wit a 'fool' and opines: "the dignity of the [king]... was preserved by a simple arrangement, namely, the ranking as 'fool' or a deranged wit everyone who ventured to utter to his superior a disagreeable truth" (*History of Court Fools* 40). The researcher observes that an ambiguity is created by using the word 'fool' interchangeably with 'jester' or 'court jester'. The rich tradition of comic criticism that has been a salient characteristic of imperial courts in India is proposed to be delved into aiming at a few questions such as: how do they serve the kings, what are the major traits of their personalities which make them distinctive, what are the techniques through which they temper the irrational self of the powerful emperors?

The term 'Court Jester' is not a suitable term to refer to Indian courtiers such as: Birbal, Tenali Raman, GonuJha, and GopalBhand. The critical reading of anecdotes reveals that these courtiers are versatile and we see them in different roles. It would be wise enough to quote the following words:

Irreverent, libertine, self-indulgent, witty clever, roguish, he is the fool as court jester, the fool as companion, the fool as goad to wise and challenge to the virtuous, the critic of the world (Kaiser, 126).

Walter Kaiser enumerates the common characteristics of the courtiers across the globe very appropriately here in these words. Indian court jesters too share the key characteristics along



with their global counterparts. In this research paper, Indian court jesters are depicted primarily in the following roles:

1. Courtiers as Critical Consultants to the Exploited, Queens and the Kings :

Close and consistent critical study reveals that the court jesters under discussion are critical consultants not only to the kings rather they allow their wits to travel to the poor sufferers and to the queens too. Though, all the court jesters undertaken for research in this research paper are all time companions to the kings, yet they remain loyal to the humble economic backgrounds from where they come. Their loyalty to the masses remains intact thoroughly. Whenever and wherever they see a sufferer they themselves come to the rescue of the sufferer both through their wit and their privileged position in the court. There are plenty of anecdotes in which the court jesters are found to be very supportive to the exploited individuals or group of people. The researcher has selected an anecdote entitled: *Birbal Ki Khichdi* for validating this argument. One winter night Akbar and his all-time companion Birbal were enjoying the comforts of the fort. Now, a poor Brahmin ushers in. He gives a detailed account of his utter poverty and asks for help. Akbar says that Brahmins can perform amazing feats. Therefore, he asks the Brahmin to walk into Jamuna till the water reaches his chest and to stand there all night. Next morning, the court assembles and King Akbar inquires about the Brahmin and finds the man waiting for the reward. Before, conferring any award upon the Brahmin, emperor inquires about the way he managed to keep himself warm throughout the night. The Brahmin replies king's question and tells that he stood in the river under the palace and fixed his eyes on it- that kept me warm. Brahmin's reply exasperates the king. The king accuses him of warming his body with the help of a light from his palace. The emperor deems it unfair on the part of the Brahmin. The despondent Brahmin approaches Birbal and narrates the whole episode in front of him. After giving some instructions to the poor Brahmin, Birbal himself goes to attend upon the emperor. Later the day, the emperor and his close companions ride out for hunting in the forest. All of a sudden they see a column of smoke rising in the air. They ride over to investigate and find that a man has lit fire under a tall



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tree, hung a pot. The king asks: “What are you doing?” (*Tales of Akbar- Birbal* 4). “Cooking some rice” the man replies. Akbar bursts out laughing and says: “You fool, why have you put your pot in the tree when your fire is down here on ground?” (*Tales of Akbar- Birbal* 4). The king interrogates the rationality of his misdeed. Birbal finds it a significant opportunity to deploy the emperor’s rationale to correct the irrational accusation leveled by the king upon the poor Brahmin. Stepping forward Birbal speaks: “Your Majesty, he is that poor Brahmin whom you accused of warming himself with the light from the window of his palace. Surely, if he could do that, he can now cook his rice in the pot hanging on the tree from the fire lit on ground here” (*Tales of Akbar- Birbal* 4). This is one of the most popular anecdotes of Akbar- Birbal that is widely circulated. Here, it is important to note that, mistakenly people use the expression ‘*Birbal kikhichadi*’ to refer to someone’s circumvent way of talking. But indeed, the expression has very philosophical insights behind it. Birbal does not engage in an overt contestation with the king to help the poor Brahmin. Rather, he devises a dramatic situation to make the king understand that a poor Brahmin standing into the deep river water cannot get warmth from the light of the palace.

2. Daring and Skilled Players in Correcting the Irrationality of the Kings:

A critical study of the cultural narratives associated with the kings and their courtiers explicitly reveals that keeping the king in good humor is not the sole target of these court jesters. Rather keeping them in good humor is a method to achieve the larger target of correcting their irrational perspectives. Before we come to explore the ways through which these court jesters tend to the irrationality, it would be more benefitting an idea to analyze some specimen cultural narratives in brief here. There is an anecdote titled: *The Language of Owl*. This narrative is an excellent example of blending of the ‘beauty of their wit’ and ‘brevity of expression’. As Walter Kaiser has already defined the court jester as a companion, one day Birbal is returning to the royal place after hunting in the forest. On the way back, Akbar observes two owls sitting on a tree. Both appear to be arguing and hooting at each other. With the intention to tease Birbal, the king asks: “What they could be quarrelling over?” (*Witty Tales of Akbar- Birbal* 24). It is almost



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impossible to understand the language of birds though on the basis of their expressions at times, one may conjecture about what the bird appears to be saying. As it is beyond human ken to understand the language of birds, in this case owls, it is impossible to tell the topic of their conversation. However, Birbal accepts this challenge too. Applying the faculty of his indefatigable wit, he responds to the king's question with the words: "Hazoor! I can understand their language. What they are talking might displease you" (24). The king assures that he would not be offended on knowing what they are conversing with each other.

Birbal finds it an opportunity to correct one of the bad habits of the king. Birbal reports to the king that the owls are discussing about a marriage proposal. He introduces the owls as representatives of the bride and the groom's sides, the issue of dowry being the bone of contention between the two. The groom's side demands thirty forests whereas the bride's side offers twenty jungles now and the remaining later on. The owl from the groom's side is suspicious of the promise right away – if beyond twenty there are no jungles available now from where would they come later on. The suspicion of the owl makes common sense. With growing population and modernization the forest area is definitely declining. But the bride side owl presents a convincing argument concerning his promise:

The bride's owl says that the emperor is fond of hunting. So, he goes on adding forests by forcibly taking away cultivation land from poor farmers for planting trees, he says. He is certain that the emperor will go on ruining farm lands. That is why he is certain to be able to give ten forests later (*Witty Tales of Akbar- Birbal* 24).

The king immediately realizes that Birbal has made use of this opportunity, as always before, to drill reality into the king's mind. The king realizes that he needs to restrict his proclivity to hunting and let the poor farmers cultivate the land. Thus, going critically through this narrative, one comes to the understanding that Birbal reverse the situation during the course of the development of the narrative. Primarily the king asks seemingly an impossible question to



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answer. But by dint of his dexterous wit Birbal tilts the table in his favour. The linguistic competence of the courtier is at par with excellence. A close critical reading of the narrative under discussion reveals that the courtiers exploit the ambivalent situation with equal ease and excellence. Here in case of this narrative the situation is lent ambivalence by the king. It is known to the king himself that human beings cannot understand the verbal language of birds and animals. Still, behaving as if the language of birds can be understood, the king desires to know the topic of the discussion taking place between the owls. Birbal too knows that it is a trick to show Birbal down by asking a question that is impossible to answer. But behaving wisely Birbal does not call the question irrational. Rather keeping the fact in his mind that even the king cannot understand what the owls are talking exactly; he finds an opportunity to express his own ideas in his own language but pretending that the idea is that of the owl. Thus, here we come to know that the courtiers are wise enough to express their views as the views of other which otherwise would have been difficult or impossible for the courtiers to express. To conclude, one may say that the courtier convert the situational ambivalence in an opportunity to say the most critical things without offending the king. Hence, one may say that Birbal has the technique to tend the irrational of the king (i.e. representative of the powerful) through converting mundane happenings into opportunities to say the critical things.

This follows that exploiting the 'situational ambivalence', in addition to bringing the linguistic ambivalence to zero, is another significant way to correct the irrationality of the king. It has been observed precisely that the jesters are skilled in exposing our misdeeds:

The clowns represent us in our misdeeds... the clowns show life as it should not be... the clowns show, mimic the hidden immoralities and bring them into the open so we can see where we have gone wrong (Louis Hieb 32).

Next, the researcher has selected an anecdote wherein, Birbal responds to King Akbar's irrational demand of having arranged a green horse. While enjoying a horse ride in the lush green royal garden the king expresses his desire to have a green horse and he assigns Birbal to arrange



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one such green horse within a week's time. Birbal appears before the king on the seventh day and reports that he has been successful in his search of a green horse. The king desires to see the horse. Birbal explains the difficulty of seeing the horse saying:

The master of the horse has put two conditions... the emperor will have to personally come to fetch the horse... because the horse is of a very unique breed, the day of its handing over should also be unique. Emperor may come any day except the seven days of the week (*Witty Tales of Akbar-Birbal* 26).

Here, we come to know about one more technique deployed by the jesters to respond to the irrational-self of the king. Birbal does not call in question the probability of having a green horse. Rather, he thinks of bringing home the idea to the king that desiring a green horse is equally irrational as having eight days in a week. Even though, he does not communicate this idea overtly. It is through the second condition laid down by the master of the horse that Birbal puts forward his argument – improbable things happen in impossible time space only (i.e. fantasy)

3. Celebrated Champions in Court Politics:

Next, it would be interesting to see how the courtiers correct the irrationality of the kings in connection to their quest for measurement and data. The researcher has analyzed several narratives which unveil the kings' quests for false measurement. For the purpose of elucidating this point it would be appropriate to undertake a critical scrutiny of some cultural narratives here.

There goes a narrative in circulation titled: *Gopal Measured the Erath*. GopalBhand is considered as the Birbal of Bengal. He served in the court of King KrishanChander of Krishan Nagar. Meerjafar was the contemporary Nawab of Krishan Nagar. The eccentric NawabMeerjafar was in the habit of troubling King KrishanChander through his question having no head or tail. One such incident took place when the Nawab sent a letter to King KrishanChander and asked the king to find the exact length and breadth of the earth within a stipulated time of fifteen days. The Nawab mentions in the letter that in case the king fails to do



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so then the Nawab would remove him from the throne. The letter goads the king to madness. Then GopalBhand assures the king that he would answer the Nawab's question within a week's time only. Gopal requests the king for twenty five bullock carts filled with the cotton threads to be arranged. Heading a cordon of twenty five bullock carts filled with cotton threads, GopalBhand reaches the palace of the Nawab. The Nawab- was already familiar with the Gopal as a courtier in the court of KrishanChander-asks Gopal in a teasing tone: "You have brought the measurement of the earth, Gopal?" (*Witty Tales of GopalBhand*8). Gopal gives a quick answer in an equally teasing tone: "I have brought the measurement, Hazoor" (*Witty Tales of GopalBhand*8).

The Nawab asks him to present the measurement. The cunning courtier cordially requests the Nawab to come out in order to see the measurement of the earth. Pointing towards the cordon of twenty five bullock carts, Gopal says:

Let it be received properly. This is the exact measurement of the earth...in these carts there are spools of cotton threads. In one cart the number of spools is ten thousand. In total there are twenty five carts. You calculate that how many spools are there in total. Hazoor! The thread of the first fourteen carts tells the length of the earth and the rest the breadth (*Witty Tales of GopalBhand*9).

Gopal does not stop here and shows the complexity embedded in the question by asking the Nawab to "join the ends of the spools and stretch the thread along the required length and breadth" (*Witty Tales of GopalBhand* 9) in order to find the answer. Thus, Gopal corrects the irrational question of the Nawab by creating a parallel perplexed dramatic situation. The creation of a parallel dramatic situation is one more technique through which the courtiers correct the irrational selves of the kings. They know the best way to settle an absurd query is to counter it by a doubly catchy absurdity – to cure of whim by a bigger whim. SimaQian describes Jester Meng as having had: "a fund of witty repartee at his disposal... always offering his ruler useful advice



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in the guise of a good joke” (*History of Worthies of England* 162). This observation might be seen as a common characteristic of jesters globally.

An oft-quoted and a similar anecdote with Gopal’s measurement of the earth is recorded in Urdu jest-book *Hikayat-e Birbal*. The book mentions that The Head Eunuch conspires to entrap Birbal into a vicious trap and therefore he requests King Akbar to dog Birbal with the odd queries regarding: "... where the center of the earth is, how many stars are there in the sky, and how many men and women there are in the world" (*Hikayat-e Birbal* 39). Birbal seeks a day’s time to respond.

The next day, Birbal, appears in the court with hammer and an iron nail. The king is curious to begin the day with Birbal’s pending response. Birbal drives the nail into the midst of the royal palace, and says, "Your Majesty, this is the center of the earth. If you don't believe me, have it measured" (39). Hearing this excellent answer, the king falls silent. And when the king asks the answer to the second question, Birbal brings a ram to stand before him: "Your Majesty, as many hairs as there are on its body, there are just so many stars in the sky. If there's any doubt of this, please count them" (40).

Birbal does not stop here and furthers his critique of the irrationality infused in the question posited before him. While answering the third question, Birbal launches a venomous verbal attack on the conspirator and says: "I have also brought the correct answer to the third question. But one matter has thrown me into perplexity. It is this: in which reckoning should the eunuchs be counted? They are neither women nor men. Thus the idea has come to me that if all the eunuchs in the world were to be killed, the account would become correct." Birbal’s repartee leaves the king in peals of laughter as the later understand Birbal’s intent – absurdity cannot be settled through rationality. Birbal knows that those who sow wind deserve to reap whirlwind. The court politics of Akbar’s court is painstakingly recorded with proof by Siegel who describes Birbal as a “playful brahmin gadfly” (*Laughing Matters* 307) who is seen as someone who upsets the Muslim courtiers, especially Bada’uni, who hated the influence the infidel Birbal had



over the emperor. Out of this jealousy Bada'uni used to call Birbal "that bastard", the degree of hatred finds expression in the fact that when Birbal dies, Bada'uni records Birbal's death in his chronicle very delightedly: "Birbal... was slain and entered the row of dogs in hell and thus got something for the abominable deeds he had done during his lifetime" (*Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh* 361-362).

4. Skilled in Linguistic Interpretation :

In Europe, the foundations of jesters are rooted in the musical performances and mocking antics played by the courtiers intending to amuse the royal audience. Another, integral facets of fools in the European context, is clowning and cosmetics. But, contrary to their European counterparts, Indian court jesters are seen engaged in more serious deeds rather than just indulging in wordplay. They often meaningfully criticize the kings whenever they behave irrationally or seem entering a world of folly. They find the best method and the best moment to critique the kings. They are able to strike a fine balance between pleasing and displeasing the king by the virtue of the candidness of their indulgence. These courtiers utter nothing critical without a cause and precisely because of this reason their critical comments never whip up the wrath from the kings. This has been illustrated with an anecdote entitled: *The Truthful Tableau*.

The Mahanavami festival has been a silent cultural feature of Vijaynagar dynasty. The glamour of this nine-day festival used to attract the attention of the visitor from all over the world. At the occasion of one specific festival, King KrishanDevRai invites ambassadors from all the friendly neighboring kingdoms. The king understands this is an occasion to drive home the glory through exhibitionism. He schedules a tableaux presentation at this accession so as to depict the diversity and the glory of the state. As a strategy to give the skilled artists a tempting impetus to present the state in the brightest of the colours, the king announces a very huge prize for the winner of the competition. Most of the tableaux are prepared based on the themes such as: the greatest victories of the Vijaynagar army, the brave deeds of King KrishanDevRai, and some



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people go to the extreme extents of sycophancy as they stage scenes from the poems composed by the king.

The king inspects the preparations at proper intervals. The passion exhibited in the preparations of the event pleases the king very much. Some of the tableaux remind the king of his battlefield heroics that he would have actually forgotten. He feels a glow of satisfaction to see his ministers remembering these events so well. However, during these heady preparations, Tenali Ram appears to be on a different plane throughout. Everybody assumes in the court that Tenali must be working on a mysterious tableau. Tenali's morose looks lead people to aver that Tenali's tableau experiment is bound to be a flop this time.

Finally, the D-day arrives. King KrishanDevRai appoints himself and two other ambassadors as judges for the competition. The prize is almost to be announced. But interesting for the audience and luckily for Tenali, an old rival of Tenali reminds the king to evaluate the tableau of Tenali before announcing the name of the winner. On being asked to present his tableau, Tenali takes the king aside and pleads to him to come alone to evaluate his tableau. The king overrules his request citing the reason: "The foreign judges need to see all aspects of Vijaynagar, and how could they judge it, if they did not see it?" (*Tales of Wit and Wisdom: Tenali Raman* 134).

Tenali has prepared his tableau in a poorer quarter of the town. Now leaving the royal opulence of the festival, the king along with his foreign guests are made to walk "through streets not so well lit, or so well paved" (134). On reaching the site of the presentation the jury finds "an enormous, grotesque effigy of some kind of a rakshasa" (134). The king gets offended and demands to explain the meaning of this "bizarre creation" (134). In that dank and dingy corner, a voice emanates as a reply to the King's demand:

I am the demon that Goddess Durga kills every year. And I am the Ravana whom you burn every Dasara. But don't fool yourselves... I never leave, I am as much at home in Vijaynagar, as in every other kingdom, right through the year...I am poverty and disease, in my gnarled limbs you'll see hunger and grief... My voice



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is the cry of the thousands of war widows... (*Tales of Wit and Wisdom: Tenali Raman* 136).

These bitter words in the presence of his foreign guests infuriate the king beyond measure. The emperor draws out his sword as if to kill the life-like monster there and then. Now the scripted drama unravels as “a flap of cloth from the rakshasa’s dhoti is lifted up and two scared men scrambled out” (136). These horrified men plead for mercy saying “it was Tenali Raman’s lines that they had learnt and repeated” (136). The king pauses for a moment and then turns towards his jester in a furious mood. To pacify the king, Tenali Ram bows his head and articulates: “Your Majesty...forgive me, but this was meant to be a private message to you from me” (136).

This follows that Tenali does not go with the flow with fellow courtiers. Rather he takes the risk of offending the king in the presence of foreign guests for the cause of correcting the king’s folly of spending lavishly at festivities, thereby compromising social priorities.

A critical mind can easily pose and probe questions of contemporary relevance here: In today’s political scenario, do we have such fearless ministers who would care to critique the spendthrift political parties and governments? Do we have such rulers either? However, Tenali executes this daring deed so effectively that the desire of his fellow courtier to make Tenali a public fool results in proving the later the avant-garde citizen that he is supposed to be.

Beatrice K. Otto observes that the connection between the jester and the poet works both ways. The author mentions:

...the qualification of a good jester included the ability to extemporize verse and trot out rhyming retorts or cringe-inspiring doggerel. Poetic skill was a vital part of the jester’s ragbag of tricks in most places (*Fools are Everywhere* 16).

Indian court jesters like Birbal, Tenali Ram, Genujha, and GopalBhand, fulfill this criterion consistently and competently. Linguistic competence and clarity has been the hallmark of these



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men even prior to their appointment as courtiers in different courts. These people have been successful in securing a place for themselves in the court primarily because of their linguistic deftness. The researcher has selected two brief narratives to highlight this facet of these wise fools. Once, Akbar while roaming around the kingdom riding a horse along with Birbal passes a comment on Birbal: “Bhai AsyaPidarSumast” (Witty Tales of Akbar-Birbal 22). These words of Persian language have two meanings: (a) ‘This horse belongs to your father’ and (b) ‘This horse is your father’. How could quick witted Birbal receive and accept such crude joke? Therefore, Birbal retorts trotting out the phrase: “DadahHazurast” – having equally two meanings: (a) ‘Majesty has given’ and (b) ‘It is grandfather of Majesty’ (22). There is another cultural narrative in which Akbar willfully throws his maala (rosary) into the river and asks Birbal: ‘Maa la do’, Birbal understands the deeper meaning and says: ‘Bhane do’.

Further, one may quote the much circulated anecdote: Donkeys’ do not Eat Tobacco in order to support the argument that the Indian court jesters are skilled in creating spontaneous wisecracks. This tradition naughty repartee between the king and his court jesters seems to be successful in grabbing Otto’s attention as it is observed:

A frequent pastime involving jesters was verse capping, in which one supplied the first line and the second would complete the couplet, preferably with suitable rhymes and parallels. Jestors often used the second line to offer a witty comment on the first, or simply a ridiculous match (Otto 16).

Thus, once again we come face to face with the intrigue against court jesters undertaken for research. These *Vidusakas* remain placid even in the most perturbed situations. Possessing the power of laughter acts as an asset during difficult times as it brings a kind of conquest with it. This laughter can be seen as a moral victory if one succeeds in laughing at one’s exploiters, forcing them to see that there is a part of their victim’s injured armor that apparently is impenetrable. Commenting on this aspect of the jester it has been reasonably been remarked: “only the gallant...remain light-hearted in adversity” (Durrell 47).



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In this research paper, ‘wit’, while discussing the courtiers in various roles, emerges out as the most salient feature of the personality of these court jesters. Keeping in view the excellent expression of their ‘wit’, it would not be an aggregation if one calls ‘wit’ as their identity. It would be prudent to substantiate this argument through an anecdote itself. Once, Badshah gets angry with Birbal and orders him to leave the city. Following the orders of the king, Birbal starts to live in a far off village in disguise. On the other hand, Akbar starts missing Birbal but no one knows his address. Messengers are sent far and wide in search of Birbal by Badshah but none comes to know Birbal’s whereabouts.

When one is lost, one is searched by sharing one’s physical identity. But in case of Birbal’s search, the emperor devises a unique method. He announces: “...anyone who would come before him in half-shade, half-sunlight would get prize of Rs. 1000” (VishwaNath 12). Birbal too come to know about the royal announcement. He weaves a charpoy in which he leaves spaces in between. He gives this charpoy to a poor farmer and tells him: “Look, put this charpoy above your head and appear before the emperor and tell him that according to the declaration you have appeared before him in half-shade, half-sun and therefore you should be rewarded” (12). The moment the farmer appears before the king, the king immediately understands that there must be Birbal’s brain behind this presentation. Further, he asks the poor farmer: “Tell me the truth, who gave this idea?” (12). On the revelation of the truth, the king rewards the poor farmer and sends two messengers to bring back Birbal with great respect.

Through this research paper, the researcher has made an attempt to establish the fact that folk wisdom has both the depth and variety. The historicity of the tradition of the comic criticism, that has been an integral part of the Royal Courts in India, has been established in the works of many writers such as C.M. Naim and Beatrice K. Otto. The folk heroes of wit Birbal, Tenali Ram, GonuJha, and GopalBhand raise themselves from common folks to the position of dignified courtiers by dint of their wit and clarity of linguistic expression. The narratives informing the entry of these folk heroes in the royal courts are thematically similar – their wit wins them the passport to the ministerial chamber. It has been appropriately been remarked: “The recruiting of



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jesters was tremendously informal and meritocratic” (Otto 21). The researcher observes that the witty minds of Indian jesters are never in haste to respond to anyone. Rather they bid their time and in a premeditated manner spin a strategy to win over their opponents.

The court jesters undertaken for research in this paper are the men of multitudes and therefore the research has tried to bring to fore the traits of their personality through various anecdotes. They are critical consultants, daring and skilled players in correcting the irrationality of the kings, celebrated champions of court politics, and are skilled in linguistic interpretation. The researcher has perennially focused on outlining the techniques through which these jesters tend to the irrational and how their wits contribute to the good of all. Some of the techniques deployed by the jesters to tend to the irrational of the kings, as identified by the researcher are:

1. To raise a ‘rational question’ as a reply to an ‘irrational question’
2. Bringing ‘linguistics ambivalence’ to zero in a humorous way
3. By converting mundane happenings into opportunities to critique the irrational.
4. By exploiting ‘situational ambivalence’ to critique the irrational perspective in a depersonalized manner.
5. Improbable demands are proposed to be fulfilled on equally improbable conditions.
6. By creating a parallel dramatic situation. The courtiers know that the best way to settle an absurd query is to counter it by a double catchy absurdity – to cure a whim by a bigger whim.

It has been found that the envious courtiers often set booby traps for their rivals. But as journeymen champions of the court politics, Birbal and Tenali Ram invariably succeeded in not only shattering the trap, but also exposing their conspirators, teaching them good lessons as in case of *Birbal and the Head Eunuch*. The court in those times consisted of disparate elements including ministers, worriers, priests, barbers entertainers and so on. Often they had a parochial philosophy: promote their own cause at the cost of others. The kings’ favorites like Birbal and



Tenali Ram were perennial eyesores for them, both as fellow rivals and superior wits. Hence, the two were constantly in a tug of war involving one against many. But since they were endowed with insuperable wit, they knew how to wriggle out of vicious traps set against them. However, what is noteworthy is that their persons are not reactive in nature; rather their minds are wired for higher purposes as benefactors of the downtrodden, the discriminated, and those denied justice.

The capacity to maintain mental placidity even in the most perturbed situations proves an asset for them as it is the precondition for effective functioning of the mind. By invoking these anecdotes and tales, the researcher poses questions of contemporary relevance: In today's political scenario, do we have any Birbals who would care to critique the spendthrift political parties and governments? And equally important question: Do we have any Akbars who would give space to the truth-tellers?

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