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**THE NATURE OF COMEDY**

Comedy comes from the Greek word ‘Komos’ which means "a revel" and its origin is traced to activities surrounding ritual performances in honour of the Greek god of fertility and wine called Dionysus. Comedy is a form of drama often considered as the exact opposite of tragedy. It is remarkable that the popular emblem of drama, a pair of masks, appears to confirm this relationship between comedy and tragedy. While the sorrowful one is representing tragedy, the one smiling designates comedy. Apparently, comedy is generally characterized by an element of the comic. But while a whole play may be described as comic, an aspect of a play may just constitute the comic element. This means that you may find the comic element in a play, even when it is not a comedy. Another principle which is used in judging whether a play is a comedy or not is whether it ends on a happy note. A tragedy is often seen as ending on a sad note, often with the death of the hero. A third principle that we may apply to identify a comedy also emphasizes its differences from the tragedy. It suggests that a tragedy appeals to our emotion while a comedy appeals to our reason. In other words, comedy makes us think due to the issues it raises.

**ORIGIN OF COMEDY**

Comedy, just like tragedy, is believed to have originated in Greece. Aristotle saw it as inferior and thus detracts from the importance of its subject. Aristophanes (448 -385 BC) is believed to have contributed a lot to the making of the form. He made comedy a medium for the correction of social ills. Interestingly, the leaders of Athens were not spared. If satire was the main concern of Aristophanes' comedy, Menander, was identified with a different tradition of comedy, one that focused primarily on love. There have also been significant contributions to the development of comedy in various places, including Italy, France, and England. Moliere promoted a tradition of comedy in France in the seventeenth century. Shakespeare has also written a number of comedies which, expectedly, have defined an identity for his comedy.

Shakespeare's comedies draw extensively on various sources and are often set in outlandish places. Most of his comedies are concerned with love, and music is employed to enliven the unique world that they represent. One of the best known of his comedies is The Merchant of Venice.

**FORMS OF COMEDY**

Comedy is broadly divided into two forms: High Comedy and low Comedy. High Comedy is that type of comedy that elicits a form of laughter that is thoughtful. It is friendly while trying to correct man. Examples of High Comedy are Comedy of Festivities, Comedy of Manners, and Situational Comedy. Low Comedy, on the other hand, is unsparing in ridiculing man. This is also reflected in the form of laughter it provokes. Examples of low comedy are Comedy of Marionette, Slapstick Comedy and Farce.

**TRAGICOMEDY**

We have examined two main forms of drama -Tragedy and Comedy. You will be right if you wonder whether there is a form that stands in between the two. The form in this case blends the attributes of tragedy and comedy. The form is called Tragicomedy. It elicits both tragic and comic feelings. A tragicomedy normally has two plots that must eventually merge.

It should not be surprising that comedy and tragedy have always been associated. They have a common root in ancient Greece. You must keep this fact in mind as it enables you explain the tendency to always try to explain one by differentiating it from the other. But the discussion on comedy should even appeal more to the Indian because most of the plays written by Indian playwrights tend to be satirical. Satire, incidentally, is a sub-genre of comedy. The list of such Indian plays is long and it includes T.P. Kailasam’s plays as well.

The evolution of dramatic forms as traced, has not drawn attention to the Indian contribution. This is not a way of denying the existence of drama in India. The fact is that a dramatic performance in India takes forms other than those that the Western idea of drama accommodates. In a sense, we admit that there is more to drama than what ancient Greece, Elizabethan England or the Romans have offered us. There is a need to explore much on Indian drama and oral literary traditions as well.