DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Ramakrishna Mission Residential College (Autonomous), Narendrapur

Inter-University Students' and Researchers' Conference 2017

November 10-11, 2017

On

Limits of Laughter in Cultural Discourse and Practice

This conference seeks to engage with the rationale of laughter in literature and other cultural texts. Laughter in this context does not merely refer to a physiological stimulus but its broadest possible application incorporating terms such as black humour and carnivalesque. The oldest theory of laughter goes back to Aristotle, as stated in *De anima:* "Of all living creatures only man is endowed with laughter.'' In the Indian classical text *Nāṭyaśāstra*, laughter or 'hasya' comes second in the aesthetic hierarchy of the eight rasas, only after 'shringara'. The field of humour studies beginning from Aristotle through Kant, Bergson, Freud and Bakhtin among its contributors on the one hand and numerous cross-disciplinary hypotheses on the other have attempted to explain human laughter offering psychological, physiological and sociological accounts. But the discourse remains cheerfully unstable.

Hobbes's superiority theory brings in the psychological attitude to laughter as he locates the origin of laughter in the realization of an "eminency in ourselves" arising from the comparison with the "infirmity of others." Kant focuses on the intellectual origin of laughter by pointing at the nexus between the perception of the incongruous and laughter. The archetypal biological definition is offered by Darwin that pins laughter to an efflux of the excess nervous energy. The sociological studies trace the shift from genial laughter to subversive laughter and underpin the fact that laughter can engage in a power game with institutionalized meanings and pose a political threat to establishment. These hypotheses despite their avowal of separate disciplines seem to share the idea that laughter is an aberration from the familiar and the normative. Yet, it is deeply anchored in some discursive order to be intelligible. In literature, laughter on most occasions dwells upon an anti-heroic attitude to life's incongruities but it might also engage with the gap between personal emotion and impersonal affect as we encounter (in late modern literature in particular) laughter without humour, bordering on violence. The representational politics is problematic because the reasons that make people laugh are sometimes unknown to both the laughers as well as the observers of laughter.

Considering these issues and many more, we can seek to understand laughter both on its own terms and in terms of its form and functionality in texts and culture across history. We invite papers focusing incisively and analytically on the praxis of laughter; its instrumentality and everyday struggle with the normative.

Some of the areas which can be addressed are the following:

Laughter and aesthetics

Laughter on stage

Laughter and the scope of subversion

Genres of the comic

Laughter in the visual medium

Cultural construction of laughter and the laughable

Laughter and Gender

Laughter as a limit-experience

Non-humorous laughter in modern literature

Censorship, laughter and the State

We invite abstracts of not more than 300 words from college/University students and research scholars to be emailed to the conference convenors at **english.rkm@gmail.com**. The names, contact numbers, email ids, and affiliations of those sending abstracts should be clearly mentioned in the abstracts. Please write "SRC2017 Abstract" in the subject heading of your email.

Publication of selected papers is an issue under deliberation.

Important Dates

Last Date of submission of Abstracts: 8th October 2017

Notification of acceptance of Abstract: 14th October 2017

Registration fee

College/University Students: INR 100/-

Research Scholars and Independent Scholars: INR 300/-

Queries may be addressed to the seminar convenors at **english.rkm@gmail.com**