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**Some Characteristics of Tamil Jokes**

**A. Parimalagantham, Ph.D.**

# Some Characteristics of Tamil Jokes

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## Introduction

This paper describes the structure of Tamil jokes and how creative writers use jokes to bring about laughter and sometimes social awareness in their readers.

Laughter is specifically human. Humor, subtle and not so subtle, is put to various uses in human interaction. Individuals and communities build on the innate human propensity for laughter to meet various ends. We use both verbal and nonverbal means to create laughter. Telling jokes and acting out jocular moments have been an integral part of social and cultural living in all human societies.

## Paucity of Jokes in the literatures of Indian Languages

Generally speaking, humor and jokes are not widely depicted in literary creations in Indian languages. References are made to the humorous episodes, and statements that so and so character or hero or heroine laughed, smiled, etc. But the actual jokes are not listed in any elaborate manner. Sanskrit drama has provision for vidushaka, who may perform the role of a jester, commentator, with great wisdom. This character is given the duty to create jokes and hilarious moments. But this has not resulted in widespread use of jokes in literary creations.

## Tamil Situation

In ancient and medieval Tamil literature there are only a few jokes. Since prose was not extensively used in ancient and medieval literature for literary creation, there were very few conversational pieces that communicated humor and related jokes in such literature. Pun on the word is a poetic or prosodic device in Tamil literature. Humor is recognized in classical Tamil grammars as an important part of literary experience. Subdivisions of humor are identified in Tolkaappiyam, the earliest Tamil grammar. However, we do not find their elucidation and exploitation in Tamil literary works in any significant manner.

Tamil did develop a special genre based only on the pun on the word and through the exploitation of polysemy. However, such literature was didactic in some cases, and, in most cases, those creative works focused more on the skill and craft of the poets in creating such works. Humor was largely not part of the purview of such literature. One could, however, trace the slow development of humor and consequent laughter in other genres such as *Kuravanji* later on.

The adoption of prose as the major medium of literary creation and emergence of drama as an widespread spectator art led to the expansion of the potential of creative writers to cover jokes as part of their creation. The role of Vidushaka and comedian became crucial in spectator events, such as drama.

## **Data**

The data for this paper is collected from several Tamil weekly magazines such as *aanandavikaTan*, *kumudam*, *kumkumam*, *varamalar*, etc. The jokes were collected on the basis of the problems they seek to focus on.

## **Method of Analysis**

I collected nearly fifty jokes. These jokes are analyzed and classified on the basis of the social factors represented in the jokes, such as Occupation, Education and Social Gatherings, etc.

## **Structure of Jokes in Tamil**

1. Tamil jokes are told between at least two persons. Both may interchange their role as speaker and hearer.
2. Jokes are usually part of a conversation. Thus, there are oral elements involved in narrating a joke.
3. There are jokes or jocular moments in which only acts, with no oral utterances, convey the meaning and intent of jokes.
4. The jokes contain minimum two or three internal parts or divisions. That is, jokes may be narrated in several stages.
5. The stages of jokes may occur either simply as conversation or as conversation with pictures and/or physical acts.
6. Mostly, the jokes are presented in the form of question and answer.
7. Pun on the word seems to be the most commonly used strategy.
8. Words with multiple meanings (polysemous) are more commonly exploited for creating jokes and to create laughter. The speaker choose intends one meaning of the word, and the listener-interpreter chooses another meaning of the same word in this situation.

9. Sometimes words from the spoken and written language which convey different and hilarious meanings are used.

10. Presuppositions of speaker and listener may be different for the same situation and this results jocular moments.

### How Jokes Operate

1. The change of words may change the meaning and it creates laughter.
2. The syntactic structure of the joke may produce laughter.
3. The semantic deviation may induce the people to laugh.
4. Acts performed on their own may provoke laughter.

### Some Jokes Highlighting Social Problems

#### Jokes Related o Kidney Stealing

Now-a-days, stealing kidneys from people are on the increase in the society. Doctors are supposed to help people live healthy. However there are some doctors who make money through the illegal means. The following joke is about such doctors.

**Question:** poNNu paakka vanta daaktar maappiLLaiya een poolisukku piTiccu kuTuttiinga?

“Why did you handover the doctor bridegroom-to be, who came to see your daughter for possible wedding, to the police?”

varadaTcaNaya nooru kiDni kekkuraaru.

“He asked for 100 kidneys as dowry.”

பொண்ணு பாக்க வந்த டாக்டர் மாப்பிள்ளைய ஏன்  
போலீஸுக்குப் பிடிச்சக் குடுத்தீங்க?  
வரதட்சணையா நூறு கிட்னி கேட்டாரு.

Daaktar, kaTavuL een manusanukku reNDu kiDniye vaccu anuppi irukkaar? “Doctor, why God gave two kidneys for the human beings?”

Oru kiDniye engale poonRa DaaktarkaL eTuttukirattaa.

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9 : 12 December 2009

A. Parimalagantham, Ph.D.

Some Characteristics of Tamil Jokes

“He wants doctors like us to take away one kidney.”

டாக்டர் கடவுள் ஏன் மனுசனுக்கு ரெண்டு கிட்னிய வைச்சு  
அனுப்பியிருக்கார்?

ஒரு கிட்னிய எங்கள் போல டாக்டர்கள் எடுத்துகிறதான்.

(Kumudam 2008)

A simple joke from a movie is used to create social awareness against doctors who perform “kidney frauds” on their patients. In the movie *karakaaTTakaaran*, one person asks his assistant to go and get two bananas. The assistant goes out and buys two bananas from a nearby. The assistant eats one banana, near the shop itself and comes back to his master with only one banana. The master receives that one banana and asks the assistant, “what about the second banana?” The assistant tells him that the second one is the one he just gave to his master.

The following joke is created on the basis of the above joke.

Daaktar oru kiDni inka irukku innooru kiDni engannu keeTTu anta  
peeshaNTu praccane paNRaar.

“Doctor, that patient is creating trouble by asking, “One kidney is here, where is the other one?”

itai kuuDavaa engiTTe vandu keeTkaanu...anta innonnutaa itunnu saamaaLinga.

“Is it necessary to bring this trivial problem to me? You try to manage telling him that *the other* kidney is this only.”

டாக்டர் ஒரு கிட்னி இங்கே இருக்கு இன்னொரு கிட்னி  
எங்கேன்னு கேட்டு அந்தப் பேஷண்ட் பிரச்சன பண்ணார்.

இத கூடவா எங்கிட்ட வந்து சொல்லணும்... அந்த  
இன்னொன்னுதா இதுன்னு சமாளிங்க.

### Jokes about Fake Doctors

We read in the newspapers that some individuals pose as medical doctors and cheat people. This phenomenon is now widespread, and there are many jokes about this.

anta DaakTar pooli daakTarnnu eppiTi colRe?

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9 : 12 December 2009

A. Parimalagantham, Ph.D.

Some Characteristics of Tamil Jokes

“How do you know that doctor is a fake doctor?”

vayittule puzhu puucci illeenu oru amma vandirukkaanga. avangale  
maNNu caapiTac colliTTaaree.

“A lady came complaining that there is not even a worm (meaning she is not able to conceive) in her stomach. The doctor asked her to eat mud (so that she will have worms in her stomach).”

அந்த டாக்டர் ஒரு போலி டாக்டர்ன்னு எப்படி சொல்ற?

வயித்துல புழுபூச்சி இல்லைன்னு ஒரு அம்மா  
வந்திருக்காங்க. அவங்களை மண்ணு சாப்பிடச்  
சொல்லிட்டாரே

Anta DakTar oru poolinnu ninaikkiree  
eppaTi?  
How do you tell me that the doctor is a fake doctor?

poosTmaarTam paNNiTTu, saari peeashanTek kaapaatta muTiyalennu  
colliTTup pooRaaree.

After doing the postmortem, the doctor told the corpse, “Sorry I can’t save the patient.”

அந்த டாக்டர் போலின்னு நினைக்கிறே  
எப்படி?.

போஸ்ட் மார்ட்டம் பண்ணிட்டு ஸாரி பேஷண்ட காப்பத்த  
முடியலைன்னு சொல்லிட்டு போறாரே

(Varamalar 2997)

### Jokes about Cheating in the Examination

Cheating in the examinations is widespread these days. Invigilation is strict, and yet students are able to somehow cheat by copying from materials they take into the exam hall, or by looking over the answer papers of others students.

un pakkattule unkaarntu paricTcai ezhutiya manoharep paattu nii kaappi  
aTittirukkeengarada vaatiyar eppuDik kaNDupiTittar?

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9 : 12 December 2009

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Some Characteristics of Tamil Jokes

“How did the teacher find out that you copied from Manohar who sat in the same row near you?”

pariccaip peeparle kaTaiciyaa nanRi manoharnnu ezhutit tolaiccuTTeen.  
“At the end of the exam paper, I wrote ‘Thanks, Manohar’.”

உன் பக்கத்துல உட்கார்ந்து பரிட்சை எழுதிய மனோகரப்  
பார்த்து நீ காப்பி அடித்திருக்கேங்கறத வாத்தியார் எப்படிக் கண்டு  
பிடித்தார்?.

பரிட்சைப் பேப்பர்ல கடைசியா நன்றி மனோகர்ன்னு எழுதித்  
தொலைச்சுட்டேன்.

“I wrote ‘thanks Manohar’ at the end of the paper”

### **Jokes Regarding the Tips on Demand to waiters/servers in restaurants**

Now-a-days giving tips to the waiters and servers is becoming popular, sometimes enforces even in small restaurants. Tips are usually given as appreciation for the service rendered by the servers, in most places in India. However, these days, waiters and servers demand tips openly and this makes some customers upset. The following joke relates to this situation.

mugattule kaTalai maavu taTavina mugam paLapaLappaa irukkum  
If you apply *chana* (a lentil) powder on the face, your face will shine very well.”

itai een engiTTe colliRiinga?  
“Why are you telling this to me sir?”

niitaanayya caappiTTe piRaku Tips taranumnnu keeTTe.  
“You only asked me to give you tips after eating. Didn’t you?”

A wide variety of jokes are noticed for the very common incident of losing shoes and slippers in wedding halls. There are also jokes about ladies’ garments. Many jokes are told about the behavior of politicians. Pure and simple jokes are now combined with cynicism and satire, especially when these jokes are about politicians.

### **Conclusion**

Comedy, humor, jokes and laughter are now quite common in TV and movies. There are channels devoted exclusively to comedians. These channels are more active during the

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evening hours in Tamil TV, thus providing much relief from the daily chores and tensions.

However, such serials are mostly low comedies, just as many of the jokes in Tamil magazines.

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