



# Humour as *the Focul Point of Charlie Chaplin's Comedies:* *A Very Short Introduction*

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**Abstract:** *"'Tis strange to see the humour of these men  
These great aspiring spirits, that should be wise."* (Samuel Daniel)

Born in England in 1889, Charlie Chaplin, the comedian and the versatile personality, has been a constant inspiration to the world audience in the field of humour. In the history of the motion-picture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Chaplin occupies a very special place, a place that others cannot even dream of occupying. His comedies are considered timeless as they are enjoyed in places where English is not known or heard of. The kind of humour that does not require any language to convey the emotions is his specialty. This paper intends to illustrate briefly how Charlie Chaplin has contributed a special kind of humour, following certain techniques of comic outlook, which has revolutionized the silent era.

**Key Words:** Humour, Motion-picture, Techniques, Silent Era.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Humour is acknowledged and celebrated universally. A culture without the presence of it is doomed to be miserable. Living with a sense of humour in life shall be compared with the usage of salt in the art of cookery. In the culinary art the salt content decides the perfection of the food preparation. Adding too much salt will spoil the food and the absence of it shall render it inedible. In the same way humour makes life more bearable and enjoyable though the proportion decides the bearability and enjoyability. Life without humour is distasteful and gloomy. At the same time too much of it may become obnoxious because it may denote a symptom of psychological unrest. Alison Ross in the introduction to her book titled *The Language of Humour* says, "Humour has a high profile in our society". Philosophers, thinkers, researchers and scholars have been exploring the concept of humour for centuries and still it proves to be inexhaustible and all the more growing in meaning. The inexhaustibility and the context of humour asseverate the essential nature of it in society. Societies may be built by serious thoughts but many a time they are best understood by various humorous episodes. The role played by humour in the face of social life demands the attention it needs to be adorned with.

## 2. The concept of humour

The concept of humour itself is an element of contrast. It is given a high place in society but is often considered a less superior form of writing. Even after knowing its high value, it is most often looked down on. Another contrasting element is in its usage. It comes handy while extending friendship and relationship but at times it is used as a tool to exclude people from particular groups or societies. Next contrasting feature lies in the fact that humour, comic amusement and laughter are wanted, enjoyed, and funny but books about them are not. No wonder why this term attracts a gigantic literature being written on it. It is because the agents of contrasts are always a matter of fascination.



### 3. Humour in the life of Chaplin

Sometimes humour enforces certain values by breaking the rules. For instance, the comic film episodes of Sir Charles Spencer Chaplin, widely known as Charlie Chaplin, focuses on the beggarly person called the Tramp (mostly himself) making fun of the so-called aristocratic people by satirizing the unnecessary luxuries enjoyed by them in society where one section is always in need of the basic amenities. His biographer David Robinson while mentioning Chaplin's singular style, in his book titled *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, calls him "A comedian of the first water" (1). Hailed as a class-act comedian, Chaplin strongly believed in the power of combining contra elements. In his book, *My Autobiography*, he says, "I wanted everything to be a contradiction: the pants baggy, the coat tight, the hat small and the shoes large... I added a small moustache, which, I reasoned, would add age without hiding my expression" (2). And laughing at the face of difficulties when society expects the paupers to be sad is the broken rule showcased in his comic strips and movies, and life can be lived in a contented and a cheerful way when the basic needs are met is the value enforced.

### 4. Reflection of Humour

This idea upholds Charlie Chaplin's belief as expressed in his book, *Charlie Chaplin's Own Story* that "Life is a tragedy when seen in close up, but a comedy in long shot" (11). Being the widely-popular movie icon of the silent era, Chaplin recommends a whole new way of seeing life like seeing through a camera. In a camera, the lens shall be adjusted to see the way one desires: long or short, clear or blurred, bright or gloomy. Similarly, in life too, stepping out of the context to perceive the better is essential. His idea echoes Henri-Louis Bergson's philosophical concept. Bergson, the French-Jewish philosopher in his essay *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, while exploring the effect and appeal of the comic, proposes an imaginary application of giving importance to every little detail in life. If done so, life may look very morbid. Then he adds, "Now step aside, look upon life as a disinterested spectator: many a drama will turn into a comedy" (3-4). The tenet of Henri Bergson is resonated in Charlie Chaplin, though not consciously done, and their perspectives highlight the need to see life differently to turn it into a happy episode, or at least a less grim one.

### 5. Conclusion :

Charlie Chaplin's humour remains priceless and timeless and pertinent even to the contemporary ages as he has always portrayed the issues of the low or middle class masses. Issues like poverty and class divisions are often portrayed through his character called the 'Tramp'. Though laughter is not always an essential feature of humour, it can serve as a beginning point of socializing. The very fact that laughter evolves in company strengthens its social bond. Henri Bergson's idea, "Our laughter is always the laughter of a group", indicates its significant role in constructing communal identities. The difficulty of comic translations from one language to another occurs because the humour of a group has cultural and social roots to its own group. Even response to it happens only if there is some kind of bondage or compliance among the group. Thus, Chaplin's humour is received, enjoyed and appreciated as there is no hostility on any ground.

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