

Theory and Praxis

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Indian and Western

Edited by

R.N. Rai, M.S. Pandey and Anita Singh

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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
R.N. Rai	
Chapter One.....	24
Reader Response Theory and the Concept of <i>Sahridaya</i>	
G.B. Mohan Thampi	
Chapter Two.....	35
Psychoanalytical Frameworks in the Utopian Impulse	
Daniel T Baker	
Chapter Three.....	42
The Nation as Goddess: Ritualizing Politics, Politicizing the Sacral	
Namrata R. Mahanta and Banibrata Mahanta	
Chapter Four.....	53
Postcolonialism and Strategies of Narration in India	
Awanish Rai	
Chapter Five.....	61
Contemporary Theory in the Postcolonial Third World	
Jai Singh	
Chapter Six.....	71
Locating Edward Said's Politics of Liberation in <i>Orientalism</i>	
Ravi Kumar Kumbar	
Chapter Seven.....	80
Suppressed Histories, Racial Conflicts and Postcolonial Disorder	
in <i>A Bend in the River</i>	
Prakash Chandra Pradhan	

Chapter Eight.....	104
Rescripting the Dominant, Essentialist Narrative on the Splitting of India: Bapsi Sidhwa's <i>Ice Candy Man</i> Nupur Palit	
Chapter Nine.....	110
<i>Bhagvadgita</i> : A New Interpretation Damodar Thakur	
Chapter Ten	123
Androgyny and Postfeminism: Revisiting D. H. Lawrence Devender Kumar	
Chapter Eleven	140
Ecology and Feminism in India in Linda Hogan's <i>Power</i> : An Ecofeminist Perspective R.D. Gholap	
Chapter Twelve	150
Exploring Animal Ethics in J.M. Coetzee's <i>The Lives of the Animals</i> : A General Semantic Approach Dhriti Ray Dalai	
Chapter Thirteen.....	160
Discourse of Otherness: Minority and Subaltern Perspectives in Rohinton Mistry's <i>A Fine Balance</i> Chitra Trivikraman Nair	
Chapter Fourteen	171
Gopinath Mohanty's <i>Paraja</i> : A Subaltern Study Bhagabat Nayak	
Chapter Fifteen	189
Re-reading Ramayana: Exploring Sita in <i>Sita Sings the Blues</i> Aartee Kaul Dhar	
Contributors.....	200
About the Editors.....	202

INTRODUCTION

R.N. RAI

The word ‘theory’ is derived from the Greek term ‘theoria’ which literally means a view or perspective of the Greek stage. This is exactly what literary theory offers – a view or perspective of literature. Literary theory may be defined as a set of concepts and intellectual assumptions, which help us in explaining or interpreting literary texts. It is a description of underlying principles, which we use, in the practical reading of literature. At the level of critical practice these conceptual sets of principles may be used to identify, classify, analyse and interpret works of literature.

Though the origin of literary theory goes back to Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Bharata Muni’s *Natyasastra*, its practice became a profession in the 20th century, especially in the 1950s when the structuralist linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure started influencing English literary criticism. It was at its most popular stage from the late 1960s through to the 1980s. In the early 1990s its popularity started declining, and by around 2004 critics had started discussing the relevance of theory in literary studies. Though the relevance of theory may be a controversial and debatable issue, it is an acknowledged fact that theory does play an important role in the study of literature. In the 20th and 21st centuries three major movements – Marxism, Feminism and Postcolonialism led to the serious questioning of the so called metanarratives of literature, science, history, philosophy, economic and sexual reproduction. This has brought about the incorporation of all human discourses and made literary theory an interdisciplinary body of cultural theory, which has now become an important model of inquiry into the human condition.

Since the 1960s evaluative criticism began to lose its importance in the academy. A large number of innovative literary theories and methods of critical analysis emerged. The emerging influence of structuralist and poststructuralist theories in the 1970s and after, accompanied by the impacts of Marxism and Psychoanalysis, tended to displace critical evaluation further in favour of ‘scientific’ or otherwise value-free assessment of literature. In the research article “Literature and the

Academy”, published in *Literary Theory and Criticism* (2006) Chris Baldick has rightly observed that pure criticism:

. . . became increasingly contaminated by neighboring academic disciplines such as philosophy, linguistics, sociology, history and psychology, giving rise to new, politicized interdisciplinary structures: Cultural Studies, Women’s Studies, Gender Studies and Post-Colonial Studies. These developments have been lamented as signaling the collapse of critical standards, cultural value, and even the traditions of Western Civilization. (94)

Whereas literary criticism emphasises the experience of close reading and explication of individual works, literary theory insists that the assumptions underlying reading practices must be made explicit and convincing. In the anthology *Literary Theory and Criticism* Patricia Waugh has rightly observed that “no reading is ever innocent or objective or purely descriptive. Theory asks questions about authorship, criteria of value, centers of reading, and the definition of literature. In some sense, then theory is a criticism of criticism, a recursive, self-reflective activity” (2). The most significant specific year which may be regarded as the year of the beginning of the ‘theory’ revolution is 1967, when two key texts – Jacques Derrida’s essay “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences” and E.D. Hirsch’s *Validity in Interpretation* – were published. They clearly illustrate the nature of the gap between the assumptions of traditional literary studies and those of poststructuralism. In poststructural criticism many critics felt compelled to ‘theorise’ their individual positions and practices. Literary criticism was no longer the exclusive concern of literature but it became integral with all other pursuits of human science. “Theory now became so inclusive that”, say M.H. Abrams and G.G. Harpham, “it often designates an account of the general conditions of signification that determines meaning and interpretation in all domains of human action, production and intellection” (240). An important aspect of poststructural theories is that they are opposed to inherited ways of thinking in all domains of knowledge. They make serious efforts to challenge, destabilise and subvert what they identify as the foundational concepts, procedures, assumptions and findings in traditional modes of discourse in Western literary criticism.

Structuralist criticism originated from Saussure’s pioneering work on language *Course in General Linguistics* and culminated in the 60s with the works of powerful intellectuals such as the anthropologist Claud Levi-Strauss, the philosophers Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and the literary critics Roland Barthes, A.J. Greimas and Gerard Genette. Like Russian Formalism it believes in the

possibility of a 'science' of literature which is based on form rather than content, organisation rather than meaning. It tends to divorce the text from historical and social context and regards it as a function of the system of literature. Structuralism puts emphasis, says Hans Bertens in *Literary Theory: The Basics* (2001), "on the conditions that make meaning possible, rather than on meaning itself. It tries to map the structures that are the actual carriers of meaning and the various relations between the elements within those structures" (76). Saussure regarded the linguistic sign as arbitrary and hence the meaning is diacritical rather than referential. Meaning is derived from differential relations among elements within a system and hence the system is more important than individual utterance – *langue* is more important than *parole*.

Structuralism attempted to draw an analogy between language systems and social systems. Saussure highlighted the systematic nature of language and insisted on the importance of carrying out a synchronic (systematic) rather than diachronic (historical) study of language. Instead of making efforts to ascertain the genesis, the earlier form, the sources and the evolution of words, the linguist should try to focus attention on language's current structural properties. The structuralist critic is more interested in the 'deep structure' of narrative rather than the presentation of surface appearances – the concrete, the particular or the historical. In the essay "Structuralism and Narrative Poetics" published in the anthology of Patricia Waugh, Susana Onega highlights the role of the creative reader and remarks that "the creative reader or 'scripter' replaces the author from his or her position in discourse as the figure who confers and authorizes meaning" (278). Structuralism replaces the author with the reader, though not the traditional reader as a conscious, purposeful and emotionally surcharged individual but a person who is interested in the impersonal act of reading. The impersonal process of reading brings into play the requisite codes, conventions and expectations which help the critic in making a literary sense of the text with the help of the sequence of words, phrases and sentences.

Though the French philosopher Jacques Derrida had never proclaimed any affinity with structuralism and his well-known article on "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" is its severe and penetrating criticism, critics have regarded Derrida's theory of deconstruction as the theory that emerged out of the insights of structuralism. The term 'post-structuralist' is often applied to Derrida on account of his opposition to structuralism. Derrida was not the originator of the term 'deconstruction'. He rather found it in the obsolete form in a dictionary and started using it in the 1960s. He first used it in order to translate a

concept of Martin Heidegger. The term 'deconstruction' does not refer to a single fixed definite meaning, which stands behind and apart from all its uses. It is rather, says Alex Thomson, in the article "Deconstruction", published in Patricia Waugh's famous anthology, "one of a potentially infinite series of the uses of the same word, in different contexts, to communicate different meanings . . . We can never fully pin down or exhaust its meanings" (300-1). Derrida has always regarded it as 'an experience of the impossible'. The major target of deconstruction is to organise the experience of temporality in terms of past, present and future. It analyses and dismantles the concept that structure is in any sense either given or objectively immanent in the text. Though the text creates the semblance of stable meaning, it always suffers from fundamental undecidability. Text can always be deconstructed; it never achieves its *closure*. There is no finality in the meaning of the text; it always remains a domain of possibilities. In this connection Jeremy Hawthorn in *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Terms* (1998) has aptly observed that, "... for Derrida the meaning of a text is always unfolding just ahead of the interpreter, unrolling in front of him or her like a never-ending carpet whose final edge never reveals itself" (39).

Deconstruction de-centers the centers that it finds in the text and makes the text more interesting. In the opinion of Derrida since the language is not a transparent medium of expression, it never offers us direct contact with reality. The relationship between signifier - the word we hear or read and the signified - what the word signifies - is always subject to an inherent instability. The signifier is of course stable, but the signified may change over the passage of time. It is quite possible that the words and phrases, which used to carry vivid metaphors may now have lost their metaphorical edge. In order to express this problem Derrida coined a new term *différance* that contains both the idea of difference and the process of deferral of meaning. Derrida's theory of deconstruction paved the way for the emergence of poststructuralist theories or major approaches to literature that still dominate literary studies.

Poststructural theories attempt to challenge and destabilise, sometimes even undermine and subvert what they identify as the Western fundamental assumptions, concepts, procedures and findings in the traditional modes of discourse in literary criticism. They deconstruct all those binary oppositions which are central to Western culture and expose, says Hans Bertens, "false hierarchies and artificial borders, unwarranted claims to knowledge and illegitimate usurpations of power" (147). Their emphasis is placed on fragmentation, difference and absence rather than sameness, unity and presence. Though Derrida's deconstruction of

logocentricism interrogates power, the interest in power, and its workings that dominate the poststructuralist criticism of the 1980s and 1990s, becomes evident in the works of Michel Foucault. Foucault draws our attention to what he regards as the Enlightenment desire to establish the standards by which we regulate ourselves and our societies on a rational and systematic ground. In the opinion of Foucault new sciences have generated certain norms and standards which fail to recognise the subtle differences among different groups of human society. They impose definitions upon us, which we might like to reject.

Poststructuralists target the concept of essentialism because it claims that we can know the essence of things. Since the language is not obedient but fundamentally uncontrollable, it is not capable of getting to know the truth. Consequently the interpretation of literary texts may never lead to a final, definite *closure*. Like structures, interpretations are mere freeze-frames in a flow of signification and hence subject to the effects of *différance*. Since the texts are capable of generating an infinite flow of meaning, interpretation of the texts has now become the serious concern of the reader. The statement of Roland Barthes regarding 'the death of the author' has led to the emergence of 'the birth of the reader' who is free to interact with the text in order to explore the multiple layers of meaning.

The New Critics and Formalists had shifted their emphasis from the author to the text and with the emergence of reader-response theory, the emphasis has been shifted from the text to the reader who is now at the centre of literary theory. We can no longer ignore the reader's vital role in the elucidation of the meaning of the text. The text, in the absence of the response of the reader, has no real existence. Its meaning, says Raman Selden, "is never self-formulated; the reader must act upon the textual material in order to produce meaning" (116). The reader is not only a close companion of the writer but a co-creator also. The text is embedded more in the consciousness of the reader rather than in the printed words. Hence the reader should be alive and interactive rather than passive or dead, as it is the reader who endows the text with new meanings and fresh interpretations.

Though Structuralist, Poststructuralist, Formalist, Feminist and Psychoanalytic criticism have expressed their orientation towards the text/reader nexus, the last five decades have seen the publication of such works which specifically concentrate upon the reader and the process of reading. The 'Aesthetics of Reception', developed out of phenomenological philosophy as developed by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, is a modern philosophical tendency which stresses the perceiver's central role in determining the meaning of the text.

The critics like Wolfgang Iser, H. R. Jauss, Stanley Fish, Michel Riffaterre, Jonathan Culler, Norman Holland and David Bleich who have contributed to the growth of reader-response theory, belong to quite different philosophical traditions. The concept of reception was brought into the history of philosophy and science in 1958 by Hans Blumenberg, and since 1967 there has been a comparable reorientation towards the new concept of aesthetics of reception. In the process of aesthetic communication the place of honour was reinstated, says H. R. Jauss, to “the recipient in his own right as receiver and mediator, in short, as the bearer of all aesthetic culture” (53). Aesthetic experience was now to be evaluated, says Jauss, “as a productive, receptive and communicative activity” (53).

The reader unfolds the inherent dynamic character of the literary work, sets the work in motion which ultimately results in the awakening of a response within himself. The process of reading involves a kind of kaleidoscope of perspectives, preintentions and recollections. It reveals the ‘unexpressed reality’ as well as the ‘virtual dimension’ of the text. While reading the text, the reader has to pass through the process of anticipation and retrospection, and as we know, the process is not a smooth one. There are various unexpected twists and turns in the text and hence whenever, says Wolfgang Iser, “the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections for filling in the gaps left by the text itself” (79). By ‘gaps’ Iser means the details or connections – the vaguenesses within text which are to be filled up by the reader himself, and the reader does it in his own way with the help of his own experience. The text is ‘indetermined’ and ‘determinancy’ is brought about by the reader through the act of reading by filling in the ‘gaps’.

While there is an interaction between the reader and the text and the reader moves through the process of anticipation and retrospection, s/he has to form the ‘gestalt’ (an organised whole) of a literary text. In this context Iser’s remark is very significant:

While expectations may be continually modified and images continually expanded, the reader will strive, even if unconsciously, to fit everything together in a consistent pattern. By grouping together the written parts of the text, we enable them to interact, we observe the direction in which they are leading us, and we project onto them the consistency which we, as readers, require. The ‘gestalt’ must inevitably be colored by our own characteristic selection process. For it is not given by the text itself; it arises from the meeting between the written text and the individual mind of the reader with its own particular history of experience, its own consciousness, its own outlook. (81)

The American critic Stanley E. Fish has developed an interesting concept of 'interpretive communities' of readers with shared practices and competences. Fish's idea of 'interpretive communities' may be summed up under the following points:

- (i) The meaning of a text lies in the reader's experience and not in the structure of the text.
- (ii) 'Interpretive communities' of readers, acquainted with reading conventions, norms and strategies, tell us what a poem is. Since reading conventions are impersonal, criticism is a combination of both the personal and impersonal.
- (iii) Interpretive strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read.

Raman Selden is critical of Fish's concept of 'Interpretive communities' on the ground that it excludes all possibilities of deviant interpretations and hence "it can chill the spines of readers" (126). Jonathan Culler in his book *The Pursuit of Signs* (1981) has drawn our attention to the fact that although the text is unalterable, the meaning of a text changes according to the system or approach that we follow. "Meaning is not an individual creation", says Culler, "but the result of applying to the text operations and conventions which constitute the institutions of literature" (127). We thus realise that the meaning of a text is not determined once and for all and it is open to a new interpretation at any time.

Since the early 1980s New Historicism has been accepted as a mode of literary study. It is opposed to Formalism and does not deal with the text in isolation from its historical context. It takes into account, say Abrams and Harpham, "the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meanings, its effects and also its later critical interpretations and evaluations" (190). It makes an attempt to study a literary text in the context of several other texts from the same period in order to identify the social, political and anthropological contexts of their production. This new approach was known as 'New Historicism' in America and 'cultural materialism' in Britain. Though many poststructuralists are skeptical about the attempts made to recover historical 'truth', the New Historicists are of the opinion that with the publication of Foucault's work a new, non-truth oriented form of historicist study of text is possible and desirable.

The New Historicists challenge the older concept of historicism on several grounds and try to trace the interconnections between literature and the history of a period:

- (i) New Historicists believe that if history is the record of the events of the past, the past can never be narrated or represented in its pure form. It is always colored by one's ideology, prejudice or preconceived notion.
- (ii) There is no single history written in the world, but only discontinuous and contradictory 'histories'. The ruling classes, in order to serve their interests, have been imposing the concept of a uniform and harmonious culture on history. Otherwise there is no single, uniform worldview of any history or culture.
- (iii) No historian can claim that his/her study of the past is fully objective and detached. "The past is not", say R. Selden, P. Widdowson and Peter Booker, "something which confronts us as if it were a physical object, but is something we construct from already written texts of all kinds which we construe in line with our particular historical concerns" (191).
- (iv) The relationship between literature and history needs to be redefined. There is no fixed or stable history available to us. What is available to us is not history but histories which are nothing but narrations of the past stories, using other texts as our intertexts. Literary and non-literary texts should not be treated differently but they all belong to a different order of textuality.
- (v) The New Historicists, putting emphasis on the intertextual nature of all texts, search for allusions, echoes and similarities in the texts of law, religion, medicine, natural sciences or literary texts. Louis Montrose has demonstrated how Spenser's famous allegory *The Faerie Queen* contributed to the formation of a friendly image of Queen Elizabeth I.

The New Historicists in America, such as Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, Jonathan Goldberg and Stephen Orgel, and cultural materialists in Britain – Jonathan Dollimore, Alan Sinfield, Catherine Belsey and Francis Barker, have deviated from the older historicist mode of juxtaposing of 'text and context', and re-situated the texts in the complex discursive frame by resorting to a detailed allusive reading of texts in their intertextual relations with other contemporary social, political, cultural and popular discourses. New Historicists, under the influence of Foucault, initiated a new kind of intertextual historical theory which assists us in re-assessing the past. Drawing upon poststructuralism, cultural materialists question the claims of some of its versions to liberate the innocent free play of meanings. Both New Historicism and cultural materialism have covered a wide range of approaches to the study of literature and history

and have interrogated the received canon of literary works often in conjunction with postcolonial, feminist and gay/lesbian theories.

Though the postcolonial theory is based on the ideas and concepts of anti-colonial struggle, its current theoretical form starts with the publication of Edward Said's groundbreaking study on *Orientalism*, published in 1978. Under the influence of Foucault and Gramsci, Said focused his attention on how the British and French scholarly works of literature, political tracts, journalistic texts, travel accounts, religious and philosophical books have constructed the impression of the Orient. Western representation of the East serves to form a binary opposition in which the two poles define each other. If East is represented as primitive, marginalised, irrational, sensual and despotic, the West automatically becomes progressive, democratic, rational, dynamic and hence central and superior. The Orientalist discourse moves from imaginative representations of the East to the actual manifestation of the Western administrative requirement. Orientalism is a method of thinking, a mode of representation, which creates the impression about the East as frozen and unchanging and thereby justified the colonial presence of the West in the East. In the opinion of Said, Western representation of the Orient was, says Hans Bertens, "invariably false representations that have affectively paved the way for military domination, cultural displacement and economic exploitation" (204).

Postcolonial theory is the theory, says Waugh, "which questions, overturns and/or critically refracts colonial authority – its epistemologies and forms of violence, its claim to superiority" (341). It is based on the two important principles of political self-determination and cultural independence. It questions the expansionist imperialism of colonising powers and their value systems which supported imperialism and its sinister devices. It makes serious efforts to analyse the process of effects of cultural displacement and the methods adopted by the displaced to defend their cultural identity. Homi Bhabha, one of the leading postcolonial theorists, has rightly observed:

Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third world countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of east and west, north and south . . . They formulate their critical revisions and issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments with the 'rationalizations' of modernity. (438)

Postcolonial theory questions the anomalous, derogatory and discriminatory legal as well as cultural status assigned to the migrant,

diasporic and refugee populations in the imperialist countries. They have suffered displacement and marginalisation in those countries. The issues of race and ethnicity, language, gender, identity, class and above all, power are also closely related to these issues. Even in the early twenty first century, though the colonies have more or less disappeared, neo-colonial relations have developed not only between Western nations and their former colonies but also between the majorities and ethnic minorities which have become the cause of serious concern to the postcolonial thinkers.

During anti-colonial struggles, twentieth century thinkers from Asia and South Africa – Mahatma Gandhi, Aime Cesaire, Leopold Senghor, Albert Memmi had drawn our attention to the racial dimension of colonial rule and the gradual erosion of native values and cultures. In their opinion colonialism is something more than mere political subordination; it is in fact an effective means of cultural domination through representation, discourse and documentation. Postcolonial theory, under the impact of Foucault's notion of 'discourses', Gramsci's 'Hegemony', deconstruction and Marxism, emphasises the role of 'texts' in colonial enterprise. It examines how the texts legitimise colonisation by constructing the coloniser's superiority over the colonised's inferiority. Hence it is opposed to the 'master narratives' of Western imperialism and is strongly in favour of counter narratives which can help the colonised people fight their way back into the world's history. It is interested in producing the counter texts which can provide an effective alternative to the Eurocentric Hegemonic texts. In Britain and America serious efforts have been made to include the works of innovative postcolonial writers such as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka from Africa, V. S. Naipaul and Derek Walcott from the Caribbean islands, and G.V. Desani and Salman Rushdie from the Indian subcontinent in their standard academic curricula.

Gayatri Spivak, who is regarded as the first postcolonial feminist critic, speaks for the female subaltern and wants to save her from misrepresentations either by coloniser British or traditional Indian. She has drawn our attention to the fact that even in colonised nations there is a difference in the status of men and women. Women have been doubly marginalised both on account of colonisation as well as patriarchy. In the process of colonial production, if the subaltern has no history, the female subaltern has been placed in a more pathetic condition on account of gender and ethnicity. Women's 'double colonisation' has been voiced very frequently in the works of Spivak who attempts to develop 'new ethnic', cultural and national identities for women.

Referring to the potential resistance of the native subject Homi Bhabha suggests the idea of 'mimicry', which is nothing but the disciplined imitation of the white man and his culture by the native. In the opinion of Bhabha this is the site where colonial authority, instead of being reinforced, is broken down and gradually weakens. During colonial encounters, the mimic man seems to imitate the white man's authority but consequently fractures and disrupts it. In this connection Homi K. Bhabha in his essay "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" published in *The Location of Culture* (2007) has rightly observed that "The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (126). The dualism of the native – dualism between difference and disobedience is what Bhabha regards as resistance. In the process of articulating resistance the native thus becomes the split, decentered and resistant personality.

Globalisation may be regarded as a mechanism that leads to the merging of cultural practices and movement of people, commodities and capital across the national borders. It has generated a new kind of colonial domination which is known as neocolonialism. It is not so much based on violent conquest but on diffused, insidious forms of consumer culture. Here, recognisable structures of power are not visible and the political, military and financial centers are often diffused and multi-layered. Immigrant and diasporic identities are regarded as celebrations of migrancy in postcolonial theory. They find themselves standing at the border of two cultures, looking at both critically and finding themselves incapable of assimilating either of them. This is what is regarded by Homi Bhabha as hybridity which is the rejection of a single or unified identity and acceptance of multi-cultural locations and identities. Hybridity, in postcolonial theory, is an answer to the dangers of cultural binarism or cultural purity. Cultural theorists like Stuart Hall favour the concept of 'new ethnicities' which do not support the idea of 'essential' White or Black identity. Bhabha in theory and Rushdie in literature have valorised the concept of multiple identities, which is a valuable state of human existence. Neither of them, however, at any point take into account the issue of a migrant labourer or a black woman, who in spite of their best efforts can never escape his/her racial or ethnic identity. They are normally treated as a dependant, racially marked minority.

Postcolonialism has also its significant manifestation in the form of feminist theory. Though feminism as a conscious literary movement is basically a twentieth century phenomenon, voices of protest have been raised from time to time against the suppression of women and the denial

of equal rights to them. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Woman* (1869), Friedrich Engel's *The Origin of the Family* (1884) and Olive Schreiner's *Women and Labour* (1911) may be regarded as some such efforts in this direction. In the 1920s, however, there were clear signs of radical changes in the attitude towards women and their position in the society. Virginia Woolf's extended polemical essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and her work *Three Guineas* (1938) became classic documents in the feminist critical movement. In these works Woolf explored gender relations and developed woman-centric perceptions of reading and writing. Women have to accept patriarchal norms in this regard and hence women's texts fail to survive except as the poor cousins of the male authored texts. Language, in Woolf's view, is also gendered and inherently sexist. Women authors have no option but to use this language which fails to capture the woman's experience. Woolf explored the possibility of a distinctive tradition of women's writing and pleaded for the recognition of female experience in its own right.

The French feminist, women's rights activist and the founder of the Journal of the feminist theory *Questions Feministes*, Simone De Beauvoir, published her most influential book *The Second Sex* (French Version 1949 and English translation 1953) which proved to be a significant milestone in the growth of feminist consciousness. She clearly stated that woman has been marginalised on account of the patriarchal norms of society in which man is regarded as the 'Absolute' and woman as the 'Other': "She is not regarded as an autonomous being . . . She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not with reference to her. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute and she is the Other" (270).

Man's prolonged dominance and the opinions of priests, philosophers, legislators and writers have created the impression that woman's subordinate position is willed in heaven and implemented on earth. This assumption has been internalised by the women themselves. Beauvoir questions the perpetual subjugation of woman on the basis of her womanhood because "one is not born a woman: rather one becomes a woman" (273). People are highly mistaken about 'sex' and 'gender' and they take them synonymously. Whereas sex (male-female) is a biological construct, gender (masculine feminine) is a cultural construct. Biological construct cannot be altered according to our own sweet will but cultural construct can certainly be modified in order to fulfil the genuine and legitimate aspirations of the 'other' half.

The radical American feminist who was the most remarkable advocate of de Beauvoir's anti-essentialism was Shulamith Firestone whose text *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) advanced the arguments of Beauvoir further. The text immediately became an important manifesto for the second wave feminism. Firestone suggested that modern technology should be used to free women from the restraints imposed on them by their biological construct. She not only advocated abortion and contraception but artificial gestation and communal child rearing also. She was of the view that these developments would not only free woman from the tyranny of men but also help them overcoming their biological differences.

Many feminists, however, did not feel very comfortable with this kind of assertion that femininity was an unnecessary or negative state of human existence. Maternity or the emotional ties of a woman to her child are not an undesirable part of female life. They were of the view that the dominant masculine culture in fact suppressed an alternative feminine culture and the only way to regain feminine value is to reclaim the female heritage and celebrate her potent relationship with nature and the body. In her book *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) Mary Daly, the American feminist theologian, condemned the patriarchal norms of society and pointed out that the image of 'God the Father' had been constructed in Christianity in order to provide validity to the rule of father in society. Christianity had assimilated the original female - fertility myths and turned down the goddess-based religion. Daly suggested that woman should not accept the patriarchal tools, including language and religion, which play a very important role in shaping our view of life. Neither language nor religion takes a balanced view of female life and feminine sensibility.

Daly draws our attention to the fact that whereas men try to compete with nature, women develop intimacy with the objects of nature, as women have instinctive urges for pacifism and nurture. These theorists became the great admirers of 'eco feminism'. They were great supporters of anti-war and anti-nuclear protests and pointed out that all kinds of violence – from rape to war or deforestation – were intimately related to the colonial male's bent of mind. Ecofeminists have clearly stated, says Fiona Tolan in *Feminisms* that "women, nature and the Third World are all victims at the hands of an exploitative male capitalist technology and ecofeminists frequently used the image of '*the web of life*' to express the themes of cooperation, interdependence and harmony" (325). Referring to the different representations of human life on account of sexual difference, our attention has been drawn to five factors – biology, experience, discourse, the unconscious and social and economic conditions. Women have different experiences on account of different biological attributes

which are regarded as sources of superiority rather than inferiority. Since only women have gone through specifically female life experiences (ovulation, menstruation, parturition), they alone can give authentic voice to their experiences.

Feminists have paid due attention to the issue of difference in male-female discourse also. In her book on *Language and Women's Place* (1975) the female sociolinguist, Robin Lakoff has expressed the view that since woman's language is actually inferior and focuses on trivial, frivolous and non-serious personal emotional responses, woman should adopt male language in order to achieve social equality with man. Other feminists, however, do not agree with this view and they are opposed to the patriarchal ideology of strong man and weak woman. In *Man Made Language* (1980) Dale Spender has stated that male dominated language has virtually suppressed the genuine female sensibility. If we believe in Foucault's statement that what is 'true' depends on who controls the discourse, male domination has entrapped women inside the male 'truth'. Hence women writers, instead of contesting the male control of language, should try to create a separate 'feminine' discourse. Dale Spender explored the possibility of a gendered language and found that whereas male language was imperative, declarative and aggressive, female language was passive, apologetic, deferential, tentative and diffident. Focusing on the language of women's writing Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray postulated a fluid, non-linear, elliptical, mystical, autobiographical and part mythic, realistic and fictional writing. It makes experiments with visual and graphic alterations to fonts, parentheses, blanks, breaks, silences, hyphenated words and altered punctuations. The poetry of Emily Dickinson exemplifies feminine writing, as it is full of strange images, gaps and pauses which disrupt the normal, expected flow of language. By disrupting the normal flow of language, the female author disrupts the social structure which is essential for women's emancipation.

In 1973 Virago Press started publishing the texts of female authors, prominent among them being Antonia White's *Frost in May* (1978). The Anglo-American practice of gynocriticism was based on the impression that male literary tradition had suppressed the alternative female tradition which needs to be discovered and highlighted. Its remarkable exponent was the American theorist Elaine Showalter who coined the term 'gynocriticism' and was the author of *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977). In her essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", published in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (2000), Showalter explained gynocriticism as a concern with, "women as writers . . . the history, styles, themes, genres and structure of

writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition” (311).

Explaining the necessity of gynocriticism, Showalter points out that if phallogocentric criticism is based on the concept of creativity, literary history or literary interpretation depending exclusively on male experience but being projected as universal theory, female authors and critics should formulate their own norms based on female experience. Hence the seventies saw the publication of such feminist novels like Erica Jong’s *Fear of Flying* (1973), Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), and Marilyn French’s *The Women’s Room* (1977). Showalter changed the direction of feminist discourse by generating the fresh appetite for women’s literature and by reviving forgotten female authors for thoughtful assessment. She was of the opinion that women not only wrote differently from men but should be read differently also. In this context Peter Barry’s remark in *Beginning Theory* (1995) is quite significant; “It switched its focus from attacking male versions of the world to exploring the nature of the female world and outlook and reconstructing the lost or suppressed records of female experience” (122). Women’s writing, by evolving its distinct patterns, thoughts and identity, constituted a subculture within the literary tradition.

In her influential book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) gender theorist Judith Butler suggested the idea of the fluidity of the gender. In her opinion masculine and feminine as two mutually opposing positions are artificial constructs imposed by heterosexuality. The fundamental features defining gender are social and cultural productions which give us the illusory impression of being natural. Gender thus is a ‘performative’ pattern of behaviour which we repeatedly enact in our life. By subverting gender norms binary gender categories may be deconstructed and the division between male and female may ultimately be transcended. In the 80s and the 90s significant efforts were made for the exposure of a typical ‘cultural mindset’ in the public which generated and perpetuated gender inequality. Even women nurtured the patriarchal codes of conduct without being aware of its sinister designs. Contemporary feminism drew its nourishment from various movements such as liberalism, Marxism, radicalism, structuralism and New Historicism and helped in the emergence of a ‘new’ woman who is radically different from the traditional one: The ‘new’ woman is dynamic, resourceful, confident, sometimes even aggressive. She has succeeded to a very great extent in redefining herself and acquiring her new identity in every walk of life.

Though there was unanimity among women regarding the 'new' identity, voices of protest started coming from black, lesbian and working class women. They protested that the opinion of educated, upper class women cannot be regarded as the universal voice of feminism, as they represent the views of a privileged minority and ignore the differences that exist among different categories of women. Black women expressed their resentment on the ground that they faced oppression and discrimination not only on the ground of gender but on the ground of race also. Black feminism was in fact opposed to both patriarchy and white feminism. 'Black Women' or 'Third World Women' reveal a racist hierarchy of privileges. The postcolonial Indian critic Chandra Talpade Mohanty has rightly stated that just as men reduced women to the status of the 'other', white women by creating the image of Third World Women as illiterate, poor and superstitious have pushed them to the same status in comparison to themselves. Western feminists have never looked at the problems of Third World Women from a racial point of view and hence perpetuated racial prejudices against them. In her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* Jean Rhys reveals how Anglo-American feminist critics have undoubtedly pushed the 'other women' of the text just to a shadow of white woman's self. African American feminists have talked of a black voice or black aesthetics, and Alice Walker's novel *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1983) has given an authentic voice to the unique experiences of black women.

Just as feminism was accused of racial prejudices, it was also attacked for the presumption of heterosexual norms only. While Showalter was exploring her (heterosexual) women's literary tradition, lesbian feminists were raising their issue of identity crisis and asking whether lesbian tradition was possible or not. Gradually second wave feminists started looking at sexuality not as a biologically determined position but as a cultural construct and a political choice. Radical lesbian theorists like Mary Daly have expressed their view that if women do not conform to the heterosexual norms, women can defy the patriarchal code of conduct. Literary theorists question whether lesbianism refers to a different mode of sexuality or it gives priority to mutual female relationships. Since the 1970s a powerful lesbian literature has come into existence, highlighting the differences in feminist discourse. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's novel *Herland*, which tries to establish distinct lesbian identity, seems to aspire for an all-female (non-sexual) utopia.

Since the 1990s queer theory has emerged as a new theory and is primarily interested in reversing heterosexuality as the only accepted norm. It refers to the combined range of gay and lesbian studies related to all modes of variance such as bisexuality, transsexuality, sado-masochism

and cross-dressing. It destabilises essentialising identities and resists heterosexual cultures through transgression, carnival and parody. It is anti-assimilationist, co-sexual and treats men and women on an equal footing. Though originally the term 'queer' was used in the derogatory sense highlighting the same sex love as deviant and unnatural, since the early 1990s it has been increasingly used to identify a way of life and an area for scholarly exploration. Queer does not refer to something particular but anything which is at odds with the dominant, the legitimate and the normal. Raman Selden has rightly pointed out that "queer theory proposes a disruption of normative sexual identities and a conception of agency linked to the performance which installs those identities" (265). Queer reading refers to interpretive strategies which seek to subvert and confound the established verbal and cultural boundaries between male/female, homosexual/heterosexual and natural/unnatural.

The Queer theory which derives inspiration from Michel Foucault and Raymond Williams and has strong affinities with British cultural materialism is propounded by Dollimore, Alan Sinfield, Judith Butler, Annamarie Jagose and Joseph Bristow. In his work *History of Sexuality* (three volumes, English translations 1977–1986) Michel Foucault theorised sexuality and pointed out that sexuality is located within the structures of power which have marginalised queer sexuality and regarded it as unnatural and devilish. He traced the history of 'normal' sexuality and tried to point out how heterosexuality emerged as the standard norm through a process of the demonisation of gay/lesbian relations. The distinct contribution of queer theory to literary and cultural studies lies in the fact that in addition to race, gender and class it recognises sexuality as the fourth category of human understanding and human relationship. Queer theory provides a philosophical challenge to the status quo and encourages such readings which subvert sameness and celebrate otherness. Queer theory makes an assault upon the privileged heterosexual relationship and seeks to celebrate perverse sexualities which are conceptualised in terms of fluidity, contradiction and indeterminacy.

We are living in a world which is moving fast towards the worst phase of pollution, contamination and bio-disaster. Drawing our attention to the environmental crisis, environmentalist philosopher Val Plumwood in his book *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (2002) has highlighted the "massive processes of biospheric degradation, the failure and permanent endangerment of many of the world's oldest and greatest fisheries, the continuing destruction of its tropical forests and the loss of much of its agricultural land and up to half its species within the next thirty years" (1). Hence it is expected from the democratic politicians to

make our advancement eco-friendly for the balanced growth of human civilisation.

As conceived in the early 1970s by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess and developed in the 1980s by American environmentalists like Bill Devall and George Sessions, deep ecology is a radical form of environmentalism and is opposed to the technological and materialistic uses of human resources for civilisational advancement. It advocates, says Richard Kerridge, “a bio-centric view which recognises the non-human world as having value independently of its usefulness to human beings, who have no right to destroy it except to meet vital needs. Deep ecology proposes drastic changes in our habits of consumption not only to avert catastrophe but as spiritual and moral awakening” (536). The norms of deep ecology are mainly responsible for the emergence of worldwide environmental activism. Its central hypothesis is that whereas our world view is human-centric, it should be eco- or bio-centric for the survival of a safer planet. In poorer nations, a safer planet cannot be delinked from the issue of their resources, their livelihood and their norms of social justice.

Ecocriticism is a kind of literary and cultural criticism from the point of view of environmentalism, which is opposed to industrial modernity introduced by scientific and technological advancement. Ecocriticism is hostile to the Marxist and New Historicist theories which could see nothing in nature writing but preservation of conservative ideology and a return to the nostalgic and reactionary state of human existence. Ecocriticism in fact uses ecology as metaphor for culture and looks at culture as the manifestation of ecology. Culture has been regarded as masculine and nature as feminine. Two things are common in both of them - reproduction and nurture. Ecofeminists like Vandana Shiva, Mary Mellor and Ariel Salleh have made subtle analysis of the relationship between nature and gender. By the late 1970s the term ‘ecocriticism’ was coined by the combination of criticism and the shortened form of ‘ecology’. Ecocriticism refers to the critical writings which explore, as has been stated by M. H. Abrams and G. G Harpham, “the relations between literature and the biological and physical environment, conducted with an acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on that environment by human activities” (81). By the end of the twentieth century serious concern was expressed by scientists and conservationists over the environmental crisis caused by the depletion of natural resources, gradual extinction of plant and animal species, pollution of the biosphere and the explosion of population beyond its reasonable limit. By the 1990s ecocriticism had been recognised as the emerging field of literary pursuit with its own organisation ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and

Environment) and its own journal ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment), though a few works of ecocriticism such as Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* (1973) and Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1975) had already been published. Jonathan Bates was the first British critic who used the term ecocriticism in his book *Romantic Ecology* (1991). The two novels - Leslie Marmon's *Silko's Ceremony* (1977) and Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1995) were devoted to the celebration of the environmental values of Native American cultures in opposition to the destructive forms of Western industrial devolvement.

Ecocentrism places the ecosystem at the centre and is opposed to anthropocentrism which places humanity at the centre of everything. Western philosophy or religion is basically oriented to the betterment of human beings who are regarded as superior to nature and have been given the freedom to exploit the natural resources in order to serve their own purpose. Ecocentrism, on the other hand, admits the importance of all living things and their earthly environment and considers them in no way less important than the human species. Ecocriticism is opposed to the use of such binaries as man/nature or culture/nature and does not regard them as mutually exclusive. They are rather interconnected and mutually interdependent.

Ecocriticism points out that the differences in attitude towards the environment are related to the writer's ethnicity, race, class or gender. Kolodny highlights the fact that the male authored literature genders the land as female and resorts to nature for pastoral enjoyment and gratification. She also draws parallel between the subjugation of woman and the exploitation of the land. In the light of structuralist anthropology, Sherry B. Ortner in the influential essay "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture" (1974) has compared the women's subordination by men to nature's exploitation by culture. Ecofeminism is based on women's comparison with nature. Ecofeminists believe that the traditional norms of patriarchal society have ultimately resulted in the oppression and exploitation of both women and nature.

There is growing interest in the animistic religions of the non-Western world such as Hinduism or Buddhism, which do not believe in the Western distinction between humanity and nature and which do not authorise the human beings' dominance over the non-human world. The ecocritics in America think of the natural world as a living, sacred thing in which each individual feels intimately related to the natural world. The two anthologies, namely *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and *The*

Greening of Literary Scholarship: Literature, Theory and Environment (2002) edited by Steven Rosendale, and the book *Ecocriticism* (2004) written by Greg Garrad, have caused sufficient growth in the field of ecocritical theory.

The present anthology contains fifteen research papers on various aspects of Indian and Western literary theory and practice. G. B. Mohan Thampi in his article “Reader-Response Theory and the Concept of *Sahrdaya*” has made a very perceptive analysis of the different aspects of the Reader-Response theory, and has highlighted the significant role of *Sahrdaya* in Indian poetics. The concept of *Sahrdaya* has wider implications than the concept of the reader to its Western counterpart. In his paper on “Psychoanalytical Frameworks in the Utopian Impulse” Daniel T. Baker uses Stephen Donaldson’s Fantasy trilogy – *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever* and discusses Jameson’s Utopian impulse which contains a negative function. It is deconstructive rather than productive, a regulatory method rather than an imaginative representation. In their article on “The Nation as Goddess: Ritualizing Politics, Politicizing the Sacral” Namrata R. Mahanta and Banibrata Mahanta have made a serious attempt to present the development of the mother-goddess tradition in the Indian concept and have explored the ambiguities which are inherent in the construction of the deity, its development trajectory and the complex of meanings that have been attributed to the icon through the different phases of Indian history. In his paper on “Postcolonialism and Strategies of Narration in India”, Awanish Rai has highlighted the vibrant temporal as well as thematic dimensions of postcolonialism and comprehensively explored its implications in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Rajmohan’s Wife*, Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*, R.K. Narayan’s *Swami and Friends* and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*.

In his article on “Contemporary Theory in the Postcolonial Third World” Jai Singh has drawn our attention to the contradictions prevailing in Third World postcolonial theory and reached the conclusion that though it seems to be liberating, it has become an instrument of recolonising the Third World on account of the control of capitalism which was once upon a time the main cause of colonialism. Ravi Kumar Kumbar in his article “Locating Edward Said’s Politics of Liberation in *Orientalism*” has explicated Said’s critique of Orientalism and acceptance of humanism which is opposed to every kind of tyranny, domination or racial exploitation and whose social goals are directed towards the acquisition of non-coercive knowledge produced in the interest of human freedom. In his article “Suppressed Histories, Racism, Ethnicity and Postcolonial Disorder in *A Bend in the River*” P. C. Pradhan has made a comprehensive

postcolonial reading of Naipaul's novel *A Bend in the River* which presents political uncertainty, narrow racism and cultural conflicts threatening the stability of the post-Independent African society. In "Rescripting the Dominant, Essentialist Narrative on the Splitting of India: Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*" Nupur Palit has explicated Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* as a counter narrative, challenging the officially sanctioned narratives on the issue of the partition of the country. By emphasising differences with the nationalist narratives and the hegemonic discourses, Sidhwa becomes the voice of dissent and resistance.

Damodar Thakur in his insightful article on "*Bhagavadgita: A New Interpretation*" has suggested a new meaning of *Gita* which conceptualises life as journey, a journey from being to an endless becoming. The central message of this great classic is that spirituality is not 'an escape' from worldly ambitions and aspirations but a rich and vibrant fulfilment of the basic urge of our being for a multifaceted, positive and proactive becoming. In his article "Androgyny and Postfeminism: Revisiting D. H. Lawrence" Devender Kumar has reevaluated D. H. Lawrence in the light of the contemporary norms of androgyny and postfeminism. Lawrence aspires not for a 'sexless' but for a 'genderless' society and thus makes serious efforts to divest sex of its power to ascribe gender. In the paper on "Ecology and Feminism in Linda Hogan's *Power: An Ecofeminist Perspective*" R. D. Gholap has analysed Native American Linda Hogan's novel *Power* from ecological and feminist perspectives. Hogan explores the concept of nature as female and traces its relation with the female protagonist, Omishto. Hogan highlights the concept of fair justice which must be indiscriminately ensured to the environment, human and non-human world. In her article "Exploring Animal Ethics in J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of the Animals: A General Semantic Approach*" Dhriti Ray Dalai has subtly explored Coetzee's response to animal rights in the larger context of marginalisation.

The next two research articles are devoted to the exploration of the burning problems of the minority and the subaltern in contemporary Indian society. In the paper on "Discourse of Otherness: Minority and Subaltern Perspectives in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*" Chitra Thrivikraman Nair has examined the trials and tribulations of Parsis and Dalits in the predominantly Hindu majority culture of India in the light of the theory of cultural studies against the political backdrop of the internal Emergency of the mid-1970s. Bhagabat Nayak in his article on "Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja: A Subaltern Study*" has made a sociological and anthropological analysis of the sufferings and exploitations of the Paraja community by the Sahukars and selfish government officials. Mandia's violent action at the

end is a crime in the eyes of law but he has no option but to resist the tormentor in order to decolonise himself.

The last article, by Aarttee Kaul Dhar, has explored the dimensions of film studies. In her article “Rereading Ramayana: Exploring Sita in *Sita Sings the Blues*” she has analysed Nina Paley’s film *Sita Sings the Blues* and explored the dimensions of Sita’s character, the leading female icon of India not only in mythological tradition but in the Indian subconscious also. She has discussed the issue of whether Sita will continue to survive in the times to come or if she stands the risk of fading out from public memories, dying a natural death from the collective consciousness.

The present anthology is a collection of articles which critically attempt to explore the multiple dimensions of contemporary literary theory. It provides a wide spectrum of theories and shows their application to the different texts across the globe. I am thankful to the two other editors – Prof. M. S. Pandey and Prof. Anita Singh for their sincere cooperation and meticulous editing of the articles. I also express my thanks to the contributors and publisher of this anthology - Cambridge Scholars Publishing, U.K.

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CHAPTER ONE

READER RESPONSE THEORY AND THE CONCEPT OF *SAHRDAYA*

G.B. MOHAN THAMPI

Reader response criticism and its corollary Reception theory appeared in the 1970s and the 1980s as a reaction to the New Critical intrinsic school, which tended to ignore the reading process in its exclusive concentration on a poem itself. Ironically, I. A. Richards, who figures prominently in the genealogy of New Criticism, has formulated some key ideas, which are indispensable for understanding this school. Stanley Fish, Norman Holland and David Bleich represent the U.S. academy and Hans-Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser are known as the chief German exponents of the Reception Theory. Unlike Marxism or psychoanalysis, this school does not have a strong base of ideology. But in the context of literary pedagogy, their ideas deserve serious analysis. David Bleich wanted to liberate poetry reading from every kind of institutional authority and allowed freedom to his students to interpret poems in terms of their subjective feelings. Norman Holland, using Freudian ego psychology, insisted that readers read their own fears, desires, defenses, expectations and fantasies in literary works. Stanley Fish began with the analysis of the production of meaning in the actual process of reading experience but later came to the conclusion that reader's responses are determined by the writer's creative strategies. "Interpretive communities" share the knowledge of these strategies and literary conventions. Members of these communities make their own contribution in shaping the meanings of texts accessed by readers.

In the present paper I follow mainly the arguments of Jauss and Iser, theorists of the University of Constance, Germany, who analyzed the reading process in terms of "the fusion of horizons", "gaps and vacancies", "repertoire" and "virtual text". After a brief consideration of the concept of *Sahrdaya*, I compare the difficulties of poetry reading enumerated by I. A. Richards with Abhinavagupta's treatment of *rasa vighna*, or obstacles to