

The Language of Literature and its Meaning

The Language of Literature and its Meaning:

*A Comparative Study of Indian
and Western Aesthetics*

By

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(Ashima Shrawan)
February 2017

INTRODUCTION

There has been a kind of general misconception on the part of scholars of modern theories that literary theory never existed before modern theories, and that traditional critics and aestheticians are prehistoric moles working in the dark before the dawn of formalism, new criticism, stylistics, structuralism and post-structuralism. Simultaneously it has also been realized that few people in literary theory have much familiarity with Indian (Sanskrit) literary theories, and fewer still have research expertise in the field. The experience I had during my Master's study in Panjab University, Chandigarh was of this nature—entirely unrelated to the Indian intellectual tradition—except for a few intervals of layman's reading/listening to/about contemporary scholars of Indian literary theories. The first impression I got from direct and indirect interaction with the scholars of Indian literary theories was that there was a kind of conspicuous correspondence between the formulations of modern literary theories of the West and those of the Sanskrit literary theories of India. This impression was further intensified during my pre-Ph.D. course in Gurukula Kangri Vishwavidyalaya, Haridwar. There, I realized that Indian scholarship has made a significant contribution to the theoretical aspect of poetics. Remarkable literary theories have emerged from Indian aestheticians which exemplify the art and method of appreciation, the modes of analysis and interpretation, and judgement.

We have well-known expositions of these literary theories from Krishna Chaitanya, M. Hiriyana, Kupuswamy Sastri, Raghvan and Sankaran who took into account the wealth of detail, mystical terminology and legendary examples. Considering the limitations of the work done so far based on the theoretical aspects of Indian poetics, Indian Professors of English like Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah, Prof. T.R. Sharma, Prof. M.S. Kushwaha, Prof. R.S. Pathak, Prof. Kapil Kapoor, Prof. K.G. Srivastava, Prof. Avadhesh Kumar Singh, Prof. Sudhir Kumar, Prof. D.R. Purohit and Prof. Shrawan K Sharma emphasized the need for practical formulations of Indian poetics and produced tracts/articles/books outlining the application models based on different Indian schools. They have also written a number of articles on the comparative aspects of Indian and Western poetics. It was this exposure that propelled me to study Indian and Western literary theories,

concentrating on some fundamental questions about literature and its contexts:

- i. Does literature refer to or correspond to something outside texts? What sort of ‘truth’ does literature aim towards?
- ii. What mental process—the writer’s or reader’s—contributes to the production of literary texts?
- iii. To what extent are texts ‘autonomous’? What are the formal and structural properties of texts? Is a text’s structure determinate or indeterminate?
- iv. Is literature a part of history? Can we know what social, economic, geographical and other historical processes determine or condition the production of literary texts?
- v. Is literature primarily a form of moral experience? Do writers’ moral ideas or ideologies (conscious or unconscious) determine the nature of their writing?

In recent decades there has been a marked awareness of the language of literature and its meaning. The aestheticians, writers, critics and scholars hold that the language of literature embodies a significant aspect of human experience; it has a pattern of verbal substructure much more carefully modified than that of everyday language; it is this language that expresses the meaning of literature. Most modern literary theories, like formalism, new criticism, stylistics, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, discourse analysis, semiotics and dialogic criticism, in one way or the other emphasize the study of the language of literature in order to understand its meaning and relish it.

It is remarkable to note that Indian aestheticians have made several exploratory but penetrating contributions on many issues, having a distinct bearing on the language of literature and its meaning which still confront modern scholars. Although they do not use the terminology of modern criticism, their formulations on the language of literature and its meaning are seminal. They hold that literary beauty ensues from formal and structural features of a composition. They also hold that it is a literary linguistic presentation that possesses some element of art and represents an object as it figures in the literary imagination. Krishnamoorthy rightly holds, “the whole field of Sanskrit poetics may be regarded as one continued attempt to unravel the mystery of beauty of poetic language.” By erecting their theoretical edifice on the firm foundations of literary activity, they have examined the language of literature and its meaning

from various standpoints: *rasa* (aesthetic experience), *alamkāra* (poetic figure), *rīti* (diction), *dhvani* (suggestion), *vakrokti* (oblique expression) and *aucitya* (propriety).

The present project is an attempt to explore how the language of literature and its meaning have been dealt with in both Indian and Western aesthetic thinking. The project concentrates on Kuntaka's theory of *vakrokti* and Ānandavardhana's theory of *dhvani* from Indian aesthetic thinking, and Russian formalism and deconstruction as part of Western aesthetic thinking. The study focuses on:

- i. the intersection between the theory of *vakrokti* and Russian formalism; how they approach the language of literature, and
- ii. the intersection between the theory of *dhvani* and deconstruction; how they approach the meaning of the language of literature.

As far as Kuntaka's theory of *vakrokti* and Russian formalism are concerned, they revolutionized literary criticism by focussing on the language of literature. Kuntaka analyses the language of literature on six levels: *varṇa-vinyāsa-vakratā* (phonetic obliquity), *pada-pūrvarddha-vakratā* (lexical obliquity), *pada-parārdha-vakratā* (grammatical obliquity), *vākya-vakratā* (sentential obliquity), *prakaraṇa-vakratā* (episodic obliquity) and *prabandha vakratā* (compositional obliquity) in his book *Vakroktijīvitam*. As the title of his *Vakroktijīvitam* unfolds, *vakrokti* is the life of literature. He further defines *vakrokti* as a *vicitra abhidhā* (striking denotation) and conceives of it as a striking mode of expression depending on the peculiar turn given to it by the skill of the poet. It is based on an aesthetic concept which is never lured away by what is ordinary and ornate since its whole concern is to distil the aesthetic essence in the ordinary as well as extraordinary ingredients of the subject. It is an indispensable character in the texture of literature; it is a striking mode of speech; it is the result of a talented writer or, in other words, it depends upon *kavi-vyāpāra* (creative endeavour); it is a literary expression of speech as distinguished from expression or speech, be it either of the ordinary work-a-day life or of the scientific laboratory, the scholastic classroom and the philosophical textbook; it is also recognised as the embellishment of the word and its meaning, the physical constituent of literature; it facilitates literary expression to give a kind of unique pleasure to *sahṛdaya* (the reader).

Like Kuntaka, Russian formalists establish the priority and autonomy of the language of literature and use defamiliarization for obliqueness. According to them, the purpose of art is to make objects unfamiliar, so that a renewed perception of them creates a fresh awareness in the beholder, beyond the stale routines of automatized schemes. In his essay, ‘Art as Technique’ Victor Shklovsky points out that the purpose of art is to impart the sensations of things as they are perceived, and not as they are known. Russian formalists view literature as a specialized mode of language which is self-focused and does not make extrinsic references. They offer a special kind of experience by drawing attention to language’s own formal features, excluding the subject matter and social values. Here, the object of study is “literariness” which consists “in the maximum foregrounding of the utterance i.e. the foregrounding of ‘the act of expression’ the act of speech itself.” The primary aim of literature in thus foregrounding its linguistic medium is to estrange or defamiliarize. The writer, by disrupting the mode of ordinary linguistic discourse, makes strange the ordinary world of everyday perception and renews the readers’ lost capacity for fresh sensation. The formalists stress the function of purely literary devices to produce the effect of freshness in readers’ sensation. The foregrounding properties or artistic devices are deviations from ordinary language.

Ānandavardhana’s theory of *dhvani* and deconstruction focuses on the meaning of the language of literature. Ānandavardhana holds that there are enumerable *dhvanis* (suggestions) leading to enumerable meanings, and through *dhvani* (suggestion) the meaning of a text can be differed and deferred endlessly. The basic structure of this theory flourishes on the word-powers— *abhidhā--abhidheyārtha or vācyārtha* (primary meaning), *lakṣaṇā--lakṣyārtha* (secondary or derivative meaning), and *vyanjanā—vyaṅgārtha or dhvanyārtha* (tertiary or suggested meaning)—which give vent to all kinds and sub-kinds of *dhvani* (suggestion): *arthāntarasankramitavācya* (partial transformation) and *atyantatiraskṛta vācya* (complete transformation), *saṅlakṣyakrama-vyaṅgya* and *asanlakṣyakrama-vyaṅgya*, *vastu dhvani* (suggestion based on subject matter) and *alamkāra dhvani* (suggestion based on poetic figures), *kavipraudhaukti mātra siddha* (poet’s inventive fancy based suggestion) and *svataḥ sāmabhavi* (possibility-based fact suggestion) and *rasa dhvani* (suggestion based on aesthetic sentiment).

Deconstruction focuses on two things: the nature of language and the constitution of meaning. Derrida says that all Western theories of language

and its uses are partly logocentric and partly phonocentric. He argues that Saussure, like Aristotle, Plato and Rousseau, takes speech as privileged because of its self presence. He holds that it is not speech alone that is privileged but that presence is privileged over absence. As regards meaning, he concludes that meaning can never be fully present in any given sign. Meaning is not the result simply of the attachment of a given signifier to a particular signified. Rather, as we have seen, the attachment of a particular signifier to a given signified to form a sign is determined by the sign's relationship to other signs in the sign-system. For this reason, in order to 'mean' at all, signifiers ceaselessly and endlessly gesture towards the other signifiers of a particular sign-system from which they are differentiated. As a result of this, meaning is less 'self-contained' within a given sign than it is dispersed or disseminated. In short, 'cat' or 'white' depends upon its difference or distinction from all the other signs (e.g. 'dog' or 'black') in order to signify anything at all.

Deconstruction deals with the meaning of text. According to deconstruction, "there is nothing outside the text." Derrida holds that in order to interpret a text one cannot go beyond the sequence of verbal signs to anything that stands outside of, and independent of, the language system that constitutes the text. The process of deconstruction results in a destabilization which we have unproblematically come to accept. It is a means of exploiting the tensions and inconsistencies with the way things are and the way things have been, not just in language, but in institutions. When Derrida wrote, "There is nothing outside of the text" he is referring to the fact that "outside" is merely another text, another set of referents and assumptions. There is no external reality, only intertextuality.

Although Indian and Western traditions have separate histories, the similarities between them fill a significant gap in the knowledge of aesthetic theory as a global phenomenon. There seems to be a conspicuous correspondence between the above mentioned formulations of the theories of the West and those of the Sanskrit literary theories of India. In both schools, there are two seminal aspects: the language of literature and its meaning. The present project compares the arguments of Indian and Western aesthetics, with a particular focus on Kuntaka's theory of *vakrokti* and Russian formalism, and Ānandavardhana's theory of *dhvani* and deconstruction.

CHAPTER I

THE LANGUAGE OF LITERATURE AND ITS MEANING IN INDIAN AND WESTERN AESTHETIC THINKING: AN OVERVIEW

The language of literature is highly innovative and creative, and represents the most delightful and unique expression of the human soul. It is “a conspicuous departure from what competent users of a language apprehend as the standard meaning of the words, or else the standard order of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect” (Abrams 107). It is this language which enables a poet/writer to transform his basic concept into an effective and meaningful message. It is this very language which enables a reader also to understand the meaning of a literary work which is an inescapable notion because it is not something simple or simply determined. Hence, it requires assiduous use of linguistic elements to express the sense or sensibility of language. When composing a piece of literature, one may need concern themselves with the phonological, morphological, syntactical, and semantic components of language, amongst others, as well as all the additional linguistic aspects like plot, characterization, setting, theme, motifs and imagery.

In the world of aesthetics there has been a marked awareness of the creative use of language and its meaning. Aristotle in his *Poetics*, talks of language as distinguished and out of the ordinary when it makes use of exotic expressions; non-standard words, metaphor, lengthening, and anything contrary to current usage. He also holds that any deviation from the use of ordinary words will give it a non-prosaic appearance. Aristotle’s definition of tragedy in Chapter VI is as follows:

Tragedy is an imitation of an action, that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the

form of action not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper catharsis, or purgation of these emotions. (Butcher 23)

The above is an account of the creative use of language. By the term 'language embellished', he means language which possesses rhythm and melody. The 'action,' which comprises all human activity, including deeds, thoughts and feelings, is non-verbal expression. The other parts of the definition—"serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude", "the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play" and the use of emotions—can also be included in the creative use of language.

William Wordsworth, in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads", categorically talks about the nature of the language of literature. He says that a poet should write poetry "in a selection of language really used by men, at the same time, to throw over them a certain coloring of imagination whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect" (164). Coleridge, in praising Wordsworth's poetry, refers to the poet's ability "to combine the child's sense of wonder and novelty with the appearances, which every day for perhaps forty years had been rendered familiar" (Coleridge 81). He further says that poetry "produces the strongest impressions of novelty" and "rescues the most admitted truths from the impotence caused by the very circumstances of their universal admission" (82). This is why one does not become weary of novelty. Even repeated readings of the same text afford new perspectives on its complexities and are rendered pleasurable. Coleridge's own writings evidently show that his concept has the defamiliarizing process in mind. His well-known definition of the poetic imagination in *Biographia Literaria* which says that it "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate" (xci) is a revised version of defamiliarization. He seems to explain it by underlining the "two cardinal points of poetry" which are "the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by modifying the colors of the imagination" (190).

Percy B. Shelley, describing the language of literature in "A Defence of Poetry" holds that it "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects to be as if they were not familiar..." (233). The language of literature, according to him, in other words, overcomes the barriers of customary perception, and enables us to see some aspect of the world freshly, or even for the first time. Conceptualising his view about the language of literature, I.A. Richards observes: "Metaphor is something special and exceptional in the use of language, a deviation from its normal

mode of working, instead of the omniscient principle of all its free action...a grace or ornament or added power of language, not its constitutive form” (89).

Similarly, modern theories emphasize the language of literature in order to understand the meaning of a piece of literature and relish it. Russian formalism views literature as a specialized mode of language which is self-focused and does not make extrinsic references. It offers a special kind of experience by drawing attention to its own formal features, excluding the subject matter and social values. Here, the object of study is literariness which consists in the maximum foregrounding of the utterance i.e. the foregrounding of the act of expression, the act of speech itself. The primary aim of literature in thus foregrounding its linguistic medium is to estrange or defamiliarize. Shklovsky further says that:

Defamiliarization is found almost everywhere where form is found... An image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it, its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object - it creates a vision of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it.... (7)

That is why Shklovsky defines poetry as attenuated, tortuous speech. He holds that poetic speech is formed speech. Prose is ordinary speech - economical, easy and proper. The foregrounding properties or artistic devices, according to him, are deviations from ordinary language. These devices consist of patterns of speech sounds or alliteration, rhythm, rhyme, grammatical constructions, words and images. Victor Shklovsky tackles the issue by looking into the techniques of writing in his essay “Art as Technique”. He says that:

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important.... (2)

The formalist movement also attempted to define defamiliarization by discriminating systematically between art and non-art. Therefore its notions are organized in terms of polar oppositions. One of the most famous dichotomies introduced by the mechanistic formalists is a distinction between story and plot¹, or *fabula* and *syuzhet*. Story (*fabula*) is a chronological sequence of events, whereas plot (*syuzhet*) can unfold in

non-chronological order. The events can be artistically arranged by means of devices such as repetition, parallelism, gradation, and retardation.

Jakobson also suggests that defamiliarization results from structural patterning in texts, or, to give it its later name, parallelism. For him, the poetic function is manifest when the message to be communicated becomes the focus for its own sake. When discussing “What is poetry,” he writes

Poeticity is present when the word is felt as a word and not a mere representation of the object being named or an outburst of emotion, when words and their composition, their meaning, their external and inner form, acquire a weight and value of their own instead of referring indifferently to reality (750).

With regard to this, Elmar Holenstein opines:

A poetic sequence is characterized on all levels of language by the reiteration of the same and similar elements (alliteration, rhythm, homonymy, synonymy) and by their contrastive variations (rhythm, antonymy, negative parallelism). In the case of contrast, the antecedent link of the combination is repeated in an implicit (i.e., negative) manner. (145)

Jan Mukarovsky, a member of the Prague Linguistic Circle, postulates that the function of the language of literature consists in the foregrounding of the utterance:

In poetic language foregrounding achieves maximum intensity to the extent of pushing communication into the background as the object of expression and of being used for its own sake: it is not used in the services of communication, but in order to place in the foreground the act of expression, the act of speech itself. (43-44)

He was interested in identifying the formal and functional distinctions between literary and non-literary writing, noting that the language of literature deviates from what he termed as the ‘standard language’. According to him, the consequence of such deviation is the creation of a defamiliarizing effect for the reader, something he claims to be one of the hallmarks of the language of literature.

Bakhtin, in *Dialogic Imagination*, focusing on the language of literature, lists the stylistic features into which the unity of the novel is usually divided. He characterizes them as “stylization of everyday speech” and

“various types of extra-artistic speech”. His point is that each of these “heterogeneous stylistic unities” combines in the novel to “form a structured artistic system”. His view of novel is dependent on a broader view of the nature of language as “dialogic” and as comprised of “heteroglossia.” He explains the language of literature in the following way in *Dialogic Imagination*:

The language in a poetic work realizes itself as something about which there can be no doubt, something that cannot be disputed, something all-encompassing. Everything that the poet sees, understands and thinks, he does through the eyes of a given language, in its inner forms, and there is nothing that might require, for its expression, the help of any other or alien language. The language of the poetic genre is a unitary and singular Ptolemaic world outside of which nothing else exists and nothing else is needed. The concept of many worlds of language, all equal in their ability to conceptualize and to be expressive, is organically denied to poetic style. (286)

Discourse analysis, unlike the traditional view and philosophy of language and stylistics which typically focus on isolated units of language, concerns itself with the use of language in a running discourse, continued over a sequence of sentences and involving the interaction of speaker or writer, and auditor or reader in a specific situational context. H.P. Grice coined the term ‘implicature’ to account for indirection in a discourse which suggests the rise of multiple meanings. According to this concept, there is an illocutionary force of an utterance that lacks an explicit indicator of its illocutionary intention. It holds that users of language share a set of implicit expectations called communicative presumption which helps to make the utterance meaningful and intelligible. Other language theories have expanded the collective assumptions that help to make utterances meaningful and intelligible, and serve also to make a sustained discourse instead of a mere collocation of independent sentences. These collective assumptions are:

1. Writers or speakers and readers or hearers share a large body of non-linguistic knowledge and experience.
2. Writers use language that is intentional, purposive and in accordance with linguistic and cultural convention.
3. There is a shared knowledge of the complex ways in which the meaning of the text varies according to the particular situation in which it takes place.

In a nutshell, the contemporary literary theories have the following spectrum about the language of literature divided into segmental level, supra-segmental level and Syntactic level:

I. The segmental level includes the following aspects of language:

1. Phonemic level of organization (patterns of speech sounds, alliteration, onomatopoeia, sound symbolism or phonetic intensives meter or rhyme)
2. Morphemic level of organization (words and their prefix and suffix), and
3. Lexical level of organization (dictional aspects of language).

II. The supra-segmental level includes the following features of language:

1. Stress
2. Juncture
3. Intonation

III. The syntactic level includes the following features of language:

1. Combination of words, phrases, clauses and sentences
2. Paradigmatic relations (vertical relations between a single word in a sentence and other words that are phonologically, syntactically and semantically similar, and which can be substituted for it)
3. Syntagmatic relations (horizontal relations which determine the possibilities of putting words in a sequence so as to make a well-formed syntactic unit)
4. Surface structure of a set of ‘kernel sentences’; deep structure of a set of ‘kernel sentences’.

It is this spectrum which embodies a significant aspect of human experience; it carves out a pattern of the language of literature; it makes the language of literature much more structured and creative than the everyday language; it is essentially innovative; and it is this spectrum that expresses new meaning every time, when used creatively.

Here it is worth noting that the theories discussed above focused on the language of literature. The interpretation and meaning of literature, though impregnated with the focus on the language of literature, was not a conspicuous one. It was Hermeneutics in the 19th century that came to be designated as the theory of interpretation in general—methods involved in getting at the meaning of all written texts. These theories suggested that in order to understand the determinate meanings of a text, the reader should

know the meaning of its constituent parts. E.D. Hirsch in his *Validity in Interpretation* and *Aims of Interpretation* opined that a text asserts what its author meant and so meaning is stable through the passage of time. If a text is read independently of reference to the author's intentions, Hirsch asserts, it remains indeterminate. However, Hans Georg Gadamer claims that since the meaning of a text is always co-determined by the particular temporal and personal horizon of the individual reader, there cannot be one stable and right interpretation.

Practical Criticism began in the 1920s with a series of experiments by the Cambridge critic I.A. Richards. He gave poems to students without any information about who wrote them or when they were written. In *Practical Criticism* of 1929, he reported on the results of his experiments. The objective of his work was to encourage students to concentrate on 'the words on the page', rather than relying on preconceived or received beliefs about a text. This form of close analysis of anonymous poems was ultimately intended to have psychological benefits for the students: by responding to all the currents of emotion and meaning in the poems and passages of prose which they read, the students were to achieve what Richards called an 'organised response'. This meant that they would clarify the various currents of thought in the poem and achieve a corresponding clarification of their own emotions.

In the work of Richards's most influential student, William Empson, practical criticism provided the basis for an entire critical method. In *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), Empson developed his undergraduate essays for Richards into a study of the complex and multiple meanings of poems. His study presented the poems as "elaborate structures of complex meanings". Empson's seven types are briefly defined in the table of contents:

First-type ambiguities arise when a detail is effective in several ways at once. . . In second-type ambiguities two or more alternative meanings are fully resolved into one. . . . The condition for the third type ambiguity is that two apparently unconnected meanings are given simultaneously. . . . In the fourth type the alternative meanings combine to make clear a complicated state of mind in the author. . . . The fifth type is a fortunate confusion, as when the author is discovering his idea in the act of writing . . . or not holding it in mind all at once. . . . In the sixth type what is said is contradictory or irrelevant and the reader is forced to invent interpretations. . . . The seventh type is that of full contradiction, marking a division in the author's mind. (76)

Empson further says that ambiguity impedes communication when it results from the writer's indecision:

It is not to be respected in so far as it is due to weakness or thinness of thought, obscures the matter at hand unnecessarily . . . or when the interest of the passage is not focussed upon it, so that it is merely an opportunism in the handling of the material, if the reader will not understand the ideas which are being shuffled, and will be given a general impression of incoherence. (76)

However, the protean properties of words i.e. their ability to carry multiple meanings in a variety of ways are a major component of poetic language. The awareness of the facet of language which pertains to how it operates is one of the pleasures of poetry. Empson explicitly holds that *Seven Types of Obliquities* is primarily an exercise intended to help the reader, who has already felt the pleasure, understand the nature of his response.

The New Critics tried to stabilize the polyvalence of texts, by asserting the determinate structure of works called 'verbal icons': ambiguities, ironies, imagery, texture, symbol, paradox and tensions in poems and plays. C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon summarize tension as

A term introduced by Allen Tate, meaning the integral unity that results from the successful resolution of the conflicts of abstraction and concreteness, of general and particular, of denotation and connotation....Good poetry, Tate asserts is, the 'full, organized body of all the extension and intension that we can find it. (473)

Cleanth Brooks considers that 'paradox' belongs to the 'very nature of poetic language'. A poem is 'a total pattern', able to incorporate the disparities and contradictions of experience. In this way the poet preserves both plurality and unity. Brooks observes: "The tendency of science is necessarily to stabilize terms, to freeze them into strict denotations; the poet's tendency is by contrast disruptive. The terms are continually modifying each other, and thus violating their dictionary meanings" (6).

New Criticism focuses on the 'structure' of a text. The structure being referred to is a structure of meanings, evaluations, and interpretations; and the principle of unity which informs it seems to be one of balancing and harmonizing connotations, attitudes, and meanings. It adds that a close reading of the text enables a reader to understand and enjoy a poem. Hence, a poem should be analysed not by emphasizing character, thought and plot, not by emphasizing the extrinsic background i.e. historical,

sociological, psychological, biographical and literary background, but rather by concentrating on the use of language- phonemes, words, sentences, figures of speech and symbols. New Criticism seeks precision and structural tightness in the literary work; it favoured a style and tone that tended towards irony. It emphasizes “intensive reading...which begins with sensitivity to the words of the text and all their denotative and connotative values and implications. An awareness of multiple meanings, even the etymologies of words as traced in dictionaries, will offer significant guidelines to what the work says” (Guerin., et al 94).

New Criticism argues that each text has a “central unity”. The reader’s responsibility is to discover this unity. In their argument, the reader’s job is to interpret the text, whilst recognising in what ways each of its parts contributes to the central unity. Thus, the primary focus is in the themes. A text is spoken by a persona (narrator or speaker) who expresses an attitude which must be defined, and who speaks in a tone which helps define the attitude: ironic, straightforward or ambiguous. Judging the value of a text must be based on the richness of the attitude as well as the complexity and the balance within the text. The key phrases are ambivalence, ambiguity, tension, irony and paradox.

Reader Response² critics take a radically different approach. Their argument is that in the reading process, readers occupy an important place in the interpretation of a text:

A text does not even exist, in a sense, until it is read by some reader. Indeed, the reader has a part in creating or actually does create the text...Reader Response critics are saying that in effect, if a text does not have a reader, it does not exist- or at least, it has no meaning. It is readers, with whatever experience they bring to the text, who give it its meaning. Whatever meaning it may have inheres in the reader, and thus it is the reader who should say what a text means. (Guerin et al, 351)

Louise Rosenblatt, another critic, advances a transactional theory according to which a poem comes into being only when it receives a proper (‘aesthetic’) reading, that is, when readers interact with a given text. Wolfgang Iser, yet another critic, says that a text does not tell readers everything; there are gaps or blanks which he refers to as the ‘indeterminacy’ of the text. Readers fill these, and thereby assemble the meanings, thus becoming co-authors in a sense. Such meanings go far beyond the single ‘best’ meaning of the formalist because they are the products of such varied reader backgrounds. David Bleich, in subjective criticism, denies that the text exists independent of its readers. He says that

a text may be an object but in that it is a paper symbolization in the minds of readers. Meaning is not found; it is developed. Stanley Fish, who calls his technique of interpretation affective stylistics, rebels against the New Critics' claim that a poem is a single, static object, a whole that has to be understood in its entirety at once. His pronouncements have come in stages. In an early stage (*Surprised by Sin*), he argues that meaning in literary works is not something to be extracted; meaning must be negotiated by readers, a line at a time. Meaning is what happens to readers during this negotiation. In *Is There a Text in This Class?*, Fish concludes that every reading results in a new interpretation that comes about because of the strategies that readers use. The text as an independent director of interpretation has in effect disappeared. Thus, the Reader Response critics put forth the idea that the reader is the most important component, not the text. There is no text unless there is a reader. It is the reader who can say what the text is. In this way the reader creates the text as much as the author does. Hence, to arrive at a meaning, critics should reject the autonomy of the text and concentrate on the reader and the reading process.

Structuralism considers language as the first order structural system of literature and in order to understand the language, one needs to focus on the larger structures of language. It holds that language is like things which cannot be understood in isolation and need to be seen in the context of the larger structure of which they are a part. Here, structures mean those structures which are imposed by our way of perceiving the world and organizing experience. It is not objective entities already existing in the external world. This means that the meaning is not inside the things one sees. It is outside them, in perception. "Meaning lies outside". Meaning is attributed to things by the human mind. In the context of the language of literature, these structures are abstract, such as the notion of the literary or the nature of the narrative.

This issue of language has been explained by Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss linguist (whose lifetime spanned 1857-1917) by codifying them as *langue* (language as a system or structure) and *parole* (utterance in that language). He says that a language has larger structures and that one has to understand those structures to understand the utterance. He introduced the concepts of sign, the signifier, and the signified during lectures he gave between 1907 and 1911 at the University of Geneva. His views revolutionized the study of language and inaugurated modern linguistics. As such, a sign—for instance, a word—gets its meaning only in relation to

or in contrast with other signs in a system of signs. He holds that the meaning of a word is purely arbitrary because it is the outcome of convention. "The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Since I mean by sign the whole that results from the associating of the signifier with the signified, I can simply say: the linguistic sign is arbitrary" (2). He concentrates on the synchronic (patterns and functions of language) rather than on diachronic (historical development of languages and the connections between them). His second aspect is that the meaning of a word is relational. No word can be defined in isolation. The definition of any word depends upon adjoining words i.e. paradigmatic chain or a horizontal design. The relation is also called 'differencing network'. One understands day only when one knows night. The third aspect is that language constitutes our world. This means that meaning to an object or idea is attributed by the human mind and constructed by, and expressed through language. It is not contained within the thing. For example, designating a person good or bad is not an objective or neutral way. It is always the perception of the human mind. Taking the above views into account, it can be said that structuralism views literature as a second order system that uses the first order structural system of language as its medium.

Structuralism views texts as a system that poses the question of how a construct of language can contain meaning for the reader. It adds that discursive manipulation of the raw data is another instance of the defamiliarization one associates with, and expects in literary art. The devices like flashbacks, unequal treatment of time, alternation of dramatic and expository passages, shifts of viewpoint or speaker, or even the absence of viewpoint, cause defamiliarization. An indirect support is given by Jonathan Culler who says that structuralist poetics, "is essentially a theory of reading" which aims to "specify how we go about making sense of texts" (128). By specifying the structuralist poetics based on the model of Saussurean linguistic theory, he invites intelligent and unprejudiced readers to contribute to the expansion of that poetics, which he defines simply as the procedures of reading that ought to be found in any discourse about literature. Literature, Culler insists, can have no existence beyond a display of literary conventions that able readers identify as the sign system that they already know, and that is analogous to the way one reads sentences by recognizing phonetic, semantic and grammatical structures in them. Through experience, readers acquire degrees of literary competence that permit degrees of textual penetration. Culler stresses that it is the reader's business to find contexts that make a text intelligible and

to reduce the “strangeness” or defamiliarization achieved by the text. Here it can be said that meaning is determined by context, since context includes rules of language, the situation of the author and the reader, and anything else that might conceivably be relevant. But if one says that meaning is context-bound then one must add that context is boundless. There is no determining factor in advance of what might count as relevant, or which shift the broadening of context might be able to achieve regarding the meaning of a text. Meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless. Structuralism also focuses upon cultures which have binary oppositions, like the binary features of language. Roman Jakobson has called them “distinctive features” like those of soft/hard, high energy/low energy, tense/relaxed, etc.

Post-structuralism, the culmination of structuralism, views literature as ‘the infinity of language’. The text’s meanings can never be limited. New systems of meaning can always be brought to bear on it. Roland Barthes’ theory of codes differs drastically from the familiar structuralist notion of system. The codes are not determinate in number. The structure which the codes produce is not a fixed one, but an ever-growing multiplicity of significations. In *S/Z*,

...the networks are many and interact..., the text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning, it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend as far as the eye can reach, they are indeterminable; meaning here is never subject to a principle of determination, unless by throwing dice); the systems of meanings can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language (Barthes 5-6)

Barthes classifies five literary codes in literature:

1. The code of action asks the reader to find meanings in the sequence of events.
2. The code of puzzles (hermeneutic code) raises the questions to be answered.
3. The cultural code refers to all the systems of “knowledge and values invoked by a text”.
4. The connotative code expresses themes developed around the characters.
5. The symbolic code refers to the theme as we have generally considered it, that is, the meaning of the work.

Barthes in his poststructuralist essay “From Work to Text” opines:

The Text...practices the infinite deferral of the signified: the Text is dilator: its field is that of the signifier. The signifier must not be conceived as ‘the first stage of meaning’, its material vestibule, but rather, on the contrary, as its aftermath...Text is radically symbolic. A work whose integrally symbolic nature one conceives, perceives, and receives is a text. The text is restored to language: like language, it is structured but decentred...the text is plural. This does not mean just that it has several meanings, but rather that it achieves plurality of meanings and irreducible plurality.... (3)

The text³ does not close on a “signified” like a work, but practices “the infinite deferment of the signified”.

Deconstruction arose out of the structuralism of Roland Barthes as a reaction against the certainties of structuralism. Deconstruction finds disorder and a constant tendency of language to refute that order and meaning in the text as in the sentence. It says that a text is found to deconstruct itself rather than to provide a stable identifiable meaning. It views the text as subversively undermining an apparent or surface meaning, and it denies any final explication or statement of meaning. Derrida, questioning the unity of language itself, and putting metaphor under erasure, radically opens up textuality in *Of Grammatology*: “The text has no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end” (11). It is rather the field “of *freeplay*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble” (17).

Deconstruction questions the presence of any objective structure or content in a text. The practitioners of deconstruction celebrate the text’s self-destruction, as a never ending free play of language. Instead of discovering one ultimate meaning of a text, as formalism seems to promise, deconstruction describes the text as always in a state of change furnishing only provisional meanings. All texts are thus open ended constructs, while sign and signification are only arbitrary relationships. Meaning can only point to an indefinite number of other meanings. “The concept of centred structure is in fact the concept of a free play based on a fundamental ground, a free play which is constituted upon a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which is itself beyond the reach of the free play” (Das and Mohanty 394). A figure allows a writer to say one thing but mean something else, by substituting one meaning for another or displacing meaning from one sign in a chain to another. And he believes this vital indeterminacy of meaning is paramount in literature.

Derrida⁴ questions the metaphysical assumptions of Western Philosophy which, since Plato, locates authoritative meaning in speech rather than writing. The metaphysical assumption of Western Philosophy is that “Meaning is present in the word (the Word was made Flesh). The Text is treated as having the authority of divine utterance, and therefore can have only one true meaning; no ambivalence or indeterminacy can exist in God’s word” (Seldon 289). But deconstruction denies the concept of centre. “There was no centre, that the centre could not be thought in the form of a being-present, that the centre had no neutral locus, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play” (Seldon 395). Thus, deconstruction is a discourse “when everything became a system where the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, it never was absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification ad infinitum” (395).

Barbara Johnson, another deconstructionist, views that language is infinitely plural and opens to the free play of signifiers and difference, unconstrained by decidable, totalised and unified meaning. She exemplifies it by analysing Barthes’ use of codes and lexis which transforms the text into a ‘complex network’ with ‘multiple entrances and exits’. The purpose of these cuts and codes is to pluralise the readers intake, to effect a resistance to the reader’s desire to restructure the text into large, ordered masses of meaning: “if we want to remain attentive to the plural of a text...we must renounce structuring this text in large masses, as was done by classical rhetoric and by secondary-school explication: no construction of the text” (Barthes 11-12). Thus, the process of deconstruction results in a destabilization of the centre. Gayatri Spivak describes the process as such: “To locate the promising marginal text, to disclose the un-decidable moment, to pry it loose with the positive lever of the signifier; to reverse the resident hierarchy, only to displace[not replace] it: to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed” (Translator’s Preface 1 xxvii). In other words, the process of deconstruction is a means of exploiting the tensions and inconsistencies with the way things are and the way things have been, not just in language, but in institutions. When Derrida wrote, “There is nothing outside of the text” (158) he is referring to the fact that “outside” is merely another text, another set of referents and assumptions. There is no external reality, only inter-textuality.

Thus the European aestheticians, poets, writers, critics, linguists and stylisticians all are conscious of the language of literature. To them, style and formal features are important aspects of making an analysis and of working out of the meaning of a piece of literature. All the modern theories discussed above categorically, in one way or another, emphasize the language of literature in order to understand the meaning of a piece of literature and relish it.

It is remarkable to note that Indian aestheticians also have their categorical view about the language of literature. They have made several exploratory, but penetrating contributions on many issues, having a distinct bearing on language of literature, that still confront modern scholars. Although they do not use the terminology of modern criticism, their formulations on language of literature are seminal. They hold that literary beauty ensues from formal and structural features of a composition. They also hold that it is a literary linguistic presentation that possesses some element of art and represents an object as it figures in the literary imagination. Krishnamoorthy rightly holds, “the whole field of Sanskrit poetics may be regarded as one continued attempt to unravel the mystery of beauty of poetic language” (22). By erecting their theoretical edifice on the firm foundation of poetic activity, they have examined the creative use of language from various standpoints: *rasa* (aesthetic experience), *alamkāra* (figure), *rīti* (diction), *dhvani* (suggestion), *vakrokti* (oblique expression) and *aucitya* (propriety).

In order to have a detailed account of the language of literature as discussed in Indian poetics, it would only be fitting to begin with Rājśekhara’s metaphorical presentation of *kāvya* (a literary composition) as *kāvya-puruṣa*. Bṛhaspati informs about *kāvya-puruṣa* to be the son of Sarasvatī. He holds that *śabdārtha* (sound and sense) form his body and Sanskrit is his mouth. Here Sanskrit does not mean Sanskrit language but a *prāñjal bhāṣā*, a language used by the writer. Further, Prākṛt (dialects) are the limbs or arms, Apabhraṃśa (tribal or folk) the legs, Piśāci (languages of the illiterate) the feet and *miśrit* (mixture of all languages) the large bosom. His speech is elevated. Here metrical composition is the pores, questions and quizzes, the forms of discourse, and *alamkāras* (figures) the ornaments. *Kāvya-puruṣa* transcends time and is linked with past, present and future because of the creative use of language. It is again because of this creative use of language that, a reader, while studying this *kāvya-puruṣa*, feels thrilled, transported even, at varying intervals. This experience involves two things: the first is beauty caused by the creative

use of language, known as aesthetic beauty, and the second is pleasure caused by the beauty known as aesthetic pleasure which is experienced by the reader. This aesthetic experience may be *rasagatasaundarya* (beauty caused by *rasa*), *alamkārāgataśaundarya* (beauty caused by figures), *rītigataśaundarya* (beauty caused by diction), *dhvanīgataśaundarya* (beauty caused by suggestive meaning), *vakroktīgataśaundarya* (beauty caused by oblique expression) and *aucityagataśaundarya* (beauty caused by propriety). Accordingly, Indian aestheticians have examined the language of *kāvya* from the standpoints of *rasa*, *alamkāra*, *rīti*, *dhvani*, *vakrokti* and *aucitya*.

Bharata's theory of *rasa* propounded in his *Nāṭyaśāstra* (2nd Century BC) is based on the harmonious and creative use of language which makes its expression the highest kind of *kāvya*. Bharata mentions four kinds of language, based on the four kinds of *abhinaya* (histrionic representation)—*āṅgika abhinaya* (physical representation) to depict emotions/feelings of a character being played by the actor, *vācika abhinaya* (verbal representation) to express emotions/feelings, tone, diction, pitch of a particular character, *āhārya abhinaya* (costume and stage representation) to enhance expression, and *sāttvika abhinaya* (psycho-physical representation) to express the deepest emotions of a character. It also includes four kinds of *vṛttis* (styles)—*bhārativṛtti* (verbal style) which gives a prominent place to speeches, *sāttvati* (grand style) which focuses on words and gestures, *kaiśiki* (graceful style) which focuses on costumes, and *arabhata* (energetic style) in which violent actions dominate. The basic concept of *rasa* formulated by Bharata in his *rasasūtra*, is: “*vibhāvānubhāvavyabhicārisamīyogādrasaniṣapattiḥ*” (the savouring of the emotion is possible through the combination or integration of these elements: *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhicāribhāvas* (NS, VI. 15) and is also based on the creative use of language. Here *vibhāvas* (causes and determinants of the rise of an emotion) are *ālambana* (supporting causes, usually the hero or the heroine or such objects) and *uddīpan* (features or circumstances that accentuate the feelings of *ālamban*, *anubhāva* (gestures expressive of what is going on in the heart or the mind of main characters, like casting a terrified glance, heaving a sigh or involuntarily shedding a tear) and *vyabhicāribhāvas* (transitory emotions which go along with, and consequently reinforce prevailing mood or emotional disposition). Through the conjunction of the language of *vibhāvānubhāvavyabhicāri* the poet activates, with some kind of empathetic induction, the propensity of *sthāyībhāvas* (basic sentiments)

in the reader and the movement it is consummated, the *sahrdaya* experiences an afflatus or transport which is designed as *rasa*.

In the process of a *rasa* experience, it is the creative use of language that turns the *sahrdaya* from *laukik* (worldly) into *alaukik* (supra-human) and hence now aesthetic pleasure is experienced even in weeping. At this juncture of the language, the *sahrdaya* is neither subjective, nor objective, nor neutral. The reader transcends the world but does not enter into a divine world. Here *citta* (mind) has two states: *dīpti* (state of luminosity) and *pighalanā* (state of liquefaction). The former state arouses the *rasas* of *bhayānaka* (the terrible), *vīra* (the heroic), *hāsya* (the comic) etc. while the latter arouses *karunarasa* (sentiment of pathos), *sr̥ṅgārarasa* (erotic sentiment) etc. It is noteworthy here that *citta* (mind) is like sealing wax which gets melted in the presence of heat and finally turns to liquid form. Now *rajas* (mode of passion) and *tamas* (mode of dullness) are also liquefied, and so *citta* experiences universal rhythm followed by *rasa*. Now *citta* transcends the worldly limits. It is *rajas* and *tamas* that makes *citta* have different experiences of life. They limit the realization of *citta* but the moment these *guṇas* (modes) are melted, the limitations of *citta* are removed and we have *rasa* (aesthetic sentiment). The liquefaction of *citta* takes place after *rajas* and *tamas* get subdued for the time being, affording scope for the *sattva* (mode of goodness) to inundate the inner consciousness.

Bhāmaha's theory of *alamkāra* given in his *Kāvyaalamkāra* (in the 6th Century), which defines *kāvya* (a literary composition) as: “*śabdārthausahitaukāvyam*” (KA, I.16) (togetherness of sound and sense) has evolved from the very creative use of language of literature. He emphasizes both the sound-sense aspects in the following statement: “the poem which lacks meaningfulness, well-turned expression, decency, logicity and intelligibility is bad poetry, however musical it may be” (Lele 29). Here it is not to be taken as merely an insipid statement but should be possessed of some charm created by the figures of speech. According to him, *alamkāra* is the most essential element of poetry and it consists in the striking manner of putting a striking idea in equally striking words. Thus poetry should be possessed of some charm created by figures of speech. Bhāmaha makes a shift from the grammatical purity of words to brilliance of meaning. He opines that in literature the subjects and the language are the same, but the word structures are different, unusual, uncommon, striking and hence pleasing. This shows the beauty of poetry lies in the uncommonness of expression. According to him “the locus of