Chapter I

POETIC DISCOURSE:
SEMIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

"A linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unconversant with linguistic methods, are equally flagrant anachronisms."

Roman Jakobson
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Every human interactive discourse attains its existentialist significance through semiotic mediation in which the role of human intellection is of paramount importance. The emphasis upon a notion of semiotic mediation here implies an approach characterized by careful attention to the distinct ways in which signs mediate in the world of human activity. As each and every discourse is actualized through various textual representations, stemming from a complex interplay of different systems, each and every act of understanding the discourse constitution is embedded in a context of socio-cultural signification which can never be exhausted by a given set of closed formalistic explanations. Literary discourse, in this regard, is no exception. Though, since classical times, there have been several attempts to theorize 'literature', to treat the literary text as a singular, autonomous, finite entity within some coherent ontological framework, most of those attempts have proved not only inconclusive but, at times, mutually contradictory. Hence, the idea of literature has remained intractably problematic and in some ways ineffable. The question that arises then is whether a semiotics of literature is conceivable as a multifaceted but nevertheless integrated enterprise which would explain in a systematic
manner the modes of signification of the literary discourse in all its genres and various interpretative operations embodied in it. Given the problems and projects of literary semiotics, particularly those that have figured in contemporary theoretical debates, the examination of the ways and means of literary signification is found to be inevitably eclectic, taking into consideration sources ranging from classical poetics and rhetoric to recent philosophical, logical, linguistic, psychological, anthropological and socio-ethnographic research. The central concern here is to show the theoretical rationale and empirical consequences of the multidisciplinary inquiry into semiotic processes involved in literary discourse in general and poetic discourse in particular.

When one maps the terrain of twentieth century semiotics - its various forms and practices - one finds it difficult to give a neat developmental outline. Many disjunctive intellectual traditions have played their role in characterizing the current state of the art. It has become imperative now to identify the major continuities and discontinuities in its complex history and to argue for some reappraisals of the taken-for-granted arguments about what literary semiotics is supposed to be and what it is capable of. For the findings and formulations in this study, I address myself to a twofold task: to
present brief profiles of the major concepts of literary theory in Western semiotic tradition, together with a critique of them and also, where ever possible, to review some of the major traditional Indian theories propounded by different schools in Sanskrit Poetics which have significant semiotic underpinning: namely the Rasa school, the Riti school, the Dhvani school, the Vakrokti school and the Alamkāra school. The aim is to expound, clarify and evaluate some key concepts, purely in the spirit of critical investigation, for understanding the relative merits of their perspective.

At the outset it is necessary to turn to a brief exegesis of certain basic notions of semiotic theory that are prime requisites to any serious consideration of literary signification.

Fundamental Semiotic Notions:

Sign and Semiosis: We, as human beings, make and use signs, produce texts, create discourses; in short, we participate in different processes of semiosis. As David Sless (1986:9) points out: 'Semiosis comprises signs, referents and users in an indissoluble triad'. This triad forms the pivot for semiotic research. Semiotics¹, in the broadest sense, is concerned with the creative, cognitive and communicative universe of
human beings. As an intellectual pursuit, it attempts to answer various ontological and epistemological questions pertaining to semiosis - a continuous process of sign production and signification. The ingredients of semiosis are distinguished differently by different semioticians. However, it involves a 'standing-for' relation. This relational characterization of semiosis, according to Sless, constitutes three obvious ingredients: (i) an object (ii) whatever the object stands for and (iii) somebody who invokes the stand-for relation. Ronald Posner (1992:37) describes such structuring of semiosis by four different expressions: 'A takes B to stand for C, B refers to C for A, A takes account of C by virtue of the presence of B and A interprets B as representing C'. In Posner's framework, A is the interpreter, B is a sign and C is the meaning that A assigns to B. Posner further states that the term sign is used in two different ways with respect to this triadic relation. While some theoreticians like Morris and Carnap use it as a term for B's, others like Saussure and Hjelmslev use it for pairs of B's and C's. A sign or representamen, in C.S. Peirce's definition is 'something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity.' In this Peircian description of the 'standing for' relation, one encounters four important notions: (i) sign or representamen, (ii) object that which the sign stands for, (iii) interpretant, the 'cognition of a mind'
or mental representation created by the sign-vehicle in its standing for some object, and (iv) ground. These four elements refer to the means by which signs signify; the relationship between them determine the nature of the process of semiosis. It is important to note that Peirce's concept of the sign differs substantially from that of Saussure. In Saussure's view, the sign is an overarching whole composed of two parts: (i) a sound image (or signifier) and (ii) a concept (or signified). The Saussurean notion of sign includes the sign vehicle - interpretant side of Peirce's trichotomy but omits their relation with a third element, object. By positing the object in the triadic relationship, Peirce emphasizes that the sign 'mediates in itself' and is 'socially grounded'.

Peirce's voluminous writings on semiotics inform us a great deal about the kinds of signs that exist and the way signs work. His complex taxonomic formulations suggest three essential criteria for distinguishing types of signs:

First Trichotomy: Signs may differ according to the features inherent in the sign or representamen itself; a sign may be a mere 'quality' (or qualsign), 'an actual existent thing or event' (or sinsign), or a 'general law' (or legisign).
Second Trichotomy: Another criterion differentiates signs according to their different relations with object. A sign can refer to an object by virtue of an inherent similarity between them (icon), by virtue of an existential contextual connection between sign and object (index), or by virtue of a general law that permits sign and object to be interpreted as connected (symbol).

Third Trichotomy: Here signs are distinguished according to the way they are represented by their interpretants - either as 'a sign of possibility' (a rheme), or a 'sign of fact' (a dicent sign), or a 'sign of reason' (an argument).

Reflecting on various aspects of Peirce's highly insightful tripartite typology of signs, one gets to know some salient features of the language act. Though linguistic signs are usually symbolical in nature because the relation between a symbol and its conceptual object is arbitrary; in literary semiosis they work in combination with other types of signs. Saussurean notion of langue (or Language as a system) exists at the legisign level whereas parole (actual manifestation in language use) is comparable with a sinsign. Unlike the formalists who think that the basic quality of a sign is its relative autonomy or arbitrariness vis-a-vis
the object, the pragmatic semioticians give due importance to the sign use and the sign-users. To the pragmaticists, the sign as a semiotic entity includes both a constant core composed of certain qualities or ideas (its intension) and a set of objects-in-the-world to which it can refer (its extension). In short, it implies that both intra- and extra-linguistic contexts must be taken into consideration for analysing any text which is grounded in and through language. Any work of literary art can be viewed as an example of 'Rhematic Symbolical Legisign'. V.Tejera (1995:40) argues that "in the reader's interaction with a work, the latter, first presents itself to him as a qualitative complex that is potentially a whole, potentially intelligible, and promissory of some gain in pleasure or knowledge. To call a work 'potentially whole' is to say that it is rhematic, to call it 'intelligible' is to say that it is symbolic (or argumental) .... That a work is pleasing makes it indexical, connects it existentially to its reader, as does the fact that it informs".

As the manifestation of sign involves a representational function, being integrated in an actual process of semiosis, its signification depends on various psycho-social traits of its interpreter. It is the typical consciousness of the interpreter that analyses, comprehends, transposes and transforms with characteristic liberty the coded structures; only then
the sign acquires its power of invocation and the idea or the concept of the object in question comes to the fore. The sign does not constitute a static representing entity, it is a functional unit, an ideological phenomenon which gets its precise existential contours through the inferential specification of its interpreter. As every discourse is a complex 'network of signs', the main goal of semiotics is to account for the multifariously dynamic conceptual structure of the discourse within a given text. Since language is the most privileged and elaborate system of such signs in the world of human literary activity, semiotics with linguistics as an integral component has immense prospects to provide the methodological apparatus to discern the problematic of literary sign systems.

Text and Discourse:

Literary text is considered to be a harmonious confluence of aesthetically realized signs distilled through the discursive logic of human consciousness which has the potential to be a consciousness about something. The 'being' of a literary discourse gets actualized by virtue of the twin selves of the text - the *inscriptional self* on the one hand and the *non-inscriptional self* on the other. The former has a sensory, material representation whereas the latter has a cognitive, pragmatic
representation. The inherent dialectics between these two selves are such
that they are mutually complementary and they always reinforce each
other's existential fabric. Discourse, which is a hermeneutic construct,
is realized by the juxtaposition of the manifest and immanent structures
of the text. The literary text as a lingua-aesthetic artefact seems to have a
unique structuration principle that governs both its manifest and
immanent representations. Its manifest form is structured in a linear,
contiguous, combinatorial, syntagmatic order which is the metonymic
order and an order in praesentia but its immanent form is presented in a
non-linear, paradigmatic, metaphorical order which is an order in
absentia. These two levels of representation get their semiotic value
through the human intellective mediation because signification never
begins ab nihilo. It is the rational incision of the interlocutor, an
inferential act, which proffers the text its particular ideological, aesthetic
import. In other words, the inferential specification makes the ground
for the signifier-signified relation to be incorporated into a particular
semiosis in such a way that the new knowledge concerning the 'signified'
can be manifested in a new sign and the discourse can emerge. It must
be stated here that the discourse is always realized in a given
socio-cultural praxis, and it always presupposes the active participation
of the human hermeneus i.e. the signifying subject, the interpreter of the
word and the world. Discourse hints at a world beyond the inscriptional self of the text; it has no specific corporeal delineation because it operates at the level of systemic potential, though it is appropriated by various possibilities of the textual processes. A text can establish itself in a variety of ways. The textuality of a text does, however, both result from and establish the need for a right to interpretation. In this sense, a literary text is, to use Descombes' term, an interpretative text - i.e. a text which demands an interpretation. Hence the hermeneutic responsibility of the reader/critic is to probe into three crucial aspects of the text: (i) its structural organization, (ii) its functional orientation and (iii) its pragmatic implication. Here there is a need for a point to be made: the astitā (is-ness) of the text should be distinguished from the sattā (being) of the discourse; otherwise theories pertaining to literary signification would always waver between some sort of ontological idealism and epistemological relativism. The textual component at the inscriptional, exhibitive level may provide the scope to treat the 'text' as a close, finite, observable object but does not make any provision for a dialogue between the text and the human hermeneus (i.e. the interpreter). In this context, one recalls a statement by Gadamer: 'The text is a "thou" with whom we are engaged in
conversation. The dialogical nature of the text is emphasized in the discoursal perspective of current semiotic theory.

The *paradigm* of text-interpretation in the modern post-structuralist agenda has radically transformed the idea of text. The text is no longer a mere, mimetic entity with fixed markings: 'title, margins, beginning, end, authorship etc.' The plurivocity of the text has been focussed upon and in consequence, the reader has also become the *scriptor* of the text. The turning point is the discoursal perspective.

According to Recoeur (1981: 210), this paradigm of interpretation, draws its main features from the autonomous status of the 'written' text. This autonomy is encapsulated in the four forms of distanciation: (i) the fixation of meaning as opposed to the event of saying; (ii) the dissociation of meaning from the intention of the author; (iii) the non-ostensive nature of the text's references; and (iv) the universal range of the text's audience. Together these four traits constitute the 'objectivity' of the text. However, Recoeur is aware of the fact that there is more than one way of construing a text, and that a construction based on authorial intention cannot be privileged over other interpretations. He further argues for the case that a text must be treated as a whole, and its status as a structured totality irreducible to its
constituent parts must be maintained. Though the interpretation of texts is an open process, it does not necessarily mean that all interpretations are valid or that there is no way of judging which of the several interpretations is the more plausible one. 'It is always possible to argue for or against an interpretation, to confront interpretations, to arbitrate between them and to seek agreement, even if this agreement remains beyond our immediate reach' (ibid., 1976 : 79). In order to argue for or against an interpretation, it is necessary to produce reasons and coherent arguments based on what is contained in the text itself.6

The Identity of a Poetic Text and Its Design:

Opinions differ as to what makes poetic discourse different in kind from other types of discourse; at a more basic level, what makes a verbal message a work of art; more particularly, what are the intrinsic linguistic properties of the text which makes it a poem. Jakobson's communication theory (1960) has been of particular significance in addressing to these issues. Jakobson distinguishes six constitutive factors in any given act of verbal communication. All these six factors can be schematized in the following way:
Corresponding to these six factors are six major functions, each assuming an orientation within the verbal message on one of the factors:

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<tr>
<th>Addresser</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Message</th>
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<td>Contact</td>
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- Emotive
- Referential
- Poetic
- Phatic
- Metalingual
- Conative

The aesthetic uses of language are defined within a typology of language functions. In most cases, a language function is associated with each of several factors in communication. In this formulation, the poetic or the aesthetic function, comprises 'the focus within the verbal message on the verbal message itself.' The message is, of course, central to every language-act. Most verbal messages usually fulfill a variety of functions, which are integrated with one another in hierarchical fashion with one function being predominant: 'the verbal structure of a message depends primarily on the predominant function' (Jakobson, 1960: 353). The poetic or the aesthetic function can be found elsewhere and poetry
includes other functions too but poetry is that use of language *par excellence* in which the dominant function is the orientation toward the message. From this point of view, the message itself ‘is a system of systems of signs and at the same time a sign (of some complexity) with both a *signans* and a *signatum*.’ *8 Here a sign is considered as an intrinsic and indissoluble combination of a perceptible *signans* and an interpretable *signatum*. For Jakobson, phonology holds the key to the identity of the literary sign. He suggests that it is phonological parallelism and reception that produce semantic polysemy, ambiguity and heterogeneity in the literary artefact. But with the advent of free verse and with the disappearance of the system of classical versification, one cannot accept this criterion without demur. Another important formulation of Jakobson regarding poetic function is one which draws on both the selective and combinative modes as a means for the promotion of equivalence: ‘the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination.’ This becomes the distinguishing feature of the poetic use of language, as opposed to any other use. In this regard, Jakobson also mentions that the metaphoric mode tends to be foregrounded in poetry whereas the metonymic mode tends to be foregrounded in prose. The two axes may be represented as follows:

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In poetic discourse, all parts of the text stand in a principled relation to other parts and to the structure of the whole. Jakobson's account of poetic function and the verbal art underscores the poem's relative autonomy, its auto-referential mode.

Many literary theoreticians would suggest that the aesthetic uses of language are essentially novel, deviant, strange, opaque etc. These aesthetic uses, remarks Cureton (1992: 81-82), 'extend productive linguistic processes, disrupt expected sequencing and proliferate statistical rarities counteracting linguistic naturalness ... [these] not only create alternative worlds; they also employ alternative means and in doing so, call attention to those means'. These theoretical postulates, mentioned above, do not take into consideration the reader's active role in the reception and analysis of a text.
The reader-oriented perspective is required to account for variability in interpretation of a given work-of-art. V. Tejera (1995) quite appropriately argues that 'in order to take effect, the artistry of the author and the configurations of the text will most depend upon the reader's literary competence.' In current literary semiotics, one of the major underlying assumptions is that the artistic devices of the author in conjunction with the hermeneutic accomplishments of the reader bring the text into life.

Critical reading of a literary work requires that the reader must know the technical or generic tradition out of which the work appears to come (what G. Genette calls the *architext*). It also requires, on the part of the reader, personal experience and judgment of (i) the artist's thematic material, of (ii) comparable work, and of (iii) the way the artist has structured the work.9

It has become commonplace to note that most often literary artists challenge existing judgment of experience, and previous ways of constructing responses to it. Hence, Tejera (1995 : 38) suggests that 'to be adequate and responsive, the reading of a work - or the report of reading - must be self-reflective as well as historically knowledgeable
about, but not bound by the literary tradition'. Interpretations do vary; that is the rule of the game of grammata ('the written text'). The process of interpretation is never complete, according to the principles of Peirce's semiotics.

Given these theoretical formulations, the major tasks before semioticians, dealing with literary texts, have been, first, to provide a collection of concepts and analytical procedures that can be used to relate various linguistic forms and their aesthetic effects; and second, to document how these relations, both individually and in combination, have been realized in textual corpora of various sizes and compositions - individual texts, the works of an author, or the texts of a given situational variety, genre, or historical period. The semiotic analysis of any literary text would involve three important components of the semiotic study: (a) Syntactics: the study of formal aspects of signs, the relations between signs and the combinations of signs (b) Semantics: the study of conditions, an entity must fulfill so that can be represented by signs for interpreters in semiosis; in other words, the relations between signs and the objects that they refer to; and (c) Pragmatics: the study of signs in relation to their users. Because of the interdependence
of these three components, it is not easy to devise a clear cut division of labour for the investigation of semiosis.\textsuperscript{10}

In semiotic terms, a poem can be viewed as a sign in a sign-complex, composed of language, with aesthetic value. As an object of semiotic inquiry, it poses a series of challenging problems; its textual embodiment and thematic configuration escape any kind of rigid theoretical formulation. Semioticians believe in the fundamental distinction between two antithetical modes of experience and two corresponding types of semiological code: logical experience and affective or aesthetic experience. Pierre Guiraud (1971 : 66) points out that 'the former concerns the objective perception of the external world, the elements of which are enclosed rationally in a system of relations. The latter involves the subjective impressions which reality makes upon the human spirit'. Guiraud further argues that in their pure state, logical signs are arbitrary and homological to the extent that they signify form but not substance whereas the aesthetic signs are iconic and analogical. That is why the 'aesthetic message does not have a simple transitive function which leads to meaning; it is of value in itself; it is an object, a message - object'.
Semiotics of poetry is based on two underlying assumptions: first, a poem is an indirect mode of signification and second, unity is a condition of poetry; in other words, various signs within a poem cohere and constitute an integrated whole. To understand the multi-level representations in a poetic text, to understand the ambiguity or openness of literary signification, one needs to develop a comprehensive model which would account for the very process of literary interpretation. Taking into account the text-reader dialectics, an impressive but quite ambitious theoretical proposal has been made by M. Riffaterre (1978) in his *Semiotics of Poetry*. He suggests that interpretation of a poetic text involves two stages of reading: *heuristic* and *retroactive* or *hermeneutic* readings successively. In the initial or heuristic reading, one comprehends the linguistic signs in the text, primarily in a denotative manner. In the process, one encounters different kinds of deviant structures or 'ungrammaticalities' which cannot be interpreted referentially. But since, Riffaterre assumes, the reader knows that the text is an autonomous organic whole, the reader must seek another level where the text's organic unity can be identified. At the mimetic level, the text seems to be a mere string of representations. Hence, there is a need for the second stage of reading i.e. the retroactive reading in which the reader's earlier understanding of
the text is modified, the deviant structures become meaningful; and the reader realises the significance of the text as a unified whole. In Riffaterre's words: 'everything related to this integration of signs from the mimesis level into the higher level of significance is a manifestation of semiosis'. In this semiotic framework, both the world of the text and the world of the reader gain prominence.

Modern semiotic research on literary discourse has developed out of the firm conviction that the impressionism in literary studies should be abandoned in favour of more rigorous objective methods. A central task of semiotics is to offer a working criterion (though not an exclusive criterion) for the selection of those linguistic features which are of literary significance. 'Deviation' is one such criterion, which is an important characteristic feature of poetic language: the poet intentionally deviates from the 'expected norms' of linguistic expressions which occur in ordinary practical discourse. In poetic language, Mukarovsky (1964:19) points out that 'foregrounding achieves maximum intensity to the extent of pushing communication into the background as the objective of expression and of being used for its own sake ....'. Here the term foregrounding suggests, the effect that is brought about upon the reader by linguistic or other forms of deviation in a text.
The deviation, being unexpected, comes to the foreground of the reader's attention as a 'deautomatisation' of the normal linguistic processes. The normal linguistic features of a poem become the background against which the deviant features are foregrounded.

In the analysis of a poetic text, remarks G. Leech (1985:50), deviations are not just to be interpreted in isolation, but to be considered as 'forming meaningful patterns in themselves', i.e. the reader must seek the patterns of coherence in foregrounding. Leech suggests that the coherence of foregrounding can be considered in two different ways: (i) cohesion between deviations occurring in different parts of the poem and (ii) congruence between deviations occurring concurrently, but at different linguistic levels - metrical, phonemic, syntactic, discoursal etc. Though the concept of 'deviation' has faced several criticisms due to its indeterminate nature, its role in stylistic analysis of literary texts is a useful one. Deviation is not the only type of foregrounding which one encounters in a literary text; there is another type of foregrounding which is known as 'parallelism'. It is in a sense the opposite of deviation because 'it consists in the introduction of extra-regularities, not irregularities into the language'. - (Leech 1969:62). Keeping in view the contrast between expression and content, classical
Rhetoric has drawn a distinction between two types of rhetorical figures: SCHEMES and TROPES. Schemes are figures of repetition or devices of parallelism. They may be identified at phonological, graphological, lexical and/or grammatical levels. Schemes are very powerful devices of versification. Figures like alliteration, chiasmus, onomatopoeia, anaphora are unique parallelistic devices which are quite often employed in poetic composition. Tropes may be identified as formal or semantic deviations. Among tropes, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony are considered as major tropes. Schemes and tropes have traditionally been considered as two different kinds of deviation: schemes operate at the level of form and tropes at the level of content. But these two levels are not so distinct so far as the operation of deviation is concerned; there is a great deal of interdependence between the levels because quite often formal deviation presupposes semantic deviation. Tropological signs like metaphors are semantic innovations which undergo sign-mutation whereas the schemes operate through various mechanisms of sign combinations and sign repetitions.

Metaphorical signs constitute the predominant mode of poetic discourse; it is the 'touchstone of the cognitive value of literary works'.
Metaphor, says Monroe Beardsley, is 'a poem in miniature'. The employment of metaphors in poetic composition is not merely an act of ornamentation; metaphors are semantic innovations which have immense emotive value; they enable us to see reality anew.

Metaphor as a Figure:

As much of the symbolic manipulations in poetic discourse rest with metaphor; since classical times, rhetoricians, poeticians and literary critics have tried hard to explain how metaphors work to convey symbolic meaning. In western tradition, Aristotle's definition of metaphor has generated lot of debates. According to Aristotle: 'Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on the ground of analogy' (Poetics, 1457 b). This taxonomy has served as the basis for the later distinctions among synecdoche and metonymy, as well as analogy. Aristotle's notion of metaphor has three important characteristics: (i) Metaphor operates at the level of words, not sentences; (ii) Metaphor is viewed as deviant from ordinary literal usage because it involves the transfer of a name to some object to which that name does not properly
belong; (iii) Metaphor as a trope is based on a relationship of similarity between two things. The most widely debated claims of Aristotle concerns whether metaphor involves some similarity between disparate things; whether metaphor operates only at the word-level or at the lexico-grammatical level. Some scholars consider metaphor in opposition to metonymy: while metaphor is based on similarities between two things, metonymy is based on an external relationship of contiguity. In the opinion of S.Ullmann, metonymy generally lacks the 'originality and expressive power of metaphor' because 'instead of forging new links or uncovering new resemblances they are motivated by relationships of spatial juxtaposition'.\textsuperscript{15} In recent years, many scholars have interpreted metonymy as a sub-category of metaphor. However, others retain the distinction for privileging metaphor over metonymy, to assert the artistic inventions in literary discourse. I.A.Richards (1936) has proposed a useful framework for discussing the problem of metaphor. According to Richards, every metaphor is in the form of 'X is like Y in respect of Z', where X is the tenor, Y the vehicle and Z the ground. In literary discourse, it is not always easy to identify precisely the topic, the vehicle and the ground because metaphors, to a large extent, are based on 'contingent cultural conventions'. From the perspective of reading or reception aesthetics, one can argue that
responses to metaphors are not purely random or idiosyncratic phenomena; they can be accounted for by positing norms, conventions, codes and structures. At the same time, one can also argue that the effects brought about by the metaphorical mode of literature on the reader, are not, always, wholly predictable. Theories concerning metaphors abound; some of them even diverge widely but all of them highlight the working of the human creative mind.

Any metaphorical process, at the beginning, requires setting up of equivalence between two different verbal signs, having their own distinct semantic domains. Due to the relationship of equivalence, in a metaphorical construct, one needs to see a resemblance or similarity between two signs which are referentially different. The creation of metaphor, hence, resolves the contradiction between two different semantic domains on the ground of similarity. Here it should be noted that the notion of similarity works due to the paradigmatic choice, inherent in the language system. Recoeur (1978) argues that metaphor should be considered as a predicative operation which brings in a semiotic relationship between two things which are apparently dissimilar. Eco (1981:18), puts forth a radically different view: 'a metaphor can be invented because language, in its process of unlimited
semiosis, constitutes a multidimensional network of metonyms, each of which is explained by a cultural convention, rather than by an original resemblance'. In Eco's argument, the dependence of metaphor on metonymy is suggested. Interpreting Eco's view, J. Culler (1981:202) notes: 'metaphor and metonymy thus become in turn not only figures for figurality but figures for language in general'.

To sum up, in all these diverse theoretical postulates, the primacy of metaphor, as an operational trope with cognitive and aesthetic import, has been emphasized. Particularly, in the case of poetic discourse, the ubiquitous prioritization of metaphor over others suggests that the poetic text has multiple implications amongst which the interpreter chooses. By using a term of speech-act theory, one can say that a poem performs through metaphors. That is why a poetic text is opaque and at the same time opulent as well.

At this point, it is important to stress that some of the major issues in modern semiotics regarding poetic discourse, have been at the centre of the philosophical, linguistic and aesthetic speculations in the Indian tradition of Sanskrit Poetics.
Poetic Discourse: Indian Perspective

In Indian Sanskrit Poetics, there are five major schools of thought, that can be distinguished on the basis of the particular theoretical position they take regarding what constitutes the essence of poetry, or to put it differently, what constitutes 'kānyokti', or the literariness of a composition. It is important to note that Indian poeticians have distinguished consistently between 'the materiality of poetry (kārya śarīra) and its spirit or essence, its determinant as poetry (kāryatmā). According to the Rasa - school, what determines poetry is the Rasa or the emotive and evocative power of the poetic discourse; for the followers of Riti school of thought, it is the 'mode of expression' that constitutes literariness; for the Vakrokti school, the literary composition is deviant, opaque, defamiliarized; for the proponents of Dhvani school; it is the 'suggestiveness' of the literary expression that characterizes the essence of literature; and for the followers of Alamkāra school, what constitutes the essence of literature, is the presence of figures of speech (alamkāras).

Among the Indian poeticians a remarkable divergence of conception and treatment is noticeable in the theory of Vakrokti. It is
an analogue of the theory of 'poetic deviation' discussed earlier. *Vakrokti* literally means oblique or deviant expression. In Bhāmaha's formulation, *śabda-vakratā* (obliqueness at the level of form) along with *artha-vakrata* (obliqueness at the level of meaning) constitute *vakrokti*. It is the fundamental principle of all figurative expressions. Bhamaha identifies *vakratā* with *atisayokti* (a heightened form of expression) and suggests that it is a necessary condition to constitute a poetic figure. Kuntaka, an ardent exponent of Bhamaha's concept, defines *vakrokti* as an 'unusual, striking way of saying', as opposed to normal, established mode of speech. This deviancy is brought about by the creative skill of the poet; it characterizes both the formal aspects of the composition and meaning. According to Kuntaka, what makes poetry is the presence of strikingness (*vaicitrya*) due to the unique, unusual mode of expression, in the alliance existing between sound and sense, employed in a poetic composition. The aesthetic cognition of the poet is conveyed through an unusual but proper adjustment of the relation between sound and sense, i.e. from and meaning. Kuntaka is aware of the fact that *kavi-nyāpāra* (creative imagination), which is the source of *vakrokti*, is in its nature undefinable; yet one can classify the function of *vakrokti*, (i.e. strikingness) into six different spheres: (i) in the arrangement of letters (*varṇa-vinyāsa-vakratā*), (ii) in the substantive (*pratipadika*) part of a work -
modifiers, synonyms, compounds, suffixes, roots, gender, verb etc., (iii) in the terminal \textit{(pratyaya)} part of a word, both nominal and verbal (case, number, person, tense, voice, particles etc.), (iv) in the sentence \textit{(vākya-vakratā)}, which again, is of several varieties, (v) in the topic \textit{(prakaraṇa-vakratā)} and (vi) in a whole composition \textit{(prabandha-vakratā)}.

It may be seen from this brief outline of Kuntaka's taxonomy that Kuntaka's conception of literary discourse covers the entire spectrum of literature as a verbal art - from the phonemic level to the discoursal level. It is important to note that Kuntaka's theory of 'Vakrokti' has wider implications; it does include the ideas of \underline{Dhvani}, \underline{Rasa} and \underline{Alamkāra} in its scope. V.K.Chari (1993:136) rightly remarks: 'it takes into account, not merely the formal structures or micro-structures, but all foregrounded features of literary expression, including the macro-structures...'. Daṇḍin, in his \textit{Kāvyaadarśa ii}, draws a distinction between \textit{vakrokti} and \textit{svabhāvokti}. He defines the latter term as the \textit{adya alamkṛtib} (the first or the primary poetic figure). Though \textit{svabhāvokti}, the ordinary natural mode of speech, has a place in poetic composition, the reality it describes is not the common man's reality, it is the cognized reality, resulting from the poet's creative imagination. Daṇḍin considers both \textit{svabhāvokti} and \textit{vakrokti} as two modes of literary expression \textit{(Kāvyokti)}. A literary expression thus has 'rhetorically referential'
dimension. As Kapoor (1994: 122) suggests: 'Rhetorical expression makes non-literal reference (Kavisamayak) or figurative reference (alamkarik).' The distinction between 'non-literal' and 'figurative' was proposed by Rajasekhara. 'Non-literal references constitute the convention of a particular poetic tradition', whereas in case of figurative reference, the reference is made to something on the ground of similarity or resemblance. According to the Alamkāra School, the literary language has the characteristic feature of being referentially figurative. Figures of speech are most often the result of the deviant use of language which can operate at both syntagmatic and paradigmatic levels.

In Indian philosophical and grammatical tradition, the significative powers of linguistic signs have been discussed under the rubric of śabda-śakti, which are three-fold: (i) abhidā (which is the cause of vācyārtha, overtly or directly expressed meaning; some may call it denotative meaning) (ii) laksanā (connotaion, indication or implied meaning) and (iii) vyājanā (suggested meaning). Some poeticians viz. Abhinavagupta, also add a fourth category, called itāparya (which is the cause of making known the speaker's intention). The doctrine of śabda-śakti has considerable explanatory power with regard to the internal dynamics of metaphorical processes in poetic discourse.
Alamkāras (or the figures of speech) are the rhetorical devices which the poets take recourse to, for providing the text with aesthetic value. The poetic text, thus signifies implicitly and indirectly. The theory of laksanā, including vyājana, argues for the case that the literary signs, by nature, are based on the principle of transfer or upacāra; in other words, 'metaphorical meaning is an unstated meaning arising out of some relation to the stated (literal) meaning'. In Indian poetics, the rūpaka (or the metaphor) has received critical attention, though the elements of metaphor are considered to be not different from the elements of upamā or simile - i.e. upameya "the subject compared", and upamāna "the object of comparison". Bharata, in Nātyaśāstra, defines metaphor as 'the process of giving identity (rupa) of one object or entity to another entity on the basis of evident similarity (sādraśyā) or equivalence of qualities or attributes (gunasamya). Taking into consideration the major texts of Indian poetics, Kapoor (1994:124) notes that the upamāna and upameya are brought together on the basis of any of the five relations: (i) sādraśyā, 'apparent similarity', (ii) gunasamya 'equivalence of attributes' (iii) tadṛṣṭa-pratiti, 'perception of sameness of form' (iv) sambandha 'qualified-qualifier configuration' and (v) kārya-karana bhāva, 'cause-effect homogeneity'. In this context, it should be mentioned that these relations are not inherent but 'assumed' or
'imposed'. The metaphoric mode of literary expression calls for an interpretation of the complex and diverse relations that exist between the 'expressed' and 'implied' referents. Metaphoric significance of text is worked out by recognizing various contextual factors within which the text operates; such as the poet, the reader, the text, the place, the time, the occasion or the subject etc. Metaphoric operation brings about non-difference or abheda between two different entities; metaphor is thus called abheda-pradhāna. This synthesizing power of metaphor, claims for itself, the appellation, 'the figure of figures'. Among the innumerable figurative devices which are employed in poetic discourse, nipaka or metaphor is just one such device of adornment - but a dominant device. Any metaphor-encountering event leads to a tension between the perceptual knowledge and the inferential cognition. In the understanding of a metaphor, inference overtakes perception to resolve the tension. Since literature is a second-order semiotic system, 'understanding the language of the poem is not same as understanding the poem.' Linguistic competence should be duly supplemented by literary competence to have a meaningful encounter.

The figures have been classified differently by different poeticians, being based on different parameters: (a) objects of
comparison (b) standards of comparison (c) value of figures (d) semantic basis (e) grammar (f) coherence with known facts or otherwise and (g) syntax - as suggested by Kapoor (1998: 17-19). Rudrata classifies all figures into two broad categories: (a) *Sabda-alamkāra* (devices of verbal form) and (b) *arthā-alamkāra* (devices of meaning). Further sub-classification of these has led to a total of sixty-eight *alamkāras*. To these two major categories of Rudrata, Bhoja has added the third one, called *ubhayalamkāra* (for a dual figure of speech i.e. of both form and meaning). Ruuyaka’s classification discusses seven types on the basis of how the meaning is constituted: (a) *sādṛśya* (similarity), (b) *virodha* (opposition), (c) *sūkhalabdha* (Chain bound), (d) *tarka nyaya* (reasoning or logic), (e) *lokanyāya* (popular logic), (f) *kā Vyanyāya* (logic of poetry), and (g) *gudhārtha pratīti* (inference of meaning). Mammata, one of the most influential poeticians, in his *Kavyaprakāśa*, has enumerated sixty-one types of figures and grouped them into seven major categories: (a) *upamā* (simile), (b) *rūpaka* (metaphor), (c) *aprastuta prāśamsā* (indirect eulogy), (d) *dīpaka* (illuminator, stringed figures), (e) *vyatireka* (dissimilitude), (f) *virodha* (contradiction) and (g) *samuccaya* (conjunction or concatenation). As every poetic composition is marked by embellishment, the rigorous taxonomy of figures offered by Indian
poeticians, would be always useful for understanding the significant power of the poetic discourse.

The proponents of riti school have discussed elaborately on the style and compositional aspects of poetic discourse. To them, riti or the mode of expression, constitutes the salient aspect of poetry. The phonetic, lexical and syntactic organization of a poem is given prominence in their theoretical pronouncements. Basically, riti is not merely a theory of poetic diction but it also accounts for various ways in which the stylistic features of a composition do correlate with the theme, the effects on the addressee and the sentiments. In this sense, it has both formal and psychic implications.

In the dhvani view, the indirectly evoked meaning, i.e. suggestion (as argued by Anandavardhana) is the characteristic feature of literary discourse. This is quite similar to the connotative semiotics of literary discourse, as proposed by the French semiologist Roland Barthes. Anandavardhana relates his dhvani theory with the rasa or the aesthetic experience which is the effect of suggestion. It is this evocative function which is thus a necessary condition of all poetic composition. To Abhinavagupta, rasa is the fundamental goal and purport of poetry. According to the rasa theory, the rasa is a state of being or a condition
produced in the recipient, a unitary exulted feeling. In brief, one can state that, ‘evocation’ is the most dominant aim of the literary discourse whereas the didactic, informative and other aspects of the discourse are merely incidental ones. The *rasa* theory has been treated as a ‘core literary theory’ by all major Indian poeticians. It is evident from this brief survey that the linguistic and literary speculations of ancient Indian poeticians are quite pertinent even now as they have dealt with many problems and issues concerning poetic signification which are similar to those in the contemporary debates.

**Poetic Text, Interpretation and the Semiotic Framework:**

Twentieth century has witnessed a period of unprecedented ferment in semiotic theory which has had a number of different kinds of influence on literary studies. Literary semiotics provides the prospects for and advocates in favour of a humanistic literary critique which deals with a work of literature as produced by ‘a human being for human beings and about human beings and matters of human concern.’ Semiotics has often been considered as totally caught in the structuralist web. According to the structuralist doctrines, the structure is an immanent relational network of elements constituting an object. The network reveals the specific identity of the object, under the semiotic
inquiry. Semiotics treats the notion of 'structure', both as an epistemological and methodological entity. In the epistemological paradigm, the ontological status of a structure is stressed i.e. the structure is the idea of the object, which determines the object as a whole. According to the second conception, a structure is considered as a construction, based on specific dimensions of a given object and in accordance with explicit theoretical criteria. When one turns one's attention directly to poetry, it is quite evident that the form would rank as one of the central structuralist or formalist preoccupations. In the formalist tradition, 'meaning' is constructed as the representational effect produced exclusively by the immanent properties of the sign or the sign-complex. The form, i.e. the expressive or the verbal design of a poetic text, is such that it acts as a viable lingua-aesthetic instrument, which is autonomous, self-revelatory; by the paradigmatic and connotative means, it takes the language beyond its normal range of denotation. In contrast to this formalist tradition, the pragmatic tradition is concerned with the sign-object relation, without paying exclusive attention to the internal structure of the sign itself. For the pragmatic semioticians, like C.S. Peirce and Karl Bühler, the formal features of the sign will not suffice to give a comprehensive explanation for the way the 'sign-object' relation is incorporated into a particular
semiosis. The rigid notion of structure behind the structuralist paradigm has been questioned many a time by the deconstructionists and the hermeneuticians. The irreducible nature of semiosis presupposes that in any semiotic inquiry, no proposition regarding signs, referents or users can be made in isolation from each other. A proposition concerning one has always implications about the other two. Many unresolved issues revolve around the complex relationship between these three crucial ingredients of semiosis. However, with the advanced refinement of semiotic theory and the advent of a number of more pragmatically oriented language models, the time has come for a new phase of semiotic analysis of literary discourse. Integral to this new phase is the necessity for methodological eclecticism, in order to locate literature in a wider social context.

In commonsensical perception, the term ‘poem’ is viewed as ‘fiction in verse’. The ‘fiction’ component, in someway, distinguishes it from the non-literary, practical discourse, and the verse component is the differentia specifica that opposes poetry to prose. A semiotics of poetry is based on two assumptions: first, poetry should be treated as an artistic mode of signification and communication which implies that the rhetorical turns and twists in the inscriptive-self of the poetic text
call for elaborate formal analysis; second, one can identify various aesthetic effects of signification, by situating the text in a given socio-cultural context. In Gadamerian hermeneutic perspective, the readers/critics inherit their own cultural and personal horizons and have to seek for meanings in terms of them. Reading of a text for Gadamer, (as noted by Deborah Cook)\textsuperscript{21}, is 'a trans-subjective and trans-objective process in which the reader eliminates subjective prejudice in order to merge with the tradition as it is given to the linguistic community. Reading involves a form of \textit{parousia} in which the reader goes beyond everyday praxis and returns to it with an understanding that can then be applied to that praxis'. Here, the reader is considered as a finite being whose understanding of the text is a temporal process.

The texts, under consideration in this project, are instances of written language, hence the semiotic framework needs to come to grips with the 'problem of writing'- the intentional exteriorization of discourse in the graphic mode where the author is a concealed being and the reader is radically 'a temporal and non-substantial being'. It is now well established that contemporary literary semiotics has radically, transformed the idea of text. The 'texture' (or formal aspects) of the text is no longer, considered to be 'insular to itself', on the other hand, there
is a methodological shift towards the 'textuality' of the text which recognizes the intertextual and contextual elements that constantly disseminate the text. Some of the recent theories in text-linguistics (that of Robert de Beaugrande, Wolfgang Dressler and others) demonstrate that the seven standards of textuality that deserve critical attention are: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality. Though every literary work-of-art presupposes some conventions, it also, by its ontological nature, contravenes, contorts or modifies any number of them. Most often, new conventions are invented in order to achieve novel aesthetic goal and the text, in its formal design, is supposed to provide the cue to the reader to identify those innovations with regard to the qualitative aesthetic scheme of the text. The poetic text demands of the reader an active collaboration for its very execution and explication. The reader's interpretation activates the text, sets it in motion, connects it to the world. As the human hermeneutic agency (the active, interpretative, participatory role of the reader) has occupied a central position in the recent semiotic theories, 'interpretation' itself, has become a crucial member of the critical vocabulary. The factors determining the pragmatic framework have caught the special attention of the semioticians. In the process of interpreting a literary text, one moves
from inductive empiricism to deductive rationalism, from materialism to idealism, from sensory impressions to non-trivial or sublime assertions.

The poetic texts are not merely marked by their elliptical verbal devices but also by their figural disposition. This figural disposition hints implicitly at the propositional attitude of the poet, which a valid reading is expected to reconstruct. The paradoxical qualities of fictional discourse and the immanent properties of the figurative language make the text an open-ended entity, not a closed, finished product. The mode in which a poetic text is cast, is centrally constitutive of its complex effect. There is no palpable ‘final sense’ in case of a creative text. The text educes or induces a given interpretant, depending upon the psychic, linguistic and cultural disposition of the interpreter, at the time of a given interpretation. One is also aware of the fact that there is a possibility for over-interpretation or mis-interpretation of a text, as the interpreters belong to different interpretive communities. For the interpretation to be valid or adequate, one needs to identify and analyse all the elements in the syntagmatic and paradigmatic planes of the text, the interrelations between various micro or macro-units and more importantly, the contextual determinants of its implicit meaning. Any semiotic inference pertaining to a text, has a ‘specific orientation’ and ‘a
mark of subjectivity'. Hence, there would be always incessant attempts at apprehending the significance of a literary creation.

The Poetry of e.e. cummings:

Edward Estlin Cummings (1894-1962), an American poet, novelist, essayist, playwright and painter, is undoubtedly one of the most innovative poets of the modern age. His various stylistic novelties bear testimony to his perpetual quest for fresh modes of expression. Cummings has remained highly esteemed for his creative celebration of life and love, his proclamation on the primacy of the individual self and freedom of expression. His avant-garde, experimental compositions have appealed both to the general and the special readers since the early twenties. No one can read Cummings for the first time without being shocked and dazzled by two things: the strangeness of his typographical designs and the subtle ingenuity of his poetic vision. His virulent diatribes against the orthodox, conventional rationality and societal restrictions on free expression, are the results of his strong commitment to the individual freedom. In the 'nonlectures' which he has delivered at the Harvard University, Cummings has shed light on his artistic predicament: 'So far as I am concerned, poetry and every other art was, is, and forever will be strictly and distinctly a question of
individuality'. Much of his creative endeavour is directed against the stereotypical, herd mentality of the 'mostpeople' in modern society. Of Cummings the poet, much needs to be stated: but one may introduce him by observing that this poet has always striven to break up an outworn convention, he knows how to play with all the available signifiers in order to develop a language with its peculiar tang, colour, range and expressiveness which would elegantly possess a unique poetic message. He has deftly executed a large number of poetic and rhetorical devices which have earned him an impressive amount of recognition. Horace Gregory, a poet himself, could comment that in Cummings' poetry 'one is refreshed by the revival of courtly music and compliment, of poetic wit, and the art of burlesque'. Cummings' artistic manner is so essentially a part of the man himself, and is so sharply distinctive that no one can fathom it without a genuine concern for the poetry and for the poet himself. In the past, his poetry has received mixed responses. On the one hand, many of his noted contemporaries - Graves, Marianne Moore, Dos Passoss, Williams, Auden, Spencer, for example - have always expressed admiration for his poetic craftsmanship; on the other hand, there are critics who have treated him quite disparagingly - R.P. Blackmur, G.S. Fraser, Louis Untermeyer, and a few more. Some of the criticisms labeled against Cummings are that (a) his poetic diction is
unintelligible and eccentric and (b) he lacks development and growth, and has behaved as an adolescent all through his poetic career. These criticisms cannot be taken seriously as these critics have their own prejudices and narrow, favoured conceptions as to what poetry should be. Cummings' innovative verse, obviously, cannot be evaluated by any narrow conception of poetic discourse. The permanent worth of Cummings as a writer is threefold: Firstly, he is one of the most powerful and profound lyric poets of America; secondly, he is one of the few acknowledged masters of original style- 'an arch-experimentalist' in the visual form of the poetic language; thirdly, his treatment of some universal themes - in his own words, 'ecstasy and anguish, being and becoming; the immortality of the creative imagination and the indomitability of the human spirit'- has immense aesthetic significance.

For his daringly original and uncompromising poetic talent, Cummings has never been judged without strong critical responses. The reigning critics of his time could not do justice to their evaluation of Cummings' poetic genius. Most often, the critical response has revealed an attitude of either 'confused indifference or confused approbation.' The critical apparatus at their disposal, have been found inadequate to assent to Cummings' verse. It is the purpose here, then to attempt a
detailed assessment of his poetry as a whole in a semiotic perspective, in order to discover the bedrock of his poetic art and get familiar with his poetic devices and designs.

Cummings has published twelve volumes of poetry including one that has appeared after his death (*73 Poems*, 1963), but not including selected or collected works. These volumes contain 770 poems - a prolific and impressive output by any standard. During his literary career, spanning over five decades, he has produced, in addition to his verse, 'a pair of miscalled novels; a brace of plays, one in prose, the other in blank verse; ...... an indeterminate number of essays; an untitled volume of satires; and a ballet scenario'- as noted by Cummings in his first 'nonlecture' at Harvard in 1953. In Cummings' poetry one witnesses a curious confluence of two streams: transformed traditionalism and innovative ultra-modernism. In terms of his ideological and artistic pronouncements, he is very much like a New England Transcendentalist or an English Romantic, who would always champion the cause of individuality and artistic freedom. He has always been faithful to his inner voice - a rebellious voice which revels in unconventionality. Cummings' characteristic deviation from conventional poetic postures is not the consequence of callousness or ignorance but a deliberate and a
highly conscious departure from the norms of conventional discourse which has successfully served legitimate artistic ends.

It is not simply possible to classify Cummings’ verse on the basis of any single taxonomic principle. His lyric poetry displays an extraordinary range from the highly melodic to the literally unpronounceable. His stylistic strategies involve both the accepted tools of traditional techniques and the well-wrought experimental devices which are his own novel accomplishments. In this sense, it can be stated that Cummings’ amalgamative approach to the poetic art is a matter for detailed analysis.

Throughout his life, he has persistently and diligently worked to articulate his subjects, ideas, and situations, by bringing into poetry the aesthetic principles of such modernist art forms as cubism and futurism. It is surely noteworthy that the typographical and spatial arrangements of Cummings’ poems have greatly transformed the visual dimension of poetic form, enlarging its horizon and multiplying its poetic possibilities. R.M. Kidder (1979:3) has rightly pointed out that ‘poetry and visual art grew, in Cummings’ mind, from one root; and while their outermost branches are distinct enough, there are many places closer to the trunk when it is hard to know which impulse accounts for a piece of work’.
One should not assume that the poet, with his painterly skill, intends to offer merely a verbal equivalent of a visual idea. In fact, his poem is much more than its perceptible visual design. By adopting the strategy from the visual arts, the poet aims at giving more intensity and vividness to his poetic subject and thereby achieving better aesthetic effects. The distinct stylistic relationships between Cummings' poetry and painting are of profound importance for those scholars, concerned with the relationship between literature and the other arts. The visual configuration of Cummings' poems, to an unprejudiced reader, signifies a great deal; the poetic composition is not just to be read in a traditional manner, but to be seen with rapt attention. In both poetry and painting, he has sought movement and precision, the most effective and economical means to convey his vibrant feelings and ideas, to push meaning to the utmost. The natural subtlety of his creative mind and his fascination for revolutionary typography, at times, make his style a little gritty and crabbed; but his scrupulously designed earnest compositions give enough evidence for his spectacular poetic achievements and the catholicity of his literary tastes. It seems, for Cummings, 'self-relisation' is the supreme motto in life and the only valid purpose of his artistic pursuits. As a versatile poet, a skilled craftsman, his influence on modern poetry and modern readership, is
irrefutable; his poetic devices are splendidly atypical of his time. Regardless of what device he employs, from the terse cryptic ideogram to the free-verse stanzaic forms, his aim remains the same: through technique to accomplish the conceptual accuracy which conclusively displays the inner necessities of his artistic creation.

One way to understand the technical and ideological foundations of his work as a whole is to trace briefly the development of his mind in relation to the main events of his life. Cummings has spent his childhood in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where his father, Edward Cummings was a Professor of Sociology and political science of Harvard and a well-respected Unitarian clergyman. Cummings, with the full support and encouragement of his parents, has demonstrated a unique predilection for poetry and painting at an early age. It has been reported by R.K. Martin that during his student career at Harvard, from 1911 to 1916, Cummings has composed poems almost daily and has become a member of the editorial board of the \textit{Harvard Monthly}, a college literary magazine in which he has published his first poem in 1911. During his undergraduate years, he has had the opportunity to form lasting friendship with John Dos Passos, Robert Hillyer, Gilbert Seldes and S. Foster Damon. Among the significant artistic and literary
influences of this period, as R.K. Martin notes, the most remarkable ones are ‘his discovery of Marlowe, his training in Greek and Latin poetry (Catullus and Sappho remain significant forces in his work), and his awareness of the new poetry movement, centered around Ezra Pound and *Poetry* magazine.’ During this period, he has developed a strong sense of appreciation for the innovative techniques adopted by Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, Igor Stravinsky, and Pablo Picasso. One finds later, some of the stylistic traits of these poets and artists in Cummings’ works. In 1917, in the anthology *Eight Harvard Poets*, eight poems by Cummings have appeared which display the typographical innovations that would later become his trademark. In their thematic content, these poems are suggestive of Keatsian romantic tradition.

Cummings, in his personal life, has gone through a series of rich and varied experiences. During the World War I, he has volunteered for the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Service and sailed for France. He has been highly impressed by the ‘bohemian atmosphere of Paris and its abundance of art and artists’. Few years later, Cummings recalls his
expenence during his first visit to Paris with great nostalgia, in his 

*nonlectures:*

I participated in an actual marriage of material with immaterial things; I celebrated an immediate reconciling of spirit and flesh, forever and now, heaven and earth. Paris was for me precisely and complexly this homogenous duality: This accepting transcendence; this living and dying more than death or life. Whereas by the very act of becoming its improbably gigantic self - New York had reduced mankind to a tribe of pygmies, Paris (in each shape and gesture and avenue and cranny of her being) was continuously exposing the humanness of humanity.....

For Cummings, Paris has provided the significant impetus to free himself from the bondage of puritanism, to celebrate ‘love’ and ‘beauty’ in his mythic universe. In France, he has had some bitter experiences too. Cummings and his close friend William Slater Brown have been arrested on suspicion of treason and held in an internment camp in Normandy for four months. His experiences in the French internment camp have been well documented in his first book, *The Enormous Room* which is considered by many as a classic of World War I literature.
In the first book itself, he has amply demonstrated the adventure of his inner voyage, the essential core of his aesthetic philosophy and his innate urge to discover the subjective self through 'a sense of redemptive alienation from the conventional world'. With all the ardour of his creative mind, he has transformed his adverse prison experience into a brilliant metaphor for the 'ruck and reel' of the material universe and the miserable plight of the innocent individual. This book has firmly set the ground for his ideological conviction and artistic vision which he has consistently pursued all through his life, in all modes of expression. To question the banal, conventional dictates of the world, has been part of his nature; and to preserve the dignity of the individual-self in a dehumanizing situation, has always been his primary concern.

Cummings' first collection of poems, *Tulips and Chimneys* has appeared in 1923. By the time, this volume has been published, the readers have already got the chance to read twentyseven poems of Cummings in *The Dial*, a prestigious periodical of the time, and a few more poems in the *Harvard Advocate* and *the Harvard Monthly*. R. M. Kidder (1979 :17) reports that Cummings, with his extraordinary talent for the word-play, has referred to *Tulips and Chimneys* by such
pseudonyms as ‘Daisies and Fireescapes’ and ‘Geraniums and Elevators’. Kidder further informs that Cummings has worked out well over a hundred other candidates for the title of this first volume of poetry; some of them are: ‘fishhooks and pajamas,’ ‘lilacs and monkey wrenches,’ ‘starfish and phonographs,’ ‘squirrels and efficiency,’ and ‘doughnuts and tranquility’. All these titles suggest a great deal of significant oppositions which Cummings handles quite efficiently in his poetic composition. Besides *Tulips and Chimneys*, Cummings has published three other books of poetry during the twenties: *&* (1925), *XLI Poems* (1925), and *is 5* (1926). Since then, Cummings has had enthusiastic supporters as well as immoderate detractors; at times, in deed, the same reader has experienced contrary reactions and been flustered. As John Logan (1970: 271) has justly remarked: ‘Cummings is the most provocative, the most humane, the most inventive, the funniest, and the least understood.’ A semiotic study of Cummings’ poetic discourse would no doubt help in estimating his major poetic accomplishments.

In order to understand the nature of Cummings’ poetic discourse, one needs to inquire into the poet’s thematic structuring of his composition in terms both of the techniques by which its form has been
achieved and as a function of the level at which the work has succeeded in addressing the human existential conditions. A semiotic approach to literature presupposes that there will be plural interpretations of given literary works, but "it is possible and necessary to specify generically some ways in which literary works may not be read without a violation of their integrity." For a valid reading, the reader is required to enter into the perspective of the maker who is placing his semiotic objects on exhibit, which have implicit aesthetic significance. Hence the semiotic interpretation aims at making the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic structures of signification as explicit as can be, by treating the text as a complex thematic symbolic sign. In the following chapters, we intend to assess the visual, the sonic, the verbal and the figurative designs of Cummings' poetic texts and their thematic configuration.