CHAPTER 4
ABHINAVAGUPTA AND THE READING PROCESS

Ānandavardhana changed the course of Sanskrit poetics by giving importance to the suggested meaning which was perceived and relished by the sahṛdaya-s. Earlier Sanskrit poetics seemed to concentrate on elements like figures of speech, guṇa-s, rīti-s etc. which were just the paraphernalia of literary works. Ānandavardhana’s theory emphasized on the literariness of texts that helped in the manifestation of the suggested meaning. Ānandavardhana analysed the literary aspects of the text that helped in evoking rasa. Ānandavardhana emphasised that rasa can only be evoked through the verbal power of vyāñjanā.\footnote{Dhvanyāloka, pp.81-82.} He envisaged sahṛdaya as one who enjoyed aesthetic delight by relishing the suggested meaning. His theory does not furnish any idea of the way through which a sahṛdaya receives and relishes a literary work. It also does not discuss the subjective experience of the reader involved in the relishing of rasa. The process of suggestion was conceived as a verbal function where the the role of the sahṛdaya was restricted. Thus there were some gaps in the link between the theory of suggestion and the role of the reader in the relishing of the essence of literature.

The poetic and dramaturgy texts composed after the period of
Anandavardhana\(^2\) discuss the process through which sahṛdaya relished rasa. Thus an evident shift of the locus of the rasa from the ability of the text to evoke rasa to the sahṛdaya’s reception of the text is clearly seen in these texts. This shift of focus to the reader’s reception of literary texts should be read along with the gradual developments that happened in the exposition of the rasa theory.

### 4.1. Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka’s influence on Abhinavagupta

It is well known that Nāṭyaśāstra presented rasa to be the main element of nāṭya and also hinted at the process of the production of rasa through the rasasūtra. According to it, rasa was produced by the combination of vibhāva, anubhāva and vyabhicāribhāva with the sthāyibhāva. The rasasūtra was interpreted in different ways. Abhinavagupta cites these interpretations in his commentary on Nāṭyaśāstra. He introduces the interpretations of Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa, Śaṅkuka, Bhaṭṭa Tauta and Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka. Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa considered rasa to be situated in the character. He believed that the sthāyibhāva of the character, nourished by elements like vibhāva-s transformed into rasa. Śaṅkuka considered rasa to reside in the actor. The emotion of the character imitated by the actor was called as rasa. The spectators just inferred the rasa from the actors. Thus it can be seen that these interpretations do not consider the reader/spectator to relish rasa. These views mainly pertained to the enjoyment of rasa in a drama. Relishing of rasa in poetry was not taken into consideration by these thinkers. Anandavardhana

\(^2\) Texts like Daśarūpaka, Kāvyaprakāśa, Sāhityadarpaṇa etc.
showed that *rasa* existed not only in *nāṭya*, but also in *śrāvyakāvya*. He envisaged the power which manifested *rasa* as a verbal power known as *vyañjarāna*. But the reader’s role in the relishing of *rasa* and the reception of the text were not discussed by him. Thus the actual shift of focus to the reader’s reception of text may possibly be traced to the views put forth by Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka who came after Ānandavardhana.³ It was Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka who first said that *rasa* was relished by the *sahṛdaya*. Unfortunately, *Hṛdayadarpaṇa*, the work of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, has not been recovered and it is known only through some quotations cited by rhetoricians like Abhinavagupta. It is assumed that the work was written to oppose the theory of *dhvani*. Dhanaṅjaya and Dhanika, the authors of *Daśarūpaka* and *Avaloka* respectively, seem to echo some views of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka. Later rhetoricians like Mammaṭa, Ruyyaka etc. are seen to paraphrase Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka’s views. Today these quotations and paraphrases serve as the only sources to understand Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka’s ideas.

Most of the rhetoricians who came after Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka undoubtedly placed the *sahṛdaya* as the locus of *rasa*. Abhinavagupta, who frequently attacks Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, seems to have borrowed a lot from him. Abhinavagupta’s notions on the reader’s reception of literature and aesthetic enjoyment show an effort to fill the gaps found in the theory of suggestion with the help of the ideas put forth by Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka. Dr. K. ³In-depth studies have been brought out by Prof. Sheldon Pollock on this aspect of rasa theory. His essays like *What was Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka saying?*, *From Rasa seen to Rasa to be heard* etc. discuss this topic in detail.
Krishnamoorthy makes the following comment regarding Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka’s influence on Abhinavagupta:

Now this whole theory of Abhinavagupta is modelled after that of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka. The idea of sādhāraṇīkaraṇa is identical in both. The only differences are in characterising the meaning-complex as dyotya or suggested, and the process of relishing rasa by the word rasanā or tasting. This is because Abhinavagupta is interpreting Bharata’s rasa-sūtra from the standpoint of dhvani of which he is an able exponent.4

Thus before foraying into Abhinavagupta’s views on the reading process, it is very essential to understand the views of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka. Abhinavagupta paraphrases some of the views of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka where Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka is seen to put forth some pertinent questions about the relishing of rasa. These questions actually shed light on the different dimensions through which the readers/spectators relish rasa.

Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka points out the difficulties that arise in the relishing of literary texts when rasa is located in the reader. When a reader approaches a text thinking that the emotions represented there are his own, he will find tragic dramas to be too painful. Moreover he will not be able to accept characters like Sītā as beloved (kāntā) as Indian tradition places her as a goddess. It would also be undesirable if he possesses an indifferent attitude. If he sees the characters as ordinary human beings, then heroic feats of characters like Rāma will lose their credibility. If they are taken as divine characters as depicted in the ancient scriptures, then the portrayal of love

4 Dr. K. Krishnamoorthy, Studies in Indian Aesthetics and Criticism, p.217.
between such characters creates a sort of embarrassment for the readers. Fixing *sahṛdaya*-s as the locus of *rasa* led to the emergence of certain difficulties which had to be solved in order to understand the role of the *sahṛdaya*-s in the process. These difficulties actually raise many questions on the status of the readers while relishing *rasa* and the process which helps them relish *rasa*. Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka tried to solve these difficulties by bringing forth three functions of literary language namely *abidhā*, *bhāvanā* and *bhogīkṛti*. Abhinavagupta quotes the following verse attributed to Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka which says:

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abhidhā bhāvanā cānyā tadbhogīkṛtireva ca/
abhidhādhāmatāṁ yāte śabdārthālaṅkṛtī tataḥ//
bhāvanābhāvyā eṣopi śṛṅgārādigaṇo bhavet/
tadbhogīkṛtirūpeṇa vyāpyate siddhimānnaraḥ//
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Abhinavagupta paraphrases these functions conceived by Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka in the following words:

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kintvanyasabdavailakaṇṭyaṁ kāvyātmanaḥ śabdasya
tryaṁśatāprasādāt. tatrābhidhāyakatvam?vācyaviṣayaṁ, bhāvakatvam
rasādiviṣayaṁ, bhogakṛtvam sahṛdayaviṣayam iti trayo ’ṁśabhūtā
vyāpārāḥ.5
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The first function (*abhidhā*) is mainly found in poetry. As far as drama is concerned, the *vibhāva*-s, *anubhāva*-s etc. are visualized on the stage. After

5 *Dhvanyāloka*, p. 193.
abhidhā, the elements like vibhāva-s, sthāyibhāva-s etc. shed their individualities and become universalized through the second function of bhāvakatva. Once the elements like vibhāva-s, sthāyin etc. get universalized, then the elements of tamas and rajas in the sahrdaya get suppressed and the sattva comes to the fore. The sattva fills the mind of the sahrdaya. The sahrdaya then enjoys aesthetic bliss which is akin to eternal bliss experienced when united with the Ultimate. The aspect of bhāvaktva, also known as sādhāraṇīkaraṇa, was new to Sanskrit poetics. It sought to solve the problem of personal attachment or indifference of the sahrdaya which hampered aesthetic delight. It seems that Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka was influenced by the Mīmāṁsā doctrine of bhāvanā.6 The Bālapriyā commentary on Locana tries to sketch the similarities between the concepts. It says:

bhāvanā nāma bhaviturbhanānukūlo vyāpāraḥ. sā cārthī śābdīti dvividhā. ārthī tu prayojaneccā-janitakriyāviṣayakavyāpārarūpā ākhyātatvena rūpeṇocayate. sā hyaṃśatrayam apekṣate.- sādhyam sādhanam itikartavyatāṃ ca..tathā ca yajetetyādivaidikavākyam svargam uddīśya puruṣaḥ prati vidhāyatvena yathā bhāvakam yāgena karaṇena guṇālaṅkāraucityādirūpayā itikartavyatayā sahrdayasya rasaṃ bhāvayatītyarthah.7

The concept of bhāvaktva stood as an answer to the nature of the sthāyin, vibhāva etc. while sahrdaya relished rasa. The problem of aesthetic distance

6 Vide M.P. Sankunni Nair’s Nātyamaṇḍapam and Sheldon Pollock’s essay What Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka was saying.
7 Dhvanyālokalocana- Kerala Commentaries (Vol I), p. 35.
which plagued Western poetics was more or less absent in Sanskrit poetics. The sahṛdaya, the characters, their emotions etc. shed their individual elements to embrace a universal stature which made aesthetic enjoyment possible.

The views of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka seem to have influenced the authors of Daśarūpaka and Avaloka. They undoubtedly place sahṛdaya as the locus where rasa is relished. Thus the sahṛdaya clearly became the focus of attention of the rhetoricians as he was the one who was actively involved in the relishing of rasa. The following quotes from these texts show this evident transformation:

- kāvyāṇi hi bhāvakāṁ, bhāvyā rasādayaḥ. te hi svato bhavanta eva bhāvakesu viśiṣṭavibhāvādimatā kāvyena bhāvyante.
- rasaḥ sa eva svādyatvād rasikasyaiva vartanāt/ nānakāryasya vrṭtatvātkāvyasyātatparatvataḥ//

Dhanaṇjaya and Dhanika rejected the function of dhvanana and included it under the function of tātparya. A critique on the ambiguities that arise on considering the manifestation of rasa as verbal power and sahṛdaya as the seat of rasa is found in Daśarūpaka and Avaloka. Dhanika says that if sahṛdaya is the locus of rasa, then rasa cannot be considered as a meaning which is manifested (vyaṅgya). An object which is already existent can only be manifested by another object. For instance, an already existing pot is manifested by the light of the lamp. If rasa is considered as a meaning which is manifested, it implies that rasa was already existing in the sahṛdaya. This
cannot be accepted. If rasa was located in the character or actor, it could be said that elements like anubhāva-s, vyabhicāribhāva-s etc. manifest the rasa existing in the character or actor. But the fact is that it is the sahṛdaya who relishes rasa. According to Dhanika, vyañjanā is incapable of explaining the experience of the reader and rasa could never be considered as a manifested meaning. They said that just as the word meanings give rise to the sentence meaning, the combination of the vibhāva-s, anubhāva-s, vyabhicāribhāva-s with the sthāyi led to the relishing of rasa. Thus it can be seen that there was an evident realization that rasa was relished by the sahṛdaya alone and there were serious discussions on the incapability of Ānandavardhana’s theory of suggestion in explaining the reader’s reception and experience of literary texts. These theories set the stage for the formation of Abhinavagupta’s views on sahṛdaya and aesthetic rapture. It is in the light of these theories that Abhinavagupta’s analysis of the sahṛdaya and his relishing of rasa needs to be studied.

4.2. Abhinavagupta

Abhinavagupta was a philosopher who lived in the tenth century A.D in Kashmir. He was a proponent of Pratyabhijñā philosophy. His main contributions lie in the field of Pratyabhijñā philosophy. He has composed about forty books. Abhinavagupta has written a comprehensive work named Tantrāloka which includes in it the doctrines of Pratyabhijñā, Kula and Krama systems. His own Tantrasāra is a brief summary of the contents of

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8 Daśarūpaka, p.255.
Abhinavagupta wrote a commentary named *Pratyabhijñāvimarśinī* on Utpaladeva’s *Pratyabhijñākārikā*. He also commented on Utpaladeva’s commentary on *Pratyabhijñākārikā*, known as *Vivṛtī*, which is now lost. It is known as *Pratyabhijñāvivṛtīvimarśinī*. He has also written commentaries on *Parātrīṃśikā*, *Mālinīvijayatantra* and some verses of *Bhagavadgītā*. He has commented upon *Ghaṭakarparakulakakāvyā*, which is a small poem, often attributed to Kālidāsa by Kashmiri tradition. In the field of Sanskrit poetics, Abhinavagupta has not authored any independent poetic treatise, but has written two commentaries named *Locana* on *Dhvanyāloka* and *Abhinavabhāratī* on *Nāṭyaśāstra*. These two commentaries adorn an esteemed position in Sanskrit poetics.

Abhinavagupta’s commentaries on *Dhvanyāloka* and *Nāṭyaśāstra* established the supremacy of *dhvani* and *rasa* in Sanskrit poetics. Abhinavagupta, in his commentary on *Nāṭyaśāstra*, has explained the process of enjoying dramas or *dṛṣṭyakāvyā*-s. It put forth theories of relishing *rasa* in dramas and its culmination in aesthetic rapture. In *Dhvanyālokalocana*, Abhinavagupta mainly focuses on the *sahṛdaya’s* experience of reading literary works. It tries to unravel the elements that guide the readers to reach the peak of aesthetic enjoyment. Here Abhinavagupta makes many interesting observations on the reader, his psychology and the process of reading. These observations gave shape to a concrete concept of a responsive reader and the process involved in his response to literature. These views had immense impact on the later course of Sanskrit poetics. This marked a new phase in the

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history of Sanskrit poetics and Abhinavagupta’s legacy continued for many centuries.

4.3. The concept of sahṛdaya

Sanskrit rhetoricians as well as poets had always recognised the role of the reader in literature. A sensible reader or spectator was called as sahṛdaya, sacetas, sumanas etc. But only a few rhetoricians had attempted to define a sahṛdaya. The most popular and oft-quoted definition of a sahṛdaya was given by Abhinavagupta in his Dhvanyālokalocana. It is as follows:

\begin{quote}
yeṣām kāvyānuśīlanābhyaśavaśād viśadībhūte manomukure
varṇanīyatanmayībhavanayogyatā te svahṛdayasaṃvādabhājaḥ
sahṛdayāḥ.
\end{quote}

A lucid translation of this definition would be: ‘A person whose mind-mirror has been polished by constant acquaintance with literature and has thus obtained the ability to identify with the things described in literary works through the attunement (harmonisation) of his heart with the literary work can be called as a sahṛdaya.’ This definition sheds light not only on the

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10 Some rhetoricians like Mukulabhaṭṭa, Pratihārendurāja etc considered Sahṛdaya to be the name of the author of the Kārikas of Dhvanyāloka. But several arguments were raised for and against this view. Scholars like P.V.Kane seem to make references supporting this view, but some others like Dr. K. Krishnamoorthy disagree with it. For a detailed discussion on these arguments, Vide Dhvanyāloka of Ānandavardhana edited by Dr.K.Krishnamoorthy, pp. xvii, xix.

11 Dhvanyāloka, p.162
qualities of a sahṛdaya, but also on the process of reading and aesthetic enjoyment. The following points can be deduced from this definition:

1. A sahṛdaya is a person who has constant acquaintance with literary works.
2. He has the ability to forgo individual concerns and the spatio-temporal limitations.
3. He is able to imaginatively identify with the universalised characters/events described.

Here Abhinavagupta is seen to use the metaphor of a mirror to describe the nature of the heart of a sahṛdaya. The heart of a sahṛdaya is like a polished mirror which reflects objects clearly. The constant practice of reading polishes and refines the mind-mirror of the sahṛdaya that it gains the ability to empathise and imaginatively identify with the universalised characters of the kāvyā by shedding the limitations of time and space. This concept of sahṛdaya occurs repeatedly in Abhinavagupta’s works. The following are some of the instances:

- ...vimalapratibhānaśāliḥṛdayayaḥ sahṛdayaḥ
- sukhumāratā hi vai malāyāparaparyāyā sahṛdayatvaḥ ṛdayasya hi kaviḥṛdayatādātmyāpattiyogyataiva utkarṣaḥ
- krīḍāprastāvavyājopadeśakāḥ vigatarāgadveśāḥ
  madhyasthavṛttayaḥ nirmalaḥṛdayamukure sati
All the above references present similar observations on the nature of a sahṛdaya. The imagery of the polished and clear mind-mirror and the ability to identify with the characters and situations described in the works recur in these observations. Actually these elements point towards the ability of the sahṛdaya to enjoy aesthetic pleasure i.e; relish rasa by identifying with the universalised characters and emotions through the attunement of his heart with that of the poet. This seems to be a reiteration of Ānandavardhana’s conception of sahṛdayatva as rasajñatā or the sensibility to enjoy rasa. Thus it emphasises on the emotional aspect of the process of reading.

While explaining Bharata’s kārikā on samādhigunā, Abhinavagupta sketches the nature of a sahṛdaya. Abhinavagupta says that a sahṛdaya who listens to a kāvya has the same experience as that of the person who reads out the kāvya. Abhinavagupta explains the point with an example. He says that a person is walking along a rough path with difficulty. A woman with a tender heart (sukumārahṛdaya), who sees the traveller, sympathises with him. Thus she identifies herself with him and experiences the pain of walking on the rough path. Similar is the case with the listener who is a sahṛdaya. Sahṛdayatva is the ability to identify with the heart of the poet. Abhinavagupta has always compared the heart of a sahṛdaya to a clear and
pure mirror. The tenderness of the heart itself is its purity.\textsuperscript{12} This quality of heart gives \textit{sahṛdaya} the ability to relish \textit{rasa}.

References to the concept of \textit{sahṛdaya} is seen not only in Abhinavagupta’s commentaries on poetic treatises, but also in his philosophical works. In \textit{Tantrāloka}, Abhinavagupta remarks that a person experiences \textit{ānanda} only when he sheds his \textit{tāṭasthya} (an attitude of indifference) and identifies with sweet song, cool touch etc. Those people who experience this delight are known as \textit{sahṛdaya}. Abhinavagupta says:

\begin{quote}
tata eva samasto’yamānandarasavibhramaḥ/
tathā hi madhure gīte sparśe vā candanādike//
mādhyasthyavigame yāsau hṛdaye spandamānatā/
ānandaśakti saivoktā yataḥ sahṛdayo janaḥ// \textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

Some people, even when they concentrate on a sweet song, are unable to identify themselves with the song and enjoy \textit{camatkāra}. Such people are known as ‘\textit{ahṛdaya’}. Jayaratha, the commentator of \textit{Tantrāloka} explains-

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{12} nanvīyatā pāṭhasaukāravanav yāt, śrotustu kimāyātam, anabhijñō devānāṁ priyaḥ, yathā hi kārkasāśarkarāṇikarakaṭakite deśe dussaṅcare saṅcarajanaṁ paśvantyā api sukkumāraḥ ḍayāyā pramadāyāstādātmānupraveṣa iva jāyamānaṁ khedamatiśrāmādate prahārakhedo va, yathā sahṛdayasya sa eva mārga, sukkumāratā hi vaimalyāparaparyāyā, sahṛdayatvaṁ hṛdayasya hi kavihṛdayatādātmyāpattiyogayaṁvai utkaraṣṭhaḥ...abhidhānakośamapi hi paṭhatāṁ suptiiḥivihaktiśca viduṣāmapi na kāvyatattvāvabodhaḥ tasmadvarṇoccaṛaṇaprayatnaṁ paruṣasparśaśaṁhanajanito yaḥ khedaḥ uccārayituh sa eva śroturapi pāruṣyamādhatte.

\textsuperscript{13} Tantrāloka, 3.209-210.
\end{quote}
loke hi sātisaye gītādau viśaye tanmayībhāvena sacamatkārāṇāṁ sahṛdayāḥ iti, anyathā parahṛdayagā (ahṛdayāḥ) iti prasiddhiḥ.¹⁴

It seems that Abhinavagupta takes the word sahṛdaya to mean one with hṛdaya (hṛdayena saha vartate iti sahṛdayaḥ). In Pratyabhijñā philosophy, hṛdaya is a synonym of vimarśa or šakti.¹⁵ Vimarśa is the power of Śiva to create/manifest the Universe according to his will. This aspect is characterised by ānanda. When the meaning of hṛdaya is viewed in such a perspective, the word sahṛdaya seems to assume new dimensions. Thus it can be seen that Abhinavagupta has explained the notion of sahṛdaya from the viewpoint of Pratyabhijñā philosophy. The term sahṛdaya itself seems to resonate varied connotations when viewed in this light.

Besides sketching the ability of sahṛdaya to relish rasa, Abhinavagupta speaks about the relevance of the genius, imaginative power, knowledge and experience of the sahṛdaya in the process of reading. Abhinavagupta does not consider aesthetic sensibility or sahṛdayatva to be a quality attained by birth, instead he considers it as an attribute which is gradually developed. He says:

¹⁴ ibid, 3.240.
¹⁵ hṛdayena parāmarśalakṣaṇena...
sā sphurattā mahāsattā deśakālaviśeṣī / saiśā sāratayā proktā hṛdayaṁ parameśṭhinaḥ // hṛdayaṁ ca nāma pratiśṭhānamucyate tasyāpi vimarśaśaktiḥ, tasyāpi prakāśatvam, tacco uktanītyā jaḍānāṁ cetanāṁ iti. viśvasya parame pade tiṣṭhato viśrāntasya idameva hṛdayaṁ vimarśarūpaṁ paramanṛṭmakaṁ tatra tatra abhidhiyate. (Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā 1.5.14)
The definition of *sahṛdaya* found in *Locana* commentary too talks about the constant acquaintance of the reader with literature. All these indicate that no individual becomes a *sahṛdaya* by birth. Even though Abhinavagupta mentions about the *punya* gained from earlier birth as a cause of aesthetic sensibility, he clearly indicates that constant practice of reading and understanding literary works can only sharpen the aesthetic sensibility of a reader. Thus exposure to literary works moulds an ordinary reader into a *sahṛdaya*. But mere reading of literary works alone cannot turn a reader into a *sahṛdaya*. The reader should also have experience and knowledge of the ways of the world to understand the essence of literature. Abhinavagupta says about the efficiency of the reader in the process of aesthetic enjoyment in *Locana*:

*ḥṛdayasaṃvādopayogilokacittavṛttiparijñānāvasthāyām udyānapulakādibhiḥ sthāyibhūtaratyādyavagamācca.*

Awareness of the emotions and feelings of the people around is a necessary element that helps the readers to sympathise and identify with the characters and their emotions portrayed in literary works. *Bālapriyā* makes the above statement clearer. It says:

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16 Acarya Madhusudan Sastri (Ed.), *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Vol I), p. 676.
17 *Dhvanyālokalocana - Kerala Commentaries* (Vol I), p. 415
This shows that experience gained from real life is an important factor in the process of \( \text{ह्रदयसाम्व} \) or harmonisation of the reader’s heart with that of the poet. Abhinavagupta remarks about this at another instance:

\[
\text{sōke hi karuṇasthāyībhāve ye vibhāvānubhāvāstatsamucitā}
\]

\[
cittavṛttiścarvyamāṇā rasa iti aucityāt sthāyino rasatāpattirityucyate
\]

\[
prāksaṃviditam paratrānumitaṃ ca cittavṛttijātaṃ saṃskārakrameṇa
\]

\[
\text{ह्रदयसाम्व} \text{dam ādadhānāṃ cavarṇāyām upayujyate yataḥ.}
\]

This view of Abhinavagupta is further clarified in Kaumudi commentary which says:

\[
prāksaṃviditam iti. vyavahāradaśāyāṃ svasminnātmani saṃviditam
\]

\[
idānīṃ vilāpādikāryadarśanāt parasminnanumāyate; tadanantaraṃ
\]

\[
\text{saṃskārōdbodhaḥ tadanantaraṃ nirmalatayaḥ ह्रदयasya saṃvādaḥ,}
\]

\[
tadanantaraṃ tanmayībhāvaḥ.20
\]

Thus experience of the reader does not confine to the experiences from his own life, but it also includes the experiences understood from other people’s lives. Both of them implant some sort of \( \text{saṃskāra} \) in the reader’s mind which helps him in the reading process. Thus a \( \text{saḥ्रदaya} \) is a keen observer of

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\[18 \text{ibid, pp.418-419} \]
\[19 \text{ibid, pp.286-287} \]
\[20 \text{ibid, p.297} \]
life. He applies the knowledge gained from the world to make inferences while reading kāvyā-s or watching dramas.

Abhinavagupta also remarks about the existence of vāsanā-s in all human beings. The sthāyībhāva-s like rati, hāsa etc. exist as vāsanā-s in the human beings. The presence of these vāsanā-s help the individuals to relish rasa. The variations in the presence of the vāsanā-s create differences in the taste of the sahṛdaya-s. He says:

na hyetac cittavṛttivāsanāśūnyaḥ prāṇī bhavati. kevalaṁ kasyacit kadācid adhikā cittavṛtti kācid ūnā. kasyacid ucitaviśayaniyantritā kasyacid anyathā.21

Thus the appreciative genius of each sahṛdaya differs. The clarity of their mind-mirrors is varied. The extent of aesthetic enjoyment too differs with different readers. Thus Abhinavagupta remarks that rasa experience varies with differences in the sahṛdaya’s capability of hṛdayasaṅgīvāda:

tasya hṛdayasaṅgīvādatāratamyāpeksaya śrotṛpratipattispuruṣaṇaṁ

sphuṭāśphuṭatvenātivicitram.22

Abhinavagupta clearly distinguishes between the genius (pratibhā) of a reader and a spectator. He says that a reader needs more imagination and aesthetic sensibility than a spectator.23 Abhinavagupta remarks that the enjoyment of śravyakāvyā-s demands greater power of imagination and

21 Acarya Madhusudan Sastri (Ed.), op.cit. p. 665.
22 ibid, p.685
23 ibid, p.685
visualization. He substantiates it by stating that the reader has to use his imagination and genius to visualise the verbal descriptions given in śravyakāvya-s, whereas a spectator is able to see those descriptions just before his eyes. Only those people who have constant acquaintance with literature as well as who possess some inborn genius are able to enjoy rasa even when the vibhāva-s, anubhāva-s etc. are revealed slightly. But dramas provide aesthetic delight even for those who lack this ability. Abhinavagupta expresses it thus:

\[
\text{tena ye kāvyābhyyāsaprāktanapuñyādihetubalādibhiḥ saḥṛdayatasteṣāṃ}
\]
\[
\text{parimitavibhāvādyunnīlanepi parisphuṭa eva sākṣātkārakalpaḥ}
\]
\[
kāvyārthaḥ sphurati. ata eva teṣāṃ kāvyam eva
\]
\[
\text{prītvyutpattikṛdanapeśitanātyam api. teṣām api tu nātyaṃ nipatītāḥ}
\]
\[
sphuritāḥ šaśiraśmayah iti nyāyena sutarāṃ nirmalīkaraṇam.
\]
\[
aḥṛdayānāṃ ca tadeva naimalyadhāyi.}^{24}
\]

Abhinavagupta clearly states that unlike drama, a person reading a śravyakāvya needs greater imagination as he himself has to visualise the descriptions found in the work. As far as drama is considered the whole scene is visually presented before the audience. The reader of a śravyakāvya needs to visualise the settings, characters etc. on the basis of descriptions found in the kāvyas. This demands greater imaginative power and aesthetic sensibility in the reader. Abhinavagupta says that Bharata has incorporated elements like

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^{24} ibid, p.684
songs etc in dramas to make the process of aesthetic enjoyment easy for the common man.²⁵

The capacity of readers to enjoy the suggested meaning in a poem also varies. This is also expressed by Abhinavagupta in his *Locana*:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{anena ślokenātyantasahṛdayo yo na bhavati tasyaiṣa sphuṭasaṃvedya} \\
eva kramaḥ. yathātyantaśabdvṛttajño yo na bhavati tasya \\
padārthavākyārthakramaḥ. kāśṭhāprāptasahṛdayabhāvasya tu \\
vākyavṛttakusālayeva sannapi kramaḥ \\
abhyastānumāṇāvinābhāvamsṛtyādivadasaṃvedya iti darśitām.²⁶
\end{align*}
\]

The process of understanding the suggested meaning may be quick in the case of a *sahṛdaya* with greater aesthetic sensibility, while for others, it happens slowly. In their case, each step in the comprehension of suggested meaning can be easily identified. Abhinavagupta calls the *sahṛdaya* with greater sensibility as *kāśṭhāprāptasahṛdayabhāva*, ie; one who has reached the zenith of aesthetic sensibility. At another instance Abhinavagupta says:

\[
\begin{align*}
prādhānyād eva tatparyantānusāraṇaṣaṇaraṇaṣaṇakatvaritā madhye \\
viśrāntiṁ na kurvatā iti kramasya sato’pyaṣaṇaṁ prādhānye hetuḥ. \\
vācyे’rthe vimukho viśrāntinibandhanaṁ paritoṣam alabhamāna ātmā \\
hṛdayaṁ yeṣām ityanena sacetasāṁ ityasyaivārtho’bhivyakteḥ.²⁷
\end{align*}
\]

²⁵ ibid, p.685.  
²⁶ Dhanyālokacana-Kerala Commentaries (Vol I), p.313  
²⁷ ibid, p.315
A *sahādaya*’s mind achieves pleasure only after understanding the suggested meaning. Mere comprehension of primary meaning does not give delight to them. A *sahādaya*, being well-acquainted with literary works, grasps the suggested meaning very quickly. Even in the case of relishing *rasa*, a reader with constant acquaintance alone relishes *rasa* quickly, a normal reader would relish it slowly. For them the sequence of relishing *rasa* would be identifiable. Abhinavagupta mentions this:

\[
\text{sa [kramaḥ] tu saḥrdayaḥvanābhyaśān na lakṣyate anyathā tu lakṣyeta apītyuktam prāk.}^{28}
\]

As pointed by Ānanadavardhana, *sahādaya* never gets satisfied with primary meanings. His mind runs after beautiful suggested meaning. The knowledge gained by observing the world around and also from the śāstra-s, experiences from one’s own life, scholarship etc assist the *sahādaya* in the process of reading. Thus some sort of sensibility attained by birth, developed through the experience of the world and sharpened through the constant exposure to literary works moulds an ordinary reader into a *sahādaya*.

Thus Abhinavagupta defined the nature of *sahādaya* and recognised the relevant role of the reader in the process of understanding and enjoying a literary work. Abhinavagupta also considered the role of a *sahādaya* as a prominent factor in the fulfilment of the process of suggestion.

### 4.4. The function of *vyañjanā* and the *sahādaya*

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28 *Dhvanyāloka*, p.445
Abhinavagupta gives a detailed description of the powers of śabda in the commentary on the first illustrative verse of Dhvanyāloka. He accepts four powers of śabda namely, abhidhā, tātparya, lakṣaṇā and vyanjanā. Here Abhinavagupta presents the views of other philosophies like Mīmāṃsā, Buddhism and Nyāya and refutes them. He clearly defines the areas where each power of śabda functions.

The word first conveys its primary meaning through the power of abhidhā. This power stops once the primary meaning is conveyed by each word. The meaning of a sentence is conveyed through another power known as tātparya. It is to be noted that Ānandavardhana does not consider tātparya as a separate power of word and accepts only three powers. But Abhinavagupta includes tātparya as another power and later rhetoricians follow Abhinavagupta’s view. The concept of tātparya and its development as a separate power of word has an interesting history. Tātparya as a power of word is often attributed to the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsaka-s who advocate the abhihitānvaya theory of verbal cognition. But Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsaka-s take lakṣaṇā to be the power by which individual word meanings give rise to sentence meaning. It was Jayantabhaṭṭa, the author of Nyāyamañjarī, who conceived tātparya as another power of word. Abhinavagupta too accepted this view and considered tātparya to be the power giving rise to sentence meaning. If the primary meanings conveyed through the power of abhidhā do

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29 *ibid*, pp. 60-61.
30 Later rhetoricians like Mammaṭabhaṭṭa, Viśvanātha etc. accepted Abhinavagupta’s view.
31 Dr. K. Kunjunni Raja, *Indian Theories of Meaning*, p.213-224.
not suit the context or if it does not produce any sensible sentence meaning, then the third power of śabda known as lakṣaṇā operates. These powers of words were accepted by most of the philosophies, but with some differences.

Abhinavagupta, following Ānandavardhana, accepted vyañjanā as the fourth power of śabda. This power is different from inference and memory. It is also seen in places where there is no function of lakṣaṇā and operates without the causal elements needed for the power of lakṣaṇā. This power is assisted by other elements like the speciality of context, speaker, listener, tone, time, place etc. But Abhinavagupta conceives dhvanana as a function of the word which gets fulfilled only with the help of the genius of the perceiver. Thus vyañjanā, which is a power of śabda, completes its operation only with the help of the genius of the sahṛdaya. This shows that Abhinavagupta gives a new dimension to the function of dhvanana by adding the contribution of the reader in the process of suggestion or dhvanana. This indicates a relevant shift from the literariness of the text to the reader’s reception of the text. The influence of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka’s views behind this shift can never be overlooked. Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka had made sahṛdaya the substratum of the relishing of rasa. Ānandavardhana conceived vyañjanā as a power of śabda, but it did not take into its fold the sahṛdaya’s relishing of the poetic essence. But unlike Ānandavardhana, Abhinavagupta recognises vyañjanā not merely as a power of śabda. He emphasises that vyañjanā becomes complete only with the help of the readers’ genius. Abhinavagupta states it thus:
Thus Abhinavagupta points out that the power of suggestion becomes complete only with the appreciative genius of sahṛdaya-s. This is an important observation that highlights the importance of the reader in the reading and interpretation of literary works. The function of vyañjanā works only with the help of the genius of the sahṛdaya. This shows a clear deviance from Ānandavardhana’s view of vyañjanā as a verbal power. Abhinavagupta is seen to incorporate the sahṛdaya into the function of vyañjanā. This shows the shift in the attention of the rhetoricians towards the readers’ reception of the text. Abhinavagupta is seen to fill the gaps found in the views of Ānandavardhana with the help of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka’s theories assisted by the strong background of Pratyabhijñā philosophy.

As far as a literary work is concerned, the words in the work are intent upon conveying the suggested meaning. They are not employed to be just understood at its primary level alone. The fact that the power of suggestion which is prominent in literary works becomes complete only with the help of the reader indicates the reader’s role in the reading process. This itself rules out the possibility of the reader being a passive consumer of the meanings.
that a work offers to him. He obviously has an active role in the reading process. Before venturing into the analysis of the observations on the reading process found in Abhinavagupta’s works, it is necessary to briefly get introduced to his exposition of the process of relishing the aesthetic pleasure by sahṛdaya-s. This would show the role of the sahṛdaya in the relishing of rasa of literary works and dramas.

4.5. Abhinavagupta’s theory of aesthetic delight: A phenomenological perspective

Modern theories try to analyse the way by which the readers get transported to the aesthetic world or the story world. Sanskrit rhetoricians have propounded many theories which explore the various stages of the aesthetic experience of a reader/spectator as he reads a literary work or views a drama. Bharata’s rasasūtra and its varied interpretations are considered to be one of the important contributions of India in this regard to the field of aesthetics. But the original texts propounding the interpretations are not available now. It is through the commentary on Nāṭyaśāstra by Abhinavagupta that the earlier interpretations are known. Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa, Śaṅkuka and Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka are the earlier commentators mentioned by Abhinavagupta. Abhinavagupta refutes their views. But he accepts various elements from these interpretations and presents an aesthetic theory of his own.

According to Abhinavagupta, the sahṛdaya reads/sees and understands a poem or a drama. Slowly the sahṛdaya’s heart gets attuned with the emotion
and characters of the poem/drama which is known as hṛdayasamvāda. The individual elements of the characters are shed. For instance, Duṣyanta becomes a mere man/lover. The limitations of space and time disappear. All individual elements fade away. The characters and their emotions get universalised. The sthāyībhāva latent in the sahṛdaya is evoked and it also loses its subjectivity. This process is called as sādhāraṇīkaraṇa. Sanskrit poetics is indebted to Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka for introducing the concept of sādhāraṇīkaraṇa. This process is explained clearly by Govindacarya in his Kāvyapradīpa commentary on Kāvyaprakāśa as follows:

\[
\text{bhāvakatvaś sādhāraṇīkaraṇam. tena hi vyāpāreṇa vibhāvādayāḥ}
\]
\[
sthāyī ca sādhāraṇīkriyante. sādhāraṇīkaraṇam Caitadeva yat
\]
\[
sītādiviśeṣāṇāṃ kāminītvādisāmānyenopasthitiḥ.
\]

Abhinavagupta explains the process of sādhāraṇīkaraṇa and aesthetic enjoyment through the following example:

\[
\text{grīvābhāṅgābhirāman muhur anupatati syandane baddha drṣṭiḥ}
\]
\[
paścārthdha praviṣṭaḥ sarapatanabhayaḥ bhūyasāpūrvakāyaṃ/}
\[
darbhair ardhāvalīdhaiti śramavirṛtaṃukhabhrānśibhiḥ kīṛṇavartmā}
\]
\[
paśyodagraplutatvād viyati bahutaram stokamurvyāṃ prayāti//}

He says that once the reader grasps the meaning of the verse, he directly identifies with it (mānasī sākṣātkaśā) and the elements of time, space, number etc. disappear from the reader’s perception. The emotion of fear which is not embraced by the elements of space, time and individuality is relished by the readers. The fear which is relished does not belong to any particular person. It is universalised. This universalised fear is relished by the reader without any impediments transforms into aesthetic experience. Here the ego is neither completely eliminated nor completely involved in the process of aesthetic enjoyment. This abolition of all individual elements results in the similar aesthetic experience by all readers/ spectators alike.
viśeṣāvicchannatvena sthāyyanubhāvādīnāṁ ca
sambandhaviśeṣānavacchinnatvena.\textsuperscript{35}

The basic emotions like rati, śoka etc that are evoked in sahṛdaya get universalised and characters like Duṣyanta, Śakuntala etc shed their individual elements and become mere lovers. This concept became a major contribution of India to aesthetics. Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka had also put forth a process called bhāvanā or bhāvakatva through which the universalisation of characters and emotions took place. Abhinavagupta refused to accept these functions put forth by Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka. He rejected bhāvakta and bhogakṛtva. He says:

bhogīkaraṇavyāpāraśca kāvyasya rasaviṣayō dhvananātmaiva, nānyat kiṃcit. bhāvakatvam api
samucitagunālaṅkārāraparigrāhātmakamasmābhīr eva vitatvā
vakṣyate...tasmād vyaṃjakatvākhyaṇa vyāpāreṇa
guṇālaṅkāraucityādikayetikartavyatayā kāvyam bhāvakaṁ rasān
bhāvayati, iti tryaṃśāyām api bhāvanāyām karaṇāṁśe dhvananam
eva nipatati. bhogopi na kāvyāsbdena kriyate, api tu
ghanamohāndhyasaṅkaṭataṇivṛttidvāreṇāsvādāparanāmni alaukike
drutivistaravikāsātmanī bhoge kartavye lokottare dhvananavyāpāra
eva mūrdhābhīṣiktaḥ.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} Kāvyaprakāśa, p.570.
\textsuperscript{36} Dhvanyāloka, pp. 199-200.
But Abhinavagupta does not offer any explanation of how these two functions come under the realm of dhvanana which is purely a verbal power. If they are considered to be verbal powers, then it would fail to explain the process of sahṛdaya’s enjoyment of aesthetic rapture. Though his terminologies were rejected, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka’s achievement of placing the sahṛdaya as the locus of rasa and the process of sādhaṇaḥkaraṇa were adopted by Abhinavagupta.

Sādhaṇaḥkaraṇa, hṛdayasaṃvāda and tanmayībhāva are some of the key terms used in Sanskrit poetics to explain the reading process. Hṛdayasaṃvāda is the harmonisation or attunement of the heart to what is described or depicted. This attunement occurs only when the characters and the basic emotion get depersonalised and universalised through the process of sādhaṇaḥkaraṇa. The limitations of space and time are transcended. Once this process occurs, the reader’s mind gets attuned to the universalised emotions and characters. He then imaginatively identifies with them. This is known as tanmayībhāva. It ultimately leads to the relishing of rasa. Thus it is said:

\[ \text{sahṛdayasyādaʊ hṛdayasaṃvādaḥ,} \]
\[ \text{tatatanmayībhāvalābhastaduttaram āsvāda iti kramaḥ}^{37} \]

The sthāyībhāva-s like rati, śoka etc. come out of the limited individual consciousness and acquire a universal dimension. The sthāyībhāva of the

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^{37} Dhvanyālokalocana-Kerala Commentaries (Vol I), p.288
sahṛdaya, devoid of its subjectivity and freed from impediments is relished as rasa. These processes of aesthetic enjoyment have philosophical aspects corresponding to them when viewed from the angle of Pratyabhijñā philosophy. The process of aesthetic enjoyment expounded by Abhinavagupta is found to have its base in some basic concepts of Pratyabhijñā philosophy. Various scholars like K.C. Pandey and G.T. Deshpande have studied the aesthetic theories of Abhinavagupta in the light of Pratyabhijñā philosophy.³⁸

Pratyabhijñā philosophy does not consider this world as an individual’s creation, but it is the creation of a Universal Consciousness (Śiva). This Universal Consciousness encompasses the whole world. (Even when the world has objective reality in relation to the individual soul, it does not become his subjective reality.) The individual soul realises its true nature when he recognises himself to be the Universal Consciousness. All his desires are fulfilled in this state and he rests in Universal Consciousness (Śiva) enjoying bliss. This is the state which is enjoyed by the sahṛdaya when he relishes rasa. The individuals relish rasa when they shed their personal limited elements. In the peak of aesthetic enjoyment, all desires are satisfied and the self experiences bliss. The terms like camatkāra, bhoga, viśranti etc. are used by Abhinavagupta to indicate this state of aesthetic enjoyment. It is a stage of complete satisfaction, from where no further desires come up. These terms are discussed by Abhinavagupta in his philosophical writings. There he

³⁸ Vide Abhinavagupta by G.T. Deshpande and Abhinavagupta and His Philosophical Works and Comparative Aesthetics by K.C. Pandey.
makes references to the process of aesthetic experience.\textsuperscript{39} Abhinavagupta elevates aesthetic experience to the level of bliss and complete contentment, thus it is obviously different from any worldly pleasures. Thus Abhinavagupta stressed on the universal aspect of the aesthetic experience. A.K. Warder explains this as:

For Abhinavagupta the aesthetic experience is not merely of educational value, it is identical with the highest religious experience and leads to the greatest good for the spectator and connoisseur, especially for the audience in the theatre... The operation of the aesthetic experience is as it were to sublimate emotion from the psychological to the aesthetic plane. In this process individual emotion is transformed into, or replaced by, an aesthetic experience \textit{rasa}, which is non-individual, universal, transcending space, time and particular circumstances. The individual forgets himself and attains a universality of outlook, which also brings him the highest happiness. \textsuperscript{40}

Some of the concepts underlying Abhinavagupta’s theory of aesthetic experience seem to have parallels in the notions of Phenomenology that developed in Europe in the early twentieth century. Edmund Husserl propounded this philosophy with an aim to dissolve the dichotomy of subject and object. According to this philosophy, an object came into existence when it was perceived. Thus even the world was what the percever posits/ intends

\textsuperscript{39} jFor instance, in his commentary on the \textit{Vivṛti} of Utpala for the twelfth kārikā in the fifth āhnikā of the first adhikaraṇa of Īśvarapratyabhijñā of Utpaladeva, Abhinava discusses in detail the concept of \textit{camatkāra}.\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Camatkāra} is the essence of \textit{prakāśa} (yaḥ prakāśasya prāṇatvena uktaḥ), Thus it is equivalent to \textit{vimarśa} or svātantra or ānanda.

\textsuperscript{40} A.K. Warder, \textit{Indian Kāvya Literature}, Vol I, p.34.
it to be. This did not mean that each individual perceived the world in his own way. Husserl advocated the existence of an unchanging universal essence. Husserl mentioned that this essence can be perceived through the process of eidetic/phenomenological reduction. By phenomenological reduction, Husserl meant the bracketing of everything individual. Every individual views the world and its objects with some presuppositions. Husserl calls it the natural attitude. Individuals can perceive the essence of things only if they shed this natural attitude. Thus phenomenological reduction aims at bracketing everything individual to get to the universal essence which is unchanging. The real existence of objects is not required to perceive the universal essence. Thus individuals can perceive the essence of even the non-existing objects (ie, objects in fantasies). Husserl speaks about a knowledge which is free from all historical, social, cultural, spatial and temporal conditions. When Phenomenology was applied to literary criticism, it advocated the bracketing off of the historical context of the text, its author, the conditions of its composition etc. It tried to grasp the essence of the text which was the embodiment of author’s consciousness. The author’s consciousness was in turn manifested through the work.

Some of the above notions find parallels in Abhinavagupta’s theory where the readers/spectators undergo such a process of bracketing of all individual elements to reach a transcendental stage which belongs to the realm of the universal essence. Abhinavagupta deals with this process from an aesthetic point of view. According to Abhinavagupta (and other Sanskrit
rhetoricians too), the elements like the historical context, author and his biography are bracketed off and the text is considered to be independent of these factors. Abhinavagupta explains aesthetic enjoyment as the experience of a universal essence which transcends the realm of subjectivity despite being enjoyed by each individual in his own way. Thus like Husserl, Abhinavagupta also mentions about the non-subjective universal nature of rasa which forms the essence of literary works. He reiterates the nature of rasa as that which is freed from all individualistic and spatio-temporal limitations. As Husserl tries to unravel the unchanging universal essence of all objects, Abhinavagupta tries to unravel the unchanging universal essence of aesthetic objects.

Phenomenology advocates that things come to exist only when it is intended by an individual consciousness. For instance, a tree exists only when it is perceived (intended) by the consciousness. It does not believe in the material existence of objects and the outside world. Thus a text comes into existence only in the consciousness of the reader. Moreover phenomenological criticism suspends all the assumptions about the object, thus it sweeps off the question whether the object is real or illusionary. Sanskrit rhetoricians also do not ponder upon the real existence of rasa. Rasa does not have material existence outside the sahṛdaya’s consciousness. It comes into being only when it is relished by the sahṛdaya. Thus Abhinavagupta says:

• pratītir eva viśiṣṭā rasanā
\begin{itemize}
\item sarvapakṣeṣu ca pratītiparihāryā rasasya. apratītaṁ hi piśācavad vyavahāryaṁ syāt.
\item rasyataikaprāṇo hyasau prameyasvabhāvaḥ...rasanā ca bodharūpaiva.
\end{itemize}

*Rasa* is not an object which is relished, but the process of relishing itself is known as *rasanā*. It can be considered as a form of knowledge/consciousness. Ruṣyaka while explaining Mammaṭa’s gloss on Abhinavagupta’s *rasa* interpretation says:

...na rasaḥ pūrvasiddhaḥ, pratītyā viśiṣṭasyaiva rasatvāt. ataśca na rasaḥ pratīyate, api tu pratīyamāna eva rasaḥ.\(^{41}\)

This shows that *rasa* was not considered to be an object which is perceived, but the process of perception itself was *rasa*. Phenomenologists too did not believe in the existence of objects outside consciousness. The same is the case with *rasa*. It comes into existence only in the consciousness of the *sahṛdaya*. Phenomenologists also mention that reading is not a process where some external element is injected into the reader. Georges Poulet says:

In other words, the kind of comprehension in question here is not a movement from the unknown to the known, from the strange to the familiar, from outside to inside. It might rather be called a phenomenon by which mental objects rise up from the depths of consciousness into the light of recognition.\(^{42}\)

\(^{41}\) *kāvyaprakāśa*, p.578.
\(^{42}\) Georges Poulet, *Phenomenology of Reading*, p. 57.
Abhinavagupta too considers the aesthetic experience of reading to be one which arises from the consciousness. As indicated earlier, sthāyibhāva-s latent in the individuals become objects of relish. Thus rasa itself is considered as a form of consciousness.

Phenomenological literary criticism embraces varied streams of thought in it. Phenomenologists of the Geneva school postulated the view that the author’s consciousness was the unchanging essence of aesthetic objects that was manifested through the work of art. Phenomenologists like Georges Poulet advocated this view.\(^{43}\) The Constance school focussed on the reader’s consciousness which interacted with the text. Abhinavagupta views rasa to be consciousness itself. Abhinavagupta’s aesthetic theory considers that sahṛdaya enjoys aesthetic rapture when his consciousness rests in a state of complete satisfaction freed from all individual desires. But at some instances, Abhinavagupta is seen to consider the poet’s consciousness as rasa. The following sentences reveal this view of Abhinavagupta:

\[
bījaṁ yathā vrksamūlata venā stītaṁ tathā \\
rasāḥ...kavigatasādhāraṇībhūtasamvinmūlaśca kāvyapurassaro \\
naṭavyāpāraḥ. saiva ca saṁvitparamārthaḥ rasaḥ...tadeva mūlam \\
bījasthānīyaḥ kavigato rasaḥ...tatra phalasthānīyaḥ \\
sāmājikarasāsvādaḥ. tena rasamayam eva viśvam.\(^{44}\)
\]

Dr. K. Kunjunni Raja also observes this point:

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\(^{43}\) Vide Georges Poulet, *Phenomenology of Reading*.

\(^{44}\) Acarya Madhusudan Sastry, *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Vol I), p. 681
Abhinavagupta says that *Rasa* is really the poet’s consciousness from which all personal associations have been removed through the vision of beauty.\(^{45}\) But this consciousness is not the author’s individual consciousness, but a universalised one. Abhinavagupta makes this point clear when he says: *na tu muneḥ śoka iti mantavyam*.\(^{46}\) It was not sage Vālmīki’s sorrow that finds manifestation in the first verse of *Rāmāyaṇa*, but it is a manifestation of a universalised pathos which is not tied to any individual element. Abhinavagupta sometimes points to this universal essence to be the root of all arts and the perception of this essence as the ultimate end of aesthetic experience. He considers *rasa* to be the essence of the whole world. Here *sahṛdaya*-s are seen to be considered as the ones who relish the consciousness which is manifested through the literary work. But when it comes to practical criticism, Abhinavagupta is seen to stress on the reader’s imagination and appreciative genius that helps in exploring the implicit meanings of literature. This view seems to correspond to the other stream of phenomenological criticism which too focuses on the reader’s imagination in the reading process.

All these show a streak of similarity in some of the basic notions of phenomenology and Abhinavagupta’s theory of aesthetic experience. Both of them strive to perceive a universal essence that transcends all limitations. The


\(^{46}\) *Dhvanyāloka*, p.88
forgoing of individual elements and rising to the plane of the universal essence is found in both streams of thought.

4.6. *Rasavighna*-s or impediments in the realization of *rasa*

Abhinavagupta has dealt elaborately with the obstacles in the path of aesthetic enjoyment in *Abhinavabhāratī*. These obstacles not only pertain to a spectator viewing a drama, but also to a reader. They hamper the aesthetic enjoyment of the reader as he reads a literary work. Abhinavagupta’s analysis of *rasavighna*-s shed light on numerous aspects of the reading process through which the reader relishes *rasa*. He enumerates seven impediments in the path of the realisation of *rasa*. Out of these seven impediments, few of them pertain to the reader/ spectator, whereas the others pertain to the literary work/ drama.

The reader gets into the path of aesthetic enjoyment only after he is convinced of the story of the literary work. A story which is totally improbable will not be accepted by the readers. The improbability or the lack of credibility of the story is listed as the first obstacle. This aspect was pointed out by Anandavardhana during the discussion on maintaining propriety in literary works. The reader should feel that the things depicted can happen in the world. Depiction of events of ordinary life easily leads to the process of aesthetic enjoyment. In the case of extra-ordinary actions, the characters portrayed should be well-known for their super-human powers. Their powers should be familiar to the readers so that they consider the story

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47 *ibid*, p. 658.
to be credible. This shows that the conviction among the readers about the probability of the story is an essential step in the reading process. If the reader feels that the story depicted is impossible in every aspect, he rejects the work.

Abhinavagupta then points out two other obstacles which deal with personal beliefs and attitudes of the reader as well as the concept of aesthetic distance.\textsuperscript{48} If the reader/spectator takes the story to be too personal and relates it to his personal feelings, then he would not be able to enjoy aesthetic delight. The same thing happens if he/she maintains an indifferent attitude towards the work/drama. If the reader thinks that the story is about someone who is of interest to him, it also obstructs the attunement of the heart. If he is unable to forgo the spacio-temporal limitations, then again the reader/spectator would not be transported to the aesthetic world. The process of reading is also interrupted when the reader gets immersed in his own life and emotions. It is true that individual beliefs and attitude determine the taste of the readers. But the interference of personal emotions stands in the way of aesthetic enjoyment and then he would not be properly transported to the aesthetic world. These notions of impediments in the process of aesthetic experience also strike a chord with the earlier mentioned concepts of phenomenology. The flaws in phenomenological reduction obstruct individuals from grasping the essence of all objects. Similarly according to

\textsuperscript{48} Abhinavagupta speaks about \textit{svagatavaparagatavaniyamena deśakālaviśeṣāveśaḥ} and \textit{nijasukhādivivasībhāvaḥ}. (\textit{Nāṭyaśāstra}, pp.658-661).
Abhinavagupta, the failure to bracket off the individual elements stands in the way of aesthetic experience.

I.A. Richards too makes many notable observations regarding the elements that hinder the proper reading of a literary work. Intrusion of personal emotions and memories is one among these hindrances. He says,

Thus memories, whether of emotional crises or of scenes visited or incidents observed, are not to be hastily excluded as mere personal intrusions. That they are personal is nothing against them. All experience is personal. The only conditions are that they must be genuine and relevant, and must respect the liberty and autonomy of the poem.

I.A. Richards also describes the problem faced during the reading process when the beliefs of the readers disagree with the beliefs inherent in the text. Thus similar to Abhinavagupta, Richards also observed that the intrusion of the readers’ personal feelings, memories and beliefs hindered the reading process. Wolfgang Iser too considered the suspension of elements of the reader’s personality as an essential factor to enjoy literature. He says:

Reading reflects the structure of experience to the extent that we must suspend the ideas and attitudes that shape our own

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49 There have been some excellent studies that analyse the similarities and differences in the poetic theories of Abhinavagupta and I.A. Richards. Vide Comparative Poetics by R.S. Pathak, Western and Eastern Poetics by K.M. Tharakan, Response to Poetry: A Study in Comparative Aesthetics by G.B. Mohan Thampi etc.

50 I.A. Richards, Practical Criticism, p. 240.

51 ibid, pp. 271-291.
personality before we can experience the unfamiliar world of the literary text.\textsuperscript{52}

When I.A. Richards concentrated more on the problems faced by individuals while reading a work, Abhinavagupta sheds his attention to the defects in the content as well as presentation of the literary work which stand as obstacles in the process of reading.

Abhinavagupta adopts the concept of \emph{sadhāraṇīkaraṇa} originally introduced by Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka to explain the state of the reader in the process of aesthetic enjoyment. Modern literary thinkers also have thought about the state of the reader during the process of reading. Wolfgang Iser remarks,

\begin{quote}
Once the reader is entangled, his own preconceptions are continually overtaken, so that the text becomes his ‘present’ whilst his own ideas fade into the ‘past’; as soon as this happens he is open to the immediate experience of the text, which was impossible so long as his preconceptions were his ‘present’\textsuperscript{53}.
\end{quote}

They were also studies that emphasised on the importance of maintaining aesthetic distance. The reader should not take the events and emotions of the work as his own nor should he have an indifferent attitude. His place lies in between. The maintenance of this aesthetic distance is very important as far as aesthetic enjoyment is concerned. The Western aestheticians were also concerned with this notion of aesthetic distance. Edward Bullough in his famous article on ‘Psychical Distance’ discussed the concept of aesthetic

\textsuperscript{52} ‘The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach’, Wolfgang Iser in \textit{Modern Criticism and Theory} (David Lodge Ed.), p.201.

\textsuperscript{53} \emph{idem}
distance that was pivotal in the proper enjoyment of literature. He has discussed about spatial and temporal distance in his essay, as far as the Indian view is concerned, the reader/spectator forgoes his/her spatial and temporal limitations. Thus the question of spatio-temporal distance does not arise in Indian aesthetics. The rhetoricians of the West were not able to explain the position of the reader in the process of aesthetic enjoyment. Wolfgang Iser talks about the process of *identification* that occurs during the reading process. He presents *identification* as the establishment of affinities between oneself and someone outside oneself, here the *identification* occurs between the reader and what he reads. But the concept appears to be rather vague. It is here that the Indian concept of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* gains relevance. *Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* explains the virtual state of the reader which makes him neither too close nor too distant from the literary work. This concept actually elates the process of reading from the level of personal experience to a universalised experience where personal emotions fade into oblivion. The work of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka who introduced this concept is unfortunately lost. But the concept was adapted and developed into a full-fledged theory by Abhinavagupta.

**4.7. Group experience**

It is quite relevant to think about the differences in the effect of viewing a drama or listening to a literary work individually and in a group. Sanskrit rhetoricians have not discussed much about this matter. But

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Abhinavagupta is seen to make some remarks in this regard. In *Tantrāloka*, Abhinavagupta describes about the aesthetic enjoyment of a group of spectators. He says:

\[
\text{hyekāgrasakalāsāmājikajānēṣītām/}
\text{ṛttaṃ gītāṃ sudhāsāgaratvena manyate/} \tag{55}
\]

The aesthetic pleasure experienced while viewing drama as a group is here compared to an ocean of nectar. Abhinavagupta differentiates the extraordinary pleasure in viewing a performance in a group from the aesthetic rapture experienced when viewed alone by a *sahādaya* in the following verses.

\[
tata evocītāte mallanāṭaprekeśopadeśāne/
\text{śarvapramāṇītādāmyaṃ pūrṇarūpānubhāvakam/}
\text{tāvanmārthasaṃñvittitaḥ pratyekaśo yadi/}
\text{kaḥ saṃbhūya guṇasteśāṃ pramātraikyaṃ bhavecca kim/}
\text{yadā tu tattadvedyatvadharmanandarbhagarbhāt/}
\text{tadvastu śuṣkād prāgrupādanyadyuktam idaṃ tadā/} \tag{56}
\]

\[55\] *Tantrāloka*, 10.83. Jayaratha, the commentator of *Tantrāloka*, comments on it as: 
\text{ekaiapramāṇītvedyādhi ṛttaḷderanekapramāṇītvedyasyāṣṭyeva sarvasaṃcetotsaṃyo yena tāvatyaṃśe pramātraikyaṃ syāt.}

\[56\] *ibid*, 10.84-86. Jayaratha explains this verse in this way: 
\text{śuṣkāṭprāgrupāditi ekaipramāṇītvedyānīrasaprayādīti yāvat. anyadītī niratiṣayacamatkārkārūpāntarāvīṣṭamityarthaḥ.}
Here Abhinavagupta is seen to focus on the aesthetic experience in the case of dramas. When a performance is watched by many spectators together, it generates more pleasure than that which is produced when viewed by a single spectator. When each spectator is aware that many others are having the same experience as he does, it generates extraordinary pleasure. Thus aesthetic experience of a group becomes more powerful and effective than the enjoyment of a single spectator which is quite arid.

4.8. The Reading Process

Abhinavagupta’s commentaries on poetic treatises shed light on the process of reading and the factors that influence the reader. From his interpretations, the following can be considered as the factors that influence the reader and the reading process:

4.8.1. Control of the text on the reader

It was pointed out above that the suggestive power of word operates with the help of the reader’s sensibility and genius. But the reader is not free to channelize this power according to his will. The text and its elements exert influence on the reading process. They control the reader and his imagination. The following are some elements of the text that control the reader:

4.8.1.1. The effect of verbal sounds on the reading process

Abhinavagupta mentions about the role of sounds in the process of reading. Bharata explains that verses, where the sahydaya is able to grasp a
unique and beautiful meaning, contain *samādhigūṇa*. After explaining *samādhi* as an *arthaguṇa*, Abhinavagupta explains it as a *śabdaguṇa*. There he comments upon the effect of letters/sounds in the reading process. The ascending and descending nature of sounds help in the enjoyment of *rasa*. Abhinavagupta here refers to the view of Ānandavardhana. Ānandavardhana has mentioned about the ability of some letters/sounds to evoke *rasa* and some others to hamper the enjoyment of *rasa*. Abhinavagupta also says that this nature of sounds has been experienced by all. Harsh sounds obstruct the process of aesthetic enjoyment when used in the context of love, compassion, grief etc., while soft sounds nourish the *rasa* experience in such contexts. In the case of valour, anger etc, harsh sounds assist the process of aesthetic enjoyment. Thus appropriate sounds when used in proper contexts have immense effect on the reading process.

Abhinavagupta says that a *sahārya* experiences the harshness of sounds in a verse just as a tender-hearted woman sympathises with the pains of a man travelling on a rough path. When a poem with harsh sounds are read out aloud, then a *sahārya* too feels the harshness of the sounds just as the person who reads it out. If words with sounds that suit the context are used, then it soothes the listener’s mind and makes the process of comprehension easier. This effect takes place not only when the poem is read out aloud, but also

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57 abhiyukatairviśeṣastu yo’rthasyehopalakṣyate.

tenā ca rthena saṁpannaḥ samādhiḥ parikīrti-taḥ.

58 *Dhvanyāloka*, p.328.

when a work is read silently. The nature of sounds found in the literary works influences the readers. For instance, in the following verse:

\[
\text{cañcadhujabhramitacañḍagadābhighātasañcūrṇitoruyugalasya} \\
suyodhanasya/
\text{styānāvabadhaghanaśoṇitaśoṇapāṇīr uttaṃsaiṣyati kaśāṁs tava devi bhīmaḥ}\
\]

The long compound words coming one after another help in nourishing the sentiment of valour evoked by the verse. The long compound words make it easy for the reader to visualise the strong and single blow of Bhīma which crushed the thighs of Suyodhana. Thus the nature of words in a sentence is seen to help the visualisation of the event described in the minds of the readers.

I.A. Richards also mentions the effect of auditory images while explaining the various steps in the reading process. When a person reads a book, the printed words generate visual sensations in the reader. These visual sensations carry along with them certain auditory images too. A person who silently reads a work actually reads out to himself in his mind. I.A. Richards says:

Auditory images of words are among the most obvious of mental happenings. Any line of verse or prose slowly read, will, for most people, sound mutely in the imagination somewhat as it would if read aloud. But the degree of correspondence

between the image—sounds, and the actual sounds that the reader would produce, varies enormously.\textsuperscript{61}

The words and their sounds do have an effect on the reader and the process of reading. I.A. Richards says that “collocations of syllables which are awkward or unpleasant to utter are rarely delightful to the ear.”\textsuperscript{62} Abhinavagupta also comments upon the effect of various metres on the readers. Bharata insists on using meters with \textit{laghvakṣara-s} (sounds which are \textit{laghu}) when the poem contains \textit{vīra} (valour), \textit{raudra} (anger) and \textit{adbhuta} (wonder). Similarly meters with \textit{gurvakṣara-s} (sounds which are \textit{guru}) are to be used in \textit{rasa-s} like \textit{karuṇa}.\textsuperscript{63}

In the explanation of the definition of \textit{dhvani} in \textit{Locana}, Abhinavagupta has pointed out that the words and the meaning assist one another in a literary work. Neither the word nor meaning can stand alone in a literary work. The process of reading also gets influenced by their mutual assistance.

\textbf{4.8.1.2. The effect of the linguistic elements}

The process of reading does not only involve comprehending the overall meaning of the work and relishing of the main \textit{rasa} found in it. Even the minute linguistic elements have a role to play in the process of reading. This is testimonied by \textit{Ānandavardhana’s} attempts to show the suggestiveness of linguistic elements like suffix, prefix, root, verb, word, sentence etc. The

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{ibid}, p.109. \\
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{ibid}, p.110. \\
\textsuperscript{63} Acarya Madhusudan Sastry, \textit{Nāṭyaśāstra} (Vol II), pp.1337-1338.
\end{flushleft}
agents of suggestion make the process of reading more interesting for a sahaṛdaya as each suggestive element opens up various semantic possibilities for him. These agents also act as cues which control the imagination of the reader and thus guide the readers in the reading process.

Ānandavardhana had brought out the suggestiveness of many linguistic elements in the third Udyota of Dhvanyāloka. Abhinavagupta has elaborated them in his commentary. In these elaborations, he has explained the way in which these elements influence and control the reader in the process of reading. For instance,

\[
\begin{align*}
tadgehaṃ natabhitti mandiram idaṃ labdhāvagāhaṃ divaḥ \\
sā dhenujaraṭi caranti kariṇām etā ghanābhā ghaṭāḥ \\
sa kṣudro musaladhvaniḥ kaḷam idaṃ saṅgītakaṃ yoṣitā- \\
māścaryaṃ divisairdvijo’yamiyatīṃ bhūmiṃ samāropitaḥ\\
\end{align*}
\]

The verse describes the scene where Sudāmā’s hut gets transformed into a palace. The poor cows are replaced by magnificent elephants. The sound of pounding on the empty mortar is replaced by the sweet and joyful song of maidens. It is quite a wonder to see all these transformations occur in the Brahmin’s house within a few days. The situations like the old house and its pathetic condition is not stated directly. The pronouns tad and sā are enough to convey the old condition. The quick transformation is indicated by pronouns like idam, etāḥ. Abhinavagupta mentions how the pronouns like tad and idam respectively point towards the past and the present and how this
enhances the charm of the verse. The pronouns \textit{tad} and \textit{sā} suggest the poverty and pathetic conditions of Sudāmā’s hut which has now turned into a memory. The pronouns \textit{idam} and \textit{etāḥ} suggest the newly found luxury. The readers grasp the contrast between the past and the present through these pronouns and they eventually relish the sentiment of wonder. Readers also make use of elements like suffix, prefix to delve into the deeper meaning of the literary works. In the word \textit{samudvīkṣya}, the reader takes into account semantic implications of each prefix and grasps their meaning as \textit{samyaguccairviśeṣeṇeṣekṣita}ve. In the verse,

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
tasyā vināpi hāreṇa nisargād eva hāriṇau
janayāmāsatu kasya vismayaṁ na payodharau
\end{center}
\end{quote}

Abhinavagupta explains the process through which the word \textit{api} directly denotes contradiction. The word \textit{api} makes the reader look for two different meanings for \textit{hāriṇau} which leads to the direct denotation of contradiction. The word \textit{vismaya} also denotes wonder directly. Thus the word acts as a cue which controls the reader.

\textit{Sahādaya} thus recognises the suggestive elements strewn across the literary works. He uses them to comprehend and interpret the works with the help of his knowledge and imagination. The suggestive elements embedded in the literary works thus influence the process of reading. This in turn

\begin{verbatim}
64 ata evātra tadidaṁśabdādinā smṛtyanubhavayor
atyantavirudhiṣayatāsūcanenāścaryavibhāvataḥ yojitā.
\end{verbatim}
indicates the fact that text exerts its influence on the reader in the reading process.

It has already been mentioned that reading is not a one-sided process, but it is an interactive process where the reader and the text interact. Modern studies on narratology contain a special branch of study known as ‘narrative comprehension’. The field of narrative comprehension tries to analyse how the readers comprehend meaning from a narrative. For this, the narratologists approach the issue from different angles. Studies have pointed out that while trying to understand a narrative, the readers try to identify and understand the significance of the linguistic elements like verbs, suffix, prefix, metaphors etc. The attempts of Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta also show that in the process of comprehending a text, the readers try to identify the linguistic elements that are suggestive. These elements range from letters to whole sentences. This identification helps them to understand the meaning suggested by the work. Moreover the suggestive elements inherent in the works indicate the fact that the readers do not have full liberty to traverse any path they wish to in interpreting the literary works. It was shown that various elements ranging from a letter to the syntax of a sentence act as indicators of what the author wishes to suggest. The reader uses these indicators to come to conclusions based on his knowledge and imagination. Thus such indicators often set limits to the paths that readers’ imagination can travel. But it is the

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65 Vide David Herman & et al (Ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narratology*. 
genius and imagination of the reader that decides the extent to which these suggestive elements are utilised by him to open various levels of meanings.

4.8.1.3. **Guṇa-s and the state of mind of readers**

Ānandavardhana had mentioned about the effect of various *rasa*-s on the minds of the readers while presenting the concept of *guṇa*-s in the second *Udyota*. He recognises three *guṇa*-s which are the attributes of *rasa*. He defines *mādhuryaguṇa* as the attribute which brings about tenderness/softness. Abhinavagupta explains it as that which helps in melting the minds of the readers. It washes away the harshness in the readers’ minds.66 Thus this *guṇa* is found in both types of *śṛṅgāra* and *karuṇa*. *Ojas* is another *guṇa*. It causes *dīpti* in the minds of the readers. Abhinavagupta says that it is the attribute which brightens up or warms up the minds of the readers. Thus it is found in the *rasa*-s like *vīra*, *raudra*, *adbhuta* and *hāsyā*. *Prasāda* is found in all *rasa*-s. It is the *guṇa* which helps the readers to easily enjoy the literary works. Abhinavagupta defines it as that attribute which helps in spreading the *rasa* in the readers’ minds. He presents the example of fire spreading in the dry wood to explain this ability of *prasādaguṇa*. These explanations offered by Abhinavagupta show the effect of *rasa*-s on the minds of the readers. Ānandavardhana’s classification of *guṇa*-s was a new attempt in Sanskrit poetics and Abhinavagupta added a psychological aspect to this classification. Some of the later rhetoricians like Jagannātha Paṇḍīta accepted these views and presented them with some modifications. Some

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66 *Dhvanyāloka*, p.219.
modern scholars consider it as another attempt to classify *rasa* on a different criterion.\textsuperscript{67}

### 4.8.2. Reading the works in a context

Abhinavagupta recognises the importance of context in the process of comprehending the meaning of sentences. The context influences the readers in the reading process. The readers always read and comprehend verses or any kind of literature in a particular context. They rely upon contexts to understand the speaker, the listener, the place, time etc. The term ‘context’ here refers to the textual context ie; the situation where the verse occurs in a particular text. In the case of stray verses, the readers comprehend meanings by placing them in imaginary contexts. By altering these imaginary contexts, the meanings of the verses would also undergo changes. This would lead to the possibility of multiple meanings.

The relevance of context in the process of comprehending a literary text is clear when Abhinavagupta tries to analyze the stray Prakrit verses (*muktaka*-s) in a context and not as an isolated piece of writing. He presents imaginary contexts in order to analyse these stray verses. This is clear when Abhinavagupta explains a Prakrit verse quoted by Ānandavardhana to illustrate the fusing of two varieties of dhvani. The verse is as follows:

\begin{verbal}  
\footnotesize
\begin{center}
\textit{khaṇapāhuṇiā deara esā jāāe kimpi de bhaṇidā}
\textit{ruui paḍoharavalahīgharammi aṇuṇijjaa varāi}\textsuperscript{68}  
\end{center}
\end{verbal}

\textsuperscript{67} M.P.Sankunni Nair, *Nāṭakīyānubhavamenna rasam*, p.93.  
\textsuperscript{68} *Dhvanyāloka*, p.535
Ānandavardhana just says that the word anunīyatām contains scope for both arthāntarasāṅkramitavācyadhvani and vivakṣitānyaparavācyadhvani and it is difficult to decide which variety would be the most suitable or prominent one. Abhinavagupta, in his interpretation, introduces the speaker of the verse as a lady who is secretly in love with the ‘brother-in-law’. She says, “Brother-in-law! The girl who was invited by you to the festival, is crying, sitting alone in the backyard as your wife spoke something to her. Go and comfort her.” Here the word anunīyatām can suggest two different meanings. The first would be to comfort the crying girl through sexual union. Then it would be an example of arthāntarasāṅkramitavācyadhvani as the primary meaning of the word gets transferred to the sense of sexual intercourse. In the case of vivakṣitānyaparavācyadhvani, it can suggest the jealousy of the speaker towards the girl who is loved by the brother-in-law. The speaker has realised that the girl is his real object of love and the speaker has now become an object of scorn. Thus Abhinavagupta explains this point of Ānandavardhana by describing the situation elaborately. He first gives the meaning of the verse. He then presents the context, the nature of the speaker etc. He uses these elements to explain Ānandavardhana’s point. This shows that the readers’ minds obviously take into account the situation, the speaker, the listener. In the absence of a prescribed context, the reader imagines

69 idem.
situations. This leads to variations in the interpretations of the verses. Each reader’s imagination would be different.

Abhinavagupta has shown the variations in reading and interpretations by altering context, speaker, listener etc. while commenting on the following Prakrit verse quoted in Dhvanyāloka:

\[ de \text{ā} \text{ pasi} \text{a} \text{ ni} \text{vattasu} \text{ muhasijo} \text{hā} \text{vīluptatama} \text{niva} \text{he}. \]
\[ a\text{hisāri} \text{ṇa} \text{ vīgdha} \text{ṃ} \text{ karosī a} \text{ṇ} \text{nā} \text{ vi hā} \text{se}. \]

(prārthaye tāvatprasīda nivarttasva mukhaśaśijyotsnāvīluptatamoni)vahe.
abhisārikāṇiṃ vighnaṃ karōṣyanyāsāmapi hatāše)

The meaning of the verse is as follows: ‘I request you, the light of whose moon-like face destroys darkness, to be pleased. Please return, Oh lady whose hopes have been crushed! Or else you will create difficulty for other abhisārikās too.’ Abhinavagupta explains this verse in three different ways. In the first interpretation, the lover has uttered the name of another woman in front of the lady-love. This angers the lady and she is about to leave his house. Then the lover tries to appease her through these words. In the second interpretation, Abhinavagupta takes it to be the words of her maid who requests her not to go. In the third reading, the lady-love, tired of waiting for the lover in her house, sets out to his house. But she meets the lover on the way. The lover pretends as if he has not recognised her and tells her these words. They suggest that they can either go to her house or to his house. Abhinavagupta says that in the first two interpretations, the suggested
meaning ultimately beautifies the denoted meaning, while in the third interpretation, the suggested meaning outshines the literal meaning.

Thus three ways of reading the same verse is shown by Abhinavagupta. Here he alters factors like context and speaker to present different interpretations. These interpretations vary the beauty of the verse. This clearly shows that there is no pre-defined beauty in the verses. The imagination of the reader plays a part in determining the beauty of the verse. The capability of the reader to explore various semantic possibilities by altering context is clearly revealed in these interpretations put forth by Abhinavagupta. Thus changes in context change the connotations of the verses. Context always stands as a determining factor in understanding the meaning.

The readers normally grasp the meaning of a word popular by usage before the grammatically derived meaning or the meaning of the component elements of a word. The following maxim expresses this notion: *avayavaprasiddheḥ samudāyaprasiddhir baliyasi*. But Abhinavagupta points out that the meaning popular by usage may be ousted and the derived meaning would be grasped by the reader by the influence of context. This is demonstrated while explaining the word *mahākāla* in the sentence

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atrāntare kusumasamayayugam upasaṇharannajṛmbhata
griṣmābhidhānah phullamallikādhavaḷīṭṭahāso mahākālaḥ.
```

(*Harṣacarita*)
Abhinavagupta says that the word ‘mahākāla’ is used to denote the summer season as the context describes the summer season. Abhinavagupta says that the word mahākāla in this sentence does not follow the above maxim. The context of the sentence limits its denoted meaning to that of the meaning of its component elements. Thus the popular meaning of a word gets restricted and the reader would first comprehend the grammatically derived meaning of the word by the influence of context.

At another instance, Abhinavagupta says that without understanding the context, there is no particular means to decide whether a verse is a natural denotative expression or an implied utterance. Thus context plays a decisive role in deriving at the meaning of verses. In Abhinavagupta’s readings, context primarily refers to the textual context, i.e; the situation occurring inside the text. Thus it refers either to the situation that occurs inside the literary work or an imaginary situation in which the verse is supposed to have been uttered by an imaginary speaker. Abhinavagupta’s interpretations do not view the whole text in its social and historical context which led to the composition of the work. It also does not analyse the work in the light of the social and historical background in which the work is read. Abhinavagupta is concerned about the literary context found in the text. The literary context includes the speaker, listener, the situation etc. In the case of stray verses,

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70 In the sentence, Abhinavagupta describes it as mahāṃścāsau dinadairghyadurativāhatāyogātkālaḥ, i.e; a period which is intolerable and thus seems to be too long.

71 ‘Appaha jāyā’ iti gāthāyāṁ pāmarasvabhāvoktirvā dhvanirveti prakaraṇādyabhāve ekataragrāhakaṁ pramāṇaṁ nāsti (Dhvanyāloka, p. 540)
Abhinavagupta imagines a situation and creates a literary context for the greater understanding of the verse. This is true not only for Abhinavagupta, but for all the Sanskrit rhetoricians.

In modern literary criticism, the term ‘context’ is used in various connotations. Jonathan Culler, a Structuralist critic indicates the relevance of context in this way:

As the example of Beckett shows, we can always make the meaningless meaningful by production of an appropriate context.  

This indicates the relevance of context in the process of reading. Today the term ‘context’ is used to denote the historical, social and political contexts in which the work was written. It may also indicate the historical, political and social context in which the work is read by a reader. The work may also be analysed on the basis of the historical and social context which is portrayed in the work. These contexts are taken into consideration in the reading and understanding of the deeper meanings of the literary works.

When a reader reads a piece of literature, he tries to place it in a particular context. If the source of the verse is not known, then the reader imagines situations and comprehends the verse. Thus in the absence of a known context, the reader surely places the work in an imaginary situation to understand and interpret the literary works. This shows the influence of context in the process of reading and comprehending literary works.

72 Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p.138.
4.8.3. Construction of prose order and the interpretation of verses

The syntax of the verses or the structure in which the words are arranged in a sentence surely effects the reading process. While reading a verse, the readers move through the words one after another. The reader tries to interpret verses by mentally constructing the prose order of the words in the verse. Abhinavagupta comments on the prose order and its influence on the meaning of the verse in one or two places. For instance, in the verse

\[
\text{ravisāṅkrīntausahaanabhāgyastuṣārāvṛtamanḍalaḥ}
\]
\[
niśvāsāndha ivādārśaścandramāḥ na prakāśate}^{73}
\]

Abhinavagupta presents Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka’s view that there is no need to take the word \textit{andha} in its secondary sense.\(^{74}\) Abhinavagupta says that the word \textit{andha} can be accepted in its primary sense when \textit{iva} is used to connect \textit{andha} and \textit{ādārśa} (i.e; \textit{andha iva ādārśa}). But Abhinavagupta points out the flaw in such an interpretation. He says that then the words \textit{ādārśaścandramāḥ} would remain in the verse. Thus it would be necessary to take \textit{iva} once again so as to connect the words \textit{ādārśa} and \textit{candramāḥ}. But Abhinavagupta says that \textit{iva} shows the similarity of a mirror blinded by breath and the moon in winter

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\(^{73}\) The verse describes the dull moon in winter season. The charm of the moon has been shifted to the sun and the moon is covered by snow. The moon has lost its brightness just as a mirror which has been blinded by breath.

\(^{74}\) Bhaṭṭanāyakena tu yad uktam ‘ivaśabdayogād gauṇatāpyatra na kācit iti tacchlokārtham aparāmṛṣya. ādārśacandramasor hi sāḍṛṣyaam ivaśabdo dyotayati. niśvāsāḥndha iti cādaśaviśeṣaṇam. ivaśabdasyāndhārthena yojane ādārśaścandramāḥ ityudaharaṇaḥ bhavet. yojanaḥ Caitad ivaśabdasya kīṣṭam. na ca niśvāsenāndha ivādārśaḥ sa iva candra iti kalpanā yuktā.
season. Thus in the prose order, it should be niśvāsāndha ādāra iva candramāḥ. This explanation would be more pleasing to a reader than the one put forth by Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka. The variations in the arrangement of words in prose order leads to differences in the meaning. Readers tend to prefer a simple arrangement of words that lead to easy comprehension of meaning.

Changes in the prose order also leads to varied interpretations of same sentences. This reading technique is mentioned by Abhinavagupta while commenting on the verse

\[ \text{upoḍharāgeṇa vilolatārakam tathā grhītaṃ śaśinā niśāmukham/} \]
\[ \text{yathā samastaṃ timirāṇśukaṃ tayā puro’pi rāgādgalitaṃ na lakṣitam/} \] ⁷⁵

The above verse is explained from two viewpoints- one from the point of view of night and the other as the actions of a couple of lovers. While the verse is explained from the point of view of night, Abhinavagupta says that the word api should be placed near the word lakṣitam in the prose order ⁷⁶. In the other point of view, api would be placed next to puraḥ. Thus the placement of the word api in the prose order is different in the two contexts.

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⁷⁵ The moon, with its increasing redness, grabbed the face of night filled with twinkling stars. Then the night did not notice its dark attire falling down just in front of her. Here this action of moon an night suggests the amorous actions of a couple of lovers. The masculine gender of the word šaśi and the feminine gender of niśā along with the pun in the adjectives used in the verse help in the process of suggestion.

⁷⁶ puro’pi pūrvasyāṃ diśi agre ca....rātripakṣe tu apiśabdo lakṣitamityasyāṇantarāḥ.
This shows that the reading process involves such minute elements that alter the way in which the literary works are comprehended.

As it was seen, sahṛdaya is not bound by aspects like grammatical accuracy. His genius and imagination help him transcend the level of primary meanings. The sounds, words, syntax etc are utilised by him to unveil various semantic possibilities. The readers may construe the words of sentence in different ways. This difference leads to differences in the meaning of verses.

4.8.4. Aesthetic application of grammatical knowledge

Sahṛdaya utilises elements like nouns, verbs, adjectives and compounds to unravel the beauty of literary works. The interpretations made by Abhinavagupta show that a sahṛdaya is not intent on looking for grammatical accuracy in literary works. Instead he is charmed by the suggestiveness of various grammatical usages made by the poets. Thus it is not grammatical accuracy, but it is the suggestiveness of usages that matters to the readers. This is clearly seen in Abhinavagupta’s interpretation of compound words. The readers do not always follow the rules of grammar to understand the usages in a literary work. They give attention to the capacity of the usage to enhance the literary beauty of the verses. This tendency of the readers is noticed in Abhinavagupta’s analysis of compound words like suvarṇapuṣpām, phullamallikādhavalāṭṭahāso, mahākāla etc.77 While explaining the word mahākāla in the sentence

77 He explains the word mahākāla in atrāntare kusumasamayugamupasamhannajrmbhata phullamallikādhavalāṭṭahāso mahākālāḥ as mahāṃścāsau dinadairghyadurativāhatāyogātkālāḥ samayaḥ.
Abhinavagupta describes it as *mahāṃścāsaudinadairghyadura tīvāha tāyogātkalāḥ* i.e; a period which is intolerable and thus seems to be too long. Here the context has restricted the word to mean summer season. In another verse, Abhinavagupta explains the compound *suvarṇapuspām* as *suvarṇāni puṣpyatīti suvarṇapuspā* even though it is not grammatically correct. Abhinavagupta interprets the compound in such a way as to suit the context. *Sahādaya* does not try to verify the grammatical correctness of the compounds used in the work. But he seeks the beauty brought out by these words.

In the verse,

*attā ettha ṇimajjai ettha ahaṃ diasāṇḍ palohi/
 mā pahia rattietdhaa sejjēe maha ṇimajjhisi/*

Abhinavagupta explains the word *maha* or *mama* as *āvayōḥ*. Usually this word is used to denote singular noun in Prakrit. Abhinavagupta explains that the interpretation of *maha*, in the sense of *āvayōḥ* would enhance the beauty of the verse because such a usage would not generate any doubt in the mind of the mother-in-law. The explanation given by Abhinavagupta shows that readers tend to go beyond the conventional usages to make out the

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78 *Dhvanyāloka*, p.145.
meaning of literary works. They seem to comprehend the words in such a way as to unravel the beauty of the works. The knowledge of the rules of grammar also helps the reader to grasp varied connotations of the literary works. In the verse,

\[
\text{cañcadbhujabramitacāṇḍagadābhīghāta} \\
\text{sañcūrṇitoruyugalasya suyodhanasya/} \\
\text{styānāvabadhahansopitaśoṇapāṇir} \\
\text{uttaṃsayiṣyatī kacāṃ stava devi bhīmaḥ/}^{79}
\]

Abhinavagupta explains the word *suyodhanasya* using the *sūtra*, ‘\(\text{ṣaṣṭhi} \, \text{cā’nādare}’\’. The *vṛtti* of the *sūtra* is ‘\(\text{anādarādhikye bhāvalakṣaṇe} \, \text{ṣaṣṭhīsaptamayau stāḥ. rudati rudato vā prāvrājīt. rudantaṃ putrādikam} \, \text{anāḍṛtya sannyastavān ityarthāḥ’}\). The genitive or locative case is used with the word which denotes an object towards which utmost disrespect is shown. Here the genitive case in the word *suyodhanasya* indicates despise towards Suyodhana in the act of Bhīma. The act of crushing Duryodhana’s thighs shows Bhīma’s despise towards Duryodhana. Thus a reader who is aware of this grammatical rule may connect it with the usage found in the verse. This would help the reader to understand deeper meanings of the verse. The knowledge of grammar and application of grammatical rules for aesthetic purposes give a new dimension to the reading process. Thus readers equipped

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^{79} These are the words of Bhīma after crushing Duryodhana’s thighs in *VegaIsāmphāra*. Bhīma is now ready to tie the loose hair of Draupadī using his hands full of Duryodhana’s fresh and thick blood.
with the knowledge of grammar utilise it to unravel the aesthetic beauty of literary works.

4.8.5. Recapitulation of past events

As a literary work unfolds before the readers, the readers’ minds oscillate between the past events and the present. They recollect the events that happened earlier in the work and try to analyse the present situations in the light of this recollection. Abhinavagupta is seen to employ this technique while commenting on the following verse from Kumārasaṃbhava quoted by Ānandavardhana:

\[ evaṇḍi vāḍini devarāau pārśve pituradhomukhī/ \]
\[ līlākamalapatrāṇi gaṇayāmāsā pārvatī (kevalam)/ \]

The action of Pārvatī described in this verse would seem to be normal when viewed as the actions of a girl of her age. This action would suggest deeper meanings when viewed in the light of past events. Abhinavagupta reminds the readers about past events described in the work like Pārvatī’s love for Śiva and her penance to get Śiva as her husband. A recollection of these past events helps the readers understand the deeper meaning of the verse.⁸¹

The role of recapitulation of past events in comprehending the suggested meaning of verses is seen in Abhinavagupta’s commentary on two

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⁸⁰ These are the words of Sage Aṅgiras to Himavān. The sage has just presented the marriage proposal of Lord Śiva with Pārvatī. As the sage was talking, Pārvatī, who stood beside her father, her face bent down, was counting the petals of the play-lotus.

⁸¹ Dhwanyāloka, p.270.
verses quoted by Ānandavardhana in two different instances. Ānandavardhana points out two verses where the usual denotation of the word Rāma, as the son of Daśaratha, slowly gets transferred to other qualities of Rāma. The verses are extracted from two different dramas. They are words spoken by Rāma in two different situations. Abhinavagupta points out the transference of the meaning of the word Rāma by analysing the verses in the light of the past events in the life of Rāma.

In the first verse,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{snigdhaśyāma} & \text{āka} \text{ntili} \text{patv} \text{iyato} \ v \text{elladbalākā} \ \text{ghanā} \\
v\text{ātāḥ śīkariṇāḥ} & \text{pay} \text{odasuhṛdām} \ \text{ān} \text{andakekāḥ} \ \text{kalāḥ} / \\
kāmaṃ & \text{santu} \ \text{drīḍhaṃ} \ \text{ka} \text{ṭhorohṛdayo} \ \text{rāmo’smi} \ \text{sarvaṃ} \ \text{sahe} \\
vaidehi & \text{tu} \ \text{katham} \ \text{bhaviṣyati} \ \text{hahā} \ \text{hā} \ \text{devi} ! \ \text{dhīrā} \ \text{bhava} / / \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Mahānāṭaka)

Rāma is grieved by Śītā’s separation. Monsoon season has arrived and the whole atmosphere has elements that intensify Rāma’s love for Śītā. But in her absence, these love-evoking elements make Rāma grief stricken, yearning for Śītā. Rāma utters these words desperately as he is concerned about Śītā’s inability to tolerate the sorrow of separation. As for Rāma, he is a man with a strong heart who can tolerate all sorrow. It is quite unusual for the speaker to address himself by his own name. The reader would surely ponder over the reason behind such a reference in the verse. The word kaṭhorahṛdaya would make the reader think about all the grief that Rāma has endured in his life. Events of the past like his exile from the kingdom and the life in forest would
surely come to the reader’s mind. Thus he would take the word Rāma to indicate that person who had endured all such adversities with a strong heart. Such Rāma would survive this grief too. Abhinavagupta thus explains this transference of meaning of the word by analysing it in the light of context. The beauty of the use of the word unravels when it is interwoven with the past events.

The other verse, found in the third Udyota is:

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pratyākhyānaruṣaḥ kṛtam samucitaṁ krūreṇa te rakṣasā
sodhāṃ tacca tathā tvayā kulajano dhatte yathoccaiḥ śirah/
vyarthaṁ sampratī bibhratā dhanur idaṁ tvadvyāpadeḥ sākṣiṁā
rāmeṇa priyajīvitena tu kṛtaṁ premṇaḥ priye nocitam//
(Unidentified Rāma Play)
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Here Rāvaṇa plays a trick on Rāma by displaying a fake, severed head of Sītā. Rāma breaks down in grief seeing this and utters the above words. Abhinavagupta, in his commentary, reveals every aspect that would go through a reader’s mind as he reads each word of the verse. He points out that the first two pada-s of the verse make the reader think about the appropriateness of Rāvaṇa’s action as a demon and Sītā’s action as a lady of noble birth. As the reader comes to the last two pada-s of the verse, he grasps the futility of Rāma’s weapons that failed to save Sītā, his beloved. Thus Rāma, to whom life was dear, could not do what was appropriate to his beloved. Here too, Rāma addresses himself using his name. The context would make the reader think about Rāma’s heroic deeds of the past where he
had lived upto the expectations of his loved ones and taken appropriate timely actions. Recollection of the past events would help the readers realise Rāma’s failure to do justice to his beloved Sītā. Thus the word Rāma, in the verse, gushes into the reader’s mind innumerable qualities of Rāma. The word seems to assume new dimensions when viewed in the light of Rāma’s previous actions. In his commentary, Abhinavagupta seems to have put into words what a sahṛdaya feels while reading the verse. He sketches the process through which the reader grasps the various shades of meaning the word Rāma suggests. As the reader reads the verse, the various shades of meaning is enjoyed by him when he recollects past events and relates them with the present.

This shows that readers analyse each event in a literary work by relating it with the events that happened earlier in the text. All the events described in a literary work have an underlying unity. This unity is grasped by a reader. The reader would grasp the significance of a particular event in the text when he links it with earlier events. The above examples showed the significance of the word ‘Rāma’ used in the verses by connecting it to the past events in the life of Rāma. This interlinking done by the reader seems to give deeper connotations to the word used by the poet.

The interweaving of the past and the present by the readers makes the process of reading a dynamic one. It becomes a non-linear process which involves a to and fro movement between the past and the present. Many of

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82 *ibid*, pp.177, 314, 315.
the modern narratologists have agreed to the fact that the action of the reader in keeping track of the characters, events, time and their mutual connections is a major factor in the comprehension of a narrative text. Wolfgang Iser makes a similar point in one of his essays. He puts forth three stages of reading. He considers the process of anticipation and retrospection an integral part of the reading process. The reader anticipates the events that would happen in the course of the story. He would also retrospect the past events as he proceeds in his reading of literary works. Eventually the story would unfold before the readers. The to and fro movement of the reader actually plays a relevant role in the interpretation of numerous elements in the text. Various aspects of the work seem to acquire deeper connotations as they are interpreted by connecting the past events. Anticipation and retrospection done by the reader surely unveils fresh shades of meaning.

4.8.6. Conversion of linguistic symbols into experiences

As mentioned earlier, the branch of narratology dealing with narrative comprehension tries to understand how a reader keeps track of events, characters, places and their mutual relations. It also attempts to understand the process through which the readers transform string of words into complex representations or experiences. This is done from both linguistic as well as psychological viewpoints.

In the third Udyota of Dhvanyāloka, Ānandavardhana is seen to point

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out the suggestive linguistic elements which influence the process of reading. Abhinavagupta sketches the psychological impact of these elements on the reader. He more or less traces the way readers comprehend these elements and enjoy aesthetic delight. The process of transformation of the comprehension of linguistic elements into aesthetic experience is an abstract notion which is difficult to be depicted in a concrete manner. But Abhinavagupta is seen to be successful in sketching the reader’s experience in his interpretations. This is clearly seen in his commentary on the following verse from Meghadūta:

\[
\text{dīrghīkurvan paṭu madakalam kūjitaḥ sārasāṇāṁ}
\]
\[
\text{pratyūṣeṣu spṛṣṭitakamalāmodamaitrīkaśāyaḥ}/
\]
\[
\text{yatra strīṇaṁ harati suratagāñīgaṅkūlaḥ}
\]
\[
\text{siprāvātaḥ priyatama iva prārthanācāṭukāraḥ}//
\]

Here Abhinavagupta explains various connotations of the verse by skilfully unravelling the beauty of each word in the verse. He explains the way in which the fragrant and cool breeze from Siprā river rejuvenates the lovers who are tired after intercourse. The breeze excites mutual passion in their minds to make love again. The verse presents the similarity of actions of the breeze to that of a lover. Abhinavagupta as a sahrdaya goes a step further in analysing the beauty of the simile. As the breeze comes from the Siprā river, it will be well acquainted with urban way of life and culture. Thus the lover indicated in the verse would be a sophisticated urban gentleman who is adept in polished methods of wooing his beloved. Such a lover would not be
impolite while approaching his love and his actions would be more civilised. This pleasing approach, just like the breeze, rekindles mutual passion in their minds. This shows that the imagination of the reader opens up newer dimensions to the simile used by the poet.

Abhinavagupta’s commentary seems to the sketch the visualisations of the lover’s actions, done by the reader while reading the verse. The simile presented by the poet is taken to new dimensions by the reader. The reader (here Abhinavagupta) transforms it into a beautiful picture linking the urban culture and the behaviour of the urban youth with the urbane breeze from Siprā river. This analysis done by Abhinavagupta actually sheds light on the way the readers transform the literal descriptions into aesthetic experiences mixing it with their own observations. The readers elaborately visualise the descriptions given by the poet. It brings out the relevance of the reader’s imagination in the reading process. This conversion of linguistic symbols into experiences needs both imagination and knowledge of the world. The process of reading would be lifeless without this transformation.

4.8.7. Reading as an exploration of semantic possibilities

Readers constantly try to explore various semantic possibilities that a literary work offers. They make use of various techniques to understand the literary works. As pointed out earlier, knowledge, imagination and experience aid the readers in this process. Different readers may comprehend the same verse/sentence in different ways. The existence of such semantic possibilities is revealed by Abhinavagupta. He often presents the different
interpretations of the same verse. This reveals the semantic possibilities found in literary works. Abhinavagupta’s interpretation of the following sentence from Harṣacarita, quoted in the second Udyota of Dhvanyāloka unveils this possibility:

\[ atrāntare kusumasamayayugam upasamharannajṛmbhata \\
\[ grīṣmābhidhāṇah phullamallikādhavalīṭṭahāsop mahākālaḥ. \]

This line is quoted to illustrate ṣabdaśaktimūladhvani. While interpreting this line, Abhinavagupta describes four different ways of reading it. He quotes these different ways as the views of other persons without attributing them to any person. The views presented by Abhinavagupta are paraphrased as follows:85

1. The words like mahākāla are found to denote meanings like Lord Śiva. But the context restricts the denotative process and the word comes to denote another meaning, summer season. After this, the meaning, Śiva, is conveyed through the process of suggestion and the suggestive power is based on the power of words.

2. The second meaning, ie; Śiva, is denoted by a second power of denotation (abhidhā) which is termed as suggestion (dhvanana) because of the difference in the supporting elements. The suggested meaning is one which is different from the meaning grasped through convention, but is

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85 Dhvanyāloka, pp.260-261.
understood with the help of various supporting factors.\textsuperscript{86} Here the power of denotation conveys the meaning of summer to the reader. The reader also comprehends the severity of summer through the power of denotation and finds similarity between Lord Śiva (who is also known as Mahākāla) and summer season. Severe summer brings to an end the season of spring and fierce Śiva brings to an end a yuga/epoch. This similarity helps the reader in grasping the meaning suggested by the words. Thus when the reader grasps the similarity, the suggested meaning of Śiva is understood by the reader.

3. In śabdaśleṣa, two meanings are brought out by two different words. Similarly some rhetoricians believe that in arthaśleṣa too, the word that conveys two meanings is not a single word, but two different words. Sometimes the second word is brought about through denotation. For instance, the single phrase, sveto dhāvati, contains answers for two questions- ka ito dhāvati (who runs?) and kīḍṛśo dhāvati (what kind of a thing runs?).\textsuperscript{87} When the second word is brought about through suggestion, then the second meaning is also suggested. Here the second word is brought out through suggestion, thus the meaning Śiva is also suggested.

\textsuperscript{86} saṅketagrahaṇaṃtrasahakāreṇa śabdasyārthāvabodhanaśaktirabhidhā. saṅketagrahaṇātiriktārthāsāmarthāvisahakāreṇārthabodhanaśaktistu dhvananamato’tra sā dhvananarūpocayata itī bhāvaḥ. (Bālapriyā commentary)

\textsuperscript{87} The answer for the first question would be śvā ito (sveto) dhāvati. The answer to the second question would be śveto (śvetavāraṇyuktaḥ) dhāvati.
4. The second meaning related to Śiva is denoted by the power of denotation (abhidhā). When the second meaning is grasped by the reader, the similarity between the summer and Śiva is manifested to the reader through the process of suggestion. Thus this becomes an example of alaṅkāradhvani.

Abhinavagupta quotes these views, but does not refute any of these. These views show that the process of comprehending meaning from a sentence can be varied. It is difficult to fix a single method of reading a sentence. Every reader will have his own method of reading and understanding a sentence. As far as literary works are concerned, the language used in them would contain ample scope for such varied readings. They are composed in such a way as to open up numerous semantic possibilities.

In the verse,

\[
\text{ramyā \textit{iti}} \text{ pṛāptavatī \textit{patākāḥ} rāgaṃ viviktā \textit{iti} vardhayantīḥ}/
\]
\[
yasyāṃāsevanta namadvalīkāḥ samaṇaḥ vadhūbhirvalabhiryuvānāḥ}//
\]

This verse, from Śiśupālavadha, is quoted by Ānandavardhana to illustrate śleṣadhvani (suggested pun). The word ‘samam’ found in the verse has plagued all its commentators. Some of them have taken it in the sense of ‘equal’; while others have taken it as ‘together with’. Ānandavardhana explains the word samam as ‘together with’. Thus the verse would then mean that the young men of Dwāraka enjoyed the beautiful terraces together with their wives. The adjectives of the terraces, though used in a different case
(accusative) in the verse, are seen to suit the nature of the young wives too. Thus the pun in the adjectival phrases gets suggested and the similarity between the wives and the terraces is conveyed. Abhinavagupta supports Ānandavardhana’s views. He says that if the word samāḥ, in the sense of equal, was used in the verse, then the similarity between the wives and the terraces would have been denoted directly. Abhinavagupta very clearly says that the word samam in the verse acts as a kriyāviśeṣaṇa or an adverb, ie, it modifies the verb. The words in the verse first denote the meaning that the young men enjoy the terraces along with their wives. The compatibility of the denoted meaning helps in suggesting the pun found in the adjectives of terraces. Once the readers grasp the pun suggested by the verse, the similarity between the terraces and the wives is grasped by them. Here as the suggested pun brings about beauty to the verse, it is considered as prominent. The words in the verse render complete denoted meaning in the absence of pun too. The pun gets suggested only after the denoted meaning is conveyed. Thus Abhinavagupta furnishes a satisfying explanation of this verse. Here he seems to explain the process of reading the verse. It shows that the difference in the comprehension of a word in a verse leads to changes in its connotations.

Abhinavagupta also brings out the different meanings suggested from the same verse when viewed from the point of view of different listeners. This is clearly seen in the verse

88 The adjectives are in accusative case, whereas the word vadhiḥ is seen in instrumental case.
The verse presents the words of a maid spoken to a lady who has come home after meeting her lover. The maid says, ‘Oh lady who has the habit of smelling lotus flanked by bees! Will any lover be not angry seeing the wounded lips of his beloved. Oh lady who does the prohibited things! You need to tolerate whatever that happens.’ The maid tells these words to the lady in such a manner that they are audible to the woman’s husband sitting inside the house. Abhinavagupta imagines other listeners too which include the lover, the other wives of the husband and the reader himself.\(^8^9\) He brings out the suggested meaning grasped by each listener. This shows that the suggested meaning differs with the listeners.

Thus Abhinavagupta helps in establishing the multiplicity of suggested meanings. A sahṛdaya would surely try to open as many semantic possibilities as possible. He would count upon factors like context, speaker, listener etc. Different interpretations of a single word may lead to the comprehension of a variety of meanings. Thus reading is a complex process where there is no single path to a definite meaning. Varied supporting elements would be employed by the readers in different ways to arrive at different meanings.

\(^8^9\) Dhvanyāloka, pp.77-78.
Post-modernist thinker Roland Barthes classified texts into ‘lisible’ or readable and ‘scriptible’ or writable. Among them, the first kind of texts does not present any scope for deriving multiple meanings, while the second kind of texts consists of several layers of meaning. The ‘writable’ texts gave the readers the opportunity to explore the multiple meanings. Roland Barthes celebrated the existence of multiple meanings. Sanskrit rhetoricians who stood by the theory of dhvani also supported the possibility of multiple meanings in literary works. But they did not completely negate the author’s intention. Even when they accepted the existence of the author’s intention, they did not set aside the readers’ possibilities of exploring different meanings.

4.8.8. Observations on the process of reading: Moving from one level to another

The interpretations presented by Abhinavagupta often sketch various steps of comprehending a verse or a portion of a literary work. He follows his theoretical viewpoint in these interpretations. Initially the reader grasps the primary meaning. In some situations, the reader finds the primary meaning to be incompatible in a particular context. The reader then moves on to the secondary meaning which is related to the primary meaning. Finally the reader grasps the meaning which is ultimately suggested by the verse. The reader relishes the charm brought into the verse by the suggested meaning. For instance in the verse,
Abhinavagupta explains the primary meaning of the words suvarṇapuspāṃ prthvīm cinvanti puruṣāstrayah as suvarṇāni puṣpyatīti suvarṇapuspā, i.e; earth which blooms gold. But it is a fact that gold does not bloom on the earth. The words denote their meanings through abidhā and the sentence meaning is conveyed through tātparyavṛtti. But as the denoted meaning of the word suvarṇapuspāṃ does not fit into the context, it leads to a secondary meaning. The wealth and prosperity associated with gold is taken as the secondary meaning. Once the secondary meaning is understood, the excellence of men who are courageous, educated and who know to serve others in life is suggested. This is the process through which the reader relishes the suggested meaning. In the third Udyota, Anandavardhana gives three examples for avivakṣitavācyadhvani. For these verses too, Abhinavagupta very clearly mentions the process of comprehending the meaning of the verses i.e; the impossibility of the denoted meaning in the context, its rejection, taking up of

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90 Abhinavagupta’s commentary of the verse goes like this:

suvarṇāni puṣpyatīti suvarṇapuspā, etacca vākyamevāsaṃbhavatsvārthamiti kṛtvā’vivakṣitavācyayam. tata eva padārtham abhidhāyānvayaṇ ca tātparyaśaṅktyāvagamayayaṅca bādhakāvāsena tamupahatiṣvā sādhvyatisulabhasthābhavābhāraḥbhājanatāṁ lakṣayati. tallaṃkṣaṇāpravarojanaḥ śūraṃkṛtavidyasevakānāṃ prāśastyam aśabdavācyatvena gopāyāvaṇaḥ sannāyikākucakalaśāyugalam iva mahārghatāmupayad dhvanyata iti.”
secondary meaning and final relishing of suggested sense generated through this process.\textsuperscript{91}

Some of the modern scholars think that the readers comprehend the meaning suggested by a text only when they face some kind of resistance in the comprehension of meaning. Jonathan Culler quotes such a view of Paul de Man in his book \textit{On Deconstruction}. He says:

Close reading for de Man entails scrupulous attention to what seems ancillary or resistant to understanding...Primary points of resistance might be what we call rhetorical figures, since to identify a passage or sequence as figurative is to recommend transformation of a literal difficulty, which may have interesting possibilities, into a paraphrase that fits the meaning assumed to govern the message as a whole.\textsuperscript{92}

But Ānandavardhana and the followers of dhvani theory is seen to accept the existence of \textit{abhidhāmūldhvani} where the reader faces no such literal difficulty. It is interesting to note that Abhinavagupta raises such a \textit{pūrvapakṣa} during the commentary on the following verse used to illustrate \textit{abhidhāmūldhvani}:

\begin{quote}
śīkharīṇī kva nu nāma kiyaccīrām kimabhidhānāmasāvakarottapaḥ/
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{91} The three examples are- \textit{saptaitāḥ samidhāḥ śriyāḥ ,kaḥ sannadhe virahavidhūrāṁ tvayyukekṣeta jāyām, kimiva hi madhurāpāṁ maṃḍanaṁ nākṛṭiνāṁ.} (Dhvanyāloka, pp.313,314)

\textsuperscript{92} Quoted in \textit{Sāhityamāṃṣa- Tāratauyaparipekṣya} by Chathanath Achutanunni, p.65.
Here Abhinavagupta says that some readers consider the primary meaning to be incompatible in the context. They raise this objection by saying that the parrot cannot perform *tapas* as described in the verse. As it contradicts normal experience of the world, the primary meaning is incompatible. Thus they rely upon *lakṣaṇa* to overcome this difficulty. Here it can be seen that a literal difficulty is imposed in the process of understanding which creates a sort of psychical resistance. This resistance serves as a step towards the comprehension of the suggested meaning.

The above examples show that the reader first grasps the primary meaning. If the primary meaning does not suit the context, the reader faces some psychical resistance. He overcomes this resistance when he grasps a secondary meaning related to the primary meaning. The reader then considers elements like context, speaker, listener etc which give rise to the comprehension of suggested meaning. Readers are thus never satisfied with the primary meaning a literary work offers. When they face any difficulty in the comprehension of meaning at the initial level, they proceed to clear the difficulty and perceive the suggested meanings.

Another discussion on the process of reading takes place during the explanation of the following verse:

\[
\text{evam vādini devarṣau pārśve pituradhomukhī/}
\]
\[
\text{līlākamalapatrāṇi gaṇayāmāsa pārvatī (kevalam)/}
\]
Here Ānandavardhana says that after the comprehension of the primary meaning, the verse first suggests the transient emotion of shyness. Then from the suggested transient emotion, śṛṅgārarasa is suggested. Here rasa is not suggested directly from the verse and it is perceived only after a gap of time. Thus the suggestion of rasa in this verse does not fall under the category of asaṃlakṣyakramavyaṅga or the suggestion where the sequence of perception is not noticed. Thus the sequence of relishing rasa becomes clearly identifiable.

The use of the word sākṣātśabdaniveditebhyo in the description given by Ānandavardhana may give rise to doubts in the readers whether rasa can be directly conveyed by words. Earlier Ānandavardhana himself had advocated the view that rasa can never be conveyed directly through words. Here Abhinavagupta tries to clear this dilemma. He reiterates the fact that rasa can never be denoted by words and it can only be suggested. But this suggestion need not always fall under the category of asaṃlakṣyakramavyaṅga. When rasa gets suggested from another suggested transient emotion, then the sequence of relishing rasa occurs gradually, making the sequence noticeable. In the above verse, the reader perceives the primary meaning without facing any literal difficulty. He understands the context and connects the action of Pārватī to the earlier events in the story. From these recapitulations and connections, the reader perceives the transient

93 sākṣātśabdaniveditebhyo vibhāvānubhāvavabhicāribhyo rasādiṁāṁ pratītiḥ, sa tasya kevalasya mārgaḥ.
94 This view of Ānandavardhana later became a topic of debate between the scholars like K. Krishnamoorthy, J.L. Masson, M.V. Patwardhan etc.
emotion of shyness initially suggested from the verse. Once he grasps this suggested meaning, he perceives the *rasa* suggested from the suggested emotion of shyness. Thus the reader comes to relish *rasa* step by step. This shows that the relishing of *rasa* need not always occur quickly, instead it may occur gradually. The analysis of this particular verse actually opens up a different path of relishing *rasa*. Instead of a quick and direct enjoyment of *rasa*, the reader here relishes *rasa* slowly step by step.

In the case of the relishing of *rasa*, the readers may relish *rasa* directly from the direct description of *vibhāva, anubhāva* etc. Then the perception occurs quickly. But when *rasa* gets suggested from another suggested meaning, then its perception occurs gradually. Thus the readers go beyond the primary level to discover the unending semantic possibilities latent in the literary works.

4.9. Analysis

Abhinavagupta’s interpretations have opened up ample scope for analysing the reading process. He considers the process of reading to be one involving various stages. From the aspects described above, the process of reading envisioned by Abhinavagupta can be briefed as follows:

Readers always read a piece of literature by placing it in a particular context. If the textual context is unknown, the readers themselves create an imaginary context. Then they would grasp the primary meanings. They are initially influenced by the sound of the words used in the literary work. They visualise
the characters, settings and the events using their imagination with the help of descriptions in the works. But the process of reading does not stop with the comprehension of primary/denoted meaning. The appreciative genius of the readers would search for other meanings connected to the primary meaning or the words used. In this process, the readers utilise the possibilities put forth by factors like context, speaker, listener etc. The saḥṛdaya-s identify the agents of suggestion like letters, prefix, suffix, words, syntax etc. They are in fact guided and controlled by these elements. Thus under the control of the cues provided by the text, the readers try to arrive at the meaning suggested by the literary work. In this process, the minds of the saḥṛdaya-s traverse between the past and the present events. They go on making interconnections between the events of the work. The process of reading is a process consisting of various levels which culminates in the perception of the suggested meaning. As far as Abhinavagupta is concerned, the ultimate end of the reading process would be the enjoyment of the prominent rasa.

From the interpretations, it can be deciphered that reading is a non-linear action where the readers’ minds oscillate between the past events and the present. The readers connect the present events with the past in order to understand the deeper connotations. Thus this process of oscillating between the past and the present goes on till the end of the reading process. This factor is emphasised greatly by modern thinkers like Wolfgang Iser. They consider this action of the reader to be an essential part of the reading process.

The process of reading is a complex one which involves the play of numerous factors. The readers are enchanted not only by the overall meaning
of literary works, instead they shed their attention on various linguistic elements that influence the reading process. Roots, suffix, prefix, indeclinables, compounds and syntax influence the process of reading. These elements help the readers to get to the heart of a literary work. They act as certain codes or tools that help in understanding the suggested meaning. This corresponds to the Structuralist view that the codes to interpret the work lie inside the work itself. A competent reader recognises these codes inherent in the texts and uses them to find the meaning of the text. This actually indicates the fact that the text contains tools to control the readers. The readers in turn would use these tools to decipher the text. Thus they are not free to imagine meanings according to their fancies. The texts themselves lay down certain frameworks of interpretation. Even though Abhinavagupta is seen to read and interpret literature using various techniques, he is seen to justify the interpretations using the indicators found inside the text itself. Thus the process of reading allowed the readers freedom to interpret the works in different ways, but the freedom was not without its limits.

The process of reading is not a one-sided process where the literary work would reveal its deeper connotations to all the readers. Genius, imagination, knowledge and experiences of the readers are indispensible elements that help in the discovery of multiple meanings and deeper connotations of the literary works. The suggestive power gets fulfilled only with the assistance of the readers’ aesthetic sensibility and genius. For instance, readers who are well-acquainted with grammar, utilise this knowledge to explore various ways to interpret literary works. In the case of
verses, the readers may make creative changes in the prose order to interpret the same verse differently. It is to be specially noted that the knowledge and capabilities of the reader have a decisive role in the process of reading. The reader-oriented modern theories have envisaged different kinds of readers. Some critics have put forth the concept of competent readers. Jonathan Culler, the Structuralist thinker envisaged a competent reader who has internalised the codes and conventions of interpreting a text. Umberto Eco talks about a model reader without whom the text does not become complete. Here Abhinavagupta too is seen to present a sahṛdaya who has certain attributes. Every reader does not become a sahṛdaya. The capabilities of each reader differ. Thus Abhinavagupta distinguishes the zenith of aesthetic sensibility or sahṛdayatva from the ordinary aesthetic sensibility. He also recognises the differences in the appreciative genius of a spectator and reader. He says that a reader must have greater imaginative power than the spectator. But Abhinavagupta does not take into account the differences in the expectations of the readers when they are reading different genres of literature like mahākāvyas, nāṭakas, khaṇḍakāvyas etc.

The possibility of the existence of varied interpretations makes the process of reading interesting to the sahṛdaya-s. It was shown that a single verse or a sentence was interpreted in varied ways and this led to differences in their shades of meaning. But no interpretation was rejected as incorrect. Thus according to Abhinavagupta, reading is not a simple process confined to the comprehension of primary meaning, instead it is a multi-layered and non-
linear process which involves multiple meanings. Even though the text exerts control on the reader, it still opens up semantic possibilities for the reader.

Abhinavagupta’s concept of rasavighna-s is another notable aspect of the reading process. Abhinavagupta analyses the impediments in the process of relishing rasa very precisely from both the point of view of the reader/spectator and of the theme or presentation of literary works/drama. His emphasis on the dangers of immersing oneself in one’s own personal feelings or maintaining an attitude of indifference is really relevant. The reader is not able to enjoy a literary work if he does not shed his personal sorrows, beliefs and prejudices. The concept of sādhāraṇīkaraṇa which was originally conceived by Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, was adopted by Abhinavagupta. The absence of credibility of the story, lack of clarity in the characters and events etc. also hamper the process of enjoying a drama or a literary work. The impediments mentioned by Abhinavagupta have parallels in certain notions in Western criticism. A comparison of Abhinavagupta’s views with that of I.A. Richards’ was attempted earlier in this chapter.

The process of aesthetic experience presented by Abhinavagupta raised the reading experience from the plane of subjectivity to the higher plane of the transcendental. Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka had done the necessary groundwork on which Abhinavagupta built his theory. This theory freed the process of reading and interpretation from the subjective aspects. Thus reading became a process where the reader shed his individual elements, kept aside the spacio-temporal limitations and his sthāyībhāva attained a universal
dimension. *Rasa* came to be considered as a non-subjective essence. This lent a universal dimension to aesthetic experience. Even though each reader’s level of aesthetic experience differed, there was a non-subjective aspect which lent this experience a universal dimension. As pointed out earlier, some concepts of Phenomenological literary criticism share strong affinities with the aesthetic theory of Abhinavagupta.

Abhinavagupta had a major role in placing *rasa* as the ultimate end of the reading process. The relishing of the prominent *rasa* was considered to be the final stage of the reading process. This actually set a framework for the process of reading. It had a far-reaching impact on the Sanskrit poetics of the later period. Many a times the interpretation of literature got restricted to the analysis of main *rasa* in a text. All other literary aspects got sidelined.

Abhinavagupta’s strong exposition of the concept of *sahṛdaya*, the reading process and aesthetic enjoyment was built upon a strong base of *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy and Abhinavagupta’s astounding scholarship in various branches of knowledge. His theory of aesthetic experience clearly substantiates this fact. He garnered the views of earlier thinkers and blended them into his philosophy as if it was his own. Thus his theory, though indebted to earlier thinkers, seems to be unique with its own identity.

Abhinavagupta’s analysis contains elements of psychology and linguistics. Abhinavagupta renders a mixture of both aesthetic and practical aspects of the reading process. His interpretations found in *Dhvanyālokalocana* reveal his practical observations on the process of
reading. Abhinavagupta thus placed the *sahṛdaya*-s in an enviable position in the field of Sanskrit poetics. This made the later rhetoricians to ponder over the process of reading and the role of the reader in the reading process. Abhinavagupta’s theories about the reading process are thus a beautiful blend of a practical literary criticism and aesthetic philosophy.