INTRODUCTION

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The history of Western poetics shows that its focus shifted between the text and the author from time to time. At an early period, literary texts circulated among the readers without any thoughts about its author. Later, the author became prominent. The life and philosophy of the author came to play a part in literary criticism. Slowly this focus shifted to the text with the advent of theories like New Criticism, Structuralism, Russian Formalism etc. These theories considered the text to be an independent entity. Thus it can be seen that the reader was not given much attention in these periods. But in the recent years, the reader has hogged the limelight of Western literary criticism. A noted critic observes,

All present-day literary theories can be said to be, in one way or another, essentially theories of reading, concerned, as Jonathan Culler said about French Structuralist Criticism, “to specify how we go about making sense of texts”; each theory therefore has at its centre the concept of the adept or informed or competent reader.¹

Reading is no longer considered as a passive activity, but it is viewed as an active and creative process where the reader has a prominent role to play. These reader-oriented theories mention that text comes into existence only when it is read by the readers and meaning is produced through the

process of reading. Various branches of knowledge like Semiotics, Narratology, Psychology etc. are giving attention to the reader’s interaction with the text.

Most of the reader-oriented theories mainly focus on the process of the transaction between the reader and the text, the act of reading and the extent to which the text and reader influence each other in the creation of the text’s meaning etc. Various thinkers have put forth different notions of a reader like ‘implied reader’, ‘competent reader’, ‘inscribed reader’, ‘model reader’ etc. In these theories, the reader is either a dominant entity who manipulates the text for meaning or he is a submissive entity manipulated by the text.

Similar to the ability to write creative works, the reader should also possess certain inherent attributes to perceive and enjoy a literary work. This instinct or the ability to savour aesthetic experience is not a common one. It is not found in every individual. Thus the capability of individual readers to enjoy literature differs. Such aspects of the nature of a reader which influence the reading process have not yet received adequate attention.

New reader-oriented theories seem to focus mainly on the extent of liberty that the reader has in the creation of text’s meaning. Even when the process of reading has been discussed from varied perspectives, the effects of the process of reading on the reader, his experience of the literary text etc. have hitherto remained out of the limelight in these theories. The element of subjectivity which creates differences in the aesthetic experience of individual readers and the undeniable universality in the experience of
aesthetic pleasure stand as two poles which have to be synthesized to explain the experience of reading. A study says:

In literary studies, the mental processes involved in converting texts into rich and complex cognitive representations are often taken for granted. However from a linguistic and psychological point of view, there is a significant amount still to be learnt about the way in which readers move from perceiving mere strings of words on the page of books to the sensation of being so immersed in different worlds that they feel as if they are witnessing events and experiencing the emotions of characters.\(^2\)

Thus the process of reading stands as a realm where there are many more areas yet to be explored.

It is at this juncture that the theories about the reading process found in Sanskrit poetics ought to be analyzed carefully. A scholar observes,

Indian aesthetic thinking is primarily audience- or reader-oriented and the center of much discussion is the response of the readers.\(^3\)

The Indian concept of sahṛdaya presents an entity which has wider implications than the Western reader. The term sahṛdaya actually stands for taste, flair and penchant and thus it refers to the reader and the reading process contextually only. As mentioned earlier, Sanskrit poetics thinks about

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the reader’s interaction with the text and his response to it. These observations on the reader and the reading process found in Sanskrit poetic texts may help in filling the gaps found in the modern literary theories. There have been many studies that try to build a new literary theory by blending the concepts of Sanskrit poetics with the modern theories. Such a comparative approach can help in giving shape to a comprehensive theory on role of the reader in the process of reading. This study aims to fulfill this larger objective.

**Review of literature**

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw a renewed interest in ancient Indian knowledge. A number of Western as well as Indian scholars composed many insightful works that shed light on various branches of ancient Indian knowledge. This helped in opening up the ancient Indian knowledge before the whole world. Western scholars were attracted by the Indian thought systems and they began to learn and explore ancient Indian texts. They started studying Sanskrit because a huge cache of knowledge was documented in this language. They also studied Indian philosophy, Vedic literature, mythology, *dharmaśāstra*-s etc. The scholars who got acquainted with ancient Indian texts brought out numerous studies which highlighted the features of Indian thought. Many Sanskrit texts were published along with their translations. Not only the Western scholars, but numerous Indian scholars too commenced to analyze ancient Indian knowledge in a modern point of view. All these led to the emergence of a renewed interest to study
and explore Indian thought systems with a comparative approach. Along with other knowledge systems, Sanskrit literature as well as literary criticism too gained attention among the scholars. Both Western and Indian scholars like Dr. K. Krishnamoorthy, Dr. P.V. Kane, S. K. De, Dr. K.C. Pandey, M. Hiriyanna, V.K. Chari, R. Gnoli, M. V. Patwardhan, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Krishna Chaitanya, Dr. V. Raghavan, Dr. K. Kunjunni Raja etc. wrote extensively on Sanskrit literature and poetics. Their essays provided a fresh insight into Sanskrit poetics and brought out its unique features.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries also marked the burgeoning of numerous movements in Western literary criticism like Structuralism, Phenomenology, Deconstruction, Narratology, Russian Formalism, Stylistics, Semiotics etc. These movements led to numerous changes in the realm of literary criticism. These developments in the world of literary criticism and the intermingling of the Western and Oriental streams of knowledge led to the emergence of comparative studies. The twentieth century saw the publication of numerous books and articles on comparative aesthetics and literary criticism. Books like *Oriental Aesthetics* by Thomas Munro were published. Journals like *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *Journal of Comparative Literature* etc. brought out articles by scholars which highlighted the features of Sanskrit poetics. Prominent concepts in Sanskrit poetics like *rasa*, *dhvani*, *vakrokti*, *anukaraṇa*, *aucitya* etc. were compared to Western concepts. Indian theories of meaning were also put to intensive study and compared with concepts involved in Structuralism, Deconstruction,
Semiotics etc. Thus the knowledge found in Sanskrit poetics came to be studied deeply and it was compared with various Western concepts.

The comparative study of Indian and Western notions of literary criticism has continued to gain momentum through the twentieth century. The latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century saw scholars like R.S. Pathak, Krishna Rayan, Dr. C. Rajendran, G. B. Mohan Thampi, V.S. Seturaman, Dr. Nagendra etc. publishing numerous essays which examined the notions of Sanskrit poetics with a comparative approach. Western scholars like Daniel H.H. Ingalls, Jeffery Masson, Robert P Goldman, Yigal Bronner, Sheldon Pollock etc. have also critically analyzed the nuances of Sanskrit poetics. Most of the comparative studies focused on the concept of *rasa* which was accepted as a unique feature of Indian aesthetics. The other theories which became topics of discussion were *dhvani*, *vakrokti*, *guṇa*-s, *alaṅkāra*-s and *aucitya*. Western and Indian notions about the causes and purpose of poetry, poetic truth etc. were also analyzed in depth. Western concepts like sentiments, plot, stylistics, suggestion, metaphor, metonymy, sublimity etc. were compared with elements found in Sanskrit poetics. Thus the scholars attempted to find parallels between Western and Sanskrit poetic concepts. Similarities and differences between these concepts were analyzed by them.

The emergence of reader-response theories in Western poetics led to studies that compared Western notions on the reader with Indian concept of *sahṛdaya*. Indian theories of *dhvani*, *rasa* etc. were also analyzed in the light
of modern reader-response theories. Scholars tried to unravel the reader-oriented nature of Sanskrit poetics.

R.S. Pathak’s collection of essays titled *Comparative Poetics* discusses Indian poetic concepts in the light of Western theories. It tries to apply concepts of *dhvani, rasa, vakrokti* etc. to practical literary criticism. R.S. Pathak has analyzed the reader-oriented approach of Sanskrit poetics in his essay ‘Dialectics of reader response: An Indian approach’. Here he summarises the main elements of reader-response theories. Then he begins to examine the concept of *sahādaya* by stating,

The concept of *sahādaya* (the responsive reader) can be taken to anticipate the present-day position in a meaningful way. Indian Poetics attaches greater significance to the nature and role of the responsive reader.⁴

He also brings out the reader-oriented nature of Indian poetic theories. He says:

According to Indian aestheticians, the meaning of the text is realized in the consciousness of such a reader as a state of satisfaction of maximum intensity, which has been conceived of as a form of “textasy”.⁵

Thus R.S. Pathak presents a brief but insightful study on the concept of *sahādaya* and modern reader-oriented theories. He has also edited another book *Indian Response to Literary Theories* (2 volumes) which covers a wide range of poetic concepts from both Indian and Western poetics.

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⁴ R.S. Pathak, *Comparative Poetics*, p.65.
⁵ *idem*
G.B. Mohan Thampi has tried to shed light on the Indian observations on the *sahṛdaya*’s interaction with the text by comparing it with the modern reader-response theories. He has mainly focused on the aspect of *rasa*. He analyzed the uniqueness of the concept of *rasa* by comparing it with possible Western counterparts. He has also brought out a comparative analysis of the difficulties in reading listed out by I.A. Richards and *rasavighna*-s mentioned by Abhinavagupta. His articles on *sahṛdaya*, aesthetic experience etc. and the book *Response to Poetry* are notable studies in the field.

Krishna Rayan is another scholar who has tried to fill the gaps in Sanskrit poetics. In his books like *The lamp and the jar, The text and subtext: Statements in suggestion* etc., he has attempted to reshape Sanskrit poetics so that it can be used as an effective critical tool in recent times. Exploring the role of the reader in Sanskrit poetic theories, he makes an interesting observation:

Sanskrit literary theory takes note of omission or suppression (*saṁśṛtyābhīhitān vāstu*) resulting in gaps and half-realized or indeterminate elements. It, however, merely regards these as source of aesthetic appeal (*gūḍhaṃ saccamatkaroti; gopyamānatayā labdhasaundaryam*) and does not proceed to investigate how precisely the gaps make the reader work to fill them subjectively and thus achieve creative participation.⁶

Krishna Rayan opines that Sanskrit literary theories were more interested in analyzing the nature of aesthetic experience in general.⁷ Rayan also remarks

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⁷ *idem*
that most comparative studies in poetics were just superficial in nature and the real problems in poetics are not discussed in depth in such studies. He also tried to bring out the prominence of the theories of dhvani and rasa in the contemporary world.

Besides these scholars, there have been other scholars who have adopted a comparative approach in analyzing Sanskrit poetic theories. Scholars like Dr. K. Kunjunni Raja, Dr. C. Rajendran, K. M. Tharakan etc. have focused on varied aspects of the Sanskrit poetics and analyzed them by finding parallels with as well as divergences from Western theories. In the recent years, many books were published which contained notable studies dealing with comparative poetics. The collection of essays titled Theory and praxis: Indian and Western edited by R.N. Rai, Anita Singh et.al deserves special mention in this context.

Besides the reader-response theories, there have been many studies which focus on the role of reader’s inference in the reading process in the West in the recent years. Scholars like Gail Mckoon, Roger Ratcliff etc. have tried to analyze the nature of inference made by the readers in the reading process.

There have also been numerous books which try to explore the hitherto unveiled aspects of reading and verbal cognition. Books like Rolf A Zwaan’s Aspects of Literary Comprehension: A Cognitive Approach, a collection of essays titled Stories and Minds: Cognitive Approaches to Literary Narrative etc. shed light on the varied dimensions of the complex
process of reading. The process of reading is now being studied from different viewpoints. A glance through these studies gives ample scope for comparing them with various observations found in Sanskrit poetics.

**Research design**

It is well recognized that Sanskrit poetic theories were mainly reader-oriented theories. Sanskrit rhetoricians were mainly interested in understanding the nature of sahṛdaya’s aesthetic experience. Some scholars have remarked that Sanskrit poetics does not explore the reader’s creative role in making sense of the texts. This study tries to find out whether the scattered and implicit observations in Sanskrit poetic works point to the active interaction of the sahṛdaya with the text using his imagination and knowledge. It tries to find out whether the sahṛdaya in Sanskrit poetics is one who dominates the text or one who submits to the text. The views of three prominent rhetoricians namely Ānandavardhana, Abhinavagupta and Mahimabhaṭṭa are being analyzed for this purpose in the light of reader-oriented theories. The study also tries to go beyond the major theories of rasa and dhvani and trace the numerous minute observations in Sanskrit poetic texts that point to the process of reading.

The thesis is descriptive in nature and adopts a comparative approach. The study first sketches the major notions involved in the modern reader-response theories. It then presents the Indian concept of sahṛdaya in a generalized manner. The study also tries to define the concept of ‘reading’ in

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8 idem
the ancient Indian context. It thus seeks to bring out the implications of the ‘reading process’ as far as Sanskrit poetics is concerned. The thesis then proceeds to analyze the views of three major aestheticians ie, Ānandavardhana, Abhinavagupta and Mahimabhaṭṭa on the reader and the reading process. A comparative approach is adopted while presenting their views. References to the views of other rhetoricians like Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, Bhoja, Mammaṭa, Kuntaka, Viśvanātha, Jagannātha Paṇḍīta are also made occasionally. The thesis also tries to trace the process of reading implicitly found in the Sanskrit commentaries. This is done by taking up a case study of four commentaries on Meghadūta. Four commentaries of Meghadūta, namely Pradīpa of Dakṣināvantanātha, Vidyullatā of Pūrṇaśarasvatī, Sumanoramaṇī of Payyūr Parameśvara and Saṇjīvanī of Mallinātha are taken up for analysis. It tries to point out the similarities and differences in the reading process as observed in the commentaries.

Thus this thesis tries to bring out the nuances of the process of reading and the reader’s creative role in the reading process as found in Sanskrit poetic texts. Comparisons are made wherever similarities or differences between Western and Indian concepts are observed. The thesis does not intend to establish the superiority of any of the perspective; instead it seeks to comparatively analyze and synthesize the varied viewpoints found in Sanskrit and Western poetics in order to get a better understanding of the reader, his experiences and his interactions with the text.