

Dialectics of the Reader-Response : The Indian Approach

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It is said that Meliere evaluated the worth of his plays on the responses of his cook and that T. E. Hulme wanted to speak of poetry in a way as he would speak of pigs. A cook's responses, however, cannot be taken to be reliable, and good poetry cannot be spoken of as pigs. Poetry demands a particular kind of sensibility both in its creation and appreciation. Speaking at a book fair in Turin, Italy, Joseph Brodsky, the new poet laureate of the United States, maintained some years ago that the way to develop good taste in literature is to read poetry, for poetry is "supreme form of human locution, ... the most concise, the most condensed way of conveying the human experience". Poetry, he added, is "an incurable semantic art" and offers "the highest possible standards for any linguistic operation". Brodsky's remarks underscore the most important aspects of the complex process of poetic creation and response.

No literary activity worth the name is possible in a vacuum. Even Jean-Paul Sartre, who regarded creativity as "an incomplete and abstract art", admits that it involves the "coming together of the World and the Self — in relation to artistic creation". A writer is as Dryden says, 'a man with a comprehensive soul', who does not write merely for himself. He knows fully well that "to write is to make an appeal to the reader".² Writing thus presupposes a correlation between the reader and the writer. He who writes has to recognize the rights of his readers and he who reads must take into account the freedom of the writer. The mutual confidence and interaction are the very cornerstones of any literary activity. Writers have generally been cognizant of this fact in all cultures. A well-known Indian poet Kamala Das, for example, has confided : "Large areas of my ignorance had been obliterated by the lesson learnt from life and wanted my readers to know of it. I had realized by then that the writer had none to love but the readers".³ Unless the reader contributes something from his own side, the real significance of a work cannot be brought out. As Wayne C. Booth aptly puts it,

The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader, he makes his reader as he makes his second self and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement.⁴

One of the distinctive properties of a literary work is that "it is a dynamic field through which the reader may temporarily be the characters, be the author of his own text and an interpreter"⁵

The significance of the responsive reader has been variously affirmed by writers in the Western world. Aristotle was probably the first to recognize the crucial role played by such a reader. He divided all readers into two categories, i.e. the common readers and the perfect readers, the latter being more sophisticated and organic in their response. Even Shakespeare, who has been called "the principal entertainer of Elizabethan and Jacobean London", is said to have written "to please his audience".⁶ Milton was all the more categorical in holding a brief for the 'fit' reader. The Romantics particularly valued their reader's response. Wordsworth, for example, said that the reader should not merely be a passive participant, "like an Indian prince or general stretched on his palanquin and born by his slaves". He would rather prefer to be read by "the intelligent reader", whom he would not let be shackled by a poet interweaving "any foreign splendour"

Certain modern writers have also affirmed the relevance of the responsive reader. They seem to believe with I.A. Richards that "An improvement in response is the only benefit, which any one can receive, and the degradation, the lowering of response is the only calamity".⁷ T.S. Eliot, despite his adherence to the impersonal theory of art, has vindicated the role of the responsive reader :

It is only the exceptional reader, certainly, who in the course of time comes to classify and compare his experiences, to see one in the light of others; and who, as his poetic experiences multiply, will be able to understand each more accurately.

Another great English poet W.B. Yeats, however, feels that a poet in his creative activity is justified less by what he expresses than by the quality of life that he conveys and the kind of readers it engenders.⁹ The intrinsic worth of an aesthetic object, he says elsewhere, is less compelling than "the worth of... the mind", the mind which in due course becomes "the inheritance of his people".¹⁰

It is in F.R. Leavis that we find the clearest and most impressive views on this matter. "The ideal critic is the ideal reader," he maintains. He favours "the complete reader" who will possess "not merely a fuller bodied response, but a completer responsiveness". Leavis also suggests that since the reading demanded by poetry is of a different kind from that demanded by, say, philosophy, the business of a qualified reader of poetry would be "to attain a peculiar completeness of response and to observe a peculiarly strict relevance in developing his response", his real concern being to unravel the mystery of a literary work "in its concrete

fullness".¹¹ To Leavis analysis is a kind of creative process and reading of poetry requires the "total response" of the reader and "a more than ordinary faithfulness and completeness". Emphasizing the value of the perfect reading, Leavis further remarks :

There is about it nothing in the nature of 'murdering to dissect', and suggestion that it can be anything in the nature of laboratory-method misrepresent it entirely. We can have the poem only by an inner kind of possession.¹²

To Leavis the personal appreciative approach is the basic factor in the study of literature. "An approach is personal," says he, "or it is nothing",¹³ Leavis thus shows probably the keenest awareness of the significance of the reader's response in literary analysis and enjoyment. It is a pity that despite his earnestness, he did not thrash the problem of the reader-response in all its aspects.

It were the New Critics, however, who fully shifted emphasis from the writer to the reader. They felt that the reader should be given more importance and that his reading of and response to the text, irrespective of the intention of the writer, should be given priority. Philippe Sollers observed: "Today the essential question is no longer that of the *writer* and the *work*, but of *writing* and *reading*".¹⁴ The result of this approach taken to its logical extremes was the disappearance of the intention of the author and the exaltation of the text. The text, it came to be believed, is more in the consciousness of the reader—an intelligent reader—than in the printed word. George Steiner later summed up the 'new' approach thus :

A text is generated where the reader is one who rationally conceives himself and writing a 'text' comparable in stature, in degree of demand to that which he is reading. To read essentially is to entertain with the writer's text a relationship at once recreative and rival. It is supremely active, collaborating yet also agnostic affinity whose logical, if not active, fulfilment is in 'answering text'.¹⁵

Without the textual demands of the 'answering text' the reader would lag behind the writer and the reading activity would not be as meaningful as it ought to be.

A brief reference to other Western theories regarding the reader's response will not be out of place here. Of the two well known models of reader-oriented interpretive strategies, the phenomenological approach banks upon the belief that the "shared intentional object" gives rise to the author's meaning and the

significance derived by the reader, the reader's main task being to concretize the text. The reader's "horizon of expectations", it is held, is nothing but "a system of references" or "a mind set that a hypothetical individual might bring to any text".¹⁶ The horizon of expectations is thus related to a kind of cultural norms, which make literature meaningful and relevant. The interpretation of a piece of literature meaningful and relevant. The interpretation of a piece of literature will change according to the cultural and social background against which the artifact is perceived and interpreted.¹⁷ As Iser points out, "the structure of the text frequently induces the reader to read the text against the internalized norms of the society, to which he belongs".¹⁸ The reader in the process is able to forge subtle connections with the writer's mind. "These connections," Iser says in a different context, within a text are "the product of the reader's mind working on the raw material of the text, though they are not the text itself".¹⁹

Modern hermeneutics not only recognizes the social context of all linguistic use but also concedes that both the author and the reader are relevant in the process of interpretation. Jenet Wolff remarks :

By referring constantly to the meanings of the artist, his work and society, the sociology of art cannot fail to take account of the nature of art itself, and the aesthetic of art, the work of art, the relationship of these artistic meanings to the world of the artist and his audience will also be an intrinsic part of the analysis.²⁰

The semiotic analysis is concerned with the text-reader dialectics and rejects authorial hermeneutics. It places the reader at the center of the entire literary activity. The interaction between the reader and the text is of crucial importance. Riffaterre, who has called interpretation a co-creative activity of the author and the reader, is of the view that a literary text requires two readings, i.e. the heuristic, and the retroactive. The heuristic reading can give only referential meaning whereas the retroactive reading serves to modify the reader's understanding by filling in 'gaps' and making deviations meaningful and thus generates a self-signifying semiotic text.²¹ A more comprehensive interpretive strategy, however, has been suggested by Scholes who maintains that a text has three components—discursive syntax, semantic pattern, and pragmatic situation, and that an identification and correlation of these three components is necessary for interpretation of a literary text.²² The reader will then be able to recognize the linguistic, propositional and sociocultural codes operating upon the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic components of the text respectively. This approach has put into focus the three basic characteristics of literary artifact—opacity, discontinuity, and fictivity, which are responsible for its openhandedness and multivalence of meaning.

Some linguists and stylisticians also have affirmed the value of the reader's responses. While talking about the two modes of linguistic arrangement, i.e. paradigmatic and syntagmatic, Roman Jakobson, for example, suggests that an ordinary reader may not recognize equivalences in a text.²³ Crystal and Davy are of the opinion that the reader's "intuitive response" precedes the analysis of a poem.²⁴ The possibility of "some prior intuitive interpretation" of a work has been accepted by Widdowson also.²⁵ More recently, Michael Riffaterre and Stanley Fish have considered this issue in some detail. In his critique of the analysis of Baudelaire's *Les Chats* by Roman Jakobson and Levi-Strauss²⁶, Riffaterre objects to their use of "constituents that cannot possibly be perceived by the reader". His answer to Jakobsonian technique would be to introduce the concept of "super-reader" as a "tool of analysis", who would be equipped with a body of appropriate linguistic and literary-historical knowledge and would work through the text in terms of the specified knowledge he possesses.²⁷ Riffaterre's concept of the "super-reader" is, in fact, a development on his earlier notion of the 'Average Reader', who belongs to "the group of informants used for each stimulus or for a whole stylistic sequence". Literary communication, to Riffaterre, is "at the outset the author's response to an exceptional challenge", and proper results, he feels, can be obtained "through the reader" because "he is the consciously selected target of the author". Riffaterre would prefer "cultivated readers" whose even "secondary responses" to the text can be of considerable help.²⁸

Though writing with a different purpose, Stanley Fish also expresses his dissatisfaction with the reader-excluding premises of formalist critics. Attacking vehemently the approach of Wimsatt²⁹ and others, he proposes instead "an analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time". Fish reaffirms the significance of the "method of analysis which focuses on the reader rather than on the artifact" and declares that "a description of the reader's experience is an analysis of the sentence's meaning". In his category of response, Fish would include not only "tears, prickles" and "other psychological symptom" but also mental operations involved in reading.³⁰ He calls his reader "a construct, an ideal of idealized reader"— "the informed reader", who is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built and is in full possession of the semantic knowledge that a mature user of a language wields, including lexical sets, collocations, idioms and various linguistic devices.³¹ The stand taken by Riffaterre and Fish is a good point of departure for stylistics, but a lot more deliberations are needed to work out a plausible theory of the "informed" or competent reader's response to a literary text. As Fowler aptly remarks,

Restoring the linearity of the reading experience is... a necessary corrective to the rather static creations of the New Criticism and its descendants. But the reader's experience, linear or not, raises a more general question which stylistics must confront in the next phase of its development; the exact theoretical nature of the 'super-reader' or 'ideal' reader' mentioned by stylisticians as diverse as Fish and Riffaterre, a natural constituent of any generative poetics and great in need of clarification.³²

The 'exact theoretical nature' of the responsive reader is yet to be worked out in the Western world, though serious efforts are being made there to understand and appreciate complex processes underlying reading and analysis of a literary text. This is one area in which the deliberations in Indian Poetics can lend useful insight.

Available reader-response theories of the West, however, are cognitive in emphasis. Formalism and Czech structuralism have failed to account for the permanence of an aesthetic appeal. For example, Jakobson's scheme provides no way of deciding which of the equivalences are esthetically significant in a given text. Mukarovsky is right in locating meaning in a reader's aesthetic dispositions.³³ Jonathan Culler also suggests that one should start with the aesthetic effect and then seek an explanation of the effect in linguistic structure.³⁴ But this has rarely been done. The limitations of two representative works may be taken to be symptomatic of the entire gamut of Western Criticism. Wimsatt and Beardsley, while acknowledging that "poets have been leading expositors of the laws of feeling" and that "Poetry is a way of fixing emotions or making them more permanently perceptible", have maintained: "The emotions correlative to the objects of poetry..... [are] presented in their objects and contemplated as a pattern of knowledge".³⁵ This is nothing but an attempt to banish emotions from the reader's experience and to preserve them in the 'objective' structure of a poem. On the contrary, Roland Barthe's *The Pleasure of the Text*, with its notion of 'jouissance', is an advocacy of orgiastic bliss a kind of Dionysian abandonment³⁶ — and does not present a full-fledged theory of aesthetic response.

It is for this reason that Iser has argued persuasively to show that the reader's 'discoveries' pertaining to the text are cognitive as well as emotional. The term used by him, 'Wirkung' in *Wirkungsästhetik* ('aesthetics of response'), is broad enough to encompass both the poles.³⁷ Kant's identification of the 'beautiful' with "disinterested contemplation" and Coleridge's description of the aesthetic experience as "an immediate and absolute complacency, without irreverence.... of any interest, sensual or intellectual" do not say much about the

nature of the reader's response. It is this fact which has prompted Paul B. Armstrong to remark :

What we need instead is a comprehensive theory of aesthetic emotions which encompasses the full range of feelings art can provoke, from meditative calm to blissful transport, from mourning to celebration, from compassion to fear and trembling. In a truly comprehensive theory of response..... aesthetic emotions deserve equal footing with the cognitive aspects of reading.³⁸

Centuries ago Indian aestheticians had raised and answered similar questions. Creditably enough, they arrived at certain conclusions on the basis of their observation of a vast body of empirical data. It would be instructive to see what they have to say about response to a literary work.

II

Indian poetics have discussed in a systematic way many seminal issues which are being taken up for a fuller consideration in the West now. The concept of *sahrdaya* (the responsive reader) can be taken to anticipate the present-day position in a meaningful way. Indian Poetics attaches great significance to the nature and role of the responsive reader. As C.D. Narasimhaiah has pointed out, "Indeed, history doesn't know of any literature, ancient or modern, which has given such a central place to the critic (*sahrdaya*) as the Sanskrit literature".³⁹ The term '*sahrdaya*' literally means 'one of the similar heart' or 'one akin to the poet's heart'. It has been translated by Gnoli as one "possessed of heart".⁴⁰ The term, however, refers to an ideal reader endowed with all qualities expected of a perfect reader of creative writings. To Masson and Patwardhan he is nothing less than "the intelligent and responsive reader".⁴¹ 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".

It may be noted that there had been an excellent tradition of the responsive readers in ancient India. All important cultural centres in India such as Ujjaini and Pataliputra were well-known for readers with culture and critical acumen, whose views could not be set aside even by great creative writers. Kalidas, for example, in his *Raghuvansam* (1/3), addresses himself to his competent readers and critics as "a dullwit aspiring for poetic fame" (*mandah kaviyasahprarthi*). Again, in the Prologue to his masterpiece, *Abhijnanasakuntala*, he clearly states that he would be loth to be proud of his dramatic skill until the responsive readers were satisfied with its performance, and ends the work with the words:

"Let the words of the learned flourish !" (*sarasvāṭisrutamahatam mahiyatam*). Even Bhavabhūti, who rightly claimed to be well-versed in Grammar, Interpretation and Logic (*padavakya-pramanajna*) and the minion of the Goddess of Learning, expresses, in the Prologue to his play *Malatīmadhava*, his ardent desire to be read and appreciated by one who is akin to him temperamentally and whom he does expect to find some day somewhere, for the time is endless and extensive is the earth.⁴² A good reader of poetry has, according to Indian aestheticians, to be first of all a *sahrdaya*. Anandavardhana, Abhinavagupta and Mallinatha are the finest representatives of such readers and critics of poetry.

The worth of a literary work can be evaluated from more angles than one. As K.C. Pandey suggests, in order to ascertain the aesthetic merit of a work, one has to look at it either from the point of view of the author or from that of the reader.⁴³ Indian Poetics, unlike Western Criticism, favours evaluation of literature from the reader's point of view. Speaking about the difficulty of pinpointing factors responsible for the success of a poem, John Wain remarks :

But to illustrate these things in the concrete is to approach the vanishing centre of literary criticism, which..... is bound sooner or later to reach a point at which demonstration breaks down and is replaced by a shared sensibility, though, of course, this point is very much more distant than the anti-critical writers on literature would have us think.⁴⁴

For Indian aestheticians it was not merely 'distant', but actually beyond the horizon. they simply could not think of arguing over the final worth of a work or even its interpretation in quite the same way as has been done in Western Criticism. This fact makes the responsive reader's role all the more significant. It is he who was supposed to have the final say on the worth of a work. It is nevertheless surprising to note that the *sahrdayas* tended to agree amongst themselves to an astonishing degree. Mahimabhatta and Kuntaka, for example, disagree sharply with Anandavardhana's views, on account of the principled stand taken by them, but when they comment upon a poet they are in a remarkable agreement.

Indian Poetics has defined literature (*kavya*) used in a very comprehensive sense) with reference to its effect on the responsive reader. According to Anandavardhana, it is characterized by the oneness of word and meaning which causes pleasure to such a reader⁴⁵. Abhinavagupta also believes that the aesthetic pleasure of the reader is the chief end of poetry⁴⁶. The aesthetic susceptibility is considered to be the first and foremost quality of an ideal reader. The

characteristics and responsibilities of the responsive reader, as suggested in Indian Poetics, may be considered briefly.

Indian aestheticians have again and again insisted on the importance of the *sahrdaya*. The opening verse of the *Dhvanyalokalocana* states that the poet and the reader between them form the essence of the Muse's being.⁴⁷ In the *Abhinavabharati* also it has been maintained that only a responsive reader has right to pursue poetry.⁴⁸ In a well-known passage in the *Locana*, Abhinavagupta has defined *sahrdaya* in the following terms :

Those people who are capable of identifying with the subject matter, as the mirror of their hearts has been cleansed and polished through constant repetition and study of poetry, and who sympathetically respond in their own hearts— those people are what are known as *sahrdayas* (responsive or sensitive readers).⁴⁹

In support of his stand, Abhinavagupta quotes a verse from Bharata's *Natyasastra*⁵⁰ which in Manmohan Ghosh's translation (1951, p. 120) reads as follows: "The state proceeding from the thing which is congenial to the heart is the source of aesthetic delight and it pervades the body just as fire spreads over the dry wood". Abhinavagupta, however, seems to take the verse from the *Natyasastra* as an indication of the condition of the ideal spectator or reader.⁵¹

We find the treatment of *sahrdaya* in Indian aestheticians' deliberations on *rasa*. The concept of *rasa* originated in dramaturgy and was later extended to literary theory. Abhinavagupta forcefully maintained that all poetry lives by *rasa*; without it no poem can exist even in the least.⁵² The other terms used as synonyms are *bhavaka* and *rasika*. *Rasa*, which may be defined as the affective response of the competent reader/ spectator to a composition, is born when the pre-existing emotional set (*bhava*) in the reader's or spectator's mind is born and generates poetic meaning.⁵³ The *rasika* is by definition the kind of respondent who is capable of savoring *rasa*.⁵⁴ Abhinavagupta has described this quality as "the capacity to respond to aesthetic stimuli".⁵⁵ The terms *sahrdaya*, *bhavaka* and *rasika* have much wider connotation and none of them refers specifically to the activity of reading. But the flair, penchant, taste, sensibility and perceptiveness denoted by them can be fruitfully applied in literary theory to convey the qualities of the responsive reader. The consciousness of such a reader, when cleared of all distorting factors such as preconceived notions, prejudices and other irritants blocking aesthetic enjoyment, becomes maximally receptive.

The process of aesthetic enjoyment comprises three distinct but interrelated stages: The mind of the responsive reader first becomes attuned to the emotional

situation delineated in the literary work (*hrdayasamvada*); it is then completely absorbed in its portrayal (*tanmayibhavana*); and this absorption finally results in aesthetic delectation (*rasanubhava*). According to this approach, the poet and the reader are temperamentally alike. This identity between the two is the very basis of Indian Poetics. The poet and the reader are very often described in it by the same set of terms. Bhatta Tauta speaks of sympathetic vibrations taking place between the poet and the reader.⁵⁶ The poetic sensibility in the reader, says Abhinavagupta, is nothing but the faculty of entering into an identity with the poet's heart.⁵⁷ As Pratiharenduraja suggests, when ideas are exalted, the expression is transparent and emotion graphically presented, the reader is able to realise completely the poet's mind mirrored in his work.⁵⁸ Thus a circuit of experience is completed between the poet and the reader.⁵⁹

If we analyse the modality of this experience in terms of stimulus-and-response theory we find four entities—the world, the creative writer, the literary form which objectifies the writer's response to the *realia*, and the reader/spectator receiving aesthetic experience—interacting in interesting ways. "The circuit is complete," says Chaitanya, "when aesthetic experience makes the *sahrdaya* a more sensitively functioning entity in the world, with enriched and more refined reactivities". Indian Poetics banks heavily on the reader's/spectator's identification with the creative writer for aesthetic delectation, for which vicarious pleasure is no substitute. A similar full-blooded response from the spectators is said to have been the characteristic of the Elizabethan audience. M.C. Bradbrook writes :

The way in which an audience was delighted or ravished or charmed in Elizabethan times implies their collective assent beyond the level of everyday feeling..... Abhinavagupta, five hundred years before Zeami maintained that the spectator participates imaginatively but actively in the play. He tastes the emotion as immediate experience through an imaginary identification, but it is generalized in his lived or pre-reflected consciousness. To achieve this he has to be trained in feeling, as the actor trained in movement and speech—has to be a qualified spectator, an *adhikarin*.⁶⁰

The value of identification has been emphasized in the Indian concept of *sadharanikarana* (Transpersonalization), which results in sublimation and extension of consciousness. This concept embraces all the three factors in aesthetics: the poetic creative experience, the poem, and the reader's response. The emotions embodied in a poem enter directly into our hearts to vibrate and dance before our mental eye.⁶¹ These emotions do not have spatial and temporal determinations.⁶² "Nothing human is

foreign to us, "maintains Abhinavagupta, and adds: "There exists no living being who is devoid of the latent impressions of the nine mental states" (*sthayibhavas*)⁶³, which I.A. Richards calls "appetencies".⁶⁴ The realisation of *rasa*, as Visvanatha points out, ultimately results in the expansion of one's consciousness.⁶⁵

Indian Poetics, at its height, attains a rare synthesis between creation and criticism, between the poet and the reader.⁶⁶ Every connoisseur of poetry, according to the Indian viewpoint, is virtually a poet, for he, too, possesses a poetic heart, what though it pulses somewhat lower in him than in the case of a poet. The basic difference is that the poet attains this condition spontaneously whereas the reader is induced by him. As Jameson puts it, the reader actually determines and repeats "that conceptual operation, often of a very specialized and limited type", which took place in the poet's mind.⁶⁷ This is effected by the complete fusion of the reader's self with the life of the poem (*tanmayibhavana*), which indeed is the highest gift. It is this quality, says Bharata, that goes to make one an ideal reader or spectator.⁶⁸ The absence of this quality will make one insensitive to charms of poetry. In the *Tantraloka*, Abhinavagupta has defined *tanmayibhavana* (identification) as "the attainment of one's highest self", adding that "It is the highest stage of fulfilment, and there can be no further fruit after that".⁶⁹ Insensitive readers, he is convinced, will never attain identification: "Those who do not identify, who do not know how to submerge the body, etc. in that object and whose intellect as a means of cognition is not merged—they are known as insensitive".⁷⁰ To insensitive readers the magic casements of poetry remain always closed.

The Indian concept of *sahrdaya* is obviously elasticity. The aesthetic experience is not a common experience. Writings in Sanskrit contain ironical remarks on people who are not meant for poetry.⁷¹ Abhinavagupta has categorically stated that the privilege of enjoying poetry in the true sense is reserved only for those who, because of the good deeds of their past lives and assiduous practice of the present life, have been endowed with a highly developed aesthetic susceptibility.⁷² In his *Tantraloka* he conceives of the *sahrdaya's* heart as vibrating when he enjoys poetry:

When the ears are filled with the sound of sweet song or the nostrils with the scent of sandal-wood, etc., the state of indifference (non-participation, impersonality, and so on disappears and the heart is invaded by a state of vibration. Such a state is precisely the so-called power of beatitude,⁷³ because of which a person is gifted with aesthetic susceptibility.

Mahimabhata also recognizes a distinct subjective condition, which he calls *sahrdayatva* and which alone makes the aesthetic experience possible.⁷⁴

Bhoja, however, holds slightly different views. He uses the term '*rasika*' in place of *sahrdaya*, which refers, according to him, to some excellence in one's personality. This quality is the very Ego (*ahanakara-tattva*) of the person, the finest development of which results in culture, creative power and appreciative faculty.⁷⁵ It is this that produces in him the power of empathy—the capability to get into others' moods, which is surely the most significant asset of a good reader. Bhoja is of the opinion that the aesthetic experience at the highest level is the experience of the *sahrdaya*, the secret of which lies in the good deeds of the previous births and consequent enhancement of divine qualities (*sattvaguna*). Unlike Bhoja, Abhinavagupta does not bother about culture but defines in precise terms how one can become a fit literary enjoyer. His concept of the *sahrdaya* reaches philosophical altitudes; the supreme aesthetic experience is akin to the experience of bliss. Raghavan is of the view that Abhinavagupta's "explanation of *sahrdayas* contains the most satisfactory theory of literary appeal".⁷⁶ The really competent reader has an admirable potential of transcending self-consciousness. "It is this transcending of self-consciousness— this migrating from the narrow self," says Hiriyanna, "....that constitutes the secret of aesthetic delight".⁷⁷ This wholly unique aesthetic experience is known in Indian Poetics by the name of *rasa*, 'essence or most delectable thing'.

Rasa is *sui generis*.⁷⁸ It has rightly been regarded as "the cardinal concept of Indian aesthetics"⁷⁹ *Rasa* can be experienced by men of sensibility alone.⁸⁰ The men of taste and culture have been defined in Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra* as those who enjoy the good things of this world with a developed taste as members of the cultivated society. There is, in fact, no knowing of *rasa* apart from directly experiencing it; it defies description. According to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *rasa* is "an inscrutable and uncaused spiritual activity", brought to life through the reader's own capacity and "experienced in an impersonal, contemplative mood".⁸¹ The process of reading and appreciating poetry in Indian Poetics hinges on the concept of *rasa* and its realisation on the part of the reader.

The concept of *rasa* has been an inexhaustible source of polemic discussions to generations of Indian scholars. The term '*rasa*' is used in the *Natyasastra* in the sense of the taste of physical senses. Bharata writes: "Just as well-disposed persons while eating food cooked with many kinds of spices, enjoy its taste and attain pleasure so the cultured people taste the dominant states (*sthayibhavas*)."⁸² The response evoked in the spectator, as mentioned by him, is also not of a very high order :

Slight smile, smile and excessive laughter, "Well done!", "How wonderful!", "How pathetic!" and tumultuous applause or swelling uproar are the signs of success expressed vocally. Joy expressed in horripilation, the rising up from the seat and giving away the clothes and rings are signs of this ...expressed physically.⁸³

With Bharata, *rasa* seems to be an objective concept. But by the time the concept reaches Abhinavagupta's hands, it assumes a purely subjective character.⁸⁴ Borrowing the basic tenets of his theory from Bhattanayaka, Abhinavagupta feels that *rasa*-realisation takes the reader to the blissful state of contemplation and calm (*samvidvisranti*). The reader is then, according to Sankuka and Vamana, in *samplava* (submergence). A modern authority on the Reader-Response E.D. Hirsch also maintains that reading and interpretation are "an affair of conscience".⁸⁵ Aesthetic experience is different from a psycho-physical pleasure, a purely intellectual pleasure and also from the spiritual experience of a yogin. Indian aestheticians have called it *brahmanandasahodara* (akin to god-realisation). Because of its beatific and contemplative character and freedom from the contact with mundane perceptible things, aesthetic experience, says Bhattanayaka, is superior to all these kinds of experiences. Panditaraja Jagannatha maintains that aesthetic enjoyment "is of the form of a mental impression, already crystallised in the mind and implanted in the mind since the time of birth (or since time immemorial) and cognised by the reader or spectator along with the joy of selfrealisation which is absolutely real and self-luminous". He then goes on to say that the relishing of *rasa* is nothing but the breaking off of the mantle of ignorance, etc. covering the pure consciousness or the transformation of the mind into the bliss of pure consciousness which is the nature of the *atman*.

The concept of *sahrdaya* obviously restricts the circle of the competent readers of poetry. Not everybody has the intrinsic capacity to enjoy a poem in the real sense. The secret of poetry, says anandavardhana, would be revealed only to a few gifted souls.⁸⁷ A competent reader is a keen observer of situations and feeling-patterns and has a large fund of experience. Moreover, he possesses a mirror-like sensibility, cleaned, refined and purified by his constant acquaintance with poetry. Aesthetic pleasure is, again, reserved for those who, because of the good deeds of their past lives and assiduous practice, are endowed with a highly developed aesthetic sensitivity. A work of art, according to this view, would bring aesthetic pleasure to its readers in accordance with their sensibility and aptitude. Spitzer says that a good critic must be equipped with "talent, experience and faith".⁸⁸ Many more rigorous qualifications have been suggested in Indian Poetics. Bharata, for example, has given a formidable list of such qualifications.

The ideal spectator, he says, is a man of good character; he is born in a noble family; he is learned and desirous of fame and virtue; he is impartial, mature, attentive, honest and conversant with various disciplines including Grammar and Prosody, and so on.⁸⁹ These qualities, as Bharata himself admits, seldom exist in one and the same person. Moreover, not all men can respond to all emotions properly : *sarvasya na sarvatra hrdayasamvadah*. An ideal reader should possess, besides a general aptitude, a pure intuitive heart which would enable him to find out the quintessential virtues of poetry.⁹⁰ He should be not only well read and wise but also initiated into the theoretical intricacies of poetic discourse.

Indian scholars recognized four types of poets called *cintakavi*, *sutakavi*, *arthakavi* and *pratibhanakavi*, of which the last type is superior to others.⁹¹ There is nothing in the realm of being or in that of thought, Bhamaha feels, which does not serve the poet's purpose.⁹² For a good poet, culture (*vyutpatti*), practice (*abhyasa*) and genius (*pratibha*) are regarded as essential.⁹³ On the whole, Indian system placed greater reliance on genius for the making of a poet.⁹⁴ In the Fourth Chapter of his *Kavyamimansa* Rajasekhara has given a detailed typological discussion on poetic genius and readers. Of the two kinds of *pratibha* (*genius*) mentioned by him, the creative genius (*karayitri*) is an innate equipment of the poet and is of three varieties— *sahaja* (innate/spontaneous), *aharya* (acquired), and *aupadesiki* (learned).⁹⁵ The perceptive genius (*bhavayitri*), says Rajasekhara, "reveals the poet's effort and intention, and because of it the poet's enterprise becomes fruitful". He also mentions the view that the poet and the responsive reader are not different in terms of imagination.⁹⁶ What is even more significant to note in this context is Rajasekhara's hierarchical ordering of four types of readers, i.e. *arocikin* (fastidious), *satrnabhyavaharin* (omnivorous), *matsarin* (miserly), *tattvabhinivesin* (discerning), the last type being the best but not easily available.⁹⁷

The acquired component in the reader, as in a poet, relates to his constant exposure the texts of the inherited literary tradition to which he belongs. The exposure would result in his internalising conventions of the system. However, on account of certain variables even a trained reader's responses may not be always satisfactory. Abhinavagupta has mentioned no less than seven obstacles to aesthetic enjoyment (*rasavighnas*) : poverty of intuitive talent; intrusion of spatial and temporal considerations; interference of personal feelings; defective means of perception; obscurity; absence of a clear knowledge of the relative importance of the depicted elements and doubts about the proper correlations between Determinants, etc. Abhinavagupta's treatment of these obstacles invites a comparison with I.A. Richards' discussion of factors which may result in a defective reading and due to which the reader may have to face the following

difficulties: inability to make out the plain meanings of the poems including sense, feelings, tone and intention; difficulty in sensuous apprehension; weakness of visual imagination; erratic and irrelevant associations from private life; stock responses; sentimentality; inhibitions; doctrinal predilections of the reader; implicit or explicit technical presuppositions; and general critical preconceptions and illegitimate expectations bred by theoretical prejudices.⁹⁹ A good reader of poetry will not let his responses be vitiated by any of these factors.

It is this aesthetic sensibility that distinguishes the responsive readers from others. The aesthetes like Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde also considered it to be of great value to a literary critic. "What is important," wrote Pater, "... is not that the critic should possess a correct abstract definition of beauty for the intellect, but a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects".¹⁰⁰ The right kind of temperament will make the reader burn like a hard gem-like flame in response. Echoing his mentor, Wilde remarked: "Temperament is the primary requisite for a critic— a temperament exquisitely susceptible to beauty".¹⁰¹ The aesthetic sensibility characteristic of *sahrdaya*, however, is of greater dimension and calls for greater tolerance; he is expected to ignore lapses in a work if it is otherwise competent. To quote Anandavardhana,

The nature of poetry is held to reside even in faulty compositions where the *rasa*, etc. are clearly perceived in like manner as the character of a jewel is held to belong to such a thing as a jewel which is perforated by an insect.¹⁰²

For the *sahrdaya*, unlike a critic, vast erudition (*vahusrutatva*) is not an indispensable qualification. In Indian Poetics aesthetic susceptibility and capacity of aesthetic enjoyment (*rasajnata*) are interchangeable. The Indian approach finds support in a modern thinker's stand in this regard :

The entire qualification one must have for understanding art is responsiveness. This is primarily a natural gift, related to creative talent, yet not the same things; like talent, where it exists in any measure, it may be heightened by experience or reduced by adverse agencies. Since it is intuitive it cannot be taught.¹⁰³

As such a really competent reader is not easy to find; he is, not unlike a great poet, born and not just made. D.H. Lawrence aptly says: "A man who is emotionally educated is rare as a phoenix". The *sahrdaya*, as conceived in Indian Poetics, is not merely a passive reader. He is a competent and 'complete' reader in F.R. Leavis' estimation, who is properly 'educated' both emotionally

