What To Do with the Past?: Sanskrit Literary Criticism in Postcolonial Space

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Abstract Throughout its history of almost a millennium and a half, Sanskrit *kāvyaśāstra* was resolutely obsessed with the task of unravelling the ontology *kāvya* (literary prose and poetry). Literary theoreticians in Sanskrit, irrespective of their spatio-temporal locations, unanimously agreed upon the fact that *kāvya* was a special mode of expression (distinctly different from the ordinary form of speech) characterized by the presence of certain unique linguistic elements. Nonetheless, this did not imply that *kāvyaśāstra* was an intellectual tradition unmarked by dis-agreements. The real point of contention among the practitioners of Sanskrit literary theory was the prioritization of certain formal elements as the 'soul' of literature. This strong sense of intellectual disagreement on the question of what constituted the soul of *kāvya* eventually paved the way for the emergence of new frameworks of criticism and extensive scrutiny of the existing categories, thus playing a vital role in keeping this tradition alive and new.

But towards the turn of the 20th century, Sanskrit *kāvyaśāstra* tradition under-went an epistemic rupture primarily because of a change in the way the idea of literariness was understood. During this phase, the traditional Formalistic notions about literature (to which Sanskrit *kāvyaśāstra* conformed) underwent a radical transformation, and the style and language of literature eventually became similar to everyday speech. This trend played an important role in severing Sanskrit *kāvyaśāstra*'s natural tie with literature. Eventually, the vigour in which new trea-tises in Sanskrit literary poetics were produced also dwindled. This did not mean that the scholarship (*pāṇḍitya*) in Sanskrit poetics vanished. Scholars in Sanskrit poetics continued to flourish in India, but in a different form and shape. In other

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words, the focus of scholars in Sanskrit poetics slowly got shifted from the production of new treatises in Sanskrit poetics to the creation of the intellectual history of this field and the application of these theories to evaluate the literary merit of modern literary texts. Though these two approaches played a vital role in disseminating the knowledge about Sanskrit poetics in modern times, they were caught up in an ontological certitude. In other words, neither of these two directions attempted to study these theoretical positions from a standpoint other than that of literary theory. To borrow a Barthian terminology, these two approaches treated Sanskrit poetics as a 'work,' instead of a 'Text.' This paper aims to intervene in this lacuna of scholarship by proposing the Derridian idea of 'play' as a methodological framework to unearth the potentialities lying dormant in these theories and to move beyond the ontological certitude traditionally imposed on these theoretical positions. The new methodological praxis that I put forward in this paper is further exemplified through a non-canonical reading of Ānandavardhana's *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani* (*dhvani* where the literal meaning is not intended).

Keywords Ontological certitude · Sanskrit Poetics · New direction ·
Play · *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani*

Sanskrit Poetics: Early and Medieval Phases

Throughout its history of almost a millennium and a half, Sanskrit *kāvyaśāstra* was resolutely obsessed with the task of unravelling the ontology *kāvya* (literary prose and poetry). It believed that it was the presence of certain special linguistic features such as poetic suggestion, figures of speech, figurative deviation, etc. that attributed literariness to a work of art. Therefore, throughout its history of almost a millennium, Sanskrit *kāvyaśāstra* was exclusively preoccupied with the task of identifying and analysing the formal devices generating literariness in a work of art. Considering *kāvya* as a 'specialized' mode of language marked by the 'ingenious' use of certain distinctive linguistic devices, *kāvyaśāstra* always made it a point to delimit *kāvya* from other uses of language such as *śāstra*, the Vedas, and workaday language. Literary theoreticians in Sanskrit, irrespective of their spatio-temporal locations, unanimously agreed that *kāvya* was a special mode of expression (distinctly different from the ordinary form of speech) characterized by the presence of certain unique linguistic elements. According to Gerow (1977), "the problem of *kāvyaśāstra* was then seen in differentiating that particular expression we call poetic from other verbal means, *śāstra,* and narrative" (224), and throughout its history of almost a millennium, *kāvyaśāstra* "never ever strayed away from this central problem" (219).[1]

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[1] Hemacandra in *Kāvyānuśāsana* observed that it is the presence of four components such as *śabda* (word), *artha* (meaning), *guṇa* (poetic quality) and *alaṅkāra* (figures of speech) that constitutes a *kāvya* (I.22). Vāgbhaṭa II delimited the ambit of *kāvya* by defining it as a composition of *śabda* (word) and *artha* (meaning) marked by the absence of *doṣa*s and the presence of *guṇa*s and *alaṅkāra*s (14). Mammaṭa observed that *kāvya* is composed of flawless words and sense adorned with merits and excellences of style (I.4). In *Candrāloka*, Jayadeva also set the limit of poetic expression by defining *kāvya* as a verbal icon

Nonetheless, this did not imply that *kāvyaśāstra* was an intellectual tradition unmarked by disagreements. The most important and long-standing of all the points of contention among the practitioners of Sanskrit literary theory was the prioritization of certain formal elements as the 'soul' of literature. This strong sense of intellectual disagreement on the question of what constituted the 'soul' of *kāvya* eventually paved the way for the emergence of new frameworks of criticism and an in-depth analysis of various formal elements, thus playing a vital role in keeping this tradition alive and contemporary.

Although *kāvya* originated as early as the beginning of the Common Era and flourished through the works of writers like Aśvaghoṣa (2 C.E.), Bhāsa (4 C.E.?), Kālidāsa (4 C.E.), et al., there was no attempt to systematize the knowledge about the art of composing *kāvya* until 700 C.E. According to the available historical evidence, Bhāmaha's *Kāvyālaṅkāra* (7 C.E.) is the earliest available text in the *kāvyaśāstra* tradition.

For Bhāmaha, the earliest known exponent of *kāvyaśāstra*, it was primarily *alaṅkāras* (figures of speech) that transformed a piece of writing into *kāvya*. Therefore, in his *Kāvyālaṅkāra*, Bhāmaha was chiefly concerned with the identification and analysis of *alaṅkāras*. According to Bhāmaha (1998), what made an *alaṅkāra* different from other uses of language was its figurative deviation (*vakratā*) from ordinary speech. He opined that a poet should always be diligent in horning his skills in the art of figurative deviation, the vital force of all *alaṅkāras*. Bhāmaha pointed out that prosaic statements such as 'the sun has set,' 'the moon shines' or 'the birds fly back to their nest' were a mere 'report' or *vārta*, not *kāvya* (II.87).[2] He noted that *vakrokti* by which linguistic expressions are rendered beautiful is found in all *alaṅkāras*, and poets should be assiduous in cultivating it.[3]

Footnote 1 continued

characterized by the absence of *doṣa*s and the presence of *lakṣaṇā* (deviant utterance), *rīti* (diction or style; literally means 'path'), *guṇa*, *alaṅkāra*, *rasa* (aesthetic emotion) and *vṛtti* (linguistic modality) (I.7). Vidyānātha in *Pratāparudrīya* saw *kāvya* as a special composition of both *gadya* (prose) and *padya* (poetry) bereft of *doṣa*s and adorned by *guṇa*, *alaṅkāra*, *śabda* and *artha* (II.1). Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka talked about three crucial components that were conspicuously absent in other uses of language and present only in *kāvya*. According to him, these three elements were *abhidhāyakatva* (denotative function), *bhāvakatva* (ability to evoke aesthetic experience) and *bhogakṛttva* (the experience of aesthetic emotion). In his commentary on *Dhvanyāloka*, Abhinavagupta reproduced this view of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka (*Locana* 2.4 *L*). Kuntaka opined that the figurative deviation of speech (*vakrokti*) makes *kāvya* different from ordinary expression and the use of language in *śāstras* (291). According to Bhoja, although poetry is called the combination of word and meaning, not all compositions of word and meaning could claim the status of a *kāvya*. In *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa*, Bhoja made a clear distinction between *kāvya* and other linguistic genres based on the nature of language employed in them. According to Bhoja, workaday language is the explicit language of science and daily life. On the other hand, *kāvya* was the deviant language found in texts teeming with aesthetic pleasure (I;221). We can see this view of *kāvya* as a special linguistic category with complex literary conventions and elaborate metrical schemes, unchangingly going down the line till the end of the active phase in Sanskrit literary culture in the seventeenth century, with Jagannātha observing that *kāvya* is a special combination of word and meaning, with beautiful words denoting noble significations (*ramaṇīyārthapradipādakaḥ śabdaḥ kāvyaṃ*; 4).

[2] *gatoʂstamarko bhātīnduryānti vāsāya pakṣiṇaḥ| ityevamādi kim kāvyaṃ vārtāmenāṃ pracakṣate*‖ (Ibid. II.87).

[3] *saiṣā sarvaiva vakroktiranayārtho vibhāvyate| yatnoʂsyāṃ kavinā kāryaḥ koʂlaṅkāroʂsnayā vinā*‖ (*Kāvyālaṅkāra* 2.85). Ānandavardhana in *Dhvanyāloka* repeats this idea. See (*Dhvanyāloka* 3.36).

The exponents of the theories *guṇa.* (poetic merit) and *rīti* (style) refuted the primacy that *ālaṅkārika*s such as Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin had given to figures of speech. Vāmana (8th century) (2000) noted that *rīti* (poetic style) where *guṇa*s are properly knit together served as the soul of *kāvya* (I.2.3).[4] For him, *guṇa*s such as *ojas* (grandeur) and *prasāda* (perspicuity) were primarily responsible for the unique nature or literariness in *kāvya*, and *alaṅkāra*s could only enhance the charm already beautified by the presence of *guṇa*s (*Kāvyālaṅkārasūtravṛtti*, III.1.1). Ānandavardhana (9th century) (1990), who was Vāmana's successor, vehemently opposed the primacy given to both *alaṅkāra*s and *rīti*s by his predecessors as the vital components of literature. For Ānanda, *dhvani* or poetic suggestion was the 'soul' of *kāvya*. Ānandavardhana criticized his predecessors who "contend that poetry is nothing more than what is embodied in word and meaning".[5] He was of the view that *"*It was persons unable to analyse the true nature of poetry . . . who propounded the doctrine of "styles" (*Dhvanyaloka*, 3.46 K).[6]

Kuntaka, a tenth-century Sanskrit literary critic from Kashmir, considered *vakrokti* (figurative deviation of speech) as the chief source of literariness. According to Kuntaka (1977), "*Kāvya* is that combination of *śabda* (signifier) and *artha* (signified) which shines forth with *vakratā* (figurative deviation of speech) to impart pleasure to readers" (61).[7] According to him, "*Vakrokti* signifies that kind of a beautiful signification (*abhidhā*) which is different from common usage ("*prasidhābhidhānavyatirekiṇī* "; 91).[8] Kuntaka says that "These two [*śabda* and *artha*] are things to be ornamented. The only ornament that beautifies them is *vakrokti*, and *vakrokti* issues from a poet's expertise in using language beautifully" (*Vakroktijīvita*, 91).[9]

Samudrabandha (1915), a tenth-century commentator on Ruyyaka's *Alaṅkārasarvasva*, gives us a glimpse into the history of this debate in the following passage.[10]

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[4] *rītirātmā kāvyasya* | (*Kāvyālaṅkārasūtravṛtti* I.2.6).

[5] Ānandavardhana is indirectly criticizing literary theoreticians like Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin and Vāmana who opine that *kāvya* is primarily a combination of *śabda* and *artha* (sound and sense). For detailed reading, see Bhāmaha (I.16), Daṇḍin (I.10) and Vāmana (I.1).

[6] *asphuṭasphuritam kāvyatattvametadyathoditam* |
aśaknuvadbhirvyākartum rītayaḥ saṃpravartitāḥ ‖ (*Dhvanyāloka* III.46 K)

[7] *śabrarthau sahitau vakrakavivyāpāraśālini\bandhe vyavasthitau kāvyam tadvidāhlādakāriṇi* (*Vakroktijīvita* I.7).

[8] *vakroktiḥ prasiddhābhidhānavyatirekiṇī vicitraivābhidhā* (Ibid. kārikā on I.10).

[9] *ubhau dvāvapyetau śabdārthāvalaṅkāryāvalaṅkaraṇiyau kenāpi śobhātiśayakāriṇālaṅkaraṇena yojanīyau\ kim tat tayoralaṅkaraṇamityabhidhīyate—tayoḥ punaralaṅkṛtiḥ | tayordvitvasaṅkhyāviśiṣṭayorapyalaṅkṛtiḥ punarekaiva yayā dvāvapyalaṅkriyete\ kāsau—vakroktireva | vakroktiḥ prasidhābhidhānavyatirekiṇī vicitraivābhidhā‖* (Ibid. I.10)

[10] I would like to point out the two opposing views regarding the evolution of Sanskrit poetics. While scholars like Kane and De follow the classification of Sanskrit poetics along the lines of *guṇa* and *rīti*, McCrea (2008) rejects it. For Kane and De's views, see respectively *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, p. 372 and History of Sanskrit Poetics Vol II, 32. For McCrea's view, see *The Teleology of Poetics In Medieval Kashmir*, pp. 30–31.

A literary work is marked by certain special words and meanings. The speciality of these two [i.e. *śabda* and *artha*] can be analysed in three ways—through some language feature [*dharma*] or through some function [*vyāpāra*] or through aesthetic suggestion [*dhvani*]. The first group contains two sects—the one that gives importance to figures of speech and the one that lays emphasis on poetic qualities. In the second sect, some pay attention to beautiful expression and the others to the capacity to produce aesthetic pleasure [in readers]. Of these five groups, the first one is accepted by Udbhaṭa and others; the second one is accepted by Vāmana, the third one by the author of *Vakroktijīvita*, the fourth by Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka and the fifth by Ānandavardhana.[11] (*Alaṅkārasarvasva* 4)

This strong sense of critical thinking continued to exist in *kāvyaśāstra* even in the medieval period which is often wrongly dubbed as the dark age by imperialist historiographers. Bronner's observation on this matter is worth mentioning here. Bronner (2002) opines,

A remarkable trend of innovation seems to characterize Sanskrit Poetics on the eve of colonialism. Like intellectuals in other Sanskritic disciplines, *ālaṃkārikās*—from about mid-sixteenth-century onward—adopted a new discursive idiom, composed in novel genres, demonstrated a fresh interest in the history of their tradition, and worked across disciplines at a hitherto unknown rate. Moreover, they often had a clear sense of themselves as breaking new ground and were thus conceived by their colleagues. (441)

It is significant to note that Sanskrit literary theoreticians in the medieval phase often called themselves *navya*s (new intellectuals) to mark their intellectual departure from their predecessors (who they often addressed as *prācīna*s or old-fashioned ones). A case in point is Jagannātha's (17th century) debate on the causes of *rasābhāsa* or the semblance of *rasa* in *kāvya*. According to *prācīna*s, a woman with multiple male partners was not a cause of *rasābhāsa*, provided she was married to them. But for *navya*s like Jagannātha, this was a clear case of *rasābhāsa*. Therefore, he argued that Draupadī's love for her five husbands was a case of *rasābhāsa*. Distancing himself from the old school and calling himself *navya* or new, Jagannātha (1888) declared: "Here Draupadī's love for her husbands is definitely an instance of *rasābhāsa* or semblance of *rasa*. This is the view of the new intelligentsia. But the ancient scholars do not see this as an instance *rasābhāsa*" (*Rasagaṅgādhara*, 101).[12] Similarly, Jagannātha's *Citramīmāṃsā-khaṇḍana* is a repudiation of Appayya Dīkṣita's (16th century) *Citramīmāṃsā* which had previously criticised scholars such as Bhoja (11th century), Mammaṭa (11th

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[11] *iha viśiṣṭau śabdārthau kāvyam| tayośca vaiśiṣṭyam dharmamukhena, vyāpāramukhena, vyaṅgya-mukhena, vā iti trayaḥ pakṣāḥ| ādyeṣpyaalaṅkārato guṇato vā iti dvaividhyam| dvitīyeṣpi bhāṇītivaicitryeṇa bhogakṛttvena vā iti dvavidham| iti pañcaṣu pakṣeṣvādya udbhaṭādibhirāṅgīkṛtaḥ, dvitīyo vāmanena, tritīyo vakroktijīvitakāreṇa, caturtho bhaṭṭanāyakena, pañcama ānandavardhanena|* (Samudrabandha, commentary on *Alaṅkārasarvasva* 4). Samudrabandha, a twelfth century Sanskrit critic from Kerala, is known for his commentary on Ruyyaka's *Alaṅkārasarvasva*.

[12] For a detailed reading of the debate between *navya*s and *prācīna*s, see "Vastutas tu: Methodology and the New School of Sanskrit Poetics" by Bronner and Tubb.

century) Ruyyaka (12 century) and Vidyānātha (13th century). Siddicandra's (16th century) *Kāvyaprakāśa-khaṇḍana* was self-evidently a criticism of Mammaṭa's *Kāvyaprakāśa* which attracted a series of commentaries from the practitioners of literary criticism all over Sanskrit cosmopolis.[13]

Sanskrit Poetics and the Colonial Period

It is interesting to note that even during the colonial period scholars continued to produce treatises in Sanskrit poetics. A few cases in point in this respect include Cirañjīva Bhaṭṭācārya's (18th century) *Kāvyavilāsa*, Hariprasāda Māthura's (18th century) *Kāvyārthaguṃpha*, Garaḷapurī Śāstrī's (19th century) *Kṛṣṇabhūpalīyam*, Caṇḍamārutācārya's *Citramīmāṃsodhara* (19th century), Rama Pisharody's (19th century) *Dhvanyalokalocanākhyāyikā*, *Kuvalayānandavyākhyāyikā* and *Citramīmāṃsāvyākhyāyikā*; Acyutācārya's (19th century) *Sāhityasāra,* and Gulāba Rāva Mahārāja's (19th century) *Kāvyasūtrasaṃhita*.[14]

But towards the turn of the 20th century, Sanskrit *kāvyaśāstra* tradition underwent a serious epistemic rupture. During this phase, the vigour in which new treatises in Sanskrit poetics were produced dwindled. This does not imply that all discussions about Sanskrit poetics came to a close during this period. One should note that scholarship about Sanskrit literature and literary theory continued to exist, but in a different form and shape. During this phase, the scholars of Sanskrit poetics were primarily interested in faithfully recording the intellectual history of this epistemology, as opposed to creating new texts in Sanskrit poetics and carefully criticizing the observations of their predecessors. This does not mean that *pāṇḍitya* in Sanskrit poetics and the production of literary works in Sanskrit disappeared from the scene altogether.[15] What is really significant about this period is the fact that the dynamism of Sanskrit knowledge system to create history drastically diminished. Pollock (2001) underlines this decline: "The two centuries, before European colonialism decisively established itself in the subcontinent around 1750, constitute

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[13] Highlighting the popularity of *Kāvyaprakāś*, Maheśvara (17 C.E.), the author of *Kāvyaprakāśādarś-ana*, says that although a commentary of *Kāvyaprakāśa* is prepared in almost all houses, it still escapes the grasp of intellectuals by its innovative nature (Jhalakikar 39). For a detailed reading of commentarial tradition, see *The Kāvyaprakāśa in the Benares-Centered Network of Sanskrit Learning* by Cummins (2020).

[14] For a review of all the works in Sanskrit poetics ever published in India, see *An Annotated Bibliography of the Alaṃkāraśāstra* by Timothy C. Cahill. A note of warning should be sounded now: though Sanskrit kāvyaśāstra texts continued to get produced in the 19th century, the amount of original thought that went into these texts remains to be determined. Any categorical observation about the originality of these texts in terms of their interaction with the tradition requires a great amount of work. However, one thing we can say for certain is that none of these texts composed during the colonial period could become landmarks in the history of Sanskrit poetics as Jagannātha's Rasagaṅgādhara or Appayya Dīkṣita's Kuvalayānanda could do in the previous epoch.

[15] For detailed reading of modern works in Sanskrit, especially of those from the 19th and 20th century, read Radha Vallabh Tripathi's "Modern Writings in Sanskrit: A Resume." Tripathi notes that "Modern Sanskrit writers made a departure from their age-old literary traditions by the way to looking towards vernaculars and European languages also" (169).

one of the most innovative epochs of Sanskrit systematic thought (in language analysis, logic, hermeneutics, moral-legal philosophy and the rest). . . Concurrently with the spread of European power, however, this dynamism diminished so much that by 1800, the capacity of Sanskrit thought to make history had vanished" (1). One would be surprised to note that well-known scholars of Sanskrit *kāvyaśāstra* in the 20th century such as S.K De, P.V Kane, C.D Narasimhaiah, M. Hiriyanna, Krishna Chaitanya, K Krishnamoorthy, Raghavan and so on did not produce a single new treatise in Sanskrit poetics. This is primarily because by the twentieth century the traditional ontological notions about literature (to which Sanskrit *kāvyaśāstra* greatly conformed) started undergoing a radical transformation, and the style and language of literary works became similar to everyday speech.

In the olden days, literature was a special form of language which could be created only after a careful and dedicated practice in *alaṅkāraśāstra* which treated *kāvya* as a 'special' use of language, distinct from the ordinary form of speech. This was primarily motivated by the hope that understanding the textual elements responsible for the unique nature of *kāvya* will contribute greatly to the creation of good art (Sivarudrappa and Seshagiri Rao 1985 78; Pollock 2003 44). Many Sanskrit literary theoreticians talked in extenso about the role that proper training in poetics played in the production of literary texts. Daṇḍin's observation about the importance of education in *kāvyaśāstra* is a representative case in this regard. According to Daṇḍin (1962), "Just as a blind person cannot distinguish between different colours, so also a poet untrained in poetics cannot differentiate between poetic merits and faults" (*Kāvyādarśa* I.8).[16] He went on to say that a poet, irrespective of whether he is naturally endowed with poetic genius or not, can master the art of poetry simply by learning and practicing *kāvyaśāstra* (I.104).[17] According to Bhāmaha (1998), an aspiring poet should venture into composing *kāvya*s only after achieving mastery over all the *śāstra*s related to *kāvya* (I.10).[18] Vāmana (2000) held that a poet should understand the *guṇa*s and *doṣa*s of *kāvya* by getting educated in *kāvyaśāstra.* Even if a person is naturally endowed with poetic talent, s/he should definitely undergo training in poetics (*Kāvyālaṅkārasūtravṛtti*, I.1.4.5).[19] In his *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* (10 C.E.), Rājaśekhara (2000) emphasised the importance of education in *kāvyaśāstra* by saying that "[t]he prior knowledge of *śāstra* is essential for the appreciation of *kāvya.*" According to him, "Just as nothing is visible in the dark without the aid of light, so also no poet can create [poems]

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[16] *guṇadoṣānaśāstrajñaḥ kathaṃ vibhajate janaḥ|*
kimandhasyādhikāro ̱sti rūpabhedopalabdhiṣu|| (*Kāvyādarśa* I.8).

[17] *na vidyate yadyapi pūrvavāsanā*
guṇānubandhi pratibhānamadbhutam|
śrutena yattena ca vāgupāsitā dhruvam karotyeva kamapyanugraham|| (Ibid. I.104).

[18] *śabdābhidheye vijñāya kṛtvā tadvidupāsanaṃ|*
vilokyānyanibandhāṃśca kāryaḥ kāvyakriyādaraḥ|| (*Kāvyālaṅkāra* I.10).

[19] *sa doṣaguṇālaṅkārahānādānābhyāṃ|*
sa khalvalaṅkāro doṣahānāt guṇālaṅkārādānācca sampādyaḥ kaveḥ || śāstrataste || te doṣaguṇālaṅkār-ahānādāne śāstrādasmāt||
śāstrato hi jñātvā doṣāñjahyāt guṇālaṅkārāṃscādadīta|| (*Kāvyālaṅkārasūtravṛtti* I.1.3-4).

without the knowledge of *śāstra*" (20).[20] All these observations attest to the fact that mastery over *kāvyaśāstra* was as important as *pratibhā* (inborn genius) for a person to become a *kavi*. Familiarity with the technicalities underpinning a literary artefact was also necessary for the readers of Sanskrit *kāvya* to appreciate literary works. This conception remained unchanged even when vernacular literature took shape during the medieval period. The very existence of texts in vernacular poetics— *Līlātilakam* in Malayalam, *Kavirājamārga* in Kannada, or *Kavikulkalptaru* in Brajbhāṣa—attests to this fact.

But, by the mid-twentieth century, a new conception about literariness (which already began in the 19th century under the influence of Western literature) started taking deep root in the Indian subcontinent. This new approach tried to replicate the style and cadence of everyday speech in literary works and consequently stood in contrast to the Formalistic notions about literature to which Sanskrit *kāvyaśāstra* conformed. In other words, the erstwhile conception that one needs to know the lessons of Sanskrit poetics before attempting to compose a literary work altogether disappeared. By this time, the literary world in India was also making a transition from Sanskrit to English and the vernacular languages which mostly embraced and championed this new conception of literature through new genres like novel, short story, autobiography, etc.

It is also significant to note that there was a strong feeling among many vernacular critics that the parameters of Sanskrit criticism were not adequate enough to judge and appreciate the new literary works founded on a new sense of literariness. In connection with Malayalam literature, K.M George (1973) observes,

> In the olden days, literature was essentially in verse and in India the language was Sanskrit. In order to enable the average *sahṛdaya* to enjoy literature, there was a need for commentaries and interpretations. It was therefore natural that external apparatus like rhyme, rhythm and figures of speech was expounded by scholars: this was an accepted aspect of criticism, construed by some as the be-all and end-all of criticism. When works came in *nālikera pāka* (like a coconut), the hard shell had to be broken and the kernel shown. So this kind of criticism developed in Malayalam and it was quite relevant when classics appeared in the *maṇipravāla* style. Even in the modern period when we deal with the poems of Kumaran Asan and Vallathol, though the shell is not hard, a similar analytical approach had some relevance. But criticism had to take a fresh turn, to explore and explain the spirit of the work, which was more elusive than the external aspects. And when fiction came to the force, a completely different approach was called for. The form itself was Western and works were mostly in draksha paka (like grapes) and hence the analysis of the external structure had no relevance. What was necessary was to unravel the spirit of the work and to arouse the reader's dormant sensibility to full participation. Who wants a commentary for Thakazhi's *Chemmeen*, written in the colloquial language? (86)

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[20] *śāstrapūrvakatvāt kāvyānāṃ pūṛva śāstreṣvabhiniviśeta | nahyapravṛtitapradipāste tavārdhasārd-hamadhyakṣyantī*(Rājaśekhara, *Kāvyamīmāṃsa* 20)

Many literary critics in Malayalam vehemently criticized the Sanskritic influence upon drama and sought for the employment of a new set of parameters for the appreciation and analysis of modern literary works which shared the style and sensibilities of everyday speech and life.[21] Satchidanandan in his "Dilemmas of Indian Literary Criticism" further observes, "The new textures of urban living with its contradictory aspects of penury and luxury, the intensification of the alienation among the intelligentsia; the angst of the new awareness of space and time; the growing consumer instinct; the loss of traditional values and the growth of the new post-industrial ethos made possible by new technologies", etc. proved that "traditional critical frameworks are hopelessly inadequate to meet the needs of literary criticism which declared their independence from Sanskrit centuries ago, even while retaining aspects of it that they found useful to their flowering and growth." According to him, "this crisis which is often unacknowledged had already begun with the maturing of Indian languages."

What engendered a radical break off from this conventional notion of literariness was obviously the educational policies of colonial government. An important aspect of colonial education was the introduction of Western literature in schools and universities. The new genres of literature from the West such as the novel, short-story, essay, etc.[22] which stood closer to the style of workday language, played a vital role in replacing the old conception of literariness with a new one.

The erstwhile ontological notion of literature on which Sanskrit *kāvyaśāstra* was founded could never again recapture the terrain of literature. Today literature is no longer an ontological category, as it used to be in the past. It has now completely become a functional category. In other words, according to the modern parameters of literariness, any piece of writing (be it a news item in a daily or a hoarding on wayside or a railway catalogue) can become a literary work, provided the reader reads it poetically. Terry Eagleton (2008) talks about this paradigmatic shift to a functional, reader-oriented view of 'literariness: "There is no 'essence' of literature whatsoever. Any bit of writing may be read non-pragmatically, if that is what reading a text as literature means, just as any writing may be read 'poetically.' If I pore over a railway timetable not to discover a train connection but to stimulate in myself general reflections on the speed and complexity of modern existence, then I might be said to be reading it as literature" (10). This changed perception about literariness also stalled the production of new texts in Sanskrit poetics which traditionally believed in the ontological definition of literariness.

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[21] K.C Anthappayi's *Bhāṣānāṭakapariśodhana* is a case in point. In this work, Anthappayi criticizes the predilection of Malayalam playwrights for Sanskrit dramas. He also opines that critics should do away with the *guṇanirūpaṇam* (analysis of literary merits) of Malayalam dramas based on the parameters of literariness set by Sanskrit poetics.

[22] For a detailed reading of the role that Western literature played in the consolidation of colonial power in India, see Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest Literary Study and British Rule in India*.

A New Direction for Sanskrit Poetics

Despite the general feeling that Sanskrit poetics is outdated to appreciate modern literary works, a group of critics during the 1980s attempted to apply Sanskrit *kāvyaśāstra* to evaluate the merit of modern literary works from India. This shift which can be labelled a 'revivalist trend' was spearheaded by Indian literary theoreticians such as K. Krishnamoorthy, Krishna Rayan, Ayyappa Paniker, C.D Narasimhayya, and so on. This tendency in the first instance was the result of a strong desire to decolonize Western critical sensibilities and to "reconstitute a sense of Indianness of the texts considered, and assess their virtue by the standards and assumptions of indigenous aesthetics (Bill Ashcroft, et al. 173). Bill Ashcroft (2002), et al. talk about this tendency in literary criticism in their *Empire Writes Back*,

> Indian scholars and critics have been locked in debate as to how far these traditions can be adapted to the needs of modern criticism for Indian literature. The debate centres on whether or not the 'highly sophisticated theories' propounded by the Sanskrit 'schoolmen' can be, or, indeed, ever were 'applied in the evaluation of works of art' (Krishnamoorthy 1984) and, more specifically, whether the terms of this tradition: *rasa, dhvani, alaṅkāra*, etc., are more relevant and suitable than imported terms to the description of contemporary literatures in the Indian vernacular languages and, to a lesser extent, to Indian literatures in English. (116)

The seminal event which inaugurated this movement was a seminar held at the Literary Criterion Centre at Dhvanyāloka in Mysore, on the theme of 'the formulation of a Common Poetics for Indian Literature Today.' The seminar paid considerable attention to the practical use of Sanskrit poetics as a common critical framework to effectively understand and judge the literary merit of Indian literary texts in modern times. The conference concluded that the *rasa-dhvani* approach, being the most dominant critical system in the Indian literary context, could be used as a common critical framework to evaluate literary texts of Indian origin.

The book *The Burning Bush* (1988), edited by Krishna Rayan, was an immediate output of this thought. This book analyses seventeen literary works from seventeen different Indian languages through the lens of *rasa-dhvani* approach in order to understand the practical applicability of these theoretical positions in modern criticism. The blurb of the book says,

> With literature in the various Indian languages interacting more vigorously today than ever before, it has become all-important that critical practice in them shares a common theoretical framework, so that the assumptions, analytical tools, and evaluative criteria used are roughly uniform. Obviously, there are major advantages in evolving this framework from existing Indian theory rather than sources elsewhere. The most widely dominant Indian critical system is the Rasa-dhvani theory formulated in the 9th century. But before adopting it, it must be revised in the light of other Indian and Western

theories, and it must also be tested on texts in Indian Languages. It is this latter that Krishna Rayan's book [*The Burning Bush*] seeks to do.

Krishna Rayan's "*Rasa-Dhvani* and Present-day Literary Theory and Criticism"; Ayyappa Paniker's "The Renovation of Rasa-theory"; Krishnamoorthy's "The Relevance of Rasa Theory to Modern Literature"; R.B Patankar's "Does the Rasa Theory Have Modern Relevance?"; Umashankar Joshi's "The Relevance of Sanskrit Poetics to Contemporary Practical Criticism," etc. are some of the major works in this direction.

Though these two approaches to Sanskrit poetics, namely the Intellectual historiography and revivalist trend, were crucial in introducing modern readers to the complexities of Sanskrit literary science, they were caught up in ontological certitude.[23] In other words, neither of these two directions attempted to study these theoretical positions from a standpoint other than that of literary theory. Although it is important to record how classical knowledge systems were canonically understood and practiced, it is also significant to re-read and reinterpret these theoretical positions from newer perspectives. Each time we re-interpret or re-read these theoretical frameworks from a new position, we are in fact creating new knowledge about them.

In other words, we necessarily need to come out of our fetish for the frameworks of canonical reading with which we have so far been dealing with these theories. To borrow a Barthian terminology, we need to treat Sanskrit poetics as a 'Text,' instead of a 'work.' According to Barthes, while the idea of 'work' imposes a permanent signification and a specific generic label on a discourse, the concept of 'Text' does not limit a discourse to any permanent categorization or any fixed order of signification. Barthes (1986) notes,

> The Text is plural. Which is not simply to say that it has several meanings, but that it accomplishes the very plural of meaning: an *irreducible* (and not merely an acceptable) plural. The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination. The plural of the Text depends, that is, not on the ambiguity of its contents but on what might be called the *stereographic plurality* of its weave of signifiers . ("From Work to Text" 159)

We should also note that 'work' and 'Text' are not two separate entities. It is our attitudinal difference that makes a certain discourse either a 'work' or a 'Text.' If we attribute a definite meaning and a generic label to a discourse, then we are considering it as a 'work,' whereas if we hold that a discourse can have multiple meanings and generic labels, then we are treating it as a 'Text.' It is to mark this radical attitudinal shift from the idea of monolithic signification to multiplicity of signification that Barthes employs the term 'Text.' To open up Sanskrit poetics to newer possibilities of reading, we necessarily need to treat this epistemology as a 'Text.'

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[23] Ontological certitude is the act of reducing the identity of an entity to a set of fixed assumptions.

Just as a poem or a drama or an article can be interpreted from multiple perspectives, so also the texts that constitute Sanskrit poetics can be revisited from a variety of vantage points. I do not mean to propose that all kinds of readings that a reader or a researcher makes about this epistemology should be considered valid. Only those reading that are backed by proper textual evidence should be taken into account in this process. Hence, we should, as Derrida (1997) has famously put it, 'play' with these texts. The Derridian idea of 'play' is always a reader-oriented position in the sense that it gives freedom to readers to deal with a text without aiming at any teleological point of completion or permanently adhering to any specific framework of reading. The idea of 'play,' as Derrida conceives it, aims to explore a text's potential to produce an infinite number of significations.

That said, I do not mean to propose that the existing approaches to Sanskrit poetics—Intellectual historiography and revivalist trend—are invalid and one should always stay away from understanding these texts in the canonical way they have been practiced and understood. Along with this praxis, we also need an 'interventionist historiography of ideas' which will critically examine these theoretical positions from different vantage points thereby preventing them from becoming static categories. Each new reading of a text dislodges it from our taken-for-granted conceptions about it and leads us to the production of new knowledge about/from that text. This is the only way in which we can make sure the live continuum of the existing frameworks of ideas. Each time we deconstruct or 'play' with a text, we are in fact creating new knowledge about that text. An approach of this sort has often given a new lease of life to many philosophical positions that were considered exhausted and out-dated. A case in point is Nicholas Royle's re-interpretation of Freud in *The Uncanny*. In *The Uncanny*, Royle (2003) gives "a series of close-readings of different aspects of the topic" [the uncanny] (Royle: vii), thereby breaking free of the canonical reading prescribed for the understanding of the idea of uncanny. The following section of the paper is an exemplification of this methodological praxix vis-à-vis Ānandavardhana's famous *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani*.

Dhvani and Play

In Sanskrit poetics, Ānandavardhana is the first literary theoretician to approach the idea of *dhvani* or poetic suggestion systematically. Ānanda divides the whole realm of poetic suggestion into two, namely *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani* (*dhvani* where the literal meaning is not intended) and *vivakṣitānya-paravācya dhvani* (*dhvani* where the literal meaning is understood in a different way). While *vivakṣitānyaparavācya* deals with aesthetic emotion and stylistic aspects, *avivakṣitavācya dhvani* deals with semantic aspects. The conventional notion about *dhvani* is that it is an essential formal element for a piece of writing to be called a *kāvya*. Therefore, Ānanda calls *dhvani* the soul of literature. But in my analysis of *dhvani*, I would like to take a non-canonical approach towards the idea of *avivakṣita-vācya -dhvani* by calling it a mechanism which resists the rigid, conventional relationship between signifier and signified. Here I argue that *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani*, as conceptualized by

Ānandavardhana, opens up a signifier to new significations that are not conventionally associated with it. In this process, I also argue by extension, that *avivakṣita-vācya* becomes a liberating experience for the author, reader and the sign.

Convention exists everywhere and even the language we speak is ultimately a product of it. As far as the realm of language is concerned, convention prevails in the form of lexicon, grammar, style, orthography, etc. In any language, convention is a necessary evil. It is necessary in the sense that it is important for the production of meaning. It is an evil in that it curbs one's freedom to use the language in whatever ways one wants. For example, if one says 'he study hard before his exam' or 'you sings well', s/he will be considered wrong in their usage of English, as it is directly at war with the conventions of the English language. The same holds true for the relation between the signifier (the word that represents a concept) and the signified (the concept represented by the signifier). As far as the relation between the signifier and signified is concerned, convention imposes a semantic ambit upon a signifier. What I mean by semantic ambit is the range of significations that a particular signifier is allowed to signify. Because of this semantic ambit, a signifier is not allowed to designate significations that are outside the limit of the semantic ambit. For example, the word 'cat' cannot normally represent the idea 'rat' or 'bat' or 'tree.' This semantic ambit not only structures the signifier, it also forces the language user, be it a reader or a listener or a speaker or an author, to approach a signifier in a specific fashion. In other words, conventional semantic ambit is a restrictive force upon the language user. Now let us see how *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani* transcends the conventional semantic ambit imposed upon a signifier so as to liberate the position of the reader/listener and the writer/speaker.

According to Ānandavardhana (1990), *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani* is that sort of *dhvani* where a signifier abandons its primary meaning to suggest a new meaning that is not conventionally associated with it. To deterritorialize or transcend the semantic ambit, *avivakṣita-vācya* banks upon secondary usages like metaphor and metonymy (*Dhvanyāloka* 3.33 i *A*).[24] An example of *avivakṣita-vācya* given by Ānandavardhana in *Dhvanyāloka* will further show us how this particular form of *dhvani* transcends the conventional semantic ambit. This is one of the numerous examples of *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani* that Ānanda gives.: "The sky filled with drunken clouds (*mattamekhaṃ gaganaṃ*)."[25] We know that the conventional meaning of the word 'drunken' is to be in a state of intoxication and the word 'drunken' is always associated with a sentient entity. In other words, only a sentient creature can get drunk. But here in the given context, the word 'drunken' is associated with a non-sentient entity which is a 'cloud.' So, the primary meaning of the word 'drunken' gets blocked here and the focus gets shifted to a quality conventionally associated with a drunkard, i.e. to wander around aimlessly. So, the word 'drunken' deterritorialize its semantic ambit to incorporate a new meaning that is not conventionally associated with it.

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[24] *vyañjakatvam hi kvacit vācakatvāśrayeṇa vyavatiṣṭhate| yathā vivakṣitānyaparavācye dhvanau| kvacittu guṇavṛttyāśrayeṇa| yathā avivakṣitānyaparavācye dhvanau| tadubhayāśrayatvapratipādanāyaiva ca dhvaneḥ prathamataraṃ dvau prabhedāvupanyastau.* (Ibid., p. 427).

[25] See the complete verse from *Dhvanyāloka. gaganaṃ ca mattamekhaṃ dhārālulitarjunāni ca vanāni | nirahaṅkāramṛgāṅkā haranti nīlā api niśāḥ ॥* (273).

Now a question may arise—since secondary usages can also be part of linguistic convention, as in the case of dead metaphors like 'leg of a table, etc.' how can *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani* ensure that it always pushes a signifier beyond the conventional meaning? To capacitate a signifier to transcend the conventional semantic ambit, Ānandavardhana eschews from the domain of *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani* all the secondary usages that have become part of the existing linguistic convention. According to Ānanda, a secondary usage can become an instance of *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani*, only if it is outside the purview of the existing linguistic convention. Ānanda opines, "To this we reply that here also there is no fault; because while the type of suggestion where the expressed meaning is unintended [*avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani*] relies on the path of secondary usage, it is not itself secondary usage. Secondary usage can also be found [in instances that are entirely] without suggestiveness" (3.33 j *A*).[26] For instance, the expression 'leg of a table' is technically a secondary usage because it is not possible for a table to have legs. But based on the function that a leg performs, the tool which shores up a table-top is called a leg. Technically it is a secondary usage, but it cannot become an instance of *dhvani* because 'leg of a table' is a dead metaphor—a secondary usage that has become part of the linguistic convention. So only those secondary usages, which are novel and innovative and are not part of the existing linguistic convention, can become a *dhvani*. [27] Ānandavardhana opines, "A denotative power is the very self of each word, for the word is never known without it. But suggestiveness is not bound to the word, but accidental, for our apprehension of it is conditioned by context, etc. and it is not apprehended in the absence of those conditions" (3.33 l *A*).[28] This impermanence of the boundaries of semantic ambit prevents *avivakśita-vācya-dhvani* from becoming another convention. In this mechanism, the author is forced to be more creative, in the sense that he is endowed with the task of pushing a signifier beyond the borders of its conventional semantic ambit. Ānanda notes that the meaning of a word in *avivakśita-vācya-dhvani* "is beyond the range of those who have taken pains only on the definitions of words and who have paid no attention to the poetic meaning, just as the character of the notes (*svara*s) and *śruti*s, etc. is beyond the range of those who know the definitions of music but are not good poet" (1.7 *K*). It goes without saying that a conventional semantic ambit so rigid that the author/speaker of a particular language cannot transcend the pre-given territory of signification. In the provisional semantic ambit created by *dhvani*, the speaker or the author can transcend the rigid boundaries traditionally imposed on a signifier by convention.

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[26] *ayamapi na doṣaḥ| yasmāt avivakṣitavācyo dhvaniḥ guṇavṛttimārgāśrayoˢpi bhavati, na tu guṇavṛttirūpa eva| guṇavṛttiriḥ vyañjakatvaśūnyāpi dṛśyate|* (432).

[27] Ānandavardhana cites a lot of examples where dhvani does not occur even in the presence of gauṇavṛtti (secondary usage). A case in point is the word *lāvaṇya*. Ānanda observes, "Words such as lāvaṇya, which are used idiomatically in a sense other than their proper (etymological) sense, are never instances of dhvani" (184). *rūḍhā ye viṣayeˢnyatra śabdāḥ svaviṣayādapi | lāvaṇyādyāḥ prayuktāste na bhavanti padam dhvaneḥ ||* (Ibid., p. 147).

[28] *ata eva vācakatvāttasya viśeṣ vācakatvam hi śabdaviśeṣasya niyata ātmā, vyulpattikālādārabhya tadavinābhāvena tasya prasiddhatvāt | sa tvaniyataḥ aupādhikatvāt | prakaraṇādyavacchedena tasya pratīteḥ itarathā tvaprātīteḥ |*(436-437)

It is also important to note that Ānanda gives freedom to the reader/listener to experiment with the semantic ambit in their own stead. Ānanda observes that even if the author/speaker does not intend *dhvani* in his/her speech, the reader has the freedom to deterritorialize the semantic ambit. According to Ānanda, "Rather, it is a suggested element in any of the three forms, [*vastu*, *alaṅkāra* or *rasa*], *whether in the form speaker's intention or not*, if it is suggested as the final sentence meaning, that justifies the term *dhvani*, as we said in defining *dhvani* in terms of the aforesaid types of suggestiveness" (3.33 m *A*).[29] Ingalls, the translator of Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka*, further explains the words of Ānanda. Ingalls notes, "The *vyaṅgya* need not be intended by the speaker. A naive girl, to give an example not seldom used in Sanskrit poetry, may make a suggestion of which she is quite unaware and which she is so far from intending that she would avoid if she were" (n.2 on 3.33 m *A*).

This non-canonical analysis of *dhvani* that I have shown now generates new knowledge and perception about Ānandavardhana's concept of *avivakṣita-vācya-dhvani*. Similarly, one can also approach other theoretical positions from new standpoints hitherto untried. This approach can certainly take us beyond our blinkered conceptions about ancient knowledge systems. As I pointed out at the outset of this essay, it is important to constantly question and critically approach knowledge systems to ensure their continuum in the future. A strong sense of debate and resistance to uncritical reverence are what we need today.

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[29] *kintu tadeva kevalam aparimitaviṣayasya dhvanivyavahārasya na prayodanakam avyāpakatvāt | tathā darśitabhedatrayarūpam tālparyeṇa dyotyamānam abhiprāyarūpam anabhiprāyarūpam ca sarvameva dhvanivyavahārasya prayojakamiti yathoktavyañjakatvaviśeṣedhvanilakṣaṇe nātivyāptiḥ na cāvyāptiḥ.* (443).

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