



# AN INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN LITERARY THEORY

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**INTENDED AUDIENCE :** B.A and M.A students of English literature. At present, many universities in India have incorporated Indian literary theory in their syllabus. Some of the major universities in India that offer courses on Indian poetics include JNU, Delhi University, Jadavpur University, EFLU, Central University of Haryana, Kerala University, Calicut University, Madras University, etc.

## COURSE OUTLINE :

Poetics is the theory of literary forms and devices, and the term is familiar to us mainly through the Greek philosopher Aristotle's work of the same name. Aristotle's Poetics is believed to be an incomplete treatise and the work that we have with us today is a systematic attempt to define only one genre, namely the art of tragedy. The treatise explores the various aspects of the genre, providing answers to what goes into the making of a tragedy and how it evokes the right kind of aesthetic response in a spectator. This attempt to systematize the study of poetry or all forms of literary composition is not specific to Greek or western literature but can be found in all literatures worthy of the name. In the Indian literary history, the term poetics in its broadest sense was concerned with two domains of art, namely nāṭya (play which blended drama, music, and dance) and kāvyā (poetry and other forms of literary composition). The factors that distinguished nāṭya from kāvyā in terms of form as well as content were so discernible that Sanskrit poetics virtually got bifurcated into two streams, namely nāṭyaśāstra and kāvyāśāstra. The nāṭyaśāstra tradition of poetics, as the term denotes, focused primarily on nāṭya or performance of plays on stage with the accompaniment of dance and music; these aspects were technically termed in Sanskrit as āṅgika (pertaining to gestures) vācika (verbal elements) āhārya (make-up and dress) and sāttvika abhinaya (representation of emotions). Kāvyaśāstra, on the other hand, was exclusively concerned with the ontology of kāvyā (poetry and literary prose). The proposed course aims to introduce the students to the eight major schools in Indian aesthetics which functioned as the foundation of these two streams of poetics, such as rasa, dhvani, vakrokti, aucitya, alaṅkāra, anumāna, guṇa and doṣa.

## ABOUT INSTRUCTOR :

Prof. Sreenath V.S is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IISER Bhopal. His areas of interest include Literary Theory (both Western and Eastern), Comparative Aesthetics, and South Asian Studies. He has published articles in journals such as EPW, Indian Literature (Sahitya Akademi), Journal of Indian Philosophy (Springer), South Asian Review (Taylor and Francis). His book An Introduction to Indian Aesthetics: History, Theory, and Theoreticians (co-authored with Prof. Mini Chandran) was published by Bloomsbury India in 2021. He is the recipient of the Meenakshi Mukherjee Memorial Prize 2022, awarded by Indian Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies.

## COURSE PLAN :

**Week 1:** Literature before theory

**Week 2:** An Overview of Sanskrit Literary Theory

**Week 3:** Theory of Rasa

**Week 4:** Theory of Alaṅkāra

**Week 5:** Theory of Dhvani

**Week 6:** Theories of Riti, Guna and Doṣa

**Week 7:** Theory of Aucitya

**Week 8:** Theory of Vakrokti