



Research article

Towards a Problematic Canon: Indian Poetry Anthologies and the Construction of Modernism

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Abstract

The history of modern Indian poetry in English as evidenced in anthologies is riddled with many modernist tendencies, both linguistic and political. Within anthologies, poetry becomes not merely literary and artistic pieces, but agents in a larger narrative. To establish an argument for Indian poetic modernism (post-1950) in anthologies requires an inquiry into the processes in which editors, through the *paratextual* matters, (titles, prefaces, introductory notes, headnotes, endnotes etc.) help create a persuasiveness about newness or modernity. With more than 200 Indian poetry anthologies published since 1950, there is also the problem of selecting an authoritative volume that reflects the national canon. By juxtaposing Gérard Genette's (1991) paratextual theory and Ramond Williams's (1977) epochal theory of classifying the *dominant*, *residual*, and *emergent* cultural tendencies, this paper attempts to understand poetry anthologies as commodities and cultural vehicles constantly striving for dominance. An argument is made that any canon – modernist or otherwise – is a sub-product of this cultural and material struggle. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to provide an alternate understanding of the arrival of modern Indian English poetry canon as a form of construction that occurs within the pages of anthologies.

Keywords: Anthology, Indian English poetry, Modernism, Archives, Canon

Anthologies as Archives

There has never been a moment in English historical thinking that acknowledges the ontological significance of the anthology and the dual purpose it serves as both literary criticism and literary

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history (Sharan, 2004). It may be argued that this fluid nature of the anthology has facilitated the consolidation and propagation of significant thinking throughout the 20th century. The anthology's content, based on editing, may be disparate, stratified, and even impressionistic, but in each of these cases, it fundamentally remains an epistemological unit. It is upon this premise that this paper attempts to establish the significant role anthologies have played in the solidification of Indian poetic modernism in the wider literary landscape.

In the West, experimentation with modernity and the search for newer styles of expression began as early as the middle of the 19th century when artists and writers started producing works that challenged bourgeois values. The publication of Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*) in 1857 and the exhibition of Édouard Manet's painting *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (*The Luncheon on the Grass*) in 1863 were a form of cultural diagnosis. Both events are now taken as watershed moments of the modernist movement (Biome, 2007, pp. 676-677). Arguably, modernism began when these artists began "reflecting life in their time", not seeing themselves as creators, but also as serious cultural critics (Greenberg, n.d.). Modernism took a more concrete shape after World War I when the post-war literary world erupted with a rebellious effort to replace the old status quo. Poets such as Ezra Pound, W.H. Auden, and Robert Graves were establishing novel ways of expressing both the form and language of the new poetry. By the time T.S. Eliot's famously erudite collection *Prufrock and Other Observations* was published in 1917, literary modernism had taken concrete shape in the West (Tate, 1940, p. 567). The great irony of the modernist movement in the West, however, is that its whole existence is hinged on the past. Greenberg argues that modernism "didn't make its entrance by breaking with the past" but instead got its standards "from the past, that is, the best of the past." Even Ezra Pound's vague and atmospheric modernist slogan "Make It New!" by which he abided as a professional obligation has now been ascertained as a recycling of an anecdote found in the *Da Xue* – the first of the four Confucian moral philosophy books (North, 2013).

What officially announced poetic modernism as an event were not the individual poems that were written and published, but the consolidation of these poems which took place within the pages of anthologies. We can think of W. B. Yeats' *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* and Michael Roberts' *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* which both came out in 1936 and which helped consolidate the modernist verse of the West. In short, modernism was not a matter of individual talent, but a task of archiving dominant tendencies. Chris Baldick (2004) in his book *The Modern Movement* terms the period between 1910 to 1940 as "a great age of anthologies," as it was during this period that new poetry was being anthologized for the first time (p. 109). The Hogarth Press, which Virginia and Leonard Woolf began in 1917 played a key role by publishing anthologies of modernist poets. Their anthology *New Signatures* (1932) introduced the poetry of a new generation of poets to the public's attention. Similarly, around the same time, Ezra Pound recognizing the power of this medium also edited four anthologies during this period – *Des Imagistes* (1914), *Catholic Anthology* (1915), *Profile* (1932), and *Active Anthology* (1933).

20th-century career anthologists Louis Untermeyer and Harriet Monroe also shepherded the common readers through their lengthy prefatory matters. They introduced authorial biographies and illuminating critical evaluations of poems in their anthologies – an element that has become a common anthology feature since. According to author John G. Nichols (2006), Untermeyer and Monroe "circulated an image of modernist verse as an unequivocally established element of a

literary canon" (p. 171). The editorial direction in which Monroe and Untermeyer took the anthology medium may only be theorized in terms of what Barbara Brookes and James Dunk (2018) argued concerning archives as "calcified" writings maintained to "create order and control" (p. 282), in conjunction with Marjorie Perloff's argument that modern anthologies are a form of "corporatization of information" (as cited in Nichols, 2006, p. 171). The astute and individualistic introductions to the poems in many 20th-century anthologies erased the need for readers to search for contexts. Instead, the poems are perceived and understood by the readers within the contexts the editor creates for them.

The Construction of Indian Poetic Modernism

On the other spectrum of the emerging literary world(s) exists India. The origins of modernist thinking in India is a relatively complex and delicate issue to locate compared to how it began in the West. Poet Syed Amanuddin in his 1976 essay "Modernism in Indian Poetry in English" argues the impracticality of adopting Western conditions in India to understand modernism in Indian poetry (p. 2). For Amanuddin, the arrival of *new poetry* was an act of reacting to the poetry of "romantic excesses, blurred experience and abstractions, and demanding from poets a language of vitality and concrete experience" (p. 7). Poets who actively began writing poetry after the "event" of India's independence were struggling with a new kind of conflict – the conflict of cultural rootedness and cultural ambivalence against the influence of Western thinking.

The beginnings of modernism have always been an arbitrary and progressive project for Indian writing in English. Particularly for Indian poetry, no singular poem emerged which caused a modernist stir. Instead, the tasks of announcing modernism have been undertaken by anthologies that were published throughout the 20th century (albeit with various degrees of success). Many anthologies have made numerous attempts to enclose modernism within their pages and they may be broadly understood as two main strains: the first strain which emphasizes *chronology* and confines modernism within certain hard boundaries, and the second strain which brackets modernism with *conceptual* boundaries.

The post-1950 anthologies from well-known poets/editors including Pritish Nandy's *Indian Poetry in English 1947-1972* (1972), K.N. Daruwalla's *Two Decades of Indian Poetry 1960-1980* (1980), Vilas Sarang's *Indian English Poetry Since 1950: An Anthology* (1990), and more recently *The Harper Collins Book of English Poetry 1950-2010* (2012) edited by Sudeep Sen, have all made respective attempts to define Indian poetic modernity. This type of anthology which is driven by a chronological demarcation of poetry to announce "newness" creates what author Leonard Diepeveen (2004) calls the "anxiety about claiming temporal boundaries" (p. 138). Such anthologies end up becoming easy and satisfactory archives of poetry but they do not define what makes them inherently modern.

In his book *Is Literary History Possible?*, David Perkins (1992) proposes that "contrast" is often demanded by any literary narrative; i.e. schematics of the previous forms to bring the present into focus (p. 36). Diepeveen's arguments complement Perkins' reasoning too – that "the period that is capable of being schematized is also inevitably seen as the antagonist in the narrative" (p. 145). The problem(s) of defining modernism thus become continually tied to the past. The question: modern as opposed to what? becomes central to any attempt at defining modernism. Ironically,

modernism is predicated upon unifying the past in an attempt to bring the present into sufficient focus.

This investigative research concerning anthologies and the construction of modernism has led to the identification of four closely connected systems that assist in the construction of specific literary identities and literary cultures. In our case, a strong argument may be made by examining Indian poetry anthologies and the question of modernism as a *process* – not just predicated upon the schematized “old writing” versus the modern “new writing” – but as a complex, nuanced, and holistic four-pronged system comprising of the following:

1. The Text
2. The Paratext
3. Production
4. Consolidation

Firstly, Indian poetic modernity cannot be understood in its totality by analyzing only text(s) – in our case, poems. Such an analysis is limiting and becomes an isolated exercise of deconstructing poems. Secondly, such investigations ultimately lead to the examination of two fundamental elements: language and poetic devices. Within the pages of anthologies, modernity, as a concept, is constructed through an incisive blend of both the *text* and the *paratext*. The constituent elements of the poem(s) – language, poetic devices, metaphors, and images all become a part of the *text*. On the other hand, the secondary materials that surround the *text* including the title of the anthology, introductions, prefaces, headnotes, editorial commentaries, etc. constitute the *paratext*. Thus it becomes a challenging task for the editor to produce a formative combination of both *text* and *paratext* to make an anthology a sound conceptual unit.

The third system is the culture and machinery of production, which in our case is the commodification of the anthology. The publication of a decently edited “modern” anthology with the right *text* and *paratext* does not guarantee its survival in the long run. What guarantees the survival of the anthology is the ability to sustain production and distribution in various public and academic channels – a process that ultimately translates into cultural influence. The fourth and final system concerns the consolidation of specific literary culture which occurs within the pages of anthologies. Through reviews, reader responses, and criticisms poetry anthologies often become participants in the anthology wars. This war determines the survival of a *dominant* variety, which ultimately results in the formation of literary canons.

These complex systems and their coordinated operation are discussed in detail in the subsequent sections.

1. The Text

The discourse concerning the origins of modernity in Indian poetry, for the large part, remains transfixed with the politics of language. The language question has been a recurring point of entry for anthologies that were published throughout the 20th century and continue to exist in the 21st-century anthologies. The fairly recent Jeet Thayil edited anthology *60 Indian Poets* (2008) opens with an essay titled “One Language, Separated by the Sea” where he goes back to India’s contentious relationship with the English language. To argue his case, Thayil makes a succinct

point by bringing in a famous icon, M.K. Gandhi, who in his youth famously sailed for England to become a gentleman and a barrister. He writes:

Gandhi's experiment with gentlemanliness was only partly successful. He gave up English clothes, but he kept the language. When he wrote in English, he wrote well enough, though it was never an easy relationship: he could not help but see the language as a vestigial implement of India's colonial legacy. This suspicion by association persists among many Indians today. (Thayil, 2008, xi)

Concerning the emergent shifts in the new literature of the world, Pascale Casanova makes a strong argument in her seminal work *The World Republic of Letters* (2004), where she argues that this new literary practice is connected to a "new idea of language" and its relationship to its community of speakers (cited in Mufti, 2010, p. 459). What materialized after India's Independence was the emergence of a *new* idea of language and the emergence of a *new* relationship with the language. The arrival of *new* poetic thinking in Indian poetry occurred only when the poets were able to change their relationship with the language. This is evident in the poetic language(s) of Ezekiel, Moraes, Kolatkar, etc. The "modern verse" became possible when these poets started utilizing the English language as a completely liberated tool without any sentimental baggage, freed from tradition, freed from formalism, and freed from the need to "write back" to the West, or the Past.

A few significant events fueled the impetus of this new kind of thinking in Indian poetry in English. These events (henceforth referred to as *catalysts*) also helped stabilize the Indian modernist identity, and the relationship of the Indian poets, the critics, and the readers' relationship with the language.

1.1 First Catalyst (1957)

The first catalyst is perhaps the recognition of English as one of the national languages by the Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters, and the support it gave the *new poetry* through its English language journal *Indian Literature* (estd. 1957). It helped change the way English was perceived as a poetic language (King, 2004, p. 19). It gave validity to literary works and shifted the critical gaze from the language. Through Sahitya Akademi's intervention, English transformed from a foreign language into an integrated part of the national literary identity.

1.2 Second Catalyst (1962)

The second catalyst happened when American poet of the Beat Generation, Allen Ginsberg accused the Bombay Poets of still writing derivative verse during his visit to India in 1962. Ginsberg who read his poems along with Peter Orlovsky at Nissim Ezekiel's residence is recorded to have implicated the Indian poetic language for being born of an idiom "too polite and genteel" (as cited in Kulshrestha, 1980, p. 9). This stirred a "mood of rebellion" among the Indian poets of the day which resulted in the creation of multiple radical *little magazines* throughout the 60s including *Bombay Duck* (1964), *Dionysius* (1965), and *Blunt* (1967-68) all of which were either boycotted by college authorities or confiscated by the police because of their allegedly obscene content (King, 2004, pp. 22-23).

1.3 Third Catalyst (1963)

The third driving force was Budhadeva Bose's controversial entry in *The Concise Encyclopedia of English and American Poets and Poetry* (1963) where he accused "Indo-Anglian" poetry of being "a blind alley, lined with curio shops, leading nowhere" (pp. 177-178). Bose's allegation fueled P. Lal to initiate a series of correspondence with several Indian-English writers inviting them to respond to Bose's charges (Roy, n.d.). The replies along with the poetic works of the respondents became the foundation of his 1969 poetry anthology *Modern Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology and A Credo* published by Writers Workshop, Calcutta.

1.4 Fourth Catalyst (1980)

Finally, just like The Sahitya Academy's authorial entry into the Indian literary space, the establishment of SCILET (Study Centre for Indian Literature in English and Translation) in the early 1980s (at American College, Tamil Nadu) became a watershed moment for Indian literature in English. Through its English medium journals and other academic activities, it introduced a venue for the much-needed critical dialogue around Indian writing in English which had been missing. Through their efforts, what followed was also the institutionalization of Indian writing in English within the school and college curriculum for literature classes during the 1980s and 1990s. SCILET also brought to the discourse a sense of collective national pride for the language.

What we find in Indian poetry anthologies are poems (or *texts*) that are riding on the shoulders of these language discourses. What we consider *new poetry* or *modern poetry* are fundamentally poetry that has established a new relationship with the language. Anthologies, by drawing attention to these new developments, can consolidate and solidify a narrative. However, if "modern" poems were to be read in isolation, they would not inherently reveal or proclaim anything concerning a collective *modernist* identity. This is where the limitation of the *text(s)* truly begins. They exist in "an undecided zone" (Genette & Maclean, 1991, p. 261). Poems in an anthology often reveal individual traits and features and require secondary elements/frameworks to be understood in a contextualized environment, otherwise, they often end up becoming "hollow rhetoric" (Davis, 2013, p. viii). This is where the need for the *paratext* is born.

2. The Paratext

Within the pages of the post-1950 poetry anthologies, the *paratextual* matters: prefaces, introductory notes, headnotes, endnotes, etc. became more elaborate in an attempt by the editors to explain and justify their selection, and to offer the readers an anchor. Philip Davis, author of the Oxford Literary Agenda book *Reading and the Reader* (2013), calls it the "holding ground", a place where readers can centre themselves and their experience while reading the literature (p. x). However, on a more substantial level, it is the French structuralist Gérard Genette who tackles this nuanced relationship between the *text* and the *paratext* in his seminal work *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997). In his "Introduction to the *Paratext*" he writes:

The literary work consists, exhaustively or essentially, of a text, that is to say (a very minimal definition) in a more or less lengthy sequence of verbal utterances more or less containing meaning. But this text rarely appears in its naked state, without the reinforcement and accompaniment of a certain number of productions, themselves verbal or not, like an author's name, a title, a preface, and illustrations. One does not always know if one should

consider that they belong to the text or not, but in any case they surround it and prolong it, precisely to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb, but also in its strongest meaning: to *make it present*, to assure its presence in the world, its "reception" and its consumption, in the form, nowadays at least, of a book. (p. 261)

Taking a cue from French essayist Philippe Lejeune's comment that it is "the fringe of the printed text which, in reality, controls the whole reading" (as cited in Genette & Maclean, 1991, p. 261). Genette continues:

This fringe, in effect, always bearer of an authorial commentary either more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes, between the text and what lies outside it, a zone not just of transition, but of transaction; the privileged site of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an action on the public in the service, well or badly understood and accomplished, of a better reception of the text and a more pertinent reading—more pertinent, naturally, in the eyes of the author and his allies. It would be an understatement to say that we will return to this action: everything that follows will deal only with this action, its means, its modes, and its effects. To indicate what is at stake here with the help of a single example, an innocent question should suffice; reduced to its text alone and without the help of any instructions for use, how would we read Joyce's *Ulysses* if it were not called *Ulysses*? (pp. 261-262)

What we find in the Indian poetry anthologies that emerged post-1950 is the conversion of the *paratextual* matters into sites of "pragmatics and of a strategy". The 1959 anthology *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry* edited by P.Lal and K.R. Rao may be considered as the earliest collection of modern Indian poetry. The importance of the anthology resides in Lal's inclusion of the first manifesto of the Indian modernist movement in his "Introduction" delineating the principles of "language, method, and intention" (p. vi). They are summarized as follows:

- 1) It is necessary to choose a "vital language" to write poetry;
- 2) Poetry must be written in "concrete terms with concrete experience";
- 3) A poet must be honest in his writing and his poetry "free from propaganda";
- 4) Experimentation in poetry is encouraged as long as it does not create "excessive obscurity";
- 5) All manner of imitation are strictly condemned;
- 6) The phase of Indo-Anglian romanticism has ended with Sarojini Naidu;
- 7) Poets require patronage from benevolent industrialist;
- 8) It is important to safeguard the private voice of the poet and utilize the lyric form as it is "best suited for a capsule-minded public." (Lal & Rao, 1959, p. vi-vii).

In 1969 when Lal published his second edited anthology *Modern Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology and A Credo* through Writers Workshop, he was familiar with the potential of the *paratextual* space within the anthology. He utilized the introductory section again to a) respond to Buddhadeva Bose's 1963 accusations of Indian poetry in English being a "blind alley leading nowhere", and b) to revolt against the inherited tradition of English poetry. As an ambitious anthology containing the poems of one hundred and thirty-two poets, and running close to six hundred pages, Lal's editorial effort juggled between the two *paratextual* tasks of simultaneously defending *new poetry* while revolting against the *old*.

In our retrospective understanding, many poets who were first included in Lal's 1969 anthology have entered into the pantheon of canonized modern Indian poets. His anthology not only

challenged many pre-existing biases against Indo-Anglian poetry in general but also helped set a strong foundation for modern Indian thought. Poets who were anthologized in his volume including Vikram Seth, Kamala Das, Agha Shahid Ali, and Nissim Ezekiel have since become venerated voices of Indian modernism. What Lal achieved with his anthologies was the consolidation of ideas through his theorization of the *new poetry*. The strength of his anthologies resides not in the *texts / poems* which he selected, but in the *paratextual* bracket(s) he provides within which the *texts* may be consumed and understood. The volumes that came out in the next great decade of anthologies – the 1990s – followed the same blueprint set by Lal to defend the new poetic thinking. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra would announce (and re-confirm) modernism in the Introduction to his anthology *Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992) by displacing what he considered was “old”, arguing that Indian poetry “written between 1825 and 1945, is truly dead” (p. i).

3. Production (The Commodification of the Anthology)

The third system which has played a crucial role in the consolidation of Indian modern poetry is the mechanics of production. A well-edited anthology with a modest selection of *text* and *paratext* becomes insufficient to announce or sustain a literary culture. It is the capacity to produce, reproduce, and market the anthology as a “material object” or “commodity” which becomes the deciding factor regarding “which volume” by “which editor” and by “which publishing house” gets to shape the canon. The survival of a poem largely depends upon its inclusion in an anthology, and the survival of the anthology depends upon how long it remains in circulation.

The widespread adoption of newer printing technology in the second half of the 20th century assisted the transformation of the anthology from an archival space into a “commodity” that may be mass-produced, mass-circulated, and also mass-consumed. Bruce King (2004) argues that “the poets had to create their own cultural space, start their journals and edit and publish each other’s manuscripts” and this precisely was one of the driving forces behind the lack of “continuity between the new poetry and that written before independence” (p. 11). Because the tools of production were at their fingertips, they could not be censored, regulated, or moderated by external agents, and the poets could publish *new poetry* with a modern idiom. The problem, however, with production is that it is also tied to economic imperatives. It is the main reason why the *little magazines* that erupted during the new international counter-culture wave of the 1960s disappeared equally fast. Mention may be made of the Arvind Mehrotra stenciled magazines: *damn you: a magazine of the Arts* (1965-68), *Ezra: an imagiste magazine* (1967-71), and *fakir* (1968); the Nissim Ezekiel edited *Quest* (1955-57), and *Poetry India* (1966-67); and Pritish Nandy’s *Dialogue* (1968-70) which went bankrupt by 1971. King (2004) argues that the present canon of modern poets were beginning to assemble around these publications (pp. 23-28).

The fate of poetry collections and anthologies is no different. By the end of the 20th century, there were only a handful of dedicated major publishers who published poetry. As per the historical publishing record found in Bruce King’s *Modern Indian Poetry in English* (2004, revised ed.), The Writers Workshop had a print run of 500 copies per book, Clearing House with a print run of 750 copies per book, The Newground Press with a print run of 1000 copies per book, and then Arnold-Heinemann which printed 2000 copies, which according to King, could only sell about 1000 copies in a span of three to four years. Then there was Oxford University Press, which offered 1500 prints

through their commercial contracts along with reprints (pp. 52-53). R. Parthasarathy's 1976 anthology *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets* published by OUP ended up with 3000 copies in the same year. Since then it has been reprinted in 1979 (with corrections), 1983, 1984, 1986, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1999, 2022, 2004, and 2009, with many of these subsequent reprints running in the vicinity of multiple thousand copies each time (OCLC, n.d.). The same is the case for Mehrotra's *Twenty Indian Poets*, first published by OUP in 1990 which went on to have ten reprints by 2012; with the 10th reprint running for 10,000 copies.

The argument to be made here is that while poetry anthologies are printed rapidly every year, they disappear from the market equally fast. Most of the Oxford anthologies of Indian poetry, however, have remained in print and in circulation among general readers and within academia – a place where canons are still decided. For instance, along with Parthasarathy's 1976 anthology (dated, but still read widely), the Oxford anthologies of the 1990s: *The Oxford Indian Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992) and *The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry* (1994) have dominated our cultural understanding of the modern Indian canon in recent history. The reasons are both conceptual and technical. Both anthologies appeared after the radical and creative experimentations of the 1960s and 1970s had subsided. They are – to use Germano's phrasing – “backwards-gazing” and reflective, revealing the patterns of modernity that were invented during the immediate post-independent decades (cited in Di Leo, 2004, p. 4). On the technical side, with the combination of OUP's heritage, publishing capabilities, and networks in both the academic and public spheres, these two anthologies have arguably come to represent the consolidated modern Indian poetry.

There have been many other anthologies of Indian poetry published alongside with these Oxford volumes. But where are those volumes now? And how do we assess their influence? Just like the WW Norton anthologies in the West, the Oxford anthologies have entered into the academic and public discourse because of their availability. The machinery of production and reception goes alongside with the politics of influence. Canons and the hegemonic literary culture they promote follow later.

4. Consolidation

The fourth system in the understanding of anthologies and their role in the establishment of Indian modernism is the consolidation of texts. In his critical work *Marxism and Literature* (1977), socialist author Raymond Williams proposes certain arguments concerning the nature of culture(s) and the interrelational tension that exists amongst them. His arguments were put forward concerning broader social interactions, however, when we consider literature and all the processes that entail in the production of literature, it too emerges as an entire culture unto itself. Regarding this tension that exists within cultural system(s) and the constant struggle for hegemony/dominance, Williams writes:

The complexity of a culture is to be found not only in its variable processes and their social definitions – traditions, institutions, and formations – but also in the dynamic interrelations, at every point in the process, of historically varied and variable elements. In what I have called 'epochal' analysis, a cultural process is seized as a cultural system, with determinate dominant features. (p. 121)

The struggle for dominance is integral in the world of anthologies. The anthology wars came early in the West with the race for anthologizing modern poetry reaching its climax in the 1950s and 1960s (Chaitas, 2017, p. 191). However, its roots go back to the 1930s with publishing and editorial animosity growing between T. S. Eliot, representing Faber, and W. B. Yeats, representing Oxford, each coincidentally releasing *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* and *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* in 1936.

For the Indian literary enterprise which was still mapping a post-independence identity, Lal's massive anthology *Modern Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology and a Credo* (1969) initiated the anthology wars. The anthology was extensively reviewed in the national press and journals and although it was denounced for "lacking selectivity and discrimination" it succeeded in creating a dialogue into the 1970s (Chaudhuri, 2016, p. 167). In 1972, as a direct response to Lal's anthology, Saleem Peeradina edited *Contemporary Poetry in English: An Assessment and Selection* which was published by Macmillan. While Lal included over a hundred poets to showcase "how widespread the new writing had become" it also opened the doors for the establishment (or lack therefore) of rigorous standards. Peeradina's anthology on the other hand was a "serious attempt at distinguishing who were the better Indian English poets, their characteristics and faults" (King, 2004, p. 31).

During the 1960s and 1970s as anthologies were being regularly published, the criticism of other anthologies continued as a dialogue in the *paratext* of newer anthologies. Peeradina's anthology included a concluding essay by Eunice de Souza titled "Two Anthologies" where she attacks not only Lal's *Credo*, but also an earlier anthology by V.K. Gokak titled *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1970) for their open-door policy and lack of qualitative inclusion (Gupta, 1996, p. 107). Pritish Nandy also addresses the issue in the "Introduction" to his anthology *Indian Poetry in English 1947-1972* (1972) published by OUP. He writes:

if by making available in a single book the work of all the significant poets of the literature I can give the reader a glimpse into the strange and fascinating world of Indian poetry in English, the anthology would have served its purpose. Earlier anthologies, unfortunately, have failed to do this by being totally indiscriminate (as P Lal's anthology running into 600 pages with nearly 150 poets, most of them one-poem-by-accident versifiers, never heard of since), blatantly biased (as the one recently edited by someone called Saleem Peeradina for Quest magazine) or dated and misleading (like the one brought out by Sahitya Akademi, edited by V. K. Gokak). (as cited in Gupta, 1996, p. 107)

Nandy's introduction is a perfect model of Lilian Chaitas's (2017) argument that "an anthology always conveys a presumption of its own legitimacy as to its agenda, its outline, and its selection, as well as the representativeness of its selection" (p. 191). When Parthasarathy's *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets* was published by OUP a few years later in 1976, the consolidation of modern Indian poetic identity had become more visible. It may be understood as a dialectical product of an agitated literary culture, a product of the anthology wars.

Although the modernist dialogue has continued with the later anthologies that have been published since the 1970s, it may be argued that Parthasarathy set a definitive tone for the modern Indian anthology. The later anthologies that followed, especially in the 1990s, also juggle between the desires of reconciliation with the pre-1950s poetry and post-1950s poetry in order to revise

the Indian poetic identity. Kaiser Haq's anthology *Contemporary Indian Poetry* (1990) published by Ohio State University Press, and Makarand Paranjape's anthology *Indian Poetry in English* (1993) published by Macmillan, both made attempts to cast a wider net to reconcile with some select poets/poems from the pre-1950s era. But they were quickly objected to and challenged by the Oxford anthologies that were published contemporaneously: Mehrotra's *Twenty Indian Poems* (1990) and *Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992), and Dharwadker and Ramanujan's *Modern Indian Poetry* (1994). Mehrotra (1992) famously opens his arguments in his *Introduction* in the tradition set by Parthasarathy's anthology:

Indians have been writing verse in English at least since the 1820s and it goes under many ludicrous names – Indo-English, India-English, Indian English, Indo-Anglian, and even Anglo-Indian and Indo-Anglian. 'Kill that nonsense term', Adil Jussawalla said of Indo-Anglian, 'and kill it quickly.' The term may not be easy to destroy, but much of the poetry it describes, especially that written between 1825 and 1945, is truly dead. Later poets have found no use for it, and a literary tradition is of no use to anyone else.

The origins of modern Indian poetry in English go no further back than the poets in this anthology. (p. i)

Mehrotra's statements made in the "Introduction" clearly reflect the desire to make his anthology perform "the cultural work of canonization", and the principles of his selection establishes the "symbolic boundaries between inclusion and exclusion" (Chaitas, 2017, pp. 191-192). By promoting a certain type of poetry – Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Kolatkar, etc. – as the *dominant* variety, the anthology automatically renders the poetic progeny of the pre-1950s sensibilities as the *residual*. Unlike a few earlier anthologies which provided space for the transmission and transference of ideas – from the *old* to the *new*, Mehrotra's anthology makes a clear demarcation between the two poetic sensibilities and in doing so establishes itself as the absolute foundational anthology of modern Indian English poetry – the absolute archive.

Conclusion

During the 20th century, the anthology became a cultural vehicle constantly striving for dominance; a dominance which has consequently translated into – and determines – literary culture. Assessments of paratextual historiographies reveal the tendencies of anthologies. It also reveals the understanding that the anthology "is almost always a response" (Gupta, 1996, p. 102).

The OUP has clearly dominated the project of consolidating the current modern Indian canon. However, other publishers have continued to put out poetry anthologies, and so the dialogue still continues. The emergence of newer anthologies from major houses like Penguin, Harper Collins, and Bloomsbury etc. is a form of resistance against the established OUP canon. This cultural resistance corresponds to Raymond Williams's extrapolation of the *dominant*, *residual*, and *emergent* cultural tendencies in his "epochal" theory which falls within the concept of "cultural materialism" which Williams formulated to understand literature within its socio-economic context. Author K. M. Newton (1997) succinctly presents Williams' argument that "At any particular period different cultural forces are in play, with the dominant forces never attaining complete power but being resisted by reactionary or progressive forces" (p. 234). This struggle of forces is constantly visible in the making of modern Indian poetry undertaken within the pages of

anthologies. Anthologists always try to justify in the introductory *paratext* that the present collection is separate from the “unified past” (Diepeveen, 2004, p. 144). In doing so, they constantly bring them back into existence i.e. “the residual”, and modernism, in essence, is built upon “the old”. Thus the paradox of defining modernism becomes a *process* which is continually tied to the past – of unifying *the old* in an attempt to bring *the new* into sufficient focus.

Literary standards have their origins in yesterday’s anthologies. Similarly, the modern anthology is always striving towards building an archive or canon, and they remain the site of a deeply self-conscious struggle. The creation of Indian poetic modernity that has taken place within the pages of anthologies is merely the manifestation of a particular type of literary culture. Literary culture – in practice – is constructed with many processes and systems working in nuanced coordination. To understand the origins of how the Indian poetry anthologies constructed modernism, we need to consider not only the stylistic and ideological newness of the poems, but also the question of production of the anthologies as “commodities,” and how they are tested in the public sphere, through circulation and reception. It is the anthology which survives this cultural war that decides the mainstream culture/canon. Arguably, any canon – “modernist” or otherwise – therefore becomes a sub-product of this cultural and material struggle. Thus, within anthologies, poetry exists not merely as literary, artistic, or aesthetic pieces, but as enigmatic agents in a larger narrative. As Jahan Ramazani (2004), editor of the *Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry* (Third Edition) delightfully comments, the anthology is a “pretheoretical” object, and it is struggling to survive in our supposedly “post-canonical” era (p. 270).

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