

**THE MAKING OF MODERN INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY:  
TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF ANTHOLOGIES**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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September 2025**

Chapter Six

**CONCLUSION**



## I

Compared to the popularity of fiction studies amidst the rise of postcolonial and other literary theories in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, poetry studies have only been undertaken under special interest within academia. Furthermore, studies concerning literary anthologies and collections can be classified as a rarity. It demands a separate acumen of understanding the intersectionalities of not just literature studied against the backdrop of society – as it is widely adopted within literature departments – but literary culture studied against the backdrop of our market society. A sincere attempt has been made to position this thesis within a tradition of discourse which originates from literary luminaries including Francis Palgrave, Arthur Quiller-Couch, Louis Untermeyer, Laura Riding, Robert Graves, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, Michael Roberts, P.Lal, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Jeet Thayil, etc. However, the current study can be neither considered the beginning nor the end on the subject; rather the arguments presented in this thesis must be taken as “semicolons” within the tradition.

This thesis began with a handful of central questions concerning the problematic evolution of Indian English poetry and the challenges of defining what constitutes “modern” Indian poetry. The objectives of the study were developed around a few key questions: a) what roles do anthologies play in the making of modern poetry/modernist canon? b) Is the modernist identity of Indian English poetry created through/with certain external agencies? and c) Is the modern Indian poetic canon a product of “manufacture”? As the primary arguments of the study have been presented in the preceding chapters, the last chapter of this thesis seeks to present the implications of the study, its limitations, and a few suggestions for possible future research concerning the area.

Chapter One of the thesis presents a contextualized history of Indian English poetry, its existence within anthologies, and the contentious ideological and linguistic crisis that developed between the pre-independence poets and the post-independence poets. The chapter examines the modern anthology as a “problematic archive” (Diepeeven 141), and establishes an understanding of the anthology as a complex literary commodity which is both a record of the cultural history of communication in print (Darton 65), and the site for establishing narratives. The chapter achieves an understanding of poetry anthology as a vehicle which documents a specific kind of cultural expression comprising of the artistic and ideological currents of its milieu.

Chapter Two presents an examination of the origins of the anthology as an archival medium and its gradual entry into society's cultural system. The chapter, through an extensive literature survey, presents how the arrival of print technology in the Indian subcontinent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century affected how literature was distributed and consumed. Furthermore, the chapter problematizes the "modern" Indian poetry anthologies which were edited and published by English editors in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as part of the Orientalist project and presents a holistic examination of the poetry anthologies that emerged from the Indian soil by Indian poet-editors after the independence which are highly driven by a consolidated yearning for a new literary identity and a new national identity.

Chapter Three presents an examination of the significant and systematic roles anthologies have played in the consolidation of the modern Indian poetic identity. The core argument concerning the making of Indian poetic modernism through a nuanced four-system mechanism consisting of i) the text, ii) the paratext, iii) production, and iv) consolidation is achieved in this chapter. The chapter also arrives at an understanding of the dominance war in the world of poetry anthologies through Raymond William's epochal theory. The chapter achieves a broad examination of the role publishing houses have played in influencing the creation of specific canon(s).

Chapter Four achieves an examination of anthologies as a confluence point of various agents within a socio-economic context. Through Pierre Bourdieu's theory on cultural production, the chapter identifies certain social determinants within which "literature" or "the literary" operate. The chapter presents arguments concerning the production of poetry and the production of new poetic identities (via anthologies), and problematizes them against the existing influences of institutions, publishing practices, and forms of capital at play within Bourdieu's "field." The chapter further achieves an identification of the existence of these structures within the Indian poetry anthology enterprise and arrives at an understanding of poetic modernism itself as a complex manifestation within the pages of anthologies.

Chapter Five achieves an assessment of the contemporary trends and new direction(s) of modern Indian English poetry in the pages of anthologies. By establishing the anthology as a habitat for the "textual afterlife" (Bennet 1), the chapter presents the stylistic and ideologic transition of Indian English poetry and the complicated process of

poetic consecration that occurs through two strains of anthologies – the *centripetal* and the *centrifugal*. Furthermore, the chapter concludes with arguments concerning the circularity of modernist thought, and the emergence of new modernism(s) in Indian poetry anthologies as a symptom of a developing consciousness caught in the intersections of the “local” and the “global” tendencies.

What the present study has tried to achieve overall is the examination of the concept of Indian poetic modernism as a collective whole that is often accepted without extended critical inquiry. Modernity defined by what? By whom? This thesis is an attempt at a sustained thinking on the medium of anthology as a significant utilitarian commodity as well as a cultural placeholder of literary texts – a place where ideas are grounded.

## II

### **Limitations of the study**

One of the primary limitations faced during the study is the overall unavailability of a comprehensive and categorically segmented Indian book market dataset. The Nielsen @ India Book Market Report(s) – 2015 and 2022 – are the most authoritative dataset available presently, however both present a broad classification of the book market and lack detailed segmentation and corresponding statistics. Furthermore, most major online retail platforms also withhold the disclosure of sales data, and therefore the re-creation of the book market data through multiple secondary data sources – although viable for a controlled study – cannot be considered as authoritative.

The second limitation, which can be considered secondary, came during the timing chosen for data collection. The interviews of poets, editors, and booksellers which were conducted to gain an “insider” perspective began in February 2019, but it was severely affected by the onset of COVID-19 pandemic followed by the total restriction of human mobility. Out of the many interviews that were planned, a few of them did not materialize. Of those which did materialize, a majority of them had to be converted into email mode and therefore the data collection process tuned into an extended longitudinal effort which affected the timeframe of the research to a certain degree. Thirdly, the conversations I had with Dibyajyoti Sarma of Red River Books could not be cited as he did not go on record. The inability to commute during the data collection stage affected

by the lockdown(s) also prohibited the materialization of proposed meetings with Hemant Divate of Paperwall Publishing, and Urvashi Butalia of Zubaan Books, two of the current leading publishers in India. Even though the present study does not consider interviews as the primary source of information, their testimonies and insights concerning the ideological and practical side of publishing in contemporary India would have offered more depth to the thesis.

### **Suggestions for future research**

As more archival materials and documents of Indian publishing history begin to surface there will be opportunities to understand India's literary/poetic "history" on a rigorous level. The intersection of "the life of the text" and "the life of the book" can be an important area of investigation. It will open up a lot of understanding concerning literary culture and its wider impact in the shaping of human thought and society at large. An investigation of the recently catalogued "Adil Jussawalla papers, 1944-2019" by the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library may be carried out. It could serve as a rich entry point *into the world of post-independence Indian poetic thought*.

Anjali Nerlekar's *Bombay Modern* (2016) has comprehensively covered the "sathottari" years of *little magazines* and small presses that flourished between the years 1955 and 1980 in Bombay which impacted the identity and sensibilities of modern Indian poetry. Laetitia Zecchini's *Arun Kolatkar and Literary Modernism in India* (2014) has accomplished a similar object. However, if interested, one may go back in time and explore the plethora of archived Indian periodicals which have been recently made available under a project titled *Ideas of India: The Rediscovery of India* (ideasofindia.org) led by Rahul Sagar at NYU, Abu Dhabi since 2018. Consisting over 405 indexed journals and 325,000 indexed articles, it is a rich archive of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian English-language periodicals. Such a study could open a lot of understanding of the cultural and literary tendencies which influenced the reading public and also gain insights into the making of the proverbial "cosmopolitan" class. Notable periodicals namely *Bengal Magazine*, *Haris Chandra's Magazine*, *The Indian Magazine*, *Allahabad Review*, *The Madras Review*, *The Dawn* etc., and also the magnificent trio – *The Hindustan Review*, *The Indian Review*, and *The Modern Review* emerged at the fin de siècle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. All these periodicals which affected the sensibilities of the

emerging urban class and dominated public life, politics, and opinion(s) for the next half a century are available for access on the portal and can be a good resource for scholarly examination.

As for the scope and future of literary history studies in India, there is reason to be optimistic as we have only begun uncovering archival printed matters. The access to archival matters, periodicals, personal letters of publishers, and testimonials of authors and editors can encourage new ways of assessing and understanding literary history and culture, and also assist in the development of alternate book histories. The publication of Adil Jussawalla's *Maps for a Mortal Moon* (2014) edited by Jerry Pinto, which is a rare collection of essays dealing with the 1960s and 1970s publishing circle in metropolitan India signifies a renewed interest not just in Indian writing in English, but the origins of the modern Indian literary tradition. If more such volumes emerge along with the emerging democratization of access to digital archives, it will create opportunities for scholars of literary history to re-examine literary works and literary culture not only against the backdrop of political milieu, but also accomplish a very intimate understanding of the private minds of the people who visioned the creation a national literary identity.



