Chapter Three

ANTHOLOGIES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF POETIC MODERNISM

I

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 history (Sharan 5). Because of this neglect, the anthology remains an object without concrete boundaries. It is still not certain whether to consider the anthology as a medium, a genre, or just a collection of texts because it interchangeably serves all three categorizations. This fluid nature of the anthology has facilitated the consolidation and propagation of significant thinking throughout the 20th century. Its content, based on editing, may be disparate, stratified, and even impressionistic, but in each of these cases, the anthology fundamentally remains an epistemological unit. It is upon this premise that the chapter attempts to establish the significant role anthologies have played in the solidification of modern Indian poetry.

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 which challenged bourgeois values. The exhibition of Édouard Manet's painting *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (*The Luncheon on the Grass*) in 1863, and the publication of Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*) in 1857 were a form of cultural diagnosis. Both events are now taken as watershed moments for the modernist movement. Napoleon III's personal intervention during the exhibition of Manet's painting due to its subject matter instantly started a public outcry and made Manet a hero among the younger generation (Biome 676-677). On the other hand, Baudelaire's poetry which eulogized the victims of imperialism: the beggar, the blind, the prostitute, the gambler, and the transformation of his beloved Paris into a bland neighbourhood of bourgeoisie emerged as an entirely new breed of literature. Modernism began when these artists began "reflecting life in their time" not seeing themselves as creators but also as serious cultural critics (Greenberg).

History has recorded that the modernist movement intensified and took a more concrete shape during the period that followed World War I in the early 20th century. The post-war literary world erupted with a rebellious effort to replace the old status quo. Literary critic G.S. Fraser defines modernism as "an imaginative awareness of the stress of social change" in his book *The Modern Writer and His World* (1960). Early 20th century poets including Ezra Pound, W.H. Auden, Alexander Blok, Anna Akhmatova,

and Robert Graves were establishing novel ways of experimenting the form and language in their respective 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 567). German critic Michael Hamburger in his book *The Truth of Poetry* (1972) argues that "the truth of poetry, and of modern poetry especially, is to be found not only in its direct statements but in its peculiar difficulties, short cuts, silences, hiatuses and fusion" (45). This thematic and linguistic experimentation of modernism is visible in Eliot's opening lines of *The Waste Land*, which is an ironic rewriting of Chaucer's *General Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales:*

> Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote,
> The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
> And bathed every veyne in swich licóur
> Of which vertú engendred is the flour; (Chaucer 1-4).

Eliot begins *The Waste Land* thus:

> April is the cruellest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire, stirring
> Dull roots with spring rain. (Eliot 1-4).

The great irony of the modernist movement in the West is that its whole existence is hinged on the past. Greenberg argues that modernism "didn't make its entrance by breaking with the past" instead they got their standards "from the past, that is, the best of the past." Ezra Pound's vague and atmospheric slogan "Make It New!" by which he abided as a professional obligation is also been ascertained as a recycling of an anecdote found in the *Da Xue* (Ta Hio) – the first of the four Confucian moral philosophy books (North).

What officially announced modernism as an "event" were not the individual poems that were written and published, but the consolidation of these poems which took place in the pages of anthologies. In short, modernism was not a matter of individual talent, but a task of archiving dominant tendencies. Chris Baldick in his book *The Modern Movement* (2004) describes the period between 1910 to 1940 as a "great age of anthologies," as it was during this period that the new poetry was being anthologized for

the first time (109). The Hogarth Press, which Virginia and Leonard Woolf began in 1917 also played a key role by publishing anthologies of the modernist poets. *New Signatures* (1932), an anthology published by Hogarth, introduced the poetry of a newer generation of poets to the public's attention. It brought the works of poets such as W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and Cecil Day Lewis to wider notice (Baldick 54). These anthologies not only forced the editors to invent new interventions to accommodate newer ideas but also invited readers to question traditional literary styles while broadening their taste.

As a poet and editor, Ezra Pound also recognized the power of this medium and edited four distinct anthologies during the period between 1910 and 1940, namely *Des Imagistes* (1914), *Catholic Anthology* (1915), *Profile* (1932), and *Active Anthology* (1933). Pound argues in his preface to *Active Anthology* that anthologies were the only way to rescue the precious "cargo of a sinking paideuma" (qtd. in Ehlers 115). Coming from the leading celebrated figure of the modernist movement, it is perhaps the most significant justification for the medium. It also makes a firm argument on how editorial choices gave the modernist movement a solidified identity.

Author John G. Nichols argues that the two important editors of literary anthologies of the early 20th century, Louis Untermeyer and Harriet Monroe shepherded the common readers' taste through their lengthy prefatory matters that "attempted to define new literary movements and categorize emergent authors" (171). Moreover, they also introduced authorial biographic headnotes and brief illuminating evaluations of poems in their anthologies – an element which has become a common feature in anthologies. According to Nichols, Untermeyer and Monroe "circulated an image of modernist verse as an unequivocally established element of a literary canon," because according to Nichols's understanding, both editors "organized poetry in ways that de-emphasized the literary and political conflicts inherent in anthology and canon formation." (171). The editorial direction in which Monroe and Untermeyer took the anthology can only be theorized in terms of Barbara Brookes and James Dunk's argument concerning archives as "calcified" writings maintained to "create order and control" (282), in concurrence with poetry critic Marjorie Perloff's argument that modern anthologies operate as a form of "corporatization of information" (qtd. in Nichols 171).

A startling example of how anthologies and anthologists influence the solidification of poetic identity can be found in the consolidation of modern American poetry that took place mostly through Louis Untermeyer's recurring anthology *Modern American Poetry* which ran for seven revised editions between 1919 and 1950. Untermeyer, who created an industry of anthologies and established himself as the chief anthologist of modern American poetry, guarded the reading public against the poetry of T. S. Eliot for the first half of the 20th century. He describes "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" as "the blasé retrospection and weary wisdom of crabbed youth" (qtd. in Abbott 107), and *The Waste Land* as "a pompous parade of erudition, a lengthy extension of the earlier disillusion" in his essay "Disillusion as Dogma" (qtd. in Abbott 110). It was only in 1942 with the publication of the sixth revised edition of Untermeyer's anthology that he was coerced to include Eliot's "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land* together in their entirety. In doing so, he steered the public taste again – through his editorial commentary – from disdain to acceptance of the Eliotic modernism, through whose established standard the modern canon is now arguably identified and measured.

During the 20th century, it was not only poetry that changed through the way they were presented and preserved. The emergence of a new kind of professional anthologist who meticulously edited volumes challenged both the author and the critic. Louis Untermeyer's astute and individualistic introductions to the poems in his many anthologies erased the need for readers to search contexts. Instead, the poems are perceived and understood by the readers within the contexts he creates for them. The anthologist's role thus progressed from the restrictive sphere of being a passive compiler to a more sophisticated position where creativity is involved and almost closer to literary authorship.

II

On the other spectrum of the emerging literary world(s) exists India. The origins of modernist thinking in India is a relatively delicate and complex issue to locate compared to how it began in the West. Poet Syed Amanuddin in his essay "Modernism in Indian Poetry in English" argues the impracticality of adopting Western conditions in India to understand modernism in Indian poetry (2). Through the post-independence decades, Indian poets and literary critics have collectively regarded the arrival of modernism in Indian poetry as a reactionary movement to the monotonous and blatant imitation of

romantic British and American verse. 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" (7). Poets who actively began writing poetry after the "event" of India's independence experienced a new kind of conflict – the conflict of cultural rootedness and cultural ambivalence against the influence of Western thinking. It can be argued that this crisis had been present in some form in the collective psyche of the older literary generation. For Dutt, Ghose, Tagore and the earlier Indian poets, writing in English was a clichéd case of "writing back" to the West, just as Tagore describes in his foreword to Dunn's 1918 anthology (xi). Despite the gallantry of Tagore's foreword, the whole poetic practice was lamentably Eurocentric. However, for the post-independence poets, the "event" of independence forced a reassessment of their relationship with the English language, and a reassessment of their relationship with their predecessors' poetic practices, not with Europe. So, the crisis, it can be argued, is deeply internal. Indian modernism began when the poets began writing not "for" or "back" to anyone.

Regarding the matter of inception, poet Jeet Thayil persuades the readers in his introductory essay to *60 Indian Poets* that "A convenient starting point for a look at modern Indian poetry is Independence, when His Majesty officially gave India back to the Indians" (xv). Poet Nissim Ezekiel took the first leap for Indian modernity with his 1952 collection, aptly titled *A Time to Change* which introduced a modern wry, cynical, and ironic style of writing. The event of Independence linguistically shaped the beginning of modernism in Indian poetry.

Author Laetitia Zecchini, whose work extensively deals with the Bombay poets and their circle discusses the intrinsic shared history of Western and Indian modernism in her book *Arun Kolatkar and Literary Modernism In India* (2014). She argues that "not only is colonialism essential to the project of Western modernity, but modernism in India is entangled with the historical experiences of colonialism and decolonization…." (17). Zecchini further comments that "The 'otherness' of the English language and of Western modernists was crucial for Indian poets to reinvent themselves and invent their own version of modernism" (18). For instance, in his poetic sequence *Jejuri* (1976) which Arun Kolatkar composed entirely in English, he achieves not a rediscovery of his cultural roots, but a fresh documentation of mundane activities among the holy ruins in

Pune. Kolatkar accomplishes this through defamiliarization: of his cultural background, sense of belonging, and the collective past; a style which Zecchini describe as the "aesthetics of estrangement" which is at the heart of his modernism (17). In the end, what his poetic sequence records is not a pilgrimage, but an ironic pilgrimage. Since then it has been hailed as a modernist collection "that never seems to date" (Subramaniam 20).

Another revered Indian poet Umashankar Joshi (b.1911 – d.1988), whose life spanned almost the entirety of the 20th century expresses a similar sentiment in his article "Modernism and Indian Literature" where he argues that Indian literary modernism happened as an "impact of the egalitarian ideals of the West on a closed and stratified society" (19). He understood Indian modernism as an event that unfolded in two distinct stages: the pre-1930-35 (Renaissance), and the post-1930-35 (Post-Renaissance). Joshi argues that it is the latter stage which is characterized by "the signs of modernism" which he interprets as "a zealous quest for the appropriate form and technique and in particular its search for the right word, the genuinely poetic language" (22). For a person whose life, youth, and maturity coincided with the most turbulent and equally energizing moments of the building of the nation, Joshi's observations are quite acute. From a literary perspective, his demarcation of the national timeline through a range of years (1930-1935) is quite fitting as literary shift(s) – and all the tangents it entails occur as a *continuum*. Vinay Dharwadker in his afterword to *Modern Indian Anthology* makes an observation that agrees with Joshi's arguments. Dharwadker writes:

> The other nation-wide movement that started in the 1930s – and continued to affect writers and readers until the end of the 1970s – was the Indian counterpart of Anglo-American modernism, in which poets in practically every language broke away from traditional (often highly Sanskritized) meters, stanza patterns, styles materials, and themes to invent "free verse" poetry. In exploring new forms of writing, these poets often took up distinctively high modernist positions. (189)

The beginning of modernism has always been an arbitrary and progressive project for Indian writing in English. For Indian poetry in particular, no singular poem emerged which caused a modernist stir like Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Instead, the tasks of announcing modernism have been undertaken by the multitude of anthologies that have been published throughout the 20th century, albeit with various degrees of success. These

Indian poetry anthologies have made numerous attempts to enclose and present modernism within their pages. In our retrospective examination, these modern anthologies may be broadly classified and understood as two main strains: the first which emphasizes *chronology* and tries to confine modernism within certain timebound boundaries, and the second which tries to bracket modernism within *conceptual* boundaries.

Many anthologies of Indian poetry in English which appeared post-1950 made multiple attempts to present the new poetry within chronological boundaries. Some such anthologies from well-known poets/editors include 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, which includes the work of poets born post-1950 exclusively. This type of anthology which is driven by a chronological demarcation of poetry to announce "newness" creates "*anxiety* about claiming temporal boundaries" (Diepeveen 138). Such anthologies end up becoming easy and satisfactory archives of poetry, but they hardly become established as the most important volumes, and neither do they define what makes them inherently modern.

The second type is an anthology which presents its contents in a "non-historical" context often prefaced for their aesthetic excellence, and where the relationships between chronology and ideology are neither enforced nor encouraged. In short, these anthologies do not engage with history (Diepeveen 140). Their merit only resides in celebrating poetry that embraces certain values, as they provide some delight or express aesthetic joy. It is in continuance with the understanding of this second tradition that many newer anthologies of Indian poetry cannot also be truly considered modern anthologies. Although recent, the Bloomsbury anthologies *100 Great Indian Poems* (2018), *100 More Great Indian Poems* (2019), and *The Bloomsbury Anthology of Great Indian Poems* (2020) cannot be deemed as anthologies of modern poetry because characteristically they are non-developmental. They do not introduce any new reflections or unique perspectives into the poetry being anthologized. The editor of the anthologies, Abhay Kumar brings up big questions in the editor's note to his *100 Great Indian Poems.* He asks, "What makes a poem great? Is there a standard definition of a great poem?"

(Editor's Note). In the Bloomsbury anthologies, the poems are presented, but they are not argued for; they remain on the pages as "aesthetic pieces," historical, but not historicized. Modernist critic Leonard Diepeevan argues that modernism is "premised on an aesthetic responsive to contemporaneity," and it is absent from these volumes (141).

III

Author David Perkins in his work *Is Literary History Possible?* proposes that contrast is often demanded by any literary narrative i.e., schematics of the previous forms in order to bring the present into focus (36). Leonard Diepeveen further compliments Perkins's arguments by reasoning that "the period that is capable of being schematized is also inevitably seen as the antagonist in the narrative" (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 study concerning anthologies and the construction of modernism has led to the identification of four closely connected systems which 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

To begin with, the concept of Indian modernity cannot be understood in its totality by analyzing only texts/poems as such an analysis is limiting and eventually becomes an isolated exercise of deconstructing poems. Secondly, such types of investigations ultimately lead to the examination of two 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 poetic 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 commentary etc. constitute the *paratext.* An editor's task thus becomes a challenge 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 which ultimately translates into cultural influence. The fourth and final system concerns the *consolidation* of specific literary culture(s) 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 sub-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 anthology *60 Indian Poets* opens not with poems or a preface, but rather 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. Thayil observes:

> 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 still persists among many Indians today. (Introduction xi)

Before Nissim Ezekiel opened the doors of modernist verse with his collection *Time to Change* (1952), only four figures were noted as key poets who wrote in English, out of which three of them were of Bengali descent, and all four Calcutta-based: Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, and Rabindranath Tagore (Thayil xv). Furthermore, it is Tagore, who published his English translation of *Gitanjali* in 1912, that is considered the last great poet of pre-independence India. Irish poet W.B. Yeats wrote in his preface to *Gitanjali* "[T]hese prose translation from Rabindranath Tagore have stirred my blood as nothing has for years" (qtd. in Thayil xii). However, Yeats would later change his opinion regarding Indian writing in English, and it is recorded in a 1935 correspondence with his friend William Rothenstein where Yeats complains:

> Damn Tagore. We got out three good books, Sturge, Moore and I, and then, because he thought it more important to see and know English than to be a great poet, he brought out sentimental rubbish and wrecked his reputation. Tagore does not know English, no Indian knows English. (qtd. in Nikolayev)

Yeat's retrospective arguments have since resonated among critics of Indian writing in English, especially among the community of India's vernacular writers. Marathi author Balachandran Nimade calls Indian English writers "intellectual pygmies" in his 2002 cover story for the weekly *Outlook*, and the Hindi language writer Rajendra Yadav calls English language writing in India a "third-rate serpent-and-rope trick" (qtd. in Thayil xiii). As English writing in early and mid-20th century India was practiced by a small coterie of Westernized middle-class minorities, the institutionalization and legitimization of this new literary culture met constant domestic criticism as well. Arguably the most astute criticism on the matter was made by Ajanta Sircar in her 1992 essay "Production of Authenticity: The Indo-Anglian Critical Tradition" published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, an enduring journal of the Bombay Left. In it, Sircar criticizes the new culture as "part of a *political strategy* maximizing the interests of a collaborationist minority vis-à-vis the vast native subaltern sector" (1921). For perspective, this criticism was made ten years after Salman Rushdie had published his English novel *Midnight's Children* (1981) to rave international reviews. And to put things in even more perspective, Indian poetry in English predates Rushdie's novel by a margin of 150 years.

The relationship between people, language, and literature that emerged in the postcolonial world(s) was heavily influenced by the significant growth and change in the literary landscape of Europe and its colonies (Mufti 459). Concerning these 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 the new postcolonial literary practice is connected to a new idea of language and its relationship to its community of speakers (20). What materialized in India after its Independence was the emergence of a new idea of language along with a new relationship with the English 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, and Kolatkar. The "modern verse" became possible when Indian 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*.

An argument may be made concerning a few significant events which fueled the impetus of this new kind of thinking in Indian poetry in English. These events (henceforth referred to as *catalysts*) helped stabilize the Indian modernist identity and also helped stabilize the relationship between the Indian poets, the critics, and the readers' relationship with the language.

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 19). This recognition also gave a sincere validity to literary works and literary discourses 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.

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" (qtd. in Kulshrestha 9). This stirred a "mood of rebellion" among the Indian poets of the day which resulted in the creation of multiple *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 22-23).

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" (177-178). Fueled by Bose's allegation, P. Lal initiated a series of correspondence with several Indian-English writers inviting them to respond to Bose's charges (Roy). 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. Lal's anthology materialized to become the most comprehensive survey of modern Indian poetry of the time.

Fourth Catalyst (1980)

Finally, just like The Sahitya Academy's authorial entry into the Indian literary space, the establishment of the Study Centre for Indian Literature in English and Translation (SCILET) in the early 1980s within the premises of 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. Through its translation programme, it was able to unify the various regions and languages with English. The introduction of its annual poetry journal *Kavya Bharti* (estd. 1988) has given many poets a platform to display their talent and many have since entered into the modern Indian canon.

In summation, what we find in Indian poetry anthologies are poems (or *texts*) which are riding on the shoulders of these language discourses. What we consider new or modern poetry is fundamentally poetry which has established a new relationship with the language. Anthologies, by drawing attention to these new developments consolidate and solidify the narrative. Some textual examples for the discussion of the new poetry are presented below:

Sample I

There's only this:
a tarred road
under a mild sun
after rain,
glowing;
wet, green leaves
patterned flat
on the pavement
around dog-shit; (lines 1-9)

Sample II

From the long dark tunnel
of that afternoon, crouching, humped,
waiting for the promised land,
I peeped out like a startled animal
and saw a friend flapping his angelic wings.
I welcome him. (lines 1-6)

Sample III

Other day I'm reading newspaper
(Every day I'm reading Times of India
To improve my English Language)
How one goonda fellow
Threw stone at Indirabehn.
Must be student unrest fellow, I am thinking.
Friends, Romans, Countrymen, I am saying (to myself)
Lend me the ears.

> Everything is coming –
> Regeneration, Remuneration, Contraception.
> Be patiently, brothers and sisters. (lines 11-20)

The above three extracts: sample I, sample II, and sample III are poems which are anthologized in *The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry* (1992), *The Oxford Indian Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1994), and *60 Indian Poets* (2008) respectively. They are all poems written by Nissim Ezekiel and published after 1950. In sample I (original title: "7" from *Hymns in Darkness*) Ezekiel uses a very matter-of-fact stylistically flat language stripped to the essentials. It is terse and evokes vignettes of fleeting images, almost like a haiku. In sample II (original title: "Two Images") we find Ezekiel experimenting with surrealist visions which arguably resonates the concluding lines of Allen Ginsberg's American opus *Howl* (1956):

> I'm with you in Rockland
> in my dreams you walk dripping from a sea-journey on the highway across America in tears to the door of my cottage in the Western night (Ginsberg, lines 110-112).

The use of powerful conglomerate images like "long dark tunnel," "promised land," and "angelic wings" were for Ezekiel the culmination of his love for Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception* (Baksi 64), and his experimentation with drugs (especially LSD) during his years in America which is well documented in his personal confession "DRUGS: A Personal Footnote," where he writes:

> I had glimpses of my true self, which I had never dreamt existed in such depth and complexity. My understanding of philosophical, metaphysical and religious questions became keener and acquired greater immediacy. I also saw the limits of my abilities more clearly and developed a sense of destiny. I owe more to LSD and marijuana than to my reading, though perhaps without it I may have benefited less from them. (qtd. in R. Rao 179)

In the third extract, sample III (original title: "The Patriot"), we find a very familiar Ezekielian language full of wry irony and mock humour whose subject is the city, its inhabitants, and the self. In a few lines, Ezekiel presents "satires of local social manners and behaviour" by making fun of the Bombay middle-class status quo for reading the

"Times of India" (King 21). Ezekiel covers the political sentiment of the time "Threw a stone at Indirabehn/ Must be student unrest fellow," and exposes the halfhearted ambitions of the middle-class and their knowledge of the great English plays in a manner which is a complete Shakespearean travesty "Friends, Romans, Countrymen, I am saying (to myself)/ Lend me the ears." Ezekiel "indigenized English to the rhythms and flavours of Bombay" and although he targets the shortcomings of the city and its inhabitants, there is also a layer of "humane sympathy" that lightens the effects of his subversions (Patke 62).

The above-discussed poems are part of the constituents of the leading modern poetry anthologies that have been published in India in the last thirty years. There is an evident departure in terms of the character(s) of poetry that have been written since, but if these 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 and Maclean 261). All the poems reveal individual traits and features, but they require the reinforcement of secondary elements/structure to be understood in a contextualized environment, otherwise, they often end up becoming a "hollow rhetoric" (Davis viii). It is where the need for the *paratext* is born.

2. The Paratext

Within the post-1950 poetry anthologies, the *paratextual* matters: prefaces, introductory notes, headnotes, editor's notes, footnotes, endnotes etc. became more elaborate in an attempt by the editors to explain and justify their selections, and to offer the readers an anchor to consume the texts. Philip Davis calls it the "holding-ground" – a place where readers can center themselves and their experience while reading the literature (Preface x). But on a more analytical 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 Genette's earlier study "Introduction to the *Paratext*" (1991), he introduces the philosophy of the paratext:

> 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, 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 in order 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. (Genette and Maclean 261)

French critic and essayist Philippe Lejeune also argues that it is "the fringe of the printed text which, in reality, controls the whole reading" (qtd. in Genette and Maclean 261). In continuation of the discourse, Genette further presents his arguments on the "fringe" elements:

> 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 of 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….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. (Genette and Maclean 261-262)

What we find in the Indian poetry anthologies that emerged post-1950 is the conversion of *paratextual* matters into sites of "pragmatics" and "strategy." The 1959 anthology *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry* edited by P.Lal and Rao may be considered the earliest collection of modern Indian poetry in this regard (see fig. 5). The significance 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" (Introduction 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 and Rao 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 both defending new poetry while revolting against the old.

Lal defended the new poetry by publishing along with the poems the responses to Bose's accusation from contributing poets. A total of seventy-six replies came back to defend Lal's vision and along with the poetic works of one hundred and thirty-two poets Meenakshi Mukherjee called it "the first major compilation of Indian poems in English" (qtd. in Chaudhuri 166). Secondly, he writes in the introduction "To rebel against giants, who use their excellent strength tyrannously and thereby deaden healthy growth, is a good thing" (iv). The giant he was rebelling against was Sri Aurobindo who represented the residual culture of an inherited English tradition (Roy).

The period following the publication of Lal's two anthologies may be considered the period of early modernism in Indian English poetry. However, despite Lal's lifelong pursuit to promote modernism in Indian poetry, he was described as a "neo-romantic" in his obituary which was published in *The Guardian* in 2010 (Habib). His anthologies, nonetheless, continue to serve as a symbol of the type of revolt that he engaged to usher in a new poetic language. 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 included in his anthologies including Vikram Seth, Kamala

Das, Agha Shahid Ali, and Nissim Ezekiel have since become christened as crucial voices of Indian modernism.

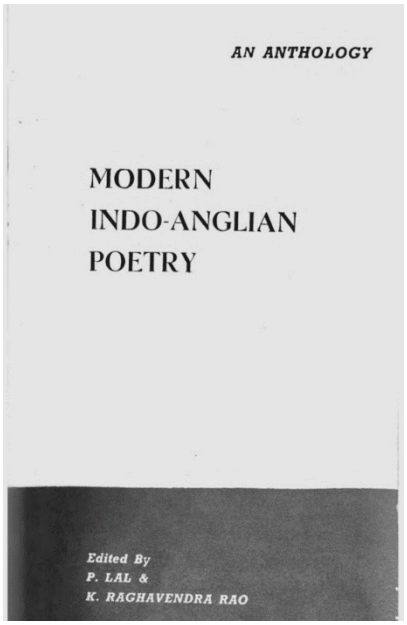

Fig. 5: Title page of P.Lal and Raghavendra Rao's *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1959); https://books.google.co.in/books/about/Modern_Indo_Anglian_Poetry.html

The modern anthology evolved much in terms of its capacity for influence since a serious utilization of the *paratext* began. According to Genette, modern volumes are unlike those of "antiquity and the Middle Ages, periods in which texts frequently circulated in their almost raw state, in the form of manuscripts lacking any formula of presentation" (263). With the assistance of the *paratext*, the 20th century anthologies have moved from being a space for collection to a space for consolidation of ideas. What P. 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 anthology volumes that followed in the next great decade of anthologies – the 1990s – follow the same blueprint set by Lal in defence of new poetic thinking. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra would announce, and re-confirm, modernism in his anthology *Twelve Modern Indian Poets* by displacing what he considered was old; arguing that Indian poetry "written between 1825 and 1945, is truly dead" (Introduction 1). The anthology, and the making of modern Indian poetry, benefited a lot from the *paratext*

because it is where provocative arguments and aesthetic principles concerning the new Indian thought were presented and consolidated.

3. Production (or 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. The examination of the medium through which literary movements are facilitated along with the production of the medium is requisite. French philosopher Pierre Macherey raised this concern in his mid-20th century seminal work *A Theory of Literary Production*. He observes, "we seem to have given up the study of the conditions of literary production, in order to tackle the question of how the text communicates with its readers" (78). For instance, a well-edited anthology with a modest selection of *text* and *paratext* becomes insufficient to announce or sustain a literary culture. On the other hand, the capacity to produce, reproduce, and market the anthology as a "material object" or "commodity" 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 second half of the 20th century saw the widespread arrival of newer printing technology and the establishment of numerous publishing houses. With their assistance, the anthology transformed from an archival space into a "material object" and a "commodity" which may be mass-produced, mass-circulated, and also mass-consumed. The history of the emergence of modern Indian poetry is closely tied with the history of poets who experimented with the printing enterprise. According to Bruce King, "the poets had to create their own cultural space, start their own 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" (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.

In 1972, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra contributed an introductory essay for an anthology titled *Measure 3: Young Poets of India* edited by Howard McCord. In his essay titled "The Annihilation of Indian Literature: An Introduction," Mehrotra exposes

the actualities of being a poet in India where the infrastructure and attitudes towards publishing creative works are extremely challenging:

> Publishing houses, especially in the north, are operated between a collection of poems and a basket of mangoes. Thus many young to middle-aged writers bring out their slim volumes themselves or pay a publisher to do so. Setting up one's own book can be charming and whitmanesque [sic] only if done every fifty years. The story is different when it's done by all the poets around all the corners in an endless country. (7-8)

In a similar nature, while recollecting the publishing struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, poet Adil Jusawalla writes in his 1981 essay "Six Authors in Search of a Reader" about the struggles of publishing poetry at the time:

> Looking at it now, one clear fact emerges: how very much writers who are in their thirties or forties have had to depend on themselves and on one another to get their work published. Professional publishers didn't seem to have been around from the very time they started.
>
> The situation now is much worse. The writers – novelists, playwrights, poets – have continued to write. New writers have emerged. But new publishers haven't. No publisher, that is, who has been willing to keep pace with the quality and quantity of the work. It's the writers themselves who've had to take this risk, venturing into a field about which they know nothing but must, of necessity, learn. (3)

The problem, however, with production is that it is also tied to economic imperatives. It is the main reason why the *little magazines* which erupted during the new international counter-culture wave of the 1960s disappeared equally fast. Mention may be made of the Arvind Mehrotra stencilled 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 argues that the present canon of modern poets was beginning to assemble around these publications (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. This includes The Writer's Workshop with 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 but 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 (King 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). The same is the case for Mehrotra's *Twenty Indian Poets,* first published by OUP in 1990 but 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 (Appendix 1), 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 *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets* (dated but still read widely), the Oxford anthologies of the 1990s: *Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992) and *Modern Indian Poetry* (1994) have dominated our cultural understanding of the modern Indian canon in recent history. We may question why. 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 backwards-gazing and reflective revealing the patterns of modernity that were invented during the immediate post-independent decades (Di Leo 4). On the technical side, with the combination of OUP's heritage, publishing prowess, and networks in both the academic and public spheres, these two anthologies have arguably come to represent the consolidated modern Indian poetry.

To gain a more panoptic perspective, and to understand the scale of OUP's involvement in the establishment of the Indian poetic identity, one only needs to go through the timeline of the OUP poetry anthologies that have been published since the

1970s (see table 1). What is characteristic in the OUP anthologies is that they are not keen on archiving contemporaneity or what is considered urgent. They have clear boundaries – either they attempt to establish a consolidated canon as in Parthasarathy (1976), Mehrotra (1992), or Souza's (1997) anthologies, or attempt a wider presentation of poetic voices, which is a form of study of the recent past and reflective in nature. But they arguably oppose the publication of verses which has not been scrutinized through time.

Year	**Title of the Anthology**	**Editor(s)**
1972	*Indian Poetry in English 1947-1972*	Pritish Nandy
1976	*Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets*	R. Parthasarathy
1977	*Hundred Indian Poets: An Anthology of Modern Poetry*	Pranab Bandyopadhyay
1990	*Twenty Indian Poems*	Arvind Krishna Mehrotra
1992	*The Oxford Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets*	Arvind Krishna Mehrotra
1994	*The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry*	Vinay Dharwadker and A.K. Ramanujan
1997	*Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology*	Eunice de Souza
2005	*Early Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology 1829-1947*	Eunice de Souza
2010	*The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India (Volume I & II)*	Tilotoma Misra

Table 1: List of OUP Indian English poetry anthologies (1972-2010).

There have been many other anthologies of Indian poetry published contemporaneously alongside these OUP 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 the politics of influence. Canons and the literary culture they promote follow later. Publishing houses such as Penguin Books, Macmillan, Bloomsbury, and Harper Collins have recently entered the market for poetry anthologies (Appendix 1), and it may be argued that the project for the construction of Indian poetic identity is still in a continuum.

The India Book Market Report(s) published by market insights provider Nielsen ® are quite revelatory as to why the Oxford anthologies are influential. These surveys which were conducted by Nielsen BookData in collaboration with the Association of Publishers in India (henceforth API) and the Federation of Indian Publishers (henceforth FIP) reveal a lot about the market capitalization of publishers. There have been two recent India book market reports during the last decade – the first published in Oct 2015, and the second published in Oct 2022 (see fig. 6). The K-12 signifies the school book market which commands a hefty 71% of the sales. The Higher Education sector accounted for 22% in 2015 and has increased to 25% in 2022. Meanwhile, the Trade Books sector has reduced from a 7% market share in 2015 to a 4% market share in 2022 in the latest report.

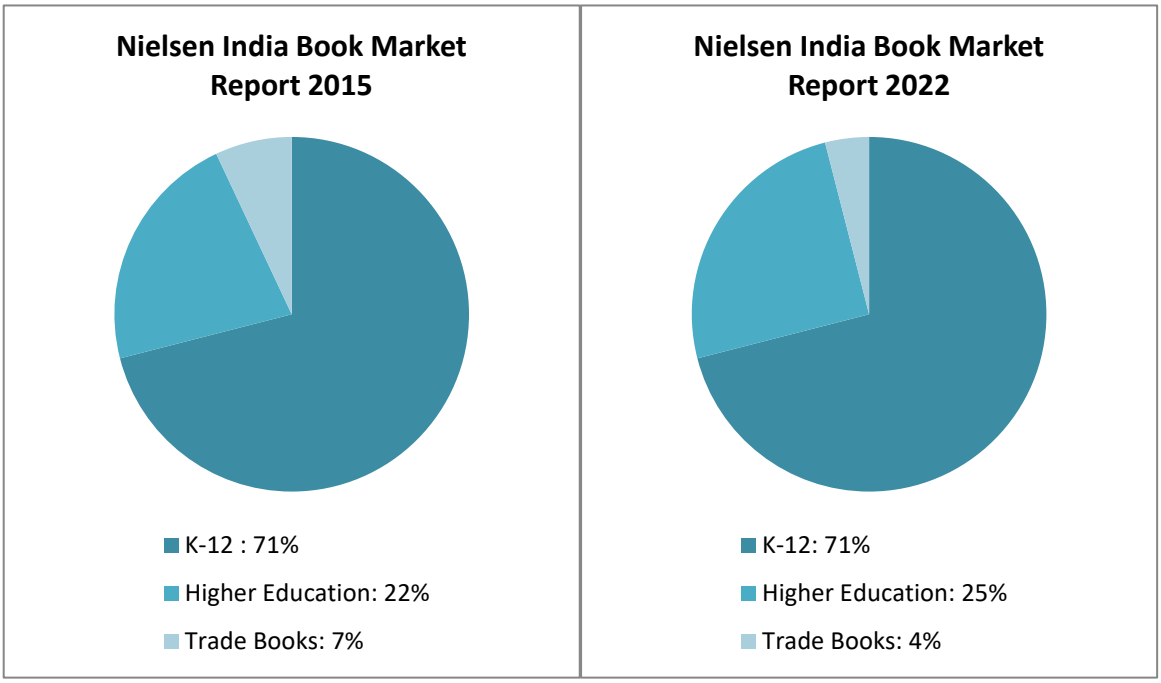

Fig. 6: Data of the Indian book market constitution conducted by Nielsen ® (2015 and 2022).

Most of the anthologies that have been published by independent and major publishing houses constitute a fraction of the Trade Books sector – a slice of the 7% in 2015 and 4% in 2022. The population that purchases anthologies comprises of K12 students, university students, and general readers who Diepeveen argues are "moderately interested in poetry" but not committed enough to purchase individual volumes of poetry (142). However, the Oxford anthologies have their footprints across the entire board. In this regard, Bruce King observes:

> The Parthasarathy [1976] and Daruwalla [1980] anthologies are used at most universities and Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Ramanujan, Kolatkar and Daruwalla appear to be the most studied authors. The University of Bombay started teaching Indian literature in 1975 and has one optional paper in Indian literature at the MA level, using Daruwalla's anthology, and one at the BA level, using Parthasarathy's book. (King 55)

Once an anthology enters the market it becomes a commodity whose value becomes interpretable in Marxist theory of production. Karl Marx was engaged in the analysis of a particular kind of capitalist production in his understanding of "the base" which refers to the mode of production and "the superstructure" which refers to the ideas, culture, and institutions which are born out of the mode of production (Williams 76-79). In the case of literary texts, the mode of production, dissemination, and adoption ultimately influences the literary culture and canon they create. Subsequently, the Oxford anthologies of modern Indian poetry can be understood as both conceptual volumes and as commodities. Their influence may be easily understood through a pyramidal structure of production and consolidation through which a hegemonic literary landscape is created (see fig. 7). The idea of a canon itself is normalized through this structure.

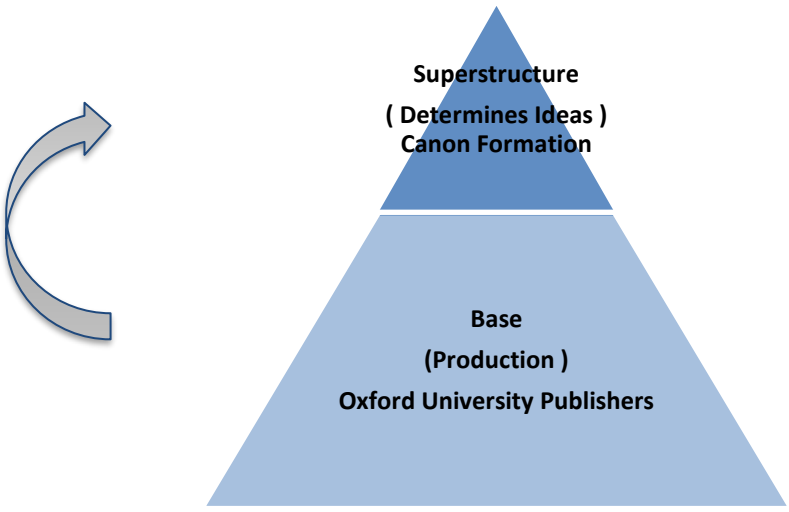

Fig. 7: Presenting the OUP anthologies through the Marxist *base* and *superstructure* model

4. Consolidation

The fourth system in the understanding of anthologies and their role in the making of Indian modernism operates very close to the third system i.e. *production.* In his critical work *Marxism and Literature* (1977), critic Raymond Williams proposes certain arguments concerning the nature of culture(s) and the interrelational tension that exists amongst them. Although his arguments were put forward concerning broader social interactions, when we consider literature and all the processes that are entailed 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. (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 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 releasing *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* and *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* in 1936 (see fig. 8). A brief examination of their correspondence leading up to the publication of their respective anthologies reveals a very tangible war for literary dominance. W. B. Yeats in his letter to Charles Williams writes, "Faber and Faber are bringing out an anthology and as the entire contents seem to have been approved by Laura Riding we are apparently in for a war of the books" (qtd. in Rubin 34), and T. S. Eliot in a letter to Michael Roberts, editor of the Faber anthology, writes:

> Our book should be a bulky one, and I think we are giving very good value for the money. Of course, it will take us a considerable time to get our money back, but we are counting on a long run. Incidentally, I have all confidence that your book will succeed because it will be the best. (Eliot, "Poets and Anthologies")

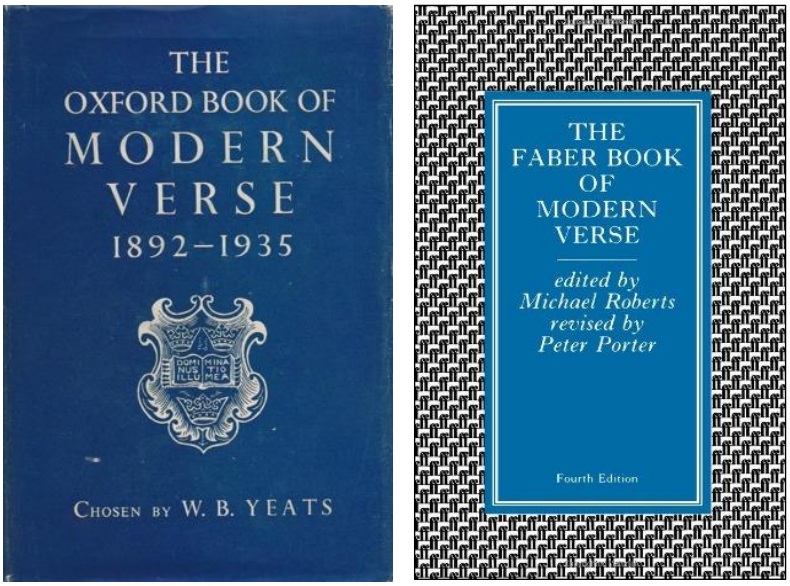

Fig. 8: Cover pages of the 1936 *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (left), and *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* (right); https://www.abebooks.co.uk/Oxford-Book-Modern-Verse-1892-1935-YEATS/31139635791/bd; https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/1616734

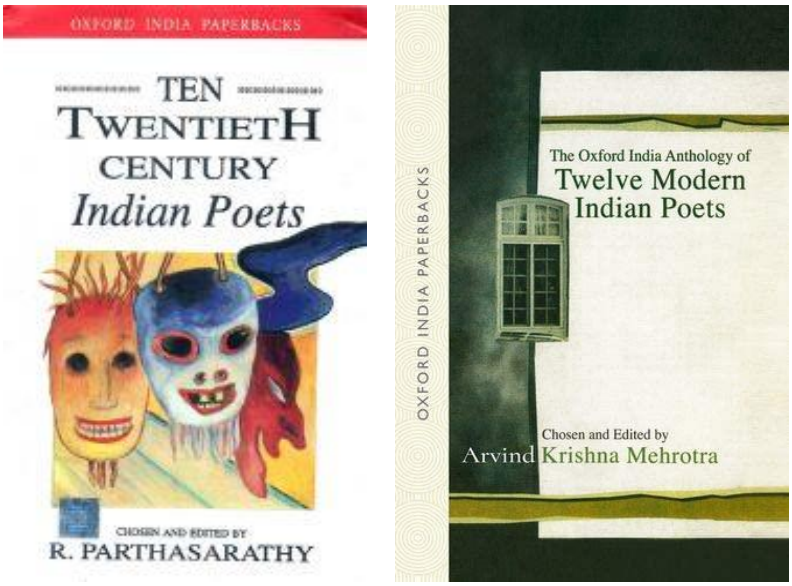

Fig. 9: Cover pages of *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets* (1976), and *Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992); https://www.oxford.co.za/book/9780195624021-10-20th-century-indian-poets; https://atlanticbooks.com/the-oxford-india-anthology-of-twelve-modern-indian-poets-by-mehrotra-arvind-krishna-9780195628678

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 is recorded to have been extensively reviewed in the national press and journals, and although it was denounced for "lacking selectivity and discrimination" it continued to create a dialogue into the 1970s (Chaudhuri 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 of (or lack 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 31).

Because of the vibrant emergence of new writing during the 1960s and 1970s, evaluation and consolidation became an increasingly important and necessary task. While anthologies were being regularly published, the criticism of 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* (1969)but also Gokak's *The Golden Treasury* (1970) for their open-door policy and lack of qualitative inclusion (Gupta 107). Pritish Nandy also addresses the issue in the introduction to his anthology *Indian Poetry in English 1947-1972* (1972) published by OUP.

> …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). (qtd. in Gupta 107)

Nandy's introduction is a perfect model of Lilian Chaitas's 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" (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 within the later anthologies that have been published since the 1970s, it may be argued that Parthasarathy set a framework for the modern Indian anthology. The later anthologies that followed, especially in the 1990s, also juggle between the desire for reconciliation with the pre-1950s poetry and post-1950s poetry 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 i.e., Mehrotra's *Twenty Indian Poems* (1990), *Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992), and Dharwadker and Ramanujan's *Modern Indian Poetry* (1994). Mehrotra famously states his arguments in his introduction to *Twelve Modern*:

> 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. (Introduction 1)

Mehrotra's statements in the introduction reflect the desire to make his anthology perform "the cultural work of canonization" (Chaitas 191), and the principles of his selection establish the "symbolic boundaries between inclusion and exclusion" (Chaitas 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.

Assessment of the paratextual historiography reveals the tendencies of anthologies, and it may be argued that "the anthology is almost always a response" (Gupta 102). During the 20th century, the anthology has become a cultural vehicle that is constantly striving for dominance, and dominance consequently translates into, and determines literary culture. The OUP has evidently dominated the project of consolidating the current modern Indian canon, however, other publishers have continued to put out anthologies and so the dialogue continues. OUP's most recent anthologies are *Early Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology 1829-1947* edited by Eunice de Souza and published in 2005, and the two-volume *Oxford Anthology of Writings from North East India* edited by Tilottoma Misra and published in 2010. Between 2000 and 2022 there have been roughly seventy-five anthologies of Indian poetry in English published by both independent and major publishing houses. Some anthology statistics from leading publishers during the mentioned two decades are: Penguin Books: 06, Bloomsbury: 04, Hawakal: 04, Sahitya Akademi: 04, Harper Collins: 03, Poetrywala: 02, Authorpress: 18, Macmillan: 01, Red River Press: 01 (Appendix 1).

The emergence of these 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. It all falls within the concept of "cultural materialism" which Williams formulated to understand literature within its socio-economic context. Author K. M. Newton succinctly presents Williams' argument in his chapter "Cultural Materialism and New Historicism" 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" (234). This struggle of forces is constantly visible in the making of modern Indian poetry undertaken by anthologies from different publishing houses. Anthologists always try to

justify in the introductory *paratext* that the present collection is separate from the "unified past," in doing so, they constantly bring them back into existence (*residual*), and modernism, in essence, is built upon the *old*.

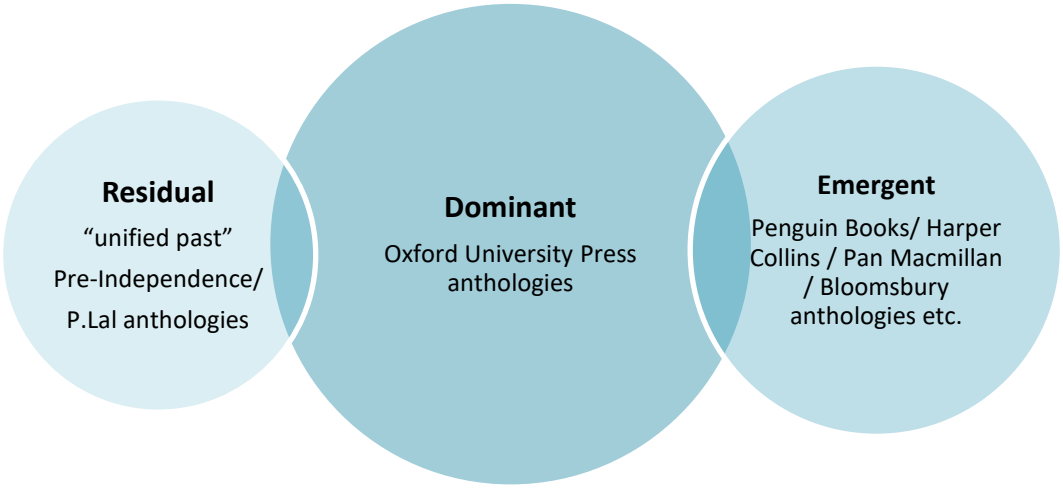

Fig. 10: A graphical presentation of the Indian poetry anthology war through Raymond Williams' epochal theory.

Literary standards have their origins in yesterday's anthologies. Similarly, the modern anthology is always striving towards the building of an archive, and they remain the site of a very self-conscious struggle. The struggle for Indian poetic modernity that takes place within the pages of anthologies is merely the manifestation of a particular type of literary culture. And literary culture, in practice, is constructed with many processes and systems working in nuanced co-ordination. 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 the *production* of the anthologies as "commodities." And in the public sphere, anthologies are tested through circulation and reception. It is the anthology which survives this cultural war that decides the mainstream literary culture/canon. Any canon – modernist or otherwise – therefore becomes a sub-product of this cultural and material struggle. In the Oxford anthologies, poetry exists not merely as artistic and aesthetic pieces but as agents in a narrative. The same is true in the case of the Thayil anthologies published by Penguin, although they are much more voluminous in comparison. But as Jahan Ramazani delightfully comments, the anthology is a "pretheoretical" object and it is struggling to survive in our supposedly "post-canonical" era (270).