Chapter Five

NEW MODERNISMS: PLURALITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

I

There is a real irony in the philosophy of the anthology as archival space – that any kind of newness that the anthology achieves constantly flows into the categorical past, and the whole enterprise is intended for the future. Andrew Bennett, in his book *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (1999) makes a case concerning the philosophy and practice of writing for posterity in what he calls the "textual afterlife" (1). Bennett writes:

> Writers, artists and other manufacturers of cultural artefacts have a perennial fascination with the immortality effect, the ability of a poem, novel, statue, painting, photograph, symphony to survive beyond the death of the artist. But during the eighteenth century this quality begins to be figured as a determining force in cultural production. The poet … no longer writes simply for money, contemporary reputation, status, or pleasure. Instead, he writes so that his identity, transformed and transliterated, disseminated in the endless act of reading, will survive. (Bennett 1-2)

The anthology arguably serves as a habitat for the "textual afterlife." The motive for this culture of posterity began in the 18th century as an impulse associated with the production of poetry among the Romantic circle and one which still influences the very essence of modern poetry. The Keatsian idea of "negative capability" or William Hazlitt's idea of "disinterested sympathy" which insists on the dissolution of personal/poetic identity in the quest for the ideal is at the centre of artistic autonomy and the theory of posterity. It was on this conviction that Keats' poems were anthologized for the first time in *Anthology of British Poets* (1824) edited by William Hazlitt himself. The invention of the modern canon thus began with an insistence on the belief that through criticism and discrimination, a good work will eventually become separated from what is "common" or "everyday" (Bennett 3).

Theories of poetry have always been rooted in an absolute division between writing what is original, innovative, and revolutionary i.e. a form which challenges the categorical past, and writing which is anchored in tradition i.e. the replication and simulation of the past. The objective to achieve a style of writing which possesses both a contemporary appeal and an in-built redundancy is very much at the core of the modernist literary architecture; the argument being that the "original" poem should be

"both new and before its time" (Bennet 3). Wordsworth in his famous preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* cajoles the poets to ponder, "to whom we address ourselves," leaving it as a suspended statement; as an inquiry to which he never gave a suitable answer (175). This is the predicament that French theorist Jean-François Lyotard referred to as "modernity" – a complex circumstance in which the writer "no longer knows for whom he writes" (qtd. in Bennett 21). During the 20th century, the democratization of print technology, the commodification of literary culture, and the growth of readership led to the disintegration of the erstwhile sympathetic audience which was a closed coterie until the 19th century. This development coincided with emerging forms of criticism and taste judgement which determine the criteria for establishing the culture of posterity. Therefore modernism began as a cult and culture of post-Romanticism where new theories of contemporaneity and posthumous recognition became increasingly important (Bennett 21).

The stylistic and ideologic transition of Indian English poetry during the 20th century (pre-independence and post-independence) is marked by an extremity of attitude towards the romantic ideals of the past. The quest for original, innovative, and revolutionary spirit in poetry vis-à-vis the modernist voice was first established in the manifestos of A.V. Rau's anthology *Modern Indian Poetry* (1958) and P.Lal and K.R. Rao's *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1959). This attempt to create a new literary paradigm within the anthology medium is perhaps one of the most significant events of modern Indian thinking. Between 1918 and 2022 there have been over ninety-three poetry anthologies that have used a combination of the "Indian", "Modern". or "Contemporary" in their titles (Appendix 1). It is a substantial number of publications which reveal a deeper subconscious desire to anthologize the nation – to create an idea of a new India. The challenge, however, is that the very act of editing an anthology as a representative of post-independence Indian poetry is a difficult task of constructing an "ideal continuity" between heterogeneous texts (Srivastava 151-152).

The problem with the "modernizing trajectory" offered by anthologies that have been published since the 1950s is that much of their marketability resides with the titles themselves which reflects a taxonomical obsession with classifying literary specimens (Srivastava 152). Mention may be made of a few volumes published over the years including *Modern Indian Poetry: An Anthology* (1958), *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1959), *Modern Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology and a Credo* (1969), *The*

Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry (1970), *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English: An Assessment and Selection* (1972), *Modern Indian Poetry* (1974), *New Writing in India* (1974), *New Dimensions in Indo-English Poetry* (1980), and the fairly recent *Modern Indian Poetry by Younger Indians* (2019) etc.

This diverse textual availability may also be understood as a symptom of "the widespread impact of an emerging mass print culture on a developing modern consciousness" (Brinkman 1). It may be argued that Indian poetic modernism had its consecration through a continuum of anthologies that spanned from the 1950s and culminated with the OUP anthologies of the 1990s. To use Walter Benjamin's argument about objects and collecting practices, the continuum of anthologies falls into a category of "completeness" and integrates into a new system/identity and every single component within this new system benefits from its identity. For instance, after the publication of Mehrotra's *Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992) by OUP, all the twelve poets in the anthology entered the canon. However, a conflict also arises: the poetic modernism of the post-independence euphoria archived in the anthologies of P.Lal – *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1959) and *Modern Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology and a Credo*(1969) is very different from the poetic modernism archived in Mehrotra's *Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992). The taste judgment which set the criteria for modernity in the 1950s is divergent from the criteria of the 1960s, the 1970s, and what ultimately ended up in the 1990s anthologies. Two arguments may be proposed at this juncture, one acting as the corollary to the other: a) Indian poetic modernism may be best understood as a continuum which goes through a cycle of innovation and consecration within anthologies where various agents come into play, and b) the existence of these cycles makes Indian poetic modernity an evergreen project which embodies Jürgen Habermas's idea of modernity as an "unfinished" project.

It is still a curious question to ask, that after two centuries of writing Indian English poetry, and hundreds of anthologies later, volumes with titles like "modern" and "new" continue to emerge. Why is it so? Some explanations may be taken from Macherey's arguments on literary production, that modernity is an "ideological" and "explicit theme" against which "work is continuously defined" (184), and it has to move as a collective identity – hence anthologies – because the "solitary outlaw of the past could not embody modernity" (235). The anthologies of Indian poetry that have emerged

in the marketplace since the 1990s are not as elementary as the titles because most contain within them the poetry of the present, the past, and what is considered new. There is always a dialogue happening between the *dominant*, the *residual*, and the *emergent*, and the negotiation among different literary and cultural tendencies continues to take place within its pages.

II

Our understanding of the modern anthology as a "problematic archive" is constantly reinforced every time we try to deconstruct its inner workings (Diepeveen 141). Although it is through anthologies that modern canons are arguably constructed, within modernity another substructure called the contemporary also emerges and it becomes difficult to decipher their respective meanings as both represent cultural dimensions of time. What is considered *new* continuously flows into the categorical *past* and becomes part of the historical. Herein lies the fundamental problem with the use of titles such as "modern" in poetry anthologies: it merely becomes an attempt and never truly succeeds in defining the "modern."

One of the solutions that Indian poetry anthologists/editors developed to mitigate this problem is through the creation of specific time frames and chronological frameworks to define their modernity. Sudeep Sen in his anthology *The Harper Collins Book of English Poetry* (2012) features only poets born post-1950. Mehrotra's *Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992) takes a similar approach where only poets whose first publications occurred post-1950 are included. Dharwadkar calls them "children of *Midnight's Children"* who "have grown up in a country which is separated by a massive rupture from the India of the Raj." (206) Both the mentioned anthologies and many others regard the mid-point of the 20th century as the beginning of the new wave of modernity in Indian English poetry. All these anthologies, despite being separated by decades, are "contemporaries in their shared concerns" in the project of establishment and consecration of *new modernities* (Fish 465).

For Indian poetry in English, the 1970s was an important decade where a new dichotomy of anthologies and anthologists emerged. Two strains of anthologies emerged that were almost opposite – one *centripetal* by design, moving towards canon building, such as R. Parthasarathy's *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets* (1976), and the second *centrifugal* by design, moving towards wider inclusion such as P.Lal's *Modern Indian*

Poetry in English: An Anthology & A Credo (1969). When taken as singular volumes, the editors of every poetry anthology make unique individual claims about the kind of collection they have edited/curated, but they eventually fall under these two panoptic frameworks.

The discourse on discontent and pluralism in Indian English poetry thus began with P. Lal's *An Anthology & A Credo*. While it was majorly criticized because of Lal's decision to include over a hundred poets in his anthology, it pushed the boundaries a little bit further in terms of innovation. Literary critics, on the other hand, have always operated with a discriminatory attitude towards the inclusion of multiple voices at any given time. As a fallout of the "canon wars" of the 1980s, Indian anthologies that were published in the 1990s decade became more conservative and closer to Matthew Arnold's proposition of the central aspect of culture in *Culture and Anarchy* i.e. "the best which has been thought and said in the world" (6), thereby becoming more *centripetal*.

A substantial number of Indian poetry anthologies published since the 1950s have attempted the creation of new literary paradigms (Appendix 1). Neelam Srivastava in her 2010 essay "Anthologizing the nation: Literature anthologies and the idea of India" argues that what anthologies have done is force a sense of "ideal continuity between disparate texts, which aims to reproduce a narrative of the post-independence Indian nation, indeed to mimic its supposedly modernizing trajectory" (152). Srivastava goes far as to accuse the publications between the 1970s and the present of being "ambivalent" and "Janus-faced" (152). It is evident that anthologies create a narrative through an assemblage of texts, however, the polyphony of voices that have emerged in the last three decades (post-1990) has led to new pluralism of literature(s) which are also defined by their own sets of discontents. Over the said decades, the enterprise of archiving poetry, editing anthologies, and building canons in India has become tied up to not only larger national and literary concerns but also concerns of the globalized world. In doing so, the decisions and liability of the editors have become more pronounced and high stakes. The need to continually examine canons against the backdrop of political culture has never been more required (Di Leo 12).

To illuminate the problematic modernity of Indian English poetry and canon building as evidenced in anthologies, this thesis has arrived at an understanding of two broad categories of anthologies as per their fundamental designs: a) the *centripetal*

anthology, and b) the *centrifugal* anthology. The *modus operandi* of the *centripetal* anthology is the clear vision to establish critical standards – to build canons. On the other hand, the *centrifugal* anthology is a much more complicated domain where two further substructures exist: the *bridge* and the *anti-canon* tendencies. The bridge anthology tries to establish a narrative through the inclusion of both the old and the new, symbolizing an exchange and the passing on of tradition; the anti-canon anthology is anti-status-quo, innovative, and a rebellious strain that celebrates absolute newness (see fig. 12). Some detailed characteristics and specimens of the anthology types are listed below:

1. The Centripetal Anthology

- Canonical in nature
- Characterized by the editor's meticulous selection
- Characterized by subsequent reprints often backed by major publishing houses
- Tendency to prioritize poets instead of poetry
  Ten Twentieth Century Poets (1976) ed. R. Parthasarathy
  Twelve Modern Indian Poets (1992) ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra

2. The Centrifugal Anthology

2.1 The Bridge Anthology

- Inclusion of both canonized poets and newer poets
- A dialogue often takes place between the anthologized texts
- Comprehensive and voluminous
  60 Indian Poets (2008) ed. Jeet Thayil
  Harper Collins Book of English Poetry (2012) ed. Sudeep Sen
  The Penguin Book of Indian Poets (2020) ed. Jeet Thayil

2.2 Anti-Canon Anthology

- Exclusively newer poets
- Often topical
- Works with the idea of celebrating and archiving the contemporary
  Strangertime (1977) ed. Pritish Nandy
  Poetry with Young People (2007) ed. Gieve Patel

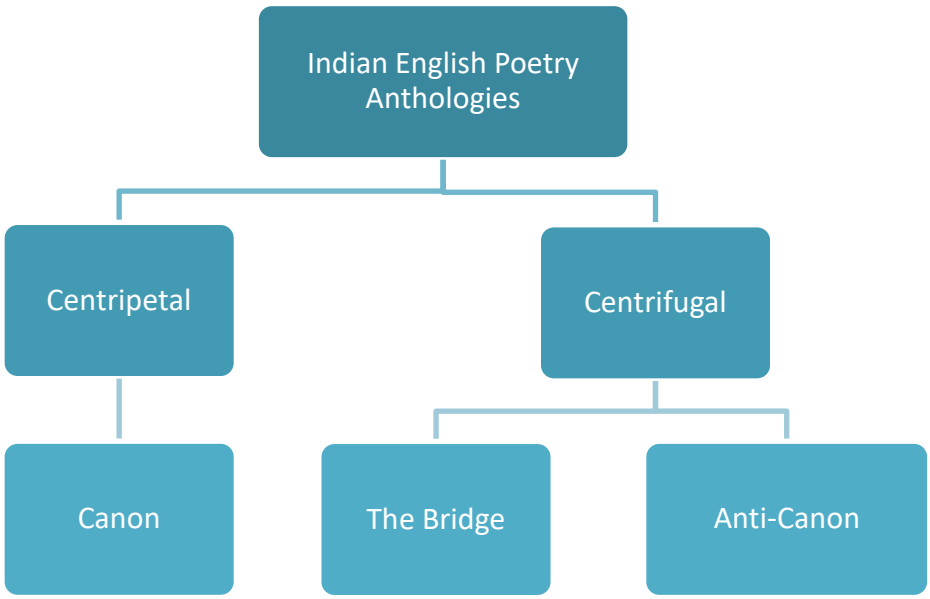

Fig. 12: The anthology strains and their substructures

A succinct argument cannot be made regarding which anthology strain contributed in shaping ideas of modern Indian English poetry for the reading public because both are a diametrical product of the other in an endless process of literary canonization. One of the difficulties of defining Indian poetic modernity lies in the distinctness of the anthology strains; almost all editors claim in their respective *paratextual* matters the value of their anthology and why it was required to be published, implying that the previous ones were not sufficient. We may go back to Mehrotra's immodest proposal that "The origins of modern Indian poetry in English go no further back than the poets in this anthology" (1) statement in *Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992). A more recent example may be seen in the editor's note to the Bloomsbury anthology *100 Great Indian Poems* (2018); the editor, Abhay Kumar justifies his collection by claiming that he has "read widely, all poetry anthologies which have been published so far, covering different languages and geographical regions of India" (xiv). It is a tall statement, but just as we cannot entirely accept it, we cannot entirely reject it either. His objective is the presentation of his anthology as the most representative of the Indian subcontinent, challenging all other anthologies preceding it. Kumar's editorial note and his promises stand in contradiction to an argument that Karen Kilcup, a scholar who has worked extensively on canons and traditions makes, that "No anthology can make a serious claim to being characteristic until the editor has read virtually everything

in the field" (38). Kilcup's observation is pragmatic; any anthology in no way addresses the aesthetics of an entire field of texts.

The publication of newer anthologies has therefore been driven by some inherent feeling of disatifaction with the past. However, the cyclical nature, or the inseparability of the *centripetal* and the *centrifugal* strains of anthologies is apparent while assessing the historical current in the making of modern Indian poetry. In fig. 13 we can see a timeline representing the overall sentiments/tendencies which were dominant among the Indian poetry anthologies in each decade post-1950. The immediate post-1950 anthologies were driven by the need to promote a modern idea of India, a new national literature, and a new canon. The *centripetal* efforts of the 1950s were spearheaded by anthologies such as Rau's *Modern Indian Poetry: An Anthology* (1958), and Lal and Rao's *Modern Indo-Anlian Poetry* (1959). The experimental *centrifugal* decades of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were led by anthologies from P.Lal, Pritish Nandy, V.K. Gokak, Saleem Peeradina, Gauri Deshpande, Adil Jussawalla, Vilas Sarang and others (Appendix 1). A few contrarian anthologies including R. Parthasarathy's *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets* (1976), K.N. Daruwalla's *Two Decades of Indian Poetry 1960-1980* (1980), Kaiser Haq's *Contemporary Indian Poetry* (1990) began to set foundations for the canonical anthologies of OUP to emerge in the 1990s. What we may problematize here is how modern Indian poetic identity was achieved through the slow cultural consolidation of poets and poems through decades of anthologies. Through some Hegelian dialectic progression, the *centrifugal* anthologies exist to be distilled into *centripetal* anthologies through scrutiny and taste judgements by editors, institutions, and the reading public.

In fig. 14 a volumetric visual representation has been illustrated using the list of Indian English poetry anthology dataset compiled during the course of this study (Appendix 1). The dataset cannot be considered authoritative since this research is not an empirical study, however as described in Chapter One, the dataset was generated using the two most reliable sources in this domain: a) the "Chronology of Significant Publications, Journals and Events, 1947-99" included in Bruce King's *Modern Indian Poetry in English* revised edition (355-387), and b) forty-six issues (1972 to 2020) of the annual bibliography "India" compiled by Shyamala A. Narayan and published annually in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*.

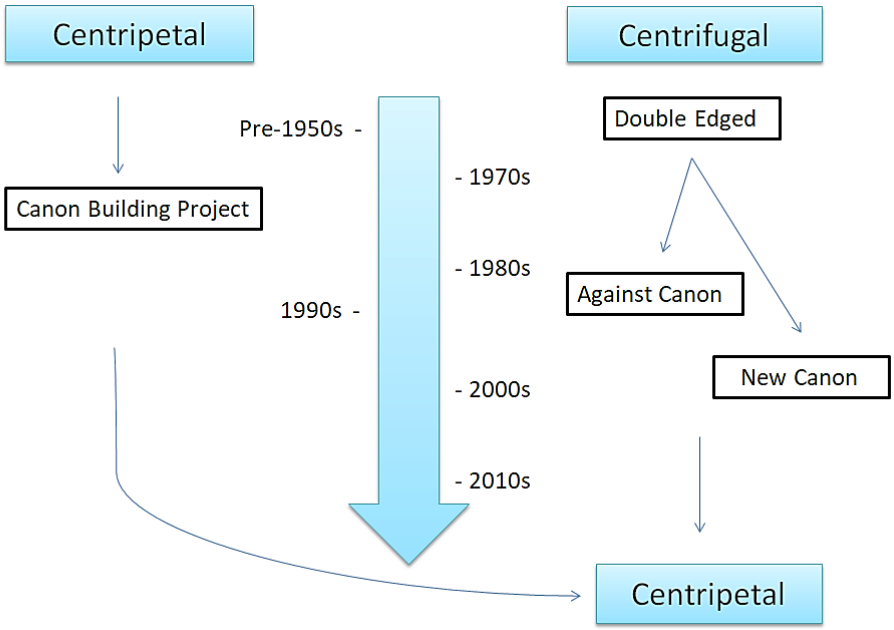

Fig. 13: Timeline of anthologies of modern Indian poetry in English.

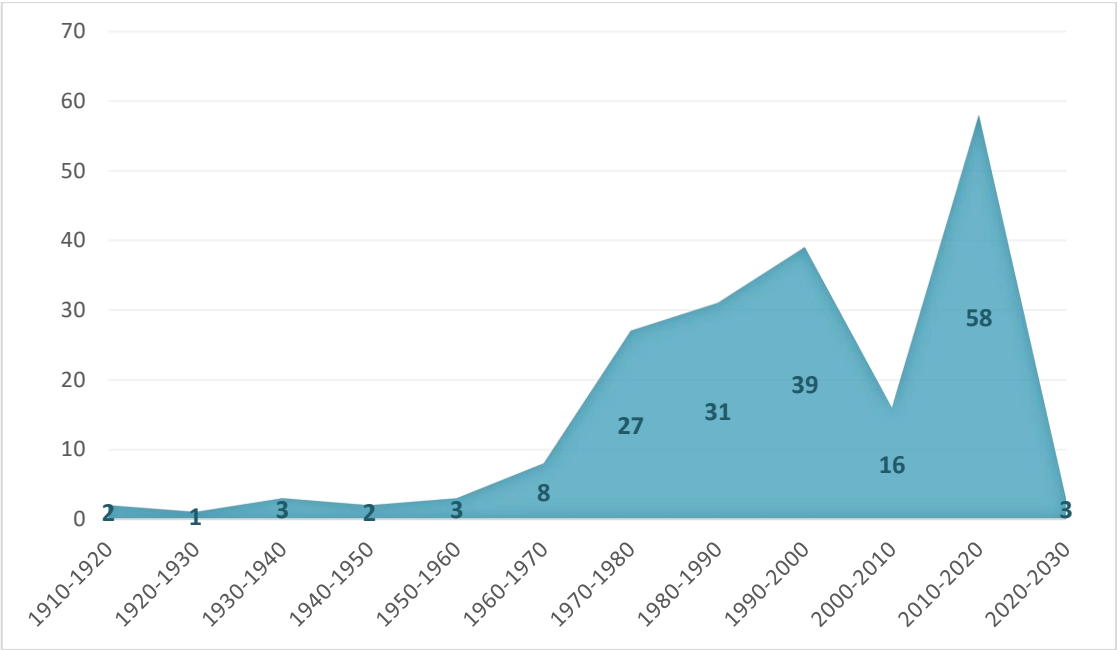

Fig. 14: A volumetric representation of Indian poetry anthologies from 1910 to 2020.

It is visually apparent that the second half of the 20th century or the post-independence decades of India has been an exciting time for poetry (see fig. 14). The cycle of production, poetic experimentation, and consolidation can be visibly discerned. The decades from 1960 to 1990 are marked by continuous peaks, a sign of multiplicity of publications, and the sudden slope between 1990-2000 is the consecration decade when

both *The Oxford Indian Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992) and *The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry* (1994) were published. The following sudden peaking of publications post-2000 represents a repetition of the cycle of breaking free from old canons or desiring to break free from old canons – a repetition of the cycle of *centripetal* and *centrifugal* anthologies.

III

In recent decades, the arrival of economic liberalization and political liberalism has shown its influence on cultural expression and cultural impressions. But mostly it has had far-reaching consequences in literary publishing. Poetry anthologies, despite their limited market share, have been one of the foremost participants and politicized spaces within the publishing industry. A remarkable seven anthologies of Indian poetry in English were published within ten months from major publishers including Bloomsbury, Penguin Books, Harper Collins, and Hawakal during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in 2020. The pace at which newer anthologies with *centrifugal* tendencies have emerged in recent years is unique because it reveals the inner workings of the canon discourse and changing attitudes within the publishing industry as well. Famed literary historian John Guillory observes, "The assumption has been that canonical authors in some sense 'represent' their race, gender, or class constituencies, rather as legislators might represent their constituencies…" (qtd. in Gates 35). Because of the rising pressure of political correctness and liberal attitudes, what we are witnessing is the shift of emphasis from an *evaluative* to a more *representative* mode of anthologies. Debates regarding multiple literary identities, fair representation, and linguistic and cultural diversity in literature have become the criteria for the *new modernism*.

In our retrospective investigation, it can be seen that anthologies of modern Indian poetry have become extremely varied since the 1990s. Vinay Dharwadkar observes in his afterword to *Modern Indian Poetry* (1994) that the "great variety of voices and echoes, shapes and forms" that are in his anthology "highlights the intertexture of modern Indian poetry" which inhabits "a wide range of sources, influences, conventions, and literatures, that are variously local and regional, folk and canonical, national and international" (198). As publishing became more democratized, it created conditions for new poetic trajectories to emerge, and with the crystallization of the modern Indian poetic identity reaching a plateau in the 1990s, the need for new

modernities and *plurality* also arose. The systematic examination of the post-1990s anthologies reveals a freedom which forays into more interest-based, identity-based, and ideological-based volumes (Appendix 1). These parallel or alternative poetry anthologies that have been emerging in the market are separated by their specialized interests from their legacy counterparts, and their trajectories are arguably motivated by prior shortcomings. This new *plurality* in anthology-making may be considered radical, but the desire to establish a political identity is still inherent within them. They too seem unable to escape enforcing boundaries for their thematic, political, and ideological needs.

The emerging importance of aesthetic and political assessment in Indian poetry anthologies that have been published in the last thirty years is very evident. Anthologies including *Nine Indian Women Poets* (1997) by Eunice de Souza, *Dancing Earth: An Anthology of Poetry from North East India* (2009) by Robin Ngangom and Kynpham Nongkynrih, and *Tattooed with Taboos* (2015) by Chaoba Phuritshabam, Shreema Ningombam and Soibam Haripriya all draw a political boundary with their collections. Even though they are thematic, they are not topical anthologies in the traditional sense, they draw concrete boundaries be it gender or geographical which are both volatile spaces.

There have been *bridge* anthologies in between such as Eunice de Souza's *Both Sides of the Sky: Post-Independence Indian Poetry in English* (2008) published by National Book Trust, Rubana Haq's *The Golden Treasury of Writers Workshop Poets* (2009) published by Writers Workshop, along with other retrospective volumes such as Eunice de Souza*'s Early Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology 1829-1947* (2005) published by OUP, and Sheshalatha Reddy's recent *Mapping the Nation: An Anthology of Indian Poetry in English 1870-1920* (2012) published by Anthem Press, New York. Nonetheless, anthologies of the past two decades – like those of the 1960s and 1970s – have shown real *centrifugal* tendencies and the political voices that have emerged from these anthologies have been taken notice with seriousness.

In recent history, the publication of Robin Ngangom and Kynpham Nongkynrih's *Dancing Earth* (2009) by Penguin Books, and Tilottoma Misra's *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India vol. I & II* (2010) seem to have raised awareness of the strong regional poetic sensibilities of the Indian subcontinent. In recent years regional poetry has distilled into the university curriculum. The recently introduced anthology for

the four-year undergraduate course *Indian Writing in English* (2013) by the Department of English, University of Delhi contains select works of only four Indian poets: Henry Louis Derozio, Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, and Robin Ngangom. Although the poets are represented by two poems each, the metrical weightage is a twenty-five percentile share in an anthology that is studied by thousands of students each year. The inclusion of Ngangom's work in a university anthology designed to cover two hundred years of Indian poetry in English therefore becomes a significant event. It reflects the changing *habitus* of regional poetry to institutional anthologies, and also the mobility of the same from *low-market/autonomy* zone to *heteronomony/consecration* zone which are the conditions of canonization (Webb 59).

The second significant trajectory seen in recent poetry anthologies as part of the *new modernism* is the manifestation of the diaspora anthologies. In recent years, diaspora anthologies have gained traction with their self-styled promotion and audience engagement. Since 2010, two diaspora collectives led by Indian-origin poets have come into existence – MATWAALA, based in the United States and headed by the late poet Saleem Peeradina, and secondly, The Whole Kahani, based in the United Kingdom headed by poet Kavita A. Jindal. Apart from organizing poetry events, they have published their respective in-house anthologies, consolidating the works of newer diaspora poets. MATWAALA's recent anthology titled *MAPS* (2019) is not a commissioned volume, but rather an act of assertion. The fact that it is made available for free access on their website indicates that the intention is not commercial but rather a political and ideological one. Unlike the case of Dom Moraes who is long absent from Indian poetry anthologies or otherwise classified as a diaspora poet (Krätli), the MATWAALA anthology represents a case, not of forced identification, but of the formation of a political identity that is generated organically from within.

But how do we understand these new trajectories? How do we define the diaspora anthology? Where does it historically stand in the overall tradition of modern Indian poetry and Indian poetry anthologies? The activities of the diaspora collectives have become quite frequent and engaging, their goal seemingly driven to engage both local and foreign audiences. Some of the past venues they have chosen for their gatherings, indicated by their website, include Hunter College, NYU, Murray Edwards College, Cambridge University etc. with dignitaries like Salman Rushdie attending the sessions.

The venues appear very strategic and before long we may see their poetry distilling into institutional anthologies published by university presses.

The anthologies of the diaspora collectives: MATWAALA, and The Whole Kahani, although not disruptive at the moment seem to be setting down new paths towards the expression of solidified parallel identities. During my interview with Kavita A. Jindal (Appendix 5), founder of The Whole Kahani, I raised inquiries concerning the motivation behind The Whole Kahani collective, their work, and the emergence of the diaspora anthologies as well. Some revelatory excerpts from our exchanges are presented below:

> **Benjamin Karam:** How did the conception of The Whole Kahani (TWK) collective happen? How and why did you decide to start publishing TWK anthologies?
>
> **Kavita A. Jindal:** The group was formed in 2011 to provide a creative perspective that straddles cultures and boundaries. Initially it was a spin-off workshop group for writers who had contributed to the anthology 'Too Asian, Not Asian Enough', published by Tindal Street Press, UK. This title encapsulated the conundrum faced by British writers of South Asian ethnic background – either their stories were deemed to not be following the usual tropes required, or they were deemed as being too steeped in Asian culture. In 2013, Reshma Ruia and I co-founded the group as a more formal entity with a focus on the publishing future and the ethos of the group. We had the uniqueness of being a group of mainly-published British writers hailing from the South Asian diaspora; individually we drew on dual or triple heritages in our writing; we understood each other; and we had a 360 degree perspective on the UK and also our ethnic heritages. Thus 'The Whole Kahani' was named and born. A 21st century central London set.
>
> **Karam:** Diaspora literature has been an area of study in academia for a quite some time now, but the act of establishing collectives such as MATWALLA or THE WHOLE KAHANI makes it even more concrete. Would you say that the anthologies published by these collectives are necessary manifestations required for being recognized and stem from a desire to archive? And would you also say

> that the 'diaspora anthology' is a new sub-genre within the anthology genre itself?
>
> **Jindal:** Yes, I would agree with you that the 'diaspora anthology' is a new sub-genre within the anthology itself. Yes, these are necessary manifestations of the desire to be seen, to be heard, to be read, and most importantly to bring solidarity to each other by identifying our commonalities as coming from the same part of the word, rather than our provincial differences.

Similar to the plight of regional poets and their attempts to consolidate their poetry, the emergence of the diaspora anthologies, and their struggles to establish their unique globalist community may be understood as a long-drawn conflict of an experienced dislocation – of both place and mind. The desire "to be seen, to be heard, to be read," as stated by Kavita, reveals the yearning for a poetic *habitus* for the diaspora community. This presents an argument of dislocated identity and a broader commentary on the nature of new modernism and the continuing challenges of being relevant.

IV

The modernism that swept the collective psyche of post-1950s India was experimental in nature and expansive, yet held together by the quest for a metaphysical centre. One may argue that there was even an inertia of new thinking. Jerry Pinto in his 2017 Clearing House article recalls a personal exchange with poet Ranjit Hoskote as the latter talks about the crucial role that Clearing House and its books played during the time. He recalls:

> [Clearing House] marked "the emergence of a new generation that was politically aware, linguistically inventive, playfully alive to the variousness of rhetoric". Second, the Clearing House poets immersed themselves in English as well as other languages, such as Marathi (Chitre and Kolatkar), Hindi and Prakrit (Mehrotra), Gujarati (Jussawalla), Spanish (Chitre).… Third, their engagement with what we would today recognize as a local that was already opening itself out to, and being powerfully reshaped by, a sense of the global. Fourth, and indeed quite crucially, Clearing House offers an early example of that paradigm that we have, in recent years, come to describe as the 'collective' or the 'collaboration'. (qtd. in Pinto 238)

Within the realm of postcolonial studies, the "local" and the "global" have become an emergent confluence point of discourse. The "global" can no longer be assumed as a sense of literature of the world, but understood as "'international' structures that arise and transactions that occur across national borders" (Srivastava 153; Prendergast 6). It may be argued that there was a sense of collective dreaming, of literary utopianism in the modernism of the Bombay poets, reflected in their poetry and anthologies of the 1960s and 1970s. However, the *new modernism* that we are beginning to see in anthologies is of an entirely different strain – one that is *centrifugal*, without the quest for a metaphysical centre, without the quest for a national identity, and without a common dream. They embody an inward-gazing character that insists upon its existence. On retrospective inquiry, the *new modernism* as it manifested post-1990 India may be summed up with W. B. Yeats' famed line "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" from "The Second Coming" (Yeats, line 3).

In my interview with poet and editor Rochelle Potkar (Appendix 4), I also raised a few questions concerning the changing directions of modern Indian poetry and its future; her responses – as an "insider" – were enlightening. Some relevant sections are presented below:

> **Benjamin Karam:** I have been following the recent trends in poetry publication in India and it seems to me that more and more anthologies are now entering into a more democratic and diplomatic space, often focusing on defining a whole, a collective, instead of promoting schools of poetry (like the Bombay School or Bengal Poets) or individual poets. Where do you think this new desire stem from? Could it be an influence of the growing nature of political liberalism among the young people in the country?
>
> **Rochelle Potkar:** I think it's the maturing of the ecosystem. It's not a crying toddler who needs to be picked up every time, but a teenager who might have angst, but also can stand on its feet and find its own friends for travel or cultural exchange. Once we fill our hunger and express the attacks of our muses in singly-authored collections, there is appetite left for cross-breeding. Also, a personal collection takes a long time to bake, anthologies are quick bites and can reach the market in 1/3rd the time. I am glad the schools of poetry be it Bombay or Bengal

is not the mainstay. That seemed too elitist and exclusionary in my opinion, filled with mostly male poets, and fortressed.

Another reason is a plain marketing device. If you have 50 people in an anthology you have at a minimum 50 mouths to market it, against one poet with one collection.

Karam: As a poet who is travelling from place to place organizing workshops and promoting poetry, do you believe poetry has a future, not just in classrooms but in the public sphere?

Potkar: No. and Yes. Poetry doesn't have much of a future unless it is sponsored robustly. If it is sponsored stingy, only a few poets who hold a stranglehold on curation or have contacts and networks will get to read and they will display their works year after year to the sheer neglect of many other rising voices. If poetry is sponsored there will be more interfaces and more voices.

But for sponsorship, the money-people need to see a return in terms of brand building or something. That's why we have all kinds of festivals in India from well-sponsored to self-sponsored.

Poetry I think will survive in the public sphere only because it is indispensable in the private sphere. To make sense of an increasingly chaotic absurd world of climate change and political upheaval, economic upturns and feminisms, you will sooner have to rely on the telegram of some sense-surreal sense – poetry.

Potkar is a poet of the present, and there is a lot we can establish from her two responses. She (and her contemporary) seem to be acutely aware of the poetic *habitus* – the need for social capital and economic capital likewise, and the need to position the *self* not within national concerns as it were in the categorical *past*, but against "global" concerns – a symptom of our hyperglobalized age. The *new modernism*, therefore, seems to be trapped between the pragmatism of social and capital consciousness and the idealism of "global" concerns.

This new conformism can be traced in two significant major Indian poetry anthologies that have been published since 2000 – the internationally well-reviewed *60*

Indian Poets (2008), and its recent expanded edition *The Penguin Book of Indian Poets* (2022), both edited by Jeet Thayil. The latter anthology is praised by Salma Rushdie as "Dazzling," and by Michael Ondaatje as "Groundbreaking." Both are quite impressive endorsements from literary veterans to make the anthology an instant bonafied volume. In his foreword, provocatively titled "Extinction Violin," Thayil discusses how the need for his new anthology of Indian poetry arose. He writes:

> In the intervening years the world had transformed, and where form had been the theme for the earlier anthologies, more urgent considerations were now in play. Unsurprisingly, the book developed an end-of-the-world climate all its own, a sense of catastrophic atmospheric changes. (xix)

Thayil continues in his foreword:

> We were witness to the struggle between the desperate regimes of authoritarian old men and a brash new world clamouring to be born. From this came the idea of extinction, and extinction's music, and a climactic archiving. There are ninety-four poets in this anthology, of whom forty-nine are women and forty-five men. Three quarters of a century separate the oldest poet, born in 1924, from the youngest, born in 2001. The dates serve as bookends to a movement's unlikely coming of age (xix).

The whole enterprise of this massive poetry anthology from Penguin is interesting because Thayil also clarifies that he was suggested by Meru Gokhale (Editor-in-Chief of Literary Publishing at Penguin Random House India) to "refurbish *60 Indian Poets*" (Editor's Note xxiii). For good or bad, *60 Indian Poets* has generated a lot of dialogue – just like Lal's *An Anthology and a Credo* did in the 1970s – accumulating praises as well as criticisms. There are now 94 poets in the anthology including the works of poets Robin Ngangom, Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih, and Revathy Gopal who were previously excluded from *60 Indian Poets*. The works of Agha Sahid Ali continue to be absent from the volume because Thayil argues that "copyright holders would not part with the necessary permissions" (Introduction xviii).

Thayil's statement in his foreword confesses a few significant insights in the making of the new anthologies: a) Anthologies of modern Indian poetry have engineered the deliberate extinction of old ideas and old poets through archiving. Both *60 Indian*

Poets and *Penguin Book of Indian Poetry*, although it is not disclosed explicitly in words, include only the poets whose works appeared post-1950, and who write in English; b) *Penguin Book of Indian Poetry* is exemplary of how the political milieu can no longer be ignored in the process of editing major anthologies. The fact that Thayil explicitly has to disclose the weightage of female poets and male poets is coerced by the changing social and political demand for equal representation. He writes: "There are ninety-four poets in this anthology, of whom forty-nine are women and forty-five men" (i); and c) Although most editors of anthologies opine that *poets* don't matter as much as the *poems*, these new evidence emerge quite contrary to their claims, because they have become subjects of a new form of political scrutiny, and the resulting volume is nothing short of a "climatic archiving" driven by fear (Foreword i).

At this peculiar juncture in the continuing literary history of Indian poetry in English, there is little we can understand and even fewer things we may predict. However, the poetry of the *new modernism* will be archived in anthologies in time. Karen Kilcup, a scholar of canons and traditions, observes "What (and whom) should we represent in our anthologies? What do we mean by such terms as *diversity* and *inclusiveness*?" (qtd. in Di Leo 114). These are the questions that will regulate the future canons. Just as canons are not something that is built overnight, the landscape of Indian poetry in English from two hundred years ago, its identity amid the 20th century, at the end of the 20th century, and the categorical present are very far apart. A schematic understanding of what anthologies and Indian poetry in English have accumulated over the decades in terms of cultural impressions can be seen in John Guillory's arguments in *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (1993), where he observes:

> The canon achieves its imaginary totality, then, not by embodying itself in a really existing list, but by retroactively constructing its individual texts as a *tradition*, to which works may be added or subtracted without altering the impression of totality or cultural heterogeneity. (qtd. in Srivastava 153)

Canonized poets keep changing from time to time in anthologies. Traditions are built and destroyed, and anthologies continue to "fill the gaps between readers and literary works by creating a "narrative" assemblages of texts, as well as offering a critical apparatus to explain and contextualize them" (Srivastava 151). This process of creating "bizarre textual synecdoche" consecrates new life into the texts (Bloom 406). It is

because of the same reason this flexibility provides that the establishment of a true Indian canon could never be undertaken by the state. Only the collective interest and intersections between literary works, readers, and institutions have helped in the establishment of the Indian canon and it remains somewhat fluid as Guillory calls "imaginary totality" (33). That being said the emergence of *new modernism(s)* – the diaspora voices, the gendered identities, the globalist idealisms, and many other tangential interests continue to raise many questions regarding the process of locating them within the tradition.

The entry of Indian poets/editors in the poetry publishing industry in the late 1950s was a groundbreaking historical moment which enabled the archiving of poetry/texts with a non-Orientalist perspective. It uprooted the national literary temperament which was trapped in the East-West dichotomy. Anthologies and canons in particular are consolidation exercises and there has always been a tendency, as observed in the past, for literary canon to become extremely hegemonic once solidified (Bérubé 457). The *new modernism* and *pluralism* we are experiencing now is not a condemnation of the existing canon but a new counterpart to the canon that demands a dialogue. Perhaps it is only through a dialectical exchange in the pages of future anthologies that a healthy and transparent idea of modern Indian poetry may be nurtured. At present, Indian poetry is rich, but the creation of a *true* modern Indian canon arguably remains unfulfilled. A gradual shift in the landscape of poetry anthology publication in India is seemingly visible, yet the change is quite marginal and uncertain. It remains to be seen whether the new tangents and trajectories emerging in Indian poetry will be consecrated along with the old, or will they strive towards complete literary de-canonization. Poetic modernism remains an "unfinished" project – a continuum of changing values and tastes – and publishing houses, editors, and the anthologies that archive them continue to remain entangled in the dialogic web and the cultural wars of its times.