

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Most research on Indian poetry in English has focused on either the general thematic aspects or the changing perceptions of English as the medium of poetic expression in India. The language of Indian poetry in English has been analyzed for structural aspects and for nativisation, but the process of creation of such poetry demands further research. There is a need to understand the processes of signification from a cultural semiotic perspective, an area relatively unexplored by critics and researchers of Indian poetry in English. Moreover very little work on contemporary Indian English poetry in this direction is available. The underlying hypothesis for the study is that the principles of 'Cultural Semiotics' can provide a framework for analyzing the processes of signification in the contemporary Indian Poetry in English.

Application of semiotic frameworks to literary texts helps in revealing the ways in which meaning is produced by the structures of interdependent signs, by codes and conventions. Theories of semiotics proposed by theorists such as Saussure, Pierce, Barthes, Greimas, Jakobson etc. have proved beneficial to understand the processes of signification in literature and move beyond hermeneutic function of literary research. The present study attempts to analyse the cultural semiotics of the contemporary Indian poetry in English and develop a framework to understand the processes of meaning creation and evolution of such poetry as a cultural text, based on the framework primarily proposed by Lotman but also draws upon the works of Todorov, Kristeva, Barthes, Rifaterre, Williams and others.

To discuss the cultural aspects of contemporary Indian poetry in English we need a fresh look at definitions of 'culture' from the Indian perspective. The term acquires a whole new dimension in the Indian context. Our general notions of culture are coloured with theories primarily originating in the west. Conventional western theories of culture look at culture as a homogeneous whole representing a particular community or nation. This definition suffers when it comes to India as

India is predominantly multicultural, multilingual and may not necessarily follow the binary oppositional structure. Every state has its own cultural practices preserved in their own unique regional languages besides some kind of a common pan Indian culture. The case gets more complicated when we talk about Indian poetry in English as most poets are not just part of this multi-layered Indian culture but also partake in multi-national cultures being diaspora writers or having spent major part of their lives abroad. For example Tabish Khair, born in a small town of Bihar, shares the indigenous culture of Bihar as well as the national or the common core of Indian culture. But he has spent major part of his life teaching and living in Denmark. Thus his poetry presents at once an insider participant view of Indian culture as well as an outsider perspective who can see the interactions of the local culture and its 'anti-culture' forming one cultural whole. Similar is the case of Agha Sahid Ali, native of Kashmir, born in Delhi and educated in Delhi, Srinagar and Pennsylvania. He had a good part of his higher education in the US and most of his creative writings were produced during his stay in the US. Though most of his writings apparently present the Indian culture, a blend of Islamic and Hindu traditions, his style is often very American.

The term 'contemporary' for the purposes of this research refers to post 1990 period. Though many anthologists and critics like Hoskote (2002) and King (2001) consider 1980 as the point of departure, the researcher proposes to see 1991 as the dividing line. Major socio-cultural changes happened in India because of the economic liberalization and globalization processes which began in the 1990's. The other shaping forces which gained prominence in the 90's are the rise of 'global' terrorism, the satellite TV, ubiquitous media, internet revolution and lately web 2.0 or social media(blogs, facebook, twitter etc.) . The study is based on poetry published around this period by poets born in 1960's and 1970's like Tabish Khair, Sudeep Sen, C. P. Surendran, Sampurna Chattarji, Arundhati Subramanyam and Jeet Thayil etc often considered the second generation of modernist Indian English poets and emerging poets like Anand Thakore, Meena Kandasamy and Tishani Doshi. Poets from the North East like Anjum Hasan, Robin S Ngangom and

Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih also have been studied. Some later works of earlier generation poets born around 1950's, considered part of the 'canon', such as Agha Sahid Ali, Rukmini Bhaya Nair and Eunice de Souza, have also been considered provided they were published after 1990. The second generation of modernist Indian poets, unlike the earlier poets, is not involved in the cultural politics of Indian English. King argues that "the earlier poets often had a thinness of texture, an unwillingness to take chances, an avoidance of lyricism, obscurity, the wild, the political, the deviant. The poets who followed would explore these regions (333)."

Regarding contemporary Indian poetry in English, Ranjit Hoskote observes in his anthology, *Reasons for Belonging* (2002) that the 'anxiety for belonging' is no longer there in the Indian poets writing in English. Eunice De Souza(2008) in her introduction to the anthology of post-independence poetry observes about the Indian poets writing in English that they embark on a search for meaning, through an examination of themselves, their relationships with people, the environment and the world.

These poets present a new sensibility and thematic variety. The contemporary Indian English poets present new processes of signification where they draw their myths and metaphors from diverse cultures, history, religion, contemporary urban spaces, and media. Some of their themes may be 'conventional' but represented in contemporary language using words like 'spam', 'password' etc., signifying through a blend of contemporary as well as redefined myths.

The contemporary Indian poets writing in English have interactions with more than one parallel cultures and almost all are at least bilinguals. Kachru locates the 'literariness' of bilingual poets in "a blend of two or more linguistic textures and literary traditions" (161). Poets such as Tabish Khair, Sujata Bhatt, Sudeep Sen have lived, worked or had education across countries such as India, US, UK and China. This unique situation lends them access to different sign systems. Therefore their poetry demands a different poetics. They are not products of one culture in the conventional sense of the term. To understand the diverse parallel trends in their

poetry which at once represent immediate reality and also draw on canonical traditions, and to understand their interactions with culture we have to move from the conception of culture as ‘a bundle of primary and secondary modelling systems’ to the notion of ‘semiosphere’, as proposed by Lotman. This is also a shift from static to dynamic thinking. Through the semiospheric point of view, culture takes the shape of a heterogeneous whole bustling with multiple rhythms of development and transient dominants.

This study attempts to find answer to the following research questions:

1. What signification processes do contemporary Indian poets writing in English employ in their interaction with culture?
2. What role does the contemporary Indian English poets’ exposure to different cultures and bilingualism play in shaping the literariness of their creative expression?
3. What are the different parallel trends in contemporary Indian poetry in English and what semiotic framework can be used to explain the co-existence of such diverse parallel trends?
4. How Indian poetry in English evolves as a cultural text?

‘Cultural Semiotics’ as a methodology is usually associated with Tartu Moscow School of Semiotics and its chief proponent is Yuri Lotman, whose work became available in English only recently. Lotman’s ‘Cultural Semiotics’ proposes a holistic study of culture and the processes of meaning generation. Lotman’s chief contribution to the field is probably the notion of ‘Semiosphere’ and ‘Cultural Explosion’. In “Theses on the Semiotic Study of Cultures(as Applied to Slavic Texts)” presented at the Moscow Congress of Slavistsin, Lotman and his colleagues Uspensky, Ivanov, Toporov, and Piatigorsky proposed that culture may be regarded as a hierarchy of particular semiotic systems, as the sum of texts and

the set of functions correlated with them, or as a certain mechanism which generates these texts. Lotman defines cultural semiotics as a science studying functional correlation between different sign systems. In *Universe of the Mind*(1990), Lotman defines culture as ‘an open hierarchy of texts functioning as models of the culture they belong to. In being models they retain the distinctive features of the culture in question and thereby also define its boundaries to non-cultural or alternative cultural areas’. The cultural semiotics of Juri Lotman is directed toward the interdependence of regular and irregular conditions, stable and unstable semiotic processes, and the socially and semiotically highly tense relationship of centre and periphery. For any semiotic system two fundamental questions are to be described, first its relation with the world that lies beyond its borders and second relation between its static and dynamic processes. For the first Lotman says that a minimum of two languages is required to reflect a given reality. The space of reality cannot be represented by a single language, it can be expressed only through an aggregate of languages. Each of these is reciprocally dependent on the other due to the incapacity of each to express the world independently. They reflect the same reality in diverse ways. The relationship between multiplicity and unity is a fundamental characteristic of culture. Semenenko (2012) summarizes the core principles of Lotman’s semiotics as:

...the principle of *cultural isomorphism* —which postulates that all semiotic entities from individual consciousness to the totality of human culture are based on similar heterogeneous mechanisms of meaning-generation—and the *principle of textuality of culture* , the assumption that culture is an exceptionally complex text that in turn consists of texts within the texts.(146)

The key premises of cultural semiotics are that culture is the whole of uninherited information and the ways of its organization and storage. Text is essentially polyglot and belongs to at least two languages simultaneously. All sign phenomena are immersed in a specially organized continuum called ‘Semiosphere’ and beyond this semiotic space the existence of semiosis is impossible, no

culture/text/sign exists in isolation. The tension between the core and periphery semiotic space of culture is the basic mechanism of cultural dynamics and boundaries act as a membrane controlling, filtering and adapting the external into internal and act as a catalyst of communication. Any communication act is a translation and entropy / unpredictability are an indivisible part of semiotic communicative systems and meaning is essentially the product of the dialogic correlation of one semiotic element with other semiotic elements.

Every culture as a system has an auto-communication feature whereby it tends to develop a meta-language to define itself. To study Indian poetry in English as a cultural text we first need to understand how it has tried to define itself, its journey from 'Anglo-Indian' to 'Indo-Anglian' to 'Indian' poetry in English. The nationalist concerns have led literary historians to consider only poets of Indian origin as part of the canon of Indian poetry in English, beginning with Henry Louis Vivian Derozio. Accordingly Indian poetry in English is supposed to have begun around the mid nineteenth century. Though considering Derozio as an Indian poet defined by conventional parameters also has its complications owing to his mixed parentage. To take a more encompassing view we have to consider all English poetry written in India whether by Indians or otherwise. We could also define Indian poetry in English as English language poetry which draws its metaphors from the Indian semiosphere. This view extends the scope to as far back as the arrival of the English in India. Native British writing in English shared literary cultures with these poets. Most of these early British poets were born in Britain and had come to India as civil servants or missionaries but they had imbibed Indian culture and shared the same polyglossia. Most of them like their Indian counterparts were multilinguals and had exposure to multiple cultures, two of the most common characteristics of Indian English poets till date. Some of these British writers were even born and educated in India. These poets shared or at least were witness to the same socio-cultural and historical space as the Indians and which is well evident in their verse. They were in dialogue with the contemporary Indians writing in English. They used Indian metaphors as much as they owed their allegiance to the British poetry in England.

Jones is considered the first link between British and Indian poetry. He lamented the literary sterility of contemporary European poetry which had “subsisted too long on the perpetual repetition of the same images, and incessant allusions to the same fables” and believed oriental translations could offer “a new set of images and similitudes...which future scholars might explain, and future poets might imitate.” (Cannon,1971). Some other native English poets who wrote in and about India during colonial times include Sir John Horsford who was born in England, Mary Carshore and Mary Leslie who were born and died in India, Henry Page with obscure origin who considered himself an Indian Patriot.

The first indigenous poets in English began writing around the first quarter of the nineteenth century in this same textual-political environment and, as Dharwadkar(2001) notes, developed two distinct orientations towards it. In one direction, the poetry remained embedded within the larger sub-continental literature in English, and hence produced within its own textual formation the dynamic of critique, counter- critique and self –reflexive critique that had preceded it. In other direction, however, it reacted to its antecedents by devaluing prose and elevating verse as the vehicle of indigenous expression, and launching an ambitious aestheticization of subcontinental discourse and experience, which transposed the conflicts between India and Britain(or East and West) from the social , economic and political planes onto the poetic plane. These two orientations proved to be seminal, because they shaped much of the development of poetry in the high colonial and postcolonial periods. But the objects of criticism and aestheticization turned out to be variable over time, changing with successive generations of poets, entering into new combinations, and even cancelling each other. The history of the poetry therefore became inseparable from the story of a series of aesthetic and critical positions that individual poets and groups of poets invented in order to deal with their particular circumstances and with the material and cultural conditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These positions opened up the poetry to a range of historical ironies and cultural ambiguities, as also to a variety of conflicts over language, literariness, identity, representation and originality.

The history of Indian poetry in English till recently has largely been the history of coming to terms with the English language. While the earliest writers, invariably prose writers, chose English as a means to counter the prevalent misinterpretations of India in the contemporary English writings, the subsequent generations have grappled with linguistic, cultural and political issues related to writing poetry in a language which is not the first language of the land. The cultural semiotic presented by Indian poetry in English is a result of the dialogue between a language and many cultures including the one primarily associated with it. And this process is shaped by changing point of views of the participants of the cultures involved and the changing power relationships between the contesting cultures and within the participants of the individual cultures. Jones and other British civil servants brought the language to India and started writing poetry in 'Native English' and used it to present metaphors drawn from India and its indigenous culture. English literature as we know it today was not accorded the same respect that it acquired later as a result of conscious efforts driven by colonial motives. The literature in Britain, as Jones himself claimed, was suffering from a literary sterility and was desperately looking for fresh narratives and metaphors from the orient. At this stage the language of poetry remained native British fused with Indian myths and metaphors. There were no questions of language choice or the later discourses of the politics of using English as a medium of creative expression as these British officers were writing in the only language they knew.

Language became an issue when Indian poets began writing in English as the language of their creative expression was neither their primary language nor the language of the culture that they were participants of. Thus the indigenous poets in India resisted the nativisation of English language and followed English poetic forms. The trend lasted pretty much till India gained independence. Barring a few examples, the language of poetry at the phonological, syntactic and pragmatic-symbolic level followed the language primarily associated with English culture. Thus there was a discord between the language and the indigenous culture in India. Even the use of Indian myths and metaphors seem superficial. Indian poetry in English before independence thus failed to create any definitive place amongst



literatures in India or abroad. But this was a gradual and continuous process which attempted to juxtapose two mutually untranslatable semiotic systems culminating in creation of new cultural texts.

Here it is essential to discuss another problematic term 'India'. Many parts of the pre-independence India have become sovereign nations now. Many recent anthologies have chosen to use the term 'South Asian Literature' to avoid the issues of identity politics. Basham in the *Cultural History of India* explains the origin of the term 'India' which actually comes from Greece. The Indus region most of which falls in present day Pakistan was named so after "*Sindhu*", the Sanskrit name of the river Indus. When it became a satrapy of the Achaemenian Empire of Iran acquired the name *Hindush*, the Indian 's' becoming Persian 'h'. The Greeks borrowed this word from the Iranians and called the river Indos and the country through which it flows as India. It was somewhere around the time of Alexander of Macedon that Greeks got to know that there was another valley beyond Indus Valley, the valley of the river Ganges. The classical writers applied the term India to the whole land mass that extended from the Himalayas to the sea. The Arabic *Hind* and the Persian *Hindūstān* had the same connotation. Thus Europe and West Asia have for over 2000 years used the term India for the whole of Mainland South Asia irrespective of the political boundaries. Thus it would not be wrong to use the term India even if we referred to regions beyond the geographic boundaries of the Republic of India.

The culture taken as a semiosphere or as a text presumes a boundary which separates it from the 'non-culture' or 'alternate culture' or the 'other'. Lotman bases this approach on the broad concept of text according to which every artefact with a function and a coded message can be regarded as a text; he notes, however, that every culture selects from the set of these texts a small subset which its members consider important for their cultural identity. He maintains "The selection of a certain number of texts from the mass of [...] messages can be considered as indicating the emergence of a culture as a special form of self organization of society"(38). This selection of nuclear texts to define the cultural identity may be

considered the process of canon formation. The canon of Indian English poetry has been shaped through the various anthologies published by the writers/publishers who were mostly poets themselves and had allegiance to certain politics of literature. As Makarand Paranjape observes that though politics may make literature, literature has its own politics, the politics of language, of identity, of influence and of self justification.

T. O. D. Dunn's collection *Poets of John Company* (1921) is one of the earliest works which collected colonial poetry in English though he treated Indian poets separately from the British ones in another collection titled *The Bengali book of English Verse*(1918). Since then most British and North American scholars have ignored most English language poetry in India. At the same time Indian anthologists have focussed only on those poets who could be considered a part of Indian nationalist canon. Post- independence there have been many anthologies, chronologically put, P. Lal's *Modern Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology and a Credo*(1969), which included 132 poets, Saleem Peeradina's anthology *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English: An Assessment and Selection*(1972) with only fourteen poets, R. Parthasarthy's *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*(1976), Keki N. Daruwalla's *Two Decades of Indian Poetry(1960-1980)*(1980), Vilas Sarang's *Indian English Poetry Since 1950*(1989), and A K Mehrotra's *The Oxford India Anthology: Twelve Modern Indian Poets*(1992), Makarand Paranjape's *An Anthology of New Indian English Poetry*(1993). K. Ayyapa Paniker's *Modern Indian Poetry in English*(1991) published by Sahitya Academy signals official recognition of a poetry that was nationally derided thirty years ago. This anthology includes twenty poets Meera Alexander, Keki N. Daruwalla, Kamla Das, Gauri Deshpande, Nissim Ezekiel, K R Srinivas Iyengar, Adil Jussawala, K D Kartak, Arun Kolatkar, Shiv K Kumar, P Lal, Jayanta Mahapatra, A K Mehrotra, Dom Moraes, Pritish Nandy, R Parthasarthy, Gieve Patel, Saleem Peeradina, A K Ramanujan, Vikram Seth. These poets are the most anthologised ones and thus form the canon or the representative texts of the semiosphere. In these multiple anthologies we witness the self organising principle of the culture. Similarly contemporary Indian poetry in English emerges with other selection of texts such

as Ranjit Hoskote's *Reasons for Belonging* (2002) which has fourteen contemporary poets who were born between 1959 and 1971. The poets included in this anthology are Jeet Thayil, Tabish Khair, Ranjit Hoskote, Vijay Nambisan, H Masud Taj, Rukmini Bhaya Nair, C P Surendran, Vivek Narayanan, Gavin Barrett, Anjum Hasan, Jerry Pinto, Smita Agarwal, Arundhati Subramaniam and Anand Thakore. These poets represent the second and the third generation of post colonial poets. What marks their difference as Hoskote himself notes is that "they feel no obligation to prove their Indianness to nativist detractors who, arguing from an essentialist model of cultural identity, vilify Indian literature in English as being 'inauthentic' and 'alienated' from its context." They savour the uses of hybridity and are at ease with the cultural condition. It is the texts produced by these poets which form the subject of the present study.

Anthologies like Eunice De Souza's *Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology* (1997, 2001) published by OUP, New Delhi and *We Speak in Changing Languages: Indian Women Poets (1990–2007)* (2000) edited by E. V. Ramakrishnan and Anju Makhija published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi have attempted to create a separate space for women poets.

Similarly there have been attempts at creating regional identities or sub-spheres within the larger semiosphere. *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast* (2003) published by NEHU Publications, Shillong and *Dancing Earth: An Anthology of Poetry from North-East India* (2009) published by Penguin Books India, New Delhi both edited by Robin S. Ngangom & Kynpham S. Nongkynrih cover poetry both in English and north eastern regional languages in English translation by poets belonging to the North- East India.

While most critics tend to consider 1980 as the point of departure, the present study prefers 1990 as the beginning of the contemporary Indian Poetry in English. Many explosive moments happened in India and abroad which were to change the whole landscape be it political, cultural, or literary beginning with Germany's unification in 1990. Then 1991 proved the big bang moment in history with the

collapse of Soviet Union ending the great socialist dream and the rise of the US, a capitalist nation, as the only superpower. The cold war officially ended in 1992. 1991 also saw the Gulf war waged in the Middle East by UN coalition forces led by US and the UK against Iraq. 1991 also saw the world wide web as an internet service which was to prove the biggest globalising force and which was to give birth to the 'social media' and user generated content in Web 2.0. Hypertext, hyper reality and virtual reality become the keywords. If in the 1990s internet started shrinking the world as the whole world literally became a connected village, web 2.0 gave brought the biggest shift of power. Authority was never before challenged like this and now power lied with anyone who had access to internet. 2000s saw the massive penetration of internet across the globe thus globalisation becomes the keyword in most discourses. Another such keyword was 'terror' and 'war on terror'. In the twin tower attacks in the US on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, popularly known as 9/11, the world woke up to the reality of global terror. The US declared war on terror and attacked Al-Qaeda. Saddam's regime comes to an end under attacks by the US forces. US forces continue to fight Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. 'Terrorism' defines the 2000s beginning with 9/11 attacks in New York, 2002 Bali bombings, 2004 train bombings in Madrid , 7/7 London bombings in 2005, and 26/11 Mumbai attacks. 2008-09 also saw the global economic slowdown.

Economic liberalisation that began with opening up of Indian economy in 1991 to tackle the balance of payments crisis has proved pivotal to the reforms that we witness even today. The 1990s also saw the emergence of two polarising trends in national politics. First is the politics of social justice beginning with the implementation of the Mandal commission report in 1989 recommending 27% job reservation for OBCs and the subsequent protests and self-immolations in 1990. Second is the rise of the politics of Hindu nationalism marked by the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and the consequent pan India communal riots. Early 90s also saw the beginning of the terrorism in Kashmir and the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir. Security forces were also accused of alleged human rights violations. While the US declared a 'global war on terror', India herself has been grappling with its own war on terror. 1990s also marked the

telecom revolution, mobile telephony and the arrival of internet in India culminating in the globalising and empowering reach of the social media. 1990's onwards in India is marked by the keywords of globalisation, dalit, Hindu nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and terrorism.

The contemporary Indian poetry in English is represented by poets who have expanded the semiosphere of Indian poetry in English as a spatial entity whether the term 'spatial' is taken literally or metaphorically. While most modern Indian English poets were based in the metropolitan centres of India, these new poets are spread all over the world Darius Cooper(USA), Meena Alexander (USA), Agha Sahid Ali(USA), Melanie Silgado (London) , Tabish Khair (Denmark), and even in the remote corners of India like the Shillong poets – Anjum Hasan, Kynpham Sing, Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang and Robin S Ngangom.

The primary texts from the TMSS used to develop the theoretical framework for the study are the following:

**1. *Theses 1973 or the “Theses on the semiotic study of cultures (as applied to Slavic texts)”*:** The core members of the TMSS – Lotman, Ivanov, Toporov, Pjatigorskij and Uspenskij together produced the “*Theses*” under the leadership of Lotman published in Russian and English the same year in 1973. It is the collective manifesto of TMSS. This seminal work was the result of an understanding arrived at the Tartu Semiotics Summer School in Kääriku on the possibility of an integral approach to culture from the semiotic point of view. In 1973 Lotman proposed to formalise the discipline of the semiotics of culture. This work marked the emergence of TMSS on the international scene as well as the establishment of Semiotics of Culture as a discipline. The primary aim of the discipline as stated in the *Theses*(1.0.0) is “... the study of the functional correlation of different sign systems.”

**2. *On the Semiosphere* (1984, 2005):** This article was first published in 1984 in *Signs Systems Studies*. The present research uses the English translation by Wilma Clark published in 2005 in the same journal. Lotman coined the term ‘semiosphere’ for the first time in this article to refer to “the semiotic space outside of which semiosis cannot exist.” Lotman suggests that in reality clear and functionally mono semantic systems do not exist in isolation. “They function only by being immersed in a specific semiotic continuum, which is filled with multi-variant semiotic models situated at a range of hierarchical levels.” Lotman calls this continuum as “semiosphere” by analogy to the concept of “biosphere” introduced by Vernadsky. In this article Lotman proposes that all semiotic space be regarded as one unified mechanism rather than the totality of individual texts and isolated languages as they relate to each other.

**3. *Universe of the Mind – A Semiotic Theory of Culture*(1990)** (Translated by Ann Shukman): Lotman endeavours to develop a general and historical semiotics of culture through this work. He extends his idea of the text as a unity to the whole semiosphere (culture as semiosphere) as a single mechanism. This work marks his shift from structuralism to post-structuralism. The book is divided into three parts: The first looks at the ‘text’ as a meaning generating mechanism, the second develops his thesis of the ‘semiosphere’(culture as semiosphere) and the third deals with the semiotics of history and cultural memory.

**4. *Culture and Explosion*(1992,2004):** This is Lotman’s final work presenting his culminating thoughts on the semiotics of culture and was first published in Russian in 1992 shortly before his death in October 1993. The present study uses the English translation of the same by Wilma Clark and edited by Marina Grishakova published in 2009. The book discusses the fundamental questions relating to the description of any semiotic system. Discussing the dynamics of semiotic systems, Lotman says that reality cannot be represented by a single language. Thus two or more diverse languages with their mutual untranslatability (or limited translatability) reflect one and the same object in diverse ways. The work also talks about the dynamics of the development of culture in terms of

predictability and unpredictability, continuity and discontinuity, stability and instability of the system. The mutual tension between the immanent process of a culture and external influence determines the dynamics of a culture.

The selected works (published after 1990) of the following major Indian poets writing in English have been considered for studying the contemporary Indian poetry in English:

Agha Shahid Ali (1949 - 2001) was born in New Delhi but grew up in Kashmir, got educated at the University of Kashmir, University of Delhi, Pennsylvania State University and University of Arizona. He identified himself as an American poet writing in English. His poetry blends Hindu, Muslim and western traditions. He introduced the Ghazal to American poetry. *A Nostalgist's Map of America* (1991) presents his travels through the blurred landscapes of his present American home and Kashmir. *The Country Without a Post-Office* (1997) is written against the backdrop of the insurgency in Kashmir. His last publications were *Rooms Are Never Finished* (2001) and *Call Me Ishmael Tonight: A Book of Ghazals* (2003).

Anjum Hasan (b. 1972): Hasan was born in Shillong, Meghalaya but now lives in Bengaluru, Karnataka. She is a novelist, short story writer and a poet. Her novels are *Lunatic in My Head* (2007), *Neti Neti* (2009) and *The Cosmopolitans* (2015). Her short story collection is *Difficult Pleasures* (2012). Her first collection of poems called *Street on the Hill* (2006) was published by the Sahitya Akademi. The poems in the collection present middle class lives in a Shillong or any other small town.

Sujata Bhatt (b.1956) : Born in Ahmedabad, Bhatt was brought up in Pune and later in the US. She currently lives in Germany and is a Visiting Professor in Creative Writing at Nottingham Trent University. Her poetry collections are *Brunizem* (1988), *Monkey Shadows* (1991), *The Stinking Rose* (1995), *Point No Point* (1997), *Augatora* (2000), *The Colour of Solitude* (2002), *Pure Lizard* (2008) and *Poppies in Translation* (2015).

Sampurna Chatterjee(1970) : Born in Ethiopia, she grew up in Darjeeling, West Bengal, graduated from New Delhi, and is currently based in Mumbai. She is a poet, novelist and a translator. Her debut poetry collection *Sight May Strike You Blind*(2007) was published by the Sahitya Akademi. Her second poetry book *Absent Muses* (2010) was published by Poetrywala. Hoskote observes in the blurb of the volume that “while some of Chattarji’s poems can be expansive, encompassing cities, deserts, islands, the journeys of scholar-explorers and of migrating tribes, she can also produce poems that are spare, haiku-like in their compression, delicate and mysterious as netsuke.”

Ranjit Hoskote (b. 1969): Poet, art critic and a curator, Hoskote was born in Mumbai and studied at the University of Mumbai. He is the author of five collections of poetry: *Zones of Assault*(1991), *The Cartographer's Apprentice*(2000), *The Sleepwalker's Archive*(2001), *Vanishing Acts: New & Selected Poems 1985-2005*(2006) and *Central Time*(2014). Bruce King writes about Hoskote :

“Hoskote has an historical sense, is influenced by the surreal experiments with metrics and has a complex sense of the political.(334)”  
"Hoskote has an historical sense, is influenced by the surreal, experiments with metrics and has a complex sense of the political... An art critic, he makes much use of landscapes, the sky and allusions to paintings. His main theme as seen in ‘The Acrobat’, is life as intricate, complicated, revolutionary movements in time; however, time eventually brings stasis and betrays." (334)

Tabish Khair(b.1966): Born in Ranchi, Tabish Khair grew up in his hometown Gaya, a small town in Bihar. After his Masters in English from Magadh University he worked as a staff reporter for the Times of India in Delhi. He did his PhD from Copenhagen University. He presently teaches at the Aarhus University, Denmark and lives in a village off Aarhus. His poetry collections include *My World* (1991), *A Reporter's Diary* (1993), *The Book of Heroes : A Collection of Light Verse and*



*Much Worse* (1995), *Where Parallel Lines Meet* (2000), and *Man of Glass* (2010). His poetry presents the world divided between the rural and the metropolitan.

Rukmini Bhaya Nair (b. 1952): Nair is a linguist, poet and a critic based in New Delhi. She is a Professor of Linguistics and English at IIT Delhi. She holds a PhD from the University of Cambridge and has served as Visiting Professor at the Stanford University, the National University of Singapore and the University of Washington at Seattle. She has published three books of poetry: *The Hyoid Bone* (1992), *The Ayodhya Cantos* (1999) and *Yellow Hibiscus* (2004).

Sudeep Sen (b. 1964): Poet, translator, photographer and graphic artist, Sen studied English literature at the University of Delhi and Journalism at Columbia University. He has over a dozen poetry collections to his credit including *Postmarked India: New & Selected Poems* (1997), *Lines of Desire* (2000), *Rain* (2005), *Fractals: New & Selected Poems | Translations 1980-2015* (2015).

Arundhati Subramaniam (b. 1973) : Poet and dance curator, she has worked as Head of Dance and Chauraha (an inter-arts forum) at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Mumbai. Her books of poems are *When God Is a Traveller* (2014), *Where I Live: New & Selected Poems* (2009), *Where I Live* (2005), *On Cleaning Bookshelves* (2001). Her poems have appeared in many major contemporary anthologies such as *Reasons for Belonging: Fourteen Contemporary Poets* (Edited by Ranjit Hoskote); *We Speak in Changing Languages* (Sahitya Akademi) and *The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poets* (Bloodaxe, UK). Her poetry presents a blend of the spiritual and the material.

Menka Shivdasani : Menka is a Mumbai based poet and translator. Poetry collections authored by her include *Nirvana at Ten Rupees* (1990), *Stet* (2001), *Safe House* (2015) and *Frazil* (2018). She was one of the founding members of the Bombay Poetry Circle in 1986. Her poetry talks of drugs, sex, broken relationships and the problems of being a single woman in Mumbai. She presents a private world with chaotic emotions.

Vijay Nambisan(1963-2017): Poet, translator and journalist, a graduate from IIT Madras, Vijay Nambisan's first collection of poems appeared in a volume shared with Jeet Thayil *Gemini I* (1992). His second collection was *First Infinities* (2015). Rukmini Bhaya Nair in the introduction of *These Were My Homes: Collected Poems* (2018) observes: 'in Vijay's intelligent, self-aware meditations on mortality and human folly in this final and complete volume of his poems, readers will come to as close an apprehension of the nature of epiphany as is possible—to those sudden illuminations of the spirit that can, without warning, light up flares in our dull, corporeal bodies.'

Jeet Thayil(b. 1959) is noted for his literary cosmopolitanism. He uses metric verses with ease. His common themes are the attractiveness of pain and self destruction as evident in *Gemini* (1992). His *Apocalypso* (1997) presents surreal humour and echoes poetry from other countries.

Meena Kandasamy (b.1984): Based in Chennai, Meena Kandasamy is a poet, translator and activist. She represents the Dalit voice in Indian English poetry. Meena has published two collections of poetry *Touch* (2006) and *Ms. Militancy* (2010)

Robin S. Ngangom (b.1959): Born in Imphal, Manipur in the North Eastern India, he is a bilingual poet and translator writing in English and Meitei. He presently teaches at the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. His books of poetry in English include *Words and the Silence* (1988), *Time's Crossroads* (1994) and *The Desire of Roots* (2006). He is also the co-editor of *Dancing Earth: An Anthology of Poetry from North East India*(2009 Penguin) which has English poems and English translations of poems in Assamese, Hindi, Bengali, Khasi, Chakma, Nepali, Manipuri and Kokborok. As a representative poet of the North East, he presents the landscape of North Eastern states like Meghalaya, Arunachal, Assam, Mizoram and Sikkim. His poetry also centres around the social revolutions and the contemporary political situation in Manipur.

Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih (b.1964), born in Sohra, Meghalaya, teaches at the department of English, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. He is a bilingual poet writing in Khasi and English. His English poetry collections include *Moments, Secular Poems* (1992 Writers Workshop, Calcutta), *The Sieve, Love Poems* (1992 Writers Workshop, Calcutta) and *The Yearning of Seeds* (2011 Harper Collins). He is also the co-editor along with Ngangom of *Dancing Earth: An Anthology of Poetry from North East India* (2009 Penguin). He received the North East poetry award in 2004 and the first Veer Shankar Shah Raghunath Shah National Award for literature in 2008. His poetry is rooted in the Khasi Hills and presents like other poets of the region a connection with the land, nature, local myths and folk lore. His poems also the quest to redeem the lost indigenous identity, the impact of exploitation of the land, people and resources, influx of migrants, politics, corruption and everyday life affected by the armed insurgency.

C. P. Surendran (b. 1958) : Born in a Malayali family, he received his education at the University of Delhi and taught at the Calicut University before moving to Mumbai, his present place of residence, where he worked as a journalist with the Times of India. His poems first appeared in *Gemini II* (1994). His poems present the anguish of modern urban secular life. In the preface to his *Posthumous Poems* (1999) he explains that the poems are ‘posthumous’ to the breakup of his marriage, the collapse of communism and the failure of naxalites. His other poetry collections are *Canaries on the Moon* (2002) and *Portraits of the Space We Occupy* (2007).

Bibhu Padhi (b. 1951): Born in Cuttack, Odisha he studied and taught at the Ravenshaw College (now Ravenshaw University). His poetry collections are *Going to the Temple* (1988), *A Wound Elsewhere* (1992), *Lines From A Legend* (1993), *Painting the House* (1999), *Games the Heart Must Play: a trilogy in of love poems* (2003), *Living With Lorenzo: Poems on D H Lawrence* (2003), *Choosing A Place* (2011), *Migratory Days* (2011), *Brief Seasons: 60 love songs*, (2013), *Magic Ritual* (2014), *Midnight Diary* (2015). His poetry presents a provincialism of places

where life moves slowly and people move to other places for education and jobs. His is a “poetry of waiting, of silence, of monotony, of place” (King 344).

Anand Thakore (b. 1971): Anand is a poet and a Hindustani classical vocalist. His poetry collections are *Elephant Bathing* (2012), *Mughal Sequence* (2012) and *Waking in December* (2001). He is also the founder of Harbour Line, a Mumbai based publishing collective. The imagery and sound patterns in his verse have a song like quality which reflect his vocation as a Hindustani classical singer.

Tishani Doshi (b. 1975) was born in Chennai, Tamilnadu to a Welsh Mother and Gujarati father. She is presently a Visiting Professor of Practice, Literature and Creative Writing at New York University, Abu Dhabi. Her first poetry collection *Countries of the Body* (2006, Tranquebar Press) received the Forward Prize for best first collection in 2006. Her other works of poetry are *Everything Begins Elsewhere* (2012) published by Bloodaxe Books, UK and Copper Canyon Press, USA in 2013 and *Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods* (2017 HarperCollins India). She has worked as a dancer with Chandralekha troupe for fifteen years.

**Chapterization:** This thesis is divided into five chapters:

**1. Introduction :** The first chapter introduces the object and the objectives of the study. It introduces the Indian poetry in English and the theoretical framework of Cultural Semiotics. The chapter also talks about the primary texts used for developing the framework and the contemporary poets who have been considered for analysis in the present study.

## **2. Cultural Semiotics: Towards A Methodological Framework**

This chapter presents an overview of the growth and development of the cultural semiotics theories especially the Tartu Moscow School of semiotics (TMSS). The chapter begins by differentiating between the cultural studies and the cultural semiotics. ‘Cultural Semiotics’ as a methodology is usually associated with

Tartu Moscow School of Semiotics and its chief proponent is Yuri (also spelt 'Jurij' in some English transliterations) Lotman. Lotman's 'Cultural Semiotics' proposes a holistic study of culture and the processes of meaning generation. Lotman's chief contribution to the field is probably the notion of 'Semiosphere' and 'Cultural Explosion'. In this chapter an attempt is made to discuss the evolution of cultural semiotics, to define the key concepts associated with it and discuss why and how cultural semiotics could be used to study the diverse trends in contemporary Indian poetry in English.

### **3. A Brief Cultural History of Indian Poetry in English**

This chapter outlines the development of Indian poetry in English beginning from the poets of colonial India. Though most anthologies because of their nationalist concerns consider Derozio as the beginning, this study taking the cultural semiotics approach includes all those poets who draw from the Indian 'semiosphere' as part of Indian English poetry thus even ethnic British poets who were either born and lived or were brought up in India or who imbibed and represented Indian ethos in their poetry as part of the cultural history of Indian poetry in English. The chapter presents a cultural history of the evolution of Indian poetry in English. It also discusses the cultural politics of the use of English as a language of creative expression and the changing attitudes to the language till contemporary times where that anxiety of belongingness seems to have been finally rested. The chapter also looks at how the canon of Indian English poetry was formed.

### **4. Cultural Semiotics of Contemporary Indian Poetry in English**

This chapter forms the bulk of the study and applies cultural semiotics framework to analyse the contemporary Indian poetry in English (CIPE). The major poets studied in this chapter are Agha Sahid Ali, Sampurna Chattarji, Anjum Hassan, Eunice De Souza, Ranjit Hoskote, Tabish Khair, Rukmini B. Nair, Sudeep Sen, Arundhati Subramaniam, C.P.Surendran, Jeet Thayil, Meena Kandasamy, Robin Sing Ngangom, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Tishani Doshi etc. The chapter

begins with an introduction to these poets dividing them into groups: the core, the periphery and the expanding circle. Some of them are further categorized as the women poets, the dalit poets, regional poets and the emerging voices. The chapter applies basic concepts of the cultural semiotics framework such as semiosphere, boundary mechanisms, memory and amnesia, unpredictability, intertextuality and intersemiosis, semiotics of myth to understand the signification processes of the CIPE and its evolution as a cultural text.

### **5. Conclusion: Unlimited Semiosis**

The last chapter presents the final conclusions of the study and recommendations for further research. The chapter discusses the growing semiosphere of Indian poetry in English. It observes that it follows a pattern of unlimited semiosis with unique boundary mechanisms. Further it shows how what is considered the core of CIPE from an outsider perspective actually lies at the geographic periphery. Thus these borders are relative. This paradox of core and periphery is central to the CIPE. CIPE can be best analysed not as individual poems but as a system through the framework of cultural semiotics which helps in getting a holistic view. The chapter finally concludes with suggestions for further research in the area.