Chapter IV

Cultural Semiosis in Contemporary Indian Poetry in English

Contemporary Indian Poetry in English can be studied either as discrete units or as part of a totality, as a unified text with a boundary and both discrete and continuous elements spread in a continuum called semiosphere. CIPE in being a cultural text not only represents the culture but also creates it. Similar is the paradoxical nature of any research which aims to analyse it as the same will potentially alter the cultural text being a participant in auto communication/ self description process. Thus the semiosis that it studies may only be a contingent semiosis as every attempt at analysis or definition will only alter it and this leads to a situation of unlimited semiosis.

If any literature is to treated as a text which has a meaning and a function, then the Jakobson's model of communication is not adequate as it presumes an artificial language where the addresser and the addressee share the same code. Such a situation according to Lotman generates no new meaning. To study any literature especially poetry if we adopt the semiosphere approach as suggested by Lotman, we can arrive at a holistic view of the text and the various sign processes or semiotics involved. Though the concept of semiosphere has been dealt with earlier and a more detailed account will be presented later, it is relevant here to look at the example of a museum that Lotman uses to describe it.

"So across any synchronic section of the semiosphere different languages at different stage of development is in conflict, and some texts are immersed in languages not their own, while the codes to decipher them with may be entirely absent. As an example of a single world looked at synchronically, imagine a museum hall where exhibits from different periods are on display, along with inscriptions in known and unknown languages, and instructions for decoding them; besides there are the explanations composed by the museum staff, plans for tours and rules for the behaviour of the visitors. Imagine also in these hall tour-leaders

and the visitors and imagine all this as a single mechanism (which in a certain sense it is). This is an image of the semiosphere. (Lotman, 127)"

We may imagine any synchronic section of CIPE as a similar museum where multiple texts are presented with verbal as well as visual language, and 'artefacts' representing different worlds, poems of varying themes, lyrical and syntactic forms, complexities and constituting of memories of a diverse geographic and time span. Then it has poets, and anthologists, academics and researchers (like the tour guides and museum staff) all contributing to the 'self description' of the cultural text/s. All of them trying to translate between multiple untranslatable languages and thus generating new meanings. These self description agents also act in creating the tension between what is core and periphery. It is this 'tension' which is realized as a major trope for CIPE.

The term 'contemporary' for the purpose of this study refers to the post 1990 period and the study covers poetry published (preferably written) after that. Though many anthologists and critics like Hoskote (2002) and King (2001) consider 1980 as the point of departure, the researcher proposes to see 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. Germany united in 1990. 1991 proved the big bang moment in history. Soviet Union collapsed ending the great socialist dream and 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 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 the 11th of 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.

India took a momentous turn when Dr. Narasimha Rao, the then Prime Minister of India, decided to open up the economy of India. Economic liberalisation that began with this courageous step in 1991 to tackle the balance of payments crisis has proved pivotal to the reforms that we witness even today. Liberalisation was linked to privatization and globalization. Globalization began in the late 1980s. While globalization was supposed to erase the boundaries between nations, it was accompanied with resurgence of nationalism and religious fundamentalism. During this wave of globalisation in the early nineties India witnessed a rise on one hand of Hindu nationalism and separatist terrorism in Kashmir. Giddens observes that "the revival of local nationalism and an accentuating of local identities are directly bound up with globalizing influences to which they stand in opposition (*Beyond Left and Right* 05)." The 1990s also saw the emergence of two polarising trends in national politics. First is the politics of social justice triggered by the implementation of the Mandal commission report in 1989 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 mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir and the beginning of the terrorism in Kashmir and alleged human rights violations by security forces. 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. The

ubiquitous keywords in dominant discourses of the post 1990 India are globalisation, dalit rights, Hindu nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and terrorism. Post 2000 a new keyword 'Social Media' came to the fore with the rise of internet and Web 2.0.

Literature cannot remain insulated from the developments in the social-political sphere. Indian poetry in English in contemporary times has also been a witness to all these global and regional developments. 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(California), Meena Alexander (New York), Agha Sahid Ali(Amherst), Melanie Silgardo (London) , Tabish Khair (Aarhus), Vikram Seth (Salisbury), Sudeep Sen (London, Delhi) and even in the remote corners of India like the North East – Anjum Hasan, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Desmond L. Kharmawphlang and Robin S. Ngangom. These new poets are university teachers, artists, journalists, translators, activists.

Semiosphere

The contemporary poets present a new semiotic of Indian culture and shifting core-periphery relationship. They are polyglot and multicultural like the Indian English poets have been for almost two centuries. But now they are spread not just in the metropolitan centres of Delhi or Mumbai but far off places like Shillong and in countries like USA, UK, Denmark, Germany. They are no longer just teachers or journalists but artists, architects, activists writing a poetry emerging out of exchange between overlapping cultures and different semiotic structures. These poets are no longer grappling with the politics of using English as the language of their creative expression or the anxiety for belonging.

There is a paradigm shift in the way poets have treated 'Indianism'. Earlier Indian English poets were always under the nationalist pressure to be explicitly Indian and show cultural nationality by portraying Indian cities, lives, mythologies. The pressure was even more as they were writing in the language of the imperialists.

Even post-independence there was a deliberate attempt to find a sense of belonging as English was not the language of any particular state or region in India. In the contemporary poets that anxiety is diminished. The most notable development is that most of these poets have travelled, lived or are living in more than one country. The earlier diaspora were caught between their desire of homecoming and at the same time belonging to the adopted country. The contemporary poets belong to more than one culture. Poets like Jeet Thayil, Agha Sahid Ali, Sujata Bhatt, Tabish Khair have spent most of their lives in more than one country and are now settled abroad. Ranjit Hoskote in the introduction to his anthology '*Reasons for belonging*' quotes Jeet Thayil's poem "English" to show how these new poets are at ease with their cultural condition and even though they are multilingual no longer see a need to justify their use of English: "English, however, is their language of creative expression, one that they inhabit, reshape and extend, more than they do any other." (xiv)

> And I would be ruined still by syntax, the risk
>
> And worry of committing word to stone.
>
> English fills my right hand, silence my left.

("English" 32)

The core of the contemporary Indian Poetry in English is populated by poets like Jeet Thayil, Sudeep Sen, Tabish Khair, Ranjit Hoskote, Sampurna Chatterjee, Sujata Bhatt, Bibhu Padhi, Arundhati Subramaniam, Anand Thakore and some earlier generation poets who are still routinely anthologized.

Jeet Thayil was born in Kerala on 13th October 1959 and had his education in Mumbai, Hong Kong and New York. He attended schools at Mumbai, Patna and Delhi before moving to Hong Kong with his family. In 1974-75 he moved to New York and came back to Hong Kong to finish his schooling. After which he earned his BA from Wilson College in Mumbai. He also stayed in Paris for a while as a struggling musician. In 1990s he started working for *Asiaweek* in Mumbai and in 1995 went back to Hong Kong only to return in just six months, got married and divorced. In 1998 he returned to New York to study MFA in creative writing and

started working as a newspaper editor. He married Shakti Bhatt in New York who died quite young at just 27. He came back to India and now divides his time between Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore, his family home. These wide life experiences are clearly echoed in his poems which cover a wide landscape from New York to Hong Kong to Nepal and Mumbai. He is the author of four collections of poetry: *These Errors Are Correct* (Tranquebar, 2008), *English* (2004, Penguin India, Rattapallax Press, New York,), Apocalypso (1997 Ark) and *Gemini* (Viking Penguin, 1992). His first novel was *Narcopolis* (2012, Faber & Faber), which won the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature and was also shortlisted for the 2012 Man Booker Prize.

While his first two poetry collections *Gemini* (1992) and *Apocalypso* (1997) present the pains of a drug addict and alcoholic and the desire to commit suicide, his English (2003) is about reformation and finding hope. The poems in this collection also cover wide geographic span from Pashupatinath (Nepal) to Hong Kong. Having travelled across continents he finds in the penultimate poem of the collection *Doune* (Scotland) a sort of paradise that he has regained or had been searching for which is free from any history or memory:

> he cannot remember
> when last he felt so cheerful.
> When he steps into morning,
> there's a chill mist
> thin as strands of cotton:
>
> blank, absent, without meaning,
> a landscape untouched
> by history or memory,
> a place whose weather
> matches his own.

<div align="center">(82)</div>

Exile is a dominant trope in his poems, owing to his wide travels. In '*About the Author*' the opening poem, a faux biographical note, of *English*, he finds himself a citizen of no country except English. It is English which connects his life across continents.

He longs for the Bombay of the 70s and 80s and is disillusioned by the sectarian violence of Mumbai of the 90s "for the Times of Bombay-not-Mumbai" (p 4) and looking for new hope leaves for New York only to find that he did not belong there too. He shifted to New York in 2001 and was a witness to the devastation of 9/11 terrorist attacks. Though he doesn't explicitly mention the incident he writes:

"I'm standing on Sixth, watching ruin, with

...just before the savage winter of 2001" (p4)

The collection is prefaced with a drawing of the world as seven circles from top to bottom which are reversible. These seven circles refer to the seven parts in which the book is divided- Moveable, Shapeshifter, Ache, The Genesis Godown, Ache, Shapeshifter, Moveable. Each part consists of seven poems. This in-seven structure is modelled after Robert Wilson's seven act play *Stalin*, where parts 1 and 7, 2 and 6, 3 and 5 reflect each other, part 4 is the point of reflection. These seven parts could also represent phases of the poets life where he moved between various cities across the globe only to find that pain existed everywhere. The drawing has an incomplete outer circle on which there are two ships labelled 'english' showing his movements from the city on top probably New York to the city at the bottom, probably Hong Kong. It is English which keeps him connected across cultures, across continents and across different phases of his life. This outer circle could be considered the semiosphere which lends meaning to the life of pain, despair, suffrage and movement.

Journey and movement are major tropes in Thayil's poetry be it in the bylanes of Mumbai or Hong Kong or across continents from Hong Kong to New York. The reader gets a virtual walkthrough in his poems. These journeys are both outward

and inward from a druggist and alcoholic to a reformist, from a life of pain and despair to the land of hope.

While Thayil's poetry has India especially Bombay as part of his larger canvas covering other major cities of the world, Agha Shahid Ali presents himself as a more politically committed Kashmiri. He uses Arabic and Urdu literary forms as an assertion of his cultural identity. Born in New Delhi on February 4, 1949, Agha Shahid Ali grew up in Kashmir. He studied at the University of Kashmir and University of Delhi before moving to the United States in 1975 where he attended the Pennysylvania State University and the University of Arizona. He is one of the few Muslim poets and even fewer Kashmiris writing in English. Having spent a large part of his life in the US, he belongs to the group of new American multicultural poets. He began his academic career in 1987 at Hamilton college in New York and then moved to the University of Massachusetts-Amherst in 1993 where he served as director of the MFA Creative Writing program. Later he became professor of English and creative writing at the University of Utah. He also taught creative writing at Warren Wilson College, Princeton University and the New York University. Recipient of several awards and fellowships, Ali's collection *Rooms are Never Finished* was a finalist for the National Book award in 2001. He died on December 8, 2001 in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Agha Shahid Ali's poetry presents a unique blend of Hindu, Muslim and Western traditions. He uses rhythms and forms of the Indo-Islamic tradition. His poetry is looking for continuity between the Indo-Islamic tradition of Pre-British era and contemporary times. He often uses the Ghazal form coupled with contemporary American idiom. Like most diaspora writers there is nostalgia in his writing too but of a different kind. There is a longing for a past that he was not a part of and a future that may not happen. He represents the new breed of contemporary Indian poets who are at ease with multiple cultures and languages. He falls in that subset of the Indian semiosphere which overlaps with western semiospheres. Thus there is a merging of the multiple semiotics. His poetry presents what is a blend of music and metaphors drawn from a harmonious conjunction of

Hindu and Islamic cultures, presented in a foreign (English) language, in a distinctly American style. His symbols are spatially located between Tucson and Kashmir, between places he has lived at and places he never visited or may never visit. On the temporal scale its located between a past that goes back to Moghul era and contemporary times that he is a part of extending to a future he may never see or which may not happen.   His poetry presents the themes of journey and exile, myth and politics, history and loss. On the one hand we see his nostalgia for Kashmir and on the other we have a cartographer's gaze of his second home, America. Grief and despair, whether of political struggle or personal loss manifests in the most powerful form. He contributed to the American literary scene not just the Gazals but also a never before range and variety of sources, as Daniel Hall(2008) notes in his introduction to 'the Veiled Suite', "the literatures of several continents; Bollywood, Hollywood, and art- house cinema; classical Indian and classical European music; and American pop."

His poem 'Tonight', a ghazal first published in 1997 in *The Country Without a Post Office* and posthumously in *Call Me Ishmael Tonight,* summarizes his themes of love, loss and longing, crisis in Kashmir and his life between Eastern and Western traditions, in couplets with each line of twelve syllables.

> In the heart's veined temple, all statues have been smashed.
> No priest in saffron's left to toll its knell tonight.

> …And I, Shahid, only am escaped to tell thee—

> God sobs in my arms. Call me Ishmael tonight.   (375)

Sudeep Sen a Bengali, educated in Delhi and New York, dividing his time between London, Delhi and New York writes poetry that fuses multiple semiotic systems owing to his keen interest in music, photography, visual art and poetry. Sen received a degree in English literature from Hindu College, University of Delhi and a master's degree from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in New York City and a master's degree in English and creative writing

from Hollins University. He was an international poet-in-residence at the Scottish Poetry Library in Edinburgh, and a visiting scholar at the Harvard University. His major works in poetry include *The Lunar Visitations* (1990), *Postmarked India: New and Selected Poems* (1997), *Lines of Desire* (2000), *Distracted Geographies* (2003), *Rain* (2005), *Fractals: New & Selected Poems | Translations 1980-2015* (2015), *Path to Inspiration* (2017). He has also edited many anthologies of poetry including an editor on many anthologies, including *The* and *Midnight's Grandchildren: Post-Independence English Poetry from India* (2004) and *HarperCollins Book of English Poetry by Indians* (2012). His poems have been translated in about 25 languages and have appeared in major international anthologies. His collection *Fractals: New & Selected Poems |Translations 1980-2015* covers over thirty five years of his poetry and translations. The collection has a wide range of poems including lyric, haiku, free verse, prose-poems and ekphrastic poems. The themes range from death, illness, love, sex, religion etc and are inspired by art, music, literature, mythology, photography, cinema and architecture. His poems represent imaginative spaces which occupy a zone of secrecy that is limitless, expansive, and full of mystery. Sen in an interview to Ziaul Karim explains that "it is a space that allows for creative unfurling of ideas and energies because so much of that area is unknown, untapped, uncharted, waiting to be realised, experienced and learnt."

Tabish Khair presently based in Denmark comes from a small town in Bihar. He has authored many poetry collections *Where Parallel Lines Meet*(Penguin, 2000) and *Man of Glass*(Harper Collins, 2010). He has also authored the novels *The Bus Stopped*(Picador, 2004), *Filming* (Picador, 2007), *The Thing About Thugs* (Harpercollins, 2010; Houghton Mifflin, 2012) and *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position* (Interlink and Corsair 2014). He is also known for his critical study *Babu Fictions: Alienations in Indian English Novels*(OUP, 2001). He won the All India Poetry Prize(the Poetry Society and the British Council). His novels have been shortlisted for many prestigious prizes including the Man Asian Literary Prize. His poetry has been published in various anthologies including the

Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poetry, The New Anthem and Penguin's 60 Indian Poets.

Khair's poetry presents the divide between the two worlds, the one he inhabits and the other which he has left behind, the metropolitan cities of Delhi, Copenhagen and the streets of his hometown Gaya. The title of his collection of poems "Where Parallel Lines Meet" is drawn from Andrew Marvell's 'Definition of Love' that describes two loves which are like parallel lines which can meet only in infinity.

> As lines, so loves oblique may well
>
> Themselves in every angle greet;
>
> But ours so truly parallel,
>
> Though infinite, can never meet.

The volume has poems which describe the paradoxes of life. They present a past which can never be reconciled with his present except in infinity. The opening poem 'Ganesh Stuti' is presented as a preface before the titled sections of the book begin reflective of the Indian cultural practice of invoking Ganesha before any auspicious work. Ganesha is a metaphor of this irreconcilable paradox of life which can be resolved only in imagination. The elephant headed god, incomplete in himself, is invoked to ensure the successful completion of any proposed work.

The two worlds represented in Khair's poetry are like two semiotic systems and he himself lies at the imaginary border which unites the two. He lies simultaneously at the conjunction of the Hindu and Islamic cultures of India as well as at the conjunction of the rural and metropolitan regions. Despite being a Muslim he had a Ganesha idol at his home in Delhi and begins his book with *Ganesh Stuti*. His mother's kitchen is presented as a metaphor of the semiosphere where 'parallel lines meet', the lines of different time periods and different languages, religions and cultures.

> "My mother had three stoves in her kitchen:
>
> Electric, gas and coal…"
>
> "…You may call this a sort of infinity, but we
>
> Knew *that* as the point where parallel lines meet."

<div align="right">('Kitchen', *Where Parallel Lines Meet* 99)</div>

The 'infinity' here is an obvious allusion to Marvell's poem but is not the place where two loves meet but the overlapping zones of different semiotic systems.

"My parents' ability to understand what they said

About their parallel worlds in their own dialect."

<div align="right">('Kitchen', *WPLM* 101)</div>

Semiosphere is marked by heterogeneity where multiple rhythms of development co-exist. The three types of stoves in her kitchen also represent the simultaneous presence of three different times.

The first section of the book is titled "Squares and Circles" which represents the asymmetry of the semiosphere. The poems in this section describe the opposites which coexist but cannot meet in this world. The very first poem in the section "Epact" tersely describes the difference between the mother's 'moon of faith' and the 'overbearing sun to which I awoke at thirteen'. Epact refers to the age of the Moon on the first of January and is used to relate the dates in the lunar calendar and the solar calendar. With this one word he is able to fill the chasm between religion and scientific thinking, the faith of his mother and his adolescent rebellious rationalist thinking. The two may be paradoxical but he has to live with both.

"But it is the only word I know,

And will have to do." (*Where Parallel Lines Meet* 3)

The poem 'Tamar-e-Hind' shows the impact of other semiotic systems. When the structures of these invading cultures alter the existing systems, they not merely alter the signs but lead to a loss of cultural memory.

And drop the common 'h' unconcerned

At the loss of worlds: tamar-e-hind,

Once palimpsest Persian for 'date

Of India' turns a peeled 'tamarind'. (*Where Parallel Lines Meet* 30)

Education, especially English education, has led us to lose the stories of our culture. Tamarind tree is associated with the folk tale of Babban Hajaam who had whispered the king's secret to the tree. And when the tree was cut and made into musical instruments their music revealed the king's secret. Though the tree could store the secret even after being chopped, it couldn't save its real name from the impact of English.

Tabish in an interview given to Times of India, says that he writes in English because he can read and write it better than any other language. He moved away from Hindi and Urdu because of his education and the political divide between the two. In a short poem titled 'Urdu' he describes how the word 'Urdu' in its Turkish origin means a 'horde' or 'camp' whereas in India it's a language full of meanings, sounds and feelings.

> Made of the Turkish 'camp' a riddle:
>
> Abridled 'horde', but back home a feast
>
> of meanings, feelings, sounds – a language. ("Urdu" *WPLM* 41)

'Epilogue', the final poem in the volume, sums up the hybrid culture that Tabish's poetry presents:

> I who am not of the East
>
> Nor of the West, un-Christian,
>
> Not Muslim or Jew, neither
>
> Born of Adam nor Eve,
>
> What can I love but the world itself   (*WPLM* 104)

Tabish's poetry presents the life, language and the images of a common man's India with the precision of a journalist's eyes. His canvas may spread from small town Gaya where he grew up to Metropolitan Delhi. But his subjects remain the common people, the 'Nimbu-Pani' vendor, the 'Corner Shop Cycle Repair Boys', the 'Metre- Reader', the Circus girls , the seller on the footpath.

'Circus Act in Gaya' describes the plight of the circus girls riding bikes inside a wooden globe. Their life is cut off from the world outside that globe and from the home which may be miles away in a small village in the South of India. They spend their life criss- crossing the wooden globe in their 'closed world' unperturbed by the outside world of spectators which is also a circle within the circle of the town.

Sampurna Chattarji was born in 1970 in Ethiopia and is a poet, novelist and a translator. She has two books of poetry to her credit : *Sight May Strike You Blind* (2007) published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, *The Fried Frog and other Funny Freaky Foodie Feisty Poems(2009)* published by Scholastic India, New Delhi and *Absent Muses* (2010) published by Poetrywala, Mumbai. Her poems have appeared in major anthologies such as 60 Indian Poets(Penguin), Both Sides of the Sky(NBT), We Speak in Changing Languages (Sahitya Akademi) and The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poets(Bloodaxe).

Her poetry covers a wide canvas travelling places and yet has the urgency, the tautness of expression. Sampurna Chattarji does not come at you in the expected ways — no whingeing about identity- theft, no lost-and-found fairytales from the love department, no tea-bagging of memory into a waiting cup. Her concerns are simpler and more elusive (Mani, 2011). Arundhati Subramaniam (2007) says that she has full command over her craft and thus is able to produce "a poetry of verbal muscle, formal flexibility and control, intellectual curiosity, an ability (particularly in the last section) to throw away a line, toss in an image without overworking it, while operating, like every poet must, on more levels than one."

The arbitrariness of cultural symbols "Bared breasts can be a sign of great civilization" and the attempts to assign meaning to everyday events, find predictability in unpredictable actions, deciphering portents is captured in "Ciphers":

It is the everyday prediction—

will the phone ring, will the mail come,

> will she make up with him, will he take her out---
>
> That takes the form of portents. (5)

Home is a dominant trope in CIPE owing to the disconnect between the language and a specific geo-political region or culture which it is native to. Sampurna echoes the same .

> We are walking and talking of home.
>
> Here, where neither you nor I belong,
>
> We are wondering what *home* might mean. ("August in Edinburgh" 31)

The globalised and tech ruled world today is so full of news of extraordinary happenings that now unusual seems ordinary and simple everyday things may seem extraordinary.

> In a world where cults can believe that humans were put on earth by aliens, ... how extraordinary the ordinary must seem, how marvellous the shine of tears on a cheek that I can lean forward and wipe away without a word.
>
> ("Dialogue", *Absent Muses*, 27)

Ranjit Hoskote was born in Mumbai 29th March 1969, and is famous not just as a poet but also as a curator, an art critic and a cultural theorist. He is one of the more recent poets who began writing in the 1990s. His collections of poetry include Zones of Assault, the Cartographer's Apprentice, the Sleepwalker's Archive, Vanishing Acts: New and Selected Poems 1985-2005 and Central Time. His poems have appeared in many Indian and international journals including *Poetry Review* (London), Wasafiri, Poetry Wales, The Iowa Review, Lyric Poetry Review, Kavya Bharati, The Four Quarters Magazine and Indian Literature. His poems have been included in major anthologies including Language for a New Century(New York: W. W. Norton, 2008) and The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poets(Newcastle: Bloodaxe,2008). His poems have also been translated into

German. He has also translated the Marathi poet Vasant Abaji Dahake and the 14th century Kashmiri mystic poet Lal Ded.

Besides poetry Ranjit Hoskote is also a noted art critic considered one of the major five art critics in India and has helped shape the contemporary art discourse in India. He was the principal Art critic for The Times of India, Mumbai from 1988 to 1999 writing a weekly column of lively cultural commentary for it. He began the well known column on spirituality called "The Speaking Tree" for the Times of India. He has also been an art critic and senior editor for The Hindu from 2000 to 2007. His identity as an art critic overflows onto his poetry where we clearly see landscapes and allusions to paintings. Bruce King commenting on his "Zones of Assault", finds it full of obscurity, clichés and not many magnificent lines. Further he finds the endings of poems often chaotic. Despite such unsympathetic remarks he finds Hoskote's work a "daring book" as he finds that Hoskote has "an historical sense, is influenced by the surreal, experiments with metrics and has a complex sense of the political."

Rukmini Bhaya Nair is a professor of linguistics and English at the IIT, Delhi in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. Her poetry collections are *The Hyoid Bone* (1992), *The Ayodhya* Cantos(1999) and *Yellow Hibiscus* (2004). Her poetry is discussed in detail in the later sections of this chapter.

Arundhati Subramaniam(b. 1973), poet and dance curator, 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 *On Cleaning Bookshelves (* 2001), *Where I Live (* 2005) , *Where I Live: New & Selected Poems(2009), *When God Is a Traveller (*2014). 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. Her poetry is deeply personal and individual yet appear as if intended to be read aloud. She writes about love, family,

emotional anxieties. She presents the tension between the intimate desires and longing to be alone. Her language is laconic yet passionate. Her poems begin in a way that one may not know where it is headed but then it captures exceptional detail with unconventional metaphors.

> Beloveds are best documented
> out of the corner of the eye
> where the retina bleeds into
> the imagination.
>
> ('The Archivist' *Reasons for Belonging* 138)

Though she "was neither born nor bred" in Madras (Chennai) the city of her parents does not leave her.

> City that creeps up on me
> just when I'm about to affirm
> world citizenship.
>
> ("Madras" *We Speak in Changing Languages* 269)

Anand Thakore (b.1971) is a Hindustani classical vocalist by profession, lives in Mumbai and teaches Hindustani vocal music. He spent part of his childhood in Britain. His verse collections include *Waking in December* (Harbour Line, 2001), *Mughal Sequence* (Poetrywala, 2012) and *Elephant Bathing* (Poetrywala, 2012). He is also the founder of Harbour Line, a publishing collective. His poetry is noted for its vivid imagery and musicality. Arundhati Subramaniam calls his art "an oracular mode that is capable of swerving abruptly into the mock-heroic or vividly anecdotal; a repeatedly articulated need for stasis as well as the need for change; an impulse to craft a self and a world that is sovereign and inviolable and yet welcome a 'stark and craftless rapture'; the urge to remain 'sealed', 'inanimate', 'unhurt' and yet open out to surprise, danger, denouement, and the inevitable journey downhill and seawards'."

Thakore being a musician has a strong sense of music, rhyme and metre. His poems cover landscapes, seascapes and ordinary everyday objects around him, like 'bitter gourd', 'wind chime' or a 'punching bag', all given a new meaning. He is always in a contemplative mode whether he is "Negotiating Negativity on the Western Ghats", looking at a Fondue Pot or when he retells the cogitations of Kunti, Dhritrashtra or Karna in mythical "Mahabharata Sequence".

Thakore's *Mughal Sequence* (2012 Poetrywala) recaptures the history of Mughal Dynasty as a historical present. The sequence begins with Humayun pondering over the time when he had lost most of his kingdom which he regained and expanded later. Then we are introduced to Gulbadan Begum, Humayun's sister, at Surat en route Mecca. She is worried about the religious experiments of his nephew Akbar.

Forgive him, Lord, his eagerness
To learn the ways of the infidel.

The Emperor is only a boy who wants to play. (35)

Then we come across a dancing girl who once adorned the court of Sultan Ibrahin Lodi and is now owned by the Emperor and is now handed over by one soldier to another, "I was born with a gift but now I have become one". "I gave myself with rehearsed compliance/ This ensured it would be over quickly" (39). The fourth voice is of Babur who was:
 Builder of princedoms and treacherous ramparts,
Architect of couplets, sculptor of epithets,

Mason of quatrains and finite lists,
And breaker of hearts and temples, idols and oaths,   (51)
The last voice is of the diamond Kohinoor, Koh-i-noor, a mineral which belonged to the Mughals but with their downfall now is one of the crown jewels of

Great Britain. The mineral has been a mute witness to the rise and fall of the Mughal empire, "I, who have never cared to be a seer,/ Have seen these things" (70).

The semiosphere is not a homogenious space. It has internal irregularity. The structural heterogeneity of semiotic space creates reserves of dynamic processes. It is this heterogeneity which acts as a mechanism for creation of new information. In the peripheral areas the structures may be more flexible and thus the dynamic processes meet with less opposition and develop more quickly. In the centre the development of "meta-structural self descriptors (grammar)" dramatically increases the rigidity of structures and slows down its development (Lotman 214). And in future the periphery displaces the centre and the former centre may be transformed into the new periphery. The relationship between the core and the periphery can be summed up in these lines from Sudeep Sen's poem 'The Vortex':

> Where the madness of the border and the sanity of the centre
> Were at constant war, not knowing whether
> The insanity belonged to the centre or sanity to the border
>
> I like the periphery; it has more space at its edges,
> More room to breathe and create, more room to perish unnoticed
>
> (*Fractals* 175)

The boundary is the area of accelerated semiotic processes. These processes always flow more actively on the periphery of cultural environments trying to affix them to the core structures. The periphery grows by incorporating external structures and then translates its semiotic structure through to the centre and in due time may 'conquer' the cultural sphere of the centre. The earlier core of the Indian poetry in English lied in the metropolitan centres of Delhi and Mumbai. in contemporary times poets living abroad mostly in the US or the UK or those having lived there have occupied the core besides those at the metropolitan centres of India.

The periphery today is covered by poets in remote corners of India and those with alternate or subversive voices and some emerging poets. The core is always shifting and thus these voices may soon acquire the core. Some of these are poets from the north east like Anjum Hasan, Robin S. Ngangom, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Desmond Kharmawphlang and from Kerala like Meena Kandasamy and Tishani Doshi from Chennai.

Anjum Hasan born in Shillong, Meghalaya better known for her novels, is a multi- genre writer presently based in Bangalore and serving as the books editor for the Caravan magazine. Her parents are originally from Uttar Pradesh but she was born and brought up in Shillong where her father served as a lecturer in English at the North Eastern Hill University. She did her schooling in Loreto Convent and BA Honours in Philosophy from St.Mary's College and Masters in Philosophy from North Eastern Hill University, Shillong.

Her debut collection of poems *Street on the Hill* (2006) won the Sahitya Academy award. The poems deal with middle class lives in a small town ranging from childhood memories to men running sweetshops, nuns teaching in convent schools, Chinese restaurants, sports goods stores etc. She presents the lives of the 'hill people' who may settle elsewhere but can never be detached from their past. The outsiders view them as shy, forever shifting people. In "My Folks" she says that these people have 'hills in our blood'.

> "we have hills in our blood
>
> But end up smelling fat cars on city streets
>
> And garbage strewn under rain.
>
> ... We shall never lose our shyness" ('My Folks' *Street on the Hill* 17)

Now she is based at Bangalore but she finds herself lonely in the new city.
> "I long to be part of the music and mercury,
>
> The cut and the thrust of people together anywhere."

Meena Kandasamy (b. 1984) is a poet, translator and a dalit activist. Her collections of poetry include *Touch*(2006) and *Ms Militancy* (2010). Her first novel, *The Gypsy Goddess*(2014) was published by Atlantic Books(UK) and Harper Collins India. Kandasamy subverts traditional Hindu myths to challenge the patriarchal structures.

> "Meena Kandasamy's full-blooded and highly experimental poems challenge the dominant mode in contemporary Indian poetry in English: status-quoist, de-politicised, neatly sterilized. These caustic poems with their black humour, sharp sarcasm, tart repartees, semantic puns and semiotic plays irritate, shock and sting the readers until they are provoked into rethinking the 'time-honoured' traditions and entrenched hierarchies at work in contemporary society. The poet stands myths and legends on their head to expose their regressive core. She uses words, images and metaphors as tools of subversion, asserting, in the process, her caste, gender and regional identities while also transcending them through the shared spaces of her socio-aesthetic practice." (Satchidanandan)

Her purpose in writing poetry is not for aesthetic pleasure but to register her protest, "I have to write poetry to be heard (9)".

Her forced juxtaposition of the languages of religion and mythology with the contemporary language of computers and technology act as the semantic trope conceptualised by Lotman as "a pair of mutually non-juxtaposable signifying elements, between which, thanks to the context they share, a relationship of adequacy is established(38)." Ketkar notes that the politically subversive poem "Random Access Man" plays on the word 'RAM' which is an acronym for Random Access Memory in computers and the name of the Hindu god Lord Rama, "This rather fortuitous juxtaposition between the language of mythology and religion and the language of computer technology is possible because of the chance resemblance between two unrelated semiotic systems (11)." Kandasamy's woman is not meant to wait on 'cold nights' but "She sent her dickhead husband/ On a wild-goose chase

– Get me/ the testicle of a golden deer" and "She picked herself a random man/ for that first night of fervor." Kandasamy subverts the narrative of Ram going to hunt the golden deer (Rakshasa Marich in disguise) followed by Lakshman who drew *Lakshman rekha* (boundary line) which Sita was not supposed to cross. This mythical '*Lakshman Rekha*' has become a metaphor for unquestionable patriarchal rules which women are not expected to break. But Kandasamy's woman is no Sita, she deliberately sends her man away and crosses the line to satisfy her desires from a random man. She is a 'Mamasita'(a contemporary urban slang meaning 'hot babe').

Being a socio-linguist by training she has a deep understanding of patterns of language use in contemporary society and deftly plays with them.

> burying his face between my thighs
> he says a cunt by any other name
> would smell as complicated
>
> and then, sniffling in Sanskrit,
> he christens it *yoni*, the womb,
> uterus, vulva, vagina, the female
> organs of generation.   ("A cunning stunt" 11)

Vaginal penetration becomes a metaphor for forced acculturation:
> and he opens my legs wider
> and shoves more and shoves
> harder and I am torn apart
> to contain the meanings of
> family, race, stock, and caste
> and form of existence
> and station fixed by birth   ("A cunning stunt" 11)

Robin S. Ngangom (b.1959) born in Imphal, Manipur in the North Eastern India, 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). 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 is a bilingual poet based in Shillong writing in Khasi and English. His English poetry volumes include *Moments*(1992), *The Sieve*(1992) and *The Yearning of Seeds*(2011). Nongkynrih explains the reason behind writing in both Khasi and English:

> The desire to be read and understood by my own people makes me wish to write in Khasi. But how can one write in a language whose writings are, without being read, frowned upon as biblia abiblia by the educated elite? Therefore, though most of my poems are started in Khasi, my immediate ambition is to exhume them as it were from the crypt of Khasi literature and get them tested through English journal publications…And so, driven by circumstances and supported by literary ambidexterity, the creation of every one of my poems becomes essentially the birth of twins. (Nongkynrih)

His poetry responds to the exigencies of his time and place. Besides his politically charged poetry he has written about the landscape and the folklore of Meghalaya. One such poem is 'Ren' based on a Khasi folklore.

> Ren, the beloved of a river nymph
> …also left a message:
> 'Mother' he had said,
> 'listen to the river,
> as long as it roars
> you will know that I live'.   ("Ren" The Yearning of Seeds" 18)

Anju Makhija, poet, playwright and translator presents the marginally represented Sindhi voices. She was born in Pune and did her MA in Communications from Concordia university, Montreal, Canada. Her *Seeking the Beloved*(2012) published by Katha is a translation of selected verse by 16th century Sufi poet Shah Abdul Latif (1689-1752) of Bhitshah in Sindh. Her other works of poetry include *View from the Web*(2005) and *Pickling Season*(2012). Her poetry is included in anthologies like *Anthology of Contemporary Indian Poetry* (2004) edited by Menka Shivdasani, *The Dance of the Peacock: An Anthology of English Poetry from India* (2013) edited by Vivekanand Jha. Along with E V Ramakrishnan she has edited an important anthology published by Sahitya Akademi *Speak in Changing Languages- Indian Women Poets 1990-2007*(2008). She won the All India Poetry Prize in 1994 and BBC world Regional Poetry Prize in 2002.

Anju Makhija's poetry has images of contemporary reality imbued with multiple subtexts. Besides poems dealing with her grandmother and other relatives, her own movement from her semi-rural home in Panvel to Marine Drive, Mumbai, she also talks of the ancestral connections and the nostalgia for Sindh.

> Oh, my little one,
> ride the waves, breast currents
> as Sohini did on her *matka.*
> Sindhu's banks you may chance upon,
> discover the Indus,
> our forgotten past.
>
> ("Umblical Connections" 50)

Tishani Doshi (b. 1975) is a poet, dancer and journalist based in Chennai. Her mother is Welsh and father Gujarati. She holds a master's degree in creative writing from the Johns Hopkins University. Her poetry collections include *Countries of the Body*(2006), *Everything Begins Elsewhere* (2012) and *Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods* (2017). Her poems are explicit, frank and truthful. They cover the landscapes from London to Madras (Chennai) and relive each street, sight, smell or sound she has come across.

How cars in reverse sing Jingle Bells

And scooters have larynxes of lorries.

How even colour can never be quiet.

('Homecoming' *Countries of the Body*22)

Intersemiotic Translation

The creative function of culture is related to Lotman's notion of polyglot text. The text belongs to two or several languages simultaneously. Lotman says that the human consciousness is heterogeneous and within one consciousness there are as if two consciousnesses, one perceiving the world as a discrete system of coding and another as a continuous system. The basic unit of the discrete system is sign and of the continuous it is the text(36). The discrete and the continuous languages represent the minimal pair of languages. Peeter Torop in his foreword to Lotman's *Culture and Explosion* writes that Lotman in his article "The Phenomenon of Culture"(1978) describes a typology for distinguishing between static and dynamic aspects of cultural languages. Here also he mentions that the cultural languages divide into the discrete and the continual (iconic-spatial) and this forms the primordial dualism. In discrete languages signs come first and meanings are created through the meanings of signs. In continual languages the text takes the primary position and the meaning emerges through a holistic text that integrates even the most heterogeneous elements. These are the two languages between which it is difficult to create translatability (xxviii). Multiple semiotic systems (languages) and

their mutual (un)translatability, the tension between the continuous (iconic-spatial) and the discrete cultural languages underlie the semiosis in contemporary Indian poetry in English.

Thayil's *English* may also be noted for the visual semiosis that it employs. The diagram at the beginning becomes an iconic representation of the structure of the book. In 'Skewed', one of the New York poems, the lines of varied lengths are arranged so as to become a visual representation of the skylines of New York. It may also allude to the picture of the Brooklyn bridge which appears on the cover page.

> "and find that the city is skewed, sweetly,
> For those who see the skyline or bridge
> In this poems's wavy right hand margin." (7)

Sudeep Sen's interest in poetry, architecture, dance, photography and music make his poetry multi-textured and multi-layered. His poetry is marked for not just innovative rhyme schemes but also visual structure and presentation.

According to Lotman the text serves the three functions of natural languages namely creative function or generating new meanings, artistic function or iconism and the function of memory or acting as a condenser of cultural memory. Meaning generation is the accumulation of new information through the translation of texts between two or more different codes. Higher untranslatability has more potential for new information generation. This is even true of translations between different semiotic systems, for example transformation of a novel into a film.

According to Lotman dialogue is an ontological principle of of the semiosphere, "dialogue presupposes asymmetry in the difference between the semiotic structures (languages)" (143). Further he states that the dialogic situation, i.e. need for dialogue precedes both real dialogue and even the existence of language in which to conduct it: the semiotic situation precedes the instruments of semiosis. The

untranslatability or limited translatability between two asymmetric semiotic systems becomes a trope in Sen's poetry. He tries to translate the movements and patterns of dance into verbal poetic language in 'Bharatnatyam Dancer':

> Spaces in the electric air divide themselves
>
> In circular rhythms, as the slender
>
> grace of your arms and bell-tied ankles
>
> describe a geometric topography, real, cosmic,
>
> One that once reverberated continually in
>
> A prescribed courtyard of an ancient temple

(125)

In this poem Sen experiments with a new line-end rhyme scheme *abacca-dbdeed-fbfggf* and so on to map the actual classical dance step pattern and beat- *ta dhin ta thaye thaye ta.* Similarly the left hand margin indentations have also been matched to the same scheme and form.

The semiotic tension is evident when Sen endeavours to translate the continuous language of painting to the discrete language of poetry. He has written a whole set of poems on visual art, poems like 'Dali's Pate de Verre' based on Dali's *Le desir hyperrational*, 'Drawing Kafka Out' based on an illustration by Franz Kafka, 'Amistad' based on a painting by Tom Feeling and 'Cover Drawing' based on Imtiaz Dharker's painting. Collected in the section 'Blue Nude' the poems are sub grouped based on painters and media. The first three groups are based on the paintings by Paul Cézanne's, Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse and the next three are based on visual art by various artists grouped according to media including photographs, canvas paintings and installations.

In the poem 'Sati' inspired by Henri Matisse's *Baigneuse dans les Roseaux(*bather in the Reeds*)*, 1952 , Sen has lines appear as if stacked over each other resembling a funeral pyre.

> She waits
>
> At the feet

of her

    husband's

pyre,

    Stacking

The last

    Pieces: (143)

The original painting by Henri Matisse actually shows a woman bathing in the reeds using brushstrokes outlining the woman and the reeds. This pictorial art is an iconic sign. But the poet here interprets as signifying a woman sacrificing her life on the funeral pyre of her husband. The sign is interpreted using the cultural codes that the poet has and subsequently translated into verbal sign where he attempts to capture the iconicity of the image in his mind through the stacked lines. Thus Sen's poem does not remain a mere ekphrastic poem.

The poem 'Cow- Dust Hour' is inspired by a Rokeya Sultana painting:

      hoofing up fine red-dust in the air

      marking an auspicious *godhuli lagna*

      it must mean passion or yearning instead;

      a force so strong that it quietly stretches

      and redefines the definition of canvas,

      geometry, landscape, and the seasons." (163)

A similar theme appears in Tabish Khair's 'Godhuli' but it is not based on a visual art representation but an actual lived experience:

      We inched through a gap in the herd,

      Wreathed in cowdust, headlights switched on,

      Casting faint, elongated shadows of cows

      On this world of dust a word could touch.

              ("Godhuli" *Where Parallel Lines Meet* 98)

In Sen's poem the translation is from visual code to verbal and thus geometry and shapes dominate whereas in Khair's version it's the haptic and the kinetic.

'The Skulls' is a poem based on the French post impressionist artist Paul Cézanne's series *The Skulls*, oil on canvas and graphite and water colour on paper painted 1898-1905. Chief among these paintings is the 'Pyramid of Skulls'(1901) which depicts four human skulls stacked like a pyramid three of which are facing forward and seem to stare at the viewer. The fourth skull is lying down behind the three forward facing skulls, and is only partially visible. This series of paintings is believed to show Cezanne's resignation to death.

> The three gods
>   I worship
> are dead.
>   They stare
> From the backs
>   of their heads,   (134)

The poet says that these skulls are like mummies from the pyramid waiting to be embalmed "in oil and graphite". While translating the paintings into verbal poetry he combines the whole series of paintings and in his mind tries to combine the heterogeneous images into one homogenous image and interprets them using the cultural codes available to him. Such a translation causes inter-semiotic tension and leads to unpredictability. Thus translation or transmutation from one semiotic structure to another generates new meaning.

Sampurna Chatterjee in "Timeshift" captures the anxiety of preserving presented by a display of two photographs of the same place a century apart. The photographs by Jürgen Nefzger and Eugène Atget of Rue Saint-Bon have captured the same place at different times but put together they present how the place has changed through the continuous language of photography. They acquire meaning

being put together. The process of translating this continuous visual language into discrete system of poetry generates a new meaning.

> I prefer to think it is blood,
>
> sacrificial, a sign of all
>
> the dead time that ghosted
>
> through this street, unseen,
>
> but for these two photographs,
>
> side by side, on a wall.
>
> ("Timeshift" 52)

Rukmini Bhaya Nair plays with spaces between words to create visual poetry. Sometimes she adds space between words(her poem "Computer" which can be read as two poems) and sometimes removes space between words as in "Genderole" which presents a violent juxtaposition of Sanskrit and English rhymes and graphemics visually represented with conjoined words.

> Comingtogetherisnoverbalmatter
>
> Howeveroursagepraisepativtrata I
>
> *Katavkantakasteputrasamsaroyam*
>
> *Ativavichitra*waswrittenformenbyaman I
>
> ("Genderole" *60 Indian Poets* 256)

The poem is a feminist critique of the monist philosophy of the 8th century philosopher, religious teacher and poet Shankara also known as Adi Shankaracharya.

In *Ayodhya Cantos* Nair juxtaposes multiple semiotic structures to create the 'comi-tragic' effect while describing the events leading to and the subsequent demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 through a retelling of the Ramayana epic fused with Ramlila performances. In 'Narasimha' she juxtaposes the verbal narrative with the language and the sounds of cinema: "How meticulously Vishnu has planned

this operation. 11.40 Dhoom!/ 11.43 Dhishum! 12.05 Dharam! (AC 38)" and similarly the language of minute by minute TV reportage :

> "…1.55. The first dome
> Collapses. Splatch! 3.30. The second dome. These are Babar's bones!
> Proclaims a grisly half-cocked goon. 4.pm. Torching of Muslim
> homes. 4.15. Ram Lalla's boulder rolls centre-stage. 4.45. A kar-sevak
> chain."

> ("Parasuram" AC 40)

Khair's 'Leaving Gaya Station' is also a visual poem describing the poet's wait for the train at the station. It has vivid images of people, rats and things, one would usually come across at any Indian railway station. The poem translates the visual into verbal and tries to capture the wait and the movement in words. The poem ends with the one word line 'Move' printed extreme right, representing an exchange between two different semiotic systems, verbal and visual :

> Space. That too putting its weight behind time.

> Move.

> (*Where Parallel Lines Meet* 37)

Entropy is an important concept in cultural semiotics. In information theory entropy is the unpredictability of the semantic content and high entropy means high information but redundancy is needed for a message to be decoded effectively. Thus entropy is seen as something which hinders communication but Lotman believes that in art and culture unpredictability is an intrinsic function of the system, and entropy is a necessary condition for meaning generation (26). The poem 'Entropy' inspired by Megan Randall's installations depicts how Randall's installation is "an art of abandonment". Contemporary ceramic artist Randall has created site specific installations using porcelain. Randall explaining his art on his website says that "it examines people's reactions to site sensitive installations and fine art objects. Not recording the people but the impact that they leave behind. Entropy is the theme of my work; how both people and nature have reactions to and on specific places. In

the process of my work I relinquish control, instead of having a predetermined outcome of how the work will be received. I do not mind if the work is stolen, destroyed or rearranged just as long as it is treated with the same passion used to create it. The small, functionless porcelain vessels which I produce to fill these empty spaces convey the idea of abandonment." Sen brilliantly captures this intended unpredictability or entropy in his poem.

> As the maker lets her off-springs fly
> She relinquishes control, allowing
> These whites to create their own colour,
> own shapes, own narratives   (181)

Terror and Violence

Contemporary times have been overshadowed with terror attacks from Bali bombings, 9/11 World Trade Centre attacks to Mumbai attacks and so on. Terror can easily be seen as a dominant trope in CIPE. Rukmini Bhaya Nair in the preface of *Poetry in a Time of Terror*(2009) discusses how the internationalization and the internalization of terror are simultaneous processes. The agents of terror are disturbingly invisible and sensationally armed. They are revered and loved by their handlers and overwhelmingly hated by the public who are their victims (xii). It is no longer just India or parts of the 'third world' which is affected. With America's 'global war on terror' it has become part of dominant discourse. Nair suggests that "Literature, symbolized in its essence as poetry, is as potent an agent in the 'war against terror' as a well armed state. She sees terror as primarily ideological as terrorists like Kasab think they can erase resistance by 'silencing' people through terror and is synonymous with the monolingual language of extermination. This terror can be fought not merely through military means. "Literature constitutes evolutionary safeguards against that fatal terror of 'the other' that has, paradoxically, always caused the species to wage war against itself"(Nair xii).

Sampurna Chatterjee's "Travel Sickness" uses the language of violence to portray the inhumanity of the terror attacks on train travellers in Madrid(2004), London(2005) and Mumbai(2006).

> No rapture can transport me now.
>
> Only metal, beaten into place around my heart.
>
> (*Absent Muses,* 50)

A similar theme is presented in "Who Calls That Strange" which was written after the blast at the Sankat Mochan Temple, Varanasi on March 7, 2006 in which about ten devotees were killed.

> It is re-membering that disturbs her, piecing together the careful shards
>
> of skin and bone, the re-collected hand, the wedding
>
> Ring around the bleeding finger.
>
> (*Absent Muses*, 65)

The North East region has been witness to terror and violence in multiple forms be it the violence against mother earth in the form of exploitation of minerals and leveling of hills in the guise of development, violence against indigenous cultures, or the armed insurgency against the state and the reciprocal alleged violations by the armed forces.

> Peace without fear of another vicious tomorrow
>
> is what we search, and not the false dusk of
>
> the seven brandished swords who guard our backs
>
> (Ngangom "We are Not Ready for the Hand of Peace" 92)

Memory and History

Many contemporary poets present violence of another type, the violence of memory and history. For them remembering is painful.

Tabish Khair writes about the tense moments of remembering on leaving a town and returning after a long time:

> A town I left behind so many years ago;

And returned last week to find the streets have shrunk.

…Her words seek the fungus. She wants to scrape it away.
I resist, fearing the nakedness of memories. ("Her Town" 60)

Vijay Sheshadri says that no one ever writes the real story.
The real story of a life is the story of its humiliations.
If I wrote that story now—
radioactive to the end of time—
people, I swear, your eyes would fall out, you couldn't peel
the gloves fast enough
from your hands scorched by the firestorms of that shame.

("Memoir" *3 Sections* 6)

To Sujatha Mathai a name triggers a memory and forgotten path. In her characteristic style she moves through metaphors of winter clothing that moulder in trunks and spring flowers waiting to spring out of the winter to show how memory acts as a secret enemy

Hearing your name
in a crowded room
the forgotten pain,
long denied, firmly put away

... And who would expect
on a quiet stroll,
to be ambushed by a secret enemy? .   ("Secret Enemy" 6)

Poetry of region

Many poets have written poetry which is socially/culturally located that is belongs to a specific region of India. They represent the social-political issues or

cultural artefacts (rituals, art, performances) specific to a certain location. They write about their local places, environments and their relationship with the place. While the modernists wrote about life in metropolitan centres of Mumbai or Delhi, a trend set by Nissim Ezekiel, many of the contemporary poets write poetry rooted in smaller towns and villages sometimes in far off regions.

Anjum Hasan's *Street on the Hill* has poems about middle class lives in a small town. Her poetry is rooted in the hill town of Shillong, Meghalaya.

> We come here from the long afternoon
>
> stretched over the town's sloping roofs,
>
> its greasy garages and ice-cream parlours,
>
> its melancholic second-hand bookshops
>
> with their many missing pages.
>
> ('To the Chinese restaurant' 23)

A similar picture of monotonous life in a small town is presented by Mamang Dai, a poet from Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.

> My hometown lies calmly amidst the trees,
>
> it is always the same,
>
> in the summer or winter
>
> with the dust flying,
>
> or the wind howling down the gorge
>
> ("Small Towns and the River" River Poems)

Poets from the North East India present a poetry deeply rooted in the local landscape. While they talk about nature, myths and folk lore as an integral part of their life, they also present a politically charged poetry emerging out of the zones of conflict. These poets may belong to different tribes or states but they share the sufferings and the pain of losing their identities.

> …Woman from the land
>
> of Chhura, our roots suck from the
>
> same liquid tongue. Because of these

shared dreams and waters, none knows you

like I do.

(Ngangom, "To a Woman from Southeastern Hills" *The Desire of Roots* 22)

Robin S. Ngangom echoes the emotions of locals when he imagines the indigenous identity which is lost in the changing times.

That was the time of the weretiger, before

temples and churches, time of the freethinking

dormitory, when boys trained in the school of

the warrior, time of the daring headhunter,

when legends could not wait to be born, and

places were named. And time before this

English tongue we speak now.

("To a Woman from Southeastern Hills" *TDOR* 21)

North East region has been grappling with insurgency for a long time and violence has become an integral part of the lives of the people.

And the women heavy with seed,

their soft bodies mown down

like grain stalk during their lyric harvests;

if they wore wildflowers in their hair

while they waited for their men,

I didn't care anymore.

('Native Land' *TDOR* 84)

The English language poetry from the North East is infused with local myths and folk lore. They talk of dances like 'Weiking'(khasi thanks giving dance), folk lore of 'Ren'(a fisherman from East Khasi hills who fell in love with a river nymph) and may be based in villages like Lawsohtun (village on the outskirts of Shillong).

An emerging Kerala poet is N. Ravi Shankar who writes under the alias Ra Sh lives in Palakkad, Kerala and presents not only local issues and places but also fuses English poetry with Malayalam and Tamil lines such as "suddenly kannadasan breaks into the music of the orbs- / ennathan nadakkum nadakkattume/ iruttinil neethi marayattume" ('Cosmic Frogs" *Architecture of Flesh* 28) and similarly a well known Tamil song in :

> Girl sings
> Unnai kaanatha kannum ……(eyes that haven't seen you)
> Harmonium wails
> Kannalla…………………………(are not eyes.)

> ("Musical Chairs on a suicidal train", *Architecture of Flesh*, 23)

Anju Makhija, though based in Mumbai expresses the anxieties of the Sindhi community and nostalgia for the lost land. Very few Indian English poets have expressed the pains of partition. Like many other regional poets she also inserts a line in Sindhi.

> 'Our ancestory lost', she moans
> cars and carriage, Garden and bungalow,
> in Karachi and Lahore.
> Nothing belongs, nothing is ours.
> '*asanjo sub kuch vayo'*.
>> ("Her Mother's Tongue" 51)

In the same poem she asserts her Sindhi identity which has got lost in the crazy life of the metropolitan Mumbai.

> Mummy, I implore, teach her our language,
> *dohas* and *bhajans* of Latif and Sachal.

Mother, dazed by traffic's haze,

and last night's party,

where diamonds and drinks mingle,

can never quite understand how. (51)

Myth as auto-communication

Indian myths have been used by poets since the beginning of English language poetry in India. Myths are part of our collective unconscious. Characters, themes and plots from the Ramayana, the Mahabharat and Puranas have been used in regional as well as English language literatures. Sita, Draupadi, Karna, Eklavya are some of the characters oft used in subversive literatures. While the earlier generations of poets used Indian myths as a marker of Indianness, the contemporary generation uses myths as subversive tools. For using myths as subversion the reader must already know the myths. Lotman observes that some texts(such as myths) in culture only have an autocommunicative function. He explains this with the difference between a 'note' and a 'knot'. While the written note has a message contained in it which can be extracted, the knot tied on a handkerchief performs a mnemonic function, that is refers to a message the reader already knows. Mythological texts are autocommunicative. They do not convey some decodable message but make us listen to ourselves. These texts also have an important social function that of preserving a certain worldview. Roland Barthes(1972) also looks at myths as vehicles for perpetuating a certain ideology and a tool for exercising power. Myths are not limited to folktales. Any text interpreted as a model of reality serves the function of a mythological text. Mythological consciousness considers objects as unique objects and cannot categorise them. Barthes considers myth as a type of speech – a second order semiological system of communication that is a special preconditioned form of language with a message("Myth Today", 107). For him myth is an expression of an historically specific ideological vision of the world. Myth has a dual function- it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us (115). Myths distort particular images or signs to

carry a specific meaning. It is an ideological process which works by presenting culture specific objects and relations as if they were timeless, natural and thus unquestionable.

Reginald Shepherd observes that there are three main ways in which writers engage with myth. "A writer can *retell* the myth, staying within the terms of the myth and basically giving another version of what's already been written and handed down. This is, from my perspective, the least interesting way to approach myth—it adds little new doesn't explore very much or investigate or question. A writer can *relive* the myth, entering into it to explore a moment or a character, perhaps opening up an underdeveloped element in the myth, while still accepting the overall terms of the myth. Or a writer can *revise* the myth, questioning its terms, bringing out what it represses or excludes, giving voice to those whom it silences, giving presence to those it makes invisible(Shepherd)." Indian poetry in English has used myth in all these three ways, 'retelling', 'reliving' and 'revising', but we may see the predominance of each of these patterns in phases. The British poets writing in or about India in the colonial times used Indian myths as simple retelling as they were writing largely for readers back home in England. Such retellings in lyric form can be found in Sir William Jones's "A Hymn to Camdeo" bringing the sensuous Kama to life: "He with five flowerets tip thy ruthless darts/   Which through five senses pierce enraptur'd hearts" and "A Hymn to Narayena"

> Spirit of Spirits, who, through ev'ry part
>> Of space expanded and of endless time,
>> Beyond the stretch of lab'ring thought sublime,
>> Badst uproar into beauteous order start,
>> Before Heav'n was, Thou art: ("A Hymn to Narayena")

But these poems based on Indian myths had to be accompanied with lengthy explanations such as 'The Argument' which summarizes and explains the content of the above poem and/or detailed footnotes as these myths were not part of the cultural memory of the target audience. These representations of myths were not auto-communicative.

A good example of 'reliving' of the myth is Anand Thakore's "Mahabharat Sequence" which has three poems "Kunti reminisces", "Dhritarastra Laments" and "Karna, on Giving up his Armour". Here he presents the musings of characters from the Mahabharat and lets the reader enter their minds.

My hands rejoice to know, for the first time,

What my bare chest feels like,

Naked, at last, in this ebbing light; and the sun,

Before he sinks below the edge of the west,

Gazes proudly on my refusal to survive.

("Karna on Giving up his Armour" *Elephant Bathing* 70)

The third type, 'revising', can also be explained in Lotman's words who observes that one type of art is oriented towards canonical systems ("ritualized art", "the art of the aesthetics of identity", while the other – towards the violation of canons, the violation of prescribed norms. In the second case, aesthetic values emerge not as a result of the fulfillment of norms, but as the effect of their violation (1).

Contemporary poets are able to use myths as subversions as they are largely writing for an Indian audience who already know these myths enabling myths to act as auto-communicative devices. Barthes wants myths to be understood by how they transform the socially and historically specific into something which is natural and inevitable. For Barthes myth "is the bourgeois ideology itself, the process through which the bourgeois transforms the reality of the world into an image of the world, History into Nature(140)." Contemporary poets like Meena Kandasamy seek to deconstruct the same unquestionable and natural myths to question the ideology of the dominant culture. Kandasamy retells traditional myths to subvert patriarchy and caste discrimination. She says that the purpose of her poetry is to register protest (9). For her Ram is not the ideal 'maryada purushottam' but just the Random Access Man (RAM). In the preface to *Ms Militancy* she blasts religious

myths and questions what she considers the fundamental conscience of Hindu society:

"You are the repressed Ram from whom I run away repeatedly. You are Indra busy causing bloodshed. You are Brahma fucking up my fates. You are Manu robbing me of my right to live and learn and choose. You are Sage Gautama turning your wife to stone. You are Adi Sankara driving me to death. You are all the men for whom I would never moan, never mourn. You are the conscience of this Hindu Society." (9)

Kandasamy revises traditional myths of the patriarchal and caste biased society as twisting the stories to the scariest extent allows her to get back not just at the society but also herself. "My Maariamma bays for blood. My Kali kills. My Draupadi strips. My Sita climbs on to a stranger's lap. All my women militate…they take on the sun, they take after me (8)."

Ms Militancy", the title poem of Kandasamy's *Ms. Militancy* (2010) retells the mythical tale of Kannagi, the central character in the Tamil epic *Silapathikaram*. Kandasamy uses the myth as a subversion to portray the kind of revolt she expects dalit women to be capable of. Dalit women have to fight against both caste and gender discrimination. In the epic Kannagi is described as a woman who stays committed despite her husbands unfaithfulness. Her husband Kovalan was falsely framed and unduly beheaded by the king. She avenges the injustice by proving his innocence and then cursing the king and the city of Madurai. Her curse led to the death of the Pandya King and the city of Madurai was burnt down making the society suffer which was responsible for her sufferings.

> The king died of shame, the queen died of shock.
> On the edge, Ms Militancy bayed for more blood.
> Vending vengeance, she made a bomb
> of her left breast and blew up the blasted city.
>
> ("Ms Militancy" *Ms Militancy* 36)

Rukmini Bhaya Nair presents a retelling of myths to portray the rise of Hindu Nationalism leading to the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992. Venkateswaran while discussing the disruptive use of myths observes that "Nair shows that myth does not necessarily dwell within a religious sphere but can be used to disrupt a violence emanating out of a narrow definition of religion"(103). Nair's *Ayodhya Cantos*(1999) blends the Ramlila performances with the *Ramayana* and she sees it as her comi-tragic attempt at a 'national allegory'. It is a contemporary parodic retelling of the Ramayana. The main section of the volume 'Via Ayodhya' is divided into three *Kandas* (Cantos) : 'Hanuman Kanda', 'Sita Kanda' and 'Vishnu Kanda'. Each Kanda consists of seven sonnets of fourteen lines each and every sonnet is followed by a lyric chorus octave. The octaves are based on the poet's own translation of *Bhavani Astakam* (prayer of goddess Bhavani). Some octaves are recited by the priests and the others by people which are their version of the *Bhavani Astakam* shlokas. The comi-tragedy has three central characters Hanuman, Sita/Sitara and Vishnu. Hanuman is a small chai-pan shop owner "Fated to remain - or so he imagines - keeper of a small-time serai, /At the cross-roads in Ayodhya." Sita/Sitara is a young girl who is perhaps Hindu Sita or Muslim Sitara "Sita, / All of thirteen years old, lives somewhere behind Mir Baki's mosque." The poetess explains that the ambiguity of the name Sita-Sitara was because in the aftermath of Babri Masjid demolition the girls selling flowers often tried to hide their names as their Muslim names could betray them. Sita and Hanuman are friends and the third character Vishnu is a local as well as a cosmic politician who keeps an eye on them. Vishnu is presented in almost all his incarnations Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parsurama – before being reborn as Ram in Ayodhya with terrifying consequences (Authors note, *Ayodhya Cantos*).

Nair prefers to call it an incomplete comi-tragedy instead of tragic-comedy as what begins as a light hearted play turns dark and difficult to comprehend. Hanuman saves Sitara from *goondas* who were trying to molest her in Bhavani Talkies, Faizabad. Hanuman takes her and other children to Ayodhya in a tonga.

In the end the voiceless chorus of the gods addressed to the priests and the people of Ayodhya request them to come out of the narratives of the politicians and have their say.

> Memory, its story told in bits and jagged pieces. *When did*
> *It begin? Who dies when a mosque comes down? Who lifts a finger?*
> Not the gods, immortal and uninvolved. Unctuous officials
> The politicians and their pudding-faced brats, lethally armed
> Forget them! *Whom can you trust?* Citizens of Ayodhya, pray
> If you must - but above all, act! You have powers greater than
> Bhavani's, insights deeper than Vishnu's. Listen to Garuda!
> ("FINALE: THE VOICELESS CHORUS OF THE GODS" *AC* 50)

In "Strategies of Silence" Sampurna Chatterjee juxtaposes the Indian mythological character of Soorpanakha with the suicide planes with "kamikaze landing" and men committing hara-kiri but "what drives you is not honour". The blend of long and short lines imitates the blood gushing with rage and coupled with violent imagery renders the reader shocked, "Two sharp strokes and you are ready, belly ripped, gutless"(5).

Intertexuality and Intersemiosis

Reconstructions of transformation of myths in poetry may also be described as intertextuality as these poems expect prior knowledge of the myths for their meaning. The term intertextuality was introduced by French semiotician Julia Kristeva. She says that any literary text is not the product of one author but of its relationship to other texts, "any text is an absorption of and transformation of another" (66). All literary texts are basically palimpsests. Intertextuality is the interconnection between related literary works that influence the reader's

interpretation of the text. The concept is closely linked to Bakhtin's 'dialogism' which suggests the continual dialogue with other texts and authors. The intersemiotic translations in Sudeep Sen's or Sampurna Chatterjee's poems based on visual art may also be seen as intertextual where the meaning is not transferred directly from writer to reader but is mediated through 'codes' imparted to the reader by other texts. Or take the poem "Bharatnatyam Dancer" where the visual representation of the poem acquires meaning only through the readers knowledge of the classical dance. The poem "The Skulls" presents the poet's interpretation of the Cezanne painting through the cultural codes available to him. Though such intertextuality does not demand prior knowledge of the painting (text in another semiotic system) on part of the reader, knowing the same can significantly alter the interpretation.

Often contemporary Indian English poets also allude to works of other poets. A good example is Anand Thakore alluding to Agha Sahid Ali's "Call Me Ishmael Tonight"

Shall I hold my tongue, lord, or call tonight?
Contain myself, or start another brawl tonight?

My dead mentor returns. Shall I silence him with words,
Or wrap his image in a shawl tonight?

(Thakore "Ghazal" 26)

Borders and Bilinguals

Semiosphere being an abstract space, the boundary that separates it from extra semiotic space cannot be visualised in concrete terms. The semiotic border acts as a bilingual filters, passing through which the text is translated into another language

existing outside the semiosphere and similarly non-texts or external texts are translated into the one of the languages of its internal space. The border of the semiosphere becomes is important as a structural and functional element. It helps create contact with extra semiotic space.

The poets living in other countries such as Tabish Khair in Denmark act as semiotic filters between Indian culture and 'extra-culture'. Lotman(2005) says that all great empires had their borders inhabited by nomad settlers. These settlers formed a zone of cultural bilingualism, ensuring semiotic contacts between two worlds. The bilingual poets like Robin Ngangom, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Bibhu Padhi help translate and introduce new semiotic structures from their regional languages. In contemporary times there are poets who are bilingual or multilingual in a very different way, being adept at multiple semiotic systems. Poets who are visual artists such as Ranjit Hoskote, Sudeep Sen, and poets who are dancers like Tishani Doshi are able to translate across semiotic boundaries, from the visual(iconic- spatial), the language of art, photography or films, the language of dance and verbal (discrete) language.

Naming of the Rose

In more than two centuries of its existence Indian poetry in English has been called various names such as Indo-Anglian poetry, Anglo-Indian poetry, Anglophone poetry, Indo-Engliah poetry, Indian poetry, Indian poetry in English, Indian, Sub-continental poetry etc. Some have preferred not to separate it from English poetry. Every nomenclature has an underlying ideology, politics and self description. It should be clarified here that the term used in the beginning sentence here is only for the sake of convenience.

The distinction between 'one's own' and the 'other' is a process of embedding the boundary in the consciousness, a dominant feature of culture. Man uses proper names to categorise and classify cultural artefacts. In order to change from "alien"

(*chuzhoi*) to "own" (*svoi*) any external culture must acquire a new name in the language of the "internal" culture. The renaming process though does not take away all the traces of the content which has been renamed. English verse in India had to be given a new name depending on who the participants or members of this culture considered as external culture and which culture they wanted to be inserted into. For example poets of British origin writing in India using Indian themes, myths, metaphors considered British poetry as their 'internal' culture into which they are trying to bring this 'external' culture. Pre-independence Indian poets writing in English were divided on what they perceived as "external". Post independence "the internal" was "Indian poetry". In general this limited body of poetry written in English was to set its boundaries in its quest for identity as a new species and also name itself. But in this process of renaming it had to follow the norms of the culture of poetry in general which is named after a certain natural language or well defined social group such as English poetry, Gujarati poetry or Hindi poetry, Indian poetry. But this body did not belong to one geo-political region, the native speakers of its language did not belong to the space that the members inhabited. It has for major part of its existence lied in the overlapping space between the Indian semiosphere and the British Semiosphere.

During colonial times it was easy to label poetry by poets of British origin as English poetry. But verse by poets of Indian origin writing in English were clubbed with translations from other Indian languages especially Bengali and called as Indian poetry as in Goodwin's *Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry*(1927). Importance of Bengali is evident in the one of the earliest anthologies of English language poetry by Indians in Dunn's *The Bengali Book of English Verse* (1918). Post independence nationalist concerns questioned the legitimacy of such poetry. It had rechristen itself as Indo-Anglian poetry and 'Anglo-Indian poets' was reserved for poets of English or mixed origin. In the 1970's once again some critics and anthologists had started calling it Indian poetry though 'Indo-Anglian' or 'Indo-English' was still being used. Now the focus was on the politics of language. 'Indian English' was presented as an Indian language. Some poets mocked at such

nativisation of language, others defended it. The official recognition of English language poetry by Indians as 'Indian poetry' happened in 1990s through Sahitya Akademi's *Modern Indian Poetry in English(1991).* Poets post-1990 consider themselves at home with their cultural hybridity and unperturbed by the politics of writing in English so 'Indian Poetry in English' is widely accepted name of the 'thing'.

Anthology as Self-descriptive Metalevel

The description of the core of a culture which is the domain of the norm is often presented as a typical "portrait" of that culture. Thus it becomes important to understand the problem of self description of that normative core and its outsider description. For the insiders/locals the norm is obvious and is considered the usual state of things whereas the same norm may seem a deviation to the foreigner. Any message consists of two parts, what is told and what is not told (Lotman 1994, 387). Locals being immersed in the actual cultural space can reconstruct the second part on their own, but outsiders/tourists lack this point of reference. Similarly a historian attempting to reconstruct the past appears to be in the position of a tourist both in space and time (Lotman 1994, 388). with reference to Indian poetry in English Arundhati Subramaniam aptly highlights this difference between outsider perspectives and participants of the culture. In her introduction to *Another Country :* "Indian poets in English are sometimes viewed- as a self-congratulatory bunch of cronies. Ironically, those within the scene are aware of a very different-lived in reality. (xvii) "

The highest form of the structural organization of a culture is the point of self-description, which any developed culture inevitably reaches (Lotman 1990, 128):

> Self-description demands the creation of a metalanguage for the given culture. On the basis of the metalanguage there arises the metalevel on which the culture constructs its ideal self-portrait. . . . The appearance of an

image of culture on the metalevel signifies the secondary structuration of this very culture. It becomes more rigidly organized, certain aspects of it are declared to be non-structural, i.e. "non-existent." (Lotman 1979, 92)

For long the central debate has been if there is any specific body of literature which can be justifiably called Indian English Literature. Today in this post- global age we can look back from a vantage point at the development of the so called IE Literature without getting caught in the radical divide between the 'nationalists' and 'internationalists'. Lotman while discussing the self organization of culture says that "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". 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 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.

Anthologies act like auto-communicative devices. Most of the anthologies are by poets themselves (Gokak's being an exception) and since Lal's anthology have followed the norm of having a detailed defence of the poets in the introduction. As most of them have more or less included the same set of poets thus defined the canon and also the self description of the semiosphere or the culture of Indian poetry in English by fixing the boundaries.

As we have already discussed the earlier anthologies in the previous chapter, we shall only be enumerating some of the names and then focus on contemporary anthologies. *Poets of John Company* (1921) by Theodore Douglas Dunn 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). Gwendoline Goodwin's *Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry*(1927) has poems written originally in English and translations from other Indian languages by contemporary poets, the first to call English poetry from India as 'Indian poetry'. Fredoon Kabraji's *This Strange Adventure: An Anthology of Poems in English by Indians 1828-1946* (1947), highlights how the English actually lose not being able to read Indian languages and appreciates the English language competence of Indian poets. The first modernist anthology was *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1959) by P Lal and K. Raghavendra Rao. *Modern Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology & A Credo* (1971) edited by P. Lal includes 132 poets, sought to defend the use of English through the 'Credo' part. Most of these poets including Lal were excluded from later anthologies. *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry, 1828-1965* (1970) by V. K. Gokak, 108 Indian poets writing in English from Derozio(1809-1831) to Kamla Das (1934-2009). The title of the anthology is modelled on the Francis Turner Palgrave's anthology 'The Golden Treasury of English Songs and Lyrics (1861). Saleem Peeradina's *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English: An Assessment and Selection* (1972), attacks Lal for promoting mediocrity and includes only fourteen poets. Other notable anthologies are 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 *Indian Poetry in English(1993),* includes Sarojini Naidu and Aurobindo. Gauri Deshpande's *An Anthology of Indo-English Poetry*(1974), Pritish Nandy's *Indian Poetry in English : 1947-1972*(1972), *Indian Poetry in English Today*(1973) and *Strangertime: An Anthology of Indian Poetry in English*(1977) restrict themselves to the 'moderns'-those who did their best writing during and after 1950s, Pranab Bandyopadhyay's *Hundred Indian Poets: An Anthology of Modern Poetry* (1977). *An Anthology of Indian English Poetry* (1989) edited by R. P. Singh & S. K. Prasad and published by Orient BlackSwan has sixteen poets from Derozio to P Lal and Pritish Nandy.

Major Post 1990's anthologies include Paranjape in *An Anthology of New Indian English Poetry(1993),* claims modernism is dead, Kaiser Haq's *Contemporary Indian Poetry*(1990), first significant anthology of post independence Indian poetry in English to be published abroad. K. Ayyapa Paniker's *Modern Indian Poetry in English*(1991) published by Sahitya Akademi, the official academy of letters in India, signals official recognition of what constituted 'Indian poetry in English' and includes twenty poets who have been routinely anthologised and thus constitute the 'canon' of Indian Poetry in English. *The Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992) edited by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra includes Vilas Sarang and Eunice De Souza but excludes Kamala Das. *An Anthology of New Indian English Poetry* (1993) edited by Makarand Paranjape includes Agha Sahid Ali among the new poets. *The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry* (1994) ed. by Vinay Dharwadker & A. K. Ramanujan includes translations of Indian language poets. Earlier usages of the phrase 'Indian Poetry' were misnomers as they only included those writing in English excluding the wide range of Indian poetry being written in other Indian languages.

Post 2000 anthologies have given a new identity to Indian poetry in English. *Reasons for Belonging: Fourteen Contemporary Indian Poets* (2002) edited by Ranjit Hoskote and published by Viking, New Delhi has fourteen poets all of whom were born between late 1950s and the late 1960s. The fourteen poets are Jeet Thayil, Tabish Khair, Ranjit Hoskote, Vijay Nambisan, H Masud Taj, Rukmini Bhaya Nair, C P Surendran, Vivek Narayanan, Gavin Barett, Anjum Hasan, Jerry Pinto, Smita Agarwal, Arundhati Subramaniam and Anand Thakore. Almost none of them were included in major earlier anthologies. Only Makarand Paranjape's *An Anthology of New Indian English Poetry*(1993) and Eunice De Souza's *Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology*(1997) had included some of these poets but it was too early for them. They were still emerging poets. Thus this anthology defines a new canon or normative core of the semiosphere of Indian poetry in English. Most of them are dominant voices in CIPE and appear in major critical studies such as Modern Indian Poetry in English- Revised Edition(2001, OUP) by Bruce King.

60 Indian Poets (2008) edited by Jeet Thayil published by Penguin Books India, New Delhi, published in the UK as *The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poets,* covers fifty five years of Indian poetry in English beginning with Nissim Ezekiel. The anthology includes almost all the poets in Hoskote's collection besides new voices like Sampurna Chatterji, Rukmini Bhaya Nair and Tishani Doshi etc, and even poets from the North East like Mamang Dai. The anthology also includes an essay 'What is an Indian poem' by A K Mehrotra. Inclusion of the same suits the self descriptive function of anthologies.

Another Country: An Anthology of Post-Independence Indian Poetry in English (2013) edited by Arundhati Subramaniam published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi is an even more ambitious volume covering eighty poets and aims to cover all major poets from 1950 to 2013. It includes almost all those in *60 Indian Poets* plus missed significant names likes Agha Sahid Ali and Sujata Bhatt. The book also gives space to relatively new names like Karthika Nair and remote poets like Mona Zote from Meghalaya.

Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology (1997, 2001) edited by Eunice de Souza and published by OUP, New Delhi covers nine Indian women poets writing in English, representing two generations of post-Independence poets: Kamala Das, Mamta Kalia, Melanie Silgardo, Eunice de Souza, Imtiaz Dharker, Smita Agarwal, Sujata Bhatt, Charmayne D Souza, and Tara Patel.

We Speak in Changing Languages: Indian Women Poets (1990–2007) (2000) ed. by E. V. Ramakrishnan and Anju Makhija published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi includes twenty one women poets going beyond metropolitan centres and include poets smaller remote hill towns like Mamang Dai from Itanagar and Anjum Hasan from Shillong.

Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast (2003) published by North Eastern Hill University 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 covers poetry both in English and north eastern languages in English translation by poets belonging to the North- East India. Noteworthy names writing in English are Desmond L Kharmawphlang, Robin S. Ngangom, Kynpham S. Nongkynrih. North Eastern states though very different linguistically, culturally are conveniently clubbed together in these anthologies not because most Indian tend to see them as a homogenous group but as they share some common grounds. They are rooted in their local geo-political realities, indigenous folk cultures and present poetry of the conflict zone. The poets have carved out a sub-semiosphere within the larger Indian semiosphere of English poetry with internal boundaries. These boundaries also act as exchange mechanisms between English and regional languages, regional culture and the rest of the semiosphere.

Yaraana (1999, 2010 Penguin) by Hoshang Merchant, the first anthology of gay writings in India, presents another periphery of the semiosphere. The 1999 version collects both gay prose and verse from Indian writers and the revised version includes voices from Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The anthology covers R. Raja Rao, Mahesh Dattani, Adil Jussawalla, Ashok Row Kavi, Sultan Padamsee, Bhupen Khakhar and Hoshang Merchant. There are also translations into English of works in regional languages including Namdeo Dhasal, Belinder Dhanoa, Madhav Gawankar, Vishnu Khandekar, Kamleshwar and Firaq Gorakhpuri. The work presents an Indian response to the western LGBT movements and attempts an alternative canon.

Facing the Mirror (1999 Penguin) by Ashwinin Sukhtankar covers lesbian writings from India. It has writings in multiple genres from across India. The works represented may be of doubtful literary merit but they present the richness and diversity of lesbian experience and sensuality and vulnerability of women loving

women. Self description becomes even more important when a group which is almost labeled as non-culture or even non-existent is trying to establish its identity. Sukhtankar in the introduction of the anthology the describes need to name this group, "When we name ourselves we can see ourselves for who we are: a group of women utterly diverse in terms of region, class, community, age, marital status, but with this one thing in common. Our love for women – that which marks us as different from the rest of the world, which brings us together, and which must be voiced if it is not to be lost. (xx)" The anthology is divided into five sections: passages, worlds, differences, connection, and love. The anthology is also important as it reveals the asymmetry of the multiple semiotic systems within a semiosphere. Films such as Kamal Amrohi's *Razia Sultan*(1983), candidly and Deepa Mehta's *Fire*(1996, 1998) explicitly had presented lesbian themes through visual medium. The writers in the anthology are seeking the recognition of lesbian identity yet many ironically write under pseudonyms. Most women writers collected in the volume have never published before and they represent only the metropolitan middle class English speaking women. Working class women and those from smaller towns or rural areas have not been covered.

All the above post 1990 anthologies are by poets except Sukhtankar who is an insider in another way being a lesbian herself. Lotman classifies self models into three main types: 1. a self model which seeks similarity with the actually existing culture; 2. a self model which differs from the ordinary cultural practices and seeks to change those practices and 3. a self model which exists as an ideal cultural self consciousness separately from the culture. (Torop 169)

The entire space of the semiosphere is transected by boundaries of different levels, boundaries of different languages and even of texts, and the internal space of each of these sub-semiospheres has its own semiotic 'I' which is realized as the relationship of any language, group of texts, separate text to a metastructural space which describes them, always bearing in mind that languages and texts are hierarchically disposed on different levels. These sectional boundaries which run

through the semiosphere create a multi-level system. Certain parts of the semiosphere may at different levels of self-description form either a semiotic unity, a semiotic continuum, demarcated by a single boundary; or a group of enclosed spaces, marked off as discrete areas by the boundaries between them; or, finally, part of a more general space, one side of which is demarcated by a fragment of a boundary, while the other is open. (Lotman 138) Anthologies like those covering exclusively North East poets or women poets create such self descriptions and consequently sub-semiospheres.

Because the semiotic space is transected by numerous boundaries, each message that moves across it must be many times translated and transformed, and the process of generating new information thereby snowballs (Lotman 140). Similarly Indian poetry in English today is a semiosphere transected with numerous internal boundaries of regional languages besides external boundaries lending it the potential for unlimited semiosis.