

Poetry
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Lecture 67
Indian Poetry in English

(Refer Slide Time: 0:15)

Indian Poetry in English



- Features of Indian Poetry in English
- Colonial and Nationalist Periods
- Post-Independent Period
- Foundations and Pioneers
- Audience, Publishers, and Anthologies
- English and Poetic Aspirations in Free India
- Poets and their Contributions
- Sea Change in Indian Poetry
- Two Poems



Hello friends, welcome to the 11th week of our course on Indian Poetry in English. This is an introductory lecture on Indian Poetry in English. First, we will examine the features of Indian Poetry in English, move on to a historical perspective from Colonial Period to Nationalist Period, then Post-Independent Period. When we come here, we will look at the pioneers who laid the foundation for Indian Poetry in English.

We will see the problems of audience, publishers and then some solutions through anthologies. There after we will see individual poets who have contributed significantly to this field. And then, we will see some of the changes that have occurred in the field today. And lastly, we will read two poems as samples for Indian Poetry in English.

(Refer Slide Time: 1:13)

Features of Indian Poetry in English



- The use of English for creative purpose
- Imitation and originality
- Search for a form and tradition
- Influence of both modernism and postmodernism
- Theme of the self and society, belonging and alienation
- Death, disease, poverty, apathy, violence, marginality
- Questions of women, environment, justice, etc.
- Socio-political issues affecting individuals and society
- Attempt to understand creativity in a different language
- Translations and transcreations/ appropriations



What are the features of Indian Poetry in English? We have listed some of them here. The basic problem with Indian Poetry in English is a use of language. Can we use a language for creative purposes in India? This was a serious problem discussed for three to four decades. If we use English as a source of creative language, then do we imitate others from our own country or from other countries, or do we write our own original poetry? That is a next question.

Then, we start writing poetry then what is the form, what is the tradition that we belong to? There is always a search for this; form and tradition. Then we are not living in an island separately from the world, so we are influenced by what is happening elsewhere in the world, particularly in the English-speaking world, that is modernism and postmodernism influenced Indian Poetry in English in different ways.

Then, what are the themes that are dealt with in this Indian Poetry? We have the theme of the self and also the society, with a sense of belonging and also with a sense of alienation. And the second theme sense of alienation is much stronger in this poetry, other themes include death, disease, poverty, apathy, violence and marginality. We also have the questions of women and environment and justice in a number of poems largely by women.

Then, common to all poets are the socio-political issues affecting individuals and society at large. Most of these poets have attempted to understand creativity in a different language. And some of

them tried their hands in translations and also transcreations for appropriating whatever tradition, whatever experience they had in the new language, that is, English language.

(Refer Slide Time: 3:10)

- ### Colonial Period
- Indian poetry in English is a (post) colonial legacy.
 - Started with the Poet's Corner page of *Hicky's Bengal Gazette* in 1780.
 - Writings in English by both the British and Indians on various themes relating to England and India.
 - **Henry Derozio**: "To India, My Native Land" (1828); died at 22
 - **Michael Madhusudan Dutt**: "The Captive Lady" (1849); died at 49
 - **Kasiprasad Ghosh**: elegy "To a Dead Crow"
 - **Toru Dutt**: descriptive and mythical poems; "Our Casuarina Tree" (1881), "Savitri"; died at 21



Let us start with the Colonial Period. Indian Poetry in English is actually a post-colonial language, but it has a colonial legacy. It started with the Poet's Corner page of Hickey's Bengal Gazette published in 1780. This Gazette included writings in English by both the British and Indians on various themes relating to England and India.

We have some well-known Indian poets from Henry Derozio, who contributed a poem called "To India, My Native Land" in 1828. He died unfortunately at the age of 22. Then we have Michael Madhusudan Dutt, who has a poem called "The Captive Lady" published in 1849, he too died at the age of 49. He started writing in English but he did not get encouragement from English people or English magazines like Blackwood Magazine.

Then he started writing in Bengali and became a pioneer in Bengali literature. Then we have Kasiprasad Ghosh, who is known for an elegy "To a Dead Crow" and then we have one of the most beautiful writers of this period Toru Dutt, who also died at a young age of 21. She is known for certain descriptive and mythical poems, two of the famous ones are here; "Our Casuarina Tree" and "Savitri."

(Refer Slide Time: 4:38)

Nationalist Period



- Poets during the Indian Freedom Movement wrote about the spirit of India to break away from the clutches of the British; invoked the spiritual tradition.
- **Sarojini Naidu**: descriptive poems on the land, the people, and their aspirations for freedom; *The Golden Threshold* (1905); "Coromandel Fishers"
- **Rabindranath Tagore**: romantic, mystical and nationalistic poems; e.g., *Gitanjali* (1913)
- **Fredoon Kabraji**: *A Minor Georgian's Swan Song* (1944)
- **Aurobindo Ghose**: a spiritual epic poem of 24,000 lines; e.g., *Savitri* (1950)



When we come to the Nationalist Period, we can see that the fervor of freedom was very dominant. Poets writing during this independent movement discussed the spirit of India to break away from the clutches of the British, they often invoked the spiritual Indian tradition. Then we have some of the poets here.

Sarojini Naidu is known for her descriptive poems on the land, the people and their aspirations for freedom. Her first collection of poems is called "The Golden Threshold." It has a well-known poem called "Coromandel Fishers," it is read by children in schools even today. Then we have the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, he was often romantic, mystical and he also wrote nationalistic poems. One of the well-known examples is *Gitanjali* which brought him the Nobel prize in 1913.

Then we have Fredoon Kabraji, known for "A Minor Georgian's Swan Song" published in 1944. And another well-known poet of this period is Aurobindo Ghose, he was a polyglot. He wrote in many languages and in English he wrote plays, prose pieces and epic poems like *Savitri* which has about twenty-four thousand lines.

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Revaluation of Early Indian Poetry



- In 1992, A K Mehrotra stated: "Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt, Aurobindo Ghose, and Sarojini Naidu were courageous and perhaps charming men and women, but not those with whom you could today do business."
- In 2016, A K Mehrotra said: "What follows is an atonement for what is said above."
- What followed was his chapter on "Toru Dutt: A Eurasian Poet" for Rosinka Chaudhuri's book, *A History of Indian Poetry in English* (2016)
- Critical positions change drastically in one's life time.
- Biases can blind us to the true worth of anything, including poetry.
- What we can and need to learn from poetry is an expansive and inclusive vision.



These colonial poems were evaluated and re-evaluated several times. We have one statement from A K Mehrotra which was re-evaluated by himself a little later. Let us see what A K Mehrotra stated in 1992, "Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt, Aurobindo Ghose and Sarojini Naidu were courageous and perhaps charming men and women, but not those with whom you could do business."

But in 2016, the same A K Mehrotra said, "What follows is an atonement for what is said above." The same quotation that we have above this. Then what followed after this is this, "What followed was this chapter on "Toru Dutt: A Eurasian Poet" for a collection of essays on 'A History of Indian Poetry in English' published in 2016 and edited by Rosinka Chaudhuri.

He changed his opinion on all these writers and then we have to understand the problems in evaluations and re-evaluations. Critical positions change drastically in one's own lifetime as it has happened in the case of A K Mehrotra. Biases can blind us to the true worth of anything, including poetry. The most important point that we have to remember is, what we can and need to learn from poetry is an expansive and inclusive vision.

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Post-Independent Period

- A continuation of the English Romantic and Victorian traditions; attempted to assimilate the modernist tendencies
- Poets from a variety of backgrounds joined the fray: journalism, advertising, medicine, bureaucracy, academics, the last one being the most dominant.
- Some like Ezekiel and Moraes used English as they had no other option.
- Some like **Kolatkar** and **Chitre** were bilinguals.
- Some others like Lal, Mehrotra, and Mahapatra were translators and creators in English
- Parthasarathy and Ramanujan had ambivalent attitudes to English but compensated for it by their translation from their native languages.



Let us come to Post-Independent Period now. This is actually a continuation of the English Romantic and Victorian traditions. In this period poets attempted to assimilate the modernist tendencies. Poets from a variety of backgrounds joined the fray from journalism, advertising, medicine, bureaucracy and academics and what not.

The last one that is the academics, they formed a large chunk of poets writing in English. Some poets like Ezekiel and Dom Moraes used English as their sole language of expression because they had no other option. Some others like Arun Kolatkar and Dilip Chitre were bilinguals, they were writing in English and also Marathi.

Some other poets like P Lal, A K Mehrotra and Mahapatra were translators and also creators in English. And lastly, we have Parthasarathy and Ramanujan, who had ambivalent attitudes to English but then compensated for it by their translation from their native languages. They translated their literature and also they translated the critical creative processes, principles from their native traditions to the English in which they wrote their own poems.

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Foundations



- Indian poets used English to discover their new self.
- Many did not doubt their mastery of English at all.
- The exposure to English education bolstered them.
- English: a link language, a window to the world, and an instrument of modernity in India
- Alternative models in American poetry
- **Rhythm** is a constant problem in Indian English
- **Nissim Ezekiel** (1924-2004): Bold step to write and publish poems in English: *A Time to Change* (1952), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965), *Hymns in Darkness* (1976), *Latter-Day Psalms* (1989)
- Poets like Moraes, Kamala Das, Kolatkar, A K Mehrotra, Jussawalla, A K Ramanujan, and R Parthasarathy



Now we have the foundations. Indian poets used English to discover their own new self. This is a driving force for many poets. Many did not doubt their own mastery of English at all. Their exposure to English education gave them all support. They were enthused to write poems in English. English was considered a link language, a window to the world and an instrument of modernity in India. When English has such benefits, who would miss it?

Poets also looked at alternative models in American poetry, not necessarily in English poetry. One of the major problems for English poetry in India is rhythm. This was recognized by Keki N Daruwalla long back in 1918. However, all kinds of poets have written poems in English, whether they wrote in the English rhythm or not. That was immaterial for them.

We have the major pioneer, the founder of this movement, new movement in writing in English Nissim Ezekiel. He was born in 1924 and died in 2004. He took the bold step to write and publish poems in English. In has published a number of poems. Here we have listed some of them: *A Time to Change*, *The Unfinished Man*, *The Exact Name*, *Hymns in Darkness* and *Latter-Day Psalms*. Other poets like Moraes, Kamala Das, Kolatkar, A K Mehrotra, Jussawalla, A K Ramanujan and R Parthasarathy, all contributed to poetry in English in India.

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Audience and Publishers



- Who will read the poems in Indian English?
- Who will publish the poetry volumes in English?
- Newspapers and magazines, especially *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, supported poets.
- **Ezekiel & Moraes** published their first volumes from London
- **P Lal** set up his Writers Workshop in 1958 and started publishing poets from 1959.
- Smaller self-supporting publishing houses sprang up in Bombay, Clearing House, Newfound, Praxis
- Commercial publishers like **OUP**, Arnold-Heinemann, Viking, Rupa, and Disha came into the scene.
- Effective promotion has happened through several influential anthologies.



The major problem facing these poets is the audience and also publishers. Who will read the poems in Indian English? And the next question is who will publish the poetry volumes in English? Initially, newspapers and magazines, especially *The Illustrated Weekly of India* in Bombay supported poets, in fact they paid for the poems of these poets, that is a rare chance today. It is very difficult to publish poems on one's own, forget about the kind of money that we can earn from publishing poems.

Ezekiel and Moraes published their first volumes from London because they had the opportunity of going abroad, staying there, studying there, living there for some time, having contacts with English poets and publishers, they could publish in England. Then we have P Lal, who set up his own writers' workshop in 1958 and started publishing poets from 1959. He said he did not have a publisher to publish his own volumes, then he thought of publishing his own book by his own publication house. That is how he started and then he helped other poets till his death. Even today this house is publishing poems by Indian poets.

Smaller and self-supporting publishing houses sprung up in Bombay. Particularly, we have three examples: Clearing House, Newfound and Praxis. Commercial publishers like Oxford University Press, Arnold Heinemann, Viking, Rupa and Disha came into the scene one after another. But then the effective promotion happened through several influential anthologies.

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Anthologies



- 1969: *Modern Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology and Credo*, ed. P Lal.
- 1972: *Indian Poetry in English*, ed. Pritish Nandy
- 1972: *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English: An Assessment and Selection*, ed. Saleem Peeradina
- 1976: *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets*, ed. R Parthasarathy
- 1980: *Two Decades of Indian Poetry: 1960-1980*, ed. Keki N Daruwalla
- 1992: *The Oxford Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets*, ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra
- 1997: *Nine Indian Women Poets*, ed. Eugene de Souza
- 2008: *Reasons for Belonging: Fourteen Contemporary Indian Poets*, ed. Ranjit Hoskote; and many others



Let us see some of their famous anthologies we have had in our country and there are a number of them, we have listed just a few. Way back in 1969, P Lal published this anthology ‘Modern Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology and Credo.’ Then in 1972, Pritish Nandy published, ‘Indian Poetry in English.’ Then in 1972, we have ‘Contemporary Indian Poetry in English: An Assessment and Selection’ by Saleem Peeradina.

Then we come to 1976 to see the most influential anthology of Indian Poetry in English, that is ‘Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets’ edited by R Parthasarathy. Then in 1980, we have ‘Two Decades of Indian Poetry’ edited by Keki N Daruwalla. Then in 1992, we have another influential anthology edited by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, that is called ‘The Oxford Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets.’

Then, another new ground was broken in 1997 when Eugene de Souza published ‘Nine Indian Women Poets.’ Then in 2008, in this century, 21st century we have many volumes, many anthologies, this is the one we have mentioned here, ‘Reasons for Belonging: Fourteen Contemporary Indian Poets’ edited by Ranjit Hoskote, we have many other volumes as we said.

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English and Poetic Aspirations



- English-educated youth aspired to become Yeats, Eliot and Pound in English and achieve popularity like them in the English speaking world.
- **Girish Karnad** (1938-2019), the dramatist and public intellectual, said: "I wanted to be a poet: the greatest ambition in my life. At the age of 22, I realized I would not become a poet, but only be a playwright, then I almost wept."
- **Homi Bhabha** (1949-), the postcolonial critic, said: "I was absolutely convinced in those days [Bombay in the 1970s] that my great gift was to be a poet ... It was my all-embracing, all absorbing passion."
- The number of those who realized their limitations is less than those who plunged into poetic frenzy.



We have very interesting phenomenon that we have to look into this Indian Poetry in English is the aspiration and the kind of capacity the poets had. Almost all English educated youth aspired to become Yeats, Eliot, Pound in English and achieve popularity like them in the English-speaking world. We have two examples: one is Girish Karnad and another is the famous critic Homi Bhabha.

Girish Karnad said in one of his interviews, "I wanted to be a poet, the greatest ambition in my life, at the age of 22 I realized I would not become a poet, but only be a playwright, then I almost wept." And that too the playwright in Kannada, not his mother tongue that is Konkani, Kannada was his second language, he became a playwright.

Then when we come to Homi Bhabha, the post-colonial critic, he has also said something like this, "I was absolutely convinced in those days, when he was in Bombay, that my great gift was to be a poet, it was my all-embracing, all absorbing passion. Fortunately, these two gentlemen did not pursue the muse of poetry. They pursued different activities, one in drama and another in criticism, post-colonial criticism. The number of those who realized their limitations is less than those who plunged into poetic frenzy. This field, Indian Poetry in English is flooded with a lots of volumes but only very few are considered to be really good poets.

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Jussawalla, Patel, and Daruwalla

- **Adil Jussawalla** (1940-) A Parsi artist and poet
 - A versatile (post)-modernist poet of self and identity
 - Used his Western experience with an Indian ethos.
 - *Land's End* (1962) and *Missing Person* (1976)
- **Gieve Patel** (1940-) A Parsi doctor, painter, and poet
 - Dealt with the rootlessness of city life with compassion
 - *How Do You Withstand, Body?* (1976) and *Mirrored, Mirroring* (1991)
- **Keki N Daruwalla** (1937-) A Parsi police officer and poet
 - Observer of violence, death, disease, and misery in society
 - Examined contemporary life through dramatic monologues
 - *Crossing of Rivers* (1976), *The Keeper of the Dead* (1982) *The Map-Maker* (2002)



Now let us see some of the poets. We have a group of poets called Parsi poets, Bombay poets. We have Adil Jussawalla born in 1940, he was a Parsi and a poet, he was an artist as well. He was versatile post-modernist poet of self and identity. He used his western experience with an Indian ethos. He has many volumes; we have listed just two: Land's End published in 1962 and Missing Person published in 1976. He is still alive today and he continues to think about and discuss poetry.

Gieve Patel is another Parsi poet, who is a doctor as well, he was also a painter. He dealt with the rootlessness of city life with compassion, he has some volumes, we have listed two here: How Do You Withstand, Body? and the second volume we have listed here is Mirrored, Mirroring published in 1991. He has also written plays.

Then we have Keki N Daruwalla, born in 1937, still writing poems and criticism about poetry, reviews, giving his views on poetry. He was a Parsi, but then he was a police officer and he also wrote poems. He had a chance to observe life very closely, he was an observer of violence, death, disease, and misery in our society. He examined contemporary life through Robert Browning's dramatic monologues. We have some volumes here: Crossing of Rivers, The Keeper of the Dead, and The Map-Maker. For 'The Keeper of the Dead,' he was recognized with a Sahitya Academi Award.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:24)

Ramanujan and Parthasarathy



- **A K Ramanujan** (1929-1993)
 - A linguist, a translator, and bilingual poet
 - Family, nostalgia, and irony in his poems
 - *The Striders* (1966), *Relations* (1971), and *Second Sight* (1976)
- **R. Parthasarathy** (1934-)
 - A poet, editor, and translator
 - Guilty about whoring after English gods
 - Themes of Exile, Trial, and Homecoming
 - *Rough Passage* (1976 and 1980)
 - Both AKR and RP explored innovative ways of using English to deal with their experiences of life in poetry



Then we have two other poets closely associated with each other having South Indian background, moving to USA, settling down there, that is A K Ramanujan and R Parthasarathy. Ramanujan was born in 1929 and died in 1993. He had a distinguished career as a linguist, a translator and a bilingual poet. He wrote in English and he also wrote in Kannada. And he translated from Kannada and also Tamil literature.

He was concerned with family nostalgia, and he treated his experiences and themes ironically in almost all of his poems. Three volumes we have listed here: *The Striders*, *Relations* and *Second Sight*. Today we talk about environment so seriously, way back in 1976, Ramanujan could think about environment very seriously. I happened to read this volume long back, I remember my writing on the *Second Sight*, the insight in *Second Sight*.

Then we have R Parthasarathy, who was born in 1934, who is a poet and editor and a translator. He felt guilty about whoring after English gods, that is he felt unhappy that he left his mother tongue, he abandoned his mother tongue and pursued English. Parthasarathy dealt with the themes of Exile, Trial and Homecoming in his collection *Rough Passage* published in 1976, revised and published again in 1980. Both A K Ramanujan and R Parthasarathy, explored innovative ways of using English to deal with their experiences of in poetry.

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Mehrotra and Mahapatra



- **Arvind Krishna Mehrotra** (1947-)
 - A rigorously modernist poet, editor, anthologist
 - A stylist, surrealist, and minimalist
 - An active member of the Bombay group of poets
 - *Nine Enclosures* (1976), *Distance Statue Miles* (1982), and *The Transparency Places* (1998)
- **Jayanta Mahapatra** (1928-)
 - A prolific poet of silence and sufferings of people
 - Influenced by European and Latin American poets
 - Widely published in international magazines
 - *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* (1971), *A Rain of Rites* (1976)
 - Two long poems: *Relationship* (1980) and *Temple* (1989)



Then we have Mehrotra and Mahapatra. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra was born in 1947. He was a rigorously modernist poet and editor and an anthologist, and also a publisher. He is considered to be a stylist, a surrealist and a minimalist. He was an active member of the Bombay group of poets. He published several volumes, we have listed three here: *Nine Enclosures*, *Distance Statue Miles* and *The Transparency Places* published in 1998. He is also known as an anthologist which we refer to earlier in our discussion on ‘Anthologists in India.’

Then we have Jayanta Mahapatra, born in 1928. He is one of the most prolific poets we have in our country, he dealt often with the silence and sufferings of people. He was influenced by European and Latin American poets, not more by British poets. He widely published his poems in international magazines, very often in American magazines. He published several volumes, we have listed some here: *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* in 1971, *A Rain of Rites* in 1976 and then two long poems: *Relationship* and *Temple*. For *Relationship* he was awarded the first ever Sahitya Academi Award for poet in English in India.

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Kamala Das



- Post-Independent women poets share certain common features among them.
- They deal with intimate feelings, personal observations, quest for a space within the society.
- **Kamala Das** (1934-2009): a bilingual poet
- Known for her unsparing honesty about being a married and unloved woman in search of love throughout her life
- Used spontaneous and startling images
- Presented frustrated and flamboyant selves
- *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973)
- "An Introduction"




We come to the most brilliant woman of Indian poet in English, Kamala Das. Post-Independent women poets share certain common features among them. They deal with intimate feelings, personal observations, quest for a space within their family, within their self and within the society. Kamala Das is a bilingual poet, born in 1934 and died in 2009. She is known for her unsparing honesty about being a married and unloved woman in search of love throughout her life.


She used spontaneous and startling images and presented her frustrated and flamboyant selves in various volumes. Some we have listed here: *Summer in Calcutta*, *The Descendants*, *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*. She is known for her poem called, "An Introduction." She introduces herself; she wants to be what she is; she does not want to be bothered about what others say.

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Deshpande, D'Souza and de Souza



- **Gauri Deshpande** (1942-2003): a bilingual poet
- *Beyond the Slaughterhouse* (1972)
- **Charmayne D'Souza**: A Goan poet
- Prefers the crucified Christ to Mary Magdalene
- Demystifies the hypocritical relations in marriage
- *A Spelling Guide to Woman* (1991)
- **Eugene de Souza** (1940-2017): a Goan poet
- *Fix* (1979), *Women in Dutch Painting* (1988)
- Anthology: *Nine Indian Women Poets* (1997)
- A subversive and ironic poetry, e.g. "de Souza Prabhu"



Then we have a group of three women poets associated with this Bombay group. Gauri Deshpande, born in 1942 and died in 2003 was a bilingual poet. She was a professor at the University of Pune and she has published a volume called *Beyond the Slaughterhouse*, but very difficult to get more information about her poems or poetry.

Then we have another poet Charmayne D'Souza, she is a Goan Catholic poet and she has published a volume called *A Spelling Guide to Woman* and in this volume, she demystifies the hypocritical relations in marriage. She also prefers the crucified image of Christ to Mary Magdalene. And that means she takes a feminist stand in her volume.

Then we have Eugene de Souza, she was born in 1940 and died in 2017. Again, she is Goan Catholic poet, we have listed *Fix* and *Women in Dutch Painting*. She is the one to edit the first anthology of women's poet in India, in this volume 'Nine Indian Women Poets.' She has subversive and ironic attitude in her poetry, one of the examples is "de Souza Prabhu."

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Dharker and Silgado



- **Imtiaz Dharker** (1954-) migrated and moved between countries constantly: Pakistan, England, India; won the Queen's Medal for her poetry in 2015.
- Not belonging anywhere is the fuel for her poetry.
- Once "a foreigner" is a foreigner and a "Lost Property."
- *Purdha* (1989), *Postcards from God* (1994)
- **Melanie Silgado** (1956-)
- Violence, sexual abuse, and a disturbed mind
- *Three Poets* (1978) *Skies of Design* (1985)
- She betrayed modernist influence in her poem "Doris" which is like Eliot's "Gerontion" in theme and outlook.
- She also founded the publishing collective "Newfound"



Let us see Imtiaz Dharker and Melanie Silgado in this discussion now. Imtiaz Dharker was born in 1954 in Pakistan, then she migrated to England. And she started moving between countries, particularly England and India. She married an Indian and lived in Bombay for some time. Associated with this Illustrated Weekly of India; she was the poetry editor for Illustrated Weekly of India.

Now she is settled in Britain and she has won the Prestigious Award 'The Queen's Medal' for her poetry in 2015. Her burden is not belonging anywhere, that is the fuel for her poetry. She has said, 'Once "a foreigner" is always a foreigner,' and also, she considers herself a "lost property." She has two volumes here: *Purdha* and *Postcards for God* among many other volumes.

Then let us see Melanie Silgado, born in 1956. Her poems are noted for violence, sexual abuse and a disturbed mind. We have listed two volumes here: *Three Poets* and *Skies of Design*. Silgado betrayed a modernist influence in her poem "Doris," which is like Eliot's "Gerontion" in theme and outlook. She also founded the publishing collective called "Newfound" in Bombay.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:14)

Alexander and Bhatt



- **Meena Alexander** (1951-2018): a professor of English; lived in India, Sudan, UK, and US.
- She is known for her "poetics of dislocation."
- *Illiterate Heart* (2002), *Atmospheric Embroidery* (2018)
- Her poetry is "The movement towards self-definition."
- **Sujata Bhatt** (1956-); a poet of languages and their power on human beings.
- Moving from place to place and language to language, she believes "Each language offers a different perspective on life, a different way of organizing life."
- Speaker of seven languages, she has found her home in words, of course, her (m)other tongue.
- *Brunziem* (1986), *Monkey Shadows* (1991), *The Stinking Rose* (1995)



Now we come to Meena Alexander and Sujata Bhatt. Meena Alexander was born in 1951 and died in 2018, she was a professor of English and she lived in India, Sudan, UK, US and she has such a wide variety of experiences. Not surprisingly she is known for her "poetics of dislocation." We have two volumes listed here: *Illiterate Heart* and *Atmospheric Embroidery*. Her poetry is "The movement towards self-definition."

We have next Sujata Bhatt, born in 1956, she is a poet of languages, in the sense, she deals with the problem of language in her poems. And she concentrates more on the power of language on human beings. Moving from place to place and language to language, she has believed, to quote, "Each language offers a different perspective on life, a different way of organizing life."

She is a speaker of seven languages and she has found her home in words, of course in her mother tongue at times in her other tongue as well. She has three volumes, we have listed here: *Brunziem*, *Monkey Shadows* and *The Stinking Rose*. We have other volumes, but we have not listed them here.

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Sea Change in Indian Poetry



- Daruwalla observes a sea change with the newer poets, as they do not have to justify their choice of medium.
- They receive recognition for their poetry abroad; **Pulitzer Prize** for Vijay Seshadhri in 2014 and **Queen's Poetry Medal** for Imtiaz Dharker in 2015.
- They experiment with language, themes, techniques freely and adopt a postmodern ironical outlook on life.
- **Diasporic poets:** Agha Shahid Ali, Meena Alexander, Sujatha Bhatt, Vikram Seth
- **New poets:** Arundathi Subramaniam, Sridala Swami, Jeet Thayil, and Ranjit Hoskote
- **Talented poets:** C P Surendran, Anand Thakore, Menka Shivdasani, and Sampurna Chattarji



Keki N Daruwalla observed a sea change in his recent article on Indian poetry. With the newer poets we have many changes as they do not have to justify their choice of medium as the early poets did. These young poets received recognition for their poetry abroad. Pulitzer Prize for Vijay Seshadhri in 2014 in the US. Queen's Poetry Medal for Imtiaz Dharker in 2015 in UK.

These new poets experiment with language, themes, techniques freely and adopt a postmodern ironic outlook on life. We have diasporic poets like Agha Shahid Ali, Meena Alexander and Sujata Bhatt, which we discussed earlier and also Vikram Seth. We have some new poets in Arundathi Subramaniam, Sridala Swami, Jeet Thayil and Ranjit Hoskote. Then we have some talented poets as well in C P Surendran, Anand Thakore, Menka Shivdasani and Sampurna Chattarji.

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Two Poems

Sridala Swami's "Chimera" [an extract]

The door creaks
in the wind, the curtains billow.
the whole room is alive. don't awake
because the door has begun a chant
that is faint but audible; a murmur,
an incantation, an appeasement
to what is alive but not yet risen.

S P Dhanavel's "The River"

The river has no driver
but it reaches the sea.
My car has all care
but it often breaks
down on the road.



We have two poems, just for reading. The first poem is by Sridala Swami on “Chimera,” just an extract from this poem:

“The door creaks
in the wind, the curtains billow.
the whole room is alive. don't awake
because the door has begun a chant
that is faint but audible; a murmur,
an incantation, an appeasement
to what is alive but not yet risen.

Then we have another poem by Dhanavel that is me. I wrote a number of poems, published three volumes. I thought this is an opportunity for me to share just one piece of my poem with you all, this is called ‘The River:’

“The river has no driver
but it reaches the sea.
My car has all care

but it often breaks
down on the road.”

Life is full of challenges; nature has no challenges. We create challenges for ourselves and we have to face the challenges of life. If we care to learn from the river, we can sail smoothly.

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Summary

- Features of Indian Poetry in English
- Colonial and Nationalist Periods
- Post-Independent Period
- Foundations and Pioneers
- Audience, Publishers, and Anthologies
- English and Poetic Aspirations in Free India
- Poets and their Contributions
- Sea Change in Indian Poetry
- Two Poems



To give a summary of our discussion on Indian Poetry in English, we have discussed the features of Indian Poetry in English, the colonial and nationalist periods, and then the post-independent period where we saw how the foundations were laid by pioneers like Nissim Ezekiel and Dom Moraes. We discussed the problems of audience and publishers, and how these problems were solved by anthologists.

And also, we looked at one of the basic problems in English, everybody wants to write poetry like me too and then see how this can be materialized. If we realize our limitations, then there will not be many problems. If we have any editors, friends who can support us to work on, see the whole idea of writing great poetries, all about the collaboration between people, the great example is Eliot and Pound.

If there were no Ezra Pound, there would not have been such a poet called Eliot, with the poem that we discussed “The Wasteland.” So, it is all about kind of collaboration which does not really work out so well in our context. We looked at individual poets like The Bombay poets, or the

South Indian poets or women poets who contributed to Indian Poetry in English. We also saw the sea change in Indian Poetry with new poets who have lot of opportunities abroad and in India as well. We read two poems, just two small samples we read to understand what kind of poetry we are going to deal with.

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We have some references, hope you will be able to see all of them, these are easily available. Enjoy, thank you.