

two-volume history from 1800 to 1956 has also worked across languages but through genre developments. He has put the work together through a collaborative effort, provided chronological details, included minor writers and has given a chronology of publication details and political events. But one has to turn elsewhere for information on translations.

My own three-volume work not only moves across languages but the middle volume is written in Punjabi (and not English). I work with the purpose of reperiodising and reconceptualising the nation with the purpose of bringing in the women writers more centrally and constructing the nation as marked by pluralism, moving away from the dominant idea of a Hindu nation. The first volume concerns itself with narrative origins, the second with relocating modernism in historical time, the third in moving beyond postcolonialism, the widespread engagement with which is increasingly leading to literary myopia, and stalls our moving ahead to explore native concerns. *Beyond Postcolonialism* goes on to work with classical aesthetics and experiential aesthetics. The latter brings one to subaltern history and subaltern writing. Subaltern writing finds a place in English through translation while history is initiated by a group of scholars, some of whom are located in the west. Dalit writing is experiential, political and ideological. As literary representation it asks for a whole new framing and conceptualisation. In fact it calls for a revision in our aesthetic norms.

When it comes to the writing of history of Indian Writing in English, in some measure we move outside both mono-lingual and multi-lingual frameworks. While single-language histories are concerned with a region and a language, multi-language histories look for interflows and influences that help to construct the nation. In a larger sense they set out to recover the past, self-worth and agency, IWE constitutes a third category. This is because it rides astride two different entities: one, a linguistic tradition, the other a cultural specificity. Here the legitimate constituents of a literary history are heightened. Power relationships are also double-edged – it may be still elitist vis-à-vis the other languages and it needs to demarcate its territory vis-à-vis the diaspora which, more often than not, is distanced from the raw reality of life in India. English language writing even as it constructs the nation,

presents different facets of nationhood, both here and abroad. The diasporic frames need to be opened out for their perception and nature of representation. The way in which India, its culture and history are being used becomes in itself an important question. More than the physical location of the author the emotional affiliation and authenticity should be placed under the scanner. Ordinarily territory and language may go together; or a travelling language and strong affiliations with a cultural territory may be at work – but at times the perspective is that of the outsider – distanced, non-comprehending or misrepresenting. It is a pity that western recognition, awards and reception are making inroads into our evaluative structures. I have no intention of attacking the writer's freedom to write or use material in any way, but I am critical of the manner in which we tend to be blindly guided by trends set in the west – whether it is the reception of a text, a theoretical formulation or a critical opinion. The centre has to be where we are; interpretation and questioning of theoretical formulations also have to flow from here. If the text is no longer a self-contained autonomous structure, critical evaluation is also guided by perception partly determined by location and affiliation. Literary histories by working as overarching narratives may allow us to discern the centre more clearly. It is obvious that there cannot be two centres; even as we work for a decentring of positions a power relation is involved and our dominant concerns have shifted over the years from influences and nation construction to resistance, margins and indigeneity. The effort has been even in the past to look for an equal relationship. If we worked with influences, we also worked with 'Indian contribution' to western literature. An interaction was also visible in the response theory when several noted scholars worked with 'Indian Response' to a particular writer like Whitman, Emerson or Steinbeck. It indicated a question of sensibility, of an emotional approach rooted in culture.

The emplotments of literary history are variously framed. R.S. Crane in *Critical and Historical Principles of Literary History* (1971) traces the main forms as (i) organic – which explains causation; (ii) historical which traces continuities and (iii) the atomistic which works through moments of change, the epicenter of crises (Devy 99–100). Perhaps all three approaches can work

together as cause and effect explain shifts of power, dislocation of agency and go on to revive an undercurrent.

The literary historiographer today may not delve deep into the interpretation of texts but he has to work with an evaluative framework. He is not a mere recorder, he is also an interpreter of trends both ideological and literary. The challenge before him is two-fold: how to attain objectivity and how to retain balance, that is to prevent his personal preferences of writers and ideas from carrying him away. If the 'histor' is a judge as the Greek origin explains, then he too is to be judged by posterity for his imbalances. In fact, the responsibility of the historian is greater than that of the writer and the critic. The writer is accountable to himself and his contemporary reader, the critic can afford to be subjective and impassioned; but the historian carries the burden of continuity as he stands between the past and future. His response to the moment thus becomes extremely important as the work is going to be read contemporaneously and is also likely to frame future receptions. It constitutes a benchmark in itself; future scholars are going to use it as a point of departure even as they rewrite his text. Thus he has constantly to negotiate his role as a recorder, moving between history and literary history, between experience and representation, between an abstract idea and a linguistic expression, and has to learn to discriminate between marketability and authenticity.

Nothing, and least of all knowledge, is to be taken on trust. In order to make both the writing and reading of literature dynamic, there is need to be constantly engaged in the task of interrogating texts, ideas, theories and choices. Departments of English (and Comparative Literature) are the centres of debate and it is here that new directions for historiography have to be worked out. Where are we heading in terms not only of employment or acquisition of knowledge, but production of knowledge, becomes an important issue which should concern both the academician and the historian.⁸

Finally, I return to Srinivasa Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English* which works within a nationalistic framework and ask myself the question what has it done for me, and for hordes of other scholars; what were our expectations from it and were they fulfilled? Its greatest strength is that even as he writes at length about spirituality, he does not allow it to descend into a religious

debate; again, with the detailed references to now-forgotten writers, or non-available material, he has created a source for future researchers if they can hunt in the public libraries for the plays of Kailasham and the novels of Venkatraman; yet again he has not fallen into the west-initiated periodisation and the excessive glamourisation of the Bengal Renaissance. In fact, he has worked through writers and formulated a thesis on the basis of his own interpretation. But perfection is not human: his responses to the modern sensibility are timid. Modern writers are an appendage to the work, the real strength for him lies elsewhere. Fully aware of these limits one still admires the task he has performed and the spirit that egged him on.⁹ It is worthy not merely of our admiration but also our homage. I am glad that I am part of these centenary celebrations which have provided the opportunity of doing a whole lot of rethinking on literary history and its multiple frames.

Notes

1. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar (1908–1999) served as professor of English and later as Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University (1966–1968). Among his several publications are works of criticism, biography and poetry. I especially want to draw attention to his works on Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda and the Mother, which form a dominant current in his writing.
2. See K.S. Srinivasan, *The Ethos of Indian Literature: A Study of Its Romantic Tradition* (Delhi: Chanakya Publications 1985), where Srinivasan questions the sole identification of Sanskrit as a literary language representative of India by British historians and scholars. Tamil and Prakrit 'too have a heritage of considerable antiquity'. He goes on to critique the Orientalists' selection of texts to be translated and the separation between Sanskrit and Tamil leading to 'tomes on literature, in isolation, e.g. Sanskrit or Tamil, not Sanskrit and Tamil.' Srinivasan explores the etymological roots of Dravida, *dravita* and *Vindhya* and the misinterpretation of these words. He writes, 'The harm done by such "knowledge" can't be estimated; but it is not difficult to see that partial perception, which led to partial truths, supported by unfounded etymology has led to the rousing of passions that fly, mounted on words' (1–5).
3. Gandhi in his search for a definition of history (and for the history of passive resistance), writes 'The Gujarati equivalent means. "It so

happened". If that is the meaning of history, it is possible to give copious evidence. But, if it means the doings of kings and emperors, there can be no evidence of soul-force or passive resistance in such history History, as we know it, is a record of the wars of the world' *Hind Swaraj*, 89 (In *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings* Ed. Anthony J. Parel, Cambridge Univ Press, 1997, ed. used New Delhi: Foundation Bks Pvt Ltd. 1997, 2005).

4. See Edward W. Said, 'Secular Criticism', *The World, the Text and the Critics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983). 4-5. Said foregrounds the 'connection between texts and the existential actualities of human life, policies, societies and events' (5).
5. Though Hayden White's emplotment basis itself on Northrop Frye's four-fold division in *The Anatomy of Criticism* into Romance, Tragic, Comic and Satirical, yet it is a useful approach for the examination of literary history and compels one to recognise the relationship between the two - history and literary history.
6. Swami Vivekananda addressed the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, where in he projected India's unique strength as characterised by its spirituality and pursuit of moksha and went on to conceptualise Hinduism as a search for perfection (uncannily echoing Nietzsche's belief in the superman). For the addresses, refer *Swami Vivekananda: An Anthology*. Ed. Bimal Prasad (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House 1994, 1996). 1-20.
7. A useful perspective is provided by Veena Das's article 'Subaltern as Perspective', *Subaltern Studies VI*. Ed. by Ranajit Guha (Delhi: OUP, 1994) In fact the whole volume is of significance.
8. See M.K. Naik's 'Preface' to his *A History of Indian English Literature* (1982), wherein he writes, 'while the needs of a systematic chronological survey have been kept in mind throughout, the responsibility of rigorous critical evaluation has not been sought to be evaded'. Also see the introduction to *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century*. Eds. Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia. (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), where besides periodisation and the cultural meaning, literary histories it is maintained also help reinvent tradition.
9. Srinivasa Iyengar also published a work in 1961, *Drama in Modern India and the Writer's Responsibility in a Rapidly Changing World* (Bombay). I have not been able to lay my hands on it. But the work gone into it is reflected in Iyengar's chapter on drama. I also draw attention to another lesser known work by the same author. *Literature and Authorship in India*.