



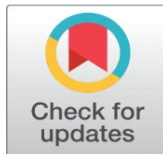
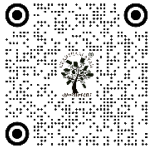


# DECOLONIAL READINGS OF ALIENATION, SILENCE, AND ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY: AN INTERGENERATIONAL STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

The interpretations of Indian English poetry frequently employ Eurocentric frameworks that prioritise imitation, hybridity, and postcolonial anxiety, thereby marginalising indigenous epistemologies. This paper offers an intergenerational and decolonial analysis of Indian English poetry, centring on the interconnected themes of alienation, silence, and ecological consciousness. Through close analysis of works by Dom Moraes, A.K. Ramanujan, Ranjit Hoskote, and Tishani Doshi, the paper demonstrates how these poets transform English from a colonial language into a medium for resistance, memory, and ecological ethics. Drawing on Bhalchandra Nemade's concept of *Deshivad* and G.N. Devy's notion of cultural amnesia, the paper argues that Indian English poetry evolves across generations from psychological alienation to ecological awareness. By integrating indigenous theoretical frameworks with detailed textual analysis, this paper positions Indian English poetry as a dynamic site for decolonial expression.

**Keywords:** Indian English Poetry, Decolonial Criticism, Alienation, Silence, Ecological Consciousness, Intergenerational Study, Indigenous Epistemology

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indian English poetry emerges from the complex historical encounter between colonial modernity and indigenous cultural traditions, where language itself becomes a site of negotiation and transformation. The institutionalisation of English through colonial education, particularly after Macaulay's Minute (1835), produced a hierarchy that privileged Western epistemologies and marginalised indigenous knowledge systems. (The Colonial Legacy in Indian Education, 2013) Consequently, early Indian English poetry was often judged as imitative and culturally disconnected (Naik, 2006).

Contemporary scholarship acknowledges that Indian English poetry has developed into a distinct literary tradition that indigenizes English. (Ahmad, 2022) Instead of simply adopting the colonial language, poets reshape it to articulate culturally specific experiences of memory, displacement, and belonging. (Mai, 2018) This transformation is particularly

evident when analysed through an intergenerational perspective, which traces how successive poets reinterpret shared themes across evolving historical contexts.

In this context, an intergenerational paper involves analysing poetic continuities and transformations across distinct literary phases. Such an approach reveals how the themes of alienation, silence, and ecological consciousness develop from colonial anxiety to contemporary global concerns. (Bhutani et al., 2025, pp. 280-288) It also facilitates a move away from Western universalist interpretations toward indigenous frameworks, including Nemade's *Deshivad*, which emphasises rootedness, and Devy's concept of cultural amnesia, which highlights the loss of indigenous knowledge systems (Nemade, 1997; Devy, 1992).

## 2. ALIENATION AS A HISTORICALLY PRODUCED CONDITION

Alienation in Indian English poetry should not be understood as a universal existential condition; instead, it is historically produced through colonial displacement, linguistic rupture, and cultural dislocation. (Chatterjee, 2020) In Dom Moraes' *A Beginning* (1957), alienation manifests as an internalised state characterised by fragmentation and emotional restraint. The poem portrays a consciousness unable to achieve stable belonging, with memory itself appearing fractured. Moraes' poetic voice frequently conveys distance and detachment, filtering emotional experience through controlled language. His lines evoke a world in which identity is unsettled and belonging remains unattainable. (Kumar & Dwivedi, 2023)

In *A Letter to My Mother*, Moraes articulates estrangement through emotional distance, where familial relationships fail to provide grounding. The absence of direct emotional articulation suggests a silence shaped by colonial displacement. (Gibson, n.d.) This aligns with Devy's notion of cultural amnesia, where the loss of cultural continuity produces a sense of alienation that is both personal and historical (Devy, 1992).

A.K. Ramanujan reconfigures alienation within culturally embedded structures rather than external exile. In *Obituary*, the line "he left debts and daughters" captures a distinctly Indian context of familial obligation and inheritance. Alienation here is not expressed through separation from culture but through ironic engagement with it. Ramanujan's poetry reveals how individuals remain embedded within tradition even as they experience detachment from it. (Kumar & Sharma, 2025)

Similarly, in *Self-Portrait*, Ramanujan writes, "I resemble everyone / but myself," a concise articulation of fragmented identity. This line reflects the multiplicity of cultural influences shaping the self, suggesting that alienation arises from navigating overlapping identities. Through Nemade's *Deshivad*, this can be read as a negotiation between rootedness and modernity, where identity is not lost but reconfigured within indigenous frameworks (Nemade, 1997). (al. et al., 2023)

Ranjit Hoskote extends alienation into a civilizational dimension. In *Vanishing Acts*, references to disappearing languages and erased histories evoke a collective experience of loss. His imagery of fragments and absences suggests that alienation is no longer confined to individual subjectivity but reflects broader processes of historical erasure. (*Broken Forests and Fractured Lives: Environmental Displacement in Indian English Fiction*, 2025, pp. 851-860) Silence in his work marks what cannot be recovered, aligning with Devy's argument that cultural amnesia involves the disappearance of entire knowledge systems. (Devy, 1992)

Tishani Doshi extends the concept of alienation into ecological and corporeal domains. In *The Adulterous Citizen*, the speaker's sense of dislocation reflects both social and environmental estrangement. In *The Sea Is Coming for Us*, recurring imagery of rising water generates a sense of impending displacement. The sea functions as both a literal and metaphorical element, symbolising ecological crisis and existential uncertainty. (Bhardwaj, 2019, pp. 43-52) Consequently, alienation evolves from psychological fragmentation to ecological vulnerability. (Bhutani et al., 2025)

## 3. SILENCE AS MEANING, RESISTANCE, AND ETHICAL STRATEGY

In Indian English poetry, silence operates as an active mode of meaning rather than a passive absence. (Singh, 2023, pp. 48-54) Within Indian aesthetics, particularly the concept of *dhvani*, silence is regarded as a space where meaning emerges through suggestion and implication. (*Resonance in Dhvani Aesthetics and the Deleuzian Logic of Sensation*, 2017, pp. 32-35) This perspective challenges Western interpretations that equate silence with deficiency. (Vineeth, 2015)

Ramanujan's poetry exemplifies this principle. In *Self-Portrait*, the brevity of lines and absence of explicit explanation create a space for interpretation. The poem's meaning lies not in what is stated but in what is implied. Similarly, in *Obituary*, the understated tone allows irony to emerge without overt commentary, demonstrating how silence can carry cultural and emotional weight.

In Moraes' poetry, silence signifies emotional rupture. His restrained diction indicates an inability or deliberate refusal to fully articulate experience. This silence may be interpreted as a response to colonial displacement, in which language becomes insufficient to express cultural belonging. (Thomas, n.d.)

Hoskote reconfigures silence as a marker of historical absence. In *Vanishing Acts*, silence signifies the disappearance of languages, rituals, and ecological systems. The poem's fragmented structure mirrors this loss, creating interpretive gaps for the reader. In this context, silence functions as an archival presence, indicating what has been erased. (*Broken Forests and Fractured Lives: Environmental Displacement in Indian English Fiction*, 2025, pp. 836-845)

Doshi's poetry introduces an ethical dimension to silence. In *Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods*, the repeated imagery of violence and vulnerability is accompanied by an undercurrent of silence, representing suppressed voices. The poem's urgency lies in breaking this silence, making visible what has been hidden. In *The Sea Is Coming for Us*, silence reflects the looming threat of ecological collapse, where the absence of action becomes a form of expression in itself. (Subramaniam, n.d.)

#### 4. ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS

Ecological consciousness in Indian English poetry marks a transition from romanticised portrayals of nature to critical engagement with the environmental crisis. (Bhardwaj, 2019, pp. 43-52) This development is closely associated with indigenous cosmologies that emphasise interconnectedness between human and non-human life. (Bhardwaj, 2019, pp. 43-52)

Ramanujan's poetry, though not explicitly ecological, reflects an implicit environmental sensibility. His references to domestic spaces, animals, and seasonal cycles suggest a worldview rooted in everyday ecological relationships. This aligns with indigenous perspectives that view nature as an integral part of human life. (Bhagat, 2026, pp. 54-56)

Hoskote's poetry foregrounds ecological loss as inseparable from cultural erasure. In *Vanishing Acts*, landscapes are depicted as sites of disappearance, where environmental degradation parallels the loss of cultural memory. His work suggests that the ecological crisis is not merely environmental but also epistemological, involving the disappearance of knowledge systems. (Hoskote, 2006)

Doshi's poetry amplifies ecological awareness. In *The Sea Is Coming for Us*, imagery of rising tides and submerged landscapes communicates the immediacy of the climate crisis. The poem situates the human body within fragile ecosystems, emphasising vulnerability and interdependence. This approach aligns with contemporary ecocritical perspectives that challenge anthropocentrism and promote ethical engagement with the environment. (Bhardwaj, 2019, pp. 43-52)

Within Devy's framework, ecological loss can be understood as part of cultural amnesia, in which the destruction of ecosystems entails the loss of traditional ecological knowledge (Devy, 1992). Similarly, Nemade's emphasis on rootedness highlights the importance of local ecological contexts in shaping literary expression (Nemade, 1997).

#### 5. INTERGENERATIONAL CONTINUITY AND TRANSFORMATION

An intergenerational analysis of Indian English poetry reveals a layered, dialogic evolution rather than a mere chronological sequence of poets. The works of Dom Moraes, A.K. Ramanujan, Ranjit Hoskote, and Tishani Doshi constitute a continuum in which each generation inherits, reworks, and expands thematic concerns in response to shifting historical contexts. This continuity is particularly evident in the transformation of alienation, silence, and ecological consciousness from inward psychological states to broader civilizational and environmental concerns.

In Dom Moraes' poetry, alienation emerges as an intensely personal and interior condition shaped by colonial displacement and cultural estrangement. His modernist idiom—marked by restraint, fragmentation, and emotional distance—reflects a subjectivity caught between inherited colonial forms and an uncertain sense of belonging. In poems such as *A Beginning*, the fractured quality of memory and the absence of rooted cultural markers suggest, through Devy's

framework, an early manifestation of cultural amnesia, in which the rupture from indigenous traditions produces a persistent sense of dislocation (Devy, 1992). Moraes' alienation, therefore, is not simply existential but historically conditioned, revealing the psychological consequences of writing within a colonial language that has not yet been fully indigenized.

A.K. Ramanujan represents a crucial shift in this trajectory, as he reorients alienation from external exile to internal cultural negotiation. His poetry demonstrates that English can be reconfigured to accommodate indigenous sensibilities, thereby challenging the assumption that writing in English necessitates cultural alienation. In *Self-Portrait*, the line "I resemble everyone / but myself" encapsulates a fragmented yet culturally embedded identity, where multiplicity becomes a defining feature rather than a source of loss. Similarly, *Obituary* situates alienation within familial and ritual contexts, where irony and understatement reveal tensions between tradition and modernity. Ramanujan's use of *dhvani* (suggestion) allows silence to function as a culturally grounded aesthetic strategy, aligning with Nemade's concept of *Deshivad*, which emphasises rootedness and the importance of local cultural contexts in literary expression (Nemade, 1997). Through Ramanujan, English is no longer a foreign imposition but a medium capable of articulating indigenous epistemologies.

Ranjit Hoskote extends this transformation by expanding the scope of poetic inquiry from individual and cultural identity to historical and civilizational memory. In *Vanishing Acts*, alienation is no longer confined to personal experience but is reframed as a collective condition arising from the erasure of languages, traditions, and ecological systems. His poetry is characterised by a palimpsest layering of references drawn from multiple linguistic and cultural traditions, creating a textured and archival mode of expression. Silence in Hoskote's work often signifies absence—what has been lost, forgotten, or rendered invisible—thereby functioning as an index of cultural amnesia. This shift reflects a broader historical awareness in which the poet assumes the role of an archivist, attempting to recover fragments of endangered knowledge systems. In this context, alienation becomes inseparable from historical loss, and poetry itself becomes an act of resistance against erasure.

Tishani Doshi further extends the intergenerational trajectory by foregrounding the intersection of ecological crisis, bodily vulnerability, and ethical responsibility. In her poetry, alienation is no longer limited to cultural or historical dislocation but is deeply entangled with environmental degradation and the fragility of human existence within threatened ecosystems. In *The Sea Is Coming for Us*, the image of rising waters functions as both a literal representation of climate change and a metaphor for impending displacement, suggesting that ecological crisis produces new forms of alienation that are simultaneously physical, emotional, and ethical. Similarly, in *Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods*, silence becomes a marker of suppressed trauma—both human and environmental—indicating that the violence inflicted upon bodies and ecosystems is interconnected. Doshi's work thus redefines poetry as a space of ethical witnessing, where the articulation of ecological anxiety becomes a form of resistance and accountability.

Taken together, these intergenerational shifts illustrate a clear trajectory in which Indian English poetry evolves from negotiating the immediate psychological effects of colonial displacement to addressing broader questions of cultural memory, historical erasure, and ecological survival. Moraes' modernist alienation reflects a moment when English remains closely tied to colonial structures, producing a linguistic and cultural estrangement. Ramanujan's work marks the indigenisation of English, demonstrating its capacity to carry indigenous meanings and aesthetic principles. Hoskote expands this indigenisation into a historical and archival dimension, while Doshi situates it within the urgent context of global ecological crisis.

This progression underscores the transformation of English from a colonial instrument into a medium of decolonial articulation. Through processes of appropriation, adaptation, and reinterpretation, Indian poets reshape English to reflect their own cultural realities, thereby challenging its colonial origins. In this sense, the language itself becomes a site of resistance, where indigenous epistemologies are not merely preserved but actively rearticulated in dialogue with contemporary concerns. As Nemade's *Deshivad* suggests, this rootedness does not imply a rejection of modernity but rather its reconfiguration within local contexts (Nemade, 1997). At the same time, Devy's concept of cultural amnesia highlights the ongoing necessity of this process, as the preservation of cultural memory remains inseparable from resistance to both historical and ecological erasure (Devy, 1992).

Ultimately, the intergenerational continuity of Indian English poetry resides in its capacity for transformation rather than thematic repetition. Each generation inherits concerns such as alienation, silence, and the human-environment relationship, reinterpreting them in response to evolving historical conditions. This dynamic evolution affirms Indian

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English poetry as a living, adaptive, and critically engaged tradition that negotiates the complexities of identity, memory, and survival in a rapidly changing world.

## 6. CONCLUSION

When examined through the interconnected themes of alienation, silence, and ecological consciousness, Indian English poetry emerges as a dynamic and decolonial literary tradition. These themes are deeply embedded in historical and cultural contexts, reflecting the complexities of colonial legacy and contemporary crises.

Intergenerational analysis shows that Indian English poetry evolves from articulating psychological alienation to addressing broader ecological and ethical concerns. Silence functions as a significant aesthetic strategy, while ecological consciousness highlights the interconnectedness of human and non-human life.

By incorporating indigenous theoretical frameworks such as *Deshivad* and cultural amnesia, this paper repositions Indian English poetry as a site of resistance, memory, and ethical engagement. It affirms the significance of Indian English poetry within global literary discourse and highlights its contribution to decolonial and ecological thought.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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