



# Indian Poetry: Part 2

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**PG TRB English**

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# Today's Class

## [Unit VII: under Poetry]

### **A. K. Ramanujan**

“Looking for a Cousin on a Swing”

“A River”

“Of Mothers, among Other Things”

### **Aurobindo**

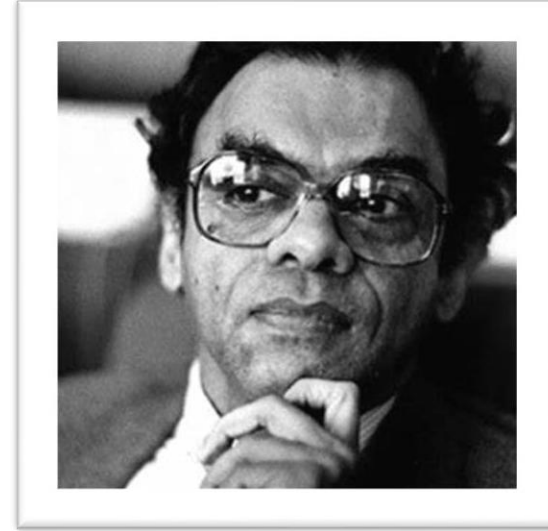
“Thought the Paraclete”

### **R. Parthasarathy**

from *Homecoming*

### **Sarojini Naidu**

“Caprice”



## **A. K. Ramanujan**

“Looking for a Cousin on a Swing”

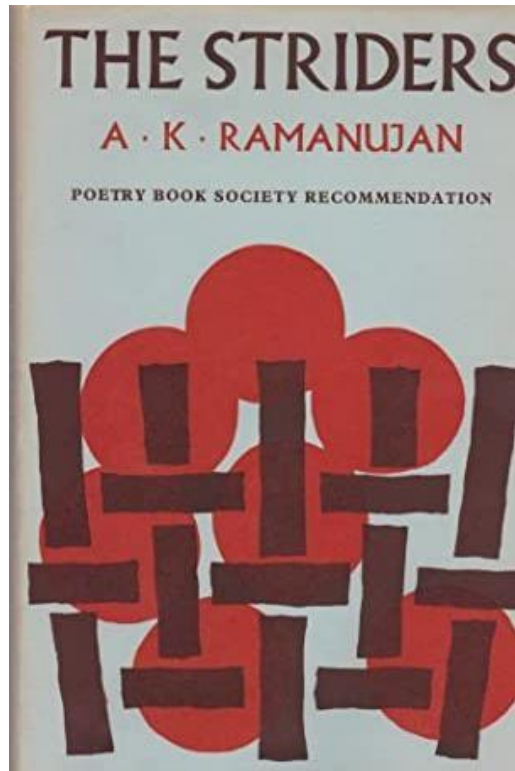
“A River”

“Of Mothers, among Other Things”



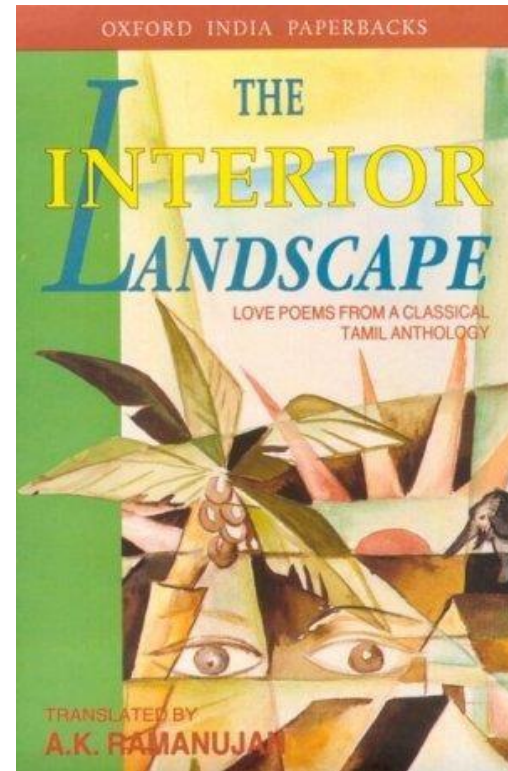
# A.K. Ramanujan (1929–1993)

**Poet**



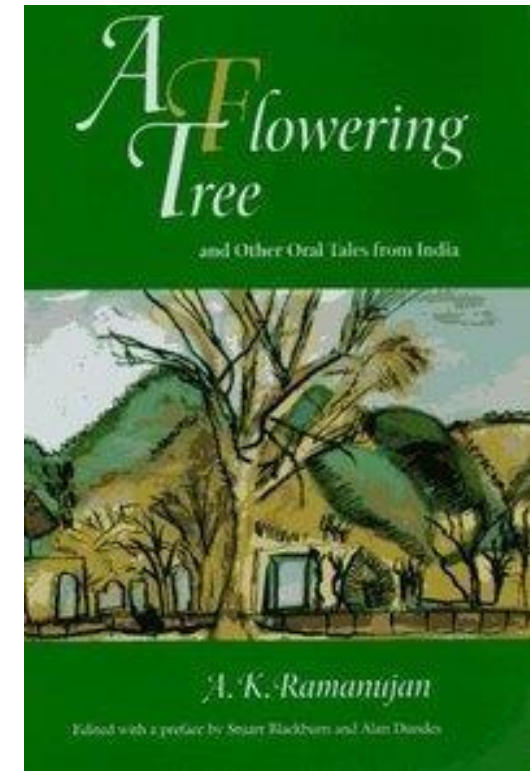
**(1966)**

**Translator**



**(1967)**

**Folklorist**



**(1997)**



## “Looking for a Cousin on a Swing”

When she was four or five  
she sat on a village swing  
and her cousin, six or seven,  
sat himself against her;  
with every lunge of the swing  
she felt him / in the lunging pits  
of her feeling; / and afterwards  
we climbed a tree, she said,  
not very tall, but full of leaves  
like those of a fig tree,  
and we were very innocent / about it.







Now she looks for the swing  
in cities with fifteen suburbs  
and tries to be innocent  
about it

not only on the crotch of a tree  
that looked as if it would burst  
under every leaf

into a brood of scarlet figs

if someone suddenly sneezed.





## “A River”

In Madurai, / city of temples and poets,  
who sang of cities and temples,  
every summer / a river dries to a trickle  
in the sand, / baring the sand ribs,  
straw and women’s hair  
clogging the watergates / at the rusty bars  
under the bridges with patches  
of repair all over them  
the wet stones glistening like sleepy  
crocodiles, the dry ones  
shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun  
The poets only sang of the floods.



River Vaigai



He was there for a day  
when they had the floods.  
People everywhere talked  
of the inches rising,  
of the precise number of cobbled steps  
run over by the water, rising  
on the bathing places,  
and the way it carried off three village houses,  
one pregnant woman  
and a couple of cows  
named Gopi and Brinda as usual.





The new poets still quoted  
the old poets, but no one spoke  
in verse  
of the pregnant woman  
drowned, with perhaps twins in her,  
kicking at blank walls  
even before birth.



He said: / the river has water enough  
to be poetic / about only once a year  
and then / it carries away  
in the first half-hour  
three village houses,  
a couple of cows  
named Gopi and Brinda  
and one pregnant woman  
expecting identical twins  
with no moles on their bodies,  
with different coloured diapers  
to tell them apart.



## “Of Mothers, among Other Things”

I smell upon this twisted  
blackbone tree the silk and white  
petal of my mothers youth.  
From her ear-rings three diamonds  
splash a handful of needles,  
and I see my mother ran back  
from rain to the crying cradles.  
The rains tack and sew

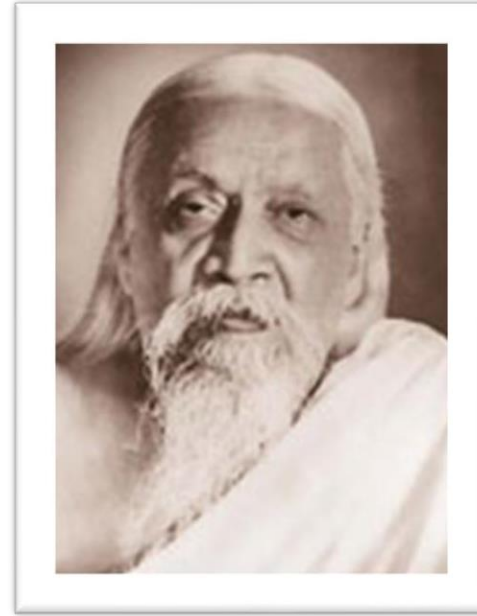


with broken thread the rags  
of the tree-tasselled light  
But her hands are a wet eagle's  
two black pink-crinkled feet,  
one talon crippled in a garden-  
trap set for a mouse. Her sarees  
do not cling: they hang, loose  
feather of a onetime wing.



My cold parchment tongue licks bark  
in the mouth when I see her four  
still sensible fingers slowly flex  
to pick a grain of rice from the kitchen floor.





**Aurobindo**

“Thought the Paraclete”



# Aurobindo Ghose (1872 – 1950)

## Sri Aurobindo Ashram



1926

## Auroville (“The City of Dawn”)



1968, Mirra Alfassa





## “Thought the Paraclete”

As some bright archangel in vision flies  
Plunged in dream-caught spirit immensities,  
Past the long green crests of the seas of life,  
Past the orange skies of the mystic mind  
Flew my thought self-lost in the vasts of God.



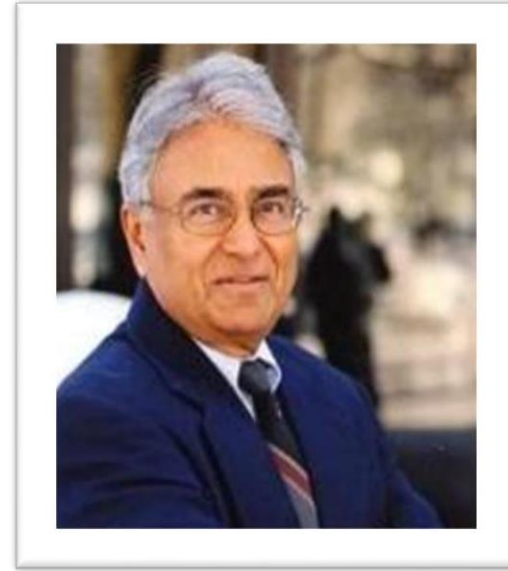


Sleepless wide great glimmering wings of wind  
Bore the gold-red seeking of feet that trod  
Space and Time's mute vanishing ends. The face  
Lustred, pale-blue-lined of the hippogriff,  
Eremitic, sole, daring the bourneless ways,  
Over world-bare summits of timeless being  
Gleamed; the deep twilights of the world-abys  
Failed below. Sun-realms of supernal seeing,  
Crimson-white mooned oceans of pauseless bliss  
Drew its vague heart-yearning with voices sweet.





Hungering, large-souled to surprise the unconned  
Secrets white-fire-veiled of the last Beyond,  
Crossing power-swept silences rapture-stunned,  
Climbing high far ethers eternal-sunned,  
Thought the great-winged wanderer paraclete  
Disappeared slow-singing a flame-word rune.  
Self was left, lone, limitless, nude, immune.



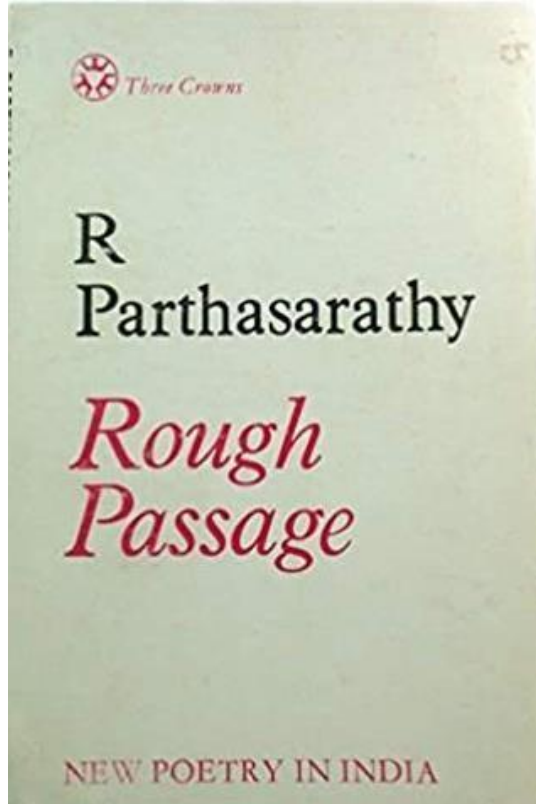
**R. Parthasarathy**

from *Homecoming*



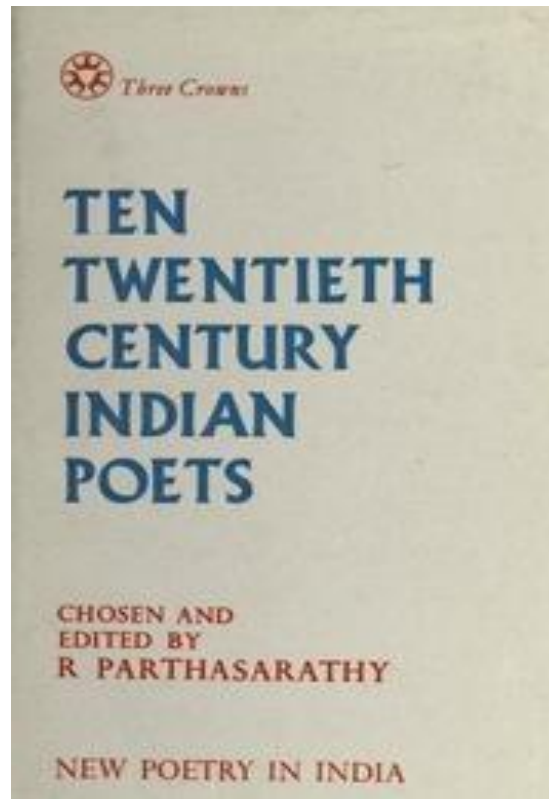
# R. Parthasarathy (1934 – )

**Poet**



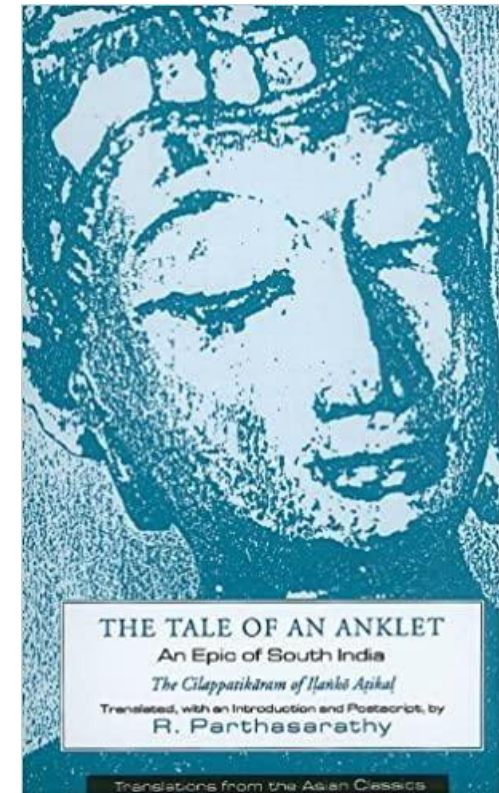
**(1977)**

**Editor**



**(1976)**

**Translator**



**(1993)**





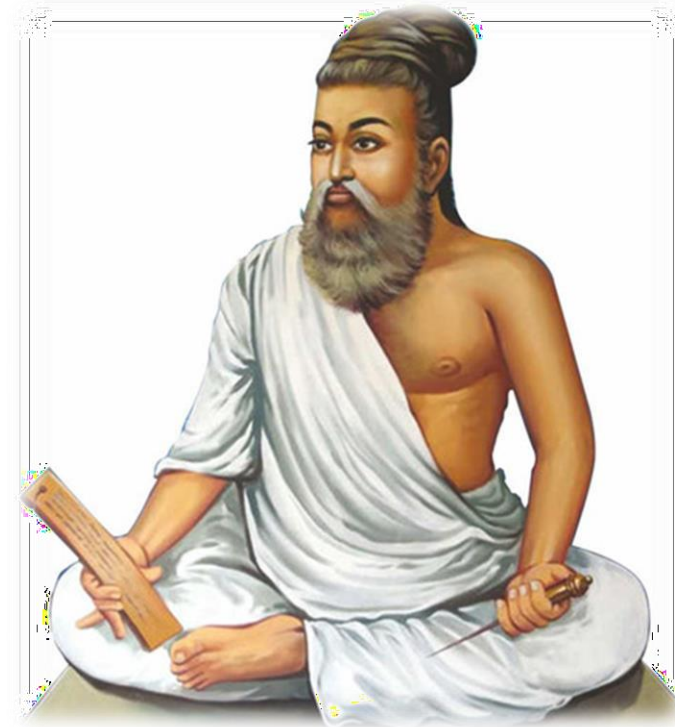
# from *Homecoming*

## 1

My tongue in English chains,  
I return, after a generation, to you.  
I am at the end

of my dravidic tether,  
hunger for you unassuaged.  
I falter, stumble.

Speak a tired language  
wrenched from its sleep in the Kural,  
teeth, palate, lips still new  
to its agglutinative touch.  
Now, hooked on celluloid, you reel  
down plush corridors.





### 3



And so it eventually happened—  
family reunion not heard of  
since grandfather died in '59—in March  
this year. Cousins arrived in Tiruchchanur  
in overcrowded private buses,  
the dust of unlettered years  
clouding instant recognition.  
Later, each one pulled,  
sitting crosslegged on the steps



of the choultry, familiar coconuts  
out of the fire  
of rice-and-pickle afternoons.

Sundari, who had squirrelled up and down  
forbidden tamarind trees in her long skirt  
every morning with me,  
stood there, that day, forty years taller,  
her three daughters floating  
like safe planets near her.





## 4

I made myself an expert  
in farewells. An unexpected November  
shut the door in my face:



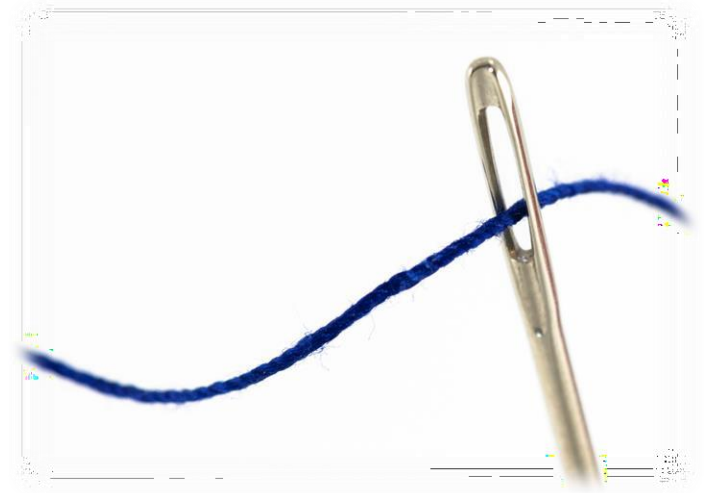
I crashed, a glasshouse  
hit by the stone of Father's death.  
At the burning ghat

relations stood like exclamation points.  
The fire stripped his unwary body  
of the last shred of family likeness.



I am my father now.  
The lines of my hands  
hold the fine compass of his going:

I shall follow. And after me,  
my unborn son, through the eye of this needle  
of forgetfulness.







With paper boats boys tickle her ribs,  
and buffalos have turned her to a pond.  
There's eaglewood in her hair  
and stale flowers. Every evening,  
as bells roll in the forehead of temples,  
she sees a man on the steps  
clean his arse. Kingfishers and egrets,  
whom she fed, have flown  
her paps. Also emperors and poets  
who slept in her arms. She is become  
a sewer, now. No one has any use for Vaikai,  
river, once, of this sweet city.





## 10

The street in the evening tilts homeward  
as traffic piles up.

It is then I stir about.

Rise from the table and shake the dust  
from my eyes. Pick up  
my glasses and look for myself

in every nook and corner  
of the night. The pavement turns informer  
hearing my steps. A pariah dog

slams an alley in my face.

I have exchanged the world  
for a table and chair. I shouldn't complain.





I see him now sitting at his desk.  
The door is open. It is evening.  
On the lawns the children play.

He went for the wrong gods from the start.  
And marriage made it worse.  
He hadn't read his Greek poets well:

better to bury a woman than marry her.  
Now he teaches. Reviews verse  
written by others. Is invited to conferences  
and attends them. How long it had taken  
him to learn he had no talent  
at all, although words came easy.





One can be articulate about nothing. / Or, was it simply / his god had left him?

Pedalling his bicycle glasses, he asks,

‘What’s it like to be a poet?’

I say to myself, ‘The son of a bitch

fattens himself on the flesh of dead poets.

Lines his pockets with their blood.

From his fingertips ooze ink and paper,

as he squats on the dungheap

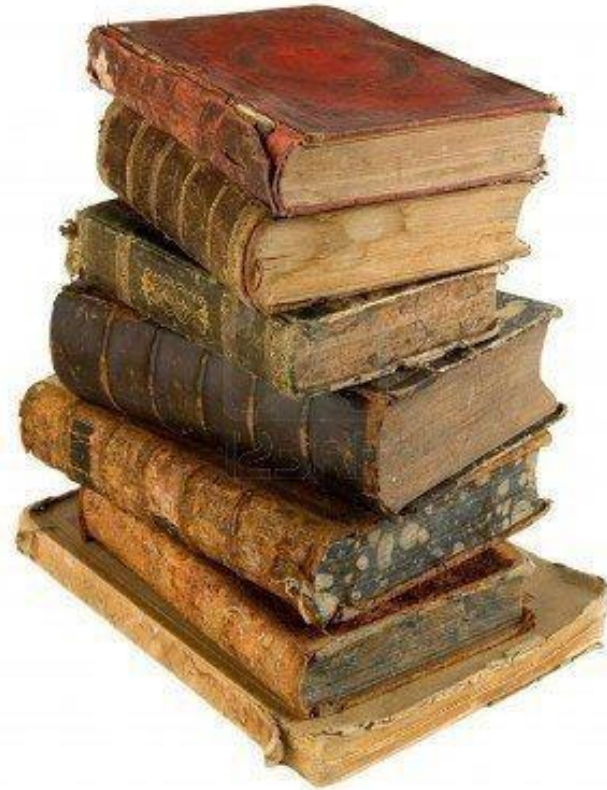
of old texts and obscure commentaries.

His eyes peel off.

Where would His Eminence be

but for the poets who splashed about

in the Hellespont or burned in the Java Sea?’





## 14

I am no longer myself as I watch  
the evening blur the traffic  
to a pair of obese headlights.



I return home, tired,  
my face pressed against the window  
of expectation. I climb the steps  
to my flat, only to trip over the mat  
outside the door. The key  
goes to sleep in my palm.

I fear I have bungled again.  
That last refinement of speech  
terrifies me. The balloon





of poetry has grown red in the face  
with repeated blowing. For scriptures  
I, therefore, recommend

the humble newspaper: I find  
my prayers occasionally answered there.  
I shall, perhaps, go on

like this, unmindful of day  
melting into the night.

My heart I have turned inside out.

Hereafter, I should be content,  
I think, to go through life  
with the small change of uncertainties.





# Sarojini Naidu

## “Caprice”



You held a wild flower in your fingertips,  
Idly you pressed it to indifferent lips,  
Idly you tore its crimson leaves apart  
Alas! it was my heart.



You held a wine-cup in your fingertips,  
Lightly you raised it to indifferent lips,  
Lightly you drank and flung away the bowl . . .  
Alas! it was my soul.





# Epilogue



# Teaching English in India

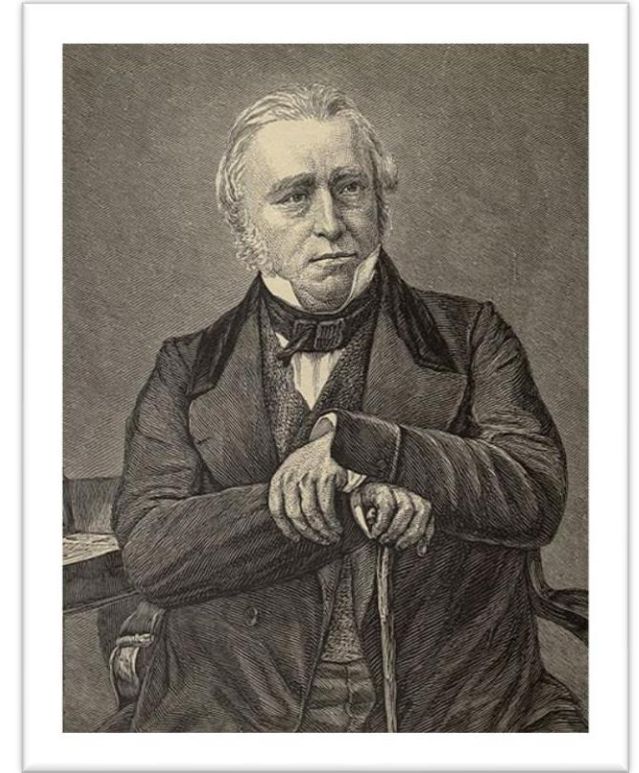
[Unit VIII: No. 6]



# The Introduction of English in India

**Thomas Babington Macaulay:**

- ❑ **“Minute Upon Indian Education”**  
(2nd Feb. 1835)
- ❑ formally known as **the English Education Act** in 1835
- ❑ He advocated **English as the medium of instruction** in the place of Sanskrit and Persian.







- “I am quite ready to take the oriental learning at the valuation of the orientalist themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that **a single shelf of a good European library** was **worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.**”
  
- “We must at present do our best **to form a class** who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern,  
– **a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.**”



# Western scientific education through English

- **On 11th Dec. 1823** (twelve years before Macaulay's 'Minute of 1835'), the social reformer **Raja Rammohan Roy** wrote to the then Governor-General of India, Lord Amherst, and requested him to introduce modern Western education in India.



- He wanted **to replace traditional Sanskrit and Persian teaching** with English.



# EFLU



Established in Hyderabad in **1958**, the **Central Institute of English (CIE)** – renamed the **Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL)** in **1972** – trains and conducts advanced research in English and foreign languages: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Japanese, Korean, Persian, Turkish.



In **2006**, it attained central university status and therefore is now called the **English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU)**, which has two regional centres: Lucknow and Shillong.



## The Kothari Commission

- ❑ Set up by the Government of India on **14<sup>th</sup> July 1964** under the Chairmanship of **Daulat Singh Kothari**, the then chairman of UGC
- ❑ To overhaul the Indian education sector, the Commission **submitted its report** on **29<sup>th</sup> June 1966** to M. C. Chagla, the then Minister of Education.
- ❑ It gave **23 recommendations** to revamp the education system in India, which include **Women's** education, **Distance** education, **Free and compulsory** education (for children aged 6 to 14 years), **Adult** education.



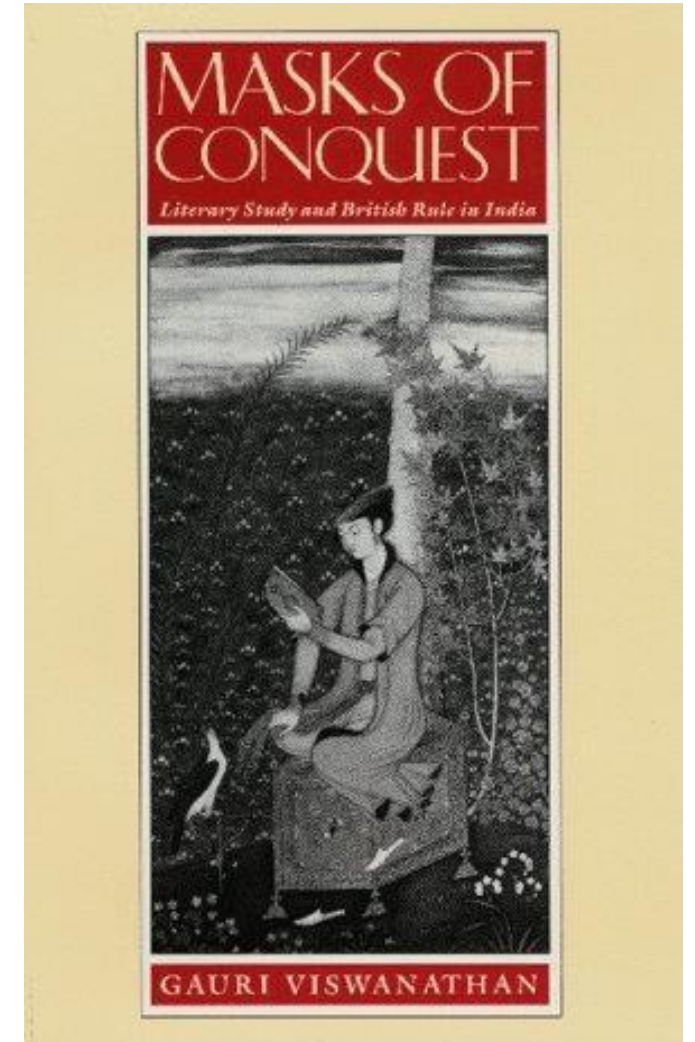
## Three-language formula

- ❑ To study “**Hindi, English and modern Indian language** (preferably one of the southern languages) **in the Hindi speaking states** and **Hindi, English and the Regional language in the non-Hindi speaking States**”
- ❑ Not followed in Tamil Nadu



“**English literature** made its appearance **in India**, albeit indirectly, with a critical act in Indian educational history: the passing of **the Charter Act in 1813**.

This act, **renewing the East India Company’s charter** for a twenty-year period, produced two major changes in Britain’s relationship with her colony: one was the assumption of a new responsibility **towards native education**, and the other was a relaxation of controls over **missionary activity in India.**”



(1989)



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