

1 “Poetry is No More a Civilizing Manoeuvre”

Language and Materiality

Fragmentation is a feature which seemed to characterise much of the literature published in the 1960s by avant-garde circles on a global scale. New printing technologies like the mimeograph initiated the period known as “the mimeo revolution”, which revolutionised the politics of independent and self-sufficient publishing. The mimeograph machine, a rudimentary stencil duplicator, was widely in use by writers and artists of the neo-avant-garde because it offered the cheapest solution to printing with the advantage of producing hundreds of copies at a fast pace. All this generated a new print culture that mirrored the frenetic and materialistic logic of consumption and modernisation, even though it emerged in opposition to the predatory nature of capitalism. The poets of the Hungry Generation partook in this revolution of printing and publishing that emerged in opposition to the established politics of the Bengali cultural world. The heightened materiality of 1960s literary culture could be perceived in the diversity of the Hungryalist records, mostly thin little magazine runs, slim leaflets and bulletins often printed on random low-quality paper such as old coffee house menus or on wedding cards. This fragmented materiality was the hallmark of the “structural rebellion” against the commercially oriented world of publishing and the institutionalisation of literary practice in India.

Unlike the little magazine landscape of Bombay, which was characterised by continuity in publication owing to the relative “stabilisation” of the small presses, the documents of Hungryalism were characterised by greater volatility, due to the lack of a more organised project of anti-establishment printing and publishing. For instance, the Hungry Generation never established a press centre that might have become representative of their anti-establishment politics of publication, unlike, for example, Arun Kolatkar’s Clearing House in Bombay and P. Lal’s Writer’s Workshop in Calcutta. By contrast, the headquarter of the movement was temporarily based at low-caste poet Debi Roy’s slum hut in Howrah at 269 Netaji Subhash Road, to signal a fundamental shift in the publishing practice of Bengali literature from the periphery of elite culture. As a result, Hungry literature has seemed to be more ephemeral, scattered and fragmented than other movements of Indian modernisms, a feature that has made the task of constituting an archive or a corpus of Hungryalist writings more challenging.

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Strategies of fragmentation have been observed particularly in the use of cheap and short-lived materials of literature (e.g. the leaflet, the manifesto, and the little magazine), but also in the poets’ adoption of a relatively new meter, the free verse (Beng. *mukta chanda*), that could better suit their experiments with confessional poetry in Bengali. A distinct way of writing poetry, the style of confessional poetry emerged at the end of the 1950s, most notably among American poets like Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. For these writers, poetry became distinctly autobiographic, the vehicle for expressing the author’s traumas, depression, sickness, sexuality and the deepest anguishes of living in middle-class American society. In many ways, the Hungryalists found in the free verse a way to speak about oneself and experiment with language out of the schemes of traditional meter patterns, from *paṅār* to blank verse and sonnet that gave the starting kick to modernism in Bengali.⁷ Free verse, emerging out of negotiations with prose, was at the heart of a revolt with the personal taking place in the realm of poetry internationally. Without conforming to a formal structure of rhyme and meter, the free verse could aptly suit the powerful expression of anguish, anger and madness of the 1960s generation of poets, from Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl” to Malay Roy Choudhury’s “Stark Electric Jesus”. Because literature for Hungryalism was a performative act, the very act of poetry-making embodied the yet unexplored possibilities of form, content and sound. It is no wonder that the free verse stirred the literary sphere and triggered reactions from some sections of the Bengali literary establishment.

Poetry is emblematic in the context of Hungryalism’s revolution of form and language in that it shows how it promoted a new way of conceiving the process of verse writing as an act of freedom and spontaneity. In every line of the Hungry Generation “Manifesto on Hungryalistic Poetry” (1961) there is the wish to abolish “the darling of the press”, that is the circle of modern poets who got published

7 Innovations in meter patterns were at the heart of modernism in Bengali, starting from Madhusudan Dutt’s introduction of the blank verse and the sonnet in his Bengali epic poems. Towards the end of his life, Rabindranath Tagore experimented with the *gadya-padya*, the prosed rhyme, a mixture of prose and verse. Retrieving Dutt’s innovations of the Bengali metre, also Buddhadeva Bose re-introduced the sonnet in modern Bengali poetry. What I believe is a meaningful passage in William Radice’s article on the significance of Madhusudan Dutt and his epic *Megh'nād'badh kābya* suits us well to understand the degree of freedom that the manipulation of traditional meter patterns could open to following poets and writers, including the poets of the Hungry Generation: “He [Madhusudan] showed subsequent Bengali poets and writers that they need not just stick to an inherited diction, as the medieval poets had done. They could take Bengali and change it, mould it, weld it to their own purposes. This is what Tagore did, and subsequent poets from Jibananda Das to Shamsur Rahman. In that respect, Madhusudan set the Bengali language free: free to develop new words, new sentence structures, new metres, new rhythms, new verse forms – anything poets or prose writers wished” (Radice 2003: 78).

and recognized by big press groups, to reinvent a more natural process of poetry writing, which should be violent, desperate and “orgasmic”. It is clear from their first manifesto that the goal of Hungryalism was to shock and to desecrate simply to show that the real nature of life is obscene and nauseating, as declared by many avant-garde artists and writers in those years.

The Little Magazine

One platform where this aesthetics of chaos and disruption was prominent throughout the 1960s was the little magazine. A primary channel of alternative aesthetics, the little magazine had already established itself in the early twentieth century in the Anglo-American avant-garde and most notably with the work of authors like Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. During the Sixties, many avant-gardes across the world adopted the little magazine format to counter the authority of national big press groups and to spread new experiments with poetry and prose writing. The global reach and the transnational and multilingual constellations of the little magazine that emerged beyond the Anglo-American world encouraged to speak of this new literary format as a “world form”, to use Eric Bulson’s words, spreading from Asia to South America (Bulson 2013). Among the increasing growth of these low-quality, cheaply printed journals, West Bengal made no exception: even the materiality of the Bengali little magazines, leaflets, manifestoes, and bulletins, became functional to represent the fragmentation and anti-structure of this marginal cultural space in postmodern Calcutta. These documents carved out a space for poetry dilettantes and contributed to disseminate avant-garde poetry – also through translation – on a transnational basis. Anjali Nerlekar too, in her work on the bilingual Marathi poet Arun Kolatkar, has suggested to see the little magazines “not just as empty containers for rebellious texts, but as generators of that rebellion through their very structures, through their material interface with the readers, the processes of circulation in which they embedded themselves, and the poetics of ephemerality they espoused” (Nerlekar 2016: 192).

The mouthpieces of Hungryalism were the little magazines *Wastepaper*, *Pratidvandvī* (The Rival), *Jebrā* (Zebra), *Svakāl* (One’s Own Times), *Eṣaṇā* (Desire), and *Kṣudhārta* (Hunger-Stricken), which documented the literary practices and structural rebellion promoted and endorsed by the Hungry Generation. A key instrument of aesthetic innovation, the little magazine also encouraged playing with graphics, favouring clearly postmodern formats like pastiche or collage. The cover of *Hungry Generation 99* is in fact a collage merging photo cut-outs of Hungryalist poets with objects, like a trumpet or a syringe, and sexual organs: Malay’s cut-out figure emerges from what seems to represent the vagina (fig. 4).



Figure 4. Front cover of *Hungry Generation 99* edited by Malay Roy Choudhury, showing a photo collage of the Hungryalist poets. Courtesy of Shankha Ghosh private papers.

These magazines visually show that the Hungryalist poets worked transversally throughout their literary materials to overturn classical visions and articulations of modernist writing in Bengali, a task they pursued by using parody and irony in their texts and by intermixing languages and media originally pertaining to other spheres of daily life, as I will show.

To shake off the old vestiges of the formal and refined shape of Bengali poetry, language registers and literary genres were blended and displaced in these Hungryalist pamphlets. The variety of Bengali words used in Hungryalist poetry was a hallmark of the Hungry Generation poets and of their project of revolutionizing language: their Bengali was enriched with English loanwords, swear words, colloquial idioms, and a new vocabulary of technology and scientific lexicon. Capitalism and modernisation were other topics in the target of the little magazine revolution. The little magazine and the pamphlet, with their provisionality and ephemerality, sought to disrupt the increasingly market-oriented and consumerist world of publishing, as we often read on the pages of *Wastepaper* and other Indian little magazines: “WASTE PAPER is not for sale; it can be had for love, as it happens, not for money. Not that anyone wanting to offer money or help, coming with love also, will be repulsed” (*Wastepaper* #2, Mitra and Mitra 1967). The non-profit nature of the little magazine recurs throughout the literary platforms of the Indian avant-garde, as in A.K. Mehrotra’s little magazine *damn you*: “for reasons other than copyright this edition is not for sale in u.s.a., or canada, it may, however, be smuggled in” (Mehrotra N.D). Moreover, Anjali Nerlekar (2016b) rightly noticed that the unperiodical, anticapitalistic, and ephemeral nature of the little magazine in many ways replicated the structureless spontaneity of the *āḍḍā*, the typically Bengali informal get-together, which Dipesh Chakrabarty outlined as an anti-profit discourse that countered the impersonality of the capitalist world (Chakrabarty 2008).

Other Bengali little magazines edited by Hungryalist poets show how these platforms were firmly grounded on the cosmopolitanism inspired by the transformations of the Indian metropolis after the independence. The relevance of translation – from Indian vernacular languages to English, and vice versa – and the material choices involved in the editorial and publishing policies of the journals, created a map of multilingual and material modernism that connected Bombay to Calcutta and San Francisco. Another editorial in *Wastepaper* magazine shows the interest of the movement for translation as a means to reach the international avant-garde public: “Apart from telling you what the Hungryalists are doing just now we have launched this mimeographed mag also to transmit Hungryalist works in English. Waste Paper will do its best to present before you the actual Hungry scene” (*Wastepaper* #1, Mitra and Mitra 1967).

However, as compared to the Marathi group of bilingual poets, the space of the Hungryalist little magazine does not seem as relevant as other “little” forms of writing and publishing disseminated by the movement. For instance, the

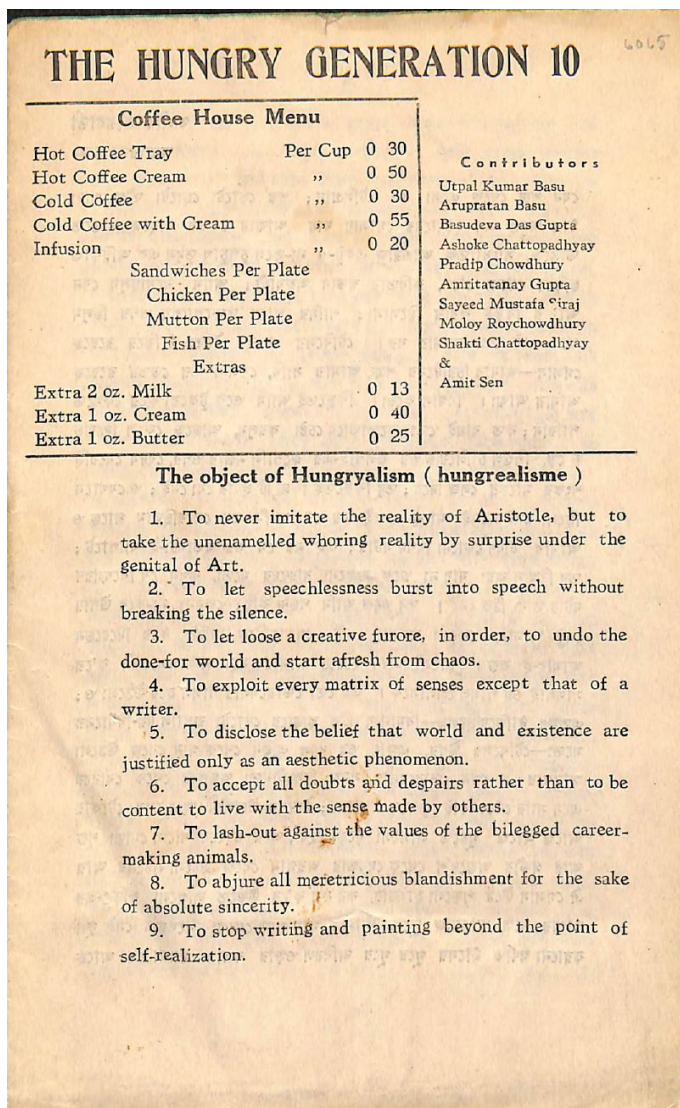


Figure 5. "Coffee House Menu" and "The Object of Hungryalism" in *The Hungry Generation 10*. In Allen Ginsberg papers, M733, Box 74, Folder 16 (XIII Periodicals. The Hungry Generation). Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

Hungryalist leaflet and the bulletin, either a single-page sheet or a multiple-page brochure, more originally represent the practices of Hungry literature than their little magazine counterpart. Once the leaflets were printed and distributed in colleges and coffee houses in Calcutta, ironically they turned into “bulletins” because they aimed at spreading the (usually literary) news about the Hungry Generation movement.⁸ What differentiates the bulletin from the little magazine, in spite of the material similarities, is its insistence on the fragmentation – of meaning and information – as a linguistic, historical, and material strategy of vanguardism in the context of postmodern critique. These documents promoted an immediacy of communication that mirrored the predatory nature of consumer culture and capitalist society, in a process that reproduced the “logic of late capitalism” in the cultural sphere, as Jameson popularly suggested in his book (1991).

The *Hungry Generation 10* perhaps seeks a solution to the contradictions of writing and publishing poetry, rarely a profitable job, in a consumerist world. In this leaflet, the manifesto declaring in few points “The Object of Hungryalism (hungrealism)” is printed beside the “Coffee House Menu” of the day (fig. 5). In the Hungryalist single-page bulletin as well as in the brochure leaflet, the juxtaposition of the commercial (the Coffee House Menu) with the non-commercial (the Object of Hungryalism) provocatively affirms the need for literature to reclaim their space in the political and intellectual sphere. It is no coincidence that the objectives of the movement were printed on the menu of the Indian Coffee House, a shop well-known as the meeting place of Bengali writers and intellectuals.

The Manifesto

In a similar direction to the little magazine went the manifesto, a typical instrument of propaganda for the historical avant-gardes of the early twentieth century. If we look retrospectively, the manifesto predated the rise of the historical avant-gardes because it initially spread as the political pamphlet and the philosophical manifesto. Arising from the tradition of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’ *Communist Manifesto* (1848), the manifesto initially demanded to be judged not on its literary merits or its poetry but on its ability to change the world (Puchner 2005: 2). The manifesto was, as Janet Lyon rightly stated, a “narrator of modernity”, an ideologically inflected genre that helped to create modern public spheres (Lyon 1999: 2). With the adoption of this device by the historical avant-gardes, the manifesto articulated new strategies of modernity through its innovative form, language

8 The political pamphlet could be seen as the forerunner of the Hungryalist leaflet, rooted in the Bengali urban culture from the early twentieth century (Sanyal 2014).

Poetry is no more a civilizing manoeuvre, a replanting of the bamboozled gardens; it is a holocaust, a violent and somnambulistic juzzing of the hy-ning five, a sowing of the tempestual hunger.

Poetry is an activity of the narcissistic spirit. Naturally, we have discarded the blankety-blank school of modern poetry, the darling of the press, where poetry does not resurrect itself in an orgasmic flow, but words come up bubbling in an artificial muddle. In the rhymed-prose of those born-old half-literates you must fail to find that scream of desperation of a thing wanting to be man, the man wanting to be spirit.

Poetry of the younger generation too has died in the dressing-room, as most of the younger rhymed-prose writers, afraid of the satanism, the vomitous horror, the self-elected crucifixion of the artist that makes a man a poet, fled away to hide in the hairs.

Poetry, around us, these days, has been cryptic, shorthand, cautiously glamorous, flattered by own sensitivity like a public-school prodigy. Saturated with self-consciousness, poems have begun to appear from the tomb of logic or the bier of unsexed rhetoric.

Poetry is not the caging of belches within form. It should convey the brutal sound of the breaking values and startling tremors of the rebellious soul of the artist himself, with words stripped of their usual meaning and used contrapuntally. It must invent a new language which would incorporate everything at once, speak to all the senses in one. Poetry should be able to follow music in the power it possess of evoking a state of mind, and to present images not as wrappers but as ravishograms.

Published by Haradon from 289, Netaji Subhash Road, Howrah, India, on behalf of the Hungry Generation.

Manifesto

on

Hungryalistic Poetry

Regisseurs :

SONDIPAN

UTPAL

SAMIR

SHAKTI

BENOY

HARANATH

SHANKAR

ARUP

BASUDEVA

ASHOKE

PRADIP

SIRAJ

AMRITATANAY

AMIT

BHANU

DEBI

Written by

MALAY

No. XII

Figure 6. "Manifesto on Hungryalistic Poetry" in *Hungry Generation XII*. In Allen Ginsberg papers, M733, Box 74, Folder 16 (XIII Periodicals. The Hungry Generation). Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

and structure, and came to be considered a genre in its own right, often blending graphic media with written. Perhaps the most memorable example is Tristan Tzara's manifesto of Dadaism (1918) with its playful and abusive language, and the subversive use of German grammar and syntax. Playing with contradiction and with absurdity is the only aesthetic principle that the Manifesto of Dadaism wished to expose in the banality of everyday life. One can easily detect these textual and linguistic strategies of subversion in the following lines of the Dada Manifesto: "I write a manifesto and I want nothing, yet I say certain things, and in principle I am against manifestoes, as I am also against principles (half-pints to measure the moral value of every phrase too convenient; approximation was invented by the impressionists). I write this manifesto to show that people can perform contrary actions together while taking one fresh gulp of air; I am against action; for continuous contradiction, for affirmation too, I am neither for nor against and I do not explain because I hate common sense".⁹ Demolishing language and social conventions, the manifesto projected its vision onto a utopian future of a new humanity. In this sense, the future-focused manifesto differs from the little magazine, which is rooted in the present moment and calls for immediate action in the world (Bulson 2013). Undoubtedly, the manifestoes are the documents most representative of Hungryalism, because of their ephemerality and material fragility, as well as for their thickness of meaning. The first "Manifesto on Hungryalistic Poetry" (1961), written in English and printed and distributed from Patna, inaugurated the movement by proclaiming the need to develop a new language of Bengali poetry (fig. 6). Its goal was to trigger a transformation in the process of poetry creation, no longer a cryptic and artificial operation but a natural and "orgasmic" flow, bursting from the horror and obscenity of real-life experiences.

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9 Retrieved from https://writing.upenn.edu/library/Tzara_Dada-Manifesto_1918.pdf, accessed 17.11.2023.

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Poetry, around us, these days,¹⁰ has been cryptic, short-hand, cautiously glamorous, flattered by own sensitivity like a public-school prodigy. Saturated with self-consciousness, poems have begun to appear from the tomb of logic or the bier of unsexed rhetoric.

Poetry is not the caging of belches within form. It should convey the brutal sound of the breaking values and startling tremora of the rebellious soul of the artist himself, with words stripped of their usual meaning and used contrapuntally. It must invent a new language which would incorporate everything at once, speak to all the senses in one. Poetry should be able to follow music in the power it possess[es] of evoking a state of mind, and to present images not as wrappers but as ravishograms.

This first manifesto on Hungryalist poetry proclaims the movement’s will to reform Bengali poetry and language, an endeavour that could only be achieved if the hyper-rational logic and binding conventions of modernism were replaced with a different idea of poetry and of its creative process: one that stems not from the comfort zone of logic and “unsexed rhetoric”, but that is born out of the “vomitous horror”, the obscenity and brutality that men encounter in their everyday lives. A first step to counter the “technocracy” of bourgeois society¹¹ for the Hungryalist movement in its early phase was to attack and demolish the bombastic castle of rhetoric and rhyme-and-metre conventions in use by the “blankety-blank school of modern poetry” to reveal a new path of poetry composition that grows out of life and obscenity. To encourage the “total free language of the entire society” becomes a central idea of the movement especially after the trial and sentence for obscenity. For instance, Malay Roy Choudhury’s pamphlet “In Defense of Obscenity” (Roy Choudhuri 1966) exploits this futuristic vision of an

10 An earlier version of the manifesto mentioned some contemporary Bengali poets, later omitted in the final typescript: “Poetry from Achintya to Ananda and from Alokeraanjan to Indraneel, has been cryptic, short hand [...]” (Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015: 112).

11 The concept of technocracy was used by counter-culture theorist Theodor Roszak in his book on the topic (1968). Roszak argues that technocracy is the social form at the basis of industrial societies, which acts through “modernizing, up-dating, rationalizing” and “planning” to create the ideal man of modern industrial society (Roszak 1968: 5).

all-embracing language, mirror of a caste and class-less society, that goes beyond the concept of taboo and distinction between social strata.

I will indulge in Obscenity, for I will ruin & destroy all class-distinctions in Language.

If you are an academic fool and do not believe in what I say, drag a booby of Calcutta's blood-sucking bourgeois society up to Dhanbad and compel him to lie on the cleanest mattress of a mine-labourer. He'd find it Obscene, ribald, shocking & antisocial. Drag the same dandy up to Bombay or Paris and tell him to lie beside a Prince Shit or Aly Khan or any Mr. Big Money. He'd be glad & joyous up to the pelvis-end of his spine.

Therefore, such a utopic vision of a "total" and "free" language in the Hungryalist project, in line with other avant-garde groups in the world, went hand in hand with the political dream of a new undivided society. The first Manifesto paved the way for the awareness of the Hungry Generation as a real *āndolan* (movement) with a social and political agenda for humanity, beyond national and cultural boundaries. Moreover, the source of this revolutionary articulation of poetry was nothing other than one's own body and sensual experiencing in the material world, which the pamphlet rightly calls the "raw material of poetry". The Bengali movement further elaborated on the idea that poetry should rise from contradiction, madness, and violence and not from logic and rationality, as stated in the following extract: "The age of creating poetry by lighting up a cigarette and switching on a table lamp, by plunging the pen into the cerebral cortex is over. Today poetry is composed as spontaneously as an orgasm. For this reason, today the creation of poetry is possible only in a state of 'conscious overwhelming' during the apex of rape, hangover or drowning." (Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015: 118). Partaking in the rape, violence and madness that is life, language would function as the major tool of re-writing standard meanings "contrapuntally", to quote the Manifesto under focus, that is to strip words of their usual meanings and replete them with images and connotations that have the power to "ravish" rather than to consoling.

Opting for English in the first Manifesto on Poetry was more a practical solution than a political statement. Malay Roy Choudhury, the main signatory, clarified the choice of English because of the lack of Bengali types at the press in Patna, where the manifesto was first printed. Even if so, one of the consequences of this choice was that the document would be linguistically accessible to non-Bengali speakers in India and abroad. Therefore, printing and distributing the first manifesto in English became a political declaration of intent per se. As its ephemeral and fragile materiality signalled the need for new vehicles to disseminate poetry, and mirror the fractures and contradictions of modernity, its use of English reached


No. : 66

HUNGRY GENERATION

ক্ষুণ্ণকাত্তর সম্প্রদায়

সুবী পীঠী

Le Hungrialisme



বোজোছেন

নই গড়িবামার এটিম চৌধুরী জামোদার নদীর ধার চৌধুরী
 সূত্রের হুজুর নদীর রাঢ়েরী বোজুর মঙ্গল কৌতুক স্বাভাব্য
 মৈলমের মোর স্বরূপনার রাঢ়েরে গমগুণে বিস্তর ছাই বিদ্যোমর-
 মের হুবে জাগরী আলৌকিক ধরুণের স্ববিনয় বাক শরভাদর
 হুণের মর রাঢ়েরী শিরের হাও ও উৎসাহতীর দেবী ময়।

Religious Manifesto
of the
Hungry Generation

- God is shit.
- Religion is an omnivorous system of feud between man's inself and exself which from God ejaculates Himself into the ebullience of the ultimate insanity where man is I am who am.
- Religion is the straightjacket "I" teaching God to walk upside down.
- Religion is Murder, Rape, Suicide, Dope, Incest, Poison, Fucking, Delinquency, Addiction, Insomnia, Metamorphosis and I continue.
- Religion is the principle of controlling things and nothings by going along with them of mastery through adaptation. The highest form of man makes himself a vacuum so that all things are drawn to him, he accepts every thing until by including all things he becomes there master.
- Religion is a gangplank of negation of the inner nothingness of my "I".
- Religion is a huge cunt where from emerges once for all the raving sickness of suicide, leading to the divino-satanic self-sailing of my ME.
- Religion is law that proclaimeth: "Bitch is he who believes and lives not in his own blood and bone but in the readymade saliva of Someone's sermon-sense.
- Religion is I with I, I of I, I from I, I by I, I less I and I is I.

—By Malay Reichshdury

দেবী স্বাস্থ্য

বাসিনাস ক্রিয়—জ্ঞাপকর মাথুয় হীতোক ভালোমানো
 জানি মাথুয় থেকে বরার
 হীতোক ভালোনা করে রাহি।

আজ শরীরের অয়োজন ॥

কেউ কেউ শিখারে একমু
 কাহিনিক শিখিত
 কনপুষ্টি দান
 ভালোবাসে ॥

বন্দীত্ব গুহর

অস্তুর ভালোদেসেগি শরীরে উন্মার ভোমার মন
 জানো, কাস্তুর হিসা তাই ওই যে ছেলেরা ন্যাসো দিক্টিয়
 বরালার ৭ জন ১ জন হয়ে প্রতিযোগী নাওর বাগ্টি।

হুই কীকে ১গা গটিয়ে 'কানি ঠিক খুলে দেবো বোমারের
 গি'টি'— এইকথান-বনতেই দিক্টিয়ের পরোজায় কাৎ হয়ে বিকম
 হাপারগি। (কোৎসার সৈকতে স্বরমহিলারা নেবে এলো নিতালনা
 লপুণ্যে আবে উজার।)

এনি নাহুছ তারা সবালেও দিক্টিয়ে, এমদকি হুপুকের
 দারন বোদুয়ে একা করে হুস্তি চলে।

কে কার ফুরে গি'টি ?

হুচোবে উন্মার হুছ হোয়গ না পোলেও

— হালো, ডাকি : ...

Published by Tubiana Sen from Calcutta-32.

Figure 7. "Religious Manifesto of the Hungry Generation" by Malay Roy Choudhury in *Hungry Generation* No. 66. In Allen Ginsberg papers, M733, Box 74, Folder 16 (XIII Periodicals. The Hungry Generation). Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

out an international audience beyond West Bengal and India encouraging the association of the Hungry Generation with the global counterculture and avant-garde. After the sentence for obscenity in 1964, the Hungryalist writings in English via translation made their way into the little magazines of various avant-garde presses in Europe and America, such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti's *City Lights* and Barney Rosset's *Evergreen Review*, as a means to support the jailed poets. Moreover, this and other Hungryalist manifestoes¹² intentionally play with the verbose language and taste of the avant-garde in an attempt to stand out as voices of the Indian counterculture and participate in the transnational debate on censorship and freedom of speech. In short, opting for English was a beneficial strategy of cultural marketing, as much as it was a deliberate challenge to the intellectual Bengali middle-class and literary establishment.

Worthy of attention is also the "Religious Manifesto of the Hungry Generation", not only for its distinctive usage of an abusive and blasphemous language, as I will show later, but also for its original layout (fig. 7). Printed on *Hungry Generation No. 66*, a typical Hungry bulletin made out of a two-folded single sheet, the manifesto is printed at the centre of the page in English types, while two other sections appear on the sides in mixed Latin-Roman and Bengali script. As Anjali Nerlekar (2016) has shown for a similar case in the Marathi little magazine *Atta*, these samples deny the chronological order and predictable periodicity of most mainstream magazines, putting emphasis on the present moment and ephemerality of non-mainstream productions instead. Moreover, the coexistence of different languages and scripts on this bulletin is not new to the ecosystem of the Indian little magazine. Other small presses in India used to interchange printing types of different Indian scripts to exhibit their concern for multilingualism and their trans-regional literary connections. This bulletin in fact presents the poets of this Bengali movement in English, Hindi, Bengali, and French to underline the connection with other avant-garde literary cultures in the Western world.

1. God is Shit.
2. Religion is an omnivorous system of feud between man's inself and exself which from God ejaculates Himself into the ebullience of the ultimate insanity where man is *I am who I am*.
3. Religion is the straitjacket "I" teaching God to walk upside down.
4. Religion is Murder, Rape, Suicide, Dope, Incest, Poison, Fucking, Delinquency, Addiction, Insomnia, Metamorphosis and *I continue*.

12 A series of Hungryalist manifestoes have been translated in English and included in the appendix to this book (chapter 7).

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5. Religion is the principle of controlling things and nothings by going along with them, of mastery through adaptation. The highest form of man makes himself a vacuum so that all things are drawn to him, he accepts every thing until by including all things he becomes the master.
6. Religion is a gangplank of negation of the inner nothingness of my "I".
7. Religion is a huge cunt where from emerges once for all the raving sickness of suicide leading to the divino-satanic self-nailing of my ME.
8. Religion is law that proclaimeth: "Bitch is he who believes and lives not in his own blood and bone but in the readymade saliva of Someone's sermononsense.
9. Religion is I with I, I of I, I from I, I by I, I less I and I is I.

With the Hungry manifesto on religion, our focus shifts to the irony and brutality of Hungryalist language and content. In form, the blend of the obsolete forms of the English language (proclaimeth) with newly crafted puns (sermononsense) and actual swear words (bitch, cunt) treats religious authorities and prescriptions in a mocking and clearly parodic tone. The often-jocular English of the Hungryalists sets itself apart from the sophisticated English spoken by educated Bengalis, a register that is shunned and despised by the Hungryalists. Therefore, the language in this manifesto overtly targets the dogmatic and prescriptive tenor of sacred books and religious authorities in general, while it crowns iconoclasm as the banner of the Bengali movement. From the point of view of language, the words used in this manifesto use oxymora, or juxtapositions of words from opposite semantic fields, to create an effect of ironic inversion. This inversion is obtained through the use of swear words such as "cunt", "bitch", "shit" and by overlapping high and low registers of the English language especially in their association with words like "God" and "Religion". Iconoclastic movements were not uncommon in India in those decades, having seen the rise of political groups like the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra and the Maoists in West Bengal during the 1960s. It is not too far-fetched to believe that Hungryalism takes its cue from similar revolutionary movements, showcasing the disillusionment with parliamentary politics and the collapse of traditional caste and class identities. Hungryalism has exhibited similar iconoclastic practices and anti-establishment positions that are utterly visible on the level of form and content in this Hungry manifesto on religion.

Ephemera and Paratextual Material

According to *Oxford Reference*, ephemera are “things that exist or are used or enjoyed for only a short time”, “items of collectable memorabilia, typically written or printed ones, that were originally expected to have only short-term usefulness or popularity” (“ephemera” 2024). Literary studies, especially those focusing on the history of modernism, have in the last decade greatly benefitted from the discovery of a great number of paratextual material, mostly non-literary in purpose, which have played a leading role in shaping new literary spheres and cultures of modernity. With his definition of “paratextuality”, Gerard Genette (1997) changed the way we see a book: an object that is received and consumed by an audience in a specific historical time, framed by the totality of both textual and graphic elements surrounding it. Typical examples of paratexts are the preface, the prologue and epilogue in a book. Since studies on modernism shifted focus to unedited archives, previously hidden spaces of social life and sites of literary exchange have come to light. In the context of neo-avant-garde movements, archives made of letters, postcards, tickets, greeting cards, posters, as well as manifestoes, pamphlets and little magazines, witnessed the rebellion and revolution in the arts already proclaimed in the relatively larger space of the little magazine. Materially speaking, they look like small pieces of paper, carrying a graphic, a drawing, or a poem meant to be distributed to passers-by. In other words, these texts are ephemera, both literary and non-literary material that is transitory, or not meant to be preserved. Avant-garde groups have availed of these alternative practices to challenge the established world of art and literary institutions: they did that by using and disseminating records of trivial daily activities for literary purposes only to be consumed by sporadic readers. In the same way, the Hungryalist poets and writers were known for distributing poetry printed on single-sheet bulletins, coffee house menus, and wedding invitation cards, in a paratextual modality which speaks to their immediate reception in socio-literary spheres of the time.

Besides the fragmented materiality of this corpus, Hungryalist ephemera exhibited a taste for satire and ironic language, typical strategies of literary inversion and distortion in postmodern artworks. Upturning styles, roles, and registers is a tactic of subversion that pertains to satire, a mode intrinsic to Mikhail Bakhtin’s concepts of the “carnavalesque” and the “grotesque body” as tools that put in place a reversal of extant power structures (1984). These documents of Hungryalist literature enact both strategies through the displacement of literary media and the mixture of registers that is typical of popular culture (Stallybrass and White 1986). In similar ways, the following Hungryalist ephemera show that satiric inversion and ironic effect can also be obtained through the manipulation of both the literary medium and the linguistic register of poetry. The Bengali authors achieved meta-textual subversion with their recycled trivial media re-used for literary

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purpose, employing nonsense language and parodying the formality and conventionality of Bengali middle-class society.

Printed on a wedding card, the “reminder” (smārak lipi) written by Phalguni Ray, cult poet of the Hungry Generation, is an invitation to a public performance to promote the third issue of Subimal Basak’s magazine *Pratidvandvī* (Dutt 1986). These invitation cards, like other literary specimens of the same kind, were distributed outside universities and inside coffee houses or mailed to Calcutta’s leading people. To subvert the formal context of the invitation, Phalguni transformed the card into an “unpolite” (durbinīta) invitation to ladies and gentlemen. The parodic inversion here takes place in the use of a formal, old-fashioned language to advertise a “royal” (rājakīya) orgy, thus satirising occasions of high society as well as grand literary events.

Homage to the glorious Hungry Generation

A humble submission,

Next Monday, 18th Caitra 1374 (1st April 1968), for the occasion of the publication of the third collection of the Hungry magazine *Pratidvandvī* (The Rival), edited by Subimal Basak, writer of my generation, a royal orgy will be performed at 10pm in my Esplanade courtyard.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, all women with their partners will be [much] obliged to reach the place of the courtyard to accomplish the unexpected deed on the overmentioned night. Please excuse the shortage of invitation cards.

Yours,
Impolitely

Phalguni Ray

The formal opening (sabinay nibedan) appears in more orthodox invitations to social events and theatre performances. Rochona Majumdar has shown that Bengali wedding invitations developed some formal and aesthetic aspects over the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth. For example, she has observed that the invitations from the 1920s and 1930s, as compared to those produced during the 1880s, develop a “more confident” Bengali, in which “the language composition and content signal a coming of age of middle-class Bengalis as a social and cultural group whose cultural aesthetics had acquired their own stamp” (Majumdar 2009: 246). By contrast, Phalguni creates the same ironic inversion by concluding

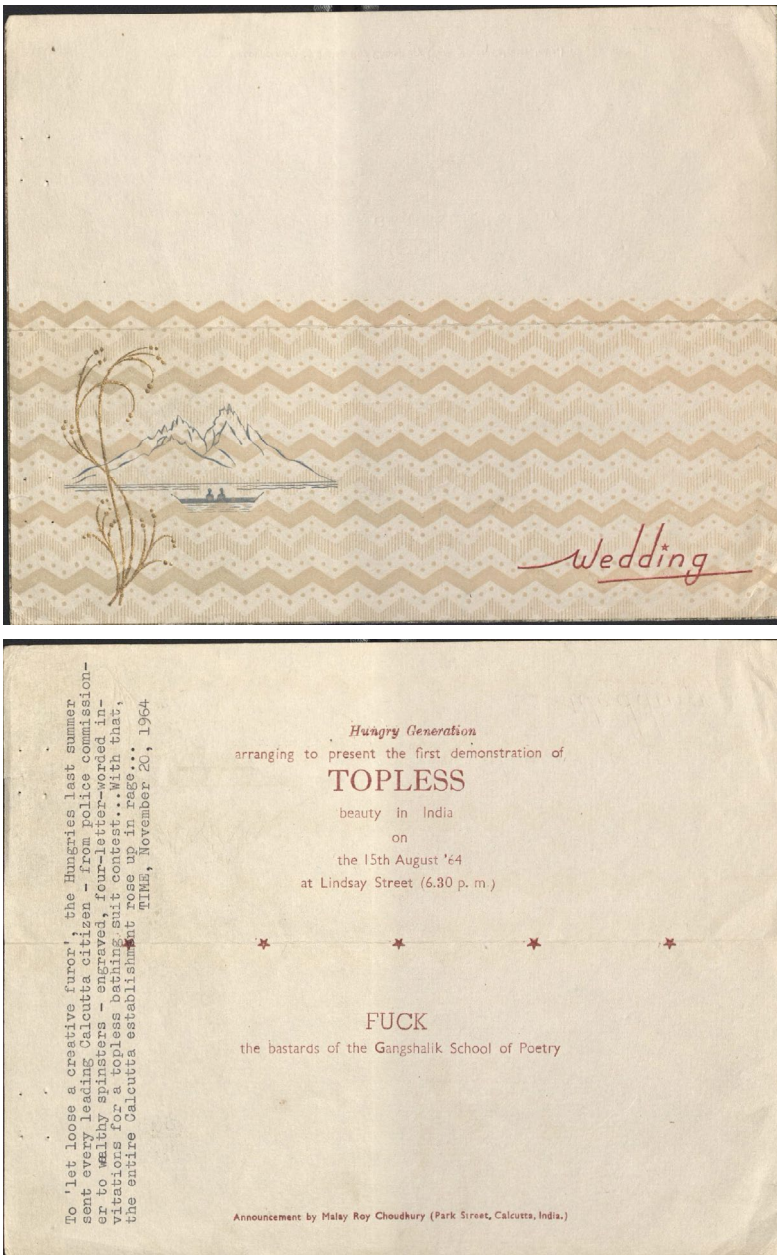


Figure 8. Front and back of the Hungry Generation wedding card announcing, “the first demonstration of TOPLESS beauty in India”. In Carl Weissner Archive, MS22, “Hungry Generation” 1966, Box 5, Folder 23. Courtesy of Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives, Northwestern University Libraries.

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the invitation with “yours, impolitely” (durbinā) instead of the typical Bengali bināta/subināta (polite) that usually ends a formal letter in Bengali. A list announces the names of those who are invited to perform at the public event, either by reading poems or for musical accompaniment. All of them are Bengali poets except for Federico Garcia Lorca, the Spanish poet assassinated by Franco’s nationalist forces, and Antonin Artaud, the revolutionary dramatist and theatre actor of the French avant-garde. The inclusion of their names in this Hungry invitation hints at the transcultural connection that the Hungryalist poets nurtured with radical icons of the global avant-garde, reconstituting a map of Bengali modern poetry with a clearly radical and anti-fascist thrust.

The next wedding card is emblematic of how Hungryalist aesthetics draws and recycles styles, vocabulary and materials from the Bengali bhadrakok culture, just like this printed wedding invitation card does (fig. 8). These revisited Hungry wedding cards purposely transgress Bengali etiquette and the formal register of its language, exposing the social event of marriage to demystification by creating humorous inversions and hyperbolic exaggerations of the formal register of Bengali language.

Instead of a formal invitation to a Bengali marriage, the wedding card advertised the “first demonstration of topless beauty in India”. An article published in *TIME* magazine in 1964 stated that these “engraved, four-letter worded invitations for a topless bathing suit contest” were printed in numbers and mailed to “every leading Calcutta citizen – from police commissioner to wealthy spinsters”. After the distribution of the infamous wedding card, “the entire Calcutta establishment rose up in rage” and “newspaper editorials proved conclusively that they were dangerous and dirty” (*TIME* 1964). It is not hard to imagine that the outrageous invitation to a topless bathing suit contest was received by the establishment as a provocation and an insult to common social ethics. The wedding card sought to make fun not only of the political but also of the Bengali literary establishment: “FUCK the bastards of the Gangashalik School of Poetry”. In his history of the Hungry Generation, Malay explains that even if there was no such thing as a Gangashalik school, the wedding card immediately spurred a reaction in literary mainstream milieu. With the word “gangashalik” (Beng. gāṅgaśālikh), meaning a mockingbird widespread across the Bengal deltaic region, the Hungry Generation targeted contemporary Bengali modern poets by and large because of their redundant usage of natural elements in their poetry (Rāycaudhurī 1994: 17).

Other cases in this paratextual corpus of irony and inversion make explicit use of a vocabulary drawn from Hindu cultural references, having the objective to debunk and make fun of the authority of sacred hymns and formulae typical of the Hindu religious and textual canon. The *Hungry Generation 100*, for instance, opens with a presentation of the pamphlet in a language reminiscent of a Sanskrit mantra: “Book of the Hungries! A collection of poetry by the motherless,

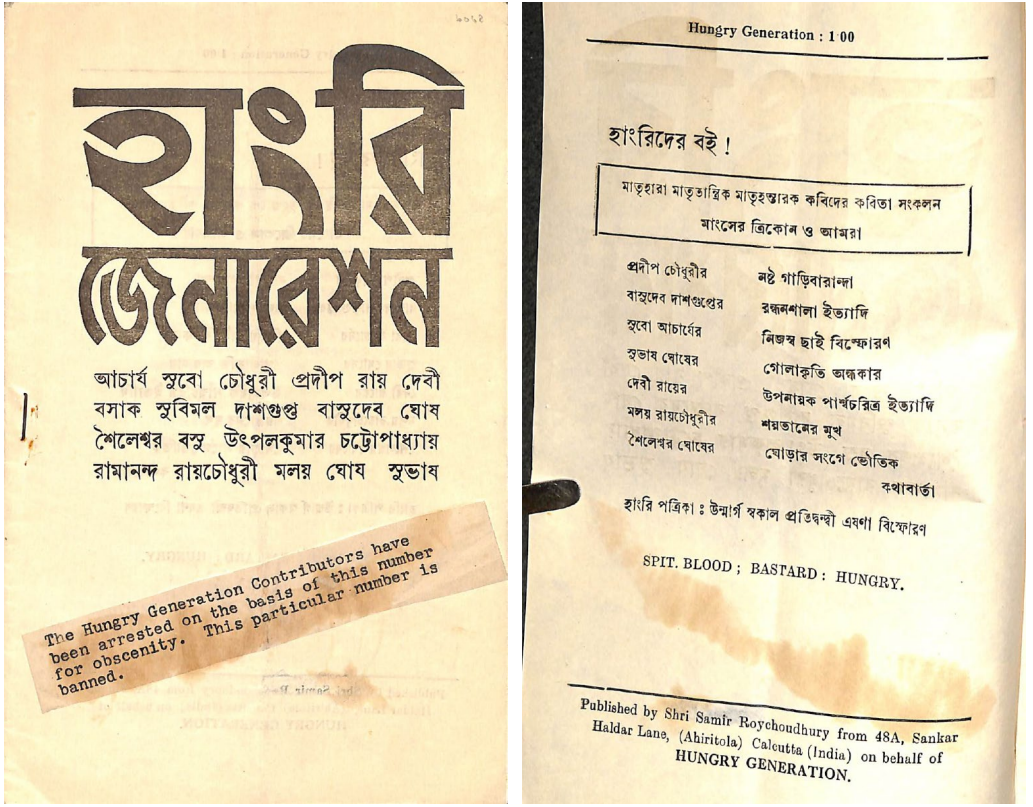


Figure 9. First page of *Hungry Generation 100* seized by the police, leading to their arrest in 1964 (left). The opening “mantra” is printed on the free endpaper of the leaflet (right). In Allen Ginsberg papers, M733, Box 74, Folder 16 (XIII Periodicals. The Hungry Generation). Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

matriarchal, matricidal poets – The Triangle of Flesh and Us” (fig. 9).¹³ The “triangle of flesh” (māṃser trikon), a playful symbolism for the vagina, creates a connection between the figure of the mother and the yoni, images that are subverted and ridiculed through hyperbolic adjectives. This twisted statement of the Hungry poet lends itself to a psychological reading of the Oedipus complex in its suggestion of the mother-child relationship, which is in fact a recurring image in Hungryalist poetry. Along with other common images of male organs and sexual female bodies, this typically brutal Hungryalist aesthetic also stems from the complex

13 Hāṃrider bai! Māṃhārā māṃṭāntrik māṃṭhantārak kabider kabitā saṃkalan Māṃser trikon o āmṭrā (*Hungry Generation 100*).

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relationship with their “abnormal” perception of bodies and sexuality, morally depraved and socially useless. To describe the Hungryalist poets as “motherless”, “matriarchal”, and “matricidal” (mātr̥hārā, mātr̥tāntrik, mātr̥hantārak) is perhaps to evoke the obscure language of Tantra or Shaktism and their goddess worship. However, the devotional inclination is inverted by stating that the poets are at the same time devoted to the mother and matricidal, i.e. of a mother who has never generated them (they are in fact mātr̥hārā, or motherless). This declaration of freedom from the parental authority of the mother, and by extension from the burden of the Indian bourgeois family, is charged with internal contradictions, as the use of the Bengali adjectives suggest. How can they declare, for example, to be both matriarchal and matricidal? While they make fun of the authority represented by sacred hymns, just as this Hungryalist mantra sounds, they also affirm their emancipation from social conventions and moral codes as suggested by the “killing” the image of the mother, suggesting a possible hint at the Freudian Oedipus complex which is not absent in other examples of Hungryalist writings.

One finds a similar structure in the “The Hungry Generation Condolence Meeting” (*Hāmṛī Jenereśaner śok'sabhā*, 1969), an invitation to a Hungryalist poetry reading for commemorating the great Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt. Here, the anonymous author, likely Alo Mitra, opens the little magazine issue by paying homage to the river Ganges (Om̃ gaṅgā), where the poets often gathered to recite poems and smoke pot. Oddly, Alo Mitra, Tridib’s wife and the only woman who participated in the movement, is here described as “Tridib Mitra’s unmarried wife according to Hindus and registration”.¹⁴

Om̃ Ganges

Arranged by Alo Mitra (Tridib Mitra’s unmarried wife
according to Hindus and registration):
HUNGRY GENERATION CONDOLENCE MEETING
25 baiśākh 1375 [1969] at 12 AM

On the grave of Michael Madhusudan Dutt

Every year on this day, the Hungries, mad with grief, beat their
heads on this grave for the premature death of the man.

This year’s special guests are:

Subhash Ghosh’s thorn-removing compass; Basudeb Dasgupta’s
short anecdotes; Subo Acharya’s blizzard; Malay Roy

14 Ālo mitra (Hindu o regestrimate Tridib mitrer abibāhitā strī) āyojitaḥ.

Choudhury's alarm chain; Phalguni Ray's terrific triangle;
Saileshvar Ghosh's male buffalo; Ajitkumar Bhoumik's king
of the dogs; Shankhapallab Aditya's belly; Pradip Chaudhuri's
scabies; Tapan Das's Muslim chicken; Debi Roy's terylene
fabric; Subimal Basak's magic spectacles.

The first lamentation will be done by: Tridib Mitra
Because this day saw the explosion of the fourth issue of his
magazine *Unmarga*.

Please take with you a phial of glycerin.

The Hungries meaningfully chose Michael Madhusudan Dutt's grave in Park Circus cemetery to stage their poetry reading. This poet, symbol of the Bengali renaissance, was in fact one of the icons that the Hungryalist poets acknowledged as their radical predecessor and transgressor of social and moral codes of the times. Besides being a renowned poet in both English and Bengali, Madhusudan is known for his controversial character in Bengali popular culture because of his conversion to Christianity, association to the radical Young Bengal group, abuse of alcohol, and for marrying an Anglo-Indian woman.

The use of the vocabulary of visionary and fantastic tools that accompany the performers in the occasion of poetry reading – i.e. blizzard, alarm chain, terrific triangle, Muslim chicken, and terylene fabric – reveals how the strategies of irony and parody are central tools of the Hungryalist subversive use of language. The inversion of the realm of the ordinary into the absurd and extraordinary vision of the poets and their “attributes” is enacted by literally visualising the performers as the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, each of them holding in their multiple hands a symbolic iconographical attribute.

Consumption and Modernisation in the Hungryalist Language

Not only form but also language was at the core of the Hungryalist revolutionary aesthetics. Besides developments in metric structures, already practiced in the Bengali modernism of the 1930s, Hungryalist poetry achieved fragmentation through the chaotic disposition of the Bengali colloquial language that was often replete with interjections, quotations, and rhetorical questions, echoing postmodern genres like the pastiche or the collage and languages reminiscent of the Joycean stream of consciousness. Another operation at the core of the Hungryalist

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aesthetic and linguistic renovation was the use of modern lexicon that mirrored the scientific, medical and technical transformations visibly happening in India in those days. The backbone of the Hungryalist project was to “rejuvenate” Bengali language and culture: and yet, what did they mean by transforming Bengali language? Or by writing with an “atom-bomb” language? This is a crucial point to understand how the Hungryalists’ language and poetry was shaped by the forces that were transforming Indian society both structurally and socioculturally in the decades after Partition. The poets’ goal was to distance themselves from the older generation by writing about subjects like sexuality, economic insecurity and existential frustration, with a language that was natural and artificial at the same time; natural, in that it must “incorporate everything at once, speak to all the senses in one” (*Hungry Generation XII*); artificial, because the brand-new language of Hungryalism altered the natural vocabulary of Bengali poetry, conceived as the only suitable idiom for writing poetry. Hybridisations, English loanwords, Bengali neologisms, colloquialisms, as well as the heavy Sanskritisation of the scientific terminology, were the bricks of the new Hungry grammar, aimed at disrupting forms and conveying new contents of language.¹⁵ The revolution that this Bengali avant-garde promoted was, to quote Allen Ginsberg, a “revolt of the personal” whose international goal was to write about oneself openly, without screens or barriers, thus transforming the personal into a political act (Ferlinghetti 1964: 118).

We know that modernism and the avant-garde at the turn of the twentieth century were influenced by the industrial and technological transformations brought about by modernity. Post-war literary and artistic movements in Europe and America often appropriated metaphors borrowed from industrial culture. Rebecca Brown observed that negotiations were going on during the 1950s in India with the ideas of industrial development, a project that became especially visible in architectural monuments, serving as powerful markers of modernity (Brown 2009: 122). Later, the growing availability of electronic devices in the households of Indian upper and middle-class families contributed to changing patterns of desire and consumption, increasingly addressed to the new commodities. The Bombay film, television and music industry had a deep impact on the creation of a national Indian identity that was grounded in the images, sounds and languages that spread through the new media communication. Although globalisation and practices of

15 A significant number of writers, novelists and literary critics in the Indian vernacular languages have stressed the extent to which these languages have been altered and hybridised by the presence of alternative discourses, especially that of English, although this feature was often resisted and deplored. For example, the Kannada-speaking critic and novelist Ananthamurthy found that contemporary Kannada texts appropriate from English and other sources of language more easily than Sanskrit (Ananthamurthy 1976).

mass consumption in India on a larger scale became widespread from the 1980s, there is evidence that the industries of entertainment and advertisement were already influencing the consumption habits of Indian families (Mazzarella 2004; Haynes 2010).¹⁶ These transformations were visible, for example, in the juxtaposition between the life of the village and that of the city, which was a recurring trope in the different vernacular literatures and movies of the Indian post-Partition (Harder 2016). The rise in the rhythms of life in urban spaces and the desire to consume were literally embodied in the vernacular poetic register of the 1960s, which appropriated the language of modernisation and commodification in a challenging and subversive way.

As a result, the register of Hungryalist language arose within the critique of consumerism and capitalism: language became itself an expression of that violence, voracity and desire for consumption – of both bodies and commodities – and it was recovered, recycled and incorporated as one of the most representative registers of the avant-garde. The anti-consumerist critique emerged already during the 1950s in the work of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, who found in Buddhism and eastern spirituality a way to counteract the “supermarket” lifestyle.¹⁷ The Italian intellectual Pier Paolo Pasolini, himself a harsh critic of consumerist civilisation, observed how, in postmodernity, the advertising slogan becomes one of the most representative and efficient modes of expressing the contradiction between the critique to consumerist society and its embodiment:

The language of the business company is, by definition, a purely communicative language: the “places” where it is produced are those where science is “applied”, that is places of pure pragmatism. Experts talk among themselves using a specialised jargon in a strictly communicative function. [...] Therefore, the fake expressivity of the slogan represents the apex of a new technical language which has replaced the humanistic language. It is the symbol of the linguistic life of the future, that is an inexpressive world, without particularisms and diversity of cultures, perfectly homologated and accultured. (My translation from Italian).

16 It must be noted that while the Nehruvian ethos emphasised development, it also postponed issues of distribution and consumption. Although the Nehruvian state encouraged economic austerity and frugality, thus seeing consumption as a “colonisation of the Indian mind” in Gandhian style, the focus on industrialisation and modernisation paved the way for promoting middle-class consumption (Rajagopal 2009: 13–4).

17 Allen Ginsberg’s poem “A Supermarket in California” (1956) portrays the alienation and homologation symbolised by “aseptic” places like the supermarket, juxtaposing this modern image of America with a quasi-mythical dimension of the ‘old’ America of Ginsberg’s spiritual masters.

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Pasolini’s observations on the commercial slogan (Pasolini 1975: 12) contain similar characteristics that are found in Hungryalist poetry: the introduction of a specialised jargon borrowed from the processes of mechanisation, modernisation and the technologisation of life. These words are predominantly English loanwords, often juxtaposed with a Bengali word, functioning as the metonymy of this idiom/vocabulary of modernisation.¹⁸ However, the anti-consumerist critic is sometimes missing in some of these Hungry poems. Let us see some examples.

A passage in Saileshvar Ghosh’s poem “From 6 to 7” expresses the uneasiness encountered in the context of new public spaces of consumption, such as the mall and the supermarket, that are experienced ambiguously as symbols of sexual attraction as well as loss of human interaction.

At 5pm the supermarket attracts me like the forbidden sex organ
no sound in the airconditioned bathroom
no human purchaser
no watercolours of childhood
one night a begum at the main door could not recognise me
and sends me to house no. 7 instead of no. 6!
(Ghoṣ 2011: 90)

Air conditioning technology was another major metaphor of the impact of technological progress on human behaviour. Together with images of television sets, urban neon and electric lights – even an “electric carpenter” (baidyutik chutār), as in Malay’s famously banned poem – air conditioning is not only the concrete image of urban modernity, but the quality of a “fridge civilisation” (phrij’sabhyatā), as Phalguni Ray put it, where society is literally ‘frozen’ in its social codes, respectability, and moral hypocrisy. By contrast, in the poem “Air-conditioned God” (Eṅār kaṅḍisāṅḍ debatā), Basudeb Dasgupta imagined addressing his prayers to an invisible entity who passively witnessed the transformations of an anonymous city in North India: pollution, automobiles, highways, skyscrapers, terrorism, fear of nuclear war, represent in this poem a dystopic, yet fully ongoing project of urban development in modern Indian cities. The figure of the poor “insane girl” at the end of this extract conjures up in one picture the contradictions of modernity through the emphasis on poverty and uneven wealth distribution.

Sky is crowded with vultures – air is polluted – the radar on top
of the twentieth floor of the tower – cyclone forecast – just now
the relief boat has been looted – where there’s no death the police

18 In sociolinguistics, the retention of words from another source-language, in this case English, which are left untranslated, is called “language variation”.

hawks – National Highway No 34 is washed away¹⁹ – no piece of land is available so that help could be dropped – an insane girl is beating a tinfoil and singing on the runway – missiles would be installed near the capital – fast feet, someone has gone to take a nap at the hotel – a bullet was found in someone’s pierced skull – the youngest of the rebels was 8 years old – our temporary humanity and eternal crying is drowning in soft mud up to waist – at the moment, inside the ring two bison are fighting for sexual supremacy – wastes of turbulent sounds – the pet piglet has pissed on the beautiful lady’s nylon – our mother came out with her dead child from the jute field – a few nylon petticoat might be the reason for fire – a crowd of vultures in the sky – every civilization has skeletons in her cupboard – the propeller of relief air planes were hit by the vultures – far away an insane girl is singing beating her tinfoil – she will die now
(Ghoṣ 2011: 197)

Here, words like *tāoṃyār* (Eng. tower), *reḍār* (radar), *rānoṃe* (runway), *kṣepaṇāstra* (missile), and *bimān prapelār* (airplane propeller) signal the unavoidable impact of technology and modernisation in the ordinary life of the Indian population. What is striking is that the vocabulary of modern technologies is deployed also to describe the sphere of sexuality and human emotions, transposing the regime of ‘feeling’ to the realm of the mechanical. Phalguni Ray’s sarcastic description of the male sexual organ “as the radar of telepathic communication”²⁰ is an instance of such transformations, showcasing the malleability of the Bengali lexicon when experimenting with new idioms of modernity.

A similar argument can explain the proliferation of medical-scientific terminologies and Bengali neologisms, likely borrowed from treatises of medical and sexual sciences, which were profusely available both in English and in Bengali in those days. Malay Roy Choudhury’s banned poem “Stark Electric Jesus” (*Pracaṇḍa baidyutik chutār*) offers in several passages the evidence of this process of “medicalisation” of the Bengali vocabulary of sexuality, either by including English loanwords or Sanskritised Bengali compounds. Examples of this medical vocabulary include English transliterated words describing a woman’s sexualised body, like *ṃuterās* (uterus), *lābiyā myājorā* (labia majora), and *kliṭoris*; and the Bengali scientific lexicon drawing on vernacular articulations

19 This is the highway that runs from Gangotri Dham in today’s Uttarakhand to Lakhnadon in Madhya Pradesh, passing through Uttar Pradesh.

20 *Bartamāne puruṣāṅgake ṭelipyāthik kamyunikeśāner rāḍār hisebeo dyākha hacche* (Mīśra 2015: 36).

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of the body, like *yoni*, *jarāyū*, *mūtrāśay*, *śukra*, *yonibartma*, *satīcchad*, *ātma-maithun*, *rajaḥsrāb*, and *śleṣmā*, which will be further examined in chapter 4. The use of a scientific Bengali jargon in Malay’s poem had a double purpose: while on the one hand it reveals the tendency to obscure more colloquial Bengali terms that were socially perceived as reproachable, on the other it also poked fun at the sterilised idiom much common in medical sciences to talk about sexuality (Cappello 2018).

Patterns of commodification are visible in Saileshvar Ghosh’s use of language in the poem “To Pranati on the Street” (*Pranātir janya rāstāy*, 1963–64), which overlaps the two domains of sexual and economic desire. In doing so, consumption is imagined as a practice which permeates a plethora of social and biological activities:

I am standing at this crossing because I will use Pranati
she liked it very much on the sea beach of Digha
she is not my woman, she will never be
yet I am running after her like a dog thinking that it was love. [...]

Now I want Pranati, as I want my own mother
Pranati, believe me, I want you.
I want to use you like Amul butter
I would even search for love from prostitutes
a certain predisposition is developing for all of them
I was ready to accept calling you a wife
I’m a half-man running
a half-man drunk
a half-man with a weapon
(Ghoṣ n.d.: 25–26)

Several points in this poem are worth highlighting. First, the Bengali verbal composition “*byabahār karā*”, literally “to use”, becomes symptomatic of the commodification of life, of which one aspect is the objectification of the bodies. In the verse “I want to use you like Amul butter”, referring to one of the most popular Indian brands of dairy products, Saileshvar is appropriating the idiom of advertising and the practice of food consumption to assimilate Pranati’s female body to cheese spread, a good that can be craved, spread on a toast, eaten and enjoyed. The female body is the target of the poet’s masculine desires. It is hard to spot any attempt at downplaying the abusive language of possession in this poem, or to subvert the poet’s unilateral masculine gaze that reduces Pranati to a sexual commodity, a “good” that can be consumed. However, Saileshvar’s appropriation of the vocabulary of advertising and commodification is perhaps an unconscious

move that underscores a criticism towards the process of India's modernisation under Nehru's banner of progress.

Similar linguistic patterns are introduced in Bengali in other poems as referents of the negotiations with modernisation and the introduction of new technologies. These processes of negotiation are evident in the recurrence of several words throughout Hungryalist poetry and manifestoes. The nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan inaugurated a period of great ambivalence towards science, technology and human intervention in nature. Fear for and awareness of the consequences of nuclear bombing are tropes that cut across the countercultural international community during the Cold War years. The Hungryalists assimilated this anti-war language too, to the point of phrasing the notion of an "atom-bomb" language that could revive and rejuvenate the static Bengali culture. Such references to nuclear weapons emerge in many passages of Hungry poetry, as shown in the following extract from "A Poem to the Editor" (1962) written by someone who signed himself as the "anti-hungry poet S.C.", who could seemingly be Shakti or Sandipan Chattopadhyay (*Hungry Generation 4*):

Stop Hungry movement boys
 Stop half in your examination halls
 answering question no. 7
 Stop writing libidinal apocalyptic
 love-poems
 Stop symbolism, stopstop surrealism
 Stop Stop Stop Stop, What? BOMB

Cockroaches on Indo-himalayan mal
 Oh stop writing love poems on love!
 Bomb Bomb Bomb

Girls, send postcards to the Jowans
 fucking – Bomb – Bomb
 redirect for a month your love-letters
 Toward NEFA & Ladakh Jowans
 don't send them to your past lovers, girls
 they are busy in boxing- shooting- Bomb
 they are no more coffee addicts
 so, hurry up girls, hurry up, it is time-
 Bomb Bomb

This is only one example of the influence that nuclear technology had on shaping the language of poetry, mirroring the anti-war rhetoric of those years. Other

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occurrences of the so-called atom-bomb language are found in Shakti Chattopadhyay's "Border proposal 1" (Sīmānta prastāb 1, 1962), which witnessed the geopolitical awareness of India's position during the Cold War years. The poem exhibits the poets' will to raise their voices and join the global anti-war movement against India's involvement in the conflicts with China (1962) and Pakistan (1965).

Stop all kinds of war
let us die of natural deaths
let us die, let us go in our familiar deaths
arrange the marriage between Kennedy and Khrushchev
don't let them beat their womb's bomb-boys
let their bomb-girls die in their womb
let their marriage anniversary be lethal year by year
without Krushchev and Kennedy will there ever be a mother?
Then stop violence, megaton war, explosion
otherwise the hungry will eat decomposed flesh as much as they
need
(Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015: 22–23)