

### 3 “A Band of Young Bengalis with Tigers in their Tanks” Modernism, Postmodernism and the Avant-garde

Two major features of the Hungryalist alternative canon of modernism are its radicalism and postmodernist thrust. Radical, because the Hungry Generation reinvented a new mythology for the avant-garde, drawing from a pantheon of radical personalities of modernity and modernism who stood out as the precursors of an avant-garde modality of political thought and action. Postmodern, because in the frame of a postmodernism promoting contamination and influence, rather than ideals of purity and authenticity, the Hungry Generation sought to locate its politics of aesthetic. The postmodern emerged as a mode of interrogating history at the end of modernity and modernism: it destroyed and then reinvented the past with irony and self-parodic nostalgia, with a high degree of undecidability of meaning and interrogation on the degree of representation of reality, as Linda Hutcheon argued in her book on the poetics of postmodernism (1988). To understand the relation between modernism and postmodernism, one should look at the latter in continuation with the former. Departure from modernism in arts and literature was the consequence of a crisis in the mode of representation emerged along with the spirit of capitalism. Taylor and Winquist provide a clear explanation of how postmodernism further carried on the project of break with the past already initiated with modernism, even though it partially reacted against its ideologies and historical orientations: “If modernism in art was the movement that tore down (or more delicately ‘deconstructed’) traditional forms of representation, it is evident that postmodernism has both intensified its estrangement from (and mockery of) representational truth, and participated in a now hysterical, now paranoid, now hypocritical, now sincere attempt to recover the ‘traditional values’ of truth in representation” (Taylor and Winquist 2001: 339). Modernism, expressing itself in various forms in the arts, literature and architecture of interwar Europe, sought to break with the past and search for new forms of expression implying new ways of looking at the world as “chaotic, fragmented and distorted” after the disillusionment wrought by the First World War (Childs 2000: 2). In seeking to emancipate itself from colonial discourse in Bengali culture and literature, the Hungry Generation resorted to the concept of the “end of the modern” (adhunāntik) to replace colonial codes and symbols and give voice to the peripheries of cultural and

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literary production. As already foreshadowed in the previous chapters, the movement attempted to deconstruct such codes by disseminating an aesthetic that valued irony and self-parody, playfulness and ambivalence, obscenity and hyper-realism. Therefore, the Hungry Generation became representative of a response to this crisis of representation in the traditional arts and literature world in postcolonial contexts. Indrajit Bhattacharya has shown that the main objective of the Hungry Generation was to “revolt against the existing domain of truth” by being “hungry for truth, the bitter truth, and for unravelling the realism however crude and rugged it was” (Bhattacharya n.d.: 2). By proclaiming a new perception of truth, the Hungryalists challenged both humanism and social realism as the dominant modes of representation in modern Bengali literature, as these had become obsolete in representing the ambivalent and fragmented reality of the Bengali middle-class youth. By contrast, what the Hungryalists sought to achieve was what Debi Roy and others named a “realer” realism (Ferlinghetti 1966: 165–66), a sort of existential hyper-realism, that unravelled through the violent process of sensorial knowledge.

It is realer. Realer because the man thinks of nothing but himself. To the Hungries, there is nothing except hunger for love, hunger for sympathy, hunger for a set of new healthy values, hunger for TRUTH. If there is still one hellish, truly accursed thing in our time, it is our artistic dallying with forms, instead of being like victims burnt at stake, signalling through the flames. So it had to be realer. So realer it has become in fact that an amazed public [...] has begun to devour this manna of Hungry newsprint like a spree at a delicatessen. It is the kind of writing that says something crucially, almost life-savingly, since we live in an Age of Suicide. It is intimate as a lovenote, a private erotic fantasy – it is actual communication from living soul to swinging living soul, and nuts to all outdated formal restrains and laughable writing conventions.

The only way out of murder and suicide, in the Hungryalists’ words, was to re-shape language in its potentiality, breaking stereotypes and overturning dominant modes of representations. Therefore, the “realer” figured as the only possible way of representation of life and “truth” which could counter Eurocentric colonial values and canons. With regard to India, Supriya Chaudhuri argued it offered striking evidence of the emergence of a new aesthetics in the first decades of the twentieth century that was especially “rooted in political and social circumstances, in the dispute over a ‘national’ style, and in the struggle to find an authentic modern identity” (Chaudhuri 2010: 943). It will become clear that also Hungryalism in many ways stemmed from the need to reject styles and modes of representation

that were still unbearably tied to the idioms and ideologies of modernism which were bourgeois, colonial and Eurocentric. Even the Bengali modernism of the 1930s reproduced similar hegemonies in that it became the standard for modern Bengali poetry and fiction. As other postmodern movements, Hungryalism sought to reject Eurocentric and colonial concepts of humanism by dismantling the lyricism and mannerism that marked Bengali modern poetry. We will now try to retrace some of the major strands in literature, poetry and philosophy that had the greatest impact on shaping the aesthetics of Hungryalism.

### Bengali Modernism and “Western Influence”

Modern Bengali writing is either trash or is a lump of academic bullshit; it is text-book writings, good for teaching of carrying on as a subsidiary business. We have abjured that line of in-action. Ours is action-writing action-thinking action-living. Ours is protest writing, fresh writing, fantastic crazy nutty grim honest liberating fertilized writing, words and thought that come untouched by manicured robot hand of Establishment, from the experience we have all shared but been too timid to come out and admit.  
(Debi Ray and Others, in *City Lights* 3, 1966)

Despite proclaiming to break away from contemporary Bengali writing, Hungryalism can be seen as a continuation of the literary tradition of Bengali modernism (ādhunikatābād) that they sought to reject. To move away from the all-pervading presence of Rabindranath Tagore was the self-proclaimed objective of the new writers of the 1930s group Kallol (Waves), as well as the more politically engaged circle of the Progressive Writers’ Movement in the first decades of the century. Although the Hungry Generation overtly rejected what Howard McCord labelled as the “genteel realism” of modern Bengali writing (Ferlinghetti 1966: 160), the movement drew inspiration from a series of canonical figures in the constellation of modernist sources. Seeing the poet and the artist as prophetic figures of ecstatic madness pushed the Hungry movement to search for countercultural icons of literary and social movements which sought to speak and act against the cultural status quo of their age: therefore, we will see many references to the French poètes maudits, philosophers of existentialism, late Romantic poets of Europe, the Young Bengal reformers, and contemporary avant-garde writers of the Indian scene. This attitude of openness to contamination in language and literature was of course not a new thing in Bengal but a distinct trait of its culture at least since colonial times.

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Representative of the receptiveness of Bengali language and literature is the poet, novelist and painter Rabindranath Tagore who, in his essay on “World literature” (Bisvasāhitya, 1907), encouraged people to “view universal humanity in universal literature by freeing ourselves from rustic uncatholicity” and to “recognise a totality in each particular author’s work, and that in this totality we shall perceive the interrelations among all human efforts at expression” (Tagore 2001: 150). Other literary critics like Buddhadeva Bose brought change to Bengali language and poetry through an extensive work of translation of western classics that embraced French Surrealism, Russian novelists and short story writers, English and American Modernism. Another icon of Bengali modernism was Jibanananda Das who followed the experiments of the 1930s to remain impressed in Bengali literary history for his creation of a colloquial vocabulary and syntax of Bengali poetry. After Jibanananda’s ill-famed story of loneliness and precarity, which tragically ended in his death by a train accident, it is no wonder that the Hungryalists made him a worshipped icon of their secular literary pantheon. Moreover, modernism in Bengali poetry was significantly influenced by the rediscovery of French, German, and American poetry which introduced symbolism and the ‘vers libre’ in place of traditional metres and focused on subjects like urban estrangement and bourgeois alienation in the focus of literature. In this sense, modern Bengali fiction and poetry was intrinsically imbued with an internationalism that has continuously characterised it in form and content since modern times.

However, since modernism initially emerged in metropolitan centres in Europe, in India it was mainly considered as a derivative discourse. In his study on the Indian avant-garde, Partha Mitter (2007) discussed the obsession with influence among art historians in relation to the Indian avant-garde. Departing from the approach of Western art history who saw the Indian avant-garde as a “Picasso manqué syndrome”, Mitter showed that the avant-garde opened up a new space for cosmopolitanism, even though it emanated from metropolitan centres like Paris (Mitter 2007: 9). In the context of postcolonial writings in the vernacular languages from India, Harish Trivedi adopted Harold Bloom’s concept of the “anxiety of influence” to point out that the anxiety of being influenced by western writings in the colonial period corresponded to the tendency among some postcolonial literary critics “to see postcolonial Indian writers as still being unduly influenced by the West” (Trivedi 2007: 129). A section of Indian literary criticism today exhibits such anxiety with regard to modern Indian writers: the Hindi literary scholar Jaidev, for example, targeted modern Hindi writers like Nirmal Verma, Krishna Baldev Vaid and Mridula Garg for threatening the integrity of Indian culture by creating a “pastiche” of Western models inspired by Western modernism and existentialism (Jaidev 1993).

In its negotiation with the past Bengali tradition, the case of Hungryalism has become a problematic one when seen under the lens of literary criticism. First,

Malay stated that the Hungryalist idea of identity and of Bengali culture was shaped by “cross-breeding and indigestion”, as well as by contamination with the “non-Bengali” (Bakken 1967).<sup>30</sup> Ajit Ray signalled that cultural hybridity was a central trait of Malay Roy Choudhury’s life and writings – who is here described as a “cultural bastard” (kāl’cārāl bāstārd) – because his childhood was spent among the mixed low-caste Hindu and Muslim neighbourhood in Patna (Mursid 2002: 46). When the Hungryalist trial for obscenity brought their work to the limelight, hardly any of the Bengali critics were willing to show any sort of appreciation towards these new trends of underground literature. An exception in the evaluation of the literature of this movement were the poets Shankha Ghosh and Alokerañjan Dasgupta (Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015; Ray 1968). Alokerañjan Dasgupta acknowledged that “even the self-proclaimed poets of the Hungry Generation, with an unfortunate fusion of anger and hunger, cannot shrink away from tradition”, which he identifies as “a strange mixture of Nihilism and Dadaism” (Ray 1968: 335). Both poets stood out in claiming that the Hungry Generation were part of “tradition” even though it proclaimed otherwise. A greater effort in evaluating Hungryalist poetry was made by the American editors and writers of the avant-garde circle, who emphasised the ebullience and boldness of their literary protest on a global scale (Ferlinghetti 1966; Bakken 1967; DeLoach and Weissner 1968). Aside from this scanty positive criticism, in West Bengal most critics, writers and fellow poets of the Hungry Generation were reluctant to acknowledge the literary quality and the socio-political impact of the movement. The movement was commonly targeted for its “illiteracy” and lack of any sense of tradition, as well as for its “juvenile ebullience”, to quote a statement by the Bengali critic Jyotirmoy Datta (Bakken 1967; Ghosh 2011b: 11). We will later see in more detail that a cause for the lack of a serious reception of Hungryalism in Bengali criticism was the anti-conformism and unconventionality of their literary praxis: the reproaching and mocking language, the jocular and juvenile trait, and the non-standard Bengali and English which made them merely a “bad copy” of the American avant-garde.

The concern with Western influence was a dominant factor in the reception of the Hungry Generation. For example, Sanchari Bhattacharya pointed out that the movement “had shaken away the yoke of dominance imposed upon Bengali literature by the stalwarts of established literary canons; stalwarts, who replicated Western philosophical thought in their writings and criticism” (Bhattacharya 2013: 146). However, she finally argued that the movement failed to create a counter-discourse against “colonial aesthetics” because the poets in the first place had been heavily inspired by Western literary and aesthetic movements (Bhattacharya 2013: 149). The ambivalence of attraction and rejection that characterised the Hungry

30 These words are from Malay’s essay “The Literary Situation in Calcutta” published in Dick Bakken’s magazine *Salted Feathers*.

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relationship with European and American models became a distinctive feature of the Bengali avant-garde. The poets announced the dissolution of colonial canons, normative taste and aesthetics that had informed Bengali literature: they rejected the 19<sup>th</sup> century concept of realism traditionally understood as the rational and progressive unfolding of thought in literature; they waged a war against cultural institutions and condemned the aesthetic trends that popularised the notion of “l’art pour l’art” – art for art’s sake. Yet, at the same time, they eagerly looked towards minor and marginal trends across the world and elevated a few personalities of world modernism to icons of an alternative and subversive approach to life and literature – i.e. Rimbaud, Apollinaire, Garcia Lorca, Jibanananda, Madhusudan, Ginsberg, Burroughs, Artaud, and Tzara – thus making a significant distinction between their understandings of “colonial” and “Western”. In a largely postmodernist fashion, the Hungryalist saw colonialism as a wider project of suppression of freedom that was still in place, enacted also by the Establishment and other groups in power across cultures and societies on a global scale, even inside India and West Bengal.

Therefore, even though the Hungryalists were in many ways still anchored to modernism – in their fascination for bohemianism and for the romantic ideals of poetry, culture and humanity – the movement significantly departed from modernism as traditionally understood because it wished to bring down, deconstruct and reinvent both language and reality. The dimension of disruption and fragmentation of canons, materials, and styles of writing was constitutive of Hungryalism and of its relationship with modern Bengali literary culture. In the same way, they carved out a space for their movement in the past literary tradition by merely name-dropping, sparsely quoting and deviating as they pleased simply to tear down what they labelled as the Establishment. But let us now turn to the ways in which the Hungry poets have re-used the rebel icons of modernism to assemble a literary pantheon of bohemian and anti-hero figures of the late nineteenth century. In this way, their goal was to unequivocally locate the Hungryalists in the same cohort of European vanguardism as figures such as Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Apollinaire, Garcia Lorca, Van Gogh, Oscar Wilde, and Modigliani.

## The French Décadence

References to modernist writers and movements that signalled a rupture from the traditional aesthetics and sensibility of modern Europe appear consistently throughout Hungryalist literature, not only through translations of their oeuvres but also through intertextual references to their works and biographies. Malay’s Bengali translations of the French poets Baudelaire and Rimbaud, for example,

illustrate this process of reference and integration into the Hungryalist fold of a transcultural modernism. Baudelaire often appears in Malay's poems along with other artists, painters and writers of that era to praise the enhancing powers of drugs and alcohol. The following extract from a Hungry leaflet (Regisseurs n.d.) shows how the use of a mystic and prophetic register, imbued with words praising the Greek god Dionysus to upheave the moral decline of man, is reminiscent of the romantic vision of the mad artist inspired by the mystical experience and connection with the universe of senses.

At once god [Dionysus] of the joy-giving vine and of mystical inspiration, he brought to his celebrants a spiritual intoxication. He entered into their being, they became gods in his name. Theirs was the Dionysian experience. He exacted neither adoration nor worship from them; rather he accorded them a share in his bivouac ecstasy, they celebrated, god-like, joyed in "doing", danced, marched, sang.

Dionysus has lived twenty-five hundred years. Today a world that had almost learned to scorn him turns back, with the old hunger of the soul, the old impulse toward divine living. For we later mortals, as we view about us the decay of moralistic religions, the confusion of conquest-mad half-dead civilizations and the spiritual bankruptcy of the so-called progressives (progotivadies), we seek again the roads of emotional-spiritual inundation, to ecstasy, to the becoming of God. [M]an can no longer slouch in the oozing matrix of his sleeping inamorata, he should become Dionysus himself.

One can note how this style, symbolically pointing to the interconnection between the realms of poetry and of the divine, was a central *tópos* of early as well as late Romantic poetry that sought to spiritually regenerate the human being. This vision is perhaps epitomised by William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790–93) and *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794), where he blended poems with printed illustrations, which are visionary examples of the investigation of the two contrary states of the human soul. The archetype of the Poet-Seer is most notably exposed by Arthur Rimbaud's *Les illuminations* (1886), which announced the mystic and oneiric character of the poetic word and the prophetic function of the poet, champion of the spiritual progress of humanity (Rimbaud 1871).

The Poet makes himself a seer by a long, gigantic and rational derangement of all the senses. All forms of love, suffering, and madness. He searches himself. He exhausts all poisons in himself

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and keeps only their quintessences. Unspeakable torture where he needs all his faith, all his super-human strength, where he becomes among all men the great patient, the great criminal, the one accursed - and the supreme Scholar! – Because he reaches the unknown!

The Hungryalists claimed to recover this language of prophecy in order to reconnect to a literary tradition that made poetry the link between the human and the divine. A similar assumption can be made on the prophetic and apocalyptic use of language in Hungryalism that restored the function of the “insane” poet and artist, unacknowledged by the establishment, as harbingers of a new humanity and world order. In the same style, Malay’s poem “Against the Freedom of the Artist” (Śilpīr svādhīnatār biruddhe) seems to evoke the prophetic function of the Romantic poet and artist. Conscious of the political and commercial power of cultural institutions, the poet once again targets the literary and artistic establishment, by provocatively professing himself against the “freedom of the Artist”. Freedom of expression being a much-discussed topic in India during the 1970s,<sup>31</sup> Malay rightly asserts that an artist can only be free to create if he is out of the governing regime of the establishment, which is here envisioned as a Foucauldian panopticon which governs, controls and regulates not only bodies but creative minds. There can be no such thing as a “free” artist precisely because it is the institution of art, that is the “establishment” in Malay’s words, that ultimately sanctions and legitimises a work of art.

Those who want freedom of art are insane  
I am against the freedom of the artist  
Only the silly slaves of the establishment are free because they  
are not poets they are clandestine liars and poor robots  
Only sick cultures need poets  
Poetry is prophecy because final destruction needs some warning  
Civilizations need human culture to be sane  
There is no need of poetry because it is nature  
So far sane governments have not appeared yet  
No poet can make any compromise because that’s what he is

The main argument in this poem is the rejection of the idea of Art and Artist as institutionalised entities, acknowledged and established by the groups in power.

31 A popular platform of discussion of the question of freedom of speech in the world of Indian academia, arts and literature was the magazine *Quest* (1954–1975), the Indian quarterly founded by the Congress for Cultural Freedom.



Malay's view, in line with the critique of the avant-garde, is that the artist can only truly be the free subject of his art when he is unacknowledged or is hampered by the Establishment. In the first decades after independence, national arts went through a process of canonisation and institutionalisation with the goal of building an Indian national literature that could represent the Nehruvian ideal of "unity in diversity", already imagined to contain the diversity of Indian society.<sup>32</sup> Opposed to the unifying view of the Indian nation, Malay overturns the question of the freedom of expression, so much at the heart of the global counterculture, proclaiming instead that the Artist can truly make the difference only when he is excluded from the sane, morally righteous "civilised" society. Only in this condition as outsider of the establishment and of "sane civilisations" (*sustha sabhyatā*), the poet and the artist can be free from the rules and standards imposed by cultural institutions. Playing on the dichotomy between sanity and insanity (*sustha – asustha*), the only true artist/poet is the one who is insane (*unmād*) and therefore free from the shackles of bourgeois society.

Egypt will be washed into the Nile  
Van Gogh mentioned the raising of the iron curtain in one of his  
letters  
Calcutta will be shattered into dust  
But Jibanananda Das at least will stay, in me and you  
I am against freedom of art  
A free writer cannot be in such a sick wicked order  
Poetry is sacrifice because it is made for men  
Here's why I say:  
Let there be  
shackles for the Poet  
dungeons exhaling venomous blue vapours for him  
electric chairs for him  
gallows, pyres for him black sweaty chambers loony bins for him  
because Franco and Salazar's grave will become graze grounds  
of the future  
I'll share the bed with Lorca and Pasternak  
I don't ask any guarantee for my freedom from anyone  
I'll write what I want  
(Dutt 1986: 3)

32 An example of such effort in nation-building could be observed in virtually all the vernacular literary scenes. Sukumar Sen's *Bāmlā sāhityer itihās* (1959), supported by the Sahitya Academy, offers an example of this institutionalisation and canonisation of Bengali literature.

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It is in the context of this poem that Malay revives 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century world icons of transgression, who defied current ideas of art and literature in different ways, like Van Gogh, Garcia Lorca, Pasternak and Jibanananda. In Malay’s catastrophic scenario of a future world, he takes his position along these proverbial outsiders of bourgeois societies to withstand the cultures of fascism and nationalism pervading cultural institutions, here embodied by the military rulers Franco and Salazar’s graves. Despite the dramatic slant, this poem does not divorce itself from the playful and mocking fashion of Hungryalism. For instance, in the verses “Poetry is meant to hurt the flesh / It’s not my wish to wound men because I’m against that kind of violence”, the juxtaposition between the violence of poetry, the overt endorsement of nonviolence and the wish of cruel torture made to the poet is ultimately a mode of inverting the modernist ideal of an Artist-centric world and proclaiming the inherent freedom of the poet.

### Hints of Romanticism and Existentialism

Hungryalism has similarly shown traces of a Romantic sensibility and an existentialist approach to the world. We will see how the Romantic tenor of their language is reminiscent of the early poets of European Romanticism as is their stress on the contemplative and spontaneous aspect of poetry writing, that which reveals the connection of the poet’s spirit with the outer world of nature. Romantic is also the Hungryalist vision of history, culture and society, initially shaped after Oswald Spengler’s anti-modernist critique of civilisation. On the other hand, the influence of existentialist philosophy can be observed in the movement’s disillusionment with the positive narrative of the Indian nation. In a mode resembling the post-modern form of collage, names like Oswald Spengler, Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Geoffrey Chaucer, John Keats and others have converged to shape the anti-modernist pantheon of Hungryalism.

In the American magazine *City Lights* 3, hunger is described as a condition of existential nudity, which produces a man’s all-encompassing receptivity (Ferlinghetti 1966: 166).

Hunger describes a state of existence from which all unessentials have been stripped, leaving it receptive to everything around it. Hunger is a state of waiting with pain. To be Hungry is to be at the bottom of your personality, looking up to be existential in the

Kierkegaard, rather than the Jean-Paul Sartre sense.<sup>33</sup> The Hungries can't afford the luxury of being Beats, ours isn't an affluent society. The single similarity that a Beat has with a Hungry is in their revolt of the personal, in the discovery of the individual feeling. The Hungry is more than an Angry Young Man. The non-conformity of the Hungries is irrevocable.

Notwithstanding this overtly existentialist description of hunger, we must note that Malay Roy Choudhury denied Romantic and existentialist influences on the Hungry Generation: "It is difficult for a person raised in Hindu (not religion) worldview to be existentialist. He won't be romantic either for the complex social upbringing". He then added that the reading of Sartre and Camus came along only later in his life.<sup>34</sup> His explanation regarding existential philosophy in Hungryalism serves to avoid the contradiction inherent in being at once a Hindu and an existentialist, or in other words, an atheist and a Marxist. Søren Kierkegaard, known as the father of existentialism, and his belief in God is marked here in opposition to Jean-Paul Sartre's atheism, one of the traits associating existential philosophy to pessimism and nihilism. We may note that while the Hungryalists were commonly seen as "nihilists and pessimists", as Howard McCord remarked, they were still perceived as retaining a "vision of what man ought to be, and should be" (Bakken 1967). Despite denying the influence of Romanticism and existentialism, we can still find traces of a simple form of literary existentialism in the movement's rejection of the Hindu middle-class moral codes and social rules. We have already seen how Hungryalism ridiculed the place of religion in the Religious Manifesto: "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*" (*Hungry Generation* 66). By contrast, the existentialist belief in the human potential of self-creation and reinvention is transposed in Hungryalism to the saving faculty of Poetry: "Poetry alone sustains hunger, for what else is there in life but poetry! Man, God, Democracy and Science have been defeated. Poetry has today become the only refuge" (Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015: 118). In other words, moving away from the classical categories of European modernity and history was the primary goal of Hungryalism, mainly voiced through its spokesperson Malay Roy Choudhury's, who turned to Oswald Spengler's concept of culture in order to assert a new vision of history in postmodern and postcolonial terms.

33 Interestingly, this sentence reproduced verbatim a quote from Beat novelist John Clellon Holmes' essay on "The Philosophy of the Beats" (1958): "To be beat is to be at the bottom of your personality looking up; to be existential in the Kierkegaard, rather than in the Jean-Paul Sartre sense" (Charters 2012).

34 Facebook mail communication, 19.01.2020.

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While writing his essay “The Philosophy of History” (Itihāser darṣan), the young Malay Roy Choudhury came across Oswald Spengler’s book *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*, 1918) which gave him the main idea of Hungryalism: to withstand “cultural putrefaction” the culture must “feed on an alien diet” (Basu 2011). Breaking with Hegelian history as a process governed by reason, Spengler saw history as a flowering of different cultural inclinations and cultures as biological organisms going through a process of evolution and decline. In Spengler’s view, civilisational decay (Ger. *Untergang*), identified with rationalism and the so-called cult of science, could be withstood only if the culture feeds on alien diet (Engles 2019).<sup>35</sup> Malay termed “hunger” the process of cultural starving and ensuing contamination only after he came across the line “in the sowre hungry tyime” from the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Boece*. Another option, as Sanchari Bhattacharya rightly noted, is that the name of the movement came right out of the poem “Ode to a Nightingale” by John Keats (1819): “Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird! No hungry generations tread thee down” (Bhattacharya 2013: 131). The reference to these icons of medieval and Romantic English poetry not only signals the variety of readings and literary traditions that influenced the initiator of the Hungryalist movement. It also shows the deep bond young Bengali writers had with the memory and legacy of English Romanticism on modern Bengali literature, a trend that was markedly pronounced in Tagore’s writings. We will see throughout the book that these clashes and contradictions are not an exception in the Hungryalist movement.

On the other hand, what fascinated Malay about Spengler was that his theory was amply criticised in the intellectual circles of that era for being unscientific and irrational. This aspect can be noticed in the Hungry issue of the magazine *Atlantic* (1986) reporting an essay on Spengler’s marginalisation from the scientific community of his age: “Scholars hacked at his blunders, scientists at his pseudo-scientific reasoning, philosophers at his conclusions, literary critics at his swollen, unlovely style. It was pointed out that the cyclical view of history was a ‘hoary commonplace’; that Spengler had borrowed his main ideas from his betters; that he was antirational, pompously prophetic, crude and melodramatic” (Dutt 1986: 56). Spengler was regarded as pessimistic and an anti-modern thinker, one of the major exponents of that “reactionary modernism” typical of the Weimar Republic era, which reconciled “romantic and irrationalist sentiment with enthusiasm for technical advance” (Herf 1985: 49). Annie Pfeifer argued that for Spengler

35 The literary critic Matei Calinescu and author of a book on postmodernism and avant-garde pointed out a parallel between Spengler’s concept of decline in Western culture and society and Arnold J. Toynbee’s “post-Modern age”, emphasising the irrationality, anarchy, and indeterminacy of the twentieth century in predominantly negative terms (Calinescu 1987: 136).

“decline” became a metaphysical theme and an argument against the existence of progress (Pfeifer n.d.). These observations give us a sense of Spengler’s anti-modernism and an insight into Malay Roy Choudhury’s endeavour to find new frames of interpretations for postcolonial history. Malay selectively took credit from Spengler in his theory of cultural decay, leaving out, for example, those ideas which became controversial for the Marxist Bengali milieu, because of Spengler’s amalgamation to the National Socialist ideology (Engles 2019). Therefore, as part of the Hungryalist project to decolonise the Bengali literary canon, Spengler’s anti-civilisational mode aptly summarised the movement’s refusal of Eurocentric and progress-oriented narratives of mankind.

### Mapping the Avant-garde in India

It is crucial to now understand the Hungry Generation’s connection with the avant-garde and its concept as it was developed in other locations of world modernism. Earlier studies on the avant-garde from Italy and Germany (Poggioli 1962; Bürger 1984) critically read it as an essentially European and early twentieth-century phenomenon, historically related to the experience of the First World war. A typical aspect of the avant-garde was the convergence of aesthetics and politics or the focus on the transformation of society and the ways of sensing the world through political action and artistic activity (Erjavec 2015: 256). In India too, studies on the avant-garde have mostly focused on the visual arts rather than on literary production, having retained aspects of radicalism, rupture and innovation vis-à-vis established institutions. Partha Mitter identified the beginning of the avant-garde in India with Paul Klee’s exhibition of Bauhaus in 1922 in Calcutta, tackling the problematic question of modernism in non-Western settings. In his words, non-Western modernism in the arts was seen as derivative and “enmeshed in a complex discourse of authority, hierarchy and power” (Mitter 2007: 7). Parul Mukherji continued looking at the avant-garde in India as a derivative concept and practice when he acknowledged the “distinct absence of an avant-garde in Indian modernism” (Mukherji 2016). Since then, scholars and artists have contributed to problematise the assumption that avant-garde in India only deserves to be analysed through the filter of Euro-American categories of modernity and modernism.

More recent trends within the study of modernism have claimed that it proliferated as a global form of critique to modernity in numerous centres of modernist practice, as Monika Juneja and Franziska Koch showed in the context of Asian art and aptly summarised with the term “multi-centred modernisms” (Juneja and Koch 2010). Such “topographic turn” in modernism and avant-garde studies aimed at valorising the circulation of aesthetics, the locations of its activities and

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its mode of organising radical cultural practices in a broad international setting (Bäckström and Benedikt 2014), reorienting the avant-garde towards transnationalism, performance and cultural hybridity (Harding and Rouse 2006). Letitia Zecchini (2014) and Anjali Nerlekar (2016), in their works on the bilingual Marathi poet Arun Kolatkar, challenged the idea that modernism in India is “only derivative, parasitic or belated” and replaced it with a more flexible syntax of modernism enriched by displacement and de-contextualisation. Geeta Kapur, the noted art critic and historian, first noticed that modernism “offered universality while imposing a Eurocentric (imperialistic) set of cultural criteria” (Kapur 2000: 276). In a more recent essay on the topic, she proposed to reinforce the “postcolonial with an avant-garde discourse”, giving purpose to the avant-garde as a “template for radical disruption” in India and other non-Western contexts (Kapur 2018). We should understand this as an attempt at revitalising the concept of avant-garde as instrumental to modes of resistance and political action in a broader geopolitical context that encompasses non-Western sites.

To track the avant-garde as a radical modality and a worlding practice, the Hungry Generation’s transnational and transregional connections and travelling trope of transgression are a case in point. We can observe such endeavours of delocalisation and worlding in the Bengali movement’s exchange and connection with other modernisms in India and abroad. Through interaction and exchange on various levels – personal, material and aesthetic – the Hungry Generation offers a model to reimagine the avant-garde as a network of thought and practice that crossed national and linguistic boundaries, while sharing the same vision of radical disruption, to recall Geeta Kapur’s words on the political potential of the avant-garde. Notwithstanding the parallels with the idea of a multcentred and multilingual Indian modernism, the case of the Hungry Generation suggests that some practices of radical aesthetics are distinctive of this Bengali movement. First of all, the Hungryalists were more intimately connected to Bengali than to English, essentially perceived still as the imperial language. If the Bombay group was pronouncedly bilingual – moving with equal ease between Marathi and English – the Hungryalists were fluent poets only in Bengali. Secondly, the urbanity of this Bengali avant-garde showed a distinctly regional and suburban character unlike the Bombay-based circle of poets. The Hungryalists were outsiders to Calcutta and to the Bengali middle-class culture because they were mainly brought up in poor suburban neighbourhoods of Bihar, Tripura, East Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. That is why we can detect a sense of marginal urbanity in their poetry and a cosmopolitanism grounded in the peripheries of literary production. Other voices shared this vision of break with mainstream canons and languages in literature in India: talking about sexuality, using an obscene and abusive language in poetry, speaking against the establishment, and ultimately showing the tensions with the national narrative of scientific advance, industrial and economic progress.

## An Avant-garde Network

Poets, who form the bulk of the avant-garden, seldom star; they live by any job, ranging from ragpicker to clerk, school-teacher to medical representative, washerman to pickpocket. They make news, often. They make precarious income and even no income and live outside the kingdom of the Business. All of them, except for a handful few, publish their books privately or on a subsidy basis, saving money out of their bread-bills. They are read less, less, and less by the common-reader and lesser by the writers and critics of the Sahitya Jagat.

Commenting on the contemporary literary situation in Calcutta (Bakken 1967), Malay distinguished between the “Sahitya Jagat”, or the institutional world of literature, and the “avant-garden”, clearly a pun on the word avant-garde. In his words, to be part of this avant-garden a poet is above all poor and living at the margins of society: he does not have the means to get published and recognised by literary institutions. Such socio-economic positioning was constitutive of the avant-garde poet and writer. It was from that condition of socio-economic marginality that these authors tackled questions of sexuality, economic hardship, class and caste in their writings, moving away from more established forms of social realism and closer to surrealism and existentialism in their way of depicting reality. According to Malay, authors like Kamalkumar Majumdar, Satinath Bhaduri, Samaresh Basu, and Santosh Kumar Ghosh were representative of the Bengali avant-garde. For example, Malay names Kamalkumar Majumdar’s *Antarjālī yātrā* (Underwater Journey, 1962), a novel which tackles questions about satī, caste and death in a Kulin Brahmin community of Bengal in a radically new way. Another name in Malay’s avant-garde pantheon is Satinath Bhaduri, the Bihar-born author of *Jāgarī* (The Vigil, 1946) and of the *Dhōrāi carit'mānas* (1949–1951), a Dalit version of Tulsi Das’ Rāmāyaṇa about Dhorai, a low caste from the Purnia district of Bihar. Samaresh Basu was known for being sentenced for obscenity after the publication of *Bibar* (The Hole, 1965), which Malay announced as “the ‘must’ obscene novel” and the novelist Santosh Kumar Ghosh as “the first existentialist novel written in Bengali” (Bakken 1967). Moving to personal connections with writers across South Asia, the Hungry Generation met the Nepali Ralpa movement, a group of young nihilists and existentialists who became Leftist poets, with whom they came in touch through the Benares-based Hungryalist painters Anil Karanjai and Karunanidhan Mukhopadhyay. Among these, they especially developed an interest for the woman writer Parijat, author of the novel *Śirīṣ'ko phul* (The Blue Mimosa, 1965), recipient of Nepali awards. The Hungryalists were equally conversant with poets and prose writers in Hindi. Agyeaya, the initiator of the New

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Poetry movement in Hindi (Nayī kavītā),<sup>36</sup> is known to have strenuously stood for the Hungryalists in the obscenity trial through several articles in his magazine *Din'mān*. With his bildungsroman *Śekhar: ek jīvanī* (1941, 1944), Agyeya paved the way for the modern rebellious hero who stood up against parental authority, religious belief, social conventions, and, as a member of a terrorist revolutionary group, against British rule. Although the literary criticism mainly identified modernism in Hindi with experimental poetry, it inscribed itself in the wider horizon of Indian modernity that included other authors in English, Marathi, Bengali, Maithili and other vernaculars, who played a key role in shaping a postmodern sensibility in poetry and prose in the Indian languages.<sup>37</sup>

From an aesthetic point of view, the Hungryalists seem to share a similar tone of provocation and aesthetics of transgression with Indian poetry in English, as shown, as an example, in the incipit of Malay's Bengali poem “Kāmar” (Bite, 1966) and in Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's English poem “Bharatmata – A prayer” (1966), both addressed to the independent Indian nation. The familiarity between the two poets is acknowledged by Arvind's dedication of his poem (‘dedicated to indira gandhi & malay roy choudhury’) to Malay.

O BHARATMATA  
O SOCIALIST MOTHER INDIA  
O BRIGHT STAR  
O LAND OF THE PEACOCK & THE LION  
LAND OF THE BRAHMAPUTRA & THE HIMALAYA  
OF THE BRAVE JAWAHAR  
OF THE MIGHTY GANDHI  
HOMAGE TO THEE

India  
My beloved country, ah my motherland  
You are, in the world's slum  
The lavatory

36 With the phrase Hindi modernism, literary criticism has mainly referred to the literary production in Hindi which started in the 1940s with the movements of Nayī kahānī and Nayī kavītā, representing new experimentations in Hindi poetry and prose. Agyeya's published anthology *Tār saptaḥ* (1943) became a real manifesto of the Nayī kavītā, and it gathered different poets including Nirmal Verma, Muktibodh and Yashpal. These Hindi poets were figures of transition, highly influenced by Marxism and generally less concerned about formalism in writing.

37 For a broader introduction to the main voices who contributed to defining modernity in Indian literature, see the edited volume by Castaing, Guilhamon, and Zecchini (2009).



Similarly, Malay's poem "Kāmaṛ" (The Bite) employs the structure of direct speech in his dialogue with India (bhārat'barṣa) about the time he spent in jail.

India, Sir, for how long will you go on like this  
seriously, I don't like it  
India, I ate the kichuri of your jail for a whole month, that is 30 days  
since September 1964 I have no job, do you know India  
do you have 20 rupees?  
(Rāy'caudhurī 2005: 181)

Anti-nationalism, preoccupation with language, and cosmopolitanism were central aspects shared by all these groups. Rajkamal Chaudhuri (1929–1967) was closely associated to the poets of the Hungry Generation, as we have already seen from their hippie encounters. Born in Bihar, he wrote in Hindi, Maithili, and Bengali until his premature death due to bad health and alcohol addiction in 1967. Rajkamal is known as one of the angry young men of India: he married twice, allegedly had relationships with different women, and imbibed his writings with the sexual, existential and intellectual conflicts of modern life in post-partition India. His popular novel *Mach'li māri huī* (1965) dealt with the homosexual relationship between two women in India. Besides the real encounters between Rajkamal and the Hungryalists, especially revolving around alcohol and drug-consumption in the hippie circles of Benares, Kathmandu and Chaibasa, one cannot ignore the multiple traits and features that this author and the Hungryalist movement have in common, as shown in the poem "Next Generation":

Mr. Jainendr has an entire list  
of items that are indispensable to the new generation:  
Lifebuoy soap, absorbent paper, nail cutter,  
Bengali girl who contains her childhood in the neighbourhood,  
Italian movies (especially 'la dolce vita'), Charminar cigarettes,  
Russian books and national bottles. Hence I wonder:  
In such a big world, I only avoid Bengali girls and Russian books.<sup>38</sup>

Introducing issues about sexuality and love in poetry and portraying the existential anguish in modern metropolitan life were main topics of his work, which found resonance in Hungryalist poetry. From his portraits of women, often lovers and prostitutes, some central arguments of his poetry have emerged: the complicated relationship with men, the emancipation from traditional norms and conventions of bourgeois society, even while realising the impossibility of release from such

38 My translation from Italian (Mingiardi n.d.: 208).

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normative social milieu (Mingiardi n.d.: 142–43). In his poetry collection *Kankāvatī 1964* (1964), Rajkamal significantly entitles the collection to Draupadi, another name for Kankavati, reusing an epic symbol of Indian womanhood precisely to expose the contradictions of modernity and modern relationships in India. Love and sex in his words are represented as a violent conflict, always stripped of any lyricism and idyllic images, in a way that reminds of Saileshvar Ghosh and Malay Roy Choudhury’s portraits of women. If, on the one hand, there is a clear will to overcome taboos and the moral norms of Indian society, there is also the awareness of the impossibility of leaving behind these social restrictions. Pessimism and cynicism against any form of institutional relationship, such as marriage, the incapacity to conform and to find an alternative to imposed values emerge as the central questions of this poet.

Notwithstanding the variety of literary forms, languages and backgrounds that these writers and movements had, one cannot deny that experimentation with language, anti-national critique and ambivalent conflict with modernity were a common ground to many of these modern writers. Looking at the phenomenon of the Indian avant-garde from a transcultural perspective has required an acknowledgement that cheap materiality, experimentation, contamination of styles and tropes, as well as personal connection can be key features of the avant-garde in India. I argue that the Hungryalists contributed to revitalising the concept of avant-garde through their “little” and fragmented literary practices that conflated into the reinvention of an avant-garde literary tradition that was Bengali, postmodern, and postcolonial. If I use postmodern and postcolonial to refer to the Hungry Generation, it is to highlight the ambivalence and paradox that emerges out of its vision of both life and poetry. Such ambivalence must be interpreted historically as well as existentially: the Hungryalists witnessed an historical rupture with colonialism, embodying the fragmented postcolonial identity, split between the quest for an alternative cultural “other” to look at and their changing identity – as Indian, Bengali, postmodern, and postcolonial individuals – in a world that sought to decolonise norms, canons, language and cultural institutions. Therefore, the same concept of “ambivalence” in our poets’ lives and literature is crucial to understand their poetry also as the outcome of that disorientation and loss of a clear-cut cultural horizon that came with the independence from British rule.

## Bengali Postmodernism or Adhunāntik

If there has been extensive criticism on modernism in South Asian literature and arts, the same cannot be said for postmodernism in South Asian literature.<sup>39</sup> The debate on the meanings of postmodern in Bengali literary scene goes back largely to the 1980s and to the magazine *Janapada* edited by Amitabh Gupta, himself a poet and a promoter of new writings in Bengali. This new perspective in Bengali poetry defined itself as *uttar-ādhunik* (lit. “post-modern”) and sought to move away from postmodernism as a Eurocentric concept and literary culture (Bertens and Fokkema 1997: 495). Amitabh Gupta and Anjan Sen were among the main voices of the *uttar-ādhunik* literary scene of West Bengal who stressed the need to resort to the use of mythology and local folklore in order to differentiate their work from a Western form of postmodernism. For example, in a paper delivered in Bhopal in 1989, Anjan Sen declares the shift from urbanity to rurality, and to mythological time and space in narrative by referring to premodern Bengali oral folklore: “There is a positive shift from urban modern standard language used in Bengali poetry... It is ‘Uttaradhunik’ poetry that created a space within which ancient, medieval and folk lyrical modes found new roles and functions. There are moving expressions of authentic experience”. Asunción López-Varela Azcárate, in her paper on Anjan Sen’s visual poetry, has shown how the Bengali poet differentiated the notion of “*uttar-ādhunikatā*” from Western postmodernism and its West Bengali version, that is the Hungryalist “*adhunāntik*”, which literally translates as “end of the modern”. While the Hungry Generation stressed deconstruction and meaninglessness, Anjan Sen emphasised the new alignment with history, cultural roots and tradition (López-Varela Azcárate 2018: 170). Therefore, the key to understand this new concept of postmodernity in Bengali literature lies in this passage from a West-looking language of urbanity to the “search for roots” announced by Anjan Sen. But if the Hungry Generation represents the West-oriented urban idiom of Bengali poetry, how does the Hungrylists’ written production link to the new perspective of Bengali postmodernity?

Samir and Malay were enthusiastic contributors to criticism on Bengali post-modern poetry. Their contribution to this subject encouraged to view the Hungry Generation as “the first literary movement in post-independence India” and one that “unleashed an entirely new phase for [other] movements” (Rāy’caudhurī

39 Even though there has been little discussion on postmodernism in India, for example, by Ashis Nandy (“Is India a Postmodern Culture?”, 2006) and Makarand Paranjape (“Post-modernism and India”, 2005), this question is not widely addressed in literary studies on India. By contrast, the analysis of the relationship existing between postmodern thought and postcolonial critique is amply documented, especially among scholars of postcolonial studies (Appiah 1991; Bhabha 1994; Loomba 1998).

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2012: 108). In other places too, Malay’s prose has been hailed as an example of Bengali postmodernism, because of his attempt to disrupt the centre and bring the periphery to the forefront of the process of writing (Mursid 2002: 152).<sup>40</sup> More notably, Malay’s “Discourse against Modernity” (Ādhunikatār biruddhe kathābārtā) reaffirmed his rejection of the concept of modernity, defined as “good, moral, aesthetic, progressive, advanced, desirable, and compassionate” and exclusive because it left out cultures and languages from the postcolonial world, like Bengali (Mursid 2002: 64). In his wish to overcome the hierarchy and hegemony of modernity, founded on the superiority of colonial Europe, he sought to break “the traditional codes and symbols of Europe” (Mursid 2002: 30).

In a diachronic survey of Bengali postcolonial literary movements, Malay’s brother Samir Raychaudhuri gave historical and philosophical coherence to the objectives of the Hungryalist movement by tracing the roots of later postmodern and postcolonial Bengali poetry in the cultural break from “colonial temporal conceptuality” (Rāy’caudhurī 2012: 110). According to Samir, the movement that operated this rupture for the first time in the history of modern Bengali literature was the Hungry Generation. Moreover, he noted that it was the first to abandon the “European time-bound conceptuality”, that is the notions of progress and linearity in history as adopted by Bengali intellectuals, who “extricated themselves from premodern spatial concepts” (Rāy’caudhurī 2012: 110). The key to this postcolonial and postmodern turn in Bengali poetry is, in Samir’s view, in the passage from temporality (kālikatā) to spatiality (sthānikatā), thus returning agency and relevance to the spatial and cultural context in which a literary culture has emerged.

The terms employed in Samir’s discussion of postmodernism in Bengali literature have shown the will to establish a link with postcolonial critique in Indian history and literature. The effect is one of overlap between discourses (the postcolonial and the postmodern) that clearly reveals Samir’s need to discuss the process of decolonisation of local languages, cultures and literatures through the valorisation of local history and folklore. He argues that the goal of the postcolonial phase of Bengali literature is to “deconstruct the colonial legacy” and aim at a “paradigm shift”, a concept he borrows from Thomas Kuhn’s philosophy of science (Rāy’caudhurī 2012: 111). The idea of a paradigm shift, not too dissimilar from Michel Foucault’s epistème as a change of historical meaning, is transferred through the Bengali “bāmk’badal” to stress the dramatic turn away from both colonial and postcolonial modes of thinking in the search for new horizons of Bengali language and literature.

40 Malay’s latest novels have often been described as postmodern. Many poets and writers associated with the avant-garde and postmodernism were translated by Malay, including Charles Baudelaire, Allen Ginsberg, Arthur Rimbaud, William Blake, Tristan Tzara, André Breton, Jean Cocteau, Blaise Cendrars, and Paul Celan (Private mail communication with Malay Roy Choudhury, 23.01.2020).

The focus of this postcolonial phase in Bengali literature is on movements rather than on single authors. The Hungry Generation is wholly representative of this paradigm shift in literary culture, being described as “the first truly postcolonial movement” (Rāy'caudhurī 2012: 110) that tried to absorb and reinvent previously colonised idioms. From the 1960s onwards, a proliferation of postcolonial movements of confessional poetry continued the project initiated by the Hungry Generation of deconstruction and decolonisation of forms and languages of Bengali poetry.<sup>41</sup> Experimentation was at the heart of the quest of these postmodern groups for new poetic forms and contents. Samir affirmed that only by longing for experimentation “man as a collective animal will survive” (Rāy'caudhurī 2012: 107). Regarding this consideration, the author makes a digression about the Neanderthal man to celebrate his “gestural language” – which he compares to the original vowel Om – as opposed to the modernist perspective of “l'art pour l'art” (Rāy'caudhurī 2012: 107). What Samir wants to argue against the intrinsic value of art typical of nineteenth-century European literature is that revolutionary artistic practice must necessarily serve the moral, aesthetic and political goals of humanity, as prefigured by the radical aesthetics of Hungryalism. In a further example of approaching these new eras on their own terms, Samir leaves unclear any differentiation between postcolonial and postmodern, conflating them into one, whilst delineating the ideological trajectory of postcolonial movements of poetry and prose in the Bengali language. This explains the recurrence of concepts like paradigm shift, post-partition, and “rejection of colonial modernity” to emphasise the rupture with a past that was colonial, scientific, and rationalistic, rather than explaining the movements from a literary perspective.

In another essay on postmodernism (“Post'maḍārn: adhunāntik”), Malay chiefly quotes from the literary studies scholar Ihab Hassan and his work on postmodernism,<sup>42</sup> which established the birth of this new perspective in literature as early as 1934 with the publication of Federico de Onis' *Antología de la poesia española y*

41 Samir (Rāy'caudhurī 2012: 122–141) identifies another eighteen literary groups that followed the Hungry Generation as postmodern movements: the Shruti movement (1965), Anti-classical prose (Śāstrabirodhi, 1966), Nihilist poetry, Poetry of Destruction (Dhvaṃsakālīn kabitā, 1967), Neem literature (Nīm sāhitya, 1970), Anti-democratic and anti-slavish literature (Gaṇatantra o cākar sāhitya birodhī, 1970), Today's poetry (Āj'kāl, 1970s), Incident-based prose movement (Ghaṭanāpradhān, 1970s-1974), Break the Mould (Chāmic bheṅge phyālo, 1973), Neolit movement (Samanva'y'dharmī, 1974), New Rules (Natun niyam, 1978), Harmonious prose movement (1979), Mathematical prose movement (Gāṇitik, 1980), Third Literature poetry and prose movement (1982), Postmodern poetry movement (Uttar ādhunik, 1985), and Malobhi Poetry movement (1988). The English translations of these movements are by Samir Raychaudhuri.

42 In his essay, Malay Roy Choudhury mainly draws from a chapter in Hassan's book of essays *The Postmodern Turn* (1987), where he addressed the history of the term postmodernism.

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*hispano-americana* (Anthology of Spanish and Latin American Poetry). Against dominant views that retrace all “-isms” to Euro-American origins, Malay reaffirms that postmodernism initially appeared in a “poor country”, that is in Latin America (Rāy'caudhurī 1997: 13). Another central question of postmodernism enunciated by Hassan concerns the terminology used to describe this new phenomenon in the cultural sphere, especially the absence of a clear consensus among scholars about the meaning of postmodern. As already noted, other scholars tended to assimilate postmodern to “neo-avant-garde”, or to identify the adjective “modern” with “avant-garde”, thus reducing the critical potential of the prefix post in “postmodern” simply to a sign of chronological posterity. Similar dynamics of disorder and intersection between words and concepts have persisted in the Bengali translation, as other terms like “bītādhunik, bhāṣābadal, aticetanā” (past-modern, language turn, super-consciousness) and “adhunikottar'bad”, another literal formulation of postmodernism, tried to stress that a turn of perspective is the central meaning denoted by the prefix post in postmodernism. Now, since the word *uttar-ādhunik* was already in use by a group of Marxist poets as well as by the school of postmodern Bengali poetry, Malay and Samir suggested using “adhunāntik”, literally translating as “end of the modern”.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, if modernity (*ādhunikatā*) is defined as “authority-based, dramatic and artistic” (*gurubādī, āṅgik'priya ār kauśalī*), then the end of modernity (*adhunāntikatā*) is “derivative, without a guru [anarchic], free from manifestoes, witty and incoherent” and defies all hierarchies and authorities (Rāy'caudhurī 1997: 39).

Therefore, against the critique of postmodern as a foreign (*bideśī*) and Eurocentric concept, Malay draws attention to a global version of postmodernism that speaks “against all centres”. Moreover, his criticism extends to Bengali people adopting foreign manners in daily life while considering concepts like ‘post-modernity’ Eurocentric, for the very reason that their intellectual world cannot exclude the “idea of the centre”, or Western theory (Rāy'caudhurī 1997: 84). Malay further explains that the concept of *adhunāntik* does not entail ownership, nor any authentic interpreter: “It [*adhunāntik*] is no movement. A man can be conservative or ‘modern’, but not ‘postmodern’, because the individual does not exist as a single entity that is transparent, without problems, limited, and well-defined. Postmodernity can be compared to the universe that we inhabit” (Rāy'caudhurī 1997: 84).

43 In works on postmodern Bengali poetry (Jānā 2001), more common Bengali terms to define the postmodern are ‘*post'maḍārn*’ and ‘*uttarādhunik*’, a more correct literal translation of the English compound word. *Adhunāntik* was originally coined by the Bengali linguist Prabal Dasgupta as a substitute for the English postmodern and for the Bengali *uttar-ādhunik*, and it was used more specifically to refer to poets and writers associated with the movement of postmodern Bengali poetry as well as to suggest the transition to an Indian version of postmodernism.

Concluding his essay, Malay states that the term postmodern cannot be criticised for its Eurocentrism because it attempted to “speak against any centre” moving beyond all kinds of essentialisms. Although the two terms semantically overlap, *adhunāntik* marks a meaningful departure from *uttar-ādhunik*. As we have noted, while the latter is informed by a search for the precolonial roots of Bengali cultural and literary tradition and the return to mythologies and local folklore, *adhunāntik* does not turn away from Western influences in literature per se but seeks to transcend the narrative of European modernity founded on the values of progress, morality, and rationality. The implicit project of *adhunāntik* and of Hungryalism – being one of its main manifestations – is of great breadth in that it merges the literary objectives of postmodernism with the aspirations to aesthetic and political assertions proclaimed by postcolonial critique, without resorting to ideas of purity and authenticity in Bengali language and literary tradition.

