

DANIELA CAPPELLO



TRANSGRESSION IN THE BENGALI AVANT-GARDE

THE POETRY OF THE HUNGRY GENERATION


HASP
HEIDELBERG ASIAN
STUDIES PUBLISHING


Transgression in the Bengali Avant-garde

Transgression in the Bengali Avant-garde

The Poetry of the
Hungry Generation

Daniela Cappello



Daniela Cappello  <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7025-2199> is a post-doctoral researcher based at L'Orientale University of Naples. Her research areas are Bengali language and literature, modern print cultures and cultural history of the Bengali-speaking region. She holds a PhD in Modern South Asian Languages and Literatures from Heidelberg University (2021).

This book is a revised version of the thesis *Transgression, Sexuality and Masculinity: The Poetry of the Hungry Generation*, which was defended as a dissertation at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Heidelberg on 19.02.2021.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <https://dnb.dnb.de>.



This book is published under the Creative Commons Attribution License CC BY-SA 4.0. The cover is subject to the Creative Commons License CC BY-ND 4.0.



Published by Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing (HASP), 2024

Heidelberg University / Heidelberg University Library
Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing (HASP),
Grabengasse 1, 69117 Heidelberg, Germany
<https://hasp.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>

The electronic open access version of this work is permanently available on the website of Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing:
<https://hasp.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>
urn: urn:nbn:de:bsz:16-hasp-1320-0
doi: <https://doi.org/10.11588/hasp.1320>

Text © 2024, Daniela Cappello

Cover image: Little magazines stored at the Little Magazine Library and Research Centre, Tamer Lane 18/M, Kolkata. Photo by D. Cappello.

ISBN 978-3-948791-90-2 (Hardcover)
ISBN 978-3-948791-89-6 (PDF)

Contents

List of Figures	ix
Notes on Translation and Transliteration	xi
Acknowledgements	xiii
Introduction	1
A History of Hungryalism?	1
The Global and the Bengali Sixties	4
Fragmented Histories, Fragmented Sources	9
Defining Hungryalism: Movement or Generation?	11
Myths of Foundation	13
The Trial on Charges of Obscenity	17
Obscenity, Sexuality and Masculinity	24
The Male Gaze and Hyper-Masculinity as Filters of Interpretation	27
A Transgressive Approach to the Sources	30
State of the Art	35
Overview of the Content	37
1 “Poetry is No More a Civilizing Manoeuvre”: Language and Materiality	39
The Little Magazine	41
The Manifesto	45
Ephemera and Paratextual Material	53
Consumption and Modernisation in the Hungryalist Language	59
2 “I’ll Kick All the Literary Trash in the Ass”: Hunger and the Aesthetics of Transgression	67
Hunger	67
Food and Eating Metaphors	70
Art as Vomit and Indigestion	72
Rice and Empty Bellies	73
Alcohol	76
The Myth of Absinthe	77
The New āḍḍā at Khalasitala	79
Psychedelic Drugs and Ganja	81

Contents

3 “A Band of Young Bengalis with Tigers in their Tanks”: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Avant-garde	85
Bengali Modernism and “Western Influence”	87
The French <i>Décadence</i>	90
Hints of Romanticism and Existentialism	94
Mapping the Avant-garde in India	97
An Avant-garde Network	99
Bengali Postmodernism or <i>Adhunāntik</i>	103
4 “I Want to Use You Like Amul Butter”: Hyper-masculinity and the Objectification of Bodies	109
Aesthetics of Rape and Consumption	112
A Clinical Gaze on Shubha’s Body	117
Masturbation as a Trope of the Avant-garde	120
Masturbation in “Stark Electric Jesus”	122
5 “I Won’t Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis”: Anxious Masculinity in Phalguni Ray’s <i>Television of a Rotten Soul</i>	125
Phalguni’s Poetic World	125
Tropes and Language in <i>Television of a Rotten Soul</i>	130
<i>Television of a Rotten Soul (Naṣṭa ātmār ṭelibhisan)</i>	135
<i>Indifferent Charminar (Nirbikār cārminār)</i>	147
<i>Black Divinity (Kālo dibyatā)</i> and <i>Artificial Snake (Kṛtrim sāp)</i>	153
Film Scripts: Family Planning, Modernisation and Body Commodification	156
The Womb and the Foetus: Subverting Hindu Symbolism	157
The Human Body on Television Sets	160
Decolonising Language: The Spectacles of Bengali Identity	164
Breaking Down Language	167
Phalguni Ray, a Postcolonial Poet?	171
6 “Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs”: Avant-Garde as a Worlding Practice	173
In Allen’s Eyes: The Hungry-Beat Connection	173
Hippies and Beats in India	174
Ginsberg’s <i>Indian Journals</i> : Appropriation and Distortion	177
Re-writing Kali the American way	179
“Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs”: Mimicking the Beats and the U.S.	183
Resisting the Beats’ Influence	188
Use of English in Hungryalist Literature	190

Contents

Translating Hungryalism: the "Hungry!" Special Issues of <i>Salted Feathers</i> and <i>Intrepid</i> Magazines	194
Practices of Translation: Reluctance and Adaptation	196
Constructing the English Canon of Hungryalism	200
Concluding Remarks	205
7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation	213
Manifestoes	213
Hungryalist Poetry	223
Bibliography	285
Index	305

List of Figures

- Fig. 1. *Decision by the Presidency Magistrate, Bankshal Court, Calcutta, concerning Malay Roy Choudhury's poem "Prachanda Baidyutik Chutar"*. 19
- Fig. 2. *In Defense of Obscenity, Malay Roy Choudhury* (pamphlet sent by Malay Roy Choudhury to Allen Ginsberg in 1966). 21
- Fig. 3. *Malay Roy Choudhury Defense Fund*. 23
- Fig. 4. Front cover of *Hungry Generation 99* edited by Malay Roy Choudhury, showing a photo collage of the Hungryalist poets. 42
- Fig. 5. "Coffee House Menu" and "The Object of Hungryalism" in *The Hungry Generation 10*. 44
- Fig. 6. "Manifesto on Hungryalistic Poetry" in *Hungry Generation XII*. 46
- Fig. 7. "Religious Manifesto of the Hungry Generation" by Malay Roy Choudhury in *Hungry Generation No. 66*. 50
- Fig. 8. Front and back of the Hungry Generation wedding card announcing, "the first demonstration of TOPLESS beauty in India". 55
- Fig. 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). 57
- Fig. 10. Phalguni Ray's residence and family mansion (Rāy'lbāri) in Ratanbabu Road, Baranagar. 127

Notes on Translation and Transliteration

All the poems and other Hungryalist texts are my own translation from Bengali, unless otherwise stated. Some texts were originally composed in English and have been preserved in this book as they were published, including spelling mistakes and typos. Poems and manifestoes are mainly drawn from anthologies of Hungryalist writings (Ghoṣ 2011; Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015; Sen 2015). Other texts like ephemera and extracts from Hungryalist bulletins and pamphlets are based on unedited primary sources which are separately listed in the bibliography. The translation of Phalguni Ray's poems is based on a collection of his writings published in the magazine *Candragrahaṇ* and edited by Baidyanath Mishra (Miśra 2015). To my knowledge, Phalguni's poetry has been critically addressed here for the first time. An English translation of his *Television of a Rotten Soul* was published by Antivirus Productions, an independent publisher based in Liverpool (Ratul 2015).

In translation, I have given priority to accuracy and faithfulness to the Bengali text. However, the general tendency to make the translation pleasant and readable, especially to non-native English speakers, has prevailed over technical and literal accuracy. Puns and twists of language, typical of the Hungryalist spirit, encouraged me to play with words in translation too. These cases have been documented in the footnotes. I have tried to transpose the Bengali interjections (e.g. ki āścarya; camat·kār camat·kār; hāy hāy; hāyere; he mohan, and hi hi hi hi hi) and, in some passages, the lack of punctuation which are a distinctive mark of Phalguni Ray and other Hungryalist poets as well. For this reason, I have retained the original structure of the poems without breaking down the lines into proper stanzas to reflect the outlook of the free verse and the style of the single author. In other cases, I have provided a more visibly fluid and readable solution.

Different terminologies to describe the Hungry Generation are used heterogeneously in the sources. Since the adjective “Hungryalist” seemed to be of more common usage, I have used it especially in its link to “Hungryalism”, conceived as the literary movement and philosophical thought of the Hungry Generation. Alternatively to Hungryalist, “Hungry” is sometimes used with a broader application underscoring the diversity of anti-establishment literary production in India.

Notes on Translation and Transliteration

All the words from Indian languages are transliterated except for names of authors, places and deities of common usage (Malay Roy Choudhury; Kali; Khalasitala; Calcutta). Although the Bengali names of the authors are spelled differently across the sources, in the book I have used the common spelling from Indian languages (e.g. Raychaudhuri, Ray, Chaudhuri, except for Malay's title which is officially spelled in English as 'Roy Choudhury'). Cases of printing mistakes and less usual spellings are common in the sources, especially in transcribed words from English (*telibhisan* instead of *ṭelibhiśan* or *phreś* instead of *ph'reś*) and other words (like *cārminār* instead of *cār'minār* and *caśma* instead of *caś'ma*). The 'incorrect' spelling has been retained in the transliteration of Bengali. Words from Indian languages that have become loan words of the English language are not transliterated (*sadhu*; *guru*; *pundit*; *ghat* and *bhadralok*). Only in the translation of poems, italics have been used to mark my choice to retain the Bengali word (e.g. *kichuri*, *paan shop*, *lungi* and *shal*) for want of a better translation. Italicisation has also been used to mark the poet's use of an English transliterated word (e.g. *caricature*, *machine gun*, *fresh information*, *frame*, *uterus*, and *clitoris*) in the Bengali original.

The system of transliteration of New Indo-Aryan by Rahul-Peter Das is used for the rendering of Bengali words, with slight modifications: as the latter part of conjunct consonants, the Bengali *b* in *tatsama* words is rendered by *v* (i.e. *dvandvī*, but *bideś* instead of *videś*). The diacritic sign used to transcribe the nasalisation of vowels (*candrabindu*) as in the word গাঁজা is *ṁ* (*gāṁjā*), and the sign used to transcribe the Bengali consonant *ṅ* is *ṁ* as in বাংলা (*bāṁlā*). The cases where the word is spelled with the equivalent consonant *ṅ* are transcribed as *ṅ* (as in লিঙ্গ = *liṅga*). Except in the case of proper names, capital letters in words transcribed from Bengali are only used at the beginning of sentences.

Acknowledgements

This book is the outcome of my doctoral thesis, on which I embarked in 2015 when I joined the Graduate Programme for Transcultural Studies and became a doctoral student of the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context” at Heidelberg University. Since then, the lively atmosphere of interaction and exchange with colleagues, friends and professors from diverse disciplinary backgrounds has been a source of intellectual growth over the years. While the Cluster at Karl Jasper Centre in Heidelberg granted a three-year doctoral scholarship, a fourth year of research was financed by the DAAD completion grant and the six-month Erasmus+ doctoral exchange that I carried out at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. Thanks to this financial support, from 2015 to 2019 I could organise multiple fieldwork and archival research in Calcutta, Chicago, Madison, Delhi and Mumbai where I worked in archives and libraries, met and interviewed Bengali poets at their homes in India. Various libraries in the US granted access to their special collections and archives both physically and digitally, enriching my contribution in many ways. For this, I am thankful to the staff of Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives in Evanston, Chicago (Northwestern University of Illinois), the Memorial Library’s Little Magazine Special Collection in Madison, the Manuscript, Archives and Special Collections (MASC) at Washington State University Libraries and the Department of Special Collections of Stanford University Libraries. In Kolkata, the immense treasure of alternative Bengali and Indian literature that is the Little Magazine Library and Research Centre has been the main source of my research on the Hungry Generation. The late poet and critic Shankha Ghosh kindly granted me access to his private papers on the Hungry Generation and Kṣudharta movement.

This research could not have been possible without the friendship and inspiration of many people in India and Bengal. Over the years and during my time in Calcutta, Delhi and Mumbai, I benefitted from their generosity and hospitality and learnt from their outstanding literary knowledge and intellectual spirit. I am especially grateful to Malay Roy Choudhury and his wife Shalila, and his brother Samir and wife Bela who welcomed me every time at their homes in Mumbai and Calcutta ready to share their past lives and be open books to a young and

Acknowledgements

inexperienced doctoral student. To the poet and translator of Charles Bukowski and many other ‘transgressive’ poets Subhankar Das and his friends Ujjal, Rajarshi and Santanu for the best talks on life and poetry. To Baidyanath Mishra, editor of the little magazine *Candragrahan* who first introduced me to Samir and his younger brother Malay. To Sandip Dutta, owner and caretaker of the Little Magazine Library in Tamer Lane. To the Hungryalist poets Debi Roy and Pradip Chaudhuri, for their time and patience. To Brinda Bose, professor at the Centre for English Studies at JNU, and her amazing classes on Charles Baudelaire, precursor of the avant-garde. To Shakti Chattopadhyay’s daughter Titi Ray and to the never forgotten Rajasri Mukhopadhyay. Last but not least, to the Bengali poets Alokeranjan Dasgupta and Shankha Ghosh. We have lost many people and great Bengali poets along the way. This book is also a child of their creativity.

I would like to thank my doctoral supervisor Prof. Dr. Hans Harder for his continuous presence and support throughout my doctoral and research life. His academic work, passion and creativity are a constant source of inspiration for my work. I am also thankful to Prof. Dr. Christiane Brosius for accepting to supervise my dissertation. To Prof. Philippe Benoit I owe a lot for his training and support, and for pointing out the Hungry Generation as a possible PhD topic. Always understanding and ready to help were the people at the department of modern South Asian studies at the Südasiens-Institut, who contributed to my work with informal discussions and precious suggestions. Essential to finishing this manuscript was the friendly environment at my home institution and the stimulating discussions with colleagues from the ERC Project “Śivadharma” led by PI Florinda De Simini at L’Orientale University of Naples. The Project financed the proof-reading of this manuscript, whose credit goes to Michael Bluett. I would also like to thank the HASP staff for the typeset.

The friends I have met across the world over these years have become my second family and were there in my personal as well as research life. A special thanks goes to my diaspora companions and colleagues I met in Heidelberg and beyond: Anna Scarabel, Costanza Travaglia, Davide Torri, Elizaveta Ilves, Frances Niebuhr, Lucia Belà, Maria Römer, Valeria Lauricella, Vera Lazzaretti, Premlata Rai and many others. I am so grateful for your friendship. Jayasree Chaudhuri and Madhucchanda Sen are two women whom I will always look up to. What I am today Bengal-wise would simply not exist were you not there. My partner Walter Venditto has joined me in my doctoral journey in various forms: as patient and understanding friend, fellow expat, travel companion, original thinker, and enthusiast of Phalguni’s poetry. His sensitivity and generosity have had a significant influence on my understanding of these young Bengali rebels. My parents and my brothers have always been supportive both professionally and – above all – existentially throughout this journey. I wished that my nonna Ida was around to see the conclusion of this path. Throughout the years I have unknowingly always kept a picture of her in my Bengali dictionary.

Introduction

A History of Hungryalism?

In 1964, *TIME* magazine reported the arrest and trial of a “band of young Bengalis with tigers in their tanks”. The article cited as one of the objects of contention a wedding invitation card advertising the “first topless bathing suit contest” in Calcutta that was sent to all leading citizens of the city “from police commissioner to wealthy spinsters” (TIME 1964). These Bengali mavericks in their early twenties wrote poems on sex and rape, printed masks of animals and parcelled them to various authorities of the Bengali establishment; they organised poetry performances at cemeteries and liquor shops and then used to walk naked and hungover in the streets. Presently, the Calcutta establishment rose up in rage and the poets’ houses were raided by the police, their leaflets and pamphlets seized and each of them was arrested and brought to court on charges of obscenity. This cohort of rebellious Bengalis became known as the Hungry Generation, a poetry movement that sought to put an end to the “game of writing rhymed-prose” and to start composing “poetry as spontaneously as an orgasm” (Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015: 118). Their new poetry manifesto (1961) announced the death of the old-school forms and styles of Bengali poetry, proclaiming the need for “holocaust, a violent and somnambulist jazzing of the hymning five, a sowing of the tempestual hunger” in their new vision of writing (*Hungry Generation XII*). Known for being charged and sentenced for obscenity in 1964, these young middle-class authors remained for decades associated with the label of “obscene” and rebelliousness especially after their encounters with Allen Ginsberg and other icons of the American avant-garde and countercultural scene. Bengali critics and journalists like Jyotirmoy Datta saw the movement essentially as a “tropical and Gangetic” copy of the American avant-garde (Bakken 1967), a narrative that until now has hardly been separated from the account of the Hungry Generation. It is true, however, that the Hungry poets mainly explored sexuality and alienation, targeted Bengali middle-class hypocrisy, its moral codes and social regulations in the mode of other “angry” countercultural movements of the world: through irony, transgression and the desecration of codes of language and norms of social behaviour. They

Introduction

did so by reproducing the taboos of bourgeois society, such as sexual violence, hyper-masculinity, objectification, alcohol and drug consumption, in their writings and lifestyle.

The main themes that emerged from a close reading of the literary texts – poems, manifestoes, essays and other miscellaneous writings – are related to what I call tropes and practices of transgression, enacted both within and without the literary texts. Transgression – of bodies and texts – is the dominant frame characterising the Hungryalist breach of literary and social norms of the Bengali middle class in the poetry of this avant-garde movement. For instance, misogyny, objectification, consumption, and sexual violence represent physical and metaphorical violations in the view of dominant bourgeois morality that these poets always wanted to shake and sabotage. My interpretation thus places the body as a site that both questions and reinforces disciplinary and normalising subjectivities through representations of hunger, sexual intercourse, objectified female bodies, rape, masturbation and instances of anxious masculinities. Moreover, my book attempts a complex articulation of the concept of transgression in a broader perspective by going beyond the realm of what was perceived as non-normative according to the Bengali middle-class society of the 1960s. Stretching the mode of transgression in the social and cultural context of postcolonial India, I argue that this mode reproduced itself also on an existential level for the Hungryalist authors, who inscribed onto their male bodies the ambivalences and anxieties of sexuality and changing gender-roles in an increasingly global and postmodern world.

In a nutshell, this book and the research behind it rest on two primary interpretive foci: the literary and the sociocultural. These two spheres are not separate domains in Hungryalist texts. In fact, they act interdependently, enlightening and reinforcing one another. The texts, literary and biographic, emerged in the context of Calcutta's post-independence when the city experienced economic crisis, unemployment, radical politics, and a massive influx of refugees from East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh). The Bengali poems are set against the broader context of India's postcolonial project of state-building and Nehruvian socialist ethos which emphasised a morality of economic and sexual frugality while, in contrast, promoting industrialisation, scientific progress and technological advance on a national scale. I analyse the literary production of the Hungry Generation poets, and especially of one of its iconic representatives, Phalguni Ray, as a reaction to discourses on sexuality and masculinity of that era. This book raises these interrogatives from a socio-literary perspective highlighting the influence that historical formations like the middle class, consumption, and modernisation had on the elaboration of the Hungryalists' language and hyper-masculine ethos. The special configuration of the Hungryalist literary materials, which consisted of poems, little magazines, manifestoes, and other ephemera, lends itself to a historical interpretation that has been functional to unravelling the anxieties, contradictions and

ambivalence that the Bengali youth experienced in India's postcolonial transition to global modernity: anxieties that were especially visible in the realm of sexuality.

Transgression of bodies and texts seemed like a natural way of interpreting these literary documents because they blatantly violate moral norms, linguistic and stylistic standards both metaphorically and concretely, as demonstrated by the actual sentence of obscenity imposed on the Hungry Generation writings following the court trial. However, this book's main contention about the so-called "obscene" poetry of this young group of Bengali bohemians is that transgression as a literary and political practice often operates historically and provisionally. Transgression has meant not only to violate and trespass borders – of an alleged moral, social and cultural status quo – but it has also been described as an act of authorised subversion, often temporary and grounded in a specific historical moment. Victor Turner, the British anthropologist who popularised the concept of liminality in modern society's rites of passage (1969), has contributed greatly to a way of viewing acts of transgression as provisional breaks in the social and political "structure", as he called it, of post-industrial societies, which he studied closely from the 1960s. Turner's revisited ideas of the "liminoid" explaining these transitory ruptures and identity mutations in post-industrial societies has seemed to work well to theoretically and historically situate the literary and cultural transgressions operating in the anti-structural world of the Hungry Generation, to use a Turnerian phrase. Therefore, following the thread of transgression, along with the extensive secondary literature on the topic, my attempt is that of bringing out a plausible historical account and historicist reading of the Hungryalist literary experience understood in the context of the Indian post-independence period. The question mark at the end of the paragraph title (A History of Hungryalism?) is of course provocative in the sense that the aim of this book is precisely to sketch a picture of Hungryalism emerging from the social and historical context of 1960s Indian post-independence, by availing of a text-based and history-grounded reading of the literary sources.

Moreover, questions about censorship and ensuing legal debates on what constitutes moral standards in the realm of art and literature seemed to naturally emerge in media and social discourse around the time I started this doctoral project. With the increasingly restrictive policies of the Indian Censor Board and the rise of BJP political rule with its overt ideology of xenophobia and religious communalism, debates on censorship and freedom of expression have resurfaced in India in the last two decades. Simultaneously, inside and outside Indian academia, greater attention was given to cultural and literary production that was considered in some way radical or transgressive vis-à-vis the cultural and political context in which it emerged. Signals of a renewed interest for radical literary cultures in South Asia prompted by centres of academic teaching and research in Delhi and Calcutta, as well as from the personal participation of teachers and students

Introduction

in workshops and theatre performances on topics like obscenity, censorship and radical literary cultures. With such social and political unrest in the background, my research started with questions about the nature of obscenity in the context of an experimental movement of poetry in postcolonial West Bengal. Why was the poetry of the Hungry Generation considered “*aśīl*” (obscene)? What were the features one could identify as obscene in their literary production? Does obscenity articulate itself differently in a postcolonial context and in a vernacular language? With such questions in mind I began my research on the Hungry Generation to end up on a socio-literary inquiry of literary transgressions and representations of sexuality as formulated by 1960s and 1970s West Bengal literary avant-garde. While such questions were retained as part of the literary and historical backdrop of this postmodern Bengali poetry, the research became oriented to see how literary texts produced at sites of crisis in a postcolonial context can challenge official cultures, canons and sociocultural standards by questioning the always contested sites of the body and sexuality.

The Global and the Bengali Sixties

Putting the Hungry Generation in context links its literary production to the cultural and political landscape of the 1960s in West Bengal and on the global scale. The Sixties have received great popular and academic attention, divided as they were between memory and history (Heale 2005). The decade has been looked at “as the sharing of a common objective situation”, what Frederic Jameson famously noted as “periodisation” (Jameson 1984: 178). Since then, scholars have conceptualised the Sixties as a global historical event, which encompassed a diversity of experiences such as decolonisation movements, ensuing nation-building, the rise of Maoism and protest movements against various establishments, such as women’s movements and the civil rights movement (Scott Brown and Lison 2014; Jian et al. 2018). Moreover, scholars put great emphasis on the vision of a “global 1968”, often understood as coterminous with youth’s rebellion against established powers, although mainly from a Eurocentric perspective. However, the transnational character of 1968 is seen in the vernacular translations of the word pointing to the regional dimension of that decade: for example, the French *soixante-huit*, the German *Achtundsechziger*, the Spanish *sesentaochero*, and the Italian *sessantotto* all characterised specific local contexts.

The “spirit of 1968” has played a special role in the global imagination not only as a symbol of rebellion, youth protest and left-wing activism. Even more evocative of that spirit were the cultural manifestations of a revolt against the establishment that was primarily aesthetic and political: experimentations with music, sound, words and image culture, as well as the democratisation of the means of

cultural production. The birth of the “counterculture” highlighted the cultural and political potential of love, peace and individual freedom, against the established culture of the petit bourgeoisie. The French protest movement known as May 68 stood for a symbol of revolt against spreading imperialism, capitalism and consumerism, inspiring similar protest movements worldwide: the anti-war and the civil rights movement in the United States, especially after the assassination of Martin Luther King and John Fitzgerald Kennedy; the crushing of the Prague Spring and the rule of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy in Eastern Europe; the end of the cultural revolution and the rediscovery of its horrors in China; the Cuban revolution and the armed struggle in Latin America. Historical landmarks, such as the moon landing, have remained impressed in the memory of later generations as new mass media and communications technology facilitated the spread of images, along with political ideas, brand-new experimentation with arts and aesthetics, and postmodern subjectivities. What became known as an “invasion” of sound and images, mainly transferred through television and cinema, paved the way for new forms of access to information and helped shape utopian imaginaries about the future of humanity. The conjuncture of the invasion of images and the creation of imaginaries has also shown that responses to the project of modernisation in the 1960s were ambivalent and affective, as seen, for example, in science fiction movies and narratives of that era (Scott Brown and Lison 2014). Ambivalent was also the academic reaction to the study of the decade, which was later criticised for having nurtured a Eurocentric radicalism without any real political outcome. Once again in the circle of French anti-humanism, which moved away from the classical subject of European Enlightenment, Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut (1985) spoke of 1968 as a “pseudo-revolution” mainly because it reasserted what they call the “democratic logic of hedonism”, observing that it “revealed its true colours through its cultural and political radicalism, its exaggerated hedonism, students’ rebellions, the counterculture, the marijuana and LSD fads, sexual liberation and porno-pop films and publications” (Ferry and Renaut 1985: 51).

On the other hand, if we look towards Asia, scholars noted that a regionalised study of the Asian Sixties has often exhibited stronger features than those characterising the decade in Europe and America. Social, political and cultural change happened more abruptly in the postcolonial countries, which brutally shifted from subjugation to independence. The experience of anti-imperialism and decolonisation in multiple sites of the colonised world has shown that the “dialectics of liberation”, as Christopher Connery phrased it, was the measure and goal of radical and revolutionary activity worldwide: liberation was promoted on different fronts, including national, psychic, sexual, economic, and social liberation (Chen et al. 2018: 575). The Bandung conference (1955) promoted transnationalism and cooperation among the Asian countries. The leaders of the new independent Asian nations (India, Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon, People’s Republic of China, and

Introduction

Indonesia) established a formal coalition of countries that opposed the politics of alignment in the context of the Cold War between a Western and an Eastern bloc. From India, Jawaharlal Nehru constructed a global geography of anti-imperialism with pivotal nodes in China, Egypt and Soviet Russia, as well as with the imperialist world of Europe and America (Louro 2018: 5). Moreover, Bandung proclaimed equality among all nations, support of the movements of national liberation against the colonial forces and the rejection of military coalitions hegemonised by superpowers.

But how are the 1960s imagined when it comes to Asia, and if we look closely at the context of post-independence West Bengal? How does the Hungry Generation feature in the worlding map of 1960s avant-garde and counterculture? To attempt an answer, I will look at the transcultural interaction that took place especially, even though not exclusively, between West Bengal and the United States in the context of cosmopolitan modernism, drawing a transcultural map of literary and imagined regions of desire that entangles South Asia with other world peripheries of avant-garde practice, often located in lesser-known literary centres in Europe and America. After all, the concept of “geomodernism” has helped to delineate the divergent narratives of modernity and modernism in non-Western contexts which have often been articulated in resistance to the assimilation by a dominant ethos (Doyle and Winkiel 2005). In this context of imagined geographies of desire, the concept of a Bengal region takes a different shape that goes beyond purely national and geo-political boundaries, in the same way as this region extended beyond the actual administrative boundaries currently dividing West Bengal and Bangladesh. The Bengali “literary region” of the avant-garde which is the focus of this book seeks to encompass literary and artistic production from various peripheral sites of modernism in India and abroad: from West Bengal, Bihar, East Pakistan (today’s Bangladesh), Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Tripura, to the United States, Germany, France and the UK, as we will see later.

Anjali Nerlekar offers a tangible example of a vernacular rendition of the Indian 1960s. In her book, she designates with the Marathi word “sāṭhotthār” (lit. post-1960) that moment of transnational influence, international connection and experimentation that characterised the literary and artistic scene of post-1960s Bombay (Nerlekar 2016: 7). Her attempt at regionalising the topical experience of modernism and negotiations with modernity in Maharashtra is persuasive, especially when set in the context of the rise of Marathi nationalism and demands for the creation of a separate Marathi state. A similar operation could be suggested for the Bengali regional context, bringing together historical events that took place in the region in those decades under the box “ṣāt sattar daśak” (the Sixties/Seventies). This label was mainly used in the context of the student movement (chātra āndolan) that took place in Calcutta and other parts of West Bengal to mark a politically meaningful time for West Bengal that saw the splitting of the Communist

Party of India (1964), the rise of Naxalism (1967), and the urban Naxalite guerrilla (1971) as the founding events of that period (Ācārya 2012). Therefore, the popular imaginary about the 1960s in West Bengal strongly links those decades to the collective memory of radical politics and the romantic ideals of revolution. Ranabir Samaddar (2018) noticed that the extensive wave of student protests and radicalism in Calcutta were in some way reminiscent of those in Europe and North America, showing an equally vocal anti-imperialist trait. The nearly six-month long Presidency College movement became the centre of the rebellious students and youth of Bengal. This university had already been the centre of radical movements in the first decades after the Independence, serving as the gathering point for student mobilisations in the anti-tram fare rise movements in 1953 and 1965, the food movements in 1959 and 1966 and student movements against the educational policies of the government (Samaddar 2018: 907). A general discontent with the new government and the high unemployment rate among middle-class youth in West Bengal exacerbated the frustration and anxiety within the middle class. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (2009), speaking on decolonisation and freedom in post-independence Bengal, argued that the “dreams of nationhood” were betrayed after a new and inexperienced government failed to handle the problems of the new nation-state. Steep price rises, food shortages, industrial unrest, continuing corruption and the black market, high crime rates in Calcutta, and above all the continuous refugee influx from East Bengal were among the causes of the vast discontent that spread among the working and middle-class population starting from the early years of independent India (Bandyopadhyay 2009: 39).

While the newly independent Indian nation was involved in armed wars all along its frontiers – against China over control of Arunachal Pradesh (1962), and against West Pakistan during the liberation war that gave birth to Bangladesh (1971) – the split of the CPI (Communist Party of India) inaugurated a period of radical left politics and peasant terrorism in West Bengal, targeting feudal landlords as well as politicians and government representatives. Calcutta became one of the focal points of the anti-imperialist agenda in Asia. The emergence of Naxalism, a Soviet-oriented and anti-imperialist movement, is one of the landmarks in Bengali political history of the last century. From 1967 to 1972, this Maoist-inspired movement born in the village of Naxalbari, not too far from the border with Nepal, transformed itself from a peasant rebellion against landowners to an urban guerrilla movement that terrorised Calcutta and other cities which happened to fall into the Red Corridor. Charu Majumdar, Naxal’s main spokesperson, gave political and ideological cohesion to Naxalism — by then turned into a cultural movement — seeking to react to the CPI’s lack of action by taking a clear anti-parliamentary stance against traditional Marxist parties in the Soviet-Union, India and Europe while supporting the Chinese Communist Party and the cultural revolution. Iconoclasm was the central tenet of Naxalism, especially after the poet Saroj

Introduction

Dutta's wrote the ideological manifesto of the movement "In Defense of Iconoclasm" (1970), proclaiming the break with the "idols of the past". The Naxalite iconoclasm symbolically and materially annihilated feudal landlords and smashed statues during campaigns. Sanjay Seth argued that Naxalism and Maoist-inspired insurgencies, commonly regarded as juvenile, naïve, and ultra-leftist, had a direct effect on the development of Marxist theory in the Subaltern studies and postcolonial theory in general (Seth 2006). One can hardly ignore the analogies with the iconoclastic movement of the Hungry Generation, which sought to dismantle canons, forms, and languages of poetry through obscenity and perversion. The analogy is plainly visible by juxtaposing Malay Roy Choudhury's "In Defense of Obscenity" and Saroj Dutta's "In Defense of Iconoclasm". Yet, despite the analogies in using strategies of rebellion and transgression in language and aesthetics, the Hungry Generation movement overtly denied any ideological affiliation with Naxalism and its political wing.

Despite Nehru's anti-imperialism, in the cultural sphere the new generation of poets and writers in India were unavoidably influenced by Anglo-American culture, mainly through music and literature. Arun Kolatkar, bilingual poet in English and Marathi, has become an icon of the Indian "roaring Sixties", deeply rooted in the local culture of Bombay and transnationally located at the crossroad of global modernism. In many ways, the critical history and reception of this poet, "barely known outside India and still a marginal writer in his own country" (Zecchini 2014: 1) shares several points with the Bengali movement of Hungryalism. Kolatkar was neglected by literary criticism in India, attacked by the "champions of nativism and cultural fundamentalism" and accused of being "'un-Indian', inauthentic, anti-national, cynical, and of mis-interpreting India, but also of obscenity and irreverence" (Zecchini 2014: 8). The Indian poets in English were equally attacked for their inauthenticity and for threatening the integrity of Indian culture (King 1987). Similar charges were raised against the Hungry Generation in 1960s Calcutta for their shocking statements about the need to "embrace the total vocabulary of MAN" (Roy Choudhuri 1966) and to pervade the everyday language with obscenity and violence. Their unconventional usage of Bengali and English in their writings was considered "utter[ly] wrong" even by the Indian poet in English Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. Even more outrageous for the Bengali critics – steeped in Marxist ideology and its anti-colonial rhetoric – was the Hungryalists' association with the American writers of the avant-garde Beat Generation, namely with Allen Ginsberg, whom the Hungryalists encountered during his Indian trip in 1962. Both groups undeniably borrowed ideas and inspired each other, but this transcultural encounter condemned the young Bengali poets to be forever treated as "derivative" and a "bad copy" of the American avant-garde, as stated in Jyotirmoy Datta's seminal letter to the avant-garde editor Dick Bakken, which can be fully read in the appendix to this book.

The connection with the poets of the Beat Generation visibly created a fertile terrain for transaction. Transnationalism expressed itself also through the movement of poetry across the Iron Curtain, proving that the Cold War synchronised cultures across the globe, leading to similar themes, forms, and critical manoeuvres. It seems natural to draw comparisons and identify world (and worlding) trends in the 1960s literature of North African novelists, Frantz Fanon's critical studies on the postcolonial individual, Phalguni Ray's poems and film scripts and American Beat poetry which sought to strike at the heart of the Anglo-American culture of materialism and capitalism. The experience of postcolonialism, frustration, anxious masculinity, severe alcohol-addiction and unemployment lived by most Hungryalist poets in post-partition Calcutta and Allen Ginsberg's obsession over mental disease, drug abuse and overt homosexuality are interdependent and comparable experiences on several levels. This view is not to reduce the impact that traumatic events like Partition, the Bengal famine, or the Bangladesh War have had for the people of West Bengal. On the contrary, these events significantly inscribe themselves in the global entanglements of the varied yet simultaneous experiences of decolonisation, independence, and revolution that have become emblematic of the global Sixties in popular culture and collective memory.

Fragmented Histories, Fragmented Sources

The sources instrumental to reconstructing a history of the Hungry Generation are varied and diverse: anthologies of Hungryalist poetry, memoirs and essays written by members of the movement, papers of the trial, letter correspondence among American editors and the Bengali poets. Meaningfully, one of the sources useful to retrace the history of the Hungry Generation is a book entitled "Hungry Legends" (Hāmri kimbadantī), with the English subtitle "History of a Literary Revolution". Perhaps provocatively the title of these Hungry memoirs (2013) penned by Hungry Generation founder Malay Roy Choudhury merges two opposing views of literary history, namely legend and history, consciously pointing at the highly fragmentary nature of the sources and nebulous constellation of narratives that were propounded on this movement. In addition, literary history has been prevalently silent about the Hungry Generation. To my knowledge, even the most recent histories of Bengali literature fail to reserve a place for the Hungry Generation in the chapters on modern and post-independent literary production.¹ Moreover,

1 I have consulted two of the most exhaustive literary histories covering the modern period (Caudhurī 1995; Miśra 2014), which only covered the literature produced until the Partition. Of these two, only Miśra (2014) mentions Shakti and Sunil, and their connection with the members of the Hungry Generation is undiscussed.

Introduction

because of the lack of a serious literary criticism on the Hungry Generation, the authors themselves have provided a corpus of critical analysis of their poetry. In this way, the silences of institutional literary history in addition to the prevalent scepticism of Indian literary criticism for Hungryalism have contributed to building mythologies of the movement rather than encouraging a critical reading of its texts. Despite these gaps in knowledge, over the last decades the movement and its poetry have received growing critical attention mainly in West Bengal and Bangladesh, and some parts of the United States thanks to academic research and a quite extensive work of translation, although mostly informal and unpublished. Therefore, literary history and criticism have merged with popular culture and literary narratives on the Hungry Generation resulting in a partial and incoherent picture, which I try to debate here.

Both the chronology and the composition of the Hungry Generation are contested areas. According to the various documents at hand, we can affirm that the movement emerged in the early 1960s, when Malay and Samir Raychaudhuri's first manifesto announced the birth of the movement from Patna. The movement grew and received international attention throughout the Sixties and early Seventies, and some of its members have continued their literary career under the legacy of the early Hungry Generation writers for decades until today, everyone with different life stories. Since 1961, the movement has welcomed authors who focused on different literary genres, hailing from different places in eastern India and from diverse social conditions, counting above 40 participants by 1964. If some writers have continued to claim the legacy and tradition of the Hungry Generation (Malay and Samir Raychaudhuri, Pradip Chaudhuri and Debi Roy), others abandoned the radical movement to embrace religious life (Subo Acharya) or the the air-force (Subhas Ghosh). Some died prematurely (Phalguni Ray), while others pursued their literary careers individually or in the folds of a later Hungry movement (Shakti Chattopadhyay, Saileshvar Ghosh, and Sandipan Chattopadhyay).

Among the documents that have been instrumental to a reconstruction of the histories and narratives of the movement, the introductions to the anthologies of Hungryalist poetry and prose are among the most reliable (Ghoṣ 2011; Sen 2015; Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015). The greatest part of these publications is quite precise when referring to the birth of the movement as an informal association of young writers: it officially started in 1961 with the printing of the "Manifesto on Hungryalistic Poetry", written by Malay from Patna, Bihar. Among these, Sen and Ghosh (2015, 2011) did not acknowledge Malay as the initiator of the movement and propagated a different version of the story. Saileshvar Ghosh, for example, was a poet formally affiliated to the Hungry Generation only until the 1964 trial for obscenity, when he and Subhash Ghosh were jailed and soon after released on bail, unlike Malay and others. At that point in time Saileshvar initiated the Kṣudhārta āndolan (lit. Hungry

movement) which he acknowledged as the “authentic” Hungry Generation movement. To support this version, Ghosh wrote a booklet trying to debunk the myth of Malay as the founder of the movement (Ghoṣ 2011b). Reading and juxtaposing Malay Roy Choudhury and Saileshvar Ghosh’s views, the feeling is that multiple souls coexisted in the Hungry Generation.

The main concern of the Hungryalist anthologies’ editors primarily regarded the debate on Hungry Generation’s initiators and leaders (*sraṣṭā*), Shakti Chattopadhyay and Malay Roy Choudhury’s pivotal role in shaping the movement, the trial and sentence for obscenity, and the final split. Tracing a genealogy of the Hungry Generation was never a serious task for the members of the movement, due to their typical attitude of non-commitment and un-seriousness that defined their literary practices. Addressing the question of the birth of Hungryalism became an issue only later in the 1990s, when Samir Raychaudhuri edited the little magazine *Hāoyāṇ*49, which soon became the mouthpiece of a new wave of postmodern writers in Bengali. This can be seen plausibly as a move to legitimise and give authority to the Hungry Generation as a literary movement in the landscape of postmodern writing in Bengali, addressing its genealogy and internal hierarchies. On the other hand, the De’j publications penned by Ghosh and Sen (2011, 2015) show the widespread trend in Bengali criticism and literary history to de-legitimise the “early” Hungryalists – mainly Malay, Samir and Debi – while it helped to authorise and build support around the “later” Kṣudhārta writers. Poets and prose writers like Saileshvar Ghosh, Sandipan Chattopadhyay and Basudeb Dasgupta became the spokespersons of what could be delineated as a spin-off of the Hungry Generation. The amount and the quality of publications by and on the Kṣudhārta founders tells much of the move to establish this later phase of Hungryalism: if Malay and his associates relied on self-funded means to run their little magazines and to print at non-commercial presses, the writers associated to the later Kṣudhārta āndolan got their prose and verses published in anthologies edited by the prestigious De’j publishing house.

Defining Hungryalism: Movement or Generation?

Another concern addressed in this wave of literary criticism concerns the various attempts at defining Hungryalism, the most recurring question being whether it deserved to be considered a “generation” or a “movement” (Ghoṣ 2011; Ghoṣ 2011b; Sen 2015; Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015). What is the difference implied in these two terminologies? The term “generation” has played a formative role in modern literary history because it helped to articulate notions of evolution, rupture and continuity. However, its use is contested and subject to intense scholarly scrutiny in literary and cultural memory studies. In its first connotation, a generation refers to a

Introduction

community sharing the social and cultural standards which have distinctly marked that era as a turn away from past generations (such as the 1960s' baby boomers). It is significant that the twentieth century saw a proliferation of "generations" (the Lost Generation, Generation of '27, the Beat Generation) to signal a rejection or fundamental rupture with traditional ideologies. For example, as Astrid Erll noted, the concept of generation has been marked by two dimensions: generationality and genealogy. The first term indicates how generations define themselves or are defined on the basis of a shared "space of experience"; the second term points to the relations generations maintain to what or who precedes them (Erll 2014). In other words, a generation is made up by synchronicity and contemporaneity as well as by diachronic transmission and the dynamics of change. These aspects emerge also in the Bengali term "prajanma", of little use in the literature on Hungryalism as compared to the English "generation". Even though the root of the two words in both languages stress the idea of birth and descentance (Latin generatio, Sanskrit jan), the modern usage of this word in the context of 20th century avant-garde points at breaking away rather than at carrying on the inherited legacy (e.g. family, clan, class, and largely, society). This is how the Hungry Generation poets portrayed themselves – as either a prajanma (generation) or an āndolan (movement) – while connecting to other avant-garde groups and movements across the world characterised by a spirit of rebellion and departure from the established – literary, political, and cultural – order.

Following the charges and then conviction for obscenity of Malay Roy Choudhury and his fellows in 1965, publications on these numerous authors have often described this literary phenomenon of West Bengal's post-independence era as an "anti-establishment movement" (pratiṣṭhān'birodhī āndolan). The usage of the phrase Hungryalist movement or āndolan points to the existence of a consistent and coherent literary poetics sustaining the practices of members of the movement. It argues that the movement acts according to a precise aesthetic agenda, following a program that is shared by those associated to the movement. It is significant that some critics of Hungryalism remarked on the absence of a real movement in the phenomenon of the Hungry Generation, considering the serious heterogeneity of the group in terms of genre, style, aesthetics and degree of participation in the literary activities. Critiques of the term "movement" (āndolan) have also pointed out the lack of a coherent theoretical reflection on poetry. Moreover, what undermined the idea of movement was, to quote Sophie Seita, the "provisionality" of such literary experiences that intentionally published and distributed "ephemera", provisional and short-lived literary material, to pinpoint the fleeting character of literary canons and institutions (Seita 2019). This recognition of variances in the usage of the terminology when referring to the Hungry Generation is significant to understand the plurality and fragmentation of sources, which have conveyed a partial and contradictory history of this Bengali movement.

The different labels describing the Hungry Generation showcase the manifold faces that this movement has shown throughout its history. In particular, it was after the arrest of the poets on charges of obscenity in 1964 that one could notice the emergence of other groups or strands within the Hungryalist movement, simultaneously bringing forth new names and definitions for the Bengali avant-garde. After Malay's sentence for obscenity, other writers gathered around Saileshvar Ghosh, declaring themselves "Hungry" (Beng. Kṣudhārta) and claiming recognition as the first and only Hungry Generation. Saileshvar Ghosh, known as a great poet also outside the Hungryalist circle, targeted Malay as the source of all the "falsity and hypocrisy" that was told about the movement (Ghoṣ 2011: 37). In contrast, Saileshvar endorsed the version that retraced the beginning of the movement to Shakti Chattopadhyay (Ghoṣ 2011b: 15). These kinds of divisions within the movement were made the object of mocking and sarcasm here and there on leaflets and little magazines: "High hierarchy – Jyotir Datta's 'Bangrezi' – yuck, Shakti Chattopadhyay + MOLE-ay Raychoudhuri – consider Saileshvar Ghosh an enemy." This example carried the signature of "Saileshvar Ghosh, Impostor, No P-O-E-T. Saileshvar Ghosh, the Kabigan of Coffee House, so called Impostor – ihihihih" (*Hungry Generation* #66).

The question of designating this literary phenomenon as a fashion, style, movement, or generation has gained momentum only recently, in a move to fix the slippery notion of Hungryalist literature and legitimise this controversial moment of Bengali literary history. Provided that a literary movement can be understood as a mobilisation of individuals sharing social, cultural and political principles, who join inspired by the common objective of countering dominant cultural and moral standards, the Hungry Generation would inscribe in this category. However, the mythologies produced by the scanty reception of Hungryalism in criticism as well as the sentence for obscenity have complicated the picture, often transforming the phenomenon of Hungryalism into a nostalgic and romanticised memory of rebellion and political dissent in Bengali popular culture. Let us see how such contested narratives on the history of the movement can serve the goal of reconstructing literary history.

Myths of Foundation

The debate about the initiation of the movement has been latent in Hungry criticism until recently published anthologies of Hungryalist poetry brought it new attention. No doubt the dominant view attributes the foundation of the movement to Malay Roy Choudhury (1939–2023). The several books written by Malay Roy Choudhury portray the group as a movement founded and led by Malay from 1961 until 1964, the year of the obscenity trial that sentenced him and other

Introduction

poets to jail. The “early” group of writers was originally made up by Malay and Samir Raychaudhuri, Shakti Chattopadhyay and Debi Roy. These were in fact the names of the authors who signed the movement’s first manifesto on poetry. Afterwards, other fellows joined the group through their friendship with Shakti: Subimal Basak, Subo Acharya, Binoy Majumdar, Tridib Mitra, Pradip Chaudhuri, Phalguni Ray, Basudeb Dasgupta, Utpalkumar Basu, Sandipan Chattopadhyay, Saileshvar and Subhash Ghosh were the main names associated with the Hungry-
alist project.

The most popular account of the beginnings of the Hungry Generation movement is told from Malay’s perspective.² In his memoirs on the first days of the Hungry Generation, these young poets in their early twenties gathered in Calcutta after the publication of their first manifesto on poetry (Rāy’caudhurī 1994). The “Manifesto on Hungryalistic Poetry” was written by Malay and edited by his elder brother Samir from Patna, where they lived in the neighbourhood of Imlitala, an area inhabited by Muslim and Dalit communities. The idea at the basis of this group of young writers was to give birth to an alternative kind of poetry showing no continuity with the past tradition, by writing in the “total free language of the entire society”, as declared in Malay’s “In Defense of Obscenity” (Roy Choudhuri 1966), with the aim of countering the establishment and aligning with the international avant-garde project of political resistance.

On the other hand, the later Kṣudhārtha writers acknowledged Shakti Chattopadhyay as the “real initiator” of the Hungry Generation movement (Sen 2015: 10). Clearly the frictions among the members and the fractures within the group already started before the arrest and the sentence, when Shakti broke up with Samir for personal reasons,³ and joined another group formed around the literary magazine *Kṛttibās*, experiment initiated in 1953 by Sunil Gangopadhyay, Ananda Bagchi and Dipak Mazumdar. Moreover, what seemingly made Shakti turn his back against Malay and the original group of poets was a disagreement with regard to the way modern Bengali poetry was conceived. Hungryalism nourished itself on the “brutal assassination of the past”, but Shakti was reluctant to completely renounce Bengali tradition. Another advocate of Shakti’s leadership — and a fierce opponent of Malay’s self-assertion — was Saileshvar Ghosh, a big name in the landscape of postmodern prose and poetry in Bengali. He described Kṣudhārta

2 We must acknowledge the Raychaudhuri brothers’ contribution to reopening the debate on the Hungryalist legacy in postmodern Bengali culture since the 1990s, mainly through their magazine and independent publisher *Hāōyā49*.

3 During an interview, Malay stated that the breakup had happened because Shakti was seemingly rejected by Samir’s cousin after he proposed to her. Probably this event provoked a series of domino effects that eventually caused the dissolution of the movement. Personal interview with Malay Roy Choudhuri, March 30, 2017.

as the “only avant-garde magazine” of Bengali literature, as “a joyful dance on the corpse of modernity” (Ghoṣ 2011: 7). In his words, the five people who created the Hungry Generation movement were Basudeb Dasgupta, Subhash Ghosh, Pradip Chaudhuri, Subo Acharya and Saileshvar Ghosh (Ghoṣ 2011: 7). He made no mention of Malay, Samir and Debi Roy as part of the initiators of the Hungry Generation.

The Hungry Generation started in 1963–64. This was the only movement in the literature in Bengali language that can be called avant-garde. Not only was it the only movement in Bengali language dealing with mind, thought and language. It was as relevant as other movements that shocked the world and carved out a new path for literature. It started spontaneously. It is ahead in some intuitions as compared to other movements from today’s homicide present of modernity. Those who like to mention the Beat Generation have misunderstood Beat and Hungry literature.

For the first time we have created a literature in Bengali that is completely free from foreign influence. The Hungry writers used to be called a third-class copy of American literature. Their goal in the first place was to destroy that kind of literature. In those days, a conspiracy kept this literature away from the people. They want to break the establishment, to destroy the immobility of power, they want to wipe away power from within themselves. That is why the Hungries are anarchists. (Ghoṣ 2011: 7–8)

A few details change in Saileshvar’s new account of the birth of the movement. The new group of poets gathered around the magazine *Kṣudhārta* announcing more assertively the rejection of foreign influence as well as the dissolution of the “early” Hungry Generation in order to establish themselves as authentically Bengali poets. While the early names related to the Hungry Generation gradually faded after a few years, other writers joined the group with renewed strength around the magazine *Kṣudhārta*, with the aim to “worship anarchy and perverted sexuality” (Ghoṣ 2011: 24). Not even the Manifesto on Hungryalistic Poetry, allegedly the first source documenting the birth of the movement, finds any place in Saileshvar’s words.

How can we explain such divergencies in recording the history of the Hungry Generation? Sabyasachi Sen’s more “diluted” version of the birth of Hungryalism has probably received greater visibility (Sen 2015). Quoting an interview with Sandipan Chattopadhyay, Sen argued that “for some time, an unknown young man called Malay Raychaudhuri led the movement from Patna. Although there wasn’t any Hungry generation that lasted too long under anybody’s leadership. In that

Introduction

period, even though Malay for a while was the leader [netṛtva] of the movement, he was not the initiator [sraṣṭā]. The real initiator was Shakti Chattopadhyay” (Sen 2015: 10). Therefore, according to a later narrative a new movement was created around the publication of the magazine *Kṣudhārta* under the leadership of Saileshvar Ghosh, after Shakti’s departure from the movement, which occurred not later than 1965. In Saileshvar’s words, the early Hungryalists were only a “generation” of writers, a passing phenomenon, who failed to build up a movement, while “the real Hungry or *Kṣudhārta* generation was made up by Basudeb Dasgupta, Subhas Ghosh, Pradip Chaudhuri, Subo Acharya and Saileshvar Ghosh. The real movement of the Hungry generation started in 1963–4” (Ghoṣ 2011b). He repeated this concept many times in his booklet.

A reviewer of Sen’s above quoted anthology lucidly notes the absence of other major initiators of the Hungry Generation and their oeuvre — Malay, Samir and Utpalkumar Basu —, explaining their omission as a deliberate move to delegitimise the impact of Malay and the other Patna-based writers on the formation of a Hungryalist movement.

By entitling this collection *The Hungry Generation (second period)*, there was the clear intention of leaving Malay, Samir, Shakti and Utpal behind. On the other hand, one cannot deny that until 1965 he [Malay] was one of the men of (the first period of) Hungry Generation — even though Malay has shown antipathy for the refugees, pride about his bourgeois past, and announced the end of the Hungry Generation in 1965.

These more recent publications demonstrate an attempt to dismiss Malay’s myth of foundation while legitimising only one version as the “authentic” history of the Hungry Generation. Both versions are significant for bringing attention to the contradictions intrinsic to the history of the literary movement. Following these two divergent perspectives, one can assume that the group initially gathered around Malay, Samir and Shakti – who were close college friends – when the Raychaudhuri brothers moved to Calcutta and started distributing manifestoes from the Indian Coffee House in College Street. Other fellow poets gradually joined the group through the help and friendship of Shakti Chattopadhyay. It was after Shakti’s departure and Malay’s sentence for obscenity in 1964 that the core of the Hungry Generation broke down into smaller pieces, walked separate paths, or formed larger groups joining under different names and literary magazines.

The Trial on Charges of Obscenity

The trial and sentence for obscenity is the main bone of contention in the history of the Hungry Generation. Obscenity trials were a near daily occurrence in those days and the Hungryalist trial, underpinned by Section 292 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), was no exception here. In West Bengal, trials for books banned on charges of obscenity included Buddhadeva Bose's *Rāt bhare bṛṣṭi* (It Rained All Night) and Samaresh Basu's *Prajāpati* (The Butterfly), both convicted for obscenity. The period after the end of the war saw a rise in governmental censorship also in the United States, often resulting in obscenity. D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Allen Ginsberg's poem *Howl*, and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* were only some of the popular literary cases that led to obscenity trials, testing American laws and standards of obscenity.

Court cases in India and the United States have shown the variability of legal definitions of obscenity. Until the middle of the 20th century, the standard definition used by U.S. courts was articulated in the British Hicklin case. Many novels were banned according to this law, including D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, also prohibited in India in 1964. The so-called Hicklin standard was later abandoned to legalise the publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, once again shifting the standards for judging obscenity, which depended on the "libidinous effect of the whole publication" and not on selected isolated passages of the work under charge. In 1957, on the occasion of another trial against Samuel Roth, who ran an adult-book business in New York, the U.S Supreme Court held that the standard of obscenity should be "whether, to the average person, applying contemporary community standards, the dominant theme of the material taken as a whole appeals to prurient interest" (Jenkins 2023). During the 1960s, Section 292 of the Indian Penal Code, which prohibited the sale, distribution, exhibition or possession of any obscene object or materials, was discussed in the Lok Sabha resulting in amendments which exacerbated the punishment for obscenity offences. After the amendment was passed in 1963, Dilip Chitre, Indian author in English, acknowledged the risks for the creative writer of working in a "far more oppressive climate than earlier", especially when definitions of obscenity, art, and literature were left vague (Futehally et al. 2011). Although India maintained older British obscenity laws and definitions, different public formations and regulatory strategies were mobilised in the colonial and the postcolonial state. Also Mazzarella and Kaur (2009) reaffirmed the shifting politics of obscenity and cultural regulation in India's colonial history and contemporaneity, along with category markers that came to be associated with it such as blasphemy, sedition and obscenity. For example, they identify ambivalence as the defining cipher of the public culture of Indian independence. If Nehru's secularism and developmentalist project marked the overcoming of the split of inner and outer domains, hallmark of the domestic

Introduction

and public spheres in colonial India, it also inaugurated a stringent filter on affective representations. The rationalising ethos of Nehru's nationalism clashed with the coming of so-called "affective-intensive" television image with its interpenetration of devotional viewing, political propaganda and consumer goods advertising (Mazzarella and Kaur 2009: 16).

This ambivalence regarding the definition and politics of obscenity seems to be a characterising feature of the workings of cultural regulation in general, as demonstrated also in the documents of the Hungryalists' sentence for obscenity. The main target of their obscenity trial was Malay Roy Choudhury's poem "Pračaṇḍa Baidyutik Chutār" (Terrific Electric Carpenter), printed as part of a Hungry bulletin seized by police and used as key evidence in the obscenity allegations against the poets. This poem, later translated and made famous via its English version "Stark Electric Jesus", would have become the mark of Hungryalist outrageous poetry and the icon of the trial and sentence for obscenity. The decision by the Presidency Magistrate (fig. 1), which confirmed Malay's sentence for obscenity on the basis of his poem "Stark Electric Jesus", is evidence of the pitfalls of the obscenity category marker when applied to the field of art and literature. The obscenity charges were supported by Section 292 of the Indian Penal Code, still largely based on British obscenity law, which stated that "the accused was found to be in possession of the impugned publication. One of the ingredients of Section 292 IPC namely, of circulation, distribution, making and possessing [of obscene material] are present" (Mitra 1965). The Magistrate acknowledged that the IPC does not define the word obscene, and that a piece of art or literature may not be judged only based on "vulgarity". The decision would have depended on a fleeting judgement of value about the writing under obscenity charges and the witnesses' deposition: does it stimulate an "obscene reaction" on behalf of the reader? Does the work positively adapt to literary values? These sorts of questions were asked to the Hungryalist trial witnesses, many of whom writers in their own right, indicating that morality and public decency were the main parameters to assess a work of art as obscene (Mitra 1965). Yet the final decision sentenced Malay's poem because of its treatment of sex and nudity in a way that "transgresses public decency and morality." Here is how the Magistrate described and explained the "moral transgressions" of the poem:

Applying the test to the offending poem and realising it as a whole, it appears to be perse obscene. In bizarre style it starts with restless impatience of sensuous man for a woman obsessed with uncontrollable urge for sexual intercourse followed by a description of the vagina, uterus, clitoris, seminal fluid, and other parts of the female body and organ, boasting of the man's innate impulse and conscious skill as to how to enjoy a woman,

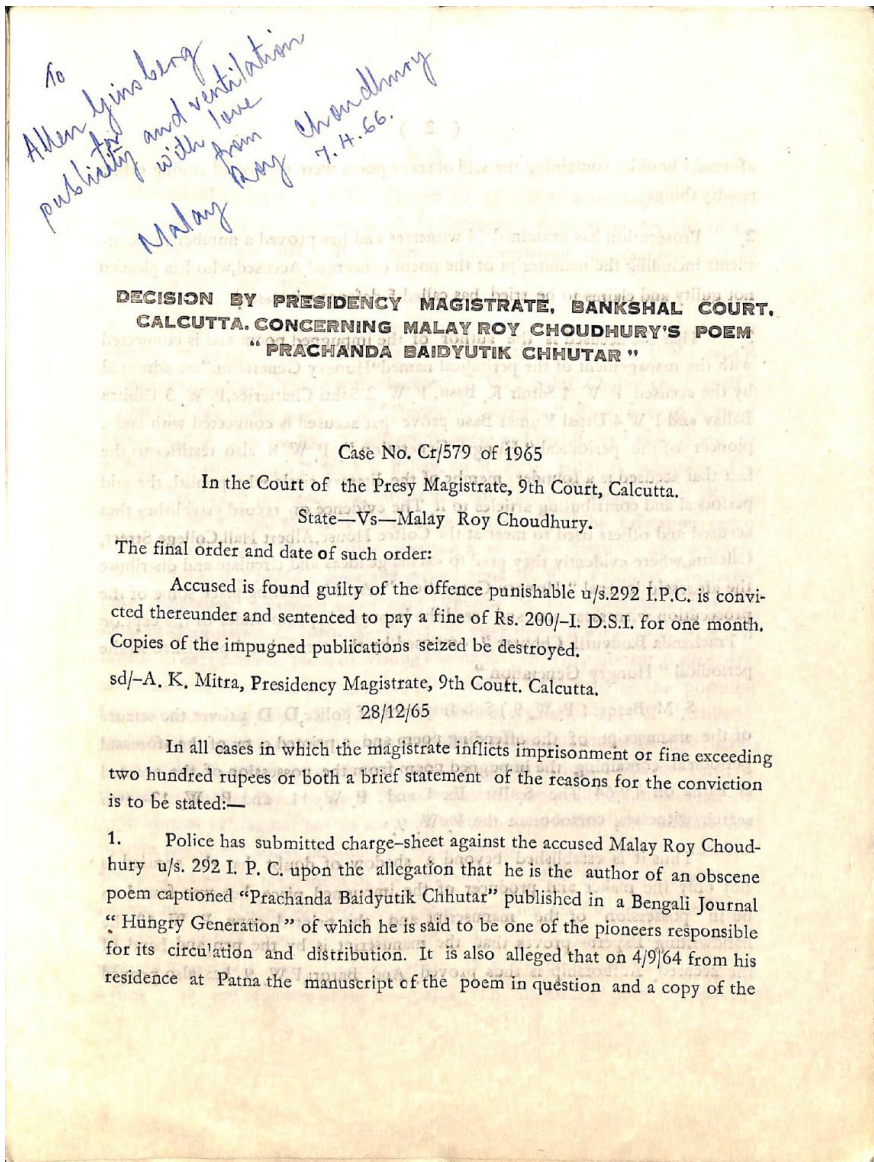


Figure 1. Decision by the Presidency Magistrate, Bankshal Court, Calcutta, concerning Malay Roy Choudhury's poem "Prachanda Baidyutik Chutar" (1965). In Allen Ginsberg papers M733, Box 16, Folder 2 (Correspondence 1960s - Choudhury, Malay Roy). Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

Introduction

blaspheming God and profaning parents accusing them of homosexuality and masturbation, debasing all that is noble and beautiful in human love and relationship. It is a piece of self analysis and eroticism in autobiographical or confessional vein when the poet engages himself in a mercilessly obnoxious and revolting self degeneration and reportage of sexual vulgarity to a degree of perversion and morbidity far exceeding the customary and permissible limits of condour [candour] in description or representation. It is patently offensive to what is called contemporary community standards. [...] Considering the dominant theme it is dirt for dirt's sake, or, what is commonly called, hard-core pornography suggesting to the minds of those in whose hands it may fall stinking wearisome and suffocating thoughts of a most impure and libidinous character and thus tending to deprave and corrupt them without any rendering social or artistic value and importance. (Mitra 1965)

In the Magistrate's interpretation, the offensive passages of the poem were the ones describing female pleasure, sexual urge and sexual activity as non-creative or performed for the sake of pure pleasure. Moreover, a crucial distinction that the Magistrate highlights here is the lack of a social purpose in the literary or artistic depiction of obscenity, described as "dirt for dirt's sake", which made it vulnerable to a legal sentence. Malay Roy Choudhury penned his "In Defense of Obscenity" as a response to the sentence and to the world trend of suppression of freedoms. Printed in various copies during the Hungryalist trial (fig. 2), this declaration addressed "the bourgeois vultures of Establishment" worldwide to proclaim the freedom of language from the shackles of morality and class distinction. This proclamation in defence of obscenity situates itself in the context of a global discourse that saw artists, writers and intellectuals debating on and battling against state censorship and for everyone's freedom of expression. The pamphlet circulated across underground magazines in the United States, such as *Salted Feathers* from Portland and *Guerrilla* from Detroit, transformed the Hungryalist trial on charges of obscenity into a global symbol of protest and resilience of the avant-garde, encouraging continued fighting against censorship and suppression of dissent.

I defend Obscenity

I'll go on defending Obscenity so long as the flagitious bourgeoisie go on claiming the atavist

Superiority of their false air.

In fact there is no such thing as Obscenity.

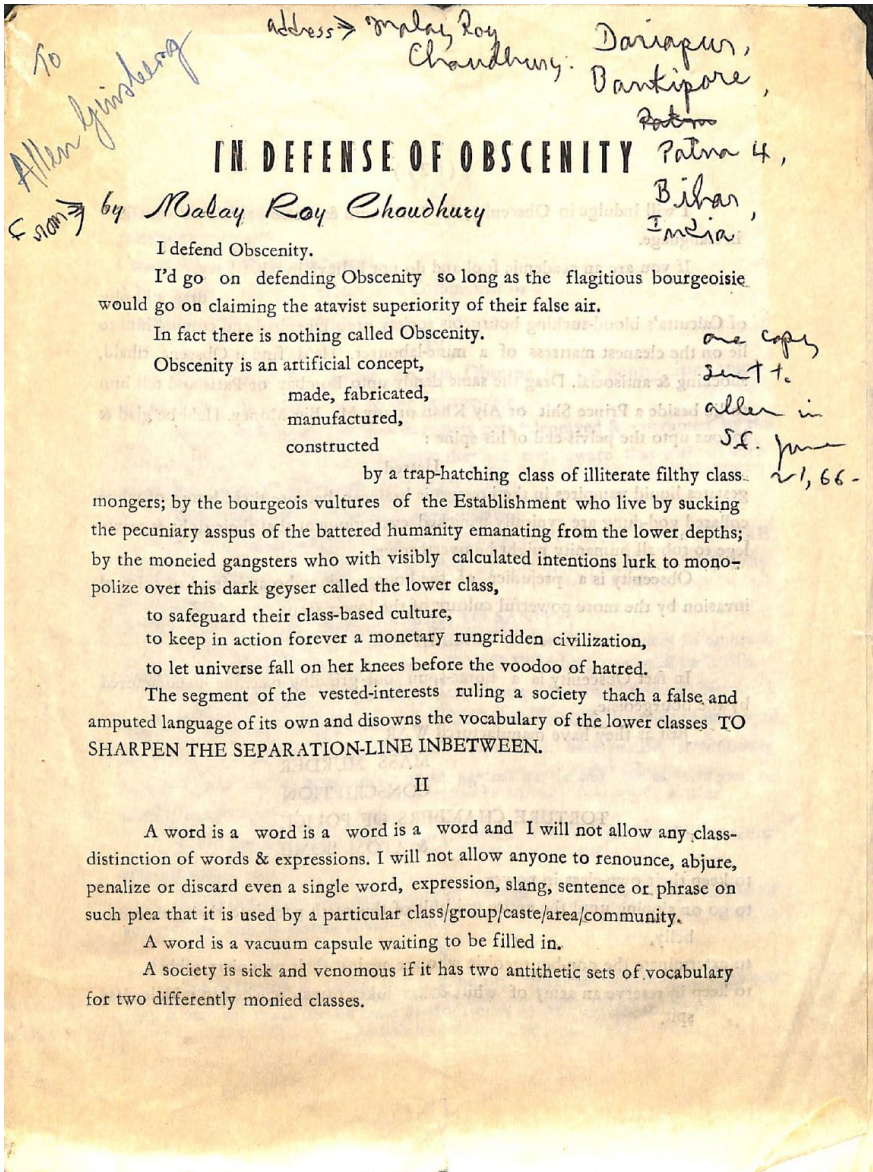


Figure 2. *In Defense of Obscenity*, Malay Roy Choudhury (pamphlet sent by Malay Roy Choudhury to Allen Ginsberg in 1966). In Allen Ginsberg papers M733, Box 16, Folder 2 (Correspondence 1960s - Choudhury, Malay Roy). Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

Introduction

Obscenity is an artificial concept,

Made, fabricated,

Constructed

By a trap-hatching class of illiterate filthy class mongers; by the bourgeois vultures of the Establishment who live by sucking the pecuniary asspus of the battered humanity emanating from the lower depths

What was exceptional in the Hungryalist trial and sentence was that it created an unprecedented chain of solidarity within the international avant-garde scene, spanning from the United States to Europe and South Asia. After the sentence brought the Hungry authors to jail for obscenity in 1964, the young men started correspondence with well-known editors, poets and writers of the American and European avant-garde scene, such as Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Howard McCord, Jan Herman and Carl Weissner, to name just a few. Although the exchange initially started out of a financial need to support the obscenity trial, as shown in the “Malay Roy Choudhury Defense Fund” sent out to Allen Ginsberg for publication (fig. 3), it eventually turned itself into a transnational platform where unedited texts, translations and trial documents were exchanged, creating a real underground space for the circulation of literary and political discourses on obscenity. Despite the obstacles of having to face a trial, the sentence for obscenity helped building the identity of the Hungry Generation, which gradually came to associate itself with the international countercultural wave. It was especially through Allen Ginsberg’s mediation that Hungryalism connected with avant-gardes across the ocean, building a transnational network of poets, editors, artists and writers who joined in the battle against censorship and the suppression of freedoms.

Furthermore, the Hungryalists’ association with the international avant-garde ensured international coverage and financial support needed during their trial for obscenity at the Bankshall court in Calcutta. Their affiliation to the global counterculture with its anti-establishment spirit was symptomatic of a world community against war, censorship and for freedom of expression. The aesthetic of obscenity became a feature that transversally crossed the literary and artistic production of avant-gardes across the peripheries of world modernism. The Hungryalist production endorsed the anti-establishment discourse of the counterculture and of the international avant-garde that made obscenity and freedom of speech the banner of their social criticism, drawing international media attention. Hence, the American avant-garde and other circles of avant-garde writers from Europe established a transnational community of exchange, protest and solidarity with the dual goal of promoting avant-garde literature and voicing the injustice of obscenity trials.

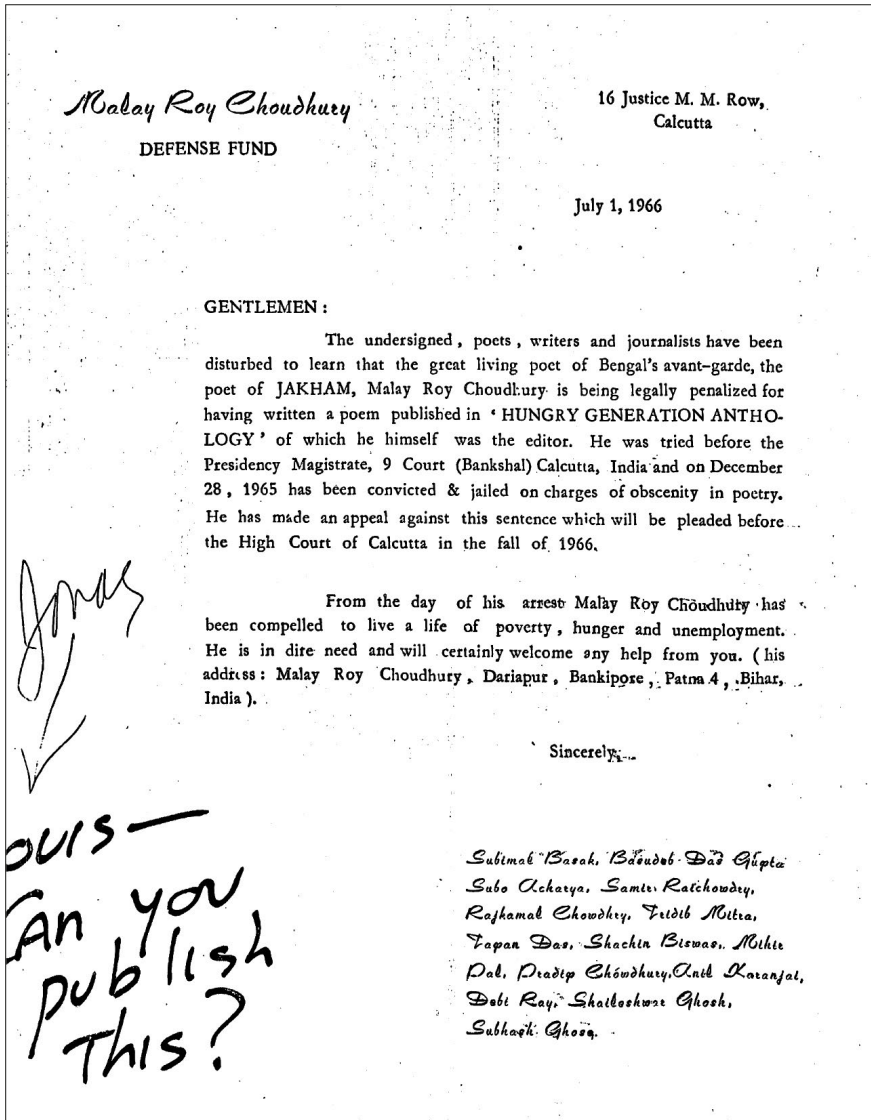


Figure 3. Malay Roy Choudhury Defense Fund (1966). In Allen Ginsberg papers M733, Box 16, Folder 2 (Correspondence 1960s - Choudhury, Malay Roy). Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

Obscenity, Sexuality and Masculinity

After the trial, the Hungry Generation was catapulted into the limelight of avant-garde magazines internationally, gathering support from fellow poets and editors worldwide to sustain them financially through the hard times of the trial for obscenity. In retrospective, the sentence managed to transform the Hungry Generation from a movement into a real cultural phenomenon within the global discourse on censorship and freedom of speech taking place out of the counter-cultural movement throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Even though obscenity as a marker of cultural regulation will be unpacked here in its colonial and postcolonial discourses and representations, the Hungryalist trial shows that the core of an obscenity ban seeks to apply a moral – therefore universal and ahistorical – judgment on a literary work. Throughout colonial and postcolonial history the basic question of obscenity has remained the same: limiting freedoms, censoring, and selecting aesthetic tastes and canons for the public knowledge. Notwithstanding the recognition of these censoring operations in the process of an obscenity ban, the Hungry trial was shown to act in the reverse. Instead of silencing the object of the obscenity sentence, it promoted and amplified its reach. Besides that, in the Hungryalist way of portraying subjects like sexuality and masculinity we find inherited legacies and colonial reminiscences that have engendered overlapping and often conflicting views of gender, sexuality, and morality, which seem to have become embodied behaviours in the context of the Bengali middle class under Nehruvian India. In order to provide an historical background to this study, I want to trace a common thread linking the Bengali poetry of the Hungry Generation with colonial and nationalist economies of morality and sexuality, to come full circle at the end of this introductory chapter with a discussion on the methodology of transgression, at the core of my reading of Hungryalist poetry. I argue that Hungryalism articulates a different idea of obscenity, precisely because it emerged in the realm of confessional poetry, adding another shade of meaning and practice to the varied and composite world of obscene print cultures in India.

So, how is the question of obscenity addressed throughout this book? To start with, obscenity has been a difficult field to delineate. In the visual arts, obscenity is defined as the “representation of matter that is deemed beyond representation or that is beyond the accepted norms of public display, that is indecent, vulgar, dirty, lewd, gross and vile, thus morally corrupting and potentially depraving” (Mey 2007: 2). Therefore, one cannot discern the question of obscenity from that of sexuality. Issues of obscenity started to have legal repercussions when sexuality became a major source of social concern. After Britain passed the Obscene Publications Act (1857), obscenity trials multiplied in a move to counter the moral panic about sexuality that was spreading in the bourgeoisie. Scholarship in the history of sexuality proved that panic about sexuality was a key factor in the formation of

middle-class identity in modern Europe as well as in West Bengal and other British colonial societies (Foucault 1978; Weeks 1981; Banerjee 1998). In British colonies, the moral panic about sexuality also brought along other issues concerning the health, purity, and hygiene of the race. Deana Heath (2010), for example, argued that the emergence of obscenity regulation in Britain was enacted as a biopolitical project in both a settler and an exploitation colony – Australia and India – where it distinctly served as a moral regulatory project. Concerns with preserving the strength of the empire and purity of the race, what Alison Bashford has named “imperial hygiene” (Bashford 2004), shifted from viewing purity as a moral question to regarding it as a medical and racial one underpinned by a socially approved scientific apparatus. Heath argued that it is the crisis generated by crossing moral and medical/biological boundaries, in other words the fear of “contagion”, that made the realm of obscenity a potent form of subversion that destabilized the boundaries of culture and society (Heath 2010: 36). In the context of the British imperial project of disciplining the colonised body, the main task of the obscenity ban was to mark the moral and biological boundaries between what was perceived as appropriate and inappropriate in the public sphere of colonial India.

With the development of a nationalist discourse, Indian nationalists and social reformers enacted similar dynamics of distinction to delineate the boundaries of the Indian race and nation. In Bengal, the formation of a class of bourgeois known as “bhadralok” (Western-educated gentry), mainly hailing from the landed aristocracy and rich merchants, delineated a body of manners and established moral standards and cultural taste. Bhadrakok tastes and manners in colonial Calcutta were shaped through the social and cultural distinction between elite and popular classes significantly affecting the perception of what came to be viewed as dirty, inappropriate and obscene (Banerjee 1998). Similar dynamics of distinction took place in India’s colonial print culture, another vital instrument for crafting identities. In India’s changing public sphere, the spread of the vernacular press encouraged the distribution of cheap publications on indecent or satirical subjects that appealed to the emerging reading audience of the cities. A plethora of Hindi and Bengali pamphlets, journals, and manuals on sexuality substantiated the fear as well as the interest for the world of conjugal love and sexuality (Gupta 2001; Ghosh 2006). According to Charu Gupta, these “low” Hindi publications, which included erotic sex manuals, popular romances, entertaining songs, and texts offering advice on sexual relationships, proliferated at a moment when a national Hindu middle class was essentially being shaped on Victorian moral codes (Gupta 2001). In the same line, Anindita Ghosh showed that the thriving market of cheap Bengali books in Calcutta’s neighbourhood of Battala (baṭṭalā) spoke to the fears and anxieties at the advent of colonial modernity (Ghosh 2006). Farces and other satirical works conveyed a topsy-turvy world of women’s emancipation, men’s weakened virility, corruption of values and depravity, lampooning the over-Westernised new

Introduction

middle class and signalling the crisis of traditional values and fractures within the Bengali society vis-à-vis the colonial rule (Harder and Mittler 2011; Harder 2013).

Gender was another crucial site of negotiation with colonial modernity. Women were particularly the target of nationalist imagination which imagined them chaste and obedient wives, relegated to the *antahpur*, the inner domain of the Bengali household. Against the fear of corruption of values wrought by British rule and colonial modernity, the woman turned into a national symbol of domesticity, chastity and spirituality that was disciplined through a national discourse that promoted moral temperance and sexual abstinence (Sarkar 2001; Chatterjee 1989). The role of women as heroic mothers of the nation was emphasised through political parallels with the *svadeś*, the motherland, elsewhere compared to *Bhārat māṭā* or Mother India (Bagchi 1990). Studies have particularly focused on Indian nationalism when the body of the Indian woman became the site of imperial, colonial and nationalist politics of reform and regulation through a highly controlled and restrained morality of modesty. For example, representations of the ideal Indian woman as a chaste housewife and devoted mother dominated the literature of vernacular journals at the end of the nineteenth century, including *Bāmābodhinī patrikā*, which sought education and empowerment of the modern Indian woman (Sen 2004). The project of women's emancipation, however, was enacted by promoting a national ideology of a domestic feminine sphere that was imagined resisting, both physically and symbolically, the corruption of moral values associated with foreign rule (Chatterjee 1989). By contrast, men were expected to embody the ideal of a martial and muscular masculinity, as well as moral fortitude, that characterised the images of the Hindu soldier and the warrior-monk (Banerjee 2005). In the realm of traditional sport and spiritual practice, physical strength and virility were maintained also through the preservation of male semen, which signified celibacy and sexual abstinence, often perpetrated with a clear anti-colonial intention (Alter 2011). Perhaps the best example of this morality of restriction and sexual abstinence is that of Gandhi and his anti-colonial politics, strongly engrained in the vision of the Hindu's physical and moral fortitude as antidote to British colonialism (Alter 2000).

Instead of changing pace after Partition and Indian independence, the post-colonial state showed a continuity with previous policies that regulated sexuality and gender. A legacy of the anti-colonial rhetoric, the Nehruvian state promoted an economic frugality that extended also to the private sphere of sexuality. Colonial anxieties around sexuality, in fact, did not diminish during the postcolonial era, with the newly independent state-nation seeking an active role in the making of modern India. Discourses on family, marriage, conjugality, and sexuality then reappeared in their institutional forms. A new debate on the Hindu Code in 1955 anticipated an institutional reform of the Hindu family, which was made the object of a process of "nationalisation" (Majumdar 2009). Eleanor Newbigin explained

that calls for family reform raised by the mobilisation around the Hindu Code Bill at first seemed “to critique patriarchal control and social order more generally, creating the intellectual space to rethink the place of women within the family, and the state more widely”, while they actually enhanced men’s individual control over the family thus establishing a “new, post-colonial patriarchy based around the authority of the propertied husband” (Newbiggin 2010). Marriage and modern forms of conjugality with a focus on intimacy and the sexual life of the married couple were reformed to suit the project of the modern Indian nation ready for modernity and scientific advancement (Majumdar 2009). In the field of science, the modern conjugal couple needed instruction on how to practice a “healthy” sexuality, as more and more men and women expressed their anxieties about sexual inadequacy on national magazines. Scientific writings on sexuality, known as sexual science, were also part of a project that sought to discipline the body of the modern Indian citizen. Sexology, or the science of sex, attracted growing interest in the subcontinent: sexual manuals, international and vernacular journals and scientific treatises of Western scholars circulated abundantly in Indian medical circles. In India, this work was pioneered by the medical doctor A. P. Pillai, who helped promoting the idea of “rational sex” based on biological needs and scientific findings (Srivastava 2013; Srivastava 2014). Anxieties about sexual inadequacy, female desire, premature ejaculation, semen loss and homosexuality – either medicalised or scientifically instructed through sexual education – had an enormous impact on the elaboration of modern sexual cultures and identities and new sexual imaginaries of the younger generations born in independent India.

We see such colonial and postcolonial economies of sexuality and masculinity playing out also in the confessional poetry of the Hungry Generation authors. Their poems blatantly show that moral panic and anxieties around sexuality were deeply entrenched in the Bengali (and Indian) middle class, also as a legacy of British colonialism. Let me explain how the colonial and postcolonial discourses of masculinity have influenced what I call the “hyper-masculine ethos” of the Hungry Generation poets.

The Male Gaze and Hyper-Masculinity as Filters of Interpretation

A picture of overlapping discourses and performances of masculinity in colonial and postcolonial India helped making sense of the articulation of manhood by young Bengali poets in post-independent India. Two views have been particularly influential in formulating the question of masculinity in Hungryalist poetry: the impact of colonialism on discourses of gender and race, and that of the Nehruvian ideology of scientific advance and industrialisation in shaping the model of a scientific Indian masculinity. These dominant agents of change and transformation,

Introduction

colonialism and nationalism, have had a tremendous impact on representations of gender and practices of sexuality in different sections of Indian society, as shown by a great number of studies on the intersection between colonialism and gender politics. I have also drawn from the reflections around Connell's idea of "hegemonic masculinity", articulated in her seminal and influential book *Masculinities* (Connell 1995). Her interpretation of patterns and performances of masculinity in 1980s American culture has put emphasis on the existence of multiple models of masculinity – hegemonic as well as subaltern –, as underscored in my analysis of Hungryalist hyper-masculinity vis-à-vis the rational and scientific masculinity promoted by the Nehruvian state. Connell's work suggested viewing masculinity in terms of power relations where masculinity cannot be reduced exclusively to the pattern of the "dominant male" of the patriarchal order. In her view, hegemonic masculinities are "patterns of practice" that legitimise men's dominant position in society and justify the subordination of women and common men or other marginalised ways of being a man. Hegemony is a crucial word here that, after Antonio Gramsci's intuition in the *Prison Notebooks*, defines a position of privilege which is achieved not by violence – although it can be supported by force – but through culture, institutions and persuasion.

Going back to the colonial scenario, the best source for our topic is Mrinalini Sinha's work on perceptions of "colonial masculinity" in late 19th century India (Sinha 1995). She argued that the new class of Western-educated Indians – the middle-class Bengali Hindu – was seen by the British administrators as an "unnatural" or "perverted" form of masculinity and became the quintessential referent for that category designated as the "effeminate *babus*" (Sinha 1995: 2). The broad generalisation about the mild-mannered Bengali *babu* (Beng. *bābu*) intersects with other stereotypes about Indians as a "feeble", "passive", and "effete" people already disseminated in the early period of colonial rule. Thomas Babington Macaulay's classic description in his *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) defined Bengalis in the following way: "The physical organisation of the Bengalee is feeble even to effeminacy. He lives in a constant vapour bath. His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid. During many ages he has been trampled upon by men of bolder and more hardy breeds. Courage, independence, veracity are qualities to which his constitution and his situation are equally unfavourable" (Sinha 1995: 15–16). The indolence and feebleness of the Bengali race explained their loss of independence to the British. With the erosion of property, the declining fortune of the landed gentry, and the loss of local businesses to the Marwari community, the image of Bengali "effeteness" became a stereotype also within the Bengali intellectual class at least until the 1930s (Rosselli 1980: 123). Other hegemonic Indian masculinities reappeared in reaction to the emasculation of Indian men such as that which glorified the muscular strength and martial prowess of the so-called martial races as well as of the Hindu soldier (Banerjee 2005).

Simultaneously, another common stereotype about the natives of the British colonies perpetrated the idea of hypersexuality and predatory masculinity as a characteristic of the natives which threatened the chastity of the white woman. Evidence of this is provided by a great number of rape trials carried out against natives in the British African colonies as well as by the alleged rape case narrated in E.M Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). But if the dominant narrative about the natives characterised them as a sexual threat for the white woman, Ann Laura Stoler has also noticed that the colony was an open terrain for the sexually repressed Westerner (Stoler 1995: 174–5). After all, via Freud and psychoanalytic theory Frantz Fanon previously observed that the “Negro” was constantly the object of the white man’s gaze (Fanon 1986: 116) as well as “the projection of the white man’s desires” (Stoler 1995: 171).

In addition to the violence perpetrated by colonialism, the Hungryalist hyper-masculinity must be understood in the framework of Nehru’s national project of scientific progress and economic development propagated in the first decades of independence. The muscular and virile, subjugating and violating action performed by the Hungryalist male body – a hungry and all-devouring body – acts with such violence also in response to the dominant models of a modest sexuality and masculinity that aligned with the ideology of economic frugality promoted by the nation-state (Srivastava 2014). The toxic masculinity that most Hungryalists perform in their poems – especially in displaying the sexual power of the male body and through the possession, consumption and objectification of the female body – should thus be interpreted in the frame of these multiple hegemonic masculinities. In my analysis of the hyper-masculine ethos of Hungryalist poetry and of Phalguni Ray’s anxious sexuality (chapter 4 and 5), I use the concepts of hyper-masculinity and “male gaze” to describe the gender approach in my reading of Hungryalist poetry. This perspective arrays within the symbolic pace of the poems while materialising in the gaze of the same authors, revealing the positionality of the poetic voice vis-à-vis the object represented. The concept of male gaze was initially addressed in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis which focused on the erotic compulsion to look, known as scopophilia, the pleasurable desire to be seen and the power of fantasy by which the viewer identifies with the object of the look. Yet it was Michel Foucault’s theory of the controlling power of the gaze, exercised through modern instruments of surveillance – the clinic, the prison and the census operation – that has remained most influential in interpreting visual and literary cultures in South Asia (Foucault 1979; Uberoi 2006; Chatterjee 2019). With Laura Mulvey’s seminal work in feminist film theory, the concept of a “scopic” regime gained additional salience in its emphasis on inequality of gender power relations in cinematic representations (Mulvey 1975). Along the same line of the feminist film theorist, the British painter and art critic John Berger analysed the unequal relationship between genders in the spectator-object observed dichotomy,

Introduction

where the former was always male and the latter a woman. He argued that this gender inequality became structural in the representation of women with its spread in television and advertising (Berger 2008). We will see that the male gaze is the primary instrument of Hungryalist aesthetics, exhibiting distinct traits of misogyny and objectification in portraying the woman's body. Description of sexual bodies and male masturbation, as in Malay Roy Choudhury's "Pracaṇḍa baidyutik chutār" (Terrific Electric Carpenter, 1964), heavily rested on what I call an aesthetics of rape and consumption which were also symptomatic of postmodernity, emerging consumerism and the commodifying logic of capitalism. However, my analysis of Phalguni Ray's poems (chapter 5) has shown a different articulation of the masculine gaze which here obsessively stares and objectifies one's own male body. Within the general hyper-masculine ethos of Hungryalist poetry, generally objectifying and abusive of the woman's body, Phalguni's writing hinted at a more ambiguous and troubled coexistence with his masculinity. It is the double declination of the male gaze and of male "pleasurable structures of looking" that is articulated in this corpus of Hungryalist poetry. This perspective shows that the male gaze as potential interpretive filter can reveal the multiple inequalities embedded in the dichotomy between viewer and object viewed. Inequalities that are gender-focused, but also sharpened by socio-cultural transformations and structural imbalances visible on a global scale in the context of mid-20th century modernisation, industrialisation and an increasingly capitalist culture.

A Transgressive Approach to the Sources

Transgression of bodies and textualities are the dominant tropes addressed and performed in the poetry of this avant-garde movement, as well as in the lives of the Hungry poets, as I argue in this book.⁴ The body that is transgressed physically and metaphorically is a deeply historical body: it is the male body of the middle-class alienated bohemian poet, who performs his virility weakened by a colonial legacy of emasculation, deprived by the desire of consuming – of bodies and commodities –, and whose (im)morality of sexual and aesthetic excess is pathologised as "abnormal" and corrupted. It is the Foucauldian body of biopolitics that must "be put in order" through discipline and governmentality (Foucault 1978).

4 I use "trope" in this book to outline recurring images, words or expressions, themes and figures of speech in the Hungry Generation poetry projecting a higher and symbolic layer of meaning beyond the literal and denotative signification of the single word (Baldick 2001: 264). An example of tropes that are emblematic of Hungryalist poetry are hunger, masturbation, rape and consumption.

How does this book conceptualise transgression? The Latin etymology of transgression literally means “to go beyond” (trans + gradi): beyond the limits of what is morally acceptable. Transgression has a long critical history that has shaped its meaning according to the sociohistorical context in which the concept was applied. Originally, transgression was used to describe historical moments of subversion of social roles and hierarchies, which Mikhail Bakhtin memorably detected in the mode of the “carnavalesque” (Bakhtin 1984). The concept proved extremely fruitful to cultural theorists for its radical potential that could be applied to a plethora of literary texts and cultural contexts. Most notably, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White used Bakhtin’s carnivalesque to explain a wider phenomenon of transgression: while the carnival embodied a celebration of the “lower bodily stratum” – associated with functions like urinating, defecating, and copulating –, it also helped to delimit the social and cultural boundaries of the bourgeoisie, which identified itself based on a differentiation with the world of the poor and dirty (Stallybrass and White 1986). A similar dynamic of social distinction was observed by Sumanta Banerjee (1998) between elite and popular culture in colonial Bengal which demarcated the physical and cultural boundaries between *bhadralok* and *choṭalok*, the Bengali gentry and the lower classes.⁵ Moreover, studies in anthropology and the social sciences proved that transgression can be endowed with various cultural meanings and interpretations. Above all, transgression was pivotal throughout history to build social identities and status through acts of social distinction and marginalisation (Douglas 1966; Turner 1969; Bourdieu 1984; Stallybrass and White 1986). My perspective on transgression takes its cue from these authors’ seminal works and insights into the dynamics of social and cultural distinction from tribal and non-Western communities to urban middle-class in post-industrial societies. The central idea of such distinction, which also gave birth to the bourgeoisie, is that the so-called “bourgeois body” essentially defined itself based on a neat separation from and repudiation of filth, what symbolically distinguished the lower classes. In studies on the history of sexuality most notably inaugurated by Michel Foucault, the historian Jeffrey Weeks (1981) too observed that “the concern with the ‘immorality’ of the working class said more about bourgeois morality than about the complex realities of working-class life” (Weeks 1981: 47). Many others followed in reaffirming the role of morality in articulating distinction, while observing that the formation of the bourgeoisie in modern societies took place through a factual as well as symbolic separation from the realm of the poor, lazy and filthy embodied by the lower classes. Looking at the separation of social bodies, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) noticed that the process of demarcation of

5 As Sumanta Banerjee noted in his popular book (1998), the idea of “obscene” (*aślīl*) in 19th century Bengal was shaped by the differentiation between high and low classes and culture, where the latter was obscured and suppressed from the life of the *bhadralok*.

Introduction

bourgeois status and taste in post-war France was steeped in the economic as well as cultural capital possessed by a certain social class. In this context, he claimed that “art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences” (Bourdieu 1984: 7).

What Mikhail Bakhtin described as the defiling and “grotesque body” in display during the subversive time of the carnival has since been qualified in various ways: polluted, abject, abnormal, excessive, disgusting, and obscene. In the realm of literature, Bakhtin was among the first to explore acts of transgression as political and cultural subversions. For example, in his analysis of Rabelais’s *Gargantua*, a model of his notion of transgression, he comments on the episode of Friar John asserting that “even the shadow of the monastery belfry can render the women more fertile” with an ironic twist that symbolically transforms the belfry into the phallus. To explain this sarcastic transgression of the denotative meaning of the word, Bakhtin points out that “the object transgresses its own confines, ceases to be itself. The limits between the body and the world are erased, leading to the fusion of the one with the other and with surrounding objects” (Bakhtin 1984: 310). These words explain well the inner workings of transgression, which functions as an actual trespassing of the border delimiting what is morally accepted and socially established by a religious, political or literary community. The ideas initially developed by Bakhtin were recovered by Stallybrass and White and others to use transgression as a potent analytic category able to reveal the “symbolic inversions” taking place during carnival (Stallybrass and White 1986: 18). They remarked a more complex dynamic of power, fear and desire involved in the construction of bourgeois subjectivity in modern Europe that structured itself in relation to the “debasements and degradations of low discourse” (Stallybrass and White 1986: 3). Seen from this perspective, transgression more generally denotes a symbolic inversion that is overtly political in nature. The result of this process of identity formation is a conflictual, contradictory and mobile relationship between the two discourses where “the ‘top’ attempts to reject and eliminate the ‘bottom’ for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover, not only that it is in some way frequently dependent upon that low-Other [...] but also that the top includes that low symbolically, as a primary eroticised constituent of its own phantasy life” (Stallybrass and White 1986: 5). The ambivalent relationship of repugnance and attraction well explains the imagination and eroticisation of the “low-Other” that takes shape also – but not only – on a symbolic level in the obscene and dirty language of Hungryalist poetry, often the object of neglect and depreciation by Indian and Bengali criticism. Sociological interpretations like these about the separation of elite and lower social bodies have highlighted other key mechanisms and ideologies that are essential to unpack the ambivalence and duality of transgression as such, also in the realm of Hungryalist poetry.

What has made the application of an idea of transgression more problematic and harder to pinpoint is when dealing with hyper-masculinity, a trope and embodied practice often involving abusive representations of a woman's body, often verging on misogyny and homophobia. How can the trope of hyper-masculinity be approached in terms of transgression? My suggestion is that hyper-masculinity should be interpreted as part of the subversive yet highly ambivalent action of transgression which turns itself into an instrument to perpetuate the social and cultural violence it seeks to overturn: an "epistemic violence", to use Foucault and Spivak's popular phrase, that is both perpetrated and endured by these young Bengalis in the postcolonial moment of 1960s India. Another major component of transgression is that it is sanctioned and legitimised by the specific structure of power. Scholars of postmodernism affirmed the sanctioning power of transgression and other textual strategies of transgression like pastiche and parody, iconic modes of postmodern writing. For example, Linda Hutcheon (1985) provided a new reading of parody as that which is "fundamentally double and divided; its ambivalence stems from the dual drives of conservative and revolutionary forces that are inherent in its nature as authorised transgression" (Hutcheon 1985: 26). Chris Jenks (2003) too referred to Bakhtin's formulation of carnival as a transient moment of desire to transgress the limits, pointing out that "every rule, limit, boundary or edge carries with it its own fracture, penetration or impulse to disobey" and that "transgression is a component of the rule" (Jenks 2003: 7). This is where the ground-breaking contribution of anthropologist Victor Turner and his concept of the liminal comes into the Hungry Generation story.

Just like changing social entities and identities in the making, Hungryalist poetry rightly functions as a literary and highly symbolic space where newly modern and national identities are questioned, subverted and fractured through a language of obscenity and all-devouring consumption of bodies and commodities. In Victor Turner's words, liminality is the condition of hybridity and in-betweenness characterising some moments of passage in history just like the traditional rites of passage (e.g. birth, puberty, menstruation, marriage etc.) which members of a society necessarily go through in order to maintain and re-establish a new social order of meaning. Liminal entities are "betwixt and between" and frequently likened to "death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon" (Turner 1969: 95). It is precisely this ambivalent nature of the Hungry Generation poets, rebellious to social and sexual standards yet perpetuating aggressive masculine roles, which configures their identity as liminal. By using the concept of transgression, I want to stress the ambivalence implicit in the subversive and corrupting language of the Hungry Generation, overtly aimed at challenging the structure while incorporating and reiterating the language of the dominant order. Representation in Bengali poetry of morally "filthy" activities like masturbating, boozing, smoking marijuana, and

Introduction

performing socially reproachable or abusive sexualities vis-à-vis Bengali middle-class moral standards locates the avant-garde acts of transgression in the liminal space between subversion and reaffirmation. Although transgression of moral standards and social rules are main operations of the Hungry Generation poets, a certain degree of differentiation can be identified in the various tropes under discussion. For instance, representations of hunger, alcohol, drug consumption, and masturbation have shown the attempt at transgressing middle-class narratives on the body through the physical abuse of the poets' own bodies. By contrast, concerns for masculinity, changing gender-roles, as well as the persistence of a family-oriented system in the postcolonial Bengali society, as it emerges from Phalguni Ray's poetry, underscore an ethos of resistance to and subversion of the dominant social structures of Indian society – the bourgeoisie, the middle class, and Hindu ideology – which delineated Hungryalism as a postcolonial and post-modern literary movement in the Bengali language.

By stressing the ambivalence between reaffirmation and disruption of norms in Hungryalist poetry, I want to demystify the prevalent view of the Hungry Generation as a rebellious and obscene movement or a condemned group of depraved misogynists. I suggest looking at both views in a larger perspective by zooming in on the literary texts of Hungryalism to gauge the transgressive potential of its main tropes. It is true that their hyper-masculinity and misogyny, as well as the spirit of rejection and emancipation from standard norms and dominant moralities, are predominant traits of Hungryalism. The duality of their language, shifting from a sexist register to the quest for emancipation from the patriarchal idiom reiterated by the Bengali middle-class society, is in fact distinctive of the transgressive mode of Hungryalism.⁶ At the same time, one cannot deny the provocative and disruptive potential of practices perceived as scandalous and immoral by the conservative cultural milieu of the Bengali middle class, such as orgies, masturbation, boozing, and smoking hemp, as these are visualised in Hungryalist poems and made part of their revolutionary process of poetry writing. This is precisely where Turner's idea of modern forms of performance as "liminoid" spaces that stage and enact social drama (Turner 1982) could serve as an interpretive tool of the Hungryalists' physical and symbolic acts of transgression of middle-class Bengali social and cultural normativity. According to Turner, modern performances – just like avant-garde theatre – reproduce on stage a crisis having the potential to engender social transformation through the inversion and re-coding of language and meaning. Turner's intuition about liminality in modern societies can be aptly used to address the question of the Hungryalists' marginality vis-à-vis the normativity of the Bengali

6 My use of "patriarchy" follows Judith Butler (1990) who inferred that this notion cannot be viewed as an essential monolithic entity. Patriarchy, like the categories of sex and gender, must be understood in relation to their specific historical and social context of research.

society of the 1960s. Transgressing the boundaries of Bengali middle-class social world, the Hungryalists drew attention to the ruptures and failures embedded in postcolonial history by revealing the contradictions involved in the struggle to emancipate themselves from the burden of social norms and moral codes of the Bengali middle class. We will see that the tropes of transgression of Hungryalist poetry articulate in the interstitial spaces between duality and affirmation, defeat, and emancipation, oscillating between the reactionary and the progressive.

State of the Art

This work aspires to be the first academic book on the topic, offering a socio-literary analysis of the Hungry Generation poetry to the wider public. The book covers some major aspects of the poetry movement regarding its literary production and reception in the American and Bengali avant-garde circle. It does so by reconstructing its histories and narratives, literary practice, so-called “tropes of transgression”, the reception and interaction with the American avant-garde in the 1960s. Although the movement counted over forty participants at its peak, this book focuses on selected poetry and other literary texts written by the following Hungryalists, in alphabetical order: Subo Acharya, Utpalkumar Basu, Shakti Chattopadhyay, Sandipan Chattopadhyay, Basudeb Dasgupta, Saileshvar Ghosh, Phalguni Ray, Debi Roy and Malay Roy Choudhury.

During my research, I have availed myself of both primary and secondary sources in Bengali and English. Among the first, Hungry leaflets, pamphlets, bulletins, manifestoes and little magazines, as well as material from the correspondence that took place among American and Bengali authors. Interviews to some Hungryalist poets (i.e. Malay and Samir Raychaudhuri, Pradip Chaudhuri and Debi Roy) have also been essential to the present research. This book discusses only a selection of the vast material I collected from the various archives in Calcutta, Chicago, Madison, Stanford and Washington because of the number and heterogeneity of the texts. Throughout the book, I have used the phrase “literary materials” to refer to non-poetic texts that are however considered of literary value because of their form, content and materiality. In other places, these are also called “ephemera”, that is cheap pamphlets, little magazines, bulletins, cards and single-sheet leaflets meant to be printed and distributed in big quantity against the usual commercial methods of the literary market. Let us now briefly review the scholarship available on the Hungry Generation.

In Bengali, Uttam Das’s book *Hām̐ri, śruti o śāstrabirodhī āndolan* (Hungry, Shruti and Anti-scriptures Movements) introduced the readers to the history of the movement in the context of other anti-establishment movements of postmodern Bengali literature (Dās 1986). More recently, Malay Roy Choudhury’s poetry

Introduction

Hāmri āndolan o drohapuruṣer kathā (On the Hungry Movement and Rebels) was the subject of a book by Kumar Bishnu De from Assam University (De 2013). Titas De Sarkar is currently conducting his doctoral research at the University of Chicago on postcolonial representations of youth culture in Calcutta, and Malay Roy Choudhury's banned poem "Stark Electric Jesus" is one of his foci, as he showed in a chapter of an edited volume (De Sarkar 2019). I previously published an article where I analyse the medical lexicon prevalent in descriptions of the female "sexual body" in the Bengali and English version of Malay Roy Choudhury's same poem (Cappello 2018). Various papers in English have discussed the movement in comparative perspective with the Beat Generation (Bhattacharya 2013; Belletto 2019). A book by Maitrayee Chowdhury Bhattacharjee was published by Penguin India with the title *The Hungryalists: The Poets who Sparked a Revolution*, the only book until now which deals with the Hungry Generation (Chowdhury Bhattacharjee 2018). Written in the genre of a fictionalised documentary, also based on archival sources, it nonetheless eschews focusing on a critical presentation and analysis of their poetry and literary history. A similar experiment which predates Maitrayee's book is Deborah Baker's *A Blue Hand: The Beats in India*, which tangentially deals with the Hungryalists in relation to the Beatniks visit to India (Baker 2008).

Based on previous scholarship on postcolonial literary modernism and alternative print cultures in South Asia, this research also contributes to these fields by turning attention to a Bengali avant-garde movement that is on many levels relatable to the bilingual literary cultures of post-independent India (Zecchini 2014; Nerlekar 2016; Chaudhuri 2008; King 1987). While building on these works, this book wants to depart from their emphasis on minor archives and the materiality of alternative literary practices. Although these features are present and relevant in the world of Hungryalist literature, I deemed repetitive a further focus on aspects of materiality and circulation, which constitute by now an established and varied section of modern literary studies (Bornstein 2001; Bulson 2013; Loren 2013; Nerlekar 2016). I decided to draw attention to the contents, the tropes and language employed in Hungryalist poetry and other writing, which call for greater critical and academic attention. In terms of size and priority, this study is conscious of its limitations in the selection of the authors and genres on which the book is based. I did not include any prose writings by Sandipan Chattopadhyay, Subhas Ghosh and Basudeb Dasgupta who were prolific prose writers even beyond the Hungry Generation. Readers and scholars of Bengali literature might be disappointed to see only marginal reference to the poets of the Kṛttibās group and other major voices of Bengali modern poetry from the post-independence era, like Binoy Majumdar. One of the reasons is that poets of the Kṛttibās group like Shakti Chattopadhyay and Sunil Gangopadhyay are by now part of the official literary culture and, therefore, more accessible for further critical studies. Moreover, this book is

more interested in initiating a qualitative and critical reading of individual authors than on expanding the already vast archive of modern Bengali poetry. A selection of poems and other literary materials was collected in a concluding appendix to introduce the full texts, without explanatory footnotes, to encourage a direct reading of these authors.

Overview of the Content

The introduction pinpoints the main features as well as the problems that have been addressed in the literary history of the Hungry Generation. I read the production of this literary movement in the context of the global as well as the Bengali 1960s, surveying the histories, sources and narratives that made this literary movement a contested object of discussion in Bengali criticism until today. In chapter 1 (Language and Materiality), I illustrate the dominant practices of Hungry literature which were characteristic of most international avant-garde and underground literatures of that period. The circulation and exchange of literary and non-literary material, including letters, little magazines, poetry, manifestoes, and other ephemera, as well as the use of a vocabulary that reflected consumption and modernisation were defining features of this Bengali avant-garde.

Chapter 2 (Hunger and the Aesthetics of Transgression) delves into Hungry-artist texts to retrace the major tropes of transgression, drawing from the theoretical discussions on transgression and liminality. With this notion, I aim at reading Hungry literary transgressions as liminal moments of rupture with middle-class normativity moving from a quasi-misogynist view to the struggle for emancipation from the burden of scientific authorities, social rules and hierarchies that dominated Bengali middle-class society in that epoch. The ambivalence and duality of their language is in fact a constituting and distinguishing trait of their transgressive behaviour. Representations of hunger, alcohol and drug consumption, masturbation, hyper-masculinity and objectification of a woman's body are transversally present in their poetry and pivotal to the formulation of an aesthetic of transgression.

Chapter 3 (Modernism, Postmodernism and the Avant-garde) follows up with a look at the possible influences from Bengali and Indian modernism and other European literary figures and philosophical traditions that helped shaping the avant-garde horizon of the Hungry Generation. Hungryalism was a postmodern avant-garde not only confined to Bengal and to Bengali language but intimately connected to other alternative circles of writers in Bombay, Delhi, Benares and other cities of North India. A central feature of the movement was its insistence on hybridity, corruption and non-Bengaliness by which it contributed to reinvent a Bengali literary modernism that is transcultural, postmodern and postcolonial.

Introduction

After retracing the possible influences that shaped the Hungry Generation as a postmodern avant-garde, chapter 4 (Hyper-masculinity and the Objectification of Bodies) goes back to the tropes of transgression, this time zooming in on hyper-masculinity and the objectification of the woman's body. Based on a few poems, it emerged that the male gaze was the primary instrument of Hungryalist aesthetics, heavily resting on an aesthetics of rape and consumption in many ways symptomatic of the emerging consumer's culture and commodifying logic of capitalism.

Chapter 5 (Anxious Masculinity in Phalguni Ray's *Television of a Rotten Soul*) continues the close reading of Hungryalist poetry and introduces the reader to the troubled and ambivalent world of Phalguni Ray's poetry. A cult figure of the Hungry Generation hailing from an old family of landed gentry, Phalguni died prematurely at the age of 36, unmarried, unemployed and cirrhotic (1954–1981). On the background of India's industrial and scientific ethos, with the rise of terrorism and radical politics in West Bengal and of middle-class consumer's culture, Phalguni transposed the economic and cultural crisis onto his male body in his poetry and film scripts, which are the subject of my analysis. His main existential conflicts portrayed in his poetry centre on the dichotomy between the normative and the socially reproachable, both crucial concepts for Phalguni's elaboration of a troubled and deeply anxious masculinity. Phalguni's marginal position in Bengali middle-class society – poor, unemployed, alcoholic, and sexually ambiguous – sets against social and religious regulations and medical and scientific discourses on sane and healthy sex in colonial and postcolonial India.

In the last chapter (Avant-Garde as a Worlding Practice), I return to questions about the reception of the Hungry Generation by looking at transfigurations of cultural symbols and language through in place across the transnational avant-garde circle. I point out the major representations of the Hungry Generation by focusing on the poets' interaction with the American avant-garde circle and its reception in Bengali criticism. Central to my analysis of these interactions are issues of imitation and adaptation, and to a lesser extent of distortion, as vital sites of production for postcolonial literatures. The ambiguous position of Hungryalism in seeking Western models while rejecting the colonial canon and values of the Bengali middle class, frames this movement's response to and engagement with the Beat Generation in terms that valued hybridity, ambivalence and mimicry.

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.

1 “Poetry is No More a Civilizing Manoeuvre”

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

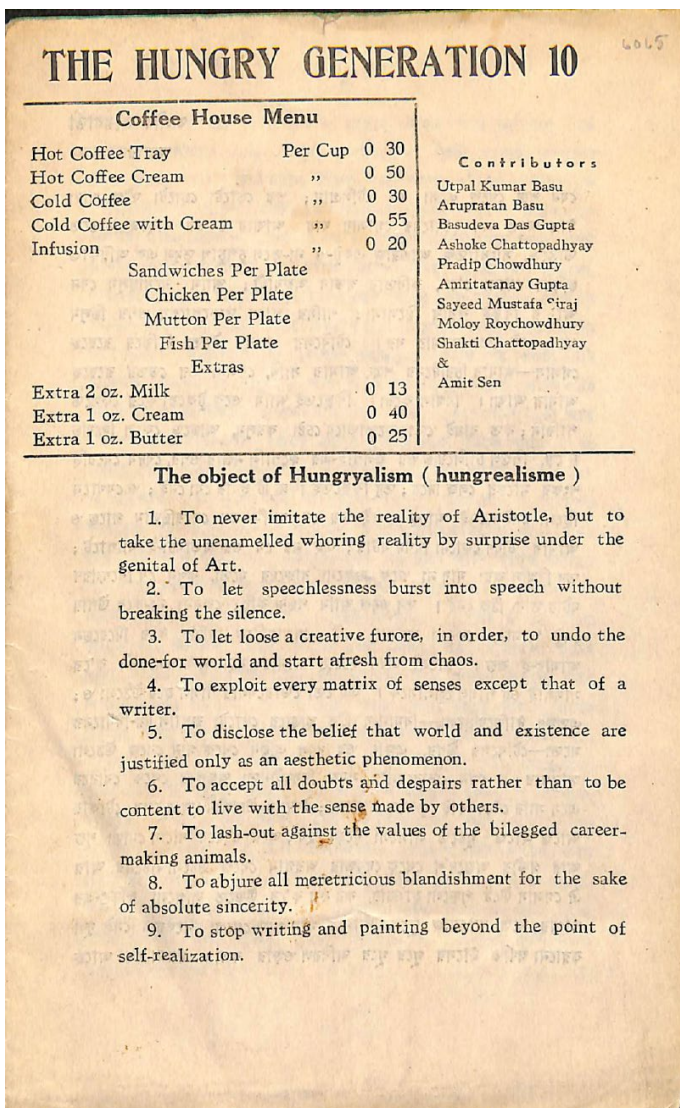


Figure 5. "Coffee House Menu" and "The Object of Hungryalism" in *The Hungry Generation 10*. In Allen Ginsberg papers, M733, Box 74, Folder 16 (XIII Periodicals. The Hungry Generation). Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

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 Haradbon 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.

Poetry is no more a civilizing manoeuvre, a replanting of the bamboozled gardens; it is a holocaust, a violent and somnambulistic jazzing of the hymning 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.

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

1 “Poetry is No More a Civilizing Manoeuvre”

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,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

সুব্বী পীঠী

Le Hungrialisme



বোজোছেন

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

Religious Manifesto
of the
Hungry Generation

God is shit.

Religion is an omnivorous system of feud between man's insell and exsell 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 ত্রাহি

বাসিনাস ক্রিয়—জয়বর মাধু হীতোক ভালোবাসে
 জানি মাধু থেকে বরার
 হীতোক ভালো করে রাহি।

আজ শরীরের অয়োজন ॥

কেউ কেউ শিখারে একম
 কাহিনিক শিখিত
 কনপুষ্টি দান
 ভালোবাসে ॥

বন্দীত্ব গুহর

অস্তুর ভালোবাসেগি শরীরে উদার ভোমার মন
 জানো, অস্তুর হিসে জাই ওই যে ছেলেরা ন্যাসো দিক্টিয়
 বারলায় ৭ জন ১ জন হয়ে প্রতিযোগী নাড়ের বাগ্টি।

হুই কীকে ১গা গটিয়ে 'কানি ঠিক খুলে দেবো বোম্বকের
 গি'টি'— এইকথান-বদেই দিক্টিয়ের পরোজায় কাং হয়ে বিকম
 হাপারগি। (কোংসার সৈকতে স্বরমহিলারা নেবে এলো নিতালনা
 লপুণ্যে আধ উজার)।

এনি নাহু জরা সবলেও দিক্টিয়ে, এমদিক হুপুকের
 দারন বোদুয়ে একা করে হুস্তি চলে।

কে কার ফুবে গি'টি ?

হুচোবে উদার হুং জোয়ান 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).

1 "Poetry is No More a Civilizing Manoeuvre"

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

1 “Poetry is No More a Civilizing Manoeuvre”

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

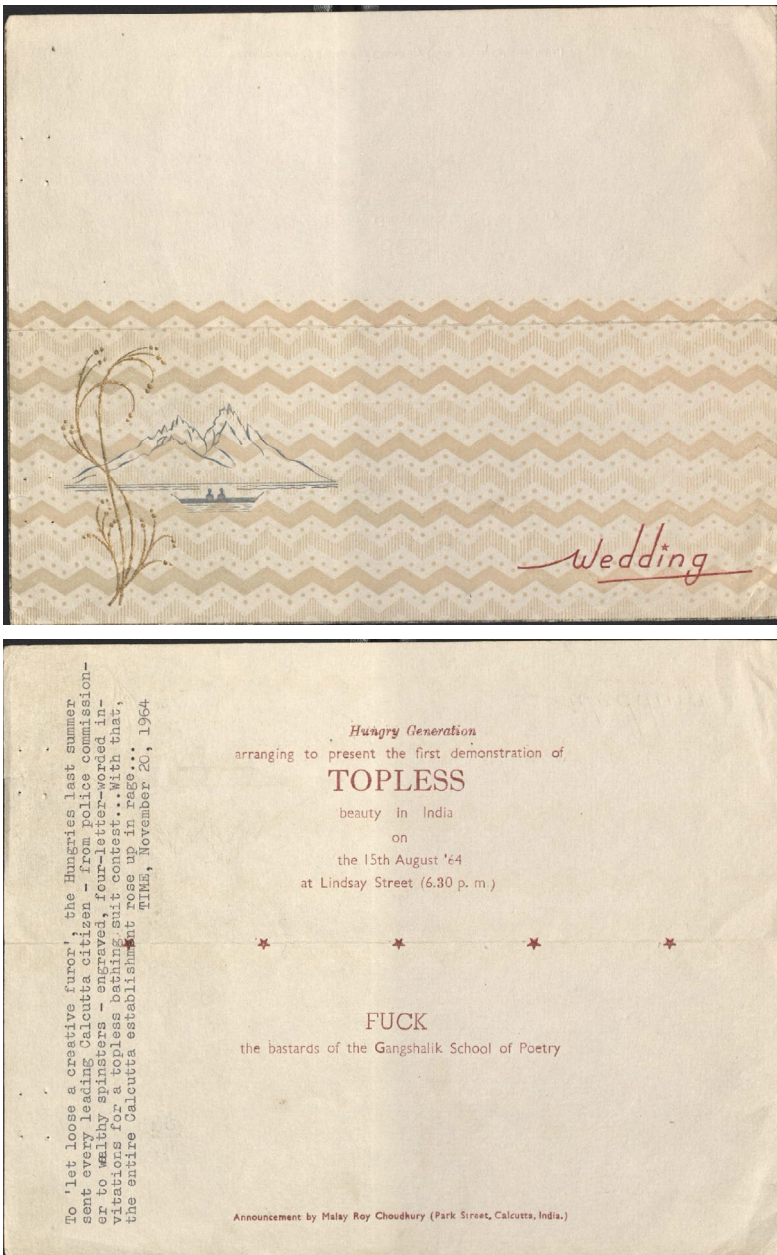


Figure 8. Front and back of the Hungry Generation wedding card announcing, “the first demonstration of TOPLESS beauty in India”. In Carl Weissner Archive, MS22, “Hungry Generation” 1966, Box 5, Folder 23. Courtesy of Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives, Northwestern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

1 “Poetry is No More a Civilizing Manoeuvre”

the invitation with “yours, impolitely” (durbinā) instead of the typical Bengali binīta/subinīta (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,

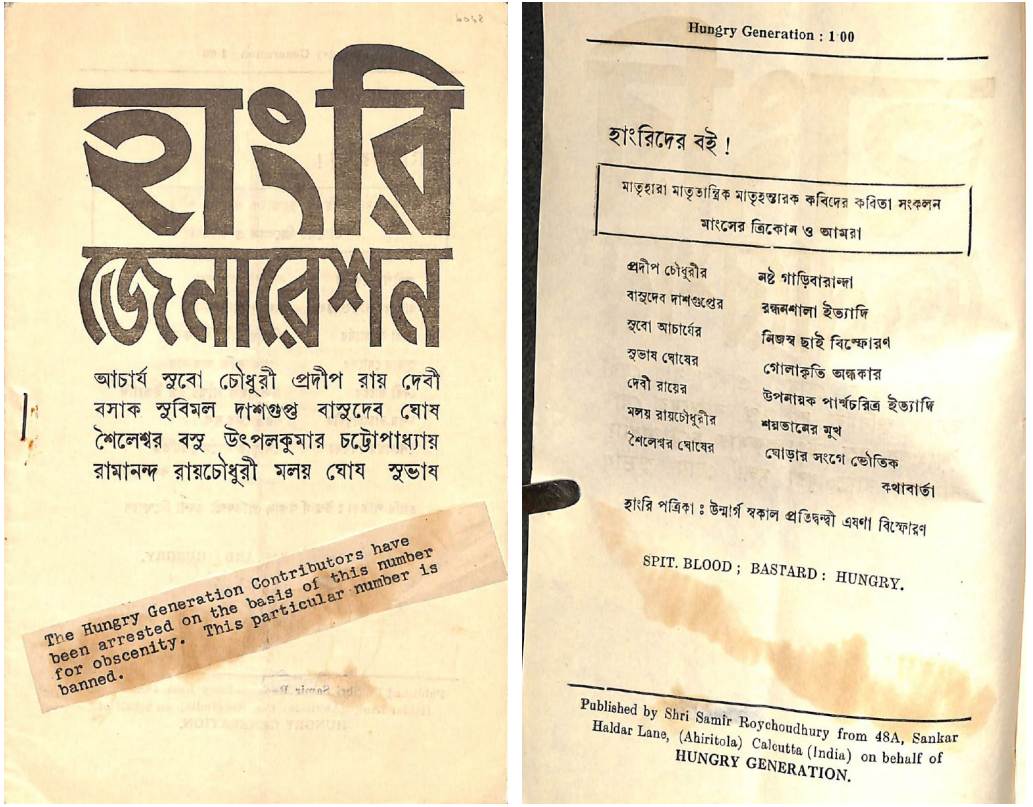


Figure 9. First page of *Hungry Generation 100* seized by the police, leading to their arrest in 1964 (left). The opening “mantra” is printed on the free endpaper of the leaflet (right). In Allen Ginsberg papers, M733, Box 74, Folder 16 (XIII Periodicals. The Hungry Generation). Courtesy of the Department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

1 “Poetry is No More a Civilizing Manoeuvre”

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

1 “Poetry is No More a Civilizing Manoeuvre”

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.

1 “Poetry is No More a Civilizing Manoeuvre”

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), *reḁār* (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” (*Pracaṇḁa 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 *yūterās* (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 rāḁār hisebeo dyākha hacche* (Mīśra 2015: 36).

1 “Poetry is No More a Civilizing Manoeuvre”

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

1 "Poetry is No More a Civilizing Manoeuvre"

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)

2 “I’ll Kick All the Literary Trash in the Ass”

Hunger and the Aesthetics of Transgression

Hunger

After our focus on Hungryalist literary sources and use of language, let us now shift to the poetic imagery that pervades the Hungryalist textual world. Drawing from a selected corpus of Hungryalist writings, I here single out what are the overarching tropes of the Hungry Generation literature, namely hunger, alcohol and drug consumption. A separate chapter will further explore their “aesthetics of transgression” by delving into the subject of hyper-masculinity.

Metaphors originating from the sense of taste, such as eating, consuming, and feeling hungry, are known to have a strong performative power. Since the early twentieth century, modernist literature and theatre performances have made the “hungry body” the centre of their artistic, aesthetic and political statements. Michel Delville pointed out that in the context of the modernist avant-garde, for example, “the body itself is apprehended and represented as an unfinished, indigestible figure which hesitates between identification and rejection” (Delville 2008: 3). The figurative force of the hungry body, torn between pleasure and disgust, and tempted by the fetish of consumption, was the powerful cultural metonymy of the Hungry Generation.

The domain of hunger (kṣudhā) proffered the Bengali authors the cultural baggage and historical memory of the Bengal Famine which linked the concerns of the Hungry Generation to the economically precarious background that the city of Calcutta was going through in the post-independence period. According to Hungryalist philosophy, all five senses of the body must be involved in the total transformation of the man and of his means of knowing the world. Sight, taste, touch and hearing must partake of this synesthetic revolution of knowledge and perception. Besides this more allegorical vision of hunger, there is also a typically historical one that emerged from the memories of the Partition of Bengal. First, the Bengal Famine of 1943 (durbhikṣa), whose reasons and number of casualties are still debated issues, left a deep mark in the memory and historical consciousness

2 "I'll Kick All the Literary Trash in the Ass"

of the Bengali people.²¹ Its effects were documented and commemorated throughout the Bengali arts scene, most notably with Chittaprosad's series of pen and ink sketches of the famine-struck district of Midnapore; in the performing arts, with Bijon Bhattacharya's drama *Nabānna* (1944); and in film culture, where its effects on the rural populations are examined in Satyajit Ray's movie *Aśani samket* (1973). Food crisis, inflation, and reduced access to food on behalf of the poorer sections of the society have been recurring episodes of Bengal history, in both sides of the country. In 1958 and then again in 1966, a CPI-led mass movement erupted onto the streets to protest against the shortage of food and the inflation of food prices. The movement is still remembered in Bengal as "khādyā āndolan" (Food movement). Hunger and poverty became infamous traits and stereotypes of the so-called Third World, a phrase which by that era had lost its technical meaning of non-aligned states to be replaced by the collective imaginary of underdevelopment, poverty and overpopulation of the decolonising countries of Asia, Africa and South America. The Hungry Generation's historical and emotional link with Bengal's history of famine and food crisis cannot but be symbolically perpetuated through the numerous metaphors of hunger.

Moreover, the feeling and physical conditions produced by hunger became a common subject of observation and of social criticism in Europe and the United States. Early twentieth century literature, for instance, following a wave of social criticism triggered by Socialist ideas, observed the living conditions of the destitute people and of the proletariat. Some authors, such as George Orwell and Jack London, became penniless beggars, wore the beggar's clothes and carried on a destitute lifestyle that helped them get closer to the life of the poor.²² Modernity and urbanisation in the urban centres of Europe and the United States triggered the romantic idealisation of the 'poor', drawing the attention of Marxist and Socialist writers concerned about the living conditions of the labour and the working-class. In West Bengal, prose writers inspired by Marxism, like Manik Bandyopadhyay and Tarashankar Bandhyopadhyay, gave dignity to real life characters living at the margins of urban Bengal in their novels. For example, hunger was a major trope in Tarashankar's novel *Caitālī ghūrṇi* (1931) and it became a key constituent of dystopia in the portrayal of industrialisation and the subsequent alienation of the individual, a claim which is made "further compelling by adding the dimensions

21 See, for example, Janam Mukherjee's detailed study on the political and economic reasons that unleashed the famine which caused the "annihilation of at least three million people" (Mukherjee 2015).

22 See, for example, Jack London's *The People of the Abyss* (1903) and George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), two accounts of the destitute living conditions of working-class people living in the poor neighbourhoods of the two capitals. Charlie Chaplin's character of the 'tramp' became part of the literary and cinematographic imagination as well as one of the most popular icons of modernity.

of physicality and urgency of human hunger” (Chatterjee 2019b: 20). In addition to the physicality of hunger, to the Hungry Generation it also symbolised the cultural need to renovate the Bengali culture and language literally by “devouring” (sarbagrās karā) foreign cultural elements. Metaphorically it signalled the need to “feed” and enrich the conventional and bourgeois Bengali culture of the post-independence with new modes, styles, themes, and contents of modernity.

Malay Roy Choudhury at first conceptualised hunger by quoting Geoffrey Chaucer’s line “in the sowre hungry tymes” from his *Boece*.²³ Payal Singh reported that according to Malay “nobody before Chaucer had expressed ‘hunger’ with relation to culture” (Bhattacharya n.d.: 4). Malay also provided a philosophical backbone to the movement and further explained the recurrence of metaphors of food and hunger in the group by mentioning Oswald Spengler’s *Der Untergang des Abendlandes (The Decline of the West, 1918)*. Indrajit Bhattacharya described the notion of hunger in Hungryalism as deeply engrained in the cultural and political alienation of the Bengali unemployed and disoriented youth of independent India: “It was the time of endlessness. It was also the time which had no measurements, no limits, no directions, no movements. When time itself saw its children’s unhealthy and improper modes of defining time, their jugglery of coining artificial and lunatic jargons, their dimensions of observations and their games, it became hungry and therefore it turned sour”. In his vision of culture as a biological organism, the “ailing culture feeds on cultural elements brought from outside” after its self-creative power decays (Bhattacharya n.d.: 4). Malay eventually described this “insatiable” need to feed on foreign cultures as hunger and, in a later article (Basu 2011), explained it as “a sour time of putrefaction” marking the period following the Partition of India.

One of the early manifestoes of Hungryalism, only later attributed to Malay, prophetically proclaimed the final liberation of poetry from the conventions and technicalities of the verse, trapped in the “cage of Form”, with a virtuous language that seemed to play with the terminology of Buddhist and Hindu philosophical traditions. In Malay’s words, life is imbued with a temporary experience of death, a central notion of the Hindu and Buddhist philosophy and discipline, both heavily centred on the spiritual potential of the body. Therefore, the political potential of hunger stems from a condition that is “mental, physical, and corporeal” at the same time, as proclaimed in the next manifesto.²⁴ Although the image of hunger is

23 I quote the full line in *Boece*’s Book 1 (Prosa 4, lines 80–81): “Whan it was in the sowre hungry tyme, ther was establissed or cryed grievous and unplitable coempcioun, that men sayen wel it schulde gretly tormenten and endamagen al the province of Campayne” (Robinson 1957: 324).

24 Other cases in literary history have exploited the symbolic potential of hunger. Franz Kafka’s *A Hunger Artist* was a “potent metaphor of artishood” as well as a powerful tool of extra-sensorial knowledge emerging out of the physical and psychological weaknesses of the author’s body. Alys Moody has argued that the “trope of starvation” resonates in much

2 "I'll Kick All the Literary Trash in the Ass"

here exploited in its metaphoric potential, underscoring a state of both cultural and material sickness, it takes on a variety of meaning all stemming from a condition that is primarily physiological and psychological, a state of lack which is at the foundation of poetry.

Today poetry is inherent in the contradictions of life. It no longer tries to be a harmoniser of life; it is not an overpopulated blind anthill, nor it is an unrelenting collection of logic arguments. Today, in this time, the human need has manifested as a terrible hunger for the inescapable depth, so much so that the need to extract meaning from life is over. Today it's the time of meaninglessness, catastrophe, soullessness. The aforesaid hunger is not only hunger for world dissent: it is also psychological, physical and corporeal. The only nourisher of hunger is poetry, for what else would there be in life without poetry! Man, God, Democracy and Science have been defeated. Today poetry has become the only refuge. (Cattopādhyāy 2015: 118).

Food and Eating Metaphors

The Hungryalist metaphor of "eating" foreign cultural elements was already present in the movement from the very beginning. In 1962, already at a very early stage of the movement, Shakti Chattopadhyay explained the Hungry movement as the contamination of Bengali literary culture with Beat elements by using the metaphor of food contamination.

If there has been an unspoken or unclean movement also in Bengal, in the perspective of similar movements like the Beat Generation, the Angry – all that is going on at the centre of literature in the West or even in Soviet Russia –, in our national and social environment only a movement related to hunger is possible. Those countries in that part of the world live in affluent social conditions, they can be Angry or Beat. But we are Hungry. Hungry for each and every form and emotion. No form or emotion is excluded; exclusion is itself impossible. It is wrong to say that the movement was influenced by Beat or Angry, because

modern and postmodern authors (e.g. the Parisian surrealists, the American Lost Generation, Beckett, Auster, and Coetzee) imagining "a novel aesthetics that sees the body as the point of mediation between art and society, between necessity and negation" (Moody 2018: 2).

the main word of this movement is “all-devouring” [sarbagrās]: it means that it wants to eat up the Beat Generation and mix it with rice, lentils and shrimps and season it with salt and spices. I hope that the idea of indigestion won’t be raised because art itself has become indigestion. Chewing life, all the inedible stuff is vomited into prose, verse, painting and so on, including cow dung (Sen 2015: 9).

By choosing the label of Hungry rather than Angry or Beat, the Bengali poets declared their independence from Western avant-gardes and from the economic and political situation of the West, an “affluent” one unlike in India and West Bengal. At the same time, the evident resemblance to the English word “angry” must have suggested a possible alternative to replace the British-sounding “angry” with “hungry”, an adjective more appropriate for describing the social and economic catastrophe of post-Partition in West Bengal. Moreover, the visual, gustative and olfactory capacity of metaphors related to food and cooking served to justify the unavoidability of literary and cultural contamination. The theme of food and hunger in modern Bengali culture went through significant transformations during the twentieth century, starting from the aftermath of the Famine, when the lack of ruṭi and bhāt (bread and rice) had made these food items literary and cinematographic metaphors of hunger, poverty and distress, all through the contemporary “gentrification” of local cooking and street food.²⁵ “Khāoyā” (lit. to eat), an all-pervading verb in ordinary Bengali language, with a multiplicity of generic and idiomatic significations, is so much part of a Bengali’s cultural world of meaning that Bengali cuisine has become a symbol of identity and belonging throughout colonial and postcolonial history. For example, while Indian nationalism promoted a morality of moderation which extended also to the consumption of food and implied a reform of taste, India’s transition to postmodernity and a growing consumerism signalled the return of “extreme” tastes as in the quick and extemporary consumption of street food in the city of Calcutta (Mukhopadhyay 2004). In their lifestyle and poetry, the Hungry Generation anticipated and mirrored quite well that morality of excess.

25 This was a widespread trope also in post-war Europe’s cultural production. In Italian cinema, for instance, the recurrence of scenes related to the table and food consumption (like the memorable spaghetti scenes with movie characters such as Totò in Mattoli’s *Miseria e nobiltà* and Alberto Sordi in Steno’s *Un Americano a Roma*) was at first associated with the memory of war deprivation and then later meant to celebrate the wealth of the post-war years, when references to food and eating had gained the grotesque tone of bourgeois criticism (as in Truffault’s *La grande bouffe*) (Natale 2009).

Art as Vomit and Indigestion

A common assumption within the world avant-garde is that the "obscenity" of life is visually and symbolically removed from public perception, confined to a space outside of the domain of the bourgeoisie. In order to counter this confinement of the so-called "matter out of place", as Mary Douglas effectively described the realm of impurity in tribal societies (Douglas 1966), the goal of the counterculture was to literally "vomit" the obscenities together with the prescriptions of society that made poets and artists slaves of the establishment. Against the institutionalisation of Art and Literature, the task of the world counterculture was to preach the need to "free" language from both cultural codes and social conventions, embracing the total vocabulary of humanity and releasing poetry from the chain of form. This vision was promoted, for example, in Malay Roy Choudhury's pamphlet "In Defense of Obscenity" (ca. 1966), which proclaimed the need for obscenity in modern society to reveal the depravities and corruptions of the system. The wish of Hungryalism, aligned with the goals of other avant-gardes, was to imagine a language that could accommodate all slangs, jargons, and taboos.

If speaking & writing in the total FREE LANGUAGE of the ENTIRE SOCIETY leads to the saintliness labelled by the money suckers as "depravity & corruption";

I WILL DEPRAVE & CORRUPT MAN TO SANITY.

I'd go on defending Obscenity until I've forced the society to embrace the total vocabulary of MAN. I want POETRY to be given back to LIFE

Linked to the project of language regeneration is the metaphor of "throwing up" because of the sense of disgust and satiation engendered by the regulations of bourgeois society. Shakti Chattopadhyay, writing about the goals of Hungryalism, compared art and the process of literary creation to indigestion (bad'hajam): "I hope that the idea of indigestion won't be raised because art itself has become indigestion. Chewing life, all the inedible stuff is vomited into prose, verse, painting and so on, including cow dung" (Sen 2015: 9). In his bleak but honest vision of life, art and literature are viewed as by-products of an inevitable physiological process that ends up by 'vomiting' the indigestible residues of life. Throughout the global avant-garde, nausea and vomit were common images to symbolise the unavoidable truth of life that is in itself violent and obscene. Jeff Nuttall, the British 'Angry' artist, writing about the counterculture in London in his *Bomb Culture*, wished to propound an aesthetics of nausea to encourage a "pessimistic acceptance of life" (Nuttall 1970: 141-2).

The magazine [*My Own Mag: a Super-Absorbant Periodical*], even those first three pages, used nausea and flagrant scatology as a violent means of presentation. I wanted to make the fundamental condition of living unavoidable by nausea. You can't pretend it's not there if you're throwing up as a result. My hope was that a pessimistic acceptance of life would counteract the optimistic refusal of unpleasantness, the optimistic refusal of life, the deathwish, the bomb.

The process of writing and creating poetry for the writers and artists of the avant-garde turned into a physiological and thus inevitable act, just like eating and defecating. Like all the primary needs, by definition bodily and physical, the language of poetry must carry the same shocking potential that pervades the grotesque representations of activities like copulation, vomit, defecation or decomposition. As a result, these writers and artists of the world avant-garde made all the defiling processes of the body part of the sacramental sphere of literature.

Rice and Empty Bellies

Besides metaphorically representing hunger in its relation to images of food and culture consumption, Hungryalist poetry visually portrayed hunger in its substantial physical and bodily features. Emaciated faces, beggars, and the recurrence of the symbol of cooked rice (bhāt), were the predominant features of the urban and rural landscape of post-independence West Bengal. In the next Hungryalist poems, it is through the silent presence of people consumed by war, famine and migration, that the image of hunger stands for the basic need of biological life. In other words, human life is reduced to “bare life” – the biological fact of life (Gr. *zoē*), to quote Agamben (1995) – which was violated and regulated during and after traumatic events like Partition and the Bengal Famine. Yet the next poem proclaims the uselessness of politics and war vis-à-vis the “emaciated hunger” painted on the people's faces, revealing that life under such circumstances means sheer survival.

Shakti Chattopadhyay's “Border proposal 1: Addressed to the Prime Minister” (*Sīmāntaprastāb 1: mukhyamantrīr pratinibedan*, 1962) denounces the poverty and deprivation that became rooted in West Bengal during the Cold War years. The author critically situates his poem in the frame of the political and armed confrontations between the two blocks of the World: the continuing provocations between America and the Soviet Union, the fear of a nuclear war, and territorial negotiations going on along the borders of India. In juxtaposition to the events of national and international politics, Shakti counterpoises a real history from below

2 "I'll Kick All the Literary Trash in the Ass"

unravelling at the level of ordinary life. The beggar boy embodies the crude truth and bareness of ordinary life as opposed to the games of politics taking place from above.

A beggar boy loved to stare at the boiled rice
and examined
the paddy plants spread in the moonlight
at the roots of the paddy
like silent waterfilled butter
glossy puffed up paddy in earth's simplicity –
Can paddy turn into rice?

At the beginning of the poem, the young beggar (bhikhāri) observes the extension of paddy fields of Bengal in the moonlight: the paddy fields are “glossy and puffed up”, according to the natural rules of the soil, and yet they do not constitute an edible food that provides nourishment. Shakti does not use any word that literally translates as “food” (like khābār) but chooses rather “rice” (bhāt), which constitutes the main nourishment of a Bengali meal. Rice played a pivotal role in cementing a sense of Bengali self-identity, unlike wheat which is mainly consumed as roti by non-Bengali communities in North India. During the Swadeshi movement of self-sufficiency, rice also became a symbol of resistance to the so-called “colonisation of taste” taking place in India and Bengal (Prasad 2015: 30–31). On a different level of reading, Shakti Chattopadhyay’s poem also seems to overturn the romanticised vision of the village of rural Bengal, which emerged in Bengali literature as the site of discourses on modernity and nation-building. In the rhetorical question “can paddy turn into rice?”, the opposition between the rich and thriving paddy (dhān), predominant feature of the landscape of rural Bengal, and the absence of rice (bhāt) voices the paradoxes of a lush and fertile soil incapable of nourishing the Bengali population. Therefore, to the eyes of the young beggar, the simple rules of the earth, as well as the transformation of paddy into edible rice, become a site of desire and utopia.

The beggar’s good boy was shaved
Many bad boys never bothered about love
they are alive
they are clean too
how many good fruits like amla exist on earth
the beggar’s good boy bad boy dropped from beggar father’s belly
In a phenomenal chaos Chinese peace is taking place on earth,
freedom, melancholy and so on
stand close to war

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 or 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
from the party of snow hyenas borders for distressed India
with a red flag of blasphemy, only with a limping hunger of the body
and seeing through the eyes of the snow hyenas the painted
emaciated hunger of the women
Chief Minister, send a bunch of Hungry poets
even though they don't know how to write
they can swallow transcendently
they can devour the entire border and discuss the issue at the
coffee house
(Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015: 22–23)

The war between Kennedy and Khrushchev, the arms race and the fear of a nuclear bomb, both located atop the ordinary lives of the beggars, seem to have no connection or effect on them. Shakti traces a line between the two foci of the poem – the war and the poor – zooming in and out from one to the other to reveal the blind link that connects people with politics. Yet, in Shakti's utopic vision, the poor and the hungries (kṣudhārta) are not helpless and passive actors of war but agents of revolution. They are the ones who will overcome and voice the wish of stopping “violence, megaton war, explosion”: they will “eat decomposed flesh as much as they need” if their demand remains unanswered. In a plea to stop the “Megaton war”, the poet directly turns to the ruling class and to the chief ministers threatening to “send a bunch of Hungry poets”, the last chance of human redemption.

Also Subo Acharya, the Hungry poet turned Hindu monk, used similar words of absence to describe the uselessness of poetry and art in general when basic nourishment is missing: “Ay! What is the sense of writing poems/ With no rice in my belly/ What can it mean to have anything in my belly/ When there is nothing in my belly/ I want to eat up the whole world” (“Personal Destruction”, in Bakken 1967 n.p.). On the other hand, the hunger denoted by an empty belly can be a powerful agent of change and political revolution, as announced in Debi Roy's poem “Hunger, I am” (Kṣudhā, āmi): “Hunger, come on, I'll change your religion / Hunger, come on let us march on Vietnam / Hunger, let us show up in Greenwich

2 “I’ll Kick All the Literary Trash in the Ass”

Village / In Iowa, in Moscow, the two of us... / I am very Hunger. I want peace thru my hunger, liberty!”²⁶ Hunger, the attribute of poverty and shortage, is now embodied by the Bengali pronoun “āmi” (Eng. “I”) in this poem, calling all the hungry people and the Hungry poets of the world to join for peace and anti-establishment protest.

We have found a multifaceted description and conceptualisation of hunger in these examples of Hungryalist poems. First, in his manifesto Malay outlines the physical and psychological connotation of hunger, a sphere that he metaphorically connects to the domain of artistic and literary creation. The institutionalised world of art and literature is in fact what the avant-garde wants to counter by “throwing up”, that is by exposing the dirtiest and abominable facts of life in the art’s sphere. The somatic traits of hunger are depicted in the numerous descriptions of beggars, starving people, and homeless refugees in the poems we have examined. Other features have concerned the figurative potential of hunger and activities related to food consumption, such as cooking, eating and digesting processes, mainly translating into metaphors of literary contamination and cultural hybridity, a key feature of the Hungryalist literary ethos. Moreover, the creation of poetry is allegorically compared to the biological processes entailed in the activities of eating and digesting. Food corruption, indigestion, the sense of nausea and vomit are seen in analogy with the literary contamination of Bengali language and culture that Hungryalism viewed as the only possibility of cultural regeneration in what Malay named the “sour time of putrefaction”, as crystallised in the title of Nayanima Basu’s article (Basu 2011).

Alcohol

Hunger deploys transversally in Hungryalism, constituting both a trope of poetry and the backbone of its revolutionary theory of art. Alcohol, another image of Hungryalist poetry, has become a common trait of the radical imaginary associated with this Bengali avant-garde. Discourses on alcohol prohibition played a role in the constitution of middle-class and nationalist identities since colonial modernity. In the late colonial period, abstinence from drinking became part of a prominent anti-colonial campaign that promoted a morality of temperance and moderation against the “corruption” of moral values fostered by the colonial encounter (Fischer-Tiné

26 Extract from Debi Roy’s translated poem “Hunger, I am” (“Kṣudhā, āmi”) quoted from Debi Roy’s letter to Howard McCord (undated). In Howard McCord Papers, Cage 578, Box 2, Folder 56, Item 2. Courtesy of Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC), Washington State University Libraries.

and Tschurennev 2013). Although boozing is still perceived as socially reproachable in middle-class India, it constitutes an essential part of the Bengali middle-class literary imagination. Boozing was already an act of transgression of the social and moral codes of Bengali society in early colonial times, when the Young Bengal group of Anglo-Indian rationalists and liberal thinkers rejected Hindu orthodoxy and performed, sometimes publicly, acts of moral and religious transgression such as drinking alcohol and consuming beef-meat. On the other hand, during the 1960s alcohol consumption has also been associated with middle-class, especially male, urban alienation due to social pressure and urbanisation. This aspect has emerged in many novels of that period, including Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Araṇyer din'rātri* (Days and Nights in the Forest, 1968), which follows a group of city youths and their journey away from city life to spend some days in the Palamau forests in today's Jharkhand. The short escape into the forest meant for them a break with the social bonds of urban civilisation. In this novel, later turned into a movie by Satyajit Ray, the middle-class protagonists visit a local liquor store where they meet young Santhal girls, who are portrayed as beautiful and lascivious: the association between the consumption of local toddy and the immorality of the adivasi women points at the middle-class stereotype that imagines the tribal community as immoral and uncivilised. Together with other novels of the same genre, *Araṇyer din'rātri* focuses on the life of the Bengali urban middle class, their disorientation in a grinding city and an oppressive society that forces them to accept all the social prescription related to status, education and marriage.

Also postmodern literature is aware of the place of booze in Bengal's social life. For example, Nabarun Bhattacharya's novel *Kāñāl mālsāt* (War Cry of Beggars, 2003) employs a variety of words to describe booze in Bengali that "interrelate the kind of alcoholic drink to class, caste, occupational group, religious and gender identity of the drinker" (Lorea 2018: 42). For example, "desī dāru" is the general term for the country liquor or toddy, a locally distilled drink extracted from date palms or flowers. Other varieties of local toddy is "colāi", a bootleg cheap distilled liquor, usually made from rice and sometimes mixed with industrial alcohol or methanol. Important distinctions of class and status exist between drinking local toddy and foreign liquor: while the former is mainly consumed by lower classes and poorer people, foreign liquor is consumed by the middle class, being expensive imported alcohol such as brandy, scotch and whisky.

The Myth of Absinthe

The Hungryalists celebrated their passion for alcohol. Their meetings and poetry readings at the country liquor shop in Khalasitala, in south Calcutta, have left traces in the memoirs of the movement. Some poets, like Phalguni and Tushar

2 “I’ll Kick All the Literary Trash in the Ass”

Roy, were addicted to alcohol and drugs like opium, and died prematurely because of cirrhosis and untreated tuberculosis. The parallels with the poètes maudits and the icons of the French *décadence* – the bohemian hero and the *flâneur* – are numerous and overtly emphasised by the members of the Hungry Generation. The repeated references to the poets Baudelaire, Apollinaire and Rimbaud, to mention only a few, in Hungryalist poems and essays signal the wish to acknowledge the legacy of decadentism in the transgressive practices of Hungryalism.

Luc Ferry has shown that “bohemian” generally denotes a bourgeois who has abandoned the safety of his society, which he rejects and desecrates by embracing immorality, promiscuity and debauchery. He is usually a man who explores the abysses of extra-sensorial experience through addiction to drugs and alcohol as forms of protest against the formality and regulations of mainstream bourgeois society (Ferry 2012). Walter Benjamin identified in Baudelaire the icon of the modern bourgeois artist, “walking through the city and making sense of the crowd” (Benjamin 2014: 99). The feeling of loss, anonymity, and disorientation in the urban crowd is, in Benjamin’s words, accompanied by the experience of *choc* which dissolves and replaces the lively and animated image of the crowd. This sense of attraction and repulsion for urban life is at the centre of Europe’s experience of modernity. The exploration of the phenomenon of modernity is also the subject of Baudelaire’s, among others, experiments with drugs, most notably expressed in his *Les paradis artificiels* (1860), in which the poet discusses the possible connections between artistic creation and drugs.

Malay Roy Choudhury’s poem “The Green Nymph” (Sabuj debakanyā) traces a direct connection with drinking as a transgressive and escapist practice. In this poem, he celebrates the qualities of absinthe, the “green nymph” of Europe: “Oh, it is you then that beautiful nymph/ Toulouse Lautrec, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Baudelaire/ Van Gogh, Modigliani and who else” (Rāy/caudhurī 2013: 17). In a later essay, Malay reported that during his stay in Amsterdam he was disappointed by his first sip of absinthe, which he tasted at a local coffee shop in the Dutch city. The drink was meant to be sipped slowly and mixed with water, which did not give him any sense of inebriation. He thought that his “Bihari tharra and local liquors from Khalasitala did not change his drinking habits” (Rāy/caudhurī 2011, blog).

The social and cultural distinction derived from consuming country liquor or foreign imported alcohol is also characteristic of the Bengali drinking culture. While in the 1960s the emphasis was rather on consuming local toddy, the focus on the poet’s relationship with alcohol in Malay Roy Choudhury’s “Theory of Drinking” (Madyapān tattva) normalises the consumption of alcohol as part of Bengali middle-class life. If consuming “Scotch or Martini” with “fried pork meat” is perceived as a transgressive habit, the poem signals the incorporation of these practices into ordinary Bengali middle-class life.

Even now I am drinking alone, oh good gracious!
a few ounces [chaṭāk] of rice liquor
stale palm tree toddy
fried pork meat
Scotch or Martini –
don't like this at all
a few jackals on the veranda
sing a blind chant
throughout the night, blowing a cigar
pulling out the spectacles from the left side,
I sit in silence
I know the earth and the motherfucker
called Dhruv, he
will accept
that racket will be
or call it as you wish
(Rāy'caudhurī 2005: 99–100)

Notice the variety of the Bengali vocabulary of spirits in this poem. Malay drinks from local palm toddies like dheno (made from rice) and tāri (made from the date palm) to imported liquors like Scotch and Martini. These practices of transgression functioned in the Bengali avant-garde as a strategy of subversion and provocation that ultimately criticises the immobility and narrow-mindedness of Indian social and cultural life.

The New āḍḍā at Khalasitala

The Hungry Generation poets were regular clients of the country-liquor shop at Khalasitala, in the neighbourhood of Alipur. This, like other shops and coffee houses in Calcutta, were at the centre of an underground map of gathering places where the Hungry Generation poets would meet to drink and discuss a variety of subjects ranging from literature to politics; in other words, to perform what has become a cultural institution in the Bengali middle-class world: āḍḍā, the informal conversation. The country liquor shop in Khalasitala greatly differed from the old coffee houses which became popular centres of reunion for the intellectual middle class since the first decades of the century. The much-celebrated Indian Coffee Houses, gathering places for most of the leftist intellectuals, were in the 1960s seen as sites of an exclusive and high-brow culture of political disquisitions and poetic reunions. Bhaswati Bhattacharya has recalled that in the Sixties and Seventies the centre of the literary āḍḍā shifted from the more bourgeois coffee houses to the

2 “I’ll Kick All the Literary Trash in the Ass”

marginal country-liquor shops usually crowded with low-class people, shipmate labourers and sailors (lit. *khālāsi*) (Bhattacharya 2017). The vision of the coffee houses as elite poetry workshops was noticed, for example, by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra in his poem “Bharatmata – a Prayer” (1970) in which he recalled that “poetry/ is kept in a hothouse/ under the artificial ceiling and tube lights/ of the India Coffee House”.

Selling local cheap liquors, *Khalasitala* was celebrated by the Hungryalist as one of the many meeting places of the Bengali counterculture, like Calcutta’s brothel areas of Sonagachi and Harkata lane in Bowbazar. This subculture praised drunkards, prostitutes, smokers, criminals, and incorporated their stories into writing, turning these marginal meeting places into an iconic and creative space for the Bengali avant-garde.²⁷ Amitranjan Basu (2012), recalling the days when he used to visit the liquor shop in *Khalasitala*, pointed out the social distinction embedded in consuming the more prestigious foreign liquor instead of cheap local toddy (*bāmlā mad*). He also showed that this practice gradually became a habit of the more educated middle class.

I have heard that country spirit shops at *Khalasitala*, *Baroduari* and *Ganja Park* are frequented by upcoming and well-known poets and writers. Well, consuming country spirit by intellectuals was nothing new in Calcutta. Writers like Saratchandra and Manik Bandopadhyay have already inscribed the history of their love for country spirit. But drinking in a country spirit bar with the so-called subalterns and trying to ‘create’ a radical culture was something new... We started drinking *Bangla mod* (country liquor) because we couldn’t afford anything else. Though we carried a hidden middle-class inverse pride that we smoked *Charminar* and drank *Bangla!* We frequented *Khalasitala* and *Baroduari* to meet our favourite writers and poets but never met them as most of the time we left the tavern by early evening. But drinking there was a unique experience as I met various people and surprisingly found that not many came to drink out of frustration as it was shown in the Bengali or Hindi films! For most of the customers it was a social space. Some would spend hours with a pint or a file (quarter) and some would quickly gulp down a few shots at the counter and leave.

27 In the last years, a re-evaluation of the underground and the subculture in literary studies has witnessed a growing interest in “establishing” also minor Bengali icons, writings and places. This is visible for example in one issue of the magazine *Kaurab* that is fully devoted to *Khalasitala* (*Kaurab 92: Khālāsīṭolā*, Kal’kātā: Hemanta, 2002).

The poet Phalguni Ray too was known to be visiting the poetry readings and meetings at Khalasitala. During his life, he became famous for his destitute lifestyle, and especially for his addiction to alcohol and opium. His death by cirrhosis at the early age of thirty-six made him a cult figure for the young generations, encouraging an analogy with other rebellion icons of the literary world, most notably with Rimbaud. A part of his poetry reflects his addiction to alcohol, viewed as a genetic disease that Phalguni inherits through his forefathers. The idea of genetically inheriting the disease was an obsession for this poet. His brother Tushar Ray, himself a controversial poet too, suffered from alcohol addiction and died of cirrhosis. We will later see that, in Phalguni's view, these are considered the signs of his forefathers' legacy and experienced as a bodily burden of alcohol abuse, diabetes and cirrhosis. Besides representing a real issue in the poet's life, the act of drinking transforms itself into an activity that prompts literary creation in a fashion that was not so different from the late 19th century myth of the French Bohème. In the following extract from the poem "Television of a Rotten Soul" (1973), Phalguni's translation of the emotional, poetic spaces from the French modern city to the Bengali city of the post-partition shows the need to formulate a new idiom of postmodernity that could work for the cultural and historical conditions lived by the young Bengali rebel writers.

I have never been by the river Seine I have never tasted absinthe
and roamed about Paris

I'm a boy from the shores of the Ganges
on a tropical stormy night I have howled out to the thunder:
"Thunder! Blaze out! I want to see your blue aura on the breast
of the Ganges!"

I have carried Christ's cross and guns smuggled by Rimbaud
marching on processions of armed revolutionaries on Gandhi's
birth centenary

I have eaten beef and sang the name of Hari
I'm not drunk now, there's no dreaming, no daydream or
nightmare and I am standing and I don't feel like smoking
(Mísra 2015: 30)

Psychedelic Drugs and Ganja

Creativity has often been associated with the world of substance addiction. It is hard to reconstruct history when it comes to man's relationship with drugs, but undoubtedly in the period under analysis drugs were very popular in art and music

2 "I'll Kick All the Literary Trash in the Ass"

culture. Research and experimentation with music and drugs, such as LSD and mescaline, encouraged the consumption of these hallucinogenic substances as means to expand consciousness both for recreation as well as to prompt literary creation. However, despite the shame and social stigma of drug addiction, the counterculture movement celebrated its aesthetic and synesthetic value often with fully detailed descriptions of processing the chemical substances. Christopher Gair recalled that the link between the bebop, cool jazz, the Beat Generation, and the "Times Square's junkies has blended Greenwich Village bohemia into this association" (Gair 2007: 61). Allen Ginsberg most poignantly portrayed the addiction, the madness and hysteria of that American generation in his famous "Howl" (1956), another poem in our transgressive corpus to withstand a trial for obscenity: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,/ dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix/ angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night " (Ginsberg 2009: 1). We could report many examples from literary and music subcultures of that age about substance use and abuse, but it will suffice here to mention Ginsberg's "Howl" as a manifesto of the existential hunger and madness of that generation.

The use of alcohol, drugs and cannabis in Hungryalism is of course not an exception in the Bengali literary landscape: other rebellious personalities of 19th century Bengal, such as Henri Derozio and Michael Madhusudan Dutt, emerged out of the iconoclast Young Bengal group, looked at the West also as an act of defiance to Hindu and Brahmo social orthopraxy. The parallels with the bohemian artist and the dandy of European modernity easily translate into the escapism of the Hungry Generation poets, who popularly consumed alcohol and drugs as means to transgress moral codes and escape the social rules of the Bengali middle class. Also cannabis was highly consumed and perceived as a common habit in countercultural circles worldwide. In South Asia, consumption of hemp (Beng. *gāmjā*) for ritual purposes was never seen as a taboo. Even though in British India cannabis became linked with insanity, immorality and revolt (Mills 2000: 47), its consumption remained a common practice of traditional Indian medicine and religious traditions since ancient times all over South Asia. However, also as a legacy of colonial medical and scientific discourses, the consumption of cannabis, and other drugs in general, for recreational purposes was disapproved of by the middle class.

Shifting to the Bengali 1960s avant-garde, it is once again Malay who recounts the Hungry Generation's first experience with drugs (Rāy'caudhurī 1994: 26–27). In his picture, Benares and Kathmandu stand out as true melting pots, where the Hungry poets, painters, Hindi writers, and hippies encountered and experienced with drugs. Hindi poet Rajkamal Chaudhuri and novelist Phanishwar Nath Renu also took part in these international drug āḍḍās: Rajkamal "enjoyed playing chess

while taking injections of pethidine. If the poetry reading went on for the whole night, he would take tablets of benzedrine”. Renu is shown carefully preparing the cannabis leaves, accompanied by a glass of local toddy: “Renu had a small, beautiful knife for cutting the leaves of cannabis and reduce them into powder. He used to mix a drop of fragrance with the leaves. He kept a cut-glass for palm toddy on which he would sprinkle some cardamom powder”. The following extract gives us a portrayal of the drug subculture in the centres of the hippy trail across India and Nepal.

From these hippies, Karuna [Hungryalist painter] got LSD, cocaine, heroin and marijuana, and we got it from him. I still remember some of them. Margaret: she would soak the blotting paper with LSD, cut the paper in different sizes. 8 hours, 16 hours, 24 hours-sizes according to the level of intoxication. The paper had to be chewed and then swallowed. Tresham Gregg: he mixed LSD with water from the Ganges. He used to carry a tambourine. Once he came all high and started to play tambourine with his mouth open. Then, from a dropper, he poured one drop on the tongue, while still high and playing, but then closed his mouth. Froth: he made a statue of Bajrang Hanuman out of hashish. He would smear sindur [vermilion paste] of about 6 inches long. After paying homage to Hanuman he cut his tail, but later gave him a new one.

In Malay’s recollection of his friend and poet Phalguni Ray, he brings to life the moments spent together on crematorium ghats, drinking, smoking weed and trying out new drugs that would make them “fly in the sky” (Mishra 2015: 105). The drug and alcoholic menu in Malay’s words shows the enormous variety of words existing to describe a wholly developed subcultural world of drugs in the Bengali language.²⁸ In his words, the “aeroplanes” that helped them to “fly higher” were cheap “small packets of hemp, hash or opium of either two, four or eight annas:²⁹ eight annas for one fourth of a bottle, four annas for one sixth of a bottle, two annas for som’rās (a Bihari rice liquor mixed with fruit liquor) and ṭharra in a clay tumbler (khuc’rā), and one anna for palm toddy (tārhi) in a clay pot (lamani)” (Mishra 2015: 105). Even then, their conversation would hinge on the connection that poetry and music nurture with drugs. When Malay asks him the reason for smoking, Phalguni replies: “I don’t get high to write poetry, I get high to escape

28 Malay clarified the meaning of the terminology in use for the country liquors, measurements of the liquid, and containers in a private Facebook conversation (28.03.2018).

29 One anna is approximately equal to 1/16th of a rupee.

2 “I’ll Kick All the Literary Trash in the Ass”

the banality of everyday life. I am not Baudelaire who smoked opium to write poetry!”. Their conversation about this everyday “banality” (byānālīṭī) would continue the day after: “You would understand if you were one of my relatives. Even the passing of time in Calcutta has become banal. People are even selling marble stones taken from the floor. There is no love, there is only the inexplicability of the absence of love” (Miśra 2015: 109–10), a very Phalgunian observation to make, as we will explore in chapter 5.

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

3 “A Band of Young Bengalis with Tigers in their Tanks”

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.

3 “A Band of Young Bengalis with Tigers in their Tanks”

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).³⁰ 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 Alokeranjan Dasgupta (Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015; Ray 1968). Alokeranjan 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*.

3 “A Band of Young Bengalis with Tigers in their Tanks”

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 19th 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

3 “A Band of Young Bengalis with Tigers in their Tanks”

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,³¹ 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.³² 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.

3 “A Band of Young Bengalis with Tigers in their Tanks”

It is in the context of this poem that Malay revives 19th and 20th 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 to 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.³³ 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.³⁴ 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.

3 “A Band of Young Bengalis with Tigers in their Tanks”

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).³⁵ 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

3 “A Band of Young Bengalis with Tigers in their Tanks”

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

3 “A Band of Young Bengalis with Tigers in their Tanks”

Poetry movement in Hindi (Nayī kavītā),³⁶ 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.³⁷

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 sapṭak* (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.³⁸

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).

3 “A Band of Young Bengalis with Tigers in their Tanks”

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.³⁹ 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 Hungryalists’ 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).

3 “A Band of Young Bengalis with Tigers in their Tanks”

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).⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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,⁴² 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.

3 “A Band of Young Bengalis with Tigers in their Tanks”

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”.⁴³ 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.

4 “I Want to Use You Like Amul Butter” Hyper-masculinity and the Objectification of Bodies

Linking back to the “transgressive” tropes of hunger, drugs and alcohol consumption as actual violations of the bourgeois body, we will now shift focus to another central trope of Hungryalist poetry: hyper-masculinity. The hyper-masculine character of the Bengali all-boys club does not only display in the gender composition of the group but in the development of a poetics of hyper-masculinity: this has oscillated between performances of a predatory virility (Malay Roy Choudhury, Subimal Basak, and Saileshvar Ghosh), and instances of anxious masculinity, as we will see in Phalguni Ray’s poetry, which voiced the aversion to traditional gender roles and the impossibility to gain release from the expectations of the middle-class society.⁴⁴ The poems under discussion have shown a consistent engagement with the anxious masculinity of these Bengali poets, confronted as they were by a rapidly transforming Indian society where gender-roles and traditional social structures were tenaciously being questioned both in the private and public spheres. For example, a major concern of the new Indian state was the rationalisation of the Hindu family as the basic economic unit of the Indian democracy (Newbigin 2013: 2). A part of this project of reforming Hindu personal law was to improve Hindu women’s legal rights within the family, by instituting divorce, civil marriage and access to property for widows (Majumdar 2009; Sinha 2007). Although structures of exploitation and ideologies of subordination persisted for women living in post-independent India, their growing participation in the public sphere offered new forums to negotiate and redefine nationalist ideas on women in the domestic sphere under the British rule (Sen 2004; Gupta 2001; Nijhawan 2012). In this context, women’s emancipation was perceived as a threat to the men’s hegemonic position in society. It is also from this fear of seeing the authority of men menaced by the transformation of the traditional social structures that the hyper-masculinity of the Hungry Generation poets stemmed, placing the poets’ manly bodies at the centre of the poem.

44 To my knowledge, the only woman who took part in the movement was Alo Mitra, editor of the Hungryalist little magazine *Wastepaper* and Tridib Mitra’s “registered unmarried wife”, as she is described in the Hungry Generation Condolence Meeting.

4 "I Want to Use You Like Amul Butter"

As previously stated, both the impact of colonialism on gender and race formations as well as Nehru's nation-state project of modernisation were essential frameworks that helped recomposing the ambivalent masculinity visible in Hungryalist poetry. In the context of Nehruvian India – with its national ideology of scientific progress and economic development – the dominant pattern of masculinity was that of a rational and scientific manliness represented by the husband and father of the planned Indian family, what Sanjay Srivastava named the "Five Year Plan hero" (Srivastava 2014: 39). This model promoted modern ideas of the Indian married couple in which man is not only the breadwinner of the family but also the provider of pleasure (Brosius et al. 2006). Besides the tendency to institutionalise religious practices of the Hindu family, as shown by the Hindu Code Bill, debates on new forms of sexuality, intimacy and conjugality circulating in Europe and other western countries played a role in the imagination of a young Indian generation. Therefore, the toxic masculinity that most Hungryalist poets perform in their poems by displaying the sexual power of the male body and the possession, consumption and objectification of the female body gains meaning when interpreted in light of these multiple masculinities and as a reaction to the dominant ideology of Nehruvian socialism that valued economic and sexual frugality as major criteria.

Moreover, homophobia, misogyny and homosexuality often coexisted in certain performances of hyper-masculinity.⁴⁵ In Hungryalist poems, these tensions merged with other ambivalent desires, including the exploration of "other" sexual behaviours and orientations, and with a predatory and aggressive male sexuality. These sexual concerns were part of a widespread interrogation about sexuality that took place across the post-war world. Certain passages in Hungryalist poetry have suggested that exploring "other" sexualities was a means to break social taboos on family, marriage and sex regulation in India. That is why the sexist and misogynist poetics of the Hungryalist writers must be seen in light of their inability to cope with the norms and expectations of the patriarchal Indian family and the impossibility of creating an alternative system of value. Here, I utilise the concept of "male gaze" drawing from Laura Mulvey's suggestions in the field of film theory. Mulvey tackled the asymmetry of social and political power between men and women at the heart of cinematic representation, arguing for the centrality of the

45 For example, Polchin (2019) revisits the dynamics of sex, power and masculinity that were at play among a young Lucien Carr, Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs, ending up in the murder of their English teacher David Kammerer by Lucien Carr. It is within the panic for a "homophobic homosexuality" that the readers have positioned David Kammerer's murder: "Whatever the motive for Carr's violence, the story of Kammerer's murder encapsulated a compelling and troubling idea in the popular imagination that took root in the forties and grew in the years after: assertions of heterosexual masculinity were defined by violent reactions against queer men".

male gaze and the aesthetic pleasure of the male spectator. In her analysis of Hollywood movies of the 1960s, the “looked-at” object was often a woman (Mulvey 1975). I use Mulvey’s concept in a more fluid way that adapts the visuality of film culture to the poetic images of sexual intercourse, violence, and rape that are so common in the poetry under analysis. Although I have found that the often-sexist look of much Hungryalist poems can be a by-product of multiple sociocultural factors – their anxieties of masculinity, postmodern anguish and alienation, reaction to dominant discourses on sexual temperance and economic frugality – the Hungryalists have shown no concrete endeavour to address women’s issues and gender equality as part of their anti-establishment agenda. Despite the poets’ effort to be released from the burden of patriarchy, the Hungry Generation did so also as victims of the discriminating race and gender politics of colonialism and of an increasing consumerist culture that objectified social relationships.

In this sense, the Hungryalist poets have continued to reproduce other mythologies about the woman in post-independent West Bengal, who was repeatedly objectified and reduced to a silent sexual body.⁴⁶ To have an idea of how stereotypical imaginations of the woman were reiterated in the post-independence period, Geraldine Forbes quoted a special issue of *Femina*, a leading women’s magazine of the 1970s, which came out with a cover portraying Indira Gandhi as the goddess Durga: “To be a woman – a wife, a mother, an individual – in India means many things. It means that you are the store-house of tradition and culture and, in contrast a volcano of seething energy, of strength and power that can motivate a whole generation to change its values, its aspirations, its very concept of civilized life” (Forbes 1996: 227). In other words, the woman’s body continued to be a discursive site of negotiation of modern identities even in the utterly masculine landscape of the 1960s Bengali avant-garde. Therefore, while in constant tension with the model of a national Indian masculinity – which imagined the Indian man as the ideal father, husband and breadwinner of the family – the young Bengali poets staged an abysmal and often abusive sexuality perhaps as a way to counter the fear for women’s changing place in Indian society, at a time when they were claiming right to sexual pleasure against a middle-class morality of chastity and sacrifice.

To showcase such dualities and fractures in the Hungry Generation’s agenda of literary and cultural transgression, I focus here on representations of the female

46 On the other hand, it must be pointed out that the 1960s also saw the proliferation of Bengali feminist poetry and fiction. For example, Kabita Sinha (1931–1999) was recognised as the first feminist poet of Bengal, rejecting the traditional housewife role assigned to women, a theme later echoed in the poet Mallika Sengupta and the prose-writer Taslima Nasreen. Her poems signalled a shift from traditional representations of woman, breaking ideals of motherhood, chastity and modesty in view of a more troubled and conflicted female world that does not accept recognition of the traditional narrative of the woman. See, for example, Tharu and Lalita 1993; Sinha 2005.

4 “I Want to Use You Like Amul Butter”

body seen through the “male gaze” – often a misogynist, hyper-sexual, objectifying and predatory one – of some Hungryalist poems. I will more specifically address Malay Roy Choudhury’s banned poem “Stark Electric Jesus” and Saileshvar Ghosh’s “To Pranati on the Street” (Pranati janya rastāy) to highlight the textual strategies and use of the Bengali vocabulary illustrating the hypermasculine ethos and objectification of the female body. For example, Malay’s banned poem is representative of the Hungryalist hyper-masculinity, as it centres on the sexual power of the male body which objectifies the female body. The objectification and hyper-sexualisation of the female body in Hungryalist poetry has seemed to legitimise what I call an aesthetics of rape and consumption, as I show in a reading of the next poems. In an attempt to go beyond the stereotype of women as devoted wives, mothers and muses, poetry for the Hungry writer turned into a site for performing a predatory virility. However, this representation of the Hungryalist masculine ethos is only partially representative of the gender ideology of the Bengali movement. A different and yet complementary articulation of this performative hypermasculinity is visible in Phalguni Ray’s writings, which do not glorify the violent and aggressive masculinity but rather endeavour to metabolise the poet’s ambivalent sexual identity by questioning gender-roles in urban post-colonial India.

Yet the male gaze remains the emblematic subject of all Hungryalist poetry, regardless of the single living experiences and performances of manhood. In the next examples from Malay and Saileshvar’s poems, the woman figures only as the object of a man’s desire. It is clear that these samples of Hungryalist poetics have no intention of rejecting the gender roles that are traditionally established within the Bengali society. However, at a closer analysis representing the woman as a purely “sexual body” does attempt at – although transgressively – to go beyond nationalist views of the Indian woman as a sacred sphere of chastity and domesticity. That is why these ways of representing women are only partially transgressive: in Malay and Saileshvar’s words, they voice the poets’ sexual obsessions and perversions of desiring and possessing a woman’s body, like a commodity: perversions that usually remain unspoken moral taboos.

Aesthetics of Rape and Consumption

Across the Hungryalist poems under analysis, women are silent and passive subjects of the hypermasculine gaze. They are portrayed either as silent sexual bodies, like Subha in Malay Roy Choudhury’s “Stark Electric Jesus”, or as commodities to be eaten and consumed, as in Saileshvar Ghosh’s “To Pranati on the Street”. One way to explain the sexist representation of women in the Bengali poetry of

the Hungry Generation is that the young poets sought to go beyond colonial stereotypes of womanhood that imagined women as chaste wives, devoted mothers, and domestic goddesses. Yet while attempting this demystification of the role of the modern Indian woman, the Bengali poets perpetrated a hegemonic ideology of masculinity that feared the image of the modern Indian girl, who questioned and transgressed gender boundaries by her individual autonomy, rebellion and overt sexuality (Ramamurthy 2006: 202). What emerges from these representations are the sexual perversions of the Bengali poets and their desires to possess the woman's body, thus reproducing the violence of a postmodern world where traditional social bonds and values were shifting and being replaced with others. Within this frame of sexual abuse, the notion of rape or physical violence (Beng. *dharṣaṇ*) has found legitimation both physically and metaphorically in Hungryalist aesthetics, where the language and forms of poetry are described as predatory, voracious and violent just like rape and murder. For example, in one of the Hungryalist manifestoes, Malay affirmed that "Poetry is formed in the unhesitant rebellion of the inner world, in the tremendous irritation of the soul, in every drop of blood" and that "the creation of poetry is possible only in a state of 'conscious overwhelming' during the apex of rape, hangover or drowning" (Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015: 118). In other words, in Hungryalist aesthetics the only way out of the bourgeois moral order is to symbolically "rape" (*dharṣaṇ karā*) and "murder" (*hatyā karā*) the forms and idioms of representation.

However, in the process of translation from Bengali to English of sensible content, Malay's translation of "Stark Electric Jesus" (Bakken 1967) demonstrated that the obscuration of morally reproachable content is used to avoid further legal charges. For example, in the following verses Malay has translated the Bengali *dharṣaṇ* into the English "copulation":

I've forgotten women during copulation and returned to Muse
[...]
My power of recollection is withering away
Let me ascend alone toward death
I haven't had to learn copulation and dying

In Nandini Dhar's feminist critique of Hungryalist poetry, she proposed a gender-based critique by pointing out the fundamental "vilification" of the female sexual agency in Malay's poetry, turned into a site of male sexual violation (Dhar 2016). In her reading, Dhar has remarked how Malay mistranslated the passages centred on Shubha's sexual body. In her view, the alleged mistranslations of *dharṣaṇ* as copulation, and "uṭhiye neoṃyā" as elevate (whereas she claims the real meaning to be "abduction") are used to legitimise rape and sexual violence (Dhar 2016). In order to clarify Malay's choice of translation, I turned to him in a private

4 "I Want to Use You Like Amul Butter"

communication where he claimed that "the word 'rape' has been in use now only. When I wrote, people talked either of intercourse or of copulation. For me at that time 'dharshan' was same as intercourse or copulation. I did not mean rape while using the word 'dharshan'".⁴⁷

Was the poet enacting a strategy of self-censorship, purging the text of its most objectionable contents to make it less problematic to the American readership? Or is the misunderstanding caused by the enhanced sexual and violent connotation assigned to the word in more recent times? Today the word *dharṣaṇ* has become a highly controversial term in the South Asian social and political landscape, especially after the Delhi Gang Rape of 2012 projected the discourse on rape and violence against women into the foreground of national interest. Taking the word out of the original poetic context here helps to retrace the semantic history and evolution of the word and establish a trajectory of social, cultural and literal meaning that cannot be transmitted to the reader through the mere act of translation. The recasting of *dharṣaṇ* and its history into the subversive semiotics of the poem, which aims to represent the act of sexual intercourse as a possibility of emancipation from the oppressive morality of the middle class, can complement Dhar's critique of a translation that "legitimises rape and sexual violence through repetitive articulations of male pain and alienation" (Dhar 2016). In the logic of poetry, *dharṣaṇ* is viewed as a twofold act that can disrupt and subvert moral and literary taboos about "appropriate" practices. The rough and unabashed bodily language that Malay uses to portray the female body, always in a passive and objective position vis-à-vis the author's male gaze, cannot but be a sign of aggressive masculinity verging on misogyny and misanthropy. At the same time, this language of excess is also a major characteristic of Hungryalist poetic register, signalling the disintegration of an ideal model of masculinity that oscillated between the traditional model of the family-oriented Hindu middle class and the changes that were occurring in other western countries within the realm of sexuality and civil rights.

Shifting focus to the poems by Saileshvar Ghosh ("To Pranati on the Street") and Subimal Basak ("sTigmata/23"), we will see that the female body is portrayed as a commodity to be consumed and a body to be possessed and penetrated. In chapter I, I already drew the parallel between commodity fetishism and the sexual urge to possess the woman's body in Saileshvar's poem. In the vocabulary of

47 Private Facebook conversation, April 17, 2018. For a reconstruction of the etymology of the word, the Sanskrit Monier-Williams dictionary translates "dharṣaṇ" also as "copulation". For a modern definition of the word, while in the monolingual dictionary of the Bengali language (Biśvās 2014) it generally means an act of suppression or submission lacking a clear connotation of sexual abuse, the Bengali-English dictionary translates *dharṣaṇ* also as rape. However, among the various Bengali synonyms of *dharṣaṇ*, there is also "balāt·kār" which involves the idea of oppression, control and submission "especially against women" (*biśeṣataḥ nārī prati*).

Marxism, the fetishism of consumption is the most visible aspect of the so-called reification, which denotes the objectification of social relationships taking place in the capitalist system.⁴⁸ As actors involved in the practices and processes of capitalist society, women too are shaped by sexual objectification as “both consumers with buying power and consumable objects” (Verkerk 2017: 149). This pattern of objectification and symbolic exploitation of women as sexual bodies clearly emerges from Saileshvar’s words, as I previously showed.

Pranati, how hard it is to live like a man
to live like a husband, like a wife or a son
even living for one’s own name is hard
to live by masturbation is even harder.
There’s no sense in living only by writing poems.
Easier than everything is dying
Bimal had hairs on his chest
still he died
Nikhil weighed 160 pounds
still he died.
My head is reeling so I shall also die
Now, waiting for Pranati
back in my room we will think of something else,
and after sleeping in bed,
today I may be eager for something else!
(Ghoṣ n.d.: 25–26)

In this poem’s final stanzas (“how hard it is to live like a man”), the poet’s ego materialises as a male body in its sheer chemical composition and biological needs of sexual copulation. The male subject views himself as an animal: reduced to his animal instincts, he has lost any connection with his humanity.⁴⁹ While Saileshvar acknowledges the social burden of being a man, the next poem by Subimal Basak “Stigmata/23” bears no trace of the self-pity that Saileshvar expressed by stressing the pain and anxiety of performing the social roles expected by a man.

48 The concept of “reification” was adopted by gender studies to signify the essentialisation of a political domain, like that of women, men, patriarchy etc., following the objectification of that political subject (Butler 1990).

49 A similar observation is expressed by Phalguni Ray in the poem “Black Divinity” (Kālo dibyatā):

“In the urban neon light
Beside my lonely shadow
Instead of your lonely shadow
A tail attached to my body” (Miśra 2015: 33).

4 "I Want to Use You Like Amul Butter"

Every woman-eye shakes a different beam of light
Different taste from different women – I get
Different use of love-flesh-blood
They come to me even if I try to discard them
Their selfishness accepts my hate with pleasure
They know the use of their flesh, skin and limbs –
& they weigh & bargain the depths of love
By their body-flesh
Right! I use their body for my ego's need
While entering into different holes
I'm alone
& I enter into Myself.

Subimal Basak's words (Mitra and Mitra 1969: 30–1) are emblematic of the reification of the female body as a result of a range of factors that included the hyper-sexualisation of masculinity – also an effect and reaction to the rise of feminism and movements for women's emancipation across the world. Note, for example, how the author consciously employs the vocabulary of the market ("they weigh & bargain") in order to operate a semantic transfer to the realm of social relationships, eventually transformed into commodities. In Subimal's overtly misogynist perspective, there is also no attempt to problematise womanhood or to contextualise the shifting gender-roles and masculinity in crisis. What strikes is rather the poet's insistence on using and consuming the women's bodies at one's own pleasure and needs. In this poem, there is only the narcissistic ego and the male gaze of the poet who describes the sexual encounter in the language of the market thus drawing a parallel between sex, love, and economic transactions. Dry and sarcastic humour is a characteristic of Hungryalist poems; yet here it is mainly the awareness to violate and to transgress a woman's body that strikes the reader, reaffirming the woman's body as a site of suffering identities in postcolonial India.

A Clinical Gaze on Shubha's Body

“I know Shubha, spread your vagina”

“Shubha let me sneak under your cloaked watermelon”

“I've forgotten women during rape and come back to Art a long time back”

(Bakken 1967)⁵⁰

The poem “Stark Electric Jesus” (Pracaṇḍa baidyutik chutār) by Malay Roy Choudhury has become the icon of the Hungry Generation, especially after Malay's infamous sentence for obscenity.⁵¹ Issues surrounding the poet's unfulfilled sexual desires, his inability to love, scenes of rape and masturbation have made this poem a divisive icon of the unabashed language and grotesque aesthetics that has become a feature of Hungryalism. Through Malay's frenzied monologue, only virtually addressed to his imaginary muse Shubha, an allegoric representation of woman, the poem describes the oedipal and sexual frustrations of the poet. Malay's “muse” Shubha materialises into the flesh of a woman's body; a merely “sexual body”, as Nandini Dhar rightly notices, a passive and silent object that opens up in her nudity to the author's eyes.

In the controversial passages of Malay Roy Choudhury's notoriously banned poem “Stark Electric Jesus”, transliterated English words are juxtaposed to a scientific Bengali terminology to describe Shubha's sexual and reproductive organs and other bodily activities such as male ejaculation and urination. The incorporation of these English words into the Bengali text helped mitigate the outrageous content and attenuate the visual power that the obscene words depicting the female sex organs may have on the reader. The following verses show how the usage of English words of Latin derivation (e.g. uterus, clitoris, labia majora) and the Sanskritised Bengali words (i.e. garbha (womb), ṛtusrāb (seasonal bloodstream), śukra (sperm) and satīcchad (hymen)) operate in the poem as means to bowdlerise the description of the female “sexual body”, cleansing it of its overtly sexual component and transforming it into a biological body, where sexual intercourse and masturbation occur exclusively as mechanical activities.

50 Unless otherwise noted, all extracts in this section are from Malay Roy Choudhury's English version of “Stark Electric Jesus” (Bakken 1967).

51 This section is a shorter version of my article published in *Sanglap: Journal of Literary and Cultural Inquiry* (Cappello 2018).

4 “I Want to Use You Like Amul Butter”

Shubha, let me sleep for a few moments in your violent silvery
uterus
Give me peace, Shubha, let me have peace
Let my sin-driven skeleton be washed anew in your seasonal blood-
stream [ṛtusrāb]
Let me create myself in your womb with my own sperm [śukra]
[...]
Let me see the earth through your cellophane hymen [satīcchad]
[...]
The surroundings of your clitoris were being embellished with coon
at that time
[...]
Let me enter in the immemorial incontinence of your labia majora
Into the absurdity of woeless effort
In the golden chlorophyll of the drunken heart

Both the Bengali words (ṛtusrāb, ātmamaithun, śleṣmā) and their English translation that are used to describe the bodily fluids (seasonal bloodstream, self-coition, ovum-flux) show a conscious selection by the author of a scientific vocabulary of the Bengali language and a correspondent English translation for the medical terminology related to the sexual body. In some of the passages illustrated above, Malay directly used the transliterated English word to denote the female sexual organ (e.g. *lābiyā myājorā*, *ṅuterās*, and *klitoris*) for lack of a Bengali equivalent.⁵² Yet the proliferation of a Bengali sexual terminology, already established from the late nineteenth century through an expanding market of medical publications, exposed Malay’s use of the English words as due to the need for a certain degree of secrecy with regard to the more contentious aspects of the poem.⁵³ It is in fact quite common in ordinary Bengali language, and especially in the technical and more

52 Malay personally claimed to have used English words for want of Bengali words to denote female sexual organs (personal interview, November 26, 2017). This lack of knowledge of the Bengali words for the sexual organs – which betray an uneasiness with using such words – is not uncommon. For example, Kumar Bishnu De, author of a book on Malay’s “rebel poetry”, admitted of being unfamiliar with the meaning of the words “clitoris” (*klitoris*) and “labia majora” (*lābiyā myājorā*). They became clear only after coming across the sequence of Bengali word in Malay’s poem that visually depicted the vagina (De 2013: 210).

53 An example of Bengali manuals on sexology is Abul Hasanat’s *Sacitra yaunabijñān* (Illustrated Book of Sexual Science, 1936). This book deals with multiple aspects of sexuality, including conception, the formation of the embryo, and birth, as well as a detailed analysis of so-called sexual perception (*yaunabodh*). Hasanat wrote books on this subject until the 1950s and his works remained highly popular through the Sixties. The occurrence of such scientific terminology to describe sexual organs and their functions in Hasanat’s manual, such as *liṅga* (penis), *yoni* (vulva), *jarāyū* (uterus), *garbha* (womb), *śukra* (semen),

problematic context of sexuality, to use English words as substitutes for a Bengali that would more easily offend middle-class morality. If the poet was already aware of the risk of a trial and sentence for obscenity, he knew how provocative and transgressive his writings could become in media and popular perception. The use of the English equivalents in the Bengali poem then shows the poet's attempts to suppress the straightforwardly "outrageous" quality of the Bengali by replacing it with a more "delicate" English word to attenuate the scandalous content.

On the other hand, Malay played with the Bengali medical lexicon related to sexual organs and activities (i.e. *yonivartma* (urethra); *ātmamaithun* (self-coition); *rajaḥ/ṛtusrāb* (menstruation); *śleṣmā* (mucus, phlegm)) to convey a biological description of the body.⁵⁴ The effects generated by such scientific treatment of the language are ones of ironic inversion of the obscene images related to sex: on the one hand, non-procreative sex acquires dignity of literary treatment, while on the other, the high status of the artificial scientific vocabulary is sarcastically downplayed through the sexual context: "Why wasn't I lost in my mother's urethra?/ Why wasn't I driven away in my father's urine after his self-coition?/ Why wasn't I mixed in the ovum-flux or in the phlegm?" (Bakken 1967). If the words "self-coition, phlegm" and "seasonal bloodstream" aim at reproducing masturbation, menstruation and reproduction purely as mechanical processes of the biological body in the anatomic lexicon, they also lay out different possibilities of interpreting the reasons behind their use. Even in the English translation of Malay's poem, the choice of the translator and editors has been to exploit the semantic potential of the English scientific terminology as opposed to the more common "masturbation" and "menstruation" to retain the clinical and perhaps sanitised intention behind the original Bengali version. In other words, choosing words from the high register of the English and Bengali languages here serves two functions: on the one hand, they elevate to a lyrical subject what the middle-class readership interprets as low, repulsive and scandalous; on the other, they manage to ironically downplay the technical scientific language by applying it to the low semantic sphere of sex and other bodily activities. The representation of Shubha's body and of the male semen through the Bengali medical vocabulary does not function only as a way to purify the text banned for obscenity. The hyper-pedantic constructions of the English translation and their juxtaposition with the higher status of the Latin-derived English words, functioned here as practices of translation and language composition that give the dignity of literary matter to the bawdy topic of sexuality.

aṅḍakoṣ (scrotum), *mūtrāśay* (bladder), *satīcchad* (hymen), *prasrāb* (urination) and *ṛtusrāb* (menstruation), offer evidence for the selection of medical words in the Bengali poem.

⁵⁴ In a private conversation, Malay confirmed his selective choice of the words describing the sexual body from a Bengali medical handbook (Private Facebook conversation with Malay Roy Choudhury, April 17, 2018).

Masturbation as a Trope of the Avant-garde

Another aspect of Hungryalist poetry underpinning the hypermasculinity of the movement is the trope of male masturbation, placing the physiological and biological male body at the centre of the poem. Against colonial representations that equated the loss of semen with emasculation, in the context of Hungryalist poetry masturbation is both a physical act and a metaphorical allusion: it is both a gesture of pleasure and metaphor of poetry writing. We find an example of the transcultural aestheticisation of the trope of masturbation in Allen Ginsberg's so-called "Blake vision", an hallucination he experienced, by his own admission, while masturbating with Blake's book *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (Mortuza 2015: 65), an extra-sensorial romantic experience which launched Ginsberg's early prophetic poetry and arguably shaped his future interest in Buddhism (Trigilio 2007: 120–1). Images of semen and male autoeroticism are tropes of Hungryalist poetry too. They stand in contradiction to the normative sphere of middle-class sexuality in postcolonial India that promoted sane sex for reproductive purposes and a eugenic program of family planning and birth control, in line with caste and class ideologies. By contrast, the non-reproductive nature of "solitary sex" (Laqueur 2003) was either treated as a mental disorder or a disease, besides being reproached and undesirable because of its anti-social and anti-utilitarian purposes.⁵⁵ The Hungry Generation managed to turn male masturbation into a literary trope, exploiting both its grotesque and metaphoric potential. We could stretch to the point of formulating masturbation as the sexuality of Hungryalism, the only solitary pleasure that is left to the men disillusioned with the traditional roles of the Hindu family and middle-class society.

In colonial Bengal, masturbation and ejaculation were signs of pathological abnormality in middle-class narratives of the body and sexuality. Scholarship on the cultural significations of masturbation in colonial India identified that loss of semen was a sign of sickness, sexual perversion, effeminacy, and anxieties of masculinity (Pande 2010, Alter 2011, Mukharji 2011). For example, the so-called "weakness of the semen" (dhātu daurbalya) was associated with impotency and involuntary discharges, substantiating the anxieties of Bengali effeminacy and racial inferiority (Mukharji 2011: 213–48). Bengali men, burdened with such

55 Thomas Laqueur pointed out that the adjective "masturbatory" was used in a pejorative way "always in pointing out to an excess of imagination, to a lack of seriousness, to a retreat from reason and from proper, polite behaviour" (Laqueur 2003: 62). Imagination was believed to pertain exclusively to the single individual, and precluded to the modern self who must perform it in solitude, autonomy, and freedom from external interference. The social fear of masturbation and its prominent individual characteristic condemned the "heinous" act as fundamentally anti-social.

stereotypes of degeneration and perversion, developed a paranoia over squandered sperm resulting in an ambivalence towards women that verged on misogyny (Pande 2010). Bengali periodicals on public health treated the subject of masturbation as a serious health issue, especially during puberty and adolescence, since it made the boy's semen "watery and weak" (śukradhātu taral o nistej) (Basu 1998: 228). In accordance with the state of brahmachārya, male Hindu celibacy, masturbation was interpreted in terms of physical strength more than as a moral vice: the preservation of semen represented in fact an act of self-control and self-development whereas "wasting" semen signified a loss of virility (Alter 2011: 55–86). According to Hindu physiology at large and to Indian traditional medicines, ejaculation was equated with a loss of masculine strength and a waste of essential energy. However, Srivastava (2001) has remarked how the notion of "semen anxiety", combined with a general ethic of self-control, came to take on the appearance of an irrevocable truth of Indian masculinity.⁵⁶

All these medical, social and psychological layers are relevant to understand the Hungryalist re-elaboration of the trope of masturbation. Again, the male body and its sexual power – as well as its impotence – is located at the centre of the poem. Masturbation becomes a way to express the social and psychological conflicts of the young Bengali male with the dominant bourgeois morality and middle-class social regulations of post-independence Bengal. At the same time, these poets' relationship with the body remains ambiguous and unavoidably torn between the expectations of the family and their personal experience, between the ongoing sexual revolution in Europe and America and the ostensible cultural immobility of Bengali middle-class society. The concern of the Hungryalist poets about changing notions and perceptions of masculinity in patriarchal Indian society finds a material as well as symbolical translation in the act of masturbation. Even though images of masturbation in Hungryalist poetry were considered "obscene" from the legal point of view, they were part of a constellation of allegedly obscene imaginaries of avant-garde poetry which spoke of the ambivalent and precarious conditions of modern masculinity in India. Therefore, portraying acts of autoeroticism in avant-garde Bengali poetry meant to metaphorically mirror the conflicts, ambivalences and anxieties of a changing concept of the modern male middle-class Bengali individual.

Turning again to Malay's banned poem where Shubha is the object of the author's so-called clinical gaze, I show that masturbation is inscribed in the same Bengali medical vocabulary that characterised the description of Shubha's sexual

56 Srivastava further argues that the obsession of India-related scholarship for semen anxiety has overshadowed the multiple, little "social topographies" that could constitute a fuller picture of Indian sexualities, a word that the sociologist declines in plural (Srivastava 2001: 3–4).

4 “I Want to Use You Like Amul Butter”

body, as we have just seen. The result of using this medical lexicon for describing the socially reproachable activities of male masturbation and copulation have operated a funny inversion of these “defiling” sexual practices, now treated with the clinical and aseptic idiom of medical sciences. In this way, Malay’s use of the image of semen in his poem is not too different from what we are about to encounter in Phalguni Ray’s description of bodily fluids: the poets’ goal is to make fun of the rational, medical and scientific discourses promoted on a national basis in post-independence India.

Masturbation in “Stark Electric Jesus”

In the Bengali original poem, the word used for masturbation is “ātmaithun”, translated in English as “self-coition”: a neologism seemingly crafted by the poet to reproduce the scientific act of masturbation. Although *ātmaithun* and *hastamaithun* seem to be the most common words in Bengali that refer to masturbation, other equivalents are used to define both male and female masturbation (*svamehan*, *svakām* and *svayāmṛati*).⁵⁷ Although the word masturbation linguistically speaking is an orthophemism – a word that does not constitute an offense –, the trespassing from the medical space into the public domain of literature and poetry makes its interpretation more problematic, to the point that it becomes one of the triggers of the obscenity charges, as pointed out by the Magistrate of the obscenity trial. In the following verses, the contentious topic of masturbation and the cultural meanings of male semen are addressed with two Bengali synonyms of semen: *śukra* and *bīrya*.

Let me create myself in your womb with my own sperm [śukra]
would I have been like this if I had different parents?
was Malay alias me possible from an absolutely different sperm?
[śukra]
would I have been Malay in the womb of other women of my father?
[...]

57 The medical periodical *Cikīṭ-sā sammilanī*, a magazine of health and medical science instructing families on modern concerns about sexuality in late colonial Bengal, also uses the word “*hastamaithun*” for the practice of masturbation among male children and adolescents (Basu 1998: 227). Abul Hasanat (Hāsānāt: 1936: 200–1) devotes a section to autoeroticism (*svayāmṛati*) and masturbation (*hastamaithun*), including these practices in the section “Different Manifestations of the Sexual Feeling” (Yaunabodher bibhinnaṁkhi prakāś).

I will die
oh what are these happenings within me
I am failing to fetch out my hand and my palm
from the dried sperms [bīrya] on trousers spreading wings
3000000 children gliding towards the district of Shubha's bosom
millions of needles are now running from my blood into Poetry
now the smuggling of my obstinate leg is trying to plunge
into the death-killer sex-wig entangled in the hypnotic kingdom
of words

The English word sperm does not distinguish between the meanings of the two Bengali words śukra and bīrya, two equivalents of the English sperm or semen.⁵⁸ As Kakar also observes, the Sanskrit vīrya is “a word that stands for both sexual energy and semen. *Vīrya*, in fact, is identical with the essence of maleness: it can either move downward in sexual intercourse, where it is emitted in its gross physical form as semen, or it can move upward through the spinal cord and into the brain, in its subtle form known as *ojas*” (Kakar 1990: 118–9). Abul Hasanat's sexology book, in the section describing the male sex organs, abounds with compounds having śukra- as a first noun for organs related to the production of semen (śukrakoś, śukravāhī nala) (Hāsānāt· 1936: 93). “Spermatozoa” here translate as “śukrakīṭ” and are described as follows: “The man's spermatozoa give life to the woman's eggs. The spermatozoa are immersed in the liquid part of the man's semen (puruṣer śukrer aṃṣe bhāsiyā beṛāy)” (Hāsānāt· 1936: 86). Therefore, the recurrence of the Bengali word śukra in such texts, as compared to the absent bīrya, suggests the scientific connotation of the former.

In Malay's poem, bīrya stands as the concrete physical appearance of the spermatogenic liquid, while śukra represents the neutral, scientific term that refers to the smaller units of the latter, the spermatozoa, as shown above in Hasanat's sexology book. Drawing a distinction between the two words becomes a significant operation in the translation of Malay's medical language: if śukra is an orthophemism, a neutral term with neither positive nor negative connotation, bīrya has attributive quality and is intentionally juxtaposed to the latter to suggest a metaphorical reference to the poet's troubled masculinity, expressed through the culminating

58 The monolingual dictionary of the Bengali language (Biśvās 2014) considers both terms as synonyms, although there is a qualitative difference between the two that classifies śukra only as a noun, while bīrya also as an attribute (as in the adjectival construction bīryavān or bīryaśālī, “endowed with vigour”). The Sanskrit definition of vīrya associates it with “manliness, valour, strength, power, energy”, and only in the third entry with “manly vigour, virility, semen virile”. The modern Bengali usage assigns to bīrya the characteristics of valour, courage and heroism, by definition qualities that pertain to a male hero (bīr).

4 “I Want to Use You Like Amul Butter”

gesture of the poet who compares the activity of masturbation to poetry-making. Also in Phalguni Ray’s poetry, words like *bīrya* or *bīj* instead of *śukra* are used to denote the material substance transmitting the heredity traits: “I observe my desire to become a father inside masturbation/ in the liquid flow of semen/ a frame of two hundred and six bones/ and attached to the frame are fleshy nerves carrying thoughts/ seeds holding the memories of sounds swim in the liquid sperm” (Miśra 2015: 29). The abstract matter denoted by the word *śukra* is substantiated in *bīrya*, significantly originating from the same root of “*bīj*”, the seed, through the bodily materialisation of the spermatozoa during ejaculation. Hence in my re-translation of Malay’s poem I suggest preserving the material differentiation denoted by the Bengali words by translating *śukra* as the English “semen” and *bīrya* as “sperm”.⁵⁹ Exploiting the Latin etymology of “semen”, I aimed at highlighting the medical representation of male semen.

Give me birth again from your womb with my own semen
Would I have been like this even if I had different parents?
Would I have become Malay alias me from a completely different semen?
Would there be Malay if my father had impregnated another woman?

The orthophemistic or neutral connotation of the words *ātmamaithun* (self-coi-tion), *śukra* and *bīrya* (sperm and semen), shows that Malay pursued an ambivalent strategy of sanitisation of the text through the medical lexicon, producing an ironical inversion where the dirty sexual matter is elevated to lyrical subject of poetry, while the high status of the scientific language is minimised through the transgressive descriptions of masturbation and bodily fluids. Therefore, masturbation is not only painted as a mechanical act, but it also stands out as the ultimate condition of the middle-class alienated Bengali poet, caged in a modernity that rationalises and mechanises sexuality, disintegrating social relationships between men and women.

59 I have referred to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*’s definition of semen as “the fluid that contains sperm cells” (Britannica 2023).

5 “I Won’t Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis” Anxious Masculinity in Phalguni Ray’s *Television of a Rotten Soul*

Phalguni’s Poetic World

Few details are available on Phalguni’s life (1945–1981), scattered across Hungryalist essays and memoirs. The major depository of knowledge about the life of this poet, however, lies in the material of his poems, sketching the personal, sensual and emotional journey of this young Bengali man throughout his short existence spanning 36 years. My task is to read these poems as visual and material fragments of Phalguni’s life in order to make sense of the major themes he addressed. I believe that the notion of fragment well represents our knowledge of this author – as well as the Hungry Generation movement – scattered, unedited, or drawn from non-canonical sources; a knowledge that I have attempted to de-construct, rather than re-construct in this chapter. More technically speaking, what is fragmented is the structure of his poems, intentionally dismissing any traditional versification to adjust his Joycean stream of consciousness to the free verse, closer to prose and natural speech. It is inside the poems that the reader gets familiar with Phalguni’s existential world and with the ironies, contradictions, ambiguities, and the anxieties that are at the centre of his poems. These were dictated by the social and material conditions he was inhabiting: even though born in a family of landowners, he experienced poverty, struggled with the new values of the Bengali middle-class and an increasingly competitive Indian society, to ultimately remain jobless, unmarried, and addicted to alcohol.

Hailing from a family of landed gentry originally from Narail in Bangladesh, Phalguni Ray (Beng. Phālgunī Rāy) saw the fall of the landed aristocracy (zamīndārī) from his riverside mansion in north Calcutta, where his ancestors moved after the state had assigned them a piece of land. With the abolition of the zamindari system in the 1950s, all the rights and estates that once belonged to the zamindar were vested in the state, allowing for the redistribution of lands among sharecroppers and peasants. Phalguni and his family, like many others in Bengal, experienced that period of loss of wealth and status that came with the Abolition Act, especially after his father’s death in 1947. He had two brothers, Lakshmikanta Ray, who was Phalguni’s twin brother, and Tushar Ray, the eldest of the three and

5 “I Won’t Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis”

himself a well-known poet.⁶⁰ The heritage house where they lived is on Ratanbabu road (fig. 10), a street named after Phalguni’s great-great-grandfather and zamindar Ram Ratan Ray (1785–1860), who also gave his name to the ghat at the other end of street in the city’s northern area of Baranagar (Miśra 2015: 5–6). Such familiar geographies are illustrated throughout his poetry, drawing a topography of the city which extended to Cossimpoore and Baranagar through portraits of small lanes, old neighbourhoods and popularly visited spots in Calcutta: the country-liquor shop in Khalasitala, the red-lights districts of Harkata and Sonagachi, the Indian Coffee House in College Street, the Nimtala and Ratanbabu burning ghat in north Calcutta, the South Park Street cemetery, along with his family mansion, circumscribe Phalguni’s poetic and existential geography on a map of the city that extended further north than the so-called Black Town of colonial Calcutta.

Unlike the Raychaudhuri brothers, who were born and raised in Patna, Phalguni was born and grown up in the Bengali city. From birth, he witnessed the decadence of a city located at the centre of a divided country, torn by unemployment, poverty and radical politics; disillusioned over the dream of an independent India that promoted progress, wealth and equality among people; disappointed with the promises of socialism and the violence of leftist politics and overwhelmed with refugees from East Bengal. As Subimal Basak wrote of his fellow poet, there was no “anarchy” in Phalguni’s spirit, but rather an “absence”: of money, safety, a lover and a happy family life, which turned him into the suffering poet of suburban Calcutta (Miśra 2015: 133). For some time, Phalguni was associated to the Hungry Generation, as we assume from his outspoken presentation to the readers of *Wastepaper* magazine: “Coming from a renowned Zaminder family, he was educated in the usual mediocre manner in his early years. But as soon as he could understand all the falsehood, meaningless logics & laws of this bourgeoisie society, his role changed and for his aggressive attitude he was rusticated from a college of Calcutta University. Now he is looking for any kind of job which will help him to get sufficient food, wine and adolescent girls to satisfy his hungers of ego. Without women and wine he feels bored and walks aimlessly for hours & for miles till midnite” (Mitra and Mitra 1967: 9). Because he suffered from insomnia and a weak health, he was sent to Patna to stay with some maternal relatives, where he became

60 Tushar also died (ca. 1977) of cirrhosis abetted by untreated tuberculosis and a chronic asthma. However, as opposed to his younger brother Phalguni, Tushar was well received in Bengali poetry circles because he became associated with the magazine *Kṛtibās*. Gautam Sengupta describes him as a sort of bohemian hero, who suffered poverty and severe ailments worsened by alcohol and drug addiction. Among his most popular poems, one line seems to be iconic of the temperament of this Bengali poet: “Police, take off your hat in front of the poet” (Pulis, kabir sām'ne ṭupiṭā tui khulis). According to Sengupta, this line was instantly composed and recited by Tushar when he, shabbily dressed as usual, was stopped and enquired by a policeman in Maidan (Sengupta 2003).



Figure 10. Phalguni Ray's residence and family mansion (Rāyibāri) in Ratanbabu Road. November 2023.

close to Malay and Samir. Phalguni died at the age of just 36, leaving us forty-two poems and six prose pieces written in the span of only five years.

Phalguni's writings must be read in the context of post-independence India's project of nation building. Nehruvian socialism was steeped in a national ideology of progress, planning and development that promoted science and technology as the heralds of Indian modernity. On the background of India's industrial and scientific ethos, and a rising middle-class consumer's culture, Phalguni transposed this economic and cultural crisis onto his male body. That is why we identify the main tensions of his poetry in the dichotomy between what was perceived as normal and socially reproachable, or "abnormal", in Bengali middle-class society, two crucial concepts to Phalguni's elaboration of sexuality.⁶¹ These contrasts set Phalguni's existential marginality in dialogue with the medical and scientific discourses on

61 The question of abnormality in 19th century Europe was addressed most notably by Michel Foucault during his lectures at the Collège de France and further developed in his trilogy on the history of sexuality (1978). He argued that the "abnormal individual" mainly identified itself with three figures: the human monster, the individual to be corrected, and the onanist (Foucault 2003: xvii).

5 “I Won’t Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis”

health and hygiene in the domains of sexuality, race, and caste promoted in the Indian public sphere of the post-independence years, as we are about to see.

In his poems Phalguni explores the physical, psychic, and emotional conflicts of a man seeking non-conformity in a bourgeois society that encouraged conformism within and outside the family unit, especially in the post-Nehruvian India that promoted industrialisation even in the rural areas of West Bengal. His family of aristocratic descent (*abhijāta*), for example, played a central role in displaying Phalguni’s struggle with the homogenisation and normalisation of the social and sexual bodies that was taking place within the Bengali middle-class. Coming to terms with the unfulfillment of middle-class social expectations gave birth to a sense of uselessness and out-of-placeness of the poet in the world. Failure, passivity, resignation, frustration and alienation vis-à-vis the positive narrative of progress and development that was being advertised, are the major emotions that we encounter while reading Phalguni’s poems.

The main frictions that emerge from Phalguni’s writings could be summed up as the juxtaposition between the bourgeois rational view of sexuality (*yaunatā*), reducing the realm of love and intimacy to social and biological prescriptions, and the “peripheral” sexualities that are embodied in the author’s confessional poetry and life experience.⁶² In twentieth century India, works on sexology – pioneered by the medical doctor A. P. Pillai – were extremely popular among certain sections of the society, and promoted the idea of a “rational sex” based on biological needs and scientific findings (Srivastava 2001: 228). The science of sex, or sexology, was a field that attracted growing interest in the subcontinent: sexual manuals and scientific treatises of Western scholars circulated abundantly in Indian medical circles. Journals and magazines, like the Bengali *Nara-nārī* and the Marathi *Samāj svāsthya*, discussed questions of sexuality in the vernacular languages, providing a secret space where the middle-class man and woman could become familiar with the knowledge on sex available at that time.⁶³ These discourses were part of a larger politics of sexual reform and surveillance that were incompatible with Phalguni’s always ambiguous sexuality. Against the Nehruvian background of economic frugality (and sexual temperance), views on intimacy, love, and sexuality underwent great changes through the influence of television, cinema and advertisement, which deeply impacted the shaping of a modern Indian

62 These tensions between a normative scientific sphere of sexuality and the proliferation of so-called peripheral sexualities that are suppressed and medicalised were the subject of Michel Foucault’s work, most notably outlined in his *The History of Sexuality* (1978).

63 Sutanuka Banerjee, for example, analysed the intersection between discourses on modern womanhood in Bengal and those on modern sexual reform around the world. She especially focused on Bengali womanhood and its representation in the vernacular magazine *Nara-nārī* from 1939 to 1950 (Banerjee 2015).

public sphere. Modern ideals of intimacy entered the world of Bengalis especially through the audio-visual impact of cinema. By the 1950s, with the emergence of Bollywood, the representation and popular imagination of romance offered new models of intimacy and physicality in relationships. In this process, the images of couples, although often marking the stereotypes of a strong masculinity and a shy femininity, contributed to “re-frame the man and the woman in a specific fashion”, producing “coded fantasies regarding intimacy” (Mukherjee 2019). At the same time, Bengali satires, vignettes, and photographs showed a prevailing sense of unease at the idea of romantic love in the conjugal couple, accompanied by disquiet and scepticism of women’s emancipation and equality in the marriage, seen as demeaning notions of manhood (Majumdar 2009: 147). The invasion of images had a deep impact on the young generation in India, shaping new notions of sexuality, intimacy and romantic love that would later enter the material culture of the Indian “world-class” in the 1990s, exposing the links between capitalism, social change and the shaping of new emotional geographies (Brosius 2010).

Phalguni touches upon issues of intimacy and conjugality, revealing the shortcomings of the institution of marriage vis-à-vis the ambivalences of sexual relationships often occurring outside the married couple, as he observed in his family. He was profoundly distressed about the ways of perceiving and portraying his male body, a sad and useless machine, revealing a real obsession for his masculinity. He ironically and unapologetically portrayed the fleeting nature of his sexual urgency, at once directed towards prostitutes, ex-lovers, young men, or even close female relatives. Yet, it is often in the solitary act of masturbation that Phalguni found the erotic dimension that is more suitable to his condition of outsider. In his poems, women appear as the archetypes of love and devotion, like Ramakrishna’s disciple and partner Sarada Debi, as well as the recipients of Phalguni’s love and unfulfilled desire. His portrayal of women, as for other Hungryalist writers in general, is antithetic to the colonial and national model of a chaste and spiritual womanhood, even though these stereotypes are manipulated and presented with sarcasm in his poetry.

While family structures were undergoing important transformations, together with a process of legal reform of the Hindu family (Newbigin 2013), Phalguni targeted two recurrent themes at the basis of many modernising institutions in India: the discourses of “scientific thinking” and “ancient Indian wisdom”, promoters of a national and postcolonial society. Part of the project of developing a national intelligentsia was also promoting a “sane” sex and “rational” gender identities firmly grounded on the principles of the eugenic program, topics that anthropologist Sanjay Srivastava has extensively addressed.⁶⁴ It was with these national

64 According to Srivastava, the discourses of an “ancient Indian wisdom” and a “scientific thinking” were at the core of the nationalist development of a postcolonial society.

5 “I Won’t Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis”

narratives in mind that Phalguni resorted to “heredity”, the principle at the basis of genetic transmission. Phalguni used the English transliterated word (*heridiṭī*) to enunciate this theory, with a clear reference to eugenics, a set of allegedly scientific practices at the core of the family planning programs carried out under Nehru and Indira’s government.⁶⁵ Playing with notions of eugenics and heredity is not casual in Phalguni’s critical portrait of the middle class, as these theories share several points with ideas of Hindu kinship and social bonds, mainly founded on blood. Studies have identified two distinctive domains that define kinship in Bengali society: the shared or inherited natural substance (*dhātu*), that is the blood, and a moral code for conduct (*dharma*) (Inden and Nicholas 1977: xiii). Liquid bodily substances like blood, semen, and embryonic acids permeate Phalguni’s poetry, even though he pokes fun at these overtly biological concepts and uses them to overturn both Hindu and bourgeois views on family and society. Male semen, which we have seen being a trope in Hungryalist poetry, represents the vehicle of Phalguni’s genetic inheritance and perhaps his “aristocratic” legacy. Even though Phalguni is sarcastic about the claim of science and religious practice of institutionalising human bonds and emotions, he appears to be seriously influenced and troubled by the cultural and social prescriptions of Bengali Hindu society.

Tropes and Language in *Television of a Rotten Soul*

Nashta ātmār ṭelibhisan (Television of a Rotten Soul) is Phalguni Ray’s only poetry collection. It was printed for the first time on August 15th, 1973, on Indian Independence Day, as part of a Hungry Generation bulletin edited by Basudeb Dasgupta. Only after the poet’s death, was the collection published in a book with a foreword by the Hungryalist poet Utpalkumar Basu, who described it as “the end of modernism in Bengali poetry”.⁶⁶ Among 14 other pieces, this collection contains an eponymous poem that illustrates well the main themes and concerns addressed

Examples of modernising institutions that promoted both views as central for the development of the modern Indian intelligentsia were the Brahma Samaj, the Arya Samaj and the Doon School (Srivastava 1998).

65 One of the scholars who endorsed family planning, N.S. Phadke, suggested that “any attempt to work out a eugenic program in India will have to take careful account of the principle of Heredity” (Srivastava 2014: 37).

66 The book was republished posthumously by the little magazine *Graffiti* (1993) with a foreword written by the poet Utpalkumar Basu. His foreword along with the whole poetry collection can be retrieved at the following website <https://aamaaderbanglakabita.blogspot.com/2011/03/nashto-atmar-television-falguni-roy.html>, accessed 21.11.2023.

by the poet in his writings.⁶⁷ The poet's personal and autobiographical voice is a distinctive mark of Phalguni's poetry and a leitmotif in all his poetic production. The biographical tenor of Phalguni's poems, which returns some coherence to the events, is countered by a fragmentation of grammar, syntax and vocabulary. His sentences lack punctuation, stumbling into one another; they are often interrupted by interjections, or unfinished and broken by the subsequent thought. The poet's use of the Bengali language reflects this fragmentation, more evidently than in the English translation, where my aim was to provide the reader with a more fluent and readable solution. The Bengali language of his poems is colloquial, a result that is achieved by using the spoken register of Bengali language in place of a more refined literary style. A vocabulary of technology is prevalently borrowed from the English language, although there is evidence of heavy loans from Sanskrit, as in the choice of high words related to the sphere of science, explaining the constant tension between tradition and change in language.⁶⁸ Inversion, irony, parody, hyperbole and paradox are the main figures of speech of his poems delineating the literary and political landscape of this author as postmodern and postcolonial.

So, why *Television of a Rotten Soul*? The English transliterated word “television” (television) and its juxtaposition with the words “naṣṭa ātmā” (rotten or corrupted soul) seem to incarnate, or better materialise, the condition of the human subject and its dimension of feelings in an increasingly mechanised and de-humanised world. The arrival of television was alarming, as also Allen Ginsberg recalled in the first draft of his poem ‘Howl’. About this, his biographer Jonah Raskin said that “in San Francisco at night, he [Allen] gazed at apartments and saw ‘futuristic television lights windows’ and terrifying television antennae on rooftops. Television seemed to be taking over, and in the first draft of ‘Howl’, he offered an image of ‘television treetop’, which suggested television towering above trees, the machine triumphing over nature” (Raskin 2004: 161). This aesthetic of the oxymoron, implying the juxtaposition of two antithetical ideas (as in “television treetop”), seems to be representative of the post-war avant-garde, and it is also a common feature of Phalguni's poetic language. The 1970s saw the transformation of the daily lives of a wealthier middle class triggered by the introduction of electronic appliances, like refrigerators, air conditioning, telephones,

67 All the poems in this chapter are my translation from the original Bengali (Miśra 2015).

68 In sociolinguistics, D'souza among others has shown that the ambivalence between purism and modernisation in Indian languages explained “the constant conflict between the forces of tradition and change”, although the “end result is a synthesis that is peculiarly Indian” (D'souza 1986: 458). Although D'souza's data are from the 1980s, a couple of decades later than the period under discussion, we can assume that such linguistic transformations were already visible in the language of our poets.

5 “I Won’t Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis”

and television.⁶⁹ Besides these new commodities, audio-visual communication media and other instruments of mass communication, including radio and television, gradually entered the ordinary life of the Indian middle class, embodying its seductive dream of consumption.

These shifts in the lifestyle of the middle-class are reflected in Phalguni’s language as well. As pointed out with regard to the postmodern tenor of the Hungry Generation (chap. 1), the assimilation of a Bengali “vocabulary of modernisation” in Phalguni’s poetry mirrored the adoption of these technical devices as well as the ambivalent feelings towards these objects. Examples of electronic and technologic terminologies borrowed from English are scattered throughout Phalguni’s poems, although this feature is not absent in other Hungryalist poets. One can find, for example, hybridisations like “phrijlsabhyatā”, literally a “refrigerator civilisation”,⁷⁰ and other English loanwords like “ṭelibhisan set” (television set), and “ṭelipyāthik kamyunikeśaner rāḍār” (radar of telepathic communication). On the other hand, the proliferation of Sanskrit loanwords displays the process of vernacularisation of the scientific vocabulary, which was predominantly used in its English counterpart until the 1940s (Mukharji 2011). The massive use of loans from Sanskrit in certain Bengali compound words and phrases and a vocabulary often drawn from vernacular physiology, as we will see, becomes representative of the attempt at resisting the widespread use and authority of English in the public sphere of postcolonial South Asia.

Among the major tropes that are exploited in his poetry, images and symbols associated with the domains of sexuality and masculinity are predominant in this poetry collection. Although these are dominant themes in the whole Hungry Generation movement, it is in the writings of this Bengali poet that sexuality and masculinity become sites for questioning gender, caste, and class identities in the context of the changing Bengali society of the 1960s. Phalguni struggled to come to terms with the contradictions and ambivalence implied in being an unemployed

69 The Indian state television system *Doordarshan*, established in 1959, provided the sole option for a growing number of Indians until 1991. In its first phase, India’s televisual modernity was oriented towards development communication and focused on national identity. The extension of media infrastructure was understood as the state’s mission, alongside creating railroads and canals, setting up heavy industries and designing new townships, laying the basis for modern attitudes that would underpin the state’s nation-building (Rajagopal 2014: 85–89). However, in the first decades after independence broadcasting in India was restricted in finance and imagination because of the austerity of the Gandhian ethos and the fear of enflaming the delicately plural Indian society. Reorganization of the AIR (All India Radio), the introduction of advertising and the rapid expansion of television were promoted under Indira Gandhi’s ministry of Information (Rajagopal 2009: 181).

70 Chakraborty more freely translated the phrase as “air-conditioned civilisation” (Tanvir 2015: 43) to convey the idea of new enclosed public spaces, like malls, cinema halls, and supermarkets in modern Indian cities.

and unmarried poet in postcolonial Calcutta. His discovery of an obsessively ambiguous sexual urge and the problematic relationship with his masculinity were marginal to so-called normal sexuality as it was known and promoted in the middle-class milieu of postcolonial West Bengal. Moreover, in a few passages of his poems he emphasises the ambivalence of his sexual identity and his sexual yearning, directed towards both men and women. He remains ambiguous about his sexual orientation, at once acknowledging his homosexuality and treating it with denial. Conscious of the different articulations of sex in the interstices of pleasure and desire, through this ambiguity the poet tries to resist the rational and scientific views of sexuality based on biological prescriptions and scientific norms by giving voice to the marginal experience of his subaltern sexual identity. Therefore, my reading locates Phalguni's reflections on his sexual urgency and troubled masculinity against the hegemonic discourses about sexuality that were promoted in postcolonial West Bengal. Central to the elaboration of sexuality (*yaunatā*) in Phalguni's poetry is the dichotomy between the national and institutional articulation of a scientific and medicalised sexuality, and his individual experience of pleasure and desire that appear as "abnormal" also to counter the institutional practices and scientific formulations of sexuality. Sex was considered socially legitimate, for example, for reproductive purposes within the heterosexual married couple. Therefore, the masculine body, in the context of Phalguni's poetry, becomes a site for displaying his conflict with normativity and literally the container of his sexual anxieties and troubled masculinity. The female body, on the contrary, is the object of Phalguni's obsessive desire and sexual urgency. In this way, the body claims a space for freedom of expression and for performing one's own experience of love and sex, by availing of the personal dimension of poetry to legitimise his peripheral sexuality that would have otherwise remained suppressed. In Hungryalist aesthetics the marginal voices of Phalguni's "other" sexuality and masculinity are thriving, overtly public, and self-conscious.

We have seen that hyper-masculinity is a distinctive feature of Malay Roy Choudhury's banned poem, as well as a more general tendency of the Hungry Generation movement. Although one can make significant distinctions among poems and authors, two main orientations can be identified in Hungryalism in relation to perspectives on gender: hyper-masculinity and the objectification of women. An aggressive and predatory sexuality seems to have represented the main thread of interpretation for the whole movement. However, Phalguni seemed to articulate a different notion of masculinity emerging from the poet's conflictual and uneasy positioning of his masculine body. It is this duality of the male gaze and of the male "pleasurable structures of looking" (Mulvey 1975) at a female body that is of interest to my analysis of Hungryalist poetry. Besides the hyper-masculine ethos of Hungryalist poetry, which objectifies and violates the female body, Phalguni's poems illustrate a more complex interaction between the spectator and the object

5 "I Won't Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis"

of gaze. He gazes obsessively at his penis, observing the functions of his male organ and its reactions to his mutable sexual desire. Linked to his male gaze is the symbolism of the mother and of the androgynous that Phalguni employs to reveal the unspoken homoerotic tensions as well as the uneasiness with being an "unaccomplished" man, unable to perform the roles of husband and father, symbols of patriarchal authority in the structure of the traditional Indian family and bourgeois society. Living the transition from the world of the Bengali landed gentry to the urban middle class of Calcutta, Phalguni was only one of many young Bengali men who experienced the crisis of values and the loss of coherence characteristic of the first decades after the partition of the country. Such existential disorientation also informed the sphere of Phalguni's ambiguous sexual identity, always in the focus of the poet's anxious investigation. In order to unpack Phalguni's anxious masculinity and homoerotic tensions we must turn again to the various discourses on masculinity that were articulated in South Asia during colonial and postcolonial times.

A key to interpret Phalguni's perversion and obsession with sex could be found in the imperial stereotypes about Indian people who were described as "weak, effete, and effeminate" (Sinha 1995), characteristics that delineated the colony as an essentially homoerotic space. With the emergence of Indian nationalism, the androgyny symbolised by Gandhi's politics of non-violence and vegetarianism caused anxiety and became associated with a political strategy of anticolonial struggle, as Joseph Alter has shown (Alter 2000: 139). Yet after independence this model was abandoned to recuperate a "lost" masculinity, heralding a renewed heteronormativity, equally homophobic and scared of effeminacy as the one nurtured by imperial and colonial stereotypes (Banerjee 2005). With the coming of independence, a particular formation of national Indian masculinity was the so-called "Five-year Plan hero" where "manliness came to attach not to bodily representations or aggressive behaviour but to being scientific" (Srivastava 2014: 39). In the emerging Bollywood cinema, the Indian and Bengali heroes broadcast a variety of manly icons who either represented the rational and scientific or the rebel angry man. Representations of homoeroticism were mainly associated with an idea of sexual perversion and corruption that came from the West.⁷¹ Phalguni's tensions

71 A repository of visual representations of masculinity and femininity can be found in the free digital archive *Tasveer Ghar: A House of Pictures* (Brosius et al. 2006). Here studies on visual culture in colonial and postcolonial India argued for the coexistence of a variety of dominant representations of masculinity. Among these, it is worth mentioning the muscular man of traditional Indian wrestling (Namrata Ganneri); the healthy and happy man of the marital couple (Margrit Pernau); the movies' underdog or angry young man played by Amitabh Bachchan (Ranjani Mazumdar); the romantic ideal of cinematic couples (Madhuja Mukherjee), and the construction of a modern middle-class woman in the domestic space (Abigail McGowan).

with normative visions of sexuality and masculinity must be set against this plural background. It is through these multiple lines of analysis and interpretation that one should examine Phalguni's male-centred poetry: by emphasising the historical dimension of his troubled masculinity, engrained in his reluctance and inability to adapt to the values and morality of the Bengali Hindu middle class. Let us see in more detail how Phalguni's peripheral visions of sexuality and masculinity are enunciated in some of his poems. I will show this by discussing the recurring images in his poetry collection *Television of a Rotten Soul* (1973) that are emblematic of the poet's negotiation with dominant social and cultural identities in postcolonial India.

Television of a Rotten Soul (Naṣṭa ātmār ṭelibhisan)

When the poetry collection and its eponymous poem were published, radical politics and terrorism were at an apex of violence. The Naxalites, a movement of peasant and low-class rebels inspired by Mao's Marxist ideology, waged a guerrilla warfare against members of the upper class, businessmen, landlords, politicians and security forces in West Bengal, later spreading to other states of eastern India. In 1971, Bengali students and intellectuals joined the rows of the Naxalite rebellion, staging a guerrilla warfare in the city of Calcutta. Prison diaries of Naxalites, as well as movies have notoriously kept record of the violence that civilians had experienced during the years of terrorism. The word revolution was on the lips of every leftist intellectual and politically committed individual. Moreover, for the new generation of young Bengali writers and intellectuals, the fight for freedom from the British empire few decades earlier in colonial India, and the fight for freedom from the occupation of Pakistan in East Bengal, were vivid memories of a recent history. Stories and legends about freedom fighters, revolutionaries and martyrs of Partition and the independence movement were setting the model of the national hero, ready to die and to withstand torture for the cause of the motherland, endowed with features of an ideal national masculinity. Phalguni was not untouched by these political happenings. In his poems, we find thoughts on revolution, partition, and the meaning of freedom for independent India. The sound of bombs, bullets and grenades burst out in ordinary and unexpected moments of the day throughout the city, observed from the inside of a moving bus. The picture that emerges from the poetry collection *Television of a Rotten Soul* is not an apologetic and lyrical celebration of the armed revolution. Phalguni, and in many ways the whole Hungry Generation, does not embrace poetry as a concrete call-to-action; rather, it distances itself from the rhetoric of revolutionary propaganda, which was a major aesthetic strand of Naxalite poetry during the peak of the movement. Phalguni remained unclear about his political positions, neither leaning for the

5 "I Won't Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis"

militaries nor for the rebels, a lack of standpoint that made his outspoken poetry dangerous and controversial.

I can see my hand
every day on my hand there's the double brain line
the same that, they say, Cheiro the astrologer has
I don't believe in palmistry
Hanging on bus-handles I came to hear sounds of poetry and death
in my skull instead of destiny there's a framework of bones
in sounds of bombs and bullets my fear of death awakens
I am a human who wants revolution

Palmistry (hāt dekhā)

The reference to palmistry or palm-reading (*hāt dekhā*) at the opening of the poem denotes a series of meanings in the sphere of Indian religious and social practice. Firstly, palmistry is a popular form of fortune-telling and matchmaking in India, and it is mainly based on Hindu astrology to which newlyweds and their families turn to check the bride and groom's charts compatibility. Therefore, palmistry and astrology were given a certain authority by the Indian middle class for its power of sanctioning social bonds and guiding the life of an individual, especially in the case of marriage and the birth of the offspring. Cheiro, the sobriquet of William John Warner – from whom the word cheiromancy – was an influential exponent of modern palmistry who contributed to revive this art at the turn of the twentieth century. We will see that the reference to the Irish astrologer and to other names associated to the new sciences of modernity, such as Sigmund Freud, Charles Darwin and Havelock Ellis, symbolise the scientific constructions of sexuality and love relations, a positivist mode of viewing sexuality in compliance with middle-class moral codes.

I kiss with the urge of desire and get pleasure beyond heaven
many times apathy lurks in such functions
in my mind the bodied divinity of wonder
I get drunk to write poetry
but I am reluctant to reflect on poetry
even revolutionaries after cleaning the barrels of their pipe-guns
are reluctant to fire
I follow Shri Chaitanya's religion of love and after giving love
to the Naxals and the Military I became listed as an enemy of
both sides

I have seen people saying, "I'm hungry, give me bread" or
"I'm jobless, give me a job"
nobody gives bread or jobs and when humans need bread and
jobs more than Picasso, Sartre or Satyajit
they see that real society
made up of father-mother-brother-sister
your own wife, other people's wives
is built with sex and economy
on my palm I see the double brain line – what they say also
Cheiro has
I don't believe in palmistry
ah, still my soul has observed that many women remain out of
reach

On the other hand, palmistry also stood for the expectations of the Bengali society and social conformism that requires Phalguni, as a young, Bengali middle-class man, to accomplish by choosing the right wife, having an auspicious marriage and giving birth to children. The palmistry reference in these lines is a good example of how scientific knowledge on sexuality, which included psychoanalysis and sexual science, was scorned and ridiculed by Phalguni because of his scepticism for scientifically established truths. However, at the same time the scientific substratum is always present in Phalguni's reading of the world of social relationships, love and intimacy. Here he mentions Freud and Havelock Ellis, the British doctor who started the study of sexology, whose theories were extremely influential for the development of the science of sex in India and the reform of sexual education promoted by Indian doctors.

and since then I have created my yoga postures
mixing Havelock Ellis' sexual psychology and Jagadish babu's *Gita*⁷²
I discovered the Oedipus complex long before reading Freud
but I don't like doing it with my mother
even though many times in the wild afternoon of my adolescence
I was ready to taste the body of any woman who was my
mother's age
I once came out on the street to commit suicide
but the sound of grenades exploding all around made me run home
for fear of death
I knew violent Revolution even without reading "Das Kapital"

72 With Jāgdiś bābu, Phalguni plausibly referred to the Bengali modern interpreter of the *Gītā* Jagdishchandra Ghosh (1872–1958).

5 “I Won’t Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis”

Phalguni rejected the authority of “theory”, a word he used to refer to the constellation of scientific norms, social prescriptions, and disciplines that govern our lives, regardless of their cultural and geographical origin.⁷³ He downplays theoretical structures to the extent that he could invent his own version of yoga by blending information taken from western manuals of sexology and a Bengali version of the *Bhagavadgītā*: the means will change but the result will remain the same, to recall a famous aphorism by Ramakrishna often quoted by Phalguni. To show the uselessness of theory Phalguni ironically points out the gap between the conceptual knowledge of the Oedipus complex and his experience of it, in the same way as he acknowledges the uselessness of reading Marx’s *The Capital* at a time when leftist guerrilla was happening at his door. In a way, he is making fun of those who boasted with theories, like some Marxist intellectuals and fans of psychoanalysis. We will take a closer look at Phalguni’s constant reference to his mother in the poem “Nirbikār cārminār” (Indifferent Charminar) later in this chapter.

The Charminar Cigarette (cār^hminār)

In Phalguni’s imagination the cigarette is always a Charminar, the most widely consumed brand of cigarettes in 1970s urban India. In West Bengal, the Charminar, originally from Hyderabad, became associated with the image of the leftist intellectual. The cigarette was identified as an attribute of masculinity, being highlighted in advertisement posters of those years.⁷⁴ In the poem “Manik Bandyopadhyay’s Spectacles”, the act of smoking a cigarette is not only an ordinary gesture that gives coherence to Phalguni’s day. The performance or non-performance of the ordinary activity of smoking is in Phalguni’s words emblematic of other realms of meaning. For example, it suggests the equation between the cigarette and the woman, where the latter can be consumed and thrown away just like a cigarette. Moreover, one can assume that alcohol and cigarettes were among the few, if not the only, luxury goods that a moneyless person like Phalguni could afford. So when the poet is left without cigarettes, he hints at a condition of greater lack – of a job, of love, of a woman, and of the possibility to imagine a future as a father and husband.

73 Even though the redundancy of theoretical knowledge as opposed to knowledge gained through living experience is a main topic throughout his poetry collection, the transliterated English word “theory” appears only in his film script “Antim jarāyū”, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

74 Similar arguments have been made on print alcohol ads in India, conveying the picture of an exaggerated masculinity, often accompanied by a highly erotic womanhood. See, for example, Rupali Sehgal, “Selling Intoxicating Bondings: Hyper Masculinity and Print Alcohol Ads in India” (5 March 2018), in Brosius et al. 2006.

Anxious Masculinity in Phalguni Ray's *Television of a Rotten Soul*

Spring, on your dry hot fields stays my heart's stamp
not in the beat of the heart
in the mist of winter I exhale smoke from the mouth without a
cigarette
without a woman on my bed
in the morning I feel that my penis gets harder
in whose belly will my child arrive?
one for which I will provide rice?

The poet's condition of lack or absence – of cigarettes and women – is outlined in the correlation between the phrase “without cigarettes” (binā sigāreṭe) and the word “without a woman” (nārīhīn) both underlining conditions of absence and solitude (the preposition binā, the suffix -hīn). Just like the act of “exhaling smoke from the mouth” can replace the real act of smoking, in the realm of Phalguni's unfulfilled sexuality erection replaces the real sexual intercourse. Similar dynamics of absence and presence are suggested by the image of the cigarette in the following passage from “Television of a Rotten Soul”. The image of the cigarette and the matches is transposed to the domain of his body and sexual desire. The woman is described only as a container (ādhār), a body to be penetrated. Yet, Phalguni does not feel excited nor sexually aroused when he has the chance of a sexual encounter with a woman. His words seem to describe a difficult relationship with his male body: a body he cannot control and that hardly belongs to him. These and other verses could be interpreted as a declaration of Phalguni's homosexuality, or as an always changing and ambivalent attitude in performing his sexuality. But these aspects are never openly acknowledged by the poet, as we will see later.

At times I carry cigarettes
but I have no matches
when I carry matches
I don't have cigarettes
at times when I feel the urge of sex
there is no container
no Radha, no wife or women to use it
when there are women
I have no desire for sex
when there's ready wit there is no unrepentant
when there is an unrepentant there's no ready wit
this is how days and nights go by

What is depicted here are a series of ordinary actions of everyday life that metaphorically explain Phalguni's utterly material and mechanical perception of women

5 “I Won’t Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis”

and of the world of sexuality. Likely modelled on the idiom of Hindu spiritual practice, Phalguni uses the noun “pratyutpannamati” (n. presence of mind, ready wit) and the adjective “abimṛṣyakārī” (adj. imprudent, unrepentant) in the context of sexuality, overturning the technical connotation originally assigned to these words. The standard meanings of the Bengali language are transgressed by applying these high scientific words to a more ordinary plane: Phalguni’s obsession with sex. The effect produced and perceived by the Bengali reader is one of dry humour also due to the exclusive and elitist significations of words such as these two that sound grand and highbrow to the ordinary Bengali reader. These words are therefore literally pulled out of the context of Indian philosophical tradition and cast down into a low level of sheer physical necessity born out of sexual arousal.

Sperm (bīrya)

After having acknowledged uneasiness with his male body and his otherness vis-à-vis what was perceived as “normal” in the realm of sexuality, he rapidly moves frame to the moment of his conception and his parents’ sexual intercourse, which is once again portrayed in extremely scientific terms.

Spending their time a bit differently
my Bengali parents gave birth to me
that is my dad’s body inside my mother’s body
my little body out from the union of the two bodies
that is from dualism to monism
I observe my desire to become a father inside masturbation
in the liquid flow of semen
a frame of 206 bones and attached to the frame are fleshy nerves
carrying thoughts
seeds holding the memories of sounds swim in the liquid sperm

His sexual numbness seems to mirror the emotional aridity of an individual caught in the highly normative and rationalising middle-class Indian society. Sex for reproductive purposes is depicted as a mechanical activity and described with a technical precision by resorting to the cold and aseptic idiom of sciences. The same strategy of language mismatch visible in the contrast between *sādhu bāṃlā* terminology and vile sexual activity operates in this verse too. Phalguni translates the act of his parents’ sexual intercourse using Sanskrit words typical of Indian philosophy, like *dvaita* (dualism) and *advaita* (monism), thus achieving an almost sarcastic and paradoxical effect, which could result disturbing to most conservative

Bengali readers. When recording his desire for paternity in the act of masturbation, Phalguni does not consider the possibility of an emotional interaction with another human being in the elaboration of his desire of paternity. Therefore, the act of masturbation is projected as the imaginative space in which the potential of his masculinity remains unexpressed and unfulfilled. At the same time, it remains the poet's safe corner in which the anxieties of his sexuality and masculinity are materialised. Again, masturbation appears as ultimately disconnected from the sphere of pleasure and desire; it is neither romanticised nor justified as a strategy of literary or artistic subversion. Autoeroticism is simply an ordinary and mechanical act used as a weapon against boredom, dissatisfaction, and frustration of his life.

In other poems, masturbation is envisioned as a liberating act that denounces and subverts the regulation of social bonds and relationships, as well as a state of frustration and uneasiness with one's own body and masculinity. In "Private Bed" (Byaktigata bichānā), for example, Phalguni makes fun of the hypocrisy of the state-sponsored family planning program and of the reassuring image of the ideal middle-class family, made of wife, husband and children, as promoted by posters and advertisement of that era. A project that propounded a vision of the family based on the economic principles of birth control and selection could not possibly imagine its "ideal man" to indulge in obscene and anti-utilitarian activities like masturbation.

Not only Radha – even the prostitute menstruates
The father of three children – the ideal man of family planning
Masturbates from childhood – doesn't he?

As already noted, semen anxiety was a major component in the analysis of colonial masculinity. Semen loss in the form of night discharges, non-reproductive sex, and masturbation was treated as a major source of preoccupation in colonial India, substantiating the fear of effeminacy and loss of virility that characterised the colonial Bengali subject (Sinha 1995; Alter 2011). In the 1950s, the anxiety of semen loss was still a concern for young married couples where wives were responsible for their husband's sexual health and the husbands in turn had to sexually satisfy their wives, as journal columns about sexuality and advertisements have shown (Haynes 2012; Botre and Haynes 2017). While my interpretation reaffirms the weight that the logic of semen anxiety had for the modern Indian middle class, at least on a more symbolic level, Phalguni's case in point discloses other possibilities of interpretation when applied to peripheral and subcultural locations of Bengal's literary landscape. In order to counter the economic logic of sex and marital life at the core of Indian society, Phalguni often resorted to the material and symbolic potential of semen revealing a real obsession with the hyper-analytical and scientific examination of the world of bodily fluids and sexuality, by

5 “I Won’t Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis”

extension. Perhaps while perpetrating these anatomical representations of semen and embryonic acids Phalguni also wanted to laugh at the language of science and dismantle the hyperrational laws of science – like heredity – and their impact on social formations. Moreover, the biological dimension sustained by the Hindu vision of caste, family and society, firmly grounded in blood ties, was further nurtured by the reappearance of an evolutionary model of society based on the science of eugenics and Malthusianism. Even though Phalguni never mentions caste in his poetry, he seems to be implicitly referring to its ideology, founded on a rule of genetic transmission, when he ironically discusses the power of heredity in influencing the social life of an individual.⁷⁵ All these various aspects that in the Hindu middle-class ideology shaped a human being were for Phalguni a constant source of observation and interrogation.

Language and Heredity

In several verses, the poem “*Naṣṭa ātmār ṭelibhisan*” also contains Phalguni’s main observations on the influence of the eugenic principle of heredity, the cultural and biological baggage of humanity, in shaping the human being as it is socially experienced. In this context, language is another object of analysis of the heredity-environment question, which wondered if human behaviour was influenced by environment or by genetic inheritance. Phalguni rhetorically wonders if a man’s education, knowledge, social position and status have an influence on biological and cultural transmission. In other words, in parodic modality Phalguni criticises the notion of caste, essentially grounded on a biological theory of transmission of traits via the mother.

Mr. Khanna speaks Hindi but his wife speaks Bangla
Mustard Khanna’s 5-year-old son can speak both ⁷⁶
through harmonic usage of tongue, teeth, palate, throat, lips
well, did the power of speaking and understanding come
through the nitric acids of his foetus?
dear heredity, what’s this language thing?
I don’t know whether it is the environment or needs that
develop language

75 For example, Mary Douglas has noted that caste identity was biologically transferred through the mother (Douglas 1966: 126).

76 The pun on the word *miṣṭānno* (sweet, pastry) plays on the previous *miṣṭār* (mister) Khanna, typical title of a Punjabi Hindi-speaker, stereotype of a military masculinity, who is here ironically downgraded to the stereotypically sweet and effeminate Bengali.

I don't know if love has a language or if there's only a language
of sensations
I see humans made of bodies
some of them want to be James Joyce and others Alamohan Das
unfortunately, we don't have any influence on our own birth
was there ever a Buddha behind Suzuki's birth?

Phalguni technically observes the biological process of birth in a specific social body: while some want to be James Joyce, a poet, or Alamohan Das, an industrialist, he has come into the jobless and sick body of a poor Bengali poet, with its innate knowledge of his mother tongue Bengali. We do not have any power nor influence on our births, he affirms, just like there is no Buddha behind the birth of the Japanese philosopher and Zen propagator Suzuki.

We have now collected enough pieces to recreate a plausible picture of Phalguni's mindset vis-à-vis the sociocultural landscape of Indian society. He unapologetically exposes the main sites of knowledge and power in modern India, reflecting the disintegration of the Indian family and Hindu traditional values: he equally targets scientific knowledge and Hindu socio-religious practice, both conflating beliefs and prescriptions on birth, sex, and marriage, into an ideology that ultimately sponsored racial purity and class distinction.⁷⁷ Questioning the influence of the deterministic law of heredity in generating human beings and human lives brings the seminal matter onto another level of discussion, which is the preservation of race in colonial and postcolonial Bengal. In late colonial Bengal, sexual temperance and abstinence were promoted to ward off fears of sexual wantonness and pollution of the health and integrity of the Bengali race, against the ongoing crisis brought about by colonial modernity. This vision clearly emerges from pseudoscientific Hindu journals on health and society of that time which sought to prepare the nation to modernity by "cleansing" the seed of future life: "If you really want to see human being happy, long-living, intelligent, rich and pious, then, before sowing the seed of future life, let the seminal fluid be ripe enough by nourishing it, search for a proper place and then plant the seed at the right moment... If you want a son who is pure, noble and most graceful, make yourself pure, noble and graceful" (Bose 2006: 164–5). Anxieties of purity were not unknown in postcolonial India too. Sara Hodges has shown that the social project of postcolonial India was dominated by the neo-Malthusian imperative to reduce poverty and the "potentially unruly poor" (Hodges 2010: 234). Questions about heredity and environment emphasise the burden of the social and religious regulations of Indian society and the influence of a

77 For more extensive studies on race, hygiene and eugenics in colonial and imperial India, and the relevance of caste in India's eugenic discourse, see Heath 2010, Hodges 2010, and Pande 2010.

5 "I Won't Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis"

hyper-scientific vision of the human subject as it was outlined in the Indian post-independence period. In general, Phalguni wanted to make fun of all the layers that were constitutive of the domain of science, which governed society in postcolonial India: this included Hindu religious and scientific inherited knowledge, colonial science, technology and medicine as central attributes of India's modernity.⁷⁸

Against the rules prescribed by science and religion, that is against the language and law of heredity, Phalguni lays out the existence of a language of love (bhālabāsā) besides one of physical perception (anubhūti). Within a postcolonial interpretation, his observations on the hegemonic discourses of Indian modernity reveal the continuities of the colonial imperative of civilisational progress with the national narrative of science and modernisation promoted by the postcolonial Indian nation. Moreover, it shows how colonial power re-inscribed the "inherited (Hindu) knowledge" about caste, gender, and race into renewed local meanings that legitimised these social constructs as proper national institutions. Thus, the search for an alternative answer to what is and what shapes an individual in its most existential needs remains unresolved in Phalguni's words ("is there any language of love? I don't know"), even though he sought to resist the power of facts and scientific truths with a utopic language of love and feeling. Aware of the colonial legacy on the anxiety for the preservation of the Bengali race that expressed through marriage, love and sex regulations, Phalguni observes the contradictions implicit in being a poet who writes and thinks in Bengali, while English, the ex-imperial language, was attaining social and official status in India. Even when speaking about "language", the theory of heredity and transmission return at the centre of his observations on English versus Bengali native speakers and Eurocentric knowledge production about India, in a way that echoes Edward Said's critique of the Orientalist imaginations of the colonies.

My Western boyfriends and girlfriends
you also don't know Bangla from birth
just like many Bengalis don't know English from birth
you also feel hungry
you also go and check the loo and the bathroom when searching
for a house
you also protest against Vietnam war
just like us, Allen Ginsberg can see the river of his poetry in
dreams and nightmares

78 About medicine, Arnold has shown that it found contested expression in both imperial ideology and nationalist agendas in colonial India. The modern scientific discourse of the postcolonial Indian state included the return of Hindu science, the revival of varied indigenous tradition, as well as Western science and technology (Arnold 2000: 169).

yet, bastard, I am a Bengali
I will learn about the God of the Shatapatha Brahmana reading
Max Müller
that's why I will take Soma and Sura, that is drug and wine
all at once, mostly in the evenings
and Buddhadeb Basu will write erudite essays on the Beat Gen-
eration saying that the Hungries are illiterate
oh, why can't I think in English?
why are my parents Bengali?
oh, you Bengali, why have you even become a poet!

In addressing his sāheb and memsāheb friends, the poet does not mean to evoke the standard foreign-native or the colonial white-black dichotomies, but rather wishes to highlight the symmetries with the Bengali people. The ex-colonised subjects and the foreigners are portrayed as part of the same human community, all sharing the same needs: satisfying hunger, desire, consuming, and dissenting. Phalguni here turns to English speakers, those who have the privilege of knowing English from birth, unlike many Indians after the demise of the British empire. The East-West opposition is here outlined in terms that are predominantly linguistic and cultural. The poet from Baranagar articulates a sense of frustration stemming from his lack of English education and proficiency in the English language, both of which are perceived as indispensable prerequisites for achieving social and intellectual success within the middle-class Bengali milieu. In this context of language and social status in post-independence India, he rightly complains that even in the realm of literature English-speaking poets are more well received and worthy of critical attention than Bengali poets like the Hungry Generation who are considered “illiterate”. The same reasons can explain his reference to Max Müller, among the first scholars to translate ancient Indian texts, and his monumental *Sacred Books of the East*, a foundational text of Indian religions even for an Indian student's curriculum in Phalguni's era. In few sentences, Phalguni encapsulates the concern of some Bengali intellectuals regarding the privileged role that English played in the public sphere of post-independence India, including education, access to social mobility, literary and intellectual achievement.

Despite recognising such cultural affinities with the West, Phalguni grapples with profound distress regarding his linguistic non-whiteness, a feeling he conveys through the nominal sentence “yet, bastard, I am a Bengali” (tabu śālā āmi bānālī). Used in counterpoint to Phalguni's preceding assertions, this clause illustrates the inherent fractures and contradictions within his pursuit of an international brotherhood. It serves to consolidate the identity of the postcolonial subject – formally liberated from the colonial administrative and political yoke – yet irrevocably anchored to the same colonial past that engendered the psychic, cultural, and

5 "I Won't Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis"

social conflicts characterising postcolonial India. Phalguni unabashedly embodies these conflicts, underscoring the complexities and tensions inherent in the postcolonial experience.

Phalguni was very conscious about the linguistic and cultural hegemony of Western knowledge and of the political power of the English language in postcolonial India.⁷⁹ Phalguni's remarks on the hierarchy of languages were not isolated but embedded in a larger political debate going on in the 1960s on the issue of the official language of India. In 1956, Hindi in the devanāgarī script replaced English as the Union's official language, although the Indian Constitution continued to acknowledge English as second official language after the reaction of non-Hindi speaking areas. The literary critic Buddhadeva Bose, active supporter of English as the lingua franca of India, looked down on Hindi's imposition as official language while he acknowledged Bengali as his "intimate language".⁸⁰ Phalguni, through his language choices, affirmed his Bengali identity, recognising that being Bengali entails carrying the cultural and biopolitical legacy of colonialism, encompassing ideas and practices related to race, gender, and class.

The paradox that Phalguni has highlighted is the continuation of the colonisation of the Bengali self that is rooted in the language, in the cultural practices and the scientific methods borrowed from Western sciences and humanities. The poet seems in fact to be highly receptive to the debates emerged from the decolonisation movements in Africa that questioned the hegemony of Western colonial epistemology and anticipated the central questions of later postcolonial studies that encouraged the "decolonisation of knowledge".⁸¹ It is within this frame that one should interpret the paradox of a Bengali learning about the sacred Hindu texts from the English translation of a German Indologist, and of the literary critic Buddhadeva Bose praising the Beat Generation while depreciating the Hungryalists as

79 Starting with William Babington Macaulay's Minute of 1853, English played a central role in the cultural and political administration of British India, where he intended to create "a class who may be the interpreters between us and the millions we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and English in taste, in opinions, in words, and in intellect" (Bhabha 1994: 87).

80 In the late 1950s, Buddhadeva Bose wrote several essays on the role that the 'mother language' plays in the cultural and social life of Bengali people. He promoted the use of Indian vernacular languages in public institutions against the growing use of English and Hindi as official languages of India. See, for example, his essays "Language and nation" (Bhāṣā o rāṣṭra); "English and the mother language" (Iṅgreji o māṭṛbhāṣā), and "Language, poetry and humanity" (Bhāṣā, kabitā o manuṣyatva). The latter was especially written in reaction to the report of the Official Language Commission (1956) which implemented the development of Hindi as official language of India (Bose 1957).

81 For example, some of Phalguni's observations on language, gaze, and identity resonate with some main views exposed by the writers who actively took part in the decolonisation movements of their countries, like Frantz Fanon.

“illiterate” and unfit for the higher goal of poetry. The Bengali language embodies and expresses Phalguni’s provincialism in contrast with the internationalism of the writers in the English language, as an obstacle to his quest for emancipating from his vernacular identity. These aspects that Phalguni repeatedly emphasised in his poetry collection *Television of a Rotten Soul* seem to resonate with the Kan-nada writer and critic Ananthamurthy’s questions about the influence of Western models on Indian writing: “Are we really a nation of mimics, victims of English education which has conditioned the faculties of our perception so much that we fail to respond freshly to the immediate situation in India? Should we reach Brecht in order to discover that our folk theatre can be used? Why do we import even our radicalism via Ginsberg, Osborne, or Sartre? And our reaction against the West – isn’t it often emotional, while intellectually we remain bound to western modes of thought?” (Ananthamurthy 1976: 186).

Indifferent Charminar (Nirbikār cārminār)

A number of symbols in Phalguni’s poetry have revealed an obsession with sexual ambiguity and homoeroticism. Among these, the Oedipal complex and the category of the androgynous have lent themselves to postcolonial interpretations of the psychic complex of colonial subjugation. Ashish Nandy, for example, has pinned down the analogy between childhood and the condition of being colonised, suggesting that many subjects internalised their colonial construction as “less male” (Nandy 1983). A psychoanalytical approach can however be reductive and essentialising because it views “Indian sexuality” as a monolithic and universal entity, heavily shaped by medical, psychological and religious concepts of “Indian culture”.⁸² Therefore, I only resort to a psychoanalytical reading to explain the symbolic potential of these images and to expose the symbolic traces of colonial oppression in these postcolonial poets. What must be stressed are the structural and social transformations that India’s middle class was undergoing after the 1960s, influenced by a culture of consumption that re-shaped material notions of need and desire.⁸³ Although these dynamics are not absent in the

82 Indian psychoanalysis has extensively engaged with the Oedipus complex, mainly with the task of formulating an Indian version of the Freudian complex. Literature on the subject includes, but is not limited to, psychoanalytic and culturalist perspectives (Nandy 1983; Kakar 1991). Other studies have problematised the psychoanalytic approach to focus on a more historicised and socially constructed elaboration of gender representations during colonial times (Rosselli 1980; Alter 1992; Sinha 1995).

83 For example, in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) Deleuze and Guattari criticised the psychoanalytical interpretation of the Oedipus complex. They pointed out that traditional psychoanalysis ignored the main feature of modern capitalist

5 "I Won't Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis"

elaboration of Phalguni's sexuality, I will delineate a reading that focuses on the autobiographical character of Phalguni's poetry, which is replete with details from his family life: the conflictual relationship with his mother, the premature death of his father, the missed marriage with his ex-lover, and his aristocratic upbringing make up the biographical patchwork of Phalguni's life. This injection of the personal can suggest a parallel way of reading his poetry as a fragmented biography which exists transversally to the psychoanalytic and culturalist reading of the Oedipus complex. For example, Sudhir Kakar argued that among the main features of the Indian Oedipal archetype are the close mother-son bond and the son's passive acceptance of the father's authority (Kakar 1981: 80). For early Indian psychoanalysis, the consequence of the son's fear of the father engendered the Hindus' complex of castration and emasculation caused by colonial rule, which was accompanied by a reassessment of the redemptive and devoted role of the mother (Boni n.d.: 7). If these symbolic aspects of the Oedipal complex are only latently present in Phalguni's poems, the sphere of the family is at the foundation of his literary world.

Moreover, in what could be enunciated as an economy of sexuality in Phalguni's poetry, the penis becomes the object of his obsessive gaze. The anatomical details revealed by looking at his male body and organ of reproduction stand in opposition to the hegemonic ideologies of Hindu middle-class masculinity. In contrast to the scientific masculinity of the post-Nehruvian era, Phalguni does not suggest a vigorous and healthy manhood. On the contrary, he counters this state-sponsored manliness by displaying an ambivalent and deeply anxious masculinity symbolised by his "unhappy penis" (*asukhī liṅga*), always in the focus of the poet's gaze – during masturbation, in erection, or becoming limp after ejaculation.⁸⁴ Unlike the hyper-sexualisation of the male body in other Hungryalist poems, Phalguni pointed out a more ambiguous masculinity that borders on homosexuality, as I showcase in the next paragraph. The diagnosis of Phalguni's clinical

society in which the family is located: the dimension of desire, its production, repression and the degree of Oedipisation of sexuality.

84 Another sample from his collection is found in the poem "Are We Renaissance or Resurrection?" (*Ām'rāi renesāms o rejārek'san?*). Here Phalguni makes an ironic analogy between the awakening of the Kundalini – the divine energy located at the base of the spine – during yogic sexual union and the erect position of his penis, which Phalguni observes with surprise and bafflement:

Where will Manu descend at the end of Manu's cosmic time?
whose son-in-law the Great Sage of Mud looking at his wife's breasts
would feel sexual attraction and reawaken the Kundalini Shakti through the practice of
exhaling, inhaling and retaining breath
my awake penis goes limp after ejaculation
and it becomes hard to believe that it can stand 'in that way'" (Miśra 2015: 47).

gaze on his virility highlights the strangeness, the otherness and the abnormality experienced for his sexual behaviour.

The Penis (puruṣāṅga, liṅga)

Emblematic of the mother figure and the anatomical gaze on the male body are the next stanzas from “Indifferent Charminar” (Nirbikār cārminār), a poem that has become iconic of the world and language of this Bengali bohemian poet. Here Phalguni turns against his mother, who represents the culture of their aristocratic family (abhijāta), affirming his inability of adapting to the values of her society, permeated with hypocrisy and conformism, not too different from the urban middle class. Such incapacity that seems to pervade the language of the Bengali poet is expressed through words that indicate a lack of agency: adjectives and nouns that describe a state of apathy and inaction, such as nirbikār (indifferent), as in the title of this poem, but also anihā (apathy) and anābaśyak (unnecessary), abound in their reference to the poet’s everyday life, performed in the anonymity and alienation of a changing society in a modernising nation state. Such conditions of passivity, inaction and unfulfillment are echoed in a number of images that symbolise the puzzlement at one’s own birth (janma), expressing the quintessentially existential aversion of being born and revealing the absurdity and contradictions of human life on earth. By contrast, in other poems Phalguni seems to envisage the possibility to carve out a personal corner to counter this sense of anomie produced by the impersonality of capitalist society.

Mother I won’t be able to laugh again with that polished snigger
of your aristocratic society
with the moronic white teeth of a God full of compassion
with the intelligent look of Satan
I won’t be able to treat my wife in matriarchal tradition as
Ramakrishna did
I won’t be able to eat saccharine instead of sugar for fear of
diabetes
I won’t be able⁸⁵ to become Devdas in Khalasitala with my
unhappy penis
on the eve of my ex-lover’s wedding day

85 Notice the repetition of the phrase “I won’t be able” (āmi pā’bo nā) revealing the poet’s inability to follow the social conventions of middle-class Bengali society.

5 "I Won't Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis"

My liver is gradually rotting
my grandfather had cirrhosis
I don't understand heredity
I drink alcohol and read poetry
my father used to fast during pujas
on the day of Holi men press the breasts of the mothers of their
neighbour-sisters in the name of religion

His comparison with Devdas, the doomed hero of Sharatchandra Chattopadhyay's eponymous novel (1917), aims to stress Phalguni's distance from the models of a national masculine heroism which conflated sexual abstinence with political resistance. The reference to Devdas is not arbitrary: this character became the icon of manhood and honour, maintaining his chastity and self-control against the appealing offer of the female protagonists, Paro and Chandramukhi. Therefore, Phalguni renounced this model of a "modest" masculinity which he defies by voicing his sexual perversions. The parallel with this icon of Bengali masculinity is reinforced by the "unhappiness" ascribed to his penis at the wedding day of his ex-lover, an event that Phalguni often re-evokes in his poetry. "Asukhī" is an unusual quality to be ascribed to the male organ: it translates as "unhappy", "discontented" or "miserable", underlying the pain that the poet must go through in his life. Unhappy here denotes not only the general discontent with his personal and sexual life but it also points to the poet's disidentification with his male body. This passage also links back to the question of heredity, which creates a connection of bodies with his ancestors, from his father to his grandfather.

Mother
many from your aristocratic society drank vodka on foreign
journeys
I will indifferently light up my cigarette on your burning pyre
tears water my eyes if I think about your death
I don't think about earthquakes of land or floods of water
I didn't think of Vaishnava lyrics when I put my hands on the
petticoat's lace of my virgin girlfriend
Mother I will also die one day

As if gradually increasing the load, now the mother is imagined on her death pyre. His mother's upbringing in the Bengali landed gentry is symptomatic of the moment of transition that Phalguni was experiencing in the radical leftist culture of 1960s Calcutta. These dynamics were not absent in Phalguni's friend circle too, as he shows in "The Flower of Wood" (1975). Here he wrote about his friends' boasting about their family's wealth and how their aristocratic origins coexisted with a

Communist credo despite the contradictions.⁸⁶ Again, an adjective signalling lack of agency and passivity like *nirbikār*, indifferent, as in the title of this iconic poem, is metaphorically transposed to the Charminar cigarette, a trope that captures Phalguni's attempted detachment and nonchalance about the material and emotional world he attaches to his mother. Does this image of a son symbolically "killing" his mother mean to overturn the Oedipus complex? Perhaps this is what Phalguni is attempting in this stanza: to symbolically build her pyre and burn their aristocratic past. As if in the wish to find a place in this world, Phalguni forces himself to fulfil this unwanted action. From a linguistic point of view, it is worth noting a degree of differentiation in the ways the mother is denoted. The more personal and emotional Bengali *mā* in this poem, also used to address goddesses in the Bengali cultural world, is distinct from the sterile connotation of words like *jananī* and *prasū* (lit. female progenitor), which he uses in the film scripts to denote the "mother" viewed as a sheer body, in its essential biological function and reproductive capacity. Always linked to the dimension of love and sexuality is the image of the Vaishnava *padābalī*, the genre of devotional poetry inspired to the *līla* or the game of love between Radha, the *gopīs* and their god Krishna. Although *bhakti* poetry generally sublimates these erotic tensions into devotional love, in the love between Krishna and his *gopīs* the erotic elements are often quite explicit too. Exploiting this very popular reference of the sensual Krishna, by way of a contrast with the Vaishnava *padābalī*, Phalguni exposes the absence or the oblivion of any lyric and poetic form of love when undressing his girlfriend and preparing for his game of love.

Another iconic figure of the colonial world of Calcutta in this poem is Ramakrishna, the Bengali Hindu mystic (1836–1886) and still today a popular saintly figure for Bengali Hindus. When Phalguni affirms of not being able to treat his "wife in matriarchal tradition as Ramakrishna",⁸⁷ he suggests another key to unravel the question of masculinity, so meaningful and problematic for this author. In Phalguni's collapsing world of meaning, Ramakrishna is a model of saintly man and perhaps an ideal example of masculinity to look up to. In other passages of his poetry, Ramakrishna comes across as the apostle of universal sexual peace because of his devotion to Kali. Representative of the cult of Ramakrishna was

86 Bacchu and Nirab Sanyal were the children of an aristocratic woman (*rāj'bhāṛir meye*). What is discussed in this piece are the fights and divergence of political opinions between the two brothers, both in different ways exponents of the leftist culture of Calcutta. Nirab felt guilty for his association with Communism: he remembers when his mother and other *bhadramahilā* were arrested and kept in jail by the Communists. His brother Bacchu, on the contrary, is a stunt Communist and works for the newspaper of the party *Samgrām*. In one article, he humiliates his brother Nirab by underlining his brother's hypocrisy: son of a zamindari family, consumer, yet a Lenin follower (Miśra 2015: 79).

87 *rām'kṛṣṇīya bhaṅgīte [bhaṅgi] strike byabahār kar'te māṭṭāntrik prathāy...āmi pār'bo nā* (Miśra 2015: 24).

5 “I Won’t Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis”

the relationship with his wife and disciple Sarada devi, who was worshipped like a holy mother by her husband. Rumours about this saintly couple, in many ways similar to the Gandhi-Kasturba couple, claimed that theirs was a spiritual marriage and that it was never consummated. I find this passage quite typical of how Phalguni conceived the realm of the Bengali guru’s sexuality, drawing a parallel with his aspirations to sexual normality. Moreover, the Ramakrishna Missions, founded by his disciple Vivekananda, are still today all over the place in Phalguni’s neighbourhood, which gives us room to assume the meaningful influence this urban cult had on the shaping of Phalguni’s world of meaning. After Ramakrishna’s death in 1886, his disciples and Swami Vivekananda decided to turn a dilapidated house in Baranagar into their maṭh, the first monastery of the Ramakrishna order. And, just on the opposite side of the Ganges facing Ratanbabu ghat, where Phalguni’s family house is still located, there is Belurmaṭh, the modern headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

At the monastery of Belur my boundless sexuality awakened
looking at the international python ass covered by the skirt of a
praying foreigner
Mother I envy you because your sexuality will be associated for
eternity with baba’s pyre
staring at my penis with modest filthiness I feel like a species
from another planet
now the glow of the setting sun shines down on my face and the
colours of sunset smearing in their wings
flocks of birds without family planning are coming back to the
peaceful nest of Banalata Sen’s eyes⁸⁸
their time for egg incubation has come

Both mother and father are mentioned in “Nirbikār cārminār”. We know that his father died in 1947, which explains why Phalguni associates his mother’s sexuality with his father’s pyre. These are heavy words for someone who lost his father at the age of only two. Even then, when writing of his father’s death, Phalguni cannot retain from obsessing on sexuality to the point that he confesses to envy his mother

88 Jibananda Das’ popular poem “Banalatā Sen” (1942) became part of the mainstream canon of Bengali literature, representing the urban middle-class nostalgia for a mythic and authentic idea of Bengal. Playing on the reassuring memory of Banalata’s “eyes like bird nests” (pākhīr nīṛer mata cokh), Phalguni disrupts the romantic imagery of the birds flying at sunset and sarcastically shows the contraposition between the Bengali ideal of romantic love, embodied by Banalata, and the impersonal and emotionally sterile project of family planning (paribār parikalpanā).

because of her extinguished sexuality, metaphorically burned on her husband's pyre. For Phalguni once again there is only left to stare at his penis with a feeling of "modest" repulsion. In this image, Phalguni encapsulates his voyeurism and "abnormality" clashing with the ideally normative sexuality of his parents. The juxtaposition between the realms of the filthy and the holy is evoked by the two powerful images of his father's pyre (*bābār citā*) and his look of modest filthiness. While his father and mother's sexuality does not come across as problematic as it became in Phalguni's time, as we read from his voice, his sexuality and masculinity are condensed into the view of "international python ass" at the monastery of Belur which reawaken his "boundless" (*sīmāhīn*) sexuality, emphasising the urgency and perversion of his desire. Despite this temporary performance of a rigid and depraved masculinity, his penis – which biologically identifies him as a man – is treated like a distant object that barely seems to belong to Phalguni's body. The stare of "modest filthiness" (*nirahaṃkāra noṅgrāmi*) reveals his feeling of repulsion at being endowed with the attributes of manliness. His masculine body is repudiated because seen as an obstacle to expressing his ambiguous sexual identity, as well as scorned because of its uselessness to the goals of pleasure and reproduction. It is Phalguni's realisation of the disidentification with his male body that engenders the typical sense of alienation and otherness vis-à-vis the normality of social conventions: the sense that makes him feel like a "species from another planet" (*anyagraher jīb*), an alien or a monster.

Black Divinity (Kālo dibyatā) and Artificial Snake (Kṛtrim sāp)

Homosexuality (samakām)

Phalguni's ambivalent relationship with his male body, often depicted as the source of the poet's troubled sexuality, could also be read in terms of homosexuality. Although performative aspects of homoeroticism and transvestism were authorised in many vernacular traditions of India, homosexuality in South Asia was generally reproached and associated to the corrupt sexuality of the West, as Ruth Vanita has shown (Vanita 2002: 134–137). This could explain the Hungryalists' hesitation in openly talking about homosexuality in both poetry and real life: so far none has confirmed that Phalguni could have been homosexual. However, what strikes in the register of this poet of zamindari descent is the utterly honest and almost psychoanalytical investigation about the pain and anguish he experienced as a non-established individual in Bengali bourgeois society and culture. Yet, the tenor of his disquisitions is often self-ironic or subtly satirical in relation to the prescriptive and manipulative logic of scientific knowledge. The next passages will illustrate how Phalguni's interrogation of his gender and sexual identity are relevant to

5 “I Won’t Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis”

understand the poet’s negotiation with normative concepts of sexuality. For example, against the hegemonic representation of masculinity – rational and scientific, economically and sexually frugal –, Phalguni responded with a sexual behaviour that is ambiguous, depraved, urgent and obsessive, almost verging on paranoia. His sexual need is directed towards multiple objects of desire, including his ex-lover, his mother’s friends, his sister-cousins, the prostitutes, as well as towards young men, as emerges from a reading of the next stanzas. The poem “Black Divinity” (Kālo dibyatā) could be read as symptomatic of Phalguni’s sexual ambiguity. The title itself seems to hint to one’s own black demons that remain suppressed in the subconscious and hidden from the surface. However, the black divinity, which one could read as Phalguni’s suppressed homosexuality, reappears and takes possession of the body of the poet in moments of deep crisis and disorientation.

In the urban neon light
beside my lonely shadow
instead of your lonely shadow
a tail attached to my body

I forget stuff like Darwin’s theory or how to spell Freud’s name
and I walk this road
the shadow of my prehistoric masculine walks beside me and then
I do not remember anything else
I do not remember whom I have cheated and who flicked ten
rupees from me
I forget about literature through the diary of sorrow and even on
Vietnam day I forget about the Vietnam problem

In that moment I remember that every afternoon at five after college
you hang out with your boyfriend and I would walk alone,
I look at the healthy asses of all those young men and regret
that I am not homosexual

In the loneliness and anonymity of modern city life, Phalguni is turned into an ape, reduced to an animal in the urban jungle. The light of the urban neon projects only the shadow of his humanity and masculinity, prompting him to get back to men’s most primitive instincts. When he walks, he drags along his contingent male body as well as the “shadow of my prehistoric masculine”,⁸⁹ or the accumulated memories of the biologic, social and cultural meanings of manhood that he cannot easily get rid of. Phalguni’s reference to Darwin’s theory points to a critique of theories

89 Prāgaitihāsik puruṣer chāyā hāmṭe āmār pāṣe (Mīśra 2015: 33).

on evolution, based on the prescriptions of science and natural history. However, one has to keep in mind that what Phalguni refers to when mentioning Darwin's theory was the more popular perception of the principle of natural selection which centred on Spenser's theory of the survival of the fittest.⁹⁰

Against the modern and positivist concept of subjectivity, influenced by biological and genetic theories on human life, Phalguni's deep historical crisis takes shape clashing with India's dominant ideology of science and development. This crisis of traditional values is epitomised by Phalguni's duality and ambivalence of needs and desires: when he "regrets of not being homosexual", he perhaps not too implicitly affirms to hide the desire of homosexuality. His amnesia of ordinary things such as forgetting "how to spell Freud's name" can be seen as an ironic reference to what is known in psychoanalysis as the Freudian slip: the linguistic mistake that brings to the surface of consciousness what the speaker has subconsciously repressed. But if he ironically points to the repressed taboos of men, he does that to subvert the idea of psychoanalysis about suppressed taboos precisely because his endeavour is to express through poetry the unspoken prohibitions of his family and society. These last observations can be read together with the poem "Artificial Snake" (*Kṛtrim sāp*), where Phalguni seeks to bring back to the surface the "consciousness of hermaphrodite" (*ardhanārīśvar cetanā*) out of his "masculine senses" (*puruṣ anubhūti*).

when I flow
in the procession of wise, talented, good looking and wealthy
men and women
in the procession of stupid, ugly and poor men and women
I forget whether I am a man or a woman
but when I touch my trouser-buttons or my chest-pockets
from the consciousness of Hermaphrodite, I come back to masculine senses
and once I come back I notice that breasts and asses of house-
wives and servant-women from many
households are very similar in terms of size and shape

When flowing (*bhese calā*) in the procession (*michil*) of men and women, that is when lost in the crowd, Phalguni forgets about the outer shell that society has

90 The phrase "survival of the fittest" was used by Herbert Spencer to describe the dominant approach of Darwin's theory of evolution and to draw parallels with his own economic theories. Darwin's theory of natural selection was then warped and simplified especially by social Darwinism, which controversially applied Spencer's phrase to the study of human society. In the opening decades of the twentieth century, Darwin's theory then became extremely influential in the development of Malthusianism and eugenics.

5 “I Won’t Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis”

cast upon him and that identifies him as a man. Only then can Phalguni recall his true consciousness of hermaphrodite, without any distinction of gender: he is the archetypal hermaphrodite, the composite androgynous form of Shiva and Parvati.⁹¹ By contrast, the only connection to his masculinity takes place on a material level when touching his “trouser-buttons” and “chest-pockets”, the only physical attributes that label him as a man. Although we can only assume about Phalguni’s homosexuality, the mechanisms of irony and shame, prohibition and sanction at play are overtly acknowledged in these representations of the poet’s a-sexual consciousness.

Film Scripts: Family Planning, Modernisation and Body Commodification

Moving on to another section of Phalguni’s production, and namely to film scripts, I will show that the re-inscription of images and events of the ordinary life of a Bengali Hindu into realms of “grotesque” meaning is a core strategy of Phalguni’s writing style and subversive aesthetics. The grotesque has more notably defined the transgressive style of the sixteenth-century French writer Rabelais who focused on “the bodily lower stratum” and a fixation on “degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high” (Bakhtin 1984: 19–20). Degradation – of content, style, and language – is of course a valuable way to describe a crucial strategy of Hungryalist aesthetics. Nevertheless, while reading Phalguni’s script “The Final Womb” (Antim jarāyū) I have noticed further analogies with the style of representation typical of Italian surrealist cinema – for example, with Pierpaolo Pasolini’s movies – where the naked body is a tool of social critique and where sexuality is called to play “a horrible metaphoric role”, because it signifies the ultimate commodification of humanity.⁹² In other words, the grotesque has the

91 It should not be out of place to see in Phalguni’s imagination of his “consciousness of hermaphrodite” a connection with what Ashish Nandy has named “klibatva” (Beng. *klibatva*) or the essence of hermaphroditism, the characteristic of the colonial culture that denied the Indian natives of their political identity (Nandy 1983). Nandy has found in Gandhian anti-colonial politics of non-violence, vegetarianism and anti-modernism the epitome of the effeminate or androgynous radicalism that “produced a transcultural protest against the hyper-masculine world view of colonialism” (Nandy 1983: 48).

92 Pasolini explained well the metaphoric role of naked bodies and sexuality in his movie *Salò*, where they visually and meaningfully pervade the scene to signify the ultimate commodification of the human body: “... all the sex that is in *Salò* [*Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*] (and it is there in great quantity) is also the metaphor of the relationship between power and those who are subjugated to it. In other words, it is the representation (oneiric

potential of blending disgust and horror with comedy and satire into one, always tending towards the unveiling of social hypocrisy. Having said this, let us plunge into Phalguni's grotesque world of "The Final Womb" in order to illustrate how subversion and degradation operate in a different kind of literary text.

"The Final Womb" (Antim jarāyū, 1972) is part of a series of film scripts published in various magazines from the late 1960s.⁹³ The grotesque and highly visual potential, as well as the usage of the idiom of filmmaking, suggest that these were written to be staged as experimental films or theatre performances. For example, the structure divided in "shots", the series of frames, and in the "freeze" frames – i.e. the single frames of content that 'freeze' the action on the screen thus resembling a still photograph – have more clearly revealed the original intention of the author. I will only focus here on the short play "The Final Womb" because its main tropes – i.e. the womb, the foetus, and the naked bodies – are symbolic of the modernisation of everyday life and the commodification of bodies and sexuality which Phalguni portrays in his film script. The bleak picture that emerges is a biting critique of India's project of industrialisation and advance in science and technology and its effects on the biopolitical regime of the bodies that was observed on a global scale. We will see that "The Final Womb" is in many ways a dystopian vision of modern societies which de-humanise people through a logic of commodification that treats bodies and lives as things. In a world where the logic of science prevails, the naked hanging bodies portrayed in their sheer biological functions apocalyptically show the end of humanity.

The Womb and the Foetus: Subverting Hindu Symbolism

The symbolism of the womb has been traced to a plurality of cultures across time. The womb is the symbol of life and birth, as well as its opposite, signifying a return to the original matter. In the poems of this author, the womb gains these universal significations, but it prevails in its reference to the female body, source of creation as well as object of commodification. Phalguni overtly criticised family planning, the government-sponsored program of demographic control, which resulted in a massive campaign of sterilisation among the poorer sections of the society, reaching a peak during the Emergency years under Indira Gandhi's government

perhaps) of what Marx calls the commodification of man: the body reduced to a thing (through exploitation). Therefore, sex is invoked in my movie to play a horrible metaphoric role". My translation (Pasolini 1975, online resource).

93 These pieces were published between 1966 and 1976 on different Hungry magazines: "The Womb" (Jarāyū, 1966); "Man-Woman" (Mānuṣ-mānuṣī, 1968); "The Final Womb" (Antim jarāyū, 1972); and "The Second Womb" (Dvīṭīya jarāyū, 1976).

5 “I Won’t Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis”

(1975–77). Sanjam Ahluwalia has shown that the birth control movement targeted the poorer sections of the population which had become a site of control because of their reproductive profligacy (Ahluwalia 2008). As a consequence, the “fear for the fertility” of the poor expressed itself in forms of medicalised violence with far-reaching effects (Tarlo 2003). His series of film scripts playing around the symbolism of the womb (*jarāyū*) are representative of these issues: the unfinished or unripe foetus (*asamāpta bhrūṇ*), the aborting mothers, and the humiliated virility of men allegorically portray the increasing objectification and commodification of the human body. In these pieces of writing, Phalguni is more than ever concerned with showing the body in its nudity and in its basic biological functions to reveal that the biopolitical regime of power can discipline and manipulate the bodies, turning human beings into “biologically living corpses”.⁹⁴

Two words are used alternatively throughout Phalguni’s poetry to denote the uterus: *jarāyū* and *garbha*, both considerably overlapping in meaning. However, the usage of *jarāyū*, which seems more specifically related to the place of fetal gestation than *garbha*, is certainly more spread in the short play we are about to examine. In the preface to “The Final Womb”, the uterus stands as the medium of creation, a place of universal and ahistorical knowledge, untouched by the social constructions that have been imposed on the bodies throughout history. To Phalguni it signifies the epitome of safety and homeness. However, the womb is also for the poet the source of a world of ambiguous sexual identities and troubled masculinity, always struggling against the normativity of middle-class society. In this apocalyptic vision, the female and male bodies are naked, stripped of their social and historical shells, projected only in their biological attributes.

Shot one: A burning pyre – around which a bevy of beautiful and ugly looking naked young women – their eyes brimming with tears.

Shot two: A Neem tree – full-moon beams dripping through its leaves.

Shot three: The blazing flames look upward to the sky and the naked young women with eyes full of tears look downward to the ground – *freeze*.⁹⁵

94 This idea is comparable to what Giorgio Agamben has called “bare life”, the biological life as opposed to the form or manner in which life is lived (Agamben 1995). The phrase “biologically living corpse” (It. *un cadavere che vive ancora biologicamente*) is used by Pier Paolo Pasolini in an interview (ca. 1975) about the society of consumerism and its effects on the post-war Italian youth (Asterione 2015).

95 A translation of “The Final Womb” appeared on the blog *Humanities Underground* (HUG 2014). My version differs from the latter in some passages.

These first shots set the scene of a Hindu funeral. The camera freezes on the frame of a group of crying women around a burning pyre, all essential components of Hindu funeral rites. Throughout this script, the author plays with traditional images of Hindu religion and ideology: among these, the burning pyre (jvalanta citā), the neem tree (nim'gāch), the full moon (pūrṇimā), and the foetus (bhrūṇ) are pulled out of their religious and sacramental connotation to be cast on a symbolically different level of meaning. The province of signification that Phalguni enters is the world of the saṃskāra, the Hindu sacraments, that must be performed throughout the life of a Hindu not only for religious observance but to purify the individual's soul and gain merit (puṇya) in this mundane life.⁹⁶ The funeral ceremony takes place under a neem tree that overlooks the scene. The neem is a highly reputed plant in Hindu religion and traditional medicine, due to its divine origins and usage as village pharmacy in today's rural India. Moreover, it is known in traditional medicine for having a strong contraceptive power. The full-moon light (pūrṇimā) that pierces the neem leaves hints at the full-moon days of the Hindu lunar calendar, which are considered auspicious days for the life of a Hindu. Yet all sorts of inauspicious events take place under the neem tree in this bleak apocalyptic picture: naked corpses of dead men hang from its branches and naked women abort their undeveloped fetuses. What to Hindu religion designates the sphere of the sacramental and the auspicious is transformed by Phalguni into a grotesquely depressing vision. The disruptive potential of these tropes, parts of the ordinary life and symbolic universe of Hindu signification, is enacted by their ascription to the gloomy scene which desecrates the original sacred meaning.

Shot four: On the branches of the Neem tree a few men hang with a rope around their neck – they have no hands or legs but in each of their phallic regions [liṅgadeś] there is a television set – beneath their hanging bodies that raging pyre and the group of naked young women with their eyes full of tears and above those dead bodies through the Neem leaves full-moon beams.

Shot five: The naked women together start ululating and suddenly from their vaginal regions [yonideś] appears an unripe

96 According to the prescriptive nature of Hindu sacraments, several rules must be followed during the performance of the funeral ceremonies. For example, Rajbali Pandey has shown that the eldest son, or a priest, is ideally the chief mourner entitled to perform the funeral rituals, starting with lighting the pyre (Pandey 1969: 434). After completing the circumambulation of the dry pyre and accomplishing the ritual offerings to the gods, the first-born pierces the skull of the defunct to release the soul on its journey towards reincarnation.

5 “I Won’t Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis”

foetus [asamāpta bhrūṅ] – like balls they plop to the ground – the women’s faces contort with pain – they scream.

The spectator’s gaze moves around the burning pyre, revealing with clinical accuracy the strange fruits hanging from the neem’s tree. Naked bodies of men hang “with ropes around their neck”, deprived of limbs but with “television sets” in place of their sexual organs. The tragic and dramatic tenor of language that should accompany the moment of mourning is absent, while the corpses are observed and described aseptically, with cold detachment. There are just a few elements that ascribe a human nature to these bodies: the screams, tears and pain depicted on the women’s faces are the only features denoting their hopelessness vis-à-vis the bleak picture of a fallen humanity. Yet the women are perhaps the only real connection to life: they are in fact those who perform the uludhvani, the typical vocal ululation that women perform for good luck to accompany auspicious events of life. The exaggerating descriptions of the bodies, the highly visual and onomatopoeic power of the language (“like balls they *plop* to the ground”), indicate Phalguni’s attempt at depicting a dystopian world of sheer commodification where the human body is advertised as a pornographic commodity and a machine for reproduction. In terms of language, the images of the female womb (jarāyū) and the foetus (bhrūṅ) are rendered with the standard Bengali register of biological terminology to designate the biological mechanisms of the female body. Also the choice of the words used for “woman” (mānuṣī instead of nārī) is a way to convey the biological aspect of the female – a sort of archetypal female.

The Human Body on Television Sets

Moving on to other grotesque and surrealist tropes in this Bengali film script, the image of the “television set” on the men’s “phallic regions” suggests an obsession with this new device of modernity, which forecasted the mechanisation and the standardisation of human life. The effect achieved by imposing the television set on the dead men’s sexual organs is not only an antithesis but a contradiction, an epitome of postmodernity.

Shot Six: The *television sets* on the hanging male bodies are turned on. On one man’s TV, one sees two young men copulating [samakāme lipta] and those naked women laughing at each other at this sight. On another TV, a naked woman pleasures herself, moaning with pleasure, and a man pierces her bosom with a sharp knife –the woman shrieks.

On another TV an elderly woman is copulating with a dog and her old husband with his face hidden on the knees of a young girl is crying inconsolably.

Shot Seven: The naked women are picking up the aborted premature foetuses [jarāyucyuta asamāpta bhrūṇ] from the ground, their eyes are now drying up and the retinal dots in their eyes begin to burst – and as their faces are awash with blood the difference between beauty and ugliness vanishes.

The emphasis of the author – here the scriptwriter – has now shifted to the visual power that images have in spreading and popularising a violent and pornographic form of sex. Linked to this topic is also the commodification of sex as a result of the reification of personal relationships that exacerbated with the coming of post-modernity. The television sets show women pleasuring themselves, young men having sex, old wives copulating with dogs, and husbands ashamed of their emasculation. Besides showing the humiliated masculinity of men, Phalguni wants to reproduce the violent mechanisms that power inscribes through the biopolitical regime in the body of the modern individual. Pornographic – and even dystopic – sexuality is the instrument that exposes such violence.

Not only are the foetuses aborted (jarāyucyuta, literally “fallen from the uterus”) but undeveloped or unripe (asamāpta, literally “unfinished”), to highlight the imperfection of what should be the potential seed of life. On the other hand, the image of aborted foetuses hints at an unfinished femininity and a failed motherhood too in the context of postcolonial India. By extension, the dual connotation of the foetus underscores the humiliated virility of men and the potential infertility of the female bodies in the bleak vision of the poet. The ideology of motherhood in colonial India became a crucial site of negotiations for a pure and authentic idea of the Indian nation that could symbolically resist the cultural corruption and economic exploitation of the British empire. Moreover, it must be pointed out that similar dynamics of shame, exclusion and marginalisation which women incurred after abortion are evident in the description of the Hindu rite of conception, the garbhādhān, by Hindu orthodox revivalists in colonial Bengal. Ishita Pande has argued, for example, that the non-performance of this rite “had multiple consequences for the person, the family and the community: the father of the girl incurred in the sin of feticide, the womb became polluted so that future sons born of the womb could not offer *pinda* or ritual offerings to ancestral spirits, and a woman who failed to perform it was fated to be a widow in many successive births” (Pande 2010: 164). Since the female body has been the focus of discursive violence in India’s colonial history, the image of the aborted foetus symbolises an abortive motherhood, and allegorically portrays the failed project of

5 "I Won't Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis"

the independent Indian nation. However, in the context of the hyper-rational and scientific project of the postcolonial Indian nation Phalguni locates both the male and the female body on the equal level of physical and psychological violence.

Shot Eight: A raging pyre – a branch of the Neem tree over the pyre – dead men hanging by the rope on the branch – *television sets* on their sexual tree [yaunagāch] – the following words appear on each *television set*:

We want food clothes a place to stay

We want women we want poetry

We want alcohol, pure and pungent alcohol

Art is our alcohol

Literature is our alcohol

Our alcohol is the feeling of hunger

Shot Nine: The naked women face the pyre and in unison say – We do not want *theory* we want bodies we just want bodies and *theories* about bodies.

On each “television sets” appeared the voiceless message of the people affirming their need to have access to basic amenities including art, poetry, women and alcohol. These words are uttered by Phalguni’s desperate voice echoing his lifestyle of poetry, drug and alcohol addiction. But literature and poetry figure in this message as the glue that gives coherence to men’s need for freedom of expression. Hence the men in “The Final Womb” are represented as dead corpses hanging from trees, portrayed without hands and without legs, whose sexual organs are caged in a television set, symbolising the deadly combination of modernity and the commodification of human life. The last words uttered by the crowd of crying women are reminiscent of a key theme in Phalguni’s poetry: the resistance against “theory” as that which cages the human bodies and their chance to freely manifest their desires. The word “theory” significantly appears in the transliterated English word (thiorī) metonymically pointing to the influence of scientific knowledge and to the power that ideologies have of regulating the lives of people. This declaration of freedom from the cage of theory, significantly uttered by a bunch of naked women, becomes representative of Phalguni’s poetic mindset, and

by extension of the reluctance of India's new generation to abide by religious and social prescriptions.

Shot Eleven: This picture is getting projected on the television sets on the phallic regions of the hanging dead-bodies – the corpses have no hands and no legs.

On one man's TV, beneath a huge family planning [paribār parikalpanā] poster the men-woman [mānuṣ-mānuṣī] couple sits with 3 babies in their lap – crying.

On another TV the man is excited – his greying hair, advancing age, the woman's greying hair and advancing age too, but a quiet, naked kid in front of them – the woman holds in her hand the kid's penis with care and the excited man tries to smash a pair of spectacles with a fat fountain pen.

On another TV the woman's whole body turns into a skeleton – only the eyes are alive – only tears in those eyes, tears, and man is blind now and his large body leprosy stricken – their child, a full-grown man but with breasts like women – long hair like women, and the man walks gingerly and the woman pets his phallus – and both say this:

Give love back to us

Give love back to us

And their girlish-man child stares at the sky, agitated – not the least sign of beard on his cheeks – like women his eyes nose lips are shaped

Shot Twelve: A sole full-moon in the sky –

Shot Thirteen: All around the pyre the naked women and in their laps unfertilised foetuses plopped out from their wombs and in every vaginal region multicoloured flowers and every eye filled with tears and everyone chants again –

Give love back to us

Give love back to us

5 "I Won't Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis"

In these final shots of "Antim jarāyu", family planning materialises in the shape of a huge poster representing the Nehruvian model of the national program for demographic regulation. By contrast, the ideal family depicted in the poster overlooks the "man-and-woman couple" (mānuṣ-mānuṣī) sitting with three crying children in their lap, thus revealing the true side of the family planning project. Carried out in a great number of countries as part of a reform of the liberal state, family planning was informed by an extremely racist and exclusivist notion of humanity and society reiterating a "eugenic, misogynist, patriarchal, heterosexist, pauperist, and racist order of reality" (Panu 2009: 5). The view on abortion that emerges from the grotesque "popping of the aborted foetus" represents the anxieties of not being able to achieve the role of mothers and fathers imposed by society. The foetus that once embodied the "seed of future life" now stands for the failure of the regulation of the citizen's bodies, as well as the failure of the colonial ideology of engendering a pure and noble nation.

Decolonising Language: The Spectacles of Bengali Identity

The preface to this film script opens other kinds of questions. Here, before painting the grotesque images discussed so far, the poet observed that language is not only the medium of creation but that it exists independently from the text and from the intention of the poet. For example, he explains this by showing that the Bengali language has been welcoming foreign words to the point that a Bengali speaker can "forget" which word is native and which one is foreign. In other words, Phalguni implicitly declares the freedom of his native language from the hegemony of English, associated with the language of the coloniser and with the influence it had on the cultural, social and psychic life of the subjugated people.

I am having an urge to say a few things about the womb
Actually just like words of a language tend to forget the scent of
the foreign and of the home-grown
like we do not remember when replacing "spectacles" [caśmā]
with *frame* that *frame* [phrem] is an English word
so often when people get mixed in real writing the idea of
writing itself becomes irrelevant
often when people get closer to an abstract god they also get
closer to abstract art poetry literature and to abstract film
as if life was a running film
one forgets that the creator is unmoved, indifferent
and that the medium itself gets a life of its own

In the preface to “The Final Womb” Phalguni affirms the priority of writing in Bengali, Phalguni’s “language of thinking” (cintār bhāṣā), as a means for emancipation from the semantic and epistemological hegemony that colonial discourse inflicted on the colonised subjects also through the English language. It seems that Phalguni wanted to argue that every human life, every single literary or artistic creation acquires a life of its own, independently from its creator. He seemed to suggest a comparison with the life of a child who, gradually separated from the womb of his mother, acquires an identity of its own. The concept of the “abstract” (bimūrta) – an abstract god, abstract film, art and literature – functions as means to recast language into a new set of meanings. He says that we are so much involved in our lives and daily tasks that they lose meaning and become irrelevant as we perform them, forgetting that this is the life we are living. Even when writing or speaking, one tends to forget the weight of the words we are using, and yet just like art and literature, we have the power to manipulate this abstract matter and give it new life. By way of comparison, the womb, just like language and literature, becomes the essence of both the creation and the medium of creation, already containing the potential seeds of life and art. This meta-reflection on life and art becomes an excuse to think about language, another central concern of our Bengali poet.

We find a link to the question of language and the use and abuse of English words in the script’s first line and English transliterated phrase “to feel the urge” (ār’j phil kar’chi). The duality and contradictions of Phalguni’s postcolonial self are mirrored in the paradoxical lexicon of his language. The Bengali word “jarāyū” (womb) significantly stands out in the linguistic mismatch of the sentence claiming for semantic independence from foreign significations. In the same way, the correspondence between the Bengali word “caśmā” and the English “frame” is not casual in Phalguni’s cultural and linguistic deconstruction: the denotative meaning of “spectacles” links to an altogether different connotation in the Bengali “caśmā” because it underlines the historical perspective of the colonised, as opposed to the “frame” (Beng. phrem) that substantiates the colonial gaze, which always identified the non-white as an object of scrutiny.⁹⁷ By putting on the lenses of the Bengali identity, which is expressed through the native language, the poet reaffirms the need of emancipating from the position of cultural

97 The idea of colonial gaze was formulated by Frantz Fanon and tackled primarily in his *Black Skin White Masks* (1952), a work on the trauma of the black subjects of being “fixed” as black and as the object of white gaze (Fanon 1986). The preface in the original Bengali is the following: “jarāyū samparke āmi kichu balār ār’j phil kar’chi, āsole bhāṣār bhetare śabderā yeman deśi-bideśi gandha bhule jāy, caśmār phrem bad’lābār samay yeman mane thāke nā “phrem” eṭā iṃgriji śabda tem’ni anek samay prakṛta lekhār bhetare mānuṣerā miṣe gele pher likhe phelār byāpār’tāi ghuce jāy [...]” (Miśra 2015: 101).

5 "I Won't Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis"

subalternity in which Bengali subjects have been continuously confined under foreign rule.

In Phalguni's claim of liberating Bengali words from their colonial hangover, one can recognise the textual strategies of postcolonial writings, and especially those that reject the privileges of the imperial language along with its imperial categories. These strategies, extensively discussed in much postcolonial critique, imply the "abrogation" of the categories embedded in the so-called language of the centre once they have been adopted and reused in the postcolonial text (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 38). Therefore, language variance, the retention of untranslated words in the English text, code-switching, interlanguage, and syntactic fusion, are the textual instruments that have served the aim of abrogating through subversion of the power structures of the English standard grammar.⁹⁸

These considerations on language and power are tackled through the author's observation on the idea of gaze, being a central trope of postcolonial literatures and critique. Moreover, it becomes a pretext for explaining his view of the idea of the "abstract" which is highly present throughout this text. Playing with the irony and paradoxes implicit in abstract arts and literature, he claims the creation and re-inscription of new localised meanings through the transgressive use of the Bengali language. He accesses the dimension of the abstract to subvert the denotative meaning of the hegemonic significations of both the English and Bengali language. Phalguni here draws attention to the superficial transgression of the English language, which, by contrast, hides a conformism. The same content becomes "transgressive", in his view, only when pronounced, or written, in Bengali, the language of introspection and thought, as Phalguni defines it. Therefore, throughout his poetry and writing the attempt is to crack the code of the English language, that is the register of what has always stood for the imperial language of the centre, in order to recover the unpleasant and reproachable content within the linguistic consciousness of the Bengali language. It is through the playful and transgressive use of Bengali that the postcolonial ambivalence is de-coded. Although Phalguni and other Hungryalists chose to write in Bengali, making a huge difference with the most canonical understanding of postcolonial writing in English, these Bengali texts retain and transform some of the postcolonial textual strategies on multiple levels: these include intrusions of English words into the Bengali vocabulary, as well as the Sanskritisation we have already pointed out with regard to the Bengali

98 According to classic postcolonial literary critique, this subversion is aptly illustrated by the language of the Rastafarians, who deconstructed what they saw as "the power structures of English grammar, structures in themselves metonymic of the hegemonic controls exercised by the British on Black peoples". An example of this is the Rastafarians' insistence on the pronoun "I" expressly used in all sentence positions to oppose the servile and objective "me" (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 48–49).

scientific lexicon. Phalguni seems to embody what the Kannada-speaking critic and novelist U.R. Ananthamurthy described as the “critical insider”, a position in which “the writer remains within his tradition but does so critically, rejecting the idea of a pure unalloyed tradition and embracing the contradictions of his own position as a mark of creative potential, not of a cultural decline or of a continuing colonial domination” (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 119).⁹⁹

Breaking Down Language

The need for releasing language and categories of knowledge from colonial epistemology, theory and science is put into words in the poem “Fresh Information” (Phreś in'phar'meśān). The main question of the poem is an epistemological one: why do we call things this way? How do we acquire such knowledge, and how is it established? With these rhetorical questions, Phalguni aims at disintegrating the preconceived meaning of things and at opening new paths of epistemological research in a decolonised world. The excuse for discussing such a problematic and controversial matter is subverting the scientific convention according to which the “mid-September sunlight” is conventionally associated with the arrival of fall. The sterile connotation of such a fact is superfluous to Phalguni’s curious look into human nature: instead of the seasonal change, the mid-September sunlight is for the poet associated with the “mating of dogs” (kukurer kāmottejanā).

Instead of informing about the mating of dogs the mid-September sunlight tells me that autumn has come
I found out about the hidden relation between stars and ships
from the neighbouring fishing nets on the river
A friend of mine who became marine engineer told me how to
determine the direction of the ocean with the help of a compass
When I’ll die what will remain all around me?

The uselessness and banality of preconceived notions imparted by hegemonic knowledge is reaffirmed when the poet talks about the marine engineer’s instructions for calculating the position of the ocean through a compass. The contrast between the natural and the mechanical, the “fishing nets” and the “compass”, metaphorically points at the predominance of scientific methods over the realm of artistic and literary creation.

99 My observations on the postcolonial language and ethos of Phalguni are based on the understanding of postcolonial texts and languages as delineated in early literary postcolonial criticism, especially in Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin (1989).

5 "I Won't Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis"

In this situation what can we do
if a poet struggles to find his own voice?
I call "water" what my great grandparents used to call "water"
I call "fire" what my great grandparents used to call "fire"
it means that the sons and grandsons will say what their fathers said
the material name of things [bastur bastugata nām] will be the
same as the object, only the ideas behind them will change
like in ancient times the penis was seen only as organ of
reproduction
today the penis is seen also as the radar of telepathic
communication
many people have seen an apple falling from a tree but Newton
did not see only the apple falling
he discovered gravity with it
Bhaskara had certainly discovered the *law of gravity* in other ways
and long before Copernicus, Aryabhata discovered that the
earth rotates around the sun
through all these events only one truth is established
different inventors discovered many ideas through different
methods
just like Ramakrishna's famous statement "as many opinions so
many ways"
just like there is diversity in the unity of humankind and unity
plays in that diversity

With bitter irony, Phalguni ridicules the language of the "great critics" (mahān samālocak'gaṇ), icons of those who retain the power to establish the preconceived meaning of things. In this poem he says many things. He proclaims that the poet's search for his own voice, a new vocabulary that produces a new language, is the first step to creation: to break the confined limits of signs and their significations as they have been established in their hegemonic significations by the different groups in power. The words that Phalguni uses to denote the objects cannot but be words passed on from one generation to the other. Words which he, as a poet, cannot do without. Yet he counters the dominant narratives of modernity that language and culture are embodied in ancient practices and literally incarnated into the individual, spread through genetic transmission, from parent to offspring. By contrast, his observation resonates well with what Ludwig Wittgenstein discovered about language in his theory on linguistic games.¹⁰⁰ In his book *Philosophischen*

100 I cannot give evidence for Phalguni's reading and recycling of Wittgenstein's theory of *Sprachspiel* (language game), but I acknowledge that his observations seem to echo

Untersuchungen (Philosophical investigations, 1953), he argued that denotation is only one of the many functions of language. Against the vision of language as “mirror of reality”, he suggests using another for which language produces reality through its varied and distinct applications depending on the context. Moreover, he affirmed that words hardly function as labels univocally and rigidly attached onto things. By contrast, in both ordinary and scientific language, words function like fluid mobile constructions whose meaning changes according to their specific function (Wittgenstein 1958). That is why, as Phalguni shows, both Western and Indian scholars of mathematics and astrology like Newton, Bhaskara, Copernicus and Aryabhata, regardless of their world location, discovered revolutionary theories by observing ordinary things – i.e. the apple falling from a tree or the sunset – and re-inscribing their univocal denotation into entirely new and ground-breaking meanings – like gravity and heliocentrism. Sarcastically addressing to the great critics, Phalguni asks for some “fresh information” instead of prescriptions, scientific recipes and instructions to embrace a linguistic and cultural practice that is postmodern and a decolonising operation. Therefore, Phalguni’s critique of language and culture is also postcolonial because it shows the continuation of colonial discourse and the traces of its cultural legacy into the realm of independent India. On the other hand, I prefer to use the term decolonisation in the context of this poem, because it emphasises the need to operate a formal and semiotic deconstruction of the colonial syntax and vocabulary by pushing the boundaries of Bengali grammar, words and meaning. Note how the poet intentionally chooses to express the principle of the poem in English language (phreś in'phar'meśan) to push the boundaries of Bengali itself, inverting and subverting hierarchies and authorities with sarcasm and self-irony.

Only critics blinded by knowledge sitting in caves of truth will
say that
everything is a rehash [carbitacarban] of something else
ahi ahi
Bidyasagar learned the alphabet from someone else and then
made it new in the children’s primer *Barnaparicay*
oh, you great bunch of critics tell me whose rehashed work was
Bidyasagar
inform me
instead of informing about the mating of dogs the mid-September
sun tells me that autumn has come
you too give me some fresh information

1950s new language theories, especially Wittgenstein’s formulation of language as “use” according to its specific context (Wittgenstein 1958).

5 “I Won’t Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis”

or will you read Mao’s quote and reply quoting the Taoist
philosophy
wearing a cross around your neck holding Ramakrishna’s
Līlāprasaṅga in one hand and Havelock Ellis’s sexology books
in the other
you will say what Lenin said “neither a renouncer, nor a Don
Juan! We must stay in a place between the two”
which one is it, Sir?

Through his reference to Ishvarchandra Bidyasagar (Beng. Īśvar'candra Bidyāsāgar) and Ramakrishna, two icons of cultural and religious reform in colonial Bengal, the poet disrupts the narrative of reason and rationality that dominated that era. He does that by teasing the so-called critics (*samālocak*) with an ironic provocation about Bidyasagar, the father of modern Bengali alphabet, who rehashed it into a new form for the children primer *Baṇaparicay*. The poem ends with a typically postmodern pastiche purposely mixing elements drawn from different cultural contexts – the cross, Taoism, Maoism, Ramakrishna’s treatise, Havelock Ellis’ sexology book. In this way, Phalguni disrupts the denotative meaning of language and operates a practice of decolonisation of language, in which both Bengali and English signs and meanings merge into each other to produce always new significations. The poem significantly ends with a rhetorical question about choosing one’s own identity, to negotiate and find a compromise between East and West, modernity and tradition: here allegorically denoted as either a renouncer or a Don Juan, in a reinterpretation of Lenin’s words. Phalguni significantly leaves the question open and unanswered.

Phalguni reaffirms a topic that we already encountered in other poems: the rejection of the sterile language and methods of sciences and the disintegration of preconceived ideas on language as a trap that labels, categorises and inscribes univocal meanings into empty containers that are art, life and language. At the end of the poem, the author acknowledges that “we” (*ām'rā*) – in this case the Bengali people – stand between two paths: one represented by Ramakrishna, icon of celibacy and renunciation, and the other by Havelock Ellis, promoter of the science of sexuality. Again, Phalguni emphasises the in-betweenness of the postcolonial Bengali, both resisting and embodying colonial, imperial and nationalist discourses. We could say that the tropes and languages of sexuality and masculinity described above are the tools Phalguni uses to reflect upon the painfully ambiguous identity of being postcolonial. His male body and his Bengali language, always in the liminal space of transgression and re-coding, are the focus of his postcolonial interrogation. Through these, the poet aimed at the re-inscription of the standard meanings of his Bengali language and culture, what the Hungrylists wanted to renew and revive, a task Phalguni enacts by subverting hegemonic discourses on

sex, gender, and caste/race and always questioning his liminal existence, sexuality and masculinity.

Phalguni Ray, a Postcolonial Poet?

By way of conclusion, in this chapter I laid out some of the tropes and linguistic strategies displayed in Phalguni's poems showing interesting points of contact with some main concerns of postcolonial literary theory. The Hungryalist connection with the cultural, political and historical premises of postcolonialism can be explained on different planes. First, what is utterly postcolonial in these poets is the duality and ambivalence towards India's colonial past. One can see their fascination for as well as resistance to the western cultural and literary legacy as representative of the ambivalence of postcolonial identities, already enunciated by Frantz Fanon (Bhabha 1994: 50). This ambivalence is epitomised in literature by their connection with the American Beat Generation movement, as well as by their characteristic use of the English language, signalling the duality of Hungryalist literary practices. From a political and historical standpoint, the decolonisation movements and the national liberations of the ex-colonial world must have had an undeniable influence on the political orientation of the Hungryalist movement, virtually aligned with other countercultural movements of the so-called Third World countries in their denunciation of imperialism.

The political and the psychological dimensions of postcolonialism could be observed more closely in Phalguni's work. His major preoccupation is the choice of writing in Bengali instead of English: a political decision that is situated within a larger debate between writers in vernacular languages and Indian writers in English. In his observations about the nature of language, the resistance against the denotative meaning of language and against colonial categories, one sees the intention of decolonising and "deprovincializing" Bengali language and categories of knowledge. The agency of colonial – and nationalist – power in creating and promoting hegemonic knowledge and a hegemonic use of language were in fact pivotal to the whole imperial project. When Phalguni used to write, postcolonial discourse as we know it in its main conceptual formulations had not been framed on a theoretical and critical basis, even though the historical and philosophical grounds of its development could already be observed in the decades following the decolonisation movements. Similarly, Phalguni's postcolonial reflection on language and knowledge seems to bear the influence of writings by contemporary critics of colonialism and theorists of decolonisation, including, for example, Frantz Fanon. The Martiniquean psychoanalyst revisited Jean Paul Sartre's account on the gaze to infuse it with a treatment on the identity of the black subject, literally "dissected" and "fixed under white eyes" (Fanon 1986: 116).

5 "I Won't Be Able to Become Devdas with my Unhappy Penis"

The question of looking is tackled in the poems of this Bengali author too, as we have seen in his displaying of the male gaze. Phalguni's perhaps unconscious task was to enrich Bengali language and poetry with new postcolonial perspectives – a transcultural and worlding gaze – through language games and contamination of standard meanings, by incorporating English loanwords and crafting Bengali compounds. Some of the textual and linguistic strategies of "classic" postcolonial literatures in English identified in Phalguni's language are, for example, abrogation, language variance and appropriation. These operations were visible among postcolonial writers writing in creole English precisely to subvert the imperial language and disrupt its standard grammar, re-claiming that power from the periphery (Ashcroft et al. 1989). My contention is that similar strategies of language subversion and resistance to colonial/imperial knowledge came through similar disruptive and subversive operations enacted by the poets through their native language, Bengali. Some of these linguistic strategies – such as the incorporation of English words from the sphere of science and technology, and the creation of Sanskritised Bengali neologisms – have been previously discussed in reference to other Hungryalist poets.

6 “Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs”

Avant-Garde as a Worlding Practice

In Allen’s Eyes: The Hungry-Beat Connection

What I will show in this chapter are the dynamics of interaction that were in place between the Beat and the Hungry Generation and, by and large, between the imagined sites of the West and the non-West during the 1960s. I particularly focus on West Bengal and the United States, homelands of both the avant-garde movements under analysis. Through the poets’ encounters and dialogic exchange, the various moments of appropriation and adaptation often generated meaningful distortions and playful imitation of language among the various actors of the literary movements. These sites of appropriation and distortion of so-called original texts and cultural meanings have characterised the avant-garde as a transcultural and a worlding practice, that is as a cultural, textual and literary process that is able of generating worlds of meaning beyond spatial, national and linguistic boundaries. Processes of worlding the avant-garde in the material and textual practices of the Hungry Generation have been translation, playful imitation of the language of the avant-garde, and distortion of meaning. The idea of worlding as a process was restored from Heidegger’s concept of “Welten” by the philosopher and literary scholar Pheng Cheah. Seeing the world in terms of temporal process, rather than in its spatial dimension, helped rethinking the relationship between postcolonial literature and the world to theorise an “ethicopolitically committed world literature” in contrast to the one that is market-driven (Sibley 2016). By restoring the concept of worlding through world literary texts, Cheah encouraged theorising the world as a fluid and experiential process that goes beyond spatial categories to return ethical and political salience to the power that literature has to engage with the world, irrespective of its language and its circulation in the literary market. Taking cue from Cheah’s idea of worlding, Arka Chattopadhyay (2023) showed that besides translation, other practices like intertextuality, cultural translation and planetarity could be cases in point of worlding Bengali texts and writers who were not so-well travelled according to the classical world literature frame. The transnational and transcultural connection among American and Bengali actors of the avant-garde took place across various spaces and realms, both ethereal and

6 “Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs”

material: not only were these poets globally connected via sounds, images and a synesthetic ground that was common to the avant-garde world transculturally speaking. Materially, this connection was shaped by the conspicuous correspondence and continuous exchange that happened among the authors and editors of the American and the Bengali avant-garde, proving their serious engagement with the anti-establishment cultural project on a global scale. Such commitment to the idea of a global avant-garde movement was especially visible through a multi-layered process of linguistic and cultural translation that involved many actors of both the Indian and the American contexts. Poets and authors in general were the protagonists, although not the only actors, on this internationally entangled avant-garde world: the work of the little magazine editors and translators, as well as the contribution of amateur writers and aficionados of avant-garde poetry, was essential to carve out new spaces for literary innovation outside established mainstream channels.

The Hungryalist writers were not passive subjects on the worlding stage of avant-garde practices. On the contrary, their cultural and political agency was visible through the strategies of imitation and subversion of the linguistic and literary material provided by existing tradition. We will see how the mocking strategy of mimicry plays out in the following analysis of some moments of the Hungry-Beat interaction. Mimicry, most poignantly described by Homi Bhabha through the identification of the “not quite/not white” (Bhabha 1994: 92) will be illustrated through the Hungryalists’ use of the English language which often mimicked the style of the international counterculture. This specific moment of mimicry significantly emerged both from the critiques that came from mainstream literary criticism in Bengali, who considered the Hungry Generation as derivative of the American avant-garde, as well as from the material exchange of correspondence with the editors and poets of the international avant-garde.

Hippies and Beats in India

The journeys to India of the Beat poets Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, Gary Snyder and Joanne Kyger in 1962 have symbolically marked the beginning of a new era of cultural, literary and intellectual interaction between India and the so-called Western world of the post-war era. Like many others, they were “pilgrims of a hippie trail” (Gemie and Ireland 2007) that brought them to India in search of a spiritual guru and to witness a West Bengal worn out by famine, poverty and unemployment. The Beat Generation poets opened new pathways to the West’s rediscovery of India, which would later emerge as a country where religion and culture could provide a viable alternative to capitalism and the logic of consumption for the young and disillusioned children of the war. Writers and intellectuals

from all parts of Europe and America recorded their impressions in diaries and essays, displaying different visions and imaginations of India.¹⁰¹ In the eyes of 1960s Europe, India represented the spiritual alternative to Europe and America's materialism, while China embodied the social and political alternative to capitalism – before the horrors of Mao's Cultural Revolution became of public domain. India was imagined as the middle way that could provide a different answer to the old world's disorientation. These encounters disclosed a renewed idea of India that enriched the West with different perspectives and approaches to politics, religion, spirituality and social life.

But it was especially the journeys of the poets of the Beat Generation throughout the ex-colonial world and the Beatles' trip to the Himalayan hills of Rishikesh that paved the way for the physical and cultural exploration of the utterly exotic, mystic and unknown land of Hindu religion (Oliver 2015). These American poets were prolific travellers who left the United States behind to produce some of their best works outside the comfort zone of their homeland. As James Fazzino shows, "this distance from home" opened up new connections and transcultural perspectives by engaging with colonial and postcolonial spaces at the great moment of decolonisation across the globe (Fazzino 2016: 2). The journeys to and the travelogues of these poets on Mexico, the Amazon, Algeria and India, greatly influenced the imaginary of the counterculture in the United States, playing a major role in the critique of the materialism which was perceived as the foundation of Western culture. The interest for Asian religions, for example, was seen as the key to counter the logic of capitalism, as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac's affiliation to Buddhism has shown (Trigilio 2007). The Beat movement's "turn to East" for spiritual inspiration was seen as the main feature of the Beat Generation, therefore essentially understood as a "spiritual protest" (Prothero 1991). The spiritual interest for India was also linked to the musical experimentalism of the Beatles and to the literary exploration of the Beat writers, both paving the way for the hippies' peaceful invasion of India.

On the other hand, the hippies, who usually were young white bourgeois, escaped the wealth and comfort of their middle-class families in search of a place that, in their perception, was free from the laws of patriarchy, capitalism, and away from the conformity and social rationalisation of the American middle class. They also embarked on this overland journey to look for a cheap drug market and try out extra-sensorial experiences of trance and meditation. The counterculture, of which the hippies were only one manifestation, was an American phenomenon born out

101 Among these writers and intellectuals, many had recorded their impressions in diaries and essays that display different visions and imaginations of this country. For example, Pier Paolo Pasolini, *L'odore dell'India* (1962); Alberto Moravia, *Un'idea dell'India* (1962); Octavio Paz, *Vislumbres de India*, and *Conjunctiones y disyunciones* (1969).

6 “Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs”

of a rejection of social and cultural ideologies such as, most notably, the racial segregation and the Vietnam war. As the 1960s progressed, the counterculture evolved along generational lines pushing the American youth to target the shameless indifference of middle-class society with regard to the Vietnam war, and its conformism regarding the slackening of taboos related to sex and homosexuality, the consumption of drugs, while new trends in music became the distinctive signs of belonging to a certain sub-culture. The hippies became the largest counter-cultural group in the United States, incorporating the values of the young generation: peace, sex, dope, rock and community, as Timothy Miller put it (1991). The hippie counter-culture embraced values and ideas already propagated by the Beatniks a decade earlier, especially with regard to discovering one’s own spiritual world, experimenting new drugs, and exploring sexuality.¹⁰² We know by a fact that Bengali and Hindi poets and painters in those years travelled to some destinations of the international “hippie trail” in South Asia, like Benares and Kathmandu, where they would meet hippies from other parts of the world to smoke, drink and discuss poetry and art, as we have discussed earlier.¹⁰³ Accounts and diaries about those days bring back the idea of the sort of transformation these young people were going through in their journey to and stay in India, especially when describing their perception of the other (Yablonsky 1969). At the same time fictional accounts of the hippie spiritual quest to India, such as Geeta Mehta’s acclaimed book *Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East* (1979), ironically satirised the exoticism of the Sixties as well as criticised what later became a commodified and market-oriented culture of Indian religiosity and spirituality.

On the other hand, what could be described as a “softer” form of Orientalism can be detected in the dynamics of mutual exchange and cross-pollination that took place between the Hungry and the Beat Generation. Allen Ginsberg’s journey to India, his encounter with Bengali poets, and his mediation during the Hungryalist obscenity trial were central moments of the exchange and interaction that took place among the actors of these two literary subcultures. Their relationship of influence, imitation and adaptation was not unidirectional but it unfolded dialogically, as I show: for example, the Hungry Generation played with the hyper-technical English of the neo-avant-garde precisely to establish a transnational connection and a global affiliation with the counterculture and

102 Ginsberg was conscious of having an influence on younger people: “I am in effect setting up moral codes and standards which include drugs, orgy, music and primitive magic as worship rituals – educational tools which are supposedly contrary to our cultural mores; and I am proposing these standards to you respectable ministers, once and for all, that you endorse publically the private desire and knowledge of mankind in America, so to inspire the young” (Miller 1991: xiii).

103 See also Baker 2008 for a fictionalised account of Allen Ginsberg’s, Peter Orlovsky’s, Gary Snyder’s and Joanne Kyger’s journey to India.

anti-establishment movements across the world. Only decades later, the Hungry-ists, mainly the Raychaudhuri brothers, took up a more conservative position highlighting their concern for the authenticity of their literary experiment and downplaying the role played by the Beat Generation in inspiring the Bengali movement. These moments of transcultural interaction and withdrawal, or openness and conservatism, that can be observed in the history of the Hungry Generation in its relation to so-called Western influence underscore that concepts like mimicry have played a pivotal role in the shaping of literary and cultural identities in the long durée.

Ginsberg's *Indian Journals*: Appropriation and Distortion

A new “oriental renaissance” unfolded throughout the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁰⁴ While it encouraged the peaceful rediscovery of a spiritual and mystical India, it also reiterated an exotic and orientalisating gaze on the post-independent nation. The Beats' investigation into the realm of the personal entailed a re-formulation of the religious symbols of Indian culture, which were transformed into highly erotic and powerful weapons of global political protest. Ginsberg's *Indian Journals* offer an interesting case of this exploration and rediscovery by engaging with the world of Hindu culture.

The criticism of Ginsberg's *Indian Journals* was mixed. The *Indian Journals* have often been accused of extending the Orientalist project of the British colonisers, due to Allen's interest in aspects that were stereotypically representative of the Western imagination of India, including sex, spirituality, and poverty. The *Journals* seemed to nurture a third-worldly vision of India emerging from the portraits of beggars, poverty, hunger, and leprosy. Ginsberg could have contributed to reinforce stereotypes about India already rooted in the Western imagination, such as the mysticism and promiscuous sexuality of Tantric practitioners, whom he went in search for during his journey to India. However, other scholars have more recently offered a new reading of his journals, such as Gayatri Prabhu, who argued that while Ginsberg encouraged certain stereotypical projections and imaginations of India “as a country of spiritual quest as well as a tourist destination”, he also concretely engaged with the “squalid, the impoverished, the deformed” of the Indian city, generally despised in the white tourist's gaze (Prabhu 2013: 2). Other scholars, like Fazzino, noticed that Beat writing could entail an “orientalist

104 I here use the phrase “oriental renaissance” to outline the peaceful and mystic rediscovery of India through the Beats and the Beatles in the 1960s, retrieving the title of Raymond Schwab's book on European philology and its intrinsic project of Orientalism (Schwab 1984).

trap” because of its risk of falling in a “too-easy identification with the other or the elision of cultural differences altogether” (Fazzino 2016: 10).

Despite the shallow portrait of the Indian city that emerges from Ginsberg’s *Indian Journals*, the Beat writers were prolific travellers, and not sheer tourists of colonial and postcolonial spaces, which mostly were unexplored in those days. The Beat poets could potentially become the initiators of a new literary and anthropological experience that could truly offer an alternative to American imperialism, by building new values through the rediscovery of postcolonial world and epistemologies. Raj Chandarlapaty saw the Beats as anthropologists who initiated the literary de-racialisation and decolonisation of poetics, writing and experience through their intense engagement with marginal cultures and communities such as Black Americans, Mexicans, Moroccans and Indians (Chandarlapaty 2009). He also argued that it was only after Ginsberg’s two-year trek trip to India that he turned into “the prophet, hippie icon, and countercultural messenger who would truly challenge American structures of domination” (Chandarlapaty 2011: 114). Following this perspective, the writings of the American Beatniks had the potential of breaching new horizons of postcolonial representation. David LeHardy Sweet, in a work on avant-garde in north Africa and the Middle East, observed that both Octavio Paz and Allen Ginsberg’s poetry and travel books about India are postcolonial works in that they discuss the question of the gaze and the object of the gaze (LeHardy Sweet 2017). Therefore, the approach of the Beat movement in exploring and discovering countries like Algeria, Morocco, and India was not only an orientalisating gaze, involving an exotic and unidirectional representation of “the Orient” through uniquely Eurocentric categories. But as members and actors of the avant-garde, their gaze entailed a global act of decolonisation of the political, literary, and geographical peripheries of the Empire. Moreover, Allen Ginsberg’s journey to India in search of a spiritual guru was instrumental to his political activism in the U.S. anti-war movement, turning him into a “countercultural messenger” at his return to America (Chandarlapaty 2011). Through his encounter with Hindu religiosity and Buddhist meditation Ginsberg made his own body the cornerstone of his political activism, using it “to blur distinctions among poetry and political activism as roughly analogous to what Choudhury and the Hungry Generation were doing in India” (Belleto 2019: 12). To Ginsberg, the *Indian Journals* are a moment of “authorial self-doubt”, essential for “redeveloping social ethics away from the rhetoric of colonialism, postcolonialism and globalization” (Chandarlapaty 2011: 114). In particular, the following anti-war poems by Ginsberg signal the meaningful re-inscription of the symbolism of Kali into a universal hymn against war.

Re-writing Kali the American way

The anti-war poems “Stotras to Kali Destroyer of Illusions” along with “Wichita Vortex Sutra”, both finished after Ginsberg’s return from India, have often explained his political and spiritual transformation that turned him into a messenger of the counterculture. These poems, along with two other famous anti-war poems by Ginsberg (“Hymn to U.S” and “Durga-Kali – Modern Weapon in Her Hands”), bring into our focus the re-inscription of the symbolism of Kali, often viewed as a fierce and bloody goddess, in the idiom of anti-war protest. In the poem “Wichita Vortex Sutra”, written a few months after Ginsberg left India, he fuses poetry with political protest in a mantra that evokes the “gurus and maharishis” encountered during his journey in a plea against the “black magic language” of war, an idea borrowed from one of his first protest-poems (Belletto 2019: 12). Let us see how Ginsberg transfers the symbolism traditionally associated to Kali onto other spheres of meaning.

The journey described in the poem “Wichita Vortex Sutra” takes place on a public bus to Wichita, Kansas, where the poet – “an old man now, and a lonesome man in Kansas” – is not afraid to publicly voice his “lonesomeness” to the other passengers. This is not an individual condition but a collective one that extends to America and the whole world humanity vis-à-vis the horrors of the Vietnam war. Central to developing the poet’s condemnation of war is the quest for “a language that is also yours”, an anti-war mantra that could speak for humanity and not against it. In Allen’s bricolage of Hindu cultural references, this mantra-like evocation summons a plethora of Hindu gods, saints and bodhisattvas to propagate a new language of freedom.

I call all Powers of Imagination
 To my side in this auto to make Prophecy,
 All Lords
 Of human kingdoms to come
 Shambu Bharti Baba naked covered with ash
 Khaki Baba fat-bellied mad with the dogs
 Dehorava Baba who moans Oh how wounded, How wounded
 Sitaram Onkar Das Thakur who commands
 Give up your desire
 Satyananda who raises two thumbs in tranquility
 Kali Pada Guha Roy whose yoga drops before the void
 Shivananda who touches the breast and says OM
 Srimata Krishnaji of Brindaban who says take for your guru
 William Blake the invisible father of English visions
 Sri Ramakrishna master of ecstasy eyes

6 “Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs”

Half closed who only cries for his mother
Chaitanya arms upraised singing & dancing his own praise
Merciful Chango judging our bodies
Durga-Ma covered with blood
Destroyer of battlefield illusions
Million faced Tathagata gone past suffering
[...]
Come to my lone presence
Into this Vortex named Kansas,
I lift my voice aloud,
Make Mantra of American language now,
I here declare the end of the War!
(Ginsberg 1968)

In “Notes for a Stotra to Kali as Statue of Liberty”, Ginsberg shows the dichotomy between India’s spirituality and the materialism of American society through Ma Kali (Mā Kālī), the terrific manifestation of the female goddess popularly worshipped in Bengal, who is transformed into a political weapon that literally descends into the Statue of Liberty, monumentally standing for the liberal and democratic values of the United States. In Ginsberg’s notes, only later re-worked and published in a final version as “Stotra to Kali as Destroyer of Illusions” (1968), the traditional Kali iconography is transfigured through a secular – although equally creepy and grotesque – pantheon of historical world icons creating a patchwork that goes beyond the hegemonic representation of the world in two halves, as it was experienced during the Cold War.¹⁰⁵

The skulls that hand on Kali’s neck, Geo Washington with eyes rolled up & tongue hanging out of his mouth like a fish, N. Lenin upside down; Einstein’s hairy white cranium. Hitler with his moustache grown walrus-droop over his lip, Roosevelt with grey eyeballs; Stalin grinning, Mussolini with a broken Jaw, Artaud big eared & toothless; the subtle body of Churchill’s head transparent & babylike; an empty space for Truman, Mao Tze Tung & Chang Kai Shek shaking at the bottom of the chain, balls with eyes & noses jiggled in the Cosmic Dance (Ginsberg 1970: 13)

105 About a comparative reading of Ginsberg’s “Stotra to Kali” and the Kārpurādi Stotra, see Scholes 2010. Scholes here assumes the influence of the Sanskrit hymn to the worship of Kali on Ginsberg’s elaboration of “A Stotra to Kali”.

The additions and rewritings of these notes show Ginsberg's continuous rethinking and engagement with the re-inscription of American domination and civilisational death into what in his view was the selfless and redemptive mould of Hindu religious and devotional tradition. Ginsberg creates a new political bodyscape of Kali by integrating other milestones of modern thought, almost in a postmodern modality, that blend "Gandhi bald with a swathe of white cloth Khadi stuffed in his craw" with "Max Planck & Wittgenstein & Trotsky's visages thudding against her Shoulderblade Gefilte Fish skin". These satirical vignette-like representations of the fathers of modern political thought replace the usual weapons of Hindu deities with equally disrupting images of the "fathers of Cold War", all attributes of this overtly syncretic Statue of Liberty. The typical iconographical representation of Kali, standing on Shiva's corpse with an erect phallus, is here visualised as treading on Uncle Sam's "godlike corpse" along with other allegorical and biblical references (e.g. John Bull, an 18th century national representation of England):

Her foot is standing on the godlike corpse of Uncle Sam who's
crushing down John Bull, bloated himself over the Holy Roman
Emperor & Mohammed's illiterate belly, & Moses underneath
hidden in a mass of hair, thru which peeps Adams Forelocks &
rosy cheeks (Ginsberg 1970: 14)

The political embodiment of Kali and her incarnation of America in the symbolism of the Statue of Liberty continues in Ginsberg's military elaboration of the bloody goddess in "Durga-Kali – Modern Weapons in Her Hand". This version, written in 1962, adds a deeper set of symbols of destruction, replacing the frightening attributes of the deity with more dreadful modern weapons. Ginsberg insists on the terrific aspect and destructive function of the bloody goddess couple of Durga-Kali, who along with other Hindu deities become agents of war and death. Each of these gods are portrayed holding their original weapons, although in Ginsberg's transfigured iconography they turn into atomic bombs, air raid sirens, jet airplanes, napalm bombs and electric chairs.

Kali Yuga 432,000 years – Deity Black
Ten Arms – Borrowed from gods to kill Buffalo Demon –
Vishnu's Chakra or Discus – $E=Mc^2$
Shiva's trident – pitchfork for tossing the hays of mind – Jet airplane
Varuna's conch Shell – air Raid Siren
Agni's flaming Dart – Napalm Bomb, electric chair
[...]
Kali's insatiable blood thirst caused by eating
too many Armies (Asura whose blood

6 "Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs"

drops formed innumerable Asuras)
Killed him with a spear & drank drips of blood.
Black, half naked. Claws. Tusks. Garland
of skulls, red tongue & mouth
dripping blood
Shiva = Destruction devouring time = white
Kali triumphs over white time – “abysmal
void”
Dance madness. Stepping on Shiva she comes
down again –
theres nothing left to dance on
Kali as Statue of Liberty starts moving
With ten arms
Reading counterclockwise
[...]

one hand fingers her pearly shining necklace of skulls –
Hitler, Mussolini, Roosevelt, Chamberlain, Laval,
Stalin, Mayakovsky, Hart Crane, Yessenin, Vachel Lindsay,
Virginia Woolf, Poe, Dylan Thomas, Ramana
Maharishi, Naomi Ginsberg, Uncle Max, Aunt Eleanor,
Uncle Harry & Aunt Rose. & WC Field – “skull rosary.”
(Ginsberg 1970: 21–23)

Once more, the classic iconography of Kali dancing on Shiva’s corpse returns in Ginsberg’s anti-war imaginary imbued with the rhetoric language of the iron curtain, which we have learned to recognise in his poetry. Kali’s iconography is again abused and transformed especially by exploiting the image of her garland made of skulls: skulls of Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, English and American poets, Russian poets and playwrights, Indian mystics and Ginsberg’s parents are bundled together in a pastiche that foreruns postmodern poetics. One last example from the anti-war poem “HYMN TO US” imagines “Mother U.S.” as embodiment of the “Spouse of Europa and Destroyer of Past Present & Future”, which subverts the masculine representation of America as Uncle Sam, which we encountered in “A Stotra to Kali”.

By thy grace may I never be reborn! Not American, Chinese,
Russian, Indian, Okinawan or Jew – May I and all my I’s never
re-incarnate but as Earth Men! Nay, not even earth Identity, but
membership in the entire Universe! Grant me this boon, Mother
Democracy, – as I fuck thee piously in the Image of America,

O Formless one, take me beyond Images & reproductions to be
thy perfect Spouse Self, beyond disunion, absorbed in My own
non duality which art thou (Ginsberg 1970: 18).

Blending high English words with references drawn from commonplace Hindu philosophical thought (e.g. “absorbed in My own non duality which art thou”), Ginsberg sarcastically addresses the “formless” Mother Democracy through the shape and “image” of America in his wish to reincarnate as a human being regardless of labels of nationality. Ginsberg imagines a collective utopian identity that projects beyond the planet earth to the entire universe, underscoring the planetarity of Ginsberg’s writing, a crucial concept to explain the worlding process of literature. In short, what Ginsberg does in these samples from his *Indian Journals* is using Indian (mainly Hindu) cultural references not to historically problematise India as such, but to open a space to question and reshape the American culture of materialism and capitalism.

“Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs”: Mimicking the Beats and the U.S.

After having suggested some patterns for understanding such worlding dynamics and transfers of meanings in place on the avant-garde stage, we now turn to focus on Hungryalism and its reception at home and in the world. Mainstream Bengali criticism has often minimised the impact that Hungryalism and alternative poetry had on a significant moment of political transition and cultural change for India. The main critique that was addressed to the Hungry Generation was due to their imitation of the American Beat Generation and of the Western culture of that era.¹⁰⁶ During the 1960s, Indian newspapers and magazines like *Blitz* and the *TIME* carried news of the Hungryalist trial and posted analysis and interviews of the group of poets, often putting an emphasis on their connection with the American Beatniks. The Indian magazine *TIME* was the first to report the antics that brought to fame the “young Bengalis with tigers in their tanks” before and after their sentence for obscenity (*TIME* 1964).

A thousand years ago, India was the land of Vātsyāyana’s *Kāma Sūtra*, the classic volume that so thoroughly detailed the art of

106 In this chapter, “West” and “Western” are mainly used in reference to the post-war (1950s to 1990s) geopolitical division of the world that opposed the United States and Europe to U.S.S.R. and its Asian allies (mainly China and India).

love that its translators still usually leave several key words in Sanskrit. Last week, in a land that has become so straitly laced that its movie heroines must burst into song rather than be kissed, five scruffy young poets were hauled into Calcutta’s dreary Bankshall Court for publishing works that would have melted even Vātsyāyana’s pen. The Hungry Generation had arrived.

Born in 1962, with an inspirational assist from visiting U.S. Beatnik Allen Ginsberg, Calcutta’s Hungry Generation is a growing band of young Bengalis with tigers in their tanks. Somewhat unoriginally they insist that only in immediate physical pleasure do they find any meaning in life, and they blame modern society for their emptiness.

Such was the beginning of the article, which right from the start introduced the Hungry Generation as a movement emerged out of an “inspirational assist” from Allen Ginsberg, after he visited the Bengali poets in 1962. It is worth noting that when describing the Hungry Generation as “young Bengalis with tigers in their tanks” the TIME journalist was likely thinking of a famous US advertising slogan used by various oil companies since the 1950s.¹⁰⁷ This formula underscores some of the reasons for the Bengali mainstream criticism towards a literary phenomenon like the Hungry Generation, which was also perceived for its ties with American culture tout court, overtly criticised by Bengali Marxist literati and intellectuals. These arguments partly explain the reluctance, and often the repulsion, on behalf of Indian Bengali and even of some American poets to fully see the movement for what it was, a language and caste-disrupting project, going beyond ideological and political visions.

Another article published in *Blitz* magazine after the poets’ arrest addressed the Hungrylists as “Calcutta Beatniks” and the movement as “Yankee-poet inspired” (BLITZ 1964). Frank sexual language, rebellion, and depravity were identified as the hallmarks of both avant-garde groups.

Yankee-Poet Inspired Movement

An example: One of those arrested is beyond doubt a powerful writer and has several publications to his credit. He, in his latest poetry, regrets why he is born at all and why his father did not masturbate instead of visiting his mother.

107 I thank Michael Bluett, who proof-red the English of my manuscript, for suggesting this connection.

In another passage, he dreams to create himself through his own sperms in the womb of his lady-love and then to see the world from her uterus through her ‘cellophane hymen’.

Two years ago, the well-known American beat poet, Allen Ginsberg came to Calcutta and stayed here sufficiently long to gather round himself some young local poets, who were enamoured of the Ginsbergian way of life and thinking, ‘The Hungry Generation’ was born with these poets.

The anonymous *Blitz*’s correspondent underlines the “Ginsbergian way of life”, referring to his homosexuality, and draws a comparison with the relevance of sexuality for Hungryalist poets, who claimed that “tension is not in the heart but in your genitals” (BLITZ 1964). Both the obscene vocabulary and the exploration of socially abhorred sexuality, like masturbation and homosexuality, are identified as the common ground between the Bengali Hungryalists and the American Beatniks.

On the other hand, Allen Ginsberg was often described as a scapegoat responsible for “corrupting the Calcutta boys”, as the Bengali poet Sunil Gangopadhyay once admitted.¹⁰⁸ Ginsberg’s help and support in the Hungryalist legal case was fundamental in bringing their trial to international attention. He sought for the intervention of the Indian Congress for Cultural Freedom, and even wrote to Pupul Jayakar, Indira Gandhi’s cultural adviser. However, the world of Indian cultural institutions would not respond positively to Allen’s cry for solidarity. Abu Sayeed Ayub, at that time president for the Indian Congress for Cultural Freedom and eminent literary critic, rejected Ginsberg’s request of institutional help in support of the Hungryalist case because he thought that the young writers did not “even possess the elementary competence of having mastered the language which they are using as the medium of their literary expression”.¹⁰⁹ Exchanges of this kind abound in magazines and in the correspondence among American and Indian authors, and they meaningfully showcase various layers of prejudice and biases for the young Bengali poets on behalf of established writers, offering interesting sites of analysis. Jyotirmoy Datta’s letter to Dick Bakken has become representative of this kind of repulsion that mainstream criticism had towards the Hungry phenomenon.

108 Sunil Gangopadhyay in a letter to Allen, undated (likely ca. 1963). Allen Ginsberg Papers, M0733, Series I, Box 25, Folder 30 (Correspondence 1960s – Sunil Gangopadhyay). Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

109 From Abu Sayeed Ayub’s letter to Allen Ginsberg (17.11.64). In Allen Ginsberg papers, M0733, Box 8, Folder 16 (Correspondence 1960s – Ayyub, Abu Sayeed). Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

6 “Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs”

I am writing this letter not to dissuade you from bringing out your special number. I would be delighted if it brings the HG people some money; I would be even happier if in some remote way it helps Malay in his trial. I would be delighted to help you to the best of my ability in translating any stuff you send me. But I had hoped that when it comes to Bengali poetry you would be more interested in what is unique to it rather than what echoes American poetry, although such phenomenon is interesting sociologically and politically, indicative as it is of how all pervasive, how unavoidable is America to the rest of the world today (Bakken 1967).¹¹⁰

The context of the letter is the following: the Bengali poet and critic Jyotirmoy Datta, at that time a young visiting scholar at the University of Iowa, was requested by the Bengali expert Edward Dimock to translate a selection of Hungryalist poems for Dick Bakken’s *Salted Feathers* special issue on Hungry poetry. The Hungries’ exchange with Allen Ginsberg, enriching both on a personal and material level, was in Datta’s words reduced to a unidirectional quest for a “Western model”, contributing to consolidate the narrative of Hungryalism as a Beat-influenced and Beatnik mimicking avant-garde. Dismissing the literature of the Hungryalists as “derivative” of the Beatniks expressed a much deeper discomfort and uneasiness with the obscene, down-to-earth language of this movement’s writings.

I don’t think his [Malay] imitation of what he thinks is contemporary American poetry is worth anything. One may or may not admire Allen Ginsberg’s poetry, but one has to concede that at least most of the time Allen sounds like Allen and not somebody else. The HG people sound as if they know of no other poetry except that which is published in the magazines, pamphlets and books that Allen sends them, and whatever they have read has gone to their head and is coming out through their pen without the least alteration. I cannot derive any pleasure from the sight of a nice bunch of Calcutta kids desperately trying to ape the author of “Howl” (Bakken 1967).

By reading this excerpt, one notes that multiple narratives and discourses were at play in the early criticism of the Hungry Generation. Clearly it was not only a

110 The whole letter was published in the special issue on Hungryalism of the magazine *Salted Feathers* (Dick Bakken 1967). It has been fully quoted in the appendix of translation (chapter 7).

matter of imitating the American writers of the Beat Generation, although this is still a debated issue in the field of Bengali literary studies. Other reasons identified from a reading of Datta's letter were the young age of the Hungry poets ("a bunch of Calcutta kids") who, in spite of that, were ready to publicly announce the death of "the blankety-blank school of poetry" and to wage a war against whatever they deemed old, established, lyric and conventional in Bengali culture and literature. The aspect of generational rupture with the past tradition was indeed a characteristic feature of this movement. Moreover, the young Bengali poets were considered to be unaware and indifferent to their past literary tradition, while even their knowledge of contemporary American poetry was limited to what was published on little magazines; but their greatest fault and failure was their blunt imitation of American Beat poetry, just "like the Anglophiles of the 19th century", which will turn the movement into "a passing phenomenon". Also, it was their choice of using non-standard forms of Bengali language and unconventional images of Bengali poetry, as well as their ties with an American literary (and equally "obscene") world, that irritated the bhadralok and Marxist culture of most Bengali critics and intellectuals.

I assume that you, and Mr. Ferlinghetti, and Mr. McCord, are genuinely interested in Bengali poetry, that you are not only interested in tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs but also in poets who are uniquely Bengali, who could not have been possible in the American tradition, who are not the creatures of some kind of literary PL-480 deal (Bakken 1967).

Jyotirmoy Datta's colourful phrase "tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs" epitomises the critique of Hungryalist poetry as imitative and derivative of the style of the American underground writers. What Datta refers to when naming the "literary PL-480 deal" is another metaphor of Third-world poets literally eating America's cultural crops, an image that stems from the United States' foreign policy and food security plans for Third World countries implemented from the 1950s. Datta then turns to encouraging the promotion of other Bengali poets who are "deeply rooted in the poets who have gone before him", like Binoy Majumdar, at the same time denigrating both the ignorance of the Hungryalists and of the American editor, who answered back to Datta's provocations.¹¹¹ To the Bengali

111 Bakken's reply was added in a footnote to Datta's letter: "We are neither so innocent as he [Jyotirmoy Datta] believes – innocent, that is of contemporary Bengali literature available in English – nor innocent of awareness about that part of the Beat scene which is sheer noise and unmelodious farting around for gelt and fame. But there are phonies in all the schools of poetry, and simply because one attracts considerable public notoriety is

critics, one of the major shortcomings of the Hungryalist movement was their complete rejection and unawareness of the past tradition, which did not make them “uniquely Bengali”. As shown by Datta’s letter, mainstream Indian Bengali criticism was reluctant to welcome a literary movement that stemmed from a complete rejection of the past Bengali tradition advocating the disintegration of all that was conventional through an obscene and transgressive language and a dangerous social behaviour.

Resisting the Beats’ Influence

A newspaper article by Samantak Das (2019), late professor of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University, has shown how the preoccupation with Western influence is still a dominant concern in Bengali literary studies today. He uses the example of the Hungry Generation to rightly demonstrate that the Indian and Bengali literary world has always been preoccupied with so-called Western influence and recognition, and to encourage a critical shift in the “constant over-valuation of the Westerner, often to the detriment of our own artists and creators” (Das 2019). It also shows that the perception of Hungryalism as an imitation of the American Beatniks persists in Bengali critical circles. Because the question of imitation had become central in the way Hungryalism was represented, starting from the late 1990s the now grown-up poets Malay and Samir Raychaudhuri resumed to writing also with the aim to mark their distance with the Beat Generation and other avant-garde movements in Europe and North America. Even though the Hungryalists made clear right from the start what differentiated them socially and economically from the Beats and other avant-garde movements in the West, highlighting their association with other (non-Indian) anti-establishment movements became the movement’s primary target after the sentence for obscenity. Therefore, in a later move to legitimise the Hungry Generation as a “uniquely Bengali” phenomenon, to quote Jyotirmoy Datta’s phrase, the Hungryalists contributed to developing the discourse of Bengali postmodernism also to get away with their derivative connection with the American Beat Generation and Western association. In a later essay significantly entitled “How did the Hungry movement influence Allen Ginsberg” (2013), Malay argued that Bengali critics could not accept that it was the Hungry Generation who influenced Ginsberg, rather than the opposite. It was the whole Indian “traditional spirit” and not only the Bengali poets that had a tremendous impact on shaping Ginsberg’s iconic poetry and secular religiosity. Malay’s

no reason (and I call on academic logic) to assume that the poems are thereby aesthetically invalid. No more so than absolutely public ignorance of a poet’s work invalidates it” (Bakken 1967).

intention was not to deny Ginsberg's influence on the Hungry Generation altogether but to reconstruct the history of that encounter to show how this dialogic relationship was founded on an open and sincere interest in exchanging, also with a view to reciprocally enrich the practice and understanding of avant-garde language and poetry. For example, Malay noticed that Ginsberg never wrote again in the same way as he did before Howl and Kaddish, which were composed after his journey to India (Rāy'caudhurī 2013: 59). Malay presents other pieces of evidence to demonstrate the Indian influence on Ginsberg. He recalled that Ginsberg first saw the "three fish with one hand" motif, which he used at the opening of his *Indian Journals*, on the gate of Akbar's tomb in Fatehpur Sikri, but he only found out its meaning when Malay took him to the Khuda Bakhsh public library in Patna. This is where they saw the same design on the leather cover of the *Dīn-i-Ilāhī*, the Persian book on Akbar's composite faith (Rāy'caudhurī 2013: 64–65). Other theories were summoned to delegitimise the view of Hungryalism as a uniquely derivative movement. Tridib and Alo Mitra claimed that the American poet concealed the Hungryalists' influence on his *Indian Journals*. For example, when he carried his harmonium from Benares to the United States, he did not mention the Hungryalist painters and Benares residents, Anil Karanjai and Karunanidhan Mukhopadhyay, who first introduced him to the instrument. According to Malay, Ginsberg "perfected playing on the instrument at the residence of Malay's cousin sister Savitri Banerjee, where her daughters were playing on the harmonium" (Mitra and Mitra 2008, blog). His essay underlies the effort of showing the reciprocal influence of both movements and cultures in order to dispel the commonplace and reiterated perception of Hungryalism as an imitation of the Beat Generation.

Moreover, while acknowledging the actual exchange that took place with the Beat culture via Ginsberg, Malay's main goal was to highlight the causes and the background that gave birth to the Hungry Generation as a postcolonial and subaltern movement of India's post-independence era. For example, to continue projecting the Hungry Generation as a purely Bengali movement he drew a line between the Hungryalist and Western "counter-discourse" (Beng. *pratisandarbha*) of the Beat Generation or the British Angry Young Man, identifying the release from so-called "European epistemology" (*iuropīya jñān'tattva*) as the main category of differentiation (Rāy'caudhurī 2013: 94). Another important distinction to be made was with the Kṛtibās movement, which had a recognised head quarter and an established publisher, while the Hungry Generation was a subaltern, anti-establishment, non-cohesive and fragmented movement (Rāy'caudhurī 2013: 110). In this way, Malay could finally reshape the common perception of Hungryalism by returning postcolonial significance to this Bengali literary avant-garde and restoring its place in the literary and cultural sphere of post-independence West Bengal. These revisited memories and reshaped histories in Malay's essays give us a sense of the urgency to draw clear boundaries between traditions and to

legitimise the movement’s position in the postcolonial literary Bengali scene. This self-declaration of Hungryalism as a postmodern and postcolonial Bengali movement emerged only in the late 1990s, which also speaks of a gradual move of legitimisation of previously controversial and “outsider” literary groups in the landscape of Bengali literary culture, progressively proclaiming themselves as home-grown and part of the Bengali tradition.

Use of English in Hungryalist Literature

Despite proclaiming their distance from the Beat Generation, the analogies between the two movements are undeniable. In terms of language, the Western avant-gardes offered a new vocabulary and a language of postmodernity which the Hungryalist were eager to incorporate. Words and idioms not perceived as authentically Bengali were welcomed into their poetry and used to violate the structures of standard Bengali grammar and symbolically overturn middle-class normativity. A central role in the Hungryalist project of revitalising Bengali language was played by Allen Ginsberg himself, who encouraged the Hungry poets to abandon foreign models and embrace their own language. Commenting on the Hungryalist poets’ English translation of their own poems, Allen Ginsberg shows a genuine interest in discovering new trends of Indian poetry and in finding a common ground for anti-establishment action (Ferlinghetti 1964: 117–8).

The poems here are not necessarily very good in English. The poets are good poets in Bengali & excellent drinking companions (They didn’t smoke much of legal *Ganja* until Mr. Orlovsky & I introduced that western notion & brought to their attention their own indigenous subliterate Shaivite pot-smoking & hymn-singing in the burning grounds as a usable poetic tradition). The poems were translated into funny English by the poets themselves & I spent a day with a pencil reversing inversions of syntax & adding in railroad stations. The poems are interesting in that they do reveal a temper that is international, i.e. the revolt of the personal. Warsaw Moscow San Francisco Calcutta, the discovery of *feeling*.

“Funny”, here meaning odd and wrong, is how the Beat poet describes the English of the Hungryalist poets in this extract, which seems to aptly epitomise the approach of these authors towards English language during the process of translation. Oddity, playfulness and improvisation were dominant aspects of both the Bengali and the English language in the works of these authors. In particular, the

English syntax and vocabulary of their translated poems appear complex, verbose, and hyper-technical to the native-English speaker, as the American editors often pointed out in their correspondence. The following sources will show that the unconventional use of the English language, instead of being welcomed by criticism and by fellow-poets as a possible site of production of new literature in India, represented a concern even for the most progressive Indian writers. We will see that the main target of the Bengali critics was the Hungryalists' unconventional and non-standard use of the Bengali and the English language in the realm of poetry. Moreover, it is worth noting that when conversing with the American editors of the avant-garde scene, the Bengali authors deliberately played with the English language in a conscious move to emulate the redundant register of the international neo-avant-garde. These two operations of language mocking and imitation are central strategies of subversion and overturning in the Hungryalist project of language revolution.

The Hungryalist attitude towards the English language, despite the differences among the single authors, can be nonetheless broken down into two major positions. While poets like Debi Roy and Subimal Basak admitted their limited knowledge of English, others (like Malay, in the first place) could mediate between the international scene and the Bengali poets, entering in conversation with a wider audience on the global literary scene. Their rupture with the standard forms of the Bengali language also paved the way for similar experiments with English, which are evident from the material exchange that took place transnationally between the two avant-garde groups. However, while remaining predominantly tied to Bengali in their literary works, the Hungryalists could not be properly called bilingual poets like Arun Kolatkar, whose work featured in both the English and Marathi language. For them, English was substantially perceived as the language of the empire or the language of experimental writing in the West. That is why the manifestoes, their translated poems, and letters represent only a minor portion of their production in English, in which they show no intention of accuracy or seriousness, but rather playfulness and imitation.

The case of these Bengali poets writing in English is not an exception in the panorama of Indian postcolonial literatures. With the independence of the country from British rule, the adoption of an official language of the Republic became a hotly debated issue.¹¹² In those years, the debate on whether a modern Indian liter-

112 In the 1960s, plans to make Hindi the official language of the Republic were met with resistance in other parts of the country, especially in the south. With the escalation of violence and the anti-Hindi movements, the government decided to extend the official use of English for fifteen years until 1967, when the Official Languages (Amendment) Act established the three-language formula (that is, English, Hindi, and the regional language of the state).

6 “Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs”

ature was possible in the vernacular languages beyond the language of the British colonisers became the cornerstone of a fight between traditionalist and more progressive writers. While some writers thought of English as one among many other “native” languages of India, with its own respectable history and literature, others believed that it could not represent the complexity and diversity of Indian culture as faithfully and authentically as Bengali, Marathi, or Kannada.¹¹³ The suspicion for Indian writers in English was well-known among bilingual Marathi poets. Zecchini noted that bilingual poets were criticised for writing in an “alien” language, for mimicking Western models and being “outsiders” to the authentic India (Zecchini 2014: 8). In the next documents, one can easily notice the hostility on behalf of some Indian poets and literary critics for the non-standard usage of the English language in the writings of the Hungry Generation. It is surprising that, from these letters, even a bilingual poet like Arvind K. Mehrotra confessed to be vexed by their “utter wrong English”.

this subimal basak sent me his poems in utter[ly] wrong english. modernity is OK but not at the expense of language. but I attribute his mistakes to ignorance. he also sent a long discourse on the hungries. to tell you the truth it looks like a dilapadated [dilapidated] form of the beats. use of fuck, cunt, cock is getting tiresome. in bengali poetry this might have been used for the first time and the fellows got excited. but putting them in the international context there is not much to the whole movement if it is one. but always good to have things moving – even if in the wrong directions. nissimezekiel [Nissim Ezekiel] has refused to review ezra/i saying it is not all that important nor all that good.

In Mehrotra’s letter to Howard McCord, American poet and editor of an anthology of avant-garde Indian poetry, he expresses doubt that whether the translation of Hungryalist poems could have any impact internationally in their English versions.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless he acknowledges their efforts of innovating the language of

113 For example, the exchange between Jyotirmoy Datta and P. Lal, founder of the Calcutta-based Writer’s Workshop, represents well the debate on English and Indian languages. While Jyotirmoy depreciated the Indian writers in English, whom he calls “caged chaffinches and polyglot parrots”, P. Lal believed that English “proved its ability as a language to play a creative role in all-India literature” (Futehally et al. 2011).

114 Based on a letter exchange between Arvind K. Mehrotra (7/12/1966) and Howard McCord (16/12/1966) concerning the publication of the anthology of modern Indian poetry edited by McCord. In Hungry Generation Archive (MS47), Box 1. Courtesy of Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives, Northwestern University Libraries.

Bengali poetry – e.g. also by introducing swear words – even though they may not come across as entirely original to readers familiar with Beat poetry. In reply to Mehrotra’s reservations on the English translations of Hungryalist poetry, the American poet Howard McCord stands with the Hungryalists’ – perhaps unconscious – distortion of the English language, encouraging to continue misusing English as a means to transform the language of poetry and “undergo a sea-change”.

Don’t sweat the Hungry Generation’s way with the English language. In many cases the poets are not fluent in English & have to depend almost entirely on the force of imag[e]ry rather than on the combination of imag[e]ry and music that more fluent speakers possess. But at the same time, their very strangeness can be an asset and provide them with a strong originality. In prose, the famous example is Amos Tutuola, the Nigerian writer. In this sense perhaps, they must be approached as primitives (as in painting le dounaier Rousseau, Grandma Moses). What is at the root of it is the idea that the poet must dominate the language, and not the reverse. As these poets learn more English, their poetry will undergo a sea-change; right now they are riding on the power of their insights, of their indignation, and their imag[e]ry, and not on the fine texture of their English. But as you well know by considering the poetry of the academics, a fine texture can be empty. Always, it seems to me, write as well as you can, and strive to write better; a poet who doesn’t do this is a fake. But a poet can many times overcome the limitations of his knowledge by a kind of compensation.

Therefore, in the words of the American poet, the Bengali poets’ originality for the international reader is also to be found in their misuse of English in the process of translation, which becomes their hallmark. It is interesting to note the parallel drawn between the English of the Hungryalist and that of the Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola, who became famous for one of the first creative experiments with pidgin English in his 1952 *The Palm-Wind Drinkard: And His Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Dead’s Town*. In the same way, McCord encourages to interpret the “very strangeness” of the Hungryalists’ English as a necessary step to manipulate and reshape language.

This kind of criticism towards using non-standard English was already visible in Malay’s use of the English language in his manifestoes, described by Jyotirmoy Datta as “pidgin” as opposed to Kavi George Dowden who wrote in “gibberish” (Ghoṣ 2011b: 28). It shows that these language operations of playing, mocking and making up a new English language code were widespread strategies of literary

action in world countercultures, both Bengali and English-based. Mehrotra’s words were symptomatic of a literary discussion about the meaning of “new” and “modern” when dealing with Indian literature, also reflecting the ongoing debate on the official languages of the Indian Union. In the same way, the description of the Hungryalists’ English as “funny”, “strange”, “original” and “utter[ly] wrong” hints at some main critical attitudes that emerged in the field of so-called Third-World literature: on the one hand, the hostility and mistrust for westernised or western-looking poets on behalf of Marxist critics and writers, and the neglect and discounting of non-standard forms of English; on the other, the openness towards “distorted” forms of English language and their acknowledgement as sites of production for experimental literature. It is in this last view that, I argue, derogatory comments about these poets’ use of English in the quoted exchange, such as “pidgin” or “dilapidated form”, signalled the influence of a postmodern linguistic behaviour that privileged the self-ironic, the mocking, and the playful.

Translating Hungryalism: the “Hungry!” Special Issues of *Salted Feathers* and *Intrepid* Magazines

The American avant-garde magazine *Salted Feathers* devoted a special issue to Hungry poetry collecting a wide-ranging selection of writings – biographies, poems, prose, blitzes from newspapers, letters, documents from Malay’s prosecution – in English translation. The texts were either translated by the authors themselves, often with Malay’s mediation, who was more well-versed in English than the others, or via other translators, like Jyotirmoy Datta.¹¹⁵ The last step was done by the editors, people like Dick Bakken and the guest editor Howard McCord, who would check and improve the Hungryalists’ English to offer a more readable solution. From the correspondence with American editors and writers, it emerged that the Hungryalist poets were often reluctant to translate their poems into English. In a letter to Allen Ginsberg, Sunil Gangopadhyay was “ashamed” of sending his poems because “when translated it looks so dead, almost like a dead frog”.¹¹⁶ Dick Bakken, who as the editor was aware of the various layers of textual

115 Malay discussed the translational and editing process of *Salted Feathers* in a letter exchange with the American editor: “I’ll have to translate all the matters. Because my friends are not well to do with English. I, myself, can somehow cook in English, as you find in this letter. So you’d have to edit the matter properly.” (Bakken 1967, n.p.).

116 “I never wanted to show you poems of mine, my poems in English, in spite of your repeated requests, for this same reason. I have no ambition to write in English, I can never reach the English readers, not even you. This translation business is not for me”. Yet Sunil is firm on his decision of translating contemporary Bengali poems in order to make them

editing, made clear at the opening of the *Hungry!* issue his politics of translation, distinguishing between the operation of “adaptations” and change into “English versions”:

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the original Bengali authors. In most pieces, since the meaning remains clear, I have chosen not to change misspellings, British spellings, grammatical errors, or awkward diction and syntax. ‘Adaptations’ are translations that have been changed some in spelling, punctuation, diction, and syntax to make them more clear and less awkward. ‘English versions’ have been changed much more, the primary attempt not always being to create a piece faithful to the original in form, diction, imagery, vision and so forth (Bakken 1967).

Also in the introduction to *Intrepid* special issue (DeLoach and Weissner 1968), the editors focused on the process of translation, highlighting the “seriousness & efficiency” of the Hungryalist poets in being both “poetic discoverers” and translators.

The translations (which are, for the most part, rough translations of the Bengali/hindi/Marathi & originals by the poets themselves) are certainly vivid enough so that we westerners who are not familiar with the Indian languages & literatures can at least guess what real breakthrough has been achieved there in terms of opening up new dimensions in the language & what most real damage has been done to the lit establishment [...]

The co-existence of different practices of translation, crosscutting various passages of editing, underscores the attempt at eradicating the semantic gap between the cultures of Bengali and English poetry without giving too much relevance to the scientific accuracy of translations. For example, it shows how the translations sometimes departed from the Bengali original text, revealing the intention of bowdlerising it of its most despicable contents, as in Malay Roy Choudhury’s “Stark Electric Jesus”, English translation of the Bengali poem “Pracaṇḍa baidyutik chutār”. Such practices of translation are well illustrated in two English versions

known to the American readers, even though the collection would result in a “third rate anthology of poor english verse” (Sunil letter to Allen, 29.11.1963). In Allen Ginsberg papers, M0733, Series I, Box 25, Folder 30 (Correspondence 1960s – Sunil Gangopadhyay). Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

6 “Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs”

of Saileshvar Ghosh’s poem “Tin bidhabā” (Three Widows), both published in the magazine *Salted Feathers* (Bakken 1967). By illustrating multiple versions, the editors wanted to transparently reveal their translational strategies also to emphasise the transcultural relevance of translation for experimental avant-garde writing. Both versions have shown how translation was fundamental in bringing attention to the challenges, the conflicts and the negotiations faced in the process of transferring ‘transgressive’ content from the Bengali to the English language and audience. On the pages of these little magazines, translation gained meaning as a worlding tool and major vehicle to channel and transfer both normative and transgressive codes from one culture to another. The outcome of the negotiations with texts, meanings and translations ended up shaping a so-called English canon of Hungryalist writings, addressed to the Anglophone audience – mainly in Europe and North America– who would finally be able to access the ‘obscene’ content and language of avant-garde Bengali poetry.

Practices of Translation: Reluctance and Adaptation

The highly controversial poem “Three Widows” by Saileshvar Ghosh chosen for publication in *Salted Feathers* shows the coexistence of different translational practices. Along with Malay’s “Stark Electric Jesus”, Ghosh’s poem became another iconic face of the Hungryalist movement because of its bawdy topic and language.¹¹⁷ Dick Bakken, editor of this issue, decided to include two versions of this poem in English translation to “illustrate some of the problems and possibilities in translating Bengali poetry to English” (Bakken 1967).

The title “Three Widows” is another way of calling the poem based on its first verse, as we will see. Originally published in its entirety as “Ghostly talk with a horse” (Ghoṛār saṅge bhautik kathābārtā) in the magazine *Eṣāṇā* (1962–3), the following extract translated for *Salted Feathers* was based on a shorter version of the poem known as “Bhautik kathābārtā” (Ghostly Talk), previously printed in a Hungry leaflet (*Hungry Generation* #30). Here, Saileshvar Ghosh plays with the idea of the ghostly (bhautik), the terrific and uncanny feeling of fear at the unfamiliar, reminiscent of the categories of the Freudian unheimlich and Julia Kristeva’s abject. The spooky scenes of the poem reproduce images that violate certain codes and norms of an imaginary Hindu middle-class family. In the first place,

117 In a letter to Dick Bakken, Saileshvar described the reaction to the publication of his poem: “At once this stirred the whole society, gave me a hatred of the stupid, complaint was set to the police interrogated and threatened me. Even a ‘so called’ early H.G. poet left H.G. in protest of the publication of my poem. He openly insulted me and accused me of writing obscene.” (S.G. to D.B. 5/18/66, in Bakken 1967).

the initial perversion of the poet “impregnating three widows” discloses a carnivalesque world where the rules and hierarchies of ordinary life are overturned. I here present my own translation in addition to those done by Jyotirmoy Datta and Girin Das and published in the avant-garde magazine.

I lay down on the holy bed after impregnating three widows
Hey horse, three glasses to the health of Calcutta!
perdition laughs at the priest’s list of sacred names
the religion of flesh [dhātudharma] for seven times rolls down
on the floor
three widows have a walk to the South Sea to get fresh air
33 gods enjoy the fruits
the farmer counts the money he owes for rent
the holy thief is at the front door
the daughters of the householder
all spinsters, wake up at night to unlock the gate
they learn how to protect the family honour [kuladharmā] by
reading the Purāṇas and the Gītā, you Horse
after giving love to the silkworms, where’s the heart gone
hearing the religion of the Gītā a dog’s balls fill up with sperm
[dhātumudrā]
you Horse, on the holy body of 330 million people
the heart engraved with the list of sacred names, where has it gone?
After impregnating three widows I lay down without virtue and
religion
at the feet of mystery, hey Horse
the transportable road is far and desolate
(Ghoṣ 2011: 635–636)

In the Bengali poem, the author operates a rupture between sacred and profane through the conscious and skilful choice of Sanskrit-loans referring to the ideal spheres of the sacred and the domestic. To initiate the reader to his idea of transgression, the “ghostly talk” introduces us to a world where taboos and moral codes on the chastity of the widow are broken. The straightforward communication and provoking intention of the first line makes for a memorable beginning: “I lay down on the holy bed, after impregnating three widows”.¹¹⁸ This image is not scandalous because of the description of sexual intercourse, as it happens in Malay’s “Stark Electric Jesus”: here the transgressive act is the impregnation of three widows, after which the poet – or an imaginary subject of the poem – lays

118 tin bidhabā garbha kare śuṣe achi puṇya bichānāy (Ghoṣ 2011: 635).

6 “Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs”

on the “holy bed” (puṇya bichānāy) toasting with “three glasses”. The recurrence of the number three, with its association to the symbolism of the Christian Trinity or the Hindu trimūrti of Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva, represents the link with the sphere of the sacred further highlighted by the repetition of the word “puṇya” (virtue or religious merit). The symbolic safety and protection of the traditional family, however, breaks down at the end of the poem, when Saileshvar lays down “without virtue and religion” (puṇyadharmahīn) after the blasphemous intercourse has taken place. The sacred threshold of the home, the safety of the domestic space (kula, gr̥hastha) and of traditional education (purāṇ!gītā) is physically trespassed by violating the body of the widows. In the Hindu perception, a widow (bidhabā) is close to a holy figure: she is almost a nun, who is expected to remain untouched after her husband’s death. The break between the realms of the sacred and the desecrated materialises through the dialectic play, skilfully reproduced through the repetition of words such as puṇya, dharma, and dhātu. The author draws such concepts from the religious and physiological world of Hindu culture, setting the normative (both religious and institutional) backdrop to the sphere of the Indian family. Especially the material connotation of the word “dhātu”, denoting both the semen and the material elements, in the context of this poem stands for the material religion (dhātudharma), which could be stretched to imply the religion of the semen, and juxtaposes to the “kuladharmā” or the religion of the family.

Without making too-close a reading of this poem, what is striking is how the two translators coped with the original Bengali poem and negotiated with Saileshvar’s most despicable and challenging terminology. To begin with, Jyotirmoy Datta opens up about his initial reaction to Saileshvar’s poem, declaring his inability to understand its meaning.¹¹⁹ Girin Das tries to be more faithful to the original Bengali poem, by retaining a more literal meaning of the more controversial words and phrases. On the contrary, Jyotirmoy shows great hesitation to retain the scandalous “garbha karā” (impregnate) and “dhātudharma” (religion of the semen), suggesting an adaptation of the original poem into a more fluent English reading, yet wiping out the linguistic taboos inherent in Saileshvar’s Bengali language. For example, while Girin Das chooses the more literal “I am sleeping in the holy bed making three widows pregnant”, Jyotirmoy replaces the act of impregnation with an equally shocking “I slump on the holy bed, the blow up job on three widows went well”. It is interesting to remark that Jyotirmoy omits that the “daughters of

119 “I cannot translate Shaileshvar’s ‘Three Widows’ for I don’t understand it. Some of the rest I do, and the more I know them, the less enthusiastic I feel” (1/15/67, Bakken 1967 n.p.). In another letter to Bakken, we learn that the only person who agreed to translate the poem was Girin Das, after other invitations were rejected. It is likely that the invitation to translate first passed through Clinton Seely, Edward Dimock and Jyotirmoy Datta, as he stated elsewhere.

the family man” (grhasther meyerā) are “all spinsters” (sab āiburō), while Girin retains all the literal details of the Bengali version.

Three is the holy thief at the gate but the farmer’s girls
Wake up only bolt fast the doors and chant pious hymns
To defend the family honor”
(transl. by Jyotirmoy Datta)

Thief of heaven in the front door. The family girls –
All spinsters, get up at night to unhook the door –
They study religion and philosophy to preserve the chastity of caste
(transl. by Girin Das)

This passage shows how the translators negotiated with the concept of “kuladharmā”, a phrase referring to the duties to be accomplished within a family. Datta translated it with “family honour”, without any specific local colour, to appeal to a more general intolerance towards the institution of the family as it was experienced transnationally. By contrary, with “chastity of caste”, Das resorted to a meaning that is closer to the general Hindu concept of purity. We know by now that these two concepts, purity and caste, are interdependent and situate themselves in a long political debate as well as cultural discourse that became prominent during British rule. Provided that the translator wanted to exploit the concept of caste instead of that of family, the question remains open as to why Girin Das translated the Bengali phrase with an atypical “chastity of caste”, instead of going for “purity”. I believe that his choice mirrors the wish to adjust the idea of “kuladharmā” into a concept that could easily be accessible to readers who were not exposed to Indian culture but were familiar with the notion of caste as a ‘backward custom’, rather than familiarising with the complex idea of a family dharmā.

Similar strategies of omittance and adaptation of the normative as well as the transgressive contents from Bengali to English emerge in Subo Acharya’s “A Poem” (Ek kabitā), again translated by Jyotirmoy and Girin. Although I will not delve into a close-reading of the poem, it is enough to say that Jyotirmoy distances himself from the most contentious passages of the poem. In another letter to Bakken, Datta explains his reluctance at translating the “adolescent outpourings” of Subo Acharya’s poems.

There are still many pages of Subo’s stuff left but I quail at the thought of having to ‘translate’ them. I put the word in quotes because these adolescent outpourings, the hysteric violence of expression clouding the lack of any real perception, have to be reordered, structured, given form and meaning before they can

be translated. These vague laments, bitter outcries, etc., etc., are the raw material of the genuine poems which I hope Subo and others will some day write; these words come out of their throats too quickly, like one who goes from the table to the basin to retch up; it hasn't settled down, the nourishment hasn't gone into their bones. Which is why your's and McCord's version of the poems read much better than the Bengali, although the hysterics and adolescent dramatics still remain: 'My head is reeling', 'I shall die very soon of anaemia,' etc., for no translating miracle can make the self-pity sound better (Bakken 1967)

His reaction to the drama and violence of Subo's poem illustrates well what was the general reaction of literati, critics, poets and intellectuals, who were educated to other literary tastes and were reluctant to welcome such violence and roughness in Bengali poetry. With this assumption, I do not wish to give any final judgement about the quality of the translations but acknowledge the overlap of different translational practices in the negotiation with so-called taboo language, and the tendency of some translators to bowdlerise controversial content in the process of translating from Bengali to English.

Constructing the English Canon of Hungryalism

While the magazine *Salted Feathers* was exclusively dedicated to the Hungryalist poets, Allen DeLoach and Carl Weissner's *Intrepid* issue collected writings from other Indian poets as well: it included the Kṛttibās group (i.e. Sunil Gangopadhyay, Tarapada Ray and Shakti Chattopadhyay), the Allahabad-based poet Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, and the bilingual English/Marathi poets Dilip Chitre and Arun Kolatkar. Extracts from Ginsberg's *Indian Journals* were also part of this issue. This number of *Intrepid* opened with a map of Calcutta and Howrah in Bengali, "the center of new creative activity in india today---due to the energetic efforts & achievements of bengal's Hungry Generation poets" thus placing the city of Calcutta at the centre of the avant-garde world, with Bombay, Delhi and Allahabad placed only after the Bengali capital (DeLoach and Weissner1968). With their diverse choice of Indian avant-garde writings, the special issues on modern Indian poetry contributed to shape an English canon of Hungryalism for the wide English-speaking audience, publishing a selection of their writings in English translation and highlighting their connection with the American Beat movement. Although it may sound like a paradox that the first collection of Hungry writings appeared in English instead of Bengali, it strategically marked an important shift in the reception of the Hungry Generation. The publication prompted the association

of the Bengali movement with the international avant-garde community, while in the circle of Bengali critics it signalled the wish to “deprovincialise” the Bengali language. In a perspective of cultural marketing, it could even attract more readers overseas. Through these avant-garde American platforms, Hungryalism easily turned into a literary movement and cultural phenomenon not only confined to Calcutta and to the Bengali language but largely associated with the variety of Indian modernism, because of its colloquial language, cosmopolitanism and urban style. An interesting cue to continue our analysis is Stephen Belletto’s argument about Hungryalism being “packaged” into an American version emphasising concerns like native spirituality, sexual frankness, and political subversion (Belletto 2019). He noticed that the Hungry issue of Ferlinghetti’s *City Lights*, through Ginsberg’s mediation, prompted the association of the Hungry and Beat Generation by foregrounding the iconoclastic features of the Bengali movement aligning it with other rebellious and countercultural movements of the world. These aspects aptly represented the Bengali avant-garde as a radical and revolutionary counterculture, resonating with other protest movements in Europe and the United States.

Allen Ginsberg’s foreword to the *City Lights* number on Indian and Bengali contemporary poetry illustrates these kinds of imaginations and projections at work in the ways the Hungryalist movement was represented. The same intention of subsuming the Hungry Generation into the Beat literary world is revealed in the editors’ choice of juxtaposing the Hungry manifesto in *City Lights 1* to Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder’s rather exotic impressions on India and Japan (Ferlinghetti 1963: 7–23). The selection of Bengali poems translated in *City Lights*, mouthpiece of the American avant-garde, displayed themes and tropes bearing trace of the Beat sensibility, especially underlining the existentialism of the doomed hero, who finds solace and creativity through the abuse of drugs and alcohol. For example, this theme is predominant in Malay’s “Drunk Poem”, while the idealism of youth is central in Sunil Gangopadhyay’s poem “Age Twenty-Eight”, two poems published in *City Lights 2* (Ferlinghetti 1964: 120–128). Although *Salted Feathers* and *Intrepid* Hungry issues so far remain the best anthologies in English to exhibit the poetry and essays of the Hungry Generation, their tendency was to present texts using a language and register characteristic of neo-avant-garde writings in English to encourage global countercultural associations. In another number of *City Lights*, we find Howard McCord describing the poetry of the Hungry Generation with an interesting series of adjectives, which are juxtaposed to contemporary Indian literature, “pallid” and “otiose”, in other words “schoolmasters’ stuff” (Ferlinghetti 1966: 159–60).

Acid, destructive, morbid, nihilistic, outrageous, obscene, mad, hallucinatory, shrill – these characterize the terrifying and cleansing visions that the Hungryalists insist Indian literature must

6 "Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs"

endure if it is ever to be vital again. With few exceptions, contemporary Indian literature is schoolmasters' stuff: pallid, otiose, and dull. It tends either to be timid and moralistic within a genteel realism, or aimlessly philosophical and romantic. Two exceptions are well known outside India, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Ruth Prabher Jhabvala. But the revolutionary Bengali writers whom the Hungry Generation has built upon, such as Manik Bandhyopadhyay, Samaresh Basu, and Asim Roy, are absolutely unknown in the West. Only in the poets of the Hungry Generation, working their own Bengali poems into nervous, energetic English, excluded from the academies and the literary aristocracy, can be seen the fullness of urgency and despair that covers South Asia.

The adjectives that McCord uses seem to repeat certain popular descriptions and characterisations of modern avant-garde writings in America: a poetry born out of a profound alienation from the norms of a bourgeois society; a language that disgusted and subverted the establishment, just like the poetry of the Beat Generation. Establishing a dichotomy between contemporary Indian literature ("pallid, otiose, and dull" or "timid and moralistic") and the "acid, destructive...obscene" visions of Hungryalism is a predictable way of endorsing what was a widespread and engrained language of bipolarities in the cultural economy of the avant-garde. McCord, himself part of that world, echoes that countering attitude, choosing to stand with the experimental Bengali horizon of Hungryalism, even though he elsewhere admitted of being only familiar with Bengali poetry available in English (Bakken 1967). Moreover, further on in his essay, he declares that the movement is "autochthonous" and "built on the strong Bengali avant-garde tradition", although inspired by poets and playwrights from France and US, and once again takes position in the debate on the Western derivation, showcasing how widespread was this debate across the avant-garde. His reference to the English of the Hungryalist poets reaffirms the prevalent and frowned-upon view on the Hungryalists' use of English, here outlined in gentler words as "nervous" and "energetic", excluded from "literary aristocracy".

Another example of the jocular and rambling English of the Hungry Generation can be observed in Malay's essay "The Literary Situation in Calcutta", among many other pieces of writing published on *Salted Feathers's* Hungry! issue (Bakken 1967). His language is replete with American slang and, as in McCord's previously discussed note, showcases the inclination to delineate neat boundaries between the establishment and the counter-community. Similar descriptions of scandal and danger are used equally by the Bengali poets, and by Malay most of all, when addressing to an Anglophone audience. This is yet another evidence

of the playful use of English which mimicked the register of the avant-garde also to be internationally known as participants of the global avant-garde community. Furthermore, the practice of writing in non-standard English – often flawed, verbose, hyper-technical and replete with jargons – was also a way to turn away from the conventional and more elitist version of Indian English, mainly spoken by bhadralok Bengali intellectuals. Unlike Malay, the other Hungryalist poets, like Sunil Gangopadhyay, Saileshvar Ghosh, Debi Roy and Subo Acharya, expressed their unease for writing in English. In “The Literary Situation in Calcutta”, the author employs long adjectival constructions, slogans and formulas to create an impressive and hyperbolic effect. Here, Malay operates a major division within the panorama of Bengali literary institutions between the “Business” (also called “Sahitya Jagat”), the “smug of academic flapdoodle” and “the avant-garde”. The Business, represented by a few big groups of newspapers, is described as “a vast string of sentimental James Bond manufacturers”, a phrase that underscores the economy-oriented machinery behind the production and marketing of literature. By contrast, the avant-garde “consists mostly of the young who look upon the bulk of post-Independence writing as cheap, pop, entertaining, filler, non-Bengali and aberrant”. Malay singles out several Bengali icons from the avant-garde group, writers who managed to stay away from the “Business and its traps of ostensible megalomania”, reconfiguring a new pantheon of Bengali anti-establishment writers through names such as Manik Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan, Jibanananda, Annada Shankar Roy and Satinath Bhaduri. Avant-garde is one step further in his analysis, which attempts to set the boundaries of “experimentalism” around a few Hungryalist prose writers.

Avant-garde fiction writing starts with Subimal Basak (Junk), the rawest of new talents, Basudeb Dasgupta (Kitchen-Room) and Subhash Ghosh (My Key), all top-level experimentalists, defiers of existing genres of prose-writing, advertisers of the soul, mainstays of Bengali new departures and the brazen confessors of rebellion, trespass and blatant exploitation of the inmost self. Calcutta’s mid-victorian police once issued body warrant against them and several writers had to intervene. They are among the most frequently mentioned young writers, unequivocally disavowed disapproved disowned by Sahitya Jagat and its crowd-sucking tentacles.

This language echoes a rhetoric and an aesthetic of excess, that is of hyperbolic and oxymoric contrapositions. For example, words like “advertisers”, “mainstays”, “confessors” and “exploitation”, intentionally drawn from the vocabulary of business, are inverted to counter the impersonal, materialistic and profit logic of

6 "Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs"

capitalism when juxtaposed with grander spiritual concepts. The effect is almost parodic: the Hungryalists, poets of postmodernity, are "advertisers of the soul", "mainstays of new departures", and exploiters of "the inner self". Finally, Malay complains about the absence of an actual questioning of what constitutes "our culture". In the juxtaposition between an authentic idea of culture and a "chaotic" vision embracing linguistic hybridity and cultural contamination, Malay and the Hungry Generation have clearly gone for the latter.

Nobody knows or wants to inquire what exactly is our culture. NOW. Cross-breeding, indigestion, complacency, spiritual materialism [a term first used by Chögyam Trungpa], middle-age rationalism, failures of democracy and overall chaos. An unforeseen journey to chaos. Chaos itself has become the subject matter for the bulk of young writers, poets and dramatists who incessantly seize on it as their own solitary spirit discovers it, unveils and explores.

Concluding Remarks

The last chapter on worlding strategies of playful imitation and transversal adaptation of languages and contents of the avant-garde has brought us full circle. After zooming in on Hungryalist poetry, I returned in this chapter to issues of imitation and adaptation across the Beat and the Hungryalist avant-garde cultures. I have shown that distortion, imitation and adaptation are vital sites of production for postmodern and postcolonial literatures that experimented with forms and languages of poetry by valuing influence and contamination. For example, we have seen that the Hungryalists' unconventional usage of the English language in their poetry translations or correspondence was deliberately verbose and hyper-technical in a move to parody the idiom of the Western avant-garde, as well as to mark their association with the global counterculture of the 1960s. Sentenced for obscenity in 1964, the movement targeted Bengali middle-class hypocrisy, its moral codes and social regulations, as well as the elitist literary establishment in the fashion of other angry countercultures: by pushing the limits of Bengali language and by desecrating the traditional forms of poetry irony and sarcasm. The encounter with Allen Ginsberg and other poets of the American Beat Generation was source of inspiration for both movements, but it also condemned the Bengali poets to be forever disregarded as a "tropical and Gangetic" copy of the Western counterculture.

This final chapter has linked back to the questions laid out in the introduction and first chapter, which sought to retrace and frame the historical, literary and material trajectories along which the Hungry Generation moved. The introduction has established the object of analysis of this book, which suffered marginalisation and exclusion from the Bengali criticism that downplayed the movement as juvenile, depraved and derivative of the Western avant-garde. Other fellow poets from the Bengali anti-establishment group *Kṛttibās* slowly moved away too from the early Hungry Generation after the sentence for obscenity, although they later proclaimed the birth of a new *Kṣudhārta āndolan* (Hungry movement) in the name of the Hungry Generation. These dynamics of delegitimisation, and trajectories of rupture and exclusion that operated in the circulation and reception of this movement were countered and echoed by the textual strategies of ambivalence, irony and parodic imitation that the Hungryalists enacted through their revolution of form and language. Instead of exclusively emphasising interconnection, exchange and continuity across avant-garde cultures, these operations have shed light on disruption and fragmentation (of texts, practices, and histories) as dominant modes of these postmodern experiments in Bengali poetry. Constituting traits of Bengali identity as imagined by Hungryalism are postmodernism and radicalism, as chapter 3 demonstrates. This could be seen, for example, in the configuration of an alternative canon of the Bengali avant-garde inspired by multiple global

6 “Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs”

traditions of radicalism and iconoclasm, such as French bohemianism and Decadent movement, German anti-modernism, American counterculture, and Indian modernism.

Chapter 2 and 4 have focused on the so-called tropes of transgression that I identified in Hungryalist poetry. We have seen that this movement mainly engaged with themes like sexuality and masculinity in the literary and social realms of post-1960s Calcutta. The concept of transgression has especially defined the interdisciplinary methodology of my research and guided a socio-literary reading of the texts produced by the Hungryalist authors. The book employed notions of transgression from anthropology and sociology (Bakhtin 1968; Turner 1969; Foucault 1978) and some perspectives from masculinity and gender studies, like hyper-masculinity and the male gaze (Mulvey 1975; Connell 1995), to reveal how the literary texts are embedded in the socio-cultural context of postcolonial West Bengal. Engaging with subjects that were perceived as taboos by Bengali bourgeois society, such as sexual violence, rape, consumption and objectification, these postmodern poets mirrored the fractures within the hegemonic views of the Indian nation-state about science, development and modernisation. I argued that the mode of transgression inscribed itself into the manly bodies of the poets, replicating the desires, ambivalences and anxieties about sexuality and consumption that could be intercepted in India’s changing public sphere. These strategies of transgression could be observed in the choice of taboo tropes and languages – e.g. sexual violence, consumption, modernisation, drug and alcohol abuse, and body objectification – expressing the violence and abuse of which the Hungryalist poets were at the same time victims and perpetrators.

By analysing a selection of poems and other writings of the Hungry Generation, this book suggests reading these texts as literary and sociocultural spaces where the dualities and paradoxes of the postcolonial Bengali identity – especially of male, urban, and middle-class Bengalis – are played out. My interpretation has sought to identify Bengali postcolonial male bodies as sites that both challenge and reaffirm disciplinary and normative subjectivities through representations of sexual intercourses, boozing and drug consumption, objectified female bodies, rape, masturbation, homosexuality, and anxious masculinities. An elucidating example of such bodily transgressions is Phalguni Ray’s poetry in which he portrayed his troubled and anxious “abnormality” in terms of class, race and gender, vis-à-vis the ideal image of the Indian man – father, husband and breadwinner – in 1960s Bengali middle-class society.

A major site of interrogation that this research used to make sense of the social and historical crisis embodied by these Bengali poets is that of sexuality. Not only has this been a central trope and topic of investigation of the realm of the personal in Hungryalist poetry, but a more sociological and historical accent has been given to the sexualities imagined and performed by these Hungry young Bengali men

through the multiple discourses on sex, marriage, love and intimacy that were captured in India's changing public sphere in the post-independence era. Drawing mainly from the history and sociology of sexuality and gendered identities as they were constructed by and for the middle class (Foucault 1978; Weeks 1981; Connell 1995; Srivastava 2013), this book provided a socio-literary interpretation of the tensions, ambivalences and anxieties that these authors expressed metonymically through the unabashed and uncensored language of their poems. But more incisively than the idea of Indian sexuality, often essentialised by psychoanalysis and culturalist approaches, the notion of transgression has helped to capture the reproaching and often subversive acts that the Hungryalists practiced through the texts of their poems. Moreover, besides framing the potentially radical actions of the Hungry poets, transgression also represents a distinctive trait of modernity and modern fiction. In Michel Foucault's essay "A Preface to Transgression" (1977), the French philosopher observes that the theme of sexuality was at the centre of writing from Marquis de Sade to Freud and symbolically represented – on a physical and moral level – the death of God already anticipated by Nietzsche (Foucault 1977). Reading George Bataille's *Story of the Eye*, Foucault provided methodological and philosophical directions to discuss the repeated use of sexuality in modern literature as that which "permits a profanation without object, a profanation that is empty and turned inward upon itself" (Foucault 1977: 30). The Hungryalists too seem to have paid homage to Foucault's statement by making 'sex' the language and trope of modern poetry and using it as instrument for expressing the depravation and obscenity of human life under capitalism. Transgression has been welcomed in literary studies in different languages and literary cultures, including gothic fiction and the picaresque novel, certainly taking cue from Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque and carnivalesque as modes of hierarchy subversion (Lickhardt et al. 2018; DiPlacidi 2018). A more politically engaged notion of transgression has, by contrast, been associated with women's writings and minority literatures in postcolonial contexts which generally did not develop an identity of their own, but rather depended on "transgression between cultures where also power and struggle for predominance are involved" (Ahrens 2005; Allison et al. 2019). Therefore, there is fertile ground to use transgression, understood as a breach of moral codes and social norms and yet site of creation of new liminal identities, as the predominant frame to critically address Hungryalist thought and practice in post-independent West Bengal.

As with the word trans-gression, the prefix trans seemed to be revealing of other key dynamics of the Hungry Generation and of postcolonial avant-gardes in general. This prefix naturally favours fluidity rather than fixity in the practice of identity building; identities, like those of middle-class unmarried and unemployed young men in Bengali society, caught in processes of transition and transformation rather than in well-established boxes. As Victor Turner pointed out, the space of

the liminal is “betwixt and between” and frequently likened to “death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon” (Turner 1969: 95). It is therefore in that liminal space of transition from the colonial rule to independence, in the emergence of India as an independent state and symbolically in the liminal space of mimicry, ambivalence and imitation that Hungryalist identities are temporarily caught, yet still seem to escape all tentative definitions.

Therefore, as with other postmodern literatures across the world, transgression as a tool of analysis and interpretive spectacle exhibited the potential of capturing shades or moments of alternative literary expression wrought by social turbulence and existential anxiety, and of extracting the ambivalences and contradictions of these countercultures rather than reconstructing any coherent and consistent ideologies existing behind literary cultures. The transgression practiced through their sexuality, masculinity, and sexist gaze was also engendered by the moment of transition from the end of the colonial rule to the rationalist ideologies of the Nehruvian nation-state. In other words, what I have sought to highlight is the fragmentary nature of histories, biographies, vocabularies and materials that characterised this movement. That this is a more common empirical methodology for the study of alternative print cultures and literary modernism in non-Western contexts is a well-known and established scholarly practice. Yet what this research adds is that the ‘fragment’ can become an epistemological instrument in its own right, representing not only in its visual and material evidence the marginality and un-officiality of print and literary cultures in postcolonial contexts, but also pointing to a radical practice of literary, cultural and political subversion.

As pointed out in the first chapter, the literary practices of the Hungry Generation were framed as postmodern and postcolonial by showing their strategies of language contamination, irony and ambivalence. Characteristically postmodernist patterns of behaviour, such as the rejection of hierarchies, were distinctive of the global phenomenon of counterculture on a transcultural scale. But how has the book reconciled with these evidently transcultural traits of the Hungry Generation? This study emphasised the multiple locations of vernacular modernism in South Asia striving to decolonise language, forms and categories of knowledge through so-called obscene poetry. The circulation and exchange of literary materials across the global avant-garde circle of the 1960s and 1970s shows that strategies of representation, imitation and adaptation in non-Western contexts are instrumental in retracing continuity, as well as difference, across the concepts of transcultural and postcolonial. The concept of the transcultural needed some reevaluation of its encompassing nature by limiting it to some moments or “scales of transculturality” in various literary fields, as Hans Harder argued (Harder 2019). Moments of transculturality can be observed, for example, in Hungryalist literature by looking at the manifesto as a genre of political modernity, the mode of

the little magazine as a platform of exchange across the global avant-garde and obscene and transgressive writings, a distinct trope of modernity. The research also stressed that the transcultural is not only defined through trans-national processes of exchange, reception and circulation. The example of Hungryalism and its reception in Bengali and American circles of avant-garde poetry, and vice versa, have shown that literary asymmetries in postcolonial texts are contested, negotiated and often resolved through parodical imitation (or mimicry), ambivalence, distortion and adaptation of other idioms and traditions.

In the last years, India has seen a peak of media and academic attention on matters of censorship, dissent and obscenity in correspondence with a resurgence of Hindu nationalism and xenophobia on a national scale. In Bangladesh, between 2013 and 2016 the killings of secularist activists and atheist bloggers have re-ignited the debate on freedom of expression in the country. In response to that, manifestations of discontent on behalf of young people and students have grown as they contributed to raise awareness of rights such as dissent and freedom of speech amidst increasing pressure from the national government for greater control and surveillance across educational campuses and in young people's lives. Against this backdrop, the memory and radical imaginary of the Hungry Generation gradually re-emerged and received greater attention in various forms, thanks to students, minor poets and literary communities in West Bengal and Bangladesh. The link that rebellious and revolutionary movements of history nurtured with political activism is best epitomised by a new concept of writing and of poetry as performances of radicalism and expression of dissent. In 2015, an experimental play based on Malay's poem "Stark Electric Jesus" was staged at JNU's Centre for English Studies as part of a seminar that explored issues of obscenity and censorship organised by prof. Brinda Bose. The student Souradeep Roy, now PhD candidate in theatre studies at Queen Mary University in London, walking half-naked on the long seminar table, recited excerpts from Manik Bandyopadhyay's short-story "Prāgaitihāsik" (Prehistoric) and from Malay Roy Choudhury's poem "Stark Electric Jesus". Other literary performances acting as forms of political protest are, for example, the political slogans inspired by Urdu poetry. The adoption of poetry as a means of protest was highly visible in December 2019, when the massive outburst of protests and police brutalities on demonstrators that followed the passing of the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) triggered a number of symbolic reactions and peaceful expressions of dissent through poetry *mushā'ira* on behalf of students from Jamia Millia Islamia University in New Delhi. Amir Aziz's poem "Sab yād rakhā jāyegā" (We will remember it all) reached out to Pink Floyd's guitarist and rock icon Roger Waters who quoted and recited parts of Aziz's poem at a protest event in London. A photograph taken at a students' protest in the same campus portrayed three girls protesting against the CAB under the shadow of a giant statue of the Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib.

6 “Tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs”

The volume *Political Aesthetics of Global Protest* (2014) shows that the imaginary of revolt and protest is utterly transcultural and that it often deploys transversally through multiple sites of protest, from the Arab Spring in north Africa to the Indian anti-corruption movement. Such analogies in the symbols and imaginaries of protest are evident, for instance, in Yemen where, during the Arab Spring protest, Bedouin poets recited their poems and songs as forms of protest (Werbner & al. 2014: 7). Therefore, poetry performance has re-emerged as the main instrument and symbol of political fight in totally new social and political contexts in South Asia and elsewhere.

However, my impression is that the performance of poetry as a form of political fight in India has reappeared not as a direct inheritance of the Hungryalists per se, but as a mechanism of existential safety in periods of crisis. Seen from this perspective, poetry is a medium of expression for the anguish and awareness of a historical crisis as experienced by a certain *communitas*, as Victor Turner noted. These contemporary expressions of dissent are part of a collectively shared literary tradition that includes various genres and codes of language in poetry that are solidly associated with a symbolism of dissent. Although the myth of Hungryalism as an anti-bourgeois movement is alive, especially in urban West Bengal, it is important to state that the same countercultural tensions and opposition between “structure” and “communitas” can be traced elsewhere and in other moments of crisis in history. By making this clear, I wanted to provide a more balanced vision of Hungryalism which, by contrast, did not set up nor inspire concrete political protest in the 1960s and 1970s. This observation is also necessary to highlight the risks of elevating the Hungry Generation and other traditions associated with revolutionary politics, like the Naxalites, to mythological actors of rebellion and transgression. In this book, I have tried to go beyond biased interpretations and established narratives of the Hungry Generation to expose less common perspectives and more complex readings of this controversial movement of Bengali literary history.

A mythicisation is visible in the contemporary reception of Hungryalism which is either extolled as a movement of political and sexual emancipation or reduced to a group of male chauvinists and misogynists. We cannot deny that so-called sexual transgression of the Bengali poets often verged on hypermasculine and misogynist behaviours objectifying the representation of the woman in their poetry. As I tried to show, their transgressions played out in all their ambiguities and contradictions symptomatic of young middle-class Bengalis struggling with their identity. However, I have sought to avoid a hyper-sexualisation of the movement’s orientation by describing the poets as utterly depraved and obsessed by sexuality and rather understand its depravation and misogyny as ways to cope with hegemonic Bengali masculinities as well as with the promises of postcolonial emancipation.

Finally, what I see needs to be stressed today, from some conversations with Bengali scholars and Hungry followers, is that we are witnessing a revival of Hungryalism that glorifies sexual freedom and the libertine aspects of the movement which result in reproducing misogynist behaviours and a masculinity disguised as gender emancipation. In this way, the Hungryalists would be transformed in a simulacrum that legitimates the depravation, excessive consumption of drugs and alcohol, misogyny, and the reproduction of conservative stereotypes about Indian womanhood. I often had the feeling that the shadows of a traumatic (colonial and postcolonial) past were re-emerging through the words of the poets as well as from the enthusiasm of my – mostly male – interlocutors with whom I discussed Hungryalism. Therefore, without pinpointing the sexual and existential anguish voiced in the poetry of this Bengali movement, we risk falling back on a populist and libertine version of Hungryalism where the sexualisation of desire and the objectification of the female body is legitimised as a model for both male and female emancipation.

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

Manifestoes

Manifesto on Hungryalistic Poetry

Poetry is no more a civilizing manoeuvre, a replanting of the bamboozled gardens; it is a holocaust, a violent and somnambulistic jazzing of the hymning 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, 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

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

possess of evoking a state of mind, and to present images not as wrappers but as ravishograms.

Written by Malay

Published by Haradhon Dhara from 269, Netaji Subhash Road, Howrah, India, on behalf of the Hungry Generation.

(Hungry Generation XII)

Manifesto on Short-Story

Short-story is no more a thing like slice-of-life, a piece from a life-size mirror, a word-making of puzzling events; it is an anti-idyllic surging of the nuance, a quest of man for the KALON, a passing through the inferno of historical experience into the purgatorio of reflection.

Short story is the imago of a mourner. Hence, for its function, it has nothing to do with the communication of facts or ideas. It should only and only, burn down the spinal-cord of an individual alife, with an emotive valency that ran through the blood of Christ on Calvary.

Short-story, so far, has been five finger exercises in the log-table of love-tricks, a camouflage of alphabetical hypocrisy, a logical description of facts seen with the eyes of a dead reptile. Oldies of the blankety-blank school as well as the Recruits, who went to conquer this Venus, finished with crooked genitals, and returned to suck the public hemlock of Press geishas.

Short-story should be a crystal of the dark and vigorous disorder of today's vulnerable life, a snatch of the haphazard journey out and along a far, treacherous, and promising vista whose end is beyond any man's sight; a journey possible only for those who retain a vulnerable openness to being. Short story, like a spiritual outlaw, must stress the Line which is essence, as against appearance or accident. (The essence of a work of art is its unstated intuitions).

Short story being a dexterous, elegant and murderous art, is a cumulous of gestures. What it must aim for is a certain enhancement of the process of being, the affirmation of life, and of the significance of human destiny.

Published simultaneously by Pradip Chaudhury (Bishwabharati, Shantiniketan, India) and Haradhon Dhara (269, Netaji Subhash Road, Howrah, India) on behalf of the Hungry Generation.

The Object of Hungryalism (Hungrealisme)

1. To never imitate the reality of Aristotle, but to take the unenamelled whoring reality by surprise under the genital of Art.
2. To let speechlessness burst into speech without breaking the silence.
3. To let loose a creative furore, in order to undo the done-for-world and start afresh from chaos.
4. To exploit every matrix of senses except that of a writer.
5. To disclose the belief that world and existence are justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon.
6. To accept all doubts and despairs rather than to be content to live with the sense made by others.
7. To lash-out against the values of the bileged career-making animals.
8. To abjure all meretricious blandishment for the sake of absolute sincerity.
9. To stop writing and painting beyond the point of self-realization.

(Hungry Generation 10)

Manifesto of the Hungry Movement

1. Authentic discovery of my complete self.
2. To introduce myself and all that is me in front of me in every possible way during poetry.
3. To leak out after having detained myself in poetry right when for some reasons I explode and set on a journey inside me.
4. To challenge every value with my own ego, and then either accept or reject them.
5. To consider everything as real and then shake it to check if it's living or not.
6. To examine every angle instead of accepting something as it appears before us.
7. To abolish both rhymed prose and rhymed verse and use a simple personal style that can smoothly merge with the temper of what is being communicated.
8. To use also in poetry the same type, size and weight that words have in colloquial speech.
9. To reveal in poetry with greater frankness the sounds that fill up spoken words.
10. To break down the long-time established *entente* between two words and build new sentences with impure and illicit words.
11. To reject all the backing used in poetry until today and let it be primitive by itself without corruption from the outside.
12. To openly accept that poetry is the ultimate religion of man.

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

13. To express sharply and from head to foot all the existential angst, nausea and disgust.
14. Ultimate personality.

[Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015: 114]

Object of Hungryalistic Politics

1. To de-politicise the soul of every individual.
2. To let every individual realise that existence is pre-political.
3. To let it be noted historically that *Politics* invited the man of the third quality, aesthetically the most lowest substratum of a society, at its service.
4. To make it clear that the conception of *Elite* and that of the *Politician* differ absolutely after the death of Gandhi.
5. To declare the belief that all the intellectual fuckeries called “political theory” are essentially the founts of fatal and seductive lies erupting out of abominable irresponsibility.
6. To demarcate the actual position of a politician in a modern Society, somewhere between the dead body of a harlot and a donkey’s tail.
7. To never respect a politician, to whatever species or organism he may belong.
8. To never escape from politics and, at the same time, neither let politics escape from the terror of our aesthetic being, and
9. To remodel the basis upon which political creeds are founded.

By Malay Raychaudhuri
(*Hungry Generation XV*)

Religious Manifesto of the Hungry Generation

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*.
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.

by Malay Raychoudhury
(*Hungry Generation 66*)

Hungry Generation

Today poetry is inherent in the contradictions of life. It no longer tries to be a harmoniser of life; it is not an overpopulated blind anthill, nor it is an unrelenting collection of logic arguments. Today, in this time, the human need has manifested as a terrible hunger for the inescapable depth, so much so that the need to extract meaning from life is over. Today it's the time of meaninglessness, catastrophe, soul-lessness. The aforesaid hunger is not only hunger for world dissent: it is also psychological, physical and corporeal. The only nourisher of hunger is poetry, for what else would there be in life without poetry! Man, God, Democracy and Science have been defeated. Today poetry has become the only refuge.

Despite the presence of poetry, all the incoherence of human existence remains unbearable. Poetry is formed in the unhesitant rebellion of the inner world, in the tremendous irritation of the soul, in every drop of blood. Oh, but why is life still so dim? Perhaps this crisis is due to the unnecessary existence of those who view poetry and life in a different way.

What we think it is poetry is not only the outcome of the terrific attraction for disillusionment from life. Poetry can no longer be known as the trapping of universal nature into the cage of form. Today even the use of poetry as a way of salvation from this neglected earth is ridiculous. Knowingly, in full awareness, poetry is surrendering to the cruel demand of free poetic wisdom in the middle of a completely savage barbarism. In all kinds of prohibitions that is what you will find, the hidden treasure of the inner world. The only thing left inside will be poetry.

This time we must put an end to calling poetry the game of writing rhymed prose. 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

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

of rape, hangover or drowning. Declaring war against art is the first condition of poetry. One can also write rhymed prose owing to a whim or through contemplation but not poetry.

Whether it is dense with suggestions or musically harmonious, or it has the power to quench the angry, intense, turbulent hunger of both the internal and external soul – poetry is characterless like a devoted wife, asexual like a beloved, and unexposed like a goddess.

[Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015: 118]

Manifesto on the Objectives of the Hungry Generation

The main task of creation is to inspire man in his struggle for life. A painter can attain this goal in multiple ways through his work. Our main task is to attract the spectator's gaze in those directions of life that are neglected for socio-economic reasons. A painter, just like all the others, is part of the people. And that is why he is a political entity.

A painter cannot fulfill his responsibilities without support from his associates. In our society, where painting is mostly patronised by the wealthy elite, many painters surrender obediently to the requests of their patrons. A painter needs moral courage. He should persist in following his direction and reject the patronage of those who hold power in this society.

Painting is such a popular medium that, without any compromise, artistic creativity can reach to a wider public and create awareness on the necessity of art. A painting or the copy of a drawing is feasible as a beginning, but it cannot keep all the features of the original picture. It distorts the reality of the picture. On the other hand, since the painter uses imagination and illusion for a specific purpose, there are no such latent conflicts.

A painter devoid of self-respect forgets himself and ensures material prosperity by keeping in mind the demands of wealthy families and their taste and requirements. The painter of the Hungry generation is completely free. There is light at the top of his brush. A painter is the guardian of our conscience, the seer, the magician and the destroyer of evil. Thus, hypocrisy in painting is unforgivable.

Written by Anil Karanjai and Karunanidhan Mukhopadhyay
(*Hungry Generation* 48)

[Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015: 117]

“Three points by Moloy Roy Chowdhury”

1. It is for our inexorable crave that Hungryalism is the poeticaclysmic chap-eron of art of our own generation. Hungryalism, in itself, is a rejection of Realism, Stream of Consciousness, Sur-realism and such other melancrockereries.
2. Conceptions such as Monologue and Dialogue have definitely become obsolete for us. A man, because he is a Sinner, soliloquizes secretly when he speaks to others and to others when to himself. We replace them with our own conception of Sinologue.
3. To out passe [past] predecessors, who wrote with the sound of their gluttonic belches, Wrappers were called Symbols, and often Images. Obviously, we abjure such things. To us, all genuine Images, because of their own character, will henceforth be called Ravishograms.

(Hungry Generation 10)

*Kṣudhārta Manifesto of Free Poetry
by Saileshvar Ghosh (1968)*

- Poetry is the last religion of men
 - Not Buddha, Jesus or Ramakrishna. Poets/Poetry will keep liberating the earth
 - Poetry will lead people towards a new resurgence
 - Poetry is the hymn of the dirty soul that reawakened from bad consciousness – the flower that blossoms in the darkness
1. To expose the face of all hypocrisies
 2. To not worship Nature
 3. To not trust the so-called unsubstantial stuff known as Art
 4. To use yourself only from head to foot
 5. To not become the servant of the Establishment
 6. To hate every institution
 7. To take a look at the final boundary of human experience
 8. To spit out the salty plaster of civilisation
 9. To speak truth straightforwardly
 10. To see and manifest life as the Seer by going beyond the stage of reasoning
 11. To twist and turn in a personal way ordinary words in language
 12. To doubt all that was created
 13. There is no way of grasping truth besides experience – the pure intellect cannot grasp true life

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

14. To use all the obscene words omitted by society and all the ideas condemned as obnoxious. These words hide many truths of contemporary life
15. To gradually break and spread oneself out
16. To see the world is to see oneself. Knowledge is Seeing.
17. To reveal all that is hidden in the top-secret land of existence, what gradually drags men to falsity and camouflage
18. To reveal the terrific relations of life
19. To abandon the life we were given and return to our real essence and merge with the basic rule and pace of creation
20. To leave the world of the intellect for the world of feeling, raising the mind to a state of anarchy
21. To defeat the power of nerves, mind and sensation and elevate them like Tantric ascetics
22. To touch the original point of the central fear of existence
23. To reject middle-class taste and values
24. To reject all bourgeois education
25. To regain freedom by liberating the obstructed mind in writing, death and sexuality, what totally deprives man of their freedom. To give freedom to obsessions in writing, that is danger for the bourgeois
26. To build a terrible relationship with the earth and with oneself, which will have to be revealed ruthlessly
27. Do not renounce to life, but immerge the clay of life into obscenity and then pull it out
28. To make oneself the icon of protest in this anti-life civilisation
29. To abandon bourgeois happiness and security

[Ghoṣ 2011: 303–4]

Kṣudhārta Resistance First Collection (1967)

Editor: Saileshvar Ghosh

Collector: Basudeb Dasgupta

Publisher: Subhash Ghosh, 2A Naren Sen Square, Kolkata

(Authors: Basudeb Dasgupta, Pradip Choudhuri, Subhash Ghosh, Subo Acharya and Saileshvar Ghosh)

Today there is no more need for art in this world. A terrible conspiracy to kill poets is happening! What did you expect? Under the pressure of Capitalism X (industry) X Communism, only the number of eunuchs has grown in the world. Hunger does

not belong only to this generation. The entire hungry India can be heard screaming in pain. Men are slowly losing the courage of speaking the truth. If they speak... everybody knows what would happen.

Advertisements on insurance companies – insurance on cancer, death etc.: “insure yourself today!” Nobody notices this big crime: when death becomes visible, any man becomes crazy and runs away. Careful readers will understand that many so-called poets and writers of Bengal have ensured. You can see them at the lake, at the park, at the restaurants in the evening, then heading back home around 9pm.

“Hunger is a fraud”. Actually life itself is a fraud. What’s more surprising than this is that after studying at school we forgot who tried to purify this stupid nation and how. It is known that who dies now won’t be hungry again. Those who are alive and want to stay alive will be hungry and scream, complain, insult, pretend, will stir hands and feet because of hunger. The bourgeois have made life obscene and bloodless. Nobody is free except for criminals. I request a free life: there is no third problem for men beside sexuality and death that can keep them trapped. Remember the “Down with Freud, with atom bomb, with Jean Paul Sartre” counter-movements for the preservation of freedom. Freedom itself is personal suffering. Let all the angry, sad, humiliated, selfish, soul-less martyrs in this loveless life join: let us build a powerful resistance.

[Ghoṣ 2011: 613–4]

Jyotirmoy Datta’s letter to Dick Bakken

My Dear Mr. Bakken,

I have at last got your letter of November 21; it was lying at the workshop, which I avoid visiting, and it was only by accident that I looked into the workshop mailbox last night.

But that isn’t the reason why it took me so long to write to you about Malay, Subimal, Subo and others. It was quite some time ago that Dr. [Edward Dimock, then professor of Bengali literature at Chicago University] passed on to me the papers that you sent him; I could have written you then; I didn’t, being rather uncertain of what to say.

Which I still am, but I am quite willing to translate any material that you send me. But I am still bewildered why should anyone in Portland, Oregon, be interested in publishing a special issue on the Hungry Generation. Is there not enough local talent in Oregon to fill up the pages of *Salted Feathers*, which you describe as a small magazine? Or is it due to an interest in the out-of-the-way, the quaint,

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

the fantastic? It is like someone in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, bringing out a special number on the Trotskyite poets revolutionizing American poetry by bringing out the Penny Paper of Iowa City (editor: Everett Frost). Hurrah for the public relations work and promotion by Allen Ginsberg, Time magazine and the silly magistrate who convicted Malay!

This does not mean that I am not sorry for Malay for the predicament he is in. He is a nice fellow; I have contributed what little I could towards his legal expenses (you could send whatever fee you would have given to Malay); I have testified in his defence in court. But I don't think his imitation of what he thinks is contemporary American poetry is worth anything. One may or may not admire Allen Ginsberg's poetry, but one has to concede that at least most of the time Allen sounds like Allen and not somebody else. The HG people sound as if they know of no other poetry except that which is published in the magazines, pamphlets and books that Allen sends them, and whatever they have read has gone to their head and is coming out through their pen without the least alteration. I cannot derive any pleasure from the sight of a nice bunch of Calcutta kids desperately trying to ape the author of "Howl".

Maybe, it is interesting to Americans, as is the fact that some wives of Vietnamese officials and profiteers find American hair spray so indispensable that there is a flourishing blackmarket in this commodity in Saigon? But to one who is trying to purge the Bengali language of all that is false, conventional, derivative, all that is the result of fashion, all the literary echoes, Malay's regurgitation of a very limited experience of American poetry seems annoying. But I have the sense to see that this, despite the PROs, is a passing phenomenon, like the Anglophiles of the 19th century, like the Indo-Anglian poets of the immediate past; after all where are the poets of the 19th century Calcutta who thought they wrote like Byron and Scott and in which they were, unfortunately for them, in all probability right.

I assume that you, and Mr. Ferlinghetti, and Mr. McCord, are genuinely interested in Bengali poetry, that you are not only interested in tropical Kerouacs and Gangetic Ginsbergs but also in poets who are uniquely Bengali, who could not have been possible in the American tradition, who are not the creatures of some kind of literary PL-480 deal. There are, or there is, at least one poet who is walking the streets of Calcutta whose poetry is deeply rooted in the poets who have gone before him and yet whose poetry is shinningly new, the songs of an angel, the meditations and prophecies of a seer. Unlike Mr. Roychoudhury, whose reading in Bengali literature is not only slightly more deep than that of his guru, Allen, Benoy Mazumdar has lived with the works of the masters who have gone before him and even in rejecting it shows his profound awareness of the tradition. No one has ever used the Bengali language the way Benoy did in Phire Eso Chaka; but he made it seem that was the way it was meant to sound all the time. The way Malay writes it, one may think that the only poets who have gone before are the contributors of Fuck You.

I am writing this letter not to dissuade you from bringing out your special number. I would be delighted if it brings the HG people some money; I would be even happier if in some remote way it helps Malay in his trial. I would be delighted to help you to the best of my ability in translating any stuff you send me. But I had hoped that when it comes to Bengali poetry you would be more interested in what is unique to it rather than what echoes American poetry, although such phenomenon is interesting sociologically and politically, indicative as it is of how all pervasive, how unavoidable is America to the rest of the world today.

American tourists at the Paris Hilton eat hamburgers and chicken flown out from America. American diplomats in Calcutta drink Bourbon in the hot summer evenings (but their houses are airconditioned and thoroughly insulated from the humid weather) and nibble on pizzas brought frozen from the consular store. I had hopes they would have a little more curiosity about things that differ from the way things are at home.

Very sincerely yours,
Jyotirmoy Datta

(Bakken 1967)

Hungryalist Poetry

Basudeb Dasgupta

Air-conditioned God [Eyār kaṇḍisāṇḍ debatā]

In this dangerous kingdom of silence is our raft floating
hundreds of corpses are visible on the shoreline
for long burned under the sunlight, they are deformed
those whose life had vibrated until now
in happiness and grief electric current
whose life once while vibrating
from desire to desire
those lives had flown

In this dangerous kingdom of silence is our raft floating
burning sun overhead
golden colour on the right side of the river

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

green carpet on sandy strip peeps
a naked man sits all alone on that strip
seeing the raft he jumps into the water
waves his hand while being washed away by the tide
as if he wanted to say something
who knows where he drowns in the heavy current
with half ton biscuit and a few saris
this small raft floats downstream

Dark hall-room
a fragrance of lavender
crowds of men run trampling the corpses of their loved ones
jump over hoping to get a fistful of food
fight with each other to get it
die
hundreds of incorporeal species in electric light
although goods for charity are not enough
terrible dearth of vehicles
and in order to reach the distressed area
the authorities never find a way
for the absence of diggers from one to one & half thousand
were buried in one pit, Sir
payment was rupees two per day
news further says that four persons in Bhootnath's house
died when the house fell over them when they were sleeping
although his state of affairs was more or less the same
happiness was not meagre in that tiny house
today beneath the open sky the ordinary truck driver Bhūtnāth
stoops with his head between his knees
the Subdivisional officer informed him:
twenty rupees more could not be given today from the poverty alleviating fund
because the person who has the keys to the cupboard did not come

Sky is crowded with vultures – air is polluted – the radar on the twentieth floor of the tower – cyclone forecast – just now the relief boat has been looted – where there is no death the police hawks – National Highway no. 34 is washed away – no piece of land is available so that help could be dropped – an insane girl is beating a tinplate and singing on the runway – missiles would be installed near the capital – quick feet someone went to take a nap at the hotel – bullet has been found from someone's holed skull – youngest among the rebels was eight years – our momentary humanity and lifelong crying is drowning in soft mud up to the waist – presently

inside the ring two bison are fighting for sexual supremacy – wastes of turbulent sounds – pet piglet 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 – the cupboard of every civilisation has preserved some skeletons – a vulture has hit the relief plane’s propeller – far away a mad girl beats her tinsplate and sings a song – she will also die now

I have covered my ears with both hands – I don’t want to listen any sound from the outside – I have covered my ears with both hands – I can’t stand the sound of words uttered by me – therefore, death –

You went for a bath and saw that water had turned yellow – in the still water you saw your acephalous shadow – from your face, your clothes, your body always emanate the smell of corpse – therefore, death death death –

I am abandoned among the deads – I have been kept in the lowest hole – you have kept away from my relatives – I don’t have the power to come out – will you perform magic deeds for the dead? – will the ghosts come out and sing songs of praise to you – do the dead feel your mercy inside the grave – is your magic visible only in darkness – will your religion be ever known in this country of oblivion – our flesh is unhealthy – our bones have no peace – fear has uprooted us – here everybody wipes his face and says: I didn’t commit any sin

[Cattōpādhyāy 2015: 91–2]

Utpalkumar Basu

The Pope’s Grave [Poper samādhi]

[VERE PAPA MORTUUS EST

A Hungry Generation message on the death of Pope John XXIII

Text by Utpalkumar Basu]

Looking through the red and yellow window glass
on that day, suddenly
in a sloppy afternoon
easily
I opened my eyes at the sunlight
“The Pope’s empire and
the resilience of his illness’s mysterious germs”
on a finger showing
the spherical circumference of a globe
I once told you in Calcutta

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

“Let measure the Pope’s empire
and the resilience of his illness’s mysterious germs”.

Do you want to wage a war against germs?
well, I don’t want that
because if it does not turn into a holy war
looking at the reflection of a little globe
in the darkness of someone’s gaping mouth in Kurukshetra
like taken aback
will I become a puppet of the Kaurab?
would I not be like a bag myself
shaken
will I let you listen
dizzy after so much shaking
the internal sound of germs, of terror, of a quarter and a half rupee?
like many other men
these 27–28 years of such a little, aggrieved life
membranes veins guts
continuously descending
in the profound love of the body
why did we falter?
with true drunkards, sinners,
theologians, saints and thieves I could not mix.
I could not travel too far on a boat
love didn’t get stronger –
no dispute took place by the canal –

Reader, now, turn your face from the pulpit of Rome
and stare at the window afar
it seems that the glow is dying away
close to the Catholic mission
I would easily ask for powdered milk
for the starving children of India
after the death of 39 popes in shrewd knowledge
free microbes of 40 popes are coming back to life – in this sense.
But also us
like many other men
have 20 to 22 years more left to live.
Until then I’ll sit at the airport
I’ll watch the planes take off and land
or I’ll visit the press and recite my poems

I will not take thumb imprints will not take
marks of a tail's hoof
will not do it
change me
at the main window of a secret
when in the darkness yellow and blue colours
wipe out the Pope's kingdom today
as tiny as a microbe
innumerable, subtle and soft
Chief God has come attended by followers.

[Cattōpādhyāy 2015: 27–8]

Subo Acharya

On Rilke's Birthday

*A postage stamp for 15 rupees [Rāinār Māriā Ril'ker janmadine.
15 pay'sāy dāk tiki]*

What sort of beauty did Richard Burton or Gordon Craig find in the butthole!
I don't know who's this Richard Burton – *Who was Richard Burton!*
I actually don't like reading Rilke at all
I feel sleepy, it makes me yawn
when I said this, Prof. Buddhadeva Bose and Rabindranath's very reliable pupils,
Sadhana and her sister, got mad at me
I want Sadhana and her sister too
even though my body has absorbed water like roots, my thirst has not quenched
at that moment I felt like crying, I felt terribly empty
Saileshvar, Saileshvar, do I really want love from this earth?
in this collapse to a foul hell filled with fear
even if I'll leave with a rope around my neck
I want to go to heaven
I don't like hell, I don't like it at all
let's go, I will kick away the door of an undiscovered heaven
come on, Sadhana, let us celebrate your "66" wedding
come on, Sadhana, let's make love with naked penis
the possessed Beatnik found a divine world in marijuana
I remain awake in my intoxication – a black awakening
or I'll break down wasted, like glass, in a public kick
there is no heaven in intoxication

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

no heaven in women
I have been restless enough
I have seen 501 penises washed in soap
I have seen microbes dying
I have seen infanticides
there is no way to come back to the other side of 30 thousand years
in that silent forest

but all these men, convicted, mistakes of nature
exile, my exile is on this earth
I don't want sin and inside the ugly rise of objects
yes, let this be over
and I don't even want love
I don't even need love
love is like an oracle
love is like a spring
love for a vagina like Taj Mahal, love for a penis like Taj Mahal
love for the body quickly fades away
yet I don't see any heaven out of the body
oh, the body – Rilke, I want to impregnate your Venus
I want her naked in copulation – all the *classic* forms of earth
I want to see everything like this

would I be free to wander after breaking Beauty
there can be no more divine dreams for me today
no divine woman
staying awake like Calcutta in the transcendental glow of this earth
but what a vast stream of time!

Like hard granite on a mountain
I am an ordinary man or a mad poet
I spread the light of my soul
all around only night – speak up Rainer Maria Rilke
say which prophecy you heard in the secret blue light
this starving Bengal and a Bengal putrefied in sultry vaginas
where many times I have seen my soul startling unnoticed
I can't hear any divine voice
because my soul is filled with its own blood
in which role will I scream out?
I can't control my penis
like Calcutta darkness

in the slope of time I have seen women
they were standing in the middle of things without hesitation – so natural!
which song did you sing to a woman?
which poetry did you read to her?
my hand overflows on her solemn breast
lips start hissing
she kisses – the mystery of her vagina upsets me
speak up, Rainer Maria Rilke

The emptiness of darkness roars like the waves of the distant ocean
but I have no urge
will I ring the bell against blind life?
mind – oh, it is mind that keeps the penis in erection
will I wander lonely and unsteady without milestones
a fading life burns in my soul

Blood coagulates in my soul
like a wind blowing in the night
the downfall of humanity in 100 international rapes
all over me there is a broken India
and the whole West
withdraws in the slippery vagina on the wicked path of U.N.O
seriously I don't want destruction but
resurrection does not mean Gandhi and Marx's mutual stimulation
I want a laxative and a beer
I want cigarettes and girls
I want love I want the poison of life I want death darkness
I want the essence of God I want prophecy I want contraceptives
I want to see all the money of the world burning
I want to see all the politics of the world burning
I want to see the sincere eyes of men, like mine

But my soul sets on fire
not even sincerity is of help
to be honest I see no way
I keep walking here like a blind man
speak up, Rainer Maria Rilke, say which prophecy did you hear
standing in this dangling creation

[Sen 2015: 59–61]

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

Poetry has Vanished from the World of Men [Mānuṣer pṛthibī theke kabitā šeṣ haye geche]

I walk in the midnight of an empty town
Far, aimless, I hear a call
like men's birth or secret skeletons
in the darkness close to the sea waves
death will wipe you out one day
we once used to be in love
all the love of the world will be destroyed in a black hole
the world of effaced poetry, the nights of Khalasitala and the nights of my love
my self-punishing running around on the empty road
a pocket with countless rupees (in dreams!)
all this is my ordinary life, my non-existing scream drowns in blood.
Today even poetry gets a taste of blood
it trembles all over in long sighs
some are scared of my existence
some leave with stooping heads
my scream full of blood will fade in my own breast –
not a shout will shake the earth, like men
a long time ago love was lost, suffering for love,
without love the heart spills blood, an empty heart, you
get drunk looking at the glimpse of a midnight light, do whatever
there is nothing like a divine life – looking at this little life an *obsessed* fear

or living in a hole of an immense and bleeding vacuum
men's alarmed stroll today in 1968 brings me close to indifference
why is there so much blood blood blood in my life?
who am I – who I am in this life of duties and embarrassment
I am standing like a celestial scream – implanted in poetry
worries cruelty awakens like immutability
for how long was I walking away from men
today I feel like coming back.

[Caṭṭopādhyāy 2015: 41]

Saileshvar Ghosh

To Pranati on the Street [Praṇatir janya rāstāy]

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.
1965 began yesterday
reading an English newspaper requesting volunteers for family planning in India
I thought that poetry is more fatal than a woman.
How fatal that
in September 1964 I spent sleepless nights
locked in Amherst Street Jail
the toilet was in the room
and there I saw all the prisoners pissing
that night after counting at least ten times with thieves
I dreamed of Pranati
After spending two nights with her
I felt a bit of love, really.
Perhaps she is thinking of something else
She is scared
seeing everywhere insult and mockery
Perhaps she will caress me even more this time
My whole day is passing very badly, and I cannot keep her face always alive
in my mind.

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
Seeing the quibbles that law gave to
thieves and associations of beggars
my blood became water
And seeing the publicity skills of the Ramakrishna Mission
I understood that I shall very soon die of anaemia.

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

Pranati, how hard it is to live like a man
to live like a husband, like a wife or a son
even living for one's own name is hard
to live by masturbation is even harder.
There's no sense in living only by writing poems.
Easier than everything is dying
Bimal had hairs on his chest
still he died
Nikhil weighed 160 pounds
still he died.
My head is reeling so I shall also die
Now, waiting for Pranati
back in my room we will think of something else,
and after sleeping in bed,
today I may be eager for something else!

[Ghoṣ n.d.: 25–26]

I am Hungry [*Āmi kṣudhārta*]

A woman turned into gold after I touched her body
I am a poor labourer, I live in Port Commission Quarter No. 5
at the touch of my breath the Communist Party of India split in two
my arms grew bigger my foot smaller my penis remained the same
I saw my mother sleeping with a god

My father lost everything in gambling – a crazy Van Gogh
had seen flames in the rice fields and in Tahiti's island
Gauguin's dog spread syphilis – I have pulled out
from my mouth a kind of sea whose tides don't swell, resist all attraction
I ran to my male friend after watching a boxing match on television.

I move around with you eat with you sleep with you
I steal your money to buy one woman after the other
when I enter a church its summit collapses, I am hungry
doors and windows of libraries close at my sight.

I was given ganja as payment for roasting roti bread
on the street I hear nothing but the sound of my own footsteps
my words light up the nuclear furnaces of India

when I'm really upset I fight with my friends
a friend stole ten rupees from me I hadn't returned him a hundred I borrowed
I don't give a shit, for I have tasted heavenly flesh
poetry rises like the monument, destroying my rationality
I tell the truth when I hallucinate – I see an angel
they fall apart at the impact of a rocket – when I'm hungry they drag me away
where my intestines fill with people's love

One of my friend is a bastard, another a traitor, another a murderer
they escaped to our gatherings without passports – another one
broke into railway wagons to loot all the aluminium ovens
I take my girlfriend to the bathroom – I am blind in one eye
I have never seen a Rolls Royce – I like smoking by myself
and if needed I push myself all the way to Dumdum Airport.

[Ghoṣ n.d.: 14–15]

I Plucked a Single Flower [Ek'ti phul chīmṛechi āmi]

I plucked a single flower and it was enough to break my world
every day I find my clothes ill-fitting on my body
I killed a bird whose song was meant to wake up the world
I will be released after destroying every faith!
Memories of sleeping with her father figure makes a woman sannyasi seek more
darkness
the grass knows that the lightning striking its breast is a game of power
at last I know that cutting off the stalk is the creator's finest act!

When there's a festival on the ground, from above us we are shown fear of
shipwrecks
our life is to watch, mesmerised, the male character playing the eunuch
a dervish had to self-immolate because his heart was overflowed with love
all the flowers that blossom on my cord, all of them are witches used to worship
you!
When I open my eyes I see the swan pierced by the arrow writhing in the pain of
death
if I nurse the swan back to life the hunter wants half of what I've saved
peace descends only at those moments when gold and iron cost the same!
When I pluck a flower, I'm a terrorist
I have offered my senses to the world

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

on the last train I heard the professional prostitute's enchanting song sitting with
the thieves
all weapons are off on pilgrimage now
murderers have located their personal sorrows,
the gods we have come to adore change their positions every day.
Like a serpent Satan coils himself around a young girl to drink from her breasts
the form in which I saw my mother from the womb burns bright in my memory
life demands from life, are all forms of violence your children?

I plucked a single flower and it was enough to break my world
a single tear falls on my face from space – I only gaze upwards
all the streams flowing from my body have gathered in a river
many kicks await you even if the scars from the shackles remain
the moment when terror was born, the world split in two, proponents and
opponents
when the Great Deluge begins every exponent of life seeks a safe sanctuary!

Thrust your son in the wedding bedroom, father, stand guard with your stick
over the iron bedroom, tonight he will be born and die soon after
the shortcut to heaven passes through hell!

I plucked a single flower and it was enough to break my world
a droplet of light self-immolates to reveal the image of my darkness!

[Sen 2015: 47–48]

Puck-talk with a Horse [extract from *Ghoṛār sāṅge bhautik kathābārtā*]

I

We'll not hang poetry upon treesky, tree itself has sprung up in the bedroom
Gravity pulls the tree knows smuggling – in the very bedroom goes on
Ceaseless alarm-attack; rises with the tree for long
Loveloverylove -. Ten years' rejected auction at Calcutta
Ratesupply sleep & love's pricelevel high – change hands at sharemarket
Heart fallback for daylong – for wholeday 33 impotents gestate
For wholeday oh Horse poetry's ghostly hunger remain!

II

For many years love begun many years with 33 ghosts
Spasms in ledger at calcuttabengal –

Many years totemyarn on mainroad whither oh Horse
Poetry erupts grazing grassweeds over 100 girls' breast!

III

100 housewives eat pregnancy-ritual, poetry alone bleed
We've opened charitable dispensary in the urinal
Calcutta dissolves – within heart copulationcluehavoc etc
Are bleached & blanched – hey, we don't trade in flour
100 satans turn together ghosts during day, breed mills & factories,
100 satans together cause abortion to housewives-
100 satans' variant tyranny suits wonder
What's this oh Horse poetry's daylong menstrual ooze!

IV

Too much woe accumulate by age 26 as if not age 26
Sleepjuice rot for 26 years yet don't grant view
Oh wordly oh trascendental oh cruel yet don't grant view
Crocodiles take away harvest at 26 – waterhill
Explodes transports appropriate by 26
Sitting unfamished the swindler within harlot's church
Upon 26 itself ravishes 26 years
Gradualcommencements occur in blood malignant spirits appear
26 messing years absurd anyhow
Oh Horse why never met for 26 cruel years!

(Malay's translation in *Hungry Generation #60*)

From 6 to 7 [☺ theke 9 er dike]

When the bell tolls at Cathedral church on my personal pulpit
a mast arises
with the sound of birth the empire's iron stone turns into dust
my memory befuddles when I place my hand on my lover's breast
when love is destroyed at Chowringhee Hotel in the Santhal village drowns
the sun of the aboriginals
when flowers of the secret garden are thrown to God
they explode like a hand-bomb
a dainty beggar like a king from the last century told me
about his dreams
screams of victory processions appear to me like the defeated grief

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

at 5 pm 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 sent me to house no. 7 instead of no. 6!

[Ghoṣ 2011: 89–90]

Last Copulation [Śeṣ sahabās]

Death of men will take place only within the love of men
no man would waste his money
no woman would throw her waist ornament in the water
is there any meaning to our seas?
A child's cry, a beggar's smile, a prisoner's wish
they suffer more after released
for 20 or 25 years I will also have to use my sex organ
will have to wipe off my forehead's sweat
will have to pick up on my shoulders the festoon of a homosexual god
will have to listen to victory song, will have to give out the paddy of prosperity
or silver
will have to see price negotiations between brother and sister
my life does not light up like an electric bulb in a dark room
there is no childhood, no hereditary judgement for fathers
palms joined like the judgement seeker –
7 billion birth evasion of god Varaha Avatara
between the thighs the flower of my coitus
I also love
live
die like this
because the last copulation never happens, nightmare remains a fact.

[Ghoṣ 2011: 93]

The New Beginning of Realism [Bāstabatār punarārambha]

I.

Sabita, humans get nothing more than fear in coming to life. For the whole night, the blue candle of secrecy burns in your room. When I leave, you will again wait on the staircase. The child's hope will scream in the darkness: "Dad, oh dad, where did you go? Take me with you". All over the small lanes that surround your house I smelled that scent, Sabita. One day in the morning you will be able to hear the cancer in your uterus – what will I ask, what happened to you? Doubled up, living with your angry and tired tubes – I know, we must take this long-practiced drug. One of us will see the magnanimity engraved in the face of the imprisoned child and say: "Can you recognise me? You don't have to forgive me for ruining your mother, you don't have to forgive me. The three of us have found out the darkness in the sky known as truth!

2.

There's no feeling of cold or heat in my open body. Rape me. Why are you, human, turning your eyes away from the controlled room? Come and sit, look, this is my girl. I brought her and gave her to your hands. We don't know prostitution, we have no clothes to hide the robbed money – am I a refugee, then? I don't even know where I'm coming from, I don't know – in this open body of mine there is no feeling at all. Rape me or take my girl. Give her a little place to sleep next to your feet on the cold pavement. Do you remember where you want to go? Do you have money to go back to the old woman [at the brothel]? Is that your whole family? I don't remember, I don't remember anything of what happened. But I had a dream: that while leaving nobody would tell us anything, this is the rule, that when I say "take me or my girl" then everybody would say "don't disturb us, we are servants, we have work to do".

(*Kṣudhārta* 2, 1972–3)

False Story [Alīk galpa]

I accepted to be the fictional character of a false story. I've accepted to be a man who satisfies all the desires awaking at night in his body. I was told that I'll have to destroy all my enemies and stay alive. That I will steal their women, seize their land and gold. That I'll have to expand this sexual body towards death. Just like my ancestors went to work, learned to hide the bunch of keys in the pages of a book on sex – the conscious and the subconscious deep inside of their body – they went to work for gambling both phantasies of their whole being. The proud and

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

full-of-himself will reject all these methods and rules. I am a man who learned the mantra of reincarnation after death. I accept that there's gravity in the parietal bone. I accept that my son's hand has descended below his waist. I accept your weary life, the misfortune of the living, leaning towards right or left, true land true light true darkness. I know I have nothing more than death. In my mother's womb, in the girl's womb – reincarnation happens gradually, entering the reincarnated body bit by bit. I have become truth in this darkness, silence, a monocellular crab. Wait like the weak, the opportunity seeker, the wound for rubbing, the flame for friction. Let the work start – attack! The cruel imagination becomes real in the smell of putrefaction. You false character, take a look at the real shape of your sister through the door lock. Do we stay human if we leave charm and wealth? No, for if this nightmarish experience of bodily convulsion stops, our imagination and bestiality will both be ruined. But it would be nice to know how this story ends. At the beginning of realism today, both hands are just hanging according to their own rules!

(*Kṣudhārta* 2, 1972–3)

[Ghoṣ 2011: 253–254]

Shakti Chattopadhyay

Border Proposal 1 (Addressed to the Prime Minister) [Sīmānta prastāb 1 – Mukhyamantrīr pratinibedan]

A beggar boy loved to stare at the boiled rice
and examined
the paddy plants spread in the moonlight
at the roots of the paddy
like silent waterfilled butter
glossy puffed up paddy in earth's simplicity –
Can paddy turn into rice?
Silent gods can talk
iron can melt
like supine women on the wooden region?
Yet that beggar boy would have loved to like rice.
He would have loved how many philosophies in life
even beyond life
how many intoxicated by cannabis
even living without paddy, without a woman, without moonlight

there must be something above.
Above all this there is God Oppressor of the Traveller
above all this there is God for Human Beings
busy in giving two bowls of rice to the beggar boy
contemporary like grass, even bigger than a bus
to carry everything.

The beggar's good boy was shaved
Many bad boys
never bothered about love
they are alive
they are clean too
how many good fruits like amla exist on earth
the beggar's good boy bad boy dropped from the beggar father's belly
in a phenomenal chaos Chinese peace is taking place on earth, freedom,
 melancholy and so on
stand close to war
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 Krushchev
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
from the party of the "snow hyenas" borders of a troubled India
with the red flag of blasphemy, only with the limping hunger of the body
seeing through the eyes of the snow hyenas the painted emaciated hunger
 of the women
Chief Minister, send a bunch of Hungry poets
although they can't write, they can devour transcendently
they devour the entire border and discuss the issue at the coffee house
there is perhaps not much difference between modern prose and verse
in Bengal marriages take place at 3,30
give Jyoti Basu a leather garland from Bentick Street
how was Soumitra's performance in *The Expedition*?
why can't people take poetry as they take rice

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

will they take it once war is over? Even beggars have understood poetry
why won't you understand, dear professor, Chief Minister Sen?

(*Hungry Bulletin*, 1962)

[Cattopādhyāy 2015: 21]

Art and Bullet [*Śilpa o kārṭuj*]

No daredevil is there to come and piss in my mouth,
he knows I will bite, knows that who would reconstruct
Lord Buddha without limbs, other than the mad Ramkinkar Baij?
only once in life I have told an art-loving lady
groping the naked left parts: "what do you think?"
Art is enough! Why then a bullet was hung to the body?

(*The Hungry Generation* 5: 9)

Sandipan Chattopadhyay

Border Proposal 2 [*Śīmānta prastāb 2*]

The main perception about death is that:
1, it is an attack. 2, it is surely unexpected, but not secret, it is foretold.
3, many people do not die together. Death one by one,
attacks one at a time. Death does not have the capacity
to devastate all human beings.

I will say: this is a great unequal war. Disease
happens when, after cured, people think "I am alive". With a smile, one should
say "this is wrong".

Nobody gets cured of death. Still, life is about other people,
we think that we are all living together. But nobody ventures out of home think-
ing that

"we are not going anywhere", that's why we always go out thinking "where are
we going"

If we remain silent, people will make us notice that we have spoken in fear.
Why don't we roam around all alone, singularly? In that case,
death won't seem vulgar at all.

When a person falls, everyone turns their neck to see him. I know these days the power of men respecting each other has grown, nobody says ah... still, how obscene is this act of looking.

That is why, if there is time, one should go *deliberately* alone. One should cross big and lonely fields more often. If everyone *singles out* oneself in this fashion, there's won't be to pick up anyone from the middle of the crowd.

If reaching the centre of the field, the whirling red will run and cover you, only a place will be left after the dust storm, the perspective of its time.

Everyone, one by one and alone, should go into the field.

What is the use of refusing? We don't want that the Yeti comes and puts its hands on our shoulders.

We have dressed ourselves. We wanted to avoid the unexpected attack. We don't want that someone finds us unprepared. Only for that we have kept us dignified, shaved our beard everyday.

Let us be called in the field. We are ready.

Communist Party

When the communists of this country are trying to live, let them live. Who is going to loose for that?

Sin [Pāp]

Kissing inside the temple is not right, not right, not right – that's why the police retreated. A sin was committed.

Love [Bhālobāsā]

When love rises, foolishness piles up. Today that redeeming foolishness is no longer there. Today on the throne sits a heavy and big brain. Heart does not have the capacity to dethrone it. Today who seats in whose place.

Fear [Bhay]

Who has placed only one book upside down on the shelf? It wasn't me at midnight!

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

Friends [Bandhubāndhab]

Shakti's ship has sunk. The rope and chains are torn off. Sunil is walking with a torch. Shankar is my dog, I belong to Shankar
Dipak is now in Bhagalpur. Bhaskar has captured everything, ahah other than Jolly Folly Sharat doesn't like anything else. Can't see Sunil in the darkness. He walks with a torchlight only Ketaki and Ashutosh keep walking around together. Shakti dangerously plunges into water, now he floats with the help of a buoy. The buoy swings in one place, it doesn't flow away. In the strong sunlight, Deepen walks around covered with a corpse. Only Ketaki and Ashutosh...when one gets love, hope gets ruined from the roots. Their embraced roots are clearly visible in the water. Only Ketaki and Ashutosh are floating. Where do they go? They float and go to Chowringee, Dunlop bridge, Tiljala, Shyambazar, Chetla, they go to Bandel. From where did Bhaskar, Shakti, Sharat and Sunil get a cigar! All four light the cigar. Ketaki and Ashutosh's head float away from Chowringee. Goes to Chetla, Ultadanga, Behala, Bandel, Baranagar. Their rooted embrace passes away in front of Shakti, Sharat, Sunil and Bhaskar, swinging.

The Expedition [Abhiyān]

The movie "The Expedition" did not create any reaction in me. I haven't spent anything else except for three hours. What is the use of inviting people to watch such type of film and drama, isn't such usefulness over? Not that. This thing is either third or fourth class or mediocre production or a complete failure. Whatever that be. It is true that it is not first class at all, neither story nor its application. MA graduated driver, chaste harlot, completely positive and commercial, if you take away the hookah pipe and bowl from it, what is the difference from Bollywood films?

The *idiosyncrasy* of journalists for "The Expedition" is incomparable.

Even if it was a first-class movie, what is the purpose of inviting people? Opportunity and contentment of being seated without any purpose for three hours with about a thousand people like me? Whether the thermo nuclear war will take place today or tomorrow? It won't take place? It is difficult to think about it now. Many people in Europe go to the theatre or to watch a movie without thinking about this, but they go with their hands around the waist of a friend. Women don't go alone, nobody goes alone, at least men, everybody goes after a drink; they have surplus time even after drinking and purchasing tickets with dirty money, and even after that they may go for a drink.

Those who went to Indira cinema at all, those who went alone, they learned to drink (not intoxicants, hashish, mescaline, cannabis, opium or drugs, result of all the education and intelligence, let us assume, drinking). Then, since in India we do not have extra money in our pockets for cultural ‘intervals’, would anyone go to Indira cinema hall instead of drinking?

Note 1. Today in any reunion that would be established by the Hungry Generation the one who would be welcomed with flowers is Kanan Bala. For example, the dedication for art on behalf of this dancer, singer and actress in this country is now not anymore in vogue. This multi-talented woman some time ago said: “there are three stars today in Bengal: Suciitra Sen, Uttamkumar and Satyajit Ray”.

Note 2. The cinema hall would have been empty, libraries vacant, nobody would have gone to see the real circus. Who would have agreed to spend on anything other than drinks. Idiots or people like me whose liver is damaged. No one would have gone to Indira without drinking.

The Prostitute [Beśyā]

There must be a mirror in a prostitute’s room, a wall-size mirror, small or big mirrors of cheap or expensive sizes, a few of them decorated.

Rarely I have seen food, but there are vessels. Vessels of glass, brass metal or bronze coated. These could be essential pieces of information about a prostitute,

that 1, she loves receiving presents; 2 she has a “soul”

3, her shamelessness is almost true; 4 she is fundamentally stupid

5, she behaves always as if there wasn’t anyone in front of her.

There is only one thing about her that must be carefully considered:

what is her state of mind when someone makes use of her body.

When a person comes by, she can be happy, disturbed, she can even hate him.

She is never jealous. When a “person” undresses her,

she is irritated, but once naked she feels comfortable, easy.

However, most of the men don’t take off their dresses together. Before lights go off,

they keep at least their underwear or their vest on. He sees the prostitute’s nakedness,

but won’t let her see his nakedness. After that, when they follow certain rules, the prostitutes,

they are helped by Satan or God,

that’s why they rarely suffer.

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

Malay Roy Choudhury

Against the Freedom of the Artist [Śilpīr svadhīnatār biruddhe]

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
Civilisations 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
Poetry is meant to hurt the flesh
it's not my wish to wound men because I'm against that kind of violence
a poet has to fight empty-handed because he is real
a poet has to build his own way by himself
he shouldn't obtain freedom through bargaining and begging.
he shouldn't cry to get freedom from the outside
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
this is 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 anyone to guarantee for my Freedom
I will write whatever I please
I will write whatever I like, it doesn't matter where I am
I listen to the fragmented tides of my blood slapped by the moon

I don't demand my own Freedom to anyone
Poetry will kick the ass of million governments
all insane civilisations will knee down to Poets
no nuclear bomb can threaten the divinity of time
which is Poetry.

[Dutt 1986: 3]

Drinking Theory [Madyapān tattva]

Even now I am drinking alone, oh good gracious!
a few ounces of rice liquor
stale palm tree toddy
fried pork meat
scotch or Martini –
don't like this at all
a few jackals on the veranda
sing a blind chant
throughout the night, blowing a cigar
pulling out the spectacles from the left side,
I sit in silence
I know the earth and the motherfucker
called Dhruv, he
will accept
that racket will be
or call it as you wish

Bite [Kāmar]

India, Sir, for how long will you go on like this, seriously, I don't like it
India, I have eaten the kichuri of your jail for a whole month, that means 30 days
since September 1964 I have no job, do you know India
do you perhaps have a 20 rupees note?
India, they're bad, even rats are eating your paddy
what did they tell you, India, in Surabardi's control room?
tell me, nah! – I'm happy too, for god's sake, I can make *caricatures* too!
and where is Calcutta going after all this Neem-renaissance I don't know
India, do publish a couple of writings on Ultarath, Desh or Nabakollol magazines
I'll become a genius too or pass by Shantiniketan

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

I'll worship literature, give me a full dhoti-punjabi suite
this afternoon let's drop by at the liquor shop in Khalasitala, I will perform Ben-
gali culture
India, why are you not building an atomic bomb
if it explodes it will fill the whole sky!
will you take LSD? Both stoned in the sun at Nimtala with a packet
India, take this handkerchief and wipe your spectacles
let me win at this year's elections, please
I will wait at Chilka lake
on tomorrow's newspaper which speech will you deliver, India?
I've snatched away the keys to intoxicate you
India, I've secretly read love letters written for you
why don't you cut your nails? There's ink on the brink of your eyes
why don't you smear more ink paste on your teeth today?
you give blood for blood but if we do then it's us to blame
I won't worry about the cat's claw
how about we take a breath and make a compromise with yourself
India, raise 144 sections from the paddy fields
send all the great books of the world to Vietnam, oh oh
let's see if the war stops or not
India, say, really, what do you want

(Hungry Bulletin, 1966)

Pickpocket from Phulia [Phuliyār hāt'tān]

A dove flies for peace with a time bomb tied on its chest
a strange old man cannot eat
and keeps stumbling and falling on the sand hiding his face
it looks like the syringes have burnt his thigh-bones
it feels like I haven't seen the creaking of the grasshopper's half-closed legs for
so long
one day the greying hair of my corpse will flutter like that
there will be no explanation about building a bomb on lost men's day
the son of the milkman peed his pants for fear of eating cow meat
his thighs tremble out of panic for the 45 rupees rent he owes to his relatives
burnt carbide in their kisses blown in the wind
from the crumpled old leaves of the *shaal* tree
sniffing the sour fragrance of veg curry
vermillion paste smeared on both their foreheads

we've been smelling the delicious taste of a cooked kebab in the teats of so many
goats
the light of all the stars will reach our eyes after 4 ½ thousand years
will make a light year enter the time bomb
pigeons have made chimpanzees fly

(*Hungry Bulletin*, 1966)

Tumultuous Suicide [Tul'kālām ātmahatyā]

The word death is wrapped around the tongue, yet I
think about my own corpse in the mirror I can almost see
myself exactly as that corpse ordinary perverted as a result poetry or art
living or love or the same work every day on the street
beneath the tram's greasy wheels, Jibanananda's reddish eyes
in the fountain of young girls with Allan Poe
a naked gay in a bunch of grapes with Blake
we all need each other
my mother's picture hangs loosely on my head, the glass cracked in hundreds by
bullets
many are discussing about art
I hanged Tolstoy and Rabindranath's pictures, a coal-mine light
two cross-shaped unsheathed daggers
I remember the funeral procession of my dead brother
a naked hurly-burly of sweet young girls with wrapped souls
heated shield and sword enlightened by curiosity
the columns of Athens splashed on the forehead
that blood
the talent of the blind king Dhritarashtra in abusing Gandhari
the misery of thinking art as a decorative veil, word after word
the begging of children of the future dwelling in the middle of an iron pot
there's no such thing as a heart
we'll have to lie down in Ceylon, Sumatra and Java
huge cave-digging Buddha under rain and storm
after a thousand years from the bottom of the soil my big finger and uvula
a chandelier circulates in every house from one corner to the other
after scattering a handful of dust I want to proclaim:
let me think of myself
set the fire somewhere at night
let us all come back to our funeral pyres after robbing women

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

lifted of all troubles, let us take a deep breath on top of the pyre
for whom will all this paper be *free*
the utility of printed characters is over now
man did not profit from the flood of civilisation and culture
fools have increased
the stupidity of the creators of poetry and nuclear weapons
bodies of women have shaken
the echo of all their laughs
an empty love for laughter and a market of syphilis
once upon a time the beautiful and the auspicious was good
Reason was good
God was good
the Aztecs thought death was good
today there's nothing good except for suicide
an irresponsible kiss on a beheaded body
let live or die

(*Hungry Bulletin*, 1965)

Iron Rod [Lohār rod]

A wheel putrefies on breast mucus in belches maybe an inert whispering
the oppressive fascism of people suppresses my screams
their police goes on with investigation on the spot on top of my head's hair
they arrested a couple with grey hair
in the darkness someone scratches the rough skin of his legs
I see a fresh green juice floating in their tears
in five or six years the right side of my body will turn numb for paralysis
where the half-chewed grains of rice stop for a while
the firmly tied body's intestines will crack
there's nothing I can do, my nose's hair oozes in my breaths
before that I will get down a couple of times
in the voting list of Gariya, Punjibajar and Sonagachi
I will get down from the *up-country* party
I will see picked up from the wind the pollen of sun-plant and silk-cotton plants
men press and beat each other in a war of pillows
they will gain sexual freedom after marriage
through the oesophagus I will distribute cancer to the vaginal silk
my bones from my mother's fortress body
a very good extract will come out of bones powder

men will believe in an earth as round as an orange
a pear or a nutmeg
the earth will learn from the scrotum how to grow and shrink down

(*Hungry Bulletin*, 1966)

Apology to Rabindranath [Rabīndranāther kāche kṣamāprārthanā]

Today I see my corpse properly arranged in an aluminium box
half rib-bones scorched in the burning flame
forgive me
let my human brain rot
let my nails and teeth rot
keep me imprisoned by the elephant's chain
I want to see if the shark jumps out of the sea of blood
kick the rice plate and crash the glass of water to the ground
forgive me
sons perform the funeral ritual of fire with the masturbation hand
the silent copulation of insects besides the root of the wild cotton grass
for a long time I wasn't able to spit on their faces
this year during the rice harvest many dead bodies have fallen
our scream in the Betla jungle for hunting the bison
the deer's meat was cut with a spade
my sons and daughters played in the tower of Betla
and extirpated the hare's eyes
I want to keep my body alive in the aluminium box
forgive me

(*Hungry Bulletin*, 1967)

Terrific Electric Carpenter [Pracaṇḍa baidyutik chuṭār]

Oh, I'll die I'll die I'll die
the minute of my skin burns in the undisputable trump card
what will I do where will I go oh, nothing pleases me
I'll kick all the literary trash in the ass, Shubha
Shubha, let me sneak under your cloaked watermelon
in the loose shadow of a saffron mosquito net in a fragmented darkness
the last anchor is leaving me after all the anchors have been lifted

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

and I can't take it anymore, innumerable fragments of glass are breaking in the
cortex

I know, Shubha, spread your vagina, give me peace
every vein carries along a flow of tears up to the heart
the contagious sparks of the brain are rotting in an eternal sickness
mother, why didn't you give me birth in the form of a skeleton?
then I would kiss God's ass for billions of light years
but nothing pleases me, nothing pleases me
if I gave more than one kiss my body would be nauseated
how many times have I forgotten women after rape and came back to Art
in the solar bladder of poetry
what's going on I don't know, yet it happens inside me
I'll destroy everything, dude
I'll shatter your rib-caged festivals
I'll drag and elevate Shubha in my hunger
Shubha will surrender to me
oh Malay
today Calcutta seems like a procession of wet and slippery heads
but I don't understand what I should do with myself
my power of recollection is fading away
let me walk alone towards death
I didn't have to learn about rape and death
I didn't have to learn the responsibility of shedding the last drops after urination
I didn't have to learn to lie beside Shubha in the darkness
I didn't have to learn how to use French leather lying on Nandita's breast
yet I wanted the vigour of Aleya's fresh Chinarose vagina
on the queen of the vaginas the vigour of sweat like fragments of glass
today I walk towards the cataclysm refuging in my brain
I don't understand what I want to live for
I think about my debauched Sabarna Choudhury ancestors
I'll have to do something new and different
let me sleep for one last time on the skin of Shubha's breasts as soft as a bed
I remember the scorching radiance of the moment when I was born
I want to see my own death before leaving this world
Malay Roy Choudhury was of no use to this world
let me sleep for a few moments in your violent silvery *uterus*, Shubha
give me peace, give me peace
let my sinful skeleton be washed in your menstruation
give me birth again from your womb with my own semen
would I have been like this even if my parents were different?
would I have become Malay alias me from a completely different semen?

would there be Malay if my father had impregnated another woman?
without Shubha would I have become a business man like my dead brother
oh please, let somebody answer all this
Shubha, oh Shubha
let me see the world through your cellophane hymen
come back to the green mattress one more time, Shubha
like *cathode* rays sucked up with the glow of a sharp magnet
I remember the letter of that final decision in 1956
at that time the surroundings of your *clitoris* were being decorated with bear skin
rib-smashing aerial roots were then falling on your breast
stupid relationships are inflated on the way to senseless neglect
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah
I don't understand whether I'll die or not
tumult was happening within the heart's entire loneliness
I'll break and destroy everything
I'll break everybody into pieces for the sake of Art
there is no other chance for Poetry except for suicide
Shubha
let me enter in the immemorial incontinence of your *labia majora*
let me go into the absurdity of griefless effort
in the golden chlorophyll of the drunken heart
why wasn't I lost in my mother's urethra?
why wasn't I shaken away in my father's urine after his self-coition?
why wasn't I mixed with phlegm in the menstruation?
yet supine with eyes half-shut beneath me
I suffered terribly when I saw Shubha seized by comfort
even after unfolding their faces in helplessness women can be treacherous
today I feel there is nothing as treacherous as women and art
now my ferocious heartbeat is running towards an absurd death
vortexes of water are coming up to my neck from the pierced earth
I will die
oh what are all these things happening inside me
I'm failing to catch my hand and my palm
from the sperm drying on my pyjama wings are spreading
30000 children fly away towards Shubha's bosoms
in flocks needles are running from blood to poetry
now the smuggling of my stubborn staff wants to enter
into the death-killing sexual wig entangled in the hypnotic kingdom of sounds
on aggressive mirrors hanging on every wall of this room I see
after releasing a few naked Malays, his unestablished conflict

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

Undecided Abode [*Amīmāṃsita ābās*]

The wheel of the cow's chariot cried in the night on the way to the village
I woke up, in the darkness I searched for the door in every corner of the room –
yet touching the wall on the left I realised a window was there all day;
groping in the darkness, putting the arm in a niche in the wall
I couldn't break the earth.

By that time the fading sound of the wheels was rolling far away.

(*Saitāner mukh*, 1963)

I [*Āmi*]

Drowning my hand
into
the water
I know it's my hand
into broken
water
then death / love / doubt / sin seems easy
God motherfucker bastard son of a bitch, look! I broke my hand

[Rāy'caudhurī 2005]

Phalguni Ray

Television of a Rotten Soul

Right Here [*Eikhāne*]

Right here the ocean merges into the river, a star melting into the sun
right here the tram's bell signals the bad driving and the stops
standing right here with a cigarette between the lips
I hear the secret sounds of poetry
touching the cold and the warmth of my blood
next to poetry the soul's screams and curses right here
the moon behind the foggy mist right here falls on the prostitute's menstruation

right here a 323 BC Greek hero forgets his desire of sex and rape
to implant valour and prowess in history right here
forgetting the taste of the soft body of Vishnupriya
Chaitanya's raised-arm love spreads from one woman to humanity – above all
the erect phallus of a man stays awake above history and religious conscious-
ness, right here

right here the scent of love of unsatisfied lover emerges from the grave
millions of mocking faces increase my ambition right here
my heart sinks when eyes meet real inquisitive eyes right here
right here one must go beyond reverential looks
I walk mile after mile in the hope to see a girl's face
only crowds of sluts
27 years – alone 27 years lying on my personal bed I see
poems of poets of poets close to brainless future sickly-nerves
all around me solid soundless dark in muddy four walls.

My Rifle, my Bible [Āmār rāiphel, āmār bāibel]

My rifle, my bible
with these two verses in my pocket I walk along the street of stories and poetry
along this street there's a road and a bazar named after a revolutionary from the
era of fire and the memorial of a martyr from the 1970s

and the shadow of the new library of the old university falls on the waters of Col-
lege Square

a bit further there's the morgue of Medical College and just opposite to the
morgue

a road runs between the temple and the library leading straight to the brothel

I walk along this way towards stories and poetry –

there are two poems instead of notes in my shirt-pocket

and below the pocket there's the undershirt below which there's my skin

and below the skin there's my heart

the bones of my heart have been cut by impersonal voices

but I didn't go to the Bone-cut [Harkāṭā] brothel area

yet now with some words I walk towards stories and poetry

I run to books with hunger to read

I run to lover with hunger for love and penis

but books haven't returned all this

the woman has

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

since then I sit by aquariums of red and blue fishes
and eat fried fishes,
instead of getting horny by the whore's big breasts I have only observed the
 mounds of flesh of her breasts
I have seen toothpaste being advertised in the bright teeth of my ex's husband but
 I haven't seen him smiling
at Ramakrishna crematorium there's Nimai sadhu
he eats well-cooked human flesh torn from burning corpses
considers this as his offer to god
he eats silt from the Ganges when he's hungry
he even eats his own shit and smokes marijuana singing the name of Hari
many think of him as Liberated
I also want liberation but that doesn't mean tearing and eating burnt flesh of
 burning dead corpses or eating mud or one's own shit
even Che Guevara wanted Liberty
and when India was ruled by others a poet had once written that
where the farmer breaks the earth to till and sow and the roads toil for twelve
 months
that's where god is
god is not at home
things like these were written about Freedom before independence
today I'm a poet of independent India
I see the unadulterated smile of countless kids chained in poverty and I think of
their path to Freedom – with two poems instead of grenades in my pocket I walk
towards stories and poetry – on this street there's a road and a bazar named after
a revolutionary from the era of fire and there's a memorial for a martyr from the
1970s on this road

Black Divinity [Kālo dibyatā]

Beside your world my feast of suicide
my song of self-willed death
has given me the great honour of Nirvana.

Here everything is done with words neutral to the tongue
the penis awakes and becomes a flute

and then, Black Divinity attacks
its piercing genius bursts out in a loud sharp laughter
trills of music vibrate out of jokes and dazzle their meaning

is Sound the Absolute Universe? Is everything Sound?
WhorePoetryLoveVagina or god or astronaut
well-mannered and obscene words are these the Absolute Universe?

I don't know, I don't know anything
but Satan, with his body of memory, keeps saying
Sounds, Words, Sentences, Sounds, Sentences, Words
Who's there? Where are you? Who are you, you crazy?
mad, melancholic, detached, come unveil this
unhistorical self-inscription *hitching fitching* countless monotony without
intoxication

what's all this going on inside my head? only memory arrives
and swallows this insane alphabet and then suddenly
all the past becomes a knife and along its sharp edges
walks and gasps at life, the hatha yogi

I stand below sullen skies and see all stairways winding down towards the
waters, I don't see
anything
I see the hilsa fish swimming from the ocean towards the sweet waters of the
mountains
tying its silvery existence up with humans from East Bengal and Mohanbagan
football clubs
and even hesitant men tying themselves to love because of the tugs of sex

In the urban neon light
beside my lonely shadow
instead of your lonely shadow
a tail attached to my body

I forget stuff like Darwin's theory or how to spell Freud's name and I walk this
road
the shadow of my prehistoric masculine walks beside me and then
I do not remember anything else
I do not remember whom I have cheated and who flicked ten rupees from me
I forget about literature through the diary of sorrow and even on Vietnam day I
forget about the Vietnam problem

In that moment I remember that every afternoon at five after college
you hang out with your boyfriend and I would walk alone

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

I look at the healthy asses of all those young men and regret
that I am not homosexual
beside your world this suicide feast of mine
this song of self-willed death
has given me the great honour of Nirvana.

Thus honoured, I walk the streets
my patella falls off my knees
I kneel and sit but I can't bow before anyone anymore
thoughts of love make the root of my teeth freeze in pain

of course I can cure all these diseases
because even before I began repenting the absence of tail and homosexuality,
I walked the roads,
alone and lethal, I
actually keep on hoping for life
even after walking from the maternal womb to the pyre

I used to walk – will walk – shall keep on walking
I used to walk with a universe of poets and scientists above my head
three traffic lights beside my head and body
walking through the brothel districts with drunk poets
I thought of Savitri and Satyavan
a burning candle would shoot up my head at that time
the *ghee* of Brahma's crown ablaze in rage and all my hair burnt down to ashes

of course I would keep the others hypnotised they could only see and hear my
shabby clothes
and Tagore's songs from my bearded post-ganja face
they wouldn't see that I have become a more skilled comedian than Charlie
Chaplin
in comedies I see my own comedy and its tragedy
to that sadness I react with a loud laughter that shatters the poetry-feasts of those
joyful clowns
and even those new mothers giving birth to dead babies
silent in grief
and all those vain lovers who promised to loot
from the pyres the vaginas of their lost beloved women
even they awoke –
all the broken melodies of life suddenly filled them with life

but I had stopped laughing
and right then –

All quiet on the furious front

Rimbaud's Paris or Miller's America

would come down easily on Khalasitala's country liquor shop

is that the Ganges? Is that the Jordan? Is that the Colorado?

everything mixes up and becomes like one thing

Black divinity would arrive from the midland between knowing and unknowing

would let me know that the colour of the menstrual blood

of the Honours Graduate student from Calcutta Women's College

is the same of that of a whore in the Bone-cut brothel

Black divinity would arrive from the middle land between sleep and awakening
and would let me know that

just like the Hungries

even Communist men need girls to love

Black divinity would arrive from the midland between remembrance and
forgetting

would let me know that close to sexuality women become

Ambrosia

Black divinity would come from the midland between dharma and adharmā

and let me know that you are infinite you are bliss

Today next to your world this suicide-feast of mine

this song of self-willed death

has given me the great honour of Nirvana.

Coming Back to Verbs [Kriyāpader kāche phire ās'chī]

I am drunk that's why my family-oriented and pious friends keep some distance
from me

on trams, trains, buses, pavements

I can't control the things I say

I can't do that at all

I saw a wife from a good family having multiple partners
surpassing whores

I throw money

I throw shattering laments and catch shattering laughter

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

I tried to keep my eyes on those of my girl
one hundred snakes shot out of vision
and slithered towards her
I hanged beefsteaks on the sanctified tufts of brahmin priests
to test the forbearance of the religious sacraments

every afternoon, except for Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, at 12.30 in the
sunlight

I try to listen to the songs of Tagore from the *paan* shop
I will loot all the rice from that *Shonar tori*, Tagore's Golden Boat
and give it to all the beggars of Shantiniketan
and I will row an empty boat and sing songs of the 22nd of *Shrabon*
along the flooded streets of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation
and I will sing "*ke jabi pare o go tora ke*"

I have hung an artificial snake on Christ's statue
I am the groundwork of sex behind the love between my parents
I tried to reject verbs but I return
to places nearby verbs

I Have No Conflict with People [Mānuṣer sanḡe kono birodh nei]

No, I have no conflict with people anymore
now if my creditor had an accident I'd take him to hospital
I can easily ask for a cigarette to my ex-lover's husband
as easy as growing a beard I am in this life

in Ramakrishna's devotion to Kali I see universal sexual peace
in Babli's devotion to her husband I see universal sexual happiness
if I loose a single slipper I buy a new pair
no, I have no conflict with people anymore

my uncomfortable gaze shifts from my sister's breasts
on the day of bhaiphota [brothers and sisters' day] I wander in the prostitutes'
area

if I die I will see the *corridor* of second births
until the moment before my birth I didn't know I would be born
I am a man without redemption involved in destiny
I am a man without destiny involved in terrorism
I have seen a dog crying in me constantly

for his bitch, a sannyasi becomes an eager debauch
to spoil the self-imposed virginity of the woman sannyasi
and even heavenly love is pulverised by this debauchery
eventually I'm in favour of seeking the joy of life instead of rhythm in poetry
that's why I have no conflict with life
no conflict with people

Fresh Information [Ph'reś in'phar'meśan]

Instead of informing about the mating of dogs the mid-September sun tells me
that autumn has come
I knew about the hidden relation between stars and ships from the neighbouring
fishing nets on the river
a friend of mine who became marine engineer told me how to determine the
direction of the ocean with the help of a compass after I'm gone what will
remain all around me?

When you get a glimpse of autumn in the mid-September sun then anyone would
eat mangoes from a half-ripe tree like my father
after he's gone I will eat mangoes from that half-ripe tree
I will die just like that and you will eat half-ripe mangoes
my ancestors that is Einstein or that affair about Rabindranath's famous
conversations
that is if there were no men there would be no meaning in the handsome Apollo's
idol of beauty
but even if there were no men the earth sun universe will be fine

What I want to say is that without men
nobody would be there to tell that the mango would be sweet also in the state of
unripe-ness
therefore, men have named "sun" the sun and "candle" the candle
It was men who said that apes were the ancestors of men or
humankind announced that this science is phonetics the other is philology
this disease is called Filariasis and that is a penis, flesh etc. etc.

In this situation what can we do
if a poet struggles to find his own voice?
I call "water" what my great grandparents used to call "water"
I call "fire" what my great grandparents used to call "fire"
it means that the sons and grandsons will say what their fathers said

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

the material name of things will be the same as the object, only the ideas behind them will change

like in ancient times the penis was seen only as organ of reproduction

today the penis is seen also as the radar of telepathic communication

many people have seen an apple falling from a tree but Newton did not see only the apple falling

he discovered gravity with it

Bhaskara had certainly discovered the law of gravity in other ways

and long before Copernicus, Aryabhata discovered that the earth rotates around the sun

through all these events only one truth is established

different inventors discovered many ideas through different methods

just like Ramakrishna's famous statement "as many opinions so many ways"

just like there is diversity in the unity of humankind and unity plays in that diversity

only critics blinded by knowledge sitting in caves of truth will say that

everything is a rehash of something else

ahi ahi

Bidyasagar learned the alphabet from someone else and then made it new in the children's primer *Barṇaparicay*

oh, you great bunch of critics tell me whose rehashed work was Bidyasagar inform me

instead of informing about the mating of dogs the mid-September sun tells me that autumn has come

you too give me some *fresh information*

or will you read Mao's quote and reply quoting the Taoist philosophy

wearing a cross around your neck holding Ramakrishna's *Lilāprasāṅga* in one hand and Havelock Ellis's sexology books in the other

you will say what Lenin said "neither a renouncer, nor a Don Juan! We must stay in a place between the two"

which one is it, Sir?

Indifferent Charminar [Nirbikār cārminār]

Mother I won't be able to laugh again with that polished snigger of your aristocratic society

with the moronic white teeth of a God full of compassion

with the intelligent look of Satan

I won't be able to treat my wife in matriarchal tradition as Ramakrishna did
I won't be able to eat saccharine instead of sugar for fear of diabetes
I won't be able to become Devdas in Khalasitala with my unhappy penis
on the eve of my ex-lover's wedding day

My liver is gradually rotting
my grandfather had cirrhosis
I don't understand heredity
I drink alcohol and read poetry
my father used to fast during pujas
on the day of Holi men press the breasts of the mothers of their neighbour-sisters
in the name of religion

Mother, many from your aristocratic society drank vodka on foreign journeys
I will indifferently light up my cigarette on your burning pyre
tears water my eyes if I think about your death I don't think about earthquakes of
land or flood of waters I didn't think of Vaishnava lyrics when I put my hands on
the petticoat's lace of my virgin girlfriend Mother, I will also die one day

At the temple of Belur my boundless sexuality awakened
looking at the international python ass covered by the skirt of a praying foreigner
Mother, I envy you because your sexuality will be associated for eternity to
baba's pyre
staring at my penis with modest filthiness I feel like a species from another planet
now the glow of the setting sun shines down on my face and the colours of
sunset smearing in their wings flocks of birds without family planning are
coming back to the peaceful nest of Banalata Sen's eyes – their time for egg
incubation has come

Some Flowers without Bees [Bhramar bihīn kichu phul]

Some flowers without bees wilted in blood right here
my swan, about to lay down golden eggs, my swan was cut down into pieces
right here – the oven satisfied with the scent of savoury meat
stared at a girl taking off her winter cardigan
in the heat of the endless oven of the sky
and retained its ardour in her breasts
my swan was cut down right next to her Picnic Garden
my blooded flowers without bees wilted that day

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

I have put my poetry about swans and flowers in the oven
for the meat had to be cooked
I longed to see the girl getting the scent of meat
because I handled a lot of meat
I have seen *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha* that is gas, bile and phlegm inside meat
in fact even the three qualities *sattva*, *tamas* and *rajas* –
Right, Darkness and Passion – reside in the carnivorous body

and yet I came out of one womb and peeked into another belly
to see the face of my child –
I saw the dead body of my father and understood
that living is important, I saw my mother's despair
and understood that even death can be important for life

and yet after all wisdom, without clocks and compasses, I
I axe my swan for a girl
I have thrown the poetry notebook in the oven for a girl
I see my being cry in my semen – right then
because it's already too late
on the sixth day of mourning I hug that girl's body
flowers without bees blossomed in blood on that day

I am a Human [Āmi māṇuṣ ek'jan]

I am human I can love and pee
I can use water in both ways – to extinguish thirst and clean the catarrh of
troubled nights
I can use alcohol in both ways – in sorrow and peace
I am a human walking from the womb to the pyre
from the *refrigerator* of creation I pull out
my personal soul

without rotting without eating it –
it walks aimlessly on the way to the brothel and remembers his lover's image –
it remembers that the body it inhabits
above this body's genius head there's often gallows or a joist
in his ears there's Rabindra sangeet, at times brain or *machine guns*
and then at times
only sky and sunshine and rivers of sunset
and darkness

in the dark sky he sees his lover's star-eyes and
the shape of Radha in the prostitute's look
I am human I can be cursed and I can curse
I am human
the body I now inhabit used to be
in the bodies of father and mother
and their bodies were once in the bodies of their
fathers and mothers, and so on
how amazing!

Ah, and who can say today
how many men like me, women like you
were around during the day of the first embryo
I can't write poetry anymore today but
look, woman
when I come close to you I find
my goddess – when I come near I feel like I become poetry myself
even a debauched can love and now the body where I stay
is shrinking, is terribly rough and torn
but in the light of a burning candle planted in its head it sees
lively lives of *amoebae* even in bodies ravaged by sorrow

no father, I am neither the son of gods nor of pigs
I'm just the child of humans – you-him-her-it-them-they all stayed
inside me –
inside me there's a graveyard of memories,
an endless mine of words and in the faith-ground
of theist communities clinging to the scrotum of the absolute universe
I roam alone, uncovered naked faithless
breathing easy breaths –
but when I hide from the people's eyes and sigh
then you, woman
look, that sort of water in the eyes of those lustful beasts
whose other name is “tears”
in the end I noticed that I bathe in the same Ganges water where I also pee
 In the girl I call a bitch
 I find a wife and a mother
 my broken soul blows to the Blue-Throated God [Nīlkaṇṭha]
 and loves more than Krishna's love for his cow-girls
 in Krishna's eyes, where in addition to nature

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

searching in himself he could also find Radha
Woman – you are more beautiful than Radha
So that in Krishna's world devouring
I find the final magic metaphor of life
this is where earth begins
the taste of the cigarette spreads beyond the tobacco farms
and is found here in this smoke
this is where earth begins
here, love for babies awakes in the mind of abortion-seeking humans
here, the earth begins
a drowsy awakening descends upon sleep – ghosts of nightmares awake in torpor
wretched memories cry out, suddenly, from the womb of oblivion
the supreme Nature awakes here
in the worship of the phallus
in hearts of women
here consciousness begins

Television of a Rotten Soul [Naṣṭa ātmār ṭelibhisan]

I can see my hand
everyday on my hand there's the double brain line
the same that, they say, Cheiro the astrologer has
I don't believe in palmistry
hanging on bus-handles I came to hear sounds of poetry and death
in my skull instead of destiny there's a framework of bones
in sounds of bombs and bullets my fear of death awakens
I am a human who wants revolution
I kiss with the urge of desire and get pleasure beyond heaven
many times apathy lurks in such functions
in my mind the bodied divinity of wonder
I get drunk to write poetry
but I am reluctant to reflect on poetry
even revolutionaries after cleaning the barrels of their pipe-guns
are reluctant to fire
I follow Shri Chaitanya's religion of love and after giving love to the Naxals and
the Military I became listed as an enemy of both sides
I have seen people saying, "I'm hungry, give me bread" or "I'm jobless, give me
a job"
nobody gives bread or jobs and when humans need bread and jobs more than
Picasso, Sartre or Satyajit

they see that real society
made up of father-mother-brother-sister
your own wife, other people's wives
is built with sex and economy
on my palm I see the double brain line – what they say also Cheiro has
I don't believe in palmistry
yet, alas! My soul has observed that many women remain out of reach
because of my economic instability I am pushed towards the path of national
Revolution

which means that I use Sukanta's lines:
"you have destroyed my love
you have broken my house
how can I forget this?"
I use these lines as a weapon for a kind of mental battle
but the woman who used to play the role of my love
that woman herself has also moved to the safety of a refrigerator civilisation
and since then I have created my yoga postures
mixing Havelock Ellis' sexual psychology and Jagadish babu's *Gita*
I discovered the Oedipus complex long before reading Freud
but I don't like doing it with my mum
even though many times in the wild afternoon of my adolescence
I was ready to taste the body of any woman who was my mother's age
I once came out on the street to commit suicide
but the sound of grenades exploding all around made me run home
for fear of death
I knew violent Revolution even without reading "Das Kapital"

I don't like violence, I like Revolution
even I drank milk from the Dhansiri river
on the combative paddy fields
between landowners and peasants
I have celebrated the Poet's birthday from the banks of the Dhansiri
boozing in a rice-liquor shop
and searched for happiness in life
at times I carry cigarettes
but I have no matches
when I carry matches
I don't have cigarettes
at times when I feel the urge of sex
there is no container
no Radha, no Wife or women to use it

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

when there are women
I have no desire for sex
when there's ready wit there's no indiscretion
or when there's indiscretion there's no ready wit
this is how days and nights go by
spending their time a bit differently
my Bengali parents gave birth to me
that is, my dad's body inside my mum's body
my little body out of the union of the two bodies
that is from duality to monism
I observe my desire to become a father in masturbation
the liquid flow of semen
a frame of 206 bones and, attached to the frame
fleshy nerves carrying thoughts
the seeds holding memories of sounds swim in the liquid sperm
Mr. Khanna speaks Hindi but his wife speaks Bangla
Mustard Khanna's 5-year-old son can speak both
through harmonic usage of tongue, teeth, palate, throat, lips
well, did the power of speaking and understanding come through the nitric acids
of his foetus?
dear heredity, what's this language thing?
I don't know whether it is the environment or needs that develop language
I don't know if love has a language or if there's only a language of sensations
I see humans made of bodies
some of them want to be James Joyce and others Alamohan Das
unfortunately, we don't have any influence on our own birth
was there ever a Buddha behind Suzuki's birth?
My Western friends
you also don't know Bangla from birth
just like many Bengalis don't know English from birth
you also feel hungry
you also go and check the loo and the bathroom when searching for a house
you also protest against Vietnam war
just like us, Allen Ginsberg can see the river of his poetry in dreams and
nightmares
yet, bastard, I am a Bengali
I will learn about the God of the Shatapatha Brahmana reading Max Müller
that's why I will take Soma and Sura, that is drug and wine
all at once, mostly in the evenings
and Buddhadeb Basu will write erudite essays on the Beat Generation saying that
the Hungries are illiterate

oh, why can't I think in English?
why are my parents Bengali?
oh, you Bengali, why have you even become a poet!
When the blue darkness of midnight falls down on the stars of your eyes
No, I won't take off your clothes now
I won't put my organ of words in your organ of reproduction
at Rasbehari crossing you can buy jasmine flowers
or a Hungry Generation book from Patiram book stall
But no,
I won't take off your clothes anymore
All over there is only the presence of Brahma
In the shape of books-knowledge-letters
Now, all over
I have seen books burning on a pyre in a French avant-garde movie
Kafka wanted to burn his manuscripts
I have burned my autobiography
I have never seen the Seine
I have never tasted absinthe or walked around in Paris
I'm a boy from the shores of the Ganges
on a night of tropical storm I have howled to the thunder:
"Thunder! Blaze out! Show your blue aura on the breast of the Ganges!"
With Christ's cross
and guns smuggled by Rimbaud
I have marched on processions of armed revolutionaries
on Gandhi's birth centenary
I have eaten beef and sang the name of Hari

I'm not drunk now
I'm standing here
without dreams
without daydreams or nightmares
without enthusiasm to smoke a cigarette
I sit in the Central Library
A man without books
Now you can go buy jasmine flowers or books of poetry
or you could even get impregnated by my friend
and I won't seek revenge
you can go now
let me see if the birth of a human being is nothing more but the by-product of his
parents' sexual desire?

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

I am a Beauty Monster [Āmi ek saundarya rākṣas]

Looking at the painted wings of a butterfly
mankind moves on from separation to marriage – I am a beauty monster
I have ripped off the scent-fetching antenna of a butterfly

I do not have faith in anyone
lazy wicked sometimes I think of living as a prostitute's paramour
when hangover fades away
and seated among rejoicing friends in that drinking place I realise my failure in
love
I look inside the full-moon there's a burning thought

Now I'm lying in the drawer of a morgue – just a corpse
my alive body has been dragged away
to the menstruation cloth of a widow with broken bangles
I am lying inside the drawer of a morgue – the wood for the pyre lies inside the
trees
there is no love no birth-giving wife at the maternity hospital
I lie inside the drawer of a morgue
this is how I live days and nights lightnings droughts
how many girls have grown heaps of flesh on their breasts
how many pregnant girls have aborted – from Satyajit Ray's country
the movie *Love in Tokyo* went to East Africa – in Marcus Square
Bengali culture Indian circus – a poets' gathering at Rabindra Sadan and
Vijayantimala's dance – I got nothing
neither ascent nor downfall

From the prostitute's bathroom to my lover's bed
my easy journey has not ended – from the womb of the sky
that's why even today stardust keeps raining on earth
still I'm lying inside the drawer of a morgue, just a corpse
and my living body is carried away to the menstruation cloth of a widow with
broken bangles
looking at the colourful wings of a butterfly
people move from separation to marriage
people move on from separation to marriage
I am a beauty monster I have ripped off the butterfly's scent-fetching antenna

Personal Bed [Byaktigata bichāna]

Not only Radha – even the prostitute menstruates
the father of three children – the ideal man of family planning
masturbates since childhood, doesn't he?

I don't want to be Rabindranath – not even Raghu the bandit
I want to be Phalguni Ray – only Phalguni Ray

I stand between a maternity hospital and a crematorium
if you don't believe me just go and see – Bus 4, 32, 34, 43

I have noticed that the word Magazine
is related to Rifle and Poetry

Are We Renaissance and Resurrection? [Ām'rāi renesām o rejārek'san?]

If the body is ruined how can a disease outbreak be possible?
in the scorching heat of midday the siren tells it's lunch-break for some
and for some it's time to listen to Rabindra sangeet
no need to listen Rabindra sangeet for the deaf ones
the blinds don't need to look at Brach's or Picasso's paintings
is it the ideology of crows or the order of macaques?
the good deeds of past life or today's karma?
in which fruit shall I be realised?
who will tell through which path of Yoga –
the Hatha, Bhakti, Jnana or the Raja Yoga? Is there any Yogi left?
Where will Manu descend at the end of Manu's cosmic time?
whose son-in-law the Great Sage of Mud looking at his wife's breasts
would feel sexual attraction and reawaken the Kundalini Shakti through the prac-
tice of exhaling, inhaling and retaining breath
my awake penis goes limp after ejaculation
and it becomes hard to believe that it can stand "in that way"
in the spinal cord human self-confidence is standing up
yet men become hump-backed
some read the *Bhagavadgita* and collect merit
in this holy book some get information
about incest between brothers and sisters
girls come out of wombs of pregnant women and get pregnant in turn
human foetus

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

about to manifest at the phallic door – foetus, can you speak? –
do you have the power to think?
ah, I won't get my embryo-life back
ah, I won't get my martyr brother's life back
ah, loving life I forget the dead ones
thinking of the dead I forget about those who are living
I get a woman's love and forget about the rejection of another
This is how I grow old and get bigger – but the size of my lying-in room
hasn't increased a little – thus without knowing Malthus theory I understood
that lands don't grow but men do increase in number
a herd of one-horned rhinos gets extinct – tales of mammoths have become *myth*
today
new mythologies are being created on humans
hey, human spermatozoa conqueror of the moon
your spacecraft has left for Venus
one day a joint venture of communist and capitalist countries will go towards the
Sun
and the Marxist-Leninist of India will be involved in civil war and will make
labourers even more bourgeois
and then the shoe salesman who earns 400 rupees per month
will show contempt for the school clerk who earns 150 rupees per month
and then will publish a magazine of poetry along with Uttam Kumar's autobiog-
raphy and will organise a poetry convention
by the countless memorials of adolescent Bengali martyrs
will pass loud and bright processions of married young Marwaris from Calcutta
and more will pass by
Bengali Hindus from West Bengal will read about the history of the freedom of
Bengalis in Bangladesh and will kill Bengali Hindus
in this apocalypse, Manu, where's your advent?
will we only know you as the father of Akuti, Prasuti and Devahuti?
where are you Krishna, slayer of the evil and protector of the good?
will we only read the Vaishnava hymns instead of pornography?
or are we the force of rising – we will be Renaissance and Resurrection
we, who want to make lovers our friends of bed and wisdom
like Prajna and Paramita – Wisdom and Perfection – in Mahayana Buddhism
we, who can't arrange bus-fares to make an Employment Exchange card
we, who haven't seen the sea anywhere but in movies
we, who write poetry about the sea even after knowing that Shelley and Hart
Crane drowned in the sea
we, who think of death not as death but as the *passport* to reincarnation
we, who call life a wonderful event

and discover the sutra of sexual geometry in reproduction
 but we can't discover the maker of the sutra
 we, who use the pen as bible and rifle
 and forget the grief for our dead children in the heat of sex
 we, who want to dry up the gunpowder of revolutionaries drowned in selfish
 crocodile tears
 and learned the lessons of not beating up or cursing anyone
 from Mao Tse Tung's book
 we, who read Tagore's poem "Ebar phirao more" to become communists
 renouncing to charity work to become revolutionaries by our own will
 Will we be Resurrection?
 or shall we listen to the taunts of the Babilis of the neighbourhood
 wearing our vests and lungi sitting in porches and smoking bidi
 we will listen
 indifferently
 to Rabindranath Tagore's songs

Artificial Snake [Kṛtrim sāp]

When I smoke I really feel like playing chess – I feel like
 studying *grammar* I don't want to be like Fisher and Fowler, the famous English
 grammarians
 after playing chess I crave smoking weed
 I need weed while studying grammar
 I never wanted to be like Panini
 I know that Sunitikumar, the language professor is three thousand times more
 educated than me
 I know that Superhero Uttam Kumar was two thousand times more handsome
 than me
 but inside me there's no feeling of inferiority
 when I flow
 in the procession of wise, talented, good looking and wealthy men and women
 in the procession of stupid, ugly and poor men and women
 I forget whether I am a man or a woman
 but when I touch my trouser-buttons or my chest-pockets
 from the consciousness of Hermaphrodite, I come back to masculine senses
 and once I come back I notice that breasts and asses of housewives and serv-
 ant-women from many
 households are very similar in terms of size and shape
 and I notice, lying in the showcase of a Calcutta boutique

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

an
artificial snake
and this thing is even more *interesting* because the name of the boutique is
“Aristocrat”

[Miśra 2015]

Other Poems by Phalguni Ray

Personal Neon [Byaktigata niyon]

I am completely devoid of genius that is why I prove my talent
by touching my nose with my tongue
sometimes while walking in front of Manik Bandyopadhyay’s house I think
that he used to walk on this very street where
I, worthless Phalguni Ray, walk
sometimes travelling in second class trams I think
that this was the tram that overran and crushed
the body of Jibanananda
this is how I wandered – earth sun stars accompanying me
during my embryo moment another death descended on the solar system
sitting in a bar a friend of mine often drinks wine from faraway lands
one day he angrily scolded me and called me a toddy drinker and cannabis
smoker
for chopping off Ekalavya’s thumb
I felt Dronacharya was a murderer

(*Unmārga*, 1967)

[Miśra 2015: 14]

I Can’t Write Anymore [Kichu likhte pār'chi nā ār]

I can’t write
I can’t write anymore that all around
there are but dogs and prostitutes’ screams
laughs, mocking of eunuchs
I can’t, can’t write anymore

Handing me the keys of the universal lost dream-world
Rabindranath the theist terribly scolded me
in a drowsy nightmare a black Christ came to my sleep
the whole body wrapped by countless venomous snakes
he wanted to embrace me and
a foolish Faust holding the hand of Mephistopheles
kept going straight in the direction of Goethe's grave

If I had an acute pain in my head
today I would see Picasso's Cubic paintings instead of Sheridan's
and knowing that the attention and words of the spectators are not favourable
to my untalented peace
while reading the *Gita*
suddenly masturbation makes everything fine and I get a sort of comfort

even accepting everybody's loyalty until the end I
remain a slave to my own soul
yet I crave for freedom maybe a way for freedom
is to write something but I can't write nothing at all
I can't write, I can't write anymore
dogs and prostitutes' screams laughs mocking of eunuchs

(*Kṣudhārta*, 1968)

[Mishra 2015: 23]

Unnecessary Poem [*Anābaśyak kabitā*]

I am a newly arrived stranger on the earth's ancient back
now as the doctor slices the poet's vein to collect blood
I remember wanting to sell my blood
to drink and write poetry
have I gone to the dogs? Still today many secrets remain hidden
I am still afraid to die, which means that I love life
that's why I walk under a cloudy sky with the Red Book in one hand
and Jibanananda's poetry in the other
I don't like those who wear sunglasses when it's cloudy
I don't like those who believe in God when the world slams them
I love those who kick away idols of gods and ask *what is what* – with great
enthusiasm

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

I took Marx Lenin Sartre Joyce Kafka to the coffee house and destroyed
cigarettes
then I walked by myself through a crowd of people, alone, actually
I'm getting nothing from books – hoping to get something from my lover
I run to her to find her sleeping with my elder brother, an officer
I am unemployed I used to speak of love with prostitutes – my brother, the
officer
bought my beloved a sari with his bonus and became her lover
the money he spent would have paid for my meals for a month, which means
it costs the same to cover my would-be wife's body and to feed me
can you imagine how we live
yet I love the naked child's smile, the renewal of the ancient earth
in front of my hungry eyes the beautiful woman's framework of bones
walks through time towards the pyre – I sell
fat philosophy books to buy bread and alcohol just for surviving, sometimes
I even manage, believe me, I even manage to write
an unnecessary poem.

(*ābaha*, 1972)

[Miśra 2015: 38]

Manik Bandyopadhyay's Spectacles [*Mānik Bandyopādhyāy'er caś'mā*]

Spring, on your dry hot fields stays my heart's stamp
not in the beat of the heart
in the mist of winter I exhale smoke from the mouth without a cigarette
without a woman on my bed
in the morning I feel that my penis gets harder
in whose belly will my child arrive?
one for which I will provide rice?
I live without a party flag without the love of a woman I live
I live in order to listen to the songs of Rabindranath in the sunlight of half past
twelve
No, I never wanted to be Rabindranath I never wanted to love Sumita
never wanted her body never wanted Mita's body
I only wanted her love but got nothing at all
of course the Khan army from Bangladesh
US mines from the coast of Tonkin and the CRPs hiding behind sacks of sand in
Calcutta have retired

China and Nixon signed a treaty
a jeep on the moon grain to India an army in Vietnam and competitors at the
Olympic games has sent white black America

Hindu Bengalis
have killed
Hindu Bengalis
in Calcutta – then under
Netaji
Lenin and
Gandhi's statue
the pilgrims of Shahid Minar have made public meetings – that is –
a lot has happened but I still haven't found a job
and so haven't found a wife
hiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii
nobody is willing to give us girls if we don't show money
neither a prostitute's protector nor a bride's father
but smearing on our body the ashes of this whore civilisation will we manage to
keep our organs folded in a loincloth and become ascetics?
To shed tears of mourning for martyrs and then become ministers?
on my way to the ballots I have seen a hungry man dying
but in the vote line even his name was sacred and his ration card was confiscated
my father died even after receiving the dietary treatment and also his ration card
was confiscated
I realised that in death there is no difference between a poor, an aristocrat or a
bourgeois and a communist
yet some deaths are lighter than a bird
yet some deaths are heavier than a mountain
oh India! will my death be light or heavy
oh India! will I be a corpse or a martyr – or will I die as Buddha died while
searching for the reason of death?
Death – are you just extinction or are you the *passport* for reincarnation?
who will tell me where is my real path?
who gave life to this heart – who will set the price of my heart?
who will give me pen and paper to write poetry?
who will provide with dietary treatment if I get sick?
who will provide food if I starve?
who will give me a woman if I long for love?
can the state provide for everything?
can communism make the *last boy first*?
can socialism turn a bad poet into a good one?

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

yet the Vedic hymn “sangacchadhvam samvadadhvam” etc. means
our paths will be one
our language will be one
our thoughts will be one...this higher Communism
was invented by Indians four thousand years before Marx’s birth
let our meal be one
let our clothes be one...wonderful
but if hearing this, someone would also say ‘let our wives will be one’ then I mean
I mean I’ll fuck myself because I can’t think of sex with a woman and sucking
up to a cow as one thing
so even if we have drunk our mother’s milk we will never eat their flesh
although after drinking the cow’s milk we’ve eaten beef

(*Kṣudhārta*, 1975)

[Ghoṣ 2011: 284]

Song of Revolution [Biplaber gān]

There once used to be love in our souls
today without money all love has fallen apart
even revolutionaries have food problems
yet the man will still be worried to provide food for his lover
how many babus will keep their concubines only because they can get food

we are not even able to feed ourselves properly
without being able to take part to genocides and mass copying
for many we have become assholes
many of us on their last year of graduation
were rusticated because of politics
we didn’t want to be assassinated we didn’t want to become assassins
but instead of becoming martyrs we enjoyed killing the enemies of class
hearing the speeches of leaders in different maidans
has putrefied the ears of many of us
the souls of our brothers, mothers and sisters
in starvation and disease
their songs of life have come to an end, they’ve stopped
and all the erudite pandits have taken the last drag of their cigarette
and have happily gone to sleep

with this memory in front of me – we are the children of pain
we are such
and we don't fear
we just want to hear now
a song of revolution

(*Kṣudhārta* 1984)

[Ghoṣ 2011: 549]

The Final Womb [*Antim jarāyū*]

[I am having the urge to say a few things about the womb, actually the way words tend to forget the scent of foreign or home-grown words within a living language, like we do not remember when replacing *caśma* [spectacles] with *frame* that *frame* is an English word, so also when people get mixed in real writing the idea of writing itself becomes irrelevant, many times when people get closer to an abstract god they also get closer to abstract art poetry literature and to abstract film, as if life was a running film, one forgets that the creator is unmoved indifferent, and that the medium itself gets a life of its own]

Shot one: A burning pyre – around which a bevy of beautiful and ugly looking naked young women – their eyes brimming with tears.

Shot two: A Neem tree – full-moon beams dripping through its leaves.

Shot three: The blazing flames look upward to the sky and the naked young women with eyes full of tears look downward to the ground – *freeze*

Shot four: On the branches of the Neem tree a few men hang with a rope around their neck – they have no hands or legs but in each of their phallic regions there is a television set – beneath their hanging bodies that raging pyre and the group of naked young women with their eyes full of tears and above those dead bodies through the Neem leaves full-moon beams.

Shot five: The naked women together start ululating and suddenly from their vaginal regions appears an unripe foetus – like balls they plop to the ground – the women's faces contort with pain – they scream.

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

Shot Six: The television sets on the hanging male bodies turn on. On one man's TV, one sees two young men copulating and those naked women laughing at each other at this sight. On another TV, a naked woman pleasures herself, moaning with pleasure, and a man pierces her bosom with a sharp knife – the woman shrieks.

On another TV an elderly woman is copulating with a dog and her old husband with his face hidden on the knees of a young girl is crying inconsolably.

Shot Seven: The naked women are picking up the aborted premature fetuses from the ground, their eyes are now drying up and the retinal dots in their eyes begin to burst – and as their faces are awash with blood the difference between beauty and ugliness vanishes.

Shot Eight: A raging pyre – a branch of the Neem tree over the pyre – dead men hanging by the rope on the branch – television sets on their sexual tree – the following words appear on each television set:

We want food clothes a place to stay

We want women we want poetry

We want alcohol, pure and pungent alcohol

Art is our alcohol

Literature is our alcohol

Our alcohol is the feeling of hunger

Shot Nine: The naked women face the pyre and in unison say – We do not want *theory* we want bodies we just want bodies and *theories* about bodies.

Their faces inundated with blood – and in each of their hands the dropped unfertilized fetuses – in their vaginal region bloom innumerable flowers – their colourful vaginas in a profusion of colourful flowers.

Shot Ten: A road – a gate at the end of the road – carved on the gate – *Maternity Home* – and on the far side, another gate with the words – *Burning Ghat* –

A twosome – a man and a woman, on the road

Man revolves around his Woman

Man interrogates his Woman

Woman interrogates her Man

Man replies

But no one speaks only makes gestures

No one speaks, only eyes language

Shot Eleven: This picture is getting projected on the television sets on the phallic regions of the hanging dead-bodies – the corpses have no hands and no legs.

On one man's TV, beneath a huge family planning poster the man-woman couple sits with 3 babies in their lap – crying.

On another TV the man is excited – his greying hair, advancing age, the woman's greying hair and advancing age too, but a quiet, naked kid in front of them – the woman holds in her hand the kid's penis with care and the excited man tries to smash a pair of spectacles with a fat fountain pen.

On another TV the woman's whole body turns into a skeleton – only the eyes are alive – only tears in those eyes, tears, and man is blind now and his large body leprosy stricken – their child, a full-grown man but with breasts like women – long hair like women, and man walk gingerly and woman pets his phallus – and both say this:

Give love back to us

Give love back to us

And their girlish-man child stares at the sky, agitated – not the least sign of beard on his cheeks – like women his eyes nose lips are shaped

Shot Twelve: A sole full-moon in the sky –

Shot Thirteen: All around the pyre the naked women and in their laps unripe foetuses plopped out from their wombs and in every vaginal region multicoloured flowers and every eye filled with tears and everyone chants again:

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

Give love back to us
Give love back to us.

(*Svakāl*, 1972)

[Miśra 2015: 101–103]

The Second Womb [*Dvitīya jarāyū*]

Shot One
Deep green all around, green deep.

Shot Two
Innumerable black dots on green, innumerable.

Shot Three
Millions of people's weeping screaming laughing ridiculing on green each black dots are transformed into human faces of various races, the faces form a line and relentless weeping screaming laughing ridiculing is heard.

Shot Four
People of various races in various dresses proceed in a march beside Vaishnavas Muslims Jews beside worshippers of African semi-gods Buddhists beside Christians.

Shot Five
Single colour vultures fly over the procession of men of various countries various colours different ages, innumerable vultures over the procession continuously flutter deep blue sky flapping wings wails howls ridicules are raised further

Suddenly everything is silent.

Everyone stops in his own place.

Shot Six
Vultures float in void, still; men are in single line, some of them raise one foot some raise a closed fist, they are motionless.

Shot Seven
Darkdarkdarkdarkdarkdarkdark.

Shot Eight

Cutting through the belly of green widespread valley and solid slanting sky a mountain whose soundless waves have crossed horizon and gone afar.

Shot Nine

A bunch of naked babies, cry laugh make tantrums they lie on the widespread valley's grass in the form of dewdrops make tantrums and cry.

Shot Ten

Touching the peak of mountain a waterfall skip jumps below, waterfall's water is blood red.

Shot Eleven

Floodwater from the blood red waterfall washes away the babies, the babies float in blood river cries laughs.

Shot Twelve

Flocks and flocks of vultures suddenly descend on floating babies vultures leave their immobile position fly down – descending they put their beaks into each baby's eyes – tear off navel and penis of boys vagina of girls with their claws – blood oozes out of babies' eyes, blood oozes from navel penis vagina, blood flows mixes with blood river.

Shot Thirteen

Hundreds of birds' waking up morning songs and countless white birds chirping white

Everything stands still.

Shot Fourteen

From the left side of a Christ's statue a colourful procession of men come forward, people of various nationalities wearing their national dress come forward large procession of men, each having a testicle in place of their left eye and blood river flows from the right side of Christ's statue, torn pieces of flesh of babies in the river, some with only head some with heart stomach vagina or legless belly and on them are seated tired vultures.

Shot Fifteen

.

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

Shot Sixteen

Procession of people go round Christ's statue fall in blood river's water, country of green slanting valley drowns in blood Christ's nailed legs gradually stand in blood red river up to his thighs eyes of people of various colourful procession cry drops of water from their right eye, since they have penis in left eyes from there semen drip out – white semen mixed with blood floats – battered baby-limbs, vultures on limbs.

Shot Seventeen

Black snakes from around Christ's body slither down into blood stream – snake with easy swim reaches each human being and before they could restrain them they climb up and enter their mouth from far away voices reverberate I am soul I am soul I am soul I am soul I am soul I am soul...

Shot Eighteen

From the mouth of each man the hood of a snake protrudes snakes are found on the head of vultures which were seated on floating babies.

Shot Nineteen

Christ's statue starts stirring, shakes up all men tremble each visible square foot minute portion gets loosened in heavy water wails blood river starts ringing siren fast quite fast Christ's stone hand stirs vultures cry fly out into sky flap wings torn pieces of babies get joined again one's head joined by some other baby's thigh – some having leg in place of hand some have vagina in place of navel.

Shot Twenty

In order to save themselves from tidal waves people start to swim around Christ's statue – in place of smile two headed snakes peep out of their mouth in place of left eye stuck up penis queer limb babies crowded around Christ's penis vultures on them.

Snakes wave their hood on the crown of vultures.

(*Kṣudhārta* 1, 1970–71)

[walkatalk 2015]

Three Poems [Tin kabitā]

1.

Does the soul weight only 21 grams?
 only 21 grams?
 oh, soul – ascetic or debauchee
 our simultaneous manifestations in the body
 you, in the shoemaker's and in my body
 even though I am not a brahman I can recite the Gayatri Mantra
 a shoemaker after making shoes can watch the *test cricket*
 soul of mine, are you lighter
 than a cricket *ball*?
 soul of mine
 overcoming the boundaries of this body
 one day you will go in the direction of the undetermined *over boundary*
 in the same way, Mahakala, with death's *bat hand*
 from the *pitch* of our consciousness, will score time's *run*
century after *century* – before Christ until the Christian era
 leaving the ripped vest behind and taking on a new dress – from one body
 a new body will be born – this is how *relay* happens
 history literature civilisation – soul is always circulating
 with such a limited weight how could you pervade everything?
 it means that the evidence of that foreign scientist was wrong
 while Indians were right?
 those who lived long before Christ preached that
 soul has no end, no fear, no dissolution
 the soul cannot be observed, it resides in ideas
 just like there is no melody in the strings of the sitar
 the melody lies in the heart of the sitar.

2.

There at the end of the century
 a dim sun
 all the light of the human intellect
 has faded away
 because of the end of the universe

as many planets satellites orbiting around the sun
 only a meteorite has burned
 all the books of history and the geography maps of the world
 in the meteor's fire

7 Hungryalist Texts in English Translation

to see the beautiful woman's eyebrows eyes nose lips breasts
the eyes of the men won't open again

3.

I suddenly feel like crying
not for vain love nor for hunger
but because of the thought of dying
from the depth of life a voice of lamentation emerges
I once did not understand, I now do quite well
how much I loved life
in poverty and despair
on the shores of unsuccessful sexual impulse
that selfish love
was only through the light
on the shores of the valley of death.

(*Kṣudhārta* 7, 1984)

[Ghoṣ 2011: 551–2]

Bibliography

Primary sources

Archives and Special Collections

- Allen Ginsberg Papers, Collection M733 (various boxes). Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.
- Carl Weissner Archive, MS22. “Hungry Generation”, 1966, Box 5, Folder 23. Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives, Northwestern University Libraries
- Howard McCord Papers, Cage 578, Box 2, Folder 56 (Personal correspondence – Debi Ray and Subimal Basak). Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC), Washington State University Libraries.
- Hungry Generation Archive, MS47, Box 1 (Mixed Materials). Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives, Northwestern University Libraries.
- Little Magazine Library and Research Centre. 18/M Tamer Lane, Kolkata.
- Little Magazine Special Collection. Memorial Library, University of Wisconsin, Madison.
- Shankha Ghosh private papers, Kolkata.

Little Magazines

- Bakken, Dick (ed.) 1967. *Salted Feathers* 8/9. Vol. IV, Nos. 1,2. March 1967. “Hungry!” Issue. Portland, Oregon.
- Basak, Subimal (ed.) 1968. *Pratidvandvī*. Subimal basāk niyantrita. Tr̥tīya saṃkalan 1968. PRATIDWANDI (The Rival) – Published & Controlled by Subimal Basak from Vivekananda Nagar, Calcutta 56 Printed at Cygnas Printing Cooperative Society Ltd, P.O. Berhampore, Murshidabad (W.B.).

Bibliography

- Datta, Prabhāt'kumār (sam.) 1986. *Atlantic – At'lāntik Hāmri jenaśan samkhyā*. Volume 6/ Number 2. April-June 1986. Āmerikāy prakāśita pratham bāmlā sāhitya patrikā. Worthington, Ohio: U.S.A.
- DeLoach, Allen and Weissner, Carl (eds.) 1968. *Intrepid* 10. Special issue "New Poetry and Prose from India plus Manifestoes including Artwork". Number X, Spring 1968. Buffalo, N.Y: Intrepid Press.
- Ferlinghetti, Lawrence (ed.) 1963. *City Lights*, Number 1 (1963). San Francisco: City Lights Bookstore.
- . *City Lights*, Number 2 (1964). San Francisco: City Lights Bookstore.
- . *City Lights*, Number 3 (1966). San Francisco: City Lights Bookstore.
- Ginsberg, Allen 1968. *Planet News 1961–1967*. San Francisco: City Lights Books.
- McCord, Howard 1972. *Measure 3: Young Poets of India*. The Tribal Press.
- Mehrotra, A. K. (ed.) n.d. *damn you*, three.
- Mitra, Tridib and Mitra, Alo (eds.) 1967. *Wastepaper #1*. A Hungry Generation Newsletter. Editor's Office: 18 Naskar Para Lane, Shibpur, Howrah, India. August, 1967. [6 pages].
- . *Wastepaper #2*. November 1967. A Hungry Generation Quarterly. Editor: Tridib Mitra. Editor's Beadle: Alo Mitra. Editor's Office: 18 Naskar Para Lane, Shibpur, Howrah, India. [13 pages].
- . *Wastepaper #4*. September 1969. An irregular Hungry Generation Newsletter. Published & edited by Tridib Mitra & Alo Mitra, 18, Naskar Para Lane, Shibpur, Howrah-2. INDIA. [16 pages].
- Mitra, Alo (ed.) BS 1375 (1969). *Wastepaper #6*. Wastepaper Hungry Generation Newsletter, 18 Naskar Para Lane Shibpur Howrah-2 India. [32 pages].

Hungry Generation Bulletins, Manifestoes, Essays and Other Ephemera

- Bhattacharya, Indrajit n.d. "Hungry Movement and Malay Roychowdhuri: A Critical Retrospection". Unpublished.
- Hungry Generation* 4 (1962). "A Poem to the Editor". Your faithful anti-hungry poet S.C. Published by Haradhan Dhara from 269, Netaji Subhas Road, Howrah. [1 page].
- Hungry Generation* 5. Contributors: Sandipan Chattopadhyay, Jean Paul Sartre, Haranath Ghose, Benoy Mazumdar, Somir Roychowdhury, Moly Roychowdhury, Shakti Chatterjea. N.d. [12 pages]
- Hungry Generation* 10. "The object of Hungryalism (hungryalism). Coffee House Menu". Editors: Shakti Chattopadhyay, Debi Roy & Malay Roychowdhury. H. Dhara publishes the H.G. 10 from 269, Netaji Subhas Road, Howrah/India. N.d. [15 pages].

- Hungry Generation XII* (1961). “Manifesto on Hungryalistic Poetry”. Written by Malay. Regisseurs: Sondipan, Utpal, Samir, Shakti, Benoy, Haranath, Shankar, Arup, Basudeva, Ashoke, Pradip, Siraj, Amritatanay, Amit, Bhanu, Debi. Published by Haradhon from 269, Netaji Subhash Road, Howrah, India, on behalf of the Hungry Generation. [2 pages].
- Hungry Generation XV*. “The Object of Hungryalistic Politics”. Published by Haradhon Dhara. 269 Netaji Subhash Road, Howrah. N.d.
- Hungry Generation 18*, transl. by Malay and published by Shakti Chattopadhyay from 14, Adhar Das Lane, Calcutta-4, India, on behalf of the Hungry Generation. N.d. [3 pages].
- Hungry Generation 20*, transl. by Malay Roy Choudhury. Published simultaneously by Jogesh Panda (from: Vishwabvaharati, Shantiniketan) and Sayyed Mustafasiraj (from: Murshidabad, West-Bengal) on behalf of the HUNGRY GENERATION. N.d. [3 pages].
- Hungry Generation 66*. “Religious Manifesto of the Hungry Generation. Le Hungrialisme. Debī Rāy. Rabīndra Guha”. Published by Tuhina Sen from Calcutta -32. N.d. [3 pages].
- Hāmri jenāreśan/kṣudhīta prajānma naṃ. 99*. Malaḃ rāy'caudhurī sampādīta. Edited and Published by Malay Roy Chowdhury from Dariapur, Bankipore, Patna India and Printed at Dipak Printers 45, Surya Sen Street, Calcutta-9. N.d.
- Hungry Generation 100*. Published by Shri Samir Roychoudhury from 48A, Sankar Haldar Lane, (Aheritola) Calcutta (India) on behalf of the HUNGRY GENERATION. N.d. [16 pages].
- Hungry Generation* arranging to present the first demonstration of TOPLESS beauty in India on the 15th of August '64 at Lindsay Street (6.30 p.m). Annoucement by Malay Roy Choudhury (Park Street, Calcutta, India.). N.d.
- Hāmri jenāreśan*. Malaḃ rāy'caudhurī sampādīta. Dariyāpur, Pāṭ'nā-4. N.d. [8 pages].
- Mitra, A.K. 1965. “Decision by the Presidency Magistrate”. Published by Zebra Books from Dariapur, Bankipore, Patna, Bihar, India.
- Mitra, Alo 1969. “Hāmri jenāreśaner śok'sabhā” in *Wastepaper* #6. [single leaflet] Regisseurs. Untitled. N.d. [1 page]
- Roy Choudhuri, Malay 1966. “In Defense of Obscenity”. Published by Zebra Books, Calcutta & Patna. [Reprint, 6 pages]

Newspaper & Online Resources

- Asterione 2015. *Pasolini sulla società dei consumi ed il potere*, 2015, July 21. [YouTube Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kez7fugpOU>, accessed 22.01.2024.

Bibliography

- Basu, Amitranjan 2012. "Adda at Barda's Shop" in *Humanities Underground*, August 6, 2012. <http://humanitiesunderground.org/adda-at-bardas-shop/>, accessed 22.01.2024.
- Basu, Nayanima 2011. "A sour time of putrefaction" in *Business Standard*, Saturday, December 20, 2011.
- BLITZ 1964. "Erotic Lives and Loves of 'Hungry Generation'" in *Blitz*, September 19, 1964, p. 6.
- Boni, Livio n.d. "Dalla psicoanalisi all'India e ritorno. Forme e ragioni della rivalutazione del femminile nella modernità Indiana", n.p., <https://www.spiweb.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/livio-boni.-relazione.-dalla-psicoanalisi-allindia-e-ritorno.-forme-e-ragioni-della-rivalutazione-del-femminile-nella-modernita-indiana.pdf>, accessed 22.01.2024.
- Bose, Brinda 2016. "The Ginsberg-Dylan Express: Tangled up in Vomit and Blues", in *Café Dissensus* 26. (June 16, 2016). <https://cafedissensus.com/2016/06/16/contents-the-beat-and-the-hungry-generation-when-losing-became-hip-issue-26/>, accessed 22.01.2024.
- Brahmachari, Goirick and Kumar, Abhimanyu 2016. "Guest-editorial – The Beat and the Hungry Generation: When Losing became Hip", in *Café Dissensus* 26 (June 16, 2016). <https://cafedissensus.com/2016/06/16/contents-the-beat-and-the-hungry-generation-when-losing-became-hip-issue-26/>, accessed 22.01.2024.
- Brosius, Christiane; Ramaswamy, Sumathi and Saeed, Yusuf (eds.) 2006. *Tasveer Ghar: A House of Oictures*. Online resource. <http://www.tasveergharindia.net/index.html>, accessed 22.01.2024.
- Chandra Sarkar, Subhash 1966. "Literature of the Hungry Generation" in *The Sunday Searchlight Magazine*, December 25, 1966, page II.
- Das, Samantak 2019. "Vulture Culture", *The Telegraph India*, February 28th, 2019.
- Dhar, Nandini 2016. "Reading Hungryalists as One Who Came After", in *Café Dissensus* 26, June 16, 2016, <https://cafedissensus.com/2016/06/16/reading-hungryalists-as-one-who-came-after-a-feminist-critique/>, accessed 22.01.2024.
- "ephemera" *Oxford Reference*, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095754277>, accessed 25.01.2024.
- HUG 2014. "The Final Womb: A Script", April 19, in *Humanities Underground*. <https://humanitiesunderground.org/the-final-womb-a-script/>, accessed 22.01.2024.
- Mitra, Tridib & Alo Mitra 2008. "Hungryalist influence on Allen Ginsberg" (Friday, 9 May 2008), *The Wastepaper* [Blog], <https://thewastepaper.blogspot.com/2008/05/hungryalist-influence.html>, accessed 22.01.2024.
- Pasolini, Pierpaolo 1975. "Il sesso come metafora del potere (autointervista di Pasolini)", in *Corriere della Sera*, 25 marzo 1975. *Il cinema ritrovato* [Website], <http://distribuzione.ilcinemaritrovato.it/per-conoscere-i-film/>

- salo-o-le-centoventi-giornate-di-sodoma/il-sesso-come-metafora-del-potere-
aointervista-di-pasolini, accessed 22.01.2024.
- Polchin, James 2019. “The Queer Crime that Launched the Beats”, in *The Paris Review*, June 27, 2019. <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/06/27/the-queer-crime-that-launched-the-beats/>, accessed 22.01.2024.
- Rāy'caudhurī, Malay 2011. “Sabuj debakanyā: āb'sārṁth”, in *Malay Rāy'caudhurī prabandha* [Blog] Posted on December 12, 2011. <https://malayerprobondha.wordpress.com/2011/12/12/সবুজ-দেবকন্যা-আবসাঁথ/>, accessed 22.01.2024.
- Rimbaud, Arthur 1871. *Lettre du voyant*, extract from his letter to Paul Demeny, Charleville, 15 May 1871. <https://rimbaudanalysis.wordpress.com/letters/>, accessed 22.01.2024.
- Sengupta, Gautam 2003. “Tusar Roy: a poet and a hero unsung”, in *Boloji.com*, 12 April 2003. <https://www.boloji.com/articles/3607/tusar-roy-a-poet-and-a-hero-unsung>, accessed 22.01.2024.
- TIME 1964. “The Hungry Generation” (20/11/1964). Vol. 84, Issue 21.
- Walkatalk 2015. “The Second Uterus”, in *Poems of Falguni Ray: The Legendary Hungryalist Poet*, March 26, 2015. <https://falguniray.wordpress.com/>, accessed 20.02.2024.

Secondary Literature

- Abu-Er-Rub, Laila; Brosius, Christiane; Meurer, Sebastian; Panagiotopoulos, Diamantis; and Richter, Susan (eds.) 2019. *Engaging Transculturality: Concepts, Key Terms, Case Studies*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Ācārya, Anil 2012. *Sattar daśak*. Kall'kātā: Anuṣṭup.
- Agamben, Giorgio 1995. *Homo Sacer: il potere sovrano e la nuda vita*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Ahluwalia, Sanjam 2008. *Reproductive Restraints. Birth Control in India, 1877–1947*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Ahmad, Aijaz 1992. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. London; New York: Verso.
- Ahrens, Rüdiger (ed.) 2005. *Violence and Transgression in World Minority Literatures*. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Allison, Maggie; Evans, Elliot and Tarr, Carrie (eds.) 2019. *Plaisirs de Femmes: Women, Pleasures and Transgression in French Literature and Culture*. Oxford; Bern; Berlin; Bruxelles; New York; Wien: Peter Lang.
- Alter, Joseph 2000. *Gandhi's Body: Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism*. Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bibliography

- . 2011. *Moral Materialism: Sex and Masculinity in Modern India*, New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- Ananthamurthy, U.R. 1976. “The Literary Situation in India: Search for an Identity”, in: *The Iowa Review* 7.2: 185–195. Web. <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.2081>.
- Appiah, K.A. 1991. “Is the Post in Post-modernism the Post in Post-colonialism”, in *Critical Inquiry* 17, pp. 336–357.
- Arnold, David 2000. *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ashcroft, Bill; Griffiths, Gareth and Tiffin, Helen (eds.) 1989. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bäckström, Per, and Hjartarson, Benedikt (eds.) 2014. *Decentring the Avant-garde*. Amsterdam; London: Rodopi.
- Bagchi, Jasodhara 1990. “Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal”, in *Economic & Political Weeks* 25: 42/43 (Oct. 20–27, 1990), pp. WS65-WS71.
- Baker, Deborah 2008. *A Blue Hand: The Beats in India*. New York: Penguin.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail, 1984 [1968]. *Rabelais and His World*, transl. by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Baldick, Chris, 2001. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bandyopadhyay, Ranjan 2017. “The White Woman’s ‘Burden’ – the Racialized, Gendered Politics of Volunteer Tourism”, in *Tourism Geographies: An International Journal of Tourism Space, Place, and Environment* 19:4, 2017.
- Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar 2009. *Decolonization in South Asia: Meanings of Freedom in Post-independence West Bengal, 1947–52*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Banerjee, Sikata 2005. *Make me a man! Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India*. New York: State University of New York.
- Banerjee, Sumanta 1998. *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*. Calcutta: Seagull books.
- Banerjee, Sutanuka 2015. *Unbinding Bodies and Desires: Re-searching the Home, the World and the In-between in Nara-naree, the only Bengali Journal on Health, Hygiene, Sex (1939–1950)*. Aalborg Universitetsforlag. (Ph.d.-serien for Det Samfundsvidenskabelige Fakultet, Aalborg Universitet).
- Bashford, Alison 2004. *Imperial Hygiene: A Critical History of Colonialism, Nationalism and Public Health*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bassnett, Susan and Trivedi, Harish (eds.) 1999. *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Basu, Buddhadeb 1957. *Svadeś o saṃskṛti*, Kolkata: Bengal Private Limited.
- Basu, Pradīp (ed.) 1998. *Sāmayikī: purano sāmayik'patrer prabandha saṃkalan (pratham khaṇḍa: bijñān o samāj) 1850–1901*. Kal'kātā: Ānanda pāblishārs.

- Belletto, Stephen 2019. “The Beat Generation Meets the Hungry Generation: U.S.-Calcutta Networks and the 1960s ‘Revolt of the Personal’”, in *Humanities* 8:3 (January 2019), pp. 1–17.
- Benjamin, Walter 2014 [1962]. “Di alcuni motivi in Baudelaire”, in *Angelus Novus: Saggi e Frammenti*, a cura di Renato Solmi, Torino: Einaudi, pp. 89–130.
- Berger, John 2008 [1972]. *Ways of Seeing* [based on BBC television series]. London: Penguin.
- Bertens, Hans and Fokkema, Douwe (eds.) 1997. *International Postmodernism: Theory and Literary Practice*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Bhabha, Homi 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bhattacharya, Bhaswati 2017. *Much Ado over Coffee: Indian Coffee House then and now*. New Delhi: Social Science Press.
- Bhattacharya, Sanchari 2013. “No Hungry Generation Tread Thee Down? – Exploring the Poetics of Alterity”, in *Margins: A Journal of Literature and Culture* 3, pp. 128–155.
- Bhattacharya, Sourit; Chattopadhyay, Arka, and Sengupta, Samrat 2020. *Nabarun Bhattacharya: Aesthetics and Politics in a World after Ethics*. New Delhi: Bloomsbury.
- Biśvās, Śailendra 2014 [1957]. *Samsad bāmlā abhidhān*. Kall'kātā: Sāhitya samsad.
- Bornstein, George 2001. *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bose, Buddhadeva 1948. *An Acre of Green Grass: A Review of Modern Bengali Literature*. Calcutta: Papyrus.
- Bose, Pradip Kumar (ed.), 2006. *Health and Society in Bengal: A Selection from Late 19th Century Bengali Periodicals*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Botre, Shrikant and Haynes, Douglas E. 2017. “Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Anxieties: Middle-class Males in Western India and the Correspondence in Samaj Swasthya, 1927–53”, in *Modern Asian Studies* 51:4, pp. 991–1034, Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, transl. by Richard Nice. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia 2023. “semen.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 7, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/science/semen>, accessed 25.01.2024.
- Brosius, Christiane 2010. *India's Middle Class: New Forms of Urban Leisure, Consumption and Prosperity*. London: Routledge.
- Brown, Rebecca M. 2009. *Art for a Modern India, 1947–1980*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bürger, Peter 1984. *Theory of the Avant-garde*, transl. by Michael Shaw. Minneapolis: Manchester University Press.

Bibliography

- Bulson, Eric 2013. "Little Magazine, World Form", in Wollaeger, Mark A. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, New York: Oxford Univ. Press, p. 267–287.
- Butler, Judith 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York; London: Routledge.
- Calinescu, Matei 1987. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. Durham: Durham University Press.
- Cappello, Daniela 2018. "Strategies for Translating Obscenity: Medical Language and Sanitization in Malay Rāyçhouthurī's Poetry", in *Sanglap: A Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies* 5:1, pp. 22–35.
- Castaing, Anne; Guilhamon, Lise and Zecchini, Laetitia (eds.) 2009. *La modernité littéraire indienne: Perspectives postcoloniales*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes.
- Caṭṭopādhyāy, Praṇab'kumār 2015. *Hāmri sāhitya āndolan: tattva, tathya, itihās. Kal'kātā: Pratibhās*.
- Caudhurī, Bhūdeb 1995. *Bāmlā sāhityer itikathā (tr̥tīya paryāy)*. Kal'kātā: De'j pāb'liśim.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh 2008. "Chapter 7. Adda: A History of Sociality". *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, New Edition, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 180–213.
- Chakraborty, Madhurima and Umme, Al-wazedi 2017. *Postcolonial Urban Outcasts: City Margins in South Asian Literature*. New York; London: Routledge.
- Chandarlapaty, Raj, 2009. *The Beat Generation and Counterculture: Paul Bowles, William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac*. New York: Peter Lang.
- . 2011. "Indian Journals and Allen Ginsberg's Revival as Prophet of Social Revolution", in *ariel: a review of international english literature* 41:2, pp. 113–138.
- Chaplin, Tamara and Mooney, Jadwiga E. Pieper (eds.) 2018. *The Global 1960s: Convention, Contest, and Counterculture*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Charters, Ann 2012. "John Clellon Holmes and Existentialism", in *The Philosophy of the Beats*, ed. by Sharin N. Elkholy, pp. 133–146.
- Chatterjee, Partha, 1989. "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India". In *American Ethnologist* Vol. 16, No: 4 (Nov. 1989), pp. 622–633.
- Chatterjee, Sukla 2019. *Women and Literary Narratives in Colonial India: Her Myriad Gaze on the 'Other'*. London; New York: Routledge.
- . 2019b. "Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay's Caitālī ghūrṇī and the Dystopia of Hunger", in *Open Library of Humanities* 5(1):29, pp. 1–23.
- Chatterji, Joya 2007. *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947–1967*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Chattopadhyay, Arka 2023. "Travelling On: Bengali and English Literatures of Transnational Worlding", in Parichay Patra and Amitendu Bhattacharya (eds.), *Frontiers of South Asian Culture: Nation, Trans-Nation and Beyond*, Routledge, 156–171.
- Chaudhuri, Rosinka 2012. *Freedom and Beef Steaks: Colonial Calcutta Culture*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan.
- Chaudhuri, Supriya 2010. "Modernism in India", in Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth and Andrew Thacker (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 942–960.
- . 2012. "The Bengali Novel", in Dalmia, Vasudha (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Indian Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 101–23.
- Childs, Peter 2000. *Modernism*. London: Routledge.
- Chowdhury Bhattacharjee, Maitreyee 2018. *The Hungryalists: The Poets who Sparked a Revolution*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Chowdhury, Indira 1998. *The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal*. OUP.
- Connell, Raewyn W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Connell, R. W. and Messerschmidt, James W. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept" in *Gender and Society* 19:6, pp. 829–859.
- Connery, Christopher 2006. "The Asian Sixties: An Unfinished Project". Editorial introduction, in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7:4, pp. 545–553.
- D'souza, Jean 1986. "Language Modernization in a Sociolinguistic Area", in *Anthropological Linguistics* 28 (4): 455–471.
- Dagnino, Arianna 2013. "Global Mobility, Transcultural Literature, and Multiple Modes of Modernity", in *Transcultural Studies* 4:2, pp. 130–160.
- Dalmia, Vasudha 1997. *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhāratendu Hariśchandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- . (ed.) 2012. *Hindi Modernism: Rethinking Agyeya and his Times*. Center for South Asia Studies: University of California, Berkeley.
- Das, Sisir Kumar 1995. *A History of Indian Literature. 1911 - 1956; Struggle for Freedom: Triumph and Tragedy*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
- Dasgupta, Alokeranjan 1977. *Buddhadeva Bose*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
- Dasgupta, Rohit K. and, Gokulsing Moti (eds.) 2014. *Masculinity and its Challenges in India: Essays on Changing Perceptions*. Jefferson: McFarland.
- Dāś, Uttam 1986. *Hāmri, śruti o sāstrabirodhī āndolan*. Kal'kātā: Mahādīganta.
- De, Kumār Biṣṇu 2013. *Hāmri āndolan o drohapuruṣer kathā*. Kal'kātā: Sahayātrī.
- De Sarkar, Titas 2019. "Words Know no Borders: Decoding Youth Culture in the Twentieth-century World", in Aditi Chandra and Vinita Chandra (eds.), *The Nation and its Margins: Rethinking Community*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Bibliography

- Delville, Michel 2009. *Food, Poetry, and the Aesthetics of Consumption*, New York: Routledge.
- DiPlacidi, Jenny 2018. *Gothic Incest: Gender, Sexuality and Transgression*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Douglas, Mary 1966. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Doyle, Laura & Winkiel, Laura 2005. *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Engles, David 2019. "Oswald Spengler and The Decline of the West", in Sedgwick, Mark (ed.) 2019. *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, Oxford Scholarship Online, accessed 19.01.2024.
- Erjavec, Ales 2015. *Aesthetic Revolutions and Twentieth-century Avant-garde Movements*. Durham; London: Duke University Press.
- Erl, Astrid 2014. "Generation in Literary History: Three Constellations of Generationality, Genealogy, and Memory". In *New Literary History* 45(3):385–409.
- Fanon, Frantz 1986 [1952; 1967]. *Black Skin White Masks*, London: Pluto Press.
- Fazzino, Jimmy 2016. *World Beats: Beat Generation Writing and the Worlding of U.S. Literature*. Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press.
- Fernandes, Leela 2006. *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ferry, Luc and Renaut, Alain 1985. *La pensée soixante-huit: essai sur l'anti-humanisme contemporain*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Ferry, Luc 2012. *L'invention de la vie de bohème, 1830–1900*. Paris: Cercle D'art.
- Fischer-Tiné, Harald and Tschurennev, Jana (eds.) 2013. *A History of Alcohol and Drugs in Modern South Asia: Intoxicating affairs*. New York: Routledge.
- Flora, Giuseppe, 2014. "Dandyism in Nineteenth-century Bengal – An Exploration", in *Le dandysme et ses représentations*, Textes Réunis Par Marie-Noëlle Zeender, Paris: L'harmattan, pp. 107–137.
- Forbes, Geraldine 1996. *The New Cambridge History of India, IV.2: Women in modern India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foucault, Michel 1977. "A Preface to Transgression", in Donald Bouchard (ed.) *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, pp. 29–52, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- . 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, transl. by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage books.
- . 1978. *The History of Sexuality*, transl. by Robert Hurley, New York: Pantheon Books.
- . 2003. *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974–1975*, transl. by Graham Burchell. London; New York: Verso.

- Fuchtnar, Veronika; Haynes, Douglas E., and Jones, Ryan M. (eds.) 2018. *A Global History of Sexual Science, 1880–1960*. Oakland, California: University of California press.
- Futehally, Laeeq, Prabhala, Achal, and Sattar, Arshia (eds.) 2011. *The Best of Quest*. Chennai: Tranquebar.
- Gair, Christopher 2007. *The American Counterculture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Gemie, Sharif and Ireland, Brian 2007. *The Hippie Trail: A History (1957–78)*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Genette, Gerard 1997. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ghoṣ, Śaileśvar n.d. [1963–1967]. *Janmaniyantraṇ*. Kalkātā: Kṣudhārta prakāśanī.
- Ghoṣ, Śaileśvar (sam.) 2011. *Hāmri jenāreśaner śraṣṭāder kṣudhārta saṃkalan*. *Sāt'ṭi pratiṣṭhān'birodhī samkhyā*. Kalkātā: De'j pāb'liśim.
- Ghoṣ, Śaileśvar 2011b. *Hāmri jenāreśan satyamithyā*. Kalkātā: Kārubāsanā.
- Ghosh, Anindita 2006. *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778–1905*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Ginsberg, Allen 1970. *Indian Journals, March 1962 – May 1963*. San Francisco: Dave Haselwood Books and City Lights Books.
- . 2009 [1956]. *Howl, Kaddish and Other Poems*. London: Penguin classics.
- Gooptu, Sharmistha 2011. *Bengali Cinema: An 'Other' Nation*. London: Routledge.
- Gupta, Charu 2001. *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu public in colonial India*. Delhi: Permanent Black.
- Harder, Hans 2016. “Urbanity in the Vernacular: Narrating the City in Modern South Asian Literatures”, in *ASIA* 2016; 70(“): 435–466. Berlin; Heidelberg: De Gruyter.
- . 2019. “Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Modern Hinduism”, in *The Oxford History of Hinduism: Modern Hinduism*, pp. 54–71. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2019. “Migrant Literary Genres: Transcultural Moments and Scales of Transculturality”, in *Engaging Transculturality*, pp. 185–195. London: Routledge.
- . 2011. *Verkehrte Welten: Bengalische Satiren aus dem kolonialen Kalkutta; bengalisch-deutsch*. Heidelberg: Draupadi Verlag.
- Harder, Hans and Mittler, Barbara (eds.) 2013. *Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair*. Berlin; Heidelberg: Springer.
- Harding, James M., and Rouse, John 2006. *Not the Other Avant-garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-garde Performance*. University of Michigan Press.
- Harvey, David 1989. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.

Bibliography

- Hāsānāt:, Ābul 1936. *Sacitra yaunabijñān (mat o path: samasyā o samādhān)*, pratham khaṇḍa. Kalikātā: prakāśak Bīreśvar Cakrabartī.
- Haynes, Douglas E. (ed.) 2010. *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- . 2012. “Selling Masculinity: Advertisements for Sex Tonics and the Making of Modern Conjuality in Western India, 1900–1945”, in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 35:4, pp. 787–831.
- Heale, M. J. 2005. “The Sixties as History: A Review of the Political Historiography”, in *Reviews in American History*. 133–152.
- Heath, Deana 2010. *Purifying the Empire: Obscenity and the Politics of Moral Regulation in Britain, India and Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Herf, Jeffrey 1985. *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hodges, Sara 2010. “South Asia’s Eugenic Past”, in Bashford, Alison and Levine, Philippa (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, Oxford University Press, pp. 228–242.
- Hopkins, Jerry 1968. *The Hippie Papers*. New York: The New American Library.
- Hunt, Lynn (ed.) 1996. *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity 1500–1800*. New York: Zone Books.
- Hutcheon, Linda 1985. *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- . 1988. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge.
- Inden, Ronald B., and Nicholas, Ralph W. 1977. *Kinship in Bengali Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jaidev 1993. *The Culture of Pastiche: Existential Aestheticism in the Context of Contemporary Hindi Novel*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study.
- Jameson, Fredric 1984. “Periodizing the 60s”, in *Social Text*, no. 9/10, pp. 178–209.
- . 1991. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso.
- Jānā, Nitāi 2011. *Post/maḍārn o uttarādhunik bāmlā kabitār paricay*. Kall’kātā: Banaśilpa.
- Jenkins, J. Philip 2023. “Obscenity.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 18, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/obscurity>, accessed 15.01.2024.
- Jenks, Chris, 2003. *Transgression*, London: Routledge.
- Jian, Chen; Klimke, Martin; Kirasirova, Mary Nolan; Young, Marilyn, and Waley-Cohen, Joanna (eds.) 2018. *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-building*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Joshi, Sanjay 2017. “India’s Middle Class”, in *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia, Asia History*. Oxford University Press.

- Juneja, Monica, and Koch, Franziska 2010. "Multi-centered Modernisms – Reconfiguring Asian Art of the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries. Introduction", in *Journal of Transcultural Studies* 1:1, pp. 38–41.
- Kakar, Sudhir 1991. *Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- . 1981 [1978]. *The Inner World: A Psychoanalytical Study of Childhood and Society in India*, Delhi: OUP.
- Kapur, Geeta 2000. *When was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*. New Delhi: Tulika books.
- . 2018. "Proposition Avant-garde: A View from the South", in *Art Journal* 77:1.
- Kaviraj, Sudipta 2000. "Laughter and Subjectivity: The Self-ironical Tradition in Bengali Literature", in *Modern Asian Studies* 34:2, pp. 379–406.
- Kaur, Raminder, and Mazzarella, William (eds.) 2009. *Censorship in South Asia: Cultural Regulation from Sedition to Seduction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- King, Bruce Alvin 1987. *Modern Indian Poetry in English*. Delhi: OUP.
- Laqueur, Thomas 2003. *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*, New York: Zone books.
- Lau, Lisa and Dwivedi, Om Prakash (eds.) 2014. *Re-orientalism and Indian Writing in English*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- LeHardy Sweet, David 2017. *Avant-garde Orientalism: The Eastern 'Other' in Twentieth-century Travel Narrative and Poetry*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lickhardt, Maren; Schuhen, Gregor, and Velten, Hans Rudolf (eds.) 2018. *Transgression and Subversion: Gender in the Picaresque Novel*. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Loomba, Ania 1998. *Colonialism and Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge.
- López-Varela Azcárate, Asunción 2018. "Anjan Sen's Visual Poetry and the Bengal *Uttar-Adhunik* School", in Skoda, Uwe and Lettmann, Birgit (eds.), *India and its Visual Cultures: Community, Class and Gender in a Symbolic Landscape*. Los Angeles; London; New Delhi; Singapore; Washington, DC; Melbourne: SAGE.
- Lorea, Carola Erika 2018. "Ghosts, Drunkards and Bad Language: Translating the Margins of Nabarun Bhattacharya's *Kāñāl Mālṣāṭ* (The War Cry of the Beggars)", in *Sanglap: Journal of Literary and Cultural Inquiry* 5:1, 36–50.
- Loren, Glass 2013. *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review, and the Incorporation of the Avant-garde*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Louro, Michele 2018. *Comrades Against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism*. Cambridge; New York; Melbourne; New Delhi; Singapore: Cambridge University Press.
- Lyon, Janet 1999. *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Bibliography

- Lyotard, Jean-François 1979. *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*. Paris: Éd. de Minuit.
- Maerhofer, John W. 2009. *Rethinking the Vanguard: Aesthetic and Political Positions in the Modernist Debate, 1917–1962*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Majumdar, Rochona 2009. *Marriage and Modernity: Family Values in Colonial Bengal*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Marcus, Stevens 1966. *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-nineteenth Century England*. New York: Basic Books.
- Mazzarella, William 2004. *Shoveling Smoke: Advertising and Globalization in Contemporary India*. New Delhi: OUP.
- Mehta, Gita 1981. *Karma Cola*. Madras: Macmillan India.
- Mellino, Miguel 2005. *La critica postcoloniale: Decolonizzazione, capitalismo e cosmopolitismo nei postcolonial studies*. Roma: Meltemi.
- Miller, Timothy 1991. *The Hippies and American Values*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Mills, James H. 2000. *Madness, Cannabis and Colonialism: The 'Native-only' Lunatic Asylums of British India, 1857–1900*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Mingiardi, Vincenzo n.d. *La produzione apoetica di Rājkamal Caudhrī: Kankāvī 1964*. Milano: Cesviet.
- Misra, Aditya 2016. “I Can but Why Should I Go?: The Romance of Opposition in Shakti Chattopadhyay’s Poetry”, in: *South Asian Review*, 37: 2, 178–190.
- Miśra, Aśok'kumār 2014. *Bāmlā sāhityer sampūrṇa itihās (ādhunik parba: 1900–2012)*. Kal'kātā: Sāhitya saṅgī.
- Miśra, Baidyanāth (ed.) 2015 [Beng. 1422] *Candragrahaṇ: Phālgunī Rāy ebaṃ kichu lekhālekhi* 11:23. Kal'kātā: Candragrahaṇ.
- Mitter, Partha 2007. *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-garde, 1922–1947*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, 1984. “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, in *boundary 2* 12:3, On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism (Spring-Autumn, 1984), pp. 333–358. Duke University Press.
- Montaut, Annie (ed.) 2004. *Littérature et poétique pluriculturelles en Asie du sud*. Paris: Editions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales.
- Mortuza, Shamsad 2015. “Allen Ginsberg’s Blake Vision” in *Crossings*, Special Volume, December 2015. https://deh.ulab.edu.bd/sites/default/files/Mortuza_o.pdf, accessed 13.12.2023.
- Mey, Kerstin 2007. *Art & Obscenity*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Moody, Alys 2018. *The Art of Hunger: Aesthetic Autonomy and the Afterlives of Modernism*. New York: OUP.

- Mukharjii, Projit Bihari 2011. *Nationalizing the Body: The Medical Market, Print and Dakṭari Medicine*, London: Anthem Press.
- Mukherjee, Madhuja 2019. "Framing the Couple: Gender and Intimacy in Hindi Cinema and Film Publicity during the 1950s", in: *Tasveer Ghar: A House of Pictures*. Online resource. <http://www.tasveergharindia.net/essay/framing-film-publicity.html>, accessed 22.01.2024.
- Mukherji, Parul 2016. "Modernism without an Avant Garde in India". *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*. Taylor and Francis, 2016. <http://www.rem.routledge.com/articles/modernism-without-an-avant-garde-in-india>, accessed 11 Dec. 2020.
- Mukhopadhyay, Bhaskar 2004. "Between Elite Hysteria and Subaltern Carnavalesque: The Politics of Street-food in the City of Calcutta", in *South Asia Research* 24:1, pp. 37–50.
- Mulvey, Laura 1975. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in *Screen* 16:3, pp. 6–18.
- Murśid, A.M (sam.) 2002. *Malay* (Essays on Malay Raychaudhuri). Kal'kāṭā: Ābiṣkār Prakāśanī.
- Murshid, Ghulam 2003. *Lured by Hope: A Biography of Michael Madhusudan Dutt*, transl. by Gopa Majumdar. New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nandy, Ashis 1983. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*. Delhi: University Press.
- Natale, Alberto 2009. *Food Movies. L'immaginario del cibo e il cinema*. Bologna: Gedit.
- Nerlekar, Anjali 2016. *Bombay Modern: Arun Kolatkar and Bilingual Literary Culture*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- . 2016b. "'Melted Out of Circulation': Little Magazines and Bombay Poetry in the 1960's and 1970's", in Rosinka Chaudhuri (ed.) 2016. *A History of Indian Poetry in English*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Newbigin, Eleanor 2013. *The Hindu Family and the Emergence of Modern India: Law, Citizenship and Community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2010. "A Post-colonial Patriarchy? Representing Family in the Indian Nation-state", in *Modern Asian Studies* 44:1, pp. 121–144.
- Nijhawan, Shobhna 2012. *Women and Girls in the Hindi Public Sphere: Periodical Literature in Colonial North India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Nuttall, Jeff 1970. *Bomb Culture*. London: Paladin.
- Oliver, Paul 2015. *Hinduism and the 1960s: The Rise of a Counter-Culture*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Orsini, Francesca 2002. *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920–1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Pande, Ishita 2010. *Medicine, Race and Liberalism in Bengal: Symptoms of Empire*. London: Routledge.

Bibliography

- Pandey, Rajbali 1969 [1949]. *Hindu Samskaras: A Socio-religious Study of the Hindu Sacraments*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Das.
- Panu, Mihnea, 2009. *Contextualizing Family Planning: Truth, Subject, and the Other in the U.S. Government*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pasolini, Pier Paolo 1975. *Scritti corsari*. Milano: Garzanti
- Peng, Hsiao-yen 2010. *Dandyism and Transcultural Modernity: The Dandy, the Flâneur, and the Translator in 1930s Shanghai, Tokyo, and Paris*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Pfeifer, Annie n.d. “Other Modernist Figures: Oswald Spengler”, in *Modernism Lab* <https://modernism.courseresource.yale.edu/2017/07/18/oswald-spengler/>, accessed 22.01.2024.
- Poggioli, Renato 1962. *Teoria dell'arte d'avanguardia*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Prabhu, Gayatri 2013. “Figurations of the Spiritual Squalid in Allen Ginsberg’s *Indian Journals*: Transformation of India in Post-war Beat and American Imagination”, in *Transnational Literature* 6:1, p. 1–11.
- Prasad, Srirupa 2015. *Cultural Politics of Hygiene in India, 1890–1940: Contagions of Feeling*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Prothero, Stephen 1991. “On the Holy Road: The Beat Movement as Spiritual Protest”, in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (Apr. 1991), pp. 205–222.
- Puchner, Martin 2005. *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos and the Avant-gardes*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Radice, William 2003. “The Significance of Madhusudan Dutt and his Epic”, in *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (SUMMER 2003), pp. 73–88.
- Rajagopal, Arvind (ed.) 2009. *The Indian Public Sphere: Readings in Media History*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- . 2011. “The Emergency as Prehistory of the New Middle Class”, in *Modern Asian Studies* 45:5, pp. 1003–1049. Cambridge University Press.
- . 2014. “Television in India: Ideas, Institutions and Practices”, in Alvarado, Manuel, Buonanno, Milly, Gray, Herman, and Miller, Toby (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Television Studies*, pp. 83–104. London; Thousand Oaks; New Delhi; Singapore: Sage.
- Ramamurthy, Priti 2006. “The Modern Girl in India in the Interwar Years: Interracial Intimacies, International Competition, and Historical Eclipsing”, in *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 1/2, The Global & the Intimate (Spring - Summer, 2006), pp. 197–226.
- Raskin, Jonah 2004. *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg’s Howl and the Making of the Beat Generation*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press.
- Ratul, Tanvir (ed.) 2015. *Television of a Rotten Soul: Poems of Falguni Ray*, transl. by Atindriyo Chakraborty. Liverpool: Antivirus.

- Ray, Punya Sloka (ed.) 1968. *Modernity and Contemporary Indian Literature: Proceedings of a Seminar*, vol. 5. Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study.
- Rāy'caudhurī, Malaḃ 1994. *Hāmri kiṃbadantī* (History of a Literary Revolution). Kal'kātā: De Book Stores
- . 2005. *Malay Rāy'caudhurīr kabitā 2004–1961*. Kal'kātā: Ābiṣkār.
- . 2013. *Hāmri kiṃbadantī 2*. Kal'kātā: Ābiṣkār prakāśanī.
- . 2013a. *Choṭoloker kabitā*. Hāorā: Ek'ti srṣṭisukh prayās.
- Rāy'caudhurī, Samīr (sam.) 1997. *Poṣṭmaḍārn kī o keno*. Kal'kātā: Ābiṣkār prakāśanī.
- . 2002. *Uttarādhanik prabandha saṃgraha*. Kal'kātā: Ābiṣkār prakāśanī.
- . 2012. “Uttar aupanibeṣik bāmlā sāhitya āndolaner dalil” (A Documentation of Postcolonial Bengali Literary Movements), in De, Bandanā (sam.) *Rabīndranāth o anyasvar: tāmr samayē o pare*. Kal'kātā: Laukik Prakāśanā.
- Raychaudhuri, Samir and Chakraborty, Dhiman (ed.), 2001. *Postmodern Bangla Poetry 2001*. Kolkata: Haowa 49.
- Robinson, F. N. (ed.) 1957. *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. London: OUP.
- Rosselli, John 1980. “The Self-image of Effeteness: Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-century Bengal”, in *Past & Present* (Feb. 1980), pp. 121–148. Oxford University Press.
- Roszak, Theodore 1969. *The Making of a Counter-culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Roy, Srirupa 2007. *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Saccidanandan, K. 1999. *Indian Literature: Positions and Propositions*. Delhi: Pencraft International.
- Said, Edward W. 1979. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage books.
- Samaddar, Ranabir 2018. “Occupy College Street: Student Radicalism in Kolkata in the Sixties”, in *Slavic Review* 77: 4, pp. 904–911.
- Sanyal, Shukla 2014. *Revolutionary Pamphlets, Propaganda and Political Culture in Colonial Bengal*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sarkar, Tanika 2001. *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Satchidanandan, K. (ed.) 1999. *Indian Literature: Positions and Propositions*. Delhi: Pencraft International.
- Scholes, Nichola 2010. “Adapting Kali: Allen Ginsberg’s ‘Stotras to Kali Destroyer of Illusions’”, in *U.S. Studies Online: The BAAS Postgraduate Journal*, Issue 17, Autumn 2010.
- Schwab, Raymond 1984. *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe’s Rediscovery of India and 1680–1880*, translated by Gene Patte and Victor Reinking. New York: Columbia.
- Scott Brown, Timothy and Lison, Andrew (eds.) 2014. *The Global Sixties in Sound and Vision: Media, Counterculture, Revolt*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bibliography

- Seely, Clinton B. 1990. *A Poet Apart: A Literary Biography of the Bengali Poet Jibanananda Das (1899–1954)*. Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press.
- Seita, Sophie 2019. *Provisional Avant-gardes: Little Magazine Communities from Dada to Digital*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Sen, Krishna 2004. “Lessons in Self-fashioning: *Bamabodhini Patrika* and the Education of Women in Colonial Bengal”, in *Victorian Periodicals Review* 37:2, pp. 176–191.
- Sen, Sabyasācī (sam.) 2015. *Hāmri jenāreśan racanā samgraha*. Kal'kātā: De'j Pābliśim.
- Sen, Sukumār 1999 [1959]. *Bāngālā sāhityer itihās (pañcam khaṇḍa)*. Kal'kātā: Ānanda.
- Seth, Sanjay 2006. “From Maoism to Postcolonialism? The Indian ‘Sixties’, and Beyond”, in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7:4, 589–605.
- Sibley, Emily 2016. “Worlding World Literature. A Review of Cheah, Pheng. *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*”. Duke University Press, 2016, in *Postmodern Culture: Journal of Interdisciplinary Thought on Contemporary Cultures*, Volume 27, Number 1, September 2016.
- Sinha, Kabita 2005. *The Unsevered Tongue: ekhano jihbā aṭuṭ*, transl. by Amitabha Sengupta. Kolkata: Nandimukh Samsad.
- Sinha, Mrinalini 1995. *Colonial Masculinity: The Manly Englishman and the Effeminate Bengali*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.
- Sinha, Chitra 2007. “Images of Motherhood: The Hindu Code Bill Discourse”, in *Economic and Political Weekly* 42:43, pp. 49–57.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakraborty 1988. “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, pp. 66–111.
- Srivastava, Sanjay (ed.) 2004. *Sexual Sites, Seminal Attitudes: Sexualities, Masculinities and Culture in South Asia*. New Delhi; Thousand Oaks; London: Sage Publications.
- . 1998. *Constructing Post-colonial India: National Character and the Doon School*. London: Routledge.
- . 2001. “Introduction: Semen, History, Desire, and Theory”, in *South Asia*, vol. xxiv, Special Issue (2001), pp. 1–24.
- . 2007. *Passionate Modernity: Sexuality, Class, and Consumption in India*. New Delhi: Routledge.
- . (ed.) 2013. *Sexuality Studies*. New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2014. “‘Sane Sex’, the Five-year Plan Hero and Men on Footpaths and in Gated Community: The Cultures of Twentieth-century Masculinity”, in Dasgupta, Rohit K. and, Gokulsing Moti (eds.) 2014. *Masculinity and its Challenges in India: Essays on Changing Perceptions*, pp. 27–53. Jefferson: McFarland.

- Stallybrass, Peter and White, Allon 1986. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. London: Methuen.
- Stoler, Ann Laura 1995. *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham; London: Duke University Press.
- Tagore, Rabindranath 2001. *Selected Writings on Literature and Language*, ed. by Sisir Kumar Das and Sukanta Chaudhuri. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Tarlo, Emma 2003. *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of India's 'Emergency'*. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- Taylor, Victor E. and Winquist, Charles E. (eds.) 2001. *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Tharu, Susie, and Lalita, K. (eds.), 1993. *Women Writings in India: The Twentieth Century* (vol. II). New York: The Feminist Press.
- Trigilio, Tony 2007. *Allen Ginsberg's Buddhist Poetics*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Trivedi, Harish 2007. "Colonial Influence, Postcolonial Intertextuality: Western Literature and Indian Literature", in *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 43:2. University of St Andrews: OUP.
- Trivedi, Harish and Mukherjee, Meenakshi (eds.) 1996. *Interrogating Post-colonialism: Theory, Text and Context*. Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study.
- Turner, Victor, 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- . 1982. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: PAJ Publications.
- Uberoi, Patricia 2006. *Freedom and Destiny: Gender, Family, and Popular Culture in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Urban, Hugh 2003. *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Vanita, Ruth (ed.) 2002. *Queering India: Same-sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Verkerk, Willow 2017. "Reification, Sexual Objectification, and Feminist Activism", in *The Spell of Capital*, ed. by Samir Gandesha and Johan F. Hartle, Amsterdam University Press.
- Visaria, Leela and Ved, Rajani R. 2016. *India's Family Planning Programme: Policies, Practices and Challenges*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Weeks, Jeffrey 1981. *Sex, Politics and Sexuality: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*. London: Longman.
- Werbner, Pina; Webb, Martin and Spellman-Poots, Kathryn (eds.) 2014. *The Political Aesthetics of Global Protest: The Arab Spring and Beyond*. Edinburgh University Press.

Bibliography

- Wessler, Heinz Werner and Consolaro, Alessandra (eds.) 2011. *Orientalia Suecana*, vol. LX (Dissent in South Asian literary cultures). Uppsala: Sweden.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig 1958 [1953]. *Philosophical Investigations*, transl. by G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Yablonsky, Lewis 1969. *The Hippie Trip*. New York: Pegasus.
- Zecchini, Laetitia 2014. *Arun Kolatkar and Literary Modernism in India (Moving Lines)*. London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury.

Index

A

Acharya, Subo 10, 14–16, 35, 58, 75,
199–200, 203, 220–221, 227
Ayub, Abu Sayeed 185

B

Bakken, Dick 8, 89, 185–186, 194,
196, 198–199, 221
Basak, Subimal 14, 54, 59, 109,
114–116, 126, 191–192, 203, 221
Basu, Samaresh 17, 99, 202
Basu, Utpalkumar 14, 16, 35, 130, 225
Baudelaire, Charles 78, 84, 90–91, 104
Beat Generation 8–9, 12, 15, 36, 38,
70–71, 82, 95, 145–146, 171,
173–178, 183–193, 200–202,
205, 227, 266
Bhaduri, Satinath 99, 203
Bhagavadgītā 138, 269
Bidyasagar, Ishvarchandra 169–170,
260
Bombay 6, 8, 37, 39, 43, 49, 60, 98,
200
Bose, Buddhadeva 17, 40, 88, 146,
227

C

cannabis 82–83, 238, 243, 272
carnavalesque 31, 53, 207

Charminar (cigarette) 101, 138–139,
147, 149, 151, 260
Chattopadhyay, Sandipan 10–11,
14–15, 35–36, 65, 240
Chattopadhyay, Shakti 9–11, 13–16,
35–36, 65–66, 70, 72–75, 200,
238, 242
Chaudhuri, Pradip 10, 14–16, 35, 59,
214, 220
Chaudhuri, Rajkamal 82, 101–102
City Lights (journal) 51, 87, 94, 201
commodification 61, 64, 156–158,
160–162
Congress for Cultural Freedom 92,
185

D

Darwin's theory 154–155, 255
Dasgupta, Alokeranjan 48, 89
Dasgupta, Basudeb 11, 14–16, 35–36,
58, 62, 130, 203, 220, 223
Das, Jibanananda 40, 88, 90, 93–94,
152, 203, 244, 247, 272–273
Datta, Jyotirmoy 1, 8, 13, 89, 185–
188, 192–194, 197–199, 221–223
DeLoach, Allen 200
Dimock, Edward 186, 198, 221
Dutta, Saroj 7–8
Dutt, Michael Madhusudan 40, 58–59,
82, 90

Index

E

- Ellis, Havelock 136–137, 170, 260, 265
Emergency 157
eugenics 130, 142–143, 155

F

- family planning 120, 130, 141, 152, 156–157, 163–164, 231, 261, 269, 279
Fanon, Frantz 9, 29, 146, 165, 171
Ferlinghetti, Lawrence 22, 51, 187, 201, 222
foetus 142, 157–164, 266, 269–270, 277–279
Foucault, Michel 29, 31, 33, 104, 127–128, 207
Freud, Sigmund 29, 58, 136–137, 147, 154–155, 196, 207, 221, 255, 265

G

- Gandhi, Indira 111, 130, 132, 157, 185
Gangopadhyay, Sunil 9, 14, 36, 77, 185, 194–195, 200–201, 203, 242
Garcia Lorca, Federico 56, 90, 94
Ghosh, Saileshvar 10–16, 35, 59, 62, 64, 102, 109, 112, 114–115, 196–198, 203, 219–220, 227, 231
Ghosh, Shankha 42, 89
Ginsberg, Allen 1, 8–9, 17, 22, 40, 60–61, 82, 90, 104, 120, 131, 144, 147, 174–190, 194, 200–201, 205, 222, 266
grotesque body 32, 53, 73, 156

H

- heredity 124, 130, 142–144, 150, 261, 266
hippie 82–83, 101, 174–178
homosexuality 9, 27, 101, 110, 133, 139, 148, 153–156, 176, 185, 206, 256
Howl (poem) 17, 40, 82, 131, 186, 189, 222

I

- In Defense of Obscenity* 8, 14, 20–22, 48, 72
Indian Journals 177–178, 183, 189, 200
Indifferent Charminar (poem) 138, 147, 149, 260
Intrepid (magazine) 194–195, 200–201

J

- Jayakar, Pupul 185
Joyce, James 17, 125, 143, 266, 274

K

- Kafka, Franz 69, 267, 274
Kali 151, 178–182, 258
Karanjai, Anil 99, 189, 218
Kerouac, Jack 61, 110, 175
Kolatkar, Arun 8, 39, 41, 98, 191, 200
Kṛttibās (movement & magazine) 14, 36, 126, 189, 200, 205
Kṣudhārta (movement & magazine) 11, 14–16, 41, 205, 219–220

L

little magazine 11, 13, 35, 37, 39–45,
51, 53, 58, 109, 196, 209

M

Majumdar, Binoy 14, 36, 187

Majumdar, Kamalkumar 99

manifestoes 1–2, 35, 37, 45–52, 69,
213–220

Manifesto on Hungryalistic Poetry 1,
10, 14–15, 40, 46–49, 213

masculinity 2, 9, 24, 26–30, 33–34,
37–38, 109–116, 120–121,
132–135, 138, 148, 150–156,
161, 170, 206

masturbation 2, 20, 30, 34, 37, 115,
117, 119–124, 129, 140–141,
148, 185, 206, 232, 249, 266,
273

McCord, Howard 22, 76, 87, 95, 187,
192–194, 200–202, 222

Mehrotra, Arvind A.K. 8, 43, 80, 100,
192–194, 200

mimeograph 39

mimicry 38, 174, 177, 208–209

misogyny 2, 30, 33–34, 110, 114, 121,
210–211

Mukhopadhyay, Karunanidhan 83, 99,
189, 218

Müller, Max 145, 266

N

Naxalism 7–8, 135–136, 210, 264

Nehru, Jawaharlal 2, 6, 8, 17–18, 24,
26–29, 61, 65, 93, 110, 127–130,
148, 164, 208

Nehruvian. *see* *Nehru*

O

objectification 2, 29–30, 37–38, 64,
109–115, 133, 158, 206, 211

obscenity 1, 3–4, 8, 10–13, 16–18, 20,
22, 24, 33, 47–48, 51, 72, 82, 86,
89, 99, 117, 119, 122, 176, 183,
188, 205, 207, 209, 220

Oedipus complex 57–58, 137–138,
147–148, 151, 265

Orlovsky, Peter 174, 176, 190

P

Pasolini, Pierpaolo 61–62, 156–158,
175

penis 118, 134, 139, 148–153, 163,
168, 227–229, 232, 253–254,
259–261, 269, 274, 279, 281–
282

postcolonial (theory) 8–9, 88, 98,
102–105, 107, 131, 144, 146–
147, 166–171, 178, 205, 208

postmodernism 33, 85, 103–107, 188

R

Ramakrishna 129, 138, 149, 151–152,
168, 170, 179, 219, 231, 254,
258, 260–261

Raychaudhuri, Samir 10–11, 14–16,
35, 103–106, 127, 188

Ray, Phalguni 2, 9–10, 14, 29–30,
34–35, 38, 54, 59, 62–63, 77, 81,
83, 109, 112, 115, 122, 124–171,
206, 269, 272

Renu, Phanishwar Nath 82

Rimbaud, Arthur 78, 81, 90–91, 104,
257, 267

Roy, Debi 10–11, 14–15, 35, 39, 59,
75–76, 86–87, 191, 203

Index

S

- Salted Feathers* (magazine) 20, 89,
186, 194, 196, 200–202, 221
Sartre, Jean-Paul 94–95, 137, 147,
171, 221, 264, 274
Section 292 (Indian Penal Code)
17–18
Seely, Clinton 198
semen anxiety 121, 141
sexology 27, 118, 123, 128, 137–138,
170, 260
sexuality 24–31, 63–64, 101, 110–
120, 127–129, 132–141, 147–
153, 161, 170–171, 185, 206–
208, 210
Spengler, Oswald 69, 94–97
sperm 26–27, 117–124, 130, 140–142,
185, 197–198, 250–251, 262,
266, 270, 282
Stark Electric Jesus (poem) 18, 30,
36, 40, 63, 112–113, 117, 122,
195–197, 209, 249
Statue of Liberty 180–182
- ### T
- Tagore, Rabindranath 40, 87–88, 96,
256, 258, 271
Television of a Rotten Soul (poem)
81, 130–131, 135–147

- The Final Womb (poem) 156–167,
277–280
transgression 1–4, 8, 18, 24, 30–38,
67, 77, 98, 100, 111, 166, 170,
206–208, 210
Turner, Victor 3, 33–34, 207–208, 210
Tutuola, Amos 193

V

- vagina 18, 41, 57, 117–118, 159, 163,
228–229, 248, 250, 255–256,
277–279, 281–282
Van Gogh, Vincent 78, 90, 93–94,
232, 244
Vivekananda 152

W

- Wastepaper* (magazine) 41, 43, 109,
126
Wichita Vortex Sutra (poem) 179–180
Wittgenstein, Ludwig 168–169, 181
worlding 6, 9, 98, 172–174, 183, 196,
205

Y

- Young Bengal 59, 77, 82, 87

Transgression in the Bengali Avant-Garde wants to introduce the Hungry Generation movement to a global audience through its poetry, manifestoes and other literary materials. Emerged from the cities of Patna and Calcutta in the early 1960s, the Hungry Generation gained international attention after the poets' arrest on charges of obscenity in 1964. Fiercely provoking the literary establishment, these Bengali bohemians used poetry and literature as means of cultural radicalism, tackling subjects like sexuality, perversion, alcohol and drug consumption, masturbation, and hyper-masculinity to challenge bourgeois morality and respectability. The book sheds light on a variety of Hungryalist sources and explores the literature of the Hungry Generation through the filter of 'transgression', showing how this concept unfolded in the language, aesthetics and culture behind this Bengali avant-garde movement. Furthermore, the book will delve into the poetry of some iconic representatives of the Hungry Generation, critically reading their oeuvre in the context of changing models of sexuality, consumption, and modernization in post-colonial India.

ISBN 978-3-948791-90-2

