

WRITERS IN CONVERSATION



The Hungryalist Movement in Bengal: A Conversation with Malay Roychoudhury

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It is not an overstatement to say that the poetry of the 1960s is characterised by counterculture. The Beat poetry of America became an international influence by the end of 1950s. Young Californian poets rebelled against the norms and mores of society under the leadership of Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg's 'Howl' is a passionate critique of the sordid life of post- World War II America.

Thousands of miles away, a poet from India, was giving similar leadership to a generation of Bengali poets. Malay Roychoudhuri and his Hungryalist Movement came to be recognised as one of the most culturally influential poetic movements which overruled standards of conventional literature, spurned mercenaries of culture, introduced new models. The lives of the artists spanned extraordinary frames changing the poetic landscape forever

Malay Roychoudhury (1939) is an Indian Bengali poet, playwright, short story writer, essayist and novelist who founded the Hungryalist movement in the 1960s which changed the course of avant-garde Bengali literature and painting. He was born in Patna, Bihar, India, into the Sabarna Roy Choudhury clan, which owned the villages that became Kolkata. He grew up in Patna's Imlitala ghetto, which was mainly inhabited by poor lower caste Hindus and Shia Muslims. His was the only Bengali family. His father, Ranjit (1909–1991) was a professional photographer; his mother, Amita (1916–1982), was from a progressive family of the nineteenth-century Bengali renaissance. At the age of three, he was admitted to a local Catholic school,

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and later, he was sent to Ram Mohun Roy Seminary. The school was administered by the Brahmo Samaj movement, a monotheistic religion founded in 1830 in Kolkata by Ram Mohun Roy, who aimed to purify Hinduism and recover the simple worship of the Vedas. There, he met student-cum-librarian Namita Chakraborty, who introduced him to Sanskrit and Bengali classics. All religious activities were banned at the school, and Roychoudhuri has said that his childhood experience made him instinctively eclectic. Roychoudhuri has proficiency in English, Hindi, Bhojpuri and Maithili, apart from his mother tongue Bengali. He was influenced, though, by the Shia Muslim neighbors who recited Ghalib and Faiz in the Imlitala locality. At the same time his father had two workers Shivnandan Kahar and Ramkhelawan Singh Dabar at his photographic shop at Patna; these two persons introduced him to Ramcharitmanasa written by Tulasidasa as well as saint poets Rahim, Dadu and Kabir

Roychoudhuri did his Masters in Humanities. He later studied Rural Development which gave him a job to visit villages in almost the whole of India for the upliftment of farmers, weavers, fishermen, artisans, craftsmen, potters, cobblers, landless labourers, jute farmers, potato growers and various under-caste Indians.

The Hungryalist movement was initially led by Roychoudhuri; his brother, Samir Roychoudhuri; Shakti Chattopadhyay; and Haradhon Dhara, known as Debi Roy. Thirty more poets and artists subsequently joined them, the best-known being Rajkamal Chaudhary, Binoy Majumdar, Utpal Kumar Basu, Falguni Roy, Subimal Basak, Tridib Mitra, Rabindra Guha, and Anil Karanjai. The movement's English name was derived from Geoffrey Chaucer's line 'in the sower hungry tyme', and its philosophy was based on Oswald Spengler's The Decline of the West. The Hungryalist movement became known in literary circles of the world because of a Time magazine story on it. Poets such as Allen Ginsberg, Octavio Paz, Ernesto Cardenal befriended Roychoudhuri during their visits to India. His poems were translated and published by Lawrence Ferlinghetti in his magazine City Lights Journal. The West Bengal government issued arrest warrants for eleven Hungryalists, including Roychoudhuri and his brother. He was jailed for a month for his poem 'Prachanda Baidyutik Chhutar' ('Stark Electric Jesus') by Kolkata Bankshall Court in 1966. However he was exonerated by the Kolkata High Court in 1967.

With his 1963 poem 'Stark Electric Jesus', which prompted the government's actions against the Hungryalists, Roy Choudhuri introduced Confessional poetry to Bengali literature. The poem defied traditional forms (e.g., sonnet, villanelle, minnesang, pastorelle, canzone, etc.), as well as Bengali meters (e.g., matrabitto and aksharbitto). His poem 'Jakham' is better known and parts of it have been translated into multiple languages.

His best-known poetry collections are Medhar Batanukul Ghungur, Jakham and Matha Ketey Pathachhi Jatno korey Rekho; and his novels Dubjaley Jetuku Proshwas and Naamgandho. He has written more than hundred books. He was given the Sahitya Academy award, the Indian government's highest honour in the field, in 2003 for translating Dharamvir Bharati's Hindi fiction Suraj Ka Satwan Ghora. However, he declined to accept this award and others.

He lives with his wife Shalila in Mumbai.

This interview has been executed by the exchange of e mails with the activist-author.

Q. Allen Ginsberg in a BBC interview spells out his religious and sexual preferences while introducing himself. He says he is certainly a beat poet, certainly Jewish, certainly gay, certainly

American practising meditation. How would Malay Roychoudhury, who spearheaded one of the most important movements in Bengali poetry, introduce himself?

Malay: Ginsberg belonged to a very rich country, his father was a poet himself and quite well to do; Ginsberg thus knew what he should leave for posterity to remember. In whichever country he went he used to send all the paper cuttings, magazines etc. related to him to his step-mother who used to arrange them country-wise in their basement. He made millions from the sale of these items including his books, poetry readings, photographs and records. Right from the beginning he had friends in the writing world. His friend Burroughs was very rich, Ferlinghetti was a publisher. As far as I know after returning from India he converted to Tibetan Buddhism and after death was cremated according to Buddhist rites; his ashes have been placed between the tombs of his parents, given to some Red Indian tribes and sprinkled on Amazon river.

I come from a very poor family of twenty members living in a slum at Patna's Imlitala locality in which the residents were all poor Mahadalits (who were called untouchables in my childhood) and remnants from descendants of Harems of Lucknow Nawabs. My father was the only earning member and we did not have any restrictions to enter any house during playing hide and seek. My elder uncle was a menial staff at Patna Museum and I had the opportunity to visit all the rooms of the Museum for free during my holidays. None of the elders in my family had gone to school and my elder brother Samir was the first member to attend school and college. Because of Samir's interest in literature we started getting poetry books, novels, drama, criticism books from Calcutta (now Kolkata) and I was introduced to literature. Not being from a literary family I have not preserved the letters written to me, the Hungryalist bulletins & magazines as well as my books. I never knew that when you meet famous writers you have to get photographed with them. In school (Ram Mohan Roy Seminary – a non-Hindu school) I was guided by lady librarian Namita Chakraborty to read Brahma Samaj writers. At Imlitala I was introduced to Faiz and Ghalib by a Shia Muslim girl (I used to visit their house to purchase duck eggs) who used to recite their poems which I did not understand at that time though I liked her sonorous rendition. This girl was the first who fell in love with me and I was initiated into the secrets of female body. This was the beginning of my heterosexual journey and I still remain a heterosexual. I am a Hindu in the sense that I was born in a Hindu Brahmin family – I call myself an Instinctive Hindu, I used to enjoy Holi and fireworks during Diwali. However, having been educated in a Brahma school all these things withered away; my parents also did not have spare time to devote to religious activities. I am certainly Bengali and certainly Indian. In fact after visiting some foreign countries I have realised that I feel at home only in India.

Q. We would like to know how the movement was conceived. Did you prepare any manifesto? Was it Calcutta centric only?

Malay: Hungryalist movement was conceived at my Patna residence when Samir and Shakti came in 1961 and Debi Roy had also come to visit me. I explained to them the philosophy of Spengler and Chaucer's line in the background of post-partition nightmare that Bengali society was facing at that time. Refugees protested almost every day at the then Dalhousie

Square, Railway stations were swarming with destitutes and we remembered Henry Louis Vivian Derozio's radicalism. The first manifesto was published on Samir's birthday, i.e. 1st November 1961.

Most of the English manifestos were written by me. I was staying at Patna at that time and a Bengali press was not available. Obviously the initial manifestoes printed at Patna were in English. I guess I wrote about ten to twelve in English. I used to pack them and send to Debi Roy who used to distribute them in Calcutta Coffee House, Universities, Newspaper offices, periodical editors etc. Since the initial manifestos were in English, we could draw attention of writers of other languages, such as Phanishwar Nath 'Renu', Ramdhari Singh 'Dinkar', S. H.Vatsayana 'Ajneya', Dharmavir Bharati (whose *Suraj Ka Satwan Ghora* I translated in Bengali, Nagarjuna, Kamleswar, Srikant Verma, Khushwant Singh, Umashankar Joshi, Arun Kolatkar, Mudrarakshasa, Dhumiil, Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena and others. Hindi, Malayalam, Gujarati, Assamese magazines wrote about our movement and published our photos at that time. Even Nepali newspapers and magazines wrote about us; we became friends with Nepali poets Parijat, Basu Sashi, Ramesh Sreshtha and others and had visited Nepal in 1965 for three months on their invitation. We used to stay in a Hippie Colony in Kathmandu.

No, it was not Calcutta-centric. Myself and Subimal Basak came from Patna. Anil Karanjai and Karunanidhan Mukhopadhyay from Benaras, Saileswar Ghosh and Subhas Ghose from Balurghat, Pradip Chowdhuri and Arun Banik from Tripura, Alope Goswami from Siliguri, Abani Dhar and Basudeb Dasgupta from Ashoknagar, Subo Acharya and Ramananda Chattopadhyay from Bankura, Sambhu Rakshit from Midnapur, Samiran Ghosh from Jalpaiguri.

Q. Could you reach out to other cities and villages in Bengal? Any particular incident you would like to share with us?

Malay: Yes. I have told you just now that the participants came from various places and we could reach out to the districts. Since at Calcutta most of the writers were against us, they would visit the printing presses and tell them not to print our bulletins, books and periodicals. We had to arrange with a press at Berhampur, Murshidabad for getting them printed and we arranged to bring them to Calcutta. Manish Ghatak, whose nom-de-plume was Jubanashwa, resided there and gave a helping hand to identify the press.

Manish Ghatak, you might be knowing is Ritwik Ghatak's elder brother and father of Mahasweta Devi. The press was run by Adrish Bardhan's elder brother; Adrish Bardhan is a known writer of detective and children's books.

Q. 'Hungry Generation' was not at all like Richard Huelsenbeck's random paper knife word. You took the word from Geoffrey Chaucer's 'In sowre Hungry times'. Does 'Hunger' in the Hungryalist movement have any other connotations?

Malay: Yes, in later years, during and after the Court case, some of the Hungryalists tried to explain their own viewpoint. Those who became a part of the Left Front explained that Hungryalists talked of hungry people of West Bengal, hunger the refugees were suffering

from. Subhas Ghose became a CPM card-holder and brought out *Khudharo* and Basudeb Dasgupta edited *Khudharo Khabor* to emphasise hunger or *khudha*. When I borrowed from Chaucer I was thinking of *Hungry Time*. TIME was more important.

Q. What was the Oswald Arnold Gottfried Spengler's historiographical theory that Hungryalist movement drew upon? Were there other theorists who influenced your movement?

Malay: Every culture in the world, according to Spengler, develops like an organism. This idea was completely different from the Abrahamic linear time or progression on which Marxism is based. Spengler conceived culture as something small, it grows, blooms and strengthens itself, produces geniuses and finally enters a stage of decline and irrevocably withers away. Spengler recognised this organic process in several cultures around the world and throughout history. We developed Hungryalism on the premise that Bengalis will no longer produce geniuses similar to nineteenth Century greats of Bengal, say, like Tagore family, Bankimchandra, Vidyasagar, Ram Mohan Roy, Satyendra Nath Bose, Anil Kumar Gain, Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis, Prafulla Chandra Ray, Debendra Mohan Bose, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Jnan Chandra Ghosh, Gopal Chandra Bhattacharya, Kishori Mohan Bandyopadhyay, Jnanendra Nath Mukherjee and Meghnad Saha and others and will gradually face a withering socio-cultural economy swarmed by puny politicians. I don't recollect any other theorists. However, during Left Front rule the stranglehold of CPM became so strong in the suburbs that Basudeb Dasgupta, Subhas Ghose, Saileswar Ghose, Alope Goswami joined the Left Front. Arun Banik, who joined the CPM in Agartala was murdered by political goons.

Q. How did the Hungryalist Movement become a significant poetry movement?

Malay: I would like to correct you that the Hungryalist movement was not limited to poetry. We had novelists, dramatists and painters. Anil Karanjai was awarded Lalit Kala Academy prize for his paintings. Karuna Nidhan Mukhopadhyay drew posters and Subimal Basak sketched some drawings for Hungryalist bulletins which created uproar during Sixties. It became significant primarily because we started writing against the modern poetry and narrative style of thirties. They had discarded Nazrul Islam and Jasimuddin; Madhusudan Dutta was also being side-lined. We said that the thirties critics thought in terms of Abrahamic single line progression whereas Brahma Tagore, Christian Madhusudan and Muslim Jasimuddin had branched out in three different paths; it was wrong to imagine poetry in terms of Western concepts of literature and history. The English manifestos also reached various literary centres of the World and young writers printed them in their magazines. Lawrence Ferlighetti published our poems in three issues of *City Lights Journal*. Dick Bakkaen published a special Hungryalist issue of his magazine *Salted Feathers*. Margaret Randall spread the word in Latin America, Karl Weissner in Germany, George Dowden in England, Gordon Lasslet in Australia.

Q. 'I am thinking of my debauched Sabarna Choudhury ancestors.' Tell us something about your ancestors.

Malay: My ancestors were Gangopadhyay. Mughal Emperor Jehangir gave the title of Roy and later Akbar gave Choudhury. Lakshmikanto was the first to use the title Roychoudhury in his name instead of Gangopadhyay. Since Gangopadhyays are 'savarnagotra', the family is called Sabarna Choudhury. Like all zamindars the Sabarna Choudhury also led a life of pleasure with several wives, mistresses and children and squandered their wealth. They were the original zamindars of the villages which later became Calcutta. The three villages of Sutanuti, Govindapur and Kalikata were part of a *khasmahal* or *imperial jagir* or an estate belonging to the Mughal emperor himself, whose *jagirdari* rights were held by the Sabarna Roychoudhury family. The British settlement was surrounded by thirty-eight villages held by others. Although in 1717, the British East India Company was permitted by the Mughal emperor Farrukhsiyar to rent or acquire zamindari rights in them, it was unable to procure the land from the zamindars or local landlords. Even the Sabarna Roychoudhury family was not keen to allow the British to settle or do trading in these villages, but the British had paid a bribe at the Mughal Durbar to ensure that the deal did not fail. Just prior to their move from Hali Shahar to Barisha, the Roychoudhury family had to transfer their rights over Kalikata in 1698, to the East India Company much against their wishes and protests. The British ultimately got the Right to Rent or lease of three villages for an annual rent of Rs. 1,300. The deed was in Persian. A copy of the deed can be seen at the Sabarna Sangrahashala at Barisha.

After the villages were transferred to the British Sabarna Choudhury became quite poor. They also sided with Siraj Ud Daulah instead of the British and failed to get gold crumbs from East India Company. Now there are about 30,000 Sabarna Choudhury all over the world. A large number now belong to lower middle class; my family was one of them. My grandfather left the clan to try in photography business in Lahore, where my Dad was born.

Q. Tell us about the poets you loved reading and the poets who influenced you. Did you read Nicanor Parra's Anti-poetry?

Malay: I had not heard or read Nicanor Parra in the Sixties when the movement was started. Another Bengali poetry group called '*Shruti*' drew on Anti-Poetry and Concrete Poetry. Their main poets were Paresh Mandal, Sajal Bandopadhyay, Pushkar Dasgupta etc. I read Parra in Eighties. I gave more importance to saying something and the voice saying it rather than the look of the printed poem on a page. At Imlitala we had two workers who worked at our home and Dad's photography shop, Sivnandan Kahar and Ramkhelawan Singh Dabur. They used to admonish us by quoting from Tulasidasa, Kabir, Rahim and Dadu – these two were important influences in my literary life.

I loved reading Jibanananda Das, Shakti Chattopadhyay, Al Mahmud's *Sonali Kabin*, Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell* (which I have translated in Bengali), Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil* and *Paris Spleen* (which I have translated in Bengali), Sarveswar Dayal Saxena's *Khution Par Tange Log*, Pablo Neruda's Love Poems. But because of time constraint due various ailments I do not find time to read anymore. My own writing takes up a lot of time.

Q. Did you ever suffer from any anxiety of influence?

Malay: No, I did not. However, I get irritated because of the label Hungryalist applied to all my works. I have published more than 100 poetry collections, novels, short story collections, essay collections, drama and have translated several western poets. Unfortunately these are not discussed much by critics.

Q. You have translated William Blake, Arthur Rimbaud, Tristan Tzara's Dada Manifestos and poems, Andre Breton's Manifesto and poems, Jean Cocteau, Blaise Cendrars, Allen Ginsberg, Paul Celan, Baudelaire. We are curious to know why you chose to translate William Blake's *Marriage of Heaven of Hell*? Also why these particular poets? Did you choose them because you found them nonconformists and radicals in their own views?

Malay: I selected them as I found them closer to my world of poetry. I had studied in a Catholic School as a child; I studied for four years in that convent for free as the Priest of the Church attached to it used to visit my photographer Dad quite often and wanted me to be sent to school at the age of three. We had to attend Bible classes at the Church every Thursday. When I read Blake I felt like going back to my childhood days of Father Hillman's Bible classes.

Q. Will you call your translations as transcreations?

Malay: No, I have tried to translate just as the poets had visualised. I refrained from interfering or imposing my personality on a particular poem. For translating Ginsberg's HOWL and KADDISH I listen to the gramophone records of Ginsberg's recitation in order to bring in exactly what the poet intended.

Q. Can we call your works 'confessional'?

Malay: Not all my poems are confessional. 'Stark Electric Jesus' and 'Jakham' may be termed confessional.

Q. Tell us something about the plays you wrote. Have they been performed?

Malay: I had written three plays during 1960s. *Illot*, *Napungpung* and *Hibakusha*, all one act plays. Bahurupi and Gandharba refused to publish *Illot*. They thought the play was against the new Left rulers, which was not. In all three plays I had tried to experiment with the diction of monologues. The characters do not talk directly to each other but the listener character thinks that it was told to him and reacts in his own monologue response. A group wanted to stage *Illot* as a postmodern drama in 1999 at Gobardanga but the Local Committee did not permit them; they thought it was against Jyoti Basu's rule.

Q. While your friendship with Allen Ginsberg is widely covered we do not hear much about your meetings with Octavio Paz and Ernesto Cardenal. Can you please tell us more about your interactions with them?

Malay: Friendship with Ginsberg had been discussed because he took up my trial with several influential people in India and abroad which no other writer did in Bengal. Rather Bengali magazines wrote against our movement, which included Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Krittibas* and Sagarmoy Ghosh's *Desh*. Ginsberg wrote angry letters Abu Sayeed Ayyub, as he was in charge on Indian Congress for Cultural Freedom and refused to help me.

Octavio Paz was Ambassador at that time and had come to Patna. He was staying in Governor's house and probably knew that I would not like to visit him there. He came to my residence with a posse of policemen along with the District Magistrate of Patna. People in my locality thought I was again being arrested for anti-state activity. Our discussion was limited to Bengali literature and what we were trying to do. I did not correspond with him, neither did he. I was in the midst of my court ordeal at that time and could not devote much time to correspondences.

I met Ernesto Cardenal in 1987 when he was Culture Minister of Nicaragua. He had come to Mumbai and I met him in his hotel room. He wanted to know about our movement as the news had reached Latin America because of the Spanish and Portuguese little magazines there. The Spanish language version of *Time* magazine had also printed the same news that appeared in the English version of *Time* with our photographs. I wanted to talk about Sandinista but found him reluctant on the subject. I had two long letters from him which I have not preserved.

Q. What are your views on obscenity in art? Allen Ginsberg has been accused of it. Saadat Hasan Manto has been accused of it. James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Gustave Flaubert, Charles Baudelaire, Henry Miller, Arundhati Roy, and many others have faced the annoyance of the authorities. Do you think that society still casts a longing look at the antique conception that art ought to be didactic?

You have openly expressed your dissatisfaction with Ginsberg's clicking of pictures of Indian beggars and lepers for the western audience. Do you think that is in a way obscene?

Malay: The problem is that we started thinking about Art in terms of the Western world view, specially Christian after the Britishers introduced their own brand of curriculum in India. We forgot our *Alamkarshastra*, *Rasashastra* and the *Rasas*. The *Adi Rasa* was condemned by James Long as obscene and because of him what now is known as *Battala Sahitya*, has vanished. James Long castigated *Rasamanjari* of Bharatchandra. When Obscenity is discussed, no one talks of Kalidasa, Jayadeva, Vidyapati, Chandidasa and other ancestors. It is no longer possible to go back as we are trapped in symbols, images, sonnets etc. Charges of Obscenity are labelled by powers in the Establishment, not by common readers. All the names you have mentioned were attacked by the Establishment. Buddhadeva Basu's *Raat Bhorey Brishti* and Samaresh Basu's *Bibar* and *Prajapati* were hauled to Court on charges of obscenity. Achintya Sengupta had stated that Jibananda Das lost his lecturer's job at City College in 1949 on charges of obscenity in his poem *Campey*. Art ought to be what our ancient Indian ancestors told us; look at Khajurao (destroyed by foreign invaders who had a different world view) Puri temple and Konarak or the sculptures at Meenakshi temple. Most of the beautiful sculptures were destroyed by invaders. Now they are talking of destroying Taj Mahal as they did in case of Bamiyan Buddha. Yes, my Dad was

very angry with Ginsberg because of those photographs. Ginsberg included them in his *India Journals* for the consumption of Western readers. Ginsberg proved to be someone of an Orientalist. I would not call it obscene. He saw India through the eyes of a regular Westerner.

Q. How do you think Hungryalists developed a voice of their own? How was it different from the previous voices in poetry? Do you think that Bengali poetry has considerably changed due to the movement?

Malay: Definitely Bengali poetry has changed. Look at poems written before and after the Hungryalist movement. We did away with the title defining the centre of a poem. The title was now a rubric and poems did not have a centre; the poem was spread all over the work. We introduced open-endedness, multi-exit, free forms, heterotopia, absence of only one voice in a poem, liminality, break from canons, spread of meaning, fragmentation, level jumping, logical cracks, Rhyzomatizm, avoidance of symbols, flux, centrifugality, complexity, micro-narratives, interlocking, hybridisation etc.

Q. Do you think idealism is important in life? In art? Do you feel let down by the artists who tune their voices with the people in power from time to time?

Malay: I would not call it idealism. I would call it opinion; a writer should have his own opinion on society, politics, economy, culture, writing and other walks of life. It is not a question of me being let down. I did feel strange when a few Hungryalist like Subhas Ghose became a CPM card holder, started raising their slogans on the streets of Chandannagar, hoarded CPM flags with thick wooden sticks, took up the distribution of CPM newspaper Ganashakti in his area, became an active member of their moholla committee. Similarly Saileswar Ghosh joined the Trinamul Congress at old age and felt happy to be photographed with Education Minister. A large number of writers and poets joined the ruling Establishment – what were they against when they talked about anti-establishment voice? I consider them fallen, enticed by the Rakshasas.

Q. We know about *Unmarga* and *Wastepaper*. Tell us about other little magazines that publish and promulgate Hungryalist poetry.

Malay: I edited *Zebra*, two issues were published. Now (2019) Avishkar Prakashani has published a combined issue of *Zebra*. Subimal Basak published *Pratidwandi*, several issues were published. A letter written by Sandipan Chattopadhyay to all his friends was published in one of the issues which angered Sunil Gangopadhyay. Debi Roy published *Chinho*. Pradip Chowdhuri published *Phooo*; it is still being published though mostly translated works of Pradip's French poet friends. Pradip was in France for quite sometime. Pradip was rusticated from Visva Bharati for writing a poem dedicated to one of the descendants of Rabindranath Tagore. Sambhu Rakshit published *Blues*, which he renamed *Mahaprithibi* which is still being published. Alope Goswami published *Concentration Camp*. Raja Sarkar published *Dritarashtra*. A researcher named Samiran Modak is trying to gather all the Hungryalist magazines and bring out an omnibus. Most of our bulletins were one-page leaflets and we did not think of preserving them.

Q. Tell us something about Shakti Chattopadhyay leaving the group.

Malay: Shakti was unemployed and lived with Samir at latter's Chaibasa hutment for three years. During this period he fell in love with Samir's sister in law Sheela. In fact all his love poems in *Hey Prem Hey Noihshabdo* were written during this period. Shakti used to spend most of his time in Samir's in-law's house. Shakti has written a novel *Kinnar Kinnari* based on his love life during Chaibasa period. Since he was not employed and drunk most of the time, Sheela's father sent her to Patna to study Master of Arts in Bengali Literature from Patna University. Shakti thought that Samir and his in-laws were trying to get Sheela married to me and became very angry. Actually at that time I was in love with a girl who is the centre of the poem for which I was arrested.

Q. Do you think poetry has the power to change society?

Malay: No. Poetry per se is not going to change the society. When it becomes a potent force for the revolting public it contributes to change. During Bangladesh's Liberation war poets such as Jasimuddin, Al Mahmud, Samsur Rahaman, Shahid Kadri, Rafiq Azad, Nirmalendu Goon, Rudra Muhammad Shahidullah, Abul Hasan wrote inspiring poems.

You might be knowing that in 2011 by Michael Rothenberg and Terri Carrion launched a movement called *100 Thousand Poets for Change* or *100TPC*. But they also knew that poetry per se is not going to change the world. The concept of 'Change' in the name *100 Thousand Poets for Change* refers to social change, but is otherwise broadly defined and dependent on the definitions of individual organisers or poets. 100TPC events do not necessarily share political or philosophical orientation. The 100TPC describes the 'change' as having only to fall 'within the guidelines of peace and sustainability'. It is held in India also but I do not know about their influences.

Q. How relevant is your brand of poetry today?

Malay: My poetry has changed over the years. Each of my collection is a turning point in terms of voice, form and breath-span. I could not develop a brand like, say, Tagore, Jibanananda, Shakti or Joy Goswami.

Q. Do you label the Hungryalist poets as 'angry' and 'fiery'?

Malay: When you talk about the society in your writings 'anger' obviously enters into a poem's psyche. Not all Hungryalist poems are 'angry' and 'fiery'. Poems written by Subimal Basak and Tridib Mitra are angry. Those written by Subo Acharya and Pradip Chowdhuri are confessional. Sambhu Rakshit has been continuously experimenting with words and sentences. Debi Roy used level jumping and logical cracks in his poems most of which are socio-political views against the Establishment are more sharp in stories and novels, specially those of Subimal Basak, Basudeb Dasgupta, Abani Dhar, Aloke Goswami and Subhas Ghose.

Q. Any regrets ...

Malay: Yes, I should have brought my ailing father to Mumbai in 1987 which I did not as I thought he was happy with Samir's family at Patna. But in his last letter he wrote that he was not at all happy and was not being treated well by Samir's wife and children. Dad felt alone after my mother's death. He was quite fond of my son.

Q. Please share with us a poem that represent you.

Malay: I would like to share the poem for which I had to face 35 months ordeal at Kolkata, without a place to sleep, have food, most of the friends having disappeared due to police action etc. The poem is 'Stark Electric Jesus' (or *Prachanda Boidyutik Chhutar* in original Bengali):

Oh I'll die I'll die I'll die
My skin is in blazing furore
I do not know what I'll do where I'll go oh I am sick
I'll kick all Arts in the butt and go away Shubha
Shubha let me go and live in your cloaked melon
In the unfastened shadow of dark destroyed saffron curtain
The last anchor is leaving me after I got the other anchors lifted
I can't resist anymore, a million glass panes are breaking in my cortex
I know, Shubha, spread out your matrix, give me peace
Each vein is carrying a stream of tears up to the heart
Brain's contagious flints are decomposing out of eternal sickness
other why didn't you give me birth in the form of a skeleton
I'd have gone two billion light years and kissed God's ass
But nothing pleases me nothing sounds well
I feel nauseated with more than a single kiss
I've forgotten women during copulation and returned to the Muse
In to the sun-coloured bladder
I do not know what these happenings are but they are occurring within me
I'll destroy and shatter everything
draw and elevate Shubha in to my hunger
Shubha will have to be given
Oh Malay
Kolkata seems to be a procession of wet and slippery organs today
But I do not know what I'll do now with my own self
My power of recollection is withering away
Let me ascend alone toward death
I haven't had to learn copulation and dying
I haven't had to learn the responsibility of shedding the last drops
after urination
Haven't had to learn to go and lie beside Shubha in the darkness
Have not had to learn the usage of French leather
while lying on Nandita's bosom

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Though I wanted the healthy spirit of Aleya's
fresh China-rose matrix
Yet I submitted to the refuge of my brain's cataclysm
I am failing to understand why I still want to live
I am thinking of my debauched Sabarna-Choudhury ancestors
I'll have to do something different and new
Let me sleep for the last time on a bed soft as the skin of
Shubha's bosom
I remember now the sharp-edged radiance of the moment I was born
I want to see my own death before passing away
The world had nothing to do with Malay Roychoudhury
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 bloodstream
Let me create myself in your womb with my own sperm
Would I have been like this if I had different parents?
Was Malay alias me possible from an absolutely different sperm?
Would I have been Malay in the womb of other women of my father?
Would I have made a professional gentleman of me
like my dead brother without Shubha?
Oh, answer, let somebody answer these
Shubha, ah Shubha
Let me see the earth through your cellophane hymen
Come back on the green mattress again
As cathode rays are sucked up with the warmth of a magnet's brilliance
I remember the letter of the final decision of 1956
The surroundings of your clitoris were being embellished
with coon at that time
Fine rib-smashing roots were descending in to your bosom
Stupid relationship inflated in the bypass of senseless neglect
Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah
I do not know whether I am going to die

Squandering was roaring within heart's exhaustive impatience
I'll disrupt and destroy
I'll split all in to pieces for the sake of Art
There isn't any other way out for Poetry except suicide
Shubha
Let me enter in to the immemorial incontinence of your labia majora
In to the absurdity of woeless effort
In the golden chlorophyll of the drunken heart
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?

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Why wasn't I mixed in the ovum-flux or in the phlegm?
With her eyes shut supine beneath me
I felt terribly distressed when I saw comfort seize Shubha
Women could be treacherous even after unfolding a helpless appearance
Today it seems there is nothing so treacherous as Woman & Art
Now my ferocious heart is running towards an impossible death
Vertigoes of water are coming up to my neck from the pierced earth
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 on my trousers spreading wings
300000 children gliding toward the district of Shubha's bosom
Millions of needles are now running from my blood in to Poetry

Now the smuggling of my obstinate legs are trying to plunge
Into the death-killer sex-wig entangled in the hypnotic kingdom of words
Fitting violent mirrors on each wall of the room I am observing
After letting loose a few naked Malay, his unestablished scramblings.



Zinia Mitra teaches English in the University of North Bengal. Her travelogues and articles have been published in *The Statesman*. Her reviews, articles, translations have been widely published in books and journals. Her translations have also been published in the *Sahitya Akademi journal*. Her books include: *Indian Poetry in English: Critical Essays*, *Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: Imagery and Experiential Identity* and *Twentieth Century British Literature: Reconstructing Literary Sensibility (co-edited)*. Her online articles include 'A Science Fiction in a Gothic Scaffold: a reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*' (*Rupkatha Journal*), 'Through a Different Window: I Can But Why Should I Go,'

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Jaydeep Sarangi is an author, editor, translator and critic of multiple works and publications on Australian literature, Indian writing in English, postcolonial studies and the Dalit literary movement in India. He has also travelled to several universities as a resource person (and a poet) on postcolonial studies, poetry, and Indian literature in the context of world literature. He

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has delivered keynote, plenary address and invited talks at different Indian and foreign universities and read poems including University of Udine, University of New South Wales, Wollongong University, University of Rezeszow, Pedagogical University of Krakov (Poland), Flinders University, University of South Australia, Adelaide University and University of East Anglia. He is currently the principal of New Alipore College, Kolkata. Sarangi is the Vice President of Guild of Indian English Writers Editors and Critics(GIEWEC) and the Secretary of Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library, ICCR, Kolkata. He has guest edited four issues for the Muse India, latest being, 'Aroma of the Heart: Poetry by the Youth' (2018).

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