Dismantling Poetic Hegemony: Translating Hungryalist Poetry in 1960s Bengal

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Abstract

The Partition of India (1947) brought an influx of refugees from across the border, which posed a serious threat to the limited resources that the country had at the time. In Bengal, this led to extreme expansion in and around the city of Kolkata and the inclusion of precarious hybrid identities that struggled with their pre-partition bhadralok sensibilities. This paper offers a reading of the Hungry Generation poems written in 1960s Bengal and how they portrayed the precarious identities that had taken root, especially in Kolkata.

Keywords: Hungryalist, Bengali Bhadralok, Partition, Refugees, Translation, Excess.

Introduction

The Independence of India of 1947 brought with it the crippling pain and violence of Partition. Along with the influx of migrants and the post-Partition 'era of hunger and murder' that it brought, it triggered an avant-garde movement in Bengali Literature called the Hungryalist Movement. It started by excluding itself from the elite portion of Bengali Literature in Calcutta circles (Chowdhury, 2018). The Hungryalists published a manifesto from 269, Netaji Subhas Road, Howrah, West Bengal. The importance of the location lay in the deliberate intention of the founders to challenge the tenets of Brahminical Bengali society and its discriminatory caste system by publishing their first-ever bulletin from the tiny room in the Dalit ghetto where Haradhan Dhara (later Debi Rai) lived and wrote. Written in English, this manifesto criticised "the blankety-blank school of modern poetry" (Chowdhury, 2018, p. 19) where "words come out bubbling in an artificial muddle" (Chowdhury, 2018, p. 19). Dissatisfied with the way the Bengali literature circles had been

hijacked by upper-caste male writers who defined literature according to themselves and the tenets of what the Hungryalists called 'bourgeois poetry', they started a socio-cultural-political movement which aimed to redefine poetry as "a holocaust, a violent and somnambulistic jazzing of the hymning five, a sowing of the tempestual Hunger" (Chowdhury, 2018, p. 19). Gradually, people from different quarters of the city began to send in their writings to the group, led by Shakti Chattopadhyay, Malay Roy Choudhury, and Debi Rai. Some stories had hitherto remained unnoticed, lumped in with daily life, unpublished for fear of ostracism. All these reached the Hungryalists, who were all too eager to publish them, notwithstanding the tremendous economic strain in which they were, with almost no well-known publishing house ready to take a chance on them. This paper aims to focus on the socio-cultural and political situation in which the Hungryalist Movement was launched, what it sought to accomplish through its raw language and the sheer difficulty in translating this poetry of pure emotion from Bengali to English. For the last part, this paper will examine the socio-cultural contexts behind the poems "If you never come again" by Binoy Majumdar and "Stark Electric Jesus" by Malay Roy Choudhary.

Displacement and Identity Crisis in Post-Partition India

The Partition of India (1947) was still fresh in the minds of the people of Bengal. The Partition had not only ushered in an excess of violence but also put the identities of people into a "precarious" situation. An influx of refugees from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) followed soon after. So much so that Jawaharlal Nehru was prompted to write a letter to Bidhan Roy, the then Chief Minister of Bengal. In the letter, Nehru stated that "everything should be done to prevent Hindus in East Bengal from migrating to West Bengal. If that happened on a mass scale, it would be a disaster of the first magnitude" (Bhattacharya, 2022). The situation in Bengal was tense. On one side, there was the heavy influx of immigrants from East Bengal, and on the other side, there was the dislocation of poor peasants and Muslim landowners by immigrants. In just three years after the Partition, 150 squatter colonies had sprung up across the length and breadth of Kolkata. In *The Spoils of Partition*, Joya Chatterji describes this extreme expansion of the body of the city:

"Refugees had literally filled up every empty space in and around the big towns, particularly in the great metropolis of Kolkata, occupying every tiny piece of vacant land they could find, whether on pavements or the 'set-asides' along the runways of airfields, in empty houses, on snake-infested marsh and scrub-land, and even on the unsanitary verges of sewers and railway tracks. This consolidated metropolitan Kolkata, previously a cluster of discrete urban settlements, into a single, gigantic, and chaotic megalopolis" (Bhattacharya, 2022). This forced spatial expansion was essential for the inclusion of the excess into the political and economic body of the city. Here, the political inclusion was at the cost of the exclusion of Muslim farmers and landholders. In her essay "Hindu Space: Urban Dislocations", Romola Sanyal analyses the spatial and political turmoil brought about by Hindu refugees fleeing from East Bengal. In her interviews with refugees who settled in squatter colonies, she found a terrible lack of identity, stability, and an immense amount of fragmentation, fear, and even guilt. A small passage from her essay will be enough to drive this point home:

> "Mr. S: At night there used to be problems at night. The Author: What problems? Mr. S: (laughing) Muslims will come. Muslims will come. Mr. A: But did they come? Mr. S: No, they never came (laughing). Mr. A: They came here in fear of Muslims right? So there was that fear from before that Muslims would come to their houses at night. After all, many of their (Muslim) houses were taken over by refugees" (Sanyal, 2014, pp. 42-43).

For the refugees, the years after Partition brought fear, guilt, loss of identity, and a deep sense of disillusionment. This disillusionment derived not just from political instability, but also from a distrust of the earlier order and way of life. This distrust can be traced to the 'economic extreme' that the Partition refugees faced. I am referring to the loss of property, livelihood, and personal belongings that befell the refugees as they traversed from East to West Bengal. However, I have used the term 'extreme' to refer to not only the precarious financial conditions of the refugees but also to the 'extreme' economic divide and disintegration it brought. The 'economic extreme' preceded the class divide that would soon

ravage post-Partition Bengal. As Romola Sanyal elucidates, "The government tried to rehabilitate many refugees, both farm and non-farm families…refugees who were placed temporarily in camps…old, infirm, disabled or unattached women…Permanent Liability Camps in areas such as Titagarh…were many others who refused to live in camps. These were mainly educated, middle-class refugees. Many had found refuge among their friends and relatives,…Being reduced to a state of poverty, homelessness, and worse, pariah status, came as a shock to them and their bhadralok sensibilities" (Sanyal, 2014, p. 40). The phrase that we will focus on from this extract is 'bhadralok sensibilities'. What do we understand by that term? In his review of the book *Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal* by Tithi Bhattacharya, Rakesh Batabyal clarifies who the Bengali bhadralok was. He states that the term became very popular as a "handy substitute for the middle class in Bengal…very popular in the 1960s" (Batabyal, 2005, p. 3834). He further states that J.H. Broomfield uses a Weberian ideal type to attach certain core societal and cultural values to the Bengali bhadralok. These include the ideals set forward by the Bengal Renaissance, which includes stalwarts such as Raja Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen, Akshay Kumar Dutt, and Rabindranath Tagore. Batabyal further explains that "a critique of the Bengal Renaissance in general and the ideas of Rabindranath Tagore by Sushobhan Sarkar in the 1940s can be seen as one of the first major intellectual efforts to theorize the way the critique should proceed" (Batabyal, 2005, p. 3834). The fragmented identity of the Bengali middle-class refugees, many of whom appeared in Calcutta's fringes after the 1947 Partition, created intense socio-economic tensions between them and the older urban elite (bhadralok) groups (Chatterji, 2007). As violence, precarity and poverty erupted, traditional cultural markers eroded in the process, leading to the disintegration and dissipation of the residual bhadralok values within these refugees. The Hungryalist Generation – emerging from this climate of social upheaval – directly attacked these lingering structures through their brutal critique of what they derisively termed the 'Gangshalik School of Poetry'. The precarious situation of the Hungryalist Generation in 1960s Bengal can be compared to the

generational shift that Virginia Woolf discusses in her essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." In this essay, Woolf emphasises how "the technique of novel-writing" (Woolf, 1924, p. 16) developed by the Edwardians (the generation prior to the Georgians) "have made tools and established conventions which do their business" (Woolf, 1924, p. 16). This is similar to the core tools attached to the idea of the bhadralok, utilised by the generations before the Partition of 1947. Woolf iterated, and the Hungryalist Generation reiterated her words: "But those tools are not our tools, and that business is not our business. For us those conventions are ruin, those tools are death" (Woolf, 1924, p. 16). Woolf "threw that ugly, that clumsy, that incongruous tool out of the window" (Woolf, 1924, p. 18). The Hungryalists launched a frontal attack on bhadralok poetry – a tradition shaped by canonical figures such as Buddhadev Bose, Sudhindranath Dutta, and to some extent, Shakti Chattopadhyay before his association with the Hungryalists. Their critique was aimed at a literary aesthetic that, in their view, had become elitist, disconnected from reality and the marginalised, and complicit in cultural stagnation. Their attempt at reconstructing an identity fractured by Partition and urban disillusionment led to the development of newer poetic forms – precarious, raw and deconstructed – a mirror of the dissonant selves they wished to represent.

With Bengal slowly moving toward the grave disaster of unemployment and lack of job opportunities, tensions erupted within the group, particularly regarding the induction of several new members, including Binoy Majumdar, who openly challenged entrenched casteist stereotypes in Bengali literary circles by acknowledging his 'Namasudra' identity. Yet, his poetry, particularly works like "Phul Phutuk na Phutuk (Whether the Flowers Bloom or Not)" employed a highly Sanskritised, erudite, and often erotic idiom. This aesthetic dissonance inhabits a strategic re-appropriation of dominant literary registers by a subaltern voice: rather than reject the canonical, Majumdar welcomes and subverts it, complicating the black and white binaries existing between caste marginality and aesthetic form – a form of 'insurgent mimicry' – to derive from Homi Bhaba – unsettling and rewriting the very cultural codes that once excluded him. One might also refer to Ananya

Jahanara Kabir's work on aesthetics and subalternity, which investigates how subaltern identities express themselves through elite cultural forms. Leadership disputes, editorial control over Hungryalist Generation publications and ideological divergence led to rifts within the group. By 1965, Shakti Chattopadhyay began distancing himself from the group, eventually leaving it for personal reasons, as pointed out by Malay Roy Choudhary in his interview with Zinia Mitra and Jaydeep Sarangi, archived at Flinders University. Roy Choudhary's reply to the question "Tell us something about Shakti Chattopadhyay leaving the group" (Mitra & Sarangi, 2019, p. 10) is a personal anecdote about an unemployed and often drunk Shakti who fell in love with Samir Roy Choudhary's sister-in-law, Sheela. He thought that Samir and his in-laws were trying to get Sheela married to me (Malay)" (Mitra & Sarangi, 2019, p. 10), and this festering anger became the final nail in the coffin of his departure. Binoy Majumdar was crowned the new leader by several others, including Hindi poet and supporter of the Hungryalist Movement, Sharad Deora. Scarcity of money hit the Hungryalist poets soon after, as jute mills shut down and recession set in across Bengal. Several Hungryalist poets became homeless, using railway station loos and the empty Burrabazar offices of Marwari businessmen as homes for the night, pooling together their money during the day to eat at tiny, run-down eateries in Shyambazar or College Street (areas in Kolkata, India).

Poetry of Disillusionment: Love in the Class-Caste Struggles of Post-Partition Bengal

The poems that the Hungryalists wrote echoed the wasteland that metropolitan Calcutta had become. Gone were the symbolism, imagery, and metaphorical language used by prior generations of poets. Comparing the following poems by Rabindranath Tagore and Krittibasi poet Sunil Gangopadhyay (a contemporary of the Hungryalist Generation poets) with a poem by the Hungryalist Bhaskar Chakraborty will highlight the differences in writing style. Sunil Gangopadhyay's poem "Wasted Love" does not engage in stylistic experiments or guttural interjections. The language is not as ornamental as that used by poets such as Tagore or Nazrul. However, the idea of love depicted here reflects the sensibilities of

the bourgeois bhadralok Calcutta to which the poet himself belonged—a milieu with which the Hungryalist Generation poets had grown deeply disillusioned. Their poetics sought to focus on the precarious identities located at the fringes of society, particularly those dislocated during Partition and never fully rehabilitated. Bengal in the 1960s was caught between a residual class clinging to the cultural capital of *bhadralok* values and a rising mass who, although not completely stripped of their personhood, were reduced to an existence shaped largely by bureaucracy and survival. These figures – subjected to governmental protocols, such as border slips and ration cards – occupy a liminal space that Giorgio Agamben later theorises as 'bare life'. While not completely stripped of their political recognition, these figures inhabited a bureaucratic identity that was a hybrid of state-managed survival and the memory of a pre-Partition socio-economic selfhood. This hybrid identity could never "reinstate them to their former economic and class position" (Sanyal, 2014, p. 44), fostering a new literary language of rage, estrangement and rootlessness. For the Hungryalist Generation poets, love that was not sensual, erratic, or extreme was truly a waste of time.

> "Each wasted love of mine fills me with confidence,
> All of a sudden I am more upstanding than ever;
> The pain travels from the hair on my head to the little toe of my foot;
> I distance myself from the crowd around me,
> And walk with slow steps
> Along this path of mine…
> My beloved has denied me
> And so this entire world seems so familiar…
> I walk such that even the trodden soil feels no ache,
> I am not supposed to cause anymore pain" (translated by author).

Rabindranath Tagore's poem "Lamp of Love" is rich in metaphor and imagery. The lamp symbolises the poet's heart, which beats without a flame as he searches for the passion to reignite his dead heart and make it burst back into life and joy:

Light, oh where is the light?
Kindle it with the burning fire of desire!
There is the lamp but never a flicker of flame—is such thy fate, my heart?
Ah, death were better by far for thee!
Misery knocks at thy door,
And her message is that thy lord is wakeful,
And he calls thee to the love-tryst through the darkness of night…
Let not hours pass by in the dark.
Kindle the lamp of love with thy life" (translated by the poet himself).

No need was felt to maintain decorum or sit for hours to find appropriate language to process emotions. Crude, direct, and in-your-face, Bhaskar Chakraborty's poem, "Things that Happen", captures the slow disintegration of dignity in an urban Bengali home:

"The days aren't passing badly for the two of us
Though it's true we haven't been to the hills,
We haven't been to the seaside, for three years now
And poverty, it's no small annoyance
Constantly borrowing money…
…there, it's raining
We went up to the window
But it was only the sound of someone pissing on the roof next door
Or, the other night, when I was writing in the tiny room
…someone from the street said loudly:
Go to sleep, Motherfucker" (translated by Arunava Sinha in Chowdhury, 2018, p. 67).

The poem paints a picture of exhaustion and bleak humour amidst financial strain. The household portrayed here is emblematic of a section of the urban Bengali middle class that was not itself dislocated and discombobulated by the Partition but shaken by the social and infrastructural consequences of it. With the huge influx of refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), the already thinly stretched job and housing markets collapsed further. This sudden

influx led to deep anxieties within the pre-existing *bhadralok* middle class, raising questions regarding the erosion of financial stability and cultural prestige. With its jarring substitution of romantic monsoon imagery for the crude noise of urine on a tin roof, Chakraborty's verse enacts this disillusionment thematically and formally. Sumanta Banerjee in *Politics of Cultural Practice,* points to this breakdown of elite bhadralok authority as crucial to understanding the emergence of anti-establishment literary movements, in a way anticipating the nihilistic tone of the Hungryalist Generation's poetry. It is also an accurate portrayal of how precarious identity was, torn between the two extremes of 1960s Bengal: to be the bhadralok or not to be? Comparing this poem with Tagore and Gangopadhyay, we can arrive at a simple conclusion. In the prior poems, the concept of love holds a central position. Tagore calls to "kindle the lamp of love with thy life," while Gangopadhyay writes of rejection in love as "my beloved has denied me." Chakraborty's poem deals with love as a peripheral figure, portraying the 'precarious' nature of the middle-class identity that he was dealing with. The poems by Tagore and Gangopadhyay are also imbued with a hopeful aftertaste. While Tagore urges the reader to take action and "let not hours pass by in the dark," Gangopadhyay's poem breeds resignation and introspection into the nature of love and pain. Chakraborty's brief tryst with hope in "…there, it's raining" is immediately belied with "only the sound of someone pissing on the roof next door." The coarse language escalates in the abrupt and aggressive "Go to sleep, motherfucker", a line that not only disrupts the romanticised association of rain in Bengali literary canon, but also unsettles the sensibilities of a certain *bhadralok* readership – traditionally middle-class, literate and attuned to cultural refinement. This linguistic rupture, while similar to the confrontational style found in the protest poetry of Dalit poets such as Namdeo Dhasal, operates within a markedly different socio-cultural framework[1].

[1] Chakraborty's social location as a Brahmin poet situates him within the cultural framework of the Bengali *bhadralok* – a class traditionally associated with caste privilege, education and literary authority in Bengal. The *bhadralok* consists of predominantly upper-caste Hindus including the Brahmins, Kayasthas, and Baidyas, emerging during the colonial period as a

Keeping the ugly records of humanity and delighting in the horror of their own destruction was something the Hungry Generation stood for. They were "nihilists in an already dysfunctional society" (Chowdhury, 2018, p. 108). They accomplished through their poems what they had set out to do — "introduce chaos and disintegration in writing, and render it conventionally meaningless" (Chowdhury, 2018, p. 106). Sambhu Rakshit's poem, "Ami Swechhachari (I'm Unruly)," forged the way forward by rejecting logical sequence to express the crux of the poem:

> "These coconut-leaf combs, even they threaten me as
> soon as I turn my back.
> Nothing, just a minute, nothing do I know about
> parliaments or rumours or.
> The shrieks of wild dogs surround me — and of course
> I should be informed, of course I
> Should be allowed to sink, allowed to go where I don't even
> want to, allowed to pace up and down" (translated from Bengali by Sanchari Bhattacharya, Chowdhury, 2018, p. 107).

Hungryalist Poetry: A Lasting Legacy?

The translations of the poems of the Hungryalists into English aided the creation of groups and courses in the hinterland, in Hindi, popularly known as the 'Bhookhi Peedhi' or the 'Hungry Generation.' When eleven of the Hungryalists, especially Malay Roy Choudhary, were charged with obscenity and criminal conspiracy because of the poems they had published, with an emphasis on "Stark Electric Jesus," the translations had reached such a far and wide spectrum that support poured in from almost every literary quarter. Sharad Deora, the editor of the Hindi magazine *Anima*, wrote the novel *College Street ka Naya Masiha* to pay tribute to

coterie of Western-educated intelligentsia that dominated Bengal's literary and cultural frameworks. While Chakraborty's use of coarse language may challenge the aesthetic sensibilities of the bourgeois *bhadralok* society of Bengal, it emerges from a position of relative social, especially caste-based privilege. This contrasts with Dalit poetry of say Namdeo Dhasal wherein the use of profanity is deeply linked to lived experiences of caste-based oppression and the articulation of systemic injustices. Recognising these differing social locations is crucial to understanding how privilege and marginality shape the poetic frameworks and their receptions.

Binoy Majumdar and the other Hungryalists. Ashok Shahane, Dilip Chhitre, and Arun Kolatkar translated the Hungryalist poetry into Marathi to show support. Umashankar Joshi and Ameeq Hanfee lent their support by publishing articles about the Hungry Generation and its endeavours in Gujarati and Urdu, respectively. When the Nepal Academy of Literature learned that the Hungryalist Generation poets had come to Nepal, they decided to bear the entire cost of their stay, as well as organise poetry readings, where the English translations had gained massive popularity. In her book, Maitreyee Bhattacharjee Chowdhury writes how the English translations were one of the major reasons that Allen Ginsberg and the world academia, including Professor Howard McCord, jumped to the support of the Hungryalists. McCord wrote a letter to Malay where he mentions how Artaud, Genet, and Burroughs served as the seeds of chaos in Western literature. He also adds, "...that the identity of speaker and spoken to is more…What must we do to drive the mule? WE SHALL SAY ANY WORD. WHEN ANY WORD NEEDS SAYING" (Chowdhury, 2018, p. 166). This is similar to what Johannes Göransson elucidates when he calls translation "a mode, a map, a work of art," and "in the deformation zone, a wound that makes impossible connections between languages, unsettling stable ideas of language, productive ideas of literature" (Mee Choi, 2020, p. 4). When Don Mee Choi discusses how all literature outside the Western canon is inevitably linked to the national borders, the first thought that comes to mind is how often the poetry of the Hungryalist Generation is conflated with the fragmentary state of Bengali society at the time (after the Partition). This discounts the literary disruption and chaos caused by the language revolution and the utilisation of any word (referring back to Professor McCord's letter here) in the Hungryalist Generation canon. In a neo-colonial zone, over-conflation with the socio-political ethos of the native country can push poetry into a corner where "there is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language" (Mee Choi, 2020, p. 5). This is especially pertinent when these borders (between Bengali and English) have historical and political connections through their colonial past (where the master dialectic has predominantly been English). To help Malay with the legal expenditure, which kept mounting, McCord got his poem "Stark Electric Jesus" published in three editions that had the cover with Trois Freres' *The Sorcerer* on them.

According to Sapir or Whorf, “no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language” (Bassnett, 2014, p. 23). Language is the heart of culture, and ignoring that culture is the worst step forward that a translator can take. What the Bengali literary elite did to the Hungryalist Generation poetry is akin to what an inexperienced intralingual translator, in Roman Jakobson’s words, would do. As Malay Roy Choudhury himself points out, “The problem is that the language of the mad and those possessed cannot be replicated, especially by those who don’t write madly, or don’t understand it. It remains a long-forgotten path, cloaked by centuries of dos and don’ts, so much so that when you finally encounter language that is primal, you feel overcome by the recognition of something that could have been you” (Chowdhury, 2018, p. 145).

The translation of Binoy Majumdar’s poem “If You Never Come Again” from *Phire Esho Chaka (Come Back, Chaka)* illustrates the complexities of rendering literary works across languages. As Bassnett (2014) argues, translation is not simply about swapping words between languages, but also about conveying the “expressive identity” of the original text. This process often involves discarding some of the source language’s (SL) elements to create equivalence in the target language (TL). Apter (2013), in her exploration of the “untranslatable,” elaborates on how certain words and concepts carry meanings that transcend direct translation. The Bengali word ‘*abhiman*’ provides an example of this difficulty. Though commonly translated as “anger” or “conceit,” neither captures the deeper emotional and cultural connotations of the word, which exists only in the context of love and affection in Bengali society. Similarly, the phrase “নাই আসো (na-i asho)”—usually translated as “never come again”—loses its informal, hopeful tone in English, which instead conveys a sense of finality. The emotional nuances and cultural context of these words are part of what Apter (2013) refers to as the “untranslatable,” a concept marked by ideological weight and cultural specificity.

TL: "If you never come again, never blow through
these steaming regions
like cooling drifts of the upper air, even that
absence is an encounter…" (translated from Bengali by Jyotirmoy Datta).

The translation of Majumdar's poem also reflects this complexity. The SL metaphor of the woman being like the vapours of boiling water is only partially captured in the TL. While the metaphor itself is preserved, the intricate emotional resonance it carries in Bengali is diminished. Furthermore, the word 'অভিজ্ঞতা' (abhigyata), which can mean both "encounter" and "experience," alters the poem's meaning based on the translation. Using "encounter" in the TL gives the poem a sense of hope, while "experience" gives it a more resigned tone, demonstrating how subtle translation choices can shift the entire mood of the poem.

TL: "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, Subha
Subha, let me go and live in your cloaked melon
In the unfastened shadow of dark destroyed saffron curtain" (Chowdhury, 2018, p.109).

Malay Roy Choudhury, another key figure in the Hungryalist Generation, translated the poem himself, though it was later involved in obscenity charges. Roy Choudhury's translation is raw and direct, capturing the anarchic essence of the original. However, the TL here also strips some of the cultural nuances present in the SL. Words like "কিছুই ভাল্লাগছে না" (kichui bhallagchhe na), which conveys a deep existential despair, are watered down in the TL to "I am sick," a translation that fails to convey the profound emotional weight of the original.

'Excess' and 'Remainder' in Translation

The concepts of 'remainder' and 'excess' introduced by Venuti and Bataille further illuminate the translation challenges involved.

Venuti's "remainder" refers to elements of the SL that resist translation and disturb the process of domesticating the text. These excesses are essential to preserving the "foreignness" of the original work, which is critical in the case of the Hungryalist Generation's poetry. The radical themes and raw expression of their work are often lost in translation, and the "excess" becomes a reflection of the poet's identity and the socio-political environment in which they wrote. These elements of 'excess,' though difficult to translate, reveal much about the cultural context and the identities shaped by the Partition of India. The concept of 'oneworldedness' discussed by Apter (2013) also challenges translation efforts, as it assumes a common linguistic ground that does not account for the cognitive and cultural dissonance that arises in translation.

In sum, the translation of Hungryalist Generation poetry is fraught with difficulties, as it involves negotiating between cultures, languages, and histories. The "untranslatable" concepts and the "excess" in their works highlight the cultural richness of the Bengali context, which cannot be fully captured in English. As Apter (2013) notes, these elements reflect the true resistance of language and culture, marking a significant challenge for translators who seek to bring such works into the global literary conversation.

The translation of Malay Roy Choudhury's "Prachanda Baidyutik Chhutar (Stark Electric Jesus)" omits cuss words or modifies them to appear genteel and friendly toward the domestic (or international) audience they are aimed at. All the 'excess' found in the Bengali version of the poem is eliminated to present a poem that does not evoke the 'starkness' that Roy Choudhury originally intended. The use of clean, scientific words such as 'bladder,' 'urination,' 'matrix,' 'bosom,' 'uterus,' and 'labia majora' makes the translated version less extreme, and the shock that overtook the entire Bengali academic community becomes less comprehensible. This may diminish the socio-cultural revolution that the Hungryalist movement sought to bring about. However, what stands out in the English translation are the repetitions, alliterations, and violent imagery that get transferred from the Bengali poem to the translated one. Roy Choudhury utilises the saudade-effect here. The practice of translation sometimes embraces over-translation, creating a wild

effect that differs from the source language (SL). Apter, for example, uses translations of the Portuguese poem "The Drunken Boat" (by Louise Varèse and Samuel Beckett) where the saudade-effect is evident in Beckett's use of words like 'haemorrhage' and 'arch-alcohol' instead of Varèse's 'blaze of day' and 'stronger than alcohol.' In *Stark Electric Jesus*, Roy Choudhury employs the saudade-effect with partial success. Phrases like "the death killer sex-wig" are balanced by stoic translations of "marmukhi ayna" as "violent mirrors" (while the word 'violent' captures the idea of the mirrors, the term "marmukhi" in the poem has an immediacy that 'violent' lacks). The mirrors in the Bengali version of the poem (representing the poet's self-reflections) have active agency, threatening to beat the poet. In this case, using the saudade-effect would have enhanced the poem's self-deprecatory tone, as Galchen notes when discussing the saudade-syndrome-"a struggle to signify the fullness of the human soul while preserving critical distance from its hackneyed expression" (Apter, 2013, pp. 600-601). The use of mirrors also recalls the poem "Memories of Giving Birth to a Daughter" by Kim Hyesoon, which Don Mee Choi discusses in her essay, where the mirrors serve as "zones of intensities through which an intensity passes" (Mee Choi, 2020, p. 11). Similarly, in Roy Choudhury's poem, the mirrors are already intense and taut, ready to shatter the poet into pieces, reflecting not only the fragmented modernity he inhabits but also the self that is denied permission to express any word within both a socio-cultural context and a linguistic context (particularly the historical power struggle between English and Bengali in colonial Bengal).

Gendered Spatiality in the Translated Space of Hungryalist Poetry

The colloquial terms ('jonikeshor', 'ston', etc.) used in the Bengali poem are everyday words that elevate 'Cholti Bhasha' to a whole new level, provoking the ire of a populace that was used to using these words in the 'oikos,' but never in the 'polis'. It is worth comparing this 'extreme' 'Cholti Bhasha' to Rabindranath Tagore's essay "Bangla Bhasha Porichoy," where he argues that Bengali academics have long favoured 'Sadhu Bhasha (Formal Bengali)'

over ‘Cholti Bhasha (Informal Bengali),’ with the former seen as a mark of high society. Tagore broke with tradition by using Cholti Bhasha (Informal Bengali) in *Ghare Baire* (Home and the World). Roy Choudhury and the Hungryalists pushed this boundary even further by bringing the ‘excess’ words from the ‘oikos’ into the ‘polis.’ The question arises—what would have happened if women had joined the Hungryalist Generation and incorporated their ‘excess’ into poetry? Would the translations or the words have been different?

In his essay, “Bangla Bhashar Porichoy (The Identity of the Bengali Language)”, Tagore argues that intellectual discussions in Bengali society required a well-structured language, and the literary community pushed colloquial Bengali aside to serve as gatekeepers of literature (Gun, 2021, pp. 17-18). The women who lived under ‘purdah’ were only amiable in front of familiar people, but not so much in front of strangers. In contrast, Occidental language does not have such a divide between the ‘oikos’ and the ‘polis’ (Gun, 2021, p.18). This divide between home language and literary language not only excluded people from lower castes but also diminished the self-esteem of women who picked up the pen.

In this context, the Hungryalist Generation’s revolution was expected to be a breath of fresh air for women in post-Partition Bengal, who had already discarded the purdah and were ready to take their place in the literary scene. However, this was not the case. The Hungryalist Generation, founded by Shakti Chattopadhyay, Malay Roy Choudhury, Samir Roy Choudhury, and Debi Rai (Haradhan Dhara), included Haradhan Dhara, the only Dalit poet in the movement. Despite the participation of Dalit writers in the anti-establishment struggle, no women joined. The only women associated with the movement were Malay’s muse Tara, who wrote letters to him, and Naseem Apa, whom Malay dedicated several sexually charged notes to. Malay mentions Naseem Apa in his account of his visit to Imlitala (The Tamarind Ghetto), describing her physical features and inviting Shakti to meet her (Chowdhury, 2018, p. 8). In *Stark Electric Jesus*, the female body is relegated to the nurturing or sexual role (for example, “Shubha, let me go and live in your cloaked melon”). Similar sentiments appear in

Saileshwar Ghosh's poem *I Am Hungry*, where he writes, "As soon as I put my hand on a woman's body, she turned to gold…" (Chowdhury, 2018, p. 161) and "I steal your money, I buy one woman after another…" (Chowdhury, 2018, p. 161).

Partha Chatterjee (1993) has noted in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* that women in colonial Bengal were policed to carry the weight of nationalistic and community responsibilities. The education of women served the purpose of preparing them to be the ideal wives of Western-educated men, while still adhering to the patriarchal nation's norms. The 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan was a bloody exodus, resulting in the displacement and murder of millions, and the rape of thousands of women. The displaced women had no agency in deciding which side of the border they belonged. Later, women's accounts of the Partition were often excluded from historical documentation. Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* attempts to collect the testimonies of first- and second-generation female survivors of Partition, documenting how many women were hesitant to share their stories and often deferred to the men in their families for guidance.

The use of the female body as the site of political and social conflict by the Hungryalist Generation poets, despite the horrors of the Partition and its lingering effects, is deeply problematic. The character of Tara disappears from the scene, along with her ideas on translating Jibanananda Das' poetry, eventually becoming a figment of Malay's imagination. Interestingly, the only woman with a 'speaking' role in the Hungryalist Generation movement is a white woman (unlike Shubha and Naseem Apa), which highlights the biases within the movement. This raises the question: How effective is a political, literary, and social revolution that commodifies the female body for sensationalisation? How is it different from the nationalist movement that based its love for the nation on the image and body of the woman?

Conclusion

The words 'extreme,' 'excess,' and 'precarious' are used in this essay to signify both the linguistic challenges in translation and the sociocultural moment in which the Hungryalist Generation emerged. The 'excess' in translation enables regional literary traditions such as Bengali to retain their distinctiveness amidst attempts at domestication by dominant linguistic systems, such as English. As Gayatri Spivak notes, translation can sometimes erase the radical alterity of the primary (source) text, essentialising colonial hierarchies under the umbrella of accessibility[2]. Nihilism, class conflict, identity fragmentation, and a pervasive sense of anger and despair permeated Bengali poetry. Even those who did not associate with the Hungryalist Generation, such as Sunil Gangopadhyay, chose despondency over hope, and 'bishad' (depression) over 'biraha' (pain of separation). Writing a poem in this context thus becomes an act of including the excess of precarious identities, an extreme move that reflects the fractured reality of post-Partition Bengal. While not within the purview of this paper, it would also be interesting to investigate the sexual politics and gendered spaces inherent in the graphic portrayal of the female in the poetry of the Hungryalist Generation vis-a-vis the portrayal of the female and the feminine in the space of the very poetry the Hungryalists wrote vociferously against.

[2] The term 'regional'/ 'vernacular' is used here in a postcolonial sense, referring to literary languages like Bengali in relation to the global dominance of the coloniser's language, predominantly English, in academic and translational settings. Drawing from Tejaswini Niranjana's argument in *Sitting Translation,* translation has been historically implicated in allowing colonial modes of knowledge production to epistemologically hegemonise regional languages by positioning them as requiring mediation. Similarly, Spivak cautions against 'translatese' where the ideological and affective depth of source texts are cancelled out to showcase fluency in the target language. In the context of Hungryalist Generation poetry, the 'excess' that resists translation becomes a mode of socio-cultural and political rebellion, especially potent in post-Partition literary environment in Bengal. For more, see Gayatri Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," and Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (University of California Press, 1992).

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