Between Two Worlds

Tapodhir Bhattacharjee
Our familiar world is undergoing rapid metamorphic change. Literary genres and their modes of representation tend to both amuse and frighten at the same time. It is indeed a very tough time both for the critics and the connoisseurs. We read tentatively and become perplexed because now-a-days even the reliable modes and expressions of critical insight seem to be inadequate and unresponsive to the unfolding puzzles. The world around appears to be lost in wilderness. We are everywhere caught and suspended between Scylla and Charybdis.
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A collection of literary essays by Tapodhir Bhattacharjee

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For
all my co-addressees
Prof. Usharanjan Bhattacherjee
Dr. Jaharkanti Sen
Dr. Manojendra Shyam
with love & admiration
Time rolls on deconstructing everything around which includes value-system, worldview, faiths and beliefs, truths and positions, preferences and conclusions. When both subjectivity and objectivity are in a flux, nothing is finalizable. Yet, because of this unique openness, it also becomes an unavoidable responsibility for all serious readers of literary and cultural paradigms to be relentless interrogators. Questions are to be reorganised continuously and all tentative responses are to be critically examined. Particularly on the wake of hegemonic globalization, blatant consumerism is obliterating all hitherto established nuances of human universe. Yet these very enigmatic uncertainties of contemporary time have inspired professor Tapodhir Bhattacharjee to take up a few literary and cultural issues for thorough interrogation. His prism has been chiselled out of Bengali literature but this is in fact an adjustable window to look at the pulsating world around. The essays collected in this volume bespeak of Professor Bhattacharjee’s sharp insight, inquisitiveness and analytical ability. These discourses collectively prepare an account of addressivity when old worlds are fading out but the expected new world is powerless to be born.
Professor Tapodhir Bhattacharjee, a leading literary theorist and critic of contemporary Bengali literature, has earned unique reputation for his originality of thinking and wide range of scholarship. He has already authored more than fifty books and monographs on different aspects of literary theory and criticism in Bengali and three books in English. Two of his books have also been translated in Assamese. Bhattacharjee's works on trend-setting literary theorists viz. Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Jacque Derrida, Rolland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard and Terry Eagleton are unique in Bengali language. Professor Bhattacharjee (born on 12 February, 1949 at Silchar, Assam) is a legendary teacher and researcher in literary studies having exceptional command in Bengali, Sanskrit and English. He taught in Gauhati, North Bengal, Burdwan, Assam and Delhi University. Where he was the Tagore Professor in the Department of Modern Indian Language and Literary Studies. Professor Bhattacharjee is the former Vice Chancellor of Assam University. He firmly believes in exploring both the innate and explicit dialogics of life and aesthetics, social history and ideology.
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Our familiar world is undergoing rapid metamorphic change. Literary genres and their modes of representation tend to both amuse and frighten at the same time. It is indeed a very tough time both for the critics and the connoisseurs. We read tentatively and become perplexed because now-a-days even the reliable modes and expressions of critical insight seem to be inadequate and unresponsive to the unfolding puzzles. The world around appears to be lost in wilderness. We are everywhere caught and suspended between Scylla and Charybdys.

Modernism has proved to be a quicksand for us. Yet many a poets and litterati have been continuously rushing towards certain self-effacement and disaster. In the Indian sub-continent, Bengali writers first responded to the beckoning of modern sensibilities. But as time rolled on, the colonial and hegemonic character of modernism became apparent. The Bengali litterateurs however, were by then imprisoned by over-powering Euro-centrism.
Rabindranath Tagore was first to recognize the ailment and he drew the attention of his successors to the traits of decadence unleashed by colonial modernism. He was grossly misunderstood by his younger contemporaries. Then there was Jibanananda Das who not only created magic of pure poetry but also sought to carve out an independent worldview for him. But literary practices were so ruthlessly institutionalized that the new generations of Bengali litterati were easily lured by the guiles of literary establishment.

As a result there was a large-scale devaluation of human feelings and ideal positions. Power made its presence felt everywhere and it tended to homogenise as well as power everything. Literary and cultural practices succumbed to its menacing pressure to such an extent that no space was spared for the others. Aesthetics was dehistoricized and creativity was relegated to mechanised processes.

But, inspite of domination, there is protest and revolt; there is craving for alterities as well. We are dangerously suspended at the edge. Nevertheless reading and rereading is our weapon to fight back against all latent and manifest hegemonism. That is why these essays may be regarded as signatures of time. Perhaps we can now recognize that there is no closure and no finality. We can proclaim this much: look, we still continue to live between two worlds but nevertheless we reaffirm the magic-spell of existential dialogics.
Wittgenstein once remarked that the motto of philosophical investigation should be ‘I will teach you differences’. This might have been an appropriate motto for Jibanandana Das’s continued quest to render a new voice for reality. In the post-Tagore situations in Bengali literature, Jibanandana had to negotiate with the phantoms of reality in the colonised world. By translating experience into poetic form, he proved that the poetic translation of the given world was never the complete reality. Always the differential network envisaged in the texts became important. Jibanandana’s life is in fact a text which is to be read thoroughly and simultaneously with his textual discourses. Jibanandana not only saw but also felt the space and time he lived with. That is why, both the surface structure and the deep structure are to be interpreted in their right perspective. His works are basically the imaginative construction of what he experienced. Thus the manner of our encounter with the works in their autonomy
is crucial to understanding them. It seems that his poetical as well as recently published prose works themselves have self-expressive autonomy intrinsic to them.

The Journey from Barishal to Calcutta was fraught with multiple significations because it meant the rediscovery of the dialogics of the poetic self and its immediate environment on the one hand and between the conceptions of the finite and the infinite on the other. The readers are required to exercise choice at the very beginning as to whether he has to abide by the dictum of pre-determined modernism or to accept certain ideological constraints which may tenuously link poetic texts with the life of the poet. There cannot be any doubt, however, that our understanding of the poetic genius lies within his texts and in our own response to their formal and literary presentation to us.

Between the two world wars, the colonial Indian subcontinent was changing very rapidly. Whatever was considered sublime, was profaned too unexpectedly. The implications of time and space in the creative microcosm had to be readjusted. This was the period when avantgarde movements of Europe were redefining both the process and meaning of creativity. Their impact was felt in colonial Bengal as well. Jibanananda was one of the very few who could absorb that impact profitably and ultimately revitalised the workout reality of the contemporary life. It is not that the poet could wield the magic wand of poesy right from the very beginning. Indeed the progress of the creative poet may be scaled only when one recognizes the gradual ascent of his creative life. The poet has the following anthologies to his credit: Jhara palak(1927), Dhusar Pandulipi (1936), Banalata Sen(1942), Mahaprithivi (1944), Satti Tarar Timir (1948), Shrestha Kavita (1954), Rupasi
Bangla (1957) and Bela Abela Kalbela (1961).

Besides, we come across some other posthumously published anthologies, viz, Sudarshana (1973), Manabihangam (1979), and Alaprithevi (1981). In recent times, Debiprasad Bandyopadhyay and Abdul Mannan Syed have contributed much to the study of the poet by editing lesser known poems and other occasional prose pieces. Debesh Roy and his associates have also shed illuminating light by publishing twelve volumes of Jibanananda’s hitherto undiscovered short stories and novels. Now we are required to read and reread all these together and discover a new Jibanananda by exploring his conceptual world and imaginative skill...

II

In Jhara Palak, the poet remained totally unaware of the actual reality and remained transfixed in the surface structure only. The foremost imaginative poet of the post-Rabindranath epoch of Bengali poetry was yet to register his arrival in creative terms. In the initial phases of his poetic career, Jibanananda could not correctly respond to the intriguing task of awakening the slumbering faculties of his mind, which would bring him in contact with authentic reality. Till then his poetic worldview had not emerged out as the outcome of that irrepressible elan vital, carrying him towards the conquest of the semiotic microcosm in which the personal soul escapes from its limitations and yields its forces to the collective rhythms of poetry in quest of mystical intoxication. Even though the poet explored the collective rhythms in his latter anthologies for the sake of those exceptional adventures in which the universe could be experienced from inside like an imponderable blazing star
from where flaming forms gush forth to fall endlessly, no such experience can be detected in Jhara Palak. Such poems which bear the unquestionable mark of Jibanananda's genius are obviously not to be sought for. Because the poems fraught with memorable speech accessible to all the senses or instances of "communion of the soul to the soul summing up everything-perfumes, colours, sounds, thought catching thought and tugging at it" generally carry all the marks of revelation and cannot be expected in the first anthology.

One understands that the poet's whole approach as a creative self in his maturer phase was to grasp the sensation of reality, rather than reality itself. In fact, one cannot possess everything. One has to reconcile first with the ever-renewing dialogics of space with time. What we possess through poetic artefacts is only a segment, never the whole thing. The poet is expected to reconceptualise the phenomenal world and revitalise them with the elixir of time. It is quite understandable that time is otherwise an abstract entity, but the poetic understanding makes it a living embodiment. Clearly this is not evident in the embryonic poetic images of Jhara Palak. The heteroglossia of time was not properly understood and interpreted at that point of time. The poet could not negotiate with the complex web of appearance and reality and hence little or no signifier emerges out. However, on some occasions, the poet seems to respond rather vaguely to innermost stirring and therefore the remote possibilities of crystallizing process of significations are hinted at though our expectations remain ungratified.

III

In the second anthology viz., Dhusar Pandulipi, the readers are brought to realise the complexity and strangeness
of the way we ourselves actually perceive the world around. From this phase, it has become increasingly evident that our encounters with Jibanananda’s poetic microcosm are surprisingly near to real encounters with human situations. The poetic experience is unique among his contemporaries mainly because his text does not ‘present us with an exact image but produces ‘simulacra which, at the same time as they make no pretense of being anything other than what they are, arose in us feelings and attitudes generally produced by an encounter with real human beings’. In the initial phase of poetic craftsmanship, the budding signifiers could not unfold the processes of imagining images and dreaming dreams. Till then they were not sufficiently prepared to draw to oneness and hence could not generate intellectually inspired life-enhancing visions. From Dhusar Pandulipi onwards we come across completed patterns of signification. The basic difference lies in the fact that the signifiers in the mature poems constitute a few patterns in the poetic fabric to justify the intricate motion as well as the closure of the poems concerned. One may note here a few pertinent points. The poets of twentieth century feel that their deepest yearning cannot be conveyed except through symbols of time and space. Under the relentless pressure of the paradoxes of civilization, poetry is being constantly squeezed in and attenuated. Consequently the conscious ‘given’ world is becoming more and more fragmentary and apparitional. Thus the innate absurdity of modern situation being increasingly conspicuous, the creative poet is left with no other alternative but to reconcile himself with the menacing contradictions of life. Reality being apparent, illogical and insufficient for creative use, the contemporary mind has to search for the swinging door at the threshold of enchanting
mystique of life and in the illuminating darkness of the
unconscious, which is the inexhaustible storehouse for
memory. In other words, this is the domain of the timeless.
The poet knows that he is the prisoner of time; yet he has to
find out the route of his escape only though the labyrinths
of the timeless. The poetic signifiers alternately illuminate
that route and darken it further. We might echo Goethe’s
famous statement here, viz. ‘we escape the world though
art and art is also our link with it’. Reading Jibanananda
thoroughly one might feel that the parole in his every
successful poem is created by a journey through darkness
and a return to light. Thus it is obvious that the return
journey cannot be undertaken except through the darkly
night of the langue of the community.

The finished poems in Dhusar Pandulipi onwards may
be deciphered as the image of that extra-ordinary journey.
One may feel tempted here to observe that the gifted poet
had the capacity to make the desert of modernity blossom
since frustration, sorrow and despair could not restrain him
in scaling the heights on the one hand and generating the
fathomless depths on the other. Being a poet with sharp
sensibilities, Jibanananda has discovered probable solutions
to many an intriguing enigmas in the dialogics of the parole
and the langue. That is why the force and originality of his
signifiers are astounding. The secret of Jibanananda’s
originality lies in his specially endowed perceptive eye and
the penetrating imagination. His unique position among the
poets of Bengali literature depends mainly on the fact that
he treats every ingredient to be a means for disclosing a
pattern beneath phenomena. It is reasonable to summarise
here that Jibanananda went instinctually further and moved
boldly afield in a frantic search for inspiration from unusual
quarters. It also reveals the emerging new patterns as the artistic expressions of a deep tension when the social structure of Bengal was changing and eroding as well as the traditional beliefs of the cultural milieu were in the process of rapid disintegration on the wake of colonial modernism. The poems of Dhusar Pandulipi unmistakably prove that the creative process of signification is awakened whenever the time is out of joint and an illusion of the space of otherness becomes a desideratum. It also connotes that the monological reality propagated by the so-called 'modernist' world has become inadequate.

From a close reading of the representative poems of Dhusar Pandulipi, one can easily guess that the domain of the supra-modern has been explored by Jibanananda since one of the fundamental aims of innovative parole has always been the tearing apart of imposing marks and breaking up of given fetters. Concomitantly the signifiers post indications of the existence of a simultaneous world next door, interest in the space of dream, faith in automatism and efficacy of chance encounters. All these point to the special favour with which the poetic imagination has regarded the irrational and that the increased liberation of imagination is the ultimate expression of its protest against organised reality of the modernists. That is why, in the maturer poems of Jibanananda, not only are the conscious theme and the unconscious form reverberate on the same plane, but also the reader is impressed by an unalterable blending of subject and object. One can say that the silence accompanied with the inarticulateness of objects peeps through into the poetic discourse along with the interfusion of subject and object, reality and fantasy. The mute clouds, stars, dusks, dew, grass, darkness etc, which the poet's gaze absorbs, transmits
him to their hidden sources of likeness. For him, the mystery of nature and the secrets of the unconscious are one and the same. Thus clearly a mute star or icy moon is a signifier of Jibanananda’s unconscious and the signified is time or space or both, in accordance with its context. One wonders whether like Wordsworth, Jibanananda too could have articulated about the natural phenomena: ‘I saw them feel,/ or linked them to some feelings, the great man/ lay bedded in quickening soul, and all/ that I beheld respired with inward meaning’. Nevertheless, Jibanananda’s signifiers are mostly archetypes chiselled out from the flora and fauna around. These are symbols of a special kind in which mystery of a physical world and unfathomable psychic coalesce. His signifiers symbolise psychic mystery. Being digested and distilled in subtle psychic matter, their physical substance is made one with the poetic mind that meditates on its symbolicity.

Jibanananda’s message is loud and clear. His culture informed his art in specific ways and his art now enables us to understand aspects of the culture he felt as well as aspects of culture of which we continue to be a part. It is also obvious that the manner of our reconceptualising is the crucial factor here. It is how we read that tells us what is evoked in us. His poems recall us to some more immediate basic aspects of real human beings—a feeling of anxiety or fear or exhaustion or love or aspiration. Such feeling is opposed to the more mediated and calculated, hypocrat and suspicious sense of being we have as a result of our modernist consciousness. This consciousness is nothing but a deliberate construction which may render our interpretation of human existence in a more conceptually calculated method (e.g. shaped by psychoanalytic or historicist or dialectical materialist theory
or by science and technology). But Jibanananda’s texts evoke a more immediate consciousness of human being. The concept of ‘pure presence’ may be recalled here. As this may lead us to theoretical debate, we can only say that what appears to be complex about our contemporary world can often be reduced to the dialogics of differences and simultaneity. The readers are required to train themselves up to see life anew. In face, they are expected to recognize the presence of simultaneous spaces and interpret them both from different perspectives as well as dialogically.

Through the texture of signifiers the poet seems to have passed on message to the readers that existence is indeed sharing of experiences and feelings. It is not that there is a hidden esoteric layer of reality unknown or unknowable by all but the specially gifted poet. Undoubtedly the truth is everywhere like an open secret which is open to all but seen by almost none. The modernist worldview feigns democracy but in actuality it allows only a privileged few to visit the Olympus of art. Jibanananda instead invites all to the labyrinths of creativity; however, the point is to find out the correct key for the entrance. Here comes the question of appropriate preparation for initiation into the reading act. The world is, as it were, before our eyes and thus within our sensible grasp not as a whole but piece by piece which we can see to understand its variegated faces. In this way, Jibanananda’s signifiers offer critique of our so-called ‘modern sensibilities’ and counsel us as to how we should prepare ourselves to see through appearances. Thus the Bakhtinian concept of ‘seeing eye’ (as envisaged with regards to Goethe) becomes relevant both for Jibanananda and his readers. This is not only true about the poems collected in Dhusar Pandulipi, but also other anthologies that followed.
As we go through the poems of Dhusar Pandulipi, we observe that many of the emerging signifiers act ultimately as the arch-symbols of the fundamental facts of his poetry. In fact, the blending of the subject and the object, consciousness of time and awareness of space, the animation of nature and the quietening of a mind safely anchored in nature intensify the symbolic essence of particularly the archetypal signifiers we are confronted with. Here we may recollect Wordsworth once again to our advantage for whom the basic ingredients of the poetry of vision was 'a motion and a spirit that impels/all thinking things. During the composition of the poems of Dhusar Pandulipi, Jibanananda's poetic craftsmanship is found to be at the first major juncture of his career. Here he seems to have first realised the importance of intricate symmetry of poetic art manifested through genuine patterns of signification. Now onwards his poetry goes on to imply an unusually warm and intimate involvement since it focuses on something beyond. As is evident from the poems like 'Nirjan Swakshar', 'Mather Galpa', 'Kayekti line', 'Paraspar', 'Bodh', 'Abasaragan', 'Campe' etc. (in English these may be translated as 'Signature of Solitude', 'A Tale of the meadows', 'Owl', 'A Few Lines', 'Simultaneity', 'Feeling', 'Song of Leisure', 'In a Camp' respectively; (however, it may be noted that Jibanananda's poems are absolutely untranslatable) a correct poetic response to life is growing and vibrating. But this response is nevertheless directed to what lies beyond the direct immediacy of objects, that is to the generative and tone-setting pattern both of the object and of the reaction to it.

These poems also display the problem of the ambivalent temporality of modernity. Time in the poetic discourses of
Jibanananda has multiple nuances. Sometimes it is manifested in an increasing narrative of the question of social ethics and subject formation. The poet has sought to interpret the relation of the human being to the social world in the context of the dialogics of time and space. One may also describe it as the decentred understanding of the world. What we encounter in all these poetic accounts are discourses of ethics of self-construction. The very first poem of anthology entitled Nirjan Swakshar (Signature of Solitude) is particularly significant because it sets the tune for several other poems to follow through crystallizing archetypal signifiers. Analysing these expressios minutely, we understand that the familiar objects have undergone complete metamorphosis and as such these bespeak of a hitherto unexperienced beyondness while their old bonds with familiar meaning are almost completely negated.

V

The guiding principle of the process of signification in this anthology is the constant reconstruction and the reinvention of the self. This assumes further importance in the context of colonial modernity as well as a complex frame of a complicated and diverse historical time. The poet seems to be tirelessly excavating the signifiers, particularly those with archetypal embers. He does so with a view to posting the message that the conception of the subject and the presence, the being and absence has no apriori objective status. These have to be perpetually reconstructed in the dialogic schemata of time and space. As we go through other poems of the anthology, an enchanting world of magic creativity is unfolded before us. One cannot but note that there are as many signifiers as there are typical situations in
life. A signifier is activated and a compulsiveness dawns only in correspondence with a similar situation in the text of life. This unfoldment is coterminus with the ever-changing hermeneutics of time. Borrowing an expression from Eliot's article, one may say that the time past and time future intermingle with the time present in Jibanananda's processes of signification. Thus the poem entitled Mather Galpa (A Tale of the Meadows) is fraught with archetypal signifiers chiselled out from nature. Jibanananda repeats these images not only in the poem itself, but also in many other poems of the anthology.

We also find that signifiers like the notes in music bear meaning only in relation to other entities. They exist in the usages of time and space. Since the contexts and usages change constantly, the life-span of a signifier is a continual verbal ritual of sacrifice. Yet within a definite pattern in a particular poem, the life of a signifier is preserved almost miraculously by poetic art and this is indeed a kind of transcendent life beyond its life-in-speech. As the aforesaid poem shows, the archetypal signifiers are stable, not in themselves, but in their relation to all other words in the poem, which in turn are hastened to the cherished meaning by their relations to it. The poet wants to alloy as it were the fever of the bone unleashed by the modernist onslaught, when he takes resort to weaving certain verbal patterns through several other poems. If we go through the verbal icons carefully, we cannot but feel that the poet, because of his special endowment, is able to transform even the commonplace words as potential archetypal signifiers. He discovers a symbolic sense in all things and every natural phenomenon seems to have its special connection with deeper reality, rechristened and rejuvenated by time.
Such experience is relived in the poems collected in the anthology entitled Banalata Sen. As we reread his poems, we are struck by the recurrent use of his metaphors. These are not only poetic ingredients, but also signatures of time inferred in space. Actually Banalata Sen marks the beginning of the more fruitful phase of his poetic career only because he has realised the existence of the dialogue of the timeless with the temporal in a more subtle way. Here a typically Jibanandanadian signifier is basically a category of poetic imagination that opens before us a tight passage or perhaps a narrow door through which one goes down to the deeper labyrinth. What comes after the door is a surprisingly boundless expanse with apparently no inside and no outside, no above and no below, no here and no there. Moreover, a close perusal of the poems shows that Jibanananda has sought to place himself at the level of deeper reality out of which dreams arise. He assumes the role of the mysterious agency that shapes our dreams whose procedures he adopts from contraction to displacement. Though some familiar objects are presented with an index of reality that characterises the world of the senses—the relations into which they enter, the rhythms that carry them along and above all the architecture of the textual integer strike us at once by their irremediable strangeness.

VI

If we follow the implicit logic of the poetic sensibilities, the coral islands of Rupasi Bangla seem to offer the solace of a port in the midst of tumultuous ocean of contemporary life. Moreover it thus provides the missing link between the texts of ‘faded manuscript’ and the mystique of the trinity of love, nature and life as envisaged in Banalata Sen. The
frozen music of the textual architecture of Rupasi Bangla has no parallel in Bengali language. One feels that the constituent elements of its archetypal signifiers tend to escape from themselves and burst the framework in which we enclose them. Inspite of their intricate density, they glide from one form to another like the ephemeral images in a kaleidoscope. The archetypal symbols signpost the beginning of a beginning in Jibanananda's poetic career. However, before the inception of the mature and major creative phase with the textual integer of Banalata sen, there is a temporary lull, manifested in the sonnets of Rupasi Bangla. His innate nostalgic feelings experienced in the preceding anthology seek special perspectives for their realization. A process of spatial illusion is created thereby to accommodate the intense solitude of the timeless rural Bengal. The poet heaps up treasures of explorations of his deeper self. New forms of archetypal signifiers spring in the poet's mind as he walks down the memory lane in rural solitude and feels a new secret bond between them and himself. In this polyphonic discourse, all modernist pretensions become totally irrelevant. Besides, the journey from Dhusar Pandulipi to Rupasi Bangla bespeaks of a spiritual and aesthetic resurrection. It leads the readers from latent possibilities of nostalgic dream to their manifestations where, now onwards, they would be confronted with an abundance of subconscious visions and archetypal signifiers in their pristine form. This might remind one of the expressions of Paul Eluard in 'Poetic Evidence': 'somber are the truths that appear in the work of true poet'. Further, in one of his short poems ('Je cache les sombres Tresors' Amour la poesie) he wrote: 'I hide the dark treasures/of unknown retreats/The heart of forests the slumber/of an ardent rocket/The nocturnal horizon/that
crowns me/press forward/hailing with a new secret/the birth of images’. This is a poetic commentary on the timeless from the viewpoint of a dialogically situated temporal other. And this is what we discover in the textual integer of Rupasi Bangla.

For Jibanananda, poetry has never has been bed of roses since he always felt deep within himself a roaring fire of which he was both the fuel and the energy of combustion. That is why, when we find ourselves confronting the deceptively calm exterior of the poem’s fireplace in the form of the archetypal signifiers, these arise spontaneously from the abyss of the usual vision of existence that these archetypal signifiers are envisaged. Through the veil of poetic art emerge the figures of the mythical and cultural time. The poet recreates the collective past only to augment the ontology of presence. As a result the monodimensional thematics of modernism has been thwarted. What is crucial to such a poetic vision of the dialogical time is the belief that one must not merely change the narratives or discourses of our histories but transform our sense of what it means to live, to be in other times and different spaces, both human as well as historical. Thus the expressions like “Somewhere a rough monument is rising in the vicinity of sky” (Sonnet-XII), ‘many a times my hut and haystock had gone a floating as listened to the music of the ritual immersal’ (xiii) etc might have sunk into the level of triviality if the poet were at the same time not particularly eager to crush habitual ways of thinking and feeling. Jibanananda’s readers are never plunged into that kind of idleness which makes them intransitive. Being a true textual integer, Rupasi Bangla allows its readers to gain access to the magic of the signifiers and thus to the pleasure of writing. This reminds us of the
famous comment of Rolland Barthes: reading is nothing more than a referendum. Undoubtedly the reference is always either to the voiced or the unvoiced nuances, that is, the eloquent or, the silent textures of time. Jibanananda's poetry inspires in us the evocation of a radical metamorphosis of life and we, too, feel deep within ourselves that a profound breach from the ordinary concept of reality has undone our established bonds with the normal universe and opened within us a fissure through which we can listen to the call of another level of existence. This may be described otherwise as the dialogue of the finite with the infinite and the temporal with the timeless.

If Dhusar Pandulipi indicated an intensely experienced vanity and vacuity of all things belonging to the domain of the finite and the temporal, Rupasi Bangla is then indicative of the poet's urge to see the otherness of time and space, that is, infinite and the timeless. It is also immensely significant that the poems of Rupasi Bangla were composed in closely guarded solitude and thereafter came Banalata Sen and Mahaprithivi where the feeling of nothingness, a typical Jibananandian nausea, is explicit. The spirit of revolt and decadence, indicative of temporal experience, still persists. But, for the poet, it is also what guarantees the possibility of scaling new heights in immediate future. Keeping this in view, one may reread Rupasi Bangla and conclude that its illumination signified the process of breaking open of temporal appearance. Jibanananda never returned to this coral islands but the dialogic significance of its innate presence can never be denied. The poet seems to have questioned the validity of the worldly appearances as well as of the fixed feeling and belief that constitute the normal habitat of the complicated contemporary man.
Jibanananda has sought to make, if we borrow Eliot’s phrase, ‘a raid on the inarticulate’. Even though the poet did not simply aspire for having a monologue with the other side of silence in Rupasi Bangla, nevertheless it marks the beginning of a poetic process to go beyond verbal artifices into the illuminating darkness of a greater reality. This is how and where the readers too have commentary.

VII

As we graduate to the poems of the Banalata Sen, we understand that the poet has ferried across to a new shore, but the basic dialogics of cessation and continuity still persists. Therefore, like the poems of Rupasi Bangla here also we are to negotiate with a rendezvous of the temporal and the timeless on the one hand and the familiar reality of the everyday world and the mysterious domain of the supra-modern existence on the other. To quote Barthes: ‘This text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds. It has no beginning; it is reversible: we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one’. (S/Z:pp 5-6) Jibanananda’s signifiers in Banalata Sen can be defined as the medium of synchronicity and of co-incidence as against the casuality of everyday reality. It may be assumed from his poems that the landscapes are co-incidental with the poet’s feeling, subject matter and metric patterns. Since he is bound to fix his gaze beyond the reach of the objective reality and follow the strings that move their limbs upto the verbal icons that control them and since the archetypal signifiers are realised and understood at the deepest psychic level—it follows that the poet is ultimately evoking the essence of an infinite beyondness.

All the representative poems of this anthology prove that
the poet is indeed a supremely hallucinated man and he needs a private mythology of his own. Indeed a communally accepted mythic paradigm has been of immense help to him right from his tryst with Rupasi Bangla.

One feels that from deep down in the pit of the racial past rose the iconic figures of the timeless that beckoned from the walls of the antiquated temples and shrines as well as the legacy of the socio-cultural history of Bengal. What Freud discovered in the Greek stock figures like Oedipus, Narcissus, Electra etc. Jibanananda found in Chand, Shrimanta, Dhanapati, Behula, Lahana etc in Rupasi Bangla and Ashoka, Bimbisara etc in Banalata Sen. Even the colours used by the poet are archetypal colours because of their undoubtable intricate symbolicty and they seem to be the bridge from toppled multicoloured appearances to the inarticulatable splendour that unifies all colours and reveals their essence. Jibanananda, too, would have coined the famous words of Yeats to describe his feelings thus: ‘life, like a dome of many-coloured glass, stains the white radiance of eternity’. It seems that, to our poet, all colours and forms, either because of their preordained nature or because of long associations in our collective unconscious, evoke indefinable yet precise emotions or rather certain disembodied powers whose footsteps descend to the labyrinths of our being. Thus, Jibanananda’s archetypal vision emanates from a fundamentally transcendental attitude to life. Rupasi Bangla unveiled a poetic process of downward flight into the uninhabited region of dreams where death and rebirth, natural phenomena and the mythic figures cohabit and intermingle as we never find in a modernist microcosm.

In his more fruitful creative phase represented by Banalata Sen and Mahaprithivi, we find that correct perusal
of the archetypal vision enables us to share the thrill of his poetry. Jibanananda's imagination hallucinates to convey the figures that help the readers to gravitate towards the signifiers. His poetry is undoubtedly a rich entanglement because it brings into play even the unnameable silent stirrings of the unconscious. If the principal Kallolaites treat the solitude of an individual man in a romantic world, the guiding spirit of supra-modern mystique initiates Jibanananda to start from the emptiness and corruption of the world to mount on a voyage toward the limitless absolute through the archetypes of dream, love, desire, nature etc.

One can only say that Jibanananda's poems are essentially disorientation maps that try to locate and give a new name for the habitation of our inner drama. That is why, the signifiers employed in Banalata Sen cast a gleam of irrationality as well as distegrating and subversive light over the breadth of the familiar world, a light which bursts upon the poet and is reflected on the reader. However, the point is not to gather together a museum of poetic expressions in the guise of archetypes that one has only to admire passively, but to put into circulation psychic explosive destined to blow up the dreary and habituated walls of commonplace reality of the much-advertised modernist world. Therefore, the words that constitute Jibanananda's archetypes in Banalata Sen (and also in Mahaprithivi), are marked with inner tension because these words seem to vex him with a tendency to escape from their accompanying structure. In the poems of Mahaprithivi. Jibanananda's intense sense of timelessness and spacelessness can be felt which eventually grope toward a distinct experience of time and space. The passage of communion has been prepared by the poet through the elusive territories of
signs. Consequently, we also feel that his alternate grouping, with drowsiness and wakefulness on the one hand and with temporal and timeless world on the other, illumines the mount of Sisyphus. Hence, his poetic endeavours to come to term with himself signify endless creative attempts, which are always frustrated yet always renewed.

VIII

Inspite of certain fluctuations of emphasis on the archetypal patterns, the essential point becomes obvious even during the composition of Satti Tarar Timir and Bela Abela Kalbela that the poet always felt it necessary to follow the directives of controlling beyondness. And that, the truly poetic signifiers stand for categorical refusal to accept the sterile present and hence the poetic techniques are to be readjusted to enable them to surpass the commonplace reality and consequently to rise above and beyond the boundaries of the familiar reality of the modernist world. It goes without saying that, for Jibanananda, the last phase of his creative life cannot be a question of merely discovering new perspectives on aesthetic problems. He is not one to be satisfied with any pseudo-truth or any other lyric equivalent; he pays attention to such temporal phenomena only in the measure that they act as signals indicating the way to penetrate into the secret strata of reality. Jibanananda’s signatures of time find themselves faced with the essential contradictions of life and it is the concomitant need to resolve this contradiction which is the secret of the magic of his poetry. While waiting for a real passage to open up, we need to see, only through those signifiers, how objective humour begins to open a crack in the block of massive reality with which we are confronted in our day-to-day life. In essence
the recurrence of Jibanananda’s sarcastic humour in this last phase is an intuitive and implicit critique of conventional reality. It unveils a force which extracts a fact or a group of facts from their routine setting and tosses them into a whirl of unexpected explorative relationships. The poet shows that objective humour can alone provide a new grotesqueness and a laudable importance to what surrounds it. Thus, in the context of his poetry, this is basically carnivalesque and it is the extreme expression of a convulsive inadaptation. As it was with the avantgarde, objective humour is sometimes the black source of Jibanananda’s poetry also. In fact, it is a negative force, a screen interposed between the consciousness and the established order of this modernist world whose attractions it counters with opacity. It tends to destroy all the habits born of this attraction which tied it down. It also frees consciousness from their pull and permits it to undergo the magnetization of the fields of attraction of the unconscious.

Poetry is indeed the best example of suggestive silence through some guiding archetypal patterns; interestingly this reminds us of the philosophical notion about non-being sprouting into being. His signatures of time have basically remained expressions of the need to explore beyond the known and not simply intellectualised technique to cause bewilderment to the readers.

In fine, the sincerity of Jibanananda’s inspiration in this respect, as elsewhere, can be best measured in the light of his willingness to adapt from the contemporary avantgarde movement as well as from vast repertoire of traditions only what will help in the achievement of his creative aims. He recognizes signifiers as essential ingredients of poetry which contribute, as much as their integral theme, to express
necessary protest against the conventional and worn-out world-view as well as the decadent traits of overpowering modernism. Therefore, his signifying mechanisms, in the ultimate analysis, prefigure that penetration of the facade of the real world which all creative rebellions seek to effect through the din and bustle of eccentric outbursts. By virtue of his verbal icons, Jibanananda has sought to formulate a special attitude to man and his moral and physical environment which is obviously concomitant with his poetic 'weltanschauung'. Jibanananda, too, has assumed the role of an 'interrogator of regimes' for he seeks also to 'glimpse the other side of the coin'. In an effort of this kind, respect for chronological time and spatial limitations easily loses its meaning in his poems. Even sometimes the poet seems to lead us deliberately to confront with that world where time runs in neutral.

Jibanananda makes fine use of the archetypal signifiers that are born from the rib of archaic darkness, to illumine what were unrecognised and to elevate what were low. He developed freely some durable patterns with those verbal icons as concomitant with his own world-view, where the existential and aesthetic values originated in a sensibility and mentality untouched by predetermined habits and prejudices of the modernists. However, these patterns, too, try to determine that 'Sublime' point in the never-ending drama of being and nothingness and, therefore, in Jibanananda's poetry, the seemingly contradictory elements gradually and decisively culminate into that cherished point where 'real and imaginary, past and future, communicable and uncommunicable, high and low cease to be perceived contradictorily' That is what makes the signifiers weighed on the strange silence of poetry and consequently inevitable
for any study undertaken on Jibanananda.

The greater the force of Jibanananda's signifiers, the more it opens like a maelstrom onto the very foundations of silent nothingness which is also the inconceivable totality of being. He achieves an existential totality in a state of suggestibility created by means of the mysteriously multi-levelled archetypal structure. In his microcosm, even the darkness is illuminating; he calls upon his imagination to implement the glimpses, gleams, traces and dashes of the creative urge while attention is being incessantly shifted from one level of communication to the next until the archetypes of essential shaping occupy the centre of the poetic universe.

Jibanananda's signifiers circumvent not only the obstacles promoted by the poetic conventions of the modernists, but also the limits imposed by habituated thought processes. These are his creative mechanisms for measuring time in its various facets. He operates both with time and within time. That is why his time is replete with human potentials which the modernist nihilism tried to obliterate. Jibanananda's signatures of time are essentially positioned in a larger world and the natural universe. His signifiers, therefore, refer to socio-cultural sequences and segments. Thus it is automatically dialogous with space and perceptible through communicable social symbols. Precisely here Jibanananda transcends modernist predilections and signposts a new aesthetics of cultural time.
MORE READINGS ON
JIBANANANDA’S ARCHETYPAL VISION

For a supremely gifted creative poet and his reader, there are two kinds of memory. Beneath the private memories, we have certain archetypal patterns of response to nature, inherited from numerous generations of ancestors who have watched life with love and patience, foreboding or hope. These are extraordinary forms of our linguistic habit and as such appeal to the deepest levels of our psyche and eventually stir up some unremembered racial memories.

The archetypes evoke the best response as shaping forms from poetic imagination while loom vaguely behind the poet’s temporal experiences and personal memories. These archetypes cannot become active in a poem, except through the medium of the poet’s personal vision. Indeed, they are the imprints of innumerable repetitions of certain modes of experience preserved in the great memory and which can be apprehended only by the ecstatic, distanced impersonal vision of art. According to Jung, these are two types of artistic
creation which he names as the psychological and the visionary. The former uses materials drawn for the realm of human consciousness and deals with normal experience raised from the level of commonplace to that of poetic experience. On the other hand, the latter emerges from the hinterland of human mind not intelligible as the former. According to Jung’s conception, the visionary art arises timeless and it is, at the same time, foreign, cold, manysided, demoniac and grotesque.

It may be more profitable to approach this region of ‘collective unconscious’ (as Jung calls it), where the archetypes are stored, from another direction. Christopher Caudwell claims:

... emotions, generated collectively persist in solitude so that one man, alone, singing a song, still feels his emotion stirred by collective images. He is already exhibiting that paradox of art-man withdrawing from his fellows into the world of art, only to enter more closely into communion with humanity.

Obviously, the archetypal critics intend to put emphasis on the language of the people, that is communal experience and the collective emotion. They point us back to a world where the community, hardly as yet differentiated into individuals, felt as one and projected its feelings into myths and archetypes. These collective emotions, buried deep in the unconscious of even the most contemporary readers, may still be stirred up by poetry only if the poem itself has tapped them. But, since they have been resting for centuries in the ocean of the unconscious, each has lost its distinctive quality and emerges not as awe, hatred, love, but as the general imaginative response which often includes the feeling of recognition and hence makes the poem appear almost a
remembrance. We may also observe that this response registers a satisfaction of the human desires for wholeness.

According to Maud Bodkin's phraseology, these images are potent which represent 'a whole of far-reaching significance, concentrated like a force behind any particular stanza or line'. Moreover, this concentration of emotional meaning seems to require some coordinating process of which poetic craftsmanship is only the final, conscious stage. It is the poet's need for the realization of a potential theme by means of the images out of which it must grow a realization working first through unconscious, then through conscious stages that makes for the association of images. The images fashioned in archetypes are thus not mere verbal decorations for him, but the very essence of an intuitive language.

Indeed, the command on archetypes is one of the convincing marks of Jibanananda's genius and his readers are always prepared to judge his creative powers by the force and originality of those archetypes. It is revealed from a close scrutiny that Jibanananda's poetic archetypes are the products of collective unconscious to which both the poetic images and myths return for its sanction. The task of Jibanananda's poetry may be said to be the perpetual discovery, through the imaging as well as the myth-making faculty, of new relationship within some archetypal pattern. The rediscovery and renovation of old ingredients of poetry are also conditioned and controlled by that pattern. Since these archetypal patterns are endowed with inherent dynamism, the mask of concrete reality is torn open and the phantasmal images overpower the familiar facets of the world. The readers are consequently compelled to look for a new kind of freshness, intensity and evocative power in the images
and myths induced by the poet's archetypal vision. The secret of Jibanananda's originality lies in his specially endowed perceptive eye and the penetrating imagination. His unique position among the poets of Bengali literature depends, among other things, on the fact that he treats every poetic ingredient to be a means for disclosing a pattern beneath phenomena. It may seem reasonable to summarise here that it also reveals the emerging new patterns as the artistic expressions of a deep tension when the social structure of Bengali was changing and eroding as well as the traditional beliefs of the cultural milieu were in the process of rapid disintegration.

The archetypes are awakened whenever the time is out of joint and when conscious life is characterised by onesidedness. It also signifies that the familiar reality loved by the so-called 'modernist' world has become inadequate and hence the domain of the supra-modern has to be explored for one of the fundamental aims of innovative parolé has always been to break certain fetters. Its well-known interest in the dream world, faith in automatism and confidence in chance encounters point to the favour with which it has regarded the irrational and that is the ultimate expression of its protest against the organised reality of the modernists. As a consequence the increased liberation of imagination sets the poetic craft to the innermost labyrinths of human consciousness from whose bourn the archetypes originate. This reminds us of the famous observation made by Miss Bodkin: '...the archetype is both a product of time, the shade in which it appears determined by past history, and also a creative energy, looking towards and helping to determining the future... archetypes are like riverbeds which the water has abandoned but to which it returns again after
an indefinitely long period. An archetype is like the course of an old river in which the waters of life having flowed a long time have worn a deep channel. The longer they were contained in the same bed, the more likely are they sooner or latter to return to it.

II

Jibanananda, being the foremost imaginative poet of post-Rabindranath Bengali poetry, seems to write not altogether from his individual thought and feeling, but his deeper mind seems to be in communion with the ordinary minds of the milieu and thus he becomes the spokesman of thoughts generated through an act of poetic communication. During the composition of Jhara palak, Jibanananda has not negotiated with ‘reality’ around and consequently could not come to term with his poetic sensibilities and hence little or no archetype emerges out. At any rate, it will be my endeavour here to find out those emerging embryonic archetypes to assess whether Jibanananda, the foremost of the seers among the exponents of the genre of contemporary Bengali poetry, was engaged in special gymnastics of craftsmanship for the purpose of infinitely extending the range of his sensation and also for removing the walls of his imprisonment in commonplace modernist reality.

In Jhara Palak, as we have already hinted at, Jibanananda’s archetypes are in their embryonic stage and hence these cannot unfold the processess of creative imagination. One can say that, till then, they are not sufficiently prepared to draw to oneness and hence cannot generate intellectually inspired life-enhancing visions. Thus, when the poet says: ‘At the silent beckoning of vast blue (sky) above, an indeterminate desire haunts me’ and ‘in the
solitary evening of a star— a certain remote sky of twilight region calls me—or ‘the sky of dawn, midnight blue haunt me time and again with their infinite treasure’, ‘O blue sky with ceaseless vision, O wizard you have broken open the prison of destiny with your magic-wand’ and ‘vast darkness, pregnant with smoke,/sinks in blue sky—on the spell-bound eyelashes, widened in dream/in Bangle-white clouds, white sky, starlit night’. We are made aware of an emerging pattern. If Jibanananda seems to be somewhat uncertain and unconvincing, it is because the poet has not yet mastered the technique of identifying the kind of utterance that the emerging archetypes represent. It took him some time to reconcile himself to the fact that archetypes are frequently secured with reference not so much to the discursive structure of the poem as to the context it implies. At any rate, their inherent limitations notwithstanding, the recurring type-images, particularly in the poem entitled Nilima (viz. blue sky, vast darkness, starlit night) are very significant in the context of Jibanananda’s poetic career. Even though, because of lack of innate strength, these are unable to act as the controlling agent of the whole poetic structure, the poet nevertheless used these aforesaid type-images to his advantage in the latter anthologies. The basic difference lies in the fact that archetypes in the latter poems weave a few patterns in the poetic fabric to justify the intricate motion as well as the closure of the poems concerned. Successful poetic archetypes inevitably lead us to a conclusion that is otherwise improbable, illogical, or in some way unstable and unconvincing. Usages might appear proper and even logical in a broad sense as well as conclusive when referred to the poet’s presumed motives or situations. Such archetypes then converge to oneness so that shapes and colours are
foreshortened and their true, relative dimensions appear.

Thus, in this respect, Jhara Palak has to be approached not for finding a few completed patterns; rather, it allows us to have a quick glimpse at the greenroom or perhaps, the antechamber of poetic creativity. We are expected to note that even a poetic fragment has a coherence and a distinct identity; one of the most significant effects of these emerging archetypes is simply to inform the reader that he is being confronted by the possibilities of the growth of formal structure of poetry and not by anything else. By way of putting this somewhat differently now, we might also observe that imposing preference of archetypes in poems signifies a clear distinction between Jibanananda’s poetic art and that of most of the Kallolaites. An archetype in Jibanananda’s poem serves, in other words, as an intricate symmetrical frame for that poem which, in no time, creates a sort of aural illusion. However, the poems included in Jhara Palak cannot quench our thirst and possibility of illusion, if any, is destroyed before it crystallized.

III

Baudelaire once told that a creative poet is ‘mineral-like, vegetable-like’ because for him the mystery of nature and the secrets of the unconscious are one and the same. Thus a mute star or icy moon is a signifier of Jibanananda’s unconscious, which might be described as 'Id' in Freud’s terminology, and the result is an acute sense of unutterable hovering archetypes. He weaves a pattern of interactive differences, as is expected of a poet of tense contemporary world. Nevertheless, his nature-archetypes are symbols of a special kind in which mystery of a physical world and unfathomable psychic latency coalesce. Jibanananda’s
archetypal objects symbolise psychic mystery; their physical substance-digested, distilled in subtle psychic matter- is made one with the poetic mind that meditates on its symbolicity.

However, this tendency was not manifested in Jhara Palak. We have to take up the poems of Dhusar Pandulipi for further investigation. There we observe that a maturer Jibanananda commences his voyage for penetration into nature. Indeed, by virtue of his realisation that he is impelled by unformulable patterns of some predetermined archetypes, the poet becomes unfathomably reticent, as it were, like natural phenomena themselves.

One cannot but be ensnared by the inherent symbolic essence of the following: ‘The dews that have accumulated on my bosom at that night’, The sky is spread over several other sky, attenuated to its blue’, ‘the thing that lives on in the fathomless crevices of heart/on a seat more solitary than the stars’, ‘my body shivers with the innate cold of the bosom of the fading star’, ‘Oh sky you are like grass of that waking earth’, ‘you are still warm in your sky, yet/ struck by the cold of external sky/ the star is fading’.

Moreover we are confronted with- ‘on several fields of late autumn/only dew drops drip/at the sigh of the wintry river/ freeze/bamboo leaves faded grass-stars of sky/an icy moon sprinkles/on paddy fields/accumulate smoky/sharp edged mists’, ‘several moons and stars/decayed on several fields, rats and owls/search paddy fields in moonlit night/...mists float on all directions-broken nests of sparrows/are wet with dews’, ‘which wave struck him on his bosom/in inarticulate darkness’; ‘you float on with innate emotions of water/water beckons you relentlessly... their forests/having fragrance of primeval night in its bosom/sings in darkness’; 'there is time to wake up and importance of sleep/this
solvency is ours— the sky is whispering something/to stars’;  
‘the windy sky comes floating/though every sky/upon the 
stars the wind seems to mean/eager becomes the darkness’;  
‘yet when stars rise in dark night of sky/our heart is inflicted 
with a fresh yearning/with that I want to entangle myself 
with that warm sky/being cloud in twilight cloud, being 
star with the star’;  ‘my gaiety was lost in the midst of new 
festivities/I am only weaving this pang with illumination 
and darkness’;  ‘the river that is lost in darkness_(solitude 
of) night, in untraceable quarters/its unquiet waters shake 
our heart with stillness’;  ‘that night was illumined with the 
light of stars and, in fading moonlight/visualising my way 
where the river flows by/having listened to its murmurs/ I 
stood by it in a magha night or perhaps, in phalguna’;  ‘dew 
drops resembling molecules of glass/dripping from the 
bozom of the moon/in northern ocean/...their silvery hair 
drizzle’;  ‘her hair resembles cloud and its ripples/ will rest 
on the bed/inside the places as white as the smoke of 
incense’;  ‘braided hair has been unbraided in darkness/ even 
today she has so much hair; I roam in illumination and 
darkness— inside my brain/there is no dream-only an intense 
inarticulate feeling acts’;  ‘that star or blemishes of that star/ 
have put obstacles time and again to the realisation of my 
love...it is whispering to me alone rotating like water ‘;  ‘it 
carries the burden of the fragrance of grass of the fields and 
the smell of dews is in its eyes/ perhaps the fading light of 
evening would spoil its desired time/...in the harvest season, 
the paddies have bended everywhere/ dew drops are 
constantly dripping from their breasts...our land of cup-
boards filled with the smell of owls and rats—bending in this 
side of the river/ the hours of her delivery are in the offing 
_beauty fades away, winter would visit her only to spoil’;
'the mosquitoes of darkness and stars know that/we also have arrived at the beckoning of the fields of harvest'; 'throughout the night in the southern breeze/ under the moon-rays of sky/I listen to the call of lady-deer/...somewhere in deep forest where there is no moonlight/ the male-deers are listening to their call.'

Thus the archetypal images are of highest value for the poetic mind since they appear as involuntary manifestations of the unconscious processes whose existence and meaning can only be inferred by the connoisseurs. That an archetypal content expresses itself as the super real or invisible vistas of consciousness is manifested first and foremost in metaphors. It may be proved by the recurrent use of darkness, star, dews etc. as archetypes. Actually Dhusar Pandulipi marks the beginning of fruitful phase of his poetic career only because the poet has realised the potentiality and mysteries of existence.

We understand that Jibanananda would develop these traits to perfection in his next anthologies where the objects constituting the archetypes rest on precarious foundations, always uncertain of their own identity.

IV

But as the reader goes though the poems of Rupasi Bangla carefully, he identifies the emerging archetypes as glowing and burning embers, whose reflection is cast on him throughout the anthology. Of course, there are those poetic embers, distinctly positive and even prophetic visions which arise spontaneously from them and are ultimately detectable as archetypes. It is precisely in the tearing apart of the usual vision of existence that these archetypal visions are engendered.
Jibanananda has not, however, retraced his steps in Rupasi Bangla; because, a close perusal of the contemporary Bengali poetry will prove that it posits between anguish and enthusiasm, between the horrible and the marvellous as well as between affirmation and negation. Indeed, our perusal of Rupasi Bangla exhibits that the extra-semantic illumination itself signifies the process of breaking open of appearances. Its difference with other anthologies, however, lies in the fact that it is blindingly brilliant and breaking apart all habitual verbal practices rather than being dark and desperate. One can say that its archetypes basically represent the second moment in which the despair-inspiring breaking open of old and wornout verbal patterns seems changed into a shining egress.

Before we travel further to the deeper provinces of the enchanting realm of Rupasi Bangla for a proper analysis of the guiding archetypes therein, we may profitably remind ourselves of the famous words of Rimbaud. In his prose-poem entitled ‘mystique’, he imposes his fantastic and ecstatic vision upon the readers through an impeccable sequence of archetypal images:

On the slope of the hillock, angels whirl their woolen robes, in the grasses of steel and emerald..The flowery softness of the stars, of the sky and of all else comes down opposite the bank, like a basket_close to our faces, and makes the abyss flowering and blue below.

Likewise, Jibanananda seems to question the validity of the world’s appearances and the fixed feeling and beliefs that constitute the normal ‘habitude’ of the complicated contemporary man. In Rupasi Bangla, the poet intends to post a caution as it were that through every archetype employed, one enters a world which contradicts the laws of
equilibrium but which emanates from a thought endowed with extraordinary plasticity which seems freed from the logical categories of the sensory world. We seem also to notice the triumph of the principle that was implicit in Baudelaire’s lesson that the poet, instead of imitating nature, would assimilate it and embody himself in it. Thus, to borrow Eliot’s phrase, the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

The very first poem of the anthology sets its tune with the unfoldment of the archetypal vision evolving around stillness of field, river and star, dewdrops, soft ripples of fragrance and owls. The poetic situation, in which we are in, constitutes of ‘quiet lamp, wet scent, soft bustle on all quarters’ and ‘the decomposition of Assyria into dust, Babylon into ashes’. Through these above mentioned archetypal images, Jibanananda seeks to bring about a rendezvous of the temporal and the timeless on the one hand and the familiar reality of the everyday world and the mysterious domain of the supramodern existence on the other. Jung tells us that the approach of an archetype creates synchronicities and that the psychic vortex it creates is like an axle, an axis of symmetry between outward reality and inward experience. Jibanananda’s archetypes in Rupasi Bangla can thus be defined as the medium of synchronicity and of coincidence as against the casualty of everyday reality. It may be assumed from his poems that landscapes are coincidental with the poet’s feelings, subject matter and metric patterns. In fact, infinite multiplicity of symmetrical patterns are unified to reveal some nature-archetypes and their flavour. We also find that total symmetry coincides with dream or quasi-trance and poetry is born as the oracular response of the evoked archetypes. Even from a cursory
glance at the poems, we are fascinated by the recurrence of clearly explicit archetypes whose origination in the familiar world does not suffer even the slightest semblance of obstacle in the crystallizing process of a new poetic mystique. Thus we come across the following expressions: 'I shall visualise the shedding of jackfruit leaves in the morning breeze, the brown wings of sparrows freezing in the evening/beneath white feathers its yellow leg dances in grass and darkness'; 'white bangles weep like conchshell in grey wind'; 'it washes its foot in water only once in silence-then to a remote unknown land/it travels in mists'; 'having risen in darkness.../I visualise under the big leaf resembling an umbrella, there is seated/a Doel bird of the dawn'; 'I know not when from madhukar boat, nearby the city of champa, Chand/visualised the beautiful countenance of Bengal in such blue shades of Hijal and Tamala Tree/when Behula once floated on a boat in the waters of Gangudha river/(she too saw) the faded moonlight of twelfth night of dark moon on the riverbed'; 'The rivers, fields, bhnata flowers of Bengal, wept like anklet on her dancing feet'; 'As long as I live, the sky has gone somewhere (for an unknown destination) being a (new intense) sky/it has become blue like Aparajita flower_being more blue'; 'I shall float on along with the Dhansnidhi river, to the cremation ground of Bengal where even today Ramprasad's goddess visits with dishevelled hair'; 'once where the sounds from the wristlets of Shankhamala, Chandramala and Manikmala/used to reverberate'; 'fruits as red as wool/would fall on solitary grass-opaque moon will remain awake-water of that river/ would nervously strike at the/grey doors of the Bishalakshi temple like a Bengali maiden'; 'a wet owl, having widened its quiet soothing eyes, in the Kadamba forest/would tell you
the tale of the goddess of wealth -the river will sing to you
the ritual song of 'immersal in solitude'.

From a careful analysis of the above-mentioned extracts
of poems, we notice that Jibanananda has become part and
parcel of outward nature to such an extent that he seems to
feel, through the natural phenomena, what goes on deep
within his psyche, behind the trains of images and feelings
and thoughts. Since he is bound to fix his gaze beyond the
reach of objective reality and to follow the strings that move
their limbs up to the archetypes that control them and since
the archetypes are realised and understood at the deepest
psychic level, it follows that the poet is ultimately evoking
the essence of an infinite beyondness. Perhaps, like Paul
Eluard, Jibanananda is keen to declare: 'The domain is here/
it does not belong to the domain of evasion'. Like a true poet,
he thinks always of something else in the poems of the
Rupasi Bangla. Jibanananda, being a poet, a supremely
hallucinated man, evokes his deepest psychic levels and it
follows that he needs a 'private' mythology of his own.
Indeed, a communally accepted mythic paradigm has been
of immense help to him. As the poems of Rupasi Bangla
signify, it is grand feat of Jibanananda's imagination for he
has found appropriate mythic embodiments for his
archetypes. However, his mythic archetypes are unique
because these are integrally connected with the
accompanying nature archetypes; 'when seven stars are
blossoming in the sky, on this grass/I remain seated... here
has arrived quiet and faithful/blue evening of Bengal, the
keshabati maiden, as it were, has arrived in the sky/hair
floats on my eyes and my face'; 'today although in the
commotion of rains and shade of the clouds/I remember
Chand, the merchant and his Madhukara boat/once they
were afflicted in a certain stormy sky over kalidaha/-These are sad, faded and exhausted inarticulatable/truth-your dream is true, Manasa herself has assured’.

Thus the perusal of the archetypes used in Rupasi Bangla leaves us with the problem of measuring countless archetypes in which the elements of fairy tale and folk-myths mingled with generalised notions represented by hair, dusk, owl, mists etc. Above all, we are confronted with those archetypes connoting death, decadence and rebirth besides a unique arrangement of colour-archetypes. These are, truly the Jungian metaphors, psychic magnetic fields and therefore their explicit material bodies are mere conductors of their secret energy emanating from the domain of surreal, that is, beyond the reach of so-called modernity, which is the force of their inherent symbolism. Once a set archetype has been thought out, its persistence is indeed little short of bewildering.

The recurrence of archetypal darkness throughout his poetic career is indeed indicative of multiplicity of probable symmetrical relationships. What counts is the act of verbal play testified to faith in the power of the words to dispose of the obstacles that stand in our path. Likewise, the obstacles, that Jibanananda’s archetypes seem to circumvent are not those of established poetic convention of the modernists alone; rather, these indicate the limits imposed by habitual thought processes upon our sense of what is real.
3
BENGALI POETRY
AT THE CROSSROADS

With the proliferation of poetic texts, the task of readers has become immensely difficult. He/She has to decide first on the frontiers of critical interpretation. Whether a reader should read for momentary pleasure only or he/she is expected to elucidate the text, discover its true discourse, interpret its metalanguage and ‘perform’ such other readerly acts—that is the basic question today. Bengali poetry has indeed traversed a long way from the epoch of Jibanananda Das, the greatest poet of the post-Rabindranath era. However, it was none other than Jibanananda who first chiselled out a new code of poetic communication, a fresh nuance as well as new symbolic framework and linguistic sequence. Thereafter the readers have become aware that the poetic language has an ontological privilege of its own. In the post-Jibanananda epoch the poets sought to codify discourses of their own with the help of a textually oriented language that ‘does not seek to express, represent, reconstitute
or describe experience or reality but constructs it’. The best examples of such constructed reality may be found in the poetic microcosm of Shakti Chattopadhyay whose texts contain varying, sometimes mutually contradictory, contours of meaning. During his heyday, Shakti could defy all established logic of signification and his art alternated between violence and eroticism, melancholy and exuberance. The readers were initially shocked as they had to negotiate with the bold transgression of verbal logic and structure. They were required to accept poetic text as a tissue and also ‘as a scion of different voices and multiple codes which are at once interwoven and unfinished’.

The seventies proved to be the watershed for Bengali poetry. The upheavals in socio-political arena brought in its yoke serious enigmatic questions regarding the authenticity of value-structure. Naturally the younger generation of poets could not but respond to the dialectics of time. Even the poets of earlier epochs had to readjust themselves to the exacting demands of the multifaceted life. In fact, the poets like Arun Mitra, Subhash Mukhopadhyay, Birendra Chattopadhyay, Siddheshwar Sen etc. exercised a choice thereby in order to continue as ‘living’ writers. They were armed with an awareness of time and as long as this flame was not extinguished, their texts could faithfully record their individual struggle from darkness towards some measure of light. However, the scions of the iconoclastic fifties refused to climb down from their dark citadels and remained captives between Scylla and Charybdis of organised delirium and self-annihilating indifference. Being disillusioned about a crisis-ridden society, those poets were totally alienated and as priests of nihilism, they zealously wielded their pens to negate everything around. They did not even hesitate to disown
ideological foundation of life and instead went on to produce
countervalues and then mythicised them. Besides they
calculatingly promoted consumerism under the pretext of
non-conformism in a shrewd and sophisticated manner. The
poets like Sunil Gangopadhyay, Shakti Chattopadhyay, Utpal
Kumar Basu, Tarapada Roy, Sharat Mukhopadhyay, Binoy
Majumdar and Shamsur Rahaman were actually registering
their protest, frustration and anger as well as an alternative
point of view against a socio-political system which was
increasingly laying bare its fangs and claws of egoism,
soullessness and greed for exploitation. But their tendentious
individualism, permissiveness, barren elitism and
disfigurement of ideologies served the interests of the
consumerists who cunningly commodified the protest and
anger of those poets. And, in no time, their texts were denuded
of content. As a result, within a decade or so, those poets were
made prisoners of their own idiosyncrasies. Their alternative
points of view became pointless and inconsequential.

The cult of little magazine began with the Krittibas, the
Alinda, the Shatabhisha etc. But the progressive loss of centre
and the cumulative effect of the saleable image of the
predecessors set the wheel of degeneration on the roll. Here
we may remind ourselves of a pertinent remark of Dylan
Thomas: ‘No one can deny that the most attractive figures in
literature are always those around whom a world of lies
and legends has been woven, those half mythical artists
whose real characters become cloaked forever under the
bizarre’. As all the mass media were tuned to the
requirements of an exploitative society, they relentlessly
promoted the total decenteredness as the hallmark of
modernity. The younger poets were drawn irresistibly to the
world of lies; they could imitate the idiosyncrasies of the
predecessors but failed to imbibe their uniqueness.

Nevertheless that was the time when the Bengali-speaking world of the Indian sub-continent became intoxicated with the elixir of poetry. The cult of little magazine ascended further and further to dizzy heights in remote parts of West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Tripura and erstwhile East Pakistan. This tendency continued with occasional ups and downs for almost two decades and a half. And then the mount of Sisyphus became evident or perhaps, the curse of Tantalus. The readers went through many an experiences during those days which included the self-hypnotizing and auto-destructive hungry generation, the formalistic Sastrabirodhi group i.e. rebels against primacy of aesthetic norms, the hourly and daily poetic bulletins that churned out poems of various description with amazing dexterity. But in the midst of din and bustle of literary extravaganza, there have been poets like Arun Mitra, Ramendra Kumar Acharya Chaudhury, Birendra, Chattopadhyay, Manindra Gupta, Aloe Ranjan Dasgupta, Shankha Ghosh, Samarendra Sengupta, Manibhusan Bhattacharya, Shamsur Rahaman, Al Mahmood, Mohammad Rafique etc. for whom the poetic art has always been a means to wrest life from various forms of darkly night. Hence the mechanical categorisation of these poets on the basis of decade-oriented timeframe is inescapably inadequate. All of them went through ordeals of burning time and their responses have been different; but nevertheless they sough to interpret the strifes and strains of a decadent society on the one hand and the dreams and groans of a world in a fix on the other. Therefore, even now, they are relevant as poets and their art is revealative, demonstrative and representative at the same time.
Unfortunately this is not applicable to the formalists of whom Paresh Mandal, Pushkar Dasgupta, Mrinal Basu Chaudhury, Ashoke chattopadhyay and Buddadev Dasgupta are the forerunners. Is seems that the oftquoted slogan raised by Amitabha Dasgupta ('Let poetry be read like newspaper. Let water and smoke evaporate totally from poetry' etc.) might have been a stratagem to hide from the readers the slimy mud of words and the sleet and hail of verbal imprecisions. In fact, the poets like Bhaskar Chakrabarty, Shamser Anwar, Debarati Mitra, Rabin Sur, Shambhu Rakshit, Kabirul Islam, Tushar Roy wandered 'between two worlds—one dead and the other powerless to be born'. Though the contemporary world witnessed unprecedented erosion of values in all the spheres of life, the poetic response to the disparity between the ugliness of the world that is and the beauty of the world that might be was never adequate. However, there are different facets of that poetic epoch; otherwise Pabitra Mukhopadhyay, Ratneswar Hazra, Shyamsul Hoque, Subrata Chakraborty and Bijaya Mukhopadhaya would not have been fellow-travellers with Manibhushan Bhattacharya on the one hand and Kalikrishna Guha, Debadas Acharya on the other. These poets grew with time and its accompanying hollowness, arrogance, tension, horror, anger, boredom and self-immolation. They sought to endow poetry with architechttonic and spatial intensity but, in most cases, their unbalanced subjectivism and lack of definite points of reference led unavoidably to the disintegration of poetic art itself. Sometimes the poets were engaged in interminable monologue and sometimes their self-pity bordered on suicidal frenzy while, on some occasions, the alienated poets succumbed to clownish disposition. Yet there were solaces
of oasis too; otherwise Kalikrishna Guha would not have been relevant after two decades with his metaphysics of feeling and Debadas Acharya with his aesthetics of neohumanism and serene rusticity.

That was the time when Manjush Dasgupta, Gita Chattopadhyay, Karunasindhu Dey, Shaktipada Brahmachari, Bijit Kumar Bhattacharya, Jia Hayder, Rafique Azad, Syed Shamsul Hoque and others wielded their pens to extend the horizon of Bengali poetry. With the proliferation of little magazines in various Bengali-speaking towns and semitowns in this sub-continent, the trend of decentralisation became sharper and pronounced day by day.

Then came the traumatic seventies. A decisive break became clearly discernible as the stupefied Bengali society dazedly witnessed a unique phenomenon in the wake of the Naxalite upsurge. The linearity in the communist movement was disturbed. On the other hand the birthpangs of Bangladesh unleashed a series of tremors in various spheres of life whose ripples are even now evident. But there was a gaping ideological vacuum and the darker shades of crisis loomed large over a vast territory of life. While disillusion reached its acme, the younger poets refused to accept the dictum of the subscribers to status quo. As the worlds fell apart, the sacred seemed to be relentlessly profaned and the concept of centre became irrelevant. The budding poets prepared themselves for an audacious soul-searching. Plurality was the order of the day. Thus urban sophistication and rustic simplicity grew simultaneously; poetic texts became increasingly codified and polyphonic. The next two decades experienced unputdownable diversities in poetic texts which were authored by Amitabha Gupta, Anjan Sen, Anirban Lahidhi, Anuradha Mahapatra,
Bibek Chattopadhyay. Bishwarup De Sarkar, Ekram Ali, Farid Kabir, Goutam Basu, Jahar Sen Mazumdar, Jaydev Basu, Khondakar Ashraf Hossain, Joy Goswami, Mallika Sengupta, Mridul Dasgupta, Nirmal Haldar, Nishith Bhadh, Parthapratim Kanjilal, Rahul Purkayastha, Rama Ghosh, Ranajit Das, Rupa Dasgupta, Shankarjyoti Deb, Subodh Sarkar, Tapan Roy and others. These are the poets who are ascending and descending or gliding and diving at will only to explore the possibilities of language as qua-language as well as the points of intersection between their texts and metatexts. Most of them are exhibiting their intuitive skill in transforming the poetic texts into a complex network with multiple exits and entrances.

But this is also a period of confusion, waywardness and reorganisation. As the poets now try to find the ontological meaning of their position in the burning cauldron of time, they have also to apply correct discretion. Therefore, he/she has no other alternative but to question the modernist assumptions as well as reinterpret and restructure the meaning of tradition. Both the form and content are to be readjusted and also the exploitative guiles of an immobile society are to be understood properly. As we closely look at the expressions of poetic weltanschauung, multiplicity strikes us most. There is a murmur of protest as well since established creeds do not satisfy the poets any longer. Unlike the predecessors, they do not remain passive and disinterested onlookers; on the contrary, they try also to diagnose the modernist malady. However, some of them have opted for pragmatism and identified themselves with the established order of disorderliness and decadence while some have remained agnostic and chosen for an in-between position, i.e. neo-modernism. Some are radicals and they
hope to achieve a theoretical alternative in the form of sans-Modernism. This has generated a lot of controversy since its position vis-a-vis tradition and contemporaneity has dissatisfied many. Nevertheless, the subjective illusion has been finally challenged and a new dialogic interrelationship between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ is on the cards. Truly, Bengali poetry is at the crossroads when the life-situation is being scripted anew.

Another phenomenon captivates our attention. A host of female poets have burst into the horizon of hitherto male-dominated Bengali poetry. A unique female world is being explored and female texts are being churned out. The female poets like Rama Ghosh, Sutapa Sengupta, Anuradha Mahapatra, Samyukta Bandyopadhyay, Anjali Das, Sanchayita Kundu, Chaitali Chattopadhyay, Rupa Dasgupta, Mallika Sengupta, Ahana Biswas are going great guns indeed. They are harbingers of new ethos, new language and new awareness in Bengali poetry.

Bengali poetry at this moment is negotiating with its ambivalences and searching for new paradigms from the pulsating life around. It bespeaks of an unquenchable and tantalizing thirst-always frustrated yet forever renewed. In the ultimate analysis, time remains the supreme protagonist whose creative assimilation or monodimensional negation always determines the ebbs and tides in Bengali poetry.
Ever since the poetic magic of Jibanananda Das (1899-1954) has cast its spell on the connoisseurs of Bengali poetry, the dynamics of tradition and modernity, renewal and innovation came to the fore. Otherwise one cannot wholly explain the unique position of Jibanananda in the post-Rabindranath epoch of Bengali poetry. When the entire nation was going through the traumatic experiences of thirties and forties, he had no choice but to construct his own reality. He felt that vitality of his art depended on the maintenance of a delicate balance between the exacting demands of the contemporary situation and the subtle intricacies of authentic tradition. One cannot be called a creative poet with 'modern' sensibilities unless he protests against barrenness of pretentious life around. He is not such a person who unconditionally subscribes to the inherent timidity of status quo. In fact, a modern creative personality tries to resolve the crisis emanating from conformism by a
leap forward into a new and original state of sensibility.

That is why we may equally apply Rimbaud’s famous phrase for Baudelaire to Jibanananda as well: ‘that first of seers, king of poets’. His famous quartet of anthologies i.e. Dhusar Pandulipi, Banalata Sen, Mahaprithivi and Satti Tarar Timir sheds illuminating light on the uniqueness of creative faculty in which we are expected to negotiate with a curious and progressive heightening of artistic temper. On the one hand, his poetic art derives intellectual and emotional accretions from the social element in which it is embedded and on the other it unveils a worldview vibrating with an integral dream. It also leads us to a trap-door through which errands for the absolute begin. Jibanananda has thereby lodged a revolt against the existing conventions in order to fashion new creative pattern in accordance with a multilinear contemporary consciousness. He has never regarded the poetic genres as mere abstractions; he believes that the genres are always recreated in a particularized time and place. His views are lucidly expounded in the collection of critical articles entitled ‘Kabitar Katha’.

There were Buddhadev Basu, Bishnu De, Sudhindranath Dutta and Amiya Chakrabarty as well, who might be equally hailed for their splendid contribution to the unfoldment of modernist attitude in its varying hues and moods. Their poetic endeavours make us aware of the complexities arising from or within generic transmission; what is more, the cross-currents of the variegated cultural milieu are mirrored in the dialectics among and within both the generic diversities and their exponents. Bandir Bandana, Je Andhar Alor Adhik (Buddhadev Basu); Chorabali, Smriti Satta Bhavisyal, Nam Rekhechi Komal Gandhar (Bishnu De), Orchestra, Krandasi, Uttarpalguni, Sambarta, (Sudhindranath Dutta);
Khasadha, Paraspar, Anihshesh (Amiya Chakraborty) etc. are milestones of Bengali poetry in more senses than one. For the later generations of poets, such anthologies proved to be infinite reservoirs of possibilities. Inspite of their mutual differences in the conception of the themes as schemata of time and execution of various creative techniques, they basically agree in repudiating the worn-out value-system and feel the inevitability of establishing a new ‘weltanschauung’. This is due to what Octavio Paz might also have stated: ‘modern time is critical time’. The motto of these Bengali poets of the thirties is: ‘no more stale habit’.

In the post-Rabindranath epoch, modernism dawned along with the awareness of the futility of the sordid mechanism of much repeated logic and mental prison, when the very foundation of the society was cracking in negotiating the quickly successive onslaughts of shattering economic depression, blackmarketing and artificial scarcity leading to a devastating famine that turned the metropolitan Calcutta into a huge graveyard. The old pattern of family life collapsed resulting into a total erosion of age-old values; the serenity of rural Bengal was lost for ever while metropolitan life was luring many into the quicksand of an unattainable utopia and unrecoverable frustration, suspicion and mutual annihilation. There were also the ripples and waves of a series of misguided ill-conceived pseudo nationalist upsurge ultimately culminating into transfer of power to the alliance of big bourgeoisie and feudal remnants of so-called Aryavarta (i.e Hindi-speaking-heartland). India was thus deemed to be free from the colonial yoke while a truncated Bengal went through the humiliating ordeals of heinous communal feuds, senseless massacres and never-ending exodus resulting into an entirely new phenomenon of ‘refugee problem’. This
was mainly the unique contribution of the process of communalised politiking of the 'nationalist' leaders. Perhaps this could only have been successfully resisted by progressive mass-movement; but, in the late thirties and early forties, that movement was rather suffering from a compartmentalised vision and therefore lack of direction. The progressive forces fought tooth and nail against the menace of fascism but failed to give due weightage to the essentiality of a concerted battle against imperialism. This historical error was fully exploited by the British and the sad fact of communalism went from strength to strength.

When the familiar world was degenerating into chaos, these Bengali poets of the thirties and the early forties recorded their sharp reaction either through anguish, alienation, ennui and despair at the progressive loss of centre or through attempting a new paradigm of value, conviction and alternative propositions. The poets of the forties were not easily reconciled to the waste and void around; they sought to create a new world by ushering in a total change of outlook and revolution in form as well. Samar Sen and Subhash Mukhopadhyay are pioneers in these respects. The former composed unique poems in prose in an effective manner and as a true representative of middle-class elite, he was engrossed in doubt and vacillation. He talked of an 'enlightened scepticism' in an article entitled 'In defence of the Decadents' when it was fashionable to attribute various sneering labels to the non-conformist young poets. That was a time when modernism was distinctively protestant. What Sen observed in that above mentioned article is still relevant for us: 'To be really progressive in our time and in our country, where only a fraction is literate, is to preserve the integrity of what is good in our past tradition
to be true to oneself and at the same time to realise that poetry is a medium through which the individual tries to adjust his relations to society, to be conscious of the complex forces which are changing our world.’

Subhash Mukhopadhyay literally took the readers by storm with his Padatik who, unlike his predecessors, did not venture to kill boredom in romantic escapism. From the very beginning, his poetry was remarkable for its vitality, youthful vigour, robust imagination and confident spontaneity. It is significant that Sen snapped his ties with poetry rather abruptly while Mukhopadhyay unfolded his creative talent through phul Phutuk, Yata Durei yai, Kal Madhumas, Chhele Gechhe Bane etc. But, in the long run, he has been slowly but decisively swallowed by the establishment. He made a choice no doubt but could not live upto his own promises. This reminds us of Samar Sen’s much-quoted words: ‘We must make a choice if we are to continue as living writers. This involves an entire reconstruction of our ways of living’. Such reconstruction is an all-absorbing process that presupposes a unique reorientation of personality, as otherwise poetry can no longer remain life-affirming. If a poet cannot feel the need to be a witness of his time and cannot shape himself by happenings around, he can hardly claim himself to be modern. Besides, he knows that gnawing strife and tension in various spheres of life are threatening to extinguish the flame within and it is obligatory for him to launch a relentless battle against all imperfections and limitations. In the midst of the whirlwinds of forties, no poet worth the name could ignore the fact that the role of destiny has now been taken over by political events. As such, poetic composition is an opportunity to change the over-romanticised point of view
to be true to modern sensibilities.

Poets like Arun Mitra and Birendra Chattopadhyay proved this time and again and showed thereby that their art helped them to put off their shell. They were always forced, to echo the words of Sartre, 'with the task of wrestling life from the various forms of night'. However, for others, a promising beginning did not exactly culminate into sharpening of creative facilities, rather it seems that the poets like Arun Bhattacharya, Narendranath Chakraborty, Arun Kumar Sarkar, Naresh Guha, Ashoke Bijay Raha, Jagannath Chakraborty were shaken by the horrors of contemporary reality and in their own individual way, sought to escape from it. We may say that gradually their poetic endeavours became wholly oriented towards a neo-romantic desire to liberate themselves from the real by means of the poetic process, through self-designed solitude and by retiring into the sanctuary of personal feeling. Undoubtedly there were Sukanta Bhattacharya, Mangalacharan Chattopadhyay, Kiranshankar Sengupta, Dinesh Das, Kamakshiprasad Chattopadhyay, Ram Basu and Siddheshwar Sen who were not reconciled to romantic escapism since at the heart of their creativity, there was an ever-renewing conception of social morality. When the moral edifice had begun to crumble, they did not try to hasten the final collapse. On the contrary, their poetry was inextricably involved in the strides of the fast-moving society; hence, their compositions were revealative, demonstrative and representative at the same time. Like Dylan Thomas, they might also have said: 'My poetry is the record of my individual struggle from darkness towards some measure of light'. This struggle seems to have special significance for Ramendra Kumar Acharya Chaudhury whose poetry emanates from an awareness of
moral malaise but nevertheless seeks to revive an antique soul in the chequered shades of modernist framework.

II

As we enter the arena of the stormy and iconoclastic fifties, we are caught between the contradictions of organised delirium and self-annihilating indifference. This is the period when the Indian ruling class was consolidating its firm grip on the society at large. Yet the capitalistic path that they adopted could not but manifest the gradual intertwining and intensification of the inherent contradictions. At any rate, the dream of the pre-independence days were shattered as hopes and aspirations were continuously belied. Crisis was evident everywhere as the system unhesitatingly laid bare its egoism, soullessness and thirst for exploitation. As tested human values were made irrelevant, elitism penetrated into creativity along with a cult of degenerated morality and culture.

The new generation of poets erroneously equated modernism with tendentious individualism, shallowness, permissiveness, unscrupulousness and disfigurement of ideologies. The rulers and their allies in literary establishments were waiting for this golden opportunity; in fact, they were calculatingly promoting consumerism among the seemingly non-conformist litterateurs in a shrewd and sophisticated manner. Its impact has been devastating on the younger generations of poets because the emergence and development of literary consumerism, completely denuded of conscience, has been relentlessly advertised as norm of modern life. All the mass media have been made subservient to such norms because of which they set the tunes of the intellectual life of the exploitative society. The poets and
writers of the fifties were cleverly engaged in whipping up consumer attitude in reading public and establishing thereby inverted and dehumanised system of values. In fact, the poetic works of these demiurges of consumer society contributed substantially in consolidating a negative hierarchy of values and amputating the conscience, moral and overall human attitudes of the people.

The fifties also ushered in a new era of myth-making since the personal lives were mystified and legends were woven around them in an unprecedented way; the publication of a journal named Krittibas had really set the ball rolling. Just as a wave carries the whole of the sea, this journal had also, in many respects, carried within it a whole trend. This observation is best applicable to Sunil Gangopadhyay, Shakti Chattopadhyay, Binoy Mazumdar, Utpal Kumar Basu and to a lesser extent, to Sharat Kumar Mukhopadhyay, Shankar Chattopadhyay, Tarapada Roy, Dipak Mazumdar and a host of others particularly those belonging to the loudly rebellious group of 'Hungry generation'. But, besides them, there are very powerful poets like Shankha Ghosh, Aloke Ranjan Dasgupta, Pranabendu Dasgupta, Samarendra Sengupta, Shamsur Rahaman, Al Mahmood etc. who did not care for the image of 'nomad and conqueror'. Nevertheless, they could successfully add variety and depth to the much-publicised notations of inexorable 'poetic violence'.

In spite of historically conditioned limitations, the leading poets of the fifties could prove a point or two regarding the creative role or otherwise of the modernist weltanschauung. If, in the name of modernism, a poet seeks to free his craft from human world and reality in different ways and various degrees, then poetry stoops to the level of avantgarde
decadent literature. Eventually such tendency lead to the overmanifestation of the supremacy of form on the one hand and ever-increasing process of abstraction as well as conception of the social and individual being of man to be alien to poetic art on the other. The essence of modernism was interpreted and creatively used by the poets of thirties as well as forties when the protracted battle against colonialism was fought and capitalism was seeking to establish itself by leaps and bounds. But the scenario having changed qualitatively, that essence was lost sight of; instead the fevered imagination of the fifties sustained itself on the apocalyptic feelings of expectations of Doomsday. That is why Shakti Chattopadhyay expressed the extinction of human content and unconsolable anguish of the strangled victim in his various poems of which the poem entitled 'Se Badho Sukher samay Nay'(in Sonar Machi Khun Karechi) may be regarded as the most representative. The poet has as it were assumed the role of a shaman, who, being a supremely hallucinated man, talks only in trance. The anthology entitled He prem He Naihshabdya marks the beginning of an inward voyage along with a paradigm of rejection of external world. The impact of surrealistic verbal automatism is easily discernible in his poetic diction. Shakti seems to try to wrest the language away from an increasingly narrow utilitarian usage because this appears to be only way to emancipate language from dreary habits and restore all power due to it. It is quite plausible that the tendency of according comparatively more emphasis on poetic themes and somewhat less attention to formal excellence in the forties might have generated a sharp reaction in the next generation of poets. With the expansion of capitalist framework, more industrialisation and concentration in
urban life, external reality was becoming inordinately menacing. Hence, an alienated poet was turning inward as a part of his defence mechanism; So naturally what mattered to him was only the inner self which is supposed to be a limitless world for private exploration. Thus we are confronted with an incredibly subjective world marked with alternation and exuberant hallucination in the anthologies like Hemanter Aranye Ami Postman, Padher Knatha Matir Badhi, Prabhu Nashta Haye Jai, Ishwar Thaken Jale, Jvalanta Rumal, etc. culminating into the serene resignation of the death-orientation in Yetie pari Keno Jabo, Caxbajare Sandhya, Amake Jagao'.

From a careful analysis of Shakti's poetic achievement, both the strength and weakness of the later phase of modern poetry become evident. At the initial stage, the poets were expressing some of their true reaction to the concomitant effects of a hostile situation in the society; they were reacting to changed attitudes, values, personal relations, social institution etc. But gradually the various forms of establishment lured them into wellwrought traps and then these poets became the priests of status quo. As a result, their poetic art became repetitive ad infinitum and no longer remained the demonstration of many-leveled vision and language. Besides Shakti, this process is equally evident in Sunil Gangopadhyay whose Eka Ebang Kayekjan, Bandi Jege Acho, Ami Kirakam Bhave Bneche Achi, Amar svapna and Jagaran Hemabarna literally captivated the readers with an excellent exposition of tender romantic feeling, sincere emotion, charming freshness, youthful exuberance and an amazing command over language and rhyme. But he is perhaps the most obvious lamentable example of surrender and resultant waste. That is why the anthologies like Svarga
Nagarir Chabi, Sada Prishtha Tomar Sange and Batase Kiser Dak Shono only confirm the degeneration of modern sensibilities. It seems that the mainstream of modern Bengali poetry is fast loosing direction and significance. Now one can recollect an important comment of Amiya Chakraborty where he said: 'Modern poetry is concerned with the exploration of casual links between nature and human will; a knowledge of unity (given by the revelation of science and by the extension of man's awareness in varied spheres of experience) has brought new responsibility to the artist. The catalysm of civilization during periods of war and the continuing tragedies of an age have made the poets conscious of their function in all social system with which their thoughts and actions are inevitably allied'. Precisely in these points raised by Chakraborty, most of the leading poets of the fifties fail to respond and thus their modernist essence and attitude to life become subjected to a close scrutiny. Because no longer a contemporary poet is expected to be just a maker of rhymes; rather, he is to be an uncompromising explorer being a wielder of vast and unassailable power who can create a new language with innovative syntax of larger meanings.

Though Shankar Chattopadhyay claimed in the preface of an anthology named Ei Dashuker Kavita that the coterie of Krittibasa had a unique philosophy of their own, nothing comes out except smart verbosity. Shankar used the following disjointed and mutually exclusive epithets to describe the modernist essence of the poets: 'Intense, indifferent, mad, genius, angry, noble, hungry, quiet, terrible, meditating, clever, honest, possessed, religious and discontented'. According to him, such poets have openly dismissed all the prevalent models and ideologies of poetry as totally irrelevant. They have taken the pledge to live for
poetry alone and also breathe only in poetic firmament etc. Such organised delirium was responsible for opening up the floodgate of mannerism and inspired many a poetasters to masquerade as innovative composers.

The silver lining in the eccentric fifties was the presence of talented poets like Alok Ranjan Dasgupta (Nishiddha Kojagari, Jharche Katha Atasknache, Laghu Sangit borer Haoar Mukhe, Gilotine Alpana, Jababdihir Tila), Binoy Mazumdar (phire Eso Chaka, Aghraner Anubhutimala, Valmikir Kabita), Al Mahmood (Sonali Kabin), Shamsur Rahaman (Nija Basbhume, Bandi Shibir Theke, Duhsamaye Mukhomukhi, Adiganta Nagna Padadhvani, Shunyatay Tumi Shoksabha, Je Andha Sundari Knade, Abiram Jalabhrami, Tebile Apelgulo Hese Othe, Jharna Amar Angule) And Shankha Ghosh (Dinguli Ratguli, Adim lata Gulmamay, Babarer Prarthana, Mukh Dheke Jay Vijnapane, Murkha Badho Samajik Nay, Praharjodha Trital, Dhum Legechhe Hritkamale). Of them, Alok Ranjan added new dimension to the manifestation of modernity by putting emphasis on sophisticated scholasticity, urban intellectualism, penetrative internationalism, sculpturesque diction and self-critical attitude. Binay, on the other hand, attempts to reach the core of human relationship and existence through a specially constructed self-induced solitude. But thereby he does not mean to renunciate the world; rather, the poet tries to place himself in an observatory from where he can penetrate into different phenomena around. His diction sheds light on a less illuminated aspect of modernism and thus becomes at once the resume of present knowledge and the prediction of future possibilities. Al Mahmood, one of the most powerful poets in Bangladesh, is a typical example of colossal wastage who
has perhaps paid the penalty of indiscretion with regards to non-interrogative adherence to religious dogmatism. He has sought to discover himself as centre and tried to determine a luminous point for his poetic art in an abstractionalised sequence which fails to take into consideration the dimensions of time and societal frame. But Shamsur is a unique priest of time who knows that contemporary can be truly modern only if it is oriented towards materialisation of a moral symbol lying very deep in the labyrinths of collective existence. He is always altered by what is happening around and, what is more, he participates in the changing drama of the Bengali society through his poetic art. Hence, he can ultimately rescue, unlike many other poets of the fifties, the coveted ‘moral symbol’ which is always lying in violent opposition with the worn-out attitude of the world. Shamsur has proved time and again that a perfect poet of modern times can never reconcile himself to corrupting interior doubt. He has no other alternative but to creatively translate the anguish and upheavals of the society into his poems. This is the best way he can register his protest and confirm his commitment to the social process. Louis Aragon talked of this in the following way: ‘There have always been elements in the society exterior to the artist which tried to break down his creative will. But never before has there been such an interior suspicion of the worth of art. This situation must be taken seriously and not simply relegated to the aesthetic realm where it becomes the province only of artists and their critics’.

That is where Shankha Ghosh fits in appreciably well. He has always been aware of the social content to be pursued and established through poetic act. He has been, through his poems, always at the centre of time and he seeks to
explore the truth and the solitude of space by reaching the core of meta-language. We would understand him better if we carefully go through his brilliant articles in the books like Nihshabder Tarjani, Shabda Ar Satya, Kavitar Muhurta etc. while reading his representative poems, one may be tempted to compare notes with a reader of Aragon's poems. Because the following expression of Aragon is comparable to the soft and quiet poetic feelings often found in Shankha:

'Never shall I lose this wonder
At language.
Never shall I wake up from words'.

In fact, Shankha has a singularly different opinion about the essence of modernism. Unlike most others, he neither subscribes to the angry and frustrated outbursts of hungry generation, nor endorses a Ginsbergian assault on poetry. He does not take the extreme position that 'the best minds of my generation are destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked'. On the contrary, for him, modernist attitude should be a region of constructive values which is endowed with an innate beyondness and can be all affirmation. Thus Shankha stands apart from other poets of his time both in poetic conception and execution. He appears to be the supreme mediator between various phases of time and experience which, in the ultimate analysis, seem to be the fundamental materials for the icon of modernism.

There are also the following poet: Tarapada Roy (Nil Digante Ekhan Magic, Pata 0 Pakhider Alochana, Daridryarekha), Sharat Kumar Mukhopadhyay (Na Nishad), Samarendra Sengupta, Alok Sarkar, Pranabendu Dasgupta, Purnendu Patri and Utpal Kumar Basu (Puri Series) etc. Mostly their poetic microcosm was a tiny self-propelled world which was chiselled out of a defensive
posture to an increasingly alienated external reality. Inspite of commendable merit of these poets, their compositions remain basically elitist and therefore, non-communicative to majority of readers. While consciously trying to shape their poetic art for the consumption of a specially gifted minority, they have exchanged clarity and warmth of feeling and faith with shallowness and mannerism of monotonous accuracy. As a result, their preference for avant-gardism only helped the elites to recognize themselves as strangers in the so-called drab mass of society and also instigated the selective few to hold their own against the multitude. Most of the poets of the fifties went on unhesitatingly to inflict abuses and innuendoes on the non-appreciating masses, thereby making the alienation complete and sacrosanct. Such tendency inevitably paved the way for intellectual minorityism that thrived on constant conflict, existential crisis, self-immolation, somnambulism, fascination for trivialities, dereliction of ethical norms. The number of the poets of lesser calibre multiplied inordinately who could only imbibe the mannerism of greater poets in the name of ‘collective movement’ but failed to assess their points of exclusiveness. That is why avant-gardism became a synonym for the banal and vulgar and the new phenomenon of esoterism restricted the lively links between poetry, society and time to such an extent that modern poetry was almost universally regarded as the apotheosis of loneliness and hence the poet’s exclusive monologue. As the means of communication with the reading public were banished thereby, the necessity of communication no longer remained valid.

In this period, modernism thus came to mean non communicativeness; clarity and accessibility of experience became so redundant for poetry that the progenitors of the
'Hungry generation' movement declared in their manifesto: 'We want a barbaric discovery of our total ego'. Such an attitude led to the following iconoclastic expression: 'Kick at art with intense rage': 'Crush, destroy that thirstless hill of words' etc. Sunil Gangopadhyay had the following significant declaration to make: 'All of us are spokesmen of decadence, we excel in annihilation. From God to Sudhindranath and the metre of Buddhadev Basu We have descended destroying all. We have shattered our parents like the dolls of Krishnanagar. We have dissolved love in excessive physical urge. We have destroyed the physical frame in suicidal galore. We have gleefully done away their images who have caused the country to distininte.'

So after all, there seems to be a method in the madness; likewise, Shakti Chattopadhyay has his own moments of philosophising when he says: 'One has to learn the process of destruction since a unique process of annihilation is more valuable than a constructive bias'. We may perhaps add after that:of the worn-out old.

But after all, the next poetic generation seems to be more aware of the negative features of such modernism and hence its non-communicativeness and elitist formation were universally accepted and given effect to ad infinitum. The direct impact of Sunil, Shakti, Sharat and Utpal is too much evident. The message is loud and clear: decadence has eventually set in: 'I am a nihilist, I listen to the inevitable signal of decay/I am treading along the path of quick degeneration since I am born/That is my destiny!'

This is because the poet of the sixties found themselves in an unenviable situation who were not even allowed to have the luxury of choice. They came to know their world only by passively responding to its masked appearances. It
was inevitable because by then class-antagonism had sharpened and all the vices of a capitalistic society had become explicit. In fact, the public symbols had lost moral authority in the society and the legacy of the predecessors had come full circle manifested in the spineless elitism. It is quite natural therefore for Bhaskar Chakraborty, Buddhadev Dasgupta and Debarati Mitra to publish the following significant anthologies respectively: Shitkal Kabe Asbe Suparna, Himyug and Anda Schoole Ghanta Baje. It seems that the poets are now busy in assuming different roles and as a result the volume of their projected selves have multiplied. There is an everincreasing sense of directionless, identity-mistaken, rootless, angry, wild, negative disposition which is philophising and self-defeating at the same time. One can refer to Tushar Roy, notorious for his self-annihilating bohemianism and, of course, for the Bandmaster. Perhaps these poets thought of breaking down the distinction of life and poetry, almost surely at the instance of the fifties, because they did not realise the futility and directionlessness of that much ado about nothing. The poets of sixties chose to write not even about what and where they actually are, rather they seem to have composed poems about their projected selves and favourite masks. Moreover, they also lodged a virulent attack on the symbol of social existence presumably trying to dissolve the conscious process of meaning. Because of the intensifying alienation in a society paralysed with profit-mongering, immorality, strife and tension—these poets interpreted human existence as a paradox and a thing imprisoned in itself and sternly shut up in its boundaries of flesh and time.

Faced with an insoluble irony of contemporary life, the sixties have been, in the famous words of Matthew Arnold,
'wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born'. In their own way they may have been wrestling to create order from chaos, while being torn between ideal possibilities and transience. They are neither here nor there since they have always been trying to centre reality in themselves. They have failed to realise that they have never set a quest for themselves and hence their auto-suggestive encounters with time have yielded very little for the readers. It seems that modern spirit in Bengali poetry has already ceased to grow. Because the essential feature of modernity in poetry is the creative orchestration of multifoliated meaning of life, always-renewing search for a faith, uncompromising protest against degeneration and quest for true freedom. The world of modern poetry cannot be spun out of a man like a spider's web; the world is constructed no doubt but it is born as well. Though the sixties witnessed unprecedented erosion of values in all the spheres of life, the poet did not quite try to interpret it creatively. On the contrary, they were obsessed with the self-induced hallucination of being in a prisonhouse and hence their poems turned out to be anguished groans or enchanting death-wishes. As Eliot would have said, most of their poems seem to have emerged 'out of the slimy mud of words, out of the sleet and hail of verbal imprecisions' and therefore, in the long run, the sharp contrast between the world of content and that of form remains unresolved. A modern poet, as has been aptly said, 'merely writes to vent his own spleen, his own bitterness, his own sense of disparity between the ugliness of the world that is and the beauty of the world that might be. He is trapped in mechanical civilisation'. But the question is: Can a poet be so immune to this disparity that it elicits no response from him? Can a poet be casual
and indifferent to a perfectly human situation that might have been and do not hesitate to justify his own numbness? And, last of all, the most important question is: Can he yet be sufficiently modern?

But, then the sixties have witnessed an unprecedented rise in the number of poets and editors of Little Magazines of various description, many of which came out with a bang though almost always ended in whimper. Magazines, exclusively for poetry, have been published even daily (e.g. Dainik Kavita edited by Bimal Roychoudhury and Shanti Lahidhi); the frenzied fascination for publication went to such an absurd extent that hourly bulletins were planned and executed. It is therefore quite natural that in an anthology published in late sixties by Amitabha Dasgupta, the readers came across the following slogans on the coverpage itself: ‘Let poetry be read like newspaper. Let water and smoke evaporate totally from poetry. Let poetry be free from puritanism and untouchability. Let poetry be of practical use like food, drink and attire’. It seems that it is a pious wish for making poetry essentially communicative. But, in reality, the poets could not shake themselves off from the swallowing quicksand of bourgeois decadence and the increasing elitist aestheticism. Now we find that their rudderless drunken boats of poesy have always been susceptible to reactionary attitudes. Thus there are expressions of basic confusion about the world and tendencies of contemporary time; there are but few protests against established forms of life and culture. Consequently, the poets of sixties have unfortunately wasted themselves in blind cycles and barrenness without even trying to discover an alternate mode of poetic art. This was bound to be as they did neither have any ideology to follow nor they have
any catalyst to fall upon.

In fact, the poets like Paresh Mandal, Pushkar Dasgupta, Rana Chattopadhyay, Kabirul Islam could not properly interpret the dynamics of social life and struggle. In spite of their conscious assimilation of the celebrated predecessors in both Bengali and European poetry, their typical centrist position and middle class orientation have unwittingly exposed deep contradiction in the development of a rootless world-view in an exploitative society. There are different facets of the sixties. Thus some poets have chosen to theories which often stoop to the level of laboured verbosity. Sometimes those poets tend to imbibe the sculptural stylistic traits of Sudhindranath Dutta. It seems that they have actually sought to lodge an artistic protest against the journalistic idiosyncrasies of the fifties. Some of them chose to withstand the demands of contemporary life and sought to fortify themselves in the elitist preference for neoclassicism. Then there is an explicit tendency of philosophisation which sometime ineluctably echo none other then Jibanananda. Thus there is Pabitra Mukhopadhyay aspiring for innate and pure consciousness; there is Ratneswar Hazra-somewhat indifferent and without passion though nevertheless concerned about the enigmatic dialectics of being and nothingness. There are some other poets languishing in metaphysics of feeling of whom Kalikrishna Guha is most noteworthy. Again some others are trying to assimilate pictorial elements from the arena of symbolism and impressionism. There are poets like Rabin Sur, Shambhu Rakshit, Debadas Acharya and Manibhusan Bhattacharya who have strived to escape the social solitude, timidity, cruelty and the isolated atmosphere of a hothouse in order to avail themselves of the real values and prospects
of the din and bustle of contemporary life. On another plane, there are Samsul Hoque and Bijaya Mukhopadhyay whose tendency towards theorising and experimentation cannot hide the hollowness inherent in the idealization of the bourgeois way of life.

The rootless sixties did not have the solace of memory; nor could they rely on any sort of emancipation because they saw unforgivable blemishes in the elders and experienced heinous intrigues in the sociopolical life. They could not afford to have an ivory tower to rely upon yet they had no option either. Ideology of all description have been rapidly and unassailably becoming irrelevant and hence violence and nihilism seemed to be the only outcome. There was no question for these middle class poets to be partisan in any way; nor can all have the poetic personality of Manibhushan Bhattacharya who grew with time and its accompanying horror, tension, arrogance, anger and self-immolation. However there is Buddhadev Dasgupta giving vent to his anguish, hatred and pity at the prevalent situations of life-blatant, violent and utterly dehumanised. He had an inimitable diction to his credit whose innate symbolism became more forceful because of its smart manoeuvrability, uniqueness, opacity and contemporaneity. But his enthusiasm for abstraction and absurdity has of late degenerated into the level of mannerism. His poetry thus offers us a good study of the recent crisis of modern poetry and its aftermath. An analysis of Buddhadev’s poetic art unmistakably shows that isolation from life often takes place under the aegis of exaltation of the poet’s subjectivity and opposition of his imposing ego, the inner abstract world of man, to the phenomena and processes of real life.

Such poetry is closely allied to the predominantly
autobiographical stream of poetry evident in the works of Tushar Roy, Belal Choudhury, Shamser Anwar, Jia Haider, Arunesh Ghosh, Debarati Mitra and of course, Bhaskar Chakraborty as well. It seems that due to an intense influence of existential thought, the poets conceived their personality as independent absolute substance whose relations with the world is perfunctory. When more crisis were precipitating in various spheres of society, these poets visualised human existence as irrational and thoroughly permeated by fear of extinction. In their own scheme of things, a modern man is bluntly from society and hopelessly doomed to morose loneliness. In such a situation of utter desperation, there was an excessive emphasis on the experimentation with form and diction. But, while doing so, thematic schemata was never given the due weightage it deserved. As a result their inseparable and dialectic relationship was ignored which, in its turn, had ultimately denuded the so-called poetic process of experiment with process of meaning. Therefore, notwithstanding the impact of western poets like Apollinaire and Cummings, the typographical rearrangement could not save the sinking ‘modern’ Bengali poetry. The poets like Sajal Bandyopadhyay, Paresh Mandal, Samsul Hoque, Pushkar Dasgupta and Shambhu Rakshit tried their best to endow poetry with architechtonic and spatial intensity; but unbalanced subjectivism and lack of definite points of reference led unavoidably to the disintegration of poetic art itself. This is what has happened to Tushar, Belal, Shamser, Yogabratya and many others whose poems are more or less equally marked with smartness, clownish disposition, sadism, alienation, sexual desire, self-pity, non-conformism and suicidal frenzy.

This reminds us of a comment by Ginsberg: Dwelling in
a universe that seems to him alien and hostile, man today retreats within the fortress of the self only to discover that he does not know himself. Engaged in an interminable monologue he develops the habit of introspection to such a degree that he comes to feel entirely alone, cut off from communication with others. The brooding intellectual of modern literature frequently becomes a solipsist and eventually learns to distrust his perceptions, his thoughts, the language he employs, and the beliefs he once cherished. Nothing seems real least of all himself. This is what has also happened to Bhaskar Chakraborty. Autobiographical elements are pronounced in his poetic microcosm; however, he is less arrogant and self-annihilating. Inspite of all suffocating complexities of life, he still manages to dream for a resurrection. He seems to have less despair and more sophisticated sadness; he keeps his urban mind intact and prefers licking his wound than going down the stream of Hades. Moreover, his prose poems are some of the rare redeeming features of the sixties. No other poet of this period has tried so much to negotiate with the confused void around. Then there is Debarati Mitra attempting to bridge the fissures between tradition and modernity, thirst for beauty and self-pity, content and form. There are Manjush Dasgupta, Gita Chattopadhyay, Subrata Chakraborty, Shantanu Das, Karunasindhu De, Ruchira Shyam, Shaktipada Brahmacari, Ashok Chattopadhyay, Ketaki Kushari Dyson treading along somewhat different paths away from the main trends of the sixties. Of these abovementioned poets, Subrata, Karunasindhu and Shaktipada deserve special mention because they searched the golden mean between eccentricity and commitment on the one hand and tradition and modernity on the other.
Mention must also be made of Ashish Sanyal, Mati Mukhopadhyay, Udayan Ghosh, Arun Basu and Shantanu Ghosh. It is a pity that very few of them lived up to their promise; in some cases, extreme subjectivism has proved to be their own undoing since this tendency has made their intentions self-negating, their aims illusory and aesthetic terms of reference non-existent.

III

The seventies have exploded the myth of 'continuum of cultural legacy' in our society, transmitting rude shock waves to all the receptive minds. A decisive break became clearly discernible when the dark shades of crisis have been looming large over a vast territory of social activity. In the mid-sixties, the communist movement has gone through a traumatic phase of bitter ideological debate in consequence of which it has split into two parties. Then in the later years of the decade, a large chunk of disillusioned youths has been impatiently preparing for an armed revolution because the prevalent political methods did not have any relevance for them. With the advent of the seventies, the Bengali society dazedly witnessed a unique phenomenon in the wake of the Naxalite movement. A good number of these young revolutionaries sacrificed their lives in various sorts of encounter with the state power while the society at large passively looked on. But nevertheless those who are subscribers to status quo have been immensely unnerved and felt the tremor in various aspects of life. That was also the time when the birthpangs of Bangladesh could be heard and ressurrected Vietnam was taking shape. The ruling class in our country was much perturbed and shrewdly reorganising itself. In such an atmosphere of bewildering uncertainty, the
fire kindled in the poetic endeavours of earlier generation has been extinguished; so the restoration of an atmosphere congenial for multifaced exploitation has to be undertaken in a cleverly designed way. Besides, the design has to be concealed under the guise of a renewed onslaught of poetic reaction. That is why, the poets securedly established in a patronising set up, undertook the task of giving a new lease of life to the phase of exhausted modernism. Therefore the excruciating banality and fastidious have become more pronounced in the works of earlier poets.

But the younger poets who began to wield their pen at that crucial juncture, generally seem to have been cautious at the very outset. However, a new mode of poetry was not to be found easily; now a poet has to apply his discretions, he has to identify the material cause of his isolation from the society and determine an altogether new position for him in the most uncertain time. He can no longer afford to compose poems as an individual, emphasizing his unique position in the society and distinction of his vision. In the midseventies, the ruling class has thrown all pretensions about democratic norms and values to the wind and bared its fangs through the unprecedented proclamation of emergency. That was also the final watershed in the arena of modern Bengali poetry since after that the methods of poetic assimilation of the world have gradually undergone clear and significant changes. An urge for reinterpretation and readjustment of different values was felt everywhere though the necessity for new morphology of feeling was understood by very few and correctly articulated by even less. The younger poets took time to settle their score with the disintegrating socio-cultural milieu as a result of which the distinctive trends manifested themselves only during late seventies and early
eighties. It is, however, not being suggested that every poet of these twin decades shares same aims and technical predilections; but after initial encounter with the poets like Anjan Sen, Amitabha Gupta, Anuradha Mahapatra, Goutam Basu, Ekram Ali, Joy Goswami, Jahar Sen Majumdar, Nirmal Haldar, Nishith Bhadh, Mridul Dasgupta, Ranajit Das, Partha Pratim Kanjilal, Subodh Sarkar, Mallika Sengupta, Rama Ghosh, Shankar Jyoti Deb, Bijoy Kumar Bhattacharya etc, we are probably more struck by the homogeneity than by the variety of their output. Inspite of their mutual exclusiveness in the matters of poetic and social faith, these budding poets of the seventies and eighties almost universally seek to bring about a reversal of hitherto prevalent modernist assumptions. We now find that there is a tendency in the younger poets to turn outwards to reality and interpret its true import in the context of a re-organised and renewed tradition seemingly because the phase of experimenting in form in the sixties has proved sterile. Perhaps of the poets of today are simply in search of a deep and subtle inspiration since they have discovered that inspiration depends on there being some common ground of understanding between them and their readers about the nature of reality, life and human relationships. There are some poets among those just mentioned who seem to have failed to cope with the swiftly changing world and mostly act out of defensiveness. Their commitment to subjective self is much pronounced that in the long run has proved to be counterproductive. In fact, perhaps unwittingly, their poetic endeavours echo the idiosyncrasies of avantgardist poets of earlier generation. Undoubtedly the poets of seventies and eighties are more urbanised and sophisticated; but the impact of decadent modernism is not to be easily ignored. It
is the worldview that really matters in creative writing and, hence, a poet can be truly innovative only when he successfully makes himself free from old and worn-out habits of expression, form, attitude and thought. A new poet has to be aware of the fresh evocative possibilities hidden in language; he has to recognise poetic art as vehicle of the new method of discovery of life. A truly contemporary poet is one who can correctly interprete the intricacies of time, refuses to surrender to cheap consumerism, discovers a new language and completely masters the technique of recreating reality. This is vitally important for constructing a new world-order of life-affirming values. It is also imperative that the poets nourished in and by time, should be uncompromising in their total fight against the menace of recurring traits of decadence masquerading as modernism for a long time.

Undoubtedly, it also means that the younger poets are expected not to be lured anymore by the exploitative guiles of various establishments. The ‘modern’ world has been teetering now after remaining on tenterhooks on many counts; but nevertheless another new world cannot be ushered in unless a drastic reorganization is truly and significantly effected. However the mount of Sisyphus has been lying before them and at every moment of this rapidly changing social perspective, every ascent is a challenge and each new creative process is a potential conquest. The seventies and eighties have unleashed an era of audacious soul-scarring; the poets can no longer afford to be indifferent to the maladies of modernism. Nor can a poet entirely erase the traces of the past legacy. When the sacred is relentlessly profaned, centre is lost and things fall apart, the new poets are faced with the task of redefining ‘modern’ sensibilities and restructuring the poetic microcosm along
with a complete reorientation of their craft. The basic differences between them and the poets of earlier generation are rather explicit; while the younger poets of today no longer remain content only with diagnosing the modernist malady, the older poets basically remain passive and disinterested onlookers. In fact, the meaning and direction of the continuing processes of social change and upheavals elude the earlier generation of poets. Hence there is growing isolation, irrelevance of faith, lack of conviction and language in modernist poetry; when the genre itself is profaned, nothing but vulgarisation remains. Eugenio Montale has likewise said, ‘To participate in a collective cry, in a universal no, seems to be the sole ambition of the modern artist.’

The poets of seventies and eighties have generally proved their alertness in this score. They have shown their willingness in taking a step forward to circumvent the obstacles and emerge from their quandary. The aimless journey of the earlier poets has not only to be avoided but also to be positively resisted. Besides, the modernist phase in Bengali poetry has so long thrived on the negation of social existence; what is more, that negation has been advertised ne plus ultra-almost to the point of deification—so that it has become an ‘intoxicating collective pseudo-truth’. The new poets have made here a decisive break and sought to obvert the process of running away from time, social responsibility and cultural history. What animates them is ‘the sense of void to be filled, a continuum to be restored and a form to be uniquely articulated’. While placing themselves in a temporal context, the younger poets try to be perfectly contemporaneous and seek to build a scale of values that presupposes a link between the past and the future. The readers are invited to decipher
the mythopoetic manifestations of the poets' new worldview which no longer puts any premium on subjective illusion and fragmentation of objective world. Undoubtedly, they have still to negotiate with the old hangovers, but nevertheless the wheel of modernist phase has come full circle in Bengali poetry. Hence, the emerging phase is claiming recognition and a local habitation and a name are now due to it.

Of late, that local habitation and name have been gradually gaining momentum among some of the leading poets of the seventies and eighties who prefer to call the dawning phase 'Uttar Adhunik' in Bengali while emphatically asserting that it is not synonymous with 'post-modernism'. Though the Bengali prefix 'uttar' may mean 'after' (i.e. post), it also carries within it the suggestion of 'transcendence' which, again according to Webster's International Dictionary, primarily connotes 'going beyond or exceeding usual limits, excelling, surpassing'. If we examine the recent interpretative discussions of the exponents of this school of 'Uttar Adhunik' poetry, we would find that the term has been painstakingly explained as basically value-loaded and definitive. The qualifying prefix does not merely describe a particular phase and as such, we prefer to translate this Bengali term as 'transcendent modernism'. Another obvious choice might have been 'neo-modernism' where the prefix 'neo' does not only signify new or recent, it also means, according to the Webster's Dictionary, a new as well as different and recently cultivated form of a distinctive creative genre. But, nevertheless, it has little trace of any suggestion of value-judgement whatsoever. Under the circumstances let us accept the term i.e. 'Uttar Adhunik' to be synonymous with 'transcendent modernism'.
Yet a note of caution has to be sounded here. Because, all the poets of these two decades do not subscribe to this school of thought. It is not that they do not like to search for a new identity and a new interpretative insight into the contemporary time and society; they are keenly aware of the perennial flux around. But they seem to have been only insufficiently convinced about the final decadence and disintegration of the post-Jibanananda modernist epoch in our poetry. Though they are also perplexed and anxious about the threat of the world-order being increasingly chaotic, irrelevant and finally extinct, they would perhaps choose to improve upon their tools of interpretation than dismissing the modernist world-view altogether. Nor they could wholly accept the formulation that all was lost and there was no redeeming feature left in ‘modern’ epoch of Bengali poetry. Therefore, they have sought to recreate reality and rebuild the crumbling edifice and thus, it seems that they have distanced themselves deliberately from the exponents of ‘transcendent modernism’. For all practical purposes, the poets like Ranajit Das, Subodh Sarkar, Mallika Sengupta, Mridul Dasgupta, Brata Chakraborty and Joy Goswami are trying their best in their own individual idiosyncratic ways to give a new lease of life to the exhausted genre of modernism. These above-mentioned poets seem to be particularly disturbed to witness the ascending process of fragmentation, dehumanisation and deepening paradoxes and they are trying to come to terms with the masks of life as well as with the predominantly urban character of a mechanised civilization.

Let us, for example, refer to the poetic microcosm of Ranajit Das. The following anthologies of his poems are some of the best representatives of the ambivalence of urban
life, crisis in sensibilities and existential paradox: Amader Lajuk Kabita, Jipsider Tnabu and Samay, Sabuj Daini. Ranajit seems to have accepted change as a normal condition; in fact, his poems celebrate the agony and dichotomy, self-pity and faithlessness of urban life while a dazed and bored audience listens about his own disintegration and hopeless situation beyond redemption. Poetic language is also in a state of crisis since it is no longer confident about grasping real entities. It is not that the poet grudgingly reconciles himself to such a situation: his restive feeling at the prospect of grasping phantoms are much too evident. Yet Ranajit has no option either; he has to search for an elbow room in such a situation and settles with provisional meanings. Then there are Subodh Sarkar (Rikshamesha-Katha, Sohag Sharbari, Eka Narakgami, Maranottar Jal) and Mallika Sengupta (Challish Chnader Ayu, Sohag Sharbari, Ami Sindhur Meye) gathering quintessences of poetry from every object they encounter. Both of them are aware of the deepening crisis emanating from meaninglessness and anarchic process of dehumanisation. When the sublime rolls in the dust, sexual passion is progressively deromanticised and even the solidarity with one’s own self is hopelessly lost- the poets react by stripping their diction of ornamental and sentimental accretions. Sarkar and Sengupta are preparing their poetic arts to absorb the enigmatic life everywhere assuming new forms. But the foundations of contemporary life are being shifted constantly; hence they are particularly concerned about evolving a new form and diction. Instead of using words with decorative import and vague generalities, they prefer to establish the autonomy of particularities. Even though the genius of a poetic language seldom allows the
luxury of translation, we may render, for example, a significant poem of Sarkar into English in order to clarify our point:

'perchance a danger may befall before dawn, so I do have no faith on that star of dawn nor I believe in the journey by boat at dawn, so I do not repose on the tramline at dawn. But can I, oh water, so continue for long. Never I have lied to you. Look, here at my left, there is that rare crystal wherein you can see a peerless lady, beckoning me at dawn-

(Bhor-Ratre Amake Dakche, Maranottar Jal)

Mallika Writes in an article entitled 'Kuobasir Kabita' (Bhashanagar iv) 'The history of Bengali poetry, in real terms, is the history of our cultivation of tradition; we do now have the variety of experience... Those who have begun to wield their pens in the fifties and sixties, two trends (i.e. smartness and versatility on the one hand and response to tradition on the other) may be detected. Westernism and tradition began to influence the course of poetry by becoming mutually exclusive. One can detect some hybird traits in the fifties, but the latter two decades of the seventies and eighties are particularly significant for adherence to tradition'.

She goes on to talk of the dichotomy between adherence to tradition and egocentricism. According to her, a poet can interprete his world in two ways; either he can look at a thing from a distance as a spectator or he can look through his own ego by identifying himself with the object. Sengupta also draws our attention to the subjective articulation of Amitabha Gupta and hastens to add: 'Bengali poetry basically treads between egoism and tradition... younger poets are engaged in digging our tradition, medieval lyrics are written afresh. It seems that tradition contains our real experience. New poetry is emerging out of a synthesis of the socio-political
values of the past and great Indian legacy; it is born in the unfathomable depth of a jewel-emitting well, in the womb of legacy'. As a creative poet, however, Sengupta seems not to like any exclusive use of archetypal paradigm though she has penchant for archaic diction, conscious symbolism and occasional restructuring of myths. There are expressions of calculated eroticism coupled with urban sophistication and chequered shades of sharpened individualism (most evident in the poems collected in Ami Sindhur Meye). Yet the 'synthesis', of which she has spoken herself in the abovementioned article, seems to have eluded her.

As we go through the poems of Brata Chakraborty (Gajaner Mela), Nishith Bhadh (Tirtha Samhar), Parthapratim Kanjilal (Devi, Ratri Chaturdashi, Table Durer Sandhya), Goutam Choudhury (Columbuser Jahaj) or Mridul Dasgupta (Jalpaikather Esraj, Ebhave Knade Na, Gopane Himsar Katha Bali), we become increasingly aware of the unmistakable fact that today there is no general goal for these young poets. Most of them lack the consolidating keystone of faith-be it aesthetic or social-but yet their poetic art is somewhat based on a common neo-modernism attitude. This may be detected in their response to the increasingly mechanistic character of the daily environment. But the response has multifarious manifestations due to different points of emphasis; hence the stance of Parthaprtim is different than that of Goutam Choudhury or the content and idiom of Nishith cannot be equated with that of Mridul. Likewise Brata does not respond to the temporal context exactly as Joy does. There is noticeable difference even among the sharers of seemingly identical moods and attitudes. This is what makes these young poets shine as individual stars irrespective of their success or failure while the poets of fifties
used to twinkle only in a galaxy. However, while we are familiar with the grouping and regrouping of the poets willing to share an aesthetic idiom or a view of society or a response to legacy, we are also conscious of the lack of an all-embracing faith or vision that may bring a degree of unison into their poetic craft. These poets have their own conceptions about modernity, and also its appropriate theme, form and language. Thus Parthapratim has put emphasis on the esoteric and mythic legacy as well as mythic paradigm while trying his best to interprete the modern phenomena in their context. Nishith may try to reorganise lyricism and Brata may enact the inner drama in the light of a series of restructured folk motifs, Goutam might be busy in discovering the inner space of an urban language while Mridul has always his private world to explore in an exceptionally sophisticated manner. With the complete transformation of the avantgarde attitude, neo-modernistic trends set in.

Then there is inimitable Joy Goswami taking the readers by storm with his hallucinatory diction, apocalyptic visions of urban life, unforeseeable archetypal patterns and a unique alchemism. His genius first unfolded itself, through the anthologies known as Aleya Hrad and Pratnajib. But he ascended to great heights in Unmader Pathakram and Bhutum Bhagaban; particularly, the latter work makes us aware of a new world-conception, a new metaphysical attitude that gives meaning to a puzzling socio-historical situation. Joy's poetic diction is specially noteworthy; It seems that the poet is keen to discover the social commitment embedded in language. Because many a promising poets failed to reach the acme of creativity only due to their lack of awareness about the basic role of language, Joy feels that
poetic language is not what it is ‘if it is not integrally associated with our concrete and lived situations in the world’. But whether this also records the expression of his venture to find new meanings in the world is debatable. His two anthologies viz. Ghumiyecho Jhaupata, ‘Ek’ seem to have concentrated more on flexibility of experiences along with deliberate constructionalism and thus miss the earlier neatness and sharp sophistication. Inspite of a pronounced urban attitude and commitment to elitist formalism, Joy’s poetic art mainly thrives on subtle sensibility and abundant self-questioning as well as on sadness, violence, indifference, eroticism, agony, boredom, satire and intense self-pity. As has already been stated, the untranslatable poems collected in the Bhutum Bhagaban bear unmistakable evidence of the poet’s keen awareness and deep understanding about the appropriate poetic language for the tension-prone contemporary time.

Whatever may be the outcome of these continuing poetic pursuits, this much is certain that the role and image of the poet has changed since the eccentric days of turbulent fifties. Now the poet is neither the mysterious soothsayer nor the enchanted lover; he is neither an unreasonable iconoclast nor a spurned outsider crying in wilderness. In a confused and fragmented world, he can never expect to find a neat and predigested world of poetry. He cannot afford to relinquish the fight in which he suddenly finds himself engrossed since this has developed his sensibility and constitutes his daily mundane existence. Therefore, notwithstanding the important stylistic differences among themselves, most of the creative poets of this period tend to develop an appropriate philosophy of life, time and creativity. As we have already noted, the concept of Uttar
Adhunik poetry i.e. a phase of 'transcendent modernism' has come into being and since then going from strength to strength because of a unique and sustaining socio-historical context.

The conception of a distinctive Uttar Adhunik' school has been fashioned from the firmament of sculptures. According to it, the past does not simply wither away as a matter of fact. On the contrary, human dimensions are restructured with the affirmative presence of the past in a continuing time-frame. In fact, a new poetics for time-space-continuum seems to have been chiselled out by the innovative poets of the school of transcendent modernism who claim themselves to be 'Uttar Adhunik'. The 'presentness' is interpreted, explored and established through a prism of multifoliated cultural legacy which also ensures a creative rapport with the future. A perfectly 'Uttar Adhunik' poet is he whose transcendent vision enables him to blend subtlety of imagination with a keen awareness of expansive perspective on the one hand and builds a new edifice of multi-dimensional schemata and frame of time on the other. Unlike the modernists, they refuse to mystify their position as poets; nor do they scramble for variegated masks which have been often aspired for and donned by the former. Nor do these Uttar Adhunik poets unabashedly seek to glorify lack of responsibility, antipathy for social commitment, non-conformism, blatant ignorance, insincerity, amoral frailty, pretentiousness, shallow formalism and wrong orientation about the 'irrelevance' of poetic philosophy. Undoubtedly, the above-mentioned catalogue of ailments has hastened the degeneration of modernist sensibilities. Hence, the new school of thinking has felt the necessity to guard itself thoroughly and solidly against the corrupting impact of such
modernist viewpoints.

Of late, some well-written articles have come out which enlighten us about the crystallizing process of ‘Uttar Adhunik’ worldview. Particularly those by Anjan Sen, Amitabha Gupta, Birendra Chakraborty and Uday Narayan Sinha deserve special mention. We would draw the attention of the readers specially to the invaluable anthology entitled ‘Uttar Adhunik Kavita’, published by ‘Alochana Chakra’ in 1989 in which Amitabha Gupta has written an excellent treatise on the integral philosophy of this protestant phase of Bengali poetry. In the very first sentences of its preface, Amitabha declares, ‘modernism is now synonymous with conservatism... due to the exigencies of historical situation, it is today hopelessly infected with the fatal virus of decadence.’ The author points out that the progressive character of modernism has been totally exhausted; instead, it is threatening to usurp the role of a monstrous tyrant and detain the creative artists in the fetters of value-destroying consumerism and stupefying barrenness of status quo. A poet can now no longer remain faithful to this craft and pulsating life around if he compromises his position to the constant allurements of the guileful establishment. There are, of course, many a poets who do not seem to be very much aware of their theoretical position; notwithstanding a promising beginning, at least some of them have succumbed to the mounting pressures and enchanting designs of the ruling class. That is why all the trends of the current phase are not equally discernible throughout these two decades. Some traits may even be considered as fortuitous; the renouncement of modernist pseudo-subjectivity, in some cases, also seem only to be apparent. Therefore, the professed ‘Uttar Adhunik’ reaction towards disorderliness,
contingency, collapse of meaning in contemporary life, ironic juxtapositions, farce and anarchy of a corrupting society etc. is not always reflected in an appropriate poetic idiom.

However, this much is certain that these young and budding poets of the seventies and eighties have been spontaneously trying to overcome the limitations as well as avoid the prolonged penumbras of the modernists. The hitherto perpetuating circulatory formalism has been increasingly done away with; the penchant for pseudo-truth, self-negation and degeneration is no longer considered to be the prerogative of genius. Some of the most promising poets of our time are also aware of the neocolonial traits in the realm of culture; therefore, in some of the articles, we come across a correct and intelligent diagnosis of the social maladies. The inherent contradictions of the bourgeois world are attended to; these poets analyse the situation and then, unlike the irascapist modernist predecessors who sought excuses for submission and surrender, they propose to construct a worldview of transcendence. Even though these two decades are witnesses of unprecedented and cunning manoeuvres of the bourgeois and imperialist forces in the national and international level, the heat and bite have not been totally taken out of the struggle of the protestant forces. Various forms of ailments of the society have assumed explosive character and the most redeeming feature is that the exponents of ‘uttar Adhunik’ poetry have been able to recognise the potentialities of the situation. The crisis due to an all-enveloping spiritual degradation has been correctly interpreted and the positive tasks ahead have been enumerated. (The articles by Amitabha Gupta, Anjan Sen etc. are to be scanned carefully.) It has been emphatically stated that the ‘Uttar Adhunik’ weltanschauung is basically
the scion of exploring time seeking to resist the contriving intrigues of neocolonialism to ossify our existence into a dehumanised sphere of despair, illusion and calamity.

The importance of this 'time-dimension' has been manifested in the poems of these two decades in various ways. Therefore Amitabha Gupta has made the following prudent observation: 'The term 'Uttar Adhunik' is therefore connotative of a time-frame. In an article entitled 'Saramo Parama' (first and second series), he raises many a pertinent points. one of the salient features of his arguments is the essentiality of appreciation of the relation of new poetry to the positive legacy of the past. While the modernists made loud proclamations of their arrogant rejection of Rabindranath Tagore (since 'being traditional' was considered to be derogatory as is evident in their blasphemous pseudo-smartness, e.g., 'Look, the works of Rabindranath are kicked to dust by three pairs of shoes'). But the school of uttarAdhunik poetry declares affirmatively that the period of suicidal frenzy is finally over. They do not hesitate to reaffirm the relevance of the great poet in their own creative pursuits; they seem to have been inspired by the following famous comment of Eliot: '...not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality more vigorously'. This renewed awareness about great creative possibilities of tradition is widely reflected in the absorption of various motifs of folk-life, myths and legends of great and little tradition, materials belonging to the old and medieval literary firmament e.g., Caryapada, Mangalkavya, Vaishnava poetry, ballads as well as details of folk culture, rituals, proverbs, wise-cracks etc. Besides the new poets have not shown any overt inclination for cheap
and deliberate eroticism; the nauseating recurrence of pornographic details (e.g. Valmikir Kabita of Binoy Majumdar) and clever manipulation of sex-symbols are no longer considered to be the hallmark of contemporaneity.

Instead, Anjan Sen claims in his thoughtful article entitled 'Kabitar Bhasha: Kayekti sutra' that the young poets of the new order have been very careful throughout about creating a new edifice for poetic diction. The negative traits of a basically neo-colonialist language-formation are consciously resisted by them; the tendency of syncretism is becoming increasingly evident in the school of Uttar Adhunik poetry. Anjan draws our attention to the ever-widening unique dialectics inherent in the new poetic situation. Thus unsophisticated rusticity is woven with urban simplicity. Fresh oral materials are blended with dreary cliches, contemporary myths with ancient archetypes and conscious ornateness with spontaneous verbal icons. As a result, Anjan says, one of the salient features of the school of Uttar Adhunik poetry has been the co-existence of two seemingly contradictory tendencies i.e. intense fascination for little and great tradition on the one hand and genuine concern for an international socio-cultural milieu on the other. In order to illustrate his point, Sen rightly refers to the poem of Goutam Basu (Kach o Devayani) and Amitabha Gupta (Bageshwar).

Here we may also refer to an article written by Amitabha Gupta whose title has been significantly coined from an hymn of the Rigveda. This ('Nyagne navyasya vachastanushu shamsamesham') literally means, 'Oh Agni! please prepare new poetry for us!' There the author has observed that poetic language is an unfailing index of the creative poet's struggle with the decadence, boredom and exhaustion of his time. The new school of Bengali poetry goes beyond the periphery
of modernism in its pursuit of truth as well as for a new base of life for language. It aims at absorbing the impact of every ripple of the never-exhausting stream of life and thus transcends and firmly establishes us in an infinite and penetrative human dimension. Their poetic diction, therefore, takes into cognizance the subtleties as well as complexities of class-antagonism being constantly sharpened in our society. The leading poets of the new school are uncompromising crusaders against the misuse of poetic language by their predecessors. In that article, Amitabha has also referred to the fire kindled by some of the young Prometheus of the seventies and eighties. They are as follows: Gautam Basu (Annapurna 0 Shubhakal) Nirmal Haldar (Purano e Jiban Amader Nay), Goutam Sengupta (Shesh Rater Chhabi), Ashok Dutta (Upasamhar), Apaabritra Lahidhi (Harano Mani), Dilip Bandyopadhyay (Gnayer Nam Parab), Anuradha Mahapatra (Kolkata Duhajar), Anjan Sen (Kathabarta) and Anirban Lahidhi (Ebang Amra).

The evolution of these above-mentioned poets is far from complete and hence we refrain from attempting any conclusive remarks about them. However, the syncretism and thirst for variety are continuing almost unabated and thus new horizons are being assiduously explored. This is clearly evident in the Path: Bharatbarsha and Tin Bishve Din Ratri of Anjan Sen, Astrer Nirabata, Nilkamal, Mrityunjaya and Dhan 0 Jaler Dhvani of Nirmal Haldar, Yatramantra, Naraker Meghe and Yakhan Anandaritu of Anirban Lahidhi; Tomar Marer Pala Shesh Hale and Tor Mukh Dekhte Chai of Bipul Chakrabarty; Jaltaranga of Chiranjib Shur; Shantijal of Apaabrita Lahidhi; Manisamrat, Santardin and Titumirer Kanya of Shankarnath
Chakrabarty; Gâdhatama Chhaya of Subrata Rudra; Alokita Jharna o Bhalobasar Desh of Rajkumar Roy Choudhury; Andhakar: Priya Svaralipi of Rahul Purkayastha; Bhikshuker Gan of Ananda Sarkar; Samachar Darpan of Ranjan Bandyopadhyay; Ashtabasur Bibha and Anaghabol of Ashok Dutta; Chhaiphusulstup and Adhibas Manikarnika of Anuradha Mahapatra; Shyamapada o Akasher Devi and Ei Sanatorium Shabda Hay Gan Hay of Shamit Mondal; Meghadut and Bhraman Kahini of Jaydeb Basu; Shraban Shramik, Labanya Pariskha and Prasabsindur of Jahar Sen Majumdar; Atijibita of Ekram Ali; Andhakarer Nauko, Anatabajra and Dhutura of Sutapa Sengupta; Manusher Janya of Alokenath Mukhopadhyay; Meghbarna Rakhal of Sanchayita Kundu; Tyakta Graha of Rama Ghosh; Bali 0 Tarmuj of Prasun Bandyopadhyay; Ei Desh Daruharidrar of Alope Som, Nilkshur Chandrayan of Jamil Saiyad; Bhuban 0 Kampoka of Arun Basu; Abidya of Samyukta Bandyopadhyay; Basak Lipika of Dilip Bandyopadhyay etc.

Though the above catalogue is neither exhaustive nor selective, it can nevertheless claim to be fairly representative in which we should include the following anthologies of Amitabha Gupta: Alo, Eso Amar Ghare, Jhara Mansusher Kavita, Mata 0 Mrittika, Khara o Yamuna and Surye Dhvanipate.

These poetic endeavours are basically embedded in specific social and historical circumstances and, inspite of certain differences in attitude as well as points of emphasis, these bespeak of the long and swerving path already trodden by them. The actual complexities of rapidly changing life are reflected in their oscillation between melancholy and fascination, abstraction and objectification, curiosity and
indifference, thirst for progress and unsuspected retrogression. We have recently come across a disquieting trend of intellectual reversal which, if not corrected without any delay, might jeopardise the growth of the Uttar Adhunik school of poetry. A note of caution is sounded here since some of the most promising poets of our time seem to have been trapped in the quicksand of jejune arguments in favour of Hindu revivalism. They should learn a point or two from the history of our renaissance in the nineteenth century when some of the best minds went astray while propagating revivalist ideologies. That was historical error that culminated into sucking the vital flow of life out of our renaissance and for which we are still paying a very heavy penalty. Those who aspire to outstep the limits of modernist decadence, possibly cannot (or perhaps, should not) compromise their position without applying discretion. Reactionary trends would always ultimately swallow the innermost essence of our human legacy without which no poet can successfully negotiate with the intriguing challenges of his time. Now the new school of poetry is preparing more vigorously to transcend the frontiers of modernism by exploring the vast abyss of possibilities in the human world. Any sort of fundamentalism, either overt or covert, cannot but disturb the inseparable fusion of feelings in our time.

Let us record here our earnest expectation from the bright poets like Goutam Basu, Anjan Sen, Anirban Lahidhi, Ekram Ali, Jaydeb Basu, Amitabha Gupta and a host of others, who are capable of creating new poetic firmaments. We can only sincerely hope that they would not be oblivious of their historically conditioned responsibility towards the society which is intensely waiting to be born anew.

At any rate, the poetic techniques envisaged by Anjan
Sen or Goutam Basu unfold before us all the positive aspects of the new school. Their poems help us to reinvent our life by interpreting the accumulated materials of human existence in a unique way. They enable us to get under the surface of things so that we can recover the lost sensibilities. The anthologies like Tin Bishver Din Ratri, Annapurna o Shubhakal, Yakhan Anandaritu, Harano Mani, Samachar Darpan, Mata o Mrittika etc. are jewels in the crown of the Uttar Adhunik poetry. Each of the above works abundantly contains the most untranslatable pieces of poems. However, we may observe here that these works have earned prominence not only as finished poetic products but the creative experiences reflected in the processes of their construction also count much. We propose here to make special mention of Amitabha Gupta since we consider him to be one of the most representative and, what is more important, one of the most consistent poets of the new school. His mode of composition is derived equally from consciousness as well as the unconscious, the ego as well as the id, the mythic as well as the contemporary world, the metaphoric as well as the narrative and the bright sunshine as well as the darkly night. It may also seem that one kind of aesthetic presentation is embedded in another form; the frontier of one generic frame overlaps with that of another. For example, Yai and Bagane, in Alo; Andhayug and Dimbapuran in Eso Amar Ghare, Ganesh Lipikar, Krishna Dvaipayana: Kavi, Ganga and Bageshwar in Mata o Mrittika, Chalo Junput, Yamuna and Khanda pralaya in Khara o Yamuna; Jalashiri, Bhasha Andolaner Sheshdin and Banglabhasha in Surye Dhvanipate are such poems, where Amitabha’s creative experiment in making the best use of mutual illumination of various genres has reached its zenith.
His poetic diction aspires to be some sort of chiaroscuro, as it were, with the criss-crossing of the subtle nuances, shades and essences of music, sculpture and painting on the one hand and fusion of narrative mode with that of the mythical and metaphorical on the other.

Since meaning is basically a communal possibility, Amitabha makes abundant use of myths, legends and motifs from the Great and Little tradition alike. The contemporary experiences are as if constantly revalidated in the perspective of an ever-renewing timeless frame. The dialectical relationship of form and content as well as of individual intricacies and collective existence has aptly manifested itself in his poems. The Uttar Adhunik worldview comes to the fore in his implicit tendency towards a comprehensive syncretism. Amitabha’s pantheistic consciousness seeks to trace out the process of metamorphosis inherent in the human world. He firmly believes in an expansive beyondness since only this can dissolve the existing artificial barriers in various spheres of our life. In an article in the journal called ‘Shabda Shabdik’(52), Amitabha speaks of such a transcendence based on metamorphosis in the objective world and asserts emphatically on the irrelevance of decadence, exhaustion, contraction and even death. That the emergent worldview of the Uttar Adhunik poetry is at the same time based on a conviction about inner sociability which aspires to encompass different walks of our fragmented social existence, has been time and again creatively demonstrated. Undoubtedly poetic art has become more explorative since it has experienced too many traumatic phases and many a times it has been blown into an infinite sequence of forms. Now the poets and their readers are required to be more circumspect because each word, each
space and each silence has to be keenly apprehended. This is true about all the leading poets of the new school, e.g. Amitabha Gupta, Goutam Basu, Anjan Sen and others.

IV

As we now look to make a circuit of the sequences of Bengali poetry, we think that the most important significance of the emergence of the Uttar Adhunik trends is the unflinching commitment to change. This new school of poetry has come into being out of a historical necessity and so long it retains its progressive as well as protestant character, it is expected to continously attain new heights. The degeneration of modernist phase has unmistakably proved that the excessively romanticised tendency of inward voyage and excessive premium on an almost fanatic belief in inner self and a limitless world for its private exploration have ultimately proved to be counter-productive. The subjective self has now shirked off the modernist negativism and dissociated itself from the paradigm of rejection. This reminds us of the famous words of Herbert Read: ‘Change is the condition of art remaining art. Art is never transfixed, never stagnant. It is a fountain rising and falling under the varying pressure of social conditions’.

The exponents of the Uttar Adhunik poetry have been trying to create their own dynamics. Their emphasis is more on poetic amplitude and totality of conception; the points of reference and the levels of diction vary in accordance with the poetic situation. Though there is a risk of profaning the wonder inherent in their untranslatable poems, let us refer to the following:

a) ‘Accepting everything except defeat

Look, there is the inner apartment in which
stretches the neat yard of words
We descend in its depth, searching, and
stepping futher in fathomless,
almost inaccessible, depths
Intending to walk like a blind Baul(folk singer),
In a path that knows no distance without aim’

(Shabda Niye, Anjan Sen, 1971)

b) ‘Seeing chains once again we think of words
chains metamorphosed in water, and when
viewers descend in past
Even then many a roles remain intact
This water is genuine companion in crematorium,
this is Ramprasad Sen’

(Annapurna o Shubhakal, Goutam Basu, 1981)

c) ‘Skeleton of man has infiltrated into the
Household of men
Women have gone to paddyfield leaving behind the
music of anklets
They are searching for fire in the fissures of field
They will decorate men with more fire
This is Joy-
Our womenfolk will again bedeck the men
Look, there is no household in the orchestra of skeleton’

(Agune Sajabo,Nirmal Haldar, 1983)

d) ‘Who plays on flute in this forest today. Iwon’t sleep
slowly the night is descending
who is that lady having a bath in the lake of deep woods
Now standing alone, wet attire, wet hair
as if very close
One column of white swans is flying into clouds
the petals of lotus fly along wind
Don’t call now, I shall sink tonight my face,
On her two palms in the bottom of the sea,
green in pitchy darkness,
Tonight is not to sleep, it is for sowing seeds’.

(Shilpa, Rama Ghosh, 1986)

e) ‘Wipe away all queries, oh deity, bring satiety for the
hunger-stricken and the lovelorn in your shining aura.
If you unfold beauty, pray, do not withdraw
make the soul indeed or all is lost.’

(Pranbhiksha, Anirban Lahidhi, 1987)

f) ‘This language spreads in sky
This is light and foetus
When, at dawn, none else
is awake, wedding symbol
Touches the cackles of child.
I am the fire in its womb
I am its aural vermilion’

(Bangla Bhasha, Amitabha Gupta, 1988)

g) ‘Whose sin’? today, the invocation is sung again
by the brahmans and snakes
Dirts of different colours are coming out in the
festival, never shall I touch these
Do you say that poetic diction is afar? Some girl
prefers to stay obstinately away in darkness.
Some one was still alive in the dark Dasami
(tenth day in Durga puja) while unclean water
flows in the Hooghly river
Modernity that aspires to go in a voyage in the
endless sea with the hope like Chand, the merchant
Today, the lamplight and the country of drought and
flood prepare to be its companion’

(Ratri, Bibek Chattopadhyay, 1989)
These undoubtedly show that the above-mentioned poets breathe the spirit of a different epoch which cannot be explained in terms of the prevalent norms of modernism. Nor this can be interpreted in the light of western postmodernism since there is basic difference in attitude, poetic temperament and technique and most importantly, in the worldview. European postmodernism seems to seek formal alternatives to modernism as well as antimodernism; inspite of its protestations, there is common ground between modernism and postmodernism. Both believe in autonomy of poetry and hence develop the idea of futility of meaning and interpretation; this tendency has culminated into depiction of a special and obsessive world that resists meaningfulness and refuses to admit any suggestion about redemption. Therefore, unlike the school of Uttar Adhunik poetry whose mainstream course is grossly clear, the postmodernists seem to oscillate between acceptance and negation. The critics have rightly noted that they continue the modernist critique of traditional mimetic art and share the modernist commitment in innovation. They try their best to go beyond modernism, but mostly take some steps around with the heavy burden of the senses of decay, disintegration, silliness, vulgarity, emptiness, desolation, triviality, fright and prophecies of doom. There is monotonous accuracy in the postmodernist attempts of ‘giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy that is contemporary history’. However, the Bengali poets of the new school, inspite of the tough experiences sometimes resulting in void, isolation, anguish and despair, do not meekly surrender to the provocations of silence and extinction. They believed in an explorable space full with possibilities and meanings; their poetic art is therefore
corrective and innovative at the same time.

Besides, the postmodernists seem to celebrate the agony and ecstasy emanating from the death-wish of the modern world with a sort of apocalyptic relish, not always without a note of gloomy antihumanism. But the school of Uttar Adhunik poetry aims at rebuilding the edifice of life on an heightened altar of humanist essence. Both the phases of self-annihilating ecstasy (of the fifties) and experimenting in denuded form (of the sixties) have prove sterile; the younger poets, therefore, aspire for regeneration of faith and 'inspiration'. Because they have discovered that creative inspiration depends on their common ground, understanding between them and their readers about the nature of the world around as well as their simultaneous participation in it. Unlike their modernist predecessors, the Uttar Adhunik poets do not venture to run away from contemporary history in the making. It is no longer a nightmare for them from which a poet struggles to wake up; rather it is an enterprise in which he is keen to participate. This is most evident in Amitabha's thought-provoking article 'Sarama o Parama' (series ii) where he asks the younger poets to be vigilant against the infectious modernist infatuations and also to be prepared for ushering in the new dawn of Uttar Adhunik awakening. He writes in an inimitable style (pp 85-88): 'This Uttar Adhunik vision suggests the inception of a new epoch, it kindles the fire of a new promise. Let the black crown of modernism dissolve now in that smouldering fire; now onwards there shall not be any compromise even with a single sentence inclined to modernism ...In that decadent world of the modernists, there is nothing but greed, jealousy and hatred; but the emerging new world of ours sustains on love and faith. Oh young poet, to which side do
you belong? ...Look, today the so-called ‘new world’ (of the modernists) is gradually sinking in the quicksand of blunt antiquity while the curtain is rising in another stage like a dream and an innate desire.

Unlike the modernists as well as the postmodernists, the school of Uttar Adhunik poetry seeks to abandon illusion and recognise reality. It is also basically committed to changing reality though there seems to be no uniformly clear conception about its process. Their ambivalence is also evident in communicative mode—sometimes in the dichotomy of form and content, sometimes in their penchant for colloquialism and use of conscious cliches while sometimes in their worldview. Particularly the recent controversies bespeak of confusion, tension and crisis raging within the socio-political milieu. At any rate, the new school of Uttar Adhunik poetry basically remains firmly entrenched in its collective character; it does not seem to have fully realised its own potentialities as yet. On the other hand, the death-knell of the modernist phase in Bengali poetry cannot be sounded so easily. Not only its hangover is still continuing, but the younger poets of new generation also sometimes fail to respond to the exacting demands of the changing time. Hence there are signs of indiscretion, shallowness and lack of motivation and perspective which cannot but lead to self-defeating contradictions. Inspite of achieving marginal developments on modernist attitude, such poets may only end in whimper though most of them started with a bang. It must be taken into account that the degenerating societal frame and the objective conditions for breeding ground of countervales are still intact. Hence notwithstanding the sincere endeavours of the school of Uttar Adhunik poetry in the level of superstructure, the corrupting agencies in the
society cannot but hit back savagely as well as adopt subtle counter stratagem. No battle can be won simply by drawing battleplans and wishing the adversary away. Therefore, the stalwarts as well as the budding poets of the new school have to realise their unique and challenging position first as socially aware sensitive individuals and then as creative poets aspiring for totally new synthesis of existence. Besides they are expected to be consistently protestant, coherent in deciphering human dimensions and unhesitatingly uncompromising and no longer remain in the isolation of ‘Ivory-tower-residing’ intellectuals. As we have already noted, the school of Uttar Adhunik consciousness has specially flourished among such poets who are engrossed in the process of making the ineffable dream concrete. The singularly important redeeming feature in the harbingers of new consciousness is the quest for the inexhaustible propensities in man. The poets are in search of a new equilibrium, their poems bespeak of an unquenchable tantalising thirst-always frustrated yet forever renewed. But this is what makes the post-Jibanananda Bengali poetry so much absorbing. Throughout its different phases, time remains the supreme protagonist whose assimilation or negation always determines the ebbs and tides in our poetry.
5

A CRITICAL NOTE ON MODERNITY

Modernity in India flourished under the extending penumbras of colonial rule. It has various facets as well as masks. India being the vast subcontinent replete with ethnic plurality and historical differences, tends to accept the dialogical principle of simultaneity of existence. When it does not, chaos predominates. Though politically India is a nation, for all practical purposes, pluralism has to be explored culturally as the unifying force. But history has its aporias and India is no exception. Its vernacular literatures try to negotiate with those aporias in their own way but the outcome of such endeavours is not quite encouraging.

The emergence of modernity in the Indian vernacular literatures makes an interesting study. Tradition is even now extremely powerful ingredient of Indian society. Hence the dialogics of tradition and modernity is quite predominant. That is why, the intervening critique of different facets of modernity and variegated responses to overpowering postmodernism bear the stamp of Indianness to a
considerable extent. At the same, India is no longer isolated from the world community in the name of its mystique and ancientness, rather it is being rapidly integrated with the guiles of international market under the spell of globalisation.

Now we live in a intertwined world and therefore at every moment the Indian literary firmament has to absorb the impact of the avalanche of ideas because of the explosion of information technology. Even those vernacular literatures which woke up relatively late from the slumbers of prolonged pre-modern phase, are of late trying to make up by glossing over the task of imbibing modernist sensibilities. They have begun negotiating with the academic postmodernism in order to avoid the unenviable possibility of being left out from the pursuit of a seemingly radical aesthetics of presence.

In fact, the worldwide web of terminological mayhem has proved to be irresistible for the new generation of Indian litterateurs. Even some of the old practitioners have relinquished their modernist positions and climbed the bandwagon of postmodernism. Bengali literature has been historically most advanced among the Indian vernaculars and the new trends are more discernible in it. From the last two decades of twentieth century, the process of theorisation has started to gain momentum. But, in spite of these attempts, most of the responses remain either simplistic or overrun apologetics of the elitist and metropolitan section of the Bengali litterateurs. The format of the critique of the media operated buzzword remains tentative. It reminds us of a cryptic comment by David Antin, ‘from the modernism you choose you get the postmodernism you deserve’. Therefore, overall Indian response to modernism and postmodernism is typically conditioned by the positionality emanating from social history of the Indian people.
The peaceful co-existence of feudal cultural paradigms and the signatures of modernity brought forth by colonization has remained an enigma for many a decades. Besides, for historical reasons again, the material development of all the regions have not been equal. This very fact of inequality has left its unmistakable stamp on the worldview of the people. Thus it is undeniable that the meaning and relevance of modernity or, for that matter, the depth and import of its dialogical relation with tradition, could never have been identical in different regional vernaculars of India. Likewise the phase of decadent modernism, neo-modernism, postmodernism or its Indian alternatives in the form of transcendent modernism cannot be present equally in Indian literature. Thus the presence or absence of any of the above phase cannot also be measured equally either quantitatively or qualitatively.

II

As it has been already indicated, literary activities in the context of gradual flourish of colonial modernism have been prolific in Bengali language which is mainly spoken in the provinces of West Bengal and Tripura as well as substantially in the provinces of Assam, Bihar and Jharkhand. Besides, this is the national language of Bangladesh. Because of historical reasons, the Bengali people came in contact with the British in late eighteenth century and benefited to a great extent by absorbing European education, culture and philosophy through the medium of English. This multidimensional contact ushered in the era of renaissance and reformation in nineteenth century. Bengali literature flourished by imbibing modern sensibilities. But the colonial nuances of the Bengal renaissance and modernity remained unassailable.
The literary genres had to negotiate with the aporias of history in different phases of colonial subjugation. Consequently, dichotomies of various kinds were evident both in subject matter and form as well as in conceptualization and execution of reality. In fact, the literary representations of reality through the nineteenth century and twentieth century have been fashioned by hegemonic worldview. The question of modernity has seldom been addressed by the marginalised in the Bengali society. It remained the exclusive domain of the power-elites.

It is pertinent to note here that first major critique of colonial modernity was initiated by none other than the greatest Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the Noble-Laureate. Though, historically speaking, some aspects of modernity were first critically dealt with by the nineteenth century renaissance idol and father of modern Bengali fiction, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894). Nevertheless the official discourses of Bengali literature were basically tutored by colonial modernity. The pangs of subjugation and protests against unredeemable situatedness were not quite absent but these hardly got any momentum before the thirties in twentieth century. In spite of the anti-colonial political movements, the critique of colonial modernity was not systematically upheld in the creative domains. The literary practitioners were aware of the contemporary European literary and artistic theories that propagated liberation from bondage, but this awareness did not logically generate their political sensibility. To a very limited extent, their literary pursuits could be regarded as expressions of cultural self-representation. Their fictional universes or poetical microcosms hardly addressed the problematics of cultural identity in the wake of craving for freedom from all bondages.
Naturally the critique of colonial modernity was not forthcoming. Rabindranath Tagore in particular and Sharatchandra Chattopadhyay (1876-1938), a reputed novelist, were notable exceptions.

From the beginning, modernity in Bengali literature has been essentially imitative and therefore divorced from the pulsating life of the masses. It was entirely dependent on the spoils of European experience. In the post-independence phase also, the Bengali power-elites did not explore the possibilities of alternative modes of existing values and creativity. Political independence in 1947 did not automatically bring forth any metamorphic change in the people’s worldview. On the contrary, real sovereignty soon proved to be utopia and aspirations fostered during freedom struggle became illusory. The meaning and purpose of independence were questioned because the whole exercise appeared to be merely transfer of power from the British to Indian rulers who represented not the interest of the toiling mass but the alliance of native feudalism and nascent capitalism. Within a few years it was evident that the cosmetic changes in the superstructure had nothing to do with the people at large. Moreover, Bengal was partitioned on religious considerations which, as the recent researches prove beyond doubt, was brought about through long-drawn conspiracy by the nexus of national bourgeoisie and power-hungry unscrupulous politicians. However, the entire process of communalisation of politics, genocide, partition and diaspora also signified the inception of the descent of high modernism in Bengali literature.

III

Therefore political independence failed to usher in the
self-sustaining conceptual world which was expected to generate free imaginative space. On the contrary, in order to evade frustration and despair of contemporary society, the creative and intellectual minds of Bengal looked for a new project of modernity in western Europe and America. It marked a fresh renewal of eurocentricity and obviously further severing of all links with the fountainhead of tradition and peoples' weltanschauung. The Bengali elites thus sought to give a new lease of life to modernism when either it was on the wane or the initial signals of postmodernism were making its presence felt elsewhere. The new generation of poets and fiction writers of Bengal practised iconoclasm and, unlike their distant predecessors, equated modernity with the cult of amnesia.

As we look back to the fifties and sixties of twentieth century, the over-reactive tendencies of the Bengali litterateurs seem to be the expressions of inconclusive conflict between exhaustion and replenishment. In the two decades since independence, the Bengali society was on the path of disintegration; abundance of rootlessness and faithlessness was evident everywhere. There was remarkable proliferation of surfaces in the wake of a new phase of commodity fetishism and continuously increasing process of cultural and political fragmentation. That is why, modernity of the pre-independence period required an immediate and smart face-lift. With the further decline of the universals and collapse of the continuum of life-world, hermeneutics and discourse dynamics—the new priests of modernity were frantically searching for another mode of euphoria. This very fact may be regarded as a concealed and discursive critique of modernity from within its fold. Another opinion has of late crystallized among the torch-bearers of transcendent
modernism (its Bengali nomenclature, Uttar Adhunikata, has however been usurped by the worshippers of postmodernism).

According to them, the above mentioned euphoria signifies the second wave of amnesia which has overpowered the Bengali litterateurs in the name of reinvigoration of modernity. The first wave could be traced in the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century which may be described as the overt archaic, signatures of the forthcoming globalization. Interestingly, in both the phases, the great poet, Rabindranath Tagore was misread, misinterpreted and ridiculed by the young iconoclasts.

This amnesia is intertwined with the gradual transformation of colonial attitudes into neo-colonial ideas and strategies. This process is not merely of academic interest because historicity of subsequent substantial changes in all spheres of life (not only in Bengal but in the entire Indian sub-continent) calls for closer scrutiny. In the seventies, described as the watershed in society, politics and and culture of the sub-continent in general and the Bengali life in particular, one can easily notice the emergence of proto-postmodern features on the one hand and a renewed navigation towards radical transcendence on the other. This decade is remarkable for uneasy coexistence of departure and convergence, protest and allegiance, legitimisation and invalidation as well as such other binary opposites. This is the period which unfolded several paradoxes inherent in the social history of the Bengali people. The confluence of decadent modernism, neo-modernism, proto-postmodernism and prelude to transcendent modernism signifies a complex intertwinneness of the neo-colonial and post-colonial forces pulling the litterateurs and thinkers in different directions.
The eighties and nineties signalled consolidation of the tenets of transcendent modernism and also preparation for an elaborate critique of colonial and neo-colonial modernism. But during the period, the efforts to be natural, to be Indian, to be near to the common man were strongly countered by the subscribers to the media-operated and market-guided virtual reality. Though the meaning and basic ingredients of post-modernity were only imperfectly understood, proclamation of adherence to that virtual reality induced by the totem of globalization was considered enough. Yet interestingly, this period also marked the beginning of subaltern, postcolonial and feminist critique of modernity both at the level of literary theorization and discourses.

IV

So long the Bengali litterateurs have been attuning themselves with the rhythm, melody or cacophony of global ideas. Now onwards they concentrated to integrate themselves with the wholesale ideational market of globalization. Obviously the collective amnesia came full circle by then and even the semblance of relevance to grassroot reality was totally disregarded. Their critique of modernity lacked historicity and consequently cohesion and substance. The denial of modernity was propagated only to proclaim the relative superiority of the new discourses since these are supposed to be loyal to the textual strategies of postmodernism. But it is interesting that the groups claiming adherence to the tenets of postmodernism in various parts of the Bengali habitat, use mutually exclusive nomenclatures. Not only that, they fight bitterly with each other through imperfectly conceived polemics in order to prove one’s supremacy and correctness. This has only added more
confusion to chaos already propounded by the decadent and neo-modernists. The eccentricities, eroticism, profanation, delirium and nihilistic tendencies gradually became more and more explicit and exhibitionistic.

In the context of pluralized perception, the contribution of transcendent (in Bengali, Uttar Adhunik) school is distinctive in many respects. Though in Bengali, the prefix ‘Uttar’ signifying beyondness, transcendence, craving for creative and intellectual perfection, has been used before the root-word ‘Adhunik’ i.e. modern—it does not connote mechanical improvement upon the earlier phase of modernism. Yet, persistence with the word ‘modern’ has sometimes caused some discomfiture for the ideologues of this distinctive school of thought. But they have tried to obviate it by launching relentless attack on the exponents of modernism and, more particularly, on the doyens of decadent and neo-modernism. Simultaneously, they have been keen to proclaim their basic differences with the global ideologues of postmodernism. Yet their efforts have been disjointed and hence, both in west Bengal and Bangladesh, the touchstone-term ‘Uttar Adhunik’, in the sense of global postmodernism, has gained currency thus uncritically including its torch-bearers and detractors alike.

It is true that some of the important postmodern tools of reading and interpretation viz., post-structuralism and deconstruction are being successfully explored by the new school of thought. As their critique of modernity emanates from post-colonial consciousness, some such discourses put emphasis on cultural politics in shaping and distorting literary truth. They posit themselves as interrogators of the legitimizing narrative of hegemonic discursive formations that have continuously subjugated alternative modes of
knowledge and experience. They are basically excavators of alternative interpretations of human culture and knowledge which have been lying hidden in the sedimented layers of history. Unlike the neo-modernists and postmodernists, they do not subscribe to the nihilistic ideas of irrevocable loss and despair.

On the contrary, they protest and fight against the hegemony induced discourses about the breakdown of meaning and identity that characterizes social schizophrenia. It is thus natural that the exponents of humanist transcendence would reject, what they call politics of vocabulary and also try to unveil the hegemonic strategies inherent in the politics of choice, change, closure, exclusiveness, standardization and knowledge. There is also an interesting trend among this school of thought (though not shared by all) to shun even the possibility of reclaiming some modernist paradigm. It is argued that colonialism has been nothing but poison for the Indian subcontinent. Instead, all efforts should be guided towards formulating and articulating concerted battle against dehumanization. Simultaneously the fight should also be for reinforcement of the living essence of the non-official discourses. Here comes one of the most important features of the critique of modernity as proposed by the transcendent school of thought. The hitherto inarticulate voices of the marginalised, the subaltern, the gendered sections of the people are given prominence over the perpetuation of textual politics of the power-elites.

V

Among all the genres of Bengali literature, poetry responded most positively to this aspiration for the transcendence and rejection of decadent colonial modernism.
In fact, there is a particular section among the above-mentioned critiques which zealously advocates tracing of an archaic stage of transcendence in the works of Rabindranath Tagore, Jibanananda Das (1899-1954) and Bishnu Dey (1909-1982) through the process of deconstructive rereading. Even, in the heyday of decadent modernism, there have been the exceptions like Shankha Ghosh (1932-) Alok Ranjan Das Gupta (1933-), Shamsur Rahman (1930-2006) and Al Mahmood (1931-) who did not subscribe to the contemporary nihilistic fervour and instead looked for a hidden human face of modernity. There was ambivalence and disorientation in them but these poets signalled that even during the pompous exuberance of modernism, there was some space for rethinking and questioning from within. Above poets are unique priests of time who know that contemporary poetry can be truly modern only if it is oriented towards materialisation of a moral symbol lying very deep into the labyrinths of collective existence. But as for participating in the dramatics of the changing Bengali society through their poetic art, there is much dissimilarity among them.

Hence, in the ultimate analysis, they have not been able to make any significant contribution to the critique of modernity whose foundations were laid by their illustrious predecessors. In the last two decades of twentieth century, the negative spell of impasse was broken by the school of transcendent poetry. Hereafter the generic name of modernism would be used sparingly with regards to the exponents of this school. They learned many a lessons from the above-mentioned mediators of time who initiated enquiry about the efficacy of modernist worldview but were hesitant to extend their discourses beyond certain limit. Then there
were the cultural anarchists termed as 'Hungry generation' for whom Allen Ginsberg was the shaman of high modernism. Though their impact on the future course of literature was marginal, the more-than-life image of the non-conformists built by the media was to be countered effectively. The avantgardism cast its spell everywhere as a result of which the younger generation of poets and writers became indifferent to their immediate reality and situatedness. Large scale imitation of shallowness and mannerism with monotonous accuracy was uncritically accepted to be the modernist creed. It meant ever-increasing alienation from external reality and as such society became inconsequential. Avantgardism became synonymous with the banal and vulgar and the new phenomenon of esotericism choked the lively links between literature, society and time. This intellectual minority-ism was very professionally marketed by the literary institutions of Bengal. Any hope of redemption seemed to be very bleak indeed at the end of the turbulent seventies. In such a situation, crystallization of any critique of modernity and modernism appeared to be impossible. More because the nexus of decadent and neo-modernism had by then assumed the status of sacrosanct official discourse. Yet the new dynamics of non-official discourse signifying protest, resistance and craving for an alternative model of worldview and aesthetics was slowly and gradually gaining momentum. This process itself bespoke of a radical critique of the hegemonic modernism. First of all, banishment of philosophy was to be revoked and without compromising the essential principles of creativity, it was also to be adequately reinstated. Secondly, strong theoretical support to the alternative literary mode was to be commissioned so that its practitioners no longer waste
themselves in blind cycles and barrenness. Thirdly elitist aestheticism was to be done away with.

All these essentially signify arrival of a comprehensive and confident critique of degenerative modernism. It was made possible by the collective contribution of a handful of poets-cum-critics among whom Amitabha Guptaa (1947-) is prominent. Anjan Sen (1951-) is another major contributor to the formulation of sharp critique of modernity as well as the radical alternative transcendent mode. In Bangladesh, the poets-cum-critics like Khondakar Ashraf Hossain, Ejaj Eusufi, Zillur Rahaman and others have also important contribution in crystallizing critiques of the seemingly unputdownable modernism. Besides there are critics like Uday Narayan Singha, Birendra Chakraborty, Prabal Das Gupta and others who exploded the myth of modernism and offered methodical analysis of the advent of new transcendent consciousness in Bengali poetry.

It may be pertinent to note here that interrogation of the processes of modernism started rather late. But nevertheless it could not be ignored any longer when the eighties were drawing to its last hours. Obviously the impact of consumerism is more pronounced in the prose genres. Yet the fiction-writers of new generation could no longer remain indifferent to the critique of colonial modernity. In fact, as zealous subscribers to the notion of alternative textualities inspired by the sub-altern postcolonial and feminist consciousness, these writers could not but accept the protestant features of the emerging transcendent aesthetics.

These fiction-writers questioned the status-quo cleverly advocated by the modernist predecessors and reinstated the process of interrogation of the official hegemonic discourses. They also successfully explored the Latin American model
of novelisation on the one hand and sought to rediscover the carnivalesque elements of the dynamics of non-official discourse. Through their endeavours of exploring polyphony in the society, these new writers actually registered their affinity with the arbiters of transcendent consciousness in contemporary Bengali poetry. They were led from the front by two illustrious authors of earlier generation, viz. Mahashveta Devi (1926-) and Debesh Roy (1936-). The modernist model of fiction was challenged and replaced by both of them in two different ways. They are also noteworthy for the search of Indianness both in content and form. The apparently unchallenged sway of the consumer-oriented modernist fiction is being very effectively countered by the younger authors like Sadhan Chattopadhyay, Abhijit Sen, Bhagirath Mishra, Amar Mitra, Swapnamay Chakraborty, Nalini Bera, Jhadheshwar Chattopadhyay, Kinnar Roy, Tapan Bandyopadhyay, Afsar Ahmed, Shahyad Ferdaus, Nabarun Bhattacharjee, Murshed A.M. etc.

VI

A critique is meaningful when it is discernible both in theory and practice. The turbulence of the seventies triggered off multidimensional changes not only in Bengali poetry and fiction, but also in varying genres of South Indian languages (viz. Tamil, Telegu, Kannada and Malayalam) and two other Eastern Indian languages (viz, Oriya and Assamese). As good translations in English (and also in other modern Indian Languages) are even now not sufficient, relevant and timely informations are not available. However, thanks to some recent publications of comparative studies and seminar papers, one can confidently say that the awesome monolithic structure of the hegemonic modernism is being
deconstructed in several vernacular literatures of India. The rallying point is the brave new post colonial dalit (literally, marginalised/sub-altern) consciousness and transcendent sociological aesthetics. These two are, however, interdependent and interactive. An urge for reinterpretation and readjustment of various values was felt by the litterateurs of several Indian vernaculars though the necessity for new morphology of feeling was understood by very few and correctly articulated by even less.

That is where the advocacy of transcendence of going beyond the high-profile frontiers of modernism by the Bengali poets-cum-critics in the mid-eighties becomes important. After dusts have settled over the traumatic experiences of the seventies, the younger poets took time to understand that now onwards they have to apply their discretion and have to identify the material causes of their isolation from the socio-cultural milieu. Moreover, they have to determine an altogether new position for them in the whirlwind of time. And last but not the least, they have to chisel out a new and distinctive poetic diction indicative of mutual illumination and transcendence. In spite of the mutual exclusiveness in the matters of poetic and social faith, the undermentioned Bengali poets, share to a great extent, the basic urge to bring about a reversal of hitherto prevalent modernist assumptions: Anjan Sen, Anirban Lahidhi, Anuradha Mahapatra, Amitabha Deb Choudhury, Amitabha Gupta, Bijoy Kumar Battacharjee, Bishnu Biswas, Ekram Ali, Goutam Basu, Jahan Sen Mazumdar, Khondakar Ashraf Hossain, Masud Khan, Mohammad Rafique, Nirmal Haldar, Nishith Bhadh, Parthapratim Kanjilal, Rama Ghosh, Samyukta Bandyopadhyay, Shankar Jyoti Deb, Sutapa Sengupta, Tapan Roy, Zilalur Rahaman etc.
They undoubtedly shared the critique of modernity till the early nineties. But, as the guiles of globalization were gradually becoming sharper and imposing, some of them succumbed to the lures of institutionalised official discourses. The continuum of the critique was left to the charge of those whose commitment was not to the idiosyncrasies of subjective self, but to the concept of transcendent life–world and the concomitant ideology of the protestant aesthetics. Along with the above mentioned poet, some other well-established poets have also been wielding their pens, viz., Joy Goswami, Mridul Dasgupta, Mallika Sengupta, Ranajit Das and Subodh Sarkar. But they basically subscribed either to the counter-aesthetics of avant-gardism or neomodernism inevitable sinking into the misty wilderness of post modernism. That even these poets have their own critique of modernity, is evident from their interviews and occasional prose writings. However, barring very few exceptions, they represent only deviations from the excessively centered official discourse of the power-elites and hence their critique of modernity is apparent, not real. We are, therefore, concerned with the critique proposed by the arbiters of transcendent aesthetics. It makes us doubly aware about restoration of faith and hermeneutics in both literature and life. We understand that it is the worldview that really matters in creative writing and hence, a writer can be truly innovative only when he successfully makes himself free from old and worn-out oppressive habits of expression, form, attitude and thought. A new writer has to be aware of the fresh evocative possibilities hidden in language; he has to recognise creative art as vehicles of the new method of discovery of life. A truly contemporary writer is one who can correctly interpret the intricacies of time, refuses to
surrender to the lures of consumerism, always renews the process of discovery of language within language and completely masters the technique of recreating reality. This is vitally important for constructing a new world-order of life-affirming values. It is also imperative that the writers nourished in and by time, should be uncompromising in their total fight against the menace of recurring traits of decadence and neo-colonial suppression masquerading as modernism for a long time and now handing over its baton to postmodernism.

VII

Unless the critique of modernism (and lately also of Euro-American postmodernism), envisaged by the harbingers of transcendence, is understood in the context of their exploration of Indianness in general and interpretation of typical Bengali legacy in particular, its uniqueness can never be appreciated. This school of thought emphatically refuses to accept the modernist logic of monologue and nihilism. The critique, likewise, offers resistance to such negation of social existence. It is argued that the negation has been advertised ne plus ultra-almost to the point of deification so that it has turned out to be an 'intoxicating collective pseudo-truth'. In spite of the continuing socio-political turmoil of the Indian sub-continent and very complex coexistence of fundamentalism, fanaticism, subservience to finance capitalism, ethno-regional terrorism—literature was rapidly assuming the role of a mask. The power-elites enjoying sway in Bengali literature were able to absorb all tremors and went on to dictate terms. Here the transcendent critique sought to intervene in the subvertive process to restore fundamental democratic ideals in all spheres of life.
The protestant school of thought proposes a decisive break and seeks to obvert the process of running away from time, social responsibility and cultural history. What animates them is the sense of a void to be filled, 'a continuum to be restored and a form to be uniquely articulated'. While placing themselves in a temporal context, mostly the younger poets and the fiction-writers to a lesser extent, try to be perfectly contemporaneous and seek to chisel out a scale of values that presupposes a link between the past and the future. The readers are invited to decipher the manifestation of the writers' courageously renovating worldview which no longer puts any premium on subjective illusion and fragmentation of objective world. Undoubtedly they have still to negotiate with the old hangovers; but nevertheless the wheel of colonial modernism has come full circle in Bengali poetry and fiction. Hence the emergent phase of transcendence is claiming recognition and local habitation and name are now due for it. It is due more because of the constantly renewed pressure from the hegemonic official discourses. The institutionalized literary fashion-makers stuck to the global mask with unflinching devotion. The global theoretical explosion is being very conveniently misconstrued by them in the smartest possible consumerist logic.

Yet, nevertheless, as the critique of the transcendent school clearly shows, the dialogics continues. The notion of hyper-reality celebrated by the decadents and neomoderns has graduated into the labyrinthine virtual reality and terrorism of de-signification in the recent postmodern phase. These have been theoretically countered by the exponents of transcendent sociological aesthetics. Though their generic nomenclature has been usurped somewhat successfully by its detractors, the critique unambiguously proves that it has
to be differentiated from the hegemonic practices of global postmodernism. According to it, ethnicity and historicity can never be obliterated from any millennium old literature and culture. Some contemporary Bengali thinkers have been formulating their counter-hegemonic discourses to stem the tide and thus the critique continues. They emphasise on the protestant mode of exploration of localized existential and cultural spaces. It is difficult to ignore the significant process of de-constructive dialogics present in that critique even though it is being systematically negated by the obstinate shamans of institutionalized consumerism in contemporary Bengali literature.

As it has been already stated, the critique of modernity of the transcendent school also posits an alternative worldview, aesthetics and hermeneutics. The distinctive keyword of the school (transcendence or beyondness: Uttar Adhunikata in Bengali) has been chiseled out of the firmament of sculpture. According to it, our past does not simply wither away as a matter of fact. On the contrary, human dimensions are structured with the affirmative presence of the past in a continuing time frame. In fact, a new poetics for time-space continuum seems to have been fashioned mostly by the innovative poets having affinity with the school. The contribution of the fiction writers is not much though interestingly the new generation of playwrights has exhibited their enthusiastic exploration and imaginative reconstruction of several aspects of both the Great and little tradition. However, there is noticable difference even among the sharers of seemingly identical moods and attitudes. We are also aware of the lack of an all-embracing faith or vision that might have brought a degree of unison into their creative craft. Yet all of them essentially subscribe to the critique of
modernity, propagated by the transcendent school and as such make appropriate generic readjustment in theme, form and language.

These poets, fiction writers and playwrights are neither the mysterious soothsayers nor the enchanted/dejected lovers; they are also neither unreasonable iconoclasts nor spurned outsiders crying in wilderness. They cannot afford to relinquish the fight in which they suddenly find themselves engrossed since struggle with amnesia has developed their sensibility and constituted their daily mundane existence. Therefore, notwithstanding important stylistic differences among themselves, the creative personalities subscribing to the transcendent critique of modernity tend to develop appropriate philosophy of life, time and creativity. In their works, present-ness of the past is interpreted, explored and established through a prism of multi-foliated cultural legacy which also ensures creative rapport in the future. Thus the critique is validated simultaneously through intellectual and creative exercises. These exercises are impossible without total commitment to the philosophical consciousness of transcendence.

VIII

The critique makes it perfectly clear that a creative personality possesses transcendent vision which enables him to blend subtlety of imagination with a keen awareness of expansive perspective on the one hand and to build a new edifice of multidimensional schemata and frame of dialogical time on the other. The critique is uncompromising in the renunciation of modernist pseudo-subjectivity. It is equally reactive towards disorderliness, tentative contingency, collapse of meaning in contemporary life, ironic
juxtapositions, farce and anarchy of corrupting society. The hitherto perpetuating circulatory formalism has been increasingly done away with. The penchant for pseudo-truth, self negation and degeneration is no longer considered to be the prerogative of genius.

The critique also dismisses the modernist notion about the irrelevance of poetic philosophy and cultural legacy. It seeks to reinstate commitment to philosophy and also towards correct and sensible diagnosis of the social maladies. Interestingly it is claimed, 'modernism is now synonymous with conservatism' (Amitabha Gupta). As alternative to the modernist maladies and excess sharpened by the cunning manoeuvres of the hegemonic neocolonial forces, the redeeming philosophy of the transcendent weltanschauung has been posited.

Tendency of syncretism has been increasingly evident in the critique of the Uttar Adhunik school. Anjan Sen, another major theorist of the critique, draws our attention to the everwidening unique dialectics inherent in the emerging discourses. Thus unsophisticated rusticity is woven with urban simplicity, oral materials are blended with habitual usages, contemporary myths with ancient archetypes and conscious ornateness with spontaneous verbal icons.

Another very important aspect of the critique, as proposed by Anjan (and also by Uday Narayan Singha, Khondakar Ashraf Hossain) is the co-existence of two seemingly contradictory tendencies, that is, intense fascination for the Great and Little tradition of the community on the one hand and genuine concern for universal human essences reflected by the international socio-cultural milieu on the other. The critique thus essentially aims at absorbing the impact of every ripple of the never
exhaustive stream of life. It goes beyond the periphery of modernism in its pursuit for truth as well as for a new foundation of life for language. Thus the critique transcends the temporal confusions and firmly establishes us in an infinite and penetrative human dimension.
6
BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

India is a vast conglomeration of numerous ethnic identities and that is why there are several stages as well as facets of interactivity among various races, languages and cultures. Multiculturalism is not only a concept here, but a creed that binds the seemingly nonnegotiable differences together. More particularly the North East Indian experience calls for close reading of the impact, or sometime its absence, of the creed of multiculturalism in the literary and cultural expressions of the region. The region known as the northeast in India constitutes of seven states viz. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya. Except Tripura all the states were under the single administrative command of Assam in not too distant past. But due to political interference in ethnic conflicts leading to violent upsurges from time to time, greater Assam was truncated into several states. Any literary or cultural study has to take into account this unassailable reality of political history. Because the problematics inherent in complex
intertwining of self and community in incomplete dialogics as well as multidimensional isolation, rootlessness, uncertainty, constant depositioning and tentative existence in the midst of imposed migration can never be comprehended without exploring the conflicting nuances of history. The state of Assam may be regarded as jewel in the crown for this region, which is replete with the presence of two major Aryan communities i.e., Assemsese and Bengalee, having rich treasures of literature and culture. Besides there is substantial population of various Tibeto-Burman linguistic groups with distinctive cultural identities of their own. There are blue hills and green valleys providing dwellings for various plain tribes, hill tribes and other communities. There is abundance of tea gardens and natural forests which, for several centuries, accomodated the Hindi speaking Aryan migrants as well as Santal tribes who brought with them distinctive material and cultural habits. This region has also witnessed massive Aryanisation which wiped of several ingredients of the Austric and Tibeto-Burman worldviews to a great extent. But nevertheless their remnants can even now be identified albeit in a changed format.

Literary expressions of this region have always been under the spell of pan-Indian perspective which sometimes assumes hegemonic character as the standardized official discourse. Yet the undeniable presence of non-official discourses crystallizing through varying dialogics of subnationalities and tribes have offered us new vistas of existence and composite model of simultaneity. But the dialectics of such multually exclusive discourses have seldom been appropriately understood. In fact, the ethnographers and sociologists have accepted the North Eastern perspective as their exclusive domain while the scholars of comparative
literature and exponents of literary theory have not quite attended to the great academic potentialities of this region. In the heyday of Area Studies, the northeast has attained considerable prominence and as a result it has made its way into the postgraduate curriculum of different academic departments in the school of social sciences in particular and in some cases in the schools of Humanities and Languages. Naturally the North East Indian Universities are also conducting Ph.D and M. phil researches in the above mentioned schools. Though such efforts gradually gained momentum in the last two decades of twentieth century, sustained theoretical and interpretative study of the heterogeneous literatures of the North-East and interactive in-depth study of their simultaneity has seldom been attempted before. Therefore it remains even now a promising arena for academic exercises.

However, one has to evolve a completely new approach to the study of interrelatedness in its varying manifestations viz., ethnicity and literature, location of culture and truth-content of the literary genres, hegemonic imposition and search for alterities by the marginalised, rationale for status quo and diasporic consciousness etc. All these aspects strongly suggest search for a completely new hermeneutics of literary and cultural activities. It is, therefore, logical that a new comprehensive position has to be assumed by us.

And, it is in this context, one has to reread the transnational experience of multiculturalism not only as a strategy but also as the guiding worldview. This experience is both lived practically and interpreted theoretically.

II

We are now global citizens without any choice. Hence
any experience may be examined in a very wide transnational perspective. We may therefore refer in particular to the citation of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act which was framed for the preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada. The section on multiculturalism policy of Canada is particularly relevant for us. This policy pledges to “(a) recognise and promote the understanding that the multiculturalism, racial and cultural diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all the members of Canadian society to preserve and enhance and share their cultural heritage (b) Recognise and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada’s future”. The clauses in the Act make it unambiguously clear that Canada is respectful to the dictates of its unique history. Hence it 'recognises the diversities of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada'. The lofty ideals expressed in these pledges find a unique parallel in the celebrated Indian attitude towards the guiding principle of searching and promoting unity in diversity. The aforesaid 'Multiculturalism Policy of Canada' fosters sensitivity and responsiveness to the multicultural reality of the country. In fact, this very reality has been manifested in the pledges to 'promote the understanding and creativity that arise from the interaction between individuals and communities of different origins'.
Thus it is evident that the scholars of different disciplines can participate meaningfully in the process of recontextualizing as well as questioning the efficacy of multiculturalism both as theory and practice. One might do well in focusing attention on the essence of Canadian as well as other national experiences of multiculturalism because the context and historicity of Indian experience defies any mechanical comparison. The changing and complicated situations in NorthEast India also refuse to be accommodated in any straitjacket. In a sense, tensions due to diversities and mutual exclusivity are apparently too uncomfortable for any sustained academic pursuit. Scholars trained through regular disciplines and methodologies are perpetually at the edge. Yet this particular historically conditioned situatedness of the North-East Indian people also calls for closer scrutiny of the problematics of multiculturalism. Interrogation of presence and absence, centrality and decenteredness, constuction of Indianness as power narrative or symbiosis of identity formation, acceptance of plurality or choosing to be the perpetual other etc. has proved beyond doubt that the proposition of reading in and through multiculturalism is not merely a fashionable concept. Rather it is embedded in the very depths of polyphonic communal existence.

Concomitantly comparative literature has also to refix both its priorities and methodologies for studying the polyvalent literary expressions of the North-East Indian people. The fixing of priorities and methodologies would depend on and be engendered by the historical context of the particular ethnic component. Obviously, the advantageous position of the Assamese and Bengali literary pursuits cannot be equated with that of other smaller ethnic groups viz., Bodo, Garo, Khasi, Naga, Mizo, Dimasa,
Manipuri, Kokborak and others. The location of the Hindi litterateurs of this region also makes an interesting study. In this unique perspective of North East India, correct choice and implementation of a multicultural canon is very important. Then comes the question of its integration with the aforesaid priorities and methodologies to be fixed by the scholars of comparative literature. It has to be obviously a composite and interrelated literary practice which would deduce both its inspiration and significant clues for rereading heterogeneous texts from the practice of multiculturalism in world literature.

III

Literatures of North East India even now suffer from isolation and inaccessibility because there are not too many publishers in the region. In Guwahati, of course, there are a few publication houses for books in Assamese but they are far behind in the national standard. In Agartala, the capital city of Tripura, the number of publishers is even less. But they are doing their best in publishing books in Bengali and Kokborak, the tribal language of Tripura. Likewise, a few publishers in Imphal print books in Manipuri. In comparison to Assamese, Bengali and Manipuri, the publication of books in Bodo, Mizo, Khasi, Garo etc is very less. Though Sahitya Academi, the National Organisation of Letters, occasionally publishes translations into English and other regional languages these are indeed very few and far between.

Even after sixty five years of independence, the isolation of the North East from the so called mainstream of national life remains a common refrain. Likewise there is little more than no enthusiasm for North Eastern literatures elsewhere in India. In fact, North East features only as a boundless
hunting ground for the trigger-happy extremists. Under such circumstances, the demand for a multicultural canon might only yield painfully slow results. Yet one has to initiate the task of relocating the cluster of marginalised other for which reading in and through multiculturalism seems to be the best strategy. However, there is no less intricacies in the particular domain of say, Bengali literature. Decidedly it has the richest treasury of literary tradition and the litterateurs belonging to this linguistic community mostly in Tripura and Assam share the same legacy. But due to the design of history, the Bengali people had to migrate from their ancestral homeland in East Bengal (now known as Bangladesh) and settled predominantly in Tripura and Assam and scantily in other states. The theoretical questions of diasporic consciousness, migrants’ worldview, forced amnesia and asymmetrical discourses of loss and compensation, dichotomy between reality and ideality etc are interwoven in their literary expressions. Some tend to call these as Third World Texts of Greater Bengali literature. The modes of addressivity are distinctive as on the one hand these litterateurs have to shirk off all suggestions of subservience to the ‘first world literature’ and on the other hand, participate in the multicultural dialogics with other literatures of the region.

The task is difficult because the boiling cauldron of politics in the region often upsets harmony and simultaneity. Regional hegemonism has ugly manifestation in mob fury, communal feuds, mistrust, suspicion and impatience. That is why the most important task of translating multiculturalism into reality through mutual illumination of the different literatures of the region has even now remained an unfulfilled dream. It is, therefore, imperative
for us to approach the problem of theorizing and implementing multiculturalism as a creed of the people of the northeast in phased manner. Relevant data are scattered in many places but these are nevertheless available. To a small extent, English translation of some texts of minority languages has also been published. What we require now is to forge a process of collecting authentic information about the oral heritage of these North Easten people as well as the specimen of unpublished texts within or outside the standardized generic boundaries. This process be immediately followed up by assessment of the responses of the people towards multiculturalism both ontologically and epistemologically. We may also try to ascertain whether any aporias in proper understanding of the creed of multiculturalism by some of the ethnic groups of the North East has induced tendency of discursive formations as well as generic readjustments. Likewise, it may be examined whether sub-nationalism is a negative trope for such concepts as 'belonging', 'commitment', 'positioning', 'bordering' as well as literary and cultural 'symbiosis'.

IV

Multiculturalism evokes different connotations in different societies for which historical specificity has a major role to play. Precisely for this reason the nuances of this term vary in different countries. The resonances of the word 'Culture' are fashioned and interpreted differently. That is why the diasporic experiences of the settlers in Great Britain, the USA, South Africa and Canada differ from each other substantially. Undoubtedly strong emotional and nostalgic associations of the immigrants with the lost or unrecoverable homeland shape the worldviews differently. The dichotomies
between the apparent and imaginary homeland may also be too prominent for some ethnic groups while it may be completely irrelevant for others. Naturally the conceptions of identity and belonging would also differ significantly. That is why Indian situation in general is also not compatible with that of its North East region.

Reading in and through multiculturalism gets a shot in the arm when one thoroughly understands the relevant academic and creative scenario in such countries where heterogenous ethnic groups co-exist. One has to closely follow various creative manifestations in their immigrant literatures and inherent pluralism of diasporic consciousness. The faith in simultaneity of communal existence acts like a mirror for any interrogative project in the arena of comparative literature including ours. Transnational experience proves a point or two with regards to a new cultural politics of difference. One may deduce certain interesting conclusions about the process of preserving modes of critique within the ubiquitous commodification of culture in the global village. Besides there is the important question of retaining distinctiveness of a smaller identity by refusing to bow down to the monolithic and homogeneous in the pretext of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity. One may have some clues from the multipolar experience of cohabitation regarding writing and reading in and through multiculturalism which highlights the importance of boldly rejecting the abstract, general and universal in the light of the concrete, specific and particular.

Let us now identify those cardinal issues which may be profitably interpreted in the light of the experiences derived from North East Indian literatures, their inherent cultural politics of difference as well as the constantly renewing
dialogics between simultaneity and decentredness. Transnational multiculturalism is expected to provide the insight as to how the interrogator can historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing ingredients of literary and cultural consciousness. Our sincere endeavour is also expected to open up new possibilities for the subaltern and postcolonial critics on the one hand and researchers in cultural semiotics and new historicism on the other.
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