

Nabarun Bhattacharya: An Introduction

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Nabarun's Work: A Brief Critical Layout

Nabarun Bhattacharya was born in Calcutta in 1948 to Bijan Bhattacharya and Mahasweta Devi, both noted literary personalities. Devi left family for a career in activism and literary writing at a very early age when Nabarun was a kid. He grew up under the guidance and immediate artistic inspiration of Bijan Bhattacharya, whose 1943 Bengal Famine based play *Nabanna* (New Harvest) had already made a huge impact in the Indian theatre world, and his uncle Ritwik Ghatak, the noted auteur, whose films captured the despairing social conditions of poverty, joblessness, and political bankruptcy in a recently liberated nation. Nabarun's literary writings were highly alert to the immediate social and political concerns and marked by an ideological faith in Marxism. This faith was never without a critique though.

Nabarun's first published story "Bhasan" (Immersion) came out in 1968 in the literary magazine, *Parichay*. It was a story about a madman killed in a park by Naxalite bombings who now spoke or thought through his dead-body. 1968 was a significant year worldwide – anger and solidarity against corrupt and inefficient governments, against imperialist war in Vietnam spread across the student and workers' communities in France, England and Europe through to North and South America. In West Bengal, the political situation was also very turbulent. The state had encountered a horrible famine in the forties and famine-like conditions and food movements ravaged the social conditions of the fifties and sixties. These factors, associated with others such as the tyranny of the *jotedars* (contractors), culminated in the tribal-peasant insurgency in the Naxalbari area in 1967-8 which came to be known as the Naxalite Movement. The later transition of the insurgency into a Maoist-socialist political programme drew attention from the urban youth, which was followed by a heavy State repression. Nabarun's literary writings began in that global political atmosphere of turbulence and came back again and again to the topics of state repression and resistance. But the focus, as "Bhashan" suggested, was not on a passionate political leader but on a madman. Curiously for us, why is it so?

One answer could be that in Nabarun's writing there is never a blind adherence to an ideology and hero-worship, but rather a close reading of the hierarchical structures of class and society – of the lower and subaltern classes that are routinely crushed by the joint forces of multinational capitalism and political bankruptcy in the name of Communism. Despite a lifelong faith in Marxism, in solidarity movements, in proletarian resistance, and especially in the October Revolution, Nabarun's writing is replete with references to and parody, sometimes virulent criticism, of the repressive regimes in Stalinist Russia, in Communist China, the contemporary Communist Party-led West Bengal, and that of the increasing Americanization of the world. His political world is underlined by anger, critique, dissent, deep faith in the return of Communism proper, and also of disillusionment – of the despair about repeated reactionary turns in revolutionary politics and parties. In such a world, the hero is not the political leader but the margins of society, the urban poor in this context, who live and continue to live within and against all these and just do not die. Nabarun's interest lies in capturing their moments of love, friendship, conversation, alcoholism, cursing, little moments of joy, anger, and criticism – aspects that constitute their everyday life. Story after story, this world and the political dimensions would seize the focus – an old stream-roller driver's sudden smashing of the glittery glass-buildings (“Stream-roller” 1970), to a man who was killed by a gunshot that only a scarecrow knew of (“Kaktarua”; Scarecrow 1979), to Kalmon and Moglai, two budding thieves and their failed initiation (“Kalmon and Moglai” 1985), to a prostitute, Foyara, who has a strange disease (“Foyara'r Jonyo Duschinta”; Anxiety for Foyara 1986), to a clerk whose son was severely wounded in football and who believed that an auspicious thread of nylon could bail him through (“Ek Tukro Nylone Dori” A Thread of A Nylon Rope 1988) to four blind and deaf corpse-bearers who were carrying a mysterious corpse through the heart of the city (“4+1” 1995), to a man who feared that he might die any day (“Amar Kono Bhoi Nei Toh” I don't Need to Fear, Do I? 2004 and translated in this supplement), to another prostitute, Baby K, who drank petrol and, forced by some American soldiers into putting a burning cigarette into her mouth, exploded with them (“American Petromax” 2012).

Like the marginal and barely visible characters of the postcolonial third world urban life, explosion too is a recurrent theme in Nabarun. In 1993, Nabarun published his first short-length novel, *Herbert* (translated as *Harbart* by Arunava Sinha in 2011) about the life and times of Herbert Sarkar. Growing up as an orphan in a once-rich “babu” family in South Calcutta and abused and humiliated by his cousin and the neighbouring children, Herbert

isolates himself from family and neighbourhood and begins to invest all his interest in the bookish world of afterlife and other-worldly communication. After the death of his beloved nephew, Binu in the Naxalite violence, Herbert declares his super-human powers of “conversation with the dead.” Though accepted soon by the society, it is finally exposed by the members of the Rationalist Association of West Bengal. In response, Herbert commits suicide, leaving a cryptic note. As his dead-body is sent to the electric *chulli*, it detonates smashing the modern crematorium into pieces. Nabarun attempts to empower the body of a long-humiliated and ignored being by giving him access to the non-bodily world, of necromancy and séance. The intention is probably to inform us of the contradictory practices of life in a third world city where hyper-rationalized, consumerist capitalism sits parallel with belief in the supernatural and the necromantic. If India opened its markets legally to globalized capital in 1992 (a year before Herbert's publication) with a logic of the neoliberal “rational” subject’s choice and practices, the same year saw the demolition of the 1527-built Babri Mosque which rolled into a series of bloody communal violence. There are multiple practices, beliefs and selves: the rational-legal happens to be the dominant, paradigmatic form of choice. That does not rule out the existence of the subordinated or the less-chosen ones. Explosion is probably an indication, a warning of that. The other part of this introduction will focus more broadly on the various aspects associated with the idea and practice of explosion – especially its relation with the spectral or the non-real. The novel won multiple awards, including the highest literary recognition in India, “Sahitya Akademi Award” in 1997 and was made into a feature film by Suman Mukhopadhyay in 2005 which also secured a National Award.

Explosion turns into the spirit of “damage” in another memorable creation of Nabarun’s: “Fyataru” published in the magazine *Proma* in 1995. The fyatarus are the flying humans of the lower or subaltern classes whose function is to damage the property and entertainment-resources of the upper class and make their private spaces filthy. They create fear within the police and the bourgeois by their sudden act of flying. Nabarun continued with these characters in many of his later stories including his noted novel, *Kangal Malsat* (War-cry of the Beggars 2003). Along with fyatarus, Nabarun introduces in this novel his other set of fantastic protagonists, the choktars, the black magicians who live in filthy alleys and slums of Kolkata. They have flying saucers locked in their dingy rooms, can capture ghosts and are now planning an attack against the State – the ministers, the police, and the army. A scathing critique of political inefficiency, corruption in and capitalist aggression by the so-called

Communist state, the novel includes characters ranging from a huge and ancient Raven who can speak human language to an eighteenth century English woman, Begum Johnson, to a dead major general to various contemporary characters such as the curator of the Victoria Memorial. Their weapons include flying-saucers that behead the intended people but do not kill, a Portuguese-built cannon of the late seventeenth century that they call “penis-cannon,” a Mughal-era sword (both found while digging for petrol in Kolkata) and the filth around – the human shit, rotten flesh, cow-dung, sweepers' broom, gout-head soup, dog excreta, etc. Nabarun extends the overlapping borders of reality and non-reality further as people from different time-scales and geographies meet and wage a spectral war against the State, compelling the latter to declare truce. These features will also appear in the later novels in *Khelnanagar* (Toycity 2004) *Mausoleum* (2006), and *Lubdhak* (Sirius 2006) which engage with issues such as the increasing toxification of the soil, the culture of saint-making in the third-world society, and the brutal torture on dogs by the humans and the removal of them from public places for accommodating global forms of consumerism. The spirit of protest and dissent never left Nabarun as he continued to write stories like “Prithibir Sesh Communist” (World's Last Communist 2003; translated in this supplement), “Shanghai e Ek Sandhya” (An Evening in Shanghai 2003), etc. during the last years of his life; as the liberatory image of the post-Revolutionary Communist Russia and the loss of Communism in the breaking up of the Soviet Union continued to haunt him. But protest now followed with a senile stoicism.

Nabarun also wrote poems. His first collection of poetry made his name known to the literary circles. Published in 1973 and titled *E Mrityu Upatyaka Amar Desh Na* (This Valley of Death is Not My Country), the poems in this collection project the writer's anger against the inhuman violence by the state during the Naxalite movement, the anxiety and fear in the heart of the citizens, the invasion in Vietnam, the children of the third world and many such issues. The spirit of the collection is suggested in the first stanza of the first and titular poem:

The father who fears identifying his son's corpse

I hate him much

The brother who is still normal and shameless

I hate him much –

The teachers, scholars, poets and clerks

Who do not ask for revenge in public

I hate him much.

And later,

This valley of death is not my country

This executioner's roaring stage is not my country

This earth of bones and corpses is not my country

This bloody slaughterhouse is not my country (*E Mrityu* 11-12)

His later collections of poetry include “Mukhe Megher Rumal Badha” (Cloud’s Scarf on the Face 2006), “Raater Circus” (Night Circus 2009), “Purnadhar Bhat Kobita” (Poems by Purandhar Bhat 2012), etc. The last one is a collection of poems by Purandhar Bhat, one of the three *fyatarus* (the rest being Madan and DS) and a failed poet whose doggerels, terse and rhymed, range from criticism of the hypocrisy of middle class morality, to the political bankruptcy in the civil society, to the blunt and consumer-led print and electronic media, to literary establishment and others. Nabarun also wrote non-fictional works and edited the little magazine, *Bhashabandhan*.

Let us now move to some of the aspects of his writing in more detail and situate his work in the Bengali and global intellectual traditions.

Nabarun: Politics, Humour and the Literary in the Bengali Novel

Supriya Chaudhuri at the end of her essay, “The Bengali Novel” passingly mentions Nabarun Bhattacharya’s *Herbert* and *Kangal Malsat* to finish her discussion on the diversely satirical ways in which the Bengali novel has connected and reconnected with the social. In situating Nabarun’s novels within the return of a repressed comic mode in Bengali fiction, Chaudhuri identifies tropes such as “fantasy, surreal farce and linguistic and narrative experiment” in Nabarun’s work (122). She finishes her survey with a hint that Nabarun brings back the historically suppressed deflatory mode of comedy in the Bengali novel which had once been evident at its inception with works like Pyarichand Mitra’s *Alaler Gharer*

Dulal (1857). Chaudhuri also maintains that in spite of a return to comedy and black humour, the Bengali novel has “developed by constantly transforming the realist terms of its initial premises, challenging the representational and referentialist illusion, yet never losing faith in the genre’s commitment to ‘reality’.” (ibid) We could initiate a discussion from some of these terms, especially on the novel’s fidelity to the real in a writer like Nabarun.

In an interview, Nabarun says: “I don’t understand writing just as a way of offering entertainment. For me, writing has a deeper alchemy and there’s risk of explosion there.”¹ (*Sreshtha Golpo* 9) The architecture of explosion isn’t limited to the representational content of Nabarun’s works, as we see for example with Herbert’s post-mortal explosion in the crematorium. Unlike *Herbert*, where the explosion is literal (but not terroristic because it’s unintentional and no one gets hurt by it), in a story like “4+1” (translated in this supplement) the explosion could be seen as the metaphor for a radically interruptive event that tears through the existing structure of dominant ideology and emasculates the state apparatus. The state cannot communicate with the four blind, deaf and dumb *subalterns* and the mystery about the “+1” i.e. the corpse as well as the event that brought the five so-called miscreants into the public eye remains entirely enigmatic. The story in its form of reportage installs the event in its function of radical non-knowledge. “4+1” finishes with an articulation of unanswerable questions that “the authorities” will always be waiting to answer. The literary text here creates an *explosive rupture* in the Statist repository of *epistemic power* by holding on to the *irreducibility* of the eventual experience. The punching line from *Herbert* that has become Nabarun’s most quoted mantra, reads: “[...] when and how an explosion will happen and who will make it happen is still outside the state’s rubric of knowledge.” (78)² The narrator informs the readers about the bizarre Naxalite genealogy of this explosion in the dynamite sticks, Herbert’s nephew Binu had hidden inside his mattress which exploded after more than twenty long years of hibernation, when Herbert’s body was entered into the crematorium on his bed. However, the state and its repressive apparatus i.e. the police have no idea about this spooky explosion till the end and they keep speculating about the event in terms of terrorist conspiracy. For Nabarun their cluelessness becomes an object of jest. In his interviews, he talks about the carnivalesque aspects of these proletarian ruptures and literature becomes a way of mobilizing this carnival of reversal where laughter, in its Bakhtinian possibilities, has a subversive role (*Upanyas Samagra* 527).

In this sense, we could argue that for Nabarun, the literary is an interventionist act in relation to dominant discourse. The works themselves are meant to be deliverers of explosion. For Nabarun, the literary is a field of *practice*, just as theory is a field of *practice* for Althusser and Nabarun never fails to emphasize the interruptive efficacy of the literary work. Literature for Nabarun is an ideological vehicle to intervene into reality but he doesn't reduce literature to a didactic political function. Literature doesn't become political by imparting knowledge; instead it becomes political by questioning a "phallogocentric" (phallic as well as logocentric or reason-centric) construction of Statist knowledge by installing non-knowledge. As the narrator dwells on the sad dispersal of Herbert's belongings after his death, he hypothesises that one day one of Herbert's traces may speak of him to an other and perhaps re-turn and re-mark him in the process. The hypothetical futurity in the tenth and final chapter of *Herbert* insists on a political speculation of the contingent which could always supplement the state of affairs with a spectral event. We might also think of the radical futurism with which the story "Blind Cat" (translated in this supplement) ends. This radical figure of the future in Nabarun is imbued with his contingent fidelity to revolution as a figure of both possibility and impossibility.

Nabarun dares to imagine a future that places the impossible in a spectrum of possibilities. On occasions this future tilts towards a strategic utopianism, as in the finale of the story "World's Last Communist" (translated in this supplement) while in the novel *Lubdhak* which depicts the dogs, revolting against their eviction from the city of Kolkata, the city as well as the whole world risks obliteration, thereby making the dystopian angle apparent. In *Khelnagar*, Nabarun returns to his thematic as well as formal experiments with explosion as the novel is arranged in sections, titled after the *bodies* of the characters as well as the elements and ending on a disembodied being ("Asharir"). But more relevant to this discussion is the novel's similar slant towards dystopia as radical speculation which seizes the future in terms of destruction and non-knowledge.³ In this context, we could remember Fredric Jameson's Marxian readings of utopia and dystopia in relation to literature's function of critique. As Jameson indicates, the dystopian can be seen as an extension of the utopian. Jameson's distinction (following Tom Moylan's work on "critical dystopia") between "anti-utopia" which is fundamentally "anti-revolutionary" and "dystopia" which is "necessarily a critique of tendencies at work in capitalism today" is helpful in placing Nabarun on the utopian-dystopian continuum of the "Left-political." ("The Politics of Utopia" 41 and *Archaeologies of the Future* 198-199)

When Nabarun invents the spectral Fyatarus (two Fyataru stories are translated in this supplement) as flying subalterns, attacking the carousing bourgeoisie and the corrupt state apparatus with excremental objects, he isn't just evoking the romanticised Left revolution but also *laughing* his way into the melancholia of that revolutionary romanticism. In Nabarun, the social and the political are dialectically poised vis a vis one another. The point where the dominant social order crumbles under the pressure of Nabarun's troublemaking political activists is precisely the point which inaugurates the political in all its dissident libidinal discharge. The deflatory comic mode enables Nabarun to mark the ludicrous and impossible nature of this political transgression even as his personages launch into their transgressive acts. The scatological indecency permeating this absurd excremental revolt is a defining feature of the farcical. In Nabarun, it is the complex network of colonial history as well as the radical past of the Indian Naxalite decade (1970s) that stages a farce-like historical return in the form of a liminal performance. The fundamental political affect of anger colours the satirical energy of the comic as a figure of ridiculous indecency.

The ghost is this returning figure of the trouble-maker in Nabarun and he appropriates and politicises this figure from the comic tradition of Bengali ghost stories. We could consider Parashuram's 1930 short story "Mahesher Mahajatra" (The Great Final Journey of Mahesh) for example where the ghosts finally assume an irresolvable dimension of trouble-making.⁴ It is not for nothing that Herbert is a voracious reader of comic ghost stories like "Bhooter Jalsay Gopal Bhand" (Gopal Bhand in the Carnival of Ghosts). Another relevant text Nabarun cuts up into *Herbert* is "Circus e Bhooter Upodrob" (Spooky Trouble in the Circus)—an essay by Priyanath Basu, the founder of Kolkata's *Great Bengal Circus* in 1887. This would bring us back to the question of history and the Bengali literary tradition of the grotesque which was rampant in the 18th and 19th century Bengali satire. As we have noted above, Supriya Chaudhuri implicitly draws a connection between this grotesque tradition and Nabarun's novels. As the author himself had said, the point about beginning every chapter of *Herbert* with obscure lines from 19th century Bengali poetry was to "arrange the gaps in history" (*Upanyas Samagra* 509). These historical gaps which reactivate the cusp of colonial modernity in India also reinvigorate the grotesque in a politically subversive way as Nabarun returns to the colonial rise of the Bengali novel with its embattled relational dynamics of reason, instinct and faith. We could think of Herbert and Bhogi's (*Bhogi* is a mini-novel published in 2007) relentless interrogation of reason in their extra-rational practices like the séance or the occult and how Nabarun carefully locates their tragic practices in a native

Indian tradition of the occult. Herbert's inspiration to practice as a psychic reader comes from two books he finds in his attic roof: Mrinalkanti Ghosh's *Paraloker Katha* (The Other-world Story) and Kalibar Bedantobagish's *Paralok Rahasya* (The Mystery of Other-world). The novel uses passages from these two books as theoretical intertexts for the occult theme. Nabarun juxtaposes the Bengali Indian discourses on the occult with the Western ones and marks a hybridization of these discourses as the intellectual capital travels from England to India through the colonial encounter. In *Bhogi*, Nabarun counterpoints Bhogi's incredulous miracles with the urban modernity of the family that receives him in the city. These liminal figures acquire a contingent political subjectivity as they extend an inquiry outside the rational circles of Western thinking that had historically created the foundation of the Bengali novel.

If we briefly come back to Nabarun's radical politics and his radical aesthetics which inter-penetrate one another, we could consider his dismantling of the linear narrative form of the novel in *Kangal Malsat*, *Mausoleum* and *Lubdhak* where the author arrests narrative flow with philosophical as well as polemical discursivity. An example is the opening chapter of *Lubdhak* which combines the genres of journalistic reportage and scientific treatise with a highly sensory body of descriptive images. Another way Nabarun breaks the narrative continuity of prose is by importing doggerels into the body of the novel. He had started his literary career as a poet in the radical decade of the 1970s but from *Herbert* onwards, it was the novel which became his major literary form of expression. And we could argue that the poetic text returns like a political spectre to produce an explosion or two within his novelistic prose. In *Kangal Malsat*, apart from using doggerels, Nabarun also mobilises newspaper articles, lists and more visual forms like ads to break the linear flow of text on the page and produces a hybrid form of assemblage which attacks realistic representation from a political standpoint. The cinematic trope is also operative in this novel as well as *Bhogi* and *Herbert*. In dismantling novelistic form, Nabarun follows a line of dissent from Bengali experimental novelists of the 60s and 70s like Debesh Ray, Sandipan Chattopadhyay and Subimal Misra who politicize the discursivity of non-narrative in fiction by posing it against the rationalist core of the European novel. To consider Nabarun's unique contribution in this literary line of dissent, one would have to think through his evocation of a grotesque political laughter which the chiselled wit of a Sandipan or a Subimal mostly bypasses.

In their hyper-realist commune, the flying Fyatarus speak in relentless expletives and cuss words as their use of biological excrement parallels their verbal ejaculations. This offers us Nabarun's critique of the Bengali *Bhadralok's* (elite's) language and in this he could be seen in a historical continuum of literary anti-progressivism that was registered by the Hungriyalist literary movement in early 1960s India. Hungriyalists like Malay Roychowdhury were the first to protest the narrative of social progress by engaging with Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1922). They experimented with erotic indecency in both form and content of their work to question the elitism of Bengali literature at large but these experiments in the 60s were primarily restricted to poetry e.g. Malay's (in)famous poem "Stark Electric Jesus" which eventually landed him up in jail. Nabarun's contribution lies in introducing this critique into the novelistic discourse and radicalising its anarchist lineage by forcing the Bengali novel to return to its repressed roots of indecent humour via the grotesque. And as we have seen above, there's more than an overlap between the spectral and the grotesque at this point. The spectral Fayatrus' deliberately indecent language of libidinal discharge speaks to capitalism's suicidal production of "surplus jouissance" that Lacan splices with Marx's theorisation of "surplus value" in capitalism. Let's consider Lacan's fundamental point that capitalism not only produces "surplus value" but "surplus jouissance" (*jouissance* as a strange enjoyment that supplements pleasure with pain) as well. For Lacan, capitalism doesn't know what to do with this surplus production and this affective excess of a hybridised pain and pleasure thus becomes a tool of resistance for the subjected subject of capitalism.⁵ Nabarun's subaltern political subjects use this invested language of excessive *jouissance* to attack the system that gives them pain. They *enjoy* their gross language and excretal revolts in a complex knotting of pleasure and pain that marks the double bind of subjection and resistance.

The anger of a politically subversive laughter captures the edge of language in Nabarun's grotesque humour which goes back to the *adbhuta rasa* (an affect as well as an effect of the bizarre) of Indian aesthetics as he brings back the submerged grotesque tradition of the Bengali novel to question its literary politics of canonization. Here we return to where we had started in this section which is the place of Nabarun in the Bengali literary canon. Let's end with a major theme in Nabarun which is that of the animal as yet another face of liminal subjectivity. Nabarun is critical of the humanism that constructs a dichotomous hierarchy of the man over the animal. A novel like *Lubdhak* directly engages with the question of animal rights and we have dwelt at some length on the novel in the "Introduction"

to our “Speculation and Fiction Issue.” Let us limit ourselves here to a different implication of Nabarun’s appropriation of the animal voice in *Lubdhak* which returns to our thread of humour and laughter. Simon Critchley in his book *On Humour* draws this relation between the animal and humour: “Humour is human. But what makes us laugh is the inversion of the animal-human coupling [...]. If being human means humorous, then being humorous often seems to mean becoming an animal.” (34) As Critchley argues, within a prejudiced humanist view, what produces laughter is man *becoming* animal but as he also qualifies, this becoming can never be possible: “what becoming an animal confirms is the fact that humans are *incapable* of becoming animals.” (ibid emphasis in the original). Following Critchley’s argument, we can maintain that the human being’s *impossible* transformation into an animal produces grotesque humour. We find this animal humour in the name “bantpakhi” or “teat-bird” with which Herbert’s neighbours poke fun at his freakishness; but of course the obvious and yet important point is Herbert is not a teat-bird and can never become one.

In *Lubdhak* or the story “Blind Cat” the animal trope goes beyond humour, acquiring a more brooding cynical status. However, what Critchley says about the satirical energy of Kafka could also be considered in Nabarun’s case: “[In satire] we are asked to look at ourselves as if we were visitors from an alien environment [...]. The critical task of the writer is to write from the place of the animal, to look at human affairs with a dog’s or beetle’s eye, as in Kafka’s stories.” (35) Doesn’t Nabarun look at the human world from the position of the animal in *Lubdhak*? Does he fall into the anthropomorphic trap by doing so? If we consider the ironic humour, nascent in this admittedly impossible and untenable position of the inverted animal gaze, it creates a space where this inappropriable position of animal alterity can be strategically appropriated, without reducing the otherness of the animal other. The satirical involution in Nabarun allows him to speak from the unspeakable locus of the animal other without falling into the humanist trap of anthropomorphism as his ironic humour backhandedly communicates the impossibility of speaking from that locus. This plurivocal humour extending itself into the spectral, the political and the animal terrains, among others, is one way of thinking about Nabarun’s singularity as a dissident Bengali novelist.

To come to the articles in this supplement, Aritra Chakraborti in “Reading and Resistance in the Works of Nabarun Bhattacharya” shows how Nabarun, the critical reader of literature informs Nabarun, the writer and how the regimes of reading translate into a practice of resistance in his creative output. Other than interests in everyday practice and the archive

of cultural memory, Chakraborti also explores the function of Nabarun's characters as readers and some of these discussions return to the way we have attempted to situate him in this introduction. Adheesha Sarkar's article "The Impossible Demands" reads Nabarun's work in relation to the political theory of anarchism. She suggests that a critical engagement with the concept of "fyataru" – flight, dissent, damage – could illuminate real-life figures such as Julian Assange and Edward Snowden who rebel against the institutional oppression and regulation of contemporary life. Dibyakusum Roy's "The Vagabond's War Cry" engages with the aspect of the "other" in Nabarun. Reading the last phase of the author's career, Roy argues that the Other should not be read here in a linear assumption of the subaltern's coming to power. Dissent in Nabarun is a ploy of letting the margin speak critically rather than radically changing the social mapping of power. Priyanka Basu's piece "Texts of Power, Acts of Dissent" situates the aspect of performance in Nabarun's storytelling. Engaging with some of his noted stories and reading them with a theoretical framework in performance studies, Basu informs us that the aspects of violence, dissent, and theatricality could be read as "performability" in the author that is deeply political by nature. Samrat Sengupta, to whom we are greatly thankful for the translations of Nabarun's poems and the bibliography, offers a different perspective on the techniques of resistance in his article "Strategic Outsiderism of Fyatarus: Performances of Resistance by 'Multitudes' after 'Empires'." Sengupta engages with Nabarun's texts in relation to a critique of capitalism and its bio-political machinery and his piece opens up a potential dialogue with Roy's article as it explores Nabarun's "strategic outsiderism" as a political ethics of the Other. We would like to express our gratitude to our teacher and professor Supriya Chaudhuri who was kind enough to translate some of Nabarun's poems for the issue. Our heartfelt thanks to Adway Chowdhuri and Debadrita Bose for their translations and Arjun Bandyopadhyay for his sketch series which adds another dimension to the supplement. Finally, we are thankful to Dey's Publishers, Kolkata whose published collections of poems and short stories have been used here for translations. They have been duly acknowledged in the critical essays as well.

In a recent edition of *Bhashabandhan*, the Bengali little magazine Nabarun edited, he published a special issue on the Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov, containing translations of and critical essays on various aspects of his work, to widen the readership of this maverick writer and to pay a literary tribute to him. As students interested in literature and critique, Nabarun's presence was a source of great motivation for us. After his untimely demise last year, on July 31, 2014, it's the work which carries his spectral presence further into the

future. We think this is the right time to celebrate the textual afterlife of the author by engaging with his work. This supplement is our way of showing a literary-critical indebtedness to him and his work. Nabarun demands as well as deserves a wider readership both because of his sophisticated and highly crafted nature of art and also for his fierce critique of establishment politics, capitalist expansion, and class domination. It is true that he is a difficult writer to read and write upon. His work shows a certain kind of resistance to translation as well as any simplistic and one-dimensional reading. Thus it was a very challenging task for us.

We are extremely grateful to our contributors who have taken up the challenge and allowed us all the opportunity to explore Nabarun from close critical quarters. There are many other aspects in Nabarun such as the gender question (the cult of masculinity and the relative lack of strong female characters), his editorial practice, his vision of cinema and theatre etc. which could not be covered here. These are windows to future criticism and there's work to be done there. We have only opened up some possible frameworks for a critical Nabarun studies which will hopefully have as radical a future as the future(s) imagined by Nabarun's texts. We need more translations and various kinds of critical engagements with the work. While the vernacular reception of Nabarun's work continues to develop on important lines of thought, it's vital to open him to the English speaking world of discourses, not only to deliver him to a multilingual Indian audience but also to generate a dialogue between his work and an international critical readership where his work, we feel, has a lot to speak to. Some of that work has started with *Herbert's* German translation this year. As translators and editors, we hope that this supplement, which is an issue by its own right, can help take these initiatives further and more such studies on Nabarun are conducted. Let these strategic framings of Nabarun in a complex network of discourses lead to increasingly dialectical supplementation. And let's hope that a more nuanced web of discourses weaves itself around the proper name Nabarun Bhattacharya as an anchor point of complex tectonic moves.

Notes:

¹ The Bengali original reads: "Ami lekhar byaparta jebhabe bujhi seta nichhok anondo deoa ba neoa noy. Aro gobhir ek alchemy jekhane bishforoner jhunki royechhe."

² We have deliberately used our own translation of this line. The Bengali original reads: “[...] kokhon kibhabe bishforon ghotbe ebong ta ke ghotabe se sombondhe jante rashtrajontrer ekhono baki achhe”

³ We could think of the final paragraph of the novel where the narrator of the last chapter informs us why no one will ever come to know about the toy-city and yet a trace or two will survive (*Upanyas Samagra* 228).

⁴ At the final point of the story, Mahesh, the sceptical rationalist who didn't believe in ghosts and afterlife, dies and comes to believe all of it as he's transformed into a ghost himself. The central image of “4+1” could be read as an ironic echo of the iconic scene in Parashuram's story where Mahesh's corpse starts to move in his final journey on the shoulders of four corpse bearers. More importantly perhaps, ghosts, in the final run, just do not allow anyone to use the money Mahesh had left at his school to fund an essay writing competition in which the student would have to argue, if not prove, that ghosts do not exist. The ghosts make Mahesh's life after death a veritable hell and when the school senate plans to spend the money elsewhere, the ghosts start pounding the roof and ensure that no one even takes the name of the Mahesh fund in future (225).

⁵ Throughout his annual seminar of 1969, Jacques Lacan discusses “surplus jouissance” as a weaving on Marx's “surplus value.” To look at a key initial moment, in the first session of December 10, 1969, Lacan adds a psychoanalytic note to Marx's discovery of surplus value: ‘excess work, [...] surplus work. “What does it pay in?” he [Marx] says. “It pays in *jouissance*, precisely and this has to go somewhere.” (20 emphasis in the original) For Lacan, the worker's surplus value is also a matter of surplus *enjoyment* and once capitalism produces it, *it has to go somewhere*. Following Lacan's thoughts across the different sessions of this seminar, it can be stated that this *jouissance* is appropriated by the capitalist subject as a way of hitting back at the system that submits him or her to this excess of combined pain and pleasure.

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