

# Return of the Alternative as the Popular: Nostalgia and the Music-making of *Moheener Ghoraguli*

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## We will Rock You<sup>1</sup>

Our concert is taking place in *Rabindrasadan*. Throughout the day, everyone worked on decorating the stage. The stage plan was non-mechanical, made entirely of bamboo and rope. The stage appeared to be a *machan* rather than a Concert. It was 1977, and Moheener Ghoraguli was just starting. Sarmistha and Sangeeta were hard at work cutting out seahorses. A group of lads tooted, announcing the streets: the enchanting song of Moheener Ghoraguli; come sharp at 7 p.m.; if you listen to these songs, your gout will be cured, the lawsuit will be won, the failure will turn into success, the business will run smoothly, and you will succeed in football; give a listen to you and make way for others; hurry, only a few tickets are left.

(Ghoshal 187)

This was the memoir of a night in 1970s Kolkata when a group of middle-class Bengali youngsters putting on jeans and wielding guitars and other instruments in hand performed live rock music in a regional (Bengali) language. Right from their distinct stage presence to the innovative announcement of the musical evening, the ensemble of performers hoped to communicate a sense that they would trailblaze existing mainstream song traditions. At that time, the mainstream was defined by the ideologies of twentieth-century Bengali *bhadralok* (gentlefolk/elite) culture, when rigid performing and listening codes of conduct were enforced to maintain the facade of grandeur and purity of the music. For the inveterate audience of these kinds of music, the band's unusual style of live performance was perceived as both strange and plausible. As a result, despite the release of three albums, *Sanbigno Pakhikul O Kolkata Bishayak* (1977), *Ajana Uronto Bostu Ba Aw-Uu-Baw* (1978), and *Drishyaman Moheener Ghoraguli* (1979), and a limited number of live performances around the city, the group, known as *Moheener Ghoraguli* (trans. the Horses of *Moheen*), had to disband due to a lack of audience acceptance and so-called commercial success. The music-making failed to leave an imprint in the music industry, but the recital of the band was often enumerated mostly by the young generation in the collective memory of the city from that time. The band aspired to establish regional rock music by incorporating the Western style of rock with the ethos of Bengali culture by infusing the direct lived experience of urban space and drawing inspiration from the age-old tradition of *Nagarsankirtan*, a folk tradition of processional singing in the streets. Interestingly enough, the band, which failed to grab audience attention earlier in the 70s, came back and released four albums, *Abar Bochor Kuri Pore*, *Jhora Somoyer Gaan*, *Maya*, and *Khyapar Gaan*, between the period 1995 to 1999. The album, *Abar Bochor Kuri Pore*, was launched in 1995 at the Calcutta Book Fair by the recording label Asha Audio. The 500 hundred available copies were all sold off the night of the release (Salim). The band's resurrection instantly set a spark that would quickly spread throughout the audience. The legacy was cemented with the subsequent albums. Then, the question arises: What has changed between the 1970s and 1990s that has allowed an experimental alternative rock band to break into the domain of the mainstream listening audience? The musical taste of the audience had evolved over time, which is a straightforward response. However, it does not present

all aspects of the politics of becoming “popular”. The phrase “popular music” is surrounded by a polysemy of meanings. In the book, *Dancing in Spite of Myself: Essays on Popular Culture*, cultural studies scholar Lawrence Grossberg provides some clarity to this ambiguous notion of the “popular” by warning against quantitative or aesthetic judgements, he says, “[the ‘popular’] cannot be defined by appealing to either an objective aesthetic standard (as if it were inherently different from art) or an objective social standard (as if it were inherently determined by who makes it or for whom it is made). Rather it has to be seen as a sphere in which people struggle over reality and their place in it, a sphere in which people are continuously working with and within already existing relations of power, to make sense of and improve their lives” (2). The history of band music in Bengal resonates with this “struggle” against the existing power relations of the mainstream song traditions. In the case of Kolkata, the beginning of the 1990s saw the rise of a new wave of band culture. Independent rock and folk bands were proliferating, experimenting with a variety of styles. Even though they had yet to enter the recording studio, they started to feel increasingly prominent through their live appearances at festivals and social events. In this context, the second coming of *Moheener Ghoraguli* is unique in that it was never obsolete from the scene. The band re-emerged as the repertoire from a revolutionary past, which is often idealised in popular literature and culture. Encompassing the lingering themes of love, urban isolation, the crisis of technology, and the spirit of revolution, their songs invoke nostalgia. Those songs become a medium through which the listener reconnects to the times of the roaring sixties, not lived but often remembered.

The paper sets a twofold objective by paying particular attention to these two phases of *Moheener Ghoraguli*. It primarily undertakes a contextual analysis of the band’s appearance in the late seventies in the cultural matrix of a revolutionary era in Bengal, focusing on its status as a pioneering regional rock music band. Thereafter, it analyses the second coming of the band and argues how thinking through nostalgia can offer a helpful framework for speculating on the undiminished popularisation of the band. Although nostalgia has been pilloried for its sentimentality, it is intentionally used in the popular music industry for both aesthetic and commercial objectives. For instance, in his article “Psychedelic Rock”, music scholar Nicholas Russo studies how the sensations of nostalgia without recourse to lived experience might be evoked in contemporary retro rock music by examining the phonographic staging of sound in the psychedelic rock music of the band Tame Impala (162-173). Russo evaluated Arjun Appadurai’s idea of “ersatz nostalgia”. Appadurai observes that a variety of merchandising and marketing tactics aim to instil a sense of nostalgia in customers by creating a sense of wanting items that consumers have never actually missed since they never had them in the first place. It often romanticised and commercialised the past by evacuating its political content and experiences of struggle or upheaval. He coined the term “ersatz nostalgia” to describe this “nostalgia without lived experience or communal historical memory”, which is sometimes referred to as “armchair nostalgia” and “imagined nostalgia” (77-8). Rock music’s current tendency to re-enact past events seems to be intended to sate “ersatz nostalgia”—a desire for a past that was never actually lived but is only represented by cultural artefacts and socially produced memory. In the popular music sphere, retro soundtracks anchor such experience-free nostalgia. This paper focuses on the politics of nostalgia in the resurrection of *Moheener Ghoraguli* while mapping in fragments the transition of the listening public, the influence of Western popular music, and the emerging regional band culture in Bengal.

### **Ain’t It Amazing All the People I Meet, Got a Revolution<sup>2</sup>**

Summing up the cultural ethos of the Sixties’ in his book *The Sixties*, Arthur Marwick hit directly at the roots of nostalgia, stating that “Mention of ‘the sixties’ rouses strong emotions even in those who were already old when the sixties began and those who were not even born when the sixties ended” (09). The Civil Rights Movement and anti-Vietnam War rallies exemplified the exhilaration of idealism, dissent, and revolt in the 1960s. The liberating ideas of the underground, counter-culture, and revolution were accepted, but the shambolism of authoritarianism, hierarchy, and

righteousness that impacted socio-cultural practice was doubted and questioned. The urge to live a better life had been revived. When young people all over the world embraced music as the universal language of a seditious, dissenting spirit, folk music's blending with other musical genres such as rock n' roll, blues, and jazz in the context of American counterculture not only played a critical role but also demonstrated how incorporating indigenous forms can avoid the charge of cultural appropriation. Popular music, as a discourse of dissent, rebuilt an existential space to foster a platform for musical expressions that questioned normative and dominant narratives. Protest songs like *The Times They Are A-Changin'* by Bob Dylan, *Fortunate Son* by Creedence Clearwater Revival, *What Have They Done to the Rain* by Joan Baez, and *Imagine* by John Lennon, as well as street protests, sloganeering, and boycotting, eventually took over the urban soundscape as a result of the cultural Left's defence in America, which emphasised creating music "for people". University campuses were turned into counterculture hotspots, not only hosting protest songs but also hosting writers such as Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, Jack Kerouac, and William Burroughs. The 1960s Counterculture Movement, which shook most of the Western world, had an impact on the Indian subcontinent, but in its own imaginative and expressive ways. The youthful generation in India could hardly envision actively participating in a Western movement that was about to renounce their parent culture. The nation-state in its infancy was already dealing with issues like poverty, inequality, corruption, unemployment, poor growth, and socio-political instability. Surprisingly, the quick rise of popular music (especially rock) as a voice of the youth on the global cultural scene did not go unnoticed. The impact of this global cultural flow recast the diverse Indian rock scene, which substantially helped to provide a soundtrack to Indian youth's under-reported harsh reality. However, it cannot be readily classified as cultural appropriation, cultural imperialism, hybridity, or ideological supremacy. As postcolonial theorist Sangeet Kumar points out the proliferation of Indian bands, both amateur and professional, grew around various linguistic, regional, political, and cultural specificities expressed through recordings, live performances, rock festivals, exclusive magazines and media, and coverage in Bollywood movies, highlighting the multiplicities and contestations within national identity engendered by globalisation. Besides, he claims that the musicians who established Western rock as an inspiring standard fell into the trap of carrying colonial ambition into postcolonial times (3107-8, 17). It's no surprise that these transcultural transactions were frequently criticised as bourgeois interests by Leftist and radical groups. However, the rock bands fused melodies like those of the Beatles to Jimi Hendrix's guitar strumming with the symbolic structure of Indian subjectivity. They had written lyrics in regional languages. The new listening public in globalising India responded to this universal appeal of music. These significant factors enabled the audience to rethink the value of Indian rock music, which was Western in style, but not in spirit, as in the case of *Moheen*. Siddharth Bhatia, a journalist on alternative music, identifies that Indian rock "became a metaphor for rebellion and angst among the new generation in those heady times" (7).

Bhatia's 2014 book, *India Psychedelic: The Story of a Rocking Generation*, focused on the blooming rock culture amid the conservative milieu. When Hindi film soundtracks, men with scruffy hair, and ladies in bell bottoms and maxis dominated popular cultural traditions, people were rarely aware of the alternative culture that was growing secretly in India's cosmopolitan cityspace. The popularity of band music had greatly increased with events like the Simla Beat Contest, which at that moment was one of the most influential annual band events. Cities like Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, and Kolkata contributed to the particular sound of an urban metropolis and converted it into a venue for the creation of localised, distinctive, and relevant alternative music. Bhatia's book gives an account of how the urban population, particularly a relatively small group of Anglo-Indians and Westernised communities, was passing along the tradition of listening to jazz or soulful Western music from the colonial era. The designated areas around the cities, such as the Churchgate area in Mumbai, Park Street in Kolkata, and Brigade Road in Bangalore, proudly displayed the opulent nightlife of hotels and clubs. Blues, rock 'n' roll, jazz, beat, and rock music from the 1960s were

enthusiastically staged at Kolkata's Mocambo, Trincas, Moulin Rouge, Blue Fox, and other hot spots, resulting in a cosmopolitan atmosphere. However, this enhancement of counterculture in these urban spaces was mostly limited to the elite society. Counterculture is a complex phenomenon and its reception varies with different cultural specificities. In this case, the rationale for consuming counterculture was limited only to the purpose of leisure and fashion. This disposition cannot be seen as an organic whole reflecting the counterculture's inherent spirit of resistance. Without a doubt, these elite Anglicised educated youth vehemently rejected many stereotypes of the traditional society with their inclusive temperament. A few high-end periodicals, such as *Rock Street Journal*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Junior Statesman*, covered the perception of Western music in India. The distribution of Western cultural outlets throughout the city was covered by and consumed through these periodicals. *Junior Statesman's* tagline was "a magazine that thinks about youth". These periodicals' distribution and consumption effectively shaped the identities of urban Anglophone Indian youth. It can be argued that Western popular culture inspired a subculture among the upper class. Here, to understand the vocation of these cultural practices, Kumar's argument of how colonial ambitions were channelised into postcolonial times sheds some light. The patrons of these subcultural activities were more interested in flouting the traditional ideals of the *Bhadralok* (gentlefolk/elite) culture of the twentieth century but the West was still viewed as the ideal substitution. *High*, a 1974 band that used to perform in Park Street, expresses a wish to travel to California, the apex of sixties counterculture. Their song *Place in the Sun* has the lyrics,

Though I know that I'll never to make it to California  
But I know I'm gonna find me a place, a place in the sun. (High)

If so, it begs the question of how to distinguish *Moheen* from these existing power structures and concepts brought about by the global cultural flow. The culmination of these several opposing factors leads to a new cultural politics that ushers in the rise of *Moheen* in the late 1970s. At that historical turning point, the songs of *Moheen* not only emerged as a cultural critique, but they also validated the expression of regional language and the angst of rock, which altered the musical course. Neither it took the countercultural influence on the level of leisure and consumption, nor it reiterated the clichéd romantic love subjectivities of mainstream Bengali music in those days. Overcoming the dilemma, the band stimulated a veritable urban subjectivity and countered the process of systemic underrepresentation of the city in the musical practice.

### There's More to the Picture Than Meets the Eye<sup>3</sup>

*Moheen's* consistent affirmation of the urban experience in music was more than musical experimentation. It was the human activity, behaviour, and experience of citizens that constituted the mood of their songs. They brought back the metaphorical presence of the city in the genre of lyric, which the mainstream undervalued. *Moheen* exerted a subversive vision that enhanced social and political consciousness and aided in understanding the urban spatial politics of postcolonial modernity. In the Indian nation-building process, the modernisation project had unequal effects and struggled to be operated as anticipated. The inequitable distribution of power divides the picture of contemporary cities, where social stratification is controlled over the urban population, relations, and experience. The historical dissociation of sensibility is characterised by a revolutionary attitude that sows nostalgia in later generations. Was it also essential to bring about this type of socio-political revolution in Bengal? It is the question that further motivates this essay. The music-making of *Moheen* provides some food for thought regarding its countercultural stance. In their 1970s album *Ajaana Udonto Bostu ba Aw-Oo-Baw*, *Moheen* directly addresses the city dwellers as *Sudhijon* or the gentlefolk and says:

Listen, gentlefolk, listen, dear,  
Not only today but with every nightfall  
Thinking about you and your afterlife

We keep awake in restless hours of darkness.  
O! City dwellers listen!<sup>4</sup>

The song's welcoming and congenial yet serious tone, which is directed at the urban audience, produces an unexpected empathic intimation. The singer in this song is not an isolated individual from the crowd. With a desire to be heard, the singer yearns to connect with the audience bringing in the essence of music also as a collective performance. Such an attempt to close the distance between the artist and the audience is unusual and strange in the context of the music of the period. Traditionally, there were strict rules of behaviour that were required to be followed when performing *Bhadra* music<sup>5</sup>, such as the artist sitting quietly and poised on stage while singing each song one at a time, and the audience appreciating the performance with softer applause. In contrast, *Moheen's* live performances followed the age-old tradition of *Nagarsankirtan* where the audience had the freedom to join in the chorus thereby creating a polyvocal performance. In Kolkata, since the colonial times, these kinds of vibrant traditional folk performances had to culturally jostle against two fierce political forces: Victorian morality of the *bhadralok* left by the colonial legacy of the city and the intense patriotic fervour from the anti-colonial struggles. According to Rangan Chakravarty in *Le Pocha*, a documentary on alternative Bengali music directed by Quashiq Mukherjee (*Le Pocha* 20:50), many individuals, mostly from the working class, moved to the city in the early 18th century, carrying with them their plebeian customs and music. They shared the same type of music since they hailed from similar cultural backgrounds. Being a centre for early urban sensibility in the 19th century, Kolkata, thus, produced its music, poetry, and theatre. However, the overt sensuality, dominance of ribaldry, and portrayal of both the "body" and the "bawdy" in these people's cultural expressions did not satisfy the standard established by the urban elites or *bhadralok*. Sumanta Banerjee writes, "In the 19th century Bengal however, the contempt for popular culture was a gift handed down to the Bengali educated classes by the English Christian missionaries, educationists and administrators, who imported into India along with other notions, the concept of 'obscenity'..." (*Bogey of the Bawdy* 1202). The recurring theme was to undermine "native culture's" underpinnings and remake it according to Victorian morality. Urban modernity has inspired new cultures over time via these negotiations and mediation. Hindustani Classical music patronised by the wealthy was also a mainstream representative musical genre. Evening performances of classical music were common. Apart from the songs of Rabindranath Tagore, called *Rabindrasangeet*, songs by Nazrul Islam, Atulprasad Sen, Rajanikanta Sen, and Dwijendralal Roy, known as *Nazrulgeeti*, *Atulprasadi*, *Rajanikanter gaan*, and *Dwijendrageeti* respectively, dominated the field of *Bhadra* music. The *Adhunik Bangla Gaan*, or modern Bengali songs, rose to popularity in the mid-twentieth century. These kinds of songs were widely popularised and spread around the city, as well as being broadcast on the radio. However, *Adhunik* is a problematic idea since, like their appellation, the songs were intended for and enjoyed by the public. Even popular Hindi cinema music rarely ventured outside of the cloister of commercial projections. The criticism levelled at commercial music is that it communicates hackneyed romantic subjectivities that ultimately fail to represent the city's pressing concerns. All of these songs were written, produced, and performed in the city, whether on the street or on elaborate stages, yet concerns about the city's discomfort and atrocity were never included. Probably the city had never become the inspiration for the romantic rhetoric in the mainstream imagination.

### Always Had High, High Hopes<sup>6</sup>

In the Bengali musical imaginarium, *Moheen* brought a sense of urban colloquialism as can be seen in *Sudhijon* and other songs. Their music depicts the struggle with urban spatial representation. They perceive the city as melancholic, sardonic, and a location of disputes. To represent the city, they created an aesthetics of dullness and sometimes deflecting attention from the city. This periodic shift in focus away from the city corresponds to the axiomatic concept of urbanity within the

framework of modernity. This duality of urban and in this case rural life fundamentally influenced their imagination as we find in the four songs from the album *Shangbigno Pakhikul O Kolkata Bishayak*. Songs like *Bhese Ase Kolkata*, *Maroon Sandhyalok*, *Hai Bhalobasi*, and *Shongbigno Pakhikul o Kolkata Bishayak* consistently focus on the search for the far-off countryside. In the song *Bhese Ase Kolkata*, there is a self-contradictory imagination of the rural and the urban where the foggy image of Kolkata's city shrouds the author's memory and the reminiscence spatially shifts to the morning of suburbs, remembering frangipani and Krishna Chura trees of the halcyon days. Then the reverie returns to Kolkata where the sound of the tram creates a fleeting tune. In the song *Maroon Sandhyalok*, the author imagines a winding road after twilight through a jungle filled with honey trees. The song *Hai Bhalobasi*, which was written on the way back from a journey to Sundarban by the band members, finds Wordsworthian solace in the memory of the songwriter, who enjoys the idyllic natural world, whether be it a moonlit stroll or reading poetry on a bleak afternoon. The author, like a flaneur, enters the city abruptly. He discovers that he also enjoys everything from Picasso's artwork to Ravishankar's nightly sessions. However, a sudden recall of a thought unexpectedly interrupts the entire narrative:

Love Picasso, Bunuel, and Dante  
 Cherish the sounds of The Beatles, Dylan, and Beethoven  
 Late after listening to Ali Akbar and Ravishankar,  
 Love to return in the dim misty morn.  
 Yet, seeing the people working, toiling relentlessly  
 In the heathland and haven  
 Abysmal sorrow engulfs my heart.<sup>7</sup>

What is causing this heart-wrenching sorrow? The potential solution might lead us to the larger discourse of the city. Rural Bengal is the primary setting for all of these songs. Idyllic is illustrated, nonetheless, from the perspective of an urban inhabitant. The Gandhian rural past serves as a utopian location while existing in a reality that belongs to the projections of the Nehruvian modern metropolis, which gives birth to the dilemma of romantic agony. India recast itself following independence under the rubric of a new modernity solidified by science, technology, and industrialisation. However, the rhetoric of Indian modernity had evolved to an anti-colonial and nationalist position rather than repeating a replica of the “developed” Western models. Nothing except the prehistory of the contemporary self is revealed by the christening of the young state under unfavourable violence and separation from its traditions and cultures of the subcontinent. The nationalist leaders aspired to assimilate the soul of rural India with the spirit of “... science and technology, but holding neither one nor the other fixed, India appears[ed] simultaneously... undoubtedly modern and irreducibly Indian” (Prakash, *Another Reason* 14). The dualistic vision of the rural and urban by nationalist leaders is connected to the ambiguity of Indian modernity. Following independence, there was a pressing need for rebuilding and developing living spaces. Obsessed with the idea of reorganising its villages and towns, multiple Master Plans were created for the state capitals and hundreds of villages. The significance of the dichotomy (rural/urban) can be best understood in terms of how it expresses the opposing political ideologies of Gandhi and Nehru. Cities like Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, and Delhi provided opportunities for nationalist activities, served as important cultural centres, and offered opportunities for regeneration, “yet the urban experience seldom received any concentrated attention” (Prakash, *The Urban Turn* 3). Gandhi's preference for villages stems from his realisation that rural India is the most desirable and true representation of the country. Even while Nehru recognised the villages' profound significance, he believed that they could not be the perfect location for the development of the modern nation since they were “backward intellectually and culturally”. Cities were envisioned as the future and the source of modernity in the Nehruvian ambition of nation-building. The depiction of metropolitan India with its dense population and skyscraping buildings reflected the significant profusion of all that modernity's offspring—science, technology, and industrialisation—can spread. The appeal for *sudin* (the auspicious day) in *Hai Bhalobasi* is

contrasted with the picture of an empty runway on an abandoned air base in the song *Sanbigno Pakhikul*, indicating that severe disappointment was shortly to come.

### Take Me Down to the Paradise City<sup>8</sup>

The Refugee Movement, the Anti-Tram Fare Rise Movement, the Teacher's Movement, the Food Movement, the Naxalite Movement, the Bangladesh Liberation War, and the countrywide Emergency not only devastated the social life of Kolkata but also compelled the "city of joy" to become dystopian. The social order was destroyed by constant submission, yet the act of compulsion might be opposed through other artistic methods. The unstable and chaotic transformation in the urban experience in transition prompted the reimagining of national borders and rethinking of social justice and alternative aesthetics. The historical period was ripe for reassessment, with astounding ideologies, cultural practices, and social ideals on display. How new authors, actors, poets, dramatists, and directors reacted and contributed to the radicalization of dynamic thought was the key turning point. And thus, amid the tumultuous worlds of politics and art, the rebel was born. In *Ajana Uronto Bostu Ba Aw-Uu-Baw*, a song about four strange clerks who imagine their dreary lives in a gloomy hostel room. The clamour of the industrial metropolis had infiltrated their private retreat. Even yet, in the isolation of nighttime, their embodied experience in the urban commonplace unexpectedly transports them into a surrealistic existence, just like Nabarun Bhattacharya's *fyataru*<sup>9</sup>:

Four of us live in a *Mess Bari* in a dimly lit city  
Shrouded with the jarring sound of Tram, lorry, and *Tempo*  
Night and day in the dark stuffy room  
We, supernatural clerks, stay...  
In the candescent city,  
Through the foggy sky of slithery  
An alien flying saucer comes down to the roof.  
Lo! Forsaking the higher officers,  
All the clerks hover in the air.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, this side of society and its characters had never been transferred into the mainstream musical narratives, which the city's popular historiography had rendered obsolete. These songs emphasise the importance of unsung heroes. When writing about an "other" community that had never been a part of the Nehruvian "master plan", architect and social activist Jai Sen enhances the term "unintended city" (2978). This vast population of officially discarded "obsolete" city inhabitants ceaselessly "provides the energy- literally the cheap labour- that propels both the engine of civic life in a Third World society and the ambitions of its modernising elite" (Nandy 2). The disenfranchised populace of the streets and slums - the "unintended city" - was rarely represented in mainstream music. The songwriter becomes acutely aware of the unseen struggle of the palimpsest individuals in a civilised metropolis. Moreover, the band members' active participation in the Naxalite Movement enables them to envisage the enigma of revolution, perceived as an obscure space between ecstasy and tragedy. The Naxalite Movement created this hollow space by hurling a genocide of the young generation to which Poet Subhas Mukhopadhyay bemoans,

Leaving me enfettered  
My lad left for the wilderness.<sup>11</sup>

Inspired by this political conundrum, the song, *Choitrer Kafon*, becomes a hymn for the lost generation in the political insurgency. It drives an evocative picture of the indifferent apparition of fiasco revolutionaries who relinquished into the ecstasy of the woods:

Who went into the wilderness in the late afternoon of *Chaitra*  
Who went to the woods, shady!  
Knows the wilderness, he walked off in a huff and remiss,

Tears in eyes...  
 As if he is lying in a blonde afternoon of *Chaitra*  
 Where shredded flowers fall on his lap,  
 Where shredded flowers fall on his shroud.<sup>12</sup>

This song alludes to the passing of a generation while concealing its political context behind metaphors. As a result of his participation in the movement, the lead musician Goutam Chattopadhyay had to lose many of his friends and comrades. He was also imprisoned and even subjected to brutal torture. However, the Western counterculture-influenced youth subculture had demonstrated blatant indifference to the rural unrest while youths were roving the city's streets during the unrelenting decade. The term Naxalite Movement had "assumed an aura of the exotic and was being used to dramatize all sorts of sentimentalism in these circles- ranging from good-natured Bohemianism to hippy-style pot sessions" (Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution* 172). The glitz of the contemporary metropolis obscures the realism of its underbelly, an opaque realm of buried narratives. By crafting a counter-narrative, the poetics of these song lyrics challenge the urbanisation project of modernity. It was a time like never before "...the country faced with such stark opposition between activism (acts of protest, literature, resistance, rebellion, organization, etc.) and pacifism including submission to law and order" (Samaddar 6-7). Sixties Bengal's artistic manifestations offer a powerful opposition to this historical process by interpreting society's obscene anathemas that the mainstream fails to recognise. However unsuccessful they are, *Moheen* acquires a bright spot and symbolises this revolutionary past of Kolkata. The songs turned into a cultural artefact, mediating the socio-culturally produced memory of a revolutionary era, that can be so readily and reliably evoked without reliance on an experiential grounding.

### And It's a Hard Rain's A-gonna Fall<sup>13</sup>

*Moheen* created a new musical vocabulary for imagining the urban even if they were unable to establish a listening audience that would commit allegiance. With the rise of independent singer-songwriters like Kabir Suman, Anjan Dutta, and Nachiketa as well as the steady rise of bands like *Naqar Philomel*, *Sohor*, *Cactus*, *Bhoomi*, *Parashpathar*, *Abhilasha*, *Krosswindz*, *Chandrabindoo*, *Kaya*, *Fossils*, and thousands more in the following decade, Bengal saw a change in the listening taste of mainstream audience during the 1990s. Bengali band music thrived as a result of several factors, including new commercialization strategies, evolving technology—from vinyl records to cassette tapes, compact discs, and the internet—widespread public distribution, and media literacy. Band music began to proliferate in the late 1990s through performances hosted by clubs and colleges. A platform was also provided by privatised satellite television networks Alpha Bangla, Tara Bangla, ETV Bangla, and Akash Bangla, as well as a Bengali FM radio station. Representing *Moheener Ghoraguli's* second coming, *Aabar Bochor Kuri Pore*, *Jhora Somoyer Gaan*, *Maya*, and *Khyapar Gaan*, four albums were released in this period. The original band members did not write many of the songs, but they succeeded in assembling a group of young musicians who contributed to the albums. Where *Moheen* served as a bridge to unite diverse bands and individuals and gave these up-and-coming musicians of the Bengali music industry a stage to perform on. The band brought a nostalgic break for both those who listened to them in the 1970s and also to them listening in the 1990s. The group quickly develops a cult following. Even they ended up serving as a benchmark and a statement of taste by which other bands were judged. Most likely, nostalgia was the driving force for their enormous appeal. The band not only served as a record of the turbulent decades that wrecked devastation on the city, but they also took part in its artistic renaissance. The tunes they put together were really relatable to young adults. Songs like "Prithibi" (The Globe), "In the Heart of the City," and adda in cafés or among friends, as well as political processions, became the anthems of generation after generation. They invited Arunendu Das, who was among the forerunners making urban-centric music, to contribute to their album. They reprised some of the songs from the 1970s again as



a throwback. The city tells the story of a generation that was saddened by seeing both the demise of the “revolutionary” dream and the fall of Bengali sovereignty over the city they had long considered to be their own. In the 1970s and 1980s, the twin forces of democracy and growth significantly altered the previous system of social-political domination, and the appearance of the city as a mostly Bengali metropolis started to break down. The object of nostalgia is elusive, and it is “an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world” (Boym 62). The music of *Moheener Ghoraguli* transports listeners to a magnificent period of the revolution by acting as a nostalgic artefact. In keeping with Arthur Marwick’s observation that the sixties evoke powerful emotions in persons who belong or do not belong to the era, it may be claimed that *Moheen*’s songs induce an emotive desire for a time without having lived experience; where the past reveals itself as the “ersatz” invoking a vicarious sense of the imagined nostalgia.

### The King is Gone but He’s not Forgotten<sup>14</sup>

The name of the band was inspired by one of the poems of poet Jibanananda Das. It inspired *Moheen*’s imagination of the city as a location of setbacks and unhappiness. Das’s critical awareness is evident in his poem *Banalata Sen*’s sweeping fantasy of the city as a site of unavoidable reality, nightmares, and unrequited lovers abandoned in their alienated reality of incompleteness. Even in communist poets’ depressed city and Hungrylists’ brutally smashing bourgeois sentimentality, the echo of claustrophobic megalopolitan was palpable. The lyrical language of scepticism and disappointment inevitably shaped the generation’s community ethos. Sixties Kolkata became a meeting place for revolutionary artists like Shakti Chattopadhyay, Sunil Gangopadhyay, Allen Ginsberg, and Peter Orlovsky, who gathered for turbulent *adda*. Maitreyee Chowdhury writes, “Dissatisfied with society, the Beats and the Hungrylists alienated themselves from the mainstream and their movements became underground, thereby challenging the poetics of the day” (1). Counterculture’s quirky attitude influenced generations of lyricists; the band, *Moheener Ghoraguli*, exemplified this aspect of counterculture—overwhelming the concept of human imagination via the dynamic reconstruction of uninhabited spaces. In popular culture, nostalgia plays a significant role as the reiteration of nostalgia has become a self-fashioning process, a prevalent feature of our current era. Nostalgia may also be perceived as providing comfort and reassurance since it is linked to a sentimental longing and yearning for the restoration of an idealised and “mythical past”. This helps to explain why popular culture is such an excellent amplifier of/for nostalgia, as evident in the case of *Moheener Ghoraguli*.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Song by the band Queen, album *News of the World*.

<sup>2</sup> Song by the band Jefferson Airplane, album *Volunteers*.

<sup>3</sup> Song by Neil Young, album *Rust Never Sleeps*.

<sup>4</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>5</sup> denoted a specific musical performance and consumption way meant for the elites or gentlefolk.

<sup>6</sup> Song by the band Pink Floyd, album *The Division Wall*.

<sup>7</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>8</sup> Song by the band Guns N’ Roses, album *Appetite for Destruction*.

<sup>9</sup> Fantastical-magical creatures, often found in Bhattacharya's writings.

<sup>10</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>11</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>12</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>13</sup> Song by Bob Dylan, album *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*.

<sup>14</sup> Song by Neil Young, album *Rust Never Sleeps*.

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