

Exploring Urban Love through the Songs of Chandrabindoo, Parashpathar, and Fossils

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Abstract: *This paper explores how love is expressed in contemporary Bengali culture through the songs of three well-known bands — Chandrabindoo, Parashpathar, and Fossils. Since the late 1990s, these bands have strongly influenced the emotional world of urban Bengali society, particularly the middle-class experience. Through a close reading of selected songs, the study shows that each band presents a different mood of love. Chandrabindoo portrays love in a simple, gentle, and often humorous way, showing the hesitation and awkwardness of everyday relationships. Parashpathar presents love as imaginative and reflective, often connected with memory and longing. Fossils expresses love as powerful, restless, and sometimes painful, showing the deeper struggles and emotional intensity within relationships. The paper suggests that these songs create a distinctive cultural way of understanding love, where feelings are shaped not only by personal experience but also by social life, memory, imagination, and everyday surroundings. In these songs, Kolkata is more than just a physical setting; it becomes an important part of emotional experience. The city influences how love is remembered, felt, and communicated. The study shows that emotions, identity, and place are closely connected in urban Bengali life. Overall, the paper highlights the importance of Bengali band music as a meaningful form of cultural expression and presents urban love as both an individual feeling and a shared social experience.*

Key Words : Kolkata, Performativity, Hyperreality, Trauma, Affective Geography.

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In Bengal's evolving urban imaginary, Kolkata emerges not merely as a backdrop but as a living, breathing witness to the emotional life of its people. Nowhere is this more vividly felt than in the musical articulations of contemporary Bengali bands such as Chandrabindoo, Parashpathar, and Fossils. These three bands, active since the late 1990s, have done more than entertain; they have provided a soundtrack to middle-class Bengali life, articulating its anxieties, dreams, disappointments, and loves. They have composed not only songs but also affective maps — emotional geographies that chart a complex vernacular poetics of desire rooted in the everyday texture of urban life.

Over the past three decades, Chandrabindoo, Parashpathar, and Fossils have crafted parallel, intersecting narratives of love that vary in tone, texture, and theoretical implication. While Chandrabindoo captures the ironic hesitations of the middle-class lover, Parashpathar constructs surreal dreamscapes, and Fossils confronts love as trauma, rage, and existential necessity. Together, their musical oeuvres reflect shifting notions of intimacy and identity in contemporary Kolkata. The city itself — with its layered histories, colonial afterlives, *para* culture, and cosmopolitan aspirations — emerges not as a mere setting but as a fourth voice in these love songs, shaping and being shaped by the affective consciousness of its listeners.

Chandrabindoo: Irony, Hesitation, and the Poetics of Everyday Love

Romantic expression in Bengali culture often appears in two recognizable forms. On one hand, it may reflect a tendency toward deep curiosity and overthinking, sometimes accompanied by intense emotional reflection. On the other hand, it may emerge through a quiet sensitivity to simple yet meaningful moments—for instance, noticing the soft warmth of winter sunlight on the face of a loved one, whether real, imagined, or still anticipated. In such moments, one may unconsciously recall poetic lines such as “Tumi jor er shesh e shurjo dhowa ghor”¹ (you are the warm sunlight that fills my room after a fever), a metaphor that conveys comfort, healing, and emotional warmth.

Whichever form it takes, such responses suggest a cultural pattern of romantic sensibility often associated with Bengali identity. This sensibility is marked by a strong inclination toward sentiment, poetic imagination, and expressive emotional experience. While this tendency may at times appear overly sentimental or slightly exaggerated, it also reflects a long-standing literary and cultural tradition that values emotional depth and symbolic expression. Therefore, the figure of the Bengali lover may be understood as one who embodies a deeply poetic and reflective engagement with love, even at the risk of seeming somewhat idealistic or overly dramatic.

Over the past three decades, Chandrabindoo has taken this very essence of Bangali-ness—our middle-class awkwardness, emotional excess, cultural self-mockery—and turned it into song. Their music, always easy, rhythmic, conversational, and emotionally accessible, feels like that friend who shows up at our door with cheap biriyani and unsolicited life advice just when one needs it most.

At the heart of their lyrical universe lives the *moddhobitto bhiru premik* — the middle-class, hesitant lover. This is a figure who performs love almost the way an actor performs a

tragicomic role: full of hesitation, irony, and more than a few awkward metaphors. In songs like “Sweetheart”², “Bondhu Tomay Ei Gaan Shonabo Bikel Bela,”³ or “Jodi Bolo Hya”⁴ love is rarely direct. It arrives through coded glances across balconies, half-written letters, Rabindra Sangeet playing softly in the background, or dramatic promises of flying to Spain: “Jodi bolo plane, pithey niye urey jabo Spain!”⁵ Obviously, that will never actually happen. Judith Butler’s theory of performativity⁶ seems oddly fitting here. Butler argues that identity isn’t a stable truth but something we enact, over and over, shaped by societal norms. The romantic subject in Chandrabindoo’s songs does exactly that. He performs his identity — through writing bad poetry, walking past someone’s house three times without saying hello, or simply sitting in a coffee house staring into space. These moments don’t always culminate in grand romantic unions. The lover contemplates, “Mone...haway peyechi tor naam...haway hariye fellam”⁷ in late-night loneliness. But they affirm a particular Bengali mode of loving: introspective, hesitant, painfully self-aware, and yet, tenderly ironic.

And then there’s the city — Kolkata. This city is not just a backdrop but a co-conspirator in every incomplete love story. In Gaston Bachelard’s words, this is a kind of topoanalysis⁸, where space and emotion entwine until inseparable. The college canteen with its cracked plastic chairs, the Victoria Memorial lawns on a lazy winter afternoon, the quiet frustration of a tram stuck in traffic — each of these places becomes a site where desire is rehearsed, deferred, and immortalized in song. The iconic song, “Bhindeshi Tara”⁹ uses images of Kolkata streets, rooftops and old houses to create emotion. One of the lines, “Rasta paar hobe sabdhan”¹⁰ shows love through care and concern- love exists in everyday life- while walking through the busy city streets or remembering someone during rainy afternoons.

Chandrabindoo doesn’t romanticize love in a syrupy Bollywood sense. Their love stories are messy, ironic, and unapologetically middle-class. There are no violin-backed confessions here. References such as “Doodh Na Khele Hobe Na Bhalo Chhele”¹¹ and the anxious memory of a difficult mathematics lesson in “Awnko Ki Kothin”¹² reflect familiar experiences of growing up within a Bengali middle-class environment. The recurring social discomforts of family expectations, body image anxieties, and self-consciousness further highlight the grounded and relatable nature of love in their narratives. In this context, falling in love is not presented as a grand dramatic event, but as a series of small, often awkward moments marked by hesitation, missed communication, and modest social interactions, such as meeting at familiar middle-class restaurants like Aminia or Chung Wah.

Chandrabindoo’s music not only describes love but also performs it through humour and self-reflection. Listening to their songs often creates a sense of observing one’s own experiences from a distance—simultaneously humorous and uncomfortable, yet deeply recognizable. The humour in their work is not merely for entertainment; rather, it encourages introspection by revealing the vulnerabilities, contradictions, and emotional uncertainties that shape romantic experiences. In “Adorer Nouka”¹³ one finds the blend of melancholy with fleeting urban intimacy- a stage where people constantly drift in and out of each other’s lives. Here relationships are shaped by schedules, distances, misunderstandings and a hope to re-connection. One must understand that the term ‘situationship’ was not coined then! In doing so, the songs act as a

mirror that reflects the listener's own emotional condition, suggesting that despite repeated disappointments or embarrassment, the individual continues to engage with love.

Perhaps what makes Chandrabindoo timeless is this ability to turn small, hesitant moments into sweeping emotional landscapes. A simple afternoon with friends, a song played at dusk, or a single line like "Please ghum hoye jao chokhey, amar mon kharap er raate"¹⁴ (Please turn into sleep in my eyes, on this night of sadness) becomes a lifeline on lonely nights. Each track is less a song and more an intimate conversation with that older version of almost every middle class Bengali, who was once foolishly, beautifully in love.

Wheeling this old cassette reel of nostalgia like a nagging but loving parent, Chandrabindoo's songs maintain a continuing relevance across generations of listeners — awkward, sweaty, sincere. Lovers may come and go, heartbreaks may leave one emptier than one would like to admit, but Kolkata stays observing the transitions from first loves to last crushes, waiting, amused, and always quietly rooting for almost every middle class Bengali.

Ultimately, what may be described as *moddhobitto bhiru prem* (the hesitant love of the middle class) is not portrayed as a weakness to be overcome, but as a condition that evolves with time. Through irony, poetic sensitivity, and cultural familiarity, Chandrabindoo's music suggests that such forms of love remain an integral part of Bengali emotional life, continuing to shape individual identity and collective cultural imagination.

Parashpathar: Dream, Simulation, and the Aestheticization of Love

If Chandrabindoo locates love firmly in the muddy, middle-class, self-deprecating alleys of everyday Kolkata life, Parashpathar, that wonderfully unclassifiable, shape-shifting Bengali band from the '90s, takes love and tosses it headlong into the surreal. Here, love doesn't simply happen over cups of tea or whispered glances from balconies. Instead, love becomes something dreamt, distorted, metaphysical—half-fantasy, half-existential confusion—set to rhythms that make one sway long before one knows what hit him.

It is appropriate to commence with what may be considered the most iconic instance of their cultural commentary: "Valobasha Mane Archies Gallery"¹⁵. For anyone growing up in Kolkata (or any Indian metro) in the 1990s, Archies Gallery was more than a shop—it was a pilgrimage site for teenage longing. Rows upon rows of plush teddy bears, oversized heart-shaped cards, and trinkets with manufactured declarations of love. Here, love wasn't something one felt—it was something one bought, wrapped, and presented. The song performs a Baudrillardian wink—what Jean Baudrillard would call hyperreality¹⁶, where the real dissolves and only the simulation remains. By the time one reads "Best Boyfriend Ever" on a card, the experience has already become twice-removed from anything visceral. Love, in this world, floats between pink paperbacks and glitter pens. It's as artificial as the cotton stuffing inside a Valentine's teddy.

But Parashpathar isn't content to stop at cultural parody. Songs like "Bhalo Lage Swapner Mayajal Bunte"¹⁷ take one somewhere stranger—into the inner architecture of desire itself. If Freud taught us that dreams are the disguised fulfillment of repressed wishes¹⁸, this song acts like a lyrical dreamscape. The beloved isn't a person but a shifting figure stitched together from fleeting images: a blurry silhouette on a tram, the sound of anklets somewhere down a rain-wet

lane, the smell of a library book last borrowed years ago. Love here is not located in a person but in an atmospheric hallucination. Desire becomes less about wanting someone and more about getting lost in the process of wanting.

Listening to this track, one can't help but think of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion that desire isn't lack but becoming¹⁹. Love is a state of continuous transformation—of wanting, not having; of dissolving, not arriving. This finds its echo in "Icche Dana"²⁰, where the narrative of love bursts free from rational containment. The song unfurls with lyrical abandon, imagining wings of desire that escape not just social norms but the very language we use to express love. Here, love becomes an escape, a flight path, a refusal to be pinned down by material circumstances or social expectations. Much like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic²¹ thought, there's no beginning, no end—just affective leaps.

Even when Parashpathar turns corporeal—as in "Aj Gaaner Taaley Hriday Doley"²²—the body becomes less of an erotic object and more of an affective instrument. In this song, the body literally dances—not just with movement but with emotional charge. The beating heart aligns with the drumbeat, breath with melody, pulse with poetry. It's not about lovers reaching out across the void; it's about bodies tuning themselves to the frequency of feeling.

The same theme ripples through "Mon Amar"²³, where the mind becomes an unreliable narrator, shifting between euphoria and doubt, longing and retreat. It's as if the song itself struggles with its own emotional bandwidth, mirroring how love feels on nights when you're not sure whether to call or disappear. The song becomes a musical performance of emotional excess and withdrawal, all within a span of three and a half minutes.

Perhaps what makes Parashpathar especially important in the Bengali emotional lexicon is their refusal to choose between irony and sincerity. They inhabit both registers at once. They embrace love's stubbornness—the way it persists, annoys, redeems. And when the chorus finally lands, it's both a satire and a celebration.

In totality, Parashpathar's love songs aren't easy to categorize. They float between Freudian dream-logic²⁴, Baudrillardian critiques of late-capitalist affect, and mappings of desire and affect²⁵. But at heart, they offer us something simple: the emotional permission to be lost, to be confused, to over-imagine, and to feel everything—all at once.

So while Chandrabindoo might teach one how to sit awkwardly in a coffee house and write bad poetry about a girl one will never confess to, Parashpathar hands one the surreal toolkit to dream of that girl turning into metaphors, city lights, paper boats, and impossible possibilities.

And perhaps that's what love really is. Not a destination, but a song one hums long after the music has stopped playing.

Love as Wound: Desire, Trauma, and the Erotic Abyss in Fossils' Music

If Chandrabindoo is the hesitant poet scribbling bad verses in the college canteen, and Parashpathar is the surrealist dreamer building castles in the air with metaphors and existential sighs, then Fossils walks in like a storm — loud, unapologetic, emotionally feral. Fossils doesn't write love songs for Sunday afternoons with tea. Fossils writes love songs for 2 AM breakdowns,

for the gut-punch moments when one realizes that desire is not sweet but jagged, not healing but rupturing.

Let us begin with “Aro Ekbar”²⁶ The phrase itself—translated as “one more time”—functions almost like a refrain, symbolically resonating as a recurring expression of longing and emotional vulnerability, particularly for those who have experienced romantic disappointment. This isn’t a love song in any conventional sense. There’s no coy flirting here, no slow build to confession. What we get is desperation as aesthetic, a sonic performance of need where every scream, every guitar riff is a plea that language can’t quite hold together. Julia Kristeva’s concept of the chora²⁷ feels apt here — that pre-linguistic space of pure affect, before words, where the body feels more than it speaks. In the song words disintegrate. What’s left is pure intensity — a cry that hovers somewhere between longing and survival.

In “Hasnuhana,”²⁸ Fossils pulls another sleight of hand. The night-flowering jasmine — that gentle, nostalgic flower — suddenly turns into a symbol of mourning. The lover isn’t bringing flowers; he’s burying them. This is love woven with loss, and the flower becomes a metonym for everything that once was but no longer is. The song feels like walking through a familiar street after a funeral — the city looks the same, but nothing smells or sounds the same anymore.

And then comes “Bishakto Manush”²⁹ (Toxic People) — Fossils at their most brutally honest. The song confronts toxic emotional entanglement head-on. This isn’t just about being hurt. This is about loving someone who hurts you and knowing full well you’re complicit in your own destruction. Slavoj Žižek once said that true love is traumatic³⁰ because it shakes the very coordinates of who you are. That’s precisely what the song does. It’s a song where desire becomes addiction, where even the venom feels necessary because numbness feels worse.

Even softer tracks like “Dekho Manashi”³¹ refuse easy romantic closure. Here love becomes an existential riddle: Do you wait? Do you walk away? Do you implode? There’s hesitation, yes, but not in the sweet, ironic way of Chandrabindoo. Fossils’ hesitation feels like standing on a ledge, unsure whether to jump or scream. Love here is not gentle courtship; it’s existential crisis with distortion pedals.

The song “Mahakash”³² pushes the envelope even further. Love here is time-bending, apocalyptic. The lyrics throb with urgency, as if the narrator is running out of both time and emotional bandwidth. Love isn’t a chapter in life anymore—it’s the end of the world happening in slow motion, one emotional detonation at a time. The scale here is cosmic. Forget roses and balcony glances—this is planetary heartbreak.

What makes Fossils’ romantic universe unique is their absolute refusal of emotional consolation. There’s no wry humor, no fantasy escape. Where Parashpathar might dissolve heartbreak into metaphor and Chandrabindoo might deflate it with humor, Fossils sits with the wreckage. The pain isn’t edited for public consumption; it’s left raw, howling, and deeply human.

Even “Ekla Ghor”³³ (Lonely Room) — a quieter track — builds not toward healing but toward acknowledgment of isolation. The bedroom here isn’t a refuge, it’s a witness to breakdown. The four walls don’t hold privacy—they trap the reverberations of late-night sobbing and unsent text messages.

And let's not forget "Neel Rong Chhilo Bhishon Priyo".³⁴ Here, even color memory becomes emotional debris. The song speaks to that uniquely post-breakup phenomenon where even everyday sensory details turn against the heart-broken. The sky, the sea, a blue t-shirt—all become hostile reminders of what's gone.

What makes Fossils particularly relevant to a generation raised on emotional repression and middle-class respectability politics is their utter lack of emotional shame. Fossils doesn't ask one to tidy up your feelings before presenting them. Fossils scream one's worst 3 AM thoughts out loud—on stage, in power chords, with unapologetic theatricality.

If Chandrabindoo gave us the vocabulary of awkward first love, and Parashpathar gifted us the dreamscapes of impossible longing, then Fossils gave us the right to sit with heartbreak unfiltered—to say, yes, I am wounded; yes, I am still bleeding; and no, I am not fine, and that's okay.

In a culture that often equates love songs with soft-focus violins and polite metaphors, Fossils kicks the door down, plugs in the distortion pedal, and makes heartbreak both unbearable and beautiful.

Because sometimes, the most honest love song isn't a serenade. It's a scream.

Kolkata: The City That Loves Back (Or At Least Watches Silently)

If there's one thing these three bands—Chandrabindoo, Parashpathar, and Fossils—agree on, it's this: Kolkata is not just a location. It's an accomplice, a mood, a fourth character in every love story we've ever botched, dreamed, or sung about.

Kolkata often becomes more than just a physical location; it functions as an emotional landscape where personal experiences of love, hesitation, and longing quietly unfold. One might imagine standing at Gariahat crossing with a paper cup of very sweet tea, watching the soft winter sunlight fall across tram lines, while thinking about a message never sent to someone important or perhaps sitting at Princep Ghat with headphones playing songs by Fossils, feeling as though one is living through a deeply personal moment of reflection or loss. In such moments, the city does not interrupt or judge. Instead, it observes with patience, subtle irony, and quiet empathy. Raymond Williams called this a "structure of feeling"³⁵ and Kolkata embodies it fully. Not a passive backdrop but an active repository of memories, emotions, and cultural expressions: Chandrabindoo's wistful terraces, Parashpathar's hyperreal shopfronts, Fossils' rain-soaked streets of disaffection and rage. Kolkata isn't solving one's love life. It is curating it.

The city has changed. Love letters became SMS, then became WhatsApp blue-ticks and Instagram DMs that stay seen but unanswered. The canteen crush of the 90s became the confused situationship of the 2020s. But still, somewhere between Shyambazar and Tollygunge, someone is nursing a heartbreak that remains strikingly similar.

What these bands have offered is not a philosophy of love but a vernacular archive of emotion. To borrow from Mikhail Bakhtin: a dialogic imagination³⁶—where humor, longing, irony, and grief sit at the same table, drinking cheap coffee and judging each other's life choices. Love in this city is not tidy. It's performed, rehearsed, deferred, and sometimes screamed into the void.

There is also a recognizable cultural tendency among many Bengali individuals to reflect deeply on relationships. Feelings are often analyzed repeatedly; messages are carefully composed and then deleted; conversations are mentally rehearsed but never spoken aloud. Emotional expression may appear intense yet restrained at the same time. Love is experienced with sincerity and sensitivity, but often accompanied by uncertainty and self-questioning.

And Kolkata? Kolkata watches it all unfold. From tramlines to metro tunnels, from wet park benches to cracked hostel walls, this city stays—half amused, half compassionate, quietly accommodates human vulnerability.

The closing lines of Chandrabindoo's song "Bhideshi Tara"³⁷ capture this emotional condition effectively: "Amar raat jaga tara, tomar akash chhoan bari... Ami chai na chute tomay, amar ekla lage bhari..."

These words suggest a form of love that accepts distance, uncertainty, and solitude, while still holding on to emotional connection.

Maybe that's what Kolkata teaches- to love clumsily, to miss people fiercely, to let the city hold one's heartbreaks like old postcards stuffed at the back of a drawer. After all, lovers come and go. But Kolkata stays. Unmoved. Amused. And somewhere... quietly... still rooting for each soul it shelters.

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