



Jibanananda: A lingering consciousness

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It is possible that his disdain of being restricted under an umbrella was primarily because of the poor response he received from fellow poets, readers, and critics. In his lifetime, Jibanananda could never imagine what his works will mean to the generations that followed.

While commenting on the influence of Das in our modern lives, renowned academician Abdul Mannan Sayed wrote —

"Why do people read poetry? And why do poets pen their poems? There are no plausible answers to these questions... His life — both the inner identity or the outward self, is shrouded in mystery. Yet, to this current generation of Bengalis, there is widespread interest surrounding this very poet. In the turbulent sixties, when we were immersed in an effort to rediscover and redefine our identity, he was our companion."

Syed spoke my mind. In my quest of self-discovery, and in an attempt to pin an identity for myself, I too found him an honest companion.

NO DREAM — NO CALM — SOME OVERWHELMING SENSATION

It is difficult to describe what I found while unearthing the treasures of Jibanananda's poetry; a rattled mind, a stirred soul, and a voice that created an overwhelming sensation through his wordplay —

I move towards a twilight world — in my head

No dream — some overwhelming sensation is at work!

No dream — no calm — no love...

*I cannot evade it,
It takes me by its hand.
Everything becomes irrelevant —
All my thoughts become futile.
All prayers meaningless,
So meaningless!*

Das has a cult following, mostly by the youth, who, without exception, carry on for the rest of their lives. As a first time reader, I could not evade from the reality that he clairvoyantly termed — 'Bodh' (sensation/or consciousness).

The poetry did little to assuage the pain, much to my anguish, it aggravated it. Yet, for my bipolar mind, and a soul torn between modern living and the resulting injustice it creates, it came as an assurance that in this fight, I am not alone — and in such a man-

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world organised more truly and proportionately by the special reading of it by the special poet.

This, I feel, is a universal statement. As a poet, Das was touched by what he saw, and the words expressed the emotions that the images evoked in him. He had led a large part of his life in pastoral Bengal, and a fair share in the modern metropolises of India under the crown.

This gave him a unique insight, which many authors — his contemporaries or his predecessors — lacked.

Jibanananda has always been honest in his expression. The fact that his published work does not reflect the timeline, or the development of his poetic vision, makes it difficult for us to see how he evolved as a poet. But once viewed in the gamut of his entire work (much may remain unpublished still), one finds a 'thinking poet'; one who interacts with society and living. At this point, whether he talks about the romantic setting at the bank of the Dhanshiri, or socialites of Calcutta and their clubs with tennis courts, becomes irrelevant, simply because he is just penning what he felt whenever and whatever he saw.

What I gather, his definition of a poet is a universal statement for all mature souls. As we age, we arrive at our own philosophy and build our own world — and never a negation of the actual one. The 18-year old me found some more answers in his words

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