

## Jibanananda: A lingering consciousness

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— Who can keep going on as simple-minded people would!  
Who can get off in this twilight station  
As the simple-minded would! Who Can  
Speak in their tongues anymore? Who  
knows  
Anything for certain anymore? Who  
knows  
Anything for certain any longer? Who  
bothers  
To relish bodily desires now? Who can  
Taste again, as every man once did, the  
soul's delight?

It would be wrong to say that at the pivotal moment of life, I was confronted with the affliction of love alone. Far from it! The societal pressure on a boy thought to achieve greatness in life, but falling far short, has to bear a load that one simply cannot offload. The spiralling effect of a bipolar sinking in quicksand was, and still is, a haunting feeling that stays with me.

*Walking along beaches — crossing  
shores  
I try to shake it off;  
I want to grab it as I would a dead  
man's skull  
And dash It on the ground; yet like a  
live man's head,  
It wheels all around my head!  
How it possesses my heart!  
If I move, it moves along with me.  
If I stop —  
It stops too;*

Acclaimed translator of Das's work, Professor Fakrul Alam noted an interesting point. As a footnote to the poem, Bodh, he wrote —

*"People...have described him as a man who often seemed to be in a trance." And he goes on to say, "This it seems to the translator, is a poem about a man overwhelmed by the poetic fit and, indeed consumed by it."*

Professor Alam's assumption is based on a comment by none other

than Das himself —

*The desire to create artworks, the thirst for them...this life-long curse of the artists has destroyed all possibilities of being a social success. Nevertheless, I have not tried to abandon the fate of the artist for the haven of the family; no artist can do so.*

**LOVE — THE UNIVERSAL EMOTION**  
Scholars are divided on facts surrounding his personal life. While many agree that he had fallen in love at a tender age, he was to marry someone else. It is quite clear that his marital life was chequered with afflictions.

The restless Jibanananda found it difficult to settle in any position, and his wanderlust took him from the remote region of South Bengal to the metropolis of West Bengal. This itself is enough reason for some marital discord.

His heroines are often described as vicious and full of guile. At times, the heroines are dead and dreadful. Yet, after his quest for solace of a thousand years, he finds peace in Natore's Bonolata Sen! But how does he consolidate his consciousness and love?

He writes —

*I had looked at a woman lovingly,  
I had looked at her uncaringly,  
I had looked at her hatefully.*

Every worn soul can relate to this. The initial days of separation or dejection is a haze where feelings of love and hate collide; the overwhelming consciousness throwing the heart into the deepest, darkest abyss of guilt. And more so, when one starts to doubt himself —

*She had loved me,  
She had ignored me —  
When I called her lovingly again and again  
She had gone away hating me;  
But once I could restrain myself — rein in my love;  
Her words of contempt  
The intensity of hate  
I was able to ignore once — whatever the stars had decreed  
Again and again as obstacles*

*to my love  
I had forgotten;  
Still my love — dust and grime —*

Jibanananda's love is often platonic, and at times, full of lustful overtones. Some hint on a carnal desire set so loose that it leads to incest. I find Jibanananda as a poet far from being confused, but troubled by the multiplicity of human emotions; its strength in harnessing and cherishing the beauty of love, and then again often succumbing to pure lust.

*Of gazing at the face of a man!  
Of gazing at the face of a woman!  
Of gazing at the face children!  
This sensation — this very desire  
So immense — overwhelming!*

**A FULL CIRCLE?**

Perhaps, there is truth to the fact that Jibanananda himself was the architect of his death; others vehemently protest that this was sheer accident. The myriad troubles in his life, and the trauma of the dreadful partition that forever took him away from his beloved Dhanshiri possibly made it impossible for Das to reconcile with. Some say, he felt alien to the land that he had to now call his home.

Now standing older and taller, perhaps wiser too, I wish I had thought of life differently when I met Das. My world view has changed, and as I now read him, I cannot pause and wonder, what if his life was different? What if our lives were different?

Did my naive teenage love forever break my heart, or did it teach me to seek and cherish all the love that life throws at me?

*In the late autumnal grassland blue  
flowers bloom —  
The heart flutters who knows why,  
"I loved" — embers — guilt ridden —  
memories  
Why do they confront me still?*

Perhaps, that is because we are human. While some simply sigh and move on, others find themselves drowning in quicksand, yet desperately trying to stay calm. Maybe those who see themselves get drawn into quicksand in the first place, never can.

*Did she — had Sujata fallen in love with me?  
Is she in love with me still?  
Electrons hurl about in the orbits on their own;  
In which purged fading sky will the answer resound?*

Such thoughts are perilous and redundant if one wishes to lead life positively. It is trivial to ponder over Porna after two decades, when in all certainly, she has moved ahead as I have. And even after being immersed in a bottomless pit of sorrow, Jibanananda often does have an affirmative view of life.

*Sujata is in  
Bhubenshwar now;  
Is Amita in Mihijam?  
Not knowing where she has been is a good thing — in every way!  
Blue white flowers bloom in the grass in the late autumnal scene;  
Its placid course in one aspect of time;  
And yet it is never completely still;  
Every day new life forms take root again.*

Truly, new life forms take root again. Sometimes I wishfully think, only if I could show Jibanananda, my one true friend, how beautiful the flowers still bloom, and will always bloom.

**By Mannan Mashhur Zarif**  
Excerpts taken from the translation of Jibanananda Das's poetry — 'Bodh' and 'Loken Boser Journal' (translated by Professor Fakrul Alam).

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