

123RD BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF JIBANANANDA DAS

# JIBANANANDA DAS

## Tropes, Tensions, Tendencies



AZFAR HUSSAIN

Dr Azfar Hussain is interim director of the graduate programme in social innovation, and associate professor of integrative, religious, and cultural studies at Grand Valley State University in Michigan, U.S. He is also the vice president of the US-based Global Center for Advanced Studies (GCAS).

TODAY—February 17—marks the 123rd birth anniversary of Jibanananda Das (1899-1954), recognised today as one of the greatest Bengali poets of all time. But he was quite neglected during his lifetime. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) did not take Jibanananda seriously at all. His first reaction to Jibanananda's poems was downright harsh and even gruffly dismissive, while his subsequent reaction was brief, curt, but favourable—inadequately, though—as he only spoke of the pleasure of looking at Jibanananda's poems, thereby pointing to the profusion and plenitude of visual images in his poetry. Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) went to the extent of making fun of Jibanananda, saying something to this effect: For him, metaphor is more important than mother.

But then, it is true that both metaphors and images constitute and characterise the very power of Jibanananda's poetry, although he is much more than his tropological and metaphorical interventions and inventions as such.

But, among his notable contemporaries, it was only Buddhadeva Bose (1908-1974) who cared to read Jibanananda and evaluate his work to the extent that he could. Yet, I argue that his fondness for Jibanananda notwithstanding, Buddhadeva—remaining high on Western poetics and aesthetics, while characterising Jibanananda as the loneliest of poets—ultimately failed to do justice to his wide-ranging oeuvre that cannot be simply reduced to the themes of mere individual loneliness, alienation, and even existential crisis, although those themes are by no means absent in his work.

Jibanananda's first collection of poems, called *Jhara Palak* (Fallen Feathers), appeared in 1927. Then his second volume, *Dhushar Pandulipi* (Grey Manuscripts), came out in 1936, while the year 1942 saw the publication of one of his major works, *Banalata Sen*, a veritable *tour de force*. His other great collections such as *Mahaprithibee* (The Great World) and *Satti Tarar Timir* (The Darkness of Seven Stars) came out in 1944 and 1948, respectively. It was in 1954—the year of his death—that his *Sreshtha Kabita* (Best Poems) was published, and his posthumous collections such as *Rupashi Bangla* (Beautiful Bengal) and *Bela Obela Kalbela* (Time, Odd Time, Inauspicious Time) appeared in 1957 and 1961, respectively.

Indeed, Jibanananda Das's writing career spanned 35 years, from 1919 to 1954, during which he published a total of 269 poems in different magazines and journals. Of them, only 162 poems were collected in his seven volumes that I already mentioned. But, over a period of more than six decades following his death, Jibanananda's numerous poems, 28 novels, and more than a hundred stories—including his essays, letters, diaries, songs, even drawings and pencil sketches, as well as his massive "literary notes" of as many as 4,272 pages—were discovered. Thus, it's clear today that Jibanananda the poet was also an extraordinarily powerful short story writer and novelist as well as a thinker, among other things.

His novels—yet to be engaged adequately—were written between 1931 and 1948, and some of them include *Purnima*, *Bibha*, *Karubasana*, *Jeebonpranalee*, *PretinirRupkatha*, *Malyaban*, *Jalpahiati*, *Basmatir Upakhyyan* and *Sutirtha*, experimentally structured and textured works of fiction that explore the

complexities of the modes of *becoming* and *being*—as well as the limits of our language—differentially enmeshed as they all are in the tensions and transactions among the autobiographical, the psychological, the social, and even the political-economic, to say the least.

But, of course, Jibanananda Das—known as one of the major modernists in Bangla literature—was a poet in the first place. Today, critics and readers—invoking Western figures or approaches—find in Jibanananda such things as Keatsian sensuousness, Edgar Allan Poe's sense of the mysterious and even the macabre, Mallarméan symbolism, WB Yeats' sense of melancholy and death, the imagism of William Carlos Williams, and so on. The aesthetic of synaesthesia—or what I wish to call the "intersensory" experience that the great French poet Charles Baudelaire memorably embodies in his superb sonnet called *Correspondences*—is also at work in Jibanananda, as the critic Alakranjan Dasgupta pointed out once. And, then, a whole host of critics have found in Jibanananda certain elements of impressionism, abstract expressionism, Dadaism, surrealism, and even "postmodernism."

This list—by no means exhaustive—at least gives us an idea of the textual plasticity and hermeneutic hospitality of Jibanananda's extraordinarily rich poetic oeuvre, which, however, remains exemplarily rooted in his own land, Bangladesh—both urban and rural.

For instance, in his collection of incomparably beautiful sonnets called *Rupashi Bangla* alone, Jibanananda's massive constellations of images—soundless lights and silent surges of moist smells in the peasant's field, dewdrops drenching the *chalta* flowers, the brown-winged *shalik* growing gold in the shadows of the dusk, the *Kadam* forest under *Ashwin*'s autumnal sky, spotted owls smelling like paddy fields, kingfishers iridescent in the sun, ripening mangoes, the stellar totality of the carambola, lemon tree branches drooping in the dark, the *sharputi* and *chital* fish leaping, and then the rivers Karnaphuli, Dhaleshwari, Padma, Jalangi as well as the proverbial Dhaniriri River itself, among others—distinctly and abundantly bespeak the poet's sensuous rootedness in rural Bengal.

In fact, this very Bengal comes to constitute a "concrete universal" in much of Jibanananda's work. It's not for nothing that the poet ardently announces in one of his sonnets, "Go wherever you desire—I'll remain by Bengal's banks."

But then, cities and their daily dirty dialects—engendered by capitalism and colonialism—also figure profusely in much of Jibanananda's poetry. Even in his book *Banalata Sen*—as in his other works—city streets, trams, buses, gaslights, bricks, signs, windows, doors, roofs—among others—serve as pervasive, even governing tropes, while the bustle of slums and the busyness of bazaars, cries of street vendors and lepers on footpaths, day labourers and *rickshawallahs*, beggars and even the *lumpenproletariat*, etc. come to characterise much of the class-riven cityscape in Jibanananda, whose brand of modernism singularly represents the tensions and transactions between cities and villages, for instance. Indeed, Jibanananda was one of the most acutely class-conscious poets among the modernists in colonial Bengal.

And—as I have argued elsewhere—he even deftly mobilised the tropes of political economy within the spaces of his poems themselves, advancing his "micro-critique" of the commodity culture of capitalism and thus unsettling the otherwise misleading characterisation of this poet as a "purist," or as an "aesthete," indifferent to the dull prose of daily living. Indeed, the Jibanananda of political economy has remained unheeded in



ILLUSTRATION: STAR

**He himself told us that his work should not be reduced to pigeon-holing labels, many of which are already in circulation; rather, he looked for a critical consideration of his oeuvre in its totality. And the very question of totality continues to remain a challenge for the readers and critics of Jibanananda Das.**

contemporary Bangla literary criticism.

Now, as for Jibanananda's broad thematic preoccupations in his poetry, one can go on and on naming them in a great variety of ways: for example, the contradictions between the temporal and the timeless within the determinate horizon of the historical, the metaphysics and the physicality of language and love, pre-history and even geological time, geographical-cartographical imagination, war and peace, social conflicts, deep nostalgia, the corruption and hypocrisies of middle-class politicians and businessmen, moral decadence in contemporary society, deadly pessimism yet tremendous optimism, and even the question of Revolution (it is not only interesting but also suggestive that he uses directly in his poetry the word "*biplob*" or "revolution" quite a number of times from, say, at least *Mahaprithibee* to *Satti Tarar Timir* to *Bela Obela Kalbela*, not to mention numerous poems discovered after his death).

In any event, one can easily see that the political and the philosophical profoundly intersect in Jibanananda's poetic spaces forged with boundless *energeia* and *élan*. I should also point out that the rhythms and pressures of his historical conjuncture—characterised by events such as World War II, communal riots and violence, famine, and the Partition of India, among others—have significantly informed his poetic sensibility and poetry.

Now, let me make a few more general observations about Jibanananda

Das. True, he has most effectively and influentially shaped the idiom of modern Bangla poetry, while his persistent concerns with the entire range of places and peoples and seasons of his own land fiercely bespeak his anticolonial rootedness, underlining his brand of poetics that challenges Eurocentrism at every turn.

In fact, Jibanananda ultimately emerges as an anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, and anti-communal poet. And, thus, he is markedly different from some of his contemporaries known as the modernist poets of the 1930s—Sudhin Dutta (1901-1960), Amiya Chakravarty (1901-1986), and Buddhadeva Bose (1908-1974), for instance. Also, Jibanananda's relentless explorations of the historical and the unconscious—accompanied by his explorations of the various rhythms of time and of different spatial contours and constellations—have given his poetry the kind of textures as well as stylistic range and flexibility that were totally unknown before him. It is because of all this that Jibanananda is always with us.

Let me now conclude by commenting on his own statement about his poetry made in the preface to *Shreshtha Kabita* (Best Poems). He himself told us that his work should not be reduced to pigeon-holing labels, many of which are already in circulation; rather, he looked for a critical consideration of his oeuvre in its totality. And the very question of totality continues to remain a challenge for the readers and critics of Jibanananda Das.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS  
1 José's house  
5 Travel stop  
10 "Skyfall" singer  
12 Plain silly  
13 Electricity producers  
15 Period of history  
16 Negating word  
17 Obtain  
18 Came back, as a lizard's tail  
20 Ripped  
21 Oscar winner  
Wither-spoon  
22 Cold War side  
23 Razor sharpener  
25 Price tag info  
28 Pesky swarm  
31 Fine study

32 Bring to mind  
34 Diner dessert  
35 Sheep sound  
36 One with political influence  
40 Kagan of the Supreme Court  
41 Photo finish  
42 "I Am Woman" singer Helen  
43 Fling

DOWN  
1 Crime outing  
2 Fond fellow  
3 Smelly flow  
4 Sallow supply  
5 Sword part  
6 "Not—dare!"  
7 Lively dances  
8 Comes in

9 Holt of NBC News  
11 Writer Hemingway  
14 Coup  
19 Takes a breather  
20 "Dear Mama" rapper  
24 Slot machine feature  
25 Big finale  
26 Baltimore player  
27 Blotto  
29 Address  
30 Winter showers  
33 Oral traditions  
35 Donkey sound  
38 Finish  
39 Granola bit

TUESDAY'S ANSWERS

1. JACUZZI  
2. BANGOR  
3. SMOELLY  
4. SWORD  
5. HILT  
6. DARE  
7. DANCES  
8. COMES  
9. HOLT  
10. SKYFALL  
11. HEMINGWAY  
12. SILLY  
13. ELECTRICITY  
14. COUP  
15. PERIOD  
16. NEGATING  
17. OBTAIN  
18. LIZARD  
19. BREATHER  
20. MAMA  
21. OSCAR  
22. COLD WAR  
23. RAZOR  
24. SLOT MACHINE  
25. FINALE  
26. BALTIMORE  
27. BLOTTO  
28. PESKY  
29. ADDRESS  
30. WINTER SHOWERS  
31. FINE STUDY  
32. BRING TO MIND  
33. ORAL TRADITIONS  
34. DINER DESSERT  
35. SHEEP SOUND  
36. POLITICAL INFLUENCE  
37. FLOW  
38. FINISH  
39. GRANOLA BIT

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার  
প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কার্যালয়  
বাংলাদেশ রপ্তানী প্রক্রিয়াকরণ এলাকা কর্তৃপক্ষ  
ঢাকা রপ্তানী প্রক্রিয়াকরণ এলাকা  
গনকবাড়ী, আশুলিয়া, সাভার, ঢাকা।  
(www.bepza.gov.bd)

তারিখ: ১৪ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২২

মহিলা শ্রমিকদের প্রশিক্ষণ কেন্দ্রকে হাসপাতালসহ নার্সিং ইনস্টিটিউট/মেডিকেল কলেজ পরিচালনার লক্ষ্যে ভাড়া বরাদ্দের আগ্রহ ব্যক্তকরণ  
Expression of Interest (EOI) বিজ্ঞপ্তি

বাংলাদেশ রপ্তানী প্রক্রিয়াকরণ এলাকা কর্তৃপক্ষ (বেপজা) এর আওতাধীন ঢাকা ইপিজেডে ০৫ (পাঁচ) একর জায়গায় মহিলা শ্রমিকদের জন্য স্থাপিত সুপারিকলিত প্রশিক্ষণ কেন্দ্রকে হাসপাতাল সম্পর্কিত ব্যবসা বা পর্যায়ক্রমে হাসপাতাল সমেত নার্সিং ইনস্টিটিউট বা মেডিকেল কলেজ প্রতিষ্ঠার নিমিত্তে মাসিক ভাড়ার ভিত্তিতে পরিচালনার জন্য আগ্রহী প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিকট হতে নিম্নবর্ণিত শর্তে সীলমোহরকৃত খামে আগ্রহ ব্যক্তকরণ প্রস্তাব EOI আদান করা যাচ্ছে। উক্ত কেন্দ্রে প্রশিক্ষণ ভবনে প্রতি তলায় প্রায় ১৬,৯৬০.৫৪ বর্গফুট ফ্লোর স্পেস সম্বলিত দ্বি-তল ভবনের ক্ষেত্রফল প্রায় ৩৩,৮৮১.০৮ বর্গফুট। এতে ০৯ টি বৃহদাকার ক্লাস রুম, কনফারেন্স কক্ষ, প্রতিষ্ঠান প্রধানসহ অন্যান্য প্রশিক্ষকদের জন্য অফিস কক্ষ, প্রয়োজনীয় যাবতীয় আধুনিক সুযোগ সুবিধা রয়েছে। তাছাড়া, ০২ টি ০৪ তলা বিশিষ্ট ডরমিটরী ভবন যার মোট ক্ষেত্রফল প্রায় ১,২৭,৫৩৪.৬২ বর্গফুট যেখানে ৬০০ জন প্রশিক্ষার্থী থাকার জন্য ১০০টি সুসজ্জিত কক্ষ, পর্যাপ্ত ক্লাসরুম ও প্রশস্ত ডাইনিং হল, পানি, গ্যাস ও বিদ্যুৎসহ যাবতীয় মানসম্মত সুবিধাদি বিদ্যমান রয়েছে। এছাড়া উক্ত আশ্রিত প্রবেশমুখে ৮২৪.০০ বর্গফুট ক্ষেত্রফল বিশিষ্ট একটি ০১ তলা গার্ডরুম রয়েছে। উক্ত এলাকায় কার পার্কিং ও ভবিষ্যত সম্প্রসারণের জন্য প্রায় ১,০৪,০০০.০০ বর্গফুট খালি জায়গা রয়েছে।

দরপত্রের শর্তাবলী:

১. আগ্রহী প্রতিষ্ঠানকে Joint Stock কোম্পানী কর্তৃক নিবন্ধিত হতে হবে।
২. যে কোনো আগ্রহী প্রতিষ্ঠান একক বা যৌথভাবে EOI দাখিল করতে পারবেন।
৩. হাসপাতালসহ নার্সিং ইনস্টিটিউট/মেডিকেল কলেজ পরিচালনার ন্যূনতম ৫ (পাঁচ) বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে।
৪. হালনাগাদ ট্রেড লাইসেন্স, আয়কর ও ভ্যাট সনদ এবং নিরীক্ষা প্রতিবেদনের কপি দাখিল করতে হবে।
৫. Memorandum of articles এবং RJSC Incorporation Certificate along with Form XII দাখিল করতে হবে।
৬. হাসপাতালের জন্য প্রস্তাবিত সার্বিক সেবা সম্বলিত বিবরণ, হাসপাতাল পরিচালনার অভিজ্ঞতার স্বপক্ষে প্রমাণক/যেষণা, অন্যান্য বিশেষ যোগ্যতা (যদি থাকে) দাখিল করতে হবে।
৭. Liquid Asset(s) এর স্বপক্ষে দলিলাদী দাখিল করতে হবে।
৮. EOI সমূহ সীলগালা করা খামে মুখবন্ধ অবস্থায় সরাসরি "নির্বাহী পরিচালক", ঢাকা ইপিজেড, গনকবাড়ী, আশুলিয়া, সাভার, ঢাকা এর দপ্তরে রক্ষিত দরপত্র বাগে ৩১ মার্চ ২০২২ তারিখ দুপুর ১২.০০ ঘটিকার মধ্যে অবশ্যই পৌঁছাতে হবে। দুপুর ১২.০০ টার পর কোন EOI গ্রহণ করা হবে না। প্রাপ্ত EOI সমূহ বাছাইয়ের জন্য ঐ দিনই দুপুর ২.৩০ ঘটিকায় দরদাতাগণের অথবা তাদের মনোনীত প্রতিনিধির উপস্থিতিতে (যদি কেহ উপস্থিত থাকেন) উন্মুক্ত করা হবে।
৯. অসম্পূর্ণ বা ত্রুটিপূর্ণ EOI সরাসরি বাতিল বলে গণ্য হবে।
১০. কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে কর্তৃপক্ষ যে কোন EOI গ্রহণ বা বাতিল কিংবা সকল EOI বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করে।

মোঃ আব্দুস সোবহান  
নির্বাহী পরিচালক  
ফোন: ০২৯৯৬৬৮৯০০২  
ই-মেইল: gm.depz@bepza.gov.bd