

ESSAY

# What happened to him “One Day Eight Years Ago”?

Trigger Warning: Suicide

ABDULLAH RAYHAN

Unless you are familiar with the reference to the poem, the title probably confused you. No, it's not about Jibanananda Das himself, but one of his poems' protagonists who did something strange. The 10th poem from Jibanananda's *Mahapritihibi* tells the story of a person who had everything in life but still, for a strange feeling, an unknown ambivalence, chose to hang himself and now is lying in a morgue.

At the beginning and toward the end of the poem, the poet clarifies that the protagonist had a satisfying marital and material life. In the first stanza, the poet describes,

“His wife lay beside - his child too;  
He had love, and dream.”

A similar idea is reflected in the second last stanza, where the poet says,

“No woman jilted him in love.  
He did not miss  
A bit of marital bliss;  
His wife went beyond what the times required

And gave him the taste of honey -  
Honey from the hive of her mind;”

In the following few lines, we also get the idea that this person owned “riches”, had done good “deeds”, and even was blessed with “a life of ease”. But these worldly pleasures were not enough for him. Something troubled his soul that he himself couldn't comprehend. And this troubled feeling is the reason he chooses to commit suicide.

But what can be the reason here?

One interpretation is that the protagonist was burdened by his loneliness. In the poem, the strange feeling that instigated the person to



ILLUSTRATION: AFSANA MIM

commit suicide was conveyed to him by “a silence like the neck of a camel.”

Sumita Chakravarty's interpretation says that this surrealistic imagery (or a metaphysical conceit?) indicates the feeling of loneliness that a desert evokes. The silent sense of solitude glided to the protagonist the way a camel would quietly stretch its long neck into the tent of bedouins.

The loneliness felt strange to him because he had a wife and a child. There is no reason for him to feel deserted while they lay right beside. Although he can't detect what it is, he infers that it's not merely loneliness. There's something more to it that trammelled his existence, and he wanted to escape the suffocation. He believed if he kills himself, he,

“Will not face anymore the stress  
The heavy burden -  
The deep unceasing pain of

consciousness.”

What is this pain-laden consciousness? It's a macabre realization that the poet either does not or refuses to understand. Toward the end of the poem, the poet again mentions that this “beguiling disaster”, this “baffling shock”, constantly “frolics in our blood”. In other words, it's something we all feel, yet the feeling is a stranger to us.

This same consciousness is referred to in another of Jibanananda's poems, “Bodh” or “Sensation”. Here, the poet says,

“Within my head,  
Not a dream, but some sensation  
works its will.  
I cannot escape it.”

The poetic persona explicitly says this feeling is impossible to get rid of, and this inescapable sensation induces a nihilistic sentiment. In the poet's words,

“All thought - all times of prayer,  
Seem empty,  
Empty, so it seems.”

This “bodh”/“sensation” is the same as that “beguiling disaster,” the “baffling shock” that incited the protagonist of “One Day Eight Years Ago” to commit suicide. This strange, ungraspable, nihilistic consciousness is the reason why a person may choose to end their life despite having loved ones. Now the question is, what is this ‘consciousness’ or ‘realisation’? Perhaps Camus can answer.

The straightforwardness of Albert Camus has blessed literature and philosophy with certain explicit truths of the human condition that people are generally ashamed of or are afraid to reveal. Camus mentions one such impulse in *The Stranger*. He wrote,

“At one time or another all normal people have wished their loved ones were dead.”

Here, Camus is saying that we experience an ambivalence when someone has an enormous emotional power over us. We are delighted about it because it's a confirmation that someone cares. But, at the same time, it feels burdensome, and we get, to some extent, the sense of being controlled. The unwritten obligation of returning the love and care, the weight of carrying implicit expectations, and the potential of disappointment it contains become too much for us sometimes.

Camus explicitly points out that “all normal people” feel this way. It is an inevitable feeling, just like the sensation Jibanananda talks about, the one that “frolics in our blood”. It's a reasonable conclusion considering that

the protagonist of “One Day Eight Years Ago” had a loving family, but he still felt an estranged unfamiliar desire. This peculiar urge nurtured the burden he couldn't sustain anymore.

At this point, there's still one unresolved aspect yet to address. Camus talks about people wishing that their loved ones were dead, whereas in “One Day Eight Years Ago,” we see the protagonist killing himself instead of doing anything to his family. The reason is, unlike Camus, he couldn't apprehend this specific emotion. This particular sentiment, this morbid wish of parting with loved ones, made him feel guilty. Probably this is why he chose to shut his mind and denied that he recognized this desire from the very beginning. The poet mentions it this way,

“He asks,  
What ghost did he see?  
Why could he sleep no longer?”

Even though he failed to fathom the strange emotion, the stress and pressure that arose from this particular epiphany were still alive in his mind. It may not be apparent to his heart, but it profoundly throbbed in his veins. And it will all persist as long as his beloveds save space for him in their soul. This is that “beguiling disaster,” that “baffling shock” which made the protagonist of “One Day Eight Years Ago” drift off to an Ashwatha tree in a moonlit night like Gautama Buddha did one day 2,500 years ago.

The translations of the poems mentioned in this article are contributions of Fakrul Alam, Clinton B. Seely, and Faizul Latif Chowdhury.

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In tribute to  
Jibanananda  
Das, born on  
February 17,  
1899



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

**She always wakes up at night and looks at me like I am some prey. These days I just keep the lights off and keep looking at the wall. She wakes up suddenly from her unnatural beeline posture, slowly and ever so gently, like a chained demon would after just hours of calculated slumber. I never look. I don't even want to accept the fact that she exists. I know her bloodshot eyes are preying on my fear.**

FICTION

## La Marionette

KAZI MAHDI AMIN

She is just three years old now. I have counted every day since this infernal presence took over my life. Her father died an unnatural death just 40 days after she came. A healthy man with stuffy arms just went a pale black, like wet coal or old blood-drenched rags. The doctors said it was some bug that ate up his veins. I never believed them. It was her. I knew it was her. “We can't be here anymore babe. We have to run somehow”, were his last words to me. But I knew we could not run. Her touch would burn my skin. She looked at me with a cold, blank and unforgiving stare. It was her.  
My small apartment always felt colder.

I only felt the sun when she was asleep. Running, hiding—nothing worked. When she woke up, I had to be there. Spiked thorns dug out my insides every time I tried to run. It wouldn't stop until I

**I crept under my sheets.  
It was cold again, like  
it has been cold for so  
long. Her voice turned to  
a deep rumble, ordering  
me to look at her.**

returned. I had to come back, always facing her wrath.

Today is the day. It was time for her to leave me. The demon that lived inside

my little child for so long, always said it would kill me. Her voice turned every time she said that. Like a trumpet blowing in the dead of the night. A chilling, unnerving voice that felt like needles all over my body. “You will die, you will die, you will die.”

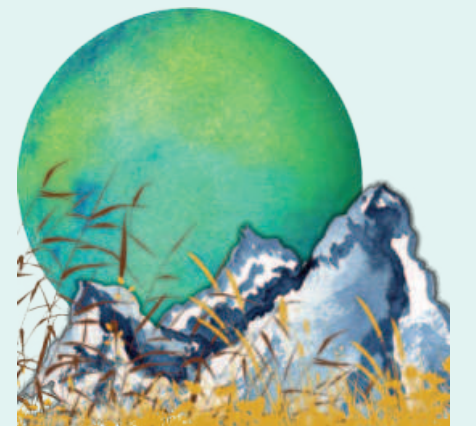
Today is the day.  
I have been living like a puppet on strings for the past three years. I fed her. Every day her dark soul grew stronger. My little child, ever lost and unborn. She was never my daughter. She was a vessel for the insurgent from hell. Somehow, after three long years, it feels like a sigh of relief. A life taken, but freed.

The small hands caressed my forehead while I crept under my sheets. It was cold

again, like it has been cold for so long. Her voice turned to a deep rumble, ordering me to look at her. Her eyes were lost under tangled and wet hair. Yet I knew, the silhouette of the motionless toddler was unblinking, looking at its prey. My beating heart pressed against my ribs, like an overweight coat hanging in a cramped closet. I had to look, or I would be forced to. My hollow mouth with half of a tongue screamed in silence. Finally, I will be free. Dead and free from her. All dead.

She left again. Hunting for new prey.

Kazi Mahdi Amin is a seasonal poet, casual writer, and a full time keyboard warrior.



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

POETRY

## Mothers of the earth

TASNEEM HOSSAIN

I sow the seeds, I nurture the ground.  
I water the plant for bountiful sprouts.  
This land is mine, here I fully survive.  
When herbage abounds, I fully thrive  
They come to claim and to deprive  
me of my freedoms and rights;  
of what I have brought to life.  
They fake my true identity.  
They burn me, they fake my cursed  
infidelity.  
I bleed, I lose my sanity.  
I nurture and I give birth to all that grows.  
I won't let anything rot;  
I am the mistress of this field.  
This ground is now my battlefield.  
Come, if you may, with swords or guns.  
Remember, I won't cry and run;  
I will rise from the depths of the land;  
The land that you have made into my  
grave,  
stop you from taking away what's not  
yours.  
I am the mistress of my own.  
Goddess of the land—Tellus, Gaea, Ceres,  
Diana, and Artemis;  
Taking the form of Amanda, Amy,  
Hannah, Leena,  
Susan West Anna Baldwin;  
Become today's Bellona, Athena ready to  
win.  
Let's rise against the beastly beasts.  
Save our produce from hyena's teeth;  
Nothing can stop our united screams,  
Together we will break the grass and glass  
ceiling.  
This land is ours, no one can steal.  
If together we stand with zest and zeal.  
Together we will overcome the ordeal  
Together we can make this a heavenly  
field.  
Rise O' woman!  
Let our screams resonate;  
As we walk the fields on our journey to  
heal.  
For the farmer women.

Tasneem Hossain is a multilingual poet, columnist, op-ed and fiction writer, translator, and training consultant.