

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 manner, these taunting lines seemed like words of comfort.

For once, I could understand what Das was all about; there is more to him than the poetry that depicts the picturesque setting of Barishal; or the tranquillity he felt for Ms Sen. As I dug deep into the abyss that is Jibanananda's consciousness, I realised there is so much more to him than those oft repeated works.

While explaining his own stance to life and poetry in general, Jibanananda said —

A mature artist — does not propose to evade the riddles around him...He arrives at his own philosophy and builds in his own world, which is never a negation of the actual one, but this is the same 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remain unpublished still), one finds a 'thinking poet'; one who interacts with society and living.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.

— 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;

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?

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.

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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 certainty, 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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