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Jibanananda Das
- poems -

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Jibanananda Das(17 February 1899 – 22 October 1954)

Jibanananda Das was a Bengali poet, writer, novelist and essayist. Dimly recognized during his lifetime, today Das is acknowledged as the premier poet of post-Tegorian literature in India and Bangladesh. He is considered as Bengal's "greatest" modern poet and "best loved" poet too, his poems being regarded as "part of the Bengali consciousness on the both side of border" between India and Bangladesh. For the poets in the latter half of the twentieth century Das "has practically come to take place of [Tagore](http://www.poemhunter.com/rabindranath-tagore/). Das's oeuvre is eclectic and resists classification under any single heading or school.

Das wrote ceaselessly but as he was an introvert and the "most alone of [Bengali] poets", he "compelled to suppress some of his most important writings or to locate them in a secret life". During his lifetime, only seven volumes of his poems were published. After his death, it was discovered that apart from poems Das wrote several novels and a large number of short stories. His unpublished works are still being published.

Das died on October 22, 1954; eight days after he was hit by a tramcar. The witnesses said that though the tramcar whistled, he did not stop and got struck. Some deem the accident as an attempt of suicide.

Biography

"Poetry and life are two different outpouring of the same thing; life as we usually conceive it contains what we normally accept as reality, but the spectacle of this incoherent and disorderly life can satisfy neither the poet's talent nor the reader's imagination ... poetry does not contain a complete reconstruction of what we call reality; we have entered a new world. "

—Jibanananda Das

Early Life

Jibanananda Das was born in 1899 in a Vaidya-Brahmin family in the small district town of Barisal, located in the south of Bangladesh. His ancestors came from the Bikrampur region of Dhaka district, from a now-extinct village called Gaupara on the banks of the river Padma. Jibanananda's grandfather Sarbananda Dasgupta was the first to settle permanently in Barisal. He was an early

exponent of the reformist Brahmo Samaj movement in Barisal and was highly regarded in town for his philanthropy. He erased the -gupta suffix from the family name, regarding it as a symbol of Vedic Brahmin excess, thus rendering the surname to Das. Jibanananda's father Satyananda Das (1863–1942) was a schoolmaster, essayist, magazine publisher, and founder-editor of Brôhmobadi, a journal of the Brahmo Samaj dedicated to the exploration of social issues.

Jibanananda's mother Kusumkumari Das was a poet who wrote a famous poem called Adôrsho Chhele ("The Ideal Boy") whose refrain is well known to Bengalis to this day: Amader deshey hobey shei chhele kobey / Kothae na boro hoye kajey boro hobey. (The child who achieves not in words but in deeds, when will this land know such a one?)

Jibanananda was the eldest son of his parents, and was called by the nickname Milu. A younger brother Ashokananda Das was born in 1908 and a sister called Shuchorita in 1915. Milu fell violently ill in his childhood, and his parents feared for his life. Fervently desiring to restore his health, Kusumkumari took her ailing child on pilgrimage to Lucknow, Agra and Giridih. They were accompanied on these journeys by their uncle Chandranath.

In January 1908, Milu, by now eight years old, was admitted to the fifth grade in Brojomohon School. The delay was due to his father's opposition to admitting children into school at too early an age. Milu's childhood education was therefore limited to his mother's tutelage.

His school life passed by relatively uneventfully. In 1915 he successfully completed his matriculation examination from Brojomohon, obtaining a first division in the process. He repeated the feat two years later when he passed the intermediate exams from Brajamohan College. Evidently an accomplished student, he left his rural Barisal to join the University of Calcutta.

 Life in Calcutta: First Phase

Jibanananda enrolled in Presidency College, Kolkata, then as now a prestigious seat of Indian learning. He studied English literature and graduated with a BA (Honours) degree in 1919. That same year, his first poem appeared in print in the Boishakh issue of Brahmobadi journal. Fittingly, the poem was called Borsho-abahon (Arrival of the New Year). This poem was published anonymously, with only the honorific Sri in the byline. However, the annual index in the year-end issue of the magazine revealed his full name: "Sri Jibanananda Das Gupta, BA".

In 1921, he completed the MA degree in English from University of Calcutta,

obtaining a second class. He was also studying law. At this time, he lived in the Hardinge student quarters next to the university. Just before his exams, he fell ill with bacillary dysentery, which affected his preparation for the examination.

The following year, he started his teaching career. He joined the English department of City College, Calcutta as a tutor. By this time, he had left Hardinge and was boarding at Harrison Road. He gave up his law studies. It is thought that he also lived in a house in Bechu Chatterjee Street for some time with his brother Ashokanananda, who had come there from Barisal for his MSc studies.

** Travels and Travails **

His literary career was starting to take off. When Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das died in June 1925, Jibanananda wrote a poem called 'Deshbandhu'r Prayan'e' ("On the Death of the Friend of the nation") which was published in Bangabani magazine. This poem would later take its place in the collection called Jhara Palok (1927). On reading it, poet Kalidas Roy said that he had thought the poem was the work of a mature, accomplished poet hiding behind a pseudonym. Jibanananda's earliest printed prose work was also published in 1925. This was an obituary entitled "Kalimohan Das'er Sraddha-bashorey," which appeared in serialized form in Brahmobadi magazine. His poetry began to be widely published in various literary journals and little magazines in Calcutta, Dhaka and elsewhere. These included Kallol, perhaps the most famous literary magazine of the era, Kalikalam (Pen and Ink), Progoti (Progress) (co-edited by Buddhadeb Bose) and others. At this time, he occasionally used the surname Dasgupta as opposed to Das.

In 1927, Jhara Palok (Fallen Feathers), his first collection of poems, came out. A few months later, Jibanananda was fired from his job at the City College. The college had been struck by student unrest surrounding a religious festival, and enrolment seriously suffered as a consequence. Still in his late 20s, Jibanananda was the youngest member of the faculty and therefore regarded as the most dispensable. In the literary circle of Calcutta, he also came under serial attack. One of the most serious literary critics of that time, Sajanikanta Das, began to write aggressive critiques of his poetry in the review pages of Shanibarer Chithi (the Saturday Letter) magazine.

With nothing to keep him in Calcutta, Jibanananda left for the small town of Bagerhat in the far south, there to resume his teaching career at Bagerhat P. C. College. But only after about three months he returned to the big city, now in dire financial straits. To make ends meet, he gave private tuition to students

while applying for full-time positions in academia. In December 1929, he moved to Delhi to take up a teaching post at Ramjosh College; again this lasted no more than a few months. Back in Barisal, his family had been making arrangements for his marriage. Once Jibanananda got to Barisal, he failed to go back to Delhi – and, consequently, lost the job.

In May 1930, he married Labanya, a girl whose ancestors came from Khulna. At the subsequent reception in Dhaka's Ram Mohan Library, leading literary lights of the day such as Ajit Kumar Dutta and Buddhadeb Bose were assembled. A daughter called Manjusree was born to the couple in February of the following year.

Around this time, he wrote one of his most controversial poems. "Camp'e" (At the Camp) was printed in Sudhindranath Dutta's Parichay magazine and immediately caused a firestorm in the literary circle of Calcutta. The poem's ostensible subject is a deer hunt on a moonlit night. Many accused Jibanananda of promoting indecency and incest through this poem. More and more, he turned now, in secrecy, to fiction. He wrote a number of short novels and short stories during this period of unemployment, strife and frustration.

In 1934 he wrote the series of poems that would form the basis of the collection called Rupasi Bangla. These poems were not discovered during his lifetime, and were only published in 1957, three years after his death.

 Back in Barisal

In 1935, Jibanananda, by now familiar with professional disappointment and poverty, returned to his alma mater Brajamohan College, which was then affiliated with the University of Calcutta. He joined as a lecturer in the English department. In Calcutta, Buddhadeb Bose, Premendra Mitra and Samar Sen were starting a brand new poetry magazine called Kobita. Jibanananda's work featured in the very first issue of the magazine, a poem called Mrittu'r Aagey (Before Death). Upon reading the magazine, Tagore wrote a lengthy letter to Bose and especially commended the Das poem: Jibanananda Das' vivid, colourful poem has given me great pleasure. It was in the second issue of Kobita (Poush 1342 issue, Dec 1934/Jan 1935) that Jibanananda published his now-legendary Banalata Sen. Today, this 18-line poem is among the most famous poems in the language.

The following year, his second volume of poetry Dhusar Pandulipi was published. Jibanananda was by now well settled in Barisal. A son Samarananda was born in November 1936. His impact in the world of Bengali literature continued to

increase. In 1938, Tagore compiled a poetry anthology entitled *Bangla Kabya Parichay* (Introduction to Bengali Poetry) and included an abridged version of *Mrityu'r Aagey*, the same poem that had moved him three years ago. Another important anthology came out in 1939, edited by Abu Sayeed Ayub and Hirendranath Mukhopadhyay; Jibanananda was represented with four poems: *Pakhira*, *Shakun*, *Banalata Sen*, and *Nagna Nirjan Haat*.

In 1942, the same year that his father died, his third volume of poetry *Banalata Sen* was published under the aegis of *Kobita Bhavan* and *Buddhadeb Bose*. A ground-breaking modernist poet in his own right, Bose was a steadfast champion of Jibanananda's poetry, providing him with numerous platforms for publication. 1944 saw the publication of *Maha Prithibi*. The Second World War had a profound impact on Jibanananda's poetic vision. The following year, Jibanananda provided his own translations of several of his poems for an English anthology to be published under the title *Modern Bengali Poems*. Oddly enough, the editor *Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya* considered these translations to be sub-standard, and instead commissioned *Martin Kirkman* to translate four of Jibanananda's poems for the book.

 Life in Calcutta: Final Phase

The aftermath of the war saw heightened demands for Indian independence. Muslim politicians led by *Jinnah* wanted an independent homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent. Bengal was uniquely vulnerable to partition: its western half was majority-Hindu, its eastern half majority-Muslim. Yet adherents of both religions spoke the same language, came from the same ethnic stock, and lived in close proximity to each other in town and village. Jibanananda had emphasized the need for communal harmony at an early stage. In his very first book *Jhora Palok*, he had included a poem called *Hindu Musalman*. In it he proclaimed:

However, events in real life belied his beliefs. In the summer of 1946, he travelled to Calcutta from *Barisal* on three months' paid leave. He stayed at his brother *Ashokananda's* place through the bloody riots that swept the city. Just before partition in August 1947, Jibanananda quit his job at *Brajamohan College* and said goodbye to his beloved *Barisal*. He and his family were among the X million refugees who took part in the largest cross-border exchange of peoples in history. For a while he worked for a magazine called *Swaraj* as its Sunday editor. But he left the job after a few months.

In 1948, he completed two of his novels, *Mallyaban* and *Shutirtho*, neither of which were discovered during his life. *Shaat'ti Tarar Timir* was published in

December 1948. The same month, his mother Kusumkumari Das died in Calcutta.

By now, he was well established in the Calcutta literary world. He was appointed to the editorial board of yet another new literary magazine Dondo (Conflict). However, in a reprise of his early career, he was sacked from his job at Kharagpur College in February 1951. In 1952, Signet Press published Banalata Sen. The book received widespread acclaim and won the Book of the Year award from the All-Bengal Tagore Literary Conference. Later that year, the poet found another job at Borisha College (today known as Borisha Bibekanondo College). This job too he lost within a few months. He applied afresh to Diamond Harbour Fakirchand College, but eventually declined it, owing to travel difficulties. Instead he was obliged to take up a post at Howrah Girl's College (now known as Bijoy Krishna Girls' College), a constituent affiliated undergraduate college of the University of Calcutta. As the head of the English department, he was entitled to a 50-taka monthly bonus on top of his salary.

By the last year of his life, Jibanananda was acclaimed as one of the best poets of the post-Tagore era. He was constantly in demand at literary conferences, poetry readings, radio recitals etc. In May 1954, he was published a volume titled 'Best Poems' (Sreshtho Kobita). His Best Poems won the Indian Sahitya Akademi Award in 1955.

 Love and Marriage

Young Jibanananda fell in love with Shovona, daughter of his uncle Atulchandra Das, who lived in the neighbourhood. He dedicated his first anthology of poems to Shovona without mentioning her name explicitly. He did not try to marry Shovona since marriage between cousins was not approvable by the society. But he never forgot Shovona who went by her nick Baby. She has been referred to as Y in his literary notes. Soon after wedding with Labanyaprabha Das (née Gupta) in 1930, personality clash erupted and Jibanananda Das gave up hope of a happy married life. The gap with his wife never narrowed. While Jibanananda was struggling with death after a tram accident on 14 October 1954, Labanyaprabha did not find time for more than once for visiting her husband on death bed. At that time she was busy in film-making in Tollyganj.

 Death

“One poet dead, killed near his fiftieth year . . . did introduce what for India would be 'the modern spirit': bitterness, self-doubt, sex, street diction, personal confession...”

—Allen Ginsberg On October 14, 1954, he was carelessly crossing a road near Calcutta's Deshapriya Park when he was hit by a tram. Jibanananda was returning home after his routine evening walk. At that time, he used to reside in a rented apartment on the Lansdowne Road. Seriously injured, he was taken to Shambhunath Pundit Hospital. Poet-writer Sajanikanta Das who had been one of his fiercest critics was tireless in his efforts to secure the best treatment for the poet. He even persuaded Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy (then chief minister of West Bengal) to visit him in hospital. Nonetheless, the injury was too severe to redress. Jibanananda died in hospital on October 22, 1954 eight days later, at about midnight. He was then 55 and left behind his wife, Labanyaprabha Das, a son and a daughter, and the ever-growing band of readers.

His body was cremated the following day at Keoratola crematorium. Following popular belief, it has been alleged in some biographical accounts that his accident was actually an attempt at ugh none of the Jibanananda biographers have indicated such, it appears from circumstantial evidence that it was an attempt to end his own life.

The literary circle deeply mourned his death. Almost all the newspapers published obituaries which contained sincere appreciations of the poetry of Jibanananda. Poet Sanjay Bhattacharya wrote the death news and sent to different newspapers. On 1 November 1954, The Times of India wrote :

The premature death after an accident of Mr. Jibanananda Das removes from the field of Bengali literature a poet, who, though never in the limelight of publicity and prosperity, made a significant contribution to modern Bengali poetry by his prose-poems and free-verse. ... A poet of nature with a serious awareness of the life around him Jibanananda Das was known not so much for the social content of his poetry as for his bold imagination and the concreteness of his image. To a literary world dazzled by Tagore's glory, Das showed how to remain true to the poet's vocation without basking in its reflection."

In his obituary in the Shanibarer Chithi, Sajanikanta Das quoted from the poet :

When one day I'll leave this body once for all -
Shall I never return to this world any more?
Let me come back
On a winter night
To the bedside of any dying acquaintance
With a cold pale lump of orange in hand.

Everyday Jibanananda returns to thousand of his readers and touches them with

his unforgettable lines.

Jibanananda and Bengali poetry

Influence of Tagore

As of 2009, Bengali is the mother tongue of more than 300 million people living mainly in Bangladesh and India. Bengali poetry of the modern age flourished on the elaborate foundation laid by Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824–1873) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). Tagore, a literary giant unparalleled in his time, ruled over the domain of Bengali poetry and literature for more than half a century, inescapably influencing contemporary poets. Bengali literature caught the attention of the international literary world when Tagore was awarded the 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature for *Gitanjali*, an anthology of poems rendered into English by the poet himself with the title *Song Offering*. Since then Bengali poetry has travelled a long way. It has evolved around its own tradition; it has responded to the poetry movements around the world; it has assumed various dimensions in different tones, colours and essence.

Contemporaries of Jibananda

In Bengal, efforts to break out of the Tagorian worldview and stylistics started in the early days of the 20th century. Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976) popularized himself on a wide scale with patriotic themes and musical tone and tenor. However, a number of new -ration poets consciously attempted to align Bengali poetry with the essence of worldwide emergent modernism, starting towards the end of the 19th century and attributeable to contemporary European and American trends. Five poets who are particularly acclaimed for their contribution in creating a post-Tagorian poetic paradigm and infusing modernism in Bengali poetry are Sudhindranath Dutta (1901–1960), Buddhadeb Bose (1908–1974), Amiya Chakravarty (1901–1986), Jibanananda Das (1899–1954) and Bishnu Dey (1909–1982). The contour of modernism in 20th-century Bengali poetry was drawn by these five pioneers and some of their contemporaries.

However, not all of them have survived the test of time. Of them, poet Jibanananda Das was little understood during his lifetime. In fact, he received scanty attention and some considered him incomprehensible. Readers, including his contemporary literary critics, also alleged faults in his style and diction. On occasions, he faced merciless criticism from leading literary personalities of his time. Even Tagore made unkind remarks on his diction, although he praised his poetic capability. Nevertheless, destiny reserved a crown for him.

 Growth of Popularity

During the later half of the twentieth century, Jibanananda Das emerged as the most popular poet of modern Bengali literature. Popularity apart, Jibanananda Das had distinguished himself as an extraordinary poet presenting a paradigm hitherto unknown. Whilst his unfamiliar poetic diction, choice of words and thematic preferences took time to reach the hearts of readers, by the end of the 20th century the poetry of Jibanananda had become a defining essence of modernism in 20th-century Bengali poetry.

Whilst his early poems bear the undoubted influence of Kazi Nazrul Islam and other poets like Satyendranath Dutta, before long Jibanananda had thoroughly overcome these influences and created a new poetic diction. Buddhadeb Bose was among the first to recognize his style and thematic novelty. However, as his style and diction matured, his message appeared obscured. Readers, including critics, started to complain about readability and question his sensibility.

Only after his accidental death in 1954 did a readership emerge that not only was comfortable with Jibanananda's style and diction but also enjoyed his poetry. Questions about the obscurity of his poetic message were no longer raised. By the time his birth centenary was celebrated in 1999, Jibanananda Das was the most popular and well-read poet of Bengali literature. Even when the last quarter of the 20th century ushered in the post-modern era, Jibanananda Das continued to be relevant to the new taste and fervour. This was possible because his poetry underwent many cycles of change, and later poems contain post-modern elements.

 Poetics

Jibanananda Das started writing and publishing in his early 20s. During his lifetime he published only 269 poems in different journals and magazines, of which 162 were collected in seven anthologies, from Jhara Palak to Bela Obela Kalbela. Many of his poems have been published posthumously at the initiative of his brother Asokananda Das, sister Sucharita Das and nephew Amitananda Das, and the efforts of Dr. Bhumendra Guha, who over the decades copied them from scattered manuscripts. By 2008, the total count of Jibanananda's known poems stood at almost 800. In addition, numerous novels and short stories were discovered and published about the same time.

Jibanananda scholar Clinton B. Seely has termed Jibanananda Das as "Bengal's most cherished poet since Rabindranath Tagore". On the other hand, to many, reading the poetry of Jibanananda Das is like stumbling upon a labyrinth of the

mind similar to what one imagines Camus's 'absurd' man toiling through. Indeed, Jibanananda Das's poetry is sometimes an outcome of profound feeling painted in imagery of a type not readily understandable. Sometimes the connection between the sequential lines is not obvious. In fact, Jibanananda Das broke the traditional circular structure of poetry (introduction-middle-end) and the pattern of logical sequence of words, lines and stanzas. Consequently, the thematic connotation is often hidden under a rhythmic narrative that requires careful reading between the lines. The following excerpt will bear the point out:

Lepers open the hydrant and lap some water.
Or maybe that hydrant was already broken.
Now at midnight they descend upon the city in droves,
Scattering sloshing petrol. Though ever careful,
Someone seems to have taken a serious spill in the water.
Three rickshaws trot off, fading into the last gaslight.
I turn off, leave Phear Lane, defiantly
Walk for miles, stop beside a wall
On Bentinck Street, at Territti Bazar,
There in the air dry as roasted peanuts.

(Night - a poem on night in Calcutta, translated by Clinton B. Seely)

Though Jibanananda Das was variously branded at times and was popularly known as a modernist of the Yeatsian-Poundian-Eliotesque school, Annadashankar Roy called him the truest poet. Jibanananda Das conceived a poem and moulded it up in the way most natural for him. When a theme occurred to him, he shaped it with words, metaphors and imagery that distinguished him from all others. Jibanananda Das's poetry is to be felt, rather than merely read or heard.

Writing about Jibanananda Das' poetry, Joe Winter remarked:

It is a natural process, though perhaps the rarest one. Jibanananda Das's style reminds us of this, seeming to come unbidden. It is full of sentences that scarcely pause for breath, of word-combinations that seem altogether unlikely but work, of switches in register from sophisticated usage to a village-dialect word, that jar and in the same instant settle in the mind, full of friction – in short, that almost becomes a part of the consciousness ticking.

A few lines are quoted below in support of Winter's remarks:

Nevertheless, the owl stays wide awake;
The rotten, still frog begs two more moments

in the hope of another dawn in conceivable warmth.
We feel in the deep tracelessness of flocking darkness
the unforgiving enmity of the mosquito-net all around;
The mosquito loves the stream of life,
awake in its monastery of darkness.

(One day eight years ago, translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury)

Or elsewhere:

... how the wheel of justice is set in motion
by a smidgen of wind -

or if someone dies and someone else gives him a bottle
of medicine, free - then who has the profit? -
over all of this the four have a mighty word-battle.
For the land they will go to now is called the soaring river
where a wretched bone-picker and his bone
come and discover
their faces in water - till looking at faces is over.

(Idle Moment, translated by Joe Winter)

Also noteworthy are his sonnets, the most famous being seven untitled pieces collected in the publication *Shaat-ti Tarar Timir* ("The Blackness of Seven Stars), where he describes, on one hand, his attachment to his motherland, and on the other, his views about life and death in general. They are noteworthy not only because of the picturesque description of nature that was a regular feature of most of his work but also for the use of metaphors and allegories. For example, a lone owl flying about in the night sky is taken as an omen of death, while the anklets on the feet of a swan symbolizes the vivacity of life.

Jibanananda successfully integrated Bengali poetry with the slightly older Eurocentric international modernist movement of the early 20th century. In this regard he possibly owes as much to his exotic exposure as to his innate poetic talent. Although hardly appreciated during his lifetime, many critics believe that his modernism, evoking almost all the suggested elements of the phenomenon, remains untranscended to date, despite the emergence of many notable poets during the last 50 years. His success as a modern Bengali poet may be attributed to the facts that Jibanananda Das in his poetry not only discovered the tract of the slowly evolving 20th-century modern mind, sensitive and reactive, full of anxiety and tension, but that he invented his own diction, rhythm and vocabulary,

with an unmistakably indigenous rooting, and that he maintained a self-styled lyricism and imagism mixed with an extraordinary existentialist sensuousness, perfectly suited to the modern temperament in the Indian context, whereby he also averted fatal dehumanization that could have alienated him from the people. He was at once a classicist and a romantic and created an appealing world hitherto unknown:

For thousands of years I roamed the paths of this earth,
From waters round Ceylon in dead of night
to Malayan seas.

Much have I wandered. I was there
in the grey world of Asoka
And Bimbisara, pressed on through darkness
to the city of Vidarbha.

I am a weary heart surrounded by life's frothy ocean.
To me she gave a moment's peace -
Banalata Sen from Natore.

(Banalata Sen)

While reading Jibanananda Das, one often encounters references to olden times and places, events and personalities. A sense of time and history is an unmistakable element that has shaped Jibanananda Das's poetic world to a great extent. However, he lost sight of nothing surrounding him. Unlike many of his peers who blindly imitated the renowned western poets in a bid to create a new poetic domain and generated spurious poetry, Jibanananda Das remained anchored in his own soil and time, successfully assimilating experiences real and virtual and producing hundreds of unforgettable lines. His intellectual vision was thoroughly embedded in Bengal's nature and beauty:

Amidst a vast meadow the last time when I met her
I said: 'Come again a time like this
if one day you so wish
twenty-five years later.'

This been said, I came back home.

After that, many a time, the moon and the stars
from field to field have died, the owls and the rats
searching grains in paddy fields on a moonlit night
fluttered and crept! - shut eyed
many times left and right
have slept
several souls! - awake kept I

all alone - the stars on the sky
travel fast
faster still, time speeds by.
Yet it seems
Twenty-five years will forever last.

(After Twenty-five Years, translated by Luna Rushdi)

Thematically, Jibanananda Das is amazed by the continued existence of humankind in the backdrop of eternal flux of time, wherein individual presence is insignificant and meteoric albeit inescapable. He feels that we are closed in, fouled by the numbness of this concentration cell (Meditations). To him, the world is weird and olden, and as a race, mankind has been a persistent "wanderer of this world" (Banalata Sen) that, according to him, has existed too long to know anything more (Before death, Walking alone) or experience anything fresh. The justification of further mechanical existence like Mahin's horses (The Horses) is apparently absent: "So (he) had slept by the Dhanshiri river on a cold December night, and had never thought of waking again" (Darkness).

As an individual, tired of life and yearning for sleep (One day eight years ago), Jibanananda Das is certain that peace can be found nowhere and that it is useless to move to a distant land, since there is no way of freedom from sorrows fixed by life (Land, Time and Offspring). Nevertheless, he suggests: "O sailor, you press on, keep pace with the sun!" (Sailor).

Why did Jibanananda task himself to forge a new poetic speech, while others in his time preferred to tread the usual path? The answer is simple. In his endeavours to shape a world of his own, he was gradual and steady. He was an inward-looking person and was not in a hurry.

I do not want to go anywhere so fast.
Whatever my life wants I have time to reach
there walking

(Of 1934 - a poem on the motor car, translated by Golam Mustafa)

In the poet's birth centenary, Bibhav published 40 of his poems that had been yet unpublished. Shamik Bose has translated a poem, untitled by the poet. Here is the Bengali original, with Bose's translation in English:

Under this sky, these stars beneath --

One day will have to sleep inside tiredness --
Like snow-filled white ocean of North Pole! -- This night - this day - O this light
as bright as it may! --
These designs for a life - will forget all --
Under such a silent, fathomless sky! -- Had felt the fragrance of a body one
day, --
By washing my body inside sea water --
Felt our heart so deep by falling in love! --
This vigor of life had seen one day awaken --
Light stoking the edge of darkness --
Have heard the passionate whispers of a night - always for a day! -- This visit!
This conscious vigil that I see, I feel --
Yet will end one day --
Time only remains for us to ripe like a harvest in green soil --
Once so ripen, then the hands of death will be likeable --
Will hold us in his chest, one by one --
Like a sleeporn --
Fugitive lovelorn --
Inside tender whispers! -- When that time will prosper to an end and he will
come --
That savor will be ... the most relishing.

Much literary evaluation of his poetry has been produced since Jibanananda Das's untimely death, beginning with the ten-page Introduction of *Naked Lonely Hand*, an anthology of 50 of the poet's poems rendered into English. Winter appears to have caught the essence of the poet, who appeared to be subtle, mysterious and bizarre even to native readers and critics of his time. He was also known as a surrealist poet for his spontaneous, frenzied overflow of subconscious mind in poetry and especially in diction.

 Prose Style

During his lifetime Jibanananda remained solely a poet who occasionally wrote literary articles, mostly on request. Only after his death were a huge number of novels and short-stories discovered. Thematically, Jibanananda's storylines are largely autobiographical. His own time constitutes the perspective. While in poetry he subdued his own life, he allowed it to be brought into his fiction. Structurally his fictional works are based more on dialogues than description by the author. However, his prose shows a unique style of compound sentences, use of non-colloquial words and a typical pattern of punctuation. His essays evidence a heavy prose style, which although complex, is capable of expressing complicated analytical statements. As a result his prose was very compact,

containing profound messages in a relatively short space.

A Magpie

At a slightly slothful pace
A silent man quietly walks across the meadows
His autumn passes by mostly propped on two legs
With a mouthful of still shadow of a plough and ox.

To his own water, the Bhagirathi is a close relative.
He responds to none from his secret den.
A magpie robin whistles out of mind-
cold from the earth's last afternoon

perched on the roof of a post-mortem cell.
Whose corpse was it? Who dissected?
Why the world today bleeds so much?
The violin goes on playing the chorus.

Twilight though, the rustic man walks as if basking in the sun
Nonexistent, yet a woman becomes visible.
When the magpie blows away the dissected corpse
I can feel the advent of a primordial magpie.

[Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury]

Jibanananda Das

A Star Converses With One Particular Star All Night Long

My eyes are sleep-laden,
I return home taking with me songs of fallen crops!
Everything held secret is gone, — how long a dream lasts?
The sunset returned with its rose hue, —it does not resemble one!
Two stars conversed all night long,
Our face remains on earth all night long!

The night has progressed well,
Yet, I hardly felt it all these years!
Those who I never saw in daylight, — they all came in gloaming's time;
The ones I never saw in the dust of the road – in smoke – among the crowd —
In my dream, I heard splash of water in the container, — the sound of bangles!
Under the night sky, I discovered them – aided by starlight!

My eyes were all awake
I witnessed many colored-cloud-cover skies in the twilight and before the
sunrise!
Alone, I returned to the rustic crop field so many days!
I tiptoed in a shady day by myself only like a flouncing butterfly
For so many a time! —In many inauspicious time, covering the meandering path
My trance ended, — the playhouse of my imagination came tumbling down.

Both my eyes are sleep-laden
I return home taking with me songs of fallen crops!
Everything held secret is gone, —how long a dream lasts?
The sunset returned with its rose hue, — it does not resemble one!
Two stars conversed all night long.

[Original: Sharati Ratri Taratir Shathe Taratir e Kotha Hoy (Bengali) from 'From Jhora Palak - A Fallen Feather', Translation by: A.H. Jaffor Ullah]

Jibanananda Das

Ah Kite

Ah kite, golden-winged kite, don't cry any more this noon
of moist clouds, as you hover around the Dhanshniri river
Your whimper reminds of her eyes dim as pale cane-fruit!

A pretty princess she has drifted afar,

leaving the Earth bereft of beauty;

Why do you call her back?

Who wants to stir up pain by digging heart?

Ah kite, golden-winged kite, stop crying this noon
of tearful clouds, while flying around the Dhanshniri river.

Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury

Jibanananda Das

Along The Tram Line

I walk along the tram line: night now deep
I hear the teasing of some life of the past:
'You are like a broken tram—
there is no depot, you don't need wage
Alas, when has this occurred! '
That old life sinks behind
The star in the sky, in darkness.

Which way to go? The quiet city has not answer.
She is just spread over,
Like the God of the believer.

I bury my face in her lap—I want to
believe, I wish
If my soul could walk away leaving
Aside the city avenues.

Light from the gas lamps beacons
At the entrance of the saddened lanes
They resonate with Sankha's wailing cries
I know them—like me they also know everything
That's why so much dark, tired, cold
All these lanes.

Yet they do not move—lost in
slumber, behind the stars
they take a break.
Who else will offer a recess?

Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury

Jibanananda Das

An October Morning

In one October morning,
some dewdrops fell on my face and hair.
The dewdrops are here through
Sarika bird's courtesy.

Three drenched sarika birds
almost touching an emblica tree
enjoying the sun's warmth.
Is it an indigo-laden blue field?
Or is it an azure sky?
Is it the sun? Or something sun-like?

The bird slithers away
from our world into its own.
In my life, I have seen many sarika birds,
but never have I seen anything
like those three.

[Original: Kartiker Bhorbela (Bengali) Translation by: A.H. Jaffor Ullah]

Note: 'Sarika Bird' is indigenous to India and is called Shalik in Bangla.
'Emblica' is known as Amloki in Bangla.

Jibanananda Das

Banalata Sen

It has been a thousand years since I started trekking the earth
A huge travel in night's darkness from the Ceylonese waters
to the Malayan sea
I have been there too: the fading world of Vimbisara and Asoka
Even further—the forgotten city of Vidarva,
Today I am a weary soul although the ocean of life around continues to foam,
Except for a few soothing moments with Natore's Banalata Sen.

Her hair as if the dark night of long lost Vidisha,
Her face reminiscent of the fine works of Sravasti,
When I saw her in the shadow it seemed
as if a ship-wrecked mariner in a far away sea
has spotted a cinnamon island lined with greenish grass.
"Where had you been lost all these days? "
yes, she demanded of me, Natore's Banalata Sen
raising her eyes of profound refuge.

At the day's end evening crawls in like the sound of dews,
The kite flaps off the smell of sun from its wings.
When all colours take leave from the world
except for the flicker of the hovering fireflies
The manuscript is ready with tales to be told
All birds come home, rivers too,
All transactions of the day being over
Nothing remains but darkness
to sit face to face with Banalata Sen.

Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury

Jibanananda Das

Day-Break And Six Bombers: 1942

I discern a few birds somewhere outside on grass,
dew drops dry-up in the sun rays
a few people—around their corn-field,
lonely like human beings
In anticipation of heavenly geometry
Even the earths undulations have
Mingled with the whole sky of
The present and the past.

Is there a general strike along
The horizon? —chimney... spread
Along the blue of the sky
easily, like birds.

Here ensteeped in the
Stillmates of the river
Clouds have arisen to the sky
Like spiral stairs—
They realize as they mingle with the nature,
... dazzling aluminium feel
I counted two three four five
Six aeroplanes
As if watching the blue of the skies,
In the sunlight, I took a look at the
Century's ghosts.

Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury

Jibanananda Das

Dispassionate!

There happens to be a port for light-skinned gals on the shore of Malay Sea.
Seen many a sea all across the globe; been through Kuala Lumpur, Java,
Sumatra, Indochina, and Bali where the blue mist laden sun's ray had touched
me.

Now it pains me to see a tan Malayan woman crying all day long.
She watches a blue hued desolate place on the shore of the sea.

There happens to be white colored cottages scattered inside a palm grove.
Those look whiter in the daylight just as fireflies would shine in the dark.
Light skinned couples milled around there just as crabs would hug a seashore,
They spend their times, the Malaya woman frets and flusters by mistake,
She cries watching this blue hued desolate place on the shore of the sea.

At the turn of the century, many ocean voyagers were heading this way,
towards this constricted harbor; thanks a million to the trade wind.
Because of the good fortune bestowed by trade wind, one day the wasteland
became filled with palm trees, opaque liquors, brothel, culverts, kerosene. Now
she
zealously guards this blue hued desolate place on the shore of the sea all
daylong.

She watched cloud-filled sunrays from a distance all day long with her lustful
eyes;
she turned forty-nine now. The wind from a dispersed zephyr still blows;
They keep those white cottages cooled all daylong now.
Red dirt filled road perks up the red spire of a church is visible amidst greenery.
The blue hued desolate place now ceases to exist. Having done with my ledger of
life

Jibanananda Das

Ghostly

Once in a starry night sprawling on the cloud's edge
It occurred: am I a soul—or merely a ghostly spirit?

Under the moonlight of a desolate sea I discern
White bones of the wind drift like silvery sands;
On a second look over the meadows I spot
A ghost standing out there
This world as if its cave to muck around.

Then I, raising face from a star to a farther star,
Become quiet, realizing my soul's puny wisdom—
And grieve over the inseparable ghostliness
of the moon and the wood
Like foxes who, chasing rabbits on a moonlit Autumnal night,
Suddenly chill to the bone, caught in humanly remorse.

[Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury]

Jibanananda Das

Go Where You Will

Go where you will – I shall remain on Bengal's shore
Shall see jackfruit leaves dropping in the dawn's breeze;
Shall see the brown wings of shalik chill in the evening,
Its yellow leg under the white down goes on dancing
In the grass, darkness – once, twice – and then suddenly
The forest's oak beckons it to its heart's side,
Shall see sad feminine hands – white conch-bangles
Crying like conch shells in the ash-grey wind:
She stands on the pond's side in the evening,

As if she will take the parched rice hued duck
To some land of legends –
As if the fragrance of the quiltcover clings to her body,
As if she is born out of watercress in the pond's nest –
Washes her feet silently – then goes faraway, traceless
In the fog – yet I know I shall not lose her
In the crowd of the earth –
She is there on my Bengal's shore.

(Sonnet 3, Rupashi Bangla)

Jibanananda Das

Having Done With My Ledger Of Life

Finally, I'm done with the ledger of my life,
Miss Banalata Sen!

Where have you gone at this odd hour?
Kingfisher hasn't neglected its midday sport,
Sarika still returns to the nest,
River has become frothy in exuberance,
Still no sign of you, Miss Bonolata Sen!

Haven't seen anyone like you – nowhere?
Why did you have to leave ahead any of us?
Makes me wonder – why you turned this world
of ours, into a desert wasteland.
(why it had to be you!)
Shattering the wizards's sorcery
You departed from this earth,
My familiar Miss Bonolata Sen.

Many a gloaming must descend over the horizon,
Many a night must we sleep next to a squalor
Many a time must we rouse by wild wind,
The night train must have reached
the station amidst oak and jombu forest,
taking away my night princes, Miss Bonolata Sen.

[Original: Shesh Holo Jiboner Shob Lenden (Bengali), Translation: A.H. Jaffor Ullah]

Jibanananda Das

I Have Seen Bengal's Face

I have seen Bengal's face, that is why I do not seek
Beauty of the earth any more: I wake up in the dark
And see the dawn's magpie-robin perched under the parasol-like huge leaf
Of the fig tree – on all sides I see mounds of leaves of
Black plum – banyan – jackfruit – oak – pipal lying still;
Their shadows fall on the spurge bushes on zedoary clumps;
Who knows when Chand near Champa from his madhukar boat
Saw such oaks – banyans – gamboge's blue shades
Bengal's beauty incomparable.

Behula too someday floating on raft on Gangur's water –
When the fullmoon of the tenebrous twelfth night died on the river's shoal –
Saw countless pipals and banyans beside the golden corn,
Alas, heard the tender songs of shama – and one day going to Amara.
When she danced like a torn wagtail in Indra's court
Bengal's river field, wild violets wept at her feet like anklet bells.

(Sonnet 4, Rupashi Bangla)

Jibanananda Das

I Remember, I Was There

I remember I used to be a king of Babylonia
You were my slave girl,
In the night, the Vesper made the minaret wore a wan _expression
In the day, my palace was covered with pigeons
It all evaporated into blue sky as smoke always does,
I am bound to meet you again,
That I knew all along?I heard you say
"I will come, I will come"
from the cavity of time for thousands of years.

This morning when the time came for commensal birds
to come, I saw in the blue Egypt sky
those birds, they all are familiar to me,
As white as milk.
They fly out. I console myself by saying, "I love you."

The one who I lost thousands of years ago
now she frolics with her symbol on the ocean of reason,
on frothy surface, trembling- I almost can hear it!
I blow my Babylonian flute even though I am infirm.
To get her out of the deep dark place towards light...more light
I am calling her again and again.

Who are all these women standing so close next to me?
My eyes, hair, hand, all can feel their presence.
They came with the tide of silence.
They remind me halfheartedly our acquaintances.
But then, they get lost somewhere without ever winking
(in the night) just as an awakened child does: huddle back to sleep!

[Taken from ungrouped poems. Translation by: A.H. Jaffor Ullah]

Jibanananda Das

If I Got An Eternal Life

If I got an eternal life - and then alone go on
walking the paths of the world: I shall see green grasses
spring up and yellow leaves dropp off - watch the sky
clearing as it dawns - and at the dusk, a streak of
blood from a slain Munia clinging to its bosom - and sessions with the stars, time
and again that too. I shall see
how an unknown woman makes her way
her loose bun falling apart - ah, her face lacks
twilight's comely touch.

If I really got an endless life - and for eternity
roamed about the world - past a lot of
Trams, buses and dusts - bunch of slums and bazaars - across
swampy lanes, pieces of broken chillum and urn -
a fight here, a quarrel there, squint eyes, rotten shrimps -
Caught sight of so many things all on the way
Except a glimpse of you for once ever in this life.

[Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury]

Jibanananda Das

In The Black-Out

Once to the stars - once to the fields
I cast my winkless eyes.

The scent of paddy disappeared from life when who knows;
Like the meadows laden with haystacks here and there
Quietly; he feels dozy.
"What will happen if the stars glow - glow - glow and dim - and then dim
forever? "
Cautioned, he wakes up again.
With straw scattered all over it feels sleepy,
Sleep engulfs.

The evening sky is studded with stars - this sky of night;
Here in the Falgoon shadow I sprawl on the turf of grass;
A gift of death right here, and these grasses will cling onto my body;
A galaxy of stars will forever remain close by.

Who sneezed there? - must be Hamid's
one-eyed moribund horse!
Enough he has worked, all day pulling the cart
Now in the moonlight he is bent upon eating grass
- no more tasks.
As if nothing hurts in this world - "Why then I think of death? "
The sky afar echoes, "Why you seek to die? "
A chuckle crosses her teasing lips.

Tamarisk fruits collect in the fold of grasses - I am lying now
upon the turf of grass, beneath the tamarisk tree.
Leaving behind the reeds, the stalk of love thorns
grasshoppers have retired back to the nest.
"Evening's star, will you show me the path to be picked?
A place where no drive is needed, passion will bug no more
Shall I get peace giving up hopes and dreams? "

"Go off to your own home", said the star with a subdued smile
"Or you can lie here on the grass, stare with love at my face;
"Or else, stretch your sight: the wheel-cart rolls
slowly in the dark - laden with golden straw
Giving up the skin of snakes, canal, laughter of darkness; - peace waits ahead;

Quietly it moves carrying the load of golden straw; -
Although all have succumbed - Gandarva, Kinnor, Yaksha included - yet it does
not think of death.

[Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury]

Jibanananda Das

On City Sidewalks

It is late — so very late at night.

From one Calcutta sidewalk to another, from sidewalk to sidewalk,
As I walk along, my life's blood feels the vapid, venomous touch
Of tram tracks stretched out beneath my feet like a pair of primordial
serpent sisters.

A soft rain is falling, the wind slightly chilling.

Of what far land of green grass, rivers, fireflies am I thinking?

Where are the stars?

Have those stars been lost?

Beneath my feet the slender tram track — above my head a mesh of tangled
wires

Chastises me.

A soft rain falls, and the wind seems lightly chilling;

But you'll not see a single mallard's nest quiver in the face of this cold
Calcutta wind so very late at night.

No dove will come to tell you of its broken sleep's soft bluish flavor,
broken by olive leaves.

You'll not mistake a yellowed papaya leaf for an unexpected bird,
Nor will your eyes grow large with recognition as you comprehend creation as
thick fog.

Nor will an owl rub her gray wings on an amlaki branch here,

Nor from that limb will sapphire dewdrops fall,

Nor will her call bring forth here stars like subtle fireflies,

Nor make the nighttime even bluer.

You'll not see here green grass strewn with countless dead dewali bugs,

Nor will the world here seem to you a soft and green and gorgeous dead dewali
bug,

Nor life itself a cold yet gorgeous, dead, green bug.

The owl's call will not here bring forth stars like subtle fireflies,

Nor will the call of dewdrops bring forth stars like subtle fireflies,

Nor will your eyes grow large with recognition as you comprehend creation as
thick fog.

[Translated from 'Futpate' (Bengali) by Clinton B. Seely]

Jibanananda Das

One Day Eight Years Ago

It was heard: to the post-mortem cell
he had been taken;
last night—in the darkness of Falgoon-night
When the five-night-old moon went down—
he was longing for death.

His wife lay beside—the child therewith;
hope and love abundant__in the moonlight—what ghost
did he see? Why his sleep broke?
Or having no sleep at all since long—he now has fallen asleep
in the post-mortem cell.

Is this the sleep he'd longed for!
Like a plagued rat, mouth filled with crimson froth
now asleep in the nook of darkness;
And will not ever awake anymore.

'Never again will wake up,
never again will bear
the endless—endless burden
of painful waking—'
It was told to him
when the moon sank down—in the strange darkness
by a silence like the neck of a camel that might have shown up
at his window side.

Nevertheless, the owl stays wide awake;
The rotten still frog begs two more moments
in the hope for another dawn in conceivable warmth.
We feel in the deep tracelessness of flocking darkness
The unforgiving enmity of the mosquito-net all around;
The mosquito loves the stream of life
awake in its monastery of darkness.

From sitting in blood and filth, flies fly back into the sun;
How often we watched moths and flies hovering
□ the waves of golden sun.
The close-knit sky, as if—as it were, some scattered
□ves, possessed their hearts;

The wavering dragonflies in the grasp of wanton kids
Fought for life;
As the moon went down, in the impending gloom
With a noose in hand you approached the aswattha,
alone, by yourself,
For you'd learnt
a human would ne'er live the life of a locust or a robin
The branch of aswattha
Had it not raged in protest? And the flock of fireflies
Hadn't they come and mingled with
the comely bunch of daffodils?
Hadn't the senile blind owl come over
and said: 'the age-old moon seems to have been washed away
by the surging waters?
Splendid that!
Let's catch now rats and mouse! '
Hadn't the owl hooted out this cherished affair?
Taste of life—the fragrance of golden corn of winter evening—
seemed intolerable to you; —
Content now in the morgue
In the morgue—sultry
with the bloodied mouth of a battered rat!

Listen
yet, tale of this dead; —
Was not refused by the girl of love,
Didn't miss any joy of conjugal life,
the bride went ahead of time
and let him know
honey and the honey of reflection;
His life ne'er shivered in demeaning hunger
or painful cold;
So
now in the morgue
he lies flat on the dissection table.

Know—I know
woman's heart—love—offspring—home—not all
there is to things;
Wealth, achievement, affluence apart
there is some other baffling surprise
that whirls in our veins;

It tires and tires,
and tires us out;
but there is no tiring
in the post mortem cell
and so,
there he rests, in the post mortem cell
flat on the dissection table.

Still I see the age-old owl, ah,
Nightly sat on the aswattha bough
Winks and echoes: 'The olden moon seems
to be carried away by the flooding waters?
That's splendid!
Let's catch now rats and mouse—'

Hi, granny dear, splendid even today?
Let me age like you—and see off
the olden moon in the whirlpool at the Kalidaha;
Then the two of us will desert life's abundant reserve.

Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury

Jibanananda Das

Septet

Here lies Sarojini; I don't know if she is lying here!
Enough she had slept; -
then one day she left for a far - away cloud.
Has Sarojini travelled that far, where - darkness over - a new horizon
wakes up under the focus of light?

So Sarojini has moved that far? Climbing without a ladder?
- like a bird, but
she had no wings at all.

May be she is today part of earth's geometric undulations.
The ghost of geometry claims: "I don't know anything."
The dryness of Saffron light clings to the evening sky;
Like a vanquished cat;
Wide awake with the idiotic
Smile of a futile trick.

[Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury]

Jibanananda Das

She

Looks light is fading out—wonder is waning all the more.
Is the sky blue as it was? The sky is no longer as blue,
Neither is there much wonder left in women's eye,
Kingfishers today are children's birds; kids are no longer
Someone's children with silky hair; can you imagine
Love vibrant with the same blood? A punch as deadly as ever?
Fog just as cold as it was? Who cares for order, who saves
anymore? Yet life seems to turn profound all the more.

I have discerned a beauty not known before—shaking off
all of past—a new Spring has embraced my life;
The Shalik birds quiver in the fields—it feels chilly,
chilly out there, —still, within my heart, in the soul's woodland
Quietly the autumn night disappeared—even the winter was
suddenly over
Because she has emerged now, whom I had sought in vain
there - in Rome and Babylon.

[Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury]

Jibanananda Das

Subinoy Mustafi

This autumn night the tale of Subinoy Mustafi crosses my mind.
This all-knowing young man had the amazing power of making the cat and the mouse held between its jaws laugh all at once.
The white cat playfully biting on the mouse
or the anxious mouse being torn into pieces
oblivious of how far they were from heaven or hell
- would make room at a very cheap rate
for the feel of living a few more days
on this turbulent earth of half light and shadow.
Yet the cat would be giggling and giggling
until seized with a cramp
'Hurrah', would shout the mouse and burst into laughter
As if to resonate with those rhythmic cramps.

[Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury]

Jibanananda Das

The Beggar

'I got a dime at Ahiritola
I got a dime at Badur Bagan
If I could manage just one more
I would then walk away, no more self-demeaning, '
☐he said, stretching out his hand in darkness.

As if a one-eyed man with the whole body at work wanted to keep on weaving;
Yet it turned out to be a saw in a Shakhari's crippled hands.

'I've found a dime from around Mathkotha
I've found a dime at Pathuriaghata
If I can secure just one more
Then paddy will be husked in a mill, not dheki.
☐saying that he brought his face out
to the gas-lamp beam.

Yet amidst the crowd—along the Harrison Road—persists a deeper concern.

A world's wrong; from a beggar's blunder; a world full of flaws.

Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury

Jibanananda Das

The Cat

All day I inevitably encounter a cat here and there
In the shadow of trees or out in the sun, around
the pile of fallen leaves;
I catch sight of him, deeply engrossed like a bee,
with his own self
Embedded in the skeleton of white soil
Having successfully spotted some bones
of fishes somewhere;
But still, nevertheless, he scratches at the trunk
of the Krishnachura tree
All day he moves about stalking the sun.

Now he shows up here
The next moment he is lost somewhere.
I spot him in the autumn dusk playing around
As if, with his white paws, he is patting the supple body
of the saffron sun;
Then he nets up the tiny balls of darkness with his paw
And spreads them throughout the world.

Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury

Jibanananda Das

The Great Twilight

The wheel-cart idly rolls laden with golden straw
—the late-noon sunshine fades
The birds: black, blue and brown—flap their wings
in the cellar of the corn field
White path dust flies turn into slumber and mingle with the sky
As the setting sun leans upon the edge of pigeon-peas field.

Now in solitude his blood longs for the taste of sleep
The pregnant field looks so good—
fire dims and glows in its eye.
One day the smell of comely charcoal will bring relief to fire.

□
Whereat waste charter pact commission plan;
Why is the uproar of envy jealousy slander exhaustion
error and blood-shed?
My heart is as answerless to time as it had shut up
Having asked the slender nun the questions
when Buddha deceased.

Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury

Jibanananda Das

The Song Of Life

Lying upon the stretcher perhaps fog clogs your eyes
Don't worry, death is not another unjust light;
How come then so many people embrace death,
craving a torch like flying ants?
Why would then men compose so many slokas
to make a ladder to the heaven?
Death today; but did not the matador die in Spain?
He fought like a hero in the sunlight
thinking himself undefeatable
Suddenly he plunged into an eternal night. Yet a Haryal
Verily a Bengal bird accepts death as
the row of bullets appears like a horizon.

Yet we embrace day-light like an alcohol dealer
Fill in the goblet; -
It seems compass, seas, sunlight
Life in effect wiser than death.
They are dead; crumpled between layers of the earth.
Still life gobbles up sun spots - privately like a sun.

[Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury]

Jibanananda Das

To Her Steady Lover

There is no meaning in living—I don't say this.
There is meaning for some, may be for all—may be a perfect meaning.
Yet I hear the white sound of wind-driven birds
In the water of the distant seas
beneath the burning summer sun.

The candle burns slowly, very slowly, on my table;
The books of intellect are more still—unwavering— lost in meditation;
Yet when you go out on to the streets
or even while sitting by the window side
Will you sense the frenzied dance of violent waters;

Right beside that a book of your cheeks; no more like a lantern,
Perhaps like a conch-shell lying on the beach as if ocean's father
It is also a music by his own merit—like Nature:
caustic—lovable—finally like the most favourite entity.

So I get the taste of expansive wind in the airing
of maddening grievances;
Otherwise in the mind's forest the python coils up around the doe:
I feel the pitiable hint of a life like that in the Sceptre of protest.
Some glacier-cold still flock of Cormorants will realize my words;
When the electric-compass of life will cease
They will eat up snow-grey sleep like polar seas in endless grasp.

[Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury]

Jibanananda Das

Tonight

Had you been around tonight we could talk;
—a world of Hijal Shirish stars grass breeze all surround.
But all our thoughts feeling emotions are filtered
through reasons and logic, and made to the point

I have been through all those protocols and their consequence
Seen India London Rome New York China's chronicles
The story of tonight and the extinct mammoths
All are covered by fierce discipline.

Where are you lost—which dice to cast in hand?
What keeps you engaged? Not all pursuits prove gainful;
Our daily dawn and dusks, river and stars—that I have known profoundly
Archived therein all those eternal truths.

[Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury]

Jibanananda Das

We Both Are Here, Again

We both are here, again,
in memory of sound bird's river of light.
Thought we both are
Egyptian mummies.
Slumbering from morn to evening.
Sporting ourselves as a morning breeze,
swaying clusters of green leaves,
or becoming a twig of emblica, sal,
or even turning into silver hued falling rain,
pretending to be all of the above—
just you and me.

We died so many times over and over again
in many cities, bazaars, waterways,
amidst blood, fire, blurred decadence,
in the darkness of inauspicious moment.
Even then, we pined for light, courage, and life.
We cherished these in our heart
and be history-bound.

Our nest, we built somewhere.
It shattered into pieces and we cried.
On froth of the ocean, we giggled.
We loved our life.
Light—more light passed away!

If men depart today,
humankind will remain here,
curdled dewdrops will become
in the parlance of history, the capital
of man and woman.

[Original: Dhoni Pakhir Alo Nodi (Bengali), Translator: A.H. Jaffor Ullah]

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This poem appears in the ungrouped (Ogronthito Kobita) poem section

Jibanananda Das

Windy Night

Last night it was an intensely windy night—
a night of countless stars;
An expansive wind played around my mosquito net;
At times billowing it like the belly of a monsoon sea,
At times tearing it off the bed as if to cast to the stars;
Sometimes I felt—may be in half-sleep—that there was
no net on my bed,
That it was drifting like a white heron
In an ocean of blue winds alongside the Swati star.

It was such a wonderful night, last night—

All the dead stars awakened
the sky became capacity packed;
I could spot the faces of the dead ones—
obscure and beloved, among those stars;
In the dark of night, the stars sparkled like the dew-drenched eyes
Of a hero kite sitting atop the Aswattha tree;
An expansive sky dazzled like the moonlit shiny shawl
from leopard's skin— spread around
The shoulders of the queen of Babylon!

Last night was such an amazing night.

Stars that had vanished from the sky thousands of years ago
They too showed up,
Gleaned through the window many a dead sky;
The beauty queens whom I saw pass away
in Assyria, Egypt, Vidisha
As if they had filed up in columns last night
With long spears in hand
along the foggy outline of the distant sky—

To overcome the inevitability of death?
To assert the invincible triumph of life?
To erect a scary solemn monument of love?

I was benumbed—totally overcome
I was almost torn asunder under last night's blue torture;

Within the endless expansive wings of the sky
The earth was vanquished like an insect!
And came down from the core of the sky turbulent wind
through my windows, gushing in,
Like a bevy of zebras in the green pasture
Bewildered by the lion's uproar.

My heart is overwhelmed with the scent of green grass
across the sprawling veldt,
With the essence of extensive sunlight
That inundates the horizon,
With the restless robust lively furry exuberance of darkness,
like growls of an aroused tigress,
In life's tempestuous blue intoxication!

My heart tore apart and flew away leaving the earth behind
It flew like a drunken balloon inflated in the blue sea of winds
chasing the mast of a distant constellation, from star to star
like an indomitable vulture.

Translated by Faizul Latif Chowdhury

Jibanananda Das

Wristwatch

Tonight, from all sides, many a cloud becoming chilly
by the grudge of fusillade from a cannon.
They wait at the foothill. Some of them sporting
watch on their wrist. The hands of hour and minute slowed down.
Under the sky lit by the moon, these strange watchmen
Will chitchat for a while; --
Their heart will flutter as if they are waiting anxiously for something special,
They absorb all the light emanated from the night sky's stars.
Leaves of the olive trees gather droplets of dews.
Roaring sound of crested waves beating the shore is audible.
Like a white bed linen -- blank and no traces of life -- the wind roars.
The night watchmen will live for some moments.
Then a stillness will descend. They will then wake up
in the infinite darkness brightened by plenteous sun rays.

[This poem appears in the poem book 'The darkness of seven stars' (Shat'ti Tarar Timir) written during the dark days of World War II.]

Jibanananda Das