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| **Das, Jibanananda (1899-1954)** |
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| Jibanananda Das was one of the pre-eminent Bengali poets of the first half of the twentieth century. With the posthumous entry of his prose-writings to the public domain, it is now generally accepted that Jibanananda was also a storyteller and a novelist of the first rank.  Jibanananda was born in the district-town Barishal (now in Bangladesh) in a Brahma household. After obtaining the M. A. degree in English from the Calcutta University in 1921, he taught in various colleges. |
| Jibanananda Das was one of the pre-eminent Bengali poets of the first half of the twentieth century. With the posthumous entry of his prose-writings to the public domain, it is now generally accepted that Jibanananda was also a storyteller and a novelist of the first rank.  Jibanananda was born in the district-town Barishal (now in Bangladesh) in a Brahma household. After obtaining the M. A. degree in English from the Calcutta University in 1921, he taught in various colleges. He married in 1930; but, failing to found a ‘happy’ family, he spent the rest of his life tied to a family ‘unhappy’ in its own way.  Jibanananda was a prolific writer, and, at the same time, a habitual recluse. This peculiar combination has partly determined the history of Jibanananda’s reception and reputation. More importantly, it has left an indelible mark on the style and syntax of his poetic thought-experiments. For a long time he was tagged as Bengal’s ‘loneliest poet’. This popular appellation was a gift of Buddhadeva Bose (1908-1974): the modernist poet who in his journal *Kabita* (‘Poetry’) passionately celebrated Jibanananda’s early productions. So contagious was Bose’s critical appraisal that soon the expression ‘loneliest poet’ became one of two focal points for any evaluation of Jibanananda. Ironically, the provider of the other ‘Archimedean point’ was Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the titan from whose grips the Bengali modernists were self-consciously trying to free their poesy. Reacting positively to the Jibanananda-poem published in the first issue of *Kabita* in 1935, Rabindranath described it as *chitrarupamaya* or ‘image-full’. Quickly a consensus emerged: Bengal’s *loneliest poet* was also a master-craftsman of *imagery*. The same consensus helped to draw a battle-line and configure two contending camps, one appreciative of Jibanananda and the other hostile to him. The first, tended to privilege ‘aesthetics’ over ‘politics’ and the second to reverse the order. The net-result: Jibanananda was either championed as the epitome of angst-ridden, alienated, awkward ‘singularity’ or denigrated as being fixated on dabbling in form, rabble-despising, self-absorbed ‘escapist’. The curious aspect of the ‘convergence’ in the seeming divergences of view among the left-leaning and not-so left-leaning poet-critics was that judgments were made solely on the basis of the first crop of Jibanananda’s poetry.  Undeniably, Jibanananda’s first three books – *Jhara Palak* (‘Fallen Feathers’: 1927), *Dhusar Pandulipi* (‘Faded Manuscripts’: 1936), *Banalata Sen* (1942) – contained exceptional poems. They also shared certain affinities with his 1934 cycle of poems mourning the lost beatitude of rural Bengal—published much later in 1957 and named *Rupasi Bangla* (‘Beautiful Bengal’), these elegiac ruminations almost instantly captivated the (urban) readers.  The fourth book printed in his life-time *Mahaprithibi* (‘The Great Earth’: 1944) flagged a fresh departure. Then on, the emphasis steadily shifted from brooding lamentations of a wounded subject to rigorous engagements with the maladies of the day by an anguished observer. *Satti Tarar Timir* (‘The Darkness of the Seven Stars’: 1948), the last book to have come out during his life, as well as the subsequent anthologies prepared by collating Jibanananda’s poems scattered in various journals, went on to strengthen the new trend.    Jibanananda’s later poetry was not *contemplative* but *reflexive*. Deeply infused by a sense of *history* yet never wholly shackled by historicist recounting, it also gave a new depth to the understanding of *geography*. Jibanananda’s ‘coming out’ of Bengal resulted in instituting a simmering metonymic relationship between diverse spaces; his poetry became so *situated* that it could mix and match Africa, Europe, the Americas, Asia, Rome-Berlin-Hong Kong-Calcutta with an urbane élan thitherto absent in Bengali poetry. What was more, the complex diction was suffused with a sardonic sense of humour. Many of Jibanananda’s novels, e.g. *Malyaban, Sutirtha*, both written in 1948, evince the same characteristics.  **Timeline**  1920 MA in English from Presidency College, Calcutta  1927 Publication of *Jhara Palak*  1934 Writes poems which later form *Rupasi Bangla*  1935 Joins the faculty of Brojmohun College, Barisal  1936 Publication of *Dhusar Pandulipi*  1942 Publication of *Banalata Sen*  1948 Writes two novels and a collection of poems  1957 Posthumous publication of *Rupasi Bangla* |
| Further reading:  (Seely)  (Winter)  (Dasgupta)  (Bandyopadhyay)  (Guha)  (S. Bandyopadhyay) |