



**Sexual, Religious, Cultural and Political Violence in Jibanananda Das's Poems 'Banalata Sen', 'Suchetana', 'Ei Sab Dinratri', 'Kampe', 'Shikar', '1946-47', 'Prithiviloke', 'Andhakar', 'Ratri', 'Sristir Teere' and 'Ratrir Chorus'**

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**ABSTRACT**

Literature at large does not necessarily reflect political or intellectual history as its background but the spirit of the age through verbal formations in a literary text or any kind of discourse which may be called ideological products. The 19th century cultural renaissance in India gave birth to nationalism and movement for liberation from British colonial power. Racism, economic exploitation, and ethnic and religious persecution are all possible sources of violence. Along with other literature, Bengali literature also talks about the notion of violence through several literary forms. In Bengali literature, one of these major writers and poets is Jibanananda Das. Jibanananda's major poems were composed in the backdrop of the violent extremist movement in Bengal. Being a poet of the time, Das's poetic discourse inevitably translates the sexual, religious, political and cultural chaos of the time. This paper focuses on these violences and conflicts illustrated in some of his writings that vindicate in a universal place.

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**Discussion**

During nearly two hundred years of British colonial rule in India, the English colonialist indulged in all sort of tortures and means of exploitation. As a result, the country's agrarian economy was completely shattered; its small and cottage industry destroyed; a sense of subordination and servitude

among people became stronger and people were reduced to almost a subhuman race. Poverty, hunger, famine and riot became the destiny of the subcontinent. The oppressors, blinded with power and greed, unknowingly enhance the process of decolonization because the tortured, exploited and plundered creatures begin to unite to resist or seek retribution come forward to fight for their cause of justice, liberty and humanity.

How can a poet, being a part of such time, escape the heat and fire of the wars and the ideological chaos which breed that chaos of hatred and violence? Cultural clashes, political violence, and religious conflict became a most recurrent themes in poetry of Jibanananda Das as well. The violence of the world, both of past and present, has been translated into violence in his poetry. Jibanananda bears the legacy of rendering the socio-political, and cultural violence into one of his potential forces of poetry. Das's comprehensive poetic statement intensifies the hidden violence and chaos underlying the diverse socio-political and cultural dimensions. He takes the guise of history, myth and rhetoric for achieving poetic effect. In his poetry, past and present become one single version of futility, anarchy and chaos. Das experiences the slavery, bondage and agony of a subdued nation. He was deeply moved by hunger, poverty, war, famine and riot. Most of the great poems of Das were composed during the decades which were deeply disturbed by the cultural chaos of nation.

Social, political, religious and cultural violence are inter-related and highly composite phenomena. They appear all through the poems of Jibanananda Das. Das drove back to the dim and distant past and experienced the disorder and chaos in the universal order of existence where physical force determines the socio-political order and stability. Das talks about political violence in his poem "Suchetana" (From Banalata Sen'). Where he says:

"The world's blood and toil and glory  
Are true; yet the last truth they are not.....  
I have striven, worn my feet roving.  
Seeking to give man what belongs to him,  
And I am weary roving in the burning sun of day.  
Yet so striving to love man.....  
I see man, my own flesh and blood,  
Strewn around dead, killed by my own hand.  
The world is sick and in pain,

Yet we are its debtors, and shall remain.”

Das speaks of deadly deep-rooted disease of the earth. And at the beginning, he gives enough indication that he is talking of the madness of wars that kills millions of human beings of meaningless victory. He also declares that the success of the warmongers is temporary and not the final truth. The poet is horrified at the fact of killing the fellow human beings, the brothers and sisters or the nearest one or relative for gaining vain temporary success. Or, elsewhere more directly he refers to the political violence from history in “Ei Sab Dinratri” (These Days and Nights):

“The lustful history in half truth is still on the shores of time.

Yet man loves this life

Man’s mind knows the meaning of the life to be

A good life for all. But that state lies far in the future;

Pushed by hoards of the blind and the maimed

To an elusive end –

For one famine is followed by another

One war ends in the battle cries of the next –

For greed knows no bounds,

There is no desire left other than of

Wiping the smile off another’s face.

There is no movement

Other than from the given seat

To the highest,

Making heavier the human load

Of falsehood, suffering and sorrow “

The poet laments over the utter failure of the mission of welfare state. He states that love, fellow feeling and benevolence are lost, and lust, famine, ferocity and war come as a ruling roost. The ambivalence between hope and hopelessness, optimism and pessimism is one the most characteristics of Das’s poetry.

His most famous poem “Kampe” is steeped in sexual violence. The theme of carnality and sexuality is manifested through different innovative symbols and images. Moreover, treachery, cruelty,



betrayal and brutality are also subjectively manifested through such beautiful symbols as ‘harin’, ‘mrigi’, ‘shikar’, ‘mangser ghran’. Romanticism of love is almost vanished, what remains is a menacing sense of tooth and nail, flesh and blood, lust and sensuality. How innocence is violated in the poem can easily be noted if we look through the poem “Kampe” (In Camp):

“Somewhere the deer are hunted tonight.  
Hunters entered the forest today.  
I too seem to catch their scent,  
As I lie here upon my bed  
Not drowsy at all  
In this spring night .....  
Lust- longing –long- desire –dreams burst forth  
In this springtide night. In this springtide night.  
Here is my nocturne .....  
One by one dears come from the wooded deep,  
Leaving behind all water’s sounds in search of another assurance.  
Forgetting tooth and claw, they approach their sister there.....  
Tomorrow she will return.  
In the morning, by daylight, she can be seen  
Nearby lie her dead lovers.  
Men had taught her all this.  
I shall smell vension upon my dinner dish.....  
And we lie here, our flesh like that of dead animals.  
All come, then fall in the face of separation – separation and death –  
Like those slain deer.  
By –living –loving –longing for love, we get pain, hatred and death.”



How innocence and purity are butchered can be seen more explicitly in the poem ‘Shikar’:

“All night long a handsome nut-brown buck, bounding  
from sundari through arjun forest  
In starless, mahogany-like darkness, avoids the cheetah’s grasp –  
He’d been waiting for this dawn.....A strange sound  
The river’s water scarlet like machka flower petals .....  
Several human heads, hair neatly parted.  
Guns here and there. Icy, calm, guiltless sleep.”

Here, neither Agamemnon nor any great hero from Indian myth and legend appear, but ‘harin’ is presented as a recurrent symbol of innocence and beauty which is butchered. Anarchy and darkness, blood and butchery, heighten the gravity of the poem. The deer (harin) suggestive of innocence, is a prey to leopardess runs after the deer to kill and devour it and the deer tries desperately to escape from the beast of prey. The symbol of deer and leopardess has multifarious connotations. Leopardess may be the symbol of evil and ferocity in woman, as we find in Clytemnestra, leading to sexual perversion and betrayal, culminating to the physical assault and murder of the lover and husband. Sexual betrayal and murder happened in the past and is happening at the present. the result is total disorder and chaos in man-woman relationship. This may also indicate the insidious nature of human psyche which Das tried to recapture through symbolic presentations in their respective poems. The symbolic suggestion of blood, venison, smoke of cigarette and rifle fortify the tone and temper of violence in the poem.

Das’s poetry has been translated directly or presented through concrete examples of past and present. Das also modernized Bengali poetry by a number of bold, innovative techniques and styles. He rescued Bengali poetry from the colossal shadow of Tagorean practice. He brought about a flesh lease of life to Bengali poetry. He uses some fantastic images and symbols and also various other modern innovative styles which have neither any predecessors nor any followers. His surrealistic methods helped to bring home the huge treasures of Bengali poetry. Das also universalizes socio-political and cultural violence through concrete and specific allusions, references or anecdotes from history, myth and legend. Das spoke of mutual respect to all religions. He vehemently criticized

religious intolerance and championed the cause of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood. Racial hatred and cultural apathy that very often lie beneath the polish surface of apparently civilized society is presented through the voice of Das when he says:

“The inner thoughts of creation. it seems, are-enmity.

The inner thoughts of creation: the dragging of a shadow of

Our doubts over our sincerity and thus bringing us pain.

We see a fountain of water gush forth from nature’s

Mountains and stones and then we gaze into our hearts

And see that because the first water is red with the blood of the slain,

I have killed man-my body is filled with his

Blood; I am the brother of this fallen brother

On the paths of the world; he considered me his younger brother

Yet the heart hardened and he failed me and I lie

Sleeping beside the bloody swells in this river, having slain

The ignorant one who was like an elder sibling-burying their heads

In his narrow chest.”

(‘1946-47’, Shrestho Kobita [Best poems])

In the above poem, Das expresses his overwhelming sense of agony, pity and remorse at the havoc loos of human life and human values in Hindu-Muslim riot. He is profoundly disturbed by the primitive impulses of sex and blood which prompt man to kill his fellow human beings without any apparent reason. Das’s vision thus surpasses the purview of narrow religious identity. His humanitarian vision upholds the broad Indian cultural outlook. Though Das is never accused of practicing religious intolerance and fanaticism, but yet he is a preacher of universal

brotherhood and love. Here, Das speaks of the Hindu-Muslim brotherhood and fellow-feeling. In '1946-47' Das vehemently attacked religious fanaticism and denounced hatred and violence. Das expresses his pity, agony and remorse at the huge loss of human values. The decadence and cultural fragmentation are reflected in his poem 'Prithiviloke' (Near and Far):

“Near and far, cities and homes collapse  
The sound of the villages falling down, rises.  
Man has lived long on earth;  
Yet his shadow on the wall  
Seems only to signal  
Death, loss and fear.”

The unforgiving crime of bloodshed and holocaust, the treachery and conspiracy, the ambition and vanity of the boastful statesmen led to mass extermination, in past as well as in the Two World Wars. The poet lashes at the dealers of death and the war-mongers. The same idea is expressed by Das in 'Ei Sab Dinratri' as discussed earlier. He also expresses his disregard for political violence even more explicitly when he says:

“State policy is the treaty of lustful desire.  
Except this there is no inspiration,  
No light in the life .....

(Akashe Raat/ Night in the sky)

Das presents the violence ridden time, war-infected history from past to the contemporary. His presentation of universal violence we find in the poem like “Prithibi Aaj” (The World Today). Here optimistic Das speaks of the infernal cycle of time and the darkness of the century. The reference to the pyramid and atomic fire connects the past violent history of ancient time and the demonic act of the dropping the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Plan, commission and conference refer to the futile political practice of the civilized nations underneath which prevails the savagery, cruelty and greed. The conference probably alludes to the conference hall of Versailles. The treaty of Versailles (1919) was imposed by the victor powers upon the losers, particularly upon Germany. The political motive was one of revenge against and repression of Germany. The peace settlement was in fact, a farce. As Hobsbawm rightly assesses:

“It is not necessary to go into the detail of inter-war history to see that the

Versailles settlement could not possibly be the basis of a stable peace. It was doomed from the start, and another war was therefore practically certain.”

Most of the later poems of Jibanananda deal with the political and cultural chaos that overtook the first half of the twentieth century. The ravaging effect of the World Wars on mankind and oppressive British rule in India deeply disturbed his vision and imagination. From 1930 onward Das is more direct, less allusive. Of course, he uses unique symbols and images to achieve the required poetic effect. How much Das was influenced by the “popular-front” politics of late 30s can be well understood from a comment of Clinton B. Seely. During late 30s. Seely comments:

“Popular-front politics was exerting an influence on writers in South-Asia.

1936 saw the formation of the. All India Progressive Writer’s Association, a direct outcome of the policies set at the world congress of the comintern a year earlier. From the perspective of A.I.P.W.A, literature should possess, an impulse towards social reconstruction, the power to reflect the hard realities of life – in short we want a literature which may produce in us movement, change and restlessness. At the moment of its inception, Jibanananda was anything but committed to such a philosophy. From the late 1930s onward, we find in Jibanananda an increasing awareness of the political world around him, a world less and less comprehensible to him.”

Since the publication of “Dhusar Pandulipi” in 1936, Das emerged as a leading avant-garde figure in Bengali poetry. This book is a significant one in the history of Bengali poetry. Not only Jibanananda emerged here as a mature poet with a distinct idiom of his own, but also someone utterly exotic to the main tradition of Bengali poetry. Side by side with the aesthetic presentation of his eternal beauty of nature, Das began to show an increasing tendency towards the chaotic and violence-ridden world. This we find in his superb symbolic poem. ‘Kampe’, or more distinctly and directly in. ‘Bodh’ or ‘Prem’, although with a personal touch. But with the publication of ‘Banalata Sen’ (1942), Das’s world widens far and beyond the single theme of love, betrayal and languishment. The poem is



built up through a series of lively images of seas and islands, birds and trees, lashing storm and quiet resting place, of nature and women, that merge the geography of mythical and geographical times only to culminate upon frustration, failure and hopelessness of modern man. The poem goes thus:

“I have walked the roads across the earth’s breast for a thousand years.

In the darkness of night, I have ranged far – from Ceylon waters

To the Malay Sea; in Vimbisar and Asok’s grey world

Have I been, and the still more distant darkness of Vidarbha.

A tired being am I, round me life’s foaming seas,

Banalata Sen of Natore gave me a moment’s peace.”

The allusion evokes not the grandeur of historical past, but the horror and blood –bath of the battle of Kalinga fought between Ashoka and the King of Kalinga. Asoka is a regenerated hero who was so much shocked with the blood-bath of the battle of Kalinga that he was thereafter transformed into religious Asoka, a preacher of peace, love and brotherhood. The persona is tired, exhausted and broken-hearted. His world-weary soul roams through the contrived corridor of history, in search of love and solace. But ‘Banalata Sen’ nature is only a figment of imagination. Failure to obtain love leads to idealization of lady love. This is another aspect of the loveless world from where the narrator willingly escapes into the world of dream and imagination. The persona of the poem expresses the agony and suffering at the plight and predicament of the situation. The world of brutality and cruelty is too much for him to bear. The narrator voyages through the passage of time and space and experiences and the same blood-thirstiness and mindless brutality and killings of man for power and profit. In this respect there is least difference between the violence of past and that of present. Of course, there is a positive argument in this respect. Violence of resistance against the oppressors is always hailed by the humanist as a noble and glorious act of virtue. Whatever may be the cause and nature of violence the bitter truth still remains, that violence exists as an inevitable reality with the existence of life.

The political violence of the world is versified further through a number of crude, cacophony and harsh jargon in the poem ‘Andhakar’ (Darkness):

“With fear and pain I saw

The red sun ordering me to stand to attention,

My face turned stiffly towards the world,

My heart filled with hatred

For the world fermented in the heat of the sun,  
Festive with the squaling of the pigs,  
Bursting with sordid joy.”

The world that Das presents here is a dark and demonic one, lacking light and life. The narrator feels himself a caged animal and painfully expresses his hatred, agony, helplessness and nausea. During 40s the world had been turned into a pandemonium and the persona had no way and nowhere to escape. Darkness and chaos had descended upon earth as the World War – II broke out in 1939 and the whole Europe is turned into a killing field. The devastating effect of the World War--II is summed up by Hobsbawm thus:

“...the global human catastrophe unleashed by the Second World War is almost the largest in human history. Not the least tragic aspect of this catastrophe is that humanity has learned to live in a world in which killing, torture and mass exile have become everyday experiences which we no longer notice.”

The fear (voi), pain (bedona), crimson sky (raktim akash), soldier (soinik) - all these words heighten the situation where the narrator revolted against brutal, cruel and violent world of the catastrophic days of 40s. In ‘Andhakar’, Das also depicts the same state of chaos in physical reality as well as psychological- spiritual state of mas. Das spoke of the ugly hags to give vent to his sense of anger, fear, disgust and nausea, generated by failure and helplessness in life as well as the ugliness and cruelty of the material world. Das’s ‘Daini’ evokes a strong sense of disgust and hatred for the contemporary world of chaos and violence. From ‘Jhara Palak’ (1927) onward, Das is deeply concerned with the socio-political violence and cultural disintegration. He presents visible, concrete and chaotic pictures of blood and dirt; hunger and riot; torture and exploitation.

Das seems to have been deeply influenced by the 19th century French poets, particularly Baudelaire and Rimbaud. He praised Baudelaire for his evocation of evil and the depiction of the dirty and seamy aspects of the sordid metropolis. In his controversial poem. ‘Ratri’ Das nakedly presents the filth, dirt and squalor of the modern metropolitan civilization in the following lines:

“Turning the hydrant on the leper licks up water

Or perhaps it was always on any way,

Midnight descends in hordes upon the city.

A motor car rushes past, coughing like a moron, restlessly sprinkling petrol.”

As a crude phenomenon of violence war plays a pervasive role in the poetry of Jibanananda Das. Das's later poetry, from Banalata Sen onward, vividly represents the war-torn violence-ridden world. The first half of the twentieth century witnessed two consecutive World Wars and both the wars were total war. That the whole of the globe was in the war, either intentionally or forcefully, was a veritable truth and all the nations were told upon directly or indirectly by the destruction and ravages of the wars. And the destruction was so havoc and far-reaching that no individual could imagine to escape the flame and burn created by the bullets and bombs of the two Great Wars. The Wars not only killed millions of human beings but destroyed human property so extensively and awfully that human beings ceased to imagine what they have witnessed and experienced. It destroyed the very foundation of global economy which had a far-reaching impact on the nation state and the African and Asian colonies. Apart from the material loss and the loss of human lives, the wars destroyed the morale of civilized culture and its long-cherished values.

Das's later poems were tuned up with the sound of guns, planes, mortars and bombs. Most of his later poems present the bare, naked pictures of World Wars and the moral and spiritual chaos it created. Poverty, famine, riot, clashes with the colonialist force were recurrent phenomena in Das. In his depiction of war and violence Das is less symbolic, more direct. Das was virtually obsessed with the Great Wars and its terrible effect. In many of his later poems the romantic, visionary and colourful world of beauty are vanished and the stern realities of hunger, poverty, riots famine and war of the 40s are graphically presented.

Das's attitude to war is very clear. He is a pacifist and never glorifies war. In this regard, there is neither any contradiction nor any ambivalence. He always condemns and criticizes the meaningless massacres of war and violence. His attitude to war is well expressed in 'Suchetana', 'Charidike Prakritir', 'Uttarsamariki', 'Itihas Jan', 'Samayer Teere', 'Ei Sab Dinratri' 'Bhor O Chhayti Bomar', 'Akashe Raat', 'Prithivi Aaj', and many other poems directly related to the Great Wars. Das expresses his disgust and anger at the meaningless massacre of war and violence in the name of patriotism and heroism in many of his poems like 'Akashe Raat', 'Itihas Jan', 'Uttar Samoriki', etc. In his poem 'Itihas Jan' he says:

“Have our old ancestors left drowsiness for us?

Our wise men have told half-truth of half-lie? ...

Knowledge remains at a far distance in the stark reality of our earth.

Time which brings knowledge to us does not exist.

Only disease and idleness continue to persist.

All around us remains only fear, exhaustion and nausea.”

Das’s poetry images of war and statements of personae are very often directly linked to the First and Second World War. We find direct reference to Hitler, the chief architect of the World War-II, and another character Quisling, integrally related to the War in Das’s ‘Sristir Teere’ (On the Bank of Creation):

“Human endeavour becomes others opportunity throughout ages.

Quisling makes his own reputation which Hitler hijacks for his own promotion

Man is being heckled by man yet and there’s no pure job on earth.

In what environment do we remain all...”

The poet’s helplessness and frustrations are expressed with utmost sincerity and acute heart-ache. The apocalyptic vision of a dark shadow, a prelude to destruction, covers the sky of the continent of Europe, Asia and Africa is illustrated in ‘Ratrir Chorus’ (Night’s Chorus):

“In the west lies Europe like witch, towards east, the ghostly head of Asia

The holy soul of Africa is like animal’s possessiveness

And the yanke relies much on transaction in dollar.”

The image of rat evokes the picture of waste, dirt and destruction of the battle-field and its diseased after-effect which eats up the health of life and civilization. Of course, Jibanananda’s presentation of the material world upholds the complete picture of socio-political state of

contemporary Bengal of early 1940s. Interestingly, Hobsbawm's account of the battle field upholds the same picture of the battle field as depicted by Das. Sumita Chakroborty defines the trend of poetry during this critical phase of 40s:

“No turning point of literary creativity can be identified by a single year. Yet after all the newer tone of post-thirty Bengali poetry is heard from 1940-41. The fountain-source of the poetry of this new phase is that of a selfish, ominous and a murderous event like the World War which had really happened second time by defying all the concept, speech and preaching of the love for humanity.”

Thus, Jibanananda's writings bear the tone of ferocity and its terrible condition.

### **Conclusion**

Though, most of the poems of Jibanananda Das contain the holocaust and violence of his personal life and contemporary society but yet they bear a universal tone of tranquility and symphony. His poetry speaks volume of the rich heritage of Indian culture and of Indian history as well. Indian folklores and myths too find their vibrant expressions in Das' poetry. Das's writings are the embodiment of human emotions in their all aspects. His poetic self certainly bears individualistic traits that separate him from other contemporary Bengali language poets. He identifies himself with the spirit hovering in the backdrop of the rural Bengal. The originality and genuineness of Das's poetic credo, built on his creative power, is the genesis of the aesthetic soul in his poetry. Das' legendary poem 'Banalata Sen' upholds the aesthetic aura of highest order. The poetic aestheticism transcends the barrier of sensibility and reason by the unifying force of imagination. An aesthetic gusto is relished in the rhythmic tone of poetic sentences, suggestive of the folkloristic aura. Das in his treatise 'Kobitar Kotha' espouses the aesthetic importance of poetry. He maintains that poetry is the articulation of beauty by the play of imagination which can integrate and reconstruct

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