



Personal and Filial Violence: A Reading of Jibanananda Das's Poems "A Strange Darkness", "Aat Bachhar Ager Ekdin", "Banalata sen", "Kabi", "Andhakar", "Prem", "Bodh"

Pranab Dey

Guest Lecturer,

Government Degree College, Old Agartala, Tripura, India

Email: pranabdey7627900984@gmail.com

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Keywords: *oppression, cacophony, violence, uncanny, nausea, paradigm*

ABSTRACT

Beginning with epic narratives like "The Mahabharata", the Homeric verses, and "Beowulf", among others, literature has always attempted to represent violence. Violence –the very trisyllabic word propagates a sense of ferocity, outrage and oppression. Bengali literature, along with other literature, also talks about the notion of violence through several literary forms. Jibanananda Das, one of the finest romantic Bengali poets, also tried to cultivate violence in his writings. His writings bear a universal tone of violence to the readers. Jibanananda's poetry became violent due to familial influence. He also belonged in a time when Two World Wars fully destroyed the financial and social condition of the entire world. Jibanananda's private sorrows and agonies have become part of a larger suffering. This paper tries to discuss Jibanananda's articulation of personal violence in some of his writings.

Jibanananda's major poems were composed in the backdrop of the violent extremist movement in Bengal against the British rulers in the early 20th century. Being a poet of the time Das's poetic discourse inevitably translates violence. Jibanananda himself was conscious of this. In his preface of 'Shreshtha Kabita' he says that his poetry has been called the poetry of loneliness, poetry of nature, poetry of historical and social consciousness, poetry of indifference and poetry of unconsciousness.

While all these are partly right, he says that each one may apply only to a particular poem or a phase of his poetry, not to the totality of his work. Sisirkumar Das is right when he says that without being a public poet, Jibanananda permitted his poetic personality to be influenced by the trauma and anxiety of the political situation. Many articles and journals are published on his works.

The helplessness of the poet has been sometimes channelized as violent poetic outburst. In his poetry “A Strange Darkness” he wrote –

“A strange darkness has descended upon the day
The finest vision belongs to the blind;
The world is led by the counsel
Of the loveless, pitiless ghost;
And upon the hearts of those that yet believe
In light, in the undying flame of man’s enduring quest
Hyenas and vulture feast.”

But it is not only the articulation of anger and frustration that makes this poetry different from Jibanananda’s earlier work. It is also the consummation of his power to address different existential questions. The rough and violent cacophony of the urban world now finds its rightful place in Jibanananda’s poetry, and irony and sarcasm surface as two powerful modes of articulation to negotiate with a strange darkness that has come to the earth today.

The poem ‘At Bachhar Ager Ekdin’ (One Day Eight Years Ago), written in his collection of poetry “Mahaprithibi”, shows his intense engagement with questions of suffering and death and of what he calls ‘bipanna bismay’ (‘terrified awe’, a wonder fraught with a sense of danger), a perception that plays in our blood and tires us out. It is a poem of severe beauty, constructed through a series of complex and even uncanny images, as well as a tense narrative of contrasts between the instinct of self-extinction.

Jibanananda reached the height of his power and virtuosity in ‘Banalata Sen’, published in 1942. The title poem, built up through a series of opulent images of sea and island lashing storm and quite resting place, fragrant forests and shipwrecked sailors, captures the old fairy land magic, that

merges the geography of mythical and historical times only to culminate in the frustration and hope of the modern age. Asoka and Vimbisara, Sravasti and Vidisa, the Malay Sea and the Sinhala Sea cease to be the luxuriant backdrop of a romantic escape. Apart from heightening the contrast between the past and the present, and intensifying the pain and agony of modern man, the poem connects narratorial voice with the ever-moving forces of history. The poetic “I” no longer remains an indefinite universal, an outsider to man’s anguished journey; it declares its location in time and space. The private voice of the narrator becomes part of his historical experience of the part of continuous journey of man and the predicaments of the here and now. Nature, a modern place-time, jars on the ear after Sravasti and Vidisa, emblamed in the serene beauty of the Buddhist world, as does Banalata Sen, a commoner without any mythical arc historical halo, welcoming the ‘hero’ with a commonplace greeting. The contrast is further intensified by juxtaposing the embellished metaphor of classical association:

“Her hair the dark night long ago in Vidisa

Her face a Sravasti carving.”

And the completely baffling image of eyes like bird’s nests, rich and suggestive yet violating the norms of comparison. The tension caused by such contrasts continues in following up a following crescendo-like sentence with a short staccato question; and one may add, with the unprecedented use of a common verb ‘chhilen’ (were) to rhyme with the surname Sen as well as the highly poetic Sanskrit word ‘saphen’ (foaming). The last few lines, now completely denuded of the glorious chiaroscuro of the past, capture the modern anxiety in simple and direct language, playing with conventional grammatically till it borders on a strangeness filled with frustration and hope:

“At the end of all the days, dusk comes like the sound of dew;

The kite wipes off the scent of sunlight from its wings.

The earth’s colors all quenched, the manuscript prepares

To tell its stories, lit by firefly gleams.

All the birds come home, all the rivers – all life’s trade ends.

Only the dark abides; and, to sit face to face, Banalata Sen.”

Jibanananda had life –long marital problems. He could never fulfill his wife Labanya’s worldly demands. Bhumendra Guha gave an account of their conjugal relationship :

“Labanya Das, wife of Jibanananda brought me near the portico. She said that Achinta babu had come, Buddhadev came and Sajanikanta came to this brother of yours was surely a poet of great stature. He left behind many things for Bengali literature, but tell me what he had left behind for me!”

In his poetry, Das gave vent to his own help, bitterness and anger though he took recourse to history, myth, dream and imagination, very often he becomes concerned with the odds and oddities of life. His personal helplessness in the face of acute financial crisis is reflected in the poem “Kabi”:

“The poet I met
I met the poet
He has been writing poems of joy endlessly
Yet he needs to earn
No one has made a will and left him anything
He has no job
He does not understand the strategies of business
He asked me,” what about playing the share market?”
Alas me!”

As a worldly man Jibanananda was a failure. He could not help his family financially nor could he establish himself in society as a man of importance. Moreover, his introvert nature alienated him from his nausea in the poem “Andhakar”(Darkness):

“My whole heart is filled with hatred
For the world fermented in the heat of the sun

Festive with the squealing of the pigs

Brusting with sordid joy.”

The persona’s heart is filled with nausea, anger, and bitterness. He does not mention a specific reason for his protest, nor exactly what he is protesting against. But the expression reveals the tempestuous state of his battered soul as he registers his revolt against the world. This grudge may be personal or universal. But the tone is intimate and original, expressed from the heart of a deeply wounded human being. Had he been treated with love and care at home, Das perhaps would not have written lines like these from the poem “Aat Bachhar Ager Ekdin”(One Day Eight Years Ago):

“Next to him lay his bride, his child

Yet what ghost did he see in the moonlight

Beyond love, beyond hope?

How come he awoke?

Or he had not slept for long-

Now he sleeps in the Morgue.”

In the above lines Das expressed his horror at the hellish state of loveless conjugal life where the persona finds his adobe of peace and happiness only after his death, in ‘morgue’. Side by side with his failure to find true love, the bitterness of the physical love is reflected in the poems of Das. In the poem “Prem” he wrote:

“One day one night I have played with love!

One night one day I have defied death

One day one night; after that love has gone.

All go by as all are destined to depart.”

The nausea of an anguished life, the burden of an alienated, afflicted soul, the pain of negligence and rejection from family and society, the continuous economic struggle leading to poverty and a

dissatisfied, disastrous, loveless conjugal life, gave vent to violent outburst in many of his poems. Violence is vividly expressed on one of his famous poems “Bodh”:

“I live amongst all, yet alone
Am I the only one to be blinded by the light
Puzzled by the many ways open before me
I have known the love of woman
Covered her with glory, neglect, scorn;
She has showered her love upon me
First drawn close, then pushed me aside in scorn
When I call her again and again with love.”

Following the psychoanalytic paradigms of repression, the complexity of human violence has been studied by modern psychiatrists such as James Gilligan in ‘Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic’ (1996). Asserting that “violence, like charity begins at home”, he demonstrates how home as a microcosm reflects the cultural and historic macrocosm in which violence thrives.

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' poetry is 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' poetic credo, built on his creative power, is the genesis of the aesthetic soul in his poetry. Das believes that Coleridge realized the importance of time which is universal. Unlike other critics and scholars, Das also maintains that Shelley's poetry bears the potential of surviving even a century. Das asserts that unlike the former poets, Tagore and Yeats have succeeded to display the contemporary time precisely, which some modern poets

too are capable of. 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.

References

- Das, Jibanananda. *Sreshtha Kabita*. Kolkata: Gitanjali Publication, 2015. print.
- Chaudhuri, Sukanta (ed). *A Certain Sense*. Kolkata: Sahitya Akademi, 2002. print.
- Goswami, Partha. *Jibanananda's Poetry in the Light of European Literature*. Calcutta: Punoshcho, 2007.
- Guha, Bhumendo. *Alekhya Jibanananda*. Calcutta: Ananda, 1999.
- Kabita Samagra [A Collection of Complete Poems: Published and Unpublished]* by Jibanananda Das, Ed. Syed, Abdul Mannan. Dhaka: Abasar, 2005. p. 162. Translation by Chidananda Das Gupta.
- Jibanananda Das, Selected Poems*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin, 2001.
- Dutt, Ramesh Chunder. *The Economic History of India in the Victorian Age*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Basu, Ambuj. *Ekti Nakshatra Aase*. Calcutta: Pustak Biponi, 1965.
- Basu, Debtosh. "Chhander Katha, Jibanananda". Calcutta: Paschim Banga, 2000.
- Chowdhury, Faizul Latif (ed.). *Jibanananda Das'er "Godhuli-shondhi'r Nritto"*, Dibbyo Prokash, Dhaka. 1995.
- Seely, Clinton. *A Poet Apart: A literary biography of the Bengali Poet Jibanananda Das*, University of Delaware Press, Newark. 1990.
- Banerjee, Deviprad. *Jibanananda Das - Bikaash Protishthaar Itirbitta* (tr: A chronicle of development and achievements of Jibanananda Das), Bharat Book Agency, Calcutta. 1986.
- Sengupta, Mallika. *Boidagha, A Special Issue on Jibananada Das*, October, 1999.