



The Tendency of Escapism in Bengali Literature: Exploration of Jibanananda Das' Poetry

Mosharaf Hossain

University of Rajshahi

Corresponding Author: Mosharaf Hossain mosharafedru175@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Escapism, Soul, Divine, Weariness, Loneliness

Received : 1 January

Revised : 23 February

Accepted: 24 March

©2025 Hossain: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



ABSTRACT

This study paper aims to examine the profound sensation of alienation and escapism experienced by the renowned Bengali poet, Jibanananda Das, with a concentrated analysis of his poems. Das is one of the most significant and widely read Bengali poets following Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam. His poetry profoundly embodies his insightful understanding of life and the universe, allowing him to establish a novel poetic realm. It is marked by desolation, deprivation, unfathomable grief, depression, estrangement, and even reconciliation. His poetic oeuvre has been so profoundly influenced that certain poems find solace in history, imagination, and the subconscious, while the majority articulate themes of despondency, unhappiness, alienation, discontent, and even a desire for death, thereby introducing a novel dimension to modernist poetry in Bengal. Das is regarded as "the last romantic, the first modern" among his contemporaneous poets; yet, his poetry is distinctly characterized by its innovation, originality, and multi-layered emotional resonance

INTRODUCTION

Jibanananda Das, a Bengali poet, is the pioneer poet of Bengali literature following Rabindranath Tagore. Following his twenties, Das, one of the five Pandavas, developed a profound passion for poetry. His employment of sensual imagery, if not immediately comprehensible, imbues the texture of modern poetry with vibrant colors, seasons, and a relaxing richness and diversity, setting him apart from his contemporaries. Rabindranath Tagore highly praises his visual lines, which are replete with vivid imagery. In several poems, Das appears as a poet in a condition of offense, frequently exhibiting a trance-like demeanor. His existence is disordered, rife with dilemmas, misfortune, gloom, and hardship that pervade his life with the anguish of sorrow, leading him to yearn for death, resulting in profound desolation and alienation. Das' poetry are frequently poignant. To comprehend fully, Das' poetry must be experienced rather than simply read or listened to.

The background research of the escape movement indicates that escape was a propensity influenced by the prevailing conditions of the day. The analyses of the five prominent poets and their works have demonstrated how they articulated such escape. No path that they might have escaped by was left untraversed by these exiles from society. Escape into Nature; the Romantics endeavored to approximate the Eternal. Their escape grew so intense that it not only produced great poetry, but also led to the evolution of philosophies, the promulgation of societal values, and the articulation of conceptions of God as the One, Beauty, and Love. Wordsworth, the intellectual escapist, exemplifies both theoretical and personal evasion. Primarily a nature poet, Wordsworth, more than any other poet, pursued in Nature the exaltation of humanity and the creation of an ideally balanced social and economic governance. However, he transcends Nature and finally finds solace in a philosophy that alleviates the tumult of his own senses and mind. He ultimately concludes that his escape lies in "infinitude and only there."

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sultana Jahan's paper titled "Reading Jibanananda Das' 'Banalata Sen' from a Surrealistic Perspective," published in IIUC Studies, along with several additional writings. The aforementioned experts have examined many facets of Das' life via their writings, employing a meticulous analysis of his poetry. One of them illustrates the conflict between perception and reality in Das' poetry. Sheikh Shareeful, in his study work, has critically examined connection between nature and Bengali nationalism in Jibanananda Das' *Ruposhi Bangla*. As we can explore, Audity Falguni in her piece "Jibanananda Das: Poet of Autumnal Dew" has also attempted to portray Das as a poet of autumnal dew. However, she is unable to completely express Das. Conversely, Anjan Basu in "Jibanananda Das: The Loneliest Poet of the Twentieth Century" endeavors to portray Das, although he fails to achieve his intended representation. These scholars have undoubtedly collaborated on Das. However, none of them addressed the alienation, loneliness, depression, and profound misery that permeated Das' existence. We think that the topic of our research has not been previously examined, to the best of our knowledge. Research continues in several domains concerning Das and his contributions. Nevertheless, several chances exist to do study in various fresh

and updated areas related to him. This work aims to significantly address this gap.

METHODOLOGY

The research approach employed in this work is the qualitative descriptive method. In our research on Jibanananda Das and his poetry, we have endeavored to incorporate novel concepts. A survey of the literature in the pertinent topic has been conducted. Consultation and information retrieval for this library are also conducted. To conduct the research, ideas have been gathered from many sources. Relevant websites are also consulted for updated information. Ultimately, the facts and pertinent references have been examined, and the analysis has been influenced by our thesis to elucidate the themes of isolation and loneliness in Das' poetry. However, these are insufficient. Even now, we observe a research gap that necessitates further study. Thus, we perceive the imperative to engage in this domain.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

"Escape" denotes a discontent with the current state of affairs. It is evident that the circumstances surrounding the Romantic Movement must have cultivated discontent and prompted escape through the mind's intricate pathways. Remarkably, all of this transpired during an era characterized by profound contentment, self-satisfaction, and arrogance—the Classic period. However, it was the philosophy of this era, its religion—or absence thereof, and its social conditions that indicated the path for those seeking refuge. Consequently, the poets will articulate this desire through their poetic expressions. The soul, with its imagination, aesthetic sensibility, aspiration for the limitless, and transcendence of material limitations, must be engaged to approximate the Absolute. Within that relentless pursuit of approximation is an escape and consistently sought, but not always explicitly articulated. Necessitarianism and Perfectibility are presented for the elevated spirit. Transcendentalism serves as the key to understanding. The spirit is liberated and allowed to flee. The evolution of the Over-Soul; the recognition that objects manifest in the mind as they are; that the mind serves as a "original, active, organizing principle" that transforms sensory impressions into knowledge. Individualism was the subsequent evolution, with J. G. Fichte as its proponent. The intricate nature of humanity was a semblance of Truth. Our attempts to grasp the Infinite, though ultimately unattainable, serve as definitive measures of our connections with the supernatural in fundamental aspects.

The term 'alienation' in literature emerged after World War I (1914-1918), and previous to this period, the concept of alienation was not evident in literary works. The concept of alienation is present in the works of Marx, Hegel, Feuerbach, and others. It appears to distinguish one entity from another. additional. If an individual perceives a disconnection from their true self, it indicates a failure to comprehend their identity or to reconcile with their conscience. They cannot perceive themselves as integral members of society nor engage in conventional social activities as their own. He is a guy of this sort who, because to a profound disillusionment with life and the world, struggled to

manage his relationships with his wife, other men, his family, society, and the world at large. Tormented, the poet was unable to achieve happiness, perpetually oscillating between hope and despair. His contemplation of life and the age, akin to those of Hamlet, King Lear, and Macbeth, burdened him with the toxin of anguish. His mental condition was not suicidal like Hamlet, however he contemplated death several times. Indeed, Das is a casualty of this stark estrangement. He is entirely engulfed in his own darkness within his artistic realm. The subsequent words reflect the torment of his estranged or fatigued spirit:

Today nowhere there is solace in the world;
There is no peace in the world for a long time.
Here there is no shelter
for a heart like a bird. (Ahammed, 2012)

Das' life was quite eventful. The more he confronted the passage of time and the deteriorating civilization, the more he endured profound inner anguish. He was progressively becoming estranged from all human beings. His poetry is replete with melancholic moments in which he is utterly sequestered. This solitude is not intended to evade challenges or to absolve oneself of societal duties. It is not the solitude of an escapist but the solitude of a distinguished poet. This sensation is referred to as perception or consciousness. Das' enduring solitude has obliterated his prospects for social achievement, as he has lost confidence in humanity. The subsequent words accurately convey the depth of his loneliness and estrangement:

As I take my place amidst the throng
I wonder-am I the only one alienated
Because of my obsession?
.....
.....
Why then this feeling of loneliness
Why then am I so alone? (Alam, 1999)

Das' life was fraught with difficulties. Poverty, job loss, professional disillusionment, marital discord, skepticism, incredulity, uncertainty, societal moral decline, familial maladjustment, and the repercussions of the two world wars obliterated civilization surrounding him, acerbic critique of his contemporaneous literary critics, readers, and acquaintances, and lack of acknowledgment as a distinguished poet during his lifetime. Additional challenges associated with his daily existence were the sources of his discontent and disillusionment. Dissatisfaction in every aspect of life renders his existence alone. Everything appears corrupt to him, as is evident when he articulates

The night fades away
On the eyes;
There is nothing
Without night
.....
.....

They all come near and go far and far away. (Ahammed, 2012)

Das employs several seasons, including fall, winter, and spring, in his poems. His opinions of these seasons are ambivalent. During his moments of dismay and sorrow, he frequently alludes to fall, a metaphor of ephemeral existence. Autumn simply serves as a transition between the monsoon and winter have a lackluster and inconsequential presence. However, he differs from Baudelaire. Baudelaire valued travel to any destination as long as it was removed from the mundane world. Conversely, Das lacked any incentive to relocate to a remote territory, possibly due to the absence of any assurance of tranquility elsewhere (Shirazi, 2009).¹ His sadness and misery can be understood as follows : "Nowhere shall you find peace. /Will you go from one chime to another distant chime" (Shirazi, 2009)? During spring, a joyous season in our nation, nature appears celebratory; but, its beauty fails to captivate the discriminating intellect of the poet. The desolation of dissipating dews and the onset of winter do not evoke a profound impact on his psyche. He experiences isolation in the flurry of golden leaves when the dew drips diminish. Consequently, using exterior items, Das consistently endeavors to depict an internal representation of his psyche.

He was always fatigued by morbidity throughout his life. Another source of his psychological distress, estrangement, and fatigue is the severe criticism he received from poets like as Nirandranath, Sajanikanta Das, and Praymandra Mitra (Syed, 1998). For composing – A Day Eight Years ago, Nirandranath harshly criticized him, but Das contended that it was more of a theatrical portrayal than a subjective poem. He saw him as a poet of "self-destructive weariness." He was profoundly upset by this accusation against him. He argues that in contemporary society, to alleviate either self-destructive fatigue or loneliness, a poet should not just adopt a cheerful disposition. While the concept of optimism may be appealing, it cannot be universally embraced by all poets. Das firmly contends that a cheerful disposition cannot inherently prevent individuals from succumbing to self-destructive fatigue. He asserts that his poems nearly fulfill all the essential functions of poetry in its truest form. The readers, somewhat apathetic, also did not regard his poems with seriousness. All of them induce his psychological distress.

Buddhadev Basu asserts that Jibanananda Das is a complex poet (Jaman, 791). The selection of his vocabulary is excessively complex for readers to discern the underlying meanings of his poems. Basu characterized him as a poet whose work is prone to derailment due to its complexities, personal essence and faith. This was criticized by several other critics, as Basu did. W. B. Yeats asserts that, in favor of complexity, "The form of sincere poetry, unlike that of popular poetry, may indeed be sometimes obscure or ungrammatical" (Jaman, 1999). Regrettably, Das did not receive acknowledgment as a distinguished poet during his lifetime, despite his merit, and he was preoccupied with the notion of self-annihilation (Mojumder 2003). The poem "Din Rat" or "Days and Night" encapsulates his profound anguish or sorrow:

The whole day went by purposelessly;
The whole night will pass miserably,
Full of frustrations and failures;
All knowingly guilty birds in their nests now lie. (Alam, 1999)

In the latter portion of his life, he was disheartened by the perception that his poetry was not being adequately assessed in the conventional sense. It was becoming progressively agonizing for him. In a correspondence to Churjit Dasgupta, he unequivocally conveyed his sorrow at the subsequent lines: "There are numerous ambiguous concepts surrounding my poetry." Consequently, I intend to compose a comprehensive article" (Syed, 1998). Regrettably, he was ultimately unable to compose the piece intended to educate the reviewers and the audience. Due to the severe criticism of the poem "Campe" or "Camping," Das was compelled to resign from his position at City College (Fazlul H., 1999). Numerous individuals charged Das of endorsing obscenity and incest in this poem. He was never able to accept it with ease, even before to his demise. Fakrul Alam said that this poem faced criticism for obscenity shortly after its publication in the renowned journal *Paricay*, due to its perceived topic of incest. Jibanananda Das refuted this charge by saying that he had not written an obscene poem and that if there was one dominant note in it, it was of the helplessness of life. Buddhadev Basu aptly referred to him as the "loneliest poet" due to his solitude and isolation. While he is undoubtedly the quintessential escapist, few poets have greater pragmatic motivations for their abrupt forays into transcendental philosophy than Shelley. Buddhadev Basu asserts that Jibanananda Das is a complex poet. The complexity of his diction obscures the readers' ability to discern the underlying meanings of his poems. Basu saw him as a poet whose troubles drove him to deviate from his intrinsic essence and faith. This was criticized by several other critics, as Basu did. W. B. Yeats asserts that the structure of honest poetry, in contrast to that of popular poetry, may occasionally be opaque or ungrammatical (Jaman, 1999).

Despite feelings of loneliness and alienation, Das remains optimistic. We see a glimmer of hope in his later poems, such as "Aaj" (Today), "Jol" (Water), and "Brikkha" (Trees), whereby he expresses his confidence in humanity. These poems describe his state of hope with clarity. Despite his optimism in later poems, Das was predominantly lonely and gloomy, as previously described. His sensitivity causes him much distress, and from his anguish and the critiques of readers, he seeks to derive positive solace for his soul through his portrayals:

Men who exist in men, rise to men from the past
Firstly to take the value of their consciousness
even after their death. (Ahammed, 2012)

It may be asserted that Jibanananda Das' poetry reflects the numerous vicissitudes he experienced throughout his life. His poetry explores the profundity of his loneliness and isolation, as well as the profound agony, despair, and misery that permeate his existence. His promental anguish and animosity towards the obliterated civilization and its devastated populace, coupled with his discontent, fatigue, and desire for death about his own existence, among other sentiments.

The concept of escape materialized for Jibananada Das. It comprised ideas, revolutions, and religions. The escape with them was not a singular action; rather, it encompassed several interpretations for each poet. It was not the sole remedy for the sporadic upheavals, whether personal or impersonal, that obstruct humanity's pursuit and desire for pleasure. Among other alternatives and recommendations, one that captivated Das was the pursuit of Eternal

Beauty, Truth, and the One as a means of escape. Das, as an individual or societal escapist, perceived no resolution in Bangla literature, unlike Shelley. He envisioned no future for himself or others. There are no elements of escapism in "Triumph of Life" by Das; rather, it just conveys the somber tone of mortality like Keats' poetry.

CONCLUSION

Jibanananda Das' poetry clearly portrays his growing disillusionment, despair, and sense of powerlessness experienced throughout his writing as well as his personal life. His poetry is predominantly infused with sorrow, loneliness, alienation, and despair, desire for death. Through the utilization of poetic tropes and metaphorical language in his poems, the poet consistently endeavors to depict an internal representation of his tormented and fatigued spirit. This essay examines the issue of escape prompted by contemporary realities. Contemporary philosophers asserted that only reason existed. However, reason and its principles did not fulfill humanity. A response replaced reason with passion and nature worship. Additionally, the faculties of human intuition were highlighted, and the imagination was liberated. No poet comprehended the political and social ramifications of the tumultuous events of the era as he did. No poet has articulated the themes of personal and collective liberation more lyrically, in philosophical, theological, and social contexts.

FURTHER STUDY

In this research paper, I did not collect data from interviews, and at the same time, I did not read all the articles related to this article. So, there is enough scope to do more research in this area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I extend my thanks as I cannot ignore the constant support, faith and motivation of my parents and my siblings. Along with them, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and deepest appreciation to all those who have been by my side in this toughest journey.

REFERENCES

- Alam, F. (1999). *Jibanananda Das-selected Poems with an Introduction, Chronology and glossary*, Dhaka: The University Press Limited.
- Fazlul, H., K., Abul. (2009). —*Adhunikata O Jibananander Jibonutkonthal*. In Hussain, Anwer, Syed (Eds.), *Uttaradhikar: a literary quarterly*, Dhaka, Bangle academy.
- Shirazi, Z. (2009). —*Jibanananda: Poet of Autumnal Shadows*. In Chowdhury, Latif, Faizul (Eds.), *Essays on Jibanananda Das*, Dhaka: Pathak Shamabesh.
- Syed, M., Abdul. (1998). —*Jibananana Dasar Kobita: Somokalin Protikrial*. In Syed, Mannan, Abdul (Eds.), *Kobita Samagra (A Collection of Complete Poems: Published and Unpublished)*, Dhaka, Abosar.
- Jaman, I., Syeda. (2009). —*Jibanananda: Shoto Jaaljharner Gaan*. In Hussain, Anwer, Syed (Eds.), *Uttaradhikar: a literary quarterly*, Dhaka, Bangle academy.