

The Child & The Poet: Innocence, Simplicity and Modernity in Jibanananda Das

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Summary Jibanananda Das, a prominent Bengali poet, is regarded as one of the leading modern pillars of Bengali literature [1,2]. Through the images and fictional descriptions of children that he presented in his poetry, it could be observed that the elements he included all evoked a distinctive kind of tenderness as well as innocence, alongside dialogue with nature [3]. In Jibanananda's poetry, the child is not only the starting point of his life but also a symbol of human simplicity and innocence [4]. This presence of children, while mixed with the beauty of nature and innate feelings in his pen, created a magical radiance [5]. Through his verses, Jibanananda presented the child as a pure, almost sacred figure. Someone untouched by the chaotic burden of modernity and the encroaching shackles of adulthood [6]. This portrayal reflects his belief that the child is a timeless emblem of purity [3]. Which is what this article attempts to accomplish this through the presence of children, the philosophical and abstract image of the child form, and its cultural context through various poems by Jibanananda.

Abstract Jibanananda Das was one of the foremost modern Bengali poets of his time. He has portrayed children in his poetry, often with a strong combination of innocence and a peaceful connection with nature. In his works, it was repetitively seen that the child is not only a symbol of the beginning of life, but the child also represents purity, followed by simplicity. The presence of children in Jibanananda's poetry interlaces with nature, and its natural beauty gives off a special glow of emotional depth. He shows these children as beings of sacred figures who are free from the turmoil of modern life. Thus, this article explores the description of children in Jibanananda Das's poetry and the cultural context. The aim of this thesis is to observe, analyze and present how Jibanananda Das used child figures as literary as well as cultural symbols of innocence, ecology and modern identity. By additional comparison of his representation of childhood versus Rabindranath Tagore's spiritual vision and positioning it with the historical and ecological context of the state of Bengal. The paper highlights how Jibanananda changed modern Bengali poetics through his unique imagery of the innocent children.

Keywords Serenity, Tenderness, Simplicity, Imagination, Symbolism, Modernity

1. Introduction to the Portrayal of Children in Jibanananda's Work

The image of children is a heartfelt and touching part of Bengali literature. Jibanananda Das, who captured this meaning, has described children with such a special significance & perfect simplicity since the beginning of modern Bengali poetry.

2. Main Discussion

The Child as the embodiment of nature

The imaginary image of the child appears in his poetry as a

form of an illusion or a mirage and an embodiment of nature

Our article will briefly discuss the role, images, and special features of children's poetry in Jibanananda's years of poetry work.

Diving into his works, in the poems of "The Golden Whip Around the Neck of a Book Child" or "The Last Poem," an image of innocence and the comparative purity of modern society are revealed through the child portrayed there [3].

Children as Symbols of harmony with nature

Jibanananda portrays the child as being one with nature showcasing a response to a peaceful, Utopian world in contrast to the complications of society as well as difficulties of human life [7]. Furthermore, in the poems of "Under the Tree" or "Dark Shadow", a further analysis showing the presence of a child entwined with the splendid beauty of nature [5]. Creating a soft, glowing atmosphere in the poem. The simplicity of a child is revealed here like a special shade or an illustrious orb of hope [4]. Jibanananda Das's era was filled with the excitement of modernism and Bengali

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nationalism [2].

Contrast with Tagore

In contrast to Rabindranath Tagore, who instead often romanticized the child as a spiritual figure [8] but Jibanananda, during this period, used children as modern symbols of the future, as well as emphasizing their potential in their new generation, draped in that innocence. This was also found in his diaries [9].

The optimistic imagination of the child

And perhaps the greatest attribute of life is a child's colorful imagination and optimistic way of thinking.

Just as the child's perspective is revealed in the poems, a clarity of his soul was revealed as well. In poems such as "Aporup" or "Surjer Thale", the imaginative spirit of a child can not only be seen but also clearly felt.

The peacemaker in modern life: The Child

Jibanananda's poetry reveal that children play the role of a peacemaker/mediator against the intensity and psychological conflicts and challenges of modernity.

The image of a child, thus, can be considered a basic human condition from a philosophical view. Which again differs from Rabindranath's vision of the child as a spiritual entity [8], ultimately highlighting Jibanananda's distinct modernist philosophy.

Children being the symbol of abstract and cultural symbolism

In his poetry, the child is not just a realistic incarnation, but an actual, abstract, philosophical, and cultural symbol carrying a strong message.

This is why his portrayal of children is a unique aspect of modern Bengali poetry that brings to the fore the fundamental meaning and thought of the relationship between children and how they signify humans.

Verses of Innocence and Nature

Mentioning verses about children in Jibanananda Das's poetry, that beautifully highlight the special technique of his poetry and the simplicity and beauty of a child's life, as quoted, *"How many times have I seen the flying insects play in the waves of the golden sun. As if the close sky, as if some diffuse life has taken possession of their minds; In the hands of a brave child, the dense thrill of the grasshopper has fought with death."*

The child's innocence and his affinity and harmony with nature, in tandem with the game of catching frogs here, while at the same time, rural life, the simplicity of children, a life shining with nature, where positive and negative things have created a pre-existing connection. *"It's morning all around. The soft color of the sun is as red as a child's cheeks; the scent of childhood lingers on the grass of the field, and the call for a quiet festival has come on the way to the village."*

Rupasi Bangla: Childhood and Ecological Belonging

A very important way to analyze Jibanananda Das's usage of children in his poetry is through their close-knit ties with

not only nature but more significantly with the land of Bengal. His poems do not just display children as only innocent figures; they are often placed inside the natural world as if they are part of the rivers or the fields or even the skies surrounding them. For example in *Rupasi Bangla* (1934), a book of sonnets written by Jibanananda, about his homeland, where he created a picture of Bengal in which children were connected to the grass, the birds, and even seasonal changes. As Akaitab Mukherjee [10] describes these poems can be seen as a sort of "ecopoetry," where the poet reminds us that the people expressed here truly belong to the land that they live in. When Jibanananda writes, *"the rice sways in the wind like a mother's song, A child runs barefoot, laughing through the fields,"* he presents to us how the child's innocence and the land's fertility are connected to each other. And this innocence here is not just purity but it is also a way of living in balance with nature.

Ecopoetry and the critique of modern life

Such a way of writing additionally offers a much gentle criticism of bustling modern city life. Esteemed scholars such as Mandal [11] noted that Jibanananda's images of various insects, dew, as well as soil highlighted a "bioregion" in short, a place where people live closely with their natural environment. Depictions of children playing in fields or chasing fireflies were examples of his belief in bioregions. He also suggests that the joy and simplicity of rural life carry anecdotes that city life cannot provide. And in his view the children act as guardians of this ecological wisdom who will carry this connection between people, their land, and their precious memories. Mukherjee [10] and Roy [12] even suggested that this kind of poetry makes use of ideas from deep ecology, a philosophy that says humans must see nature as having value in itself, and not just burnable resource. Where in this case, children in his poems symbolize a natural and real way of living that resists alienation and fragmenting.

Ecopoetry and the critique of modern life

Furthermore, another important way to look at Jibanananda Das's poetry is how children are linked to time and memory plus human identity. The childhood in his poems is not only just a phase of life, it also becomes a train of thought which includes the past, present, and future altogether. Clinton Seely [13] in his book "A Poet Apart," makes note that Jibanananda often used imagery that consisted of dawn, dusk, and seasons to show how life moved in cycles. And in this very sense the child became part of those cycles. They carried memories of what had to come before one was living in the present moment, ultimately hinting at a future still to arrive. In *The Hunt*, Jibanananda Das described dawn as *"the soft blue of a grasshopper's body, / guava and custard apple trees all around, green as parrot feathers."* This description uses an impressionistic approach as if almost like the way a child sees the world in flashes of bright colors and sensation. And here childhood is connected to a different kind of time where the time is rather fleeting yet filled with wonder.

Children as the flame bearers of memories in time

This very theme becomes much more powerful when it can be remembered that the history of Bengal during Jibanananda's lifetime. Where the country faced extreme colonial rule, a famine which massacred countless people and the Partition of 1947. All these events broke the motion of everyday life and created feelings of loss and despair. Ananya Jahanara Kabir [14] wrote that several South Asian writers of the time had to find new ways to deal with this trauma. And in Jibanananda's poetry the symbolism of children can thus be seen as the real bearers of memory, not of heroic battles but of ordinary life. Where the smell of the soil, the sound of birds, or the play of insects in the grass are displayed in a magical way. All these daily memories helped to fight against forgetting of what was deemed normal and helped in reminding readers of the elements of Bengal that politics and violence could never erase.

Children and the depiction of their fear of death in childhood

The child furthermore represented the uncertainty of modern identity. Seely [13] reminded us of that Jibanananda often avoided giving his poems clear endings where he left them open ended. And in the same way the child in his poetry was not always the figure of comfort. Sometimes children appeared with fear and elements of death. As seen in *The Grey Manuscript* (1930), he writes: "*In the hands of a brave child, the dense thrill of the grasshopper has fought with death.*" This very line mixed the innocence of children with mortality that showed even in play the children were close to the reality of loss. Thus the child was also a reminder of life's fragility.

Role of children in memory and time

Therefore, it is seen in this way that Jibanananda Das's children were focal points of time and memory. They aligned the past with the present which also held onto the fragile cultural memories, pointing towards possible futures. They showed how modern human identity is not simple in one dimensional way or whole together but instead it's made of fragments in essence moments of fear, joy, and imagination.

Poetic technique of simile and sensation through imagery

'*Similarity is poetry.*' Evidently, it was discovered that Jibanananda Das's poetry is always rich in the usage of similes [15-17]. The poet has frequently expressed his creativity in using similes by comparing the soft radiance of the sun with the cheeks of a child.

As seen, "*The smell of the grass of the field is in his chest, the scent of dew in his eyes, the rice ripens in exhaustion after tasting it, he speaks of the taste of the body; the light of the afternoon may come and (perhaps) ruin his time of prayer.*"

In these verses, the poet showcases the simple, natural, and animating feelings in a child's mind, which are an undeniable part of the life of a child growing up in close touch with nature.

In addition, his poetry contains a child's swoon, joy, fear,

and a unique sense of life that deeply impacts the reader.

"Aat Bachor Ager Ekdin"

Another one of Jibanananda Das's famous poems about children is "Aat Bachor Ager Ekdin"[3]. Where some of its famous stanzas are

"I heard that the body was taken to the crematorium;
Last night—in the darkness of the night of Falgun
When the moon of Panchami had set
He was about to die;
His bride was lying beside him—the child was also there;
There was love, there was hope— in the light— yet he saw
What ghost? Why did he break his sleep?

Or perhaps he had not slept for a long time— Lying in the room of Las Kata

He is sleeping now."

The Grey Manuscript

In addition, another poem by Jibanananda Das called "Child" was preserved in *The Grey Manuscript* [6], which highlighted his imaginative thoughts towards children. This manuscript, plus other unpublished works, was an indicator of childhood innocence, which was a recurring theme throughout his career [3].

The delicateness of childhood heavily influenced Jibanananda's philosophy of life [5]. And here, the innocence of a child is clearly revealed.

Children as figures of festivity and optimism

Children appear to be festive and an optimistic embodiment of nature. Over and above, Jibanananda's poetry is full of sensual imagery that reveals the numerous feelings of life, nature, and the dynamics of intimacy, plus relationships between people.

His mother's poem "Ideal Boy" is a well-known children's story that's included in the textbook where children's character and their qualities are praised.

3. Conclusions

Concluding, in Jibanananda's poetry, children come as depictions of simplicity, affinity to nature, and the very rebirth of life [4].

His poetry is thus filled with a respectful as well as compassionate vision for children. Blending not only innocence but also modernist nature symbolism. This altogether reshaped modern Bengali literature [5].

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