

Books by Jibanananda Das published or in press during his lifetime:

ঝরা পালক/*Fallen Feathers* (Kolikata: Sudhir Chandra Sarkar, 1927)

ধূসর পাণ্ডুলিপি/*Gray Manuscripts* (Kolikata: D.M. Library, 1936)

বনলতা সেন/*Banalata Sen* (Kolikata: Kavita Bhavan, 1942)

মহাপৃথিবী/*The World at Large* (Kolikata: Purvasa, 1944)

সাতটি তারার তিমির/*Darkness of Seven Stars* (Kolikata: Gupta, Rahman and Gupta, 1948)

বনলতা সেন/*Banalata Sen* (Kolikata: Signet Press, 1952)

জীবনানন্দ দাশের শ্রেষ্ঠ কবিতা/*Jibanananda Das's Best Poems* (Kolikata: Nabhana, 1954)

Notes:

কমলালেবু/"Tangerine," published in *Kavita* ("Poetry"), December, 1937; included in the second edition (Signet Press edition) of *Banalata Sen*.

মৃত্যুর আগে/"Before Death," published in the inaugural issue of *Kavita*, September, 1935.

Kavita's editor, Buddhadeva Bose, sent a copy of this initial issue of his journal to Rabindranath Tagore, who commented apropos "Before Death" that "Jibanananda Das's poem, full of pictorial beauty, delighted me." The *akanda* and *dhundul* are plants; the *ashvattha* is a tree, one of the more frequently mentioned trees in Jibanananda's poetic repertoire; the *bulbuli* is a melodious songbird. *Kankabati* is a Bengali folktale maiden—here probably doubling as Jibanananda's named muse. Buddhadeva Bose, Jibanananda's earliest and most ardent supporter, would title one of his volumes of poetry *Kankabati*.

নীলিমা/"Blue Skies," published in *Kallol* ("Roaring Waves"), February, 1926; included in *Fallen Feathers*. This poem, with its anti-urban bias, was the first by Jibanananda to be published in *Kallol*, the journal that came out from 1923 through the end of 1929. That journal—because it served as the premier vehicle for the new poetry of that time—gave its name to the decade of the 1920's, known in literary circles as the *Kallol yuga* or era.

বোধ/"Sensation," published in *Pragati* ("Progress"), August, 1929; included in *Gray Manuscripts*.

ক্যাম্প/"In Camp," published in *Paricay* ("Acquaintances"), January, 1932. This poem caused a bit of controversy, both before and after publication. Before publication, the editor of

Paricay, Sudhindranath Datta, complained of incomprehensibility. After publication, critic Sajanikanta Das complained of obscenity. Some, but not all, of both complaints stemmed from the expression "*ghai harini*," translated here as "doe in heat." "Harini" is perfectly intelligible to Bengali speakers, meaning the female deer; "*ghai*," however, comes from the Assamese language and refers to a live decoy, used to lure game. Jibanananda, who, according to his brother, never hunted in his life, would have learned this term as a young man from professional hunters whose staging area for expeditions into the Sundarbans would have been in many cases Barisal, since it lies atop the northeastern edge of that jungle. In Jibanananda's own words, the melody that pervades "In Camp" is one "of life's helplessness—for all life, that of man, of worm, of locust." The *sundari* tree figures prominently in the Sundarban jungles; see below the note for সূন্দরবনের গল্প/"A Tale of the Sundarban Jungles."

শিকার/"The Hunt," published in *Kavita*, September, 1936; included in the original *Banalata Sen*. The *ashvattha*, *sundari*, and *arjun* are all trees; the *shalik* is a rather ordinary and ubiquitous bird in Bengal; *machka* is the name—but a local name that is not found in the standard dictionaries—of a red-petalled flowering plant.

সূন্দরবনের গল্প/"A Tale of the Sundarban Jungles," published posthumously in *Chaturanga* ("The Four Arts"), January, 1956. The Sundarban, which literally means "beautiful (*sundar*) forest (*ban*)", takes its name, so it is said, from the *sundari* tree, plentiful in the Sundarban jungle. The Sundarban, famous for its wildlife including the royal Bengal tiger, covers much of the lower portion of southwest Bangladesh and the extreme southeast corner of the state of Bengal in India. The *tambura* (also spelled *tanpura*) is a four-stringed, unfretted musical instrument—the strings are actually wires—used as accompaniment to much vocal music; the four strings are tuned to different notes and are played in an unvarying sequence as a constant background, a drone of sorts, to the more animated melodic line.

হরিণেরা/"Deer," published in *Kavita*, December, 1936; included in the original *Banalata Sen*. From the *palash* tree comes shellac as well as a bright red pigment. Though irrelevant to this poem, it is this tree that lent its name to the village near which, in 1757, the Battle of Plassey was fought and won by forces of the British East India Company, marking the beginning of the colonial period in South Asia. ("Plassey" is the Anglicized pronunciation of "*palashi*," the adjective derived from *palash*.) Sephalika Bose is one of the many proper names of imaginary women who inhabit Jibanananda's poetry.

হাওয়ার রাত/"Windy Night," published in *Kavita*, March, 1936; included in the original *Banalata Sen*. The *ashvattha* tree appears in a number of Jibanananda's poems. Svati is one of the twenty-seven named stars in the Hindu heavens, all considered wives of the moon. Vidisha is the name of an ancient capital city, in Malwa, in India.

নগ্ন নির্জন হাত/"Naked Lonely Hand," published in *Kavita*, September, 1936; included in the original *Banalata Sen*. The word for "hand" (হাত) in this title can mean "hand," "forearm," or "arm," just as the word (পা) can mean both "foot" as well as "leg." I chose to render it as "hand," but "arm" would have been just as accurate a translation.

বনলতা সেন/"Banalata Sen," published in *Kavita*, December, 1935. "Banalata Sen," a woman's name, became the title for two of Jibanananda's volumes of poetry, his third book, brought out by Buddhadeva Bose's publishing concern, *Kavita Bhavan*, in 1942, containing twelve poems, and his fifth book, issued by Signet Press in 1952 and featuring the twelve poems of the original *Banalata Sen* plus an additional eighteen from the same period. Banalata Sen, whose identity has been subject for much speculation, is in fact a fictional character. "Banalata Sen," it could be said, became Jibanananda's signature poem. One hears that some young women, in Calcutta particularly, have been named Banalata, due to the popularity of Jibanananda's eponymous giver of solace.

Ashoka and Bimbisara are historical characters who once ruled ancient India. Vidarbha, Vidisha, and Sravasti are names of cities out of the past; Sravasti's artisans were renowned as expert crafts people. Natore happens to be a small town, a very real town within Bengal though well to the north of Barisal and Kolikata (formerly Calcutta) where Jibanananda resided for most of his life, but there is no evidence that Jibanananda ever visited Natore.

কুড়ি বছর পরে/"Twenty Years Later," published in *Kavita*, December, 1935; included in the original *Banalata Sen*. The *muniya* is a small bird with red wings and beak; the *shirish*, *jam*, *jhau*, *babla*, and *ashvattha* are all trees.

আকাশলীনা/"Merged into the Skies," published in *Kavita*, September, 1937. The name of the (imaginary) woman was initially Haimantika, in the *Kavita* version of this poem. When included in Jibanananda's fifth book of poetry, *Darkness of Seven Stars*, Haimantika had been renamed Suranjana.

ফিরে এসো/"Come Back," published in *Kavita*, September, 1937; included in *The World at Large*. Like the mango, the *nim* (also seen spelled as *neem*) and the *jhau* are trees.

বলিল অশ্বথ সেই/"Said That *ashvattha* Tree," published in *Kavita*, September, 1936; included in *The World at Large*. Besides the tree in the title, the *nim* (*neem*) and *jamrul* are likewise trees.

আট বছর আগের একদিন/"A Day Eight Years Ago," published in *Kavita*, March 1938; included in *The World at Large*. Again, there is mention of the *ashvattha* tree, Jibanananda's favorite tree; the *doyel* is bird not unlike the magpie.

পাখি/"Bird," published in the expanded, posthumous edition of *Gray Manuscripts*.

শকুন/"Vultures," published first in Jibanananda's second book of verse, *Gray Manuscripts*.

Composed in or before 1930, according to the Jibanananda's own introduction to this volume, "Vultures" was the only poem of the seventeen included in *Gray Manuscripts* not to have been published previously in a periodical. Though the translation displays no rhyme, the Bengali lyric is a sonnet of four Dantean terza-rima stanzas with a concluding couplet having the rhyme scheme *aba bcb cdc ded ee*. Jibanananda Das, the professor of English, would certainly have been familiar with Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" and its terza-rima sonnet-like stanzas.

Hindu mythology conceives of the eight compass points, north, northeast, east, etc., as guarded by eight elephants. The Vaitarani, comparable mythologically to the Styx, is a river of a netherworld over which the dead cross. The Malabar coastline is quite real and extends along the west side of peninsular India south of Mumbai (Bombay).

পথ হাঁটা/"Walking," published in the second edition (Signet Press edition) of *Banalata Sen*. It is, like "Vultures," a terza-rima sonnet. Judging from poetic form alone, this sonnet was probably written in or before 1930; see note to "Vultures" above.

ফুটপাথে/"On City Sidewalks," published in *Caturanga*, September, 1938; included in *The World at Large*. The *amlaki* is a tree; the *dewali* bug, so-called because it appears in large numbers in late autumn around the time of Kali puja, or what is called Dewali outside of Bengal, is an iridescent green.

বিস্ট ওয়াচ/"Wristwatches," published in *Kavita*, December, 1938; included in *Darkness of Seven Stars*.

ভিক্ষারী/"Beggar," published in *Nirukta* ("Categorically Stated"), December, 1940; included in *Jibanananda Das' Best Poems*. Since the publication of this poem, Kolikata has undergone inevitable growth and change, including change of its name and that of many of its streets. Harrison Road, a prominent thoroughfare in north Kolikata, now goes by the name of Mahatma Gandhi Road. The other place names have, as far as I know, remained what they were in Jibanananda's time. The saw used on conch shells has teeth that cut both when the saw is pushed and pulled, making it a difficult tool to handle.

নিরঙ্কুশ/"Inevitable," published in *Nirukta*, September, 1941; included in *Darkness of Seven Stars*. From the earth's surface upward there are said to be seven strata of air, each containing seven types of flow: flow ahead (*prabaha*), flow back (*abaha*), flow up (*udbaha*), flow with (*sambaha*), flow against (*bibaha*), flow apart (*paribaha*), and flow together (*parabaha*).

আবছায়া/"Shadows," published in *Jayasri* ("Goddess of Victory"), September, 1941. *Kokil*, though it glosses as "cuckoo," carries none of the associations that the English word has, neither "crazy" nor "one that lays its eggs in another's nest" but instead is known for its singing.

খেতে প্রান্তরে/"In Fields Fertile and Fallow," published in *Nirukta*, June, 1942; included in *Darkness of Seven Stars*. Naciketa is associated with fire; he learns the magical mantra of Agni (fire) from Yama, lord of the dead. Praceta, on the other hand, is one of the many names for Varuna, lord of all waters, lord of the seas.

এই কি সিক্কুর হাওয়া/"What Sort of Sea Breeze Is This?" published in *Kranti* ("Transition"), autumn, 1946.

অন্ধৃত আঁধার এক/"A Strange Darkness," published posthumously in *Kavita*, December, 1954.

রূপসী বাংলা #1, one of sixty-odd sonnets focusing on Bengal and composed in the early 1930s just after Jibanananda had returned to his paternal home in Barisal (in Bangladesh) following a very short stint of several months teaching in Delhi, the only time in his life that he lived outside Bengal. The entire sonnet cycle was published posthumously by the

poet's brother, Asokananda Das, under the title of *Bengal the Beautiful* (রূপসী বাংলা). The sonnet form per se, introduced by Michael Madhusudan Datta (1824-73) in the 1860's, continues to flourish in Bengali poetry today. Dhansiri, Jalangi, and Rupsa are three of the many, many rivers of the riverine delta in which Barisal is located. The *shalik* happens to be one of the more common birds of Bengal; the *shimul* is known for its kapok-producing seed pods.

রূপসী বাংলা #2. Characters Chand and Behula appear in the popular premodern Hindu verse narrative, the *Manasa-mangal*, a text eulogizing Manasa, goddess of snakes. Chand, a merchant devoted to Shiva and inimical to Manasa, plied the waterways from Champa, a city in north-western Bengal-Bihar, down through Bengal and out into the Bay of Bengal on his way to various trading centers. Behula, his daughter-in-law—whose husband one of Manasa's snakes bit and killed on his wedding night in retaliation for Chand's refusal to worship Manasa—remains faithfully with her dead husband, floating upon a raft with the corpse downstream through the lush Bengal delta. Such wifely devotion earned her entree into lord Indra's heaven, called Amara, where she danced flawlessly and thereby gained back as a boon the life her husband. *Shyama* has multiple meanings: It is feminine here, and, with its meaning of "the dark one," serves as one of the many names for the goddess; it literally can mean "the verdant one," implying richly green Bengal personified as a woman; and it is the name of a particular songbird, this third meaning being the primary one in the context of the poem. The other two meanings, however, remain latent. The *jam*, *ashvattha*, and *tamal* are all sizeable trees; the *shati* plant yields a camphor resin; the *bhant* is a flowering plant.

রূপসী বাংলা #3 The *kamranga* is a small, somewhat sour but very tasty red-colored fruit. The *muniya* bird, not to be confused with the mynah, is small with red wings and beak. Like the jackfruit, the *hijal* and *jam* are trees indigenous to Bengal. *Kalmi* is an edible, freshwater plant.

রূপসী বাংলা #4. *Kirtan* is a Vaisnava religious congregational song. *Bhasan gan*, literally "immersion" (*bhasan*) "song" (*gan*), are sung in conjunction with the immersion of the image of a particular Hindu deity following a puja, e.g., "*Manasar bhasan*," songs in praise of the goddess Manasa. Behula, a faithful wife, featured in the *Manasar bhasan*, also called *Manasa mangal* in its more lengthy narrative form. Lahana, the elder of two wives of the merchant Dhanapati, characters in the *Chandi mangal*, the verse narrative

lauding goddess Chandi. *Rup-katha*, a folk-tale or fairy tale. *Pancali*, both a style of composition as well as a particular type of medieval narrative composition. *Yatra*, the Bengali folk theatre, a true histrionic melodrama, performed to accompanying instrumental music. Both *kamranga* and *kul* are small, somewhat sour and very tasty fruits.

রূপসী বাংলা #5. "Lakshmi's owl" is the name of particular species of owl. Moreover, the goddess Lakshmi has as her *vahana* or vehicle the owl. Srimanta is the name of a merchant's son in the sixteenth-century, C.E., verse narrative known as the *Chandi mangal*, a tale that eulogizes the goddess Chandi. Srimanta travels to Sri Lanka in search of his missing father, who years ago had been imprisoned there. The tale ends well with both Srimanta and Dhanapati, his father, returning to Bengal.

রূপসী বাংলা #6. Women in Bengal sometimes use the hard iridescent green wings of a kanch beetle as the ornamental dot they place upon their forehead. The *bou-katha-kao* bird, whose name means literally "oh wife, speak," has a call that sounds like the words "bou katha kao," and thus its name. Inside a betel box or tin are smaller boxes, which hold the nuts and cloves and condiments needed for preparing the betel leaf to be chewed.

রূপসী বাংলা #7. Pakshiraja, literally the "king" (*raja*) of "birds" (*pakshi*) is both a name for Garuda, himself a bird but also Vishnu's *vahana* or vehicle, and the name of a winged horse in fairy tales. The sun god, Surya, drives a one-wheeled, horse-drawn chariot across the sky daily.