Chapter 1

Introduction: W.B.Yeats as a poet, his life and poetry, Jibanananda Das as a modern poet

1.1 William Butler Yeats

William Butler Yeats is one of the greatest poets in the English literature of his period, and is the connecting link between the nineteenth century and the twentieth century in the realm of literature. He is a poet of distinction on more counts than one: he is a lyric poet, a mystic, a mythologist, a romantic—all at the same time; he is a poet with a political ideology; he is a poet with a prophetic vision and an occult philosophy. He was the national poet of the Republic of Ireland. Like his slightly older contemporaries, such as Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wild and Bernard Shaw, Yeats was born in Dublin. He was born on 13 June, 1865, at George’s Ville, Dublin in South Ireland. But for the longer part of his life, he lived in England, and therefore he is both an Irish poet and an English poet.

Though Yeats lived the longer part of his life in England yet he could never forget his associations with Ireland and he never ceased to be an Irish poet. In fact, the lush green, the lively hills and dales, the sparkling streams as well as the profuse myths, the audacious nationalism and the Gaelic fancy of Ireland were his constant companions. All these national characteristics of Ireland, perhaps originated in the geographical situation of this dream island washed in the east by the Irish Sea and in all other directions by the fierce Atlantic Ocean. Ireland had been a British colony island which is now divided into two parts: the Northern Ireland, which covers about one sixth of the whole island and is still under British control; and the southern Ireland, which covers about five sixth of the whole island and is now the Republic of Ireland. The central part of Ireland is a rolling plain, but along her coast there are mountains and up-lands.

A born poet, Yeats began writing poetry and plays at an early age. He was inspired in his poetic debut by the abundance of Irish folklore and legends Yeats was born in an island of supernaturals, myths and folklores. The mythological names of Fergus, Cuchulain, Conor, Deirdre etc. are now well-known
throughout the world, thanks to the writing of Yeats, Lady Gregory and such other nationalistic mythologists. The mythology of Ireland, the lush green of Sligo and the whistling of the Irish curlew always remained in Yeats’ mind and inspired his poetry. Yeats was also inspired by his artist father who was a painter of moderate eminence. Actually, the Yeats family had a penchant for art. Yeats’ brother, Jack Butler Yeats, was also an artist. On the other hand, Yeats’ mother came from a merchant family of Sligo, the Pollexfen family.

Back in 1867, when Yeats was only two years old, his father took the family to Regent’s Park, London. The Yeats’ family was truly bohemian in nature. In 1874, the family moved to 14 Edith Villas, West Kensington and with the family Yeats also moved there. So from 1865 to 1874, Yeats remained either in Dublin or at Sligo, and when he was nine years old, he went to London with the family and commenced living at 14 Edith Villa, Kensington. In 1876, the Yeats’ family again moved, this time to 8 Woodstock Road, Bedford Park. Next year, Yeats was admitted in the Godolphin School in Hammersmith. As a young man he seemed to be vague and dreamy. Yeats disliked the London life around him. He longed for the countryside of Sligo, in the west of Ireland, where he had grown up. A moment of nostalgia for it inspired his most famous poem ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’:

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine beam-rows will I have there, and a hive for the honey-bcc;
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

Yeats’ health was never strong, and due to hard work, he once experienced a mild collapse in 1889. And yet he was very active that year; he prepared a selection on poems for Walter Scott and published his The Wandering of Oisin and Other Poems. The Wandering of Oisin is a composition about the exploits of the third century legendary Gaelic bard, Oisin (or Oisín). This poem shows Yeats’ deep interest in the Gaelic legends and his boyhood memories of Sligo. In the same year he met the Dubliner dramatist, poet and wit Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) and Edwin Ellis with whom he decided to publish William Blake’s poems. Also in the same year he edited Faery and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry. In
1889 itself began one of the most traumatic experiences in Yeats’ life, when Maud Gonne, the paragon of beautiful women and an active nationalist, visited Bedford Park where the Yeats family had been putting up. Yeats was then barely twenty four. He met Maud Gonne, fell headlong in love of her, and as a token of his heart-burning offered to write The Countess for her. Yeats bore this love in his heart throughout his life.

Truly, Yeats had great fascination for Maud Gonne. During this time Yeats was very shy and somewhat awkward in the company of woman, despite having two sisters of his own. In his early years, for some times he lived the life of celibacy, almost the life of an ascetic.

The first shock of unrequited love sharpened his propensity towards esotericism and Eastern wisdom, and he became a disciple of the great occultist Madame Blavatsky (Helena Petrovna Blavatsky: 1831-1891). Blavatsky, along with H.S. Olcott, founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. Yeats was drawn to Blavatsky by his school-mate Charles Johnston who became a confirmed believer in occultism by reading A.P. Sinnett’s The Occult World and Esoteric Buddhism. The interest in occultism and theosophy led Yeats to an intense study of the works of William Blake (1757-1827) and to Blake’s symbolism. His attraction for Maud Gonne still vibrant, Yeats plunged himself in the cultural movement of Ireland, perhaps as a means of vicarious gratification of his love for Gonne, because Gonne was also engaged in the cultural and national movements of Ireland, called the Celtic Revival. During the 1890’s he published a mass of prose works and poems written under the influence of the symbolist movement in France and England. All these works relate to the mythology and folklore of Ireland. For example, he published ‘Representative Irish Tales’ (1891), ‘The Countess Kathleen’ and ‘Various Legends and Lyrics’ (1891), ‘Irish Fairy Tales’ (1892), ‘The Celtic Twilight’ (1893), ‘The Land of Heart’s Desire’ (1894) which was performed first in London in the same year, ‘Poems’ (1895), ‘The Secret Rose’ (1897), etc.

In 1898, Yeats went on a tour to England and Scotland with Gonne. It was during this tour that they both experienced a strong bond with each other. Again, it was during this tour that Yeats dreamed of founding an Irish theatre that
materialized the next year as the Irish Literary Theatre or the Abbey Theatre. But before that, in 1896, Yeats went to Paris and there met J. M. Synge who founded the order of Celtic Mysteries. Yeats also became a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and through it conceived the idea of uniting Irish political parties. But for some reasons Yeats cut off his relations with the Brotherhood in 1900.

In 1912, the poet Rabindranath Tagore, while in England, paid a visit to Yeats and was surprised by the enthusiasm of Yeats and others over some half-serious translation of his own poems. In 1913, Yeats was granted Civil List pension of 150 pound per annum. He spent the autumn of that year with Ezra Pound and the next year went to the U.S.A only to return soon to England for Ezra Pound’s marriage with Dorothy Shakespeare. Yeats was very close to Pound who always wrote W.B. Y. for Yeats’ full name. However, in 1915, Yeats was awarded the knighthood but declined to accept the honour allegedly for the cause of Irish freedom.

Then, perhaps in utter despair and in need of an understanding wife, Yeats turned to a certain Georgie Hyde-Lees, with whom On 20 October, 1917, Yeats married eventually. The same year he published his collection of romantic poems: The Wild Swans at Coole. Within a few months of their marriage, Yeats discovered that Hyde-Lees was a good mediumistic subject and an adept in automatic writing. From then on Yeats for a long time researched into the phenomena of planchet, eschatology and supernatural visions. The findings of these researches are the material of his great prose-work ‘A Vision’. Besides, Yeats had a great interest in occultism and parapsychological phenomena, and himself could sometimes attain parapsychological states.

In the later part of 1918 the couple stayed in the house of Maud Gonne at 73 Stephen’s Green. During this time Yeats frequently moved among Dublin, Thoor Ballylee and Oxford. On 26 January, 1919, Anne Butler Yeats was born to the couple. Next year Yeats again went to USA on a lecture tour. On 22 August, 1921, a male child was born to the Yeats family: Michael Butler Yeats. In 1922, Yeats bought another house: the Georgian house: at 82 Merrion Square, Dublin. The same year Yeats’ father, John Butler Yeats died in New York. From
this time on, various honours began to come thickly to Yeats. Dublin University conferred on him D. Litt. degree. His nation also conferred honour on him: he was elected a Senator of Irish Free State in 1922. Next year Yeats was awarded the coveted Noble Prize for literature.

Almost the whole of 1924 he spent completing his book on mysticism, A Vision, which was published in 1925, and reading history and philosophy. Then in London he met Mohini Chatterjee who was a Bengali Brahmin learned in spiritual wisdom. Chatterjee stimulated him both spiritually and aesthetically and initiated him into mysticism. Later on Yeats' spiritual quest was intensified by his meeting with the Indian monk Purohit Swami and the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore. Yeats was so much impressed by Mohini Chatterjee that he even registered his impression of Chatterjee in his poem ‘Mohini Chatterjee’:

“That he might set at rest
A boy’s turbulent days
Mohini Chatterjee
Spoke these, or words like these.”

The poem was written between 23 January and 9 February, 1929, and it first appeared in A Packet for Ezra Pound (1929). Within two years of his meeting with Chatterjee, Yeats had a tryst with the Indian monk named Purohit Swami. Yeats was so much impressed also by the spiritual teaching that he immediately became interested in the Upanisads and even started translating some of the Upanisads jointly with the Swami, in 1935. Yeats was acquainted with and interested in the Upanisads even before that. His predilection for the spiritual philosophy of the Upanisads can be seen in his poem ‘A Prayer for my Son’ where he says that his son is but an incarnation of God.

But it is true that Yeats was never spiritually converted to Hindu philosophy. And yet, there was some love for Indian philosophy or spiritualism, as is evident also from some other poems of his, such as ‘Anashuya and Vijoya’, ‘The Indian Upon God’, ‘The Indian to His Love’, Mohini Chatterjee’, etc. Yeats also wrote an Introduction to Shri Purohit Swami’s The Holy Mountain (1934). The poet was very much drawn to the difficult mysteries of Yoga. In fact, he had a natural fascination for everything mysterious and difficult. In his poem ‘The
Fascination of what’s Difficult’ he wrote:

“The fascination of what’s difficult
Has dried the sap out of my veins, and rent
Spontaneous joy and natural content
Out of my heart.”

In 1936, Yeats became seriously ill. For long he had been suffering from heart disease and nephritis. But even with his ill health, he broadcasted on modern poetry in the summer of 1936. In 1937, he revised and published A Vision. In January, 1938, he wrote his last play The Heme’s Egg. His last public appearance occurred in August, 1938, at Abbey theatre where his play Purgatory was being performed. He being extremely unwell in the late summer of 1938, was visited by Maud Gonne for the last time; the two warm and cold hearts had had the last glimpse of each other. Yeats died on 28 January, 1939.

Yeats was perhaps aware of his end, as it appears from the titles and themes of his last two works: The Death of Cuchulain and Purgatory. Yeats himself wrote the following three lines for his epitaph which is still there today in Sligo for thousands of literary pilgrims to view:

“Cast a cold eye
On life, on death.
Horseman, pass by!” (Under Ben Bulben)

THE AGE OF YEATS

Yeats’ age is an age of transition – between Morris and Pound, and between Swinburne and Eliot. It was an age of rapid social change, for the nations in Europe were passing through intense industrial and political changes, and consequently structural changes occurred in almost all the components of the society. The growth spurt in population, the immigration of the rural population to the urban centers, the flush of factories made up the social scenario. Further, all these changes, in their turn, brought about changes in moral perception. These two changes were complementary in changing the Weltanschauung of the people. Yeats’ age was transitional because he lived between the Victorian age (1837-
1890) and the modern age that began in or around 1890, according to the general consensus.

All these literary forces were instrumental in changing Yeats' earlier style to his mature style in poetry. Here Pound exerted the most formidable influence on Yeats, though Pound himself once came to Yeats to learn how to write poetry. Besides, there was a revival of interest in John Donne's poetry, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, by which also Yeats was influenced. The intellectual quality of Donne's poems attracted Yeats, and so we find in his poetry the same far-fetched and incongruous imageries.

The scientific credo of the Victorian and Edwardian England brought with it the new invention of cinematography which also exerted some influence on literature. In the modern age, there were also innovations in the field of music, sculpture, painting and other fine arts, which were also instrumental in directing the course of the literary style. In the modern age, colloquialism and even slang language began to be used in prose as well as in poetry. Again, the freed verse, mostly employed by the French Symbolists and free verse, commonly employed in the seventeenth century France, exerted some influence in the new technique of modern poetry. However, the influences of all these literary currents gave rise to the development of a new modern technique of poems that had great impact upon Yeats in his later poems.

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE POET

It is fashionable to categorise Yeats' poems into four phases of development, or, at least, into two periods of writing. The four phases, generally accepted, are the Celtic twilight phase, the middle phase, the transitional phase, and the last phase. And the two periods of his writing are: the early period and the later or the mature period. the watershed between the two periods being roughly the year 1914. But such categorisation of Yeats' poems, or dividing his creative period into two halves, is quite prejudicial and arbitrary.

Yeats had perhaps the longest possible poetic life of over fifty years, in the history of English literature. He began his poetic career as a romantic and Spenserian bard. His natural attraction to dreaminess and mythology was pre-
dominant at the early stage. Yeats wrote his early poetry out of a love of a particular place. Sligo, in the west of Ireland, with its folklore, its belief in the supernatural, and its legends. He found material for his own mythology in translations of the Gaelic tales into English. Yeats had been a dreamy and romantic boy. Yeats grew up in the pre-Raphaelite afternoon, and it is sufficiently evident that the gathering Celtic twilight owed something of its colour to the sombre glow from Rossetti's painting room. Even as late as 1913 Yeats finds the old influence still capable of revival. As he grew up to his thirties, the romanticism and dreaminess of Yeats receded, and realism, though he had never a firm conviction about it, took their place of prominence. About a decade later after that, Yeats became a mature man and a mature poet. Realism continued to prevail upon him, but in addition, complexity overcast it. Yeats' last phase is very short: from 1936 to his death in 1939. It should be pointed out here that the transition from one phase to the next was almost imperceptible. In the transition from one phase to the next, certain elements of thought and style accrued and certain others were shaded off, but the innermost poetic self remained almost the same. For instance, even though in his mature phase he was realistic, he did never cease to be romantic.

YEATS' THEORY OF POETRY:

It is very difficult to say anything definitely about Yeats' theory of poetry, for he had no constant theory, but his view about poetry underwent several changes, throughout his poetic life of nearly fifty years. As we have seen, his poetic life can be divided into four phases. In the first phase, Yeats enshrined lyricism and romanticism in poetry. In this phase, he was very much influenced by his father's attitude to poetry. His father, J.B. Yeats thought that poetry must be dramatic, well-defined, sharp with high resolution, and clear; and hated vagueness in poetry. He then highly praised lyricism in poetry, as a consequence of his choosing Shelley as his ideal poet.

In the first phase, Yeats believed that the themes of poetry were not confined within the bounds of beautiful objects of nature and human passions grown out of human relations, but might include mythology, folklore, nationalism, etc. He also believed that poetry should be a means of escape from the hard
realities of life. With this belief he engaged himself in writing poetry of escape. He sought for themes in the Irish mythology and folklores. Yeats' father believed that poetry should be dramatic, a belief which later on we find in Eliot. Being persuaded by his father, Yeats wrote dramatic poetry. In the poems of Yeats' first phase, one also readily finds colourfulness and personalistic approach. The poems of this phase are also dreamy and sonorous. However, in spite of all these, we cannot say that he had any established theory of poetry, during the first phase. Whatever he wrote, it was only in imitation of others, like Shelley, Blake and Spenser.

In his later mature poetry, Yeats, unlike Pound and Eliot, was of the opinion that poetry is the expression of the soul and not of the mind. He held the highest value for poetry, and said that the quintessence of all poetry is its sincerity and that this sincerity can be achieved only when the poet, without reposing on the rational plane, submits himself at the command of his subconscious, or may be at the command of his unconscious. Therefore, poetry should be personal, and that the universal in poetry must be expressed through the particular experiences of the poet. He believed that literature is always personal, because it is the expression of the artist's or the poet's personal view of the life world around him. Actually both the early and the late poems of Yeats are personal to some extent, and in this regard, he is quite different from both Pound and Eliot who believed in the objectivity of poetry.

I. A. Richards, among others, subscribed to this view that Yeats, on the contrary, instead of breaking science and poetry completely apart, had preferred to reunite these elements in something of the manner in which they were fused in a religion. His system had for him, consequently, the authority and meaning of a religion, combining intellect and emotion as they were combined before the great analytic and abstracting process of modern science broke them apart. In short, Yeats had created for himself a myth. Yeats, likewise, tried to combine poetry and dream. He said that the poet should appeal to his subconscious and, may be, also to his unconscious. Poetry must not be the effect of conscious exercises, but it must come out from the inner niche of the poet's mind, like the dream, spontaneously. Again, poetry may be compared. Yeats said, with music, for like music,
poetry should be supra-rational. In fact, it was Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49) who first saw the analogy between poetry and dream, and between poetry and music. Nearly a century later, Yeats found the analogy very appropriate. Poe’s very phrasing returns to us in passage of one of W.B. Yeats’ last poems, referring to

“...forms that are or seem
When sleepers wake and yet still dream.
And when it’s vanished still declare,
With only bed and bedstead there,
That heavens had opened.” (Under Ben Bulben)

Yeats was very serious and careful about his verses, and always wanted appropriate images to express his ideas. He was frequently aware of his mask or anti-self, while writing poetry, for he thought that poetry is much influenced by the anti-self. Then Yeats was a transcendental poet; he was more concerned with the intensity of feelings and passions; and this was, perhaps, why he committed so many common grammatical errors like neglectful school boys.

**QUEST FOR UNIT: THE NEED OF A MYTH**

The poet’s mind is so conditioned by his inheritance and past that he likes to think and write in terms of myths which unite the past, the present and the future. Yeats stressed the importance of the subject-matter of poetry and identified it with myth from which he cannot break away. Though Yeats the poet was guided by ancient myths as instinct guides a migratory bird, nothing made him content; not even the invaluable subject-matter which he had inherited could quell his passion for something more comprehensive and as large as life. In spite of his admission that a poet’s images were given to him and that he could not choose them deliberately. Yeats does choose his subjects deliberately and fixes his own order of priorities. His love of Ireland and the desire to revive her rich past attracted him first to Celtic myths. His verse was, at first about Cuchulain, Conchobar and Fergus. His interest in magic, the occult and mysticism also enabled him to perceive some unity in an otherwise chaotic world. However, as he matured, life seemed to grow more complex, and threats of disintegration began
to mount. From the year 1889, when he first met Maud Gonne, he had lived in the hope of marrying her some day. Maud Gonne’s marriage in 1903 dashed his hopes. His frustration in love was followed by many distressing and catastrophic events on the national and international scene. The adverse effect of the First World War in the form of chaos and destruction constituted the subject-matter of his poems. Nothing in man’s past, not even in history and mythology, would offer an explanation of what was happening in the world, nor could they arrest the tide of anarchy and the ultimate oblivion.

Rejecting the theory that “poetry is a criticism of life”, he looked at poetry as a revelation of a hidden life and regarded poetry and music as the only means of conversing with eternity left to man on earth. Myths enable man to reach and acquire what he misses in life: they, thus, lend completion and unity to life. Yeats’ quest for a universally acceptable medium with a primordial base to project his own experience as well as the experience of his generation led him to repeatedly knock at the doors of mythology. His world of mythology consisted of folklore and legends, archetypes and symbols, dreams and rituals, and history. A Vision was a “mythopoeic synthesis”, a fulfillment of Yeats’s quest for universal images and metaphors, an amalgam of various meanings and functions of myth. A study of Yeats’ idea of myth branches out a scrutiny of different conceptions of myth and of how they were individualised and reborn in a synthetic form in his poetry, helping him to integrate the variegated experience of life.

**THE IDEA OF MYTH**

Jung describes the creative process as unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and elaboration and shaping of this image into the finished work. He describes the archetype as a figure that constantly recurs in the course of history and appears whenever creative fantasy is freely expressed. Essentially, therefore, it is a mythological figure. They are, so to speak, the psychic residue of innumerable experiences of the same type. They present a picture of psychic life in the average, divided up and projected into the manifold figures of the mythological pantheon.
In the Jungian approach the archetypes of the unconscious seem to offer possibilities of a universal and ordered mythical framework which can replace the Hebraic-Christian one. Myth also offers, as Jung suggests, a sure means of uniting one’s own experience with the continuous psychic history of man. Myth enabled Yeats, as it does every poet, to have a mental and imaginative counterpart to the real world and thus relieved the tension and strain of daily life.

While myth in Yeats’ poetry becomes a guide to psychic reality, a ritual to create a sense of recurrence and harmony, and history to immortalize some of the Irish men and women, true to the traditional it also encompasses the elements, the archetypes of Earth, Water, Air and Fire. The elements of nature, in the mythical aspect of Yeats’ poetry, become symbols of man’s various senses and of the history of mankind.

Myths seem to offer the only semblance of permanence in the world. By integrating his own experience with that of the myths, Yeats sought to achieve harmony. Moreover, as Yeats had a choice of many mythologies and a number of approaches to myth, he attempted to bring about a synthesis here too. His poetry, with the use of myth as metaphor, becomes an eclectic world into which all human action and thought converge to from a supreme reality which is more real than the commonly accepted reality. Man in this mythical world is all men and his word all words. The significance of Yeats’ use of the mythical method could not have been better noted and appreciated than by two of the twentieth century’s greatest poets, T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden. Writing about Joyce’s Ulysses, T.S. Eliot recorded his admiration for what he termed the ‘Mythical method’ used by Joyce. Yeats, according to Eliot, was the first to have consciously used this method: it was a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. In an essay on Yeats, first published in 1948 Auden takes a similar position in respect of myth and the poet’s need for a mythical framework. Auden believes that any poet today, even if he denies the importance of dogma to life, can see how useful myths are to poetry — how much, for instance, they helped Yeats to make his experience public and his vision of public personal.
Truly, it is through myths that Yeats communicates with the eternal and also, at the same time, reveals his identity and limitations.

**THE JOURNEY OF A POET**

Yeats' poetic career may be roughly divided into four major phases: the Celtic Twilight period, the disillusioned realistic middle period, the rich and complex Tower period and the last period. His early poetry is mainly introspective and escapist, and he gives expression, through symbols and myths, to the yet inexpressible longings of his soul. But even in the early period two trends are visible which often blend and overlap—his romantic longing and his nationalistic urge to revive the Celtic past and build a New Ireland of heroic standards. His poems of escape contain much poetry of earth also, and his Innisfree is at once a realm of Imagination and an actual island in Sligo. His frustration in love, and his bitter experiences in politics and in the Abbey Theatre shatter his illusions and produce the harsh, sardonic tone of the Middle poems. His attitude to life in later poetry is complex: he comes closer to life and his poetry shows an intense awareness of external reality, the Easter Rebellion, the Civil War, the turmoil in Ireland and in Europe; he wants to escape from this blood and mire and also the inevitable degradation of the body and seeks a safe anchorage in the Tower, in Byzantium. But his lust for life is also no less intense than his longing to escape and he becomes content to live life. Even in his Tower he is not a solitary recluse, and there is a sense of abounding life. It is this complexity of moods and tones that produces the rich and magnificent poems of this period. The last phase shows the completion of a pattern into which many different threads have been woven, but the prevailing impression is not one of harmony and fulfillment: the tone is intensely tragic and the defiant gaiety proves only a mask worn in disappointment. However, the style of Yeats' early poems is languid, weighted with metaphors and epithets and shows the influence of the English romantic tradition of Spenser, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson and Morris. The disillusionment and bitterness of the middle period is reflected in the sinewy bareness of diction for which he was indebted to the study of metaphysical poetry. The combination of this bony structure with a complex image-pattern gives the later poems their astonishing richness and their enduring quality.
Two things emerge from a study of Yeats’ life: the intense dynamism of his mind and the complexity of his personality. A lonely, heroic soul, he battles through circumstances, enriches his experience, and grows with each furrow on his brow. The dynamism of his character is heightened by the incessant clashes within his own mind; the formulation of the theory of the Mask is only an attempt to give a philosophical shape to the mental conflicts and oscillations which are prominent even in early youth; the shy, sensitive, lonely boy also dreams of fighting the Fenians at the head of a company of young men. This dual personality is met again and again in his later poetry and in Meditations in Time of Civil War the lonely dreamer is seen envying the man of action symbolized by the youthful combatant:

“I count those feathered balls of soot
The moor-hen guides upon the stream,
To silence the envy in my thought.”

This ambivalence is visible in his attitude to occultism, to politics, to his own philosophy system enunciated in A Vision. He is attracted to O’Leary and Parnell not simply because of their life-long devotion to the Irish national cause, but also because of a certain ‘loneliness’ in their character, and O’Leary’s emphatic words. His hatred for science and materialism and his scepticism about religion lead him to occultist experiments, in which, curiously enough, he insists on evidence, and the officials of the Esoteric Section of Madame Blavatsky’s Society find him troublesome. He hates science because it is mechanical, but he himself seeks to formulate a rigid pseudo-scientific system in A Vision. He expounds his theories with great seriousness and logical precision. The most remarkable thing about Yeats is that he has been able to transform this sense of duality and conflict into a manifold experience, and to render it in poetry in its totality, without surrendering the intricacy of his thought-process as recorded in ‘Byzantium’:

“Those images that yet
Fresh images beget…”

No study of Yeats’ life and personality would be complete without a reference to his critical ideas and views on poetry. He often grappled with the
fundamental questions of the relation between life and art, their points of similarity and distinction, and with the problems of poetry itself. The difficulty with Yeats is that he nowhere gives a coherent, systematised account, and this is enhanced by his mental oscillations. In the beginning of his poetic career, he advocates propagandist ideals and extols the work of nationalist poets like Thomas Davis, Joseph Callanan, James Mangan and their followers. In the nineties, under the influence of the French symbolists and the poets of the Rhymers’ Club, he swings over to the other extreme, to the concept of ‘art’s sake’ and devotes himself to writing pure, distilled poetry. The two extreme views Yeats clings in two different periods, even if temporarily, arise out of a fundamental misconception about the nature of the relation between art and life. Art is neither divorced from life and morality, nor a mere imitation of reality. The artistic activity involves a dual process: the artist derives his materials and impressions from life and is guided by certain intellectual evaluations; and after these impressions are collected, they are transmuted by the artist’s imagination. These images have a close resemblance to reality, but they also transcend reality in the sense that they acquire a distinct life of their own, and live simultaneously on two planes—the world of facts and the world of fancies. The inter-play between the real and the unreal makes of Yeats’ poetry a composite substance, and produces a sense of continuous expansiveness. He telescopes with the present the rich associations of the mythical past and this bringing together of disparate images across time and space evokes complex ranges of feeling. While he condemns the modern realists, he insists again and again on the need for contact with the people, on living individual speech. Yeats’ poetry is rooted in life, the life of the present, and through myths and symbols—Leda and the Swan—the life of the past. His belief in a deeper mind, a common memory of the race which can be evoked by symbols serves as a connecting link, and the varied threads are interwoven into an intricate texture. In an essay entitled ‘Magic’ he writes that the borders of our memories are shifting and that ‘our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.’ He thinks that literature dwindles to a mere chronicle of circumstance, or passionless meditations, unless it is constantly flooded with the passions and beliefs of ancient times. The traditions of the past are a rich heritage for the modern poet, and works of art are always begotten by previous
works of art. The ancient myths and symbols have the aesthetic and the emotive effects. The effect is two-fold: the present re-living its life in the past looks a little remote and the ancient images and mythical figures placed in the modern context are awakened again to life and acquire a richer significance; the total effect of largeness and complexity produced by a combination of living reality with the mystery and enchantment of the mythical past.

This interweaving of the present into the life of the past is worked out not by a cerebral process, but by the synthetic power of the poet's imagination. All great poetry, particularly lyrical poetry, is personal in the sense that observations and experiences, before they are turned into poetic themes, must pass through the transforming process of the poet's imagination; objective, environmental details may be there, but they must form part of the poet's experience. Yeats believes that the poetry of young Ireland, when it was an attempt to change or strengthen opinion, was rhetoric; but it became poetry when patriotism was transformed into a personal emotion by the events of life. He also believes that literature is always personal, always one man's vision of the world, one man's experience. Yeats evokes the beauty and splendor of Greek civilization and its destruction not by depicting it with an impersonal objectivity, but by assimilating the single image of Helen into his own experience. Helen is born again in Maud Gonne and Maud Gonne has all Helen's fatal fascination and tremendous vitality. The image does not merely evoke the beauty of the classical world; it also symbolizes the tragic story of the poet's own love and gives it depth and intensity, by redeeming it from a purely personal setting. This fusion and enlargement and this interplay of the personal and the impersonal are the secrets of the peculiar aesthetic effect of Yeats' later poems.

The transference of an ancient myth into a modern context must involve some technical peculiarity. Yeats, in his early poems, treats the Celtic legends in a narrative or dramatic form and following the tradition of Milton, Shelley, Keats and Tennyson, puts his own meaning into them. Milton's Satan is not just the Biblical devil: he emerges, in spite of his later degeneration, as the mighty enemy of God and in some aspects, as the symbol of revolt against despotism. Shelley's Prometheus and Tennyson's King Arthur reflect this infusion of contemporary
spirit into ancient myths. Yeats also creates new myths out of old and his Oisin, Fergus, King Goll and Cuchulain, while retaining their individual characters as depicted in the legends, mirror the poet’s own personality. This is, however, a simple and elementary mode of treatment and lacks the intricate artistry of a compressed, allusive, indirect mode of expression. In Yeats’ later poetry, the legends are not narrated directly; the old images are transferred from their original context, and are linked up with the poet’s own experience, thus acquiring a symbolic significance in the new setting. Yeats comments despairingly in Art and Ideas that an absorption in fragmentary sensuous beauty or detachable ideas has deprived the poets of the power to mould vast material into a single image. In his latter poetry his images, having the complex features of both ancient and modern civilization, convey this sense of intensity and vastness and the emotive responses become inexhaustible.

The intricate design of Yeats’ later poetry is achieved not only by the use of ancient symbols having slightly new meanings in a modern context, but also by the richness of his language and his balancing rhythm. In his early poetry he uses vague and blurred images conveying a wistful nostalgia; in later poetry he seeks to evoke indefiniteness through definite, precise, and often esoteric words. The common idiom, the colloquial diction and the speech-rhythm are used abundantly in Yeats’ middle poems, and also in many of his later poems. In poems like Sailing to Byzantium a new effect is achieved by relating daily speech to an incantatory pattern; in highly symbolic poems like Byzantium, glittering, sonorous epithets are put beside hard, choppy words and a resonant orchestral music permeates the poems, conveying an impression of stresses and accents of present reality as also of the mystery and richness of the past.

The compositeness of Yeats’ poetry is achieved not merely by telescoping the past and the present. The conflict of the sensuous and the cerebral, of action and dream, the sudden shifts in tones and moods, and the changes in colour and in atmospheric effects, also add to the richness and variety of its substance and structure. The main emphasis, however, is on fullness of expression, and the extension of the ranges of vision. In the early phase he shows an extra-artistic concern to propagate, however thinly, some ideas about the past of
Ireland by presenting certain heroic patterns which the Irish of the present may emulate. The use of ancient images in his later poetry has an ulterior purpose that heightens and intensifies the emotive effects and create a new poetic world. Yeats is great equally because of the manifest content which is both new and old. He strives continually to enlarge his canvas, to reach forward to new modes of feeling and expression, to reveal intricate patterns in which emotion and thought, the past and the present, form and content are inextricably interwoven. This zest for new explorative patterns is the secret of Yeats' strength and individuality as a poet.

THE GREAT PHASE

There are four main sources of Yeats' symbolism—Celtic mythology, Greco-Roman mythology, his own personal philosophical system, and literature and art. In his search for symbols, and for a newer mode of expression, he creates, besides these, a set of new myths out of the lives of the people he knew. Here memory becomes metaphorical, transforming the stories of compatriots, friends and fellow travelers into highly personal myths and giving them heroic proportions.

The poet's feelings are conveyed not in the highly oblique and symbolic manner of the Byzantium poems, nor in the bare unambiguous manner of the ballads, but in a style that approximates to direct statement, while implying at the same time that there is something behind the direct statement. The poems, in which memories acquire the depth and intensity of symbols, have three characteristic features: directness of expression illumined by sudden, unexpected symbols, a tone of tragic solemnity and thirdly, a professional quality in two senses: First, image after image comes in swift, sudden shift and enlarges the canvas; secondly, these images or characters seem to belong, at the same time, both to the present and to the past. Let us consider the first four lines of Easter 1916:

I have met them at close of day
Coming with vivid faces
From counter or desk among grey
Eighteenth-century houses
The ‘close of day’ conveys the image of an evening sky, of a pale dusk and is thus linked to ‘grey eighteenth-century houses’; the persons whom the poet describes are contemporary, but the impression persists that they belong to an ancient past and have come over again to play their part in the drama. But although they have come at close of day from grey eighteenth-century houses, their faces are vivid and this antithesis suggests transformation which is the central theme of the poem. Then follows a stream of images telescoped into one another: Constance Markievicz, Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh, Connolly and MacBride; they, as Yeats knew them once, were common men and women, but are now completely transformed through sacrifice and bloodshed:

All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

The first line is an explicit statement: the leaders of the revolution have been completely transformed. These men and women who sacrificed their lives for the revolutionary cause were not perfect beings; but their imperfections and limitation are purged like dross in fire. The heroic aspects in their characters fuse and form a new pattern, and then a terrible beauty is born. The whole poem is really focused on this single phrase - ‘terrible beauty’. In ‘terrible’ we have suggestion of terror, destruction and thrilling suspense, and ‘beauty’ is a contradiction image. But when the two images are mixed up and reconciled, a new beauty is evoked, something like a red rose emerging out of a blood-saturated ground. To this central idea of transformation is related the two basic antithetical symbols—stream and stone. Apparently ‘stream’ represents change and ‘stone’ stands for immobility and petrifaction, in other words, paralysis of the will; but to ascribe such a fixed and rigid connotation to a symbol is to travesty the complex nature of the creative process. The complexity of the texture will be clear when we realize fully the multiple meanings clinging to ‘stone’. Hearts with ‘one purpose’ are likened to a stone placed in the midst of a ;living stream’, but, at the same time, the stone is enchanting and hungry for souls; in the final process, hearts are changed utterly; the petrified stone dissolves and a new beauty is born.
THE LAST PHASE:

Yeats is generally reproached on the ground that his poetry is too personal and does not show sufficient awareness of reality. Stephen Spender even deplores that Yeats has found no subject of moral significance in the world of his time. The true mark of a poet’s excellence would lie in his capacity to make the experience private and unique to himself, impersonal and communicable, and consequently valid for his readers. And in Yeats’ poetry, the awareness of reality is well echoed in his later poems with the aid of myths and images of varied kinds.

In Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen the ingenious lovely things of Athens are depicted with agony and a stifled sigh. Almost immediately he says how all this ancient beauty has been blotted out, the vision of a new Ireland and the hope of a steady growth of public opinion have been also shattered:

Public opinion ripening for so long
We thought it would outlive all future days.

Against this background of fading beauty and perishing hope, Yeats looks at the scene of modern life and discovers the signs of an imminent collapse. The swan, once a symbol of peace and inspiration, is now seen as a portent of destruction:

The swan has leaped into the desolate heaven:
That image can bring wildness, bring a rage
To end all things …

The destruction of this dragon-ridden civilization also implies a decay of the remnants of the old order, a break-up of the feudal structure of society, and a consequent loss of past traditions and values. Earlier he wrote an elegiac poem over a house, obviously Lady Gregory’s, shaken by the land agitation, and asked if the world would derive any benefit if the house, where life moved without restraint through gracious forms, were ruined. Later in an equally elegiac strain, he describes the house at Coole Park, the books bound by famous hands, old marble statues, old pictures and the great rooms where travel-weary men found
contentment. It was a place of peace and creative joy:

"A spot where on the founders lived and died
Seemed once more dear than life; ancestral trees,
Or gardens rich in memory glorified
Marriages, alliances and families"

(Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931)

The old mansion is tottering and the cracks are manifest everywhere. Old culture and the heritage of values are lost and anarchy prevails:

"We shift about—all that great glory spent—
Like some poor Arab tribesman and his tent."

The last few lines tremble with pathos and give evidence of Yeats' profound humanity. His purpose as an artist is not to lull an indolent conscience, but to depict the life of the people, to link up actions with principles and to apply great ideals to a wide human arena:

"We were the last romantics—chose for theme
Traditional sanctity and loveliness."

The heritage of innocence, sanctity and loveliness is lost; the contact between the people and the arts is severed; a period of complete anarchy is apprehended:

"But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
Though mounted in the saddle Homer rode
Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood."

In a world of pervading chaos, vanished hopes and calls the illusions, Yeats looks it's timorously to the birds and calls the honey-bee to build its nest in the crevices of his tower. The masonry, however, loosens and the dead young soldier rolling in blood on the road haunts his imagination:

"A barricade of stone or of wood;
Some fourteen days of civil war;"
Last night they young trundled down the road
That dead young soldier in his blood.”

All these images of chaos, destruction and murderousness find the most powerful and consummate expression in the strange, terrifying poem The Second Coming:

“Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.”

Thus the contemporary sense of desolation, trauma and destruction coupled with anarchy active in his poems speaks volume of Yeats’ awareness of reality. His knowledge of past, awareness of present and vision of future permeate his poetry. However, in the process, Yeats, in the course of his poetic journey, evolved into a poet who successfully mastered the craft of creating great poetry rarely matched in the history of literature. T.S. Eliot has this to comment on Yeats: “There are some poets whose poetry can be considered more or less in isolation, for experience and delight. There are others whose poetry, though giving equally experience and delight, has a larger historical importance. Yeats was one of the latter: he was one of those few whose history is the history of their own time, who are a part of the consciousness of an age which cannot be understood without them. This is very high position to assign to him; but I believe that it is one which is secure.”

Yeats’ literary works:


Strand’ (1903), ‘The Countess Cathleen’ (1911), ‘At the Hawk’s Well’ (1916), ‘The Resurrection’ (1927), ‘Purgatory’ (1938)


1.2 JIBANANANDA DAS

Jibanananda Das (1899-1954) is a great modern poet who remains as one of the most influencing poets of Bengal. He successfully stamped his status as a great poet, despite going against the mainstream of the Bengali poetry set by the great Tagore. Poet Das is akin to nature; the imageries employed are picturesque. One of his early poems, Mrityur Aagey drew even Tagore’s compliment. Tagore called it chitrarupmoi (pictorial). The creative imagination is his real strength as a poet. His poetry is also a testimony to his unique understanding of history and time that determines the matrix of his creative art.

Jibanananda was born on 17th February, 1899 at Barisal, now in Bangladesh. His parents’ names were Satyananda Das and Kusumkumari Devi. Jibanananda Das had a younger brother named Ashokananda, born in 1908 and a sister named Sucharita, born in 1915. His father, Satyananda Das (1863-1942) was a schoolmaster, essayist, magazine publisher, and founder-editor of Brôhmobadi, a journal of the Brahmo Samaj dedicated to the exploration of social issues. Kusumkumari Das, Jibanananda’s mother, was a poet herself, well-known for a famous poem called Adôrsho Chhele (“The Ideal Boy”) whose refrain is well known to Bengalis to this day: Amader deshey hobey shei chhele kobey / Kothae na boro hoye kajey boro hobey. (The child who achieves not in words but in deeds, when will this land know such a one?)

During his childhood, jibanananda had once been seriously ailing. His mother’s untiring sevice and relentless care restored his health. Kusumkumari rushed to Delhi, Agra and Lucknow taking Jibanananda with her to set him in changed climates and weathers for his rehabilitation. In January 1908, Jibanananda, was admitted to the fifth grade in Brajamohon School. Under his mother’s tute-lage, he underwent his childhood education, as father Satyananda got himself
busy with other social activities. He used to wake up in early morning to prayersongs sung by mother Kusum Kumari and the hymnes of the Upanishads recited by father Satyananda. A young Jibanananda then kept himself engrossed in studies at his father’s library. Both his parents had the knack for writing. Thus Jibanananda experienced a literary atmosphere which propelled him to write poems at a tender age.

In 1915 he made a mark in his student life when he passed out matriculation in first division. He again showed his merits as a student two years later when he completed the intermediate examination with first division from the same Brajamohan college. Evidently in order to pursue higher education, he left Barisal to join the University of Calcutta. Jibanananda enrolled in Presidency College was graduated with a BA degree, Honours in English in 1919 and got his MA degree in English from the University of Calcutta in 1921. The following year, he joined the English department of City College, calcutta as a tutor. In the meantime he studied Law for some time. He always gave credits for the inspiration he got for his higher education to his parents and Sri Jagadish Mukerjee, the Headmaster of Brajamohan School. His literary career began in 1919, when his first poem appeared in print in Brahmobadi, a monthly journal issued from Barisal to which both his parents contributed with their write-ups. Fittingly, the poem was called *Borsho-abahon* (Arrival of the New Year). In 1925, Jibanananda paid tribute to Sri Chittaranjan Das, after the demise of the latter, by writing a poem called ‘Deshbandhur Prayane’, published in Bangabani magazine. The poem was termed as a matured one by poet Kalidas Roy. Jibanananda’s one obituary prose work entitled “Kalimohan Das’er Straddha-bashorey” was published in 1925. Henceforth his poetic works began to be published in numerous little magazines and literary journals such as Dhipchhaya, Bangabani, Bijali, Probasi, Kallol ¹, Kalikalam, Pragoti, and some others.

In 1927, *Jhara Palok* (Fallen Feathers), his first volume of poems, came out. A few months later, Jibanananda was sacked from his job at the City College after having worked there from 1922 to 1928. The baseless rumours were circulated behind his sacking from the college. Some poetic lines levelled as indecent were credited for his expulsion. But Jibanananda himself once confided

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¹Kallol refers to an influential literary movement of about 1923 to 1925, associated with Bengali literature. Kallol meaning ‘the sound of waves’ was the name of a magazine. It became the mouthpiece of a young group of writers, such as Premendra Mitra, Kazi Nazrul Islam and Buddhadeb Basu.
with Ajit Kumar Ghose, his one colleague of Howra Girls College that due to financial crisis of the college, he, along with some other teachers, was dismissed from the college. In that time, he also came under literary attack from the literary circle of Calcutta, Sajanikanta Das, being one of them, who vehemently came down upon him in the review pages of *Shanibarer Chithi* (the Saturday Letter) magazine.

Being unemployed in Calcutta, in 1929 Jibanananda left for Bagerhat in the district of Khulna. There he worked at Bagerhat P. C. College for barely three months. In December 1929, he unwillingly moved to Delhi to join at Ramjosh College where he worked only for a few months up to the month of May, 1930. Back in Barisal Jibanananda got married and remained unemployed again as he never went back to Delhi to resume his job. During this crisis he never stopped writing poems which were published in various literary journals and magazines.

Jibanananda’s life was getting in full circle when he married Labanya, whose father’s name was Rohini kumar Gupta. Labanya lost her father when she was only eight. She was later brought up by Amrit lal Gupta, the elder brother of her father. When she was studying at Dhaka, She married Jibanananda. Their reception took place in Dhaka’s Ram Mohan Library, where Buddhadeb Bose, a great contemporary literary luminary among others took part in. A daughter called Manjusree was born to the couple in February of 1931. For five years since his marriage, Jibanananda had been without any job. He served for some time as an agent of an insurance company. He took some loan from his younger brother Ashokananda and even tried his luck in business but in vain. Much later in 1935 he joined Brajamohan College of Barisal as a lecturer, where he worked till 1946. During this period he got both the mental peace and the financial security for the first time in his life. In the meantime, in 1938 his only son named Samarananda was born.

Jibanananda was a poet in particular and a man of literature in general. Even in the period of uncertainty and financial insecurity, he never ceased to write. In 1934 he composed the series of poems that would feature in his poetic volume entitled *Rupasi Bangla*. The poems were discovered after his untimely death, and got published three years after his death in 1957. However,
Jibanananda’s work featured in the very first issue of the magazine, *Kobita* pioneered by Buddhadeb Bose. It was in the second issue of *Kobita* that Jibanananda published his epoch-making poem entitled *Banalata Sen*. Dhushor Pandalipi, his second volume of poetry was published in 1936. He dedicated this anthology to Buddhadeb Bose for the latter’s championing Das’ poetry leading to its publication. Gradually his fame as a poet was circulated in the contemporary literary circle. In 1938, Tagore compiled an anthology of poetry entitled *Bangla Kabya Parichay* (Introduction to Bengali Poetry) and included an abridged version of Jibanananda’s *Mrityu ‘r Aagey*. The following year Abu Sayced Ayub and Hirendranath Mukhopadhyay edited another important anthology in which Jibanananda’s four poems such as *Pakhira, Shakun, Banalata Sen*, and *Nagna Nirjan Haat* featured.

Jibanananda’s father, Satyananda passed away in 1942. Banalata Sen, his third volume of poetry, appeared in the same year. 1944 saw the publication of another anthology entitled *Mahaprithibi*. By that time, the impact of the Second World War heightened demands for the freedom of the country. He wanted to stay at Calcutta; but due to financial constriction he could not quit Barisal as he was serving as a lecturer in B. M. College of Barisal. But the Partition of 1947 made him leave Barisal for Calcutta. He again struggled to find a job at Calcutta. He somehow made the livelihood for his family by taking tuitions. For a while he worked for a magazine called *Swaraj* as its Sunday editor. But he left the job after a few months. In 1948, he completed two of his novels, Mallyaban and Shutirtho, neither of which were discovered during his life. His another volume of poetry, *Shaat ti Tarar Timir* saw its publication in 1948. Soon after that, his mother Kusumkumari passed away in Calcutta.

By virtue of his tenacity and relentless efforts, he was gradually getting his ground in the contemporary literary circle at Calcutta. He was appointed to the editorial board of a literary magazine Dondo. In 1950, he got the job of lecturer at Kharagpur College but had to stay away from Calcutta where his family stayed at. However, he returned to Calcutta to attend to his ailing wife and finally could not go back to Kharagpur and thus lost the job of Kharagpur College. In November, 1952, he joined Borisha College as a lecturer. But the fol-
lowing year he again lost the job. He then applied afresh to Diamond Harbour Fakirchand College, but eventually declined it, owing to travel difficulties. Fortunately he got a post at Howrah Girls’ College where as the head of the English department he was entitled to a 50-taka monthly bonus on top of his salary. In the twilight of his life, Jibanananda used to get the recognition as one of the best poets of the post-Tagore era. He was constantly in demand at literary conferences, poetry readings, radio recitals etc. In May 1954, he published a volume titled *Sreshtho Kobita* which later won the Sahitya Academy Award.

Jibanananda’s life was full of misfortunes and struggles. Even his death was not a usual one. On 14 October 1954, he met a fatal accident. He was carelessly about to cross a road near Deshapriya Park when he was hit by a tram. Jibanananda was returning home after his routine evening walk. At that time, he used to reside in a rented apartment on the Lansdowne Road. Seriously injured, he was taken to Shambhunath Pundit Hospital. Poet-writer Sajanikanta Das who had been one of his fiercest critics was tireless in his efforts to secure the best treatment for the poet. He even persuaded Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, to visit him in hospital. Nonetheless, the injury was too severe to redress. He was even found to be caught with septic pneumonia. After a long battle with death, Jibanananda breathed his last in the hospital on 22 October 1954 at about 11.35 P.M. He was then survived by his wife, Labanyaprabha Das, a son and a daughter.

The contemporary literary circle deeply mourned his sad demise. Most newspapers of the time paid tributes to him in the form of obituaries containing sincere appreciations of the poetry of Jibanananda. Poet Sanjay Bhattacharya wrote the death news and conveyed it to different newspapers. On 1 November 1954, The Times of India wrote:

“The premature death after an accident of Mr. Jibanananda Das removes from the field of Bengali literature a poet, who, though never in the limelight of publicity and prosperity, made a significant contribution to modern Bengali poetry by his prose-poems and free-verse. ... A poet of nature with a serious awareness of the life around him Jibanananda Das was known not so much for
the social content of his poetry as for his bold imagination and the concreteness of his image. To a literary world dazzled by Tagore’s glory, Das showed how to remain true to the poet’s vocation without basking in its reflection.

Das’ oeuvre is eclectic, independent of any single particular literary school. Poet Das joined hands with a group of poets of new generation, who consciously attempted to infuse Bengali poetry with the worldwide emergent modernist trend of poetry. Das aside, the other noteworthy poets contributing to the newly breed of modernist poetry of Bengal are Sudhindranath Dutta (1901–1960), Buddhadeb Bose (1908–1974), Amiya Chakravarty (1901–1986) and Bishnu Dey (1909–1982).

Das is regarded as the brightest star among the poets of the new generation, though his genius was recognized only after his death. Tagore had been a towering figure in the firmament of Bengali literature up to the thirties of the 20th century. Tagore was the face of Bengali literature. Poet Das belonged to a period when Tagore’s romanticism could not correspond to modern poetry with which contemporary Bengali poets felt affinity. So they searched for something new. Das himself confesses in his treatise *Kobita kotha* that they are born in a period and in a culture as well that they have no option but to derive inspirations from European literature for language and themes corresponding to modern poetry. It was quite natural in that period that young poets drew their inspirations from him. A group of poets then appeared in the horizon of the said literature who attempted to swim against the current of the time. They took not the familiar path of the contemporary period which was centred on Tagore. They epitomized the age, known as ‘kollol-yug’. They found their path-finders in Mohitlal Mozumder and Jatindranath Sengupta. The budding poets were inspired by the materialism and pessimism pioneered by Mozumder and Sengupta. Besides, with a mission of earning distinguished identities as poets, the young poets turned their eyes to European poets and French symbolists to relish the poetic vigour, simultaneously in the way of eschewing Tagore’s impact. However, Jibanananda Das, unlike his contemporaries of thirties, such as Bishnu Dey, Buddhadeb Bose or Amiya Chakraborty, did not devour European thinkers and writers in his over-all approach to poetry. He was not completely baptized by the western tradition of

<en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jibanananda_Das>
thought-process. He was distinguished by his individualistic traits as a poet to a
great extent. He, of course, did draw elixir of poetic vitality from the fountain of
western thought in order to strengthen his poetic imagination. In the process, he
came along the path of surrealism, symbolism, etc., and discovered for himself
the territory of poetic beauty and resource from Yeats, Eliot and so. One achieve­
ment of Das was his ability in earning a place as a distinguished poet independent
of Tagore’s towering impact unlike his contemporaries who tried to evade Tagore
but in vain in the long run. Notwithstanding his liking for European poets, he had
tremendous sense of respect towards Tagore. He was not a follower of Tagore
as a poet. But he acknowledged Tagore’s greatness and wider contribution to
Bengali literature. He exchanged his ideas with Tagore through letters. In his two
Bengali essays such as ‘Rabindranath O Adhunik Bangla Kobita’ and ‘Uttor-
Raibik Bangla Kabya’, Das said, Tagore was a rare kind of time-conquering
poet, a kind unseen for ages; an ocean himself.

Poet Das possesses a distinguished poetic vision. His volume of essays
on poetry entitled Kobitar Kotha remains a testimony to his unique idea about
poetic creativity. In one essay named Kobita Prosonge, he emphasizes on the
inspiration within; imagination is an asset to the composition of a poem; the exer­
cise on imagination is mandatory on the part of a poet in his venture of poetic
beauty; Das also asserts that the composition of a poem is not a momentary
exercise; time has to be given in shaping a poem properly; then Das maintains
that time consciousness beckoned out of human universe serves for him as a
torch to poetic truth. Das, through Kobitar Kotha, postulates that the con­
sciousness of history and that of time steer a poet in his play of poetic imagina­
tion; the sense of history procures the sense of tradition which is the hallmark of
creating great poetry.

Das is a poet par excellence. His poetry is enriched by his commitment
to the essence of the poetic ideology. One such ideology is surrealism, the aim of
which is to resolve the existing contradictory conditions of dream and reality. It
turns out to be a cultural movement, started in 1920s. The element of surprise
and juxtaposition of things and ideas in varied and unexpected ways constitute
the essence of surrealism. The surrealists believe in the superior reality of certain
forms of hitherto neglected associations. For them, logic and thought pave way to dream and trance. A surrealist is supposed to see beyond the actual reality. However, the impact of surrealism upon Das is manifest in his *Kobitar Kotha*. He articulates that poetry leads us to a new realm where all earthly water, light, etc. give way to a new kind of water or light conceived by imagination, with which life bears a secret and innermost relation; such a realm is purified of all dust and stars of the earthly reality; in the process, poetry takes us to an ultra-reality — a reality in its furthest and most refined possible form. Such a surrealist thought is beautifully put into words by Das in his poem *Swapner Haate*:

Sob chhere aamader mon  
*Dhora Jodi dito aei sapaner haate*  
*Prithibir raat aar diner aaghate*  
*Bedona pelo na tobe keo aar*

Das might have taken shelter of surrealism due to some possible reasons. He witnessed that the First World War shattered all normal norms and pattern of the way of life and thought. A restless inertia gripped the human mind. The contemporary existing world proved to be a place of delusion and bitterness. Das’ poetic mind, in order to eschew the existing confusion and ennui, took refuge in sleep-inducing trance, dream and super-reality wherein a blissful mystery pervaded. His most poems, especially *Rupasi Bangla* remained a testimony to Das’ preference to sleep and dream through which he could move into a glorified world of simplicity and beauty. He could see into the figure in the shadow. He could go deeper into what is beyond. One important aspect of Das’ surrealism lies in the familiarity of atmosphere with added grace and flavour. His poetry is never out of the world. A familiar smell, sight and colour all with added charm figure in his poetry. This added charm and beauty coupled together, hitherto unnoticed in the existing world, constitutes a newness, a freshness and an unfamiliarity even in the world of familiarity. Buddhadeva Bose writes, “His world is one of tangled shadows and crooked waters, of the mouse, the owl and the bat, of deer playing in moonlit forests, of dawn and darkness, of ice-cold sea nymphs and the great sweet sea. All things hidden, forlorn, furtive, all things wanton and non-human are dear to him; some of his most characteristic poems
are on birds and beasts; and when he praises a woman it is one whose eyes are like birds’ nests and who is seen in the dark ‘as mariners, lost in far seas, glimpse the dim greenness of cinnamon islands’ … His animal or bird imagery can be related to the extension of realism thereby entering into the realm of surrealism. Some instances are given as follows:

Samai hakiya jai pecha oi amader tore (Obosorer gaan)
Tarpor pore thaake nakshater bishal akash
Haaser gayer ghran—du ekta kolponer has
Mone pore kobekar paragar arunima sanyaler mukh;
Uruk uruk tara pousher jyotsna nirobe uruk
'Kolponer has sob—(Buno Haas)

Hemanter sandhai jaafraner surjer norom shorire
Shada thauba bulye bulye khela korte dekhlam take (Bidhaal)

Mohiner ghooragulo ghaas khai kartiker josner prantore;
Prostor jooger sob ghoora jeno—ekhono ghaaser loobhe chore
Prithibir kimakaar dynamor pore (Ghoora)

All familiar animals and birds seem to roam about in the zone of super-reality cutting across the territory of reality. Then his surrealism takes him to the Keatsean world. Like Keats, Das at times leaves the existing world for a farthest world where all dream and beauty co-exist, as he is disillusioned by his bitter surrounding of famine, malady, unemployment, wars and the like. In the poem, Akashleena, his heart calls out:

Suranjana,
Tomar hriday aaj ghaas;
Bataser opaare batas—
Akuasher opaare akaash.

The word ‘opaare’ relates to something beyond—an indication of another world perceived only by unconscious and induced by dream. At times the tone of anguish or that of contempt is perceived in the poetic words marked by the poet’s contemplation. In Subinay Mustafi, such a tone is highlighted:

Subinay Mustafir kotha mone pore aei hemanter rate
Eksathe beral a beraler mukhe-dhora idur haasate
Emon aaschorjo shakti chhilo bhuyodorshi jubar

The impact of the post-War situation corresponds and leads to the degeneration of all sublimity which a human being aspires to own and poet Das contemplates in Godhuli Sandhir Nritya:

Juddho aar banijjer belowari roudrer din
Sesh hoye geche sob: binunte noroker nirbochan megh,
Payer bhongir niche brischik-korkot-tula-meen

Das’ surrealism often springs from the unearthly and mysterious appeal of the extended imagination to the point of a fairy tale spun out of the world of familiarity. Such an imagination is very much a surrealist’s creativity as is evident in the poem Sankhomala:

Dekhilam deho taar bimorsho pakhir ronge bhora:
Sandhiyar aandhare bheeje srischer dale jei pakhi dei dhora—
Bnaaka chand thaake jaar mathar oopor,
Shing-er moton bnaaka neel chaand shooney jar swar

Thus a tone of unfamiliarity seems audible in the familiar world of the bird and the twilight. The mysterious world of surrealism is well depicted in the pen-picture of Das’ images. They are so picturesque as if they were to be watched, not only to be read. There is a joy to watch, as Tagore once said of the pictorial quality of Das’ images:

Tumi kotha bolo—aami jiban mrityur shabdo shuni;
Sokale sisir kona jerokom ghaase
Ochire mononshil hoye tobu surjo aabar
Mrityu mukhe niye pordin phirey aase (Onek Nodir Jol)

There is both intensity and illusion playing together in his image. When the surrealist chord is tuned to this playful image, there is something ethereal and freshness come out. The renowned contemporary scholars, Dr. Tapodhir Bhattacharjee and Swapna Bhattacharjee, in tandem, opine that without deviating from con-
forming to the general pattern of images, Jibanananda Das’ creative genius makes the pattern more innovative; the personal and subjective response gives each word a separate entity keeping harmony with its lyrical appeal; his each effective image tends to evoke both consciousness and deep perception in relation to one another; such a judicious relation brings forth a brilliant image. A sense of evocativeness is also an element in the making of a Das’ image. In the poem, *Mulurto*, one comes across such a splendid imagery:

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Joto dur jai kaaster moto bnaaka chaand
Sesh sonali horin-shasshyo kete niyeche jeno;
Tarpor dheere dheere dubeyjacche
Shoto shoto mrigeeder chokher andhokarer bhitor
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The co-existence of perception and intellect heightens Das’ image to a new scale. Such an image when embodied with a surrealist tinge takes a reader beyond the familiar sphere of flesh and blood; such an elegant image breathes a mysterious aura; the diction employed by Das too plays a magical role in creating this aura. The poem, *Aadim Debitor* presents one such image evoking a surrealist aura:

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Charidikkar ottohasir bhitor ekta birat timir mritodeho niye
Andhokar samudra sfto hoye uthlo jeno;
Prithibir samasto roop omeyo timir mritodeher durgandher moto,
Jekhanei jai aami sei sob samudrer ulkai ulkai
```

Poet Das always gives value to the sense of history and sense of time in his poetry. The first line of *Banalata Sen* upholds this sense, “Hazar bachar dhore ami path hatitechi prithibir pothe”. He believes that the knowledge of history brings forth the knowledge of tradition. In his treatise *Kobitar Kotha* Das said that the poet needs to understand the society, and the bone of the poem must contain the consciousness of history as well as of time. Das is a dreamer. His dream is borne out of the harsh realities of life. He seeks to find out the concrete out of the abstract and the body out of the shadow. He takes to surrealism to see things outside mortal eyes. He says in *Akashlina*, “suranjana,/ tomar hriday aaj ghaas;/bataser opare batas—/akasher opare akash”. His images evoke a sense of freshness and intensity and produce an aura of beauty.
In his letter to Das, Tagore himself writes that undoubtedly Das is endowed with poetic power. In another letter to Das, Tagore also writes, Das’ writings bear all which are flavour, originality and a sense of joy to behold. Das is a poet blessed with the knowledge of myths and folklores. His poetic volume, *Rupasi Bangla* celebrates the rich heritage of folklore and myths. Again the same volume exhibits the celebration of nature of the rural Bengal. The folktales and their setting in rural Bengal are artistically juxtaposed in his poems: “Keo nai konodike—tobu Jodi iyosnai pete thako kaan/ Shunibe baataase shabdo: ‘ghora chore koi jao hey rairayan—’” (*Prithibi Royeche Besto*). The Kcatsean sensuousness of smell and sound is a splendid feature of his poem. In Chole jabo shukno paata-chhaoa, the sensuous line is featured, “Dighir joler gandhe rupali chital tar ruposir pichhu/ Jaamer gobhir paata-maakha shanto nil jole kheliche gopane”. Das writes what he believes. His aesthetic power is felt in all these above poetic lines. Only a poet of Jibanananda Das’ calibre can say, as recorded in *Kobitar Kotha*, that certain colour, sound and smell of rarest quality can be witnessed in this world, the knowledge of which gives birth to a feeling which is the source of the birth of poetry of purest kind. His poetry speaks of this truth. Besides, Das makes the effective use of metaphors, simile, symbolism, etc. in his poems. His similes ensure an atmosphere that help bring out the poet’s sense of beauty. The greatness of Das lies in the originality as a poet. Abdul Mannan Syed calls him *Shuddhatama kobi* (poet of purest kind). It is apt to quote Prof. Tapodhir Bhattacharjee, “In the post-Tagore situations in Bengali literature, Jibanananda had to negotiate with the phantoms of reality in the colonized world. By translating experience into poetic form, he proved that the poetic translation of the given world was never the complete reality. Always the differential network envisaged in the texts became important. Jibanananda’s life is in fact a text which is to be read thoroughly and simultaneously with his textual discourses. Jibananda not only saw but also felt the space and time he lived with ...”

**Major Works**

- *Jhūra Palok* (Fallen Feathers), 1927.
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- **Dhushor Pandulipi** (Grey Manuscript), 1936.
- **Banalata Sen**, 1942
- **Mohaprithibi** (Great Universe), 1944:
- **Shaat-ti Tarar Timir** (Darkness of Seven Stars), 1948.
- **Shreshtho Kobita** (Best Poems), 1954: Navana, Calcutta.
- **Rupasi Bangla** (Bengal, the Beautiful), written in 1934, published posthumously in 1957.
- **Bela Obela Kalbela** (Times, Bad Times, End Times), 1961, published posthumously but the manuscript was prepared during lifetime.
- **Sudorshona** (The beautiful), published posthumously in 1973: Sahitya Sadan, Calcutta.
- **Manobihangam** (The Bird that is my Heart), published posthumously in 1979: Bengali Publishers Private Ltd. Calcutta.
- **Oprkashitō Ekanno** (Unpublished Fifty-one), Published posthumously in 1999, Mawla Brothers, Dhaka.

**Novels:**
- **Bashmatir Upakhyan**
- **Bihbav**
- **Biraaj**
- **Chaarjon**
- **Jihan-Pronali**
- **Kalyani**
- **Karu-Bashona**
- **Malyahaan** (novel), New Script, Calcutta, 1973 (posthumously published)
- **Mrinal**
- **Nirupam Yatra**
- **Pretinir**
- **Purnima**
- **Sutirtha**
Short stories:
- Aekgheye Jibon
- Akankha-Kamonar Bilas
- Basor Sojyar pase
- Bibahito Jibon
- Bilas
- Bot
- Brutter moto
- Chakri Net
- Chayanot
- Hater Tas
- Hiseb-nikes
- Jadur Desh
- Jamrultola
- Kinnorlok
- Kotha sudhu Kotha, Kotha, Kotha
- Kuashar Vitor Mrityur Somoy
- Ma hoyar kono Saadh
- Mangser Kanti
- Meyemanuser Ghrane
- Meyemmus
- Mohsher Shingh
- Nakolei Khelae
- Nirupam Jatra
- Puliye Jete
- Premik Swami
- Prithibita Sishuder Noy
- Purnima
- Raktomangsohin
- Sadharon Manus
- Sango, Nisongo
- Sari
- Sheetrateri Andhokare
- Somnath o Shrimoti
- Taajar Chobi
- Upakkhar Sheet

**Non-fiction:**
- "Aat Bachor Ager Din" prosonge
- Adhunik Kobita
- Amar Baba
- Amar Ma
- Asomapto Alochona
- Bangla Bhasa o Sahityer Bhubshiyot
- Bangla Kobitar Bhubshiyot
- "Camp"-e
- Desh kal o kobita
- "Dhusor Pandulipi" prosonge
- Ekti Aprokashito Kobita
- Ektukhuni
- Jukti Jiggasha o Bangali
- Keno Likhi
- Ki hishebe Saswato
- Kobita o Konkaboti
- Kobita Prosonge
- Kobitaar Kôtha (treatise On Poetry)
- Kobitapath
- Kobitar Alochona
- Kobitar Atma o Sorir
- Lekhar Kotha
- Matrachetona
- Nazrul Islam
- Prithibi o Somoy
- Rabindranath o Adhunik Bangla Kobita
- Rasoranjjan Sen
- Ruchi, Bichar o Onnanyo kotha
- Saratchandra
- Sikkha-Dikkha
- Sikkha, Dikkha Sikkhokota
- Sikkha o Ingrezi
- Shikshar Kotha
- Sottendranath Dutt
- Sotyyo Biswas o Kobita
- Swapno kamona'r bhumika
- Sworgiyo Kalimohon Daser sradhobasore
- Uttor Roibik Bangla kabbyo