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# '*Life, a Drop of Water:*' The Dilemma of Perception and Reality in Jibanananda's Poems

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**ABSTRACT**

The present study conveys Jibanananda Das's notion about perceptual reality. Through a close reading of some of his poems, the paper demonstrates how unlike an ordinary person the poet found the truth about the world elusive. He felt that the objective truth of a thing remains inaccessible to a person forever. In this respect, his idea of truth corresponds with the image of the phenomenal world expounded by the illustrious German thinker, Immanuel Kant in his works. The paper attempts to analyse the Bengali poet's conception about perceptual reality as presented in his poems in the light of Kant's theory of phenomena. With this, the article also aims at showing how the poet, becoming conscious about the limitations of human knowledge, attempts to fashion a second phenomenal world with the aid of imagination and seek fulfilment there.

## INTRODUCTION

*All that we see or seem*
*Is but a dream within a dream.* -- E. A. Poe (1)

When one considers oneself a rational being, when one believes that the world he or she inhabits is a familiar one or at least the essence of which is discoverable, everything appears bright and eloquent. The person lives in an illuminated world of reality, never feeling an urge to reflect on it. Does one ever feel that the clouds one sees in the sky, the cool breeze one enjoys by the river in the evening, the tree one sees through the window every day, the garden one has reared to its present floral fulfilment, the car one rides on with one's friend or family, the neighbour living next to one's dwelling, or even the person closest to one, with whom one has spent the greater part of life, can be unfamiliar, unknown to him or her? Does one ever feel that one's sense-perceptions can be unreal? The answer is: No, one does not. A person of rational thinking would consider such feelings irrational, or at best romantic, for how can the manifest pattern of things around, so obvious, so natural, be unreal or unfamiliar? After all, the world is not a facsimile of a child's fantasy. It is real, fully operated by a logical and coherent cause-effect relation.

If we take a look at human history, we would notice that it is rooted in the obviousness, the palpability of the world of perception. Leaving perhaps a few penetrating thinkers, none has ever suspected the ability of human perception to form an accurate conception of the visible objects. Science, which is based on empiricism would straight decline any possibility of unreality in the tangible world. If I perceive something, it would assert, there exists that 'something' I sense. However, I might not possess the conception of the thing as it is in itself. In that case, science would say, my knowledge about the thing is affected by a subjective undertone, or that my cognition of it is improperly structured. As the profundity of experience within the visible world can be limitless, proper scientific methods are needed to be followed for structuring our sensational experiences aptly, so that we can form an accurate conception of our surroundings. So, the popular rational belief advocates the truth or objective reality of the world of perception. As long as one retains this belief, the world appears unproblematic. This belief is, in fact, the conviction of the greater part of humanity, and upon the conviction, the whole system of the society is structured.

The popular belief, however, has a cogent grounding which ostensibly is undeniable. The fact that an object of perception has an actual basis can hardly be refuted. The non-existence of the object of perception, in reality, would erode the very possibility of that perception – I cannot simply say that I am having an appearance of 'nothing.' In other words, what would I perceive if I live in a void? That

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means the real existence of the thing of our perception is not wrong. But there is an inherent fallacy in the popular belief. The fallacy lies in its taking the conception based on our sense perception of a thing as the objective knowledge, the truth about that thing. In reality, our mind plays a significant role in forming our idea about our surroundings. The faculty of understanding of our mind conceptualizes an object by moulding the data received about that object by our senses according to its idiosyncrasies. So, our knowledge about the world we live in is never mind-independent. It is impossible to know how a thing 'really' is transcending the role of our psyche in forming a concept about that thing. The present study focuses through the poems of Jibanananda Das (1899 – 1954) on this limitation of human knowledge. Reckoned the greatest literary figure in the arena of modern Bengali poetry, Jibanananda in his poems records with poignancy and vividness man's inaccessibility to objective reality. The paper attempts to analyse the issue by relating the motif of appearance and reality in Jibanananda's poems with the Kantian concepts of '*phenomenon*' and '*noumenon*' (Spade, 1995, p. 18). In the end, I have tried to show that as it is impossible to explore the reality about the world, and as such about life, one can experience a sense of fulfilment of his existence by constituting a second phenomenal world of his own in which imagination, not understanding, plays the primary role.

## JIBANANANDA AND KANT

*Today, I will seek not the shadowy region;*
*Its unsustaining vastness waxes drear;*
*And visions rising, legion after legion,*
*Bring the unreal world too strangely near.*
-- Emily Bronte (2)

Jibanananda Das, who according to Seely is '*Bengal's most cherished poet since Rabindranath Tagore*,' (Seely, 1990, p. 9) once said, '*life as we usually conceive it contains what we normally accept as reality...*' (3). The '*reality*' Jibanananda speaks about here is the one based on perception, the foundation of the worldly system we are part of. We make the policies of and judgements about life on the basis of this '*reality*.' So it is obvious that we consider life as rational and orderly, and perception as the foundation of objective knowledge. However, the poet's opinion about the world or life is different. He knows that life is neither fully coherent or logical, nor appearance '*the last truth*' ('***Suchetana***,' *l.* 6). What the last truth is, we can never know. If it were not that, if we could have direct access to reality, there would be no dissension in the world, with others, or, most importantly, with the self. Life would then be '*unshaken . . . by the fever of the have-not*' ('***One Day Eight Years Ago***,' *l.* 48), for we would be perfectly aware of our needs and limitations, as well as of the true value of every enterprise. There would be no '*failure in love*' (*l.* 44) or '*yawning gaps*' (*l.* 44) in '*life in matrimony*' (*l.* 43) as we would have full cognizance of their significance in relation to our being. There would be a harmonious coexistence of the individual with the world, and consequently, he would never feel – '*I live amongst all, yet alone*' ('***Within My Head***,' *l.* 30). Life would be blissful and convenient, and '*one state of affair*,' as logic claims, would follow '*from another necessarily*' (Kant, 1953, p. 77). But as the poet sees, there rarely exists life's harmony with the world, or that '*one state of things often or, at most, commonly follows another, and can procure neither strict universality nor necessity, etc*.' (ibid). The poet discerns the fallacy of the form of reality we conceive based on our perception (because there is no other way of acquiring knowledge about the world) and speaks about it again and again in his works. Perhaps the realization of Mercedes De Acosta about the world was the same when she composed the following lines –

*As I pass out into the blackness,*
*I wonder if I have ever really known you—*
*Or if you exist at all,*
*And are not but a twisted, fevered, silver creation of my brain.*
*And the unreality of you comes over me,*
*Like a mist upon a lonely sea*. (4)

Jibanananda's realization about the unreality of human experience bears close resemblance with the notion of the phenomenal world proposed by the celebrated German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). In his works like '***The Critique of Pure Reason***' (1781) and '***Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics***' (1783) Kant, while discussing the nature of existence, offers the theory of '*phenomenon*' and '*noumenon*.' By the latter, he means the thing-in-itself, that is, something as it really is. The former concept is related to our perception of an object. It is the '*phenomena*' of the world that makes our knowledge about it possible. So, the concept of '*noumenon*' is grounded more on ontology, whereas that of '*phenomenon*' on epistemology. It would be worthy to append here the words of Wan Abdullah:

[Kant's] *'phenomena and noumena' or 'appearance and reality' should not be understood as 'two forms of existence' in its literal sense. It is, as suggested, one existence, but as it appears on the one hand (i.e. as it stands in a relation to a sensory or cognitive faculty) and as it is irrespective of any sensory or cognitive faculty, on the other hand* (Wan Abdullah, 2008, pp. 30-31).

Though Kant says that the phenomenal world is unreal, he never denies the real existence of the objects that make phenomena possible. He strongly suggests that things-in-themselves exist. They '*constitute the ground for those appearances*' (Kant, p. 75). In other words, the logical possibility of the things-in-themselves is right. However, the problem arises when we try to gain knowledge about the true nature of those things. It is because, as Kant says, when we make consideration of something, we do that '*in relation to our mind*' (Wan Abdullah, p. 31). If a person ever feels that he is to consider an object not as it appears to him, but as it is in itself, he is thinking of some impossibility. He wants to consider the thing '*apart from the very precondition under which alone* [he] *can have any experience or concept at all*' (Spade, p. 21). Our mind, as has already been stated earlier, plays an important role in forming conception about the world. At first, our sense perceptions gather experience from the outside world. Then our ego processes the raw data of the perceived object(s) according to its intrinsic peculiarities

so that we gain knowledge about the thing(s) of perception. So, our knowledge about the world is limited by its relation to our mind. That means anything as it really is cannot be '*transformed into appearance that* [is] *conceivable by our senses*' (Wan-Abdullah, p. 33). In other words, our knowledge about the *noumenon*, that is, the reality of the objects we perceive is literally impossible. Kant makes the following statement in this respect:

*Thus beings of the understanding are admitted but under inculcation of this rule which suffers no exception: that we know and can know nothing determinate whatever about these pure beings of the understanding, because both our pure concepts of the understanding and our pure intuitions bear on nothing but objects of possible experience, which are mere beings of the senses, and as soon as we depart from these, not the slightest meaning is left to those concepts*. (Kant, p. 76)

It would also be worthy to add a few lines from Adams in the same context –

*In Kant's view, the fundamental reason why things are as they are or may be in themselves cannot be given as objects for our cognition is not that we do not have the concepts for it, but that we do not have the intuitions for it. In their most abstract form the basic categories of the understanding . . . are "pure" enough to apply to things in themselves . . . however, these concepts have not enough content to present our thought with any object-or at any rate with any object sufficiently determinate for us to know it as really possible. Such content they can get only from intuition*. (Adams, 1997, pp. 806-7)

The above exposition makes it clear that for both Jibanananda and Kant the phenomenal world, that is, the world of appearance is devoid of reality (or, the reality it offers is at the best relative in nature). Though I never claim that the Bengali poet was well versed in the works of Kant or even possessed a great interest in him, the tone of the unreality of the world of appearance, Kant's '*phenomenon*,' is still recurrent in his poetry. He has '*the spectacle of this incoherent and disorderly life*,' (5) in which '*The way* [of the world] *full of footmarks become*/*Devoid of direction* (as the world we know about is devoid of reality)' (***These Days and Nights***, *ll*. 42-44).

## 'PERCEPTION AND REALITY' IN JIBANANANDA

> *I was in doubt, and then everything took a hue of unreality, and I did not know what to trust, even the evidence of my own senses. Not knowing what to trust, I did not know what to do.*
>
> -- Bram Stoker (6)

Jibanananda's poetry questions, again and again, the reality of perception and the nature of existence. '*What am I – a spectre or a soul*?' (*l*. 3) is his agonized articulation in '***Spectral***'. Man's survival on earth rests largely on the belief that whatever he might be in doubt about, he is at least sure of his existence. This general conviction leads Descartes to assert, '*I think, therefore I am*' (Spade, p. 16). The optimistic faith in one's ability to know about self projects life with meaning. One is able to dream about the future, hope to attain the yet unachieved. But the poet's heart is devoid of such naïve optimism. He feels it impossible to acquire objective knowledge, like anything else, about the self. The feeling leads him to uncertainty about life, and he is '*Silenced by the ignorance* [about the self] *of heart*' (*l*. 9). He is not a sceptic, but a man wise enough to comprehend that life is indefinable.

Human enterprise – both physical and intellectual – which plays the primary role in shaping the world and endowing it with meaning, has been extolled by poets through the ages. In his timeless classic '***I Hear America Singing***' Walt Whitman (1819 - 92) says –

> *I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,*
> *Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,*
> *The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,*
> *The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,*
> *The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,*
> *The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,*
> *The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,*
> *The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,*
> *Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,*
> *The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,*
> *Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs*. (7)

Whitman has deep faith in the human ability to reshape the world to a place fit for living. He believes that this transformation can come through man's tireless effort. Assuming the existence of the meaning of life in worldly undertakings, he eulogizes effusively dedicated work in his poems. But Jibanananda does not think in the same way. To him, human enterprise finds relevance only in its relation to the world of experience. Experience rests on perception, and perception is always equivocal. The speaker in '***Suchetana***' articulates this vision of the poet when he says – '*The world's blood and toil and glory/Are true; yet the last truth they are not*' (*ll*. 5-6). His instincts tell him that fundamental perceptions are not what they appear to be, that reality of something lies beyond perception, that anything human, even a person's most enthusiastic venture, is merely relative in significance. He knows that the world of perception is '*sick and in pain/Yet we are its debtors, and shall remain*' (*ll*. 15-16). Because we can never acquire knowledge about the reality of the world we live in, we would never find a solution to the problems which recur endlessly in life. The perpetual presence of sorrow in life makes one feel '*torn, crushed, dazed. Under the ceaseless whispered wings of the sky*' (***The Windy Night***, *ll*. 24-25). Feeling lost in the deceptive reality of perception, he cries out –

> *I live amongst all, yet alone*
> *Am I the only one to be blinded by the light*

*Puzzled by the many ways opened before me*? (***Within My Head***, *ll*. 30-32)

The '*light*' signifies the relative truth of mundane existence. The relativity of this truth is the consequence of human inability to transcend perception. His puzzle results from his reflection on life and the world. He is unable to find any ultimate reality here. Being unable to bridge the gulf between the perceptible world with '*many realities*' and the truth behind this perception, the whole appearance sometimes becomes '*nothingness*' (***Near and Far***, *l*. 8) to him. That is why he feels that though man '*has lived long on earth*,' his '*shadows on the wall/Seems only to signal/Death, loss and fear*' (*ll*. 4-7). There is no promise of eternity as man is forever doomed in the world of perception. He can never go beyond the '*facticity*' (Spade, p. 172) of his relational existence here.

It was '*Aeons ago*' that '*In the limpid water of some distant ocean/Life began*' (***The Traveller***, *ll*. 1-3) – this is what man can know at best. The theories of science have taught him about the origin of life on earth, about the gradual evolution of man from unicellular organisms. If one is content with these scientific theories, if he is happy to find himself as representing a race placed on the apex of the graph of evolution, he would scarcely grumble about his existence on earth. But what happens if he wishes to probe deeper? What happens if he wishes to know why evolution took place in the manner as science tells? What happens if he ever questions about the necessity that prompted the inorganic atoms and molecules to combine is a way as to form life on earth? He might once again seek the aid of science to find the answers. But here he would be frustrated. It is because, like everything human, '*science is rooted in the world of experience*.' Arising primarily '*from a first-person perspective*' science eventually becomes a '*one-sided focus... on what is available from a third-person perspective*' (Zahavi, 2001, p.15). Any scientific theory as such contradicts its origin – it professes objective reality, though is based on subjective perception. Science would present before him a series of hypotheses which he can hardly appreciate. He would, in fact, soon realize that his queries are insoluble. The ultimate truth about anything is unattainable, for human-knowledge is limited to the world of appearance. He can never transcend this world to gain ultimate knowledge about something. With the same realization, Jibanananda says –

'*Behind it* [the story of life] *lay the hieroglyphic fog*
*Bereft of birth and death, of identity*.' (***The Traveller***, *ll*. 4-5)

Everything known to man is destined to perish, everything subjected to '*birth and death*.' Everything in this world has a particular '*identity*,' as identity is the direct outcome of the concept-formation about an object. But the conception of something one is possessed of is meaningful only in its relation to the world of appearance, because, as has been mentioned earlier, '*both our pure concepts of understanding and our pure intuitions bear on nothing but objects of possible experience, which are mere beings of the senses*.' The '*hieroglyphic fog*' is symbolic of appearance on which senses are projected to form conception about an object. The world which is '*Bereft of birth and death, of identity*' is the world of things-in-themselves which remains behind the appearance. This world is ageless, a world of pure existence, of ultimate reality. The poet knows that human perception can never penetrate the '*fog*' of mental symbols (hieroglyph) to access that reality. In other words, the ultimate reality can never become the object of '*our speculative thought*' (Adams, p. 808). So he feels that '*The fog that hung over our birth. will remain entangled with our death*' (*ll*. 20-21).

When a person becomes conscious of the '*incoherent and disorderly life*' he is doomed to endure, he seeks refuge in another world, the blissful world of his dreams. This tendency is known as escapism which we so often encounter in Keats. We see him '*Fade far away*' (*l*. 21) (8) to the blissful world of the nightingale to remain forgetful of '*The weariness, the fever, and the fret*' (*l*. 23) of life. He also escapes to the mythical world of stories depicted on the Hellenic urn (9). The same spirit of escapism is found in Jibanananda as well. However, his dream-world pivots mostly round his beloved in whom his weary soul finds solace. The beloved has many names. She is sometimes Banalata Sen, the primordial beauty inherent in nature; in other places, she is Suchetana, the light of consciousness. She is also Shyamali, eternal youth endowing the soul with hope and enthusiasm, or Sabita, the brightness of life, or even Sudarshana, the beautiful woman of his dream whose memory remains verdant in the heart forever (10). To a lover, the object of his adoration is always '*perfect and... peerless... created/Of every creature's best*' (11). The same is true for Jibanananda. His beloved is a single person in whom is embodied all the bright aspects of life. He finds contentment of heart in loving her. His morning becomes '*bright*' (***Loving You I Learn***, *l*. 3) with her proximity. She is also the warmth of his '*winter afternoon*' (***To You***, *l*. 6). The '*world's noise*' (***Banalata Sen***, *l*. 17) dies, everything around him fades in oblivion, '*And in the light of fireflies, the manuscript/Prepares to weave the fables of night*' (*ll*. 18-19) when he sits face to face with Banalata Sen. His beloved resides in the core of his heart. The adroit sculptor of his imagination has depicted her name there with utmost care. His survival in this world of sorrow and suffering is an impossibility without her. She is, in fact, an inseparable part of his being. But to his utter astonishment, whenever he has tried to know who or how she is (i.e. about her *noumenal* existence), he has failed miserably. Nor has he ever been able to be sure of the true nature of his relationship with her. However, it is not very difficult for us to assume why he has never succeeded in his effort. Whenever we try to think about a person or thing, we inevitably relate that person or thing to our mind. But the truth about anything is independent of our thinking. So, the poet can never cognize her reality separating her from his perception in the varying moods or situations of his life, that is, untying her from the time and space in relation to his existence. The poet says –

*... for ages*
*I longed for you*
*And you, knowing it, turned yourself into a lotus leaf*
*For this incarnation.* (***Loving You I Learn***, *ll*. 10-13)

It is only through this '*incarnation*' that the poet has ever been able to know about her. The '*incarnation*' is the phenomenal form of existence of his beloved. His attempt to be

conscious about the '*ground for*' that '*incarnation*' is never possible, for '*No man knows beyond man*' (***To You***, *l*. 16). All his concept about her is related to her only in negative terms – she is not like anything else he knows or can see around him. When he feels that his beloved is the essence of his life, he does not possess the concept of the true nature of that 'essence,' but comprehends her as unlike a person whose presence in his life is a non-essence. The same is true about his idea of the nature of their relationship.

Because his beloved can exist only in phenomenal form in his life, her appearance is never constant. It changes with the change of time. In the morning she is the bright '*drop of water*' (***Loving You I Learn***, *l*. 1), and in the evening she turns '*into the dew*' (*l*. 14). The poet feels her presence in the melodious '*silence*' (*l*. 16) of dew-drops falling from '*the famed lotus leaf*' (*l*. 2) all night long. His enthusiastic striving '*to hold that droplet/On the leaf*' (*ll*. 18-19) can never be materialized, for a phenomenon is '*Elusive*' (*l*. 4) in nature. This realization leads the poet to utter –

*At last I learnt the profound truth*
*You and I are fated to meet*
*Only on the lotus leaf*. (*ll*. 26-28)

However, longing '*to love* [her] *for ever*' (*l*. 20), he learns to be content with the relative truth of her appearance. He says–

*I melted into the drop on the leaf;*
*I was lit up by your light*
*I gloried in your glories,*
*Made vows of everlasting love* (*ll*. 21-24).

He does not attempt any longer to go beyond his epistemological limit, for any such attempt on his part, he is sure, would carry him '*from the void to greater voids,/From darkness into the further dark* (***To You***, *ll*. 10-11). However, though he knows that he can never unearth the objective truth about his beloved, that his knowledge about her is relative, he is sure about her existence and her absolute necessity in his life. It is because all '*the materials for all possibility*' (Adams, p. 818) in his life depends on those facts. Her '*non-being*' would erase '*the material for everything thinkable*' (ibid.) from him.

It is worthy to mention that even after becoming conscious of the limits of his knowledge about his beloved, the poet speaks about the sense of contentment that her company brings in him. Her warm proximity is a welcome to the heart. It fills him up with an ineffable bliss. The whole world becomes obscure to him when they are together –

*Only you and I lie*
*And, against the night sky*
*Stands the eternal tree*. (***Mortal Swans***, *ll*. 4-6)

But the world he speaks about here is akin to the world of imagination, a world where '*the earth no longer exists, nor creation*' (*l*. 4). It is his private world in which the phenomena of the everyday world is erased, and he finds contentment with that of his relation with his beloved, that is, with a sense of make-believe.

Jibanananda sometimes is found seeking retreat also in the lap of verdant nature '*Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife*' (12). In a series of sonnets collected in '***Bengal, the Beautiful***' the poet expresses his love for the enchanting beauty of Bengal and his longing for fulfilment in immortal lines. When he looks at the far-stretched fields under the darkening sky of the evening, he feels that '*All the world's beauty/Has spread itself on the grass*' (***Evening Comes***, *ll*. 7-8) there. It seems to him that '*All the world's doves/Are cooing among the clumps of hijal trees*' (*ll*. 5-6). So much mesmerised he is at this beauty that he seeks '*The beauty of earth no more*' (***I Have Seen the Face of Bengal***, *l*. 2). He loses himself in the captivating beauty of Bengal with the same intention as the one that has compelled him to escape to his beloved again and again –fulfilment and peace of mind. But it is worthy to mention here that he is able to experience oneness with this beauty only when his romantic imagination has erased the memory of the human world from his mind completely. From the ashes of the world of everyday existence emerges the Phoenix of a new world – a world where the senses are never compelled to confront excruciating experiences. He looks at the sky decked with glittering stars, senses the fragrance of the flowers he can see only with his mind's eye, feels the healing touch of the cool breeze by the side of '*Gangur*' (***I Have Seen the Face of Bengal***, *l*. 10). The new world is not operated by the cause-effect relationship of the world we are familiar with. Crossing the boundary of understanding, the poet arranges his sense-perceptions following his imagination to constitute his paradise. In that paradise is present only his consciousness, and his interactions with nature endowing his soul with a sense of fulfilment is the only reality there. His heart throbs with joy when in the quietness of the evening he perceives '*a sparrow* [flying] *quietly home*' with '*Wisp of hay in its mouth*,' '*A bullock cart* [winding] *its way down the village path/The courtyards. full of tight piles of golden hay*' (***Evening Comes***, *ll*. 2-4). The images presented here clearly denote the absence of a second consciousness in his world. The present state of the poet can well be compared to that of Keats when he feels transported to the world of the nightingale –

*Already with thee! tender is the night,*
*And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,*
*Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;*
*But here there is no light,*
*Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown*
*Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.*
*I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,*
*Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,*
*But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet*
*Wherewith the seasonable month endows*
*The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;*
*White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;*
*Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;*
*And mid-May's eldest child,*
*The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,*
*The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves*. (13)

It is quite interesting that in their state of ecstasy the thought of death peeps in the mind of both the poets. Keats says –

*Now more than ever seems it rich to die,*
*To cease upon the midnight with no pain,*
*While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad*
*In such an ecstasy*! (14)

While Jibanananda states –

*Somewhere death will come to me,*
*Cover me with the gentle fragrance of grass*
*At dawn, or at night*
*Or a bird at mid-afternoon*
*Will take me to its bosom,*
*Cover me like grass;*
*The night sky will blossom into blue stars*. (***The Smell of Far Worlds***, *ll*. 13-19) (15)

A wish like this might perplex a person who thinks rationally. He would epithet such desire absurd, for why would a person wish to die in happiness instead of longing for the perpetuity of his state of bliss? But if we think deeply we would find that a wish like this is quite natural and meaningful. The world popularly believed to be realistic is, in fact, a world of relative truth. The limitations of our consciousness never allow us to attain absolute knowledge, the knowledge of *noumena*, here. Wan Abdullah says –

[*T*]*he reality of noumenal world is nothing but representations of a problem which its object is possible in itself, although as a whole its solution is impossible.* (Wan-Abdullah, p. 35)

If we wish to find fulfilment in this world, we would be frustrated. It is not merely because we are able to know only the phenomenal reality of something, but also because the world we inhabit tries in every way to erode even that sense from us. It preaches a person by every institution belonging to it that by following proper scientific methods one can attain the objective reality of things. That means the world we belong to aims to present, to quote Zahavi once again, a '*one-sided*' view of the perceptible world '*from a third-person perspective*' to every individual, and then represent it as the objective reality. In a world which carries us twice away from reality, and which involves its inhabitants in a maddening contest by presenting that unreality as the foundation of realistic existence, it is quite difficult to survive with reflection. But being penetrating thinkers, neither Keats nor Jibanananda can help to reflect on life concerning the phenomenal world. Knowing the impossibility of life's completeness here, they escape to their self-created paradise. In that world, they find fulfilment, not in the sense of being able to uncover the mystery of existence objectively, but by being able to find oneness with a form of life they reckon ideal through the vicinity with nature. The new world, of course, never shows the way to reality, and more so because in its constitution the fundamental role is played by imagination. But this world promises peace of mind and is at least able to make one forgetful for a time being of the fruitless enterprise and pain of the human world. That is why once the poets feel themselves existing in their utopian world, they wish to perpetuate that existence forever by closing their eyes in that blissful state.

Of the things we have got the least idea, death comes foremost. Every '*death is so resolutely singular*. *The face of the dead remains always unknown to me. It is the anticipation of a time, beyond which no anticipation is possible*' (Ray, 2015, p. 152). However, neither of the poets ever wish to explore the truth about death. To close eyes in the lap of nature in an exultant state of mind is to them nothing more than a peaceful sleep. It is the greatest gift, they feel, they can ever wish for. Let death remain whatever it is in itself. The poets are concerned only about the subjective truth related to it. Consequently, death in happiness is to them, unlike a man of ordinary thinking, such a welcome. It would eternalize the phenomena of their world of bliss in relation to their consciousness (for they would live through happiness unless their consciousness perishes forever with their death). The phenomena might be called 'the phenomena of imagination' which would transcend the phenomena of everyday existence, and project meaning (of course, personally founded) on a life which is at bottom devoid of reality.

## CONCLUSION

What is reality? The answer to the question is indecipherable in the phenomenal world we are destined to live. Jibanananda realized this truth through his reflection on the relationship both between man and man and man and the world and related the same in his poems. The present study, as the above elucidation reveals, seeks to bring out this realization of the Bengali poet. However, while discussing the motif of perception and reality in Jibanananda's poems, I have related that to Kant's concept of phenomenon and noumenon. I have also attempted to show that the poet's awareness of the unattainability of truth or fulfilment in the world of appearance leads him to escape in the world of imagination which centres either on the beauty of his beloved or that of the nature of Bengal.

As the poet escapes to the world of imagination, he comes to know the ultimate truth – life's fulfilment which can give him '*solace is to be looked for his . . . subjective paradise*' (Das, 2019, p. 29). His inability to explore the objective truth of the world saddens him no longer, for the fulfilment he attains through his escape to his dream-world is akin to spiritual enlightenment. His romantic imagination makes him sure that even if he lies down '*below unfamiliar grass/On some unknown planet,/That grass will fill* [his] *breath/With the scent of aniseed, like Bengal's very own*' (***The Smell of Far Worlds***, *ll*. 4-7) (15). His soul bears the essence of the beauty of his 'imaginative phenomena.'

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## END NOTES

1. '***A Dream within a Dream***,' a poem by the 19th-century American writer E. A. Poe, first published in 1849, L. 10-11, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52829/a-dream-within-a-dream.
2. '***Often rebuked, yet always back returning***,' a poem by the 19th-century British poet and novelist Emily Bronte. The poem was published in the collection '***Poems by***

***Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell***,' in 1846 in which Emily became Ellis Bell, *ll*. 5-8, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/53697/often-rebuked-yet-always-back-returning.

3. Quoted from '***In Remembrance of Jibanananda Das***,' Anindya J Ayan, https://www.thedailystar.net/literature/in-remembrance-of-jibanananda-das-573622.
4. From '***Archways of Life***,' by the 20th-century American poet Mercedes De Acosta, https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/unreality-2/.
5. '***In Remembrance of Jibanananda Das***.'
6. '***Dracula***,' an 1897 novel by the Irish writer Bram Stoker, Ch. 14:7, https://www.pagebypagebooks.com/Bram_Stoker/Dracula/CHAPTER_14_p7.html.
7. A poem from the collection '***Leaves of Grass***' by the 19th-century American writer Walt Whitman. The first edition of the collection was published in 1855, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46480/i-hear-america-singing.
8. '***Ode to a Nightingale***,' one of the 1819 odes by the 19th century English poet John Keats, *l*. 21, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44479/ode-to-a-nightingale.
9. The urn spoken about here is the one which forms the subject-matter of Keats's '***Ode on a Grecian Urn***,' the third of the great odes of 1819. *Keats does not describe a specific urn in his ode, but he knew Greek art from engravings and experienced it at first-hand on visits to the British Museum, which had recently taken possession of the Elgin Marbles* (***An introduction to 'Ode on a Grecian Urn': time, mortality and beauty***, Stephen Hebron, https://www.bl.uk/romantic-and-victorians/an-introduction-to-ode-on-a-grecian-urn-time-mortality-and-beauty).
10. The names mentioned here appear in poems bearing the same titles. All the poems belong to the collection '***Banalata Sen***' (1942).
11. '***The Tempest***,' a play by William Shakespeare, probably composed in 1610–1611, ***Act*** III, ***Sc***. 1, *ll*. 47-48, '***The Complete Works of William Shakespeare***, Geddes and Grosset, Scotland, 2001, p. 670.
12. '***Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard***,' an epoch-making poem by the 18th century English poet Thomas Gray. The poem was published in 1751. *l*. 73, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44299/elegy-written-in-a-country-churchyard.
13. '***Ode to a Nightingale***,' *ll*. 35-50.
14. '***Ode to a Nightingale***,' *ll*. 55-58.
15. All the poems of Jibanananda Das cited in the paper, excepting the lines from '***I Have Seen the Face of Bengal***' which have been translated by me, are translated by Chidananda Das Gupta, '***Selected Poems, Jibanananda Das***,' Penguin Random House India Pvt. Ltd., Haryana, 2006.

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## APPENDIX

Below is given the list of the collections from which the poems dealt with in the article have been extracted:

'***Within My Head***' from ***Dhusar Pandulipi*** (***Grey Manuscript***, 1936).

'***Suchetana***,' '***Banalata Sen***' from ***Banalata Sen*** (1942).

'***One Day Eight Years Ago***,' '***The Windy Night***' from ***Mahaprithivi*** (***Great Universe***, 1944).

'***The Traveller***' and '***These Days and Nights***' from ***Sreshtha Kavita*** (***Best Poems***, 1954).

'***Evening Comes***,' '***I Have Seen the Face of Bengal***,' and '***The Smell of Far Worlds***' from ***Rupasi Bangla*** (***Bengal, the Beautiful***, published posthumously in1957).

'***Spectral***,' '***Loving You I Learn***,' '***To You***,' '***Mortal Swans***,' '***Near and Far***' from ***Agranthita Kavita*** (these poems are all uncollected, published in various magazines during and after his lifetime).