

Jibanananda's 'Akashlina': The Transformation of Suranjana, the Forest of Symbols, and World-Modernity

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Abstract

This paper explores Jibanananda Das's landmark poem "Akashlina" (first published in 1940) through the framework of Existential-Imagism. By tracing the shifting identity of the poem's female muse, Suranjana, the analysis demonstrates how she undergoes an architectural transformation from a physical presence to a cosmic and elemental abstraction, dissolving into soil, grass, wind, and sky. The discussion systematically maps the five central symbols that animate the poem (Suranjana, the young man, the poet-speaker, the vertical layers of the sky, and grass) while engaging with existentialist, psychoanalytic, and mythological frameworks. Furthermore, the paper provides a comparative study of Jibanananda's aesthetics alongside Western literary figures, contrasting his melancholic nature imagery with the pastoral romanticism of William Wordsworth and Walt Whitman, his empty voids with the French Symbolist tradition of Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Arthur Rimbaud, and his radical cosmic fragmentation with the urban alienation of T. S. Eliot. Ultimately, the essay frames "Akashlina" as a foundational text of world-modernity that portrays human disenfranchisement without traditional religious or cultural resolution.

Keywords: Jibanananda Das, Akashlina, Existential-Imagism, French Symbolism, T. S. Eliot

Celestial Pull and Cosmic Transformation in Jibanananda's 'Akashlina'

Jibanananda Das wrote the poem 'Akashlina' in the late 1930s. It was first published in 1940 in his poetry book *Satti Tarar Timire* (The Darkness of Seven Stars). Viewed through the lens of the author's proposed Existential-Imagism (Sarwar, 2026b), this poem stands as a distinctive creation of his.

In the poem 'Akashlina', Jibanananda watches his imaginary muse, Suranjana, drift away toward a faceless shadow. Historyless! Fragility blends into his plea, a desperate hope, as if the "starlight-fire" might halt her departure. He is not merely fighting a rival; he is fighting a celestial pull that is gradually erasing her from Suranjana's mind. He watches Suranjana enter a silence colder than the night wind, and he pleads for her to return to that silver light.

Suranjana, do not go over there,
Do not speak with that young man.
Come back, Suranjana,
In this night silvered by starfire. (Das, 1940/2012)

He wants to pull her down to earth, in the desperate desire of their combined existence. The poet actively mourns her loss. He sees the distance growing not in miles but in terms of "further away." Suranjana is leaving for the young man.

Come back to these fields, these waves,
Come back to my heart.
Do not go further, even further,
Yet further, with the youth. (Das, 1940/2012)

Curiosity overwhelms him. He sees Suranjana becoming a fertile soil where an unfamiliar man's love takes root like ordinary grass. The woman's identity is swallowed by the infinity of "sky beyond the sky." This is an astonishing cosmic transformation! The poet is deeply surrendered to the magic of surrealism. Suranjana is no longer his companion; she is now the soil of an unfamiliar world.

What can you have to say to him? with him?
In skies behind skies
Today you are like earth
In which grows his love, as grass. (Das, 1940/2012)

In the end, the poet stands on the shore of a reality where Suranjana is no more. Suranjana has dissolved into elements. Her heart has become grass. Her soul has become endless wind. She has found freedom that is at once beautiful yet destructive. Suranjana's name remains written only in the heart of the wind.

Suranjana,
Today your heart is grass—
Wind beyond winds,
Sky beyond the farther shores of sky. (Das, 1940/2012)

The Forest of Symbols

An analysis of the poem's symbols allows for an imaginative re-reading that departs from previously published interpretations. Poet Jibanananda Das has filled the hem of the poem 'Akashlina' with symbolism. Five symbols are particularly attractive. Suranjana is not just a woman; she is a symbol of the human soul. It seems to be a symbol of the soul's inner sensation, or of human desire. The soul is dynamic; it has its pure flow. It rushes to the call of the unknown. Suranjana's moving away means the soul's pull toward the unknown, or simply put, a symbol of freedom.

The young man's character is a creation of imagination. The symbolic meaning is temptation, or the illusion of the unknown, and its attraction can be severe. Again, the speaker of the poem, the poet himself, is a symbol for the earth's soil, which can be called the center of reality.

The poet wants to bring Suranjana back. The sky appears many times in the poem. Two exquisite images of the sky, "sky behind the sky" and "sky beyond the sky," are fascinating. In this imagery, arranged vertically layer upon layer,

the symbolic meaning of the sky is infinite. Here, the sky is an existential symbol.

The use of grass as a symbol is noteworthy. Suranjana's heart is grass. Grass sways in the wind, constantly changing direction, and is easily occupied. Symbolically, it represents the fragility of existence.

Akashlina's narrative is full of the gravity of these five symbols. Yet, there is a somewhat cloudy ambiguity in the use of the symbols. Here, the magician of imagery possesses the grayness of fog.

Theoretical, Psychoanalytic, and Mythological Dimensions

In Suranjana's hesitant mind, her desire for freedom conflicts with the poet's reality. The young man's call comes amid unknown possibilities, evoking a Sartrean existential effort to find value in a worthless world.

In psychoanalytic theory, the young man is the "id," meaning "desire." In that way, the poet is the "ego," meaning reality, and Suranjana's hesitation is the "superego."

A kind of mythological atmosphere pervades this poem. Can Suranjana be called Urvashi? Likewise, is the young man a Yaksha? Is the sky heaven? Or is Suranjana Persephone and the young man Orpheus! In both cases, the poet represents the earth, and the sky represents heaven.

Suranjana is not just a woman. She is a "Dasein" (Heidegger, 1927/1962) hidden inside human beings, who sometimes wants to remain still, and sometimes wants to get lost in sky after sky. The young man is the force that tempts humans to go beyond their own limits. And the poet is that voice saying, "Come back."

Landscape and Cosmic Layers: A Western Comparison

A comparison of Jibanananda Das's use of "grass" with the landscapes of Wordsworth or Whitman illuminates the poet's fundamentally melancholic

framework. Wordsworth saw nature as a moral teacher. He wrote in the poem 'The Tables Turned':

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can. (Wordsworth, 1798/1805)

And Whitman saw nature as a robust symbol of democracy and vitality. On the other hand, Jibanananda viewed nature as a surreal accompaniment. Das removes the romantic consolation of nature and installs in its place "starlight-fire," which illuminates the terrifying distance between two human beings. To him, grass is not a sign of life's permanence, but a shroud that covers the memory of a dead love.

In Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, grass is a "uniform hieroglyphic," which serves as a symbol of the equality of all souls. He wrote:

A child said What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;

... I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,

And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones. (Whitman, 1855)

But to Jibanananda, grass is the sign of Suranjana's surrender to a certain affection. The poet sees her becoming that very "soil" where an unfamiliar man's love takes root. This transformation does not seem to be the development of her true self, but rather its decay. It seems that while Western poets found themselves within nature, just as Wordsworth claims in 'Tintern Abbey':

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. (Wordsworth, 1798/1805)

There, Jibanananda shows the beloved losing herself entirely inside nature.

The symbol “sky behind the sky” moves beyond the conventional pastoral imagery of English poetry. It points toward a multilayered void, a foreshadowing, one might say, of post-modern alienation. Jibanananda uses these cosmic layers to show that Suranjana has entered a space where human history and personal devotion become meaningless. She is no longer the “Suranjana of the field”; she has become an abstract wonder, a “wind beyond the wind” that cannot be tied down to any heart.

Ultimately, this poem is a unique reading of modern human disenfranchisement. Nature here is no refuge; it is the “farthest shore of the sky,” where the soul is finally extinguished. Where Whitman finds the pulse of life even within death, by saying:

Has anyone supposed it lucky to be born?

I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I know it. (Whitman, 1855)

There, Jibanananda's aesthetics are even more thrilling than those of Western poets.

Existential Dissolution

The footsteps of existentialism are present in this poem. It seems that the “young man” here is not a romantic rival, but rather an existential catalyst. He acts as an “other” who causes Suranjana’s transformation from a familiar entity into cosmic facelessness. The “starlight-fire” that makes the night silver is a cold, existential light that extinguishes the lamps of love and departs into the unknown.

In his plea for her return, a deep sense of disenfranchisement is scattered. The speaker calls upon the “field” and the “wave” as a final effort to stabilize an existence that is already vanishing into vapor. The poet knows the futility of his words. The repetition of “further away, further away” reflects the

existential abyss, where once the soul begins to drift, there is no bottom. There remains no return, only the eternal motion of moving away from one's own center.

Suranjana's becoming the "soil" where love is born as "grass" is exquisite, extended imagery. In the light of existentialism, humans almost dissolve into physical reality. The poet shows this not as death, but as a terrifying expansion.

In the final section, the poem reaches a complete existential dissolution. The heart becomes "grass." The soul becomes "wind." And the destination becomes the "farthest shore of the sky." This is like the ultimate existential surrender. All eventually "merge into the sky." The poet remains alone in silence, watching his beloved cross the boundaries of human emotion and become completely elusive.

The Legacy of French Symbolism

Jibanananda Das is also an intimate bond among the French Symbolist trio, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud. Like his French predecessors, Jibanananda does not merely describe a landscape; he uses it as a vehicle for a specific mental state. In the mental flow, there is a veil of casual darkness. Jibanananda's escapist attitude is so pronounced that it is difficult to refute the critics' adverse comments.

In his poetry, 'starlight fire acts as a symbol, a cold line of light that uncovers the human soul. It seems that just as Baudelaire (1857) found a forest of symbols in his poem 'Correspondances'—"L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles" (Man passes there through forests of symbols), likewise Jibanananda finds an infinite mystery within the rural night, much like the Bogura Road's Bokultola of the then Barisal, where every blade of grass carries the weight of an invisible reality.

Mallarmé's (1913) addiction to 'L'Azur' or 'the void' finds an echo in Jibanananda's sky-depiction. The poet's plea to Suranjana to return to the 'field' and the 'wave' is, in fact, a continuous struggle against the pull of

symbolist emptiness. Suranjana here is the symbol of that elusive ideal, the beauty that French poets chased all their lives. She is like some magical vision from Rimbaud's (1886) 'Illuminations,' that poem which cannot be fully written. She is that woman who, instead of the heart's familiar anguish, chooses the silence of the 'young man.' As Rimbaud (1873) wrote in his poem 'O Saisons, ô châteaux': "J'ai fait la magique étude / Du bonheur, qu'aucun n'élude" (I have made the magical study / Of happiness, which no one evades). Jibanananda's Suranjana is likewise the beckoning of a miraculous and impenetrable joy.

The beloved's becoming 'soil' where love is born as 'grass' reflects the French concept of synesthesia, where physical sensation and emotional truth blend into one another. Jibanananda uses this symbolist technique to depict the dissolution of individual identity. In 'sky behind the sky' we get Mallarmé's (1913) feeling of the elusive, as captured in his line, "Je suis hanté. L'Azur! L'Azur! L'Azur! L'Azur!" (I am haunted. The Azure! The Azure!). One also sees Rimbaud's 'mystical vision' (voyance), where the world is formed not of matter, but of impressions or sensations that take the reader toward an infinite, terrifying depth.

Ultimately, the poem's conclusion is a classic symbolist dénouement. Suranjana is no longer a human woman. She is 'wind beyond the wind,' a soul that has dissolved into elements and reached a level of cold, pure transcendence. Jibanananda Das is one of the true successors to the symbolist legacy in Bengal. He brings the addiction to the 'Ideal' and the 'Absolute' of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud, and places it on the fertile soil of the spacious grass-covered courtyard of his damp home, a distance of less than two kilometers from the Kirtankhola River, proving that the 'farthest shore of the sky' can be reached even from the most ordinary field of grass.

World-Modernity and the Eliotian Disenchantment

By the yardstick of modernity, Jibanananda Das's 'Akashlina' and T. S. Eliot's poetic philosophy are somewhat close, though they were separated by 8,000 kilometers and their cultural spheres differed. Where Eliot's despair manifests in the complexity of the city, like the "bricks and iron cages" of "I

think we are in rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their bones" (Eliot, 1922), Jibanananda finds his existential void in his failed plea to Suranjana, within the weary courtyards of Bengal. The poem's "starlight-fire" is an intriguing parallel to Eliot's "The violet light caused by the sun's rays." The muse Suranjana is no longer a tangible woman. She acts as a shadow who moves "further away, further away," just as in Eliot's endangered kingdom: "Eyes I dare not meet in dreams / In death's dream kingdom" (Eliot, 1925).

There are limitations to this comparative analysis. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is primarily the product of the tragic social and political decay of post-First World War Europe. On the other hand, the melancholy of 'Akashlina' is much more personal and existential.

Although Jibanananda's "grass," "field," or "wave" functions like Eliot's "objective correlative," the methods of application differ. Eliot used it as an intellectual technique to suppress emotion, maintaining that "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative.'" Jibanananda, conversely, is possessed by the invocation of a highly imaginative poetic goddess. In contrast to Eliot's civic detachment, Jibanananda's lamentation in this poem is driven by surrealist imagery.

On the question of life philosophy and transcendence, the paths of these two poets have bent in distinct directions. In Eliot's poetry, the direction of liberation is bestowed upon tradition or religion, "At the still point of the turning world" (Eliot, 1943). Jibanananda, on the other hand, accepts an all-pervading dissolution. At the end of Eliot's poem, there is "Shantih shantih shantih." This mantra from the Upanishads reminds us of a mystical solution. Yet, at the end of 'Akashlina,' there is no specific salvation. Suranjana's becoming "soil" or dissolving into the "sky behind the sky" is not a religious solution, but an irony of fate. Jibanananda is more radical here than Eliot. He hints that modern humans are ultimately not just what Eliot defined as "We are the hollow men / We are the stuffed men." Instead, humans are a disembodied essence that merges into the outer space of the 'sky behind the sky.'

Conclusion

This discussion has revealed that Jibanananda Das's 'Akashlina' is a fascinating poetic creation. Quite popular! Yet, there is ambiguity in the poem. Why Suranjana is being forbidden to go there, or why she is being prohibited from talking to another young man, has sometimes seemed a foggy obscurity. Readers, do you feel the same way? The lover's anguish here often feels like a blind sense of possessiveness. To modern feminists, the poet's yearning might seem somewhat narrow. But if considered through the lens of Existential-Imagism (Sarwar, 2026a/2026c) and in light of the cultural environment of nearly nine decades ago, this paper is highly readable and a unique contribution by the standards of Existential-Imagism.

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