

Nature of Intertextuality in the Poems of Jibanananda Das: A Cognitive Poetics Approach



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Abstract

The Pragmatics of intertextuality is viewed as a broader cognitive and contextual reality that prompts readers into forming intertextual connections between texts. Intertextuality refers to overt allusions forming a functional part of a narrative, marked or unmarked quotations from other texts as well as references to names of literary characters etc. In poetry, intertextuality is seen as the result of a cooperative process between the poetic text and the readers. With a cognitively informed approach if we place primacy on readers, we can see that intertextuality is better understood not as a property of the text itself, but as a cognitive modality of perception. In the poems of Jibanananda Das, intertextual elements are abundant and very much creative. When readers try to find implicatures from such utterances, they discover themselves lost in a world of indeterminacy as well as a highly creative poetic world. My paper aims at studying what type of ‘cognitive stance’ is taken by readers when they come across intertextual elements in the poems of Jibanananda Das. The proposed paper adds new ideas to critical studies in Bengali since it draws sufficient nourishment from pragmatics and cognitive linguistics.

Keywords: Jibanananda Das, poetry of Jibananadadas, Intertextuality, intertextual frames, cognitive stance, Plesionyms, Hyponymy

Introduction

Jibanananda Das (1899-1954) was a leading Bengali poet of the Post-Tagore era. His most widely read poetic collections are “Rupashi Bangla” (Beautiful Bengal; 1934), “Dhusar Pandulipi” (Grey Manuscript; 1936), “Banalata Sen” (1942), “Mahaprithivi” (The Great Universe; 1944), “Satti Tarar

Timir” (Darkness of Seven Stars; 1948), “Bela Obela Kalbela” (Times, Bad Times, End Times; 1961), etc.

To begin my discussion on the nature of intertextual links in his poems, I shall first invoke the great French philosopher and literary theorist Roland Barthes who said that a text is “a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture” (1995:125). As I have mentioned in the ‘abstract’, intertextuality refers to overt allusions forming a functional part of a narrative, marked or unmarked quotations from other texts as well as references to names of characters, themes genres etc. Some critics like Barthes (1977, 1995), Genette (1992, 1997), Rifaterre (1978, 1980) viewed intertextuality as a property of the text itself. But with a cognitively informed approach, we see that it is a broader contextual and cognitive reality, a modality of perception.

In “The Bounded Text” (1960), Julia Kristeva views that a text is a ‘permutation of texts, an intertextuality in a space of a given text’. Even in Bakhtin’s ideas of “dialogism” and “heteroglossia” (1981,1986), there are some ideas of intertextuality. What is prominent from the ideas is that any discourse is informed by other discursive elements or voices and seeks to alter or inform it.

If the poems of Jibanananda Das are viewed from an encyclopedic approach to meaning construction, then it may be observed that words are points of access to vast repositories of structured knowledge. Hence the meaning is always realized in terms of those repositories and context of use. While reading a poem, a reader takes a cognitive stance i.e. a reader places himself/herself to a certain space in the reality of the text controlled by specific cues found in the text. Intertextuality can shed light on such cognitive stance which is actually a readiness to accept things or to deal with process, events, people, etc.

1. Different Types of Intertextual Frames and Their Functions in the Poems of Jibanananda Das

In order to observe the intertextual connections and their probable efficacy in the interpretative procedure of the poems of Jibanananda Das, I shall view intertextuality from three dimensions:

- i. Semantic intertextual frames,
- ii. Topical intertextual frames and
- iii. Stylistic intertextual frames.

1.1. Semantic Intertextual Frames and the Poems of Jibanananda Das

The meaning of a word is a ‘function of sentential context’ (Evans: 2009) which guides the encyclopedic knowledge to which a word relates in a given usage. An act of reading a text is actually a situated interpretation and it is context-specific. Evans (2009:218) observes that the first step of a reading act is ‘selection’ of appropriate lexical concept. The next step is an ‘integration’ with other lexical concept in the utterance.

*Gobhir hawar raat chilo kaal --- asankha nakshetrer raat;
Sararaat bistera hawea amar masherite kheleche;
Masherita phule utheche kakhono mausumi samudrer peter moto,
Kokhono bichana chinre
Nakshetrer dike urea jete cheyechheye;
Ek ekber mane hochhelo amar --- adho ghumer bhiter hoito ---*

*Mathar upper mashari nei amar,
Swatitarar kol gheshe neel hawar smuddre sada baker moto urche se.*

Translation: Last night it was an intensely windy night
A night of innumerable stars,
An expansive wind played about my mosquito net;
At times billowing it like the belly of a monsoon sea,
At times tearing it off the bed as if to cast to the stars;
Sometimes I felt ---- may be in partial-sleep ----- that there was
No net on my bed,
That it was drifting like a white heron
In an ocean of blue winds alongside the Swati star.
[“Howar Raata” (A Windy Night), 1-8]

While going through these lines, a reader can have access to a potentially large number of knowledge structures. Here are narrow selections like ‘mosquito net’, ‘windy night’ etc as well as broad selections like ‘Swati star’ etc. When these are integrated, the inherent semantic potentiality of such words gives rise to other layer/layers of meaning. the ‘mosquito net’ may relate shackles of existence and contrarily, ‘white heron’ may appear to be a mark of freedom. Similar frame may be discovered in Rabindeanath Tagore’s poem “Balaka”. In both the poems the poetic entity seeks freedom in the infinity of existence.

When the readers of a text come across such intertextual links, they need to bring together two types of information:

- i. Text specific information and
- ii. Their intertextual knowledge triggered by a lexical item

As in the following lines:

*Hazar bachar dhare ami hanthitechee prithivir pathe,
Singhal samuddra theke nishither andhakare malay sagare
Anek ghurechee ami; Bimbisar Ashoker dhusar jagate
Sekhane chilam ami; aro dur andhakare Bidarbha nagare;
Ami klanta pran ek, charidike jibaner samudra safen,
Amare du danda shanty diyechilo Natorer Banalata Sen.*

Translation: A thousand years I have walked these paths,
From the harbour of Malacca in the dark of night
To the straits of Ceylon at glimmer of dawn.
Much have I travelled—
The grey world of Ashoka-Bimbisara,
Further yet,
The dark city of Vidharbha;
Around me life foams its stormy breath.
Weary of soul,

I found a moment's respite in her presence—
She: Banalata Sen of Natore.
(Banalata Sen; lines- 1-6).

Here both types of information are brought together in an online processing domain termed as intertextual frame. Semantic intertextual frames arise from the identification of a single lexical item that triggers the reader's intertextual knowledge stored in the cognitive model Literary Entity. They arise from:

- a. Direct access routes and
- b. Indirect access routes.

2. Direct Access Routes

Direct access routes are created when a lexical concept affords access directly to the primary cognitive model Literary Entity triggering the formation of an intertextual frame. This takes place when same lexical item is identified in the source and the activated text alike. Any open-class lexical item is capable of triggering this type of connection. As for example I shall first mention a translation of Jibanananda Das's poem "Hai Chill" (Kite, alas) from poetic collection "Banalata Sen":

*Hai chill, sonali danar chill, ei bhije megher dupure
Tumi ar kendonako urei-urei Dhanshiri naditir pashe
Tomar kannar sure betar phaler moto tar mlan chokh mone ashe...*

Translation: Kite, alas, golden-winged kite, in this noon of moist clouds,
Cry no more as you fly beside the Dhansiri river!
Your keening brings back her eyes, pale like cane fruit.

The lexical items like 'cry' and 'eyes' remind us of a poem by W B Yeats:

O curlew, cry no more in the air
Or only to the water in the west,
Because your crying brings to my mind
Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair.

There are also cases where such knowledge originates from a plurality of sources and it is closely related to the reader's cultural knowledge. Such an example is mythological knowledge and the possible intertextual connections that arise due to the identification of mythological figures in a text. In Jibanananda Das's poetic collections like Jharapalak, Banalata Sen, Maha Prithivi, Rupashi Bangla, Satti Tarar Timir, Bela Abela Kalbela etc we find extensive exploitation of Hindu Mythology. In the poem Deshbandhu from poetic collection Jharapalak, the reference to 'Dadhichi' is such a lexical concept. Dadhichi sacrificed his body for using his bones for preparing thunder that was used by the king of Gods, Indra, to kill Batrasur. Hence 'Dadhichi' becomes an epitome of self-sacrifice. With a glance at contemporary history of Bengal, we find that the social and personal life was very much corrupted, and the poet sought reference to 'Purana' for the quest of a reformation.

Again, in the poem “Amishashi Tarabari” in the poetic collection “Maha Prithivi”, the reference to cunning conspirator ‘Shakuni’ from the Mahabharata, bears another significance. We know that Shakuni made a deep-delved conspiracy to demolish the Kuru Dynasty. Though Shakuni was killed in Kurukshetra War, he was ultimately successful in his mission. The contemporary society of Jibanananda reflects the same image of a dark era of destruction. In several poems of “The Rupashi Bangala”, Goddess Lakshmi and her vehicle ‘Owl’ have been mentioned to refer to the prosperous condition of Bengal. In many poetic collections of Jibanananda like “Jharapalak”, “Banalata Sen”, “Maha Prithivi”, “Rupashi Bangla”, etc, the readers come across scores of references from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the deities like Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna etc. Hence, the ‘Mythological Entity’ gives the readers entry to ‘Literary Entity’.

3. Cognitive Synonyms and Plesionym

*“Is it an indigo-laden blue field?
Or is it an azure sky?” (Kartiker Bhorbela)*

Here the words are cognitively synonymous with another word, as they refer to the same thing independently of context. A word becomes cognitively synonymous with another word if all instances of both words expresses the same exact thing and the referents are necessarily identical. It means that the ‘interchangibility’ of such words is not context-sensitive. Cruse (1986) gives the example of ‘hide’ and ‘conceal’. Cruse (1996:284) views that the difference between cognitively synonymous words lie in their ‘expressive meaning’ that Cruse associates with style, namely ‘the language characteristics that make different relations between participants in a linguistic exchange’. Some more examples may be the lexical items like extinguish, die, perish etc. Since cognitive synonyms share by and large the same association areas, they form intertextual connections.

Death appears in various forms in the poems of Jibanananda Das with a cognitive synonymity. Here are some examples from the poetic collection of “Rupashi Bangla”:

- i. *Je ingite nakshatra o jhare*
Tr. The gesture that causes the stars to **fall**.
- ii. *Kuashai jhare pare dike dike rupsali dhan*
Tr. Lovely paddy **drops down** in fog in different places.

“Plesionyms” designate very similar concepts and at the same time exhibit slight meaning differences so that they cannot be considered identical in meaning (Cruse, 1986:285; Storjohann 2009). An interesting feature of Plesionyms is that they shade gradually into non-synonymy. There is always one member of a Plesionymous pair in which it is possible to assert, without paradox, while simultaneously denying the other member (Cruse 1986,285).

Let us view a few lines from the poem “Adbhut andhar ek” (A strange darkness):

*Advut andhar ek eseche e prithivite aaj
Jara andha sabcheye besi aaj chokhe dekhe tara..*

(Transl.) A strange **darkness** has come upon the world today,
They who are most **blind** now see,

In the first two lines two lexical items ‘darkness’ and ‘blindness’ denote different ideas. But here they are cognitively synonymous.

4. Indirect Access Routes

Intertextual connections may also be formed through indirect access routes or looser lexical associations. A prominent form of such cases is ‘hyponymy’. Hyponymy is a relation in which the meaning of one item is included in the meaning of the other. In the poems of Jibanananda Das we find a number of names like owl, crow, shalik, pigeon, kite etc all of which are hyponyms of the lexical concept ‘bird’. Hyponymy involves entailment. A familiar idiomatic expression ‘as wise as an owl’ is embodied in the poem “Pencha” (‘Owl’) where it lacks animality and becomes an epitome of wisdom and intellect. Still it creates a separate world of its own with the less important avian entities like crow, pigeon, shalik, sparrow etc. In the legendary poem “Banalata Sen”, the expression “eye like a bird’s nest” may refer to a quest for a peaceful abode. “Trees” also come with myriad images and mystique forms:

*Banglar much ami dekhiyachhi
Tai prithvir rup khujite jai na aar
Andhokaar jege othe **dumurer** gache
Cheye dekhi chhatar moton boro patatir niche bose ache
Bhorer doyel pakhi
Charidike pallaber stup. **Aam jam kanthaler**
Hijoler asother kore ache chup.*

Transl. I have seen the face of Bengal
I need not look for the beauty of the earth.
When I arise in darkness I see in the **Dumur** plants
A Doyel bird of morning sitting under a big leaf as large as an umbrella.
I see everywhere heaps of leaves of the **mango**, the **plum**, the **jackfruit**
The **Hijal**, the **peepal** trees
All in silence.

All these reflect a silent and sublime appearance of Bengal. Thus, a single lexical item may offer access to encyclopaedic knowledge and initiate intertextual links. The readers try to recall and combine them to create a resonant link.

5. Topical Intertextual Frame

Topical intertextual frames are created on the basis of similarities between themes of two or more literary works. Here readers activate multiple models that create global effects on reading experiences. For example, I quote a few lines from Jibanananda Das’ “Rupashi Bangla”.

There is a place in this earth---the most beautiful—serene

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:6 June 2019

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Where green banks are totally covered with ‘madhucopy’ grass
There the names of trees are: jackfruits, peepul, banyan, jarul and hijal.

We find a thematic similarity of these lines with W B Yeats’ poem : ‘The Lake Isle of Inisfree’:

I will arise and go now, and go to inisfree,
And a small cabin built there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,
And live alone in the beeloud glade.

In the ‘discourse world’ of both the poems, the narrative voices use certain textual elements in order to construct the ‘text world’. The most prominent world building elements are related to time, place and entities. As Stockwell (2003: 253) notices, readers need to keep track these entities along with the viewpoint that form the ‘fictional world’. This ‘fictional world’ becomes objects of the active, evolving and recycling cultural memory (Dolzel 1998).

Transl. After the sunset, a certain lonely-haired darkness
Appears to fix her hair in a bun but by whose hands?
But it remains loose and flowing as she stares out but
For whom?

Here the reference to ‘loose hair’ may remind a competent reader of the humiliated and bespattered condition of ‘Droupadi’ in the Mahabharata. When Dusshasana humiliated Draupadi, she made a pledge that she would not fix her hair in bun until she could drench it with the blood of Dusshasana. Now, does it insinuate that the contemporary Bengal needed someone as mighty as Bhima in Mahabharata to protect the women from humiliation? In the poem “Banalata Sen” also, there are a number of historical references:

Natore: a place in today’s Bangladesh in the district of Rajshahi, noted for the palace of Rani (queen) Bhabani, a noted social worker.

Bimbisara: a great king of Haryanka dynasty of ancient Magadha and a protector of Buddhist culture.

Ashoka the Great: a great emperor of Maurya Dunasty, noted for his promotion of Buddhism.

Vidharbha: a place situated in Maharashtra in the northern part of the Deccan plateau, also an abode of some rulers who patronized the construction of some of the caves of famous Ajanta.

Shravasti: one of the six largest cities in India during the life time of Gautam Buddha who spent a part of his Monastic life in Shravasti.

Vidisha: a prosperous town in central India, now located in Madhya Pradesh; Emperor Ashoka governed here during his father’s lifetime.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:6 June 2019

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Again, these lines from the poem “Hi Chill” (Kite, Alas): *‘ke hai hriday khunre bedeana jagate bhalobase’* (trans. Who would want to suffer, digging up sorrow from the heart’s recesses?), remind us of that famous line from Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind”: “I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!” Here one thing must be mentioned that topical intertextual frames are very closely related to semantic intertextual frames. Topical frames are activated when a reader comes across various lexical items that give rise to related semantic intertextual frames.

6. Stylistic Intertextual Frames

Stylistic intertextual frames are related to the act of identification of formal and structural characteristics including quotations in a literary text. Here the idea of ‘genre’ is very closely related to the stylistic intertextual frames. For example, the poems in the poetic collection “Rupashi Bangla” are all sonnets some of which follow Petrarchian tradition of Octave and Sestet and some others follow Shakespearean model of three quatrains and a concluding couplet. We also find examples of some “ornamental quotations” that are actually repetition of a pretext in a subsequent text. As for instance, W B Yeats writes in his poem ‘The White Birds’:

For I would we were changed to white birds on the
Wondering foam: I and you....

Jibanananda writes in ‘Ami Jadi Hotam’ (‘If I were’):

If I were a wild drake, were you a wild duck...

‘Schema’ plays a vital role in identification of such frames. In a number of poems of Jibanananda like ‘Ghora’ (Horse), ‘Horinera’ (Deer), ‘Buno Hans’ (Wild Duck), ‘Hower Raat’ (Windy Night) etc, there is an influence of Surrealistic thoughts.

We are not yet dead – yet images are born all the time:
On the moon-lit pasture of an autumn night, Mohin’s horses graze,
As if from the Stone Age – still roaming, greedy for grass,
On this grotesque dynamo of the earth.

.....

In the round table the serene breath of time
Blows out the paraffin lamp,
As it touches the horses’ Neolithic moonlit silence.

(“Ghora”; Lines 1-4; 9-11; translation Utpal kr Basu)

Here are ample illustrations of the workings of the sub-conscious mind. Here manifested dreams and emotions are not controlled by reason or chain of logic.

7. Creativity and Intertextuality

From all the examples so far discussed, it may be said that intertextuality is a realization of the potentiality of language for indefinite extension of its resources to new contexts and situation. For a holistic consideration of creativity, the semantic, topical and stylistic intertextual frames must be taken

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into consideration. Among the three frames I have discussed, semantic intertextual frames are most creative since their creation depends solely on the cognitive models, individual readers possess. It depends on the activation of cognitive model 'Literary Entity' associated with a particular lexical concept. Here intertextual links create added layer of meaning. The richness that intertextual knowledge creates in the 'text world' exposes the creative nature of intertextuality. Here readers' creativity is seen as their ability to furnish the intertextuality based text world and richness that it acquires. But in case of stylistic intertextual frames, the degree of readers' creativity is more limited. Here the role of the author is more prominent because it is based on generic schematic activation. Moreover, affective responses like emotion are deeply correlated with intertextuality.

Readers can easily identify themselves with the protagonist of a literary text and sympathise with the feelings of the authorial intention. Such mode of communicative operation also serves as an adjustment of social relations. In this way the intertextual elements in the poems of Jibanananda Das are very much creative.

8. Conclusion

'Walking' bears a special meaning in different poems of Jibanananda Das. The poet himself walked extensively across various avenues of human thoughts, contextualized them in his own way and created a valid domain for 'aesthetic aptness'. By considering the intertextual links in the poems of Jibanananda Das the readers can have a distinct view of the text world created by both the poet and the readers. Both the author and the reader share a common cognitive space in relation to the alluded text. The structure of the text enriched with intertextual connections enhances the probable implicated premises of the text. The current approach also captures impressionist readings and emphasizes the importance of investigating responses of 'real readers'.

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