“Where were you so long?”: From Meaning to Being in the Mother-imago in Jibanananda Das’s “Banalata Sen”

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ABSTRACT
In the light of Lacanian dichotomy of “Being” and “Meaning,” the present article intends to illuminate how the protagonist’s journey of life in Jibanananda Das’s masterwork “Banalata Sen” (1942) proves to be a retreat to the Jungian “mother-imago.” This “imago” is the idealized image of the mother constituted by one’s infantile memory of her fulfilling self that remains preserved in the unconscious. It imbibes all the facets of womanhood. In essence, it is both instinctual and archetypal. The protagonist’s enterprising career in the human world invites into his life a sense of fatigue. He feels disintegrated into sundry worldly roles. The unconscious nostalgia for the unified “Being” eventually transmutes his aimless wanderings in the way of the world to a quest for love and fulfillment. Ultimately he succeeds in recapturing his defragmented entity, his “particular me,” as well as experiencing a sense of blissful serenity through his association with his “mother-imago,” Banalata Sen.

1. Introduction

I was tired of the sun, the moon, the road by me
In my aimless path, I came to thee.

– Das, “The Journey” (10)

The much-acclaimed twentieth century Bengali poet Jibanananda Das’s 1935 poem “Banalata Sen” is widely deemed “one of the most eternal poems of Bangla literature” (Jahangir, The Daily Star). It is a succinct but profound tale of love and fulfillment that seems to transcend the threshold of textual denotations to acquire universal significance. The story of “Banalata Sen” pivots around the weary wanderings of a man in the way of the world, and his eventual discovery of solace in a woman named Banalata Sen. Through vivid images primarily from history and mythology, Das portrays with rare poetic beauty the solitary journey of his protagonist for days and nights through the ages –

For aeons have I roamed the roads of the earth
From the seas of Ceylon to the stairs of Malaya

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I have journeyed, alone, in the enduring night,
And down the dark corridor of time, I have walked
Through the mist of Bimbisara, Ashoka, darker Vidarbha. (1–5)

The protagonist is on an ardent quest for something. However, his “soul” is overwhelmed with fatigue as a result of his wanderings which have proved futile eventually.

The rest of the poem is dedicated to depicting the tranquil rapture the proximity of Banalata Sen bestows upon him. Her beauty is ineffable, the coalescence of seeming familiarity and impenetrable mystery. The image of “bird’s-nest eyes” (14) conveys the protagonist’s realization that the sole object of his craving had always been Banalata Sen. In the final stanza, Das shows how in the propinquity of Banalata Sen, the protagonist relishes life in the silence of the darkened ambiance. He feels an inexplicable joy in the soul when evening descends “with the footfall of dew” (15) and “the world’s noise die” (17). At last, as the final lines seem to imply, he attains eternal bliss by transcending the human world, symbolized by the “darkness” around (21), and being united with Banalata Sen forever.

Das’s poem, as should become evident from the discussion above, poses some curious and, of course, interrelated questions. Who is Banalata Sen? What is her relationship with the protagonist? Why is it that the protagonist finds happiness and peace of mind in her presence? The objective of the present article is the unbolting of the answers by taking into consideration the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and Carl G. Jung.

It is, however, worth mentioning here that some critics and commentators have already attempted the answers to these questions from other angles. The Bengali critic Apurba Jahangir, for instance, says that Banalata Sen is a pure abstraction, the symbol of hope and love. The soul-withering journey of the protagonist is actually his quest for hope in the murk of despair by finding his true love. His journey eventually “leads [him] to the perfect woman,” Banalata Sen. He is endowed with hope on discovering in her the possibility of “eternal love.” Banalata Sen thus becomes “a ray of light among the darkness, a spark of merriment in the pool of barrenness” of the world for the protagonist (The Daily Star). Yeasmin and Mondal delineate Banalata Sen as the idealized image of the woman of imagination of the poet. She is primarily the beloved of the poet’s dream but sometimes appears also as a mother or a sister. In her, as they say, Das has portrayed the “ancient sanctuary for all human beings” (Yeasmin & Mondal 68). Coming to the “sanctuary,” that is, his beloved, the protagonist finds placid joy. The protagonist is implicitly the projection of the poet himself and the protagonist’s rapture, his own yearning. For Sultana Jahan, Banalata Sen is emblematic of the beauty of nature, especially that of Bengal. The protagonist’s journey to Banalata Sen bestows joy on him as he is able to retreat to his root, which is Bengal. Here again, the protagonist seems to be the projected self of the poet. “Bengal’s nature,” symbolized by Banalata Sen, is the permanent “source of comfort and shelter” for the poet (Jahan 91).

Now, quite differently from these interpretations, this article will try to establish Banalata Sen as the personification of the idealized image of the mother present in the unconscious of Das’s protagonist. But concomitantly, it will also claim that this unconscious image is situated in every person’s psyche. In this image (as such, in Banalata Sen) is embodied all the facets of womanhood and love. The image is molded by one’s
experience of the vicinity with the mother at the earliest stage of life. This article will convey how by discovering the fulfilling image of the mother in Banalata Sen, the protagonist is endowed with the opportunity to re-live infantile bliss. As such, the connection between Banalata Sen and the protagonist will be looked upon as the mother-infant relationship.

2. Jibanananda Das and “Banalata Sen”

Writing . . . helps us let go our built up emotions and thoughts and lay them out in front of us . . .

– Morrison, Teaching the Writerly Life

It is popularly believed that a piece of literary work often bears a relationship with the situation of the author’s life. The notion seems to be true vis-à-vis the connection between “Banalata Sen” and Jibanananda Das. However, before determining this relation, a brief introduction to the poet is necessary. Jibanananda Das (1899–1954), who is reckoned by many as the most influential figure of the post-Tagorean era in the Bengali literary world, played “a leading role in introducing modernist elements in Bengali poetry” (Das 30). His unorthodox poetic style, language, and images drawn equally from mythology, history, and everyday life, though at first received unfavorable opinions from the critics, in due course proved to exercise tremendous influence both on the readers and the emerging poets. Today he is placed among the most significant poets ever born in Bengal. The modern American scholar of Bengali language and literature, Clinton B. Seely, has called Das “Bengal’s most cherished poet since Rabindranath Tagore” (Seely, A Poet Apart 9).

Let us now consider the main issue – the relationship between “Banalata Sen” and Jibanananda Das’s life. “Banalata Sen” first appeared in 1935 in the December issue of the Bengali poetry magazine Kavita and later on became the titular poem of Das’s third collection of poetry that was published in 1942. At the time Das composed the poem, India was under British rule. There was social and political upheaval throughout the country. There was also student unrest in the educational institutions. It was due to such unrest that Das had lost his job as a lecturer in City College, Calcutta, some years back. Though recently he was able to procure a job in Brajamohan College, he was already crushed by poverty and professional disappointment. Das’s marital life was also a disaster. Besides, in many cases, his poems received unfavorable opinions from critics. All this resulted in tremendous emotional turmoil in him. He found himself lost in the abysmal gloom of despondency. He felt a desperate need for love and joy. It was precisely at this time that he wrote “Banalata Sen.” He was, as though, trying to attain through poetry something he found impossible to get in reality. The protagonist of the poem, as such, can easily be claimed as the projection of Das himself, and the protagonist’s discovery of solace in Banalata Sen, the symbolic rendering of the fulfillment of his yearning for happiness and love.

It is, however, worth mentioning here, not wise to claim “Banalata Sen” as nothing more than the symbolic reflection of Das’s situation or desire. The poem is far more than that. Das’s use of complex images and the synchronization of the sense expressed in the lines make the poem’s two characters get untangled from his mind or life to get related to
the life and psyche of humanity in general. The outcome is that the protagonist becomes every man and Banalata Sen his ultimate longing. Now, as this article intends to delineate in Banalata Sen the personified mother of infantile experience (the reason behind which will become clear eventually), an idea of the nature and significance of the mother-infant relationship becomes necessary to comprehend the protagonist’s desire or his connection with Banalata Sen. The idea along with the three questions it gives rise to are going to be presented in the next section. Upon those rest the essence of the entire argument of this article.

3. The primordial relationship: Freud and Lacan

Mother,
During those early, dearest days
I did not dream that you had
A large life which included me,
For I had a life
Which was only you.

– Angelou, Mother, a Cradle to Hold Me (ll. 11–16)

“To be human necessarily involves a loss” – this is how the architect of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), delineates the essence of the human condition (Easthope 27). The loss is initiated at an early stage in life, as with the crossing of the threshold of infancy, the elemental “dyadic unit of mother and child” is impaired (Mitchell 23). Before that, the infant savors intimacy with its mother, pivoting upon whom the little one’s whole world is constituted. This world is an ideal one, a world complete in itself. The affectionate care that the mother showers on the newborn provides immediate satisfaction to its every need. The infant lacks in nothing. It knows no despair, no fear. It experiences a sense of fulfillment and relishes unadulterated bliss.

The bonding of the neonate with the mother is the foundational relationship of life. It is the first relationship one ever establishes in the world. Denoting the attachment between the creation and the creator, it becomes the most primordial of all relationships. Its essence is love, one which is pure, fulfilling, and amoral. The little one whom “nature has . . . given to women as a substitute of the penis” discovers in the mother its first love (Freud, Pelican Freud 297). It loves the mother wholeheartedly not only because she provides its “biologically fixed needs . . . for nourishment, warmth,” and security (Eagleton 132), soothes its every pain, and endows it with her dedication and time, but she also functions as the satisfier of the first sexual urge that looms in its being. “[W]e are all,” says Freud, “destined to direct our first sexual impulses towards our mother” (Freud, The Interpretation 239). It is out of unblended love that the mother gratifies every need and craving of the infant. The infant loves its mother and also finds the emotion to be reciprocated by her in equal proportion. The 20th-century French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) states that to love is “essentially, to wish to be loved” (Lacan, Four Fundamental 253). Having the attribute of complete reciprocity, the love of infancy is naturally a fulfilling experience. Such an experience endows the little one with a sense of wholeness and unadulterated joy.
But with time, one needs to bid farewell to infancy on the way to becoming a child. For both Freud and Lacan, it is precisely this transition that splits the human psyche “between conscious and unconscious” (Easthope 26). Until now, the “little animal” (Easthope 90) had relished fulfillment in the world of the mother. But the time has come that it gets introduced to another world, the world of “culture and civilization” (Easthope 26). The new world is no longer a world complete in itself, for there is no mother to gratify the child’s urges. The founding factor of this world is the social code, or the rules of the human world, or even, in Lacanian term, “language” (Lacan, *Ecrits* 86), “a shared system” of humanity, and existing “out there” even before the child comes along (Easthope 91, 90). The child now becomes “an object” in the new world (*Ecrits* 86). The units or “signs” of this world can be combined and recombined into various signified(s) (Easthope 35). Quite obviously, the child no longer remains a separate, a whole entity. Lacan describes this transition in human life as the one “from Being to Meaning” (Easthope 91). “Being,” in simple terms, signifies the wholeness of existence the infant experiences in the world of the mother. Here one is entirely oneself. “Meaning,” contrarily, points to the disintegration of the self in the world of the human-oriented system. Here one identifies oneself “in language” (or social codes) but “only by losing [oneself]” (*Ecrits* 86).

The child is now no more the “particular me” (Easthope 91), a “Being” sensing fulfillment through satisfying love. That sense “has got lost in the transition” (Easthope 91). The transition can well be compared to the loss of Paradise. The world of the mother is synonymous with heaven, full of love and joy. However, the child is present in that world no longer. As with time, the child advances toward adulthood and gets more and more entangled in the world of “culture and civilization,” the memory of the previous world (that of the mother) recedes farther and farther away until it is thrust apparently into complete oblivion. Gradually one gets used to one’s fragmented entity in the human world, and the standards of the new world become normalcy for the person.

Though apparently the fulfilling, blissful experience of infancy is forgotten in adulthood, is it possible that it gets completely erased from the psyche? Is it possible that the memory of the mother, the person with whom one’s first-ever relation is established, the relation ennobling him or her in infancy with the most satisfying form of love, is substituted utterly by the code, the “language” of the fragmented world of “culture and civilization?” Is there any likelihood that the yearning to regain the “Being,” the “particular me,” now never emerges in one’s person? Let us attempt to shed light on the answers through “Banalata Sen” as that will also satiate the questions posed in the beginning.

### 4. Fragmentation and lack in the world of “Meaning”

These fragments I have shored against my ruins.

— Eliot, *The Waste Land*, *V* (l. 110)

As “Banalata Sen” opens, one sees the protagonist who has “roamed the roads of the earth” for “aemons,” and is now “weary” of his wanderings (1, 6). The “roads of the earth” is symbolic of the human world of “culture and civilization,” one which has consumed his entire “Being,” his “particular me” with his separation from his mother, to substitute that with “Meaning” with its code or language. The language of this world, quite unlike the
tacit language he exchanged exclusively with his mother in infancy, being a “shared system,” his meaningful existence has fragmented his entity in accordance with the syntax of that language. Like any person living in this world, he has become a role-player, performing sundry roles that life in this world demands. One can imagine him quite conveniently as a son, a friend, a husband, a father, a man of a profession, and so on. Each role is a fragment of his present meaningful entity. The image of his roaming on the “roads of the earth” signifies his engagement in these roles. He might have performed each role with earnest enthusiasm and adroitness all along, and that might have endowed him with worldly prosperity. But the fragments of his entity have concurrently ensured the loss of the “particular me,” the unified self that he was in his infancy in his attachment to his mother.

The intensity of his engagement in worldly roles gets conveyed by the span of his journey. He has “journeyed” (3) throughout the world,

From the seas of Ceylon to the straits of Malaya

... Through mist of Bimbisara, Ashoka, darker Vidarbha. (2, 5)

The poetic genius of Jibanananda Das gets revealed in these lines. He eradicates the barrier between the past and the present and condenses the whole world in the wanderings of his protagonist. In this way, he universalizes the protagonist’s mundane engagement. What the protagonist has been doing all along had been performed in ancient times by the great emperors like Bimbisara or Ashoka, the people contemporary to them, as well as by the citizens of Vidarbha. They have all played their roles following the syntax of the worldly language. The same is true about the world the protagonist finds himself in. Everyone here is dedicated to his or her role in making life meaningful. Consequently, the fragmented entity of the protagonist is symbolic of the situation of the entire humanity. Human history, as such, can quite conveniently be claimed to have been composed of the fragments of humankind. The pages of history record, or at least emphasize, a single role (or some particular roles) of a person, which becomes meaningful in its relation to the enterprise of humanity on the whole encoded in the language of “culture and civilization.” The universality of the protagonist’s engagement in his roles gets underscored once again by the time he has expended in his journey – he has “roamed the roads of the earth” for “aeons” (1) and, as such, has experienced history through the rise and fall of civilizations. The protagonist becomes every person, one whose journey becomes symbolic of that of humanity in general, per se. Herein rests the greatness of “Banalata Sen.”

The protagonist’s success in endowing his life with meaning has not only disintegrated his “Being” but also made him forgetful about the world of the mother where the “Being” had emerged and got nurtured. The memory of that world got repressed in the “unconscious” of his psyche. The obvious consequence is a void or, in Lacanian terms, a “lack” in him (Lacan, The Seminar 223). His lack is, however, threefold. He lacks not only in “Being” (ensured by his fragmented self) but also in love and joy, all of which he was provided with in infancy. The discussion has already been undertaken above about the first lack. The second two lacks are, in a sense, paradoxical in nature. It is because whereas adulthood makes one utterly forgetful of one’s “Being,” people might feel time and again to be experiencing love and happiness in their “Meaning.” Of course, love peeps into
one’s life even in the world of “culture and civilization” through the parents, the sibling(s), the friend(s), the beloved or the lover, and so on. But love in each case represents merely one facet of the love in the wholeness experienced in infancy. The love one shares with one’s sibling(s), for instance, is quite different in essence from the one the person experiences with the beloved or the lover. Thus, the fulfilling emotion related to “Being,” one which bears in its foundation selflessness, reciprocity, affection, care, playfulness, as well as sexual overtones, gets fragmented in relation to one’s “Meaning.” That is why the love of “Meaning” fails to exalt a person like the one endowed on a “Being.” A person lacking in wholeness both in his or her self and in the experience of love (the primary emotion of life for being the constituent of the first relationship one establishes in the world) can scarcely be claimed to relish pure joy. Joy in the person’s life is volatile. Like love, it is fragmented and perpetually threatened by an imminent sorrow. In his immortal Skylark Ode, the English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) delineates the love of adulthood as clouded by “sad satiety” and the joy as the one in which “some pain is fraught” (ll. 80, 89). However, the evident outcome of the threefold lack in the protagonist’s life is his sense of weariness. In utter anguish, he feels that “Round [his] weary soul, the angry waves still roar” (6). The “angry waves” become a metaphor for the exasperation that the world of “culture and civilization” has fetched in him. This exasperation is an attribute he shares with all of humankind.

5. The desire for “Being” in the mother’s world: Jung

... I no longer seek in the stars or in books; I’m beginning to hear the teachings of my blood pulsing within me.

– Hesse, Demian (10)

The threefold lack “that cuts into” the protagonist’s life generates in him “the eternalisation’ of desire since desire is always desire for what is lacking” (Easthope 92). But because the memory of the mother’s world, a world the separation from which has triggered the lack in him, has been repressed long since in the unconscious, he does not become aware of what he actually lacks. He also remains oblivious of the nature of his desire as such. Like any dweller in the adult world, he dedicates his time and energy to the accomplishment of numerous mundane enterprises, misrecognizing those as spawning his desire. His desire becomes insatiable as, despite executing every worldly task with the greatest possible success, he gets frustrated every time in sensing the void still looming in him. Eventually, he gets “weary” of his meaningful existence and loses peace of mind. He, as though, becomes aware of the absurdity of his “Meaning.” This awareness until the present was primarily unconscious, but from there had always haunted his conscious self. According to Freud, “thoughts and emotions outside of our awareness [of the unconscious] continue to exert an influence on our behaviors [or actions]” (Cherry). The ceaseless haunting of the unconscious, mingled with his feeling of the inner void, eventually propels the awareness to his consciousness.

Once he becomes aware of the absurdity of his “Meaning,” his journey turns into a quest, the quest for happiness and peace of mind. The yearning for joy and inner calm, stemming from his unconscious and becoming now the preponderant facet of his conscious self, brings him, what can best be expressed by the phrase the 20th-century
Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho (1947 –) uses in his 1988 novel, *The Alchemist*, “closest to the Soul of the World” (Coelho 75). The “Soul of the World” is the essence that underlies all creation. It is something perennial and changeless. As though the entire universe now begins helping him get what he desires so ardently. His lifelong wandering, proved futile until the present, suddenly becomes fruitful as he arrives at a place called “Natore” (7). It is here that he sees Banalata Sen. As if for the first time in life, he experiences a profound inner calm. He realizes that he has arrived at his destination. As he sees Banalata Sen, he knows what his life has remained devoid of all along. It is love. His genuine desire, he feels, has always been the attainment of love. This love, however, is not one among the sundry forms of love he is cognizant of, not the one that bears the capacity to satiate only a part of his inner void, not even the one that is fleeting or assumes a different intensity or disposition with time. The love he experiences in the proximity of Banalata Sen casts an enchantment on him by endowing him with a sense of wholeness. He relishes love in its primordial form, the form in which he had savored the emotion in his infancy in connection with his mother, and since the split in his psyche, which had remained repressed in the unconscious, but from there had always haunted his conscious self in multifarious forms of misrecognized desires. He is enraptured by discovering that he now wants nothing. He can hear no more the rumbling of “the angry waves” around his “weary soul” (6).

On experiencing the wholesome love, an unspeakable bliss emerges in the core of the protagonist’s being. Das uses a beautiful simile to enunciate this ecstatic state:

I saw her as a sailor after the storm  
Rudderless in the sea, spies all of a sudden  
The grass-green heart of the leafy island. (10–12)

The sailor’s rudderless voyage on the sea can well be delineated as the protagonist’s restless enterprise for sensing his “Meaning” in its entirety. But as “Meaning” is indivisible from disintegration, his treading on the way of the world has brought in him the sense of weariness with repeated foundering. The profound joy that a mariner, after being entangled in the tempest for days, senses on viewing a “leafy island” is the inner tranquillity that the protagonist experiences on his encounter with Banalata Sen. She is his refuge and also the idealized image of the primordial self that rests as the essence not only of his “Being,” but also that of every person. She has a close kinship with “the Soul of the World.” In her primeval image, the conscious desire gets interlaced with the unconscious memory. This memory, in accordance with the 20th-century Swiss psychoanalyst Carl G. Jung (1875–1961), is concomitantly instinctual and archetypal (Jung, *Aion* 9–10).

Significantly, the protagonist meets Banalata Sen at Natore. Das’s use of “Natore” as the culminating point of his protagonist’s journey is pretty intriguing. Natore is, after all, a real place, “a small town … within Bengal well to the north of Barisal and Kolkata … where Jibanananda resided for the most of his life” (Seely, *The Scent* 112). The real Natore is pretty dissimilar from the serene “leafy island,” the magical abode of the primeval mother figure, Banalata Sen, of the poem. However, it is to be remembered that Das only uses the name, not the traits of the real Natore, to portray his “Natore.” He chooses the name of that town probably because it was “the cultural and heritage hub of ancient Bengal” (*The Daily Star*). Das’s “Natore” might make the reader reminiscent of the Byzantium that the celebrated Irish poet W. B. Yeats (1865–1939)
has portrayed in his timeless classic “Sailing to Byzantium” (1928). In Yeats’s own words, “Byzantium was the center of European civilization and the source of its spiritual philosophy” (Yeats, qtd. in Jeffares 217). As Yeats’s Byzantium promises permanence and bliss through purification of the worldly self (“Meaning”), Das’s “Natore” showers on the protagonist perpetual love and joy by bringing him back to that primordial figure he had lost with his loss of infancy. In this sense, Das’s “Natore,” like Yeats’s Byzantium, acquires a mythical significance.

The protagonist’s distance with his “Meaning” now gets widened exceedingly. That ensures his vicinity to his “Being.” He transcends the world of “culture and civilization” by descending from his wrecked ship (his fragmented self) on the “leafy island” (12) of Banalata Sen (the world of fulfillment). His situation at this stage can well be dramatized as that of “a man living regressively, seeking his childhood and his mother, fleeing from a cold, cruel world which denies him understanding” (Aion 9). He is seeking

the protecting, nourishing charmed circle of the mother, the condition of the infant released from every care, in which the outside world bends over him and forces happiness upon him.

(Aion 9)

Das brilliantly delineates the union between the son (the protagonist) and the mother (Banalata Sen) in the subsequent lines of the poem. It is pretty significant as well as apparent that it is not merely the son whose self was parched for the union (though he was unconscious of the fact until the present), but the mother was longing for her son with equal keenness. Wistfully “With her bird’s-nest eyes,” Banalata Sen asks him, “‘Where were you so long?’” (14, 13). It seems as though she had summoned him again and again from the unconscious to retreat to her world from the “cold, cruel” one, but his enterprising career in the conscious world, one dedicated to codifying his “Meaning,” had kept him deaf of her plea. But now that he has become aware of the primeval bonding with his mother, the absence of which has resulted in all his misrecognized desires, her eyes take on the shape of a “bird’s-nest.” She is his home, his destination. In search of her, he has “journeyed, alone, in the enduring night” (3). But now, her propinquity eradicates all his pain, all his weariness by reorganizing the disintegrated parts of his “Meaning” to remold those into his “Being.” That is why, coming to her, he attains peace of mind, something which he has remained devoid of all his life. He says, “My only peace I knew with Banalata Sen of Natore” (7). “Though the comparison between eyes and bird’s-nest is apparently far-fetched,” says Jahan,

a profound meaning can be traced [in the comparison] as the bird’s-nest signifies peaceful shelter of a bird. The incoherent image of “bird’s nest-like eyes” capture the dominant tone of the poem: rest and repose... The mood [of the poem] is endowed with an alienated heart frequently seeking safe heaven in the heart of a woman. (Jahan 90)

Through the union with Banalata Sen, the protagonist once again discovers “the particular me,” something which was lost long ago “in the transition” (Easthope 91). The discovery makes him blissfully serene. In the words of Jung, the essence of this union is the “immemorial and most sacred archetype of the marriage of mother and son” (Aion 10). The relation the union points to is the one that has been present in the core of the world since the birth of creation.
6. Conclusion: “Dying into life”

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain.  
— Keats, *Ode to a Nightingale* (ll. 55–56)

As the protagonist is unified with Banalata Sen, the whole ambiance becomes tranquil and magical, as if every element in nature is eager to pave his path of experiencing a profound inner calm. Das uses beautiful images to depict the backdrop against which the union takes place:

As the footfall of dew comes evening;  
The raven wipes the smell of warm sun  
From its wings; the world’s noises die.  
And in the light of fireflies the manuscript  
Prepares to weave the fables of night;  
Every bird is home, every river reaches the ocean.  
Darkness remains; and time for Banalata Sen. (15–21)

The time, it is pretty significant to mention, is everything. It is the time when the earth becomes indolent, and every creature returns home after a day’s weary undertakings. The raven’s wings declare the setting of the sun, the bird closes eyes in the nest, and the river “reaches the ocean.” The children being “weary” become “ready for rest” round “the laps of their mothers” (Blake, *The Echoing* ll. 21, 28, 25). It is also the time when the protagonist retreats to Banalata Sen, the personified entity of his “mother-imago” (*Aion* 10), being tired of the absurdity of the ventures of the “world of culture and civilization.” This “imago” is the idealized image of the mother imbibing all the facets of womanhood, especially those associated with love, care, and fulfillment. It was molded by his idea of his mother’s fulfilling self, experienced during infancy, and was preserved in his unconscious since the fateful “split” in his psyche. But the “imago” also has an archetypal dimension. It is because the mother-child (infant) relationship, as indicated above, is the most primordial of all the relationships known to humanity. It is the earliest episode in everyone’s life. So, the “mother-imago” is not an exclusive possession of the protagonist’s psyche. It is rooted in the unconscious of every person. The “imago” is concomitantly “instinctual and archetypal,” the first dimension of which “includes the natural impulses [of an individual], [and] the second the dominants that emerge into consciousness as [a] universal idea” (*Jung, On The Nature* 151). In this way, even the protagonist’s blissful experience acquires universality, and he becomes a representative of humanity once again.

However, in the proximity of Banalata Sen, the protagonist becomes a little child once more to rest around “the lap” of his mother. He is rather an infant, experiencing love in its primordial form, the love which is selfless, amoral, and fulfilling, the love from which has emerged all the love-forms the consciousness ever becomes aware of. His conscious experience merging in his long-cherished unconscious desire and the archetypal image of the mother, he experiences an inexplicable bliss. Banalata Sen, “the mother,”

at this level . . . is both old and young, Demeter and Persephone, and the son is spouse, and sleeping suckling rolled into one. The imperfections of real life, with its laborious adaptations and manifold disappointments, naturally cannot compete with such a state of indescribable fulfilment. (*Aion* 10)
The protagonist thus withdraws to his first love, the image of which is ageless like “the Soul of the World.” Banalata Sen appears to him as a friend and a beloved, besides appearing, of course, as a mother. All these roles merge in the “mother-imago,” which is very much identical to his first impression of his mother founded in his infancy and which until the present had rested in his unconscious as the aftermath of the “split” in his psyche. Banalata Sen showers on him a love that comprises every facet of the emotion. Once again, the protagonist becomes “the particular me” by escaping to the world that he shares exclusively with Banalata Sen (the mother). The whole “Meaning” of his entity gets consumed in the darkness of the night illumined by “fireflies” (18), and his “Being” once again becomes capable of narrating to the mother the story of undiluted joy in the tacit language of infancy. He dies in the human world to be reborn in a world of “dyadic unit,” his true abode. His death is a sort of “Dying into life.” The journey of his life thus ends where it had begun. Das, in this way, masterfully delineates the story of the narrator’s regaining his lost Paradise in his isolated existence with Banalata Sen, and through this story points to the fact that in the root of all happiness, love, or fulfillment of life lies one’s relation to a primeval figure, one which “point[s] unmistakably to the mother” (Aion 9).

Notes

1. Das’s love for Bengal’s nature constitutes the central theme of his collection of poems, Bengal the Beautiful (1957).
2. Bimbisara (558 BC – 491 BC), a king of Magadha in ancient India, was from the Haryanka dynasty.
3. Emperor Ashoka (304 BC – 232 BC) was arguably the greatest ruler of the Maurya dynasty. He ruled over almost the entire region of the Indian subcontinent from 273 BC (arguably, 268 BC) to 232 BC.
4. The name of a city in ancient India (cf. Seely, The Scent of Sunlight, 112).
5. This is the title of Chapter IX of John Middleton Murry’s book, Keats and Shakespeare. Oxford University Press, 1926, p. 112.
6. Only line numbers are mentioned while referring to “Banalata Sen.”

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