Chapter 4

VISION OF HUMANITY THROUGH THE PRISM OF CHARACTER ANALYSIS

The short story is fundamentally and principally the story of men. Even the stories of birds and beasts have human elements as their principal concern. The stories need characters to illustrate the themes. But these characters are much more than mere pawns: the writer's magical powers make them vibrant and throbbing.

Once the background has been set, the characters appear one after another. They act and behave as per age-old conventions. They carry within and without traditional ideas and thoughts. At least, that is what they usually do. In the hand of talented writers, some of them come surprisingly alive.

It is desirable that there should not be many characters in a short story, for it is not possible for the writer to portray the inner maze of a crowd of men and women within given limits of this literary form. He must therefore deal with as few characters as possible.

These characters should act as the writer's agents and carry the story forward. But the story also controls their action. In other words, they are as much led as leading.

The art of characterization is built upon description and dialogue. The writer may himself describe a character or he may make other characters do it on his behalf. The
characters may reveal themselves in their speeches, or may get revealed through other peoples conversations.

Sometimes the characters are revealed through their actions. However, it is not desirable to expose the characters by extraneous means. The writer ought to enter into the inner recesses of their mind, and measure them in the light of their thoughts, experiences, actions and reactions.

The short story cannot portray the whole life of its characters. Of necessity it selects a part or a distinctive feature of the said life. Its success depends on the accuracy and justness of that portrayal.

Some characters grow, some other do not. The former are conceived in the round: they keep evolving in a dialectical context and become complex and enigmatic in the process. The latter are static and flat and monochromatic, and the reader has no difficulty in taking their measure at once. Such characters make excellent comic staff, but they are ill suited to tragic purpose. As a foreign critic has aptly said: "Flat people ... are best when they are comic. A serious or tragic flat character is apt to be a bore."¹

In his 'Aspects of Novel', Forrester has shown when and how a 'round' character becomes a successful artistic creation. According to him, every man lives in two worlds.
One of these worlds is external and evident. The other is the internal, invisible world of true passions. A character comes alive when these true passions get artistically reflected.

The characters can be classified as individuals and types. A 'type' character represents only one aspect of human life and is, therefore, easy to judge. The epics and romances are full of types. In the writings of the moderns, these types have come to be known as 'flat' characters. "Many people look down upon and criticise such characters, but such characters shall ever be needed."2 The novelist cannot but accommodate them. Their unlinearity is their strength. They remain unforgettable in their distinct, uncomplicated particularity. The earlier faith in man's humanity got lost in the post-Renaissance days. The earlier practice in the novel and the story of presenting the characters as a queer mix of goodness and evil has also been abandoned. Today the presentation of a man's humanness is not considered as important as it had been in the days gone by. What matters now is the presentation of man's biological self. A flat character has his or her birth in such a concept.

The mind of the modern man is difficult read. His conscious and subconscious thoughts from a mysterious, unintelligible chiaroscuro. Freudian ideas have deeply influenced the mind of the novelists. Let us recall what Evans has said: "They (novelists) gained through him a sense that the conscious life was only a small part of man's
existence and the mind, instead of being ordered and logical, was like a misbehaved and disordered menagerie.\(^3\)

The realistic novelists of the West cast away all illusions and undertook the task of revealing man's true self. They took into account the biological as well as economic factors of human life. This realism entered, though late, also into Bengali literature. The writings of Pramatha Chaudhuri showed the first signs of the influence of the literature of France. In the very early part of the 20th century a group of writers came together under the banner of the magazine, 'Bhārati'. The younger ones among them, led by Monilal Gangopadhyaya, started translating foreign realistic works into Bengali. They could not however, produce anything truly original. The first original realistic novel was written by Nareshchandra Sen Gupta, though he had been somewhat anticipated by Sureshchandra Bandyopadhyay in his novel 'Mathkathā'. Since Sureshchandra had written for 'Bhārati' and Nareshchandra for 'Nārāyan', a critic said: "Realism made its beginning in Bharati; Nārāyan largely brought it up."\(^4\) The writings in 'Basantikā' (1922), published from Dacca, initiated this revolutionary change in Bengali literature. Of course, the movement gathered real momentum in the 'Kalol-Ace'. The writers learnt of the psychology of sex from Freud and Havelock Ellis; their socialistic awareness they owed to Marx. This is not to say that every one of them was a true realist; as a matter of fact, many of them wrote in a spirit of wild abandon. Notwithstanding all this, the
literature of the age was chiefly characterised by the wide expanse of its themes. Till then Bengali literature had been concerned with the rich and the high-ups, or with such ordinary people as were extraordinary in one respect or another. But the literature of this age focused its attention also on slum dwellers, jute mill workers and miners. These people were mostly merely biological entities, least affected by progress and civilization. Some of the writers of the day portrayed not only the exterior of these people, but also feelingly revealed their inner life.

It has been said that Gokulchandra Nag’s "Pathik" paved the way for the modern novel. We shall not go into any detailed discussion in this regard, but we can safely assert that the realistic movement initiated in the 19th century found in this novel its first full expression and through it came to greatly influence Bengali literature. We shall now try to see whether this influence produced anything worthwhile.

Literary realism can be produced by one who is free from all illusions. The Kallolites were bohemians, intensely intolerant of traditional values and norms. Anarchy was what they wanted to achieve and the literature of the West, granting them a glimpse of this anarchy, excited them. But their writings failed to bring into focus the mental disorders so remarkably reflected in Western literature. Consequently, the literature of the Kallol group could hardly rise above the
level of fashion. "Modern literature evolved out of a crisis in the life and thoughts of Europe ... In our country, it has emerged neither from necessity nor from any profound realization. This is why our modern literature mostly looks so artificial. It has just been reduced to a fashion." In their blind rage the Kallolites attacked Rabindranath; their blind love drew them towards the Russian and Scandinavian literature. In other words, they could not judge things objectively. There were, however, some exceptions. Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay and Jagadish Gupta kept up the true realistic tradition in Bengali literature.

Sailajananda was a Kallolite. Rabindranath complimented him as a writer and wrote: "He knows the life of the poor and he knows how to write. This is why there is nothing artificial about his depiction of poverty." of Jagadish Chandra, who never enjoyed any popularity and was ignored even by the enlightened critics, Sukumar Sen wrote: "Jagadish Chandra was extraordinarily powerful as a writer. Perhaps that was why he could not become even a group-leader of the modern writers." 6

Though both Sailajananda and Jagadish were realists, they were different from each other in some respects. Hiren Chattopadhyay wrote: "While Sailajananda concentrates more on his plot, Jagadish Gupta takes more care of his characters. Sailajananda looks for realism in subject-matter, context and circumstance and his characters, thoroughly identified with
these, are presented mainly as biological entities, on the contrary, Jagadish Gupta's keen insight discovers the unknown human personality in the familiar context and circumstance.9

Since our theme is Jagadish Gupta's art of characterisation, we have little scope for discussing Sailajananda's art. But we must respectfully remember him as a precursor of realism in Bengali literature.

There is room for doubt as to the aptness and naturalness of Jagadish Gupta's art of characterisation. Rabindranath had bitterly criticised "Lalhu-guru". But the same Rabindranath welcomed the publication of his first collection of short stories, 'Binodini' with the words: "I am happy with the new flavour and form of your stories."10

We shall later talk about the form. As to the flavour, it issued from Jagadish's unique ability to lay bare the innermost self of man. He himself was quite conscious of the uniqueness of his stories. He was more or less certain that the readers and critics of conventional literature would little appreciate his art. He said so in a letter to Muralidhar Basu, the editor of 'Kalikalam': "The characters have been presented frankly and uninhibitedly. You can't find them acceptable."11 He knew that his stories were refused because his characters were unacceptable. A critic said: "Jagadish's writings principally aim at exposing man's smallness, meanness and inhumanity."12 He wrote, it was said, "not of the glory of man, but of the lack of it."13 Such a
charge had once been pressed against Sartre. Sartre wrote:

"The essential charge laid against us is of course that of our emphasis upon the evil side of human life... So it appears that ugliness is being identified with existentialism."

He further said: 'Existentialism is humanism'. "This is humanism because we reminded man that there is no legislator but himself, that he himself, thus abandoned, must decide for himself, also because we shew that it is not by turning back upon himself but always by turning beyond himself, an aim which is one of liberation or of some particular realization, that man can realise himself as truly human... What man needs is to find himself again and to understand that nothing can save him from himself, not even a valid proof of the existence of God... In this sense existentialism is optimistic."

It is true that Jagadish Gupta did not present life as dream-like. He gave an unadorned account of man's struggle for existence. His compassion for man is evident in his novels and stories. He did not allow his own understanding to be changed or disturbed under external pressure. His characters are certainly no strangers: we come across their real-life counterparts often in our day-to-day life. A barber like Rati, a mother like Horimohini, a couple like Guru and Kamala, a neglected lawyer, an old pensioner, a meen-minded man like Sadukhan, a worthless son like Tamal: are not these men and women like the ones we come across in our daily life?"
The third decade of the 20th century witnessed the erosion of all human values and the dissolution of all human dignity. This was a post-war development. Jagadish made no attempt to assert the glory of life in order to assure and console the grief-stricken readers of his day. Certainly, he highlighted man's state of confusion and helplessness. He owed it to the society he belonged to. He could not ignore the truth of life and give in to the lure of artistic imagination.

"He hit at the economic and social disparities and tried thus to ensure that man got back his glory." This statement is only partially true. His writings certainly brought out the said disparities, but in the most objective manner possible. The writer remained uninvolved throughout; never did he display any missionary zeal.

What Jagadish Gupta really did was to make man aware of his own limitations. Unlike Rabindranath, he did not find any trace of nobility in human sorrow. He did not think that man's sufferings would ultimately lead to glory and greatness. He was convinced that man originated from suffering, developed and changed through suffering and would also melt into suffering in the end. This being the human situation, how could man achieve honour and distinction?

Jagadish Gupta's stories are about the poverty and miseries of the moneyless and the lower middle-class people of the countryside. He did not have anything in particular to say about the social problems, let alone suggesting any solution.
"He did not always raise social problems; he did not sharply protest against social oppressions and deceptions."\(^16\) He explained the why of it thus: "Words can only excite human sensibilities; to get things done, man must first realise his own needs."\(^17\) In any case, all agree that the writer's primary duty is to correctly portray life, not to highlight social problems and suggest solutions.

Almost all of Jagadish Gupta's stories carry the burden of the sorrows of life. But they do not provoke any heart-rending cry or anguish. So we find in them Fate's cruelties and man's foolish expectations, we are filled with a profound sense of pity.

It needs no telling that like any other realistic writer Jagadish Gupta also wrote of his age and of the men and women of the day. But his stories cannot be called 'dated'; relevant for his times, they were meant to be relevant for the times to come.

"Rabindranath's stories had once been derisively termed as 'unrealistic' by some of his critics. It meant that his poems and stories are exclusively products of his imagination, having, therefore, no relation to the sorrows and joys, and hopes and despairs in the daily life of the men and women of Bengal. Even Bipinchandra Pal laid such a charge. But Rabindranath's short stories were certainly not products of mere imagination. They were but the expression of the truth which Rabindranath had gleaned out of his profound experiences
and feelings. At that time he wrote in a letter: "I can clearly see the reality of everything, but even in the midst of all smallness and self conflict I feel the presence of an inexpressibly divine mystery." 

As far as their visions were concerned Rabindranath and Jagadish Gupta were poles asunder. Jagadish's study of man did not lead him to any 'divine mystery'; the mystery he came up to was exclusively earthly. He expressed in his stories what he felt to be real and what he felt to be real lacked powers of transcendence.

No writer can cover all the aspects of human life. Of necessity one has to be selective, his selection being determined by the peculiarity of his mental make-up. Rabindranath looked into one aspect of life and took it as real. Jagadish Gupta looked into another aspect of life and took it as real. The expression in his stories of his Fate-awareness greatly influences and widens our limited sense of life. His stories depict man's defeat in the hand of cruel Fate, and give voice to man's sorrows and sufferings, but there is a peculiar boldness about the way in which all this is done.

The discussion has so long been based on Jagadish Gupta's total or comprehensive view of man. This view emerges from his patterning and analysis of characters and incidents. By taking into account the many actions, relations, joys and sorrows of a variety of people, he tries to establish the very identity of man. However, as a short story writer, he had to
select a portion of life and deal with it; but as a true artist he knew the art of transforming the part into a comprehensive whole.

There is no single rule governing the art of characterization. Different writers follow different ways. The art changes with the local, temporal and attitudinal shifts. The difference in the outlooks of Rabindranath and Manik Bandyopadhyay accounts for the big difference in their arts of characterization. The Kallolites and Jagadish Gupta belonged to the same country and the same age, but their methods of character-depiction had little in common.

Before we discuss the distinctive nature of the realistic presentation of Jagadish Gupta's characters, it shall be in order to say a few words about their variety. In this regard, we shall take into consideration only his short stories and leave out his novels, since the latter do not come under our purview.

In his stories we come across a variety of people from various strata of life: poor people, briefless lawyers, idealists, prostitutes, the superstitious, to name a few.

He objectively discerned the multi-directional movements of the human psyche. One of these movements, unique in its nature, has been recorded in 'Ādi Kathār Ḋkti'. There he has portrayed with remarkable artistic skill man's life tossed upon tears, envy, greed, selfishness and also joy.
background is almost primal. Each character, representing one or more of the primitive instincts, is surprisingly alive.

Such unforgettable characters as Krishnakanta, Shibapriya, Subal, Satkarhi, and Lila represent the bolder aspects of life. But Jagadish Gupta wrote also of other people. If on the one hand he expressed his feeling concern for the simple-hearted, unostentatious villagers, on the other he wrote of a variety of people variously suffering the pains of life in such stories as 'Jagannāther Yantranā', 'Māre Kesta Nākhe Ke', 'Kāmākhya Karmacūḍe', 'Gyāthā Kanda', 'Byastabācīsh', 'Adhrubam Nastameba hi', 'Chār Raysay Ek Ānā', 'Satyashīber Bau' and 'Kāpālik O Māhākāli'. Those who think that Jagadish Gupta's characters lack variety would be better advised to pit Keshablal or Subal against Jagannath of 'Jagannath's Yantranā', or compare Satkarhi with the paying guest of the story 'Paying Guest'. They should also separately consider the characters of Maya (in Putra and Putrabadhu) and Trilokpati (in Trilokpati's Tirthabhraman). All this will surely convince them that each of these characters is a distinct personality - distinct in his or her own hopes and despair, distinct, in other words, in his or her own experience and understanding of life.

It is true that Jagadish Gupta's characters are relatively little involved in the conflicts of real life. But they are certainly neither types nor creations of mere romantic fancy. They have a flesh and blood existence of
their own, so much so that they look exactly like the men and women of the world we live in.

One may ask why Jagadish Gupta depicted his characters thus. Why did he not, while presenting them as life like, sharpen their conflicts? Or why did he not use them for the creation of an atmosphere of sweetness.

The answer to these questions can be had only with reference to Jagadish Gupta’s own personality. As a human being he was unostentatious and detached, his own experiences of life accounting for his detachment. His own mental make-up largely determined the mental make-up of his characters. This is nothing to be wondered at. The mental make-up of every writer necessarily influences the mind of his characters. So one can express what he himself does not think and feel. However, a character becomes an artistic success not merely by bearing the stamp of the writer’s personality. A lot more is needed for the creation of a character of artistic value.

First and foremost, a character, in order to be convincing to the reader, must appear probable and real. Be he or she a monk, or a murderer, or a drunk, or an artist, or an idealist, his or her identity must be established and developed through appropriate actions. He or she would be accepted as natural and recognised as an artistic success only if the writer succeeds in forcing in his readers a suspension of disbelief and creating an illusion of reality.
Judged in this light, most of Jagadish Gupta's characters are real and artistically evolved. Such characters as the idealist Trilokpati, and such very ordinary people as Shibapriya, Tamal, Jagannath, Keshablal, Subal, Makhan, Maya and Parvati create quite an illusion of reality. But Jagadish Gupta could portray women better than men. Most of the male characters in his stories are victims of psychological perversion of one kind or another. Some of them are sex-perverts, some are prey to limitless envy, and some others are driven by pessimism. They fret all the time, ignore what they have, and keep running after what is beyond their reach. The women characters shine in comparison. They expect nothing; they keep away from the limelight, and their strength lies in this attitude. Amala does not lose patience despite all adversities and sufferings, and tries to protect her husband. Subarna nurses her father-in-law. Makhan and Maya withdraw themselves from public attention. Kshanaprava denied even the least of happiness, turns insane. Pile fights against Fate and comes out victorious.

Jagadish Gupta had presented in his stories a variety of women characters. He revealed each one's unique personality without ever pausing to care for her social acceptability.

The portrayal of the character of Krishnakanta or of Keshablal is not just a dazzling novelty; it is an important discovery. Pramatha Bishi said: "The act of creation means calling into existence what had never existed before. Discovery
Jagadish Gupta had written in a letter to Muralidhar Basu, the editor of 'Kālikalam'. "The present day stories often deal with secret love affairs, miseries in life in the slums with prostitutes and persecuted women." Evidently, he was aware of all the problems of his day, but he chose only the well-known ones as his artistic material.

Like many of his contemporaries, he also wrote of the helplessness and suffering of women. Saratchandra’s writings had immortalised such suffering and pain. But Saratchandra and Jagadish were different in their attitudes and manners of expression. Saratchandra was sympathetically identified with the suffering women of his stories and novels, while Jagadish remained surprisingly detached. He did reveal the sorrows and sufferings in women’s life, but he shed no tears and clearly uttered no words of sympathy. He did it all with an excellent sense of control and economy and with as little expression of personal opinion as possible.

The story 'Kalarıkita Samparka' realistically portrays Makhan’s distressed mind. She suffers intensely on account of her husband’s attitude and her conservative and superstition-filled circumstance. But the writer appears to be detached. He appears to be detached and realistic in a good many other stories.
To come back to Makhan. She is a married village woman, married to Satkarhi, a good for nothing libertine. The latter was caught in his attempt to rape a young widow in the fair at Madhudanga. When after a long stay in the jail, he is about to come back, Makhan shrinks in aversion. While others at home rejoice, Makhan wonders how she can accept him as her husband. She is an uneducated woman, fed since her birth, upon superstitious ideas about marriage and eternal loyalty to the husband, and still her inner self wants to protest against her husband’s inhuman dissoluteness. The very sordid prospect of Satkarhi’s return when she is his wife would be obliged to serve him knocks her senseless. “She is a wife, an outsider now turned an insider. No one has ever tried to find out whether she has really any hold on her husband. Still she has been expected to hold absolute monopoly in one area in particular.” But she has failed to rise up to that expectation, and she keeps lowering her head in shame. “Her husband is supposed to be her link with the throbbing life of the world outside.” But now she sees no light. Biraja’s superstitious words only add insult to injury. She meets Satkarhi at night. Her eyes weep without shedding tear. But Satkarhi notices nothing. When he invites her to bed, she is filled with repugnance. “She does not know where to go. She wants to move out into the wide, open world.” As she tries to resist, Satkarhi gets scared and shouts. Biraja, her mother-in-law, gets furious and throws her out of the house.
Satkarhi is responsible for the break-down of Makhon's faith. Her profound sense of dignity takes her away from her lewd husband. She would rather live alone in the world than submit to such a man.

Maya in 'Putra and Putrabadhu' is another such character. Her husband, Amrita is a perverted sex-maniac. Maya extremely beautiful to look at, is an ordinary uneducated village girl, reared in traditional Hindu faith. Still her inner self makes her rise in revolt against her husband's perversities. She leaves her husband and returns to her father's house. His father-in-law tries in vain to take her back. She would not compromise, come what may. It is this uncompromising personality which the story brings into focus.

Jagadish Gupta also dealt in his stories with the problems related to polygamy. The story 'Chandra-Surya Jatadin' portrays the envy and jealousy of two sisters fighting and competing for the love of their common husband. Stories of triangular love with co-wives as principal characters had been written earlier in Bengali. Bankimchandra's 'Kundanandini' and 'Suryamukhi' and Rabindranath's 'Madhyabartini' and 'Dristidan' may be cited as instances. But both Bankimchandra and Rabindranath related this triangular love chiefly to human sentiments. Later, Sailajananda wrote a story 'Narir Man', in which he showed two sisters bitterly fighting for the love of one single man. But in the end sisterly love triumphs over the contestants' jealousy and bitterness.
But Jagadish Gupta lent a different kind of significance to his story. In that story, in order to grab his father-in-laws properties, Dinataran though already married to ‘Khanapratāḥ’ marries ‘Prafulla’, his sister-in-law. Khanapratāḥ is a mother, but she is not content to remain just a mother. She finds it impossible to remain as affectionate to her sister as before and she feels mortified at this. She gets her son properly dressed up and sends him to his father as her emissary. Once she finds Prafulla going through the rituals of make-up. She remembers that she also had once been beautiful, but her beauty could not keep Dinataran satisfied. Can Prafulla, then, always enjoy his loyalty? Dinataran has never cared for love; he is only after sensual pleasure.

One day she gets into her husband’s bed at the behest of her mother-in-law. But she experiences then an intense feeling of repulsion. “That man is just a lump of flesh — so ugly and so full of lust . . . . . All his body seems to be gaping . . . . .”24 Khanapratāḥ closes her eyes, but the husband extracts his dues. The next day Khanapratāḥ is found in a state of total insanity, though she still holds her child in her arms.

Sailajananda’s ‘Shuli’ abdicates her wifely rights in favour of her sister and leaves home. This unquestionably a noble gesture, but hardly life-like. Jagadish Gupta did not impose any such nobility on man. He did not forget that
man was a biological being whose animal instincts could not be easily got rid of. In the field of Bengali literature only Manik Bandyopadhyay seems to have shared Jagadish Gupta's views on the irresistible powers of human instincts. "Only Manik Bandyopadhyay was close to Jagadish Gupta in his mental make-up. The only other man also could write such stories as 'Vivek', 'Sailajashila' and 'Kustha Rogir Bua' was Jagadish Gupta. Manik Bandyopadhyay, of course, changed much in later times. Jagadish Gupta's writings betray no such change."25

"I know that there are such characters as 'Jibananda', 'Sorhashi', 'Abhaya', 'Achala', 'Kiranmayee' and the 'Bamuner Maya'. But then there are many other varieties literature should deal with."26 These 'many other varieties' are to be found in Jagadish Gupta's novels and stories. In his age it took special courage to write about prostitutes and the very few who wrote about them modelled their art of characterization on SaratChandra's prostitutes, they thought, were prostitutes under compulsion and not by choice; like all other women, they also wanted to live a healthy, natural life. But those writers never thought about those prostitutes who could not, even in favourable circumstances, rise above the faith of their profession, Jagadish Gupta had little in common with such writers. Rabindranath thus described a prostitute who was courted by a young sage:
"At once, washed clean.
Come out a virgin girl." 27

Needless to say, Rabindranath found in the prostitute the virtues of a goddess.

Every one knows so much about Saratcandra's attitude to the prostitutes that nothing more need to be told about it. Premendra Mitra also drew them with affection and pity. Begun, in his story 'Bikrita Kshudhar Phande' could not shoo away the helpless pauper. Even in a story by Bimal Kar, Angurbala is seen taking all pains in order to get the dead body of Nanda Chakravarty properly cremated.

What a contrast is offered in Jagadish Gupta's 'Thikanai Budhbar'. However loyal her lover, a professional prostitute could never have, according to the writer, any real sympathy for him. The heroine of the story, Lila is one such woman. A rich man falls for love her and makes frank confessions of love to her on his regular Wednesday visits. Once, when seriously ill, he gets out to meet Lila, but dies on the way. Like every one else, Lila also goes to the spot to ascertain the identity of the dead. On seeing the dead man, she however does not fall down senseless. In that, she is so unlike her traditional literary counterparts. She just takes a look at the man's face in the light of a lantern, and turns back smiling 'My wedness day! come! Let him lie there'.
If he had even a little of Saratchandra's sentimentalism, Jagadish could never have written such a story. Of course, he did not follow the same pattern all the time. A change of direction is noticeable in his 'Laghu-guru'.

He wrote also of domestic life in such stories 'Annadār Abhishāpe', 'Karnadhar Pāler Gaman O Āgaman' and 'Satyashiber Biye O Bau'. He wrote of man's helplessness and suffering, but unlike others, he did not hold the society responsible. It was man's foolish expectations, dark desires and greed and jealousies that attracted disastrous consequences. This human situation moved him into pity and with great compassion he painted the picture of human defeat. "Man gets lost when circumstances overpower him. He becomes important only when he can create his own circumstances. But when circumstances have the whip-hand, man is not allowed free development. In such a condition one must note how man, takes his circumstances in his stride and what mental changes are effected in this process." 29

Sibapriya is an ordinary man who has to work hard for his living. His family consists of himself, his mother and his wife. One day a sadhu comes to his village. The Sadhu is said to have the magical power of creating gold. Lured by avarice, Sibapriya leaves home. He gets engrossed in his dream of the impossible. Basically a soft-heated man, he can little withstand the onslaught of the subsequent cruel
developments. The resultant grief drives him insane. Jagadish Gupta wrote in a letter to the editor of 'Kalikalam': "He could, as well have sunk in the water and died. His fate drove him to the farthest extent of hopelessness and hollowness before putting an end to his life. Does it draw out a sigh?" 29

"It is quite difficult to record within the limited canvas of the short story the various facets of man as expressed through alternations of events. I can only suggest this variousness. I shall have written in vain if I fail to indicate some of the directions of the human mind." 30

Judged in the light of this statement, Jagadish Gupta's characters appear as a class by themselves. 'Krishnakanta' in 'Peyamukham' and 'Keshablal' in 'Nayer Mrityur Dine' have no parallels in Bengali literature. No other Bengali writer has ever succeeded in exposing the dark recesses of the human mind so openly and in such a detached manner.

A character has to have two dimensions. On the one hand, he lives a public life, on the other, he has a private life of his own. This is what makes him look different from the people we come across in real life, for in real life we see men only from outside, while in literature a character is seen from both outside and inside. Apparently a loving and caring father, so normal and healthy in daily life, one can have devilish desires within one's heart. It is this
duality which make Krishnakanta a 'complete' literary character.

Krishnakanta is eminently illustrative of Jagadish Gupta's distinctive attitude to life. He is shrewd and calculating, and this is borne out by the story he tells his life, Matangini in order to explain the nature of Bhutanath's stupidity. In his days, as also now, the son and not the daughter, is considered a big business capital. In order to use this capital to the best advantage, he tries to turn his son into a scholar by making him study 'Kalap and 'Mudhabodh'. Later, in order to get his son profitable married, he cleverly extols his son's non-existent virtues. He cruelly eliminates, one after another, his daughters-in-law so that each new-daughter-in-law would bring in fresh fortunes in the form of dowry. He judges the importance, or the lack of it, of Bhutanath's second wife accordingly as he succeeds, or fails, in his venture in jute industry.

When after the death of his second wife, Anupama, Bhutanath expresses his reluctance to remarry, Krishnakanta argues : "These days men seem have become their wife's slaves. They refuse to re-marry when their wives die ... well, some people must die so that others can be accommodated. Otherwise hordes of people would have jumped into the sea by now."31 It is no wonder that with such an outlook on life, Krishnakanta should keep urging his son to marry again: first he considers as nonsensical all husbandly love and
loyalty; secondly, re-marriage means more money; more economic success. But though he knows that life is short, he is least indifferent to money and wealth, and in that he remains a creature of contradiction. He bulldozes Bhutanath into a re-marriage. He deliberately chooses a dark skinned girl for his son, and shyly extracts from the girl's father a lot of money under the threat of rejecting her.

But Krishnakanta receives a deadly blow from his own son, the very one for whose sake he has committed so many crimes, when Bhutanath gives voice to his feeling of intense hatred for him. He, who had earlier smoked contentedly while reclining upon a big pillow, now shudders in silent fear in the face of the fury of his son's hatred.

A comparable character is found in Keshablal in the story 'Mayer Mrityur Dine'. Keshablal is a selfish opportunist, devoid of any human consideration. He has no love even for his mother. Accumulation of wealth and property is his singular driving passion. He is ever reluctant to spend, ever afraid that his spending shall overtake his earning. When the price of milk goes up he vilely abuses not only the milk-seller but also the people for whom he has to buy milk. He feels mortified at having had to spend so much money for his daughter's marriage. He thinks that he has been taken for a ride by the malicious people around, and that none but he could have withstood all this. His wife laughs at his ideas. She knows how silly her husband can be; since school
fees have to be paid he calls the school-authorities cheats and crooks.

Keshab's mother is ill. As she lies dying, he feels greatly worried. But he worries not because he has had to buy fruit juice for her, nor because he will have to spend a lot on her last rites. He is worried on a different account. He keeps hoping that his brother, Ramlal, would not come back home before his mother's death. He has written Ramlal a letter asking him not to hurry back, though he tells his neighbours that he has vainly written him three letters and sent him even a telegram urging him to reach home without delay. But then his mother has asked for Ramlal's hurried return though a letter sent on her behalf by her grandson. Keshab is afraid that should his brother arrive before his mother's death, she might give him half of her jewellery. He thinks that "it is only her strong indefatigable will to hand over to Ram half of her jewellery that is keeping her alive."  

When the doctor says - "I doubt if she will last this night." He feels like paying him Rs. 4/- his fees. He has never felt this way before, for he has ever considered such payments as mere misuse of money. Of course, he does not pay the doctor; he only puts on an expression of intense grief.

The mother dies before Ram's arrival, and her ornaments are at once transferred to a different place.
Thus the plot of "Näyer Mrityur Dine" turns round a death, a death intensely desired by an unspeakably greedy man. Jagadish Gupta did not conceive of this character merely for the sake of realism; he artistically portrayed what he felt to be true of the contorted human mind involved in the cruel and dark business called life. Cupidity is there more or less in every man. There is no death of such covetous people as Kesabblal. But we do not know of any one but Jagadish Gupta who has so objectively described the dark, greed-infested world of the human mind.

Sanatan in 'Harh' and Sadukhan in 'Pralayankari Sasthi' have much in common with Kesabblal. A different kind of psychology is at work in the story 'Loknātherfamāsikatā'. Loknath first selects a beautiful bride for his own son and then rejects her in favour of a dark-complexioned one. This he does out of a sense of envy and frustration for having failed to find a beautiful wife for himself though he has never publicly owned up to such a feeling. "His race is almost run but he has never had the fortune of living and getting identified with beauty. He cannot allow his son Asim, to happily gloat on beauty, leaving him ever hungry for it."

Jagadish Gupta threw light on various other dark alleys of the human mind in such stories as 'Unmilār Man', 'Parapār', 'Āshā O Ami', 'Purātan Vritya' and 'Pāmar'. He did not cook up things but presented in a most detached manner only the very facts of life. His characters, as a result,
never look anything but real.

Jagadish Gupta was quite aware of the literary concern of his age with instincts of desire and psychological analysis. Rabindranath and Saratchandra had earlier tried to examine the nature of sexual complications. But they cared little for the biological aspects of sex. They idealised sex and presented it as a complex of feelings and sentiments shaping and directing mutual human relations. Jagadish Gupta on the contrary, analysed sex as a biological process. He realised, to quote for Evans, that "Sex played a far larger place in man's life than had been previously conceived."35 Gopikanath Roy Chaudhuri wrote: "In the post-war period sex-comlications were specially dealt with in the works of Nareshchandra Sengupta and Jagadish Gupta."36

The story 'Ādi Kathār Ekti' may be mentioned in this context. Kanchan, a beautiful young widow, and her five year old child, Khushi lives in a deserted locality. Subal, a young man of twenty three years, wants to marry Khushi. Despite the big difference in their age, the marriage takes place. Subal, however, has a different design: what he really wants is to get close to Kanchan. Kanchan is caught in two minds; if as a young woman she feels like responding to Subal's amorous calls, as a mother she should look after her daughter's interests. To put an end to the dilemma, she drives Subal away. But later Subal comes back and takes advantage of her illness to get close to her.
The story shows the extent to which a man can be stretched by his own blind sexual urge. However, the story concludes in a manner which Sarat Chandra would have approved: Subal apologises to the guardian of the society, Santadip Adhikari for his act of impropriety. This concession to sentimentalism does not fit into the realistic context of the story. But for this, it would have been a faultless piece of writing of extraordinary artistic power. Arunkumar Mukhopadhyay says: "'Adi Kathar Ekta' best illustrate the writer's scientifically objective and accurate manner of revealing sexual instincts." The naturalness of this revelation has invited the following comment from Subir Roy Chaudhuri: "Anandashankar's 'Agun Niye Khela' is no better than playing with dolls ... But sexual desires have been expressed in Jagadish Gupta's stories in so natural a manner that they can be neither doubted, nor scoffed at."

The grey-haired middle-aged people in Jagadish Gupta's stories go in for marriage after their first wife's deaths. This they do not do only in order to ensure continuity of their line of descent, but merely to satisfy their sexual desire. One such character is Banku Guin in the story "Tarenga Haite Tarenga". Ullas Chaudhuri in 'Apahrita Akashkousa', realises that he has really turned old not when he detects grey hair on his head, but when he fails to get physically excited at the sight of beautiful women walking down the road. Even Jagadish tried to write of Platonic love, he could not altogether write off the body. In the story
'Shashanka Kabirajar Street' the Kabiraj's friend weaves so many beautiful dreams about the Kabiraj's wife, but he fails when he learns that she is pregnant.

Jagadish Gupta displayed his deep understanding of human psychology in his delineation of abnormal sex-instincts. He scientifically identified and analysed the incurable perversions of the human mind. And he did it all in a most sensitive manner. That lent his outlook its peculiar uniqueness. This point needs to be kept in mind, for otherwise, he might be easily misunderstood.

Jagadish also portrayed idealists in some of his stories, the character of Trilokpati in 'Trilokpatir Tirthabhraman' being an excellent example. But he never did accept idealism at the cost of realism. The real issue in 'Trilokpatir Tirthabhraman' is marital in nature. In the present set-up, marriage is but a licence for sexual mating. Jagadish had a different view; he attached little importance to the complicated marital rites. He moved closer to what Dostoitesky had called 'the higher reality'.

We do not find in Jagadish Gupta's stories any character cast in the classical mould, comparable, say, with Mrinal, Gafur, Gnanada or Angur. But this is no reason why his characters should be considered less important; they are certainly unique in as much as they embody the crisis of their age. As Gunamay Manna has aptly remarked: "Jagadish Gupta's
writings do not suffer from any lack of human interest. The writer has shown a wide variety of human beings. These beings, to use Jibanananda's words, are as gregarious as ants, now moving upwards, now sliding down, now collecting food, now being robbed of it by others, and now entering into friendship. They are illuminated by sudden flashes of light and some of their aspects come alive in those lighted moments. Like Dinabandhu Mitra, Jagadish Gupta could also suggest a man's total personality only with a few strokes of his brush.39

It was Jagadish who tried to direct our attention from the world outside to the world within.
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