Chapter 5

FORM AND TECHNIQUE IN JAGADISH GUPTA'S SHORT-STORY VIS-A-VIS SHORT-STORY IN GENERAL

The short-story is indeed a rather recent literary growth. It is novel both in matter and manner. Taste changes with the passage of time and newer modes of expression come to be established. The short story owes its existence in this universal rule.

Though a relatively recent growth, the short story has already established itself as a very distinctive branch of literature. "No form of literature has more immediate appeal than the short story. A poem may be more deeply suggestive, but it calls for careful reading and re-reading to be fully apprehended. A novel may sustain a reader's interest for hours or days, but its total effect is massive and general rather than sharp and direct. In the short story the reader can experience a situation both briefly and intensely. A poem insinuates, a novel pushes, but a short story hits. To read and enjoy a short story requires neither the effort that poetry demands, nor the time that is required by a novel.

The short story also has the appeal of variety. In a few hours a reader can experience the horror of a tale of the supernatural, the excitement of a rousing adventure story,
the intrigue and suspense of a mystery, the tragic irony of a character caught up in an inevitable circumstance. He can relax in the genial atmosphere of a humorous tale, experience the thrill and poignance of a love-story, come to know strange places, fascinating persons and exciting situations in a variety that no other form of literature can provide so readily.\(^1\)

The short story appeared as a literary form only as recently as the 19th century. The Encyclopaedia Britannica informs: "Although the modern concept of the short story as a distinct literary form took shape only as recently as the beginning of the 19th century ... ... \(^2\)

The short story is not a mere narrative, nor is it supposed to be morally instructive; it is a distinctly different literary creation.

The short story was called into existence much earlier in France and Russia than in England. The Bengali short story appeared almost about the same time. It made its beginning in a weekly called 'Hitabādi'. It was the pages of 'Hitabādi' that first carried the stories of Rabindranath's 'Galpaquochcha'. Rabindranath, we must not forget was the first Bengali short story writer. 'Hitabādi's importance, therefore, shall ever remain supreme in the history of the Bengali short story.
The short story may be said to have existed, if at all, only seminally before Rabindranath’s days. Sukumar Sen has traced its origin in the stories of the ‘Vedas’. The countless narratives of varying lengths in the ‘Mahābhārata’, the tales of the ‘Jātakas’ and various myths, legends and fables had also anticipated the short story. However, the short story has little in common with whatever might have been its predecessors. It is, as a matter of fact, not easy to define. The lack of any universally agreed definition of the short story is suggestive infinite variety. Sen wrote: “Material art follows certain rules, because it is meant to serve the common purpose of a great many people. The art born of the writer’s own thoughts and inspirations are not meant to meet the demands of daily life. People analyse this art and try to find out the rules supposedly guiding it. These rules may, when properly followed, produce a few fine pieces of writing, but these pieces are not destined to last long. The works of the best writers are not subject to any rule.” Yet, critics and writers have commented variously on the nature of the short story. According to Sen, “the short story deals with a single idea or emotion, and fills the reader’s heart with it. As the story progresses, the idea or emotion gains in intensity. And this is brought about by great economical means.”

Even after the narrative has come to its end, it leaves a lingering feeling in the reader’s heart. “The heart
shall remain unsatisfied. The end (of the story) shall not appear as absolute. In other words, the conclusion of the story shall only incite the reader's further curiosities. A critic wrote: "Like the lyric the short story also depends on the warmth of feeling shared by the writer and the reader. Like the lyric the short story also is of a various nature. It shall be meaningless to classify the short story as one of love, humour, or the supernatural, etc. For the complexities of man's life are endless and the varieties of the human mind are indeterminable. The branch of literature which issues from various conflicts in the human mind, defies classification."

Edgar Allan Poe has defined the short story thus: "It is a piece of fiction dealing with a single incident, material or spiritual, that can be read out at a sitting; it is original, it must sparkle, excite or impress, and it must have unity of effect or impression. It should move in an even line from its exposition to its close."

"The short story may be variously defined. It can be likened to the discovery of the infinite in the finite, to the experience of bathing during the Churamoniyo, to the perfect little pearl within an oyster, to the brief but profound edict etched on the forehead, to the light from a hidden source, to the portrayal of ordinary, everyday life, or to a flash of lighting in the dark."
According to Webster's Third New International Dictionary, the short story, "a relatively brief invented prose-narrative that typically deals with a limited group of characters involved in a single action usually aims at unity of effect, and after concentrates on the creation of mood rather than the telling of a story."9

As Srikumar Bandyopadhyay has put it, "the art of the short story is different due to its short compass. It has to select such a small portion of life which can find its fullest expression within the limitation of space. Its beginning and its close must be invested with certain dramatic qualities."10

According to Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay "there is little scope for gradually developing the characters in the short story. The writer's job is to present the characters as already developed and to establish the right relation between them and the action. The action, therefore, must be thoroughly relevant."11

Narayan Gangopadhyay said: "The short story is a short narrative, owing its genesis to an impression. It comes on to its own by revealing an incident, or a circumstance, or an attitude involved in conflicts and contradictions."12

Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay wrote in his book 'Kāler Puttalikā': It is not possible to indicate all the elements that go into the making of the short story. One can only say
that an intense and controlled imagination and a unity of purpose and effect are the essential prerequisites. In a letter to his friend, Balfour, the English writer, Robert Louis Stevenson said: 'There are, so far as I know, three ways only of writing a story. You may take a plot and fit characters to it, or you may take a character and choose incidents and situations to develop it, or lastly, you may take certain atmosphere, and get actions and persons to realise it.'

Evidently, all this recognises in the short story the supremacy of character, or of plot, or of impression.

Edgar Allan Poe's comments on the nature and structure of the short story are well worth quoting. "A skilful writer has constructed a tale. If wise he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents, but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be brought out, he then invents such incidents - he then contrives such effect - as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tends not to the outbringing of this effect then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him
who contemplates it, with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished because undisturbed.  

The short story writer takes every possible care from the very start to produce the effect he wants to produce. He chooses the incidents which shall best serve his design. He has to be careful even about the sentences he writes. The story fails if the very first sentence fails to suggest the writer's design. As a matter of fact, the short story has no room for such an incident or sentence as is not suggestive of the things to come.

One of the chief characteristics of the short story lies in its unity of direction. This unity is very much there in all the famous stories written by Poe. ".. .. Poe's short stories and poems are miracles of precision. Each word is in place. Every sentence is constructed with the aim of contributing sharply to the ultimate and clearly envisioned effect. In some of these stories, these effects are too full of art: we are conscious, as we read, that we are being hoodwinked, that a necromancer is playing fantastic and wonderful tricks upon us." 13

Maupassant and Chekov initiated two very distinctive trends in the art of short-story writing. Maupassant's stories conclude in sharp, sudden twists, while Chekov's
stories reach what may be called a 'logical conclusion'. But though different in their methods, both the writers achieved a great artistic success. "Chekov was very much concerned with the technique of the short story and he had some uncommonly interesting things to say about it. He claimed that the short story should contain nothing that was superfluous ... But the most drastic demand that Chekov made was that an author should strike out both the beginning and the end of his stories. That was what he did himself." 16

The short story has little scope for amplification. The writer must strike the right chord from the word go. He must take the reader to his point of view through the shortest possible route. Naturally he must have at his command a very suggestive language. O'Faolain said: "A story can be subtle in proportion as it manages to convey a greater amount of information by means of these suggestions and if a reader fails to catch the suggestions, that is his loss." 17 One may recall, in this context the remark made by Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay: "The greater the suggestiveness of a short story, the higher its status as a work of art." 18

The short story may choose anything for its theme. Many short stories have been written about philosophical, psychological, historical, political, social problems; many others have dealt with adventure, romance, mystery, the
supernatural and the grotesque, and what not. All these shows how infinitely various the short story is. In order to be true to its genre, all that the short story requires is a singularity of purpose and design sharply realised.

Taking the short story as an art form, Rabindranath wrote: "Life moves through joys and sorrows. The collision takes place suddenly in the last chapter and everything is crushed and silenced at once. God develops his story slowly, but he ends it with a sudden single stroke." It is the same method which Rabindranath himself employed in his last three stories. In each of these skilfully constructed stories, the action develops slowly and builds up an expectation which, however, gets suddenly obviated at the end.

According to Narayan Gangopadhyay, "two things combine to make the short story - the writer's own understanding or philosophy of life which may or may not be profound, and his selection of that portion of life which incorporates that vision. This is why, a good short story of the day does not order the incidents only in order to stir up curiosity: it also does not use the plot simply as a medium for its message (which comes out automatically from the writer's attitude to life); it has indeed, one single inclination: it shall be real and yet transcendental, it shall go over and yet be symbolic."  

On the basis of the already quoted statements the following may be offered as the principal characteristics of
The short story:

1. The short story must have a story, and this story must have what Aristotle demands for the drama - a beginning, a middle and an end.

2. The principal constituents of the short story include plot, theme, character, language, the writer's vision of life and the title. The artistic success of the story depends on the right selection and employment of the same.

3. The story is not concerned only with human characters. It may choose to reveal a natural law or the all conquering power of fate. Such human instincts as fear, hatred, envy, superstition, loyalty and faithfulness may also constitute its theme. It may also sympathetically depict the animal world. In fine, the short story has an inexhaustible stock to draw on.

4. The short story must deal with only one single theme. It cannot make room for anything in excess not only in regard to all other elements.

5. Its canvas being short, the short story cannot depict life in its multiple dimensions. For the very same reason, it cannot also draw the characters in the round. It concentrates on a single psychological aspect or inclination and shows the actions and reactions of the same in a definite context.

The short story cannot have more than one plot. Its unity of theme ought to culminate in a unity of effect. No
short story worth its name can do without these unities.

(6) Words must be most economically employed in the short story. Discussions and descriptions must be severely rationed. All the stages in the development of the story must be most carefully construed, and all the elements must be organically interrelated and orchestrated.

However, it has to be conceded that no dynamic art can keep itself confined to a given framework. It is ever involved in newer experimentations, and finds newer expressions by the day. It inevitably changes with the change of time. To quote Narayan Gangopadhyay: "Every original artist consciously tries to free himself from the influence of his predecessors. He wants not to remain a mere imitator. As times change, ideas also change, and the conscious efforts of the artist produce newer modes of expression. So the definition of to-day shall lose its validity tomorrow; the present regulations shall become absolute in the future." According to Birendra Datta, "In every country, the art of the short story has kept changing from the very moment of its birth, and this is but natural. A river as its fountain-head assumes a different look as it enters level ground. Even on the plains it looks and speed keep changing from time to time. A tree sprouting from the seed of another tree is never the latter's exact replica; it has a distinct identity of its own. A man changes from his forefathers as per the dictates of his age and society. The
same is true also of the short story; different writers lend it different shapes, natures and significances." 22 However, such changes do not matter as long as the writer succeeds in recording in the story his point of view. As Maugham has said, "after all it is the personality of the author that gives his work its special interest." 23

We shall now examine in detail the components of the short story.

(1) One of the components of the short story is the arrangement or ordering of events. The short story selects and reveals a piece of life of special significance. The events should therefore be expressive of the characters and their conflicts and circumstances.

Conflict is of the very essence of the short story. It must necessarily issue out of the chain of events. In the opening portion of the story, it is this chain which helps establish a rapport with the reader. The events must be placed in context. "In the drama the background and make-up conform to the activities of the hero and the heroine and create in the spectator's mind an illusion of reality. Similarly, the context of the story makes the story more attractive." 24 — so said Dr. Saroj Mohan Mitra. Indeed, no story can achieve the force of reality without first being placed in the right context. A love story, for instance, must have a credible background. This background may be formed,
say, by a lake, a starlit night, or a flower garden.

(2) The short story is essentially the story of man. It must therefore involve human elements and values. Such elements and values are found present even in the ancient stories of beasts and birds. There, the characters, beasts or birds, behave very much like human beings.

The human elements can only be revealed through characters. Every character is bi-dimensional. On the one hand, the character is related to the world outside; on the other, it has an inner world of its own.

(3) Next comes plot characters and events join hands to create it. The plot has to have, to apply an Aristotelian concept to the art of the short story, a beginning, a middle, and an end. The three tire stories may not have dramatic triangularity, but they certainly have a pillar-like upward movement. The writer discovers the driving force behind the portion he selects from life and with the help of his characters and the right context he drives the story towards the desired end. The task is not easy. He has to meet the demands not only of life, but also of art.

One cannot have a story by merely shuffling a few events. The story draws its sustenance from the conflict of events and personalities. This conflict needs to be built up and presented carefully in order that it can produce the right effect. Plot is the name given to the process of revealing
and reconciling this conflict. It is divisible into such successive stages as the initial background and the initial incident, the developing action, the climax, the sloping away and the final incident or conclusion. The following diagram the different parts and their arrangement in a short story.
Let us suppose that the emotion resulting from the conflicts of events and personalities in a short story grows as the story advances. The first part deals with the initial incident, after which things begin to get more and more complicated till they reach the critical stage. Then there is a sloping away, during which preparations are made for reaching the conclusion. The writer's powers can be seen to their best advantage in the stages called sloping away and conclusion.

We must, however, remember that if this is a rule, there are quite a few exceptions to this. The critical period may also be reached in the second part, and the 4th part may also bring about resolution. In such cases, we shall have different diagrams:

![Figure 1](image-url)
We have talked about the various nature of Plot. Let us now take a bit more comprehensive view of the different stages:

(a) The initial context: It creates the atmosphere, fixes the time and the place, introduces the characters, and suggests the theme and the point of view.

(b) The initial incident: It brings into focus the conflict and lends it momentum. Needless to say, this incident is the starting point of the story.

(c) The developing action: It represents the gradual movement of the story, in consonance with the characters and the circumstances, towards the critical point. It involves a good deal of complication.
(d) The critical point: The conflict reaches the highest intensity at this point, and the reader has simply no idea as to how it is going to be resolved. It is here that the story takes a sudden, startling turn.

(e) The sloping away: At this stage the crisis starts dissipating, and things begin to be sorted out fast, so that one understands that the resolution cannot be far behind.

(f) The conclusion: The conflict is resolved, and the reader is left with a unity of emotion, be that of love or loss, of joy or fear.

(4) The inner substance of the story is its theme. It cannot be grasped till one has reached the end of the story. It is the verbal representation of the writer's own understanding of the truth of life, without, of course, any ethical bias. The theme of Saratchandra's 'Mahesh' does have no ostensible moral orientation; it is primarily concerned with the agony of a poor peasant oppressed by religion and also by the landlord. More than one story can be written on the same theme. In other words, the theme keeps changing with the change of context in the hands of different writers, writing in different times and places.

(5) The short story is short in compass and is directed towards one single end. It makes no room for unnecessary expansion. "... From the very word 'go' the short
story keeps moving towards a definite goal. Every word is
made to serve that purpose. The short story cannot move as
leisurely as the novel; it has little scope for rest."

The words to be employed in a good short story need
to be well-chosen, unsentimental, economical and suggestive.
One may use either the literary or the colloquial language,
one's choice in this regard being determined by the context
of the story. While writing stories against mythological
backgrounds, one may use ancient Sanskrit words and syntax in
order to produce the required effect of solemnity. While
writing stories of the supernatural, one may use such words
as can best create a sense of thrill and mystery. While
writing of his own times and place, the writer may make his
characters use the local language or dialect. In any case,
the writer must take special care to see that his language
remains natural all the time.

(6) The writer's vision of life is what lends distinction
to the short story. His personality is reflected in his writing.
He looks at life and society from many different angles. His
vision changes as life and society change. In other words, his
vision is related to reality. His art is, as a result an
expression of the realities of life and his own experience of
the same.

(7) The title of the story and even the names of the
characters have quite some importance. The title should
ideally be indicative and suggestive in nature. A story of incidents is usually named after the principal event, while a story of characters is named after its hero or heroine.

(8) There are three narrative methods: the story can be described either in the first person, or in the third person, or it may employ the method of indirect narration.

The first person narratives may be divided into three kinds. (a) To the first category belong the stories which are told by the principal character. (b) A minor character is the narrator in the second category of stories. (c) In the third category, the speaker is the character uninvolved in the action of the story.26

In the story told in the third person, the writer himself supplies a good deal of information about the characters. Such a story is usually distinguished by its economy of words, dramatic characterization and objectivity.

The stories adopting the method of indirect narration are usually written in the form of letters or diaries. Such a story may be made either of a number of letters written by a single person or of a number of letters written by a number of persons.

Besides, the stories of the supernatural often employ a different method altogether. One finds in them stories within stories.
We have seen in the preceding chapter that Jagadish Gupta threw light on the innermost recesses of his characters. He allowed no emotionalism to interfere with his portrayal of a prostitute or a housewife. A perfect analyst of the human mind, he went in for internal, not external, realism. And he possessed the linguistic skill required for the purpose. But he had little regard for plot. "It lacks plot", he said, "I have only expressed my view here. I do not want to build a story. The kind of arrangement and development of incidents that distinguishes the novel is not to be found in this." He further said: "The narrative does not keep its focus steady on any one person and the direction is often lost. It might seem that the story has failed to become a complete whole." Let us see if this is an artistic lapse.

Plot is the logical ordering of events or incidents. A plot is also a narrative of incidents, the emphasis falling on causality - said Forster. We can try to examine Jagadish Gupta's just quoted admission in the light of Forster's words.

To admit that characters and incidents in a story are interrelated and subject to one another's influence is to admit causality. The traditional view of the plot is founded on the following axioms: (a) Characters and incidents are causally related, (b) good and evil exist in life and the world, (c) human life unfailingly reaches an end, tragic or comical, and (d) the end, though seemingly circular, is of a
But the plot in Jagadish Gupta's stories is not based on any such view. Things did happen in his world, but he did not know why. "What never happened before is happening now. I do not know how it can be possible. Whatever I hold as possible always turns impossible." 29

His predecessors had a different perception of life. Bankimchandra recognised the role of both Fate and society in the shaping of man's destiny. Saratchandra did not believe in Fate; he held man's society solely responsible for man's sufferings. Rabindranath looked at life in the light of his great faith; he was convinced that no amount of suffering and sorrow could take the sap out of life.

Jagadish Gupta stood outside the tradition of beliefs subscribed to by the earlier writers. He felt that man was destined to be crushed. He found no purpose and pattern in human life. Fate was cruel and inscrutable, playing with and playfully destroying man without any reason whatsoever. Life being so uncertain and unpredictable, how could art assume a definitive role? The question must have plagued Jagadish, and he answered it by deliberately rejecting plot, not only in his short stories, but also in his novels. In this he betrayed a very modern outlook. Rabindranath also later came to question the plausibility of plot and this was evidenced in his stories
and novels written in the age of 'Sabujpatra'.

In the introduction to his novel 'Dulaler Dola' Jagadish Gupta wrote: "I won't be surprised if these are considered not as novels or stories, but as essays." 30

His distinctly objective and detached mental make-up was well reflected in his style which remained unaffected by any kind of sentimentalism. Said Somerset Maugham: "I have read a good many books on the art of fiction and all ascribe very small value to the plot." 31

Jagadish Gupta had a somewhat similar view of plot. But he was an artist, and like many other artists he could not always correctly assess his art. Critics may identify in his writings many distinctive features of which he himself was quite unaware. Some of his stories, his views notwithstanding, have excellent plots. Perhaps, Jagadish Gupta was not alive to this.

Let us analyse the plots of two of his stories - 'Peyamukhom' and 'Nārīh'.

victim of Fate as of his own nature; he carries within himself the germs of his own decay.

The first stage:

The initial context: Sanatan is introduced as a mean-minded thief, who has once been a convict. He picks up quarrels for nothing and does not feel a bit sorry for that. He has been responsible for the untimely death of his wife, Raksa. He is too much conscious of his prowess.

The second stage:

The initial event: Before she dies, she wants to put Mathur, her only child, under Rasi's care. She knows that Sanatan cannot properly bring up the child.
The first stage:

The initial circumstance: Bhutnath and his father Kaviraj Krishnakanta Devasharma, essentially different in their mental make-up, are the principal characters. The story begins with the conflict between their contrasting attitudes. The father is affectionate, but authoritarian. In order to ensure a bright future for Bhutnath, he wants to train him up against his wish.

The second stage:

The initial incident: Krishnakanta's authoritarianism compels Bhutnath to marry the nine-year old Manimala. One day Manimala falls ill. Krishnakanta administers medicine, but
Manimata does not survive the treatment.

The third stage:

The action now develops at a rapid pace and approaches the critical point. Bhutnath marries Ampama who also dies. He is then forced by his father to marry Binapani. On the ground that Binapani is dark-complexioned Krishnakanta extorts money from the father. When Bhutnath comes to know of this, he begins to get suspicious. He feels that Krishnakanta's avarice must have been the cause of his late wives' deaths. He suspects that he has been just a means with which his father has tried to satisfy his lust for money. Krishnakanta's attempt to cause Binapani's death confirms the suspicion.

The fourth stage:

The sloping away: Krishnakanta realises the extent of his son's hostility towards him. The medicine meant to kill Binapani is put into his trembling hand by Bhutnath himself. "This wife has a long life, says Bhutnath and so she has failed to die of cholera. Father, you better try it yourself."32

Conclusion: The writer's objective is to depict Krishnakanta's ultimate cruel lot. Binapani's illness the administration in secret of a killer medicine by Krishnakanta and the return of the same medicine to himself create a grim atmosphere. 'Peyomukhom' clearly shows that man is as much a
Many of the villagers are afraid of Rasi, who they believe, has magical powers. But Sanatan is not afraid of her.

The third stage:

The action develops rapidly and soon reaches the critical point. Sanatan and Rasi fight over Mathur. Rasi is keen on bringing Mathur under her care in order to honour Raksa's last wish; besides, being a childless woman, she feels all the more for Mathur. But Sanatan would not let Mathur go for his own selfish reasons.

One day, Santan, as he is going to fish, meets Rasi in the field. He insults her there. This makes her as furious and cruel as a tigress. "Let the fish devour you to-day!", she yells.

The fourth stage:

The sloping away: Santan defies the curse and goes to fish. No untoward thing happens, and he returns with his catch. But as he eats his dinner, a piece of fishbone gets stuck in his throat, and he dies that very night.

Conclusion: Rasi comes that night to see the dead man, and then slowly slips out of sight.

The victory of Rasi's magical power, earlier laughed and defied by Sanatan, forms the conclusion of the story 'Harh'.

Let us now discuss Jagadish Gupta's literary style:

(1) Jagadish Gupta wrote with a fair amount of objectivity and an excellent sense of control. He used short sentences and showed an enviable capacity for reticence, thus meeting one of the chief demands of the short story. A few instances may be quite in order here.

(a) "Youth has receded far away. This youth is as much full of life, as restless and wild, and as slippery as the sea. It has slipped away smilingly before it could be held on to. The sea is eternal; youth is short-lived; and yet youth rolls forward like the sea. It looks restless and wild, but it has a rich store of gems inside itself. The memory of his youth, like the memory of the formless, uncontrollable, hungry sea, appears to be fraught with fear to-day. Still it remains a fascinating obsession."33

What is remarkable is Jagadish Gupta's objective method of getting at the truth of youth. He did not, like many of his contemporaries, allow any sentimentalism to cloud his vision. Like a primitive sculptor, he created everything out of raw material.

(b) "There was commotion in the water; the spot, covered with mud and blood, turned deeply brown."34 - This is how Jagadish described a fearful of situation. His controlled tone and economical expression helped greatly in creating the necessary atmosphere of awe and suspense.
(c) "Then she felt like saying, 'Mother, how many times must your son bathe in the waters before he can become pure?'. But she chose not to speak out; she felt so contemptuous that she would rather not waste her words."  

Maya was left with no illusion when she came to know of the perverse nature of her husband, Amrita. But Jagadish Gupta kept a light rein on his description of the collapse of the wife's long cherished ideas. He was equally reticent in his description of Maya's newly felt sense of hatred and revulsion. But the reader has no difficulty in intimately knowing Maya's miserable state of mind. 

The syntax involved in the language of description is also worth careful attention. 

(d) In the very same story Amrita’s tyrannical behaviour is thus described: "And she (Bhuban) said everything ... She spoke of Amrita's behaviour in their locality, of the number of his women there, of his lust for her body and the infinite indifference of her lame, good for nothing husband, of her rejection leading to her confinement in a room with the help of the locality, of Amrita's arrival, of her escape after having had Amrita beaten, and of her arrival here with her complaints."  

Quite some incidents have been packed together and this is that accounts for the length of the sentence. But,
remarkably enough, nothing here is in a state of confusion; the total picture is vivid and clear. Besides, the quick-paced short clauses, like cinematic shots ably build up the desired effect.

Jaçadish Gupta believed that since man was a prisoner of Fate, all his expectations are doomed to be frustrated. This being the human condition, he found little cause for ecstasy. This accounts for the tone of mild banter and the satirical stance in his short stories.

(a) When in 'Jāhā Ghatila Tāhāī Satya' death defied the astrologer's predictions, Jaçadish Gupta wrote calmly and detachedly: "The child is lying there, but its open eyes do not blink and its chest does not heave ... . The white sheet covering its chest bears the imprint of two small feet exactly of the size of Chantu's feet."37

(f) "There also came a man well known for his unfailing power of healing poisoned men. But before his arrival, Lab's lips had turned blue, his nose had begun to bleed, and his body had gone slack and numb. He died even while the man was reciting his magical verse. The people brought to a huge quality of water and poured it on the dead boy's head. The Courtyard was drenched, and as the people moved about, the water turned into slush."38

This factual account of the death of the only son of a poor woman (in 'Sabār Shehe Gayā') reads almost like a
newspaper report. None but Jagadish Gupta could remain so aloof and unininvolved while describing such a pathetic incident.

(g) Despite the close watch kept by numberless amulets with magical powers, Panchu died. Jagadish Gupta wrote:

"When Panchu could be seen once again by the other side, he was motionless in the crocodile's jaws ... ... . The crowd yelled in anxiety. The last red rays of the Sun shone upon Panchu's face, pale in death ... ... . The crocodile offered the Sun its food and disappeared once again."^39

This is the portrayal of an act of villainy causing a terrible death. This villainy is the villainy of life; this forms life's hard core. It is difficult to fathom the depth of that aversion to life which attracts such thoughts. The language here is used like a painter's brush.

(2) Jagadish Gupta possessed an analytical bent of mind. He made statements or comments, examined and illustrated them, and would come back to them again to reassert their validity. If this accounts for the somewhat halting movement of his stories, it also explains why Jagadish could so deeply impress his readers. The practice is most effective in 'Mark'.

"Why don't they kill and eat?"

- Ha, ha, ha ... ...

This is the cause of Hathur's sudden laughter. After having a mouthful of rice, Sanatan grabs and throttles his
throat with his own hands . . . . His eyes pop out; it seems as if these are being pushed from inside. At the sight of his father makes, Mathur begins to laugh.40

This shows how Jagadish brought his analytical method to bear upon his narrative prose. The analytical method has been employed also in the literature of the past. It has also been brought under critical scrutiny. Aristotle divided it into six parts called consecutive, consequential, volitive, reactive, durative and equipollent.

The first part introduces something as a consequence of something else. Secondly, the initial incident defines and determines the action of the story. The action may even be suspended, or it may attract quick reactions. The fifth part brings in resolution. All this is to be found also in the art of the cinema.

Let us now put under scrutiny a small portion of 'Adi Kathār Ekti'.

"Subal was trembling when he got on to the verandah". The reader knows the context. Action, in the Aristotelian sense, comes to a halt here and waits for the next phase to begin. But, since a shot gives birth to the next shot, newer pictures keep evolving. 'Silently he looked through the door. He saw Kanchan lying with her eyes closed and her body uncovered. For a moment Subal stood numbly at the door—then
We now reach the second stage. Subal's action invites reaction, though the reaction is not very direct. 'At the sound (of the door opening) Kanchan opened her eyes, and on seeing Subal standing at the door, she set up and covered her body with her clothes.' A direct reaction comes in the wake. 'And the very next moment a cry broke out of all her dumbfoundedness. Subal had never before heard such a sound produced by any human being. Kanchan kept shouting: 'Get out, get out of my sight, get out, I tell you.' The shout as well as the sight of whatever little of Kanchan's face was visible in the pale light of the lamp startled Subal and turned him into a status. He could find nothing but ferocious hatred in her stare.' The action halts mid-way again.

We find no further reaction at the third stage. 'Kanchan's weak brains could not stand so much of weakness. As it reached the highest pitch, her voice failed. She lost sense and fell down.' But at the fourth stage Jagadish adopted a cinematic means and showed by then 'the animal in Subal had been fully roused.' All the actions and reactions are resolved at the fifth stage in the following manner:

They did not speak to each other any more. As in a cursed royal house, their infinite fret and unhappiness turned into lifeless stone.' We are now at what Aristotle calls the sixth stage. 'Sarandab Adhikari had a nickname 'Juju.' The
word is short but very suggestive ... Then Samandas once again kicked Ranjan in the back and clubbed Subal in the neck, and said: 'I can't rest till I have driven you out of this village.' 'Get up and get out', he said, pointing his finger towards the western border of the village. 41

(3) The stories of Jagadish Gupta are full of images drawn from nature.

(a) "The field does not look so nice at the end of Phalgun. It is mostly filled with thorny gamuras. And yet as the Sun rises from one of its ends, all the dryness mysteriously disappears. The wretchedness of the Sun." 42

(b) "The river is calm; like a girl sleeping in her mother's arms, the river seems to be sleeping in the loving light of the soft, blue sky. Like a happy father, the Sun appears to be standing nearby, lending her grace and beauty. The still, green border of the distant forest looks like a girl's braid of hair lying lavishly motionless on a pillow ... ... . The passionate kisses of the current etch their marks on the soil." 43

(c) "A big resinous tree with its thick foliage stands by the northern corner of the house. It is covered with glow worms looking like thousands of winking eyes ... ... . It seems that it wants to say something, but it pants under the burden of its failure of speech." 44
Rebindranath’s nature-imagery is incomparably apt and beautiful. But Jagadish did not toe Tagore’s line for the simple reason that he did not share Tagore’s vision of life.

The phrase ‘etch their marks on the soil’ in the second quotation has a distinct flavour of its own and marks the quotation out as something special and unique. The picture we find from the third quotation is startling. We are made to stand face to face with something grotesque and fearful. Jagadish Gupta possessed the unique power of combining the grotesque and the real into an artistic whole.

No less remarkable are his realistic images. Four instances are cited below:

(a) “Shuban raised her up, but Rasi looked as frightening as an angry cat. Anger made the hair of her body stand erect ... . Her stare was fixed, her eyes were filled with tears ... . The loose skin over her eyes seemed to be trembling.”

(b) “As if Prafulla had bitten her in the chest and sucked out all her blood at once ... .”

(c) “The man standing there is just a lump of flesh. He is so ugly and so much full of lust. His whole fleshly body seemed to be gaping.”

(d) “Kanchan could look into Subal’s inner self. She clearly saw that he who had so long crawled like a snail with
his long-cherished desires and deceptive, evil designs was now suddenly standing erect.48

In the first image Rasi has been likened to an angry cat. Indeed, the sight of her five-foot frame instils fear into our heart. In the second image Khamaprava's sister, Prafulla, has been compared to a ferocious animal with long sharp teeth. The third image brings out the animality in Dinataran's nature. A comparison is involved in the fourth image between Subal and the snail. If it be argued that the snail is tame while Subal is wild, it can be countered by saying that we do not know the reality of the snail since that remains hidden under its shell. Subal hides his evil self behind his civilised exterior. He lies in wait for the right opportunity, and when the opportunity comes he walks out of his shell. It is only then that one gets to know his real self. Needless to say, the comparison is very apt.

Jagadish Gupta also drew a good many images from mythological sources.

(a) "She is the beloved of the estranged Yaksa, she is the fancied creation of the poet. Man has ever been offering her his agonised feelings. In love or in separation, life keeps dancing around her."49

(b) "Then he did not look like his usual self. He seemed to be Shiva, the destroyer."50
(c) "I did not know when Madan (the Hindu god of love) had got up and come with spring to peep in."

(d) "The name was Sri Tamalkrishna. The very sound of it ... creates the vision of a profound greenness. This green is deflected from the distant newly formed cloud as well as from the sprouting grass here, and it fully merges into the water of the Yamuna."

However, these images are neither natural nor very clear, and for that reason they do not integrate well with the stories.

(4) We have earlier spoken of Jagadish Gupta's sense of reticence. But in a few cases he did not bother much about economy of words. He would be much less restrained when he came to write about the psychology of his characters or when he described in detail the physical aspects of the characters in order to bring out their inner reality.

The description of Benukar Mandal's domestic possessions runs into excess, though realism does not suffer the least on that account. "Benukar Mandal of village Nachansaha has a few bighas of land. He has the plough with which to till the soil and he has the oxen to draw the plough. Some people owe him some money; he owes some money to some others. He has a fallow plot adjacent to his house. Ash from dead ovens has been sprinkled on it. Benukar has
turned it into an ash-dump and it is hobby to grow spinaches there .. ..

Besides, he has a wife called Janaki, and he has a grievance at heart. He has none and nothing else. 

Various were the ways in which Jagadish Gupta described the physical appearance of his characters. He used his language of description also to reveal the inner world of his men and women. What follows is illustrative of this:

"Ullas Chaudhuri is forty-one now .. .. .. He is a big man, with an awesome appearance. He looks like a solid mountain. But his eyes, that sparkle ever so merrily, suggest that he need not be feared, notwithstanding his big bones and great height. It has been seen that Ullas does not turn violent even in anger .. .. .. His hair is neither curly, nor absolutely straight. In his early youth he had tried to curl his hair with a hot stick of iron, and his persistence in this regard had surprised his intimate friend, Shailadhar. But he had thrown away the stick when he found out that the curls would not last. Ullas cannot be called fair-complexioned, but then he is not quite dark .. .. .. The years of his life have not left their impress on him. Ullas Chaudhuri never feels that he is above forty, that he is actually forty-one: in other words, he remains ever young." Evidently, this physical description is
excellently reflective of Ulla’s inner personality.

We may also consider another piece of description which mirrors well the nature of a man of ripe experience.

"Dinapati Roy’s eyes are small, but they have a sharp look. He has hair on his head, but not an abundance. He sports a moustache trimmed very short. The tip of his nose is red, but his nose is also indicative of his high intelligence. He has hair on his ears. He allows his toenails to grow and with a stick scrapes out the dirt that collects under them."

Jagadish Gupta could also bring his characters alive even without describing their physical looks in great detail. The stories ‘Hārh’ and ‘Pralayankari Saethi’ bear this out.

This is how Sanatan’s first appearance has been described in ‘Hārh’:

"Raksa’s husband, Santan is not a good man ... ... .

Once Sanatan had gone to a clothier’s shop to make some purchases. There on being caught in the act of stealing a nine-yard long dhoti, he was severely beaten. He had also to serve a three month’s term in jail.

Sanatan is a dare-devil, afraid of none. He moves defiantly under public gaze. He scares people with his arrogance and harsh, bitter words. He gets agitated even
without much provocation and comes chasing people with a staff in hand; even if the chased escape unhurt, they can by plugging their earholes with their fingers, only shut out the echo of his loud and vile curses . . . . There had been many occasions on which the goats of his neighbours lost their life before they could even come close to his saplings."

In 'Pralayankari Sasthi', Sadu Khan's first appearance has been thus described:

"His eyes are round and red. He is huge both in width and height. But his language is more frightening than his build and looks. Sadu Khan talks slowly in a hushed voice. The disparity between his manner of speaking and physical proportions is so great that to hear him speak is to suddenly think of a smouldering fire. His words are indeed like light smoke, and one never knows when the tongue of fire will leap out of it, and it is this that makes people cringe before him. Even the few people, who are close to him and enjoy no mean authority, fold up as they face him, frog in winter."

There is, of course, some physical description in such sentences as 'His eyes are round and red' and 'He is huge both in width and height'. Evidently, this description is very short. It is the writer's language which makes things vivid in the rest of the passage quoted above.

More physical descriptions are also not wanting in Jagadish Gupta's stories. A portion of one such description
in the story 'Kalankita Samparka' is quoted below:

"... agreeable to the eye, a dot tattooed on black, excellent health, wide eyes, no mark of vermillion, no conch-bangle ... evidently a stupid rustic."

(5) Some important features of Jagadish Gupta's language:

Jagadish Gupta was quite alive to the importance of grammar, and this affected his literary style to a great extent. He used to write short sentences in general and only in special cases did he go in for long, complex sentences. He affected fine nuances by deftly manipulating the infinite verbs as well as by skilfully shuffling the positions of the nouns in the accusative case. All these features have been competently discussed by Narendra NathDashgupta. However a few other features remain still undiscussed. Let us now look into them.

Dots for instance, seem to have been used a bit too much in the writings of Jagadish Gupta. Many later writers used the sign of the dot to indicate gaps or change of time, but none of them attached so much importance to it as Jagadish did. Let us cite an instance:

"What did you say? ... Where is the fish? What else? The fish is there in that packet ... Can't you see? ... These are small shrimps. Do you call
them fish? .. .. Not a single fish there? .. .. Look closely .. .. It must have slipped out of the torn packet. .. .. O dear! Why should you weep so much? .. .. ."

Dots are much in use also in the story, 'Payamukham'. "Nothing lasts, everything is destined to die either to-day or to-morrow .. .. what a fool! .. .. which a holy book is there that says that a widower must live his wife only with the memory of his dead wife? .. .. . This pretence of asceticism is a modern fashion. It is no widely spread, though so insufferable .. .. well, some people have to die in order that some others can find room in the world. Had it been otherwise hordes of men would have been obliged to into the seas by now .. .. But Bhutnath remains totally indifferent." 61

Jagadish was naturally economical in his expression. He would not write a sentence if the sentence was felt to be unnecessary. He extensively sign of the dot perhaps for the sake of concision and brevity.

According to Bengali grammar, the sign of the apostrophe may be used to indicate the elision of sound involved in the transformation of Sanskrit or elegant words into colloquial forms (e.g., kariyā into ka're, haiya into haiye, bariyā into ba'ne). In Jagadish Gupta, the sign is found to have been widely perhaps a bit too widely used.
In a good many cases Jagadish used the word और (and) as a copula, though its frequent overuse is likely to mark it out as a mannerism. A look at the following may be instructive.

"Nobody had imagined that Karnadhar Pal's daughter, Piley could become so bright and natural and smart and majestic and so irresistible and graceful in her springly manner ..."

Another remarkable feature of Jagadish Gupta's linguistic style consists in the recurrent use of the verbs in the present tense. In psychoanalysis, the past and the present form a continuum. Jagadish's preoccupation with the human mind naturally determined the extent of his use of the verbs in the present tense even when he was writing of things gone by.

(6) Dream-elements in Jagadish Gupta's stories:

"It is popularly held that dreams are insubstantial, without any basis in reality. But perhaps it is not proper to call anything unreal simply because its basis cannot be detected at a glance. Man's quests and frustrations, his secret wishes and desires of a long or short standing, his meaningless fancies and all that he has heard or seen mesh up with one another and go into the making of his dreams. These dreams are directed by the nature and movement of man's
conscious or subconscious mind. In other words, according to the science of dreams, dreams are not unreal at all."

The above given passage is an extract from what Jagadish wrote in his novel, 'Nanda and Krishna', and is, therefore, representative of his views on dreams.

He used dreams and reveries in his stories. He was, of course, not the first one to do it in Bengali literature. Bankimchandra had done it much earlier. The later modern writers, in their stories use dreams as symbols of man’s subconscious desires. Jagadish Gupta had little taste for any such symbolism. The dreams in his stories are perceptibly, though not ostensibly, related to the realistics of life.

Frued initiated a revolution in his study of dreams. According to him, man’s repressed desires find oblique expressions in his dreams. Laurence Cherry wrote in his admirable article on Jung’s concept of dream: "Like Frued, Jung believed that dreams are the key to the unconscious. They symbolise ignored or rejected aspects of our personalities. For example, a man’s dream about an appealing woman (anima) may represent his more ‘feminine’ side, while a woman’s dream about a man (animus) may symbolise her hidden, more ‘masculine’ qualities.

Jung differentiated between ‘little’ dreams about the trivialities of daily life, and ‘big’ dreams - those with
poetic force and beauty with striking images of heroes and buried treasures with mystical significance. "Such dreams occur mostly during the critical phases of life" said Jung, particularly in early youth, puberty, at the onset of middle age and within sight of death. If people would listen to the messages conveyed by their most important dreams, Jung insisted, they would find the way to self-fulfilment."64

Bankimchandra used to attach greater importance to ethics than to skilful psychoanalysis. This accounts for the supernatural nature of most the dreams in his novels. We may refer to the two dreams of Kundanandini in 'Rishabriksha'. The first one is not at all related to the existing realities of Kundanandini's life. As the title, 'Chāyā Purbaṃmīnī', of the chapter in which it occurs rightly suggests, it only gives us a prevision of her future. The second dream is, however, is not totally unrelated to her life.

Since the dreams that Jagadish Gupte's characters dream are not symbolic, they need not be interpreted in the light of Freudian and Jungian theories. These dreams have their roots in reality. They mirror what men feel in their life of failure and frustration. They are, for that very reason, easily perceptible.

In the story, 'Sashānka Kabirājer Stree', what Satish had was not exactly a dream. He found in his friends wife the
woman of his imagination. The longing he felt for her came out thus in his waking reverie: "... But there stood in front of Satish's closed eyes the image of Indira, Sashanka Kabiraj's wife - not exactly as Sashanka Kabiraj's wife, but as a woman ... He felt that this woman could not cook, feed, prepare the bed, string garlands, or sit by the window; she could only turn men amorous ... She was not near, and still she seemed to be all around ... 

She would not block the way and yet none could get out of her charmed circle ... One could breakout only to come back with wilder desire, ... Once outside the circle, one felt small, failed to see and breathe freely, went numb in the body and lost all fancy and joy ... 

This eternally young woman had attracted generations of men ... Men could not conceive of any heaven that was uninhabited by her ... with her withdrawn from his vision, the poet could not write anything worthwhile ... 

However, the dreams to be found in 'Sabār Sheesh Gayā' and 'Putra O Putrabadhū' reflect, as it were, Jagadish Gupta's own vision of life. Man's futile lust for life and the cruel mockery of Fate invade man's subconscious mind and this mind, in its turn, releases the resulting sorrows in the form of dreams.
In 'Kalankita Samparka', Makhan did not really have any dream; what she had was a waking reverie, in the face of the inevitable hostilities of life. Let us quote a passage:

"It was the dead of the night ... ... Makhan came out. She looked skyward and uttered the name of God ... ... .

Dense clouds had driven out of sight all the lighted spots on the vast sky ... ... . The earth had sunk in the fathomless sea of darkness, and there was no breath of life ... ... .

Makhan began to feel afraid ... ... . It seemed that some spirits had gone to the bottomless depth of the darkness. It seemed that they were churning it in order to retrieve their lost treasures. Their hands made no sound; their feet made no sound; no sound came out of their mouths. Only their eyes were blazing.

As they kept ceaselessly and mercilessly beating the darkness with their staff, waves preceded by smoke, started violently spreading out, and then the frothy poison came gushing out ... ... . Someone seemed to be moving carrying a vessel filled with that burning poison. The dark figure was clearly visible in the dark. It was moving slowly, silently and steadily. She would be obliged to drink up that poison. She had no other way out ... ... . The figure would keep coming; one day it would reach her and hand over to her that
poison-filled vessel."

Her elder sister-in-law was the first to get up. It was she who found Makhan lying senseless in the courtyard.

It was, as we have earlier said, not exactly a dream. It was a feeling closely connected with reality, playing upon the conscious mind with the force of a dream.

In the story 'Sabār Sheshe Gaya', Gayamani's dream assumes tragic proportions by being charged with the irony and cruelty of Fate along with the pathos inherent in man's futile struggle for existence. This is how the dream has been described:

"... while bemused, she had a dream. It was a vivid and cruel dream. She saw that the sky was overcast; there was neither a flash of lightning, nor any burst of sound. It was getting only darker and heavier and more swollen every moment. It could be withstood because it was far away. Should it descend and come nearer, the chest would be rent into pieces.

Gayamani could clearly see the bright full moon slowly pushing its way through two seemingly kissing clouds in much the same way as men push open closed doors. But the clouds did not change their colour, nor did the darkness dissolve. But the very next moment, the moon turned into a silver coin. Its
dark spot was now covered with the imprint of the king's face which stared steadily at her. As Gayamani was looking at it, there came another change. The coin with the king's head was replaced by a face—just a face, brightly lit, with the eyes smiling in jest. It was so far away, yet every line on it seemed to be alive. And it was so clearly visible that there seemed to be no gap between it and Gaya's eyes. It seemed that Gaya could stretch her hand and touch it.

She could not recall whose face it was, but she felt a tearing pain in the chest.

Suddenly she remembered. It was Lab's face. At once she cried out in her sleep and as she got up to hold him in her eager, outstretched arms, everything went dark.*67

This dream, evidently, is indescribably intense. This is something to be felt, not to be analysed and explained. There seems to be no point in asking whether the clouds in the dream stood for fate which mercilessly killed every hope for a bright life in Gayamani's heart. Jagadish Gupta's feelings and the words that carry those feelings forward leave us overwhelmed and dumb.

Let us refer to two more dreams and there-with conclude the discussion on Jagadish Gupta's literary style. The first dream, in the story, 'Parbat O Pārbati' runs thus:
"Kamini was dreaming. A grandson had been born. It was a beautiful, chubby child. But the naughty child would not come and sit on his lap. Kamini was holding a red napkin could not draw it on to his lap. The fun provoked as much laughter in Kamaro of that house as in him."

At its simplest, this is a very healthy dream. But the statement that the naughty child would not come near Kamini carries a cruel suggestion. Fate would not allow Kamini to realise his hope; it would on the contrary, grind it mercilessly.

The second dream occurs in the story 'Dibaser Shesha'. Panchu wakes up and tells her mother "that he shall be taken away by a crocodile on that very day." He must have had this premonition in his dream. All efforts to save Panchu fails: He is really pulled away by a crocodile. The dream here is not merely a personal dream having its genesis in one individual's own reality. It is much more than that; it is a perfect metaphor of Jagadish Gupta's vision of a world cruelly dominated by Fate and of a life ever fighting a losing game.