

Chapter 2

JAGADISH GUPTA : HIS MENTAL MAKE-UP

"It is difficult for the contemporary people to correctly guess how long, if at all, a writer's fame will last after his death or if a writer shall be resurrected in later times. The much discussed and much controversial writer, Jagadish Gupta, was not properly assessed in his own time. He earned neither money, nor fame and popularity. He was widely misunderstood. Life and time are eternal, but none of these follows a single uniform pattern. Times change; so does man, his attitudes and values suffer ups and downs. His literature also changes direction and pace, and takes new turns. Still, some writers, with all their merits and demerits, remain as milestones of history. One such writer in the world of Bengali literature is Jagadish Gupta."¹

Jagadish Gupta wrote a lot in his seventy one years of literary life. If he wrote much of remarkable literary worth, he also wrote much just to meet the demands of his publishers. However the glow of his genius is visible more or less in each of his compositions. This is due to his unique mental make-up as a writer. The very frustrations of his personal life may also have been partly responsible.

Jagadish Gupta portrayed man's meanness and frustration and announced the triumph of cruel Fate, but it would be unfair to turn away from him on that account. He

did not have Tagore's vision of transcendental love, nor did he have Tagore's ability to enrich his language with saintly wisdom and joy. Rabindranath, while writing of the contemporary day and society, never turned a blind eye to the eternally noble instincts and values of human life. In the process, he transcended the limits of his age and earned the respect of all ages. Jagadish Gupta moved in the opposite direction; he wrote of what was low, ugly and dark. But that is no reason why he should not be given his due. Jagadish Gupta did not exploit tears; he had little regard for Saratchandra's literary style. He moved away from sentimentalism, and popularity and critical eulogy eluded him. He artistically portrayed the life of such people as become undesirable, neglected and hated under adverse social circumstances and on account of unhealthy instincts. He did not look for transcendence, but then he never preached the philosophy of nothingness. His art was founded on the awareness of a distinct, eternal truth. The present-day society is not at all free from the meanness, dishonesty and bitterness he exposed through his writings. This very fact confirms his ability to transcend 'datedness', and he must be respectfully appreciated on this account. The words of Saroj Mohan Mitra come to mind : "He wrote in a different age and hit at the prevalent systems. Had he written in later times, he would probably have achieved great popularity."²

Should one first discuss the writer's attitude to life before one starts discussing his literature? Opinion differs on this issue. But we hold that a discussion of Jagadish Gupta's attitude must precede any discussion of his literature. Besides, we must also know his life-story in order to rightly assess his genius. His personal life, we emphasise, was inseparable from his artistic life.

He was born in 'Kushthia' in the month of July, 1886 A.D. He belonged to the widely respected Sengupta family of the village, 'Khordameghachami', under the police station of 'Kaliakandi' in the subdivision of Goalanda within the District called Faridpur. He had used the title 'Sengupta' only for a couple of times at the beginning of his literary career. But then, in his aversion to excess, he shortened the title and came to be known as Jagadish Gupta. His paternal house, 'Anandabhaban' had been named after his grand father, Ananda Mohan Sengupta. Ananda Mohan had two sons - Kailashchandra and Prasannakumar. Jagadish Gupta was the youngest son of Kailashchandra Sengupta. His mother was Saudamini Devi.

The Sengupta family of the village, 'Khordameghachami' was well known as a family of lawyers. Both Kailashchandra and Prasannakumar were successful legal-practitioners. Their profession made them live in the town of Kushthia in Nadia. It was there that Jagadish Gupta's educational career began. While a student at school, he began to write poems secretly.

Writes Sukumar Sen in a foot-note in his 'Bāṅgla Sāhityer Itihās (vol. IV) : "while an adolescent, Jagadish chandra used to write poems on love in imitation of Gobinda Chandra Das."³ But this poetic activity, which ran counter to his educational activity could not be kept secret for long. His elders discovered his poems and were shocked when they read them. He was moved into a boarding house on Harrison Road, and admitted to the City collegiate school. After his matriculation he got himself admitted to the Ripon College. But when the college authorities did not condone his long absence due to illness (typhoid), he gave up his studies. At the age of nineteen he was married to Charubala Devi, then began his life as a typist in the Judges Court at Siuri, the principal town of the district of Birbhum. But these details little reveal the real man. Jagadish Gupta had never been financially well-off, but this could not bend his spirit a bit. A few incidents of his life would be mentioned now to illustrate the independence and firmness of this mind.

He gave up his job at Siuri and went to Sambalpur to work in the office of the Executive Engineer. But he did not stay there for long; he came to Patna to work in the High Court. He would not stick to anything by compromising his self-respect.

For him, his experiences even in the high Court at Patna were off putting. Once he had an argument with his superior English officer. Whether or not a particular

English word should begin with a capital letter was the bone of contention. Jagadish Gupta held the right view, but the English-man turned it down since it came from a black. Humiliated, Jagadish Gupta gave up the job, what was more, he took the vow of never again working under any one else.

He came to Calcutta and thought of starting an independent business. At that time the business of bringing out magazines was considered quite respectable. So, he brought one out and called it 'Gupter Galpa'. Every issue of this magazine would carry a few stories written by him in a light vein. But, unfortunately, the magazine achieved little success. Jagadish Gupta never had in him what makes one a popular writer. The lay readers, ever fed on emotionalism, could not appreciate his objective realism. But their indifference could not shake his self-confidence. He remained firm and steady in his faith.

While bringing out his magazine, Jagadish Gupta sustained great financial loss. But he would not accept any further job under any one's authority. Finally, with all the resources at hand, he got into the business of manufacturing ink for fountain-pens. He called this ink 'Jago's Ink'. But he lacked business acumen. Once again he had to sustain great loss and was compelled to wind the business up.

Utterly ruined, Jagadish returned to 'Anandabhaban'. But Anandabhaban was no longer an abode of joy; it could only

offer a roof over one's head, but there was no food for one's empty stomach. Acute paucity of funds drove him to Balpur. There he began to type out, in exchange of money, the papers of litigants in the Law Court. Even then his spirits remained as high and strong as ever, and the publication of the book 'Binodini' was an eloquent evidence of this. Though much effort and much of money had gone into its publication, the book did not sell. A good many copies remained ever imprisoned in the packing boxes only to be moth-eaten there. Still Jagadish did not give in. Unshaken in his self-confidence, he kept on writing, without caring if what he wrote would ever be published. One after another came out the novels - 'Dulāler Dolā', 'Romanthan', 'Asādhu Siddhārtha', and 'Laghakuru', and the collection of short stories, namely, 'Ruper Bāire' and 'Srimati'.

Jagadish Gupta lived in Balpur for a long stretch of time. His last years he spent in his own house in the 'Rangarh Colony'. The government of West Bengal made provisions for a monthly allowance of Rs. 150/-, however, the amount was later reduced to Rs. 75/- only. Shortly, after returning home, he was involved in an accident. Wounded, he was taken to his elder brother's house on the Parasar Road. There he died on April 14th, 1957. He was survived by his wife, Charubala Gupta, and his adopted daughter, (He was childless) Sukumari, affectionately called 'Suku' or 'Saku' by him.

The discussion that follows shall bear out that the creative brilliance of this humble, ever cheerful man never suffered any eclipse. This brilliance, in the context of Bengali literature, was unique and unclassifiable.

He served literature all his life : want could not rob him of his inner joy; poverty failed to silence his voice. He was also a musical artist with the ability to play deftly upon three musical instruments - the violin, the flute and the eesaj. But he never blew his own trumpet. He was also a widely-read man. He regularly studied English journals and magazines. "Look into any English magazine for its stories and you shall find humour, uncanny at times, and an endless variety of elements like race, detection, mystery, war, sea, navys and airship, etc."⁴

Jagadish Gupta wrote of village life. But according to his wife, had no intimate association with very ordinary people. But the red light area could be seen from the house in which he lived when a child. He would then go there to play and would often standing in the street, hear the prostitutes quarreling among themselves. It has also been learnt from his wife that he was fond of having a nice time of fun and mirth in the company of his friends.

We have talked of the literary context of that decade of the 20th century in which Jagadish Gupta appeared as a writer. That was an age of doubts and hesitations and

the writers in general were inspired by Marxist philosophy and Freudian principles. But Jagadish Gupta was an exception. He was, so to say, an old man out in his age. He should have appeared, perhaps, a couple of ages later. But then every man of genius appears as somewhat exceptional in his day he stands out among his contemporaries, and for that very reason demands our special attention. But, paradoxically, that is also the reason why we may like to shy away from him. The fierce individuality of the man who hazarded all the risks of swimming against the current can repel as much as it can attract.

Jagadish Gupta was contemporaneous with 'Kallol' and quite friendly with a good many writers of the 'Kallol' group. "He greatly helped 'Kālikalam' by writing a number of stories for it. At the same time he developed a close friendship with Muralidā. All this shows that one is, whatever one's age, as young as one feels."⁵ But his attitude was different from that of the said writers. "He was distinctly different in his outlook from the young Kallolites. He had his own way of looking at things; he cast a mysteriously oblique glance on life."⁶

Age-wise he was senior to the young writers of the 'Kallol' group, and naturally had a wider range of experiences than they had. While not yet a full-fledged writer, he had for professional reasons, been to a good many places, including Birbham, Sambalpur, Cuttack and Patna. He had

worked in the office of the Law court visited by people of various classes and nature. There he had seen many seamy sides of life representing crimes, deceptions, improprieties and injustices. As such, his experiences, though remarkable, were by no means exceptional; but exceptional was the way in which they were pressed into the service of his art.

Barindrekumar Ghosh wrote in the preface to the novel 'Romanthan'. "Jagadishchandra is the literary descendant of Saratchandra."⁷ The remark, though not wholly valid, cannot be rejected out of hand. Jagadish Gupta chose to write against the background of village life, a life which had found its best portrayal in Saratchandra, and some of the former's stories recall the latter's. But in their outlook on life, the two writers were poles asunder. There is no denying that Jagadish worked wonders within the given limitations. He wrote of the ordinary man, but arrived at an extraordinary perception of life. The 20th century is our, 'Age of Interrogation'; we are troubled with so many doubts and misgivings in regard to our world and life. A spirit of scientific curiosity drives us on. We no longer remain foolishly self-satisfied; on the contrary, we keep searching for the truth that holds together the universe and the life of man.

Jagadish Gupta appeared on the Bengali literary scene with the avowed purpose of revealing the inner mystery of life. "His literary self was inevitably drawn towards the

inner mystery of life, and the inner maze of the human mind."⁸

The first thing that strikes us, as we think of Jagadish Gupta the writer, is the originality and comprehensiveness of his outlook. Every writer has more or less an original way of looking at things, and there are so many ways of viewing life and literature - a fact which accounts for the multitude of visions and techniques found in novels and stories. Needless to say, Jagadish Gupta was not influenced by any one. His attitude was not shaped by the then fashionable trend of 'overgoing' Rabindranath just for the heck of it. "Jagadish Gupta was the first worthwhile artistic protest against the literary taste jointly created by Rabindranath, Prabhakumar and Saratchandra."⁹ He tried to get the Bengali reader out of the charmed circle drawn by Prabhakumar and Saratchandra at least in one respect. Prabhakumar and Saratchandra created the impression that the so-called sinners and immoral characters were basically honest good. They held similar opinions on fallen women; these women, they held, knew as much about chastity as any one else. But Jagadish Gupta cruelly struck at these views. To him, a sinner was verily a sinner, a man of questionable reputation was very much a man of questionable reputation, and a fallen woman was just a fallen woman. He did not indulge in sentimentalism, he did not affect undue generosity, and he did not paint black as white. The characters he created had nothing illusory about themselves. He used to read different

authors and his reading led him to a variety of questions. He tried to find the right answers in his own way from out of his own experience and understanding of life.

Of course no writer can pack all his experiences into his art. For his art Jagadish Gupta naturally selected such experiences as were compatible with and consistent to his mental make-up. While writing of labourers, for instance, he would draw on such experiences as would best reveal the harsh realities of their life.

It has been said earlier that Jagadish Gupta dealt mainly with the poorer section of the 20th century Bengali society. Many earlier writers had already written about the poor and the lowly. The 'Kallol' group, we should not forget, was also active at the time when Jagadish was writing. Still, Jagadish Gupta remained distinctly different. The 'Kallol' group's attitude was an attitude of protest against the then literary convention, but the group could not effect any noticeably radical change in its own writings. "Without being discourteous to Achintya Kumar, we can consider 'Kallol' as having had its genesis in a spirit of reaction. The movement, by being directed only against Rabindranath, could hardly gain any maturity; it was simply reduced to a fashionable trend. If we count Jagadish Gupta out, we shall have to admit that the spirit of reaction which motivated 'Kallol' was nothing but a spirit of romantic waywardness."¹⁰ Only Jagadish Gupta realised in his art what 'Kallol' failed

to do.

The young writers of Bengal reacted only sentimentally to the First World War, and their entire literary movement degenerated into a merely fashionable opposition to Rabindranath. "While most writers, in their youthful exuberance and for cheap popularity, were after expressing, without any sense of discipline, their narrow vision, Jagadish Gupta remained indifferent to popular appreciation of his remarkably mature and comprehensive awareness of life."¹¹ He remained uncompromising in his attitude all through his life. If this inflexibility was sometimes a cause of unpleasantness, it was this that conferred uniqueness on his personality. Achintya Kumar Sengupta said: "Jagadish did never visit the office of Kallol. He lived in a suburban town and he was happy living there. He did not ask for any certificate of success from the milling crowd. He loved literature from the core of his heart. He wrote straight from his heart. He remained ever true to his vision, ever unwavering in his loyalty to his art."¹² Bhabani Mukhopadhyay introduced him thus: "Homeless, childless and poor, Jagadish Gupta was like a monk, free, unchained. Disease could not weaken him, and poverty could not crush his spirit. He was denied the honour and recognition which lesser writers had not been denied; but he had no regrets. He coveted nothing; he was indifferent."¹³ This spirit of indifference ever informed

his art. He never failed to see man's real face under the mask. In other words, the same spirit of indifference made his art realistic. No clarity of vision can be achieved if one allows one's thoughts to be clouded by a set of traditional views on life and the world. Even Rabindranath admitted this when he said : "If you ask me what pure modernism means, I shall say that it means looking at life not subjectively, but objectively. The objective mind is the best carrier of science and art."¹⁴

Jagadish Gupta directed all his efforts towards identifying man's real self. He did not look at life through the prism of traditional values and idealisms. Of course, he did not use his pen merely to hit at any one, he wrote out of his own conviction.

He had a remarkable mental make-up. He looked at life from a novel angle. His uniqueness did not lie in the background he chose for his stories. A good many writers of the day had rejected the older context, and looked for a newer one. So, Jagadish Gupta can be said to have followed the literary practice of his age in this respect. The social and family life of the old-fashioned middle-class and lower middle-class people of the countryside formed, in the main, his literary context. However his direct experiences in the various parts of the country he had visited, found little reflection in his writings. As a matter of fact, he was never drawn towards the surface of things. The inner maze

of the human mind was his principal artistic concern. He had his own perception of things and he tried to analyse life in its light. He aimed both at expansion and concentration in his portrayal of the mystery of life, and he reconciled the opposing purposes admirably well in his unbiased depiction of human nature. All through his literary life he remained unsentimental unprejudiced, objectively aware and analytical, and it was with such a mental make-up that he wrote of man, his family and his society. And he succeeded well in his effort. He was the first Bengali writer who was free from all traditional bias and all sentimentalism in the world of thought. His searching look laid bare the crooked serpentine nature of life, and the resultant misgivings and doubts bred bitterness and discontent in his heart. He did not fail to find out the perversions, sexual urges, selfish desires and ugly designs that are at work under the apparently quiet surface of life. The people of the post-World War period were confused with doubts and misgivings. Traditional faith, reason and ways only led to an immeasurable meaninglessness. Jagadish Gupta analysed life with the objectivity of a scientist. He realised the extent to which life had been disabled by the forces of instinctive perversions. Quite naturally, he could not churn out nectar. He 'seemed' to have little affection for life. However, it would be not quite right to assert, as a critic has asserted, that "Jagadish Gupta was a bitter pessimist; he had all through judged life heartlessly."¹⁵ Such an assertion cannot be made

in respect of a number of characters of his stories. Some of his stories, again, conclude on a note of hope. One may mention "Annadār Abhishāpe", "Kāmākhyār Kamodoshe", "Paying Guest" etc. in this context. Nevertheless, most of the time, he had cast a cold look on life. His younger contemporaries found in their youthful romantic dream an escape from the doubts and misgivings bred by the age. But Jagadish Chandra found no such way out. "His artistic self was incapable either of weaving youthful romantic dreams or of indulging in Kallolite sentimentalism. Consequently, for this realist writer, an attitude of doubt and misgiving about life was inescapable."¹⁶

Our literature often fails to successfully reflect the contemporary life. A writer's reactions to the happenings in his life-time are among the principal means by which one measures the nature and extent of his awareness of his times. Every writer is a social being, bound to be influenced by his age and society. Jagadish Gupta was naturally no exception; his writings reflect the social circumstances and happenings of his day. "Indeed, while portraying the social background Jagadish took care to throw light on the dark side of the human mind."¹⁷ His writings showed how the social maladies got the better of the nobler sense of values and intensified the darkness of doubts and vacillations. He showed how money corrupted the society. He exposed the roles played by greed, smallness, envy and

selfishness in the countryside. He portrayed such characters as, bereft of any noble idealism, struggled hard for mere existence.

The stories and novels of Jagadish Gupta do not present the soft, soothing and mellow aspects of love. He did not deal with such love as is a beautiful expression of man's sexual awareness and is more concerned with giving than with self-indulgence. He chose to depict the physical expression of sexual urge. It has been said earlier that his characters were not sophisticated urban men and women; they were the illiterate or semi-literate people of the countryside. Naturally one cannot expect any exposition of the complex psychology of sex in his writings. He considered sexual urge a mysterious, irresistible and blind force in every one's life. Let alone labelling it as morally reprehensible, call sexual hunger unnatural, even when it ran into excesses. Human life, he thought, was controlled more by man's animal instincts than by his society or family. In a letter to the editor of 'Kālikalam' on 6.7.27 he wrote : "When in the remote past, man was no more than a mere animal, he used to be driven only by lust. If he had any other gift, it just remained dormant at the time."¹⁸ According to him, lust was one of the first principles and would remain so till the end of creation. Some Bengali writers had earlier written on this primitive instinct of man. Nareshchandra Sengupta was one such writer as his novels 'Paper Parinam' and 'Bhuler Fasal'

show. But the lure of popularity took away his desire to be truthful, and ultimately he came to be remembered as the author of 'Abhoyer Biye' and 'Rabin Master'. Attempts were also made to write about the nature and role of lust by some of Jagadish Gupta's contemporaries. Annadashankar, for example, raised the issue in his 'Āṅgoon Niye Kheḷā' but nothing came alive there as the characters did not possess flesh-and-blood existences. Subir Roy Chaudhuri said : "Annadashankar's 'Āṅgoon Niye Kheḷā' was really playing with dolls. There is a lot of witty remarks on sex-consciousness in a couple of chapters of his novel, 'Satyāsatya', but Jagadish Gupta expresses sex-consciousness so naturally that no wit is needed as a prop. Even Manik Bandyopadhyay's 'Chotushkon' seems contrived to me. One cannot take for natural Rajkumar's perverse way of thinking. Such stories as 'Ādikathār Ekti', 'Chandra Surya Jatadin', 'Kalankita Samparka', 'Apahrita Akāshkusum' and 'Shashānka Kabirajer Stree' show how natural, realistic and clear sighted Jagadish Gupta had been in his attitude to sex."¹⁹ The Kallolites expressed sex uninhibitedly, but Jagadish toed a different line, completely his own. His attitude found little favour with the sentimental middle-class. He did not present sex just for its own sake. "He recognised sexual urge as one of the primary instincts of man, but he was neither pedantic about nor shamelessly expressive of it."²⁰ Many of the Kallolites analysed sex as a perversion. But Jagadish tried to get at the truth of sex.

He was different and untraditional also in his attitude to good and evil. "There is nothing in life as virtue or vice. It is all a bias picked up from hearsays or books. I wonder how man came to have such silly notions as 'vice takes one to hell, virtue is the way to heaven' and 'hell is but the other name of the present world'. I am scared neither of heaven, nor of hell."²¹ Instances of evil are numerous in the stories of Jagadish Gupta. Sadu Khan's lust finds a prey in Jasim's wife; Krishnakanta murders one after another his daughters-in-law. Rabindranath called the hero of the second part of 'Laghuguru' "the Devil incarnate." But Jagadish judges such things differently. He considered the so-called vice and evil as integral parts of life. As long as the victim does not stir, the cat sits silent and inactive; but the moment the victim moves, the cat jumps upon it. Similarly, man is safe as long as he remains inactive; but the moment he stirs, and he cannot but stir, he is overpowered by the forces acting against him. In other words, good and evil, and virtue and vice are inseparably tied together. Man is tossed around these two extremes. 'Naba' is introduced as 'good' in the story 'Purātan Shritya'. But does he remain 'good' to the end? No. He gets spoilt as he gets going. Shibapriya in 'Kibār Loke Thik Baley' was initially good, but he turns irretrievably bad as he fails to resist temptation. According to Jagadish Gupta, "man is neither great, nor small, he is just what he is, moving all his life through the maze of good and evil."²² However,

Jagadish did not really deny man's inner passion for nobility. What he wanted to stress was the fact that man's life, good or bad, virtuous or sinful, was inescapably conditional by his circumstances.

Looking at Jagadish's portrayal of the poverty and frustration in human life, an enlightened critic remarks : "A deep disregard for man constitutes the chief characteristic of his writings. His theme is not the glory of man, but the lack of it."²³ The remark, understandably, is not wholly just. As a matter of fact a good many people judged him harshly by pitting him against the humanistic writers. The great humanistic tradition in Western literature developed in the age of the Renaissance started wearing off in the ages to follow. A great many changes were effected between the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. All this had its impact on Bengali literature. The third and the fourth decades of the present century initiated radical changes in the techniques involved in the writing of novels and stories. Said Ashrulkumar Shikdar : "The features of the post-Renaissance anti-humanistic literature are mostly to be found in the writings of late Jagadish Chandra Gupta. . . . But he was not influenced by the literature of the West; he wrote his bitter pieces from out of his very own realisation."²⁴

In humanistic stories and novels, the struggle between good and evil ends in the triumph of the former over the latter. Such writings carry a message of eternal, or

at least, contemporary relevance. The lofty idealism that informs these literary works is an unfailing source of satisfaction for the readers. The works of Bankimchandra, Rabindranath and Saratchandra had undoubtedly their genesis in idealistic humanism. The tradition was carried forward under various garbs by a number of later writers including Bibhutibhusan Tarashekar and Banaphul. It was broken first by the writers of 'Pragati', 'Kallol' and 'Kalikalam'. But these writers lacked originality and consequently became 'dated'. "Among the contemporary writers only Manik Bandyopadhyay and Jagadish Gupta were remarkable for their original and distinctive ideas."²⁵

The new literature which rose in opposition to the old humanistic tradition has been called 'inhuman' by some critics. If goodness is a human trait, so also is man's animality. Which one of the two is more desirable should be determined by the sociologist. The function of the artist is not to pass moral judgements on them, but to express them artistically. It is not only the bright face of the moon that we should turn to; we must also try to discover what is there beyond the light. Jagadish Gupta did neither idolise nor denigrate life. He called a spade a spade. In other words, he was a realist per se.

Had he been thoroughly mistrustful of man's humanity, he could not have raised his voice of protest against Buddhadev Basu's adverse criticism of Prabhat Kumar's writings

so spiritedly. He wrote : "Even without determining whether Prabhatbahu lacks what is meant by art today, one can safely assert that the quiet beauty and gentle humour in his stories shall ever remain as a source of enjoyment for the connoisseurs. These days the theme and language of the stories are so ostensible and sharp, that reading for pleasure is just not possible. Many modern readers are after the pleasure of reading; they shall not forget Prabhatbahu. His manner of writing shall not be discontinued even in future times."²⁶

He wrote mainly of village life, and he used his language very conventionally, allowing colloquialism to enter only in the conversations between his characters. Still, he was a modern, his modernism being a matter of attitude. "Doubts and misgivings, in one word, cynicism, the most characteristic feature of modernism, greatly shaped his mental make-up."²⁷ Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay said: "The romantic vision of Kallol, its joyous philosophy of pleasure, its invitation to free sex, its idolization of poverty and its natural youthful exuberance were not enough to fully build up modernism. Modernism came through oblique attitudes, scientific curiosities, objective analyses and sharp explorations. Modernism is bred not by youthful, romantic dreams, but by doubts and disillusionments."

The truly modern writer entertains no illusions about human nature; he does not indulge in fancies, sentimentalism

and unreasoned ecstasies. He puts no faith by standardization of morals; he doubts and enquires, and he does not believe in the inevitability of the ultimate victory of good. He moves about freely in the dark maze of the human mind, discovers the secret and complex motives directing life from within, and gives them artistic expression. He is ever aware of his world and this awareness is made manifest in his portrayal of man and his surroundings.

It was Jagadish Gupta who first introduced such modernism in the Bengali short story.²⁸

Jagadish Gupta was sceptical of the ultimate triumph of good. He felt that all the honest efforts of life were destined to fail. He thought that a cruel, blind force was responsible for this. No good will, he believed, could improve the human situation; no political, social or collective effort could save mankind. Jagadish Gupta was not a heartless man. He certainly wanted man to be crowned with glory. But, then, he was certain that his wish would not come true. This is borne out when he writes :

"The God of fate has created our inner life,
 It's so lofty, so beautiful.
 Take a look and think
 How desirable it would be
 To complete the stairs leading to it."²⁹

But ultimately no high hope can be realised in the face of the

world and future. In his own word :

"I want to say that is world
Is incapable; it has not been allowed
Total bliss; and Future shall block
Its way to happiness."³⁰

The realist writers located in man's cruel circumstances the cause of his unhappiness; Jagadish Gupta considered man a helpless victim of cruel Fate. As an enlightened critic has remarked "The stories of Jagadish Gupta unmistakably point to the fact that heartless and ferocious Fate plays with the life of man."³¹

Arunkumar Mukhopadhyay considered "Jagadish Gupta not a realistic writer, but a naturalistic one."³² According to Mohitlal Majumdar, "Realism in literature involves an attitude of freedom from wild imagination and bias regarding good and evil . . . ; It turns into naturalism when that attitude becomes more comprehensive and more exploratory. Call it whatever you like, Jagadish Gupta's art aimed at reaching the heart of things."³³

There are broadly speaking, three noticeable tendencies in literature, namely, idealism or romanticism, realism and naturalism. In the age of 'Kallol' and 'Kalikalam' Bengali literature came to be influenced by Western literature. Romanticism is bred by the natural imaginativeness of the

human mind. When the novelist tries to faithfully reproduce life in his art, he may be called realistic as he is after creating an illusion of reality. The creation of this illusion involves a greatly complex process.

The realism that Emile Zola introduced in his novels came to be better known as naturalism. Many people identify realism with naturalism, though the two are not exactly alike.

In fact, naturalism is realism stretched to its optimal limit. It may be defined à la Mohitlal as mature realism. A critic has explained : "Naturalism is the logical result of realism; one is a process, and the other is the aim."³⁴ The naturalists believe that man has no free will, that he is a helpless victim of cruel Fate, that his life is ever burdened with misfortunes, and that principles matter little for his existence.

L.G. Gardiner, while making a comparative study of realism and naturalism, comments : "The realist writes only of what he has seen but selects from the mass of evidence what is required for his purpose; the naturalist without selecting flings all he has seen into his book, clean and more often unclean; he is photographer, not an artist."³⁵

But the true writer is the portrayor of human character, he is not a mere photographer. It is the reader who distinguishes between the hero and the villain. Even the naturalistic writer is required to be a portrayor; for only a

portrayor can breathe life into his art - a task which no photographer can perform.

Let us not enter the debate on realism and naturalism. It would be wise to agree with Mohitlal when he asserts : "Call it whatever you like, Jagadish Gupta's art aimed at reaching the heart of things."³⁶

Jagadish Gupta was intensely aware of the role of cruel Fate in human life. The conviction that man could not overcome his destiny turned him into a pessimist. Of course, in some of his stories like 'Bijay Chakravartir Bikram' and 'Paik Sree Mihir Prāmanik' and in the novel 'Nidrita Kumbhakarna', we see a different Jagadish Gupta. He made the following remark in 'Nidrita Kumbhakarna' : "Besides Fate, man himself can somewhat shape his future and destiny."³⁷ However such an attitude is exceptional and insignificant in the context of his general outlook on life. He wrote of man's struggle for freedom from the tyranny of Fate, and of man's inevitable defeat and consequent pain. This, he thought, was the real human condition.

Jagadish Gupta burst upon the Bengali literary scene with this attitude of doubt and despair. Thus he anticipated the later pessimistic writers in Bengali. None of his predecessors or contemporaries had his power to analyse and present human despair so intensely and vividly. However, we should not confuse the philosophy emerging from stories

and novels with the writers personal philosophy. The writer selects an issue, looks at it from various angles, introduces a number of characters reacting to the issue in a variety of ways and often clashing over it, and thus shows how integrally related the issue is to human life. Jagadish Gupta did not take to writing merely to say that life meant frustration and meaninglessness. He tried to find out how the frustration could assume their formidable proportions. Not that he had no faith in man's physical and inner abilities. He did not hold that human miseries would last for ever. He wrote :

"Sorrows and pains cannot last for ever,
 These shall wear off some day.
 Lucky is he who finds bliss
 After the end of his sufferings,
 I do not have such luck, but I do not grieve,
 I offer my gift of tears to the Goddess of Grief."³⁸

This sense of sorrow in Jagadish Gupta's art may be traced to the sense of sorrow in his personal life. "At a single stroke was crushed the enlightened and energetic talent which had collected the best material for imaginative creation. The fire of starvation destroyed it the way the fire in Lord Siva's eyes had destroyed Madan. The soundless groan did not reach any one's ear. Today the poet is pale-eyed and bent. He does not have the courage to look other human beings in the eye."³⁹ Admittedly, the story somewhat reflects Jagadish Gupta's personal life. Besides remembering his past and

present, the writer also accurately foresaw the future. He spent the last few years of his life on the paltry financial aid he received every month from the Government of West Bengal. His last confession was truly pathetic. 'Binodini' his first book of stories, got published under the financial patronage of Kamababu, an intimate friend. "I distributed some thirty five copies among the people I knew. The rest - about one thousand copies - never came out of my and Kamababu's packing boxes marked 'Binodini'. These were later moth-eaten. I have no regrets as a human being and writer, but I remain ashamed of having wasted Kamababu's money to the tune of Rs. 250/-."⁴⁰

"Indeed Jagadish Gupta was gifted with great innate powers of head and heart. But he found little recognition of his worth. This, thoroughly unmerited in his case, led him to the edge of the dark cave of pessimism."⁴¹ He had started by worshipping youth in his secretly written poems. When caught in the act he had been admonished by his insensitive guardians. He could not proceed far with his studies. He never found any respectable or gainful employment in his service life. After all, this only two alternatives were open. One was to get emotionally worked up and wail, and to wearily and painfully inch towards self-destruction, other one was to withdraw into one's own self and to let the iron enter into the soul. If Michael had chosen the first alternative, Jagadish chose the second. Jagadish Gupta made

repeated mention of the cruel role of Fate; perhaps the same Fate conspired against him and robbed him of his dues as a writer. Only poet Jatindranath was close to him in artistic temperament. However Jatindranath's pessimism was basically metaphysical; on his own admission, it did not evolve out of his own personal experiences. But, as has already been said, Jagadish's attitude towards life was partly shaped by his personal life. His pessimism had its genesis in his metaphysical as well as social consciousness.

His characters, generally speaking, are not driven by hope. This is, however, not to suggest that they do not have any hope at all. What overpowers them most is their sense of despair, for they have hardly anything positive to cling to. The stories of Jagadish Gupta express the same sense of irremediable pain and sorrow as expressed in the writings of a good many writers of the West. "All the stories and novels of Jagadish Chandra have an undercurrent of melancholy and despair. None of these expresses man's simple joys, none depicts the delights of everyday life. To read them is to experience a suffocating sense of frustration."⁴² In the story 'Dibaser Sheshey' belonging to the anthology, 'Binodini' he defined the primary and principal cause of human suffering as 'a cruel, autocratic power'. It is futile to try to explain why this power should frustrate all the parental cares in the said story. Jagadish Gupta sought no rationalisation of this irrationality. He artistically

showed the changes in man's fortunes and misfortunes brought about by the mysterious power of cruel Fate.

Jagadish Gupta was not just a cold spectator of human frustration, he would often find amusing the spectacle of man helplessly laid low by misfortune. But his humour is never ostensible, and that is very much in the fitness of things, for otherwise, it would had become, in the general context of his pessimistic art, more a hindrance than a help.

However, in his writings, Jagadish Gupta never made frustration absolute. If he considered frustration inescapable, he also believed that man's life was not a tale of unrelieved gloom.

But the writings of Jagadish Gupta point, in the main to the mysterious and unfathomable darkness of life, to the endless pains and miseries man is heir to. This was as Jagadish saw it, the reality; it had nothing fanciful about it. This was why he did not portray life as pleasant and beautiful. In his writings perverse desires got the bitter of love, despair and doubt overrode hope and faith, and death, physical as well as spiritual, asserted its supremacy over life. This was something rarely to be found in the writings of his contemporaries, and he ought to find a permanent place in the history of literature at least on this account. "He painted the picture of man's eternal failure and pain, but he never undermined man. This is the most important aspect of Jagadish

Gupta's art."⁴³ He was one of the few writers of the 'Kailol' and 'Kālikalam' group who wrote with the conviction that literature ought to throw light on the dark mysterious life. Achintya Kumar rightly said : "He was a powerful current in the river of modern literature."⁴⁴

He was no exegetist of 'eternal' life, or of the life 'beautiful'. He tried to probe life's inextricable complications and confounding mysteries. His art sprang from his knowledge of the life of numerous people ridden with myriads of problems in their daily life. It would be, therefore, unreasonable to call him narrow in his outlook and cry him down, for having kept himself away from the general literary trend of his day. True, he did not truly belong to his age; true he did not stick even to the age-old literary tradition of our land; but his unique originality has marked him out as a writer to be looked up to and respected.

REFERENCES

1. Desh - 26th July issue, 1986 (Jagadish Gupta : Abikalpa Tragedy)
2. Epār Bānglā - Āshārḥ-Shrāban issue, 1381 B.E.
3. Sukumar Sen - Bānglā Sāhityer Itihās, ^{Vol. II} p. 341
4. Letters, Jagadish Gupta Rachanābali (Granthalay), vol. 1, p. 602
5. Achintya Kumar Sengupta, Kallol Jug (3rd Ed.), p. 260
6. Gopikanath Roy Chaudhuri, Dui Biswajuddher Madhyakālin Bānglā Kathā Sāhitya, p. 320
7. Jagadish Gupta Rachanābali (Granthalay), vol. 2, p. 506
8. Gopikanath Roy Chaudhuri, Dui Biswajuddher Madhyakālin Bānglā Kathāsāhitya, pp. 320-21
9. Saroj Bandyopadhyay, Bānglā Upanyāser Kālāntar, p. 261
10. Saroj Bandyopadhyay, Bānglā Upanyāser Kālāntar, p. 260
11. Hiren Chattopadhyay, Bānglā Upanyāse Bāstabatā : Jagadish Gupta, p. 105
12. Achintya Kumar Sengupta, Kallol Jug (3rd Ed.), p. 260
13. Bhabani Mukhopadhyay, 'Jagadish Gupta' Chotushkon, Āswīn issue, 1384 B.E.
14. Rabindra Rachanabali, Jansha-shatabārshiki Ed., vol. 14, pp. 348 and 352
15. Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay, Kāler Puttalikā, p. 423

16. Gopikanath Roy Chaudhuri, Dui Biswajuddher Madhyakālin Bānglā Kathāsāhitya, p. 321
17. Biplab Chakravarty, Nairashya O Jagadish Gupter Sāhitya, 'Jalārka', Shrāban-Chaitra issue, 1368 B.E.
18. Letters, Jagadish Gupta Rachanābali (Granthalay), vol. 1, p. 618
19. Subir Roy Chaudhuri, Lupta Lekhak Jagadish Gupta, Sāraswat, Āshārḥ issue, 1375 B.E.
20. Ibid.
21. Jagadish Gupta, Meghabrita Ashani (Asha O Ami)
22. Gunamay Manna, Beināshiker Jibandarshan O Shilpapratimā, Jalārka, Shrāban-Chaitra issue, 1368 B.E.
23. Ashru Kumar Shikdar, Manushyadharmor Stabe Niruttar Jagadish Gupta, Jalārka, Shrāban-Chaitra issue, 1368 B.E.
24. Ibid.
25. Jagadish Gupta Rachanābali (Granthalay), vol. 2, p. 496
26. Kālikalam, Paush issue, 1334 B.E.
27. Gopikanath Roy Chaudhuri, Dui Biswajuddher Madhyakālin Bānglā Kathāsāhitya, p. 321
28. Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay, Kāler Puttalikā, pp. 422-23
29. Jagadish Gupta, Kashyap O Surevi (Achyutanānder Tikata)
30. Ibid.
31. Sukumar Sen, Bānglā Sāhityer Itihāse, vol. IV, p. 341
32. Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay, Kāler Puttalikā, pp. 423-24

33. Mohitlal Majumdar, *Sāhitya Bitān*, p. 311
34. John D. Jump, *The Critical Idiom : Realism (Naturalism chapter)*
35. L.J. Gardiner, *Outlines of French Literature*, p. 397
36. Mohitlal Majumdar, *Sāhitya Bitān*, p. 311
37. Jagadish Gupta *Rachanābali (Granthalay)*, vol. 1, p. 327
38. Jagadish Gupta *Rachanābali (Granthalay)*, vol. 1, p. 633
39. Jagadish Gupta, 'Jauban Yajner Kabi', *Kālikalam*, Kārtik issue, 1333 B.E.
40. Jagadish Gupta *Rachanābali (Granthalay)*, vol. 1, p. 647
41. Bhudev Chaudhuri, *Bānglā Sāhityer Chetacalpa O Galpakār*, p. 534.
42. Anilbaran Roy, *Ādhanik Sāhitye Dukhabād, Bichitrā*, Bhādra issue, 1336 B.E.
43. Saroj Bandyopadhyay, *Bānglā Upanyāser Kālāntar*, p. 268
44. Achintya Kumar Sen Gupta, *Kallol Jug (3rd Ed.)*, p. 260.