

INTRODUCTION

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. Life and time are eternal, but none of these follows a single uniform pattern. Time changes, 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.

Jagadish Gupta a Bengali short-story writer and a novelist was born in Kusthia in the month of Asarh, 1303 B.E. (July, 1886 A.D.) in a lawyer's family. It is a little over thirty years since Jagadish Gupta died. To-day we think of him as a brilliant artist, possessor of one of the most original talents in Bengali literature. Each of his books is attention-compelling, baffling the critics to define his exact place as a writer. But during his life time, Jagadish Gupta was insulted, humiliated and misunderstood as a man and as a writer. He earned neither money, nor fame and popularity.

The publication of his short-stories and novels created a storm of protest. It was excoriated as being a book of crude stories written by a monster and designed to corrupt the morals of society. But there were some, who appreciated his stories. He blossomed forth in both the branches - novel and short-story. It seems to us, however, that he is more an

adapt in short story writing.

In this work, we have been led to say more about Jagadish Gupta's mental make-up and his art than we meant to. We cannot say what impression the reader has gained of the sort of man he was, but we are sure it is an incomplete and, so erroneous one. In one of Grimm's fairy tales, there is a story of a youth who entered the castle of the Golden Sun, where sat an enchanted princess awaiting a deliverer. But when he saw her he had a shock. Her face was full of wrinkles, her eyes were sunk deep in her face and her hair was carrot. "Are you the king's daughter of whose beauty all the world talks?" he asked. 'Alas' she replied "this is not my true form; the eyes of mortal man can only see me in this hateful guise. But that you may know how beautiful is the reality, look in this mirror which cannot err. That will show you my face as it really is." She gave him the mirror, and he beheld in it the portrait of the most beautiful maiden the earth could contain. So it is with Jagadish Gupta. Although the thesis is entitled "A Critical Approach to the Short Stories of Jagadish Chandra Gupta" but from the presentation itself it should better be called "Jagadish Gupta's mental-make up and the form and technique in his short story". Emphasis is laid on his mental-make up because of the strangeness and profanity of his mental analysis.

The twentieth century, in which Jagadish Gupta appeared as a writer, 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 had a remarkable mental make up. He looked at life from a novel angle. The first thing that strikes us, as we think of Jagadish Gupta the writer, is the originality and comprehensiveness of his outlook. He 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. He was, so to say, an odd 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.

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 idealism. 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 sentimentalism in the world of thought. His searching look laid bare

the cracked, 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, sensual 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 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 goodwill, 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 could not come true. Fate wrecks men by the score and dances triumphantly on their graves. He used his characters - Krishnakanta, Sibapriya, Nakhai, Kahanaprabha and so many others - as a weapon to show this. All designed to flesh the canvas against which Fate is indelibly etched. Determinism was his philosophic credo. And he almost proved it.

In this discussion, within the limits of short story, we have attempted to discover the unique mental attitude that pervaded Jagadish Gupta as an artist of life. His firm faith, strong vitality, keen realism, boldness and independence have uplifted him to an exalted state. Almost uninterruptedly from

the first to the fifth chapter we have tried to highlight the extraordinary features of the author's mind, sometimes from outside, at another from within the story itself. Never before him in Bengali literature do we find any parallel of an absurd, unprecedented projection of the vital, mental and social life of a creature, that is called man. We have not considered the whole range of his literary output, rather it has been confined to short story alone, but there is no contradiction in him as an artist of life be it in short story or in novel writing.

In contrast with the disorder of his personal life Jagadish Gupta's short stories are miracles of precision. 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 hoodwinked, that a necromancer is playing fantastic and wonderful tricks upon us. The climax of horror is reached in a genuine excitement. We are moved, we are appalled. We have been touched and we have felt terror.

Some may groan under the weight of his cumbersome sentences, excessive detail but interest never flags. The man's energy and vigour is larva-like, you are pushed, shoved, and carried along - a willing captive. For in his hands the dazzling Second Empire comes alive in all its tinsel glamour and decadence.

In order to give a rational exposition of our conclusion reached above, we have arranged our discussion in several chapters as noted below :

- I. Contemporary background and Jagadish Gupta's uniqueness
- II. Jagadish Gupta : His mental make-up
- III. Fate-awareness in Jagadish Gupta's stories
- IV. Vision of Humanity through the prism of character analysis.
(Chapter three and four is an elaboration of chapter two.)
- V. Form and Technique in Jagadish Gupta's Short-story vis-a-vis Short-story in general.

It is true, just a few years ago, he was almost dead as a writer. Critics were silent. Manabendra Sanyopadhyay wrote about him in 1975 A.D.

"You could not heard anything in the niche
 You lie straight without
 the light of the learned books.
 Or are you alive?"¹

We think of him he is alive, not only alive but gloriously alive.

Exactly twenty years ago (Āshār 1375 B.E.), Subir Roy Choudhury in a periodical named 'Sāraswat', published from Calcutta had written an article on the hidden author Jagadish Gupta ("Lepa Lekhak Jagadish Gupta"), thereby intending to rouse the interest of readers and literary critics in him. With this was added an incomplete catalogue of Jagadish Gupta's books. In the same issue was reprinted Jagadish Gupta's short story 'Ādi Kathār Ekti'. About six years ago this issue was made available to me by my teacher and research-supervisor Dr. Usha Ranjan Bhattacharyya. The story enchanted and amazed me at the same time. Thereafter I read several stories one after another, each of them appeared to me 'unknown' in Bengali literature so far. This is the primary reason which led me

1. Jagadish Gupta's Galpa, Subir Roy Choudhuri (ed.), 'Introduction', p. iv. Translator : Rama Bhattacharyya.

towards research. In spite of the best will, it was not feasible to collect the works of Jagadish Gupta. His published books were out of print. Whatever has been published by 'Dasmati' and 'Granthalaya', but constitute a fragment of his writings. In the course of my inquiry, I come to the conclusion that the major part of his writings is still away from human sight. This statement is valid even upto 1938. Whatever has been published is scattered through different periodicals and magazines. A great deal of labour has enabled me to find out ninety nine and my inquiry rests on these. No one has so far been able to provide me with an edition of his four anthologies of short-stories. I have given a full account of this in the 'Epilogue' (pp. 185-89).

Upto the period of undertaking this inquiry, not more than twenty articles were published about Jagadish Gupta. A full-fledged discussion was null. This is the second desideratum which leads me to embark on an inquiry on him. Subsequently, some books on him have been published. One full-fledged research work also has made its appearance. All these have come within our parview. A full account of these have been furnished in the 'Epilogue' (pp. 179-183). While recognising the value and importance of these publications, we may assert that the present inquiry is not a mere echo of what has been done earlier. This too had a scope and we believe that we have done justice to our designed course. Accordingly we submit our discussion to the circle of scholars with the belief that this humble attempt will incur their pleasure.