Chapter-2

Concept of Family, Family Conflict and Gender Relations

The family has always remained one of the most significant social institutions in India. It is often understood as an ideal homogenous unit with strong coping mechanisms. It is a basic, cohesive and integral unit of the larger social systems. Moreover, families in a large and culturally diverse country such as India have plurality of forms that vary with class, ethnicity, and individual choices. Its members are bound by interpersonal relationships in a wider network of role and social relations. It is considered a link between community and change (Tata Institute of Social Sciences – TISS 1993). The family is the basic and important unit of society because of the role it plays in generation of human capital resources and the power that is vested in it to influence individual, household and community behaviour (Sriram 1993).

In the book *The Great Indian Family* (2006) Gitanjali Prasad revealed the origin of family, structure and its relevance in India as long as back to the Vedic Era. Family may be defined as a bond of two or more persons united by marriage, consensual union, blood or adoption, in a single household, with interaction and communication between them (Desai, 1994). Since ancient times, family, caste and community have dominated the Indian society. Family dominates the life of the individual as well as life of the community, hence it plays a pivotal role in Indian society.

Sunderland (2006:28, 29) described gender as a “social correlate of sex.” Gender is, in general, equated with the biological fact of being male or female. Some theories also look upon gender as a mode of behaviour and locate it in the behavioural differences between males and females. Gender, thus, becomes a perspective through which people
are categorized as males and females and are expected to think, act and perform in certain predefined socio-cultural ways. Thus, boys are expected to be tough, macho and brave while girls are naturally expected to be shy, frail and submissive. Biological and cultural prejudices shape social perspectives on both the sexes and their gender issues are looked upon as belonging to markedly different sets. Along with caste, class, race and sexuality, gender also becomes an important parameter of categorizing and dividing a society into different groups. Gender thus, becomes enmeshed in issues of power and becomes an important parameter by which social dominance and marginality of population groups is meditated upon.

A man always tries to control ‘women’s body’ and gain dominance by marginalizing her from power roles (Faith, as cited by Lloyd 82). Language pattern is normally used as a tool for dominating women by creating difference between man and woman. Language and speech furnish a way to exert supremacy of male over the other sex. Male talk more and exert dominance and control over women, they also prevent women from speaking because of their pre-conditioned mindset to devalue women [Dominance Theory by Thorne et al 1983 and Prominence Theory by Maltz and Broker (1982) and Tannen (1990)].

Both Rabindranath Tagore and Kartar Singh Duggal are writers who, in the remarkable range of their writings, have concentrated upon the institution of family. The subtle nuances underlying the wide, shifting and often conflicting range of family interests and relationships have been brilliantly fictionalized by both of them in their works. Gender manifests itself as an important theme in their works and in representing it
according to the conventions of their times, they also project ways of dismantling it, thereby protesting against such irrational and artificial social divisions.

In the short stories of Tagore and Duggal, patriarchy presents itself as a significant socio-cultural force that orders and demands its own discriminatory social structure. Men and women, under patriarchal norms, are expected to behave according to conventional pre-ordained roles which hamper their growth and development as individuals. Rabindranath Tagore and Kartar Singh Duggal, with their acute sensitivity to gender issues, have explored various aspects of familial relationships. Their short stories focus on the way that power, class, caste and gender become linked in society to oppress and marginalize certain groups. Along with gender, age also emerges as a distinct ground of social and particularly familial marginalization with old people gradually being forced to occupy the margins of family life. Again, the family has a well-defined and well-regulated orbit of kinship relationships and matters deemed to be ‘private’ must be strictly kept within its four walls. However, in cohesive communities, friends and neighbours are often admitted into this closed circle and come to replace kinship ties. “Man and wife do not, as a rule, live together; they only breakfast together, dine together, and sleep in the same room. In most cases the woman knows nothing of her working life (he calls it her home life)” (Shaw 11).

In Indian society, the position and status of women is rather ambiguous, for while, on the one hand, women are worshipped as deities and embodiments of cosmic creative and destructive power, on the other, they are victimized and tortured on account of their bodies. In a land where the conventional blessing given to a woman in myths, epics and legends is ‘May you be the mother of a hundred sons’, being born as a woman and giving
birth to a daughter are tantamount to failing in one’s duties of womanhood and hence, the stigma of inferiority and unwantedness is attached to women, right from the moment they are born. Marriage being looked upon as the only alternative available to women in view of the limitations upon female education and employment opportunities, the family further becomes a site in which the woman must tolerate untold tyranny and miseries because of the lack of a social support system. Kate Millett rightly points out:

Under patriarchy, the female did not herself develop the symbols by which she is described. As both the primitive and the civilized worlds are male worlds, the ideas which shaped culture, in regard to the female, were also of male design. The image of woman, as we know it, is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs. These needs spring from a fear of the "Otherness" of woman. Yet this notion itself presupposes that patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set himself as the human norm, the subject and reference to which the female is "other" or "alien." (Millett 46-47)

In view of these ideas, this chapter shall attempt to explore the various shades and kinds of familial relationships that Tagore and Duggal outline in their several short stories.

Marital Relationships

The husband-wife relationship constitutes the chief and most important relationship in the network of family ties. A healthy relationship between spouses not only enables the effective functioning of the household and the growth and development of the partners involved but also ensures the proper socialization of the children born into the family. On the other hand, marital conflict brings about negative consequences on the physical and emotional upbringing of children and also disorganizes the household unit
apart, leading to private and social disharmony. The quality of interaction between husband and wife, thus, has serious repercussions for the entire family unit.

Tagore’s heroines, Charulata (“A Broken Nest”), Mrinal (“The Wife’s Letter”) and Anila (“House Number 1”) were married to men who were intellectuals but who, as husbands, failed to be sensitive to the needs of their wives and let them languish in neglect and isolated suffering. In response to this neglect meted out by their most intimate partners, these characters eventually chose to break free of their marital ties and prepared themselves to undergo all that such a decision entailed. These three women characters, though intelligent and highly sensitive, were handicapped by the problem that was characteristic of women of their era – namely economically dependence.

Charulata manifests herself as Tagore’s most unfortunate heroine among these three. Initially she attempted to establish her own identity through her creative writing skills and Amol always encouraged her in these attempts. However, after Amol’s departure she could not bring herself to break the rules and regulations of marriage and kinship bonds. Mrinal and Anila proved to be more courageous as they resolutely chose to leave their marital homes when they discovered that their marital association failed to bring about mental and emotional compatibility with their spouses and that the compromises of family life were only leading to a collapse of their identities in various ways. Their acts broke the traditional image of the ‘happy wife’ who, under any circumstance, stood by her husband and made her destiny to forcedly rhyme with his.

Tagore’s other heroines - Bindu (“The Wife’s Letter”) and Kamala (“Musalmanir Galpo or Muslim Girl”) were unlucky to find poor matches in their marriage. Bindu had the fate of being married to an insane person, and Kamala was abducted before she reached her
marital home. Even within an unhappy relationship, Bindu tried to survive but, apart from Mrinal, she received no support from her family. Everybody failed to understand her miseries, leading Bindu finally to choose death as the only escape route available to her. This also broke the model of kinship in the anthropological literature (Sen 105).

The original, “Musolmanir Galpo” (1941) is the last short story of Tagore, dictated about two months before his death. “Musolmanir Galpo” was published in 1955 in Ritupatra (Tagore). The protagonist of the story, Kamala, was saved from dacoits by Habir Khan but she was disowned by her family as she was said to have lost her caste by seeking shelter in the house of a Muslim. To Kamala, however, this stigma was immaterial as she realized that humanity was beyond caste and though her savior was a Muslim, he had protected her and provided her shelter when she was homeless. She received utmost care and affection in Habir Khan’s house. No male was allowed in her mahal. Khan’s son began to visit her mahal secretly, and she developed an emotional bond with him.

Then one day she told Habir Khan:

Father, I've no religion of my own. The man I love is my religion. I could not find the grace of God in the religion which deprived me of all love and dumped me to the garbage heap of neglect. The deity there humiliated me every day. I can't forget such insults. Father, I discovered love for the first time in your house. I realized that the life of a destitute like me has some value. I worship the deity which has sheltered me through the respect of such love. He's my God—he's neither Hindu nor Muslim. I've accepted your second son Karim; my life and my
religion have mingled with him. You can convert me to Islam, I've no objection—
may be, I belong to two faiths. (Tagore trans. by Banerjee)

Despite being abandoned by her family, she saved her sister Sarala from the dacoits who attacked her bridal palaquin. The last lines of the story embody a strong human message:

Uncle, my pranam to you. Don't be afraid, I won't touch your feet. Now take your daughter back home. Nothing has made her untouchable. Tell my aunt I had to take her grudging food and clothes for long, and never thought I could repay your debt like this. I've also brought for Sarala a red silk sari and this brocade sitting mat. If my sister is ever in trouble, let her remember that she has a Muslim elder sister to protect her. (Tagore trans. by Banerjee)

Thus, neither lineage nor the obligatory marriage models prove adequate to characterize kinship for this Tagorean character (Sen 106).

Through the projection and representation of his female characters, Tagore introduced the concept of ‘nest-leaving cohort’ to focus on the condition of women in the 20th century. Due to two consecutive world wars, there was a severe economic depression all over the world which resulted in crisis in India also. There was paucity of investment in education and family and parents compelled girls rapidly into marital relationship. Thus, under this broad concept, ‘marriage cohort’ can cover expectations about marital relationships and commitments. Tagore examined in his stories how far this ‘nest-leaving’concept enabled his female protagonists to break and re-establish the kinship values independently in their own lives.

To Tagore, the family as an institution is a social construct and it collectively decides, imposes who should belong to it and who must must be excluded from its
frontiers. Hence, characters like Mrinal (“The Wife’s Letter”), Anila (“House Number 1”) and Kamala (“Musalmani”) leave their family due to utmost neglect while Boshtomi (Devotee) voluntarily chooses to exile herself from society as she failed to achieve a balance between nature and home. Mrinal chose her exile when she failed to modify the inhumane situation within her family. Bindu’s suicide led Mrinal to take refuge in the outer world. She went to Puri as she realized her place in the family was that of a second fiddle. Similarly, Anila could not accept her utterly insensitive husband and chose to break her marriage rather than be exposed to constant suffering within it. She even turned down an invitation from another charismatic outsider for bonding and relationship, having realized the subordination that women are subject to in all marital bonds. Kamala chose her own partner as she realized humanity to be above prescriptions of caste, culture and religion. She also took the onus of rescuing women from kidnapping by dacoits so that they wouldn’t have to face her misfortune. Thus by making each of these characters decline kinship through reproduction, Tagore attempted to show that in leaving their marriage alliances, his heroines were capable of becoming free, healthy individuals responsible for and contributing towards society.

In Boshtomi (“Devotee”), Tagore explores the theme of a free woman who neither feels the commitment to maintain the norms of kinship, nor of gender relations. In this context of self-exile from home, Tagore describes Boshtomi in the story “Devotee” (Tagore 1916) thus:

One day, in a small village in Bengal, an ascetic woman from the neighbourhood came to see me. She had the name ‘Sarva-khepi’ (the mad woman) given to her by the village people, the meaning of which is ‘the woman who does not care
about earthly matters.’ Evidently she pitied me who lived (according to her) 
prisoned behind walls, banished away from the great meeting-place of the All, 
where she had her dwelling. I felt that this woman, in her direct vision of the 
infinite personality in the heart of all things, truly represented the spirit of India. 

(Tagore, *The Hungry Stones and Other Stories* 125)

Through all his women characters, Tagore focused on the change that took place in 
family relationships as ethical and traditional values fell apart.

“The Skeleton” (1926), is the story of a child widow who had died in childhood. 
Her body was later donated to a school, which had kept her skeleton for the purposes of 
classroom scientific study. One night a young student was sleeping in a room next to 
where the skeleton was kept. The student saw the spirit of the girl who told the young 
man her story during that night.

She was married in childhood, and her husband died within two months and she 
became a widow. Her father-in-law declared to the neighbourhood that she was a “poison 
bride” (biṣkanyā) who had brought death upon her innocent husband. She was driven 
away by her parents-in-law from their house and without knowing her ominous signs she 
returned happily to her parents’ home. She grew up into a beautiful young woman and 
was admired by men. She used to dress up secretly in colorful saris with bracelets on her 
arms, imagining men admiring and caressing her. Then a doctor came into the first floor 
of her house, and she used to ask him how to use poisons to help sick people die.

Then one day she heard that the doctor was getting married. On the evening of his 
wedding, the girl slipped some poison from his office into one of his drinks; before he 
left for the bride’s house. She then dressed herself in a silk wedding sari, put a large
streak of red vermilion in the part of her hair, and adorned herself with all of the jewellery from her chest. She took poison herself and lay down on her bed. She hoped that when people came to find her they would see her with a smile on her lips as a married woman.

“But where is that wedding night room? Where is that bride’s dress?” she asks the listening man. “I woke up to a hollow rattling sound inside of me and noticed three young students using me to learn about bone science! In my chest where happiness and sadness used to throb and where petals of youth used to bloom every day, there was a master pointing with a rod about which bones have what names. And there was no sign of that last smile that I had placed on my lips.”

(Tagore 68)

When dawn arrives, the spirit of the skeleton silently leaves the room. The widow in this story is a “poison bride,” who causes the deaths of the men she unites with, and she is also a lifeless skeleton, with passions and dreams but no means to fulfill them. This pattern—the woman as a poison bride causing her husband’s death and then turning into a skeletal widow—is repeated twice. First the girl is a real bride who is perceived to have caused her husband’s death by her ominous nature, and next she is dressed as a bride who actually administers poison to the departing groom. At the end of each sequence, after causing her groom’s death, she becomes a skeleton. What Tagore is, thus, metaphorically insisting is that it is her existence as a widow that is skeletal. A beautiful woman full of dreams and passion, she is forced to live the bare emotionless life of a skeleton - without love, physical fulfillment and consensual union with males. By the story’s end, the
metaphor has become a reality and the widow has literally become a hollow skeleton that possesses no signs of life or emotion.

In the story, “Living and Dead” (1926) Tagore presents a youthful, childless widow, Kadambini. At the beginning of the story, she loses her consciousness and everyone thinks that she is dead. Her body is taken quickly to the cremation ground by men from her father-in-law’s house. The men leave her there as it suddenly starts raining and she awakens on the pyre. Seeing the cremation ground around her, she believes that she has died and that she is now a ghost. She returns to her native village to a childhood friend who is now married. Eventually, when her friend and her husband find out that Kadambini is supposed to have died, they chase her away screaming, calling her inauspicious. Kadambini then returns to her in-law’s home and when she holds her beloved nephew she discovered that she is not a ghost. But the people of the household plead in front of her not to harm their child and not to bring misfortune upon their household and lineage.

Kadambini could take it no longer, she cried out frantically, ‘But I am not dead, I am not dead. How do I convince all of you I am not dead? Look, I am alive.’ Seizing the metal bowl from the floor, she struck herself on the forehead with it, her forehead began to bleed immediately. ‘Look, I am alive,’ she declared. (Tagore 107)

Kadambini finally drowns herself in a pond and by her death she is able to prove to her family that she had been alive. Here the widow’s existence is compared to that of a departed spirit (pret). Kadambini is a widow who is neither living nor dead. Inhabiting a marginal world, she realizes that her being alive or dead has no social consequences for
anyone. However, to her own identity, this fact of living or death mattered. Kadambini expresses her pitiable condition while at her childhood friend’s house:

Who am I to you? Am I of this world? You are all laughing, crying, loving, each of you engaged in your own business, and I am only watching like a shadow. I don’t understand why God has left me in the midst of you and your worldly activities (saṃsār). You are afraid of my presence, lest I bring misfortune (amangal) into the joys of your daily lives. I, too, cannot understand what relation I have with any of you. But since God did not create another place for us to go, we must keep hovering about you, even after the vital links (bandhan) are severed. (Tagore 104)

Widows, within the Indian family structure, enact the existence of ghosts or immaterial beings. Though they live in the family, like ghosts, they are forbidden from participating in everyday household life as they are believed to bring upon misfortune. Tagore suggests that widowhood presents a sorry state for society as no rituals could release the widow from her pathetic condition. So Kadambini prefers to end her life to free herself from her terrible living conditions.

Thus, Charu, Mrinal, Anila, Kamala and Boshtomi succeed in empowering themselves through personal and collective organization; and transform their dependent and compromising existence within family life into an exploration of their own selfhoods as they step beyond the strict cultural boundaries and regulations of marital life to embrace a freer world.

Dasgupta and colleagues (2013) observed that in Tagore’s earlier stories his women protagonists were based on patience and self-sacrifice. As he matured he
took up a more progressive stance regarding his women heroines. Mrinal from *The Wife’s Letter* rejected home and family in search of a new meaning in her life as a human being. Tagore in these six short stories interrogated the system of arranged marriages and the entrapment and enslavement of these women as wives. They all have loveless and childless marriages, although apparently their husbands provided them with shelter, security and sustenance. Usually wives were taught to adjust and accept the patriarchal stereotype. Equal partnerships in marriages were impossible. (Sen 113-114)

However, Tagore, despite devoting his stories to a realistic portraiture of their times, condemned patriarchy and raised his voice against the injustices that it perpetuated within the stereotypical family. The female protagonists were either educated or mature individuals who dared to break the prescribed norms of family, something that was revolutionary and considered outside the domain of femininity during the colonial times in Bengal.

Kartar Singh Duggal, who has written extensively on issues pertaining to gender, family conflicts and unconventional relationships in his stories, has generally been identified as one of the foremost and finest short story writers from Punjab. The recipient of many global awards and accolades for his short stories, Duggal wrote mainly in Punjabi and English and his works have been translated in several languages including Hindi, Urdu, Telegu, Tamil, Oriya, Bengali, German, French, Russian etc. Located in the post-independence period when his native land was trying to recover from the painful wound of Partition, the agony of partition and communal violence are found to dominate his writings thematically. But his stories also contain a vivid portrayal of the common
man, his imperfections, flaws and his limited social destiny. With respect to family relationships, Duggal was well in advance of his times and his themes vary from inter-class conflict, adultery and female foeticide, to neglecting and deserting parents in their old age. Critic Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia says,

The spatio-temporal particularity of characters and events constitutes the essence of the novel form. Short story in a sense is an expression of atomistic experience happening in atomistic time. Because it is the experience in a flash of moment, so it has all the spontaneity looked up in that moment when it appropriates to itself the totality of time. Spontaneity and intensity- these are the qualities of Duggal’s artistic experiences which have ensured him top position that he enjoys today. (Chaudhury 26)

The characters in Duggal’s stories are found to suffer because of the social labels that are tagged to them and which one cannot change like caste or class, greed, lust, poverty, pride and self-obsession. “Women’s Lib” is the story of an ambitious woman Zarrina who desired to have a girl child and her husband Professor Ahmad failed to impose his wish for a boy on his wife. The daughter was named Zulfi as she was the split image of her father and was pampered by her parents from childhood. Zarrina thought of using Zulfi as an instrument to fight male chauvinism and take vengeance against the male sex who had, for generations, enforced humiliation and atrocities on women in the society. Exposed to such ideas and that too from a creative artist like Zarrina, Professor Ahmad was both astonished and disheartened. Zulfi gradually grew up to become a beautiful and charismatic lady with every passing year. Zarrina was overwhelmed by her daughter’s beauty, talents and glory and thought that her daughter will be a heartthrob for
the rich boys and cause them to empty their wallets charmed by her glamour. She wished her daughter to betray one lover after another and to lead a carefree life. Professor Ahmad protested at his wife’s wild and vicious ideas but nothing could stop Zarrina from liberating her daughter and disappointed and heartbroken by the state of affairs in his family, he ultimately died of heart failure.

Zulfi grew up to be a self-dependent woman and became, by her beauty and glamour, the attraction of late night parties. She earned a substantial salary and was free and empowered to choose her partner on her own. Zarrina as a mother, never questioned her daughter’s late night home arrivals. In fact, she rejoiced over the issue that her daughter was a liberated new woman and was not regulated by the conventional norms and codes of the patriarchal society.

“After all what is the purpose of the pill?” Zarina continued, “the pill has liberated woman. Today she is free as man ever was. I have told my daughter to avenge herself for mother and mother’s mother. She must choose the best, the richest, the most handsome, the most gifted boys, exploit them and then throw away. The way menfolk have done with women all these days.” (Duggal 19)

Bulbul, Zarrina’s youngest sister Zakkia’s daughter married in the court against the will of her parents as she was pregnant. She delivered a son but found her life unhappy in the matrimonial fold and chose to return to her parents. Bulbul went on to develop an illicit relationship with a boy who was much younger to her and even married him, allowing her ex husband to take their son along with him. But after a few days, this relationship also failed and Bulbul returned to her mother. Coming to know about all this, Zarrina visited Zakkia and motivated Bulbul to become self dependent like her own
daughter. Using her contacts she placed Bulbul in a job, firmly insisting that Bulbul, rather than anyone else, should make the relevant decisions concerning her life.

When Zulfi chose to marry Bansi who was a smart, good looking and rich man, and the prosperous owner of ten companies, the difference in religion did not emerge as an issue. Zarina was not ready to leave her daughter but Zulfi, who was madly in love with Bansi paid no heed to her mother’s moral policing. Zulfi converted herself and married Bansi, giving birth to a baby boy from their wedlock. But later on Zulfi, experiencing domestic violence, left her in-laws home.

In this story, Duggal depicts how even for the modern, educated and independent woman, marriage and its exploitations still remain in place. The greatest irony of the story is that though the daughter was given every parental freedom to defy the traditional gender practices of her age, she still is forced to undergo the same kind of victimization that almost every married woman of her society endures. Zulfi finds love and wants to spend life with her family but even her rich educated husband ends up discriminating against her and, in attempting to dominate and subjugate her through violence, he erases all the liberated woman’s identity that Zulfi’s mother Zarina had struggled to nurture for her.

Similarly, in the story “The Sins of Her Fathers”, Magistrate Murli Manohar belongs to a scheduled caste and for that reason he enjoys special privileges which enabled him to accomplish swift and smooth promotions in his professional career. As per the opinion that the so-called higher class is always on a look out to deprive people like him, he was always been wary of social class divisions. He was in love with a Brahmin girl Janki who too loved him and accepted him as her husband against her
family’s fury and opposition. They eventually became popular in the town as an ideal couple and Janki’s family also forgave and accepted them into the family fold after they were blessed with a girl and a boy in the course of a couple of years.

One day, a strange murder case came to Manohar for hearing. The Zamindar’s son had been murdered by an untouchable girl. The girl accepted her guilt and her confession statement concerning the crime weighed heavily over Manohar’s mind. The Hindu boy forced the girl to have sex with him in the crop field where the girl was scouring for weeds. The girl repeatedly told not to assault her sexually as she was a cobbler girl and, therefore, untouchable, but the boy refused to listen to her pleas.

How can one refuse a zamindar’s son? God knows how long we had lain together in the field when something happened to me. I felt as if I was going to break into pieces. My eyes closed. I was exhilarated and I asked him to kiss me. My lips were burning. I begged him to kiss once. But he wouldn’t. Again and again I took my lips but he would brush me aside. Then I do not know what happened to me. I felt like a tide rising inside me. I held his neck with both my hands and started kissing him; .... And then when I had fully quenched my thirst from his lips, I let him go. To my surprise, I found his body gone cold. He lay there dead. (Duggal 281)

Murli Manohar had handled many strange cases in his judicial career but he had never come across such a case nor such a confession. The words of the convict echoed in his ears, “My lips were burning, I begged him to kiss me just once. But he would not” (281).

The case changed Manohar’s domestic life completely; he lost all his interest in his wife and kids. He could not bring himself to kiss his wife on the lips anymore. Janki
attempted to revive her marriage and bring back the old fervor of love into it but she came to know that her husband had developed an extra marital affair with a Municipal Board school teacher who also belonged to the lower caste. Janki’s love had clearly been forgotten in the aftermath of Manohar’s handling of that strange case and now, she had ceased to matter in his life as his wife and an individual and had become to him a symbol of that same upper caste who had exploited the lower castes since generations. Janki’s efforts to rescue their relationship went in vain as Murli Manohar remained indifferent and now she did not even have the option of going back to her parents as her marriage to Murli Manohar had been her rebellion against societal discrimination as she had wanted to prove her family and their caste notions wrong. Shattered by her husband’s deceit, Janki was completely heartbroken. She failed to understand or identify for whose sins she had been victimized and realized that for all her modern ideas concerning caste prejudices and all her sacrifices, she was actually paying penance for her belonging to a higher caste which was the root cause of the breakdown of relations with her beloved husband.

Duggal, thus, depicts in this story how modernism and education also failed to suppress the caste differences between a husband and wife who had been passionately united in a love bond. Despite the strong love that existed between them, their sensibilities were ultimately overpowered by societal patterns of age old discriminations in the name of caste. The social taboo of caste could not be curbed even by love, education and rationality and ultimately Murli could find solace only in a relationship with a co-caste partner.
“The Making of a Militant” is a story which brings out the adverse repercussions of the lineage of the caste system within a family. The so-called Chamars - Marhu and his son Mangu took up the practice of farming by abandoning “their caste profession of treating the hides of dead cattle” (Duggal, *The Miracle And Other Stories* 85). They worked as labourers in the farms of Biswedar, the Zamindar of the village. While Marhu Ram never mentioned his caste, his son Mangu took pride in his lineage. “We are Chamars by caste though we have taken to farming. My father’s father and his father were the low-caste Chamars” (85).

Marhu Ram got his son married to Saleti, a woman of exceptional beauty. Mangu’s wedding took place with great pomp and joy but when the party concluded after midnight and Mangu entered the room, he was bewildered and aghast not to find his bride. Seeing her son in discomfiture Mangu’s mother told him:

“Beta the bride has gone to the Biswedar. She will be back soon.” “But why? What has she to do with the Biswedar at this hour of night?” “Beta…” and the rest was struck in his mother’s throat. In the meantime his father came out of his room and explained. “The bride has to spend the first night at the Biswedar’s.” (89)

The revelation made by Mangu’s parents about the village tradition according to which every new bride of the village has to sleep first with the Zamindar before spending her nights with her own wedded spouse and that Mangu’s mother had also done the same, came as a cruel shock to Mangu’s sensibilities. Consumed with anger and hatred, Mangu unearths a buried weapon and leaves the house to seek revenge from the Zamindar. The story ends informing the readers that, Not many days had passed when news came that
the Government had announced an award of one lakh rupees for anyone who would help arrest Mangu Ram, son of Marhu Ram of village Talwandi Biswedar! (89)

This story very clearly highlights the class conflict within the society by which people from the upper castes not just oppress the people of lower castes economically but deny them human dignity as well. “Just because Mangu belongs to a low class (socially and economically), he is powerless in the face of the tradition that requires every lower-class male to give over his wife to the Zamindar of the village for the first night after his marriage just like his father had to. This kind of exploitation in the name of tradition is totally unacceptable and kudos to Duggal for so minutely and distinctly portraying this grave issue to his readers” (Banerjee 111).

Kartar Singh Duggal’s story “The Taxi Driver,” is another skillful tale that revolves around an honest taxi driver, who does not want to use the money left by a passenger in his taxi. His wife, however, questions his ideas on morality and its declining relevance in the cruel times. The opinion generally prevalent about Indian auto rickshaw drivers is not a good one and they are ill-famous for their rude and roguish behavior, their whimsical ways and their dishonest pretexts for charging outrageous fares from their passengers. Duggal, however, with his delicate and sensitive portrayal of the auto rickshaw drivers in “The Taxi Driver,” makes his readers re-think about their ideas and view-points concerning the auto-rickshaw drivers’ fraternity, for on the one hand are issues of morality and ethical behavior while on the other is the more practical and pressing need to feed one’s family. In the absence of measures of social welfare, every householder is first responsible to his own family and when, confronted with the possibility of making their ends meet, does ethical and honest behavior imply giving
away the opportunity to tend to one’s family by returning the wallet to the passenger who had been careless and indifferent enough to lose it?

Dittu woke up from his sleep. He was perspiring profusely. Banti was fast asleep in her bed. She had the wallet held firmly to her bosom. Dittu tried to snatch it from her. She woke up suddenly and grappled with her husband. In the struggle, Dittu lost his patience and smacked Banti on her face. Banti gave a loud shriek. Dittu gave her another blow. (Duggal 5)

While the taxi-driver’s conscience does not allow him to keep the money, his love for his family fails to allow him to part with it either and the story, open-ended as it is, does not leave the reader with any clear-cut answers.

Child Relationships

Parent-children conflicts with regards to individual freedom and double standards giving greater freedom to sons than daughters, is a recurring feature and has been noted in many studies (Kurian 1986). A girl child is allowed to remain a child only for short period of life. It is always stressed that her relationship with her natal home is temporary. Parents tend to discriminate among boys and girls not only in terms of reinforcing speech, activity and games, but also in terms of food, education and other material possessions in India. Many of the social customs and rituals favour or promote child abuse. Indian society makes a relative underestimation of girls and views them as a family liability. Girls get less autonomy and freedom from parents than boys (Ghadially 1988).

The twentieth century has been termed as the "Age of Anxiety" and the "Age of Alienation" by some (Murchland 28). Modern man has, today, become acutely conscious of his role and responsibility and of the impact of psychological issues on his life. He is
overwrought with feelings of uncertainty, loneliness, doubt, self-conflict, value conflict etc. which are gradually engulfing the entire human civilization. Bewildered by the shattering and breaking down of the once standard values of life and behavior, modern man is suffering from a crisis of faith. This condition is aggravated by the "crisis of the present". Edmund Fuller suggests, "in our age, man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but from inner problems . . . a conviction of isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in his way of existence" (Fuller 3). There is an atmosphere of uncertainty and the modern man is languishing in confusion, frustration, disintegration, disillusionment and alienation. He becomes restless in search for peace and tranquility. There is a gap in what the individual aspires for and what he achieves, what he really is and what he would like to be taken for. This leaves his life crumpled. As Jasbir Jain puts it,

Alienation, a main concern of modernism, is an urban phenomenon; and at odds with the Indian belief in religion, the social life style of a joint family and the absence of the concept of privacy. Alienation is linked with the growth of individualism and with Western thinking. (Jain 66)

Several inter-related situations are responsible for this condition of modern man, some of which are – powerlessness over circumstances, meaninglessness of life, isolation from society and self-estrangement. Melvin Seeman is of the view that these situations "can be profitably applied in conjunction with one another in the analysis of given state of affairs" (Seeman 789).

Relationships between women are also explored in this context, sometimes between women of different generations, such as that between mothers and daughters and
particularly between mother-in-laws and daughters-in-law, which constitutes a central theme in Indian popular culture. Almost all of the stories of Tagore bring to fore the conflict between doing what brings satisfaction to the self and that of carrying out one's responsibilities and obligations to others. This is a theme which is gradually becoming more prominent in Indian culture as more women are gradually becoming educated and gaining political awareness of their rights which in turn conflicts with their duties as householders and women. The disappointments and frustrations between women's desires for more freedom for self-regulation and the restrictions imposed on them by networks of family relationships are experienced more intensely by educated women who are acutely aware of the gap that exists between the ideal and the real.

Ratan in Tagore’s story, the “The postmaster” is an orphan girl who did odd jobs for the postmaster who was a town-bred young man and posted in the remote village of Ulapur. Though the village was a small one, there was an indigo factory nearby, and the proprietor, an Englishman, had managed to get a post office established. The postmaster belonged to the city of Calcutta and he felt like a fish out of fresh water in this remote and dull village. The postmaster's salary was small and he had to cook his own meals, which he used to share with the orphan girl, Ratan. One heavily clouded morning, Ratan who was also postmaster's little pupil, for he had been teaching her lately to read and write, “had been long waiting outside the door for her call, but, not hearing it as usual, slowly entered the room of the postmaster. She found her master stretched out on his bed, and, thinking that he was resting, she was about to retire on tip-toe, when she suddenly heard her name—"Ratan!" She turned at once and asked: "Weren’t you asleep, Dadababu?" "I don’t feel well,” said the postmaster painfully. “Have a look – feel my
forehead” (Tagore, *Selected Short Stories* 44). In the absolute loneliness of his exile in
the village, the postmaster was in desperate need of a little tender nursing. Homesick and
distant from family and friends, he longed to remember the touch on his forehead of soft
homely female hands with tinkling bracelets, to imagine the presence of loving and
nurturing womanhood and the nearness of mother and sister. Realizing the postmaster’s
pain and agony, Ratan rose up to the occasion and from that day, she ceased to be a little
girl. Stepping at once into the shoes of mother and sister, Ratan immediately assumed all
the responsibilities for the postmaster’s health and spirits. She called in the village doctor,
gave him the prescribed pills at proper intervals, cooked and washed for him, stayed up
all night taking care of his ailing health and tended him like a mother till the time he was
able to leave his sick bed. But the postmaster, though grateful for her help, sincerity and
dedication, decided to go back to the city. Applying for a transfer which he was denied
forced him to resign from the job. All the time, he remained quite kind to Ratan in his
own way and even seemed to suffer from pangs of remorse at the prospect of leaving her
behind. But he could not make up his mind to ask her to accompany him to the city,
something which Ratan had expected and longed for.

Tagore’s short story, “The Exercise Book”, also deals with the suffering of a little
girl Uma who undergoes an early child marriage. Tapobrata Ghosh writes about the
inspiration for the story:

“The Exercise Book” is set against the Hindu revivalism of the late nineteenth
century. This reactionary movement aimed to prop up a decadent religious and
social orthodoxy, partly by the grotesque ‘scientific’ defences of old customs and
superstitions. Shortly before the date of this story, the Age of consent Bill had
been passed with the object of stopping child marriages. Conservative Hindus reacted sharply. Rabindranath’s story reflects his opposition to Hindu revivalism and to child marriage—though his own daughters were married of very early. (11)

The very first sentence of this short story clearly outlines the attitude of the family towards the girl-child. Girls, in Tagore’s times, were not expected to be educated or even to aspire for education. Rather, they were thoroughly discouraged from reading and writing. The story is narrated from the point of view of a little girl called Uma and the narrative clearly reveals her desire and yearning for education. Little Uma began to be considered a troublesome girl by her family when she started learning how to write. She began scribbling and inscribing her literacy on every wall of the house, on every sheet of paper that she found within reach, on her father’s important documents such as his account book etc. One day she performed her inane scribbling on her brother’s important write up which resulted in the taking away of all her writing tools by her brother Gobindalal. Deeply hurt and humiliated, little Uma felt that the punishment that she had received at her brother’s hand, was much more than what she had justly deserved. After sometime, Gobindalal returned her writing equipment and also gifted her, in compensation for the punishment, with a hard bound Exercise Book. From that day, this exercise book had assumed a significant importance in Uma’s life. It became her best friend, her constant companion and many of her thoughts, lines from poems and prose found a place in this exercise book.

Very soon however, such opportunities for reading, writing and self-expression, came to an abrupt end when Uma was married off at the tender age of nine to Pyarimohan, a friend and literary associate of her brother. Although Pyarimohan was
educated, he was of a strong orthodox mindset. The child-bride’s heart was full of fear and misgivings as she left her parent’s house. Her trusted servant Jashi accompanied her to her in-laws house, and stayed there for a few days to settle Uma in a new environment. The day Jashi returned to Uma’s parents’ house, Uma shut the door of her room and poured out her heart in her previous exercise book: “Jashi has gone home, I want to go back to mother too” (Chaudhuri 47). This little act reveals several facets of the girl-child’s plight. Her shutting of the door in order to confess her feelings into her exercise book via the mode of writing, shows how even the simple act of literacy was forbidden to girls. Also, her longing to return to her parents as soon as her servant went back, is an indication of the fact that how little emotionally and psychologically prepared this child was, for marriage.

Writing in her exercise book became in her new household, the sole source of self-expression for Uma. Being literate was virtually a taboo for women in those days and was also considered to be a sin and one day, when Uma was secretly scribbling in her exercise book, she was seen by her three sisters-in-laws through a crack in the door. Reading and writing amongst women was so looked down upon at the turn of the nineteenth century in India that the writer ironically comments, “The goddess of learning Saraswati, had never made even so secret a visit to the women’s quarters of their house”(Chaudhuri 48). As a consequence, Uma’s husband was duly informed about her grave “misdeed” and the information deeply disturbed and upset Pyarimohan, the typical male chauvinist who espoused the idea that literacy and education were solely the social and intellectual prerogative of the male sex.
After the scolding and mockery that Uma received from her husband, she did not, out of fear and humiliation, write in her exercise book for a long time. However, one autumn morning, when she heard a beggar woman singing an “Agamani” song, the homesick little girl was so enraptured and emotionally moved that she could not restrain herself from writing. According to Hindu mythological lore, goddess Durga visits her parental home once during autumn and the traditional Bengali song sung to celebrate her homecoming is called the “Agamani”. On hearing the song, Uma yearned with longing to be united with her mother in the same way goddess Uma (another name for goddess Durga) was returning to her mother’s home. Calling the singer to her room secretly, she wrote down the words of the song in her exercise book. Her sisters-in-laws again saw what she was doing through the crack in the door and despite Uma’s pleadings to the contrary, her husband was informed about it. Pyarimohan took very seriously this information of Uma’s lapse which, in general also, was looked upon as a grave offence by his family and social community. He snatched the exercise book from her that very moment and attempted to humiliate the little girl by reading aloud its contents in a pompous and mocking manner while his three sisters laughed.

Rabindranath Tagore was a writer who strongly felt the social urgency for reforms, particularly in the spheres of education, gender equality and child marriage. The above short story is a subtle exploration of the impact that a prejudiced patriarchal society can have on the life of a young girl with a creative and intellectual bent of mind and a desire for learning. Narrated from the viewpoint of the girl-child Uma, who was, like the usual lot of the girls of her age at the time, forced into child-marriage and denied education and self-expression, “The Exercise Book” very artistically brings out the emotions, thoughts,
feelings, humiliation and pain of a girl child caught within the shackles of social prejudice and her own intellectual yearnings. The exercise book in the story stands as a symbol of Uma’s freedom of expression, giving her a space to voice her individual views and to explore the recesses of her own mind and self. Its being taken away thus stands symbolic of society’s denial to allow women a voice and an independent identity.

“Unwanted” or “Castaway” published in 1895 narrates the tragic tale of a homeless boy Nilkanta. The story delineates a very delicate and sensitive relationship between a wedded motherly woman, Kiran and the orphan Nilkanta. Sharat accompanied his wife Kiran to Chandernagore, so that the change in surroundings and air could assist the recovery of her health. Kiran, an extrovert woman by nature, was used to living in a joint family. She was popular among her family and neighbours and hence, oppressed by the silence and loneliness of Chandernagore, she wanted to desperately return to their native place. Given to society and amusement, the silence and loneliness of her riverside villa did not suit her at all. She had nothing to do all day, there were no interesting neighbours to gossip with and she hated having to pay medical attention to herself all the time. This was the subject of the conversation between husband and wife as they sat in their room one stormy evening. Suddenly the servant shouted a message through the shut door and Sharat, on opening the door learnt that a boat had capsized in the storm and that one of its occupants, a young Brahmin boy, had succeeded in swimming ashore at their garden. Kiran was at once overjoyed at the prospect of something to do and set to work to get out some dry clothes for the boy. She then warmed a cup of milk and invited him to her room. She learned that his name was Nilkanta, and that he belonged to a theatrical troupe. They had been coming to play in a neighbouring villa when their boat had suddenly
foundered in the storm. He had no idea what had happened to the rest of his companions and being a good swimmer himself, he had somehow managed to reach the shore.

The boy, encouraged by Kiran’s affection, stayed on with them. His narrow escape from the prospect of an inevitable death led Kiran to take a warm interest in him. Sharat also regarded the boy's appearance at this moment of their life as a rather welcome fact, for Kiran now having company would have something to engage her attention and might be persuaded to stay on here for a longer period of time, thus, allowing her health greater opportunities for recovery. Her mother-in-law, too, was pleased at the prospect of profiting their Brahmin guest by her kindness. And Nilkanta himself was delighted the most at finding his way unexpectedly into the arms of care, affection and home. It was hard to guess Nilkanta's exact age for he seemed to be either a man too early or a boy too late. Having joined the theatrical band at a very young age, he had been considered appropriate for female roles and had played the parts of Radhika, Damayanti, and Sita. His destiny, it seemed, had so arranged things that he grew to the exact stature that his theatrical manager had required, and then growth ceased and stopped forever.

Shortly after the advent of Nilkanta, Sharat's younger brother, Satish, came to spend his college vacation with his brother and sister-in-law. Kiran, in Satish’s presence, was highly pleased at finding a fresh occupation. She and Satish, being of the same age had always been good friends, and the time now passed pleasantly as they engaged in games, bickering, quarrels, reconciliations, laughter and sometimes, even tears. She would often come secretively from behind and clasp him over the eyes with vermilion-stained hands, or she would naughtily write "monkey" on his back, or else she would quietly bolt the door on him from the outside amidst peals of laughter. Satish too, took no
time in paying her back for these pranks and would constantly have his revenge by
stealing her keys and rings; putting pepper in her betel or tying her to the bed when she
was not looking.

Kiran had a knack for feeding people well. Nilkanta had an immense capacity for
eating, and never refused a delicacy however often it was offered to him. So Kiran liked
to have him eat his meals in her presence, and used to ply him with delicacies, happy in
the bliss of seeing this orphaned Brahmin boy eat to satiety. After Satish's arrival she had
lesser time on her hands to spare for Nilkanta and was mostly absent from the scene when
the boy’s meals were served. Earlier, her absence had made no difference to the boy's
appetite, and Nilkanta would not rise from his food till he had drained his cup of milk and
rinsed it thoroughly with water. But now, if Kiran was not present to ask him to eat this
and that, he began to feel miserable, and even the most deliciously prepared meal failed
to make an impact on him. He would get up leaving his food mostly untouched and say to
the serving-maid in a choking voice: ‘I am not hungry’. He imagined that the news of his
repeated refusal, ‘I am not hungry,’ would reach Kiran. This, he felt, would arouse her
concern and lead her to send for him and press him to eat. But nothing of the sort
happened. Kiran never came to know of his refusals for food and therefore, never sent for
him since the maid usually finished off whatever he left. Pained by what he assumed to
be Kiran’s negligence of him, Nilkanta would then put out the lamp in his room, and
throw himself on his bed in the darkness, burying his head in the pillow in a paroxysm of
sobs. What was his grievance? Against whom? And from whom did he expect redress?
At last, when no one else came, Mother Sleep soothed with her soft caresses the wounded
heart of the motherless lad. Since, all these changes in Kiran’s behavior had taken place
after the arrival of Satish on the scene, slowly but surely, Nilkanta came to grow jealous of Satish.

One day Sharat and his family decided to go back to their native place and hence Kiran asked Nilkanta to go back to his own native place. The news of this inevitable separation from Kiran greatly upset Nilkanta and reduced him to the verge of tears. Seeing him cry, Satish proceeded to tease him which further roused Nilkanta’s ire towards Satish and anxious to teach him a lesson, Nilkanta stole Satish’s most prized possession; his beloved silver inkstand and hid it in his box in his room. All the other members of the family except Kiran suspected Nilkanta’s involvement in the disappearance of the ink stand and they insisted that the boy’s room be thoroughly searched. Kiran, however, put her foot firmly down and would have none of it. Her strong faith in Nilkanta’s innocence would not allow them to treat Nilkanta as suspect and finally, her family had to relent. The day before Kiran and her family were to leave for her native place, Kiran wanting to give a parting gift to the boy, went stealthily to his room to place two new suits of clothes, a pair of shoes and a hundred rupee note into his box. From her bunch of keys she selected one that would fit the lock and noiselessly opened the box. It was so jumbled up with odds and ends that the new clothes would not go in. So she decided to rearrange its contents and as she brought out one item after another, from under the linen there emerged unexpectedly, the missing inkstand. An astounded Kiran, with flushed face, sat down helplessly with the inkstand in her hands, not knowing how to react. In the meantime, Nilkanta had come into the room from behind without Kiran’s knowledge and having witnessed the whole thing, he had assumed that Kiran too, had with the rest of the family, believed in his guilt and had
come stealthily into his room in the dark to confirm the theft. He realized that there was no way of convincing her that he was not a thief, and that he had been prompted only by revenge and not greed to take the inkstand which he had actually meant to throw into the river at the first chance. In a moment of weakness, however, he had failed in his courage to throw it away and had put it in his box instead. ‘He was not a thief,’ his heart cried out, ‘not a thief!’ But he realized that he could never explain to Kiran how grievously wrong she was and so saying nothing to her, he left as stealthily as he had come. Finally Kiran, having arrived at some decision agonizingly, with a deep sigh replaced the inkstand in the box, and, as if she were the thief herself, covered it up with the linen and the trinkets as they were before; and at the top she placed the presents, together with the banknote which she had brought for him. “The next day there was no sign of the Brahmin boy. The villagers said that they had not seen him; the police said that he was missing” (Tagore, *Selected Short Stories* 171). The entire family went back to their native place. Only the dog of Nilkanta remained there waiting for his master’s return.

For Nilkantha, Kiran had come to represent the entire world. Initially all her time had been spent with him alone and he had occupied the centre of her attentions. So it was very natural that he felt extremely hurt and betrayed when his love, care and attention started to be shared with Satish. This jealousy of Nilkanta, with the passing of time, came to be transformed into anger and then revenge which prompted him to steal Satish’s most precious belonging from him. In his own eyes, Nilkanta was not a thief but more than the family’s suspicion of him, it was unbearable for him to imagine that Kiran had thought him to be a thief and this emotional betrayal by Kiran ultimately led to his tragic disappearance.
The three short stories “The Postmaster”, “The Exercise-book” and “Unwanted” or “Castaway” end on a pathetic note of betrayal from the point of view of the young protagonists who are all children. The protagonist Ratan of “The Postmaster” loved her “Dadababu” the postmaster, with all her heart and soul. Responsible to him in the capacity of a mere household help, when the situation demanded she rose up to the occasion tended to the postmaster like a sister and a mother. But the postmaster failed to respond to her love and devotion and decided to return to Kolkata, thoughtless of Ratan and knowing very well that she had no one to call her own except him. On the other hand “Uma” the protagonist of “The Exercise-Book” is a victim of the narrow societal thought prevalent during the time of Tagore which was against girl education and in favour of child marriage. Uma must, according to the prescriptions of society, surrender her exercise book and her passion for learning and for creativity into the hands of her patriarchal husband, thus, forever, giving up the opportunity for education and identity. Nilkanta, the protagonist of “Unwanted” or “Castaway,” being an orphan since childhood, found in Kiran an affection that he had never received in his life. However, his love and his emotions towards Kiran failed to be valued by Kiran’s family members and perhaps by Kiran herself.

All the three stories have extremely tragic endings and the reader tends to feel that such tragedy is completely undeserved by the protagonist. Therein lies the beauty and mastery of pathos which few geniuses like Tagore can create. As has been rightly said “Rabindranath’s success as a master short story writer was actually ensured by his essentially lyrical temperament since … there is close affinity between a short story and lyric” (Bandyopadhyay 62).
Duggal, like Tagore, excels in pointing out the shortcomings of the society. His stories repeatedly bring out the absurdity of the ascription of communal labels like Hindu, Muslim, Sikh etc. to individuals. These categorizations, Duggal insists, are arbitrary and dilute the essence of a person as a human being. In the story, “What Is a Hindu?” a child Bubli delivers this lesson to her parents who have lost their moral values due to the terrible experience of partition. Mr Singh and Mr Pandit, two bosom friends, left their belongings and homes in Pakistan during partition and came to Jalandhar. They become neighbours again. But the communal violence between Hindu-Sikh and other communities forever cast a shadow on their old friendship. The relationship came to be filled with suspicion and distrust and it compelled the Singhs ask their younger daughter Bubli not to play with the Pandit’s son Banti. The young girl thus talks to Mrs Singh, her mother: “Mummy’ please tell me-What is a Hindu?” “Banti’s daddy is a Hindu!” Mrs Singh explains. “No, he is uncle,” says the child (Duggal 12).

All other evaluations and comments become superfluous as the truth comes out from the mouth of a child! What her parents and others failed to understand because of the terrible conditions prevailing in society, Bubli did. Moreover Bubli was alone as her own brother and sister were grown up and studied in a hostel. She had only Banti as her play mate but she never understood why Banti is different from her and why her parents forbid them to play together.

“With What a Face?” is a story built around the theme of the India-Pak Partition and its bloody aftermath. The Muslims and non-Muslims in the Indo- Pak sub-continent had and have a lot to share. The Bakshis and the Sayyads in the present story shared even their offspring and yet they are forced to become aliens, even blood-sworn enemies
overnight. The story resonates with ironies of several kinds. The very name ‘Aman’ (Peace) is an unusual one for a Muslim, but the Sayyads, his foster parents, christen him so. Aman, born of non Muslim parents, is brought up in Pakistan like other children and fed on malicious and tendentious stories about the depravity of India and Indians. He is keen to destroy that nation and remind them of the Muslim marauders of yore like Ghauri and Abdali. But during a campaign he himself disappears without a trace.

This story is also remarkable for its circumstantial details and the emotional restraint of the author. The details about the events of the three Indo-Pak wars are restricted to bare necessity but, nevertheless, are sufficient for the purpose of the story. Duggal does not go overboard in exhibiting his patriotism by vilifying Pakistan as a lesser writer might have done. But he does implicitly expose the Pakistani bluster about their imaginary conquests in almost every war with India. Duggal could have said much more but he wishes to express himself more through the subtlety of his art than through direct statements.

**Sibling Relationships**

Sibling relationship is recognized as unique among close human relationships because siblings share a common genetic heritage and common early experience within the family. The exchange patterns of emotional support are established among the siblings during early years (Avioli 1989 as cited in Sonawat 183). Sibling relationship is also marked by discord when paternal authority is weak or absent. Such conflict is an important dimension of sibling relations. Herzberger and Hall (1993) states that boys and girls may have different expectations when siblings are involved in the conflict. As joint family system is one of the basic features of Indian society, it becomes essential to consider the cordial and conflicting relationship between secondary relatives.
Tagore’s short stories depict female characters suffering under the strictures of patriarchy. They have no choice but to undergo suffering at the hands of their husbands or brothers or fathers-in-law. There are very few short stories of Tagore where heroines resist oppression from their siblings. Two such short stories are “Punishment” and “Elder Sister.” The story “Punishment” was published in 1893. The story is about the life of two young brothers Dukhiram and Chidam and their wives Radha and Chandora. Dukhiram lost his temper and killed Radha as she uttered harsh words while serving him food. Chidam requested his wife Chandora to take the blame to save his brother Dukhiram. He instructed her to say to the police that she had been forced to kill Radha in self-defence during an argument. He thought Chandora would not be punished as a result of this explanation and would be set free. “Chandora who loved her husband dearly is taken aback by her husband’s cruel suggestion and is convinced that her husband had never given any value to her feelings” (Basu 59). So she decided to break all bonds of life as act of protest.

In the court Chandora told the judge that she hated her sister-in-law and pleaded no mercy on her killing. Chidam took all the blame on himself to save his wife but, on the confidence and clarity of Chandora’s confession, the judge gave Chandora the death sentence.

By depicting the bitter life of peasant women, Tagore writes at the end of the story: ‘Some time in the dawn of youth a very young dark complexioned lively girl, setting aside her dolls left her parents place to live with her in-laws. But who could imagine that auspicious marriage night, of what would happen today.’ (Basu 60)
Chidam thought that if he lost his wife he could get another, but if his brother was hanged he would never be able to replace him. Chandora understood Chidam’s motive and interpreting it as his lack of feeling towards her, she decided to break all bonds with Chidam. At the end of the story, Chandora simply uttered the words: ‘Oh I want to die.’ Sankar Basu comments:

These simple words convey the depth of the offence and grief in the mind of a simple but strong-willed and stable woman, who found that she has been deceived in his love towards her husband. Such laconic, natural and highly impressive endings of Tagore’s stories in many ways remind us of the endings of Chekhov’s stories. (115)

The way in which Tagore has depicted in the story, the feelings of Chandora is highly remarkable. Till the end, she wanted to see her mother and not anyone else. When the doctor suggested the name of her husband, her reply was ‘Not him,’ with an emphasis on the word ‘him.’ “In the original Bengali story instead of the term ‘him’ the term ‘maran’ was used. “Maran” literally meant “death.” It was a common ironic expression particularly among village-women. The complex implications here included Chandora’s rejection of the husband she still loved, the pride [abhiman] that prevented her from backing down and a shy reluctance to show her true marital feelings in public” (Dominic).

In the story “Elder Sister” (1895), Tagore has depicted a brave woman who sacrificed her life for her younger brother, Nilmani. Shashikala was a modest, kind-hearted woman who loved her husband deeply. The smooth married life of Jaigopal came to an end when Shashi’s mother gave birth to a son. Jaigopal’s love towards his wife was
centered round her wealth and he left Shashi. Tagore has portrayed greedy, selfish and money-minded people through the character of Jaigopal. Shashikala’s life became miserable when her parents died. Shashi started to nurture the child. Meanwhile Jaigopal returned to her to kill the child and inherit the property. Jaigopal was an acquaintance of the Deputy Magistrate and he refused to help Shashi when she approached him because she was an unprotected woman. Jaigopal succeeded in getting hold of Nilman’s property. Shashi narrated the whole story to the Magistrate and requested him to look after the orphan. The Magistrate took the responsibility of the child and promised her that he would reconsider Nilmani’s case. Shashi went back to her husband and started living together. Shashi had anticipated her death and her husband killed her when he came to know about her rebellious act. Thus, though Shashi was weak, she sacrificed her life for her brother.

Her death symbolises the awakening of women. In the character of Soshi a splendid picture of Bengali women has been revealed. Their brave, decisive and kind nature capable of loving intensely and struggling for justice has been reflected in the story. (Basu 62)

Tagore expressed his doubt whether Shashi could fulfill her promise to her brother that he would see her again in the end of the story. Analysing Shashi’s character critic Upendranath Bhattacharya writes:

When woman sees her beloved is helpless, then her love becomes stronger, and then she like a fortress defends her beloved from any blow and attack. When Soshi found that besides her Nilmani had none, she then started through all she
might to defend him from the attack of her cruel and egoistic husband. (qtd. in Basu 62)

Bhattacharya rightly analysed Shashi’s immense sibling love towards her brother. Shashi becomes the representative of the courageous Indian women who are willing to give up their lives for noble causes.

Kartar Singh Duggal has written some of the finest stories on basic harmony, communal divide, Pre-and Post-partition riots and migrations in his collection Abducted Not and other Stories of Partition Holocaust. “The Clay of Muslim” is a complex, engaging and thought-provoking story arising from the theme of the partition. A Sikh girl, Rukko, is abducted by a Muslim during the holocaust of the Partition. Her brother Kulbir (Beera) manages to escape intact to India.

The three year old Beera had watched with his own eyes his parents and siblings writhing in pools of blood and breathing their last. And then he had also watched one of the rioters appear on the scene of that infernal pandemonium, with his head and face wrapped all around, and abduct Rukko in one neat and clean operation.

Beera could never forget that scene thereafter. (Duggal 169)

Kulbir became a big officer in India, comes to Pakistan in search of his long-lost sister. Rukko's abductor Mohammedu marries her forcibly and loves her to madness. With the passage of time Rukko becomes the mother of a number sons and daughters. Finally Rukko's younger brother, locates her. Rukko is given the option either to stay on or to go with her brother Beera leaving her loving husband and family behind in Pakistan. When at long last she makes up her mind to leave, Mohammedu cannot take it and pumps three
bullets with his pistol into her chest and then cries very loudly to collect the whole village around himself.

Ironically she is killed by both the men who love her to craziness—Mohammedu her husband and Kulbir her long-separated brother who has a sort of monomania for her. Kulbir must search her out, and Mohammedu would never let her part. She gets killed between the two of them. She is a lady killed with kindness—if ever there was one!, Rukko's post-mortem canonization as a latter-day Muslim saint bristles with ironies of its own brotherless sisters make a beeline for her mausoleum praying for a brother. And she has died as soon as she got back her own brother. (Madhumeet 15)

Similarly in the story “Where is My Mother?” Yunus Khan saved a wounded little girl who was a victim of communal riots and took her to hospital where her life was saved. The girl reminded him about his own sister Nooran. After her recovery he wanted her to take home but the girl was a Hindu who was mortally afraid of him. “I don’t want to go home,” the girl pleaded, “Take me to the refugee camp. I want to go to the camp” (Duggal 286). The girl was not convinced by the benevolence of the soldier Yunus Khan. She was of the opinion that he would take her to a lonely spot and kill her. Even after the repeated assurance by him the girl screamed and began beating the Baluchi on the chest with her small fists. “You are a Muslim… you’ll kill me.” “I want my mother. Where is my mother?” (286). The story depicts the impact of bloodshed and communal riot which compelled even a teenage girl to disbelieve her life saver. The act of humanity turns to suspicion and even repeated assurance of a sibling relationship between the two could not bridge the differences of religion and communal divide.
Family Violence

Family violence is a complex concept which encompasses wife abuse, child abuse and elderly abuse. Pagelow defined family violence as “any act of commission or commission by family members and any condition resulting from such acts and inaction which deprive other family members of equal rights and opportunities and/or interfere with their optimal development and freedom of choice.” (437)

Violence perpetrated on women in the family is a truthful fact truthful since centuries and across the world. It is listed under the category of gender based violence, abuses such as battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry related violence, marital rape and female genital mutilation.

Family conflicts are related to human love and literature is about human love, feelings and behavior, and romance. That’s the reason why both elements are associated in the collective unconscious of the population of all times. Literature is about conflicts. Life is a conflict itself. Although the conflict itself is not necessarily negative, its serene resolution is an imperative to continue the peaceful family continuity. The bad resolution of those disagreements through violence and rage, bring the family, and specially the children to a vicious circle of maltreatment, trauma and disadvantages for the rest of their lives. Tagore and Duggal through some of their short stories try to highlight this negative impact of family conflict which it can have on any society.

Broadly, we can say that it is man's estrangement from someone, something with which he was attached to his family, his group, his society and even his own self. Alienation, loneliness, isolation, withdrawal and lack of communication, in some ways,
these problems are interrelated or exist as "a corollary of disruption of good human relationship." (Srivastava xxvii)

Family violence in the short stories of Tagore can be seen in “Giribala”, “Punishment”, “A Wife’s Letter” and “Exercise-book”.

Gopinath’s beating of Giribala when she refuses to give him the keys of the locker is simply the bullying of a woman in the name of patriarchy. Similarly in “Exercise-book” Uma received beatings from her brother and mockery from her husband for her creativity. She was envied by other women of the family. They always tried to conspire against her as she was educated and could read and write, which was considered a taboo in colonial times.

“Punishment” is a fierce story depicting murder of Radha by her husband Dukhiram. The blame is put on Chandora the sister-in-law. In “Punishment,” not only violence but basic human rights are also violated.

Rabindranath Tagore represents the dehumanization of women and applies themes of invisibility and expendability to demonstrate how society dehumanizes women. The theme of making women invisible by dehumanizing them is prevalent throughout the story. At its most elemental level, this is a story about an innocent woman facing a trial, justice system, and society that are stacked against her. (Gracia)

Mrinal is considered as a second wife not as a member of her family. She faced severe neglect and life threatening condition during her delivery. She was kept in most unhygienic conditions which resulted in the death of her daughter.
Similarly in “Woman’s lib” by Duggal, rich, educated man like Bansi became a drunkard and thrashed Zulfi brutally. Zarrina did not let her daughter tolerate such heinous behavior. She humiliated Bansi and his family and took Zulfi back to her home. Zulfi recovered from her shock and returned to her old self and started working. One thing she never did was talking about Bansi to anybody.

Zarrina was perplexed with one behavior of Zulfi in which she visited her sister-in-law’s place with the child even after separation. Zarrina asked her not to get entangled in all this and lead her life on her own terms, but Zulfi defied her mother every time. To avoid any argument she hid her visits to her sister-in-laws house. Zarrina guessed but never asked Zulfi about it. On the other hand Bulbul her neice had settled in her job and became serious about her self-dependence. She has in true sense liberated herself. Zarrina was happy for her.

One night Zulfi did not return home. Zarrina was anxious as this never happened. She guessed Zulfi might have gone for a visit to her sister-in-laws house. She also heard in rumors that Bansi visited the place too. In the morning she asked Zulfi about her stay outside the house and her guess came true. Zulfi was with Bansi at her sister-in-laws house and an affirmative nod of Zulfi on her interrogation pierced her women liberation dream into tatters which Zarrina dreamt through Zulfi. She could not bear the defeat of her liberation dreams and found peace in the arms of death. She too died of heart failure like her husband Zulfikar Ahmad.

In the story “When Will This Father Die?” Gobindi’s first husband was a mine worker. He had the habit of gambling and routinely he lost more than he won in betting. He had the bad habit of beating his wife; Gobindi faced domestic violence in every win
and loss of her first husband. On winning day he thrashed her with fists because she was upset with his habit of gambling. On the day when he lost he would beat her for making a dull face. He snatched Gobindi’s gold earrings which was gifted by her mother and were very dear to her.

Gobindi always prohibited her husband from stealing coal and every time he brought home stolen coal they quarreled. Although everyone in the mine was aware of it and every worker stole coal and brought home but in Gobindi’s eyes it was theft and she would not allow stolen property to enter her house. Once her first husband threw her on the coal heap and thrashed her. Goni saw Gobindi’s body was full of scars while she was taking a bath and the act of brutality was enough to love her mother more as she received thrashings from her husband.

Gobindi wanted to work in mines like other fellow couples but her first husband would not allow that. The shallow pride of her first husband emerged from what the village folk would say if they come to know about it. His narrow mentality made Gobindi sit idle at home. He would become jealous of his prosperous neighbours as they had two salaries in their home but failed to understand the reason behind his self-created miseries. One salary wasn’t enough for running the household but his thoughts didn’t change.

Gobindi never beat her husband she would become angry when she heard a women raised hand on her husband in the miner’s colony. She had internalized the social idea that husband is symbolic of God and God cannot be beaten. One day her husband returned home and was constantly vomiting. He was hale and hearty in the morning and suddenly he fell ill and developed high fever. Before they could call the doctor, he was dead.
Gobindi started working in the mine for livelihood. Gobindi decides to marry again for the sake of better future for her child. But one evening her second husband came in a dead drunk state. Gobindi was surprised as he never spoke about this habit. At Gobindi’s disgust he slapped and beat her mercilessly. Then it became a regular practice but Gobindi tolerated all this violence without uttering a word as her son would come to know of it. Goni loved his mother and knew how cruelly she was beaten each night and asked her mother, “Mummy, when will this father die?” (Duggal 120)

This story is a portrayal of the fact that how addiction ruins a family. Gobindi’s first husband was addicted to gambling and second was addicted to drinking. The male chauvinism prohibited both men to allow Gobindi to work in mines. Inadequate money to run household along with addiction spelt untold miseries in their life and Gobindi was held responsible for these and faced domestic violence. In case of Gobindi’s second marriage materialistic pleasure comes before and she failed to learn from the previous marriage and failed to enquire about her second husband’s addiction for drinking. As a result it amounts to her sufferings and brutal thrashing from her second husband, who didn’t like Gobindi disliking his addiction. On the other hand her son Goni is sympathetic about her agonies and feels death of her second husband would free her from all the tortures.

“Trishna” is the story of female foeticide. Rajani, the female protagonist in the story cannot muster courage to face her husband. Partool-the male protagonist- is the stereotype of an insensible, run-of-the-mill bureaucrat who uses his dominant- male’s right with absolutely no regard for the inmost feelings and cherished desires of his wife Rajni. He always pressed Rajni to become a mother to a son. After conceiving Rajani
was screened for knowing the sex of the embryo and the knowledge of the foetus being a female, led to an abortion.

The poetic symbolism representing the death of unborn child is remarkable and depicted the void of a mother. “She felt as if a serenade were wafting in the air; as if a soft fragrance were poking her right and left; and as if a shimmering ray were losing itself in the redness of the setting sun” (Duggal 84). Trishna is the softly and feebly flickering ray of light and she merges in the light of the setting sun which symbolizes death. Duggal’s story is a modern depiction of domestic violence in which specially females are forced to abort female foetus in lieu of becoming the mother of a male child but fails to realize their identity as woman.

The stories like “The Prostitute” give us a peep into this aspect of the society and the pertinent issue like AIDS is also taken up in this story. It evokes the plight of poor, helpless, exploited women commodified by a male-dominated society. Prostitutes are not born as such but are made. They are helpless victims of a cruel society. To intensify the reader’s sympathy, a story-writer often succumbs to the temptation of crediting a fallen woman with a heart of gold, an exceptionally noble character.

The two protagonists in the story have both their good and bad points. Sankranti is the conventional “noble prostitute”. But her nobility, aroused by her real love for Murli, is limited only to her dealings with the man who arouses it. As regards other customers, she makes no issues about sleeping with them for payment, knowing full well that she is generously communicating to them the fatal disease of AIDS. Commanded by the madam of the brothel to please her customers despite her AIDS, she is hesitant for a while, but immediately becomes compliant. “By the time she reached her own room
Sankranti had regained her poise. The girls populating brothels are adept in such histrionics” (Duggal 184).

Murli’s character, too, is a mixed bag. His love for Sankranti is quite genuine of course, but he leaves a dying Sankranti without a second thought. The ending of the story is indeed pathetic-more so, because of Murli’s cowardice. Had he taken Sankranti’s hand in his own, she would have died still, but her death would have been a little fulfilling as well.

Kulsum, a beautiful girl is the stereotype of misfortune who fell into the hands of men with evil plans. She is the representative of those innocent beauties who had woven rosy dreams about their prospective marriage, groom and conjugal bliss but which had unexpectedly come to a naught. Kulsum, a young beauty, a girl of flesh and blood is “gifted” as a commodity to a schoolmaster by an old man who was lucky to have a “catch” as pretty as Kulsum. When Kulsum refuses to sleep with the schoolmaster and implores him to marry her first he feels exasperated. To set her right, the old man barges into the hut, defiles her chastity and walks out paving the way for the young schoolmaster’s convenience. The girl soon puts all her expectation of marriage to rest. “This, perhaps, was the awaited Independence. The substance of it. It was only yesterday that the country had won its freedom, the young schoolmaster repeated to himself” (151) the school master commented ironically.

Rakhi, the protagonist of “Pakistan Zindabad” and Rukko, the protagonist of “The Clay of a Muslim” both are converts to Islam married to Muslim husbands. Rukko was forcibly lifted by Mohammedu from her house like a bale after much bloodshed resulting in brutal death of her father and some siblings as they belonged to the Sikh community.
Likewise Rakhi’s family also had to bear the wrath of the Muslim rioters. She left miraculously unscathed. Then both of the women married Muslims, lived happily but not ever after as they were traced by their long-lost brothers.

Conflict recurs when both the women are claimed by their respective brothers. Rakhi refuses to leave her husband and is prepared to sacrifice a hundred brothers to be with him. The fear of rootlessness and alienation lurks in her mind despite the reassuring presence of her sibling—her own blood. Rukko, on the other hand, prefers the ties of blood to those of love. She readies herself to leave with her brother Kulbir to India. Mohammedu, shot in the chest of his one-time beloved wife once when she discloses to him her decision to leave him for good. The helplessness and suffering of the couples move the readers too. They get engrossed and take sides, with some approving and some outrightly disapproving the decisions of the protagonists.

Duggal’s “A Dead End” explores the story of several generations within a Sikh family. The ideologies which are subject to changing times are outlined here without any falsification. Jassi’s great grandfather, a staunch Sikh was venerated as “the uncrowned king of the region” during the Mutiny of 1857. Jassi’s grandfather, a pucca Akali, laid down his life fighting the British during Guru Ka Bagh agitation. Jassi’s father was a Congressite. Committed to the party and Mahatma Gandhi, he had to spend a major chunk of his youth in jail. Jassi’s brother was an inveterate Communist who was shot dead by the police for his anti-government seditions activities. Jassi like her ancestors and brother was a gritty woman. Despite being separated from her husband, she did not lose any pluck and made a contribution to the society. Having not got the custody of her son, she missed him a lot. But what a strange encounter does she have with her son! Youth
belonging to the new faction of extremists come to finish her off, and the one who ruthlessly stabs her to death is none other than her own son. The saga of the Sikh family shows how the forefather of Jassi had made substantial contribution to the certain causes and how the values underwent a drastic change and Jassi’s son becomes a terrorist. He also fights for the “cause”. Unemployment had derived the youth to start a crusade of extricating employment from the undeserving people.

To conclude, from the above exploration of some short stories of Rabindranath Tagore and Kartar Singh Duggal, it is evident that family and familial relationships play a significant role within their fictional worlds. In many of these tales, it is often found that the familial relationships portrayed, are not harmonious. This only implies that authors have attempted to write realistic stories which mirror the exact conditions of their times, for it is a fact that though in the world, the institution of family continues to exist and to be upheld, yet we seldom come across a family that does not live without compromises. One may live harmoniously with friends and neighbours but within our most intimate kinship bonds, the stakes are greater and a happy and successful relationship is far less likely. Kinship bonds are the ones that we are born into and that we further cultivate through marital alliances. In either way, choices are limited and within the givens of family and relationships, harmony and personal fulfillment are difficult goals to aspire for. Both Tagore and Duggal insist, however, that when the self and the family are at conflict with one another, it is the self which deserves to be chosen, though such a choice is always difficult to make and entails its own risk of social criticism and ostracization which, in turn, threatens personal well-being.
Works Cited


