

Psycho-social Aspects of the Non-marital Relationships: A Comparative Study of Rabindranath Tagore's and Gurdial Singh's Selected Short Stories

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ABSTRACT

The man-woman relationship is usually seen from the lens of the husband-wife relationship; however, it can have a non-marital side as well, which may be mediated and regulated by love, lust and/or friendship. Both, Rabindranath Tagore, the prominent pre-partition Nobel laureate writer from Bengal and Gurdial Singh, a renowned post-partition Sahitya Academy prize winning writer from Punjab, show a deep understanding of and an intense sensitivity towards various nuances of human relationships; they have delineated some subtleties of cultural, social, and psychological aspects of non-marital relationships between men and women in their short stories. This article focuses on the portrayal of such relationships in some selected short stories by Tagore and Gurdial Singh. Tagore views unrequited love as an ideal, quintessential, and celestial emotion, whereas Gurdial Singh portrays love as a victim of socio-cultural forces and projects it to be neither ideal nor spiritual. Gurdial Singh portrays lust to be a dominating emotion that leads to the exploitation and commodification of women, while Tagore does not let lust prevail against ethics and humanitarian values. Tagore depicts friendship as an idealized relationship with maturity and divinity. Gurdial Singh, on the other hand, touches on the poetic dimension of friendship and eventually shows how such a relationship between a man and a woman is viewed suspiciously in society.

Keywords: Punjab, Bengal, Woman, Man, Story, Relationship

Introduction

Human beings are social animals; hence, they tend to associate and connect with one another to fulfil their individual and societal needs. The craving for belongingness is a universal human attribute, and there is no denying that relationships are a human necessity as they pave the way for a meaningful and wholesome life. Miller posits:

[E]ach person becomes a more developed and more active individual only as s/he is more fully related to others. I think, too, that there is no such thing as "self-motivation," but there is the ability to act, which emerges from constructive processes within relationships. (1986, p. 2)

There is no denying that human relationships are a source of fulfillment and they lay the foundation of society. For Graham A. Allan (1979) "the personal relationships do not simply provide compensation and distraction from the more serious issues of

social life, but they are the bones of social structure" (p. 102).

Man-woman relationships, which are primarily based on familial/social ties, mutual attraction, regard, desire, affection, and/or admiration, are not confined to the institution of marriage; they may take many forms. They may take birth out of friendship and mutual understanding (*Maitri*¹) or love (*Agape*²/*Eros*³); they may manifest themselves in different colors and shades, such as unconditional, selfless, altruistic, or erotic love between two lovers, brotherly/sisterly bonding, and social connectedness rooted in the idea of civic life.

¹*Maitri* is translated as friendship, selflessness, and generous compassion for the other.

² *Agape* is a Greco-Christian term referring to love, "the highest form of love, charity" and "the love of God for man and of man for God".

³ *Eros* is the physical, sensual intimacy.

Such relationships may also touch new dimensions which sometimes remain untouched by social, economic, cultural, or even traditional factors. They may be based on humanitarian and compassionate factors, psychological and biological needs, political views, etc. There is no doubt that the area of the man-woman relationship is vast and multidimensional.

This article compares and contrasts nonmarital relationships between men and women in some selected short stories of Rabindranath Tagore and Gurdial Singh. It explores love, lust, and friendship as three crucial aspects of such relationships.

Understanding Love, Lust, and Friendship

Love, lust, and friendship are the three major facets of man-woman relationships. They are complex concepts and cannot be out-rightly defined in absolute terms. Love is an intense feeling of deep affection that may lead to the physical and/or spiritual union of two lovers; lust is a strong sexual desire, and friendship is usually a non-familial and non-sexual relationship of understanding and affection. "With love, you tolerate the reality of this person; with lust you run from the truth, you love the idea of a person. We use passion and lust to fill the voids of love" (Bouza, 2019, p. 10).

Love tends to have a powerful impact on the human mind. In the preface to *The Pursuit of Love*, Singer (2009) refers to love "as a primary form of life by which creatures like ourselves seek meaningful relationships to persons, things, or ideals that matter to us" (p. x). Robert Sternberg (2007) endorses the different forms of love through his triangular theory of love: "The three components of love, according to the triangular theory, are an intimacy component, a passion component, and a decision/commitment component" (p. 332). Intimacy entails feelings of attachment, closeness, and bonding. Passion contains an inclination towards both limerance and physical attraction. Commitment encompasses, in the short term, the decision to remain with another, and in the long run, the shared achievements and plans made with that other person.

Contrary to love, lust involves only the physical dimension and is prompted by a sexual desire. Bereft of intimacy and commitment, it feeds exclusively on passion. In *The Holy Gita* (1992), Lord Krishna declares that along with anger and

greed, lust/desire is one of the three gates to *Naraka* or hell. When Arjuna asks him by what one is impelled to sinful acts, he replies, "It is desire/lust only, Arjuna..." (224). Then, Krishna exhorts him to end it: "Therefore, O Arjuna, best of the Bharatas, in the very beginning curb this great symbol of sin — by regulating the senses, and slay this destroyer of knowledge and self-realization..." (230). Lust has always been considered a sin and human weakness across different cultures. The sixth commandment in the list of the Ten Commandments mentioned in *The Bible* is "Thou shalt not commit adultery".

Friendship or *philia*⁴ entails a fondness and appreciation of the other. It is a stronger form of interpersonal bond than an association. Strong friendships are a critical aspect of most people's emotional well-being. Moseley (1995), while explaining *philia*, quotes Aristotle: "[T]hings that cause friendship are: doing kindnesses, doing them unasked, and not proclaiming the fact when they are done" (*Rhetoric*, II. 4, trans. Rhys Roberts). Generally, friendship is selfless; therefore, it is a jewel amongst all human virtues. To simplify the terms love, lust, and friendship, it may be said that physical attraction leads to desire; physical attraction along with emotional bonding results in love, and spiritual and emotional understanding usually sets the stage for friendship. Lust and sex bring out the animal side of human beings; love indicates the human side; friendship inclines towards the spiritual side. All the three facets of the man-woman relationship are found within and outside the marital relationship.

Love

Keats writes:

Heard Melodies are sweet,

Those unheard are sweeter still. (Keats, Ode to a Grecian Urn)

Love if it remains unrequited is more delectable. Indian culture is replete with many tales of unrequited love- love that could not get translated into a marriage. Some of these legendary love

⁴ *Philia* is a term used for 'friendship' by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII. It means close friendship or brotherly love in Greek. It is one of the four types of love in the Bible.

stories are of Heer-Ranjha,⁵ Sassi-Punnu⁶, and Sohni-Mahival⁷. These tales have stood the test of time⁸ and left an indelible imprint on the Indian psyche. One of the possible reasons for their long-lasting impact and popularity is their common theme, i.e., the theme of unrequited love, which recurs in works of literature written across the world and which is universally acknowledged. Besides, the love which remains unfulfilled always carries a sense of pain and anguish that renders it an ideal image in the eyes of those who enjoy a romantic relationship. Tagore and Gurdial Singh present unrequited love in their stories beautifully and effectively. Their narratives present nonmarital relationships from the viewpoints of men as well as women.

Tagore beautifully elaborates on the love between a man and a woman in his stories. "The Wedding Garland" captures the essence of feminine instinct and longing for love and companionship through the character of Kurani, an orphaned girl. Patal, Jatin's cousin, mischievously introduces Jatin to her as her would-be-bridegroom. Kurani's child-like mind expresses her chaste love through a garland of *Bakul*,⁹ which she presents to Jatin in a similar way as one does while worshipping gods. She has borne the pain of her physical ailments and the loss of her parents nonchalantly. The rejection and desertion by Jatin make her life meaningless.

...the foolish girl could find no meaning in her life and surroundings. Everything seemed to be a harsh riddle. What could have happened and how, to make the morning, the house, and everything else so utterly desolate? She had very little power to understand anything: what had suddenly cast her in the occult pit of her

heart's fathomless pain, with no light to lead her? (Tagore, 2012, p.183)

Kurani's departure from Patal's home, the only haven she knows, showcases her psychological trauma. Jatin realizes how he unintentionally inflicted excruciating pain on Kurani when he, a doctor by profession, finds her sick and serious in a medical camp, carrying the dry and withered garland. He tries to make amends by begging her for her love, and she gives him the withered *Bakul* garland in a gesture of forgiveness. Kurani dies, but even in her death, she leaves Jatin with an insight into the spiritual love that redeems and ameliorates him. He feels enriched with the gift of Kurani's love. While looking at her peaceful inert form, he thinks, "He has taken back the treasure that was His. But He did not deprive me either" (Tagore, 2012, p.187). True love is like a touchstone; it transforms those who come into its contact.

Anupam, the narrator in Tagore's "Woman Unknown", is all set to 'love' Kalyani, the girl his mother and Uncle have selected for him as his prospective wife. He does not know about the girl. But this 'love', when rejected by his wife-to-be whom he has never met, transforms into hate in no time. It is evident that his love has a sybaritic and immature dimension as it comes under the influence of his ego. It is not the kind of love that brings spiritual refinement to an individual. When he meets Kalyani again, he is simply mesmerized by her personality and nature. When he gets to know about her identity, though he is flogged with self-deprecation, he shows maturity and strength of character which were lacking in him earlier. His momentary hate transforms into love, noble, self-effacing, and transcendental in essence, which is impervious to customs and traditions. Anupam takes the important decision of devoting his whole life to assist his beloved in her noble cause without any expectations in return. Anupam's act is a glowing tribute to the love that can exist between a man and a woman. Love brings happiness, empathy, mutual respect, and a sense of purpose; It allows humans to communicate through their emotions. Love can have a powerful effect on the human body. "For a person in love ... life is never without meaning" (Singer, 2009, p.2).

Tagore brings an ennobling side of love in "A Single Night". In this story, Tagore brings special moments of love to a standstill. There is no

⁵ Heer-Ranjha is a true tale of Heer, the beloved, and Ranjha, the lover from the village near Chenab river, now in Pakistan.

⁶ Sassi-Punnu is folklore of two lovers, Sassi and Punnu, of Sindh, Punjab.

⁷ Sohni-Mahival is an 18th century true tale of the love of Sohni and Mahwal from Punjab

⁸ Most of these are a part of oral folk culture.

⁹ *Bakul* is an evergreen tree found in South and South-East Asia.

exchange of words. There is no physical intimacy. The single night that the narrator glorifies is a dark, rainy, flood beset night when he finds himself marooned on a hillock with Surabala, the girl with whom he had been betrothed in childhood. Because of his waywardness, her parents married her off with someone else. He is a teacher's assistant in a school, and she lives with her husband, Ramlochan, in the same village. Looking at Surabala, who is married to someone else, fills him with unreasonable frustration.

I could not drive away the thought that Surabala living behind the walls of Ramlochan's house, belonged more to me than to Ramlochan. (Tagore, 2012, p.62)

This dissatisfaction arises from the anguish that he had lost the love of his life due to his carelessness. The realization that the present sense of loss is on account of his own mistakes stays with the narrator. In this one-night circumstantial meeting, Tagore beautifully leaves many questions unanswered in the story.

In Tagore's perception, love is an ideal, quintessential, and celestial emotion. Hence, this silent togetherness on the brink of destruction momentarily fills the narrator with a sense of wonder and anticipation. The selfish aspect of love seeks a union that was denied to them in life, in death. The protagonist feels that

the course of death had now brought the full bloomed flower back to me. Now, with one more hug wave, the two of us could be washed away from this edge of the earth, snapped from the stem of separate lives, and merge into a single soul. (Tagore, 2012, p.64)

However, this feeling is transient and passes over soon, culminating in a prayer for life and happiness for Surabala and her husband. Nothing is said; nothing is heard but the feeling, even in its transience, unfolds the force of love buried deep in the soul. Love, even if unrequited, is a source of happiness and satisfaction, and it suffuses life with completeness and meaningfulness.

Tagore depicts a higher form of love in his stories- the pure love that brings a man closer to the

refinement and enrichment of his soul. This love may be one-sided, yet there is something divine about it. It is without any ego, and it borders on a heavenly plane and remains a superior entity. Be it the narrator with selfless love for Surabala or Kurani's worship of Jatin or Anupam's unrequited but self-fulfilling love, the different spectacles of love in the nonmarital man-woman relationships in Tagore's short stories pose an ideal side and glorify love. Though love is unrequited in all these stories, it fails to arouse the pathos of a tragedy. Instead, it highlights the best in human existence- the elevating and ennobling spirit of love.

In Gurdial Singh's stories, the treatment of love in the man-woman relationship is affected tremendously by social patterns. Tagore's romantic treatment is hardly visible in Gurdial Singh's stories, which seem to lack the poetry of transcendence. Different social elements, such as class, economy, and persecution, make their presence in the narratives and unravel the bonds of love. Singh's stories portray the tragedy of love in nonmarital man-woman relationships.

Gurdial Singh turns away from this idealistic attitude of his forerunners and depicts life as it is actually experienced by the people of his native land. With his entry in the world of Punjabi literature (especially in novels), the focus was shifted dramatically from idealism to realism and further realism to hyper-realism. (Chauhan, 2012, p.6)

In "The Topmost Bough," class distinction is brought into play to show its effects on relationships. Basant, a twenty year old poor but hardworking and good looking boy, suddenly gets conscious that a girl who passes by his house everyday notices him. It kindles hope in him, and his young heart pulsates with love. His sensible mother cautions him:

Son, the sensible birds don't make nest upon the topmost boughs for the fear of rain and storm is always greater there. (Gurdial Singh, 2002, p.116)

However, the excitement of the first love is too intense, and the boy is lost in his unreal world of fantasy where class, education, money, etc., do not

matter at all. He is rudely awakened from the stupor of his first love when he finds his first love to be the daughter of the owner of the factory where he works. Caught in a pathetic existential situation, he makes pitiable efforts to avoid her, so that she does not see him clad in stained clothes with a leather stench. Basant's pure love is crushed under the social and economic gaps in society. When he presents himself in his working clothes to the girl, he is pained to observe the difference in her response.

Earlier also, many a time, he had followed her in this manner, and as he got closer, she would slow down, bringing certain springiness in her gait. But today, seeing him follow her, she almost wanted to take to her heels. He too picked up his stride, but this time when the girl turned around to look back, there was no affection, only a strange fear in her eyes. (Gurdial Singh, 2002, p.117).

A young human heart is unable to reconcile with the staggering fact that the love which has not even passed the budding stage of its life is savagely plucked off by the rude winds of reality. Basant's tender mind is unable to come to terms with the realization that the dark cloud of his poverty will always cover the brightness of his love and fill his life with darkness. The wailing of Basant's heart is marked by autobiographical elements, as the author himself had gone through a similar phase in his life. In his autobiography, he mentions,

All the time, I kept on wondering what kind of life it was where, at the young age of playing and enjoying life, one got nothing but humiliation even after eight or nine hours of bone-breaking labor after walking six to seven miles every day. What favor had those handsome boys and beautiful girls staying comfortably in excellent hotels had done to Gods that they lead such a heavenly life. (Gurdial Singh, 2002, p.148)

Love is suffocated and trampled upon by the consciousness of class differences. In Gurdial Singh's narratives, unrequited love does not possess much of a spiritual dimension but concerns itself with the harsh realities of life. His depiction of a man-woman relationship in love is very realistic and depicts the dark side of human existence. His characters are trapped in situations that are abysmal and closer to the ground reality of class distinctions and societal pressures. In "Silent Rage", Singh presents the romantic notion of love that does not seem to rely upon words; it, in fact, makes communion possible. Bhundu is a deaf and dumb farm labourer whose love for Jalo finds expression through his eloquent eyes. The purity of this love can be judged by the fact that he has never crossed his limits, and Jalo, the only daughter of a bed-ridden mother and a feeble poor father, feels secure and confident in Bhundu's presence. It gives her the courage to face the village loafers boldly. She understands that Bhundhu as her self-appointed guardian is exposed to danger, and she is terribly concerned about him. She enjoys a loving bond with Bhundhu.

In this story, Gurdial Singh highlights the power of love. He presents the picture of the poor and oppressed farm labourer, a 'Siri'¹⁰, who plucks up the courage to destroy the powerful and rich landlord. Through this symbolic representation, the author brings out the image of the irrepressible human spirit in all its glory. Bhundu could never have tolerated tears in the eyes of his beloved. Although he is poor and dependent on the landlords, yet he flares up to know that Jalo's honor is at stake, and the power and influence of the village headman cannot deter him, and he sets on to avenge his beloved's tears. In Gurdial Singh's stories, love is not a poetic emotion that ends with music of its own. Instead, it ends tragically in a hopeless way. It becomes a scapegoat.

Lust

The physical aspect of the man-woman relationship is usually seen as a biological need. Tagore

¹⁰ 'Siri' is a term used in malwai Punjabi for a farm labourer

who works on daily wages.

generally presents the man-woman relationship in the folds of gentleness and decency, where attraction roots more in emotions and physical bonding than physical desires. However, his story "Laboratory" is one of his later masterpieces, which deals with all the significant aspects of man-woman relationships. In this story, the author shows an uncanny understanding of various levels of the man-woman interactions in this world. The physical attraction between a man and a woman can turn out to be a constructive as well as a destructive emotion.

The relationship between Sohini and Nandkishore as a married couple touches different scales altogether. Through Sohini and her daughter, Nila, Tagore presents a feminine understanding of the male world. Sohini and Nila have a deep understanding of the male psyche and are well-versed with the art of seeking attention. Initially, Sohini plans to ensnare Revati through the charismatic physical beauty of her daughter, Nila, to make him agree to work in the laboratory. She presents her daughter deliberately in a way that Rebati is unable to take his eyes off her.

Lust clouds a person's ability to think sensibly. In Hindu Mythology, there are tales of the god Indra, the king of heaven, sending his beautiful dancers to attract the attention of various saints and disrupt their meditation, which threatened the peace and tranquillity of heaven. Looking at these beautiful *apsaras*¹¹ would blind these sages with a sexual desire and distract them from their spiritual path. Sohini also maneuvers to get her daughter married to Rebati; she makes her daughter use lust as a weapon to win Rebati, an intelligent and serene scientist.

Nila's flawless body was sharply defined through her nightwear, like a sculpted statue. Rebati could not help but look on, totally spellbound. Nila left. Rebati laid his head on the table and slumped. Such amazing beauty was beyond

his dreams. (Tagore, 2012, p.290)

Physical attraction can lead even a noble person astray. Once Rebati joins the laboratory, Sohini realizes that her daughter's beauty and tantrums will distract the young scientist from his work. So she warns her daughter to keep her distance from him, as she does not want anything or anybody to distract this young scientist from the laboratory work. Nila has understood her impact on poor Rebati, and she plays with his feelings to use him the way she wants- as a tool to get the wealth her mother keeps away from her so hard. Rebati, a cloistered Brahmin, is easily swayed by Nila's beauty and her promise of sensual pleasures and loses track of his passion and his aim of being a great scientist.

Lust has always been considered a negative feeling in the public domain in Indian society; it is said to be confined to one's personal spheres of wedlock and bedroom. Otherwise, lust can cause the downfall of people gripped by it. Rebati gets attracted to Nila's physical beauty. Their relationship lacks the depth and higher elements of love. Since it is based on the ice tower of lust and destined to crumble, their relationship is short-lived and destructive. Lust in this case appears to shatter Nandkishore's dream of promoting scientific research.

Gurdial Singh presents the barrenness entailed in the sexual and lustful aspect of a man-woman relationship in his story "Black Bull". Lust is another name given to unmitigated physical desires. Since it is a threat to society, it is not socially and publicly acceptable. Attra's love with Bachhni, a married woman of the village, is adultery; therefore, it is ethically and morally objectionable. His sister-in-law and all the villagers view this relationship with disdain. As a result, nobody in the village is ready to marry his daughter off with Attra even though he is hardworking. Due to the stigma attached to this relationship, he is estranged from his family and the rest of the village. When he is past his youth, he hungers for stability and is not satisfied with furtive moments of flirtations. When Attra, in a spurt of love and affection, asks his ladylove, "What if you were to marry me?" (Gurdial Singh, 2002, p.62), there is a quick rebuttal by Bachhni. Her answer is a rude awakening to him that their relationship was a fake one with no future. She says, 'You'd better not dream of such things...Now we'll talk of marriage in our next

¹¹ Apsaras are supernatural beings (the nymphs) who appear as young women of great beauty and elegance that are proficient in the art of dancing.

birth. Besides how can you claim someone else's wife?'(62). Evidently, their relationship could never reach beyond lust, and Bachni is not mentally prepared to leave the security of her home and spoil her married life.

In "Price of a Bride," Gurdial Singh sheds light on the commodification of women in Indian society. Lust can turn men into animals, devoid of soul and any sense of shame. Santi's elder brother-in-law, Maghar, an idler and drunkard who is always surrounded by his notorious friends, has bought a bride to satisfy his sexual needs. Santi's hatred is directed towards this new bride, as she considers her to be the cause of change in her husband, Pakhar. This man has been a good husband for the last twelve years, but ever since the arrival of the new bride, he has started beating his wife mercilessly. But Santi gets a shudder down her spine when she knows from this bride, bought by her brother-in-law, how she is paying the price for being a woman. The woman tells her:

...I'm a 'paid for commodity.'
I sit or stand wherever my
'master' asks me to-I've no
will of my own!... Sister I'm
nothing more than dirt. These
men have scrapped my skin
with their teeth... (Gurdial
Singh, 2002, p.96)

This poor woman is nothing but an object of lust for the brothers. They have crossed all the limits of humanity, and this lust has made them behave like animals, who have not a modicum of shame or values. Obviously, this bride is being treated as a commodity, and her tormentors use her body to satisfy their lust because they have paid the price for it. Makhar's brother and his friends have helped him with money and that makes them equal claimants in this inhuman and animal show of sexual appeasement. Santi's anguished realization is that the inhuman criminality of her husband and his brother stem from the fact that they consider women merely as the objects meant for satisfying and fulfilling crude desires. Her pain for the wronged girl is an articulation of the feminine consciousness. Lust has always been identified as a deterrent to the growth and evolvement of society, which has to follow some rules; otherwise, there will be nothing but cataclysmic chaos all around.

The processes of making,
interpreting, and implementing

social rules as well as
reformulating and
transforming rules are
universal in human societies.
In this perspective, social rules
are not transcendental
abstractions but are embodied
in groups and collectivities of
people, their cultural forms,
institutions, and practices:
language, customs and codes
of conduct, norms, laws, and
the social institutions such as
family, community, economic
organization, and government.
(Durkheim, 1974, p.71)

Gurdial Singh portrays lust and the havoc it causes in a more realistic manner than Tagore does. Probably, his lower middle-class background brought him closer to the ground reality. Lust is a gruesome picture of the lowest aspect of the man-woman relationship; in fact, in its purest form, it is the ugliest of all the facets of this relationship. Shakespeare goes so far as to compare lust to a kind of madness; in Sonnet 129, he presents lust as a powerful emotional and physical desire that makes one feel stronger as if in heaven but eventually leads them to a torturous hell in the end: "Past reason hunted, and no sooner had, Past reason hated, as a swallow'd bait."

Friendship

Friendship is a very elevated aspect of man-woman relationships. Sakhi (a female friend) /Sakha (a male friend) is a celebrated version of the relationship best known through the pairs of Radha-Krishna and Draupadi-Krishna in Hindu mythology. Friendship, the most selfless and divine form of the man-woman relationship, is remarkable for its undemanding and unselfish nature and is also suffused with an acute understanding and caring of one by the other.

A level of understanding where a person can share all his trepidations, truths, and hopes with an unselfish and reliable person lays the foundation for friendship. Veldman compares Kant's and Aristotle's perception of friendship and says:

For Kant, as for Aristotle, the
highest friendship is a space in
which people of good virtue

reveal who they are to each other. As long as both friends keep similar characters, the relationship will endure since the motive behind it is to care for the friend. For Kant, moral friendship permits an intrinsically valuable self-disclosure that uniquely connects human beings to one another. (Veldman, 2011, p.456)

Aristotle and Kant conceived these concepts keeping in view men's friendships. However, these concepts are also applicable to men-women associations. It is notable that Adrian. F Ward (2012) posits that women and men cannot be friends because men and women have vastly different views of what it means to be "just friends"—and that these differing views have the potential to lead to trouble. Ward's ideas are contestable. In Tagore's and Gurdial Singh's stories, men and women are presented as friends. The friendship of Sohini and Professor Manmatha Choudhary in "The Laboratory" reaches a beautiful level of understanding where Professor Choudhary discerns the fears and doubts assailing Sohini's mind. She also trusts him. Their association glows with frankness, unselfconscious wit, and above all, mutual honesty. Sohini is a passionate, bold, Punjabi woman with a remarkable astuteness and intelligence, and Professor admires this plain speaking and honest woman. He helps her in choosing the right person for the laboratory she wishes to run in the memory of her husband. It is the Professor with whom she shares her confidential plans of gifting the laboratory to the public rather than keeping it in the family, where her daughter, Nila, will most definitely ruin it out of her avarice. She unreservedly and confidently exhibits even the dark side of her nature to her friend. Talking about her involvement in her husband's dream of making the most exceptional laboratory in Asia, she says:

It was this craze that has kept me going all these years, or my heady blood would have fermented and spilt over. Choudhary Mashai, you are the only friend with whom I can talk frankly about the evil that clings to my nature. Finding an

outlet for the scandalous side of my nature is a great relief.

(Tagore, 2012, pp. 276-77)

Their friendship is rooted in mutual respect and trust. The Professor's concern, care, and respect for Sohini are the defining factors of friendship. Sohini's courage and positivity impress him much, and he says, "I used to write poetry once. Now I feel I can write it again" (Tagore, 2012, p.287). Evidently, Sohini inspires him with her qualities—the foremost of which is her dedication to her deceased husband's dream. Professor promises her that he will be there through any difficulties, "From now on, I will be the drummer in your triumphal march" (Tagore, 2012, p.287). This friendship, indeed, is dedicated, selfless, and seasoned with the frankness that comes with maturity.

The bond of friendship is visible in the closeness and mutual understanding between Patal and Jatin in "The Wedding Garland." These two cousins belong to the same age group and are brought up together in their home in the same family. They have different temperaments. Jatin is serious and philosophic, and he is a doctor by profession. On the other hand, Patal is full of mischief and irrepressible mirth. Still, both of them understand each other well.

A crucial moment comes in their friendship when Patal playfully asks Kurani if she likes Jatin and if she will marry him, Kurani replies in the affirmative. Jatin is embarrassed and finds it difficult to bear this senselessness. He leaves her home all of a sudden. However, Jatin, although critical of Patal's overstretched sense of humor, is quick to call her when he finds Kurani in a medical camp in a sick and weak state because he is also conscious of her friend-cum-cousin's anguish. His special bond with Patal is evident from the fact that he is quick to grasp the significance of what Patal is asking for when she asks him, "Jatin, don't you love Kurani a little bit?" (Tagore, 2012, p.186). It is not only to bring respite to the dying girl that he proclaims his love but also to bring peace to the guilt-ridden and disturbed mind of Patal.

Tagore treats friendship in the man-woman relationship with the poetic dimensions of 'maitri', an idealized version of friendship with maturity and divinity. Gurdial Singh, on the other hand, presents friendship in the man-woman relationship in a realistic manner. In the orthodox circles of the patriarchal society of Punjab, the friendship

between men and women except in myths is looked down upon; it is considered to be lacking in propriety. Singh touches the poetic dimension of friendship between a man and a woman but eventually portrays how such a relationship can lead to a crisis in the socio-cultural contexts.

The bonding of unfulfilled love can find itself in a mellowed form of unclaimed friendship. In "Bonding," Bantu and Jai Kaur, two aged persons from the same village in a chance meeting while walking down from the station to their village, remember their association when they were young. Jai Kaur's footfalls are "...music to his ears, almost like the melody of drum and cymbals in the gurudwara¹²..." (Gurdial Singh, 2002, p.107). This chance togetherness fills Bantu's heart with a sense of joy and the gap of thirty years seems to fade away. The gloominess of their present state-unloved, lonely, and neglected- is forgotten for a while. The state of acute loneliness in their lives is indeed poignant and binds them in an empathetic bond. Gurdial Singh presents a suppressed longing to build mutual support through a relationship that is more or less defined by friendship. But this sort of relationship will be unacceptable to society as well as to their families. Jai Kaur feels compassion for Bantu, for he, although blessed with children unlike her, is still as lonely as she is. Life has once again brought them close, even if it is for some time. Their friendship may not be acknowledged and approved of by society, but both understand, sympathize, and empathize with each other.

Conclusion

Short stories, which are like snapshots of characters or situations, require a master to draw a satisfying finished picture. Both Tagore and Gurdial Singh are masters in their art of presenting situations as well as characters caught in the vortex of relationships. The treatment of nonmarital man-woman relationships in the stories of Tagore and Gurdial Singh exhibit an interesting insight into the human mind. These relationships, as presented in the stories of both the writers, sustain not only the cultural and regional hues but also the imprint of the writers' lives, personalities, and socio-cultural backgrounds. It's not that all the characters in

Tagore's stories are from the educated class; Kurani is a completely illiterate and dimwit girl. Nevertheless, it can be said that most of the characters in Tagore's stories are subtle and sophisticated. A strong imprint of Tagore's background is evident in his delineation of the man-woman relationships. Gurdial Singh's characters are predominantly rural, illiterate, and earthly. Thereby, they lack the subtle nuances of Tagore's characters.

In his introduction to *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Writings on Literature and Language*, Sisir Das (2001) maintains that Rabindranath's approach to literature and art was holistic, his emphasis being on the ultimate impact or *rasa*. No wonder Tagore's short stories, which are rich in the variety and subtlety of human relationships, are aimed at bringing out the euphony of humanity. Nevertheless, in the delineation of the relationships among his rural characters, he comes amiss with the natural vitality- the one that is noticed in Gurdial Singh's characters like Bhundu or Santi. Gurdial Singh brings the pulsating vibrancy of rural life in his tales.

Tagore's man-woman relationships may fall in any category; love, lust, or friendship, yet these carry a surreal beauty. Kurani-Jatin, Kalyani-Anupam, Surabala-Narrator, Patal-Jatin, Nila-Rebati, Sohini-Dr. Choudhary, etc., are the characters bonded in relationships with each other that seem too complicated and too good to be true. Gurdial Singh, on the other hand, deals with these relationships with uncanny realism. Most of his characters, such as Attra-Bachni, Jai Kaur-Bantu, Bought bride-Maghar, and Jalo-Bhundu are simpletons who lack the enigma and complexity we find in the characters in Tagore's stories. Gurdial Singh's delineation of the man-woman relationships seems to lack the complexity and aesthetics of Tagore's art but impresses the reader with its ingenuity and closeness to life. His characters are made up of sweat and blood and pulsate with vital passions- anger, hate, and love.

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¹²A gurudwara is a place of worship in Sikhism.

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