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Editor speaks

CRITICISM

Manoj Das' World of Wonder : A Study of His Short Stories with Reference to Rasa Theory and Magical Realism

* Pragyan Prabartika Dash

In no other writings, perhaps, could we come across such a harmonious blend of Indian Poetics and Western Thought as in the short stories of Manoj Das, the bi-lingual writer from Odisha. These two notes are unmistakably and clearly discernible in his writings and his literary practice and life bear testimony to this fact. Sujata Shiven writes:

Where Mr.Das was quite influenced by the mysticism of Sri Aurobindo, the effect of Western thinkers on him is well visible in his writings. Freud and Jung affected him so much that he used to write about dream and psychological analysis, mental imbalances, insanities and craziness through his characters" (1).

Many of Mr.Das' stories witness the presence of Indian Poetics and Indian Mysticism along with Western Literary Theory and Western Thought. Mr.Das came under the influence of many Indian mystics. Likewise, the theory of Magical Realism, as revealed in the Western writers like Garcia Marquez, Isabella Allende and Salman Rushdie, is clearly noticeable in the stories of Mr.Das, for instance, "The Last I Heard of Them" and "A Trip to the Jungle", which deal with the theme of search for ultimate happiness and its dreadful results.

In its attempt to study the short stories of Manoj Das with reference to Rasa Theory and Magical Realism, this article proceeds along the following lines: a brief account of Rasa Theory, the presence of *Adbhuta Rasa* in the stories of Manoj Das, a brief study of Magical Realism as a parallel to *Rasa* Theory and the presence of Magical Realism in the stories of Mr.Das.

In Indian Poetics, *Rasa* Theory has gained tremendous importance, as it has stimulated both creativity and critical discourse in Indian arts. According to Bharata, the first exponent of *Rasa* theory, *Rasa* is the essence of art. A speech

has no meaning for him if it lacks *Rasa*. He describes it as the most relished element in art. He writes: “RASYATE ANENA ITI RASAH (ASVADYATVA)”⁽²⁸⁾. Sunil Princy writes :

According to Anandavardhana, the well known art critic in Indian poetics, and the writer of *Dhvanyaloka*, *Rasa* is the representation of the ultimate emotive experience evoked by a literary piece of art.... And for Lollata, another famous critic of Indian Poetics, the base of Indian aesthetics is ‘*Rasa*’⁽²⁹⁾.

Rasa is first created by the creator of art and it generates through *Bhava* (emotions) to the *Sahridaya* (reader). The realization of *Rasa* results from the union of *Vibhava*, *Anubhava* and *Sanchari* or *Vyabichari Bhava* that align with the permanent mood (*Sthain Bhava*). As says Bharata : “VIBHANUBHAVA VYABICARI SAYOGADA RASANISPATTIH”⁽³⁰⁾.

The emotions or *Bhavas* are communicated to the reader through *Vibhavas* (determinants) and *Anubhavas* (consequents). The means by which an emotion is activated is termed as *Vibhava*, which is divided into two types, i.e. *Alambana Vibhava* (basic stimulus) and *Uddipana Vibhava* (outside stimulus). *Alambana Vibhava* refers to the person or object through whom the emotion is experienced, and who takes the responsibility for the evocation of *rasa*. *Uddipana Vibhava* refers to the situation or environment or atmosphere that intensifies the mood or emotion. There are eight types of *rasas*, i.e. *Shrigan*, *Hasya*, *Karuna*, *Roudra*, *Bira*, *Bhayanaka*, *Vibhashcha* and *Adbhuta* which culminate in another *rasa*, i.e. *Shanta*. Sometimes *Batsalya Rasa* can be found in some works of art, but basically it is not included among the primary *rasas*. There are eight *Sthain Bhavas* (basic mental states) of the primary *rasas*, i.e. *Rati* (love), *Hasa* (laughter), *Soka* (grief), *Krodha* (anger), *Utsaha* (fortitude), *Bhaya* (fear), *Jugupsa* (disgust), *Vismaya* (wonder); thirty three *Sancharis* (accessories) and eight *Sattvika Bhavas* (involuntary physical reflexes). These forty nine emotions together generate *Rasa*.

Adbhuta Rasa (wonder) permeates the stories of Manoj Das. The exotic tigers, mysterious forests, supernatural bodies like fairies and ghosts, owls and jackals are plentifully available in his stories. *Vismaya* (surprise) is the predominant emotion (*Sthain Bhava*) that is evoked while reading his stories. We get a range of uncanny atmosphere, metaphysical elements, mysterious twilights and magical moonlights which are the *Uddipana Vibhavas* (external features) of this *Rasa*. He writes about people’s odd behaviour, their being unconscious, giving wide-eyed, dumb-founded expressions which serve as the *Anubhavas* (bodily expressions by which the emotion is expressed). The characters (*Alambana Vibhavas*) may be persons or birds or animals having deviant behaviour. The *Sanchari Bhavas*, i.e. tear, sweat, eagerness, perplexity,

excitement etc. (the supportive stimulants) presented by the author make the stories completely amazing.

The *Adbhuta Rasa* in the stories of Manoj Das is always portrayed through a psychological level. He always has a connectivity with the other world or the metaphysical world. This is often called para-psychology in scientific term. With this, we come across mental powers that exist, but which cannot be accounted for by natural law and knowledge and that which cannot be obtained through the usual sensory abilities. In the stories of Mr. Das, we have these events (*Vibhavas*), occurring with or without our knowledge, and they play tremendous roles in our real life. "*Vismaya Bhava*" is generated in these emotional achievements, yet we cannot prevent ourselves from understanding them as real and actual. This cognitive phenomenon is often called extra-sensory perception, in which a person acquires knowledge of other people's thoughts or of future events through channels apparently beyond the five senses. These channels (*Uddipana Vibhavas*) play superb role in these stories, as they sometimes act as real characters rather than mere imaginative ones.

Anything connected with the supernatural always has an appeal to the mind, the appeal of terror or delight. It has a two-fold effect. For children, it is full of surprise, mystery and invention (*Sanchari Bhavas*). But mature people get other impacts on their mind or body (*Anubhavas*), like experiencing moral, spiritual or physical knowledge from these channels (*Vibhavas*). It is far away from the so called natural understanding process, but a '*Sahridaya*' can feel it properly and Manoj Das and the readers appreciate this *Bhava* (emotion) well as they cannot think it to be unreal.

"The Owl", "The Birds", "The Crocodile's Lady", "The Tiger and the Traveller", "The Tiger at Twilight", "The Turtle From the Sky", "The Fourth Friend", "He Who Rode the Tiger", "The Night the Tiger Came" are the stories where animals play as strong stimulants (*Vibhavas*) for presenting *Adbhuta Rasa*. Whereas the narrator depends on ghosts and spirits in stories like "Farewell to a Ghost" and "Friends and Strangers" for the creation of *Adbhuta Rasa*, Nature plays the most vital role in creating this *Rasa*, either through the conscious or the subconscious mind. In "The Tree", "The Man Who Lifted the Mountain", "Son and Father", "The Dusky Horizon", "The Kite" and "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night", Nature's dominating effect on human life surprises us and compels us to be connected with its effects.

There are some other stories also which surprise us with the typical abnormal behaviour of people. These *Anubhavas* (actions) puzzle us as we read the stories like "Sharma and the Wonderful Lump", "Miss Moberly's Targets", "The Shadow", "The Submerged Valley", "A Song for Sunday" and

“Bhola Granpa and the Tiger”.

Adbhuta Rasa is originated from *Vismaya (Sthayin Bhava)*. Sometimes this is felt through animals, which are said to have some extra sensory powers. In “The Owl”, the supernatural atmosphere is created by the hooting of the owl and its supposed impact on the death of the zamindar. The owl’s continuous hooting is considered evil by the villagers and when they presume that it was killed by the zamindar, they predict more evil. These ‘*Anubhavas*’ surprise us though the more surprising thing comes later following the zamindar’s death. The zamindar, in fact, did not kill the owl. But the fear and anxiety (*Sanchari*) of the people continues unabated because of the owl’s ominous association in their minds and they prophesize about the extinction of the zamindari system after the death of the young zamindar. But the most surprising thing is that the zamindar, before his death, did not reveal his innocence to the foolish villagers and never tried to get them rid of their superstitious belief and his sudden and shocking death intensified their superstition. The villagers are also very volatile and instantly change their opinion to perpetuate their superstition. Though it is confirmed that the owl is safe and alive, still its hooting continues to have ominous meanings for them.

“The Birds at Twilight” shows amazing relationship between a man and a tiger, where both of them die for each other and attain the ultimate freedom. Kumar Tukan Roy, the illegal son of Late Raja Sahib of Mandarpur who is in charge of the Palace, always takes pleasure in shooting birds. He owns a Tiger as the inheritance of his father, but soon it has to be captured by the forest department. He wants to make it free one day, hence unlocks it and addresses : “Come on, my boy, you are free. Now, run into the forest” (*Selected Fiction* 156). What is more surprising is the tiger’s behaviour (*Anubhava*). The tiger stands still looking at the setting Sun. Then it only follows him, as long as he runs. It only sticks to its master. The *Sthayin Bhava* (surprise) is maintained throughout the story by the emotions (*Bhava*) shared by the two *Alambana Vibhavas* (the tiger and the master). The *Uddipanas* (the sky, the twilight, the colourful birds, the forest etc.) are well chosen by Mr. Das which affects the mind for the generation of *Adbhuta Rasa*. Their anxiety, their love for freedom and the mutual affection (the *Sanchari Bhavas*) well support the emergence of *Adbhuta Rasa* among the *Sahridayas* (readers). The *Anubhavas* like the tiger’s running along with its master, Roy’s slapping the tiger lovingly and its responsive roaring and their sleeping near each other are surprising and deeply moving. Describes Mr. Das:

He pulled the animal down by the neck as though in an attempt to hide it within himself ⁽¹⁵⁸⁾.

This act generates *Anubhava Batsalya Rasa* which culminates in creating *Karuna Rasa* at the end when both the tiger and its master die in each other's clasp, drawing tears from the eyes of the *Sahrydaya* (reader).

"The Crocodile's Lady" is another story written in *Adbhuta Rasa*. The story is based on the blind beliefs of the villagers and the tale is associated with their belief. One old lady is believed to be the crocodile's lady once in her life when she was dragged away by a crocodile in her youth and became the beloved at first sight. The lady's enchanted life underwater in the crocodile form and her transformation afterward to her human form create the dominant emotion (*Sthain Bhava*) in this story in the form of wonder (*Vismaya*). What is more surprising is the crocodile's possessiveness towards his lady, his tremendous effort in showing his love for her, risking his life for her and finally losing it for the sake of love. These are strong stimulants (*Sanchari Bhavas*) in this story for the stabilization of permanent wonder before us. The old woman's telling all these tales and the remarks given by Dr. Batstone and the villagers serve as the *Anubhavas* whereas in the story of Mahatma Languli Baba, people's superstitious mentality creates a setting of awe (*Uddipana*) for the stimulation of *Adbhuta Rasa* in this story.

Ghosts, unseen spirits, heavenly bodies, fairies and demons become the causes (*Vibhavas*) of wonder (*Sthain Bhava*) in many of the stories of Mr. Das. Thus, *Adbhuta Rasa* generates itself from the elements and surroundings (*Uddipanas*) like uncanny atmosphere, ominous clouds, river, sky and sea, sounds of wind and disasters.

In "Farwell to A Ghost", the spirit of the maiden lived in a deserted villa for years, sleeping most of the day and weeping most of the night. She was being loved and taken good care of by the villagers. Once, she was obliged to leave her dwelling forever, as the villa was going to be renovated. The whole village came to bid farewell to her by offering good food and shedding tears for her. The *tantrik's* ritual made her leave the place, but the sympathy of the villagers followed her always. The children changed their playground to the nearest place of her new dwelling in order to remove her boredom. In this story, the spirit is the *Alambana Vibhava* and the deserted villa, the tree to which the spirit moved and the ground become the *Uddipanas*. People's concern for the ghost, their mood of remorse and their support are the *Sanchari Bhavas*, whereas their bidding farewell, shedding tears, offering food and advice to the ghost and the *Tantrik's* exorcism and pronouncement over unseen matters are the *Anubhavas* that strengthen the bewilderment (*Sthain Bhava*) in the reader (*Sahrydaya*).

In the story "Friends and Strangers", the two friends, Tirthankar and

Sivabrata (*Alambanas*), become moonstruck when they meet and talk to the third friend Pramath, not realizing that he was a ghost. His information about presenting shawl to Mrs. Wilson, who was actually dead at that time, makes them think Pramath's talk absurd and they are very much surprised; but their later enquiry about him makes them totally shocked. The bewilderment develops so much that they even doubted each other's existence. From the initial meeting with the ghost to the last enquiry about him, the *Anubhavas* add more awe and mystery to the story. But what seem more responsible for the *Sthain Bhava* (wonder) are the *Uddipanas* (atmosphere and setting). The moon which plays magic on the friends, the uncanny silence of the evening, the ominous cloud in Autumn, the erratic breeze and the creatures of the night etc. are some of them. From the beginning to the end the story continues to evoke only one *Bhava* (emotion), that is *Vismaya* (wonder). This is an outstanding story written in *Adbhuta Rasa*.

Nature's role cannot be denied while discussing the *Adbhuta Rasa*. It not only serves as *Uddipana* (setting), but also plays the role of *Alambana* (character). Nature is humanized in many stories like "The Dusky Horizon", "The Night the Tiger Came", "Friends and Strangers" and "The Shadow". The settings of "The Dusky Horizon", including the Peacock Hill, the wild forest, and the river bank, are awesome when they play the role of *Uddipanas*, but when they become furious and responsible for taking the life of the central character Lily (*Alambana*), they transform into *Alambanas* themselves. The same thing happens in 'Son and Father', where the watchman's son loses his life, merging himself in Nature's roughness (*Anubhava*), whereas Nature plays as *Alambana* and also as *Uddipana Vibhavas*.

Manoj Das often creates *Adbhuta Rasa* by presenting people's odd behaviours, dreams, mental disturbances and connectivity with the world unseen. Stories like "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night", "The Tryst", "The Shadow", "The Submerged Valley", "The Sage of Tarungiri and the Seven Old Seekers" and "The Last I Heard of Them" belong to this category. Thus, we confront Ashok, who surprises us by his daydreaming, Mr. Sarkar, who takes shelter inside a well; Mr. Sharma, who believes his shadow to be lost; *Abolkara*, who believes living underwater and the seven old friends who search for illicit miracles. These characters serve as *Alambanas* in the stories to amaze us, but the qualities they possess (*Sancharis*) are really responsible to categorize these stories as written in *Adbhuta Rasa*.

When we analyse the stories of Manoj Das according to *Rasa* Theory, another parallel comes to our view, though it belongs to Western Thought. This is Magical Realism, one of the most popular literary genres of our time. Used

as a literary term, Magical Realism refers to a mode of writing that may shortly be characterized as an amalgamation of realism and fantasy. The term, in its present sense, was first applied to Latin American literature from the 1960s, with Gabriel García Márquez, whose novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) is regarded as paradigmatic of this genre. Other magical-realist writers from Latin America include Alejo Carpentier, Isabel Allende, Julio Cortázar and many more. The concept of Magical Realism which begins its actual journey in the 1980s, has broadly been used in discussing postcolonial literatures as well as Canadian fiction. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) and many of Salman Rushdie's novels (1981-1995) are examples of this. Jack Hodgins's *The Invention of the World* (1977) and Robert Kroetsch's *What the Crow Said* (1978) may be mentioned as the works from Canada.

As a postcolonial theory, Magical Realism has felt its presence in the writings of many Indian writers too. It is unmistakably discernible in the short stories of Manoj Das. An analysis of his fictional works reveals the perfect blending of realism and fantasy in them. Supernaturalism, communication with the channels from the unknown, sensory details, extensive use of symbolism and imagery and the use of fables and myths group the fictions of Mr. Das among the major magical realists, Mr. Das' strong faith in the miraculous and the marvellous prompts him to portray strange characters and situations.

Manoj Das very often mingles and juxtaposes familiar and unfamiliar themes, using magic realist devices to offer the vision of a more deep and true reality. While the unfamiliar themes reflect over man's mysterious relationship with the natural and the supernatural world and man's helplessness in the face of an omnipotent supernatural order; the familiar themes, having strong socio-political and human significance, point to man's strengths and weaknesses. Time is treated as a theme of change and changelessness in some stories. In the story "The Submerged Valley", Mr. Das celebrates time-theme in a carnivalesque manner. For him the whole of history is made of only two factors, construction and destruction, which is presented in this story. Among the postcolonial themes, the search for national identity and rural beliefs and superstitions are included which are presented in "The Owl", "The Tree", "The Birds at Twilight", "Time for a Style" and "The Strategy" etc. where we meet *zamindars* devoid of their power due to colonial rule, and the frustrations, day dreaming and anxieties running inside them due to this reason and the superstitious villagers who support impossible probabilities. The theme of the supernatural is clearly shown in "Farewell to a Ghost", "Friends and Strangers", "Evenings at Nijanpur", "A Night and A Dawn in the Haunted House" etc. where we really get thrilled by the supernatural presence through dreams and other psychological devices,

occultisms, mystery, man's relationship with Nature, roots, community, identity, loss of freedom and the struggle of life forces against death. His themes sometimes create extreme situations for which the characters struggle a lot. However, the unique strategy of choosing themes marks Mr. Das among the major magical realists.

Mr. Das has made his characters accept rather than question the logic of the magical element in his fictions. There are often the inversion of cause and effect behind the tragedy of characters who suffer through mental turmoil most of the time. Paranormal, supernatural, fantastical, superstitious, and dream like elements are easily found in his characters. As his stories deal with the cosmopolitan urban life and its heterogeneous problems, Mr. Das often tries to bring out the inner alienation, emotional tension and frustration of the modern man and gives a vivid picture of the surrounding around him. The stories like "The Tryst", "The Kite", "Birds at Twilight" and "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night" present these themes. He has a subtle sense of humanistic appeal which reveals the most pathetic inner self of the character. Extra sensory bodies, such as, ghosts, spirits, demons etc. often come under his characterizations, as we see in the stories like "Farewell to a Ghost", "Friends and Strangers" and "A Bridge in the Moonlit Night". Man's mysterious relation with Nature and animals, which always remained a favourite subject of the Magical Realists, can be found in the stories like "Birds at Twilight", "The Dusky Horizon", "He who Rode the Tiger" and "The Man Who Lifted the Mountain".

While we get such realistic character portrayal, we also find the magical quality surrounded with some of them. Thus we meet *Babas*, *Tantriks*, Occultists and Exorcists who serve as the *Alambanas* for *Adbhuta Rasa*. Mahatma Languly Babu survived his infancy among jackals and vultures in "The Crocodile's Lady"; Tukan Baba proved himself as a pure mystic who created miracles for the seven old friends in "The Sage of Tarungiri and Seven old Seekers"; Hidamba Baba in "The Last I Heard of Them" actually showed the right way towards mysticism by giving shocks through magic water; *tantrik* Pundarik confronted ghosts in "Red Red Twilight", and the necromancer Hidamba Baba gave premonitions that came true in "The Vengeance". They not only surprise us with their knowledge, but also create a third world consciousness in us.

Manoj Das has mastered the art of creating the magical atmosphere. His ghosts, accepted as normal in normal people, yet feel at home in the eerie ambience made up of marshlands, dark forests, deserted palaces and old temples. He presents settings bathed in moonlight and twilight where howling jackals, roaring tigers and hooting owls move freely and create a supernatural atmosphere. Moon is a recurring and powerful image in many of his stories

like “Friends and Strangers”, “A Bridge in the Moonlit Night”, “Bhola Grandpa and The Tiger”. Just before introducing the bizarre in “Friends and Strangers”, the author describes the autumn evening scene thus:

The moonlight on the lush outskirts of the town was so thick; one felt one could net a kerchief-full of it and pocket it for future use ⁽¹¹⁰⁾.

And in “A Bridge in the Moonlit Night”, he writes :

At times, the moon appeared so big and so close to Ashok’s balcony that he wondered if he could say hello to it... There were moments on such moonlit nights when he could see elves and fairies...playing hide-and-seek among the silver-rimmed clouds and atop the starlit trees on the faint horizon ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

Not only the moonlit nights, but also the fearful nights with roaring wind and blinding rain, the valleys bathed in an uncanny atmosphere, hills possessing mystery and grounds occupied by spirits have also been presented by Mr.Das. They portray magical settings for which the amalgam of fantasy and realism becomes possible. Like Rushdie, Manoj Das introduces postcolonial factors such as, the feudal system and its degrading rulers and the British colonialism and the adversities faced by the country people. The postcolonial culture of India, with its combination of the Occident and the Orient, conceals the violent nature of political and historical happenings, in effect laying difficulties in the establishment and interrogating the achievement of a consummate Indian identity that is liberated from external contaminations temporally, spatially and culturally. The new Independence and its associative falsehood and the growing psychological disorders due to those factors create frustration and false hope in the country people which is very effectively presented by Mr. Das.

The short stories included in the selection entitled *The Lady who Died One and a Half Times* have the mesmerizing quality of grandmother’s tales. The fables and fantasies easily fit into the great fictional tradition of India. Although these stories take the reader to another time and another place, they synchronise perfectly with the present-day sensibility. Mr. Das’ ability to link the traditional with the modern and the mundane with the magical makes his fictional world so fresh, and his characters and ghosts so enduring. He very often engages child narrators, as in “Farewell to a Ghost” and “The Submerged Valley”; ‘narrator within narrator’ as the centre of consciousness, as in “The Crocodile’s Lady”; and ‘story within story’, as in “The Princess and the Storyteller” and “The Man Who Lifted the Mountain” to project a sense of awe

and wonder. Manoj Das imitates the Indian tradition of storytelling to make his magical realist works as interesting and credible as “grandma’s tales”. He uses all types of narrative strategies of magical realism, such as fabulation, orality, fantasy, symbolism, ambiguity, and incorporation of myths and legends. These strategies bring us fragmentation of self, physical and spiritual metamorphoses, and the strings of surreal images that blur distinctions and transform things. At the core of his delving questions is the ‘fragmented-self’ presented as *blurred identity* – an identity that is ever in doubt, especially in contradiction with the hostile environment and with the ever-polarized world of stark globalization. His presentation of metamorphosis is often coined with a problematic past or cultural hybridity. All these things often put his writings in a hallucinatory light. In his attempt at an intense exploration of reality, he focusses the scientific reality with the psychological human reality by incorporating such aspects of human experience as thoughts, emotions, dreams, cultural mythologies, imaginations etc. to yoke the opposites like natural and supernatural, life and death and real and surreal in the components of his stories. He delves deep into the magic of being to reveal an insight into the unexpected richness of reality which is deeper, truer than the perception of reality found in realistic fictional works.

Magic Realism transcends literary realism by acknowledging the magic inherent in reality —a feat which, Zamora and Faris admit, is “a simple matter of the most complicated sort”⁽²²⁾. “Magic” is perceived in the ordinary. What one understands as the “real” is defamiliarized: it expands, shifts, transforms to juxtapose elements normally considered opposites—life and death, waking and dreaming, civilized and wild, male and female, mind and body. Magical Realism stretches the boundaries of realism in order to stretch the definition of reality. According to Zamora and Faris, magic becomes ordinary, “admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism”⁽²²⁾.

But, no matter how elastic that definition is, Magical Realism stays grounded in the phenomenal world, unlike fantasy, which is set in the unreal. All these things find a parallel place in the stories of Mr. Das. There is the extinction of the boundary between reality and fantasticality in them. Whereas at some points he has naturalized the supernatural, somewhere else supernaturalization of the natural has taken place. The ordinary meets the marvellous and marvellous becomes ordinary most of the time, which is one of the major distinctions of Magical Realism.

Mr. Das’s fictions focus upon the unknown within the known, discovering

emptiness inside an apparently full reality. Man's level of understanding expands between illusion and reality in this age of science and technology. Somewhere these things mix with each other in our day-to-day life also, which we fail to perceive as it does not suit our natural understanding. A magic realist always suggests for that perception to the eligible reader, which Mr. Das has accomplished in great magnitude and with amazing craftsmanship. □

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MANOJ DAS – THE MAKING OF AN ARTIST

* Bhabagrahi Moharana

Manoj Das, one of the most illustrious post-independent short story writer of India, who is regarded as the Vishnu Sharma in the world of story-telling, has carved a niche for himself in the lush environ of Indian English literature, and inscribed his name visibly in the invisible rock of time for good. His story-telling is indeed thrilling and mesmerizing to the readers. The real world around him, Indian mythologies, society and social evolution, the world of fantasy and invisibility help him to create a new world in his stories – a real living world for his readers. But it cannot be denied that he followed the foot prints of the great story-tellers like, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and others as it is rightly said:

No poet, no artist of any art has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone, you must set him, for contrast and comparison among the dead..... ⁽¹⁾

As to the position, Manoj Das is one of the few story-tellers to have achieved equal success of writing in two languages, both in Odia and English. He has trotted both the worlds of Odia and English literature with a felicity that is rare. His position among the best known story-tellers in India is quite distinct to his readers. In this context Graham Greene observes:

Manoj Das will certainly take a place on my shelves beside the stories of Narayan. I imagine Odisha is far removed from Malgudi, but there is the same quality in his stories, with perhaps an added mystery. ⁽²⁾

Manoj Das's stories easily remind us of Edger Allan Poe and O' Henry Born and brought up in the lap of Nature in a coastal village of Shankari, Balasore, Odisha. Manoj Das experienced the fury of Nature when a cyclone devastated his area. This was followed by famine and an epidemic which took thousands of lives and also left a deep mark of empathetic reminiscences in his life. In Odia, he made his literary debut, a collection of Odia poems, under the title **Samudrara Kshyuda** (The Sea's Hunger/The Hungry Sea) at the age of fourteen. At the age of fifteen he launched 'Diganta', a reputed literary journal in Odia. By now he has to his credit more than 80 books both in Odia

and English. When he was asked how it all happened, he made his reply to Sachidananda Mohanty:

Writing came to me like several functions in life beholding the splendor of rainbow or the beauty of a garden. It mattered when the little book received attention and appreciation came from connoisseurs in the field of literature ⁽³⁾

Born in the year 1934 Manoj Das had to pass through a transition. He got the opportunity to experience the drastic changes that took place in social ambience pre and post independence. The atmosphere in which he grew up, the spirit of freedom movement and the condition of Independent India stirred his creative mind. In an extempore interview with P.Raja that had been arranged by All India Radio and was broadcast as National Programme by all its stations on June 18, 2005, Manoj Das himself spoke on his felicity in both Odia and English languages:

Felicity in my mother tongue came naturally, primarily due to my mother, Kadambini Devi, a great lover of literature and a poet, who had no ambition to become known. She initiated me to the finest works in Odia literature even before I had learnt the alphabet. So far as my writing in English is concerned, I was provoked into it. I was in the B.A. classes when a friend read out a passage on the Indian village life written by a so called celebrity in English. It was a portrayal bereft of realism, devoid of the spirit of rural India. I thought, born and brought up in a remote village, amidst undiluted rustic air, I had a duty and right to project the milieu through English for those who cared for it. But my entry into the spirit of English language was possible only through the writings of Sri Aurobindo. The scholars – British or Indian – are yet to appreciate the magnitude of felicity and dignity he achieved for English, the height of expressiveness the language has received in his hands. ⁽⁴⁾

Das was greatly influenced by his mother in his childhood. The Indian epics like **The Ramayan** and **The Mahabharat** narrated to him could help him to shape his creative mind to weave the threads of plots to produce magnificent stories. It is sure that none can refute the influence of past and that of the heritage and culture in his works. All sorts of writers, be they poets, novelists, playwrights, and others, all are imbued by the mementos of the past. While talking to Dr. Ramendra Kumar he says:

*..... stories from the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharata**, recounted to me by my mother stirred my imaginativeness. Hence we can say that Valmiki and Vyasa – particularly the latter – was the earliest influence on me, albeit indirectly. Then, by the time I was capable of reading, there were the works of Fakirmohan Senapati, the grand pioneer of modern Odia fiction, awaiting*

me, all collected by my mother. Senapati, undoubtedly, was a consciously felt influence ⁽⁵⁾

Manoj Das also owes to the great translators of India who are definitely a great source of inspiration for him. He believes that one cannot conceive of Indian literature without the role played by the great translators like Kamban, Tulsidas, Sarala Das, Kashmir Das and Thungam. He says most of the modern Indian languages achieved adulthood through a translated or trans-created version of the two great epics of India, the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharata**. What is more, we are beholders for the entire robust branch of our pragmatic literature to an illustrious translator, Somadeva. This eleventh Century savant of Kashmir translated a much earlier work, Gunadhya's **Brihat Katha**, from a language that is dead since long, *Pishacha*, into Sanskrit. The impact of Somadeva's work, entitled **Katha-Sarit-Sagara**, is not only on Indian literature but also on the literatures of the world, and it is incalculable and can be rivaled only by **The Panchatantra** and **The Jatakas**. Now it can be confirmed that the translations of such stories are ingrained and also stirred Das to translate the stories of the Indian classics for the young generations. The stories from **The Panchatantra, The Jatakas, The Kathasaritsagara, The Brihat Katha, The Ramayana, and The Mahabharata**, have inspired him to procure themes for his stories. Besides, he has also exploited the world of fantasy to a great extent. Like the metaphysical poets he has also yoked the most heterogeneous plots in his stories what keep his readers in suspended breath. The stories like the **Crocodile's Lady, Farewell to a Ghost, and The Owl** are the specimen of such type.

However, the surrounding around an artist helps him to flourish his talent as it is found in case of Manoj Das. In fact the birth place of a writer plays a great role in making him an artist of any kind. The landscape of the home land, its prevalent beauty, the living world, nature and specially the society that supports him to develop along with its norms and conventions, beliefs and superstitions, religion and spiritualism, life and livelihood, birth and deaths, sorrows and happiness, pangs and pleasure do help a person to grow into an artist. When we look at Manoj Das, the conspicuous influence of his little village nestling to the eastern coast forms a beautiful picture in our mind. During a talk with Sachidananda Mohanty, a Professor of English at the University of Hyderabad, Manoj Das speaks about the influence of his childhood in his writing: *"Nostalgia can cast a spell on you and edit your memory. I voted for my impressions of innocence. That alone could create its distant horizon, its own credibility."* The work **Chasing the Rainbow** is a beautiful account of Das's growing days as a child in his little village. Like Wordsworth's **Prelude-I**,

Chasing the Rainbow records the memoirs of Das's childhood experiences in a quiet and supine coastal village. Though he has not created another Malgudi like R.K. Narayan, still his small village Sankhari, in the Balasore district, Odisha is no less important for him. This small village of Das is the locale of most of his stories. His nostalgic reminiscences of the beautiful landscape bring his boyhood alive in most of his short stories. Although he grew up amidst the soft, tender and splendorous milieu of Nature, he also experienced Nature's fury when a cyclone devastated his region followed by a famine and an epidemic that took the life of many innocent people. In addition his house was also twice plundered by dacoits while he was only six years old. A conglomeration of such sweet and bitter experiences gave a much needed fillip to the formative stage of his creative mind, and by the time he was in high school, he had already published many of his works in his mother tongue, Odia. It was indeed the influence of his mother Kadambini Devi who herself was a great lover of literature and a poet. In his infantile she instilled in him such spirit that could enliven his talent before he started learning. Admitting this, later in an interview with Dr. P. Raja, Manoj Das says:

She initiated me to the finest works in Odia literature before I had learnt the alphabet ⁽⁶⁾

Both the pre-independent and the post-independent scenario of India play an important role in Das's art of story-telling when independence was dawning with the receding of the British Raj from the soil of India. In most of his stories the readers meet the characters of rural India, particularly of his homeland. Many stories included in his **Selected Fiction**.

The end of the princely states and feudal system with the breaking of the shackle of British Raj has brought an indelible impact on Das's mind. The sense of dispossession of the former rulers of the princely states and other beneficiaries of the feudal system are the characters that never cease to tingle Manoj Das's fancy to deal with them in his stories. Such idiosyncratic figures of independent India, who fail to adapt to new kind of living style like that of the ordinary mortals, are portrayed by him very artistically. It is, indeed, the nationalist upsurge that had stirred the entire Indian society and is writers to a great extent. So the society and DAs appear to have been blended into a story-teller. On fiction, as Hazlitt puts:

It is constituted of the very web and texture of society as it really exists hence finds a fertile soil in a society in ferment ⁽⁷⁾

The introduction of modern education in India replaced the Indian cultural inheritance in religion, norms, tradition and social conventions which was opposed vehemently by the nationalists. The national movement started to unveil the spirit of Indianness in every sphere. This was also reflected in Manoj

Das's family. In his early days he too was greatly inspired and influenced by Sri Aurobindo, the active freedom fighter of India and a superman in the world of philosophy and spiritualism.

Aurobindo's writings brought an unfathomable and indelible impact on Manoj Das. In an interview published in **Life Positive** he has explained his own belief system and Sri Aurobindo's thoughts for mankind in these words: *"He attracted me because of his belief that the present status of man is not the acme of evolution. As delved deeper into Sri Aurobindo's works. I realized that though suffering is bitter, it is an intermediary process through which man grown."* Being asked what he finds most appealing in Sri Aurobindo's thought he further remarks:

Sri Aurobindo brings in a touch of fulfillment. He sees man not only as what he is, but also as what he could be. Sri Aurobindo talked about an evolution, which leads to the triumph of spirit over matter ⁽⁸⁾

Further regarding Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy he points out:

It is decisive, but nobody can predict it. It all depends on human receptivity, human willingness to transcend limitations and man's preparedness to be disillusioned about his own hypocrisies. It is not a question of an individual transcending; it is the question of humanity transcending. ⁽⁹⁾

Manoj Das was also a communist in the beginning. The communist ideology also brought an undeniable impact on his writings. He was a youth leader in his student days. He took an active part in Afro-Asian Students Conference in 1956, and was also arrested.

The influence of the Shri Mother and Aurobindo becomes conspicuous in his works and speech. This can be studied from his lecture that he delivered on 'Preface to the Future' at Sri Aurobindo Centre, Delhi in which he says:

Today's man is so preoccupied with his present that the future remains behind the curtain of his vision. He is not ready to ponder over the future because he feels it is very uncertain, and even a little inward thought digs out memories of a past burdened with agonies and woes. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Manoj Das himself says that a short story should always be inspired and not contrived or invented. Here he is indeed possessed by a fresh inspiration that propels him to create a different genre. While having a chat with Swapan K. Banerjee, commenting the thought of solitude, he remarks in the following words:

The idea could occur to one any moment: In a tumultuous environment, in a circumstance not very conducive to a meditative solitude. But to shape it into a literary creative piece, to give expression to the idea, you require solitude. Without solitude it remains only raw material. The deeper spirit of the theme can be felt only when one is withdrawn, and one can be withdrawn only

when one is in solitude. Solitude, let me clarify, is no necessarily only physical solitude. One can remain in solitude even amidst a crowd, provided an inner discipline has been cultivated. But that's a yogic poise one has to master. ⁽¹¹⁾

The language of silence also plays a vital role in the creativity of Manoj Das; in fact he creates his works of art by thinking through silence. Being a bilingual writer, to the queries of P. Raja as to which language he thought before writing a piece, he makes a quick and stunning answer:

"..... in the language of silence, if I do not sound presumptuous." He hastened to explain, *"The creative process ought to be allowed some mystery. Inspiration surely precedes articulation through any language. This is absolutely true in regard to good poetry and substantially true in regard to good fiction. Without this element of inspiration, which is beyond language to begin with, literature can hardly have a throbbing soul."* ⁽¹²⁾

Odisha is one of the most colorful regions of our country, both geographically and culturally – the vast blue ocean at its east and the mountainous ranges and the deep forests in the western and southern zones enhance the beauty of its landscape. It has also an extremely rich tradition of oral literature consisting of innumerable myths, legends and folklore, there are many features of language, food habits, costumes and folk-lore of Odisha that are common to both the north and the south of India. Though cultural and commercial transactions, the local tongue has been enriched contributing and being contributed with a lot to inspire its literatures including Manoj Da. The most important of them are Upendra Bhanja, Baladev Ratha, Fakirmohn Senapati, Kali Charan Patnaik, Mayadhar Manasingha, Satchidananda Rautray, Surendra Mohanty, Manoranjan Das, Manoj Das (1934) Sntanu Kumar Acharya and Sitakant Mahapatra.

Novel writing started in India as a result of the Indian author's exposure to Western literature, from mid – 19th century onwards. Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918) is the first major novelist whose **Chha Mana Atha Guntha** (Six Acres and a Half, 1897), dealing with the exploitation of the peasants by a landlord, is a classic in Indian literature. Senapati wrote in the tradition of realism. His writings dealt with problems of ordinary men and women and they were written in colloquial Odia.

The tradition of Odisha and its story-telling background have left an impressionable influence on Manoj Das's career which can never be denied. In order to bridge the gap between urban and rural consciousness, between the past and the present, another trend which is very much visible in the post-modernist writing is the use of mythology to present the modern predicament. Manoj Das took the responsibility of this job in his writings. His social con-

sciousness and the impact of the immediate literary surroundings carried over from his Odia short stories, and reflected in his English short stories.

The Renaissance which started with the advent of western education in India brought about novel thinking and a different sway in the mode of creative writing. The eminent figures who influenced and ignited literally men were Ram Mohan Roy, Ranade, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Tilak, Gokhale, Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. These stalwarts are considered to be the makers of modern India who used English as the effective means of communication for the purpose of spreading their message in India and the world. Their writings are supposed to have made the immense contribution to our National Literature. English was accepted and got included in our languages boosting Indian writing in English. It can be traced back to the publication of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's tract "**Sati**" in 1818. This Renaissance had also its influences on Odisha and served as an instrument of bringing social changes. The story-tellers of Odisha began exposing the inner weakness of society unlike the poets of the Renaissance because they were liberal and their poetry ventilated the joy of life and the eternity of soul and the unity of the Divine and the Mundane world.

Again independence brought a new vista in the field of Indo-English writing giving a new means of form and utterance to each and every facet of human pain and pleasure of India inspiring the writing of the creative writers like Manoj Das. But the preceding communal conflicts and the following heinous massacre and the heart-rending mass exodus of people across the border stained the joy of the freedom. It was aggravated when Mahatma Gandhi was gunned down on 30th January, 1948, on his way to prayer and the entire nation remained stunned with shock and grief. Although Manoj Das had a drastic spiritual change, he had not forgotten the first blow that our independence had brought upon us. In some of his stories he revealed the savage communal violence that remained asleep in the mind of certain satanic Indians who camouflaged themselves as the true Gandhians.

Thus Manoj Das, out of such milieu, emerges prominently as a distinguished story-teller among the third generation of the short story writers, the first consisting of Manjari Isvaran, Mulak Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, the second comprising of Khuswant Singh, Ruth Prasad Jhabvala, K.A. Abbas and Bhabani Bhattacharya. (Venugopal: 103)

G.D. Khosla, Bunny Reuben, Ruskin Bond, Chamanlal Nahal, Parasara Balakrishnan, and Usha Joho do comprise the third generation of short-story writers. When Khosla was inspired by the evils of Indian society and its transition from tradition to modernism: Reuben, with the aspects of India's traditional society; Ruskin Bond, with his humaneness, Manoj Das got influenced by the changing force of India. In his stories we find the traits of modernism such as

Marxism, Existentialism, Psychoanalysis and Surrealism along with the stream of Consciousness and internal Monologue with vigorous force. Manoj Das, to use analogy, is a hard core critic of society like Mark Twain in America. No doubt he started his career as a typical Odia writer and himself translated some of his works into English. He uses the nuances of Odia culture, folklore, folk tradition, etc and presents them in his creative writing skillfully and magnificently. When Modern Indian short-story writers like Manohar Malgonkar, R.K. Narayan, K.A. Abbas, Khushwant Singh and Prafulla Mohanti have successfully projected the tradition and culture of India, Manoj Das can be judged within this parameter. The most important trait of his style of writing is his irony, humour and satire that add great success to his stories which stand out as masterpieces.

He is one of the successful master story-tellers, perhaps next to Tagore and stands as the most talented bi-lingual creative writer who has used both Odia and English comfortably in his writings. □

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MANOJ DAS WITH VARIED TONES

* Dr. Gangalaxmi Pattnaik

It's always a pleasure to review the writings of a story writer who's from the same state as I am: Odisha. It brings about a certain sense of solidarity especially when it's a fellow writer who is increasingly being recognized for his versatility. Manoj Das (1934-) a devoted disciple of Sree Aurobindo, is one of the very few reputed writers in Indo-Anglian literature, writing both in English and Oriya languages. Born in Balasore of Odisha, he is quite familiar with its life, its rites and rituals, customs and traditions and the poverty of the exploited villagers. Like Sree Aurobindo, he reconstructs the universe according to his own vision, expressed in intimate, and at the sometime, esoteric vocabulary and symbolic system that convey the fundamental realities of human condition. *Cyclones (a novel)*, *The submerged valley and other stories*, *A Bride inside a Casket and other Tales*, *Man who lifted the Mountain and Other Fantasies* are some of his important contributions of literature. Das's latest stories take off from the writer's multifarious experience across time and space. The stories take us through many experiences of the writer through some varied tones and images, sometimes predictable at times, gently surprising and now and then shocking. The predictable tone and image in his story books is that of explicit sentiment and so, I like Manoj Das' stories best when they are startlingly ironic, terse, or even playful. Every story has its share of such incidents. He has been the recipient of many literary awards including the most prestigious Sahitya Akademi award for his *Katha O' Kahani*.

His story *The Murderer* exhibits a keen insight into the behaviour pattern of each character portraying it with subtle humour and gentle satire. It is a titillating story of exploitation and oppression by the sahuakar. It presents in a very individual and personal term the situation of a girl trapped within a loveless relationship from which she seeks release. The blind and deaf girl of sixteen years of age was given by her father to Dabu Sahukar, the money lender who engaged her as a maid servant in his house. The domestic help is tortured physically, mentally, psychologically. She is heartbroken and left speechless. No word of complaint is heard. One day the girl is found dead in

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the tank. This is the first instance of exploitation resulting in the death of Sati, the orphan girl. Dabu Sahukar is evil and corrupt money lender who represents the oppressive world of male authority. Harassment is the identity of the Sahukar. Manoj Das's story reminds us the story of Kamala Das (story writer is no more) known as *A Doll for the Child Prostitute* where the girl's predicament is precarious. The poignancy of situation is exactly same as in the story of Manoj Das where death is the only escape from the torture of the situation which is very much echoed in another way in the story *Trespassers*. The story reflects that the present world is a place of disaffection – a wasteland where lilacs of love, affection, gratitude do not bloom. The present society is founded upon the absence of attachment, tolerance, sympathy and such human values. The central character of the story is Roy Saheb, who has been sent by his children to the oblivion where he resigns philosophically to his lot despairing at his prospects, looking at the horizon with blank and bony gaze. It is a story of feeling, a feeling various and intimate. The feeling of grief in the sense of lament for something lost. The story is a great document of crying human emotion and of basic human relationship. Now-a-days we are more with matter than with good intentions necessary for life. The present generation has no time to take care of the elders, older generation. The consequence is filial ingratitude. Man runs after money. Money is the pivot around which the mind revolves. But at times it brings disaster to human happiness, which is transparent in the story *The Man who lifted the Mountain*. It is a story of greed, avarice and ambition which brings death to the man. When the question of lifting the mountain comes, Tieffou, the thief is inspired by the announcement of the king and expected to lift the mountain so that he could get fabulous reward. Tieffou demanded that he should take the hand of the king's daughter and become his only son-in-law. Since the king had no son, after the death of the king, he would be naturally crowned as the king. The mountain had promised to keep itself feather-light for an hour. The hour had passed. Tieffou forgot the time and the mountain touched the ground and settled quietly. Tieffou rested forever under the mountain. Although placed in the distant past, the characters and incidents are unmistakably contemporary.

Family and personal reminiscences are the overriding theme of some stories. His stories touched me for the references he has made to the rural and semi-urban setting of the villages. He explores the essential helplessness of man set against the hostile circumstances of life. He has achieved eminence in writing the story *The submerged Valley* that presents a brief but meaningful picture of village life, the attachment of villagers to the soil, and unique character like Abolokara who adds colour to village life. Abolokara, the disobedient fellow

of the village had an implacable love for the soil of the village. When the village was going to be submerged he did not like to leave the place because it was the village of his forefathers. All the villagers left the place except Abolkara who lived there under water for five years. At last the narrator's father risked his life to save him and he was saved. The following line of the story is relevant to the understanding of the narrator's father's own attachment to the village which compelled him to revisit the village:

When it was certain that hillock would get submerged during the night, I had to go out in the lunch again. The temple had disappeared. All that remained was the rock with this gentleman sitting on top of it. What a welcome smile he gave when I focused my touch on him!

(Invitation to English-2, P-34)

The deep attachment of the narrator's mind is synonymous with the poem *Kalahandi* of Niranjana Mohanty (who is no more with us) the celebrity poet of Odisha. One can get a clue from what the poet Mohanty expresses in his poem *Kalahandi* about the sentiment of the people.

Perhaps, the hearts go heavier here by day, and the bodies, by night, lonelier. Cattle chew paper scraps and line, butterflies flounder about black stones. Rivers do not flow here. The pools and wells never glow with the bliss of water. No vegetation, no fruition only the bones' hunger seeks an ascension.

(A House of Rains, P. 31)

Deep attachment is an essential element of Manoj Das and Niranjana Mohanty. It colours all their utterances and gives depth and originality to their work of art. Das also expresses the dominant emotion of the villagers, in his story *Tree*. The feeling of disenchantment and despair at the loss of the tree uprooted and carried away by the river in spate is reflected in the story. The tree symbolizing the past, present and the future is intimately connected with the villagers and their life pattern. The short story has resemblance with the poem *Tree* of N. Mohanty, where Mohanty sought relief and happiness. He glances the tree outside and finds a reflection of his own self:

A tree shall I implant
xxx xxx xxx xxx
In its blossoms I shall collect
the departed sun-set's drooping face,
the pollens of yellow bird's grace.
xxx xxx xxx xxx

By night I shall count glow worms,
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and by day, its leaves.

xxx xxx xxx xxx

this tree hold my own disposition.

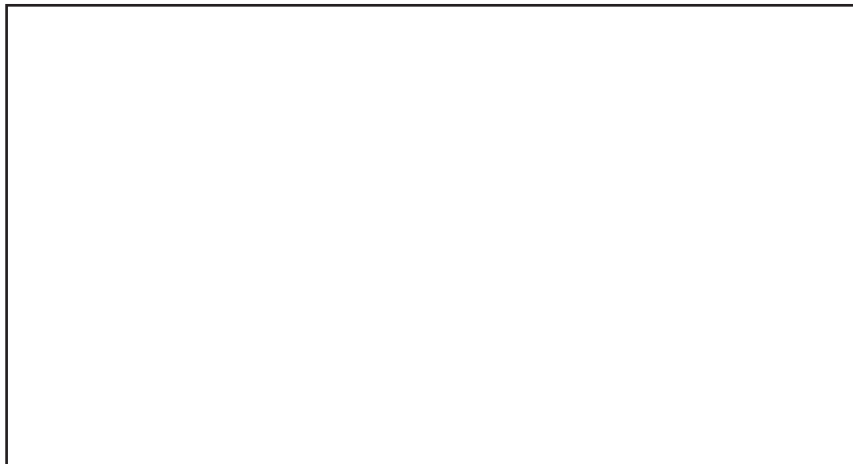
(Tiger and other poems, 57)

The beauty of the story *The Kite* lies in the way Das has so boldly used his source material. The story opens with the recurrent theme : the mixing of memory and desire in present barrenness. The tragedy of Kunjo, the hero is that he was arrested and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for killing the village Mahajan. One day he was carried to the working place and found a kite stuck to the top of a palm tree at a distance. He shows his inclination and aspiration to soar high like the kite. His mind shifts from his present situation to the past memories. He ran speedily to catch the kite but disappeared in water.

Manoj Das is a profound scholar of modernity and traditionalism. Going through his short stories, one may mark his irresistible attraction for the villagers of Odisha. His stories are the evidences of the writer's ability in presenting the scense of Odisha with all its naturalness in the typical Odissan way. □

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Manoj Das As The Editor of The Heritage

* Gopal Roy

Eminent story writer Manoj Das edited a magazine named The Heritage from January 1984 to December 1989. It was an English monthly published by Chandamama Publication from Madras (now Chennai). The magazine contained features on widely varied subjects with suitable beautiful photographs giving a taste different from 'pot-pourris of politics and cinema'. Manoj Das did not disclose the other kind of purpose at first without two or three years. The heritage was greatly accepted by the readers with decent taste which were clear from the letters to the editor published in 'views and voices' section of the magazine. Mrinal Kapur, a reader from 'Bombay' wrote: 'A Western friend of mine (I need not identify his country) who saw a set of the heritage in my house and spent all his reading time during his week's sojourn on the set, told me: 'This is the only complete cultural magazine I have come across. This gives so much good fiction, so much to wonder on 'The other experience', so much to reflect on the editorials, I must confess that we do not have a magazine of this quality in our country, a homely magazine which can be treated like a member of one's family' He emphasized the word homely' ... (Views and Voices, Oct. 1989 issue).

During 1980s, vicious circle, the most powerful and corrupted lobby in India inflicted upon the people in some ways were a part of world-wide process. In West Bengal we saw Dr. Pratap Chandra Chandra, once minister of social welfare and culture in the central govt., left the field of politics in disgust and involved himself with various socio-cultural activities. During this time, television entered into remote parts of India, badly affecting the charming variety of language and culture in various Indian province. Larger and larger sections of educated middle-class people were getting more and more accustomed with hypocritical style. Manoj Das took up these matters in his editorials from various angle... The intellectuals ought to reflect on the manifold attack by decadent, reactionary and outright deceptive values on the minds of the masses. Has any group of sociologists studied the impact of the aggressive, western style

advertisement given out by our TV on its newly cultivated suburban and rural audience – its contribution in breeding false needs among the already needy? ...Has anybody observed the impact of the couples of ad-starlets hugging each other in cozy beds on the minds of rural audience constituted of grand ma, father, mother and all the kids?’

‘The TV may signify technological progress, but it is not progress proper. It is only a means for satisfaction. It can be used to satisfy false, lower and base needs, it higher also be used to satisfy intellectual, aesthetic and higher needs. Will the intellectuals gird up their loins to protect the means from its misuse by decadent minds?’ (From The Editor, Jan: 1987)

Sincere people with really educated mind stood against the misuse of TV, yet day by day we saw innumerable things to consume, alluring and lustrous, without being conscious how or soul were getting lost in confusing mess. Even in the world of creative activities persons had to compromise in the question of standard. Manoj Das in editorials was expressing his anxieties: ...‘We live in a world terribly mixed up. Though I do not enjoy cricket, I have respect for great cricket players, who have come to personify a collective sense of pride, some kind of excellence and perhaps the spirit of sportsmanship. But I feel very disappointed when I see some of them appearing in advertisement as salesman for one consumer product on another... For purely monetary consideration (and I am told that they are already very rich) they are showing disrespect us for they know that they have no greater qualification to champion a product than any ordinary man. I will still applaud their achievements in sports, but I will not respect them, for they are taking advance I will still applauded their achievements in sports but I will not respect them, for they are taking advantage of our respect’ ... (From The Editor, Nov. 1987).

Next paragraph of the same editorial has revealed the vulgarity of ‘free press’ thus: ... ‘we have great respect for freedom of the press. But I feel sad when I see a popular newspaper trying to brainwash the people ... All kind of writing flourish in a free society. There are some columnists who have graduated in the art of tickling us. They are intelligent and well-informed, intelligent enough to pass on a bit of vulgarity as frankness and informed enough to pour information into us which we hardly need. There is nothing grievously wrong in it. They are entitled to their way of survival and popularity. But when one of them is described by a widely circulated weekly as the father of modern Indian journalism, we feel uneasy. Modern Indian journalism which began with Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, Gandhiji etc., all certainly deserves better consideration’ ... (From The Editor, The Heritage, Nov. 1987). Manoj Das ended it with a mild

satirical conclusion: ... 'we must develop an ever better and keener sense of discrimination, must keep our head above the reach of those who are stretching themselves to reach our brain to wash it will mugfuls of rubbish' ... (From The Editor, Nov. 1987)

Das's editorials were after subdivided into two, three or four sections for treating certain topic from various angle. Sometime he discussed through story-telling or through narrating incidents he witnessed here and there creating dialogue. Here one finds closeness between story-writer Manoj Das and editor Manoj Das. In stories, Das after has juxtaposed the innocent and imaginative world of children and adolescents with the narrow, insensitive world of distrust of grown-ups. In his writings we also find a few exceptional grownup who retain the simplicity of children within in a way. Here is a part from editorial where the experience he had in his child hood was described: ... 'Born and brought up in a village (the nearest seasonal bus-stop was eight miles away ...) I lived amidst animals as much as human beings. Cattle, dogs, cats and a maina bird apart, we had a peacock that was moody but beautiful. I had brought up a mongoose that was ready to perform a variety of tricks the moment it was sure of an appreciative audience.

'To this was added an unexpected trophy. Flood used to turn my sister's village into an island at intervals of some years. During one such havoc a tigers and her two cubs found refuge in a bushy frontier of the village ... The tired tigress was killed in a simple operation. News came that I could have one of the cubs if I so desired. What greater excitement could be offered to a nine-year-old?'

'I reached my sister's village as fast as I could. The return journey was perhaps the proudest in my life, a villager carrying the cub in a basket on his head, it giving out its soft growl from time to time, excited dogs barking at it all the way.'

'After a few days of bewilderment, the cub began to get adjusted to the new environment. I can never forget the look with which it used to survey my face for minutes at a stretch. That was the sign of its developing faith in me sign that made me uneasy. No doubt I loved it, but it was a possessive love, inseparable from a sense of pride...'

'I am afraid, we are fast losing the natural quality conducive to nurturing pets. To have an animal in the house is to be continuously reminded of our lost traits of innocence and faith – a rather painful exercise – unless we succeed in contaminating them with our own conceit.' (From The Editor, Oct. 1987)

Above quotation is from 'unforgettable look' – the last part of the editorial published in the Oct. 1987 issue. One can identify the source from where a number of Manoj Das's stories have emerged. The editorial is subdivided into four sections interlinked to each other in a unique way. Let us take from it's first part 'Knowing The Spring Through The Ad': ... A broken hill is perhaps among the most pathetic witnesses of man's barbarity, for, in principle we can raise a forest, but never a hill ... But some men continue to destroy the hills in an era when they can be easily spared' ...

'Man's alienation from Nature – rather man alienating Nature from his life – has dangerous physical consequences and this is a fact universally acknowledged ... The alienation from Nature has perhaps been the beginning of a chain of alienations – alienation of own sense of beauty from our attraction of glamour, of our love for peace from our pursuit of pleasure, of our inner self from our social and superficial identity.'

'But that is a different matter and a more subtle issue. Can't there be a moratorium on all such activities? Why don't our regional political leaders who are ever ready to launch mochas and gears against their rival politicians, divert their attentions for a decade to this problem? If they don't, why the common educated people of every region grow alert enough to protect their ecology?' ... (Knowing The Spring Through The Ad, From Editor, Oct. 1987).

From the third part of the same editorial: 'All the animals that can be domesticated had been tamed by our ancestors at the twilight of civilization. The 'civilized' man has not been able to add a single species to the list. By the by we have only lost own hold on them. In the households of ancient Egyptian nobility baboons served as waiters. 'The Chinese, during the region of Kubla Khan, used lions on hunting expeditions.' Informs Isaac Asimov' ... (Achievement of The Primitive)

After five years of careful observation, Das had to stop the publication of The Heritages; the magazine became history. Before closing, Manoj Das in his editorial (Nov. 1989 issue) disclosed why The Heritage were started: ... was launched out of a kind of anguish. During the last two decades, we have witnessed a dazzling crop of magazines in India. Many of them deserve accolade for their production, layout and intelligent coverage of men and matters. Intelligent, but hardly anything more; simulating but not elevating.

How The Heritage was arranged? Let us read from Das's editorial again: ... 'No doubt, it had article in places, known and little known, festivals, traditions, tribal etc. which other magazines also carry, but it covered many more

areas of interest which are ignored by the others. Through regular features like, 'The Other Experiences, "An Episode to Remember, "Fables and Parables for Adults' and 'The World of Dreams' it emphasized that there were more to life than meets the eye; ... (From The Editors, Nov. 1989)

The editor of The Heritage wanted to introduce a sense of beauty and ethics in trading with magazines: ...' gone are those days when a magazine like The Modern Review could sustain itself through its sale revenue, advertisement or no advertisement. The cost of production of a copy of The Heritage is higher than its price. Hence, advertisements are a must. But the character of the magazine would not let us accept advertisements of dubious nature. The Heritage could not be a party to the bizarre tradition of inducing the people to consume a certain product while giving them a statutory warning that it was poisonous. The Heritage could not accept insertions, which, it felt banked more on its method of entwining the readers, by trying to arouse enjoy, last etc. in them ... No wonders that our reservations would put off the advertising agencies' ... (From The Editor Nov. 1989).

The Heritage had a great potentiality but the situation was more and more adverse. Manoj Das wrote in the editorial for Nov. 1989: ... 'it could not reach its potential buyers whose number would have easily reached a million, spread over the vast country. In a small-town the stall-owner would be untreatably reluctant to allocate space to the Heritage which, he knows will sell ten copies, where as if he used that space to display a pot-pours of politics and cinema, it will sell a hundred copies' ...

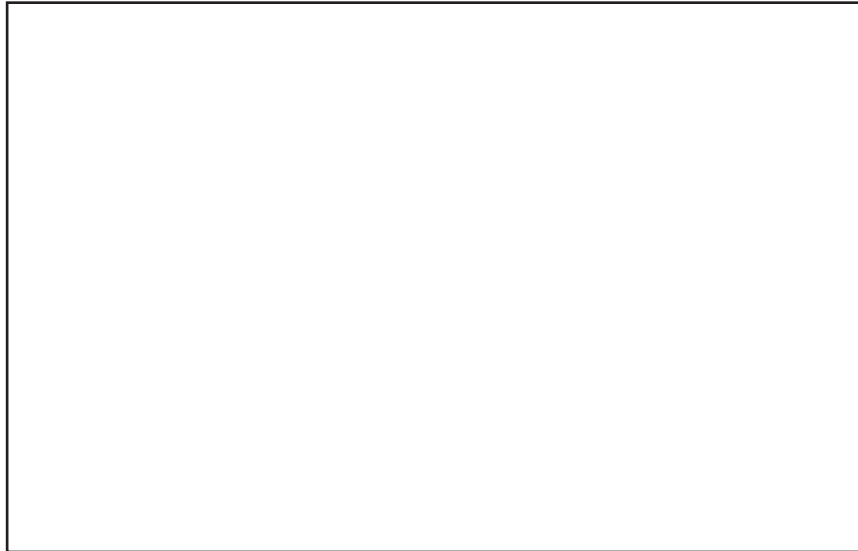
Yet, The Heritage could continue if the intelligentsia of this country would give sincere support ... 'The situation would be different had all those liked The Heritage could afford to buy it or to subscribe it, insisted on getting their copies of it. I beg your person – but I must say that have failed in their duty ... I have known members of intelligentsia speaking effusively of The Heritage, but a look into their drawing room had revealed that they have a glittering display of a news magazine, a cinema magazine, a sports magazine, but there is no copy of The Heritage'...

In spite of all these, Manoj Das sent a message of faith and confidence in his closing editorial: ... Those who have been the devoted readers of The Heritage are the hope of tomorrow's India. And it is a great hope. In the fields of taste and culture, the leadership and initiatives always remain in the hands of a few. The spirit The Heritage represented will surface in one form or another for that is an undying spirit. Despite all appearances to the contrary man's march in the direction of light and truth is a spiritual fact of existence. No amount of

cynicism or corruption of culture can belie this fact' ... (From The Editor, Nov. 1989).

As an editor how Das kept link with those whose writing had ever appeared in The Heritage? This writer humbly cites his own experience. An article by artist Mukul Dey narrating his visit with Sri Aurobindo appeared in Aug. 1988 issues of The Heritage. This made me encouraged to send an article on Mukul Dey as I knew the artist personality for years. Das too encouraged me through letters from time to time. while the article was sent the artist was alive but it happened to publish after his departure. I expressed my pain in a letter to Manoj Das soon after the death of the artist. He wrote back: ... "I am very sorry to learn about the demise of the great artist ... kindly convey my deep sympathies to his near ones if you happen to meet them. Your letter of 2nd March, 89 bears the stamp of your great anguish' ... (Letter: 14.3.1989). I went to Mukul Dey's residence at Tagore's Shantiniketan with the letter in my hand and passed how much time in a gloom among his family members I can not say.

More than two decades have passed after The Heritage was closed. Still the issues of the magazine are assets to me. And I can recall the message: ... 'The spirit The Heritage represented will surface in one form on another for that is an undying spirit' ... At least, this writer feels the spirit some how present in the pages of Rock Pebbles. □



Satire and Humour In the works of Manoj Das

* Dr. Sarbeswar Samal

I

Gilbert Highet observes in *The Anatomy of Satire*:

*Satire is not the greatest type of literature. It cannot, in spite of the ambitious claims of one of its masters, rival tragic drama and epic poetry. Still it is one of the most original, challenging and memorable forms. It has been practised by some energetic minds... Voltaire, Rabelais, Patroclus, Swift; by some exquisitely graceful stylist... Pope, Horace, Aristophanes; and occasionally as a paragon by some great geniuses... Lucretius, Goethe, Shakespeare.*¹

Satire generally ridicules an object with a view to having an amendment of vices and correction of taste. M.H. Abrams says, "Satire is the literary art of demising a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it attitudes of amusement, contempt, indignation or scorn."²

It differs from the comic in that comedy evokes laughter as an end in itself while satire derides, that is, it uses laughter as a weapon and against a butt existing outside the work itself. That butt may be an individual (in personal satire) or a type of person, a class, an institution, a nation or even as in Rochester's "A Satyr against Mankind" and much of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* especially Book IV. the whole race to man.

Meredith in his essay on "The Idea of Comedy" points out. "If you detect the ridicule and your kindness is chilled by it, you are slipping into the grasp of Satire."³

The distinction between the comic and the satiric however is a sharp one only at its extremes. Shakespeare's Falstaff is a comic creation presented without derision for our unmitigated enjoyment, the puritanical Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* is for the most part comic but has aspects of satire directed against the type of complacent and fatuous hypocrite; Jonson's *Volpone* clearly satirises the type of man whose cleverness is put at the service of his cupidity; and Dryden's Mac Flecknoe while representing a permanent type of poetaster, ridicules specifically living individual, Shadwell.

Satire has been usually justified by those who practise it 'as a corrective of human vice and folly'. Pope remarked that 'those who are ashamed of nothing else are so of being ridiculous'. Its claim has been "to ridicule the failing rather than the individual and to limit its ridicule to corrigible faults excluding

those for which a man is not responsible.”⁴

The subject matter of satire is multifarious but its vocabulary and the texture is difficult to mistake. “Most satiric writings contain cruel and dirty words; all satiric writings contain colloquial anti-literary words.”⁵

Manoj Das is more a humorist than a satirist. He is not unhappy or intolerant of mankind. His muse is essentially comic for, whatever he attacks or exposes, it lacks the bite or the sting.

Nevertheless, most of stories are written in satiric vein whether they are couched in realistic or fantastic framework. Some of his stories are conspicuously satiric and there are stories, even though where the overall from is not satire but satire occurs as an incidental element in a situation or a character or as a certain ironic commentary on some aspect of the human condition or contemporary milieu and trend.

“Sharma and the Wonderful Lump”, “Mystery of the Miss-Ing Cap”, “The Bull of Babulpur”, and ‘Statue-breakers are Coming’ are predominantly satiric in form and spirit. The realistic stories like “Of Man and Monkey”, “Lakshmi’s Adventure”, “A Trip into the Jungle”, “The Last I Heard of Them”, “The Love Letter”, “A Night in the Life of the Mayor”, and the fantasies like “Operation Bride”. “He who rode the Tiger”, and “Man who lifted the Mountain” contain satiric elements and to diminish the subject by ridicule is the organizing principle of these stories.

“Mystery of the Missing Cap” is a comical realistic story. It is a gentle satire on the visit of a minister to an Indian village. Here the writer has a dig at the rise of the new class of patriots, the ministerial demi-god like stance and style, the sponsors of Moharana, the sycophants like P.R.O, Moharana, the benevolent host and aspirant for a seat in the legislature, and the complacent and facetious minister of fishery and fine arts. The whole state of affairs has been mocked at and travestied by the monkey.

“Sharma and the Wonderful Lump” is a brilliant piece of satire on a society that thrives on a pack of false values and ideals. It focuses on the vulgarity and perversion that have come to characterize our civilization.

Sharma with his wonderful lump is a unique creation of Manoj Das. He is at once grotesque and fascination. Sharma had gone to America with the sole motive of getting rid of an abnormal growth of flesh on his head by surgery. But to his dismay, he was admired as a medical wonder and an extraordinary phenomenon by the Americans. Sharma postponed the operation and was out to exploit the advantages it held out for him. He became a celebrity overnight.

Dr. Hardstone, the surgeon, instead of advising Sharma to liquidate the crown of flesh tempted him like Satan of ***Paradise Regained*** to accept the offer of a T.V. network. Dr. Hardstone cajoled Sharma only with the personal motive

of earning a similar sum and fame as the discoverer of Hardstone's Tumor in the fashion of Halley's Comet.

The people here are not characters but types, the types of exploiters and opportunists we encounter in our day to day life. The America society is the symbol of the strange world we live in. All are victims of the cross-currents of automatic occurrences set in motion by men who have forgotten the true goal of life.

Once Sharma became famous after being featured in the T.V., the media people pounced on him in order to serve their own ends under the pretext of enlightening the masses.

By and by, the aboo man's demand soared high. There was a time when Sharma used to keep himself hidden from the world as much as possible and at times thought of committing suicide because of the repulsive lump. But now the very lump has made him world famous.

When Sanitarywalla from the Indian Embassy in America informed Sahrma that his movements in that country might have serious repercussion on Indo-American relations, Sharma replied sharply with a flush of anger and annoyance. " ..the Indian Government is on tender hooked the moment I am recognized abroad." (p.52)

Here the satire is double-edged. It may be that the author, on the one hand, is making fun of India that does not bother to recognize talent and coolly leaves it to foreigners to promote it and, on the other, has a dig at the talented high-brows who pride in selling their talents abroad.

However Sharma was virtually reduced to a clown by agreeing to the dehumanizing terms and conditions of M/s. Eagle Hats who proposed to plan for him "a lasting career...by stationing him at the entrance of their main show room." Sharma was to raise his hat and bow from time to time as the customers would enter the hall.

Thus having portrayed the different kinds of exploiters, Manoj Das finally comes to politicians. Bald breast in America and Roopal in India who made use of the aboo to lure more votes.

Here, the aboo symbolizing irrelevant fascination and falsehood disappears ultimately with the intervention of the mystic power. The allegory lies perhaps in the author's vision of a transition to a better future that a spiritual awakening along can bring.

It is a brilliant satire operating at various levels. Once Manoj Das said while being interviewed by P. Raja on behalf of a daily,

I always remember what Jonathan Swift said: 'Satire is a sort of glass wherein beholders generally discover every one's face but their own.' But I

*never forget to try to behold my own face in that mirror.*⁶

This seems to be the secret of Manoj Das's satire. His satire is mild and inoffensive, yet highly effective at the same time. His tone is neither condemnatory nor contemptuous but a mixture of sympathy and amusement like that of James Thurber towards Walter Mitty in "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty". Mr. Mitty's meditation is somewhat preposterous and ridiculous but at the same time, there is a certain sympathy for the henpecked little man whose only escape from the tyranny of his wife and the dullness of his routine is by means of these ridiculous reveries.

'Statue breakers are coming' is equally a fine piece of satire. Here Manoj Das comes hard on Yameswar Gupta who is self-conceited and hypocritical to the last.

Yameswar Gupta thinks that he could have become the Chief Minister, Prime Minister or the President. Such day-dreams and wishful thinking are absurd and abominable. Equally facetious and ludicrous is the epithet, "the illustrious son of India".

Thus Yameswar Gupta succeeded in seeing his statue destroyed and had a sigh of relief as that alone would ensure and earn him the reputation of a national leader.

Though this fantastic cum melodramatic situation, the writer satirises not only Yameswar Gupta's statue-mania, hypocrisy and pretension but also man's narcissistic complex and his craze for fame.

In "The Bull of Babulpur", the author brings out the pretension and arrogance of Mr. Boral. Mr. Boral was a seasoned criminal lawyer who got suddenly inclined to turn on the path of asceticism. But in the process, he sheltered under the bull and explored the third avenue and swung back to politics, the resort of scoundrels. Thus the story not only focuses on man's hypocrisy but also on the aimlessness of life.

"The Love Letter" deals with an unusual situation created by the assumption of the fact that Gita, the artist, has left a love letter behind. Here the writer ridicules the secret, sordid desire and the attitudes of various people towards her.

In "Operation Bride", the writer criticizes the perversion of taste, silliness, and the pedagogic pompousness of the experts of care a perfect bride out of the daughter of a wood-cutter.

In "A Night in the life of the Mayor", the author exposes the vanity, complacency and superciliousness of the mayor, Divyasimha who laughed at Prof. Roy's helplessness but eventually learnt the alphabet of helplessness after being stranded naked on a river for a whole night.

Manoj Das brings into focus the latent jealousy, rivalry and fear complex of the people towards one another in "The Night the Tiger Came".

"He who rode the Tiger" and "Man who Lifted the Mountain" and, to some extent, "The Turtle from the Sky" present people's propensity to flaunt their ego and arrogance at the slightest opportunity. Not only has the ego been nicely punctured but also the author has shown how it can spell danger.

Manoj Das looks gingerly on the seven old seekers' craze for sensuality and their obsession with nudity. This theme is tackled not only in "The Last I Heard of Them" but also in "Martial Exploits" and "A Tale of the Northern Valley".

His banter cuts deep and bitter in "A Trip into the Jungle" where he comes hard on man's depravity and savagery.

Thus every story contains elements of satire. Manoj Das is a social critic of the first order. His satire is of a different kind. It is neither virulent nor sarcastic. There is neither malice nor contempt. It is mixed with sympathy. It is Horatian, witty, urbane, and tolerant. Here is a sort of wry amusement rather than indignation at the spectacle of human folly, frivolity, pretentiousness, and hypocrisy. In a lively and informal language, he evokes a smile at human follies, foibles and absurdities.

As pointed out earlier, he is essentially a humanist. He is fully aware of the innate goodness in man. As such he has not lost hope in the prospect of man's regeneration.

Moharana and Babu Virkishore are basically good people. Otherwise they could have swallowed the shock of disillusionment but since they were good they left politics for good.

Even sharma who appears to have made an unnecessary fuss over a trifle is innocent for his true self was revealed when he was threatened to death and he cried and sincerely wished to return to India.

On the other hand, even those who kidnapped him for their political end, shed tears with him. Thus there is hardly a villainous character. All are victims of a situation or a trend of time. On the country, there are character who are positively good like Marilyn, the conscience incarnate and Sharma's mother, the image and embodiment of bliss and benediction.

This kind of realization has mellowed his tone as a result of which his satire is soft and gentle. Although there is a general dig against the vulgarity, sensuality, and perversion, it is saved from turning bitter by his excellent sense of humour and a broad, profound and humanistic vision.

The target of Manoj Das's satire is either a politician, a minister, a mayor, a pedant, a braggart, an egoist, a self-conceited man or a crazy fellow. But the pundit of the primary school is his regular butt. Yet he does not laugh at his expense. Like Goldsmith's treatment of the "Village School Master", he

presents him with a good deal of sympathy and humour. Thus in his satire there is no disillusioned chagrine or cynicism but only a note of discontent or disapproval.

He might appear to have criticized human failings and frailties but what he really pleads for, is the sanity and humanity that will ultimately preserve man's true nature and his essential goodness.

II

Humour is said to be the salt of life. It lubricates mind and purges it of impurities. Humour sweetens the heart and takes away the melancholy, it is essential in comedy as it is in life.

An American psychologist, L.W. Kline opines that the humour stimulus "creates the sense of freedom". The function of humour is to rest and relax mind. Humour is said to cut "the surface tension of consciousness" and to increase "the pliancy of (the mind's) structure to the end that it may proceed on a new and strengthened basis".⁷

The *Penguin English Dictionary* defines humour as the "capacity for seeing the funny side of things; cheerful and good tempered amusement".⁸ Encyclopedia Britannica defines it as "the sense within us which sets up kindly contemplation of the incongruities of life and the expression of that sense in art."⁹

"True humour" as Carlyle says, "springs not more from the head than from the heart; it is not contempt; its essence is love: it issues not in laughter but in smiles which lie far deeper."¹⁰

When laughter becomes sophisticated and philosophical we know it is caused by humour. Thackeray, while discussing Dickens, defines humour as "a mixture of love and wit."¹¹

Humour is often contrasted with wit, a narrower term included within humour and meaning the expression of humour in some form involving an unexpected play on words. It is also to be distinguished from satire for the humorist laughs at himself whereas the satirist laughs and has all his fun at the expense of others. The laughter produced by satire is not unadulterated whereas that of humour is pure fun and amusements we countenance in the Jeeves Stories of P.G. Wodehouse.

Meredith has drawn a very subtle distinction between humour and the comic. The comic spirit is censorious and critical "but the humorist...has an embrace of contrasts beyond the scope of the comic poet."¹²

Though laughter arises both from humour and the comic, humour is, as Thorndike says, "the consummation of the instinct for laughter."¹³

According to James Fiebleman laughter is the result of 'the recognition of the wide difference between what is and what ought to be.'¹⁴ Immanuel Kant

remarked that humour is clearly allied to the gratification provoked by laughter. It lies in the "sudden transformation of a tense expectation into nothing."¹⁵ Henri Bergson traces it to "the detection of something mechanical encrusted on the living."¹⁶ Sigmund Freud tells us that it "arises from the word-play or from the liberation of nonsense."¹⁷ For Voltaire laughter is spontaneous. It arises from "a gaiety of disposition absolutely incompatible with contempt and indignation."¹⁸

A. Thorndike observes, "we laugh in imitation or by contagion rather than in superiority, with such a purpose, comedy...responds to the joy of the life rather than to the ridicule of inferiority."¹⁹ That is how we laugh at and with Falstaff, Mr. Pickwick, and Quixote.

The essence of humour is human kindliness. There must not only be "perception of the peculiarities, the contrasts and shortcomings...but there must be a tolerance or acceptance of them."²⁰

This is beautifully explained and corroborated by George Meredith:

*If you laugh all round him (the ridiculous person), tumble him, roll him about, deal him a smack, and drop a tear on him, own him likeness to you, and yours to your neighbour, spare him as you shun, pity him as much as you expose, it is a spirit of Humour that is moving you.*²¹

Manoj Das's stories are so delightful and absorbing that there is hardly a dull moment in any of them. It is due to the presence of genuine humour which comes to him as naturally as breathing.

Manoj Das saw life as a mysterious web; saw its tender, sweet, and pathetic side. So he could laugh easily and his capacity for the perception of fun in life is amazing. His humour like his genius is many-sided. It is invigorating and refreshing, good and effervescent, kindly and patronizing, broad and semi farcical, pointedly satirical and coarse. But the dominant features of Manoj Das's humour are its spicy piquant touch, the festive jocund hilarity, wit and urbanity and above all, a humanist's friendly joke with his fellow-beings.

The genial laughter of Manoj Das at human absurdity is free from even that amiable cynicism. It is the laughter of love and compassion. It is like the effulgence of gentle sunshine that never hurts but pleases and illuminates. His humour is marked by kindliness, naturalness and spontaneity. There is good natured mirth and forbearance. It celebrates the joy and glory that is life.

Humour is not a distinct or separable thing with him but a pervasive and permeating ingredient of his make-up. It acts as a sort of common solvent in which different and even opposite lines of thought are moulded into happy reconciliation. There is no contempt or derision; it is all a deep undercurrent of his earnest sentiment. It steals into us visibly and unsuspectingly.

In the deepest strain of his tragedy, there is the subtlest infusion of comedy. We may feel it playing delicately beneath his most pathetic scenes. Manoj

Das might have learnt the art of combining pathos and humour or 'Laughter behind the tears' from Kanta kabi i.e. Lakshmikanta Mohapatra, a great poet and story writer in Odia. Manoj Das was a great admirer and connoisseur of Kanta Kabi.

The humour of Manoj Das is much more than a laughter producing power. It is a presence, the animating and scintillating force, a pervading influence throughout his creation.

His poetic imagination and joyous temperament look upon the vagaries of human nature and affairs with an amused detachment. It takes all sorts of people-the grotesque and the funny, the poetic and the prosaic and the romantic and the absurd-to make his world.

Manoj Das's humour permeates everything. Every inch and item of his writing-his words, similes, metaphor, title, episode, character, situation and description, sparkle with the glow of his lusty, ebullient and exhilarating humour. His humour is so apt and appropriate, natural and vivacious that it electrifies a situation at once. The reader feels like gliding merrily through a festive or hilarious occasion. Here melancholy melts into ripples of joy and bubbles of laughter.

Such a lively sense of humour can spring only from a healthy philosophy of life; a sanguinary temperament, one that has seen the strange but absorbing drama of life and has rejoiced plentifully in its glory, pity and irony.

His humour has the peculiar habit of presenting itself at the most unexpected places often giving one the sense of a sudden revelation of something so apt, yet so unusual that one bursts out laughing, a quality which reminds one of that master humorist, P.G. Wodehouse, e.g.,

"Nambakkai Marry and her brood censorious to the last muttered, 'wanton shameless creature; and looked so sour that your teeth rattled.'" ("The Ways of a Maid")

His humour like that of P.G. Wodehouse whose example is cited above is mostly verbal: The reply of Nabaghan, the minister to Dr. Saha, the psychiatrist who diagnosed his disease as the callousness to crises is an instance in point:

*That is called politics Understand? Politics. But rest assured, my government is taking such steps which will choke ten famines to death! You are my heaven-gone' father's pal after all. How can I lie before you.*²²

Manoj Das creates humour by twisting and configuration language, the unusual collocation of words, the sheer jugglery of words repetition and manipulation of sound like alliteration and consonance, modulation of tone and speech, means of amplitude like the use of superlatives in terms of numerical and quantitative comparisons, hyperboles and exaggeration and technique of

contrast. Over and above all the unusual description of incidents and episodes, the funny and strange situations, the peculiar fantastic nature and behaviour of human beings, their angularities and craziness, physical gestures and dialogues, unexpected movements and surprising bumps and jolts of plot-generate humour.

Manoj Das's humour is like a series of Japanese fireworks; images tumble one after another. There is no break or breather in the sequence of humour.

"What was that strange thing that sprang into the river?" God knows. Looked like a "gorilla".

The humour of Manoj Das is liner progressive and ascending type. It accumulates and accentuates into a climactic point or situation. After a glittering session of illumination and entertainment, it suddenly bursts like a cracker or bomb.

In "Mystery of the Missing Cap", the surprised minister mumbled,

"Er...er...is not this one the very cap taken away by the noble man?"

"And something most fantastic came out of the dry lips of Sri Moharana who seemed to be on the verge of collapsing "Yes, yes, this is the noble man..."

"His eyes buylging out, the minister managed to say", what... whet did you say? Well ? 24

His humour has a native flavour i.e. it is Odia in texture and splrit. The phrases like, bone in the tongue, 'Rotwal or Kotwal', 'true sons of the father' and 'in our fourteen generations'.... Have a touch of Fakir Mohan Senapati. But the difference is that while Fakir Mohan Senapati used humour or satire for the sake of social reform, Manoj Das uses it as an art for the sake of art.. purely for the sake of amusement. It is a part of his technique and integral to his vision.

Whatever may be the source of his humour, it is chaste, pure, lively, intoxicating and artistic in nature. There is no vulgarity or baseness to weigh the mind down. On the country it is kathartic. The overall feeling is one of buoyance and rejuvenescence of spirit. We are cheered to have a fresh look at life. Manoj Das's humour is like a Jasmine whose fragrance melts, lingers and is pervasive. Every word and sentence breathes an unmistakable aroma of humour so much so even a casual and uninitiated reader will be aware of its presence.

Humour is the chief ingredient of Das's stories, nay it is the forte and charm, the pepper and salt. It has given a peculiar flavour and character to his stories and made them delightful in every way.

His humour has a saving grace. It disallow satire from becoming derisive and pathos from acquiring the tragic dignity. Just as Manoj Das injects the right amount of pathos into a story (without making it tilt towards melodrama), the unpleasant core of human experience is lightened by his lively and unfailing sense of humour.

Manoj Das is a master of the 'ludicrous'. In "Statue-Breakers are Coming", Jameswar Gupta thinks that he could have become anything... "Chief Minister, he ha ! Prime Minister, he ha or president... had not modesty checked him !" ²⁵

Hiding his identity he says, "Guptaji is not a local celebrity. He is famous all through Cape to Mount" (P. 121). This is ironic and humorous. The humour is due to exaggeration and the writer deflates the character after inflating it too much.

It is interesting to observe Jameswar Gupta's manner and mode of self advertisement : "Don't you think that the newspapers would come out with their boldest and blackest banner head lines when he would depart from this world?" (p.122)

Here the superlatives and the alliterative arrangement of words engender humour.

"For heaven's sake, do not say Gupta Sahib. Guptaji fought valiantly against the Sahibs and still he is a crusader against the Sahib Culture. He wears coat, no doubt, but that is on dhoti." (p.122)

Though grandiloquent and rhetorical jargons, the writer exposes the character. The humour here is pointedly satirical.

"He was the mayor and either president or vice-president of nearly one dozen cultural and social organizations including a kids' Club." (p.123)

Quite interesting is the bathetic decline of the order.

Equally ridiculous is the comparison between "Jameswar Gupta" and 'friend Jawahar'. The minister assured Jameswar Gupta that "No body would touch a hair of Guptaji's Statue... The statue breakers are after the statues of big national leaders." (p.125)

So, humour, irony and banter have made the story highly interesting.

The peculiarity of the situation and the superstitious belief of the rustic people account for the humorous elements in the story. "The Tree".

Referring to the banian goddess, the writer says, "Children in particular found her quite helpful in regard to crises arising from undone home works or the ill-humour of the pundits of the Primary School". ²⁶

Denouncing the impudent manners of the youngsters, Ravindra commented.

"They have developed bones in their tongues."

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“You are studying in the College. Are not you? Come on, save the tree with your English algebra and all that abracadabra.” (p.20)

Srikanta Das showing his extra pious sentiment and blindly supporting the ill tempered Brahmin implored the youngsters, “... let none but the spirit of the tree know that if the tree is saved. You will shorten your hair ! Please my fathers ! Make a solemn promise.” (p.21)

These dialogues have preserved the local flavour and the tinge of typical Odia humour.

It is simply ludicrous on the part of the crowd to turn to Sridhar Mishra, the homoeopath and Raghu Dalbehera, the only man possessing the gun for saving the tree inclining to fall.

When the M.L.A. arrived there, an old man said to him, “it is during your reign that the sacred tree standing from the Era of Truth is going to leave us.” (p. 23)

M.L.A. is also equally funny when he gave the clarion call, “Come on, gird up your loins....” (.23)

The story, “A Tale of the Northern Valley” is highly enjoyable because of its genuine humour born of a highly imaginative and original plot and the superb orchestration of language.

The people of the small town in the northern valley lived and feasted on rumour. One such rumour was that Miss Pinquee, the danseuse who was staying on the upper floor of the ‘Evening Star’ would shed her clothes and appear above the same. This drew the dutiful hundreds of gentlemen of the town to the spot by sundown. Among them were the retired judge and the old educationist who adjusted their spectacles to view the rare spectacle.

Awfully kind of you to assemble here to see me in the nude.”

Said Miss Pinquee and “threw away her sparkling mink coat and opened the topmost button of her gown. Her face and neck looked like made of concentrated moonlight.”²⁷

The retired judge “felt a nasty pain” and was carried home. By the time she opened the second button, “the educationist lost his walking stick. He slouched and groped for it...” (p. 83). This is a sheer triumph of humour.

By the time Miss Pinquee opened third button, all turned their backs on her and were seen dispersing. “And Miss Pinquee was laughing behind them probably she was crying.”

Thus the laughter is sad the humour, sardonic. Even a vulgar and erotic subject like nudity is given an exalted and dignified treatment.

The headmaster in “The Sensitive Plant” after recognizing Rao as his ex-student, immediately fell into one of his rhapsodic moods and said,

Remember, how that little Ramu... I believe he belonged to your batch.... Who later took to politics, used to doze while walking. Ha ! ha ! No wonder that he falls soundly asleep in the Assembly as some people report. ²⁸

When he referred to Wordsworth's love of the rainbow Rao said,

"Of course sir' ! You mean' my heart leaps up when I see... "Rao was interrupted by the headmaster, "Nonsense" ! Could not Wordsworth do anything better than merely see? He did behold? Follow? Don't forget in future. Right?" (p. 129)

Thus Manoj Das makes fun of the typical mannerisms of teachers and the humour is spun out of the twisting of literary facts. Everything-science, Psychiatry and Literature is grist to the mill of his humour.

"Creatures of Conscience "is a fine story. What can be more funny and humorous than David Claxton, an octogenarian who thought that he could very well be young; his having grown old was nothing but a dream.

One day, seeing a pair of lovers seated on the other corner of the bench, David Claxton was reminded of his own affair with Miss Jimi Biscuit Walla Where there were no movies to teach people the language and technique of love. Of course Jimi Biscuit Walla dismissed his proposal for marriage saying,

"My parents belong to the most orthodox lot among the pareses. I have to virtually rebel if I am to marry an Anglo-Indian even so virtuous a one as you. I have no enthusiasm for doing that. Besides, my father is a patron of the school where you teach. One nasty word from him and the management is sure to chuck you out. My conscience would not excuse me if I make young lose your job. Be conscientious yourself, David and bridle your passion. You are good at football. Continue to be so. "(p.86)

Mr. Claxton continued with football but spurred by a theoretical urge he wrote to Miss Biscuitwalla at Bombay. "It is alright if we cannot marry for technical but will you please tell me if I can expect you to love me."(p.86)

Although there is a great deal of irony here, yet the humour is witty, delicate, chaste and pure, mainly manufactured by twisting the idea and playing upon the words.

When the Youngman wanted to say something to the lady, the young lady responded with a sporting sprit,

Are you? Fine, so am I!"

"Fine Fine Fine" ! Mr. Claxton felt like clapping his hands. Go on my girl, never mind my presence. Take me for a yard or two of an alligator's skin if you please but don't stop...why you don't speak more. You green horns? No knowledge of the right sort of worse? How many marks did you secure in your literature papers? Have not you read Jane Eyre? What did Rochester tell

Jane? ...Have not you read even 'The Merchant of Venice'. What did Portia tell Bassanio? Haven't you read 'The Tempest' either? Don't you remember what Ferdinand... had to say at his very first meeting with Miranda...

Say something similar. I should be the last person to accuse you of plagiarism..." (p.88)

The humour is created out of the mixture of romantic love, episodes from the pages of literature and colloquialism. It is genuine pure, warm, intoxicating, and appetising with a touch of delicacy as one feels when nibbling at a creamy cake or sipping hot tea flavoured with dry champagne. This can only come from genuine humourist.

In "The Dusky Hour"³⁰ the humour issues forth from Aunt Roopwati's character which is full of contradictions and opposite traits that ultimately make her ridiculous.

She was a peculiar lady with peculiar whims and notions, strange and unpredictable. She was so dashing and daring that she would rush to any place like a tornado without minding what others would mind. She was so virile and masculine that her contemporaries were mortally afraid of her personality and her tongue as well.

Though Aunt Roopwati consented to marry Jagdishji for his personal morality, she rejected him smartly on the first ever night after the marriage.

Jagdishji who was always clad in spotless white and spoke a spotless grammatical prose, welcomed his bride into his bed room with a profound show of respect. After he had made her comfortably reclined on the bed, what he opened with no less respect was a medium size canvas bag containing three written by himself... At little past midnight, he finished reading the first essay. That was on the 'socio-economic benefits of the proposed prohibition.

By 2 A.M. he had been able to finish reading "Reflections on the Benefits of Adult Education". There after had just read out the title of his third composition, "The Question of Celibacy in Married Life", When the bride exclaimed, "What a pity, the lamp is running out of oil!"

"Is that so? Let me fetch some more", said Jagdishji.

"Is that really necessary? Why not let your knowledge light us as long as possible?" She asked and snatching away all the three essays let them burn leaf by leaf. (P.65).

The passage is replete with sparkling humour: it is original, witty and ingenious. The language is carved and barbed for the purpose. Here not only Roopwati is savage in her attitude and action but we have a savage. Laugh at the conjugal life and a tense expectation is reduced to nothing.

Manoj Das explores all possibilities and packs his story with humour
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to the maximum. Witty observations, unusual collocation of words, rhetorical flourish of language and idiomatic use of words and sound exploitation go a long way to generate humour.

In "Farewell to a Ghost", the description of the village people entering the villa in search of the gallant lad is quite amusing.

The humour here is kindly, gentle and playful.

Similarly in "The Crocodile's Lady"³² after some collective coughing of the villagers, Sombhu Das, the money lender, began to explain to Dr. Batstone, the notorious nature of the ghost:

Will you believe, Sahib, that he was my cousin, my very own father's own maternal uncle's own son-in-law's own nephew? And had not I done everything for him, from sharing own pillow with him to doing half the shopping for his marriage? Yet.... this treacherous brother-in-law of mine, I mean his ghost, chose to harass me out of all the millions and billions of people of my village, within a week of his death? Who does not know that for a whole year.... I never stepped out of my house at night even at the most violent call of nature? (p.19)

The humour here is bucolic, original and ingenious. It is spun out of the typical rusticity of speech involving repetition and exaggeration.

"Mystery of the Missing cap" is a superb realistic, comical story. The entire story, right from beginning to end, glows with the radiance of a delightful humour.

Here the humour is at its peak, almost in the manner of a gala day celebration or observance of ritual. It is genuine, broad, farcical, rustic, pawky and satirical.

"Sri Moharana had a considerable reputation as a conscientious and generous man. He was an exemplary host with two ponds full of choice fish and a number of well cared for cows." (p.67)

The description of the reception accorded to the minister is highly funny and interesting. For a fortnight, everyday the children of the village lower Primary School devoted the afternoon to the practice of the welcome song. The narrator says that the refrain of the song still echoes in him, "O mighty minister, tell us, do tell us, do tell us. How do you nurse this long and broad universe?" (p.69)

The narrator got the first shock of disillusionment when he discovered that the minister was snoring like an ordinary man. His egg-bald head rested on a gigantic pillow.

~~When the minister's cap was stolen, the public relations officer said,~~
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“Evidently there is a deep-rooted conspiracy.... In fact, I fear, it may have devastating effects on the political situation of our country.” (p.72)

Moharana was literally shaking. He was sweating like an ice-cream stick so profusely that (the narrator feared) “he might completely melt away in a few hours.” (p. 72)

The climactic scene of the story came when the monkey sitting down between the minister and Sri Moharana, put the cap on his head and then offered it to the minister most genially. The minister was bewildered and asked, “Er...er.. is not this is the nobleman ...” (p. 77)

The story bubbles with boisterous and rollicking fun and the humour is linear and ascending in character.

In “The Submerged Valley” the humour is sober, subdued and delicate.

Abolkara, literally meaning disobedient, was a good for nothing fellow. An affluent farmer commissioned him to guard a pile of paddy. An hour later, people saw Lord Shiva’s bull lying in place of the paddy ruminating with eyes closed and the Youngman entertaining it to a post banquet song. (p. 2)

The villagers apprehended that if the dam is constructed, they will be thrown out of their ancient land. Recounting the glory of the narrator’s engineer-father, they said

“Of our pious forefathers who had toiled and got immersed in the soil , of the several good gods who dwelt in the shrines even though rather ineffectual in the current Era of falsehood...All...all will go under water babu: Despite having begotton a worthy son like you. Are you so unlucky that the cruel hand of the Government will so unceremoniously throw us out of our God given lands:” (p. 3)

Here is a sort of wry humour strewn with the sentimentalism of rustic folks.

“Bhola-grandpa and the Tiger” ³⁵ is a masterpiece so far as its humour is concerned. It can be ranked with any world class story on the ground of its pure, delicate, and genuine humour.

Bhola-grandpa is an extremely simple and forgetful man. The narrator says that while returning from the festival of Lord Shiva, suddenly Bhola-grandpa gave out a loud wail. Taken aback: their party came to a halt. Inquiry revealed that Bhola-grandpa had led his daughter’s son who was of his (the narrator’s) age to the festival. He piloted the grandson through the jostling throngs with two of the boy’s fingers held tightly in his grip. He did not realise when those fingers slipped queried that he remembered the grandson and gave out the wail.

~~His (narrator’s) father chose two keen eyed escorts from their party.~~
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The grandson who had found a congenial shelter under a cow's belly (something unexpected) and kept blinking at the alien world was rescued before long". (pp. 12-13)

The narrator's father recounted that one afternoon Bhola-grandpa while young was found sprawling on their verandah with his tongue stretched out, a shiver ran through those who found him in that condition. They took him for dead. "What however had happened is this: an hour ago someone had broached to him a proposal for his wedding. Modesty had made him stretch out his tongue. He had just forgotten to withdraw it while asleep." (p. 13)

Sundarbanas:

Bhola-grandpa was returning from the weekly market in the company of a group of people belonging to the camp area. He did not remember when he had fallen behind the party.

"He woke up to his aloneness when at a distance of about five yards before him, a full grown Royal Bengal Tiger made a jolly growl fixing a bright gaze straight on his face." (p.15)

Bhola-grandpa instantly climbed a banian tree that was at hand. The tiger roared and circled the tree a hundred times. Then it settled down under a bush and continued in that position without taking its eyes off Bhola-grandpa even for a moment. The whole night passed and at dawn Bhola-grandpa came down. There was a hamlet of Santhals a furiong away. Bhola-grandpa went towards it and requested the first man he saw for a little fire to light his bidi.

The santhal eyed Bhola-grandpa with perfect bewilderment. He asked, "What is your secret sir, that you walked past that hungry beast and it just gaped at you and did nothing else!" (pp. 15-16)

Bhola-grandpa looked at the bush. The tiger was seen stretching its limbs and yawning as if in a mood of disgust. Bhola-grandpa is said to have swooned away for a moment.

Half a century later when he, then ninety, was found to have died peacefully, the most original of the laments came from the eighty year old granny, Bhola-grandpa's wife, "The old man must have forgotten to breathe." (p. 16)

Thus here is not only a sustained and systematic cultivation of humour but clear demonstration of how humour can be fresh, virginal and amusing.

The story is undoubtedly written in a lighter vein solely for entertainment. Its humour is simple, unsullied, original, and ingenious but not stale or insipid.

Manoj Das, the humorist is seen at his best just as he is seen in "Mystery of the Missing Cap". There it is boisterous and rollicking; but here it is subtle, delicate, and innocent. The laughter is in a quieter vein. One smiles and muses within.

"He who rode the Tiger"³⁶ is a delightful tragi-comedy. Manoj Das, by the sheer magic of language, sound manipulation and hyperbolic contrasts, has created a superb story of humour.

"A rope trap set up by the malis to catch a naughty boar which regularly made a mess of the watermelons patch had netted a tiger of impressive dimensions." (p.107)

The quarrel between the two mali as to who can ride the tiger is very interesting: The first mali flared up,

"Have you the bone in your tongue to suggest that I shrieked as you did? Fool: I have simply made a whoopee of victory. If only you had seen how I captured the tiger: I jumped onto his unwilling back and boxed his ears and prodded him into the trap. Understand!" (p.108)

The second mali shouted, "Stop!..you think I cannot ride a tiger. ..."
Saying so he too advanced towards the tiger

"Here is yet another true son of his father!" commented some voices from the crowd.

Thus "both the sons of their fathers tried to prevent each other from approaching the tiger and in the process fell to wrestling." (p. 109)

The game continued to the delight of the audience and the amazement of the tiger.

When they saw kotwal and rotwal approach the scene, the malis... each in the position of tearing the other's beard, stood petrified for a moment and limping towards the officers knelt down before them,

The rotwal and kotwal argued similarly among themselves as to who would ride the tiger. The restless crowd spurred the officers to some more spectacular action.

"Who will ride the Tiger?"

"The kotwal or the rotwal"

"He who is verily the son of his father!" (p.110)

Thus the see-saw battle is presented in a sing-song manner. This is typical Odia style of provoking persons to found or fight. It also contains the rhythm of Odia folk song.

The kotwal and rotwal instantly fell into silence when the minister and commander arrived on the scene. The rotwal stated "Huzoors!.....who are we to carve such luxuries? Had any one in our fourteen past generations ever even smelt a tiger!" (p.111)

The kotwal stated, "Huzoors! all I did was to correct him, saying that he should have said fifty eight generations instead of mere fourteen!" (p.111)

Though the use of hyperbole, Manoj Das twists facts and gives them a force.

The minister and commander quarrelled in a similar fashion till the arrival of the king. The king was a perpendicular fool and fully drunk with ego and vanity. In a cold logical fashion, he summarized the thing and asserted his own right:

“We have heard everything...The jungle from which our tiger came is ours. The tiger itself like all other beasts and your selves is ours. The orchard is ours. But when it comes to riding the tiger it must be one of you, eh, you goblin?” (p. 112)

When the two suspended officers boxing each others' ears whimpered that only his Highness could ride the tiger, the king announced.

“Correct, we will ride it...But we can't ! Don't you see we are fat as a great king ought to be...(as if fatness were an important attribute of a great king)...But our son will ride on our behalf. Fetch him. Quick!” (p.113)

The humour here is effervescent, lively, and biosterous. Here is a fun-fair or a ceremonial session of humour. One feels like merrily gliding through a festive and hilarious occasion. Everything in the story...language, dialogue, speech rhythm...is harnessed to create humour. This is an example of ascending or cumulative humour. As the story unfolds, the humour gains edge and momentum. There is no break or breather in the process.

“The Turtle from the Sky”³⁷ (“The Panchatantra for Adults-2”) is highly amusing and delightful.

What a wonderful sight it would be when one imagines the flight of a turtle across the sky clamping his jaws tightly to the middle of a stick while two swans carried him holding the two ends of the stick in their beaks: The very idea or the fact is funny and interesting. The turtle, while flying, muses. “I will go down in the history as the first astronaut among the turtles.” (p.72)

Seeing the rare phenomenon, the smaller birds like sparrows and partridges were frightened while the more honourable birds like the kites and pigeons spoke gravely of the apparition. An old cynic among the crows observed, “I have always prophesied that the future of our sky was gloomy. The invasion of the sky by a turtle surely marks the beginning of the end.” (pp. 72-73)

‘And swans have always been renegades,’ commented a crane. (p.73).

Here the birds caricature the human ways.

Some cowherd boys seeing this event, clapped their hands and ran keeping pace with the swans for some time. Kambugriva with difficulty saw the goings on below and felt like clapping his own hands.

But the gem of comedy comes from what transpired between the bride and bride-groom. Over a river, a boat was carrying a marriage party with the bride and bride-groom seated in the middle. Hearing others talk and exclaim,

the bride peeped out from the veil, at the flying marvel and giving a push to her husband squeaked, "Can't you get that for me?"

The husband stood up nervously wondering what to do only to resume his seat abruptly as a lurch of the boat made him lose his balance.

"You fool!" the turtle managed to gulp down the surging words." (p.73)

As the turtle was flying near the palace tower, the king and his entire court that included an emissary from another kingdom were amazed at the sight of the approaching turtle:

"You fool!" shrieked Kambugriva,..." (p.74) and fell dead on the palace tower.

"It is an excellent turtle or a rare delicious variety" declared the court's chief epicure. 'Well fit for the royal table...' (p.74)

Thus the entire story is flavoured with the salt of humour. The second half of the story gives a picture of a mock-court and full or time court humour. The story is a nice handiwork of fantasy. It is fantasy once again that creates a humorous atmosphere. Just as fantasy is an adjunct to realism, it is an aid to humour; the chief mode or means of creating humour.

"Sharma and the Wonderful Lump"³⁸ is a wonderful piece of satire and a story of humour.

Once Sharma set foot in America, everything changed so fantastically and favourable for him that he himself was taken aback by the wildest of events.

When Dr. Hardstone told Sharma that his tumor would fetch him a handsome amount and a TV network had already proposed to pay for it, Sharma said with a smile, "Doctor! Have not I placed my aboo...at your disposal? ...I brought it up with so much attention and care. If it has now grown up enough to earn me a few chips, why would I grudge it." (p.23)

The two chipper women inside the green room of the TV house who powered Sharma's head with visible devotion explained with a tender smile, "your top, Mr. Sharma might otherwise shine like a light house..."(p.23)

Mr. Sharma's fleshy growth on his head was applauded as the world's biggest tumor. It was captioned as the True or Neo-plastic Tumor as distinguished from the 'Non-Neo-plastic' category.

When Sharma came out of the TV house Miss Marylin came running to greet him. "You looked so majestic like the Grand Moghul with his crown." (p.26)

Here satire, humour, irony, innuendo, and sarcasm are all mixed and woven together. The humour here is not fine or genial but satiric and caustic. At times, it is bawdy, erotic, foppish, and farcical bordering on low comedy. Thus the sting of satire is more pronounced than the pleasing touch of pure humour.

Manoj Das is a class by himself so far as humour is concerned. it is
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unfair to compare him with Saki, O' Henry or Mark Twain, although in a large measure he has the "insouciant spoof"³⁹ of Saki and "the mellow, humorous, ironic"⁴⁰ moods of O' Henry. Of course, he resembles mainly R.K. Narayan and P.G. Wodehouse, the greatest humorist whose humour is for the sake of pure delight.

But Manoj Das is a typical product of Odisha. His humour is highly imaginative and has a strong native flavour about it. Like Mark Twain's unsullied country humour, Manoj Das's humour is mostly bucolic and rustic in character.

Just as he is an instinctive storyteller, Manoj Das is also an instinctive humorist. His humour is witty, ingenious, lusty, warm, and delicious. It is not something extraneous, superimposed or an uncalled for diversion. It is functional and integral to his vision. It is ingrained in his sensibility and an innate feature of his temperament.

Like fantasy, it is part of his technique. Manoj Das uses it for the revelation of character and situation. But the primary purpose is to enlighten the unsavoury or unpleasant core of the human affairs and situation. And the reader undergoes "a liberating sense of the comedy of experience"⁴¹ as with "The Drunkard" by Frank O' Connor or "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" by James Thurber.

Like P.G. Wodehouse, "The Great Sermon Handicap" Manoj Das's stories are intended purely as light entertainment. They are irresistibly comic and appeal to, what David Cecil says, "something basic and enduring in man's sense of the ridiculous."⁴²

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MANOJ DAS: A BI-LINGUAL LITERARY GENIUS

* Dr. Tuta Eswar Rao

Manoj Das was born on the 27th February 1934, the fifth and the last child of Madhusudan Das and Kadambini Devi. His mother, herself a gifted poet, would lead the boy to the fabulous world of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, reciting them to him and his two elder sisters, even before he had learnt the alphabet. About forty Kilometers away from the railway station and twelve Kilometers away from the nearest seasonal bus stop, the small village Sankhari in the northern Balasore of Odisha was an enchanting realm for the author in the thirties of the twentieth century.

Manoj Das initially wrote in Odia in his early stages and later on switched over to English. In this context, in an exclusive interview held on behalf of the British Council's Literature Alive (June 1986), he said:

"At one stage I felt inspired to write in English because I was haunted by a feeling if I do not sound presumptuous – that much of the Indo-Anglian fiction that claimed to project India did not do justice to the claim. I was born in a village before independence and lived through the transition at an impressionable age. Hence I thought I could present through English a chunk of genuine India. Well, right or wrong, one is entitled to one's faith in oneself!"

The name of Manoj Das entered into the galaxy of Indo-English writers. Post-Independent India Writing in English saw a group of eminent Writers, such as Bhabani Chatterjee, Khuswant Singh, Nayantara Saigal, Kamala Markandeya, Anita Desai, Ved Mehta, Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Manohar Malgonkar, Arun Joshi, N Daruwala, Ruskin Bond and Manoj Das. Their concern for Indian society and its enrichment was marked by the proliferation of humour and satire in their writings. India was undergoing a phase of transition in the initial years of independence. It was the year of recovery and reconstruction when Manoj Das entered into the arena of Indian English literature. Coming out from the shackles of foreign domination, this young nation was trying to find out a foothold to establish its identity. This transitional phase was a fertile ground for writers like Manoj Das. This is more so evident in the exploitation of social eccentricities and its urge to cling to sudden values and ideas in such writings. The study seeks to establish this sensitivity of Manoj Das in his satirical portraiture of this transitional Indian society.

Manoj Das said that the language of silence inspired him in most fo

his writings. Das was at his humble best when he received the country's highest literary honour – Sahitya Akademi Fellowship said: "once a leading English literary magazine asked which language inspired me the most. After a few thoughts, I said it was the language of silence. I think I improved upon this language."

Commenting on his crisp style and command over English language, Vijay Tendulkar, a famous Indian writer, said: "Manoj Das, like Graham Greene and R.K Narayan, is a deft spinner of yarns. He is also crisp in his style and very much at ease with English, which is not his mother tongue. Narrating an Indian experience in a language, which is alien or not Indian, without losing the original Indian charm and ethos is difficult task. Das succeeds in this like Narayan."

His deeper quest, however, led him to mysticism and he has been an inmate of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Puducherry, since 1963 where he teaches English Literature and the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo international Centre of Education. A bilingual writer with almost an equal number of books in Odia and English, he has been translated into several major languages of India and the world as well.

His major works are: Shesha Basantara Chithi, 1966; Manoj Dasanka Katha O Kahani, 1971; Dhumabha Diganta, 1971; Manojpancabimasti, 1977; (short stories); Tuma Gam o Anyanya Kabita, 1992 (poetry). His notable English works include: The Crocodiles Lady :a collection of stories, 1975, The Submerged Valley and Other Stories, Farewell to a Ghost : short stories and a novelette, 1994; Cyclones, 1987, and a Tiger at Twilight, 1991.

His major English works include "Temples of India, 1970, Stories of Light and Delight, 1972 and A Bride Inside a Casket, 1981. His latest publications are: The Escapist, my Little India, The Lady Who Died One-and –a-half Times and Other stories and Chasing the Rainbow.

Manoj Das, then 27, was the youngest in that galaxy of awardees. It was his collection of stories Aranyaka, that was chiefly responsible for this honour. And it is this Aranyaka that won for him the Odisha Sahitya Akademi Award for fiction in 1965. The Sahitya Akademi Award, India's national recognition for creative writing, came to him in 1972, followed by the Sarala Award in 1980, the prajatantra Visubh Grand Award in 1986, Odisha Sahitya Akademi (for the second time and for Essays) in 1989. The Sahitya Bharati Samman, by now Odisha's most prestigious Award, began with him in 1994 and the Bharatiya Bhasha Paishad (Kolkata) Puraskar was him in 1995. He was the first author to receive the Annual Sri Aurobindo Puraskar (English) instituted by the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan (The) Birthplace of Sri Aurobindo, supported by the West Bengal Government) to mark the 125th Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo, for his

pioneering research in the British archives bringing to light several little-known facts regarding India's freedom struggle led by Sri Aurobindo in the 1st decade of the 20th century. In 1998 the Book-Sellers and publishers Association of South India chose him for their BAPASI Award as the best English writer of the year in the South, he was also a recipient of Rotary's 'For the sake of Honour'. The Saraswati Samman, India's most prestigious award for creative writing, came to him in 2000 and the president's Padma Award came in 2001. While the Utkal Sahitya Samaj, Odisha's oldest and hallowed literary organization decorated him with the title Utkal Ratna, in 2007 the Sahitya Akademi bestowed on him its highest honour, Fellowship 'reserved for the immortals in literature'.

The Berhampur University offered him the status of Honorary Professor Emeritus of Culture. He was the only person chosen by the Utkal University of Culture to receive the D. Litt. (Honoris Causa) in its first ever convocation. Next, Odisha's oldest University, the Utkal University, bestowed D.Litt. (Honoris Causa) on him. That was followed by the Fakir Mohan University (Balasore) and the North Odisha University (Baripada) in giving him this coveted honour. The latest to do so was Odisha's first college (where Manoj studied) now elevated to the status of a university, the Ravenshaw University.

Once when asked about his response to awards and honours, he candidly quoted some Western wit who, when given an award, said that he did not deserve it, but he had arthritis and he did not deserve that either! 'I wish'. Said Majoo, 'There were no awards and prizes at all the readers' appreciation were the only recognition. But such wistful thoughts are irrelevant. Awards are a reality. Some writers feel encouraged by it. If one is a good writer, he may feel encouraged to write more and good. If one is not a bad writer he may feel encouraged to write more and bad.

Manoj Das is perhaps the foremost bilingual Odia writer and a master of dramatic expression both in his English and Odia short stories and novels. He says that characters follow the theme of a story and the words are merely added by author to represent the thoughts of the character. That is the precise reason why Das's persons in fiction are from so many varied backgrounds and display many different dimensions of human nature. He is a philosopher, a thinker-writer whose works can be defined as quest for finding the eternal truth in everyday circumstances. He is settled as an ashramite of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry, and is presently concentrating on writing novels. □

CHILD CHARACTERS IN MANOJ DAS'S THREE SHORT STORIES: A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

* Dr. K.K. Gandhi

In Manoj Das's short stories child characters are many and varied. In some stories they play a pivotal role and thereby sculpture a distinct identity for them. In addition, Das creates a distinct world of the children within the world of the elders. The beauty of that world is enhanced by the inner beauty of the child characters, i.e. their pristine innocence which enables them to see the world differently.

There is not a distinct and tangible 'Malgudi' in Manoj Das's stories; but there is, none the less a perceptible familiar world. It originates from his native region in the northern part of Balasore district (briefly North Balasore) in Odisha, the memories of which are engraved on the pages of the author's '**Chasing the Rainbow**' which recreates the "lost moments, situations and characters" (Preface XVII) associated with his childhood experiences in a quiet and serene village by the sea. But instead of stagnating, this world expands, evolves and metamorphoses into a living world acquiring a pan – Indian identity. At the same time the smell of the native soil persists.

The socio-geographical scenario in many a story of Manoj Das is resonant with his childhood experiences and memories. But more pertinently, any of his child characters carry in them these experiences and memories. Succinctly speaking, his child characters often embody these experiences and are, thus, multiple expressions of deep-seated, first-hand experiences of child Manoj. Consequently, they are so life-like and they live in a world easily identifiable. Their world seems to be an expansion of the world that is in the mind of child Manoj and they themselves are parts of the process of self-expansion of him. In that sense the child Manoj permeates his child characters. Ultimately, they emerge as a companionable type irrespective of their sex as they are the offshoots of the same experience.

The present study examines the child characters in Manoj Das's three short stories namely "Lakshmi's Adventure", "A Letter from the Last Sparing" and "Mystery of the Missing Cap". They all live in a world different from the

affected world of the elders and exhibit a capacity to outgrow the mind-made narrow cell that imprisons the elders. This wonderful capacity makes Manoj Das's child characters distinguishable and gives them an identity of their own.

In "Lakshmi's Adventure", in the process of Lakshmi's communion with the deity, the latter has been humanized and the child divinized. She brings the deity to a human level and establishes a deeply intimate relationship with Him. She opens her heart with a faith and innocence that is not ordinarily possible. She tells the deity about her trouble with arithmetic. She speaks about her father's poverty and her mother's sorrow. She prescribes for the god not more than four bananas a day. Obviously she takes the deity to be a living entity – a feat attained by yogis and sadhaks. She even censures the elders for their gaudy action of using loudspeaker while praying. She asks a very pertinent question that leaps out of the depth of her heart "Did Dhruv and Prahlad use loudspeakers for their prayer song?" (Story Land, 41). Her relationship with the god attains a spiritual height, unwittingly though, because she is above greed and selfish interest. Her prayer is more or less a *nishkam* prayer: "And if you would somehow make the priest sleep every day at noon, I could visit you often." (ibid, 43) This is a prayer for the deity's *darshan* which a spiritual aspirant yearns for.

Her act for taking a couple of bananas is nothing but an exhibition of mutual love between the deity and herself too subtle for the selfish and diseased human mind to understand. Before her departure from the temple she cautions the god not to eat all the bananas at a time. What an unpretentious and warm love between the divine and the human! The priest dubbed it as theft and chased her into a pond. The village elders cast aspersions on her act. She succumbed to the shock. The elders like the local leader and two of the members of the managing committee vociferously expressed their perverse pleasure by describing Lakshmi's death as the manifestation of God's anger; but conveniently took their own misdeeds as beyond His knowledge. The writer tells curly, "They did not know if the deity had any knowledge of their deeds; but they were most loud in their praise of the Lord and hoped that he heard them all right" (Story Land, 45). Lakshmi's world and that of the elders are, thus, widely apart. One is a world of unselfish love, total faith, open heartedness and sympathy; the other is hypocrisy, falsehood and hatred.

Lakshmi passed away, but not without an impact. The consequent shock overpowers the priest. A deep sense of penitence makes him dumb. A mysterious perception visits him, "...the priest felt as though the soul of the deity suddenly departed from the shrine, leaving behind only a dull and useless form" (Story Land, 45). This perception glorifies the deity as well as Lakshmi

and establishes a final identity between the two, i.e. the divine and His human lover. If Lakshmi leaves her mortal frame, the spirit of the deity also leaves His material form. The priest's last prayer ["God! Next time let this sinner be born without a tongue!" (ibid, 46)] indicates God's glory. Lakshmi shines in her death, she becomes a transforming force. Her capacity to open herself completely to the deity, to see God as a living being and to understand the things of the world with a genuine sympathy show the possibility of inner growth latent in her.

Though born in different settings, one in a poor family in an orthodox village and the other in a wealthy family in an elegant metropolis, both Lakshmi and Rina exhibit equally a tremendous capacity to love – a deity or a mother and a genuine sympathy in understanding others' plight. If Lakshmi was absorbed in her world of love for the deity, fond memory of her loving mother submerged Rina completely. An unmitigated yearning for the mother's love forms the essential Rina.

The usual world outside with its flux of life moves on. The cart covered with colorful film posters passes on the road. The young man and the young lady on their bicycles incite the mustached watchman to cough and the juvenile vagabond to whistle "meaningfully" (Story Time, 118). The tall bearded man "assuming a supernatural air" (118) comes out on his traditional business. The postman appears twice a day. Above all, Rina's mother in the sanatorium passes away. But Rina, oblivious of this world of the elders, is absorbed in her self made world of love and loneliness waiting for letters from her mother. It is Rina's natural innocence that makes her believe and imagine that letters from her mother will reach her.

If she can make such a world of fantasy, she is simultaneously capable of going beyond it. The narrator's act, i.e. waiting on his verandah as Rina did on hers, aroused her sympathy as she understood that he, too, never received any letter from his mother. Consequently she decided to part with her most precious treasure, i.e. "the only letter she had ever received from her mother" so that the narrator's "agony at not receiving a letter" from his mother would be reduced (Story Time, 123). She wants the narrator not to suffer from the same agony that she suffers. Her empathy with the narrator reveals her capacity to love and make sacrifice and makes her dazzle as a mother figure.

While the child characters in the above two stories are girls, in "Mystery of a Missing Cap" it is a rustic boy. But in essence, he remains the same child with natural innocence and warm and spontaneous sympathy. In addition, he is endowed with a keen sense of observation mixed with a genial humour. These qualities add genuineness to his act as the first person observer and give him a distinct and respectable identity. At the same time, his world is separate from that of the elders and from there he peeps into their world to observe their complex

and hypocritical activities. Manoj Das makes the children's world quite lively and genuine. It should be noted here that the narrator recounts the episode that constitutes the story two decades after its occurrence. That is why I have made a distinction between the child observer and the narrator. But the child observer is equally important because the narration, no doubt, is based on his observation of events.

As the minister, after getting down from his jeep, plodded through the street in the midst of shouting of slogans "the half-naked, pot-bellied, uncivilized kids walked parallel to the minister at a safe distance and could not help feeling extremely small and guilty" (Selected Fiction 146). This is how the writer introduces the world of the children quite distinct from that of the elders. Their innocence aroused their curiosity. Their wonder besieged minds wrangled over many issues regarding the minister: "What does a minister eat? What does he think? Does he sleep? Does he ever suffer from colic cold as ordinary mortals do?" (146). Through the workings of their mind, the writer gives us more ideas about their world. Their innocent minds imagined the minister to be a great man. So when the observer discovered the sleeping minister "snoring in the style of any ordinary man", he really suffered "the first shock of disillusionment" (ibid, 147) in his life regarding great men. When the atmosphere was rife with tension because of the missing of the minister's cap in a mysterious way, the children were wild with speculation which reflected their innocent mind: "One said that the thief, when caught, was to be hanged on the big banyan tree beside the river. 'Perhaps all the villagers will be thrown into jail', said another. Among us there were natives who even believed that the minister's cap was a sort of Aladdin's lamp, that any one who put it on would find himself endowed with ministerial power the very next moment" (ibid, 148). Manoj Das creates, thus, a world of innocence, curiosity and simple faith for the children that remains inaccessible to and invincible by the hypocritical and complex-minded elders. Though it operates within the elders' world, it maintains its distinct identity and stands as a witness to the activities of the elders.

The child observer in this story is not a mere passive witness, but a keenly involved observer of events and characters. His observation of events sheds light on the contemporary social situation and that of the characters unravels different aspects of their personality. In this role he exhibits an uncommon maturity. He keenly observes the excitement of preparation for the visit of the minister, the minister's walk to Shri Moharana's house from the very first welcome arch, the luxurious lunch followed by the "ministerial repose" (Selected Fiction, 147), Jhandoo's picking up the minister's cap, Shri Moharana's maiden speech, the minister's two and a half-hour long speech and the moment

of the minister's departure. His observation being mixed with tender humour, innocent probing and vivid imagination adds a new hue to reality. He watches Shri Moharana's response to different situation sympathetically. One example is the description of Shri Moharana's reaction after the disappearance of the minister's cap: "I could see Shri Moharana literally shaking. He was sweating like an icecream stick, so much so that I was afraid, at that he might completely melt away in a few hours" (ibid, 148). The reader feels that the event appears alive in front of him. The child observer's capacity to see things so vividly and penetratingly creates a distinguishable identity for him.

In these stories Manoj Das transports us into the world of the children and for sometime we remain absorbed in their world. We see the beauty of this world with wonder and become overwhelmed with the beauty of the heart and mind of the child-characters. What leaves us more awestruck is the possibility of an inner growth that they exhibit. In this, they become the path-finders for the adults, Manoj Das explores the mind of his child characters and discovers this possibility in them because of his unique way of looking at things. His penetrating look traces this special identity of the child character. Capability to touch the heart of reality is Manoj Das's specialty. □

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Manoj Das : a Short story writer with A Vision

* Dr. Minati Pattnaik

“Manoj Das is a prolific writer who could narrate a story without losing the Indian charm and ethos. He could be the best story teller after R.K. Narayan”. Gopi Chand Narang, the President of Sahitya Akademi said at a function when Das was conferred with the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship- the Country’s highest literary honour.

Noted writer, poet, novelist, short-story writer, columnist, travel writer, children’s writer, thinker, philosopher who is author of over 70 books written in English and Oriya, Manoj Das is amongst the few best story tellers in the world. He is perhaps the foremost bi-lingual Oriya writer and a master of dramatic expression both in his English and Oriya short stories and novels. He says that, “Characters follow the theme of a story and the words are merely added by author to represent the thoughts of the Character”. That is the precise reason why Das’s persons in fiction are from so many varied back grounds and display many different dimensions of human nature. He is a thinker-writer whose works can be defined as quest for finding the eternal truth in everyday circumstances. Tusar N. Mohapatra, Director of Savitri Era Learning Forum sent his comment to the Indian Express, New Delhi: “Manoj Das not Only creates a rural, Semi-urban environment effortlessly, he also provides an authentic voice which deeply reflects the vernacular, depth, substance and humour. The short stories are very skillful, indeed. Characters are so finely etched. Luminous, re-discovery of the quiet life”.

Truly the narration of story of Manoj Das is incomparable to any Indian contemporary writers. The words will make you laughing/ crying and readers forget that they are going through the books. The descriptions are such that you can see the cinema rather than just read. Some stories depict the actual picture of a typical Indian village which may not be possible to justify without Manoj Das. Through his nearly 300 short stories Manoj Das has brought about an awareness about the rural Indian life. He has stressed the divinity and psychic splendor inherent in man. He has among his admirers celebrities such as Graham Greene, K.R. Srinivas Iyengar and so many academics in the western

world.

In the very conception of most of the stories of Manoj Das there is an originality and a freshness which delight and appeal to the reader's mind. But his narrative technique is conventional : he follows the traditional beginning – middle-end structure in each of his stories. His style is certainly remarkable: it is characterized by a rare aristocracy. The writer does not embroider much. In fact many of his stories are so little embroidered that they appear threadbare. He makes liberal use of irony and humour. A vein of quiet laughter runs through stories like 'Mystery of the Missing Cap', 'A Song for Sunday' etc. Besides, we find an undercurrent of pathos in many stories, in 'Mystery of the Missing Cap' the writer speaks of a politician and his rural henchman, who suddenly changes the course of their lives due to an event, apparently quite trivial. The politician who was a minister then lost his cap while he was camping in a village. The cap was stolen from his bedroom by a domesticated monkey. The minister's henchman had cunningly invented a story to save the situation, even to elevate the minister with his account, for whom, it appears, he had been nursing immense contempt in his sub-conscious. But the moment of the minister's departure the monkey itself appears with the cap and offers it back to the minister, thus shattering the fictitious account of the henchman. The monkey acted just like a monkey but it contained the potentialities to change the lives of two professed politicians. The writer's motive is obviously satirical. The significance of the story is the psychological element. The story is funny as well as sad, satirical as well as melancholic.

Similarly in 'A Song for Sunday' the protagonist Mr. Lenka is an humble stenographer in the District Collectorate. He wants to enjoy a joke on Sunday, but the peculiar effect of the joke wrecked his sanity for a lifetime. Mr. Lenka's tragedy though appears like a parody, reminds us of the realities that operate in the lives of men which can destroy one's life even though he might be suffering from no 'flaw'. The subject matters of the story are basically socio-cultural and sometimes political aspects of society existed during the period of independence era.

In 'Submerged Valley' a whole village goes under the waters of a dam and when the water recedes, the villagers return only to have a last glimpse of the place they have lost forever. The magic of human affection has nearly been so beautifully worked out as in 'The Submerged Valley'. One will invariably be led to a plane of reality and one also realizes that there are planes and planes of reality interspersed with one-another. One's perception of life expands. The idiosyncratic figures are horribly shaken up at sudden removal of their power and grandeur in the independent India. Even if they try, they just cannot master

the art of living like ordinary mortals. They don't know where they belong to in the new dispensation. This unique creation can have mirror reflection of human lives and day-to-day problems. The writer approaches them with sympathy, compassion and restrained humour.

Another representative short story 'Tragedy' is a comical but realistic treatment of the way a mass reacts to a particular situation. The average male or female is fond of 'copying other persons: he imitates anybody whom he thinks his superior in certain respects, however superficial that superiority may be. In this story the writer speaks of the predicament of a theatrical group who were staging a serious tragedy before an assemblage of ladies. These lady-spectators had among them a veritable sun around whom all others revolved like planets. This queen-bee, seeing something ludicrous, starts laughing when the drama was heading towards denouement and soon the entire auditorium was one peal of uncontrollable laughter. Of course the story is more than a mere presentation of mass-psychology. It is also a reflection on the living relationship between the audience and a theatrical performance. Here sighs and tears are invited as an encouraging response.

In 'The Story of Baba Chakradhari' the people are assured of an astonishing fire-jumping feat. But the organizers are not able to present because of sudden change of climatic condition. The man hired to perform the feat himself is afraid. The wind is roaring furiously and to perform the feat would be too hazardous. The assembled crowd are demanding to enjoy the show and to have fun as they have paid for it. The audience can see the performer's performance but cannot see the stress, anxiety and apprehensions of the performer. In 'Farewell to Ghost' the writer portrays a village folk's strong belief in the existence of spirit. The village people think that the ghost is the spirit of a young girl of the same village. In festive occasions, people offer her sweets, food and drink though none have ever seen her. The impression of ghost is only a fiction, still they are moved by true pathos in bidding her farewell. Thus the writer signifies that how make-believe is not a self-deception but it gives significance to existence.

'The Crocodile's Lady' is about the villagers, how they create a folk story about the girl who suddenly disappears from the village and reappears in the village after one decade or so. Actually nobody knows about her life in these intervening period, but the villagers weave a very romantic story about her missing. They build up such fantasy only to satisfy themselves. In this story one cannot say explicitly that make-believe plays a healthy role like 'The Wild-duck' by Ibsen. Now-a-days it has disappeared to some extent because of the advancement of scientific knowledge.

Manoj Das's some short-stories deal with child psychology. His child characters play a very significant role and sculpture a distinct identity for them. Manoj Das takes an attempt to exhibit a distinct world of the children through their innocence, inner beauty and thought. Many of his child characters carry in them the writer's childhood experiences and memories. These child characters often embody these experiences of child Manoj. They are so life-like and they live in a world, easily identifiable. Of many remarkable qualities of his stories one is the presence of faith. 'A Letter from the Last Spring' is one of his most conspicuously tragic story. Rina's mother passes away but the love she has invoked in Rina is immortal. It is Rina's natural innocence that makes her believe and imagine that letters from her mother would reach her. Rina's tireless waiting on her verandah for the letter arouses sympathy. The writer understands that she would never receive letter from her mother. Thus Rina's innocence, curiosity and simple faith make the narrator to act as a mother figure.

'Laxmi's Adventure' is another tragic story. Here one weeps within, yet not without receiving an assurance that man lives by something more than what is lost. Laxmi might have died but the awakening she brings in the heart of the priest is a boost to his evolution. Indeed this faith in the evolution of the individual in the continuity of life through death is probably the invisible base of the author's faith. This faith remains as an unpronounced vision. The process of Laxmi's communion with the deity is not ordinarily possible rather it is an emancipation of a spiritual aspirant. The deity has been humanized and Laxmi (the child) is divinized. She brings the deity to a human level and establishes a deeply intimate relationship with 'Him'. She opens her heart with a faith and innocence. She accepts the deity to be a living entity. She communicates to the deity all her day to day happenings, she speaks her father's poverty, her mother's sorrow and all. She prescribes for the God not more than four bananas a day and her act for taking a couple of bananas is nothing but an exhibition of intensity of love which is above greed, selfishness and pretention. The elders like the local leaders and two of the members of the managing committee describe Laxmi's death as the manifestation of God's anger. So the writer gets shocked and writes,

"They did not know if the deity had any knowledge of their deeds; but they were most loud in their praise of the Lord and hoped that 'He' heard them all right" (*Story Land*, 45)

'The Bridge in the Moonlit Night' is one of the gems of Manoj Das's stories. The pungency of unexploited Love had rarely been so deeply felt by the readers as in 'The Bridge in the Moonlit Night'. The International Number of New Orleans Review (Loyala University 1979) chose only one story from

Asia and that was Manoj Das's A Bridge in the Moonlit Night. In 'The Bridge in the Moonlit Night' an old man suddenly discovers that his love offered to a girl some sixty years ago had not gone in vain; she had responded to it, but the bearer of her letter had torn it to shreds and let the air carry them into the river under the bridge. He quietly dies in his easy chair while listening to the bearer's confession, but one of his friends claims to see him from a distance, as if he was searching for something under the bridge at that very moment. The writer does not make it clear whether it was the friend's hallucination or really the man's spirit, after its sudden departure from its body, was looking for it. Probably it is the second possibility which is super natural and is a relative experience.

Critic A. Russell, while reviewing **The Vengeance and Other Stories**, stated :

"There is little doubt that Manoj Das is a great story teller of the Sub-Continent and he has too few peers, no matter what yardstick is applied to measure his ability as an artist. he show how powerfully all artifices of story telling can be used to write a story in realistic genre without any attempt at being faithful to the photographic details of facts. His world has the fullness of human psyche, with its dreams and fantasies, its awe and wonder, the height of sublimity can be courted by the depth of the fictive. He proves that the reality is richer than what realists conceived it to be." (**Story Time** 1987)

However Manoj Das's stories linger in the reader's memory for years, but that is not unusual. There are other great short stories in the Literature of the world which also create that effect but Manoj Das's stories not only linger, they somehow enlighten, soothe and remain as a kind of invisible companion. □

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Humour as a mode of Correction in the Short stories of Manoj Das

* *Durga Prasad Dash*

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In this world of rapid changes and globalization when the art of storytelling has gone a sea change, one can find the story telling or what we generally refer as narrative style and narrative technique of Manoj Das is quite unique. He takes simple things of life and elevates them into universal level in a very simpler way, of course that could be his original way of universalizing certain issues. In this present scenario when the human society is facing a great challenge to uphold the political, ethical, moral and social values, the study of the short stories of Manoj Das is quite relevant. This paper makes an attempt to analyze humour which is the main form that Manoj Das uses in writing his stories. Humour is used purposefully to bring correctness through self-realization and common human emotions like sympathy and compassion. A few selected stories have been taken into consideration where this corrective tool or motive of the writer is quite prevalent.

Manoj Das is perhaps the foremost bilingual Oriya writer and a master of dramatic expression both in his English and Oriya short stories and novels. He says that characters follow the theme of a story and the words are merely added by author to represent the thoughts of the character. That is the precise reason why Manoj Das's persons in fiction are from so many varied backgrounds and display many different dimensions of human nature. He is a philosopher, a thinker-writer whose works can be defined as quest for finding the eternal truth in everyday circumstances. **Manoj Das** has acquired the status of widely read short story writer among the writers who are categorized as writers of Indian Writings in English (IWE). The popularity of Manoj Das is reflected in the words of British poet and critic **A.Russel** , while reviewing "**The Vengeance and other Stories**" he observes:

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"There is little doubt that Manoj Das is a great storyteller of the sub-continent and he has too few peers, no matter what yardstick is applied to measure his ability as an artist...He shows how powerfully all artifices of storytelling can be used to write a story in realist genre without any attempt at being faithful to the photographic details of facts" (Russel, 135).

It is of little doubt that Manoj Das always narrates his stories in a very humorous way. Therefore, humour is a predominant element in the stories of Manoj Das. But for a careful reader these humorous situations or characters in the stories have some other intentional overtone of the writer that is purposeful. This paper makes an attempt to discuss the elements of *humour* that are pervasive in the short stories of Manoj Das. The paper also makes an attempt to discuss how Manoj Das uses humour as a mode to achieve his purpose successfully. Mr. Das has certain correctional motives, so he often takes resort to satire. But his satirical tone is subdued by brilliant flashes of humour. His stories are a perfect blend of humour and satire. Manoj Das's satire is not fierce. His attack on ruthless exploitation, moral depravity, fanaticism, spiritual sterility, pretence and superstitions is not vehement. Some select stories that mainly represent humour in its varied aspects have been taken for this discussion and analysis.

Ethical aspect and the satirical aspect are the two prominent aspects of humour. Ethical humour is tinged with moral sense and it unveils the defects and vices of society. It also exposes the frailties and follies of individuals in a lighter vein. But satirical humour is devoid of moral sense. This evokes laughter which is an end in itself. *Sigmund Freud's* theory of laughter distinguishes between the two kinds of jokes '*one which is innocent and harmless and one which has a purpose, a tendency, an end in view*'. (*Freud, 245*). The former is pure humour, whereas the latter is satirical humour.

Born in a rural atmosphere, Manoj Das has the experience of witnessing Indian society from its core and very bottom level. Therefore, he is able to portray the Indian sensibility from a very close range. From his childhood Manoj Das has seen the Indian society marching ahead from one phase to another phase. During this changing period particularly when the nation was struggling to stand up independently after obtaining independence from the British rule, Manoj Das writes about the Indian society and Indian people by placing their mistakes and follies before them intending to bring some reforms. He is an

optimist who believes in a better future of mankind and his writings exude his faith. Through his creative writings he has brought about a new awareness about the sweetness and serenity that pervades life in general and rural Indian life in particular.

Nature has given us a sense of humour to save us from the sufferings and of setbacks of life. Life without humour is dull but we are not all born with a sense of humour. A person with a sense of humour laughs so that he may not weep. It is well known that humour springs primarily from real life. Humour is the salt of existence; without it the world would have got out balance. According to Dr.P.Raja *"laughter packed with choicest wit and hilarious humour is certainly the elixir of life. In the field of Indo-Anglian short story, no other writer than Manoj Das, with the possible exception of R.K.Narayan, is capable of providing such an elixir. Almost every story by Manoj Das has a humorous frame. They are inspiring and free from malice and pungent satire .His humour is alien to vulgarity, obscenity, and indecorum"* (Humour in Indo-Anglian Literature, Yuva Bharati, Aug.1985).

Manoj Das is a comic artist. We hardly find burlesque, farce and parody in the short stories of Manoj Das. In order to uncover what is antisocial or ego-tistical or inelastic in human nature, he takes the help of comic perceptions. True, he does not write like Swift or Pope, but in the true style of a modern professional he achieves his goal. His stories generally do not end with a tragic note. One can find in his short stories a sense of acceptance and reconciliation. Humour forms the basis of his short stories. Some of his short stories are serious but with a lot of humorous elements. But in the guise of humour Manoj Das always tries to convey a message.

The short stories of Manoj Das are mostly in humorous frames. They comment on varied aspects of life. His stories are packed with hardcore realism, psychological import as well as Man's encounter with supra-human, or infra-human elements. Basically he is a poet at heart and combines the old art of storytelling with modern ideas and techniques. He believes in the ancient Indian tradition of giving advice through the medium of storytelling. In the same way 'Panchatantra' is an example where Vishnu Sharma teaches the princes through the fables and stories. Manoj Das never forgets this valuable technique of amusing and transmitting simultaneously. Manoj Das explores the essential helplessness of man set against the hostile conditions of life.He may be compared with O'Henry for his subtle humour and his understanding of human psyche. The essential quality of Manoj Das as an artist is that he always

keeps his readers in good humour. The essence of humour is not contempt but love and human kindness which we find adequately in the short stories of Manoj Das.

Ethical aspect of humour is that part of humour which makes a person correct in his manners what (s)he can know after being ridiculed or exposed through funny situations. This gives a different turn to his personality and (s)he becomes what (s)he ought to be. Manoj Das believes in transformation of human nature, therefore he tries to bring an awareness of this sort by presenting and placing his characters in different humorous situations.

Manoj Das's good tempered humour not only creates laughter but it exposes the human ego. In many cases it is quite hilarious but they teach a lesson to the readers. His humour and satire exposes the human follies and hypocrisy through a smooth story telling method. Even though he embarrasses the hypocrites through his story telling, the narration of humour presents an intoxicating amusement to the reader. A story like 'The Mystery of the Missing Cap' is an example. This story exposes the false pretence of the Hon'ble Minister of Fishes and Fine Arts Babu Virakishore. The Minister is once invited to an Indian Village. During his stay he loses his Gandhian cap. In fact, Jhandoo, the half-tamed monkey has taken the cap. It is not known to anybody. The narrator, a child, is the sole witness to this act of theft by Jhandoo. Everybody is shocked at the turn of the event. Meanwhile the narrator secretly informs the incident to Sri Moharana. The latter asks the narrator to keep the secret to himself. He explains a different story before the Minister. Later, Moharana, who aspires for a great political ambition, surprisingly announces to the public that a nobleman of that area has secretly taken the minister's cap to keep it as a sacred memento. This gives the minister a good chance to boast his popularity and creates a pretentious appearance before the people around him. The missing of his Gandhian cap gives an opportunity to blow his own horn. The boastful minister proudly says, "*Well, Moharana, ha ha! the way things are moving, ha ha! I am afraid, ha ha! people would start snatching away my clothes,.....*". The minister is even ready to discard all his clothes for the love of his people.

But this ecstasy of the Minister is short lived. After some time, Jhandoo, the little monkey, walks towards the minister carrying the same missing cap. He sits down between the minister and Sri Moharana, and plays with the cap. Though it is quite hilarious but it definitely exposes the false pretence and the false ego of the minister. His embarrassment is palpable, when he tries to cover up saying "*Er.....er.....is not this one the very cap taken away by the nobleman?*" Sri Moharana with complete nervousness utters "*Yes, yes, this is*

the nobleman....” The conclusion of the story is noteworthy as far as the aim of the present discussion is concerned. It is told that both the Minister and Sri Moharana have altogether given up all their aspirations in politics after the incident of the missing cap.

The story ‘Concubine’ presents similar kind of situation in which the backdrop of the story is a small town but one that had been a ‘capital’ of a small principality. The town has only one hand press and now some ambitious young men are anxious to use this machine of great potentiality to announce the glory of the little town to the wide world by publishing a news magazine.

The flavour of the situation could be felt in the words of Manoj Das:

As the post-independence Nijanpur had marked an encouraging growth in the number of goats along with the population of goat-eaters the affluent and patriotic butcher had shifted his business to a spacious house and had allowed the ambitious youths of the town to use the old one for their proposed cultural revolution. (The Concubine, 157)

In the same story, general elections are approaching. The prince, the son of the last ruling Raja, now no more, is a candidate. One afternoon a concubine of his father is addressing a meeting of the womenfolk, seeking their votes for the prince. The progressives suddenly appear on the scene and expose the lady as the late Raja’s concubine. They are sure that she would feel humiliated. That would be a saucy news-item for the inaugural issue of the magazine. But the situation takes a different turn. The lady, when ‘exposed’ feels delighted that the young men of a different generation have been able to recognize her! Tears in her eyes, she fondles them and distributes sweets to them. She, who has no guilty-conscience in her, does not see anything awkward in the manner in which the youths addressed her. She had promised to the Rani, in the latter’s deathbed, to take care of the prince. She is doing her duty. It is the ‘Mother’ in her that dominates her thought, not the ‘concubine’ that she once had been. By the time the reader comes to an end of the story, what pleasantly surprises him and amuses him is the innocence of the concubine, a quality that has obliged the young men who went to confront her, give up their arrogance. Something good, obviously morals and tender has been stirred in their hearts. They are embarrassed; at the same time they feel relieved. While taking leave of the lady ‘duely bowing to her, we felt that the late noon had suddenly become tender and pleasant’ (Concubine, 166-67). The effect of the encounter was even deeper. They decided to launch a cultural magazine

instead of a news fortnightly. Change that occurred in the minds and hearts of the youths is due to the presence of morality and ethical sense. This was not there in the beginning but later it was aroused by in their hearts because of the situation. The reader experiences the triumph of the humane over hostilities based on ideals and ethics, present in the society.

Similarly the story 'The Crocodile's Lady' is also humourous. Here the humour is rustic but quite original. It tells about the blind, unquestioning belief of the village folk about things like ghosts and other, uncanny accounts. For example, the narration by the money lender about his fear of a particular ghost is both entertaining and plenty of humour. Another story 'Sharma and the Wonderful Lump' talks about the false values and ideals. Sharma, the protagonist, goes to America to cure his aboo (a tumor) on his head but he is exploited by many for their own benefits. Even Sharma, the aboo man, could not resist the temptation of getting some money because of this easy popularity.

Manoj Das believes in the continuity of life. The moral and ethical at the psychic level one experience in life can perhaps go with him to his next birth. In some of his characters we see this point of growth arriving at the last moment. We are born into a society. The moment we are born, we immediately become one of a group of people and we establish certain kinds of principles, moralities and ethics for the smooth running of society. The moment these ethics and morals are violated or absent in the society, a chaotic condition takes over. Life becomes restless and disturbed. To trace out what is crude, and is undesirable, different measures are adopted. Manoj Das adopts the medium of portraying such characters and through them he wants to show the bare tell truths of the society. He does not want to tell the unpleasant things in an unpleasant way, rather he presents them in a very funny and humorous way.

The underlying intention of Manoj Das is to bring some correction and reform through the experiences of his characters in his stories. Therefore, he never creates very complex characters; rather he takes up very common and ordinary characters from the walks of life. These characters in his stories have been interpreted on moral and humanitarian grounds, at the same time their presentation and description arouse laughter. But this laughter is not the outcome of his harsh treatment to his characters; it is quite fresh and humorous. Hence, one finds laughter and humour all at the same time in the short stories of Manoj Das. Another thing that is also pervasive in his stories that he takes all these mediums to correct and reform and sometimes instruct these things in an amusing manner. □

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Alchemy of the Soul : A Comparative Study of Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and Manoj Das's *The Escapist*

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It may seem very unlikely to compare *The Alchemist* (1993) with *The Escapist* (2001), for when Paulo Coelho's magnum opus has already established itself as a classic on its own rights, Manoj Das's representative work has not achieved anything spectacular that may stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the publishing phenomenon¹ that *The Alchemist* is. But the dissimilarity ends here. While this paper neither intends to investigate into the cause of the phenomenal popularity of *The Alchemist* nor the lackluster response meted out to *The Escapist* in comparison, it nonetheless asserts that both these novels have worked on the identical theme of personal transformation and they deserve equal critical attention, which has been lamentably absent. The contention of this paper is that when Paulo Coelho has based his fiction on the principles of alchemy, particularly Carl Jung's interpretation of alchemy (individuation), Manoj Das has followed the transformative psychology of Sri Aurobindo. It is further found that Sri Aurobindo's practical psychology² of personal transformation involving consciousness is supportive of Carl Jung's individuation based on transformation of consciousness (Cornelissen 408). Alchemy believes that base metals like lead can be transformed into gold, and psychologically, an ordinary person can be transformed into a self-actualized being, through self-awareness and self-development. On the other hand, Manoj Das, an Aurobindonian, believes that if a wonder like the lotus could evolve out of sheer mud and mire with the intervention of the sunlight, similarly the human mind, despite all the filth at its bottom, can change into a godly mind with the intervention of Grace.³ Thus, both these novelists believe in Self-realization, through self-conscious efforts. However, a conducive atmosphere toward such a transformation may be set in motion unconsciously, say by a chance happening or even a dream. Against this background, this paper avers, there is a justification of attempting a comparative study of Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and Manoj Das's *The*

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Escapist.

A study of the novels discussed here necessitates an understanding of the traditions Paulo Coelho and Manoj Das representing. When Coelho is writing in the alchemical tradition of English literature, Das is writing in the tradition of Indian English Literature and the influence of the philosophy and psychology of Sri Aurobindo. An understanding of these traditions, from the view point of personal transformation is indispensable to critically appreciate *The Alchemist* and *The Escapist*. As of Paulo Coelho, a brief analysis of the doctrine of alchemy will suffice. Manoj Das, a creative artist, has made an attempt to embody the ideas of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, in his novels—especially in *The Escapist*. An attempt will be made here to synthesize the two philosophies and relate them to these two representative novels under study and then compare and contrast them to iron out how the theme of personal transformation shapes the text and context of *The Alchemist* and *The Escapist*, respectively.

As artists are endowed with vision—philosophy of life and attitude to life and the world—both Coelho and Das view man as a transitional being immensely capable of self-development and self-actualization. In other words, both of them have an essentially humanistic view of man. While both of them believe in the agency or the capability of man to influence, alter, and reshape his world, they do not preclude the presence of Providence or God. Chances, Luck, Destiny are nameless characters in the fictional world of Paulo Coelho as much as, or to a greater degree, in the microcosm of Manoj Das. However, these independent agents do not make the characters mere puppets in the world, as in Thomas Hardy; rather, they are seen as agents of transformation provided the protagonists have accepted the circumstances as they find themselves in and this acceptance goes in a long way to accelerate their personal growth. Thus the chief protagonists—Santiago, the shepherd boy, in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and Padmalochan ('Swami Padmananda') in *The Escapist*—work out their own salvations in the circumstances they are pitted against or in spite of them. Both of them take chance in a stride and evolve themselves into self-actualized beings, otherwise called alchemy of the soul.

As we have said earlier, an understanding of the representative works of fiction of an author is always facilitated by an understanding of the tradition or milieu he is representing in his work. We have already pointed out that Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* is pitted against the positive, transformative philosophy and psychology of Alchemy, whereas Manoj Das is chiefly executing on Sri Aurobindo's vision of man in *The Escapist*. Das talks of the major influences on his writing in the following words:

"The heritage of Indian fiction—the great yarn-spinners of yore like Vishnu Sharma and Somadeva constitute the influence of which I am conscious

. . . Fakir Mohan . . . the father of the Oriya short story, was also an early influence. Then there is Sri Aurobindo. He has given me a new vision of man.”⁴

Paulo Coelho is influenced by the ideas of Alchemy in writing *The Alchemist*. The novelist spoke of the influence of alchemy, which was introduced by the Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung into the 20th century psychology and he continues to be the most comprehensive exponent of alchemy till date. In an interview, Coelho admits that his own understanding of Alchemy was quintessentially influenced by the ideas of Carl Jung: “I like to use the term alchemy, which is the soul of the world, or those of Jung’s collective unconscious. You connect with a space where everything is.”⁵ In the next paragraphs, we can discuss alchemy and Aurobindonian transformative vision of man.

Paulo Coelho exploits the philosophy of alchemy in describing the self-actualization of Santiago. Alchemy was both an experimental and experiential discipline. Kathryn Langford Hitchcox has provided a comprehensive account of alchemy in his *Alchemical Discourse in the Canterbury Tales: Signs of Gnosis and Transmutation*:

Alchemy appeared in the Alexandrian Age (4th c. B.C. to 7th c A.D.) as a system of philosophy, cryptic in expression, that intended to develop an exact science of the regeneration of the human soul. Contrary to the aims of gold makers, or false alchemists, who sought to create mineral gold, the object of the true alchemical endeavour was to produce that substance or effect in which all opposites were united. The alchemists named this substance the *lapis philosophorum* or Philosopher’s Stone, which would perfect material reality by healing the disharmonies of the physical world, and the conflict between the purely natural and the spiritual man as well. The experimental aspects to create the Philosopher’s Stone and transmute base metals into gold were carried out with the aim of adducing a material proof about the striving of man and matter into perfection. (5-6)

As the above paragraph reveals, the chief aim of alchemy was the transformation of an ordinary human being into a self-realized person, who has embodied psychic wholeness. The transformation of lead into gold is the allegory of personal transformation. The novelist is, however, more interested in the psychology of Alchemy, “bringing spiritualism in contact with the material plane” rather than in making gold.

The alchemists believed that everything in the universe has a soul and evolution is basically teleological: everybody is moving toward perfection. As

a psychology of personal development, alchemy laid emphasis on achieving psychic wholeness. According to Carl Jung, the chief authority on esoteric alchemy, unity of being is the central concern of alchemy.

The goal of alchemy as well as individuation was to embody psychic wholeness by extending consciousness and expanding the mundane consciousness by purging it through the fire of self-knowledge and reach a cosmic consciousness. Paulo Coelho works on the philosophy and psychology of alchemy and his protagonist, Santiago, embodies the concept of the Self-realized individual.

To locate Manoj Das in a proper perspective is not very difficult, for the author has articulated his views in this matter. An active member of Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry, Das is initiated in the philosophy and humanism of Sri Aurobindo, whose spiritual treatise *Life Divine* contains an explanation about the crude realities of life, the true nature of humans, and the vision of man. According to Sri Aurobindo, man is a transitional being: he can degenerate into bestiality or ascend up to divinity. The seer also talks of evolution in terms of consciousness and believes, like Jung, that psychic wholeness is not only desirable but also can be attained. As Jung believes that the Self, which is the totality of the psyche, drives individuals towards achieving perfection or Self-realization, similarly Sri Aurobindo takes it as *a priori* that humanity is guided by a secret longing for God, Light, Freedom, and Immortality (*Life Divine*, p 6). The saint believes that “all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony” and “the manifestation of the divine in himself and the realization of God within and without are the highest and most legitimate aim possible to man upon earth” (7-8). Self-realization through self-exploration, self-analysis, self-knowledge, and self-development (action) is the ideal goal of life in the views of both Carl Jung (and alchemy) and Sri Aurobindo. Thus, it is interesting to explore the theme of Self-realization or ‘alchemy of the soul’ in Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist* and Manoj Das’s *The Escapist*.

In the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, to achieve *Sat-Chit-Anand* is the supreme goal of life. In other words, constant identification with truth, poise or steadfastness, and unwavering bliss are the highest goal of life. Usually, an ordinary individual is afflicted with suffering. However, one can mitigate one’s suffering by the above said methods of attaining Self-realization. Sri Aurobindo focuses on this prospect:

Since the nature of suffering is a failure of the conscious-force in us to meet the shocks of existence and a consequent shrinking and contraction and its root is an inequality of that receptive and possessing force due to our self-limitation by

egoism consequent on the ignorance of our true Self, . . . ,

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the elimination of suffering must first proceed by facing, enduring, and conquest of all shocks of existence.....: by this endurance and conquest we proceed to an equality which may be either an equal indifference to all contacts or an equal gladness in all contactsBut neutrality to the imperfect touches of pleasure and the perverse touches of pain is the first direct and natural result of the soul's self-discipline and the conversion to equal delight can, usually, come afterwards....
(*The Life Divine*, p119-120).

The solution to man's existential problem is identified by both alchemy (or Jung) and Sri Aurobindo. Alchemy envisages that man is the essence of all things and beings in the universe and he should strive to achieve harmony in his life by subordinating the ego to divine providence. Expansion of the ego in the light of the highest is prescribed by both alchemy and Sri Aurobindonian philosophy. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Man, the individual, has to become and to live as a universal being; his limited mental conscious has to widen to the superconscious [superconscious] unity in which each embraces all; his narrow heart has to learn the infinite embrace and replace its lusts and discord by universal love and his restricted vital being to become equal to the whole shock of the universe upon it and capable of universal delight; his very physical being has to know itself as no separate entity but as one with and sustaining in itself the whole flow of the indivisible Force that is all things; his whole nature has to reproduce in the individual the unity, the harmony, the oneness-in-all of the supreme Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. (*The Life Divine*, p121)

Sri Aurobindo recognizes that consciousness pervades the universe and the scheme of evolution is to what degree the divine consciousness is unfolded or revealed. Matter does embody consciousness, as do Nature, Mind, Life, etc. When the consciousness in matter is the least evolved, but full in potential, it is manifest in every atom of the universe, in varied degrees. The expansion of this consciousness is the goal of man.

Alchemy also visualized evolution as teleological: Man, Matter, Nature—everything in the universe that has a soul—are evolving to be perfect. Thus lead would one day become gold naturally in due course of time, but man could accelerate this process by the gentle imitation of Nature. The much talked about Philosopher's Stone of alchemy was the evidence of the manifestation of the highest evolution of matter. It was recognized to be the symbol of the Self, the realized man. Sri Aurobindo as well as the alchemists held common belief that an individual can achieve selfhood by integrating his conscious and

unconscious into an integrated whole, i. e., the Self. The individual has got to evolve himself from a leaden state to a gold-like state—from imperfection to perfection—a self-actualized state. Lead in alchemy is a metaphor for an ordinary, mundane, body-bound consciousness whereas gold is the metaphor for the total, integrated, non-corrupt consciousness. In alchemy, the Philosopher's Stone or gold was produced through the transformation of lead through three stages—*Nigredo-Albedo-Rubedo*. The *Nigredo* represented melancholy, ignorance, and crucifixion of the ego (self-analysis), whereas the *Albedo* represented light, knowledge, truth (self-knowledge) and the *Rubedo* represented wisdom, action, and self-actualization. In both the systems (alchemy and Sri Aurobindo), the individual should pass through self-analysis, self-knowledge, and intuitive action to achieve Self-realization. This process of personal transformation is otherwise called the 'alchemy of the soul.' In the following paragraphs, an analysis of Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and Manoj Das's *The Escapist* will be attempted first individually and then comparatively with a view to decoding the personal transformation in the novels under study.

The title of Paulo Coelho's novel reads as *The Alchemist* and its subtitle defines its theme: *A Magical Fable about Following Your Dream*. It is suggestive of the fact that the novel is about goal-setting and goal-realization. No, it contains something more and that makes all the differences. Interesting enough, the fiction works like the alchemical opus in which lead becomes gold; here Santiago, an ordinary shepherd boy, becomes a self-actualized being. The boy's transformation begins with a dream, which is the manifestation of the unconscious, in which a child visits him and directs him to go to the pyramids of the Egypt in Africa where he could find the hidden treasure. In Jungian psychology, the appearance of a child in dream signals the appearance of the Self. If one could truly understand one's dream, it could aid individuation or in achieving selfhood. The poor boy, much to the annoyance of his father, leaves home by dashing his father's hope of becoming a priest. The relenting father gives him his blessings and some gold coins to become a shepherd and pursue his dream (of the hidden treasure) till its realization. Thus, the process of transformation of lead into gold starts, consciously or unconsciously, in case of Santiago, the Andalusian boy.

In conformity with the genre of the novel (i.e., fable), Santiago learns a lot from his sheep. He learns to make the best of life (or existence) like his sheep, but unlike them he decided not to be content with only food and water: he wants to experience the unknown and travel the world. A Gipsy woman interprets his dream as true and goads him to go to the pyramids in quest of the hidden treasure. The *nigredo* represents an ego-shattering experience, and is marked by blackness; it represents the ascent of the Unconscious. During

this stage, one suffers from ignominy, from negative emotions, and all seems to be lost. This state of despair has to be tolerated, for it leads to *albedo*. The end of the *nigredo* stage is signalled either by the advent of a source of light or succour from a benevolent force. The greatest problem of *nigredo* consists in accepting change. To accept change, however, is not all that easy. Besides, nobody likes to embrace the unknown. Santiago gets disappointed with the Gipsy woman and decides to “never again believe in dreams” (Coelho 14).

While Santiago dithers about whether he should set out in such an adventure or not, he is visited by a wise old man, who initiates him in the knowledge of the world and self-knowledge. It makes him worldly wise. Santiago's *nigredo* began with his decision to leave home, travel all over with his sheep, and suffer indecision or confusion with regard to whether to believe the Gipsy woman or not. The arrival of the old magus, the King of Salem, signals the end of his *nigredo*. Melchizedek, onetime King of Salem, convinces him that the dream has in fact unfolded the goal of his life, his Personal Legend. The old man tells him that the greatest lie of the world is “that at a certain point in our lives, we lose control of what's happening to us, and our lives become controlled by fate. That's the world's greatest lie” (Coelho 17). As we know, the belief that we can transform our lives for better at any point of time is a fundamental belief in Alchemy. The *nigredo* stage in Santiago's journey is unusually short, for the old man he has come across is Melchizedek, the old king of Salem, the famous alchemist who had shown the way to Abraham as described in the Bible. The old alchemist impresses Santiago with his knowledge by writing the names of Santiago's father, mother, the merchant's daughter that he was fancying, and many of his otherwise inaccessible thoughts. He explains to the perplexed boy that he appeared to him because he had succeeded in discovering his ‘personal legend’ (20).

Coelho clarifies what he means by Personal Legend, which is so crucial to achieving success in life. He observes in the novel: “It's what you have always wanted to accomplish. Everyone, when they are young, knows what their Personal Legend is. At that point in their lives, everything is clear and everything is possible. They are not afraid to dream, and to yearn for everything they would like to see happen to them in their lives. But, as time passes, a mysterious force begins to convince them that it will be impossible for them to realize their Personal Legend” (Coelho 22). The King of Salem, the old wise man, further explains this force to Santiago: “It's a force that appears to be negative, but actually shows you how to realize your Personal Legend. It prepares your spirit and your will, because there is one great truth on this planet: whoever you are, or whatever it is that you do, when you really want something, it's because that desire originated in the soul of the universe. It's your mission on Earth” (20-21).

Alchemy's Soul of the World and Jung's Collective Unconscious are more or less synonymous. Through the penetration into the Soul of the World or the Collective Unconscious, one could perform miracles. Santiago is further told to believe in omens and that his success in realizing his dream largely depended on his ability to read the omens, which manifest as situations or through others and indicate the future results. One could, however, manipulate the situation by changing one's actions and thus their outcome.

Experience teaches him to recognize and read the omens even as he understands that every opportunity ignored becomes a curse. Armed with spiritual wisdom concerning the personal legend, universal language, Soul of the World, omens, the Beginner's Luck, etc. and equipped with Urim and Thummim stones as a substitute for omens to steer clear of confusion, Santiago resumes his journey. Inability to read the omens costs the shepherd boy dear as he is deprived of all his money that he got by selling his sheep in order to go to the pyramids as he is duped by a trickster. The boy had learnt that life was a journey and taking detours also meant to go ahead if one did not lose sight of the track. He offers to help a crystal merchant and brings luck to the shop through the reading of omens and changing the tactics of selling crystal ware. He earns enough to enable him to go to the pyramids on the caravan run by camels.

Santiago befriends an Englishman, a fellow traveller in the caravan, who is in look out of a 200-year old Alchemist who lives in the Al-Fayoum island in the Sahara. Soon they become friends and exchange their knowledge and compare notes concerning their experience. The boy learns a lot about alchemy from the Englishman. The boy had started understanding the omens and the universal language. He could also penetrate into the Soul of World. In the desert they stop moving as the news about a tribal war is on. However, they manage to reach the Al-Fayoum island, which is usually treated a neutral ground. There, the boy witnesses a designed flight of two hawks and he interprets it that an invasion of the island is imminent. In the meanwhile, the boy has attempted to contact the Alchemist in a view to helping the Englishman. While trying to help another to find his destiny, he discovers his own: he meets Fatima, a desert girl, and both of them fall in love at the first sight. Love makes Santiago bold enough to face death as he breaks the news of the invasion to the tribal chiefs. He is proved right. The most crucial development is that the Alchemist seeks out Santiago and pleased with his courage accepts him as a disciple and promises him to help him find his dream: the hidden treasure. With the love of Fatima, Santiago fulfils one condition of Albedo—male-female union. Now he has been blessed with spiritual wisdom and his departure from

Fatima to realize 'their' dream seals the *albedo*. The *rubedo* of Santiago starts with his departure for the pyramids accompanied by the Alchemist himself.

On Santiago's entreaty to the Alchemist to teach him alchemy, the amused alchemist surprises the boy by saying that he has already learnt alchemy:

"If we're going to go our separate ways soon," the boy said, "then teach me about alchemy."

"You already know about alchemy. It is about penetrating to the Soul of the World, and discovering the treasure that has been reserved for you."

"No, that's not what I mean. I'm talking about transforming lead into gold."

The alchemist fell as silent as the desert, and answered the boy only after they had stopped to eat.

"Everything in the universe evolved," he said. "And, for wise men, gold is the metal that evolved the furthest. Don't ask me why; I don't know why. I just know that the Tradition is always right."

"Men have never understood the words of the wise. So gold, instead of being seen as a symbol of evolution, became the basis for conflict."

"There are many languages spoken by things," the boy said. "There was a time when, for me, a camel's whinnying was nothing more than whinnying. Then it became a signal of danger. And, finally, it became just a whinny again."

But then he stopped. The alchemist probably already knew all that.

"I have known true alchemists," the alchemist continued. "They locked themselves in their laboratories, and tried to evolve, as gold had. And they found the Philosopher's Stone, because they understood that when something evolves, everything around that thing evolves as well."

"Others stumbled upon the stone by accident. They already had the gift, and their souls were readier for such things than the souls of others. But they don't count. They're quite rare."

"And then there were the others, who were interested only in gold. They never found the secret. They forgot that lead, copper, and iron have their own Personal Legends [i. e., destiny] to fulfil. And anyone who interferes with the Personal Legend of another thing [in realizing one's potential] never will discover his own." (Coelho 131)

Thus, it follows that alchemy is more an art of personal transformation than the science of transmuting lead into gold.

Santiago realizes his *rubedo* by the power of love. Self-awareness (i.e., the individual is an integral part of the cosmic consciousness), Self-analysis (dialogue with one's soul), Self-knowledge (one's 'persona' or social role is not one's true identity), Self-identification (one is not a human being having a spiritual experience, rather he is a spiritual being having a human experience), and Action (issuing from one's realization that my work is not against God's will) are the ways to Self-realization. Santiago achieves this (or his *rubedo*) through the knowledge of alchemy. He is able to penetrate through the Soul of the World and turns himself into wind. At the end, he discovers his hidden treasure—Self-realization and the treasure promised to him earlier, but not at the pyramids—it is at the very place he had his dream of the treasure. The wisdom Santiago shares with the readers is the one he had got from the Alchemist: "Where your treasure is, there also will be your heart" (Coelho 132). As we shall discover, Manoj Das's Padmalochan alias Swami Padmananda achieves Self-realization through listening to his heart, self-knowledge, and through genuine submission to God's will in *The Escapist* akin to Paulo Coelho's Santiago, the shepherd boy, in *The Alchemist*.

With million-years old spiritual wisdom of India at the background, the finest expression of which is Sri Aurobindo's philosophy (metaphysics), writes Manoj Das.

Sri Aurobindo has been rightly hailed as the confluence of the epistemology of the East and the West, for a synthesis of these two heterogeneous ways of thought he has achieved which is singularly striking. This fact is differently evidenced in Ken Wilber, perhaps the greatest living philosopher now, who built his *Atman Project* synthesizing many philosophies/psychologies of the East and the West, among which are included Carl Jung's *Individuation* and Sri Aurobindo's *Supermind*. Jung and Sri Aurobindo were contemporaries but wrote independently, unaware of each other. Interestingly enough, their systems hinge on one theme—Self-realization—and they support each other unconsciously, too. *The Escapist* (2001), the author's English rendering of his Odia original, *Akashara Isara* (1997), clearly enacts the theme of Self-realization in an otherwise contemporary socially realistic setting.

In spite of Sri Aurobindo's influence on Manoj Das's *The Escapist*, it does not come under the tag 'Philosophy as fiction.' On the other hand, his protagonist is an orphan boy, who suffers from the trials and tribulations of life, severely exploited by the materialistic world, a weakling who graduates to selfhood through adherence to truth, which comes from the practice of accepting change

through detachment at times and at times from a negative attachment, or simply through introspection and sticking to spiritual values and wisdom. Manoj Das's conviction that if the lotus could be born out of sheer mud and mire through sunlight, why an ordinary individual could not become a self-actualized being through the Grace of the divine parallels alchemy's assumption of lead becoming gold. Let us see how the adventures of Manoj Das's 'the escapist' (i.e., the protagonist Padmalochan) matures into *The Escapist*.

Padmalochan, the orphan boy, leaves 'home' for the town in a very dramatic manner but not like Coelho's Santiago, who deliberately leaves home enticed by a dream. This simple, charming, poor and intelligent boy is used by "Natabar Sir", his teacher to advance his political prospects but situation requires him to go to the town in search of employment. The boy makes a self-analysis:

To be ambitious—playing a clown in the crude circus of ego—was nasty indeed. But despite having grown up as a hapless orphan, I was, unfortunately, ambitious in a puny way. I was yet to learn that in some cases higher aspirations too, bursting out our superficial craving for power or popularity, albeit temporarily, soon to get sublimated into an urge for inner growth. (*The Escapist*, 14-15)

Chance, as we had noted earlier, plays a pivotal role in the novel as it plays in the life of Padmalochan. The author quotes Anatole France in the foreword of the novel: "Chance was the pseudonym of God which He used when He did not wish to put down His signature" (5). At first he takes up a job of an assistant with Sharmaji, a former minister, and on his death Padmalochan reaches at house of Jayant Thakore, a business tycoon, as a suppliant for a job. Thakore absentmindedly tells him to sit down in a chair and the young man obeys him sits in a non-existent chair assuming the posture of *utkatasana*. Ranjita Devi, Thakore's wife, an eccentric but kindhearted lady, sees him in this posture and takes him to be a great yogi with immense supernatural powers. Chance again forces him to act out the role of a sadhu/yogi in spite of the compunctions. It is not only for his own benefit but because not to frustrate the kind lady that Padmalochan has to enact the role of Swami Padmananda. "Padmalochan Pramanik," observes the narrator, "an ordinary boy from an ordinary village named Govardhanpur, metamorphosed into Swami Padmananda" (11). Chance thus flies him away like a dry leaf under the spell of circumstances, leaving the young man always the possibility of making the best out of the worst. It is quite interesting to see how a fake sadhu becomes a true one.

When 'Swami Padmananda' converses with Ranjita Devi with the 'authority' of 'Swami Padmananda', it is very interesting when it comes to respond to Ranjita's question whether several mischievous powers are exercising their

influences on human life:

“There are. But never mind, they play with us as long as we live in ignorance. Once we decide to grow within, every situation can contribute to that growth, can play a helpful role in that direction. But, mind you, they can be justified only in terms of our spiritual progress, not per the rules of profit and loss, pain and pleasure, the standard our ego sets.”

Had a certain truth dawned on me because I was myself trying desperately to find a meaning in the strange situation in which I was? In interpreting her predicament, I had interpreted mine. A peace settled in my heart. No, there was no hypocrisy in me. I was communicating with a sister of my soul. (54)

Compelled by circumstances (mischievous powers?) to act out the role of a monk possessing power to do miracles, ‘Swami Padmananda’ is believed to cure Kumar, Ranjita and Jayant’s only son, whose marriage with his wife Sushie has not consummated yet. The demented Kumar is also a spoiled child. His schizophrenic behaviour torments the beautiful Sushie, who is not at all ready to entertain the frenzy of her so-called husband. ‘Swami Padmananda’ now bears the responsibility to unite Sushie and Kumar as per the request of Ranjita. Unfortunately though, the ego plays a trick: ‘Swami Padmananda’ is himself attracted to the charming woman in Sushie and fancies to *escape* with her to the Himalayas where he visualizes a beautiful ashram, of course not without the good wishes to save her from Kumar. The fake sadhu admits: “She looked to me like a mode of music, a *ragini*, personified” (43). Her devotional song uplifts the Swami to “the sublime plane at which the song and the singer had become inextricably one” (45). The feelings evoked by Sushie is beautifully analyzed by H. P. Shukla in his article “In Search of a Nation’s Self: A Reading of Manoj Das’s *The Escapist*” in the following words:

Obviously, she is not of this world: hers is the charm and beauty that spring from soul and even if she sends to turmoil Padmananda’s grosser being there is nothing of the gross in her. Tied to a mentally and emotionally invalid husband, she has borne her life with a radiant calm. She has touched that plane where pain is just another face of Bliss. She is so much greater than him that Padmananda simply fears her. Even his attraction for her encompasses other dimensions: “Her dignified gait, her dutifulness accompanied by a serene detachment, last but not the least, her dazzling beauty bereft of jewellery and cosmetics, were simply irresistible” (65). Mastered by her superior being and wisdom, he realises that “the real Sushie was a phenomenon

quite distant from the Sushie of my imagination” (142).⁶

The burden of sainthood is very painful and particularly tormenting if one is torn apart by attachment on one hand and detachment on the other. When the affliction of ‘Swami Padmananda’ may be equated with his *nigredo*, Sushie’s spiritual guidance to him and the moral union and understanding subsequently they have, particularly after the honest and sincere admission of ‘Swami Padmananda’ about his false sadhutwa to her, may be equated with his *albedo*. Self-realization could not remain a far dream.

Unconsciously though, ‘Swami Padmananda’ realizes his own weakness ensnaring him. His deep learning of the scriptures and detachment for the way of the world have made him a real Swami Padmananda very unconsciously. Self-pity gives in to prayer and it cleanses him within. In making a fake god man his hero, Manoj Das has sent a message to his readers: How bad one may seem to be, the innate urge to realize one’s Self leaves no opportunity, whether triggered by mere ‘chance’ or through deliberate working, of spiritual awakening when one is really ready. ‘Swami Padmananda’ burns his ego in the fire of self-knowledge, atonement, and his penchant of adhering to truth even at the cost of his life makes him a real god man—Swami Padmananda. In one of the parties, in an ironical situation, he stupefies all by saying: “...”Professor! Neither Scopenhaur nor Bergson nor Nietszsche can satisfy us. We are all imperfect—impatently in search of perfection—and in a state of continuous despair” (126-27). As the last blow to his ego, Sushie spurns his offer to escape with him by asking that “Can anyone follow someone else to the world beyond life?” The thin veil of ignorance lifts as death-consciousness gives a deathblow to the ego. The last remnants of ‘Swami Padmananda’ are born in the fire of self-knowledge and the realization of the truth purges him of all worldly desires. The birth of Swami Padmananda becomes imminent. The ascent of Swami Padmananda is complete when the goons of Jasmine, the wily, crafty secretary of Jayant Thakore, beat him into near-death situation for a piece of diamond in the expectation that he possessed it as he left Thakore’s for good. The realization of death-in-life saves his soul. Death-consciousness, both physical and mental, purges him any trace of ego from Padmananda and he even considers his assaulters to be seekers of truth like himself. Purged of his ego, he surrenders himself to the divine will unconditionally. However, he does not lie. He is rescued by a highly advanced Yogi of the Himalayas and his letter to a friend in the Epilogue speaks of the completion of his *rubedo*: his Self-realization is complete. He is *the escapist* till he is settled in God.

Like Santiago of *The Alchemist*, in which the hero is similarly beaten into near-death, Manoj Das’s Padmalochan alias Swami Padmananda achieves

selfhood. There is no doubt that both Coelho and Das have adopted an ordinary boy as their hero and their novels narrate the physical-psychological-spiritual adventure of the hero in an alchemical fashion—from imperfection to selfhood or totality of the Self. Master artists as they are, the transformative stories of Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and Manoj Das's *The Escapist* underscore the innate aspiration of man to realize the Self and the need of the alchemy of the soul. □

End Notes

1. As of today, *The Alchemist* has sold more than 65 million copies in more than 150 countries.
2. Sri Aurobindo called the Yoga as 'practical psychology'.
3. Manoj Das in his novel *Chasing the Rainbow*.
4. See Samal, p.
5. Cited in <<http://archetypalmind.wordpress.com/2011/07/23/the-alchemist-the-great-way-of-the-body-explored/>> Accessed in March 2012.
6. See Shukla, p 3.

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Human Relationship in the Stories of Manoj Das: A Brief Study

* Bijay Ketan Pattanayak

“There are only a few good story teller left in the world today and Manoj Das is one of them. “This statement of Ruskin Bond appreciates what sort of a literary heavyweight Manoj Das is. In fact, this bilingual literary artist, most acclaimed for his short stories, has earned an adorable niche in the contemporary literary horizon. Exploring the deepest corner of human psyche, his masterly pen in story telling provides great delight and didacticism to the lovers of art and literature, to those who love art and literature not for art’s and literature’s sake, but to understand what life is. The aim of this paper is to reflect, in a bird’s eye view, Mr. Das’s basic attitude to human life and human relationship as depicted in his short stories.

Manoj Das is undoubtedly acclaimed as one of the doyens of Indian short story writing in English. He can be bracketed with Tagore and Premchand. His world has the fullness of human psyche, with its dreams and fantasies, its awe and wonder, the height and sublimity, above all, human relationship as crux of Indian way of life and living. The families he deals with in his short stories are seen in both feudal and civil society and, hence, the types of relationship he depicts range from patriarchal and feudal to the pre-capitalistic. It will not be possible to deal with all the aspects of human relationship in this short space. Hence I have intended to revisit briefly only three most well known short stories of Manoj Das to prove how love plays a pivotal role in patriarchal relationship, brotherhood and friendship.

Mr. Das’s much appreciated story “The Submerged Valley” deftly presents patriarchal relationship, most precisely how the children appreciate their parents when they find them doing their duty by helping the poor and the needy. It presents the psychology of a child and his sense of appreciation for his father’s innate goodness. A dam is to be constructed in a particular area. The people of that area approached to an engineer, the narrator’s father, to stop the construction of dam at any cost. The narrator’s father is a reasonable man and the people have enough faith in him. As he listens to them he

tries to persuade them not to obstruct the construction of dam in the interest of the state. The people express their deep feelings and sentiments towards their holy birth place, but all their approaches go in vain. When the villagers are asked to vacate their places and ancestral habitations, they want to fight against the ruling government with all their might; but when they realize that they are fighting a losing battle they give up. Thus, from the beginning the narrator bears an impression that his father is a hard and cruel fellow without any milk of human kindness. His graveness seems to be an indication of his inner nature. But things are not what they appear to be. The incident of bringing Abolkara in torrential rainy night by the engineer father changes the children's previous estimation of their father. They consider their father to be great because he has risked his life only to save Abolkara. They are elated to say, "Father is wonderful, isn't he?"

In the story "*The Brothers*" the notion of brotherhood as an aspect of relationship is beautifully highlighted. The story deals with two brothers: Bhuvan and Saroj. Bhuvan, the elder brother, is a freedom fighter. He is startled to see many people using patriotism as a means to promote their career. His sense of surprise becomes so abnormal in certain situation that other people look upon him as a mental patient. The younger brother Saroj is a doctor in the West. When he comes home and finds that his elder brother is treated as a mad person, he fails to comprehend the reality of the situation. When he attempts to take his brother to an asylum, Bhuvan gives a slap on his cheek. Instantly Saroj remembers one of the incidents when he was hit by his elder brother for smoking. He also now realizes that his brother is not a lunatic and the latter is still capable to discharge his elder-brotherly duty of rectifying the younger brother's mistake. Bhuvan weeps for his misdeed. Saroj starts shedding tears out of emotional joy since his fear of losing a normal brotherly relationship is evaporated. His sense of profusely exposed when he turns his deepest core into mouth:

"Brother, you must accompany me to my place of work. You will use my earning for the needy. I have no desire to hoard. Once the period of my contact with the hospital is over, we shall be back here and you will lead me into the village. My service shall be your disposal"

Thus, the younger brother not only understands his elder brother appropriately but also extends his heart's love and sentiments and renders his service for his elder brother for ever. The younger brother's promise to come back to village shows his love, care, duty and responsibility towards the elder brother.

The relationship presented through these two brothers shows the mark of patriarchal relationship. The emphasis on the long-lasting and intimate rela-

tionship among the family members has always been given importance in the Indian patriarchal society. The desire to maintain a healthy, intimate and strong relationship is another aspect of patriarchal family. This is clearly seen in the younger brother's attitude towards his elder brother. Though Saroj works in a western society he has not been influenced by the western relationship and bears the mark of his patriarchal ideology being careful and concerned about his brother. Besides, the younger brother's intention to spend his life together with his elder brother portrays the presence of reciprocal bond in the Indian family system.

In his story "*The Rest of the World*" Manoj Das has reflected the notion of friendship and sisterhood between two young girls of two families. Veena and Anjani are two close and 'cheery friends' who have completed their intermediate in second division. Once the two friends go for shopping and buy two sarees of the same design but of different colour. Wearing their new saree they visit their friend Kusum's house. Veena puts on the green one and Anjani puts on the blue. When they visit Kusum's house, her mother appreciates everything about Veena's success to the success of her own daughter though her daughter fails in the examination. Kusum's mother decides to buy a saree of the same colour of Veena. When Veena proposes to buy a saree of the similar colour of Anjani, the lady rejects the idea by saying "No, no, no, no, no. I want nothing inferior to this." Veena understands the hypocrisy of Kusum's mother and therefore protests against her in a round about way. She shows her friendship and respect to Anjani and her parents respectively by giving a fitting reply to Kusum's mother. She says:

"How do you underestimate your parent's value by underestimating their gifts?"

Thirteen years have been elapsed. Veena marries a man working in a private firm in Delhi and Anjani marries a rich man. After their marriage they were separated. But once they come across each other at a textile exhibition in Delhi. Anjani's love for Veena is not reduced. She invites Veena to her house and share each other's plights. Anjani becomes overwhelmed over their meeting and reveals :

"Veena, Destiny has brought us together again, isn't it ? Observe Anjani. As long as we can meet and talk, how do we care for the rest of the world?"

Really, the two intimate friends do not care for the rest of the world. Though the relationship is presented outside the family system here, the story firmly holds the strong notion of friendship sisterhood which are the most fertile ingredients for human relationship in a Hindu family atmosphere. The friendly relationship of Veena and Anjani is often threatened by the hypocritical at-

titude of Kusum's mother, but the strong understanding and pure belief of the two friends have made them successful in sustaining their healthy relationship for ever. In fact, their belief in destiny to keep their relationship alive is more than their belief in the rest of the world. The story marks how the sisterly love between two young girls, who share each other's life in both good and bad times, in delight and distress, instils mental courage to give a damn to the rest of the world. Even the possession of money and wealth, power and self has not able to affect their strong and genuine friendship and sisterhood.

To bring my discussion to a conclusion, I would like to point out that Manoj Das is a master artist in the portrayal of human relationship where the concepts of genuine love, pure friendship and integrated trust dominate over thousands other things in human life and living. □

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THEME OF “INDIANNESS” IN THE STORIES OF MANOJ DAS

* Dr. Sukanti Mohapatra

Manoj Das is one of the foremost of the new generation of Indian writers and one among the few gifted writers who writes both in Odia, his mother tongue, and in English with equal ease and dexterity. During mid-sixties of the last century he appeared in the Indian-English literary sky as a luminous star. He is popular among his readers as a story-teller who is disciplined, economical, has control over the medium and message, over the art and the plot and who has a great penetration into the psyche of his characters. He is a potential writer who makes his readers laugh and be thoughtful simultaneously. He is a past master in the genre of writing short stories. He is internationally acclaimed and his stories are well received and appreciated for their “Indianness”.

“Indianness”, a term which is difficult to define but could be felt, which is at the core of one’s existence as an Indian, which is a sum total of one’s belief, faith, aspiration, and environment is a major theme of Manoj Das’ stories. As an Indian writer, he has never forgotten to reflect on the age old rich cultural and literary tradition of India. He always feels that there are certain truths that are found only in Indian culture and they should be presented to the entire world. That is why in his stories he always tries to inculcate the theme of “Indianness”, the most cherished aspect of his creative vision:

I thought born in a village, born just before independence and hence living through the transition at an impressionable age, I could present through English a chunk of genuine India. Well, right or wrong, one is entitled to one’s faith in oneself, said Manoj Das in an interview ([The Times of India](#) 13).

It is also true that his stories with the theme of ‘Indianness’ are not a conscious effort made by the author to make the same pronounced rather it is a natural trait of the theme which is greatly felt and experienced by a reader.

Mystery, mysticism and occultism are the basic ingredients of ‘Indianness’. In the stories of Manoj Das one can find these elements treated in a varied manner but not at the cost of exhausting the scope of Indian sensibility.

Raja observes: In earlier stories of Manoj Das, one can observe an undertone of typical Indian mysticism pervading the theme, but never showing in the contours of the plot, invariably allowing the reader a range of possibilities from which to formulate his impression and conclusion. ([Language Forum 134](#)).

Sita's dream and her mysterious death just before her marriage. Sita, who is very eager to find a suitable bridegroom for herself, visualizes Rama Chandra to be her real groom. In her dream she sees the same sight as she has imagined before: Rama, as a charming boy but not without his mighty bow and his crown of burning gold, had come to her as her bridegroom, accompanied by a host of child-gods amidst heavenly music (Das [MOMC142](#))

To this dream, her parents laugh, but Sita grows increasingly serious, at last she dies after a slight attack of fever just when her parents are arranging her marriage.

A question as has been raised by S. Samal about the mysterious link between Sita's dream and her death has also been answered by him:

There seems to be an element of mysticism here in that her soul no longer felt it necessary to stay in the world for it was mystically married to her dream-spouse, Ramachandra. Thus it fled and departed for its destination (14)

This mystic faith resumes its curve in the story "Laxmi's Adventure" also. Laxmi, a six year old girl meets God in her dreams. The idol inside the village temple is a living reality for her. She is used to talk to the God in the temple during noon hours when the priest is already asleep and snoring outside the temple. One day, Laxmi in her child-like innocence discloses her heart's anguish over many things she concerns for – prayers through loud speakers, the money-lender's cruelty towards her father, her father's helplessness, her own desire for a frock remaining unfulfilled, her mother's forbearing – everything. Laxmi is a true devotee, believing innocently in the physical presence of 'God' in that idol. She takes away two bananas from a huge bunch of banana thinking that God has told her to do so. She is considered a thief by the priest and the villagers, cannot survive the shock and humiliation and after suffering from fever for three days she dies.

This untimely death of Laxmi like that of Sita's has something mystical in it. Their relationship with God, their departure – all are mysteries from a particular point of view.

Das is of the belief that there are numerous realities beyond the surface realities that our eyes meet. Ordinary human beings for their lack of 'true knowledge' fail to realize it but saints and sages marvel with their realization of various invisible realities and live a blessed life. He clarifies this in his story

‘The Sage of Tarungiri and seven old seekers’.

‘The Sage of Tarungiri and seven old seekers’ is a story about a mysterious sage and seven selfish old men who seek his blessings to overcome the worries and anxieties of their life. The old bearded sage, Tukan Baba weeps all the while and lives in his lonely cave. He comes out of this cave only in full moon nights. His disciple, Meghananda has the mystic faith that whoever touches the feet of this spiritually enlightened sage in that blessed moonlit night and seeks his blessing is rewarded splendidly and all his desires are fulfilled. The seven old men are convinced that there are more things in heaven and earth that are dreamt of in their philosophy. So they make all fictitious preparations to collect blessing from Tukan Baba. But when Baba comes out smiling instead of weeping, a rare occasion in a gap of twenty years, they miss the chance for their material attitude and foolishness.

In the meanwhile, Baba has gone back to the cave. These seekers in their dismay have forgotten to touch his feet. So they entreat Meghananda, his trusted disciple, that Baba should appear to them once again. In spite of Meghananda’s refusal that Baba would never come back again, these old egoistic materialists tried to enter the cave forcibly. Just then a ferocious roar shook the hill and what shone like a pair of tars inside the dark tunnel seemed to grow closer to them. Out of extreme fear they bounced back and rolled down the hill.

There is a spiritual world beyond the reach of ordinary mortal and none can enter into it unless he has purified his heart and developed his soul. The seven old seekers are gross egoistic materialists and are ignorant of the ways of the sages. Baba’s weeping or smiling is too mysterious a thing for them to understand. So they fall and they have to wait for another twenty years during which there can be a lot of change in them to avail spiritual bliss.

In this story mystery, mysticism and occultism are shuffled up in a nice manner.

“The Last I Heard of Them” is the story of seven old men, rich and prosperous, who want to have a short cut to god. A “mystic vagabond” known as Sadhu Lambodar leads them to Hidamba Baba, a non-spiritual occultist who performs miracles. The seven old men forget their true mission and are lured by miracles. They meet horrible outcome of their endeavour to see the men and women naked by some magic drops in their eyes. It reveals the dangerous side of the occult power and its implementation.

Some stories of Manoj Das where mysticism and plain mystery merge in a twilight zone and when the thread of some sort of ‘magic realism’ runs through are “Farewell to a Ghost”, “The Crocodile’s Lady”, “The Bridge in the Moonlit Night”, “Friends and strangers” and “Evenings at Nijampur”

In a particular village, there is a deserted Villa once constructed by the Feringhee Indigo Planters which is believed to be haunted by the spirit of a girl. Nobody has seen her but there are gossips galore around that maiden spirit. But strangely nobody seems to be afraid of her rather she enjoys the status of a very near and dear person to the villagers. This charming ghost would participate in all the feasts of the village. The villagers are sad when the Villa is going to be soon bulldozed to make way for the implementation of some mysterious government project. The villagers ruefully led the ghost to a new dwelling (a palm tree on the outskirts of the village) with the assistance of an exorcist and the favourite playground of the village lads moved with her. At last the narrator of the story finds the palm tree dead, struck by lightning. As it is aptly commented by P. Raja:

Nowhere in the story one meets the ghost. Yet he serves as a magic mirror on whom a variety of minds are reflected, building a little world of rural romance, at once enchanting and convincing ([Language Forum](#) 135)

For Manoj Das, ghosts, imps like supernatural elements belong to some other plane of reality. It seems as if he has a special fascination for ghosts. More or less ghost stories of the author create an atmosphere of mystery as one reads by.

“Friends and Strangers” deals with a mysterious situation in which two friends take each other’s existence as unreal. In a moon-lit evening two friends, Tirhtankar and Sivabrata are sitting on a rock in a forlorn area surrounded by the tall palm trees. They are chit-chatting when it seems to them that their other friend Pramath is walking through a narrow path fifteen feet below and fifty yards away from their rock. They hear him telling them that Mrs. Wilson has already seen him, therefore he must visit her first. They are surprised as they know that the old lady has died since two months. When they go to check with Pramath they find that he has died that noon. These two friends then believe that the other no longer exists and preferred to continue with this unreal situation throughout their life.

“The Bridge in the Moonlit Night” is a story where we meet a similar mysterious situation. Here, the octogenarian Prof. Ashok who spends his time in a dazed state (half-awake and half-asleep) learns about a fact which had happened some sixty years ago. Sudhir, his friend and once a student reveals to him the truth that to his many love letters Meena had responded but he (Sudhir) out of jealousy and baseless apprehension had torn that sole love letter of Meena and thrown it into the moving water below the bridge. When Ashok heard this he immediately leaves his body there and goes in search of

that long lost love letter. Meanwhile, Mahindra, another friend of Ashok and Sudhir arrives there and expresses his surprise over the fact that how fast could Ashok walk and outrun him and reach home while a few minutes ago he has seen him engrossed in looking for something at the dismantled bridge. This is when Sudhir finds Ashok dead. Who was then looking for the shreds of the torn letter. Was it the spirit of Ashok? Such questions are natural to haunt and crop up and the answers are still shrouded in mystery as far as human perception is concerned.

Supernatural presence yet makes another story quite mysterious and unusual. There is the theme of being possessed by the spirit. In the story “Evenings at Nijanpur”, the atmosphere and happenings as recollected by Vikram is quite strange. It is obvious in the following descriptions.

But the strangest experience of his life was yet to come.

Looking for a moment at the picture in his hand, he felt a shiver, for the picture appeared to have suddenly sprung to life and to have become anxious to express itself and, since that was not possible, it was as though passing its personality to Vikram, to act through him. Vikram was unable to shift his eyes from the picture in spite of his feeling of becoming a captive. His outer self had been numbed by the crazy utterances and weeping of the lady, while from beneath his skeleton was emerging an alien being.

Then he uttered a few words – an act the memory of which bewildered him even today twenty years after that fateful evening. He said that he had indeed come to take away the lady with him in a voice which was simply not his (Das MOMC, 89)

The narration here clearly shows how Vikram had been possessed by the spirit of the dead young man in the photograph who was perhaps the lover or the husband of the head mistress of the girls high school. This appeals to the readers' sense of mystery. Life is not certainly a mirror in which everything finds its true reflection. Life is itself a mysterious phenomenon. A writer faithfully tries to reveal that mystery according to his perception and conviction.

The theme of ‘Indianness’ of which mystery is an indispensable part is present in many stories of Manoj Das. Sometimes this is expressed through blind beliefs, superstitions, simplicity of the villagers and some convincing situations. In “Crocodile’s Lady”, a young village girl is believed to have lived a life being a crocodile’s lady in the depth of the river. In fact, she had been dragged by a crocodile while bathing in the river. She was lost for a decade.

When she returned to her parents a crocodile was also found near her house and killed by the villagers. A strange story was woven round her missing that she was married to that crocodile and lived under water. She herself believed in this fantastic twist and turn of the facts-perhaps for her own safety. When she narrated her life as the crocodile's lady to Mr. Batstone, a foreign visitor, the latter seemed to be overwhelmed taking the story as a truthful account of her life.

It is superb story evoking the mysterious and wonderful and her not only the human and subhuman mingle but also the subhuman is humanized and raised to the level of the supernatural as well.

Stories like "The Tree" and "The owl" are raised to a supernatural level by the superstitious beliefs of the people and they have a mystical aura about them. In the novella *A Tiger at Twilight* one will find an abundance of mystery. The atmosphere which pervades the novella and some of the characters and their actions are mystifying beyond the penetration of common intellect.

"Mystery in a wide and subtle sense – mystery of life, indeed, is the core of Manoj Das's appeal", says P.Raja (II). Graham Green confirms it when he has made this remark after reading stories of Manoj Das that his stories "will certainly take a place on my shelf beside the stories of Narayan. I imagine Odisha is far from Malgudi, but there is the same quality" in his stories, with perhaps an added mystery" (Qtd. In Raja II).

The theme of "Indianness" in the stories of Manoj Das has another important aspect also, that is the presentation of beautiful village vignettes.

Most of his stories are set in remote villages. Born and brought up in an idyllic village the writer has richly drawn his characters and settings from the vast pool of rural India. Those who have reviewed his stories never forgot to focus on this particular theme of his work. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar says:

The background is rural India, the changing yet changeless Indian village, or the rather more quickly changing 'our small town' Bholi grandpa, the retired general Valla, the elusive yet ubiquitous Abolkara, the dying undying village tree, Kunja and his kite, the intriguing owl, the well-beloved local ghost, the faded heroine of the local myth about the crocodile bridegroom, the would be murderer, the obsessed avenger-these and other uniquely realised persons and powers are, not of Odisha alone, but of all India (*The Hindu* 15)

Manoj Das's familiarity with different aspects of village life gives his work a certain concrete image filled link with rural India. His stories invariably mirror the "typical" Indian village of the Forties and Fifties: the feudal hierarchical relationships, the simple pleasure, the credulity and the unexpected depths of

wisdom and above all the upheaval round the corner as the village encounters the political and social repercussions of the independence movement.

Das's rural India is painted in picturesque images. An authentic picture of the same is given in the story, "The Submerged Valley":

Our village had several other aspects to it. A lame crow perched on a crumbling stone arch of the temple and cawed on in an ominous way. Nobody ever dared to scare it away. A certain member of the Harijan community looked completely white because of congenital vitiligo. His fond grandparents had christened him Sahib. From some mysterious source he had secured a cork topi of the type the white men used to wear in colonial India. He visited the weekly market sporting the topi and invoked in the throng something of the awe that was due to the real Sahibs who ruled the country.

The trees that stood in front of our school used to appear as human to us as the wandering bull of Lord Shiva. One of the trees looked as if it was kneeling in meditation. Two more were never tired of chattering to each other. If the teacher had scolded or thrashed us, they seemed to be sympathizing with us. At the approach of a vacation they seemed to be talking of the many sweet moments in store for us (Das SE 87-88)

Kasturi Kanthan, a reviewer of the book Farewell to a Ghost : Short Stories and a Novelette, has given a detailed description of Manoj Das's rural settings:

Manoj Das of course, does not identify his locale so specifically but he definitely sets his stories in villages in Odisha-Sapanpur-on Sea, Vishalpur, or Parvatipuri. This rural settings offer an insight into the daily life of these villagers, meandering through lanes and life with an ease which one wishes one could easily emulate. Time seems to stand still in these villages where the teacher "has taught for forty years without having heard of Hegel or Marx or Freud or Einstein or even Bernard Shaw and Charlie Chaplin" (The Crocodile Lady). Untouched by time or progress, no winds of change blow through these villages / stories. The tumultuous tempests, tidal waves, whirlwinds and upheavals of society do not touch these coasts. Nestled in a warm, comfortable and sheltered atmosphere these villages are not riven by the familiar themes of caste wars, tragedy of the landless, exploitation of innocence, industry and integrity. The

~~themes are not of desire or frustration. There is no seething~~

anger or resentment. Voices are not raised against oppression, clamoring for reforms and redressals, if at all they are raised, they are not screams of anguish or pain, but either to question the young zamindar on having shot the “owl of the shrine dead” (The owl) or to shout at the youngsters when they talk of the old banyan tree failing. “what ! The tree fall? How dare you say so?” (The Tree) or to hold a few unreported meetings in the village about the building of the new dam which will replace them. “Must everything go under water, Babu? Are we so unlucky that the cruel hand of the government will so unceremoniously tear us away from our god-given lands” (The Submerged Valley) (The Book Review 27)

Besides this his stories present a myriad facets of Indian scene. They abound in angry rivers that flood villages, small temples on hillocks, jackals, tigers, ghosts and magic. It is primarily the magical and that beyond reason, which attracts the author to the villages. On occasion, this theme is woven completely into better stories generally vignettes of childhood – so that the story is flavoured with a delicate nostalgia for youth and its capacity to believe in the mysterious. In “Farewell to a Ghost”, for example, the narrator remembers with affection a resident ghost in the village where he spent a happy childhood. On one of his trips back to the village, the narrator now adult, finds the palm tree in which the ghost lived dead, struck by lightning. His visit to the village become rarer, “the new generation of village boys were so different, so ignorant. They were just afraid of ghosts (Das 108).

Thus the theme of ‘Indianness’ has been a conspicuous feature and tenor in all the writings of Manoj Das. As M.V. Kamath has rightly pointed it out, “The thing that stands out about all the stories is their Indianness that indefinable quality one first discerned in Mulk Raj Anand and later in R.K. Narayn (The week 1-7)

Like Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan Das deals with contemporary Indian life and situation. But unlike them his realism is not confined to photographic pictures of various contemporary scenes. He studies life deeply right from the very core of its base passions and emotions with a humanitarian outlook. He blends fantasy and realism in his stories and creates myths and legends out of social realism. A subtle comment on human life and situation runs through all of them. □

Manoj Das - an eminent story writer: A study at a glance

* Priyadarshini Mishra

Manoj Das (born 1934) an eminent story teller is recognized as one of the acclaimed writers with his award winning short story writings on human psyche. He is usually regarded as one among the few intellectual writers of Indian English literature. For this artistic talent he is compared with the famous story teller O' Henry. Manoj Das has written several volumes of short stories in English as well as Oriya and he writes in both with a masterly pen. His stories sparkle in humour, irony satire, pathos and sadness. They confirm to all ingredients of a short story. For his artistic construction of plot and delineation of character he has created a unique literature of his own as the best story teller of our time. The writer who received the National Sahitya Academy award in 1973, for his contribution to Oriya literature is still young and his growing maturity is a matter of great hope to the lovers of art, those who love art not for its own sake, but to understand life, death and humanity better to prove their understanding of life.

His passion for story writing produced some of Indian novels' finest masterpieces till date. He is considered as one of the greatest story writers of the 20th Century. His works brought Indian novels on to the international stage, bringing in appreciation and recognition world over. His received recognition broke new ground in Indian mainstream cinema and staggering hits too. If we take a bird's eye view of his achievements we can easily find the list of select honours and awards conferred on him is:

- Orissa Sahitya Akademi Award, 1965
- Sahitya Bharati Award, 1995
- Orissa Amruta Phala, 1996
- Aakashra Isara, 1997
- Prabhanjana; Godhulira Bagha
- Kanaka-Upatyaka ra Kahani
- Sahitya Akademi Award, 1972
- Sarala Award, 1981
- Vishuba Award, 1986

- Sahitya Bharati Award, 1995
- Saraswati Samman, 2000
- Padma Shri, 2001
- Tandralokara Prahari, 2001

Manoj Das has the honour of being one of the most fondly remembered short story writers in the history of Indian entrepreneurship. He has pioneered the Indian genre of science fiction and detective stories. These are but a mere sliver of the honour that this great man has received and each and every one of them has been only a feather in his overcrowded cap. Most of his stories are endowed with uncanny power of delving deep into the minds of innermost recesses of his characters. He has mastered the art of exposing the oddities and eccentricities of human beings in a most lovable fashion. He creates a fairy world of romance, fantasy, mock adventure in his stories. Further most of his stories are 'redolent of the Orissa scene' and even the titles of his copious stories demonstrate the unmistakable hallmark of Orissa: Manoj Dasanka Katha O Kahani, 1971; Dhumabha Diganta O Anyana Kahani, 1971; The Crocodile's Lady: A Collection of Stories, 1975; Manojpanchabinsati, 1977 ; The Submerged Valley and Other Stories, 1986 Cyclones, 1987 A Tiger at Twilight, 1991 Farewell to a Ghost: Short Stories and a Novelette, 1994 Legend of the Golden Valley, 1996 Samudra Kulara Ek Grama (Balya Smruti), 1996 Bhinna Manisha O Anyana Kahani; Chasing the Rainbow : growing up in an Indian village, 2004 Laxmi Ra Abhisar.

This Famous Indian novelist, social activist, short story writer, columnist, travel writer, children's writer, world citizen and philosopher, is a wizard of words who has mesmerized generations of readers with the sheer genius of his writing style and interpretation. The range of the short stories of Manoj Das is wide and it contains purely realistic stories of men and mice apart, a rich variety of fantasies, fairy tale-like allegories and satires. They abound in humour and wit. So far, in "*Cyclones*", humour meets the reader in such an unobtrusive manner that later we enjoyed it in the Swiftian sense – when we knew it not. Employment of humour in "*Cyclones*" also brings a classical analysis of humour into reader's mind – that it is the happy compound of pathos and playfulness—where element of humour has been handled.

The title of *Cyclones* is significant. There is the absorbing description of a physical and political turmoil sweeping the country which is another kind of cyclone and there is the cyclone raging in Sudhir's mind. He is a man, force of time and situation that makes him different from others and placed him in a different situation. A great feature of the novel is its authentic portrayal of rural India on the eve of freedom, in a style that is at once lyrical and real. "A great

novel can combine in itself all the breadth and sweep of an epic, the tension of a drama, the emotional drive of a lyric and the intellectuality of an objective essay, with a simplicity of presentation and clarity of visualization of a novel “Cyclones fulfils these conditions incredibly well.

The short story is a fine literary representation that provides ample scope to the story-teller to go deep into the heart of the readers to mesmerise the beauty of its concept. Manoj Das in his stories handles the short story not only to explore the psychology of the solitary individual but also he explores the ‘mass psychology’ or, “herd psychology”. One of his representative short-story is his ‘Tragedy’ where he portrays the comical as well as realistic treatment of a particular situation. The average male or female is fond of copying other persons, they imitates anybody whom they think their superior in certain respects, however superficial that superiority may be.

Mass psychology is again treated in “The story of Baba Chakradhari”. But in this story the knife of satire is much sharper, the mass shown here is possessed in mania, unlike in “Tragedy”. The mass in “The story of Baba Chakradhari” is not a select audience but it is an assemblage of all the people of a small town. These people were assured of an astonishing fire jumping feat which on account of sudden deterioration of climatic conditions that the organization was not able to present. The man hired to perform the feat himself was afraid. The hired was roaring furiously and to perform the feat would have been too hazardous for him.

A psychiatrist, a social commenter has given us a basket of inexplicable Stories that remain beyond critics grasp as in his first collection of English stories he is about the thin divide between sanity and insanity. Hence the stories of this incorrigible notable writer not only linger but also enlighten reader’s hearts. In his story “mystery of missing cap” he enables us helplessness of human being and pungency of unexploited live. In “The Bridge of moonlit night” and one of his remarkable short stories, “The Submerged Valley” he beautifully brings an outlook to realistic approach of showing human affection. Now we can make a noteworthy remark for him; as he became a successful poet because of his self identification and his acute sense of knowing his surrounding in particular and India in general.

Manoj Das is a voracious novelist who speaks in his mind and inspires other Indian writer to do the same without hesitation. Being Powerful dynamic and prolific writer, he has managed to ruffle a few feathers and taken the nation by storm, with his controversial comments on many of the nation’s burning issues. This man of substance bagged the Booker Prize award almost every major literary award including the Central Sahitya Academy Award, the Sarala

Puraskar.

He is an inspiration for people across faiths and religions owing to his work for bringing joy and hope to the lives of the destitute and the needy. He led a simple life and was devoted to his work; this dedication inspires millions, even today. He is also one of the cases who got admired abroad before being attended at home for elements of Indianness that he poured in his poems. He remains aware and conscious in his poetry writing; as it depletes with resonance of Orissa local sight and scene, way of life. We come across ironic reflection about love, sex and sensuality in his earlier poetry and that of social and political events in the latter poems. He has his dauntless and open mind and a willing ear which help him choose theme for his poetry before he acclimatizes language. In his poetry the theme of Indianness has been very forcefully presented being selected from different nook and corner of the country. The landscape of our country, its culture and tradition loom very frequently. He became a successful poet because of his self identification and his acute sense of knowing his surrounding in particular and India in general.

The range of ideas that Manoj Das employs in his stories has a remarkable significance. One of the recurrent themes in his stories is modern man's over-obsession with sensuality and sense-pursuits. Being "caught in the sensual music" the modern man forgets traditional values and ethical significance of life which has incessantly pursues a perennial titillation. So far the future consequence of such an obsession became the subject matter of many stories like, "The Last I Heard of Them". Here he speaks of seven aged men who set out on a quest, for the sake of their self-quest of a supernatural agency which could aid them in gratifying some primitive, rather, perverse, cravings. Fortunately or unfortunately they found miraculous ointment which made them anxious to use it to see naked female bodies in a club as soon as possible. But they over-reached themselves as they saw, was a spectacle of skeletons pressing upon them from all sides that were a dreadful sight enough to kill the most courageous person.

The same artistic extravaganza is the theme of other stories like, "A Trip into the Jungle", though the technique employed here is different than the earlier. In "The Last I Heard of Them" and in many other stories as well the writer has used supernatural elements to bring home the central idea. But even while using supernatural elements Manoj Das employs a perfect "objective correlation" for the experiences to communicate and to response is about a "willing suspension of disbelief". In "A Trip into the Jungle", however, the writer employs a naturalistic technique as he portrays a group of epicures who are in a strange picnic trip into the forest could have devoured half-roasted human flesh under strong alcoholic influence. However such an improbable and unpredictable climax of the story may appear as the writer has developed

the story originally. One of the very striking features of Manoj Das' writing is to develop each story organically and situation based themes and characters growing out of imagination and presentation of reality which gives rise some superficial events; and the dialogues towards the end of the story are handled with immense care to deal with human passion and emotion.

What strikes most in many of Manoj Das' stories is the unexpected turn of an event or a chain of events takes place. Often the sudden, unexpected turn of an event flashes in our mind like lightning leaving behind a wealth for reflection. In "Mystery of the Missing Cap" the writer speaks of a politician and his rural henchman, who suddenly changed the course of their lives due to an event, apparently quite trivial. The politician, who was a minister, then lost his cap while he was camping in a village. The cap was stolen from his bedroom by a domesticated monkey. The minister's henchman had cunningly invented a story to save the situation, even to elevate the minister with his account, for whom, it appears; he had been nursing immense contempt in his sub-conscious. But the moment of the minister's departure the monkey itself appears with the cap and offers it back to the minister, thus shattering the fictitious account of the henchman. This event, by itself, is quite trivial though the monkey acted just like a monkey, but it contained the potentialities to change the lives of two professed politicians. The real significance of the story, no doubt, is the psychological element of the writer's deep insight into the mysterious workings of the human psyche that characterizes it.

The writer, however, doesn't offer any comments; he leaves us to reflect upon and his motive is obviously satirical. But a very striking quality of the story is the tender regard with which the writer held the characters even if the satirical intent obvious. The story, therefore, is funny as well as sad; satirical as well as melancholic. So is "A Song for Sunday". In this story, the protagonist's "downward march" recalls O'Neil's "The Emperor Jones", though the hero here is innocent and harmless. Mr. Lenka, a humble stenographer in the District Collectorate, wanted to enjoy a joke on Sunday; but the peculiar effect of the joke wrecked his sanity for a lifetime. We have heard of the tragic hero's "flaw" which enmeshes him with a chain of cause and effect until he pays the price of life; but Mr. Lenka's tragedy, though appears like a parody, reminds us of the realities that operate in the lives of men which can destroy one's life even though he might be suffering from no flaw. It is needless to say that we do witness such tragedies very often in real life.

If Manoj Das is least at home with didactic stories, he is most at home with stories dealing with child psychology. Stories like "A Letter from the Last Spring" or "The Substitute for Sitar" are not possible unless a writer has the gift of "negative capability" or complete "de-personalization". In "A Letter from

the Last Spring” the writer portrays a motherless child Reena, and an aged Professor. Both gaze at the passers-by on the road, standing on the balconies of their respective apartments: Reena, eagerly expectant to receive a letter from her dead mother whom she thinks to be still alive and the aged Professor mostly watches Reena, as he feels an inward kinship with her. The last part of the story not only reveals the nobleness of Reena’s heart; but also the way Reena, the young girl, viewed an aged man. Reena thought that the old man also expected a letter from his mother and so he was standing on the hotel verandah for hours and hours, watching the postman. To miss this psychological element in the heart of the story is to miss the real beauty of it.

In the very conception of most of the stories of Manoj Das there is originality and a freshness which delights and appeals to the reader’s mind. But his narrative technique is conventional; he follows the traditional beginning-middle-end structure in each of his stories. His style is certainly remarkable; it is characterized by an Olympian serenity, a rare aristocracy. The writer doesn’t embroider much. In fact, many of his stories are so little embroidered that they appear threadbare. He makes liberal use of irony and humor. A vein of quiet laughter runs through stories like “Mystery of the Missing Cap”, “A Song for Sunday” etc. But beneath the bubbling gaiety there is an undercurrent of pathos. After reading many of his stories we remember Shelley’s lines:

“Our sweetest songs are those
That tells of saddest thought.”

Considering the range of ideas and style of writing, Manoj Das appears to be a writer of unusual gifts. His themes range from the most matter-of-fact happenings of everyday life to the events suggestive of supernatural. While considering his stories we recall the following words of Henry James: “Experience is never limited ... it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider web of the finest silken threads, suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind.”

The writer in two of his recent creations presented the curious ways by which a fiction is accepted by a whole mass of people all true and believed decade after decade. These stories are: “Farewell to a Ghost” and “The Crocodile’s Lady.” The fact that make-believe plays an important role in the lives of men is only too obvious to anybody who has some insight. Make-believe should not be taken as a synonym for self-deception. Make-believe can be healthy; self-deception is not. Self-deception is the vice against which Jane Austen had tirelessly waged her pen in novel after novel. It blights the growth of personality; sometimes even poisons the whole environment. On the other hand, make-believe can be hygienic: it may enrich life, give significance to existence.

~~In “Farewell to a Ghost” the writer has portrayed a village-folk who~~
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had unshaken belief in the existence of a spirit. The ghost supposed to be the spirit of a young girl of the same village, was accepted as one among them: in festive occasions she was offered sweets, food and drink though none had ever seen her. But the depth of their attachment to the “darling daughter” (as they affectionately referred the ghost) became known when, on compulsion, they bade her farewell. The ghost was only a fiction but they were moved by true pathos in bidding her farewell.

In “The Crocodile’s Lady” again the writer speaks of the fantasy building capacity of the villagers. A girl, who suddenly disappeared from the village and was missing for a decade or so made an equally reappearance. Nobody knew about her life in the intervening period. But the villagers, with their creative fancy, had woven a very romantic story round this happening, liberally using elements from folk-stories and fables, to satisfy themselves. In neither story the writer is explicit about the healthy role that make-believe plays in the lives of men as Ibsen is in “The Wild-duck”. But in each story the writer had commented upon the fact that make-believe, which was accepted by whole groups of people until a few decades ago, had fast disappeared from our society. Growing advancement of scientific knowledge definitely has to account for this; but even a greater reason perhaps is the growing isolation of the individual. Make believe now is confined to the individual and subtler in form.

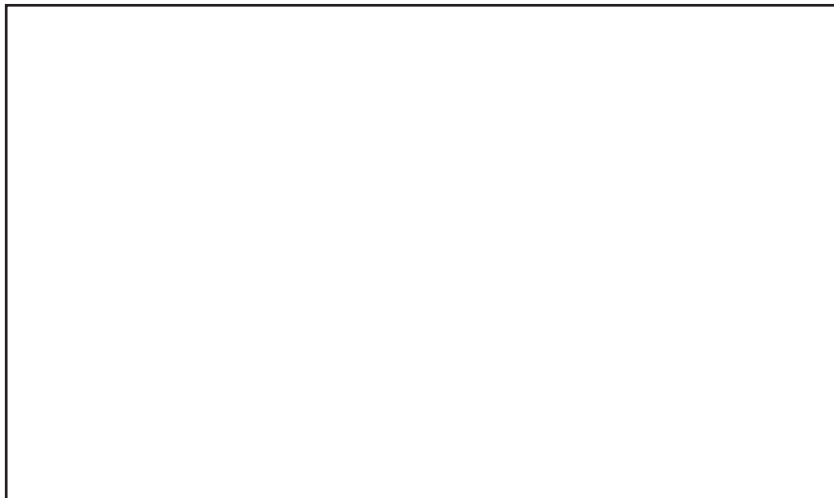
Manoj Das is one of the few writers to have achieved equal success writing in two languages. He has straddled the world of English and Oriya literature with a felicity that is rare. The lyrical style, imagery, simplicity and the magical charm of his writing has won him admirers in every generation and across all countries and continent. Once world famous fiction writer Graham Green said, I have read the stories of Manoj Das with great pleasure. He will certainly take a place on my shelves besides the stories of Narayan. I imagine Orissa is far from Malgudi, but there is the same quality in his stories with perhaps an added mystery.

To sum up Manoj Das as one of the foremost bilingual Oriya writer, with his mastery of dramatic expression both in his English and Oriya short stories and novels displays many different dimensions of human nature from different backgrounds; says that, ‘characters follow the theme of a story and the words are merely added by author to represent the thoughts of the character ‘as a quest for finding eternal truth in everyday circumstances. He has come a long way, from being a bottle seller to one of India’s key spokespersons. His concern for the people of India is truly inspiring and it is without doubt that he will be remembered as a social crusader for years to come. He is one of the few Indians who shone the torch of India high in the world. He is a matter of pride to every Indian novelist or rather every Indian. As a mark of honour, the

phenomenon is known for his brilliant writings all through. □

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Human Relationship in the Short Stories of Manoj Das

* Madhumita Das

Manoj Das has always been compared, as a short story writer, to Hardy, Saki and O'Henry. This is misleading; he is no one but Manoj Das. One of the delights of Manoj Das's writing is that he has not been trained to write like Charles Lamb or George Eliot, but he writes a spontaneous English quite free from imported literary idioms. And he writes as an Indian indeed, with a wholly Indian view of things, from an Indian background.

Manoj Das is a keen observer of the delicate nuances of the manners and modes of human society. The treatment of human relationship is a noteworthy aspect of Manoj Das. Human relationship depicted in Manoj Das has taken many forms: between parents and children, husband and wife, brother and sister and grand parents and grand children. Das reveals his keen observation and clear understanding of relations in the society. He belongs to those Indian writers who have placed primary importance on the family as the most significant institution of the Indian society. The discussion of the following stories presents a clear picture of Das's treatment of human relationship

Though family relationship does not figure so prominently in the stories of Manoj Das, yet the relationship between the mother and the child forms a significant part of his stories. "The Substitute for the Sitar" is the story where motherhood is the theme. The writer presents the most delicate workings of a child's mind. It was an isolated hilly area. When the husband left for the office, the wife remained alone and got mostly bored. At the suggestion of the husband, a sitar was brought home so that the wife could revive her old practices and pass her time with pleasure. On the reaction of the daughter to the arrival of the sitar, the narrator comments:

But then the unexpected came ! Suddenly Meena vaulted into her mother's lap and in a determined bid tried to separate her from the instrument. Nothing would pacify her until she occupied her whole mother. Thus, the first advent of the muse of melody into that arid belt met with a violent rival. (Mystery of the Missing Cap 48)

The story shows how children are exclusively possessive in nature and

nothing can stand between a mother and her child. The vents are recollected years later by the father when he receives the news of his bright daughter receiving laurels as a sitar player. By then the young artist's mother is no more, but it becomes obvious that the daughter's talents have flourished only on the mother's sacrifice of her own pleasure in playing the sitar. The sacrifices and silent absorption of shocks by the mother lie as a backdrop in several other stories of Manoj Das. The backdrop, sometimes prominent and sometimes faint, is "always deep in its effect like the warbling of the sea, be it loud and mild, which always speaks of vastness and grandeur", as Manoj Das conveyed the impression of an Indian mother in his letter dated May 20, 1988.

"The Old Man and the Camel" is a story of an old father who is a revolutionary of the olden days and disapproves of the new politics. Old Basu had a queer fascination for the camel. He missed the long-cherished desire till the last moment of his life. He shed tears when he heard about the camel outside the town. The camel was the only creature in which he found an agreeable counterpart of his own suffering, deception and betrayal. His fascination for the camel remains queer and mysterious.

In the story "The Brothers", the writer presents the notion of brotherhood. The story deals with two brothers - Bhuvan and Saroj. Bhuvan was a freedom fighter. His sense of surprise and silence is mistaken when he finds many using the goodwill of patriotism to promote their career. He is looked down upon as a mental case. The younger brother Saroj is a doctor in the west. When he comes home he is confused to see his brother treated as a mad person. Saroj wants to overcome from the situation by sending his brother to an asylum. Bhuvan hits him in his cheek. They both recall a childhood incident where Saroj was slapped for smoking by the latter. But now he was smoking. Soon the elder brother realizes his blunder and weeps. The sense of brotherhood is manifest here. Saroj's fear of losing his brother is given up. He says his brother to accompany him to his place of work where he shall earn and his brother shall use his earning for the needy since he has no desire to hoard. Love as an aspect of human relationship is another concern of Manoj Das. As P.Raja says: "In Manoj Das' portrayal of human relationship, generally the positive elements like love, and trust dominate over other traits....."(37).

In many stories like "The Love Letter" or "A Transcendence", Das deals with the theme of love to describe the romantic relationship among the characters. In "The Love Letter", Goutam, the research scholar tells a colourful lie that Gita who was a genius in the field of art had left a love letter just before she died at the prime of her youth. As the letter is not addressed to anyone in particular, there are many claimants to it, irrespective of their age and relation-

ship. These people- the vocalist, Prof. Dhar and Pran Chowdhury, the friend of Gita's father were all love-lorn and lunatic. They suffered from illusion or self-deception.

For Das a relationship spreads over years may not mean much whereas one lasting a brief hour may alter the course of one's life. This relativity is made clear in his short story "The Bridge in the Moonlight Night". A romantic relationship between the young college teacher Ashok and one of his students, a shy young girl has been forgotten by all concerned but one – the one who has been the carrier of the young lady's only letter to the anxious Ashok but who had torn the letter to shreds and thrown into the river. After over half a century the affair suddenly surges up in their memory and culminates in a dramatic finale. Manoj Das is one of the foremost writers of the new generation of Indian writers. The basic material of Manoj Das's stories is obtained from his observation of human experiences. He possesses a sublime curiosity about human affairs in abundance, but with great skill and psychological subtlety he succeeds in recreating that experience and revealing its underlying significance.

Although he presents human predicament in his stories, his world is not that dark and bleak. Sarbeswar Samal, in his book *Manoj Das : A Critical Study*, writes :

The stories of Manoj Das are refreshingly free from horror, sex, violence and crudities of life. In one word, they are sublime. His world is not bleak or grim like that of Kafka's harrowing unredeeming picture of human loss, estrangement, guilt and anxiety. On the contrary, it is a self-poised, self-possessed and satisfied world of harmony and symbiosis. (Preface)

The human relationship presented in the stories of Manoj Das transforms the trivial, base and horrible aspects of existence into a meaningful, happy and sublime life. □

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Love, Poetic Justice and the Holiness of God's Creation : A Study of Manoj Das' Novelette *The Fourth Friend*

* Dr. Mrutyunjaya Mohanty

Manoj Das' novelette *The Fourth Friend* presents love in its munificence – friendship, filial love, conjugal love and most significantly, love between three human beings and the ferocious beast – a tiger.

It portrays a story of sublime friendship, a friendship among three friends to which even the impending death cannot thwart. During the flood and at the time of their encounter with the tiger and the snake, their friendship remains steadfast. Even when the perils of death stare them at their face, they do not forget to see the well-being of each other.

Again, filial love in its most unadulterated form, manifests itself in this novelette. P.Raja writes :

There are not many stories by Manoj Das in which the family relationship among the characters is the theme or the plot. However, one relationship that projects itself, though in flashes, but with a sustained prominence, is the relationship between the mother and the child, or, to be more specific, the mother as seen by the child. (31)

However, in this work of Manoj Das, the love of both father and mother for the children and of the children for the mother in particular are presented with all their bounty and purity.

Further, the contamination of the good through love forms an integral part of this novelette. It seeks to establish that sacrifice, which is the breath of love, can not only bring fruition to conjugal love but also transform base metals to gold – evil to good – and proclaim the establishment of a holy order.

But the most significant aspect of this work of Manoj Das is that it endeavours to unfold the probable presence of holiness in the sentient beings, even in the awe-inspiring beast – a tiger. Of course the beast here is a domesticated tiger, but this novelette states, by implication, that ferocious beasts – tigers – could be domesticated, could be made civilised, could be

humanised, and even could be sublimated to the level of the humans. This even tells more – that there is divinity in the beast, as much as it is probable in the human beings. This novelette not only levels the boundary between the humans and the wild animal, but also enables the humans and the beast, through their association with each other to ennoble themselves. Each one in his feeling grows in stature through his association with the other – both complement each other. Here, the humans and the beast coalesce in a perfect unity of harmony, creating a holy order. Hence is the title *The Fourth Friend*. Even the Divine (the stolen image of the Deity), is restored to the human beings through the intervention of this fourth friend, the tiger – a beast. This work of Manoj Das exemplifies the view of Maupassant that literature presents “a vision of it (life) that is fuller, more vivid, more compellingly truthful than even reality itself . . .” (quoted in Allott 36).

This novelette conforms to the concept of the ethical role of literature through the establishment of “poetic justice”. The conception of the term “poetic justice” has been given expression from the dawn of the civilised world in varied forms – sometimes in a lighter vein and often with greater earnestness – from Aristotle through Ben Jonson, Philip Sidney, John Dryden, Thomas Rhymer, John Dennis and many more. The term “poetic justice” was introduced by Rhymer in the year 1678 in his book *Tragedies of the Last Age* and Dryden used this term in 1769 in the Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*. Though expressed in various veins, the term “poetic justice”, in its simplest and most commonly accepted meaning, is that the wicked shall be punished and the just shall be rewarded. It is on this basis that poetry or imaginative literature has often been glorified and distinguished as superior to other branches of knowledge. Philip Sidney writes :

Now, to that which commonly is attributed to the praise of histories, in respect of the notable learning is gotten by marking the success, as though therein a man should see virtue exalted and vice punished – truly that commendation is peculiar to poetry, and far off from history. For indeed Poetry ever setteth virtue so out in her best colours, making Fortune her well-waiting handmaid, that one must needs be enamoured of her. (Chatterjee 16)

In the holy world of *The Fourth Friend* not only is “poetic justice” established, but also the appreciation of the good has received its most vocal pronouncement and prizes in cash. And goodness here not only seeks to embrace the welfare of the human beings, but also extends itself to the safety

of the animal world. Simultaneously, evil is also duly exposed so as to meet its logical end of punishment. But the novelette is conspicuous by its absence of villains and villainous acts. The only villain here is Ghanu Goonda and he has performed his villainous act – thieving the idol of the Goddess – much before the central action of the novelette begins.

‘A technique which the writer masters to perfection from the ancient story tellers is weaving a story into a story. The episode of Naib’s family in *The Fourth Friend* adds greater dimension to its design and reinforces its central theme – the holiness of God’s creation. The transition from the horror of the three friends at the sight of the tiger to the establishment of relationship between them and the wild animal and the succeeding interaction between them have been portrayed so skilfully that it creates the adequate “willing suspension of disbelief” in the reader to partake of the holiness of God’s creation. In the novelette the particular is universalised and the seemingly ordinary is given cosmic significance. But the characters are not portrayed in an absolutely sublime and superhuman context. Minor frailties and small temptations also affect the protagonists. Apprehension of the humans persists till very late in their relationship with the tiger. But, on the whole, this work presents a holy order – a harmonious, happy and just creation.

Friendship :

The novelette opens with the two significant events taking place at Devla simultaneously : cinema and circus. Three friends – Ramu, Jay and Shekhar – have been introduced with their visit to the cinema. Of course, like other mortals, Ramu and Shekhar are victims of small temptation : “The circus had visited the place once earlier and Ramu and Shekhar had seen it. Hence they had inspired the little Jay to follow them to the cinema” (*The Fourth Friend* 1). But they show great examples of love and friendship when, on their way back after the cinema show, they encounter a flood. When Shekhar is separated by the flood from his other two friends, he is not concerned for himself, but for Jay – the youngest of them – and tells : “Ramu, don’t let Jay slip away. It is flood, you know ! “ (*The Fourth Friend* 5). Further, the author reveals each one’s concern for the other : “Ramu, of course, clung on to Jay as tightly as he could, but his limbs were getting numb” (*The Fourth Friend* 5). And Ramu is equally concerned about Shekhar : ‘ “Where are you going, Shekhar ?” asked Ramu, trying to locate him’ (*The Fourth Friend* 5). Shekhar becomes very happy after being reunited with Ramu in the flood. Immediately Ramu shows his concern for Jay and asks : “Is Jay with you ? ...” and Shekhar’s pessimistic thinking shows his seriousness and love for Jay : “Well, if you have lost him, he is just lost ! Forever !” (*The Fourth Friend* 9). Even at the time of their first

encounter with the tiger in the flood, their concern for Jay does not falter. Ramu asks : “Shekhar, do you think our Jay is still alive? “ and Shekhar’s pessimism reflects the intensity of his love for Jay : “I believe he is and he will remain alive until it is time for the tiger’s breakfast” (*The Fourth Friend* 12). An example of sublime love and friendship is unfolded when Ramu and Shekhar, at the sight of the tiger, are prompted to jump into the water, but they do not – only because of their concern for Jay who does not know how to swim :

Ramu and Shekhar had the simultaneous inspiration to jump into the water. But that was also the moment for them to realise how dearly they loved Jay. Could they escape, leaving Jay, who hardly knew how to swim, at the tiger’s mercy ? (*The Fourth Friend* 13)

But this story, apart from putting this friendship to the acid test and elevating it to the summit of glory, also universalises the theme of adversity and love by bringing in another episode that took place some sixty years ago to this incident. That was also another flood – a similar act of the rage of Nature – and though that was not an incident relating to the test of love, it was an instance of the frenzy of Nature transforming itself as the harbinger of love and human relationship. This incident was related to Ramu’s grandfather. The author narrates :

Once – that was some sixty years ago – a flood had carried away his grandfather, then a young man, and had dumped him atop a temple that luckily had a flat roof. He found himself amidst a couple and their daughter, a sweet girl of marriageable age. Grandpa considered himself luckier when, a year later, the girl became his bride. (*The Fourth Friend* 7-8)

Filial Love :

Modern scholarship traces elements of discomfiture in all love, and especially in the love of the mother for the child. Joseph Tennenbaum writes :

All love is based on the sadistic – masochistic, pleasure – pain principle, and mother love, more than anything else, approaches this principle. The urge to punish a child for petty infractions is said to be stronger in the mother than in the father. Her holy patience with the child’s demands on her time and physical strength, the intense pleasure of suffering for the sake of the child, have an uncanny admixture of unholy masochism. (275)

However, the works of Manoj Das in general, and *The Fourth Friend* in particular,

exhibit no discord in filial relationship. The children in *The Fourth Friend* glorify their mothers and there is perfect harmony in the relationship of the father and the mother with their children. In this work of Manoj Das filial love has been portrayed with poignant effect. After the occurrence of the flood and before the three friends reaching their home, Ramu tells : "... we must hurry home. They must be quite anxious on our account – I mean the kind of mothers we have ! " (*The Fourth Friend* 25). When they reach their home they realise how right they are :

Their mothers, announced of their advent, rushed out
with open arms; their fathers smiled and heaved sighs
of relief and discussed among themselves how to call
back those kinsmen who had fanned out in search of
the boys. (*The Fourth Friend* 25)

Later, motherly love is shown with all its intensity. Jay's mother cries with the apprehension of her son's plight when she witnesses the strange conduct of her son – Jay kneeling down and putting his arms around the neck of the tiger. Of course at that moment Jay is entirely preoccupied with the thought of the tiger – if the tiger has harmed anybody. Yet he understands the concern of his mother for him and consoles her saying : "Mother, don't you see I'm hale and hearty ?" (*The Fourth Friend* 43).

The author compares the relationship between the tiger-tamer of the Great Grand Circus and the tiger to that of the mothers of the three friends and their sons. The conduct of both, the tiger and the tiger-tamer, at their reunion after the flood, reveals this. The author narrates it when the tiger-tamer – the man with the impressive moustache, and the Collector – the smiling smart young man appear on the scene :

The tiger rushed out, in the process reducing the
smart young man's smile to a scared grin – to meet
the person behind him.

" O my Timpu ! How much worry you caused
us ! " The stranger who sported an impressive mous-
tache curled upward, said to the tiger exactly in the
manner the mothers of Jay, Ramu and Shekhar had
expressed their anguish to the boys when they were
found. (*The Fourth Friend* 43)

Conjugal Love :

Das' treatment of conjugal love in this novelette bears evidence to his astute craftsmanship of weaving in a story within a story. Meenakshi Mukherjee writes :

The digressional Method is perhaps the oldest device in narrative literature. Weaving in stories within a story or pausing to narrate a parable to drive home a point, these are characteristic devices of the *Panchatantra*, the *Vishnu Purana* and other Sanskrit narrative treatises and of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* as well. (138)

In *The Fourth Friend*, in the story of the Naib's family, we come across a digression from the main theme. *Bipin* accompanies Jay on his (Jay's) return journey to his home from his uncle's place. It is in connection with a crisis that witnesses the Naib's family. Shakuntala, Naib's grand-daughter had been married at the age of seven and now that she has grown up as a young lady, her husband has come there to take her to his home. But he refuses to enter her house unless given a bicycle and perches himself on the spacious verandah of the Naib. He even refuses to look at Shakuntala who regularly brings to him his breakfast, lunch and dinner.

This part of the story is marked by the author's subtle use of irony and satire, directed against the husband. This young man has been given everything that could be given to him as a gift. He pursues the "noble vocation of a teacher in a primary school" (*The Fourth Friend* 35) and yet he is so demanding. This irritates the good and kind Naib who was even ready to give him a milch cow as a gift. Bipin was the person who had arranged this marriage and hence he comes here at this critical time.

This story reinforces the import of the central theme of the novelette – love, sacrifice and the holiness of God's creation. Along with the great love of Jay manifest in his frantic effort to save the tiger from Virdas, the gunman is shown the supreme love of Shakuntala for her greedy husband who tries to "protect her husband's precious life from the tiger, or at least to sacrifice her own life first" (*The Fourth Friend* 42). Here the husband comes to the butt-end of the author's satire. Jay tells : "No, no, believe me, sister Shakuntala, my friend will do no harm to your husband even if he demanded a bicycle ! " (*The Fourth Friend* 42). Das' treatment of the husband justifies the concept of Norman Knox on the function of irony – that there are "many verbal devices that 'say' one thing and 'intend' another and thus invite the reader to reconstruct unspoken meanings" (quoted in Booth 7).

The contamination of the good through love forms a significant aspect of the story. The action of Shakuntala in not hesitating to sacrifice her life for her husband and herself coming between him (her husband) and the tiger transforms the grand-son-in-law of Naib (her husband) who "renounced his demand

for a bicycle – which in fact was not his but his greedy father's demand" (*The Fourth Friend* 47). But the elixir of love and sacrifice is not exhausted here. It strives to percolate to wider spheres. The author implies to state that the significance of the sublime act of love and sacrifice by Shakuntala is not simply confined to the transformation in the individual case of the Naib's grand-son-in-law. The grand-son-in-law also throws a question "to the wide world, which included his father and the tribe of similar fathers" (*The Fourth Friend* 48).

The Humans and the Beast :

Birds and beasts figure prominently in Das' writings. To name a few, it records the relationship between a crocodile and a lady in "The Crocodile's Lady", between a half domesticated monkey and some politicians in "Mystery of the Missing Cap", and between a circus clown and a monkey in "Of Man and Monkey". But Das has an obsession with tigers. In "A Tiger at Twilight" the human being and the beast unite, but it is the bestial that characterises both. Das writes : "Looking at Heera I wondered if she was not the tigress, and looking at the tigress I wondered if she was not Heera . . . I could not know the human from the beast" (*Selected Fiction* 338). It ends in the death of both – Heera and the tigress. In "Birds at Twilight" also the human being and the tiger unite, and again it ends in the death of both – Kumar T. Roy and the tiger. In "He Who Rode the Tiger" the prince obeys the king, his father to ride the tiger and is killed by the beast.

The Fourth Friend presents not horror and death, but the establishment of a harmonious universe, a holy order. The humans and the beast here symbolise sparks of divinity and the relationship between them signifies a holy order. This novelette dissolves the boundary between the humans and the wild animal. It seeks to establish the probable presence of the holiness in the sentient beings, including a wild beast.

The return of the three friends from the cinema show and their encounter with the flash flood synchronise with the separation of the tiger from the circus by the same flood when he was performing on the arena. Flood – the fury of Nature – which some sixty years ago heralded a wedding and now brings in the test of friendship to the pinnacle of love, also now accomplishes a greater act – making possible the human beings' communion with the wild beast in a tie of love.

The beast that this novelette presents is a tiger. The author talks of him as the "gentleman of a tiger" and that "the tiger looked more gentlemanly than all the gentlemen they had known" (*The Fourth Friend* 15-16, 24). Shekhar tells : " Look here, Jay, he is good – very good – like any of us ! " (*The Fourth Friend* 16). This is an assertion of their own confidence ; but more importantly

it equates the goodness of the tiger with their own goodness. The idol in the Devi temple was stolen after which it lay desolate. But the so called beast – the tiger – restores the Goddess from the truly bestial – a human being – who had stolen the Goddess. However, the author does not universalise the goodness of tigers, as much as he does not universalise the depravity of human beings. The author tells a story of the three wizards who restored a dead tiger to life, and the tiger then devoured all three of them. Likewise, he presents Ghanu Goonda, the thief who steals the idol of the Goddess, but then juxtaposes him with Ramu, Shekhar and Jay. The author wants to reveal the presence of the Divine, both in human beings and in other animals : “ . . . this tiger was surely different !” (*The Fourth Friend* 21), like Ramu, Shekhar and Jay.

The goodness of the tiger is reinforced when the story unfolds, towards the end, that he (the tiger), despite his love for the three human friends – Ramu, Shekhar and Jay – does not forget to obey his Master – the tiger-tamer of the Great Grand Circus : “At a hint from the stranger with curled moustache, the tiger quietly entered the cage” (*The Fourth Friend* 44). The tiger is not true only to his newly found friends, but also equally faithful to his old Master.

What is very much touching in the relationship between the three human beings and the tiger is the self-contentment of the four friends in the relationship and the mutual respect for each other. When Jay, during their journey on the boat, covers the tiger with a shawl, the “tiger, quite conscious of the elevation wrought in its status by the shawl displayed a dignified gait” (*The Fourth Friend* 25). The author writes that the same is true about the three human friends. He begins narrating about Jay and then writes about Ramu and Shekhar:

...surely he had added considerably to his stature during the few hours past ! Ramu and Shekhar could not but appreciate the fact that very few heroes on earth could drop themselves right into a tiger’s embrace and emerge unscathed, and fewer still could have the courage to pack a tiger in a shawl. (*The Fourth Friend* 26-27)

The three friends even take tigers as an ideal , a model of determination. On the issue of overcoming their hesitation to gag the goat, the author describes the feelings of the three friends thus : the “time for hesitation was past ; they were the tiger’s friends ; to a certain extent they, too, must act like tigers ! “ (*The Fourth Friend* 28). It is not only the particular tiger that is referred to, but the species of the tigers. Human beings and the terrible beast merge in a unity.

However, there is often the human apprehension to be devoured by the tiger. The dread of wild animals for human beings is pronounced by the author in the lines : “The village had known floods and mild earthquakes, but tigers ?

Never !” (*The Fourth Friend* 20). Though this apprehension of the three human friends gradually evaporates through interaction with the tiger, yet it continues to intermittently exist till very late in the story. Though very early in the story Jay’s life is saved by the tiger, yet he is not comfortable with him (tiger) for quite some time. The gulf between man and beast does not altogether bridge up for a very long time. Having been back to the village from his trip to Sumanpur, when Jay does not find the tiger inside the sanctum sanctorum of the temple and finds someone lying in a corner, he becomes apprehensive : “Had the tiger, in a sudden spurt of hunger, eaten up one of his friends and flattened the other and run away ?” (*The Fourth Friend* 37).

The novelette also implies to state that physical separation between the humans and the wild animal is inevitable. Despite the great love and understanding between the three friends and the tiger, this feeling captures the thought of the three from the very beginning of their growing relationship. Ramu tells : “ I know that the Collector is camping at Devla. As soon as the water recedes, we must proceed there and inform him about our friend” (*The Fourth Friend* 21-22). And the end of the novelette exemplifies it.

But this human apprehension – a minor frailty – is insignificant when judged with reference to the broad contours of the structure of the novelette. Rather it lends credibility to the story. And the physical separation of the tiger from the three human friends does not in any way diminish the intensity of their relationship. On the other hand, it holds aloft a sanguine hope of the existence of a harmonious universe. A study of the relationship between the three friends and the fourth friend, the tiger from its genesis to the end of the novelette bears testimony to this contention.

The flash flood brings the three friends and the tiger together. The tiger who appears as the messenger of death to the three friends soon becomes their fourth friend. The first gesture of love and friendship is shown by the tiger. He first saves Jay from a cobra and then rests him (Jay) on his chest when he (Jay) falls down from the tree, thereby protecting him from further fall. And the three friends reciprocate this gesture in a hundred ways.

The communication between the human beings and the ferocious animal takes place through looks : “ . . . the tiger, by his look at Ramu and Shekhar, seemed to suggest that they ought to take charge of their friend without any further delay” (*The Fourth Friend* 15). Look – the language of silence – creates wonders in tying the knot of love between three human beings and a wild beast, the tiger : “In the long silence that followed during which the tiger looked at them again and again and they looked at the tiger, Ramu, Shekhar and Jay had begun to feel that they were no longer three friends but four” (*The Fourth Friend* 16). The horror outside is compensated by the glorious attribute of the

inner self – feeling of universal love :

The clouds looked fearful and the sun was struggling hard to shine through them. The familiar landscape had suddenly become alien to them. Amidst all this they were waking up to the thrill of conquering their fear for the most dreadful situation imaginable – their proximity to the tiger ! (*The Fourth Friend* 16-17)

The dreadful outer nature is juxtaposed with the beautiful inner nature.

Communication and relationship grow up between the humans and the tiger. In response to Ramu's good gesture of offering three fishes to the tiger, the tiger raises the right forepaw in appreciation. The tiger also casts separate looks at each of the three human friends in recognition of their gesture of offering fishes to him. Jay, who feared the tiger most, spells out what his other two friends, including himself, feel when they three are about to leave that place in a boat : "How can we leave him behind ?" (*The Fourth Friend* 20). It is again Jay who gives the idea of fixing the tiger in the Devi temple – to protect him from the wrath of human beings.

The concern of the three friends for the tiger grows. During their journey on the boat, to keep the tiger out of the sight of others, they "took care to avoid going closer to a couple of other boats..." (*The Fourth Friend* 22-23) and Jay squeezes the water out of a cotton shawl that is drifting away and covers the tiger with it. Ramu and Shekhar warn Jay not to speak a word about the tiger to anyone.

When the three friends assemble after their meals, they ask one another about the tiger's lunch and each one of them produces an item from the pocket – Ramu a banana, Shekhar a cucumber, and Jay a pouchful of puffed rice. They are concerned about the type of food the tiger would relish. Formal religion gives way to the religion of love. The three friends speculate over the right kind of food for the tiger – the meat of a lamb, or a goat, or a fowl, even though they are Vaishnavites, for whom the mention of a chicken or an egg is deemed to be a sin. They even go to the extent of sacrificing a goat and rationalise to themselves to "commit a minor crime for the sake of a lofty cause" (*The Fourth Friend* 27).

After common deliberation among the three friends, Jay even proceeds to his maternal uncle's house, a distance of five miles from their village and "had to cover a mile by a *dinghy* and for the rest, had either to plod through the mud or take detours" (*The Fourth Friend* 33). And all this strain is undertaken only to consult Bipin about the proper food for their fourth friend, the tiger. Bipin lives there and is supposed to be the most knowledgeable person

in the region about tigers since he was once working in a zoo. But no useful information could be obtained from Bipin and the writer explodes the myth of Bipin's knowledge of tigers. Bipin only engages himself in braggadocio, narrating how he tamed ferocious tigers. He circumvents all the questions of Jay relating to a tiger's food. The nature of a tiger's food remains a mystery until the very end. Towards the end of the story the tiger-tamer of the Great Grand Circus feeds the tiger with "some cake-like food he had brought" (*The Fourth Friend* 44), but it is not told what stuff it is made of.

Falsehood, showmanship and superficiality come under the scathing attack of the author. When the tiger enters the village in the absence of his three human friends, there is panic everywhere. Having just been back from his uncle's house Jay comes to know about it and implores Bipin to take care of the situation along with him since he (Bipin) is the only person who is known to have ridden a tiger in the past. But Bipin is seen "retreating", "panting", and "sweating" (*The Fourth Friend* 38) and in a great hurry he runs away into the multitude of women and children.

Ramu and Shekhar are marked as much by their love for the tiger as their presence of mind. When they hear news about the contemplation of the people of their village to kill the tiger and summoning Virdas, the jackal-killer for the purpose, they immediately decide to seek the help of the Collector as the only means to save their friend. So, they hurry to Devla "running through knee-deep water most of the way, covering an hour's distance in half an hour" (*The Fourth Friend* 45).

The intimate relationship between three human beings and the tiger with its divine and emotive significance has been very well described through the carrying of the cage of the tiger to half a mile where the jeep is waiting to take him to the Circus. Ramu, Shekhar, Virdas, Bipin and the two sepoys carry it ; Jay, falling short in height, is "content to walk under the cage" and almost "the entire village followed them" (*The Fourth Friend* 50). This human procession in the honour of the tiger is amply reciprocated by the gesture of the tiger's eyes which are "fixed on his three friends" (*The Fourth Friend* 50). The sublime human action of tear generated for the love of the animal and the still more sublime bestial action of suppressing it offer a fitting finale to the novelette : "Jay, Ramu and Shekhar had to make tremendous efforts to suppress their tears, for they supposed that crying would not be in keeping with their status as the friends of the tiger ! " (*The Fourth Friend* 50).

Poetic Justice :

The novelette presents a world where goodness is appreciated – goodness that embraces the welfare of human beings as well as the safety of the

animal world, and goodness that is manifest not only in the human beings, but also in the wild animal. It does not also allow evil to prosper, and exposes it to its punishable state.

The story presents the confession of Ghanu Goonda of his crime of dislodging the idol from Her seat in the Devi temple.”...he had hid the image in a hole in the darkest nook of the sanctum sanctorum itself” (*The Fourth Friend* 45). Ghanu Goonda now intends to shift it to the town when he notices that for some reason the three boys are interested in the temple. He will sell it to a gang for a handsome amount of money and it shall be smuggled out of the country. But it is the beast, the tiger who becomes the protector of the Divine for the humans. Ghanu Goonda feels that “it was the wrath of the goddess that had taken that terrible form and was about to wreak vengeance on him” (*The Fourth Friend* 47). That makes him unconscious which finally leads to his confession before the Collector.

A very significant aspect of the novelette is the appreciation of good deeds –not silent, but vocal appreciation of them. Shakuntala’s husband, the Naib’s grand-son-in-law, following his transformation from evil to good, becomes so vociferous in his pride for his wife that she is driven to embarrassment. The Collector eulogises the three friends as the pride of the country and praises the valour of Jay and the presence of mind of Ramu and Shekhar. The crowd applaud it. The Great Grand Circus announces “a reward of two hundred rupees for the person or persons who would give them any information about the tiger, leading to its recovery” (*The Fourth Friend* 49-50) and that goes to Ramu and Shekhar. The Collector rewards Jay with hundred rupees for his “exemplary courage” and tells that “their virtues cannot be measured in terms of rewards” (*The Fourth Friend* 50). The story aptly culminates in singing the glory of God by the crowd–‘a thunderous shout of “Haribol” ’ (*The Fourth Friend* 50).

On Manoj Das’ story “The Crocodile’s Lady” Sarbeswar Samal writes that it is a “moving saga of love and sacrifice . . . of the romance between the human and the subhuman i.e., between the crocodile’s lady and the crocodile” (19) and that it is a “superb story evoking the mysterious and wonderful and here not only the human and subhuman mingle but also the subhuman is humanised and raised to the level of the supernatural as well” (28). But this story only narrates the love relationship between a female and a male – the human being, a female and the crocodile, a male - and this relationship is also not free from taints. It does not present the all-inclusive love and the love that extends beyond the physical and hence does not evoke the feeling of universal love and transcendence in the reader as in the case of the novelette *The Fourth*

Friend.

Manoj Das' novelette *The Fourth Friend* celebrates the triumph of universal love and acknowledges the presence of the Divine in the sentient beings, including the wild beast. It preaches the gospel of love, sacrifice and goodness and proclaims that harmony and justice are established in God's holy creation. □

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Chasing the Rainbow: A Search for the Identity of a Village

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Sankhari, the village by the sea in Odisha (to be exact northern part of Balasore district) that forms “the main backup of the events. Episodes, and characters” (Preface to Chasing the Rainbow, xviii) narrated in Chasing the Rainbow” Growing up in an Indian Village, is not a fairytale world “as would be evident from the accounts of human misery and collective tensions described in a few chapters”(preface,xvii-xviii). But the magic of Manoj Das’s narration and the vision he “had had as a child and a young boy-a vision that was by all means subjective” (xvii) make one feel that it is a fairytale world. Is not a world “where a child could run across a green meadow studded with palm trees or along the ridges of lakes teeming with red and white lotuses, aspiring to catch the end of a massive rainbow spanning the sky” (xviii) a fairytale world? Is not a world where Dolly, the ghost plays with the brother of an inmate of Dolly Mess; where Bagah, the tiger of the village goddess, pays a daily nocturnal visit to the temple backyard to partake of the Prasad; where Vasihnav Baba lives in Kalia’s hut with child Krishna (Kalia) talking to him a fairytale world? And this, indeed, gives a unique identity to the village Sankhari which is any remote village in India, of course, with characteristic differences. It should be noted here that the other villages described in the book, namely Jamalpur, Jaleswarpur and Mirgoda seem more an extension of Sankhari than separate villages. The other place described in this book, i.e.”Gunupur in the hilly and sylvan district of Koraput” (xviii) is not brought into this purview of this study.

At the same time, it is a real world of joys and sorrows of life. It is a world of warm human relationship where a woman looks upon a child as “a child of the village and not the exclusive responsibility of any particular family” (preface, xviii). It is a wonderful world of sublime reality where a smiling mendicant continues to remain “unfailingly happy” (xi) even during the terrible famine of 1940s because “he knew how to silently share the happiness of others, to be happy when there were causes for someone else to smile and thank Providence” (xi). It is a world of strange human beings where a hungry, limping

and stooping father, during the famine, carries the bagful of rice to the house of his daughter who had stolen in the same bag and was caught red handed by villagers. "Human misery and collective tensions" (xviii) fail to dampen the warmth in the heart of the villagers. This warmth in human relationship gives a distinct identity to the village Sankhari.

The location of the village creates, to some extent, an ambience of a fairytale world. Sankhari, the village by the sea, is one of the last village at the edge of our state. It is quite a distant and isolate place "25 miles from the railway station at Jaleswar and 7 miles from Batagram, a muddy spot flanked by paddy fields where a fair-weather bus, launched at Jaleswar, terminated its 18-mile long voyage" (preface, xviii). The rows of tall palm trees in the ever-green pastures between the sea and the village, giant sand dunes covered by varieties of creepers, the sea spreading under a starry and milky sky appearing as profoundly conscious as a great goddess, two natural lakes – the smaller one abounding in red and the other teeming with lotuses provide the village a fairy world surrounding more vibrant. Another legend about the mysterious, timeless Bagha of Mirgoda, the tiger of the village goddess, who she had "once rescued from the mad whirling waters during a primeval deluge" (Chasing the Rainbow, 83) contribute to the same air of mystery. Jamalpur of the river Subarnarekha flanked by mile of wasteland and acres of paddy fields and having the company of "varieties of supernatural beings" (ibid 65), Jaleswarpur that seems to be a floating colony in the sea of sand and moonlight form the parts of the same world. Many remote Indian villages have such distinct peculiarities. One example is Halasangi, a village in Bijapur district of Karnataka, "situated amidst the ruins of a medieval fort" (xiv). By the year 1965 it was a village of peacocks where "along the village streets proud and heedless peacocks ambled about side by side with men, women, children and cattle"(xiv). Of course, presently the peacocks are no more in the village.

Love for native has inspired Manoj Das to recreate it in chasing the Rainbow. He has expressed his love for the village in no uncertain terms. When he was ten he was sent to the Biswanath Academy at Jamalpur for higher studies and was lodged in the hostel. He writes fervently: "Only then I realized how deeply I loved my village. If the bus service remained suspended for some reason, I would, accompanied by a servant, plod through mud, water, and sand all the 26 miles as soon as vacations began" (Chasing the Rainbow, 6). All the "experience and impressions "narrated in this work were gathered between the narrator's fourth and fourteenth year of age " (preface xviii). This teenage love for his village gives birth to a nostalgia which has been "a driving force' behind this work, or as the narrator asserts, behind his "recreating these

lost moments, situations, and characters, “This love also results in a sense of fear that these will be lost to a future and the narrator does not want them to be lost. The “real inspiration” behind this work is, as he puts it, “the fear that they will be lost to a future that is bound to be so different from them” (xvii)

In the process of this recreation, the village ceases to be an inanimate stretch of land and becomes a living being. Like human characters, Rangada (a stretch of the narrator’s family land given to the cultivation of watermelon, cucumber etc. mentioned as ‘Baniabadi’ in the Odia version of this book), two natural lakes teeming with red and white lotuses, the sand dunes “continuously refashioning themselves” and always “covered by varieties of creepers yielding (us) delicious berries” (Chasing the Rainbow, 3), the sea [which was “not only vibrant with life, but also, it appeared, as profoundly conscious as great, if awful, goddess” (Chasing)] etc. also became living characters. At times it seems the book is not the narrator’s reminiscences, but the autobiography of the village and the narrator appears to be the atma-purusha of the village.

Nesting at a place where the ocean, the sky and the earth unite mysteriously and having the company of the characters like the woo, the lunatic, the talking kalia (child Krishna), the Lanjkanid (meaning half tailed, it is the name of a monkey), the tiger-cub the ghost of Dolly, the smiling mendicant, Nagar-the tribal youth, the cursing mendicant, the tiger of the goddess (Bagha) the village seems to be a dream-world. To put it other way, with many unforgettable characters and situations Manoj Das has created a world of his own- quite living and fascinating. The touch of reality and the wonder of dream make it a unique world and once you enter this world you can’t resist but become its willing inhabitant. This is more a tale than an account. The narrator goes on telling the tale – it may be about the terrible cyclone and the consequent famine, the nightmarish dacoity or about the ghost or the woo – with unabated charm and we continue to “listen like a three year old, the mariner halts his will” (P.S. Sundaram, The book review).

The narrator moves from reality to fantasy and vice versa with a natural ease and reader accepts him with equal ease and willingness. His fantasy is not outrageous nor is his reality. Of course, his reality is completely based on human experiences. But what is special is that he looks at human experiences from a different angle, to put it circumspectly, he looks into the heart of these experiences. In the chapter “The Cyclone”. Annapurna, Raghu’s daughter, had stolen at night a bagful of rice from her father’s house he had secured “by pledging his land to one of the local landlords” (Chasing15) during the terrible famine and was caught red handed by some villagers. The initial shock melted after the lapse of some silent moments and at last the father himself carried the bag to the daughter’s house. The narrator’s inward look discovered

the loving father, who seems to be an angelic personality from a fairytale world, in a disheartened and disappointed father who very much belongs to our earth or Sankhari.

In the chapter “descent of Freedom an a sandy Stretch”, while describing his experiences of Jaleswarpur days the narrator takes us to “an aged women, arms akimbo, ready to fight “(Chasing150). She is the owner of a tiny pond inside a grove where the narrator went stealthily to take bath in a summer. Naturally this surreptitious act muddied the water of the pond. The sharp-tongued woman warned him never to come to the pond. On the day of his final departure from Jaleswarpur, when the narrator meets her and reveals his innocent deception, she comes close and gives a “smile of innocent amusement and love” with these words of affection and blessing – “How naughty you are! Live long, my son!” (chasing.....152). Suddenly a being of our muddy earth becomes a denizen of a fairytale world – so unbelievably sweet! And the narrator’s observation makes her more so – “where is a woman without an Aunt’s heart!” (Chasing150).

In this work, the borderline between reality and fantasy is very thin, at times even invisible. Sometimes reality borders on fantasy; at other times fantasy appears to be real. The book abounds in many such examples. One is Dolly’s presence in Dolly Mess described in the chapter “The One Left Behind”. Dolly is the deceased daughter of the Bengali assistant headmaster. The clay house where he lived before her death, is converted into Dolly Mess and her presence is felt here in various ways. Her apparition appears in the dream of a new inmate. An eerie scream arousing a boy from his afternoon siesta and saving him from a possible attack by a cobra, surreptitious opening of the door by invisible hands are also attributed to Dolly. But the incident of Dolly playing hide and seek with Ravi, the younger brother of an inmate Mukund is really intriguing. The whole incident seems to be a fantasy. The next moment one feels it is real.

The ecstatic world of Vaishnav Baba (in the chapter “The Repentant Deity”) is really wonderful. It is too hard to dismiss it as a fantasy world, it is equally difficult to accept it as real. When Vaishnav Baba asks one, “Don’t you see how mischievously he is smiling at you? “(Chasing ...61), he feels like responding in the assertive. The frontier between the reality and fantasy melts. Vaishnav Baba’s ecstatic vision permeates one’s whole being. In the chapter “The invisible Radha”. We encounter an amazing character-an old woman, a real flesh and blood character. After watching the drama she was pining to see her Radha and Krishna and intensely desired to take them home to “Wash their feet, bedeck them with flowers feed them with banana, coconut and jaggery”. The narrator could understand her feeling. He explained to

her, “Granny, what you have seen in the Yatra, in the persons of two boys like us, are the true Krishna and Radha. And you have already taken them inside yourself. They are there. What use waiting for two human dummies? “As he watched her, the old woman was growing indescribably beautiful in his vision. The narrator describes, “It was as if I had a glimpse of the mythical Radha. She was a princess of the realm of consciousness. More than the sleeping princess of the fairy tale, this prince had already felt the awakening touch of the golden stick.” (Chasing, 120). An old woman of this muddy earth becomes a woman of the fairytale. Many such characters who are ordinary and at the same time extraordinary make an ordinary village situated in an obscure corner of Odisha an extraordinary place, through them the village acquires an endearing place in the heart of the readers and a glorious identity.

In his unique travelogue *My little India* Manoj Das has created other-worldly atmosphere while narrating many significant places in our vast country. He has not only resorted to their forgotten identity to these places, but also added a new aroma by passionately associating them with legends and tales and factual history told with “all the warmth of the whisper of gossip” (*The Literacy Criterion*, Vol XLI, 66). In that work the canvas is much wider. Here, in *Chasing the Rainbow*, he narrows down the canvas to a village and some other nearby villages. But the warmth of narration is not less with legends and tales interspersed in the narrative. Rather the whole thing is told like a gripping tale. The village, at one moment, is very much a real place of this earth and, in the next moment, it changes into a fantasy world. This capacity to unite both the worlds gives the village a special identity. But in both the cases, the reader lives in the village, at least during the span of his reading, very intimately. The village becomes a special place to live and to love. □

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Manoj Das' India: A Study of Some of His Short Stories

* Aditi Chatterjee

A prolific Indian writer, Manoj Das has enthralled the imagination of his readers through his short stories. The unique intricacies, typical of the Indian social life, pose a major hurdle for Indian writers who find it difficult to express these minute details in English. Manoj Das has not only overcome this hurdle, but through his writings he has adopted a style of presenting Indian life without any distortions which makes his short stories even more interesting and enjoyable and has imparted a universal appeal to them. P.Raja writes: "Manoj Das' short stories are internationally acclaimed, published in noted magazines and anthologies in the West and praised by distinguished writers like Graham Greene, H.R.F. Keating and A. Russell" (2).

His works can well be considered as a touchstone for the upcoming writers who, after a thorough reading of them, will find it much easier to portray the otherwise untranslatable nuances of Indian conversation and ways of life perfectly. P.Raja aptly states: "The short story form seems to be peculiarly suited to the mirroring of Indian life since the writer of it can choose any one part of life and deal with it with the attention, care and mastery which it requires" (1).

The mystic village environment coupled with its natural beauty is presented with precise accuracy in his short stories. As we see in "The Crocodile's Lady", he manages to transport us, along with Dr.Batson, "the real Sahib" (*Selected Fiction 18*), to a land far far away as though in a fairy tale - a land where "miles and miles of marshland and sand tracks" (*Selected Fiction 17*) elude the sense of time and space. The writer narrates : "This was before our villages suffered the intrusion of huge red triangles, glorifying birth control, politicians preaching patriotism, and billboards on virtues of small savings and cigarettes, not to speak of loudspeakers blaring from community centres" (17).

This is a world where everything is predestined. Nothing ever has occurred which could not be predicted. The appearance of the real Sahib has inspired the awe of the rustics who could not stop gaping wide-eyed at him. But the awe-inspiring "Sahib" is himself captured into the mysterious environment created by the villagers and he cannot resist himself from falling a prey to their fantasies by asking, "do all these people believe in ghosts?" (*Selected*

Fiction 18). And definitely, the answer leaves the Sahib spell-bound, who can only utter the word "Fantastic".

The story narrated by the old woman transports us into a mystical world where all reality is temporarily suspended. Like any good folk lore it captures our imagination, a world which can be fathomed by heart and rationality. Surely, in his writings, the otherwise perfectly average Indian village attains the power to bewitch minds. The writer states : "Years later, the professor wrote to me from his city of skyscrapers: 'Often I pass into a reverie remembering the days and nights I spent in your village. Surely, I was under the spell of a mantra (who uttered it?) for a brief time. Fantastic!'" (*Selected Fiction 25*).

If this mysterious village environment can bewitch our hearts, it can prove to be fatal, to all those who disregard it, as we see is the case with the landlord's only son in "The Owl". Whatever we may want to name it, "senior-most resident of the village" (*Selected Fiction 27*) is a strict disciplinarian who would punish the slightest slip in one's conduct rather severely. The "fearful possibilities" (*Selected Fiction 26*) of such an uncalculated step is enough to waver the logical reasoning and sound judgement of the young graduate in law. The poor man is scared to his death.

This is a post independence era, where the people have dared to question the rule of the zamindar. The outlook of the villagers has changed, but not drastically. They still find themselves petrified at the deed of the zamindar's son.

The villagers do not exactly disclose his fate, but it is in their silence that the inevitable is heard with clear precision. The possibility seems to become a grotesque reality when nature itself tunes into the mood of the villagers. Here nature is presented as a character which gives a basis to the beliefs of the villagers. Thus the superstition weaved into the minds of the older generation through a series of events only becomes more pronounced with the death of the zamindar's son. P.Raja writes: "Any day can be the day of death for any one and no extraordinary disease or situation is necessary for that" (7). But the owl is like the deity of the village, omnipresent, whose seniority cannot be questioned and anybody who disregards him will be annihilated. Here we see that the age-old Indian way of life still dwells in a wonderful, mysterious and fascinating environment.

The sense of belonging and sharing, a part and parcel of a typical Indian village life, is predominantly noticed in the short story "The Tree". In an Indian village, every animate and inanimate object becomes an important aspect of the village life without which the village becomes incomplete. The simple villagers are emotionally attached to the tree which has become a part of their daily life.

The river is described as a living pet of the villagers who has suddenly lost all control of itself. The writer describes: "The villagers felt scandalized every time the familiar tame river expanded and grew alien. It shocked them; as if a docile domestic animal suddenly had gone crazy, behaving wildly and not responding to any amount of endearment....."(Selected Fiction 57).

So when the tree is about to be engulfed by the otherwise "tame river", the villagers wish to save it. Various schemes are plotted by the elders of the village and are concerned about it and wish to do something. The tree is no ordinary tree. It is a goddess. As though through a little window the writer takes us back through time where we can see and decipher why this tree has held such a significant position in their life. This tree is ancient and legendary, and the villagers hold on to it as the reminiscent of the bygone era, the "Era of Truth"; it is "the oldest institution in the village" (Selected Fiction 58). Anything that is ancient at once attains supernatural significance in the Indian villages. Thus the tree, by virtue of its age, has ceased to be a normal tree, but has evolved into a goddess loved and respected by every inhabitant of the village.

When the tree finally gives way, the villagers consider this to be a conscious decision made by the tree. As is often found in folk-lore of India, death or the leaving of the mortal world is a conscious and pre-planned decision, undertaken by the enlightened soul. This tree too follows the path. The villagers believe that the tree has borne their sins for these many centuries, but now the burden is too much for it. Like the river Ganges, which can cleanse one's soul from all impurities and stain, this tree also purified the life of all those who were connected to it, especially the villagers.

Finally it is Bishu who is possessed by the spirit of the tree and consoles the weeping villagers by assuring them that it would be reborn again: "I will be born again - again!..... I will be born as a thousand trees –here, there, everywhere!" (Selected Fiction 65).

It is possible only in Manoj Das' India that ghosts become a part of the collective consciousness of the villagers. Thus the ghost of the girl as we see in "Farewell to a Ghost" becomes an important member of the village. The "villagers' affection for the ghost did not decline" (Selected Fiction 102). No ceremony in the village was considered complete without her due share: "No feast in the village, be it due to a birth or marriage or death, passed without the girl's share being duly offered to her"(Selected Fiction 103).

With time, she becomes the protector of the village. The villagers also arrange for her an alternate dwelling place, in a palm tree when the government decides to demolish the villa. Such is their concern for the ghost. But whether she still resides in that tree is left to the imagination of the reader. When the narrator returns to his village, he discovers it dead: "The tree was dead, struck

by lightning. Its branches were crumbling" (*Selected Fiction* 108).

In "The Submerged Valley", the village, otherwise taken for granted, earns its significance when the narrator is asked to write an essay on it. The picture of the typical Indian village is complete with the presentation of the lame crow, a congenital vitiligo of the Harijan community, the trees, the pool and also the Shiva temple, without which any Indian village would remain incomplete.

When the decision to construct a dam in that area is passed by the government, the villagers decide to meet the engineer who happens to be the narrator's father. According to Dr. Bhagat Nayak, this story presents the theme of postmodern India, where industrialization has just set in. They try to persuade the engineer against the construction of the dam, but he dissuades the villagers and asks them not to interfere with the work of the government.

The ancestral home of the villagers are about to be ruined forever and the villagers resort to folk-lore, thereby glorifying the ancestral past of the villages. Through some untold sensibility, a part of them still resided in the village soil. But the progressive- minded engineer solemnly advises them not to interfere in the work of the government. The old system must go, in order that the new one can be established.

Somewhere, this story echoes the tale of the thousand civilizations born and then lost in time in India. "Look here, for me the whole of history is made of only two factors, construction and destruction- be the latter planned or accidental" (*Selected Fiction* 89) , said the engineer, and so is the history of India. Destruction of the age- old ways paved to a progressive post- independent India.

Manoj Das' India is thus a land of fantasy of mysticism where objects of nature possess supernatural significance, regulating and inspiring the life of its inhabitants. □

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MANOJ DAS' CYCLONES – AN OVERVIEW

* Dr. Lily Arul Sharmila

Among all forms of literature, the convergence of fiction with human society has been very central. As life and literature are inseparable, social phenomenon constructs the nucleus in most of the novels. But the writer's attitude to the social subjects varies. There are many novels well grounded in social history of the nation foreshadow the past event as an atmosphere to the story. The grandeur of the fiction lies in blending social and psychological strands in a way that fusion makes it hard to isolate the fictional element from social history. These two phenomena reinforce one another. The writer takes the strength of his art to synthesize the invented events and the actions of people of particular age. The microcosm of life is viewed in the social context in perfect conformity with the impulses of the characters live in the society. As a critic comments, "The socially conscious writer does not set to work in a vacuum but urges his society from what it is and towards what it might be" (Cook, p.3).

Cyclones by Manoj Das exemplifies a fact that a true social novel is a form that is social in its features and not simply by mere imaginative happenings that sprang forth from the creative mind that probed into the past. In the domain of novel, Manoj Das has effectively dwelt upon the disorder in the social structure seen through India's recent history. The novel borders on the exterior landscape of society, as well as the outward state and expressions of personages related to the past period in India. The interior landscape of the mind has been viewed in terms of exterior movement of things in the society, which strikes the discordant note.

Cyclones a literary text gets itself related to social study by virtue of the network of society, beliefs, feudal system crumbling at the surging of a new political wave and uncommon transition of a typical village into a seemingly upgraded town visualized through desperate and desperate elements in the life of the hero Sudhir. The novel offers an indepth study of a protagonist's disillusionment with British temperament, the Eurocentric imperialism for destroying the natural wealth under the sheath of urbanization. The narrative ends

finally with loss in all fronts for all major personages, the worst sufferer being Sudhir. The mechanisation and its discontents shattered away the cherished dreams of Sudhir and the visionary around him. The novel can be treated as a metaphor of violence against nature as the structures that hit the root of feudalism were not demolished.

There was a desire for national awakening and independence among the villagers but these villagers were mere subordinates to follow the instructions of the English officials. The self-honour and esteem is evolved within the inner being of Sudhir. His world failed to gain political freedom but extreme courage, fortitude, truth and sacrifice rein the recesses of his mind. In his effort to upbuild the natural identity of India, a foundation upon which the nation was to be constructed. Sudhir weighed down by the colonial pain, waited for the sunrise to lead his steps.

As a guardian of human society, Manoj Das contemplates on the troubles in village surroundings and feels that there is something in the rivalry between two sections that is accountable for the dilemma presented in the novel. The novel assumes a stature of the ecological writing, exposing the post-colonial ecological erosions. It is an appealing tribute to human mind. The novel makes a comprehensive picture of the troubles in the village surroundings of Kusumpur. After the British invasion into the fantastic ecological kingdom, the transition has been rapid. The British political officers set out on a mission to explore the course of the river Kheya flowing through the territory in the midst of the dense natural surroundings. The disappearance of the river Kheya had brought the villagers physically closer but had coincided with a terrible emotional estrangement. Some imps of crazy purpose pretending to care for the safety of the Hindus have been making money selling daggers to the native villagers. The novelist has additionally demonstrated the complexities of power in British reign.

The novel revolves around the subject of the search for the original land and the fight of a group against the hopelessness created before independence. "We live in a world with powerful histories of resistance and revolution in daily life (Mohanty, p.4). The entanglement of harmony in Kusumpur was at its peak. The political drift inside the country led to the disorientation of a normal life and further loss on all compartments of life accounted at restlessness, economic injustice and so on. The cries of devolution and greater power are ringing around. Though India has won independence from the colonial rule, the impact of imperialism in the poor country like India is predominant. The West has influenced the future of the Indians in the post-colonial period. "The human predicament cannot be ended by political or administrative or constitutional changes. Man must transcend the present stage of consciousness."

(Manoj, p.186)

The novel reveals that the effort directed towards the reconstruction of a nation lies in the two divergent activities, one political and the other spiritual. There is for certain a variation in the technicalities, astuteness, and patterns of the political front, but the spiritual realm of our nation never allows the interference of British dominion and direction. The main character Sudhir soon got acquainted with the strange powers of the sage. Soumyadev fascinated him. Soumyadev introduced Gita to Sudhir. "Abandon all codes of conduct and take refuge in me alone." Sudhir clarified his doubts with Sadhu and understood that it is only our inner growth towards God that matters. With this, new dawn he began his conscience and there was sunrise of the soul in Sudhir. He had learnt that the very first thing one must learn is to look upon one's life as an incessant process of evolution. Human existence is a continuous adventure from the prison house of one's ego into infinity's freedom whatever may be the experience of the present moment, sorrow or happy state must be treated as a contributory to that process. Soumyadev says that this attitude brings a new conscience to life and saves one from distress. The mental state of man or its urge may be expressed through symbols.

The novelist denotes much space for the picturisation of deranged mind of the hero. Sudhir walked along the dead Kheya out of the ground. The rain could not revive the river which was filled with the sand and earth by the people. There emerged only one force, that of Soumyadev. It was the countenance of his own tranquility. He waited on the enlightening steps to lead him on. The embankment that used to guard the Kheya crumbled down and it had no role to play. The multi-tier home for white and the rich still lay sprawled. With the river gone, the forest loomed larger on the village. The villagers were panic stricken and sleepless as the wolves and hyenas frequented the villages, stalking their streets at night.

Manoj Das crafts the village ambience sympathetically. The villagers were passing through an extremely tough time. They inhaled some kind of poison that was in the air. The disappearance of the river had brought many consequences in the village. The bonfire was a part of the programme of struggle against the British. The freedom struggle had just began to inspire him. The young volunteers had taken a promise to lay down their lives if necessary at the altar of mother land. "They wanted their own country or at least their own state in which to manage their own affairs...." (Desai, p.9). The mosque was the greatest factor in breeding vengeance in the heart of the Hindus against Muslims. The confrontation between the Hindus and the Muslims created a constant feud among them. When Sudhir was shut up in the petty shell of his

private world, he began to see Sethji in the role of his liberator. The peculiar circumstances landed Sudhir in jail. The novelist accentuates the flavour of his writing by providing infinite variety and fullness of details that colour up the central content. Buck up and save the environment in such horrid exploitation of nature forms the victory message with the images of execution.

Cyclones is a literary creation of a speculative endeavour, a deep perception of the human psyche, human situations and dilemmas. The protagonist Sudhir felt like an explorer on the verge of rediscovering a lost island. The post colonial scene with the combined spectrum of materialism and commercialization is invested with the subtle deep study on the comprehensive reality encountered by the central character. Sudhir with serious matters such as the transfer of power by the British, the impending election and so on.

The narrative gives an insight to the approach of a storm at Kusumpur and the depth of havoc caused by cyclones was always awe inspiring and exotic. The palm trees were mowed down. The huts and thatches were blown away and scattered. All the houses in the village were made of clay except Chawdhury villa. Many had been hurt by falling walls of their houses. Sudhir, a humanist received the batches of fugitives. He had exhausted himself opening and closing the door repeatedly running up and down feeding, clothing and consoling the refugees. It was when Sudhir felt the need of a mother.

Manoj Das scrutinizes at a deeper surface of the offshoots of the introduction of European element into a non-Western country. The features of British refer to the domain of modernization, the yearning for a pleasurable life, corporeal desire and luxury. The British government perished the natural wealth of villages in India for the urbanite structures. This is proved by Sudhir's narrative on post-colonial rage. When the river Kheya had been done to death, the approach of death always built up some sort of atmosphere in the village. The clay house assumed a gloom. The cawing of the crows and the hooting of owl sounded ominous. The destruction of the river had become a fate. For the most part hunger obliged the workers to join together with bowed heads. The clashes between the Hindus and the Muslims sent waves of tension into every corner. A dark premonition begins to overwhelm Sudhir. Many could not muster courage to face pressures of sufferings.

Manoj Das introduces a wide range of characters in the novel – Brindavan's son Ravi who throws around Sudhir a girdle of protection, Sahind the sub-inspector, Navin the Contractor, Duryodhan spy, Sowmyadav, Kamal on duty towards the victims of the cyclone, his sister Reena, college friends Sujan (Poet) and Shyam. The virtuous characters are delighted at the idea that

human world is advancing. The politicians and workers strive hard to abolish the wall between the rich and the poor. The anti-social elements like Raghu, the burglar, Laddu, the butcher, Time, the loafer are such scums in the village.

English refined the concept of progress itself by engineering and representing a giant leap in the progress of the situation in the village. "Is that the lofty ideal that inspires you to strangle our poor Kheya..." The natural wealth of the place Kusumpur was at stake. Sudhir hailing from a noble family, only educated in the area shouted angrily. When there were maps and drawings spread out on the table by the engineers before Sudhir, for constructing the lock at the point of the mouth of the river, it was much obvious that the White Government thinks of expanding into a minor port. The chart showed the loss caused by the flow of water from Kheya branching out at the spot. Two broad roads were to be built to the proposed air strip and the port. The fishing community was cheated with the new lucrative sources of livelihood working for the construction of the port.

A comprehensive narrative churns out the variety of the reliance of man on nature. The cyclone that occurred the village had provided enough for the villagers and for whole generation to go up in flames comfortably. Though disastrous the cyclones were, Sudhir on a closer inspection found the marks to be innumerable new sprouts, renewal in natural objects that refers to the revival of faith in Sudhir. The members of the managing committee were in panic. They had not dreamt that scientific marvel that was electricity generating dynamo obtained from the town could fail so unceremoniously.

Manoj Das, a philosopher and a reformer concern for promoting environmental ethics is more reflected in his story. This unfolds high intensity, psychological disturbance in the characters. The novel depicts dichotomy of his vision and self-revelation, the imperial outlook on colonized. The novelist discusses aspirations, conflicts and predicaments of the natives of Kusumpur. He probes into the contemporary situations from the current perspective. The didactic strain imbued into the story expostulates novelist's true lesion on Indian history. "My quest for a panacea for human predicament – the phenomenon of suffering in particular led me read several authentic philosophical and spiritual works..." (Manoj, p.186)

With a view to attain harmony and unity India has always detested the race of political might and India never evinced interest in domination, autocracy, expansion through aggrandizement and encroachment which resulted in political charm and glory. He details that he collects the fabrics from the people whom he came across and then he weaves them into literary account within the framework of present keeping the past in view. He projects the destiny of Mankind under the pretext of their own cultural coercions or cross cultural

fatalism and contentions. He had laid before the world subtle nuances of the existing state, without giving direct reference to history, the novelist probably wants to throw light on the atrocities and injustice of the British rule which had enormous effect on the personal and social life of the Indians.

Manoj Das has painted a character Kamal, whose dreams were to build an institution for them for any lover of serenity a small model school, or orphanage, a retreat for musicians and artists. The characters dream of a free India which would be in need of creative centres for bold experiments in culture and education which the novelist delineates in an elaborate manner. The period of intense national turmoil in the Indian history is portrayed deliberating the plight of Indian villagers.

Indian society, post-colonial experience and the revolts against the White rule are the subjects of vital interest and predominant themes in the writings of Manoj Das. He shows his abundant care for the mother land in varied ways. The political ideologies, material yearning, cultural, psycho-spiritual awareness and scruples and philosophical doctrines flash throughout the text. The hero at the end of the novel is presented as potentially enlightened. The novel is an artistic manifestation of the affirmative vision of human existence. Since the objective of the hero's life is attained through his establishment of a new relation with nature as the spring head of energy, serenity and a meaningful life and there lies the important dimension of Das' work. Thus the novel, **Cyclones** unfolds a venue for the communication of human experience. Manoj Das has carefully crafted the novel that it appears as a certain current of Indian writing.

Cyclones, an epoch making work of fiction portraying characters and human situations snared in the turmoil of a three dimensional experience of colonial days to freedom, oppression, ailment at the advancement of politics and a typical Indian village that is supposed to be the hues of culture and heritage upgrading into mechanization witnessed through the several stages of suffering experienced by Sudhir but with a final victory of spiritual ascension. □

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A Marxist Interpretation of Manoj Das's "The Murderer"

* Binayak Prasad Pradhan

In this essay an attempt has been made to interpret a short story, "The Murderer", by Manoj Das in the light of Marxism. Manoj Das happens to be one of the most eminent figures in the firmament of Odia literature. His contribution to the enrichment of Odia literature is certainly unmatched. His creative brilliance as a writer is clearly reflected in his novels and short stories. Familiar to the readers of Odia and Indian writings in English, Manoj Das is one among the gifted writers of India who can wield the pen, both in his mother tongue and in English, with equal ease. However, while talking of his popularity as a writer he is more popular as a short story writer. His short stories have fetched him an international repute. In this connection P. Raja says that "many found in him a significant story-teller who, while giving an authentic portrayal of Indian scene, presents his characters in an entirely credible frame"(5). His ability to stimulate in his readers the age-old urge to enjoy a story is a major factor in his popularity. While acknowledging his talent and creative excellence Dr. K.R Srinivasa Iyengar, the doyen of criticism of Indian writings in English, brackets him with Tagore and Premchand (Cited in P.Raja 5). Even a British poet and critic, A. Russell, while reviewing *The Vengeance and Other Stories* admits: "There is little doubt that Manoj Das is a great story teller of the sub-continent and he has few peers, no matter what yardstick is applied to measure his ability as an artist.....He shows how powerfully all artifices of storytelling can be used to write a story in realist genre without any attempt at being faithful to the photographic details of facts. His world has the fullness of human psyche, with its dreams and fantasies, its awe and wonder, the height of sublimity can be courted by the depth of the fictive. He proves that the reality is richer than what realists conceived it to be" (Poetry Times 12.2, 1987:135).

Manoj Das deals with a wide range of subjects. He not only enthrals the readers with his sense of humour and romanticism but also inculcates moral values in them through many of his didactic stories and novels. His profound understanding of human life always adds to his writings. Most of his writings represent the slice of life. He is an exceptional writer with a tremendous in-

sight into human life. Being a Marxist and a fiery student leader in his college days, Manoj Das has made his audience spell-bound by his oratorical skill. As we know, the main objective of literature is to reflect the society in all its manifestations, to bring about certain reformation in society. Manoj Das being a Marxist, social critic and a perfect literary figure, has always endeavoured to reform the society by most of his writings. He is an optimist who believes in a transformed future of mankind and his writings and talks exude his faith. As a social reformer he uses the short story form to depict the passions and foibles of man as they surface in different circumstances.

“The Murderer” is a story by Manoj Das which portrays him as a social reformer and a Marxist. In this story the writer has voiced some of the vices or follies of our society in an implicit manner. In addition to it, this story bears an undertone of Marxism. But before analysing this story in the light of Marxism, we should be aware of some of the basic tenets of Marxism.

The chief exponents of Marxism are Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who are of the opinion that literature must be understood in relation to social and historical reality. Marx and Engels claimed that the history of mankind is determined by the changing mode of its material production, that changes in the overall economic organisation effect changes in the social class structure, giving rise in each period dominant and subordinate classes that constantly struggle for economic, political and social advantage, and that human consciousness is constituted by an ideology- the beliefs, values and ways of thinking by which human beings perceive what they understand to be reality and that the ideology itself is what is propagated as legitimate by the dominant social class. Marx considered the ideology to be the product of social-economic system. Michael Ryan says that according to Marxist criticism literature always possesses form and structure, but it always also exists in time and space, history and society.

Marx noticed that all societies are arranged in such a way that a large group of workers do the labour of production, while a small group of owners reaps the benefits and accumulates wealth. All history is characterised by such unequal class arrangements, the result is that all history is characterised by class struggle, the conflict between those who own and those who labour. While focusing upon the function of Marxism Peter Barry says that “the aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless society, based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange (156).

The story “The Murderer” clearly shows the capitalistic hypocrisy and dominance. In this story we find Binu as the central character who is a poor orphan. Binu’s marriage was fixed with a sixteen-year-old deaf and dumb beauty named Sati. Binu was quite hopeful regarding his marriage but he could not retain his happiness for long. It is Dabu Sahukar who snatched away his

Sati from him. Sati was sent to Dabu Sahukar's house-hold as a maid only for a meagre amount of money. Dabu Sahukar, the moneylender was a man devoid of human feelings and compassion. He made Sati work day and night quite mercilessly. Like a desperate creature Sati kept on devoting hours in the morning and afternoon to cleaning utensils in the pond behind Dabu's house. She looked sad and tired. She looked hardly any different when one afternoon, she was found lying with half her body in the pond as lifeless as the utensils scattered around her.

Binu did not show any reaction to this incident. Nobody had ever heard Binu grumbling on account of Dabu Sahukar depriving him of a wife or the fellow's inhuman and callous treatment of the sweet Sati. All the villagers remained silent in front of the despotic and tyrannical Dabu. While describing the Dabu Sahukar, the writer says :

"Dabu Sahukar was an evil genius. Many could recite the long list of unlucky men who had lost their houses and lands to him. To be alert enough to escape Dabu's trap was considered the height of prudence. People dreaded him as much as they dreaded an eclipse or the hour of Saturn. To incur Dabu Sahukar's displeasure meant to be prepared to see one's house going up in flames sooner or later"(42).

Binu himself was obliged to find shelter in Dabu's establishment. His honesty was well known and Dabu Sahukar employed him for realizing his dues from his debtors. Dabu also used him as a bodyguard when he was required to travel with a fat purse. But, once all of a sudden Dabu Sahukar disappeared from the locality. Binu was suspected to have killed Dabu. It was quite natural on the part of the villagers to doubt Binu, because Dabu had created a void for Binu which could not be easily compensated. Besides this, the people also assumed that Bhupal Singh who had a long-lasting enmity with Dabu has instigated Binu and got Dabu killed. But all these apprehension and suspicion came to an end when people discovered Dabu Sahukar in the outfit of a saint.

This story seems to be very simple and riveting for the ordinary readers but for those who go for an inferential reading, it serves a great purpose. Manoj Das being a Marxist has made an attempt to expose the class distinction and the hypocrisy of the ruling class. By means of some fictitious characters, the writer has endeavoured to draw our attention to the attitude of the ruling class people towards the poor. Dabu Sahukar, the moneylender and litigant is the representative of the capitalist people who always exercise their dominance over the lower class or subordinate people. Dabu Sahukar being a member of ruling class uses Binu to achieve his material pursuits. Dabu's affluence is

the result of a lot of sacrifice of the poor. Dabu Sahukar as a capitalist does not show any kind of concern for the lower class people which becomes very clear from his cruel treatment of Sati. Sati has been treated as a beast by Dabu Sahukar. The writer has skilfully described the pathetic existence of the working class people who add to the prosperity of the rich by their unending exploitation. According to Marxism all history is characterised by class struggle, the conflict between those who own and those who labour. In this story also we find the same class struggle and conflict. The villagers have showed their strong discontentment and hatred to the inequality and injustice perpetrated by Dabu Sahukar. The exploitation and suffering of Sati is reflective of the pathetic and desolate condition of the entire working class whose voice has been silenced by the people like Dabu Sahukar.

However, the dramatic transformation of Dabu Sahukar into a saint can be taken as the hidden wish of the writer who demands a classless society. Through this short story Manoj Das has tried to touch upon a universal issue. The gap between the haves and have-nots cannot be bridged up for all the time to come. By means of this story the writer has made an attempt to instil a sense of awareness in his readers and induced them to correct the vices and bad practices prevalent in our society. This short story portrays Manoj Das as a meticulous observer of human society.

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A Critique on Some Works of Manoj Das

* Ashish Mohanty

This article makes an effort to critically evaluate some of the works of Manoj Das.

Regional literature refers to literature produced in a specific region and a particular geographical area. Every regional literature deals with the ethos and way of life of a region and is therefore culture specific. However, we may say that it is the notion of “Indianness” or “Indian Consciousness” which unites all regional literatures into a pan Indian phenomenon regardless of their internal differences. Therefore R.K Dhawan suggests :

All inter-lingual inquiries in the Indian situation operate within a set of oppositions which can be called the unity-diversity set of oppositions. This unity-diversity set of oppositions otherwise is complementary to each other. There is no doubt that we have multiplicity of ideas, multi-linguism and multi-level meaningfulness of existence, but at the same time it is very true that literature in different Indian languages creates visions that transcend barriers of diversities and bring us nearer to one another to point out our basic unity (Dhawan 1994:17).

Odia literature, during the twentieth century, owes much to this concept of “Indianness” or “Indian Consciousness”. The literature which flourished during 1950s and 1960s in Odisha shows the mark of ideologies such as Gandhism, socialism, and the freedom movement. The literature written in Odia before 1950s and 1960s also reflects much of this “Indianness” by dealing with the various Indian social systems and institutions like feudalism, marriage, and caste system.

Manoj Das who started writing during the 1950s and 1960s has depicted the various ideologies of post-independent India. However, he also

presents the old social order like feudalism, thus making a bridge between the pre-independent and the post-independent literary traditions. His desire to deal with the Indian subject matter is quite obvious in this effort. His vision has been restricted not merely to rural Odisha but also extends to the pan Indian themes as well.

Das's rootedness in faith, ideology and tradition of his society is quite obvious in his literary works. The influence of tradition on his individual genius is apparent in his choice of subject-matters, incidents, and events which are to be found in the rural villages of India. The issues and incidents he takes into his stories are not only regional but also Indian in scope. For example, feudalism, which Das deals with, is not only a regional system but also all Indian in character. The political situation, freedom movement and nationalism presented by Das have a connection with the pre-independent and post-independent India. The treatment of family and family life, though set in rural village of Odisha, reflects much of the trends of traditional Indian patriarchal family. Thus the reality of Das's works springs from his deep rootedness in the social, cultural and political situation of Odisha and India.

A brief discussion of Das's subject matters can bring out the nature of his works. This can be examined in his treatment of subject matters such as political situations, freedom struggles, feudalism, community life and human relationships. In what follows, I have made an attempt to discuss and critically evaluate some of the contents of his works.

The short story, as an art-form, provides ample scope to a writer to excursion deep into the individual's consciousness, though the excursion is presented on a very limited canvas. And Manoj Das handles the short story not only to explore the psychology of the solitary individual; he explores as well "mass psychology", or better still "herd psychology." "Tragedy", a representative short story of Manoj Das, is a comical but realistic treatment of the way a mass reacts to a particular situation. The average male (or female) is fond of "copying" other persons: he imitates anybody whom he thinks his superior in certain respects, however superficial that superiority may be. In this story the writer speaks of the predicament of a theatrical group who were staging a serious tragedy before an assemblage of would-be cultured, blue-stocking ladies. These lady-spectators had among them a veritable sun around whom all the others revolved like planets. This queen-bee, seeing something ludicrous, starts laughing when the drama was heading towards denouement—when, in fact, sighs and tears were invited as an encouraging response—and soon the entire auditorium was one peal of uncontrollable laughter, thus tolling the bell for the play. Of course the story is more than a mere presentation of

mass-psychology: it is also a reflection on the living relationship between the audience and a theatrical performance. Mass-psychology is again treated in “The Story of Baba Chakradhari”. But in this story the knife of satire is much sharper: the mass shown here is possessed with a mania. Unlike in “Tragedy”, the mass in “The Story of Baba Chakradhari” is not a select audience: it is an assemblage of all the people of a small town. These people were assured of an astonishing fire-jumping feat which, on account of sudden deterioration of climatic conditions, the organisers were not able to present. The man hired to perform the feat himself was afraid: the wind was roaring furiously and to perform the feat would have been too hazardous. But the assembled crowd was hysterically demanding the show: people wanted to have the fun as they paid for it, no matter what the consequence. The chief organiser, anyhow, was bold enough to play a trick to appease the crowd; but the mass presented in the story, even at the end when it was frantically disintegrating, is a mob—and a very realistic mob it is.

The writer in two of his recent creations presented the curious ways by which a fiction is accepted by a whole mass of people as true and is believed to be so decade after decade. These stories are: “Farewell to a Ghost” and “The Crocodile’s Lady”. The fact that make-belief plays an important role in the lives of men is only too obvious to anybody who has some insight. Make-belief should not be taken as a synonym for self-deception. Make-belief can be healthy; self-deception is not. Self-deception is the vice against which Jane Austen had tirelessly waged her pen in novel after novel. It blights the growth of personality; sometimes even poisons the whole environment. On the other hand, make-belief can be hygienic: it may enrich life and give significance to existence. In “Farewell to a Ghost” the writer has portrayed a village-folk who had unshaken belief in the existence of a spirit. The ghost supposed to be the spirit of a young girl of the same village, was accepted as one among them: in festive occasions she was offered sweets, food and drink though none had ever seen her. But the depth of their attachment to the “darling daughter” (as they affectionately referred the ghost) became known when, on compulsion, they bade her farewell. The ghost was only a fiction but they were moved by true pathos in bidding her farewell. In “The Crocodile’s Lady” again the writer speaks of the fantasy-building capacity of the villagers. A girl, who suddenly disappeared from the village and was missing for a decade or so reappeared. Nobody knew about her life in the intervening period. But the villagers, with their creative fancy, had woven a very romantic story round this happening, liberally using elements from folk-stories and fables, to satisfy themselves. In neither story the writer is explicit about the healthy role that make-belief plays in the lives of men as Ibsen is in *The Wild-duck*. But in each story the writer

had commented upon the fact that make-belief, which was accepted by whole groups of people until a few decades ago, had fast disappeared from our society. Growing advancement of scientific knowledge definitely has to account for this; but even a greater reason perhaps is the growing isolation of the individual. Make-belief now is confined to the individual and is subtler in form.

Devdas and Sandip are the omnipotent and privileged protagonists in Manoj Das's two novellas, "A Tiger at Twilight" and "Cyclones". They look different in appearance, but similar in articulation; two sides of the same name that are mutually exclusive and reciprocate each other in exchange. Besides that, the author himself added a third dimension to the same coin. He says in an interview that nostalgia can cast a spell on a person and edit his/her memory. Devdas is often engrossed in a fairy tale, or otherwise he kept close to the window and gazed at the woods, lost in himself. As a lover of pastoral slowness he is always comfortable with solitude. Sandip could merely tide over an hour in trance as a silent spectator to a fluttering butterfly or a frolicsome squirrel. As an eternal nocturnal tripper to the river bank he always "felt the need of a mother, to sink into her arms and shut his eyes and ears to everything around."

Both the protagonists inherited two massive mansions as the sign of centrifugal force in their respective villages, Nijanpur and Kusumpur. The places are disguised in a hazy mystical mist throughout or at length, submerged in the sticky liquid of dream and fairy tale and seldom come out to show its real face. One can easily chart out the geo-political milieu of the locale thus: at the centre two imposing mansions and their masters overlooking the valley, then came the exotic flora and fauna, and in between lies a vast expanse of esoteric ethereal plane where spooks, spirits and fairies are real. And at last in the queue stand the mirage-like distant tribal hamlets hiding from each other. Against the rhizomatic texture of reality these four worlds are themselves engaged in shouldering each other for hegemony. Albeit, all of them get defeated one by one finally by an exotic intruder from behind: the arch spiritual sixth world.

In this imaginative landscape, every thing is embedded by its names and places: Kadamba flowers, Krushnachura trees, or even a dove got a princely name as "Princess", and here heartthrob of the forest and the warbling of the sea have its own phonemes. But "houses are unknown and faraway". Here, the servant Subbu being scolded as a "fool" by his master Dev for his ignorance, mistook the sounds of classical Sanskrit as violent stuttering. Thus at the margins of text things and happenings are not holistic and aseptic, but uncertain and subversive, transgressing all the comfort zones of the narrative strategy. Here the text becomes the site of discursive ambivalence rupturing the grand narrative into splint groups.

The two novellas are set against the "transitional changeover" of
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history. "Cyclones", as an outscapes, is closely-fitted for the onstage periodic freedom struggle and "A Tiger at Twilight" is an inscape tailor-made for post-independence setting. In the latter one shikar was not yet banned, an erstwhile raja still ruled the heart of tribals and rigging the elections, a resort was set off when tourism was a far-off concept, and a marauding tiger prowling around the village. Then, at the end of a climactic hunting Dev kills the "loose" woman Heera and tiger at once in a single shot and steps back to his "venerated pure" woman Balika wearing blue sari.

"Enigmatic" Heera and ferocious tiger are interchangeable nomenclature in the narrative. And again the female is divided into opposing constructs, docile bodies and hysterical transgressors. In between shuttles an ambiguous type who wore trousers first and then shifting comfortably to sari for the sake of her dominant macho. And everything comes back full circle, cyclic rather than spiritual.

In "Cyclones", two cyclones have concurrently swept through the enclosure of that text. One is tropical and the other is metaphorical or political one. The former collapsed everything like houses of cards and the latter triggered a seismic change across the political tectonics during India's freedom struggle. Even so two things remain intact: the zamindari Chowdhury mansion which is "not built with bricks but with dharma", and the other is the finality of age old varnasramadharma, that of being sannyasa to which eventually the disillusioned protagonist apolitically returned after being drifted away by the political storm. However, he had a premonition that the "tryst with destiny" was about to be born with infantile disorders. Even though he sidestepped them to embrace his swadharma- the inner law of his being; here also the circle is complete with a sharp U-turn.

What strikes us most in many of Manoj Das' stories is the unexpected turn of an event or a chain of events. Often the sudden, unexpected turn of an event flashes on our mind like lightning, leaving behind a wealth for reflection. In "Mystery of the Missing Cap" the writer speaks of a politician and his rural henchman, who suddenly changed the course of their lives due to an event, apparently quite trivial. The politician who was a minister then lost his cap while he was camping in a village. The cap was stolen from his bedroom by a domesticated monkey. The minister's henchman had cunningly invented a story to save the situation, even to elevate the minister with his account, for whom, it appears, he had been nursing immense contempt in his sub-conscious. But at the moment of the minister's departure, the monkey itself appears with the cap and offers it back to the minister, thus shattering the fictitious account of the henchman. This event, by itself, is quite trivial: the monkey acted just like a monkey, but it contained the potentialities to change the lives of two professed

politicians. The real significance of the story, no doubt, is the psychological element: the writer's deep insight into the mysterious workings of the human psyche characterises it. The writer, however, does not offer any comments; he leaves us to reflect upon and his motive is obviously satirical. But a very striking quality of the story is the tender regard with which the writer held the characters even if the satirical intent is obvious. The story, therefore, is funny as well as sad; satirical as well as melancholic.

Conclusion

In the very conception of most of the stories of Manoj Das there is an originality and a freshness which delight and appeal to the reader's mind. But his narrative technique is conventional: he follows the traditional beginning-middle-end structure in each of his stories. His style is certainly remarkable: it is characterized by an olympian serenity, a rare aristocracy. The writer does not embroider much. In fact, many of his stories are so little embroidered that they appear threadbare. He makes liberal use of irony and humour. A vein of quiet laughter runs through stories like "Mystery of the Missing Cap", "A Song for Sunday" etc. But beneath the bubbling gaiety there is an undercurrent of pathos. After reading many of his stories we remember Shelley's lines:

"Our sweetest songs are those
That tell of saddest thought."

To sum up: considering the range of ideas and style of writing, Manoj Das appears to be a writer of unusual gifts. His themes range from the most matter-of-fact happenings of everyday life to the events suggestive of the supernatural. While considering his stories we recall the following words of Henry James:

"Experience is never limited ... it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider web of the finest silken threads, suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind." □

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MANOJ DAS, A FELLOW OF SAHITYA AKADEMI, ON TRANSLATION

** Interviewed by Dr. P. RAJA*

“The highest honour conferred by the Akademi on a writer,” reads Sahitya Akademi’s General Information brochure, “is by electing him as its fellow. This honour is reserved for ‘the immortals of literature’ and limited to twenty-one only at any given time”. Pondicherrians can take pride for their fellow-citizen Manoj Das on whom the Sahitya Akademi, conferred its Fellowship. Honoured with the Padmashri & the Saraswati Samman awards, Prof. Manoj Das is on the English faculty of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry.

Manoj Das is one of those writers whose impact on the readers is deep. First and foremost a poet, he is an internationally renowned short story writer, novelist, essayist, book critic, columnist, editor, biographer of Sri Aurobindo, researcher and also an enchanting teller of tales for children. A bi-lingual writer, he wields his pen both in his mother tongue, Oriya, and his chosen tongue, English, with equal ease. He started his writing career when he was barely 14, and at 15 he had his first book published. He has to his credit about 40 books in Oriya and nearly the same number of books in English. Innumerable pieces of his writings lie scattered in magazines and newspapers and only a computer can keep track of his writings.

He is seventy-three years young and delightfully breathes the air of Pondicherry ever since he joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in his late twenties. His works are internationally acclaimed, published in noted magazines and anthologized in the West, gathered between covers by eminent publishers and praised by distinguished writers like Graham Greene and H.R.F. Keating. Recognised as an able interpreter of Indian literature and culture, he is an optimist who believes in a transformed future of mankind and his writings and talks exude this faith.

Manoj Das writes with a kind of austere simplicity, which he uses in a very Indian way with a choice of warm earthly images. He has a clear lucid way of handling dialogue; he creates conversation that sounds real and this he

manages to do even through the lips of such stock types as the politician with his inflated ego, the doctor with his neuroses and a Raja with only a past. In most of his stories he is not only a storyteller but also a storyteller. His English has its peculiar charm. It is at once chaste and yet has the Indian flavour in the most delicate sense of the term. He is most at home with stories dealing with human psychology. Treated on a par with O. Henry, Chekov and Maupassant, he has successfully explored the deepest recesses of the human mind in his fiction, both short and long

Why did he write in English? In an interview given to me for *The Times of India*, Bombay dated May 18, 1980, he said: "...At one stage I felt inspired to write in English because I was haunted by the feeling – if I do not sound presumptuous — that much of the Indo–Anglian fiction that claimed to project the Indian life and situation was not doing justice to its claim. I thought, born in



a village, born just before independence and hence living through the transition at an impressionable age, I could present through English, a chunk of genuine India. Well! Right or wrong, one is entitled to one's faith in oneself!"

Most of his fictional writings are available for the readers both in Oriya, and in English. And so I once asked him, "You are a bilingual writer. In which language do you think while formulating a story?" he answered: "In the language of silence... a fiction writer is first moved by experience, or an inspiration. I let this experience or inspiration become a feeling in me, a process that goes on in silence. When the feeling is well formulated, I sit down to write. In which language I should write, depends on some immediate factors. If I have promised a story to my Oriya Publishers, I write in Oriya...But I do not translate one into another. If the theme continues to inspire me, I try a fresh execution" (*Literature Alive*, The British Council, June 1988).

To say that Manoj Das is one of the rare successful bilingual writers in the country is far from exaggeration. Equally at home in Oriya and in English, he demonstrates in the following interview a possibility, which can be an example for many budding and would-be Indian writers.

P. Raja: *If translation is also creativity, where would you draw the line between creative writing and translated writing?*

Manoj Das: There are two planes of creativity: Inspired Creativity and Imaginative Creativity. I believe – and that is also my experience – that the theme or idea for an original piece of work is always inspired. It comes with a force of spontaneity. Once the writer sits down to execute the inspiration, the theme unfolds itself. Characters and situations fall into their proper slots. What emerges is expected to become memorable.

Now, so far as translation is concerned, the translator must be imaginative enough to locate the right word, the right simile or metaphor, the right phrase and idiom in the language into which he is translating, to convey as exactly as possible the motive of the original writer. This is not an easy task. Mere scholarship or a dependable knowledge of both the languages is not enough. The translator must have the power of empathy, of identifying himself with the original author to a great extent. I feel that a highly successful translator was a potential creative writer, who had chosen the mission of presenting the worthy stuff of another language in his own language.

P.R: *You are a bilingual writer. Do you translate from one language into another?*

M.D.: If I translated, I cannot be called a bilingual writer. By its very definition, a bilingual writer is one who writes in two languages. However, I have also translated one or two novels of mine...

P.R. *But most of your short stories are present in both English and Oriya; aren't they?*

M.D.: That's right. They are not translations from one language into the other. Sometimes I have written a story in Oriya and then have later taken up the same theme and plot into English, and vice versa. They remain basically the same, but since I am the writer, I can take liberty in changing them or reconstructing or elaborating a certain situation while rewriting it in the second language. If someone else were to translate a story of mine, he would not have that freedom. But as I said, I have also translated my writing, to fulfill a particular demand.

P.R. : *What are the difficulties you encounter when you translate your ideas into English? How easy the work is when you translate your ideas into your mother tongue, Oriya, from what you had originally written in English?*

M.D.: I have not entered the realm of such difficulties, because I have recreated my stories, free from any commitment to be literal in rendering. That, I believe, is the privilege of a bilingual writer.

P.R.: *Poetry is what is lost in translation, said Robert Frost. Is that why you have not translated your poems in Oriya into English?*

M.D.: Absolutely right. Poetry emerges from planes that are subtle and the expression depends much on the association of words and ideas strictly native to a poet's milieu. Often the dreams and reveries formed in the poet's mind and conveyed through his language cannot be exported into another language. Of course, there are possibilities of successful translation from languages that are quite similar to one another. But even then the translator has to be pretty sure about the nuances of the key words.

P.R.: *Do you agree with the theorist who declared that translation is a thank-*



less job?

M.D.: Such observations are relative. I do not know what the theorist meant – thankless in what way. If a translator had sacrificed his own creativity or devoted his time and energy for the sake of his love for translation, then his satisfaction itself is his reward. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Bhagavatam have been translated practically into all the Indian languages. In fact most of the modern Indian languages earned maturity through the translated versions of the epics. I am not speaking of Tamil which is one of the oldest living languages in the world. I am speaking of those languages that evolved between 10th and 14th centuries. The translators of those epics undertook their task out of great devotion for the epics as well as great love for their own languages. What thanks did they expect apart from their own satisfaction in serving their mother tongues? It was certainly a creative satisfaction that was infinitely more precious than the recognition or royalty one receives today.

P.R.: *You have wielded your pen in almost all literary genres. You are a very successful bilingual writer. But your CV doesn't show you as a translator. What are the reasons you would like to attribute to this?*

M.D. : My CV does not show me as a translator because I have not translated anything! There are many number of writers who have never translated any work. The inspirations for the two kinds of activities are different. However, now that you have put the question to me, I should make a confession. Many years ago, I tried to translate a story of a veteran Oriya writer into English. To my horror I found that I was recreating it in my own way. Howsoever I tried to be faithful to the original, my creative zeal would not let me do it. I gave up in despair. Indeed, translation is a discipline one must practise with dedication.

P.R.: *Your works have been translated in almost all the Indian languages and also in many foreign languages. What is your reaction to your translated works?*

M.D.: Mixed reaction. Some translations are good and some are not satisfactory. Two volumes of my stories in Portuguese language have been well received – friends from Brazil inform me, whereas I do not receive reports about individual stories published in magazines or anthologies in French, Italian etc. In Indian languages my short story collections are reasonably well translated. Several translators of mine have received the Sahitya Akademi Award for translation.

P.R.: *Translation, Transcreation and Adaptation. Which of these three terms you would like the translator of your works to use?*

M.D.: Translation of course! But, for reasons practical, when a work has a reincarnation in another medium – say stage drama or film – naturally the principle of adaptation has to come into operation. That is why I generally do not allow my stories to be filmed, though I had to let a few films be made of them in Hindi and Oriya because of exceptional reasons.

P.R.: *What would you like to say of the recent Tamil translations of your two books: *Mystery of the Missing Cap* and *Tales told by the Mystics*?*

M.D.: I understand that *Mystery of the Missing Cap* is a success as a translation, though I have no idea about their circulation. It was because you, the translator, were well-acquainted with the spirit of my stories and you are a creative writer who combined in yourself the zeal for translating into your mother tongue works that you liked. About the other book, I have received no report so far. But that is a collection of tales originally told by mystics, retold by me. The pure story elements in them are such that they should prevail in any case.

P.R.: *It is said that voracious readers too show very little interest in reading translated works. What have you to say about this?*

M.D.: There are readers and readers. But I suspect that there is some truth in this impression. An average reader finds himself at home in situations and amidst characters that are not alien to him. But whatever little I have read of literatures of other countries, I have done so only through their translations in English. Your case also is not likely to be different.

P.R. ~~*How much of the literatures you have read all these years were in transla-*~~
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tion?

M.D.: My problem is, I am an extremely slow reader. I have with me for years a number of acclaimed works from different languages, translated into English. But I have read little. If I look back into the past ten years, the books and individual articles and stories in translation I have read may be less than ten percent of my total reading. But I have friends who are avid readers of contemporary works available in translation. I just envy them.

P.R.: *What are your favourite books in translation?*

M.D.: Fiction of Dostoevsky, Gogol, Chekhov, Victor Hugo, plays of Ibsen. I cannot remember more at the moment.



P.R.: *As you know a few literary journals in every state of India devote themselves to the propagation of literatures of India through translation. The journal Pratibha India for which this interview is taking place is one among them. Can you name such magazines in other states? And why do you want to remember them here?*

M.D.: I know *Anubad Patrika* in Bengali, *Thisai Ettum* in Tamil and *Vipula* in Telugu. I remember them because they are, like the *Pratibha India*, serving a great purpose. They are the symbols of the unity of Indian literature though written in many languages.

P.R.: *Has your Oriya novel Amrita Phala that won for you the Saraswathi Samman award, been translated into any other Indian language? Who is doing that in English?*

M.D.: It has been translated into Bengali and Hindi. I began translating it myself into English. But I had to stop because of pressure on time. I do not know when I will be able to resume the work. □

Cyclones: Land, Ethics and the Politics of Colonial Discourse

* Dr. Marie Josephine Aruna

The outstanding scientific discovery of the twentieth century is not television, or radio, but rather the complexity of the land organism. Only those who know the most about it can appreciate how little we know about it. The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant: "What good is it?" If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not. If the biota, in the course of aeons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts? To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering.

- Aldo Leopold

Professor Manoj Das, a prolific writer and a living legend of our times is a litterateur par excellence. *Cyclones*, one of his two novels written originally in English, published in 1987, however, represents the defining moment in the country's history that of the freedom struggle and the eve of independence in the wake of Partition. Kusumpur, a coastal hamlet is the centre stage where the drama unfolds. The text truly extrapolates the author's sensitivity to Nature and aspects of Nature and in the bargain exposing the interconnectedness/ integral link between the human world and its environment. Having been born in a coastal region of Odisha the writer certainly expounds his knowledge of the climatic patterns of the place, the cyclonic devastations followed by famine, a recurrent feature of the land due to its geographic positioning. As when he describes the range of havoc caused by a cyclone in such a concise and chiselled manner: "The cyclone had spared no tree tall enough to respond to the wind in the village. The devastation had been stunning. There was no rustling of leaves, no human murmur either. The earth lay benumbed along with her children" (*Cyclones* 172). The title also has a metaphorical significance in that it symbolizes the "cyclones" that upset the seemingly smooth lives of the protagonist and the villagers on the one hand and that of the country on the other. Running parallel to the political history of the nation and its transition is

the history of the river Kheya, the lifeline of Kusumpur, not only for the human lot but also for the animals and the general sustenance of the vegetation in the region. Every being (human and non-human) of the village in a sense is deeply linked to and finds meaning in its connection with the river. It is in other words, an organ/member of the land. The rural community life is inclusive of the land, the river, the trees, the animals, and the forests. And the river Kheya to the people of Kusumpur had a special significance that they thought of it as their beloved Kheya, “the companion that had never failed them through the ages, a river that had never troubled them, even with a mild flood” (218).

Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), considered to be the father of wildlife ecology, developed the concept of “land ethics” in his seminal book (on environmental ethics), *A Sand County Almanac* which philosophy reflects on the evolution of an ethics that involves the discovery of living in harmony with the land and with one another. In developing a biocentric and holistic ethics regarding land and the movement for wilderness conservation, Leopold posits the view that “Ecology is the science of communities, and the ecological conscience is therefore the ethics of community life” (qtd in Flader and Callicott, 16). The ecological conscience to Leopold hence, “is an affair of the mind as well as the heart” (16). According to Leopold, man’s instincts prompt him to compete for his place in the community whereas his ethics should prompt him to co-operate. In that case land ethics as a concept serves to enlarge “the boundaries of the community so as to include soil, waters, plants, animals, or collectively: the land” (Leopold “The Land Ethic”). The ethical and emotional value that the people of Kusumpur attach on their Kheya is sadly undermined by the imperialist government when it decides as usual for reasons of self-interest to fill up the Kheya. It nurtures the selfish motive of transforming the filled up river as a port where it can build its own centre for trade as well as a military base. The villagers are hardly consulted as there is lack of dialogue between the people and the government over the issue.

It is Shyam, who visits the village along with the team that brings relief to the storm torn Kusumpur, to first awaken the gullible people about the impending danger to the life of their Kheya. It sounds so unreal to even the educated Sandip, who wonders as to why anyone would ever think of doing away with the Kheya which was as pure as a calf. Though Shyam’s interest in the issue goes only as far as his rebellious leftist nature, for the protagonist however-

A scheme to fill up the river sounded to him like an advance notice for strangulating someone –in this case a shy serene and dewy-eyed infant deity. How could he pass his days at Kusumpur without the prospect of his nocturnal trips to the riverbank, to

bathe in the midst and the star-beams while gazing at the quiet flow? (Cyclones 217)

Shyam's aim is to just instigate the people to agitate collectively, to revolt, to resist, whereas Sandip says he'd rather die than to let the Kheya be done to death. It was a matter of life and death for the river. The young English officer on the other hand representing the Raj divulges to Sandip the well planned decision of the government which is to fulfill an immediate need by building an airstrip over the river bed and later on to establish a minor port that would ensure lucrative sources of income for thousands of villagers. He argues that after all the Kheya cannot be spared for the simple reason that it benefitted only a village or two. Colonialism with its highhandedness overrides the plea of the innocent villagers while the absence of Sandip too puts an end to any formidable protest and succeeds in putting Kheya to death. It shows the same kind of scant regard for the people as well as their land. To the Imperialists they are the unquestioned masters of all they survey and therefore show no sign of ethical consideration towards the environment. Just as man has evolved economically, socially and politically so does he need to evolve ecologically. Leopold envisions a biotic community in which even a river is like an organ or member of the community life (Callicott 94). He gives a clarion call to evolve a land ethics that can ultimately prevent the alteration, management, and use of the natural resources but that would rather affirm the right to its continued existence in a natural state. A land ethic would endeavor to change the role of human beings from conqueror of land community to just an ordinary fellow member and implies respect for every member of the community. The colonial discourse however remained one sided with the rule of master/slave theory of exploitation without any moral consideration for the ruled.

This aspect is highlighted when Manoj Das succinctly portrays the attitude of the foreign government toward the cyclone stricken Kusumpur and its people. The sub-inspector at Shukpur voices the indifference of the rulers when he is highly pleased that the cyclone has played havoc in the coastal belt which could actually prevent the Japanese from landing in the area. The insensitive officer proudly discloses to Sandip whose lack of curiosity makes him say "you are puzzled no wonder. These are issues far more difficult to comprehend than even your English textbooks. You see, if the Japanese arrive now, they will hardly get any food or shelter. Can they be effective, hungry?" He laughed" (Cyclones 186). It is very interesting to note at this juncture in order to reiterate the callous behavior of the Raj and its officials, a parallel situation in the history of colonial administration, described by the economist Amartya Sen in his book *The Idea of Justice*, wherein he points out how:

the government policy far from being helpful actually
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exacerbated the famine. There was no official famine relief over the many months in which thousands were dying every week. More than this, the famine was aggravated, first by the fact that the British India Government in New Delhi had suspended the trade in rice and food grains between the Indian provinces, so that food could not move through legitimate channels of private trade despite the much higher price of food in Bengal. Second, rather than trying to get more food into Bengal from abroad – the New Delhi colonial administration was adamant that it did not want to do that – the official policy took the form of looking for food exports out of Bengal over that period. . . . the Viceroy of India told the local Bengal government that he simply must produce some more rice out of Bengal for Ceylon even if Bengal itself went short. (Sen 339-340)

When Sandip conveys the woes of Kusumpur to the 'huzoor', of the plight of the homeless villagers, he retorts if Sandip did not know that the government was fighting the Germans and the Japanese with the one hand and tending nearly half of the world with the other. The aftermath of the cyclone renders the area with carcasses of birds, animals, and dead bodies of people scattered everywhere that infested the environment with rotten smell. But at least a voluntary organization comes forward to provide relief for the victims of flood affected villages. The total lack of sympathy on the part of the government reaches its height when famine follows the cyclone and disrupts normal life completely. With the cyclone destroying greater part of the bazaar, the shopkeepers sold rice and other commodities at steep price and spread word that even the government and the gods would go without food as worst times set in. Probably the policies of the government as Sen speaks of would have triggered off the price rise. Sandip loses all hope of redemption for his people.

Natural calamity and the government's decision to put Kheya to death, together like a two edged sword has its toll on the people of Kusumpur. Hunger and suffering force them to throw bucketfuls of sand into their own riverbed, while the labourers from other regions for whom the Kheya did not signify any emotional or physical ties, went about the job as if they were merely helping "to dispose off a corpse after someone else had committed the murder" (*Cyclones* 282). On his last visit to the Kheya after it's filled with scorched mud and sand, Sandip ruminates:

Grass and shrubs would soon cover up the new earth. A monsoon or two and all traces of the river and the marks of the operation to obliterate it would be gone. A couple of fairytales

featuring mermaids swimming in the Kheya would by and by be forgotten, for the narrators would no longer be able to point at the river as the living evidence in support of their stories.

(287)

Sandip wonders with regret how on full-moon nights a herd of elephants from the forest gathered to eat the kadamba flowers and intoxicated rolled into the waters of the river. On the next full-moon night only disappointment awaited them with the river gone. The river served to protect the village from the wild animals but now the hyenas and wolves had easy access to Kusumpur and started stalking the streets causing fear among the people. Doing away with one organ of the ecological system upsets the entire community life. What Leopold calls the 'healthy' functioning of the biotic community, which includes the relationship between the diverse elements in the system is lost due to the callous attitude of the British. The moral maxim of his land ethic appears to be that - "a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, the stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (qtd in Flader and Callicott, 15). The terrible act of the government in filling the Kheya is certainly wrong since it tends otherwise.

Sandip takes the argument a little further when he attributes the communal strife that breaks out in the village between Muslims and Hindus in such a manner: "the disappearance of the river had brought the two villages physically closer, but had coincided with a terrible emotional partition" (*Cyclones* 293). At the microcosmic level, the lack of ecological conscience on the part of colonial administration had disrupted community life to the core not only among the human worlds, but also among every other organ of the land. Partition of the land on a larger scale, at the macrocosmic level had resulted in the separation of a whole country, and its people. The land as Leopold suggests is neither property nor meaningless/useless aspect of Nature. Land is very much an integral part of the community, and cannot be divided at the whim and fancy of the colonizers. Man does not have any moral right over land to own it. By causing such geographical division, the British have left behind a legacy of communal disharmony in the subcontinent. Manoj Das depicts the strife torn city where Sandip witnesses Haru Mia's death. In the name of freedom on the one hand and development on the other, the Land becomes a place of suffering and turmoil both manmade and natural. But Sandip struggles hard to avert the communal problem in his own village through some sensible dialogue with people of both communities and succeeds in making them see sense. They shed their fear and hatred over one another. As one critic points out the world of Manoj Das always concerns the organized and collective community life which is a striking aspect of Indian society. Every single member of the community

contributed in one way or other for the collective purpose of the community. There was respect for one another and a sense of general obligation towards the entire community.

In *Cyclones* the author provides a vast canvas that depicts the rural background with its community life as a whole. This is revealed not only in their attitudes and approaches but also in their way of communing with Nature. Sandip revels in staying amidst the bounty of Nature, the stars, the rivulet, the breeze from the trees, even the hooting owls and howling jackals became integral to his world. Darkness too is described as luxuriant and doting like a mother; “steeped in the primal innocence and so close to Nature, man lives in possession of other sense organs than merely the physical. He retains a magical visionary power and his perception of Reality is different from a dry rationalists’ neatly arranged lifeless schemata” (Shukla 103). Ironically with the onslaught of urbanization, the trees that gave beauty to the village are cut down mercilessly. The villagers are mere spectators and watch helplessly to the felling of peacock flower trees at the behest of the government. Sandip’s friend Kamal representing the capitalist society converts a fifty acre land into a factory for manufacturing liquor bottles. The death of the river finally signifies the death of an old order, a way of life in communion with nature, where harmony with one another as well as the land is lost. Ecological conscience calls for an environment wherein the plants, animals, soil, water, are fellow members of a single community, of which human beings are also plain members. Man, therefore does not enjoy any special or superior power over his environment. In his interview to fellow writer P. Raja, the author explains his affinity with Nature:

I remember one of my earliest responses to the wonders of Nature. I had barely learnt to run when during a cloudy twilight I saw a beautiful rainbow spanning the eastern sky, its ends appearing to be very far, hiding behind the trees forming the horizon of the meadow. I ran and ran to catch hold of it until a villager came . . . and left me home. Indeed a child belonged to the entire village and my villagers were such a kind lot! Then came the cyclone and the famine reducing the villagers to their skeletal existence. . . (Raja “Conversation with Manoj Das”)

As an ecologically conscientious writer Manoj Das has subtly deciphered the insensitive rationality behind the politics of colonial discourse that lacked in concepts of cohabitation, land ethics and community life which are integral to Indian rural way of living, adding colour with his own personal experiences. And Leopold’s non-fictional work serves to interpret a literary text across disciplines,

with fresh insights and shows at the same time how authors from different fields of knowledge engage themselves on similar issues though through different media and methods. □

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Magical Realism and The Theme of Regression : A Study of Manoj Das's *A Tiger at Twilight*

* Dr. D. Gnanasekaran

Magical realism is a genre of contemporary fiction in which a limited number of fantastic elements appear within a preponderantly realistic narrative. Often the magical events in magical realism are narrated in great realistic detail but without the narrator registering surprise or commenting on their strangeness. Events of different orders or conflicting codes are presented as equally accepted by the narrator, so that the reader's acceptance of them is modelled by the narrator's. To suggest that magical realist writing can be found only in particular locations would be misleading. It is after all a narrative mode, or a way of thinking in its most expansive form, and those concepts cannot be 'kept' in a geographical location (Bowers 32).

"Better be prepared to accept the inevitable when it occurs. Therein lies prudence," says Subbu, a character in *A Tiger at Twilight* (102). With a slight twist, when it comes to reading Manoj Das's *A Tiger at Twilight*, it can be said, "Better be prepared to accept the incredible when it occurs. Therein lies a willing suspension of disbelief." There is a wondrous fusion of things real with those of fancy to project the regression of a human character in Manoj Das's *A Tiger at Twilight*. A discerning reader can understand how the real and the fanciful are transfixed by each other in this novel. In Manoj Das the fusion is implicit and the narrative technique crosses the bounds of the incredible subtly.

Chanady pinpoints the difference between the fantastic and the magical realist: "In contrast to the fantastic, the supernatural in magical realism does not disconcert the reader, and this is the fundamental difference between the two modes. The same phenomena that are portrayed as problematical by the author of a fantastic narrative are presented in a matter-of-fact manner by the magical realist (e.g. Henry James' "The Turn of the screw"). It is possible to have magical realist elements in a text that is not consistently magical realist in its approach (e.g. Kafka's "Metamorphosis"). However, unless the magical aspects are accepted as part of everyday reality throughout the text, the text cannot be called magical realist" (qtd. in Bowers 32).

In *A Tiger at Twilight*, the magical aspects are accepted as part of everyday reality. In this novel, it is the Raja with the hangovers of his past glory and

the tiger-like woman, Heera who merit our attention most. In *A Tiger at Twilight*, who is the tiger? The man-eater or the Raja who awaits the tiger or the tiger-like Heera? The tiger in Manoj Das's novel is not a mystery but a living entity and a terror to the surroundings. Is it the tiger or the Raja who is at the twilight of their life? Both of them appear to be heading for it. Or is it Heera at the twilight of her life? Twilight is a transitional phase and one cannot distinguish the day from the night. Darkness is descending on all the three but there is going to be a daybreak for Balika, the hapless princess who is poised to emerge from the dark at last.

Balika who has been in the murderous clasp of Heera can be conceived to be representing all that is good and all that is beautiful. This angelic character breaks free at last after Heera's death and comes into the open to bask in the sunshine of love and care ensured by Dev, the narrator. So Balika too is beginning to move through a certain transitional exercise, of course, for the better.

Considering the novel's backdrop, India as a country after partition is also sailing through a crucial phase. Within the changing socio-political system, the erstwhile feudal system has almost broken down and its residue is still holding on to the people's collective consciousness. However, the Raja in Manoj Das's *Tiger* is allowed to enjoy the fast declining glamour of the feudal system in terms of social hierarchy with some lingering nostalgia. He is forced to sell his Nijanpur mansion, the last piece of his royal inheritance to one Sahoo, an ordinary upcoming merchant. And with this sale, the past of the Rajas and Ranis has vanished into the unknown pages of human history. The mansion is a symbol of the beauty and graciousness and authority too of a way of life that has seen its time. Things have indeed come to an end for the Raja in India. Does the twilight characterize the universal awareness that the old order was dying? Throughout the novel the auguries of radical change are worked out in human rather than political terms. Magical realism is a leading genre in post-colonial fiction, allowing for the voices and traditions of formerly colonized cultures to emerge into the global literary arena. *A Tiger at Twilight* reflects this.

The Raja, though conscious of the changed socio-political system, is not sincerely repentant of the follies and foibles of himself and his predecessors. Rather, somewhere in the privacy of his inner self he has been gloating over the "so-called achievements" of his ancestors (18) and nurturing a wish to stage a comeback and relive the bygone days. The Raja, although immobilized by the inability to face reality, still possesses more self-awareness. True he manages to come to terms with the newly arisen circumstances that embarrass him a lot, but the spark of residual royal dignity and ambition often kindles him to

relish his past glory secretly and, given a chance, he is prepared to re-enact the same. Acting upon his royal instinct, he undertakes “midnight adventures” (121) and plunges into the temple pond as a daily ritual in the dead of night with the burning desire of getting back what his lineage has lost. He rummages through the pond slush, fishing for a treasure that marks the world of illusions the Raja has forcibly pushed himself into. He is at last for a rude shock deservingly in the sanctum sanctorum of the dilapidated temple and the treasure is nothing but a heap of skeletal ruins covered with mud. “It could have been the remains of a rebel punished by an ancestor of the Raja or the remains of a country lass who had inspired the passions of a prince but had endangered his honour”(125). Disappointment shatters his high hopes and it spells disaster on his psyche. He is not able to survive this mental wreck and collapses. With his death, the remaining traces of his memories, like his Nijanpur mansion in Samargarh and his only daughter, tear themselves away from him. The mansion changes hands and now it belongs to Sahoo. The only survivor of the Rajas, Balika, the Princess too moves into a family far away from her royal image. The ex-princess transits herself into the loving and caring hands of Dev, into his residence, named *Horizon*. Unknowingly a relationship of deep friendship and trust takes place between them. Her dark and unpleasant past is waiting to break up at the horizon and the rising sun will shine upon her to put her in a different light, adorning her with an aura of happiness and security. She is now on her feet after a prolonged bedridden life and walks up to *Horizon* and Dev hopes that “She will surely be able to walk further”(132). The relationship is going to metamorphose into love and hers is thus a progressive transition.

Regressive transition in the case of the Raja and the “enigmatic” Heera started from the days of misrule and misconception, avarice and unreasonable authority and is still continuing. Both of them fall victim to their own inherent tendencies. They refuse to read the writing on the wall and pursue their interest of seeking pleasure and satisfaction in their own self-styled manner. The Raja is now “not only a reminder of the inglorious colonial white rule, but also a symbol of all that was reactionary”(85).

The Raja, the master of the household and legal inheritor of the royal title, shies away from Heera and why he is not able to contain Heera or at least overrule her idiosyncracies is shrouded in mystery. It gives room for the inference that they share certain attributes. Though the Raja manages to put up a pragmatic stance, in his subconscious layer lie the embers of his anger and agony over his sudden slump. The embers burn bright at midnight and force him to indulge in his nocturnal quests in the pond waters, braving the chill and muddy slush. Is it a quest for something unknown or an attempt to dig into the

past and bring out the skeletons in his cupboard ? Balika, the sickly princess is found talking to Dev in the presence of Vimla though. Heera appears there as “an apparition”(101), falls on Balika and slaps her. Her silent and stern stance chills Dev’s blood. The Raja, father of Balika who is a motherless child, comes and stands mute without exhibiting even a vestige of displeasure or protest. How powerful Heera’s spell on him is!

Heera is not a member of the royal blood. The Raja’s father brought her from some unknown whereabouts and entrusted her to the Raja. That is how Heera entered the royal portals. Is she the collective symbol of all the misdeeds and sins committed by the Rajas over the years ? “You know the absurdity and whimsicality for which the Rajas were notorious”(97). Is it the right turn of events that the nemesis should hang over the destiny of the royal family ? Whatever it might be, Heera, herself being “formidable”, can be understood to match the formidable nature of the Raja who can laugh as a tiger roars(65) and by all means she is evil. When her designated bridegroom had drunk himself to death for no valid reason the night before the marriage day, “apparently she found great amusement in announcing the death of her prince to the guests”(80). The unlucky wife of the Raja, had to “swallow all the poison Heera spat forth in every word she uttered”(81) while the Raja remained indifferent. Nobody is sure about Heera’s relationship with the Raja. As Vimla, a sometime childhood nurse of Dev and now Balika’s nurse, says, “the Raja knows that she is not his step sister. And yet he cares for her so much! That is rather surprising”(78). Vimla felt that Heera was a curse on the Raj family. Misfortune had stalked the dynasty since her arrival. Heera keeps the Raja under an inexplicable spell. Heera took charge of the Princess and developed a frenzied attachment to her. It is not like “a child’s fondness for its lifeless doll” but “a boa constrictor’s coiling grasp round its hypnotized prey”(81). Heera chose to narrate to the Princess “tales of horror only — of bloodthirsty vampires, brutal killers, and ferocious tigers”(82). The Raja is a bit humane to all appearances but, however, he often unwittingly makes a claim to be deviant and despicable. The Raja prefers midnight adventures, masters the study of behaviour of ferocious animals like the tiger and observes mysterious silence over Heera’s atrocities. His own daughter is slapped and yet she looks the other way and not a word he utters to admonish Heera or at least show her the prescribed limits. A certain fancy enshrouds his character and he appears to walk clandestinely hand in hand with the explicit evil force, Heera. He is pictured as being helpless and lacking will and resolve. The Raja and Heera complement each other in a sense and warrant their inevitable end.

Heera is a “chatterbox”(79) and can “unstring the Raja’s purse at her

will”(79). When she at last located the man of her dreams, the Prince Charming, “after months she smiled, conducted herself beautifully in her manners and speech. That was the finest phase of her life”(79). Surprisingly, Heera could conduct herself as a social animal but only for a very short span and the ferocious tigress in her could be temporarily masked in some cruder part of her being. Evil smiles and it smiles only to spit venom. Excepting this finest momentary phase in her life, Heera is not better than a tiger and betrays her arrogance and audacity wherever possible. When Dev conveyed Sharma’s determination to marry her, Heera’s true colours surfaced yet again and Dev was shouted at. It was a kind of roar all that he could hear (93). Dev wonders: “Was it a human face at all ?”(93). “Like a wild cat she chased Sharmaji. Poor Sharmaji continued scurrying from one corner of the hall to another even after she had given up the chase”(93). Her regressive transition from a human being into a ferocious tigress is gradual and certain in the absence of any corrective steps. If at all, it is the only one, the master of the household, the Raja who can hold some sway over her. But the master fails to show her the way to humility and serenity. Every human being has in him or her something animal-like which can smell certain things concerning himself or herself which others cannot. Heera can smell others’ weak points and suck their spirit like a “vampire”(39).

We are told that Heera is “an enigma” and “the subject of many a rumour, some juicy and some fearfully weird”(3). She shoots Dev’s “dear doe”(121) dead and shows no signs of regret. Dev finds her “feeling as much at home in the forest as a squirrel in the bush”(35). She is “much more her natural self here than in the castle”(35). Yes, she is a wild cat by nature. To Dev, Heera “was as alive for me as the midnight hours I paced through; as trenchantly real as the death of my dear doe or the slow death of Sharmaji, I mean his real death preceding his physical death; she was as unforgettable as the slap she had planted on Balika’s cheek which, I felt, had struck my jowls”(121).

Heera, being animal-like at the beginning of the novel, gets totally metamorphosed into a tiger towards the end of the novel when she suddenly, probably deliberately, appears to dare the tigress, the man-eater that has been eluding the people and the Raja. The transition culminates into a transformation which is total. In the final encounter, when Dev from the *machan* sights the real tigress, another unexpected tigress appears at the spot below, Heera all by herself. Heera and the tigress they awaited “seemed transfixed by each other”(119). The man-eater roared and Heera gave a blood-curdling shriek — simultaneously. Dev is confused: “I could not distinguish between Heera and the beast. Looking at Heera I wondered if she was not a tigress and looking at the tigress I wondered if she was not Heera”(119). He admits: “I could not know

the human from the beast.” Heera comes there as if to challenge the man-eater to a duel and prove her might over the non-human tigress. Established habits are difficult to change. In the process the human-tigress is fatally mauled and this human-tigress is not a match for the real tigress. Nature is invincible. The question why Heera finally identifies herself with the man-eater may arise. No wonder, but for the physical frame, Heera and the man-eater share all their qualities. Heera’s regression leads her to her ultimate doom as it is clear that a man-eater can hardly be allowed to survive its onslaughts for long. Heera lacks proper guidance and has a spiritual paralysis within. In the absence of a bridled tongue and sensible advice, a human being is destined to become an animal.

One of the unique features of magical realism is in its reliance upon the reader to follow the example of the narrator in accepting both realistic and magical perspectives of reality on the same level. It relies upon the full acceptance of the veracity of the fiction turning the reading experience, no matter how different their perspective may be to the reader’s non-reading opinions and judgements.

Manoj Das’s magical realism must be a political question of reinterpretation of reality, utilizing the oral style inherited from his native land’s fantastic story-telling. Manoj Das seems to want to reproduce a traditional, popular rural perspective, challenging the hegemony of the alien, dominant, imported culture and reinstating the value of the community’s own cultural perspective. □

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Indian Community Life in the Works of Manoj Das

* Bismita Pradhan

Critic A. Russell, while reviewing **The Vengeance and Other Stories** stated, "There is little doubt that Manoj Das is a great story-teller of the subcontinent and he has too few peers, no matter what yardstick is applied to measure his abilities as an artist.... He shows how powerfully all artifices of storytelling can be used to write a story of realistic genre without any attempt at being faithful to the photographic details of facts. His world has the fullness of human psyche, with its dreams and fantasies, its awe and wonder, the height of sublimity can be courted by the depth of the fictive. He proves that the reality is richer than what realities conceived it to be" (Poetry Time 1987).

The organized and collective community life has always been a striking aspect of Indian society. The high regards towards human relationship, love and understanding among each other, feelings and concerns for the fellow-men, sharing of each other's sorrow and pleasure are the important features of India's community life.

Das's works show not only his insight into individual relationships but also his observation of collective community life. The life style of the communities, as seen in their attitudes and approaches towards different situations, static or volatile, is a remarkable aspect of his work. In the story. 'The Tree' he presents the collective attitude of a community towards a difficult incident. This shows his indebtedness to the villages for subject matters for his works. This aspect of the community-stand is presented in the story 'The Tree'. The story deals with the villagers' collective plan to save their old banyan tree believed to be a god from the mouth of flood. The sudden coming of the flood makes them gather on the river bank. The writer vividly describes the villagers' act of making one another conscious of sudden coming of the flood. As the writer presents it:

The flood came at a little past mid-night.

The jackals with their long moaning howls, managed to wake up several people who called out to one another and reassured of a collective awareness ... (Das 1986:46)

When the villagers became aware that their banyan tree which was once a place for God, used for meeting and sometimes as a market place, was going to slide into the flood water, they ask for each other's suggestions

and help to save the tree from collapsing into the river. Nirakar Das, the retired Head Pandit, notices how the birds and animals were deserting the tree which was their home. Srikanta Das, another elderly member of the community, suggests every body to take a solemn vow silently within the heart that if the tree was saved everybody would shorten their hair. He tells that because of the sin of the villagers the tree was going to collapse and therefore suggests that everybody ought to pray in order to be forgiven. Next to him, Shridhar Mishra, the well known homoeopath, is also looked upon by everybody to find a quick remedy for the situation. Even Raghu Dal Behera, the famous gunman of the village is not ignored in regard to finding a solution. Thus, the curiosity among the villagers grows more and more to find a better solution to save their banyan tree from disappearing into the river. On the other hand, the possibility of the banyan tree's collapsing very soon increases along with the increasing anxiety and tension of the villagers. The situation worsens gradually and finally the tree slides into the flood water. But the banyan goddess in the form of a stone is rescued. Bishnu Jena who used to be "possessed" by goddess, earlier, seems to be seated before her now. The villagers, as usual, start praying to the beat of the cymbals, conch-shells, drums etc in order to arouse the power of the goddess and to get the messages of the Banyan Goddess through him. The village folk announce Hari Bol! Hari Bol! to bid a glorious farewell to the banyan tree. What is obvious here is the collective consciousness, common ideologies like belief in God and religion, and integrated community and responsibility towards a complicated situation. The common belief and attitude of the villagers reflect their deep-rootedness in the traditional Indian society. The invitation for favourable remedies to overcome the hurdle to save the tree and the responses of the villagers depict the notion of fraternity and universal brotherhood of the community.

In "Farewell to a Ghost", the writer presents the collective consciousness of the villagers towards a ghost in a village that happens to be an illegitimate daughter of a sahib by a tribal woman. In order to possess all the gold and money kept by the sahibs, the girl kills all the three sahibs by giving them poisoned food. But her plan to acquire the wealth fails when she herself is murdered by her accomplice. Thus, the girl turns into a ghost.

The villagers notice the girl's lonely activity in the deserted villa in this village. Their actual attitude towards the ghost has never been disrespectful or harmful. The villagers' sympathy and concerns for the little girl is clearly presented in the Pundit's offering a share to the girl. The innocence and simplicity of the girl (ghost) inspires the villagers to treat her more as a living girl than a ghost. Thus, the villagers had always treated her as one of their community

members.

Therefore, when the government decides to “demolish the crumbling villa” where the girl (ghost) had been staying, the villagers become anxious to find a solution to settle the ghost in some other place. The villagers request the government to spare some days for them so that they can find a solution before the demolition of villa.

Finally, we find the villagers having a ceremony where they offer rice, banana, coconuts sweet meats, cakes etc to the girl. Everybody, including women and children, are also seen to be allowed to participate in this ceremony. The priest who performs this ceremony using a human skull and a bone is seen calling the ghost to take the food. Accordingly the ghost comes out without taking the food follows the priests command to leave the house. The priest takes her and orders her to get into a tall palm tree. Then he beats the tree with cane and circles it for sometime in order to confirm that the ghost got into that palm tree Eventually, he assures the villagers that “She can never leave the tree, I have tied her to it “(Das 1994 :108). The villagers feel secure in finding a solution to their earlier, in secure feeling that if the ghost was not given a place to rest in, then it could come and stay with any of the family in the village. Thus the story presents the common level of the community in superstition, regardless of the attitude of the outside world. Thus, Das’ deep observation of the community and society in a larger context reflects the realism of his works.

“The Love Letter”

as a Story of Man-Woman Relationship:

Manoj Das’s Rising above Stereo-type Thinking

* Dr. Pradip Kumar Patra

What normally wouldn't have been possible to speak about men and their attitude towards women, Manoj Das tells that in the form of a story, “The Love Letter”. The story unpretentiously projects men's feeling towards women irrespective of age and position. Das feels this is what man is. The writer wants to remain outside the binary construct. He is not in favour of taking any extreme view. If the binaries are dissolved, the world is rather very vast. Das covertly seems to be asking the readers to link oneself to a vast network which doesn't have anything closed. Rather, everything seems central.

There are different characters. The author brings to life the people of various age, position and background, obsessed with a young, beautiful and illustrious woman who is already dead. The author successfully elicits their mental state. It is universal that when and where there is a beautiful woman, a man naturally feels amorously for her. Such instances we find in mythologies and history in abundance. It carries greater amount of meaning when we look at the society and time to which the author belongs. We go on having our own cultural construct, apparently for the well-being of the society, although covertly we are guided by our own agendas and ideologies. In the last two decades of twentieth century, particularly when the story was written, North Odisha had not opened up that much compared to eastern Odisha flanked by the Bay of Bengal. As it is today, education also had not come to the people at grass-root level. They were natural and shy no doubt. But their yearning for love might not be less than the people of any other clime, region and time. The then society looked upon men infatuated with women as abnormal. The author implies that there is nothing wrong if men, irrespective of age, knowledge and position are obsessed with beautiful young women. It doesn't mean that the author is encouraging such mentality. As a writer he just shows the working of human mind. One gets the impression from the story that Das has gone high above human thinking. His way of universalization conglomerates thinking as well as imagining. ~~He seems to be implying that there can not be just a stereotype~~

relationship between man and woman. The relationship could be very natural and sacred . If at all it is grotesque , it is because of our limited thinking . That's why as a reader one hardly is able to read any other motive between the lines and things do not appear hot and sizzling. With such a debatable issue of man –woman relationship no other writer probably could be as unbiased as Das. With our cultural configuration, which otherwise is an imposition by itself, we just hide this particular instinct . The author implies that it is of no use to do so.

On the other hand , the author being a spiritualist in Sri Aurobindo Ashram has a high sense of responsibility towards society. That's why the entire articulation of and yearning in the story by the characters take place in absentia i.e.the heroine is dead.

The time about which the author speaks is not as fast and digitized as today . Hence, the title of the story, “ The Love Letter”. In today's world there might be a very few people who would be writing love letters when technology plays a dominant role in transforming human life . With mobile and internet , the act of expressing love and the corresponding response is easier and quicker than before . The author gives a shape to his idea of love in present time. In contemporary love there is no scope for imagination and visualization . Love is rather utility oriented . Had the author given a shape to his idea of love in present time , the entire structure of the story would have been different . But then the aesthetic idea which is noteworthy in case of a love letter doesn't match well with electronic mode of expression and confession . With letter one gets to know the other very slowly. The letter just doesn't intimate one's emotion and feeling for the other , it becomes a kind of concrete love . Through it the bonding becomes memorable and strong . That's what is missing in contemporary love triggered electronically.

The story just cannot be read in isolation .If one relates it to contemporary society, what is obvious is that at least love has not perished . There is inconsistency of mind and mood always in the time we live in . Love has lost its depth , although not its lustre . Relationship collapses each and every moment. When such is the situation the story comes to the readers as a gentle breeze in scorching heat .

The story could be read from different angles also .The love of the four persons , Gautam, Professor Dhar, the musician and Pran Choudhury towards Miss Gita is not the type as we understand traditionally. The author might be implying it in most universal sense in which the question of physical contact might not be arising. Hence, here is an author who speaks very less, he rather shows more. An equivalence of it is found in various activities favourable to

women .Through these activities a desire for physical contact is camouflaged, delayed and deferred.

More we're cultured , more we seek to put everything in proper perspective . Misplacement usually is done by the people who are very natural. Hence, the story has a touch of irony. Gautam trying to figure out the right position of the moon hints at the human intervention in the proceeding of the universe resulting in catastrophe and chaos . Such instances like earth-quake , avalanche , storm , global warming etc. are many .The writer's years of spiritual practice probably has given him the wisdom that progress is most welcome, but without interference in the process of universe .

As the story progresses , we find a rupture in the text . It is the genius of Miss Gita which is subject to evaluation. It is more because she is a beautiful woman, less because of her versatility of art . In the discourse of art this is a very common phenomena. In each and every male-dominated society such kind of prejudiced focus is very common .

Gita's paintings have been successfully exhibited in the West which shows the fascination of the third world countries for the West . Western countries are the forerunners in each and every field like art , science and technology. But it is wrong to value their appreciation and judgement as flawless always . Many of their awards like Booker , Pulitzer and Nobel are ridden in controversy in present time . Sometimes , the West has its own inner agenda and politics behind its award . Even the most prestigious awards of our country are not free from any ideological lobby and undertone .

Hence, any research on Miss Gupta's art is a pretext of love for her . Das exhorts the readers to think differently. As a spiritualist he might not just be concerned with moral issues , but also with probable thinking . It is not just what the readers think at present , but also what the readers might think even hundred years after which really is the concern of the story . There is nothing more invaluable than what the author hints : It is the support and care that one receives from a woman are really important , not the physical attraction .It might just be the flip side. □

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MAJOR ASPECTS OF THE CRAFT AND CONCERNS OF MANOJ DAS

* Dr. Vandana Rajoriya

Manoj Das is a writer, thinker, and philosopher who, it seems, is specifically made for story telling, the natural ease with which he creates his stories and their events with a natural flow often makes us marvel at his genius. His stories are a combination, a perfect blend of the real and supernatural, the elegant and the pathetic, the mysterious and the wonderful. He is a wonderful narrator who infuses life in his words and has the power to make the readers get the feel of the events and characters of the story and not only make them laugh and smile, worry and cry with them but also share their dreams and ambitions, hopes and fears. His wonderful and fascinating stories aided by powerful descriptions have the power to transport the readers into their own world so powerfully that at times while reading one barely remembers that actually he is reading a novel or story and not watching the events live. The pictures and the atmosphere which he creates are so very true to the theme and texture of the story that one often gets the feel and smell of the place and its distinct characters while reading.

His works can best be defined as the quest or the search for ultimate truth and meaning of life in general and human existence in particular. Not meant just for fun and amusement, his stories almost always have a purpose with them; the purpose to teach, to educate readers and make them aware of the existing superficialities of human life and meaninglessness of the human whims and fancies and help them in growing into fuller and mature beings. Along with the external events of the story most of the time we find his characters to be involved in a kind of inner quest, the search of meaning and implications of life. The characters and events of his stories keep meditating and bringing in light the serious question of deeper implications like what is the true meaning of life? What is the root cause of human suffering and unhappiness? Apart from their superficial life of loss and gain, happiness and pain his characters almost always have an inner life with more significant and deeper implications. In reply to a question in an interview he once said the: *Creative writing of any kind has always both the aspects to the process. Pleasure at a subtle, more meaningful and lasting level; pain at the surface level, while the exercise is on.*⁽¹⁾ [World of Manoj Das, 'On his fictional writings' (Interview with Prof. P.

Raja)]

And this observation holds true for most of his novels and short stories. Messages conveyed by him keep moving and penetrating in the readers' consciousness in the longer run of life and of course help them in evolving, growing and maturing. His stories are so arresting that if you once give them an ear; then you can be sure of searching more and more of him wherever and whenever you can get hand at. To approve the observations which we have made in the foregoing, let us take into consideration some of the major aspects of Manoj Das's crafts and concerns particularly with reference to his two excellent novels. **A Tiger At Twilight** and **Cyclones**.

The pleasure which one gets from reading these two novels is of a very true and natural type. For instance when in '**A Tiger At Twilight**' he describes the landscape, be it a river or mountain, hilltop or valley, forest or lake, castle or mansion, he evokes the whole scene very realistically in front of us in a mysterious and fascinating way that not only arrests us but also draws our attention to its magnificent beauty and powerful situation. And it is with these very powerful descriptions that he starts building up his mystery. For instance let us take into consideration the following description of the mansion, Horizon, from the novel:

Horizon, the mansion I had now come to own, stood on a hill four thousand feet above sea level. Behind it stood a mountain, bearing the name Nagdev, a barren peak raised like the hood of a cobra, looming protectively over my mansion. On moonlit nights, the ashen peak radiated a bluish hue. Fairies played on it, asserted a native legend. On a full moon night when it looked particularly resplendent, I would watch it for long, in the hope of stealing a glimpse or two of those supposedly charming beings. I loved to believe that they would peep out of the peak or the clouds surrounding it any moment, ⁽²⁾

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p.4]

In a wonderful and fascinating way he introduces us to the events that led to construction of Horizon (this name was given to the mansion by the protagonist himself) which was previously known as Heermahal. Even when he is describing his fear and awe at the possibility of Herramahals (Horizon's) mysterious Heera; the domoness suddenly revealing herself in the dark of the night; the descriptions not only impress us but also catch our attention to their magnificent beauty and powerful description:

I was afraid of looking out too long into the night lest I should catch a glimpse of her weird face. In fact, every flash of lightning across the clouds threatened to reveal it – a colossal visage with a sinister

laugh, even though the golden raindrops, whenever flashes of lightning showed them, looked like a falling dust of stars knocked down by thunderbolts.⁽³⁾

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p.3]

And when Manoj Das describe the unusually beautiful and arresting charm of Heera, describing her mysterious ways and whereabouts, the stories of her actually being a fairy child tamed by the old king through his magical powers, of her feet bleeding milk instead of blood when cut accidentally by a blade of grass and so on; we are left with no option but to believe him and start imaging about her beauty. While her unusual charms arouse in us both a sense of wonder and awe we are simply led away with the narrative looking forward to the mystery revealing itself to us in the full:

It was on that festive day that Heera was first seen in public at Samargarh. She dominated the scene with her dazzling gaiety and glib tongue and proved a far greater attraction than the hero of the event, the carefree yuvraj in the process of his transmutation into a raja, a ruling prince. There was even people who steadfastly held to the belief that she was a fairy child, trapped by the raja from the clouds once while aboard a plane. Later he had tamed her with the help of wizards and trained her in human lifestyle. My father's old personal attendant swore that his brother-in-law had seen milk instead of blood oozing out of her toe when a blade of grass scratched it.

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p.6]

Manoj Das further intensifies mystery by revealing our exceptionally beautiful heroine, Heera, to be having hypnotizing and captivating powers. And gradually the idea of this exceptionally beautiful but sinister heroine catches hold of us in its entirety:

Those who had seen Heera agreed that she was charismatic. But those who had not seen her were more effusive about her charisma and some of them attributed a certain supernatural quality to it. That way it was easier to explain her hold on young raja, who was otherwise known to be intelligent, level-headed prudent.

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p.7]

The story of Vaneswari's wrath and the beginning of the ritual of sacrifices brings in shocking but realistic picture of the superstitions people of rural India in a critical voice. The story begins, as considered by people of Samargarh, generation ago when a ruler of Samargarh usurps the land of our hero with the help of some other feudal lords by some conspiracy and the deity's wrath strikes his family. Gradually members of the family start dying in several odd

ways, for instance, one member dies by being afraid of his own shadow which strangely looked to him to be headless. All the poojas and offerings to various deities go in vain. Then one day the chief priest of Vaneswari in a possessed and awful state knocks at the raja's gate revealing the desire of the goddess Vaneswari to him. On hearing the desire the raja is left stupefied, for it wanted one of his sons to be sacrificed at the altar of the goddess. To our surprise, without doubting the genuineness of the priest's message, after some hesitation, the raja takes the agonizing decision of honouring the priest's message:

A month later, upon the recurrence of the moonless night, under some pretext, the meeker and milder of the two princes was led into the temple and was frankly informed that unless he was sacrificed, not even a kitten belonging to the raj family would survive the deity's curse. The prince was beheaded before he could react.

.....
The rulers of the succeeding generations continued the practice, but in a modified manner. They would not sacrifice their sons, but would adopt an infant, generally an orphan, pamper him as a prince and performed the accursed ritual before the boy had any inkling of the fate that awaited him.

The rite was practiced in absolute secrecy and the priests seem to have grown bolder than their ancestor who initiated the rite.

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p. 9]

Manoj Das draws our attention to the pathetic, unwanted, unnecessary and uncalled-for beginning of this practice by drawing our attention to the facts that the period who was responsible for the beginning of this ritual of sacrifice went mad and his heirs for a few generations started being born deformed. The practice ends when the last heir of the family is bomb warped and paralysed in his adolescence. And when the hero Dev comments that the Raja's race was not evicted even when the sad, real and pathetic ritual of sacrifice to the deity meant for preventing his race is stopped; we as readers are forced to think deeply about the various rituals, practices and superstitious beliefs which have developed firm roots in our culture with very strange and pathetic logics behind them. Manoj Das's works are a storehouse where you can find many of the superstitions and stupid practices of the remote parts of India brought into light with disapproval and scorn at one and fun and amusement at other times. We are not only surprised but also moved and influenced by them.

A wonderful craftsman in his art Manoj Das keeps on heaving mystery upon mystery and before we are out of one the other is already there revealing itself in full and surprising, of baffling of moving us at its magnitude. So we find in 'A Tiger At Twilight' a tiger make its presence felt in Samargarh in mysterious

ways:

A farmer who was returning from the market at sundown was under the impression that someone walked behind him. He even made a comment or two regarding the unprecedented rain and hasty approach of darkness along the lonely road, but did not care to check why no response came from the listener.

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p. 16]

Manoj Das says that, 'Characters follow the theme of a story, and the words are merely added by author to represent the thoughts of the character'. And this observation holds true for the wide range of characters created by him. His characters come from many varied backgrounds and display many different dimensions of human nature in their best possible ways. The way he builds up his characters is very impressive, giving the details of physical appearance and make, relating their whims and fancies, dreams and ambitions through the carefully crafted pace of the story: For instance let us look at the following description of Heera:

She must have been in her teens when she sat for it, yet she did not look any different now. Her cheeks were pinkly youthful and her hair was still the brilliant auburn shown in the portrait.

The raja gestured us to remain seated as Heera came nearer. Dazzlingly fair, she was in a jasmine-soft white saree. A pair of diamond earrings gave her shining eyes the company of two tiny stars Heera sat down beside the raja. Her gaze fixed on me, she asked in a resonant but acid tone, 'The mansion does not retain that identity, I suppose, or does it?'

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones; Manoj Das, p. 23]

At times he would chuckle up at the innocence of people, their strange amusing ways and blind faith. For instance let us take into consideration the strange conduct of Vasant Singh who falls in love with a rope-cot which he feels is lucky for him and saved him from being eaten up by a Tiger in a beat organised by him to kill it:

Vasant Singh took some time to regain consciousness. His joy knew no bounds when he realized that he was alive while the tiger was dead. He fell in love with rope-cut, so much so that he would carry it to his home at Samargath and bring it back when he came to his camp. He would not sleep on any other bedstead. Years later, he died a natural death on the same bedstead and was cremated along with the cot. I do not know whether that was done in deference to his wish or because

his family thought it proper to dispatch the spirit of the cot along with its master's to the world beyond.

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p. 37-38]

And at times he would pounce at their ignorance, hypocrisy and stubbornness with a scorn, for instance let us look at Mansingh's straight forward response to the evil design of Ketu's conduct meant for humiliating him in the eyes of public which was to be their prospective voters:

'Ketu, apart from the fact that your offer is unwarranted, how can I am unaware of all the nasty lies you and your roguish disciples are spreading against me?

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p. 81]

Or just look at his observations on the fake outburst of Heera on Sharma believing that Heera is in love with him and would like to marry him and unable to propose her himself forces Dev to propose Heera on his behalf inviting the disaster".

'The rogue of a hobgoblin that traders in stupidity are not itself stupid; it is cunning and quick. It waits in ambush till the time when its prey would be over wherever by some fascination generated by his own greed or ambition, and pounces him before any better sense in him or higher influence on him had a chance to restore his balance. Poor Sharma! How easily he let himself be fiddled about by passion gone astray!'

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p. 104-105]

As a ecocritic we find Manoj Das addressing some of the important concerns or burning issues like deforestation, mining and its adverse effects and environmental degradation in the novel which are a major cause of worry these days. For instance let us take into consideration the following observation by raja sahib and Dev about the stark reduction of the forest cover of Samargarh and its adverse effects like the adverse effects like the attack of the tigers on the human beings, who were forced to come to this part of woods as other part had been thinned down by illegal cutting of trees by timber merchants and others:

'Alas, but the woods look poorer though now they belong to the nation! The raja was fully justified. The forest had been and still was mercilessly plundered by timber merchants
The raja felt that some tigers had been obliged to come away to the part of the forest close to the valley, because the other part had grown thin. One of these refugees had somehow tasted human flesh and had developed a taste for it.

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclone, Manoj Das, p. 39]

As far as the story, style and presentation are concerned Manoj Das is
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superb but the moment we are done with its encapsulating charm and wonderful fascination a few serious questions crop up. One question which comes into mind with considerable force is that why is it impossible or so very difficult for Manoj Das to find at least normal if not capable women as characters in his novels. Why most of the time he draws on the eccentricity and stubbornness of a few female characters to create his effects and why he fails to paint them in positive light. Why all the women characters of Manoj Das are either eccentric or abnormal and otherwise their presence is insignificant. Every now and then we feel like questioning why an eminent scholar and story teller like Manoj Das could not find it feasible to portray powerful, impressive and uprighteous female characters in his novels. For instance let us take his novels 'A Tiger at Twilight' into consideration. In this novel Manoj Das builds up his story at the cost of feminine natural virtues and by depicting them as abnormal, as insignificant and wanting in something or the other which diminishes their importance to a considerable degree so we find all the three significant ladies depicted in the novel to be seriously wanting in one thing or the other. Heera to be an exceptionally beautiful but sinister and eccentric lady, while king's daughter Balika is mentally ill, King's late queen i.e. Balika's mother is described more to be a kind of a sleeping beauty who never took care to revert back to the hostile extremities pounded upon by Kings sister Heera. Majority of female characters of Das fail to have the strength of character and a positive note of depiction from him.

As it is in the works of Shakespeare we find in works of Manoj Das also nature to be most of the time a party to events of the story and as far as its depiction is concerned we find nature always to be a participation in the gaiety or gloom of the human destiny. For instance when in his novel 'Cyclones' we find the hero Sandeep in remorse we find nature to be trying to sooth and comfort him:

Reaching the riverbank he durst into sobs. He gazed at the sky for a long time as though to discover the particular one that had dropped him on this alien earth. His moist eyes read a communication of comfort in the soothing arrow of light shooting down from the constellations. Across the sprawling meadow on the other side of the river, droplets of light twinkled in unknown and faraway houses. They too seemed to respond to his heartthrobs. Even the forest beside the meadow, a fortress of darkness, seemed willing to cuddle his little self in a demonstration of affection. Then there was the warm warbling of the sea, when all else was silent, that spoke to his heart.

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p. 163]

Natural and supernatural elements participate and contribute to the
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adventure of the story and often the characters get to feel their physical presence too. For instance when Sandip in 'Cyclones' reaches Sadhu Soumyadev's hermitage with sadhu Sadananda and sadhu Sadanada starts singing, Sandip feels that the sadhu's audience was not limited to their small party but the whole nature was giving ear to him:

For a moment it appeared to Sandip that the Sadhu's audience was not limited to their small party; the trees slowly recovering their forms, the birds and the beasts in the process of waking up, and even the stars fading out heard him and their appreciations were conveyed by some subtle tremors in the cool breeze.

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p. 264]

Night seems to preoccupy the mind and imagination of Manoj Das as most of the events and adventures take their shape in night only and it intensifies the wonder and mystery of the events. For instance most of the events in 'A Tiger At Twilight' take place in night only. Most of the time we find Raja Sahib going out on his secret missions and trips in nights only. Our hero Dev also is led by king to his daughter Balika's room in nights only. In 'Cyclones' most of the significant feelings and observations fall upon Sandip in the dark of the night only.

As stated earlier most of the times we find Manoj Das's characters to be philosophising and questioning the way of life, meaning of life, effects of providence and destiny and so on and so forth. For instance let us take into consideration the character Sandip from his novel 'Cyclones'. Sandip is a character who keeps wondering about the unknown and invisible ways of life. He keeps thinking about life, its meaning and implications and comments on the darkness which surrounds one's life with very little knowledge of what is there in the womb of destiny for them:

What is life if not wading through infinite darkness, with no brighter light than a lantern could provide?

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p. 162]

And further thinking about the darkness of his origin he starts questioning everything, the whereabouts of the Chowdhury's, multitudes of homes in the world, strange disappearance of Chowdhury, pathetic turn of events which are forcing him to flee from Kusumpur right at the point of time when he has started loving it and wondering at the strange ways of destiny and its unknowability comments with exasperation:

Was one's destiny as strange and impenetrable as this forest of the night?

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p. 162]

Further in Sadhu Soumyadev's hermitage when Sandip meets Vi-

kashananda, who is a first class post graduate in philosophy and hails from a very well to do family he dramatically starts disclosing his knowledge of philosophy, starts relating about the events which lead to opening of his third eye and comments on the uncertainty of life and its happenings. Although his way seems to be arrogant and pompous but his observation seems to have a lot of truth and weight in it:

I've seen enough of your wide world and your humanity, have frequently mingled with your elite and have felt shocked at the paucity of their knowledge, have explored your poetry and philosophy and have felt scandalized over their hollowness. I have stood amidst magnificent ruins of civilizations and have observed the pompous doings of men and their undoing by time. Who could have imagined that I should at last land on this obscure jungle and find the stuff for which my soul thirsted?

Strange thing about this Vikashananda is that even after studying all philosophy, after the so-called opening of his third eye which as he boasts has enabled him to see through the reality of life and its nothingness is ominously self conscious of his knowledge and is possessed by superiority complex which makes his entire position seem to be small, misplaced and laughable.

We often find Manoj Das's characters to be searching for the meaning of life and its deeper implications. As the story develops they gain knowledge and this knowledge is not limited to the outer world but they also gain knowledge about their own incomprehensible and unfathomable selves. As much it is a search outside it is also a retreat within to the deeper levels of the sub conscious and unconscious mind. For instance when Navin Contractor is murdered after Sandip had threatened him to kill him Sandip had started feeling that even though he has not murdered him directly but somehow he is responsible for his murder and he starts feeling guilty for it. But as the events proceed and in Sadhu Saumyadev's hermitage when he gets to read Gita which is introduced to him by Sadhu Soumyadev he gets to realize that his feeling for guilt is a mere creation of his ego and is totally unrealistic and superficial and therefore unnecessary and uncalled for.

By and by Sandip felt that his study of the petite scripture dispelled from a subtle layer of his mind the dark suspicion that perhaps, to a certain extent, he was responsible for Navin Contractor's murder! He tried to analyse the process and soon realized that his feeling of guilt for a crime he had not committed was merely a sign of delusion created by his ego, which was in the unconscious habit of taking credit, or dreaming of taking credit for deeds it had not done. The Gita had enlarged his vision. He had begun to recognize the play of numerous

forces around him and behind all happenings — and of a power sublime
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that embraced everything, big and small.

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p. 275]

And this realization, this small and partial success over his ego, as he himself says, purges him of this feeling of guilt and makes him feel relieved of the several burdens which were on his consciousness both knowingly and unknowingly.

We often find Das's characters peeping into the deeper level of their inner consciousness and searching for meaning within. And this process of retreat within from the outside world judiciously combined with the external course of events of the story by Das makes his characters attain knowledge and grow in the process. For instance let us take into consideration the discussion of Sandip with Sadhuy Soumyadev about the inevitability of human destiny which makes Sandip look within his consciousness and aided by Soumyadev's explanations leads to a new sunrise of his consciousness. It so happens that when Sandip questions Soumyadev that why 'must man be so powerlessly swept by an unforeseen and unpredictable course of events?' Soumyadev explains to him that this is to enable their inner growth towards the lord and adds that it is the only thing that ultimately matters. When Sandip further asserts that why 'must that process be so unpleasant?' Soumyadev explains to him that the process is unpleasant only for one's superficial self, for one's ego which is dominated by mind and senses and not for the real self. He explains to him taking example of Miranda and Prospero from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' where both Miranda and Prospero observe the same shipwreck from the same spot and at the same time but respond to it differently. While Miranda's heart breaks at the sight, for she knows only the present, Prospero remains absolutely calm due to his knowledge of the past, present and future. Knowledge makes Prospero's attitude to the situation different. Sandip admits that knowledge would make him also respond differently to the things and questions that how can he acquire Knowledge? To it Soumyadev replies:

The very first truth one must learn, if one has reached the status of a seeker, is to look upon one's life as a perpetual process of growth, a journey from the prison of one's ego into infinity's freedom. Whatever be the experience of a given moment – happy or unhappy – must be taken as contributory to that process. This attitude not only brings a new awareness of life, but also sages you so much anguish!

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p. 275-276]

And one morning when Sandip informs Soumyadev of his dream of a sunrise Soumyadev interprets it as the symbolic sunrise of his soul; beginning of a new dawn for his consciousness. And finally when the novel comes to an

end we find Sandip a changed man, a grown up soul, a new peaceful soul with all doubts and passions purged:

Sandip had walked a long way not merely from Kusumpur, but also, he felt, from many epochs in memory, from Reena, from Lalita and from Geeta. He sat down on a mound amidst a vast meadow. His mind seemed to have become clear of all clouds. There emerged to the forefront only one face, that of Soumyadev. He knew that it was the face of his own peace.

[A Tiger At Twilight and Cyclones, Manoj Das, p. 162]

Another wonderful aspect of Manoj Das's craft is the beauty, the ease and perfection with which he combines the legends, the local and mythological stories with his stories to shape the course of events. No story of Manoj Das is complete without reference to a few myths and legends and mythological figures. So in 'A Tiger At Twilight' we find Das to be referring to many folktales and legends and the mythological figures like Yaksha and Vaneswari. In 'Cyclones' we find Soumyadev to be quoting from Mahabharata, Gita, referring to many legends and folktales. One of them being the tale of a wealthy man who in spite of his good health, fame and harmonious family life was unhappy and thinking that the happiness lay in the opposite set of conditions one day left everything. He went to a far of hilltop which matched his dream of ideal place and built a hut there and started living in it. Although he felt that he was happy but he couldn't find true happiness. It is only when the monsoon destroyed his hut in spite of his offering of hut to God and the future course of events that he comes to understand what his soul yearned for when he looks at the charming idol of lord Krishna, the village deity, placed in the little stone shrine built for him by the villagers in place of his hut. When he understands that God has accepted his offering of insignificant hut and changed it into a shelter that could withstand storm and as a proof of his acceptance installed an image of 'Himself' in it.

To conclude we can say that Manoj Das is a wonderful novelist and story teller who mingles and the events of his story into a perfect whole and not only amuses and pleases us in the process but also enlarges our vision of life and its happenings and gives us an insight into what might be or what consists of true happiness. He gives us an insight into the eccentricities of human nature, unknowability of human mind. He makes us ponder upon the meaninglessness of life and its happenings and think about the serious questions of higher importance like what is the true aim of life, what is true happiness and so on. Whatever be the course of events of his novels and stories,

all of them lead us to a matured outlook towards life and end with the hope of a better future, promise of a new beginning of the life of peace and happiness when characters gain knowledge and rise above the insignificant happenings of this world and start looking at the bigger picture of life heading towards a higher, spiritual and meaningful life. □

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The Misty Hour: The Aesthetics Of An Indian Political Story

* Dr. Kalikinkar Pattanayak

The Misty Hour, the first story in Selected Fiction by Manoj Das, the most mature bilingual Indian writer, reads like a brilliant specimen of a powerful political tale. It stretches the imagination of a perceptive reader to understand the structure of the mind of woman which is basically political; it also titillates the intellect about the changing scenario of Indian politics. The plot of the story is woven round two principal characters: Chinmoy Babu, an incorruptible political leader and Roopwati, is marginalized. The name of the characters are Indian, particularly, Bengali. Roopwati's fascination for Chinmoy Babu with her weakness for name and fame constitutes the cruz of the story is Dhani Chowdhury's explanation for advancing amorous hand towards Roopwati in the dark. Floor-crossing which marks Indian politics is dealt with in an ironical vein. The story evokes Karuna Rasa (pathos) because the heroine, Roopwati's husband who is a brilliant young man dies at thirty five.

The aesthetic of any story lies in the principles that ho into the making of the story; the aesthetic pleasure arises out of the dexterous construction of plot, the innovative use of language, the artist's deeper involvement in the culture of the country where he is born and so on. The aim of this article is to analyse the structure as well as the texture of the story and discover the aesthetic elements which account for the popularity of Das as an Indian story teller.

The title of the story The Mistry Hour is apt and suggestive. Usually 'misty' doesn't collocate with 'hour'. It is a kind of foregrounding device which is used, to borrow the language of Mukarovsky, to 'attract the attention of the readers to the communication situation' (The Aesthetics of Sensuality, page. 12). In The New Oxford Dictionary Of English it is found out that when mist is associated with time it refers to 'something that blurs one's perceptions or

memory' (1184). The word 'misty' is substituted by 'dusky' in the concluding sentence of the story:

But the silence of that dusky hour had brewed a disturbing question in my mind; was the confession of the former treasurer Dhani Chowdhury true?

(Selected Fiction: 8)

The sentence strikes the key note to the understanding of the plot of the story. The story is basically political in its content. Dhani Chowdhury, a politician, comes out with convincing statements to defend the image of Chinmoy Babu, the leader of the party. The truth of his statements is doubted by the author, the narrator of the story. The basis of his doubt is rooted in the observation in context of relationship between Chinmoy Babu and Roopwati, his political opponent in his election campaign. Roopwati claimed that Chinmoy Babu had been her lover once. Even in one occasion he stretched his hand over half of her palm in the darkness. To such statements by Roopwati who was campaigning against Chinmoy Babu Dhani Chowdhury, the fan of Chinmoy Babu, the party Chief remains untarnished:

The one to advance his amorous hand at Roopwati's was none other than Dhani Chowdhury, then the youthful treasurer of the party. The lights didn't return before the meeting was over and hence Roopwati never found out who owned those audaciously crawling fingers. (page. 7)

Such a passage creates suspense which is the soul of a short story.

The title *The Misty Hour* stands justified in another context. Roopwati, the heroine of the story admires and adores Jagdishji, a brilliant intellectual and chooses him as his life partner. But Roopwati's audacious and arrogant manners towards her newly-wed husband on the night of reception are shocking and surprising. The husband, an erudite scholar, invites his women to a discourse on his essays. Roopwati, an educated woman, retains patience till two of the essays are read out. When the third essay entitled *The Role Of Celibacy in Married Life* is going to be read Roopwati, the bride cries out:

'What a pity, the lamp is running out of oil' (S.F.3)

To such an exclamation Jagdishji, the husband replies enthusiastically, 'let me fetch some more oils' (ibid). To such a reply Roopwati retorts:

'Is that really necessary? Why not let your knowledge light us as long as possible?' (ibid)

Then she shows peculiar manners. She snatches away the essays from the hand of her husband and burns them.

Such an incident is terribly shocking to her scholar husband. The hours

that follow are misty hours for him.

Another occasion in the story proves embarrassing for Chinmoy Babu when he is considered to be an incorruptible leader to be the chief of the party. Roopwati offers herself to manage the election campaign. Chinmoy Babu rejects this proposal and Roopwati curses him. She joins the opposite camp and tries to defame Chinmoy Babu. Roopwati claims that once Chinmoy Babu happened to be her lover. She also, on one occasion, praised Chinmoy Babu to the skies. But she turned enemy when he refused to comply with her request. The hours after her propagation remained misty for many observers. When Chinmoy Babu won election he proceeded to the cremation ground where Auntie Roopwati was cremated in the darkness of the evening; he knelt down and placed his bouquet on the remains of auntie's pyre. This hour is quite misty for the author who is a press man and was watching Chinmoy Babu's movements and gestures.

Kuntaka, the great aesthete of India holds that the use of pithy phrase is the essence of artistic pleasure. His theory of Vakrokti implies artful expression which is contrary to straight forward narration. Das conforms to the aesthetic standard set by Kuntaka. In the opening paragraph of *The Misty Hour* he pictures a romantic scene in which the heroine blushes, the hero takes to versifying which leads to a happy conjugal life. In fact it is a fine introduction for a romantic story but the story is more political and less romantic. Hence this story is a mixed bag and the title *The Misty Hour* is the most appropriate for it because *The Misty Hour* is that hour when the person is puzzled. In this story there are several occasions when the characters experience puzzle and shock. Thus Das translates the theory of Dhvani (suggestiveness) propounded by Anandvardhan, the ancient Indian aesthete into a reality.

The aesthetic of the story is judged by what Spitzer, the German aesthete holds, by philological 'circle' Benedetto Croce corroborates to this view and holds that linguistic interpretation is the part of aesthetics. Vossler, another stylistician, holds that linguistic analysis provides clues to national cultures. Das is conscious of India's political culture. Here floor-crossing by the politicians is not considered to be an offence. The masses are eager to vote for a man of spotless character. Hence Das writes a passage on the cause of the collapse of ministry:

A merry floor-crossing by a group of members of the legislature brought the state ministry crashing down. Chinmoy Babu had already been aught in the malestorm of politics. His reputation as an incorruptible leader was the only hope for his party's return to power. He was induced to come down from parliament

to steer his party to victory in his home state. Needless to say,

he was to be the chief minister. (S.F. 6)

The passage above sheds light upon Indian political scenario. Because of the floor-crossing and existing multi-party system the untimely collapse of ministry is a phenomenon in India. The political leaders, here, raise slogan against corruption because it is rampant here. Often the members of parliament are entrusted upon the responsibility of election campaigning in the state because very often the state leaders lose their image in the eyes of the public because of growing corruption. Such situations are real in India today. Das understands the pulse of time and writes the story which sounds realistic. In this context we can quote popular saying, 'in story everything is true except names and dates'.

The story, doubtless, is political and psychological in its content, hence the story teller is to make the dexterous use of literary devices: wit, humour, irony and hyperboles. These literary terms have been defined by perceptive literary critics in the following manner. T.S. Eliot holds that wit is the tough reasonableness beneath a slight lyric grace. M.H. Abrams corroborates it because he associates it to the human faculty of intelligence, inventiveness and mental acuity GLT 219. In regard to humour he views that it is that element in a work of literature which is 'designed to amuse or to excite mirth in the reader or audience' 218. About the ironic mode of expression he holds that it is that strategy by which the literary artist hides what is actual the case; the explicit expression goes contrary to the intention; hence he achieves special rhetorical effects. Hyperbolic use of language causes laughter. A careful reading of *The Misty Hour* will convince that Das is a master in the use of such literary devices. Here is a brilliant passage about the heroine of the story, aunty Roopwati who talks about her feminine grace which attracted many a youth of her times:

Not only had all the eligible youths of the time either fallen or come close to falling in love with her, but also a much revered leader of her father's age, at an opportune moment, had bared his bleary eyes of his thick spectacles and made a pass at her! Aunty, after all, could have bestowed her favours only on one. Forty years after the death of her choice, Jagadishi, Aunty was eloquent in his praise. Jagadishi emerged like a figure of mythical proportions - a Leonardo da Vinci in genius, a Caesar in courage and a Rama in character. (S.F. 5)

In the above passage the heroine praises her youthful charm which prompted many a talented person to fall in love with her. Finally she chose Jagadishi who was the embodiment of courage, goodness and artistic talents. Ironically, Jagadishi died young. The other descriptions in the story reveal that

the heroine was not in good terms with her husband. The use of proper names of extra-ordinary personalities like Leonardo, Caesar and Rama in context of the heroine's husband points to the very fact that just to match the imagination of the lady the story teller found exaggerated descriptions to be essential. The use of such hyperbolic language creates humour. Thus in this passage with (the intelligent manipulation of words) gets combined with humour, irony and hyperboles.

In this story Das has closely studied two generations of politicians: Politicians in free India and freedom fighters during British regime. He regrets that the younger generations of political people are opportunistic, manipulative and unscrupulous:

The younger generation of political aspirants, who tried to buffet their way to power partly through demagoguery and partly through terrorizing or blackmailing their seniors, without the obligation to risk a thing, found it great fun to provoke Roopwati into her tirades. They flattered her by calling her Aunt. (S.F.3)

The story teller condemns the politicians of his age who didn't possess the strength of character which the freedom fighters did have. Lust for power replaced the holy trend of sacrifice for the mother land. A sorry state of affairs indeed!

Das is adept in using similes, metaphors, analogies and other figures of speech in order to lend beauty to the narration of the story. Roopwati was gifted with various qualities. One of the qualities was to sing. Das writes that she could even sing like a Shehnai. Shehnai is a Hindi word. Use of such expression points to the fact that Das was preoccupied with notions of Indianized English. Words from regional languages could be used in Indianized English. Roopwati was an orator. She was fearless in condemning the vices of the powerful political people. Hence the politicians were afraid of her, the story teller gives a portrait of these politicians along with Roopwati in the following lines:

Most of them had captured chunks of power, but they knew how ineffective their powers and positions were against Roopwati. She could strip layer after layer of their reputation with incredible ease, like peeling an onion, leaving nothing at the end. (S.F.3)

The use of analogy : analyzing the characters of political people with 'peeling of onion', is striking. The layers of onion are compared to those of reputation. Das also looks upon power as solid rather than liquid. Hence he uses the word 'chunk' which implies the thick piece in context of power. The word 'strip' is suggestive. It is used in the context of undressing, peeling, pul-

ing, divesting and so on. It appears that the author is a reformer. He believes in the disclosure of truth whether in politics or in morals. Hence he creates a character like Roopwati who is used as an instrument for the revelation of truth in social and political and, say, in public life.

Das's writing at times becomes closer to journalese. Since *The Misty Hour* is a political story the author adopts a kind of style in some of the passages which is journalistic:

Five days of hectic campaigning, and a day more of silent anxiety during which no canvassing was allowed, preceded the polling. There was no room for any doubt regarding Chinmoy Babu's landslide victory. (S.F.8)

The worlds in the above passage : campaigning, canvassing, polling are used in news papers but Das uses them in such a way (repetition of 'ing' that symphony of nasal sounds comes out which enhances the beauty of story – a creative place of writing.

Each great artist who conforms to the aesthetic norms set by the distinguished aestheticians of the world is, at the out set, a keen student of human nature. He understands very well that humans are complex entities. There are various forces acting and reacting within the self. Shakespeare writes that 'To be or not to be that is the question'. The great playwright understands that Man by nature, is indecisive. Das, the story teller understands this truth in his marrow bone. In the opening paragraph of *The Misty Hour* he writes a witty sentence in context of the determination of caste in marriage – 'Nine times out of ten he and she belonged to the same caste' (S.F.1) Casteism is a controversial issue in the independent India.

When a reader or a researcher is trying to highlight the aesthetic of a literary masterpiece he, as Spitzer suggests, must try to know the 'inward life-centre of the work of art' (19). When the scholar tries to discover the life-centre of a piece of literature he should know the ideology of the author through the careful linguistic analysis of the text. In this story while Das is depicting the relationship between Chinmoy Babu and Roopwati the heroine he is picturing amorous advances, as Roopwati alleges, in the following words:

Chinmoy was by my side. He brought his hand close to mine. Slowly, his fidgeting fingers crawled onto my hand. We sat like that for a full hour during which he succeeded in spreading his hand over only half of my palm (S.F.6)

The description is amorous but Das doesn't stoop to any kind of vulgarity or obscenity which can be practised by Arundhati Roy, the winner of Booker prize. Hence his style of writing is so polished, decorum so observed that no

.D. Narshima Roa would written an article like 'A Curse To Creativity'.

Das is an ardent devotee of Sri Aurobindo, the seer, the mystic and the ideologue; in his writings he creates world of mystery, miracles and magic. In many of his stories a reader would perceive, as Shakespeare did, the operation of gods, the invisible agencies in human affairs. In other words, in adverse situations the human beings realize their insignificance and exclaim, 'as flies are to wanton boys are we to gods; they kill us for their sport'. In The Misty Hour the death of the heroine Roopwati due to pneumonia on the eve of election is shocking as well as surprising. The pre-mature death of Jagdish at thirty five is quite shocking. The disease of Dhani Chowdhury – a kind of arthritis, deprives him of the position he was to hold. Thus in this story, Das pictures many unexpected happenings – politics is a majour theme but a perceptive reader visualises many things beyond politics; it is in the perception of 'the beyond' – the operation of the super natural, lies the beauty of the story and the greatness of the story teller. □

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MAGIC REALISM IN THE STORIES OF MANOJ DAS

* Banamali Mishra

The paper seeks to presents a cursory glance of the use of magic realism in English literature in general and in the stories of Manoj Das in particular. It deals with three stories of Mr. Das such as the "Man who Lifted the Mountain" "The Night the Tiger Came " and "The Submerged Valley" Das is compared with some British writers such as D. H. Lawrence in respect of the use of the device. Apart from the magical world, Das deals with the realism of Indian life in his stories, The realism of Das exposes a wide range of character. Such as eager children, proud youths, old cranks, egoistic officers, shrewd politicians and so on. Das displays keen insight into the behavior pattern of each character portraying with subtle humour and gentle satire.

Magic realism or magical realism is an artistic genre in which magical elements or illogical scenarios appear in an otherwise realistic or even normal setting. It has been widely used in literature, art and film. Today, the term is used in broadly descriptive contexts rather than critically rigorous ones. The writer or the artist who uses magic realism does not create a new world but suggests the magical in the real world. It is an amalgam of real and surreal. From this point of view dream is a part of reality. Very often it is found operating in some poets and writers, novelists and story tellers. The literate artist project dreams and enters in to lives of things and perceives the truth hidden behind them. It is a kind of dream vision or intuition that is found operating in some great literary artists.

Some instances of magic realism or dream vision can be taken for discussion. "The casting of the magic of atmosphere is the triumph of Shakespeare". He conceives dreams, omens, superstitions and supernatural and transmutes them into reality in order to lend a magical atmosphere to his plays. Calpurnia's dream is transformed into reality with the murder of Caesar in Julius

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Caesar. The supernatural beings in Hamlet and Macbeth are conceived by the dramatist to project the psychic process in the protagonist. "The supernatural beings that make their appearance are not to be taken as mere illusions, they are distinctly conceived as living a real existence outside the sphere of hallucination" The most prominent artists using magic realism are the Romantic poet's such as S.T. Coleridge and John Keats. Coleridge is fascinated by mysterious forces working behind the visible things and that he tries to explain the weird, the supernatural and the obscure" by his sheer imaginative power to reveal a universally accepted moral. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is set in a demon infested sea but the poet adds a moral that "The mariner is to teach by his own example love and revered all things that God made and loveth " to all optimum dreams. His poems produce what he calls the willing suspension of disbelief". Similarly, Keats's concept of "Negative capability" : being operatives in his poems presents the idea of magic on a Grecian Um" is both physical and mental, worldly and eternal, real and magical in which the element of stories can be discussed in this perspective.

"The man who lifted the Mountain" can be taken as a case in point to analysis the idea of magic realism. The story crops up in a dream of the writer. Two of his friends, one being an anthropologist the bend of a mountain called Luvura. The trio took Brest at its foot with is shocked when the writer sleeping and dreaming. The soul of the mountain appears in his dream and harrated the king who loved his daughter very much. The king is shocked when the princes fell ill and could not recover despite the attempts of the best doctor of the Kingdom. The king declared that if anyone helped recover the princess one would be the second powerful man to the king.

A thief lived at the foot of Lavarva. His name was Thieffou. The Mountain asked him to take the earth lying beneath it and besmear the same in the body of the princess so that she would recover. The mountain also assured him to be as light as jasmine for an hour so that he could collect the earth. Being overjoyed, Thieffou went to the king and convinced him of the princess recovery. A day was appointed for the life of the mountain. Many people including the king and his officers gathered to see the mountain to be lifted by the thief. The people get stupefied and stunned to see the miraculous lift. But the earth lying beneath Luvurva could not be collected because of Thieffou's ambition and attitude of revenge. At one time he thought to throw the mountain upon the king and become the king himself. At other, he thought to kill the policemen by throwing the mountain upon them and avenge the torture they had inflicted upon him for his crime. Thus, when he was negotiating with his varied selfish thoughts the limited time span offered by the mountain expired and it returned

to its normal position. But Luvurva could not retain its original shape. It got a little bend because the thief had been pressed under its heavy weight.

The spirit of the mountain disappeared. The writer's dream vanished. He relapsed into consciousness and understood the reason why there was a bend in the mountain. He understood the truth of his dream vision. When human reason fails to explore the truth it is the dream, the irrational, may reveal the truth. The mystery behind the bending mountain is revealed in the dream.

"Man who Lifted the Mountain" is a product of the writer's intense imagination. From this point of view it can be compared with D.H. Lawrence's "The Rocking-Horse Winner". The story presents the same imaginative twist at the instance of the protagonist who is a young boy. The boy's mother was discontented because her husband's wants in their minds, this craze for money had an adverse effect on the boy's mind. He wanted to help his parents. He had a wooden rocking horse on which he used to sit and rock up and down. He imagined that his horse would be able to know about the horse races, about the horse which can win the horse race, while riding on the rocking horse he allowed himself to be extremely imaginative. The name of the winning horse comes to his mind while he used to sit swing on his rocking horse. He seemed to go to a transcendental plane when in a flash the name of the winning horse appeared in his mind. He used the secret of his knowledge to earn more money.

"Man who Lifted the Mountain" is a satire on human greed and covetousness, Thieffou is symbol of greed, avarice, pride and so on. He is comparable to Subbiah, the protagonist of R.K. Narayan's "Half-a-Rupree Worth". Subbiah takes recourse to hoarding, profiteering, black-marketing, blackmailing and bribery. He brought about his own annihilation for half-a-rupee Thieffou on the other hand gets the same consequence for his own greed. He was a middle aged hunch-back who lives on stealing. He lives in a hut on the other side of the mountain. He hides his stole property under the bushes of the mountain. The mountain advises Thieffou to give up theft. Thieffou's agreement with the mountain not to steal is neutralized when he falls a prey to greed and avarice forgetting the words of the mountain. His desire to become the king or the Deputy superintendent of police and amass wealth brought his own death.

"The Night the Tiger Came" is a social comedy. A dying or dead tiger floating down the river becomes the case of a critical study of the minds of so many self-important officers each seeing the vision of his dream tiger.

The story presents a river, a small industrial town near it and a colony where officers and workers live together. In a rainy season a dead tiger is found floating on the water of the swollen river. A peon informed

the chief Engineer and other officers rush to the river bank. Seeing the tiger floating, the Chief ordered to the chief security officer to fetch his gun. The chief fired two shots aiming at the tiger's head. It is evening. The tiger is not seen. They return to their respective bungalows.

The officers are not sure if the tiger is dead. The tiger appears in their dream at night. The chief imagines in his intoxicated mind that the tiger is approaching towards his bungalow. He gets started to see the sleeping on his bed. He shrieks, but in reality, it is the wife of the chief in a night gown having strides in it,

Mrs. Chief rang to the Deputy Chief Mr. Samapat and told him that a tiger was heading towards his compound gate, the Deputy Chief informed the Chief Security Officer, Mr. Bonbon that a tiger had entered his compoud. Mr. Bonbon told the labour leader Mr. Shawoo over telephone that the tiger had entered the latter's compound. The labour leader announced in a loudspeaker informing the workers not to come out on the wake of a wandering tiger moving in the compound.

In the morning the peon informed the chief that the tiger which was floating on the river had been dead. But it was not the same tiger which the chief had shout. This tiger was without any wounds.

The writer criticizes the vainglorious and self-important officers and their way of functioning. The vanity parade of the bureaucrats and the fuss over nothing as realized at the end, are fine examples of genial humour. Das's originality as a short writer lies in the presentation of an Indian scene with all its naturalness in the typical Indian way.

"The Submerged Valley" is a typical story exhibiting magic and realism. Das exploits the elements of folk lore, and superstition in order to project his own childhood memories. The story deals with three major dimensions as recollected by the narrator. They are such as the peaceful village life with a communion with nature in which the narrator is a part; the ominous presence of the lame crow and the Harijan boy indicating the superstition of the people and the progress of life symbolized by the role assigned to Abolkara by the narrator.

The story starts with a narration of the author's boyhood. He was a small boy, going to school and reading in class three. His headmaster asked it was there only he became conscious of his village. The writer's sense of love for his native village and his sense that his village was like his mother's love and realizes that the trees near the school had lives who appear to sympathies

the pupils. While narrating the different features of his village the writer speaks about so many things, the chief among being, the lame crow, the Harijan boy and Abolkara.

The Government proposes to construct a dam at the lower level of the river which will result the submergence of the writer's village. The Government has a plan to control flood and irrigate the land for a better cultivation. But and there is a protest from the villagers. They meet the writer's Engineer father now living in the town and appealed him to intervene in the affair so that the construction of the dam will be forestalled. But the writer's father's appearance to be indifferent to their appeal and argues that the entire story of civilization are made up of construction and destruction; the latter being either natural or man-made. However, the dam was constructed, the villagers were paid compensation and the matter of protest ends there.

The introduction of the ominous signs at the beginning of the story has significant bearings on belief system of the people. The lame crow caws perching on a stone arch. People do not dare to disturb it. The Harijan boy suffers from a congenital disease for which his whole body has turned white. His fond grand parents called him *sahid*. The author suggests that they are omens has a rationale behind it. It is suggested that the displaced and the village is submerged under water owing to such ominous presence. Such a description in the story justifies the idea of magical realism and , Mr. Das is called a magical realist.

The folk element of the story is presented with introduction of Abolkara. The writer says: "Here he was called Abolkara, literally, the disobedient, the funny hero of and series of folk tales popular in our region" Abolkara is a traditional character but with a difference. In traditional stories Abolkara always follows his master at the time of tour and travel to different parts of the country. In such cases Abolkara is subservient who was to carry out all the orders of his master. The role of Abolkara is subservient who was to carry out all the orders of his master which can be said to be both theory and practice for the study. But Das's Abolkara stands as a lover of nature and nativity. He is a patriot and son of the soil. It is suggested in the story when the villagers leave the village. The rumour goes on that he was living beneath the water. He appears in a novel setting after five years of the construction of the dam. He appears at the Siva temple and the hillock when people visited the spot following a fall of water leveling the reservoir. They asked Abolkara, "How did you manage to live under water? What was your diet?" Abolkara replies, "Like that, like that". Das ignores for long five years but it is not mystical but intentional. His inten-

tion is to make the folk hero alive, afresh and green through the ages.

Abolkara is finally saved from a possible danger by the writer's father. Such a gesture of the father changes the minds of the children. They understood that their father was kind and sympathetic. The writer says, "I Looked at the Father's face in deep admirations". (6). His sister, Putu, says, "Father is so wonderful".

There are many devices of magic realism in the stories of Manoj Das. They include dream, folklore, fairy tale, fable, superstition and so on. They are discerned in several aspects of his stories such as setting, atmosphere, narrative and the like which transform the monotonies and cheerless reality to an interesting and enjoyable one. Such a phenomenon in his stories makes them almost unique and original those earn him name and fame as the greatest story teller of the world. □

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INDIAN LIFE IN TRANSITION: A STUDY OF 'A TIGER AT TWILIGHT'

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Manoj Das is a gifted Indian writer blessed with a prodigious perception of life and its mysteries. Born in a semi-feudal set-up of Balasore (Orissa) in 1934 and again, groomed as a political activist of the left reckoning during his student life, he is at present teaching English literature in Sri Aurobindo International Centre for Learning, Pondicherry. Widely acclaimed as a short story writer, Sri Das is a novelist of rare distinction, and in all his works he takes an attempt, as it appears, to delineate the social and personal aspects of human existence by an apparently light-hearted but ironic stance. In his works we can and often do discover an undertone of typical Indian mysticism, fantasy and mystery pervading the theme, but never showing in the contours of the plot, invariably allowing the reader a range of possibilities, from which to formulate his impression and conclusion. His works more often than not accommodate the theme of transition: India's passage from a colony to a free nation, the passing of feudalism, especially the rule by Chieftains and Zamindars and the slow transformation of Indian villages into small towns and urban centres. **Cyclones** portrays all these transitions in realistic and metaphoric terms. In fact, what seems to be a matter-of-fact reporting, mostly by the first person narrator, proves to be a socio-psychological comment, which leaves the reader in a reflection. In this paper, an attempt is made to explore the theme of transition in **A Tiger at Twilight**, a Penguin original fiction. A search for the nuances of hidden transcendence of man is taken, as well.

In one of his interviews, Manoj Das has confessed: "I thought, born in a village, born just before independence and hence living through the transition at an impressionable age, I could present through English a chunk of genuine India. Well, right or wrong, one is entitled to one's faith in oneself".¹ In the said vein, Das's canvass in **A Tiger at Twilight** is significantly larger to embrace a number of forces at play in a setting of transition, again typically Indian. The physical backdrop is 'an enchanting valley' and a remote town therein called Nijanpur, which 'has never disclosed the secret that shrouds its past.....'. The cover presents the picture of two tigers and two women in close proximity and a third impression with the tiger super-imposed on the woman figure.² It gives a

clear insight into the plot and also meaningful hints at the lady protagonist-Heera, who is no less an enigma by herself so much so that she is as acrimonious and aggressive as a tigress.

The narration begins with the description of a storm: "...For three days and nights my small valley writhed under a gale. At times the heavy downpour erased from my sight everything beyond my window. At night whizzing gusts sounded like weird incantations of a witch who rocked and swung the valley through the clouds in a frenzied whim..."³ This storm outside points at the storm within the otherwise peaceful social fabric of Nijanpur, because of two strange developments: a man-eater has dared into the valley and the Raja (King) of Samargarh back to Nijanpur (his summer resort) after twenty years. An amusing, yet nerve shattering, chain of events develops on these two intertwined events.

Raja's reappearance is typical-he is back with his step-sister Heera, who 'during the Raj was seen by a few, but had been an enigma to all'. In course of narration, Dev (who appears to be the author's persona) confirms that Heera is found to be exercising even greater influence on the Raja. Because of Heera's whimsical ways and evil machinations earlier, the Rani (Queen) had a wretched life and she passed away uncared and unlamented. And now her daughter Balika (Princess), who is under Heera's controlled surrogation, is suffering from partial paralysis, which is less physical and more psycho-somatic. Balika is kept in a dimly-lighted confinement under the strict vigilance of Heera, thus leading to sensory deprivation and, for that matter, the lop-sided growth of her personality. In Raja's analysis, which lets out to be a lame excuse for his incapacity to bring the situation under control, 'Heera is possessive of Balika no doubt, but she is awfully attached to the girl'. However, in the light of the structure of the novel and again keeping in view Heera's character and vision, it can be ascertained that Balika's suffering is not divine-ordained, it is not nerve-based either, but more often than not it is man-made.

The apparent situation here is ludicrous, but at a deeper level it shows how thin is the line that divides sanity and insanity, love and hatred and, above all, the human and the inhuman. In this context Heera's character warrants further study. Nobody takes her official genesis seriously, but it is certain that she did have and now does have a spell over the Raja. While recounting upon his subservience to Heera, the Raja admits: "... Perhaps at some point of time in my youth, I realized that while I could not forestall events or alter situations, the way I reacted to them remained my prerogative". Ironically enough, Raja's concern for his only daughter Balika also remains sentimental. In course of conversation with Dev (the narrator) he muses: "My daughter had become a

symbol for me, a memory of my wife, my past and a reminder of black future. She suddenly ceased to be the jolly little cherub pestering me with her babbling and her antics. Yes, she had become a symbol like a distant moon. You feel close to it, without knowing whether it knows you or not. On a realistic plane, I felt that she, my only dream of joy, would continue to remain a dream.”

In this expression the Raja gives vent to his inner conflict (a sort of approach-avoidance conflict) and it appears how helpless a victim he remains in the hands of Heera. More so, while conversing with Dev, Balika's caretaker unravels to her disapproval of the Raja's surrender to Heera. Should we not take it as a reflection of the Indian king's obsequiousness to the white race? In fact, Heera, as per her origin, belongs to the said race.

Soon to be drawn into the circle of Heera's spell is Sharmaji, an orthodox pandit, who undergoes a metamorphosis under the delusion that she loves him. It is pathetic indeed to note that such a childish fancy of Sharmaji is jilted off, when he is grabbed by the man-eater in his bid to return Heera's gifts given to him earlier. The Raja in course of his conversation with Dev opens the mystery. While explaining Heera's ratiocination vis-à-vis Sharmaji's predilection, he expounds: "... If by prize possession you mean the suit Heera presented to Sharma, I must tell you that it was Heera's ways of avenging the man who, having agreed to wed her, chose death instead. Heera has not excused him. It has been her fond pastime-though she indulges in it very rarely-to locate the fool in the crowd around her and to adorn him with something or other bearing the memory of the young man, she had perhaps once loved in her life." This declaration of the Raja gives a clear insight into Heera's personality-the manic-depressive in her owes its origin to her early conditioning in regal lavishness and, later, to the trauma of lost love.

The narrator Dev, the sole representative of a bankrupt feudal family, has many reasons to fear and hate Heera. Obviously, he could not have anticipated the situation, which she and he himself too, were drawn into. He had just climbed to examine a *mancha* (pedestal, built temporarily) on which the Raja himself was to wait at night for the man-eater. Heera happened to come to the spot standing alone, petrified and 'staring at something in a dazed manner'. He narrates: "I followed her gaze and saw a giant beast facing her-perhaps it was the tigress we waited. They seem transfixed by each other. ... The man eater roared and Heera gave a blood-curdling shriek simultaneously. ...I could not distinguish between Heera and the beast. Looking at Heera I wondered if she was not the tigress and looking at the tigress I wondered if she was not Heera. ...I thought I wept blood. But I could not know the human from the beast. I do not trust the accuracy of my vision or my memory of that moment, but I think I saw them springing on each other with equal frenzy and fury. At once

my power of discrimination was restored. I shot aiming at the beast, before I fell into a dead faint.” Inevitably, the shot from Dev’s gun killed the tigress and Heera being mauled by the beast also breathed her last. But, Dev feels shaken and he confesses: ‘... the memory of the bizarre episode weighed on my chest like a vampire, sucking at my spirit.’

At this point again we are introduced to another world of fantasy concerning the Raja’s nocturnal adventure. After independence the kingdom being merged into the Indian Union, the Raja has left his ancestral palace and preferred to stay in the cities, spending lavishly whatever resources he was having, partly to satisfy his wounded ego and partly to meet Heera’s prodigality. Dogged by the economic imperatives or by the need for some kind of one-upmanship, the Raja is able to savour fully the idea of taking dips into the pond near the temple of Baneswari. He takes regular dips in the pond beside the temple wedded to Baneswari, his ancestral deity, with the hope of retrieving some private wealth by the help of a Yaksha. In course of his irrational yet passionate venture, he discovers a buried treasure in a steel trunk containing a human skeleton, which inevitably remains the cause of his shock and inopportune demise. The author comments: “These could be the remains of a rebel punished by an ancestor of the Raja, or any country lass who had inspired a prince’s passion, but had endangered his honour. The victim had wreaked his or her vengeance on the last of the Rajas.”

Now the question is whether the novel is a document in Indian English fiction of an aspect of Indian life in transition. Hailing from Orissa which had more than thirty-six feudal states of an exclusive kind, some of them marked by the sort of places described in the work and again, belonging to one of such royal families, the author had evidently an intimate knowledge of them. In the introductory note to the novel, he vindicates: “The contours of their setting too have rapidly changed. Many readers may find the characters, situation and setting of **A Tiger at Twilight** strange, ... But they are not fictitious... of course, in no work of fiction, the factual realism is the sole realism.”⁴

Nevertheless, any discerning reader can find the author transcending factual realism. One also feels in the narration the author’s deeper understanding of or faith in different levels of *Karma*, the play of occult forces in human life and the knowledge of unpredictable developments confronting and baffling us. But again, we also discover the author’s unbound faith in the role of a transcendent element in life. In one of his interviews, entitled *Sustha Aamodara Bibhutiru Aame Bancita* (Deprived are we of the Sacred-ash of Salubrious Joy), he laments: “That man has shaped for himself a pitiable and languishing present, there is no doubt about it. What else would he see except darkness, through the prison-hole of this listless present? But I repose faith on a nobler potency

than this destructive force, which would influence our future. It would while negotiating with man's own inner propensity for higher attainments also control the future of mankind. We have reasons enough to be frustrated about the present plight of man. But one blessed with the knowledge of the real being has also got sufficient cause to be optimistic about the future of mankind. Beyond the ego-centric contours of man's ability and inability, there are many a force at work and a many plans to be realized, about which man is unaware."⁵

The novel, however, ends in a subtle and sweet note of hope, obviously a touch of grace, the design of the divine at work, when Balika (the Princess - the Raja's lone survivor), the silent character totally enmeshed in her suffering, believed to be a paralytic walks into a sunny meadow. Dev observes: "... In my heart frozen by the recent events, her image shown like a bluish flame, I felt a delightful thaw set in... ." What is the secret of Balika's transformation then? One thing appears certain that she is perhaps free from the guilt of her otherwise unruly and wayward fore-fathers, 'the bluish flame' indicative of her liberation, her transcendence. Das admits the interplay of the uncanny and the eerie in our day-to-day lives and in the light of the said admittance, we have apoint to ponder over. Das confesses: 'I use fantasy as a medium to focus on contemporary and real problems.' In fact, Balika, like the mythical Sita, evolves out of the flame. Viewed differently, especially from an earthly angle, she is also no more within the grip of Heera. She is incidentally free from the clutches of the tigress in Heera; metaphorically, the post-independent India's sole survivor of an otherwise feudal set-up is obviously free from the control and surrogating influence of a character, representing the white race.

At this point, we can ask ourselves a pertinent question: who is then the tiger at twilight? Is it just the beast or metaphorically Heera, who is no less a tigress in her action and volition; or, both in their respective bid to spring on each other fuse into one? This subtle art of mingling men with animals, or in a different sense, humanizing the non-human and vice-versa, Manoj Das seems to have imbibed from the innocent folk tradition. It is perhaps a deliberate attempt on his part to raise the tiger to the level of an allegory and, therefore, in the title the tigress is skillfully altered to a tiger. Or, should we take the Raja to be the tiger (as it is hinted in the beginning – the entry of man-eater and the return of the Raja to Nijanpur occur at the same point of time) and 'twilight' to the phase of transition in the lives of Indian feudal chiefs on the eve of independence? Basing on all these labyrinthine nuances and intriguing possibilities, we may take the tiger as one suggesting fear, the beastly force in us all, which remains the cause of another's awe and shock. We can here refer to one of Das's short stories 'The Night the Tiger Came', where the tiger is finally reduced to a symbol, 'a tiger, which roams in city-street without leaving its paw marks'. It

is not necessarily Narayan's tamed tiger, not the majestic tiger of Blake either. It is the tiger which we confront often in our day-to-day life within us, or in our close relations around us.

While native imagery is a marked trait in Das's works (which is at times questioned), we can ascertain that Das is extremely cautious in using the Indian idiom, style of speech or proverb in their translation and, of course, in their proper context.⁶ Such a totally unexpected use of words and their collocation arising perhaps from the exact situations and agents, of a kind an English writer would not have, may raise the eye-brows of certain highbrow critics; but not for nothing it imparts a touch of nativity to the writer. Eventually after all, what is written has to be recognizably Indian to the Indian reader and recognizably English to the English reader.⁷ We will certainly then account for the demonstration of such a rare trait in Manoj Das. It is through a superb craftsmanship he has drawn home the picture of a society in transition, through a heterogeneous mix of mystery and supernatural, realism and fantasy, comedy and satire and, none the less, with the haunting observations on the meaning of our existence in this 'vale of tears'. □

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The Fictional World of Manoj Das : A Study of Magic and Mystery

* Dr. Bhagabat Nayak

From a card carrying communist to a votary of Sri Aurobindo's mystical teaching and student of Integral Yoga Manoj Das has a quaint progress in the field of fiction writing both in Oriya and English. As a bilingual writer, critic, columnist, educationist he has filled a gap when Indian short story writing in English was in shortage of a writer like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao who had popularized Indian short stories in English. Das never writes bed time stories but they are the 'lorries' which narrate the character and condition of every contemporary individual of his time. Gone are the days when the Indian short story writers were drawing inspiration from ancient Indian fables and tales from the Panchatantra, the Jataka Tales and the Kathasaritsagara. Story telling for Manoj Das is a charming form of art to create a world of unity and impression. Unlike Ruskin Bond he writes his stories differently on regional set ups with a pan-Indian and universal touch.

Indian English short story had its beginning with Shoshee Chunder Dutt's Realities of Indian life; Stories Collected from the Criminal Reports of India (1885), growth in the hands of Shankar Ram, A.S.P. Ayyar, S.K. Chettur, Manjeri Isvaran, and the great trios – Anand, Narayan and Raja Rao; and development in the hands of Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, Chaman Nahal, Ruskin Bond, Manoj Das, R.P. Jhabvala and Anita Desai. Although its dimension is extended from regional to continental subject matters in the hands of a few writers like Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Dina Mehta, Shashi Deshpande, Vikram Chandra, Shiv K. Kumar in the regional level writers like Ruskin Bond and Manoj Das still continue their writing and consistently attempt to make the local into global in their stories.

In early Indian English short stories mostly mythological tales are retold. The story collections of Cornelia Sorabji in her Love and life Behind the Purdah (1901), Sunbabies : Studies in the child Life of India (1904) , Between the Twilights (1908) and Indian Tales of the Great Ones Among Men, Women and

Bird-People (1916) are mostly the studies of Hindu and Parsi life in both princely and plebian circles. They were chiefly on anecdotes and character sketches. During the Gandhian era stories were mostly in artless and sentimental form with conventional motifs. The stories written during this time were mostly on the themes of social reform, and plight of woman in traditional Hindu society where young girls were married to old men for money by their parents, abandoned or persecuted wives, victims of the dowry system or on the absence of birth control. Often the stories were written in autobiographical mode or in epistolary method with the imagination accomplishing "a willing suspension of disbelief" in the readers' mind. Manjeri Isvaran theorises short story in his 'preface' to *A Madras Admiral* (1959):

A short story can be a fable or a parable, real or fantasy, a true presentation or a parody, sentimental or satirical; serious in intent or a light hearted diversion; it can be any of these, but to be memorable it must catch the eternal in the casual, invest a moment with the immensity of time (qtd. in Naik 179).

Short stories written for more than seven decades from 1930s to the first decade of twenty-first century cover the contemporary environment with the treatment of fantasy and supernatural elements, flowery style, innate sentimentality and touch of human psychology. Although some of the story writers wrote their stories approximating to the technique of the folktale and with the influence of fairy stories they have revealed a wide-ranging mood and tone. In the pre-Independence era stories were written with strong social awareness, a touch of inevitable clash between tradition and modernity, experience of universal human plight, tell-tale marks of militant leftism and leftist propaganda. In the post-Independence era stories were chiefly written on striking incidents from Indian history with heavy-handed satire in several aspects of modern Indian life, glimpses of several areas such as army life, espionage, hunting, mining, smuggling, treasure seeking and amusing anecdotes covering the theme of partition and its aftermath.

In the post-Independence period Ruskin Bond and Manoj Das have established a long tradition of story writing. Although they have been writing for a long time with a flair their stories never become pale in the post-colonial time. The strange similarity is that both the story writers never create the locales like R.K. Narayan's Malgudi or Thomas Hardy's Wessex in their stories but they deliberately draw the fictional canvas of their stories on the contours of Dehradun and North-Orissa. While Bond's fictional imagination greatly deals with the 'great affinity between trees and men', in Das's stories his characters oxygenize in North Orissa's vegetation and socio-political environment.

Manoj Das is one of the doyens of Indian short story writing in English has more than eighty books to his credit. Although his first book is a collection of poems, *Shatabdira Artanada* in Oriya, published in 1949 while he was a student of class nine he has written a number of novels, collection of poems, travelogues and more than twenty collections of short stories both in Oriya and English. Das's political life is brief but it is very much demonstrative in his stories. In 1956 he had participated in students' and peasants' demonstration for which he had to undergo for a while and was in jail on charges of sedition and attempting to overthrow the government. He was also included in the Indian delegation to the Afro-Asian students' conference at Bondung in Indonesia. He is a believer in radical Marxism and revolutionary spiritualism. But after the Soviet dictator, Stalin's fall from grace Das had a mental upheaval. He searched for various causes to believe in and pondered over the nature of suffering. After reading some of the writings of Sri Aurobindo he had his exposition of individual as a transitory and evolving being. His quest for knowing the nature of suffering and the meaning of life drew him to the Mother at the Aurobindo Ashram, Pondichery, in 1963. Since then he has been mostly living there as a member of teaching faculty. At present he travels outside to give lectures in various universities or to receive doctorates and other honours. He also remains as a member of the general board of the Sahitya Akademi. Besides his creative writings he has written some authoritative treatises on Sri Aurobindo and writes regular columns for several national dailies.

Das's major writings are stories and novels. His novels are limited in number but stories are published in several collections. From 1967 to 1977 he has four collections of short stories. They are *Song For Sunday and Other Stories* (1967), *Short Stories* (1969), *The Crocodile's Lady* (1975) and *Fables and Fantasies For Adults* (1977). But his later collections like *The Submerged Valley and Other Stories* (1986), *Bulldozers and Fables and Fantasies for Adults* (1990), *The Miracle and Other Stories* (1993) and *Farewell to a Ghost* (1994) deal with the various aspects of life and society and the change of human condition due to urbanization and industrialization that result helplessness, agony and loneliness. His themes are wide ranging, his world is warm and palpable. His characters are known by their intensity. His stories have always hints of pathos, humour, subdued irony, gentle mockery, fantasy, dubious nature of individual, satire and contemporary situation with psychological delineations. As an acclaimed novelist and short story writer, and genuine poet he always establishes his spontaneity and impressions of innocence. All his stories are mere edits of his memory and products of his brain and heart. The miracle of his language and the miracle of communication, cadence of the flow of words,

and visual images in his writings form a magic world in his fictional imagination.

Magic and mystery are the two major aspects of Das's fictional imagination. His narrative style is marvellous, startling, wonderful and exciting for the creation of people, places and situations. His art of narration creates wonders, enchantment, and sorcery of producing illusions. He presents the secret or mysterious power of nature over events, human imagination or will. His investing the powers of nature, environment and imagination appears like a legerdemain. Similarly the plot and theme of his novels and stories have some hidden meaning from the ordinary readers but they reveal some meaning and purpose to the spiritually enlightened minds. Often his plots are obscure to understand and beyond the common man's knowledge to explain. His fictional plots are so artistically drawn on fables, fantasy, history, mythology and contemporary incidents that they are difficult and incomprehensible to understand. His characters include prince and princess, kings and queens, ministers and courtiers; supernatural characters like ghosts, apparitions; and common animal characters like crocodile, tiger, turtle, and monkey. Some characters like saints, sadhus, tantriks, astrologers, exorcizers, necromancers and typical human personas play their respective roles. North Orissan landscape, local politics, traditional beliefs, customs of people, human nature in particular and everyday situations in life dominate the theme of his stories. The people he presents get fed up with the upper class, bureaucrats and ministers who advise them to do something but in practice they do something reverse. He presents the attitude of the bureaucrats and ministers in the government that makes the common people frustrated. As a result the common people develop hatred and distrust for upper class hypocrisy. His characters are all types. He has a strong and curious fascination for them. Through his characters he intends to criticize something or someone and makes them patented under the hallmark of his imagination.

There are two Orissas - the traditional and the postmodern in Manoj's Das's fictional world. While his traditional world is predominantly marked with the treatment of fables, fantasies, history, mythology, mysticism, superstition, rural scene and rustics; the post modern world projects contemporary society and politics, impact of industrialization and urbanization, the role of bureaucrats and ministers, and government's attitude to common men. He projects these elements as the magic compound in his narrative technique. At the same time his characters, narration of situations and understanding of human nature are full of mystery. For the portrayal of locales and landscapes he almost appears like an Indian Hardy, for giving a psychological dimension to his characters he appears to be an Indian Maugham, for speaking philosophy in the mouth of his characters with a touch of didacticism he appears like an Indian Chekov, and

for giving a surprise ending he establishes his identity as an Indian O' Henry. Above all the incidents and situations he deals with in his stories are local in colour and he carves them on the contours of Orissa with the renderings of truth and realism. While dealing with individual's basic attitude to life in his stories he maintains universality.

The imagination of plots for his novels and stories is always natural and spontaneous. In novels and short stories "His fond characters are mostly ordinary mortals, village folks much familiar to us. They exchange their pains and pleasures, small griefs and sufferings, convey confessions and conundrums" (Bhattacharjee 2). He has always the tendency to project the shifting, transforming and everchanging native world and its landscape which becomes a symbol of the power of the oppressed and the neglected who act as a revolutionary force to resist and dismantle the static, fixed and conservative force of the upperclass and bureaucracy in the government. In a sense his realism exposes the complexities and contradictions of postmodern and postcolonial life. Although he appears to be supra-rational in his interaction with the situations, events and individual's life he makes a more realistic presentation. The shifting patterns of ordinary events, narration of fantastic mysterious and dreamlike elements from myth and fairytales in his plots are the new experiments in his story writing. His imagination in fiction writing is based on fantastic, mythical, nightmarish serious or trivial, horrible or ludicrous, tragic or comic elements. They are though inventive but highly effective and evocative. In a sense magical realism is found in his fond imagination. When he is asked about it in an interview he says: "I have never felt inclined to classify my fiction or identify elements in them. I find "magic realism" – what the term conjures up in my vision – abundantly present in the Mahabharata and Homer's Ulysses" (The Hindu Literary Review. January 7. 2007:2). But in his fictional imagination he has emphasized the urge to perceive reality in some sense unreal, and the unreal as in some sense embodying the real. His vision and revolutionary social representation are integral to the magical presentation of social realism. In his fiction "Magical realism reflects the shifting, transformative, everchanging native world and even its very tropical landscape, which becomes for him a symbol of power of the colonized and oppressed to act as a revolutionary force and to resist and dismantle the static, fixed and conservative force..." (Childs & Fowler 134- 35).

While making an approach to Manoj Das's fictional world and treatment of magic and mystery in it the paper is aimed at analyzing a few of his novels and selected short stories. Choosing two of his best novels for a brief analysis the paper focuses on his imagination and recollection of past memory in

Cyclones (1987) and magical realism in Amrita Phala (1996). In *Cyclones* he presents nature's fury during a devastating cyclone in the pre-Independence era in 1942 that had caused irreparable loss to North-Orissa. But this had left an indelible impression in his mind. The novel is partly a memoir and partly a surrealistic presentation of the condition of the people in North- Orissa who appear to be the recurrent victims of this natural calamity. About the novel, *Cyclones*, he says in an interview:

kind and courteous. A terrible cyclone ruined all, ushering in famine and epidemic. The human misery kindled in me the search for a panacea. I found the answer in Marxism. That was an exiting time. The communist movement was still undivided (The Hindu Literary Review. January 7, 2007:2).

This memory of childhood in his native village, Sankhari in the district of Bala-sore still harkens to his mind to with the recollection of situations after the cyclone in 1942. This enables him to give a picture of so many starving people which still rankles in him. Nilova Roy Chaudhury rightly remarks:

A devastating cyclone swept through the village when he was eight. Only his house survived. The subsequent misery of hundreds of famine- afflicted people, many collapsing and dying of hunger by the wayside, left him traumatized... *Cyclones*, recounts in some measure the destruction wrought by the cyclone in 1942 , set against the backdrop of pre-partition India, while simultaneously evoking the reactions of intense storms, both internal and external, and their impact on the mind and development of the protagonist of the novel, the idealist scion of a zamindar family, Sandip Chowdhury (3).

The cyclone that had caused a devastation in his remote village Sankhari close to the Orissa- Bengal border is very similar to the destruction of the most recent Super-Cyclone of 1999. The novel portrays the present and prognosticates the future. Das laments that due to the cyclone the extraordinary beauty of his village was lost. He has a jolt to his young mind that gradually left him groping for the real truth behind the façade of reality.

Amrita Phala is Manoj Das's one of the best novels ever written in Oriya begged him Saraswati Samman in 2001. The novel is based on history, legend, mystery, magic and realism. Contextualising a legend in history of the first century B.C. Manoj Das postulates King Bhatruhari's existential suffering with the Amrita Phala, a magic fruit. Amrita Phala provides long life and youth, like mythical Sanjeevani for which the divine, human and demon had a craving. The fruit possesses the power of making the ethereal into enternal and spatial into spiritual. One day while a yogi gives this fruit to Bhatruhari, the King of Ujjaini he presents it to his best loved queen Pingala. The King loves queen Pingala

more than Sindhumati, his first queen. But ironically queen Pingala gives it to a young minister who further gives it to a danseuse whom he loves the best. When King Bhatruhari comes to know this it suspends his disbelief with a question – how much one can depend on his own confidence and consciousness. The magic fruit opens now the mystery of human nature for him. He gets disturbed by the magic fruit and the mystery of human nature. It becomes difficult for him to measure the vector of human feelings, emotion and confidence. He is confused with the mystery of life, love, ethic and nature of human sacrifice. In illusion he renounces the world and leaves everything to his younger brother Vikramaditya. Although the legend has different versions in different editions of history the story writer rewrites this version intending to project the past in the analysis of the present by narrating the suffering of human beings quite similar to the legend in his fictional presentation. He presents Amrita Phala as an objective co-relative to deal with man's existential dilemma that poses the question, how much does modern man differ from his ancestor in his primeval longing for truth, bliss and immortality.

But in his fictional imagination he has emphasized the urge to perceive reality in some sense unreal, and the unreal as in other sense embodying the real. His social vision and revolutionary social representation are integral to the magical presentation of social realism. The magic of Das's stories lies in his capacity to delineate his characters or to portray the situations with scintillating wit, genial humour and subtle and suggestive power. While writing his stories he presents some stark realism, dreamy fantasy and cryptic mystery with humorous, awesome, droll or pathetic, quiet or stormy situations. Analysing these elements in his stories it is found that "The Misty Hour" narrates about an intriguing lady Roopwati. Making her the central character of the story the story writer makes her a familiar stuff with a picturesque finesse. "The Naked" is a fine story with a mediocre end. It takes us to a time when the British Raj was on its last legs. The hamlet of a fisherfolk is the setting of the story. Rajmata of Sapanpur has asked Bhanu Singh, the scion of the hereditary senapatis to greet a group of august nudists. While discharging his duty Bhanu Singh finds himself inadequate to execute the order. He grows nervous and flinched. He is lost in a moral dilemma. Bhanu Singh has an inner turmoil. The scary atmosphere and the conflict in Bhanu Singh's mind heighten the dramatic intensity in the story. "The Crocodile's Lady" presents an unusual relationship of love and affection between the crocodile and crocodile's lady. As the crocodile's lady is unhappy and weeps bitterly the crocodile comes to her rescue. He gives her a mantra to recite to get back her human form. The crocodile's lady seems to have forgotten her parents and is completely immersed in love. They start to swim from river to river in joy and ecstasy. The tragic end comes when the

crocodile's lady escapes from the crocodile's control. Now crocodile, the true lover climbs the embankment and is killed. The story persuades the reader to suspend temporarily his disbelief. It is an interesting mix of the real and unreal with a flight to beauty, beyond reality.

"The Owl" is an uncanny tale. With the setting of a village Vishalpur the story writer narrates how the village had an owl in its holy shrine. One day a young desperate zamindar sahib stormed to the scene to kill the bird, the feathery friend of the villagers. The people of the village alerted him of the fear. The fierce storm in the cloudy night was an indication of ominous nature. That night the death of the bird brought a painful death to the Zamindar. The story conveys a message that happiness in order to be perfect, must be general and universal in character. "The General" is a hilarious account of a life that narrates about a General named Valla who gladly accepts the proposal made by a group of young artists. Valla accepts the proposal to appear in a small and cardinal role of a commander in their play. While playing his role Valla fails to perform due to his nervousness. The storywriter narrates some ordinary things with unexpected lusture. "The Miracle" is an interesting story of our daily life in which two fake monks – Braja Vaishnav and Bulu Baba conceal their real selves and hoodwink the gullible people. "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night" is an impressive story presents its protagonist's nostalgic mood. Sudhir recollects the moments which are scribbled in his diary book. It burns into his memory. The memory of treachery haunts him like a phantom even after sixty years. The story writer raises some questions– Is it really a pain he feels, or it a sense of guilt? Is it a story of puzzling love or of sheer stupid jealousy? Of regrets and confessions? "The Tiger at Twilight" appears like an outstanding novella. The story is set in the village Nijanpur and it records the chilling realities of a royal family. The account reveals great warmth and feeling for its gripping historical record that unravels to a crystalline story.

"Mystery of the Missing cap" presents the chaos created after the missing of the minister's cap. Narrating the experience of the honourable minister of fisheries and fine arts Das presents how the man in the government is infuriated at the loss of his cap. Das unmistakably draws the minister who hails from his native place and discusses the portfolios of fisheries and fine arts. Introducing two important characters, Moharana a well-to-do villager who nurtured his ambition to be a member of state legislature, and Baba Birakishore who was invited to the village by Moharana to field for latter's entry to the legislature. The situation takes a different turn when a monkey named Jhando takes away the minister's cap. Moharana lies before the minister and informs him ~~that an admirer has taken away the cap because he considers it sacred. But~~

Moharana's hand in the missing of the cap also cannot be falsified. The story presents the treatment of masses to their politicians in the pretext behind the monkey's taking away the cap and role of flattery that they do to please the minister. The story also reveals the hideous nature of politicians who, though good at speech, they are opposite in action in their private lives.

"The Vengeance" is a story on human relationship. In the story the protagonist pines for taking revenge on his enemy. It is interesting to see him wait and watch and spending much time to pursue him. But in the end when he finds his enemy dead he feels cheated. This makes him taunted as he feels his enemy's death is a triumph over him. "Encounter" presents the habit of the people of one profession who look down upon the people of another profession. The story presents two classmates—a school teacher and a chauffeur who are sitting in the same canteen after years of their schooling. Now they recognize each other but don't talk to each other because each one thinks that he is superior to the other. The story writer presents how human beings are guided by false ego and dislike for one another at the cost of their relationship. "The Murderer" is a story on the nature of man. The story has a mysterious atmosphere in which Binu is taken to be a murderer believably for his alleged involvement in killing Dabu Sahukar, a village moneylender. Binu is tortured and punished for this. But after some years a Sadhu comes to that village and surprisingly he is recognized none other than Dabu Sahukar. The answer for the questions is left to the readers whether Binu killed Dabu Sahukar or he had disappeared in the forest while returning with Binu. "The Sage of Tarungiri and Seven old Seeker" is a similar type of story like "The Miracle". The story presents the falsity and fraud of the saints like Tukan Baba who attracts the innocent people.

"The Love Letter" is a story on individuals' sense of propriety. The story is based on the reaction of some people to a supposedly love letter written by Geeta. The letter is actually a scrap blank paper found by a research scholar, Gautam. An interesting situation arises when Goutam pretends that he has discovered the love letter of Geeta. Many people including one, Chaudhury a man of Geeta's father's age becomes the claimant to this letter. Unfortunately it is found that all the claimants of the love letter pose themselves to be very close to Geeta and threaten Goutam with dire consequences. The bathos comes at the end when it is revealed that the paper is not a love letter but a blank one. The implicit irony surprises us how people irrespective of their age, position, status forget their sense of proportion and shamelessly claim that they are loved by young and beautiful girls. "The Red Red Twilight" is about the unconsummated love of Pundarik who later confronts the ghost of his beloved Kumudini. ~~Pundarik could not marry Kumudini because of his father,~~

Raghav Sharma's opposition. When Kumudini drowns in a pond it is assumed that her spirit moves around and creates nuisance by entering the body of a young girl, Kuni. The exorcist Raghav Sharma is called for to cure Kuni. As he is not well, his son Pundarik goes to cure the girl. But in confrontation with the spirit in the little girl Pundarik recognizes that it is the spirit of Kumudini. Now Pundarik is terribly frightened of the spirit and runs to his house and hides in his father's room. Seeing his son's plight the exorcist father gets frightened with the impression that Pundarik is possessed by the spirit of Kumudini. The story writer presents that Kumudini takes her revenge on the father and son in her death. The story ends with a mark of poetic justice.

Manoj Das's "The Submerged Valley" is a much appreciated story that presents the theme of postmodern India. The story combines history, psychology, realism, philosophy and basic attitude to human life. The story shows how children appreciate the parents when they find them doing their duty to the best of their ability by helping the poor and the needy. At one level it presents the psychology of a child and his sense of appreciation for his father's inert goodness, and the impact of the industrial civilization on rural areas of the country. A dam is to be constructed in a particular area. The people of that area approached to an engineer, the narrator's father to stop the construction of dam at any cost. He is a reasonable man and the people have enough faith in him. As he listens to them he tries to persuade them not to obstruct the construction of dam in the interest of the state. P. Raja rightly remarks:

The story is a good example of character portrayal. We meet an assortment of people visiting a rock and a temple. Once the centre of a village, but since submerged in a dam and temporarily visible as the water level goes down in summer. Among them is Abolkara (literally disobedient), a half crazy egotist who claims that he had been always there, in a mysterious way. Soon all the villagers leave their boats as the water level begins to rise. The narrator's father, an engineer, had a tough time in persuading Abolkara to leave. He fails and returns with his family in his motor boat into the bungalow on the bank and goes over to attend a meeting (12-13).

The story reminds us about the impact of industrialization on rural people who are displaced due to the construction of dam. They at first, protest and want to fight it to the last but when they realize that they are fighting a losing battle they give up. The story writer successfully recreates the village scene in Orissa and demonstrates the anxiety and agony of the native villagers who are made to vacate their places and ancestral habitations in the face of construction of a dam. The characters in the story particularly the Engineer, his wife, their

children, Abolkara, the villagers and the narrator are life-like and very convincing. The changing rural scene yielding place to industrialization is a hallmark of post-colonial Indian situation. It also presents how the rustics are deeply touched when they are made to leave their places of birth.

“The Irrational” is a psychological story. In the story the minister, Subrat Das visits the village Kakali to inaugurate the charitable dispensary built by Choudhurani (the landlady) in memory of Choudhury with the request of the local people. As he rests there for one night in Choudhury’s bungalow he is reminded of his young age and past days when he was working as a school teacher in Choudhury’s house. He also takes fancy of imagining the time when Jamindar’s daughter was a fourteen year old girl and was his student.

The brief analysis of two of his novels and select short stories reveals story writer’s concern for human plight with social realism, human nature, everyday situations, acceptance of traditional beliefs, superstitions, magical realism, mystery, uncanny atmosphere, animals, birds, ordinary creatures and native culture. In each of his fictional presentation he has human predicament and concealed truth which he draws with reason. It is observed that no two stories of Das are singularly alike in theme and they reveal a marked preference for problems confronting ordinary mortals in their day to day life. His stories are essentially studies in human character and existence. Through his characters he tries to present the inner feeling and motive of human life. He encompasses life in its immense fun, simplicity shock and serenity. It appears that either his characters are hollow men or helpless victims in the hand of an inscrutable fate. They are neither fatalists nor gallant heroes but just the common human beings. They are among us not above us, full of follies and foibles, mistakes and miseries, and enjoy life in uncertainties and inadequacies.

Nature appears almost symbolical like a character, caretaker and conservator. The milieu of his stories is marked with different natural background or environment with photographic fidelity. His plot is always providential and characters are portrayed with pathological details and exhibition of passions, motives, and moral power. Das has great human interest with greater significance. His chief concern is to elaborate the trivial and commonplace incidents. His vision is humanistic and insight is microscopic in the study of human psyche, essential motive, impulse and principles. In his fictional presentation every observation is true except names and dates. All his stories have human subjects and he presents the subject matter for our intellectual nutrition and moral sustenance. He has always a modifying colour of imagination in presenting the environment and characters. It appears that every character is a product

of his Integral philosophy but he never philosophises them. It would be honest and gratuitous to say that Manoj Das is a towering personality in Indian short story writing widely read and loved for treatment of magic and mystery in his fictional imagination. □

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Re-creating Village Ecology : Tryst with Rural Simplicity in Manoj Das's writing

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It's not just about houses or water or any particular system. It has to be about how we think. The ultimate object of ecological design is the human mind (Orr, D, 2004 : 190).

Of late , with the introduction of Eco-criticism as environmental literary criticism that emphasizes study of literature in relation to environment, literary critics , ecologists and creative writers have unanimously evinced an engaging interest in rural life and village ecology. And environmental problems have become increasingly central to public discussion and literary discourse . There is no denying the fact that rustics and rural settings ,peasants and pastoral landscapes have enriched romantic narratives .Time and again , poets and novelists have tended to conceive of an ideal world of bucolic setting and rural charm in order to counter the ills and evils, artificialities and hypocrisies of the 'economic man' and 'technical man' nourished and nurtured by civilization and rapid industrialization .Needless to say , the urban –rural dichotomy was forcefully pronounced in the philosophy and creative writings of Rousseau , Wordsworth and Coleridge , who , while exposing the ills and wounds of urban centers and industrial towns , called for the celebration of 'noble savage' embodying pristine simplicity , primeval innocence , rural realism and rustic charm that betrays the artificiality, hypocrisy and belligerence of the 'economic man'. The dichotomy was further aggravated after the French Revolution (1789) and the Industrial Revolution (1763-) that witnessed an increasing demand for establishment of factories , industries and industrial estates . The galloping growth of civilization in consonance with industrialization and technological advancement facilitated import of food grains thereby marginalizing agriculture and forcing farmers , villagers and the rural landscape as a whole to groan with misery and pain . Whereas the 19th century experienced massive migration from villages to towns and cities , the 20th century witnessed the holocaust of two horrible World Wars, large scale deforestation and massive rise in population which posed formidable threats to forest lands , pastures , fields , cultivable

lands and for that matter , to village ecology as a whole . Village and villagers were pushed to the margin , whereas towns and cities were brought to the centre-stage . There was therefore an ecological demand , an environmental necessity for reviving , in terms of nostalgic longing and a proto-romantic pinning , an interest in /for village life and rural landscape epitomizing simplicity and charm , serene air and a pollution-free environment, rustic innocence and behavior bereft of artificiality and pretension . The ideological demand was for regaining the 'lost paradise' and the 'garden of innocence', for recreating village ecology encompassing pastoral landscape , rural characters and manners reminiscent of Wordsworth's Cumberland beggar and Michael , Hardy's rustic grandeur in Dorset Village , R.K. Narayan's Malgudi village , Raja Rao's depiction of the sea-side village (Kusumpur) in "Kanthapura" and Manoj Das's celebration / treatment of the village vignettes– sights and sounds , men and manners of people in his native village (Sankhari)by the Bay of Bengal in the Balasore district of Odisha state (S . Samal,1998: 5)

A rebel and a fiery leader as he was right from his schooldays , Manoj Das began his career as a college teacher at Cuttack professing Marxism ;but his Marxist god perished prematurely when he unexpectedly chose a life of consecration and spiritual dedication following the footsteps of Sri Aurobindo and the Holy Mother . In most of his short stories and in some of his novels like "Chasing the Rainbow : Growing up in an Indian Village" (2004) , "A Village by the Sea" (Samudra Kulara Eka Grama) , "The Submerged Valley" , "The Bull of Babulpur" , "Mystery of the Missing Cap" , "The Trees" , "The Owl" , "Farewell to a Ghost" and "Bhola Grandpa and the Tiger" however , his love for the common men – the rustics , peasants and the rural poor – figures prominently . And a serious reading of his short stories shows that apart from his zest for social realism and critical realism characteristic of the art of Fakir Mohan Senapati, the father of Odia fiction , Das was admittedly interested in rural realism which is strongly reminiscent of Mahatma Gandhi's observation that the soul of India can be really located in the village . It is for his adroit art of combining different types of realism with fantasy , myths and legends that Manoj Das was so popularly acclaimed in the critical circle .In this connection , Graham Greene , a 20th century novelist of renown , makes the following important observation .

'I have now read the stories of Manoj Das , with very great pleasure . He will certainly take a place on my shelves beside the stories of Narayan . I imagine Orissa is far from Malgudi , but there is the same quality in his stories with perhaps an added mystery ' . (S . Samal , 1998:7)

Greene perhaps juxtaposes R.K. Narayan's Malgudi and Manoj Das's

remote village 'Sankhari' by the sea side and constructs solid paradigms of / for village ecology which Das so sincerely pined for . For him ,recreating rural ecology is a spiritual necessity and an environmental demand as well. Dr Harek-rushna Mahatab(1997 : 10) the architect of modern Odisha , emphasized this aspect of Das's creative self – an urge for spiritual feeling / experience and a mysterious and somewhat inexplicable quest for the unknown . And Out of this quest for the unknown was constructed 'village' as the abode of divinity and the god of common man . It is here that innocence and simplicity are held high as rare qualities divinely bestowed on men for their spiritual celebration in the temple of humanity . In Manoj Das's scheme of things, the supremacy of goodness and innocence over complexity , artificiality and hypocrisy is established time and again . Simplicity is divine and hypocrisy is devilishness .It is his tryst with rural divinity and its glorification through celebration of the world of nature and pure environment – of birds , insects , animals , men and women and their manners –that brings Das closer to Thomas Hardy . The realistic details , vivid description prompted by minute observation and depiction of rural scenes and situations , sites and sounds and human condition with the help of memory and nostalgia , myths and legends and attribution of divinity and supernatural glory to village ecology – all these constitute the nucleus of his superb artistry and creative vision .An analysis of some of his select short stories accommodated in " The Submerged Valley and Other Stories"(1986) and "Stories and Tales" (Manoj Dasanka Katha O Kahani ,2009) would substantiate the above arguments.

Manoj Das recreates village ecology by subscribing to the most fundamental feature of the romantic poetics , i.e. , recollection in tranquility with the help of sacred memory and nostalgic sense .Like Wordsworth faithfully recording his childhood /boyhood and adult experiences in "Tintern Abbey" and "The Prelude" in candid and touching expression , Das recalls and recreates in his short stories his childhood / boyhood experiences about his village by the Bay of Bengal . As he was born in the sea side landscape of Balasore in 1934 at a time when the whole world was hatching towards a conflagration (II nd World War) , Das was obviously destined to experience the dichotomy between rural simplicity and spontaneity ,and the complexity and artificiality of the modern civilization epitomized by the urban world .Right from his very childhood , his thought process was shaped by this contrasting pattern and binary opposition .The misery and suffering of the innocent villagers under the dictates of crooked politicians , feudal lords and the white ego of the British lurks large in his mind , yet the child of the sea is enamoured of the idyllic charm of his alma mater (Sankhari) , whose ideal image is envisioned every now

and then through the fragrant memories of the writer- the child ,the boy and the man of matured vision and critical insight .The adroit alchemy of the rural imagination of a child with the critical stance of a professor- critic constitute the hallmark of Manoj Das's thought process which stimulates him to recreate village ecology by paradoxically juxtaposing pleasure and pain ,simplicity and complexity , rural innocence and urban wickedness , political manoeuvre and economic exploitation of the rural world by the economic and utilitarian man .While presenting the binary experience with the help of memory and nostalgia , Das also exploits Odishan beliefs and superstitions , Indian myths and legends . In his scheme of things , the spiritual agents and supernatural figures constitute a living reality. In other words , they appear not as abstract and shadowy figures but as indispensable essence of the rural psychology and village ecology .

In "The Bull of Babulpur" , the writer presents a telling contrast between the human and the animal world with doses of irony and satire The bull representing the animal world is endearingly portrayed as more lovable , popular and sociable in the village than Mr Priyanath Bodal – the representative of the human world – who betrays humanity by his hypocrisy , shrewdness and opportunism .They are ironically set against each other as formidable rivals . Mr Bodal's decision to stay at his maternal uncle's house is , symbolically speaking ,an onslaught / intrusion upon the rural world of simplicity epitomized by the bull , the children and the villagers of Babulpur . The unconditional applause of his car by the children , the careless sleep of the village dogs and the nameless gossip of the villagers in the middle of the road can be contrasted with the sounding car of the lawyer that stands for a formidable signal of aggrandizement of the rural world by the cruel civilization . One car has already taken the innocent life of a goat in the village , and now the lawyer's car has dismantled the sand temple erected by children on the village road . The bull is the representative of the divine world and the village ecology of Babulpur which has been threatened by Mr Bodal and his car . That is precisely the reason why the bull is obstinate enough to let his car go . His request to remove the bull is left unheeded even by the local police because the animal has no individual master. As the vehicle of Lord Shiva , the bull is the saviour of the entire village, and hence it is a challenge for the animal to protect the villagers and its environment. Now the bull is garlanded by a widow and the next moment it is bathed by another villager with turmeric water and is yet again offered for consumption two green cabbages by another villager.

Significantly, the immense popularity of the animal is acknowledged when the entire village environment is sanctified with the eulogy of Babuleshwar

(Shiva) and his bull .The bull is thus the symbol of unity,friendship and spiritual affinity,and the cultural geography of Babulpur is largely conditioned by the animal. Das writes:

“Such a collective surprise the villagers of Babulpur had never been felt in the past .The bull was , in the collective memory of all the villagers , an indispensable aspect of the cultural geography of Babulpur ... The bull , was as it were , the soul of Babulpur , at once indestructible and eternal” . (Manoj Das , 2009 : 201)

The hypocrisy , artificiality , demoralized personality and so called political popularity of the criminal lawyer pales into insignificance before the pristine innocence and pure popularity of the bull . The artificial man goes down in the grip of melancholy and finally decides to accept asceticism signifying the philosophy of lord Shiva (Babuleshwar) and his vehicle (the bull) . Whereas the lord and his vehicle are agreeably assimilated into the village ecology and rural environment of Babulpur , Mr Bodal the man of hypocrisy is left unaccommodated. The lawyer goes for the third mask of politics to win over the popularity of the bull and his last attempt too ended in fiasco . Babulpur is thus a unique construct of Manoj Das’s rural imagination and behind the celebration of its rural environment , lurks large the author’s love and endearing attachment for Sankhari, his own village by the sea .

The inviolable affinity between human and the animal world constitutes a fundamental feature of village ecology in Manoj Das’s writing . Whereas the urban imagination humiliates and destroys the animal world and that of trees ,facilitating deforestation , the rural world nourishes and patronises them,and finally welcomes them to their fold as friends and members of the rural family. Cows and goats, bulls and monkeys, cats and foxes , chakunda , debadaru, banana and banyan trees , owls and snakes , sensitive plants and bakul trees , parrots and herons , sanyasis and eccentric disobedients (abalokaras) , tigers and village thieves – each of them has a prominent part to play in enriching the rural environment . Das is nevertheless aware of the fundamental philosophy that nothing is without a purpose in this cosmos and that the negligible and tiny creations of God often serve humanity in a big way . Here he comes closer to Hardy and Whitman , for whom a bunch of grass reveals the mysterious and many sided nuances of the creation (“Leaves of Grass”) .In “Mystery of the Missing Cap,”Mr Maharana is characterized as a hospitable host and a happy villager who treats the Minister of fisheries and fine arts, Babu Virakishore with cow milk,sweet curd ,tender coconut water,ghee-baked rice mixed with nuts and cloves .Besides village hospitality, the writer takes absorbing interest in depicting other important aspects of the village environ

in the following:

Though it was summer , the cabin's window being open to a big pond and a grove , there was enough air to lull even an elephant to a sound sleep . Volunteers had been posted to see that no noise whatever was made anywhere in the village to disturb the ministerial repose .

(Manoj Das , 2001 : 147)

The villagers and their children are all spontaneously curious about their Minister ,and their rustic simplicity is really rewarding.For, they are far away from civilization ,and for them ignorance is bliss; knowledge is curse. They wrangle over issues like the food and sleep, thought and feeling,cold and colic,sufferings and inconveniences of the Minister.The curiosity of the villagers boils to such an extent that even the invalids join hands in shouting slogans for the august visitor.The writer recalls how the half-naked and pot-bellied uncivilized kids accompanied the visitor's car with nameless humility and simplicity. It was for the first time that a young female did garland a Minister and that teaching in the village school was affected for a fortnight simply for preparing the welcome song in honour of the Minister. Here is an ironic dig at the intrusion of urban politics into the world of rustic innocence—a world where goodness is confused by self-prestige and Mr Maharana tells a lie to tackle an unpleasant situation. His pet monkey steals away the cap of the bald-headed Minister and symbolically speaking exposes the hypocrisy of the politician who addressed the villagers with a naked head . Like the bull of Babulpur , exposing Mr Bodal , the monkey exposes the artificiality of Mr Maharana on the one hand and the hypocrisy and concealment of the minister on the other . The snatching away of the cap by Jhandoo (the monkey) symbolically shows that the rustic mind cannot entertain hypocrisy and pretension characteristic of the city mind . Like the ideal bull of Babulpur , the monkey appears in the role of a noble man —animal in form but noble in spirit . Like the bull , Jhandoo is a mysterious creation of the rural world that stands by 'fact' rather than 'fiction' . When the realities are brought to the fore , both Maharana and Babu Virakishore have no way out except accepting the reality in tearful eyes . In Manoj Das's scheme of things , hypocrites and double dealers are defeated in the hands of nature and environment . Mr Bodal and Babu Virakishore are defeated politicians unfit for the innocent world of the rustics .

What is laudable about Manoj Das as an artist is that he treats village vignettes in a broader perspective , not in fragments . Like Wordsworth and Robert Frost who attributed uncanny and uncommon significance to tiny and negligible things of society and nature , Das creates , with the help of personification and humanization , a world of mystery and supernatural significance . For example, in "The Tree" , he attributes the monsoon season , the sinister

clouds gathering in the sky and the long moaning of the fox with some ominous significance. The jackals moaning in the midnight are pictured as potential friends who manage to wake up the villagers when the river plays havoc with the hamlets forcing people to ascend their perch on the trees. Despite the fury and havoc of the river, she is treated by the villagers like a docile domestic animal, suddenly going crazy and out of control. With their pale faces and hungry stomachs, they still go by the immaculate ethics of affection and kindness: "To Forgive is Divine". The big banyan tree, like the bull of Babulpur, is considerably humanized and it is under the spreading roof of the tree that the villagers take shelter during the flood. Like the bull, the banyan tree stands for safety, security, shelter, hope and courage for the flood-prone rustics:

The leaves of the banyan tree chatter incessantly their familiar language of hope and courage. Its innumerable boughs spread out overhead had been the very symbol of protection for generations, affording shelter not only to those who bore love and regard for it, but even to those who had proved impudent towards it... (Manoj Das, 2001 :57).

The lines quoted above point to one of the fundamental beliefs of Odiya /Indian people that trees carry spiritual and supernatural significance by sheltering spirits and vampires, snakes and gods. It is therefore imperative for the rural world that trees must be worshipped not only for spiritual benefits but also for creating a conducive environmental condition for sound art of living. In the story under question, the writer is at one with the ecocentric views of the environmentalists that trees, and for that matter, the sylvan world of nature must be protected and respected rather than ruthlessly exploited and destroyed.

A similar approach is noticed in "Farewell to a Ghost", a story of superstition, in which the village folk bid farewell to the ghost of a darling daughter with intensity of feeling and sincerity of pathos. Like Shakespeare and Coleridge, Manoj Das has treated the invisible ghost in terms of a tangible and living reality so that the incredible would be accepted by the rustics as credible and realistically relishable. Like the bull, the tree and the ghost girl, the owl and the cat embellish the village environment as well. Considered to be the oldest resident of Vishalpur, the owl in "The Owl" perches in the hollow of the temple, whereas countless birds chirp on their old trees on the marshland at the western end of the village. The ecology of Vishalpur is shaped by the sound of the birds, the ceremonial howling of the jackals from several strategic points along the marsh land and their impact on the human world was nevertheless undeniable. The owl possesses the most formidable personality among all the owls of the eastern region of the country and is looked upon

as a supernatural force and its hooting from the hollow of a temple enabled a villager to prophesy drought, cyclone, an impending death, a gun shot and the birth of a baby. The owl is thus a messenger of the philosophy of life—a drama of pleasure and pain.

In “The Cat”, Das has quite convincingly appropriated cat as an indispensable member of the rural home and as an endearing and aesthetically satisfying impetus that edifies village ecology. Through the sensitive character of the retired District Commissioner, Mr Mahendra Mishra, the story writer creates a powerful sentinel of village ecology and ingeniously applies memory and nostalgia to revive down the memory lane the intimate association of the cat with his mother who is no more. As a formidable family rival for fish, dry fish and milk, Mishra recalls, how he used to chase the white cat away out of anger and punish her like a victorious Rama or Parshurama after a long chase round the Devadaru and Chakunda trees. Being defeated and shaved to the sadistic pleasure of the master, the cat makes a dramatic exit only to let his mother lament till her return at night. The reason why Mishra’s mother is so much emotionally attached to the cat is that after the death of her parents and destruction of their ancestral house, the cat was the only companion to accompany her to her father-in-law’s house. The pet has become since then a part and parcel of the Mishra family, and more particularly so to the mother. After his superannuation, Mr Mishra has decided to stay in the rural environment of his village, and with the return of the native memory and nostalgia torment him with agony as he goes down the memory lane only to be betrayed by the paradisaical relationship between his mother and the pet cat. The white cat is envisaged as an ideal for the rural world and Mishra’s search for the cat under the Bakul tree symbolically points to a maddening search for the innocent past which can be regained no more. Both his mother and the cat have left them once and for all, yet their memory stands out as an ideal to be emulated by the rural people for the establishment of a heaven on earth through the immaculate relationship between man and animal, between the master and the pet.

“Bhola Grandpa and the tiger” is another important story in which Das shows the commitment of the rural people to live and also to die in the lap of their village. The ninety-five year old Bhola and his eighty year old wife Granny who live in a hut under the big Bakul tree at the western end of the village Sankhari remind the reader of the commitment of Wordsworth’s pastoral figures like Michael, Cumberland beggar and old Simeon Lee living with his wife at the old age by a fountain. Their unanimous message to the world is to live in communion with nature, and to love life, trees, animals and birds with love and friendship by defying the dictates of death.

Manoj Das’s vision of an ideal rural India through his nostalgic recollection of childhood/boyhood days can be further established on the basis of

his “Chasing the Rainbow :Growing up in an Indian Village” (2004) , a collection of memoirs in which the author reminisces his childhood experiences in the quite lap of his village by the sea – an epitome of the Indian rural world – and his consistent plea for the reader is that one should nourish goodness and naturalness , child like purity and innocence – qualities that transform the rural world into an earthly paradise . But , with the march of civilization and technology , the author’s vision of a pure rural India has been shattered into pieces . “The Hungry Sea” (Samudrara Kshyudha) and “The Submerged valley” poignantly present how the pristine purity of the rural woman (Subha) is polluted and village ecology notoriously damaged by the demands of politics, science and civilization . Though the writer is realistically aware of the plight of the people of Sankhari following the construction of a dam that has rendered them homeless,he has tenaciously tried to show that the rural beauty has been mutilated and that the rural world and people are in the grip of the complex civilization. Sankhari ,and for that matter Babulpur and Vishalpur , can be considered in terms of an ideal paradigm for ‘eco village’ based on ‘human ecosystem interdependence’ (Kasper : 2008 ; Catton and Dunlap: 1978) where the rural mind and mood would be shaped and conditioned by a sustainable and agreeable affinity between man and nature / elements of nature .D . Orr’s (2004) notion of ecology emphasizing human mind as the ultimate object of ecological design,and the broader perspective of village as ‘home’ rather than a mere combination of individual houses can go a long way in cementing the fundamental divide between man/society and nature/environment which constitutes the root of most environmental problems in present times.□

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THE TONE OF SATIRE OF MANOJ DAS

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Comedy evokes laughter as an end in itself but satire uses laughter as a weapon and against a butt existing outside the work itself. That butt may be an individual or a type of person, a class, an institution, a nation or even the whole mankind – as in Rochester's "A Satire against Mankind" and some of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Satire has been usually justified by those who practice it as corrective of human vice and folly. The subject matter of satire is multifarious but its vocabulary and the texture is difficult to mistake. "Most satire writing contains cruel and dirty words; all satiric writing contains colloquial anti-literary words". (Highet, p.18)

In the history of Indian story tradition Manoj Das is an internationally acclaimed artist par excellence. His creative contribution to Indian English as well as Oriya literature has no bounds. In short, he is a creative artist of great repute in the contemporary world of traditional story telling. Unlike other traditional writers he leaves no scope for experimentation in his writings, rather with great intelligence he humorously portrays his characters exploring their minute subtleties. Nevertheless, most of his stories are written in satiric vein whether they are couched realistic or fantastic framework. Some of his stories are conspicuously satiric and in some, satire occurs incidentally in a situation or a character or as a certain ironic commentary on some aspect of the human condition or contemporary milieu and trend.

Stories like "Sharma and the Wonderful Lump", "Mystery of the Missing Cap", "The Bull of Babulpur", "Statue-breakers are Coming" are satiric in form and spirits. But stories like "Of Man and Monkey", "Lakshmi's Adventure", "A Trip into the Jungle", "The Life of the Mayor", "The Last I Heard of Them", "The Love Letter", "Operation Bride", "He Who Rode the Tiger" and "Man Who Lifted the Mountain" only contains elements satire.

“Mystery of the Missing Cap” is a comical but realistic story. It is a satire on the visit of a minister to an Indian Village. The writer ridicules at the rise of a new class called patriots, the stance and style of the minister like demi-god, the sponsors of Maharana, the host and aspirant for a seat in the legislature, the complacent Minister of Fishing and Fine Arts. The whole state of affairs has been mocked at end travestied by the monkey.

“Sharma and the Wonderful Lump” is a brilliant piece of satire on a society that thrives on false values and ideals. It points at the vulgarity and perversion that characterize our civilization. The man with a remarkable lump on his head, Mr. Sharma is unique creation of Manoj Das. Sharma had gone to America to get rid of that lump on his head by surgery. But contrary to his expectation, he has been admired as a medical wonder and an extraordinary phenomenon in America. He postponed the operation to utilize that for this advantage. He became a celebrity overnight.

Here, the lump symbolizing falsehood and irrelevant fascination disappears ultimately with the intervention of the mystic power. The allegory lies in the author’s vision of a transition to a better future that can be brought only by a spiritual awakening. It is a brilliant satire operating at various levels. In an interview with P. Raja, Manoj Das said:

“I always remember what Jonathan Swift said: ‘Satire is a sort of glass where the beholders generally discover everyone’s face but their own.’ But I never forget to try to behold my own face in that mirror. (P.Raja, p.72)

This is the secret of Manoj Das’s satire, which is mild, inoffensive and also highly effective. His tone is neither condemnatory nor contemptuous, but a mixture of amusement and sympathy.

An equally fine piece of satire is “Statue-Breakers are Coming”. Manoj Das comes hard on Yameswar Gupta who is self-conceited and hypocritical to the last. Yameswar Gupta thinks that he could have become the Chief-Minister, Prime-Minister or the President. Such day-dreams and wishful thinking are absurd and abominable. Thus, Yameswar Gupta succeeded in seeing his statue destroyed and had a sigh of relief as that alone would ensure and earn him the reputation of a national leader. The writer satirizes Yameswar Gupta, his statue mania, hypocrisy and pretentions, as well as his narcissus complex and craze for fame.

In “The Bull of Babulpur” the hypocrisy and arrogance of Mr. Boral has been revealed. Mr. Boral was a seasoned criminal lawyer who got inclined to turn on the path of asceticism. In the process he sheltered under the bull and swung back to politics, the resort of scoundrels. The focuses on man’s hypoc-

risy, but also on the aimlessness of life.

“The Love Letter” deals with an unusual situation created by the assumption that Gita, the artist, has left a love letter behind. The writer ridicules the secret sordid desire and the attitudes of various people towards her.

In “Operation Bride” the writer criticizes the perversion of taste, silliness and the pedagogic pompousness of the experts to carve a perfect bride out of the daughter of the woodcutter.

Divyasimha, the mayor in “A Night in the Life of a Mayor”, once laughed at the helplessness of Prof. Roy. Eventually, he learns the meaning of helplessness when he was stranded naked in river for a whole night. The vanity, complacency and superciliousness have been exposed in the story.

“The Night the Tiger Came” focuses on the latent jealousy, rivalry and fear complex of the people towards one another. People are often prone to flaunt their ego and arrogance at the smallest and slightest chance. Such ego has been aptly punctured and the author has shown the possible danger from such ego in many stories like “He Who Rode the Tiger”, Man who Lifted the Mountain”, and slightly also in “The Turtle from the Sky”.

Craze for sensuality and obsession with reality has been tackled in “The Last I Heard of Them”, “Martial Exploits” and “A Tale of the Northern Valley”. The author comes hard on man’s depravity and savagery in “A Trip into the Jungle”.

Manoj Das is a social critic of first order and his satire is of a different kind. It is rather virulent not sarcastic. There is no malice, no contempt, but there is sympathy. It is Horatian, witty, urbane and tolerant. We find a sort of wry amusement without much indignation at the sight of human folly, frivolity and hypocrisy. Manoj Das’s satire is soft and gentle. There is general dig against vulgarity, sensuality and perversion, but it never turns bitter. His excellent sense of humour and a broad, profound and humanistic outlook makes everything pleasant and enjoyable.

Many are the target of Manoj Das’s satire; politicians, ministers, mayor, pedants, braggart, egoist, self-conceited men or often the pundit of a primary school. But he does not laugh at their expense. He might seem to have criticized human failures and frailties but what he really pleads for, is the sanity and humanity that will ultimately preserve man’s true nature and his essential godliness and goodness. □

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SHORT - STORY

The Wild Stream

* Dr.Nandini Sahu

My mother sat on the hard wooden seat along the verandah the entire evening. I lit the round charcoal stove and placed it at her feet. Massaged some heated mustard oil with cloves of garlic in it, so that her pain would subside.

But pain seemed to cling to her bones quite obstinately today, refusing to leave her. She has been speaking of her grievances against all her maidservants, one after the other, telling them over and over again how she has been '*more sinned against than sinning*' by all of them.

"I fed them, clothed them just like I would do for my daughters, against everyone's better advice! Now I am paying for my folly and no mistake. These girls and that old woman, and above all that wretch, Mami, who thinks she is nothing less than a Madhuri Dixit....Oh! I am going crazy! After all these years of love for them, finally police came to my house? Of all, my house!"

We all sympathized with her, but couldn't help feeling that it served her right.

Mami, Mami Pradhan. The beautiful, super stylish maid of my mother, who was her ego-booster, oil massager, cook, domestic help, gossip-partner, gardener – one in all, all is one. Today Ma was cursing her. But there is a background to her story.

Before Mami's mother joining the post of my Ma's maid, or getting all those promotions and increments after that eventful day, there were two other maids, who had troubled her so much (or at least she thought that they harassed her!) that she was losing weight every day. Sukamaa ,our first maid, was a good woman, very dedicated to all of us, especially to my younger sister, now in the U.S., so much so that even if my sister would pee in her plate , she would wash and eat her rice, would never throw it with the fear that it may harm the child. My little sister would ease herself in her plate most of the times, and it supplied laughter and entertainment to the entire house.

"See, this silly woman, now she would wash and eat it back."

Ma would insist, "Sukama, don't you do that. Take a fresh plate of rice and eat."

"Ma, how can you be such an enemy of my *beti*? You want her to fall ill?"

Yes, she claimed that my sister was her daughter. But the fact was, she had three daughters and two sons of her own. Shakuntala, Shaila, Koili, and I am forgetting the boy's names. Koili was her pet daughter; perhaps she loved her as much as she loved my sister. So the year Koili was pregnant for a third time after two abortions, Sukamaa had to leave our house. My mother was grieving, fretting, fuming throughout the day.

Et,too,Sukamaa?

"Ask Koili to come and stay here, why do you need to quit your job and go there? I would keep another maid, and then who will give you so much money, food and saris? Your sons-in-law?"

Ma was right. She literally pampered her maids. She was a school teacher, so she was totally dependant on them; the maids were her real home-makers.

Sukamaa left, finally. We consoled Ma that she was not family, so forget her. Ma and all of us missed her tattooed face, tattooed horizontally and vertically all over to avoid attraction of other men towards her charming face; and her loud kisses to us, that would sound like the music of a *tabla*.

Sukamaa episode was over.

Next came Czarina.

She was street smart, a girl from the mussalman basti having five brothers who were butchers; she was a hefty, strong, dark skinned girl in her twenties. She took over the kitchen, garden, under the beds, all extreme corners of the house where Sukamaa's old hands couldn't reach.

Ma was happy, instantly.

But we were not.

Because she started eyeing our make up kits, lipsticks, bindis and bangles from the day one. She would stare at us when we were getting ready to go out, and sigh, then ask us the price of things that we thought she can never afford to buy.

But it was not so. After many months we discovered her affluence on that morning when police came to our house for the first time ever. Czarina had been stealing money from my Ma's school bag, which Ma called here *vanity bag*. First, our lipsticks, *bindis* went missing. When asked, she would reply, "Do I look like a thief, han? Even if I look, I am not one. My brothers get better things for me than yours, ok?"

Czarina was quite notorious. My youngest sister, who was a few months old, would relieve herself on a newspaper every morning. Ma would ask Czarina to take the shit wrapped in the newspaper and throw it in the large pit in the extreme corner of the street. But madam Czarina had a different plan. What she

would do was—there was Jaga Bhaina’s grocery store adjacent to our house, and people used to crowd there from morning to evening. Jaga Bhaina would make nice packets of dal, *gudakhu* (a toothpaste made up of opium), sugar, salt and tie them with a typical thread of jute. The packets were quite tempting. Czarina collected some thread from Jaga Bhaina saying that Ma needs little thread. Jaga Bhaina was very nice to our family, because he had a small note pad with Baba’s name written on it, and we could take anything from his shop, chocolates, puffed rice, *muan*, (a sweeten puffed rice cake) sweets, nuts, any time. All he had to do was jot down the amount and price in the note pad. In the end of the month, Baba had to take care of the bills. Also, Ma was especially nice to him, because sometimes when she would be hurriedly getting ready for her school, Czarina would report, “Ma....garlic is finished, also dal.”

“Oh! This girl will never spare me. All the time she has complaints. And there is the headmistress, Jumelia Raut, to wait for us at the gate itself sharp at 10 am! You go and ask Jaga Bhaina to give you whatever you want; now go!”

That was that. Czarina would bring lentils, garlic and also some jute thread from him. Then she would wrap my little sister’s shit with the same newspaper where she had done it, take another fresh newspaper and cover it for safety, and tie it up with Jaga Bhaina’s thread with ultimate professionalism and put the nice, neat packet in the middle of the road. Anyone would feel that some buyer from Jaga Bhaina’s shop has dropped a packet on the road by mistake, and pick it for sure when no one is looking at him. Czarina’s duty was to keep the packets on the road and call us to wait and watch who was picking the packet that day. To our surprise and giggles, everyday someone was sure to look around, and then lift our shit-packet pretending as if it was actually his grocery packet which he had dropped by mistake.

We were very impressed by her smartness. Until that evening on *Pana Sankranti* (an Odia festival on which people have intoxicating drinks) day, she didn’t lock the back door of the house properly, to facilitate her brothers to enter our house in the night for a robbery.

Next morning, we woke up to the wails of my mother and to my father’s anxious talks to the police about the robbery last night. We were in deep sleep after drinking the sherbet with *bhang*, then Czarina’s butcher brothers just pushed the already open door, entered our house, spread some smoke to make us lose our sense for awhile, and stole everything from our house. Old utensils, clothes, money, jewelry, Ma’s puja box and Baba’s old gramophone, bedsheets, boxes, just whatever they could lay their hands on.

The police searched the near by areas and discovered that only my father’s gramophone that he cherished (and someday I am sure to be the heir-

ess to that) and my mother's *gurubara pedhi* (box for Goddess Laxmi's puja) were thrown in the lake side. Ma says, "Idiot *Mussalman* thieves, how could they have stolen my Goddess Laxmi's box, would she have spared them?"

Both of them were relieved to discover that they hadn't harmed any one of us. We were sleeping happily when the robbery was going on.

Thus, came to an end the Czarina episode. Czarina dynasty, say. Anyway, after many years I saw her in the town when I was getting down from the bus. She stole her eyes and ran away.

Ma had to take a week's leave from her school to find another maid. My second sister had to write her tenth board examination in her night suit, because Czarina's brothers had not spared her school uniforms too.

Ma could manage to find a frail, shabby, poor woman, *Mami-bou* (Mami Pradhan's mother) for her maid. She had always fever, always backache; she was ever-complaining and ever-demanding.

Anyway, she was the savior, as she facilitated Ma to re-join her duty in the school. Ma was the only Hindi teacher in an Odia school, so she was pretty much in demand. No one could engage her periods, so we were happy that our Hindi periods had been converted to games periods the whole week. Now Ma had to hurry up to finish the syllabi of all classes and make up for the absented week. She was upset. Her best friend was Urmila mausi, who was her colleague, our geography teacher. "See Urmila, these maids are giving me a tough time. I pay them so well, feed them every day, still they are such ungrateful."

For a working woman, balancing between home and office is a real Herculean task. Urmila mausi had similar problems, in her case they were created by her relatives from her in-laws side.

"Yes Mira didi, I can only understand. My sister-in-law and mother-in-law are making my life hell. They came for a month, and now it's six months since they are here. Not taking the name of leaving. I am the in-charge headmistress these days, and I have to complete my syllabus for tenth class by next week. Their test exams are on. But again next week we are getting three days off for the students, because Biju Patnaik is visiting the town and our school ground will be the helipad for his chopper."

"Oh, is that so? My girls would be very happy to see the chief Minister!" Ma was always enthusiastic; she wanted our lives to be full of action. On Monday we had no classes, no class work, and no homework. Three days off from the school! On Wednesday the chief Minister of Odisha would be visiting our town, and he has decided to grace our school, not the boys' high school, by landing in our play ground. We were teasing Baba, because he was a teacher in the boys' high school. ~~There were many volunteers from the party, cleaning and~~

labeling our ground, decorating the building, hiding the pits temporarily with soil, arranging a large canopy overhead under which the CM would sit and deliver his speech, cleaning rubbish from the ground, making room for water supply and food stalls where we used to play hide-and-seek, hanging colourful paper-cuts in different patterns on threads, putting two large freshly-cut banana trees at the entrance, still small raw bananas hanging on them, fixing loud speakers at four corners of the ground, one huge throne-kind-of-a-chair, red in colour, used for the brides and grooms in marriage receptions, placed at the centre for his majesty, the CM of Odisha, and the plastic *Neelkamal* chairs standing inferior around the throne, creating the binary opposition.

We were excited. Ma gave *chutti* (leave) to Mami, our maid's daughter, from watering her plants that day.

Mami was spending her childhood in our house as a woman while we, the children of the house, savoured her womanhood. She had no routine; no one forced her to go to school if someday she was delayed due to household work, or if she had no mood to go. I was always fascinated to see that she had no homework, no studies; she was in the kitchen, humming a tune to herself, peeling boiled potatoes, while we had to study from six to ten in the evening.

But she had, of course, a routine, not of her own making; she had been fixed with a routine by poverty that made up our lives. She had to water Ma's plants, polish our shoes, lay our uniforms on the bed, dry our clothes that her *Bou* would wash, broom our verandah.

But that day it was different.

That day we took her along and rushed to the school ground at 10 am, even if the CM was to arrive at 11am.

Mami Pradhan was ten years old. But she had a tremendous sense of dignity, doing nothing that would be frowned upon in the society as just suitable to a maid's daughter. She was thin, flat chested, malnourished and looked hardly six or seven years old. She maintained herself as far as she could, always looking good in her own terms in my old clothes. She was my classmate, studying in the MCD school. Even native clothes looked fine on her, however old fashioned they might seem to others. She had that air of a refined, accomplished girl, which was purely made up, superficial. She would always struggle to be a face in the crowd, to be different, and was successful to some extent, because she had the advantage of a beautiful, beaming grin, ear to ear, quite unnecessary most of the times.

Udayagiri was a small town in central Odisha, in Phulbani district. It was a sleepy town, having no character of its own. My parents spent their lifetime there, more than forty years, without any definite reason. First, they

wanted to be together, one in a boy's high school and the other in a girls' high school, both government schools, so that their children would be secure with both parents. After retirement we pleaded them to move to some other town where proper medical and higher education facilities would be available. But they never agreed.

"Beta, Phulbani means where flowers speak to men, '*phool*' and '*vani*'; you see the greenery around. And Udayagiri is where the sun rises, it's like the sun-city," Baba had all excuses. But they spent their whole life with tooth aches, fever, rheumatism, with lack of medical facilities, now they are all alone. Their children are away, in townships, in metro cities and two of my sisters are in the U.S., because one cannot think of a career in Udayagiri, unless one is a farmer or a shopkeeper; or at best, a school teacher.

Most people of Udayagiri belonged to the hills and most had never seen a train, a sea; forget about an airplane or a chopper. So on that eventful day, we gathered in our school ground, wearing our best frocks, applying little Emami snow white cream of Ma under Ponds powder, and trying to look our best. Mami had taken special care to groom herself, she was looking more like a clown with that artificial black mole tattooed on her cheek and magenta coloured *alta* applied on her lips to appear like lipstick. She wore one of my old frocks which Ma had given her the previous year, which she wore only on special occasions. She had made it a point to stand a little ahead of the crowd, to catch the attention of people, and was grinning all the while, for no specific reason.

The helicopter landed at 11am on the right time, most unlikely for a politician. Biju Babu was different. He was hyper-active and happy-go-lucky kind of a man, quite good looking, like his son Naveen Patnaik, the present Chief Minister of Odisha. Biju Babu was garlanded by the choicest beauties of the local college, carefully chosen by the lady teachers, best attired, perfumed, who also had the pleasure of shaking hands with the CM.

The CM went off the dais straight away and started passionately lecturing the audience. His gestures drew a suppressed murmur from the awestruck audience. In the midst of loud applause, he waved his hands and said, "Jai ho!"

"Jai ho!"

"Biju babu ki jai ho!"

"Long live Biju babu!"

"Jai ho! Jai ho! Jai ho!"

Instantly, our Mami caught hold of a national flag lying in the ground and vigorously waved it at the party workers and the CM, out of excitement. I

tried to stop her from drawing the attention of people towards us, but she was adamant. She shouted in her shrilling voice "*Baju baju jai ho!*" "*Baju baju jai ho!*" That's what she could make out from the slogans, I mean.

Biju babu glanced at her, a lanky girl, looking as old as five or six years, hands thin as a bird's legs, waving and hopping, in rags.

So, she belongs to the people below poverty line, BPL; can make an eye-catching headline.

Suddenly he did a very unusual thing. He asked one of his party workers to get that girl on stage. He did it promptly, lifted Mami in a moment and placed her on the dais, in front of the CM, the very chief Minister of Odisha. Biju babu patted on her shoulder, and asked, "What's your name, *beti*?"

"Mami, Mami Pradhan," she announced proudly.

Ok, she belongs to BPL as well as to the SC category. So, that was that.

"*Bhaiyon our behano!* This is real India. This is the real face of Odisha! Look at this girl. Mami Pradhan. She has a dream in her eyes, even if she is poor. Poor? Who is poor? Lord Krishna ate a fistful of puffed rice from his devotee *Sudama* and they shared their fortune!

Mami is our *Sudama*. Let us all take an oath today that we, the privileged, the educated, would do our lot to support all Mami Pradhans in our villages. You have shown your great love and faith in me by casting your precious votes for our party. If you promise to shower your love on me in the coming general elections, I would also promise you that we can materialize an Odisha of our dreams, where there is no poverty. *Garibi hatao!*"

"Jai ho! Biju babu ki jai ho!"

There was thunderous applause in the air. The journalists rushed to click photographs of Biju babu holding the reed thin hands of Mami Pradhan, still with a grin, ear to ear.

"God! Look at this girl, she is not at all nervous! See her guts!" our neighbor Mini didi told my elder sister.

"Yes, she has always been that dare devil. I knew she would do something like this someday."

Not that Mami could make out any head or tail of the contents of the CM's speech. She had nothing to do with the national or the state politics; her entire politics was her individual psyche, of catching attention of one and all. Only one sentence of the CM had impressed her greatly, "*Mami Pradhan has a dream in her eyes*". True indeed. After that day, she became the best ever dreamer under the sun.

~~The CM was ready to leave. Mami got tears in her eyes. "Don't leave..."~~
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don't leave....don't leave...." She was not ready to be parted with her glorious moment. It was her lifetime achievement award.

Mami-bou rushed to the ground as someone told her about the happenings in the ground. She dragged her daughter home, hurling, showering her choicest abuses at her. "Ay Bou, leave me alone. Let me go near the helicopter!"

"You bloody, go home and broom the house. Ma will come home after this meeting and then shout at me that she had given you off, not me, from the household chores. can't broom today, I have back pain."

So the king of kings, Biju babu, left, leaving behind ambitions and a truckload of dreams in Mami Pradhan's eyes.

The next day, the front pages of all news papers in the state carried photographs of Biju babu holding the hands of a BPL girl and showing a Utopian future for every poor of Odisha. The front lines were like, '*Biju Babu identifies the real face of Odisha, 'Scheduled caste girl makes history!*'

Mami managed to collect most paper cuts of the day. Till today one can find a few of them laminated, hanging on the broken walls of her hut.

In the evening, Ma was amazed talking to her.

"Ay Mami, why were you jumping like that in front of the dais? You wanted them just to notice you and call you there, eh? What an idiot you are! If something would have happened to you? Your Ma would have scolded my daughters that they had left you alone. Do you know how these politicians are? Biju Babu is a nice man ,no doubt, but do you know the party workers? If someone would have lifted you and rushed into his car? If you were crushed in the crowd? Don't do such things again, you got that? What a girl!"

Mami got annoyed, because she was still basking in the glory of the morning. She just rushed out of the room bouncing her pig-tail, grumbling something at Ma. Hurling a *gali* or two, perhaps.

From that day, she stopped having pigtails and managed to snatch some money from her mother's monthly salary to buy Lifebuoy soaps to wash her hair and have a pony tail, like me. Perhaps she had a proper hair-cut too.

To add fuel to the fire, the next day two local journalists came with a mike to our house and *Madame* Mami was hailed.

"Mamiji, how old are you?"

"Ten years."

"Do you go to the school?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Yesterday, the chief Minister of Odisha could identify you among all and said that you are the real face of Odisha. How do you feel?"

"Oh, I was the most beautiful among all present over there, in fact I am

the most beautiful one in the whole town, so he noticed me. Someday I shall go to his house and stay there; I shall.... I shall....”.

My Ma pushed her *Bou* to go and stop her. “You never know what rubbish this stupid girl is going to tell them! Go stop her and ask her to clean the verandah instead. All these journalists are making a *tamasha* here, they have no other business. Those politicians left. Now let us understand that we shall see them again after five years. I don’t know why on earth all of you are getting such excited. We have seen it all.”

But Mami became, or at least she thought that she was, a celebrity overnight. All that media attention, photographs in news papers. “*Mamiji, how do you feel? How do you feel? How do you feel?*” She was metamorphosed from an ugly caterpillar to a pretty butterfly. The ugly duckling turned into a prince charming with the magic wand of Biju babu. She felt she was more of a socialite lady now than a mere maid in our house. She had new airs. She was stubborn not to wear my old frocks anymore; thus her *Bou* gave her some finicky slaps.

“Ay *Bou*, slap me. Till I go to his house someday, you scold me, hit me. Then all of you would come to meet me with appointments. Then I won’t have time.”

With this new-found celebrityhood, she stopped studying with us during the evening. Baba had always made it a point for Ma that Mami’s mother as well as Mami had to help her during the day time, but Mami had to sit down to study with us from six to nine in the evening, till Baba would allow us to watch Door Darshan channel on our new Konark colour T.V. for an hour. Mami started dozing and dreaming during her study hours, looking forward eagerly for that T.V. time, to get in touch with the hot and happening girls in big cities, their new hair styles and make up. She would always try and experiment those hair styles on herself. But her new hair styles always ended up in a disaster.

So was her tenth Board examination, disastrous, as expected. She failed, never to appear in an examination, ever.

I topped the entire district, my photograph and interview was in the news paper, ‘Small Town Girl Tops Tenth Board Examination’. Mami was least bothered about her failure. While everyone was looking at the news paper with my photograph, she said, “Oh! What’s so great about being in the news paper? That to, just one! I was in the news papers, all of them, before five years. What’s the big deal?” She preferred to go back to her world of dreams. From then on, Mami’s dreams became like a bird trapped in the dreams of that man who had promised to open the kingdom of dreams to the caged bird. Under the weight of its flapping wings her feelings turned out to be tender as of women in love.

Yes, Mami fell in love in her fifteenth year. That goat-eyed boy in our

neighborhood seemed to her as the prince charming of her dreams.

“Mamiji, my dearest, sweetest, loveliest one! The chief Minister of Odisha loved (!!) you once! If only you agree to be my sweetheart, I shall buy you lipsticks, powders, even a sewing machine and a wrist watch. I shall wash your bottom, I don’t want you to do that with your hands that touched the CM. You need not touch a bottom! And we would look together like Rahul and Riya in Hindi films.”

Madame Mami was impressed. The slumbering clocks were not awakened anymore. Time stopped there. We all got absorbed in the grim affairs of the world, in the face of which Mami’s dismay over her mother’s desire to keep time running seemed as meaningless and unreasonable as the Lord Indra inundating some parts of the world with unending torrential rain while leaving some other parts dry and thirsty.

“Aey *Bou*, why don’t you quit their house and do some other job where we can get lots of money?”

“*Hey bhagwan!* Who will make this girl understand it for good that you are a maid servant’s daughter and you yourself are a maid!”

Had Mami left our house after those bizarre happenings years back, she would have, being so bowed down by the enormity of the errors that life can divulge, lost the enthusiasm to fight the battles for a life full of luxury. But she grew up in our house, saw us growing and achieving laurels and adding new feathers to our caps every time. We were, kind of, her alter-ego. My eldest sister got a high profile job in a good city. Second sister was also settled in a government school, and third sister was working hard towards her aspirations of becoming a fashion designer like Ritu Beri someday. I was good at studies, and got accolades at every step. Our Mami never thought that she was an inch less respectable than any one of us in the society even if she never crossed the tenth board examination. So what? She was a celebrity. After all she had photographs with his Highness, the CM of the state.

Her mother would always fret and fume before my Ma.

“See *Maaji*, this girl wants new suits every month. She doesn’t want to work; neither has she agreed to marry my cousin’s son who is working in the new bus-stand *dhaba* as a cook. She thinks someday she will marry a *raj kumar*. Tell me! *Maaji*, hike my pay or may be I’ll have to find another house.”

Only the wearer knows where the shoe bites. It was enough for my Ma. Because, since last few years she had grown very fond of Mami, she felt very flattered by Mami. Every now and then, Mami would bring *Zarda paan* for her, massage her back, head, legs, make delicacies in the kitchen learning from the cookery shows on the T.V., gossip with Ma about everything happening in the town, would boost Ma’s ego by convincing her that she was the best and

prettiest among her colleagues; she would just pamper her. Ma was ageing, my eldest sister was married, second and third sisters were busy with their new jobs, I was in the hostel, and my youngest sisters were running from home to college to tuitions to home. No one of us had enough time for Ma and her antics. But Mami was there, always at hand, ready to do all odd jobs for her, and show her usual grin even when Ma would scold her.

Ma didn't want to spare her. Mami-bou's annual increments became six-monthly, then quarterly. Mami got Ma's unfinished Emami face creams, *chappals* and sarees (which she would cut and stitch into suits) more and more.

Cheating Ma was easy for Mami. She would get her boy friends to our lounge and kitchen garden when Ma was in the school, and everybody was out; offer them tea and snacks from our kitchen, as if it were her own; she would pick anything from our dressing table or shelves and use them. If we would see and shout at her, Ma was always there behind her.

"Get a new one for yourself! Why do you shout at her? Poor thing, she is helping you so much." It was the other way round, our house was helping Mami to get what she always wanted. Attention.

My third and youngest sisters were very pretty, so all those road side Romeos would try to roam on the road in front of our bungalow and peep in. But we were too busy even to notice them. Mami was always there, to smile at them, say "Hi! How are you?" to them when we were not watching. Anyway, she was growing old, pimple-faced, scarred due to the forcefully burst pimples, bald headed due to no oil massage (Ma said so!) .She could no longer wait for her prince charming. All her boy friends had deserted her in search of newer pasture lands. She was alone and frustrated. Her mother was too old to work and provide for her.

One day she got married, in fact ran away, with the first man who proposed her actually to marry him. Who was that boy? Or that aging man? It doesn't matter at all, once a girl is married. But anyway, she managed to retain her age old dreams in her eyes and found a space in her husband's home to hang her historic photographs taken years back. Even though she felt that the big dreams were no match for the small thatched house in that slum where her husband brought her, still they were alive.

Ma was upset, as expected, without her flatterer around.

Mami got pregnant the very first day of her marriage. And it happened every year. There was very little time for her to nourish her dreams with all the household chores that she had to attend to— cooking for four kids and her husband, washing clothes of people in the near by government quarters. Still in her subconscious, she had the broken pieces of her lost dreams which rushed

into her mind every now and then.

She must do things better than sleeping beside a man in rags on a rotten mattress; and life had more in its store than washing bottoms of her kids. “Oh my prince! Did you send only your servant instead of coming yourself for me because I was a maid’s daughter? You had touched me one day, did you forget? But don’t think that I will give up.”

The search was on.

One fine morning, Mami left her husband’s hut and her four kids back and caught the first bus to Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Odisha, where *he* lived. Her prince, who had once touched Ahalya and made her a woman from a piece of stone.

She only knew his name by heart. But hardly did she know that now the regime had changed. A new government was ruling over the state, and her prince had passed away since long, leaving room for his son as the head of the opposition party.

She got down from the bus and asked a rickshaw puller to take her to the Chief Minister’s house.

“Why? What would you do at the CM’s house?”

“Oh... he knows me well. In fact the whole of Odisha knows it how close I am with him. Don’t you know? Where are you from?”

“Ay mad woman, shut your mouth! *Where are you from*, eh? Knows the chief Minister! Gone crazy? Go from here! Go!”

“You don’t shout at me like this, ok? Do you know who am I?”

“How do I know? Who are you? Aishwarya Ray?”

“See this photograph. This is me with him. I shall go and stay in his house. I would marry his son. The Chief Minister’s son, ok? Then you can come and take some help from me if you want. Now take me to his house, hurry up!” The rickshaw puller saw that photograph, looked like taken in the eighteenth century, an unclear figure of some politician, a blurred image and nothing else, holding the hand of a beggar like girl.

He burst into a howling laughter, and his friends gathered. “See *bhailog*, the daughter-in-law of the Chief Minister of Odisha, and this photograph was clicked on her engagement party. He..he..he..” Somebody snatched the photograph; it got torn into two pieces, to the utter dismay of Mami.

“Oh god! What did you do?”

How can he recognize me now?

I was too small by then. Oh! what shall I do now? How could you do this? You bloody fool, I will kill you...!”

They were laughing, teasing her, having the fun of their lives, throwing her photograph from one to the other, and she was helplessly trying to catch

hold of it. As if it was her last hope— otherwise, again she would have to revise the mathematical table. Again the alluring alphabets have to be freed. For her, there was no other way but to make herself free of all inhibitions and spill water of all the pitchers.

She moved from one darkness to another great failure. A reindeer knocked her out of bounds. In a sudden rage, she took out the stone she had kept in her cloth bag and threw at them. One of them got hurt, bled profusely, and they pounced on her. Before anything could happen, she started running on the crowded road of the capital amid heavily loaded trucks and the busy traffic.

“I’ll see all of you. You don’t know who I am...”

Mami got lost in the darkness of the blackish green forest — on the other side of the place where common men and women like us live. Perhaps she waded through the water of many streams; perhaps she broke into laughter and tears many a times, for reasons best known to her.

Mami Pradhan, the eternal dreamer, pierced through the darkness gathered in the vacuum through ages.

Mami Pradhan was never ever seen again. After searching for his wife for a whole week, her husband wrote an FIR in the local police station. Mami’s mother was too old and was not able to see, she was lying in a corner of her hut where her daughter-in-law kept a morsel of rice and a pot of water twice a day, like she would have for a pet dog, unwanted.

My Ma had another maid, our Tintu-Maa, as usual, and she didn’t like to talk about Mami anymore. That’s why she was most upset when the police came to meet her and my father to get some information about Mami; but in vein.

The more I thought about it, the more I got struck with bewilderment. I hadn’t thought of it, ever, can a wild stream and a girl be one and the same thing? Are severing the wings of a bird and filching the dreams of a woman are one and the same thing? It is just today that I realized this for the first time.

□

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NINE OLDMEN & A VENDER

* Nityananda Panda

“Good Evening Sir! Glad to meet you. What a pleasant surprise! Perhaps this is destiny, isn’t it?” Mr. Sengupta could tell this much after verifying his glass twice or thrice.

A bench beside the scented hedges. A one-side bench. Mr. Poddar was found sitting on it. Assured ---- someone was saying something--- at first he tried to smile and then slid up the sleeve of his Punjabi (a popular Bengali Kurta) and in a luxuriant way tried hard to recognize the fellow through the lenses of his glass. As a matter of fact, he recognized him correctly.

“Hey! Please be seated, Well, Mr. Sengupta! Did I see you somewhere very recently?” – asked Mr. Poddar. He reminded himself to exhibit a smiling face. For no gentleman is greeted without smiles.

Of course, Mr. Sengupta had had some problems with his visual sensory; but not so with his auditory senses. He listened correctly that Mr. Poddar Sahib was inviting him to take a seat by his side. He hesitated for a moment to sit beside ... a cabinet minister on one bench Oh! But the next moment he resolved to neglect the events & incidents of long pastat least not at this age. Moreover what kind of conversation can be possible, standingly? Mr. Sengupta sat on the same bench. And told

“Sir, you might not have seen me. May be some one else The matter is that I have only arrived at my daughter’s place only yesterday”. Mr. Sengupta clarified this much before going to other discussion.

“No, That can’t be. Although my eyes always blur me, it can never be so in your case”, Mr. Poddar expressed emphatically.

Mr. Poddar had a great opportunity to while away at least an hour ... occasionally two to three hours, a day, perhaps, everyday after 4 O’clock. He was quite contented. His only daughter-in-law drives him up to the Park-gate, drops him there and disappears without a word.

Occasionally, two to three hours as mentioned above has nothing to do with Mr. Poddar. It solely depends on his daughter-in-law’s visit to a friend

or spending time at a party. On return she picks up her father-in-law from the park-gate. According to Mr. Poddar, he never minds her delay. Because, in the meantime, he has the chance to meet many-a-people; although very few recognize him rather better to say 'none'.

Soon after getting down from the car, Mr. Poddar slouches slowly towards the ticket counter. Purchases a ticket for rupees five and enters the park. It is a habit with him for last five years.

Mr. Tarunakanti Poddar was a cabinet minister, in the department of Culture and Tourism. Once upon a time ...an 'Honourable'. Not only during his tenure but also in his own sacred hand the foundation – stone for a twenty-acred park was laid and inaugurated by him. The motto was to incorporate the ancient godless Maharani Temple, full of rare sculptures, into Tourism Industry. And it was done with grand applause from the citizens of the state and along came the Assembly Election; and Mr. Poddar, got defeated. Eventually, he failed to return to active politics. Mr. Poddar with inner most secret desire to become the Chief Minister of the state dastardly failed to become even an M.L.A. Finally, the people and the Govt. forgot him.

Once before collecting an entry-ticket at the counter Mr. Poddar had told, "While I was a Minister in the Culture Department you might not be born. Even if you were born, you might not be above five. I am talking of an event of thirty-six years past. Do you get me?"

The counter, comprised of only three employees, it appeared to Mr. Poddar, had laughed. "Am I wrong", he mumbled. At the very moment the counter clerk commented", Lo! Why should a minister compel himself to visit this place (the Park)? Rupees five per head and we are three here. It won't work, Sir. Yes, it is better to ask that Gate-keeper. Ask him whatever you want. Ok, Old-gentleman! Will you pay me five rupees, please?"

Since that day Mr. Poddar has never opened his lips neither inside or outside the park. Without an exchange of words, he pays rupees five and receives a ticket.

Presently, Mr. Sengupta got startled at the over assuring statements of Mr. Poddar. Have I visited the capital someday in between? No, never. I have been forshaken from the Ministry thirty years hence, once and for all. I had been to the capital the following election – year to procure a ticket. After completion of 15 years of tenure as a Deputy Minister and Minister of State when I had an indomitable desire to acquire the Cabinet Ministry at that time a group of young politicians remoured ill against me and cunningly prevented me from getting a ticket. The insult was quite intolerable. Hideously, I had to return to my parental house in my own constituency. Still I had a hope against

hopes – if not this time, may be next time. By then those evil young guys and their adamant leader Mr. Ganguly might have been blamed. Really, they had been blamed. But the party High Command considered such blemish as an olive leaf tagged to their fun-cap.

As a result I gave up politics for all time to come. On what ground should I helter-skelter in the capital? And before whom? At last I considered the capital as a bad place and a hub/den for bad people and suppressed myself and suppressed till date.

Mr. Sengupta reminded himself that he was 82 now. In last 30 years the people of his own constituency in the coastal district had simply forgotten him, let alone the capital city. Of course, very few lower cadre bureaucrats, knowing him to be an ex-minister, fling salutes at him, as if it were not necessary.

Hey! Gentlemen! Do I force you to show me respect? If you don't like, it is better you don't. Why such disrespectful manners? Perhaps you don't know ... the then time. Even the senior officers ... much senior in rank and office ... used to wait on verandah and returned home, not being able to meet the minister. You people are quite fortunate, aren't you?

With the passing of time Mr. Sengupta forgot to think in that way. Forgot completely. Forgot and stopped going outside very often.

Now-a-days, his daughter and son-in-law are living in the capital after retirement from Berlin. At the outset Mr. Sengupta has doled out a good advice to them "Build a new house and live in your village instead of living in the capital. The capital is a bad place; the village soil is gold".

Before his son-in-law could say something, his daughter turned down his suggestion and bought a building in the capital. Mr. Sengupta was disheartened. He avoided his daughter's request to spend a few days at her place. But how long? Finally, he came. He came only yesterday.

But Mr. Poddar says that he has seen him. How strange! When did he come?

Mr. Sengupta said, "Sir, have you seen me in the capital?" "Certainly, yes. I haven't been outside the capital for last 20 years. Let me recollect, where have I seen you?" said Mr. Poddar looking at some pigeons playing with one another on the broken roof of the Maharani Temple at a distance.

Mr. Poddar laughed seeing Mr. Sengupta quite startled. His laughter appeared to be a cry in his teeth less mouth.

"Laughing at me, Sir?", Mr. Sengupta spoke in surprise.

"I have no way out but laugh, Mr. Sengupta. I realize today that my memory has weakened to a great extent. Didn't I say, I have seen you some where – that's it". There was still a ray of laughter on Mr. Poddar's lips.

"Is it true that you have seen me? If it is true, how come I couldn't see you?", he said this in his own defence and as a matter of protest and coughed a little.

"I know you would ask this question. In nutshell, I have seen you, but you haven't seen me. And that's not your mistake – it's a fact. Because on that day you were dead – a departed soul", and Mr. Poddar went on smiling.

"What! 'a dead soul'?", Mr. Sengupta's head reeled. He would have fallen, but he managed to catch hold of the rear side of the bench and saved himself.

He bemoaned and mumbled, "I am not a dead-soul, sir! you see! I am sitting beside you and talking to you".

"What's that to me? That day you were also with me, but you were not talking. Only staring at me. Criticizing me for my failure to become the Chief Minister. Are you happy, now? Listen! I saw you on the newspaper. Your photograph was printed under obituary. Am I wrong?", Mr. Poddar explained.

"Sir, it is a fact that I don't tour now-a days, but does that mean my photo be printed under obituary, when I am still alive?", Mr. Sengupta bemoaned. Once out of disgust he had remarked his daughter that the capital was a bad place; today he understands that it is not entirely a vague statement.

"Don't be childish Mr. Sengupta. Weren't you a Cabinet Minister? I don't see a bit of common sense in you. Just use your conscience. If someone brings out your photo before your death, dare you beat him? This might be so. Seeing no possibility of being thrashed, someone has printed it. I can guarantee that it won't be so in my case. For my daughter-in-law has been empowered to punish. Let it. Let by gone, be by gone.. Well, tell me what do you do now-a-days?", knowing Mr. Poddar knocked on the ground with his walking-stick.

Mr. Sengupta sat silently. The bird of his life had flown out of his body and flying hither and thither like a butterfly and all on a sudden re-entered his soul. He was not a dead-soul. Thank God!

Can a Cabinet Minister belie? No, Never. Someone might have played a prank with him and printed the photo, only to chide him. Instantly, he blamed the govt. and the bureaucrats. Why not? When you - people neglected an ex-minister like me, one dared to go to such an extent-declared one living man, dead. Oh! Yes. It demands a remedy.

"Well, Sir. How old are you now? The matter is that I am eighty-two. You are a bit older. May be around ninety, aren't you?", enquired Mr. Sengupta.

What makes you discuss on 'age' all on a sudden? What I thought of initially is correct. That you lack common sense. Hey! When one is aged, it

is better to add a couple of years. Let me add. Ninety four. What, then?", Mr. Poddar appeared inspired.

Instantly, the park was lighted in the same resonance. The crowd youth, middle-aged and children grew to its spirit. With this grew their spirit of biting at pea-nuts and mixture. Since the two former ministers were sitting aside, it disturbed none.

Mr. Sengupta said, "The 15th August, the 26th January and many more occasions are celebrated in the District Headquarters. I am never invited."

- "Do you think, I am invited?"

- "You know, I was a minister in the department of Animal Husbandry and Fisheries for many years. If the Govt. counted on my experience and used it up, it would definitely add to the welfare of the State, wouldn't it?", Mr. Sengupta spoke with an assured voice.

"Only I did for the department of tourism. Only for this the Govt. is collecting huge revenue. Believe me, I have got so many superb plans with me; if the Govt. executed them, the state revenue would increase by five times. But listen to me Sengupta; if they don't confide in me, I'll never disclose those plans", said Mr. Poddar with a pricked heart.

"I am of the same opinion, Sir! Let us constitute an Association of the Ex-ministers. After constitution, let's call for a strike not before the chief-minister's office – but before the office of the Governor. The govt. shall be compelled to confide in us. However, the ultimate objective is something else to let the people know that we are not dead. How do you appreciate my idea, Sir?", Mr. Sengupta concluded (expecting a positive response from the Ex-Cabinet Minister) hopefully.

But Mr. Poddar looked sad. He was speechless.

- "What is the matter, Sir?"

"You said and I heard. What happened and when? Listen, Mr. Sengupta I am familiar with the state as a realistic leader. Of course, I was. But the problem at hand is of a different kind. I agree that I'm old. I can't unite all the Ex-ministers. You are still young. Nothing has changed in you. You are yet not lenient on crutches. You can. Your idea is good", Mr. Poddar shifted the entire responsibility on to Mr. Sengupta.

Mr. Tukun Sengupta – the ex-minister for Animal Husbandry and Fisheries Department – was highly elated. He giggled at the possibility of his proposal being turned into reality. Nothing could be possible without the accent of the age-old ex-cabinet minister, Mr. Poddar. He clapped at it. His clap jerked some children at a distance. They turned at the two old gentlemen sitting together. They again re-engaged themselves at play.

- "What made you clap?"

"Clapped? Oh! Yes. Sir, do I expect any odd jobs from you? You'll only be the President. I'll be the Convenor and manage everything. I'll contact all ex-ministers over telephone. The day after tomorrow shall see a seven hours strike from 10- o'clock to 5 pm before the Raj Bhavan. Let's see the power of the Govt. But Sir?", Mr. Sengupta looked terrible.

- But me, no buts.

"Sir, your name has been printed on the banner as the President. If you forget (about the strike) the date and time, everything will be spoiled", Mr. Sengupta had finished writing the banner in his mind of minds.

"Forget? How can the President forget his presidentship? Shall I speak the truth? Still today I imagine myself as the Minister of culture department; although I have not examined the memory of my daughter-in-law. Listen, I shall reach at the Raj Bhavan at sharp 10 a.m. Be sure, leaving the walking-stick aside Mr. Poddar patted on the back of Mr. Sengupta.

Presently, the gate-keeper appeared and told to Mr. Poddar, "Dear Old-gentleman, Madam is waiting at the gate. She seems very angry. By now you should remain present at the gate. Please, come".

"Yes! Yes! I am late. Much time has been lost on an useless topic. My daughter-in-law is quite justified for her irritation. Time is quite precious, isn't it? Good-bye, Mr. Sengupta. Look forward to meet you the day after tomorrow. Don't forget to bring the banner. Yes, let's walk Walk beside me. Really, I wasted a lot of time", Mr. Poddar slouched away.

On the assigned day, Mr. Poddar boarded an auto-rickshaw and reached at the Raj Bhavan. Wao! Mr. Sengupta's handi-work-is quite appreciable. The stage with banner was prepared. Mr. Poddar looked through his glass after cleaning it once and again. It was written – "The Association of Ex-Ministers. President – Mr. Tarunkanti Poddar – Ex-Cabinet Minister, Department of Tourism & Culture, Govt. of Odisha.

Mr. Poddar's bony chest expanded under his Punjabi. Long years hence, he saw his name written colourfully. Someone said with a sigh, "The President has arrived". Mr. Sengupta and another participant led Mr. Poddar towards the dias. A garland of marigold was presented around his neck. A smiling Poddar (sat on the ground with spread-legs) put his walking-stick aside. He counted there were only nine-meansonly nine ex-ministers. The attendance was not altogether bad.

Leaning on the ground Mr. Sengupta stood up. He introduced Mr. Poddar and expressed in few words the objective of the strike. The other seven approved his words with booming claps. Poddar imagined himself as the Chief

Minister presiding over the Cabinet Meeting and considered Mr. Sengupta as a cabinet minister. The strike resumed.

Mr. Poddar looked at every one once and again from below his fatty lenses, No, he couldn't remember any one of them. From among the hazy faces, he could identify Mr. Natu Digal - the Minister of Pension & Grievances of his time.

Mr. Natu Digal. Yes, he is found sitting hopelessly. Mr. Poddar knocked on every nook and corners of his brain. If he were Natu Digal, he might be definitely highly shocked. He himself is responsible for such shocks. He was forced to resign from his post on a complaint lodged by a widow pensioner. Mr. Poddar had demanded for his resignation.

Mr. Natu Digal was sitting like a hunch-backed owl. His face downwards. Is he still angry with him? Mr. Poddar thought himself to be a criminal. He wished to wash away all his angers with some soothing words.

"Mr. Digal, are you fine? See, I am quite sorry for the past incident. As we didn't meet, I couldn't beg excuse. I learnt later on that the widow's complaint was deceitful and baseless. By then you had already joined another party. Do you remember?" Mr. Poddar was happy to have expressed the truth, even though late.

Mr. Sengupta suddenly interrupted, "where is Mr. Digal? He had been to heavenly abode five years since. He, who is sitting there, is Mr. Baliyar Singh – ex-minister of Excise Deptt. Your name has attracted him to represent the western district. He is accompanied with his grand son."

Oh! Mr. Baliyar Singh. Good. I recognize him now. Of course, now-a-days, I have a problem of recognition; but it matters less. Ok. Thanks for joining. Let's warn the Govt. in reality, Mr. Poddar couldn't really recollect about this Mr. Baliyar Singh.

Mr. Poddar was given to understand that the other eight members were above eighty. Only he has touched ninety. He is the senior most. Hence, Honourable. He was inspired to speak something. After much thoughts he said, "Our strike is aimed at the interest of the state. If the Govt. accepts our experience-based suggestion, it will surely develop. This strike is intended for this."

"Yes, that's it", said Mr. Baliyar Singh.

"And inviting us to Public Functions? Asked Mr. Sengupta.

"That will follow automatically", replied Mr. Poddar.

By 12 noon, the Governor got the news that nine old men were on strike. He sent an emergency message to the Chief Minister to take care of the matter. To him the old are the valuable property of the State.

~~The Chief Minister consulted with his P.S. (Private Secretary). The P.S.~~
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examined the legal side of it. Whether the old or the lepers, to go on a strike without notice is illegal. Hence, it should be declared illegal and they should be dispersed.

The Chief Minister was simple and humanistic by nature. Although his private secretary told the right thing, he, however, didn't accept it. He told him, "you personally visit the spot; try to get who are they and what are their demands?"

An ambassador car stopped at the spot. The secretary got down with a diary in hand. He was first attracted to the banner. His fear increased about 100 times. He hesitated a bit. The old men were all ex-ministers. He counted nine salutes at them and came near them. He sat beside the President. But, how strange? The old men were all indifferent to him. They were quite silent.

He mumbled, "I have been sent by the Chief Minister". "have been sent, please, sit-down", whispered Mr. Poddar - the President.

By then about six ex-ministers have been snoring in sleep. The convenor, Mr. Sengupta, was looking at the lady-constable standing at a distance. Mr. Baliyarsingh, though his eyes were wide-opened, was sitting in such a posture that it was too difficult to imagine whether he was awake or asleep. Mr. Poddar was dozing intermittently. The secretary enquired, "what's the objective of your strike?" "Oh! Yes, the objective", Mr. Poddar sighed with his toothless mouth opened and concentrated on dozing.

The secretary was stunned. He had opened his diary to write something; but nothing was to be written. He only noted "Association of Ex-Ministers" & "Nine" and stood up.

He thoughtfully entered the office of the Chief Minister. For, he was dissatisfied with his inquiry. The chief was awaiting him.

"Who are they?", the CM asked instantly. In English. He was not good at Odiya.

"Ex-Ministers ... Meaning ... Ghost Ministers ... Nine ... Nine in number," replied the P.S.

"Ghost? That means they are dead long since. And the ghosts forming an association is another wonder in the world, isn't it?", the CM said this, bereft of his usual hesitating smile.

- "Sir! Ghost ... Means ... Virtually"

- "Ghost means Ghost, you understand? But why here? And the objective? Is it evil?", asked the CM.

"Didn't say anything. Didn't submit any memorandum, the secretary - usually in habit of talking at length, could utter only these few words.

The CM looked enlightened.

And said, "Have you ever heard of the ghosts talking? You might have
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read somewhere. Even if they spoke, you might not be able to listen. Ok. Do one thing. Have a strong watch on them. Letn't the passers by ... the people be troubled by them. Listen, some ghosts are very dangerous. But no problem with dusk, they'll vanish. Disappearance is their nature. Wait till evening, yes! Prepare a report on this and dispatch it to the Governor. Go, Do it now", the CM repented for canceling all his tours.

The dusk dwindled on the earth. Crowd on the street was proportionately decreased. By then the nine old men had forgotten why they were sitting there. In reality, they needn't look at one another. On the other hand, the President Mr. Poddar was afraid of looking at Mr. Baliyar Singh. To him he was a real ghost sitting before him.

At that moment Mr. Sengupta's voice was heard. That he could sound so loud was unbelievable. All got astonished at his loud voice before they could understand anything. All eight old men including Mr. Poddar turned towards Mr. Sengupta.

Feeling for his walking-stick Mr. Poddar said, "Hey, Sengupta, why did you make such a sound?" He reminded himself that Mr. Sengupta had not spoken for a long period.

Mr. Sengupta kept mum. He indicated his finger towards the street. Mr. Poddar and the other ---- all looked towards it.

A vender with "Gup-Chup" (a small snacks for refreshment) was walking along the street. He was very near to them. He halted. He flicked a smile at them. The glass box containing loads of "Gup-Chup" in his hand-driven vehicle were quite visible. They (Gup-Chup) also appeared smiling at them.

Mr. Sengupta told in a trembling voice, "I had taken "Gup-chup" when I was at college. By the side of the college road. I have not tasted it since then. A matter of disgrace," He fumbled to disclose the matter before the ex-cabinet minister.

Mr. Poddar expressed in a trembling voice, "It was 1965 – the marriage ceremony of the son of the central minister, Mr. Srivastav. "Gup-chup was a dish at the reception. I can recollect, I took some twenty pieces. I hadn't seen it before. Latter on I came across it, but not taken", a stream of saliva trickled down the corner of his lips.

The old man from the southern region was sitting with his head down. Bending down he said, "Gup-chup is quite suitable to our mouth. It's very fine. Again there is no one to over see."

"Let's go" – Mr. Poddar was first to get up. All followed him. They surrounded the gup-chup walla. They were under the spell of childishness. Soon everyone's Punjabi (Kurta) was soaked with sour-water.

When Mr. Poddar's daughter-in-law, searched for him, came to know that he had been out since 10 in the morning, she surmised! Where could he go? She got worried and irritated. She entered the house once again to look for him everywhere.

At once the telephone rang.

"Mrs. Rosy, you may not turn up today," his daughter-in-law heard someone saying.

"I think so. My father-in-law is not seen since 10 in the morning, Is it viable to go out now?", the daughter-in-law felt sorry for her inability.

"I come to know from T.V. news that the ex-ministers are on a strike in front of the Raj Bhavan. Uncle is the president. O.K. better don't come today", - someone told from the other end.

The daughter-in-law drove towards the RajBhavan. She reached there soon. Suddenly, she braked near the vender. Mr. Poddar recognized her car and saw his daughter-in-law getting down.

"The entire day was lost on a useless work. Mr. Sengupta! Let me go. One whoever relies on you Well, Mr. Sengupta Good-bye", Mr. Poddar got into the car without looking at his daughter-in-law.

The CM. was replying someone over phone, "the ghosts disappear. And they vanished. There is nothing to be happy at this. I told this from my common sense. Common sense. Do you get me?" □

Originally written in Odia. Translation : Mr. Sapan Kumar Jena, Chief Sub-Editor, R.P.

“SIBA BHAI” SALON

* Udaya Narayan Das

On my way back home from morning walk, I was astonished to see the salon open after some months. Emotionally, I came near it. I haven't seen Mr. Siba Bhai for a long time. Today at any cost I'll enquire about his surgery and his daughter's marriage. I was sure he might be angry with me for not visiting his house. Still he will change his mind, when he saw me. A conversation with him refreshes one's woes.

But, see, how strange? Siba Bhai was n't there. Only two hand-drawn rickshaws were in front of the salon. Three men were dragging out all the luggage including the chair, the mirror and other furniture and loading them on the rickshaws. In the end they loaded the sign-board made of tin. The beautifully and quite ornamentally decorated “Siba Bhai's Salon” looked entirely empty. The three men were pulling out even the photographs of attractive beautiful film heroines and that of the cricket stars quite mercilessly. A moustached black young man on a Hero Honda was commanding in a rough voice, “Finish the job quickly. I am getting late. I have lots of work to do. After you finish the work, I have to lock it up.”

xxx xxx xxx xxx

I met Siba Bhai for the last time on 20th April. That day my wife told me irritatingly, “Are you the only man doing a job or many others are there? Saying that you have no leave, you head for the office every morning. Don't the other employees on the earth shave like gentlemen? No, it's all your plea, a show before the public.

Of course, I used to forget many things for pressure of office work. Even I forget to dispatch money in time to my mother for her medicine, to write a letter to my father or to ring up an emergency news to a friend; or to go for shopping to bring a plumber to work on a water pipe jammed over a month, to address a forwarding letter to the University in support of my daughter's migration certificate from the college etc. All such works couldn't be done in time. But when I stood before the mirror, I came to realize that my hair had turned rough. I recollected that I had been to Siba Bhai's Salon a month and a half back. I had no time to scan how speedily time elapsed in between.

That was a Sunday. 7 o' clock in the morning. I headed for the Salon. I had enough trust on Sibabhai that soon after finished with two to three customers, there would be my turn. Of course during that period I used to visit his Salon any day excepting holidays. For on holidays his salon was crowded and Sibabhai had to toil hard to manage the crowd single-handedly.

Even on other days it took at least one and half hours on conversation. The topics ranged from world politics to a row over Mirza-Pokhari (a pond). He used to treat one with a plain-pan (a piece of betel) and a cup of tea (inspite of all my denials).

During thirty years of stay in this city, I have come across lots of employees, businessmen and many a wise men. But every where there is a formal relationship. There exists no emotional or deep heart felt relationship in urban life. But Sibabhai was a rare exception to this deep emotional attachment to which I was attracted all the time. Seeing me he used to greet me with a smile "Good morning, Sir! I was expecting you in mind of minds for last five to six days. I knew, it's time for your hair be dressed up and you would show up in one morning."

Or he would be heard saying, "Sir, I don't see you now-a-days on morning walk. Don't you go for outing in the morning. I get my salon opened everyday at 4 o' clock in the morning, whether it is winter or summer. Sir, please don't stop walking in the morning. It's quite useful to your age."

Or something he used of say, "Sir, your father-in-law came yesterday to shave his beared. I didn't know till date that Mr. Pitambar was your father-in-law. He is a man of principles. Quite punctual a this work. Only yesterday he told me that he was your father-in-law."

In this way while shaving and talking, he would extend all the news papers of the day towards me. While I was busy reading a newspaper and he shaving someone's beared, he would say, "Please, listen me Sir! These days I came to know of the Iraq-America war from T.V, newspaper and people. The U.S. is fighting there. I don't get the right cause behind the war. I was simply waiting for you. You'll tell me the right thing.

Or Siba Bhai would be saying, "No longer we can survive here, Sir! The Bush Administration beyond the seven seas bosses every country here. It pokes its nose at Arab's oil market and Indo-Pak turmoils over Kashmir. Sir! tell me, why does Mr. Bush boss everywhere and over everything?

Hearing all those things from Siba Bhai, I would be appreciating him in my own mind. Siba Bhai is quite illiterate. But the city life has taught him everything. He knew many things of far and near from his respectable customers."

The news unknown to me is informed by Siba Bhai. A discussion over all the national and international news and events like death from stampede due to bomb-hoax on a bridge over Tigris in Iraq, promises on Gandhi's Birth Anniversary Day for three more medical colleges in the state, test-ride on the broad-gauge railways between Rupsa & Baripada, the loots by the naxalites in Malkangiri or a threatening to vacate the villages, or the no. of recipients from our district at the Sahitya Academy Board – 2001, or the demand for a Govt. Medical College in Balasore etc. were all initiated by him. When the gentlemen began to argue over a topic, he silently minded his work with a smiling face.'

The customers used to leave the Salon one by one with the conversation on. The Salon would experience an intellectual atmosphere. Some people, even though didn't require a shaving, used to visit Siba Bhai's Salon on Sundays and participate in the discussion.

Siba Bhai's Salon was a source for all kinds of unknown national, international or urban, local events and incidents. I used to get a clue to many breaking news from this source. As a result many learned educationists, bank officers and govt. employees thronged there every Sunday whether they needed a shaving or not. All wise elites knew that the Salon discussed valuable things. Being in touch with these educated elites, Siba Bhai had become an expert at world politics & economics. Nothing was unknown to him.

While alone at the Salon, he used to tell me, "At 32 when I came here from my village, this place had no signs of a town. There were only a few shops. Only the Motiganj market was a crowded area. By then I was simply a stupid fellow. I joined the 'Baboo's' 'Salon' adjacent to the Cinema Hall. With great hardship I learnt hair dressing from him."

I asked him, "I have never seen that salon." He replied, "That salon has been replaced by the Madhumita Stationery. Suffered from some unknown disease, Baboo Bhai closed the salon."

Spitting away the betel mixed saliva and wiping out the shaven foam, he said, "Sir, now-a-days it is very difficult to say a word to the new-learners of this profession; but those days were quite different. In spite of all punishments at the hands of Baboo Bhai, I used to respect him. I have reached this status through many ups and downs."

I used to say, "Really, Siba Bhai! Time has changed a lot. We are to follow the demands of time."

Having a long sigh he said, "For God's grace only I have reached this height. Have I ever imagined of a salon of my own in this town? Moreover, such a relationship with a great deal of people. Everything is due to our fate and the blessings of the Almighty. Everything depends on him. Or else, can I think of my own identity or existence of my salon in this town!"

During lonely hours he would tell me about his family members. His son was at final year B.A. Siba Bhai planned to engage him in his salon after his studies. But his son did not agree to it. He wanted to go to Bhubaneswar for higher studies. And, hence, he was hopeless.

I said, "If the boy intends to study, you should not stop him. Better his studies, greater is your fame. In your time you couldn't study. Let your son study."

Siba Bhai said, "Of course, you are right; but what if he remains unemployed after higher education? Hence, I like him to be engaged. The two of us-father and son-together can manage the salon well. I am quite aged. He is my only son. If he joins me now, I can train him properly."

I said, "Siba Bhai, please leave everything unto God. Let your son decide his own path. God is there to tread him on right path."

Looking above he said, "Let your words come true".

I asked him about his other children. He said, "Sir, three daughters – one above and two below the son. Hence, my anxieties. Runu, the eldest one at home now passed B.A. last year. She is learning tailoring at a shop. I am quite worried about her marriage. Three proposals are there. I have to take care of it. The middle one is at college and the youngest one is going to appear matriculation exam this year."

I suggested, "Give Runu on marriage, this year. A marriageable girl idle at home is a source of all evil thoughts."

He said, "Yes, Sir! I have to finalize the matter at any cost by the turn of December. A proposal given by Mr. Saha is worthy. Since it is August (the month of Bhadrava), we can't put up the proposal. The groom is the eldest son of his parents. He owns a computer shop in the town. They ask for 1.5 lakh towards dowry. Still we'll go for it. On a Sunday in the next month I shall carry you on my Luna (a moped) to the groom's house. Please, don't deny."

I said, "Fix it by yourself. Why waiting for my suggestion? You are much more experienced than me. You are managing thousands of people here. Can your choice go wrong? Because we are service-holders, are we really experienced?"

Siba Bhai was not prepared to listen to me. He said, "No, Sir! you are trying to avoid me by such intelligent mess up. You are surely to accompany me. Please Sir! Take two to three days of leave for the marriage ceremony."

I stared at him with wide-open eye. He said, "why such look? I'll never spare you, your father-in-law and some intimate friends shall be invited to adorn the chairs on my verandah. You are all a source of courage for me. I'll be really encouraged. I'll also invite your wife. I don't care for the expenses. On my words Mr. Maliram Marwari shall lend me a lakh or two. Only your presence

shall be my pride. Who else is there to be called my own, there?

I said, "Don't worry. Everything will be alright. Let that time (marriage ceremony) approach."

In a soft voice, Siba Bhai said, "The matter is that my daughter's marriage is my first festivity. Unless I arrange it in a suitable manner, the friends and relatives from village shall speak ill of me."

I encouraged him by saying, "you'll have no trouble. Please, carry on."

Sometimes he used to tell me about his wife, "Sir, your sister-in-law is auspiciously precious. Or else, who am I? What's my salon? She has brought all these fortunes."

Jokingly I told him, "Siba Bhai! You always talk of my sister-in-law, but never invite me to your house. At least I could taste her cooking."

Siba Bhai told with a smile, "Sir! can great people like you ever come to our place to taste the dishes from the hands of your illiterate sister-in-law?"

I retorted, "Why? What are we? What great man? Do we take delicious palatable food everyday? Don't we have any sorrows? You see, Siba Bhai! We also belong to rural area. We are simply fortunate enough to get some education to have a job and been able to own a house in the town. Because we are writing a few lines in the files, are we great? and you, a poor fellow?"

Siba Bhai said in a soft voice, "No, Sir, can we be equal to you in any way? Can't you differentiate the gap between heaven and hell? Moreover your sister-in-law is a blackish woman from a remote rural. She has neither education nor mannerisms. So I am reluctant to take you home."

After a while he said, "yes, now-a-days your sister-in-law visits an ashram. She practises Yoga there. At home too she practises it locking herself behind the doors. She has taught yoga also to our daughters."

Agreeably I said, "It's a good thing. I think, she is doing nothing evil. She is not tarnishing your image by going round the town. She is only learning yoga-exercises at the Ashram. It's a great thing."

Praises from my lips for my sister-in-law brought flickering smile to his face.

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Yes! Now, let me narrate the sorrowful story of Siba Bhai that I heard from him the last Sunday. I was aghast at the sight of the salon. Although a Sunday morning, the salon was quite empty. At this time it would get a crowd like that of a car festival. But it was calm and quiet all around. Clad with a bed-sheet, Siba Bhai was trembling under the April sun. Although I stood very close to him, he was not able to talk to me.

I realized that he might be seriously ill. Still, he could tell me something; but he covered his face instead. In order to express my presence, I told, "Good

Morning Siba Bhai! Is today's newspaper there? Are you ill?"

The word 'paper' brought tears to his eyes. He said, "No, Sir! paper won't be available anymore. Even the salon may be closed down any day." I couldn't get at the mysterious words of Siba Bhai who was always a man of humour. At that very moment Siba Bhai was suffering from an unsurmountable restlessness.

In a soft voice I said, "Oh! Siba Bhai! Are you worried for your physical illness? or have picked up a quarrel with my sister-in-law over your daughter's marriage proposal?"

My words brought him to breathless cries of a child. The languor even melted the walls of the salon. He soothed himself and said, "All my ill fate, Sir. God envied my happiness. Seriously ill, I was taken to Cuttack by your sister-in-law and my son. The treatment cost a lot there. My abdomen was scanned. Finally, the doctor suggested for an operation. It may cost around three lakhs. Without operation, the disease may aggravate. I am brooding over the fate of my children after my death.

I was stunned at his words. In order to encourage him I said, "why so worried? you have many rich friends in the town? Even Maliram Marwadi is there. When approached, he would surely help."

Thoughtfully, he said, "No; Sir! when I was fine, everything was fine. But when they listen about this disease, who will pay me a loan? And even if I am operated with, who can guarantee my recovery? Who will loan me on trust?"

He burst into a laughter and said, "No, Sir, It's not that. I simply brood over my fate, Perhaps. He can't bear with our happiness for longer." This again reddened his eyes and he bemoaned like a baby.

I brushed my hand over his body and said, "Siba Bhai! If you become nervous, how can your family survive?"

Siba Bhai pulled himself up and said, "Sir, you haven't been shaven since long. What can I do? Today I have turmed everyone away. I have told my son to take care of the salon from Sunday next. Let's see, what happens? Sir, I have a request; if my son takes up the salon, you must visit him. You'll also persuade all for the benefit of my son's business. I will teach him everything intermittently. Please, don't expect me."

I comforted him, "Don't worry. We are all with you. Is your son alien to us?"

Having said this when I began to getup from the bench, Siba Bhai said, "Sir, please don't leave. Whatever it may happen to me, today I'll dress up your hair. You have come with so much hope, how can you return without a shave?

———— With this he pulled me by my hand and seated me on the salon-chair.

He didn't listen to my denials. He covered my body with the white towel and began to cut my hair with a pair of scissor. When his hand touched my body, I felt that he was in high fever. And hence, his hand wasn't properly moving on my head. He finished dressing my hair with much difficulty. In spite of my denial, he also shaved my beard. I could feel that his hand was unusually trembling while moving the razor. I was also afraid lest the razor bleed my neck. I shirked very often. Reading my thought, he spoke in a trembling voice, "No, Sir! don't worry. I am moving the razor consciously."

I could discern that he was worried for long to tell me something. After shaving was over when I offered to pay him money, he said, "No, Sir. Today I'll take no money from you. It's my love for you."

I said, "No, you are badly in need of money now. Please, don't deny, Siba Bhai. He said, "Yes, huge money is required – which is unimaginable. I am not confident enough to earn such a great amount from my business. Let this be with you. Some day you'll repay it with interest."

I was speechless. I returned from his salon. At that moment in a trembling voice he said, "Sir, I have something to tell you". Internally, I was a bit afraid. What else would Siba Bhai say? Will he ask me for money? Still, I asked, "Yes, speak up".

He said in light voice, "I am going to Cuttack on coming Monday. Your sister-in-law and my son will accompany me. They will check me up again. But I had told your sister-in-law about your desire to visit our home. Every one in the family was happy about it. We couldn't invite you for my illness. Please, visit us on Monday. Or I'll regret it forever."

I said, "Siba Bhai, is it a big task? Let you be recovered first. Now it's a hard time for you. Won't I attend your daughter's marriage?"

He cried like a baby. I consoled him by wiping out his tears, "Siba Bhai, if you become impatient, it will tell upon your health. O.K. I'll definitely reach your home on Tuesday night."

These soothing words made him happy and he said, "I will send my son with my Luna (a moped). Do come with him."

I said, "OK."

While returning from his salon I thought on the way that if I visited his house, he might ask for money towards his operation. Who knows how much he might need? Again, who'd ensure his recovery? Presently, I was also in need of huge money. My daughter had been successful at Medical Entrance Exam. on payment seat. Her admission would cost a minimum of two lakh. My son at +2 science was looking forward to coaching on Engineering Entrance at the Capital. It might cost fifty thousand more. More over, the second floor of the house had been begun. However, I had sympathy for Siba Bhai. But how

could I help him?

Why thinking so much? It's better not to go to his house. I'll better spend my time at Abhay Babu's press from 7 evening to half past ten. His son would be turned to go back. My wife would reply, "He has been out on an official emergency."

And I did the same. Since that day knowingly I had kept no information about Siba Bhai. When I went on morning walk, I used to see his salon locked. It seemed as if someone with a razor was running towards me at dusk.

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That day the salon was found open. I halted at a distance. The luggage of the salon were loaded on a rickshaw. The man on the motor cycle locked the empty salon. His men pulled down the steel sign board. It was unwantedly deserted on the ground. When I approached towards the salon, I discovered a bound photo of Siba Bhai left forlorn. It was his pride possession – the Chief Minister rewarding him as a good citizen on behalf of the Business Association of the town. But that day it appeared as if his empire was completely devastated.

Did I have any courage to enquire something about Siba Bhai? Was the salon sold or leased out to this moustache fellow?

I felt someone's pathetic moan inside me. I had been standing there for long. I had to bring mutton from the market. My son had been at home from the Capital since yesterday. □

Original in Odia. Translation : Mr. Sapan Kumar Jena, Chief Sub-editor, R.P.

POETRY

Three Poems
by Shankar D.Mishra

(I)
**A TRIBUTE TO MANOJ
DAS**

Learn from the heavenly flowers
How to spread the smell of virtue
and nobility;
Learn from the inquisitive Manoj
Das
How to overcome the ignominious
ignorance poverty.

Learn from the firm, unperturbed
Himalays
How to weather with aplomb and
fortitude adversity;
Learn from the just, perseverant
Manoj Das
How to maintain self-respect and
dignity.

Learn from the benevolent and
bounteous candle
How to burn yourself to illuminate
all around;
Learn from the astute, articulate
Manoj Das
How to inculcate, enlighten and
astound.

Learn from the industrious, benefic
honey bees
How to sacrifice yourself along
with your savings;

Learn from the avid, studious
Manoj Das
How to foster to flap your knowl-
edge wings.

Learn from the lofty, innocuous
birds
How to soar in the high altitude;
Learn from the candid, detached
Manoj Das
How to cultivate a right attitude.

Learn from the pure, life-sustaining
water
How to nurture indiscrimination;
Learn from the observant, didactic
Manoj Das
What to do if you seek emancipa-
tion.

Learn from the commonplace cow-
dung compost
How to enhance useful and harm-
less fertility;
Learn from the voracious votary,
Manoj Das
How to develop callousness to
self-cheap publicity.

Learn from the desireless, devout
Sudama
How to attain the rare beatitude
and bliss;
Learn from the determined, diligent
Manoj Das
How to muster effortless mastery
over English.

Learn from a sincere, devoted
gardener

How to tend a sapling to grow and blossom;
Learn from the master humorist
Manoj Das
How to paint with words to revamp and reform.

Learn from a chaste, bereft Indian widow
How to absorb acute pain and bitter sorrow shroud;
Learn from Utkal's booned scion,
Manoj Das
How to make your Mother and Motherland proud. □

(II)

TO TWO GREAT LITERARY GIANTS OF BALASORE

Hats off to the soil of Balasore:
The Daughter of Mother Utkal,
The Grand-Daughter of Grand-Mother India
For giving birth to two glittering giants
Who dazzled Her sacred brow with glowing sparks
Of their radiating literary crations
In the respective Pre and Post Independence Eras!

Fakir Mohan, the inimitable Bradman of Odia literature
Reigned the hearts of million Odias
With his bemusing, witty puns and fecund, matured languages
Bamboozling many an English mind

Playing a pivotal role in India's

Freedom Struggle
Whose epigramic pen truly proved mightier than the sword!

And Manoj Das, the Sachin of Utkal in modern English writing
Deserves a tantamount, resonant applause
For, he is endowed with a spawning, versatile genius
Who has enriched English literature
And carved a special niche for himself
Amongst the ever growing English readers
With his ebullient, reformative, satirical and humorous exploits.

Still insatiable is his appetite
Unquenchable his thirst
That still springs like a perennial tributary
To embellish and adorn the river of English literature
And entrance, enthrall and enlighten the masses for ages to come....
□

(III)

TO THE EDITOR, THE HERITAGE

If a journal one does ever edit
Must one command the readers' credit
And the latter must willingly plaudit
The formers's just, impartial and healthy verdict.

In the eighties as the Editor of
"THE HERITAGE"
Manoj Das never tarnished his
towering image
Unturned he never left no stone
To bag global kudos and an envi-
able recognition.

He was blest with an ant's percep-
tion and sensitivity
Endowed with a canine vigilance
and alertness
Gifted with a sensible man's re-
sponsibility
To render a flawless editor's laud-
able service.

Let all the editors out of his worthy
book take a leaf
And endeavour to shine even after
life's bivouac brief. □

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Peace

Oh Peace! Why obscure?
Here souls unrest
As passions beset
and love bereft
Streams carry dead victims
Violence defaced all dictums
Come thee sing thy music sweet
Let souls bow thy holy feet

Thy power is angles' test
Keats even could not sing it best
Weakened the Planet
by misery rife
Sprinkle thy mercy
and rename life
Come down Divine Power,
time is bleak
By thee unloved,
world pass and die weak □

Dr G Manjulatha Devi,
Karimnagar, A.P., India

