

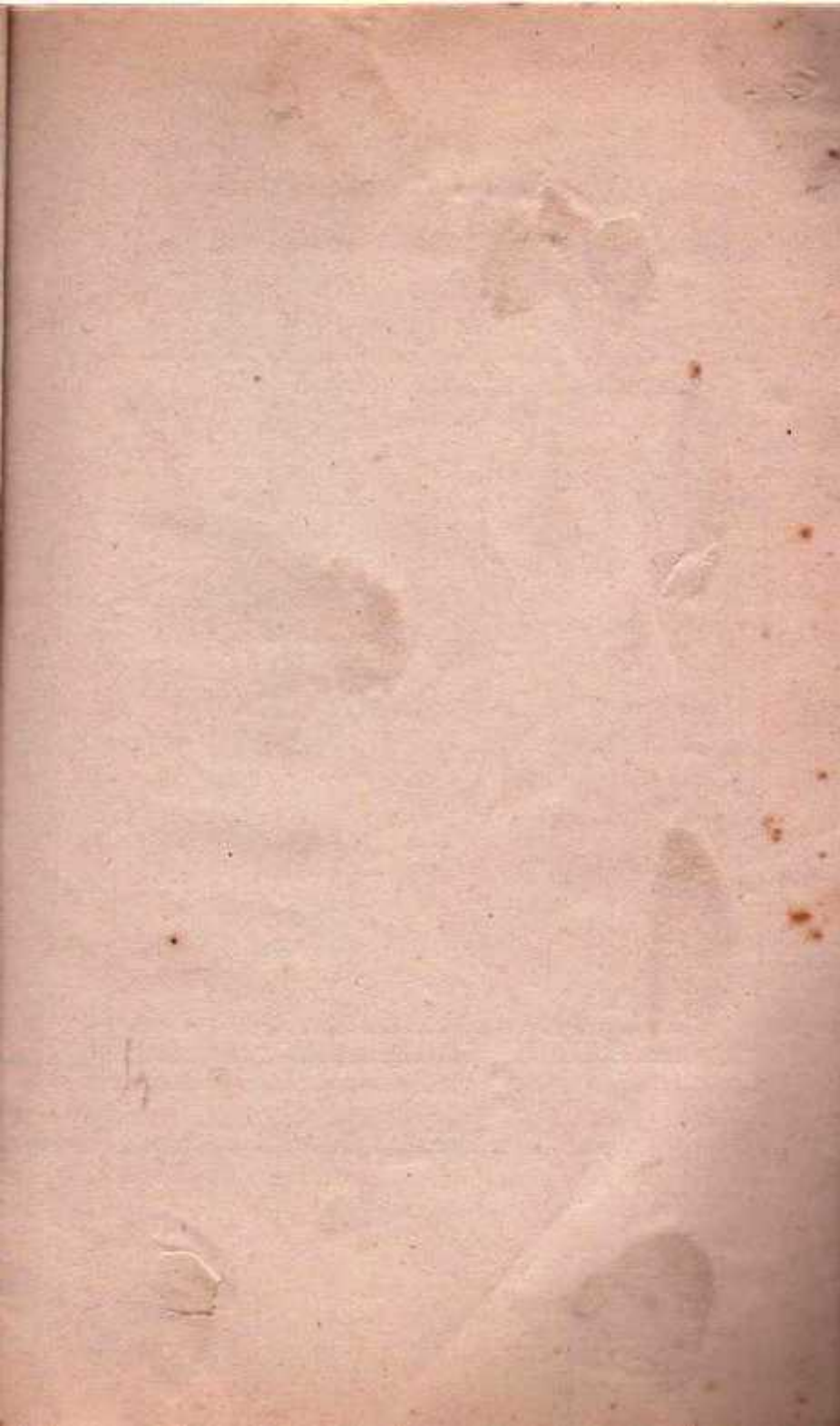
MANOJ DAS A CRITICAL STUDY

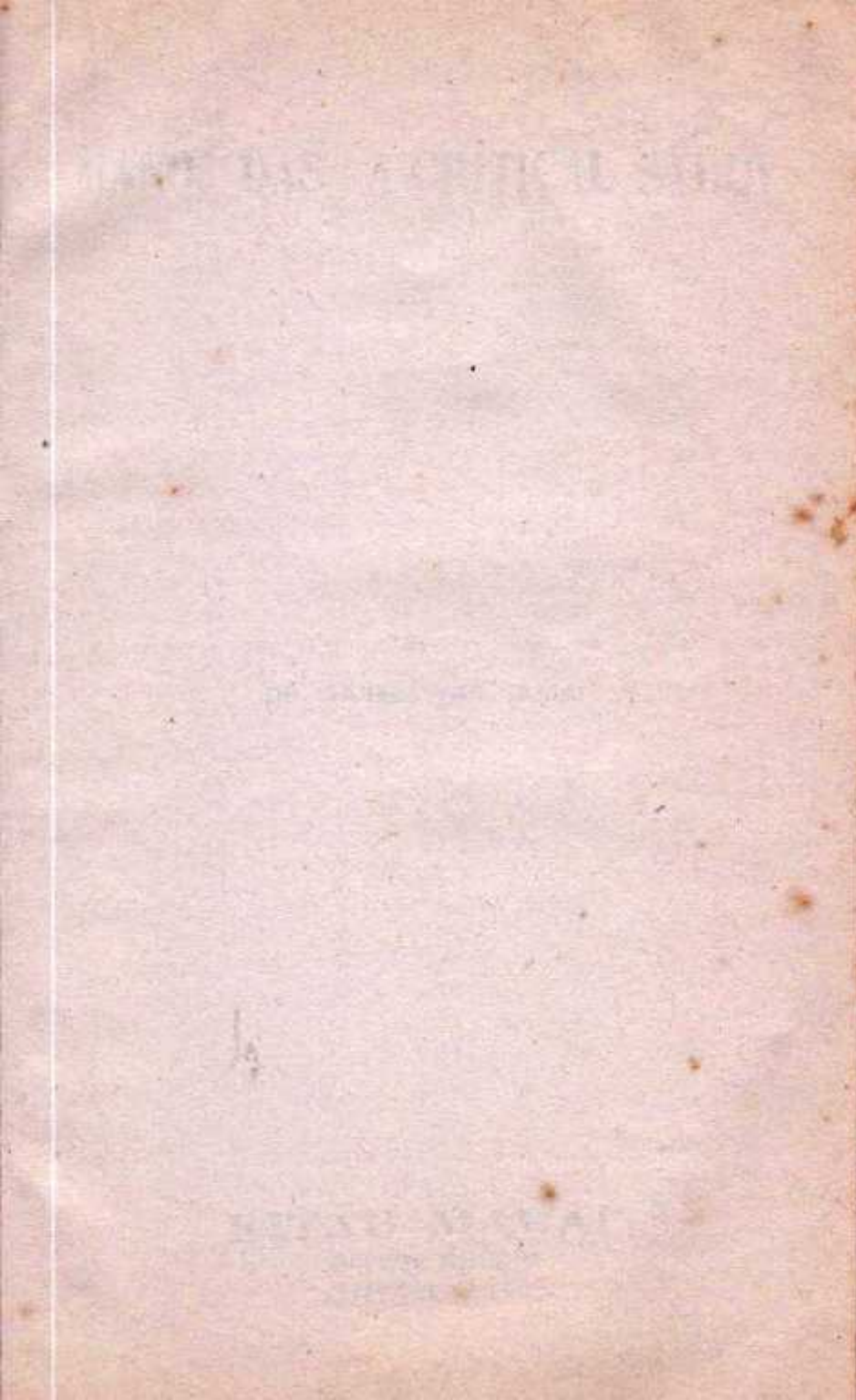
in reference to his oeuvre and style

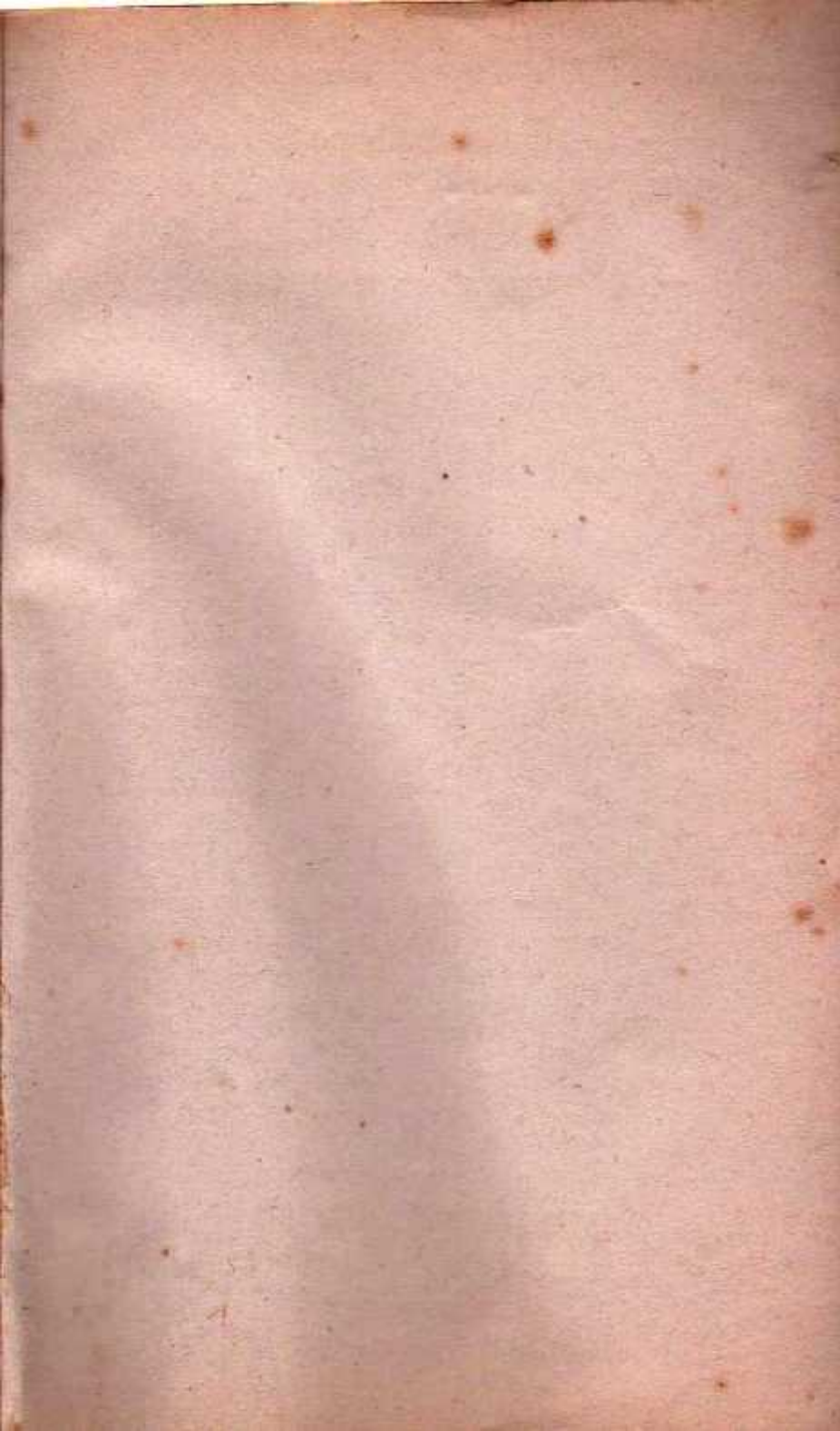


SARBESWAR SAMAL

KITAB MAHAL







MANOJ DAS : A CRITICAL STUDY

By :

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PREFACE

It gives me immense pleasure to think that my doctoral dissertation on Manoj Das, the fruition of some hard labour is at last metamorphosed into a book of literary criticism and for that the whole credit goes to Jagdish Khandai, the generous and lion-hearted publisher and proprietor of Kitab Mahal, Cuttack.

Manoj Das is one of the finest story-tellers we have in the world today. His stories are either realistic or fantastic; comic or satiric, sad or humorous but they glow with an unmistakable core of human essence and significance. They are distinguished by a rare sense of pathos, tenderness, subtlety, irony, mystery and poignancy. They give us an original and autochthonous image of India, the mythical rural or changing sub-urban. Most importantly, his stories are a kind of succinct comment on human psyche and nature and his basic plight and dilemma in the universe.

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.

So far as the craft of story-telling is concerned, Manoj Das is a master story-teller. The old stories are charmingly retold with fresh insight into contemporary situation. His forte lies in artless narration and the way he spins the yarn, his language is lucid and clear, tales candid and fresh but the most important thing is his humour. Each story is a carnival of ample mirth and humour, while aesthetically wrought into a perfect fabric of art. His stories contain certain message which our ailing civilization can listen to over and over again with much profit and pleasure.

S. SAMAL

THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON
FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT
TO THE PRESENT TIME
IN TWO VOLUMES
BY NATHANIEL BENTLEY
OF THE BARR

THE FIRST VOLUME
CONTAINING THE HISTORY
FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT
TO THE YEAR 1780
IN TWO VOLUMES
BY NATHANIEL BENTLEY
OF THE BARR

THE SECOND VOLUME
CONTAINING THE HISTORY
FROM THE YEAR 1780
TO THE PRESENT TIME
IN TWO VOLUMES
BY NATHANIEL BENTLEY
OF THE BARR

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1894

Introduction

I

The genesis of the short story reveals that it lurked in the groves of Eden long before Adam and Eve treated themselves to the forbidden fruit. In fact, it sprang up with human life. Men have always told and listened to stories and storytelling is a primal human instinct.

Somerset Maugham says :

The desire to listen to stories appears to be as deeply rooted in the human animal as the sense of property. From the beginning of history men have gathered round the camp-fire, or in a group in the market place, to listen to the telling of a story.¹

The great teachers of the world like the Buddha and the Christ told stories to expound their teachings and cast a spell on their hearers in the process. Their excellent stories intended to illustrate a moral or just to entertain.

Very highly effective stories are found in *The old Testament*, *Jataka Tales*, *The Panchatantra* (5th Century A.D.), *Aesop's Fables*, *The Kathasaritsagara* (11th Century A. D.), Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (14 Century), Boccaccio's *Decameron* (14th Century), and a host of other collections of stories.

Such collections are found in most of the major languages of the world. But the short story as a distinct literary genre is of recent origin. It's history is not vast but very brief. The anecdotes and stories found in the old books had germs and sparks of art but these 'gateway ancestors' could not lay claim to being called short stories in the modern sense of the term.

The modern short story is fairly a product of the 19th century impressionism or as a young art, it is a child of this century.

However, the modern short story which differs widely from the older tales in conception, form, technique and style, has never been adequately defined.

It has something of the infinite and indefinitely variable nature of a cloud. It has become all sorts of things; situation, episode, characterisation or narrative ... in effect, a vehicle for everyman's talent. While Maupassant regarded the short story as the finished product of art, Chekhov thought of it as only 'a slice of life' to be presented suggestively. Frank O' Connor, on the other hand, points out, "But the short story like the novel, is a modern art form; that is to say, it represents better than poetry and drama our own attitude to life."²

Sean O' Faolain remarkably observes, "The truth about a good short story is poetical, it lies in the pointed vision, a sort of ecclaircissement of an inward eye-flick of an unforgettable thing seen."³ It is like Rossetti's sonnet; 'a moment's monument, a memorial to a dead deathless hour.'

In a similar vein, Elizabeth Bowen points out :

The short story is at an advantage over the novel and can claim its nearer kinship to poetry because it must be more concentrated, can be more visionary... Fewer characters, fewer scenes and above all, fewer happenings are necessary... essentially at no point in the story, must the electrical-imaginative current be found to fail... But the short story revolves round one crisis only—one might call it, almost a crisis in itself. There (ideally) ought to be nothing in such a story which can weaken, detract from or blur the central single effect.⁴

Equally worth-noting are the views of Nancy Hale. "The short story is like making a decision. It comes upon the reader like what the French call, the coup de foudre—a thunderclap, like in the meaning of the idiom falling in love. It is remarkably falling in love, rather rashly."⁵

But on the other hand, quite significantly Robert Geller maintains, "The short story, an indigenous American form like the movie has been called an "artful audacity" because of its marvellous compression and its ability to heighten feelings and evoke human responses."⁶

However, whatever it is, the short story primarily contains, as Richard Summers says, "the interpretation of the writer's conception of life either by direct statement or by implication."⁷

Short story may subsume any form. As Manjeri Iswaran says, "A short story can be a fable or parable, real or fantasy, a true presentation or a parody, sentimental or satirical, serious in intent or light-hearted diversion..."⁸

A story is like a horse race. It is the start and finish that count most. It has to seize, as H.G.Wells points out, "the attention at the outset, and never relaxing, gather it together more and more until the climax is reached."⁹

Every short story must contain "the element of suspense so that the reader wonders and continues to wonder throughout the story what is going to happen..."¹⁰

The characters in a short story are like figures projected on a screen by magic lantern. They are caught in a moment of time and show only the turning point or the crisis in their being or temperament. The modern short story views life from within. As such, the action is more inward and psychological than external.

So far as the style of short story is concerned, it is essentially an art of concentration and crystallisation.

"It does not move from one point off in the direction of another point; it is happening all on one point. The events and characters are being viewed," as O' Connor puts it, "from some glowing center of action"... The short story while it may involve many events or personal destinies must tie them all in one knot, explode them in one crisis, combine them in a gestalt."¹¹

Thus the aim of short story is to produce a single narrative effect with the greatest economy of means. Its method is of suggestion and stimulation rather than of exhaustion. What it aims at is a totality of impression through simplicity of design and directness of utterance.

The craft of the short story looks deceptively simple but nothing could be farther from the truth. It draws heavily on literary devices that depend upon condensation and verbal economy. Some of the modern short stories are an exercise in pregnant metaphor; almost all of them have a degree of high suggestiveness which sparkles through many a well-known symbolist poem. It has been described as a 'modest art' but in its subtlety and depth, improvisation and enterprise, it has nothing to feel modest about it.

The variety of approach found in short story today is amazing. It ranges from suspense stories by E.A.Poe to science fiction by H.G.Wells, from stories where plot dominates (Alexander Dumas : "Zodomirsky's Duel") to stories which study a character from within (Anton Chekhov : "The Kiss"), from a serious study of a significant theme (Joseph Conrad : "Youth") to a humorous or an emotional approach to the same (H. H. Munro : "The Schartz-Metterclume Method", and William Faulkner : "That Evening Sun"), and from those interpreting life through symbolism and irony (Albert Camus : "The Guest"), to those which look at life through the medium of sheer fantasy (D. H. Lawrence : "The Door in the wall").

II

The art of short story owes its origin primarily to two great pioneers, N.V. Gogol (1809-52) and Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49). From Gogol's "Over Coat" sprang all the Russian writers like Tolstoy, Turgenev and Chekhov who was master of this craft.

Poe's great followers in America were Herman Melville, Bret Harte, Ambrose Bierce, Stephen Crane and O' Henry who

is a great name in the field of short story. Washington Irving, William Faulkner, Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, Katherine Ann Porter, John Updike and Salinger are some of the modern writers who have substantially enriched the repertoire of American short story.

France has produced one of the greatest short story writers of the world in Guy de Maupassant.

Rudyard Kipling was the first man in England to cultivate this art and was followed by a galaxy of writers like Wells, Doyle, Maugham, Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, A. E. Coppard, Saki, H. E. Bates, Frank O' Connor, V. S. Prichett, Alan Sillitoe, T. F. Powys and Elizabeth Bowen.

Indians, too are not far behind in their contribution to short story. In fact, India is the cradle and nursery of short story. In this vast sub-continent with its panoramic landscape, lovely fauna and flora and strange beliefs and living, there is always something to allure and inspire one to write a story. In India, short story has a hoary ancestry. It begins with the Vedas, the earliest extant literature, as narrative tales in classical Sanskrit. The ancient Indian tale broadly took two forms : the fable and the folk tale or the popular tale.

The fable form is best exemplified in the tales of the *Panchatantra* and the ancient Indian popular tale is an example of typical Oriental tale as typified in the well-known the *Kathasaritsagara* (Ocean of Tales).

Dr. C. V. Venugopal writes :

The Indian short story writer in English has tried a synthesis of the salient features of both the fable and tale while avoiding the over-didacticism of the fable and the pure description of the popular tale in his attempt to arrive at a deeper and more analytical interpretation of life.¹²

It was in the year 1898 that a collection of short stories by an Indian writer in English was first published in our

country—"Stories from Indian Christian life by Kamala Sathianadan and introduced then by a Madras Publisher to a comparatively small reading public."¹² Since then Indian short story in English has seldom looked back.

Notable among our pioneers are K. S. Venkatramani and K. Nagarajan. The major writers who have earned distinction and approbation in the field are Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, K. A. Abbas, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Khushwant Singh. Besides, writers like Tagore, Prem Chand, Sarat Chandra, Krishan Chander and Fakir Mohan Senapati have written beautiful stories in their mother tongues. Among our contemporaries, one who has successfully handled this form and exploited fully the possibilities of this genre, is Manoj Das.

III

Manoj Das is one of the foremost writers of modern India better known for his delightful exquisite stories. In a lucid and simple language, he gives us an authentic picture of Indian life and atmosphere; one of the few gifted writers of India who can wield the pen both in Oriya, his mother tongue and in English with equal ease and dexterity. He has to his credit, more than thirty books both in Oriya and in English.

Born in 1934, Manoj Das hails from a village called 'Sankhari' full of idyllic charm and natural beauty in Balasore district of Orissa, the land of Lord Jagannath and a peaceful agrarian province of Eastern India.

Right from his school days, he was a Marxist, a rebel and a fiery student leader. When he was barely fourteen, he made his literary debut with a collection of Oriya poems. His first story, "Samudrara Kshyudha" ("The Hungry Sea") bears a distinct mark of marxism.

He was teaching in a college at Cuttack and editing 'Diganta', a Journal of progressive writing, when suddenly

leaving his job and press behind, he joined Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry in 1963.

This sudden change in his attitude to life came as a shock and surprise to many. But there was nothing sudden. He was always sure of what he was doing. As he said, he was not at all happy with the usual run of life. The process of life should be something else. He was always haunted by something inexplicable and unintelligible and his quest for a better and significant life was born out of this. His marxist god died young and he found an answer to all his queries and problems in the visionary philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, his view of man as a transitional being immensely capable of self-development and in the divine love of The Mother. Thus he became a pilgrim in the eternal path of Sadhana; a life of consecration and spiritual dedication.

This marxist turned spiritualist now lives in Sri Aurobindo Ashram and teaches English Literature to the students of several nations at Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry.

While introducing Manoj Das to a Singapore audience, Minu Tharoor comments that Manoj Das is a "man of considerable importance and influence in India's literary and journalistic world, a winner of India's most prestigious honour, The Sahitya Akademi Award"¹⁴

He is an author published many times over. He writes for newspapers and magazines. He is essentially a creative writer. "And it is his short stories for children, fables to some, fairy tales to others that capture the imagination."¹⁵

M.V.Kamath, the former editor of *The Illustrated Weekly* and a distinguished critic says :

Manoj Das has been compared as a short story writer to Hardy. Saki and O' Henry. The comparison is unfair. Not that Manoj Das does not know how to give his short stories surprising ending...one has only to

read the lead story itself or any of the others to realise that here is a master of the art an authentic 22 carat gold Indian writer.¹⁶

Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab, the veteran statesman and litterateur of Orissa, while full of praise and appreciation for Manoj Das, reminisces with joy :

It is a pride to note that Manoj has earned international reputation in the field of literature. His stories and articles give an indication of spiritual feeling and experience. Manoj does not view things as we use to do from a gross and ordinary point of view. He views incidents and events from a very subtle point of view. This is the speciality and unique feature of his stories.¹⁷

K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, the noted critic and authority on Indo-Anglian Literature while evaluating Manoj Das's *The Submerged Valley and Other Stories* writes, "In our times, masters like Tagore, Prem Chand, Masti, Mulk Raj Anand and Vaikkhom Muhammad Basheer have made their mark as exemplars of the art. And Manoj Das is of the same Class."¹⁸

Crowning all these, there is Graham Greene, the renowned novelist of this century, who in his letter to Batstone, the publisher of Manoj Das's *The Submerged Valley and Other Stories* wrote :

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.¹⁹

All these cluster of compliments and appreciations from various quarters prove that he is an artist *par excellence* and probably the finest of the short story writers living in the world today.

He has earned an international audience adequately for himself. His stories have fascinated the sophisticated readership through the publications such as *The Ascent* (Deptt.,

English, University of Illinois), *The Carlton Magazine* (Carlton College, Minnesota), *The Malahat Review* (Victoria University, British Columbia, Canada), and the Avant-garde Journal, *The New York Smith*.

He has also been published in the fiction anthology of Macmillan, London and St. Martin Press, New York.

When Martha Foley prepared her annual list of best stories published in the U. S. A., and Canada in 1975, she included five short stories by Manoj Das and the five stories were all that Manoj Das had published during that year in some of the prestigious magazines and anthologies of the U. S. A.... No wonder one of his stories was included in Vol. XVIII of *Winter's Tales*.

Manoj Das's first collection of short stories in English *A song for Sunday and other Stories* (Higginbothams) appeared in 1965. Since then he has published seven more collections of short stories : *Short Stories by Manoj Das* (Triveni Publishers, 1969), *The Crocodile's Lady* (Sterling Publishers, 1975) *Fables and Fantasies for Adults* (Orient Paperbacks, 1978), *Man Who Lifted the Mountain and Other Fantasies* (Spectre Press, England, 1979), *The Vengeance and other Stories* (Sterling Publishers, 1980), *The Submerged Valley and Other Stories* (United Kingdom : Batstone Books, 1986), and recently *The Dusky Horizon and Other Stories* (New Delhi : B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1989).

Apart from these story collections, he has got a novelette captioned "A Tiger at Twilight" (published in *The Heritage*-January 1985, pp. 87-105) and his maiden appreciated novel, *Cyclones* (Sterling Publishers, 1987).

He is the winner of Orissa Sahitya Akademy Award (1965), the recipient of the Central Sahitya Akademy Award (1972), the Sarala Das Award (1981) and the Visuv Grand Award (1987).

Awards are not the yardstick to measure the worth or talent of a writer. Manoj Das is an ever growing and maturing

writer and each time he is adding new feathers and territories to his crown.

So far as the art of his story-telling is concerned, he is a master story-teller and perfect craftsman. He is unique and outstanding in style and theme, original in its conception and execution. His stories are distinguished by depth and sensitivity, vividness and significance. They are marked by a rare delicate beauty and subtlety.

He combines Tagore's tragic awareness and Fakir Mohan's (Father of Oriya short story and fiction) satiric stance and comic perception. He combines Maupassant's sense of plot and direct dramatic presentation, Chekhov's sense of sympathy and mystery and O' Henry's tricks and understanding of human psyche.

His stories are a happy blend of fantasy and realism and a subtle comment on human life and situation. He creates myth and legend out of social realism.

Humour permeates his stories and we laugh heartily with him and his characters. His satire is mild and irony, poignant.

His stories are highly absorbing and enjoyable like falling in love or losing one's near and dear ones or an unforgettable thing seen.

NOTES

1. Quoted R. J. Rees, *English Literature : An Introduction for foreign Readers* (London : Macmillan Education Ltd., 1973) p. 109.
2. Frank O' Connor, *The Lonely Voice* (London : Macmillan, 1965), p.13.
3. Quoted K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar & Prema Nandakumar. *Introduction to the study of English Literature* (New Delhi : Sterling Publishers, 1966), p. 186.
4. Quoted "Introduction", *English Short Stories of My Time* chosen and introduced by Lord David Cecil (London : Oxford University Press, 1970), p. xii.

5. Nancy Hale, *The Realities of Fiction* (London : Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1963), pp. 189-140.
6. "Foreword." *The American Short Story Vol. 1*, Ed. and introduction by Calvin Skaggs (New York : Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), p. 9.
7. Richard Summers, *Craft of the Short Story* (New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p. 25.
8. Quoted C.V. Venugopal, *The Indian Short Story in English : A Survey* (Bareilly, Prakash Book Depot, n.d.), p.33.
9. Quoted Walter Allen, "Fiction : Introduction", *The Reader's Guide*, Ed. Sir Williams Emyrs Williams (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1961), p.149.
10. Summers, p.27.
11. Hale, pp. 138-139.
12. Venugopal, p.2.
13. Venugopal, p.1.
14. Minu Tharoor, "Aesop, Faith and Manoj Das," *The Straits Times*, (Dec. 5, 1981) 'Courtesy : Manoj Das'.
15. Ibid.
16. Quoted *Prajatantra Saptahiki*, (April-12, 1987), p.8.
17. This is the English version of Dr. Mahtab's Oriya statement in his article, "Sriman Manoj," *Prajatantra Saptahiki*, (April-12, 1987), p. 10.
18. "Stories of Rural India," *The Hindu*. (26 Aug., 1986) 'Courtesy : Manoj Das.'
19. Quoted "Manoj Das interviewed by P. Raja, *Literature Alive*, Vol.2, No.1, (June, 1988), p.25.

Theme And Vision

I

Though technique counts a lot in decoding the idea of a writer, a story or any work of fiction or drama is primarily remembered for its theme and the vision of the writer it embodies.

The theme of a piece of fiction is not to be thought of as merely the topic with which the story may be concerned. For instance, the topic of growing up, the initiation into manhood has been treated in Sherwood Anderson's "I want to know why" and Hemingway's "The Killers". But in these stories the meaning of initiation is different. Between Maupassant's "Love" and "Love" by Jessie Stuart, even though the titles proclaim the same topic and the treatment is similar, we find a significant difference in meaning and the very feel of the story. The theme is not just what is made of the topic, but rather a comment on the topic.

On the other hand, the theme is not to be confused with any idea or bits of information however interesting. For instance, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* gives a full and fascinating account of whaling but whaling represents the world—the background against which the human experience works itself out meaningfully.

Thus Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren point out :

The theme is what a piece of fiction stacks upto. It is the idea, the significance, the interpretation of persons and events, the pervasive and unifying view of life which is embodied in the total narrative. It is...what we are to make of the human experience rendered in the story.¹

Theme is nothing more than the total meaning of the story, it is, as Richard Summers says, "the purpose of the story."²

It is a structural necessity and the theme creates what the critics call the 'Unity of impression'.

The short stories of Manoj Das cover a wide range. He has stories with hard-core realism, plausible and enjoyable fantasies, stories of psychological import, satires in the garb of folk-tales, fables and stories of man's encounter with supra and infra human elements.

Manoj Das does not write like a foreigner imagining and picturing India to himself; he writes like an Indian with a wholly Indian view of things and from an Indian background.

His themes are essentially Indian, evoking the Indian scene and atmosphere.

Mystery, mysticism and occultism permeate his work. Mysticism is a pan Indian theme. In the stories of Manoj Das, it is treated severally. Sometimes it is plain mystery, sometimes it is pure occultism and in some cases, mystery is mixed and shuffled with mysticism and occultism.

"The last I heard of Them" shows, on the one hand, what the temptation and horror, miracle spells for its believers. On the other hand, it reveals that men of miracles are not necessarily men of God nor is occultism a path way to God-realisation.

"The Sage of Tarungiri and seven old Seekers" deals with the seven old friends of Merry Guy Club who were utterly bored and felt a void in life. They got suddenly intrigued with Tukan Baba who weeps for twenty-four hours.

But strangely enough when they met him, he smiled instead of weeping. This not only disappointed but irritated them.

Thus whether Baba wept or smiled was none of their business for they were too poor to decipher the meaning of

Baba's weeping or smiling. Baba simply marvelled at the mystery of God's creation and his love and compassion for the same overwhelmed him. So here is mystery, mysticism and occultism,,all mixed and shuffled in a nice manner.

In "Sita's Marriage", the writer describes how Sita, a lovely little girl had once a peculiar dream that "Ramachandra, as a beautiful boy with his mighty bow and his crown of burning gold had appeared before her as her bridegroom with so much of heavenly music and child-gods as companions around him!"³

Poor Sita came so much under the enchantment that she believed the dream to be true. When Sita grew up, her father, Dev arranged for her marriage though she would decline. But as ill-luck would have it, the sweet little Sita passed away after a slight attack of fever.

The question arises : what mysterious link is there between her death and her dream ?

Of course, it is a study in child psychology; yet it is a case of mystery also, at least the way Sita died suddenly just on the eve of her marriage.

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.

The story, "Mystery of the Missing Cap" gives an account of a minister's visit to an Indian village. When the minister, after being warmly received and hosted with a sumptuous dinner, was sleeping, his cap was stolen by a half-domesticated monkey. This not only engendered an unpleasant feeling between Moharana, the host and the Honourable Minister but also led to a minor political crisis. Subsequently, both Moharana, an aspirant for a seat in the State Legislature and the minister, quite complacent of his popularity were forgotten and ignored in politics. But the narrator somehow

feels that the monkey episode had a link with the eclipse of their political career.

Whether the monkey played such a crucial role or it was due to some other thing is shrouded in mystery.

"The Murderer" is at once a complex and intriguing story. Whether Binu murdered the much dreaded Dabu Sahukar or Dabu Sahukar, undergoing a spiritual transformation, turned an ascetic is shrouded in mystery. The story also throws certain mystic hints on the fact that some people completely forgetting their past life indulge in a kind of living quite contrary to their self or the nature of their souls. But when they are exposed to a strange extraordinary situation that throws wide open the long shut doors of their memory and perception they awake to their former self and consciousness.

Some of Manoj Das's stories deal with strange and fantastic phenomena like hallucination, dream, reverie and occult experiences like the tryst with some Baba or coming across a ghost or an apparition.

In "Friends and Strangers", Tirthankar and Shivabrata were a kind of strange friends. Both were moon-struck and suffered from hallucination. They imagined all sorts of improbable and inconceivable things. Although Mrs. Wilson was dead since two months, they thought that they had seen Pramath, their friend, going to meet Mrs. Wilson and present her a shawl.

Next when they learnt from Pramath's house that he died in an accident that noon, they immediately realised that they must have seen Pramath's ghost. After that they parted hurriedly without exchanging a syllable. They doubted gravely whether each one of them was alive or dead.

The seeing of a ghost is again presented in "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night". What Mahindra saw was not the living Ashok Babu but his apparition. But the most surprising thing is that Ashok Babu had not gone out that evening at all. He

was very much physically there dozing in the sofa. When Mahindra and Sudhir tried to wake him up from his usual habit of falling asleep, they found that their friend and old professor, Ashok Babu had passed away silently without giving any indication to them.

Besides, the three hundred year old, Languly Baba who walks stark naked and talks only to invisibles around him and the half-crazy disobedient Abolkara who claims that he was always there all these years when the rock and the temple were submerged in water, are strange and baffling characters.

Thus instances galore can be cited inexhaustibly to show the rich tapestry of Manoj Das's stories woven out of the theme of Indian mystery and mysticism.

His stories present beautiful village vignettes. They are stories of rural India. With vivid realistic details and minute observation, they depict simple human situations and dilemmas. The stories of Manoj Das cajole even a biased reader for a brief trip into a veritable wonderland.

The majority of his stories are set in some remote villages or provincial towns where the most learned person is the village school master (one is often reminded of Goldsmith's 'Village School Master' as portrayed in *The Deserted Village*) and the most pressing problems are posed by the encroachments of the modern world. These stories are mostly the recollection of the narrator's childhood events.

Manoj Das not only evokes the village scene and atmosphere in stories like "Farewell to a Ghost", "The Bull of Babulpur", "Mystery of the Missing Cap", "The Submerged Valley", "The Tree", "The Owl", and "The Crocodile's Lady" but he draws the portrait of the village with rare authenticity, clarity and luminous precision.

Romantic themes are tackled with aplomb in "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night", "The Dusky Hour" and "The Crocodile's

Lady". All these tales depict not only the profundity of love but also the various ways in which love inevitably engenders lies and deceit.

"The Bridge in the Moonlit Night" is a superb love story.

Ashok Babu, now an octogenarian, had professed love for Meena, his student, while he was a professor in youth. He eagerly waited for a response from Meena and was pretty sure that some day Meena would write to him. But it never happened so and Ashok Babu thought Meena cruel and unkind as a stone. Since then he never married and suffered an unutterable woe in silence. In order to kill somehow time and forget the drudgery of life, he used to stroll about the bridge in the company of his student friend, Sudhir who is also old and happen to be the acquaintance of Meena. But since the bridge was demolished, there was no place for them to stroll about. Mostly they lounged in a sofa and gossiped.

Once Sudhir, troubled by his guilty conscience, confessed before Ashok Babu that it was he who played the treachery with him for Meena had written a letter to Ashok Babu and asked him to meet her at the bridge. Since he was the bearer of the letter, he read it and tearing it to pieces threw it to the river.

Ashok Babu was listening all the while with rapt attention for he had not fallen asleep as he often used to do. Suddenly he made an effort to get up with an inexplicable urgency and asked Sudhir to go and look for those scraps of paper.

After sixty years when much water had flown under the bridge, the passion remained still young. Ashok Babu became agonisingly conscious that Meena was not unkind as stones and that a precious love rather life was simply wasted.

Such is the sadness, intensity and poignancy of a love that was at once romantic, lyrical and remained unrequited. Even when Ashok Babu died, his apparition was seen to search for those precious pieces of paper in the dry desolate bed of the

river. Thus it is a classic of love and loss, regret and reminiscence and a passion musing on the adolescent romance and the opportunity that slipped by.

"The Dusky Hour" presents the sad yet sizzling romance of Aunt Roopwati. Though she appears as a daring, domineering, controversial and riddlesome lady, undoubtedly she is vivacious and uncannily charming for which others are drawn towards her. But one thing clearly emerges from the intricacy of facts and her character that Aunt Roopwati had been groping for the man of her choice throughout her life and unfortunately she was denied and deprived of the same. After rejecting several suitors she had Jagdishji whom she gladly married but found soon to be an apology for a husband. At last she found one such in Chinmoy Babu, an artist in youth, a man with a stamp of originality and the lone gentleman in the politics of the State.

After being elected as the mayor, when Chinmoy Babu was accorded a grand reception in a mammoth public meeting, Aunt Roopwati dashed to the dias uninvited. She was received cordially by Chinmoy Babu. In her speech she praised him profusely and blushed more than Chinmoy Babu did. On another occasion, she dashed to the dias and occupied a seat by the side of Chinmoy Babu. Thus on some pretext or other at the slightest opportunity available, she sought the proximity of Chinmoy Babu.

When he was elected to the Rajya Sabha, Aunt regretted that had she responded to his love earlier and let him marry her, he would have become a greater man.

But the path of romance never did run smooth for Aunt Roopwati. When Chinmoy Babu was to contest for state politics, Aunt met him confidentially and offered herself to manage the election campaign. Chinmoy Babu declined the proposal. Aunt Roopwati was unhappy and soon she joined the opposition party and became its prize star. In sheer frustration and a kind of masochistic pleasure, she publicised the scandal that it

was Chinmoy Babu who made an overture to her while sitting close in a meeting.

However this debatable and colourful lady died suddenly bringing, as it were, the lurid story of a generation to a close.

One cloudy evening, when Chinmoy Babu was returning from the election campaign, he stopped en route by the lake and went to pay his homage to Aunty. He was seen to kneel down prayerfully at the place of her cremation and place his bouquet on the pile of ashes and wipe his eyes again and again.

Thus ends a long but engrossing story of love which is sincere and poignant, though to some extent bizarre and baffling.

While Aunty Roopwati was vociferous, outspoken and effusive in her love which, in some way confounded others, Chinmoy Babu bore and treasured it silently in the core of his heart as the most precious thing in the world.

"The Crocodile's Lady"⁴ is a moving saga of love and sacrifice. It gives an account of the romance between the human and the subhuman i.e., between the crocodile's lady and the crocodile.

It is the story of their courtship, the initial hesitancy and the mystical rapture of wooing. Being unhappy with her plight of living in water, when the crocodile's lady wept profusely, the conscientious and kind-hearted crocodile gave her a mantra to recite in order to regain her human form. She was further advised not to do so when in deep water but only when close to the bank. At the same time, the melancholic crocodile shed tears for he knew that he would not find her some day when he returned.

Meanwhile, the crocodile's lady forgot her parents and merged completely in love-making. Day after day, together they swam from river to river and confluence to confluence.

Finally, when the lady somehow managed to escape from the crocodile's clutch, the crocodile, the true lover as he was, climbed the embankment and got killed.

Rarely does one come across such a story of love between the human and the subhuman in world literature.

One of the major themes of Manoj Das's stories is the erosion of traditional bucolic existence by modern life. "The Submerged Valley" and "Farewell to a Ghost" focus on this theme. Particularly, "The Submerged Valley" is a vivid account of how the happy villagers are rendered homeless by the construction of a dam. It projects not only the dislocation but also the sense of rootlessness and the loss of their ethos which they desperately tried to cling to and preserve.

Satire and humour are the dominant features of Manoj Das's stories. Most of his stories are written in humorous and satiric vein.

"Mystery of the Missing Cap" is a delightful and amusing story. It is a gentle satire on a minister's visit to a village. The background is the early post-independence India.

"Sharma and the Wonderful Lump" is a brilliant piece of satire on how a society thrives on a pack of false values and ideals. Sharma who had gone to the United States to liquidate his lump, the crown of flesh by surgery, is hugged and pampered by Americans as a medical wonder.

"Operation Bride" is in a highly humorous way ridicules the funny and fantastic attitude of the surgeons and officials, their pomposity and perversion of values and sensibility. Plastic Surgery aiming at a perfect bride only distorts and reduces a fairy to a scarecrow i.e., a bride sans soul.

"He who rode the Tiger" is one of the most powerful and moving stories, full of comedy and tragic irony. In a lighter vein, it presents a serious theme. The story is a sheer display of man's pseudo vanity and arrogance. It presents how human ego

and for that matter, pride and pretension lead to an unforeseen disastrous consequence.

Allied to satire and humour in his stories, one notices that the pundit's pomposity and man's ego are punctured in an interesting way.

When the agents of Domdaniel kidnap Sharma and threaten him to death, the point to which the perverted desires and values of our civilization have dragged man, then only Sharma's illusion and pretension are shattered and he perforce realises the charm and truth of the elemental values of life that nourished his existence : "I have my mother in India. None has a mother like that...."⁶

The vanity of the mayor ("A Night in the life of the Mayor") pales into insignificance before the small girl's innocent gesture of throwing her torn and soiled frock at his naked body.

The egoistic and pretentious man is again made a helpless butt of mockery in "Mystery of the Missing Cap" when the monkey is presented as the nobleman. The recognition of this reality dashes all the illusion of the honourable minister, Babu Virkishore.

Disillusionment is also one of the minor themes presented in Manoj Das's stories through which his characters grow.

In "The Love Letter" Goutam, the research scholar on Gita 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. Since the letter is not addressed to anyone in particular, there are many claimants to it, their age and relationship notwithstanding. These people—the vocalist, Prof. Dhar, Pran Chowdhury, the friend of Gita's father were all love-lorn and lunatic. They suffered from illusion or self-deception.

The unusual situation created by the assumption of Gita's love letter is a fine expose of man's ego, perversion and craziness.

The themes of Manoj Das's stories are essentially human i. e., they are about human follies and frailties, misery and suffering, pathetic helplessness and loneliness. They describe how men are simply puppets in the hand of a cruel destiny that scowls and crushes them pitilessly.

His stories are a comment on human life and situation. Through comedy and humour, he conveys the poignancy of the human situation. Behind the facade of the comic, lies the painful realisation of men's loneliness and sense of loss.

This predicament is movingly illustrated in the story, "The Princess and the Story-teller". Bhatta and Shawoo whose finer feelings have been blunted during their criminal career, suddenly find themselves exposed to tender side of human existence in the act of the story-teller's sacrificing his eyes for his beloved princess and the princess, in turn, offering herself to marry him. Later on, even though the story-teller confesses it to be only fiction both Bhatta and Shawoo refuse to accept it as they have been suddenly led to a realm of tender values or the finer aspects of life of which they were deprived earlier. Their stubborn refusal to accept it as a figment of imagination speaks of their yearning for life.

This pathetic sense of human loss is movingly presented in "Farewell to a Ghost", one of his best stories recounted with warmth and verve. The 'Ghost' represents the innocence, the traditional belief and ethos that sustained the community life and existence. When the tree in which the ghost was forced to dwell was struck with lightning, it marked not simply the end of an innocent belief but the death of innocence.

All the beliefs and superstitions that have gone to make the emotional being of the villagers sadly disintegrate. Such death of innocence is again treated symbolically in "Lakshmi's Adventure".

Manoj Das presents the complex human situation with the agony and ecstasy of life; the various feelings and emotions

that give meaning to life. In most of his stories, a haunting sense of life's sadness contributes to intense lyricism. The 'still sad music of humanity' is vibrant in his stories.

"He who rode the Tiger", where the young innocent prince dies on the cross of his king-father's ego and arrogance and "The Kite", where the grown up Kunja is hardly different from the child Kunja who like a jasmine withers in wilderness because of the cruel design of the mahajan and destiny, throb with the cadence of pathos and tragedy.

"The Anatomy of Tragedy", "A Letter from the Last Spring" "Lakshmi's Adventure", "Sita's Marriage" and "So Many Smiles" deal with the tender innocent world of the child. Manoj Das has tremendous love for children. He is at his best when he describes the delicate nuances of a child's feeling.

"A Letter from the Last Spring" presents the psychology of a tender child, Rina who is anxiously waiting to receive a letter from her mother not knowing that she is already dead.

"The Anatomy of Tragedy" recounts the sad story of the crippled boy who was all along imprisoned in the cell of his loneliness. When Sumi, the orphan girl, went to the balcony of the upper floor, hoping to meet the other handsome dream-boy whom this crippled boy resembled and asked him to give her roses, she met the crippled boy instead. She was so much frightened that she ran hurriedly down the stairs as if she had seen a ghost. Looking at the befuddled girl, the boy burst into peals of laughter and fits of wailing. Finally he died of the shock that made him acutely realise the terrible void and limitation in life.

In all these stories, the writer shows the child as a creature of loveliness and innocence juxtaposed with the world of adults with all its complexities and hypocrisy.

"Lakshmi's Adventure" describes how Lakshmi, a lovely little girl was pitilessly strangled by the so-called preservers of propriety and righteousness in society represented by the

priest and the people who joined him. At noon, when the entire village was steeped in siesta and desolation, Lakshmi would steel out of her house. As the priest was snoring, she would like to talk and narrate before the deity the whole story of her parents' privations. In her playful innocence, once she took a couple of bananas offered to the deity. Just then the priest woke up and shouted that she had stolen the bananas from the temple. Joined by others, the priest hounded her till she entered a pond in fear. Though she was rescued by her father she died within three days after suffering an attack of fever.

The short story projects, what Frank O'Connor says, "an intense awareness of human loneliness". It is not only the lonely voice but also a lonely personal art. The characters of Manoj Das are lonely crusaders made to stand on the brink of existential plight and dilemma. In his stories, there is always a painful realisation of man's alienation in a lonely and lost world.

Lakshmi and Kunja represent a lone lyric cry against the tyranny of society.

Miss Moberly, Old Basu, Rina, the crippled boy, Roy Sahib and Hrishikesh Chowdhury are all trapped and locked behind the barricade of loneliness.

Basu who sacrificed so much for the country living a dark, black-listed and haunted life was utterly ignored and forgotten after independence when his son became a minister. He was mostly confined to a spacious room which reminded him of the prison in the Andamans. Thus "The Old Man and the Camel" focuses attention on man's alienation and disillusionment in an ungrateful and callous world.

Besides, the theme of snobbishness of the rich and innocence of the poor as represented in Katherine Mansfield's "Doll's House", Manoj Das's "Trespassers" deals with man's sense of isolation and disillusionment in the world.

Roy Sahib's two sons, Baboo and Saboo who were the ideals and cynosure of suburban fathers and brought up with the best care and illustrious style of aristocracy, ultimately became slaves to their wives and grew indifferent to their parents. Thus Roy Sahib, despite his glittering teeth is a lone pathetic figure imprisoned in his lack-lustre mansion.

The story, "Of Man and Monkey" though a contrast between the man and the animal, is a pathetic story of man's loneliness, rootlessness and his struggle and suffering.

Latu, an orphan boy who used to perform clownery jointly with a monkey in a circus once fell ill and asked the master, Nayak to provide him a tonic as he was too weak to work. Mr. Nayak, ill-tempered, extremely selfish and exploiting in nature, preferred the role to be played by the monkey alone and Latu was asked to quit the party. Ultimately Latu left the party and he was joined by the humane monkey when he was drifting from place to place in search of his livelihood.

In "Miss Moberly's Targets", the author has drawn a pathetic and harrowing picture not only of Miss Moberly but also of the other inmates of 'Rest'. These people are mostly lonely old people, bereft of relations, warmth of love and affection, only cared and looked after by paid attendants.

More or less, all these characters are shipwrecked in the storm of life and stranded on the shore of loneliness and helplessness.

The truth that Manoj Das seeks to explore in his stories is the essential helplessness of man in the face of the hostile circumstances of life.

Each one of these people is caught in a peculiar plight and predicament. So is the case of the little girl, Rina who is anxiously waiting for a letter from her mother who is already dead in "A Letter from the Last Spring". Equally pathetic is the lot of the old professor who watches her from the apartment of his hotel.

More heart-rending is the rape scene in "Samudrara Kshyudha" ("The Hungry Sea"), his first story in Oriya. Subha, the fisherwoman's younger daughter-in-law comes at night to the sea beach where she hopes to meet her long lost husband in one of the military camps there. Ironically, she was lured by a flicker of light inside a hut which she recognises to be their own, abandoned a few days ago. She is dragged inside and her baby son is snatched away and strangled to death. A huge man rides on her unconscious (dead?) body. The other two soldiers are too drunken to claim their share of Subha's flesh.

Beneath the situation of this kind, lurks the terrible truths of life, the cruelty and misery of human existence.

"The General" recounts brilliantly the most interesting and baffling story of General Valla who was to laugh in the role of a commander in a dramatic performance. That General Valla who had blown off his enemies and had the loudest laughter in military history, should get stiff and nervous and struggle hard for a mere laugh on the stage and ultimately pay the price for it—is something strange and inconceivable. Yet these are the terrible truths of life.

"Encounters", though brief, is a neat and beautiful story on the predicament of human relationship. Both the chauffeur and the primary school teacher never talk with each other. They confide to the narrator in the cafe that though both of them are classmates and known to each other from school days, they cannot talk to each other lest the other would mind.

Equally pathetic is the compulsion which made Hrishikesh Chowdhury decide once again in old age to allow a free growth of hair all over his face as he used to grow whiskers in youth though on a different ground.

Everywhere, the sadness of life is prominent. Some of Manoj Das's stories deal with the theme of the loss of freedom.

The agonising sense of the loss of freedom, haunts Kunja in the story, "The Kite".

The message of the loss of freedom is communicated in "Birds in the Twilight". In Roy, there is a psychic growth and he gropes for self-realisation. One evening, Tukan Roy is about to press the trigger. The birds he aimed at, flew away. He kept track of the flight of the birds. At night, he freed the solitary tiger in the zoo and giving him the lead both entered the forest. Thus through making the tiger taste its freedom. Roy too yearned to fly into a new horizon of joy and emancipation from the stale stinking circumstances of life.

Such stirring of soul and flashes of conscience we often come across in the stories of Manoj Das.

This is subtly worked out in "Lakshmi's Adventure". When Lakshmi passed away feeling this world too unworthy for her, we notice the spark of penitence and conscience in the priest's mumbling a queer prayer : "God : Next time let this sinner be born without a tongue !"⁹

A similar stirring of soul is faintly hinted in "Sita's Marriage".

In "A Letter from the Last Spring" Rina, another little girl spares the only letter from her mother to the old man thinking that he must be waiting in vain to receive a letter from his mother. Such sublime feeling can only spring from a motherly heart welling up with the milk of love and sympathy for a child.

A subtle communication between two souls is the theme of "The Brothers". The elder brother, who fought for the country and once a rising star in politics, is now almost given up as a mental case.

On the other hand, the younger brother after pursuing a successful career abroad has returned home.

There are stories where the natural and supernatural mingle. This inter-mingling of the natural and supernatural is best exemplified in "Farewell to a Ghost."

The deserted villa once constructed by Feringhee Indigo planters is believed to be the abode of a maiden's spirit for long. The villagers looked upon her as an unfortunate daughter of theirs and offered her share of food on festive occasions.

Though the ghost is seen nowhere, its presence is felt everywhere and what is more striking is an emotional affinity, or the affection and sympathy of the villagers for the ghost. Here the supernatural is not only naturalised but also humanised. This process of humanising the non-human even extends to nature, not in the pantheistic manner of Wordsworth but in the folk way of believing and attributing life to aspect of nature.

This theme is handled differently in "The Crocodile's Lady". A village girl is supposed to have been dragged by a crocodile. After disappearing for a decade, she reappears suddenly. Meanwhile, a crocodile is seen climbing the embankment and gets killed. From this tiny shred of facts, a strange story evolves : the missing girl is metamorphosed into "Crocodile's Lady" because she had married her abductor-crocodile who while coming to look for her, got killed. The focal point of the story is the crocodile's lady who is now extremely old and sincerely believes that she once lived with her lover crocodile down seven palm-tree deep water.

Thus, 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.

On the other hand, there are stories like "The Tree" and "The Owl" where the natural phenomena like the owl and the tree have been raised to a supernatural level and given a mystical touch.

The true premises of a writer is the psyche—human psyche. And Manoj Das whom scholars often compare with O' Henry, has explored the deepest recess of the human mind in his many brilliant stories. Manoj Das not only delves deep into the individual's consciousness but also explores "mass psychology" or "herd psychology."

"Tragedy", a representative short story of Manoj Das, is a comical realistic treatment of the way a group reacts to a particular situation.

A serious tragedy was being staged before an assemblage of sophisticated, blue-stockings ladies. These lady spectators had a queen bee among them who, seeing something ludicrous, started laughing when the drama was heading towards the catastrophe. Following her soon, the entire auditorium exploded with one peal of uncontrollable laughter, thus tolling the bell for the play.

The writer shows the curious way by which a fiction is accepted by a whole mass of people as true and believed for decades. The stories are "Farewell to a Ghost" and "The Crocodile's Lady". Here make-believe plays an important role in the lives of the village people.

"Farewell to a Ghost" portrays a village folk who had not only unshaken faith in the existence of a ghost but considered her as their darling daughter. The ghost was a fiction but they were moved by true pathos in bidding her farewell. "The Crocodile's Lady" speaks of the fantasy-building capacity of the villagers.

Allied to the portrayal of mass psychology is a study of the interior landscape or the inscape of the human mind. Most of his stories are psychological and a fine analysis of how the mind of an individual behaves in a particular situation. His chief concern was with psychic man and psychic reality.

"A Song for Sunday" is a case in point. It is a clinical study of how Damoder Lenka, a perfectly normal man and

stenographer to the District Collector of Cuttack became slowly and steadily mentally deranged.

in "The Substitute for the Sitar" 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 practice and pass her time with pleasure. But Meena, the only child of the young couple, stood in the way. Whenever her mother took up the instrument, she would vault into her lap and try to separate her mother from the instrument and occupy her whole attention. Thus the melody died before it began. The story shows how children are exclusively possessive in nature and nothing can stand between a mother and her child.

"Miss Moberly's Targets" is a fine psychological portrayal of Miss Moberly, a pathetic human wreck. She was an aged spinster residing in 'Rest'—a shelter for the affluent old. The story deals with her silent suffering, the bleeding scars of her abortive affairs in youth, her repressed desires and her desperate attempt to take vengeance on her betrayers by throwing tantalising crumbs of food to dogs named after her suitors as Robinson, Patel and Dick and shooting them one by one and thereby hitting her targets.

Vilas Singh in "The Vengeance" is awfully obsessed with a mania for vengeance. He gets trapped as it were in his own web so much so that he pursues vengeance beyond the death of his enemy. Bahadur.

In "So Many Smiles" the writer focuses attention on the psychological basis of joy and fear. The child's mind is like a *tabula rasa*. It mirrors whatever it sees. Bapi, whose eyes were always moist and whose face was as long as a cucumber, was full of smiles when he was exposed to the sweet little girl munching ripe round guavas in the fairy land of Peacock Hill.

Mrs. Roopwati in "The Dusky Hour" is a pathetic wreck but a psychological triumph over her counterparts. She is highly ego-centric, quite masculine, unpredictable and masochistic in her attitude to life and people and more so in her obscure and lurid affairs with Chinmoy Babu.

"Prithviraj's Horse" is another masterly story and a fine psychological study of Mukund. Mukund was a teacher in the school, Goswamy Academy. After the disclosure of the Tantrik Astrologer, Pundit Purandar Sharma that he had been Prithviraj Chauhan's faithful horse in an earlier incarnation, he underwent a strange transformation from a timid school teacher into a fearless hero. Thus the story reveals how faith works and influences one's psyche drastically.

To miss the psychological import or implications in these stories is to lose much of their meaning and charm. Almost all or most of his stories are raised on the basis of some subtle psychological fact.

His stories provide a profound insight into human nature that is so engrossing, mysterious, lovable, and reprehensible.

"Encounters" is a succinct comment on human nature. Man is primarily snobbish and suffers from complexes while denying it.

"He who rode the Tiger" shows how men of words are hardly men of action. People who unnecessarily boast of their origin and pedigree are like an empty vessel sounding much. Some people pose as superiors before their inferiors but shrink as inferiors before their own superiors.

All the 'Panchatantra stories for Adults' throw ample light on human nature.

"The Tiger and the Traveller" demonstrates that greed is the guiding passion of life and the temptation of life is much more powerful than the flimsy aberration of suicide. Such is the lure and fascination of life that a man, hell-bent on committing

suicide fell in love head-long with the golden bangle, symbolising greed, the deadliest of the deadly sins. Thus it shows that man is essentially greedy; greed breeds sin that ultimately brings death.

"The Turtle from the Sky" allegorically speaks of those people who are not contented with their lot and like the turtle think that greener must be the valley beyond the hills. Ultimately they pay the penalty for their inordinate desire.

Similarly in "Man who lifted the Mountain", the writer seems to say through Thieoufiu that man's nature hardly changes. Even if he is showered with all the riches of the world, he will stoop lower than his usual ugly self.

Moharana in "Mystery of the Missing Cap" is the epitome of all those people who try to twist and cloak a plain truth thinking that it will avert or save the situation. But the truth reveals itself and he finds himself clamped in an awkward situations.

"The Sensitive Plant" brings out all that is best and lovable in human nature. The old retired headmaster who is very hard and strict like a rock is seen to tend a sensitive plant. On meeting his old student Roy in police uniform after long time, he asks him to recite from Wordsworth entirely forgetting the context or situation. Roy too like a subdued sensitive plant salutes his teacher and obeys his command for getting his present duty and assignment. Thus it tells that a teacher is essentially a teacher with a soft and submerged interior hidden beneath the hard exterior and a student is a student for all time irrespective of his age, status and assignment.

Equally sweet and lovely is the bond of love and understanding shown in "The Time for a Style". Though both Chaitan (the old barber) and Hrishikesh Chowdhury (now old zamindar) are reduced to ancient fools, they understand each other better than anyone else. In their pathetic helplessness

they share a kind of silent sorrow and look like twins. So, time cannot snap the old thread of their relationship. Thus Manoj Das's stories show the various strands in human nature.

One of the recurrent themes in his stories is modern man's obsession with sensuality and his craze for nudity and sense-pursuits.

Being caught in the sensual music, the modern man forgets traditional values and ethical significance. What he incessantly pursues is a perennial titillation. A possible consequence of such an obsession is the subject matter of the story, "The Last I heard of Them".

Here the writer speaks of seven aged people who are out for a 'Short cut to God'. A mystic vagabond leads them to Hidamba Baba. Forgetting their original quest they press the Baba to give them the magic water that will show them people nude. Having obtained the water from the Baba, they enter a posh hotel when a ball is about to begin. As they treat their eyes to magic water, they see the dancing couples in the nude. But being greedy for a longer duration of the lurid sight, they put more water in their eyes and see a spectacle of skeletons pressing and pursuing them from all sides.

Similar is the theme of "A Trip into the Jungle". This is a story of man's depravity and bestiality. Here again, the writer portrays a group of epicures who in a strange picnic trip into the forest could have devoured (remains a mystery) half-roasted human flesh instead of the flesh of a boar under strong alcoholic influence.

This is man's atavistic journey into the jungle of his primitive or savage core.

Manoj Das celebrates the poignancy of memories. Most of his stories are childhood memories or the reminiscences of by-gone days distilled into living and moving legends. It is not the "emotions recollected in tranquillity" but "the remembrance of things past".

He has an uncanny fascination for the past. Anything belonging to the past i.e., the village, its people, their superstition, belief in supernatural beings and the feudal order fascinated him. Probably there is something elemental that appeals to his imagination and his muse lustily pastures in them.

In this, he is not an antiquarian or primitive but a traditionalist. His is not the historical past but the past that is undying and green with an eternal charm and a wholesome integrating effect on mind.

If a thing of beauty is a joy forever, Manoj Das celebrates a beauty that is gone for ever. He creates myth out of the beauty of the past. Most of his stories are recreations or recapitulations of a lost world. He finds ample compensation in terms of fictional recreation for what he has lost in reality. Such is the vision of a world Manoj Das presents in "The Time for a Style", "A Tiger at Twilight", "The Submerged Valley", "Farewell to a Ghost", "Trespassers", "The Evening at Nijanpur", etc.

Transition is another typical pan Indian theme. Most of his stories recount changes wrought by the passage of time.

Manoj Das has an equal fascination for the feudal order; an order at once glittering and glamorous with its king, queen, Raja, Rani, Prince, Ministers, Concubines and Landlords.

The feudal world is fast fading away and Manoj Das is pained to see the ignoble and unceremonious way this order is vanishing; the contours of its setting are rapidly changing.

"A Tiger at Twilight" is a document in Indo-Anglian fiction of an aspect of Indian life in transition.

In the introductory note to it Manoj Das writes, "...Sometimes a decade might change a tradition or a habit or an attitude that had prevailed for centuries."¹⁰

This is the principal idea in "The Submerged Valley" and a dozen other stories. "Time has licked them off, just for the sake of change."¹¹ Manoj Das is the minstrel of this change. The pitiless and whimsical time changes the green lush valley to a submerged valley rendering its simple innocent villagers homeless.

In "Trespassers", we notice the kaleidoscopic face of this change, once the narrator was looked upon as a trespasser but now his son is seen scaling the parapet of Roy Sahib's building without any fear or hesitation. Besides, he has become a source of delight for Roy Sahib who enjoys his time playing the ball with him. Simply fantastic and incredible ! But such are the wonders and miracles wrought by the magic signatures of time.

Time too has made old Basu ("The Old Man and the Camel") a museum piece or fossil by throwing him outright from the mainstream of national life and politics into a spacious Andaman cell-like room.

Manoj Das is very much sensitive to the panoramic yet pathetic changes wrought by time which are projected in "The Time for a Style" and "The Owl". Like Maupassant, he not only gives the picture of a faded nobility and dwindling aristocracy but the pathos involved in it.

It is again Time's treacherous ice that has brought old age amnesia, hallucination, the twilighted mingling of dream and awakened state and the fond memory breeding lilacs of love in "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night". Thus time and its legitimate and lurid child, change is the recurrent theme. In many of his brilliant stories, time is the principal actor, the chief wrecker and destroyer bringing in all the ruins and spoils in the process.

The spectrum of Manoj Das's stories is so varied and colourful that it includes many strands in its scope.

It focuses on the superstitious frame of mind of the illiterate, naive, simple and credulous village folk. The age-old superstition has entered their bone and marrow. It is held as sacred and sacrosanct; the forte and nourishment of their life and existence.

We have already seen how they have an unshaken faith in the existence of ghosts in "Farewell to a Ghost".

"The Owl" presents how the villagers are intrigued by the ominous supernatural power of the owl. They strangely believed it to have been killed by the young Zamindar which means ultimately the latter's death.

"The Tree" on the other hand, shows the villagers' pious reverence and grave concern for the tree. The tree is supernaturalised, deified and given a mystic touch as if possessed with life and spirit.

The theme of generation gap finds its moving manifestation in "The Time for a Style", "The Old Man and Camel", and "Trespassers".

Hrishikesh Chowdhury, Chaitan, Old Basu and Roy Sahib belong to the older generation whose views are radically different from those of the younger generation represented by Chaitan's son and his associates, Basu's minister-son and Roy Sahib's Baboo and Saboo respectively.

Considering the range of Manoj Das's stories from the most matter of fact happenings of every day life to events suggestive of supernatural and metaphysical things, one recalls the 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 Chambers of consciousness and catching every air-borne in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind."¹²

II

The short story is an imaginative work of art that introduces the reader to a unique and lovely world.

Such a unique and lovely world Manoj Das presents. It is a world of fable and fantasy, history and mythology, mystery and mysticism, fairytale-prince and princess, king, queen, minister and courtiers, supernatural characters like ghosts and apparitions and subhuman characters like the crocodile, tiger, turtle and monkey, holy men like Baba and Sage, occultists like tantrik-astrologer, exorcist and necromancer and a thousand other mysterious phenomena.

Manoj Das presents the picture of a traditional India or Orissa with her fabulous past, the many-splendoured feudal system of Raja (king), Rani (queen), landlords and the poor village folks, their age-old superstitions, simplicity and naivety.

In fact, he is so much enamoured of it that he looks back on it nostalgically, as it were, to draw solace and sustenance from it. For him, it is the real India, the India in her elements. He is not primitive or obscurantist. Like R. K. Narayan, he is partial to tradition and wants to preserve all that is lovable and memorable in it.

Truly, he is a votary of the past, the past that is undying and enchanting. He speaks, as Eliot says, not of the hoary "pastness of the past but of its presence"¹³; the unchanging eternal India in the face of a changing world.

He sings of a beauty that is no more. Nevertheless, the beauty lingers and haunts his mind.

The India of Manoj Das has two faces...one is mostly rural India changeless in the midst of the changing world, the quintessential India. It is so much embedded in the mythic lap of its slumberous past that it looks askance at the civilized world.

The other India that emerges from the stories of Manoj Das is the India in transition...the realistic India, the socio-political,

historical India, the early post-independence India with the rise of patriots, politicians, ministers, mayors, city-fathers, professionals like doctors, lawyers, engineers, brigadiers, police officers and headmasters. In other words, it is the urban or the quasi-urban India mostly a provincial town with the look of modernity and an air of sophistication, pretension and hypocrisy.

Unlike Nirad Chaudhury, he perceives India from the vantage point of interiority. He operates from within his society and like Narayan, he looks at his community from within it.

The India of Manoj Das is not the Tourist's India. Unlike E.M. Forster's India, it is seen from inside. It is the expression of her inner soul and spirit. So Manoj Das presents essentially an authentic and autochthonous image of India.

Manoj Das's people are highly interesting and amusing though they appear to be strange, egocentric, somewhat unusual and abnormal. His fictional personae can be divided into two broad categories : (1) children and old people, (2) rural folk and town or city dwellers.

The children represent a tender lovely world of innocence ruined by the little ironies of life. The old too are caught in their peculiar plight of old age and loneliness. The village folks are a fantastic variety of funny, peculiar, simple and superstitious rustics. The city people are vulgar, sensual, snobbish, shrewd, sophisticated, egoistic and hypocritical.

Be he a simple rustic or a city dweller, an innocent child or a retired general or headmaster, there is something strange about them and it is this queer quality about them that surprises, intrigues and amuses the reader.

The world of Manoj Das is a universe in miniature. Like Narayan's *Malgudi*, his fictional village is a global village. What is true in his fictional town or valley is true in the world. It is an image of India and a metaphor of everywhere else.

Despite the Indian colouring of Manoj Das's stories, we become aware of universal human nature.

The microcosm of Manoj Das is a close and compact world governed by its own laws and regulations. It is an all-inclusive and homogenous world based on an intimate relationship and understanding between man and animal, natural and supernatural, the mysterious and the realistic and the extraordinary and the commonplace. It is a self-poised, self-possessed and self-satisfied world ("A Tale of Northern Valley", "Old Folks of the Northern Valley", etc.). More or less it is a static world that refuses to change or changes very slowly from its cosy euphoric state.

The underlying principle of Manoj Das's cosmology is a healthy symbiosis. Here not only the human and the subhuman, the natural and the supernatural co-exist but also dualities exist and contraries co-exist.

The comic has always a symbiotic relationship with the serious, as humour has with pathos, satire with sympathy, tenderness with irony and facts with fantasy. This impeccable duality and harmony are the ultimate character and personality of Manoj Das's stories.

From theme and presentation of the world emerges the vision of an artist.

The vision of an artist means how an artist views life and visualises things. It refers to his foresight and insight, his philosophy and attitude to life and the world. Vision is born out of an intense awareness of life and a profound perception and subtle understanding of truth and reality.

The vision of Manoj Das is essentially humanistic. It is the sad story of humanity he presents. He communicates the vision of a tender lovely world where innocence and aspiration are betrayed by cruel ironies and the great drama of human existence is warped by anti-human forces.

Beneath the gaiety of bubbling comedy and lilting laughter lurk the agony and eclipse of life. He is pained to see this wonderful dream of existence wither under various compulsions. Yet behind all these, there is an awareness of the sensitive artist of the eternal throb of life; the tender desire of man to live. All is not lost and the world of Manoj Das is not that dark and bleak. Behind all these ugly distortions, there is always a ray of hope for mankind.

The little girl who throws her soiled and torn frock at the naked body of the mayor, the motherless child, Rina who sacrifices the only letter from her mother in a noble gesture and the priest in "Lakshmi's Adventure" mumbling a saintly prayer-hold promise for humanity.

Humanism permeates all his works. His tone is so soft and mellowed that he never offends while exposing. His satire does not degenerate into cynicism and his pathos does not lead to tragic catastrophe.

Thus subtlety is a unique feature and hallmark with Manoj Das. He never views things as we often do from a gross or superficial point of view; he views things from a subtle point of view.

So his humanistic vision need not be presumed or accepted *prima facie*, it should rather be approached and understood in the light of the various influences, the beliefs and background and the vicissitude of his life.

Right from his young days, two distinct trends were in operation and developed simultaneously within him.

As hinted earlier in this study he was never contented with mere ideology or a handy solution. He always sought something higher and nobler a philosophy or goal in life. This resulted in the unfolding of a subtle consciousness giving birth to an artist as well as humanist.

Just as his journey from "Samudrara Kshyudha" ("The Hungry Sea"), his first story in Oriya, to *Cycolnes*, his maiden

novel in English marks an unbroken continuum of a great creative activity, similarly, his journey from "Sankhari", his childhood pastoral world, to Pondicherry and his journey from Marxism to spirituality-is a great Odyssey.

He was fully convinced of Sri Aurobindo's futuristic vision of mankind that man as the epitome of present imperfection will travel "not from darkness to light but from light to light."¹⁴

Such a vision and ultimately his tryst with the Mother ("I have met the most remarkable personality in her")¹⁵ mellowed his life and art.

Thus his humanistic vision and compassion for the erring and suffering humanity just found a steady poignant expression in his socio-political stance of Marxism and later, his spiritual anchorage in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the divine love of The Mother finally helped it find its full flowering in his wonderful stories.

NOTES

1. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren; *Understanding Fiction* (New York : Appleton-Century Crofts, 1971) p. 273.
2. Summers, p.35.
3. "Sita's Marriage", *Short Stories by Manoj Das* (Madras : Triveni Publishers, 1969), p. 122. "Subsequent references to this collection are cited in the text."
4. "Crocodile's Lady," *The Crocodile's Lady* (New Delhi : Sterling Publishers, 1975), p.34. The story appears as "The Crocodile's Lady," in *The Submerged Valley and Other Stories* (U.K. : Batstone Books, 1986), p. 17.
5. "Operation Bride," *The Crocodile's Lady* (New Delhi : Sterling Publishers, 1975), p.168. The story appears as "The Perfect Bride" in *Man Who Lifted the Mountain and Other Fantasies* (London : Spectre Press, 1979).

6. Manoj Das, "Sharma and the Wonderful Lump," *Fables and Fantasies for Adults* (New Delhi : Orient Paperbacks, 1978), p.57. "Subsequent references to this collection are cited in the text."
7. O' Connor, p.19.
8. Although "Samudrara Kshyudha," ("The Hungry Sea") is a story written in Oriya, the mother tongue of the author, it is included here because it is the first story written by Manoj Das. But more important is the fact that the story is significant both for its theme and technique. It contains the early signs of his talent and maturity. As such it deserves study and analysis in order to trace the development of the artist.
9. "Lakshmi's Adventure," *The Crocodile's Lady* (New Delhi : Sterling Publishers, 1975), p.55. "Subsequent references to this collection are cited in the text."
10. Quoted P.Raja, *Indian Sensibility and the Fiction of Manoj Das*, *Indian English Writing*, Ed. R. K. Singh, (1987), p.138.
11. *(The Submerged Valley and Other Stories*, p. 3).
12. Quoted Sarat Chandra Parida, "Short Stories of Manoj Das : A Brief Critical Study," *Triveni*, (Oct. Dec., 1973), p. 70.
13. T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and individual Talent," *Selected Essays* (London : Faber and Faber Ltd., 1980), p.14.
14. Tharoor, 'Courtesy : Manoj Das'.
15. Manoj Das mentioned this during a conversation with me at his residence in Pondicherry.

Realism and Fantasy

I

"...Art is Life to that degree that there is absolutely no Life without it...Art alone takes, and holds and preserves Life',¹ says Robert Liddell.

Cassirer makes it plain that art constitutes one of the perspectives by which to view reality. Art is no mere entertainment, no mere diversion, no mere act of play. It is a revelation of our life. "Such art is in no sense mere counterfeit or facsimile, but a genuine manifestation of our inner life."²

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in their monumental book, *Theory of Literature* observe that literature

"must, of course, stand in recognisable relation to life, but the relations are very various: the life can be heightened or burlesqued or antithesized: it is in any case a selection, a specifically purposive sort, from life."³

So literature imitates life and, in a large measure, is a social document and reality. The poet or artist is not simply a member of society; he is the most conscious point of his age. The artistic consciousness is nothing but a transmutation and crystallisation of the social consciousness.

A writer is a product of his society and his art is a product of his reaction to life and society. His impressions and experiences directly or indirectly reveal itself and thus his work bears a stamp of truth or a semblance to reality.

"Realism and Naturalism whether in the drama or novel are literary or literary-philosophical movements, conventions, styles like romanticism or surrealism."⁴

According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,

"In Literature and Art realism again is opposed to idealism in various senses. The realist is (i) he who deliberately declines to select his subjects from the beautiful and the harmonious and more especially describes ugly things and brings out details of an unsavoury sort, (ii) he who deals with individuals not types, (iii) most properly, he who strives to represent the facts exactly as they are."⁵

M. H. Abrams points out, "Realism is used in two ways : (1) to denote a literary movement of the 19th century" (especially in the prose fiction of Balzac, George Eliot and William Dean Howells and) (2) "to designate a recurrent way of representing life in literature."⁶

Unlike romantic fiction that presents life as more picturesque, heroic and adventurous than the actual, the realism presents an exact picture of life as it is. The realist sets out to write a fiction which will give the illusion that it reflects life as it seems to the common reader.

However the artist can never transcribe things as they are; it is always his sense of things, not an exact photographic representation but an imaginative reconstruction of things. The mission of Art is not to copy Nature but to express her. The artist is not a vile copyist but a poet. He has to seize the spirit, the soul, the expression of beings and things.

On the contrary, he cannot afford to shut himself up in a charmed bower of Ivory Tower. He must be teased by an emotional consciousness of social reality and give expression to it in his works.

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren referring to the reality of a work of fiction observe that reality "is not necessarily or primarily a reality of circumstance or detail of or common place routine."⁷

Manoj Das's stories are a convincing reading of life and stories of hard core realism. All his stories including the fantasies are realistic in base and substratum. He gives a faithful portrayal of Indian life and scene. Readers accept his portraiture of India because it resonates with the clarity of authenticity. His characters behave in ways that are recognised as Indian by every foreigner who has ever visited India. His books have the ring of true India about them. The image of India he presents in his stories is essentially original and autochthonous.

Besides, his stories deal with certain basic issues of human life. So they are realistic in the sense that they present the joy and irony, the nobility, crudity and absurdity of man's existence.

Manoj Das does not describe facts as simply facts nor does he give only a historical or geographical account of a place but he adds his feelings unto it. The scenes and situations he depicts are coloured and transfigured by his feelings and imagination. This is why his portraiture appeals and looks real just as a Dorset village described by Hardy appears like a real village and the dinner party in Jane Austen appears like a real dinner party.

His fictional village is also the reader's village. While retaining its local colour and flavour, it evokes a larger context and dimension. He builds the village vignettes with such vivid, realistic and elemental strokes that the reader instantly recognises it to be his/her own. Thus Manoj Das creates not only the paradigm of credibility but also an illusion of actuality that embraces both the particular and universal in its scope and purview.

Walter Allen observes,

"...verisimilitude is essential...yet it is plain that broad realism, verisimilitude is not a sufficient description of all novels. In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Bronte creates a completely convincing world as solid and as satisfying as George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and yet one

that is certainly remote from the everyday world of George Eliot. The reference, as it were, is to something else, not to quotidian reality."⁹

Similarly the realism of Manoj Das is not the surface or factual realism. Along with the path of surface realism, he leads the reader to a deeper plane of which he/she is hardly aware. His is a subtle version of reality that impinges upon the reader's consciousness.

He achieves realism, by several ways. Mainly he relies on the village pictures. The rural people and rural scenes are the grist to the mill of his imagination. In a way, his village vignettes are more realistic and natural than his urban or suburban pictures.

The setting and atmosphere he builds up, his character portrayal and the sentiments and feelings he evokes through the characters are quite realistic and natural. Because he confines himself, as Fielding writes, "within the bounds of probability."¹⁰

Realism is of two kinds : tangible realism dealing with the circumstantial or social reality and psychological realism dealing with the modality and behaviour of human mind.

Manoj Das projects social reality through the portrayal of traditional society as well as semi-urban society. Just as traditionalists tend to "look inward on their community."¹¹ Manoj Das presents a collective image or identity in his stories. He has beautifully delineated the loss of community life and the erosion of bucolic existence in "The Submerged Valley", "The Tree" and "Farewell to a Ghost".

As hinted earlier his stories are stories of rural India. The rural scene and atmosphere are faithfully evoked in "The Submerged Valley", "The Tree", "The Owl", "The Bull of Babulpur", *Cyclones* etc.

"The Submerged Valley" is a realistic story in every respect : in content, style, character-portrayal, and the description of setting and atmosphere.

The story is remarkable for its portrayal of character. We meet an assortment of people visiting a rock and temple which was once the pivot of the village and now submerged due to the construction of the dam but visible occasionally when the water level recedes in summer.

With exemplary precision, Manoj Das creates the authentic rural atmosphere. He draws almost graphically the village picture with its unique and typical features like the lame crow perching, a member of a Harijan community looking white, meditating trees in front of the school and lastly the insane woman and her son, Abolkara, the disobedient. With these physical details and particularity, he builds up the scene and atmosphere. Here is a complete fusion of environment and character.

"Farewell to a Ghost", though a story on the superstition of people, equally presents a rural scene where the village folks, their belief in the ghost, endearing her as their darling daughter, their sincerity of pathos in bidding her farewell while leading her to her new dwelling place through drizzle and the narrator's and other children's feelings are delineated so remarkably and realistically that the invisible ghost is felt to be a tangible and living reality.

"Mystery of the Missing Cap" is another brilliant comical, historical and realistic story which deals with a minister's visit to a village in Orissa. Here a distinct and unmistakable Oriya flavour permeates the whole story. The rural scene is vividly portrayed with a plethora of details.

Set in the backdrop of the early days of independent India, the story gives a glimpse of the socio-political picture and atmosphere of the then India.

The story shows the village folk's reverential attitude towards the minister. Right from the way the reception was accorded to him with the song, "O mighty minister,... How do you nurture this long and broad universe :", Moharana profusely garlanding him, the reaction of the rustic children including the

narrator himself who thought the minister to be a demi-god or a superman and their feeling when the elephantine minister ploded through the street amid the air-rending slogans. "We, 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",¹² to the ministerial repast of sweetened ghee-baked rice and the ministerial repose in a cabin with a window open onto a big pond and a grove-are all so immaculately vivid and realistic that they immediately conjure the sight and scene of a village in one's mind.

"The Tree" like "The Owl", though predominantly a story on superstitions, is very much realistic so far as the description of the setting, atmosphere, and particularly the feeling of the people is concerned.

It gives an authentic picture of the villagers' grave concern and pious reverence for the tree showing all tendency to fall.

As the flood came at little past midnight, the villagers gathered on the river bank and began to worry about the imminent fall of the tree.

Thus the whole scene of flood and tree is held before the reader's eye. He sees in his imagination the entire situation including the unforgettable village folk and their so-called Tree-god.

"The Owl" which is set in the backdrop of post-independence-India stands parallel to "The Tree" for both these stories are more or less modelled on the same theme, technique and design.

Just as the tree is shown as a god possessing immortality, the owl, a common bird is presented as a supernatural phenomenon. It can prove fatal and spell danger, if it is hurt, killed or otherwise parodied.

Though primarily, the story dismisses the baselessness of superstition, it also shows convincingly how superstition can be pathetic and dangerous.

Here the description of the setting and the attitude of the village folk are though funny but realistic.

Just as the bull, the tree and the ghost-girl were a part of their environment and existence, the owl was considered the oldest resident of Vishalpur.

"The Bull of Babulpur" presents, on the one hand, the most interesting bull of Babulpur, the central focus and character of the story and on the other hand, the hypocrisy, shrewdness and the opportunistic tendency of Mr. Boral.

It is a perfect story in all respects...theme, presentation and characterisation.

Mr. Boral and the bull are set against each other as formidable rivals as if the author had meant to say, 'Let us see who wins the duel, the bull or Mr. Boral for both are evenly placed and poised'.

The story shows how Mr. Boral, the noted criminal lawyer, got suddenly overwhelmed with melancholy and decided to spend the rest of his life in Babulpur, the village of his late maternal grandfather.

But in the process of switching over to asceticism, he had a crucial encounter with the bull of Babulpur. Being nearly defeated and demoralised by the imposing personality and immense popularity of the bull, he was clever enough to explore the third avenue of politics, the last resort of scoundrels.

Babulpur as a village is unique and unforgettable. Though a fictional name, it strikes a note of familiarity in the heart of the reader as if all of us have seen or known it. It is at once real, romantic and the intimate village of one's infancy.

Manoj Das is a keen observer of the delicate nuances of the manners and mores of human society. Here he throws light on the social life and the ethos of the community.

After wandering for an hour or so, the bull returned exactly to the same place from which it had begun the journey.

People started their slogan, 'Jai to the great Lord Babuleswar, Jai !'

Seeing this and sensing that there was an opportunity for becoming a politician, Mr. Boral joined the people in their slogan-shouting and with a new intonation of voice addressed them, "My brothers and sisters !...This beautiful sacred bull is the glory of our village. Let us unite under the shadow of this bull and resolve to..."¹³

It is worthwhile to observe that these raising of slogans is a usual feature in Manoj Das's India or Orissa and it expresses not only the jubilant mood but also the religious fervour of the people. But at times, persons like Mr. Boral resort to it for their political gains.

Manoj Das does not give us a banal and photographic representation of things and life, rather he gives us, as Maupassant says, "a vision of it (life) that is fuller, more vivid, more compellingly truthful than even reality itself..."¹⁴

"Encounters" is a befitting comment on human nature and relationship. It shows how the chauffeur and the primary school teacher, though known to each other, are unable to revive their old relationship because they suffer from certain inexplicable complexes.

"The Sensitive Plant" is a masterpiece of Manoj Das. It throws light on some of the fundamental aspects of human relationship.

That the retired headmaster who was hard like a rock and strict a personality would tend and caress a sensitive plant and be moved by the delicate dewy eye-lid like leaves of the plant is something surprising. But the headmaster found that the sensitive plant was like those tender hearts (students) he once tended and groomed. This shows that he had a soft core beneath the hard exterior that welled up with the milk of love and father-like compassion for his students.

The feelings expressed here are very warm, profound, sincere and intense. The writer here and in stories like "Encounters" and "The Time for a Style" presents not simply a bald ordinary "illusion of reality" but he achieves, what Henry James calls, "Intensity of illusion"¹⁵. Mere illusory reality is not enough, the intensity of illusion is the ultimate test.

"The Time for a Style" portrays the panoramic decline of the old order of feudalism and the aristocratic values and ideals.

Once again it is Time, the chief wrecker and destroyer that brings about changes in things and man's attitude towards things. Manoj Das is very sensitive to the changes wrought by time and its traumatic effect on human mind.

Hrishikesh Chowdhury, the zamindar while young used to have his haircut by Chaitan, the family barber on payment of four annas. Now Chaitan is old and manages a saloon with his son in the town. Hrishikesh Chowdhury, also aged, does not mind going there for his haircut. But despite the changes, he still, in holy sentimental oblivion, clings to the old habit of paying four annas for his haircut.

When one day in Chaitan's absence, he offered a four anna piece to the young man after the haircut, not only was he puzzled by the way the young man stared at him but also he was totally nonplussed by those few words of Chaitan's son.

Then six months later, Chaitan appeared before him with his old little shaving box long out of use. Hrishikesh Chowdhury told him (the barber) that fifty years ago when he had a great fascination for growing novel hair styles, his late father disallowed it. So of late, when he had decided to have a free growth of hair all around his face, he (Chaitan) should not stand in his way.

Thus the story is not only realistic but highly moving and human.

We find his canvas suddenly enlarging to embrace a number of forces at play, in a setting of transition again typically Indian in "A Tiger at Twilight", a novelette.

The physical backdrop this time is not an average village but a valley, quite an enchanting place. The valley Nijanpur is the summer resort of the Raja of Samargarh. The last Raja has left for some unknown destination after the merger of the feudatory states within the union of India.

The story opens after a storm that raged for three days. The narrator discovers two important things which have taken place during those beastly days.

A man-eater had dared into the valley and the Raja of Samargarh was back there after twenty years.

An absorbing and event-packed drama ensues. The Raja is out to kill the tiger which is found to be a tigress. There is Heera with the Raja who was seen by few and an enigma to all.

It is a realistic portrayal of the typical Indian feudal world that has vanished. Many readers may find the characters, situations and the setting here strange but they are not fictitious.

Manoj Das said in an interview :

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 oneself¹⁶.

India, of course, is like the proverbial elephant experienced by half a dozen blind seekers, one feeling its tail to be a rope, another its flank as a soft mountain and another hugging one of its legs and describing it as a pillar.

But like the elephant who has certain characteristics that are different from those of a tiger or a monkey, Manoj Das believes that "India has her specific characteristics too and an Indian writer, when guided by his spontaneous inspiration, is bound to breathe Indian spirit into his writing."¹⁷

Such spirit, sensibility and awareness of social life he infuses into his maiden but ambitious novel, *Cyclones*. The novel desperately tries to catch some of the forgotten innocence and joy of rural India. Independence is two years away. The World War II has entered the last phase. The centuries old calm of Kusumpur lies shattered for the cluster of krishnachura trees in the village has been felled down for building an emergency air-strip. No more red krishnachura blossoms for decorating the hair of the village girls nor the cuckoo to herald the advent of spring.

The sea-side village, Kusumpur like Raja Rao's 'Kanthapura' is quintessential India. It is connotatively rich and tremblingly poetic.

The novel is remarkable not only for the wonderful evocation of the Orissa countryside but also for the rich memories of pre-independence India. It is a moving saga of social upheavals and human suffering. The facts and events of *Cyclones* have a ring of truth and reality about them.

Manoj Das ruefully recalls,

It was the days of my boyhood when a devastating cyclone rocked the North Balasore of Orissa. After the tornado, came the epidemics and battalions of cholera. People tumbled down one after another. There was fear and gnawing silence and the phantoms of human skeletons were visibly moving in darkness.¹⁸

All these heart-rending events and the epoch of turmoils have gone into *Cyclones*.

Manoj Das's characters are real, not fictitious or frigid abstractions. They are sharply out-lined and highly individualised. They have a life in the round. They unfold and grow in stature. They convince and surprise us for they are put in credible frame-work. They resemble and represent human beings in certain fundamental aspect. Aunty Roopwati, Mr. Boral, Mr. Moharana, Jameswar Gupta, Divyasimha, the mayor of Madhuvan, Hrishikesh Chowdhury, Damodar Lenka, Latu, Ashok Babu and

children like Lakshmi and Rina are sheer triumph of characterisation and specimens of human beings.

Even Bholagrandpa who appears a bit queer and primitive is a plausible human character. Because there are people still in the remote rural areas of Orissa who, in their simplicity and primal innocence, are prone to forget things, and it is not unlikely that they like Bholagrandpa confuse the day-dream with stark reality.

Although many of Manoj Das's stories appear to be fantastic, realism permeates all of them. Despite the heavy atmosphere and preponderance of fantasy, there is a deep-rooted realism in his works.

Even the stories in *Fables and Fantasies for Adults* are based on certain basic human truths. They are a comment on or a profound study of human life and nature.

Although the way Sharma moved and the extent to which his wonderful lump carried him like the magic lamp of Alladin is simply fantastic, his passion for money and craze for fame... are presented convincingly in the realistic backdrop of American society with its highly commercialised attitudes, maddening media and the vicious and intricate political system.

Manoj Das does not project only the social consciousness or reality in his stories but also he presents the psychological truth and realism. His primary concern, as most of his stories reveal, is with the psychic man and psychic reality. He has shown beautifully the process of psychic growth, changes and aberrations in "Birds in the Twilight", "A Song for Sunday" and "Miss Moberly's Targets" respectively.

"Sita's Marriage", "A Letter from the Last Spring", "The Substitute for the Sitar" and "Lakshmi's Adventure" deal with the delicate nuances of child's feeling and thinking. It shows how the mind of a child behaves in a particular situation. What Rina broods in the solitude of her mind and Lakshmi muses in

the presence of a mute deity are not only moving and touching but highly realistic.

Imagine the case of General Valla who was to laugh on the stage in the role of a commander. But could he do so ? It was a herculean task for him. Having the loudest laughter in military history and numerous astounding martial exploits to his credit, he struggled hard to laugh before the audience and when he laughed, it was only a grimace and finally he paid the price for it.

Who would believe this ? Yet these are the truths and truth is stranger than fiction and nobody for certain, knows what the truth or reality is.

In "Prithviraj's Horse", Mukund is a strange paradox. On the one hand, he is a nice teacher in the school of Goswami Academy and on the other, he is a dangerous and diabolical fellow.

Mukund, under a strange conviction that he was Prithviraj Chauhan's horse in his previous birth, brutally assaulted Ghotot-coch, another youngman for nothing.

Such is the strange face of reality. In fact, strange are the ways of the world and half the world does not know how the other half lives. Thus reality is far from being what it is ordinarily construed. There are more things in Heaven and Earth than are imagined.

Manoj Das has presented beautifully the various shades and facades of reality in his stories.

II

The story is a fantasy when,

It is not presented as an account of real people meeting real problems. It is all based on an assumption that certain conditions are true. It reports what might happen if certain conditions existed.¹⁹

It chiefly depends on, what Coleridge calls, 'the willing suspension of disbelief'.

According to E. M. Forster, Fantasy implies,

The supernatural but need not express it. The writers of a fantastic turn have used such as the introduction of a god, ghost, angel, monkey, monster, midget and witch into ordinary life; or the introduction of ordinary men into no man's land the future, past, the interior of the earth, the fourth dimension; the divings into and dividing of personality or finally the device of parody and adaptation. These devices need never grow stale. They will occur naturally to writers of a certain temperament...²⁰.

Novelists "who do not write about the past but are nevertheless haunted by it, often 'mingle the Marvellous' by introducing elements of fantasy and the supernatural..."²¹.

Henry James encourages his imagination to conjure up ghosts and presences believing that "these best serve the story-teller's fundamental appeal to wonder."²²

In fantasy, there is the sense of mythology. It can invoke all beings. "The power of fantasy penetrates into every corner of the universe...."²³

Fantasy as a literary kind, is richer than realism. While realism is born out of an arid orthodox imagination, fantasy is born out of the flamboyance of rich romantic imagination.

Some of the great writers of the world like Sterne, Melville, Virginia Woolf, Cervantes, Dostoevsky, Dickens, James Joyce, Ambrose Bierce and Gabriel Garcia Marquez belong to this fantastic axis.

Norman Matson's *Flecker's Magic*, Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dubson*, Lowes Dickinson's *The Magic Flute*, Joyce's *Ulysses* (all fiction) and Beerbohm's "Felix Argallo and Walter Ladgett" (a supreme masterpiece of satiric fantasy), D. H.

Lawrence's "The Rocking Horse Winner" and "The Door in the Wall", Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" and "One ordinary day with Peanuts" and Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis" and "Penal Colony" are classics in the field of fantasy literature.

Manoj Das is a great writer of fantasy. He can write fantasy with as much ease as a story of realism. As every writer has an interest in certain aspects of life and those aspects alone intrigue and fascinate him, similarly Manoj Das is interested in the strange, fantastic and wonderful aspects of life. His muse lustily revels in the carnival of fantasy. His is an enchanting world of fable, fairy-tale, magic, mystery, wily jackals, wise kings, sighing princes and wistful princesses and all unheard of and unimaginable things like tiger offering a golden bangle, doves arguing human matters, a turtle flying across the sky, a man lifting the mountain, and people appearing not only without clothes but also without flesh.

Manoj Das's is an omnivorous sensibility that conceives and devours anything and everything that comes in its way. It is imagination of an enriching and life-enhancing kind.

Although he writes about common facts and people, he always presents them in an extended and magnified form, so that they appear unusual and uncommon. He not only supernaturalises the natural but also naturalises (even humanises) the supernatural. He elaborates and intensifies a simple situation till it assumes a greater garb and significance.

His is essentially a mythopoeic imagination. He mythicises common facts and mythologises social reality and creates legends about a particular place in the manner of Raja Rao's 'Sthala Purana'. His Kusumpur or Mount Luvurva or the Northern valley is fictional like Raja Rao's 'Kanthapura' or R. K. Narayan's 'Malgudi'.

Manoj Das is a happy blend of realist and romanticist. He does not look at things as they are in their usual and common aspect. He looks at things through a haze of awe and

surprise like a tribal or primitive man wondering at the big towers and buildings of a city.

His people too appear strange and unreal. Sharma, with the wonderful lump trotting the new world, Thieffou, the man who lifted the mountain, the mayor, who drifted naked on a canoe under a starry night, Kunja, the man who flew over the waves to catch the kite, Tirthankar and Shivabrata who suspected themselves dead while very much alive, Mukund, the paradoxical gentleman cum rogue and the people who thought the tiger swimming in the river and dreaded that it had entered the colony even after being shot, Bholagranda who was like a strange man from the labyrinth of primeval time, Languly Baba who was born in the burial-ground and has lived three hundred years and walks stark naked and the enigmatic Abolkara who claims that he has always been there all these years when the rock and temple were submerged under water—are the people from some other world, the world of fantasy and incredible happenings. Something strange and translucent, remote and unreal hang about them. They appear to modern mind as odd relics from the limbo of time.

Manoj Das invariably begins his stories with realism but at the earliest opportunity, he moves away from it, expands and soars high with fantasy and finally comes back to realism, thus completing the circle.

Time and again, he impresses that realism i.e. factual realism is not enough. It has other planes or dimensions too, the areas which are not covered by broad realism. Fantasy enables man to transcend the logical bounds of perception and peep into the hidden recesses of things.

According to Forster, the aim of fantasy "is to degrade all things and more particularly Civilisation and Art by turning inside out and upside down."²⁴

But for Dostoevsky, it is quite the reverse. Truth lies in the 'exceptional,' not in the 'arid observation of ordinary trivialities'. He says, "what most people regard as fantastic and

lacking in universality, I hold to be "the inmost essence of truth."²⁵

Fantasy for Manoj Das does not simply evoke the 'sense of past', the wonderful and 'the love of the uncommon in human experience', it provides greater clues to his design and meaning; his motives and intentions. In this connection, the observation of Brooks and Warren warrant our special attention:

The violation of our ordinary notions of probability which is characteristic of fantasy, seems to promise an imaginative escape from ordinary experience, but in the end we discover that the intention of the creator of the fantasy is not to provide us with an escape from our ordinary experience but to provide us with an interpretation of our experience. In other words, fantasy as a type of fiction differs from other types of fiction merely in method and not in its basic intention.²⁶

So in the case of Manoj Das, fantasy is not an escape from reality but an escape into reality. His fantasy is related to social reality. When asked about his penchant for fable and fantasy, Manoj Das said, "I make fantasy a medium of comment on current problems and realistic issues. For example, in "Sharma and the Wonderful Lump" which is about a man who becomes a celebrity because he has the largest growth in the world on his head, my satire is directed through this fantastic situation at the sensationalistic media."²⁷

Through fantasy, he expands and exaggerates a situation like pumping a balloon to its maximum size or point. He strips his characters like peeling an onion layer by layer and makes them completely bare, thus exposing what they are in their essential core or real self.

It is a double-edged sword. Besides giving a very good entertaining and appetising story, it enables him to articulate the nature of reality. It reveals what is shabby or sublime in it.

Thus fantasy neither falsifies and fictionalises nor distorts and degrades but defines and articulates the true nature of reality. It is the other side or dimension of reality. It is like a microscope that reveals the virus eluding the naked eye. Hence it is not the polarity or reverse of realism but an aid, adjunct and complement to it. Thus fantasy is an 'extension of reality'.

"The Tree" is a case of fantasy woven out of the superstition of the people.

As the flood came, the village people were worried about the fall of the tree.

The tree with its branches spreading over acre, has become an institution for the villagers. It is a symbol of protection for generations.

The tree was thought immortal standing there from the Era of Truth. It was seen as god possessing some spirit or supernatural power and finally the 'dying-undying tree' expressed itself through Bisu, "I will be born as a thousand trees.. here, there, everywhere." Thus a perfect myth is built around the tree.

"The Owl" too like many other stories is a mixture of realism and fantasy.

At Vishalpur, after all other noises like the ceremonial howl of jackals, the sound of conch-shells at sunset died down, from the hollow in the temple, the hooting of the owl was heard. The owl was considered to be the oldest resident of Vishalpur.

The villagers used to debate at due intervals whether it was the same owl meditating on whose hooting certain wise villagers could prophesy drought, cyclone, flood or death half a century ago or it was a new one. However they agreed that the owl was a supernatural presence and if it was hurt or killed, the person concerned would die.

One day, a group of villagers returning from the market felt that the owl must have been killed by the young zamindar

seen then with a gun in hand, for the hooting of the owl abruptly stopped. They strongly believed that the young man must die as a matter of consequence.

The young man had camped in the kachehari. At night the villagers haunted and vexed him with their persistent visits. Surprisingly enough it so happened that the young man broke down and died, thus confirming their due expectation. But like the voice of the dying-undying tree, they too were stunned to hear the hooting of the dying and undying owl.

Thus one can imagine how much fantasy has been blown into the story of an intriguing owl.

"The Crocodile's Lady" is a highly enjoyable and delightful fantasy. The tale is recounted with such supreme artistry that it defies at once the question of fantasy or reality.

We have already seen how the strange story of "The Crocodile's Lady" evolved out of the tiny shreds of facts.

Although the metamorphosis of the missing girl into crocodile's lady appeared fantastic and incredible to Dr. Batstone, the sociologist, he was simply charmed when he heard the story from the lady herself.

Thus it is a masterpiece of fantasy woven out of the evocation of the mysterious and wonderful, the intermingling of human and subhuman and elements of make-believe.

"Farewell to a Ghost", one of his best stories shows how a maiden's spirit was sustained by a romantic legend and beguiled a band of village children merely through reputation.

The deserted villa where she was supposed to dwell is described as eerie and fascinating as a fairy-tale world or a phantom castle floating on an unreal sea.

Here she lived weeping the whole night and sleeping most of the day. A gallant lad of the village fell in love with her and one summer noon, he crept into her room and kissed her. Next morning when a dozen brave men entered the villa they found

the lad lying dead on the hundred years cotton mattress on the cot.

The villagers looked upon her as one of their unhappy girls and offered her share of food on festive occasions. They believed the ghost girl to be a part and parcel of their life and environment.

When the villa was threatened to be demolished, the villagers led her gently to her new dwelling place with the help of an exorcist and bade her a profound farewell. Everybody was visibly sad for the invisible.

"The Night the Tiger came" is a beautiful fantasy but it has also elements of social realism.

A tiger was supposed to swim in the river. The way the Chief Engineer and his subordinates chased the image of the tiger in the river is fantastic.

At sunset, a number of half naked kids while running through the haze over the river bank shouted that a tiger was swimming in the river.

Soon the news drew the Chief Engineer and his party and a large gathering of men and women to the spot. The Chief, otherwise a coward, shot at the tiger but it was not clear what happened to the beast. While returning, the crowd felt to have seen something moving inside the bushes.

At midnight, when the Chief was drinking and looking at his sleeping wife in a gown with tiger stripe, he suddenly shrieked that the tiger was moving outside the garden. Mrs. Chief woke up and rang up the Deputy Chief drinking then, that the tiger had entered their colony. He in turn rang Mr. Sampat, the Security Officer, also drinking and the Security Officer passed the news of the tiger on to Mr. Shawoo, the labour leader. Thus, all being drunk, suffered from a kind of hallucination or an imaginary phobia from which they tried to run away as quickly as possible.

Similarly we come across another fantastic and interesting situation in "A Night in the Life of the Mayor" where the mayor of Madhuvan was stranded naked.

The mayor, Divyasimha who was quite proud of his achievements in life laughed at his old professor, Roy who was greatly upset over a stray cow chewing up his grand daughter's note-book.

The same evening, the mayor was having a dip in the river at a lonely spot leaving his trousers and shirt on the bank. In the water, he was obliged to take off his underwear and it slipped off his hand. When he crawled ashore, he found the notorious cow moving away with his half eaten clothes still clinging to its mouth. He was totally nonplussed and bewildered.

His open car on the bank aroused suspicion in some officers who happened to pass by the way. The police arrived on the spot. The mayor, undone and ashamed let himself be drifted away resting on a small canoe. He had not been alone for a long time. Under the starry sky, he had an intimate dialogue with himself. At dawn a little girl came to his rescue by sacrificing her soiled frock and then on learning that he is a big man by fetching a towel for him.

"Friends and Strangers" is a very good fantasy on an experimental basis like O' Henry's "A Strange Story" where John Smothers one night had gone to bring some medicine for his ailing daughter and returned after many years on a night when his grand daughter suffered similarly from colic and the little girl immediately recognised him as her grand father.

In "Friends and Strangers", we meet Tirthankar and Shivabrata, the two strange friends who, being moon-struck, suffered from hallucination and imagined all sorts of improbable and inconceivable things. For example, they thought that they saw Pramath, their friend going to present a shawl to Mrs. Wilson already dead for two months. Next when they learnt of Pramath's death in an accident that noon, they immediately realised that they must have seen Pramath's ghost.

There after, they parted hurriedly without saying a word to each other and further they suspected each other to be dead when they were very much alive.

In Manoj Das's stories, we find two types of fantasies—fantasy pure and unalloyed; where there is no message but sheer delight and entertainment and mixed fantasy where there is message and realism.

"The Crocodile's Lady", "The Princess and the Story-teller", "A Tale of the Northern Valley", "Old Folks of the Northern Valley" and "Friends and Strangers" are pure fantasies.

Manoj Das has written several stories on valleys. His fictional valley does not have a topographical or geographical identity. It has no local vestige or regional colour. Its setting is anywhere in the world. It is a miniature universe and its characters are the people of the world.

The town in "A Tale of the Northern Valley" is a lovely place. Nestling on a hillock, it looks like a fairyland where there is cloud, mist, flowers of all colours and to crown everything there are precious rumours to pass into hoary legends.

Rumour is said to be one kind of mental masturbation. Rightly the town hungered for it and it was the principal food and diet of its people.

One such rumours was about young Davra and Miss Jolly who sat close to each other on the parapet of a ruined historic monument. Miss Jolly's sky-coloured shawl was fluttering in the wind. By noon, the rumour was spread by jealous Miss Jamila that Mr. Davra and Miss Jolly had turned into monkeys dangling their tails. This drew a vast crowd, the true connoisseurs of rumour but to its surprise they (Davra and Jolly) went out as usual and tailless as ever.

The other really noteworthy rumour was that Miss Pinquee would appear nude on the balcony of 'Evening Star'. By sundown the educationist and the retired judge and a dozen other gentlemen gathered to view the rare spectacle adjusting

their spectacles. The way Miss Pinquee opened her milk-white minki and the buttons one after another was a sheer fantastic and sizzling experience for all.

"Old Folks of the Northern Valley" deals with a gay, wonderful and primitive brand of people. They would gather on the small plateau to celebrate the annual festival beating drums and singing the entire evening.

The festival commemorates the elopement of a frail and beautiful princess with a man as old and haggard as a scarecrow. The princess fell headlong in love and she loved him for the sheer elegance that was his age.

No one can question the credibility of his story for Manoj Das chooses such locale or setting which he can easily invest with an aura of fantasy. His settings are either a hill-top, a mountain, a river-bank, a valley or a hamlet, and his people are either simple superstitious rustics or primitive folks. It is a land far from the civilised world where he safely plies his narrative on the plane of fantasy without running any risk of disbelief.

The stories which are included in *Man who lifted the Mountain and Other Fantasies* and *Fables and Fantasies for Adults* are also fantasies but interspersed with realism. Although the scenes and characters they depict, are not real yet a deeper plane of reality is not lacking in any of them. Reviewing *Man who Lifted the Mountain and Other Fantasies*, Adrian Cole, himself a writer of fantasy says,

There is more than a little Arabian Nights quality to the stories and all are punctuated with very tasteful imagery and we are given a number of insights into the Indian way of things which the author delivers unobtrusively and unprejudicially. Not only did I enjoy the flavour of the stories but also I enjoyed their characters which are very real²⁵.

Set in the good old days of kings and queens, these tales are embellished with original humour, sardonic understones

and sparkling metaphors. These fantasies have concrete message that are of great relevance to our time.

"The Princess and the Story-teller" recounts how a naughty princess who found sadistic pleasure in befooling her suitors was ultimately tamed and out-witted by a clever and diligent storyteller.

Here the storyteller is a school teacher who tells the story to Bhatta and Shawoo, previously criminals, at the request of his friend, Roy.

"He who rode the Tiger" is one of the highly amusing and powerful stories. One day, a tiger was caught in the orchard of a king. Right from the mali, the kotwal and the rotwal to the minister and commander—everybody boasted that they could ride the tiger as their fore-fathers had already done such things. When the king arrived on the scene, everybody fell awfully silent. The king, after being briefed with the matter, soon declared that it was he who alone should ride it but since he was fat, the young prince would ride it on his behalf. The prince, being very calm and artistic in his bent of mind, was reluctant to claim such glory. But his foolish king-father forced him to do so. Consequently the bored and opportunistic tiger carried him soon to the mid-forest only to reduce him to a souvenir soaked with blood.

Here the fantasy is created out of the fairy tale world of king and his retinue and the bawdy and earthy fun and humour.

"Operation Bride" is a marvellous fantasy woven out of the juxtaposition of the romantic fairy tale world with the dull distorting mechanistic world of science.

The setting is Mount Luvurva where the wandering prince beheld a lovely girl jumping from rock to rock and singing to herself and fell headlong in love with her. But since the girl was the daughter of a wood-cutter there was some difficulty in the matter of her marriage with the prince. As such, a fantastic plan was drawn up by the king and the ministers so that she would

be truly carved into a perfect royal bride. Accordingly the girl was thoroughly maimed and distorted by plastic surgery and equipped with the latest electronic devices.

When the prince saw her, he immediately collapsed, for what he saw was not his dream-girl of the hill but a scarecrow and her carcass.

"Man who lifted the Mountain" is a superb fantasy and allegory. One needs a big heart and a highly imaginative mind to enjoy such fantasies. Here the mountain speaks and is lifted as a feather. One simply has to believe and silence all qualms and stings of disbelief.

A king had a daughter who ailed for a long time. At last a mendicant told the worried king that a handful of earth under the mountain if smeared on the princess's body would cure her. But who would lift the mountain? However, the king's herald announced that he who lifted the mountain would be the richest man in the kingdom.

On the other side of the mountain lived Thieffou, the thief who wept and wished that he were able to lift the mountain. The kind mountain told him that it would be lifted as light as a feather provided he changed his nature. Thieffou promised to do so.

Accordingly the king was informed and the next evening, the expectant crowd along with the solemn royalty gathered near the mountain. To everybody's astonishment, the mountain went up and rested like a toy-balloon on Thieffou's fingers. But suddenly Thieffou began to behave wildly. He demanded that the Income-Tax-Minister should come out of the crowd so that he would place the mountain on him and also Rooplal to declare him as his adopted son and finally the king to accept him as his son-in-law. The queen and princess got panicky and fainted.

However the one hour time had passed and the mountain was merciful enough to come down again and bury the uncontrollable Thieffou under it.

His highly acclaimed *Fables and Fantasies for Adults* is a charming, sometimes whimsical collection of contemporary satire and ancient legends retold with a fresh thought provoking perspective.

The basic themes of these intriguing little fables are derived from ancient Indian tales, some of which are buried in our consciousness.

"The Tiger and the Traveller" (The Panchatantra for Adults-1) is a fable and allegory.

A traveller going to commit suicide was lured by a golden bangle offered to him by a tiger. Having accepted it, he was soon transformed into a tiger. Although he bartered his desire to die and embraced life for the bangle, he could not enjoy the same because of his tigerly transformation. Being deprived of real death he had the terrible death-in-life. Seeing this the doves on the branch of the tree began to diagnose and argue out the cause of his misery.

"The Turtle from the Sky" (The Panchatantra for Adult-2) is one of the superb fables resurrected from the granary of folk-tales.

Once a turtle who was living in a beautiful lake by the valley thought that greener must be the valley that lay beyond the hills. At last with the help of two swans, it had the most ambitious flight across the sky.

Finally it fell over the palace tower. The chief epicure of the court came out with a fantastic proposition that the meat of such a turtle that fell from the sky once in a millennium was a sure cure for all diseases and defects. So it was properly cooked and tasted by all the royal personages including the king himself.

"Sharma and the wonderful Lump" though predominantly a satire, contains fantastic elements. The way Sharma moved and was pampered by the Americans, the growth of flesh on his head was looked upon as a medical wonder and was diagnosed

as a True or Neoplastic Tumor and he was hugged and extolled as an extra-ordinary phenomenon in the media, is nothing less than fantastic and ludicrous.

Apart from these stories for adults, Manoj Das retells fables and stories for children with enormous success. His book, *A Bride inside a Casket and Other Tales* was published by Times Books International, Singapore and W. W. Allen and Co., London. Commenting on his stories for children, Manoj Das says,

I started writing children's stories out of my love for children. I do not feel happy about the stuff that they are fed. Of course, many of the fables depict a very down to earth view of the world. But I try to avoid stories that show the darker side of life. There is no harm in children learning that it pays to be prudent and circumspect.²⁰

Thus while rounding up the chapter on realism and fantasy it is worth while to observe that Manoj Das's fantasies are not wooly abstractions or exercises in mysticism. They are rooted to reality and within the believable bounds of one's conceiving and imagining things. There is an unmistakable cogency and logic of probability about them.

His fantasies are not vague and pointless. Nor are they the riot of his fancy and imagination but the product of his creative genius. They are allegorical, as they constitute a double frame of reference and hearken to something deeper in significance.

Beyond and beneath the factual or phenomenal reality, there is a subtle and hidden reality. To have a glimpse of this hidden or submerged portion, we need a certain subtle method and fantasy is one such device to delve deep into the heart of reality. The reality in oneness and diversity is viewed from several probable angles.

Thus fantasy, in the hand of Manoj Das, is not simply an art or mode of thinking but a part of his technique, a sort of objective correlative to project his motif and vision.

Manoj Das's art exhibits a kind of artistic marriage between realism and fantasy. Like the comic-serious, romantic-classical, the realism and fantasy co-exist in a balance of symbiotic relationship. "Despite the ambience of fantasy, a hard core of realistic predicaments and problems underlines the stories."³⁰

What exactly is noticed is that there is a queer blend of the two here. We may call them realistic fantasy or fantastic realism or 'magic realism' as each is inextricably tinged with the other but for the truth, they are so mixed and shuffled that they are an indivisible and undistinguishable matter. Fantasy is the mode or framework and allegory is the method through which he projects realism.

Far from all these analyses or autopsy, his is a unique stuff superbly conceived, masterfully executed, at once poignant and delightful so that it transcends the question of fantasy or realism.

Like Conrad, Manoj Das has a double allegiance to "the uncommon" and "the ordinary".³¹ Stories like 'The Crocodile's Lady', 'Farewell to a Ghost', 'Man who Lifted the Mountain', etc. are human in their basic impulses and motivation but legendary in their background. By evoking the supernatural, Manoj Das appeals to our sense of the wonderful and marvellous. He strikes a balance between the ordinary i.e., realism and the uncommon i.e. fantasy.

He is a 'romantic realist' because his stories convey a sense of mystery and fantasy while rooted in a strong sense of fact and reality.

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The Use of Irony

Norman Knox points out that there are

many verbal devices that 'say' one thing and 'intend' another and thus invite the reader to reconstruct unspoken meanings. Metaphor and simile, allegory and apologue...to say nothing of Metonymy, Synecdoche, asteismus, micticismus, charientismus, pretention or of banter, raillery, burlesque and paranomasia...have all been discussed in terms of similar to those employed for irony.¹

Analysing the views of I.A.Richards, Cleanth Brooks and Kenneth Burke, Wayne C. Booth maintains that they have all suggested that,

every literary context is ironic because it provides a weighting or qualification on every word in it thus requiring the reader to infer meanings which are in a sense not in the words themselves : all literary meanings in this view become a form of covert irony whether intended or not.²

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, irony is "a form of speech in which the real meaning is concealed or contradicted by the words used."³ It always involves, says Brooks and Warren "contrast, a discrepancy between the expected and the actual, between the apparent and the real."⁴

It is particularly used for the purpose of mockery and contempt. The Greek word was used for an understatement in the nature of dissimulation, especially exemplified in the assumed ignorance which Socrates adopted as a method of dialectic.

But the term has acquired other meanings and associations in modern times. Its function and relevance have been viewed

from several angles : the metaphysical, aesthetic, structural and technical.

For Friedrich Schlegel, irony was a succession of contrasts between the ideal and the real, a technique by which the transcendental ego "was capable of mocking its own convictions and its own productions. It was ultimate self-parody."⁵

I.A. Richards, on the other hand, says, that irony (in this sense) "consists in bringing in of the opposite, the complementary impulses,..."⁶ Richards' concept of irony reminds us of Solger's claim that irony is 'Co-extensive with art.'⁷ It also calls for comparison with T.S. Eliot's notion that the function of wit is to provide an 'internal equilibrium' which seems to be the complement of Nietzsche's conception of a 'harmony' "that is rung out of every discord."⁸

Richards has drawn a distinction between 'poetry of exclusion' and 'poetry of inclusion'. The poetry of 'inclusion' systematically draws upon other and larger contexts. Henry James, in his preface to *The Lesson of the Master* declared that "Operative" irony implies and projects the possible other case.⁹

Yvor Winters describes a structural method, which he calls the progression by Double Mood i.e. by ironic qualification. In this kind of progression, the poet alternates : he "builds up a somewhat grandiloquent effect only to demolish it by ridicule or by ridiculous anti-climax."¹⁰

R.P. Warren observes that poets have not only tried to say what they mean, they have tried to prove what they mean.

The saint proves his vision by stepping cheerfully into the fires. The poet somewhat less spectacularly proves his vision by submitting it to the fires of irony... to the drama of his structure... In other words, the poet wishes to indicate that his vision has been earned that it can survive reference to the complexities and contradiction of experience. And irony is one such device of reference.¹¹

Irony is a structural principle. In fact, it is the touchstone, the desideratum and the crucible of any literary writing. writers use irony to build up the power and total effect of their stories. It lends objective stance to a work of art. Like 'ambiguity', irony is 'plurisignation' adding richness and complexity to the structure of meaning.

Manoj Das's stories are replete with ironical implications. His titles too carry many an ironic hint and suggestion. As most of his stories are in satiric vein, irony is ingrained in them for the purpose of mockery. Often a trivial or commonplace situation takes on ironical significance. Life's little ironies are handled in a masterly fashion and presented superbly by him.

His stories betray the tragic awareness of human agony and suffering. Men are but puppets, rather marionettes in the hand of an unseen force that sports to its whim.

Like Wordsworth, Manoj Das listens to the "still sad music of humanity". He shows how innocence is betrayed and the tender joys are ruined by the ironies.

Manoj Das is a realist and humanist. As such he sees the sunny as well as the seamy side of life. For him, irony is an undeniable fact and it has a definite place in life. He views life's joy along with its sadness and ironies. These ironies are not the cruel negations but the truths of life; paradoxically the sweetest and saddest songs of life.

"Mystery of the Missing Cap", "The General", "Tragedy", "The Love Letter", and "A song for Sunday" are the instances where a trifle often leads to an ironical situation.

In "Mystery of the Missing Cap", Moharana cloaked the simple fact of the missing cap and told a colourful and appetising lie that a certain nobleman had taken the cap secretly to preserve it as a sacred memento. But this fabrication was too tenuous to last long because the nobleman in question appeared in the form of a monkey and presented the cap to the minister. The minister, with a flush of anger and surprise, wanted

Moharana to confirm whether the monkey was not the same gentleman that had taken away the cap. Moharana quite helplessly admitted that it was verily the same gentleman. Hearing this, the minister flared up and his eyes bulged and burnt like fire.

This situation was not only climatic in the sequence of the story but also in the life and relationship of Mr. Moharana and Babu Virkishore. Both were separated with "reddened eyes and drawn faces" which was ironically interpreted as indicative of sorrow and pangs of separation.

Here irony is achieved by hyperboles, overstatement and exaggeration ("mighty minister", "elephantine minister", "head glowing like a satellite", etc.). Everything here is presented on a grand level as well as in a mock-serious vein.

The monkey not only makes a mockery of the entire situation but the episode of the missing cap is an irony on Moharana and the minister for both are not only disillusioned but also reduced to a ridiculous position.

This is, what Yvor Winters says, 'Progression by double mood'. This structural method is employed with success in several other stories like "A Night in the Life of the Mayor", "Sharma and the Wonderful Lump", "The Last I heard of Them", "Man who Lifted the Mountain", and "Operation Bride".

The story of General Valla ("The General") who was quite bold and vivacious is highly baffling. General Valla was to laugh as a commander in a dramatic performance. But the prospect of a true commander...ever acting a true commander's role ended in a kind of anti-climax. That General Valla who had, to his credit, amazing heroic exploits like blowing off the enemies on a stormy night and who was known to have the loudest laughter in military history, should get stiff and nervous while trying to laugh before an audience, is not only tragic but strange. Later on, he suffered from a heart attack and died. Thus what appears to be a child's job turns tragic and ironic for General Valla.

"Tragedy" describes how a serious play was ruined by the freakish behaviour of a lady. This lady who was some sort of a queen-bee among the lady spectators started laughing seeing something ludicrous while the drama was heading towards the catastrophe. As a result, the entire audience burst into laughter; thus forcing the play to an abrupt close. What is interesting and ironic here is that the audience laughed when it was expected to weep. It is irony of action leading to the reversal of situation.

"A Song for Sunday" recounts what happened to an egocentric man who thought that he was only playing an innocent joke.

Mr. Damodar Lenka, the stenographer to the District Magistrate and Collector of Cuttack while returning home on a Sunday afternoon found the old cranky woman sitting on the cantonment road smiling cordially at him. There was nothing wrong in the smile of the woman but Damodar Lenka, puffed with ego, thought that the cranky woman should not dare to laugh at him for he was not an ordinary man. After all, he was the stenographer to the District Magistrate and Collector of Cuttack. He felt annoyed and offended.

He went near the woman and crouching before her called 'Yo-ho' as the urchins used to do on other occasions. The woman was surprised to see this and tears streamed down her cheeks. Although Damodar Lenka felt pity, he could not help repeating the mysterious cry 'Yo-ho' again like a playful animal trifling with its prey.

Meanwhile, a group of people consisting of the postman, a hawker and some kids who had gathered there, was stunned to find Mr. Lenka's gestures and behaviour.

Mr. Scott, the District Magistrate happened to pass by the way. Noticing everything, he took Mr. Lenka in his car. When inside the closed office room, he very sympathetically asked him to explain what the matter was, Damodar Lenka behaved in a way that only confirmed that he had really gone insane.

Mr. Scott sent him to the mental hospital at Ranchi and since then he has not returned.

Thus the story is an irony of fate accruing from an irony of action. If it is a tragedy of Damodar Lenka, it is due to the tragic flaw or hamartia in his character. Here tragedy issues out of action and character becomes destiny.

Like Vilas Singh caught in a web of vengeance, Mr. Lenka is trapped in the very snare of his own design, thus becoming the author and architect of his own ruin. What he considered to be an innocent joke turned ironical and fatal for him. He could not retrieve his steps from the deep dark tunnel of his own trick. The forces of evil and destruction stalk all around and manifest only when man exposes his Achilles' heel.

Divyasimha, the mayor ("A Night in the Life of the Mayor") was quite proud and complacent of his achievements. He simply brushed aside Prof. Roy's complaint that a stray cow had eaten up the psychology note-books of his grand-daughter. Ironically, the same evening, when the mayor was having a dip in the lonely spot of a river leaving his bush shirt and trousers on the bank, the notorious cow was seen to have stomachached his clothes. He was stranded naked in the water of the river and let himself drift the whole night on a canoe. At dawn, met a little girl who offered him a towel to cover his naked body. Thus he cut a pitiable figure and learnt the costliest lesson of his life.

The seven old seekers ("The Last I heard of them") had gone to Hidamba Baba in their quest for 'a short cut to God'. It is an irony they forgot God and implored Baba to give them the other kind of water that would show them people in nude. Thus their search for God was ultimately a finer craze for libido.

After being hosted and entertained to their hearts' content with the lurid sight of dancing nudes, they were thrashed with the horrible spectacle of grinning skeletons.

Sharma ("Sharma and the wonderful Lump") who had gone to America to remove a fleshy growth on his head was

hailed as a celebrity and medical wonder. Ironically, his tumor was diagnosed to be a True or Neo-plastic Tumor. The media men and even the political parties went mad after him. This sensational drama of aboo-wave continued until he was threatened with death by the agents of Domdaniel. Then only he realised the horrible limitations of life and the dreadful consequence of treading into questionable paths. Thus Sharma, frightened and warned, was cut to size and hurried back to India in no time.

The king and the minister ("Operation Bride") wanted to carve a perfect royal bride out of the wood cutter's daughter as she was uncivilized. Though the girl was a perfect beauty, the experts and specialists in their drunken foolishness drew up an ambitious design to replace the gift and grace of nature by the artifice of plastic surgery and electronic devices. Consequently, they produced only distortion and deadly imperfection, while aiming at perfection. Thus it is an instance of dramatic irony underlining the perversion of these people's sensibility.

In "Man who Lifted the Mountain", the writer focuses our attention on Thieffou who is at once a real human being and a symbol.

Once having lifted the mountain, Thieffou is a changed man. Puffed with ego and arrogance, he behaved wildly as a bison.

He threatened all including the king with his new incalculable power to place the mountain on their head. All were panicky and crying in their helplessness. But see the irony. The mountain came down in time and buried Thieffou under it. We are reminded of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player.
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage.
And then is heard no more...¹²

Thus, through ironic implication, Manoj Das not only underlines the pity and pathos in life but also exposes the ego

and myopia that brings in uncalled for suffering. In story after story, he seems to suggest that not ego and arrogance but humility and goodness are essential human virtues.

That things assume ironical significance and mystical overtones is demonstrated in the story, "The Vengeance". The relentless five years' ruse of Vilas Singh was foiled when Bahadur, his enemy gave him the final slip by dying.

Badgered and disappointed, he went to seek the advice of Hidamba Baba who assured him that he could wreak his vengeance because Bahadur's soul would creep into an infant about to be born in a village.

At home, he was invited to see his new born child sleeping in a swing.

What his eyes bled to discover was a delicate miniature of the wound he had once inflicted on Bahadur and Bahadur is born as none other than his own child. Thus his mania for vengeance turned into a mockery and irony.

Roy Sahib ("Trespassers"), in spite of his dazzling denture, is a pathetic figure of faded aristocracy. He is alone in his old decaying mansion. The two sons, Baboo and Sahoo, who were brought up with great care and expectation left their old parents and went on the glittering paths shown by their illustrious wives.

It is an irony that the son of the narrator who was once looked down upon as a trespasser has become the sole charm and fond delight in the dreary desert of Roy Sahib's life.

Hrishikesh Chowdhury ("The Time for a Style") had to shave his whiskers in youth when he had a great fascination for them as a novel hair style and was forced to have a free growth of hair all over his face in old age when he sincerely desired to have a haircut.

In "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night", the irony is implied in the fact that the treachery of tearing the letter, which was

done by Sudhir, the student-friend of Ashok, is revealed to him (Ashok) after sixty years when much water has already flown under the bridge and time too has crippled body and mind. After sixty years, Ashok suddenly realises that Meena is not dead and unkind to him for she wrote a letter to him asking him to meet her at the bridge but now all this is too late and gone. Because there is neither youth nor time to wheel back to the past. Only the memory haunts and rankles in the breast.

It is ironic on the part of David Caxton ("Creatures of Conscience"), an octogenerian, to jog with the idea that he could very well be young; his having grown old was nothing but a dream. Can reality be averted by such a reverie or day-dream?

While young, David Caxton had succeeded in confessing love and proposing marriage to Miss Jimi Biscuitwalla who, being a creature of conscience dismissed it saying that her conscience would not excuse her if she made him lose his job. She advised him to be conscientious, better to bridle his passion and continue to be good at football.

What a devastating irony and cruel joke on a lover to divert his passion from romance to soccer. In old age, while sitting in one corner of a bench in a park, Davide Caxton was amused to find a pair of young lovers recollecting their first meeting in the presence of a wonderful moon. David Caxton imagined them to be greenhorns and silently encouraged them to behave and speak something, like romantic lovers somewhat in the manner of Rochester and Jane, Portia and Bessanio or Ferdinand and Miranda.

But nothing of that sort happened as he imagined or expected. Rather, contrary to it, he heard them propose to get their divorce sanctioned through mutual consent instead of running into complication.

It was a stunning blow to Caxton who "gave out a faint cry...the kind of it which Miss Moberly had alleged to be the out-come of a rat-eared ghost harassing him in his dream."¹³

Thus Mr. Caxton who was deprived of love in life, wished to have a glimpse of a borrowed romance and thereby have a flicker of substitute gratification, was denied of it.

Here everybody is a creature of conscience but in a negative and a bit hypocritical way. Being unable to face reality, they turn their backs on life. As such they miss the most vital thing i.e. the happiness of life. Thus the entire story is replete with the undertone of irony.

Old Basu ("The old Man and the Camel") had suffered and sacrificed a lot for the country. But the irony is that when the country became free, he was forgotten and confined to an Andaman cell like spacious room. Not only was he ignored but also he was cheated and betrayed being offered a plaque when he was expecting them to show him the camel.

Thus the whole story is built upon a series of ironic contrasts between the father and the son, the past and present and the camel haunting Basu so mysteriously and he being deprived of seeing it so tragically. The camel that intrigued and eluded him throughout his life is paradoxically the sole interest and irony of his life. In a way, it sustained him and made his life miserable as well.

Aunty Roopwati's life ("The Dusky Hour") is riddled with so many contradictory facts that nothing in particular can be confirmed about her.

She is an enigma and her entire life is shrouded in irony.

Aunty Roopwati praised and married Jagdishji but God knows what might be the reason that she rejected him suddenly. She tried to reach for Chinmoy Babu but could not. She praised him profusely and scandalised him openly. The greatest irony is that what she aspired to get in her life was granted to her only when she died. These opposite traits in her not only puzzled others but also ruined her life. Thus her life is a tragedy and a splendid piece of irony.

In "The Tiger and the Traveller", (Panchatantra for Adults-1) we find a man; who was bent upon committing suicide, is tempted by a golden bangle and headlong decides to live. The irony is further reinforced by the fact that the bangle for which the traveller bartered his desire to die was not enjoyed by him because of his tigerly heart and tigerly transformation. Thus he could neither live nor die, only faced as the dove rightly read the case, the consequence of double suicide.

"The Turtle from the Sky" (Panchatantra or Adults-2) shows the turtle flying across the sky. It is not only unseen and unheard of but highly ridiculous and ironical on the part of a turtle to aspire for an ambitious flight in the sky. With wonder and delight, the turtle mused, "I will go down in history as the first astronaut among the turtles."¹⁴

Irony is present in stories which are a kind of comment or satire on society and human nature.

"Of Man and Monkey" is a pathetic story showing the total helplessness and loneliness of man in a hostile and heartless world.

Latu, the orphan boy who was jointly performing buffoonery with a monkey in a circus, once fell ill and wanted his master, Nayak to provide him with a tonic.

But Mr. Nayak was extremely selfish, miserly and exploiting by nature. He kicked Latu out of the job and preferred the role to be better played by the monkey alone.

"He who rode the Tiger" is full of tragic irony. The pity is that those who boasted, including the king himself, of riding the tiger, managed to evade the issue well. It was the innocent prince who was neither interested nor breathed a syllable regarding the rare feat, was compelled finally to ride the tiger. It is an ironic truth that some people commit blunders while others get crucified for them.

In "Encounter", the chauffeur and primary school teacher meet often in a cafe. They are classmates and known to each

other from their school days. But the irony is that they cannot talk to each other lest the other should mind or feel embarrassed.

"Statue-breakers are coming" is a superb piece of satire built on the subtle shades of irony.

The hyperboles lavishly used have an undermining effect on the image of Yameswar Gupta. Through exaggeration and overstatement, the writer reveals the shady and sordid niche of his character.

Now Guptaji apprehends that the anarchists who are on the rampage may destroy his statue. He rang the minister of police department. The minister assured him that "nobody would touch a hair of Guptaji's statue. The statue-breakers are after the statues of big national leaders." (p. 125)

Thus here is a man who got his own statue installed and finally arranged to see it destroyed. What can be more funny and ironic than the fact that a man wants to be reckoned as a national leader by drawing the attention of the people to his statue and eventually getting it destroyed for the same reason?

"The Bull of Babulpur" shows Mr. Boral quite proud of his calibre and achievement; his car proceeding triumphantly on the village road. But his proud and pontifical stance came to naught when he was blocked and brow-beaten by the invincible Bull of Babulpur that went on ruminating quietly in the middle of the road.

There is an anti-climax and irony in Mr. Boral's sudden change from the profession of criminal lawyership to the rare and serene path of asceticism and finally his mysterious resort to the crowded and crooked path of politics.

Manoj Das presents the "still sad music" of life. His stories vibrate with the cadences of pathos and the agony of life. Most of his stories, particularly his stories of children, focus on how their tender joys and aspirations are betrayed and ruined by the ironies of life. His treatment of little ironies is often redolent of Hardy's skill.

"A Letter from the Last Spring", "Lakshmi's Adventure", and "The Anatomy of Tragedy" deal with the world of a child who is caught in the pathetic plight of loneliness and tragedy.

Tragedy inheres in life and our little joys are throttled by the cruel ironies of life. In the very sources of pleasure, lurk the forces of our destruction. Destiny scowls on human beings and crushes them pitilessly.

Similar is the case with Kunja ("Tee Kite") for whom Kite flying was the sole joy and aspiration. But see, what happened to it. There was nothing wrong apparently in it but slowly he got into trouble by stepping into the forbidden zone of Mahajan. Thus the forces of destruction came from behind very slyly and trapped him before he could smell or do anything about it.

In "A Letter from the Last Spring", the little girl, Rina is anxiously waiting for a letter from her mother who is already dead but the pity is that she is completely unaware of it. The riches of Rina's father, the flower-beds in and around the building they live in, ironically underline the misery and emptiness that corrode their being.

These are the terrible truths that lurk beneath the gaiety and glitter of human existence. Irony permeates Manoj Das's stories, just as it permeates human life. In story after story, he has convincingly shown how sorrow is the essence of life and how tragedy and irony are part of life.

With Manoj Das, irony is structural and operates like an undercurrent. Like fantasy and humour, it is also pervasive; hence a technique. It builds up the tension and conflict in the stories. He uses irony basically for two purposes : to expose the ego, the silliness and craziness of human beings and to bring out the element of pathos and tragedy in human life. Thus he has successfully handled ironical implications and contrasts in his stories.

Often his titles carry ironical overtones. The "perfect bride" is a distorted bride, "Man who lifted the Mountain"

was the man who was ultimately crushed and buried. "He who rode the Tiger" is none other than the prince who was neither interested nor given to boasting. "The bridge in the Moonlit Night" is not a reality but a phantom and a streak of one's shattered dream. "Statue-breakers are coming" is about a sensational rumour and Yameswar Gupta is the protagonist of that melodrama and "The Time for a Style" is never the time for Hrishikesh Chowdhury to grow his hair in a novel style but it was a bitter joke and cruel compulsion on him.

The preponderance of the use of irony in stories is due to his recognition and awareness of the fact that evil as a potent force exists in human life and universe. As such, it figures and occupies a definite place in the metaphysics of Manoj Das. His is not an arbitrary and nihilistic account but a plausible and realistic one.

There is delicacy and tenderness about his irony over which man sorrows, wonders, feels helpless, and finally is reconciled to it but never resents or revolts against it.

NOTES

1. Quoted Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p.7.
2. Booth, p.7.
3. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* vol. 12, p.683.
4. Brooks and Warren, p. 685.
5. Quoted William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism : A Short History* (New Delhi : Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., 1974), p. 379.
6. Quoted Wimsatt & Brooks, p. 620.
7. Quoted Wimsatt & Brooks, p.621.
8. Ibid.
9. Quoted Wimsatt & Brooks, p.646.

10. Quoted Wimsatt & Brooks, p.672.
11. Wimsatt & Brooks, p. 675.
12. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (London : Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1947) Act V.Sc.V., p.7.
13. (*The Vengeance and Other Stories*, p.88)
14. (*Fables and Fantasies for Adults*, p.72)

Suggestion And Symbolism

"To see a World In a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in Wild Flower
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour."

William Blake : Song of Innocence.

Symbolism is mainly a French Movement in art and literature in the later part of the 19th century. It was "a revolt against Naturalism as being too concrete and against Parnassianism as being too clear cut".¹

Mallarme in 1891 made the most celebrated observation about symbolic methods :

To name an object is to do away with three quarters of the enjoyment of the poem which is derived from the satisfaction of guessing little by little, to suggest it, that is the illusion. It is the perfect handling or mystery that constitutes the symbol.²

Arthur Symons describes Symbolism as "an attempt to spiritualise literature, to evade the old bondage of rhetoric, the old bondage of exteriority."³

The object of the symbolists was not to depict, not to transcribe but "to suggest; to communicate in their lost subtleties the most intimate and evanescent tones of experience."⁴

Prof. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar says, "the beautiful is to be magically evoked, not simply described...the cardinal symbol words, should be the open 'sesame' that throws open the gateway to the soul of things."⁵

William Blake gave an idea of infinity in a grain of sand and the idea of immensity and ferocity of nature and life through the image of the bright burning tiger. If an image "persistently

recurs, both as presentation and representation, it becomes a symbol..."⁶

According to Cassirer, there is a thoroughgoing identification between subject and object and a "complete congruence between image and object between the name and thing."

Martin Turnell, on the contrary observes,

The use of symbols is simply one aspect of language; the mistake lies in trying to invest them with some sort of transcendental significance instead of regarding them as a technical device of the same order as simile or metaphor. A symbol is nothing more than a vehicle for imaginative experience. What is essential is that it should correspond to the emotion invoked.⁸

Symbolism adds an element of artistic piquancy to creative writing. Manoj Das sometimes uses symbols to project his vision. His symbols are traditional just as his manner of storytelling is traditional. The background of his symbols can be traced back to the repertoire of Indian folk-tales, legends, fables and other common stock and sources.

His stories are symbolic in the sense that there always runs a subtle meaning beneath the surface meaning. "A good story", says Nancy Hale "is like a glass that struck gives out a clear ringing...that keeps sending, that rung note farther and deeper and fainter down into consciousness."

Such farther and deeper notes Manoj Das's stories do have. His themes are poetic and symbolic. They deal not with man in relation to society but in relation to himself, to the things occult, supernatural, spiritual, and mystical. Some kind of vastness analogous to that of tragic poetry and tragic drama attends to them ("The Kite" or "Birds in the Twilight").

Apart from being conventional, his symbols are intelligible as they have the ring of traditional associations and are mostly drawn from the world of nature.

However the symbolic mode is not the usual or natural mode with him just as fantasy or humour or even irony is an intrinsic feature of his work. He has not cultivated it consciously nor is it worked out on a major plane. Nonetheless, it remains a fact that he has projected his imaginative experience, the subtle, elusive and evanescent tones of things through symbols.

His symbols gain meaning from the allegorical association and the symbolic association often merges with the allegorical significance.

The ghost in "Farewell to a Ghost" shows man's uncanny fascination for the unseen and unknown. It represents the traditional belief and ethos of the community. The ghost had become an innocent and indispensable part of the life of the villagers. When the tree in which the ghost was left to dwell was struck by lightning, it marked not simply the end of an epoch but the superstition that had gone to make the emotional being of the villagers and sadly disintegrated. It suggests a farewell to the culture and the innocent belief that had nourished their existence. Such death of innocence is again symbolically treated in "Lakshmi's Adventure."

It also throws light on the psyche of the village folk. The ghost was a kind of common mental luxury or pre occupation for the villagers ready at hand. It satisfied and engaged their fiction-loving simple idle minds.

In "Lakshmi's Adventure", the writer through the juxtaposition of the ugly adult world and child's tender lovely world shows how the little girl, Lakshmi is pitilessly strangled by the social high-ups representing hypocrisy and heartlessness.

Thus Lakshmi's death is a betrayal, rather the crucifixion of innocence as "Farewell to a Ghost" is its cruel negation. It is again the community's failure to comprehend the subtle workings of a child's consciousness. Lakshmi's death is interpreted as the inevitable consequence of her sin but it suggests that when a certain soul finds its environment too

unworthy for its living, it leaves such an environment for a worthier one.

"The Crocodile's Lady" evokes the mysterious and the wonderful in an unforgettable manner. Like "Farewell to a Ghost", it shows the fantasy-loving village people that lend credence to and sustain the legend.

Granny's tale which Dr. Batstone listened to with rapt attention reads like a saga of the human race. The lady's story that she lived with a crocodile and together they swam from confluence to confluence, thus enacting the eternal drama of love and creation, is a sheer wonder and mystery.

She is one of the primordial figures which rouses our curiosity in the lost threads of life lived thousands of years ago and buried in the Collective Unconscious. It is a kind of voyage into the limbo of Racial Memory. Her tale is so absorbing and bewitching that Dr. Batstone, the man from the land of skyscrapers was hypnotised for those few moments and found a sort of liberation from the suffocation of reason.

"The Tree" brings out powerfully the delicate concern of the villagers for the tree showing signs of fall. The tree is the symbol of protection for generations. Standing from the Era of Truth, it is seen as a god possessing immortality. Through its undying and unbroken continuity, the community wishes to live and perpetuate its life:

The story is symbolic of man's irrational fear and primal dependence on something as a shelter or succour. The tree is a kind of emotional crutch and a psychological prop for the villagers; the tree being uprooted, the villagers feel as if they too were doomed or uprooted. This may sound funny but it was quite natural on the part of the naive illiterate villagers. The tree is given a mystical touch. Meenakshi Mukharjee observes that the impostor i.e. the theme of faith adds an ambivalent touch or quality to Indo-Anglian fiction. "The blind faith of the people represents an essential moral weakness as well as very elemental strength..."¹⁰

The story vividly presents the typical rustic psychology in clinging to the tree as a symbol or primordial totem of shelter and protection.

"The Owl" projects the typical thinking and attitude of the village folk and the baselessness of their superstition. The owl as a bird is seen as a handful of supernatural presence. It spelt not only the death of the young man but the end of a dynasty. Through the symbol of owl with its ominous association, the author quite artistically and suggestively has shown the passing away of an old order, the feudal order known as the 'zamindari system', in the backdrop of post-independence India.

In "Bhola-grandpa and the Tiger" beneath the facade of slender facts and gentle humour, the writer draws our attention to the significant aspect of the character of Bhola-grandpa.

Grandpa's action and attitudes are generally funny but Bhola-grandpa's actions are doubly funny and interesting because he is forgetful. Manoj Das has created in him an archetypal figure, at once fascinating and lovable, immortal and unforgettable, the sample of original humanity with primal innocence and simplicity.

"The Old Man and the Camel" is a story of man's disillusionment and outright betrayal of life and his sense of alienation in an ungrateful world.

Old Basu had a queer fascination for the camel because of its peculiarities and mode of living.

Though Basu always longed to see the camel, he missed tragically this long-cherished desire till the last moment of his life because of the sordid contrivance of circumstances. He shed tears when he heard about the camel. Thus his desire to see the camel is rather strange and inexplicable.

Perhaps the camel was the only creature in which he found an agreeable counterpart for his own suffering, deception and betrayal. Undoubtedly, he had a great deal of circumstantial as well as temperamental affinity with the animal.

In the ultimate analysis, it can be said that while the old man stands for suffering, sacrifice, and betrayal, the camel stands for life-long aspiration frustrated. It also represents something dear and unattainable in life like a streak of dream that haunts but eludes all the time. Beyond all these speculations, Basu's fascination for the camel remains queer and mysterious.

"Operation Bride" shows the perversion of taste and muddleheadedness of intellect. That the experts and specialists would carve a perfect bride only underscores their stupidity and foolishness. The bride sans the soul who was designed to live by sophisticated electronic devices suggests a human existence devoid of any spirit behind the tinsel glitter of our jaundiced civilization. It reminds us of Baudelaire's image of 'Gouffre' to symbolise the void behind the facade of our civilization.

"Birds in the Twilight" symbolically treats the stirrings of soul and psychic growth in man. Manoj Das believes in the continuity of life. The psychic growth, one experiences in life, can go with him to his next incarnation. In some cases, this point of growth arrives late in life as in the case of Kumar T. Roy.

Just as in twilight, things look hazy and indistinct, similarly the promptings of the soul-awakening were suggested to Roy feebly and faintly. He groped to realise it and only when he watched the birds flying, he felt an unknown thrill in his heart. He ran keeping pace with them.

The joy experienced at the flight of birds was only a sign of his soul's readiness to fly into a new horizon from the stale and stultifying confines of life, so much so that he released the half-dead tiger in the zoo in order to make it taste its own freedom. Thus the birds fluttering their wings in the air suggest the vibration of freedom and the soul's yearning for emancipation.

It is interesting to note that Manoj Das repeatedly uses words like 'twilight', 'moon' or 'moonlit night', 'tiger' 'valley', and 'monkey.'

'Twilight' or 'Moonlight' obviously contributes to the mood of the story. 'Moonlight' occurs in a number of stories like "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night", "The Love Letter", "Friends and Strangers", and "The Tiger and the Traveller" (The Panchatantra for Adults-1). The moon influences them so much that the characters behave abnormally. It confuses them and confounds their thoughts. They imagine all sort of improbable things and suffer from hallucinations. The moon lends a dream-like unreality and translucence to the situation where the characters are placed.

Similarly, 'Twilight' creates illusion and presents things in a hazy and confused manner. This twilight creates the illusion of a tiger in "The Night the Tiger came". "A Tiger at Twilight" reveals that it was not a tiger but a tigress and the narrator fails to distinguish between Heera and tigress for each looked like the other.

In "The Dusky Hour" i.e. the twilight hour, after the death and disappearance of the most vociferous, daring and glamorous lady, Aunty Roopwati, not only did the affairs of the dusky hour come to an end but the dusky hour descended literally on the story. The dusky hour descended too in the gloomy and forlorn life of Chinmoy Babu.

Thus while the dusky hour is mingled with suspense, mystery and melancholy, the twilight in "Birds in the Twilight" marks the transitional phase in life.

"The Bridge in the moonlit Night" is a tragedy of old age and unrequited love. The story draws our special attention to the bridge.

The bridge was there as the venue of their evening stroll. Even when it was demolished, Ashok could not remember whether the bridge there existed or not. Thus it was at once real and

living for Ashok because this is the bridge where Meena had proposed to meet him, where her letter was torn and thrown into water and where the phantom of Ashok searching for something was seen by Mahendra.

When the bridge existed it could not bring them (Meena and Ashok) together. When it is not there, ironically it bridges the gulf of sixty years. It links the past and the present. The link only deepens the tragedy.

The bridge exists nostalgically in Ashok's subconscious like his passion for Meena. It stands as a memorial of love and loss and with moonlight it acquires the association of sadness and melancholy.

But apart from this, the bridge as such, arching over the river and hanging under the sky connecting two unconnected patches of land, holds a perennial charm for the human mind. It is archetypal, esoteric and enchanting in its appeal.

In "The Kite", we meet Kunja whose nostalgic yearning for childhood sports and delights is objectified in the kite and drives him out of the artificial barriers of prison life. Kunja is almost Titanic and Prometheus-like in defying the mundane forces and embracing the sea.

The kite symbolises his yearning and aspiration. Kunja is an artist and the kite is his art and ecstasy. That is why he could never remain separated from it.

The sea where Kunja felt as if he were flying over the waves symbolises freedom. We are reminded in this context of Baudelaire and Mallarmé who used the sea as a pervasive image of liberation.

"Encounters" focuses on the predicament of human relationship and failure of communication. The story shows modern man's pseudo culture and spurious status or prestige consciousness; a strange situation born of uncalled for pretension where men stand estranged from each other.

No fruitful rapport emerges from the sterile chance-encounters. We are reminded of Eliot's *Waste Land*,

"On Margate Sands
I can connect
Nothing with nothing."¹¹

Thus "Encounters" is symbolic of the crisis and the stalemate in human relationship.

"The Sensitive plant" is just the reverse of "Encounters". It speaks not of the failure but of the triumph and glory of human relationship. The encounters here instantaneously connect and forge the link. The characters almost instinctively respond to the promptings of the heart.

"The Sensitive plant" primarily refers to Roy, the ex-student of the retired headmaster and presently the police officer who became shy and humble with respect the moment he met his teacher.

It also refers to the headmaster who was also like a sensitive plant because there was a soft and tender core in him which was moved and melted when he saw a sensitive plant. It is a metaphor for human beings that hunger for the tender touch and sweet caressing words of love. Love or human relationship is a matter of reciprocity. It requires, as Charles Morgan says, a "communicating tension" between the two poles. "It is the product of two interacting forces...the force of giving and the force of receiving."¹²

"Sharma and the Wonderful Lump", though to some extent, a fantasy and a satire, carries many a symbolic suggestion. Through the commercial transactions of Sharma with various American Companies ranging from American T. V. to Baldbreast's campaign, Manoj Das focuses on the vulgarity and perversion of values in our civilization.

Sharma is a composite symbol for the people in our society who become crazy to earn money and fame overnight.

The lump is not wonderful but abominable; there is no sign of beauty but ugliness. It is a replica of social distortion in the form of fake values and pseudo pursuance. It represents the moral degeneration and aberration from the path of sanity.

Similarly, "Man who lifted the Mountain" is a fantasy and allegory. Thieffou is a symbol of greed and exploitation. The writer ironically and allegorically hints that black will take no other hue. Human nature being what it is, man hardly changes, even if he is granted all the riches of the world.

The episode of lifting the mountain is symbolic of man enlarging and flattening his ego and hubris. Through this fantastic situation of a mountain being held aloft, the egoistic and arrogant Thieffou is once again crushed and punctured.

The mountain symbolises justice and mercy, the voice of Nemesis. Out of mercy, the mountain was moved and lifted itself and again seeing the arrogance of Thieffou, it came down and buried him under it, thereby dispensing divine justice.

A statue is generally erected as a mark of respect and commemoration of a man's service and sacrifice. But quite contrary to it, Yameswar Gupta ("Statue-breakers are coming") himself is the architect of the making and breaking of his statue and these two events are associated with his craze for being famous as one of the national leaders.

Thus Yameswar Gupta's preoccupation with his statue is suggestive of modern man's narcissus-complex and his sordid craze for fame.

It brings out in stark terms the horrible inner vacuum and moral diffidence from which man is unable to escape and which he, like Yameswar Gupta, is desperately trying to cover up by things like statue-making or statue-breaking. Thus Yameswar Gupta stands for those social crooks and neurotics aspiring for reputation by hook or by crook.

"The Turtle from the Sky" (The Panchatantra for Adults-2) is a fable. It implies that one who overreaches meets with disaster.

The turtle reminds us of Icarus who flew near the sun as a result of which his wings made of wax melted and he plunged into death in the sea.

The turtle represents those people who are never contented with their lot and always run after the 'impossible' and 'unattainable'.

The 'Sky' suggests man's appetite for the boundless and unknown, the illusion that tempts and deludes like a fantastic dream that haunts but is never realised.

'The Tiger and the Traveller' (The Panchatantra for Adults-1) is also a fable. It suggests that 'greed' is the deadliest of the deadly sins and death is its ultimate reward.

The tiger here is the tempter, the Satan or Mephistopheles who tempts and goads man to evil. The traveller is the personification of 'Greed' who is tempted easily and trapped unaware.

The golden bangle is the temptation or the illusory world that tempts and deludes.

In "He who rode the Tiger", we come across two types of people : men of words who boast but never act and men who act but foolishly. The former is represented by Mali, Kotwal, Rotwal, the Minister and Commander who are all impostors and the latter is represented by the king himself who was drunk with ego and blinded by vanity. The prince, in contrast to these shallow, pompous and pretentious people, was silent and given to meditation.

Here everybody flaunts his ego and pseudo ancestral dignity. The king did not ride the tiger himself but forced the prince to do it. Thus it is again a tragedy of innocence and freedom both butchered on the altar of brazen ego.

The tiger symbolises the ego ruining the innocence symbolised by the prince. The story also suggests the generation gap where the elders will prevail and impose and the younger ones cannot choose or escape.

The prince in his innocence and silent suffering represents Jesus Christ suffering for the sin of humanity.

The tiger in the story is a natural tiger. It is not responsible for what happened in the end. Just as it was its instinct to enter the orchard and be caught in the process, so also it devoured the prince when he rode it into the forest. We may say that it is an opportunistic tiger making the most of the opportunity that came in its way. Thus the tiger is a force like any other force, an instrument, as shown here of destruction.

The 'tiger' in the Sundarbans is a realistic one because Manoj Das's father had an estate in the Sundarbans area which was infested with the Royal Bengal Tiger. The picture of horror and fear associated with the tiger has left quite an indelible mark on the mind of Mr. Das as a child.

In "The Night the Tiger came", the actual tiger is dead, what they see is the phantom of their own illusion. It brings out the unknown fear latent in them. The tiger serves as a magic mirror in which the minds and feeling of these people are reflected. The apprehension of the tiger coming and moving in the colony is not only the nightmare they dreaded, but also the reality which they could not confront but ran away from in fear. Here the tiger symbolises or brings into focus their innate fear and sense of jealousy and rivalry which they tried to pass on to others.

Thus we find that the 'tiger' symbol is the most pervasive symbol used in Manoj Das's stories. It is used in its ferocious and destructive aspect as well as in its harmless and fascinating aspect.

In "The Tiger and the Traveller", the tiger is the tempter, acts in a human way and passing the bangle seeks to escape the damnation on it. It is the tiger of the ancient Indian folk-tale harmless and endowed with wisdom.

The 'tiger' in "Bhola-grandpa and the Tiger" stares but does not pounce upon Bhola-grandpa when he walks past it calmly. The tiger here also belongs to the tradition of ancient

Indian tale and as such is liable to be outwitted. In "Birds in the Twilight", the tiger and K. T. Roy are joint travellers and pilgrims in their quest for liberation. In "The Night the Tiger came", the tiger symbolises the phantasmagoria through which the latent phobias and complexes of different people are brought to the fore.

In "He who rode the Tiger" the tiger is shown in its natural and destructive aspect. However, taking all these stories into consideration, it can be said that Manoj Das is intrigued by the sense of horror, mystery and wonder that was tiger.

The other animal that recurrently figures in Manoj Das's stories is the monkey. Apart from the fable or allegorical aspect, the monkey is a real monkey, in "Mystery of the Missing Cap". Such scenes or incidents are quite common in rural Orissa or India. Yet the monkey here plays a crucial role not only in creating a mild row between Moharana and the minister but in changing the course of their lives. Thus the monkey makes a mockery of the entire situation. Through the 'monkey' image, the silliness and absurdity of human affairs is brought to the fore.

In "The Stupid Servant", the monkey makes a mess of the entire affair. Apart from the obvious implication that "a conscientious foe is better than a stupid servant" as stated in the story, the story is an allegory and parable on stupidity. The monkey travesties and turns the entire situation upside down. The dig at the sociologists and psychologists for their preoccupation with the subconscious ironically underlines the stupidity of human beings.

"Of Man and Monkey" suggests how man is no better than monkey in his utter callousness and lack of fellow-feeling. The monkey serves as a contrast and a norm as well to measure as to how much man has progressed or regressed.

The other important image that demands our special attention is the 'valley'. "The Submerged Valley", apart from speaking of the valley that is submerged and its people gone

ruined, speaks of the heart of the 'father' which is full of affection and consideration for others. It is so submerged that it is never seen on the surface. It is the father who braves the storm at midnight and saves Abolkara.

The recurrent reference to valley is nothing but reminiscent of Manoj Das's village.

The geo-physical contours of Manoj Das's village, Sankhari, today has undergone a sea change. Before the eye, there were corn fields, tanks with blooming lotuses both white and pink, vast green meadows fringed with rows of palm trees, the coconut orchard and beyond that the sea extends to horizon where the blue of the sky and the sea is mingled in a lurid fashion.

But since then everything has changed. The idyllic hamlet is no more. It is ruined by huge modern constructions and spoiled by monstrous mushroom growth of buildings.

But distinct are the imprints of those unforgettable pictures on his mind.¹³

Thus Manoj Das is very much nostalgic and laments the loss of that serene pristine beauty, innocence, faith and charm of corporate living. His portrayal of the valley is at once realistic and visionary in appeal, created out of the fusion of memory and passionate longing.

"The Submerged Valley", "Old Folks of the Northern Valley", "A Tale of the Northern Valley" and the valley of Nijanpur...all these fictional valleys are the recreations of the actual valley that Sankhari was with all its sylvan setting and idyllic charm.

It is like W. B. Yeats, "Lake Isle of Innisfree" or the 'City of Byzantium', the haven of peace and artistic anchorage.

It is his 'imaginative geography' and emotional paradise to which his soul invariably flies. It continuously haunts and

inspires and sustains his art. Thus these valleys are fictional recreations where he finds ample emotional compensation for what he has lost in terms of reality.

His concept of Evil which is a part of his metaphysics and vision is also subject to symbolic interpretation.

Evil is innate in man. Our culture, civilization and education are a thin vaneer to cover and camouflage that. This is the idea expressed in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Manoj Das too, through fable, fantasy, allegory, and realistic stories like "Lakshmi's Adventure" or "A Trip into the Jungle" has projected his concept of evil and villainy. He is pained to find mankind wither under various compulsions like pretension, hypocrisy and the ironies of life. Yet life is not that dark and bleak. Man, as the epitome of imperfection, is capable of evolving and transcending evil on his moving "from not darkness to light but from light to light".

There is a spark of saintliness in villainy and there are also characters who are 'creatures of conscience'.

Similarly his concept of change and modernity should be viewed in the light of other associations and suggestions.

Manoj Das apparently seems to be opposed or allergic to change and the trend of modernity. Changes are inevitable whether one desires it or not but as a sensitive artist Manoj Das views them in the perspective of human loss and the plight brought in its wake.

He wishes that changes need not be only an outward manifestation in terms of material or physical progress. It should be an inner transformation of man too.

Civilization is the story of man's journey from primitive cave to modern city or megapolis. But Manoj Das feels that if it is not purged of its destructive and disintegrating forces, it would be regressive and retrogressive instead of being progressive. Man instead of fostering the 'Divine' will revive

the 'brute' in him. The line of progression should be in the direction of the awakening of the soul and the evolution of consciousness.

These are some of the ways in which we can read meanings into Manoj Das's stories and his stories are rich because of these symbolic associations and suggestions.

NOTES

1. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 21, p. 701.
2. Wimsatt, Jr. and Brooks, p. 592.
3. Quoted Iyengar and Nandakumar, p. 230.
4. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* Vol. 21, p. 701.
5. Iyengar and Nandakumar, p. 230.
6. Wellek and Warren, p. 189.
7. Cassirer, p. 98.
8. Quoted Wimsatt, Jr. and Brooks, p. 608.
9. Hale, pp. 129-130.
10. Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Fiction* (New Delhi : Heinemann, 1971), p. 30.
11. T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land", *The Complete poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London : Faber and Faber, 1985) Lines 300-303, p. 70.
12. Charles Morgan, "Creative Imagination", Derek Hudson St. & Ed. *English Critical Essays Twentieth Century* (London : Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 63.
13. This is the English version of "Abhaya Singh and Alope Jena's interview with Manoj Das, "published in *Prajatantra Saptahiki*, (12th April, 1987), p. 6.
14. Quoted Tharoor, 'Courtesy : Manoj Das'.

Satire and Humour

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, Petronius, Swift; by some exquisitely graceful stylists...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 diminishing 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 of 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 puritanic 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 writing contains cruel and dirty words; all satiric writing contains 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 his 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 form 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 Missing 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 organising 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 characterise our civilization.

Sharma with his wonderful lump is a unique creation of Manoj Das. He is at once grotesque and fascinating. 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 American 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 Sharma 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 tenter hooks the moment I am recognised 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 recognise 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 dehumanising 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. Baldbreast in America and Rooplal in India who made use of the aboo to lure more votes.

Here, the aboo symbolising 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 alone 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 where in beholders generally discover every one's face but their own.' But I never forget to try to behold my own face in that mirror.'

This seems to be the secret of Manoj Das's satire. His satire is mild and unoffensive, 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.

Through this fantastic cum melodramatic situation, the writer satirises not only Yameswar Gupta's statue-mania, hypocrisy and pretension but also man's narcissus 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 criticises the perversion of taste, silliness, and the pedagogic pompousness of the experts to carve 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 contrary, there are characters who are positively good like Marilyn, the conscience incarnate and Sharma's mother, the image and embodiment of bliss and benediction.

This kind of realisation 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 criticised 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 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines it as "the sense within us which sets up a 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 humourist 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 amusement as 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 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 kindness. 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 patronising, 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 kindness, 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 Oriya. 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 only spring 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 configuring 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 linear, 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 bulging out, the minister managed to say, "what...whet did you say ? ...Well ?"²⁴

His humour has a native flavour i.e. it is Oriya in texture and spirit. 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 weight the mind down. On the contrary 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 breathe 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", Yameswar 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 humourous. 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. Guptaaji 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)

Through 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 organisations 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 Guptaaji's Statue... The statue breakers are after the statue 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."⁵⁶

Denouncing the impudent manners of the youngsters, Ravindra commented,

"They have developed bones in their tongues."

"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 Oriya humour.

It is simply ludicrous on the part of the crowd to turn to Sridhar Mishra, the homeopath 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,..." (p. 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 and 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 recognising 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 ! I 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 Caxton, an octogenerain 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 Caxton was reminded of his own affair with Miss Jimi Biscuitwalla where there were no movies to teach people the language and technique of love. Of course Jimi Biscuitwalla dismissed his proposal for marriage saying,

"My parents belong to the most orthodox lot among the parsees. I have to virtually rebel if I am to marry an Anglo-Indian even so virtuous a one as yourself. 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 you lose your job. Be conscientious yourself, David and bridle your passion. You are good at football. Continue to be so." (p.86)

Mr. Caxton continued with football but spurred by a theoretical urge he wrote to Miss Biscuitwalls at Bombay. "It is alright if we cannot marry for technical reasons 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 spirit,

Are you ? Fine, so am I !"

"Fine Fine Fine" I Mr. Caxton 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 don't you speak more. You green horns ? No knowledge of the right sort of words, eh ? 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 a 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 consenscended 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 essays 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 he 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 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"²¹, 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"²², 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"³³ 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. 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, "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 one the very cap taken away by the noble man?" and quite helplessly Moharana uttered, "Yes, yes, 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"³⁴ 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 village to 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 begotten a wrothy 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 off. His grip however continued to be in tact. It was when someone queried that he remembered the grandson and gave out the wail.

His (narrator's) father chose two keen eyed escorts from their party. "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 veranda 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)

Sundarbans :

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 furlong 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"⁴⁰ 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 malis 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

whoopie 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. Under-stand !" (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 Oriya style of provoking persons to feud or fight. It also contains the rhythm of Oriya 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)

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

The minister and commander quarrelled in 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 summarised 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 yourselves 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 of 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 of fine 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 favourably for him that he himself was taken aback by the wildest turn 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 powdered 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 Marilyn 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 unfair to compare him with Saki, O' Henry or Mark Twain, although in a large measure, he has the "insouciant spoof"⁴³ 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 Orissa. 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 a 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 situations. 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

NOTES

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6. Quoted P.Raja, "Manoj Das's Sharma and the wonderful Lump : A Study," *Triveni*, (April-June, 1981), p.72.
7. Quoted Wimsatt, Jr. & Brooks, pp.570-571.
8. Quoted Mehta, p.15.
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21. Quoted Mehta, p.27.
22. (*The Crocodile's Lady*, p.106)
23. (*The Crocodile's Lady*, p.92)
24. (*The Crocodile's Lady*, p.33)
25. (*The Crocodiles Lady*, p.120)
26. *The Vengeance and Other Stories*, p.18)
27. (*The Vengeance and Other Stories*, p.83)
28. (*Short Stories by Manoj Das*, p.129)
29. (*The Vengeance and Other Stories*, p.84)
30. (*The Vengeance and Other Stories*, p.63)
31. (*The Submerged Valley and Other Stories*, p.78)
32. (*The Submerged Valley and Other Stories*, p.17)
33. (*The Submerged Valley and Other Stories*, p.67)
34. (*The Submerged Valley and Other Stories*, p.1)
35. (*The Submerged Valley and Other Stories*, p.12)
36. (*Fables and Fantasies for Adults*, p.107)
37. (*Fables and Fantasies for Adults*, p.71)

38. (*Fables and Fantasies for Adults*, p.19)
39. Christopher Morley, "Introduction," *The Short Stories of Saki* (H.H.Munro) (New York : Modern Library, 1958), p.VI.
40. Bennet Cerf and Van Cartmell, "Introduction," *Short Stories of O'Henry* (New York : Modern Library, 1945), p.x.
41. Brooks and Warren, p.82.
42. "Introduction," *English Short Stories of My Time*. chosen and introduced by Lord David Cecil (London : Oxford University Press, 1970) p.XV.

Dynamics of Narration

Sometimes what a writer says, gains in importance from how he says it and that makes all the difference. In other words, much of the success of a story or fiction depends upon the dynamics of narration.

The dynamics of narration broadly refers to all the discernible signs of the author's artistry employed in his narrative. It includes mainly, for instance, the technique of point of view, form or structural principles, the method of picture-making dramatisation, setting and characterisation, the art of narration and the other various means and elements that ultimately constitute his workmanship.

Mark Schorer contends that the form or technique and content are inseparable :

Or technique is thought of in blunter terms...as the arrangement of events to create plot; or within plot, of suspense and climax; or as the means of revealing character motivation, relationship and development, or as the use of point of view...¹

Technique is the only means by which the writer discovers, explores, develops his subject and conveys its meaning and finally evaluates it.

Wayne C. Booth, on the other hand, observes;

"It is as broad as the work itself but still capable of calling attention to that work as the product of a choosing evaluating person rather than as a self-existing thing."²

Percy Lubbock calls it 'Method'. But the most obvious point of method is the 'Centre of Vision'. According to him,

"The whole intricate question of method in the craft of fiction is governed by the question of the point of

view—the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story.”¹

The critics in recent years put more emphasis on the importance of “the point of view” as a means towards the positive definition of theme rather than as “the Henry James-device of narrowing or broadening of perspective.”⁴

According to Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, there are four types of narration: “(1) First-person, (2) First-person observer, (3) Author-observer, (4) Omniscient author.”⁵

In Manoj Das’s stories, we come across mainly two types of point of view: the first person and the omniscient author. This is in keeping with the Indian tradition and the practice of other Indian writers. “The most recurrent technique in Indo-Anglian Fiction”, says Meenakshi Mukherjee, “has been that of the first person narrative.”⁶

Manoj Das has adopted the method of first-person narration in quite a number of stories: “Mystery of the Missing Cap”, “Farewell to a Ghost”, “The Submerged Valley”, “Bhola-grandpa and the Tiger”, “The Murderer”, “The General”, “Trespassers”, “A Letter from the Last Spring”, “The Crocodile’s Lady”, “Sita’s Marriage”, “Encounters”, “Man who Lifted the Mountain”, “The Concubine”, “The Stupid Servant”, “Old Folks of the Northern Valley”, “The Last I heard of Them”, etc.

Some of these stories are narrated by children or grown ups remembering their childhood and a few others are narrated by elderly persons. Much of the charm in stories like “Mystery of the Missing Cap”, “Farewell to a Ghost”, “The Submerged Valley” and “Bhola-grandpa and the Tiger” depends upon the child’s point of view and the manner of narration.

Because of this, there results a ‘never to be found’ simplification and clarity. The child narrates like a man on the spot who has witnessed everything, thus giving a first-hand rendering or testimony to facts.

The child-narrator is not a main character but a minor one who tells the story. It is partly his story as well as the story of others. He is involved and has his reactions and observations. Our response and appreciation of the story is moulded and modified by his feeling and attitude towards the action. As such, he is the "centre of consciousness" for everything is seen and reported from his angle of vision.

In "Mystery of the Missing Cap" we have a first person narrator in the child. The child occupies a key place in the story. He knows the truth about the missing cap which, on Moharana's request he keeps it a secret. He co-ordinates and acts as a confidant to Moharana.

The narrative here is not rambling. The 'I' is kept to the minimum and everything is presented as objectively as possible.

Similar is the case with "Farewell to a Ghost." The narrator is also involved, has his reaction and observation on the situation. He evokes our sense of pathos and sympathy for the ghost. His feeling for the ghost is quite sincere and endearing.

But while "Mystery of the Missing Cap" focuses our attention on a close-up scene, "Farewell to a Ghost" is panoramic like "The Crocodile's Lady". It traces the history of the ghost from Feringhee days to her dwelling in the villa and finally to the palm-tree where she was forced to lodge.

Both "Bhola-grandpa and the Tiger" and "The Submerged Valley" are retrospective in technique. In "Bhola-grandpa and the Tiger", the child recalls a scene from his childhood and recounts the story of Bhola-grandpa. Or he is just a catalyst who joins and presents kaleidoscopically the sundry pieces of Bhola-grandpa's life.

The narrator here fulfills two requirements : (1) The narrative is warm and authentic because Bhola-grandpa as a servant belonged to his family; hence there is a note of affection and touch of intimacy in his tone, (2) all the episodes which are

apparently a series of disjointed objective scenes, are held together. Minus the inter-weaving thread-like presence of the narrator, the whole story crumbles to pieces. The narrator lends unity and coherences to the narrative. Otherwise the method is scenic because hardly anything is narrated; rather everything is shown.

"The real art of fiction", says Percy Lubbock "does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be shown, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself."⁸

In "The Submerged Valley", the narrator after a gap of time, reconstructs the picture of his village in mind. Here "the point of view" is the first person narrator's. The child's overall impression of the situation,, his sympathy for the villagers, humour on funny occasions, admiration for father, and appreciation of mother and his curiosity for Abolkara...are all presented objectively. The pictorial method merges with the scenic method. Because the reader visualises the whole situation for himself.

In "Crocodile's Lady", the first-person observer is a formal device. Otherwise the prevailing method is like that of a third-person focus or observer-author. The narrator is not the interpreter or refractor of meaning as the child in "Mystery of the Missing Cap".

He is just a translator, a reporter and a relaying machine. The method is reportorial and once again dramatic. The 'I' here is almost non-existent. Although the narrator is a participant in the action, he is not at the centre but at the periphery. Such a device or focus of narration is fully justified in unfolding the tale of "The Crocodile's Lady".

Such a variation of the first-person narration is followed with success in "Encounters", "Sita's Marriage", "Man who Lifted the Mountain", etc.

"Trespassers", "A Letter from the Last Spring", "The Concubine", "The General", and "The Murderer" (to some

extent in a lesser degree) are examples of the first-person narrator. Because the narrator in these stories is involved and has a feeling of sympathy and understanding for those he describes.

In "Man Who Lifted the Mountain", the real narrator of story is the mountain itself. The narrator says, "I felt as though a voice inaudible to physical ears which was narrating the story was now slowly fading within the Luvurva" (p.151)

In the manner of the voice of God in *The Book of Job*, the voice of the mountain is that of a "disguised narrator".⁹ This is also an example of 'Narrator within narrator'. Such labyrinthine or intricate method of a story within a story, a narrator and an observer within an observer (the Santhal in "Bola-grandpa and the Tiger") is a common device employed by Manoj Das. Using this device in stories like "The Crocodile's Lady", "Farewell to a Ghost", "Man Who Lifted the Mountain", etc., he allows the 'I' self-expressions but confines it within the framework of an outer third-person narrative.

The first-person narration is used to advantage by Manoj Das. It is not simply a convention nor is there the 'terrible fluidity of self-revelation' but the revelation of character and situation. The 'I' is kept to the minimum and is a taut and depersonalised expression. On the other hand, there is warmth, naturalness, freshness and immediacy in the narrative. The narrator here is a "reliable" narrator for not only what he says rings authentic but also he "speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work" (which is to say the implied author's norms)...¹⁰

A question may arise as to why the child is chosen as the narrator. Several reasons may account for this. Manoj Das's love for children may be one of the reasons. Everybody must be curious to know how a child views things. The grown-up child remembering his childhood is a built-in-device of dramatising things.

When the grown-up child comments on the events that are distanced by time and filtered through memory, there is an ironic distance or detachment. He brings in the element of humour and satire into the narrative, as a result of which it is dramatised.

Thus he is involved and detached simultaneously. There is emotional involvement because the locale and setting are his but temporally and physically he is distanced from the action. This is as good as Henry James's "indirect and oblique view"¹¹ which while retaining the warmth and immediacy aims at concentration, subtlety, economy and intensity.

Manoj Das has been able to project the sense of wonder, make-believe, and looking at things with an aura of awe and surprise through the child's unsophisticated inquisitive eyes. The essential simplicity and directness of the child have crystallised the commonplace episodes into living lore or biblical type of stories.

Observer-author point of view :

"He who rode the Tiger" is a brilliant example of the scenic method because the scenes here move in quick and rapid succession and are presented most vividly and dramatically.

"The Night the Tiger came," also follows the same method. These stories not only contain the self-contained objective scenes but also the dialogue is handled most effectively to create the sense of drama.

In "The Sage of Tarungiri and Seven Old Seekers", we have "the third-person limited point of view" and the method is objective and reportorial.

Omniscient-author point of view :

The omniscient point of view is adopted in a large number of stories like "The Kite", "A Song for Sunday", "The Time for a Style", "Birds in the Twilight", "A Night in the life of the Mayor", "The Old man and the Camel", "Creatures of

Conscience", "The Sensitive Plant", "The Dusky Hour", "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night", "The Vengeance", "Friends and Strangers", "The Owl", "The Love Letter", "Prithviraj's Horse", "Operation Bride", "The Turtle from the Sky", etc.

In "Sharma and the wonderful Lump", we have the third person focus of narration. In Sharma's consciousness, there is the Jamesian "large lucid reflector"¹². It is an instance of the 'oblique method' with a 'dramatised consciousness'.

"The Princess and the Story-teller" is one of the finest stories of Manoj Das. The story begins as a third-person narration but as it unfolds gradually and grows more and more absorbing, it slides into a first-person mode. Manoj Das retells the old story with a new point of view, where he opens our eyes to see a story within a story. This is a story about telling stories with its wheels within wheels' structure. Manoj Das is a great 'fabulator' and a master in the art of 'metafiction'.

The omniscient method is used with certain variations in some stories. Though "The Tree", "The Kite", "A Trip into the Jungle", "A Tale of the Northern Valley" and "The Bull of Babulpur" are narrated from the omniscient point of view, they slant towards the scenic and observer-author method.

One might feel that "Statue-breakers are Coming" could have been rendered in a rigidly dramatic framework but the probe into Guptaji's mind won't be there which is only feasible by an intrusive omniscient or analytic author. Thus Manoj Das manages his material well exploiting the relative potentialities of the topic.

He has imbibed this omniscient method of narration from the ancient Indian tale. As Dr. C. V. Venugopal observes that "the ancient Indian tale follows normally a single method of narration—the omniscient-author technique,..."¹³

Manoj Das never states anything straight but tangentially. He never confines himself to a single mode. He pleasingly shuffles across and adopts the variations according to the

exigency of the subject. In the ultimate analysis, it is the 'point of view' that determines the tenor and treatment of each story.

Since drama is the essence of fiction or the highest point a fiction writer aspires for, the sole aim of Manoj Das has been to 'dramatise' and he achieves dramatisation severally in his narrative.

Manoj Das has been mastered the art of picture-making by using the dramatic method.

Apart from that, Manoj Das does not simply recount his tale, rather he presents and shows them. Probably he knows that "an episode shown is more effective than the same episode told..." or¹⁶ "dramatic telling" is "the only kind of story telling."¹⁷

The following passage from "Encounters" is an instance in point :

"Some of the customers were used to occupying a few scattered stools on the veranda despite the chilling gusts. They were the ones in a hurry excepting the dark and pock-marked man in bright livery who leaned against the wall and seemed to relish every drop of his tea. If he did not come, it was because the imported car he had parked before the cafe was too precious to be left out of his sight." (p. 78)

An impressionistic passage like this is a proof of his visual imaginings.

So he does not state an action; he renders it in terms of scene, situation and character. The description of Bholagrandpa's encounter with the tiger in the Sundarbans, the exorcising ritual conducted by the necromancer pointing a bone in "Farewell to a Ghost", General Valla struggling to laugh on the stage in the role of a commander, the palanquin carrying the dead body of the youngman and the retinue of the old zamindar following in "The Owl", Bisu Jena falling into one of his trances and becoming the voice of Tree-god and the villagers dancing and chanting 'Haribol' in ecstasy, Kunja flying over waves

pursued by the police and the climactic confrontation scene between the minister and Moharana in "Mystery of the Missing Cap"...is rendered dramatically. The scenes are conspicuous for their vividness and sharp picturesqueness.

Manoj Das's stories exhibit a delicate balance between the dramatic and narrative and the summary and the scene. "He who rode the Tiger", "A Trip into the Jungle", "The Bull of Babulpur" and "The Night the Tiger came" are triumphs of scene whereas "The Time for a Style", "Tragedy", "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night", "The Crocodile's Lady" and "Farewell to a Ghost" are triumphs of summary. His summary is not a bald documentation of facts; it is instinct with the drama of feeling and emotion.

Sense of form :

Henry James says, "Form is (not) substance to that degree that there is absolutely no substance without it. Form alone takes and holds and preserves substance."¹⁶

"The best form is that which makes the most of its subject..."¹⁷ says Percy Lubbock. Brooks and Warren remark, "Form is not to be thought of merely as a sort of container for the story; it is rather the total principle of organization and affects every aspect of the composition."¹⁸

Manoj Das's stories are based on well-defined plots. They are espoused to a single design and an unmistakable unity of impression. All the great wealth of material has been used for the purpose of realising the theme. In stories like "The Kite" "The Time for a Style", "A Song for Sunday", "Mystery of the Missing Cap", "The General", "Encounters", "The Sensitive Plant", "The Bull of Babulpur", and "He who rode the Tiger"... the idea of the story and the meaning behind the idea are best displayed because the entire narrative has been, so to speak, "jelled into one discrete mold, a shape, a design."¹⁹

These stories possess a sense of solidity; shapeliness and finish. The dialogue, description, plot and narration are fused

together to unfold the story. In other words, there is assimilation of form into meaning. The stories have a centre or a kind of focus, as Tolstoy says, "where all rays meet or from which they issue."²⁰

Even though some stories are episodic or elaborate in nature, they are not discursive for they are linked with the main thread of the story. There is no confusion or blurring of vision.

Besides, one notices the "Organic description"²¹ in his stories. His description of nature, description of character and description of setting are not separated from the body of the story; they go hand in hand to further the movement of the story. As such, there is 'the single vision'.

The most striking feature of Manoj Das's stories is that the reader is never aware of a dull moment while going through them; hardly he feels that he is swimming in 'a sea of tasteless puddings'. As Henry James says, "There is nothing so deplorable as a work of art with a leak in its interest;... Form is the absolute citadel and tabernacle of interest."²²

And Manoj Das' stories never betray a leakage of interest. Through suspense and surprise and a gripping lucid narration, he whets the curiosity and sustains the interest.

Pattern and Rhythm :

Manoj Das's stories exhibit some kind of pattern, if 'the idea of pattern implies a repetition.' in terms of plot, the actual incident is not repeated but a variety of incidents in sequence "recalls us directly or indirectly to the central conflict"²³ or question: it points to the motivation and development of character within the story. In "Bhola-grandpa and the Tiger", all the three episodes unfold the character of Bhola-grandpa and it is a story of forgetfulness in its extreme.

In "The Crocodile's Lady", the episode of Languly Babs, the villagers' talk about the ghost, and finally the story told by the lady herself—point to the village-folk's make-believe and their capacity for fantasy-building.

In "Farewell to a Ghost", the deserted villa threatened to be demolished, the Feringhee episode, her accomplice killing her, and finally the farewell to the ghost-girl...point to her pity and suffering and the villagers' love and sympathy for the girl.

Thus in "The Crocodile's Lady", "Farewell to a Ghost" and "Creatures of Conscience" and many other stories too, we notice a choric effect and a semblance of pattern.

Rhythm, though ordinarily refers to 'the rise and fall' in the movement of a fiction or story, technically speaking, It is the 'ebb and flow of feeling' 'lovely waxing and waning to fill us with surprise and freshness and hope' and "the interdependent sequences of crisis and resolution which contribute to the 'rhythm' of the whole work."²⁴

E.M.Forster compares it to Music or Symphocg. He says, "Expansion. That is the idea the novelist must cling to. Not completion. Not rounding off but opening out."²⁵

Thus the movement of a story may be leisurely or racy according to the tempo and pressure of the same. In "He Who rode the Tiger", "The Kite", "A Trip into the Jungle", "The Night the Tiger came," and "A Song for Sunday"...the movement is racy and rapid whereas the movement of "A Tale of the Northern Valley", "The Crocodile's Lady", "A Farewell to a Ghost", "Evening at Nijanpur", "The Submerged Valley", "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night"...is lucid and leisurely. In fact, the rythm of these stories helps a lot to pick up the feel and meaning of the story.

As we finish reading stories like "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night", "He who rode the Tiger", "A Trip into the Jungle", "The Kite", "Birds in the Twilight", etc...."great chords begin to sound behind us."²⁶

The Basic Framework:

Every Indian short story writer in English adopts the form of the ancient tale, The folk tale is a strong cultural force in any

civilization, more so in a country like ours which has a cultural past covering thousands of years. Every child here is practically nourished on them; consequently every Indian imbibes consciously or unconsciously the form of the folk-tales so much so that its simplicity, vigour, clearcut characterisation, and the style of narration are almost in his blood and our leading writers are no exception to it.

Both the fables and the popular tale cycles are highly developed in *The Panchantra* and the *Kathasarit sagara*.

The plot of a typical *Panchatantra* story has the basic requirement of a well-told...story, an effective beginning, an interesting middle and a perfect logical conclusion. Its style is smooth, diction simple and narration straightforward. The stories are spiced with witty statements. And Manoj Das's stories contain all these features in a large measure.

The allegory in a fable as well as the representation of animals behaving as human beings provided an excellent medium for social satire : Raja Rao's "Kanakapala" Anand's "Five Short Fables", Narayan's "At the Portal", Manjeri Iswaran's "Illumination" and Manoj Das's three "Panchatantra" stories included in *Fables and Fantasy for Adults*—are glaring examples.

The Indian writer's tendency to fill in his stories with continuous action and episodes as evident in Anand's "Barber's Trade Union" Narayan's "The Roman Image", Manoj Das's "The Crocodile's Lady" or "Farewell to a Ghost" owe to the *Kathasaritsagara*.

Element of Tradition :

Manoj Das must be placed in the *milieu* and viewed in the proper perspective. Not only the manner of his story-telling is traditional but also the form he adopts in his stories is traditional. His stories are modeled on the basic framework of *The Panchatantra* and the *Kathasaritsagara*. If the allegorical and satirical mode of his fables and fantasies are traced back to *The Panchatantra*, the element of supernatural, fantasy, fairy

tale, suspense, emboxing of stories and human aspiration and desire, belong to the hoary tradition of the *Kathasaritsagara*. His narrative tales even owe to the manner and style of classical tales in Sanskrit found in the Vedas.

Manoj Das is a queer blend of classicist and romanticist. His imagination is essentially a folk-tale imagination. The folk-tale served him most with the element of its credulity and myth-making power.

Manoj Das gleefully acknowledges the four major influences on him :

"The heritage of Indian fiction—the great yarn-spinners of yore like Vishnu Sharma and Somadeva constitute the influence of which I am censcious...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,"²⁷

Thus Manoj Das is thoroughly embedded in tradition. He is a glorious preduct as well as a part of that great unbroken continuum called Indian Literature whose vast expanse and pervasive nature have been stressed by both Winternitz and Krishna Kripalani.

"Like Indian culture of which it is more or less a faithfully expression, Indian literature, a composite growth... reflecting the impact of different ages, races, religions and influences and maintaining simultaneously sometimes in harmony and sometimes in disharmony different levels of cultural consciousness and intellectual development."²⁸

To this very ancient lineage, Manoj Das belongs. When viewed from this perspective, it will be revealed that his stories lend a remarkable feature, rather a unique character to Indian literature. His stories, not only reflect a genuine autochthonous image of India but also voice its inner spirit and soul.

Manoj Das is an ardent admirer of T. S. Elliot's theory of 'Tradition and Individual Talent.' In fact, the meeting point of

the two elements is as subtle as the meeting point on the horizon of the ocean's blue with the sky's. He says,

"When an Indian writer is naturally Indian, his Indianness is hardly pronounced but what becomes grotesquely pronounced is when an Indian writer makes a conscious effort to highlight his Indianness or does the opposite... tries to consciously cultivate a stance, that should appear dazzlingly different from the traditional writing."²⁰

Thus while drawing sustenance from the tradition, he resuscitates and dynamises it. The fables and fantasies are charmingly retold with fresh insight into contemporary human situation.

He is original in conception and invention; language and theme, subtlety and humour. He has blended the old art of storytelling with modern ideas and techniques.

He has evolved a new method of his own combining the salient features of ancient Indian tale and the social and individual consciousness seen in the stories from abroad.

In his realistic comical stories, he is like R. K. Narayan with his journalistic background, keen observation and lively sense of humour and like Fakir Mohan Senapati (the Father of Modern Oriya Fiction) with his satire and social consciousness.

In his serious realistic stories, he is like his western counterparts. He is in the line of Maupassant with his sense of pict, living details and clear picture. But he is more of Anton Chekov in heart and spirit as a compassionate suffering observer. At home, he is more with Mulk Raj Anand and Manjeri Iswaran.

The stories like, "The Time for a Style", "A Song for Sunday", "Trespassers" and "The Submerged Valley" are seen in the light of human loss and tragedy.

Similarly, "A Letter from the Last Spring", "Anatomy of Tragedy", "Lakshmi's Adventure", "Sita's Marriage", and

"The Kite" are stories of rare sensitivity and tenderness. They contain Kanta Kabi's (Lakshmikanta Mohapatra) pathos and Tagore's tragic awareness and above all, a Christ-like all-embracing humanism.

The stories of Manoj Das have a ring of universality. They concern any human being at any place and any time. As such, the pictures are more generic than specific.

Element of Modernity :

Though Manoj Das is traditional in form, method and projection of India's image, he is modern in ideas and sensibility. His is a synthetic digest of traditional technique and modern sensibility.

He is modern in the sense of his analysis of human psyche and psychic reality. The existential dilemma is one of the major themes of modern times. And Manoj Das presents powerfully the predicament of man in the universe.

He is modern in the sense that he has not only used the technique of point of view in a variety of ways but also he has used the Flash-back technique ("The Kite"), Stream of Consciousness ("The Night the Tiger came"), Naturalistic technique ("A Trip into the Jungle"), mixture of Stream of Consciousness and Surrealism ("The Bridge in the Moonlit Night"), and Surrealism ("Friends and Strangers") quite successfully. This shows his intrepid originality and Ingenuity.

Apart from these, his stories are buttressed by several tricks and devices almost similar to O' Henry's twist, Saki's surprise and humour, Saroyan's or Thurber's comic perception, Maupassant's straightforwardness, Chekhov's suggestiveness and hovering sense of mystery and Katherine Mansfield's poetic grace and luminous precision.

But Manoj Dash is Manoj Das unlike anybody else, unique and inimitable in every way. He is remarkable for his note of subtlety and delicacy, gaiety and gravity, mystery and humanism. He is original and authentic, strikingly fresh and novel

in his conception of plot, humour, fantasy, style of narration and orchestration of language and imagery. His world and people are intensely vivid, deep and absorbing and inexhaustibly stirring. Evidently, there is an unmistakable Manoj Dasian stamp or quality in his stories.

Some Other Features :

(a) One of the Major sources of the charm of Manoj Das's stories accrue from humour. But humour is a technique with Manoj Das. It not only gives a peculiar piquancy to the language but also moulds his style into an effective medium.

(b) Fantasy does not simply provide amplitude to his story but acts as 'objective correlative' and allegorical framework to it.

(c) In Manoj Das, we not only come across the prodigality of invention but a panoramic mythopoeic imagination. He refers to known and established myths like Ramachandra and Sita very rarely. But he mythicises common facts and mythologises social reality; thus intensifying a simple situation, he gains an extension in vision and creates 'Sthalapurana' in the manner of Raja Rao.

(d) Manoj Das has the typical knack of creating an unusual situation which is a fine expose of the human ego. His characters are stranded in certain awkward irretrievable situation or circumstances where not only their helplessness is brought out but also their hypocrisy and emptiness is brought to the fore. For example, the Mayor of Madhuvan was stranded naked in the river and earned his adulthood, Moharana felt nonplussed and stammered before the minister when the latter demanded to know whether the monkey was the same gentleman or not and Sharma wept when he was kidnapped and threatened to death.

(e) Manoj Das is an able craftsman. His plots are neatly constructed, no jumbling or blurring of focus. All essentials of characters and situation are distilled and assimilated into them. Any story of his, even the slenderest like "Encounters" and

"Friends and Strangers" carries a sense of finish and completeness. Events run full circle and stories have traditional beginning, middle and end structure. But there are certain variations like the flashback or back-tracking method employed in certain stories like "The Kite" or "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night".

(f) Beginnings :

In the opinion of Anthony Trollope, "Once upon a time" with slight modification is the best way of telling a story.³⁰ Manoj Das's stories have almost 'Once upon a time' beginning interspersed with suspense and surprise ending. His beginnings are direct and straightforward without any prelude or circumlocution. They are appetising and intrigue us to proceed on. They are just teaser that promises further delights within.

He does not give all the information or let his cards all at once but unfolds one by one. While reading a Manoj Das's story, none can smell what is going to happen or how the story is going to end.

Usually he opens his story with the description of a setting or background in a leisurely manner. But in certain stories, he takes us straight into the heart of the story. "The Kite" begins with the word, "Halt". It is dramatic. We are suddenly pricked with something and the prick continues till the end.

(g) Endings :

As in a horse race, so also in a story it is the finish that counts most. The endings of Manoj Das's stories leave a profound influence on the reader's mind. It is mostly fraught with surprise or anti-climax ("The Bull of Babulpur" "The Return of the Native", "Mystery of the Missing Cap", etc.)

Some of his stories end with an uncanny twist : "The Murderer" "Vengeance" "Prithviraj's Horse" etc. But the majority of his stories are laden with a hovering sense of mystery, something inexplicable and a kind of milk-white translucence shrouds his endings : "The Bridge in the Moonlit

Night" "The Kite" "Friends and Strangers" "Sita's Marriage" "The Dusky Hour" etc. His endings are not arbitrary but drawn to a natural and logical conclusion. "A Song for Sunday" "The Last I heard of Them" are cases in point.

But most of his finest stories end quietly with a delicate touch of pathos. In "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night" "The Time for a Style" "A Letter from the Last Spring" "Lakshmi's Adventure" "The Anatomy of Tragedy" "Trespassers" "A Tale of the Northern Valley" and "Creatures of Conscience" we are aware of the cadence of an echo dying gently.

Apart from an added sense of mystery the overall feel of Manoj Das's stories is the lulling placidity and brooding serenity of a lake. Even in stories like "He who rode the Tiger" "The Dusky Hour" or "Creatures of Conscience" where there is comedy and laughter, quite subterannean runs the note of pathos and solemnity.

(h) Characterisation :

Richard Summers says, "Stories are memorable by their portrayal of character long after plot, theme, suspense and the rest are forgotten..."³¹

Manoj Das's portrait gallery presents a pageant of unforgettable human beings. He does not give hints or snap-shots but a full-drawn portrait of his characters. His characters are highly interesting. They surprise us and have a roundness about them. Manoj Das particularises each character with such subtle strokes and authenticity that they appear at once living and credible. Bholi-grandpa, General Valla, Jameswar Gupta, Mr. Boral, Aunty Roopwati, Miss Moberly, Sati Dei, David Caxton, Lakshmi, Rina ...are sheer triumph of characterisation.

(i) Setting and Atmosphere :

When it comes to the description of setting and evocation of atmosphere, Manoj Das is at his best. He builds the scene and situation with concrete details and phenomenal particularity.

into another thoughts. This was and still is the ordinary style of narration."³⁶ It is this direct method of clear narration that has found favour with the Indian writers.

Mrs. Barbauld points out that "the narrative or epic" method is "the most common way" and it will not be lively if the author "frequently drops himself and runs into dialogues."³⁷ And Manoj Das has imbibed this common narrative or epic method where the 'dramatic has been thrust into the narrative.'

There is no monotony; his narration plays several notes : ironic, tragic, amusing, satirical, pathetic or farcical.

Although his narration is traditional, it is enriched by several touches and twists; animated with interesting anecdotes, witty dialogues and humour. It is made interesting by his knowledge of the scriptures, epic, history, folk-tales, etc.

(i) Tale within tale :

Manoj Das retains the habit of introducing a tale within a tale.

"The digressional Method," Meenakshi Mukherjee observes, "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."³⁸

This supple pleasant digressional manner of unfolding is found in a great number of stories like "The Crocodile's Lady", "Farewell to a Ghost", "The Princess and the Storyteller", "Man who lifted the Mountain", "The Murderer", "The Vengeance" etc.

But the stories within the story never diffuse or detract from the main point. They are secondary threads running into or in the direction of the main thread. The concatenation of events or episodes is choric in effect and tenable in terms of Locke's 'theory of association of ideas'. As such, they build up and

contribute to the total effect. Anything that helps the main plot has a logic of its existence.

(m) Invention :

When it comes to improvisation and invention, Manoj Das is a genius. The reader hardly senses where he leads. His narrative meanders like a jolly stream at its own sweet will. Take, for instance, "Farewell to a Ghost", "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night", "The Crocodile's Lady", "The Princess and the Story-teller" or even "Sharma and the Wonderful Lump". Here the reader moves through many a turn and twist, corridor and antechamber of incidents and episodes before he reaches the heart or the Sanctum-Sanctorium of his story.

In him, we are aware of a prodigious and panoramic mind. He is anecdotal, episodic and comprehensive like Dostoevsky; hence more a seer than a sage. His talent is essentially lyrical. He is more an intuitive or instinctive storyteller than an intellectual one; guided more by the logic of imagination and inspiration than by any interior dialectics. He is a hardie writer as Melville or Lawrence is.

(n) Element of Suspense and Surprise :

Every short story must contain the element of suspense and suspense is the essence of Manoj Das's stories. The strength of his stories lies in an elementary manipulation of curiosity.

General Valla getting stiff while trying to laugh and finally exploding with the loudest laugh, the 'Operation bride' while advancing towards the prince with a garland in her hand stopping pale and petrified and then resuming functioning and Kunja defying the whole world and embracing the sea—are situations that throw wet blanket on our notion of cold logic.

Manoj Das achieves suspense without being abstruse. He provides ample clues to trace his suspense. Suspense does not occur by accident. It is structurally necessitated and ingrained in the story itself.

With Manoj Das, surprise is not an abrupt development as the thick-ending of O' Henry. It is natural and foreshadowed. Manoj Das prepares the reader for it by some early hints.

The craft of Manoj Das is also evident from his nomenclature. Richard Summers says that the names given to the actors in a story "are far more important than the average young writers realize."⁹

He has given a good deal of attention to the names of his characters. Names like Vikat, Sankat and Kambugriva are Sanskritised words; they are serious and solemn in their association. Mr. Sharma and Tantrik Purandar Sharma are Indian names. Maku Mishra, Dalabehura, Shrikant Das, Nirakar Das, Damodar Lenka, Moharana and Babu Virkishore are distinctly Oriya names. Baldbreast, Mrs. Younghusband, Miss Pinquee, Miss Moberly or Mr. Spider are Jocular foreign names. Thus Manoj Das slowly but stlyly breaks down the connotation of a person's name either for a comic, humorous or an ironic effect.

(o) Sense of restraint and artistic touch :

The rape scene in "Samudrara Kshyudha" ("The Hungry Sea") could have become crude and sensational in the hand of a lesser artist. Similarly the episode of Miss Pinquee appearing naked on the balcony of Evening Star in "A Tale of the Northern Valley" could have become crude and vulgar but for a fine sense of restraint and artistic touch exhibited by Manoj Das.

(p) Fusion of technique and vision :

The fusion of technique and vision is one of the major achievements of Manoj Das.

The story, "Farewell to a Ghost" is an illustration of the point : A deserted villa was the haunt of a maiden's spirit. When it was proposed to be demolished, the villagers who loved the spirit as one of their unfortunate darling daughters, commissioned an exorcist to lead her to a new dwelling place. But the pangs of separation brought tears to their eyes. Such is the description of the scene that one cannot but be moved even if one does not believe in ghosts.

The masterly handling of the art lies here : the sceptic is never offended because the ghost is seen nowhere but its presence is felt everywhere.

The mingling of the natural with the supernatural (or the human with the subhuman) is differently handled in "The Crocodile's Lady". It is a fantasy that is invested with credibility. The cynosure of the story is the woman herself, now extremely old, living an enchanted life under the spell of her belief with so much sincerity that it made Prof. Batstone, the sociologist from the city of skyscrapers, suspend his disbelief.

A unique assimilation is achieved between satire and sympathy in "Mystery of the Missing Cap". The missing of the minister's cap led to a crisis. The monkey who took away the cap, had all the justification for its conduct. But the narrator says that it was "this episode of the cap that changed the course of their lives."

Both the characters (Moharana and Babu Virkishore) were good natured and naive, so they could not cope with the demand of new politics.

Manoj Das can be severe if the vision demands it. "The last I heard of Them" is the story of seven old men now out for a "Short cut to God". With the help of magic water, these people saw the dancing couples in nude and, at the same time they were exposed later to the grinning skeletons that ran about them to capture them.

He can come down to a sober plane as seen in "The Concubine". The youth who wanted to humiliate a lady as a concubine, were completely disarmed by the love and affection of the same.

The same fusion takes place in "So Many Smiles", "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night", or "Prithviraj's Horse". There are certain stories whose settings are purely imaginary and whimsical, as in "A Tale of the Northern Valley" or "Old Folks of the

Northern Valley". These tales are fantastic in conception, yet one feels that the facts or characters are real in some corner or plane of this strange creation. It is again this fusion of technique and vision that creates credibility.

The fictional craft of Manoj Das is something very old and basic...the setting down of truth as he sees and feels it and the finer accommodation of Method and means to that vision within. It can be better understood in the light of what H. E. Bates said of Maupassant :

"It has nothing to do with the technique except in so far as technique is another word for control. It arises perhaps from something very old and simple of achievement; the setting down of truth as you see it and feel it without tricks or sham or fake,....."⁴⁰

For Manoj Das, "Truth is the path and Truth, the sentinel."⁴¹

Notes

1. Quoted David Lodge, *Language of Fiction* (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 4.
2. Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 74.
3. Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (New Delhi : B. R. Publications, 1983), p. 251.
4. Quoted Mukherjee, p. 37.
5. Brooks & Warren, p. 684.
6. Mukherjee, p. 31.
7. Henry James quoted Allott, p. 194.
8. Lubbock, p. 82.
9. Booth, p. 152.
10. Booth, p. 158.
11. Allott, p. 191.
12. Quoted Mukherjee, p. 31.
13. Venugopal, p. 109.
14. Booth, p. 28.
15. Kibold Knight quoted Booth, p. 26.

16. Quoted Liddell, p. 102.
17. Lubbock, p. 40.
18. Brooks and Warren, p. 684.
19. Hale, p. 138.
20. Quoted Allott, p. 235.
21. Summers, p. 99.
22. Quoted Liddell, p. 103.
23. Brooks & Warren, p. 655.
24. Allott, p. 166.
25. Forster, p. 149.
26. Forster, p. 150.
27. Quoted P. Raja, "Manoj Das : A Significant Storyteller," *The Times of India*, (18 May, 1987), p. 13.
28. Krishna Kripalani, *Modern Indian Literature : a panoramic glimpse* (Bombay : Nirmala Sadananda Publishers, 1986), p. 12.
29. Quoted P. Raja, "Indian Sensibility and the Fiction of Manoj Das" *Indian English Writting*, (1987), pp. 133-184.
30. Quoted Allott, p. 260.
31. Summers, p. 42.
32. Quoted Lodge, p. 43.
33. Quoted Liddell, p. 72.
34. Lodge, p. 47.
35. Hale, p. 165.
36. Quoted Mukherjee, p. 31.
37. Quoted Allott, p. 258.
38. Mukherjee, p. 138.
39. Summers, p. 101.
40. Quoted Venugopal, p. 19.
41. This is the English version of Menoj Das's Statement published in *Prajatantra Saptahiki*, (April 12, 1987), p. 8.

Style

'Style' generally pertains to the language aspect for "the distinguishing mark of style is language"¹ or more specifically to the diction, tone and imagery in writing.

Mark Schorer says that the 'resources of language' should be thought of as part of the technique of fiction... "language as used to create certain texture and tone which in themselves state and define theme and meanings..."²

Prof. Srinivasa Iyengar points out that the poet or the novelist... all need the instrument of language and "style is the consummateness of their mastery of this instrument..."³ Not the instrument of language but the manner in which the writer or speaker has induced the motion constitutes the style. But it is largely determined "by the temperament, the resourcefulness, the whole personality, of the man."⁴

But B. Rajan writing of Milton's style says,

"Style whatever else it is, is not the man but the poem... the language of *Paradise Lost* works in conjunction with its structure and it is the union of the two which ought to be discussing..."⁵

J. Middleton Murry discriminates between style as "personal idiosyncrasy": style as "technique of exposition" and style as "the highest achievement of literature."⁶

"Style is not separable from Meaning, if by Meaning we understand the total Meaning... which Mr. I. A. Richards has analysed into four parts : Sense, Feeling, Tone and Intention..."⁷

M. Riffaterre while discussing 'Scientific Stylistics' says,

"Style is the means by which the writer, or in linguistic jargon 'encoder', ensures that his 'message' is 'decoded' in such a way that the reader not only

understands the information conveyed but shares the writer's attitude towards it."⁸

However style is the means by which a writer achieves certain effects in communication and it is "one of our main sources of insight into the author's norms..."

The fictional world of a novel or short story is a verbal world, determined at every point by the words in which it is represented. It is interesting to see how Manoj Das builds up this verbal world.

The task of an Indian writer who wants to communicate the nuances of Indian thought and evoke local colour using the English idiom or language is fairly complex and difficult. Commenting on the peculiar problem faced by an Indo-Anglian writer, Raja Rao says,

"One has to convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own...yet English is not really an alien language to us. We are all instinctively bi-lingual, many of us are writing in our own language and in English. We can't write like the English. We should not, we can write as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us."¹⁰

As Srinivasa Iyengar, the historian of Indo-Anglian writing has said, "What is written has to be recognisably Indian to the Indian reader and recognisably English to the English reader."¹¹

Harindranath Chattertopadhyaya, the veteran poet maintains,

"The language we learnt from English writers must find distinct expression in a style and manner reflecting our traditions. We must Indianise it, coin our own vocabulary in order to extract the Indian essence."¹²

Manoj Das is one of the few talented Indian writers who has handled and exploited English language quite successfully.

As a writer, Manoj Das has been compared to Hardy, Saki and O' Henry. This is quite misleading and unfair. He is like no

one but himself. Indeed it would be a serious defect if he wrote like an English man or an American. In that case he would have belied his sensibility and vision.

In an interview given to the magazine of Jawaharlal Institute of post-graduate Medical Education and Research Manoj Das said :

'Praising my short stories, Mr. Menon (K.P.S. Menon) commented, 'My old Magistrate used to say, (he was an English man) that an Indian writer in English appears like a man playing a piano not with his fingers but with sticks'. But nobody would say so about your writing in English.'¹³

One of the chief delights of Manoj Das's writing is that he has not been trained to write like Charles Lamb or George Eliot but writes "a spontaneous English quite free from imported literary idioms. And he writes as an Indian indeed with wholly Indian view of things from Indian background."¹⁴

Manoj Das is one of the very few successful bilingual writers in India. His creative gift finds expression not only in English but in Oriya the language of his homestate, Orissa. Sometimes a story will come to him in one language, sometimes in the other but "he does not translate either way, preferring to try a fresh treatment of a theme if the language is different."¹⁵

Clarifying his bilingual stand Manoj Das says that while formulating a story he thinks in "the language of silence"¹⁶ He allows the experience or inspiration to become a feeling in him a process that goes on in silence but when he sits down to write, he writes in Oriya if he promises a story to an Oriya publisher and in English if he promises the same to an English magazine. And most of his stories figure in both the languages.

Manoj Das is at perfect ease with the English language. Like Raja Rao, he tries to make the English Language 'yield to the Indian need'.

In this experimentation, he takes the maximum liberty with the idiom and syntax of the English language and conforms to

the exact laws and demands of grammar, while trying to evoke a particular mood or thought. He moulds the accepted diction and fashions it anew with a twist or configuration. It is essentially a personal experiment where he has forged an individual style and medium that best answers his need. In consequence, his is a type of English that expresses the shades of Indian thought and feeling, while remaining as chaste and polished as English for ever.

His writing is spontaneous, not stilted. One of the intriguing quality of his English writing is :

"the lack of clichés, the totally unexpected use of words and their collocation, arising perhaps from the exact and fresh description of his visual imaginings of Indian situation and agents,..."²⁷

For example, see how he describes the Sundarbans in "Bhola-grandpa and the Tiger", the villa in "Farewell to a Ghost" or the hut dwelt in by 'The Crocodile's Lady'.

Manoj Das does not transliterate Oriya or Indian expressions nor does he interpolate Oriya or Hindi words frequently, although he inserts a Sanskrit or a Hindi word here and there occasionally but effectively. He uses them whenever they are warranted. His language is chaste and flawless, highly charged and energised. There is no rigidity or hard and fast fixity of the formal standard English. It is the language of a highly sensitive artist. It has freshness, delicacy, beauty, and pliability to meet the Indian needs.

It is simple but profound like that of R.K. Narayan with a tinge of humour. Its charm lies in absolute readability and felicitousness. Just as the narration is direct and straightforward, so too the sense flows without any halt or hindrance. It is a product of the sensibility born out of the harmony of prose and poetry, 'the best words in the best order'. According to Swift, "The proper words in the proper place" make "the true definition of style."²⁸ Or as J. Warburg points out,

"The good use of a language, then consists in choosing the appropriate symbolisation of the experience you wish to convey from among all the possible words and arrangements of words."¹¹

Manoj Das's words are carefully weighed and measured to evoke a particular note or response.

His English has the same naturalness of a Raja Rao minus his Sanskrit and philosophical flavour. It has the same smoothness and artlessness of R.K. Narayan but with an added uncanny and poetic touch that results in an intensity of feeling and aura of revelation.

His language is generally lucid and charming. He has succeeded in imbibing the Indian imagery and rhythm. Although at times, he appears to be idiomatic, rhetorical, ornate, and adjective-ridden but at his best, his is a perfect and natural style where an assimilation of language into meaning is achieved.

Corroborating Buffon's celebrated remarks, "the style is the man"¹², David Lodge observes,

"Every writer displays his own unique 'signature' in the way he uses language...Modern linguists...ascribe to every individual speaker an 'idiolect' or way of using language which is unique."¹³

Manoj Das devises an 'idiolect' that serves his purpose. He selects the type of language, imagery, even form and atmosphere that answer best the nature and demand of his story.

Let us take for example, "So Many Smiles". Bapi's exposure to the idyllic world of Peacock Hill, his tryst with the Eve-like little girl of the hill and his meeting with other men and women who cheered him smilingly...are all described in a tender and mellifluous language.

Manoj Das is very choosy about his rhetoric. Just to evoke a particular effect, he would prefer 'woo' to 'love'.

In "The Dusky Hour", his language is predominantly idiomatic. The expressions like : "As smart and dashing as

Roopwati", "Jagdishji clad in spotless white and spoke a spotlessly grammatical prose", "the lamp is running out of the oil", "the city fathers raced for the mayoral chair"...indicate that Manoj Das has deployed the figurative use of language almost in the fashion of copy book style.

But there is no rigidity or stiffness about the phrases. They are suffused with meaning of association. Thus the rhetorical devices are commensurate with the element of irony, humour, and satire in the story.

The whole of "Prithviraj's Horse" is a brilliant display of his various stylistic devices. Here the texture of language is metaphoric and adumbrated to create humorous and satiric effect. The story is also written in a mock-epic vein. For example, "he tickled the dead past back to life.", "he felt scalded within and battered outside" "a monarch among stallions!"...are all idiomatic, alliterative and metaphoric.

Similes like "Mukund ran at a great speed feeling like a badminton cork hit by a gorilla's racket (p. 94)...are illuminating and point to his originality and power of visual imagination.

His reference to historical or puranic personages like Prithviraj, Sanjukta, Ghototococh or king George, the Fifth, only by way of contrast, reduces Mukund to a ridiculous non-entity.

The interview of Mukund with Pundit Purandar Sharma is a gem of Manoj Das's inventive mind and fictive genius.

In "Bhola-grandpa and the Tiger", the language is realistic and vivid. The words are juxtaposed in such an unusual and unexpected way that they turn extraordinarily humorous and dramatic: "He piloted the grandson through jostling throngs with two of his fingers held tightly in his grip", (pp. 12-13).

In "The Submerged Valley", the language is simple, natural, and vivid; in "Mystery of the Missing Cap," it is comical and realistic, in "The Crocodile's Lady" "Farewell to a Ghost", "The Tree", and "The Owl", it is endowed with an eerie uncanny touch to evoke the supernatural.

The language in "Lakshmi's Adventure", "A Letter from the Last Spring", "The Bridge in the Moonlit Night", "The Time for a Style", etc....is simple but profound and serene with the cadence of sorrow and pathos.

In *Fables and Fantasies for Adults*, his language, though generally satiric, is tilted towards poetry.

Thus the structure of his rhetoric or the texture of his language is shaped and moulded according to the tone and tenor of his story.

Manoj Das is a conscious and meticulous artist who weighs each word and uses it with a clear cut calculation.

He is a perfect craftsman who knows how to carve and chisel his language like a diamond designer who cuts it into its exact shape and size with artistic neatness and scientific precision. Thus his craft reminds one of filigree work i.e. the minute artistic designs or the needle works on silver for which Cuttack, the old city of Orissa is famous.

His language is a combined product of a crisp journalistic prose, an elegant artistic prose and the language of poetic fantasy.

In spite of the various experimentations and innovations, perspicacity and liveliness are the hallmarks of Manoj Das's style.

The following broad features characterize his linguistic or stylistic devices :

(1) His language is highly idiomatic and figurative :

"The intruder sprang upto the feet", "Shashikala croodled and then burst into a sonorous laughter", "At once the buzzing audience slumped into a reverential silence".

(2) His style is generally adjective-ridden :

"extra-stout Durwan", "duly grown up", "sparkling minK coat", "a cup of thickly boiled milk",

(3) Although his style is idiomatic, it is lively and pliant remarkably free of clichés.

(4) His language is pointed and polished :

(a) "Father is wonderful. Is not he?... "Fools how long you take to realise things that are obvious I..." ("The Submerged Valley"—p. 11)

(b) One should note also the syntax and structure of the following sentence : "I slapped Putu mildly and meaningfully in time to stop her bursting into a savage laugh," ("The Submerged Valley"—p. 8).

Here is humour, alliteration, euphony, and resonance.

(5) Manoj Das uses the language of feeling :

—"Tears of joy drizzled from mother's eyes,"

—"the villagers felt scandalised."

—"Mukund had a feeling that his arm was liquefying".

(6) His language is evocative :

—"I got my monkey up" ("The Stupid Servant" p. 79).

—"Sharma focused an owl's look on Mukund" (Prithviraj's Horse", p. 95).

—"The jungle from which our tiger came is ours. The tiger itself like all other beasts and yourselves is ours. The orchard is ours"(He who rode the Tiger", p. 112.)

The repetition of 'ours' in the last example not only builds up meaning but also is suggestive of ego and vanity,

Manoj Das's language is never "diaphanous where we hardly seem to notice the verbal surface"²². His language, on the contrary, forces us to pay attention to the surface of words.

(7) There is economy and concentration in his use of language :

When all but Abolkara returned by the boat, the narrator describes the scene, "It rained heavily, the launch swerved

violently. The lake looked fearful. Putu clung to Mother." ("The Submerged Valley," p. 9).

This is not only vivid and realistic but very brief and succinct. A scene of tension and anxiety is distilled into a few words. The cumulative power of language arises primarily from the order of sentences.

Stories like "Trespassers", "Encounters" and "A Tale of the Northern Valley" ... though shorter in length, are wonderful. Their brevity is the soul of their beauty.

(8) Manoj Das knows the precise language of suspense :

"The sun was about to set. Eager to reach the village soon, they (Dabu Sahukar and Binu) took the short-cut. Both entered the wood. But Binu alone came out" ("The Murderer", p. 4).

Thus with a simple but a deft stroke, he creates suspense.

(9) Manoj Das is quite striking and original in his coinage :

"a bearded jolly fellow", "god-given land", "two-keen eyed escorts", "a fullgrown Royal Bengal Tiger",

(10) Not only his words are peculiar and unusual but also unusual is their collocation :

"agents of horrendous set up", "despite my mailings so many clippings to you", "The Fabulous Aboo favours Baldbreast", etc.

(11) Some of his expressions are dramatic in nature and strike like a sudden revelation :

"But suddenly Bhola-grandpa gave out a loud wail"

(p. 12)

Or

"The grandson who had found a congenial shelter under a cow's belly and kept blinking at the alien crowd was rescued before long" (p. 13).

(12) He uses certain sentences which are cryptic and quibbling in meaning :

(a) "Catastrophe !" quipped Balabhadra Das"

Or

"Well, the matter was clinched" Balabhadra said..." ("The Owl", p. 39)

(13) Manoj Das adds comic piquancy to his words. His inclination to humourise on any and every occasion is evident everywhere.

Not only does he create humour out of the unusual collocation of words, comic or laughter-provoking names like Baldbreast, Miss Chi Chi or Mrs. Younghusband but also by the use of certain odd sounding words as nincompoop, goblin, funk, dunderhead, numbskull, brigand, nonpareil, imp, blockhead, etc,

(14) Hyperboles and exaggerations figure profusely in his writing :

- (a) "She gave us a full dozen of poignant anecdotes and at last over the third cup of tea, revealed the fact that Chinmoy Babu too was in love with her in their youth" ("The Dusky Hour", p. 67).
- (b) "He who had successfully steered clear of seven proposals for marriage, he who looked ten years younger than his age, he whose farewell meetings drew a hundred streams of tears..." ("Prithviraj's Horse", p. 94).

(15) There are plenty of numerical and quantitative epithets and expressions :

"under seven-palm-deep water" "two tons of sleep", "under the focus of a dozen dazzling lights" etc.

(16) Similarly we come across the use of superlatives :

"the newspapers would come out with their boldest and blackest banner headlines", "opened the topmost button of her gown", "the loudest laughter in recent military history", etc.

(17) Richard Summers says, "A strong style is composed essentially of good verbs and of substantives that form concrete images,..."²³ And Manoj Das makes use of substantives and verbs :

"Tigers apart, alligators frequently sneaked into the swamps" ("Bhola-grandpa and the Tiger", p. 14).

(18) Manoj Das takes the cue from a word, repeats it till it acquires new meaning. At times he puns and gives a twist to the meaning :

(a) "...a true commander ever acting a commander's role, ..." ("The General", p. 10).

(b) "My conscience would not excuse me if I make you lose your job. Be conscientious yourself David and bridle your passion" ("Creatures of Conscience", p. 16).

(19) His transliteration of typical Oriya saying is natural as well as effective :

(a) "They have developed bones in their tongue."
("They Tree", p. 20).

(b) "Here is yet another true son of his father I" ("He who rode the Tiger", p. 109).

Or

"Had any one in our fourteen past generations ever even smelled a tiger?" ("He who rode the Tiger", p. 111).

In these examples, no sense is lost but the sentences are as good as English. Besides Manoj Das has imbibed the rhythm and incantation of Oriya speech or conversation :

(a) "Who will ride the tiger ?
"the kotwal or the rotwal I"
"Who ? The Kotwal or the rotwal ?"
("He who rode the Tiger, p. 110).

(b) "All...all ..will go under water, Babu I" ("The Submerged Valley", p. 3.)

(21) Manoj Das inserts a Sanskrit or an Indianised word occasionally here and there : *Dharma*, *Mantra*, *Bhrigu Samhita*, *Baba*, *Guru*, *Sujalam*, *Suphalam* or *Bidi*, *Malika*, *Chapatis*, *Luddoos*, *Santhal*, *Kotwal*, *rotwal*, etc. These words are commonly understood and have a pan-Indian appeal. They contribute a great deal to the realistic representation of life in his stories.

(22) The most distinct feature of his language is its sound aspect. He manipulates sound for thematic as well as humorous effect. He has a fine sense of the music of words. His sensitiveness to the various sound devices like alliteration, the degree of euphony, consonance, and assonance accounts for intense lyricism. The reader is drawn to the verbal surfaces of the words or towards, what Hopkins calls, their 'inscape', e.g., "voices buzzed", "quizzical glances", "upsurge of tissues", and "a dozen dazzling lights".

Sentences like "The hurricane lantern was burning with the growl of a wounded panther", "its mantle growing pale at regular intervals" or "The river hissing like a thousand hooded cobra"...are euphonic in nature.

Many are the instances where we find both consonance and assonance; "the dogs romped and hopped", "give company to certain utterly butterfly princess", "He yelled, giggled, clapped his hands at regular intervals", etc.

But his usual tendency is to alliterate, just as he is inclined to humourise or add an uncanny twist to plot or words: "Fidgeting fingers", "bared his bleary eyes", "placing the plastic tray on her lap", "Oratorical operation", "mumbled out Miss Moberly", etc.

These alliterations and sound manoeuvres may seem somewhat deliberate contrivances but they are part of his style and mode of seeing things.

The question arises, why does he so often alliterate? The reason is that Manoj Das was a poet in his early writing and is a poet at heart even while writing fiction. These alliterative and metaphoric expressions are the manifestations of the unwritten or unuttered poetry in him.

(23) Some of his nature or background descriptions are vivid and poetic. They are the proof of his capacity for visual imagination:

(a) "The pine tops were sprayed with gold. The blue blood

sensitive moon of the Himalayas had just emerged from behind the peak. ("Creatures of Conscience", p. 87).

- (b) "Beautiful was the lake and green was the valley. But Kambugriva was ambitious." ("The Turtle from the sky" p. 71).

Or

"I will, O Mountain, by all means, I will, promise,..." ("Man who lifted the Mountain", p. 143).

These sentences are almost lyrical. Apart from this, his images and similes are highly poetic :

"The minister and commander both shaking like blades of grass in the teeth of wind", "tear drops as large as grapes", "Stars as pallid as the eye of a dead fish", "Her face and neck looked like made of concerned moonlight", etc.

When any other writer would have said 'pin-drop silence' or 'grave-yard silence' Manoj Das has his own way of expressing things, "such was the silence even a spider could have been heard spinning its web,"²⁴

(24) His language is essentially metaphoric. As such his similes and metaphors demand special attention. Here are some similes :

"Sawoo sighed like a punctured bicycle tube", "Bhatta sat erect and alert like a dog ready to snap up a crumb", "Sharma started like stepping on a cobra and stammered", "Vilas Singh's reply sounded like an explosion".

The following are a few of his metaphors :

"Volcano of agony", "the growl of a wounded panther", "the tint of a rose on his cheeks" "star-eyed", "apple-cheeked", etc.

Most of his images are visual because there is a sense of drama and vividness in them. Some of his images are also auditory as a lot of sound manipulation has gone into their texture.

Some images are sensuous : "the smell of crushed raw earth", "noisy kiss", "he often let me share his cream soft milk-white bed", and "nibble on delicacies from the royal table".

Manoj Das's similes are not only ingenious but sparkling. They conjure up an apt and crystal-clear image before the reader's mind :

- (a) "He was sweating like an ice-cream stick,..." ("Mystery of the Missing Cap", p. 27).
- (b) "The minister nodded the big clean head which glowed like a satellite" ("Mystery of the Missing Cap", p. 29).
- (c) "What was that strange thing that sprang into the river". "God knows Looked like a gorilla" ("A Night in the Life of the Mayor", p. 92).

Thus Manoj Das's language is lively and humorous, exact and elegant, precise and polished, delicate and evocative. But there is a kind of lilting jerk, an unexpectedness and, above all, a sense of amplitude and festive flavour. His rhetoric is robust, animated, and effective.

His narration is simple, clear, artless and straight-forward and style, pleasing, natural, and spontaneous.

With the inconspicuous agility of his style, he can pass into the uncanny, ironic, tragic, satiric, and realistic.

On the whole, everything...his technique and style, experiment with syntax and diction, the abracadabra of sound and sense, and the glittering fireworks of similes and metaphors ...has a curious compatibility with the theme and tenor of his story.

Notes

1. Leo Marx quoted "An Annotated Checklist," *Huck Finn among the Critics*, Ed. M. Thomas Inge (Washington D. C. United States Information Agency-Forum Series, 1934), p. 372.

2. Quoted Lodge, p. 4.
3. Iyengar & Nandakumar, p. 259.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Quoted Lodge, p. 49.
7. Liddell, p. 46.
8. Quoted Lodge, p. 58.
9. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 74.
10. Quoted Venugopal, p. 73.
11. Quoted Dick Batsone, "Introduction" *The Submerged Valley and Other Stories*, p. VII.
12. "The Throes of the Spirit," *Mirror* Vol. XXVI, No. 6. (April, 1987), p. 69.
13. Quoted P. Raja, "An Authentic Story-teller," *Bhavan's Journal*, (June 16, 1981), p. 64.
14. Batstone, p. VII.
15. Ibid.
16. Quoted "Manoj Das Interviewed by P. Raja," *Literature Alive*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (June, 1988), p. 26.
17. Batstone, p. VIII.
18. Quoted Iyengar and Nandakumar, p. 265.
19. Quoted Lodge, p. 61.
20. Quoted Lodge, p. 42.
21. Lodge, p. 50.
22. Quoted Lodge, p. 48.
23. Summers, p. 74.
24. Quoted P. Raja, "Man who Lifted the Mountain and Other Fantasies by Manoj Das (U.K. : Spectre Press, 1979), *"Mother India*, (April, 1980), p. 266. (A Review of *Man Who Lifted the Mountain & Other Fantasies*).

Summing up

Manoj Das is one of the foremost writers of the new generation of Indian writers.

It goes without saying that he is the Indian Chekhov in his awareness of human misery and ironies of life, in the art of exposing all that is vulgar, shameful, and pitiable.

The basic material of Manoj Das's stories is obtained from his observation of human experience. Like Maupassant and Chekhov, 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 Manoj Das has written a novel, *Cyclones*, it is in his stories that we find the highest expression of his creative power and profundity of thought. In these works we find reflected, as in a convex mirror, the whole immensity and panorama of his world.

Manoj Das is a significant storyteller in the present day world whose stories can be recounted and listened to over and over again with pleasure and profit. Because he still retains the same old simple charm of oral tradition and the trick of throwing a spell on the reader's mind.

The basic art lies in the fact that Manoj Das tells a good and neat story in a simple and lucid language. There is the same *Panchatantra*, *Kathasaritsagara*, *Aesop's Fables* or *The Arabian Nights* quality in his stories.

He is a master in the art of spinning the yarn. The main structure of his stories is buttressed by several secondary threads or anecdotes. He employs the old method of embedding stories quite successfully. He never introduces his theme or topic all at once but unfolds it gradually. The reader seems to

walk leisurely through many a corridor and antechamber like the merry pilgrims of Chaucer ambling their way to Canterbury.

Browsing through his stories is similar to the experience one feels while visiting an unfrequented palace or fort for the first time. The experience, nonetheless, is gripping and rewarding. It is a kind of psychic journey bordering on the liberation of mind and buoyancy of spirit.

Qurratulain Hyder, herself a renowned short story writer is of the opinion that Manoj Das, as a sensitive writer, "evokes that particular mystery and romance, one usually associates with his homestate, Orissa,"²

While depicting Orissa with authenticity, he also brings in a strong elementary touch of Indianness into his writing. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes, "his English stories, convincingly autochthonous, have by virtue of their own Indianness won for him a discriminating world audience."³

Manoj Das's stories contain some message. There is, underlying his stories, 'a moral nexus and a tough ethical core'. But he is not overtly didactic. Whatever message he has, is wrought into the aesthetic framework or texture of his stories.

His approach is always subtle. His seemingly simple and open designs never betray his real intentions. Slowly and steadily, he leads to a depth the reader is hardly aware of. Hence subtlety is the cardinal characteristic of Manoj Das's stories.

Although he presents human predicament in his stories, his world is not that dark and bleak. In his stories, we never come across Kafka's grim, harrowing, and unredeeming picture of "human loss, estrangement, guilt, anxiety...an experience increasingly dominant in the modern age."⁴

His stories are refreshingly free from the element of horror, sex, and violence...the crudities which make most of the

modern writings morbidly distasteful and keeps the reader's mind sullenly down. They are distinguished by their aesthetic quality, abiding human interest, and universal appeal. They stir us out of the depths of our being and we partake of something akin to 'the sublime.'

Time and again, Manoj Das seems to suggest that evil or any other negative impulse can be transcended by a positive human feeling or action or attitude like love, sympathy or fellow feeling.

Manoj Das is traditional in form and technique but modern in idea and sensibility. He is original in devising plot, invention, the subtle interpretation of things, and the use and adumbration of language.

The old stories are charmingly retold and fresh insight is brought into the contemporary human situation. Even if realistic topics and superstition were dealt by earlier writers, it is Manoj Das who treats them in his own characteristic way with a touch of vividness, delicacy and authenticity revealing the rarer aspects of things. He intensifies a simple situation in the manner of Washington Irving and reads essence and meaning into it.

When all is said and done, a pertinent question arises : Is Manoj Das a completely flawless writer without any lacuna or blemishes ? But who does not have the Achilles' heel ?

Of course, Manoj Das has certain limitations. Thematically speaking, Manoj Das does not seem to touch upon some of the vital aspects of human life like love, personal relationship, struggle for existence or social issues like poverty, injustice, and exploitation. He is rather interested in things which are generally strange, unfamiliar and somewhat uncanny.

No woman character is fully realised in his work except Aunt Roopwati or Sati Dei or Miss Moberly

Manoj Das's stories mostly deal with the old or aged people and children. Young people excepting a very few rarely

figure in his stories. He has not focused on the problem or predicament of youth as we find in S. erwood Anderson's "I want to know why" or Joyce Cary's "The Bush River" or Walter de la Mare's "The Trumpet".

This is not a point to argue because each writer is fascinated by certain aspects of things and those aspects alone intrigue and ignite his imagination.

Some of his stories like "The Turtle from the Sky", "He who rode the Tiger", "The Stupid Servant" and "Man who lifted the Mountain" are completely fantastic and they outright flout the ordinary notion of probability. But these stories are rare beauties only when they are read in the context of implied allegory and the human element in them. The reader needs poetic imagination and a large sympathetic heart to enjoy such prodigious fantasies because they are the product of a highly fictive genius and inventive mind.

In fact, the trouble with the most of Indo-Anglian writings is that it is skin-deep, it is superficial and seeks merely to entertain the western reader and not to disturb him. But Manoj Das is far above and beyond such a charge, His portraits are authentic and original. His stories have depth, profundity and significance. They are not simply to be read and interpreted but to be experienced and thought over

Technically speaking, Manoj Das's style is ritualistically adjective-ridden.

Meenakshi Mukherjee observes, "... the bulk of Indo-Anglian writing even now is marked by two characteristics, ... a meretricious, ornate and adjective-ridden style, and an excess of solemnity."⁵

Manoj Das does not suffer from 'an excess of solemnity' but his style is strewn with adjectives to an extent that where one adjective would have sufficed, he would like to exhaust two or even more. They are, at times, so conspicuous that they draw too much attention to themselves. But the paradox is that

they have a curious compatibility with his comic mode of writing because a writer can build up comic or humorous themes only by exaggeration and a lavish use of adjectives.

Hence these flaws appear quite minor and negligent when studied in the broader perspective of the full effulgence of his art and artistry.

Henry James points out, that there is :

"a quality superior to perfection itself and that is life... Perfection is then no longer the criterion according to which we shall judge a work of art, we shall ask of it beauty, a certain logical order, purity of language, originality of style and freedom of thought."⁶

And Manoj Das possesses all these in abundance.

Meaning is 'the reverberation of significance' beyond the matter immediately under observation. Some writers leave no room in their brilliant surfaces for any meaning to rise. But not so Manoj Das whose stories are rich and pregnant with meaning.

The real strength and charm of his stories lies in their exquisite and delightful humour.

Christopher Morley writes, "Mr. E.V. Lucas, expert on both mirth and grimness, long ago described the perfect hostess as one who puts by the guest-room bed, a volume of either O' Henry or Saki or both."⁷

But the ideal combination would be if Manoj Dash, the Indian maestro is added to the list of O' Henry and Saki because they together form the world's impeccable trio of humorists.

"The late C.P. Snow, the celebrated novelist stated as recently as in 1979, in his preface to *44 Hungarian Short Stories* (Corvina Kiado, Budapest) that "the Short Story in English is a dying form."⁸

This may be true not only of the short story in English but also of the short story in some other language in the technologically advanced countries. 'But so far as India is concerned'

says Balu Rao, "the Short Story continues to enjoy an assured place, as it has always done..."⁹

And Manoj Das is one such Indian writer writing short stories in English, who holds out a great promise to keep it alive while most of the major Indian writers in English have turned to the novel and are writing short stories only occasionally.

Undoubtedly he is a pastmaster in the genre of story-writing. Today he is increasingly appreciated in India and abroad because he tells clear and 'candid tales'. His stories are simple and refreshingly humorous. They are highly significant in that they provide profound insights into the anomalies of human existence. An ailing civilization that tragically lacks the grace of tenderness and humanity has much to listen to and learn from Manoj Das, the sage and spiritualist of the modern age.

Notes

1. Maxim Gorky, "Anton Chekhov," *Anton Chekhov: Collected Works Vol. 1* (Moscow : Reduga Publishers, 1987), p. 12.
2. Qurratulain Hyder, "Preface," *Short Stories from India*, Eds. Khushwant Singh and Qurratulain Hyder (New Delhi : Sterling Publishers, 1974), p. 8.
3. Quoted "Manoj Das interviewed by P. Raja," *Literature Alive* Vol. 2. No. 1, (June, 1988) p. 25.
4. Philip Rahv, "Introduction," *Selected Stories of Franz Kafka* (New York : Modern Library, 1952), pp. VIII-IX.
5. Mukherjee, p. 199.
6. Quoted Liddell. p. 113.
7. "Introduction," *The Short Stories of Saki (H.H. Munro)* (New York : Modern Library, 1958), p. VI.
8. Quoted S. Balu Rao, "Introduction," *Panorama : An Anthology of Modern Indian Short Stories*, Eds. Mulk Raj Anand and S. Balu Rao (New Delhi : Sterling Publishers, 1986), p. XII.
9. Balu Rao, p. XII.

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MANOJ DAS is a master storyteller. His language is lucid and clear ; tales, candid and fresh sparkling with humour and human essence. The book is a full-length discussion on story (satire, irony, humour, realism, fantasy and symbolism) in general and craft of fiction (Point of view, narrative technique, problem of style, etc.) in particular. As such, it will be immensely a readable and useful book of reference for students and scholars as well.

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