

RURAL CULTURE IN THE SHORT FICTION OF

MANOJ DAS

INTRODUCTION

The literary scenario of India has spread out new dimensions due to emergence of notable writers during the post-Independence period. It was during this period writings of various genres such as novel, poetry, essay and short story in Indian English Literature flourished. The short story is one of the oldest forms of literature and has remained the most popular form. It is deeply rooted in Indian tradition and is enriched by oral and written tales. It is as old as Indian society and culture. The early writers of Indian short story had found their source of inspiration in the ancient tales of *Panchatantra* and in the Buddhistic *Jataka Tales* which are didactic in tone. There are folktales, which are preserved in the *Kathasaritsagar* and the *Dashakumaracharitam*. Apart from these, the ancient Indian tales are also found in several *Upanishads* and *Puranas*. The great Indian epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharat* have been storehouses of tales. They provide materials to the writers of all the ages. The Jains have added such tales in *Padmapurana* and *Mahapurana*. All these works provided motivations to Indian short story writers. The short story as a literary genre came into existence in almost all the Indian languages. The periodicals and journals played a crucial role in popularizing short story.

Sisir Kumar Das refers three distinct stages in the growth of the short story as a modern literary form. All these stages are autonomous and self-sufficient but inter-related. These three stages are anecdotes, tales and fables, short fiction. Further he mentions that the short story from anecdotes, tales, sketches, reportage and novellas came at the last stage of the evolution of narratives. According to him as a form, it shares

some features of these four but it developed its own distinctiveness identified by the presence of a conscious narrative, foregrounding, a particular incident, or a situation, or a moment of emotional intensity. (302)

Indian English has come to be recognized as a variety of English in its own right. Indian English literature has become one of the most significant literature in the world. Indian writers in English have been using almost all the forms of literature. The Indian short story writer in English began his work under the impact of the west, at the close of the nineteenth century. These writers have made many innovative experiments with the form and the narrative techniques. The Indian short story writers who have got the world recognition are R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Manjeri Iswaran, Manohar Malgaonkar, Nayantara Sahgal, Bhabhini Bhattacharya, Salman Rashidie, Anita Desai, Saros Cowasjee, Arun Joshi, Shiv K. Kumar, Kwaja Ahamed Abbas, Dina Mehta, Farrukh Dhondi, Ruth P. Jhabwala, Shashi Deshpande, Indu Suryanarayanan, G.B. Desani, Amitav Ghosh, Ruskin Bond, Manoj Das and so on.

The short stories written by these and other writers are rich in depth of perception, expression of complex experiences, style, variety and innovativeness. But these short stories need critical attention.

RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY :

The brief survey of Indian Short Fiction in English indicates that there is a wide scope for its study. The writer of short fiction, selected for the present study is Manoj Das. He is one of the foremost short story writers in post-Independence India. He was born in a coastal village of Orissa in 1934. He grew up amidst nature's splendour. But he also

experienced its fury when a cyclone devastated his area, followed by a famine and epidemic. These experiences in his early life shaped his creative mind at its formative state. As a student he was a Marxist. Then he was inspired by Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy and joined his quest for knowledge. He is settled as an ashramite of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry since 1963. The main inspiration of his creative sensibility is the Indian tradition of folklore, spiritual writings and deep cultural consciousness. Dr. K. R. Srinivas Iyenger brackets him with India's greatest story tellers such as Tagore, Premchand and Mulk Raj Anand. As there is little work done so far on short fiction selected for this study, there is great opportunity and wide scope for the researcher to do research in order to focus an authentic presentation of rural culture of India, in the short fiction of Manoj Das.

A modest attempt has been made to analyze Manoj Das's point of view inherent in the short fiction, in the study entitled, 'Rural Culture in the Short Fiction of Manoj Das'. He has brought about an awareness about the rural Indian life. He portrays the life of rural people with concreteness and authenticity. He depicts very effectively and skillfully a way of life of people living in villages, their values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, traditions, customs, superstitions, religion etc. in his stories. There are prominent features of rural culture which are reflected in the various collections of short fiction of Manoj Das. He depicts various facets of human existence in his stories against the background of rural India.

LIFE AND CAREER OF MANOJ DAS : A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH AND SHAPING INFLUENCES

The Life of Manoj Das :

Manoj Das was born on 27th of February 1934, in the small seashore village Sankhari in Orissa. Between his house and the sea, there were two natural lakes and a vast ever-green meadow studded with palm trees. Even bullock carts had no access to the village because of its sandy environment. A devastating cyclone followed by a terrible famine left deep mark on the mind of Manoj Das. He was shocked by human misery and suffering. He started his search to find a remedy for human suffering. This quest made him turn a Marxist. He came under the influence of a Marxist theoretician Shyam Sundar Mohapatra. He graduated from Samanta Chandrashekhar College, Puri in 1955. Further he joined the law college at Cuttak and completed LL.B. course. He started contributing to English dailies and periodicals during his college days. He studied M.A. in English in Ravenshaw College, Cuttak. Then he joined the Christ College, Cuttak, as a lecturer in English. He married Pratijna, the elder daughter of the Samants of Kujang princely states in 1959. He settled down at Jobra, Cuttak and revived the trend setting magazine, Diganta.

His quest for meaning of life led him to Sri Aurobindo. On 21st of February 1963, it was the Darshan of the Mother inspired Manoj Das and his wife to live in close proximity to her. He resigned his job and handed over the charge of the Diganta and came over to Pondicherry. Both are settled to the Ashram as the ashramites. Manoj Das teaches English Literature and the works of Sri Aurobindo and his wife teaches Psychology at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry. He travels abroad and also visits institutions and universities at their request to deliver lectures. The Annual UNESCO series of talks began in New Delhi with him. He delivered Sahitya Akademi's

prestigious annual Samvatsar lecture. He was the leader of Indian delegation of writers to China in 1999.

He received the Orissa Sahitya Akademi Award for fiction in 1965 and for second time for essays in 1989, Sahitya Akademi Award for creative writing in 1972, The Sahitya Bharati Samman in 1994, the Annual Sri Aurobindo Puraskar in 1997, Saraswati Samman in 2000. He is honoured with the President's Padma Award in 2001, Utkal Ratna in 2007. The Sahitya Akademi bestowed on him its highest honour, fellowship, 'reserved for the immortals in literature'. The Berhampur University offered him the status of Honorary Professor Emeritus of Culture. He received the D. Litt (Honoris Causa) by the Utkal University of Culture, The Mohan University (Baleswar), North Odisha University (Baripada) and the Ravenshaw University.

The Works of Manoj Das :

Manoj Das is a versatile writer. He is a well-known scholar, thinker, novelist, short story writer, poet, editor, columnist, essayist and writer of children's literature. He is an outstanding bilingual writer who writes in English and Oriya at ease. He was at his humble best when he received the country's highest literary honour – Sahitya Akademi Fellowship. He said he believed in literature that was inspired but not invented.

He was well-known as a poet in his mother tongue before he became famous short story writer. His first two publications were books of poetry. He is an outstanding short story writer in post-independent India. He has published his first collection of short stories *A Song for Sunday and Other Stories* in 1967. He added more number of collections of short stories to his account and they are: *Short Stories of Manoj Das*

(1969), *The Crocodile's Lady and Other Stories* (1975), *Fables and Fantasies for Adults* (1978), *Man Who Lifted the Mountain and Other Stories* (1979), *The Vengeance and Other Stories* (1980), *The Submerged Valley and Other Stories* (1986), *The Dusky Horizon and Other Stories* (1989), *Bulldozers and Fables and Fantasies for Adults* (1990), *The Miracle and Other Stories* (1993), *The Farewell to Ghost and Short Stories and a Novelette* (1994), *Mystery of Missing Cap and Other Stories* (1995), *Selected Fiction* (2001), *The Lady who Died One and a Half Times and Other Fantasies* (2003). There is a greater influence of Sri Aurobindo's vision of life and Hindu mythology on all his writing. He was inspired by his mother in his childhood. He is also inspired by the great story tellers of ancient India like Somadeva and Vishnu Sharma. His short stories reflect rural Indian life. The peaceful and happy ways of life of villagers, their innocence have provided inspiration to him. He has contributed to the various genres of literature. He has written three full-length novels : *Cyclones*, *A Tiger at Twilight* and *The Escapist*. He has also contributed to the children's literature. His notable books for children are *Stories of Light and Delight* and *Books Forever*, *The Fourth Friend* and *The Legend of the Golden Valley*. He gives an account of his childhood experiences in a quiet and serene village by the sea in his memoir, *Chasing the Rainbow: Growing up in an Indian Village*.

He also contributed regular columns to India's leading English newspapers. The columns he wrote for the newspaper were motivated by his commitment to society. He was the author-consultant to the Ministry of Education, Govt. of Singapore. His non-fiction works include *Sri Aurobindo*, *Sri Aurobindo in the first decade of the Century*. He has also written a travelogue *My Little India* (2002). He has edited a book "Streams of Yogic and Mystic Experience" published by Centre for

Studies and Culture, which works under the Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India.

REVIEW OF WORK DONE ON MANOJ DAS :

Manoj Das is the significant milestone in the post-independent Indian English Literature. He is the foremost bilingual writer and a master of dramatic expression in his English and Oriya short stories. He is a keen observer of the changing socio-political and cultural scenario in the post independent India.

Several articles and reviews have been published in various anthologies and journals to focus short fiction of Manoj Das. Even the scholars have done research work on the short fiction of Manoj Das.

Dr. P. Raja may be called as the pioneer researcher who explored for the first time a vast realm of Manoj Das' fiction. In his book *Many Worlds of Manoj Das* (1993) he focuses on the wide variety of themes handled by Manoj Das. Dr. Sarbeswar Samal in his *Manoj Das : A Critical Study In His Reference To His Oeuvre And Style* (1997) explores themes and vision; realism and fantasy; use of irony and symbolism; style in the fiction of Manoj Das. Dr. Sukanti Mohapatra in her the doctoral thesis *The Spiritual and Psychic Elements In The Stories of Manoj Das* (2008) explores the spiritual and psychic elements in the fiction of Manoj Das. Panchanan Dalal in his M.Phil thesis *The Search for Identity: A Study of Female Characters in Manoj Das's Fiction* (1999) focuses on the image of Indian woman in the fiction of Manoj Das. There are thirty two research articles on various aspects of Manoj Das's stories and novels published in A Peer- Reviewed International Journal *Rock Pebbles*, a special issue on Manoj Das (Jan-June 2012).

Apart from these major contributions on the works of Manoj Das there are several reviews on the different collections of short stories and novels of Manoj Das. Scott Findlay in his “Changing Times” reviewed stories from *The Dusky Horizon and Other Stories*. Chinmay Kumar Hota in his “Forever Fresh” reviewed stories from *Selected Fiction*. Ramchandra Sharma in his “Magic Storytelling” reviewed stories from *The Submerged Valley and Other Stories*. Kasturi Kanthan in “Metaphors of Love, Ghosts and Old People” reviewed stories from *Farewell to a Ghost: Short Stories and a Novelette*. The profound impact of Hindu mythology and Sri Aurobindo’s vision of life on the writings of Manoj Das is discussed by P. Marudanayagam in his review “A Ride for Fun: Three Approaches to ‘He Who Rode the Tiger’”. Ragini Ramchandra reviewed stories from *The Submerged valley and Other Stories* and focused attention on the writer’s potential for weaving a web of situations and creating real life characters. R. N. Pradhan, Dr. Mrs. Savitri Tripathi and Dr. Manish Shrivastva reviewed stories from *Selected Fiction* in a research article “Decay of feudalism in the post Independent India : In the Fictions of Manoj Das” and focused their attention on exploitation of the poor peasantry by the zamindars. Carlo Coppola reviewed stories from *The Crocodiles Lady : A Collection of Stories* and focused on a wide variety of themes handled in the stories which treat many facets of life in contemporary India. Purabi Panwar in his “A Voyage Into The Depths” reviewed the stories from *The Miracle and Other Stories*. Dr. Bhagabat Nayak in his “The Fictional World of Manoj Das : A study of Magic and Mystery” analyzes stories and novels of Manoj Das in order to focus elements of magic and mystery in the fiction of Manoj Das. Apart from these reviews, there are several reviews, articles in journals and on internet in praise of his short fiction.

While a British critic A. Russell says, “there is little doubt that Manoj Das is a great story-teller of the sub-continent and he has too few peers, no matter what yardstick is applied to measure his ability as an artist.”

However, there is no extensive research work done collectively on the short fiction of Manoj to focus an authentic presentation of Indian rural culture in his vast variety of stories. The researcher feels that there is a need for a detailed study of his short fiction to highlight dominant characteristics of Indian rural culture in his stories during the changing socio-cultural scenario of rural India in the days of globalization.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RURAL CULTURE IN INDIA :

In order to clear about the term ‘rural culture’, it is necessary to explain the terms ‘rural’ and ‘culture’. The Oxford Dictionary states of the term ‘rural’ as ‘agriculture’ or ‘pastoral’. Webster’s Dictionary explains the word as: “rural is the comprehensive, non-specific word referring to life on the farm or in the country as distinguished from life in the city.”

The term ‘culture’ is defined by Edward Burnett Tylor as : “Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”

Thus the term ‘rural culture’ means a way of life of people living in villages as distinguished from life in the city.

India has a large number of villages. It is proverbially called as the ‘nation of villages’. As the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* states, “Oriental society has been historically more rural than has been Western

society.” From times immemorial, the village has been the basic unit in the organization of the Indian society. Descriptions of the village community and administration are found in the Arthashastra of Kautilya (3rd Century B.C.)

The glimpses of village communities and the agricultural system are found in the Jain and Buddhist texts dating from about the 5th century B.C. Even in the Maurya period the villages were roughly divided into the biggest, the middling and the smaller ones. Even fables like *Panchatantra* (5th Century A.D.) and *Hitopadesha* (14th Century A.D.) depict the flora and the fauna of Indian country side. It proves that classical Indian literature particularly story literature was considerably rural. From the ancient times till the advent of the British rule in India, the Indian village was characterized by its placid, calm, agrarian, simple way of life. As Charles Metcalfe noted in the nineteenth century:

The village communities are little Republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds to revolution, Hindoo, Pathan, Mugal, Mahratta, Sikh, English are all masters in turn; but the village communities remain the same – the same site for the village, the same position for the houses, the same lands – (181)

The village with internal specialization and exchange is focused in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*. It is stated that the villages have been able to develop considerable self-sufficiency by creating part-time specialists and even full time professional occupations. The best

examples of this kind of village are found in India, where a typical village may contain as many as 2,500 people. The professional specialties are pottery manufacturing, stone working, barbering, trading, weaving, laundering and herding. All of these occupations are carried on by separate castes, to which should be added the “twice born” caste, the Brahman. Further the services of the various castes are discussed. It is stated that the specialized services of the various castes often are rendered without any immediate payment or return service. The occupational castes all have an obligation to provide their services. The full time peasant agriculturalist, for example, expects a new plow or hoe from the carpenter, a pot from the potter, haircuts from the barber and so on. After the semiannual harvest the peasant distributes appropriate shares of produce to those who have served him. (885-86)

While commenting on the special characteristics of Indian village, Manoj Das in his preface to *Chasing The Rainbow: Growing up in an Indian Village* states that the Indian village was peaceful but not passive. The villager was much more than resigned to ‘seeking the food he eats/and pleased with what he gets, he did not advance economically, technologically or academically. According to him the villager made progress and matured inwardly, in his consciousness. And that, they knew very well, was that truly mattered. Further he assures that this does not apply to everybody, but if this was true in the case of one a hundred, the potential opportunity in that regard was there for many. (ix-x)

SIGNIFICANCE OF RURAL CULTURE IN THE SHORT FICTION OF MANOJ DAS

Manoj Das has presented a serene and simple way of life of rural community in India in his fiction which is rapidly disappearing. He has expressed his strong love for his native village in his writings.

“I thought born and brought up in a village at an impressionable age I can present an authentic atmosphere of the rural life, the rural air of India” said Manoj Das in an interview given to the Times of India (May 18, 1980). He has drawn his experiences to create an authentic picture of rural life of the times. The customs, rituals, beliefs and superstitions of the village community of India have found an expression in his short fiction. There are sixty-seven short stories with rural background which are selected from the twelve collections of short fiction of Manoj Das for the present study. Further, these short stories are categorized as satires, the fables and fantasies and the ghost stories and the mysteries, in order to draw concrete predictions.

Satires : There is presence of subtle satire in all the stories of Manoj Das. He throws light on social, religious, political and economical aspects of Indian rural culture. He comments on contemporary rural community for its changing values, impact of blind beliefs and superstitions, exploitation of the weaker section, hypocrisy etc.

Fables and Fantasies : Manoj Das exposes the true nature of reality with the help of fantasies. These stories are written out of his social observations. The settings of his fables and fantasies are either a hill-top, a mountain, a river bank, a valley or a hamlet. The characters of his fantasies are either superstitious villagers or primitive folks. These stories have concrete message relevant to our time.

The ghost stories and the mysteries: The ghost stories of Manoj Das depict the faith of the village folk in the existence of ghosts and spirits. They perform different rituals with the help of tantriks to free the persons who are possessed by spirits. In these stories Manoj Das depicts

dominating effect of Nature on human life. These stories have rural setting.

His the mysteries reflect man's mysterious relationship with supernatural world. We come across babas, tantriks, sadhus in these stories.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY:

It has been hypothesized that Manoj Das's Short Fiction deals with experiences of the village community with panoramic presentation of Indian rural culture.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY :

- To categorize a vast variety of tales of Manoj Das as satires, fables and fantasies, the ghost stories and the mysteries and to highlight its nature and techniques.
- To try to define the concept of rural culture in India and to draw its prominent characteristics.
- To focus on the literary term Rural Fiction which is a sub-species of Regional Literature.
- To take a brief survey of the reflection of rural culture in Indian English Fiction in order to get a fairly good perspective for the present study.
- To focus on the origin, history and development of short story as a literary genre.
- To focus on the prominent features of Indian rural culture in the short fiction of Manoj Das.

- To highlight the changing phases in Indian rural culture in the days of globalization and the author's nostalgic yearning for the preservation of rural culture.
- To highlight the clash between rural culture and urban culture and to focus on how rural culture is superior to urban culture.
- To show the interconnectedness between man and nature in the short fiction of Manoj Das and to highlight his strong appeal for the preservation of eco-friendly atmosphere.

Therefore, this kind of study and its conclusions would add to the knowledge and perception of the people. It will be very useful to create social awareness among the people for the preservation of Indian rural culture during the rapidly changing villages and human values.

DATA

The data for the present research work is collected from primary as well as secondary sources.

PRIMARY DATA

The Primary data is collected from Manoj Das's following collections of short fiction.

- 1) A Song for Sunday and Other Stories (1967).
- 2) Short Stories (1969).
- 3) The Crocodile's Lady : Collection of Short Stories (1975).
- 4) The Vengeance and Other Stories (1980)
- 5) The Submerged Valley and Other Stories (1986)
- 6) The Dusky Horizon and Other Stories (1989).
- 7) Bulldozers and Fables and Fantasies for Adults (1990).

- 8) The Miracle and Other Stories (1993).
- 9) Farewell to a Ghost : Short Stories and Novelette (1994).
- 10) Mystery of the Missing Cap and Other Stories (1995).
- 11) Selected Fiction (2001).
- 12) The Lady Who Died One and a Half Times and Other Fantasies (2003)

SECONDARY DATA

The secondary data is collected from various sources such as books, research journals, magazines, periodicals, research articles, papers, unpublished theses, encyclopedias, web-sites and so on.

METHODOLOGY

A study of Manoj Das's short fiction is made by using analytical and interpretative methods which are helpful to seek certain observations for the concrete predictions. The stories selected for the actual analysis have the setting of a village or a small town or a rural region. Then these stories are broadly categorized into satires, moral fables and fantasies; and the mysteries and the ghost stories. While analysing the stories first the brief introduction with its thematic occupations is provided. Then the central characters are focused. While focusing the rural sensibility in the stories important quotations from the stories are cited to highlight rural background and setting of the stories. These quotations also display the writer's commendable narrative techniques. Further the dominant features of rural culture in the stories are highlighted with critical comments and quotations from the stories. Then a brief conclusion is drawn to highlight specific characteristics of the story reflecting rural culture at the end of

the story. Even the remarks by the experts, scholars on the stories are provided to support the findings.

Furthermore Manoj Das's interviews, references from his speeches and writings are used to support the observations and findings.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Manoj Das is a prolific writer in post- Independent India. He is an outstanding philosopher – writer, scholar, novelist, short story writer, poet, editor, columnist, essayist and writer of children`s literature. He is a versatile writer of India. However the present study focuses on his a vast variety of short fiction only. The short stories selected for the the present research work are drawn from his twelve short story collections which are mentioned in primary data. Therefore, this study is only limited to short fiction of Manoj Das.

CHAPTER SCHEME OF THE PRESENT STUDY:

Introduction

The thesis is divided into five chapters prefixed with the introduction. The introduction of the thesis comprises rationale and significance of the study, life and career of Manoj Das: a biographical sketch, review of work done on Manoj Das, significance of rural culture in India, significance of rural culture in the short fiction of Manoj Das, hypothesis of the study, aims and objectives of the study, data, methodology, scope and limitations of the study, chapter scheme of the present study.

Chapter I : The Concept of Rural Culture: Theoretical Perspectives.

This chapter explores the nature of term ‘rural’, the nature of the term ‘culture’, the concept of ‘rural culture’ and its characteristics, the nature of term ‘rural fiction’ and its characteristics.

It also focuses on globalization and changing phases in Indian rural culture, the origin, history and development of short story and rural culture in Indian English Fiction: perspectives.

Chapter II : Rural Culture in Satires of Manoj Das.

This chapter defines literary term ‘satire’. Moreover, it provides Manoj Das’s views on his application of satire in his fiction. Further, it gives analysis of satires and highlights dominant features of rural culture in it. The bulk of satires is classified into social, political, religious and economical rural life.

Chapter III : Rural Culture in Fables and Fantasies of Manoj Das.

This chapter focuses the nature of Manoj Das’s fables and fantasies. Then the fables and fantasies with rural background are analysed to focus the characteristics of rural culture in it.

Chapter IV : Rural Culture in Ghost Stories and Mysteries of Manoj Das.

This chapter studies different techniques of Manoj Das to handle the theme of supernatural and the mystery in his stories. His mysteries and ghost stories are analysed to highlight the characteristics of rural culture in it.

Chapter V : Conclusion

This Chapter draws definite conclusions along with their possible human values and implications. The chapter focuses on the presentation

of dominant features of Indian rural culture in the vast variety of short fiction of Manoj Das. An attempt has been made to suggest scope for further research work.

Chapter fifth is followed by Bibliography.