

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology  
of Egypt / Egyptology

**DEPICTION OF RURAL FICTION IN SELECTED SHORT STORIES  
OF MANOJ DAS**

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**Dr. Shaifali R. Puri , Depiction Of Rural Fiction In Selected Short Stories Of Manoj Das , Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(5). ISSN 1567-214x.**

**Keywords: Rural Fiction, Literature, Manoj Das etc.**

**ABSTRACT:**

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. Manoj Das is one of the major Indian English writers of the twentieth century. He is from Oriya and also considered as Indian Writer in English translation because he has translated some of his stories and novel from Oriya into English. Thus, he is at a time, Indian English writer and also Indian Writer in English Translation studies. The Indian writers may be divided into two groups Indian English Writers and Indian Writers in English. Some writers are categorized in both fields as they worked in both fields. This article defines literary term 'satire'. Moreover, it provides ManojDas's views on his application of satire in his fiction with the help of "Trespassers" and "The Submerged Valley". 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.

**1. INTRODUCTION:**

Indian English literature is the production of multilingual and multicultural writings. All Indian state-writers who write in English and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India come under one roof that is called Indian English literature. They express their own feelings, thoughts and social problems through their writings. Now, it has reached very high position with the contribution of national and international writers.

Sake Dean Mahomet (1759-1851) was the first Indian English writer and publisher. The book entitled The Travels of Dean Mahomet (1794) is his first Indian English autobiographical

work. The book opens with the praise of Genghis Khan, Timur and particularly the first Mughal Emperor Babur. It describes several important cities in India. Also he describes a series of military conflicts with local Indian principalities. He was born in Patna in a traditional family that served the Mughal Empire. He joined the East India Company's Bengal Army in 1769 and travelled with it as a camp follower and subaltern officer for the fifteen years, going as far north as the city of Delhi.

Raja Rammohan Roy had an understanding of the different religions of the world. It helped him to compare them with Vedanta philosophy and garner the best from each religion. Sufi mysticism had a great influence on Roy. He was dissatisfied with the English system of education and the rote learning method of learning English. He formed an association of English and Hindu scholars. He also invested his own money in the starting of schools wherein he introduced subjects like Science, Mathematics, Political Science and English. Roy felt that an understating of these modern subjects would give Indians a better stating in the world of day. Roy had introduced to new thoughts for Modern India. He removed old religious beliefs and typical rituals through the movement of The Bramhosamaj. Rammohan Roy worked 3 for the betterment of women, the freedom of press, the English education and fight for the social justice.

## **2. NOVEL, NOVELLA AND SHORT STORY: A THEORETICAL APPROACH.**

Novel, novella and Short story are three different forms of the fictional writing. Novel is a broader form, novella is short form and the short story is the shortest form. The novel and novella are different but both are related to each other in their nature. Story is the substance of the Novel and the novel is the broadest form or enlargement of the story. As a narrative form, the novella came from the European literature, especially Italian literature. Novella is a short novel. Novel became popular only after the 15th century in England but the short story is popular from the beginning of the civilization.

Short story is one of the genres of fictional prose. It is a popular form from ancient times to the modern age. Everyone likes to read short stories. A short story is that one should be able to listen and read it in one sitting. It is very difficult to define short story because story depends on teller's thoughts- once the teller told true stories or imaginative stories. Some stories are giving moral messages to readers and listeners. A classic definition of a short story is- Short story is that one should be able to read it in one sitting.

Origin of short stories in India can be seen in the hymns of RigVeda and Upanishadas. These books have many moral stories. During the ancient times many writers wrote collection of short stories in India. Vishnusharma is one among them. His worldwide popular book is "Panchatantra"; it is a good collection of moral short stories in India. Dandin is known as a poet and writer, his famous book is DasakumaraCharitha. Another famous writer and works of India is Somadeva's the Kathasaritsagara; Narayan Pundit's the Hitopadesha and the Buddhist Jataka Tales.

The tradition of Indian short story is very rich. Katha Saritsagar, Panchatantra, Dashakumarcharitam, Hitopadesh, Upanishads and Jataka stories are among the well-known classics of world literature. They are read and enjoyed even today not only in India but also in every part of the world. The various regional languages of India have also given birth to a number of classical short stories; but unfortunately most of these stories bloom and diffused their aroma in the 'desert air' often withering away unnoticed due to the absence of translation

of those regional short stories which contain almost all the salient features of a successful short story

Today Indian English writers gained strong ground and got international accolades and recognition every year. In this convention the contribution of women writers is unforgettable. In the field of poetry, the new poets are also trying this best to obtain the height of literary flavour; but in composition with fiction and poetry, the contemporary modern short story is not being properly nursed. Mature resulting in decaying and with using of those tender saplings. So, for their proper growth and development a constant casing, watering pruning and maturing on the part of the writers in Indian English literature are essential so as to bring them to their Himalayan Height and to receive positive traditional cultural and social background of the ancient short stories.

### **3. THE NATURE OF THE TERM ‘RURAL FICTION’ AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS**

The term ‘rural fiction’ is very rarely used by English writers and critics. Phyllis Bentley used the term ‘rural regional’ or those writers whose fiction show the dominance of the rural element. The term ‘rural novel’ is perhaps for the first time annotated in *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms* (1973) by Roger Fowler. But he does not define it. He only gives a few obvious features of its content:

“the usually even pace of country life,” “the self sufficiency, resilience and limited ambition of many peasants their resolute practicality and acceptance of things.”

The literary theoreticians like Beckson and Ganz in their *A Reader’s Guide to Literary Terms Dictionary* very clearly describe ‘regional literature’ as follows:

“Regional literature is generally realistic and is likely to concern itself with life in rural areas or small towns rather than urban centres.”

The connection of the term ‘region’ undoubtedly includes the rural region. Local colour which is the important characteristics of the regional literature, comprises the topographical configuration of the locality with its inhabitants, their customs, costumes, religious faiths, festivals, rituals, pastimes, taboos and superstitions.

After the detailed theoretical discussion of the concept of rural culture and its prominent characteristics which reflect in the present study of short fiction of Manoj Das, it is also necessary, to focus the origin, history and development of short story as a literary genre.

Manoj Das is one of the foremost short story writers in post-independence India. He has produced a vast variety of tales which may be categorized as moral fables and fantasies, the mystery and ghost stories and satires.

Manoj Das uses gentle satire on contemporary social vices and individual follies. He is optimistic of the future of the mankind. There is an influence of the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo on the vision of Manoj Das. He comments on the contemporary society particularly rural India for its changing values, impact of blind beliefs and superstitions, exploitation of the weaker section, rural poverty and economical inequality, hypocrisy and arrogance etc. His satires are very effective but never offend others. In this context, in *The Hitavada* (June 15, 1980) he honestly confesses that:

“I always remember what Jonathan Swift said: ‘Satire is a sort of glass wherein beholders generally discover everyone’s face but their own’. But I never forget to try to behold my own face in that mirror.’

His stories are written out of creative inspiration and a sense of social commitment. His satire is mild and good-humored. He has sense of observation and humanistic attitude. He believes that the spiritual path of life will be helpful to solve miseries and helplessness condition of man.

ManojDas’ stories are comment on the changing rural culture in the process of globalization. He supports traditional rural values and condemns urban vices. We trace in his stories his nostalgic aspiration for the preservation of rural culture which is changing in the course of modernization/industrialization/urbanization.

Keeping in view the above discussion of the literary term ‘rural fiction’ the following prominent characteristics of ‘rural fiction’ are drawn in order to study short fiction of Manoj Das.

There should be establishment of local colour and rural atmosphere. It means description and evocation of geographical setting of the village or the rural region with its physical phenomena such as the land, the hills, the rivers and the flora and the fauna. The local colour must be organically connected with the life of people.

The village or the rural region in a rural fiction must emerge as a living protagonist, in terms of the story a central figure, a hero or a heroine who is a representative figure.

There should be portrayal of the region and its characters as they are in actual life.

#### **4. THE SOCIAL RURAL LIFE IN SHORT STORIES OF MANOJ DAS**

##### **4.1 Trespassers**

Manoj Das uses his childhood experiences and memories in his short stories. His child characters carry in them these memories. In his “Trespassers” the narrator of the story draws his memories of thirty years ago when he was a child. In the story the writer depicts the clash between simple and natural way of life of rural people and the structured and (DHOS 63) confined way of life of modern culture which is devoid of emotions and affection.

The story is centred around Roy Sahib and his two sons Baboo and Saboo. The poor children living in thatched houses are proud of Roy Sahib’s double storeyed, cream-tinged, wonderful mansion. It is compounded by the wall and also guarded by a durwan. The neighbourhood children and even their guardians cannot enter the house without the permission. Further the writer throws light on the natural and simple way of life of the poor village children in contrast with disciplined and artificial way of life of Roy Sahib’s sons which is devoid of pure and natural pleasures. The writer depicts this contrast. He states it as:

Upon being caught in a quiet summer noon in the process of swimming in the river or climbing the date-palm tree or playing do doo and being dragged home, we heard our fathers or uncles commenting, “Pity, you blockheads learnt nothing from those Roy boys!”

The practice of snubbing the elders had not grown widespread. Otherwise we could tell them to their faces what we knew for certain – that the Roy boys had no need for climbing trees for dates, that they could just enter a posh store and walk away with packets of sweetened dates or toffees putting their magic signatures to a scrap of paper. Further, they had radio and picture books galore to keep themselves away from the sun.

But the narrator has a great attraction for the Roy boys. Baboo was of the narrator's age and Saboo was younger. They wore gold-framed glasses. They were well-disciplined and neatly dressed. The writer comments on too much disciplined life of Roy boys. He puts it as:

“In fact, I had an impression that they had come out of their mother's womb wearing their glasses and socks, and with faces as gentle as photographs.”

One day, the narrator decides to visit Roy Sahib's house to meet Baboo and Saboo. But durwandoesnot permit him to enter the house. But next day he crosses the compound and enters in the house in durwan's absence. He meets Roy Sahib in his shining gown and tells him that he is a friend of his sons. Roy Sahib asks him whether he has taken an appointment at this hour. The narrator turns to leave but Roy Sahib hurts him saying,

“Listen boy. It is an offence to trespass like this, follow? Well, now you may go.”

In the evening the narrator comes to know the meaning of the word “1605azaars1605” from the dictionary and he suffers from the feeling of humiliation.

In the course of the time Roy boys grown up and achieved good jobs in faraway towns. Roy Sahib and his wife become old and sick. They decide to spend the rest of their lives with their elder son, Baboo. One day they leave with several trunk-loads of things. But a fortnight later they return with their trunks. Six months later they leave for Saboo's house, again to return in haste. Mr. and Mrs. Roy are driven out by their obedient and disciplined sons when they are in need of their love and affection in their old age. Mr. Roy suffers the effects of over-discipline. He confines his children in four walls and prevents them to play in fresh light and air with other children. Now more bigger and sophisticated buildings are built in the town. These buildings have thrown Roy sahib's house into a pale background. Now there is not a durwan to guard the house. Roy sahib enjoys his time playing with narrator's son with the ball. There is inner transformation in the character of Roy sahib. The rude and self-centred man becomes loving and enjoys playing with small children of the locality.

The writer shows greater sympathy towards rural values. He supports simplicity, innocence and simple way of life of rural people. He comments on changing human values and lifestyle of people under the impact of modernization. The story shows how rural culture is superior to urban culture.

#### **4.2 The Submerged Valley**

In the story “The Submerged Valley” Manoj Das portrays rapid changes taking place in the life of people living in Indian villages due to developments in science and technology in early twentieth century. The story reflects dominant features of the rural culture. The narrator of the story critically views the ongoing changes in modern society. The story takes place in a village. The story centres on the character of father and son. The father who is an engineer represents modern society. On the other hand, the son who is the child supports the traditional way of life of the villagers. He represents public voice of the villagers.

The authentic rural sensibility is evoked by the setting of the story.

At the beginning of the story the narrator describes his village as follows:

We become conscious of our village the day our headmaster asked the students of Class Three to write an essay on the topic.

So far we had taken the village for granted-like our breathing or our mother's love. But thereafter the elements that made the village the trees, the pools, the Shiva temple and the hillock adjacent to it – had begun to look significant. There is beautiful description of Nature at the beginning of the story. The trees are personified. The narrator while describing the trees states:

The trees that stood in front of our school were as human to us as the one of wandering bull of Lord Shiva. One of the trees looked as if it knelt down in meditation. Two more were never tired of chattering between them. If the teacher had scolded or thrashed us, they seemed to be laughing with us. At the approach of a vacation they seemed to be talking of the many sweet moments that were in store for us.

Further the village is going to be submerged on account of the construction of a dam by the Government. The villagers as well as the narrator got this news. They became gloomy. They came to the narrator's father to use his influence to stop its execution. The narrator states the deep-rooted love of villagers for their native place as follows:

“Mother wept. By and by several respectable men of our area visited us and not one of them went back without shedding tears.”

The 'native place' is the dearest thing to the villagers. The villagers' love for land is a prominent feature of rural culture. They don't want to be separated from their “God given lands”.

The father heard in silence the appeal made by the villagers. Then he reveals the benefits of the construction of the dam. He remains unmoved by the emotional account of the past history of his village and explains:

Where is Harapa today and where is Babylonia? Time has licked them off – just for the sake of change. On the other hand, if we are losing our lands, it is for a change for the better, for the welfare of a larger population. And we ought not to ignore the fact that the Government is ready to compensate for our loss and to provide us with every facility for rehabilitation.

He consoles the villagers. He tells them about the compensation and rehabilitation schemes of the Government for the affected villagers. At last the villagers reconciled the situation. Half of selected alternative site a valley eighteen miles away. They carried their deities and the bull of Lord Shiva with them. The rest chose cash compensation and dispersed in villages and towns in search of jobs.

While departing from village, the villagers expressed their attachment to their soil. The narrator states it as:

“We heard that on the eve of their departure most of the people rolled on the ground, crying and beating their heads against it and smearing themselves with the soil.”

Five years has been passed since the making of the dam. The writer critically gives details of benefits of the dam as follows:

Three districts has now less to fear from floods. Regulated irrigation gave some boost to agriculture, though increase in population did not let it mean anything more than a statistical satisfaction.

The people did not receive benefits which were promised when the village was submerged. After five years, the locality has been completely changed. There were two decent bungalows stood on two ends of the embankment. A cluster of small buildings was constructed for the dam officials. A bazaar has also has established in the locality. In this way, the whole face the village is changed in the process of modernization. For this change, the villagers has sacrificed their native place.

At the end of the story, in summer, the villagers went to see their ancestral place. They greeted narrator's father and mother. There was Abolkara (literally disobedient) who has not left the place. Suddenly the water level began to rise. All the visitors left the place by boats and launch except Abolkara, who refused to leave the place. But the father risking his life brought Abolkara in his launch and saved the life of a rude and orphan boy. It shows that though he is practical he has respect for the forefathers of the village. He has also love for his native place.

The story suggests that in the process of change which is encouraged by deliberate measures, a part of the traditional culture may suffer extinction.

In an interview with Prof. NandiniSahuOn Folk in Modern IndianLiterature Manoj Das comments on the changing rural culture. He states:

... the village life is changing. There was a legend behind every shrine, every forest, every rivulet and hill. Local stories were there behind some of the landmark trees and creatures man encountered – a fox or jackal or a vulture. Numerous shrines have disappeared; forests, rivulets and even hillocks. Trees with hoary traditions behind them have fallen. You rarely come across jackals and vultures now roaming the outskirts of hamlets. Along with their departure the legends too are lost.

Manoj Das has experienced the rural life in its natural environment and in chaos also. The present story describes an authentic picture of changing rural India under the impact of industrialization. The background, characters and setting are true representation of the rural culture, which leave a deep impact on the mind of the readers.

## **5. CONCLUSION:**

This chapter draws definite conclusions based on the present study. An attempt has been made to focus on the presentation of rural culture of India in satires, moral fables and fantasies; and mysteries and ghost stories of Manoj Das. His short fiction is studied from an Indian perspective. India is predominantly an agrarian country. Most of the regions in India are countryside. The rural region in India is bound to be different from the one in England or any other Western countries. It is predominantly villageous in its set-up, whereas in England it is a midway between a village and a city. Further the rural region in India is primarily agrarian and pastoral though in recent times some rural regions are being exploited by industries. Manoj Das is a keen observer of the pre and post Independent India. In his short

fiction he depicts socio-cultural, economical, political and religious life of people living in the villages.

The second chapter throws light on the dominant features of rural culture in satires of Manoj Das. There is an element of subtle satire in all the stories of Manoj Das. The bulk of his satires is further classified into social rural life, socio-political rural life, socio-religious rural life, socioeconomical rural life. This type of classification is not watertight division. They can overlap. This chapter also focuses on the nature and techniques of satires of Manoj Das and highlights the following features of rural culture in satires of Manoj Das.

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