

Saraswati Samman award to Pondicherry writer

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

Pondicherry, Feb 27 : Manoj Das, the 66-year-old internationally acclaimed bi-lingual writer is the first Pondicherryan to be selected for the Saraswati Samman by the K.K Birla Foundation for the year 2000. A recipient of the Padma Sri award this year, he is perhaps the first bi-lingual writer in the whole of Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu to be honoured with the both the awards.

Manoj Das, an internationally renowned short story writer, novelist, essayist, critic, columnist, editor, biographer of Sri Aurobindo has also excelled in children's literature. As a bilingual writer he wields his pen in both his mother tongue Oriya and English with ease.

Presently working in the English faculty of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry, he

has started writing when he was barely 14 and has written over 40 books in Oriya and an equal number of books in English.

A recipient of several awards including the Sahitya Akademi Award for short stories and BAPSI (Book Sellers and Publishers association of South India) as the best English writer for the year 1999.

Here are excerpts from the interview with the The New Indian Express Correspondent, Debjanl Dutta.

IE : How do you feel now after having received two great honours - the Padma Sri award and the Saraswati Samman in the course of a few weeks, although you had received several awards earlier including the Sahitya Akademi Award?

MD: Indeed, it is difficult to articulate my feelings. I am a creative writer and I write out of my inspiration. There is no barometer to measure the sublim-



Manoj Das

ity of a piece of writing. Hence, in principle, awards can go to a wrong person or a wrong work too-though I would not consider myself to belong to the wrong category. However, my satisfaction is, so many of my fond readers grow happy when I receive an award. They take it as an endorsement of

their appreciation for my works. That makes me happy.

IE: We understand that your first book was published when you were in your early teens. What drew you to writing that early?

MD: Somehow I never looked upon writing as an activity that was special. It was just a mode of expressing myself. I took it as absolutely natural. If some body asked me why or how I wrote, I looked vacantly at him or her.

Why did you choose to be bi-lingual writer? What did you wish to achieve through it?

MD: I began writing as was natural, in my mother tongue, Oriya. Years later, when I was in my twenties, someone showed me the review of an Indian work in English which passed on abroad as an authentic picture of rural India. I felt depressed and annoyed. The picture was that of a false India, an exercise in pseudo-realism.

Born in a remote village and grown up in that atmosphere till my early teens, I believed I could portray a bit of true India. Thus, I was provoked to write in English. I believe, I have not failed in my purpose. I have a discerning readership in India and abroad and its response justifies my decision.

IE: What do you feel about the present day writing?

MD: If you mean writing all over the world, it is as it should be in keeping with the modes of life today - at once complex, perplexed, disillusioned about a fat lot of values and groping for new values-yet indefatigable in its quest and explorations. It is often vulgar and pretentious, but sparks of genuineness too are inevitably there. If you are speaking on Indian writing, the best of it is in Indian Languages and not in English.

IE: What turned you to Pondicherry? Why did you make

this your home?

MD :In my quest for the meaning and goal of life, I read several philosophies in the course of which I read Sri Aurobindo. His vision of man as an evolving being, the faith that mind could be surpassed and a greater faculty of consciousness could transform mankind if it is genuinely aspired for it, proved convincing to me. I visited this place out of curiosity and saw the Mother.

IE : Any message for the younger writers?

MD: Message hardly helps anybody. It is the motivation - that drives one's pen in this direction or that.

One may write for commerce or out of social commitment, or may write because h cannot but write -that is to say writing comes as a natural inspiration to him or her. My appeal to the last category is, let us try to understand life which is vaster than its appearance.