

The Submerged Valley and Other Stories,
Manoj Das, Batstone Books, 24, Gloucester
Street Malmesbury, Wiltshire, United King-
dom, 1986, pp. 160. Price : Rs. 25/-, £2.50

THE SUBMERGED VALLEY and Other Stories is a collection of seventeen short stories from one of modern India's best-loved writers, Manoj Das. As a story teller Manoj Das has always enthralled the readers of contemporary Indo-Anglian literature. But the ability to weave a fascinating yarn is well-matched with his subtle social satire.

The collection offers a wide variety of themes to suit nearly every mood. *Vengeance* tells of how Vilas Singh gets trapped in his own vengeatic web. *The Murderer* is an interesting account of the psychology of the simple village folks and also provides a humorous dig at the ingenuous concoctions grannies' tales are made of. *The Owl* dismisses our baseless, though deep-rooted, superstitions. In *The Love Letter* Mukund tells a crazy, though colourful, lie that Gita 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 for it, their age and relationship with Gita notwithstanding. The unusual situation is a fine expose of human ego.

The forgetful Bholagrandpa and the vivacious General are done up with utmost understanding and love. The portrayal of Abolkara and Father and the description of the Submerged Valley in the title story reveal Manoj Das' capacity for visual details and vivid characterisation. *The Mystery of the Missing Cap* develops a rather comic situation which changes the course of two politicians' lives, and all due to the caprices of a monkey, Jhandoo.

The Bridge in the Moonlit Night is great not just because of its depiction of sadness and frailty attendant on old age nor because of its eerie atmosphere at the end but also because of its poignant adolescent memories—memories of love and treachery.

One feels sometimes that Manoj Das has a special fascination for ghosts. Many of his stories centre round a ghost or ghosts as in *Friends and Strangers*. At the end of the story one cannot say with certainty who is alive and who is not. But the ghost in Manoj Das is always harmless and leaves as in the *Farewell to a Ghost* when asked to do so without any fuss. Perhaps that explains the kind of the special bond that exists between the village folks and the ghost of the girl. The Protagonist's contempt for the new generation of boys who were

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just afraid of ghosts articulates the author's own feelings. Manoj Das seems to have a penchant for recreating a fantasy where human beings and ghosts and crocodiles and trees could not only co-exist but live together in total understanding and harmony—sharing common experiences. The world of fantasy however, only helps the author capture the modern man's dilemma more vividly and more sympathetically. Each new situation reveals a new artistic insight.

Undoubtedly an enjoyable collection which makes us pause and ponder over the complexity of human nature and frailty of human life.

—ARUNA SITESH

Scattered Thoughts, Prakash Joshi, Sameer
Prakashan, Amravati, 1985, pp. 35. Price :
Rs. 15/-

PRAKASH JOSHI'S POETIC collection rings of contemporariness, a deep concern for the social and cultural degeneration of the country and a genuine desire to reveal the truth in absolutely unembellished language. His slim volume of poems provides interesting fare : from anguish for the present state of our society to the portrayal of hypocrisy in the day to day situations.

The reader is introduced to the poems very appropriately with *To My Motherland*. Here the wails of the mother are punctuated by the agonised accusations of the poet:

We have given you, motherland,—
The last drop of our red-hot blood
For your rotten wound to cauterize.
But, in exchange, among us you dropped
These hideous parasites
Who devour our human crop!!