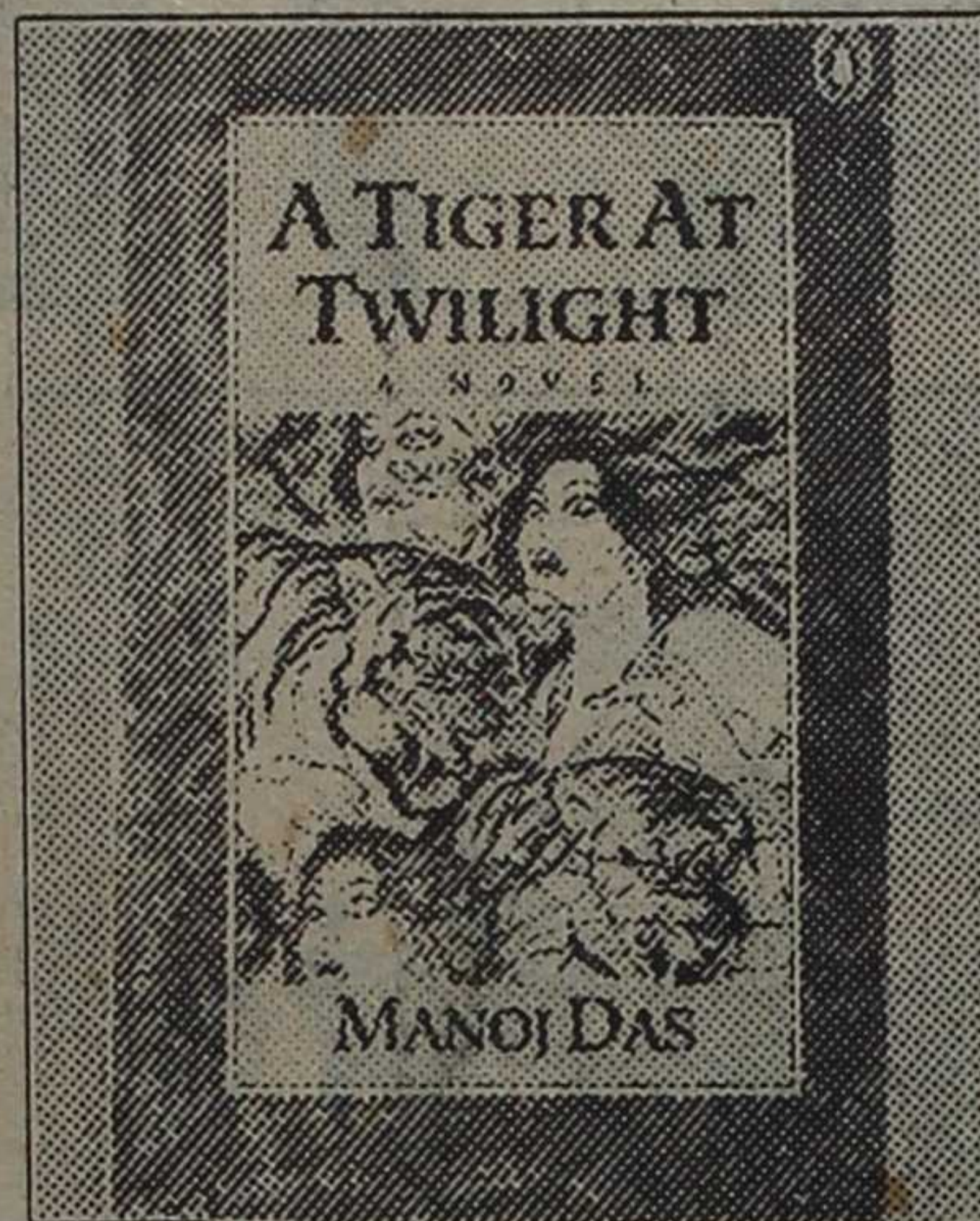


A tale of nostalgia

THIS novel is partly inspired by nostalgia, and partly an exploration into a pre-and immediate post-colonial period, recalling the world of rajas, white majors and tigers, an era, literally and figuratively, close to the jungle where beastly powerlusts predominate. Manoj Das appears to want to examine a will-to-power in a deliberately simplified context of feudal Nijanpur where he can juxtapose folklore and tradition in his tale. His novel recalls Ranga Rao's *Fowl Filcher* (1987), though Rao's book is more obviously subversive. Das's first person narrator creates an ambiguity in that he seems to suspend assessment and judgement and presents his context in its totality. He supports the Raja and by the end of the book is, perhaps, his only support. The Raja's death symbolises the end of an era.

Das introduces folklore at the beginning of his novel in the form of an ancestral royal legend, a story of the sacrifice of one of the sons to appease the local deity and protect the people. The blood lust of the



A TIGER AT TWILIGHT

by Manoj Das
Penguin Books
Price : Rs 65

deity transfers itself in the contemporary era of the novel to a tiger who destroys the villagers. At several points the tiger is identified with the Raja. His daughter.

A key moment in the novel is when his illegitimate daughter, Heera, and the tiger, attack each other and each is killed in the

encounter.

Once again the power lust of man and beast are matched. At the end of the novel the bedridden daughter of the Raja miraculously learns to walk after the death of her father and sister, and this is suggestive of a crippled society trying to find its feet. On the whole, a compact, neat readable book.

In the larger context of Indian fiction in English, books like those of Rao and Das, who are older writers, project different literary concerns to those of a younger, and more prominent generation. These older writers are not so concerned with the use of language as a literary and political vehicle. They also do not show the impact of contemporary world writing in English. Their concerns are presented within a very localised non-urban context, and show an affinity with writers in other Indian languages whose works appear in English translations, such as Tejaswi's *Carvalho*. Yet within his chosen boundaries, Das has shown fictional maturity.

Rita Joshi