

Indo-Anglian fiction

"THE CROCODILES LADY" collection of stories by Manoj Das, Rs. 5.50. **"A TIME TO BE HAPPY"** by Nayanatara Sahgal, Rs. 7, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi-16.

A new collection of short stories is always welcome in this jet age, when few have time to read a novel. Manoj Das is a past master in this genre of writing. His stories present a myriad facets of the Indian scene, in prose which is terse, taut and to the point. His delicate and deft touch captures passing moods, both grave and gay. There is a certain timelessness in these stories because they depict eternal and unchanging human passions and foibles.

The author's gift for satire is well brought out in tales such as "Operation Bride" and "The Last I Heard of Them". Besides an extensive knowledge of adult human nature he is no stranger to the psychology of children and adolescents, as the stories "Lakshmi's Adventure" and "The Anatomy of Tragedy" reveal.

A better title for the work would have been "A Night in the Life of a Mayor" instead of "The Crocodiles Lady" because the former story, rich in droll humour seems superior to the latter. But "The Crocodiles Lady" has a rural setting and the author's depiction of simple, unsophisticated, village folk is particularly felicitous. Short stories are a matter of taste and this collection with its varied fare,

offers something to please every palate.

I enjoyed "A Time to be Happy" much more than the two novels by Nayanatara Sahgal, "Storm in Chandigarh" and "The Day in Shadow" which I had previously read.

The narrator of the story belongs to an opulent mill owning family of Sharanpur. Though he has been brought up in the lap of luxury, he refuses to follow in his father's footsteps and head the family business. Instead he throws himself into the freedom movement and works for rural uplift and the growth of cottage industries.

His friend Govind Narayan, a "wealthy landowner" lives in Lucknow. He is in love with his own gracious style of living and would like his family to emulate him in spirit and have the same sense of values. Though his son, Sanad is more at home on the tennis court than in an office or drawing room, he joins the British firm, Selkirk and Lowe where he inevitably comes into conflict with authority, but never sacrifices his principles. Later he marries Kusum whose brother has become a martyr in the national cause.

Painted on a wide canvas, this novel has many more characters, including some British citizens, like Sanad's boss Cyril Weatherby and Dora Grange, the leader of Sharanpur "society". The author paints an unforgettable picture of India at the dawn of independence.

B. G. R. Krishnama.