

MANOJ DAS



Some time in the spring of 1963 all the newspapers of Orissa carried an item, some of them with a few lines of editorial surprise appended to the news — to the effect that Manoj Das was leaving Orissa to join Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry.

Manoj Das, in his late twenties, was already a top writer in Oriya literature then, voted by the readers of the premier Oriya monthly, *Dagora*, as one of the few writers having the greatest contribution to the post-independent Oriya literature. He was then teaching English at a Cuttack College and was editing "Diganta" which had become a prestigious magazine of ideas and experiments.

But it was not his literary achievements which surprised the people for his decision to join an Ashram. Although Manoj's political activities had by then quietened, nobody had forgotten the zealous Marxist student leader and fiery orator that he had been for years — as the President of the University Law College Union (uncontested for the first time in the history of that college — he was so popular!), as a leading member of Indian delegation to Afro-Asian Students' Conference at Bandung, and one who had also spent a term inside the jail.

While one newspaper suspected that Manoj was joining the Ashram to infuse more red blood into that great institution, the intelligentsia of Orissa felt sad, afraid that a creative talent of great promise was going to be lost to their land and literature.

Over the past twelve years, Manoj has belied both the fears. His "change of heart" was genuine. (Sorry, Manoj does not relish this phrase: he would rather say, he has just evolved a bit. He would add, "You should not believe that because I am here, I am a spiritually enlightened man. There are many who are. But I am an ordinary seeker with formidable weaknesses.") And far from being a loss to his literature, he has flourished as an outstanding Indo-Anglian short story writer, while continuing to write in Oriya too. His home state knows it well. It gave him both its prestigious awards, Orissa Sahitya Akademi Award and The Prajatantra Vishuv Milan Award in 1965 and in 1971. Manoj then received the Central Sahitya Akademi Award in 1972, the first one ever to receive this national award for short stories from his state.

"Many of your stories are to be found both in Oriya and in English. In which language do you write first?" Manoj's answer: "Sometime I write a story first in English and sometime first in Oriya. But I do not translate one into the other. I leave it upon the spirit of each language to carry me along separately."

Manoj's English has its peculiar charm. It is at once chaste and yet has the Indian flavour in the most delicate sense of the term. His stories have fascinated the sophisticated Western readership, through publications such as *The Ascent* (Department of English, University of Illinois), *The Carlton Miscellany* (Carlton College, Minnesota), *The Malahat Review* (Victoria University, British Columbia, Canada) and the Avant-garde journal *The New York Smith* which introduces him as "one of the foremost of the new generation of Indian writers". He has also been published in fiction anthology of Macmillan London and St. Martin's Press, New York. Translated by Indologist Elisabeth Beck, and Frances Hill, his stories have been published in Germany and Switzerland respectively. *The Sunday Times* (London) *The Writer* (London) have commended his subtle humour. In the characters and situations of his stories critics have observed a deep understanding of the human mind.

Manoj Das is also a well-known writer of books for children. One of such books by him "Stories of Light and Delight", published in the Nehru Bal Pustakalay series of the National Book Trust India, has proved very much popular in all its fourteen Indian language editions apart from the original English. His other book published in the Nehru Bal Pustakalay series is "Books Forever", which introduces to the young readers the great books of India's past.

His appeal with the younger generation of readership is deep. In the universities of his home state his writings are prescribed at every level including the Post-graduate.

Manoj Das was the editor of World Union, an international quarterly, during 1968-69.

He went to the U.K. in 1971 and made a research in the recently available private papers of Lord Minto at the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, and other records in the archives of London and made a study of some little-known episodes of India's struggle for freedom during the first decade of the century, led by Sri Aurobindo. His study has been published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust under the title "Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Century" and scholars have come to look upon the work as a valuable source book.

Manoj Das has over 20 books to his credit both in his mothertongue and in English.

Manoj now teaches English Literature at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry.

PUBLISHING AND PRINTING EXPORT IN 1975 \$18 MILLION

Sales abroad of Israel's printing and publishing industries reached \$ 18.1 million in 1975 — according to provisional data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Publishing exports (book, periodicals, right) totalled \$ 13.6 million, while sales of printing services to foreign countries amounted to \$4 million. The latter figure represents a substantial increase (6%) as compared to the previous year.
