

A CREATIVE writer undergoes diverse life processes which affect the core of his sensibility. "These imprints of the reality on his psyche, mingled with his fecundity, in an instance of inspiration — sometime provoked by a spark of nobility of a character or the absurdity of a situation with which the writer can sympathise or laugh at along with others — determines the variety and the quality of his creation."

"Humour and satire are the techniques I use to bring forth the apparent underlining conflict of the human behaviour", Manoj Das explains, his bespectacled, deep-set eyes glowing with gentle warmth.

Born in 1935, in the picturesque rustic surrounding of northern Balasore of Orissa, Das's childhood anima was etched with two traumatic events — the devastating cyclone of 1942 and the dacoity of his wealthy household, stripping the

family of its fabulous wealth and gold.

While a student at the Balasore Zilla school, he was attracted to Marxism, which he believed in firmly until the early '60s as the only way to end the misery of the oppressed mass. In 1949, while he was in class IX, his poet's instinct had already started its outpour. *Shatabdira Artanada*, his first collection of poems, was published that year.

By **BOB ROY**

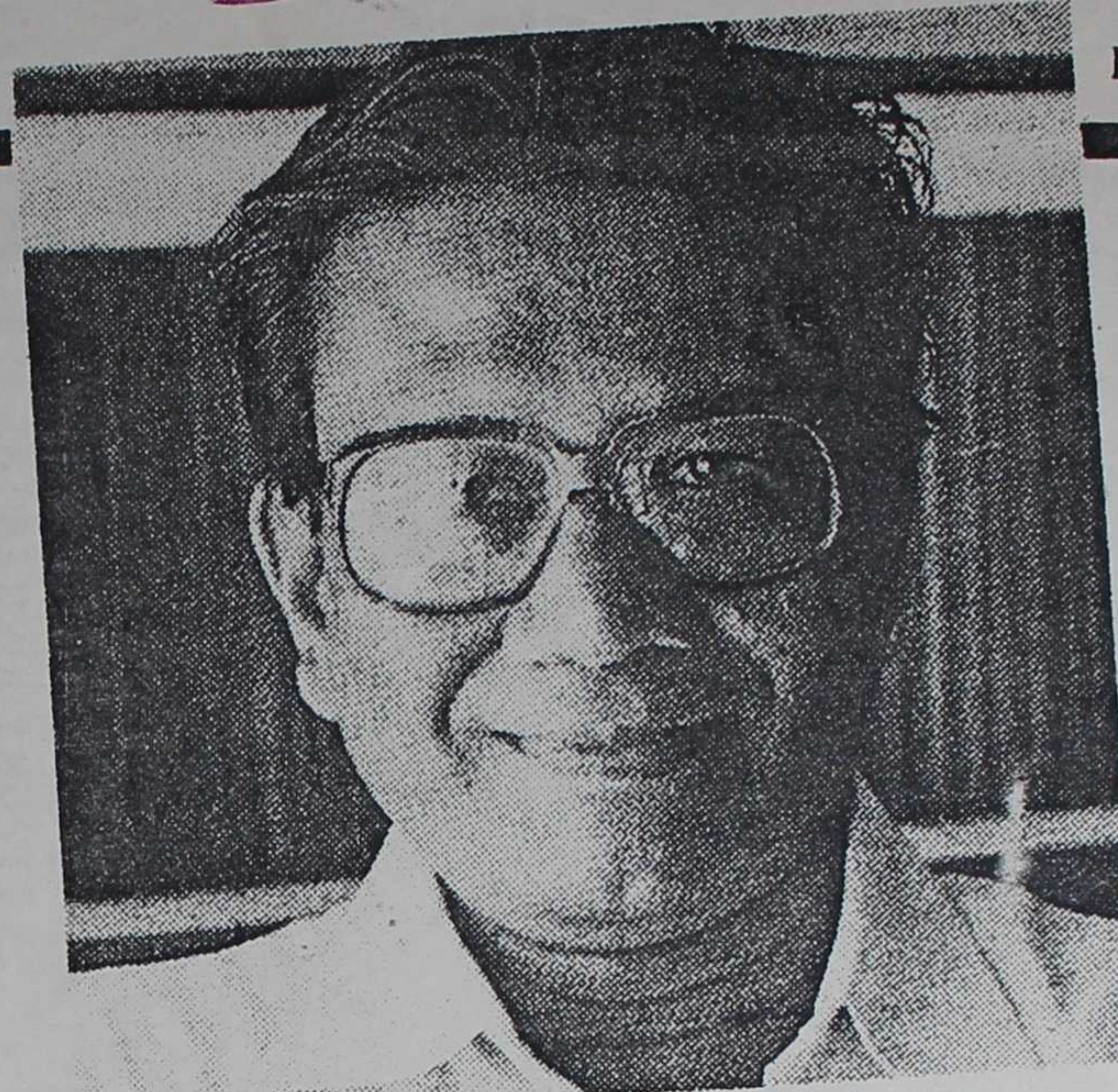
Diganta, an Oriya literary periodical, was brought out by the precocious Das in 1950.

The tumultuous college days were marked by his active participation in the politics of the time, organising rallies, holding protest marches, earning him a term in jail at Cuttack. In 1956, he went to Bandung to participate in the Afro-Asian Students Conference.

"There I met the *Partai Kommunist of Indonesia*

(PKI) leader DN Aidit. That was Khrushchev's de Stalinization era and there was a lot of furore in the international communist movement arena. I had asked the PKI comrade about his analysis of the situation to which his first reaction was to bang his forehead with his fist thrice, indicating the fall of the prime idol of the communist movement of the time," he said smilingly.

His eclat for short story writing bloomed in the succeeding years. Recognised as the most prolific contributor to the various genres of the post-



Manoj Das

SUBTLE SATIRIST

Independence Oriya literature, he has bagged dozens of prestigious awards including the Sahitya Akademi Award (1972).

In the '60s, he underwent a phase of internal dilemma as the realisation dawned upon him that the

external conditions were not the sole cause of suffering. Contrarily, often they were the projections beyond the consciousness of man. In his quest to identify the esoteric cause of all maladies, he read Sri Aurobindo and found his answer to the problem

in the latter's philosophy.

"I am depressed and disturbed at the fact that our civilisation is undergoing an evolutionary crisis of consciousness. A lack of morals and degeneration of values is clearly showing in all the vistas of our crumbling existence. This crisis occurred earlier too, as evidence bears in the history of mankind and art. But I am an optimist at heart as I believe in Sri Aurobin-

do's faith in the intrinsic capability of men to overcome this crisis and rise to a phase of evolution — to transcend into a supra-human stage where there will be a qualitative difference in their level of consciousness."

Das joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry in 1983. He is a professor of English literature at the Sri Aurobindo International centre of Education.

His latest book *Bulldozer's and Fables and Fantasies for Adults* is another classic example of his inimitable genius and craftsmanship as a short story writer. His subtle sense of satire and sympathy, intertwined with sparkling imageries, all blended with the use of crisp and precise language, as readers could sense from the excerpt below, is altogether marvellous.

Das's next venture, to be published shortly, is titled *A Tiger At Twilight*, a work based on another realm of fantasy.