

K. S. DUGGAL

MANOJ DAS

GANGADHAR GADGIL

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

RAJA RAO

MADHUSUDAN DAS

breakthrough

Volume ; 1 / Number : 1

A literary periodicals dedicated
to contemporary fiction in
Indian writings.

Editor : Ms Sarojini Sahoo

MANOJ DAS

After The Sunset

As the sun set in Winter, the banyan tree overlooking Miss Alice Dunkerley's verandah grew lively. That, of course, was the kind of liveliness an abandoned child exuded when crying.

The banyan tree leaned on to Miss Dunkerley's house as if anxious to protect it. Once a spacious bungalow, the house for the most part had been reduced to heaps of boulders and bricks sheltering a few mongoose families and serving as the maternity for the stray bitches, the two surviving rooms marked by patches of papers on their broken glass-panes, and the verandah by swarms of dead leaves.

One could appreciate the anxiety of the tree : the house and the tree were of the same age - ninetytwo - both senior by one year to the lone surviving inmate of the house, Miss Alice Dunkerley, also born there.

Her father had once been a big boss in the Indian Railways. Later in life he had become the hub not only of the local Anglo-Indian community, but also of the whole town.

It was a small town with hardly any body left to remember the once revered William Dunkerley, Esq. Even the brass - plate bearing his name had been knocked off about half - century ago.

There was of course Richard Butier, popularly called Dick Sahib, two years younger than Miss Dunkerley. Despite participating in two world wars - it was not quite clear in what capacity or capacities - he never forgot the good old days of the small town and, on every visit to Miss Dunkerley, fondly reminisced over her great father.

But he disappeared for weeks on end. 'Had a short trip to England' - he claimed on reappearing. The problem was, what he narrated as the current events in England were the ones he had already narrated several times over the past years. Miss Dunkerley did not understand why the little England, her grandfather's homeland, should have to undergo a series of same experiences time and again.

She could not discuss the enigma with anybody, for she had none in the world save a tom-cat, as dark as the darkest hour of the night.

Dick Sahib had just arrived. He relaxed leaning on Miss Dunkerley's closed doors. Evidently he was listening to some sound with rapt attention, so much Eugene the salesman who happened to pass by had a queer feeling that Dick Sahib's ears and eyes were growing abnormally bigger.

He signalled Eugene to come over.

"Listen to the old Alice talking to her cat." he whispered as soon as Eugene had sat down by his side.

Eugene was amazed. He pressed his left ear against the door and then, because it was rather weak in reception, turned and pressed the right one and tried to receive as much as possible.

They sat for ten minutes during which the sun disappeared totally and all of the billy-goat too, its tail excepting, behind a rock.

"Have you ever known any one talking to a cat so intently?" asked Dick Sahib, his whisper growing faint.

"No," Said Eugene. Dick Sahib's lips twitched in a brief smile in appreciation of the salesman's confession.

"Now listen," whispered Dick Sahib after a minute, his hair visibly on end, "how the cat is replying to her ! Fantastic!"

He stood up and so did Eugene. As they walked past the banyan tree, its leaves rustled as though to accommodate the first consignment of darkness despatched from the blue.

"I had had this suspicion for long that it was not at all difficult for her to make the cat, the awfully dark one she had, talk," observed Dick Sahib in an ominous tone.

They walked quite fast.

Eugene came closer to him. Never before had he known that familiar road to be so very desolate and the dusk that descended day after day to be fraught with so many weird possibilities.

They had walked a furlong when Eugene looked back over his shoulder. A small boy was coming out of Miss Dunkerley's house.

"Dick Sahib."

"Yes ?"

“I see a man-child, if my eyes don't deceive me, emerging from Miss Dunkerley's house.”

Strangely, he sounded rather funny to himself.

“I knew,” observed Dick Sahib, speeding up, “that in no time she could turn her cat into a man-child. In fact, she could do anything with that dark creature once the sun had set. Won't I be completing a century in just another decade ? I “ve seen enough, known enough.”

The salesman Eugene did not look back again. Soon he left Dick Sahib behind.

From :-

The Dusky Horizon And Other Stories

by Manoj Das, to be published

by B. R. Publishing Corporation,

29/9, Nangia Park, Shakti Nagar

DELHI - 110 007.