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Manoj Das: A postcolonial writer

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Abstract

Manoj Das's writings take the readers to the horizon where both the fantasy and fact are mingled, fables and parables are interconnected and folk tales and stories are mixed to a type of creation to hype the imagination as if wandering in the Disneyland. His short stories and novels portray the ruins and debris left behind the departure of the colonial rulings in India. Like a colonial writer, Das focuses on the fertile culture of his native land that is severely affected by the colonial ruling. His short stories based on the folk lore of his localities that he heard during his childhood. The folk tales he rewrites adding characters and incidents take a shape that is unique and marvelous. The present paper focuses on the post-colonial context of his writings.

Keywords: Post colonialism, legend, narrative, folk tale, folk cultures, fantasy, realism and moral values

Introduction

Manoj Das, a postcolonial writer, focuses mainly on Indian cultures affected by the western world. He attempts to rewrite myths, legends, folk cultures and fairy tales in his short stories which were the only means of moral teaching in past. The enriched literature and culture of Indian partially paused by the western educated intellectual again revived in his writings.

Das has written volumes of fiction and non-fiction. Almost all his writings go in a single direction to deal with human values. When he portrays women, we find them the motherly and sisterly love that nurtures internally. When a villain is sketched, we also feel the humanity inside him and could locate his soft feeling for foes finding his vanquished in pain.

His short stories are analyzed from the postcolonial perspectives. In most of his short stories he discusses about the Rajas and landlords and their pathetic conditions in the dawn of independence. How the most powerful Indian rulers meet their pathetic demise at the end has been narrated in detail through different incidents and characters. The landlords and their plights, after the elimination of *Zamidari*, have been accurately portrayed.

Das, like postcolonial writer, stresses on Indian ways of life, its culture and moral values. India is rich in cultures and moral values that must remain untouched by the western culture which is nothing but hallow. The tale of "Crocodile Lady", a folk tale, is believed as a factual incident, by the villagers of a remote village in Odisha that touches the heart of Dr. Batstone, a western professor who could not forget tale told by the lady herself.

The lady tales her own tale to Professor Batstone how did she spend a decade with the male crocodile after being dragged into the river. Das writes, "Look, Granny, hear is a Sahib, not a native baboo, mind you, but a pure Sahib, who has come to us flying through the blue. He desires to hear something from you ^[19]."

In this story the folk tales have been glorified. The writer proves that the native social structures are framed as per the folk tales which are difficult to be affected and diluted by the western cultures. Even the educated people of the village believe in such stories that are the part of their ways of living. Das is not against the western culture but certainly against the people who are uprooted from their own fertile cultures in the name of modernism. Most of the postcolonial writers glorify their own culture and tradition against the western cultures that gradually swallow the native culture and tradition.

In his other stories, Das focuses on the unwritten folk tales of ancient India that verbally pass from one generation to another with a lot of modification and changes.

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The stories he heard in his childhood from his grandmother and mother have been extended by going through the tales of Bisnu Sharma that is generally reflected in his writings. Das is called the Bisnu Sharma of Odisha for reviving the old tradition of folk tales.

Most of his short stories deal with fact and fantasy. Fact and fantasy exist together in the postcolonial writings. The writers like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and Jhumpa Lahiri add both fact and fantasy in their fiction. The postcolonial writings portray problems and inside the problems man tries to get solution by the supernatural ways. Such superstitious nature of man is very common as a result literature pertaining the spell of ghosts, witches, wizards and other supernatural elements act as the spices for reading.

Das's stories abundantly deal with the supernatural elements. The stories he heard on ghosts in his childhood have their expansions and extension. The existing folk tales are rewritten or expanded adding some characters and incidents. The story "Farewell to a Ghost" portrays a dilapidated house that houses a ghost. The ghost is one of the members of the hamlet which is served the foods and water on the special occasions by the villagers. The villagers severely opposed when the ruined house was evacuated for certain construction purposes. The reaction of the villagers reveals how the supernatural elements are the part and parcels of society. These elements influence life and living of the rural folks. Such sentiments cemented by religion which give stress on souls. Life after death is directly related to religion. In his other stories also Das vividly deals with life after death. Such abstract elements are even endorsed by the philosophy.

Ruskin Bond's supernaturalism is like the analysis of Das but his portrayal of supernatural elements differs from Das. Monoj Das gives spiritual elements a color of religion but supernaturalism to Bond is something secular. Postcolonial writers rooted in the cultural heritage of their motherland. They use religion as a means to reach the goal i.e. to revive the past glory tampered by the colonial ruling.

Monoj Das has certain philosophy that circles round his writings. The philosophy is to infuse morality and humanity in a reader. Morality owes from religion has lost its values in the colonial rules and it has been reduced to mere lip-service without having its right reflections in day to day activities. In "The Submerged Valley", the short story writer shows both morality and immorality of an Indian British employee who, as a representative of the colonial government, rejects the prayer of his own villagers to put off the evacuation to displace the villagers from village for a massive construction purpose. The employee shows his morality by rescuing Abolokar, a mentally retarded young man of his village, from the swelling reservoir even at the risk of his life. The ugly face of the colonial administration is again revealed by its lack of sensitiveness at the sufferings common mass.

Though Das writes in the colonial language, he is typical Indian by spirit. The postcolonial writers are attached to their motherland which is a commitment to revoke the native culture and tradition.

In "The Misty Hours" Das preserves the modesty of Roopwati, a beautiful young lady and the centre of attraction for many young men. Das writes, "Roopwati asserted that all the budding leaders of the time had been dying to marry her. A little flattery and show of credulousness induced to

come out with a volume of anecdotes narrating how the honorable suitors tired to woo her [23]."

Here Das has not stoop her low either by bending on other young men or hobnobbing with others for gratifying her desires. Her modesty and womanly dignity is quit preserved though the writer satirizes the beautiful lady boasting of her beauty as a weapon to weaken the top leaders. This is also proved at the end of the story when the Chief Minister became very much nostalgic at the funeral sight of Roopwati. It implies that the volume of anecdotes induced her to narrate by slightest flattery was true otherwise her demise at age of seventy would not have put the CM in nostalgic.

Das does not portray Roopwati like a western lady though she was educated and was in contact with many young men during the freedom struggles. She could protect her modesty and preserved her dignity even during the crises. Das preserves the native cultures and sanctity of tradition which the postcolonial writers do.

Das is against the western traditions that he maintains in his writings and ways of life. The spell of spiritualism was the foundation of Indian tradition that strengthens and lengthens life and living. His writings have a spiritual flavor. The characters and the events he lifts from the common life are basically spiritual in nature. The Indian society is structurally spiritual and each Indian is a religious animal. Literature cannot be imagined secular which Das believes.

Manoj Das's postcolonial analysis and its basic features surfaced in his writings are clear and visible. His predecessors like R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Ananda and Raja Rao are artist in some extent but Das is an idealist. He rarely goes beyond his ideology or he changes in ideologies in the changes of time. He sticks to his culture, tradition, and spiritualism which he believed to the soul of his writings. He does not oppose western culture but jealously sticks to his own culture and tradition. Manoj Das is a postcolonial writer in the context of emphasizing Indian culture and spiritualism without saying anything against the western modernism.

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