



## THE FABLE MODE IN THE TREATMENT OF THE SUPERNATURAL IN SELECT SHORT STORIES OF MANOJ DAS

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Some of the stories of Manoj Das can be brought under the fable mode narrative, a tool used as a part of his magic realism technique. This article takes up for an analysis Manoj Das's five stories from three of his short story collections where he uses the fable mode narrative and discusses the writer's handling of the technique to render the stories credible and interesting. A brief note on "Fable" will augur well for the discussion. Fables are the brief tales in which animal characters that talk and act like humans and indicate a moral lesson or satirize human conduct. A fable is something which neither happened nor could happen. Spearing regards fables as "invented fictions or pagan myths" and "as allegories, requiring interpretation to uncover a truth hidden beneath the surface" (195).

Fables are meant to entertain. They are poetic, with a double or allegorical significance. The purpose of fable is to instruct, to teach humans a lesson about recognizing and overcoming their foibles; to criticize authority figures in humorous and caricature ways to poke fun. Normally in fables, animals are employed as characters. They usually display the vice or foible being criticized. This foible is what brings embarrassment or a downfall to the character and this ending leads directly to the moral.

Though fables aim at the entertainment and didacticism, they reveal the noteworthy features of the short story. The Fable has a simple straightforward narration dwelling on human weaknesses and virtues, and romantic love leading to adventures that excite the readers. It is a narration of a number of different stories within the framework of a single narrative. For instance, the *Panchatantra* consists of the most part of fables, which are written in prose with an admixture of illustrative aphoristic verse. A similar collection of fables is seen in the celebrated *Hitopadesa*, or "Salutary Advice." It is one of the best known works of Sanskrit literature in India. It is uncertain who the author of *Hitopadesa* was. Both the *Panchatantra* and the *Hitopadesa* are originally intended as manuals for the instruction of kings in domestic and foreign policy.

In contemporary situations, fables are popular subjects for modern storytellers and illustrators. Many writers attempt at constructing fables and fantasies in their own ways of writing. No great Indian writing is ever done for the sake of writing, or for awards, but for the sole sake of revealing and bringing out in concrete symbols the domains of the highest truth. Manoj Das's short stories, like those of R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao, bring out the essential Indian spirit. It is mysterious, mythological, and occult. It is also dream-like, as if woven by Maya. He reconstructs the stories of *Panchatantra* and *Jatakas* without changing their originality of the plot but he reconstructs the story using his own inspiration. His fable narrative mode surprises us with a message that is of great relevance to our time, and it also provokes humour, subtle undertones, and sparkling new metaphors. Raja observes, "his stories, which, for their primary plot, is dependent on some of the ancient tales, but of course the author handles them with a different intention" (15). Manoj Das was influenced by the popular Sanskrit classics. He himself admits: "the heritage of Indian fiction – the great yarn-spinners of yore like Vishnu Sharma and Somadeva – constitute the influence of which I am conscious" (qtd. in Raja 15).



Manoj Das reconstructs the fable of the *Jatakas* and *Panchatantra* in a satirical vein, to focus on the different levels of human mind in the light of psychology and politics as they have since grown. As Samal observes, “Manoj Das’s fables are based on certain basic human truth. They are a comment on, or a profound study of, life and nature” (54). He mingles men and women with animals and the conduct of the animals appears realistic where he intends to be allegorical or didactic. Consequent on the introduction to ‘Fable’, Five of Manoj Das’s stories are taken up here to explore the ways the writer treats the supernatural very explicitly using the fable mode.

(i) “Man Who Lifted the Mountain” from *Man Who Lifted the Mountain and Other Fantasies* (MWLM)

Manoj Das as a social critic uses his short stories to depict the passions and foibles of man as they surface in different circumstances. His short stories depict his deep and thorough understanding of human psychology and it is expressed through his multi-dimensional narrative. “Man Who Lifted the Mountain” is another best example of his use of the supernatural elements. This story can be termed as a new parable and the satire involved in this short story has an everlasting impact on humanity.

The theme of this story is about greed and its consequences. The story, “Man Who Lifted the Mountain”, begins with a description of Nature. Manoj Das’s love for nature is clearly seen in his description, “We had driven long through an arid terrain, and I had been too tired to withstand the lullaby of the cuckoos in the shady coolness of the ancient forest. I closed my eyes, leaning back against the mountain base” (MWLM 13). His satire on man’s materialistic attitude is clearly depicted in the story of the mountain which stood alone and broken away from the nearby range of hills. The deserted mountain begins its story by introducing the princess of the palace, her sudden sickness and the recovery medicine for her sickness:

There is a kind of earth under the mountain that stands behind your palace. The princess could be cured of her ailment if only a handful of that earth was smeared on her body. But who can ever remove that mountain in order that the earth could be made available? (MWLM 15)

Manoj Das makes it appear as a real life happening. He uses the mountain itself as a living character. The mountain reveals that a thief by name Theiffou, can hold it in his hand for an hour. The inanimate object to the naked eye, the mountain, is vested with all the human faculties. However, writers like Wordsworth, Thoreau, and Emerson could listen to the voice of Nature. Manoj Das, following the footsteps of those writers, uses this relationship between man and nature and treats the impossible as the possible through his narrative mode. In this story, the mountain is capable of feeling, speaking and interacting with human beings as if it were a living being. Das invests the character of the mountain with a soul, when the thief tried to lift the mountain he heard a strange grand voice and the great voice said, “Don’t you know me? Were you not just pushing against me? I am soul of this mountain” (MWLM 15).

Manoj Das describes the interaction so vividly and sentimentally that the reader is imperceptibly sucked into the vortex of the narration. Ultimately the reader is inveigled into believing what Manoj Das says. The mode of fantasy is part of magic realism and Manoj Das beautifully handles the mode in his own unique style. The conversation of the thief with the mountain shows the writer’s skilful blending of magic with realism. The thief’s conversation with the mountain shows him as one who



steals because of his poverty. Thus the mountain offers to become light weight for one hour so that he can lift the mountain in his hand and get the gifts from the king by curing the illness of the princess. His excessive greediness leads him to death when he continues demanding more and more gifts by threatening the king with putting the mountain on the king and his subjects. Materialism blinds the thief and blunts his reason.

(ii) “The Professor Fox” from *Bride inside the Casket and Other Tales (BIC)*

Manoj Das uses animal characters to satirize the contemporary life in a fairy tale framework. “The Professor Fox” is also a reconstructed form of an ancient fable. In this story, Manoj Das brings the present mindset of the parents who want their children to reach a high position through education. He also pictures how parents and children are victimized under the notion of best education. His satire exudes simple humour and at the same time makes the readers aware of the present-day realities. It is the story of a mother turtle which takes efforts to give its three children the best possible education.

A turtle lives with her three infants on a cozy nook of the valley overshadowed by a huge bush. A fox lives nearby and is attracted by the round soft turtlets and it decides to take them as its prey in a cunning manner. The character of the fox goes well with the usual depiction of the fox as a cunning animal in fables. The fox, as though purely out of courtesy, enquires the mother turtle why the latter is not seen often in the forest. The turtle replies being, “ a lover of nature I am indeed, but hardly find anytime to roam about our beautiful forest now that I have three toddlers to look after” (*BIC* 30). The turtle is portrayed as an affectionate mother who is taking care of its young ones. The fox, popularly known as Professor Fox comes forward to get the three young turtles a good education.

The mother turtle represents the ideal mother: “They pamper their kids and that is almost all that they do. Then they look on helplessly as the young ones grow up into the same stupid beings as themselves” (*BIC* 30). Manoj Das also describes how the parents are hoodwinked under the false notion of education through the character of Fox who is boastful of his scholarship:

You see, I gave up my professorship long ago. All my students are now holding prestigious position in the forest, in the service of King Lion. However, since you are my neighbour, I can undertake educating your children. Come on, hand them over to me. (*BIC* 31)

The turtle entrusts her young ones to the care of the fox and her hope of getting her young ones educated clearly depicts the attitude of a human mother who does her best for the sake of her children’s education. The fox eats up each turtle a day for three consecutive days. The fox cheats the mother turtle:

When the mother turtle went to look them up the next day, he brought the remaining two out of his hole and then led them back and brought one of them again. The mother ambled home happily. (*BIC* 31)

The fox repeats the same trick till it has nothing to show to the mother turtle the third day. Having eaten up all turtlets, the fox explains the children’s absence by saying that they have been sent to its elder brother, who happened to be the retired Director of Public Instruction in the forest, for higher learning.



Manoj Das shows how parents are exploited in the name of education and how they are cheated by the shadowy prospects of better job opportunities. The cunning nature of the fox is exposed by the voice of a raven living in the vicinity and the turtle stands shocked. The words of the turtle to the raven clearly expose the mindset of modern generation who mindlessly act to seek a good future for their children. The turtle explains, “It is for their education, my dear raven, and because I have been keeping the future of the forest in mind I have entrusted my boys to Professor Fox!”(BIC 33). The turtle could do nothing more than curse the fox for a full hour. The fox listened to her with a villainous grin on his face like the modern business sharks that have opened education shops. But the turtle is determined to take her revenge. The turtle tries twice to take revenge on the fox. Once it catches the fox’s leg under the water but let it go, being fooled by the words of the fox.

Next, after hours passed, the turtle waits to catch him when he crosses the river again. But the fox uses the turtle’s back to hop and in another bounce crosses to the other side of the river. Having failed in its attempt, the turtle sheds bitter tears. The raven expresses its sympathy for the turtle and gives an idea to punish the sly fox. Manoj Das dovetails the animal story into a human story in the later part of the story. This is seen clearly in the words of the raven while giving ideas to punish the fox:

While I sat on the queen’s window this morning, I heard that she is coming to bathe in the river this evening, for it is going to be an auspicious full moon night. As soon as the queen is neck-deep in the water, swim near her stealthily and hang on to her necklace. To get rid of you, she will take off her necklace. (BIC 35)

The turtle acts accordingly and hurls the necklace onto the bank. The raven swoops down and flies away by picking the necklace. The bodyguards of the queen run after the raven in order to scare it to drop the precious ornament. The raven flies neither too fast nor too high but beyond the reach of the arms of the bodyguards to give them a hope of getting the precious ornament. The raven drops the necklace into the hole of the sly fox, in full sight of the queen’s men and flies to a safe place on a tall tree. The bodyguard thrusts his sword into it and the scared fox leaps out of it. The guards kill the fox by bringing down their heavy clubs on his back. He dies not before giving out a loud howl which the turtle could hear from the river. The turtle’s revenge is thus accomplished.

Manoj Das uses the fable narrative mode to bring the attitude of humans in the contemporary society. True, the world is full of vice and dishonesty. However, one should be discreet in befriending others. Das thus describes the characteristics of the animals that often appear in fables. The cast of the story includes mainly animals and birds – a fox, a mother turtle with its three little ones and the raven. But they have all the human faculties to speak, listen, overhear, and even use the brain. The whole forest is described as a land with various administrative bodies. The fox is a retired Professor and his students occupy good positions in the administration, like the Directorate of Public Instruction. As a person who enjoyed the fruit of good education, Professor Fox uses the importance of good education as a ploy to exploit the innocent mother turtle. Like any mother in the human world, the mother turtle reasons out but fails to see through the fox’s cunningness.

Manoj Das conjures up animals and birds as humans invested with all human attributes. The reader forgets for a time that it is not just an animal story or a fable and his thinking process relates the characters in the story to the real life characters. It is a subtle manipulation of illusion and reality and



the line dividing them is successfully erased. The reader brings into play his experience and wisdom to put together all the customary associations that go with both animals and human beings.

(iii) “The Bewildered Giant” from *Bride Inside the Casket and Other Tales*

Manoj Das has affixed a distinct Indian stamp on his short stories by giving a blend of Indian folk tales and western techniques. “The Bewildered Giant” is an original work of the author who combines the treatment of the supernatural with the fable narrative mode. The story starts with the Princess’s encounter with a giant. Manoj Das with his magic realism portrays how the giant shrinks when it cries and turns into a bird when it laughs. The bird later changes into the Prince of the Horizon on hearing the song of the Princess.

Manoj Das opens his story with an enchanting scene in the forest. The Princess is leaning against Chompuc tree. She heaves a sigh and expresses her expectation for the arrival of the Prince of the Horizon. Indian belief in prophesies is clearly portrayed in the story. The Princess informs the giant that she and her family have fled to the forest because of the nasty giant ravages their land. The giant expresses the feeling that the story and names she utters sound familiar to him. When the giant tells his normal menu for the giant, the Princess offers herself as food and asks the giant to go satisfied without taking the lives of her parents. On hearing that, the giant breaks into tears. As he weeps, a strange thing happens. It seems to grow smaller and smaller.

The giant is reluctant to eat her and so the Princess offers her share of dinner to him. She brings a jug full of milk and fruits. She informs the giant that Nature is helpful to them: “The trees around us lean over us so that we can pluck their fruit easily. A wild cow appears before our hut and continues to low until we have milked her. Such is the climate of love prevailing in this forest” (BIC 90). Nature itself sympathizes with them and behaves like a friend in need. Humans and Nature go for mutual dependence and we ought to be eco-friendly. The giant gulps down the dinner provided by the Princess and he breaks into a loud wail which makes him even smaller. The giant is quite unusual in his behaviour and has certain sophistication about him. Thus it repents by stating, “What an uncivilized giant I am to wolf down your entire dinner!” (BIC 90)

Human beings grow pale and thin at the time of sorrow. Manoj Das uses this simple fact in an extraordinary manner in this story. The continuous weeping of the giant reduces him to a pocket size one. Later, to the pleasant surprise of the Princess, he begins to laugh. Surprisingly, the giant then turns into a bird. Now it is known that “When a giant weeps, he diminishes; when he laughs he becomes a bird” (BIC 93). The princess takes the bird on her tender palms and on the request of the bird, she sings a song. Her song represents the inner agony and she forgets herself. Her desire of waiting for the Prince of the Horizon is clearly seen through the song.

Manoj Das doesn’t use the fable mode not just to inculcate any moral values. Instead, he brings the bird’s conversation to heighten the enchantment that overpowers the forest. On hearing the song of the Princess, the bird changes into the Prince of the Horizon. The young man informs her that he has temporarily been changed into a giant in order to confront the real giant that gripped his country in fear. He also informs her that he drove the giant away from her kingdom. Manoj Das gives the reason for the giant’s bewilderment at the end. The reason is that after driving away the giant that held the kingdom in captivity, the Prince of the Horizon has forgotten who he was. The Prince tells her that the kindness and courtesy of the Princess helps him to get back his real figure. He expresses his gratitude towards her.



They chat for hours together. The King and Queen steal a glance at this and the young ones are wedded after a few days. They pay a visit to the forest again and find themselves once again in a state of ecstasy in the enchanted atmosphere.

Manoj Das portrays the union of Princess with the rescuer, the Prince of the Horizon using the magical element. He creates the forest as a place of enchantment and in that magical world he builds the story of the Prince and the Princess. They find themselves in a state of pleasant surprise. Their bewilderment multiplies when the giant metamorphoses himself into a dwarf by weeping and then into a bird while laughing. The Princess sings a melancholy tune meditating on her possible union with her lover, the Prince of the Horizon. Amidst the series of miraculous happenings, the bird talks to the Princess and encourages her to sing out her worries. Yet another miracle happens, the bird transforms into a handsome Prince, much to the bewilderment of the reader. Manoj Das deftly handles the narrative blending magic and fable to create a beautiful romance in a short story. This story has all the fairytale inputs but they are clearly manipulated to foreground the human passions of a love-lorn girl in an eco-friendly ambience.

(iv) “The Tiger and the Traveller” from *The Lady Who Died One and a Half Times and Other Fantasies*.

“The Tiger and the Traveller” is a story from the *Panchatantra*. Manoj Das has retold the story colouring it with his imagination and portrayed the animal-human relationship. The human being is transformed into an animal, a Tiger, as a result of his desire for a gold bangle. Though one is fed up with life and willing to commit suicide, he comes back into life with a bounce for material gains once again. There is an old and feeble tiger, unable to capture its prey. It holds out the golden bangle standing in the pond water to catch the greedy people as its prey. A Brahmin, “came into this forest with the intention of drowning myself” (LDO 56). The Brahmin gets the bangle from the tiger and looks quizzically for some time. At first the Brahmin doesn’t react to the bangle he has in his hand. The conversation between the tiger and traveller clearly shows the different mind levels of the human being when he is exposed to valuable things. The Brahmin stands in neck-deep water of the pond and examines the bangle:

There were sizeable pieces of diamond and other precious stones set on it. It radiated a wonderful glow and I kept gazing at it long. I thanked my luck for the chance to behold such a marvel just before dying.

Then I cursed my luck. (LDO 56)

The traveler’s mind starts to change while he has the bangle in his hand. His attachment to life is growing strong, “I could not take my eyes away from the bangle. And as I gazed at it, I clearly felt the grip of life slowly tightening on me” (LDO 57). Manoj Das portrays how greediness conquers the mind of a person who is almost detached from life. The conversation of tiger and the traveller is an unbelievable incident but Manoj Das makes it believable by narrating it in a fable mode. The tiger stares at the Brahmin and his transformation into a tiger is just unbelievable, “The tiger raised his head, fluttered his eyes and looked around and then stared at me again . . . Then advancing towards the pond I gazed at my reflection in the water. It was true: I had turned into a tiger” (LDO 58).

This transformation draws a parallel to that of the Crocodile’s Lady Character, “I saw the crocodile staring at me intently” (CL 42) and her reflection in the water was that of a crocodile. The traveller’s



transformation and its consequence are clearly depicted through the comments of a dove couple. The male dove feels that the traveller is facing the consequences of a double suicide.

‘That the bangle dragged him back to life is beside the point. His decision for suicide had been final and hence he must suffer its consequence. His decision to live for the sake of the bangle was yet another suicide and he must suffer its consequence too.’ (LDO 58-59)

The death is imminent even if he succeeds to pass on the bangle to some other traveller. Through this story Manoj Das portrays the wavering mentality of human beings. His fable narrative mode makes the reader enjoy the fusion of the fantastic elements and the realistic life incidents.

Detachment from life doesn't come to one so easily. Human beings cling on to their possessions and acquisitions as long as possible. Avarice is a human failing and that has been around for thousands of years. A quick glance at the history of the world will testify to this. Manoj Das uses the ancient fable mode that has been used in oral literature across the world. He draws comments on the human activities from the animal world that does appear to be knowledgeable and well-informed about the worldly affairs.

Despite his determination to commit suicide by drowning, the offer of the golden bangle by a tiger beckons him back into the prospect of prolonging his longevity. So his greed for another lease of life brings about yet another disaster. He is now transformed into a tiger standing in neck-deep water. He was in search of death in life but ended up in life in death. So what Manoj Das tries to convey is that unless one severs connection to the mundane world, he cannot get into eternity and freedom from worldly afflictions. As long as you hold on to your possessions, you have to go through the cycle of rebirths and a chain of sufferings.

(v) “A Turtle from the Blue” from *The Lady Who Died One and a Half Times and Other Fantasies* (LDO)

Manoj Das's use of words and tone-to-life visual images in his writings form a magic world with his fertile imagination. In the story “A Turtle from the Blue”, Manoj Das uses birds, reptile, and human beings as characters and indulges in a pleasant mockery on the political situation of the society. Manoj Das portrays turtle as a character which is filled with desire. He christens the turtle, Kambugriva. It is ambitious and adventurous by nature and it is evident from its thirst for knowing the unknown. Kambugriva lives in a beautiful lake in the green valley. Like a human, it sighs by cursing its luck for being a turtle. It wants to go beyond the green valleys and hills. Hence, it wishes to fly far away like a feathered creature.

He experiences a trance and visualizes the strange phenomenon, “dancing trees, musical mountains, blue rivers falling perpendicularly from the clouds, men and monkeys assembled in magnificent halls debating the virtues of the tail” (LDO 60). A couple of swans, Vikata and Sankata, visit the lake and camp there for a week during the monsoon every year. Kambugriva waits for their visit. The swans are his friends and, “knew of the turtle's extraordinary interests and did not grudge him an hour or two of storytelling every day” (LDO 60). The turtle requests them to take it along in their flight to the great lake. The swans, at last, agree to give a try for a mile.



Manoj Das portrays the swans as having thinking and reasoning ability like humans. “They evolved a technique for Kambugriva’s air-travel after several brainstorming sessions. The turtle clamped his jaws tightly on the middle point of a rod. Vikata and Sankata, holding its two ends in their beaks, took off” (LDO 61). After having a successful trial, they plan to go for a long distance. The swans, Vikata and Sankata, warn the turtle not to open its mouth while flying. The swans foresee the danger like human beings, “It would have been regrettable if we had tried to warn you while flying, replied the swans” (LDO 61).

Human beings often forget the circumstances they are actually in and do something unwittingly that risk their very lives. In the same way, the turtle in this story doesn’t listen to the warning of the swans. It starts to enjoy the adventurous travel, “Kambugriva did not seem to hear. He goggled at the landscape with wonder and delight. ‘I’ll go down in history as the first astronaut among the turtles,’ he announced excitedly before taking hold of the stick once again” (LDO 61). The swans start their flight with the turtle. The flight of the turtle creates a stir everywhere. The smaller birds like sparrows and partridges are frightened but the birds like kites and pigeons speak gravely about it:

An old cynic among the crows observed, ‘I’ve always prophesied that the future of our sky was bleak. This invasion of the sky by a turtle surely marks the beginning of the end!’ ‘And swans have always been renegades,’ commented a crane. (LDO 61-62)

Manoj Das brings out the superstitious belief of the people that turtle is a symbol for bad luck through the words of an old crow. The swans fly rather low and pass over a river. A marriage party witnesses the strange incident. In order to fulfil the bride’s wish of getting the three creatures, the swans and the turtle, the bridegroom tries to catch them but falls off the boat losing his balance. Kambugriva suppresses all its feelings and comments regarding human absurdities lest it fall. While they are crossing the kingdom, people inform the king about the strange sight. The king, his entire court, and an emissary from another kingdom witness the sight. Manoj Das portrays the contemporary situation, how rulers are blowing their own trumpets in order to show off their government’s superiority. The emissary’s ego is hurt and he boasts about seeing a pig swimming through the clouds in his kingdom. He also adds that the pigs are carried by some buffalo-sized birds.

Kambugriva is humoured by the conversation and unaware of its position, it shrieks, “You fool!” (LDO 63). As a result, it falls down on the palace roof and dies. The swans drop the rod and circle the palace for a while and then perch on a nearby tree. The actual *Panchatantra* story ends here but Manoj Das builds it further in his own way. He satirizes the courtiers of the government for their whimsical interpretations. The court’s chief epicure comments that the turtle is of a rare delicious variety, suitable for royal table but the king looks down upon the turtle meat. The court physician-cum-astrologer adds that, “it’s only once in a millennium that a turtle comes crashing from the blue and when it does, its meat is a sure cure for a hundred ills” (LDO 63). Then he prophesies the next fall of the turtle from the sky. The king enquires why the astronomer doesn’t interpret the turtle’s fall.

Then the king orders the cook to roast the turtle and decides to distribute it among the neediest. The General and the emissary express their wish of tasting a bit of it. Then everyone complains of one ailment or other in order to taste it under the pretext that they could provide better service to the king. In the meantime, a portable throne is brought. The king sits on it and the others sit down on the floor of the terrace. The king asks the courtier to say the last words of the turtle before its fall. The words are



‘You fool!’ and the king is of the opinion that the courtiers are not fools. The courtiers are convinced. Suddenly the king cries out that it is he who is a fool.

The king eats the whole creature by justifying his act, “But a king cannot afford to remain a fool! He must cure himself of such a defect even if that meant his breaking a sacred tradition and condescending to eat this creature, the whole of it if warranted, which in any case was no ordinary turtle!” (LDO 65) Manoj Das mocks at the action of the ruler who tries to enjoy all the profits as his own whether it is a superstitious belief or a fact. Then the king orders the emissary to fetch a couple of those buffalo-sized birds within a month. In case of his failure, the king will annex the land from where the emissary comes. Manoj Das satirizes the insensitive nature of the rulers and the officials through the words of the king, “It was time we did something useful. Our soldiers grow fat and our General gout for sheer want of a war” (LDO 66).

In the fable narrative, the turtle, like a human being, is presented with desires and passions of its own. It interprets the voice of human beings using its reasoning ability and invites its fall by its sheer pride. By the same token, Manoj Das doesn’t fail to point out a fact that all human beings suffer from certain limitations and failings. The turtle, knowing its limitations fully well, venture upon something unprecedented and finally risks its own life. There are people in the world who endure such a misadventure just for the sake of friendship. The swans are good natured and try to reason out things. However, their friendship with a turtle gains the upper hand and leads to the eventual death of their friend, the turtle. Likewise, the emissary makes a tall talk wherein he boasts about buffalo-like birds in his land.

Manoj Das brings out the idiocies of the emissary and the turtle and regards them as ego-inflated idiots. The turtle’s misadventure is like the emissary’s hyperbolic twist of facts. Human beings and the fauna of the animal world behave in the same way and the line of demarcation between them is no more visible towards the end of the story. The reader has the feeling that he is surrounded by characters in full flesh and blood, a cast inclusive of several characters, irrespective of the two major classifications of the species.

All the five stories critically analyzed in this article revolve on the supernatural coming into play through the fable narrative mode. The supernatural element is explicitly treated. Neither ghosts nor other nocturnal spirits interrupt the action. Rather Manoj Das weaves magic, metamorphosis and mind-boggling imagination together so that the probable and the improbable walk hand in hand in the full glare of sunlight and human view. His fables are written with as much ease as realistic stories. He is interested in the strange, fantastic, and wonderful aspects of life. Samal observes, Manoj Das’s “is an enchanting world of fable, fairy-tale, magic, mystery, wily jackals, wise kings, sighing princes and wistful princesses and all unheard of doves arguing human matters, a turtle flying across the sky, a man lifting a mountain, and people appearing not only without clothes but also without flesh” (87).

Das converts unnatural and far-fetched happenings into ones that we come across in our everyday life, making use of the fable narrative technique. Humans and animals freely meet and converse in an explicit manner. Their interaction enumerates human vices and follies, entertains with humour and irony, and ultimately enriches human values. The mundane and the magical cohere seamlessly and project a unified whole, each complementing the other.



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