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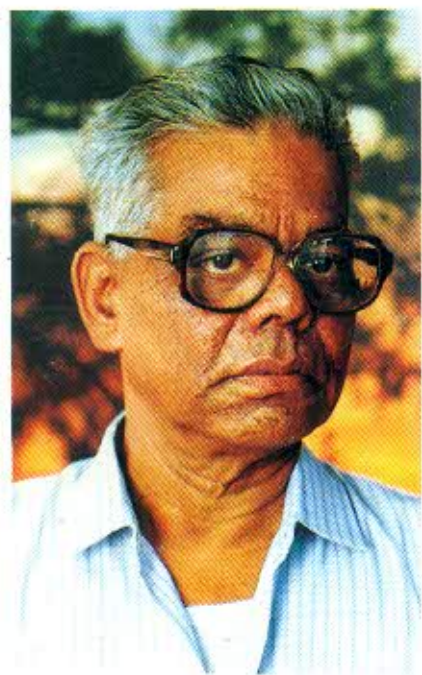


Sahitya Akademi

meet the author

Manoranjan Das





Shakespeare's Jaques described the world as a stage and the human life as a seven-act play. This philosophic observation leads to certain deeper questions : What is then the relevance of another play—the written one? How does proscenium justify its existence against the universal theatre?

Manoranjan Das is one such play-wright whose subtle, sensitive and penetrative depiction of human action on the stage manages, unwittingly perhaps, to answer these questions more effectively than others. He has stirred a whole generation of Oriya audience to the connotations and implications of life and stimulated them to an emotional voyage to the world both within and without. It is through his plays that they have extended the scope of their experiences and expressions.

Born in 1921 in a village near Cuttack, Sri Das passed his childhood days at Kujang near Paradip where his father was at that time posted. The childhood impressions of the fantastic as well as awesome beauty of the coastal vegetation have recurred in his plays time and again as structural motifs. Theatre was a paternal heritage to him and he started acting from his early childhood. His role as an actor on

the stage continued till he passed the Intermediate Examination in 1942.

Sri Das switched over to play-writing when he was a graduate student. *Jauban*, his first play to be staged by the Annapurna Theatre Group of Cuttack in 1944, had a significant title, as it gave a clarion call to the youth to eschew sloth and complacency and work for the emancipation of the motherland.

In the later half of the same decade Sri Das wrote three important plays, viz *August Na* (1947), *Boxi Jagabandhu* (1949), and *Agami* (1949), which explored the human psyche vis-a-vis the prevailing socio-political milieu. Though *Boxi Jagabandhu* had the historic Paika revolt of Orissa as its theme, the treatment of the event was perfectly modern and the spirit vocally contemporary. But it is his *Agami* which brought about a complete metamorphosis in the prevailing dramatic scenario in Oriya literature. In the perspective of the existing socio-political situation of the post-Independent India, the play explores the female psychology and the frustrations in man-woman relationship. It stands unique in the sense that here the temporal converges to the perennial, the local to the universal. Commenting on the play, Gopinath Mohanty, the Jnanpith award winning novelist of Orissa, wrote : "In one leap Oriya drama has crossed the gap between the medieval and the modern".

Agami was closely followed by *Aboradh* (1951) but after this he remained silent for about eight years. He left his service at AIR, Delhi and was struggling against the wolf at the door. To support himself, he did all kinds of odd jobs till he went back to AIR, Cuttack in 1958. Once again he renewed his stage and literary activities and his first bunch of plays written and produced for AIR, subsequently converted to stage plays and published as *Chhota Natak*, won him the State Sahitya Akademi Award in 1964. Then came another collection of short and one-act plays



Receiving the Sangeet Natak Akademi award from Dr Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay

entitled *Mahasamudra* in 1967. In a review of the book, Dr Sitakant Mahapatra commended Sri Das's excellent delineation of "strange complexities of character and its psychic levels in a small and limited frame-work".

With the establishment of the Theatre Group named Srujani, Sri Das's creative zeal received another boost. In quick succession he wrote a good number of plays which enjoyed tremendous stage success. In these plays of the sixties, he completely moved out of the "socio-political confines" and sounded the "depths of human psyche and probed into the problems of existence in a manner which initiated still newer trends and responses in Oriya drama". (Professor J. M. Mohanty in *Into Another Intensity*). The products of this new creative consciousness include *Banahansi* (1966), *Aranya-fasal* (1970), *Katha Ghoda* (1972). In *Banahansi*, the failure both in love and in family of a couple is depicted and the play ends with their intense agony of a futile search for happiness. *Aranya-fasal*, which received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1971, unravels the hypocrisy and suppressed sex pervading the modern urban life. Professor Bidhu Bhusan Das in his foreword to the English version of

the play observed, "The language used in this play is a clue to the attitudes of the characters. The dialogues are often in stichomythia, staccato in rhythm, echoes of one another thereby suggesting the restlessness, anxiety and tension which characterize modern man". In *Katha Ghoda*, Sri Das seeks to recreate the horror of a world of de-humanized routine with a style that proximates in its dialogues, songs and stage props the Oriya folk drama (*yatra*). In *Sabdalipi*, the play-wright deals with a couple who continue to live together, through painful shams and pretensions, in their loveless relationship. In a review of the Hindi production of the play, *The Hindustan Standard* commented: "*Sabdalipi* is a multi-dimensional play, that is social, symbolic and philosophical at the same time".

That Sri Das's enthusiasm for an exploration into the human psyche persists even in the eighties, is evident from his two latest plays—*Bitarkita Aparanha* and *Nandika Kesari*. While the first highlights the erosion of certain basic values of life on one hand and the emergence of a newer understanding of life on the other, the second deals with the desire of a human existence in a larger social perspective,

which finally gets shattered and lost.

Now at 70, Sri Das still goes on exploring the human composition. Through the demonstration of the theatrical beings, he compels the audience to probe their own beings. Thus the small stage approaches the bigger one and the proscenium theatre merges with the universal.

A Select Bibliography

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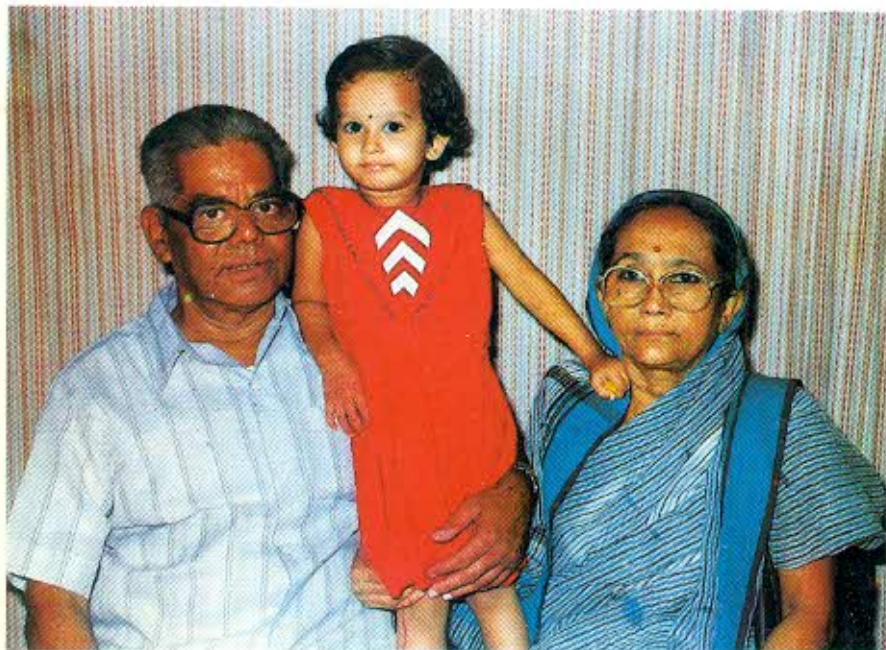
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With wife and grand-daughter



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COLLECTION OF ONE-ACT & SHORT PLAYS

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TRANSLATIONS

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tor Calls', 1st stage production
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tack, 1986. 74 p. 21.5 cm

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baneswar, Bookland Internation-
al, 1982. 70 p. 21 cm

Hindi :

ARANYAFASAL, New Delhi
Radhakrushna Prakashan,
1976. 104 p. 21.5 cm

SABDALIPI, New Delhi : Rajesh
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Rajesh Prakashan, 1978. 60 p.
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marg Prakashan, 1984. 80 p. 18
cm

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Klanta Prajapati, Published in
Sahitya Akademi's Journal
Samakalina Bharatiya Sahitya'
No. 19, New Delhi)

Bengali :

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Ghoda) : Calcutta; Rabindra Lib-
rary, Aswin 1381. 33 p. 18 cm

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Sahitya Parisad, 1977. 84 p.
18 cm

With Dr Gopinath Mohanty



BANAHANSI, NBT, New Delhi :
1981. 78 p. 21.5 cm

A Chronology

- 1921 : Birth
1932- : At School—Cuttack & Ku-
40 jang
1940- : Student, Ravenshaw Col-
46 lege, Cuttack. Began writing plays
1944 : Annapurna Theatre
staged *Jauban*
1947 : Co-founded 'Jana Sanskruti
Sangha'
1948 : Joined All India Radio,
New Delhi
Married to Kusuma Kumari
1950 : Co-founded 'United Artist'
1953 : Asst. Director and Dia-
logue Writer of the Film
Amari Gaon Jhua
1954 : Co-Director, Joint Screen-
Play Writer and Dialogue
Writer for the Film *Kedar
Gouri*
1955 : Passed L.L.B.
1956- : Legal Practice
58
1958- : Joined All India Radio, Cut-
60 tack
1964 : Orissa Sahitya Akademi
Award for *Chhota Natak*
1964 : Co-founded 'Srujani'
1971 : Sahitya Akademi Award
for *Aranya fasal*
1972 : Member, General Council
and Executive Board, Oris-
sa Sangeet Natak
Akademi
1973- : Member, General Council
77 and Executive Board,
Sahitya Akademi
1974- : Secretary, Orissa Sahitya,
79 Sangeet Natak & Lalit Kala
Akademies
1978 : Orissa Sangeet Natak
Akademi Award
1978- : Member, General Council
79 and Executive Board,
Sangeet Natak Akademi,
New Delhi
1981 : Sangeet Natak Akademi
Award
: Visited Bulgaria, Poland
and USSR under Govt of
India's Cultural Exchange
programme
1983 : Senior Fellowship (Govt of
India) to write plays
1983 : Member, Advisory Board
(Oriya), Sahitya Akademi,
continuing
1984- : Producer (Emeritus),
87 Akashvani and Doordar-
shan
1990 : Sarala Award for *Nandika
Kesari*

A scene from *Sabdalipi* in Hindi

