

CHAPTER – III

RURAL CULTURE IN FABLES AND FANTASIES OF MANOJ DAS

3.1 THE NATURE AND TECHNIQUES OF FABLES AND FANTASIES OF MANOJ DAS

Manoj Das is a notable writer of fantasies. He is interested in the fantastic and wonderful aspects of life. But his fantasies are related to social reality. In his preface to *Bulldozers and Fables and Fantasies for Adults* he states the nature of his fantasies: “These stories owe their origin to purely social observations, circumspection, little ironies and funny situations encountered by all of us – and sometimes a sense of revolt in me and a propensity for being naughty – I hope to a pardonable degree” (VIII) Thus with the help of fantasy Manoj Das exposes the true nature of reality.

Dr. Sarbeswar Samal in his *Manoj Das: A Critical Study* throws light on the setting of the fantasies of Manoj Das. He states it:

No one can question the credibility of his story for Manoj Das chooses such locale or setting which he can easily invest with an aura of fantasy. His settings are either a hill-top, a mountain, a river-bank, a valley or a hamlet, and his people are either simple superstitious rustic or primitive folks. It is land far from the civilized world where he safely plies his narrative on the plane of fantasy without running any risk of disbelief. (65)

Manoj Das uses the good old days of Kings and his courtiers for the setting of his fables and fantasies. They have concrete message

relevant to our time. His fables and fantasies are rooted to reality. They are the creations of his literary genius.

While focusing on the nature of Manoj Das' fantasies Dr. Sarbeswar Samal says:

Beyond and beneath the factual or phenomenal reality, there is a subtle and hidden reality. To have a glimpse of this hidden or submerged portion, we need a certain subtle method and fantasy is one such device to delve deep into the heart of reality. The reality in oneness and diversity is viewed from several probable angles.

Thus fantasy, in the hand of Manoj Das, is not simply an arc or mode of thinking but a part of his technique, a sort of objective correlative to project his motif and vision. (69)

In this chapter, an modest attempt is done to highlight notable characteristics of rural culture in fables and fantasies of Manoj Das.

3.2 RURAL CULTURE IN FABLES AND FANTASIES OF MANOJ DAS

Man Who Lifted The Mountain :

“Man who Lifted the Mountain” is an outstanding piece of fantasy. Adrian Cole, a writer of fantasy in his review of *Man Who Lifted the Mountain and Other Fantasies* says:

There is more than a little Arabian Nights quality to the stories and all are punctuated with very tasteful imagery and we are given a number of insights into the Indian way of things which the author delivers unobtrusively and

unprejudicially. Not only did I enjoy the flavour of the stories but also I enjoyed their characters which are very real. (65)

Thus his fantasies have concrete message relevant to our time.

The action of the story takes place at the foot of Mount Luvurva. There is evocation of rural sensibility with the photographic description of the surrounding area of mountain Luvurva:

The sun was overhead when we reached the foot of Mount Luvurva. There was, no doubt, something queer about the hill, as though it had revolted and broken away from the nearby range of mountains, choosing to stand and brood ascetically alone amid the dense forest.

We had driven through a long and arid terrain and I had been too tired to withstand the lullaby of the cuckoos in the shady coolness of the forest. (BFFA 62)

The narrator with his two friends, one is geologist while other is an anthropologist visit Mount Luvurva. The story takes place in the dream of the narrator when a sleep descends on his eyes. There was a king. He had a beautiful daughter whom he loved very much. The writer's use of Nature imagery to describe beauty of the princess is superb. He writes:

Every morning the beautiful princess galloped towards the rising sun across the hills, her face glowing in the early glimmer like a shooting-star, her flying hair making a sparkling trail. It was a divine sight for all the people- the princess riding towards the blue, bright horizon and the sun narrowly escaping her clutch. (BFFA 63)

One morning the princess did not rise. The physicians of the kingdom became unsuccessful to recover the princess. The King became desolate. One day the wandering ascetic told the king that the princess could be cured if a handful of that earth under the mountain smeared on her body. The king's herald announced that one who can remove the mountain would be made richest person next to king.

There lived a poor thief in a small hut on the other side of the mountain. The folks called him 'Thieffou'. When he heard the herald, he wished that he could remove the mountain. The writer creates supernatural atmosphere in the story which is the important characteristic of rural culture. Then Thieffou heard a grand voice saying, "I am the spirit of this mountain, to be precise." (BFFA 65)

The mountain promised him to be as light as Jasmine flower for an hour in order to collect the earth. The mountain promises him to help, if he will give up his habit of stealing. Thieffou told him that he steals because of his poverty. The writer throws light on the poverty of lonely rustic which has compelled him to become a thief. The writer expects positive change in society.

Next morning he informed king that he is going to lift the mountain that very evening. From the distant villages people gathered near the mountain. The writer focuses the curiosity of the villagers about the miracle. The members of the nobility also gathered there. As Thieffou moved his hands upwards, the mountain went up and rested like a toy-balloon on his fingers. Then the crowd broke into cheers and applause. Then Thieffou's laughter became louder and wilder. He asked Income Tax minister who has done harm to country's economy, to stand on the ground so that he would place the mountain on him. He demanded

Rooplal to declare him as his heir. Then he declared his wish to marry with the princess. He also threatened the king to crush him under the mountain.

Thus one hour allotted to Thieffou had passed and the mountain touched the ground burying him under it. Thus writer throws light on the greedy and over-ambitious people who are responsible for their disastrous end. The setting of the story is in the distant past but characters like the minister of Income Tax, the chief trading magnet of the kingdom, Roopal, the constables, the school teacher, Thieffou are from contemporary world.

Dr. Sarbeswar Samal in his *Manoj Das: A Critical Study* gives nature of fantasies. He says, “By evoking the supernatural, Manoj Das appeals to our sense of the wonderful and marvelous. He strikes a balance between the ordinary i.e., realism and the uncommon i.e. fantasy.” (70)

Thus the story is masterly comment on the greedy and over ambitious people from contemporary world. The mountain which is personified represents justice and kindness. The mountain gives chance to Thieffou to become a good person but he fails because of his over-ambitious and greedy nature. Moreover the story is notable for its evocation of rural atmosphere with the beautiful descriptions of the nature.

He Who Rode The Tiger

“He Who Rode The Tiger” is a powerful fantasy. It is created out of the fairy tale world of the King and his officers and servants. In the story the writer ridicules man’s obsession for the prestige and false pride.

The action of the story takes place on the outskirts of the capital. A tiger is caught in a rope-trap set up for a boar in a royal orchard. Two

mali's quarrel over the right to ride tiger. The people from the nearby hamlet had begun to gather. For them it is a rare sight. However both mali's become successful to prevent each other from riding. Then the royal officers the Kotwal and the Rotwal appear on the scene. The officers hear the report of the dispute and each claims to ride the tiger first in order to achieve reputation. Then the minister and the commander arrive through the crowd. The writer creates rural atmosphere with the use of 'rustic idiom' The Rotwal gives the report of their dispute. He says:

“Huzoors!” he said addressing both the officers. “How I have suffered defending your honour! I declared that the minister and the commander or the commander and the minister, were the only fit personages to sit on the tiger. Who are we to crave such luxuries? Had anyone in our fourteen past generations ever even smelled a tiger?” (BFFA 58)

Then the commander and the minister start their quarrel over the right to ride the tiger. The commander who is very proud of his forefathers says “that my forefathers were great lovers of tigers’ backs. My heaven gone father used to go to the primary school always rocking on a plump soft tiger” (BFFA 58)

On the other hand the minister in the same way talks about his family custom: “It was a custom in my maternal uncle’s house to domesticate at least half dozen tigers and keep them at beck and call. My mother, when a baby, had a pet Royal Bengal tigress for her pussy” (BFFA 58)

Here the writer throws light on the proud and exaggerated nature of the people working on higher positions. The minister and the commander

stop their sword-fight when the king approaches on the scene. They both fell flat on the ground before the chariot of the king. This act shows their hypocrisy and ludicrous nature.

The king who is symbol of power and vanity declares that riding the tiger is the royal right. The king declares his own right to ride the tiger but he can not ride because of his fatness. He orders his men to bring his son who will ride on his behalf. The prince dislikes the pomp and hullabaloo of the court and lives in a lonely house. The king orders the prince to ride the tiger to achieve a glory. But the prince is reluctant to ride the tiger. At last, the king compels his son to ride the tiger. The helpless son rides on the tiger. The tiger walks away disappearing inside the forest. All keep staring at the dusky wood in silence. Further the king realizes his folly. He shouts at his men. But the commander returns with a piece of the prince's garment soaked in blood.

P. Marudanayagam in his "A Ride for Fun : Three Approaches to He Who Rode The Tiger" focuses on the irony in the story. He states:

The critics that look for irony in "He Who Rode the Tiger" will find it at all levels in both its structure and texture. The whole narration, tinged with genial humour and mild irony, is vintage Manoj Das. All the characters in the story the two mali's, the two officers, the minister, the commander and the king himself – who aspire for the honour of riding the tiger, are cowards at heart and never venture beyond any verbal claims but withdraw at the slightest excuse. On the other hand, the prince who shies away from pomp and publicity, wins the glory and rides the tiger though at the cost of his life. If in *Panchatantra* animals and birds

are endowed with human qualities, the human characters in this story excepting for the prince are portrayed as beasts.
(121)

Old Folks of the Northern Valley

“Old Folks of the Northern Valley” is an interesting fantasy. Manoj Das has written several stories in which location is valley. According to Dr. Sarbeswar Samal, “the fictional valleys of Manoj Das are the recreations of the actual valley that Sankhari was with all its sylvan setting and idyllic charm.” (101)

The setting of the story is the mountain village of the northern frontier. Mr. John narrates his past memories in the company of the wonderful old people of the mountain village. The writer focuses on the strange customs and festivals of the villagers. There is the annual festival on the small plateau up the hill. It was for the old people only. They would gather on the plateau beating drums and singing at the evening. The festival begins the elopement of a frail, beautiful princess with a old and haggard man. The princess loved him for the sheer elegance that was his great age. The princess was carried off by the old swain and up the hill they went. The soldiers pursued them but old man hurled abuses and they returned their place. This incident happened forty years ago. But this custom was still in vogue.

However the young persons were prohibited to enter the plateau. But Mr. John was tolerated since he came from a faraway town. As he was returning, there was storm and cloudburst. He takes shelter in the narrow cave for an hour. Then he starts his return journey but his car does not start. He takes shelter in the inn at the entrance of the village. The innkeeper gives him good service and hospitality. The writer focuses the

traditional values of the folks which are disappearing in the course time. He puts it as:

When the innkeeper opened the door, I almost collapsed into his arms. Though himself a bit tipsy, the old man helped me into a large cane chair.

“I am tired and hungry,” I told him. “I will feed you,” he said with what seemed to me a truly angelic smile. Angelic because there were generosity and gentleness there. Along with the angels themselves that sort of smile too is lost to your world. (BFFA 101)

Thus the writer glorifies the traditional rural values. The hill, the valley, the range of mountains form the setting for village are most vividly depicted.

Dr. Sarbeswar Samal throws light on the fictional valleys in Das’s stories. He states :

“... Manoj Das is very much nostalgic and laments the loss of that serene pristine beauty, innocence, faith and charm of corporate living. His portrayal of the valley is at once realistic and visionary in appeal, created out of the fusion of memory and passionate longing. (101)

The Panchatantra for Adults

The panchatantra stories made use of in this series are widely known in India and abroad. In their originals, the first story ends with the tiger devouring the traveller after the latter is caught up in the mire; in the second the turtle falls to its death when it forgets the necessity for keeping mum. Needless to say, the present versions are

never meant to be alternative to the profound didactic message the original parables have. The author has only borrowed them, with apologies to Pundit Vishnu Sharma, to give vent to the imagination they inspired in him. (BFFA 72)

I

The Tiger and The Traveller

“The Tiger and The Traveller” is an interesting fable. It shows greed is the deadly sin. The action of the story takes place near the ancient pond in the forest. There is evocation of rural atmosphere with snapshots of Nature.

At the beginning of the story there is a greedy traveller who wants to commit suicide in the ancient pond. But the old tiger offers him the old bangle with precious stones. He accepts the bangle from the tiger. Then the traveller swims towards the middle of the pond and stands in the neck-deep water. He examines the bangle. He is lured by a wonderful glow of the bangle. His mind revises his decision to die. His attachment to life grows stronger. He indulges in future dreams:

I contemplated the effect the bangle could have on the material plane of my existence. Its diamonds alone would surely place me among the most affluent members of my society. I would buy a lavish retreat in Tahiti; assume a new name-should it be Vikramaditya or Harun-Al-Raschid? – and commence a new life-style. (BFFA 74)

Next moment his eyes fell on his hands, and he horrifies. He has transformed into a tiger. In anguish, he lets out a sharp cry. He listens the conversation between the doves on the banyan tree. The doves think that

the traveller is facing the consequences of a double suicide. He suffers first for his decision for suicide. Secondly his decision to live for the sake of the bangle is another suicide and he must suffer for this.

Thus, the traveller does not enjoy a golden bangle because of his tigerly transformation,. The greed for the bangle makes his life miserable. He neither lives nor dies.

While commenting on the symbol of 'tiger' in the story Dr. Sarbeswar Samal observes, "In 'The Tiger and the Traveller', the tiger is the tempter, acts in a human way and passing the bangle seeks to escape the damnation on it. It is the tiger of the ancient Indian folk-tale harmless and endowed with wisdom." (99)

Thus the story reflects characteristics of rural culture. It is notable for its beautiful snapshots of Nature.

II

The Turtle From the Sky

"The Turtle from the Sky" is one of the superb fables. It comments on the people who aspire beyond their limits. They run after impossible things and they are never satisfied with their lot.

The setting of the story is green valley with beautiful lake. Once there lived a turtle by name Kambugriva who was ambitious. He had curiosity to know more beautiful lakes and much greener valleys beyond hills. The writer gives very beautiful snapshots of Nature. He portrays it:

At times he climbed to the bank and strolled for a while licking up a drop of dew from a blade of grass or chewing up

a tiny flower. But far from satiating, that only enhanced his thirst for knowing the unknown.

Often he would pass into a sort of trance and in his vision see strange things: singing trees, blue rivers that fell perpendicularly from the clouds... (BFFA 77)

Each year, there camped a couple of swans, Vikata and Sankata by name passing on to a much bigger lake beyond the hills. Turtle and Swans become intimate friends. The turtle proposed that they take him along in their flight to the great lake. One day the turtle clamped his jaws tightly to the middle of stick. The two swans took off the turtle holding two ends of the stick in their beaks. The swans instructed turtle not to open his mouth. But the turtle did not listen it carefully. Turtle goggled around at the landscape with wonder and delight. He said excitedly before taking hold of the stick, "I will go down in history the first astronaut among the turtles." (BFFA 78)

The smaller birds like sparrows and partridges were frightened by the apparition. Some cowherd boys observed this event and clapped their hands and ran keeping place with the swans for some time. As the swans with turtle were flying near the palace tower, the king with his entire court including emissary was on the terrace. The emissary told the king that they have birds as big as buffaloes to whisk the pigs across the sky. This time Kambugriva shrieked "You fool!" (BFFA 80) and fell dead on the roof of the palace tower.

The chief epicure of the court declares that the meat of such a turtle is a conclusion sure cure for all diseases and defects. Then the royal cook arrives with a big tray of steaming turtle. The King tastes it with the courtiers.

Thus the turtle stands for overambitious and proud people who always chase unreachable things and finally meet with disaster. However, the present fable conveys true nature of reality. It gives us message that one can not aspire beyond his/her limitations.

The story is packed with photographic descriptions of rural life with its trees, rivers, lake and the hills. Though the setting of the story is the good old days of Kings and Queens, it has concrete message relevant to our time.

The Last Night

Manoj Das is a notable writer of fables and fantasies. His fables and fantasies are based on basic human truths. They comment on human life and nature.

E.M. Forster in his *Aspects of the Novel* explains nature of fantasy. He puts it as:

The supernatural but need not express it. The writer of fantastic turn have used such as the introduction of a god, ghost, angel, monkey, monster, midget and witch into ordinary life; or the introduction of ordinary men into no man's land the future, past, the interior of the earth, the fourth dimension; the divings into and dividing of personality or finally the device of parody and adaptation. These devices need never grow stale. They will occur naturally to writers of a certain temperament ... (106)

The story "The Last Night" is an expansion of tales from the *Jatakas* and the *Panchatantra*. The narration of the story clearly indicates the point where the original version ended and then from where the

author builds up the story according to his own inspiration. The present story, in its original, ends with the bandit advising the young wife of the old man to be mindful of her husband's needs.

The present story is presented through a dialogue between two Orissan folk characters, Samanta and Abolkara. Samanta is endowed with a great fund of knowledge, and Abolkara has an insatiable curiosity. Samanta has been an indefatigable traveller in his youth feels an irresistible urge to repeat his feat years later. A rustic youth Abolkara agrees to accompany him as his servant on the condition that he will stop the moment any scene or sight intrigues him and would resume walking only after his query had been satisfied.

The action of the story "The Last Night" takes place in village of Ahladpur. At the beginning of the story there is evocation of rural atmosphere. The writer pens a graphic description of the physical features of village Ahaladpur:

Having passed a night in the prosperous and sprawling village of Ahladpur, Samanta and Abolkara resumed their journey in the morning. At the centre of the village was a small lake and on its bank stood an old shrine of Lord Shiva, stones from its broken parapet lying scattered all over the place. (LWDOHT 46)

As Abolkara is taking rest, he draws Samanta's attention to a frolicsome dog and cat. This very dog gave a chase to this very cat on the outskirts of the village. But the same dog and cat become friendly inside the village. Abolkara asks Samanta about the secret of this miracle. At that time Samanta explains the truth, "The dog and the cat you see are really possessed by the "vital spirits" of two dead gentlemen, fathers of a

bride and her groom. Don't confuse the "vital spirit", the seat of one's desires, passions and ordinary emotions with what we know as the soul." (LWDOHT 47)

Here the writer creates supernatural atmosphere with the presence of vital spirits which is the prominent characteristics of rural culture. There is presence of sublime aspect in the internal atmosphere of this village. When this aspect dominates animals feel splendid. The writer also comments on dowry system prevalent in society. The bride's father who had offered dowry has become a dog after his death for supporting wicked tradition of dowry. The groom's father has become a cat after his death for his greed for money. Thus this episode supports the theory of Karma-Sidhanta in Bhagvatgita. If you are involved in good deeds in your life, you will get good results and if you are busy in evil deeds its consequences will be disastrous.

Then the writer throws light on great human truths. While commenting on the presence of a great soul of a lady, Samanta throws light on the human truths. He states it as, "Fame and true greatness do not always go together. Many of the great live unknown and depart in silence while knaves and the vain-glorious steal the limelight." (LWDOHT 49)

Then Samanta tells the Panchatantra story about the old man with a young wife. Mahapatra of this village married several times but his wives were short lived. He risked an eighth marriage with the sixteen year old young lady. One full moon light, he found himself in his young wife's embrace. He was surprised and suspected it to be a dream. But later on he come to know that it was the presence of a bandit in the room compelled the girl to do so. The old man welcomed the bandit and offered him to take whatever he liked. But instead of looking for valuables, the bandit

advised the young lady to take care of her old husband and the bandit left the place. Here the Panchatantra story ends.

Then the writer builds up the story henceforth according to his own inspiration. As per the advice of the bandit the young lady begins to pay attention to her husband. Then the old man meets a hermit living in a valley near the village. He asks him to grant him a youthful vigour. At this point the hermit states the goal of the life of man, He says, “My explanation will be meaningful only if you are conscious of your life’s goal. It is not to remain entangled forever in the process of birth, suffering and death, but to transcend it and reach the Divine Consciousness: that ought to be our ultimate aim.” (LWDOHT 51)

Here we find influence of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy on the vision of Manoj Das. But as per the insistence of the old man for youthful vigour, the hermit guides him to muster some youthful vitality for a short period. The hermit tells him to bath three times in a small waterfall in a hidden Himalayan valley and lick some germinal worms and then he can develop youthful vigour. The excited old man leaves his wife in search of the waterfall. After one year, the old man returns with his youthful vigour. He is eager to enjoy his desire at night. His wife comes to know her husband's success. She welcomes him and cooks delicious lunch for him. After that she sits in meditation and passes away in her trance at sunset. The old man's passionate desires end with the death of his wife. He also dies at dawn. The villagers cremate them together. Later the hermit tells that the lady was highly evolved soul and bit of her asceticism was still present in the occult atmosphere of Ahladpur.

Thus the present story ends with moral lesson which is very useful in the present materialistic life. Man has made materialistic progress with

the help of science and technology. Still man is not happy. Man can achieve true happiness by developing his spiritual power. The story is notable for its picturesque description of the village, Alhadpur with its mysterious sublime air. The hermit stands for spiritual world which is the dominant characteristics of rural culture.

The Lady Who Died One and Half Times

Manoj Das's fables and fantasies have thrilling and mesmerizing quality. There is influence of Indian mysticism on the writings of Manoj Das. "The Lady Who Died One and Half Times" is Manoj Das's original contribution to the great tradition of Indian lore, which throws light on the beliefs, experiences of a mystic. It also focuses on the philosophy of Tantra and its adverse effects. It supports the belief that knowledge of God and of real truth may be obtained through Yoga and spiritual insight.

The story is presented through a dialogue between two Orissan folk characters, Samanta and Abolkara. The action of the story takes place in Sage Dhiman's hermitage located in a lush green forest. The story centres around Tanmoy, a disciple of Sage Dhiman and Susmita, the adopted daughter of the Tantrik – Chandagauranga. There is evocation of rural sensibility with the description of the river and its surrounding. The writer pens it as: "The river Kshipra, flowing by the hermitage, was in spate. An ace swimmer, Tanmoy loved to float with or against the strong currents for long stretches of time. The river had turned like a sickle a furlong beyond the bathing ghat used by the inmates of the hermitage" (LWDOHT 2)

Then Tanmoy comes in contact with Susmita who used to live in a relatively dense part of the forest. She conquers the heart of Tanmoy. The writer draws imagery from nature to describe her beauty. He portrays her beauty as "No wonder, for her body was like a champak flower, her eyes

a pair of glittering stars, while sometimes they twinkled like diamonds, at some other times they were as gentle and inviting as two drops of dew”. (LWDOHT2-3) Further their love transforms into intimate relationship. Tanmoy visits Susmita’s house and meets her father. She tells Tanmoy that her father has observed in him a great capacity for practicing the Trantra. But Tanmoy refuses to take the practice of Tantra because of its dangerous effects. He wants to pursue Yoga seriously. The writer focuses on the philosophy of Tantra and its perilous path. The fake Sadhas and Babas use these tantras to perform miracles and they deceive the poor rustics. The writer states it as:

... The Tantriks involve themselves in and delve deep into the attractions, which the spiritual seekers of other disciplines are keen to avoid. The Tantriks enter the dusky tunnel of occult laws with the aim of emerging into the sunlight of Truth at its other end, but only one in ten thousand succeed in that. The rest are lured and diverted by false lights emanating from the numerous labyrinths branching out of the tunnel, lights of puny *Siddhis* or powers for performing miracles. They go in quest of *Avidya* – tricks performed by the lower *Prakriti*. (LWDOHT 3)

But Susmita ignores Tanmoy’s views on powers of Tantra. She secretively performs a Tantrik rite with Tanmoy at its force which could ensure him a throne. Further she informs him that according to her father he is likely to become either a king or a spiritual Guru. But Tanmoy realizes the limitations of his knowledge. In the evening Sage Dhiman advises Tanmoy to confine himself to his dwelling tomorrow from sunrise to sunset. Tanmoy obeying his Guru takes bath at dawn and enters his cave. He sits down and shuts his eyes and gets immersed in a light

trance. But a sudden burst of unusual noise compels him to step out of his cave. He watches a massive elephant decorated with jewellery and garlands is walking at the head of procession comprising the Prime Minister, the General, the Kotwal, the Chief Priest and courtiers, it raises its trunk holding golden pitcher and pours fragrant water sanctified by certain rites on Tanmoy's head. Tanmoy is declared as the king by the Prime Minister. The General informs that their noble king has passed away without leaving male heir. As per their tradition they left the choice of the new king to the royal elephant.

Further the coronation ceremony of Tanmoy takes place and he orders the monarch to remove the dead body of king for funeral rites. He remembers Susmita and how her tantrik rites performed for him has proved true. Further the foresight of his Guru pains him because he has disobeyed his Guru. As he has forbidden him to come out of his cave before sunset. He wants to meet him to seek his blessings. But the Prime Minister tells him that Saga Dhiman has already left for the Himalaya. Then they inform him about his wedding with Princess Haimavati. Tanmoy protests it and tells them that he has to marry with Susmita. But the priest objects this marriage. He says that Susmita is not Tantrik's own daughter but she is adopted by him. But they permit Susmita into queen's apartment as a companion of the princess and his concubine. However the wedding ceremony of Tanmoy and Princess takes place. As per their tradition the couple visit Varanasi. They start their journey but the queen becomes critically ill when they arrive the city. She cannot recover from her illness and she closes her eyes. While sitting near her, he observes the outline of a woman in the faint light and smoke. The woman in outline is Susmita's spirit. She tells that now queen is no more and she is also no more. She asks Tanmoy's help to enter her spirit in the dead body of the

queen. Tanmoy performs the rite and soon the queen opens her eyes. Susmita's spirit enters in the body of the queen. The attendants become happy at the miraculous recovery of the queen. But now the real crisis starts to disturb Tanmoy. She prohibits him to touch Haimavati because she feels tormented. Tanmoy becomes confused in this critical situation. He wants to meet his Guru in the Himalaya before resuming his kingly duties. He gives his charge of king to the queen who will rule in his absence. When he reaches Haridwar, he comes to know that Sage Dhiman has decided to spend the winter in a state of Samadhi in a cave at Badarikashram when holy hamlet would be covered in snow.

After four months, while returning from Haridwar, he gets the report of the queen's tyrannous activities. She has put a number of nobles to death. Sage Dhiman advises Tanmoy to return to his capital and take the charge of situation. Confused in critical situation, Tanmoy asks his Guru reasons for the queen's tyrannous behaviour. Sage Dhiman throws light on the difference between 'vital being' and 'soul'. The writer states it as:

My boy, what possessed Queen Haimavati was by no means Susmita's soul, but only her vital being, her life-force, an explosive reserve of her desires and passions. The Susmita you knew was no different because her vital being was constrained by her soul. Once dead, her soul went away to its own sphere where it must await an appropriate rebirth. Detached from the soul, her vital being must have come under the influence of some hostile element. It is one's vital being which generally, though not necessarily, wanders about for a while after one's death. (LWDOTH 15)

Then Tanmoy reaches to his capital but he receives bad news of the queen's violent death in the attack of the rebels led by the General. They surrender to Tanmoy but they are pardoned. King Tanmoy continues to rule peacefully. Then Samanta explains Abolkara what is meant by one and half times dead? He puts it as: "Susmita at first died in her own body; her vital being died once again in Himavati's body." (LWDOHT 16)

Manoj Das is a philosopher-writer. His quest for finding the eternal truth of life is reflected in the present story. The story throws light on the adverse effects of the powers of Tantra used for performing miracles. The spiritual seekers of other disciplines avoid these lower powers. Tanmoy represents yogic and spiritual world which leads its Sadhak in quest of truth. On the other hand, Susmita stands for world of Tantra which lures person by its false lights. They become slaves of lower powers and its end is severe. The story throws light on the mysticism and occultism. The story is a masterpiece of an authentic presentation of a hermitage located in a serene, placid and lush-green forest which is the dominant characteristics of rural culture. It focuses true nature of spiritual life which is the dominant characteristics of rural culture.

Operation Bride

The short stories of Manoj Das comment on various aspects of life. He has depicted placid and serene rural culture in his stories. "Operation Bride" is a marvelous fantasy. The story presents clash between village culture and modern civilized culture.

The setting of the story is a small hill-top village. At the beginning of the story there is evocation of rural atmosphere. The writer pens it as:

Rain came down, suddenly, over Mount Luvurva, amidst the forest not very far from the capital. The wandering prince took shelter under the thick-leaved roof of a stout tree. (CL 168)

The story centres around a lovely girl. Her father is a poor wood-cutter living in a lone hut on the hilltop. When the wandering prince behold this beautiful girl jumping from rock to rock and singing herself, he fell in love with her. As the girl is neither a princess nor from any noble house there is problem of her marriage with the prince. But the King agrees this proposal because the girl is as beautiful as a fairy. According to the King the prince should marry with the bride who must be perfect in health and beauty. So the King sends the team of the best experts to the hilltop to find out the details. After a month the experts met the King and give the list of suggestions to make the girl perfect royal bride.

The experts and specialists make a plan to replace the natural beauty of the girl by the plastic surgery and electronic devices developed by modern science and technology. The writer critically comments on the team of the experts. He puts it as:

But there were one hundred members in the committee of experts. One by one they spoke of so many, so varied and so very highly sophisticated defects and possible defects and possibly possible defects that the King soon thought it less trouble to limit his reaction to nodding his head.

The discussions went on till it was dawn. Still they remained inconclusive. It was only while rushing towards their 'conveniences' that they unanimously decided to

handover the responsibility of perfecting the would be bride to a famous firm of specialists across the seven seas. (CL 172)

The specialists on skin, heart, nerves, eyes, the arts of smiles and sighs and eye-brow manipulation were invited for the work of perfecting the bride. This project had been completed after five years. The team of the experts while working on the project removed the girl's original heart, liver, her teeth, hair, eyebrow, toes etc. and transplanted perfect synthetic parts, lasting and insured. But in this process her soul slipped away. Thus the royal bride is powered by the latest super-electronic devices.

The date of the wedding is fixed. The girl with garland in hand stood ready to welcome the prince. But when the prince watches her, he collapses. The writer puts it as, "Death due to failure of heart due to a sudden shock due to something inexplicable." pronounced the doctor.

(CL 174)

Thus Manoj Das criticizes the experts and specialists who represent modern civilized culture which boasts for its development in science and technology. In this materialistic world man gives importance to external beauty and forgets presence of soul. On the other hand the girl stands for rural culture. Her way of life is simple and innocent. She lives in the company of nature so far unaffected by the impact of the city culture. She is gifted with natural beauty and does not require any cosmetics and plastic surgery. She bursts into songs when it rains or when there is a rainbow in the sky. But the King does not like her natural ways and activities. He orders experts to teach her discipline and etiquette of royal family. Thus in the process of making perfect bride, her natural beauty is destroyed and she is transformed into a scarecrow by plastic surgery. The

writer supports rural culture for its natural way of life. He criticizes modern culture for its pomposity.

Dr. Sarbeswar Samal comments on the modern culture in the story. He states it as:

“Operation Bride” shows the perversion of taste and muddle headedness of intellect. That the experts and specialists would carve a perfect bride only underscores their stupidity and foolishness. The bride sans the soul who was designed to live by sophisticated electronic devices suggests a human existence devoid of any spirit behind the tinsel glitter of our jaundiced civilization. It reminds us of Baudelaire’s image of ‘Gouffre’ to symbolize the void behind the façade of our civilization. (93)