

CHAPTER - IV

RURAL CULTURE IN GHOST STORIES AND MYSTERIES OF MANOJ DAS

4.1 THE NATURE AND TECHNIQUES OF GHOST STORIES OF MANOJ DAS

Manoj Das is the successful master story teller. He has handled different forms of short stories in his writings. He portrays supernatural characters like ghosts, spirits and demons etc.

Though we are living in advanced age of science and technology, there is fear of the unknown in our mind. Though science denies the existence of ghosts and spirits, the readers love to read about them.

The writers have handled the theme of supernatural and the mystery in their writings. Virgil Scott and David Madden in their *Studies in the Short Story* write:

One way to tame, to domesticate our primitive fears is to give them shape and confront them vicariously, to witness the hero's combat with them ... The way we deal with modern fears is to understand them; role-playing in encounter groups to confront our own personality problems is similar to our interaction with tales of horror; but the continuing appeal of tales in which the emphasis is more on confrontation than understanding suggests that for some people understating is not enough. Because we can not totally always repress our fear of death and the unknown, such tales give us opportunities for facing them with only imagined danger. The result is a thrill rather than a trauma.

Tales do not enable us to rid ourselves of primitive fears but to co-exist with them. (207)

Many of the Manoj Das' stories centre around a ghost. He handles these stories with a different technique. We find his quest for reality in these stories. James Mitchie in his introduction to *The Bogley Head Book for Longer Short Stories* states:

These ghost stories leave behind the more enduring and less definable reverberations a sense of weather, the feel of a place, the memory of gesture, the mystery, not to be shaken off, of a personality (even the narrator himself), quite apart from the mere fact of what actually happens. Indeed, what fails to happen may turn out to be the important thing. (8)

In these stories Manoj Das depicts dominating effect of Nature on human life. At the background of the ghost stories of Manoj Das there is moonlight and twilight, howling jackals, roaring tigers, blinding rain, hooting owls which create a supernatural atmosphere. These stories have rural setting. The people living in the villages have strong faith in the presence of ghosts and spirits. They perform different rituals with the help of tantriks or occultists to free the persons who are possessed by spirits.

Pragyan Prabartika Dash in his "Manoj Das' World of Wonder: A Study of His Short Stories with Reference to Rasa Theory and Magical Realism" states the nature of *Adbhuta Rasa* in the stories of Manoj Das. He puts it as:

The *Adbhuta Rasa* in the stories of Manoj Das is always portrayed through a psychological level. He always has a

connectivity with the other world or the metaphysical world. This is often called para-psychology in scientific term. With this, we come across mental powers that exist, but which can not be accounted for by natural law and knowledge and which can not be obtained through the usual sensory abilities. In the stories of Mr. Das, we have these events (*Vibhavas*), occurring with or without our knowledge, and they play tremendous roles in our real life. “*Vismaya Bhava*” is generated in these emotional achievements, yet we can not prevent ourselves from understanding them as real and actual. This cognitive phenomenon is often called extra-sensory perception, in which a person acquires knowledge of other people’s thoughts or of future events through channels apparently beyond the five senses. These channels (*Uddipana Vibhavas*) play superb role in these stories, as they sometimes act as real characters rather than mere imaginative ones. (9)

In this chapter, an attempt is made to trace the prominent features of rural culture in mysteries and ghost stories of Manoj Das. Though their number is limited, these stories are effective and show the writer’s skill.

4.2 RURAL CULTURE IN GHOST STORIES OF MANOJ

DAS

Farewell To a Ghost

“Farewell To a Ghost” is an outstanding ghost story by Manoj Das. The story presents the faith of the village folk in the existence of the ghost of girl which is a century old. The people especially living in rural areas have a strong belief in ghosts and spirits which is the dominant

characteristic of rural culture. The story takes place in a village. The girl's spirit used to live in the deserted house which was built by the Feringhee Indigo planters. The story begins with the description of deserted villa, the abode of girl's spirit :

It was on moonlit that the deserted villa looked particularly fascinating from the river bank we looked at it in long silences. When the fitful breeze made waves of the tall yellow grass around it, the house looked like a phantom castle floating on an unreal sea. Though pale, desolate and eerie, I must repeat, it was as fascinating as a fairy-tale world. (FGS 101)

The writer has created air of suspense and thrill with the help of this description. It also evokes rural atmosphere.

The girl happened to be illegitimate daughter of a sahib by a tribal woman. As the legend goes, the three young feringhees had brought this girl. The girl kills three sahibs by giving them poisoned food. She plans to possess all the gold and money kept by her masters but she herself is stabbed by her companion. Three days later some feringhees with native sepoy forced the villagers to bury the girl's body. Thus the girl turns into a ghost.

The villagers always treated her as a member of their community. They looked upon her as an unfortunate daughter. They have very sympathetic attitude towards her because of her harmless nature. The villagers treated her more as a living girl than a ghost. The writer here focuses simple and affectionate way of life of villagers which is the feature of rural culture. The villagers suppose the spirit as the guardian-angle of the village. Even the boys also respected the spirit. The villagers

offered a share to the girl in almost all religious ceremonies observed by them. The narrator states:

No feast in the village, be it due to a birth or marriage or death passed without the girl's share being duly offered to her. The ceremony took place in the dead of night. Some young men would carry the food in earthen pots. The party would always be led by a respectable elderly man, generally the head pundit of the primary school. We juniors were allowed to survey their actions only from a distance. After the pots and an earthen lamp had been placed between the villa and the banyan tree, the head pundit would intone: Unhappy girl, here is your share of the feast which has been held by the benevolent so-and-so on such-and-such occasion. Be satisfied with this. And, we ask you to guard the village from evil to the extent of your capacity. We have never tried to dislodge you or disturb you, have we? No. Why not? Because we look upon you as one of our unlucky daughters. God grant you peace! (FGS 104)

Then there is shocking news that government has decided to demolish the crumbling villa where the spirit of girl is living. The villagers become anxious to settle the ghost in some other place. While discussing the solution, the writer uses the authentic expressions to reveal rural beliefs of the villagers in the following words:

‘Can't we request the government to spare the villa?’

‘No, since the time the zamindar was declared bankrupt, the land has become the government's property. The government does not provide for ghosts,’ the village

headman said, and his statement was followed by a prolonged silence and intermittent coughs and yawans.

Then, a lizard tick-ticked and two or three people muttered, 'True, true!' 'But what will happen to the girl? She has lived there all these years and has never harmed us. Rather, there are reasons to believe that she is a benevolent ghost.'

The lizard tick-ticked again and this time more people said, and more loudly, 'True, true!' (FGS 106)

The villagers request the authorities to delay the demolition work for a few days. A religious ritual is arranged for farewell to ghost. The writer throws light on the strong impact of beliefs and rituals on the mind of the villagers.

A priest, well-versed in necromancy was appointed to perform ceremony. It was told that the priest wore a garland of beads carved out of the spine of a willful witch. Here, Manoj Das presents the socio-religious aspect of rural life very effectively. Customs, rituals and superstitions form the rural religious life which is the important feature of rural life. The farewell ceremony of the ghost is presented with effective expression which leaves strong mark on the mind of the readers. It is very emotional incident:

'Almost every family had brought a little food-rice, bananas, coconuts, sweet meats or cakes – to offer the girl ... The presents were arranged in a semi-circle on the varandah. The priest placed a parcel at its centre and slowly removed the red linen covering it. It was a complete human skull. He also

held a stick of bone. He recited hymns while drawing figures in the air with the bone ...' (FGS 106-107)

The priest leads the ghost to a tall palm tree. Then he beat the tree with the bone and circled it a number of time. After this, the villagers walked in silence. Then everyone returned with weeping silently. The narrator and his friends used to visit this very spot every evening till the last day of summer vacation. The narrator was led to town for admission to a school.

The narrator returns to his village after three months. Then he notices the very tree where the ghost was placed. The tree was dead, struck by lightning. Now the village boys forget the ghost. Even the narrator's visits to the village became rarer. The new generation of the village boys are ignorant about the ghost. They are afraid of ghosts.

Thus the story is a masterpiece of the representation of traditional beliefs and values. Manoj Das highlights compassionate and innocent attitude of the villagers in rural India. The ghost of the girl has become part and parcel of the life of the villagers. The tree where the ghost was placed was struck by lightning. It indicates the end of an epoch. Manoj Das shows his deep anguish for changing innocent beliefs and values of rural culture.

Friends and Strangers

In the story "Friends and Strangers" we come across two friends, Tirthankar and Shivabrata. Manoj Das creates an outstanding atmosphere at the setting of the story. The story takes place in "the small town in the northern valley". It was an autumn evening and the moonlight was very thick on the lush outskirts of the town. The two friends have just come to

their native town to spend their holidays. Every time they used to meet their third friend, Pramath.

The writer describes the gossip between two friends by creating atmosphere of suspense and fear which reminds us mysterious and silent life of rural people. :

Tirthankar and Shivabrata sat on a rock, chit-chatting. The moon seemed to have risked coming so dangerously close to the tallest palm tree between the rock and the lake that the two friends feared that the branches of the tree, swaying madly might scratch its delicate surface.

It was a forlorn area where even a mongoose running between the bushes looked quite a personage. (FGS 113)

The two friends while sitting on the rock, see their third friend, Pramath, walking along the narrow road, fifteen feet below their rock. They talk with him and he informs that he has seen old Mr. Wilson seated in front of her house and he has presented shawl to Mrs. Wilson who was in reality dead. The two friends become totally shocked to listen the information provided by Pramath. Further they visit Pramath's house and they get the information that a telegram had brought the news of Pramath's death in an accident. They looked each other, each had felt the other to be unreal – as unreal as Pramath.

Thus, the writer creates atmosphere of mystery and fear with the help of the moon, the silence of the evening, the erratic breeze, hyenas to dogs which remind us familiar rural areas.

Evenings at Nijanpur

Magic and mystery are the dominant aspects of Manoj Das' short fiction. There is influence of mysterious, supernatural aspect on the events, human imagination in the fiction of Manoj Das, which is the feature of rural culture. In "Evenings at Nijanpur", we find presence of supernatural element which makes story mysterious. The central character of the story is Vikaram who is possessed by the spirit. He recollects his past experience before twenty years in Nijanpur. He states:

In place of this heap of broken bricks once there stood an old and small double-storeyed house. That was twenty years ago. And the house was occupied by the first headmistress of the Rani Tarangini Girls' School, founded by the late Rani Saheba of the erstwhile Nijanpur State. (MMCOS 85)

Vikram came to spend a few days with their family friend Brajnath. In the course of time there is change in Nijanpur. The narrator states; "Nijanpur was a sleepy little town, with the palace, a guest-house, the Raja's little kachahri, a jail, a dispensary, the old High School and moderate shapes and fields and parks." (MMCOS 86)

Vikram used to stroll after sunset. He recollects the experience which he had in that house and unknown to Brajnath. The headmistress of school lived lonely in that house. But Vikram heard her voice while she was talking to someone. Actually she used to worship the photograph of her lover, who appears to have died. But she strongly believes that he would come back one day. After returning from the school late in the evening she talks to the picture of her lover. Vikram secretly goes there watches the strange behaviour of the headmistress. One day he becomes successful to reach her house in her absence. He stared at the picture. But

he experiences strange feeling of the picture staring at him. He keeps sitting there. Then the headmistress arrives there. She supposes that her lover has returned. She pours out her woes, her waiting for him. At that time Vikram experiences very strange experience: “Looking for a moment at the picture in his hand, he felt a shiver, for the picture appeared to have suddenly sprung to life and to have become anxious to express itself and, since that was not possible, it was as though passing its personality to Vikram, to act through him!... His outer self had been numbed by the crazy utterances and weeping of the lady, while from beneath his skeleton was emerging an alien being.” (MMCOS 89)

The lady collapsed out of delight or terror. But the picture in Vikram’s hand was directing him to do something more.

The story suggests that Vikram had been under the spell of the spirit of the young man in the photograph. The writer tries to reveal this mystery by creating magical atmosphere by using effective expressions like ‘dilapidated house’ ‘a golden moon mingling with dark clouds’, ‘a remote, snowy horizon of total aloneless,’ ‘the queer and eerie feeling’, ‘the uncanny power of being seen in the dark’ ‘from beneath his skelton was emerging an alien being’ etc.

The Dusky Horizon

In “The Dusky Horizon” Manoj Das presents the nostalgic recollection of his childhood memories in a village. The writer shows a greater sympathy towards traditional rural values which are changing in the course of the time. He also criticizes the ill-sides of the village life. The writer has created atmosphere of mystery to indicate impact of supernatural elements on the mind of villagers. The story represents outstanding features of rural culture.

At the background of the story there is typical Indian village. The narrator of the story is a village boy who narrates his childhood memories. There was a curiosity in his mind about the ogres. The narrator presents his idea of 'darkness' in the village very effectively. It creates atmosphere of suspense. He says:

No sooner had I read about the hill on the horizon than I remembered the hill on the outskirts of my village. Because of its resemblance to a peacock with spread out tail it was called the Peacock Hill and though not very high, to us kids it appeared gigantic.

Although I passed all my days since my early youth in cities where darkness meant only lights switched off, I had never forgotten the grandeur of rural dark, awfully alive, like a surging flood throbbing with impulses and emotions of its own and which in my childhood, used to assume its most impressive and terrifying stance on the Peacock Hill.

(DHOS 1-2)

The villagers believe that an ogre dwelt in the thicker part of the forest on the Peacock Hill. So the children are not allowed to go there. There is also rumour about the stranger living on the hill who had murdered ten or twenty rogues. Grannies added the number of his victims to one hundred and one. Here Manoj Das throws light on the blind beliefs of the villagers.

Further the narrator tells about an ambitious village lad who is a scholar of History. He is first youth to proceed to the town for higher studies. The narrator's father describes the personality of the youth. Here the writer's use of rural imagery is superb. He says: "the bamboo –

legged, pipe - necked youth always looked agog with ideas.” (DHOS 3) The youth has been seen living on the hill but one day he disappeared. Nobody saw him thereafter. This gave rise to the speculation about the dweller on the hill. Some thought that he was a sorcerer, and others thought that he was a Yaksha. The writer throws light on the beliefs of the villagers.

Then the narrator gives details about Shri Jagatbandhu Das, a distinguished young man of the village. He was considered as a wise idealistic boy. His father had a small zamindari comprising of two villages. He becomes a doctor and marries a Christian nurse. Here the writer throws light on the reactions of the tradition-ridden villagers on the intercaste marriage. Here we come to know that the path of social change is never smooth. The writer puts it as:

“... that ominous news reached our village, the solemn lot of our elders were seen walking the roads with heads hung low and their faces pulled long like cucumbers.

They straightened their heads only when the progressive and ever optimistic Jagatbandhu, appearing in the village with his bride, was not only obliged by his father to seek shelter in the cowshed, but also was completely ostracized by the villagers who showed exemplary unity on this issue.

In the cowshed Jagatbandhu's wife took ill. Nobody came to his aid. He was even forbidden the use of the village ponds and had to fetch water from the river himself. Respectable people from several nearby villages, umbrellas stuck under arms, came to steal glimpses of Jagatbandhu in that condition.” (DHOS 5-6)

One day Jagatbandhu leaves for the town with his wife. In the course of the time his wife dies leaving behind her a son. Further the son grew up into a brilliant scholar and married. Then his wife gave birth to a daughter. Then along his wife, he also leaves the world.

Half a century has passed since the time of Jagatbandhu's romance. Manoj Das presents changing villages under the impact of British rule. There is influence of city life on the way of life of villagers. The writer states:

“... some well-to-do villagers and their families had made exploratory trips to the town and had returned with beautifully bordered family photographs which they hung in company of the colourful portraits of gods and goddesses and of King George the Sixth. One bespectacled gentleman subscribed to a weekly and carried a bundle of the periodical wherever he went.

To top it all, a post office and a government dispensary had been opened in a village notorious for its modernity, only three miles away from ours.” (DHOS 6-7)

Then there is entry of Jagatbandhu with his grand-daughter Lily in the village. Now time has changed. He has been treated with respect. On the rural background of the story, Lily plays very important role. Lily comes from city. She wore a frock at eleven by which age the village girls wear sarees. She is not shy girl and used to survey the boys from top to toe. She knew English. Thus Lily's world is different one.

The narrator gives details of his two friends one is their leader Hatakishor alias Hatu and the deputy leader Navin who used to sit under

the banyan tree on the river bank. In the course of time Hatu, Navin, the narrator and Lily become close friends. They used to play together and also enjoy their breakfast. The close bond of friendship has been developed between three village boys and a girl from the town. While discussing about the existence of ghosts, the narrator asks Lily whether there are ghosts in the town? Lily answers:

“Yes, but perhaps not as many as you have here. I know only one case. Years ago, there was a fair in the suburb. A photographer had camped there. One evening a gentleman, holding his infant grand daughter on his lap, posed for a picture ... when the picture was ready, the photographer observed, ‘I don’t understand why the lady’s picture should come so indistinct.’”

‘Who then was standing behind you, holding on to your chair?’ asked the surprised photographer and showed the picture to the gentleman who, as soon as he looked at it, shrieked and almost fainted. The phantom figure was his dead daughter-in-law, that to say, my mother. Grandpa was the gentleman and I was the baby he held.” (DHOS 15-16)

After telling all these details, Lily wipes her eyes and twilight changes into evening. In the dusk, the hilltop looked like an island floating on the horizon. Lily puts forth her plan to visit Peacock Hill. The narrator and his two friends had visited Hill only twice or thrice before. It is very risky to launch an independent expedition. But at last they set upon their journey. They reached the top, when the sun was disappearing, and clouds were gathering in sky. They decided to return but the wind turned cold and cruel and the rain started with lightnings and thunder

claps. Lily lost her glasses and could see nothing. They started to climb down separated from one another. At last they reached base but without Lily. Jagatbandhu about a dozen people including Hatu, Navin and the narrator advanced towards the Peacock Hill. They found dead body of Lily on the patch of grass. Lily was buried on that very spot.

After sixty years, when narrator visits his village he found out that Navin has become a writer and Hatu has become a hermit. The narrator and Navin visit the Peacock Hill and while returning from the hill, the narrator expresses his grief:

“Hatu is doing penance in his own way. You paid your tribute to Lily by recreating her as the charming heroine of your fairy tale. But what about me?” I asked, and to my own great surprise, wept.

“Only if I could weep like you! It is not so easy at seventy, you know!” said Navin. (DHOS 24)

Thus each has chosen his own way, but they can not forget Lily. She continued to live in their memories in their old age also.

Thus the story is a master piece of an authentic representation of rural life in India. It is also outstanding for its rural setting. The atmosphere of mystery and suspense has been created by the description of Peacock Hill, the thick forest, the existence of ogre, the river bank, the erratic breeze, dusky horizon etc. The writer also focuses his attention on traditional customs and blind beliefs of the villagers. He also takes note of the changing villages under the impact of modernization.

Red Red Twilight

Many of the short stories of Manoj Das centre around ghosts, souls and supernatural elements. He handles these stories with a special technique. The people living in villages have strong faith in ghosts and supernatural aspects. There is strong influence of traditional customs and beliefs on their mind. They believe in the rituals performed by tantriks or occulist.

“Red Red Twilight” is a horrific ghost story which is full of horror and suspense. It is an outstanding story for its setting and background. The setting of the story is a village. The central character of the story is Pundarik, well known tantrik and occulist. His father, Raghav Sharma is also towering tantrik of the region. The atmosphere of mystery is created at the beginning of the story. The writer states:

There were uncanny sunsets when the horizon turned ghastly red. If one had to cross the meadow then, all alone, when the erratic breeze carried the smoke of corpses burning at some distance, one felt like weeping-more so if the water of the lonely pond with the huge old trees surrounding it looked awfully red and enchanted. (MOS 68)

Raghav Sharma is a very famous exorcist. He is supposed as a terror to spooks and sprites also to ghosts. As he is sick, he sends his son Pundarik to handle the case of Kuni who is obsessed by ghost. Pundarik wishes to marry a village girl named Kumudini. But Raghav Sharma opposes it.

Here the writer focuses on the strong effect of traditional customs, mores on the mind of rural people which is the characteristics of rural

culture. As Raghav Sharma is proud of his forefathers, he gives reason for his disagreement with the proposal of marriage of his son with Kumudini. He states:

Look here, son, Kumudini's mother was a child-widow who married for the second time. Kumudini might be a sweet girl and her father a rich man, but such facts do not undo the scandal. That is not the only snag. We are beholden to the distinction of our calling that has come down to us from our blessed forefathers. Our powers would be irreparably damaged once a bride from sinful stock has been ushered into our family. That would mean the funeral of our proud tradition. (MOS 70)

Pundarik remained silent and he did not protest his father. On the other hand Kumudini commits suicide. She is drowned in the pond. Pundarik tried to forget Kumudini and even refused to see her dead body.

Now Pundarik has visited Kumudini's village to cure Kuni. He was very frightened. He began to run. He reaches the village hurriedly. Kuni had gone to pick berries from the shrubs on the ancient pond. When she stood under the banyan tree, a bough of tree came swinging down at her, she shrieked and fainted.

Pundarik tries his best to free Kuni from the clutches of the ghost. The writer gives details of it. He observes:

Someone brought a saucer loaded with smoldering cakes of wood, puffing and blowing into it with all his vigour, and placed it between kuni and Pundarik. From the darkness

outside the room came the whimpering of a woman. Kuni's mother. (MOS 73)

Further Kuni raised her head and looked at Pundarik. He recognizes that kuni is possessed by Kumudini's spirit. Kuni suddenly stood up and began to run followed by Pundarik. She fell down under the big banyan tree. He began running toward his village. He reaches home and enters his father's room. Raghav Sharma gets frightened to see Pundarik obsessed by the spirit of Kumudini. The writer describes how Kumudini takes her revenge on the father and son. He states:

Raghav set up. No sooner had his eyes fallen on his son than he yelled, "What has become of you, Pundarik? Who are you? And why this sneer and giggle? Spare me, spare me, please! O God, I was not prepared for this!" (MOS 75)

Manoj Das has become successful to create very effective background to express impact of ghosts and supernatural aspects on the life of rural people. He has created mysterious and magical atmosphere with help of following expressions: the red horizon, erratic breeze, burning corpses, howling wind, vixin's wailing, the howling of jackls, a seasoned spirit etc. Thus, the story is the best example of an authentic presentation of Indian rural life.

The Bridge in the Moonlight

Manoj Das presents beautiful village vignettes in his stories. His stories are set in villages and small towns. There is presence of supernatural element in the majority of his stories. We find ghosts, unseen spirits, demons in many of his stories. He creates atmosphere of

mystery in his ghost stories. 'Moonlight' contributes to the mood of the story. It creates dream-like situation.

In his 'The Bridge in the Moonlight' Manoj Das creates mysterious situation. He presents the theme of the seeing a ghost in this story. He depicts man's helplessness before his destiny. The action of the story centres around the character of octogenarian Prof. Ashok. He remembers his past moments when he looked at full moon. There is evocation rural sensibility. The writer pens the beautiful Nature under the influence of moonlight which has dreamlike quality. He depicts it as:

There were moments on such moonlight nights when he could see elves and fairies- he was surprised that they never aged – playing hide-and- seek among the silver – rimmed clouds and atop the starlit trees on the faint horizon. He enjoyed their frolic to his heart's fill, but often dozed off in the process and, what was intriguing, still continued to see them. His only problem was, he could not say how much of his those playful beings he saw while awake and how much asleep. (FGS 50)

Thus Prof. Ashok is aware of his queer forgetfulness. But he is proud of his clear vision at the age of eighty. He gives its credit to his feeding at his mother's breast till the age of five, being her last child. Here the writer throws light on the intimate relationship between the mother-child in Indian villages which is disappearing in modern city culture. There was the bridge on the small river two furlongs away. But Ashok can not see the very bridge. Then Sudhir, his friend younger to him by a decade arrives there. Ashok decides to visit the old bridge with Sudhir. But Sudhir informs him that the old bridge is destroyed and the

new one will be constructed. Here the writer throws light on the changing placid and serene atmosphere of rural culture in the process urbanization. He nostalgically pens it as:

‘... Where is the blessed bridge? Why do you think we haven’t enjoyed any stroll for a while month? They have pulled down the dear old bridge to its last brick. They plan to erect a new one – a stylish one with a number of jetties on both the sides for the taxpayers to enjoy their evenings around crotons and bougainvillaea, cracking nuts and sucking at ice-cream sticks. In no time it will turn into a fish market, I’ll bet,’ Sudhir spoke with some anguish. (FGS 52)

Then Sudhir confesses the fact which had happened sixty years ago. He tells Ashok the truth that Meena had written a sweet reply to Ashok’s epic love letters and she had agreed to meet him at the bridge. But out of jealousy Sudhir had torn it and thrown it into the water below the bridge. Thus Sudhir feels guilty for his treachery and requests Ashok bhai to pardon him. When Ashok listens this fact his soul leaves his body and goes in search of that precious but lost love letter. Then Mahindra another friend of Ashok arrives there and tells the fact that a few minutes ago he has seen Ashok searching something under the dismantled bridge. Thus Ashok bhai had not gone out that evening. He has fallen asleep in the sofa. When Sudhir and Mahindra tried to wake up him, they found him dead. Mahindra has seen spirit of Ashok searching the shreds of the torn letter.

Thus Manoj Das very skillfully presents the theme of seeing a ghost by creating atmosphere of mystery. Moonlit night provides proper setting for the story. The writer very effectively connects past memories

with the present which creates nostalgic mood. He depicts character of Prof. Ashok who loved Meena, his student. But she never responded him. He remained bachelor throughout his life. He remains faithful to Meena. While commenting on the melancholic atmosphere in the story Dr. Sarbeswar Samal states :

The bridge exists nostalgically in Ashok's subconscious like his passion for Meena. It stands as a memorial of love and loss and with moonlight it acquires the association of sadness and melancholy.

But apart from this, the bridge as such, arching over the river and hanging under the sky connecting two unconnected patches of land, holds a perennial charm for the human mind. It is archetypal, esoteric and enchanting in its appeal.

(95)

Thus the bridge in the story links the past and the present which deepens the melancholic mood in the story. Ashok Babu represents deep and faithful love for Meena, his student and remains unmarried throughout his life. But such type of faithful love is rare in modern culture. The writer expresses his deep anguish towards changing values of rural culture.

Interpoles

Manoj Das introduces magical atmosphere in his short stories. We come across extra sensory bodies like ghosts, spirits and demons in his stories. We don't find clear-cut boundary between reality and fantasy. He has become successful to naturalize the supernatural elements. He has used rural setting in his short stories. The villagers believe in the

existence of ghosts and spirits. They also believe in the phenomenon of the dead possessing the living.

In “Interpoles” Manoj Das very effectively portrays the supernatural world in which the dead person’s spirit possesses the living. He also comments on the changing rural culture in the process of urbanization.

The action of the story takes place in the village Talkota. The writer pens the authentic picture of the changing, placid and serene atmosphere of Talkota in the process of modernization. He observes it as:

“...Talkota of those days had nothing more to boast of than its palm-studded semi circular beach cutting into the sea like a giant sickle and this solitary mansion of the Maharaja just turned into a hotel,” reminisced Khanna, the founder-manager of the hotel. ... Khanna was never tired of bemoaning the loss of the serenity and tranquility of the place, perhaps somewhat envious of the elegant Talkota of today, thoroughly identified that he had been with the Talkota of bygone days. (MOS 76)

The action of the story centres around the character of Pravin, the guide at Talkota. He was honest and charming. He secured customers for the hotel. Khanna provides him a small suite in the outhouse of the mansion. But there was turning point in the life of Pravin. There was an accident in which four tourists were killed when their boat had been sunk. Pravin alone had survived. Pravin became very much depressed and sad. He stopped working.

One winter night Khanna was surprised to see Pravin in a glittering nightgown. He wants to draw picture of Khanna. Khanna believed in the phenomenon of the persons possessing by spirit of the dead. He recognized that Pravin had been possessed by M.Raymond, a French artist who had proposed to draw his sketch. But Pravin could not draw the picture properly. So he gave up it.

Then one morning Khanna heard a tune, hummed by Mr. Barrett, drowned along with the other three. Pravin greeted Khanna exactly in Mr. Barretts' style. Khanna recognized that Pravin was under the spell of spirit of Mr. Barrett.

The third person who died in the accident was a young man from northern Indian city. His parents came with a young lady who had been betrothed to the dead young man. Pravin stalked her with sad mood. Khanna observed Pravin and confirmed that he was possessed by the spirit of young man. The young lady too started to glance at Pravin. Then the visitors left. Pravin looked sad. At this stage, Martha, a Scottish divorcee arrived on Talkota. She wanted to complete a crash course in Nirvana. She spent her time in the company of Pravin who was in need of woman's love. She was now in love with Pravin. She planed a tour with Pravin. After one month she arrives before Khanna. He came to know that Pravin deserted Martha. Martha died after one month due to viral fever. Then Khanna discovers a diary left by Bob, the fourth member of that fatal accident. The last page of the diary has been written by Bob mentions : "Talkota is fine, but I must leave for Rishikesh. From there begins the mysterious abode of the gods..." (MOS 81)

Thus Martha fell in love with Pravin, when he had come to be possessed by Bob's spirit. The spirit of Bob left the body of Pravin at Rishiketh.

The story is notable for its authentic presentation of belief of the rural people in the dead possessing the living. Manoj Das very effectively naturalizes the supernatural world. The story also takes note of changing village culture in the course of modernization. We find the writer's nostalgic longing for preservation of rural culture.

A Night in the Haunted House

There is dominance of supernatural elements in the short stories of Manoj Das. In these stories he highlights man's mysterious relationship with the natural and supernatural world. There is strong urge in the human mind to explore unseen world. This strong faith in mysterious world prompts the writer to present strange characters and situations. His stories centre around the rural people who believe in the existence of ghosts.

In "A Night in the Haunted House" Manoj Das gives an authentic presentation of the haunted villa where two friends pass night. The people believed that there lived spirits of English couple, who have always tried to kill anyone occupying villa. We get thrilled by the mystery and suspense in the story. The story is centred around two close friends Suresh and Vinay who meet after thirty years. They remember their past memories during their school and college life. They walked together holding hands and climbed the steps of ladder up to its last rung. After achieving the desired success they had gone in different directions. The writer evokes rural sensibility with the description of seashore where they used to meet. He pictures it as:

It was a lonely seashore – as lonely as the path one takes in, one’s life, but full of sound and fury on the surface. Looking for the last ladder, they got only a touch of that loneliness, a charming, soothing touch, but nothing more than a mere touch. And they realized how difficult it was to prolong the touch. Where was this sweet breeze hiding for all these years? Behind some distant snowy mountain across the sea? Or was it always abundantly there around them, though unnoticed by them? (MMCOS 102)

Here the write draws nature imagery to depict lonely seashore which arouses past memories of the intimate friends. They mused on their memories and their love for adventure. Suresh reminded Vinay how they planned to spend a night in that haunted house. But it had been postponed every time. Now they decide to pass night on that very day. There is evocation of rural sensibility with the description of the abandoned, haunted villa. He pictures it as:

Vinay looked to his right. Huge trees bent over a dilapidated parapet wall circling a mansion in ruins. There had been no end to their curiosity about this abandoned building, notorious as a haunted villa. Long ago it had been the abode of an English couple. They died under tragic circumstances and their spirits, it is said, “have always tried to kill anyone occupying the villa.” (MMCOS 103)

Vinay switches on his torch and enters the villa. It was already 10:45 p.m. He expects that Suresh should have been already there. He feels uneasy. He remembers his past when he had lectured against superstitions and the existence of ghosts and ghouls.

However fear tightens its grip on his chest. Then he listens an old familiar whistling followed by Suresh's voice. He accepts silently that Suresh is braver than him. Suresh encourages Vinay and tells him that he should not be afraid. But Vinay can not see Suresh. There is suspicion in the mind of Vinay. He thinks that why Suresh is standing aloof from him. Then a couple of nocturnal creatures circles overhead and a young palm tree bends towards the verandah and the doors fling open. The two friends focus torch lights through the open door and notice a heap of broken furniture. Even then the house does not seem have remained unused for a century. They don't understand then who is using it? They now enter in the inside of the house. They throw their torch lights here and there, but never on each other. Vinay is about to focus his light on Suresh's face but he stops. He doubts, "What if the face looked unfamiliar? A fresh wave of anxiety invaded his mind." (MMCOS 105)

Then Suresh pushes a chair towards Vinay and sits down in another. Vinay has always felt displeased because of tricky behaviour of Suresh. Both friends accuse each other for their treacherous nature. Then Suresh tells Vinay that he has carried a revolver. He gives a threat of using this weapon against him. Then Vinay starts to confess his dark deeds during his career. Then they start suffocating in the damp darkness of the room. In the darkness they can not come closer to each other. Further Vinay also warns Suresh that he has also kept a revolver in his hand. Suresh jumps up and shrieks. In continuous flashes of lightning, Vinay can see everything inside the room but he can not see Suresh. He shoots twice. He sweates and calls Suresh. But there is no response. He hears two more shots. The old banyan tree fells in the wind in front of a gate. In the morning two gentlemen are found in a fainting fit, beside the haunted house.

The story presents an authentic picture of the haunted villa. There is dominance of mysterious element in the story. It builds an atmosphere of suspense and fear. As a result characters in the story sweat and faint. The story highlights man's fascination for unseen world. Nature plays very vital role for the creation of mysterious world. The writer throws light on the strong impact of beliefs and superstitions on the minds of rural people.

4.3 THE NATURE AND TECHNIQUES OF MYSTERIES OF MANOJ DAS

Manoj Das very skillfully depicts the world of mystery in his short stories. His short stories reflect man's mysterious relationship with the supernatural world. He portrays the characters which are helpless and want to take help of unseen power to solve their problems. Such characters represent materialistic world of city culture. They believe in marvelous and miraculous aspects of the unseen world.

With the help of science and technology, modern man has made materialistic progress. He has invented modern devices to make life comfortable and luxurious. But true happiness lies in recognition of spiritual power of individual. There is presence of supreme power in the every aspects of this universe. It is all pervading. In order to be recognize this presence of supreme power, a spiritual faith is necessary. In an interview with Haraprasad Paricha Patnaik, *Sun Times* (4 April, 1999) Manoj Das answers to the question "whether this faith can bring a change to our present predicament strengthened by our so-called scientific and technological progress of scientific truth and material growth" He puts it as:

Yes, but it must be a faith supported by an aspiration to grow beyond mind; we must know that all our scientific discoveries are in a way an exploration of the known. Nothing need be dismissed; nothing need to be shunned in an ascetic manner, but all our endeavours can be an offering towards the fulfillment of human destiny – the spiritual destiny. Spirituality is not asceticism or rejection of the world, but giving a Godward turn to everything. (3)

Thus Manoj Das is optimistic about the future of the mankind. Man can elevate his consciousness to a higher perception. There is an authentic character portrayal in his short stories. We come across babas, tantriks, sadhus in his stories.

4.4 RURAL CULTURE IN MYSTERIES OF MANOJ DAS

The Sage of Tarungiri and Seven Old Seekers

In the story “The Sage of Tarungiri and Seven Old Seekers” Manoj Das represents clash between the spiritual world presented by Tukan Baba, the sage of Tarungiri and materialistic world which is presented by seven old seekers of ‘Merry Guys’ club. The seven old men want the blessings of the Baba to overcome their frustrations and worries. They get information about Tukan Baba from Tapan. Meghananda, the disciple of Tukan baba led Tapan to his guru, Tukan Baba who lived in a cave in a dense part of the forest. The writer evokes rural sensibility with the description of Baba’s cave. He also throws light on the beliefs and faiths of the villagers of hamlets around the forest. The writer pens it as:

The Baba shunned visitors and never came out of his cave in daytime. Residents of the hamlets around the forest

had strange things to say about him and his cave. The Baba strolled in front of his cave, but at night. It was only on full-moon nights that he was certain to come out. The interior of the cave was believed to be a world by itself, with light and breeze of an altogether different quality. (MMCOS 73)

Further the writer depicts the spiritual world of Tukan Baba. He pens the presence of supreme power of God. He depicts it as:

The old, bearded Baba wept continuously. He would fix his gaze on the hill-top and mutter, “O Lord! How very compassionate it is of you to turn into a mountain so that we, the tigers, the snakes, the birds, Tukan Baba and his disciples, could find shelter in you!” Then he would break into a mild sobs. (MMCOS 73)

The seven old men plan to meet Tukan Baba with guidance of his disciple, Meghananda. Here the writer pens beautiful snapshots of Nature. He puts it as : “The moonrise was announced by the untimely chattering of birds and the sudden transformation of the tree-tops into golden torches. Three hundred miles to the north of their town the seven old seekers sat humbly on the narrow rocky forecourt of Tukan Baba’s cave a thousand feet above sea-level.” (MMCOS 73-74)

In the bright moon light, tall and emaciated, white beard baba emerged from his cave. His face was as bright as the moon. But instead of weeping, Baba smiled kindly and departed into the cave. But the seven old men forget to touch the feet of Tukan Baba. They request Meghananda to bring the Baba out once again and then they will touch his feet to receive Baba’s blessings. But he refused to guide them. The seven old men advanced forcibly towards the cave and peeped in. Then a

ferocious roar shook the hill and what shone like a pair of stars inside the dark tunnel seemed to come nearer them. They bounced back and rolled down the hill.

The seven old men represent materialistic world. They are only interested in worldly pleasures and comforts. They lack spiritual sensibility. They cannot understand Baba's mystic weeping and smiling. They are egoistic and foolish. They try to enter the cave forcibly but they rolled down the hill. On the other hand, Tukan Baba, living in the company of Nature represents rural culture and its spiritual aspect. He experiences presence of God in every aspects of universe. The seven old men who are non-spiritual cannot understand Tukan Baba's spiritual power. They are ordinary men running after wordly pleasures.

Thus the story is notable for its authentic presentation of clash between rural culture presented by Tukan Baba's spiritual and mystic world and city culture which is presented by seven old men interested in materialistic pleasures.

The Last I Heard of Them

There is dominance of supernatural elements in the many of Manoj Das's short stories. But he uses a perfect "objective correlation" in these stories. He gives valuable message through these stories. "The Last I Heard of Them" may be called a new parable. In this story Manoj Das comments on modern man's mad pursuit of sensual pleasures. While doing so, he forgets ethical and moral values.

The story is centred around the seven old seekers who are crazy for sensuality and Hidamba Baba, a non-spiritual occultist who performs miracles. These seven old seekers come across a saffron-robed fellow,

Sadhu Lambodar. The writer creates rural sensibility by giving details of a species of mystic vagabonds which is becoming rarer in the course of time. He puts it as:

I heard the story from one of those mystic vagabonds who are, as a species, becoming rarer day by day. These people wander from place to place, from guru to guru, serve them faithfully and learn theories and tales galore but achieve nothing by themselves. Not that they want to achieve but fail. They never wanted. They were happy to be as they were. They grew big beards but spoke and behaved effeminately. (CL 175)

The seven old seekers insisted Sadhu Lambodar to guide them to a guru who would tell them the secret of a short-cut to God. But Sadhu Lambodar informs them about the nature of genuine spiritual guides. Here the writer throws light on the spiritual life of the genuine gurus and their status which is the dominant characteristics of rural culture in India. He states it as:

... Neither your cleverness nor your so-called merit would elevate your position before the guru. The guru prescribes paths according to one's *adhikara*. Do you understand *adhikara* ? It's the right or eligibility your inner self has earned through many a birth. He might ask one of you to study the scriptures for a year while he might ask another of you massage his feet and tend his cows for twelve years. You should not think that the one for whom the scriptures are prescribed is superior to the other. (CL 176)

But the seven old men do not understand whatever told by Sadhu Lambodar. They are proud of their qualification and their Class I positions. They are not truly aspired for truth. They are old, bored and curious. They offer a hundred rupee note to Lambodar and told him to show them the miracles like eating a ball of fire or changing a piece of rope into a snake and to cure their diseases like back-pain, baldpate and failing eye-sight which are caused because of their old age. Then Sadhu Lambodar informs about the various sorts of queer powers of Hidamba Baba. The seven old men forget their original quest for truth. They are lured by the miracles of Baba. They request Sadhu Lambodar to take them to meet Baba. He agrees to take them and also warns them about the dangerous consequences of the miracles performed by the non-spiritual occultists. Early in the morning they set out for their visit to Hidamba Baba. The writer creates the rural atmosphere with the description of Hidamba Baba's dwelling. He states it as:

... Early in the morning we started for the Luvurva hills, the dwelling of Hidamba. The seven friends carried with them packets of food and bottles of wine ...

We took our lunch at a small bazar. After a little rest we drove again. The road was difficult, with rough stones and thorny bushes. We advanced slowly by the time we reached near the hut of Hidamba Baba, it was already evening. (CL 179-80)

The seekers fold their hand and request Baba to give them the magic water that would, when put in the eyes, show them people nude. With genuine hatred, Hidamba Baba gives magic water and warns them about the effect of the water. Sadhu Lambodar feels guilty by the helping

these seekers to get the water from Baba. After obtaining the magic water, they enter Hotel Honey where a dance has just begun. As they treat their eyes to magic water, they gave a shriek of surprise and joy. They see the dancing couples in the nude.

They applied magic water for second time for a longer duration of the miraculous sight. Further they forced Sadhu Lambodar to treat their eyes with another round. He emptied the bottle in their eyes. They sat quiet with their eyes closed. Meanwhile Sadhu Lambodar escapes from the scene. The writer depicts their helpless condition: “When they opened their eyes they saw people not only without their clothes, but also without their flesh. So, a hundred skeletons were dancing around them. They hurried out to the street. But there too skeletons moved in hundreds, skeletons driving cars, skeletons selling news papers, and then skeleton coming to capture them ...” (CL 186) As a result one of the seven friends, a heart patient dies in his chair. Two faint and the rest of them run about till they are captured.

The writer very skillfully depicts the craze for sensuality of the modern man and its dreadful consequences. He puts forth the clash between the spiritual life and the materialistic life. Hidamba Baba shows disgust for seven old seekers who are interested in sensual pleasures at the old age. They forget traditional moral values and the real aim of their life. Hidamba Baba teaches them a moral lesson by giving them magic water. The story shows how rural culture is superior to urban culture.

The Tryst

We get realistic character portrayal in the short fiction of Manoj Das. His characters suffer from mental tensions and disturbances. Manoj Das creates mysterious atmosphere to present odd behaviours and mental

restlessness of his characters in his stories. These characters try to form connectivity with unseen world to find a solace of the mind.

In his “The Tryst” Manoj Das shows contrast between the city life which is full of anxiety and tension and the rural life which stands for peace, relaxation and solitude. The action of story is centred around the former Roy Bahadur Sadanand Sarkar I.C.S. (Retired) who has bought the mansion from a bankrupt zamindar. He has bought this mansion three years before his retirement to enjoy the rest of his life in solitude and relaxation. Sadanand has come over to his mansion on leave preparatory to retirement. The writer creates rural atmosphere at setting of the story. He draws beautiful snapshots of the nature. The writer pens it as: “The fragrance of the *Chompuk* flowers had got diluted with the moonlight wonderfully well. The golden screen on the window recorded the rhythmic motion of the breeze through a hundred glittering ripples.” (MMCOS 50)

Sadanand’s only son, Subroto, an engineer and his wife is also expected to come and live with him in a month. At the very first night in the mansion, Sadanand can not sleep. He begins walking up and down the balcony. He becomes restless and fear dominates his mind. He has lost his wife fifteen years ago. He thinks of waking the servant but his mind does not permit him to express his fears to anybody. He stops strolling and descends the stairs and discovers the well at the corner of the ground. He decides to hide in the well in order to escape from fear. But Mr. Priyanath Boral, criminal lawyer in city visits the mansion and warns Sadanand that there is possibility of a murderer dumping his victim’s body in his well. Now the peace of Sadanand’s mind is broken by Mr. Boral’s suspicion. The writer comments on the difference between city life and village life. He puts it as: “He had spend only a few hours free

from the anxiety and tension of his long career as a civil servant; he had felt as if he had just come out of a murky tunnel into the tender sunbeams of a spring morning.” (MMCOS 52)

Then Sadanand observes the well and its surrounding in the moonlit. There are number of plants and creepers grown up inside the well. The dark water at the bottom of the well has made its inner world fearsome but fascinating. Sadanand stands gazing into the well. Suddenly he feels affinity with the well. He spends almost an hour near the well. Further he calls a contractor to raise the height of the compound wall and completes it in three days. Now nobody can trespass easily. He enjoys sound sleep on the fourth night. Next day he observes the doors of the well which are old and decayed. Again his peace of mind is disturbed. He reaches the well and listens voices which are calling him from the bottom of the well. As a result, he begins to descend into the well. He has never known such a thrill in life. Next morning he calls a carpenter and the old doors of the wall are replaced by the strong new doors. But he remembers a remark by the carpenter, “Now the wall is so high that nobody can climb it without a ladder.” (MMCOS 54)

Next night, he starts descending into the well with ease and confidence. He enjoys a little rest inside the well. He has enjoyed types of sofas and chairs. But these appear insignificant to him as compared with this new-found seat of luxury. In the morning, he fixes pieces of sharp glass on the wall top to prohibit someone to enter in the compound using a ladder. Sadanand forms intimate relationship with the mysterious world inside the well where he gets peace and relaxation. The well with its creepers, plants and frogs becomes part and parcel of life of retired Sadanand. The writer very effectively depicts the strong bond of love

between Sadanand and the mysterious world inside the well where he gets peace of mind. He puts it as:

... He had just fallen in love with the well – or rather the original alternative to the pattern of his life the well offered. The time he spent clinging to the branches and close to the undisturbed water was a time of enchantment and of a hitherto unknown intimacy with himself. He sat like that till the cocks in the neighborhood signaled the dawn. (MMCOS 55)

At last his engineer son, Subroto arrives there. He discusses with his contractor friend about the task of filling up the well in order to construct the garage for his car. His friend assures him that his trucks will bring sands from the river early in the morning and fill up the well.

When Sadanand comes to know the plan of filling up the well, he becomes restless and desolate. At night, when the moon appears over the banyan tree Sadanand reaches the well. The well looks more intimate to him. He descends and settles down in the crevice. He feels warmth in that intimacy instead of the coolness of atmosphere. Then he closes his eyes in peace. In the darkness his son wakes up at the sound of friend's trucks pouring sand in the well.

In the story, the writer glorifies the peaceful and serene way of life of rural people. Sadanand Sarkar, a civil servant experiences anxiety and tension while doing his job in the city. He tries to get peace and solace in the company of the well. He takes his final rest with peace and comfort in the well. Demolishing of the well for the construction of the garage for the car symbolises intrusion of urban culture upon rural world of simplicity and peace. The story is a masterpiece of the writer's plea for the preservation of rural culture in the process of modernization.

The Shadow

Manoj Das very skillfully portrays man's mysterious relationship with natural and supernatural world. He depicts strange characters and situations using the supernatural atmosphere. He comments on the tension and frustration of the modern man. In his "The Shadow" he depicts odd behaviours of professor Sharma who believes his shadow to be lost.

At the setting of the story, there is a remote Himalayan valley. The narrator of the story gives account of his past memories of thirty years ago. He had seen Anjan Sharma, when he was in the college. Sharma was an scientist. He had done research in the area of the laws of gravitation for running all kinds of engines and his technical thesis covered two thousand pages. But unfortunately all the research documents and instruments kept in the laboratory were destroyed in the fire by arsonist. The people imagined that the mishap taken place because of jealousy of a colleague of Professor or an international conspiracy. There after the Professor hardly spoke and he resigned his job. The Professor's millionaire friend sent him and his wife to the mansion in the Himalayan valley. The narrator's chance meeting with his friend brought him to this mansion. His friend who was the artist came to the Himalayas in search of inspiration but forgotten his art. He was hypnotized by the beauty of the region. The writer portrays the beautiful scenery, which is the dominant characteristics of rural culture. He puts it as: "... For a living, he looked after this solitary summer mansion of Raja built on a lovely lake and generally passed his time, clad in a shawl, gazing at the snowy hill-tops, the lush green forest often bursting into different hues, and the sky." (MOS 2)

The Raja sold this mansion after the abolition of the princely states. Then it had been acquired by the tourism department of the government. The narrator's friend was appointed as a manager of this mansion. Anjan Sharma and his wife used to live in small suite in the upper storey of an outhouse. Suddenly the charming wife of the Professor died. But the Professor did not show any visible reaction to the death of his wife. He has now become part and parcel of nature. The writer depicts his settlement of his life in the company of nature as: "He has just settled down to a different plane of living, serene and peaceful. And the tranquility was beginning to inspire in him some other kind of creativity, when his wife died..." (MOS 3)

Further the writer highlights the strong bond of love between man and animal which is the characteristics of rural culture. The last companion of the Professor was a faithful dog nurtured by his wife. But after the death of his wife the dog gave up eating and died after a month. The Professor lost his self control and cried loudly. The dog's death after the death of its master, and loudly crying of the self-controlled Professor moves the heart of the reader deeply. Then the lonely Professor used to take walks amidst the woods forgetting the world around him. He established his intimate relationship with nature. One afternoon he suspects followed by someone. But there is no one following him but his own shadow. He suddenly burst out at his shadow, "Why must you keep me company when everybody else has deserted me? Get lost, I say." (MOS 4)

Because of the intensity of the Professor's admonition, his shadow detached from him and hid in a bush and he could hear its sobs. Then the Professor stopped coming out into sunlight or moonlight. He walked into the valley only after the dusk. He switched off the lights when someone

knocked on his door at night. He had taken care to keep his secret that he was bereft of his shadow.

After five years the narrator visited his friend who had returned from Himalayan sojourn and settled in his native village devoted to agriculture. His friend informed that the Professor was found lying unconscious at the foot of the hills and died a little later.

The story is masterly presentation of serene and tranquil atmosphere in a remote Himalayan valley, snowy hill tips and the lush green forest which is the dominant characteristics of rural culture. Nature plays very important role in the tragic life of Anjan Sharma. The frustrated and disturbed Professor achieves tranquility and solace in the serene and peaceful atmosphere in Himalayan valley. He takes his final rest in lap of mother earth. The writer comments on the vices like jealousy, treachery, conspiracy presented by highly intellectual persons from modern culture which are responsible for the tragedy of Anjan Sharma's life. On the other hand lonely and frustrated Professor settles down to serene and placid plane of living in the company of nature. Even he wants to get rid off his own shadow in his seclusion. The story shows how simple and serene way of life of rural culture is superior to urban culture which is dominated by jealousy and conspiracy.

Vengeance

In the story "Vengeance" the writer comments on the passion for revenge which is the characteristic of human nature. It also comments on certain beliefs and faiths of rural people.

The story takes place in a village near the forest, at the foot of the Luvarva hills. The central character of the story is Vilas Singh. He is restless and can not sleep. His mind is burning with passion of revenge.

He is in search of an opportunity to take revenge on Bahadur. He wants to finish Bahadur who has given him the slip. The writer gives us a graphic picture of his angry mind with full of revenge. He puts it as:

Vilas Singh stood dazzled for a moment. A hundred fingers of fire rent as under the giant heart of darkness.

He felt a bit of the lightning creeping into his veins, sparking off a double-edged sensation. Among the fiery designs that flashed along the horizon he saw an outline of Bahadur's face. And, the suddenness and the sharpness of the blaze reminded him of his own dagger. Surely, he could be equally sudden in handling in, driving it through Bahadur's breast! (SVOS 99)

He makes his mind to finish Bahadur's life because he has snatched his beloved Sumati and also his savings of a decade. Shashikala, an immoral woman tries to dissuade Vilas Singh from his mad pursuit. But he does not listen her. His passion for revenge continues over a period of five years.

There is an evocation of village sensibility in the story. The writer's use of effective 'animal imagery' is remarkable. It is drawn mostly from Nature which provides suitable setting to rural life. Note for instance, the following description:

Vilas Singh reacted like a serpent when tickled. He was ready to splash Shashikala's face with his hot tea, but checked himself and gasped.

“The brazen face that is mine does not get scorched easily,” Shashikala crooned and then burst into a sonorous laughter.

Hedges and bushes in the meadow before the hut had just begun recovering their individual forms from the dusk. Against the sky over the eastern horizon could be made out the flight of the first covey of birds. (SVOS 100)

In the meantime Vilas Singh gets married and is blessed with a son. Bahadur is under impression that Vilas Singh has given up the chase and has settled in the village. In order to murder Bahadur, Vilas Singh visits the tavern which is Bahadur’s haunt. But Bahadur has given him a final slip. Bahadur dies of a head injury inflicted by Vilas Singh.

The writer throws light on the village people who believe on predictions of astrologers. Hidamba Baba, the tantrik-astrologer assures Vilas Singh that Bahadur’s soul will creep into an infant and will reveal his identity by sporting a mark. When Vilas Singh looks at his infant son, he marks “a tender miniature of the wound he had once inflicted on Bahadur.” (SVOS 107-108)

The writer shows how Vilas Singh is shocked by the quick turn of fate. Thus the story is a subtle satire on individual follies. The apt observation of Dr. P. Raja which highlights role of fate in the life man in the story. He observes it as:

In this story, the message given in a negative process, is quite eloquent by implication. One can never truly avenge oneself for one’s enemy can not only give one the slip through death, but also can stage a comeback in a totally

unexpected manner – putting one to an utterly helpless state. Vilas Singh is deprived of his vengeance by a trick of destiny. Hence empathy and understanding are the basis of relationship not hatred and passion for revenge. (MWMD 37)

The story is notable for its evocation of rural atmosphere. The writer very effectively depicts the strong hold of beliefs and faiths on the mind of the villagers.