

CHAPTER - II

RURAL CULTURE IN SATIRES OF MANOJ DAS

2.1 THE NATURE AND TECHNIQUES OF SATIRES OF MANOJ DAS:

Manoj Das is one of the foremost short story writers in post-independence India. He has produced a vast variety of tales which may be categorized as moral fables and fantasies, the mystery and ghost stories and satires.

There is a presence of subtle satire in his every story. He has successfully applied the concept of satire in his short stories.

M. H. Abrams in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms* explains the term “satire” as:

Satire can be described as the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn or indignation. It differs from the *comic* in that comedy evokes laughter as a weapon, and against a butt that exists outside the work itself. That butt may be an individual, or a type of person, a class, an institution, a nation or even the entire human race. (275)

Manoj Das uses gentle satire on contemporary social vices and individual follies. He is optimistic of the future of the mankind. There is an influence of the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo on the vision of Manoj Das. He comments on the contemporary society particularly rural India for its changing values, impact of blind beliefs and superstitions,

exploitation of the weaker section, rural poverty and economical inequality, hypocrisy and arrogance etc. His satires are very effective but never offend others. In this context, in *The Hitavada* (June 15, 1980) he honestly confesses that: "I always remember what Jonathan Swift said: 'Satire is a sort of glass wherein beholders generally discover everyone's face but their own'. But I never forget to try to behold my own face in that mirror.'" (6)

His stories are written out of creative inspiration and a sense of social commitment. His satire is mild and good-humoured. He has sense of observation and humanistic attitude. He believes that the spiritual path of life will be helpful to solve miseries and helplessness condition of man.

While explaining the nature of his satire Manoj Das in his 'Preface to *The Abooman and Other Stories* says:

I have never consciously written satire for satire's sake. I have felt very low about myself... How can this writer with numerous flaws in him have the right to satire? However, to my good fortune, my readers and critics have taken up my so called satire not as mere satire but as a means of some profound message. (6)

Manoj Das' stories are comment on the changing rural culture in the process of globalization. He supports traditional rural values and condemns urban vices. We trace in his stories his nostalgic aspiration for the preservation of rural culture which is changing in the course of modernization/industrialization/urbanization.

Dr. Kalipada Pradhan in his “Manoj Das: A Study of his life and Satiric Art” says: “Das belongs to the Indian Satirical Short Story tradition and it has an immense impact on his creative story literature. His satiric vision based on genuine love for humanity coupled with awareness of moral sense and robust optimism. His world is an all-inclusive unique world presented with various shades and colours. It is a world of satire, humour and irony, Das is a subtle satirist.” (6)

The satires which are selected for the present study in this chapter have village background. The action of the stories take place in a village or a small town.

In order to draw definite conclusions the bulk of the satires is further classified into (a) Social rural life (b) Socio – Political Rural Life [i] Decaying feudal system in rural India [ii] Post –Independent political rural life (c) Socio-Religious rural life (d) Socio-Economical rural life. But this type of classification is not a water-tight division. They can overlap. Thus these satires comment on social, political, religious and economical aspects of Indian rural culture. The present chapter highlights the prominent characteristics of rural culture which are reflected in the satires of Manoj Das.

2.2 THE SOCIAL RURAL LIFE

Trespassers

Manoj Das uses his childhood experiences and memories in his short stories. His child characters carry in them these experiences. In his “Trespassers” the narrator of the story draws his memories of thirty years ago when he was a child. In the story the writer depicts the clash between simple and natural way of life of rural people and the structured and

confined way of life of modern culture which is devoid of emotions and affection.

The story is centred around Roy Sahib and his two sons Baboo and Saboo. The poor children living in thatched houses are proud of Roy Sahib's double storeyed, cream-tinged, wonderful mansion. It is compounded by the wall and also guarded by a durwan. The neighbourhood children and even their guardians cannot enter the house without the permission. Further the writer throws light on the natural and simple way of life of the poor village children in contrast with disciplined and artificial way of life of Roy Sahib's sons which is devoid of pure and natural pleasures. The writer depicts this contrast. He states it as:

Upon being caught in a quiet summer noon in the process of swimming in the river or climbing the date-palm tree or playing *do doo* and being dragged home, we heard our fathers or uncles commenting, "Pity, you blockheads learnt nothing from those Roy boys!"

The practice of snubbing the elders had not grown widespread. Otherwise we could tell them to their faces what we knew for certain – that the Roy boys had no need for climbing trees for dates, that they could just enter a posh store and walk away with packets of sweetened dates or toffees putting their magic signatures to a scrap of paper. Further, they had radio and picture books galore to keep themselves away from the sun. (DHOS 63)

But the narrator has a great attraction for the Roy boys. Baboo was of the narrator's age and Saboo was younger. They wore gold-framed glasses. They were well-disciplined and neatly dressed. The writer

comments on too much disciplined life of Roy boys. He puts it as: “In fact, I had an impression that they had come out of their mother’s womb wearing their glasses and socks, and with faces as gentle as photographs.” (DHOS 64) One day, the narrator decides to visit Roy Sahib’s house to meet Baboo and Saboo. But durwan doesnot permit him to enter the house. But next day he crosses the compound and enters in the house in durwan’s absence. He meets Roy Sahib in his shining gown and tells him that he is a friend of his sons. Roy Sahib asks him whether he has taken an appointment at this hour. The narrator turns to leave but Roy Sahib hurts him saying, “Listen boy. It is an offence to trespass like this, follow? Well, now you may go.” (DHOS 65) In the evening the narrator comes to know the meaning of the word “trespass” from the dictionary and he suffers from the feeling of humiliation.

In the course of the time Roy boys grown up and achieved good jobs in faraway towns. Roy Sahib and his wife become old and sick. They decide to spend the rest of their lives with their elder son, Baboo. One day they leave with several trunk-loads of things. But a fortnight later they return with their trunks. Six months later they leave for Saboo’s house, again to return in haste. Mr. and Mrs. Roy are driven out by their obedient and disciplined sons when they are in need of their love and affection in their old age. Mr. Roy suffers the effects of over-discipline. He confines his children in four walls and prevents them to play in fresh light and air with other children. Now more bigger and sophisticated buildings are built in the town. These buildings have thrown Roy sahib’s house into a pale background. Now there is not a durwan to guard the house. Roy sahib enjoys his time playing with narrator’s son with the ball. There is inner transformation in the character of Roy sahib. The rude

and self-centred man becomes loving and enjoys playing with small children of the locality.

The writer shows greater sympathy towards rural values. He supports simplicity, innocence and simple way of life of rural people. He comments on changing human values and lifestyle of people under the impact of modernization. The story shows how rural culture is superior to urban culture.

The Submerged Valley

In the story “The Submerged Valley” Manoj Das portrays rapid changes taking place in the life of people living in Indian villages due to developments in science and technology in early twentieth century. The story reflects dominant features of the rural culture. The narrator of the story critically views the ongoing changes in modern society. The story takes place in a village. The story centres around the character of father and son. The father who is an engineer represents modern society. On the other hand, the son who is the child supports the traditional way of life of the villagers. He represents public voice of the villagers.

The authentic rural sensibility is evoked by the setting of the story. At the beginning of the story the narrator describes his village as follows:

We become conscious of our village the day our headmaster asked the students of Class Three to write an essay on the topic.

So far we had taken the village for granted-like our breathing or our mother’s love. But thereafter the elements that made the village – the trees, the pools, the Shiva temple and the hillock adjacent to it – had begun to look significant. (SVOS 1)

There is beautiful description of Nature at the beginning of the story. The trees are personified. The narrator while describing the trees states:

The trees that stood in front of our school were as human to us as the one of wandering bull of Lord Shiva. One of the trees looked as if it knelt down in meditation. Two more were never tired of chattering between them. If the teacher had scolded or thrashed us, they seemed to be sympathising with us. At the approach of a vacation they seemed to be talking of the many sweet moments that were in store for us.
(SVOS 1-2)

Further the village is going to be submerged on account of the construction of a dam by the Government. The villagers as well as the narrator got this news. They became gloomy. They came to the narrator's father to use his influence to stop its execution. The narrator states the deep-rooted love of villagers for their native place as follows: "Mother wept. By and by several respectable men of our area visited us and not one of them went back without shedding tears." (SVOS 3)

The 'native place' is the dearest thing to the villagers. The villagers' love for land is a prominent feature of rural culture. They don't want to be separated from their "God given lands". (SVOS 3)

The father heard in silence the appeal made by the villagers. Then he reveals the benefits of the construction of the dam. He remains unmoved by the emotional account of the past history of his village and explains:

Where is Harapa today and where is Babylonia? Time has licked them off – just for the sake of change. On the other hand, if we are losing our lands, it is for a change for the better, for the welfare of a larger population. And we ought not to ignore the fact that the Government is ready to compensate for our loss and to provide us with every facility for rehabilitation. (SVOS 1-2)

He consoles the villagers. He tells them about the compensation and rehabilitation schemes of the Government for the affected villagers. At last the villagers reconciled the situation. Half of selected alternative site a valley eighteen miles away. They carried their deities and the bull of Lord Shiva with them. The rest chose cash compensation and dispersed in bazars and towns in search of jobs.

While departing from village, the villagers expressed their attachment to their soil. The narrator states it as: “We heard that on the eve of their departure most of the people rolled on the ground, crying and beating their heads against it and smearing themselves with the soil.” (SVOS 4)

Five years has been passed since the making of the dam. The writer critically gives details of benefits of the dam as follows:

Three districts has now less to fear from floods. Regulated irrigation gave some boost to agriculture, though increase in population did not let it mean anything more than a statistical satisfaction. (SVOS 5)

The people did not receive benefits which were promised when the village was submerged. After five years, the locality has been completely

changed. There were two decent bungalows stood on two ends of the embankment. A cluster of small buildings was constructed for the dam officials. A bazaar has also has established in the locality. In this way, the whole face the village is changed in the process of modernization. For this change, the villagers has sacrificed their native place.

At the end of the story, in summer, the villagers went to see their ancestral place. They greeted narrators father and mother. There was Abolkara (literally disobedient) who has not left the place. Suddenly the water level began to rise. All the visitors left the place by boats and launch except Abolkara, who refused to leave the place. But the father risking his life brought Abolkara in his launch and saved the life of an rude and orphan boy. It shows that though he is practical he has respect for the forefathers of the village. He has also love for his native place.

The story suggests that in the process of change which is encouraged by deliberate measures, a part of the traditional culture may suffer extinction.

In an interview with Prof. Nandini Sahu *On Folk in Modern Indian Literature* Manoj Das comments on the changing rural culture. He states:

... the village life is changing. There was a legend behind every shrine, every forest, every rivulet and hill. Local stories were there behind some of the landmark trees and creatures man encountered – a fox or jackal or a vulture. Numerous shrines have disappeared; forests, rivulets and even hillocks. Trees with hoary traditions behind them have fallen. You rarely come across jackals and vultures now roaming the outskirts of hamlets. Along with their departure the legends too are lost. (6)

Manoj Das has experienced the rural life in its natural environment and in chaos also. The present story describes an authentic picture of changing rural India under the impact of industrialization. The background, characters and setting are true representation of the rural culture, which leave a deep impact on the mind of the readers.

Bhola Grandpa and The Tiger

In the story “Bhola Grandpa and The Tiger” Manoj Das represents a rustic who has habit of forgetting things. The story takes place at the background of the village which is near sea-coast.

There is an effective evocation of rural atmosphere at the beginning of the story:

Bhola grandpa and his wife lived at the western end of our village. Their hut was overshadowed by a large *Bokul* tree which, with the advent of spring, grew luxuriant and continuously showered its tiny red fruit in their courtyard. The tree had become the permanent abode of a small troop of monkeys. Bhola-grandpa and his wife did not mind it.
(SVOS 14)

Bhola-grandpa is senior to the narrator’s father by a few years, He, his father and grandfather too have been employed in the narrator’s house. The narrator gives one amazing incident of forgetfulness of Bhola:

One afternoon, decades ago, he was found sprawling on our veranda with his tongue stretched out. A shivar ran through those who found him in that condition. They took him for dead.

What, however, had happened is this: an hour ago someone had branched to him a proposal for his wedding. Modesty had made him stretch out his tongue. He had just forgotten to withdraw it while falling asleep. (SVOS 13)

Further the narrator's father narrated an amused episode of their younger days, which throws light on Bhola-grandpa's forgetfulness. The living pictures of clusters of thick jungle, valleys and the narrow serpentine branches of the Ganges present authentic rural life of Bengal. The narrator states:

The locale of the most significant incident in Bhola-grandpa's life had been the Sundarbans. The region was still marked by clusters of thick jungle. Royal Bengal tigers stalked the picturesque valleys between the narrow serpentine branches of the Ganges. My forefathers, though belonging to Orissa, were among the few landlords who owned chunks of estates in that dangerous region of Bengal.

Bhola-grandpa was periodically sent there to manage the property.

In the Sundarbans of those days nobody would walk alone even in daytime. Tigers apart, alligators frequently sneaked into the swamp. (SVOS 14)

One evening while returning from the weekly market Bhola has fallen behind the party. When he wakes up he finds himself face to face with a full-grown Royal Bengal tiger. He instantly climbs a banian tree. The tiger roars and circles the tree and settles down under it. The night passes. At dawn Bhola grandpa comes down and goes to a hamlet a

furlong away and requests a man for a little fire to light his bidi. The man has been a witness to all that passed between the tiger and Bhola-grandpa. He asks: “What is your secret, sir, that you walked past that hungry beast and it just gaped at you and did nothing else?” (SVOS 15)

Only then Bhola realizes that he has forgotten the tiger. He looks towards the bush. At that time “the tiger was seen screeching its limbs and yawning and preparing to leave the place as though its bewilderment was giving way to a mood of disgust.” (SVOC-16)

Half a century later, Bhola-grandpa died peacefully in his sleep. The most original of the laments came from the old wife of Bhola: “The old man must have forgotten to breathe!” (SVOS 16)

The writer throws light on the simple way of life of Bhola who has spent his life in the company of nature in the village.

While commenting on the rural simplicity in Manoj Das’s writing Dr. Bishnu Chavan Dash says:

“*Bhola Grandpa and The Tiger*” is another important story in which Das shows the commitment of the rural people to live and also to die in the lap of their village. The ninety-five year old Bhola and his eighty year old wife Granny who live in a hut under the big Bakul tree at the western end of the village Sankhari remind the reader of the commitment of Wordsworth’s pastoral figures like Michael, Cumberland beggar and old Simeon Lee living with his wife at the old age by a fountain. Their unanimous message to the world is to live in communion with nature, and to love life,

trees, animals and birds with love and friendship by defying the dictates of death. (277)

The Crocodile's Lady

In the story "*The Crocodile's Lady*" Manoj Das presents the socio-cultural life of rural people. Customs, beliefs and superstitions form an inextricable part of rural-religious life. The villager's religion, as the sociologist, Prof. S.C.Dube, in his *Indian village* puts it as:

a mixture of animism, animation and polytheism, with the occasional appearance of monotheism also. To these must be added a living faith in spirits, ghosts, demons, witches and magic. The complex of all these diverse factors constitutes the picture of the supernatural world as it is understood by the people in the countryside. (68)

In the present story the writer comments on the old education system, superstitions and beliefs of rural people in Orissa.

The story takes place in a village from Orissa. Dr. Batstone, the sociologist from the west visits the village to experience a real Indian village. The writer portrays very effectively the placid village life of the people as follows:

Dr. Batstone who had lived in a city of skyscrapers all his life had expressed a desire to experience a real Indian village.

This was before Indian villages were reduced to distorted miniatures of bazars with huge red triangles to glorify family planning, politicians preaching patriotism and bill-boards informing the villagers of the virtues of small savings and

cigarettes, and loud-speakers blaring from the community centres.

Dr. Batstone relaxed in an armchair on our spacious verandah and muttered to himself, every five minutes, “wonderful, fantastic!”

There was no need to ask him what was wonderful or fantastic. That one could view the whole sky, from east to west, all along one’s journey, was wonderful enough. That a hundred cattle would move through fenceless cornfields with absolute abstinence obeying a tiny tot’s hooting was as fantastic as the Pied Piper’s magic. Wonderful was the huge rainbow, fantastic the revelation that ninety-seven percent of our villagers lived quite contented without having seen a locomotive or a cinema. (SVOS 17-18)

Dr. Batstone gets a wonderful experience when he comes across the head-pundit of the ‘Model’ Lower Primary School of the village. The head pundit Shri Maku Mishra has a teaching experience of forty years without having heard of Hegel or Marx or Freud or Einstein or even Bernard Shaw and Charlie Chaplin.

The writer criticises The *Malika*, an ancient folk epic of prophecies. The people of Orissa have a strong faith in the *Malika*. But this sacred book fails to make any prophecy about the visit of foreigner to their village.

Further there is dialogue between the villagers and Dr. Batstone. Dr. Batstone wants to know the way of life of the rural people. It is not easy to present Indian rural life in an alien medium. There is effective use

of 'rustic speech'. Manoj Das' use of rustic speech adds to authenticity of rural life. He uses Indian idioms and proverbs in their translation. While presenting the dialogues between Dr. Batstone and the villagers the writer writes:

“Will you believe, Sahib, that he was my cousin, my very own father's own maternal uncle's own son-in-law's own nephew? And hadn't I done everything for him, from sharing my own pillow with him to doing half the shopping for his marriage? Yet who in this wide world does not know that this treacherous brother-in-law of mine, I mean his ghost, chose to harass me out of the millions and billions of people of my village, within a week of his death? who does not know that for a whole year, till his annual *shraddha* fully satisfied him – and for your information I was obliged to share half the expenses – I never stepped out of my house at night even at the most violent call of nature?” Declared Shombhudas, the money-lender.

“No Sahib, you, after all, are a foreigner. How much are you familiar with the ghosts of this country? You ought not to trust them. If they get a chance they twist the necks of even the exorcists!” revealed the second pundit of school. (SVOS 19-20)

A good deal of 'village sensibility' is evoked in the story through presentation of supernatural element. Dr. Batstone and the villagers visit riverside. At that time the narrator tells story of a village girl to Batstone. There is a girl who has been married at the age of three and has become a widow at four. One day while bathing in a river side is dragged away by a

crocodile. A decade later she suddenly returns in the village. But a strange story circulates; the lost girl has been transformed into a crocodile and married the crocodile who has carried away her. The crocodile, unable to bear separation comes to take her back but got killed by the villagers.

Manoj Das gives an account of a realistic picture of rural culture through the presentation of beliefs, customs and superstitions of the villagers.

While commenting on the mystic village environment in the story Aditi Chatterjee states:

This is a world where everything is predestined. Nothing ever has occurred which could not be predicted. The appearance of the real sahib has inspired the awe of the rustics who could not stop gaping wide-eyed at him. But the awe-inspiring “Sahib” is himself captured into the mysterious environment created by the villagers and he cannot resist himself from falling a prey to their fantasies by asking, “do all these people believe in ghost?”. And definitely, the answer leaves the Sahib spell-bound, who can only utter the word “Fantastic”.

The story narrated by the old woman transports us into a mystical world where all reality is temporarily suspended. Like any good folk lore it captures our imagination, a world which can be fathomed by heart and rationality. (132-33)

Prithviraj's Horse

In the story "Prithviraj's Horse" the writer comments on the proud nature of Mukund. The story is a subtle satire on contemporary social-vices and individual follies. Though there is a gradual change in the village life by rapid industrialization and modernization, the old taboos and faith seem to have their firm grip on the people's superstitious and gullible minds. The astrologers and fortune tellers take advantage of this weakness and they exploit people. The present story criticizes such people.

The action of the story takes place in a hick town named Parvatipuri. The story makes us aware about the fact that the rural values are changing in the process of modernization. The story writer puts it: "Time has reduced Parvatipuri to a hick town, but it had a glorious past." (SVOS 90)

Mukund is the teacher of History in the school of the Goswami Academy. He lives alone and takes his food at a small restaurant. His family members has made attempts at providing him with a consort. But in every case bride appears to be strong. So he decides to remain a bachelor forever. He is proud of his knowledge of history. The character of Prince Prithviraj fascinates him. He feels delighted and grateful when he overhears words of praise from girl-students for his lively teaching of history.

One day, on a quiet sunset he comes across a giant man. He prefers to name him Ghatotcoch, Bhima's gigantic son by his giant-wife Hidimba. When Mukund throws his smile for fourth time at him, he jumps down and holds Mukund by the arm. He escapes cleverly from the clutches of Ghatotcoch. His pride is pinched by the giant Ghatotcoch. The

writer comments on this scene in very humourous manner. The story writer writes:

Back home he lay down. He felt scalded within and battered outside and just absurd. He who had successfully steered clear of seven proposals for marriage, he who looked ten year younger than his age, he whose farewell meetings drew a hundred streams of tears and who could tell you from his memory the exact times of the Kalinga war, the coronation of Kanishka, the confrontation between Dupleix and Clive, he who dreamt of becoming the founder president of a cultural cum gymnastic club upon retirement, was just going to end up unceremoniously in a murky lane in the grip of a dunderhead! Was his life a bubble for anybody to blow at and burst it?" (SVOS 94)

Mukund has a lot of attraction for the historical hero Prithviraj Chauhans. He is curious to know his past particularly his status in the court of Prince Prithviraj. So he visits a Tankrik-Astrologer. He comes across the signboard under a dangling bulb. The story writer puts it:

Tantrik-Astrologer, Gold Medalist – Worshipper of Goddess Kali, Advisor to kings and Emperors, Predicator of the Future, Expert in reading the *Bhrigu Samhita* and Revealing your Past Life – Pundit Purandar Sharma.(SVOS-95)

Mukund asks Pundit Sharma to tell him about his earlier incarnations. But Sharma tells him that he has already closed *Bhrigu Samhita*. He tells Mukund : "I have closed the sacred Bhrigu Samhita for today. Once closed it cannot be opened before sunrise. Not even if King George that Fifth pleads for it or promises half his kingdom." (SVOS 95)

But when Mukund offers him ten rupees, Pundit Sharma agrees to tell him about his past. He breaks his own rule for money. The answer to first query, costs ten rupees and the subsequent ones cost only five each. The Pundit tells him that he was the “faithful horse” of Prithviraj in the distant past. After knowing the past life by Pundit, Mukund firmly decides to take revenge on Ghatotcoch.

Thus the story reflects prominent characteristics of rural culture. It throws light on the superstitious and gullible minds of the villagers. It also comments on the professional astrologers and fortune tellers who deceive simple and innocent villagers.

Quest of Sunderdas

The story “Quest of Sunderdas” is a plea for pure rural culture. The writer aspires for the nourishment of purity, innocence, love, simplicity and straightforwardness of village culture. The story is a tale of Sunderdas, who sets out to various cities in the world in quest of happiness. The action shifts from village to city and back from city to village, disappointed and shattered.

The central character of the story is Sunderdas. Indian village in the thirties is a placid village so far unaffected by impact of the city culture. The villagers are under the impact of superstitions and beliefs. The writer throws light of the beliefs of villagers when they watch plane flying in the sky. The writer describes it:

Soon the plane had been lost amidst a bouquet of clouds coloured by a setting sun.

The villagers discussed the phenomenon till late night. Although they were more or less sure that it was made of

metal, the thoughtful ones were of the opinion that a giant English eagle had been harnessed to do the flying. The wisest ones refused to be surprised at all, for they could easily remember several instances of flying chariots used by the heroes in the epics. They credited the Sahibs with rediscovering the secret. (DHOS 68)

Sunderdas keeps quiet while listening this discussion. He thinks his village as “habitation of dwarfs”. (DHOS 68) So he decides to shift from his village to the city in quest of happiness. He begins his life as a clerk to an Anglo-Indian contractor and soon becomes a contractor. Further he shifts to a British Colony in Africa and becomes a millionaire and his business shifts to the West.

The writer throws light on the difference between village culture and city culture. Sunderdas’s realization of harsh realities of the modern urban world is expressed at several places in the story. He falls in love with a daughter of a wealthy partner. They become engaged. But he suddenly notices same girl in someone else’s embrace. She is not a faithful girl. Even second time he watches her into a similar scene. He cancels his proposal. He remembers his late mother and the rustic face of a girl who was his proposed bride. He becomes sad and depressed. The writer uses past memories of Sunderdas to rouse nostalgic feelings. Sunderdas remembers the death of his mother. His brother informs about death but he was busy in his business. He sent thousand rupees for her last rites. Even his ancestral house and land had been sold by his brother with his permission. By then his business flourished and he started to earn five thousand rupees an hour. He becomes very wealthy and decides to build his private hill in the valley amidst the Himalayas. He marries his secretary who is charming and loving. Sunderdas thought that he is the

happy person in the world. But there is turning point in his life. Fate plays very important role in his life. His wife dies leaving a son to Sunderdas. He becomes addicted to the costliest drinks. His friends try to console and support him.

When his son becomes grown up, he decides to return India. But his son does not agree with him. He becomes desolate. He wants peace of mind and wants to visit remote place. He visits a world-wide travel agency. He is dispatched to a genuine house in a village. The writer pens an authentic village life. He describes it:

A pair of cuckoos sang at some distance. The sound – heard by him after decades – surprised and delighted him.

“Good Morning, Sir.”

It was the young lady. “It is time I give you a brief outline of this scheme. It should be a thrill for you to know that you are in a genuine Indian village. No Sir, not a make-believe one! This earthen house was once owned by a real villager. We have not altered it in any way. Our agency has acquired only half a dozen such houses in different nooks of this vast country. The Government is reluctant to let us have more at the moment. Of course we have acquired a few similar houses in South America, Africa and Formosa too. Now, Sir, you must forget your air conditioned mansion, your telephone, T.V., radio, newspapers, as well as your attendants. Nobody on your staff knows your address. Hence no call from any area of your business empire is likely to disturb your peace. Even though we will be at your back and

call, we will remain invisible – confined to that small bungalow yonder built for us.”

The lady smiled and resumed, “I hope it will rain and you’ll have the thrill of living under a real leaking thatch, enjoy the true touch of a peasant’s residence. There is a pond behind the house. You can bathe and catch fish. There is a small orchard with ripe fruits guarded with care for you to pluck them personally. Is it not wonderful, Sir? Our boss is remarkable for his adventures in ultra-modern ideas. Here are oil lanterns and earthen lamps. A village maid will come to cook for you. Of course we have your favourite menu with us and we will be ready to supply the food you are accustomed to should you prefer that. What will you have now, sir? Tea or coffee ?” She paused. (DHOS 71)

Sunderdas does not reply to the lady. He slowly walks to verandah and steps down to the sandy stretch. He observes thick bushes where his grandma used to say that an ogre lived. Thus Sundardas identifies that it is his own house which he had left years ago.

Sunderdas does not get happiness and peace of mind outside his village. The story gives us message that the true happiness dwells inside of oneself. In the story we find idealization of the village. The story is remarkable for the writer’s nostalgic yearning for the village culture, which is changing in the course of the globalization.

Manoj Das in his preface to *Chasing the Rainbow* throws light on his nostalgia. He states it:

... Nostalgia has certainly been a driving force behind my recreating these lost moments, situations and characters. But the real inspiration behind the exercise has been the fear that they will be lost to a future that is bound to be so different from them. I may appear to be romanticizing the reality, but that is because I have been faithful to the vision I had as a child and a young boy – a vision that was by all means subjective, but vibrantly true so far as the observer was concerned. (XVII)

Return of the Cat

Manoj Das depicts everyday life in Indian villages in his stories and novels. In “Return of the Cat” the writer throws light on the nostalgic recollection of the past memories of Mr. Mahendra Mishra, associated with the pet cat and his mother who is no more.

The setting of the story is a village. The story centres around the character of Mr. Mahendra Mishra, the retired District Magistrate and Collector. He recalls how he chased his mother’s pet cat like Arjun or Parasurama crushing bushes and shrubs but unable to capture it. The writer describes his vision of the cat. He puts it as:

The cat was back in his vision – and along with it the face of his mother who never ate or slept until the cat’s return if it had strayed into the neighbourhood in the evening. In the backdrop of a total silence the cat would suddenly drop from the wall-top with a soft thud and purr on, rubbing itself against Mother’s legs, its tail raised triumphantly. (MMCOS 26)

There is strong intimacy between the mother and the cat. After the death of her mother’s widowed mother and destruction of their house in

the fire, her mother's cat crossing three villages, two cemeteries and acres of paddy fields reaches Mahindra's house. Mahindra tried his mother to get rid off the cat but mother forced him to bear with the cat.

Further he becomes Sub-Deputy Collector at the remote Gunupur taluk. He comes home to take mother along with him. The mother prepares his lunch. While taking his lunch, the cat appears and tries to pull a piece of his fish. Mishra becomes angry and starts chasing the running cat. The cat disappears in a long stretch of bushy meadow. At midnight Mishra sees his mother waiting for the cat. But the cat does not return. Next morning they leave the house. Here the writer throws light on Mishra's mother's love for native place. The writer describes the village in a routine manner with its trees, the ponds and the houses. He describes it as:

After a last look at her locked house, mother boarded the bullock-cart a little before sunrise and they left for the railway station. Much later, when Mahindra recollected the tearful eyes with which she had looked at the trees, the ponds and the houses of the village while the bullock-cart speeded up, it appeared to him as if she knew that she will never again set her foot in the village that had been her home for more than thirty years. (MMCOS 30)

Mahindra's mother lived with him for short time. She was always worried about the cat. She became sick and died. After his retirement he returns to his native village to spend his rest of life. He remembers his mother and her pet cat. He sets out in search of the cat. The writer focuses the nostalgic feelings of Mishra. There is photographic description of rural life which is peaceful and placid. The writer describes it as:

Tiny streams crisscrossed the sandy village road. All was quiet except the drip-drop upon the trees and the rumbling of the distant thunders.

He recognized the bokul tree between the village and the meadow. He was fond of its fruit when very young and his mother brought him here, holding him against his waist. The cat came with them. Even the village dogs were so respectful for mother that they would not bark at her cat. Its intrusion into any kitchen in the neighbourhood was readily pardoned. (MMCOS 30-31)

Mishra's search for the cat which had been lost thirty-five years ago becomes futile.

The story depicts very effectively the strong bond of love between man and animal which is the dominant feature of rural culture. Mishra's search for cat symbolizes his yearning for rural culture which is changing in the course of time.

Dr. Bishnu Charan Dash while commenting on "Village Ecology" in the present story states:

In "The Return of Cat" Das has quite convincingly appropriated cat as an indispensable member of the rural home and an endearing and aesthetically satisfying impetus that edifies village ecology. Through the sensitive character of the retired District Commissioner, Mr. Mahendra Mishra, the story writer creates a powerful sentinel of village ecology and ingeniously applies memory and nostalgia to revive

down the memory lane the intimate association of the cat with his mother who is no more ...” (227)

The story is outstanding for its close observation of rural life.

The Third Person

In Indian society, there is a great respect for the image of mother. She stands for infinite and unconditional love. Manoj Das very effectively depicts the image of mother in his short stories. In “The Third Person” Das presents the image of mother which provides love, care and dignity to her child.

The setting of the story is the roadside inn in the country side. There is evocation of rural atmosphere with the photographic descriptions of the Nature at the beginning of the story. The writer writes in his pictorial style:

A few frothy clouds floated on the hillocks of the distant north. I had marked them while cycling along the deserted road late in the afternoon. They bloomed like flowers upon the green locks of the meditative summits. But I was going westward; the serene and dropping sun lured away all my attention, until I was forced to look back by a sudden gust of cool breeze. I woke up from my reverie and saw that in the mean time those creamy shades against the hazy hills had changed into a vast somberness. Two chunks of dark cloud, perhaps the darkest I ever saw, were swiftly advancing to extinguish the flame on the western horizon. In a few minutes, whipped by sharp rain and caught under a bit of whirlwind I was thrown upon the ground. Rain and mud made my clothes heavy. (MMCOS 121)

As the darkness starts gathering, the narrator decides to stay in the roadside inn. The writer depicts rural atmosphere with the description of the inn. The innkeeper with a lantern in his hand leads the narrator to the solitary room in his clay house. The rent of the room is half a rupee for a full day and night. The narrator enjoys a mug full of tea and goes to sleep. After some time, he sees a rustic with his wife taking shelter in the same inn. Then rain starts pouring heavily. As the narrator closes his eyes, he remembers his childhood stories of dwarfs and demons.

In the morning the narrator listens the quarrel between innkeeper and the late-night tenant. During the night, the woman gives birth to a son. Now they are three and the innkeeper charges for third person. The father is not willing to pay charges for the baby. But the mother comes holding her baby to her bosom and tells her husband to pay the rent for baby. The narrator states:

“No!” said the lady advancing towards the cart, “Give him the full rent for the baby. Why should my child remain indebted to anyone from his very birth? Hasn’t he any prestige?” (MMCOS 123)

Then the husband pays the rent without any hesitation. Manoj Das very effectively glorifies the institution of the motherhood. He shows greater sympathy towards rural values. The story is also outstanding for its snapshots of the nature which is the dominant characteristics of rural culture.

The Jackals

Manoj Das has represented his childhood experiences in his short fiction. His stories are remarkable for its beautiful snapshots of Nature which includes birds, animals, trees, and rustics. He glorifies rural culture

for its innocence and simplicity and condemns urban culture for its hypocrisy and artificiality. In “The Jackals” he throws light on the intimate relationship between man and animal. The story also depicts the writer’s nostalgic yearning for rural culture which is disappearing in the process of the globalization.

At the background of the story there is a village with the river. There is small forest on the other side of the village. The story centres around the character of Sarveswar, a school going boy. From his childhood, the fearful picture of a jackal had been printed on his memory. The jackal dyed in blue supposed as a supernatural creature increased his terror of the jackals. While returning from school to home at sunset he used to listen collective howl of jackals. The writer describes this atmosphere with supernatural touch:

... Walking along the river bank, his eyes would revert to the meadow on the other side. That was the time for the jackals to gather amidst the shrubs and make their collective howl, looking at the serene and sad twilit is sky. The gait and style of their performance left Sarveswar in no doubt about some ominous significance sealed in the ritual. It filled him with melancholy. (MOS 55)

Then there is an unexpected and unforgettable event takes place in the life of Sarveswar. The young new teacher plans an excursion into the forest for the senior class students. The writer gives very beautiful snapshots of the forest with its river, trees and flowers which is the dominant characteristics of the rural culture. The writer pens it as:

There was a small forest on the other side of the river. In spring the cuckoos who lived in silence for months at a

stretch suddenly made a riot of *coos*, creating the effect of an indisputable argument assuring everybody of a passionately sweet, romantic tomorrow. The flowers of different hues covering hundreds of trees in a row appeared like a notice prohibiting entry into the fairyland they guarded. (MOS 55)

In afternoon, Sarveswar with his friends and teacher cross the river to visit the forest. They bring puffed rice and sweetmeats of coconut and jaggery with them. When they reached the forest, they enjoy flavour of rice and sweetmeats. Their teacher allows them to play in total freedom with some important hints. They start to play hide and seek. While hiding from friends, Sarveswar comes across bushy shrubs with Vainch, the berry which he is very fond. While busy in search of berries, he finds a pair of piercing eyes of jackal focused on him. He started running fast. The jackal is also running fast but in the opposite direction. Sarva is moving away from his friends. It is nearly dark. He is frightened and about to burst into a cry. Now the luminous eyes surveying him are not four but six or eight. He listens their howl at sunset. Then he collapses and passes from unconscious stage into a slumber. When he opens his eyes, he notices a mother jackal with her cubs. He feels that she is there in order to guard him. Then his teacher and friends arrive there. They thank God to see him safe.

Now Sarveswar has been a city-dweller all his adult life. But he plans to build a bungalow in his village to pass his last days. On his occasional visits to the village he notices his village fast growing into a bazaar. He is surprised to notice drastic change in his village during the one and half decades. His mind confuses on his decision of shifting from town to village which is growing into a hick town. Here the writer

comments on the urbanization of the villages which is an inevitable process.

Further Sarveswar comes across Samaresh Devta, the would be builder of the apartment in the village. He informs Sarveswar that he has killed hundred jackals. He is proud of his shooting feats. Sarveswar wants to slap him for his shooting jackals cruelly.

Thus the writer comments on the large scale of deforestation. He criticizes modern man's action of destructing flora and fauna of the forest. Man is destroying eco-friendly atmosphere which results in global-warming.

Thus the story is a masterpiece of nostalgic longing for rural culture which stands for rustic innocence, simplicity, love as well as healthy and eco-friendly environment.

The Hunger

In "The Hunger" Manoj Das comments on the sexual exploitation of the poor and helpless woman from the village. The hunger symbolizes lust and cruelty in human nature.

The action of the story takes place in a village in Orissa. There is a evocation of rural atmosphere at the beginning of the story. The writer gives beautiful snapshots of Nature. He depicts it:

Like an infant toddling out of its mother's lap, the sun emerged from the sea into sky with a small hop. But the sky was tender and affectionate. The pampered sun soon grew brighter and hotter.

After filling up the thatches of the small hamlet of the fisher folk at the confluence of the river and the sea, the surplus sunlight spilled into the streets, showing the faces of all the men and women gathered there in their clearest contours. (MMCOS 167)

There is drummer who announced the order of the magistrate to leave the village. As the village is going to turn a battlefield. There is a war between the English and the Japanese. The fisherfolk are part and parcel of the sea. They are fishing for their livelihood. How will they leave their native village? They have strong love for their native land. The writer throws light on the fisherfolk's love for their land and sea which is the dominant characteristics of rural culture. Hadu Malik sits stunned to listen the drummer. The writer depicts his restless mind, "How could any power on earth ask him to abandon his ancestral home, the sea, the sunlight, the breeze that were as much his as his own eyesight or voice?" (MMCOS 168)

Hadu Malik lives with his daughter-in-law Shobha. He has three year old grand-son. His son Gopal has joined army. Shobha hopes that her husband will come as a soldier as their village will turn into a battlefield. Hadu Malik announced his decision to stay in the village. He declares that he is not going to move an inch from his soil. He talks on till his voice cracks. Then he dies. The sad villagers hurles his dead body into the confluence. Shobha expresses her grief on the death of her father-in-law. Now she does not have support. She has to face calamities on her own. At night she leaves her home with her small son. But Lala, Gopal's uncle's son insists her to live with him as wife in his house. Lala tries to seduce Shobha. But she escapes from his clutches. Then she reaches her abandoned house in search of her husband in army. But the house is

acquired by the soldiers. Shobha is sexually exploited by the soldiers. They behaved like bears and jackals. They killed cruelly her little son Satu also. Thus the beastly lust and cruelty of the soldiers destructed life of rustic woman who stands for faithfulness, simplicity and straightforwardness.

The story is a masterpiece of authentic representation of rural life in India.

Choop Saitan

In “Choop Saitan” Manoj Das depicts authentic picture of Indian rural life. The dominant characteristics of rural culture are reflected in the present story. The writer portrays the villagers’ strong beliefs, their customs, ceremonies and rituals. The story also comments on the science of black magic and its strong effect on the minds of the villagers.

The action of the story takes place in a village. The story centres around the character of Vishudas. At the beginning of the story, the writer illustrates the title of the story. He puts it as, “Saitan or rogues were of any kinds, but the most wicked among them were those who could mask themselves with a face of innocence: the Choop Saitan”

According to Nathu Mohanty, Vishudas belonged to this category of choop saitan. Then, the villagers start to doubt Vishu’s black magic, whenever they are in difficulties. For instance, Jagdish Jena’s milch cow refuses to give enough milk for last four days, since Vishu has asked him for milk and he refused to give him. Then Vishu sneezing right in front of Mangal Patra three times on Tuesday was significant because since then Mangal has a headache every Tuesday, at noon. Here the writer throws light on the strong beliefs of the villagers. The writer depicts these beliefs with realism and precision; “If Tempa, the only child of the affluent

oilman's house was sporting an enlarged liver, if the impressive branch of bananas hanging in Shrichandan's orchard was not showing any sign of ripening, if the wound (due to excessive whipping) on the back of Tima Sawoo's bullock refused to be healed, it was of course because of Bishu's black magic." (MMCOS 115-16)

Vishu has no means of livelihood. Two years ago, in the annual festival and fair, he has chosen a beggar girl as his bride. The senior priest of the Siva temple has put them under wedlock in a minute-long brief ceremony. The writer states hold of the authority of the priest on the minds of the villagers. He puts it as, "Nobody in an area of twenty villages could question the action of the senior priest, a man of few words, but with authority that no other Brahmin had the cheek to contest." (MMCOS 116)

Vishudas used to appear on the verandah of any house for his daily food and to carry a part of it for his wife. The villagers never complained it because the entire village indebted his forefathers. Vishu's great-great grandfather had rehabilitated the flood affected villagers. But everybody in the village began to fear Vishu when Nathu Mohanty disclosed Vishu's power of black magic. Payodhar Panda, the priest of the village deity was about to milk his cow. But he saw Vishu crossing his gate, he pushed the cow back. Adhikary's kiln did not catch fire properly. As Vishu was passing by it, Adhikary suspects Vishu's evil influence and requests him to utter antidote to save his life's saving. Now the villagers stopped talking to him. Vishu realizes that something is wrong with him.

One day Vishu looked very grave. Sati, the village midwife, disclosed the reality. Vishu's wife was in labourpain. At midnight Vishu knocked the door of Sati for her help. But she refused to attend because

of his effects of black magic. Next day the village volunteers' group carried the dead body of Vishu's wife. Vishu stopped entering anyone's compound. He lost his smile since his wife's death. One day he was found lying with fever. The village physician had been called to examine Vishu. But he died in the evening. Beside his pillow, the villagers found a bundle which contained broken bangles, of tiny box of vermilion and a comb of his wife.

Thus the story is a masterpiece of an authentic representation of rural culture. The writer throws light on the socio-cultural life the villagers sunk in poverty, illiteracy and superstitions.

The Rain

In "The Rain" Manoj Das glorifies rural culture. The story reflects the writer's nostalgic attitude towards ideal rural life which is changing in the course of modernization. The writer shows a greater sympathy towards traditional rural values. He focuses his attention on the simplicity, innocence, affection and humanistic attitude of the Indian villagers.

The central character of the story is Jaipal. He used to live in air-conditioned rooms and cars in the city. He and his companions propose to set up business far from the madding crowd. Jaipal experiences a thrill in the company of nature. He and his would be partners decide to visit the site for their business. He experiences a joy when he watches the river and the meadow. His companions drove away towards their broker's village. Jaipal remains alone in the company of nature. The writer gives very beautiful snapshots of nature. He describes it as:

It was after nearly three decades that Jaipal experienced such a thrill. The ripples on the river surface reflected silver flakes of light from some secret cracks in the overcast sky. Birds flew by with a kind of abandon he had not seen for long; the breeze was tender yet exhilarating, evoking sensations he had not had for years ... (FGS 155)

Jaipal gazes to the river. He experiences highest joy while watching ripples on the river. He experiences much different type the pleasures which he can not get from the clubs and the cocktail parties in the city. When he looks up, he watches heavier clouds. He receives the first drop of rain. He recollects so many lost moments of his childhood. He takes shelter under the old banyan tree. Then he observes two rustics gazing at him. The writer uses 'animal imagery' to evoke rural sensibility. He puts it as, "The two strangers who sat under the tree and surveyed him with the eyes of a couple of hungry hyenas in the zoo waiting for their daily meat ..." (FGS 156)

Jaipal becomes frightened. When the rustics ask him the price of his costly watch, Jaipal suspects them as thieves. Further they also ask about his pack of notes in his pocket. Now Jaipal's heart begins to beat violently. He thinks that the two rustics will kill him for his costly watch and money. Then the junior rustic disappears. Jaipal feels terribly giddy. He is lonely in the critical situation. Fortunately his car comes with his two friends. He flung himself into the car. The Junior rustic also arrives from the rain. Here the writer highlights affection, simplicity and humanity of the simple villagers. The writer puts it as:

'So, the car is back. Good. I fetched my umbrella for Babu – for the sake of his costly watch and his stack of

notes. Did you cover your watch with your handkerchief?
Wise of you.'

The young man, breathing heavily, unfurled his old and faded umbrella which till then he had kept tucked under his arm, drenching himself.

The older villager came closer and bowed to Jaipal conveying his farewell. (FGS 158-59)

Jaipal becomes astonished. He is very much influenced by the simplicity and affection of the villagers. He cancels the site chosen for his proposed business in the village. He does not want to spoil the simple and innocent way of life of the villagers. He wants to preserve rural culture which is changing in the process of globalization. The writer depicts this feeling in a poetic manner. He states it:

No, he would never allow a bazaar to crop up here. Long live the banyan tree; long live the tribe of the two he met; long live their wretched umbrella!

He strained his neck to have another glimpse of the banyan tree. It was lost in the rain like an infant in its mother's bosom. (FGS 159)

The story is a masterpiece of the writer's plea for the nourishment of rural culture which stands for purity, innocence, simplicity and straightforwardness.

The Sensitive Plant

Manoj Das has a sense of humanistic attitude which reflects the inner self of the characters. His stories explore the deepest corner of

human mind. He is a master artist in the presentation of human relationship. In his “The Sensitive Plant” he focuses his attention on the respectful and loving relationship between the student and the teacher.

The action of the story centres around the retired head master and his ex-student Rao who has become a Police Inspector. The action of the story takes place at the outskirts of small town. The Police Inspector Roy and C.I.D. Inspector George with his assistants come together in search of criminal at the outside of the town. The writer evokes rural sensibility with the description of the spot. He puts it as: “Beside the isolated, bushy mound which, like a headland, ran into the extensive natural lake on the outskirts of the town, C.I.D. Inspector George stood waiting for him ... Most excitedly he dragged Rao into a deserted hut and whispered the strategy to him.” (MMCOS 33)

Through the dense bushes Rao and George crawl ahead to arrest a big man wrapped in an overcoat. Then they watch this big man stooping down to pick up something. But he stands up erect when a passer by approaches. George brings out his revolver and whistle. Rao decides to take the big man under his control. They watch his movement carefully. But they come to know that instead of picking anything up he just touched something very cautiously. The writer describes it as: “... he was, most gently, simply touching a small sensitive plant. As he touched it, the tiny, dewy leaves were closing spontaneously like a multitude of delicate eyelids and that made the man smile – a most warm affectionate smile, rather a blush than a smile. He touched branch after branch of the plant and smiled again and again.” (MMCOS 34-35)

Now Rao and George understand their mistake. They suspected the big man as a criminal. The strange man also startles at the sudden

appearance of the men. But he utters a queer command: “Stand up on the bench” (MMCOS 35) Immediately Rao stands at attention and salutes the big man. Even George also follows him. Rao discovers his old headmaster in wrapped overcoat even after two decades. The headmaster used to give that particular command whenever he got angry with the boys in the classroom or at his residence with his wife. For Rao it is a rediscovery of a man after twenty years: “And such a headmaster, known to be hard as a rock, was playing with a sensitive plant, far from the madding crowd!” (MMCOS 35)

Rao identifies his headmaster and shows his surprise with respect. Even his teacher also recognizes him with his name. He informs his student that now he is living a pensioner’s life. He enjoys with sensitive plants. He compares these sensitive plants with the hearts of hundreds of his students which he has tented. Then he admits that he always loved the sweet dawn as Wordsworth loved the rainbow. Then he asks Rao whether he remembers the poem of Wordsworth. Rao starts to utter the poem but the headmaster interrupts and corrects him. Rao assures him that he will not forget it in future and raises his right hand to touch his ear. They cross the mound and return their homes. Rao feels inner satisfaction of his mind with his meeting with his old headmaster. The writer highlights it as: “After many years Rao was really enjoying to his heart's content the gentle, cool breeze of a wonderful dawn. He felt a release from all his responsibility, for, he was obeying his headmaster! His heart was filled with peace and gratitude.” (MMCOS 36)

The story highlights traditional rural values preserved by the teacher and the student. Though the teacher is known as hard as a rock, Rao, his student, after twenty years rediscovers in him love and compassion for his students. The student also shows his respect and

gratitude towards his teacher. The story is a masterpiece of Manoj Das which glorifies affectionate and respectful relationship between the teacher and the student which is disappearing in the modern culture of technology. He wants to preserve traditional culture and its values. The writer draws imagery and metaphor from nature to evoke rural sensibility. He uses metaphor of the sensitive plant to express teacher's love and compassion for his students whose hearts are tender like the sensitive plant.

The Intimate Demon

Manoj Das is essentially a humanist. He is thinker-writer who believes in the innate goodness in man. He is optimistic of the future of mankind. His quest for finding the eternal truth in everyday circumstances is reflected in his fiction. In his "The Intimate Demon" he focuses his attention on a simple way of life of a poor rustic. He shows greater sympathy towards rural values and comments on false pride and status of the man. The action of the story takes place in the train while the narrator is travelling by the train with his small daughter. His daughter is sleeping so he sits by her side to protect her. The train is passing through mofussil stations. Then train reaches to a small station where a waiting room is served by tall trees all around it. But a big crowd emerges in the train. When the narrator tries to climb to upper berth, he notices a big man with beard hanging on. He lifts the glass of window and asks him to come in. The man enters and sits down on the floor. He informs narrator that there is big festival and the people who have crossed a river to reach the festival are on their return journey. Then the narrator tells him that they are in the first class compartment and he may have a third class ticket but he has no objection for this. Here the writer focuses on the narrator's proud nature. On the other hand the old man confesses reality.

The writer puts it as: “The stranger introduced himself as a perpetual wanderer with all his worldly belongings under his arm and assured me that he had neither any ticket nor any destination.” (MMCOS 38)

The narrator gives up his idea of sleeping. Suddenly he listens shrill sound. But his daughter is still asleep. He finds the old man who has started playing a flute. He becomes furious and tells him to stop playing a flute. The old man becomes confused and puts the flute back in his haversack. He salutes the narrator and gets down when the train stops at another station.

Then his daughter wakes from her sleep and tells him that in her dream she has watched a charming garden with flowers and fairies. There was a child who played his flute. But a bad demon stopped his music.

The narrator identifies demon which is concealed in his consciousness. The writer states it as: “I looked through the window at the vast moonlight meadows. But I was waking up to a chunk of darkness and a demon lurking somewhere inside.” (MMCOS 39)

The story glorifies rural values presented by the old man who is a wanderer. He stands for honesty, humbleness, simplicity and detachment of life. On the other hand, the narrator is proud of his status and compassion. In her dream, the narrator’s daughter experiences angelic power in the old man’s playing of a flute and demonic power in her father’s behaviour who stops the music of the old man.

Passing of a Storm

Nature’s dominating effect on human life is recorded in many of the short stories of Manoj Das. His stories are marked with photographic presentation of Nature. There is intrinsic connection between man and

nature. In his “Passing of a storm” Manoj Das gives an authentic picture of a violent storm.

The action of the story takes place in a dilapidated and abandoned villa, amid the vast solitude of deserted beach. The story centres around Mr. and Mrs. Sinha and the latter’s brother Prof. Prabal Kishor. Mrs. Sinha has great fascination for sea. She wants to enjoy watching of unhindered sequences of sea-moods away from the cities like Bombay or Madras or Puri. They are in search of “a spot where the blue waves burst upon the artless mounds of primeval sand-dunes.” (MMCOS 57) Prof. Prabal Kishor locates such a spot seventy miles from their home-town. The writer evokes rural sensibility with the description of old villa and the deserted beach. He pens it as:

... Nature lay enchanted there under the persistent incantations of the booming waves, breaking before a villa built long ago by some feudal chief ...

It was late in the afternoon when they got down from their jeep. Amidst lush green bushes and silver sands, embraced by cool breeze under a sun rendered weak by layers of cloud, the villa looked like a cosy cradle in which they could swing and relax for a while. (MMCOS 57-58)

After strolling away the sands, they enter the sea to deal with waves but suddenly the storm breaks out. They pick up their bags and rush into the upper floor of the building. Mrs. Sinha watches the dazzling strings of lightening. The wind grows fierce so they shut all the doors and windows. Whirling columns of sand continue to dash against the building. Then the darkness engulfs them. Mrs. Sinha has left her torch in the jeep. Prabal Kishor gets ready to get the torch from the jeep. But he

stops as he listens an eerie sound. Then Mr. Sinha gets ready to collect the torch from the jeep. But he has also left his spectacles in the jeep and he can not walk without his spectacles. Then they listen to the roaring of the sea in the violent storm. Mrs. Sinha worries about their security in this natural calamity. Her professor brother laughs and says : “Well, Didi, I must point out that you are yet to gauge the depth of the crisis. Our survival is too mean a question. I shouldn’t be surprised if half of the world is already gone. Who knows if this mansion is not one of the floating objects amidst a world-wide deluge?” (MMCOS 59) Mrs. Sinha becomes aware of the severe calamity. The storm increases its fury till midnight. Then the storm begins to subside towards the last quarter of the night. Mr. Sinha opens the window to observe the situation. Gradually the atmosphere becomes clear and calm. They heave a sigh of relief and reach to their jeep. Mr. Sinha notices a gentleman soundly asleep inside the jeep. The professor wakes him from his sleep. He informs that he is the watchman of the villa and his name is Dambarudhar. He has gone his village a mile away to take his food. When he returns, he finds the house which is locked from inside. So he sleeps in the jeep. As he is thirsty he comes across Mr. Sinha’s small bottle of brandy. He makes it sure that it is not hair oil and he drinks it and sleeps. He is totally unaware of violent storm and calamity at the night. Mrs. Sinha looks at the rising sun joyfully and their jeep disappears beyond the sand dunes.

The story is outstanding for its authentic presentation of nature in its form of fury. It also focuses on the beautiful snapshots of nature. The writer throws light on the difference between city life and rural life. The man living in the cities is under the burden of tensions and anxiety. He wants relax and solitude to heal his disturbed mind. The environment in the cities like Mumbai, Madras and Puri is polluted by factories and

industries. The purest form of nature is disturbed by the modern man. Mrs. Sinha in the story has a great fascination for the sea. She does not get pure joy from sea-watching at the cities. But she enjoys sea watching amidst the vast solitude of the deserted beach far from the madding crowd which provides calmness and happiness to her mind. The story throws light on how rural culture is superior to urban culture.

Smiles and ...

Manoj Das's stories take note of metamorphosis of village India in process of urbanization. He draws his childhood memories to depict ongoing changes in the modern society. In his "Smiles and..." he focuses on Prafulla Babu's unfulfilled love for Leena. The story also records changes in the village in the process of urbanization. It also pens the beautiful snapshots of the garden with flowers.

The story centres around the character of Prafulla Babu. Fifty years ago, he left his native village after the death of his maternal uncle who was a prosperous businessman. As his uncle was childless, he inherits his business. Now he returns to take root once again on his native soil. Here the writer focuses on Prafulla's love and his attachment for his native place which is the characteristics of rural culture. Then the writer throws light on the changing social scenario of the village. He depicts it as:

The massive old-fashioned mansion of yesteryears had given way to a multi-storied building that looked like a house of wax. The legend on the right pillar of the gate reading "God is good" had made way for "Beware of dogs."
(MMCOS 134)

Then he observes the garden on the eastern side of the house and the new version of the old verandah where he used to sit on an easy chair fifty years ago. Further he enjoys the coolness and tenderness of the dew drops on the grass. When he notices a girl plucking the flowers, he enters in the realm of his past memories when he was twenty. He remembers Leena, the daughter of neighbouring house who used to pluck the flowers for her mother as well as Prafulla's mother. Then she used to give the best flower from her basket to Prafulla. One day he decides to express his love for her. He gathers his courage and says, "You give me a flower a day. Why not give something more today-say-a kiss?" (MMCOS 135) Then Leena ran away to her home. She did not come from the next day. He quarreled with Leena in his dreams for her disappearing from his mornings. Further he also leaves the place to handle his uncle's business. There is strong impact of the unfulfilled love on his life. The terrible thirst sometimes scorched his entire interior. He wants to wipe out that irritating sensation with the petals of tender flower with fresh dew. Now the little flower girl comes close to him just Leena used to do. He demands a flower from the little girl and also asks her to give him kiss. The smart little girl gives him a perfect rose and plants a kiss on his cheek. Prafulla gets feeling of his transformation into a butterfly. He feels that there are hundreds of flowers and the breeze is carrying their kisses to him. The cool thin mist gathered in garden is wiping off the burning sensation of Prafulla.

The story is masterpiece of an authentic presentation of beauty of the nature. There is glorification of the Nature in the story. The garden with its beautiful flowers with dew drops provides coolness to the burning sensation which Prafulla suffered from fifty years. He gets solace of his mind in the company of nature. The writer very beautifully presents

feelings of Prafulla: “Tender sunshine flooded the garden. And the golden sun suddenly appeared to him like the Heaven’s kiss on the earth and her children.” (MMCOS 137)

The story focuses on man’s emotional relationship with nature. Nature is part and parcel of life of rural people. The story highlights on how rural culture is superior to urban culture.

Son and Father

There are radical changes in the life of the people living in Indian villages in the twentieth century. Development in science and technology has changed serene and placid rural India.

In the story “Son and Father” Manoj Das presents difference between the modern civilized culture represented by Samir, the writer and luminous, sublime and majestic aspect of rural life represented by a nameless, motherless boy living in the lap of Nature.

The action of the story takes place in the forest near the guest house. The story is centered around the character of the boy. At the opening of the story there is continuous rainfall and brighter flashes of lightning. Samir, the successful writer sits alone in the forest guest house. He is watching drama of appearance and disappearance. There is display of long fireworks of lightning. Samir can not understand difference between reality and illusion. Here the writer gives beautiful snapshots of Nature in poetic language. He depicts it as:

The meadow extended up to the hills. Lush green palm trees stood in a scattered fashion, like a lyric broken into haphazard lines. There were dwarf rocks and bushes and shrubs galore for erratic punctuation marks. (MOS 17-18)

Then Samir observes the strange boy approaching at the speed of a shooting star. He has seen him for the fifth time. The activities of the boy indicate that he is a part and parcel of Nature. Earlier, Samir has seen him flying with the wind and also climbing to his verandah and spinning around a pillar. Samir is very much influenced by the boy's activities. He wants to talk with the boy. When Samir asks the boy about his name, the boy replies, "Don't know". (MOS 19) He disappears beyond a mound of earth.

In afternoon the watchman arrives with tiffin and tea for Samir. When asked about the strange boy, the watchman informs that the boy is his son. The memory of nameless boy haunted Samir. Then he looks the boy who is coming with the dogs onto the verandah. Here the writer throws light on the rural poverty. He pens the character of the boy: "The boy was in loose shorts, perhaps gifted to him by a well-wisher, and bare for the rest. He was talking, but it was not possible to say whether with dogs or with the trees." (MOS 20) The boy's talking with trees and dogs indicate that he has become inseparable part of the Nature. Samir wants to talk with the boy. But the boy promises him that he will meet him in the evening. Then the boy runs through the rain. The writer gives very wonderful picture of the boy's relationship with nature. He pens it as:

A fresh blaze of crisscross lightening tore the sky apart like a demoniac wizard spreading all his ten fingers and hypnotizing the prostrate earth.

The boy raised his arms and scampered off, as if to catch hold of the lightning or to wrap himself up with them!

He ran through the rain. The two dogs kept pace with him. The wind seemed to change its course suddenly so that

it could blow in his favour. Or was the boy pulling the wind with him?" (MOS 21)

Samir is astonished to observe the deep relationship between the boy and the nature. He becomes restless. He can not concentrate on his writing. Then the watchman comes with tiffin at the late evening. When Samir asks him about his son, he reports that his son is no more. He is whisked away by the lightnings. Samir collapses in his chair. He does not understand "What was the purpose in his appearing like a string of lightning, playing like a string of lightning and disappearing like a string of lightning?" (MOS 22)

Samir can not forget deeper, luminous eyes of the boy. Next morning Samir joins the watchman to bury the dead body of the boy. As the watchman's native hamlet was on the other side of the forest and no relative of the watchman lived nearby. After the burial of the dead body of the boy, the father in his calm and candid voice observed, "Whatever the sky had left, was taken over by the earth." (MOS 23) Then Samir leaves the place the same day. But he can not forget the son and the father. They appeared him like the elements of majestic horizon.

The story is a masterpiece of man's intimate relationship with the Nature which is the dominant characteristics of rural culture. The Son and the Father are the inseparable parts of the Nature. The boy is born and brought up and also died in the company of the nature. He used to talk with dogs and the trees which are the members of Nature. He used to laugh during a lull in the thunderclap. He has formed intimate relationship with the breeze, the rain, the lightning and the thunder. Though he is motherless boy in literal sense, he is nurtured in the lap of Nature. He takes his final rest in the lap of mother earth which is a

sublime source of solace. His father represents the natural calmness and confidence, a greater sense of duty which is rare in modern city culture. On the other hand, Samir who is wrapped in the costly Kashmiri Shawl represents pride of the intellectual world of the city culture. But his pride is hurt before the deeper and luminous eyes of the boy. The writer pens it as:

“Hello, boy!” he called rather loudly. A hurried glance was all he received as the boy’s response. He realized, unhappily, how futile his Kashmiri shawl, his well-built personality and carefully groomed moustache were. Even his baritone voice failed to elicit the respect it deserved. (MOS 19)

Thus Manoj Das depicts sublime power of Nature. The story is notable for its presentation of rural landscape which represents serene air and eco-friendly environment, rustic innocence, simplicity and charm.

So Many Smiles

Manoj Das presents a tender and lovely world of the children in his many of short stories. He depicts his childhood experiences and memories in a quiet and serene village by the sea in his short stories.

In the story “So Many Smiles” Manoj Das depicts the world of children which is full of innocence, curiosity, adventure and affection. The action of the story takes place on the outskirts of the village on the Peacock Hill. At the centre of the story there are two characters and they are Latbar and Bapi. Apart from these two characters, there are other six children who are playmates and they are Ravi, Badal, Dhumal, Jay, Shiv and Saboo.

Latbar is the only one from the village who used to live in the city. He has a pair of moustache which are thick and majestically curled. He used to tell the exciting story of his life to this group of children. He tells them that his moustache are not original but of the demon from the Peacock Hill on the outskirts of his village. He defeated the demon on a wrestling bout and the demon surrendered his moustache to him as per custom with demons. The innocent children believe this story. But Bapi raised so many questions to Latbar. He is very curious but sensitive boy. He is known for his weeping face. Latbar insults him and warns him to keep quiet. Latbar plans to take the boys to the Peacock Hill. Thus the cart starts leaving behind Bapi. He stood stunned.

Then the writer throws light on the certain beliefs and faiths of the villagers about the existence of the demon on the hill. He pens it as:

Crossing the hill would have been a short-cut to the valley. But who was not afraid of the demon on the hill? Almost the first thing every infant in the village knew, after knowing its *ma* and *ba* was all about the demon, his shovel-like teeth, long lolling tongue, a tummy that put an elephant to shame and an infinite appetite for such tots who cried a lot or pestered their fathers with too many queries. (VOS 93)

The cart disappears at the distant bend. Bapi breaks out into a wail. Then he stops his crying and decides firmly to cross the hill and reach the riverside alone. He started walking in the direction of the hill. He experienced great thrill and joy while walking through bushy meadow. He watched a squirrel, a mongoose, a rabbit and a jackal. The writer gives beautiful picture of nature.

Then Bapi observes Latbar's cart. He becomes happy and climbs the upper half of the hill. At last he reaches at the top. He watches there a little girl sitting and munching a guava. He also finds a sack full of ripe guavas beside the girl. She offers a big guava to Bapi. Her name is Malli. She comes from a small hamlet situated on the hill itself. She guides Bapi to her little world on the hill. Here the writer depicts beautiful snapshots of Nature which evokes rural sensibility. He pens it as:

Nearby was the stream that grew broader and broader as it flowed down. Sweet was its murmur. A number of tiny birds frolicked over it, dipping their beaks and wings in the shallow flow and spraying the water around themselves, scattering numerous wee rainbows. (VOS 95)

While departing, Malli gives six guavas for the friends of Bapi and seventh one for Bapi. When asked about the demon, Malli informs that there is no demon on their hill. Bapi becomes very happy to discover the truth. He starts hopping down. Then he comes across a man who is climbing the hill. The man smiles at Bapi. Then he meets an old woman. She says, "Be careful, sonny," and she too smiled at him. (VOS 96) Bapi reaches in the valley. He is surprised that all smiled at him. He continues to beam happily and decides never to weep. He meets his friends and gives them a guava each. At that time, Latbar has fallen asleep in the cart. Bapi informs his friends that there is no demon on the hill. Thus the children come to know the reality. There is no magic in Latbar's moustache. They are ordinary as there is no demon on hill. Then the children decide to cross the hill and reach their homes. Bapi places a guava on the chest of Latbar who is sleeping. He also tells the carter to take Latbar back to the village. He also offers his own guava to the carter and the children leave the place.

Thus the story depicts lively and authentic world of the children in the villages. Bapi and Malli represent innocent and simple way of life of rural people. Malli's offer of guavas to Bapi and Bapi's act of distributing these guavas among his friends including Latbar who is unkind to him show philanthropic attitude of innocent rustic lad which is absent in the modern city culture. It also indicates the inward beauty of the heart of the child characters. They share their happiness with others. Here the writer gives us the message. He puts it as, "if one smiled at the world, the world smiled at him." (VOS 97) Thus the world of child characters represents angelic qualities. They are innocent and straightforward by heart. On the other hand Latbar who lives in the city is dishonest and liar. He frightens the children by telling false stories of demon. Thus the writer glorifies rural culture. The story is also notable for its photographic picture of Nature which is the dominant characteristics of rural culture.

2.3 SOCIO-POLITICAL RURAL LIFE

2.3.1 DECAYING FEUDAL SYSTEM IN RURAL INDIA

The Strategy

In "The Strategy" Manoj Das comments on the exploitation of the weaker section of the society by the zamindar of the village. They oppress the poor peasantry. He also throws light on the luxurious, drug and alcohol addicted life of the kings and landlords of the feudal system.

The setting of the story is a village in pre-independent India. The central character of the story is an old widow called Gauri. She is ninety-three years old. She has lost her father before her birth and mother at the age of three. Her husband died when she was seven years old. Even her adopted son also dies. Gauri learned midwifery from her grandmother at the age of sixteen. She starts practicing midwifery for her livelihood. She

lives lonely life. There is no one to support her. She works honestly and with dedication which brings her good reputation and recognition. The writer puts it as:

For all the children of the region she become the golden bridge between their mother's wombs and the Mother Earth, as they descended on her palms. It was she who responded to their first ever cry. In every such cry she heard the infant's assertion of a blind faith that there was someone to hearken to it. And in her own spontaneous response she heard the reassuring voice of Providence. (MOS 101)

Even Gauri receives the gold ring as reward for seeing the zamindar's daughter-in-law through a critical phase in the process of her delivery. Gauri imparts her skill of midwifery to Ahalya, a young widow. The writer throws light on the changing villages in the process of modernization. A big dispensary has been opened in the vicinity of the village. Now there is no scope for Ahalya. The job had been entirely taken over by the nurses. So Ahalya continues to take care of Gauri. Further the writer presents luxurious and drug addicted life of feudal lords after the abolition of the feudatory system.

On the other hand, "Gouri willed her patch of land to be annexed by the adjacent school compound, after her death." (MOS 102) Though she is poor and lonely, her act of donating her land to school shows her concern for society. Thus Gouri's character is glorified. The old woman symbolizes traditionalism, simplicity, straitforwardness, devotion to work and social awareness of the Indian villagers.

In the course of the time, the villagers neglect old Gouri. Even they are unaware of her presence, when the servant informs the zamindar that

Gouri says that she is going to die. At that time the zamindar carelessly asks? “Die? Was she alive?” (MOS 105) Nobody takes notice when Gouri dies.

The story “The strategy” is notable for the writer’s keen observation of the changing socio-political scenario in Indian villages.

The Concubine

In “The Concubine” Manoj Das presents the decline of the feudal system and its effects on Indian community life from villages and small towns. The setting of the story is a small town called Nijanpur. There is evocation of rural sensibility at the beginning of the story. The writer puts it as, “The small house to the west of Nijanpur, which could be reached after trudging through acres of marshland with thorny bushes, had a past, but the members of the Progressive Club were not at all in favour of discussing it.” (DHOS 99)

At the centre of the story there is character of Sati Dei, a concubine of the late Raja of Sumanpur. She plays role of mother in the life the prince after the death his parents. The Rani has given responsibility of the prince to Sati Dei, while she was dying. There is only one hand press in town. The members from ‘the Progressive Club’ decide to launch a fortnightly to publish wonders of Nijanpur and to discuss social problems like inequality, corruption and superstition.

As the wind of elections are blowing, the Prince decides to contest election against the candidate supported by the Progressive Club. The members of the club targeted the Prince as a symbol of reactionary feudalism. Actually, the Prince appeared to be popular. The people has forgotten tyranny of his father. The prince has goodwill in society. Sati Dei arranges a meeting of womenfolk to seek the votes for the prince. In

order to humiliate Sati Dei, the members of the club arrive in the meeting to expose her identity as a concubine of late Raja. But the old and serene Sati with smile meets the members of the club quietly. She feels happy to know that the younger generation recognized her. She does not feel any humiliation. She is doing her duty as a mother which she has promised to late Rani. The motherly love and care of Sati changes the arrogant nature of the members of club. While leaving they duly bow to her. They gave the name “The Monthly Jasmine” for their proposed magazine. It denotes their respect for the mother image in Sati’s personality.

The writer has become successful to bring some positive change through the experiences of his characters in this story. Sati represents simplicity, morality and ethical sense of the rural people in India.

A Time For a Style

In “A Time For a Style” Manoj Das depicts decline of feudalism during the early half of the twentieth century. Feudalism is an important aspect of Indian society. The Zamindars and Rajas started to lose their dominance and prestige in peasantry society. Manoj Das records this phase of transition and its impact on society in his writings.

The setting of the story is an Indian village. The village is described with usual placidity and greenery. The writer depicts it as,

It was the year with which the twentieth century began. When young Hrishikesh Chowdhury entered his village after having been away in Calcutta for six months, it was a spring morning with the village huts still lying lulled in the lap of blooming greenery, and cuckoos singing from the retreats of prolific groves. (MMCOS 40)

The story centres around the character of Hrishikesh Chowdhury, the Zamindar. In his youth, when he returns from Calcutta he has tried a fashionable style with long hair. But his father does not like it. He protests this change which has western influence of Sahibs. He orders the village barber, Chaitan to shorten the locks of Hrishikesh. Then Hrishikesh gives four anna coin to Chaitan for his service. Hrishikesh keeps up this shape for over fifty years. Here time plays very important role. Change is the law of nature. In the course of the time, Chowdhury Ugranarayan passes away. There is drastic change in the life of Hrishikesh. The old order is changed. There is decline of feudal system with emergency of independence. The estate is gone. Lands and orchards are sold. Even the village culture also changes. The writer observes it, “by the magic touch of time, the obscure village had been transformed into a bazaar of some commercial importance.” (MMCOS 42)

Even the old-style mansion of the landlord is also forgotten. Hrishikesh starts getting older and poorer. The writer focuses the change after the decline of feudal system. The old prices of land keep soaring higher. Even Zamindar’s accountant’s son becomes Deputy Minister. The close friends of Hrishikesh forget him.

But Chaitan who has also grown old visits Hrishikesh every month to cut his hair. Then Chaitan with his son opens a saloon, ‘The New London Saloon’. Hrishikesh visits this saloon for his monthly haircut. Chaitan receives him in his saloon with respect and love. In the course of the time many things changed but he continues his habit of paying four annas for his haircut. One day he visits saloon in Chaitan’s absence. As usual he gives four annas to Chaitan’s son after his haircut. At that time, the young man stares at him and comments with insulting words. Hrishikesh becomes benumbed by these words. The writer puts it:

“Once upon a time, the ancient fool used to give this much. He continues doing the same even in ‘The New London Saloon’ where we cannot accommodate customers who would happily pay more than twelve annas, our fixed fee!’ He added after a chuckle, “I don’t mind the amount he gives as much as the way he gives it – showing his philanthropy to everybody present.” (MMCOS 44)

The writer focuses on generation gap between father and son. He also shows a greater sympathy towards traditional rural values which are changing in the course of the time.

After six months, Chaitan visits Hrishikesh Chowdhury with his old little shaving box. Chowdhury tells Chaitan that fifty years ago he has fascination for novel hairstyles but his father protested him. Further he firmly tells him that: “I have decided to allow a free growth of hair all around my face. That will be the best style at this age. Don’t you think so? And now, Chaitan, at least you should not stand in my way. Should you?” (MMCOS 45)

Chaitan also tells him that he is not attending the saloon because he feels exhausted.

The story is outstanding for its authentic representation of village culture which is in the process of change. It also takes note of decaying feudal system.

The Gold Medal

Manoj Das represents socio-political life of the rural people in his short fiction. He is a close observer of pre and post independent rural India. In pre-independent rural India, the feudal lords exploited the

weaker section of the society sunk in poverty, illiteracy and superstitions. The miserable condition of these people is depicted by Manoj Das in his stories. He also depicts decaying feudal system and its effects on post independent India.

In “The Gold Medal” Manoj Das comments on the decaying of the feudalism. The setting of the story is a village. There is an end of the zamindari. Krishnachandra, a village actor in drama, recalls nostalgically his past memories. He has performed the play “Janaka-Nandini” in the presence of the zamindar Rudra Chowdhury. Influenced by the Krishnachandra’s performance, the young Nandan Chowdhury promises him the gold medal. The promise of gold medal continued to inspire him for years. After forty years when he reaches his village, the villagers stood under the peepal tree to receive him.

The writer focuses the villagers’ strong faith in God. Indian village life is never complete without the presence of the shrine and its deity. The writer throws light on the socio-religious life of the villagers. He describes it:

... “Welcome, Krishna Babu, most welcome, surging clouds frightened us in the morning. But the goddess Kalika, despite our failure to repair her shrine compassionate enough to suck them off the sky. All that remains is that one dark scrap in the west. Our goddess must be struggling with it, I’m sure,” said the old Mani Dutta - once the gumastha of the Chowdhuries. (MOS 34-35)

Further the writer comments on the socio-economic position of the zamindar, Nandan Chowdhury after the decline of feudal system. The zamindar has become addict of opium. The writer describes his

personality as: "... Chowdhury did not look smarter than an old owl." (MOS 35). Even his economic condition is not good. He waits for the last installment of the compensation from the Government for his estate.

Then the writer comments on Krishnachandra's life in town. He joins a theatre company in the town. He works as a helper to the unit of choreography, make up. But he is not allowed to create an identity for himself. Even he has no chances to play role in drama. He does not get scope to develop his art of acting. The artist in him revolts and he returns to his village after twenty years. The action shifts from city to village. He decides to perform his guru's play "Janak-Nandini" in the village. He accepts the role of king Dasharatha.

There is urge in the mind of Krishnachandra to receive gold medal publicly by Nandan Chowdhury . As, Chowdhury 's economic condition is not sound, Krishnachandra brings a gold medal and gives the zamindar and requests him to offer it publicly to him.

After the successful performance of the play, Nandan Chowdhury stands up and addresses the audience as : "Listen all. Charmed by the genius of ustad Krishnachandra, a noble soul and an expert guru- the crown of artists – I reward him with this gold medal!" (MOS 41)

After this function Chowdhury gives a small packet to Krishnachandra. He whispers: "This is the value of the medal. I had promised it to you. I can not allow you to pay for it." (MOS42) Chowdhury sells the layer of gold on the handle of his walking stick to award 'The Gold Medal' to an real artist, Krishnachandra to whom he has promised it before forty years.

The story depicts very effectively the process of social change, in the villages. The writer shows a greater sympathy towards basic human values which are not changed during the changing rural society. The writer highlights philanthropic attitude of the zamindar. The story is notable for the writer's close observation of rural life.

The Candle

Manoj Das gives an authentic presentation of pre and post-Independent rural India under the dominance of Feudal system. The landlords and the raj families oppressed the poor peasantry ruthlessly. The whole feudal system underwent a change with the emergence of Independence. They lost their dominant power and prestige. They become addicted to alcohol and drugs.

In the story "The Candle" Manoj Das depicts lost glory of raj family of Makarandpur. The action of the story is centred around the character of Roy Sudhakar Harichandan Mahapatra, the scion of the great and holy Roy Raghuvir. Harichandan is playing the game of dice with Madhu Naik, the well-wisher of Raj family in the candle light. His grandfather, Roy Raghuvir had lost his estate in the game of dice. The writer throws light on the fading picture of prosperity and glory of Raj family. He states it as:

Harichandan seemed to send a puff of smoke aiming at the moon. "Uncle Naik!" His voice had grown grave. "We are playing just as kids- putting one handful of sand on another and calling it a castle. But is it not a fact that my grandfather, Roy Raghuvir Harichandan Mahapatra, did indeed give away estates to his rival in the game of dice?"
(MMCOS 198)

Harichandan lives amidst the ruins of huge mansion with his dog. He feels that he is watched by the spirits of his forefathers. The writer throws light on the belief of rural people in the existence of ghosts and spirits. He depicts it as:

“Would you believe me, Uncle Naik ? At moments when all is quiet at night, I get the strange feeling that I was being watched by invisible spirits. Must be of my ancestors. I don’t know if spirits can breathe, but I feel some sensation on my forehead. After all I am the last scion of the dynasty!”
(MMCOS 199)

Uncle Naik advises Sudhakar Harichandan to marry as he has crossed thirty. He has to keep alive the family tree. Further they begin the third round of their game. If uncle Naik is defeated in the third round, he can pledge his daughter Sulu. Uncle Naik is defeated by Harichandan in the third round. He smiles and takes leave of Harichandan. The writer evokes rural sensibility with the description of surrounding of the mansion. He depicts it as: “Harichandan handed over another bidi to him. He walked on the double. The way through the deserted meadow, at that hour of the night, was not for leisurely stroll, particularly with the spirits referred to by Harichandan still infested his mind.” (MMCOS 200)

Harichandan has rejected proposals of marriage coming from several distinguished houses of former landlords because of his misery and poverty. He is disturbed by the thought of “how can he see the daughter-in-law of the family living in utter misery ?” (MMCOS 201) He decides to marry Sulu, as he has won her in the game. Uncle Naik also becomes happy to become the father-in-law of the scion of Harichandans. The writer throws light on the customs and traditions of the Raj family

while celebrating wedding ceremony. Two drummers and two sehnai-players were invited to revive the practice on festive occasion. The villagers were also participated in the function to make the occasion successful. They helped in cooking for a grand feast and declared that they had not seen such a event for decades.

Sulu comes to live in the house. Harichandan shows her, his grandma's bedstead which was once studded with filigree and ivory. But they were taken out and sold. Sulu stands gazing at the old-paintings of her husband's grandfather and father in the light of flickering lantern. She raises its wicks but they are dry. Then Harichandan tells Sulu his plan of shifting to Calcutta where his maternal uncle has assured him of shelter and a job. He has pledged the mansion and raised a loan for their wedding especially for the grand feast for the villagers.

The story throws light on the changing socio-political condition of the feudal lords when the zamindari system lost their power. They lost their status of kingships and lordships. They become bankrupt. Roy Sudhakar Harichandan Mahapatra comprises with the changing critical situation and shifts to Calcutta with his wife to earn for living. The story gives an authentic picture of the fading feudal system in rural India.

2.3.2 POST-INDEPENDENT POLITICAL RURAL LIFE

The Mystery of Missing Cap

In the story "The Mystery of Missing Cap" Manoj Das satirizes the hypocrisy and double-dealing nature of the politicians. At the setting of the story there is a village in the early post-Independence India. There are two important characters in the story. First one is Sri. Moharana, a well-to-do villager and other is Babu Virkishore, Minister for Fisheries and

Fine Arts. Manoj Das gives an account of how the new caste of patriots emerged:

Came Independence. As is well known, the ancient land of India has had four major castes from time immemorial. But during the days immediately preceding independence a new caste was emerging all over the country-that of patriots. The 15th of August 1947 gave a big boost to their growth. In almost every village, beside the Brahmins, Kshatiriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras a couple of patriots came into being. (SVOS 67)

The minister, Babu Virkishore is invited to deliver speech in the village. When the minister visits the village, people become over enthusiastic. Here the writer ridicules the visit of a minister to village and the way the villagers welcome him.

A reception is arranged for the minister with Shri Moharana as the chairman of the committee. The children of the village lower primary school are made to practice a welcome song every afternoon for a fortnight. The head-pundit of the school who has lived sixty-five years without any poetic activity has composed the song. The narrator gives literal translation of the song as follows:

O mighty minister, tell us, O tell us, How do you nurture this long and broad universe! (SVOS 69)

The writer evokes traditional way of life of rural people when they welcome the minister. On the outskirts of the village the minister is garlanded by Shri Moharana. The minister is welcomed with applaud and shouts:

All the people – even invalids – for many of whom it was the experience of a lifetime – when alternately shouting slogans and gaping at the august visitor. we, the half-naked, pot-bellied, uncivilised kids walked parallel to the minister at a safe distance and could not help feeling extremely small and guilty. (SVOS 70)

Further the writer throws light on calm and fresh atmosphere of the village which evokes rural sensibility:

Soon the minister retired to the cabin set apart for him. Though it was summer, the cabin's window being open to a big pond and a grove, there was enough air to lull even an elephant to sound sleep. (SVOS 70)

While the minister takes rest in a cabin, the narrator observes that the mischievous Jhandoo comes inside through window and picks up the cap of the minister and disappears into the grove. The narrator child tells Shri Moharana what has happened. But he tells the narrator to keep it a secret. The incident throws a wet blanket on the occasion.

Further Shri Moharana announces in a public meeting that a certain nobleman took the cap away to preserve it as a sacred memento. The minister reflects on the loss of his hat in ridiculous way:

Well, Moharana, ha ha! the way things are moving ha ha! I am afraid, ha ha! people would start snatching way my clothes, ha ha! and ha ha! I may have to go about, ha ha! That is the price one must pay for winning love! ha ha ha! (SVOS 75-76)

At the end of the story Jhandoo rushes towards the minister and offers the cap to him. At that time Shri Moharana breaks into tears and the minister weeps too. The writer satirizes double dealing nature of the politicians. He also throws light on the social life of rural people. It shows that these rustics are ignorant of reality. The shrewd politicians take the benefit of this exact weakness of these simple people and they try to deceive them.

While commenting on the “Satire and Humour in the works of Manoj Das” Dr. Sarbeswar Samal states:

‘Mystery of the Missing Cap’ is a comical realistic story. It is a gentle satire on the visit of a minister to an Indian village. Here the writer has a dig at style, the sponsors of Moharana, the sycophants like P.R.O. Moharana, the benevolent host and aspirant for a seat in the legislature, and the complacent and facetious minister of fishery and fine arts. The whole state of affairs has been mocked at and travestied by the monkey. (37)

The Assault

In “The Assault” the writer comments on the helplessness of man to face unexpected event in life. The story also comments on false pride and glory of the political leader who runs after fame and name in vain.

The central character of the story is Avani. He is a leading politician and an elected president of his party. The action of the story takes place in the native village of Avani. Avani is at the peak of success in his life. His son is a successful contractor and also a model citizen.

In the course of the time everything changes. Now Avani is lying in the hospital. He is attacked by a billy-goat very severely. His son, daughter-in-law, media and his political rivals are worried about his recovery. The writer gives picture of urbanised garden. In the course of urbanization everything is changed. There is adverse effect of it on trees and birds also. The writer depicts it, “The light of the setting sun was fading out of the garden. Avani had observed that the garden had only a few birds looking quite urbanised, to twitter and hop about in style from branch to branch. At the moment, however, there was only one bird present and its voice betrayed monotony and dejection.” (MOS 45)

Avani lying on the hospital bed remembers his old Sanskrit teacher. He recollects his memory: “And Avani did not know why it reminded him to the ominous warning chanted by his old Sanskrit teacher time and again: *Ma kuru dhana yana yauvana garbam Nimesh kalah haroti sarvam!* – Never be proud of either your wealth or your authority over others or your youthfulness; in the twinkle of an eye Time can strip you of everything!” (MOS 45)

Avani recollects the dreadful incident. He pays private visit to his native village. He wants to purchase the land owned by an old widow adjacent to their ancestral house. His contractor son wants to build the house in the village. He does not want a hut or a cowshed near his future house. According to him it will spoil environment around the house. Actually, an old woman doesnot have any direct heir. She has decided to give her property to a young relative, who is looking after her. Here the writer throws light on the inequality in society. There is gap between the poor and the rich. The lonely old woman from the village represents helplessness and poverty. On the other hand Avani and his son represent power, wealth and arrogance. They want possession of land forcefully.

They are trying to exploit poor, lonely widow. The writer gives description of calm and peaceful life in Indian villages. He describes it, “Avani had reached his village at sundown. He was keen to avoid any public gaze. It was a calm twilight when he left his house for the widow’s hut, situated on a hillock-like mound of earth beyond a marshland.” (MOS 51)

As he reaches the top of the mound, he faces a huge and strong billy goat. The writer creates atmosphere of horror and suspense. The jackals start howling and breaking the silence. Avani becomes frozen. He becomes helpless. But at this critical stage, he does not forget his status and honour. He tries to convince his position to billy-goat. He puts it as, “Perhaps you don’t know me. I am a V.I.P., rather a V.V.I.P. Please be reasonable and ask yourself before taking the next step: should a man of status go down in history as one trampled by a billy goat?” (MOS 52)

But the goat takes two forward steps. He makes a dash at him. The goat tries to gore him. He begins rolling down the mound. The writer describes his helpless condition. “And with each turn of his body was peeled off a certain value he cherished, each collision with a shrub or a clod of hardened earth demolished one of the numerous monuments of his achievement. That is how he left.” (MOS 52)

Thus the goat teaches him a lesson. His veil of false pride and honour has been taken away. He exposes reality to his son. There is inner transformation in the character of Avani. The story is the comment on the socio-political life of the politicians from the villages.

The Centenarian

In “The Centenarian” Manoj Das comments on the socio-political life of the villagers. The writer presents contrast between the simple,

innocent and straightforward life of the rustic centenarian Sahib Das and the pompous, hypocrite and opportunist political leaders like Bayahati Bhuyan and Mohapatra.

The action of the story takes place in a special village, Paschimpur. The village has nurtured the persons who have played important role in the life of contemporary humanity. For instance, the village grocer's son obtained a doctoral degree. Another young man visited United Kingdom for a brief training. A middle-aged widower married a Christian and a school teacher fell in love with the daughter of the wealthy money lender. Even, the former zamindar, Bayahati Bhuyan has been elected to the State Legislature. Thus the writer depicts the process of socio change in the life of the villagers.

But the only person who is not changed in the course of the time, in the village is Sahib Das. The story centres around the character of Sahib Das. Kishor Mahapatra, sub-editor of the daily and advisor to the M.L.A. introduces innovative idea of felicitation of a person who had lived for hundred years. When they are discussing this idea, Sahib Das arrives there. When asked about his age he confuses and can not tell his exact age. He has lived before coming on Paschimpur. The persons who has saved him from a floating log in the river had died. The younger generation has taken him granted as the river, the old banyan tree or the ceremation ground.

The writer pens the daily life of Sahib Das with realism and precision. In the course of his life, Sahib Das has performed various tasks like shepherding the cattle, scaring away burglars, massaging the *Mahant's* legs and repairing the thatches of the *Muth*. There is no change in the daily routine of Sahib Das. While throwing light on the residence

of Sahib Das, the writer states, “During the sixty years past, his small hut at an insignificant nook of the *Muth* campus had never needed for its repair or thatching the assistance of another hand beyond the pair of his own.” (MOS 123-24) He wears old dhoti given by the previous Mahant. His name is also a gift of his earlier master. He is fair, so he is Sahib and Das suggesting that he is the servant of the Lord. He used to work in the zamindar’s mansion.

Further, Mohapatra arranges the function of felicitation of the centenarian, Sahib Das. He persuades the Chief Minister to attend the occasion. They arrange the press conference. Sahib Das sits on chair for the first time in his life. Along with guest they offer him sandwiches, sweets and tea. But Sahib Das is unknown to all these formalities of upper class people. He tries to escape. After the press conference Sahib Das receives a large number salutations. The villagers start to respect him. But he chooses total silence. There is no effect of this new status on his life.

The Chief Minister arrives for the meeting in the village. Some volunteers ushers Sahib Das onto the platform. The Chief Minister garlands Sahib Das. Mohapatra asks Sahib Das to stand up and to receive the ovation but he could not follow him. He stands up and departs from the stage. Next day, in the afternoon he was found lying dead with garland still on him, on the river bank. They bring his body to the *Muth* for cremation. After the cremation Mohapatra smiles and observes with a significant wink, “Had we been a day late in organizing celebration, well, well you know what I mean!” (MOS 127)

Thus, the writer comments on the hypocrisy and artificial attitude of the politicians and journalists. These people are always running after

fame, name and money. On the other hand Sahib Das remains aloof from publicity and the pompous life. He leads very calm and un-disturbed life in a small hut at the corner of Muth. He is spiritually satisfied person and assumes servant of the Lord. Because of this spiritual power he is able to complete century of his life. He is a representative of Indian rural culture which is changing in the course of the time. In this context, it is appropriate to quote Manoj Das's views on changing rural India. In his preface to *Chasing the Rainbow* he states:

... Even though the city population had grown threefold in the twentieth century, the villages are not likely to be deserted; the gap between the urban life and the rural is destined to become more and more narrow. Changes are inevitable as technology, development and education are spreading. But one truth which we are likely to forget before long is that the villager was illiterate, but not uneducated, if education was expected to help a person develop higher values, nobility, readiness to sacrifice, conscience, intelligence, and wisdom. A wonder would have been achieved if the villager's capacity to graduate spontaneously into that level of education was not arbitrarily replaced by today's conventional education which makes one suave, informed and clever, but is incapable of preventing one from becoming a super-fraud or an arch-hypocrite, if there could have been a imaginative synthesis. But that is a wistful thinking. The death of the silent process of education of the villager is one of the greatest tragedies of the era of transition, unlamented and often not realized. (xvi-viii)

The Brothers

In the story “The Brothers” Manoj Das depicts love and affection between two brothers. The story throws light on the affectionate family relationships in Indian joint family system in rural areas. The writer also comments on the corrupt and selfish political leaders of the time.

The story centres around two brothers – Bhuvan and Saroj Mishra. The elder brother Bhuvan is a freedom fighter-cum-social reformer at seventeen. He has been married, at fourteen to a bride of nine. He often blames his mother for involving him in sin of child-marriage. His wife comes to their house when Bhuvan becomes twenty years old. Bhuvan has joined the freedom struggle. So he does not pay proper attention to his family. He is busy in his activities of the party. His wife works hard to compensate his absence in the family. She dies leaving a two year old son behind.

The country gets freedom. Bhuvan has bright future in politics. He is a faithful patriot. His service for his country is selfless. After the country’s Independence, it is the time of the first General Elections. Bhuvan is deprived of contesting elections by his party’s leader Kalu Roy. Bhuvan is inspired with idealism. He is made the president of the party’s district committee. Here the writer criticises the fake political leaders for their opportunistic and selfish attitude. In this changing situation, Bhuvan finds himself a stranger. But he continues his selfless services to the people. As a result he is harassed by his party members. Since then the people look upon him as a mental case.

On the other hand his younger brother Saroj has won a scholarship and has become a successful doctor. He has lived in the west for a long time. Saroj returns to India after his six years stay in London. Here the

writer shows clash between Indian rural culture and urban culture of London. The writer depicts it, “But I am not going so soon. After six years in a London flat I just cannot bear yet another city. How sweet is this our cosy little town. Nothing has changed.” said Saroj Mishra’s wife. (DHOS 114)

Saroj is confused when he sees his brother treated as a mad person. He and Bhuvan’s son Ravi decide to lead Bhuvan to an asylum. Ravi gives details of his father’s erratic behaviour. When Saroj listened these details, he remembers past events. There was a by-election in the town. Kalu Roy has to face a formidable rival. In order to bribe voters, Kalu Roy gave one lakh rupees to Bhuvan. On the other hand Bhuvan donated this money to the orphanage, the widow-welfare centre and the Prime Minister’s Relief Fund. Thus the writer comments on the corrupted and hypocritical political leaders of the time. In order to achieve political power they use illegal and corrupt ways. But Bhuvan is a true patriot. He is aware of the problems of deprived section of the society. In order to help them he distributes fundings of Kalu Roy and protests corruption. But he is suspended by the party for his indiscipline.

Bhuvan is also a kind hearted brother. He has deep love for Saroj. The writer states it as: “From morning uptill now I must have walked ten miles in search of fresh butter. You love it, don’t you? You must have gone without it for years. This is all I got after exploring three villages of milkmen.” (DHOS 117)

Thus the readers are touched by this intimate bond of love between two brothers which is disappearing in the course of the changing rural culture. Saroj feels grateful for his brother’s concern for him. Then Saroj sits absorbed in his own thoughts. He forgets Bhuvan’s presence and

lights a cigarette to smoke. Suddenly he receives a slap. Forty years ago, Saroj had been caught red-handed with a stolen bidi. At that time Bhuvan had warned Saroj against smoking. Saroj throws away the cigarette. He assures his elder brother that he will never smoke again. He realizes his brother's true love and affection for him. They understand each other. Saroj decides to help his brother in his mission of social work in rural areas. Saroj explains his future plan to his brother. The writer describes it as: "Brother, you must accompany me to my place of work. I shall earn. You will use my earning for the needy. I have no desire to hoard. Once the period of my contract with the hospital is over, we shall be back here and you will lead me into the villages. My services shall be at your disposal," Saroj exclaimed. (DHOS 118)

Thus there is a sense of respect and mutual understanding between two brothers. Manoj Das successfully depicts the intimate family relationship in the joint family system in rural India. He also criticizes the corrupt and opportunistic political leaders of the time.

The Old Man and The Camel

In "The Old Man and The Camel" Manoj Das comments on the generation gap between father and son. The writer also focuses his attention on the disillusionment of the old man. The story also depicts contrast between the way of village life which is simple and innocent represented by the old Basu and sophisticated city life represented by his minister son.

The action of the story takes place in a village. The central character of the story is an old Basu. There is evocation of proper rural atmosphere at the beginning of the story. The writer describes it as:

He longed to see a camel. Once an illustrious *Sadhu* happened to camp in the bazaar a few miles away from his village. The Sadhu's party comprised of nearly a hundred human beings who never tired of chanting holy phrases, a dozen cows which never tired of giving milk and for some mysterious reason, a lone camel.

Young Basu was then down with fever, consequent on his devoting a long Sunday afternoon to swimming and diving in the muddy waters of the river. (DHOS 119)

Basu has a fascination for the camel and he wishes to see a camel. But his wish is not fulfilled. In his youth he devotedly participated in country's freedom movement. His marriage and even the birth of son did not stop him from his mission. His conspiracy was broken and, he and his compatriots were sentenced to imprisonment in the Andamans.

Years later he returns to India. He becomes pessimistic about the success of any revolution. During his activities of the freedom struggle, his parents and his wife die. He satisfies to the fact that his son has joined the freedom struggle. But he does not agree with the young patriot's philosophy. But time has changed. Now Basu has become old. But he has still fascination for camels.

Basu's son becomes famous leader of the village. On the eve of country's independence Basu expresses his anguish. Then Basu was not called to address any public meeting. He was forgotten again.

Basu's son becomes a minister. One day Basu is lured by his grandson who tells him camping of the camels in the valley. The

grandson has done this act as per his father's hints. When Basu realises reality he becomes very sad.

Thus the story highlights the contrast between the father and the son. The father who has spend his life for country's freedom has been forgotten when country becomes free. He has been deprived of seeing a camel. There is similarity between the life of Basu and the camel. The camel stands for tolerance and hard work in critical circumstances. The camel never showed protest against being overloaded. The grandson who deceives his grandfather stands for the future which is dark. The writer shows a greater sympathy towards human values represented by the old Basu who stands for rural culture. On the other hand his minister son represents changing values in the course of time.

A Night in the Life of a Mayor.

In “A Night in the Life of a Mayor” Manoj Das comments on the proud and ego-centric nature of the Mayor. The writer also focuses his attention on the contrast between urban culture and rural culture.

The action of the story shifts from the city to the village and again from the village to the city. The central character of the story is Divyasimha, the Mayor of Madhuvan. He is very proud of his achievements in life. He has defeated the professor, Sudarshan Roy at the mayoral election. Once he was professor's student. The professor criticizes the election procedure for its dominance of bribery and deceit. In the corporation meeting, he gives details of the cow who has chewed up the notebooks of psychology of his grand-daughter who is preparing for her B.A. examination. Prof. Roy sheds tears while narrating this tragic incident which shows his helplessness. But after listening this incident the

mayor laughs at the helpless professor. The professor does not argue but leaves the hall sadly.

Divyasimha is on the peak of success. He has not known helplessness. He has powers that matter – of mind, men and money. He comes to the lonely side of the river at the evening. He jumps in the cool water. There is nobody to notice him. He takes off all his wearings except the underwear and dashes into the river. Suddenly he feels a tickling sensation inside his underwear. He takes off the underwear and the sensation has gone. But the underwear slips out of his hand. It is already dark. He comes towards the shore and finds the notorious cow who has already eaten his shirt and banian and busy in eating his trousers. The naked mayor rushes to fight the cow but the cow gives him slip.

He stands helpless on the bank. The headlights of the jeep focuses on him. He suddenly plunges into the river. Three officers of the corporation come out of the jeep. They are bewildered to see the open car of the mayor. The policemen arrive there for investigation. The jeep leaves the place. Now the lonely mayor experiences ‘helplessness’ in real sense.

Then action of the story shifts to a hamlet. The mayor comes upon a small boat. He unfastens it from a tree and gets into it. The boat moves. As he leaves search party, he cries boldly and loudly. It was ages ago, he has cried on lying his mother’s lap or clinging to his father’s chest. He experiences in the river his mother’s lap and in the sky his father’s chest. In the company of the Nature he experiences calmness and purity of the soul. Then he sleeps calmly like a child. When he wakes up, finds himself in a hamlet. There is evocation of proper rustic atmosphere. The writer’s close observation of rural life becomes evident in his apt use of the rustic

imagery. He describes it as, “There was a hamlet close to the bank. Smoke, filtered through thatched roofs of huts, was coiling up and birds had just begun to fly. The silhouette of the landscape was distinct and beautiful. (CL 95)

He notices a little girl looking into the river. He asks her to help him. The girl immediately takes off her torn, soiled frock and gives him. He kisses the frock and wipes out his last drops of tears. Then she brings a handloom towel for him. The mayor puts the towel around his waist and follows the fisherman into his hut. He sits down near his oven and smokes a bidi. Without hesitation he narrates his condition to the fisherman. The poor fisherman shows sympathy to the mayor. The mayor wears the best piece of dhoti given by the poor fisherman.

Then the mayor reaches the city by bus. He rushes to Prof. Roy to apologise. He tells him, “I beg to be pardoned, sir, now I know what helplessness is; I believe, I earned my adulthood last night,” (CL 97-98) Now the mayor gets calmness of mind with the experience of the night. His ego is diminished.

Thus the writer shows difference between city culture and rural culture. When the mayor is in helpless condition, the little girl and the poor fisherman from the hamlet help the mayor with affection and humanity. The little girl gives immediately her old and soiled frock when the mayor is in critical situation. The girl represents angelic qualities. The little girl and her poor father represent innocence, affection and simple and straightforward life. On the other hand the mayor represents ego, pride, superiority complex. Thus the story shows how rural culture is superior to urban culture. The writer shows greater sympathy towards rural values and criticises vices and evil ways of city life.

The Irrational

Manoj Das throws light on the changing socio-political scenario in the post-independent rural India. There is decline of feudal system after the Independence of India. In “The Irrational” the writer gives an authentic picture of Subrato Das’s political career. The story also focuses on Subrato’s past memories when he visits Kakali.

The action of story takes place in Kakali, a small town. The story centres around the character of the minister, Subrato Das. He has spend four and a half decades of his life to serve the country with dedication. He has not addicted to corruption and nepotism. He is invited to inaugurate the dispensary built by the Chowadhurani in memory of her late husband. Subrato has crossed numerous hurdles and curses in his life. But he can not get rid off a most irrational fear from his mind. So he decides to put an end to this reflex. He wants to visit Kakali and pass a full night in the town. At evening his car enters Kakali. He inaugurates the newly built charitable dispensary and pays tribute to the late Chowdhury. As he is tired, he takes rest in the guest-room of the Chowdhuries. But at midnight, he comes out to the verandah and surveys the area. The writer throws light on the changing villages and decaying feual system. He depicts it as:

The row of rooms, one accommodating the clerk of the household and another the tax-collector of the Zamindari, and the third one in which he had been put up for a fortnight some forty-five years ago, had disappeared.

And where was the bush on an acre of swamp behind which he sat shivering for hours?

The swamp had become a colony of moderate sized building. There were crotons and bougainvillaea, but no bush. (FGS 134)

Further he remembers his young age. He has worked as a teacher in Chowdhury's school. The teachers who came from outside the village were given free board and lodging by some affluent villagers. Here the writer throws light on humanistic and compassionate attitude of the rural people. Subrato was also provided with this facility. Then he remembers the fourteen year old daughter of the Chowdhury who was his student. On the fateful evening he watched Chowdharies' daughter concentrating on a book with a lantern on her table. He entered the room of the girl and closed her eyes with his palms in a playful way. But she shrieked loudly. Subrato became confused and tried to escape from the critical situation but at the exit his dhoti snagged in a wooden bar. He lost his entire dhoti and then he crouched behind a bush. He returned to his room at midnight. In few days he left Kakali and got a better job in the city. Then he entered into politics and held ministerial posts during the next twenty years. But he can not forget his soiled, cheap dhoti which he had lost decades ago and his humiliation that evening.

In the morning the Choudhurani meets Subrato and hands over a small parcel containing his lost dhoti which she has preserved carefully. When Subrato asks her why she has preserved this dhoti, she states it as:

‘You are looking for logic! What was the logic behind your impulse to seal my eyes with your hands?’

She stood up. She looked as fresh and serene as the morning sky visible through the window. Subrato saw in a

flash, emerging from the white hair and wrinkled face, the moon he had rushed at, once upon a time.

The Choudhurani paused near the door. ‘It was irrational of me to shriek, it was irrational of you to run away; perhaps the most irrational part of the episode was your running away from Kakali. (FGS 137-38)

Then she smiles and says goodbye to him with joined hands. He returns to the capital.

The story throws light on the Subrato Das’s love for Chowdhuri’s daughter when she was fourteen year old girl. It also focuses on changing villages and its values in the process of urbanization. The writer draws imagery from the nature to evoke the rural sensibility.

2.4 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RURAL LIFE

Birds in the Twilight

There is intimate relationship between human world and world of nature. Manoj Das glorifies nature and landscapes in his fiction and highlights the delicate balance between man and the environment. He condemns wickedness and artificiality of urban world. His “Birds in the Twilight” highlights man’s eternal quest for freedom. It also suggests man’s aspiration for spiritual elevation.

The action of the story is centred around Kumar Tukan Roy, one of the illegitimate sons of the late Raja sahib of Mandarpur. The rural sensibility is evoked by the very setting of the story, with its marshland on the river, the red sun behind the hills, the old banian tree and green pigeons.

Kumar T. Roy was a bachelor. He lived with Giloo who is also an illegitimate son of late Raja. In the course of the time feudal system collapses. The old palace of Mandarpur lay largely deserted. The step-brother of Kumar Roy, the present Raja who was sick lived in a city. Kumar Tukan Roy used to spend his every afternoon shooting the birds in the marshland on the river. One evening he aims his gun at a pair of pigeons. Just then a third pigeon comes and settles with a flutter on the next branch. As he becomes eager to press the trigger, there is sudden lightening across the clouds which dazzled him and the birds fly off and melt away in the infinite. He does not feel irritation. But he feels thrill of freedom. The writer gives very beautiful snapshots of nature. Pacing with the flight of doves, Kumar Roy experiences that he himself is spacing inwardly. There is inner transformation of the character of Kumar Roy in the company of nature. He experiences elevation of his soul. The writer pens it as:

The birds were in too much of a hurry. It was not possible to keep up with them. Roy stopped and rolled his eyes across the sky-from horizon to horizon. He had never known that his eyes were so big – that they could see so much of the vast sky – that they were, in fact, as vast as the sky. The birds which had just flown across the sky- across his eyes – had brushed away from them the accumulated dust of many years and had left them pure and young.

In spite of the deepening dusk, he spent nearly an hour in the valley before he returned to the palace. And while dining, he did not feel the agonized distaste that he usually felt at a vegetarian meal. His whole being was elsewhere –

where, exactly, he did not know. But he was happy to be there. (CL 58-59)

Kumar Roy experiences sublime power in the vast valley. This experience develops his inner power of soul. A week before, he has captured a parrot. The next morning, he frees the same parrot from his cage. He wishes that, “he had many birds to free, or rather, that he had the power to make every creature on earth run or fly to its heart’s content towards the God-knows-where of freedom. He stood enchanted in his own thoughts for a long time.” (CL59) Further one midnight he frees the tiger in their personal zoo. He addresses the tiger, “Come on, my boy, you are free. Now run into the forest. Well, don’t waste your time run into the forest ...” (CL61) Roy points his finger at the hills and the forest and tells the tiger to run. But the tiger has forgotten to run, he has to set an example to a tiger. Both run into the forest for about a quarter of an hour. Roy realizes that people are pursuing them in order to rescue him from the tiger. He runs till he comes to a dense part of the forest. Then tired Roy stretches himself upon a block of rock. He experiences a wave of freedom into his veins and feels tranquility. The tiger also experiences the spirit of freedom and gives out an impressive roar which produces echoes in the hills. Roy pulls the tiger to hide it. The tiger sits down with its forelegs on him. Roy observes intimacy in the eyes of the tiger and closes his eyes with satisfaction. The writer very effectively depicts the sublime experience of Roy. He states it as : “And in his vision were flying hundreds of birds – blue, white – of many a hue. The hundreds became thousands. They were scattering into ever-expanding heights and horizons like silver arrows and golden bullets. Roy, his eyes still closed, recognized them as the vibrations of the freedom that electrified him - freedom vast and vaster still.” (CL 64)

Further they are noticed under the jeep's headlights. The tiger slowly lowers its head on the Roy's chest. The rescue party notices both of them dead. They confuse when they see Mr. Roy without a scratch. They suppose that he died because of heart – failure due to fear. Thus Kumar Roy's death has nothing to do with the speculations of the rescue party. Kumar Roy dies in perfect peace and satisfaction. He identifies himself with birds and experiences total liberation. The writer personifies tiger and highlights intimacy between the tiger and Mr. Roy.

The story is a masterpiece of interconnectedness of man and nature which is the dominant characteristics of rural culture. The entire atmosphere of the story is packed with snapshots of nature with its sublime air, spiritual elevation. The flight of birds symbolize quest for freedom. While reading the story, the readers breathe pure air and experience thrill of freedom and yearning for emancipation of soul.

A Crack of the Thunder

In “The Crack of the Thunder” Manoj Das comments on ruthless exploitation of the common people in villages by the Zamindar particularly innocent young girls who have become prey of their sexual lust. These simple people have no choice but to serve the landlords and Rajas and Princes from generation to generation. They can not revolt against tyranny of the Zamindars because of their poverty and illiteracy.

The story takes place in pre-independent Indian village. There is evocation of rural sensibility through the description of Nature. The writer states:

There was a fresh shower, accompanied by a sudden gust of wind. Despite a new umbrella over his head, Shekhar was getting drenched ...

It was not yet past first quarter of the night. But to him this darkness seemed to have prevailed since primeval times. Tonight it had expanded and succeed in swallowing up the moon and all the innumerable stars perhaps for good; it had erased the contours of the trees which, at this season, looked lush and vibrant with an abundance of life (DHOS 125)

The story centres around a village girl named Lalita. She is very beautiful and charming but dumb. She is twenty years old and an orphan. She lives with a widow aunt. The old Zamindar was lusty but he was no more. But his son is lusty as well as boorish. His wife dies young leaving behind a son. As a result the Zamindar gets freedom to live reckless life.

Shekhar is the old servant of the Zamindar's family. The Zamindar gives ill-treatment to Shekhar. He is humiliated by the Zamindar. The Zamindar comes to camp in the local catchery. The Zamindar watches Lalita, while she is emerging from the river after bath. He informs Shekhar that he has fallen in love with Lalita and he should bring her in his house that very night. Shekhar takes help of Heera, a maid servant of the Zamindar's family to persuade her. Heera brings a saree and necklace for Lalita. Lalita likes ornaments very much. Ornaments is her only weakness. Heera becomes successful to bring Lalita in the Zamindar's house. But Shekhar becomes restless and wants to go home. The writer puts it as, "Shekhar found it hard to walk. He felt as if he was towing someone along. In his mind flashed the vision of a goat being dragged to the alter for sacrifice. He had done that himself several times." (DHOS 129) Shekhar feels guilty for deceiving innocent, dumb Lalita. The writer throws light on socio-religious life of the villagers. Religion has a firm hold on the villager's mind. The deities are inseparable part of Indian village life. The writer states:

In no time the drizzle changed into a heavy shower Shekhar climbed the veranda of Goddess Mahamaya's shrine. But he jumped down the next moment. Although the doors of the shrine remained shut, the deity stared in that direction. She can certainly see his sins through the heavy doors. (DHOS 130)

Shekhar prays God to pardon him for his sin. He bangs his head on the stone wall and collapses. He wakes at the dawn. He approaches the Zamindar's house to bring Lalita back. He surprises to see the image of the mother Goddess. He recognizes Lalita in that image and the Zamindar's motherless son in the form little priest kneeling before deity. The motherless son finds in Lalita a model for Goddess Durga and begins drawing her picture. When the Zamindar enters on scene he forgets his evil intension and folds his hands. Lalita in the form of mother figure transforms the Zamindar's outlook. Shekhar also fells at Lalita's feet and begs pardon for his evil task.

The writer throws light on the hidden spiritual power in man's inner self. The story suggests that with the evocation of this power man can attain spiritual perfection. The reader gets Anubhuti of sublime in the story. The writer puts it as :

“Look at this one, father, is this not as beautiful as Mother Durga?” the boy's soft and confident words worked like a magic balm in Shekhar's burning consciousness. And, he heard in them a perfect invocation to the Goddess, *Ya Devi sarva-bhutesu matri rupena samsthita!* “Thou dwellest in all as the Mother.” He saw no longer through his physical eyes alone. (DHOS 131-32)

The present story shows an influence of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of life on Manoj Das. The writer has become successful to bring positive transformation of his characters in the story. The writer depicts socio-religious life of the villagers in India.

Lakshmi's Adventure

Having grown up in an Indian village, Manoj Das has drawn his experiences to create an authentic picture of rural India of the times. He portrays the beliefs, rituals, traditional wisdom of the rural people. He also throws light on their mistakes and follies in order to bring some reforms. He is an optimist who believes in a better future of mankind.

In his the most discussed story "Lakshmi's Adventure" he comments on the hypocrite and corrupt people who exploit a poor, little girl Lakshmi. The story takes place in an orthodox village. There is evocation of rural sensibility with the description of descending noon, trees and houses. The writer states:

When the summer noon descended on the suburban hamlet like a medieval school teacher and put the trees and houses and the tea-stall under a spell of fright and when even the indefatigable pedlar of ever-hot groundnuts kept quiet, Lakshmi stole out of her house and peeped into the temple from the shadow of the *Krishnachura* tree. (DHOS-73)

Lakshmi wants to enter the temple but she fears the old priest who was lying asleep and snoring. Here the writer throws light on the strong impact of religious beliefs even on the mind of small children from villages:

It was after many a noon that she had spied upon the priest lying soundly asleep, snoring lustily. Lakshmi crossed over him and immediately touched her forehead with her right hand as a mark of penitence for jumping over a holy being. (DHOS 73)

Lakshmi enters the sanctum and kneels before deity. She starts her conversation with God, supposing god as a human being. She opens her heart before god very honestly. It shows her faith and innocence. She tells her problem with arithmetic. She observes a huge bunch of bananas before god and tells him to eat two bananas a day.

Poverty is a regular feature of an Indian village and without money man is helpless. Exploitation originates in poverty. Laxshmi frankly speaks about her father's poverty and helplessness of her mother. Here, the writer puts this conversation in very touching manner:

But, O God! we had just come out to the veranda when a fearful man, who reminded me of a stalking tiger I had seen in a picture, confronted us. With a sigh Papa quietly emptied his purse. Do you know why? Papa had borrowed some money from that fellow. Once a week the fellow comes for collecting the interest, but he comes carrying a huge *lathi* in his hand. Papa says that the fellow has already collected as interest more than what he had given. Don't you think, God, that he should stop asking Papa for more?

I told Papa: If borrow you must, take care to choose a shorter money lender with a shorter *lathi* and less violent moustache.

For your information, God, we did not go to bazar, for who will give me a frock without money?

I told Mummy that I had no particular desire to buy a frock. I should be happy to make one cut of a torn but colourful saree which I had seen lying useless in her trunk for a long time!

You can certainly guess, God, that I lied to mummy, I had in fact seen a beautiful frock displayed at the window of a shop in the bazar which I would have loved to put on.
(DHOS 75)

Lakshmi has great love and affection for her parents. Before leaving the temple, she takes a couple of bananas and reminds god not to eat all the bananas at a time. The priest awakes from his sleep and suspects of thief. Lakshmi starts running followed by the priest. she enters into the pond holding two bananas. Her father comes and rescues her from the crowd. But the crowd comment very rudely on the act of taking bananas from temple. Lakshmi has attack of an fever. She dies after three days. The village elders comment that her death is the consequence of God's anger. In reality these village elders were corrupt and hypocrite.

Lakshmi represents innocence, honesty, strong faith in god. On the other hand the village elders stand for hypocrisy, corruption and exploitation.

At the end of the story the priest becomes dumb. He realises his folly. He feels that the spirit of the deity has escaped from the temple. For

the remaining of his life he has shown mumbling a prayer, “God! Next time let this sinner be born without a tongue! (DHOS 77)

Laxshmi’s death leaves strong mark on the mind of the priest. Thus the story is remarkable for its portrayal of character which leaves a strong impression on the minds of the readers.

Thus the story glorifies rural values represented by Laxshmi. The writer has given an authentic presentation of the way of life of the orthodox villagers.

The Tree

In the story “The Tree” Manoj Das depicts an authentic picture of socio-religious village life. It depicts a sad account of the flood-affected villagers. The story also comments on superstitious nature of villagers. It also criticises hypocrisy and double dealing nature of political leaders. The story reflects dominant features of rural culture. The action of the story takes place in a village in Orissa. A peasant in India has to face certain natural calamities. He is helpless before fury of nature. He has no choice but to surrender it. At the beginning of the story the narrator gives description of the flood which evokes rural sensibility. He states:

The flood came at a little past midnight. The jackals, with their long moaning howls, managed to wake up several people who called out to each other and, reassured of a collective awareness gathered on the riverbank with lanterns or torches of dry twigs. The Flames danced in the gusts of wind making their faces alternately appear and disappear (SVOS 47)

Further the wind grew stronger and colder soon accompanied by a thin shower. All the villagers ran to take shelter under the banian tree. Trees play very important role in the life of Indian rustics. They believe that trees are sacred. These trees are associated with some folk beliefs. The writer evokes rural sensibility by commenting on superstitious nature of the rustic people. The villagers fear to cut the branches of the banyan tree situated near the idol of the Banian Goddess.

Nature's phenomena is inseparable from the life of villagers. The writer has personified the tree to create rural sensibility. The interdependence of man and Nature is powerfully portrayed in the story. The banyan tree is described as follows:

The leaves of the banyan tree chattered incessantly their familiar language of hope and courage. Its innumerable boughs that spread overhead had been the very symbol of protection for generations, affording shelter not only to those who bore love and regard for the tree, but even to such people who had been impudent towards it, of course, so far as the latter were concerned, only after humbling them to their knees. (SOVS 48)

The villagers have a great respect for the banyan tree. No one has challenged this strong faith. It is told that the mound near the banyan tree contained the ruins of a certain king's palace. It is recalled that the king has tried to cut down branches of tree to extend his palace. Before he could do so, a terrific storm devastated the palace. The royal family survives by taking shelter under the banyan tree. The king realises his mistake and clasps the tree and weeps.

Village life in India is incomplete without the presence of Gods or Goddesses. The Banyan tree was the oldest institution in the village. Beside one of the trunks rests the tiny Banyan Goddess. The villagers have great respect for banyan goddess. The Goddess has become part and parcel of every day life of the villagers. They report their small issues and pray Goddess to solve crises. The village-meetings are also held under the banyan tree. Even an old woman used to sell her wares sitting there. The writer presents an authentic socio- religious aspect of rural life as follows:

Beside one of the trunks rested the tiny Banyan Goddess. She had no regular priest attached to her. Whoever so desired could approach her and sprinkle vermilion on her of which she was extremely fond. In the course of generations the vermilion crust had come to account for the greater part of the goddess's person. Devotees ordinarily did not prostrate themselves to her, but everybody, while passing before her bowed enough for her to take cognizance of his respect.

In matters complex and formidable, the villagers prayed for the intervention of famous deities of distant temples. But small issues were referred to her from time to time. Children in particular found her helpful at crises arising from home works not done or the ill humour of the pundits of the primary school.

The area before another trunk was the usual site for the village meetings. Relaxing beside a neighbouring trunk, eyes

shut and jaws moving in a leisurely rhythm, could be found the much revered sacred bull.” (SOVS 49-50)

In this way, human beings, animals and birds live very happy and calm life under the protection of the majestic banyan tree with the presence of baniyan Goddess.

The tree is going to collapse because of the forceful water of flood. Almost all the villagers, women and children gathered there. Everyone in the crowd wants to save the tree. Just then someone reports that the MLA has been seen on a nearby road. The villagers bring the MLA in their village and report him the flood situation and ask his help to save the ancient tree. But the MLA tries to escape from his social responsibilities. Here the writer criticises the hypocrisy and double-dealing nature of the political leaders in our country.

Further the rural sensibility is evoked through village beliefs and superstitions of the villagers. At the end of the story the sacred banyan tree collapses by the force of the flood water. The Baniyan goddess is dislodged. The narrator states:

“Gone! The tree-god gone! Hari bol! Hari bol!” For a long time, under a continuous drizzle, they kept up the poignant chant with all their hearts, all of them looking stupefied and some weeping.

Old Bishu Jena had seated himself before the Baniyan Goddess. Someone who saw that he had begun to shiver, cried “I think Bishu is falling into his trance!” (SVOS 57)

Further the narrator states that Bishu was in a trance again, after at least two decades. The instruments were played and again he opened his mouth and he predicted:

I will be born as a thousand tree – here, there, everywhere!

Hari bol! Hari bol! Hearken to the tree-god's message. He will be reborn as a thousand trees! (SVOS 57)

The tree with presence of banyan goddess symbolises the traditional way of life of the villagers. Though this tree has been collapsed it will be reborn. The writer is hopeful of the future.

While commenting on the Indian village life presented in the story Aditi Chatterjee states:

The sense of belonging and sharing, a part and parcel of a typical Indian village life, is predominantly noticed in the short story "The Tree". In an Indian village, every animate and inanimate object becomes an important aspect of the village life without which the village becomes incomplete. The simple villagers are emotionally attached to the tree which has become a part of their daily life. The river is described as a living pet of the villagers who has suddenly lost all control of itself. (133-134)

Thus the story is a masterpiece of authentic presentation of Indian rural culture.

The Miracle

In "The Miracle" Manoj Das comments on socio-religious life of the villagers. The fake sadhus and babas deceive the simple and innocent

rustics. There is strong hold of beliefs and religion on the minds of the villagers. So they are easily deceived by the fake sadhus.

The action of the story takes place in the village, Sankhari five miles away from the nearest bus stop and twenty-five miles from the railway station. The action of story centres around Brajgopal and Bulu Baba.

Bulu is the son of a villager, Harida. Bulu looks abnormal. He is eight or nine years old but he had beard and moustache on the face. Even one of his eyes is bigger than the other. Bulu's father supposed that it is the sin of his earlier birth which is responsible for the birth of abnormal son. Here the writer focuses the strong beliefs and faiths of the villagers. There is another wonderful character of Braja sadhu alias Brajgopal Das. He looked overwhelmed himself, under the spell of the holy name of Krishna. Haridas brings Bulu to prostrate him before Brajgopal. Bulu knelt down and laughed. The writer comments on this meeting. He states "That was the first ever time anybody saw him laughing. It was rumoured that the laughter had an occult language, which Brajagopal alone could decipher." (SF 173) The devotees suppose that Bulu is one of those concealed Mahatmas. Thus Bulu becomes Bulu Baba. He was born on full moon night.

On every full-moon night the devotees start to gather around Bulu, on Brajagopal's courtyard. At the beginning their number was small. A clerk wins a case and offers hundred rupees to Bulu because he has selected his lawyer according to the guidance of Bulu Baba. Then the crowd of devotees start to swell. Even people suffering from gout and colic found relief after making prayer to Bulu. Once the gout ridden zamindar sends his manager and his bullock cart to bring Bulu Baba in his

mansion. But Brajgopal opposes to it. While Brajgopal was busy in arguing with the manager, Bulu Baba comes near the cart and stands looking at bullocks. Then the manager lifts the Baba and puts him in the cart. The carter shouts at the bullocks but they refuse to move. Then the manager set the Baba on the ground and the bullocks begin to move. Thus this incident brings reputation to Bulu Baba. He becomes centre of the crowd of his devotees.

Navin Ray, the lecturer decides to free the people from superstitions. One day the narrator and Navin reach Brajgopal's courtyard. Navin asks the questions concern with Bulu Baba's new avatar but Brajgopal doesnot respond it. So they quit the place. Then Bulu Baba and Brajgopal set out for Vrindavan with their twelve devotees. As they reached on the railway platform a grand idea flashed in the mind of a devotee. The writer states it as, "Once Bulu Baba ascends the train, it cannot move away according to its own free will, just as the zamindar's cart had failed to do." (SF 176)

The station master warns them that they should not board the train. But the excited devotees don't pay any attention to the warning. They want to prove Bulu Baba's power. So they pushed Bulu Baba into a compartment and waited to see the miracle. But the train began to pull out and disappeared. Brajgopal and two villagers left for the city in search of Bulu but came back without Bulu. But Brajgopal does not seem serious. The writer states it as, "*Leela*, to play," he said, his arms raised towards the heavens, and slipped into a trance like silence, 'He came of his own will; of his own will he parted!' said his near ones in the way of own will; interpreting their leader." (SF 171) Thus the writer leaves the end of the story open.

The story is notable for its authentic picture of the life of the rural people. It presents socio-religious life of the villagers in a foreign language. While commenting on the problem of language equivalents V.Y.Kantak in his “The Language of Indian Fiction In English” states:

... Their problem, in so far as it concerns language, is essentially the same, namely, how to give us the ‘feel’ of that life in an alien medium. The difficulty is to find language equivalents to convey those minutiae of gesture and expression which distinguishes the life of the home or of the social round, to convey that unique flavour of rural life or life of small towns where everything seems strangely coloured by superstitions and the ritual of tradition. To present it wholly, the truth as well as the superstition, is not easy. The language has to be broken to it, as it were, and made new. (224)

The Bull of Babulpur

In “The Bull of Babulpur” Manoj Das depicts clash between rural culture and urban culture. The well-known criminal lawyer, Mr. Boral from the city stands for hypocrisy, artificiality and arrogance. On the other hand, the bull, vehicle of Lord Shiva, from Babulpur village stands for the free, immortal and invincible universal soul.

The setting of the story is Babulpur. Mr. Boral decides to spend the rest of his life in peace and meditation in his maternal grandfather’s village, Babulpur. One Saturday afternoon, he visits the village with his car. Here, the writer depicts calm and un-disturbed village life of Babulpur. He puts it as:

Babulpur had never experienced the advent of a car. The raw, sandy road, luckily, was broad and relatively smooth. Kids ran before and behind the car, celebrating the hair-raising event with ecstatic shouts. Folks gossiping and sharing *hookah* on the middle of the road hurriedly cleared away, amazement writ large on their faces. Drowsy dogs stood up reluctantly and then realizing the seriousness of the situation ran and barked furiously from yards away. (DHOS 40)

As Mr. Boral's car advanced, he found the big bull, sitting and ruminating in the middle of the road. The chauffeur, the uncle and Mr. Boral tried to remove the bull from their road but in vain. Mr. Boral feels humiliated. Mr. Boral asks about the owner of the bull. The uncle answers, "But the owner is Lord Shiva, Sri Sri Babuleshwar, the presiding deity of the village." (DHOS 41) The bull represents divine world. He is part and parcel of Babulpur. The writer focuses the socio-religious life of the villagers. The entire village has strong faith and respect for the bull who is the saviour of the village. Mr. Boral requests the police to remove the bull. The constables arrived the place. Then the bull suddenly stands up and begins walking. Further the bull is garlanded of jasmine flowers by an old widow. Next moment a brahmin smeared sandalwood paste on the bull's forehead. From the next house, someone offered a pair of water-melon.

After one hour the bull returned to the very spot from it had started. Here the writer uses Indian expression to show the strong faith of the villagers on Lord Babuleshwar. He puts it:

"Jai Baba Babuleshwar!"

"Jai the great bull of the great Lord!" (DHOS 43)

Further the writer ridicules the opportunistic attitude of Mr. Boral. After the observation of the situation, he senses an opportunity for becoming a politician. He addresses the villagers for half an hour. He plans to seek election to the State Legislature.

The story is outstanding for its photographic presentation of Babulpur village with its bull, the vehicle of Lord Shiva; Sri Sri Babuleshwar, the presiding deity of the village. Manoj Das focuses on the socio-religious life of the villagers in India. The arrival of Mr. Boral with his car in the Babulpur symbolizes intrusion of urban culture upon simple, placid and eco-friendly rural culture.

Dr. Bishnu Charan Dash in his “Re-Creating Village Ecology – Tryst with Rural Simplicity in Manoj Das’s writing” states:

The hypocrisy, artificiality, demoralized personality and so called political popularity of the criminal lawyer pales into insignificance before the pristine innocence and pure popularity of the bull. The artificial man goes down in the grip of melancholy and finally decides to accept asceticism signifying the philosophy of Lord Shiva (Babuleshwar) and his vehicle (the bull). Whereas the lord and his vehicle are agreeably assimilated into the village ecology and rural environment of Babulpur, Mr. Boral the man of hypocrisy is left unaccommodated. The lawyer goes for the third mask of politics to win over the popularity of the bull and his last attempt too ended in fiasco. Babulpur is thus a unique construct of Manoj Das’s rural imagination and behind the celebration of its rural environment, lurks large the author’s

love and endearing attachment for Sankhari, his own village by the sea. (224)

The Bride

In “The Bride” the writer comments on the socio-religious aspect of rural life. There is strong hold of beliefs and superstitions on the sensitive minds of the villagers.

The action of the story takes place in a village. The story centres around the character of Tipiri, a village girl. Her marriage is fixed with Prabhakar. He works in a city departmental store. He met Tipiri while Tipiri’s pleasure trip to the city with her parents. Prabhakar became their guide. The writer throws light on the way of life of city people. He states: “Prabhakar was not only handsome, but also equipped with a wrist watch, a fountain pen and a perfumed handkerchief.” (MMCOS 186)

The proposal for Tipiri’s marriage with Prabhakar was put forth before the parent’s of Prabhakar. They agreed the proposal. There was not a suitable date in the almanac for their marriage during the six months after the postponement of event. But Prabhakar has visited the village for at least four times during this period in order to meet Tipiri. Here the writer focuses his attention on the strong hold of beliefs and superstitions on the minds of the villagers. He states:

A new date was fixed for their wedding. But, three days to go, one afternoon Tipiri cried out, “Mother! There is a vulture on our roof!”

Here mother came rushing out. She saw no vulture, but cast a piercing gaze on her daughter. The astrologer forbade marriage within the month, but the mother told her

husband, "I am afraid, our reading of our daughter's mind was incorrect. Let us look for another match!" (MMCOS 186)

Thus Tipiri's watching of a vulture on the roof of house is supposed as a bad omen. As the vulture symbolizes death. As a result Tipiri's parents cancel her marriage with Prabhakar. Then they fixed Tipiri's marriage with a person who held a respectable post of the Judge Sahib's typist. But Tipiri was not happy. She was enquiring about the methods of committing suicide. Again this proposal has been also cancelled.

On the other hand, Prabhakar's parents were also busy in finalizing his marriage at another place. But Prabhakar informed his parents by sending telegram that he would die rather than marry with anybody else. At last the date of marriage of Tipiri and Prabhakar has been fixed. But one day before their marriage ceremony, Tipiri fell into the pond and fainted. She suffered by high temperature. Tipiri's father did not dare to inform the bridegroom's party. They came drumming and fluting. The writer describes this touching event:

Tipiri smiled – as pale as a lily in a moonlit night. Her bridegroom sat near her head.

No doubt she felt thrilled even though she blushed. Then she laughed and, before a full hour had passed, she died. Her mother fainted, her father sobbed and younger brother wailed, Prabhakar, the bridegroom, looked the very picture of bewilderment. They were to be married the same day. (MMCOS 185)

Thus the story presents realistic picture of the villagers under the impact of beliefs and superstitions. There is strong impact of religion on the gullible mind of the villagers.

The Owl

In the story “The Owl” Manoj Das throws light on the change of old order. It also comments on the superstitious nature of the villagers. The story takes place in a village named Vishalpur. ‘Local colour’, which is one of the chief characteristics of the rural fiction, is to be found in abundance in the short fiction of Manoj Das. The evocation of village life is accomplished in the story mainly through incidents, characters, customs, superstitions, topography, rustic speech and agrarian imagery.

Villages in India are symbols of peaceful and still-life. Presenting the topography of the village, the writer puts it:

At Vishalpur the sunset seemed to follow a certain rhythm - and the birds which flew back to their old trees on the marshland at the western end of the village did so beating time with it. As their vigorous dialogues swapping their experiences of the day would die down the high-pitched voice of a father or an uncle would be heard-calling the boy who had been late in returning from the fields with the cattle.

And when there was no doubt left about the sun having set, the jackals let out their ceremonial howl from several strategic points along the marshland. (SVOS 142)

There is a half-ruined temple which stands between the village and the marshland. The temple is an abode of a owl. The owl is believed to be the senior-most resident of the village. The temple has been constructed

by a landlord. In the course of time, their estate changed hands. Now the responsibility of the maintenance of the temple is shouldered to the new landlords. But they don't take care of it. When the temple is ruined, the deity is carried away by the priest to his own clay house, which is regularly cow-dung-washed. It is customary for the villagers to renovate the temple through a public subscription every five or ten years.

In the course of time, the temple comes under the owl's possession. The villagers from old generation used to predict drought, cyclone and noteworthy deaths on hooting of the owl. Here the writer depicts the beliefs, customs of the villagers which evoke rural atmosphere.

We get some glimpses of rural way of life in the story. The writer pens village life with realism and precision. He puts it:

A group of villagers who were returning from the weekly market eight miles away keeping the wicks of their lanterns down to the minimum came to a dead halt. Once in a while, when the zamindar camped in his local kachari, people heard gunshots at twilight coming from the marshlands, to be followed, an hour or two later, by the smell of cooked meat which defiled the atmosphere of their Vaishnavite kitchens.
(SVOS 145)

The paralysed landlord's young son fires a shot at the hooting owl on a clouded night. The villagers detect him emerging from the bushes behind the temple with the gun in hand. They think that the young zamindar has killed the owl. They believe that he shall die as a result of his action. The villagers become angry and follow him silently.

Further, one of the villager, Balbhadra tells the story of a foolish child. He tells that one moonlit night when the owl began to hoot, a village boy mimicked the owl. As a result the boy gets lost and never comes back. Then the villagers return to their houses. There is violent storm.

The young zamindar suffers from high fever and dies. His dead body is carried into the palanquin at night. The villagers follow the palanquin. They keep sitting on the meadow when, just before dawn, there comes the sound of the hooting of the owl. The villagers are bewildered. They are now sure that the owl is not dead. At the end of the story the writer hints that the old order is now changed. He puts it as:

“Is the rumour I heard in the market the other day, that the zamindari will be abolished, true?” someone asked.
(SVOS 152)

In the Review – Article: “Manoj Das’s ‘The Owl’ : A study”, P.Raja comments as follows:

‘The Owl’ impresses us with its power without a mystic nuance or even an element of mystery. It is a many dimensional story, a story of transition, of efficacy of suggestions, of an interplay between superstition and innocence, but above everything of the intrinsic, helplessness of man- a characteristic of the fiction of Manoj Das (89)

To wind up the discussion, we can say that the writer has given a sincere and authentic account of the customs, beliefs and superstitions of the rural people. He also throws light on the change in order. The abolition of the zamindari is focused. The writer also highlights that the old taboos and

faith seem to have their firm grip on the minds of superstitious and gullible villagers. The story is the best example of the authentic presentation of the socio-religious life of rural people.

The Naked

Manoj Das has depicted the decline of feudal system and emergence of independence in India in his many stories. He presents the life of rural communities, their customs, beliefs, mores and superstitions in his various stories. The story “The Naked” takes place when British rule was weakening its grip on India. The wind of change is blowing. Though the feudal system is on the verge of the decline, the feudal attitude continues.

The setting of the story is a hamlet of the fisher folk named Sapanpur. The writer portrays graphically Sapanpur on the sea with its decaying palace. He puts it as:

In the fifties Sapanpur on sea hardly ever recorded the impact of the revolutionary events taking place in the rest of the world. The once prosperous port had been abandoned and the place deserted...

Hence there was no sign of modern times (which had just dawned elsewhere in India) visiting the few old buildings left to the mercy of raging winds from the sea, a row of shops always appearing to be in the red and the nearby hamlet of fisherfolk.

Even the summer palace of Raja was fast decaying...
(DHOS 133)

The central character of the story is Bhanu Singh who is the scion of the hereditary senapaties, the generals of the Rajas, looked after the summer palace. The abolition of Feudal Raj has shocked him. However, he has continued his services by receiving a quarterly allowance from Raja's bank balance.

Rajmata of Sapanpur asks Bhanu Singh to receive the fifty persons who are to camp in the summer palace. She also provides him money to buy some provisions. After confirming the meaning the word 'nudist' in dictionary, Mujumdar tells Bhanu Singh that he has to receive a group of the fifty naked men and women. He also tells him that he should be also naked while receiving them. Both the Headmaster and Mujumdar slip out. Bhanu Singh remains lonely and helpless. Even Pratap Roy, the manager of taluk and Kapil, a former servant in Raj family deny their help to Bhanu Singh. He returns to the palace helpless and desolate. He grows nervous and his mind becomes restless.

The writer focuses on the villagers's strong faith on God which is the prominent characteristics of rural culture. When man is helpless in critical condition, no one helps him. He has to face the situation on his own. If you trust in presence of unseen power of God, it will strengthen your mind and you will face all the difficulties in life. It is true with Bhanu Singh. He visits the nearest shrine and prays God. The writer puts it:

The nearest shrine was that of Vishaleswar, built by an ancestor of the Raj family. The deity, from all accounts, seemed to have been a powerful one in days gone by. But the bigger part of the shrine had collapsed for lack of maintenance and Sapanpur had lost its importance...

Bhanu Singh folded his hands and sent up his obeisance to the deity. He hoped that Vishaleshwar had the leisure to pay attention to his peculiar predicament. (DHOS 138)

He feels like weeping. Further he reaches the foot of the small hillock bearing the another temple. He receives the shocking news of robbery in the temple. The writer describes this event very effectively. He describes the old shrine which is the important institution of the socio-religious life of the people in the hillock. He states:

Oh, so you are ignorant of the fact that the deity has been robbed of all his belongings- his copper utensils, his brass bell as well as the pair of old silver coins kept before him for ages. The pity is, the robber has even snatched away the yard of yellow silk the Lord wore, leaving him naked! (DHOS 139)

After observing this situation, Bhanu Singh makes his mind strong to receive the nudist party. But there is turning point at the end of the story. As Bhanu Singh reaches the palace, he gets a telegram informing him about cancellation of the proposed conference of the nudist. He becomes very happy to listen this news, His eyes fill with tears of gratitude. His faith in Lord Vishaleswar strengthens. He wants to buy colourful silk for God. The writer very effectively describes his faith in god and his sense of gratitude. He states: "But his eyes were filled with tears of gratitude. Who but the sky and the ocean would understand what the naked deity had mean to him!" (DHOS 140)

The story is notable for its charactersketch of Bhanu Singh who has been caught in moral conflict.

2.5 SOCIO-ECONOMICAL RURAL LIFE

The Kite

In the story “The Kite” the writer comments on the changing of the old order. Manoj Das criticises Mahajan who stands for power and wealth. He exploits the poor, fatherless village boy, Kunja. He humiliates his mother for land. The story throws light on the deep-rooted love of son for his mother. It also shows Kunja’s love for freedom.

The story takes place in a small village. The central character of the story is Kunja who is a great kite-flyer in his boyhood. There is use of third person narration technique in the story. There is a recollection of boyhood memories of Kunja. The story opens with a description of routine life of prisoners in the city. Kunja spends his seven long years as a prisoner in prison. The writer portrays trees in the city. He puts it: “It was one of those desolate trees in the town condemned to stand where they did not belong, leaves pale and remorsefully drooping.” (SVOS 59)

Kunja sees a kite entangled in the top of a desolate tree. Suddenly he recollects his past. The narrator gives us details of Kunja’s past life in village. He puts it as:

In his small village he was the king of the art of kite-flying. To earn that status one had to achieve mastery, simultaneously, in the other art of playing truant. But that had been relatively easy. He had lost his father. There was none to chide him.

He would run for miles, holding on to the line of his kite, along the vast solitude of marshland at noon, sometimes

alone, sometimes followed and applauded by kids from the nearby villages or the cowherd boys. (SVOS 60)

Kunja has a dream of flying a grand kite. But he does not have sufficient money to buy it. Here the writer depicts rural poverty and economic inequality. The pitiable condition of Kunja who does not get sufficient money to buy a kite is described in these words:

The few small coins he found were not enough and he had to borrow some from an admirer. Equipped with half-a-rupee, he visited the weekly market seven miles away and brought some quality thread, thick but strong. He explored several clusters of bamboos to find the right material for making a light but lasting frame. He massaged the legs of the *Mahajan's* wife for full two hours to earn a few ounces of flour with which to make a cementing paste. He bribed her eleventh and youngest child with four bunches of cane fruit, spread over four days, in order to get four sheets of a weekly newspaper. (SVOS 61)

At last he becomes successful to make the giant kite and he launches it into the sky. As it is the symbol of his aspiration. But unfortunately, it dives into the banyan tree inside the Mahajan's compound and its tail gets entangled in a top branch. Kunja becomes very sad.

Exploitation is the greatest evil which arises out of economic inequality. The writer gives details of how Kunja is ill-treated by Mahajan. Kunja enters the Mahajan's compound to collect his kite. But the Mahajan's dog detects him. Kunja is tied to the tree with thick rope.

He is threatened to shoot by Mahajan. But Kunja's mother throws herself at the Mahajan's feet and requests him to set free Kunja.

Next year Kunja goes to the town and starts working as a factory labourer. Because of his bad economical condition, Kunja shifts to city. He visits his village only once or twice. There is influence of city life on Kunja. He comes in his village with a soap in a plastic case and wears sandals.

One day he gets the news that his mother is abused and beaten up by the Mahajan. The 'love of land' is deep-rooted in the minds of the peasants. It is the dominant characteristics of the rural culture. Kunja's mother denies to sell a small piece of land adjacent to the Mahajan's which she has once promised to sell. So angry Mahajan humiliates and punishes her. On this background, the writer tells us that there is change in old order. But evil nature of Mahajan is not changed.

At noon, Kunja reaches home. He gets the details of his mother's humiliation by Mahajan. The Panchayat is then in session in Shiva temple. Kunja enters the temple and takes iron trident of Lord Shiva and brings down on Mahajan's head. Kunja is arrested by the police. In the court, Kunja is sentenced to a long imprisonment.

It is a clouded twilight. While returning to jail, he sees the same kite stuck to the top of the desolate tree. A sudden gust frees the kite from the tree-top. Kunja starts running after the kite. The kite and himself – they are the only truths. The writer pens graphically the chasing of the kite by Kunja. There are beautiful snapshots of Nature presented by the writer to create rural sensibility. He puts it as:

The red in the sky was fast fading under the dusk. A furlong away from the railroads were quiet hamlets and after that a stretch of paddy fields. The sea was two miles away.

The kite disappeared, as if immersed in the horizon over the sea.

Kunja ran into the water. But his vision was still wandering in the sky. He leaped over the waves. He was beginning to fly, he felt. (SVOS 65)

The writer focuses on Kunja's yearning for freedom. P.Raja comments on the Kunja's thrust for freedom. He puts it:

While for Kunja, the kite has been the invitation into freedom, what has come to him is death, but a death with a difference. It is neither a suicide nor an accident. It can be said as an immersion in infinity, again a relax into freedom. It was a violent circumstances for all the onlookers, but a sublime experience for Kunja. (MWMD-46)

The story is remarkable for its presentation of the pathetic and desolate condition of the poor in rural areas exploited by the feudal lords.

The Murderer

In the story "The Murderer" Manoj Das criticises evil nature of Dabu Sahukar, the reputed money-lender and litigant. He gets pleasure while exploiting the poor villagers. Many villagers have become a prey to his trap. They have lost their houses and lands to Dabu Sahukar.

The story takes place in a village. There is an evocation of village sensibility in the story. The writer draws 'animal imagery' mostly from

Nature which provides a suitable setting to rural life. He also presents the beliefs of the rural people which predict future incidents. Presenting the topography of the village, the writer states:

The night was somewhat chilly. From time to time the wind howled in the bamboo grove at the back of our house. The moon, looking already battered, was threatened by a chunk of cloud abominably dark. A lone moaning was heard from the bushes behind the temple of Lord Shiva, the place where we played hide-and-seek on Sundays.

“It is a vixen”, commented Uncle. The capacity to determine the sex of an animal from its cry revealed only the tip of Uncle’s vast wisdom.

“It is going to rain” observed mother, looking at the sudden upsurge of cockroaches all along the veranda. (SVOS-132)

Further the narrator tells us about Binu, an orphan who plays an important role in the story. Binu is supposed to be the murderer of Dabu Sahukar. At thirty, Binu owns a small patch of land and a saving of two hundred rupees. He marries with a sixteen-year old deaf and dumb girl named Sati. The father of Sati demands half of that amount saved by Binu. Binu is very happy at this phase of life.

Poverty is a dominant feature of an Indian village. Exploitation originates in poverty and ignorance. The writer throws a light on the economical conditions of the Indian villagers. He tells us how Binu’s wife Sati is exploited by Dabu Sahukar. The writer comments on the inhuman treatment given to Sati who is dumb and deaf. He puts it:

But Binu's humming stopped as abruptly as it had begun. Sati had been driven into Dabu Sahukar's household. Nobody could say exactly how much he had paid her father. But everybody knew that it was much more than Binu's entire saving.

Passers by could see the emaciated and ever silent girl devoting hours in the morning and again in the afternoon to cleansing utensils in the pond behind Dabu Sahukar's house. She looked sad and tired. She looked hardly and different when one afternoon she was found lying with half her body in the pond, as lifeless as the utensils scattered around her.

It had not been necessary for any physician to examine her and declare her dead. (SVOS 134)

Binu does not show grumbling on account of Dabu Sahukar's inhuman treatment to Sati.

A peasant in India has to fight natural calamities for his survival. After the death of Sati the famine strikes the region. Binu, unwillingly takes shelter in Dabu Sahukar's house. Because of Binu's honesty, he is employed for realising his dues from his debtors. He is also appointed as a bodyguard of Sahukar. One day Dabu escorted by Binu is returning from the Sub-divisional town. They take short cut to reach early but Binu alone comes out. The villagers suspect Binu as the murder of Dabu Sahukar. Further he is appointed as durwan of the zamindar, Bhupal Singh, enemy of Dabu Sahukar.

After thirty years, an old Sadhu Baba pays a visit to village. The writer depicts how the beliefs and customs govern the sensitive minds of the

villagers. The writer portrays authentically the personality of Sadhu Baba. He puts it:

Tall and bright, he sported a large beard and a temple of knotted locks on the head. His look was penetrating but gracious. He was accompanied by a number of *chelas* who said that the Baba, who had his hermitage in the Himalayas, was out on a tour of the country. (SVOS 138)

The writer evokes spiritual sensibility with the use of several words. e.g. *chelas*, *gurubhai*, *bhajans*, *darshan*, *Haribol!*

There is a turning point at the end of the story. In reality, Dabu Sahukar is not dead. He has turned into a hermit and emerges as Sadhu Baba in the village. Sadhu Baba's presence has spread a festive spirit over the area. Hundreds came to have a look at him. On the day of the Baba's departure, more than thousand men and women collected on the river bank. The murderer, Binu also arrives on the scene and clutches at Baba's feet. Sadhu Baba said to the crowd: "Who says Binu had not killed me?" (SVOS 141) It is the evil genius in him has been killed and a new life has been given to him.

Here is an evocation of village sensibility in a foreign medium. The words are English but the organization of the material is Indian. It is not an easy task to present the Indian rural sensibility through English. But Manoj Das has done it successfully. The writer very effectively presents the rural reality. Images and metaphors are his natural modes of expression, and they happen to touch upon object and experiences that are distinctively rural.

Binayk Prasad Pradhan in his “*A Marxist Interpretation of Manoj Das’s “The Murder”*” interprets the story in the light of Marxism. He puts it:

... The writer has skillfully described the pathetic existence of the working class people who add to the prosperity of the rich by their unending exploitation. According to Marxism all history is characterised by class struggle, the conflict between those who own and those who labour. In this story also we find the same class struggle and conflict. The villagers have showed their strong discontentment and hatred to the inequality and injustice perpetrated by Dabu Sahukar. The exploitation and suffering of Sati is reflective of the pathetic and desolate condition of the entire working class whose voice has been silenced by the people like Dabu Sahukar.

However, the dramatic transformation of Dabu Sahukar into a saint can be taken as the hidden wish of the writer who demands a classless society. Through this story Manoj Das has tried to touch upon a universal issue. The gap between the haves and have-nots cannot be bridged up for all the time to come. By means of this story the writer has made an attempt to instill a sense of awareness in his readers and inducted them to correct the vices and bad practices prevalent in our society. This short story portrays Manoj Das as a meticulous observer of human society. (144-145)

Thus the story is notable for its an authentic presentation of rural poverty and social inequality. It reflects prominent characteristics of rural culture.

The Poison Girl

In “The Poison Girl” Manoj Das comments on the exploitation of the poor and helpless class. The story centres around the character of Heera , a prostitute. She lives near the “Price system Pure Hindu Hotel” on the eastern end of the station road. The writer evokes rural sensibility with the description of Heera’s house. He puts it as:

But one could see several shadowy figures moving inside the house. For them, the half-tiled, half-thatched roof was the dome over a magic house of joy, the decaying earthen rooms and pillars - some of which had turned into ant – hills – constituted a paradisaical sphere where they could freely fly about as long as they wished, for they believed themselves to be endowed with faery wings. (MMCOS 108)

Heera takes up prostitution because of her poverty and helplessness. She has not any other sources for her livelihood. The selfish and shrewd owner of the hotel only provides meals for her. Heera’s profession of prostitution helps to advance hotel owner’s business. He takes advantage of Heera. She has no option to escape from this critical situation. She becomes prey of hotel owner’s crooked plans. Heera has been exploited sexually and economically. The writer describes her daily life very effectively:

A familiar skulk of jackals howl across the meadow, atop the banyan tree a few birds flap their wings. Their repose is disturbed.

The house become less and less noisy. One by one the customers get up, yawn, and depart.

The night ends in that fag end of the bazaar with the gurgling of an incoming train. The locality returns to life, leisurely. But Heera continues to sleep. (MMCOS 109)

Heera takes poisonous herbs to relieve the pains and sufferings of her sexual activities. She suffers physically also. In reality, Heera has come here from a distant village to escape from her slavery in landlord's house. She dreams for her own house. Mangaldas, the founder of the hotel has inspired the dream in her. She loved him but unfortunately he dies. The writer throws light on the strong belief of the rural people on the ghosts, spirits and supernatural aspects. The writer states:

When exactly did Mangaldas die? She had not kept count of days. But sometimes in the eerie silence of lone summer noons or at grim twilights, the spirit of Mandaldas seemed to escape from the world beyond and make a beeline into her house riding minor whirlwinds or sudden gusts. Heera remains depressed for long. (MMCOS 110)

In the course of the time Heera loses her charm and beauty. She is of no use. The customers avoid her. The hotel owner stops her meals. For her livelihood, she opens panshop. But the customers notice wounds on her hands and reject her panshop. Heera becomes helpless. All the doors of hope and help are closed. Finally she dies without anybody's notice.

The writer throws light on the economic conditions of the Indian villagers sunk in poverty, illiteracy and superstitions. The writer

highlights inequality in society and exploitation of the weaker section very effectively.

Catching a Thief

In “Catching a Thief” Manoj Das faithfully depicts the pitiable condition of the villagers who are affected by the brutal drought. He aptly records Nature’s vagaries.

The action of the story takes place in a village. The central character of the story is Annapurna, a daughter of the villager, Raghunath. Annapurna means bountiful goddess. At the beginning the story, the writer depicts scenes of drought-affected village, “Even birds ceased to visit the hamlets. The brutal drought had made the trees inhospitable for them. Besides, tiny sprouts were nipped away by the vigilant human kids, the dark hunger-incarnates, who constantly hung on to choice trees.” (MMCOS 22)

The writer highlights some social evils following the famine. He depicts scenes of rural poverty and economic inequality. The old Raghunath has been moved by the kindness of the landlord. He has given him a full bag of rice in exchange of a acre land. The writer critically comments on the compassion of the landlord. The local committee decides to bestow the title of “Danavira” upon the landlord. The writer depicts this contrast. He puts it:

... He had eaten too much of a goat. His *gumastha*, who had eaten less, is said to have lamented, “The Mahashay, as few will ever realise, had taken to more and more meat-eating so that his rice-stock could be at the

service of the starving multitudes. But O blind, blind Fate!”
etc. etc. (MMCOS 22)

Raghunath has not seen a bagful of rice during the year. His son has gone to city in search of work. His daughter with her little son has arrived in the village. She required some rice for her elder son who was sick. When Raghunath reaches home he brings a empty bag and fills it with half of the rice he has secured. Then he puts one bag in the other room and takes the other inside. He plans this idea in order to preserve rice. There is fear in his mind if his daughter come to know about the rice, she will expect more rice. Anu sees the rice bag in the outer room. But her father lies her that his friend has left this bag and he is going to collect it next day. Then he shows her the rice bag kept inside the room. She overjoys and prepares curry with rice. Raghunath enjoys lunch with satisfaction.

At night, the people heard a cry. It said, thief, thief from the end the village road. The people with lanterns started to search thief. The thief has thrown the stolen property. It was Raghunath’s rice-bag. The villagers surrounded the grove. They formed a ring around the grove. They saw a shadow shooting out of the ring and dashing towards the village. The crowd chased the shadow throwing stones at it. The shadow disappeared near the Raghunath’s house. There were marks of blood on his gate.

After the crowd disappeared, both the father and the daughter stood shocked. Raghunath realises that the thief is not any other person but his own daughter Annapurna, whose name stands for bountiless goddess. Anu has three children and a husband who does not work at all. She can not provide sufficient food to her children because of her poverty and brutal drought. The critical circumstances compel her to steal a bag of

rice from her father's house. Her father is also helpless because he has got a bag of rice in exchange of a acre of land. Thus man is helpless before Nature. Even man forgets blood-relationship when he faces critical situations for survival.

Thus Manoj Das focuses his attention on the pitiable condition of man for the survival due to famine. He also authentically depicts rural poverty and economic inequality. He criticizes the landlords who suppose themselves as danvira but exploit the poor and snatch their lands for a bag of rice.

The Discovery

In "The Discovery" Manoj Das depicts authentic picture of the miserable life of the villagers affected by famine of 1943. He gives realistic picture of the villagers dying because of starvation and epidemic of small pox.

At the setting of story, there is a village on the sea, in northern Orissa. At the outskirts of a village, there is "The Government Free Kitchen" handled by Kinkar Babu and Gobar Babu. They give inhuman treatment to the villagers who come there for rice and dal. They have to show their pass before taking the food. The writer comments on the rude behaviour of the suppliers:

"You she-jackal! Show me your pass!" one of the riders on the stools demanded of a haggard old woman, with a flourish of the glistening cane in his hand.

The woman tried to straighten the upper half of her body. Blinking, she muttered, "Lost huzoor!"

“Get Out!” The cane in the guardian’s hand swung briefly, but at high velocity. The woman tumbled. The chowkidar dragged her away and abandoned her under a tamarind tree denuded of leaves. (MMCOS 177)

Nivaran curses the persons who are incharge of issuing the passes. He moves towards the “Ideal Upper Primary School”. The writer depicts miserable condition of the villagers who are on the verge of death, “The verandah was crowded with half - dead people – like a devastated battlefield. Only difference was there was no bloodshed. In fact, there was hardly any blood in anybody to shed even if there arose an occasion for it.” (MMCOS 177)

Then the writer gives realistic picture of man’s helplessness before vagaries of the nature. The fresh dead bodies has been left on the meadow. Nivaran observes the dead body of Raghu’s wife lying under the bush. The vultures advance upon the bush. The number of dead persons increases so high that the families do not have time, strength and means to cremate their dead relatives.

Someone gatecrashes without a pass. Kinkar Babu and Gobur Babu again humiliate the hungry villagers who are half dead. On this occasion it is beastly to measure the degree of one’s hunger. The writer comments on the arrogant nature of Kinkar Babu and Gobur Babu:

The cane in Kinkar Babu’s hand dazzled like a serpent’s tongue. Gobur Babu was lecturing on the punishment the criminal deserved.

“How dare you do this to your very license to live? Is it your patnernal property, you rogue?” Gobur Babu gave vent

to his wrath on someone holding out a soiled pass. (MMCOS 178)

Nivaran takes the advantage of the chaos and enters without the pass. He sits at the end of a row. He eats a coconut - shellful of rice and a thin yellowish liquid dal. While returning home he notices the old woman who was dead under the tamarind tree and a crow was pecking at her eyes. Further he watches a dying man in soldier's dress. He stops near him and takes off his dress and puts it on himself. Thus the writer depicts very effectively man's struggle for survival.

Then the writer throws light on the pathetic condition of Nivaran's father, Chakuli Jena. When he notices Nivaran in the home, he asks him for a little food. But Nivaran doesnot take any notice of his father. He insults him. The writer gives details of this situation:

“Why should I bring for you? Who stops you from going to the free kitchen? I will kick you silent if you go on ordering me about!” yelled Nivarna.

“Kick me silent, will you? Who but a worthy son can announce this!” Chakuli hid his face under the quilt. His hiccup sounded like a prolonged cry, broken by his swearing against his son. (MMCOS 180)

Thus the writer shows that while facing such type of critical condition even the blood-relationship ends. It shows man's struggle for survival. All the relations, human values end here.

Nivaran opens the bundle of rice and eats of it and hides remaining one behind an earthen pot. Then he goes out. When he comes, he does not find the rice. He suspects his father. But the old father tells him that he

has not eaten a morsel of food for three days. Further Nivaran pushes the earthen pot and finds two rats running away. He watches number of red little rats. He goes out to find his cat Rangji. When he returns with his cat he finds two rats instead of five. Suddenly his father is beset with spasms and hiccup. He vomites and Nivaran observes red limbs of the rat on the stuff vomited out by the old man.

Now Nivaran discovers new idea to solve his problem of food. He places two rats in pot and goes out in search of fire. Thus the wirter depicts the final struggle of son and father for their survival.

The story is notable for its authentic presentation of the miserable condition of the villagers affected by natural calamity and their struggle for survival.

Of Man and Monkey

In the story “Of Man and Monkey” Manoj Das depicts a strong bond of love between a rustic circus clown and a monkey. He also comments on the exploitation of the very clown who is the orphan boy by the proprietor of the circus. The writer focuses his attention on the rural poverty.

The action of the story takes place in the circus which is camped in a big village. The central character of the story is Latu, a circus clown. He is an orphan boy. He lives lonely life. He has a great attraction for the circus. He joins the Great Grand Circus and works as a clown in it for his livelihood. The little party of the circus includes two dozen men and women, a old bear, a gentlemanly bull, a leopard and a tricky monkey. An old man sells the monkey to Nayak, the proprietor of the circus for few chips. Nayak asks Latu to take charge of the monkey. At first

monkey resentes Latu's interference and scratches his face. Latu pretends to weep and treats the monkey with affection and humility. Now Latu and the monkey become good friends. He does not part from the monkey during the whole day. The monkey has its first ride into circus. It sits on Latu's head. The writer puts it as:

“It was warmly applauded by the rustic audience. Latu's jocular feats were greeted with peals of laughter louder than usual, for, in all his movements he was mimicked by the monkey.” (MMCOS 125)

Thus the clownery presentation of Latu with the monkey become successful. They become the foremost attraction of the circus. Latu treats monkey as his fellow player. In the monkey he has found a pupil and a friend. Here the writer throws light on the friendly relationship between man and animal. Latu, an orphan boy who is lonely and finds true friend in monkey. He treats monkey with love and affection. On the contrary, Latu is treated inhumanly by Nayak. In the course of the time Latu becomes old and feeble. When the circus party is travelling from one place to another, they came under a heavy rain. Latu suffers from high fever. He is unable to perform his show. In Latu's absence, monkey carries on the show successfully. After a week Latu recovers. But he becomes very weak. He requests Nayak to give him money to buy a tonic. But selfish Nayak rejects his appeal. He insults Latu. The writer depicts it as: Nayak burst out, “If you dislike my ways and dealings, you can quit! That monkey is performing rather well!.” Then he added, absolutely unnecessarily, “Better I provide the creature with some tonic!” (MMCOS 127)

Thus Latu is helpless and lonely at the last phase of his life. He leaves quietly the circus tent and sleeps on verandah of a lonely inn. Then the monkey escapes from the circus. As Latu sits his eyes closed, the monkey arrives there. Latu becomes very happy. He fondles his pupil. The monkey solves his problem of livelihood. The writer describes it as: “He could comfortably earn his bread roaming from village to village with the dear companion.” (MMCOS 128)

Thus Nayak represents selfish and heartless attitude. He gives ill-treatment to his honest servant. He stands for the changing values of rural culture. On the other hand, the monkey from animal world remains honest with his companion. At the end of the story justice is given to Latu. Latu represents rural values like simplicity, kindness, devotion for work. The story highlights intimate relationship between human and animal world which is the prominent feature of rural culture.

The Kuturi Nani

In “The Kuturi Nani” Manoj Das depicts an authentic village life in early twentieth century India. The story reflects Manoj Das’ nostalgic longing for a lost world of love and innocence. The writer comments on the exploitation and harassment of Kuturi Nani by her drunkard husband. The story depicts domestic life of Kururi Nani.

The setting of the story is Gunupur village. The writer pens the village life with realism and precision. He states:

Our small bungalow, a rented house, was situated on the outskirts of Gunupur on the river Vamsadhara, amidst acres of wilderness. We - my mother, my elder sister and I – had come to spend a season there with my newly married

maternal uncle. All was quiet by the noon time ... I felt restless and slipped out of the house. (MMCOS 205)

The story is woven around the character of Kuturi Nani. Kuturi means sensitive to tickling and Nani means sister. Kuturi collects milk from cattle-owners in her village and supplies in official colony. She also supplies milk to the narrator's uncle's house. She forms friendship with narrator who was a child. Kuturi Nani is doing the profession of collecting and supplying milk for her livelihood. On the other hand her husband does not do any work and remains idle in the house. Nani's husband gives ill-treatment to her. He drinks a lot and beats her severely. But Nani does not complain or protest her husband. She silently endures her husband. She adjusts herself with helpless condition which is the feature of rural culture. She symbolizes modesty, simplicity and endurance.

One day Nani did not come. The narrator with Nageshwar, the servant visit the house of Nani. He describes the house of Nani which throws light on her poverty. The writer evokes rural sensibility by describing earthen houses and huts. He puts it as:

We climbed the embankment and then passed through rows of sal trees. Now we were entering the hamlet of small earthen houses and huts. I could not contain my excitement any longer. "Nageshwar, have you been to Nani's castle – I mean her house – before hand?"

"So many times. There it is!" He showed at a dilapidated hut. Nani was emerging from it with an earthen jar. (MMCOS 208)

The narrator notices cuts on her forehead. She can not walk properly. She was beaten by her brute husband mercilessly. The narrator with his family leaves Gunupur. But he doesnot forget Nani. He states, “The train left, my eyes focused on the receding landscape of Gunupur, dominated by the vision of Kuturi Nani’s tearful face.” (MMCOS-209)

The writer throws light on the economical conditions of the Indian villagers, sunk in poverty and illiteracy. It also comments on exploitation of the rustic woman by drunkard husband in male dominated society. The writer has become successful to present an authentic Indian rural culture in the story.