Conclusion

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, an attempt was made to present the Indian fictional villages in the light of sociological definitions and analysis. At the outset, an in-depth study of the real village was conducted and the results categorised. Armed with such knowledge, a path was cut into the fictional village and its precincts carefully examined. The study thus made also revealed the life of the inhabitants of this rurality. Thus, two types of villages were encountered; one the actual, historical village described in the texts of history, economics, sociology, and so on. The other was what may be termed a 'literary' village, seen primarily in Indian English fiction. In any attempt to correlate the two, there arises an interesting question regarding the historicity of the 'literary' villages. This question of historicity is essentially a two-pronged one. The first part of the question is whether the representations of the village in the novels analysed provide a historically verifiable picture of actual Indian villages. And, the second part is whether the novels themselves can be viewed as historical documents that faithfully depict the truth of the Indian villages. To answer this question we must understand that there are different types of historicity; and here, in connection with the villages, there are principally two types of historicity possible. One is empirical historicity and the other experiential historicity. Empirical historicity relies on scientific or statistical study while experiential historicity is based on human experience, not only that of the writers but also that of the larger populace. The former is to be ascertained and confirmed in terms of the fidelity of the representations to actual sociological, economic and political phenomena, real events, persons, etcetera; while the latter can be established in terms of the faithfulness of the representations to the lived realities and experiences of the people in the villages, their trials and tribulations, their fears and anxieties, and the forces that govern and direct their lives.

In this treatise the real village is viewed from three perspectives namely, physical, social and conceptual. To study and analyse the characteristics of each perspective, texts of different disciplines such as sociology, political science, economics, religion, and
history were extensively made use of. These volumes so consulted provided ample information about the origins of the villages, their layout and population, family structures prevalent in them, their economic systems, and their systems of social structuring. In addition, details on conceptual areas such as religion, belief systems and other factors of a real Indian village were also gathered. It was found that though India is a land of villages, it is difficult to point out a single village as a typical village. This is due to the fact that one village is slightly or substantially different from another village in many respects. From the multidisciplinary texts it was also possible to gauge the changes the village had undergone and also determine the multidimensional impact of the change. It was also found that mainly three factors were responsible for the change that the villages underwent; namely industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation. However, in spite of the apparent changes, the villages also remained basically the same in many respects. The houses, buildings, roads and other things changed but landmarks like rivers, forests, and hills and certain life practices and attitudes remained substantially the same. All this has been included in the first chapter titled, “The Indian Village: A Multi-dimensional Space”. It may also be pertinent to say here that the most recent changes experienced by the villages have been stimulated by the processes of liberalisation and globalisation.

Bearing in mind the results of the sociological study of the real villages, the fictional villages, as they appear in the novels of Anand, Narayan, Rao and Markandaya, were approached. Most of the novels of these writers are in fact village novels and these fictional villages were analysed in the light of the pertinent information from the selected works of these authors. The same parameters that were used to study the real villages were also used in analysing the villages in the novels. Thus, in the second, third and fourth chapters, the village was analysed as physical, social and conceptual entities respectively. The village was at first considered as a physical or real space. Here, in the second chapter, the layout of the village and the lanes, the design and construction of the houses and roads, and such physical features were examined. In addition, the population of the villages, the location of the temples, other landmarks, and so on were studied. In the third chapter, the village was viewed as a social or lived space. It was found that the
four writers, while mentioning the different basic aspects of the village society gave emphasis to certain particularities. For example, while Anand is eloquent on trade union activities and revolution, Rao and Markandaya are silent on that aspect. This chapter sheds light on social and family customs. While discussing the economic system prevailing in the villages, mention is also made about the ruthlessness of the zamindars and the landowners, the exploitation of the moneylenders and the resultant rural poverty. Industrialisation and the consequent migration of the villagers, and the repercussions of urbanisation and modernisation, all have been elaborately charted out in this section. Another important aspect of this chapter is the study made on the religious beliefs of the villagers. Religious beliefs have become the woof and warp of the life of the Indian villagers and so elaborate comments have been included on religion, Gods, Goddesses and the high priests. This has invariably led to a discussion on the evils of the caste system and untouchability. The first half of the twentieth century was a turbulent period with the storms of nationalism, the independence struggle, and anti-colonial and anti-imperialistic movements making their presence felt on the political scene. Gandhi appeared as a silver lining on the big, dark cloud that had gathered. All these find expression in the third chapter.

The fourth chapter dwells on the analysis of the rituals, the beliefs systems, the knowledge systems and other conceptual practices of the village community. The belief of the villagers in their fate and karma is exemplified in this chapter together with their trust in horoscopes and omens. It is also evident from this section that the villagers have immense faith in prayers and in the scriptures. Another point extensively discussed is the belief of the gullible villagers in superstitions. A short sketch at the end of the last chapter on the changes that the villages have undergone tries to give information about the changing rural scenes.

As mentioned earlier, two types of historicities have been identified—empirical historicity and experiential historicity. This work can thus be analysed using these two paradigms. Empirical historicity lies in the fact that the villages in the novels bear a general resemblance to the real villages and have many of the characteristics of the real
villages. Novels may bear general correspondences to historical epochs and to actual events and phenomena. The novelist is a witness to the events and conditions of his times and he may give occasional expression to those happenings. But it must be borne in mind that these novelists do not describe a village that actually existed at any point in the course of time and hence these villages, as such, are not found in any text of history. So also, their portrayal of a real event may not be historically accurate. Moreover, the villages in the novels are not identifiable villages that exist anywhere in India. In other words, the villages seen in the novels are representative villages created by the Indian writers in English. Hence they are not historical villages as such, in the sense, that none of the villages described in the novels existed in actuality, anywhere in India. However, the authors with their first hand knowledge of the Indian villages, brought together a number of features from the different real villages and created their fictional villages that sometimes feel truer than a faithful depiction of actual villages. The fictional villages have been depicted as they evolved in the minds of their creators. The personal experience of the novelist might have contributed to the nature of the village and he might have also fashioned the village to suit the requirements of his story. Hence these novels cannot be taken as real historic documents of the Indian villages.

At the same time, the study also reveals that the villages described in the novels and the narrations of life in them do resemble the larger experiential patterns of actual villages and the life therein. Experiential historicity concerns the life experiences of the people living in the villages. Such experiential history, which the fictional texts give, may be found in few texts of history or sociology. It is presented and highlighted primarily in fictional texts. The duty of fiction is not to replicate empirical history, but to present faithfully a quintessence of the experience of the villagers – their fears and sorrows, their pains and sufferings, their joys and tribulations. For example, only experiential historicity can reproduce the injustice and misery that the untouchables suffered in India. The humiliation and anguish of Bakha and Sohini can be effectively portrayed only in this manner. No empirical historicity can reproduce the human degradation and anguish of the coolies in the Assam tea plantations and in the factories and slums of Bombay as revealed in the novels *Two Leaves and a Bud* and *Coolie* respectively. Only experiential historicity
can be resorted to in successfully depicting the tragic fate of Nathan and Rukmani and the consequences of industrialisation. Such experiential historicity is probably equal, if not more, in value to empirical historicity due to the fact that it explicates the thoughts, feelings, beliefs and passions of the people. And that is the intrinsic worth of these novels.

Another dimension of experiential history is seen in the fact that these writers who never lived in secluded ivory towers took certain firm positions, stands and attitudes in the political, social, religious, and economic arenas, with regard to the life in the villages. This to a great extent depended on the ideological beliefs and approaches of the authors, which in turn represented certain denominations within the larger attitudinal sphere of Indian society of the times. Thus the writers also gave a clear view of the political and social attitudes that influenced the general approaches and attitudes to village life. These attitudes and positions were not exclusively of the authors alone, but on the other hand, it emanated from their social responsibility. In fact, it was the *vox populi*.

So, it may be said that these novels remain fictional historic texts or documents parallel to actual historical documents. They provide exhaustive insights about the villages and the life in the villages. The intrinsic value of these novels lies in the fact that they are chronicles of rural life with an amply magnified experiential dimension, that brings out the different contours of the villages and the life therein. Thus, the reader has the experience of fiction becoming history through them.