

## CHAPTER – I

### THE CONCEPT OF RURAL CULTURE : THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

#### 1.1 THE NATURE OF THE TERM ‘RURAL’

In order to be clear about the term ‘rural culture’ we should first discuss the meaning of the word ‘rural’. It is the adjectival form of the Latin word ‘ruralis – rus – ruris’ which stands for ‘country’. The Oxford Dictionary states of the term ‘rural’ as ‘agricultural’ or ‘pastoral’. Webster’s Dictionary explains the word as: “rural is the comprehensive, non-specific word referring to life on the farm or in the country as distinguished from life in the city.”

While explaining the term ‘rural’ N.K. Misra in his *Rural Geography* quotes, “...that the term ‘rural’ essentially means an area which is characterised by non-urban style of life, occupational structure, social organisation and settlement pattern. Rural is essentially agricultural, its settlement system consists of villages or homestead; socially it connotes greater inter-dependence among people, more deeply rooted community life and a slow moving rhythm of life built around nature and natural phenomenon and occupationally it is highly dependent on crop-farming, animal enterprises, tree crops and related activities.”(1-2)

The word ‘country’ is derived from the Latin word ‘contra’ which means “land with farms and small towns, rural region as distinguished from city or town”. This again leads us to the word ‘village’, which is derived from the Latin word ‘villaticus’ which means: “a group of houses (villas) in the country, larger than hamlet and smaller than a city or town”, “an agricultural estate of Roman or early medieval times.” Thus

‘village’ and ‘agriculture’ are inseparably associates. The following passage from *Society: An Introductory Analysis* by Melver and Page gives nature of ‘city’ and ‘country’:

For many centuries city and country have been the two recognizable general types of human habitation. But between the two there is no sharp demarcation to tell where city ends and country begins. Scattered farmsteads pass perceptibly into villages, villages into towns. Rural and urban depict models of community life, not simply geographical locations. (311)

Perhaps, the pioneering work on village studies was done by Gilbert Slater (1918). Slater, while writing in his “Introduction” to the study of some *South Indian Villages* observes:

“Villages came before towns and even in the most industrialised countries, where all economic questions tend to be studied from an urban point of view, it is well be reminded that the economic life of a town or city can not be understood without reference to the lands which send its food and raw material and the villages from which it attracts young men and women. The importance of rural activities and of village life in India in view of the enormous preponderance of its agricultural population over that engaged in mining manufacture, commerce and transport is not likely to be overlooked...” (56)

## 1.2 THE NATURE OF THE TERM 'CULTURE'.

The term 'culture' has been conceptualized differently. The classic definition of culture was provided by the 19<sup>th</sup> century English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in the first paragraph of his *Primitive Culture*(1871): "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."(874) M.Albrow (2003:6) defines culture as "ways of acting, thinking and feeling which are transmitted from generation to generation ... through learning, not through inheritance." (210)

In *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia Article* the term 'culture' is explained as: "Integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour that is both a result of and integral to the human capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations."

Culture thus consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, ceremonies and symbols. It has played a crucial role in human evolution, allowing human beings to adapt the environment to their own purposes rather than depend solely on natural selection to achieve adaptive success. Even human society has its own particular culture, or socio-cultural system. Variation among cultures is attributable to such factors as differing physical habitats and resources; the range of possibilities inherent in areas such as language, ritual and social organization; and historical phenomena such as the development of links with other cultures. An individual's attitudes, values, ideals and beliefs are greatly influenced by the culture (or cultures) in which he or she lives. Culture change takes place as a result

of ecological, socio-economic, political, religious or other fundamental factors affecting a society.

Further *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* gives the details of cultural types. The relationship between culture and topographic area suggests the concept of culture type, such as hunting and gathering or a special way of hunting, pastoral cultures centred upon sheep, cattle, reindeer, and so on; and horticulture and agriculture.

Then it is mentioned that configuration and pattern are concepts related to culture area and culture type. They view culture as meaningful organizations of traits: areas, occupations, configurations (art, mathematics, physics), or patterns (in which psychological factors are the bases of organization). Clark Wissler's "Universal Culture Pattern" was a recognition of the fact that all particular and actual cultures possess the same general categories: language, art, social organization, religion, technology and so on. (878)

Keeping in view the various conceptualizations, Kameshwar Choudhary in his '*Globalization and Culture*' defines culture, as a way of life of humans covering way of thinking, feeling, and acting, which are transmitted from one generation to the next both at the level of ideas and practices in the forms of values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, traditions, customs, religion, language, artefacts etc. According to him, in this sense, culture can be viewed as having three aspects: ideational aspect (the valuational / normative / representational / symbolic facet), behavioural aspect (cultural practices, or practices associated with cultural norms, values, beliefs etc., such as customs, traditions, rituals among others), and material aspect (material objects / goods artefacts associated with ideational and behavioural aspects of culture) (211)

### **1.3 THE CONCEPT OF 'RURAL CULTURE' AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS**

Keeping in view the theoretical discussion of the terms 'rural' and 'culture', the concept of 'rural culture' may be explained with the following words:

**A way of life of people living in a village/country/ a rural region who spend their life on the farm or in the country as distinguished from life in the city, at the level of ideas and practices in the forms of values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, traditions, customs, religion, language, works of art, institutions, tools, techniques etc.**

The following are the characteristics of rural culture which reflect in rural fiction.

- Each village or each rural region has its own texture of life its 'sthalpurana' caste and class systems, traditions and arts, taboos, superstitions, social mores and dialects.
- The Indian village society is dominantly agrarian. The 'Mother Earth' is the dearest to the villagers. The love of land is deeply rooted in the minds of peasants. They can not be separated from it. The villager's love of land is a unique characteristic of the rural culture.
- Exploitation, poverty, ignorance, illiteracy, unhealthy competition are the characteristics of Indian rural life.
- Superstitions, blind beliefs, tradition, customs have a powerful hold on the minds of the villagers.

- Nature provides suitable setting to rural life. The flora and the fauna are often used in the similes and metaphors. Rustic idiom and agrarian imagery, regional expressions evoke rural sensibility.
- A peasant in India has to face natural calamities like drought, heavy rains, storms, changing courses of rivers, pest and pestilences. This fight for survival is depicted in Indian rural fiction.
- Simplicity, straightforwardness, beauty, harmony, serenity, hospitality, nobility, innocence and spiritual faith of Indian villagers are the positive aspects of Indian rural culture.

#### **1.4 THE NATURE OF THE TERM ‘RURAL FICTION’ AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS**

The term ‘rural fiction’ is very rarely used by English writers and critics. Phyllis Bentley used the term ‘rural regional’ (44-45) for those writers whose fiction show the dominance of the rural element. The term ‘rural novel’ is perhaps for the first time annotated in *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms* (1973) by Roger Fowler. But he does not define it. He only gives a few obvious features of its content: “the usually even pace of country life,” “the self sufficiency, resilience and limited ambition of many peasants their resolute practicality and acceptance of things.” (165)

The literary theoreticians like Beckson and Ganz in their *A Reader’s Guide to Literary Terms Dictionary* very clearly describe ‘regional literature’ as follows: “Regional literature is generally realistic and is likely to concern itself with life in rural areas or small towns rather than urban centres.” (181)

The above discussion shows, that rural fiction is a sub-species of the Regional Literature. Similarly, writing about ‘the regional’ and ‘local colour literature’, M.H. Abram in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* says : “The detailed representation in prose fiction of the setting, dialect, customs, dress and ways of thinking and feeling which are distinctive of a particular region.” (145)

The connection of the term ‘region’ undoubtedly includes the rural region. Local colour which is the important characteristics of the regional literature, comprises the topographical configuration of the locality with its inhabitants, their customs, costumes, religious faiths, festivals, rituals, pastimes, taboos and superstitions.

Dr. V.D. Katamble in his *The Rural Novel in Indian English* throws light on nature of ‘region’. According to him the locality, the landscape (nature), the inhabitants, their socio-cultural life and their speech go to make up the local life of the region. He further mentions that a strong love for the homeland, locality and the charming past is very strong in the minds of the people, especially when they are estranged from their locality. He further adds that God, nature, religion and the members of the society enter into a correspondence with the regional society. That is why religion, superstitions and nature’s vagaries greatly influence and mould the life of people. All this is local colour.

Further Dr. Katambale explicates the terms ‘local colour’ and ‘atmosphere’ which are largely responsible for the creation of local or regional life. According to him Nature (landscape, setting) plays basic role in creation of local colour and atmosphere. Whereas local colour serves only as an extrinsic background, atmosphere is intrinsically connected with the characters. According to him a real artist himself

becomes one of the characters or at least a close observer of the events in the region. The region speaks, feels and participates in the activities of its dwellers. He further mentions that 'realism' is the forte of the regional fiction. Since the regional writer deals with life of the people living before his eyes he focuses on the portrayal of the region and its characters as they are in actual life.

Then he states characteristics of rural fiction. According to him a rural fiction must establish its characteristics local colour and rural atmosphere. Each village or each rural region has its own texture of life - its 'Sthalapurana'. Further he adds second characteristics of rural fiction. According to him the village or the rural region in a rural novel must emerge as a living protagonist, in terms of the story there may be central figure, a hero or a heroine who again is necessarily a representative figure.

Keeping in view the above discussion of the literary term 'rural fiction' the following prominent characteristics of 'rural fiction' are drawn in order to study short fiction of Manoj Das.

- There should be establishment of local colour and rural atmosphere. It means description and evocation of geographical setting of the village or the rural region with its physical phenomena such as the land, the hills, the rivers and the flora and the fauna. The local colour must be organically connected with the life of people.
- The village or the rural region in a rural fiction must emerge as a living protagonist, in terms of the story a central figure, a hero or a heroine who is a representative figure.

- There should be portrayal of the region and its characters as they are in actual life.

## **1.5 GLOBALIZATION AND CHANGING PHASES IN INDIAN RURAL CULTURE.**

There was growth of industrialization/urbanization in India after the First World War. The new tools of farming, new means of transport and communication and chemical substances were introduced. As a result there is a gradual change in the life of the rural people, in their economy and the structure of their social, religious and cultural relations. The traditional rural society resisted the change, but ultimately reconciled to it. The rural culture in India started changing rapidly. Rural India underwent several major transformations during the period of globalization.

While commenting on the studies on rural culture under the regime of globalization in India, in his “Globalization and Culture” Kameshwar Choudhari states two perspectives: (a) reorientation of the socio-cultural/valuational life in villages with adaptive changes, that is; without homogenization; and (b) rural life undergoing profound changes, as noted in the increasing disenchantment with village life, weakening of solidarity/ unity, increasing consumerism, increasing market orientation and instrumental attitude with the spread of agribusiness, etc. (298)

Further he gives observations of Panini (1999) on shift from agriculture to agribusiness. His study observes that farmers are developing an instrumental attitude, with the adoption of new agricultural practices. The market forces them to provide scope for speculative orientations lead to crises in case of failures of crops and even resulting in suicides. Further he mentions that farmers are now dispossessed of their

knowledge of traditional agriculture with growing agribusiness. They are losing the tradition of resilience and pragmatism, which had been the base of their survival strategy. The rich farmers prefer to build farm houses and to secede from village life, while the labour is demanding higher wages and going to near by towns and cities for work. (300)

Then Kameshwar Choudhari gives observations of Kulkarni (2011) on changing 'Bharat' (referring to rural India) during the globalization based on his personal understanding and as narrated to him by a villager. Kulkarni notes disappearance of *sneh* (affection), *atmeeyata* (sense of closeness) and *swabhiman* (self-pride) from the village life. Hearts of people have turned dry. 'Almost all people have become money-minded'. There is increase in disputes over property, both within and between families. The old system of dispute settlement by village elders has almost broken down. Respect for elders has declined both within families and at the village level. The craze for money is on the increase. Honesty and scruples are disappearing. Corruption is rampant as is widely reported in the implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act Scheme. Educated and nouveau riche families are seen to be highly individualistic and least cooperative. There are motorcycles as well as mobile phones in large numbers. But civic sense has become weak. Kulkarni quotes the observation of a villager: 'In the past, our people [rural] were poorer but happier. Prosperity has come at the cost of our traditional ethos of cooperation, mutual care and tolerance.' (300-301)

Manoj Das also expresses his anguish over the changing the age-old village. The disappearance of serene and placid village life causes him pain. In his editorial part of the monthly *The Heritage* devoted to the

350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the city of Madras, he expresses his views on changing village life. He puts it as:

What has been the biggest loss to India during the recent years? ... Let me share with you the answer I would readily give. The biggest loss has been the destruction of Indian village.

The village is neither dead nor in a coma, it has just been driven crazy. Its harmony, serenity and beauty have disappeared or is fast disappearing giving way to bizarre life style marked by ecological ruination and exploitation of caste sentiments by politicians, intrusion by commercial enterprises-ranging from arbitrary establishment of factories to opening up of liquor shops. Let it be emphasized that the extension of technology and new amenities to the village (including electricity) are not at fault. That was necessary and the village has got it as a matter of its right. It is the demoniac hunger for false prosperity and lack of respect for the rural grace, along with an inability to see the consequences of certain kinds of developmental activities on the part of the entrepreneurs, planners as well as the villagers themselves (at least some of them) that have brought about the sad state of affairs.

If the village has lost, who has gained? Is it the city? The answer, unfortunately, is “No”. Someone described Los Angeles as seventeen suburbs in search of a city. In the Indian context, we will not be very far from the truth if we

describe any of our major cities (New Delhi excluding) as seventeen hundred slums in search of a city ...

Manoj Das gives an account his childhood memories which are spend in a village by the sea in his writings. He also takes note of changing social scenario of rural India in his short fiction which is discussed in the next chapters of the present study.

## **1.6 THE ORIGIN, HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF SHORT STORY.**

After the detailed theoretical discussion of the concept of rural culture and its prominent characteristics which reflect in the present study of short fiction of Manoj Das, it is also necessary, to focus the origin, history and development of short story as a literary genre.

The short story, the genre of imaginative literature is defined in *A Reader's Guide to Literary Terms Dictionary* as follows:

“A prose narrative briefer than the short novel, more restricted in character and situations, and usually concerned with a single effect. Unlike longer forms of fiction, the short story does not develop character fully; generally, a single aspect of personality undergoes change or is revealed as the result of conflict. Within this restricted form, there is frequently concentration on a single character involved in a single episode. The climax may occur at the very end and need not involve a denouncement, though many other arrangements are possible. Because of limited length, the background against which the characters move is generally sketched lightly.” (203)

Similarly, M. H. Abrams in his *A glossary of Literary Terms*, gives the nature of short story. He states:

A short story is a brief work of prose fiction, and most of the terms for analyzing the component elements, the types, and the various narrative techniques of the *novel* are applicable to the short story as well. The short story differs from the **anecdote** the unelaborated narration of a single incident – in that, like the novel, it organizes the action, thought, and dialogue of its characters into the artful pattern of a plot. And as in the novel, the plot form may be comic, tragic, romantic, or satiric; the story is presented to us from one of many available points of view; and it may be written in the mode of fantasy, realism, or naturalism. (286)

The form of prose narrative which approximates the present concept of the short story was developed, beginning in the early nineteenth century, in order to satisfy the need for short fiction by the many magazines that were inaugurated at that time. (287)

Since time immemorial, man has been in touch with stories and deriving pleasure and lessons of life from it. The christening of this form took place late in 1933. The term came to be used for the first time in OED supplement. It was then recognized as particular kind of literary product.

The art of storytelling is the oldest artistic faculty in the world. Stories have long history and their forms are diverse. Stories can include histories or narratives of real battles, victories, and happenings. Stories are made up to entertain or to instruct the listener. The first tales of oral tradition explain how things got started. The next stage in the evolution of storytelling was the period of the beast fables, stories in which animals

are shown acting like humans in order to teach a moral lesson. The beast fable form is even used occasionally by modern writers. (Charters 787)

The religious parable is the another early form of the story which present didactic lessons justifying the ways of God. Brief tales in the classical and postclassical literature of Greece and Rome were often included in large narrative collections, like the *satyricon* of Petronius in the first century A.D. and the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius in the second century. These stories were brought to Europe from the East which became part of the reservoir of traditional material for later storytellers. An example of the such works is the *Panchatantra*. Its original Sanskrit form dates back to the early sixth century. In a variety of translations it spread through Europe in the Middle Ages. Short narratives were commonly written in verse in the medieval period in Europe. Prose was usually reserved for devotional, instructive pieces until the fourteenth century. The short prose tales of Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) became popular. In the same century, the Englishman Geoffrey Chaucer wrote the *Canterbury Tales*, which include different short fictional genres like the religious parable, the romance, and the fabliau. The medieval distrust of stories as entertainment took hundreds of year to overcome. Most of the Renaissance storytellers in Italy, England, France, and Spain are part of the Boccaccian tradition and include a structure of moral and religious values in their narratives. (Charters 787-88)

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the fictional narratives evolved into forms as closer relations of modern stories and novels. These prose forms developed in periodicals were popular with middle class European readers. The news periodicals printed a variety of prose – character sketches, satires, gothic tales, rogue stories, simple adventure stories, and sentimental sketches. In France, Voltaire also composed his philosophical

tales in the mid-eighteenth century, and his contemporaries Diderot and Marquis de Sade wrote stories to illustrate their theories of morality and psychology. The older tradition had played itself out, and a new era of storytelling was about to begin. The periodicals became a market for professional writers of stories. This literary form was also shaped and given vitality by the spirit of its age. Originality and imagination were valued above all other qualities in writing. (Charters 788-89)

Then a different kind of short fictional narrative emerged in which every word chosen in the structure of the plot, and every detail of description and characterization, contributes to a unified impression. German writers were the first to experiment and develop this new form into original, imaginative narratives that resemble what we call short stories. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote some short prose fiction. The writer Washington Irving read these German authors and was inspired to create Americanized versions of European folktales. His tales has an enormous influence on the next generation of writers in America. He handled fictional narrative in a descriptive and discursive manner. Shortly afterward, the young writers Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe began contributing fiction to magazines. They used more dramatic compression in developing their plots and revealing their characters. Poe published his theories about short fiction in his book reviews. He stressed the concept that power and unity could be achieved in works of short fiction. (Charters 789-90)

The mid-nineteenth century was a time of great transition in literature. The earlier mode of romanticism slowly gave way to realism. Fiction by Leo Tolstoy illustrates this realist mode. His fictive world is a mirror of the actual world of men and women at the time. The literary form developed spectacularly into nineteenth century. Guy de

Maupassant and Anton Chekhov, were the most influential writers of short fiction at the end of the nineteenth century. They brought remarkable innovations to the content and form of the short story. Both wrote realistic fiction, and both are considered modern writers because of the content of their stories. Experimental writers of the next generation were influenced by Chekhov. These were the modernist writers in the early years of the twentieth century, who challenged the conventions of the dominant literature and culture. In Europe this group included Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, D.H.Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, and Issac Babel. Influenced profoundly by both Chekhov and Maupassant were the American modernists, including Sherwood Anderson, Katherine Anne Porter, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, and Richard Wright. Today the short story is well established in every country of the world. The flood of new magazine fiction often carries with it stories of real literary distinction. The contemporary short stories reflect the attitudes toward life which govern an author's sense of reality, and the literary techniques of expression. (Charters 791-93)

After passing through various stages, the short story has developed in its present form. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, firmly developed plot design was given the significance. The methods of poetry (figurative and rhythmic) and drama (direct presentation) have become central in it. A large number of writers experimented with the structure and texture of the short story. Every author uses the elements – plots, characters, setting, point of view, style etc. to provide a concrete shape to his themes.

Edgar Allan Poe, commenting on the Importance of Single Effect in a Prose Tale observes that in almost all classes of composition, the unity of effect is a point of greatest importance. He further says that a

skillful literary artist has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents, combines events as any best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. (703-704)

Guy de Maupassant while commenting on the writer's goal states that the serious writer's goal is not to tell a story, or to entertain or to move but to make us think and understand the deep and hidden meaning of events. It is the personal views of the world that the writer tries to communicate to us by reproducing it in fiction. The writer does it with scrupulous accuracy, with such dissimulation and apparent simplicity that it is impossible to uncover its plan or to perceive his intentions. According to him, the writer will pick up his characters at a certain point of their existence and carry them, by natural transitions to the following period and will show how minds are modified under the influence of environmental circumstances, and how sentiments and passions are developed. In this regard, he further mentions that the author knows how to eliminate, between the minute and innumerable daily occurrences, all those which are useless to him. He at the same time knows how to emphasize those which would have escaped the notice of less clear-sighted observers. And it is this, which gives the story its effect and value as fiction. Literature presents cleverly orchestrated events and concealed transitions. He states that each writer has a personal illusion of the world and his goal is to reproduce this illusion of life faithfully, using all the literary techniques at his disposal in the story. (710-711)

Anton Chekhov mentions that a true description of Nature should be brief and have a character of relevance. He further states that Nature becomes animated if one is squeamish about employing comparisons of her phenomena with ordinary human activities. He further states that it is best to avoid depicting the hero's state of mind; instead the writer ought to make it clear from his actions. (717)

Edith Warton while commenting on the subject of the short story states that a good subject for a short story should always be capable of being expanded into a novel. Every subject must necessarily contain within itself its own dimensions. The subject which presents itself to writer is suited to the proportions of a short story or of a novel. If it appears to be adopted to both, the chances are that it is inadequate to either. He further mentions that the effect of compactness and instantaneity sought in the short story is attained by the observance of two unities- the old traditional one of time and other one more modern and complex requires the rapidly enacted episode seen through only one pair of eyes. (726)

Grace Paley in conversation with Ann Charters states that stories are closer to poetry than they are to the novel because first they are shorter and second they are more concentrated, more economical, and that kind of economy, the pulling together of all the information and making leaps across the information, is really close to poetry. (761)

Nadine Gordimer, commenting on the difference between the story and the novel states that if the short story is alive while the novel is dead, the reason must lie in approach and method. According to her the short story, as a form and as a kind of creative vision, must be better equipped to attempt the capture of ultimate reality at a time when we are drawing

nearer to the mystery of life. She further observes that the short story always has been more flexible and open to experiment than the novel. Short-story writers always have been subject at the same time to both a stricter technical discipline and a wider freedom than the novelist. According to her, short story writers see by the light of the flash. They focus on the present movement. They have learned to do without explanation of what went before, and what happens beyond this point. How the character will appear, think, behave, comprehend, tomorrow or at any other time in their lives, is irrelevant. (767)

The nature, brief history and development of short story as a literary genre indicates that there is a wide scope for its study. The present study focuses on the short stories written by Manoj Das. His vast variety of stories are classified into moral fables, fantasies, satires, the mysteries and the ghost stories. He expresses his indebtedness to the heritage of Indian fiction. We notice profound impact of Hindu mythology and Sri Aurobindo's vision of life on all his writings. He is also greatly influenced by the Indian epics like *The Ramayan* and *The Mahabharat* which helped him to shape his creative mind. In the next chapters, his vast variety of tales are analysed to trace the dominant features of rural culture in it.

## **1.7 RURAL CULTURE IN INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION : PERSPECTIVES**

### **I**

There is reflection of rural culture in Indian English Fiction. The customs, rituals, beliefs, superstitions, taboos, codes, institutions, tools techniques, work of art, ceremonies and symbols of rural people in India are reflected in Indian English Fiction. It is necessary to take brief survey

of the reflection of Rural culture in Indian English Fiction so that we get a fairly good perspective for our present study.

Bengal provided the first crop of rural fiction in Indian English. The early novels deal with village life. The first rural novel in Indian English was written by Bengali writer, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) is a romantic tale of domestic life, with a rural setting of an East Bengal village. This was followed by Lal Behari De's *Govind Samanta: The History of Bengal Peasant* (1874), which suggests a strong, deliberately designed story to throw light on the various aspects of Bengali rural life. The last two decades of the nineteenth century produced English translations of two of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novels: the first is *The Poison Tree* (1884), Miriam S. Knight's translation of *Vishavruksha*, a story centring round a feudal landlord and his love-affairs and the second is *Krishnakant's Will* (1895), a translation of *Krishnakanter Will*, presenting a vivid picture of middle class life in a Bengali village. Bipin Chandra Pal's *In the Days of My Youth* (1884), the first volume of his autobiographical novel, *Memoirs of My Life and Times*, which presents authentic glimpses of rural life in East Bengal. R.C. Dutt's *The Lake of Palms* (1902), which is the translation of his Bengali novel, *Sansar* (1885) is an idyllic picture of Bengali village life. The writer focuses his attention on the brighter side of the village life – its joint family system, its simple routine of life and its fairs and pilgrimages. R.P.De in his *Mother and Daughter or A True Picture of Hindu Life of Bengal* presents the trials and tribulations of a Brahmin widow and daughter from a Bengal village of the nineteenth century. Tagor's *Gora* (Bengali 1910, English translation 1923) presents arresting rural scenes. The Mohammedan village of Ghosepara, where Gora gets into scuffle with the British police, is a typical village in the early years of the

twentieth century. Tagore gives a graphic picture of the exploitation of the Indian tenants by the British planters and zamindars.

Balkrishan, a Punjabi writer, wrote *The Love of Kusuma* (1910), which presents an ordinary love story with the background of a Punjabi village. Though the story is commonplace, the village life is depicted with a good deal of local colour. A. Madhaviah, a South Indian writer wrote *Thillai Govindan* (1921) which is remarkable for its vigettes of village life and its theme of religious reform.

It is notable that the fiction of the first phase (pre-1920) is characterized by the spirit of social reform. The writers of this period depicted domestic rural life and peasantry figures in their fiction. The novel and short stories of this period provide graphic sketches of village life. Most of the stories had a didactic strain. C.P. Verghese in *Problems of the Indian Creative Writer in English* rightly comments on the fiction of this period:

- that direct reportage and sketches of domestic as well as rural life in India, which were undertaken with a view to eliminating certain social evils such as the tyranny of customs and superstitions and the economic plight of peasants, directly or indirectly influenced the development of fiction in English. These sketches total up to the portrait of a country that was in the process of gradual transformation because of the impact of English education and the consequent social and religious movements. However, the stories written in the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century were poor creative effort. They highlighted social evils, eulogised the

lovable qualities of Indian womanhood and depicted Indian rural life. (98)

Thus the Indian Fiction in English of this first phase gave beautiful and graphic scenes of village life.

## II

The following survey of brief short stories, novels, translations and autobiographical sketches in Indian English reflect characteristics of rural culture. This is given in order to provide a fuller perspective on the area of our present study.

*Hari, The Jungle Lad* (1924) by Dhan Gopal Mukharji is a long story about a young boy dwelling in a village on the outskirts of a forest. The story presents a fine picture of the countryside life. His *Kari, the Elephant* (1922), *My Brother's Face* (1925), *Gay Neck* (1928), *Ghond, The Hunter* (1928), *Chief of the Herd* (1929) and *The Master Monkey* (1932) are long stories of jungle life.

N. Ramabhadran wrote *Kettle Drums* (1933), a collection of stories which presents the sketches of the headman, the schoolmaster and the landlord of a village. Manjeri Ishvaran is an important short story writer and theorist on the form of the short story. His *Naked Shingles* (1941) is a short story which portrays the fishermen's life. Shankar Ram wrote *The Children of Kaveri* (1926) and *Creatures All* (1933). His later stories present rural reality of India. He presents the superstitions, the caste system, the poverty and other rural problems. S.K. Chettur concerns himself with rural reality, superstitions, feuds and supernatural elements in his collections of short stories: *The Cabras of Dhermashevi and Other Stories* (1937) and *The Spell of Aphrodite and Other Stories* (1957). In

*Scented Dust* (1942), Firoz Khan Noon describes the economic condition of the peasants, the village tax system and the condition of village women. Masti Venkatesh Iyengar's *Short Stories* (1943) presents portrayals of South Indian village life. George Barret's *Forty Three Years* (1944) is a story of a village boy who goes to Bombay and with the contact of urban world undergoes a social change. K. Nagarajan's *Gold Rice* (1945), a collection of short stories, contains descriptions of rural scenes of the coromandel coast. Shanta Rama Rau in her *Remember the House* gives description of the coastal life in Malabar. She contrasts this simple life with posh life in Bombay. Justice M. Anantanaryan's *The Silver Pilgrimage* (1961), gives lavishing descriptions of the Indian country side.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *Steel Hawk* highlights village character and cultural insights. His *Pilgrims in Uniform* gives description of annual pilgrimage of a group of peasants to attend the Car Festival in the holy city of Jagannath. His another story *The Faltering Pendulum* focuses on Indian village life and folk imagination. The story catches the rhythm of the village speech and psyche. His *She, Born of Light* is the story of a chance-meeting between Suta, a peasant girl and Dhruva, an urban artist who comes to the Ajanta Caves. Thus one is the child of nature, pastures and innocence, the other is in pursuit of art, essence and form. The last story in the anthology, *Steel Hawk*, gives an account of the acceptance of modern industrialisation by the traditional rural folk. (72-74)

Mulk Raj Anand in his *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934), *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* (1944), *The Tractor and Corn Goddess and Other Stories* (1947), *The Power of Darkness and Other Stories* (1959), *Lajwanti and Other Stories* (1966) presents beautiful snapshots of village life in twentieth century India.

Raja Rao in his collections of short stories *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947) and *Policeman and the Rose* has painted realistic village life. There is evocation of the villagers's belief in rigid caste system, in legends and superstitions and above all their ignorance and simplicity. In the story *Javni* he presents the true image of an illiterate, simple and credulous woman of an Indian village in the pre-independence days. In *Akkayya*, Raja Rao successfully depicts the life of the traditional joint Hindu families in the villages of the early twentieth century India. *The True Story of Kanakapala, Protector of Gold* is a realistic story of a serpent in the folk-tale style which adds life to narrative even as the whole account illumines the life in Indian villages of more than half a century ago. *The Little Gram Shop* presents a realistic picture of the familiar character of an ordinary bania found in any Indian village in the good old days of the earlier parts of the century. His *Narsiga* presents quite realistically the profound influence that Gandhi and Gandhian movement had over the innocent minds of the ignorant villagers.

R.K. Narayan is a writer of middle class life in Malgudi town. The main setting of Narayan's fiction is an urban region. His protagonists are also white-collared citymen. His involvement with village life is incidental.

However, born and brought up in a village, he depicts certain aspects of rural life in his novels. In his *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) the scene of the hero Chandran's disguise as a saint amidst the villagers of Kopal is revealing. In *The Dark Room* (1938), we venture a little across the Sarayu river into Sukkur village. In his *The Financial Expert* (1952), there is portrayal of the exploitation of the peasants by Margayya. There are references to the Mempi Hills, the ruined temples and the jungle tribes. In *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), there is realistic descriptions

of rural life in scenes of the visits of the Gandhian hero, Sriram to the villages around Malgudi. Narayan gives a realistic picture of the superstitions and gullible villagers of Mangola in his *The Guide* (1959).

### III

The following short survey of Indian English Fiction of the post-1920 period reflects characteristics of rural culture in it. Only the most prominent of them are discussed here .

Venkatramani's *Murugan the Tiller and Kandan the Patriot* (1932) are the pioneering novels of the post-1920 period, that mark a new era in the history of Indian English novel. These novels are extremely important as they manifest for the first time the socio-economic awareness of the Indians in fictional literature. Though these novels depict traditional Indian village life, they are the indicators of the trail of the coming industrial age.

In *Into the Sun* (1933), Frieda H. Das portrays life of Govind Mishra and his wife, an orthodox Brahmin couple from the village of Ratnagiri who migrate the town of Barasel, encounter the city-ways and finally return to their village. The village is described in a routine manner with its usual placidity, greenery, sunlight and open air. The town-life of the same family is contrasted with their village life on several levels.

Shankar Ram's *The Love of Dust* (1938) is a plain tale of agrarian life which depicts the customs, beliefs, family-feuds, land quarrels, debts, the love of land of the rural people.

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) is saga of village life. There is no conventional hero or heroine in it. The village of Kantapura itself, with its

life-giving river Himavathi, with its rustic topography, with its characteristic superstitions and customs is one of the main characters.

Mulk Raj Anand's *The Village* (1939) deals with the boyhood of Lalu, a peasant boy in the Punjab village of Nandpur. The village is depicted as seen through eyes of the peasant boy, Lalu who gradually turns into a rebel against all the village mores. The novel presents an authentic picture of traditional village life.

Anand's *The Road* (1961) presents the tale of the untouchable Bhiku from the Punjab village of Govandhan. The novelist depicts the confrontation between the caste Hindus and the untouchables in the novel. We get some glimpses of 'rural customs' in the novel. Anand's *Coolie* (1936) is a tale of Munoo, an orphaned village boy from the Punjab Kangra hills, who sets out to various cities in search of livelihood. The contrast between the village and the city life is sustained throughout the novel. *The old woman and the Cow* (1960) is another novel of Anand in which he deals with encounter between village and city life. The novelist has depicted both the rural and urban worlds with equal force and reality.

Aamir Ali's *Conflict* (1947) centres round the 1942 Quit India Movement. Shankar, a sensitive village boy, leaves his village, goes to Bombay for college education, and getting stirred up by the political atmosphere in Bombay and fired with patriotism and the zeal for village reconstruction, returns to his village. The novelist depicts a placid village so far unaffected by the impact of the city culture.

D.F. Karaka in *We Never Die* (1944) presents a highly educated cityman who goes to village, marries a village girl and returns to the city. The action shifts from city to village and back from village to city,

welding the two points in a synthesis. The novelist here supports the gospel of village-city synthesis, Hindu-Muslim amity and social change.

Humayum Kabir's *Men and Rivers* (1945) is another rural novel which depicts the tale of Muslim domestic life in a village on the riverside of the Padma in the erstwhile East Bengal. The novel deals with the loves and sorrows of the pioneer farmers who stake their lives in reclaiming land from the Padma riverside for cultivation. The novelist presents a realistic picture of the fluvial culture of Bengal.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960) is a masterly satire on the social and economic life of an Indian village called Sonamitti in the Vidarbha region. The novel presents village life in its various aspects of the eventful pre-1947 days. The physical features of Sonamitti, a village in the coil of the river Kanhan, with several other villages around it forming a circuit, are graphically drawn. In Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* (1947), *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954) and *Music for Mohini* (1952), the village and the city are set in two opposite camps and are shown as clashing with each other. These novels depict the contrast between the village life and the city life on social and cultural levels.

Sudhin Ghose's *The Balaram Tetralogy* is a lonely journey of the protagonist from a rural-pocket of Calcutta to a remote village in Penhari Parganas and then again to Calcutta and finally to some unknown place abroad-depicted through the innocent eyes of the narrator. The tetralogy comprises the four novels, viz., *And Gazelles Leaping* (1949), *Cradle of the Clouds* (1951), *The Vermilion Boat* (1953), and *The Flame of the Forest* (1955). The third and the fourth novels deal primarily with the protagonist's life in the city of Calcutta, first as a student and then as a

young man taking up a variety of occupations. In these novels the village-city relationship is depicted from the narrator's point of view of an innocent, sensitive, imaginative and inquisitive village boy.

In Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), we get a clear picture of the transition from the insular, autonomous village life of the old days to new village life dependent upon the urban civilization of the modern times. The novel depicts the story of rural India of the early 1950s struggling with the forces of tradition and modernity, rapid industrialization and the exodus to the cities. In *Handful of Rice*, Kamala Markandaya depicts the central character Ravi, a peasant boy, who joins in the general exodus to the city of Madras where his life turns into a tragedy. The action starts at village moves towards city and terminates there only. In her another novel *Possession* (1963) Markandaya tells us the story of the relationship between Caroline, an English lady, and Valmiki, an Indian village boy whose soul she wants to possess. The East and the West meet on a complex level of human relationship. In *The Coffer Dams* (1969) of Markandaya, the East-West confrontation is intertwined with the theme of industrialization of rural India, the presence of West is very prominent. The confrontation is presented on the industrial, racial, cultural and personal levels.

In Manohar Malgaonkar's *Cambat of Shadows* (1962) the East-West encounter is depicted. The confrontation of the coolies with masters and the exploitation of the coolies, are subtly dramatized. The coolies in the tea estate are illiterate, superstitious and gullible.

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) presents a picture of the partition tragedy enacted in a village in the Punjab on the Indo-Pak border on the banks of the river Sutlaj. It is the tragic tale of sudden

disruption of the placid village of Mano Majra on account of the communal flare-up. In the novel the agrarian life of the placid Mano Majra village is portrayed with utmost realism and precision.

In Anita Desai's *The Village by the Sea* (1982) the awakening of a remote Indian village under the impact of industrialisation is pictured through the story of a poor agricultural family.

#### IV

The brief survey of notable Indian novels in English translation.

Premchand's Hindi novel *Godan*, translated into English by Dhanapat Rai Srivastava in 1957 and jointly by Jai Ratan and P. Lal in 1972, is a superb portrayal of peasant India. Set in U.P. village, it realistically depicts the exploitation of the peasants by the landlords and moneylenders. Vyankatesh Madgulkar's Marathi novel, *Bangarwadi* (1958), translated as *The Village Had No Walls* (1977) by Ram Deshmukh is a masterpiece of shepherd life in Maharashtra. *Garambicha Bapu* (1952) of S. N. Pendse, translated as *Wild Bapu of Garambi* by Ian Raeside is a classic rural novel. *Dev Chalale* of D.B. Mokashi, translated as *Farewall to the Gods* (1972) by Pramod Kale, is a moving tale of four brothers who come from Bombay back to their ancestral village-home for the last time.

K. Shivram Karanth's Kannada novel, *Marali Mannige* (1950), translated as *The Whispering Earth* (1974) by A. N. Moorthy Rao, presented a gripping tale of the three generations of a poor peasant entangled in vices bred by poverty and ignorance. His another novel, *Chomana Dudi* (1955), translated as *Choma's Drum* (1978) by U. R. Kalkur, is a tragic tale of Choma, an untouchable bonded labourer, whose

ambition to possess his own piece of land and a house proves to be inevitably an error and leads him from one tragedy to another till he inevitably meets his doom. leaving behind him his beloved drum. T. Shivashankar Pillai's Malayalam novel, *Rantitangazhi*, translated as *Two Measures of Rice* (1968) by M. A. Shakoor, realistically portrays the life of South Indian peasants in the difficult period of transition from the old feudalism to the new wage economy. His Akademi award-winning novel, *Chemmeen* (1957), translated into English (1964) by V. K. Narayana Menon, tells us a poignant tale of the fisher folk on the coast of Alleppey in Kerala. It is a simple romantic story woven round a superstition which governs the attitude and activities of the fisherfolk community, all the same put into a realistic setting. Manik Bannerjee's *Boatman of the Padma* (1948), translated from Bengali by Hirendranth Mukharjee, gives a realistic account of the life of the Bengal fishermen. Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyaya's well-known, Bengali rural novel, *Pather Panchali* (1929), translated into English by Mrs. Manika Verma (1973) is the most lyrical novel of the Bengal countryside, based on the writer's own boyhood experiences of his village life. *The River of Blood* (1979) by Indira Parthasarathy, a Tamil novel translated into English by Ka Naa Subramnyam, is a chronicle of social protest grappling with the theme of untouchability.

The fiction of the post 1920 period shows advance in thematic variety, form and technique. The rural fiction of this period depicted the life of the peasants, and untouchables. There is influence of Gandhi on the writers of this period who depicted the miserable lot of the poor villagers and untouchables.

The rural fiction of this period is coloured by a romantic love of the village. The village is depicted in the words of A. R. Desai as a "theatre

wherein the quantum of rural life unfolds itself and functions"(13). There is description of socio-agrarian culture with its characteristic set of customs, rituals, beliefs and superstitions. They depict village life for its own sake.

On the other hand, the post-Independence fiction shows influence of Nehru's favour for industrialization. The fiction of the post -1947 presented the various socio-economic-cultural problems in Indian life. With the industrial revolution, there is change in rural region of India. The traditional set up of the human community in rural area is shaken up and the usual social life is disrupted. The decline of the rural way of life has been reflected in Indian English fiction. With this discussion in mind, an attempt is made in the following chapters to trace the reflection of Indian rural culture in the short fiction of Manoj Das.