CHAPTER – III

IDEOLOGICAL HETERODOXY IN SOVIET LITERATURE
(1964-1982)

i) State Policy Towards Literature and Culture during Brezhnev Period

After Khrushchev’s fall from the power in October 1964 and his replacement by Brezhnev and Kosygin, there were some immediate changes. The Commission for Ideology (established in 1962, during Khrushchev’s regime) was disbanded and the Central committee’s Department of Culture returned to supervise literature. New instructions were issued to publishers. However, there was a confused interval of transition lasting from late 1964 into 1966, during which some interesting literary works and articles by historians and military experts were allowed to appear. The brief period of relaxation can, perhaps, be attributed to the natural caution of the new leadership, a temporary neglect of Cultural Policy because of continuing power struggles in the Kremlin, and possibly also to the pacification of the literary bureaucracy by the award of the Nobel Prize to Sholokhov in 1965.

Ideological control was maintained under Brezhnev but with some important developments. News Coverage was selective. Those items which were thought to develop a “Socialist consciousness” were reported.
and "negative phenomena" were ignored. Hence Soviet disasters, interpersonal conflict, crime, and violence were not covered in the press or on television. These events that portrayed the desired image of the future were given prominence: economic achievements, fulfillment of the economic plan, discussion of the ways of improving productivity and equality of work, Soviet achievement in space and in sport were highlighted. Sensationalism and sex were taboo. Knowledge of unrest in Eastern Europe, such as the rise of solidarity in Poland, or the rise of reform movements under Dubcek in Czechoslovakia, for instance, and of Soviet participation in the civil war in Afghanistan were either not reported at all, or portrayed in a way that would not imply any criticism of inadequacy in Soviet policy.

Many aspects of internal Soviet life were regarded as state secrets. No comprehensive information was published on crime, suicide, accidents, structural inadequacies in government services, the extent of poverty, public catastrophes (such as air crashes), and certainly no criticism of the policies or personal deficiencies of the political leadership was allowed.

In contrast to the Stalin era, warnings to the writers' community, and even arrests and exile were somewhat less inhuman. Still, the warnings offered a choice among three options, all variants of capitulation. The first was observance of the state's rigid standards of ideological purity
and absolute artistic conformity. The second was complete silence. The third, "writing for the drawer," so to speak, rested on hope for a period when dangerous pages of seditious ideas or other subversive art and thought might appear. The modest publication of verse by such long silenced living poets as Boris Paternak and Anna Akhmatova was among the most exciting cultural events, and kept hope alive that such a period would one day come for other works that remained suppressed.¹

But state control was not uniform, many different organizations and institutions had the responsibility for media: Party organisation, government departments, professional associations, local government organs, and voluntary associations (such as the Churches) published their own journals and books. While the Party sought to maintain control, it proved difficult to maintain consistency and differences of opinion over what was and what was not a "Socialist Approach" often occurred. In some of the national republics in particular censorship was less stringent. In Georgia, for example, films were passed for exhibition that would not have been allowed in the Russian republic.

By September 1965 the increasing influence of the neo-Stalinist Politburo member Shelepín and his ally, the KGB chief Semichastny, led to the imposition of a repressive policy against literary dissidents: three

copies of Solzhenitsyn’s novel “The First Circle” and his play “Feast of the Victors” were confiscated by the KGB from the flat of his friend V. Teush; and the writers Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuly Daniel were arrested and accused of having published their works abroad under the pseudonyms of Abram Tertz and Nikolai Arzhak. Their trial in February 1966, at which they were condemned to seven and five years of hard labour respectively, caused considerable indignation throughout the world, as it was the first trial against Soviet writers in which ‘The principle evidence against them was their literary work.’ After the trial a special meeting convened in order that the judge could “explain” the verdict to Soviet Writers demonstrated the authorities’ realization that they had made a mistake. The trial which took place, was ‘open’ only to a carefully selected public. Both Siniavsky and Daniel pleaded not guilty but it did not help much. They were charged with having conducted anti-Soviet propaganda abroad. Both Siniavsky’s “Lubimov” and Daniel’s stories like “Moscow Calling” and “The Man from MINAP” poked fun at the Soviet Establishment and the press. What is, however, particularly odious is that in his labour camp Daniel was to be subjected to great physical suffering; thus, according to well-substantiated reports, he was refused anti-mosquito ointment in the mosquito-infested

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The trial of Daniel and Sinyavski is instructive in showing the way that estranged groups are prevented from articulating their interests: they are suppressed because their activity threatens (at least in the eyes of the elites) the integrity of the system. The charge against the two authors was that they broke article 70, section 1 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR:

"Agitation or propaganda carried out with the purpose of subverting or weakening the Soviet regime or in order to commit particularly dangerous crimes against the state, the dissemination for the said purposes of slanderous inventions defamatory to the Soviet political and social system, as well as the dissemination or production or harbouring for the said purposes of literature of similar content, are punishable by imprisonment for a period of from six months to seven years and with exile from two to five years, or without exile, or by exile from two to five years."\(^5\)

After the trial, it was proposed that Sinyavsky and Daniel should be released against the surety of the Writers' Community and the matter was taken up in a letter signed by 62 Moscow writers led by Vladimir Voinovich, but the proposal was rejected. The letter said that the trial had failed to prove that the books had been published for an anti-Soviet purpose, 'even though we do not approve of the methods used for getting these books published abroad.' "Besides, sentencing a writer for publishing satirical works creates a very dangerous precedent, and one liable to slow

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down the development of Soviet culture. Neither art nor science can exist without the possibility of expressing paradoxical ideas or of creating hyperbolical characters. The complex atmosphere in which we live calls for an extension (and not a limitation) of artistic and intellectual experiments. From this point of view, the trial of Siniavsky and Daniel has done more harm than all the errors they themselves have committed. “

The Sinyavsky - Daniel trial was the catalyst which speeded up the process of dis-affection of many liberal Soviet writers from the regime. The trial could, however, be seen as a compromise on the part of the regime, because concerted efforts by neo-Stalinist failed to secure further arrests of intellectuals or the complete rehabilitation of Stalin at the Twenty-Third Congress of March 1966. Another slight lull from late 1966 to early 1967 was marked by the first publication in the USSR, in a shortened version, of Bulgakov’s novel “The Master and Margarita.

The public prosecutor of Siniavski - Daniel case, argued that the work of the ‘so called’ soviet literary underground was a form of “ideological subversion” in the interests of the “imperialist reactionaries.” Sinyavski, it was alleged, had ridiculed the Soviet system and the principles of Marxism - Leninism; he had ‘maliciously slandered Marxist theory and the future of human society.’ Similar charges were made

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against Daniel who had depicted 'Soviet Society as being in a state of moral and political decay.' This story suggested that the entire Soviet people is to blame for the cult of personality, that 'our prisons are within us', that 'the Government is unable to give us our freedom', that 'we sent ourselves to prison.' Sinyasky and Daniel, like Solzhenitsyn, were harshly dealt with because they allowed their criticisms to be published in the West under the pseudonyms of Abram Tertz and Nikolay Arzhak.

After the appointment of Yury Andropov as chairperson of the KGB in May 1967, a firm but more flexible line was taken on cultural and ideological matters, Solzhenitsyn took the unprecedented step of circulating an open letter attacking censorship to all members of the Fourth Writer's Congress in May 1967, but although letters signed by 80 of the country's most distinguished writers asking that Solzhenitsyn's demands be discussed at the congress were sent to the Union Secretariat, the Union leadership failed to respond or make any public mention of the controversy. Another watershed in Soviet literary politics was the year 1968, which saw the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the hardening of official policy after many writers had signed protests against the trial of the dissidents Galanskov and Ginzburg.

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The vast majority of the soviet writers implied agreement with the reality that their strength lay in their tie to the Party. The powerful Union of Soviet Writers was a creature of the Party. Self-censorship within the Union along with the three more formal means of censorship continued to assure tight control over the printed word. The clear implication of the sections of the Soviet criminal court code which dealt with the printed word was that Soviet law could not and would not tolerate any anti Soviet material. In achieving this end, there was “Agitprop”, the Department of Propaganda and Agitation, “Glavlit”, the Office of Literature Publication and external filter that the Soviet news agency “Tass” provided. Moreover, one had virtually no chance for achievement in the Soviet Writing field unless he was a member of the writers’ union. This party-dominated organisation took great care to admit only those whose politics would serve party ends. Even these controls, however, were not enough. The editor of “Pravda” was officially appointed by the Central Committee of the CPSU, thus in practice, the Politburo. Local newspapers were organs of the district Party Committees.

In late 1969 Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Writers’Union, and other writers, notably Voinovich and Vladimov, were subjected to increased harassment. The hopes of liberal writers were finally dashed at the end of 1969 by Suslov’s dismantlement of the editorial board of “Novy
Mir”. Which almost led directly to the death of Tvardovsky in 1971. In 1970, at Suslov’s instigation, the extreme Russian nationalism associated with the journal “Molodaya Gvardiya” since 1966 was also officially discouraged through dismissals and arrests. Solzhenitsyn was expelled for “Joining hands with those who speak out against the Soviet social system.” As stated above, Tvardovsky suffered with him. The appearance in the West of Tvardovsky’s banned poem “By Right of Memory” served as the final pretext for a campaign against him by editors of rival journals. His most independent colleagues were dismissed from the editorial board of “New World”, creating conditions under which he himself felt obliged to resign.9

The final stage in Solzhenitsyn’s relations with the Soviet authorities began when the KGB discovered his huge history of the prisons and labour camps, “The Gulag Archipelago (Archipelag Gulag). In 1973 the KGB discovered and confiscated a copy of “The Gulag Archipelago”, whereupon Solzhenitsyn authorised its western publication. Shortly afterwards, he was arrested and deported from the USSR.10 Solzhenitsyn’s writing in “One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich” (1962), “For the Good of the Cause (1971), “Cancer Ward” (1968) and the “First Circle (1968)

10 Ibid., pp.537-38.
was a critique of bureaucratic mis-deeds in Soviet Society. Here the author bitterly and sceptically contrasts the ideology of Soviet Socialism with its reality. He caricatures the social elites and Stalinist political leadership and exposes the rhetoric and privilege of those in established positions. The contrast is always made with those who are the objects of authority - prisoners and patients.

Andrei Sakharov, is another critic of soviet power reared under Socialism. Until 1966, Sakharov was an "internal critic" of aspects of Soviet policy. In 1966 he signed a letter to the Twenty-Third Party Congress opposing the rehabilitation of Stalin. He protested against the Soviet law of slander of the state. In 1968 was published in the west his manograph "Reflections on Progress", "Co-existence and Intellectual Freedom" (London, 1968). Here Sakharov argued that 'Socialism and capitalism are capable of long-term development, borrowing positive elements from each other and actually coming closer to each other in a number of essential aspects.' He advocated co-operation between capitalist and socialist states to work out a 'broad programme of struggle against world hunger.' He opposed 'irrational and irresponsible' censorship, the violation of all human rights; he wanted an amnesty for political prisoners and the complete 'exposure of Stalin.'


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The clamp-down on dissenters in the Soviet Union and the withdrawal by the authorities of Sakharov’s clearance for scientific work further alienated him from the Soviet system. In 1970, he became a founder of the Moscow Human Rights Committee. From the mid-1970s, Sakharov took up the cause of many Soviet people whom he felt were discriminated against. In his Novel Prize Speech in 1975 (Peace, Progress and the Rights of Man) he championed the cause of Soviet political prisoners and exiles. He publicly supported the claims of few Jews and Germans who wanted to emigrate, the claims of Crimean Tatars who sought to return to the Crimea, and many other groups. In January 1980, Sakharov was arrested and sent into ‘administrative expulsion’ to the town of Gorky.

Both Solzhenitsyn’s and Sakharov’s early protests were within the framework of Soviet values and practices. Solzhenitsyn opposed - as did Khrushchev - the ‘excesses’ of Stalin; Sakharov agitated quite legally against Soviet tests of nuclear weapons. But the regime’s response in clamping down on dissent led to these critics becoming further enmeshed in ‘deviant’ activities. The action of the Soviet state in the shape of the Security Policy (KGB) not only penalized the offenders, but unintentionally sustained the deviance. It created a sense of distrust, of stigmatization - the deviant becomes aware that his life chances are restricted, his
interactions with other people are inhibited. Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov and Medvedev all lost their formal work position and were socially ostracized by their colleagues.

The majority of Soviet artists and thinkers resigned themselves to the inevitable. However, a few chose a new path: unauthorized circulation of their writings in crude typewritten form, illegal exhibits of canvases, and increasingly frequent smuggling of manuscripts for publication abroad. For the first time in Soviet history, rebellious writers and intellectuals turned defiantly to "Samizdat" and "Tamizdat", "self-publishing" and "Publishing out there", that is, in the West. People were no longer afraid of listening to foreign radio stations and censored news about writings reached those who were curious to know. A number of writers who were forced into emigration, published their works abroad.

Andrei Sinyavsky, whose arrest in 1965 and subsequent trial established the precedent of criminal prosecution for publishing one's work abroad (which was not illegal), shrewdly noted that the existence of censorship promoted, indeed assured, graphomania, since a rejected manuscript inevitably invited suspicions of political discrimination. Many "Samizdat" publications were devoted to a variety of implicitly political causes. Foremost among these was "The Cronicle of Current Events," a scrupulously dispassionate journal that recorded with admirable restraint
and impartiality, Soviet violations of human rights. The “Chronicle” was identified with the so-called Democratic Movement, of which the unofficial leader was Andrei Sakharov.\(^\text{12}\)

Officially, there is separation of church and state in the Soviet Union, and this might be assumed to imply the state’s non-intervention in religious matters. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, complaints multiplied from groups of religious believers - dissident Baptists, Roman Catholics, Moslems, and even members of the Russian Orthodox Church. All of these groups were subjected to systematic mistreatment by the militantly atheist Soviet State, some more that others and at different times with varying degrees of zeal. All were, outwardly resigned to the fact that no religious believer is allowed to occupy a position of any prominence in the USSR.\(^\text{13}\)

The years of Leonid Brezhnev’s leadership, so universally denigrated, were actually a time of contradictory developments in the relationship between the Soviet bureaucracy and the intelligentsia.

The crack in the monolith most apparent to the outside world was the confrontation between the bureaucracy and the creative intelligentsia that marked the Brezhnev era and worsened towards its end. Typically, representatives of the bureaucratic interest and outlook were installed or


\(^{13}\) Ibid., p.259.
maintained in the nominal institutions of intellectual leadership, especially the unions of writers and other artistic categories. Repression of creative individuality, ranging from simple censorship or refusal to publish, all the way to arrest, trial, and imprisonment or exile, put an end to the relative freedom of the thaw of the 1950s and early 1960s, and effectively drove the new surge of creative effort underground. In the best Stalinist style, Brezhnev told the Twenty-Third Party Congress in March 1966, "We are unfailingly guided by the principal of party spirit in art and a class approach to the evaluation of everything that is done in the sphere of culture." 14 For Voznesensky, the Brezhnev regime meant the "collapse of illusions." 15

The period since 1970 has been marked by greater caution and the absence of the unpredictable oscillations in cultural policy typical of the Khrushchev period and, to a lesser extent, the late 1960s. In the first place, the period has been characterised by lively literary debates on such genres as "village prose", "everyday prose", "production fiction", "war prose" and "science fiction", in the course of which a variety of conflicting views an literature and society has been expressed. Secondly, year of relative calm have been punctuated by periodic attacks on liberal and dissident writers, reflecting the regime’s general policy towards dissent.

The bureaucratic organisations controlling literature have not changed much since Khrushchev's time, but an important development has been that since 1971, the Congress of the Writers' Union has taken place every five years - that is just after the Party Congress which also occurs every five years. The purpose of this change was to make it difficult for writers to adopt any independent initiative.

By the mid- and late 1970s the Brezhnev regime seemed to the becoming more lax, both in its literary policy and its tolerance of corruption, perhaps initially because of the continuing policy of "detente" and subsequently because of the growing age and failing health of the party leaders. The height of "detente", the years 1975-1976, witnessed the publication of such interesting anti-Stalinist or critical works as Trifonov's "House on the Embankment; Bondarev's" "shore" and Rasputin's "Farewell to Matyora." By 1977, however, growing annoyance with Carter's 'human rights' policy led the Soviet authorities to take further repressive measures against dissidents. Extremely harsh, attacks on "emigre" scientist and writers, unusual even in the Soviet press, appeared to herald a worsening political climate.

The limits of official tolerance were, however overstepped in January, 1979 with the unofficial printing in eight copies of the almanac "Metropol", compiled by Aksyonov, Bitov, Iskander and others, a collection
of hitherto unpublished Soviet Writings, most of which had been, rejected by Soviet publishing houses.¹⁶

The new crackdown on dissidents occurred from late 1979 because of the invasion of Afghanistan, and the desire to clear Moscow of subversive influences during the Olympic Games of 1980. The deterioration of relations with the USA and the worsening crisis in Poland leading to the establishment of martial law in 1981-82 gave the party no incentive to change its hard line on literary policy. At the Twenty-Sixth Congress of 1981 Brezhnev attacked 'works that defame our Soviet reality' and reiterated the Party's uncompromising attitude towards 'the ideological orientation of our art.'¹⁷

The literary climate in the second half of the 1970s and early 1980s is consistent with the theory and an aging leadership under Brezhnev was attempting to steer a middle course on cultural policy, but occasionally adopted a very harsh line perhaps under pressure from the chief ideologist Suslov or the KGB chief Andropov. It is possible that the KGB may sometimes have operated independently, exceeding the limits established by the party, for in 1977 Brezhnev himself felt the need to give a public

¹⁷ L. Brezhnev, Pravda, February 24, 1981.
assurance that there would not be a return to mass terror.¹⁸

The later years of Brezhnev saw the steady erosion of people's respect for the Party leadership and the state bureaucracy. In spite of this the press, the radio and TV were full of laudatory references to Brezhnev. This left the public sentiment cold and jokes and anecdotes about Leonid Brezhnev and other leaders were widely current among the common people.

While it must be noted that communication was becoming more open and differentiated, this was more in spite of the regime rather than because of the political leadership. On the other hand, Soviet mass media was becoming ineffective, as a medium of political information, in the late Brezhnev period. The authorities gave way, often grudgingly, to demands made by various groups.

Andropov replaced Suslov as 'Chief Ideologue', and between May 1982 and Brezhev's death in November became the most influential member of the Politburo. The clearest sign of Andropov's increasing impact on literature was a Central Committee resolution of July 1982, 'On Creative Connections between the Journals of Literature and Art and the Practice of Communist Construction.' This hard-line decree placed a renewed emphasis on traditional socialist realism, demanding that writers

fulfill the tasks of the Twenty-Sixth Congress, selecting subjects of contemporary relevance, such as industry, agriculture, the army and navy, concentrating on depicting 'positive heroes' and inculcating worthy moral values such as patriotism, hard work, internalism and disapproval of 'political indifference' and 'a consumer mentality.'

In any case, Soviet writing of the Brezhnev era has been purged of the social reformism of the period immediately preceding and allowed and encouraged to immerse itself in probing human emotions. These span a wide range and include love and jealousy, loneliness and longing, curiosity and grief, tear and joy. These emotions are frequently portrayed in complex social surroundings.

During the two decades of Brezhnev’s leadership many of the steps haltingly undertaken to liberalise Soviet public life were gradually reversed. Many writers and intellectuals were persecuted, some were exiled and some imprisoned. The works of many well-known writers, who were not openly attacked, were quietly suppressed.

The main factor determining Soviet Policy towards intellectual and cultural matters in the Brezhnev era were, first the desire to preserve tranquillity and stability, and secondly, the provision of support for intellectual activity which was likely to be useful economically and

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\[19\] Pravda, July 30, 1982.
relatively neutral politically, and the rejection of intellectual activity which might prove to be politically dangerous and economically irrelevant. The Soviet leadership continued the policy which Khrushchev was pursuing in the last two years of his rule: the encouragement of the publication of mediocre, ideologically correct writing for the masses; an attempt to prevent the circulation of works which might be construed as actively anti-Soviet; and the desire to pacify, the liberal intelligentsia by permitting the small scale publication of some excellent books and articles.

Clearly, there was discontent among Soviet Writers, and it was at least expressed more openly during Brezhnev era than it was earlier. Certainly more openly than during the time of Stalin. Yet, the party achieved important success among the writers. There is a long history of censorship in Russia. Under the tsars, many writers looked to history to provide answers in a way very similar to the "historical synthesis" or "critical realism" that was the modern Soviet theme. Most important of all, perhaps is that the positive hero was a major theme of the literary greats in the past, including Gogol, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky and little effort was needed to adapt this attitude to the modern emphasis on the development of "the new Soviet man." Obviously, there were weaknesses in the Soviet attempt to use the communications media as a major adjunct of rule. Nevertheless, Leonid Brezhnev touched on part of the truth when he spoke
on the occasion of “Izvestia’s” 50th anniversary, and stressed the importance of the role of the press in advocating the general line of “Leninist Policy.” In his view, the press serves as a major means of inspiring the Soviet masses to achieve new heights.

ii) Village Prose: Treatment of the village in Soviet Literature

During Russia’s great years of industrialization and urbanization, tens of millions of people left the country side and moved into the towns to live permanently. In the process much that was characteristic of peasant life has been destroyed. The shattering social and political upheavals which it was Russia’s misfortune to undergo affected the young, educated and male inhabitants more than it did the old, uneducated and female. It was on the whole, the former went into the towns and the army and the latter stayed back on the land leading a rural life.

Furthermore, the very pace of modernization in the towns and the armed forces usually meant that few resources were left for the countryside, so that there cultivation continued with methods that in most European countries had been abandoned by the First World War. Finally, the peasants’ passive resistance to the statigation of agriculture compelled the government to compromise with them by allowing them to keep the old household plot of land. However, these plots kept on providing vitally needed supplies for the towns and armed forces.
The Soviet government thus first of all destroyed the bulk of the peasant way of life, then put what remained in cold storage in order to concentrate on other aspects of society and the economy. Life of the people living in the town were more secure, more comfortable and prosperous, access to education, culture and more human company were far better. Those who could get away from the village, – young men going into the armed forces, or young people generally who had qualified for specialized or higher education tried their best not to return to the village. Their parents and their less capable, ambitious or forceful contemporaries stayed behind.

The modern Russian peasant literature which arose in the early 1950s is known as 'derevenskaya proza' (village prose). It includes novels, short stories and documentary sketches. An early pioneer of village prose was Valentin Ovechkin, whose sketches were highly critical of Party bureaucracy as imposed on the country side. He was followed by another influential author of bucolic (countryside) sketches, Yefim Dorosh, and a whole school of successors. They include Fyodor Abramov, who had written numerous stories and novels conveying a grimly comic picture of rural conditions.²⁰

Ovechkin (1904-68), while accepting the imperative of

modernization, nevertheless argued that the Party and the state planning authorities should defer more to the peasant’s experience his knowledge of local climate and soil. In his ‘Povincial Routine’ (an irregular series of sketches beginning in 1952) he portrayed frankly the atrocious conditions of countryside, and laid the blame for them on insensitive Party officials obsessed by output targets and commands from the centre, and too impatient to get the best out of the collective farmers under their charge.

Efim Dorosh (1908-72), in his ‘Village Diary’ (Derevensky dnevnik, published in installments 1956-70), focused on what the villagers had inherited from the past. The ‘Village Diary’ dwelt lovingly on private cows and garden plots, on the fretwork friezes of the peasant huts and on the local linguistic usages of the Rostov region. He saw all this as a single ecological and cultural organism whose unity could not be disrupted without economic as well as human loss. Most of the works describe the difficult life of the post-war Russian village and the character of the Russian peasant who has preserved his inner purity and high moral qualities despite all difficulties. Some are written in the spirit of nostalgia for the good old life of the past, and the values associated with it. These works often juxtapose the countryside with the city and the city is being viewed as an intruder which disturbs the natural life of the village and the normal course of development. It is evident that “village prose” questions
the very foundations of contemporary Soviet society and the main course of its development which is identified with urbanization and technological progress.\textsuperscript{21}

The post-Stalin 'liberalization' – witnessed a 'new wave' Soviet prose gradually shifted the focus of its interest from public values (roughly speaking, the question of how individuals should behave as members of society or of the Party) to the exploration of more private aspects of life. The typical genre was now the long short story or short novel (Povest). This was partly a reaction against the long-windedness of Stalinist literature.

What is most offensive to its enemies about this new prose is the absence of 'positive heroes'. Who, in classical socialist realism, were supposed to serve as inspirational models to Soviet readers. This is not to say that the new fiction does not raise, if only by implication, some of the broader issues of Soviet society. There are of course specific problems which arise from the havoc caused by the years of Stalinism. The extent, for example, to which the Russian countryside was plundered in order to pay for industrialization has been demonstrated in an impressive body of writing, mainly in the form of sketches (Ocherki) and short stories. Reminiscent of the populist prose of the last century in their frank

documentation of the country's major social problems, the writings of Valentin Ovechkin, Yefim Dorosh, S. Zalygin, Fyodor Abramov, B. Mozhayev and other came close to saying outright that the Party's agricultural policy has been a disastrous failure from the beginning to end.

Some of the writers in this group (often referred to collectively as the derevenshchiki, 'village writers') have tended to emphasize a more positive aspect of the countryside as a repository of traditional values which are disappearing in the towns. This is a remarkable feature of some of Tendryakov's stories. Sometimes there are distinctly religious undertones, as in the sketches and stories of Vladimir Soloukhin. Other interesting 'village' prose has been written by Vasily Belov, Valentin Rasputin and Vasily Shukshin.²²

Beginning in late 1950s the Russian village and rural themes entered the mainstream of literature and inspired some of the best writing of the twentieth century. The twentieth century offers a series of highly significant works, both in prose and in verse, specially in the second half of this century a number of writers. Some of them close to peasant life, attempted to give an account of that rural life from the inside.

The country prose writers wrote about the immense problems of

Kolkhoz economy. They dealt with the various problems and issues related to rural life, such as depopulation of the villages, the gross mismanagement, the callousness of quota obsessed district officials, the lack of proper tools and equipment and the recurring famine. Among these writers are F. Abramov (b 1920), V. Shukshin (1925-1974), V. Belov (b. 1933), and S. Zalygin (b. 1913). Many had a rural background.23

The rural writers sought to return to a more distant and healthy past which had, in their view, been underestimated, even looked down upon, during the Stalin period. This was the past of the traditional peasant village. Of course, their had been numerous depictions of the village in Stalinist fiction, but most of them operated on the assumption that it needed to be changed, that peasants should be dragged into the modern world, if necessary against their will, since their mentality was so backward they could not be expected to appreciate fully the advantages of modernity.

At the same time, this literature re-examined in great detail the way of life of rural Russians, their traditions, customs, values, psychology and aspiration. Most of the village writers were themselves of peasant origin, proud of their roots and eager to celebrate the best of their heritage, but also unafraid of exploiting its dark sides on the whole, village prose

displays an intricate mixture of affection and concern for the countryside and its inhabitants on the one hand, and sadness, revulsion, and anxiety about their future on the other.

Village literature is oriented on peasant families – their antecedents and traditions, their formation and ferment, and often their alienation and breakup. Village writers like to dwell on memories of a rural childhood and youth – sometimes idyllically happy, sometimes confused, deprived, and impoverished. The contrast, and frequently the conflict, of generations is emphasized. Particular prominence is given to elderly persons, especially women, who are shown to embody the best elements of peasant culture and serve as the last repositories of ancient Russian spiritual values. It is they, for example, who know the songs, tales, superstitions, and legends of old, and who demonstrate a sensitivity, respect for custom, wisdom, and fortitude far superior to those their children and grand children. And it is they who are most closely attached to the land and its farmsteads, are most alert to the rhythm of the seasons and attentive to the surrounding natural beauty, and who lament most profoundly the passing of the village way of life.

Most often, these old people convey the author’s own alarm over a perceived cultural loss, or the threat of it. The village writers lovingly describe their own birth places and the fields, forests, meadows, rivers,
lakes, and living creature around them. Their characters speak in local dialects; the characters' folk beliefs and their arts and craft display regional peculiarities. In paying such close attention to ethnic detail, writers, are not only attempting to preserve a cultural heritage but also pleading against the obliteration of the culture itself. They are also asserting, in varying degrees of insistence, the special claim of the Russian peasant for attention, his unique worthiness as a human being.²⁴

The split between town and country was also a split in the personalities of numerous Soviet individuals. This theme of the social, cultural and psychological split between town and country was to prove a very fruitful one in fiction, for what it revealed both about the Soviet Union's social structure and about soviet man's image of himself. In fact almost without exception the principal figures in 'village prose' have been ordinary peasants, and very often the oldest and most backward of them. It is though the present recently urbanized generations wanted to retrieve, before it finally disappears. The memory of a past which has been slighted too long, and thereby to restore a sense of tradition and psychological wholeness, a spiritual integrity which modern urban civilization does not seem to them to offer.

The new and more appreciative approach to rural life established

itself in part because many writers of the up-and-coming generation were themselves peasants by origin. They brought with them their memories of childhood, as well as stories of their parents and grand parents. They offered a kind of oral history in a culture whose written history has gaping lacunae. The city was coming to seem a place not just of cultural and technical progress, but also of pollution, alienation, and even dehumanization. The urge to search for a new moral anchor, and to seek it in the past, was, then, very strong.25

Nostalgia for the rural Russia of yesterday and anxiety over its cultural transformation are found in connection with other strains of village writing: environmental and ecological concerns and anti-urbanism. The poisoning of the atmosphere, and the land itself with industrial effusions; the diversion of rivers and drying-up of lakes; and the flooding of farmland and settlements to build hydroelectric projects all appear in this writing as evils are extremely ominous.

After the death of Stalin, writers' attitude toward the peasantry began to change. In order to overcome the conspicuous backwardness of the rural sector, the state and Party made an effort to reform the internal structure of Kolkhozes and agriculture method. It was Khrushehev who by his personal style and projected reform programmes moved the peasants to

the forefront of Soviet politics. He made it his task to arouse the awareness of Soviet intellectuals and the Party. He used his control of 'Pravda' and other Party journals, mobilizing journalists and writers to present a frank picture of the atrocious conditions of rural life, Khrushchev did not dissent from the accepted Stalinist view that peasants had to be changed, but he believed it could not be done by continued exhortation from the centre. Instead he proposed to solve the agricultural crisis by granting more initiative to the men on the spot, the Kolkhoz chairmen and the local Party secretaries, who knew the soil and the climate and the peasants with whom they and to work. Khrushchev wanted to divert resources from the traditional Stalinist priorities of heavy industrial and military expenditure in order that the country side should have better facilities and the peasants should have material incentive to work on the collective fields rather than devoting their time to their own little private plot.26

Though Khrushchev gave agriculture greater priority, a larger budget and a new dynamic image in his Virgin Lands programme, most of his reforms did not work out as intended. Some of them were impractical, some were blunted by conservative opponents, and some were vitiated by Khrushchev's own view of himself as the nation's no. 1 Kolkhoz chairman,

competent to solve all problems for all farms in all areas. But once he had set in motion a relatively frank debate about the Soviet countryside, he had unleashed something which both he and his successors found difficult to control. Those who saw the disappointing results of Khrushchev reforms began to look further than the local Party secretary, to the peasant himself, to try to understand him and even perhaps in the end to learn from him. Writers who had given their allegiance to Khrushchev began to turn against him in order to fight for the ideal of a sturdy and prosperous Soviet peasantry, which he seemed to have abandoned.

Most importantly, “Village Prose”, looks past what is immediate and obvious in Soviet urban reality, and returns to older phenomena in Russian society and in Russian culture. The Russian village has been both exploited and reorganized, but in many essentials it has not changed.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the “Village Prose” of the 1960’s has been evidence that Soviet writers are gripped by the same yearning for that sense of community which has been lost in the corrupt and impersonal urban world.²⁷

The more fully developed portrait of the Soviet rural inhabitant was treated with equal sympathy and greater insight by a far superior artistic talent. Two short works by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who is considered to

²⁷ Ibid. p. 706.
be the earliest practitioner of village prose, 'One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich' (Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha) (1962) and 'Matrena’s Home' (Matrenin dvor) (1963), illuminated and widened the scope of Kolkhoz literature.

In 'Matrena's Home', Solzhenitsyn gave an explicit content to the moral values which had been preserved in the village. He painted a portrait and stated a set of moral values that were to serve as a paradigm for much subsequent rural fiction. The narrator of 'Matrena's House' had been obliged to spend many years 'beyond the Urals', and as the story opens up he is trying to find his way back to his roots in the Central Russian forests and fields. The ex-prisoner is especially sensitive to language, and after his long exile among aliens the yearns for the unspoiled idiom and intonation of Russian speech. In the neglected hamlet of Tal’novo, demoralized and exploited for the needs of a neighbouring industrial settlement, he shows an old peasant woman as having maintained a humility and selflessness such as is vital in binding communities together.

The soviet industrial settlement named "peat-product (Torfo-product) has polluted the environment and nearly obliterated the old village. The railway line is the source of evil in the story, the purveyor of modernization, and the scene of a tragic accident, but if one moves far away from the line.

Valentin Rasputin was born in 1937 in a Siberian village. He appeared in the literary scene in 1967 with his story “Money for Maria” (dengi dlia Marii), which was followed by “The Final Term” (Poslednii Srok, 1971), ’Live and Remember’ (Zhivi i Pomni, 1974) and ‘Farewell to Matera’ (Proshchanie s Materoi, 1976). Rasputin set nearly all his novels and short stores in the villages of the Irkutsk area of Siberia, from which he comes. His approach to the subject matter is distinct from that of the other rural writers in that, although he employs some dialect words, his narrative language is unequivocally his own, and not that of his characters. His early writing was often a romantic celebration of the Siberian forests and villages. Latterly Rasputin had been more concerned with exploring individual psychology.

He mainly focuses on the individual and the problems of private existence. Placed against the background of rigorous natural environment, the main protagonist is shown grappling with difficult personal situation that test the strength and vitality of his inner resources. Rasputin’s contribution has been to translate the familiar themes of ‘village prose’ into a network of closely observed individual emotional relationships, which he does usually by portraying some crisis as it affects the villagers. He stood out in his ability to combine local, specifically Soviet Russian topics with timeless, universal concerns. The sensitivity and breadth of Rasputin’s
humanity, in fact, is one of his major strength. Another strength is the discipline and compactness of his writing.

Rasputin’s novel "Farewell to Matyora’ (Proshchainie s Materoy),\(^\text{29}\) was published in 1976. It deals masterfully with Rasputin’s persistent theme, the tragic impact of industrial progress and unbridled urbanization on a peasant community still rooted in the past and fatally attached to ancient and decaying buildings, ‘old artifacts, animals, and fields, and to the old method for securing and continuing life. The story is set in Siberia by the Angara river. The island of Matyora is to be flooded to make way for the building of an hydro-electric power station and the islanders have to prepare for relocation in a newly established settlement or the city. Rasputin’s novel has the effect of shifting the focus of attention to the project’s real cost in the dislocation of human beings and displacement of cultural values. Whether he intended it or not, Rasputin’s Matyora might be understood as a microcosm of Russia itself undergoing the experience of forced industrialization.

The several characters represent three generations and at least as many distinct experiences of the approaching catastrophe. Wandering by the river, Darya, most articulate of the island’s elderly inhabitants, who is the focal character of the novel, reflects that ‘there is nothing more unjust

than when everything, whether a tree or a man, lives long enough to become useless and turns into a burden; of the countless sins sent into the world to be redeemed and expiated, that one alone is held to be unpardonable.’ Darya bemoans contemporary mankind’s arrogant violation of nature for the sake of material progress. She believes that man has delivered himself to forces over which he has no control. Her outlook is embodied in the form of a kind of earth spirit, guardian of the island and repository of the rich collective subconscious of the community. She knows her ancestry gaining back a century and a half, and she sees the meaning of her life in continuing her ancestors’ traditions guarding and extending their achievements for her descendants.

Darya’s grandson Andrey, like other younger ones – lured by dreams of technical progress and convenience – look forward to their new lives. Who is full of Soviet wisdom on the broad horizons and unlimited possibilities of man, Andrey who has no time for the ramshackle old village an leaves it for the last time without a backward glance. He unquestionably accepts material values and seems indifferent to his grandmother’s anxiety over the countryside and its threatened culture. The middle generation tends to be ambivalent. Darya’s son Pavel, a responsible man who enjoys the advantages of urban living but has lingering misgivings about its lack of spiritual substance.
‘Farewell to Matyora’ is primarily a work of social protest, directed against those who are altering the environment and disrupting a time-honoured mode of existence in the name of material progress. To Rasputin, goodness, lack of vanity, and a feeling of natural guilt and a responsibility for everything that happens in our world are the most important qualities of life. Man is not necessarily master of his environment and that rationalism and the purely scientific approach to life have their limitations.

Vasili Ivanovich Belov (born 1932) is the author of distinguished works of fiction about his native Vologda region in Northern Russia, and of ethnographic portraits of the same area. In 1966 Belov became well known with the short novel, “That’s How Things Are’ (Privychnoe delo).30 “That’s How thing Are “ reveals extraordinary power in the sympathetic treatment of nature as the setting for the toilsome and often tragic lives of highly resourceful Russian peasants. Without skill and toughness no human could have survived in the harsh winters and short summers of northern Russia, and Belov communicates in this novel, a deep respect for the farmers and workers who carved a life out of that cruel northern forest, and armed only with axes, fashioned beautiful structures of every kind.

The hero of the novel is a peasant, Ivan Afrikanovich Drynov, a far

northern kolkhoznik, who does not embody the usual peasant strengths. It is his wife, Katerina, as a milkmaid, who really keeps their large family, while Ivan only picks up a bit of money here and there by fishing or doing an occasional piece of carpentry. He is a childlike character, affectionate and dependent, easily led by others, and not very competent at the task which a peasant needs to master in order to survive in the far north. Ivan is totally dependent on Katerina. They have nine children, whom the two of them have to clothe and feed. The whole family’s main source of income is only a cow. On the other hand, the Kolkhoz regulations do not allow them enough hay to maintain the cow. Ivan and his son Grishka, must mow hay secretly on the edge of the wood by night, otherwise, without milk there would be no bread and sugar, and they would die of starvation.

The real plot starts when Katerina’s brother Mitka, comes from the town and urges Ivan to return with him, to earn some proper money and perhaps eventually resettle the family there. Ivan resists, objecting that Mitka is trying to buy him.

But, Mitka succeeded in persuading Ivan, that Ivan’s children will not thank him for staying in the village. That changed Ivan’s mind. Finally ignoring Katerina’s pleas, Ivan starts his journey to town, after a painful parting with Katerina. He becomes helpless as soon as he leaves the
village. After travelling few stations, he loses his railway ticket. He feels that the freedom he is experiencing is alien to his strongly rooted nature. Katerina, on the other hand, broken by their painful parting and by the labour of supporting nine children on her own, has a heart attack and dies. Ivan returns home only in time to grieve at her graveside.

The rest of the story is concerned with Ivan’s grief and his attempts to come to terms with what has happened. Katerina’s death brings about a genuine break in the unity in which he has lived. He can not comprehend how is it that she has gone, but everything else has stayed put.

After pondering suicide, he gropes to the uncertain conclusions that life will go on anyway even after his death, that his children and other people will continue to live, and that in general it was better to have been born than not to have been born.

Men, children and animal are part of the same fundamental natural unity, Ivan’s tragedy is his attempt to break out of his natural unity; the attempts itself is an indication of the demoralized state of the village, the devaluation of the traditional peasant way of life. Ivan is born peasant, who can lose himself in the rhythms of agricultural work. Ivan suffers because he is not his own master, because his own initiatives to increase production are rejected by central bodies out of touch with the land.

The social message here concerns the evil effects of arbitrary and
illegal methods when employed in government dealing with the peasant.

One of the most prolific and authoritative village writers was Fyodor Abramov (1920-1983), a literary scholar and critic who turned mainly to fiction. Abramov was the author of numerous, stories and sketches, and of the tetralogy of novels 'The Pryaslins (Pryasliny, 1958-78), an epic treatment of life in his native remote northern region of Arkhangelsk.

Abramov's short stories are often little more than portraits of interesting and memorable people and places. In describing them, he relies heavily on the local point of view and the local language. Characters, objects and scenes are shown and judged by the peasants who know them best, and the author does not visibly interfere. The narratives, which bring an authentic flow of daily life and the main protagonists of his work are picked from the peasant mass.

Abramov's powerful story 'Beating About the Bush', or it can also be translated as 'Around and About' (Vakrug da Okala', 1963).31 This work deals with the tribulations of Anany Mysovsky, chairman of the "New Life" collective farm, an educated man, a thinking man, who can not remain indifferent to what he sees around him. Mysovsky, the chairman of a collective farm in a northern village, who makes the rounds of his poverty-stricken neighbours in an effort to enlist volunteers to bring in the hay. He

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is a devoted Communist with a history of activity as an agricultural leader going back to the early days of collectivization. This thought becomes explicit in the chairman’s memories of himself as a young man just demobilized from the Red Army and assigned to collective one of the northern villages. He remembers how he himself and then village chairman terrorized those peasants who did not sign up for the complete collectivization as per the rule of the regional committee.

The collective farm in Mysovsky’s charge is in a state of deep trouble, the concrete details of which appear in the chairman’s visit to the number of households. He found, alcohol has disabled some of the best workers. Stealing from the common fields is a regular thing and he can do nothing about it. One of the peasants he asks for help with the haying wants to know why the collective farm workers are not given passports and therefore are not free to leave. As it turns out, the chairman’s long day of explanation and persuasion among the peasants had been an exercise in ‘beating about the bush’, but at the end of it in a moment of drunken euphoria he promises and takes it upon himself to offer members of the collective farm thirty percent of all the hay they make, for their own private use. Mysovsky has knowledge, and enterprise, and takes decisions only when they have been well thought out and have a sound basis. And it is precisely this that makes him a challenge to the system then prevailing
in agriculture a system grown old and out of date, already impossible to reconcile with the demands made by real life, but which clung on and would not be dislodged.

The author and the character were both rebelling against the prevailing outdated system. The powerful plea, in the story is to encourage private motivation on the collective, and to eliminate dictatorial interference by the higher authority not in touch with the realities of peasant life.

Vasili Makarovich Shukshin (1929-1974) was born in a small village in the Altai, called Srostki. He was a man of varied and brilliant talent whose prose writing should be included with the village writers, though he is very different from them in his thematic range and versatility. We find in Shukshin’s stories narrations of various rural happenings, of odd, sad and tragicomic incidents. He was also a film director, the author of film scripts, and an accomplished actor as well as a writer of prose.

His works, like “In Profile and Full Face” (V Profil i anfas, 1967), “Snowball Berry Red” (Kalina Krasnaya 1973), “An Old Man’s death” (Pomiraet Starik, 1967), two long novels ‘The iyubavins’ (Lyubaviny, 1965) and ‘I Have Come to Give You Freedom” (Ya prishel dat’ vam volyu, 1971), deal with a variety of experiences in Soviet life and the characters of his works never fail to amuse us whatever the danger, extremity, or hopelessness of the situation in which they find themselves.
In 'Snowball Berry Red' (Kalina Krasnaya, 1973), the main character, Egor Prokudin was brought up as a small child in a Siberian village, and during the terrible famine of 1933 he became separated from his mother. He was separated from his mother for a long period of his life. Egor was a victim of 'dekulakization', a victim of Soviet social experimentation during thirties. The story does not mention much about his early childhood, except that he fell in with a gang of criminals. He spent a period of time in labour camp. After coming out from the labour camp, Egor tried to find some solace and harmony in the social life outside, to start a new life. The main plot is concerned with his attempt to break away from the life of crime and settle down, in a village not far from his birthplace with a woman to whom he has been writing from the labour camp. The gang catches up with him and murders him.

Egor is seen as a person who is unable to form a stable relationship with others, who lacks his roots, his traditions and the sense of identity. His childhood was brief and broken after his isolation from his mother and his birth place. Egor could not adapt any of the peasants' customs or skills. He was left with a few memories, a distorted picture of his childhood, which always troubled his mind. After coming out from the labour camp, Egor tried to find stability with Lyuba, to whom he has been

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writing from the camp. Half-measures and sharp changes of direction characterize all his actin. Egor’s attempt to find stability in a job is no more successful. He quits the job as a Chauffeur to the Sovkhoz director, because he can not stand the limited and convention bound relationship of driver and passenger. The most painful of all is the Egor’s relationship with his mother; from whom he was separated almost through out his life.

Egor could not succeed in leading a stable and peaceful life. Good relationship for him are brief ones. Egor is one of the example of Shukshin’s characters, who is uprooted, disoriented and bewildered, by turns aggressive and timid, insecure and unstable. Who strives after a goal or an ideal without having strength and confidence, the inner personal resources to attain it.