CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION
The words 'country' and 'city', which are as old as the human civilization, represent the two modes of living - rural and urban. Raymond Williams, a well-known English critic in his book, 'The Country and the City', elaborately dwells on the origin, development and the meaning of the words 'country' and 'city'. According to him, the word 'country' has been derived from 'contra' meaning land spread out against the observer. It got its modern meaning of a tract or region and a land or nation in the thirteenth century. The city, according to him, got its meaning from the word 'civitas' meaning community and later an ecclesiastical district. Today, a village generally consists of “a cluster of houses situated amid its cultivated fields which define its boundaries, separate it from other similar units, and give it a distinct identity”¹. A city, on the other hand, is “a relatively dense aggregation of population of considerable size, in which the conditions of life can be described as urban in contrast with the rural life of the open country”². Sociologists, archaeologists and historians studied various aspects of the rural and the urban life through Ages.

It has been observed that country life had its beginning many centuries before Christ. But, there are specific references to the beginnings of urban life in history. A study of the great ancient civilizations - Egyptian, Roman, Mesopotamian and Indus Valley - reveals that there flourished great cities in these civilizations which were as advanced as the modern cities. But, the purpose and functions of these cities, unlike the modern ones, were not well defined. These cities were established mainly by kings only to safeguard their
kingdoms and themselves, and their “walls enclosed the temple, the palace, and the granary or store house, and incidentally protected the ruling group from assault by the surrounding inhabitants”

In India, according to the archaeologists, the Indus Valley civilization is the first known well-established urban civilization. There are also references to the urban life in the Mauryan and the Gupta Ages. But, these civilizations and their cities could not last long as

they could hardly subsist by themselves and when the source of their subsistence from outside was disturbed or arrested, the cities used to decline and get ruralised.

Most of the civilizations that followed the Indus Valley civilization were rural in character. The Vedic civilization was rural and was inimical to urbanization. Hala’s Gatha-Saptasati reflects the social realities of the Post-Mauryan era and a clear view of the life of the people of the period. It gives interesting information on the village life, particularly of the Deccan region. The characters, so well depicted, all come from a rural background — the farmer and his wife, the village headman and his daughter, the householder, his wife and children and so on. The villagers, their areas, the cultivable lands, hilly tracts, trees, the shrines and deities installed therein, the religious sentiments of the villagers, the house-holders, their ways and variety of their kinsmen
and relatives, the unchaste women, wild tribes and a host of other things come into focus.⁵

There have always been considerable dichotomies between the rural and the urban ways of life due to various reasons. The range of actions of a human being “is limited by his geographic as well as social and cultural environment.....the peculiar nature of these influences in the rural setting accounts for rural urban differences”.⁶ Location, climate, topography and natural resources constitute geographic environment which accounts for rural-urban differences. The differences come about because the rural person usually faces Nature in its unmodified extremes and gets his living directly from it. In doing so, he develops customs, practices, and personality traits compatible with his struggle against Nature. The urban dweller on the other hand, “seldom comes face to face with the extremes of his physical environment. He generally works indoors instead of outdoors, and when he works outdoors he has many ways to protect himself.”⁷

Another aspect that separates a villager from an urban dweller is the capriciousness of Nature. Because he has to struggle against and endure the caprices of Nature, the peasant is a more practical man than a townsman. His close communion with it differentiates him from his urban neighbour. He takes pleasure in having a feeling for open spaces away from thickly populated areas. He is happy to consider plants and animals, animate and human. He takes pleasure in walking through his rows of corn or his herd of
cattle and speaks of them with pride and feeling. He views the land as the most precious of possessions. His city neighbour has little to do with all these things. He "has difficulty in understanding this aspect of behaviour and would seldom enjoy the isolation from humans". One conspicuous difference between a village and a city is population. While rural areas are known for low density of population, urban areas are teemed with millions of people.

Social environment also plays a significant role in the rural-urban dichotomy. In a village, people normally engage in the same occupation namely cultivation and lead the same kind of life which is scarcely ever true in the urban setting. A city consists of a large proportion of immigrants, a great variety of racial and cultural elements that constitute many divergent groups and create great social difference. Caste principle is more rigid in rural areas than in urban areas. This is very much true of Indian villages, as caste relations remain intact in rural areas, long after they have been discarded in the cities.

Culturally there remain substantial dissimilarities between the rural and the urban living as cultural expressions in the country are simpler in form than those in the city. Simple virtues and moral and ethical values lose their rustic simplicity in the urban world. To a peasant, the word 'sophistication' is new and he seldom knows about the goods and service that the city dweller is aware of. Social mobility, law and order are some aspects that separate a rustic from an urban dweller.
In literature, the significant writing about country life appeared in Hesiod's *Works and Days* in the 9th century B.C. It is an epic of husbandry, in the widest sense: the practice of agriculture and trading within a way of life in which prudence and effort are seen as primary virtues.9

In the third century B.C., pastoral emerged as a literary form in the Sicily of Theocritus and Moschus. The tenth Idyll of Theocritus had a background of sowing, harvesting and the herding of goats, sheep and cattle. Next appeared Virgil on the scene in the first century B.C. His *Eclogues* were directly related to the hopes and fears of farmers. In Horace's the *Beatus Ille*, one can notice the celebration of the herds and honey and fruit and clean streams.

In English Literature, the word, pastoral, takes a new turn by extending its meaning of 'the life of the shepherd' to 'the life of Nature and natural feeling'. This convention finds its place in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in the works, *The Shepherd's Calender* by Spenser and *Arcadia* by Philip Sidney. Here one sees the conversion of conventional pastoral into a localized dream and then, increasingly.....into what can be offered as a description and thence an idealization of actual English Country life and its social and economic relations.10

With the emergence of novel as the most creative art form of time, the English countryside has become an increasingly dominant theme in it. The
plot of Fielding's *Tom Jones* is based on the desire to link, by marriage, the two large estates in Somersetshire. The proposed marriage of Sophia Western to Blifil is conceived to this end. Her marriage with Tom Jones, who is eventually revealed as Allworthy's true heir, achieves what had formerly, for personal reasons, been rejected. Similarly, in Richardson's *Clarissa*, Harlowe's proposed marriage with Solmes is a part of her family's calculation in concentrating on their estates and increasing their rank. It is from this she recoils to the destructive and cynical world of the established landowning to aristocrat, Lovelace. Even Defoe's *Tour of England and Wales* records the detailed realities of country life.

Country life in its full form receives a better treatment in the novels of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. George Eliot's tendency to turn back to a "pastoral world of peace and plenty in times of insecurity and change is perennial" in her novels. Her novels include farmers and craftsmen of the mid-nineteenth century England.

Hardy's novels are incomparable chronicles of Wessex in England. They are inescapably an evocative cultural statement about the quality of life in a rural community. They do relate to the conditions of rural England in the later half of the nineteenth century as acknowledged not only by some of Hardy's famous critics but also by Hardy himself.
Landowners, tenant farmers, dealers, craftsmen and labourers, who appear in rural England, are the main characters of his novels. 'Sensitiveness to Nature' also finds a place in his works. His language is free from artifice. He keeps "an ordinary world as the basis of his major fiction."¹³

After Thomas Hardy, we have many novelists like H.E. Bates, Adrian Bell, Kenneth Grahame, Constance Holme, Winifred Holby, Sheila-Kaye-Smith, and Eden Phillpots who fostered the rural tradition in English fiction. For example, in the novels of Sheila-Kaye-Smith, one finds "an entirely naturalistic picture of the rural community."¹⁴ The dominant theme in the novels of these writers is that "man does not live by man alone, but by a vital struggle with his environment."¹⁵ Most of these novels have been set against the background of the Industrial Revolution. Hostility to industrialism makes them evince interest in country life.

In the Indian novel in English, the rural tradition in its embryonic form could be found in Lal Behari Day's Govinda Samantha (1874), Behramji Malabari's Gujarat and Gujaraties (1882), Coopoo Swamy's Everyday Life in South India (1885), T.Ramakrishna Pillai's Life in an Indian Village (1891) and Nagesh Vishwanath Pai's Stray Sketches in Chakmakpore (1894). In these works, one finds the authors' narration of ancient myths and rural folk-tales. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, one finds the rural tradition pronounced in Lal Behari's Folk Tales of Bengal (1883), Manmatha Nath Dutt's Tales of Ind (1884) and in P.V.Ramaswamy Raju's Indian Fables (1889).
The early 20th century India witnessed many changes which gave momentum to the creative writers of fiction in English. The rapidity of the national movement, the growing awareness of people to socio-economic problems and the Sathyagraha movement influenced the Indo-English novelists. Writers in India started to write in their novels about India and its people. They began to stretch their imagination towards the rural society with a view to showing the real India to the world by writing mainly on rural themes. Some wrote with the first hand observation of the village life and others depicted it through the spectacles of books. This, naturally, led to the emergence of rural novel in India.

In the twenties, writers like Munshi Premchand in Hindi and Sarat Chandra Chaterjee in Bengali started to reflect Indian social life, especially those of villages in a realistic mode in their writings. These writings mainly “deal with everyday problems of the rural community”¹⁶ in India. Premchand, in his Rangabhumi (1925) and Godan (1936), deals with the life of villagers. For instance, his well-known novel, Godan, focuses its attention on the age-old evils in the form of poverty, caste and ignorance, which subject the rural masses to untold miseries and perpetual subjugation. Hori, the protagonist, like the heroes of Anand, violates the relentless rules of the village community and, as a consequence, he and his family are cut off from the fold of the community. The novel expresses its author’s “profound indignation and protest against the obscurantist beliefs, decayed customs and social distinctions”¹⁷ that fetter the Indian rural society.
K.S. Venkataramani, in a way, pioneered the Indo-English rural novel with his publication of *Murugan, the Tiller* in 1927. In the words of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, “the scene shifts from village to town and back from town (or city) to village, till at last one has the feeling that all roads lead to Murugan and his rural experiment.”

*Murugan, the Tiller* is about Ramachandran, the owner of a little coconut garden and a plot of agricultural land on the banks of the Kaveri in the village, Alavanti. He goes to Madras to pursue his studies but returns to his village after his failure in his B.A. examination. He, repentant, expresses his sorrow before his servant, Murugan, “the most valued of the hereditary tillers of the soil”. Murugan advises his master to remain in the village and look after his lands, like his forefathers. Momentarily, he accepts his proposal and decides to settle down at Alavanti. But soon, Kedari, his intimate friend in Madras, exhorts him to go back to the city to complete his B.A. Knowing this, Murugan tempts his master in vain to stay back in the village by telling him about the fertile soil of his estate thus: “come and see the fields today. ...the finest fields in the village. This morning there is an inch of deposit of silt which means a splendid crop this year”.

Ramu goes to the city again and gets married to a city girl against the wish of Murugan who wants his master to marry a village girl. He fails in B.A. degree examination again and returns to his village with the decision to settle there, once for all. He cannot make strides in the village as his city-bred mother-in-law, Meenakshi, comes in his way by asking him to go back to the
city. In the meantime, his fields are heavily flooded and all his crops fail. The mother-in-law takes this opportunity to influence him again to move to the city. Making Murugan a lessee of his land, he takes the job of a clerk in a far off town. Unable to make both ends meet, he sells off his cultivable land to the village money-lender and his coconut garden to Murugan.

Murugan, as the owner of the garden, raises his income considerably and falls a victim to temptations. He opens a toddy shop in the village and makes enemies around him. As a result, he involves himself in a riot and lands up in prison. Ramu, with his honesty and simplicity, impresses the collector, Mr. Cadel. He is deputed to disband a gang of dacoits operating in the district of Madras. During one of his operations in the dacoit-infested area, he meets Murugan, who has joined the fold of dacoits after his escape from the jail. He effectively disbands the gang of dacoits and rehabilitates them as tillers of the soil in a model village, Meenakshipuram. Ramu, on his own, settles down to a plain and simple life of 'the tiller of the soil'.

Thus, Murugan, the Tiller, depicts primarily "the Gandhian ideal of going 'back to the village' and secondarily emphasizing the need for the traditional Indian way of living."21

Another writer who evinces interest in rural life is Shanker Ram, a contemporary of K.S. Venkataramani. His novel, Love of Dust (1938), deals with the life in a south Indian village. It depicts the story of the peasants in an interior village on the banks of the Kaveri. It is "a common story of love and
hatred, joys and sorrows of the peasants”\textsuperscript{22} who are much inspired by the Gandhian ideal, ‘back to the village’.

Along with these, there emerged ‘the big three’ -- Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao -- who placed the Indian English novel on a definite track. They presented in their novels an authentic picture of Indian life, each looking at it from different angles. While Anand and Raja Rao in some of their writings depict Indian village life, R.K.Narayan stands aloof from them by depicting semi-urban middle class life of Indians in a comic and satiric way. His greatness is that “\textit{he could write in deceptively simple prose about a deceptively simple place called Malgudi and still win a place in the hearts of readers everywhere}”\textsuperscript{23}

Raja Rao comes out on the scene as a rural novelist with the publication of his epic novel, \textit{Kanthapura (1938)}. This novel delineates the tale of the people of Kanthapura, a village in Karnataka, during the freedom struggle. Various aspects of the novel reveal the authenticity of Raja Rao as a novelist writing in English about his own people in an accurate and realistic way. He has chosen an old woman, Achakka, as the narrator of the story to highlight and let others know the Indian traditional way of tale-telling. Using flash-back technique, he makes her tell in a powerful way, the story of the people of her village with all their strengths and weaknesses. As a critic points out,

\textit{Kanthapura} is the story of a village and its people whose life has meaning in their identification with temple, river,
hill, mound and market which amount to a peasant sensibility expressing itself in style which is unique in Indian fiction.24

The novel, as a rural one, abounds in rural imagery and the very landscape in the novel is personified as a living character. Perhaps, no Indian English novel has such richness of beauty in the description of landscape. The agricultural operations in the village are described with vivid accuracy. As a rural novel, it records

the changeless, yet ever-shifting spectrum that is Indian village life. The description of the village -- its physical features and separate quarters for those belonging to different castes, and professions -- and the day to-day life of the villagers with the monotonous events of planting, harvesting and marrying, and the occasional celebrations of festivals allaying the even tenor of their life is quite realistic.25

Raja Rao, in the novel, makes use of the technique of myth to make the story appealing and Indian. The people of Kanthapura plunge into the freedom struggle imagining that Gandhi is an avatar of Rama whose sole aim is to save Bharat (India), which is like Sita, from the clutches of the British who symbolise the demonic force of Ravana. Murthy, a young Brahmin of the village, becomes their leader and leads them on the path of Gandhi. He also fights against caste and exploitation in the village. Raja Rao's style of
narration and use of Indianised English make the novel a minor Indian classic. To put it in a nutshell, "It is India in microcosm: what happened there is what happened everywhere in India during the early stages of its struggle for freedom"²⁶.

Anand succeeds Raja Rao as a rural novelist with his publication of The Village (1939), the first novel in his trilogy. He presents in the novel the life of the peasants in a Punjabi village during the colonial regime. The novel, in a convincing way, delineates the day-to-day activities of the peasants, their pleasures and sorrows, their unflinching belief in the age-old customs and traditions, and above all, their superstitions and exploitation.

The scene of action is Nandpur, a village in the Punjab. The story centres round Lal Singh, a young boy of the village. His impulsive and courageous nature makes him revolt against the injustice done to him and his family by the sahukar, money-lender and the village priest. He, with his modern outlook, pities the people of his own class for their ignorance and superstition. He proves himself to be a different boy with his bun of hair cut which is a gross violation of the holy principles of Sikhism. He also questions the authority of the landlord, suspects the cunning nature of the money-lender and exposes the hypocrisy of the village priest. Unable to tolerate the straightforward nature of Lalu, the landlord implicates him in a theft case in order to take revenge against him for his alleged flirtations with Maya, his daughter. The villagers along with his own family members parade him on a donkey for violating the rules of his religion. All his efforts to bring about a change in the
villagers go futile and, ironically, they bounce back against him in a dangerous way. So, he leaves the village and joins the Imperial army to save himself from the assault of the domineering. Thus, the basic theme of The Village "is the helplessness of its hero, half child, half-adult, in a predominantly callous world" of his village.

Anand's novel, Gauri or The Old Woman and the Cow (1960), like The Village, is a rural novel par excellence. It deals with the sad tale of Gauri who is subjected to unbearable hardships both in her mother's and her husband's house. She is mercilessly suspected, beaten and thrown out of the house by her husband, Panchi, for he is badly influenced against his wife by his aunt, Kesaro. Later, when she goes to her mother, Amru, her uncle and possessor of her mother, sells her to a money-lender in the town in lieu of his debts. She escapes from the clutches of the old Seth with the help of Mahindra, a doctor, who later appoints her a nurse in his hospital. But there also the assistant of Dr. Mahindra subjects her to humiliation, and as a result, she again goes back to her husband. But, her experience of town life makes her a misfit in the traditional, superstitious and hostile world of the village. So, she leaves her husband forever to lead a free and individual life in the town, thereby claiming her individuality. The novel, thus, presents

the travails of the rustic heroine and her incessant struggles with the hard realities of life. Her struggles assume tragic proportions as they are against the rigidity
of the impenetrable folk ethos of the Hindu order. Through these struggles, she emerges as a true folk heroine.\textsuperscript{28}

The novel also highlights the ignorance, superstitions, abject poverty that make the poor peasants live in eternal miseries. Besides these, they are subjected to merciless exploitation by the landlords and the money-lenders. The novel also brings about petty jealousies, caste barriers and drought that stifle life in an Indian village.

Humayun Kabir's \textit{Men and Rivers} (1945) depicts the life of peasants in a Bengali village. He is exclusively concerned with recording the archetypal character of the peasant experiences. Like Bronte's \textit{Wuthering Heights}, the novel presents the tale of two generations of two families. The novel is about two friends, Nazu and Asgar, who, once intimate, now become bitter enemies. Nazu, caught in a storm, dies and Asgar succeeds him as the village head. He marries Nazu's wife whom he loves ardently. He accepts the responsibility of looking after Malik, son of Nazu. In course of time, due to a devastating flood, they lose all their possessions and settle on a new Island where they regain their lost property. Asgar's wife, once the wife of Nazu, dies, leaving behind a daughter, Nuru. The trouble starts when Malik and Nuru fall in love with each other who according to Asgar, are brother and sister.

What is remarkable about the novel is the novelist's marvellous presentation of the life of fishermen. Its delineation of the love of the villagers
for their native soil is quite convincing. In the epilogue of the novel, Asgar Mia says:

We are men of the river. We are peasants. We build our homes on sand and the water washes them away. We build again and again and we till the earth and bring the golden harvest out of the waste land.29

This passage rightly presents the continuous and unending predicament of the villagers and their strong attachment to their native soil. As a critic points out,

Men and Rivers, like Markandaya's 'Nectar in a Sieve', shows in dramatic and social terms, how man's eternal struggle with natural forces is central to the peasant experience of life, and how this struggle is classically pure and elemental.30

K.A.Abbas, in his novel, Tomorrow is Ours (1946), attacks the exploiters - the zamindar, the money-lender and the priest - who as intimate allies and comrades collectively suck the blood of the poor peasants. Parvathi, wife of the landlord, Srikanta, strongly feels that it is zamindari system which is responsible for the woes of the tillers of the soil. It is the exploiters who force the people to leave their village and go to the industrial towns for work. Thus, in this rural novel, K.A.Abbas exposes “the exploitation of the poor Indians by the rich Indians”31.
Among the practitioners of the new class of rural novel, Bhabani Bhattacharya occupies a prominent place. He, in his three novels, *So Many Hungers!* (1947), *Music for Mohini* (1952) and *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960), deals with rustic life. While *A Goddess Named Gold* is a purely rural novel, the other two novels present both the rural and the urban life. Bhattacharya commenting on the art of his writing says:

> unless a writer has keen observation and an eye on noting
> the details of general behaviour of folks, he cannot write a social novel - most of my characters have shaped themselves from the real earth.\(^{32}\)

With this belief, he expects writers to be rural in their depiction of incidents and portrayal of characters. Quite in tune with his concept of rural novel, he, in his *A Goddess Named Gold*, presents the life of the peasants of Sonamitti in a realistic way. The central character, Meera, proves to be a model to the village women by fighting against the greedy money-lender, Seth Samsunder, and making him condescend to sell cloth at reasonable rates. The minstrel, grandfather of Meera, makes the villagers aware of the significance of the hard-earned freedom. He cautions them against the greedy exploiters who may misuse independence for their selfish ends. The novelist makes the novel allegorical by introducing the touchstone, which converts the base metals into gold. He, in the end, unravels the secret of the power of the touchstone saying that the ‘touchstone’ is our ‘freedom’ when used properly will yield fruitful results. On the whole, the novel concerns itself
with the theme of economic freedom of the hungry masses
and warns against the evils of the profiteering greedy rich
men who may exploit the freedom to serve their vested
interests. It is a masterly satire on those who live by the
lure of gold. The novel may also be considered as a fable
of rural India on the eve of independence.33

Bhattacharya's So Many Hungers! is concerned with the life of the
peasants in Bengal during the terrible famine that devastated millions of
people. Though the novel is based on the theme of hunger, it presents the
pathetic story of the rural masses as well as the life of the people in Calcutta.
The rural part of the novel takes place in a village called Baruni, which is
guided by Devesh Basu, a retired teacher. The novel delineates the sad tale
of the peasant family of Kajoli, the heroine, in particular, and the life of other
people, in general. Its main concern is with the simple and humble life of the
members of the peasant family, their pleasures and sorrows, and their
exploitation by the Government agents, the city people and the money-
lenders. They leave for Calcutta where their position turns from bad to worse.
What is interesting about the peasant family is its concern for its village and
self-respect. No doubt, the “family represents some of the finest qualities
of rural Bengal or of rural India.”34

Bhattacharya's Music for Mohini is about a city-bred girl, Mohini, who
is given in marriage to Jayadev, a young scholar of Behula. The novel
portrays her life in the village with all its orthodoxy, superstitions and
feudalism. Mohini slowly adapts herself to the traditional restrictions of her mother-in-law and her philosophical husband, and ultimately, comes out successfully as a modern woman. Jayadev and Dr.Harindra, with their reformative zeal, collectively drive away the social evils such as ignorance, superstitions and illiteracy from the village. In a way, the novel is about the triumph of modern forces over traditional forces. Thus, in the novel, Bhattacharya is

deeply involved in the project of giving shape to a new social order, free from orthodox values, old customs and outmoded traditions. He envisions a new model of an ideal village incorporating the best from the past and the present, and accordingly strives to liberate the villagers from the clutches of old beliefs and superstitions.\(^{35}\)

After Independence, the Indian novel in English witnessed changes regarding its themes and techniques. The novelists began to express the cultural, social, economic and political aspirations of their people in their works. Most of them bestowed their attention on the teeming millions, particularly of the problems of the villagers. As P.P.Mehta rightly points out,

the rural poverty which was emphasized by the Government while presenting their first five year plan has thrown up a new class of the novel.\(^{36}\)
Kamala Markandaya emerges as a powerful novelist among the women novelists of India. Perhaps, she is the first woman novelist in Indian English literature to present rural life in her novels. Her *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) is acclaimed as one of the best rural novels. The novel presents a graphic account of the life of Rukmani, its central character. The family of Rukmani, which has its strong roots in its village, is uprooted both by the vagaries of Nature and the tannery. Besides these, the family is exploited by the landlord and the money-lender. All these force it to get shattered in different directions. Rukmani and her husband, Nathan, leave for the town to meet one of their sons but, contrary to their expectations, they face hazardous life and finally Nathan dies of starvation and hard work. Rukmani returns to find solace and peace in her native village. Thus, the novel is about a peasant woman "who has to endure unspeakable suffering and misery throughout her life."37

Anita Desai in her *The Village by the Sea* (1982) delineates the life of the people of a coastal village in Karnataka. Though the novel is branded as a children story book, it realistically records not only the life of the children of a peasant family but also the hard life of the peasants in general. It, unfortunately, has not drawn due attention of the critics. Like Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, it presents the onslaught of Industry on the life of a calm and serene village. which uproots the villagers from their native soil. Hari, the protagonist, like Anand's Munoo, migrates to the city of Bombay to eke out his livelihood where he faces unremitting hardships. He finally returns to his
village with all his future plans for it. Anita Desai thus "creates a vivid picture of a family, of life in a small Indian village" in the novel.

Prafulla Mohanti's My Village, My Life (1973) unfolds the story of the peasants of Nandpur, a small village in Orissa. The village in the novel, like Kanthapura, has a definite number of houses, scattered over twenty nine acres of land. It is a traditional village comprising illiterates who plough the land and live. Though the novelist is London-based, he records the life of the peasants in India. He tells in his introduction,

It is not only my own interpretation. I have let the villagers speak for themselves. I spent long hours talking to them, patiently helping them to overcome their shyness. I did not interview them like a journalist. Because we knew each other, they spoke freely to me about their experience, their hopes and problems.

The novel becomes authentic as the novelist, with his personal recording of the story, makes the reader feel "the presence of the villagers and share the villagers' joys and sufferings". Like Raja Rao, the novelist uses the folk narrative which is very close to the Indian village life and makes the story realistic. He also mentions that every house in the village has a book of puranas that suggests the close association of the villagers with the folk narrative form. Talking about his novel, he proudly declares, "This is the first time that a book has been written by an Indian villager about his own village."
Romen Basu is another practitioner of 'the rural novel' with his three novels *The Tamarind Tree* (1975), *Outcast* (1986) and *Blackstone* (1989). He deals in them "with the economic and social problems of Bengali villagers". As a writer of 70's and 80's, he rightly mirrors the problems of the rural society of his times. *The Tamarind Tree* presents its heroine, Mohamaya's crusade against the evils of her village, Balavpur. The novel highlights the Hindu-Muslim unity, prohibition and the removal of untouchability in the village. The people of the village follow the path of Gandhi and solve their problems in a non-violent way.

Basu's *Outcast* is the story of Sambal, an untouchable of the village, Basuli. He wages a relentless war against an unjust and oppressive society. 'Caste' plays a major role in the novel. It differentiates the high and the low and also creates disunity among the untouchables themselves according to their gradations, which prevent them from resisting oppression.

Romen Basu's *Blackstone* is about Kalapathor who joins hands with the Naxalites to take revenge against the tormentors of his family – the landlord and the police. A young university scholar, Kesab Ganguli, who is an appointed leader of the Naxalite movement in his district, Gopibalavpur, guides him. Encouraged by the young leader, Kalapathor kills the first enemy of his family, Gaur Holdar, the landlord, and later Ghanashan, another landlord. In course of time, differences set in between the chairman and the secretary of the Naxalites which they amicably solve and stand for the destiny of the nation.
T. Vasudeva Reddy comes to us as a recent novelist to portray rural life. *The Vultures* (1983), his only novel, depicts the life of farmers, in general and the life of a petty farmer of Siripalle, a village in Andhra Pradesh, in particular. The novel is about Ramayya, who, like Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*, becomes a victim of drought and famine. In spite of this, he wants to give the benefit of higher education to his son so as to realise his dream of a better tomorrow. It becomes inevitable for him to borrow money from the village money-lender and landlord, Rudraiah, who lends him money by keeping his hut along with the site in mortgage. Ramayya is also exploited by the area supervisor of the Rural Co-operative Bank who takes a cartload of firewood for sanctioning him a loan of Rs. 500/-.

Over the years, his daughter, Santhi commits suicide for her being raped by Nagaraju, son of the money-lender. His educated son, Suresh, is murdered by hoodlums hired for the purpose by the money-lender, for his single-handed fight against him. Losing everything, the farmer is reduced to a living corpse. The title of the novel aptly suggests how the money-lender and the banker, like vultures, make the poor peasants their prey and reduce them to skeletons. Thus,

*The Vultures* is not a documentation of dry details about the Indian peasantry, it gives a definite peep into the contemporary rural reality of India, though a lurid one. 43

To sum up, the rural novel as a genre emerged markedly in the 19th century with the powerful writings of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy as a
mark of protest against industrialization and urbanization of the rural world. It had struck its roots deeply in the 20th century with the publication of many rural novels by prominent writers like H.E. Bates, Adrian Bill, Kenneth Graham and Eden Philpots. In India, during the early decades of the 20th century, there emerged Sharat Chandra and Premchand in regional literatures to depict the hard realities of rural life in their novels.

K.S. Venkataramani, with his novel, Murugan, the Tiller, stands out as the pioneer of Indo-Anglian rural novel. Shanker Ram, too, comes to us as a fine representative novelist of rural India through his Love of Dust. Raja Rao successfully emerges as a realistic presenter of rural life in his Kanthapura, using a language and technique that is very much Indian.

Mulk Raj Anand in his two novels - The Village and The Old Woman and the Cow - presents the life of the Punjabi peasants with all their backwardness and their exploitation by the affluent landlords, the money-lenders and the religious priests. Humayun Kabir in his Men and Rivers depicts the ardent attachment of the villagers to their native soil. K.A. Abbas, in his Tomorrow is Ours, delineates life of the exploited peasants by the zamindars. Bhattacharya, in his A Goddess Named Gold, records rural life in its entirety. In his So Many Hungers! and Music for Mohini, he unfolds both the rural and the urban aspects of Indian life in a realistic way. Kamala Markandaya, in her Nectar in a Sieve, delineates the life of peasants in a south Indian village. Besides these writers, Anita Desai, in her The Village by the Sea, Profulla Mohanti, in his My Village, My Life, Romen Basu in his
three novels—The Tamarind Tree, Outcast and Blackstone—and T.V. Reddy, in his The Vultures, explore some of the salient features of Indian village life.

Though the idea of city has been associated with the human life for many centuries, it got its definite meaning in the sixteenth century. According to Raymond Williams, one can notice the regular sixteenth— and seventeenth—century association of ideas of the city with money and law; the eighteenth century association with wealth and luxury; the persistent association, reaching a climax in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the mob and masses; the nineteenth and twentieth century association with mobility and isolation.44

This analysis of urban life by Raymond Williams makes one understand various characteristics of the city in the four centuries.

City life is viewed as one, which is isolated from the open country. It is also associated with the experience of darkness, of oppression, of crime and squalor and of mechanical and busy life. Besides, it is understood as a life of tensions and pressures, of apathy without any sense of community and with no sense of Nature or the changing weather. It is for machines and wealth which dominate it.

City life appeared first in the poetry and later in the novel in English literature. Blake and Wordsworth are two prominent poets who delineate city
life markedly in their poems. For example, Wordsworth in the seventh book of The Prelude describes the loneliness felt by him in London:

How often in the overflowing streets
Have I gone forward with the crowd and said
Unto myself, the face of everyone
That pass by me is a mystery. \(^{45}\)

This passage rightly throws light on how cities were understood as places of crowds with all their indifferent attitude towards their fellow beings.

City life gained prominence during the Victorian England. The Industrial Revolution, scientific inventions, growth in population and the prosperity of England led to the enormous growth of cities. This, in turn, had given scope to writers to depict various aspects of this new kind of life which, in a way, had taken away the bliss of country life. It is not an exaggeration if one says that Charles Dickens was the first most authentic novelist to write about the English urban life. He looked at the dark side of city life. In many of his novels, he delineated the life of children – their exploitation by the factory owners, dirt and squalor of cities with dense black clouds of smoke, and meaningless and insipid life of the crowds that throng cities for livelihood. He had viewed the city “as a destructive animal, a monster, utterly beyond the individual human scale”. \(^{46}\)

In the twentieth century, the image of city grew into a kind of dominance. Many a writer attempted to write about the social character of the
city – its transitoriness, its unexpectedness, its essential and existing isolation and procession of men and events – viewed as the reality of life.

India, under the colonial rule, had witnessed some growth of cities. Like the English people who migrated to cities in the nineteenth century for work, in India too, in the early decades of the twentieth century, the rural masses started to migrate to cities not withstanding oppression and poverty in villages. The people “who had formed the backbone of village life in the past, who were the depositaries of the village tradition, had to seek refuse in the large centres”. This naturally encouraged the creative writers to write about the urban aspects of life which hitherto had been neglected.

Munshi Premchand, perhaps, is the first Indian novelist to present a contrasting view of the village and the city life in his novels. He presents the parasitic and aggressive town dwellers on the one hand, and the passive and toiling rural masses on the other. His observation of the town and the village is well brought out in his Rangabhumi (1925).

The town is the abode of the rich and the centre of buying and selling. The outlying area of the town is the place for their recreation and relaxation. In its central part are located the institutions for the education of their children and the seats of litigation where in the name of justice the poor are continually harassed and persecuted. On remote the outskirts of the towns are the dwelling places of the poverty striken masses. Here we have neither the light of
the urban lamps nor the urban sanitation nor the rush of the urban crowds.\textsuperscript{48}

This very clearly brings out the cleavage between the two places as viewed by Premchand. As a critic points out, "Premchand is at his best when he sharply portrays the glaring contrast of life of the rural poor with affluence of urban upper classes."\textsuperscript{49}

K.S. Venkataramani appears on the scene to present the dichotomy between the village and the town in the Indian novel in English. Though his \textit{Murugan, the Tiller} is branded as a rural novel, it does present an aspect of urban life opposed to the placid and pleasant village life. In the novel, Madras is described as a symbol of materialistic life which is "\textit{huge, vampire growth, scattered, poor, broken and ugly}."\textsuperscript{50} Criticizing the false appearance of city life, Kokilam, one of the characters tells Janaki, another character,

\begin{quote}
Dear Janaki, all this glitter covers a lot of ugly things within. You don't know town life. This high life, false and showy runs like a rot unseen within the flower.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

Thus, in the novel K.S. Venkataramani emphasizes the "\textit{importance of simple and plain life of villages .....as a substitute for complex showy and wicked life of towns}".\textsuperscript{52}

Mulk Raj Anand emerges next on the scene as a powerful novelist to present urban life in his novel \textit{Coolie (1936)}. He highlights the life of a village lad, Munoo, who becomes a victim of circumstances in the inhuman and cruel urban world. He moves on quickly from one town to another – Shamnagar,
Daulatpur and Bombay – and in each place he is subjected to unceasing hardships. His rural innocence and ignorance make him a misfit in the cunning and selfish world of towns. He is unjustly exploited by the factory owners. When a communal riot breaks out in the city, he runs away from the haunting mobs and police. In the process, he accidentally falls under the car of a Eurasian, Mrs. Main Waring, who takes him to Simla and makes him her servant and rickshaw-puller and a toy of her sexual desire. Worn out by hard work and consumption, he dies very young, unsung and unwept.

What is very significant about the novel is that it presents, like the novels of Charles Dickens, dirt, squalor and disease of the urban world. It also powerfully presents the horrible life of labourers, pavement dwellers and their exploitation by the factory owners. Thus, Anand in Coolie exposes “the evils of poverty, child labour, social injustice and inequality, communal hatred, capitalist exploitation, unemployment, human vanity and inhuman cruelty”53, which are the characteristics of Indian urban life.

Bhabani Bhattacharya, a novelist of the old generation, wrote his novels during and after independence. In his first novel, So Many Hungers!, he presents the urban life as a contrast to the rural life. He grippingly delineates the life of the people of Calcutta in the first few chapters of the novel. He depicts life of the fashionable and the commercial class. In the last few chapters of the novel, he very powerfully records the pathetic life of the destitutes who migrate from villages to the city for livelihood. The novel is also concerned with the life of Samrendra Basu and his son, Rahoul, who
stand opposite in their attitude towards life. While the father is for the British rule and wealth, the son is for freedom of the motherland and for the poor and the helpless. The peasant family of Kajoli, the heroine, faces untold miseries in the city of Calcutta which is unkind and indifferent. The novel also exposes the busy life of the city, the indifferent attitude of its people towards their fellow beings, merciless exploitation of the destitutes by the cunning city merchants and sexual exploitation of women by the unscrupulous rich. On the whole "the picture that Bhattacharya presents in the novel is ghastly and grim. Its heart rending sights of human misery and suffering move us to tears".  

**Music for Mohini** is his next novel that presents the urban life along with the rural life. The first eight chapters of the novel are devoted to delineate the life of the people in Calcutta. The novelist chooses a university professor whose family consists of his daughter, Mohini, his son, Heeralal, and his mother. The life in the city is meant for fashions and advertisements, education and entertainment, and above all, for freedom. Mohini, the heroine, educated in the Western system, wishes to have love affairs with young men. She also wishes to become a radio singer. The professor who is modern in his thinking opposes his traditional mother in matters of horoscope and marriage. His way of thinking very much reflects the way of thinking of an urban mind. Bhattacharya in the novel delineates the life of the people who work on pavements of the city. To sum up, the novel, though rural oriented,
Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954), like his *So Many Hungers*, dwells on the theme of hunger which degrades the moral values of the people in an urban milieu. He vehemently attacks not only those who exploit the society mercilessly but also the hypocrites who pass for gentlemen with their affluent background. The novel is about Kalo, a blacksmith, who while on his way to the city, unable to bear hunger, steals a banana for which he is sentenced to a three month imprisonment. In jail, he comes in contact with B10, a city youth named Bikash Mukherjee of Calcutta. B10 teaches Kalo how to teach the society a lesson by exploiting their gullibility. In course of time, he disguises himself as a miracle man and exploits the credulous nature of people. The people who once hated him touch his feet. The novel is, thus, an attack on the exploiters and the hypocrites of the urban society.

The novelist also presents the horrible conditions of city life. Kalo, the blacksmith, is forced to take the work of carrying destitute corpses into the municipal trucks, as there is a heavy competition for work in the city. He also becomes a procurer for a group of brothels to eke out his livelihood. The horrible nature of brothel houses is exposed when Kalo, to his shock, finds his own beloved young beautiful daughter in one of the ill-famed houses to which he supplies customers. Thus, the novel, in many respects, is an urban novel vividly portraying the dark and evil side of city life.
The Indian urban novel in English gained significance in the post-independence era. The freedom struggle and its impact on the rural community and the influence of Gandhi on Indian masses became the themes of the past. With the advent of independence, the process of urbanization gained momentum in India. The city with its enormity and industrial development paved the way for employment which in a way attracted the rural poor. The city became a place of hope for the poverty-stricken rural masses. The exodus of the villagers to the nearby urban centres resulted in the development of cities on a large scale.

Another significant factor for the development of the urban novel is the emergence of women novelists whose main thrust is on urban life as most of these writers belong to the urban centers. They have proved themselves to be authentic in their presentation of the world of towns and cities. Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal are the prominent women novelists in the post-independence era. All these writers, by birth, are familiar with towns and cities, and so, their writings inevitably reflect their experience of life where they live.

Kamala Markandaya, in her Nectar in a Sieve, presents the life of Rukmani and her family in her village and later her life in a city. Owing to the vagaries of Nature, feudalism and urbanization, the family of Rukmani is shattered and she, along with her husband, Nathan, leaves for the city in search of one of their sons. Their life in the city turns from bad to worse. Unable to find work, they at last become stone-breakers in a quarry. Owing to
heavy work and hunger, Nathan dies and Rukmani finally returns to her village, dejected. As a critic points out the city with "its corrupt ways and its sagging morals drives them back, like shuttle cocks, to the village, killing one, invisibly wounding the other".\textsuperscript{55}

Though the novel is predominantly rural, it presents a brief sketch of town life. It portrays the busy life of the city and the indifferent attitude of its inhabitants. It also delineates how the poor are subjected to a horrible and wretched life. To find a place of shelter, even in a temple, becomes very difficult for the destitutes. The thieves rob the poorest of the poor. On the whole, the novelist's account of the miserable life of the city poor is quite convincing.

Kamala Markandaya, in her \textit{A Handful of Rice} (1966), is preoccupied with urban life. It is about Ravi Shankar, who unable to bear poverty in his village, joins the general exodus of the hungry masses to the city of Madras in the hope of work. He becomes one of the members of a gang of bootleggers and criminals. In a drunken mood, he forces himself into the house of Apu, a tailor, and later marries Nalini, his daughter. Ravi becomes the sole breadwinner of the family after the death of his father-in-law. His struggle for survival in the enormous and indifferent city is the main thrust of the novel.

Though the novel is based on the theme of hunger, it exposes the hard facts of city life. It realistically presents the life of the underworld criminals and the bootleggers who are for deception and exploitation. The struggle of the city poor for a place of shelter and security becomes one of the main
aspects of the novel. It also presents the baffling overcrowdedness, the competition for work and the exploitation of the city poor by the cunning city merchants through their corrupt ways. Thus, the novelist has successfully depicted the hard realities of city life with its vile traps, indifference and vices.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, in an objective and unsentimental way "writes about possibly the only segment of urban India that she knows at first hand". Her novels portray the variety and complexity of the post-independence urban life. The locale she selects for her novels is Delhi. Though most of her novels are based on the theme of East-West encounter, her novel, "The Householder" (1960) deals with the life of Prem, a teacher in a private college, who, with his meagre salary, finds it difficult to make both ends meet. The novel highlights the apathetic and callous attitude of people towards the suffering of their fellow beings. It also presents the dull and sober life of the middle class educated who do not find happiness neither inside nor outside their homes. With the exception of this novel, her other novels, besides depicting urban life, present cultural conflict between the East and the West. Her characters, drawn both from India and the West, search for their identity, try to understand the socio-cultural milieu of the Indian urban society and struggle to find fulfilment in life. As K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar rightly points out,

Living in Delhi in the years after independence, Mrs. Jhabvala has had opportunities of exercising her powers of close observation on a milieu that changes
chameleon-like from local to cosmopolitan, from traditional to conventional, from naive to sophisticated; only, sometimes one hardly knows which is which.57

Anita Desai, like Jhabvala, is concerned with the life of the people in cities. Her primary concern is with the human psyche. Most of her novels are set in cities where the characters struggle within to come out of their physical as well as psychological problems. What is conspicuous in her novels is her use of the locale as a backdrop to reflect the mode of their thinking. The best novel that can be cited is her *Voices in the City* (1965). According to a critic “In *Voices in the City* an attempt is made, perhaps for the first time in Indian fiction, to relate the subjective world of the individual to the spirit of a locale.”58 It is about three young people – Nirod, Monisha and Amla – of one family who come to grips with life in the enormous, indifferent and monstrous city of Calcutta. Like the characters in the novel, the city gains significance with its deep association with the human life. ‘Black’ is the colour chosen to represent the dark and evil life of the city. The novel presents the rootless and amorphous life of the people in restaurants, nightclubs and wayside bars, in a powerful way. It also highlights the hectic activity of the business world and the ethos of a corrupt commercial life of the people in the city. To sum up, Anita Desai’s *Voices in the City* is one of the best novels that depicts urban life with its busy, mechanical, indifferent and callous life.

Nayantara Sahgal, too, comes to us as an urban novelist as her novels are set in cities though she is branded as a political novelist. She describes in
her novels the life of the high-class people, especially those who are in the political arena, and alienation and frustrations of the younger generation of Indians in the light of opportunistic politics, hypocrisy and corruption. For example, her novel, A Situation in New Delhi (1977), delineates the situation prevailing in Delhi after the death of Shivaji, the Prime Minister of India. The novel highlights the upsurge of Naxalite movement, and the violent student unrest and agitation at Delhi university leading to its Vice Chancellor, Usman Ali's resignation linking it with the rape of a girl. Allegedly raped Madhu Devi, the widowed sister of the deceased Prime Minister, is the central figure in the novel. The protagonist is critical of those who create violence and disturb the steady life of the city, without having genuine principles or moral conduct. The novel, thus, realistically presents the chaotic conditions prevailed in Delhi after the demise of the Prime Minister. Allegorically, it depicts in "rather superficial manner, the aftermath of Nehru's death, the Naxalite movement and student unrest".59

To sum up, the depiction of urban life in Indian fiction in English finds its roots in K.S. Venkataramani's Murugan, the Tiller. Mulk Raj Anand in his Coolie presents an authentic picture of urban life with all its dirt, filth, disease, death and exploitation. Bhattacharya, in his So Many Hungers!, depicts both the positive and the negative aspects of life in Calcutta. In his Music for Mohini, he portrays a brief sketch of city life in the first few chapters. He Who Rides a Tiger also places on record the dark and evil aspects of urban life as observed by Bhattacharya. In the post-independence novel, urban life gains
momentum with the emergence of women novelists who authentically portray it in their novels. Kamala Markandaya, in her *Nectar in a Sieve*, presents the influence of technology and urbanization on an Indian village. She realistically portrays the miserable life of the protagonist, Rukmani and her husband, Nathan, in the city. She, in her *A Handful of Rice*, describes the life of its hero, Ravi, in Madras. She is also concerned with the horrible conditions of the city poor in the world of criminals, bootleggers and exploiters. Jhabvala, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal have proved themselves to be powerful in their observation of the life of the people in metropolitan cities.

In the following chapters, an attempt is made to show how Mulk Raj Anand, in his *The Village, Gauri* and *Coolie*, Bhabani Bhattacharya in his *A Goddess Named Gold, So Many Hungers!* and *Music for Mohini*, and Kamala Markandaya in her *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice*, with their double vision, have powerfully and realistically portrayed the rural and the urban life of India.
REFERENCES:


8. Ibid, p.27.


13. Raymond Williams, p.213.


15. Ibid, p.204.


20. Ibid, p.11.


44. Raymond Williams, p.290.


51. Ibid, p.145.


