

PREMCHAND'S LIFE AND LITERARY WORKS: A REVIEW

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Premchand is widely celebrated as a pioneer of realist thought in Indian literature. His entry into Hindi novel writing heralded a transformative phase, often referred to as the 'Premchand Era' or the 'Development Period of Hindi Novel Literature.' Although he passed away nearly 87 years ago, his literary legacy continues to resonate in the hearts of readers. This research aims to explore the themes surrounding Premchand's life and his literary contributions, while also examining the perspectives of various scholars and critics on his work. Based on secondary sources, the study employs descriptive and analytical approaches, with a primary focus on textual analysis.

Keywords: Premchand, literary works, social system, social reform

Introduction and Background

The themes of Premchand's literary works were profoundly rooted in human welfare and social reform. Through his writings, he sought to raise awareness about the rigidities and injustices present in the social structures of his time. When a writer addresses the pressing concerns of their era with a focus on human welfare and social reform, and when successive generations continue to recognize the importance of their work, such a writer becomes relevant not only to contemporaries but also to future audiences. Premchand exemplifies this timeless relevance.

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His novels inspired many contemporary writers to adopt his style and orient their literature toward societal issues.

Hence, the study of the life and philosophy of a socially conscious writer like Premchand is of undeniable importance. This research endeavors to examine the themes related to Premchand's life and literary contributions while also considering the perspectives of various scholars and critics. Primarily, it aims to provide a comprehensive introduction to Premchand—his life, experiences, works, and enduring contributions to the field of literature.

Objectives

This review focuses on the following objectives:

1. To gain insight into the themes related to Premchand's life and literary works.
2. To discuss the opinions put forward by various researchers and critics regarding the themes associated with Premchand's life and literary works.

Methodology

This work is primarily based on secondary sources. These secondary sources have been collected through the study of books relevant to the topic, discussions, critiques, research papers, and research books written by various individuals on the subject. The research work adopts descriptive and analytical methods, primarily relying on the method of textual analysis.

Review of Earlier Discussions

Based on our limited knowledge and in alignment with this work, various contexts and topics raised by different researchers and critics at different times are highlighted here:

Madan Gopal, in his book *Munshi Premchand* (मुंशी प्रेमचंद), prepares a biography of Premchand (Gopal, 2006). The book utilizes resources, primarily relying on Premchand's book *Chitthi-Patri* (चिट्ठी-पत्रीद्वंद्व). Gopal interview of various individuals endeavors to investigate and rectify the misconceptions and errors repeatedly mentioned regarding Premchand's life, the timeline of his poetic works, and their publication.

Kamal Kishor Goenka's *Premchand Adhyayan Ki Nai Disbaen* (प्रेमचंद अध्ययन की नई दिशाएँ) analyzes various details provided by Premchand himself as well as those given by others (Goenka, 1981). Published in 1981, it draws on the works of those who had previously worked on Premchand, such as Amrit Rai, Shivranidevi, Madan Gopal, and others. Additionally, based on the information gathered from various sources during his research, Goenka analyzes the authenticity of Premchand's life.

The *Premchand Ghar Mein* (प्रेमचंद घर में), written by Shiv Rani Devi (Premchand's wife), was first published in 1944 (Devi, 1944). The book was revised and republished in 2005 by her grandson, Prabodh Kumar (Kumar, 2018). Reflecting Premchand's biography and autobiography, this volume suggests that Shivranidevi did not employ any artistic method while writing it but wrote down events as they came to her memory. Her writings are simple but so emotionally evocative that readers get the opportunity to re-evaluate Premchand and his literary contributions through her work. The book clearly reflects the fact that the productive seeds necessary for Premchand's contributions to the field of literature were found within his own household.

Navalkishor (2019), in his book *Premchand Ki Pragatisilta* (प्रेमचंद की प्रगतिशीलता), made an effort to understand and re-establish Premchand's greatness. The book is a compilation of eight research papers on Premchand writings. Compiling Premchand's humanism in his writings, connection with the masses, and attempts to convey a message to society, the book also includes critical discussions of various writings of Ramvilas Sharma (Sharma, 2007 & 2008) and Namvar Singh (Singh, 2017), offering substantial and insightful discussions on Premchand's works.

The *Premchand: Kalam Ki Sipahi* (प्रेमचंदरू कलम का सिपाही), written by Amrit Rai, is a biography by the renowned Hindi litterateur and Premchand's son (Rai, 2005). However, Amrit Rai does not portray Premchand merely as a father but as a human being, objectively presenting both the positive and negative aspects of his character. To write this book, Amrit Rai painstakingly collected Premchand's correspondence, oral

accounts, connected with Premchand's old friends, and used various other means over a period of about five years.

Gopal Rai's *Upnyas Ki Sanrachna* (उपन्यास की संरचना) describes the novel as a living creation, stating that it embodies two forms: the first is the form crafted by the novelist, and the second is the form created by the reader through their consciousness. The first two chapters of the book discuss the structure of the novel in detail, while the subsequent eight chapters provide a well-organized discussion on the structure of two dozen Hindi novels. According to Rai, Premchand was the pioneer of realist structure in Hindi literature who not only established realism in Hindi literature but also developed it significantly. Gopal Rai notes that the influence of European realist writers like Thackeray and Tolstoy on the structure of Premchand's later novels such as *Rangbhoomi* (रंगभूमि), *Kayakalp* (कायाकल्प), *Premashram* (प्रेमाश्रम), and *Godaan* (गोदान) cannot be denied (Rai, 2009).

A critical work by Ramvilas Sharma in his book *Premchand* (प्रेमचंद) reflects the author's responds to those who denies the progressive aspects of Premchand's literature (Sharma, 2007). This edition strives to firmly establish various ideas related to the progressive stream of Premchand's literature. Sharma successfully intervened in the debates surrounding Premchand's literature between 1935 and 1940. In 2008, Ramvilas Sharma's *Premchand Aur Unka Yug* (प्रेमचंद और उनका युग), Premchand is portrayed as a realist and optimistic litterateur where his writings are described as highly relevant to Indian society. Sharma notes that Premchand's literary works, especially his novels, still pave the way for solutions to contemporary issues. He describes Premchand's literary works as not only artistic but also historical documents for Indian society (Sharma, 2008). Sharma states that wherever there is reform, Premchand is present...not only sowed the seeds of reform but also nurtured them.

Namvar Singh's book *Premchand Aur Bharatiya Samaj* (प्रेमचंद और भारतीय समाज) is a compilation of interpretations and essays written by the author on Premchand at various times. All aspects reflected in Premchand's works are elaborately discussed in the essays included in this book. The book clearly expresses a progressive perspective on Premchand's ideology, experiences, and works (Singh, 2017).

Discussion

In this section, we will explore Premchand's birth and family background, childhood, education, and teaching career to gain a deeper understanding of his life through the insights reflected in various writers' literary works.

Premchand's Birth and Parents' Identity

Premchand was born on July 31, 1880, in a small village called Lamahi in Varanasi, into a Kayastha family. The Indian Postal Service confirmed his birth year as 1880 through a postage stamp issued in his name in 1980. Most researchers and scholars, including notable names such as Madan Gopal, Shivranidevi, Amrit Rai, Kul Nath Gogoi, Ramvilas Sharma, Namvar Singh, Yogeshbhai Pratapsingh Jhala, and Dinesh Sharma, also accept July 31, 1880, as Premchand's birth date. However, writer Kamalkishor Goenka has expressed doubts about Premchand's birth date based on certain evidence, stating: प्रेमचंद पर शोध कार्य करते हुए मुझे दो ऐसे प्रमाण मिले, जिन्होंने प्रेमचंद की प्रचलित जन्म-तिथि पर एक प्रश्नचिन्ह लगा दिया है। (While conducting research on Premchand, I found two pieces of evidence that cast doubt on his commonly accepted birth date.)

Additionally, Kamalkishor Goenka (Goenka, 1981) has noted:

उनके एंट्रेंस सर्टिफिकेट धनपतराय के नाम से है और इस पर यूनिवर्सिटी ऑफ इलाहाबाद, एंट्रेंस एक्जामिनेशन 1899 मुद्रित है। इस सर्टिफिकेट पर अंकित है कि धनपतराय ने जनवरी, 1899 में हुई एंट्रेंस परीक्षा 17 वर्ष 4 मास की आयु में पास की।... यदि मान लिया जाय कि विश्वविद्यालय ने 20 फरवरी, 1899 को सर्टिफिकेट देते समय उनकी आयु की गणना करके उनकी आयु 17 वर्ष 4 मास मानी थी, तब उनकी जन्म तिथि 20 अक्टूबर, 1881 होनी चाहिए, परन्तु वह जन्म तिथि कुंडली की जन्म तिथि से मेल नहीं खाती। (The entrance certificate is in the name of Dhanpat Rai, and it mentions University of Allahabad, Entrance Examination 1899. The certificate states that Dhanpat Rai passed the entrance exam in January 1899 at the age of 17 years and 4 months. ... If we assume that the university calculated his age as 17 years and 4 months when issuing the certificate on February 20, 1899, then his birth date should be October 20, 1881. However, this does not match the birth date in his birth certificate.)

Goenka further provides another piece of evidence:

इसके साथ यह भी एक आश्चर्य की बात है कि प्रेमचंद की सर्विस-बुक में लिखित जन्म तिथि न तो जन्म-कुंडली से मिलती है और न एंट्रेंस सर्टिफिकेट से। सर्विस बुक में उनकी जन्म तिथि दी है - 10 अगस्त, 1881। इस प्रकार प्रेमचंद की जन्म तिथि के रूप में तीन तिथियाँ सामने आती हैं। उनके जन्म कुंडली वाली प्रचलित जन्म तिथि अन्य दो उपलब्ध प्रमाणों से अनुमोदित नहीं होती,

अतः उनकी सत्यता में संदेह होना स्वाभाविक ही है। (Additionally, it is surprising that the birth date mentioned in Premchand's service book does not match either the birth date in his birth certificate or the entrance certificate. The service book lists his birth date as August 10, 1881. Thus, we get three different dates for Premchand's birth. The commonly accepted birth date from his birth certificate is not corroborated by the other two available pieces of evidence, so it is natural to have doubts about its authenticity.)

Premchand's real name was 'Dhanpat Rai.' Madan Gopal, in his book *Kalam Ka Munshi: Premchand* (कलम का मुंशीरू प्रेमचंद) (Gopal, 2006), explains Premchand's name as follows:

घर का दिया गया नाम धनपतराय था और उसे ताऊ उसे प्यार से नवाब पुकारते थे। जब धनपत राय ने पहले-पहल लिखना शुरू किया, तब उन्होंने नवाब राय नाम को ही अपनाया था। (The name given by the family was Dhanpat Rai, and his uncle affectionately called him Nawab. When Dhanpat Rai began writing, he adopted the name Nawab Rai.)

Premchand's father's name was Ajaib Rai, a postal clerk by profession, and his mother's name was Anandi Devi. Since Premchand was born after three daughters, the villagers referred to him as 'Tetar.' A boy born after three daughters was called 'Tetar' because, according to the prevailing superstition of the time, such a child would not survive long without causing harm to one of the parents. Regarding this, writer Amrit Rai, in his book *Premchand: Kalam Ka Sipahi* (प्रेमचंदरू कलम का सिपाही), describes it as a kind of irony of nature because the boy who grew up to fight lifelong against such superstitions and social evils was himself born under the shadow of superstition and regressive beliefs (Rai, 2005).

Premchand's Childhood

Childhood is a sweet phase of human life. Premchand spent this sweet period in his village. He was very fond of playing, extremely lively, and loved entertainment. In this context, an incident from Premchand's childhood, as described in the book *Premchand: Ghar Mein* (प्रेमचंदरू घर में) by writer Shiv Rani Devi (Devi, 1944), is mentioned here as an example:

एक बार की बात है दू कई लड़के मिलकर नाई-नाई खेल रहे थे। आपने एक लड़के की हजामत बनाते हुए बाँस की कमी से उसका कान ही काट लिया। उस लड़के की माँ झल्लाकर उनकी माता से उनकी शिकायत करने आई थी। आपने जैसे ही उनकी आवाज सुनी, खिड़की के पास दबक गए। माँ ने दबकते हुए उन्हें देख लिया था, पकड़कर चार झापड़ दिए।...

(One day, several boys were playing a barber game. While pretending to cut a boy's hair with a bamboo comb, Premchand accidentally cut the boy's ear. The boy's mother, in anger, came to complain to Premchand's mother. As soon as he heard her voice, he hid near the window. His mother saw him hiding, caught him, and gave him four slaps...)

Those times passed beautifully. However, those happy days did not last long. His mother passed away due to a prolonged illness of dysentery. At the time of her death, Premchand was 8 years old, and his elder sister was six to seven years older than him, meaning around 14-15 years old. That same year, his sister was married off just eight to ten days before their mother's death. His mother's death brought many changes to Premchand's life. Regarding this, Yogeshbhai Pratap Singh Jhala mentions in his research work:

माँ के मरने के बाद नवाब के पास वही पुरानी दुनिया थी, वही मौलवी साहब, वही खेल मैदान, वही आम-इमली, वही भाग-दौड़, वही गुल्ली-डंडा, किन्तु फर्क सिर्फ इतना था कि अब उसे रोकने वाला कोई न था। माँ थी, तब तो उसे किसी काम के लिए रोकती टोकती थी, कभी मारती भी थी, दादी तो बस उसे लाड़ करती थी। शायद इसलिए कि बेटा माँ के मरने का गम भूल जाए। लेकिन प्रेमचंद का मन अब किसी चीज में नहीं लगता था। बिना किसी रुक-टोक की वजह से धीरे-धीरे आवारगी प्रेमचंद की सबसे बुरी आदत बन गई, साथ ही दूसरी बुरी लतें भी बढ़ने लगी। झूठ बोलना, चोरी करना, सिगरेट बीड़ी पीना आदि। (After his mother's death, Nawab had the same old world, the same Maulvi Sahab, the same playground, the same mango-tamarind trees, the same running around, the same gulli-danda, but the only difference was that there was no one to stop him now. When his mother was alive, she would scold or sometimes beat him for certain things, but his grandmother only pampered him. Perhaps she did so to help the boy forget the sorrow of his mother's death. But Premchand's mind no longer found interest in anything. Due to the lack of discipline, aimless wandering became his worst habit, and other bad habits like lying, stealing, and smoking bidis or cigarettes also took hold.)

Premchand's father, due to his busy job, could not give him much time. His father remarried, but the new mother could not fill the void of Nawab's mother or alleviate his loneliness. With the arrival of his stepmother, his father's attention toward him further diminished. The loss of his mother and the neglect from his stepmother caused him immense pain. He referred to his stepmother as Chachi (Aunt).

Regarding this, prominent writer Madan Gopal states:

चाची घर की मालकिन बनी। धनपतराय से उनका व्यवहार ऐसा था कि घर से भागने को जी करता।
(The stepmother became the mistress of the house. Her behavior toward Dhanpat Rai was such that he felt like running away from home.)

Regarding his father, Premchand expressed his feelings through the character of a boy in an occasion as noted by writer Kul Nath Gogoi, who translated Premchand's work, comments as follows:

My father was very short-tempered. He had to do a lot of work, and for that reason, he would get angry over small things. I never went close to him, and he never showed me affection. He would come home only twice a day for meals, staying for about an hour each time. The rest of the day, he spent writing at the office. He repeatedly requested the officer for an assistant, but it bore no fruit. Though he never showed affection, he would give me money whenever needed. Perhaps, being busy with his work, he thought giving money was the easiest way to keep me content (Gogoi, 2011, pp. 18, 19).

In his childhood, the lively and fun-loving Premchand enjoyed all the pleasures of childhood, but those joys lasted only as long as his mother was alive. After her death, many changes occurred in his life, whether in his behavior or his education.

Premchand's Educational Life

Premchand began his educational journey at the age of five. About one to one-and-a-half miles from Lamahi, in a village called Lalpur, there was a Maulvi Sahab who was a tailor by profession and also ran a madrasa. This Maulvi Sahab provided Premchand with his early education. Premchand's initial education was in Urdu and Persian. His wife and writer Shiv Rani Devi (Devi, 1944) mentions in her book:

आपकी पढ़ाई पाँचवें वर्ष शुरू हुई। पहले मौलवी साहब से उर्दू पढ़ते थे। उन मौलवी साहब के दरवाजे पर सब लड़के के साथ पढ़ने जाते थे। आप पढ़ने में बहुत तेज थे। लड़कपन में आप बहुत दुबले थे।
(His education began at the age of five. Initially, he studied Urdu under Maulvi Sahab. He used to go to the madrasa with other boys to study. As a child, he was very weak in studies.)

As a young boy, Nawab did not have much interest in studies. He studied under Maulvi Sahab alongside his uncle Mahabirlal's younger son, Haldhar. Nawab would eat leftover food at night and head to the madrasa for studies. However, often claiming to go to the madrasa, he would spend most of the day wandering aimlessly. There was no attendance register at Maulvi Sahab's madrasa, nor were there fines for not attending. Taking advantage of this, Nawab sometimes remained absent from the madrasa for an entire week. When Maulvi Sahab questioned him, he would give such clever excuses that Maulvi Sahab's anger would subside. As he grew older, Premchand's attraction to Urdu and Persian languages gradually increased. He credited Maulvi Sahab for strengthening his foundation in these languages. Due to his fascination with Urdu and Persian, at just thirteen years old, he completed reading the massive 25,000-page Urdu book *Tilismi Hoshruba* (तलिस्मी होशरुबा) by Maulana Fauji in just two to three years.

In 1895, Nawab Rai came to Varanasi to enroll in high school. To study in Varanasi, he asked his father for a monthly allowance of five rupees. With two rupees for school fees and one rupee for milk, he was left with two rupees for himself, which made it difficult for him to manage the month. Therefore, instead of staying in Varanasi, he arranged to walk to and from Lamahi to Varanasi for his studies. At night, he would spread a cloth on the floor, place a lamp in front of him, and study. He was very weak in mathematics. Regarding this, researcher Yogeshbhai Pratap Singh Jhala mentions:

सन 1896 में उनके पिता की मृत्यु हो गई। स्कूल में तो प्रेमचंद की फीस माफ हो गई थी, किन्तु मैट्रिकुलेशन में सेकंड डिवीजन आया। अच्छा दर्जा आने तो फीस माफी की संभावना थी। सिफारिश से भी काम न बना। गणित में कमजोर न होते तो शायद काम बन भी जाता। बीज गणित और रेखा गणित से तो उनकी रूह काँप उठती थी। (In 1896, his father passed away, and his school fees were waived. However, he passed matriculation in the second division. Had he secured a first division, there might have been a possibility of a fee waiver. No recommendation worked either. If he hadn't been weak in mathematics, something might have worked out. Algebra and geometry made his soul tremble.)

In 1910, Premchand passed his higher secondary examination with distinction, taking mathematics as an optional subject. Later, in 1919, he also successfully completed his B.A. examination.

The lack of his mother's affection brought many changes to Premchand's life. To keep himself occupied, he began reading books. His friends nicknamed him a "bookworm." He found the only way to overcome his loneliness in books. Reading various types of books, including those on magic, mysteries, and more, he became a walking encyclopedia. Regarding this, Kul Nath Gogoi notes:

'The stories in books began to fuel his mind. Who knows when, perhaps from birth, the hunger in his heart, awakened by his grandmother's stories, was now being satisfied by Nawab himself. In this way, he abandoned his habits of wandering aimlessly, playing games like tang-guti, and immersed him in thick books on magic, illusions, and mystery stories. Thus, by reading, he became a complete encyclopedia.' (Gogoi, 2011, p. 21)

Nawab Rai read hundreds of novels in about three years. During that time, writers like Maulana Sharar, Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshar, Mirza Ruswa, and Maulvi Muhammad Ali from Hardoi were his favorite novelists. Whenever he found their works, he would forget about school and only find peace after finishing the book. At that time, *Reynolds'* novels were very popular. Their Urdu translations were constantly published and sold out quickly. Nawab was a fan of his books. Hazrat Riyaz translated one of *Reynolds'* books as *Harmsara* (हरमसरा). At the same time, Maulana Sajjad Husain, the editor of the weekly magazine *Awadh Punch* (अवध पंच) from Lucknow and a renowned humorist, translated Reynolds' second novel as *Dokha* (दोखा) or *Tilsmi Fanus* (तिलस्मी फानूस). Nawab read all these books during that time, and his thirst for Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshar's books was insatiable, no matter how much he read. He read all of Sarshar's works. In a secluded place, a bookseller named Buddhi Lal had a shop. Nawab would often sit there, pulling out novels from piles of books to read. Since he couldn't spend the entire day at the shop, he would take English dictionaries and notebooks from Buddhi Lal's shop, sell them to schoolboys, and in exchange, bring novels home to read. Within two to three years, he finished reading hundreds of novels. When he exhausted the stock of novels, he read Urdu translations of Puranas published by Naval Kishore Press.

Given the number of books Premchand studied in his childhood, it's unlikely that anyone else at that time read so many books so deeply.

Regarding this, researcher Yogeshbhai Pratap Singh Jhala writes:

अपने पुरोगामी तथ समकालीनों में प्रेमचंद ही ऐसे एक मात्र उपन्यासकार थे जिन्होंने विश्व-साहित्य की श्रेष्ठ कृतियों का सर्वाधिक अध्ययन किया हो। शैशवकाल में ही उन्होंने बहुत कुछ पढ़ डाला था। (Among his predecessors and contemporaries, Premchand was the only novelist who studied the finest works of world literature the most extensively. Even in his childhood, he had read a great deal.)

Premchand as a Teacher

Premchand's primary means of livelihood was teaching. His passion for both acquiring and imparting knowledge led him to choose teaching as a profession while continuing his studies simultaneously.

बनारस, कानपुर, गोरखपुर, बस्ती आदि कई जगहों पर उन्होंने अध्यापन कार्य किया। कई बार आर्थिक कठिनाइयों और जीवन निर्वाह के लिए ट्यूशन भी करना पड़ता था। (He taught in various places like Banaras, Kanpur, Gorakhpur, Basti, etc. At times, he had to give tuitions to meet financial needs and sustain his livelihood.)

In 1899, Dhanpat Rai began teaching for the first time at a mission school in Chunar. Alongside teaching, he continued his studies and gave tuitions. Due to financial constraints, he reluctantly took up the job at the mission school. Writer Madan Gopal notes:

धनपतराय ने मिशन स्कूल में नौकरी कर तो ली थी और कहाँ मिलती थी—परन्तु, यहाँ बहुत खुश न थे। इसका एक कारण तो यह था कि आर्य समाज के अनुयायी प्रेमचंद ईसाई पादरियों द्वारा प्रचार को देखकर दुखी होते थे। उनका विचार था कि ईसाई पादरियों का प्रचार हिन्दू समाज के लिए घातक होगा। (Dhanpat Rai took up a job at the mission school out of necessity, but he was not happy there. One reason was that, as a follower of the Arya Samaj, Premchand felt pained seeing the Christian missionaries' propagation. He believed their preaching would be harmful to Hindu society.)

On July 2, 1900, Nawab Rai was appointed as a fifth-grade teacher at the district school in Bahraich, earning a monthly salary of 20 rupees. Two to two-and-a-half months later, he was transferred from Bahraich to Pratapgarh. Satisfied with his work in Pratapgarh, he was sent to Allahabad in July 1902 for teacher training, and from there, in 1905, Nawab obtained the Junior Certificate Teacher. According to writer Madan Gopal, the certificate states:

गणित पढ़ाने की योग्यता नहीं रखते, चलचलन संतोषजनक है और समय के पाबंद हैं। धनपतराय ने अपना काम खूब मेहनत से और अच्छी तरह किया। (He does not have the

apitude to teach mathematics, but his conduct is satisfactory, and he is punctual. Dhanpat Rai performed his work with great effort and well.)

At that time, the principal of the training college was Mr. Capelstar, and Nawab was his favorite student. Consequently, in 1905, Capelstar appointed Nawab Rai as the headmaster of the training college's model school. In 1908, Nawab Rai was appointed as a deputy inspector at the district board in Mahoba, within the Hamirpur district. Later, in 1915, he worked as an assistant teacher at a government school in Basti district. Eventually, inspired by Gandhi's non-cooperation movement, he resigned from his government job.

Premchand's Literary Works

In this section, we will examine Premchand's literary journey, his contributions as a storywriter, novelist, and playwright to gain a deeper understanding of his literary works through insights from various writers' works. Regarding the time when Premchand entered the field of literature, prominent writer Madan Gopal states:

धनपतराय ने कब और कहाँ लिखना आरम्भ किया, इसके बारे में निश्चित रूप से कुछ कहना बहुत कठिन है। स्वयं प्रेमचंद ने भिन्न-भिन्न स्थानों पर भिन्न तिथियाँ दी हैं। एक पत्र में प्रेमचंद ने लिखा था, लिटरेटरी जिन्दगी 1901 में शुरू की। रिसाला जमाना में लिखता रहा। कई साल तक मुतफरिक् मजमीन लिखे। 1904 में एक हिन्दी नावल प्रेमा लिखकर इण्डियन प्रेस से शायी कराया। एक दूसरे पत्र में लिखा, हमखुमा व हमसबाब जिसका हिन्दी अनुवाद प्रेमा के नाम से छपा व किशना 1900 की तसानीफ हैं। फरवरी 1932 के हमसरा में प्रेमचंद ने लिखा-उपन्यास तो मैंने 1901 ही में लिखना शुरू किया। मेरा एक उपन्यास 1902 में निकला और दूसरा 1904 में। (Dhanpat Rai began writing at an uncertain time and place, making it difficult to pinpoint exactly. Premchand himself mentioned different dates in different places. In one letter, he wrote that he started his literary life in 1901. He wrote for the journal *Jamana* (जमाना) for several years, contributing various articles. In 1904, he wrote a Hindi novel *Prema* (प्रेमा) and published it through the Indian Press. In another letter, he wrote that *Hamkhuma va Hamsabab* (हमखुमा व हमसबाब), whose Hindi translation was published as *Prema* (प्रेमा), was probably a work from 1900. In February 1932, in *Hamsara* (हमसरा), Premchand wrote that he began writing novels in 1901. His first novel was published in 1902, and the second in 1904).

Premchand was one of the most popular literary figures in Hindi and Urdu literature. Initially, he wrote under the name 'Nawab Rai.' Regarding Premchand, literary scholar Namvar Singh notes:

प्रेमचंद हिन्दी और उर्दू में लिखते हुए भी सच्चे अर्थ में भारतीय साहित्यकार थे। (Though Premchand wrote in Hindi and Urdu, in the truest sense, he was an Indian literary figure.) (Singh, 2017)

For someone with an incredible passion for reading books, developing an interest in writing was natural. Premchand documented every event of his life, turning them into stories, plays, or novels. When he read his writings to his friends and received their praise, his enthusiasm doubled. He realized that the power of the pen was far greater than physical strength, and adopting this as his guiding principle, he advanced in the field of literature. Namvar Singh (Singh, 2017) further mentions:

पैंतीस वर्षों के लेखन काल में प्रेमचंद ने लगभग तीन सौ कहानियाँ, बारह उपन्यास, तीन नाटक, दो सौ से ऊपर लेख और एक दर्जन अनुवाद प्रकाशित किए। कहने की आवश्यकता नहीं कि यह एक अनवरत संघर्ष और अथक परिश्रम की बेमिसाल कहानी है। (In his 35-year writing career, Premchand published around 300 stories, 12 novels, three plays, over 200 essays, and a dozen translations. It goes without saying that this is a remarkable story of relentless struggle and tireless effort.)

In the initial phase, Premchand wrote a play based on the love story of a relative (maternal uncle) and the insults he faced from cobblers as a result of that love. After showing the play to his friends, they all praised him. This play was his first literary work. However, it remained unpublished, as mentioned by Premchand in his essay *Pehli Rasna* (पहली रचना). Premchand's first Urdu novel, *Asraare Maabid* (असरारे मआबिद), was published serially in the Urdu weekly *Awaaze Khalk* (आवाजे खल्क) from Banaras between October 8, 1903, and 1905, and was later translated into Hindi as *Devasthan Rahasya* (देवस्थान रहस्य). As already mentioned, his second Urdu novel, *Hamkhuma wo Hamsabab* (हमखुमा व हमसबाब), was later translated into Hindi as *Prema* (प्रेमा) and published in 1900. Nawab's first Urdu story collection, *Soze Watan*, (सोजे वतन), was published in 1908. Filled with patriotic sentiments, this collection faced restrictions from the British government, which confiscated and burned all its copies and warned him against writing such works in the future. Consequently, the renowned Urdu journalist, social worker, and editor of *Jamana* (जमाना), Munshi Daya Narayan, advised him to write under the name 'Premchand,' and from then on, Nawab Rai began writing as 'Premchand.' In a letter to Munshi Daya Narayan, Nawab Rai wrote:

Premchand is a good name. I like it too. The only regret is that the efforts to establish 'Nawab Rai' over five to six years went in vain. This gentleman's fate is always unfortunate and will remain so. (Gogoi, 2011, p. 87)

The first story Premchand wrote under this name was *Bare Ghar Ki Beti* (बड़े घर की बेटी), published in 1910 in the journal *Jamana* (जमाना). In December 1915, his story *Saut* (सात) was published in the then-popular monthly journal *Saraswati* (सरस्वती). In 1918, Premchand's first Hindi novel, *Sevasadan* (सेवासदन), was published. His immense popularity in Urdu literature also established him as a Hindi storywriter. Premchand published most of his works in both Hindi and Urdu. In 1921, after resigning from his government job during the non-cooperation movement, he fully dedicated himself to literary creation. Premchand also served as the editor of the journal *Maryada* (मर्यादा) for a few months and edited the Hindi journal *Madhuri* (माधुरी) for about six years. In 1930, he worked as the editor of the monthly journal *Hans* (हंस) published from Banaras. From 1930 to 1934, he served as the editor of the weekly journal *Jagaran* (जागरण), and additionally, in 1934, he wrote the screenplay for the film *Majdur* (मजदूर). Beyond stories and novels, Premchand enriched Hindi and Urdu literature with plays, biographies, essays, and translations.

Premchand as a Storywriter

Munshi Premchand entered the world of storywriting at the beginning of the 20th century, a time when nationalist consciousness was awakening in every Indian's mind. The stories he wrote initially were filled with nationalist sentiments. *Soz-e Watan* (सोजे वतन) is one such story collection, which led to Premchand facing the wrath of the British government. The vision Premchand had of India's independence and the creation of a new India is reflected through his story *Namak ka Daroga* (नमक का दरोगा). Literary scholar Madan Gopal highlights Premchand's statement regarding his first Urdu story:

मेरी पहली कहानी का नाम था, दुनिया का सबसे अनमोल रतन। वह 1907 में जमाना में छपी। (My first story was titled *Duniya ka Sabse Anmol Ratan* (दुनिया का सबसे अनमोल रतन). It was published in 1907 in *Jamana* (जमाना))

Shatranj ke Khiladi (शतरंज के खिलाड़ी) is another of Premchand's stories filled with nationalist thought. As an example of how Premchand crafted a story, his statement is presented:

मेरी कहानियाँ प्रायः किसी-न-किसी प्रेरणा या अनुभव पर आधारित होती हैं। इसमें मैं झामाई रंग पैदा करने की कोशिश करता हूँ। परन्तु केवल घटना के वर्णन के लिए मैं कहानियाँ कभी नहीं लिखता। मैं कहानी में किसी दार्शनिक का भावात्मक तथ्य को दिखाना चाहता हूँ। जब तक इस प्रकार का कोई आधार नहीं मिलता, मेरी कलम ही नहीं उठती। (My stories are usually based on some inspiration or experience. I try to infuse a dramatic tone in them. However, I never write stories just to describe events. I aim to showcase some philosophical or emotional truth in my stories. Until I find such a foundation, my pen does not move.)

Researcher Yogeshbhai Pratap Singh Jhala mentions in his research work:

पंडित महावीर प्रसाद द्विवेदी की प्रेरणा से उन्होंने अपनी उर्दू कहानियों को हिन्दी में प्रकाशित करवाया, जो हिन्दी साहित्य जगत में काफी लोकप्रिय हुई। (Inspired by Pandit Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, Premchand published his Urdu stories in Hindi, which became very popular in the Hindi literary world.)

Premchand wrote around 300 stories, compiled into eight volumes under the title *Manasarovar* (मानसरोवर). His prominent stories include *Poos ki Raat* (पूस की रात), *Kafan* (कफन), *Budhi Kaki* (बूढ़ी काकी), *Panch Parmeshwar* (पंच परमेश्वर), *Do Baiton ki Katha* (दो बैलों की कथा), *Bade Ghar ki Beti* (बड़े घर की बेटा), *Namak ka Daroga* (नमक का दरोगा), *Sadgati* (सद्गति), *Aabhooshan* (आभूषण), *Prayaschit* (प्रायश्चित), *Kamna* (कामना), *Saut* (सौत), *Swa Ser Gebun* (स्वा सेर गेहूँ), *Shmashani* (‘मशानी), *Atmaram* (आत्माराम), *Shatranj ke Khiladi* (‘तरंज के खिलाड़ी), *Sujan Bhagat* (सुजान भगत), *Mantra* (मंत्र), *Eidgab* (ईदगाह), *Gulli-Danda* (गुल्ली-डंडा), *Thakur ka Kuva* (ठाकुर का कुआँ), *Rasik Sampadak* (रसिक सम्पादक), *Ram Leela* (राम लीला), *Virodhi* (विद्रोही), *Mitra* (मित्र) etc.

Premchand as a Novelist

Premchand made an unparalleled contribution to the field of Hindi novels. Researcher Yogeshbhai Pratap Singh Jhala notes:

उपन्यासों के क्षेत्र में तो प्रेमचंद ने एक युग प्रवर्तक का काम किया है। प्रेमचंद के पूर्व जितने भी उपन्यास लिखे गए उन्हें हम उपन्यासों का शैशवकाल कह सकते हैं। प्रेमचंद ने उपन्यास साहित्य में प्रवेश करते ही जैसे उपन्यास साहित्य को नई दिशा मिली। वे उपन्यास के क्षेत्र में एक युग पुरुष बनकर आए और युग प्रेरक के रूप में रहकर उपन्यास साहित्य को समृद्ध बनाया। (In the field of novels, Premchand played the role of a pioneer of an era. The novels written before Premchand can be called the ‘childhood’ of novels. With Premchand’s entry into novel writing, it was as if the genre found a new direction. He emerged as a monumental figure in the field of novels and enriched it as an era-inspiring figure.)

Through his novels, Premchand endeavored to raise social awareness. When selecting themes for his novels, he ensured that the content was aligned with real life, exposed the prevalent social anomalies of the time, and suggested remedies for these issues. His novels addressed contemporary social evils, customs, and practices, such as the problems of farmers, Dalits, women, gender inequality, and communalism. Writer Narendra Kohli comments on the purpose of Premchand's novels:

1) प्रेमचंद मनोरंजन को साहित्य का उद्देश्य स्वीकार नहीं करते। 2) उनका उद्देश्य अप्रत्यक्ष उपदेश द्वारा समाज में गति तथा सक्रियता उत्पन्न करना था। 3) इस गति तथा सक्रियता के माध्यम से स्वतंत्रता प्राप्त कर वे देश तथा समाज को दुख शून्य और सुंदर बनाना चाहते थे। (1) Premchand never accepted entertainment as the purpose of literature. 2) His aim was to generate momentum and awareness in society through indirect instruction. 3) Through this momentum and awareness, he sought to achieve independence and create a happy and beautiful nation and society.)

The year 1918 was significant for Hindi novels, as Premchand's first Hindi novel, *सेवासदन* (*Sevasadan*), was published that year. The novel highlights issues such as women's subjugation, the life of prostitutes, the dowry system, and the financial and social problems of the middle class. In reality, *Sevasadan* (सेवासदन), *Premasram* (प्रेमाश्रम), *Rangabhumi* (रंगभूमि) are Hindi translations of his Urdu novels *Bazaar-e-Husn* (बाजारे हुस्न), *Gosha-e-Aafiyat* (गोशाए आफियत), *Chegane Hasti* (चौगाने हस्ती) respectively, but they were published in Hindi before Urdu. Premchand's novels include *Sevasadan* (सेवासदन), 1918; *Bardan* (वरदान), 1920; *Premasram* (प्रेमाश्रम), 1922; *Rangabhumi* (रंगभूमि), 1925; *Kayakalpa* (कायाकल्प), 1926; *Ahankar* (अहंकार), 1926; *Nirmala* (निर्मला), 1927; *Pratigya* (प्रतिज्ञा), 1927; *Gaban* (गबन), 1931; *Karmabhumi* (कर्मभूमि), 1932; *Godan* (गोदान), 1936 and *Mangalsutra* (मंगलसूत्र), published posthumously in 1948.

Premchand as a Playwright

Premchand's first play, *Pehli Rachana* (पहली रचना), remained unpublished, and its backdrop was based on his maternal uncle. Writer Ramvilas Sharma notes:

प्रेमचंद की पहली रचना, जो अप्रकाशित ही रही, शायद उनका वह नाटक था जो उन्होंने अपने मामा जी के प्रेम और उस प्रेम के फरस्वरूप चमारों द्वारा उनकी पिटाई पर लिखा था। इसका जिक्र उन्होंने 'पहली रचना' नाम के अपने लेख में किया है। (Premchand's first work,

which remained unpublished, was probably a play he wrote about his maternal uncle's love and the humiliation he faced from cobblers as a result. He mentioned this in his essay *Pehli Rachana* (पहली रचना).

Premchand was as enthusiastic about writing plays as he was about stories and novels. His plays include *Sangram* (संग्राम), 1923; *Karbala* (कर्बला), 1924; and *Prem Ki Bedi* (प्रेम की बेदी), 1933. In addition to novels, stories, and plays, Premchand enriched Hindi literature through essays, translations, and biographical works. Researcher Jhala expresses his view on this:

उनका लेखन न केवल संख्या की दृष्टि से बल्कि विषयवस्तु की दृष्टि से भी विशाल है जिसमें भारतीय समाज की सच्ची झाँकियाँ देखने को मिलती हैं। (His writings are vast not only in quantity but also in subject matter, offering a true glimpse of Indian society.)

Conclusion

While working on his novel *Mangalsutra* (मंगलसूत्र), Premchand succumbed to a prolonged and complicated illness on October 8, 1936. Consequently, *Mangalsutra* remained incomplete and was later completed by his capable son, Amrit Rai.

Premchand began his literary journey under highly adverse conditions, as the administrative system of his time was largely oppressive and anti-social. Despite these challenges, he vividly depicted the social confusions of his era in his novels with a realistic approach, reflecting a progressive outlook grounded in humanistic philosophy. Even today, nearly 87 years after his passing, the themes of his literary works—the issues, grievances, and societal concerns he highlighted—remain relevant in the 21st century. Premchand did not seek to incite rebellion; his primary aim was social reform. Through literature, he not only raised awareness about the rigidities and flaws in the social structure but also cautioned people from all walks of life about the potential consequences of these issues.

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