

Mirroring the Real World in the Vicinity of Fiction: A Study of Selected Short Stories by Premchand

Paper Submission: 01/03/2021, Date of Acceptance: 12/03/2021, Date of Publication: 20/03/2021



Rishi Pal

Associate Professor,
Dept. of Hindi,
B.A.R. Janta College,
Kaul, Kaithal, Haryana, India



Shrishti

Research Scholar,
Dept. of English,
Panjab University,
Chandigarh, Punjab, India

Abstract

Hindi Sahitya with its rich legacy stepped into the Adhunik kal precisely with the onset of 1900's. This paradigmatic shift from the Riti-Kavya Kal was brought about by the most celebrated writer Munshi Premchand, who from the yoke of alienated literary sphere brought in a strain of realism and progressive movement by the means of his fictive writings. This paper is a tribute to the revered writer Premchand of the Hindi Literature, who is not confined to Hindi but is translated into numerous other languages for his universal reach. On another level, the paper is a close reading aimed at selected short stories by Premchand which bring about the true picture of the society with all its imperfections.

Keywords: Hindi Literature, Premchand, Short Stories, Realism.

Introduction

Dhanpat Rai Srivastav better known from his pen name Munshi Premchand [1880- 1936], was a pioneer figure of the Hindustani Literature of Indian subcontinent. Master in art of writing short fiction, Premchand paints a mirror to the society by the means of his pen. His articulations are in the indigenous languages, including both Hindi and Urdu. It is wrong on the part of the audience to merely confine an iconoclast as, Premchand, as a fiction writer. Not only a prolific fiction writer, Premchand was a socio-political critic and a reformer. Far from the realm of romantic disposal, Premchand's plots are based on the realistic depiction of the society with all its flaws. He problematizes the life of lower middle class and other marginal groups. He impregnated Hindi Literature to a new untouched horizon of social realism. His writings served to propagate an awareness against the recurrent social and national issues of the early twentieth century and thus, outlook social reform. Encompassing a rationalistic vision, Premchand voiced the social nuances ranging from poverty, corruption, feudal system, untouchability, prostitution, intoxication, child widowhood, dowry system, colonialism, patriotism, Free India movement and so on. Staunch critique of zamindari system, Premchand yearned for economic liberation of the working class and peasantry. His cause overlapped with that of the peripheral masses.

Premchand authored about three hundred short stories and a small pool of novels. His short stories like "Idgah", "The Shroud", "The Old Aunt", "The Game of Chess" and "Holy Judges" are stylistically colloquial in nature, inspired by the trials and tribulations of the masses of the real world. They are deeply intricated with strong human emotions and strained gamut of relationships. It can be ascribed in today's time that Premchand was 'vocal for the locals.' Situated in the socio-economic hubris of common folks, he was both a master of human nature and human psychology. As a literary activist he owed himself a duty towards the deprived and oppressed which is propagated well by the means these stories.

"The Shroud" [Kafan] is an unsettling short story by Premchand. It pictures the utmost destitution of a lower-class family. Hunger is a motif expounded by the means of this piece, where it traverses from a physical necessity to gluttony. On another level, the story dwells on shameless selfishness and the languorous conduct with which the two protagonists Ghisu and Madhav go about. The depiction of the poverty-stricken Dalit family where the female of the household, also the wife of Madhav dies miserably alone in desolate condition deprived of any kind of medical treatment is utterly dejecting site. Premchand by the means of the tale

focuses on the gendered subaltern of Budhia as she is abandoned in her deathbed by the other two members of the family who go about relentlessly unaffected by the incidence and are more concerned of their own well-being. The title 'The Shroud' in itself brings with it some sense of tradition which is exploited by the male protagonists to quench their other needs and in the course altogether disrespect the last rites of unmourned Budhia.

Chronicler of the life of the commons, Premchand penned another very famous short story, "Idgah". The heart-touching tale on the surface propagates the themes of poverty and sacrifice made by a poor Muslim child, Hamid for his family, which merely comprises of his grandmother. On a more psychological level, the story intervenes in the consciousness of the child which enchants the other fellow mates and makes them give over the earthly material gifts. It is an elaborated satire on the capitalist mentality which even engulfs the psychology of the other kids. Hamid surpasses this material inclination towards the better cause of the family. It suggests the life lessons and responsibilities which are brought in by the socio-economic impoverishment. Also, the work spells hope, kindness, positivity in the dark light of fate to which the protagonist is subjected by the death of the parents.

"The Old Aunt" [Boodhi Kaaki] epitomizes compassion, revolving around the protagonist who happens to be a neglected aged aunt, who is astray of her senses except that of the taste. It is the uncared old lady had entrusted her property in the name of the nephew, Pandit Buddhiram who initially deceived her with great vows and on accomplishing his interests did not bother to look upon her. The deception and the utilitarian approach in hoax of familial relationships is what Premchand highlights by the means of this narrative. It is a story of the plight of an old widow who is intentionally deprived of the basic necessities as that of sufficient food. She is hurled insults in-front of the guests by the same people who she deemed to have entrusted with her property. The story also surfaces the eminent theme of hunger as of other stories by Premchand, but the 'hunger' in the story is brought about not by poverty rather is a deliberate attempt to torment the aunt with starvation. It is a depiction of the hate stemmed deep in the hearts of the Buddhiram family who hurled abuses on the old women. The story is an illustration of the real dialectic of what happens in the Indian households, with several other boodhi-Kaki's. It reproaches moral leanings of love and respect towards the elders.

"Holy Judges" [Panch Parmeshwar] comprises of the rhetoric of friendship, justice, power, faith and disrespect. Conscience and Justice are over friendship, which cannot stop Algu from imparting justice in Panchayat to the elderly aunt. The same is experienced by Jumman in the course of time when he sits over the same Panchayat, who formerly wants to announce against Algu, but is overcome by his conscience and sense of responsibility, thus, articulating justice and forgetting all grievances. The story highlights that it is the sense responsibility that weighs with some kind of power in one's hands.

'Justice above all' differences, prejudices, communal conflicts, superstitious dogmas. The story also illustrates the capitalist ideology and utilitarianism as that of "Boodhi Kaaki", where the family goes about with the same reproach of dehumanizing the old widow aunt. The ill temper and that lack of respect towards the old is the recurring motif in the works of Premchand. It underlines the importance of Human Rights and how Village Panchayat is the protector of the same and caters to the needs of to people from all age groups and sections of society. The friendship in the story surpasses the communal boundaries and is that of a Hindu and a Muslim, thus a communal harmony which Premchand means to instruct by the means of his writing.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the paper is to draw upon the creative short fiction of Premchand, subsequently canvassing the microcosm of village life which entails caste rigidity, cycle of debts, gender politics, lost humanity, domestic cruelty, hunger and penury. The study entails at unfolding the multitudes of meanings hidden in small narratives by the author. The fictive fables are an exploration of the right equilibrium between the ideal and the real.

"The Game of Chess" [Shatranj ke Khilari] is another iconic tale by Premchand which encompasses the theme of royalty, indulgence and sensual pleasures. In the reign of Wajib Ali Shah, everybody devised amusement from luxury, music, dance, drinking, intoxication, combat of chess and thus projecting a decayed society. The two protagonists of the fable Mir Roshan Ali and Mirza Sajjad Ali who are aristocrats with great ancestral estates went about dawdling their days in the game of chess. The two indolent addicts immersed in the duel of 'shatranj', lately started experiencing familial feuds. The begums of the protagonists embody fine characteristics of strong-headedness. Mirza's begum detests of his husband's addiction with the game over her own well-being and makes sures to set out the setting of the combat. Her authority runs down a shrill of terror in Mirza as well as the friend Mir, who paves his way out of the house silently. Later on the scene, Mir is seen of making boasts of his male chauvinism in statements against the Mirza's begum. It is suggestive of mere commodification of the females in the society who are merely condemned with the work of the household and not above that. In a similar context, we are introduced to the very strong begum of Mir Roshan Ali, who enjoys her sense of freedom on stake of her husband's addiction with the game of chess and is deprived of the same freedom when the scene of combat is shifted to her house. She eventually is seen making the way out for her husband. The story highlights the peaceful British annexation of Lucknow, with no bloodshed, while the two main characters are engrossed to the point of oblivion in their own worlds. The rhetoric is an extended metaphor on the game of chess played by the British, and peacefully checkmates the nawab Wajib Ali Shah.

Premchand addresses the rhetoric of day-to-day problems and prerequisite needs of the common

Anthology : The Research

folks. He lessoned his works with ethics and moral preaching which are prerequisite in a society. He wrote for the masses and the general good of the mankind in a colloquial stance which is easily comprehended by everyone.

Conclusion

Premchand's legacy stands the test of time with both contemporary resonance and relevance. He was a writer and a visionary much ahead of his time with his tide being experienced even till date. As poet lyricist Gulzar affirms his immortality, "Premchand's is as relevant now as he was during the pre-independence era. His literature, the characters he wrote, the problems he talked about, we are still struggling to get over them. Be it the poverty or the caste discrimination." Premchand's artistic excellence was amalgamated with social purpose and consciousness raising. The small anecdotes by no means portray ideal sentimentalization but offer a shrewd reality and overtones of moral sermonizing as a solution to the problem. His narratives are embodiment of truth and serve in the larger goodness of humanity. His disposition towards the cause of minority is clearly evident in his works. With artistic instincts of capturing emotions of the common man, Premchand better known as 'Upanyas Samrat' of

Hindi Sahitya, illustrates a real portraiture of the pre independence India.

References

1. Das, Sisir Kumar. *History of Indian Literature, India, Sahitya Akademi, 2005.*
2. Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994 rpt.*
3. Premchand. "Holy Judges" *The Complete Short Stories, vol.1, Trans. by M. Asaduddin, Penguin Random House India, 2017, pp.900-915.*
4. Premchand. "Idgah." *The Complete Short Stories, vol.4, Trans. by M. Asaduddin, Penguin Random House India, 2017, pp.626-645.*
5. Premchand. "The Game of Chess." *The Complete Short Stories, vol.2, Trans. by M. Asaduddin, Penguin Random House India, 2017, pp.880-896.*
6. Premchand. "The Old Aunt." *The Complete Short Stories, vol.2, Trans. by M. Asaduddin, Penguin Random House India, 2017, pp.155-168.*
7. Premchand. "The Shroud." *The World of Premchand: Selected Short Stories, vol.4, Trans. & Ed. by David Rubin, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001: 233-40.*