

Social Reformer Premchand – A Review

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The advent of Modern period in Hindi is considered from the 1900's. In the beginning modern Hindi literature was centered on the magical and fairy tales, entertaining the readers with imagination. Born as Dhanpat Rai Srivastav, he began his career as a freelance writer under the pen name "Nawab Rai", but when his work '*soz-e-watan*', a collection of short stories was seized by the British government and burnt, after this he started writing in Hindi, with the name Mushi Premchand. Premchand usually referred to as the 'Tolstoy of India' shaped the Hindi literature into a reality. He conquered the literary genre as a novelist, story writer and as a dramatist, and is titled as the 'Upanyas Samrat' (Emperor of Novels) in Hindi Modern literature. He gave a new dimension to the Hindi literary world by depicting reality of the society to the readers. He entered the Hindi literary world in the year 1917 with his novel, '*Sevasadan*'. He has penned 17 novels and more than 300 short stories which portrayed the social issues prevalent in the society during his time. He raised his voice against the feudal system, the zamindari system, poverty, communalism, caste system, and the social and economic conditions prevalent in the society. He even mentioned the discrimination the females faced in the society. He fought against the dowry system, widow marriages and opined that women have to come out and express her feelings against the social evils and discriminations showed on her. He wrote on the life around him and made the readers aware about the social structure around them. He portrayed the common man in his work's giving them the status of heroes and heroines by depicting the problems faced by them. Thus he presents to us the real India.

The review highlight's how Premchands works have influenced various genres of Hindi literature about the social issues and the struggle of the poor and how through the characters the change that could be brought in. Premchand's works also portrayed the women in society who can be classified into traditional, modern women. The following literature review attempts to demonstrate and support the objective of the study.

In the article "Realism and a Creative Process: Features of Munshi Premchand's Ideology" by Sara Rai (1979) correctly points out that for an author to depict the contemporary life, the writer has to conceptualize new process and phenomena that has never been portrayed in art. The author rightly points out that Premchand's literary canvas, comprises almost 6,000 characters from all the classes of people ranging from the poor to the rich comprising the poor peasants to the feudal lords and the entire hierarchy of the Governmental machinery.

In the research article by Rajini Obeyesekere (1986) "Women's Rights and Roles in Premchand's Godan- A literary Analysis" presents the social structure and focus on the questions of women's right and the roles which surfaces throughout in the novel Godan. Premchand has explored the female characters in two concepts as an ideal women and the modern age women. She points out that Premchand has represented the rural traditional women through Dhaniya and other minor characters and how women were expected to play their role in the changing political scenario through Malti who represents New India and symbolizes the changing face of women. In the research article "How equal? Women in Premchand's writing by Geetanjali Pandey (1986) captured the abiding and sensitive aspects on the plight of the women. She points out that Premchand upholds the dignity of women. She points out that the writer reiterated his craftsman's ship on creating the characters that reflected the existing realities and also embodied the possibilities and gave directions for the desired changes.

"Portrayal of Women in Premchands Stories: A Critique" by Charu Gupta (1991) reflects on the issues of women and her position in the society. The reviewer has picked up the women oriented stories of Premchand and has focused on the social evils and the solutions that were sought within the domestic space. She marks that Premchand makes women a focus of enquiry and the subject of the story. They reflect the complexity and irony and also the relationship of the conflicting emotions, values of women. Charu Gupta correctly points out that Premchand's stories were subjective and reflect the conflicting mentalities prevalent in his time.

From the book review archives titled "The world of Premchand" by Vijaya Ghose (1995) points out that the short stories of Premchand is not only about the poor peasant but also the plight of women who were oppressed by the rich like the farmers. He marks that the women that Premchand represents are multifaceted. They belong to all classes ranging from the poor to the rich, from the illiterate to the literate. He very well presents the mind of the woman, her generosity, loyalty and sacrifice. The reviewer truly points that the writer has perfectly rendered the communal harmony and the child psychology in his stories. Ghose has mentioned that the selected stories of the English translation will linger in the readers mind and bring in the nostalgic era of the values, and the rich Indian culture which has vanished with time.

According to Jagdish Lal Dalwar (1996) in his article "Representation of Popular Culture in Premchand's works" tries to explore the various strands of popular culture. He points that Premchand did not present the popular culture as an autonomous one, rather he represents culture marked by a changing relationship

between the privileged and the inferior social groups. He emphasized the ingenuity of the common man in coping with the ideas enforced on the poor by the rich and how they interpret these ideas in their own way.

Jesse Astbury (1996) in her article titled “Exploitation and conscience in Premchand” projected on two short stories of Premchand, “The power of curse” and “The Shroud” that the characters skillfully eke out a living by exploiting the sensibilities of a well-established, stratified people. The stories prohibit the society’s interaction with the characters depicted in the story, Ramsevak, Ghisu and Madhav at any level to form a personal, genuine human contact heedless of arbitrary social stigmas. She points out that Premchand skillfully exhibits poverty which is created by the pressure to maintain a society’s self-image.

In his review essay ‘The Gift of a Cow: A translation of the classic Hindi Novel Godaan by Premchand (Translated by Gordan Roadarmel), Thomas Jandl (2005) points out that Godan sheds light on the issues of traditional and economic development policies in the context of values, beliefs and development of a society. He rightly points out that the novel pictures the role of cultural institutions and the traditional power structure prevalent in India which hinders the economic growth in the name of caste, religion and the sufferings of the poor.

Vishnu Shelke (2012) represents in his article “Realism and Symbolism in Munshi Premchand’s Godan” that the writer has represented the social evils and the out dated traditional values through his novel. His opinions that the characters the author presents lack the authority and dynamism. These characters are symbolic are very much agreed because they are pensive with the social concern and responsibilities. And this very fact restricts the readers from seeing the inner struggles that the characters undergo. He points that the characters being symbolic display a rare blend of individualism.

According to the research article by Dr. Krati Sharma & Ms. Suman Yadav (2014) titled “Study of Gender Exploitation in Vidhwanas and Garib ki hai stories by Munshi Premchand” stated that in both the stories Premchand represents the undercurrents of the Indian Society centered on women. They briefly discuss the subjugation of the weak and the poor helpless people in the society at the hands of the rich and the powerful.

In the article written by Namwar Singh on the “Life and ideals of Premchand” depicts that Premchand’s gaze was focused on reality of his motherland, where the masses were passing through the phase of endless stupor. He very well points out that the author lived in ground reality and underwent all the pain and hence could express the pain vividly. Singh pens that this reality and experience made Premchand to adopt realism even in the era of romanticism.

In his research paper ‘Gadhya Sahitya me Premchand ka yogdan aur Unki Sampradayikta’ Dr. Sanjay Kumar (2014) mentions that Premchand has projected communalism in almost all his novels and short stories. He has depicted communalism – between the Hindus and the Muslims in a very harmonious manner where the characters live in coordination and peace. He very truly points out that the riots between the two are caused because of the vested interests of the political parties. Dr. Kumar opinion that Premchand could portray this harmony very well is because he has understood both the religion in depth.

The main objective in the review article “Social dominance and class struggle in Premchand’s the gift of the cow” by Rahul Singh Sundram (2015) shows the reality of the Indian social system and the dominance of the upper class in the society. The caste system has spread the roots deep inside the Indian society. Position of women in the family and society. He marks that most of the women are exploited by the male dominated society, who are treated as the secondary sex in few cases and are brutally subjected in the society.

Thus from the study of these articles taken together, the review focuses on Premchand’s characters who face the social stigma of the society. His protagonists are the common man that he observed around him. Premchand saw how the traditional villages were destroyed by the colonizers. He through his characters portrayed how the traditional values were destroyed and the Joint family was falling apart with urbanization. He not only observed the social issues but keenly observed the child psychology who was brought up in poverty. His works revolve around the lower, middle and the upper class people. His use of simple language makes his works to be translated and read. The readers can easily visualize the characters since they are real and present amongst us. The women and their issues which was mentioned by Premchand still exists in this era of globalization. It is very apt to mention that literature is the mirror of the society and Premchand’s work is the proof of this saying.

As a scope of further research studies can be conducted on the Humanitarian concern of the characters. The essays and the few dramas penned by Premchand can be explored.

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