

## GODAN: A STORY OF STRUGGLE FOR A LIVING BY MUNSHI PREMCHAND

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### ABSTRACT

A pioneer of modern Hindi and Urdu social fiction, Munshi Premchand's real name was Dhanpat Rai. He wrote nearly 300 stories and novels. Among his best known novels are: Sevasadan, Rangmanch, Gaban, Nirmala and Godan. Much of Premchand's best work is to be found among his 250 or so short stories, collected in Hindi under the title Manasarovar. Three of his novels have been made into films. Premchand's literary career started as a freelancer in Urdu. His famous works include Godan, Maidan-e-Amal, Bay-wah, Chaugaan etc. It would not be wrong to say that Premchand was the Father of Urdu short- stories. Short stories or afsanas were started by Premchand. As with his novels, his afsanas also mirror the society that he lived in. With a simple and flowing writing some of his works depict excellent use of satire and humour. His later works used very simple words and he started including Hindi words too to honestly portray his characters. His famous afsanas are Qaatil Ki Maan, Zewar Ka Dibba, Gilli Danda, Eidgaah, Namak Ka Daroga and Kafan. His collected stories have been published as Prem Pachisi, Prem Battisi, Wardaat and Zaad-e-Raah. His novels describe the problems of the urban middle-class and the country's villages and their problems. He also emphasised on the Hindu-Muslim unity. His famous works include Godan, Maidan-e-Amal, Bay-wah, Chaugaan etc. It would not be wrong to say that Premchand was the Father of Urdu short- stories.

Premchand was the first Hindi author to introduce realism in his writings.<sup>1</sup> Munshi Premchand pioneered the new form - fiction with a social purpose. He supplemented Gandhiji's work in the political and social fields by adopting his revolutionary ideas as themes for his literary writings.<sup>2</sup>

Besides being a great novelist, Premchand was also a social reformer and thinker. His greatness lies in the fact that his writings embody social purpose and social criticism rather than mere entertainment. Literature

according to him is a powerful means of educating public opinion. He believed in social evolution and his ideal was equal opportunities for all. Premchand died in 1936 and has since been studied both in India and abroad as one of the greatest writers of the century.<sup>3</sup>

Godaan is a novel written by the famous author, Munshi Premchand. Munshi Premchand is a writer whose novel takes us through the realistic lives of people. He is considered as a beginner of a new trend in Hindi literature.<sup>4</sup>

This novel which is set in the pre-colonial period, takes us through a trip through the lives of peasants in India. Godaan, which means 'the gift of a cow' is a novel that revolves around the lives of Hori and his family, who represents the peasant society

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of India. Throughout the novel, we feel that Hori is bearing barriers for carrying a noble and pure heart inside him.<sup>5</sup>

The story starts with Hori buying a cow from Bhola, a cowherd. The arrival of the cow is a symbol of prestige. Hori, with the help of the cow, additionally earns a few annas by selling its milk. Jealous of Hori, his brother, Heera poisons the cow. When police comes enquiring about the cow's death, Hori bribes the police and is able to remove his brother's name. Jhunia, Bhola's daughter gets pregnant by Gobar, Hori's son. Fearing of the villager's action, Gobar runs away. Dhania, Hori's wife, shelters Jhunia and again Hori has to bear the burden of debts because of sheltering a low class girl. Everyone tries to burden Hori. Then Hori lays all his hopes on his son, Gobar. But Gobar refuses to help him and Gobar settles in the town with Jhunia.

The novel brings out the problems faced by the rural society due to the political system. In the middle, the novel tells us about the love hate relationships between two people of different thoughts –Miss. Malti and Mr. Mehta. Miss. Malti believes on the equality between men and women while Mr. Mehta thinks that women should be given a higher post than men in the society. Hori is trapped in a debt trap.

Through this story Premchand makes us see the problems faced by the peasant society during colonial period. In this story, we can see struggling for a living, till his end. This lead tears to my eyes. This made me to appear in the story and pay off the debts of Hori and to present them a living of peace and comfort. This story can be described as 'mind blowing sentimental story. This is a novel which took my mind into the life of the story after the book 'Kite runner' which I read long back.

### Socialism in Godan

Premchand is universally considered one of the greatest writers of modern India. He wrote both in Urdu and in Hindi and is acclaimed as a master storyteller in both languages.

There was no short story in Urdu before Premchand. The novel, though known, was based on the romances and adventures of medieval patriarchs. Premchand brought it out of the world of dreamland and fantasy and introduced it to the realities of contemporary life. The princes and fairies gave way to ordinary men and women engaged in the struggle for existence. Premchand imparted to Urdu fiction an originality, a sympathetic treatment and a social and political awareness. He depicted with stark realism the tragedy and pathos of rural India. He showed a deep sympathy for the masses in their misery and poverty, for he saw beneath their squalor a certain dignity and worth and regard for humanity. He, like Turgenev, was above all a realist and was chiefly interested in the living truth of the human race. With Premchand, Urdu fiction became a product of the soil.

Many other stories of Premchand were translated into English and have appeared from time to time in various Indian and foreign newspapers and magazines, for which reference should be made to "A Bibliography of Premchand" by Carlo Coppola, Mahfil, vol. 1, no. 2; and "A Bibliography of Urdu Short Stories in English Translation", G.C. Narang, to appear in Mahfil.

Godan, generally considered Premchand's masterpiece, is a story of peasant India. It highlights the struggle between the peasant and the money-lender backed by various forces. It depicts an agricultural community with its hard work and simple pleasures, its exploitations and misery, its frustrations and hopes. Premchand's artistry and realism are at their best in the creation of

some of the central characters, particularly that of Hori, who emerges as an immortal symbol of the Indian peasantry. Hori as well can be taken as a symbol of Premchand's own life. Though Premchand had a tendency toward idealization, this novel is realistic, controlled in form and disillusioned in spirit.

The excerpt, included here is about a clandestine affair which Gobar, Hori's son, had with Jhunia, Bhola's daughter. Pregnant and frightened that her father will kill her if he discovers this, she turns to Gobar for help. But afraid of the consequences, he stealthily leaves the village. Late in the night Jhunia goes to Hori's hut, but he is in the fields. Jhunia admits her predicament to Dhania, Hori's wife. She rushes to Hori. Upset and angered, they agree not to give shelter to Jhunia. Gradually, however, as they are walking back to the hut, their determination gives away, and their hate turns into affection. They permit Jhunia to stay with them, although they know that this will mean alienating the entire village.

Premchand wrote a bald, simple, factual prose. His language is neither the elegant Urdu nor the high-flown Hindi. Instead he used common core Hindustani, the speech of millions in upper India, and a medium particularly suited to his themes.

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