



HISTORICISM IN MUNSHI PREAMCHAND'S WRITTINGS

Dr. FIROJ HIGH SARWAR

Assistant Professor of History,

Murshidabad Adarsha Mahavidyalaya, [University of Kalyani]

Murshidabad, West Bengal

Email Id. firojhighsarwar@rediffmail.com

Abstract:

History is of great deal to literature and many literary artists preoccupied themselves with historical materials. They show us both the environment and factors that affects people and values which dominate the very spirit of individual as well as contemporary social setup. Far from reflecting what happened to the society, these writings become the best emblem of historical realism. In Indian Context, the writings of Munshi Preamchand are of those kinds. Preamchand was considered to be the first Hindi author whose writings prominently featured realism.¹ His both Urdu and Hindi works depict a rationalistic outlook which views religious values as something that allows the powerful hypocrites to exploit the weak.² Many of his short stories and novels provide accurate and detailed knowledge of socio-economic life of poor and urban middle class people. They also present the picture of colonial exploitation, the social stratification, communal harmony and economic circumstances of a perfectly definite historical moment. He started with the writing of an article in 'Zamana' (a monthly magazine) in 1905, and expressed his anti-colonial attitude by supporting Nationalist-Extremist activism. Then, one by one, by the means of short stories (viz. *Duniya Ka Sabse Anmol Ratan*, *Soz-e-Watan*) he had shown his patriotic overtones and prop up the cause of Indian Independent Movement. On the other hand, his novels like *Hamkhurma-o-Hamsavab*, *Nirmala*, *Pratigya* raised the various women issues like child marriage, widowhood & widow remarriage, prostitution, dowry etc in a detailed manner than had been exhibited in any earlier Hindi writings. His masterpiece *Rangbhumi* (1924) and *Godaan* (1936) is more realistic in historical sense. These two novels illustrate the deplorable and exploitative condition of peasant in the decade of 1930s under colonial rule. Hence, this paper would like to investigate - how Preamchand's writings are relevant to the historicism, and - how much his writings reflect the accurate historical facts.

¹Munshi Preamchand: *The Great Novelist*, Press Information Bureau, Government of India. Retrieved 13 January 2012

²Rubin, David "Short Stories of Premchand" in Barbara Stoler Miller's *Masterworks of Asian Literature in Comparative Perspective: A Guide for Teaching*, M. E. Sharpe, 1994. pp. 168-177

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Historical realism requires the writer's critical knowledge of historicist who has a deferent interpretation of the historical events. Both the realist and modernist writers wanted to reflect the very changes in their societies in their own ways. Moreover, literary works tend to reflect a specific historical moment that is of great significance to the writer or the world in which he lives. In that way history is of great deal to literature and many literary artists preoccupied themselves with historical materials.³ Dhanpat Rai, widely known as Munshi Premchand, a great Indian writer of modern times, had wise sense of observation and depiction of historical events. Though he is not considered as historian in terms of scientific historical writing, however his writings depict enumerable historical occurrences with high accuracy. He used literature for the purpose of arousing public awareness about national and social issues. Within the framework of colonial society, Premchand was highly influenced by the contemporary stream of Indian nationalism and nationalist movements. Premchand's entire adult life was passed during the period when India was engaged not only in its great struggle for freedom from the powerful and pervasive British Empire, but also in search of its identity on which its right to freedom and nationhood could be based. This search, by its very nature, had to be more cultural, moral, and spiritual than political. The leaders of thought and opinion from Ram Mohun Roy, Dayânand, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Vivekânand to Tilak, Gandhi, and Nehru are therefore preoccupied with issues of this nature. Prem Chand was deeply alive to the trends of thought represented by these thinkers and they become live issues in his fiction and novels.⁴ Some of his finest writings, written in the last 20 years of his life, show the influences of Mahatma Gandhi, Madame Blavatsky, Mrs. Annie Besant and the Russian Revolution (1907). Moreover, his choice of subjects were of those burning issues which to be considered historically very important, viz. child widowhood, widow marriage, the rampant systems of dowry, untouchability, prostitution, the problems of landless labourers, feudal system, the offshoot of colonial land reform settlements, the plight of deprived section of the society, the moral and material corruption of the capitalists as well as various agents of British, the socio-inequalities that caused upheavals in the society, and finally India's freedom movement.⁵

According to Prof. Ramdas Gaur - "when the future historians of India write about the unwritten record of the life of Indian peasantry they will have to give credit for a true, almost photographic, portrayal of their lives to Premchand. Although he is a non-co-operator, he is not a partisan even when portraying the true emotions of

³See: Lukacs, George. *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, [trans. John and Necke Mander], Merlin Press, London, 1963

⁴ Sharma, Govind Narain. *Prem Chand's Myth of the East and West: A Reading of Premāshram*, the International Fiction Review, 5, No. 1 (1978), p.40

⁵See the article of Jalil, Rakhshanda, "For Premchand, Good Literature was about Truth and Humanity", dated on 31/07/2017, Published in *The Wire & India Heritage, Creative Arts, Literature & India Heritage, A living portrait of India*, Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Retrieved 8 January 2012

those who are his opponents. He is a faithful chronicler of the mental processes of his characters. His characters are not idealists. In fact, he has portrayed truly the lives of the people, poor as well as the rich, the zamindar and the tenant, as also the bureaucrat-in other words, all those who form part of the nation and their true physical and mental conditions." Early in 1920s, many critics including Prof. Ramdas Gaur praised Premchand for "realistic portrayal" of the rural Indian society in his writings without taking recourse to faked romances or imaginary torture.⁶

Premchand, as it said, had been deeply influenced by the role of Bolsheviks in Russian Revolution. His concept of social stratification based on economy as same as of the idea of Marx.⁷ This is very clear from his writings of the time. Particularly his article entitled *Daur-i-Qadim: Daur-i-Jadid* (the old epoch and the new)⁸ exposes the ultimate exploitation of proletariats (wage workers) by the capitalist industry owner, and the impoverished condition of poor peasants caused by the moneylender.⁹ In one of the ancillary themes in *Sevasadan*, Premchand had given his readers a glimpse into the problems of Indian peasantry.¹⁰ *Godan*, considered by many to be Premchand's best work, is a story about peasant India. This novel is an absolutely realistic depiction of the society as found in Indian villages during British rule. This work is also good understanding of socio-economic and political environment of time when Indian was struggling against British rule.¹¹ The main emphasis of the novel is that "Justice and law are on the side of those who have money. Although it is true that the moneylenders should not be hard on the debtor and the zamindars on the tenant, what do we see every day? The zamindar gets his tenant bound down and the moneylender kicks him. And it will continue to be what it is."¹² Basically Preamchand tried to highlight the mechanism of economic exploitation and others effects of 'Mahalawari' and 'Zamindari' land revenue settlements that were introduced by the British in East and North India. Preamchand's another writing *Sevasadan* is the mirror of life of absentee landlords inhabited mainly in urbanised part of Banaras, and their relationship with poor tenant cultivators.¹³ Pratapgarh, Rae Bareili and Fyzabad-the three districts, with which Premchand was familiar, had become the scene of a great agrarian upheaval in the wake of the crushing exactions by the taluqdars. He has depicted the "inhuman treatment" of talukdars that made peasants condition totally intolerable.¹⁴ He also highlighted the role of *Kisan Sabha* which worked for the protection of peasants from the high handedness of the *Zamindars*.¹⁵

⁶ Gopal, Madan. *Munshi Premchand: A literary biography*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1964, p.179

⁷ Narain, Govind, *Premchand, Novelist and Thinker*, Pragati Publications.1999, pp. 42 -46

⁸ Published in *Zamana* , February 1919

⁹ Gopal, Madan. Op. Cit. p.163

¹⁰ Ibid. p.162

¹¹ See for details: Yadav, Anurag *Munshi Preamchand's Godan; Masterpiece of Hindi Literature*, Pustak Mahal, Delhi, 2009 & Preamchand, *Godan: A Novel of Peasant India*, (Translated by Jai Rat an and P. Lai.), Jaico Publishing House, Bombay, 1963

¹² Gopal, Madan. Op. Cit. p. 432

¹³ See for details: Shingavi, Snehal (translated) *Sevasadan*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2005

¹⁴ Gopal, Madan. Op. Cit. p.164

¹⁵ Ibid. p.162

The issue of oppresses' movement against the crushing and ever-growing burden of rent, illegal exactions, eviction from land, physical harassment, the greedy clutches of zamindars, money lenders and police became the theme of Premchand's novel *Premashram*.¹⁶ *Sangram*, Premchand's little drama, was a further projection of the problems posed in *Premashram*. Premchand moved by the ideal of "swaraj". In the drama, a peasant character says: "Until the time we get swaraj, our conditions won't improve." The tenant cultivator in this drama, as in *Premashram*, is shown to be at the mercy of the zamindar and his agents fully supported by the police tyrannized over the cultivators. The drama heightens the contrast between the life of the peasant and that of the bureaucracy (as petty officials) who live like kings. The zamindars with the support of police, impostors parading as sadhus, exercised undisputed sway. Half of the cultivator's produce used to be taken away by the moneylender and the other half by the agent of the zamindar.¹⁷ Premchand's other works viz. *Sava Ser Gehoon*, *Muktidhan*, *Babaji ka Bhog* are the stark portrayal of exploitation of poor peasant by the moneylender (intermediaries) who were the product of British land revenue settlements in India.

Rangabhoomi, one of the best novels of Premchand, exhibits how the 'Gandhian ideology of Ahimsa' made deep imprint on the common peasant people like Surdas, a harijan, (the leading character of novel). He followed the path of 'ahimsa' to win over his opponents Industrialist John Sevak who tried to acquire his land forcefully. Later he became the messiah of others.¹⁸ In the background of novel, of course, was the nationalist movement guided by Gandhiji who had cast his spell on Premchand. This work also cites the worst condition of the Indian Princely States where British Resident always wants to create chaos among rulers and ruled. The novel also exposed the very imperialistic nature of British rule in India.¹⁹ Through the story of *Gaban* Premchand had explained the broader aspects of socio-economic problems faced by the man and women in the Indian hinterlands, and focused the issues of corruption, capitalist exploitation. The book still remains an excellent understanding of the commoner life under British regime.²⁰ At a point of time Premchand firmly believed in Bolshevik principles and highly criticised the 'Montague Chelmsford Reforms Act' for the limited scope of Indian in British Government in India.²¹

Premchand championed the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity, and was, therefore, critical of the fanaticism. Because of his advocacy of Hindu-Muslim unity, Premchand was highly critical of the suddhi movement of conversion from one religion to the other. "I strongly disagree with this movement," he wrote to Nigam. He

¹⁶ See: Premchand, M. *Premashram* (Hindi), Manoj Publication, 2002

¹⁷ Pandey, G. & Pandey, G. "Premchand on Peasant-Zamindar Relation. A Study of *Premashram* (summary),"

Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 1982

¹⁸ See: Premchand, M. & Jain, M. *Playground: Rangabhoomi*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2011 &

¹⁹ Gopal, Madan. *Op. Cit.* p. 205-208

²⁰ See: Premchand, M. *Gaban - A Timeless Classic*, Paperback - Pustak Mahal - New Delhi, 2013

²¹ Gupta, Prakash Chandra. *Makers of Indian Literature: Prem Chand*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1998, p.17

criticised the activities of those group like Arya Samajists who actively support this conversion movements. He wrote about it explicitly in 'Zamana'.²²

The article, entitled "*Malkana Rajput Mussalmanon ki Shuddhi*," was published in 'Zamana' of May 1923. Herein Premchand took up cudgels on behalf of the Muslims who deprecated the shuddhi movement launched by the Bharatiya Hindu Shuddhi Sabha, supported by several sections of the Hindu society, including the Sanatanists, the Arya Samajists etc. In this context, he apprehends the existence of Hindu Muslim unity in the scene of Indian National Movement. There were many among the Muslims, said Premchand, who were leaving the congress fold because, according to their thinking, congress raj would now be synonymous with Hindu raj. This trend, Premchand thought, would, therefore, weaken the movement for swaraj.²³ This being so, the suddhi movement which gave spiritual satisfaction to a few individuals, but hurt a large section of the people, should be called off. He urged Hindus to take the leading role in unite nation by leaving communal identity. He said "While I had full confidence in the wisdom of Hindus and was certain that no harm could come from them to Hindu-Muslim unity," the "first blow has been struck by the Hindus themselves."²⁴ While Muslim readers praised the "liberal mindedness" of Premchand, there was huge criticism from the Arya Samajists. In conclusion, he pointed out that the Hindus engaged in political work should recognise that the weakness of the Hindus would weaken the country. "So long as the Hindus are weak, and' the Muslims know that the Hindus are weak, Hindu-Muslim unity is meaningless."²⁵

Premchand was a great admirer of Ali brothers, Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali. (the leaders of khilafat movement). He praised and wrote to 'Nigam' (a journal) the ideas and thoughts of Ali brothers. When, in the later days of the non-cooperation movement, the swarajya group came into being and 'Nigam' asked him which party he supported, Premchand wrote back: "I favour neither. This is because neither of the parties is doing any practical work. I am a member of the party to be, that is, a party which would undertake political education of the masses. The manifesto issued by the Khilafat party has my wholehearted support. Premchand's ideas, according to 'Nigam', corresponded to those of C. R. Das who too blamed the Hindus for rigidity in approach to the shuddhi movement and Hindu-Muslim unity.²⁶ In an article entitled "Qahat-ur-Rijjal" (or a famine of wise men), in 'Zamana', Premchand wrote that in the light of the Muslim approach to the problem of Hindu Muslim unity, the Hindu

²² See: Premachanda *Sīmīnār*, *Munshī Prem Chand*, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 2005 & Upadhyay, Shashi Bhushan, "Resisting Colonial Modernity: Premchand's Rangabhoomi" in Bernard Bell, et al (eds), *Communication Process*, vol. 3, *Communication, Culture and Confrontation*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 257-272

²³ Rai, Amrit. *Premchand: His Life and Times*, (Translated by Haris Trivedi), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1991, p. 145, 256

²⁴ Das, Sisir Kumar, *A History of Indian Literature, 1911-1956*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 2006 (reprint), p.356

²⁵ Rai, Amrit. Op. Cit, pp. 351 - 354

²⁶ Gopal, Madan. Op. Cit. p.217

attitude was not above board. He felt sorry that the Hindus had not understood nor cared to understand the implications of the Khilafat movement. In fact, they 'had looked upon it with suspicion, and not from a wider angle that of Gandhiji.'²⁷

What pained Premchand deeply was an attempt to divide the nation on communal lines. He was, therefore, happy whenever he saw attempts being made to bring the different sections of the Indian people together. With the idea of making the Islamic history and culture better understood by the Hindus, he himself wrote a drama, *Karbala*.²⁸ Volumes had been written on the subject of the battle of Karbala by eminent Muslim writers, but there appeared to have been very little by Hindu writers. The exacerbated differences between the Hindus and Muslims, in fact, made it difficult for the Hindus to have an idea of the principal characters of Muslim history. It was for Premchand to cut new grounds in order to introduce the Hindus to the great men of Muslim history. For, to him, greatness was the important thing; the religion to which a person belonged was not. In fact, the drama includes references to the presence of Hindu soldiery in the army of Hussain whose martyrdom creates the impact of tragedy on the reader. The language of this work, incidentally, is more personalised.²⁹

The novel *Karmabhumi* (1932) set in the 1930's colonial India where British exploits both Hindu Muslim community of Uttar Pradesh communally who having co-existed peacefully for hundred years. The novel talks about a revolution against British Raj. Championing the Gandhian's cause of peace and ahimsa, this work evokes questions on the morality through metaphors and the progression of its various characters.³⁰ *Kayakalpa*, is the another writings which deals with North Indian Hindu Muslim Communal rights during 1930s.³¹ Some of Premchand's articles in 'Jagaran' (journal) of Banaras also involved him in such controversies. He thought Hindus were as much responsible for the communal differences as the Muslims as he wrote - "Why should they object to the sacrifice of old decrepit cows when they do not object to the sacrifice of a goat?" *Mandir aur Masjid and Sevasadan* is other important works which woven round the story of Hindu- Muslim unity and communal harmony.³²

Premchand kept writing stories that expressed the pain and suffering of the toiling masses that had been suppressed for centuries, using stereotypes where necessary to make general observations, painting on a large canvas with broad, sweeping brushstrokes, writing stories that occasionally seem preachy or moralistic when not outright sentimental to modern readers.³³ The writings of Preamchand are best known for his depiction of contemporary women's life, specially the life of

²⁷ See: *Zamana*, February 1924

²⁸ Naqvi, Mazhar. (E. article) *Karbala as Perceived by Munshi Premchand*, Muharram Mirror, 26th April, 2015

²⁹ Gopal, Madan. Op. Cit., p.218

³⁰ See: Srivastava, Lalit. *Karmabhumi* (translated from Hindi), Oxford University Press, 2008

³¹ Naravane, Vishwanath S. *Premchand, His Life and Work*, Vikas publisher, 1980, p. 134

³² Gopal, Madan. Op. Cit., pp.132-133

³³ See the e-article of Jalil, Rakhshanda "For Preamchand, Good Literature was about Truth and Humanity" dated on 31/07/2017, Published in *The Wire*.

widow, burning issues of child marriage, condition of outcast women and dowry system, polygamy, domestic violence and prostitution etc.

The prime emphasis of Premchand's short stories has been given on the problems and plight of women. *Nairashya Leela* highlights the sad plight of a child widow whose parents, neighbour and society act as impediment of her progressive life. *Dhikkar* is the moving story of the only daughter of a widow. In the story of *Mata ka Hridaya*, we see the struggle of a widow who tried to get out his only son from police imprisonment who has falsely implicated in terrorist activities. *Shanti* is another story of a poor widow who married her daughter with great difficulty.³⁴ *Nairashya* portrays the sad plight of a woman who has given birth to three daughters. *Ek Anch ki Kasar* exposes the fraud practised by some people who decry the system of dowry publicly and accept it secretly. *Uddhar* is a satire on Indian woman's sad plight. *Nirvasan* shows how a wife who gets waylaid in a fair and returns home after a week or so, is turned out by the husband. Premchand's support for the Sarda Bill, which aimed to raise the age of marriage for girls and advocated the right to give widows a share of their late husband's property, finds reflection in stories such as *Nirmala* and *Narak ka Marg*.³⁵ *Narak ka Marg* is the diary of an unhappy woman married to a rich old man who entertains doubts about her fidelity. *Swarga ki Devi* portrays the character of a woman who, despite all the harassments from the mother-in-law, continues to be devoted to the husband and her two children. *Vidhwans* highlights what the curse of a poor old woman who earns her living by selling parched gram and barley. *Shudra* is the touching story of a poor and hard working woman of low caste, who gets married with some difficulty, and is left by her husband who does not return. *Khudi* is the delineation of a young orphan girl of unknown parentage. The story shows how she struggles to protect her modesty from the evil eye of man and finally how she gets betrayed from beloved person.³⁶

Mandir is the moving story of a harijan widow and her social condition. *Subhagi* is the story of a young girl who becomes a widow at an early age when she does not even know what marriage means. *Sati* is the story of the fidelity of the pretty wife to her ugly husband. *Ghaasvali* portrays the hard life of a poor but pretty harijan woman. *Aaga Peechha* is the story of a romance between a prostitute's cultivated and charming daughter, whom everyone spurns, and a Harijan boy, who has worked his way to higher education. *Beton vali Vidhva* is the story of a widow. *Jyoti* portrays the life of a stem-hearted and frustrated widow who is jealous of the happiness of other

³⁴Rubin, David, *The World of Premchand: Selected Short Stories*, Oxford University Press, India, 2001. David Rubin is considered one of Premchand's top translators, as can be experienced reading over these twenty-four stories. As Rubin writes in his Introduction, "The inhumanity of caste hierarchies, the struggle for India's independence, and the wretched plight of women are some of the problems that arouse his indignation most frequently."

³⁵ Jalil, Rakhshanda, Op. Cit.

³⁶ Das, Sisir Kumar, *A History of Indian Literature, 1911-1956*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 2006 (reprint), pp. 265 -276

& Gopal, Madan, Op. Cit., pp. 240 - 250

women. *Khuchad* shows the dominating role of husband domestic violence upon young wife. *Miss Padma* is the story women who want to be professionally and economically independent. *Baraat* is a moving story of the degree to which a humiliated woman can go. *Vafa ki Deri*, is the portrait of a lower caste lady who used to sexually harassed by the upper class (thakur) in the absence of her husband. *Kusum* exposes the evil of dowry system. The important theme that Premchand dealt in *Sevasadan* was the institution of prostitution.³⁷

Preamchad was well aware of historic practices of caste system in India. He, therefore not leave the aspects untouched in his writing. In *Thakur ka Kuan* portrays the iniquitous system in which the Harijans were not allowed to draw water from the wells meant for the caste Hindus. *Sadgati* is the story of the' death of a chamar. It exposes the hypocrisy of the "defenders of religion." *Doodh ka Dam* shows the plight of the Harijans. Premchand had already drawn our attention to the problem of untouchability in his *Sevasadan*. He illustrated the rural scene of economic exploitation and physical torture of chamar (low caste untouchable) by agents of men who traded in religion. The problem was touched upon in *Rangabhoomi* and *Kayakalpa* also.³⁸ In the fiction *Godan* and *Kafan* Preamchand explicitly highlighted the socio-economic position of dalits in the society in the United Provinces (present UP). The short story like *Mritak – Bhoj*, *Lag-Dat* say the way in which the dalit and out caste chamars were welcomed in the Congress fold and explained their demand Swaraj.³⁹

Preamchnad, since 1905, was very conscious about the Indian political scenario. He wrote in 'Zamana' in relation to swadeshi and boycott movement. Later, in the 1920s, he was very much influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's khilafat and non-co-operation movement and the accompanying struggle for social reform. During this period, his works dealt with the social issues such as poverty, peasant's exploitation (Premashram, 1922), dowry system (Nirmala, 1925), educational reform and political oppression (Karmabhumi, 1931) etc. Premchand also focused on the economic liberalization of the peasantry and the working class, and opposed the rapid industrialization, which he felt would hurt the interests of the peasants and lead to oppression of the workers. This can be seen in works like *Rangabhumi* (1924).⁴⁰ In *Premashram*, preamchand depicted how government suppresses the freedom movement which grows through the popularisation of Gandhian philosophy like the *charkha*, boycott of the foreign cloth and the prohibition of narcotics and alcohol.⁴¹ The degree of emotional involvement of Premchand into the then current political movement is clear from a letter written about the time Bhagat Singh and his comrades were hanged by the British imperialists. It reads: "I was wanting to attend the Karachi

³⁷ Ibid., pp.162-272

³⁸ Ibid., p. 321-322

³⁹ Asaduddin, M. (Edit.) *Preamchand in World Languages – Translation, reception and cinematic representations*, Rutledge, New York, 2016, pp. 267-272

⁴⁰ Sigi, Rekha *Munshi Prem Chand*, Diamond Pocket Books Pvt Ltd, 2006, Chapter - 7

⁴¹ Gopal, Madan. Op. Cit. p. 70

(session). Bhagat Singh's death by hanging has broken my heart. With what hopes could one go there: how? People will shoot down Gandhi and the Congress will pass into the hands of irresponsible extremists, and there will be no place for us.⁴²

Gaban conveys us a feeling of the march of times in which it was written - the subservience of the Indian judiciary, the absolute powers of the police, the people's contempt for approvers in "faked" trials, the sacrifices of the common people who took the national liberation struggle forward, and the hypocrisy of the so-called leaders.⁴³ *Hans* (A monthly journal of his own) has been born at a time (March 1930) when a new epoch is being ushered in, in India, and when the country is moving frantically to free herself from the bonds of slavery. The writings in 'Hans' (journal) always encourage and motivate for struggle against British government. He urged the mass to follow swadeshi movement and emphasised on home-made indigenous goods.⁴⁴ "Fight for India's Freedom" was Premchand's main preoccupation. He says "The Congress took another step forward this year and resolved on complete independence," he wrote to Keshoram Sabarwal, a translator of his stories into Japanese. "There is a divergence of opinion in the matter; moderate opinion is not prepared to go to the extreme-independence-but the younger politicians will not hear anything short of that. Dominion status, in my view; is a camouflage and independence is the only fitting reply to the arrogant imperialists of England."⁴⁵

Premchand supported salt satyagraha movement wholeheartedly. Hitting at the critics who called the satyagraha movement "premature," he wrote to 'Nigam' that "the salt satyagraha is premature in the same way as death is always premature, or as the moneylender's demand for payment is premature."⁴⁶ No wonder, then, that he devoted a couple of hours every day to congress work. He made bulk purchase of khadi shirts, dhotis and caps, and made the young volunteers to wear them. Several of his early works, such as *A Little Trick and a Moral Victory*, satirized the Indians who cooperated with the British Government.⁴⁷ He encouraged the young volunteers by saying in *Hans: the Third Son* - "Go along, brave sons of the country," he exhorted them, "break the Salt Law. I'll join you soon."⁴⁸ His wife also actively participated in the movement. Premchand's articles and editorial comments at this time were on subjects like "The role of literature in the struggle for independence," "Dominion status and swaraj," "The duty of the youth," "Get ready for the struggle for

⁴² Govind, Nikhil, *Between Love and Freedom; The Revolutionary in the Hindi Novel*, Routledge, New Delhi, 2014, p.84

⁴³ See: Premchand, M. *Gaban: The Stolen Jewels*, (translated by Christopher R. King), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2002

⁴⁴ Sigi, Rekha. Op. Cit., pp. 53-54

⁴⁵ Gopal, Madan, Op. Cit., p. 308

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 308

⁴⁷ Rubin, David "Short Stories of Premchand" in Barbara Stoler Miller's *Masterworks of Asian Literature in Comparative Perspective: A Guide for Teaching*, M.E.Sharpe, 1994. pp. 168-177

⁴⁸ Gopal, Madan. Op. Cit., p. 309

independence," "Machine-gun and peace," "Need for propaganda in villages," "The big stick," "Simon Report," "Boycott of the Round Table Conference."⁴⁹

Stories written about this time included some powerful ones, such as *Poos ki Raat*. A majority of them, however, were graphic portrayal of the different aspects of the nationalist movement. Picketing of shops selling foreign cloth and liquor, prabhatpheries etc. were tinted. *Juloos* reflects the temper of the times of the satyagraha movement. This talked about the very nature of nationalist processions as well as the repression of British government. *Sharaab ki Dukan* echoes the boycott of liquor shops by nationalist volunteers, men as well as women. *Samar Yatra* captures the mood of the people during the satyagraha movement when travelling groups roused the people, young and old, to enrol as volunteers.⁵⁰

Some of the stories in 'Hans' were considered "seditious" by the authorities who planned to take action against such publications. *Jail* is an echo of the repressive measures imposed by the British Government against the movement for the boycott of foreign goods. It is woven round two women fully attached to each other in prison. *Patni se Pati* is a portrayal of the period when foreign manufactured articles were made a bonfire of in Indian bones. *Inteqam* vividly captures the times when nationalist terrorists were tried for various crimes and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.⁵¹

Ahuti, by Premchand, reflects the temper of the times 'when-students left colleges and schools to join the non-cooperation movement. *Anubhav* portrays how British repression of political movements proved infectious. *Chakma* again reflects the temper of the times when shops selling foreign cloth were boycotted and the duplicity of the merchants exposed. *Hou ka Upahar* also relates to picketing of shops selling foreign cloth. *Akhiri Tohfa* echoes the times of the boycott of foreign goods. *Taavaan* also portrays the conduct of the movement for the boycott of foreign cloth.⁵²

In many of the writings, Premchand highlighted the participation of women in political movements. He also raised the issues such as untouchability which assumed serious proportions in the early thirties leading to Gandhiji's fast in disapproval of Ramsay McDonald's Communal Award in September, 1932.⁵³ *Karmabhoomi* (1931) is one of the best works of Premchand which begins by a severe criticism of the educational system in colonial India. To him what is necessary for life is not a degree but education. "The real degree that we need is that of humility, service and simplicity. If we do not have this degree, i.e. if our conscience is not awakened, the paper degree is worthless."⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Rai, Amrit, Op.Cit. p. 256

⁵⁰ Gopal, Madan. Op. Cit., p. 310

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 314

⁵² Ibid., pp. 320-321

⁵³ Ibid., p. 288

⁵⁴ See: Agarwal, Girirajsharan. *Premchand: Karam Bhoomi*, Abhyas Pustika, Delhi, 2001

Many of the preamchand's writings are deals with the different plots of world history. *Pareeksha* portrays Nadir Shah's contempt for the depravity of the Moghuls which had made them and their princesses and begums lose all sense of shame and honour. *Vajrapat* portrays the massacre of Delhi at the hands of Nadir Shah's soldiers, and shows how the conqueror manages to get the precious, world-famous diamond, *Kohi-Noor*. *Shatranj ke Khiladi (or Shatranj ki Baazi)* is a pen picture of decadent Lucknow in the last years of Wajid Ali Shah. It portrays the life of various sections of the urban community, all steeped in debauchery or useless pursuits like cock-fighting, kite flying, etc. at a time when the British were making inroads into the kingdoms of Oudh and Lucknow. His other works like *Dil ki Rani*, (published in November 1933) dealt with the story of massacre in Constantinople carried away by the forces of Timur. Another story, *Qaidi*, written about this time, is taken from Russian history. *Holi ki Chhutti* based on the theme of World War I. *Kshama* is the story of the times of the Arab conquest of Spain.⁵⁵

⁵⁵Gopal, Madan, Op. Cit., p. 220