



# WOMEN PERSECUTION IN PREMCHAND'S NOVELS

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## Abstract

Premchand's literature was socially produced, so it had an excessive political and economic backdrop during the interwar period. He was aware of the exploitation of women and the horrible living conditions they faced. Premchand's story accurately depicts the systematic pattern of women's ideals and expectations. Premchand's writings explored several forms of female oppression, including child marriage, widowhood, and dowry difficulties. This study will primarily focus on community religious ethics, education, the violent and catastrophic treatment of untouchables, and the terrible lives of Indian women.

**Keywords:** Premchand, Indian women, Miserable life, Realistic vision, Caste segregation, Child marriage, Widowhood.

## Introduction

On July 31, 1880, Dhanpat Rai Srivastav was born in Lamhi, a village near Varanasi. He moved on to establish himself as one of India's greatest literary personalities, recognised by his pen name Munshi Premchand. Premchand began schooling at a madrasa in Lalpur, where he studied Urdu and Persian. Following on, he attended a missionary school where he learnt English. He was eight years old when his mother, a homemaker, died. Premchand's education was cut short when his father, a postal clerk, died nine years later. After supporting himself for a few years through tuition, he was hired as an assistant teacher in a government school in the Bahraich area in 1900. Around this period, he started writing fiction.

Premchand's writings investigate and evaluate himself as the 'Upanyas Samrat', or king of novel writing. Premchand's works are primarily his novels. His writings express thoughts regarding the social and political life of pre-independence India.

Premchand wrote novels between 1920 and 1936 that were primarily concerned with realistically depicting women's oppression and their behaviours in several nations and groups. The time between the two world wars, the devastation of continuous conflicts, and the disastrous result of the European and British wars, respectively. Devastating effects were seen across India in many regions following the start of two current wars. The need for Premchand depicted women's situations in Indian culture and literature in the early twentieth century, when new social and religious consciousness emerged in some areas of society. Indian orthodox communities and their conventional culture give an inferior status to all women, including untouchable women, to keep or retain a particular level of status. Women being acknowledged in early modern history partially centres on the impact of women's leadership in several areas, including social leadership, economic expansion, and historical interpretation. The status of women in literature and the arts is still severely restricted, particularly when considering early history as the primary historical period. Some of them

commit themselves or turn to prostitution as a result of the immense shame and humiliation they face. Domestic violence against women was more common among lower-caste women than among upper-caste women at the time, which was unusual. Women experience more struggle and humiliation in social and religious settings than lower-caste women. Lower caste women have significant advantages, including girls and women partaking in various household and outside employment activities. Women, like men, contribute to agriculture and execute a set of household tasks. As a result, they become an invaluable resource for the family. Upper-caste women, on the other hand, are more self-sufficient and financially independent than lower-caste women. The lower caste women play vital roles in conventional customs and domestic families together, more so than women. It is also assumed and commonly known that widows remarry in the community of lower-caste women. If they are dissatisfied with their husbands, they can move their living arrangements to another or an alternate individual. Some lower-caste women may even abandon their husbands; their community will not interfere with their lives or limit their social rights. Beyond the higher and lower castes of women, Premchand focusses on women and girls who face exploitation.

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Premchand has provided an in-depth assessment of women's conditions, including their suffering as they work to avoid social injustice and social rights violations by men as well as systems of patriarchy. Perhaps the most powerful women include Nirmala, Suman, Dhaniala, and Prema. Nirmala had been a significant figure within Premchand's literature. Nirmala's journey included marriage to a man of the same generation as her father. Despite this, her drive to progress from lowly student to bride and ultimately mother is a striking reflection. At fifteen years old, Nirmala's narrative began with a fear of getting married, went through many highs and lows, and concluded with remorse and regret. This is unmistakable evidence that Premchand realistically presents Indian society. This focusses on how Suman is all set to respond to the social and religious communities thrown at her. Suman's character is primarily stressed in Premchand's writing by the fundamental hypocrisy of the powerful.

Premchand's enthusiasm for socially engaged, purposeful literature is obvious in his support of a new type of writing that emerged in the 1930s. When a group of Young Turks in London draughted a manifesto for what would become the Progressive Writers' Movement, he published it in his prominent Hindi monthly *Hans* in October 1935. When the progressives agreed to organise an ambitious first-of-its-kind conference of the All-India Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) on April 9, 1936, at Lucknow's Rifah-e Aam Hall, Premchand

rose to the occasion with all of his writing abilities. Not only did he wholeheartedly support this fledgling association, but his presidential address would later become a manifesto of sorts for a literary movement unlike any other in the history of this country, a movement that would shape the responses of an entire generation of Indian intellectuals.

Premchand, who was unanimously chosen to be the first president of this all-India authors' group, produced among his best nonfiction works for the occasion. His lecture, titled *Sahitya ka Uddeshya* (The Aim of Literature), was attended by a rapt audience of emerging and established writers from around the nation. The most outstanding narrator from his generation reminded his audience in simple but powerful words that true literature can only be built on truth, beauty, freedom, and humanity, and that his concept of literature was 'the criticism of life'. And, because literature is nothing more than a reflection of its times, its definition, breadth, substance, and goals and ambitions must evolve with time. Given the world's turmoil and change, his reader - and theirs - could no longer be satisfied with the wondrous tales of love and escape that had been the standard fare of the *fasana* and *dastan* of old.

The liberation movement had moulded his writing, and his writings delighted readers while simultaneously conveying social lessons and encouraging them to join the movement. One such work, *Soz-e-Watan*, published in 1907, was banned by British authorities, prompting him to alter his pen name to Premchand. At that point, he began working as an assistant master at Gorakhpur's Normal High School in 1916. Premchand continued to write in his spare time, producing his first Hindi novel, *Seva Sadan*. Here is a glimpse of some of his famous novels.

The significance of *Sevasadan* is still relevant 100 years after it was first published and is a credit to Indian society as well as Munshi Premchand's talent as a writer. *Sevasadan* demolished the hypocrisies on show in Indian society, such as women's rights, the act of dowry, and prostitution. The commentary was a bold and daring one about the state of women in Indian society, told via the life of a beautiful lady named Suman who transforms from a *Bramhin* to a *vaishya*. The novel also focusses on how reformists treated concubines as the scum of society and attempted to eradicate them rather than understanding the circumstances that had brought them to this state in the first place. It's interesting to note that the novel was written during a period when women's reforms were a hot topic in Indian society. *Sevasadan* continues to be a work of culturally profound chronicle of that era's Indian society.

*Nirmala*, one of the most moving Indian novels about a young girl married to an elderly man, was a reformer at heart. Premchand targeted the evil that afflicted India at the time - the dowry - through the various trials that occurs in *Nirmala*, the protagonist, following her marriage. *Nirmala* is both heartbreaking and profoundly intelligent as she deals with the topic at hand. The characters are not black or white; they all have significant troubles and failures, making the author's work extremely human.

*Gaban* is a term used to describe embezzlement. *Gaban* becomes a masterpiece for readers looking for a glimpse into Indian rural life at the period, telling the story of a man in love who seeks to satisfy his wife's seemingly insatiable desire for diamonds. Premchand's story focusses on the socioeconomic hardships encountered by men and women in the Indian countryside, highlighting concerns about corruption and poverty. The central theme of the novel is how normal citizens fall victim to corruption. The work provides an informative introduction to life under British rule and its diverse social challenges.

*Karmabhoomi* unfolded in the 1930s, which was during a period when the British exploited Hindus and Muslims in the region of Uttar Pradesh. After centuries of peaceful coexistence, the story depicts a revolution against the British Raj. This work, which champions Gandhian causes such as peace and *ahimsa*, raises moral dilemmas through metaphors and the evolution of its numerous characters. *Karmabhoomi* defined 'dharma' for a modern reader, emphasizing the importance of distinguishing between genuine and superficial religious practices during times of social change, sacrifice, ideology clashes, and crises.

*Godan*, a narrative about peasant India, is often regarded as Premchand's masterpiece. Also, *Godan*, his final novel, is a realistic representation of Indian country life. *Godan* is a masterpiece that addresses a wide range of problems, including casteism, women's exploitation, capitalistic exploitation of the peasant class, and the sociopolitical climate of a period when Indians were fighting British control. This work is distinguished because of the author's skill with the numerous key characters. It's a narrative about difficult conditions, gloomy optimism, and unpleasant truths. *Godan* is Premchand's finest tribute to the Indian farmer.

*Dhania*, Hari's wife, in the *Godan*, was the chief person responsible for all the suffering. She helps women fight against injustice and abuse, especially those who are certainly tormented by their society and culture. One of the primary, powerful characters in Premchand's book was *Prema*, a character from *Pratigya*. *Prema*

is the character who raises awareness of the deplorable and impoverished circumstances faced by widows in India. This is where it becomes clear that many women have rebelled against social injustice, their unhappy lives, and societal norms because of Premchand's book. Many girls get inspiration and motivation to speak out against abuse from such women.

The main focus of this study is on women's dreadful living conditions, sad lives, and social humiliation in Premchand's novel. Women campaigned against discrimination and exploitation. Women and girls throughout all walks of life faced humiliation, social constraints, and torture. Author Premchand wished to raise understanding, with the primary purpose of increasing consciousness in social communities and religious gatherings. To achieve his drive, Premchand defended women and girls who were both politically and socially conscious. Most of Premchand's writings depict women fighting alongside their impairments and standing facing family and social injustice. The author also wishes to raise awareness in social gatherings by highlighting the atrocities committed against women and young girls. Premchand's key works effectively depicted the brutal reality of societal inequality, inequality, and lower and more privileged women comparable. It includes various aspects, such as economics. It involves a variety of issues, including economic corruption, women's maltreatment, restrictions on women's basic rights, and the inability of widows to participate in society. Some of the females endure for the rest of their lives following their husbands' deaths. Following their failed marriage, the girls become widowed and marginalised in society. Because their fundamental human rights are limited, most girls are viewed as terrible women and subjected to social taboos, and as a result, many women commit suicide. The practice of corruption, maltreatment of women, restrictions on women's fundamental freedoms, and the inability of widows to participate in society. Some of the females endure because their basic human liberties are restricted, most girls are viewed as evil women and subjected to social taboos, and as a result, many women commit suicide. This cruel state and circumstances facing Indian women had a significant influence on Premchand; therefore, he began to raise understanding about it in literature, conveying messages about their bad status in society. The rest of their lives following their husbands' deaths. Following their failed marriage, the girls remain widowed and marginalised in society. Because their basic human liberties are restricted, most girls are viewed as evil women and subjected to social taboos, and as a result, many women commit suicide.

This cruel state and circumstances facing Indian women had a significant influence on author Premchand, therefore, he began to raise understanding about it in literature, conveying messages about their bad status in society. Premchand's literature addresses the hardships of both the poor and women. Women experience greater misery than women, whereas lower caste women participate in various forms of household chores and agricultural work with males, eventually becoming an asset to the family and enjoying several benefits. Women, on the other hand, are at a disadvantage and face numerous social constraints.

## Conclusion

According to the findings of the preceding study, Premchand's perception of women's social rank reflected a thorough awareness of their deplorable living situations. He was also confident that one day Indian women will be able to put an end to all of the humiliations, exploitation, and mistreatment they face in society and at religious meetings. For him, those pure girls and women are more capable of standing up to any social ills and oppression. The author wanted to share his understanding of how women and underaged girls suffer their entire lives as a result of various societal and religious dogmas that people obey; the poor and dreadful situations upset him so much that he depicted women's subjugation in his work. Premchand feels that gender equality is essential for society's prosperity.

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