

## PREFACE

Scholars are beginning to realise the importance of the vast store of material available in the creative literature of a society for understanding its past. In our country, too, historians and social scientists are turning to literature in the different Indian languages both to corroborate the evidence obtained from other sources and to get additional insights into the ethos of a period.

Some fifty years have elapsed since the death of Premchand. In the meanwhile, especially during the last few years following the celebration of his birth centenary, studies on him by literary critics have multiplied at an amazing pace, so much so that Premchand has almost become a synonym for Hindi literature. That tendency certainly requires to be checked. But his worth, both for the sensitive glimpses into the lives of various sections, particularly the lower and middle classes, that he offers and for his own mental make-up as representative of the urban educated Hindu liberal nationalist intelligentsia cannot be exaggerated.

Works on Premchand have fallen, however, into the stereotype of using neat categories to define him. Derived from the West, these categories, like progressive, secular and revivalist, are used in a way that the specific details and peculiarities of a different socio-cultural system tend to be overlooked. Depending upon a scholar's ideological predisposition with regard to these categories, Premchand has often been, consequently, either debunked or idolised. Minds have got so habituated to such categorisations that any statement with regard to him is seen as belonging to either the idolising or the debunking camp.

In such a situation it is with a degree of anxiety that I feel the need to clarify my position. This thesis is a modest attempt to understand the interaction of a sensitive writer and his society. It tries to place Premchand with all his strengths and weaknesses in a historical perspective. It tries to describe and interpret the pattern and constituents of his make-up without upholding or condemning one value for another. The thesis thus addresses itself to a detailed view of the structure of liberal nationalist thought in the context of early 20th century society; it eschews any posthumous verdict on the good or bad of that thought. In fact, the thesis even questions the value attached per se to categories such as secular, national and modern as contradistinguished from traditional religious, regional or other cultural identities. Minds steeped in their traditional culture were not ipso facto antagonistic to change and progress. In themselves cultural categories did not have a regressive content. Indeed, they enriched national culture. It was only with the mediation of economic and political factors that they conflagrated as disruptive or backward-pulling forces.

Premchand's writings, comprising short stories, novels, essays, plays, lectures and letters, constitute the main source material for this thesis. I have consulted also works on Premchand. For understanding the locale of Premchand's own life and fiction, I have seen secondary works on the economy, history and society of eastern U.P.

Much of this work was done under the supervision of Prof. S.C. Misra. It is my deepest sorrow that he could not see it completed due to his untimely death. In him was the finest amalgam of an erudite supervisor and a gentle fatherly soul which helped me realise my potential as a scholar.

After Misraji's death Prof. V.K. Chavda kindly consented to be my

supervisor. I was lucky a second time. Prof. Chavda made sure that I lost no time owing to this sudden change. Himself a scholar of Gujarati society and literature, he inspired me to complete this work. To him I am indebted.

I owe a word of gratitude to the authorities and staff of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, Varanasi, the Hindustani Academy and Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Allahabad, and the Sahitya Akademy, Central Hindi Library, Marwari Library and the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, Delhi, for their help and cooperation.

I would specially like to thank Prof. Ravinder Kumar for his kindness in seeing me through my work with all kinds of assistance. Everything he did was more than I can believe I deserved. I really do not have adequate words to thank him. My only hope is that this thesis would have the quality that might please him.

To Mr and Mrs Sripat Rai I would ever remain beholden for providing me the warmth of a home in Delhi. Besides offering all help from the Saraswati Press, Mr Sripat Rai acquainted me with Premchand like only he, as the great writer's elder son, could have done.

An affectionate 'thank you' to my friends in Baroda and Delhi for wittingly and unwittingly giving me ideas that I have made my own. Salim and Ravindra deserve to dislike me a little for the running around from office to office I made them do in the name of my great attachment to my thesis.

My brother Gyan for his 'subaltern' influence and Sudhir for his 'ambivalence' effect on me must be thanked also for their willing editorial guidance.

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