CHAPTER I

OLIVER TWIST AND SEVASADAN

Both Dickens and Promchand emerged as full-fledged novelists dealing with social issues with the publication of Oliver Twist (1838) and Sevasadan (1917) respectively. In Oliver Twist, Dickens primarily attacks the New Poor Law of 1834 and the abuses in the workhouses. The horror of the criminal world of London is also another important theme of the novel.

Dickens begins his scathing attack in the early chapters of the novel itself. We learn that Oliver is born in a workhouse, his mother dies immediately, he is taken to a baby farm where he lives until the age of nine under the supervision of one Mrs. Mann. Then he is taken to the workhouse by the beadle, Mr. Bumble. He is taken before the Board and interrogated by the gentleman with the white waistcoat. He is told to pick oakum from the next day onwards, and Oliver sobbs himself to sleep that night. Dickens starts his description of the Board with an ironical sentence:
The members of this Board were very sage, deep, philosophical men, and when they came to turn their attention to the workhouse, they found out at once, what ordinary folks would never have discovered—the poor people, liked it.\(^1\)

The 'philosophical' men of the country tried to change this attitude of the poor people and they changed it with the implementation of the New Poor Law in 1834. Their intentions were good. They did not want able-bodied people to sit idle and get money in turn as relief. The war had its influence also on Victorian England. So, during the early part of the nineteenth century prices had gone high and wages were low. But the Reform Act of 1832 had put modern British democracy on the map by its extension of the franchise to all moderately well-to-do rate-payers. The middle-classes were asserting their individuality. Slavery was on the way out throughout the Empire and strong feelings were raised against the use of child-labour in mines and

\(^1\) Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Collins Clear Type Press, n.d.), P.19. All further quotations are from this edition. Corresponding pages are given in the text.
factories and against chimney sweeps. But the
New Poor Law of 1834 which was reformatory in theory
was unimaginable in practice. Dickens understood
the pragmatic spirit of Bentham which inspired this
legislation, and he hated it. The New Poor Law was
aimed, not at easing the lot of the poor but at
making it more uncomfortable, so as to drive them
back to work and thus lighten the burden on the
tax-payer. Dickens writes:

So, they established the rule, that all
the poor people should have the alternative
(for they would compel nobody, not they),
of being starved by a gradual process in
the house, or by a quick one out of it.
and issued three meals of thin gruel a day,
with an onion twice a week, and half a
roll on Sundays. They made a great many
otherwise and humane regulations, having
reference to the ladies, . . . kindly
undertook to divorce poor married people .
and instead of compelling a man to support
his family, as they had theretofore done,
took his family away from him, and made
him a bachelor! . . . The relief was inseparable from the workhouse and the gruel; and that frightened people.

(Pp.19-20)

The effect of the abolition of out-door relief is satirized in chapter five, when Mr. Sowerberry takes Oliver with him to measure out the corpse of a woman, in her wretched family setting, who had wasted away from deprivation. Mr. Bumble later refers to 'ungrateful' vagrants who insist on dying in the street. The older, more generous system was known as Spoonhamland from the district where it had been devised and it had been in operation since 1795. But the new law forced women and children to work in fields and factories at smaller wages, in order to avoid the workhouse, where the conditions were deliberately made extremely unpleasant. So the inmates had less than the poorest labourers who were forced to do loathsome work. Soxos were strictly segregated—even husbands could not live with their wives!

Even though the figures are a bit exaggerated, what Dickens wrote about the workhouse is true. The
new law and its application by uncaring Boards were not disliked by the poor alone. Dickens is characteristically voicing the opinion of a strong section of the public. There was plenty of mistrust of the cold calculation of utilitarian philosophers at the time of *Oliver Twist*'s appearance. Dickens has often been labelled 'radical' because of his championship of the poor and the oppressed, but the term 'radical' was first applied to the school of thought of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), followed by Malthus, J.S. Mill and Adam Smith, the economist of free trade. All of them taught the virtue of prudence and the pursuit of the 'happiness' of the greatest number as highest goal, while Dickens's ideal was that of warm, imaginative personal benevolence.

Though defenders of the new law criticised Dickens for his attack on the law which had set out to correct the abuses of the old law, his charges were confirmed with the publication of an account of the cruelties practised in Andover Workhouse in 1846. The note made by Dr. Rogor, the medical
officer at the Strand Union workhouse was quoted by Louisa Turning in *Workhouses and Pauperism* (1848), thus giving valuable evidence to Dickens's accuracy. She quoted: "The master of the workhouse was a man who might have been the original of 'Bumble' in *Oliver Twist.*"²

Chapter II of the novel ends with Oliver being ordered into instant confinement for the unimaginable offence of asking for more gruel and an offer of five pounds for anybody who wants to take Oliver as an apprentice. Oliver is confined in a dark and solitary room. Dickens excites the reader's sympathy towards Oliver and the revulsion towards the system when he says:

Let it not be supposed by the enemies of the 'system', that, during the period of his solitary incarceration, Oliver was denied the benefit of exercise, the pleasure of society or the advantages of religious consolation. As for exercise, it was nice cold weather, and he was allowed to perform his ablutions every

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morning under the pump, in a stone yard, in the presence of Mr. Bumble, who prevented his catching cold, and caused a tingling sensation to pervade his frame, by repeated applications of the cane. As for society, he was carried every other day into the hall where the boys dinod, and there sociably flogged as a warning and example. And so far from being denied the advantages of religious consolation, he was kicked into the same apartment every evening at prayer-time, and thence permitted to listen to, and console his mind with, a general application of the boys, containing a special clause, therein inscribed by authority of the Board, in which they entreated to be made good, virtuous, contented and obedient, and to be guarded from the sins and vices of Oliver Twist; whom the supplication distinctly set-forth to be under the exclusive patronage and protection of the powers of wickedomness, and an article direct from the manufactory of the very devil himself. (Pp. 23-24)
Oliver escapes the clutches of a chimney-sweeper, Mr. Gamfield, to whom it was decided by the gentleman with the white waist-coat to hand him over for three pounds and fifteen shillings, when the magistrate who has to sign and approve his indentures refuses to do so. He realizes the pitiable condition of Oliver who would otherwise be transferred to Mr. Gamfield who had "bruised three or four boys to death already" (P.26). The Board then decides to send Oliver to sea. Dickens who occasionally employs his own voice in ironic contrast to the reality he is describing, begins Chapter IV with, "In great families, when an advantageous place cannot be obtained, either in possession . . . for the young man who is growing up, it is a very general custom to send to sea" (P.32). Oliver belongs to the "great family" of the poor. In the same chapter, after Oliver reaches Mr. Sowerberry's place, the author's tone with regard to those who fashion is "humano" laws unequivocally savage: "I wish some well-fed philosopher, whose meat and drink turn to gall within him; whose blood is ice, whose heart is iron; could have seen Oliver Twist clutching at the dainty viands that the dog had neglected" (P.38).
A fortuitous meeting with Mr. Sowerberry has avoided the sending of Oliver to sea. It is here that he meets Noah Claypole, the charity boy. After about a month Oliver starts playing as a mute for the 'children's practice' and continues in regular service as an admired mute. One day he goes with the undertaker Sowerberry to arrange for a funeral. They go to the house where the woman lies dead. Dickens describes the poverty and degradation of the area: "The kennel was stagnant and filthy. The very rats, which here and there lay putrefying in its rottenness, were hideous with famine" (P.46). Oliver is appalled and frightened by what he sees. The husband is raving hysterically over the body, and the starving children are crying bitterly. The old woman, the mother of the dead woman, is a grotesque character, asking for a cloak and bread and wine in order to follow her daughter to the grave.

Oliver is admired as a mute and Noah grows very jealous of his elevation. He teases him and abuses his mother with the result that he is followed by Oliver. Bumble who comes to know of Oliver's offence advises keeping him in a collar for a day or two
and starving him since he feels that his eating meat is responsible for his behaviour. Oliver is punished by Sowerberry. That night he decides to leave the place and at dawn he sets off. After he has gone a long way from London, and reaches Barnet on the seventh day, he meets a strange boy who befriends him and offers to buy him food. He is Jack Dawkins, known as The Artful Dodger. He speaks of an old man in London, who, he tells, would give Oliver shelter. They set off and reach London at night, passing through the filthy streets, with filthy children rolling in the kennels. Thus they reach the place of Fagin where "Seated round the table were four or five boys, none older than the Dodger, smoking long clay pipes, and drinking spirits with the air of middle-aged men" (P.69). Oliver gets some food and some gin and water and then sinks "into a deep sleep" (P.70).

From here begins Dickens's depiction of the criminal world of London. The workhouse and the inhuman attitude of society towards Oliver have led the child into the trap of a criminal gang. Dickens was very much concerned with the plight of the
oppressed child. If this is true of Dickens it is equally true of Premchand that he was intensely worried about the exploitation of women in India. *Sovasedan* deals with the miseries suffered by women, and Premchand's main theme in the novel is prostitution, the circumstances which lead to prostitution and its consequences.

Suman, the heroine of the novel is born in a middle-class family. Her father, Krishna Chandra has been a police inspector for twenty five years. At the present moment he is searching for a suitable groom for Suman, who, along with her younger sister Shanta, have bloomed into their youth. Premchand begins the novel pointing out the predicament of Krishna Chandra, who is not able to get a suitable boy for Suman without paying enough dowry. The novel starts with this sentence: "Everybody has to taste the bitter fruit of repentance sometime or the other, but while others repent for their evils Inspector Krishna Chandra was repenting for his virtues."

Krishna Chandra is a sincere man and does not receive

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3 Premchand, *Sovasedan* (New Delhi: Diamond Pocket Books Pvt. Ltd., n.d) P.7. All further quotations are from this edition. Corresponding pages are given in the text. The Translation is done by me.
bribe. But, when, after a hectic search he is not able to find a match for Suman without giving enough money as dowry, he is trapped by the devil. Temptation overcomes him and he is ultimately forced to receive three thousand rupees as bribe from a high priest to allow him to escape in a criminal case. But this information is disclosed by one legal agent, and Krishna Chandra is sent to prison, just when everything is getting ready for the marriage of Suman to a handsome, well-educated boy from a good family. Everything is lost for Gangajali and her two daughters. The proposal is cancelled. After a long search, Umanath, Suman's uncle brings a proposal for Suman. The irony which Premchand uses at this juncture recalls the irony used by Dickens in the initial chapters to expose the hypocrisy of Mr. Bumble and his colleagues at the workhouse. Umanath fixes the marriage of Suman to a man in Benaras. Premchand introduces the dialogue between Umanath and Gangajali which is highly satirical:

Ganga . . . 'The boy is studying. Isn't he?'

Umanath: 'He is not studying, he is employed. He is a clerk in a factory at 15 rupees.'

Ganga: 'He has a household. Doesn't he?'
Uma: 'Who has a house in a city.'
Everybody stays in rented houses.'
Ganga: 'He has no near relations, parents?'
Uma: 'His parents have died and who in a city has no near relations?'
Ganga: 'What is his age?'
Uma: 'Around thirty years.'
Ganga: 'How does he look?'
Uma: 'It is very difficult to find such a person like him. Nobody will ever be ugly in a city. Everybody will have beautiful hair, bright clothes, and his qualities, disposition, conversation are beyond question. Flowers fall from his mouth while talking. His name is Gajadhar Prasad.'
Ganga: 'Then he might be a widower?'
Uma: 'Yes, he is a widower, but what of that? There will never be an old man in a city. The young people are boys and old people young, their youth is ever-green . . . People remain young and die young.'
Ganga: 'How is his family?'
Uma: 'Very high.'
Gangajali spoke with a sorrowful face: 'If
you are pleased with him, then I too am pleased with him.' (Pp.18.19)

Suman got married to Gajadhar Prasad and Gangajali "wept a lot after seeing her son-in-law. She was so much filled with sorrow, as if someone had thrown her daughter into a well" (P.19). So Suman goes to stay with her husband. Sufferings start for Suman after her marriage. Suman who has lived like a princess and wants to continue living like a princess is handed over to an aging widower. Life after marriage is like the life of the poor in a "workhouse". Premchand describes the character of Suman in the beginning of the novel when he compares her with her sister, Shanta. He comments: "The older girl, Suman, was beautiful, playful and proud. The younger girl Shanta was simple, serious and well-behaved. Suman wanted to live better than others. If the same kind of saroos were brought from the market to both the sisters, then Suman would put on a wry face. Shanta would be content with whatever she got" (P.8). It is a great setback for such a girl to be married off to a person like Gajadhar. Gajadhar tries all methods to please Suman, but she does not
The contrast between the life of a child and the life of a woman is significant. Even if the child is poor it experiences at times a sense of bliss which is missing in the life of an adult. Even though Oliver is unhappy right from the beginning he may have enjoyed the fleeting moments of happiness. His real problems arise only after he is nine years old and is taken before the Board in the workhouse. In a sense his right towards happiness is curtailed by his cruel oppressors. On the other hand, Suman has crossed her happy days of childhood and adolescence. Real problems arise for Suman only after her marriage. Promchand allows only a short period of joy in the life of his heroine while Oliver experiences only intermittent and fleeting moments of relief. Both Oliver and Suman soon got liberated after their initial fall into misery. Oliver feels relieved once he has come across Jack Dawkins and with him reached Fagin's den. Suman escapes the physical and mental torture at the hands of Gajadhar once she is forced to take shelter with Bholi Bai, the prostitute. Yet, these sanctuaries are not real
or permanent. In a sense Gajadhar's house is a "workhouse" to Suman. The workhouse where Oliver stayed represents the attitude of all workhouses towards their inmates, Gajadhar's relationship with Suman represents the relationship of all aging husbands towards young, beautiful wives who are forced to live with them due to poverty.

For Suman Gajadhar's house is a place where her feelings are being smothered, and she is getting disgusted with life. It is during such moments of pain that she looks towards the market place and wonders at the charming figure of Bhola Bai, the prostitute. She is not able to justify the loose life led by Bhola Bai but the glitter she sees at her place and the adulation she receives from people belonging to the higher rungs of society compel her to re-think over the 'dying' life she is leading. She allows the young boys who pass by her house to have a glimpse of herself and she derives extreme joy from it. She has no bad intentions, she just wants to show the splendour of her youth. She does this just to win over the hearts of others (P.22).
The indecision in Suman's mind tempts her to get acquainted with Bholi Bai, who stays in a house in front of Suman's. On the first evening of their meeting Suman realizes that Bholi Bai is not a fallen woman, she is much higher than that (P.22). She attends a mawlid at her house. She goes there the next evening also and Bholi realizes that she has triumphed over her (P.24). Premchand, as always in his novels, attacks the corrupt influence of western education on Indian society by showing how Gajadhar finds nothing wrong in the vocation of a prostitute and in the routine attendance of high-ranked people at her house. When Suman says to Gajadhar, "I thought that people view prostitutes with scorn," he replies, "Yes, there are such people, already counted. But English education has made people broad-minded. Prostitutes are not seen with so much contempt now. Moreover, Bholi Bai has great respect in the city" (P.24).

Suman begins to think about the popularity of Bholi Bai which is increasing day after day. She has made friends with one Subhadra in the
neighbourhood, whose husband Padma Singh is a barrister. Suman reveals her thoughts to her but Subhadra consoles her by making her realize the immoral nature of Bholi Bai's life and convincing her that she (Bholi) is inferior to her in terms of beauty.

Meanwhile, Suman and Bholi have become more friendly. One and a half years have passed after the marriage of Suman. Suman visits Bholi's house and Bholi comes to Suman's place. Gajadhar realizes the consequences of this friendship and he reprimands Suman and tells her that these high-ranked people who visit Bholi are not virtuous men. But the innocent Suman has come to believe that there is no virtue left in the world to which Gajadhar instructs her, which is the expression of Premchand's own thoughts. Suman says: "The world sees only the actions, who knows the thoughts of anybody?" and Gajadhar replies:

So just by seeing the heavy impressions of paste on their foreheads, you came to the conclusion that they are virtuous? . . . . Those who taint the lustrous
name of religion, those who earn money in the name of religion, those who indulge in luxury are sinners. If Bholi does not receive due-respect at their place, then where will she receive?

When Suman expresses unbelief at Gajadhar's words, he continues.

No Suman, this is the case in reality. There are very few good people in our country, but still the country is not without them. They are compassionate, they are righteous, they are always engaged in service, if Bholi comes like a fairy, they won't even raise their eyes to have a glimpse of her. (P.28)

Suman feels as if she is surrounded on all sides. When Gajadhar comes to know about her friendship with Subhadra and her frequent visits to her place, he gets more furious. He is told by Suman herself about Subhadra and her husband Padma Singh. Gajadhar starts to suspect her. One evening Suman goes to Subhadra's house to participate in the
celebration of her husband’s election to the city council. Bhuli Bai performs excellently and everybody is thrilled. Suman in the end realizes the difference between her life and Bhuli’s life. Premchand says:

Sitting there for a long time Suman was following the cause from the effect. In the end, she came to the conclusion that she (Bhuli) is free but she is in chains. Her shop is open, so there is a crowd of customers; my shop is closed, so nobody stands waiting. She does not care for the barkings of dogs, I am afraid of public consure. She is outside the veil, I am within it. She is chirping on the branches unfettered, I remain holding them. This very bashfulness, this very fear of ridicule has made me the slave of another.

(P.36)

Suman walks slowly home after the programme, her mind filled with despair. “Just as pride runs far away from meanness, so her heart was running far
away from that house" (P.36). Only when she reaches home she knows that it is one o'clock in the night and this delay results in her last day at home. She waits outside and when Gajadhar wakes up and does not behave properly, she too says her say. When she is convinced that he will not open the door for her, she takes her small box and reaches Subhadra's house in the early morning.

When Gajadhar comes to know that Suman has taken shelter at Subhadra's place, his doubts become clear. He begins to defame Padma Singh. Padma Singh has recently been elected to the city council. To celebrate it he has invited Bholi Bai, against his principles. From that period onwards, Vithaldas, the social reformer and his best friend takes a dislike to him. And when he hears Gajadhar's words, he believes him and becomes very happy. Very soon the false allegations spread and in the end Padma Singh is forced to ask his servant Jootan to inform Suman that due to her presence in his house he is getting defamed, and to leave the house as early as possible. Suman leaves the place, and after much hesitation as to where to go, she reaches Bholi's place.
Bholi Bai realises that Suman has quarrelled with her husband and left the house. Bholi does not ask her to go back. In fact, she convinces her that she cannot lead a happy life with Gajadhar:

Can an Arab mare and a beast of burden be yoked to one cart! You were to become a queen in a family of status. But you were given over to a man insensitive to the beauties of life, who was not fit to wash your feet. It is only you who are pulling on like this, any other person would have kicked such a husband and gone away long back. If God had given me your looks, I would have erected a golden wall by now . . . (P.46)

So, Suman's dissatisfaction with her married life, her longing for luxury and pleasure, her envy and jealousy at the life led by an inferior and contemptible harlot, at last lead her to the market-place, where she thinks she can at least lead a life free of cares and anxieties. But this is not to be the case, even though she decides not to
sell her body but only to entertain her guests with songs and dances. Time and again she is troubled by the mistakes committed by her in her anger and disgust. Yet, if she does not get the pleasure she has longed for, she leads a luxurious life, and she becomes the talk of the town.

There is a difference in the world of Oliver and the world of Suman. For Oliver, who is just above nine years old, Fagin's world appears to be a dream-world after his harrowing experiences at the workhouse and at Mr. Sowerberry's. But Dickens shows it as the reality of London's crime-world though Oliver is only an accidental part of it. In this respect Oliver's role in the novel after the workhouse episodes and his short stint with Mr. Sowerberry is diminished in importance from the sociological point of view. But the role of the new gang and its members is important to delineate the psychology of the criminals and to analyse the influence of society on them and vice-versa.

Suman is a mature girl. She cannot be excused for innocence. She passes through the different
phases of her life after marriage, influenced by her middle-class background, the easygoing life which she has led, the disgust she has experienced with her husband and the humiliation she has suffered at the house of Subhadra. She is able to place her experiences in the balance and add or remove something whenever she pleases. Oliver is ignorant of his background. And though he experiences suffering, the happy ending after the struggle is bound to help him in forgetting his past. But the question remains: Do all such children escape the oppression to reach a happy destination? Dickens doesn't give solutions in his novels. He revels in the happy outcome of the struggle of his otherwise pitiable heroes, who are most of the time children. In brief, the appearance/reality theme in Oliver Twist, mainly that of Oliver, who appears as a criminal, but in reality is innocent, is not entirely applicable to the character of Suman in Savarnaad. even though Premchand tried his best to portray her as the victim of circumstances. He voices the innocence of Suman and the guilt of Gajadhar, whom later in the novel Gajadhar replies to Krishna
Chandra's question as to how Suman became degraded.

Gajadhar says:

The reason for this was my injustice.
All this is the result of my pitilessness and inhuman behaviour. She was endowed with all merits . . . . If she had quarrelled with me for small things . . . I would have believed her. Her high ideals became the cause for my disbelief. I began to suspect her chastity. (P.177)

Yet, her care-free pre-marital life, her longing for pleasure, are also responsible for her dissatisfaction with her life with Gajadhar. And, more importantly, she receives no moral or religious education to instil in her that divine tolerance towards her husband, whoever he may be. Nevertheless, if she is bent on leading a satisfied life, she has to become a revolutionary. But being prevented by the limits of his time Premchand could not make her a revolutionary. The principle of a revolutionary is present in her personality. Prayagraj Mehta says:

To lead a satisfied life, Suman had to have a sound social knowledge. But
Promchand did not give this to her. . . .
After reading the novel it becomes clear to us that he tries to solve the problem through traditional Indian idealist philosophy of life. To strengthen the same he removes Suman from the marketplace through an artificial method and turns her towards dharma. 4

Oliver Twist reaches the underworld of Fagin and his gang and slowly begins to learn the tricks of the trade. Dickens establishes a link between the earlier world of Oliver's life and his life with Fagin. So far the world has taught him nothing, while the underworld receives him, gives him food and begins to educate him. It is Dickens's pungent attack on the existing system that Oliver, who could not learn anything from accepted society, begins to learn from the underworld. Still, it is important to bear in mind that this underworld is a mirror image of the world itself: capitalistic,

acquisitory, self-aggrandizing. So there is nothing surprising if the leader of this gang, Fagin, has many of the characteristics of a bonovolent employer. He trains his boys with great care in the elements of their trade. Dickens describes:

The merry old gentleman and the two boys played at a very curious and uncommon game, which was performed in this way. The merry old gentleman, placing a snuff-box in one pocket of his trousers, a note-case in the other, and a watch in his waistcoat pocket... buttoned his coat tight round him, and... trotted up and down the room, in imitation of the manner in which old gentlemen walk about the streets any hour in the day. Sometimes he stopped at the fire-place, and sometimes at the door, making believe that he was staring with all his might into shop-windows. At such times, he would look constantly round him for fear of thieves, and would keep slapping all his pockets in turn, to see that he hadn't
lost anything, in such a funny and natural manner, that Oliver laughed till the tears ran down his face. All this time, the two boys followed him closely about; getting out of his sight, so nimbly every time he turned round that it was impossible to follow their motions. At last, the Dodger trod upon his toes, or ran upon his boot accidentally, while Charley Bates stumbled up against him behind; and in that one moment they took from him, with the most extraordinary rapidity, snuff-box, note-case . . . even the spectacle case. If the old gentleman felt a hand in any of his pockets, he cried out where it was; and then the game began all over again. (pp. 74-75)

This "game" is more serious than any of the earlier attempts at apprenticoship, and it is worth noticing that Dickens presents the relationship of Oliver and Fagin repeatedly in educational terms: 5

'You're a clever boy, my dear,' said the playful old gentleman . . . 'I never saw a sharper lad . . . . If you go on this way, you'll be the greatest man of the time. And now come here, I will show you how to take the marks out of the handkerchiefs' (P.76) and 'You've been brought up bad,' said the Dodger . . . 'Fagin will make something of you, though, or you'll be the first he ever had that turned out unprofitable. You'd better begin at once; for you'll come to the trade long before you think of it; and you're only losing time, Oliver'. (P.149)

It only heightens the point of comparison between the two novels, and particularly the two characters, Fagin and Bholi Bai who represent the vicious and immoral side of society, when we find that, soon after Suman's taking shelter with her, Bholi Bai asks her about her education and is enthusiastic to give her the training necessary for her progress in the trade. When Bholi Bai says, "Perhaps you did not receive good education", Suman replies, "I have studied for two years under a Christian lady"(P.46).
nd the conversation continues thus:

Bholi: 'There is still a deficiency of
two-three years...'
Suman: 'Well, how soon can I learn singing?'
Bholi: 'You can learn it within six months!'
(Pp.46-7)

Charles Dickens has perhaps the best eye for
details, and especially for the details of the
squalid atmosphere of London. He begins his description
of the filthiness of London through the experience of
Oliver as he walks along with Jack Dawkins:

A dirtier or more wretched place he had
never seen. The street was very narrow
and muddy, and the air was impregnated
with filthy odour. There were a good
many small shops; but the only stock in
trade appeared to be heaps of children
who, even at that time of night, were
crawling in and out at the doors, or
screaming from the inside. The sole places
that seemed to prosper amid the general
blight of the place, were the public-houses;
and in them the lowest orders of Irish
were wrangling with might and main. Covered ways and yards, which here and there diverged from the main-street, disclosed little knots of houses, where drunken men and women were positively wallowing in filth; and from several of the doorways, great ill-looking fellows were cautiously emerging, bound, to all appearance, on no very well-disposed or harmless errands. (Pp.67-8)

But Premchand avoids, rather ignores such graphic details of the Indian setting of his novels.

Apart from the irony and satire mentioned elsewhere in the chapter, both Dickens and Premchand use language to proper effect. The slang of the thieves or the colloquial style of the boys is contrasted with the received standard of Rose Maylie, Mr. Brownlow, and the essentially middle-class group. Toby Crackit says of Oliver: "Wot an invaluable boy that'll make, for the old ladies' pockets in chapels! His mug is a fortun'to him" (P.176) and before nearing the end Sikes talks to
himself in desperation: "A good hiding-place, too. They'll never expect to nab me there, after this country-scent. Why can't I lay by for a week or so, and forcing blunt from Fagin, get abroad to France? Damno, I'll risk it" (P.399).

And Rose consoles Oliver after he reaches her place:

We are going into the country, and my aunt intends that you shall accompany us. The quiet place, the pure air, and all the pleasures and beauties of spring, will restore you in a few days. We will employ you in a hundred ways, when you can bear the trouble. (P.252)

Toby Crackit's language has the ring of truth, while Monks's is melodramatic. Rose's speech is sentimental. Such sentimental language is seen both in dialogue and description. It is this uncritical strain in Dickens that makes for the unevenness of Oliver Twist, and indeed of much of his work.

The above examples when compared with the
description of Fagin's other den highlight another important aspect of Dickens's style. Dickens describes the place thus:

In all the rooms, the mouldering shutters were fast closed; the bars which held them were screwed tight into the wood, the only light which was admitted, stealing its way through round holes at the top, which made the rooms more gloomy, and filled them with strange shadows . . .

(P.145)

The den here is symbolic of criminality with its lack of light, its "mouldering shutters" representing physical decay equivalent to moral corruption and its bars reminding one of a prison.

Throughout the novel there are images of death and the grave and the worm, all underpinning the main theme of decay and corruption. In Oliver Twist Dickens exhibits his ability to create atmosphere and to sustain graphic narrative which is a supreme achievement. The flight of Sikes and Fagin in the condemned cell are two instances which prove the
point. Both deal with imprisonment, the one of the mind and the other of the physical being.

As mentioned in the introduction, Premchand did not have the ability to delineate atmosphere through symbols. But he had a strong grasp of his medium and could ply it according to the demands of the situation. Just as Dickens manipulated language to suit the different groups of characters he portrayed, Premchand also very effectively used language to portray the difference in language of Hindus and Muslims in his early novels. Muslim characters like Bholi Bai and Abdul Latoo havo their speech interspersed with Arabic and Persian words. People replying to such characters try to imitate their speech. Among themselves, the speech of Hindu characters is Sanskritised. The vocabulary of rural characters also differs from their urban brethren. Premchand differentiates colloquial and chaste language also. Bholi Bai's language reflects vividly the dialect of her class.

Whereas Dickens's language has a sentimental effect while treating emotional situations, Premchand
is capable of treating different emotions with the requisite kind of language. Suman, when Sadan presents her with a bangle, in the end accepts it and says affectionately:

For your sake I keep this present with me. But I shall consider this as something kept on . . . . . You are not yet free. When you become the ruler (owner) of your state (potato) then I shall realise whatever I want. But not yet. (P.83)

Promchand describes later in the novel, "Gunga opened her arms to catch him, but both her hands remained open, just as the wings of a bird remain open while falling after being shot" (P. 16).

Fagin and Bholi Bai, both, are experienced in their profession. Fagin is an old man manoeuvring small boys not much older than Oliver. He is called "the old gentleman" often in the novel, which is a cant name for the devil. At the time he was writing Oliver Twist Dickens was reading Defoe's History of the Devil. So it may not be just a coincidence that Fagin's associates address him in terms usually
reserved for the arch-deceiver. Later on in the novel, Sikes hints that Fagin comes straight from the "old'un" without any father who can serve as an intermediary link.6

Fagin is a Jew, among his Christian associates and other Christian characters in the novel. Whether Dickens's depiction of a Jew in the role of a burglar and representative criminal has something to do with the traditional hatred of the Jew is not clear. But he made amends for this later on in his career when he introduced a Jew who had an admirable role to play in Our Mutual Friend. And it is interesting to note that in a world dominated by Hindus in the novel Sevasadan, Premchand employs a Muslim woman to play the role of a prostitute. It is clear from all his works that Premchand was a staunch encourager of Hindu-Muslim unity, and this was one of his important concerns which he never forgot to advocate in his works. Another prostitute in the novel is named Zuhra. But Suman too becomes a prostitute. Moreover, there are many remarkable virtuous Muslim

6 Philip Hobbsbaum, A Reader's Guide to Charles Dickens, p.43.
women characters portrayed by Premchand in his other novels and short stories. *Karmabhumi’s* Sakoona is a good example.

After some time with Fagin and his associates, Oliver manages to get a short reprieve when he is wrongly caught for having stolen a handkerchief but is later saved by the appearance and intervention of the owner of the book stall who saw the whole incident of Jack Dawkins stealing the handkerchief. Oliver reaches the house of the old gentleman, Mr. Brownlow, whose handkerchief has been stolen. Oliver falls ill there and recovers after a long period of rest, after which he is once again trapped by Fagin’s men and taken back to him.

Meanwhile, through the scene at the police office in Chapter II, Dickens attacks virulently the incompetence, brutality and ignorance of the magistrate class of his time. Mr. Fang is the magistrate. Dickens’s satire exceeds the usual pungency when he describes the appearance of Mr. Fang:

Mr. Fang was a lean, long-backed, stiff-necked, middle-sized man, with no great
quantity of hair, and what he had, growing on the back and sides of his head. His face was stern, and much flushed. If he were really not in the habit of drinking rather more than was exactly good for him, he might have brought an action against his countenance for libel, and have recovered heavy damages. (P.83)

And when the bookstall owner rushes into the office after Oliver has been mercilessly sentenced for three months' hard labour, Mr. Fang is inconsolable, the reason for which Dickens states immediately after the entrance of the book-seller:

Although the presiding genii in such an office as this, exercise a summary and arbitrary power over the liberties, the good name, the character, almost the lives, of her Majesty's subjects, especially of the poorer class; and although, within such walls, enough fantastic tricks are daily played to make the angola blind with weeping; they are closed to the public, some through the medium of the daily press. (P.87)
One of Dickens's characteristic devices in the development of his plot is the use of suspense and mystery. He was very fond of suspense and mystery that he employed them in most of his novels, and his last incomplete novel was titled, _The Mystery of Edwin Drood_, which if completed would possibly have been a master mystery novel. Moreover, the serialized publication of his novels demanded the judicial use of suspense to keep his readers waiting for the forthcoming serial. Premchand did not come across any such requirements from his readers and he did not encourage the spy thrillers which were in vogue till the beginning of his writing career. In fact, he wanted the Indian reading public to disavow their fascination for such works which did not reflect life. But Dickens used mystery and suspense only as part of his technique. We are left wondering as to what the relationship between Oliver and Mr. Brownlow will be, why Oliver is fascinated by the photograph of the woman at Mr. Brownlow's house, why their faces are similar. For the answer we have to wait till the end of the book.

_Fagin who has been desperately searching for_
Oliver, is able at last to recover Oliver with the help of Nancy and Sikes. These two characters add a further dimension to the world of Fagin. It is this trio which lends the novel the intensity it requires with their personal relationships, their grotesque behaviour, and their differing attitude towards Oliver's fate.

Fagin plays the usual role of a gang-loader in his relationship with Oliver, while Sikes also does not show any sympathetic attitude towards him. It is the behaviour of Nancy which brings her into focus and makes her an important character in the novel worth psychological study. She is extremely in love with Sikes, but realises that any knowledge of her concern for Oliver will be disastrous. But she is forced to come to Oliver's help immediately after his recapture itself when he tries to escape and Sikes decides to let his dog in pursuit. Then, a little later when Fagin hits Oliver for the same reason, and is ready to give him a second blow, Nancy comes to his aid:

'I won't stand by and see it done, Fagin',
The girl. 'You've got the boy, and what more would you have?'—Let him be—let him be—or I shall put that mark on some of you, that will bring me to the gallows before any time'. (P.130)

Her excessive concern for Oliver is revealed when she later on divulges the secret she has heard to Rose Maylie, with whom he stays after the burglary episode when he is left alone by Sikes and his companions. Nancy comes to know the evil intentions of one Monks, Oliver's half-brother who wants Fagin to train Oliver as a criminal as efficiently as possible and thus damage his personality. Monks wants to inherit the fortune which his father had transferred in Oliver's mother's name at the time of his death. Rose finds a faithful woman in the character of Nancy but she wonders why she does not abandon her calling, and lead a virtuous life. Nancy cannot leave Sikes, however brutal he is. Nancy is one of Dickens's characters, who like Abel Magwitch in *Great Expectations*, is not able to embrace a life of total evil or accept a virtuous life through complete
repentance. Dickens, who saw life as consisting of two clear divisions of people, the good and the evil, could not avoid the tendency to draw a complex, flexible character which lends variety to his stereo-typed gamut of characters. He needs a link with the "good people" of the novel, to further his plot and to provide a happy ending to the life of Oliver.

In Sovasadan, we come across the complex relationship between Suman, her sister Shanta and Sedan Singh, the nephew of Padma Singh, though it has very little resemblance to the relationship between Oliver, Nancy and Sikoo. Sedan is a frequent visitor of Suman at the market-place so much so that he gets infatuated with her. Sedan, a boy much younger than Suman, is ready to lay everything at Suman's feet. Suman reciprocates his feelings, but does not allow her passions to dominate her reason. Yet, the sweet words of Suman only increase the favour of Sedan. He even stealthily takes a golden bangle from Padma Singh's house and gives it as a present to Suman. And it is one of the strange coincidences of the novel
that Sadan's marriage is fixed with Suman's sister, Shanta.

Sadan's father Madan Singh wants the performance of the nautch-girls at the marriage-ceremony of his son, much against the storn opposition of his brother, Padam Singh. But when Madan Singh learns that the sister of the to-be bride of his son is herself a nautch-girl, he is forced by his false prestige not to proceed with the wedding. So the bridegroom's party returns without the bride just when the wedding is to take place. Premchand brings in Suman's father, Krishna Chandra, who has been released from prison, at this juncture, who, watching the extremely unfortunate state of his daughter, and unable to bear it, decides to commit suicide.

Through Madan Singh and his attitude Premchand presents one of his most scathing attacks on middle-class hypocrisy. People insist upon the entertainment provided by prostitutes and nautch-girls but are unwilling to forge a relationship with their untainted kith and kin. They will not try to blot out this curse on womanhood.

But Shanta lives like a married woman considering
Sadan himself to be her husband till her reunion later due to the influence of Suman. Here we get a striking contrast in the approaches of the two sisters towards their husbands. Though it can be argued for Suman that she is forced to live with an aging widower, insensitive to the yearning of a young girl, Shanta's attitude even after Sadan is forced to go away without accepting her as his bride shows the difference in the nature and approach to life of the two sisters, pointed out early in the novel. "Shanta was simple, serious and well-behaved" (P.8) and she remains pleased with whatever she gets in contrast to the proud Suman who wants to lead a superior life. The character of Sadan shows the indecision of the middle-class youth who are bound by tradition and are not able to voice their opinions against the injustices of society. Sadan Singh is, in fact, scared of his father and lives most of the time with his uncle, Padma Singh. Only after much introspection does he decide to break the bond of traditional injustice which dominates reason and justice.

As Arnold Kettle asserts, the centre of interest of the novel Oliver Twist is its essential pattern
and not its plot. The plot, moreover, does not correspond with this essential pattern which is the major fault of the plot. The pattern is the contrasted relation between the two worlds—the underworld of the workhouse, the funeral, Fagin's den, and the comfortable world of the Brownlows and Maylies. It is a contrast between the rich and the poor or, in other words, the oppressor and the oppressed. But Dickens makes a mockery of the initial chapters of the book, where poverty has been revealed in a light which makes the facile terms of good and bad irrelevant. The plot puts the Brownlows, Maylies and Oliver on one side and Bumble, Sowerberry, Monks and Fagin's gang on the other side. So, Dickens is unable to realise the living pattern and conflict of the book, the conflict being the struggle of the poor against the bourgeois state, symbolised in the gruel scene at the workhouse. And this consideration of the plight of the poor and oppressed is what gives the novel its value.

Kettle considers Oliver a "thin hero". Both Oliver and his rival Monks are not fully absorbed in either world presented in the novel. Oliver is never identified with the heroic forces of the book.
and Monks's parentage does not allow him to get labelled as the source of all evil.

The pattern so powerfully presented in the first quarter of the book is not developed and carried through. Herein lies the weakness of the book. But Kettle does not consider it a complete failure but a failure worth consideration. Dickens succeeds in the wonderful evocation of the underworld and is able to engage our sympathy on behalf of its inhabitants. And this results in the power of the book.

Kettle considers the novel in terms of the capitalist—proletariat struggle, and it is not surprising when he says that Oliver alternates between the two, and after he reaches the Brownlow world, the state, which is the organ of oppression of the poor and therefore of Oliver now becomes the servant of Oliver.7

It becomes clear to us that even though the world of Dickens is an urban one and largely the

one of genteeel poverty, and even though he blamed
the aristocracy for the state of society, there
were people like Mr. Brownlow and Rosc Maylie who
represented the good side of aristocracy, the simple
good aristocrats.

The same essential pattern can be seen in all
books dealing with the oppression of the poor, and
necessarily so in Premchand's works. Even though
what Premchand overtly deals with in the novel is the
bane of prostitution, he underlines the main reason
for prostitution which is poverty. The inability of
Susan's father to give her a dowry leads to her
being married oif to an aging widower. The consequences
drag her to the market-place. This is despite the
fact that Premchand is more concerned with the dowry
system than Krishna Chandra's want of money.

Prostitutes are generally considered to be an
evil cross-section of society. But Premchand
portrays the good also among them. The oppressor
class, which consists of the landlords and the
aristocrats, is also divided into good and bad.
Padma Singh, who is initially responsible for the
degradation of Suman, later repents and builds an 
ashram for widows and other destitute women, and 
calls it Sevasadan. But his brother, Madan Singh, 
who orders the return of the marriage party of his 
son Sadan without the bride, Shanta, when he comes 
to know of the nautch-girl's life led by her sister, 
Suman, represents the selfish, unconcerned, aristocrat 
class. The high-priest Ramdas exposes the hypocrisy 
of the priest-class. The character of Bhola Bai is 
often referred to in an unhealthy light with Suman 
always making it clear that she has hated the loose 
life led by Bhola. Though Bhola's class is normally 
not well-off, Bhola seems to be quite affluent, 
with a house of her own and the aristocratic and 
high-ranked people always visiting her.

And, since Premchand's plot is not so complex 
as Dickens's, since it corresponds with the central 
interest of the novel, and since Premchand is able 
to develop and carry through the pattern till the 
end of the book, Sevasadan succeeds where Oliver 
Twist partially fails.

Due to the exceeding interest generated by 
the underworld and its inhabitants rather than the
role played by Oliver in his different environments, it is a general assumption that Fagin and Bill Sikes (more importantly Sikes) can be considered as the heroes of the novel in preference to the sedate, passive Oliver. Oliver, who is the hero of the plot is too passive to win our sympathy, and Monks the arch-plotter is not convincing as a villain and is outsmarted by his agents. Fagin and Sikes, in their most extreme exaggerations, move us more than the benevolence of Mr. Brownlow or the sweetness of Mrs. Maylie—they touch with fear as the others never really touch with love. Graham Groone rightly points out that the good characters in Mr. Brownlow and Rosc Maylie could not have triumphed over the trio of Fagin, Monks and Sikes without the elaborate machinery of the plot disclosed in the last pages.

Moreover, there is the strange relationship between Nancy and Sikes which pushes the importance


of the predicament of the life of Oliver to the background in the better part of the novel. As stated earlier, Nancy has the generosity to condemn her way of life, but she cannot reject Sikes, who on the other hand, is the epitome of wickedness. But he fascinates her. It is too late for her to change herself, she says to Rosc, and, she cannot leave him at present and be his death. She is "drawn back to him through every suffering and illusion; and I should be, I believe, If I know that I was to die by his hand at last" (P.331). And she suffers death at his hand, as she felt she would. Sikes knows that she has divulged secrets to Rose Maylie, and her excessive concern for Oliver maddens him. It is the outcome of an instant's rage, which is so natural to the hard-hearted Sikes. This murder transforms the essentially animalistic, purposeful, amoral, and solitary nature of Dickens's characters in their separate colonies. The animals are turned back into men again. It exposes the sinister irony which makes it the only imaginative vindication in the book of human stature and meaningfulness, and its effect
provides the most excellent stroke in the satirical violence of the novel. John Bayley makes a valid distinction between murder and crime, which according to him is the impressive power of the novel, as there is no true distinction between the world of darkness which Oliver is in, and the world of light which he longs for. Nancy's murder transforms the otherwise boastly Sikos, who is called "the more hound of a day" by Fagin into a kind of a man. Crime is related to the inhumanity of social institutions and is the most characteristic aspect of the social order. And for Dickens murder is more human than crime. Murder brings into focus the otherwise ignored character of Fagin, and society achieves some warmth and cohesion which it lacked before. In short, for Bayley, murder is a kind of social revelation.

Just as Sikos turns into a man with the murder, Nancy turns into a woman due to her love for him. Only Fagin remains a reptilo. Oliver is sometimes

adult, sometimes like an animal himself.\textsuperscript{12}

The murder scene fascinated Dickens most and he acted it out many a time before audiences. The role of Nancy might have particularly interested him. She represents the English girl, overburdened with drudgery and whose feelings are stifled.

Another important character of the underworld is none other than Jack Dawkins, the boy who leads Oliver to Fagin's place. He provides a striking contrast to Oliver in his approach to the essential reality of life. He confronts the world on its own terms while Oliver is afraid of it. The trial scene of the Artful Dodger reminds us of the gruelling scene where Oliver asked for more and was seriously admonished, and the scene at the police office where Mr. Fang had no concern for justice. Dickens describes the scene so characteristically that we are spell-bound by the eccentricity of the character and situation and ready to miss the substance of his defiance:

It was indeed Mr. Dawkins, who, shuffling into the office with the big coat sleeves tucked up as usual, his left hand in his pocket, and his hat in his right hand, proceeded the jailer, with a rolling gait altogether indescribable, and, taking his place in the dock, requested in audible voice to know what he was placed in that 'are disgraceful situation for.

'Hold your tongue, will you?' said the jailer.

'I am an Englishman, ain't I?' rejoined the Dodger. 'Where are my privileges?' 'You'll get your privileges soon enough,' retorted the jailer, 'and peppor with 'em'.

'We'll see wot the Secretary of State for the Home Affairs has got to say to the beaks, if I don't', replied Mr. Dawkins. 'Now thon. Wot is this hore business? I shall thank the madg'estrator to dispose of this hore little affair, and not to keep mo while they read the paper, for I've got an appointment with a gonolman in the city, and as I'm a man of my word and wery punctual in business matters, ho'll go away
if I ain't thero to my time, and then
p'reps thero won't be an action for damage
against them as kopt me away. Oh, no,
certainly not!' (Pp.361-2).

He continues in this vein and when, in the end
he is found guilty and asked whether he has anything
to say, he replies in the negative and says: "not
here, for this ain't the shop for justice . . . but
I shall have something to say elsewhere . . . " (P.363).

This trial of the Artful Dodger is another
expression of the central theme of the novel, which
is the helplessness of the poor at the hands of the
oppressive state. His bearing in this scene though
remarkable is also pathetic. He will be transported,
not for any of his great crimes, as his accomplice
Charley Bates bewails, but for a "snoozobox". He
exemplifies Dickens's characterization at its best,
and his importance "in the pattern of the novel is
that he, almost alone of the characters of the
underworld, does stick up for himself, does continue
and develop the conflict that Oliver had begun when
he asked for more." 13

13 Arnold Kettle, "Dickens: Oliver Twist", An
The magnificent portrayal of the Artful Dodger does not achieve its reward because he is not required by the plot, still from the purpose of the book he is very essential and it would be a great loss if readers confine themselves to Oliver, Sikes, Nancy and Fagin, in their pursuit of the meaning of the book.

The characters in _Sovanadan_ include, apart from Padma Singh, his friend Vithaldas (who is the social reformer) and his brother Madan Singh, a coterie of his other friends also who help Premchand in developing his ideas on other social issues, like communalism, and the need for a common language. The delineation of the relationship between Suman and Sedan is a remarkable achievement of Premchand. Though it is Sedan's infatuation for the most part, Suman maintains a friendly relationship with him. This man-woman relation of friendship is a new value introduced by Premchand, and Suman makes her love for Sedan sublime through such an attachment. Even after overcoming his evil passion and developing a fond attachment towards her he mistakes

hor attitude as a sign of her displeasure. He comes to the false conclusion that Suman's abode is not a place for pure love. The gods there are pleased not through worship but through gifts. But where can he get money for the gifts? From whom can he ask for? In the end, he writes a letter to his father that he is not satisfied with the food, that modesty prevents him from complaining to his uncle, so he wants some money (₹.80). And, even after presenting a saree bought from the money he receives from home, when he sees no change in the attitude of Suman, he feels that she is not satisfied with the present he gave her. So, at last, he steals a bangle and presents it to Suman. But she is forced to give it back to Padma Singh without giving any hint that she has received it from Sadan.

Vithaldas, through his perseverance, at last, manages to remove Suman from the market-place, and put her up at the widows' house 'Sovasadan', which is established by Padma Singh as atonement for his harshness towards Suman. But Suman is not to find peace of mind even there. Shanta, too, after Madan Singh's stern refusal not to give his son in
marriage to a nautch-girl's sister, joins her sister at Sovasad. For a while they live together. But when Suman's past history comes to light, she gets into trouble. She has to leave the place after some of the women refuse to live there. Both the sisters leave the place and, at the invitation of Sadan, stay with him in his cottage near the river-bank. Sadan has realized his fault, left his father's house and adopted the life of a simple boatman by then.

The character of Vithaldas, does not come alive in the novel as he has been introduced for a definite purpose, to show the difficulties and opposition faced by a sincere social reformer in the existing system. In the process of composition of Sovasadan Premchand might have imagined Vithaldas as a great ideal, but by the end, it is clear that his importance has been diminished to the status of a dutiful individual. Vithaldas has all the good qualities of a good human being but this virtue which is bound by the limits of the individual does not have the power to carry the burden of social ideals. Vithaldas, in the process of rescuing Suman, is not
able to root out the underlying problem. As Premchand describes, Vithaldaa is indeed an epitome of virtue and service, though he has his own weaknesses. (P.70).

But the point to be made here is that the influence of his reforms cannot reach the basic problem and it cannot lend any gain to mass revolution. But the vision of Vithaldas and that of his creator, Premchand, are limited, and Premchand cannot go beyond this at this time of his career. Vithaldas saves Suman, but the next day another girl will land there. Vithaldas saves Suman, but cannot erase the stigma on her. Vithaldas is able to find a remedy for Suman, but not for the problem. As the fault lies neither with Suman, nor with the market-place, but with the system, it is not possible for Vithaldas to revamp the society which has encouraged it.

On his part, Vithaldas cannot be blamed. He is perhaps the most virtuous man portrayed in the novel, so much so that even after so many meetings with Suman at the market-place, no evil thought arises in his mind. His determination is not shaken by Suman's beauty. But it is not proper to label his
temperament with 'patriotism' and 'service to the community'. It is an excess and exaggeration. 15

Just as Jack Dawkins is not required by the plot of Oliver Twist but only to lead Oliver to Fagin's den, so Vithaldas is necessary just for the upliftment of Suman. After that he fades into the background.

Swadesdan is importantly a novel about the urban middle-class, though Premchand was to be known later as the novelist of the peasant. However, he does show glimpses of his favourite class by depicting the sufferings endured by the lower classes in the villages. There is, for instance, the episode in which Chaitu, a poor farmer is punished to death. He is not able to pay the levy imposed upon him. The landlord, the mahant of a temple, has just returned from a pilgrimage and to make up for his expenses he has increased the land tax. Chaitu is unable to pay it, so he is dragged to the temple and beaten mercilessly and the man succumbs to his injuries. There are other episodes also showing

the unbearable lot of peasants, which he was to develop in his later novels fully.

Lack of unity between Hindus and Muslims and the need for a common language which could reach the length and breadth of India were other concerns of the day with which Premchand was very much involved. As stated in the introduction Premchand was ready to do all in his might to bring the two communities together. And the existing antagonism between the users of Urdu and Hindi irritated him. He deals with those issues in almost all of his novels. The influence of western education, its unhealthy consequences was another subsidiary theme for Premchand. He remarks through Vithaldas, who says:

'This is called slavery, but a slave is free in one sense, his authority is over his body, not over his soul. Your people have sold your soul itself. Your English education has made you so oppressed that until any European scholar does not express the merits and demerits on any subject,
you will remain indifferent towards that subject. You do not respect the Upanishads because they are respected in themselves, but because Blavatsky and Max Muller have respected them . . . . This mental slavery is more harmful than that worldly slavery . . . . Due to this very mental slavery you accepted defeat in that field where through the genius and fierceconess of our ancestors we were able to hoist our victory flag for some time. (P.189)

Promchand praises his favourite peasant class through Kunwar Aniruddh Sinh who is the host at the present gathering of friends. He objects to the use of the word "slave" by Vithaldes and explains that everybody is a slave in one sense or the other. He continues, "Motor, Bungalows, Polo and Piano are equivalent to shacklos. One who has not worn these shacklos, only he can enjoy real freedom, and do you know, who are those people? They are our poor farmers, who eat the earnings of their sweat, who respect their social dross, language and emotions, and who do not bow down before anybody" (Pp.189-190).
when Doctor Shyam Charan states that English is our Lingua Franca, Kunwar replies:

You are the people who bestowed this glory on it. The contact of the foolish soldiers of Persia and Kabul and Hindu businessmen gave birth to a language like Urdu. If the intelligent of the different provinces of our nation had used their own language in dialogue with each other, then a national language would have been formed long back itself. Until scholars like you remain devoted of English, a national language will never be born . . . . I don't know why people consider it as their prestige to speak and write English. . . . I can speak and write better English than any of your outstanding scholars of English, but I feel such hatred for it, as I would feel if I wear the removed shirt of an Englishman. (Pp.191-92).

Togh Ali points out the possibility of the Muslims not supporting Padma Sinha's proposal for the removal of prostitutes from the important places in the city
and to discourage their presence and dances. He says, "At present there is the Urdu-Hindi quarrel, the problem of cow-slaughter . . . the law is trying to inflame religious fanaticism through all these" (P.190).

With the death of Nancy in Oliver Twist, the violence that has run right through the novel reaches its climax. And, in his revelation of Sikes's conscience after the event, we are more pulled towards the symbolic background presented by Dickens rather than the predicament of Sikes. It is the black picture of human squalor and desolation. The atmosphere of squalid London is presented in the earlier chapters also, but here it is very much effective:

Near to that part of the Thames . . . there exists the filthiest, the strangest, the most extraordinary of the many localities that are hidden in London, wholly unknown, even by name, to the great mass of its inhabitants.

To reach this place, the visitor has to penetrate through a maze of close,
narrow and muddy streets, thronged by the roughest and poorest of waterside people... The cheapest and least delicate provisions are heaped in the shops... Jostling with unemployed labourers of the lowest class... and the raff and refuse of the river, he makes his way with difficulty along, assailed by offensive sights and smells from the narrow alleys which branch off on the right and left... Arriving, at length, in streets romoter and less frequented than through which he has passed, he walks beneath tottering house-fronts projecting over the pavement, dismantled walls that seem to totter as he passes, chimneys half crushed, half hesitating to fall, windows guarded by rusty iron bars that time and dirt have almost eaten away, and every imaginable sign of desolation and neglect.

In such a neighbourhood... stands Jacob's Island... but known in the days of this story as Folly Ditch... At such times, a stranger, looking from one of the
bridges . . . will see the inhabitants of the houses on either side . . . and when his eye is turned from these operations to the houses themselves, his utmost astonishment will be excited by the scene before him. Crazy wooden galleries common to the backs of half a dozen houses, with holoes from which to look upon the slime beneath; windows, broken and patched, with poles thrust out, on which to dry the linen that is never there; rooms so small, so filthy, so confined, that the air would seem too fainted even for the dirt and squalor which they shelter; wooden chambers thrusting themselves out above the mud and threatening to fall into it—as some have done; dirt-boozooed walls and decaying foundations; every repulsive lineament of poverty, every loathsome indication of filth, rot, and garbage; all these ornament the banks of Folly Ditch. (Pp. 411-12)

Such is the pitous state of squalid London that "the scene itself ceases to be a mere back cloth and becomes a sculptured mass making an integral part
of the novel's pattern." This world has given birth to Sikes and the image of this world makes us understand his predicament and through a sense of all the hideous forces which are responsible for his fate, he even deserves our pity.\(^\text{16}\) He is not able to escape from this world, and, in the end, in his attempt to flee from the assaulting mob, he accidentally hangs himself.

Fagin also meets his end after he is found guilty and sentenced to death by the court. Fagin retains the quality of darkness and nightmare till the end. He, who never appears on the streets during the daytime, is soon last in the condemned cell also in darkness, in the hours before the dawn. In contrast to Sikes, he remains an animal throughout and in the end loses even his human powers of speech and intellect. The chapter which deals with this episode is considered by many as the finest chapter in the novel. It gives a superb analysis of isolation, fear, degradation—the whole consequence of a life

lived in corruption and self-seeking. He behaves like a snared animal in the dock, and the butchery of one kind of beast by another is the final horror of his execution.17

"Fagin", said the jailer.

'That's me!' cried Fagin . . . 'An old man, my lord; a very old, old man!'

'More', said the turnkey, laying his hand upon his breast to keep him down' . . . .

"Fagin, Fagin! Are you a man?'

'I shan't be one long', he replies, looking up with a face retaining no human expression but rage and terror. 'Strike them all dead! What right have they to butcher me?' (P.442)

And, as John Sayloy states, "Fagin will lose even his animal identity reverting to a dreadful human simulacrum, 'a dangling heap of clothes.'"18

Prior to the arrest of Sikes and the capture of Fagin honks is forced into a full confession by


Mr. Brownlow. And, when Oliver and Mr. Brownlow visit Fagin, he tells Oliver where the papers concerning him are hidden. So, everything comes to a happy end. We learn that Rose Maylie is Oliver's aunt. Oliver meets Monks at a hotel, and shortly after we learn of the buried will which has been lost. If it had survived, his father's property would have been left half to Oliver and half to his mother. Rose gets married to her fiancé Harry. Mr. Brownlow who was a great friend of Oliver's father adopts Oliver. Monks is able to share a small fortune with Oliver. He later dies in a prison abroad. On the other side, Noah Claypole becomes an informer, Mr. and Mrs. Bumble enter the workhouse as inmates, and Charley Bates reforms himself. A memorial tablet is erected to Agnes, Oliver's mother in the local church. The story ends—thus the good continue to live happily.

In the beginning, after she settles with Shanta and Sadan in that cottage near the river bank Suman's life proceeds cheerfully. But soon the same old story gets repeated. When Sadan's friends
come to know that Suman had been a prostitute once, they refuse to enter his house and start to desert him. The attitude of Sadan and Shanta change so much so that they treat her with contempt. She is no more than a servant girl, who does all the household chores, and receives not even a word of sympathy or kindness, let alone any appreciation.

Unable to tolerate this she leaves her sister's cottage. She wanders on and on, aimlessly, until the city is left behind and she enters a forest and stops there. She is tired and confused. Here Premchand finds no other way but to employ his penchant for condescension. Suman hears the voice of Swami Gajanand. They meet in the forest, admit their mistakes and their hearts are cleansed. The story ends with Suman agreeing to take charge of Sevasadan at her husband's persuasion. She sees a new life of selfless service in front of her.

The two novelists, in their respective novels, attacked the injustices and exploitation prevalent in their times and were successful in rousing the conscience of their contemporaries. In fact, in England, Dickens's was the solo domineering voice
against exploitation, child exploitation in particular. But, in India, Sarat Chandra Chatterji had written novels in Bengali dealing with the same subject of the predicament of the "fallen woman" more deftly and with deeper psychological insight. Yet, in Hindi, Premchand remained the lone crusader and in his later novels he gained in maturity and strength, and dealt with different issues.

As John Bayley asserts, Dickens has been able to delineate outward and inward selves that make up a whole person and to strike a balance between the two—which is very rare in his characterization. That is, Bumble for example, is vehemently shown as a person without an inner self whereas Sikes and Nancy have a vitality about them which shows Dickens's serious concern for those characters and the seriousness with which they consider themselves. The dimension of these two is the triumph of the novel. Further, this closely corresponds to the main feat, which is also unique in the history of the novel, which Dickens has achieved in combining the genre of Gothic nightmare with that of social
denunciation, the one adding to the other. 19

Dickens has done justice by showing Mr. Bumble back into the workhouse, as an inmate. But the reader is justified in worrying as to what happened to the other companions of Oliver who were present in the workhouse. And, when the world of Oliver Twist can be divided into good and bad, Nancy can be soon as good and Sikes as bad, we do not know whether the starving creatures are good or bad. Dickens enthuosies in the happy outcome to the grim and macabre experiences of his dear hero, and understandably the focus is on him at the end of the novel. Promchand, on the other hand, expected such concerns on the part of his reader. It has been cited that the efforts of a reformer like Vithaladas would not root out the reason for the degradation of women. But Promchand has, in this novel, gradually, by the end, tried to convince us of the reform of all the prostitutes at the marketplace and their willingness to lead a pure life in

future. Oliver's life at the workhouse is representative, but gradually Dickens loses control of his theme which is superseded by the plot. Suman's life throughout is representative and the plot corresponds to the theme and in the end paves way for the upliftment of all the "fallen women" at the market-place, not just Suman.