Chapter V

MUNSHI PREM CHAND

Dhanpatrai Srivastava (1880 -1936), alias Nawabrai, alias Prem Chand started his career in 1903 as an assistant teacher and rose to the then coveted post of a sub-deputy inspector of schools, but resigned it at the call of Mahatama Gandhi. He took to journalism and creative writing by fits and starts — a stint at the press, a job with a film company, and the final decision to stick to creative writing — this was the odyssey of one of the greatest fiction masters of India as well as the world.

Prem Chand has the distinction of creating the genre of the serious short story and is said to have transformed fiction in both Hindi and Urdu languages, from rambling romantic chronicle or didactic tales to a high level of realistic narrative. Before Prem Chand's advent on the literary scene Urdu/Hindi fiction consisted of only mythical legends and highly fanciful adventure stories. He liberated the genre from this strait jacket and made it the mirror of the sorrows and sufferings, happiness and privation of the common man.

Prem Chand's literary career spans over nearly three decades from 1907 to 1936. This period was politically and
socially important for India and enlightening for its thinkers and writers who were passing through a phase in which the western literary influence was accepted and reflected faithfully while socio-cultural ambience was undergoing a radical change as the traditional and the modern exchanged places. Influenced by Dickens, Tolstoy, Chekhove and Gorky among others, and strongly impressed by Marx, Prem Chand very early directed his fiction towards social reform. In his short stories he tried to make people aware of the humiliation of foreign slavery and warned them against fighting among themselves; he asked people to love their motherland and remain united. And his first stories reflect these patriotic nationalistic feelings and tends toward romantic evocations of heroic exploits from Indian history or legend. The first collection Soz-i-watan included five stories: Duniya ka Anmol Ratan, Sheikh Mehmood, Yehi mera Watan, Silaya Matum and Ishki Duniya or Hubi watan. Among other early stories are Bade Ghar ki Beti, and Garib ki Hai. And here Prem Chand often turned to the past that provided him an opportunity to criticise foreign oppression without singling out the British — although this did not save his first collection of stories from being banned in 1909. The plots of most of these early tales, full of chivalric idealism and noble sacrifice, disguises and
extraordinary adventures, show the influence of the Urdu 'Dastan' — the favourite reading of his youth. During this early period it was in fact his stay at Hamirpur that provided him the unique opportunity of travelling through the areas that once witnessed the valour of Rajputs. Prem Chand wrote quite a few stories in which he recreated that period. In these stories also he tried to educate people about the prevailing situation and the need to stand by each other to fight the evil designs of the enemies. In *Duniya ka Anmol Ratan* Prem Chand declares boldly and emphatically that every drop of blood shed in the service of nation is an invaluable jewel. At this point of time the writer was a school teacher and freedom movement reflected itself in processions and protests which moved him a lot. The genuine concern and the creative urge forced stories like these out of him. Here among the questions, What is the most valuable thing in the world— two tears of an aged father shed when his son is hanged?— the remains (ashes) of the woman who lit herself upon the pyre (sati) of her husband?— or that last drop of blood which is shed for the freedom of one's country? Prem Chand flags the last one in his reply. Prem Chand's short stories reflect his compassion, humour and psychological understanding of his own cultural heritage as well as his genuine concern for that eighty percent of Indian
population who live in villages. His pre-occupation with the contemporary political realities and a profound sense of social inequalities permeate his works of this period — the period when Britishers had strengthened their nefarious designs of plundering the state economy and the condition of common man, whose religious and superstitious beliefs were exploited, was going from bad to worse. And to counter this exploitation of the downtrodden, some movements had already started throughout the country. Around this time Mahatma Gandhi made his persuasive appearance on the political scene of India. His peaceful protest 'satyagrah', civil disobedience, swedeshi, salt movement, resolution of independence and a series of other episodes involved the common men — farmers, labourers, poets and writers most actively in the freedom struggle. Prem Chand made his valuable contribution through his short fiction that made Maulana Majid Darya abadi say that in the Indian history of patriotic movement when after about a hundred years from now the historian will record and recall the speeches and writings of Gandhi, Motilal, Jawaharlal, Mohammad Ali and Abul Kalam Azad, he will have to take cognizance of Prem Chand's short stories to view the nation's history. Of equal importance are his thought-provoking stories highlighting the social ills rampant among the common people who stood at the
political and historical cross roads — when a new culture was taking shape. Prem Chand's stories created awareness about the evil alien influence which was so overwhelming that it refused to be marginalised easily and demanded ever greater effort from the freedom fighters. At the same time the roots of Indian traditions and culture were too strong and appeared in thinking and actions of Indian people alongside new influences. The new emerging culture reflected this confused state which Prem Chand records with the exactness of a chronicler and the perception of a seer. His technique of short story writing is determined by these considerations. Being a sensitive and sincere writer he chose diverse subjects for his stories, but always stressed the social aspect. It is this experimentation that lends to his writings their special identity. Some times the technique is more direct and straightforward and sometimes it is symptomatic because technique is to a large extent determined by the content and the purpose with which it is loaded in terms of the life and attitudes of the characters. For Prem Chand writing was not merely a God given gift but also the product of hard labour and he worked on his stories, plots and characters meticulously. His gallery of characters is full of farmers, labourers, clerks (Babus), officers doti clad as well as those donning the western attire, village girls, daughters of
the rich, sane as well as scatter-brains, honest as well as dishonest, Pundits, Thakurs, the exploiters as well as the exploited — the world as he saw around him and as he visualised it. One of the brilliant example of cultural depiction in Prem Chand is his *Panchayat* — a judicial institution and an important fact of traditional India — as people believed that God himself spoke through the ‘Panchas’ who rose to a position where they ceased to be fallible and selfish human beings. Therefore, the trust reposed in this age-old institution was and still is immense. *Panchayat* is one of Prem Chand’s best known stories where we see the victory of man’s conscience over the lower side of his nature — the triumph over anger and prejudice rather than over material temptation. ‘Panchas’ — a chosen committee settles disputes or pronounces judgement upon a charge against someone in the village -their opinion is regarded as sacred. As the poor woman Khala Jaan, a victim of Jumman’s greed, puts it:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Beta .... Panch ka hukum Allah ka} \\
\text{hukum hai. Panch key muh se jo baat} \\
\text{nikalti hai woh Allah ki taraf sey} \\
\text{nikalti hai. (Son, the verdict of Panch is} \\
\text{the verdict of God. God speaks through} \\
\text{Panchas.)}
\end{align*}
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1 Joginder Pal: *Prem Chand ki kahaniyan* – (New Delhi, Qomi council Barai Faroog-i-Urdu-Zuban, 1997), P. 15.
It is this faith and confidence in panchayat that yields positive results. Here in spite of being close friends when Algu senses foul play on the part of Jumman, he cross-examines him and the latter is unable to give satisfactory answers to any of the questions raised. After deliberating with his colleagues, Algu gives his decisions:

"Jumman Sheikh, the Panchas have considered the dispute fully. Your aunt's demand for monthly expenses is reasonable. We feel that the income from her property is sufficient to enable you to give her an allowance. If you do not agree, let the transfer deed be cancelled. This is our decision 2

Jumman Sheikh is stunned as his trusted friend had turned out to be an enemy. And now Jumman waits for a chance to take revenge but, when it does come, he refuses to abuse his new status as Council head and decides in favour of Algu. The voice of God acts as a force for moral reconciliation.

Another age old tradition that Prem Chand chooses as his subject highlights the plight of those who work honestly and pin all their hopes on their meagre wages, is Ramlila.

Every autumn in villages and cities throughout North India

Ramlilas are performed - a dramatization with music of episodes from the epic of Ramayana which runs for several days and culminates in Rama's return from exile along with Sita -- his wife, and his brother Lakshman and than there is Rama's triumphant coronation. Some of these performances are great spectacles as the famous Ramlila of Ramnagar, Varanasi; others like the one described in this story by Prem Chand, are much simpler performances with only a few characters. In this story the players are given no names beyond those of the roles they play-Rama (Ramchandra) Sita and Lakshman.

The fact that few people benefit from such performances earning good money while those who toil hard and provide ample entertainment, are not even given the travel - money that would enable them to survive the journey back to their places. And what is disgusting about the whole situation is the unsympathetic attitude of people towards these small time artists.

It is these unpleasant memories of childhood, that make the narrator - (a grown-up now), find these 'acts of performance' 'absurd'. Prem Chand in clear terms accredits his growing indifference to such otherwise lively acts-of-entertainment, to the injustice done.

Prem Chand as a creative writer dispelled an acuteness of perception and a range of observation which surpasses that
of many a writer today. He chose one particular part of India, with which he was thoroughly familiar and depicted the life of this region with amazing wealth of detail. The mansion of a landed aristocrat, the hovel of starving peasant, a pan-shop at a street corner, a temple, a mosque or church, factories, law suits, government offices — his gaze penetrated everywhere. Every facet of life, every type of work, people in every conceivable vocation, all the problems which engross the attention of men and women — social, economic, religious, political, professional, domestic — everything, in short, with which the fabric of human life is woven, finds its reflection in the short stories of Prem Chand. More appropriately he was interested in man — the only inexhaustible subject, as the famous English writer S. Maugham put it. And for Prem Chand human condition was the social condition. The inner conflicts in the minds of individuals are always related to the social environment. Even family relationships are viewed as being determined by social forces where, on the one hand, we have Prem Chand projecting the industrialist and the successful professional man — the doctor, the lawyer, the financier and others who have climbed the social ladder — corresponding to these urban type, on the other hand, we have in the countryside the Zamindar, the money lender, and the holy man.
(who is also a professional man in his own way). The most familiar figures are those of the Patwari, the munim, the darogah, the kotwal, the Tehsildar and of course, the babu or clerk without whom the entire structure would collapse. A class by himself is the money-lender whose power exceeds that of the highest officials. In general all these are the exploiters and over against them there is the worker, the petty cultivator, the landless labourer, the casual wage-earner and the tenant from whom the landlord can demand forced labour. These are the victims of exploitation and among these those who are the most down-trodden and unfortunate are the harijans, whose very shadow is believed to pollute. Many of Prem Chand’s short stories are directly concerned with the life of the untouchable and the various ways in which they are humiliated and tormented. Sadgati is a faithful depiction of the trauma of these unfortunate people whose very existence is a bitter comment on the Indian Caste system and the traditions and custom of Indian society. In this story a human being is shown sinking to the very deepest limits of degradation — Pandit Ghasiram, a Brahmin who spent most of his time in worship and religious rituals and after which he would help himself generously to a drink made with bhang (marijuana). A professional priest, he accepted money and gifts
from his clients for whom he performed sacrificial ceremonies and advised them regarding auspicious and inauspicious dates. Dukhi — a poor chamar— wanted Pandit Ghasiram's help in selecting a date for his daughter's engagement. The Pandit promised to help him only if he did a lot of hard labour for him. There was an old tree trunk which Dukhi was asked to cut into small pieces with an axe. The wood was hard and knotty. Poor Dukhi strikes with all his might, but the axe seemed to make no impression upon the wood. He panted, his legs trembled. Again and again, he raised his axe above his head and brought it down with all the strength he could muster. When he was altogether exhausted, he felt the need to rest a while and smoke a chilam. He had the tobacco but there was no way of lighting the chilam — so he went to the Pandit's house and asked for some charcoal. Pandit Ghasiram's wife was furious. How dare a chamar enter a Brahmin's house! Dukhi went back and started wielding his axe again. He was hungry, he had not had a drop of water to drink since he had started working. His strength deserted him and he collapsed.

The village being predominantly of Brahmins — a chamar's corpse lying on the way to the public well seemed a nuisance. Pandit Ghasiram found himself under heavy pressure to have the corpse removed. But the chamars refused to help
and insisted on a police inquiry about the death of Dukhi. Dukhi’s wife and daughter sat outside Pandit Ghasiram’s house weeping loudly. Then just before dawn when it was still dark, Pandit ji took a stout rope and quietly approached the corpse and tied Dukhi’s legs and started dragging the corpse which had now begun to stink. He took the corpse right outside the village and dumped it in a farm. Then he returned home, read a hymn in praise of goddess Durga, and sprinkled Ganges water all over the house for purification. Meanwhile jackals, vultures and dogs were devouring Dukhi’s mangled corpse. If literature’s chief function is to present an honest critical view of life — it is here in this story. Here the writer has sincerity, style and a purpose. It is Prem Chand’s concern for the underprivileged and the downtrodden, his sensitivity to injustice and the sufferings of the victims that make Sadgati a successful story.

Prem Chand’s realism makes him question the worth and validity of attaining freedom when it does not reduce oppression, raise culture, enlighten people and better the plight of abused women and children. These sentiments are expressed by Rupmani in the story Sacrifice. Freedom for Prem Chand did not mean merely throwing out the British but to give quality life to people. Prem Chand’s realism, as his critics call it, is not a means
by which he portrays hard times or expresses propagandist diatribe; it is a passionate statement of ethical and humanitarian value. His stories can be termed as critical comments on life because for him Literature meant a criticism of life, whose chief function is to present an honest critical view of life. He found his times crammed with material that gave a writer chance to attempt an honest, critical view. He professed dignified thought, the breath of freedom, beauty and clarity of style, and a clear reflection of life's calm and bustle, the heart of truth. It must give a goal and prompt the readers to think.

*Kafan* is another masterpiece *par excellence* of grim realism — that sees life steadily and sees it bitterly. In the opening scene the father and his grown son are shown sitting quietly outside a room in which the son's young wife was in labour. From time to time, heart-rending shrieks of pain assailed them. Ghisu the father, says it looked as though she would not survive and suggests the son to go in and see her condition. Madhave, the son irritably replies, "What is the good of looking at her? Why doesn't she die and get it over with!" 3

Next morning Budhia—Madhav's wife is found dead. As Ghishu and Madhav are low caste village never-do-wells, their problem is now to get money to buy a shroud for Budhia's cremation. By the time they collect the money, they are tired

and thirsty; they go to a cheap liquor shop where they spend the entire sum on liquor. They get drunk and delirious, having rationalised to themselves that providing pleasure for the feeling, and living, is a better way of spending money than getting a shroud for the feelingless dead. When Madhav's euphoria subsides, he feels dejected and pessimistic.

But, Dada, She endured a lot of suffering in her life. How painful was her death? And he weeps loudly. Ghisu consoles him,

You should be happy, my son, that she has been released from the web of this transitory world. She was fortunate in having broken worldly bonds so quickly.

And together they sing and dance, jump, leap and fall down unconscious. This story has attracted great praise from different quarters. For David Rubins it --- transcends the limitations of earlier village tales and attains to a decided universality of utterance.

Munshi Prem Chand makes the economic aspects of social injustice increasingly prominent. Even the religious and
the political motifs are shown to be based, in the ultimate analysis, on economic considerations. The mahant, the swami, the panda and the Purohit appear in these stories usually as clevermen who know how to play upon the religious fears, hopes and superstitions of the ordinary man in order to enrich themselves. The same applies to fake nationalist, the self-seeking vote catcher.

Prem Chand's stories are a beautiful blend of good plot-weaving, realistic characters, simple but effective style and technique. He knits his plots closely, sometimes working on a single draft 10 to 15 times, — shaping and reshaping, and the beginning, middle and end in his stories are inseparable. The writer gives the motive behind a particular expression, due importance and the beauty that it invokes, works profoundly on the readers' emotions. With this aim in mind, Prem Chand would mould and sometimes change the whole plot of his stories. He wanted to give the best and strived for it. In early stories, he detailed events and was influenced by the traditional tales but later he cut down on events and one such example of the entrained plot is *Badey Ghar Ki Beți* compared to this the plot of *Pus ki Raat* is short but in any case a simple psychological truth or an intense human emotion is enough to constitute the plot of the story. In the construction of the plot
Prem Chand no longer takes resort to coincidence or manoeuvred incidents. The dialogues are interspersed at proper places and help develop the plot as well as the characters. In *Pus ki Raat* the entire action takes place in a single night — a harrowing, freezing January night — reflecting the bitter and cold experience of a villager Halku who, forced out by his circumstances and his privation, spends the entire night in a ramshackle shelter of an open field. There are only three characters here — Halku, his wife Munni and Jabru — the dog. Warm touches are provided in this otherwise cold atmosphere, by Jabru who keeps body-snuggling company with his master through the chilly night. Having to battle with the freezing night, the casual warmth of a fire lit with a heap of leaves is a luxury to his frozen body and he occasionally barks himself hoarse and dry but his master refuses to get up and react to any danger. This is when major damage is done to the crop — not one plant had been left intact by the nilgai. The concluding part of this story is characteristically Prem Chandian — in that the note is of cautious optimism when in the morning of that night a depressed Munni informs Halku about the disaster saying:

Now we shall have to work night and day

to clear the debts,\(^7\)

the latter responds non-chalantly:

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\(^7\) V.S. Naravane: Prem Chand: His life and Work - (New Delhi, Vikas publishing House Pvt. 1983), P. 249
But I will not have to spend these cold nights out in the open any more.

This story shows the writer's maturity as the plot construction is controlled and vivid.

Prem Chand's short stories show his faith in man and his future. Even when he sees and depicts human actions at their worst, he does not lose faith in human nature. In *Amavas ki Raat* where a callous deceitful vaid (a physician practising the ancient system of Indian medicine) is so deeply moved by the sufferings of one of his patients that he confesses his faults and tries to make restitution. We often see in his short stories tyrannical or unkind men repenting their conduct. In *Pacchatava* (repentance) a Zamindar who had unjustly doubted the integrity of his agent, realises his mistake and on his deathbed tries to help the agent's family.

Prem Chand not only reflects the world around him faithfully like a chronicler but succeeds in making a comment on it intelligently as a responsible son of the soil. *Shatrang ki Bazi* one of his best stories is about princes and landed aristocrats conveying the flavour of Lucknow in the days of Wajid Ali Shah, the last Nawab of Oudh. The story actually takes place in 1856, and highlights how in every sphere of life pleasure and merry-making ruled supreme. Indulgence in

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luxury pervaded the government, the literary world, the social order, arts and crafts, industry, cuisine — everywhere. From the king to the beggar all were swept with the same antic spirit, to the point where when beggars got money they spend it not on bread but on opium. Sharpening of wits and solving complex problems was done while playing chess. The two principal characters of *Shatranj Ki Bazi* Mirza Sajjad Ali and Mir Raushan Ali are masters of hereditary estates and could afford to lounge around at home enjoying their idleness for hours and days together. It could as well be a page from the history of Lucknow of this period. The plight of women and servants of these idlers who were forced to pamper their ‘art-of-doing-nothing’ and how their patience often spills over is graphically pictured in this outburst:

> He’s asked for paan, has he? Well, tell him to come and get it himself! He hasn’t got time for his dinner? Then go and dump it on his head, he can eat it or give it to the dogs!  

In fact, the two chess players are so engrossed in their game that they know nothing about the outside world. The oppression of the subjects by the Nawab’s officials, the decadence and extravagance of the court, the corruption of the rich and the misery of the poor; the increasing pressure

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of the British on the independence of Oudh — these developments did not have the slightest impact on the two chess players. The only sounds heard are, “Check” and “Check mate.” Sometimes they quarrelled, accusing each other of foul play, of deception or deliberate delay in making their moves, but soon they would make up and continue their game. Robert O. Swan comments that Prem Chand’s intention is:

- to ridicule the sham values of the Nawabs,
- two of whom in this story watch without a tremor of conscience as the English army overrun their land. Their only passion is for playing chess, and they watch with complete indifference while their king is marched off into captivity.¹⁰

Prem Chand was much concerned about the plight and the changing role of women in Indian Society at this point of time and also their positive role in the freedom struggle of India. Miss Padma is a nauseating story of modern Indian woman—tracing the tragedy of an educated Indian girl who mistakes licence for liberation, he expresses a common middle class attitude of denigration towards westernised women. But the writer tries to humanise Miss Padma as best as possible, referring to her brimming tears in the concluding section to invoke

sympathetic feelings in the reader for her because of her suffering and pain — inspite of the fact that the conception of the modern woman is in sharp contrast with an ideal Hindu woman. The story is poignant.

Jail, gives a moving account of women satyagrahis during the Indian Independence movement. It appeared first in Hans in Feb. 1931. The story revolves basically around the relationship between two characters, Mridula and Kshama. Though innocent of any political misdemeanour, Mridula finds herself arrested and put inside a prison with a group of women detained for political offences. After eight days in custody she is acquitted, much to the chagrin of her fellow inmates who feel that she is letting down the national movement by selfishly manipulating her own release.

In prison she picks up an acquaintance with Kshama-devi, a widow, who has eight months left to serve of her political sentence. After leaving prison Mridula passes through a shattering experience which changes her whole attitude to life. Her apparently secure family existence — based on her husband and young son and her parents-in-law — suddenly disintegrates when national politics enters and upset the complacent calm of the village. Her husband is killed by police firing when he joins a procession of villagers protesting against repressive
governmental measures to collect agricultural taxes. Her distraught mother-in-law, in a daze, pushes through the crowd to the site of the firing and is also shot down. More tragedy follows - her son is killed by a stray bullet while witnessing the mêlée from the balcony of his home.

The story reaches its climax during the cremation of the 'martyrs' when Mridula experiences an extraordinary mystical revelation. She has a vision of her mother-in-law and her son, and she also 'sees' her husband on the funeral pyre inspiring her with his dazzling face to go and do her duty. As a result, she decides to devote the rest of her life to break the fetters of slavery and the same prison which earlier was abhorrent to her now becomes a place of welcome where she would gladly love to spend her life as a 'guest'. She has been transformed from an ordinary self-interested, domesticated woman into a 'liberated' lady of great self-confidence, dedication and dignity.

Prem Chand in the story is concerned with the psychological transformation of a simple girl into a mature woman. There are some shrewd insights into the emotional makeup and behaviour of Indian woman. The change in Mridula does come a little too suddenly but it is entirely credible. The weakness lies not in the character sketching but in the tendency to portray all three women—Kshama, Mridula, and the mother—
in-law -- as somewhat lachrymose. At the least opportunity they express themselves in excessive sentimental weeping and make palpitating demands on the reader's sympathy. Mridula, specially, overdoes this when she relates the story of the police firing to Kshana. Prem Chand is so rooted in Indian myth and custom that he often makes casual references to behaviour which can be interpreted only in traditional and symbolic terms. When in *Jail* Mridula describes the death of her son, her immediate emotional reaction is to compare her blood drenched sari to the red silk Sari worn by a Hindu bride on her wedding night. She is so stunned that her next action is almost automatic. She says she laid the son in the lap of his father. Some critics say it should be read as 'the child on top of his father'—tracing it to the ancient Hindu ritual performed by son at the time of his father's death.

Again in *Anubhav* — a political story the protagonist is a woman the young wife of a political detainee who soon discovers that neither her father nor her father-in-law wish to be associated anymore with her. Her father-in-law is upset because he has no one to look after him in his old age, and her father fears that British will stop his increment and even perhaps sack him. The secret police trail the wife. She recovers her faith in the goodness of human nature when Gyan Babu, an elderly teacher in whose house she has taken refuge, resigns rather than give away her
whereabouts to the police.

Prem Chand thus saw women playing an important and laudable role in the changing social and political scenario of India.

*Bade Ghar ki Beti*, is the first story written under the pen-name of Prem Chand, and the first which was praised by discriminating critics. The story is a simple, touching appreciation of the compassionate nature of a rich girl Anandi who gets married to Srikanth Singh - whose family is financially much less affluent than Anandi's. She sparks off tension between Srikanth and his younger brother Lal Behari when she reports Lal Bihari's rude remarks about her parents to her husband. A major family crisis threatens, and a break-up is imminent when the 'rich daughter-in-law' suddenly resolves the problem by her genuine gentleness and forgiveness-- for she is after all a well-bred girl. Madan Gopal finds this story marking a sharp departure from the earlier stories of Prem Chand in maturity of treatment.

As a true inheritor of short fiction and keeping alive the craft of fables Prem Chand wrote *Do Bail* — an exquisitely crafted fable-narrative about the 'picaresque' adventures of two very determined and utterly lovable oxen with invincible personalities, 'splendid creatures, tall sturdy as hard working as locomotives,' and why they run away from their master Jhuri,
what happens to them when they do, and how they return, make-up the tale's charming structure. The bullock's of the tale are endowed with not only a human but a specifically Hindu — character — such as the belief in reincarnation and the importance of dharma. The story is also a very perceptive portrayal of village life and customs — heavy with many a subtle ironic and satirical comment on village superstitions and exploitations of peasants by vested interests. The story also reveals Prem Chand's profound sympathy for abused non-human animals as well as the oppressed people of his country.

Thus we see in the short stories of Prem Chand a faithful and vivid reflection of the changing pattern and trends of thought in contemporary India and the social movement that expressed these. The major trends such as the nationalistic movement, especially the one influenced by the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi, the new concept of social progress, and the reform movements to which they gave rise, a new religious consciousness based on the rejection of custom-ridden practices, shallow rituals and senseless superstitions and the ideal of economic justice and equality based broadly on the concept of socialist society, and expressed through the struggles of peasants and workers against exploitation. Like Rabindranath Tagore and others Prem Chand displayed the
utter hypocrisy of sweeping all our evils under the rug and
talking about spiritualism and taking pride in it. As Prem
Chand bares out the real situation which is often pitiable, we
feel his intense pain and deep compassion. Every line that
Munshi Prem Chand wrote feels of the agony he experienced
when he saw the conditions of a helpless widow in Ahe Bekas
or Panchayat, the insulted and tormented untouchable of
Thakur ka Kuan and Sadgati and the starving peasant of
Pus ki Raat. His characters are not wholly evil. They are human
and as human beings have weaknesses and failings — most
of the times compounded by circumstances and sick customs
and traditions. According to Prem Chand a successful writer is
able to invoke the same feelings and emotions in his readers
as are reflected in his characters. The reader should forget that
he is reading a book, a piece of literature and should experience
a kind of spiritual affinity and closeness with the characters
who he is reading about. So total should be his involvement
and so faithful the depiction. His stories have a well thought-
out background and each character has a definite place against
this background having a psychological reality to it. In his own
words:

I write for only one reason: to prevent

a human truth or to show a new angle of
looking at common and obvious things. Once I have this, I am ready to start with delineation of character. I believe very sincerely that no story can depend totally on a clever scene or a dramatic incident, the story’s sap is Psychological insight.11

He also observes:

a climax, well developed and based on psychological truth, forgives many sins.12

According to him "the genuine story writer is a product of spontaneity and gift, plot comes to him, drama and effect come to him, easily, gracefully and inspiredly." 13

In simple and graphic terms Prem Chand projects significant episodes and intimate moments in the lives of the toiling millions. The one glaring purpose of his art was attaining freedom and along with it his concerns were the poverty of Indian people, caste and class war, the rural and urban life problems. He felt it his duty to highlight all these and thus accord his writing representational-literature status wherein his stories unfold gradually step by step making every step a milestone and weaving with patience the delicate fabric of his

12 Ibid., P. 190.
13 Ibid., P. 190.
short stories. He used his powerful weapon incessantly in the interests of suffering humanity. He was a great artist and a still greater humanist. His biographer Madan Gopal says that Prem Chand worked hard on each element of his stories. In fact before writing he used to draw a complete picture of the story.

Prem Chand was handed a tradition of story-telling and like a true and worthy inheritor, carrying on the tradition, he evolved a new fictional world of feelings, emotions, ideas, situations and characters. He stands tall in stature in the gallery of short-story writers.