CHAPTER- 2

Gender, Nation and Nationalist Politics in Premchand’s writings

The British conquest of India defined in terms of power of the ‘martial’ British race and ‘masculine’, ‘brave’, ‘courageous’ people over ‘feeble’, ‘cowardly’, ‘feminine/effeminate’ Indian race, attempted to demonstrate the moral superiority of the British nation and hence legitimate the British rule and the accompanying violence in occupation and the conquest.¹ Interestingly, nation was presented by British in gender terms and women’s position in the society became indicative of the nation/society’s strength (including the military prowess). For Britain, India became the realm where Imperial masculinity was tested, as Britain reached for the supremacy in world; it’s shifting interpretation of manhood shaping the classification and categorization of the Indian populace.² The colonial gendered discourse on India accordingly fed a counter discourse from the side of the nationalists, more sharply by the late nineteenth century, on the constitutive and essential elements of the Indian nation; the gender-axis being as important in this narrative as well.

In order to break the power of colonial discourse that enfeebled and demoralized the Indians, the revivalists/nationalists in the nineteenth century tried to reshape an oppositional masculine identity for India through its traditional Icon. This construction of the anti-imperialist hero by the revivalist- nationalists, however, was done through internalization of the colonial definition of the ideal man, ascribing to him the same ‘manly’ qualities lauded by the Victorians (while purportedly rejecting the Western praxis). The masculine heroes as true representative of the Indian quality and the definitions of masculine and the feminine in the period ascribed clearly to the positions in Anglicism.

Similarly, the nationalist projection of a coherent community as ethnically, linguistically, religiously, and/or ideologically distinct from ‘them’ required a proper topography of nation. This was, however, done in gender terms for the functions it served. The nationalist movement presented the nation by the figure of Hindu goddess, ‘a new deity’ Bharatmata, an extension of the cult of mother-worship to the rising consciousness of the nation. One of the merit in presentation of nation as Mother India was to cultivate the devotion for India and to mobilize its ‘sons’ for her protection. If Motherland was projected as women’s body, in danger of violation from foreign male, her honor needs to be protected

---

3 Sikata Benerjee, ibid, p. 40.
4 Sikata Banerjee, ibid, p. 3.
by the ‘countless citizen warriors’. Besides, the cult of the mother goddesses had also been a symbol of martial strength and prowess.\(^5\) The symbolism of Mother India was therefore useful for revolutionary mobilization and so acceptable to nationalists of even non-Hindu background. Emerging from the revivalist impulse in the last quarter of nineteenth century, this continued throughout in the nationalist movement even when the movement emphatically lay on the nation’s secular, diverse and modern character.

This imagining the nation as Motherland had its own repercussions on the Indian womanhood for its passive, receptive, vulnerable image it created in contrast to the active image of the Fatherland. For in this allegorical presentation, the mother’s sons were the country’s guardians, heroes and martyrs. ‘Vande Mataram’ (hail to motherland) did not make a call for women to join. The imagery took women as symbolic collective whose pain and sacrifices would be recognized as part of the nation’s sacrifice\(^6\), but they were not being seen as active participants and stake holders in the nation. Bharat Mata icon thereby co-existed with the masculinist ideology of the nation.

---

\(^5\) Sikata Benergy ibid p14.

\(^6\) Roda Ivekovic and Julie Mostov, *From Gender to Nation*, Zubaan an Associate of Kali for Women, 2004, p.11.
These currents in political-nationalist movement are reflected in the cultural and literary productions of the period, creative writing also seen as other way of doing political work. The Indian intelligentsia proclaimed return to past glory for the construction of unified identity of nation and, language and literature played a crucial role in the construction. In nationalist terms, to communicate the agenda for progress, the strength of literature showed the strength of the nation, the life of the language was the life of nation. It was we [hum] of jati that was to speak as the subject of language and literature, transmitting its essential values.\(^7\) Thereby the gendered discourse of nation, the concepts of feminine and masculine marking nation’s identity, the female iconography of the nation etc. in its various strands and dimensions got depicted in literature.

Here we analyze the various strands of Premchand’s writings written in the context of contemporary thought and the movement as the discourse of the nation was being built and the nationalist movement launched with that framework.

Premchand fondly took the Bharat Mata depiction of the nation. Premchand in one of his article beckons the mother nation to arouse her sons in patriotic duty to her and for protecting her honor. Mother India is

presented as real mother of every Indian.\textsuperscript{8} He later spoke of Gandhi also as the true son of mother nation.\textsuperscript{9} Notably, he brings forth the image of Bharat Mata through invoking religious sensibilities. In a story ‘Ye Meri Matri Bhumi Hai\textsuperscript{10} the hero is depressed by the condition of his nation and tries to find his ideal nation. He is able to get his nation in the spiritual world. Religious practice done by the women- folk and morally strong men are portrayed as ideal. He believes in austerity as an ideal principle. His language-use also portrayed the Hindu religious symbolism used for an otherwise secular concept of the nation he so thoroughly championed. For instance,

‘yahan maine hazaron manushyon ko iss thande pani main dubki lagate dekha. kuch Log balu per gayatri mantra jap rahe the. Kuch log havan karne main sanlagn the. Kuch mathe par tillak laga rahe the kuch log sa swar vedmantra padh rahe the. Mera hridaye fir utsahit hua or zor se kah utha – han han, yahi mera payara desh hai, yahi meri meri pavitra matribhumi hai, yahi mera sarvshresht bharat hai or issi ke darshano ki meri utkresht ichcha thi tatha isi ki pavitra dhul ke kan banne ki meri prabal abhilasha hai.’\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{8} Rachnawali,ed Dr.Ramvilas Sharma, Janvani Prakashan, Delhi, 1996,Vol.14, p.319.
\textsuperscript{9} Premchand, Juloos, Pachas Khaniyan, Ed by Saraswati press, 1983,
\textsuperscript{10} Rachnawali, Vol.11, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{11} Rachanavali,Vol.11, p. 28.
(I saw people here drowning in the river Ganga, some people were residing Gayatry mantra. Some people were doing yagna. Some were putting tilak on their forehead, residing Ved mantras. My heart goes delighted with joy after seeing this and says -this is my country, my lovely country. This is my pious motherland, this is my best country in the world and I really want to see this country and I want to be a part of this country.)

Similarly his early writing ‘soze vatan’ (the first collection, published in 1909) speaks of manliness in contemporary terms of bravery, manly courage and a strong nationalist zeal. His hero was a warrior who could fight bravely and stand for justice for the people. Interestingly for Premchand at that early stage, when women were mainly seen as recipients of male protection, he demanded his heroines to be warriors, brave and an inspiration for her male counterparts. His ideal woman had strong nationalist feeling. In the story ‘Sheikh Makhmur’ the heroine, Mullika Sher Afgan marries Sheikh Masaud only when he fights bravely for his nation. She is the one who could inspire men-folk towards nationalism. He imbued nationalist fervor in women characters for the

---

12 Banned by the Government in 1909.

13 Rachnawali, Vol.11, p. 29.

14 The heroine’s capacities are however portrayed as that of viranganas from Indian tradition with great emphasis on Indian women’s quality of self effacement, sacrifice and service. Orsini Francesca, The Hindi Public Sphere, Oxford University Press, 2002, p.292.
first time that had a great influence on the national scene. As the
mainstream notion about masculine and feminine changed over time
especially with Gandhi who privileged the softer side of feminine nature
as qualities of strength and superior virtue, we find Premchand’s male
and female protagonists possessing the same qualities accordingly. In the
story ‘Katil’, he desires ideal man to be sacrificing, honest; helping,
morally upright and someone who is ready to sacrifice his life for nation.
His characters and heroes began espousing nonviolence now.

The anti-partition movement’s call in 1905 on swadeshi and swaraj could
be seen in his articulation of freedom, not limiting to political freedom
alone but to its psychological and other dimensions. Freedom meant a just
and humane social order, a society which knew neither slavery nor
poverty and offered freedom and happiness to all its members. A
character in his auto biography speaks: “…won swarajya, for swarajya is
only an attitude of mind. As soon as fear born out of slavery is exiled
from your heart, you have won swarajya. Fear is slavery and fearlessness
is freedom.”

---

16 Rachnawal, Vol.15, p.249.
His writings suggested various forms of participation in the movement at that early stage. In the story ‘Rani Sarandha’ when for the young man, his utmost duty was to save his country from the foreign yolk, women’s support to the nationalist struggle was subjected to clear-cut public – private dichotomy. We find Premchand quite upholding the ‘Ghare-Bahare’ domestic/public division, and limiting women’s participation from within the domestic space. Women characters were seen championing the cause of nation through their domestic roles, and through their duties as wives and mothers which were seen as heroic and revolutionary contribution. Women could proclaim to marry nationalists; nationalist mothers could rear their children in lessons of freedom etc. In his Soze Vatan collection ‘Duniya ka Sabse Anmole Rattan’ speaks of a noble woman setting her condition for marriage which was to bring that priceless souvenir from the nationalist fighter who died fighting the enemy. His story on a legendary and historical plot of Raja Hardayal (1910) and Rani Sarandha (1911) brought out the role of mothers in giving the nation strong muscular warrior sons. In another story Dhikkar19, Premchand admires women:

---

Veer mata, tum dhanya ho. Aisi hi mataon se desh ka mukh ujjval hota hai, jo desh hit ke samne matri sneh ki dhul barabar parvah nahi karti. Unke putra desh ke liye hote hain, desh putrake liye nahi hota.20

(Brave mother you are great. This kind of mother make the nation feels pride who can sacrifices their motherhood for nation. Their sons are for nation and nation is not for their son.)

There were certain exceptions to this general trend in woman’s participation during swadeshi. Woman like Sarla Debi Chaudharani appear as an exception at that stage who took to active participation in the movement in a militant way. In a story written at that time ‘Jail’21, while Premchand affords certain militancy to the woman characters, Mridulla and Kshamadevi, in having them involved in nationalist activities that led to their arrest by government. But would make Mridulla later apologize for her crime on account of her responsibilities towards her family and in this Premchand appears quite sympathetic towards her. The dilemma of a nationalist woman towards her household is presented as a very genuine one. She in the end comes back to jail after getting arrested for leading a procession. But now she could do so, as she is free from the household

20 Ibid. p. 318.
21 Mansarowar, n.4.vol.7, pp. 5-16.
responsibilities; her mother-in-law, husband and her only son having got killed in the firing she turns a militant and gets arrested. She remarks:

‘Mujhmen ab lesh matre bhi durbalta nahi.....main jail ke bahar rehkar jo kuch kar sakti hun, jail ke under rehkar usse kahin jyada kar sakti hun.’

(‘Now I have no fear and nothing to lose so I can do more from the jail than I can do from outside.’)  

Nationalism had entered the household and a close association between the nationalist movements and ‘nationalist’ households was established. When members of their families become participants in the movement, women became supporters of the movement. Women maintained traditional roles in, yet supported their husbands in their nationalist activities and raised their children in nationalism. Large number of women participated by giving shelter to fugitives, hiding weapons, spinning charkha etc. Their participation in no way disturbed their domestic role and responsibilities. Women like Swarnakumari composed patriotic songs. In the story ‘Rani Sarandha’ he portrayed the character of a woman in her three consecutive roles as a sister, wife and

22 Mansarowar, no.4, vol.7, p.16.
24 Madan Gopal, Munshi Premchand a Literary Biography, Asia Publishing House, p. 73.
mother, to inspire men-folk to fight for the nation, and also sets an ideal when she kills her husband, son and herself so that the enemy did not touch them.

The nationalistic bonds were built up in close resemblance to kinship relation between family and state. Thus, nation was seen as extended family writ in all profound writings of Premchand. In the story ‘Anubhav’, he shows close intimacy between two unknown families joined together only by the nationalist bond between them. After the arrest of the husband for helping a nationalist fighter, the wife feels proud as a wife of the nationalist but is not provided shelter by her immediate relations. To her refuge came an unknown nationalist family who was more than happy to have her as a guest. The woman host was more steadfast in her commitment and resolute to help her so that when the boss of her husband reprimanded him for shielding nationalists, she scolded her husband for being meek and submissive. She took the position that home was her domain and no outsider has a right of interference on its matters. In this way, Premchand speaks of the ways in which women could participate in the movement as their male-kin joined the movement.

---


26 Rachnawali, Vol.15, p.201.
Women's role in strengthening the movement through fictive impersonal relationships was emphasized. In another story 'Katil Ki Maa' a woman saves other boys from government's repression by giving evidence in the court of her son committing murder of an officer. In another story 'Sansaric Prem aur Desh Prem' written in 1908 about love and nationalist feeling. A man is portrayed as ideal nationalist fighter as he sacrifices his love for nation and decides to call his beloved a sister. The women's ideal character is also evident from the story as she sacrifices her love for nationalism and even though he calls her sister, she remains loyal to him even after his death.

If the nation was seen as an extended family writ large, then women's role was to carry out the tasks of nurturance and reproduction. He from the very beginning saw women as the inspirer and important for nation. He imbued the women with varied qualities of management, protector, spiritual guide and ideal in all aspects of life. Premchand's women also served as inspiration to her male counterparts in every walk of life and were source of strength.

Women's involvement in this period has been brought out in two distinct ways. Women could do so by either protecting the nation's possession

---

27 Rachnawali Vol.15, p. 336
28 Rachnawali, Vol.11, p.11.
(goods and land) or the other by fending off attacks on their bodies. Premchand at times imbued his women characters with the masculine traits (according to the prevalent notions of masculinity) and were shown as citizen-warriors defending nation. It seems he wishes women to have stronger position than their male counterparts. The other act of protecting women’s body remained crucial for the nation’s honour with the nation visualized through female body. The national honour embodied in women who can be sullied if enemy soldier rape women made the issue vulnerable and a cause for anxiety. Premchand’s ‘Karambhumi’ treats the subject of rape of a woman as an attack on the community. Interestingly her female protagonist was a low caste woman called Munni. The issue became a matter of nationalist campaign joined by men and women of all castes. When Munni took her revenge by murdering European men, it was seen as revenge by the community and the nation. Munni began to be hailed as a devi for her courage and action.

Notably, Premchand does not see women as ‘to be protected’ by men always. The ultimate control and protection of women’s body depend on their own courage and grit according to him. He also glamorizes the

---


31 So in nationalist movement many social reformers who were active in the revivalist/nationalist period focused on issues which would ‘protect’ women, rather than on their rights which would enable them to be more active subject in the public domain. Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi De Alwis, *Communalizing Women’s Sexuality in South Asia*, Zed, London, 1996, p. 10.

tradition of *jauhar* as a courageous act by Indian women to save honor.\(^{33}\)

Besides, the woman could remain pure in body in spite of their capture. The resistance by women to save honor should be ultimate and everlasting till the last breath. This is brought out powerfully in his 'Maryada ki Bedi',\(^{34}\) drawing the lesson from *Rajput* folklores. *Rajkumari* Prabha married to *Rajkumar* of Mandar, is kidnapped by the *Rana* of Chittor but does not commit *jauhar* instead agrees to go with her captor as she is confident that her honor is safe and the man could not touch her. She remarks:

‘Jis Bhalawad ki god main pali hun, kaya use rakt se rangwa dun.’……‘rajput kanya apne satitva ki raksha aap kar sakti hai, iske liye rudhir pravah ki awashakta nahi’\(^{35}\)

(‘How can I put my state on fire, I was brought up here’…. ‘an rajput woman can protect her honor herself no need to fight battle.)

We find rupture in women’s participation with the arrival of Gandhi on the nationalist scene; we find the influence of Gandhi’s approach on women and their participation clearly visible in a number of his stories

\(^{33}\) *He glamorize women’s courage in karambhumi: musalmano ke hamle ,shatriniyon ke juhar or rajput viron ke shorya ki charcha karte hue kaha- un diviyon ko aag main Jal marna manzur tha; par yah manzur natha ki par purrush ki nigah bhi un par pade. apni jan par mar mitati thi hamari diviyon ka yah adersh tha. Aaj Europe ka kya adersh hai? Geman sipahi france per chadh aye or purushon se gaon khali ho gaye to france ki nariyan jarnan sainikon se hi prem crida karna lagi. Ibid., pp. 112.*

\(^{34}\) *Rachnawali, Vol.12, p.12.*

\(^{35}\) *Pachas kahaniyan, p. 109.*
written in this period. Previously he championed for greater and active participation of women in the nationalist movement but the themes got quite mixed up with the traditional image of women. Her women protagonists were courageous fighters like men who fought and won wars etc. but were also seen in other stories as being dutifully nationalist through their home-bound traditional roles.

With Gandhi, his portrayal of the form of women’s participation in the movement changed considerably. Gandhi championed the feminine quality as essential for nation, in fact spoke of nation’s essence through feminine virtue. He privileged the qualities of love, pity, service, sacrifice and self-effacement as ideal virtues for satyagrahis, the qualities already present in women that made them ideal for satyagraha. In Gandhi’s advocacy for self-rule preceding the home rule, the feminine or the softer side of human nature was essentially better than the masculine and should be the governing principle rather than the martial or aggressive side of manly nature. These pervasive concepts that had a sway in the scheme of Gandhian politics definitely had its impact on the writings of his admirers.

---

Premchand appears to be deeply influenced by Gandhi; his piece ‘Jalwayne Israr’ (1921) reflect such an influence. He appears to be struggling between Gandhi and the utopian socialist thought at such a stage. The influence of the Russian revolution had been also strong on him. However, with the call of Non-Cooperation Movement by Gandhi, Premchand at once joined him in support. The influence of Gandhi continued even after he got openly disenchanted with Gandhi’s views after the withdrawal of Non-Cooperation Movement and his more vocal support for Socialist thought.

In the story ‘Lal Fita’, written in the period of Non-Cooperation Movement, Premchand speaks of women members of the family of a Magistrate supporting the decision of his resignation on Gandhi’s call. His young daughter is shown as especially fascinated by satyagraha and she immediately takes to spinning Khadi, one of the main demand from women in the movement. In another story ‘Satyagraha’ (in 1923), a woman shopkeeper keeps the oath of strike by shutting down her shop on the call of the Congress. She is more steadfast in her support than other

37 Amrit Ray, *Kalam Ka Sipahi*, Hans Prakashan, Allahabad, 1962, 2005, p165. In the initial stages however the ideas appear mixed with that of even Vivekananda and Tilak
38 Amrit Ray, ibid, pp. 246-248. After listening to Gandhi’s speech in Gorakhpur, Premchand resigned from his job.
40 Rachnawati, vol.12, p. 280.
41 Ibid, p. 455.
shopkeepers, who appear feeble in face of Government’s instruction to open shops on viceroy’s visit. The woman makes it clear than she has commitments to her people rather than the government. Women thereby in Premchand’s story appear more committed, courageous and ideal for the satyagrah movement.

Similarly, Premchand in ‘Samar Yatra’ depicts the strength of 75 year old woman, Nohri, who resists government’s orders and refuse to leave the public meeting against the order, while others get dispersed when the policed arrive on scene. Earlier people were teasing her because she was unable to contribute money for hosting the Congress meeting but the climax of the story makes her come out the real brave soldier of the movement. Premchand highlights such kind of support as essential for the nation and movement. Satyagraha is presented as a weapon of the weak and disarmed who by their moral strength and courage could defeat the aggressor. The story completely idealizes satyagraha. In bringing out Gandhi’s philosophy and women’s role in satyagraha ‘samar yatra’ remains unrivalled.

In Premchand’s stories written in 1930’s, he clearly brings out a number of stories in which women were involved in constructive program, as per

---


Gandhi’s belief that it suited the women’s nature. In the novel *Karambhumi*, the woman protagonist Sukhda is shown with tremendous capacities and the qualities needed for a *satyagrahi* and the issue of temple entry program is taken here. Premchand makes this woman stand out in leadership of the movement. She quickly took charge of the movement when faced by the government repression. The male leader, Shantikumar, of the movement suffered injuries when the officers opened fire on the demonstration to the temple for lower class people’s entry. Sukhda reacted sharply to the situation especially when she came to know that her father-in-law was responsible for the firing she immediately took to streets asking people to unite and march towards the temple. Police had to fall back in face of the strong opposition led by woman. Finally, the lower class entered the temple. Premchand thereby brings out the success story of women’s leadership of the movement. Similarly in the novel, he brings another woman character, Naina, who leads a march to the municipality with around one lakh people to demand land for housing of the lower classes. All in opposition to her own family who owned that piece of land and finally got killed by her husband. Such presentation of grit and character of women is quite common in Premchand’s writings.
As Gandhi, considered women useful in shaming men to join the movement, Premchand’s women’s active involvement, like that of Sukhda, would have motivated or shamed men to join the demonstration. However, Gandhi wanted women in public life without assuming competitive posture towards men. Premchand on the other hand is quite keen to provoke these competitive positions between men and women, trying at times to establish women’s superiority over men in the movement. Sukhda for instance is shown as more capable and strong than her husband.

Premchand, similarly brings women’s competence in picket lines. *Karambhumi’s Sukhda* participated in picketing liquor shops. Another story ‘Sharab Ki Dukaan’ depicts the more resilience in woman satyagrahi compared to men. When in the story, a young man sits on dharna at liquor shops, he could not proceed further as he loses strength and gets beaten up, but a woman, Mrs. Saxena carries out a successful dharna at the shop in spite of beatings. Her strength and determination bore fruits as the liquor shop got transformed into Swadeshi shop.

Women participation in nationalism in active roles however did not seek to break the patriarchal control of the families over them. The husbands and families expected their women to participate in the movement, join

---

processions and picket lines but expected them to be submissive at home. Gandhi’s call for women’s participation too did threaten the loosening of control. Like Premchand’s *Karambhumi* brings out the powerful character of Sukhda in strong public role but she retires back to home once the movement is won. Her husband who has been depicted in the novel as lesser to her in talent and capabilities continue to be in the work of reform while Sukhda a committed social worker leaves the public domain and happily returns home. Perhaps with Premchand the maxim of ‘house is on fire’ and women should come out of the burning house to help put out the fire, was appropriate. Similarly, once it has been put out they should be willing to go back to their natural spaces.

Like Gandhi, he too appears convinced with the “natural division of labour” between the sexes and believed that women had a duty towards the household. For Premchand men and women were equal but had different roles to play. In *Godan*, Premchand makes a respectable male character and a social reformer speak of ideal gender relations as:

‘sansar main sabse bade adhikar seva or tyag se milten hain or wah aapko mile hue hain. Un adhikaron ke samne vote koi chis nahi. Mujhe

---

45 Ibid.
khed hai, hamari behne paschimi aadersh le ra hi hain, jahan nari ne aapna pad kho diya hai or swamini gir kar vilas ki vastu ban gai hain. Pashchim ki stree swachand hona chahati hain; issiliye taki wo adhik se adhik vilas kar saken. Hamari matao ka aadersh kabhi vilas nahi raha. Unhone keval seva ke adhikar se sadaiv grehusti ka sanchalan kiya hai. Pashchim main jo chiz achi hai vah unse lijiye. Sanskriti main sadaiv aadan pradan hota aaya hai; lekin andhi nakal to mansik durbalta hai! Pashchim ki stree aaj greh swamini nahi rehna chahati. Bhog ki vidgad llalsa ne use uchrinkhal bana diya hai. Vah aapni lajja or garima ko, jo uski sabse badi vibhuti thi, chanchalta or amod pramod main hom kar rahi hai. Jab main vahan ki shikshit balikaon ko apne rup ka, ya bhari hui bahon ya aapni naganta ka pradershan karte dekhta hun, to mujhe un par daya aati hai. Unki lalsa ne unhen itna paribhut kar diya hai ki we aapne lajja ki raksha nahi kar sakti. Nari ki isse adhik or kya adhogati ho sakti hai.  

(Only dedication and sacrifice can give rights to women and which is already their, what is right to vote has to do in this. I am embarrassed that our women were taking western values, where women have lost their position, and become a tool of lust. Western women want freedom to get lost in evil ways. Our Indian mothers don’t want this. They have always

---

manage household with dedication and sacrifice, hey must take the new ideas from the west but the blind imitation is always resentful. Western women were lost in evil practices. They have lost their grace and shame in lure of consumerism, which the most sacred gift. When I saw them feeling pride in showing their physical beauty I feel pity on them, they have become blind under cloches of desire so much so that they cant protect their shame. What is more pitiable for women?)

The complementary model in sexes is negated by Mrs. Khanna who in the final say actually invokes the superiority of men over women. She says:

*Pahli bat yah ahi ki bhul jaiye ki nari shresht hai or sari zimmedari usi par hai ; shreshth purush hai or usi par grahasti ka sara bhar hai. Nari main seva or saiyan or kartavya sab kuch vahi paida kar sakta hai ;agar usmain in baton ka abhav hai to nari main bhi rahega. Nariyon main aaj jo yah vidroh hai, iska karan purush ka in guno se shunya ho jana hai.48*

(men folk are responsible for their women folk and if they have higher qualities like sacrifice, strong will, dedication, tolerance and sense of duty then only the women folk would have these quality they, have the responses of household easily.)

---

48 Premchand, ibid. pp144.
Premchand would bring the professional and rational side of woman as well. Like in Godan itself, Miss Malti is appreciated as

‘iss ramani main vichar shakti bhi hai, kewal titly nahi.’ . 49

(The lady possesses not only beauty but also brain)

He appears much fascinated with the prospect of woman’s power. Like in the story ‘Laila’ 50, woman is shown as intelligent enough to be chosen as wazir (prime minister) to the king. She was seen as the ideal ruler and model for her subjects. Her ideal nature is portrayed also through her sympathies for the laboring classes. But interestingly, Premchand makes her perform as an intelligent wazir only in male garb and she hides her identity as a woman. Even when she became the wife of ruler she sits beside the king in Darbar and is not afforded independent status, though she is the real ruler for all practical purposes. 51

However, for Premchand unlike Gandhi, he does not quite come out with the role of guardians for women in the movement. Women made their own decisions at times in joining the struggle much against the wishes of the family. In some instance the women insisted they will join the demonstration and if household work comes in way, they will carry it out

49 Premchand, ibid, p.52
50 Pachas Kahaniyan, p. 398.
first in the morning and then join it. In the story ‘Juloos’, the heroine who is a wife of a police officer carries her baby to the demonstration without any clue to her husband. The sight of her wife with the baby standing in the frontline of the demonstration greatly shocks the officer who resigns and joins the movement.

Premchand also comes out strongly in support of women’s right to vote and supports the women’s franchise movement. He makes his character Miss Malti in Godan start a women’s league. But he could not quite side with the claims of complete equality between men and women; instead through the plot he convincingly tries to bring out the ideal of women and men as complementary to each other and independent in their respective domains.

Again for Gandhi, sexuality was considered a problem for participation of the sexes together. Gandhi negates women’s sexuality and totally abhors the idea of mutual attraction between comrades in the struggle. For this he invokes the ideal of ‘sisterhood’. Premchand however appreciates the idea of mental and emotional attraction and compatibility between co-

52 Pachas Kahaniyan, p. 40.
workers as an appropriate ground for marriage; though he too considers physical attraction as a simple lust.

Interestingly, the influence of the socialist thought in terms of its position on complete equality of gender is somewhat lacking in Premchand. The socialist influence however makes him bring out the stories about the laboring women’s participation in the nationalist movement almost with same emphasis as elite women’s participation. The movement if led by a low caste woman will have the followers in only low caste men and women but if led by a high caste/elite woman, she may lead men and women of all castes. Besides, Premchand like other nationalists for whom the issue of prostitutes in the movement was an embarrassing completely ignored the issue.

For Premchand the nationalist struggle required women from all ranks and classes that required somewhat liberation from their routine engagements and concerns. The involvement in nation was considered as a higher objective in which all should participate. As it was not simply freedom from foreign yolk but involving complete regeneration, it made the women’s role in nation all the more crucial.

Nevertheless, we do not find Premchand conceptualizing much on women's share in the nation. Women do not appear as leaders in the Congress or addressing Congress meeting or member of the committee and so on. They appear as participating on the call of the Congress and might assume leadership of the movement in the absence of Congress.