PART II

Premchand and His Urdu Short-Stories
CHAPTER III

Premchand, The Man: A "Case History".
To use the "case-history" method, which is recognized as one of the basic instruments of psychological science, on a versatile writer of short stories like Premchand is a most challenging task. From the conservatives' frame of reference he is most abnormal in the sense of being far removed from the norm. Here is a man in whom are combined rare gifts of penmanship nourished in the soil. For his pen sang of the brave deeds of the common people. He raised the banner of revolt against narrow religious bigotry and injustice. Although a brief sketch cannot do justice to a man of Premchand's stature, it may at least throw light on the significant contributions he has made to literature in general and Urdu short-stories in particular.

BEGINNINGS.
The Ancestors and their Cultural Setting.

The family into which Premchand was born on July, 13, 1880, at Lamhi, Mauza Mundhwa, four miles away from Banaras, on the road to Azamgarh, was what the sociologists call "the Kayastha community". His father's name was Ajaiblal, and his mother's Anandi Devi. The parents' social position set the style for the family values, which were liberal and intellectual. It was a joint family. It is said that with four cousins, Premchand was the fifth male child in the house at Lamhi. The members of the family were closely bound together by "love solidarity" but with little outward show of affection and no expression of favouritism.
Father:

Premchand's ancestors belonged to the 'Kayastha' community. His grand-father, Gursahaila, was a patwari of Lamhi village. He extorted money from the cultivators. Ajaiblal became village postmaster on a salary of ten rupees a month. He helped his younger brother to become a postmaster, and also got two of his relations fixed up as postmen. He was an honest person. He was straightforward, balanced and soft-spoken. Even though he had read the 'Gita' and the 'Shastras', he did not believe in the traditional religion. Most of the religious ceremonies, according to him, were sham; true religion meant good deeds.

Ajaiblal carried himself well and was respected by all in the village. He would at times be made a 'panch' to give his decisions, which he did boldly without fear or favour. He was known for his willingness to do good to everybody and anybody.

Mother:

Anandi Devi's father was the agent of a Zamindar. Handsome, strong and crafty, he had a literary bent of mind. Anandi Devi was a gentle woman. She was the prettiest in the family. It is said that she had inherited good looks from her father. She was well-mannered. Like her husband, she was kind-hearted and would like to help anybody she could. She knew a little 'Kaithi' and taught it to other women in the house. Anandi Devi bore four
children. The first two were daughters, who died in infancy. The third also, a daughter named Suggi, survived her parents. Six or seven years after Suggi's birth was born a son who was named Dhanpatrai by his father, and Navabrai by his uncle. The country, however, knows him by a different name—Premchand.

Premchand was a weakling. His mother was affectionate as well as stern. She was doubly fond of him. But she was not destined to live long. For, when Premchand was eight years old, his mother was confined to bed with amoebic dysentery. Her illness lasted over six months and at last came her end. His father Ajaiblal wept. So did his elder sister Suggi, as also his cousin Premchand could not, however, understand why they were weeping. He experienced the loss later, and all over his works we find tender tributes to motherhood.

Stepmother:

Premchand's father did not relish the life of a widower and in spite of the disapproval of others in the house, he married again. His stepmother brought with her Vijay Bahadur, her younger brother, who was younger than Premchand. She would favour him and be unkind to the stepson and make him do various household duties. His father, Ajaiblal knew of the treatment meted out by his wife to her stepson, but was helpless.

Very soon, Ajaiblal was transferred to Gorakhpur, and Premchand got admission into the eighth class in the
Mission High school. Here, Ajaiblal never bothered whether or not the son stayed at home. The stepmother was tight-fisted. Premchand would get barely three-fourths of a rupee every month for his entire expenses. He would spend part of it as pocket expense, part on fees, and the rest on the poorer section of his classmates living in his own lane. He would usually run short of money. He dared not ask his father for more. And if he asked his stepmother, she would lose her temper. He would therefore, remember and cherish the memory of his mother all the more.

The stepmother's influence on Premchand was unhealthy. The young wife of an old man, she would discuss intimate details of married life with the landlady, an 'Ahir' widow, within Premchand's hearing. He would listen attentively, and, at the tender age of thirteen, "knew certain facts of life which would normally ruin a young man's life. "He also took to smoking—secretly.

Premchand's Childhood:

Like his father, Premchand was fair-complexioned. Physically, he was a weakling. He appears to have been a very intelligent and mischievous child. Young Premchand accompanied his parents when his father was transferred from one place to another. When he was three years old, his father was posted in Banda district. Later, he went round various places, e.g. Badahlganj, Azamgarh, Basti, Gorakhpur, Kanpur, Allahabad and Lucknow. Some
of the accounts left us by Premchand in some of his short stories written in the first person singular throw light on his life in his childhood days and early influences. His childhood was a tale of poverty.

EDUCATION.

At School:

Premchand's early schooling was in a neighbouring village to which he went whenever he was in Lamhi. As in most 'Kayastha' families, his early education was in Urdu and Persian. The teacher was a 'maulvi' who, in fact was a tailor and did teaching work only incidentally. His pupils would act as his agents also. The maulvi kept no attendance register. It was not unusual, therefore, for the pupils to absent themselves from the school. At times Premchand along with his cousin would absent himself from the school and indulge in a game of "gullidanda", chew sugarcane or eat sweetened peas. He would stop in front of the police station, and watch the constables parade, or pass the whole day following the 'madari's play, or go to the railway station and look at the trains in motion. Not long afterwards, in 1892 Ajaib Lal was transferred to Jimanpur. He was busy in the office and took little interest in the son. Premchand would slip away to the house of a schoolmate whose father was a tobacconist. Sitting behinds mounds of tobacco, the tobacconist and his friends would smoke and attentively listen to the recitation of 'Tilism-i-
Hosh Ruba'. So would young Premchand.

At High School:

Soon Ajaiblal was transferred to Gorakhpur. Here Premchand was admitted into the eighth class in the Mission High School. Here, as in Jimanpur, his father took little interest in him. Premchand's hobbies at Gorakhpur were guli danda and kite-flying.

Here the best relaxation for him was a perusal of novels. He read voraciously and finished "several hundreds" of them borrowed from a bookseller named Budhilal. Premchand would sell copies of "Keys" and "Notes" of English books among the students and in exchange borrow novels to take home and read.

Works of Maulana Sharar, Pandit Ratan Nath Sarabur, Mirza Rusva, Maulvi Mohammed Ali of Hardoi, who were the popular novelists of the period, were his favourites. When he got one of their books he would forget all about his studies and would not rest until he had read it from beginning to end.

He also read several volumes of "Tilism-i-Hosh Ruba"—the monumental and interminable tale of romance, in seventeen volumes, each one of at least 2,000 pages of Super-royal size. Of special interest and his favourites however, were the translations of Reynold's novels which appeared in quick succession and sold like hot cakes.

Premchand's vast reading of these numerous tales of romance awakened his sub-conscious and in fact provoked
him into indulging in "pen-pushing".

His father had been, then transferred to Jimnia which had no educational facilities, and so Premchand had to go back to Lamhi. The nearest school now was the Collegiate High School at Banaras. It was about five miles from Lamhi and Premchand had to trudge this distance every morning. Throughout the day he would be in the city. Then followed the return on foot. He would be tired. Yet he had to do his home-work. His monthly allowance was five rupees, out of which he would spare two rupees for books, clothes, etc. This amount was, of course, insufficient.

Premchand's Marriage:

Ajaiblal was a 'thoughtful person and he normally walked on the road of life with his eyes wide open'. Yet he made a great mistake by getting his son married in 1895. This created problems for his son to solve. The son, Premchand, then hardly fifteen, was preparing for his annual examination of the ninth standard. By arranging his son's marriage, Ajaiblal created responsibilities for which his young son's shoulders were not broad enough. From the very start the marriage was doomed to failure. Because Premchand's wife was dark and ugly; her face covered with small pox marks. She limped. She was also older in age. She was sharp-tongued. When Premchand's haughty stepmother tyrannized her, she shouted back.

The mutual bickerings made Premchand's life miserable.
At the College Portals: But in vain.

With the family coffers empty, it was Premchand's lot to support not only his own wife, but also the stepmother and her two sons, and also to prosecute his studies further. Tiresome excessive work and harassment by the complaints of his wife and his stepmother produced unfavourable condition for proper studies. It was in such trying circumstances that he passed his Matriculation examination in the second division.

But with only a second division, he was not entitled to a free ship at College. Admission to the Queen's College Banaras, was, therefore, out of his reach. The Hindu College, started in Banaras that very year, was a ray of hope. Desirous of entering it, Premchand went to the College. But, however, he was told that he could not get a free ship. This appeared to be the end. But he did not lose heart. He was, however, still determined to continue his studies, and wished to reseek admission into a College after improving his arithmetic. For this, he thought it necessary to live in Banaras City. This, however, needed some work for subsistence. One of his class-fellows helped him to get an assignment as a private coach to the son of his brother-in-law, a lawyer at Banaras. Premchand shifted to Banaras and lived in a small room above the lawyer's stable. He bought a small kerosene oil lamp. He would cook 'Khichri' once a day, eat it and then cleanse the utensils. Most of the time at his disposal was spent in library, ostensibly for a study of arithmetic. But this
was only an excuse. What Premchand, in fact, read in the library was not arithmetic but such novels as 'Fasana-i-Azad', 'Chandrakanta Santati' and Urdu translation of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novels. He read as many of them as were available in the library.

While his studies did not make much headway, the mounting inflation increased the burden of his family and dependents. His income from coaching was uncertain. He, therefore, thought of getting a regular job. But in 1899 there was unemployment and he did not know how and where to get one. In the meantime, his financial condition became acute every day. Once he had no money for two days. He, therefore, had to sell "A key" to Chakravarti's book of arithmetic at half the price. As Premchand was stepping down from the shop with a rupee in his pocket, a hefty and moustached gentleman, who happened to be the headmaster of the Mission School at Chunargarh, offered to him the job of an assistant teacher at Rs.18 a month. A job on Rs.18 per month being very much beyond his frustration-eaten imagination, he accepted the offer immediately and felt very very happy.

TOWARDS TEACHERSHIP.

Premchand did not remain long at Chunargarh. His attitude towards the British tommies in the cantonment and his independence of outlook precipitated a crisis which led to the dismissal of the young school teacher. He now tried, for and got a job in the district school at Bahraich where he reported for duty as the fifth
master on July 2, 1900. His salary was fixed at twenty rupees a month. Within two and a half months' time, however, he was transferred to Pratapgarh where he served for the twenty-two months.

His work at Pratapgarh appears to have been satisfactory. Here he succeeded in making arrangements for teacher's training at the Central Training College, Allahabad, the only institution of its kind in U.P. at that time. The course at the college was for two years. Here he was preparing for the Junior Certificated Teacher's diploma. He maintained himself on the stipend.

At the College he was a voracious reader. He finished, for instance, a four-volume history of India by Zakaullah Dehlvi, in a few days and that too with a great care.

Apart from reading, Premchand had started dabbling in writing— for Urdu weekly and monthly journals— articles and a novel.

In 1904, Premchand passed the special vernacular examination, in Urdu as well as in Hindi, of Allahabad University. He also passed his "permanent Junior English Teacher's Examination" in the first division. The Principal, however, wrote, Premchand was "not qualified to teach mathematics."

The Principal of the College, Mr. J. C. Kempster, any way appears to have been impressed by his work. Nine months after his return to Pratapgarh, he was called back to become the first teacher at the Model School attached to the Central Training College at Allahabad. And it was from
here that in May, 1905, he was sent, on promotion, as English Master in the District School at Kanpur, where he came into close contact with Munshi Dayanarain Nigan, the editor of 'Zamana'.

In June, 1909 Premchand was offered the post of a Sub-Deputy Inspector of Schools. The offer, which meant some monetary benefit, was attractive, and Premchand joined there on June 24, 1909, on Rs. 50/- per month. He reported for duty at Mahoba. Life at Mahoba entailed considerable touring by Premchand, a single tour some times from one and a half to two months. He would leave the family behind to be looked after by Vijay Bahadur who was deeply attached to Premchand. But Vijay Bahadur suddenly took ill and died prematurely. Premchand was, crestfallen. It broke his back. Without him it became almost impossible for Premchand to undertake his tours without worry on account of his wife.

On his tours Premchand would spend time on reading and writing. He would entrust the inspection work to the teachers. He was always tremendously popular with his subordinates. He was more of a friend and not the traditional terror. Nearing the end of thirty-two years, Premchand, as a Sub-deputy Inspector of Schools, appears to have been full of life and vitality. He looked healthy, but all was not well with him. There was ceaseless disorder of stomach. By June 1913, his health became weak and he thought of taking regular treatment at Kanpur. Dysentery had made his body its abode. He visited Kanpur for treatment and also underwent 'yunani' and allopathic
courses at Allahabad for a whole month. But all this was in vain. He asked for a transfer. While he had wanted Kanpur or Rohelkhand, he was sent, in July 1914, to Basti, in the Himalayan Foothills known as the Terai.

Meanwhile, his dysentery aggravated and he lost appetite. His father-in-law called him to Allahabad for treatment. But the treatment did him little good. He then got himself treated at the Medical College, Lucknow, and at Kanpur. This also proved in vain. He was back again in Basti. Neither the climate of Mahoba nor Basti suited him. He was fed up with the touring job too. He naturally preferred teaching to the touring job, even though it would bring him less. He got himself demoted as a teacher in the high School at Basti.

In spite of the difficulties, Premchand aspired for higher education. He had an ambition to secure M.A. degree. But his progress had been cut short after his Matriculation owing to gruelling poverty. Rather than retire as a low-paid teacher, he naturally aspired to take a Master's degree which would make it possible for him to become a headmaster. Eighteen years after Matriculation, at the age of thirty-six, he got through his Intermediate examination in Second Division in 1916. He offered English, Persian Modern History and Logic. While he was aspiring for higher education, there was also the old ambition of resigning from government service and taking up journalism and literature, the two for him than being synonymous.
In August 1916, Premchand was transferred on promotion to become the Assistant Master at the Normal High School, Gorakhpur. He taught history and geography to the post-middle and training classes. He was as popular among his colleagues as among his students. The Headmaster, Babu Bechanlal, was fond of him. His financial condition had improved, because he was appointed as the superintendent of the school hostel.

Premchand had passed his Intermediate examination while at Basti. Here, at Gorakhpur, he sat for the B.A. examination. Offering English, Persian and History, he qualified for the degree in 1919 in the second division. Hard work combined with a total absence of discipline in regard to food habits, the indifference to doctor's advice and medicines and the climate at Gorakhpur, in the Terai, aggravated his dysentery.

Resignation:

Premchand was deeply moved by the events following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and sympathised with the policy pursued by Gandhiji. After the annual session at Nagpur, Gandhiji started on a tour of northern India. He delivered a lecture at Gorakhpur. Just recovered from his acute dysentery and still sick, Premchand went to hear the Mahatma. He was so much impressed by the Mahatma that he at once became his follower. "A glimpse of Gandhiji", he says Premchand, "wrought such a miracle that a half-dead man like myself got a new lease of life".
Within a day or two, he responded to the call of the Mahatma asking teachers and professors and students to leave the schools and colleges, the lawyers to leave the courts and the government servants to resign their jobs, so as to bring the administration to a standstill.

Knowing fully well that he had passed his B.A. examination that would fetch a handsome pension; and well aware that he would lose a total monthly income of about Rs.125/- with little prospect of an alternate employment, he decided to resign. He, therefore, wrote out his resignation and handed it over to the headmaster of the school. The headmaster persuaded him not to resign. But Premchand however, was firm and adamant. "I am being forced from my within to resign" said Premchand. His resignation had been accepted as from February 15, 1921.

As School Headmaster:

Freed from government service, Premchand's health registered improvement. He decided to popularise the charkha at his own native place i.e. Lamhi. For this purpose he shifted in March 1921 to Lamhi, got Charkhas manufactured and, after explaining their economics and working, distributed them free to the peasants. He also devoted some time to his literary pursuits.

In the evening he would talk to cultivators in the village, with whom he would discuss their problems and difficulties. He would also propagate the ideals of 'Swaraj' in political and economic fields. His aim was
also to help the villagers arrive at social cohesion.

Life in the village, Premchand felt, was not all that easy. His output of short stories declined. The revival of the old bickerings between the stepmother and his wife demolished the idyllic picture of the village life that he had painted in his mind. He wished to get out of this atmosphere.

Moreover the scheme to bring out an Urdu weekly in collaboration with D.P.Dwivedi, had fallen through. His scheme to bring out one of his own was also nowhere near fruition. He had naturally to try for some job. The attempts made were in two directions: for the post of the headmaster of the Marwari High School in Kanpur, and also for the post of the secretary of the Municipal Committee of Banaras. While negotiations for the latter were going on, the former was fixed up with the assistance of Nigam and Vidyarthi. Within a few months of his resignation from the Government School at Gorakhpur, Premchand had thus accepted a job of headmaster—of course, in a private high school. He reached Kanpur towards the end of June, 1921 and joined duty. But even as late as in February, 1922, differences between him and Kashi Nath, in-charge, managing Committee of the School, had led unpleasantness. Consequently Premchand resigned his job. His colleagues and pupils felt sad.

Luckily, Shiv Prasad Gupta, a great philanthropist and social worker of Banaras got Premchand fixed up at the Kashi Vidyapeeth as in-charge of the high school section,
in July, 1922. His assignment was independent and there was little interference. There were few worries here at Vidyapeeth. Here he taught history and geography. It was indeed a matter of regret to the students of the Vidyapeeth that owing to differences with the Vidyapeeth authorities he decided to resign this job after a year or so.

WORSHIP OF LITERATURE.

Works of Maulana Sharar, Pandit Batan Nath Sarshar, Mirza Busva, Maulvi Mohammed Ali of Hardoi were Premchand's favourites. When he got one of their books he would forget all about his studies and would not rest until he had read it from beginning to end. He also read several volumes of "Tilism-i-Hosh Ruba". Of special interest and his favourites, however, were the translations of Reynolds's novels. His vast reading of these numerous tales of romances awakened his sub-conscious and in fact provoked him into indulging in "pen pushing". He would write pages after pages, and then tear them off.

He was led to his "first composition" by writing a play around his frustrated uncle who seduced a "chamarin" and got a good beating by the "chamars". Having discovered such a black spot in his uncle's character, he wrote out a play— a farce— around all that had befallen the poor uncle, and read it out to his own friends. They all had a hearty laugh. This encouraged Premchand. He made out a fair copy, and in order to know his reaction, kept it purposely under the uncle's pillow. But the uncle was not there. He searched for his play— his first ever compo-
sition— but could not find it anywhere. This happened in 1893. In 1894, he wrote a play named "Honhar Birwan Ke Chikne Chikne Paat". He began to attempt writing novel in 1898.

The earliest novel written by him seems to have been "Asrar-i-Maabil". Published under the name of "Dhanpatrai, alias Nayabrai Allahabadi". and serialised in the 'Avaz-i-Khalq', an Urdu weekly of Banaras, from October 8, 1903 to February 1, 1905. It is a caricature of the Brahmin priestly class.

Another novel written about the same time seems to have been 'Pratapchandra'. This could not be found. However, the novel was possibly revised and enlarged. The same is also true anyway of his next novel published in early 1907 as 'Prema' (in Hindi) and a few months earlier as 'Hum Khurma-o-Hum Savab' (in Urdu). It is interesting to note that the two versions (Hindi and Urdu) were prepared simultaneously. The translation is literal. The author's name on 'Prema' is given as "Babu Navabrai Banarsi". The sub-title of 'Prema', "The marriage of two friends (girls); gripping, instructive, and original novel", gives us an indication of the contents of the novel. The problems dealt within the novel are the ills of the Hindu Society, e.g. the taboo on widow remarriage. The next novel, 'Kishna' was published in 1907. This novel relates to social reforms. It is a caricature of the great love of women for ornaments.
While Premchand was writing novels, he was also making a weighty contribution to Urdu journalism. In between 1900 and 1910, he wrote on many current topics under Novabrai’s name in ‘Avaz-i-Khalq’ (Banaras), ‘Zamana’ (Kanpur), and ‘Adib’ (Allahabad). These included biographical sketches of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Swami Vivekananda, Garibaldi and Queen Victoria; literary criticism of ‘Sharar’ and ‘Sarshar’ and Akbar’s poetry; and such subjects as constitutional rule in Turkey, the ‘Swadeshi’ movement, Urdu language and the novel, and primary education in U.P.

He made his mark in the field of Urdu Short story too. He became almost a pioneer, and later attained national and international renown. It was with Urdu translations of Bengali short stories, in particular those of Tagore, that he came to be associated with short story. Mention may also be made of a longish story relating to an event in Rajput history, which he translated from Hindi into Urdu. The basis of this story entitled ‘Roothi Rani’ was the struggle for power between the incoming Moghuls and the Rajput principalities warring against each other in the year 1586. He seemed to have attempted his first original short story in Urdu in 1907 entitled ‘Duniya ka sab se Anmol Ratan’. The language of this first story is Persian-ridden and the theme is slender.

Hubbe Vatan', 'Sila-i-Maatam' and 'Ishq-e-Duniya aur Hubbe Vatan', were published in a collection entitled "Soz-i-Vatan" some time in early 1908. The 96-page book was priced at four and a half annas, a cheaper edition on Swadeshi paper being priced at three and a half annas. It is a collection of five short stories which are very powerful and moving and whose principal aim is patriotism. But the District Collector of Hamirpur saw sedition in them. He thought of these stories biased and insulting the British Government. So Premchand was ordered to hand over all the copies of the book to the Government and also never to think of writing anything without the Government's prior permission. All the remaining copies of the book were presented to the Collector who got them burnt. After his encounter with the Collector, Premchand thought the trouble was over.

Restrictions imposed on Navabrai, stopping him from writing and publishing without prior permission, were irksome. Nevertheless, as a Government servant, he had to abide by the rules. He submitted a few pieces for prior permission. It, however, took several months before these were returned to him. He was also reminded that although the undertaking did not mention newspaper articles, it meant writing of all types. Thus, says Premchand, "whatever be the subject on which I write—be it even on the tooth of an elephant— I will have to submit it to the Collector Saheb Bahadur. And writing for me is not an event that happens twice a year; it in fact is my daily routine. If an article reaches the Collector every month,
he might think that I am neglecting my duties. Additional work would then be thrust upon me. For this reason, therefore, 'Navabrai' should die, and someone else take his place."

The new pen-name, "Premchand" was suggested by Daya Narain Nigam and met with the author's approval. The pen-name "Premchand", which later got countrywide fame, appears for the first time on his story "Bade Ghar ki Beti", published in 'Zamana' of December 1910. By March 1913, Premchand had some twenty stories which awaited to be published in the form of a collection of short stories.

His interest in novel-writing also continued and his ideas on the subject crystallised. His pen moved as fast as the spade of a labourer. His next novel 'Jalva-i-Iser' was published by the Indian Press, Allahabad, in 1912. The novel was perhaps a rehash of his earliest novel entitled 'Pratapchandra'.

By 1914, his short stories continued to be uneven in themes and treatment, sentimental or reflecting the Indian mind and traditions. Later on, his short stories had gained so extensive a popularity that apart from 'Zamana', they were now being readily published in other Hindi journals, particularly the 'Saraswati' of Allahabad and 'Pratap' of Kanpur. Requests for and appreciations of his writings from the Hindi newspapers and periodicals outstripped those from the Urdu journals. He was led to believe that he had brighter prospects in the realm of Hindi letters.
than in Urdu. His literary activities after his transfer to Gorakhpur, therefore, gravitated towards Hindi. Within a year or so, we find him publishing his first major novel 'Sevasadan'.

Written in Urdu as 'Baazaar-i-Husn' and published first in Hindi, the novel 'Sevasadan' appears to have been started towards the end of 1916 and seems to have been completed before the end of 1917. The novel is dealt with the problem of moral degradation symbolised by the "red light street" institutions.

While Premchand was busy writing his 'Sevasadan' and his next novel, we find that he was doing more and more of translation work. He translated the Belgian dramatist Maeterlinck's 'sightless' which was published as a serial entitled 'Shab-e-Tar' in 'Zamana' towards the end of 1919. The translation was prefaced by a short introductory note. He translated an "unusual" story by Charles Dickens, which was published under the name of 'Ashk-e-Nadaasmat' in 'Kahkashan' in January 1920. He also translated an interesting story by Oscar Wilde.

While his collections of short stories and novels in Hindi took their place among the best sellers, the position regarding the publication of collections of short stories and of his novel in Urdu had been far from satisfactory.

That Premchand was an avid reader of literature relating to the Russian revolution is clear from his
essay entitled 'Daur-i-Qadims Daur-i-Jadid' published in 'Zamana' of February 1919, wherein he exposes the system under which the honest worker becomes a slave to the capitalist who has harnessed the machine, whereas the poor have to fight bloody wars launched by the moneyed classes. He translated George Eliot's 'Silas Marner'. Published as 'Sukhdas', the little book of 59 pages in large type, retained only the "bare bones" of the story and adapted it to Indian conditions. Side by side, he was busy translating his novel, provisionally named 'Nakeam', from Urdu into Hindi in which language it was published first. Its Hindi name is 'Premashram'. It had been finalised in February 1922. In addition to writing short stories and finalising his 'Premashram', he is reported to have written a pamphlet 'Swarajya ke Fayade' for the Hindi Pustak Agency, Calcutta. He also wrote his first drama 'Sangram'. This little drama was only a further projection of the problems posed in 'Premashram', wherein was a 'realistic portrayal' of the rural Indian society. When 'Sangram' was published, in that very year, his 'Ahankar', the translation of Anatole France's 'Thais' into Hindi, was published.

His literary fame was spreading fast. The sale of 'Premashram' beat all previous record of his books. The emphasis of his short stories also shifted to the weaker sections of the society— the poor tenants, widows, harijans— and their problems and sad plight.
He set up a printing press, named 'Saraswati Press' in Banaras. The press proved to be a white elephant and led to his financial ruination and hastened his death. But still in trying circumstances he was busy writing in his drama entitled 'Karbala', his 'Azad Katha', the abridged Hindi version of Ratan Nath Sarshar's 'Fasana-i-Azad' and the finalisation of his great classic 'Rangabhoomi', and his novel 'Kayakalpa'.

Within a few months of the publication of 'Prema-shram', Premchand started his next novel, 'Chaugan-i-Hasti'. The last novel to be written originally in Urdu, it was published first in Hindi as 'Rangabhoomi'. 'Rangabhoomi' can be counted his second best novel. It was this piece of fiction, that established his reputation as the best novelist in Hindi.

He had a passion for Hindu-Muslim unity. With the idea of making the Islamic history and culture better understood by the Hindus, he himself wrote a drama, 'Karbala'. The drama published in November 1924, is built round the cruel death of Prophet Mohammed's son-in-law Hussain, his relatives and friends, at the battlefield of Karbala. He also published a longish essay on Karbala in the November 1923 issue of 'Madhuri' of Lucknow.

Mention should also be made of some of the stories woven round the themes such as the life of the Prophet and glimpses of the Muslim characters in Indian history.
Some of them are 'Nyaya', 'Kahama', 'Fatiha' and 'Mandir aur Masjid'. His 'Kayakalpa', in part, echoes the Hindu-Muslim riots in some parts of Northern India, and the issues involved therein.

As in his novels, so in his short stories of Mid-Twenties, collected in 'Prem Pramod', 'Prem Dwadash', and 'Prem Pratima', Premchand was preoccupied with themes relating to the non-cooperation movement; to the exposure of such evils as uneven marriages, dowry system and the social odium on those women who give birth to daughters; to the innate qualities of the poor peasantry and Harijans and to their exploits by the moneylenders and the so-called 'sadhus'; and to the depravity of the Brahmin priestly classes.

His novelette 'Nirmala' was serialised in 'Chand' of Allahabad from November 1925 onwards. It only exposed a social evil, namely, the evil consequences of an aged widower with several children, marrying a girl young enough to be his daughter. At the same time, in addition to the work of running the Saraswati Press, he continued writing short stories of somewhat mixed fare.

His eminence in the realm of Hindi letters, instead of making him proud, made him more humble. He was being invited to literary gatherings like the Galpa Sammelan at Rae Bareli, or to institutions such as the Gurukul Kangri. When young writers who had just started writing, came to him for guidance, he would leave his work to talk to them at length. He considered it his
primary duty to encourage young writers, and many of the writers who became famous since, have acknowledged a deep debt of gratitude to him. Prominent among them are the short story writer Sudarshan, poet Balkrishna Sharma "Maveen", essayists like Ramvriksha Benipuri, Shyvpujan Sahai, and Jainendra Kumar.

He worked steadily for the setting up of the Hindustani Academy. The Academy was inaugurated formally on March 29, 1927, at Lucknow. He was one of the thirty nominated members. This membership was in a way a recognition by the State of his stature as a writer of Urdu and Hindi.

The 'Saraswati Press', meanwhile, continued to be in bad state. Even his incursion into the field of publishing had resulted only in losses. A large part of his earnings from his publications and translation work had to be ploughed back into the Saraswati Press. In the circumstances, it was natural that he should be forced to take up some employment. He, therefore, joined 'Madhuri's staff on February 15, 1927. His association with 'Madhuri' proved extremely useful in the sense that it enabled him to rebut allegations and charges levelled against him in conservative and rightist journals.

The theme of his next novel 'Ghaban', relates in a way to the earliest period of his authorship, e.g. the theme of woman's excessive fondness for ornaments,
which was the theme of 'Kishna'. The plot was possibly rewoven and new ideas introduced. These brought it into line with the tempo of the times. While he was busy writing his novel 'Ghaban', he undertook translation work too. He thus translated three of Galsworthy's plays - 'Justice', 'Strife' and 'Silver Box' - into Hindi for the Hindustani Academy. He also translated parts of Jawaharlal Nehru's 'Glimpses of World History' into Hindi.

At about 1928-29, Urdu Publishers took note of Premchand's popularity. More Urdu publishers any way were now coming forward to undertake the publication of his Urdu collections of short stories and his novels, as also a few other books. While he himself published 'Khak-i-Parfana', Ram Narain Lal, a publisher of Allahabad, published the biographical sketches by Premchand in a book entitled 'Ba Kamaalon Ke Darshan' the Indian Press of Allahabad published 'Firdaus-i-Khayal', Lajpatrai and Sons brought out his 'Khwab-o-Khayal, and the Gilani Electric Press of Lahore a reprint of his 'Soz-i-Watan aur Sair-i-Dervish' and his last major collection of short stories, namely, 'Prem Chalisi'.

'Karmbhoomi', started in 1929 and completed in 1931, begins by a severe criticism of the educational system in India. A monthly magazine of his own had, in fact, been one of Premchand's principal ambitions from the early years of the present century. A journal of his own, he thought, would also provide enough job work to
the Saraswati Press. The proposed journal came out in March 1930. The name given, 'Hans', was suggested by Jaya Shankar Prasad. It dealt largely in short stories. By starting 'Hans', Premchand had mortgaged even the savings from his books. Incidentally, 'Hans' posed several problems. One of these was that of ordinances and the uncertainties about the continuance of the work of the press. On October 9, 1931, he withdrew from 'Madhuri'. His financial position continued to be bad. 'Farda-i-Majaz' was published early in 1932 by a Lahore publisher who neither sent him money nor the copies of the book, nor even a reply to his letters. The translation work that he had done also did not bring him ready cash. He also entered into an arrangement for the preparation of textbooks. He later in July, 1932 joined 'Jagaran'. But it could not stand on its feet. It just crawled. It was losing heavily. Its losses were mounting. So it had to be closed later in 1934.

To this period belongs his third- and the last-drama entitled 'Prem ki Bedi'. More like a one-act play, it exposes the stupidity of the differences which divide people of different religions. His collections of short stories like 'Akhiri Tohfa', 'Zaad-i-Rah', 'Vaardast' and 'Doodh ki Qimat' were also published during this very period.

Premchand began writing his last completed novel 'Godan' in 1932. The novel seems to have been finalised in March 1935, whereas it actually came out in June, 1936!
This classic on the life of a north Indian peasant, considered by some to be his best novel, is certainly the most important and is different from his earlier novels which ended generally on a note of Gandhian compromise, or idealism. Some critics have drawn symbolic parallelisms between the vicissitudes of life that Premchand had to go through and the hard and cruel realities of the life of peasant Hori, the hero of this epic of rural India.

One of Premchand's principal objectives in starting 'Hans' in 1930 was to give in the Devanagari script the best of all the Indian languages and thus lay the foundations of national literature. The magazine had a section devoted entirely to developments in different Indian languages and published short stories translated from Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, Gujarati, Urdu, etc.

He felt unhappy that, while there were all-India organisations for Indian philosophy, Science, history, mathematics, education, there was none which interested itself in literature. Writing in 'Hans' in February, 1932, he had said that there was little exchange between one Indian language and another and that the people of one province knew next to nothing of the literary treasures of other languages. In order to bring writers of Indian languages on a common platform, Premchand tried very much to establish 'All-India Forum for Writers'. And consequently, the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad, or an "all India literary council", was set up. His 'Hans' appeared
with the great ambition of being the mouthpiece of the literatures of all parts of India.

PEEP INTO FILMLAND AND FAREWELL TO FILMS.

Premchand sincerely believed that there was no medium more potent than the film for the propagation of ideas in a vast country like India, where the masses were illiterate. In 1934 or so, he was offered Rs.750/- by the Mahalakshmi Cinetone for the film rights of his 'Sevasadan'. Even though he was warned that the film producers would "disgrace" his novel, his financial condition was so bad that he had jumped at it.

His financial condition had showed no improvement, and, if anything, it had further deteriorated. He was, therefore, happy when the Ajanta Cinetone of Bombay invited him to go over to Bombay and write scenarios for them. The basis of the offer was not salary, but a contract on Rs.8,000/- a year. All that was required of him was to produce three or four scenarios for them every year.

He arrived in Bombay on June 1, 1934. He took up a house in Dadar and ate at a wayside hotel. During the first fortnight he is found still trying to understand the work, and reading books on the subject. By July 1934, he wrote one scenario.

His first story for the Ajanta Cinetone Company portrayed the conflict between industrial labour, on the one hand, and the employers, on the other. Here he attempted to put across his Gandhian solution of compromise between
the rival interests. The directors suggested changes in the plot. Some portions were deleted and others added. The plot and the dialogues, as a result, underwent important changes. The selfishness, brutality and high-handedness of the industrialist, and the poverty and misery of the labourers were, however, highlighted. The resultant film was ready, but owing to the pressure from mill owners, the film was not certified.

It was about this time that the Mahalakshmi Cinetone's film version of 'Sevasadan' was also ready. Premchand was sadly disappointed with the product. "They have disgraced my book", he said. "There is very little of me in it". This was true of "Mill Mazdoor" also. This film was certified for exhibition in the non-industrial areas of the country. It had not been approved for exhibition in Bombay. Governments of Punjab, U.P. and C.P. also banned it.

The other story which he wrote was 'Navajeevan', woven round the theme of Rajput chivalry. This also is reported to have met with the same fate ultimately, as his earlier story.

Not one of the objects with which he peeped into filmland had any chance of being achieved. Within a few months, therefore, Premchand— who had thought that his presence in the film line might act as a brake had been disillusioned. "Those who guide the destinies of the cinema", he wrote to Hisamuddin Ghouri, "unfortunately,
consider it as an industry. And what has industry got to
do with taste and reform? It knows only how to exploit.
Here it exploits the noble sentiments of man. Naked, or
semi-naked poses, blood-curdling scenes and rapes, violence,
anger, terror and sexual orgies—all these are the instru-
ments of this industry, and it is with these that this
industry is murdering humanity”.

Meanwhile, Ajanta Cinetone’s condition worsened.
Not a single one of its productions had made a hit. The
losses went up. All the experienced and well-known actors
left; and the company went into liquidation. Premchand
was not in a position to get out of it even before the
expiry of his contract in May, 1935.

As an epilogue to his adventure in the filmland,
it may be mentioned that Himansural of the Bombay Talkies
approached Premchand with an offer. For him, however, there
was no turning back. His dreams about the films playing
an important role in the regeneration of the nation had
melted into thin air. He declined the offer.

It was his belief that only in a free India would
the film play its reformistic role. Then there would be
a powerful medium in the hands of true artists—not for
the purpose of making money, but for ennobling human
existence. And, until India became free, the film could
not rise higher than the level of vulgar dances.

Any way, he took a farewell to Bombay’s filmland
on April 4, 1935. The same day, he left Bombay and reached
Leakhi on April 24, 1935. He got busy with the finalisation of his 'Godan' and also with 'Hans'.

THE PERSONAL SIDE.

The lack of pomp and ceremony that had characterized Premchand's entire life were reflected in the simplicity of his personal regime. Of medium height, he was a thin and lean man. He was not at all given to show or artificiality. His voice was of a high pitch. He was well behaved, a "true gentleman". He was self-respecting, kind humane and sympathetic to those in trouble. He was a good student. He was a voracious reader. He was one of the members of a "Laughing Club". He liked laughing. He used to laugh full throatedly. Fellow members of his club nick-named him "Bambook".

He was never conscious of his position and was invariably kind to the poor people. He would always help the poor financially and never ask them for the money. He seldom showed any interest in games, and devoted most of his spare time to reading and writing. His life was disciplined. His daily routine was to get up before four o'clock, do his ablutions, go out for a walk, return, have tea, read the newspaper and get down to writing which he would leave shortly before ten when he would go to the school. After his return from school, he would again get down to writing, and this would continue till 10 o'clock at night.
His dress was simple and of Khadi. He would wear a shirt and a 'dhoti' at the house, and change over to pants, shirt and coat while going to school. Sometimes he would be bareheaded and at others put on a cap. He looked the very "picture of a poet or a philosopher". He was a devoted worker.

In 1918, his life's aim was to become the headmaster of a privately-run school, to edit some good papers which should espouse the cause of the peasants and labourers, and be of some service to the people. Later at about 1930, his aspirations were few. He no longer aspired for wealth or fame. He expected very little even from his two sons. In fact, all that he expected of them was that they should be honest, truthful, resolute. He would hate his children hankering after wealth, and luxuries and become sycophants. His needs were very few, simple food and very ordinary clothes. He did not aspire for a motor car or a huge mansion to live in. He did, of course, wish to write a few top class books. But the object in writing them was also the attainment of the goal of independence.

His domestic life was unhappy. There were bickerings and ugly scenes between his stepmother and his wife. The stepmother asserted her domination. The relations between the stepmother and the wife deteriorated. After a year, the two women were at each other's throats. The stepmother hurled invectives. His wife felt offended, and when it
was past midnight she hanged herself by the rope. The stepmother ran for her and unloosened her. He lost his temper. The wife was adamant to go back to her parents. At last she was sent to her parents. She left him for good.

Within three or four days of his first wife’s departure, parents of Premchand’s stepmother insisted that he should marry again. But he hoped his wife would return to him. He would not think of taking the initiative to call her back. And she seemed to have insisted that he should go to fetch her. The "fluid" situation continued for "at least three or four years".

Meanwhile, parents of unmarried girls approached him for matrimony. He had to face facts. His wife was obviously not returning and he had to remarry. He wanted to set an example of widow remarriage. After a good deal of thought and discussion, he opted for a child widow. And his second marriage to Shivani Devi took place in 1909. His marriage to Shivani Devi, against all conventions, was a bold step, and shows his courage.

By 1913, at Kanpur his wife delivered a daughter who was named Kamala. By 1916, at Gorakhpur she delivered a son who was named Sripat Rai, nick-named "Dhunnu".
In 1919, he got another son nicknamed "Mannu", who died in 1920. By 1921, at Kanpur his next son, Amrit Rai (Bannu) was born.

Premchand’s social relationships had been noteworthy for their endurance and loyalty. No better
Illustration of the endurance of his relationships can be found in his closest friendship with Daya Narain Nigam who was his friend, philosopher, and guide. How and when he met Nigam for the first time is not known. It is, however, clear that the contact was established within a year of Nigam's taking over of 'Zamana'. He took over its editorship in 1903. And within a year or two, he came so close to Nigam, according to an announcement in 'Zamana' of June, 1906, the "permanent" editorial staff of the journal included, among others, "the esteemed and popular essayist Navabrai". Premchand then used to write under the pen-name of Navabrai. Through his life, he used to take proper advice from Nigam.

Proximity of relations between the author and the publisher was characteristic of the times in which Premchand lived. We know about the close friendship that existed between Premchand and Daya Narain Nigam, Editor of 'Zamana'. Personal relations were also established with the editor of 'Kahkashan' and 'Phul', Imtiaz Ali Taj. Taj was also a writer of some merit. Premchand claimed a kinship of the soul with Taj. In Taj, he found a 'Kindred Soul'.

It was as the editor of 'Madhuri' in Lucknow that Premchand came to know a youth named Jainendra Kumar who became one of his closest friends during his last six or seven years. Premchand's firm convictions and transparent honesty as a writer, and as a man, made a
lasting impression on Jainendra Kumar, so did his knowledge of Western and Indian literature.

Premchand had a regard for Banarasi Das Chaturvedi, the editor of 'Vishal Bharat'. He always regarded him as his sincerest friend, and considered him his literary adviser, whose criticism he valued most. He accepted Chaturvedi's advice to exercise restraint in his writing. "I am really grateful to you for your most friendly advice", he wrote back.

ILLNESS, WORRIES AND THE END.

On June 15, 1936, Premchand felt exhausted and complained of stomach-ache. The pain did not subside. It aggravated. He felt uncomfortable and took no food. That night he vomited three times and was bedridden. Homoeopathic and Allopathic medicines were tried, but his condition continued to deteriorate. Within a few days, he became so weak that he could not stand on his legs. And it was in this condition that he heard the news of Maxim Gorky's death. Such was the admiration in which he held the Russian writer, that, according to Mrs. Premchand, he could not sleep. At two o'clock in the morning she saw him scribbling with tears in his eyes.

On the day, a meeting was held in 'Aaj' office. He was taken there. When he reached there he could not stand on his feet. He could not even read out his own address- someone else had to read it on his behalf.

This was the last address he ever delivered.
His condition was worsening. On June 25, 1936, he felt uncomfortable. At 2:30 A.M. next morning he felt very bad. A little later he vomited blood. His wife rushed to him. "I am going to die," he told her. From then on the nights were sleepless—devoted to writing some pages of 'Mangalsutra'—an incomplete novel, and material for 'Hans'. By the end of September 1936, his sickness worsened his condition. He could not digest food. His eyes were sunken, cheeks shrunken and tummy bulging. Tears flowed down the cheeks of the ever-laughing "Badbook". His closest friends Daya Narain Nigam and Jainendra Kumar were summoned. Both of them came to Banaras to see him. Premchand said to Nigam, "There is little hope of another meeting with you".

His literary work on his sick-bed and his worries about the future of 'Hans' undoubtedly worsened his condition. The doctor had, obviously, given him up. On the morning of October 7, he passed a loose motion. This happened repeatedly during the day. By the time night came, he was already in agony.

The principal problem worrying him clearly was how to keep 'Hans' going and the vacuum to be left behind, should it close down. The thought that the journal might be closed down was unbearable. He was not prepared to bend and compromise. He wanted someone to assure him that 'Hans', his "third son", would live.

On October 8, he was in great agony. He did not
cry. He only lay with his eyes closed. After three o'clock in the morning of October 8, he went into a coma. In a state of half-consciousness later in the morning, he asked for some tooth powder and water to cleanse his mouth. Before these could be brought to him, he could neither move nor speak. He was no more then!

The light that had lit millions of hearts in all parts of India had gone out. The life of the master story-teller who had given joy and happiness to countless people, who had carried on a ceaseless campaign for political freedom and social reform, who had given a voice to the dumb and mute dwellers of rural India, who had elevated human existence, had become a story and his name a legend.¹

... ... ...

¹ Madan Gopal, 'Munshi Premchand', p.454.