

The major concern of the Indian novelist in the 'thirties was social change. Between Gandhism and Socialism, various shades of reform and revolution were advocated by creative writers. In Hindi and Urdu, Prem Chand stands out as the most outstanding figure whose novels and stories depict with moving realism the tragic plight of the Indian peasant.

Himself nurtured in the hard school of struggle against poverty and injustice, he drew the raw material of the twelve novels and 300 short stories he wrote from his experience and close observation of life in the region of north India where he lived and worked. He also translated into Hindi from Tolstoy and Galsworthy, Sadi and Maupassant. He had read Dickens and admired Gorky, in fact he came to be known as the Gorky of Hindi literature.

This monograph by Professor Prakash Chandra Gupta, a critic of distinction and progressive outlook, traces lucidly and vividly the development of Prem Chand's genius and literary career within the narrative framework of his life.

Inset portrait by Shyamal Sen



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Prem Chand

Prakash Chandra Gupta

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The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India

From Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

PREM CHAND

PRAKASH CHANDRA GUPTA

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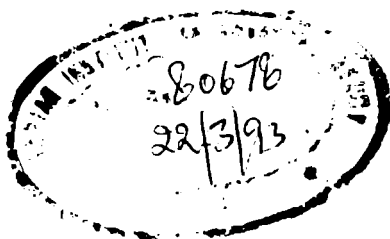
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Prem Chand

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THE AGE of Prem Chand extends from 1880 to 1936. This was a very significant period in India's history. During this period the Indian struggle for freedom gathered force and momentum. The Indian National Congress started its career under a moderate leadership, but gradually passed under the control of Gandhiji who was considered in the twenties as an extremist. He desired to launch mass struggles against the might of Britain and this meant giving up a comfortable arm-chair existence and courting imprisonment and suffering. By 1936 when Prem Chand passed away, the political line of Gandhiji was beginning to look mild and liberal. Other extremists had appeared on the scene who sought to define the political and economic content of freedom in terms of socialism. These included men like Nehru and several Leftist groups and parties.

Prem Chand sought to keep pace with the maturing national struggle throughout his career. He was an extremist of the Gandhian hue, when liberal leaders like Gokhale dominated the Congress. Later on he was furiously thinking in terms of the economic liberation of the peasantry and the working masses. In those later years he stood by the side of Nehru rather than Gandhi.

India after the Revolt of 1857 began to emerge into the light of modernism. It was a slow and painful process. Mediaeval and backward forces kept pulling her back. Railways, telegraphic lines, tap-water, modern schools, western science and knowledge were giving a new look and perspective to India. Feudal relations in the countryside, caste, untouchability and communal feelings in urban areas were difficult hurdles in the path of progress. The work of Prem Chand faithfully reflects this variegated Indian scene with all its contradictory pulls and urges.

Prem Chand was against slavish imitation of western ways and institutions. He was a true son of the soil, deeply attached

to Indian earth. He was the finest literary exponent of the Indian peasantry in our literature. His personality had a vital and homespun quality, worlds apart from the snobbery of the Indian educated in western lore.

Prem Chand may be said to have further developed the literary heritage of Tagore in the direction of socialism. He infused into it elements of radicalism which were an urgent demand of contemporary reality. Compared with Tagore, Prem Chand seems to be a more earthly creature. He lacked the spiritual insight of Tagore into the past cultural heritage of India, but he seems to be much more in tune with modern concepts derived from a scientific and progressive world-outlook. He was genuinely and strongly secular in his attitude towards the Moslem contribution to Indian culture.

Prem Chand was hostile to the rapidly advancing colossus of industrialism in India. He felt that the growth of factories would mean the peasant being deprived of his land, the oppression of the common worker, the vulgarisation of life and culture and resurgence of anti-social elements. These fears of Prem Chand have found vivid and forceful expression in his elaborate novel, *Rangabhoomi*. He did not realise that machinery eliminates human drudgery. It is capitalistic relations that turn industrialisation into a poisoned fruit.

The work of Prem Chand is dominated by patriotic overtones. In the background of his work we hear constant echoes of the voices of Ram Mohan Roy, Vivekananda, Dayananda, Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Bhagat Singh, Chandra Shekhar Azad and European fighters for freedom and human emancipation like Mazzini, Garibaldi, Karl Marx, Lenin and others.

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PREM CHAND was born at Lamahi, a village about four miles away from Banaras, on 31st July 1880. He was descended from a family of shabby-genteel *Kayasthas* who owned some six *bighas* of land and ran a large family. Prem Chand's grandfather, Gur Sahai Lal, was a *patwari*. His father was Ajajib Lal, a clerk in the post office earning about twentyfive rupees a month. His mother was Anandi Devi, a pretty, good-natured and accomplished woman, reminiscent of 'Barhe Ghar ki Beti'. It is to be noted that the heroine of this story is called Anandi.

The childhood of Prem Chand was spent in the village. He was a sportive and lively boy, very fond of playing about, stealing things from the fields. He had a sweet tooth and was particularly fond of raw sugar. At Lamahi he had his early schooling and picked up some Urdu and Persian from a Maulvi Sahib. It is on record that he was severely punished for stealing a rupee. His story, 'Kazaki', is based on his own childhood memories. Kazaki was a postal messenger who travelled long distance and always brought back something with him for the child Prem Chand. In the short story he brings a little deer for the child and is dismissed for dereliction of duty, because chasing the deer had entailed great delay in returning to the post office. Kazaki is a very human figure, full of dignity and self-respect, yet with the milk of human kindness overflowing within him.

It may be noted here* that Prem Chand was a pen-name adopted by the author later on in years. He was named Dhanpat Rai and when he started writing short stories as a government servant, the pen-name used by him was Nawab Rai. Many described him as Nawab throughout his life. When the government proscribed his first collection of short stories, *Soze Watan*, Prem Chand discarded the pseudonym, Nawab Rai, and all his later work appeared under the pen-name, Prem Chand.

A picture of these childhood days is to found in his short story, 'Chori' :

'O childhood, it is impossible to forget you! That dilapidated mud-house, the straw-bed, bare body, bare-footed wandering

in the fields, climbing mango-trees—I recollect all this very vividly. To wear indigenous village shoes gave then more joy than a pair of Flex footwear today. Hot juice of raw mangoes was more pleasurable than rose-syrup now, gram and unripe berries more sweet than grapes and the finest sweets.

‘I used to go to a Maulvi Sahib in another village with my cousin, Haldhar, for schooling. I was eight years old and Haldhar (who is now in heaven) was two years my elder. We started in the morning after eating cold bread and carrying with us gram and peas for the midday meal. The whole day was ours. Maulvi Sahib maintained no attendance register, nor was any fine imposed for absence. There was no fear. Sometimes we watched the policemen drilling in front of the police-post, sometimes we followed a juggler with a dancing bear or a monkey throughout the day. Sometimes we went to the railway station and watched the coming and going of trains. We knew more about trains than the railway timetable. On our way a city money-lender was laying a garden; a well was being dug here. This too was great fun for us. The aged gardener used to welcome us in his hut with great affection. We quarrelled with him and performed his chores for him. We watered the trees with a bucket, dug the beds and trimmed the leaves of the creepers with his scissors. How enjoyable this work was! The gardener was an expert in child-psychology. He made us do his work, but always as though he were conferring a great favour on us. We performed in an hour work which took him a whole day.

‘We were sometimes absent from the school for weeks, but we offered such convincing excuses that the frowns of Maulvi Sahib disappeared quickly. If only I had now all that ability to invent things, I would have written a novel which would have amazed everybody. Now I can find the plot for a single story only after infinite pain. Well, our Maulvi Sahib was a tailor by profession. Teaching was only a hobby of his. We cousins used to praise his work to the skies among the *Kurmies* and potters of our village. We were sort of travelling agents for Maulvi Sahib. When Maulvi Sahib obtained a little work as a consequence of our efforts, our joy knew no bounds. When we could not find a plausible excuse for absence, we brought some gift or other for Maulvi Sahib. Sometimes it was a load of pods,

sometimes half-a-dozen sugarcanes, sometimes a few ears of wheat or barley. These gifts had the immediate effect of pacifying Maulvi Sahib. During off season we had to invent other ways of escaping punishment.'

Among Prem Chand's favourite games in childhood were *gilli-danda* and kite-flying. His love for *gilli-danda* finds expression in one of his finest short stories: 'You don't need a lawn or a court, neither a net nor any other contrivance. You lop off a branch from a tree and fashion a *gilli* out of it. Two are enough to start a game. . . . Among all the sweet memories of childhood this is the sweetest.'

In 'Chori' he recounts how he stole a rupee from his house along with his cousin: 'After washing we returned home and stepped inside with great fear. If we were searched now, heaven alone could help us. But everybody was busy with his own affairs. Nobody spoke to us. We did not breakfast, nor took anything to eat with us. We took our books under our arms and went towards our school.

'It was rainy season. The sky was overcast. We were both moving towards school with great joy. . . . We indulged in airy fancies, formed a hundred plans. This was a most fortunate occasion. We wanted to spend the rupee so that it could last a very long time. In those days you could buy very good sweets at the rate of five annas a seer. Half a seer would have sufficed to gorge us, but we thought, a rupee would be spent in a single day, if we ate sweets. We wanted to eat something cheaper so that we could fill our bellies, enjoy ourselves and spend but little. We thought of guavas and we both agreed on them. We bought two pice worth of guavas. It was an age when things were cheap. We got twelve very big guavas which filled our two shirts. When Haldhar gave the rupee to the *Khatkin* she was suspicious and asked: "Where did you find this rupee? Have you stolen it?"

'We were ready with our reply. We had studied a couple of books, if not more. Knowledge had already had its effect on us. I said promptly: "We have to pay our fees to Maulvi Sahib. At home there was no loose money, so uncle gave us a rupee."'

Prem Chand's partiality for raw sugar is revealed in a story entitled 'Holi':

'Mother had gone to her parental home for three months and during this period I consumed a maund of jaggery. This

was the season for sugar-making. Grandfather was ill; he had sent for mother. My examinations were at hand, so I could not accompany her. . . . Before leaving she stored a maund of jaggery in a large pot and sealed it with clay. She gave me stern instructions not to unseal the pot. She had kept apart a small amount for me in a pail. This I got through within a week. I took it with milk in the morning, with bread at midday, with gram in the afternoon, then again with milk at night. This was legitimate consumption and even mother could not object to it. But I came home from school again and again because of thirst and consumed a piece or two each time. But there was no provision for this in the budget. I felt such a passion for jaggery that it amounted to an obsession.'

Prem Chand's mother passed away after an illness of six months. He was then studying in class eight. Two years later his father married again and a step-mother came into his life. Step mother is a recurrent theme in the works of Prem Chand. It seems clear that the step-mother could not fill the vacuum left in his life by the death of his mother.

During this period Prem Chand acquired a great passion for reading works of fiction. At a tobacconist's shop he heard the unending stories of *Tilism-Hoshruha*, a veritable encyclopaedia of fiction. The legendary author of this work is said to have been Faizi who wrote these stories in Persian for the entertainment of Akbar. For a whole year Prem Chand continued to hear these stories which greatly excited his imagination.

Among other works of fiction Prem Chand studied the works of Ratan Nath Sarshar and *The Mysteries of the Court of London* by Reynolds. He contracted friendship with a bookseller named Buddhi Lal at Gorakhpur. He sold cram-books for him at school and in return was permitted to carry certain novels to read them at home. He must have thus read hundreds of novels during a period of two or three years.

At Gorakhpur too Prem Chand produced his first literary work, a farce on a bachelor-uncle who, unfortunately for him, fell in love with a low-caste woman. The uncle used to scold Prem Chand for his addiction to works of fiction. By way of revenge Prem Chand dramatised the romance of his uncle. This first literary work is not to be traced, as perhaps the discomfited uncle consigned it to the flames.

PREM CHAND has described his life as 'a flat, level plain.' There is nothing dramatic or extraordinary in it. It is mostly a record of transfers from one place to another and dates of publication of his works. To a friend he summed up his life as follows:

'Date of birth *Samvat* 1837. Father's name Munshi Ajaib Lal. Home Lamahi in *Mauza* Marhwan, Pandepur, Banaras. Began with studying Persian for eight years. Then studied English. Passed the Entrance examination from a collegiate school at Banaras. Father died when I was fifteen years old, mother had died when I was only seven years. Then I began service as a teacher in the Education Department. Began my literary career in 1901'.

In an autobiographical fragment he summed up his life, as stated earlier: 'My life is a flat, level plain where occasionally we find pits, but where we shall find no mounds, hills, thick woods, deep valleys or ruins. Gentlemen fond of wandering among hills will be greatly disappointed here.'

Prem Chand reached class ninth at the age of fifteen. He was studying at Queen's College, Banaras, and spending rupees five a month. He started from his village early in the morning with a packet of gram and jaggery, studied at school the whole day, returning home late in the evening, and reading at night with the help of an oil-lamp.

Prem Chand was married when he was fifteen years old. The match was arranged by his maternal step-grandfather. From certain accounts it appears that the girl was neither good-looking nor elegant in manners. She was quarrelsome too and the promised romance lay in ruins, broken and shattered at the very outset.

Soon after this Prem Chand's father passed away following a protracted illness. It was the year 1897. He had to take his matriculation examination. Prem Chand was in a quandary. He started coaching a boy at Banaras. After finishing school he used to teach the boy till six in the evening, walking back to Lamahi and reaching home by eight at night. In these circumstances he passed the matriculation examination in the second

division. According to the rules at Queen's College only those students were excused fees who had passed in the first division. So he sought admission at the Central Hindu College. Here Arithmetic proved an obstacle in the way of admission.

By good fortune he obtained a coaching assignment. He had to teach an advocate's son. 'The payment was rupees five. I decided to spend two rupees on myself and send home three rupees. There was a narrow mud-cell over the advocate's stables. I obtained permission to reside here. I spread out a piece of gunny, bought a small lamp from the bazar and began life in the city. I brought some pots and pans too from home. I cooked some *khichrhi* in the morning and after cleaning the utensils went to the library. Arithmetic was merely an excuse. I used to read novels.'

Prem Chand contracted debts, living in this fashion. He sold one of his books for a rupee at a book-seller's. Here he was greeted by the headmaster of a missionary school at Chunar. He was looking for a teacher for his school and engaged Prem Chand at a salary of rupees eighteen a month. It was the year 1899.

Thus began Prem Chand's long career as a teacher. He did not stay very long here and in 1900 found a job as an assistant teacher at the Government District School, Bahraich. This was a job in the Government Service at the princely salary of rupees twenty a month. After a couple of months he was transferred to Partapgarh. From here he was sent to Allahabad to be trained as a teacher. After this he was appointed as headmaster at the Allahabad Model School. Soon after this he was transferred to Kanpur to serve at the Government School. These were years of apprenticeship in the literary field too. His stay at Kanpur brought him into close contact with his lifelong friend, Munshi Daya Narain Nigam, editor of the *Zamana*.

The first novel of Prem Chand, *Asrare-Mabid* (The Mystery of the Temple), was serialised in a Banaras Urdu weekly, *Awaze Khalk*, from October 1903 to February 1905. The novel depicts in rather an extravagant manner the evil deeds of priests and *mahantas*. Yashodanand is a *panda*, a very corrupt and licentious person. He hob-nobs with prostitutes and undermines the virtue of innocent women who come to offer worship at the temple. The leading characters in the novel are Yashodanand,

a *panda*; Bibijan, a prostitute; and Ramkali, a young woman corrupted by the *panda*.

The novel is loose in fibre, specialises in highly-coloured descriptions and may be described as naturalistic rather than realistic. It exaggerates one aspect of life and distorts it extravagantly. Reality is more prosaic than this. This is not a typical picture of life. It is the spirit of gay satire and caricature that prevails in this novel rather than the spirit of portraiture. The characters too are personifications of vice and virtue. The only decent person in the novel, Ramkali's husband, is beguiled and befooled by everybody. Dulari, a virtuous and good girl who declines to fall a prey to Ramkali's blandishments, is very slightly sketched.

It is an immature work, being the author's first venture in this direction. There is the exuberance of youth in it and the tendency to see life only white or black instead of a dull grey.

Prem Chand's next novel, *Hankhurma-o-Hamsavab*, appeared in its Hindi garb as *Prema* from the Indian Press, Allahabad, in 1907. The price was ten annas. The novel bears the subtitle, *Do Sakhiyon ka Vivad*. The novel bears the author's name, Babu Nawab Rai Banarasi. This novel is much maturer in its conception than the first venture had been. The hero of the novel, Amrit Rai marries a young widow, Poorna, giving up his pretty and rich fiancée, Prema. He courageously faces opposition from socially obscurantist elements and triumphs over them. The novel thus heralds Prem Chand's crusade against social evil in the guise of orthodoxy and his great literary war against evil in society.

While containing seeds of his future greatness in many ways, the novel is yet youthful and lacks the discipline which full maturity brings. The characters are still very simple, abstractions of vice and virtue, rather than complex human beings, mixtures of strength and weakness.

Another early novel, *Kishna*, was first advertised in 1907 and reviewed in the *Zamana* the same year. This was a work of 142 pages, but no copy of the novel is now available. It satirised women's fondness for ornaments and seems to be an earlier anticipation of a later novel *Ghaban* (Embezzlement).

Prem Chand was very happy at Kanpur, enjoying fully the literary life centred in the office of the *Zamana*. His friendship

with Munshi Daya Narain Nigam grew swiftly in intimacy. When he left for Lamahi in the summer vacation, he sadly missed the literary atmosphere of Kanpur. In a letter to Nigam Prem Chand describes the ordeal of summer at Lamahi, when he found it difficult to do any literary work:

'The heat is terrible. I am supposed to have a house and truly speaking this house is the envy of the whole village, but there is no room here in which one can live with comfort. On the first story it rains fire. The moment I climb upstairs, I perspire from top to toe. The rooms below are all full of rubbish. Very distressing. There are bullocks in one room, cow dung cakes is another; there is a pile of corn here; a grinding mill and threshing implements there. There is no room anywhere to sit or to sleep. In sore straits I have made room for a bed in the granary. Day and night I lie on it. I cannot go for stroll all by myself. The children were here for a few days. They went to Basti with my wife and would proceed from there to be with their father. It is impossible to read or write in this weather. In the morning I turn over the pages of some book for an hour or so; the rest of the time I take refuge in my cot. I sleep much usually, but even sleep is not my obedient mistress here. There are numerous difficulties and problems. Life was full of laughter and jokes at Kanpur. Here I am dumb and mute. Life these days is a sore burden. I wish the vacation to be over quickly so that we may again enjoy those friendly gatherings and merry-makings. It is more than twenty days since I came here but I have not uttered once the dear word, *Bambook*.'

Prem Chand's first marriage was a complete failure. During this summer his wife tried to commit suicide by hanging herself. This too is recounted in a letter addressed to Nigam:

'Brother, whom shall I tell my woes? I cannot bear them by myself. I had passed a fortnight with great difficulty, when domestic troubles began in a chain. The women cursed each other. My wife tried in her anger to hang herself. Mother suspected something about midnight and released her. I heard all this in the morning. I was angry and scolded her severely. My wife now demanded to be sent to her father's house. She refused to stay here any more. I had no money. I realised some thing from my fields and prepared for her departure. She cried a lot and left. I did not accompany her. It is eight days since she left.

All these days there has been no news, no letter. I was not pleased with her; now I do not desire to see her. Maybe this departure is final, Let it be so. I shall remain wifeless . . .'

There has been surprisingly little information about Prem Chand's first wife and marriage. Prem Chand talked little about it and nobody else did so either. The whole affair has been shrouded in mystery. His first wife was not good-looking. She was quarrelsome and difficult. This is hardly sufficient reason for the break-up of a marriage in India. Prem Chand himself was tolerant and long-suffering. From all accounts he remained so in his second tie also. Fortunately, the second marriage was very happy for him. What ultimately happened to the first wife is not known exactly. We only know that she lived on for some years after Prem Chand's second marriage and a proposal to bring her back was occasionally mooted. Shivarani Devi recounts that she herself wanted the first wife to be brought home by Prem Chand, but he declined to do so.

PREM CHAND was fair, tall and handsome. He had a big, brown moustache. When he wore a turban, he looked like 'a prince', though in all essentials he was simple and unsophisticated. When people first met him, they were surprised to learn that he was Prem Chand. They would come to his house and ask him where Prem Chand was. They expected to see some one solemn and imposing, not a plain and unvarnished son of the soil. Tagore was much more their idea of a great author. Such people were much disappointed in their first meeting with him. But gradually his innate goodness and nobility, his utter simplicity, his serious approach to life, his capacity for laughter reconciled them to him. He did not have the grandeur and imposing quality which they associated in their mind with greatness. He was a true child of the earth, a genuine peasant in his physical and mental make-up.

To know him was to love him. The orthodox and the conventional disliked him. He was not communal in his temper and approach. He was radical in his thinking. He attacked obscurantism in his writings without any reserve. He had a wonderful, full-throated laugh which would rise peal above peal, when he was tickled. This is a quality inherited from him by his two sons.

Prem Chand's first wife was no match for him either in looks or mental gifts. The marriage broke up and for the wife it must have been a tragic affair, a lifelong curse. The blame for this attaches to the Indian marriage-system which makes of this institution more of a gamble than it need be. Very often marriages are arranged by minions who think more of their own profit than of the happiness of youth. In a novel of Sarat Chandra an old Brahmin, his feet in the grave, marries young girls so that their parents can find a safe berth in heaven. He visits his various wives once in a year and returns home richly laden with gifts. He gets too old to undertake these journey. These being greedy he sends his low-cast minion to deputise for him and collect the riches. An amazing profession this which could flourish only in this sacred land of orthodoxy.

Prem Chand decided to marry a widow this time. It was in consonance with his high idealism and nobility. Shivarani Devi was a child-widow and her father, a brave landlord from near Fatehpur, was eager to bring off a re-marriage for her. This was a very courageous idea in the year 1906, when Prem Chand's second marriage took place.

A picture of Prem Chand's home-life emerges vividly from Shivarani Devi's book, *Prem Chand: Gher Mein*. He was a victim of dysentery like his father before him and suffered constantly from stomach ailments. He was a simple idealist who had faith in human nature. He trusted people and his trust was constantly abused. He lent small sums of money to people who did not return them, Shivarani Devi was a little more worldly in her outlook and nagged at Prem Chand for acts of generosity which he could ill afford. In *Dhaporshankh* he recounts how he was swindled by a literary pretender. He was thinking of buying a press which would provide some occupation for his younger half-brother, Mahtab Rai. Shivarani Devi suggested that the press should be bought in the name of Shripat, their elder son. This caused a serious misunderstanding between the two brothers. From all accounts it appears that the pants in this household were worn by Shivarani Prem Chand.

From May 1905 to June 1909 Prem Chand stayed at Kanpur. He took a keen interest in political affairs during this period and often wrote for the *Zamana*. He began by being a disciple of Gokhale, but was moving swiftly over to the views of Tilak. Daya Narain Nigam was a temperamental liberal, but Prem Chand was an extremist. Yet the two friends got on very well together. Nigam expresses the following opinion about Prem Chand's views:

'Prem Chand was politically inclined towards the extremist section. We went together to attend the Ahmedabad Congress and stayed at the same place, but he supported Tilak, whereas I favoured Gokhale and Sir Phiroz Shah. We argued all the time, but stuck to our own positions. He did not consider small reforms as adequate and was not reassured by the Minto-Morley or the Montague-Chelmsford Schemes.'

Nigam comments on Prem Chand's attitude: 'Prem Chand viewed with suspicion the idea of compromise in an unequal battle. He thought that nothing could be obtained without a

fierce struggle and he wanted to prepare the masses for this as soon as possible. He thought that nothing could be done without a severe clash with the Government.'

According to Shivarani Devi, Prem Chand's daily routine at Kanpur was as follows: 'He got up at four in the morning. Smoked, visited the toilet, had a wash and breakfasted on whatever he could get. Then he wrote steadily. His pen moved swiftly like a working man's spade. In the evening there were sessions with Nigam and other friends. He returned home late.'

The first short story of Prem Chand, *Duniya ka Sabse Anmol Ratan* (The Most Precious Jewel in the World), appeared in 1907. It was cast in the mould of an ancient story, like a story from the *Arabian Nights*, but its content was ethical. The earlier stories of Prem Chand were in form ethical, but they had a rich social content. There was a superficial resemblance to Aesop's *Fables* or stories from the *Hitopadesha* or *Panchatantra* in them.

In his first story he posed the question, what is the most precious thing on earth. Not the tears of a father whose son had been executed, nor the ashes of a faithful wife who burns herself on the funeral pyre of her husband, but 'that last drop of blood which is shed for the country's freedom.'

The first collection of short stories by Prem Chand, entitled *Soze Watan*, was advertised in the *Zamana*, August 1908. There are five patriotic stories in this volume. During this period of his stay at Kanpur, Prem Chand was writing profusely on political affairs too. He wrote a skit on the life of Mazzini, a biographical sketch of Garibaldi and a eulogistic article on Vivekananda.

In June 1909 Prem Chand was transferred to Mahoba as sub-Deputy Inspector of Schools. His salary at this stage was rupees fifty a month. The government's anger now descended on Prem Chand for his stories in *Soze Watan*. It was discovered that Nawab Rai was the pen-name of a government employec, Dhanpat Rai. Prem Chand was hauled over the coals by the district magistrate who ordered the forfeiture of all the copies of *Soze Watan*. Further, Prem Chand was commanded to write nothing without the permission of the authorities. The pseudonym, Nawab Rai, was now no good. It was in these circumstances that the author adopted a new pen-name for himself,

Prem Chand, now familiar to all students of Indian literature. The new pen-name was a suggestion of Nigam's gladly accepted by Prem Chand.

A description of Prem Chand's interview with the district magistrate can be had in his own words:

'I was sitting in my tent one night, when I received a note from the district magistrate asking me to see him at once. It was winter. The officer was touring. I had my bullocks yoked to the cart and travelling all night long thirty to forty miles, met him next day. A copy of *Soze Watan* lay in front of the *Sahib*. This worried me. I used to write under the pen-name, Nawab Rai, at that time. I had information that the intelligence men were looking for the author of this book. I realised that they had discovered me and I had been summoned to offer my explanation. The *Sahib* asked me:

"Have you written this book?"

'I accepted that.

'He asked me to give him a gist of the stories, one by one, and finally exploded angrily: "Your stories are full of sedition. You should bless your stars that you are living under the British administration. If it had been the regime of the Mughals, both your hands would have been cut off. Your stories are one-sided. You have committed contempt of British authority. . . ."

When Prem Chand was leaving Kanpur for Mahoba, the proprietor of the Indian Press, Allahabad, Chintamani Ghosh, asked him to take up the editorship of an Urdu journal to be published by his press. Prem Chand met Ghosh and a name for the journal was discussed. Prem Chand suggested *Firdaus*, but hesitated to throw up his government job. Finally the journal came out as *Adeeb* under the editorship of Pyare Lal Shakir. It seem strange that Prem Chand constantly smarting under the numerous handicaps of government service, again and again seemed to be on the verge of throwing up his job, but at the last moment hesitated. This happened with reference to the *Zamana* also. He wanted certain elementary financial guarantees for living at Kanpur and working for the *Zamana* but at the last moment hesitated and withdrew. Similarly, he declined to accept a post as an assistant master at the Marwari School. He wrote to Nigam that he could accept a headmastership, but nothing less.

PREM CHAND wrote his books lying down on his stomach, his legs waving up in the air. Pyare Lal Shakir has given the following description of his method of work:

'One day I happened to pass by Munshi Prem Chand's house. I thought I might meet him, since I was there. When I entered, I saw him lying on a *takht* with great dignity. He was lying on his stomach. Both his legs from knees upwards were up in the air. In front of him a Hindi book was lying open. His pen was moving swiftly and along with the pen the legs too were moving at the same speed. I thought that he was writing a criticism of some book. On entering I enquired, "Who is being criticised?" He replied laughingly: "I am not criticising anybody. I am trying to placate a *roothi rani*."'

He was translating from Hindi a novelette, *Roothi Rani* (The Angered Queen), into Urdu. It is a story of Rajput valour, intrigue and perversity, of a brave queen and a foolish, licentious king—the story of Rajput decay and disintegration and feminine heroism.

'Barhe Ghar ki Beti' was the first story to appear under the pen-name, Prem Chand. In the first phase he had written of wonders and miracles. Now he turned to social themes. There was a spontaneous upsurge of maturity in his work. While staying at Mahoba he wrote stories of *Bundela* courage and valour, stories like 'Rani Sarandha' and 'Raja Hardaul'. He wrote with great gusto descriptions of the beauty of Bundelkhand, its wooded hills, dales, streams and springs.

In 1912 was published a new novel by Prem Chand, *Jalwai Isar*. It came out under the name Nawab Rai, and was published by the Indian Press. Later on it appeared in Hindi under the title, *Varadan*. It is perhaps the same novel which Hima-suddin Ghorī calls *Pratap Chand*, since Pratap Chand is the hero of the novel. There are signs of considerable maturity in this novel, the first tentative feeling out for great mass movements. The seed of discontent grows into a mighty tree and great earthly powers have to bend under the impact of mass

displeasure. It was the same kind of fire that flared up later on in novels like *Rangabhoomi* and *Karmabhoomi*. At the same time we have here the spirit of fun and frolic so characteristic of Prem Chand. A husband tries to commit theft in his wife's room and is beaten up. Later on he tries to make love to a gardener's daughter and boards a train without a ticket. He jumps down from the moving train, when the ticket collector enters the compartment.

There are good descriptions of village life in this novel, of *holi* and scenes of revelry. There is much poverty, suffering and oppression in the village. There is considerable maturity in character-portraiture too. The characters of Birjan and Balaji—an echo of Swami Vivekananda—are particularly impressive.

In a letter to her husband, Kamalacharan, Birjan describes the sad conditions prevailing in the village: 'I had heard something else, but things are different. Tumbledown thatched huts, mud-walls, big rubbish-heaps right in front of houses, buffaloes spattered with slush, emaciated cows, all this makes me desire to go somewhere else. Men too are in sad disarray. They are just skeletons of bones. They are images of misfortune and living pictures of poverty. Nobody wears an untorn piece of cloth. How unfortunate that they sweat and toil the whole day and yet go without a square meal!'

Here are all the ingredients of the later, maturer art of Prem Chand. Ruthless depiction of reality, vivid life-like characters, the woes and desolation of the country and the gathering momentum of the people's uprising, the force of mass movements.

According to Madan Gopal, author of an authoritative biography of Prem Chand, *Varadan* may be a later version of *Shyama*. He suggests that Shyama is perhaps Suvama, the mother of Pratap Chand. The same novel has also perhaps been described as *Pratap Chand*.

At Mahoba Prem Chand fell a victim to chronic dysentery, a disease which pursued him throughout life. During a year and half's illness Prem Chand's health broke down completely. He was transferred to district Basti in the *Tarai*, no better from the health point of view. He took leave for a few months on half-pay for medical treatment and recovery. While Prem Chand was at Basti, the first volume of *Prem-Pachisi* was published. It

included some of the finest stories of Prem Chand like 'Barhe Ghar ki Beti', 'Namak ka Darogha' (The Salt Inspector), 'Rani Sarandha', 'Raja Hardaul' and others.

At Basti, Prem Chand started writing in Hindi. Here he formed a friendship with Mannan Dwivedi Gajpuri who was posted as *tahsildar* in the district. This turned his thoughts towards Hindi. He was finding that writing in Urdu was from the monetary angle a frustrating experience.

While at Basti he passed the Intermediate examination. He also wrote a large number of very fine short stories which appeared in *Prem Pachisi*, part two. An illustration of the financial straits in which he found himself is contained in a letter to Nigam: 'I have written something about my honorarium in my letter day-before-yesterday. In May and June I wrote twenty-four columns in all. I shall perhaps not be able to write anything in June, as my digestion is completely upset. I cannot sit even for an hour. At the accepted rate my honorarium comes to rupees eight. I shall be thankful, if you can send me without much trouble a watch worth about rupees three to four and a pair of shoes priced rupees four and a half. You may send both things in the same parcel. My own shoes have been taken by Chhotak and I am barefooted. . .'

This letter brings out poignantly the financial distress of Prem Chand. He wanted to give up his job and work for Nigam's weekly paper, *Azad*. But Nigam could not offer him any financial guarantee, though he desired Prem Chand's help in bringing out his papers, *Zamana* and *Azad*. Prem Chand's works today are proving a veritable gold mine for his heirs, but in his own lifetime he found it difficult even to buy a cheap pair of shoes or a watch worth about rupees three or four!

ON 18TH August 1916 Prem Chand reached Gorakhpur to work as an assistant teacher at the Normal School. He was Second Master and also worked as Superintendent of the hostel. He was very happy here. There was plenty of open space in the compound and it suited his health. His step-mother and wife used to quarrel bitterly, but he was used to this. At Gorakhpur Prem Chand found a new friend, Mahavir Prasad Poddar and this drew him nearer still to Hindi. He had written a small book on Sheikh Sadi, had translated some short stories of Tolstoy in Hindi and was bringing out some stories of *Prem-Pachisi* in Hindi. This was his first collection of short stories in Hindi, *Sapt Saroj*, published in 1917. The seven stories were: (1) 'Barhe Ghar ki Beti'; (2) 'Saut'; (3) 'Sajjanta ka Dand'; (4) 'Panch Parameshwar'; (5) 'Namak ka Darogha'; (6) 'Upadesh'; (7) 'Pariksha'. These were some of the finest stories written by him throughout his career.

In these stories Prem Chand emphasises the basic goodness of human nature. Anandi in 'Barhe Ghar ki Beti' (Daughter of a Good Family), is angry with her husband's younger brother, a rustic who shouts at her and throws a wooden sandal at her. When she finds that the family is breaking up and the young man is contrite, she forgives him and pacifies her husband.

Similarly, the Salt-Inspector in 'Namak ka Darogha' is an incorruptible person. He is dismissed by the government for his rectitude, but engaged by the corrupt *Seth* who desires to have honest people in his own employ. Thus virtue is rewarded in Prem Chand's world. Such wonderful things do not happen in real life. The village judge too is impelled by the compulsion of spirit to do justice, forgetting personal rancour and grievances. Such justice is rare even in village-society, riven by numerous differences, prejudices, caste-groupings, superstitions and dogmas.

Prem Chand exalted his readers by his innate idealism and goodness. His works were a force for good in society. He favoured right and justice and decried wrong and injustice. His descriptions of life are realistic, but he saw the subterranean

conflict between the forces of good and evil. He had faith that ultimately right would triumph over wrong.

Another collection of short stories in Hindi was brought out by the famous publishing house of Bombay, Hindi Granth Ratnakar. This was entitled *Nava-nidhi* and included his celebrated stories of 'Bundela' valour, 'Raja Hardaul' and 'Rani Sarandha'.

Shortly afterwards, Prem Chand published another collection of short stories in Hindi, entitled, *Prem Purnima*. This included another wonderful story, 'Ishwariya Nyaya', in the tradition of 'Barhe Ghar ki Beti' and 'Panch Parameshwar'. The minion of a wealthy house, honest and interpid hitherto, trips and betrays his master's widow and child. He decides to appropriate their property, having all the papers in his possession. There is a lawsuit and having virtually lost the case the widow in the open court challenges her erstwhile retainer to swear that the property is his. He is unable to do so, his innate sense of honesty triumphing at the end. This is a characteristic story in the repertoire of Prem Chand. Man is a mixture of good and evil. He falls, but ultimately recovers. This is almost a Rousseauesque faith in the innate nobility of man—a faith undermined in many cases by the sophistications of civilization.

Between 1916 and 1917 Prem Chand was busy writing the first of his great novels, *Seva Sadan* or *Bazare Husn*. It was originally written in Urdu, but the Hindi version appeared first. It was published by the Hindi Pustak Agency in 1918, while talks were still proceeding for its publication in Urdu. Prem Chand obtained four hundred rupees for this novel from his publishers.

Seva Sadan must be the first great social novel written either in Hindi or Urdu. Adventure and miracle had dominated the Hindi novel so far. Here the author faces the bitter realities of life bravely, mitigating nothing, condemning nothing. At the same time he expresses his faith that man is capable of building his life anew and there is no final perdition for man. The characters are very mature and lifelike. The publication of this novel was proof positive that the Hindi novel had come fully of age.

Suman, the heroine of the novel, is married to a poor man who cannot satisfy her natural desire for good clothes and a

decent living. Her father has been an honest police officer, hated by the force, because he stands in the way of corrupt practices. He trips and falls, as he has to arrange for the marriage of his daughter. He is arrested and convicted.

Suman is delayed at a friend's house and her husband, tired of her tantrums, turns her out of doors at night. She seeks shelter at her friend's house, but fails to obtain it. Ultimately a dancing-woman living opposite her house provides her refuge. Thus Suman ceases to be a respectable woman. Her effort to rehabilitate herself encounters stiff opposition from orthodox quarters which offer homage to the dancing-girl, but despise the struggling woman. She finds solution of her woes in a utopian community where one can make an honest and decent living.

The painting of the social scene is vivid and convincing. The deeply human spirit of Prem Chand watches over his creations with benevolent sympathy, following their sad and tragic course through life with much concern. Numerous live characters, strong and vital, emerge through these pages, infusing rich colour, movement and drama into the story.

Within a few months of concluding work on *Seva Sadan* Prem Chand started writing *Goshai Afiyat*, the original Urdu version of his second great novel, *Premashram*. He started work on his new novel on 2nd May 1918, and finished it on 25th February 1920. The novel was written in the background of India's sharpening national struggle and bears the strong impress of Gandhiji's Satyagraha movement. Those were the days of the Rowlatt Act, martial law and Jallianwala Bagh.

In *Prem Shanker*, the hero of this novel, Prem Chand advances his ideal new man. He is patient, long-suffering, but inflexible in the face of injustice. He comes from the landowning class, but sympathises deeply with the peasant. In this novel Prem Chand paints the woes of village society on an elaborate scale. Numerous exploiters and oppressors are gathering round to squeeze the peasant dry. Gyan Shanker seems to be the very symbol of evil, but Prem Shanker triumphs over all evil by his deep humanism and goodness. His suffering converts foes into friends. He founds *Premashram* where one may tend the earth and draw adequate sustenance from it.

While at Gorakhpur, Prem Chand formed a friendship with

Raghupati Sahai 'Firaq'. 'Firaq' was then studying at the Muir Central College, Allahabad, and had come home during the summer vacation. 'Firaq' says: 'The house of Prem Chand became a second home for me. I reached his place almost every day in the afternoon. Generally there were two or three chairs lying in the compound outside his house, Prem Chand occupied one of them and I came and sat by his side. Then we began to talk and this usually lasted hours . . . I would reach Prem Chand's place two to three hours before sundown. When the sun was about to set, Prem Chand would take a Banarasi *gamchha* in his hand and go to the neighbouring Urdu Bazar to buy vegetables. I would return to my own place.'

The friendship with 'Firaq' lasted throughout Prem Chand's life. 'Firaq' was essentially a poet, though he made excursions into other regions like criticism. He complained that Prem Chand did not respond to Urdu poetry.

Another deep friendship formed by Prem Chand about this time was with Imtiaz Ali 'Taj' of Lahore. He edited a journal, *Kahkashan*, for which Prem Chand used to write regularly. He had a publishing house too, 'Darul Ishaat'. 'Taj' published several works of Prem Chand, including *Bazare Husn*, *Prem Batisi* (Part 2), *Prem Pachisi* (Part 2) and later *Goshai Afiyat*. The two friends corresponded regularly but it was years before they could actually meet.

While at Gorakhpur, Prem Chand passed the B.A. examination from Allahabad University in the second division. Those were the days of national upsurge. Prem Chand did not attend the victory celebrations at the Normal School. Mr. Mackenzie, the Director of Education, asked the Headmaster to offer a written explanation for this. Prem Chand also got involved in an incident with the Collector. His cow was grazing in the compound of the Collector's bungalow. The Collector threatened to shoot the cow. It is difficult to defend the right of cow-owners to let their cattle loose in the compounds of other people, but Prem Chand was really standing up for national self-respect against the insolence and arrogance of foreign rulers.

Another incident of the same nature is recounted by one of his old pupils:

²There is a *pucca* road between the bungalow of the Collector

and the compound of the Normal School. Every evening at four o'clock the Collector used to stroll along this road which passes towards the city from south-east to north-west, along the compound of the Normal School. To the south of the road was located the residence of the second master, Munshi Prem Chand. Master Sahib used to be absorbed in studying fiction in his verandah after four o'clock. One day the Collector called him, beckoning to him. When he came, the *Sahib* said, "I pass by here every day. Why do you not come to greet me?" Master Sahib replied, "I am absorbed in my work. It is not my duty to greet every passer-by on the road, even though he may be a government officer." (Another version of the same incident presents the Inspector of Schools as the guilty person.)

Prem Chand filed a suit against the Collector in the Civil Court the next day. Ultimately an agreement was reached and the matter was dropped.

These incidents were indications that Prem Chand was preparing to quit government service.

PREM CHAND had been fretting against government service and desired to devote himself to journalism and literary work. The *Zamana* was financially in a sad plight and offered no scope. At one time Nigam had suggested that Prem Chand should edit the Urdu edition of the *War Journal* of the U. P. Government. Prem Chand declined the offer. Nigam also suggested a job as assistant teacher at the Marwari School, but Prem Chand wanted to have at least the post of a headmaster, so that he could have sufficient freedom and leisure for himself. In a number of letters to Nigam, Prem Chand states his hopes and desires. These letters throw a good deal of light on the working of Prem Chand's mind.

Referring to the *War Journal* of the U. P. Government, Prem Chand wrote to Nigam: 'Unfortunately, I do not regard this as national work. Translation is the work of beginners and has nothing to do with journalism. Please excuse me from this.'

In an earlier letter he had written to Nigam: 'I cannot now become an official paper-man. Nor have I the time to write articles about the War. I shall continue at the same old pace. After passing B.A., headmastership of a private school, editorship of a good journal and some public work. This would be the summit of life. The journal will befriend and support peasants and labourers.'

Expressing his inability to join the *Zamana* without sufficient financial support he writes: 'You say that this is not my proper vocation. I agree. But there is no help. I wish to restrict sacrifices to myself. I do not want my children to be ground down in the same mill. At least I can earn my bread. I am able to do some literary work too. This is my sacrifice. I am keeping terms with both—God and the world, the community as well as myself. I do not regard literary work as a trifling sacrifice . . .'

About this time Prem Chand lost his son, Mannoo, through smallpox. He was much distressed, but tried to conquer his own grief and offer comfort to his wife. Prem Chand himself was

not keeping good health and had grown into a shadow of his previous self.

Prem Chand had been longing to set up his own press. His younger brother, Mahtab Rai, had some experience of this work, as he was in the employ of Mahavir Prasad Poddar's Hindi Pustak Agency at Calcutta. Prem Chand was prepared to take fifty per cent shares in a Calcutta press. The money was somehow got together. Mahtab Rai was expecting that the press would be bought in his own name, but Shivarani Devi insisted that it would be bought in the name of her elder son, Shirpat Rai. So the matter fell through. It appears that Shivarani Devi had a more practical frame of mind than her husband. Prem Chand now toyed with the idea of setting up his press at Banaras and settling there.

Gandhiji's Satyagraha movement was spreading like a prairie fire. Prem Chand was greatly influenced by this movement. On 8th February 1921, Gandhiji passed through Gorakhpur while making a whirlwind tour of the country. He addressed a huge public meeting in the city. On 15th February Prem Chand resigned from government service. He had the full support of Shivarani Devi in making this fateful decision. She said to him:

"Give up this service. The policies of the government are now intolerable."

Laughing with his usual vigour he said: "Think well before deciding."

She replied: "I have considered this well. Now that you are well, I can be happy even in the wilderness. I believe that fortune is going to favour us."

Prem Chand was relieved of his duties on 16th February. He left his official residence the same day and shifted to a friend's house. He was turning over numerous schemes in his mind—a press, a journal and so forth. But all this needed money. He set up a small spinning concern, but this did not offer enough satisfaction to him. On 18th March 1921, Prem Chand left Gorakhpur for Banaras.

He settled down at Lamahi for a while, writing and propagating the Gandhian faith, but he was restless. There were quarrels at home between his step-mother and his wife which tired him out. He left for Kanpur in June, where he had been

appointed Headmaster of the Marwari School. Here, he plunged deeply into the whirlpool of national political life and ought to have been happy. But he found it difficult to get on with the Manager of the School who constantly interfered with his work. Ultimately Prem Chand resigned on 22nd February 1922 and returned to Banaras.

At Banaras he worked for Gyan Mandal, helped in bringing out the *Maryada*, wrote for the *Aj* and later took charge of the school section of Kashi Vidyapith. He had his house at Lamahi renovated, so that he could work there with less discomfort. He was also making plans to set up his own press at Banaras. The press was christened Saraswati Press. Like the pen-name, Prem Chand, this too was a suggestion of Munshi Daya Narain Nigam. The press proved to be a constant headache for Prem Chand. He sank a great deal of money and labour into it and was never at peace. Several years later he wrote: 'This press is the source of all the trouble. Heaven knows in what ill-starred moment its foundations were laid. Ten thousands rupees, eleven years' labour and much heart-ache—they have all gone waste. Because of this press I courted the displeasure of numerous friends, proved untrue to my word in the case of several others and wasted precious time on futile proof-correcting which I might have utilised in study and writing. This has been the biggest mistake of my life.'

PREM CHAND was now very active with his pen. He wrote two plays, *Sangram* and *Karbala*, numerous short stories and was embarking on his most ambitious work of fiction, *Rangabhoomi*. The background of *Sangram* is the national movement, that of *Karbala* the communal riots which were convulsing the land. Prem Chand stood squarely for communal harmony and tried his best to carry the message of peace through his writings. But communalism was a black plague, sweeping across the land and destroying everything.

In his letters to Nigam, Prem Chand outlines his political views. In a letter dated 17th February 1923, he writes: 'You ask me to which party I belong. I belong to no party. Because neither of the two parties is doing anything practical. I belong to that party of the future which will adopt the political education of small people as its programme of work.' In an earlier letter dated 21st December 1919, he had written to Nigam: 'I have now almost accepted the principles of Bolshevism.' He stood for national freedom, harmony and concord between the two largest communities of India and redemption of the poor from economic want and hardship.

On 1st October 1922, Prem Chand started work on his elaborate novel, *Rangabhoomi*. He finished the Urdu version on 1st April 1924. As in the case of *Seva Sadan* and *Premashram*, the Hindi version was published first. Prem Chand was turning more and more to Hindi, as publication of his works in Urdu was very slow.

Rangabhoomi was published by Ganga Pustakamala, Lucknow. He obtained from the publishers one thousand and eight hundred rupees. This helped him to tide over the serious crisis in his press. Instead of the press feeding him, he was having to feed the press. Dulare Lal Bhargava, the proprietor of Ganga Pustakamala, was looking for a literary adviser. Prem Chand accepted this job at rupees hundred a month.

The hero of *Rangabhoomi*, Surdas, is a unique character in the history of the Indian novel. He is a blind beggar who runs

after vehicles begging for a pice. With the profession of begging he combines an inordinate self-respect, generosity of heart and capacity to fight for popular rights. He combines the qualities of Mahatma Gandhi with the traditional Indian beggar's profession. Prem Chand had known a blind beggar of this kind at Lamahi who used to run after carriages of passers-by begging for small change. He had also come across a blind singer-boy at Gorakhpur and used to listen to his songs in the evening, after resigning from government service. On these memories of blind beggars Prem Chand superimposed a personality which keeps reminding one of that supreme beggar in the history of modern India, Mahatma Gandhi.

Rangabhoomi is a novel with numerous multi-coloured threads running through its texture. The central thread is the life of the village community in all its poverty and suffering. There is the Christian family of Mr. John Sewak who is desirous of setting up a cigarette factory in the village-pasture. There are the rich people with all their numerous contradictions, their greed, ambitions and desire for fame. Then there are the states with all their princes and oppression. Much keeps happening in the novel. The pace at which events happen is swift, almost melodramatic. It is a tempestuous river running down mountain-gorges, not slow majestic waters flowing through level plains and flooding them.

The novel is very loose in its form, carrying many suggestions of the influence of stories of adventure earlier studied by him. Mr. John Sewak acquires the piece of land belonging to Surdas for a paltry sum of money and sets up his factory in Pandepur. With the factory come numerous evils like liquor, gambling, roughs, obscenity. For the first time village women are molested by outsiders. The villagers are ousted from their homes, because residential quarters have to be put up for factory workers. Surdas goes to the city and rouses the conscience of the community against the injustice done to him and the village people. The people's wrath is roused against the tyrants. In the end Surdas dies in the fire which is destroying his hut.

As a sweet undercurrent runs the story of Sophie's love for Vinay. She follows him to far-off places fighting against wrong and injustice, their love encountering numerous difficulties, but overcoming them all.

Prem Chand looked back to primitive societies as a utopian ideal. He opposes both the tyranny of the landlord as well as the industrialist. He did not realise that socialism, that is people's ownership of social wealth, could mitigate the evils of industrialization, that man's control over machinery could eliminate human drudgery.

The strength of the novel lies in its appeal to the people against social injustice. The conscience of the community is roused by Surdas against wrong-doing and the oppressors tremble in the face of people's wrath. Similarly, Vinay and Sophie create an awakening among the oppressed people of Rajasthan, hitherto a docile area of the country.

Thus Prem Chand presents a very vivid and powerful picture of India in this novel. All sections of society came to life on this broad canvas and dozens of memorable characters are created. With this novel Prem Chand acquired a nation-wide fame and the readers spontaneously crowned him with the unofficial title, *Upanyas Samrat*.

There are numerous lengthy, moral discourses in the novel. The depiction of the Christian world of John Sewak, Mrs. Sewak and Ishwar Sewak is hostile. Vinay and Sophie suddenly meeting in the train after their adventures, is pressing the long arm of coincidence into service. How Sophie could accompany Clark on all his wandering is not at all clear. But despite a few blemishes *Rangabhoomi* was a great literary creation, a landmark in the history of the Hindi novel. It powerfully portrays both urban life and rural life and fills an elaborate canvas with the teeming life of his creative imagination.

During his stay at Lucknow, Prem Chand wrote some of his finest stories, 'Sawa Ser Gehun', 'Satranj ke Kharahi' and others, and completed *Kaya-Kalpa* which had been begun at Lamahi. This was the first novel of Prem Chand to be originally written in Hindi. He began working on it from 10th April 1924. The first part was completed within the next seven months. On 12th November 1924 he began writing the second part. The novel was published in 1926 at Prem Chand's own press.

Kaya-Kalpa has certain other-worldly trends. Raj Kumar and Rani Deva Priya are rejuvenated like Rider Haggard's *She*. Raj Kumar lives among mountains, practises *Yoga* and has invented aeroplanes which ascend and descend at will. These were

trends which could destroy the social novel which Prem Chand had been busy building up. Anyhow, these strains are only a small fragment of *Kaya-Kalpa*. There is enough material to interest the serious student of social and human trends. Communal riots flare up in Agra. Chakradhar, employing the Gandhian technique, restores peace. Oppression by the landlord is rampant in the countryside. The people rise against it. Interwoven with these events is the fascinating human story of Munshi Vajradhar and his family. The father is an old courtier, building his life on flattery and servility. His son grows into a mass agitator and then seems to retire from life. He marries an orphan girl who turns out to be a *taluqdar's* daughter. Chakradhar's son, Shankhadhar, has been cast in his father's mould.

The serious preoccupation of the novel is the problem of justice on earth. Interspersed throughout the novel are such musings as these: 'Why did God create a world, where there is so much selfishness, envy and injustice? Was it not possible to create a world where all men, all communities could live with peace and happiness? What sort of justice is this that one revels in luxury and another is pushed around; one nation sucks the blood of another and lords over it, while the other starves and is crushed under foot? Such an unjust world cannot have been created by God.'

About this time Prem Chand received an offer from the Maharaja of Alwar to serve him on four hundred rupees a month plus a car and a bungalow. Prem Chand declined the offer.

The growing reputation of Prem Chand was causing bitter heartache and jealousy among some people. One of them, Sri Oudh Upadhyaya, accused Prem Chand of plagiarism and wrote against him for six months. He worked out elaborate algebraic formulae to prove that such and such a character was reminiscent of so and so. Another sour critic dubbed Prem Chand a 'preacher of hatred'.

Prem Chand brought out a collection of his essays from the Saraswati Press, *Qalam, Tyag aur Talwar*. These were short biographical excursions on men who had made contributions by their pen or valour or by their sacrifices. Among these men were Rana Pratap, Garibaldi, Gokhale, Akbar, Vivekananda,

Raja Man Singh, Raja Todar Mal and others. These essays had been published in the *Zamana* in earlier years.

He edited the special short story number of the *Chand*, a journal devoted specially to women's welfare. The *Chand* publishers also published a collection of Prem Chand's short stories, *Prem Pramod*. The Saraswati Press was running at a loss, so Prem Chand sought a job again and went to Lucknow to edit the *Madhuri* on rupees two hundred a month.

The *Chand* serialised a new novel by Prem Chand entitled *Nirmala* from November 1925 to November 1926. Compared to his other novels it is much smaller. The theme is dowry, a practice which has poisoned the life of Indian womanhood. *Nirmala* loses her father, so she is married to a middle-aged widower. Her former fiance marries elsewhere, because he wants a big dowry. The story is a severe exposure of the evil practices prevailing in Hindu society. The novel found great popularity among the readers of *Chand* who were mostly women. Soon after the serialization of *Nirmala* in the *Chand*, Prem Chand started a new novelette in the pages of the same journal. It was *Pratigya*, a revised version of an earlier effort, *Prema*. It appeared in the *Chand* from January to November 1927.

Prem Chand wrote a story for *Madhuri* in January 1928. This was a humorous skit, entitled *Mote Ram Shastri*. A well-known *vaidya* of Lucknow was led to believe that the story was a satire on him. He filed a suit for defamation against the editors, printers and publishers of the *Madhuri*. The editors explained that the satire was not directed against any individual, it was a general exposure of conservative and backward *vaidyas*. The case thus ended quickly, though some people desired to convert it into a war of attrition against the *Madhuri* and Nawal Kishore Press, whence they had been recently ousted.

Prem Chand's son, Amrit Rai, while collecting material for his father's biography, *Qalam ka Sipahi*, was lucky to find certain jottings in a diary which throw light on his life at Lucknow. A few entries run as follows:

11th Feb. Read the manuscript of *Home Arithmetic* and reported on it. Wrote an advertisement for *Manual Grammar*.

Prepared a plan for the *Madhuri* series.

Translated two pages of *Saire Kohesar*.

12th Feb. Sunday.

13th Feb. Translated about three pages. Wrote a letter to Vichardas for 'Bijak'. Polished some advertisements for the Book Depot. Revised some pages of *Thorn in the Flower*. Sent blocks for *Bharat Katha Kaumudi* to the Department.

14th Feb. Revised fifteen pages of *Thorn in the Flower*.

Translated two pages of *Kohesar*. . .

These entries show that Prem Chand was doing a good deal of miscellaneous work for the Nawal Kishore Press besides editing the *Madhuri*. Prem Chand's colleague during this period, Mirza Mohd. Askari, makes the following observations about him:

'During these two to three years I always found him cheerful. His face always looked bright. I never noticed any anger on his face. Sometimes I said to him as a joke: "Do you never get angry? Do you never lose temper even at home?" He always laughed at this. The office of the *Madhuri* was in a room on top, but Munshiji and a few other members of the *Madhuri* staff held their sittings in a room adjacent to mine. All his companions greatly enjoyed his lively humour, goodness and sense of fun. The room echoed with the sound of his laughter which seemed to fill it with illumination. I used to tell him stories from my book, *Navadir*. I related to him the story of a *muezzin* who, while invoking the faithful, used to run from his place. When asked what he was doing, he replied that he wanted to hear how the *azan* sounded. Prem Chand laughed so much at this story that his eyes filled with tears.'

PREM CHAND was having to face various problems of a personal nature. He was looking for a suitable match for his daughter. The girl had not been able to get much education. Though properly impressed by the fact that it was Prem Chand's daughter, the boy's elders raised the question of dowry in euphemistic terms. The marriage which took place at Lamahi went off very well.

Prem Chand had been working on a new novel, *Ghaban* (Embezzlement), which was published by Saraswati Press, Banaras, at the beginning of the year, 1931. The novel is built round one of Prem Chand's pet obsessions, the ruinous effect of a wife's fondness for ornaments on her husband's life. One of his earlier novels, *Kishna*, was concerned with the same theme. This theme is to be found in many of his short stories too. Suman, the heroine of *Sewa Sadan*, is impelled by a similar weakness to slip from the path of respectability.

In a letter to Nigam, Prem Chand had written: 'I was able to save nothing from my salary and allowance. You may call it what you like—saving or income—I had a pair of bangles for my wife which she had been wanting for years. This was to remove her complaint, but I have not yet overcome the grief of this. . .' On perhaps a very small scale Prem Chand too had experienced the same discomfiture in his early years which Suman's husband in *Sewa Sadan* and Jalpa's husband in *Ghaban* experienced.

Jalpa, the heroine of the novel, desires to have a necklace. Her husband is a low-paid clerk, though he pretends to his wife that he is very rich. He is compelled to embezzle money from his office to satisfy his wife. He runs away to Calcutta, where a vegetable-seller and his wife offer him refuge. The police involve him as an informer in a faked case of dacoity. His wife, now very contrite, arrives in Calcutta and retrieves him from the sad tangle in which he finds himself. Meanwhile, a big awakening has taken place among the people against the tyrannous ways of the police. The reader feels the breath of

big mass movements in this novel. From small beginnings big storms brew in the nation's life. The transformation of Jalpa from a greedy, grasping woman into a people's heroine is a touch characteristic of Prem Chand. Again and again we find an exalting and uplifting view of human nature in the writings of Prem Chand.

This was a golden age for the writing of Prem Chand's novels. *Ghaban* was published at the beginning of the year 1931; he began writing another of his great novels, *Karmabhoomi*, on 16th April 1931. It was published in August 1932. According to Prem Chand's letters, he embarked on his last great work *Godan* in 1932, though owing to various difficulties connected with the *Hans* and *Jagaran* it could only be published in June 1936. Another novel which he was writing during his last illness, *Mangal Sutra*, was cut short by premature death. *Ghaban*, *Karmabhoomi* and *Godan* constitute a trilogy of which any novelist could be proud.

Karmabhoomi is remarkable for its revolutionary fervour. Everywhere the people are on the move; there is no checking or restraining them. In city and countryside, in hill and dale they are astir. No repression can curb them. This was India in revolt. The Simon Commission had been disowned. Bombs were falling in Assembly houses. Heroes like Bhagat Singh and Chandra Shekhar Azad had appeared on the scene. Jawaharlal Nehru declared in his presidential address at the Lahore Congress: 'I am a republican and a socialist.' *Karmabhoomi* is replete with echoes of these stirring times. Like Gorki's *Mother*, this novel is almost a treatise on how revolutions are made.

The novel presents to us an amazing string of characters: Amarkant, Samarkant, Sakina, Sukhada, Pathanin, Munni. Amarkant and Samarkant have reminded readers of the two Nehrus, Munni, Pathanin, Sakina and Lala Samarkant are all transformed by events. Society is being purified by blood and fire.

Lala Samarkant giving the call to strike depicts the contemporary scene: 'Yes, have a *hartal*, but not for a day or two. This *hartal* will continue, until the city authorities heed our voice. We are poor, destitute, unhappy. But if the great ones consider it coolly, they will realise that it is the poor who have made them great. Who builds these great palaces at the risk of

life? Who works these cloth mills? Who fetches milk and butter to their doors each morning? Who delivers sweets and fruits for the breakfast of the great? Who cleans? Who washes? Who delivers letters and newspapers every morning? Three-fourths of the city's folk are consuming their blood for the benefit of one-fourth. . .'

The whole novel may be considered as a moving drama in five acts: (1) Picture of the city; (2) Life in a village in the hills; (3) Revolt; (4) People in the hill-village; (5) Finale—revolt and victory. There are strong traces of Gandhian influence on the novel. There is repeated emphasis on non-violence. At the same time there is a revolutionary temper in the novel which will brook no compromise. The people are on the move. They have taken their destiny into their own hands and nothing can check their advance. In many ways this is the most mature and revolutionary work of Prem Chand. It represents a total revolt against social injustice. It is the character of the peasants-hero in *Godan* which makes that work so remarkable from the literary point of view. It does not surpass *Karmabhoomi* in revolutionary temper and fervour. *Hori* is to be equalled only by Surdas. In *Karmabhoomi*, however, we have an unending galaxy of revolutionary figures.

DURING THE last few years of Prem Chand's life Jainendra came to know him intimately. He saw him for the first time at Lucknow, when he was staying near Aminuddaula Park. Jainendra gives the following account of that meeting in his reminiscences:

'I was greatly shocked to see the person looking down at me from the top of the stairs. The person standing at the top had very thick moustaches. He was covering himself with a Lalimli shawl worth about rupees five. It was very old and greasy. His hair had fallen down and covered his forehead which, therefore, looked small. The head too seemed to be smaller than was necessary. He was wearing an ordinary *dhoti* which came down a little below the knees. His eyes were heavy with sleep. I realised that this was Prem Chand. There was no time to avoid this conclusion. But I was not happy to realise at that moment that this was Prem Chand. Would I have to recognize him as Prem Chand in my own lifetime? Had I come to have a glimpse of this personality from so far, with such high hope? For a moment I thought of going away and preserving my faith in the image of a more real and attractive Prem Chand. The individual standing before me in the name of Prem Chand appeared to be so ordinary, small, such a rustic. . .

'Again he said, "Come along; come."

'As I began to climb the stairs with my box in one hand, he descended and tried to take the box from me. I did not let him take the box, but he snatched from me a few other odd articles and carried them up the stairs.

'The house did not seem to be well run. Water was aimlessly spreading out in the open space. Nothing was in its own proper place. All this that I could see, was only the first view. Later on my eyes were no longer free to notice such things. In a brief while I forgot that this place was new for me in the slightest degree. My critical faculty faded and slept.

'Prem Chand left everything and sat with me. It was seven, half-past seven, almost eight, but the current of talk would not be checked. I forgot much during this period. I also forgot that

he was Prem Chand, prince of Hindi novelists. I also forgot that I was a wonder-stricken child standing on the shore of that same literary world. I also forgot that only a short while ago my heart had been filled with disillusionment and dislike at his appearance. I forgot all that, filled with a deep sense of intimacy during our talk.'

Prem Chand brought out a journal of short stories, the *Hans*, in March 1930, just a fortnight before the Dandi march of Gandhiji was to begin. He wrote to Nigam: 'I am going to bring out a Hindi journal, the *Hans*, from *Phalgun*, that is, the new year. It will have sixty-four pages and would mostly feature short stories. It is folly, a lot of headache and no profit, but I was to do something foolish. All my life has been spent in folly. Let there be a little more.'

The *Hans* carried political editorials and was bound to face rough weather. The press was asked to deposit a security of rupees one thousand. Prem Chand thought of closing down both the press and the journal. In November, Shivarani Devi was arrested, while picketing a foreign cloth shop. She was sentenced to two months' imprisonment.

Prem Chand had been a stay-at-home sort of person. During the last years of his life he embarked on a course of journeying which brought him wide and various experiences. He went to Delhi and stayed with Jainendra for about ten days. He went to Patna, but the Reception Committee failed to recognize him. He spent the night at the railway station and was thinking of returning, when at last his hosts ran him to earth.

Prem Chand's collection of short stories, *Samar-Yatra*, was published during this period. These stories depict vividly the bustle, excitement and inspiration of India in the year 1930.

Prem Chand parted company with the Nawal Kishore Press shortly after the death of its proprietor. The concern passed under the management of the Court of Wards. Prem Chand found it difficult to get on with the new set of official appointed to look after the estate. He returned to Banaras by the middle of May 1931. He stayed at Lamahi and went every day to the city to work at his press.

To add to his worries, Prem Chand took over *Jagaran* from Vinod Shanker Vyas. It was a fortnightly paper, but had only two hundred subscribers. On 22nd August the paper made its

first appearance under Prem Chand's editorship who had turned it into a weekly. Outlining the objectives before him Prem Chand wrote:

'We shall try to mould this child into a fearless, truthful, industrious, healthy and thoughtful being that carries itself well. It shall flatter nobody, but shall observe the courtesies. It shall occasionally say bitter things, but out of sense of service. . .'

The losses sustained by Prem Chand on account of the *Hans* and *Jagaran* had broken his back financially. His thoughts were now turning to the film-world. He had received rupees seven hundred and fifty for a film on *Seva Sadan*. He was now being invited to Bombay to write scenarios for the cinema on a contract basis. The Ajanta Cinetone offered him rupees eight thousand a year for writing six stories. In a letter to Jainendra he speaks of this:

'A film company is asking me to come to Bombay. It will not be salary, but a contract. Rupees eight thousand a year. I have reached a point, where I have no alternative except to say 'yes'. Either I go there, or sell my novel in the market. I consider it necessary to have your opinion in this matter. There is no compulsion about attendance. I may write what I please, where I please. I have only to write about half-a-dozen scenarios for them. I am thinking, why not go there for a year? After staying there for a year I may have a contract, according to which I may write a few scenarios from here and have four to five thousand rupees. The *Hans* and *Jagaran* can both live on that and I shall have no trouble about money.'

The *Jagaran*, however, had to suspend publication in May 1934. At the end of the month he reached Bombay. After a few weeks' gap the *Jagaran* was appearing again as a Socialist paper under the editorship of Sampurnanand, but the Saraswati Press continued to print and publish it.

At Bombay, Prem Chand felt very lonely without his family. He was a creature with domestic habits and regretted having had to come away. The two sons were admitted to the Kayastha Pathshala at Allahabad and Shivarani Devi was to join Prem Chand as soon as he had rented a house. Prem Chand wrote to Shivarani Devi:

'I reached here on the 31st. Since then I have been a guest at a friend's. I have looked at several houses. There are three

rooms in a house with rupees fifty as rental. Five rooms for rupees seventy-five as rent. I have not yet fixed on a house. But I shall have to arrange something within a day or two. I cannot yet even say, whether I will stay here or not.'

A few days later he wrote to Jainendra : 'I have taken a house. I have my meals at Dadar in a hotel and stay put. It is a very different world here. All the values are different. I am still trying to understand this life. Am studying books on this subject. I have written nothing so far. In July my family will arrive leaving Dhunnoo there. I shall pass one year somehow. Then I shall see.'

On 23rd July he reached Banaras and returned to Bombay on the 31st. Prem Chand was writing dialogues for a film, entitled *Mazdoor*. The film-owner had prepared the framework of the story. Prem Chand was providing it flesh and blood. The film depicted a patriotic factory-owner, but even this was not palatable to the Board of film-censors. The picture was, however, exhibited in the Punjab, Delhi, U.P. and C.P. It created such a stir among the workers that the police had to be called in. Ultimately, the government of India put a ban on its exhibition.

Prem Chand himself appeared for a few moments in this film. He appeared as a *panch* in a dispute between workers and owners. Meanwhile, conditions were deteriorating in his own press. For three months no wages had been paid to the workers. The manager's treatment towards the workers was not good. They went on strike.

Prem Chand utilised his stay in Bombay to tour the South. He was invited by the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Samiti to address their Convocation. He reached Madras on 28th December and after a few day's stay there went to Mysore and Bangalore.

His stay in the film-world was drawing to a close. He had not been happy there. He wanted art to be uplifting, but the film-owners cared only for entertainment-value. He wrote to Jainendra: 'None of my wishes which I brought with me here seems near fulfilment. These producers cannot move even an inch from the kind of story to which they have been used. They call vulgarity entertainment-value. They believe only in the miraculous. Kings and queens, intrigues by their ministers, fake

battle, kissing—these are their main props. I have written social stories which the educated might also desire to see, but these people are doubtful about filming them. They might not have a run. . .’

On 4th April 1935 Prem Chand shook the dust of the film-world off his feet for good. He wrote to a friend: ‘The decision has been made. I am leaving for Banaras, my home, on the 25th. Ajanta is closing down its activities.’ He left about three months before his contract expired.

In an article Prem Chand voiced his strong disapproval of the state of the cinema, as it existed then. He compares its objectives with those of literature:

‘Literature directs popular taste, does not follow behind it. The cinema follows it. It gives whatever is demanded by popular taste. Literature moves our aesthetic sensibilities and gives us joy. The cinema moves vulgar feelings and renders us crazy. The producer has no remedy against this. So long as there is demand for a certain article, it will appear in the market. Nobody can stop it. Time is yet far off, when the cinema and literature can have the same form. When popular taste is so refined that it will despise what degrades, then the cinema too will acquire the good taste we have in literature.’

THE BOMBAY stay had not brought any spectacular financial gains to Prem Chand. In a letter of Jainendra he drew up his balance-sheet as follows:

‘What did I fetch from Bombay? I got only rupees 6,300/-. Of this the boys took Rs. 1,500/-, my daughter Rs. 400/- and the press Rs. 500/-. With the utmost economy the Bombay expenses for ten months could not be less than Rs. 2,500/-. I brought Rs. 1,400/- and discomfiture only from there.’

The *Jagaran* had consumed much money and it had now closed down. The *Hans* was wobbling. Prem Chand thought of taking the press and the *Hans* to Allahabad, but these plans did not come off. Ultimately, the *Hans* was handed over to the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad and Prem Chand became co-editor with K.M. Munshi. The financial problem could not be solved, however, despite these endeavours.

During the last days of his life Prem Chand toured India extensively. Suddenly his energy seemed to flare up. It was the last flicker. He accepted all invitations and went everywhere—Allahabad, Purnia in Bihar, Lucknow, Delhi, Lahore. He seemed desirous of seeing as much of his country as he could, before the final parting came.

He went to Allahabad to attend a meeting of the Hindustani Academy. Here he met some leading progressive writers and gave them his blessings. He was also desirous of establishing a Hindustani Sabha which would bring Hindi and Urdu writers together. Branches of this body were set up at Delhi and Lahore with the help and support of Jainendra. Then Prem Chand came to Lucknow to preside over the first session of the Progressive Writers’ Conference. The Conference met on 9th and 10th April 1936. Prem Chand had already welcomed this movement in January 1936. He had written: ‘We are truly happy to know that our educated and thoughtful young men are desirous of bringing about a new energy and awakening in literature. The Indian Progressive Writers’ Association was founded in London with this end in view and the manifesto they have sent to us

arouses the hope if this association sticks to the path proposed by it, a new age will come to our literature.'

In his address to the Progressive Writers' Conference, Prem Chand declared: 'I have no hesitation in declaring that like other things I weigh art also in the scales of utility. We shall have to change our criteria of beauty . . . Art meant and still means, worship of form in a narrow sense . . . It has not yet developed the vision to see supreme beauty in the life-struggle . . .'

'There is no room in the temple of literature for those who love wealth. Here those devotees are needed who regard service as the only significant thing in life, who feel pain in their heart and have strength which love provides . . .'

He declared: 'We are soldiers holding aloft the banner of the community.'

From Lucknow, Prem Chand went to Lahore. Here he was given a very big reception by the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha. He attended numerous meetings and emphasised the need of bringing Hindi and Urdu together, wherever he spoke. From Lahore he went to Nagpur to attend the session of the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad. This session was attended by Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru, but there was much conflict on the question whether Hindi or Urdu was to be the medium for the proceedings and work of the Parishad. Maulana Abdul Haq left the Parishad in a huff, when Gandhiji suggested Hindi-Hindustani.

After his return from Bombay, Prem Chand had concentrated on writing *Godan* and left Lamahi only after completing it. There were many distractions—conferences, tours, meetings, much going to and fro. Finally, the novel was released from the press towards the end of May 1936.

Godan forms the summit and apex of Prem Chand's work as a writer. This was the climax towards which all his writings had been tending. In this novel he attacked both the evils of landlordism as well as industrialism. Whether in the field or in the factory, the toiler was suffering excruciating agony. In *Godan* Prem Chand symbolised India's sorrows in the character of Hori. Hori is India, oppressed and tyrannized over through the centuries, yet preserving its essential identity, its largeness of heart and outlook. There are other characters that loom large in the novel—Gobar, Dhania, Jhunia, Mehta, Malti. They are

drawn both from the village world as well as the world of cities, where exploitation goes on marching with giant strides. They resist evil and wrong, trying to change the world and in the process changing themselves, growing nobler and more revolutionary.

Godan is a landmark in the history of Indian fiction. No writer in India has been such a master in the art of painting the rural world. It is a large canvas of epic dimensions. And the characters, ordinary village folk, take on an epic grandeur before our eyes. Prem Chand gives to his work a socialist orientation, presenting to us the vision of a world without exploitation and without sorrow. Hori dies towards the end of the novel, struggling to bring such a world into being.

Godan was a work of three years' labour. Prem Chand had begun working on it in 1932. He had been writing various short stories, articles and editorials also during this period. He was leading a very busy life otherwise too, attending meetings, conferences, travelling constantly. His health was now completely ruined. He had been a victim of chronic dysentery since Mahoba days. Now he was down with a gastric ulcer and dropsy.

On the 16th June he vomitted several times and passed motions of blood. He complained of severe pain in the stomach region. This was an illness from which he did not recover. On 19th June there was a condolence meeting on Gorky's death in the office of the *Aj*. Despite illness Prem Chand attended this meeting and wrote a special address for the occasion. Shivarani Devi happened to wake up at two o'clock in the night and found him writing this speech. When she remonstrated, Prem Chand said: 'What am I to do? I cannot sleep. I have to write this address too.' At the meeting he felt so weak that he could not read his speech. Somebody else had to read it.

On the 25th night he felt very bad. He asked his son to fan him, complaining of the heat. He vomitted blood. Shivarani Devi came running. Prem Chand said: 'Rani! I am leaving!'. After the 25th, Prem Chand did not have good sleep. Other ailments were complicating things. Despite all this Prem Chand was trying to work on a new novel, *Mangal-Sutra*, which remained incomplete.

On 2nd August he left for Lucknow with his elder son for

an x-ray examination. A few days previously Prem Chand had described his condition in a letter to Akhtar Husain Raipuri: 'I have been ill for about a month. The trouble is gastric ulcer. I am vomiting blood, so I can do no work. I am having treatment, but there is no improvement so far. If I survive, I shall certainly bring out a journal entitled *Biswin Shatabdi* (The Twentieth Century), for the expression of our views.'

The treatment at Lucknow was doing no good. Prem Chand decided to return to Banaras. He was now a skeleton. He told Shivarani Devi: 'I shall not live now. It is dropsy.'

He shifted to a new, more airy house at Ram Katora. It had once been the garden-house of Bharatendu Harish Chandra. During these last days many literary friends of Prem Chand surrounded him with their love. Jainendra was with him until the end came. Munshi Daya Narain Nigam rushed down from Kanpur. Among others, 'Prasad', Nand Dulare Vajpeyi, Pt Ram Naresh Tripathi, and 'Nirala' also came to see him.

During his last days the *Hans* was asked to deposit a security of rupees one thousand. The government objected to a play by Seth Govind Das. The Bharatiya Parishad decided to stop publication of the journal and even made an announcement to that effect under the signature of Prem Chand. He wrote to Gandhiji about this. Gandhiji said, Prem Chand could continue to publish the *Hans*, if he so desired. Prem Chand took charge of the journal and the security money was deposited. He said to Shivarani Devi.

'Rani, please deposit the security, though I may live or not. The *Hans* shall continue. If I survive, I shall make all arrangements. If I go, it shall be a memorial for me.'

The September number of the *Hans* contained Prem Chand's article, 'Mahajani Sabhyata'. This may be considered as his last literary will and testament.

Jainendra has described the night of 7th October, Prem Chand's last night on earth: 'On the night previous to his death I was sitting next to his bed. He was to close his eyes on this world the next morning at seven. He was talking to me the same morning at three. There was silence all round. The room was dark and small. Everyone was asleep. Words came from his lips in whispers and were quickly lost. He had to be heard more by the heart than the ears.'

'He extended his right hand before me. He said, "Press it."

'The hand was swollen and white rather than pale. I began to rub it.

'He did not speak. He lay, eyes closed. He had finished talking about the *Hans* at midnight. He had expressed his hopes, his desires to me then, partly with words and partly with his eyes. He was still oppressed by worries concerning the *Hans* and concerning the state of literature. He was worried also about the future of his children. He derived some solace from me.

'Now at three in the morning with his swollen hand in mine I was wondering, was his reliance on me justified? At midnight I had committed the impudence of even arguing with him. That was rankling now. What should I say? What could I do?

'Meantime he said: "Jainendra!"

'Having said this he continued to look at me, silently. I pressed his hand with both of mine. Looking at him I said, "Do not worry, Babuji. You are now recovering. We are there for all the work."

"He continued to look at me. Then he said, "Idealism will not help."

'I wanted to say, "Idealism . . ."

'But he interrupted me: "Do not argue." He turned over and closed his eyes.

'After a while he said. "It is very hot. Fan me."

'I began to fan him. He could not sleep. He was in great pain. But he did not groan. He was lying with his eyes open.

'After a few minutes he said "Jainendra, go and sleep."

'How could I know that his minutes on earth were numbered. I went away to sleep.'

'By morning he had a fit of unconsciousness from which he did not wake up'.

On 8th October 1936, at about seven-thirty in the morning, Prem Chand closed his eyes on this world.

He died prematurely at the age of fifty-six, worn out by disease, financial worries, anxieties and by the incessant struggle against a life that humiliated man and undermined his faith. Prem Chand died fighting for a better life, a better and freer India. He was at the height of his powers when he passed away. He was writing works of such power and beauty as 'Mahajani Sabhyata' and *Mangal-Sutra*. The flag was boldly held aloft to

the very end and not allowed to droop even for a moment. He was ever a fighter and died in battle, with his armour on. He left a proud legacy behind him for his heirs to preserve and cherish. We are the heirs of that proud legacy.

HINDI FICTION was in its infancy when Prem Chand appeared on the scene. It was mostly concerned with stories of miraculous happenings such as were to be found in *Chandrakanta Santati* or *Bhhootnath*. A variety to this fare was provided by the doings of Mr. Blake, a detective with inordinate faculties of detection. Social novels like *Pariksha Guru* which appeared occasionally did not have any great literary value. They were chiefly of historical interest.

After Prem Chand's contribution Hindi fiction reached its fullest maturity and flowering. Prem Chand gave to Hindi fiction a new social awareness, a new sense of purpose. In his hands the Hindi novel came very close to life and faithfully reflects reality. Prem Chand was an idealist who desired to mould life according to dreams, but he did not close his eyes to the harsh, ugly truths of life. He mitigated nothing, condoned nothing; his work uplifts and exalts the reader. He was truly a people's writer who wrote about the life of common folk in a language they could understand. His appeal goes much beyond the closed circle of the intelligentsia and he has readers among people who have very little education. In this he reminds us of mediaeval poets like Tulsidas and Kabir whose word brings magic into the lives of masses of people in India.

He wrote about a dozen novels of the highest literary merit: *Sewa Sadan*, *Premasharam*, *Rangabhoomi*, *Kaya-Kalpa*, *Varadan*, *Nirmala*, *Pratigya*, *Ghaban*, *Karmabhoomi* and *Godan*. He wrote almost two hundred and fifty stories, some of them among the finest in the literature of the world. His son, Amrit Rai, has listed two hundred and twenty-four of them in an appendix to his book, *Qalam ka Sipahi*. The sheer plenitude of this creative work is astonishing, but even more so is its quality.

We could list certain themes as being favourites of Prem Chand. They find repeated expression in his works:

1. Love of ornaments and finery; the trouble and distress this brings.
2. The peasant's tale of woe and suffering.

3. Communal tensions, orthodoxy, superstition and blind prejudices.
4. Dowry and the marriage system.
5. The plight of the Hindu widow.
6. The stepmother.
7. Social movements and national upsurge.
8. Historical interest: mediaeval history and recent Indian history.
9. Supernatural interests and intrusions.
10. Themes of patriotic fervour.
11. Games like *Kabaddi* and *gilli-danda*.
12. Satire and exposure of pretence and hypocrisy.
13. Themes of social injustice.
14. Transformation of character under the impact of social reality. Stories of characters.

Prem Chand created the socio-political novel in Hindi. His novels have more political colouring than either the novels of Sharat Chandra or Tagore. Prem Chand charged Bengali fiction with being 'feminine' in tone. Jainendra records the following conversation with Prem Chand:

'I said—Bengali literature touches the heart more. Do you agree with this? What is the reason for this?

'Prem Chand replied—I certainly agree. The reason is that it is more feminine in feeling. I do not have enough of this.

'Hearing this I stared at him. I asked—Does it move the heart more because of its feminine quality?

'He said—Yes. It often becomes reminiscent. In memory there is the liquid quality of feeling. In resolve there is the hardness of feeling. For creativity one needs both.

'He continued—Jainendra, I do not know clearly. I am not a Bengali. They are emotional. I cannot go where emotions take you. I cannot give so much. You can reach with emotion where knowledge cannot take you. But I feel, Jainendra, that we need hardness also.

'Saying this Prem Chand blushed like a girl . . . He said—Jainendra, Ravindra and Sharat are very great, but is that the way for Hindi? At least that is not the way for me.'

There is little poetry in the vision of Prem Chand. He did see how the coming of spring transformed the countryside. He

saw the beauty of village figures sitting round a fire and talking of their common woes. He understood the beauty of noble human relationships, but he was chiefly occupied with questions of right and wrong, social justice and freedom. There was softness and gentleness in him, but his writing is mostly sharp arrows loosened against tyranny and oppression in society.

Prem Chand told good and exciting stories. His novels hold the reader spell-bound by sheer story-interest, but it has to be admitted that the influence left on his mind by such reading as *Tilismé Hoshruha* lent to his fiction elements of sensation and melodrama. Too much happens in this world. There are deaths and suicides, miraculous coincidence. In *Rangabhoomi* Sophie is captured and held prisoner by rebels. There are gun-battles and hair-raising events. Ultimately Sophie is miraculously united with Vinay in a railway train. In *Kaya-Kalpa* a rani remains young and beautiful like Rider Haggard's *She*.

He is also a master of caricature, laying on the colours too thick and strong. He is swept off by the vigour of his own descriptions and ignores all restraint or reserve. When in *Kaya-Kalpa* Manorama pays a visit to Munshi Vajradhar's house, fantastic things happen. Munshi Vajradhar is so excited that he trips and falls and the light is blown out. It is pitch dark in the house.

In a modern novel the pace of events is usually slow and not much happens. One has a meal, goes for a walk, watches the flow of traffic and broods. Indian society is still in many ways backward and the flow of events is here swift and dramatic. It is less so in more sophisticated societies, where the aroma of a cigar or the bouquet of liquor provides the highest excitement.

The greatness of Prem Chand as a writer lies in his creative gifts. He created life in superabundance, peopled a whole world of his own making. The world of Prem Chand is inhabited by hundreds of people—peasants, landlords, money-lenders, industrialists, adventurers, fighters for truth and justice, heroes cast in a noble mould, good people, bad people, gentle girls and shrewish old women. There are innumerable characters, some of the tall figures of literary history—Suman, Prem Shanker, Surdas, Samarkant, Hori, Sophie, Vinay, a whole host of them. These characters are our personal friends and more real to us than many living people.

Thus Prem Chand paints a picture of India through his writings, of people fighting against wrong and seeking redress—the peasant against the landlord and the money-lender, the widow against orthodoxy, the untouchable against the priest. By his revolutionary fervour Prem Chand transforms the Indian scene. It is not a picture of dumb, driven cattle; it is the teeming millions of India marching forward to victory.

Prem Chand wrote a large number of short stories. The same vision of India emerges in these stories as in his novels. Here we have true pictures of society, of noble men and women functioning exaltedly in their own sphere of life. Among these stories some of the most exalted are 'Barhe Ghar ki Beti' which was Prem Chand's favourite, 'Panch Parmeshwar', 'Ishwari Nyaya', 'Namak ka Darogha.' We have portraits, significant and typical such as Boorhi Kaki, Kazaki, Atma Ram or the old granny in 'Idgah'. We have stories cast in a historical setting, 'Kshama', 'Rani Sarandha', 'Raja Hardaul'. We have snippets of life with all its poignancy and pathos—'Poos ki Rat', 'Sawa Ser Gehun', 'Thakur ka Kuan', 'Mukti-dhan', 'Sadgati'. We have stories of patriotic fervour such as 'Samar-yatra'. We have satires like 'Mote Ram Shastri'. The whole colourful and sad pageant of Indian life is here, presented with vividness, strength and passion.

Here we have families being divided, a little child concerned about his grandmother, a son-in-law living with parents-in-law and being humiliated, a game of *gilli-danda*, of a good daughter of the village, of a terrible old woman whose job in life is character-assassination. There is the story of two bullocks, Hira and Moti, other stories of rank superstition and blind dogma, pictures of an age that is vanishing, such as 'Shatranj ke Khilari'. They give us intimate glimpses into the heart and soul of India, with all its backwardness and its urge to fight against these evils.

In many of his stories Prem Chand depicts a struggle in the human heart, between egoism and nobility. Ultimately the noble impulse is victorious. He is an uncompromising painter of reality, but his idealism seeks to give direction to life. That is why he liked 'Barhe Ghar ke Beti' most among his own short stories.

Replying to a Lahore journal on how he wrote stories, he wrote: 'My stories are often based on some inspiration or ex-

perience. I try to infuse a dramatic colour into them. But I never write stories merely to relate an episode. I wish to present some emotional or philosophical truth in the story. My pen refuses to move until I can discover some such basis.'

Writing to Vinod Shanker Vyas on his collection of short stories, *Madhukari*, Prem Chand defines the objectives of literature: 'In my opinion—everybody's opinion—literature has three aims—enrichment, entertainment and depiction. But presentation and entertainment are included within this enrichment. A writer's entertainment is different from that provided by clowns or fools. It embraces the concept of enrichment. Its exposition too keeps the objective of exaltation before it.'

In another letter to Vinod Shanker Vyas, Prem Chand writes: 'I desire that plots of stories should be taken from life and solve the problems of life. I do not like the function of poetry to be performed by the story. A prose-poem strikes at the heart-strings, more so than the story, because it is written with that purpose. But its blow is like the sound of music which strikes the ear and after a little titillation fades away. The story presents to you characters in action before your vision.'

THE POWER of Prem Chand's work lies in its fidelity to life, its truthful presentation of India—an India that lives in the cities and the countryside, in the fields and pastures, the byways and highways, in narrow lanes and alleys, in small fields and tumbledown huts. Prem Chand desired to transform this life by the power of his pen and succeeded to a large extent in doing so. Readers of his work were greatly influenced in their thinking by his words.

Prem Chand was a revolutionary thinker who hit out against wrong and injustice in all its vicious myriad forms. He hit out boldly and courageously against the humiliation of foreign rule, even though he was in the employ of the Government. He stood by the peasant and the worker, by the untouchable against the priest, by oppressed women against social tyrants. He hated tyranny in all its various forms.

He was an enlightened rationalist who stood foursquare against orthodoxy and superstition, against blind faith. He was an iconoclast whom the orthodox slaves of convention disliked and hated. They repeatedly attacked him, but he struck back at them with vigour and venom.

He came under the influence of Gandhism, moving from the ideas of Gokhale towards a more radical approach. He was steadily feeling his way towards a socialist vision. He was against all forms of oppression in the field or the factory. In a letter to Nigam he declared that he had 'almost accepted Bolshevik ideas'. He declared that he belonged to 'the party of the future which will have as its aim the political education of downtrodden people.'

He was talking with Shivarani Devi about Swaraiya. She asked him: 'Will there be no exploitation after Swaraiya?'

He replied: 'There is some exploitation everywhere. Perhaps it is the way of life that the strong should oppress the poor. Of course, there is Russia, where the big have been cut down to size and now the poor are happy there. Perhaps here too we may have something like Russia.'

In a letter to Banarsi Das Chaturvedi, Prem Chand outlines his own desires and aspirations: 'I have no desires. At present my biggest desire is that we should be victorious in the battle for freedom. I have no craving for fame or money. I get enough to eat. I have no desire for a car or a bungalow. Of course, I desire to write a few books of high merit, but their aim too would be the winning of freedom. . . I do not desire even to live in peace. I wish to be doing something all the time for literature and for my country. . .'

In a letter to Indra Nath Madan, Prem Chand defines his basic faith. He cannot have trust any longer in a benevolent order in the universe. He writes: 'I had formerly believed in a force above all. Not as a conclusion based on thinking, but only as a traditional belief. That faith is now shattered. Undoubtedly there is some great power behind the universe. But I cannot believe that it has anything to do with human affairs, just as it cannot have anything to do with the affairs of ants, flies or mosquitoes.'

To Jainendra he wrote: 'My life has been spent in studying and listening to intellectual things. I have no faith in God, no reverence. You are moving towards theism, rather growing into a confirmed *bhakt*. I have been moving from scepticism towards atheism.'

In a story he makes a character say: 'Nobody can be more cruel than *He* in this world. God cannot be kind, if he punishes his puppets for their mistakes and follies by pushing them into hell-fires. God is a thousand times more cruel than kind. I hate the very concept of such a God.'

Such were the basic ideas of Prem Chand about life and the universe. They form the groundwork of his art. On these firm foundations rests the impressive structure of his creative works. His ideas were the driving force, the inspiration behind his work. In all this we may compare Prem Chand with Gorki, Prem Chand, like Gorki, was a people's writer whose strength lay in his desire to transform the life of the common people with the great weapon of his art. That is why power and strength rather than beauty are the keynote of his work. Hence the masculine quality of his work rather than the feminine note of tenderness, gentleness, lyricism.

Very occasionally otherworldly notes have crept into his

work, as in his stories 'Mooth', 'Nag-pooja' and 'Mantra' or in certain portions of *Kaya-Kalpa*. But he was firmly shaking off such influences and appears as a full-fledged rationalist in his later work. He was very much a hard-headed, down-to-earth person and could not be misled and side-tracked from his aim by futile musings.

Desirous of reaching out to the vast mass of readers, Prem Chand forged a very simple, supple and yet powerful medium, a language which is either Hindi or Urdu but with a few changes. It is a flowing river that knows no obstacles or hindrances in its way. Prem Chand loved words and used them with prodigality. His style, like the other elements of his art, is remarkable for its vigour and strength rather than for ornamentation.

Prem Chand desired Hindi and Urdu to move closer to each other, just as he desired the two major communities of India to move closer. He found noble sons in Islam. He was himself tended with loving care by a Moslem during the last days of his life. One of the finest stories of Prem Chand is 'Kshama' in which a Moslem father saves a Christian, killer of his own son from the wrath of his co-religionists. Prem Chand was a true and genuine believer in the ideal of secularism, long before the word had been thus bandied about.

PREM CHAND'S last will and testament as a writer are his writings done immediately before his death, chiefly his essay, 'Mahajani Sabhyata' and his incomplete novel, *Mangal-Sutra*. We, the heirs of his spirit, may find in these last words of his a beacon-light to guide our faltering footsteps. Prem Chand wrote these works, while he lay in his sick bed.

In his essay, 'Mahajani Sabhyata', Prem Chand lays the blame on the profit motive as being responsible for all evils in modern society. He writes: 'In this capitalist culture money is the sole motive of all activity. A country is ruled, so that capitalists and bankers may derive the largest profits. From this point of view the world is today governed by bankers. Human society has been split into two parts. The larger portion consists of those who toil and labour and a very small part comprises those who have enslaved a large mass by their power and influence. They have no sympathy, no pity for this large section. It exists only to sweat for its masters, to shed blood for them and then one day to depart from this life quietly . . .'

Prem Chand saw fresh hope arising for mankind in the creation of a new civilization in a far-off land:

'The sum of a new civilization is rising in the far West. It has uprooted completely this bankerdom or capitalism. The basic principle behind this new civilization is that every citizen who creates something by the labour of his body or his mind, can be a respected member of society. Those who lord it over others on the strength of somebody else's labour or riches accumulated by their forefathers, are worthy of contempt. Such people have no right to express a view in matters of government and can have no rights of citizenship. The capitalist, enraptured by this wave, joins his voice to that of all the other capitalists in the world and heaps curses on it . . .'

Prem Chand had espoused poverty in his life. He had not opted for a life of riches and plenty. He had been a soldier of fortune, his sword at the disposal of all lost causes. He was Don Quixote attacking giant windmills, the citadels of wealth

and affluence. This idealism of Prem Chand was the strength and inspiration behind his writing. In his last work which remained only in an embryonic form, Prem Chand defines his faith once again. The hero of his last novel, *Mangal-Sutras*, is Prem Chand himself:

'Nobody can deny that he had a great spirit. It was impossible that he should be asked for help and not get it. . .He had no interest in anything except the service of literature and in this there was no money. True, he received fame and this sufficed for his self-satisfaction. He did not believe in acquisition. . .He desired to live a life of self-respect, nothing more. He certainly had a certain vanity, call it pride if you will, which is common to all devotees of literature. . .'

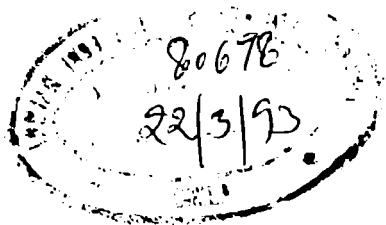
Such was Prem Chand in his own words, This may be described as a portrait of the artist by himself. Yet for all his simplicity and naivete Prem Chand left India richer and stronger than he had found it. 1880 was an age of moderate leaders who made brave speeches from public platforms and nothing more was considered necessary for achieving freedom. 1936 was a year of destiny for India, a year of new hopes and aspirations. India was now firmly on the march, moving with giant strides towards its goal of social, economic and political freedom. The writings of Prem Chand were a powerful contribution towards advance in this direction. His writings have been a vital factor in making India what it is today. There have been many other forces at work in shaping the destiny of modern India. His writings to have been a force that has contributed towards making our life what it is.

A Glossary of Indian Words

<i>Azan</i>	The call to prayers.
<i>Bhakt</i>	Devotee.
<i>Chhotak</i>	Prem Chand's younger brother, Mahtab Rai.
<i>Dhoti</i>	An apparel worn round the nether half of the body in India.
<i>Gamchha</i>	A sort of towel or large scarf.
<i>Gilli-danda</i>	An Indian game played with two bits of stick.
<i>Holi</i>	Colour-throwing festival.
<i>Khatkin</i>	Woman of low caste.
<i>Khichrhi</i>	A concoction of rice and pulses.
<i>Kurmies</i>	A sub-caste.
<i>Lalimli</i>	Name of a woollen mill at Kanpur.
<i>Mauza</i>	Sub-division.
<i>Mazdoor</i>	Worker.
<i>Muezzin</i>	One who calls the faithful to prayer.
<i>Phalgun</i>	The last month of the year in the Indian Calendar, equivalent to February-March.
<i>Panch</i>	Arbitrator.
<i>Sahib</i>	A high-placed official.
<i>Samvat</i>	Year in the Indian Calendar.
<i>Takht</i>	A wooden board for sitting or lying down.
<i>Taluqdar</i>	A rich landlord.
<i>Tarai</i>	Swampy region below the Himalayan foot-hills.
<i>Vaidya</i>	A physician following the indigenous system of medicine.
<i>Upanyas Samrat</i>	King among novelists.

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