

Chapter-III

Premchand was the pseudonym of Dhanpat Rai. He was born at Pandepur, a village near Varanasi on July 31, 1880. He is a well-known Hindi and Urdu writer, who wrote 300 short stories, novels and two plays. He used to write under the pseudonym of Premchand. He led a tragic life; he lost his mother at the age of 8, his father was remarried, and he was brought up by his grandmother, who also died very early. Premchand himself died on Oct 8, 1936 at the early age of 46. Most of his novels and short stories are full of tragic characters and events. Premchand spent most of his life in villages, so we find a very realistic description of village life in his writings. In this novel, the poor peasants are the subaltern people. They are exploited by the powerful of the village. They are always under the burden of the heavy rents and taxes. These people do not have even enough food, clothes and other basic necessities of life. These people are inferior to others socially, and economically. They are ill-treated because they have no money. The Zamindars, the money-lenders, and the religious leaders of the village are the people who control the fate of these poor and innocent people. They constitute the ruling class in the village.

Godan is a well known Hindi novel published in 1936, and it was translated into English later. It deals with the tragic life story of a poor peasant Hori, who lives with his wife Dhanian and three children, son Gobar and two daughters, Sona and Rupa in a small village Belari, in Oudh. He is a victim of the orthodox social values and norms. He is a peasant because of his caste, and he is not free to do some other profession, even though he lives a poor and a miserable life as a peasant. He thinks it a disgrace to leave the paternal profession and become a labourer. But in the end, he has to become labourer at road construction site because of the debt and poverty. He is bound to these social values and norms. He lives in utter poverty, and even is not able to provide enough food to his family. Due to the miseries in his life, and the lack of the basic necessities of life, he looks older than his real age. He is not forty yet, but he looks much older than his age. He says to his wife Dhanian that “I shall never get the age of sixty...I shall be gone long before that” (GD 2). His three children out of six died due to the lack of proper medical care, as he does not have enough money to “buy even one anna of medicine for them” (GD 2).

He is a landless peasant who tills the land of the Zamindar. Not only he, but his whole family works on the land, but even though the crop is not enough. He does the work of tilling the land of the Zamindar and pays the rent for it, but that is not all. He also has to “play sycophant”

(GD 1) to keep the Zamindar in good humour. He does the odd jobs for the Zamindar without any payment, apart from tilling the land. The rent of the Zamindar is “difficult to liquidate” even if they would live “a niggardly life stinted on food and clothes, scraped together every elusive anna” (GD 1). These characters are socially, economically, religiously exploited, and they are from the lowest strata of the society. Thus these people deserve to be called subalterns, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay “Theses on Subaltern”, “...describes ‘the bottom layers of society constituted by specific modes of exclusion from markets, political-legal representation, and the possibility of full membership in dominant social strata’.”(Spivak, XX)

Even in the state of utter poverty, Hori wants to own a cow because he thinks that the cow would be the solution to all his problems. If he would have a cow, he would have enough milk to feed his family and also would have calves, which would grow into good bullocks. To have a cow is “the brightest dream of his life, his greatest ambition” (GD 3). And one day his dream of owning a cow, comes true. He gets a milch cow on credit from Bhola, who is a milkman living in the nearby village. All the villagers come to see the cow. Soon the cow becomes the apple of eye for everyone in the family. But, Heera the younger brother of Hori who lives separately, grows jealous of the cow, and poisons the cow. The cow dies, and this opens the Pandora’s Box for Hori and his family. He has to face many difficulties because of the death of the cow. The cow is considered a very sacred animal in the Hinduism, and Heera has committed a sin by killing it. So, he runs away from the village to escape the punishment. In his absence, Hori—being his elder brother—takes the responsibility of Heera’s family and fields. With so much of difficulties, Hori tries to manage everything, but then comes another bolt from the blue.

His son Gobar is attracted towards the daughter of Bhola, Jhunia who is a widow. As a result of this love affair between Gobar and Jhunia, she becomes pregnant and Gobar runs away from his house. Once, Gobar “was ready to suffer ostracism for a sensible girl like Jhunia” (GD 38) but when she gets pregnant, he runs away. He goes to the city of Lucknow to earn good money as for him the city “...seems at first a place where one can succeed. Gobar, however, eventually realizes like his father that he cannot escape the hardship. Even in the city where dreams seemed achievable, Gobar fails.”¹

Jhunia is a widow, and she commits a sin by getting pregnant as it is not acceptable in an orthodox society that a widow gets pregnant. Hori lets her live in his house as there is nowhere she

can go. Hori runs into difficulties more deeply than before. The powerful people are also annoyed at him as Gobar makes fun of these people like Jhenguri Singh on the occasion of Holi. So, these also create problem for Hori by claiming the revenue of the land which he has already paid. He is made to compensate for the wrongs of his son. A heavy fine of 100 rupees is imposed on him; Bhola takes away his pair of bullocks in place of the cow; and he is left with nothing to feed his family. But Hori is man of strong will power. He bears all the sufferings with patience. Hori takes a loan from the second wife of Bhola to get his elder daughter Sona, married. He is a loving father who tries to save his children from all kinds of miseries and hardships of life. But to save his land, he has to sell his youngest daughter Rupa to an elderly man who is just four years younger than Hori for money.

He believes in God and fate. He takes all the difficulties as a result of his previous life's sins. Hori feels himself bound to the society and thinks it as his duty to obey all the orders of the social and religious leaders. He is like all the other peasants, scared of the strict social rules, and never dares to defy the orders of the society. But, his son Gobar is just opposite to him in nature. So, often the father and son have arguments with each-other. He is of the revolutionary nature and protests against these social rules and leaves his paternal profession, goes to the town, adopts other profession, and lives a good life. Gobar is a youth with revolutionary spirit. He believes in the equality of all men. He thinks money as the only solution to all the problems of his family. When he runs away from his house he thinks that he would work hard in the city and earn enough money to make their life comfortable.

In the city, Gobar tries his hands at many different professions. He starts selling eatable goods at the roadside. He earns good money, and starts lending money to the people. He returns to his village to get Jhunia with him, and spends a lot of money on the occasion of Holi to outshine the celebration of Jhenguri Singh's house. When he returns, he finds his place occupied. He starts working as mill worker, but a strike breaks out, and he gets injured seriously. His son also dies. Jhunia gets pregnant again. Gobar starts working as gardener at the house of Miss Malti. He earns enough money to provide his wife and son a good life. On the occasion of Rupa's wedding, Gobar returns to village, and "it was sad homecoming for Gobar. It pained him to see the condition of the house. A portion almost on the point of collapse; only one bullock at the door (and that one as good as dead) ." (GD 330)

The desire of owning a cow still burns in the heart of Hori. He now works as a labourer on the site of road-construction. While working there, one day he feels dizzy and vomits blood, and he is taken to his house where he takes his last breath. Even at his death-time, people standing nearby, tell him to donate a cow, as it is believed in the Hinduism that the *godan* (the donation of a cow) in one's life-time can bring emancipation to one after death. But, Hori does not have much to donate except a small amount of money. His wife Dhania gives away all the money i.e., twenty annas, which they have at the house and this is the all *godan* which Hori was able to make after his life-time struggle. This is the end of the tragic life story of Hori. He symbolizes the poor peasants of India who do not have any hope in their life. Hori is the symbol of the millions of Indians who live in utter poverty, and have little means of livelihood. This novel, like his previous novels, does not end with "a note of Gandhian compromise, or idealism," but depicts "the hard and cruel realities of the life of peasant Hori, the hero of this epic of rural India." (Gopal 427)

There is one more plot, running parallel to the main plot of Hori and his family, constituting the Rai Amarpal Singh, Miss Malti, Mr. Mehta, Mr. Khanna, Mr. Tankha, and Mirza Saheb. All these characters are from the upper or the high class. These people present a sharp contrast to the tragic life of Hori. These characters run after power, position and money, while Hori dreams only of having a cow. Their life is a direct contrast to the struggle and hardships of Hori's life. Hori does not have money to get his children treated; to get his daughters married; to buy a cow; and to pay off his debts. But these people have money to bet on trifle games. All these characters are hypocrite and social snubs. Rai Amarpal Singh appears to have nationalistic views, and to be the well-wisher of the poor tenants and peasants. But, he is doing so just to gain a good-will among people.

Through the characters of Miss Malti and Mr. Mehta, the novelist presents a commentary upon the man- woman relations. These characters throw light on the social perception towards the condition of women, in the modern time, which is changing very rapidly. Mr. Mehta advocated for the traditional Indian women who make sacrifices for her family and demands nothing in return. While Miss Malti pleaded for the equality of the men and women. She is a girl with the modern outlook to life and world.

These characters from the upper class of the society have no concern for livelihood. So they have spare time to ponder over such question, but the poor people living in the villages have

with them the burning issues more important than these, like their livelihood and food. Such questions barely have any existence for them. These people live a very miserable and difficult life. As Bhola says, “A man is not a man without wealth, power, and education. We are no better than bullocks, born to be yoked” (GD 20). In this novel, these two worlds are presented in comparison and contrast to each-other.

Premchand has the power to create the life-like characters. Characters created by him are so powerful that they appear to emerge out of the written pages and become alive before our eyes. His characters are always the living beings, and not the dead things. His characters always become the typical example of the class to which they belong. His characters represent the specific characteristics of their respective classes. Premchand’s works may be fictional, but his characters and the situations are realistic. They represent the true condition of the peasants living in the rural areas, and still depend on the nature for their future. In this novel, Premchand not only depicts the plight of the peasants but also the plight of the factory workers. Premchand also depicts the social and religious hypocrisy of the age. In this novel, not only the life in a small village, but life in a big town, like Lucknow also is depicted by the novelist. Hori, Dhanias, Gobars, Jhenguri Singh, Pandit Nokhey Ram, Pandit Datadin, Pateshwari Singh are the characters who live in a village, and Rai Amarपाल Singh, Mr. Khanna, Mr. Mehta, and Miss Malti are the characters who live in Lucknow in the novel. This novel is a commentary upon the then social and religious conditions.

Premchand has depicted a true picture of the exploitation meted out to the innocent peasants. Each character has his/her own peculiar characteristics. Hori, the protagonist is an orthodox who believes in the old social conventions, and does not want to break away with these, no matter what price he has to pay for this. Dhanias can fight with the whole world for her family, but at the same time she also wants to maintain the good name of the family. She always rebukes Hori for being so cowardice to follow the each and every word of the leaders of the village. But, she is also the biggest support to her husband. By nature Gobar is a revolutionary youth. He is introduced in the novel by describing that “his face reflected discontent and defiance; he worked to show his indifference towards life” (GD 14). Thakur Jhenguri Singh is the money-lender of the village. He is also a social hypocrite. He himself is married three times, but opposes to the relations of Jhunias and Gobars.

Rai Amarपाल Singh is the Zamindar of the village where Hori lives. He appears to be a

supporter of the cause of the poor peasants, and talks with them very sympathetically. But, he is actually a show off only. He only wants to maintain his right of the Zamindari. Pandit Datadin symbolizes the vices prevalent in the religious practices. He always tries to get as much money as possible out of the people, whether by the honest or the dishonest means, it does not matter. He also works as the money-lender sometimes, and has accumulated good wealth. Pateshwari Singh is the government officer. He is the revenue clerk, and has the duty to collect the revenue tax from the peasants, also makes the peasants to do the forced labour for him. He appears to be sympathetic towards the peasants, but does not miss a single chance to extort money out of the peasants.

In this village, the life of the poor is controlled by the powerful people of the village. The Zamindar, the Pandit of the village, the money-lenders and the revenue clerk are the people who decide the fate of the poor people. All these people exploit the poor as much as they can. The more powerful a person is the more, cruel he is. There is big gulf drawn between the poor and the rich. There is social and religious hypocrisy prevalent in the village. Rai Saheb talks big things about the plight of the peasants, but when it comes to do something practical for the peasants, he starts giving excuses. When Mr. Mehta tells him to renounce his rights as Zamindar, he replies:

I have come to believe that the lot of the peasants can be ameliorated not by pious intentions but by granting concessions as their inherent right. That a despot should give up his self-interest of his own free will is asking too much. In spite of my best intentions I can't give up my self-interest; it will have to be snatched away from me. Call it cowardice; I call it helplessness...The trouble is that we have to kill our conscience to such an extent that not a trace of self-respect remains in us. We have to grind down the tenants...We are like spoon-fed babies, healthy to look at, frail inside. (GD 46-47)

Mr. Mehta says that "I believe in the theory that the rich and the poor will always be with us. And that is as it should be. Wiping out distinctions will lead to social chaos." (GD 47)

Thakur Jhenguri Singh, Pandit Nokhey Ram, the bailiff of the Rai Saheb, Pandit Datadin, and Pateshwari Singh think themselves the leaders of the village, and, make rules for others which they themselves do not follow. All these people want to teach Hori a lesson for providing shelter

to Jhunia in his house. Ironically, they themselves are not innocent. When the wife of the Thakur Jhenguri Singh died, he was forty-five and had five children to take care of, but still he again “married, but his wife turned out to be barren, and he married a third” (GD 108). The Thakur keeps his both wives in purdah and deals with his both wives “with an iron hand: he made much of the fact that no one has seen the faces of his wives.”(108) But, he thinks that “a girl like Jhunia should have her head severed!...By giving her asylum Hori has poisoned the well-springs of society”(GD 108). The son of Pandit Datadin, Matadin has illicit relations with a cobbler woman, Selia but he is still considered as a pure Brahmin. All these people make a plan to harass Hori.

Though Hori has given the rent for the tilling land, Nokhey Ram, the bailiff of the Rai Saheb, asks Hori to pay the rent as Hori does not have any proof that he has given the rent because Nokhey Ram has not issued the receipt yet. He says that, “I can deal with this man. Let’s impose a fine of Rs. 100 on him and he’ll leave the village on his own accord. In the meanwhile, I’ll file a suite for attachment of his land” (GD 109). These people do not make any delay in executing their plan. The very next day, a meeting of the village Panchayat is called to decide the fate of Hori. “The meeting was largely attended, and Hori and Dhanias summoned to be present. The Panchayat announced that Hori was to pay Rs. 100 in cash and thirty maunds of grain in kind” (GD 109). For paying the fine, Hori has to mortgage his house to Jhenguri Singh for eighty rupees, and has to give away almost all his crop “for which Dhanias and his daughters had sweated in the fields by his side.” (GD 110)

Hori is an innocent person who believes in the social conventions. So, he obeys the orders of the Panchayat, as he believes that “It’s the voice of God that speaks through the Panches” (GD 109). The rich has the power to do what they like, but the poor has to follow the social conventions and the religious rules made for them. The Inspector also, who comes to investigate the case of the Hori’s cow’s death, is interested in getting a good bribe for himself. He demands thirty rupees, out of which equal share would go to Patashwari Singh, the revenue clerk, Thakur Jhenguri Singh, Pandit Datadin, and Nokhey Ram also. He shows no interest in finding out the culprit, and he accuses Dhanias for killing the cow when she refuses to give him the bribe.

In fact, such occasions provide a chance to these people to extort money out of the poor and innocent people. Hori does not want the house of his brother to be searched by the police, so he agrees to borrow thirty rupees from Jhenguri Singh for the bribe. It is the scheme of these people

to cheat the poor Hori. Jhenguri Singh gives him the loan to pay the bribe, but he also has a share in the bribe. Pateshwari the revenue clerk, who appears to help Hori during this difficult time is actually arranging for his share in the bribe. He says to the Inspector that, "It's only on occasions like these that we manage to make some money. Otherwise who cares for a revenue clerk" (GD 94). It shows the corruption of the government officers who take advantage of their position.

Religion also plays a big role in the exploitation of the poor. The religious leaders of the village make people believe that they are poor because of the sins of their past life, and they cannot improve their lot. The poor are made to perform many religious rites for their purification if they make any mistake. But, when someone relating to the powerful class commits a crime, he easily gets through. When Jhunia is given shelter in the house of Hori, whole village turn against him, and want to teach him a lesson. While, Matadin the son of the Pandit Datadin, "had clandestine relations with a cobbler woman," (GD 106) but "he didn't allow his religion to be defiled" (GD 38). And, he still performs all the religious rituals which a pure Brahmin performs, so his *dharma* (purity) is "untarnished." (106) While Datadin asks Dhania that without distributing the "rice to the community and feast to the Brahmins you won't be able to save your *dharma* (purity)" (GD 106). Dhania is aware of this discrimination between the rich and the poor, as she "realised that the society judged the rich and the poor by two different moral codes" (GD 106). There are different standards to judge the acts of the rich and the poor people as "rich men make their own laws. They do what they like. They have no fear of what people would say." (GD 41)

All the poor villagers have no choice except to follow the dictates of the powerful people, and to do the forced labour for these people. Hori is a remarkable life-like character. He is an orthodox man who believes in the religious and social rules, and obeys the social and religious restrictions. He dare not defy the orders of the religious and social leaders. He cannot change his occupation because of the prestige of his family. He has to repent for the death of the cow according to the religious and social conventions. Hori is under a heavy debt, and he has no hope to get through the debt as he describes:

...some three hundred rupees, and the loan was gathering interest at the rate of hundred rupees each year. Five years ago he had borrowed sixty rupees from Mangru, the money-lender, to buy the bullocks. He had already paid sixty rupees as interest. The loan of

thirty rupees which he had taken from Pandit Datadin to plant potatoes had now jumped to a hundred. There were other loans too, and a part of the revenue still unpaid. (29)

Hori is worried that “if things went on like this his debt would keep on swelling and one day he might have to auction his house and perhaps his children would have become beggars” (GD 30). It is not only he who is under the debt and leading a miserable life; rather debt has become a common characteristic of the peasant life. “...He was not the only miserable man; other peasants were also in the same boat; some in fact were drowning” (GD 30). All of the peasants in the village live under the burden of debt, and have no hope to get through it in their lifetime. Moreover this, there are so many social and religious restrictions which these innocent people have to follow. They have to act according to the will of the so-called leaders of the village. When Hori refuses to turn Jhunia out of his house all “the villagers had virtually ostracised Hori; no one shared the *chelum* with him or accepted water from his hands ” (GD 105). The powerful of the village also want to declare “the village wells out of bounds of Hori; only the inflammable nature of Dhania stood in the way of such a drastic step” (105). Hori is considered a “fool” (GD 107) for giving shelter to helpless Jhunia. By doing this he dares to challenge the authority of the so-called leaders of the society which is unbearable to these people. “Well, if he defied society, society would also not let him live in peace. That very night the custodians of justice held a council of war” (107) to take action against Hori.

In this male dominant and orthodox society the women live in a very poor condition. They have no control over their own life. They cannot take their decisions by themselves. They are deprived of the fundamental rights which are given to the men. There are many practices prevalent against the women in the society. There is the system of child marriage, system of *purdah* (the system to remain in the veil), domestic violence, dowry system are prevailing in this society. The women are beaten by their husbands severely for the slightest fault or no fault of theirs. They are not considered as the human beings who tend to make mistakes. They are not allowed to do any mistake, and if they make any they are beaten more badly than any animal.

They are married off according to their parents’ wish, and they can be sold or bought like animals. Heera beats his wife Punia in the street when she is trying to stop Dhamri from cutting their bamboos. “He made straight for Punia, dragged her away and starts lashing her. Punia

howled” (GD 25). And, Punia goes “meekly picking up the basket she moved towards the well, sobbing” (GD 26). Hori also has beaten his wife several times before, and beats her when she wants to go to the police to lodge a complaint against Heera. This is the condition of the women who are beaten by their husbands frequently. Beating is a part of their daily routine. “The moment you do something wrong he’ll beat you black and blue” (GD 206).

These women work with their husbands in the fields, and also manage the household, thus they are doubly-burdened with work. The girls are married at a very young age. Sona, the daughter of Hori is married at the tender age of seventeen, and Rupa, the younger daughter is married (or sold) at a very young age with Ram Sewak who is “junior to Hori by only a few years” (GD 325). For the people of high class, the marriages are "nothing more than a diplomatic move to widen" the "sphere of influence" (GD 214). Rai Amarpal Singh marries his daughter to a widower just to increase his name and influence.

A villager, Dhamri calls his daughter-in-law by bad names for running away with another man, but he does not say anything against his son who also lives with another woman. He says:

What’s worse, his wife ran off with a new man. I asked her to be a good woman and hold her peace, or I’d lose face. But she couldn’t listen. These women, a nasty, rotten lot. God should give everything to woman, but not good looks. There is no catching her once she’s good-looking. (GD 24)

The men can have relations with more than a woman at the same time, but the women are supposed to live with her husband only. Even if he leaves her, she is supposed to wait upon him all through her life. The women are supposed to be faithful to the men even while the men are having the extra-marital affairs. The system of dowry is also prevalent in the society. Datadin says that “...I gave a dowry of five rupees each at the marriage of my two daughters. Then what’s wrong in demanding five hundred rupees for my son?” (GD 233)

In this novel, we can see a difference in the thinking of the young and the old generations. The young characters in the novel are of revolutionary ideas, and want to bring a change in the society. Rupa and Sona discuss their future plans about the married life. Rupa asks Sona whether “Will you eat before your husband does?” (GD 206) And Sona replies that husbands eat before

their wives, and that's why they are stronger than their wives, so she will "of course" (GD 206) eat before her husband, and thus "I'll become strong and keep my husband under my thumb" (GD 206).

The state of the widows is also very miserable. They are not allowed to re-marry, while the man can get married as many as times he likes. Jhenguri Singh has been married three times, but no one points a finger at him as he is the money-lender of the village. Matadin keeps Selia as his keep, and misbehaves with her frequently. One day he forsakes her for no fault of her, but no one says anything against him. The women are considered as a means of amusement only for the men. They are just the objects of physical satisfaction for men. Matadin tries to seduce Jhuniah, even though he is having a relation with Selia. Sona's husband woos Selia, but he also professes his love for Sona. As Jhuniah narrates her experience to Gobar that how a Pandit once tried to molest her. She says that "what these men want is a young girl to flirt with. They think of other qualities in her when it comes to the question of marriage." (GD 41)

Dhaniah, the wife of Hori, is a woman of strong will power. She is sharp-tongued lady, but has a very soft heart for others. She keeps on struggling for her family and her husband. She is a living embodiment of "service, and sacrifice; her tongue sharp as scissors, her heart soft as wax, skimping for every pice; yet ready to stake her all when it comes to a question of honour" (GD 281-282). She works in the fields with her husband also. She looks older than her real age due to the poverty and the lack of the basic necessities.

Ordinarily nobody would describe a woman of thirty-six as old. But her hair had already turned grey and her face was creased with wrinkles. Her youthful body had declined, the glow of her swarthy complexion had turned sallow and her eye-sight dim. All because of the canker of poverty. (GD 2)

She easily becomes ready to give shelter to Jhuniah, in spite of knowing the possible consequences of this act of hers, and quarrels with Pandit Datadin when he asks her to turn Jhuniah out of her house. She takes care of Jhuniah as her own daughter, and calls Jhuniah her "daughter-in-law" (GD 109) in the meeting of the village Panchayat.

Not only Jhuniah, but Dhaniah takes Selia, the cobbler girl who lives with Matadin as his

keep, also to her house when Matadin turns her out of his house. She abuses Matadin for his indifference to this helpless girl. She says that "All men are alike. When Matadin humiliated Selia no one raised a finger in protest, but when Matadin comes in for trouble, he gets all the sympathy in the world. Has Selia no *dharma* of her own?"(GD 239) She has no fear for the society and the religion. She does not believe in age old conventions of the society and the religion, and she often quarrels with Hori on this point. But, when Hori is ready to marry Sona without dowry, and Sona's in-laws are also ready for it, Dhania refuses. She thinks it a disgrace to the name of the family if they do not give handsome dowry to their elder daughter. Gobar comes from Lucknow to take Jhunia with him but, Gobar wants to take Jhunia with him not because he loves her, but, to make her cook food for him and to give him a massage when he returns from the work in night.

Selia is only a toy to play with for Matadin. He does not love her sincerely. He is attracted to her good looks only. They both live as husband and wife but Matadin is not ready to give her any right or any place in his household as she is a low caste woman and he is a Brahmin. She is not allowed to enter his house or touch the utensils in his house. He does not accept the food cooked by her. When she gives Dulari some grain from his fields, he rebukes her and insults her in public. He tells her that she has no right over his things. Matadin does not want to get his *dharma* (purity) polluted because of her. He is considered as a pure Brahmin even though he lives with a cobbler woman. It shows the degradation of the religion which does not mean any more the purity of thoughts, soul and action, but for these people

the essence of religion lay in mumbling the daily prayers, parroting the holi books, observing fasts and eating food cooked with their own hands. So long as both father and son toed these religious formalities to the letter, no one would dare charge them with having wondered from the religious path.(GD 232)

Selia is treated like a servant in the household of Matadin. She works hard in the field of Matadin, as Datadin narrates "Selia does the work of three men. And we give her nothing but two meals a day. Sometimes we give her a *sari*." (GD 233) Matadin has no true love or even sympathy for her. "Earlier he cunningly exploited her love for him; now she was no more than a machine worked at his bidding"(GD 234). He bluntly asks her "if this work doesn't suit you, find another. There's no shortage of workers here"(GD 234).

Selia is of little importance for Matadin, as he has no true love for her. Even though she is pregnant, she works at the fields of Datadin. Matadin turns her out of his house, and she has no place to go. But, Matadin realizes his mistake at last when Selia is no more in his life. He realizes his love for her, and comes to the hut of Selia to live with her. Now, he is no more afraid of the social and religious bounds, and decides to spend his whole life with her. Now, he is not much concerned about his *dharma*, and he says that, "I want to be a cobbler, not a Brahmin. All those who fulfill their *dharma* are Brahmin, all those who violate their *dharma* are cobbler."(GD 323)

Women were not treated at par with the males. Women from the high society were also in the same boat as the women belonging to the low classes. Their condition was not better than the women living in the rural areas. Govindi Devi, the wife of Mr. Khanna is an educated lady who writes poetry also. But she is constantly ill-treated by her husband. She is like a mere "slave"(GD 175) for him. "Bringing up the children and looking after the household, were her only interest; so engrossed she was in these that her mind never wondered to luxurious concoctions. She was not a toy: she had no desire to make herself look voluptuous"(Gd 174). She is an orthodox wife whose life revolves round her husband and children only. She is constantly insulted by her husband, who behaves very politely with the others, but very rudely to her wife. Her marriage is a failure as there is no love and dedication in the relations of husband and wife.

She once leaves the house and decides to earn to live an independent life. But, she returns for the sake of her kids. She expresses the hardships of her life in her poetry. The poems which she writes reflect the sorrows of her married life. They "reflected her doleful life and were nourished in her warm tears"(GD 174). She expresses "the longing to live in an utopia where peace and bliss reigned"(GD 174). But her husband is critical of her poems and often tears them up. She is frustrated with her married life and thinks it a right move of Malti not to get married.

Was she against marriage? If she was, she did a wise thing. After all, what was there in marriage? Before marriage others bent their knees before her: after marriage she would have to live as a slave to someone. Good, there were a few women like Malti in society; they kept men in their proper place.(GD 178)

Mr. Khanna bluntly asks Govindi Devi to refuse the offer of laying the foundation stone

of the gymnasium for the ladies as he thinks "it's a trick of Mehta's and Malti's to relieve me of a couple of thousand rupees." (Gd 224)

Rai Amarpal Singh, the Zamindar of the Belari village has resigned from his seat in the Council to participate in the last Satyagraha Movement, and is considered as a well-wisher of the tenets and the peasants. He is of the nationalistic view. But, in spite of being a Nationalist the Rai Saheb "had kept up a social intercourse with officials; customary presents were made to them and fixed annuities provided to petty governments servants" (Gd 10). Rai Saheb is actually a hypocrite, and has gone to the jail to gain his "personal ends" (Gd 125). "He is a realist and knows that the Zamindari system does not have bright future." (Gopal 429) So, he appears to have been sympathetic to the peasants just to gain a good name among them and to perform well in the elections. He talks with the tenets sympathetically, but this habit of his is described with a touch of sarcasm in the novel. The novelist asks "was it not enough that he spoke kindly to his tenets? The lion must hunt. If instead of roaring and showing fangs the lion talked sweetly getting his prey would become the simplest of work."(10) He appears to be a well-wisher of the peasants, but only to prevent them from raising voice against him. It is "not so that the tenants on his estate were shown any liberty or spared the rigours of forced labour. The ignominy of such harsh treatment was laid at the doors of his agents and did not, in any way, tarnish the fair name of the Rai Saheb"(GD 10)

Every year, he celebrates the festival of Dussehra in a lavishing way, and spends a good deal of money on it every year which he collects from his peasants. On the one hand, the peasants have not even the enough money to get their children treated of the diseases, and on the another hand, the Rai Saheb spends a handsome amount of money on the Dussehra celebration just for the self-entertainment. The hypocrisy of the Rai Saheb comes forth, when the peon informs him that the tenants, brought for the forced labour, have stuck the work, demanding for food. The soft-spoken Rai Saheb starts yelling at once, "Come, I'll set the rascals right. They are not served with food, in the past. What right have they to demand it now? They were paid an anna a day; not a pice more will they get now. Work they shall, whether they like it or not" (GD 13).

He bribes the editor of the daily *Flash* not to publish the news of the injustice and exploitation being done to the tenets in his estate. The character of Rai Amarpal Singh exposes the hypocrisy and the corruption prevalent in the leader community of the country who appear to be

sympathetic to the poor people, but actually interested in fulfilling their own means. The novel is set in the pre-independence era when every Indian was colonized, and so were the Zamindars. They are also the slaves of the English people as any other Indian. The Rai Saheb who is the spokesperson for the Zamindars, voices the plight of the Zamindars:

...If I stop giving presents to the officials, I'll be dubbed a reactionary...I joined the Congress and I am still paying the price: I have been black-listed by the government. Have you ever cared to extent of my debts? If all the money-lenders get decrees against me, I shan't be left with this ring on my finger. (GD 157)

Gobar is the youth who believes in the equality of all human beings. He believes in the power of the money, and thinks that only that person is happy who has money. He does not care for the social or religious rules. He often argues with his father who is an orthodox man and believes in the traditional values. Gobar says that "God creates us all equal. Those who have power oppress the poor and become rich" (GD 16). On the other hand, Hori believes that "it's God who creates the high and the low. One comes into wealth after a lot of penance. It's the fruit of the deeds of our past life. We sowed nothing and we have nothing to reap." (GD 16)

It's all due to keeping on good terms with the Master that trouble has remained at arm's length from us. Otherwise we would have been wiped out of existence long ago. Out of scores of people in the village can you name one who has not been ejected from his land or been served with attachment orders? When your neck is trampled under the tyrant's heel the safest course is to keep on tickling his feet. (GD 1)

Gobar does not have faith in his father's theory that a person becomes poor due to the sins of past life. He wants to improve his lot by earning money. He runs away from his house and goes to Lucknow. He has "firmly decided not to enter the house until he earned enough to wipe off the blot from his name" (GD 115).

He knows that if he earns good money in Lucknow, "even Datadin and Pateshwari would respect him and his mother, of course, brim with pride" (GD 110). He returns from Lucknow with

a little money. His long stay in Lucknow has taught him “that people get off scot free even after committing sins much worse than any he had committed” (GD 186). Gobar knows that the money-lenders exploit the innocent peasants, and demand more money in return than they deserve. When Pandit Datadin comes to Hori’s house to demand his money which he had given to Hori nine years ago, Gobar does the calculation and concludes that the amount should be sixty-six rupees with interest. But, Datadin demands two hundred rupees. He retorts to Datadin:

We are nobody’s servants. We all are equal. What blasted nonsense is this? If he gives us a hundred rupees, does he want us to slave for him all our life to pay back the interest? And the principal remain intact all the time. Money-lending with a vengeance! It’s damned blood-sucking! (GD 203)

On the occasion of Holi festival, Gobar organizes a function with all the pomp and show. He organizes for the drinks, sweets, and small plays also. On the stage, some farces are played which makes fun of the powerful people of the village like Nokhey Ram, Jhenguri Singh, and others. In these plays, the money-lending system is also made fun of. It is shown in the play that how the innocent villagers are exploited by the money-lenders, and how these people are forced to pay high interest rate.

Here is one example of these plays in which there is a very amusing conversation between the money-lender Jhenguri Singh and a peasant who goes to him to borrow ten rupees, is presented. In the play, we see how the poor and innocent peasants are exploited by the money-lenders. The peasants are giving loans on a very high interest rate, and the interest is deducted in advance. In this play, “a peasant is shown holding the feet of Jhenguri Singh. After much pleading the Thakur agrees to give him ten rupees. The necessary formalities take place: he hands the man five rupees. The peasant is taken aback” (GD 201). When he asks Jhenguri Singh about the remaining money, he says:

“One rupee for my gratification Right?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“One for writing the paper. Right?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“One for the paper itself. Right?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“One as my customary fee. Right?”

“Yes, sir.”

“One as my interest. Right?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Five rupees in cash. That makes ten. Right?”

At this, the peasants also retorts back, and says that “Better keep these five too with you” (GD 202). And, he further describes the reason of giving the remaining money also to him, “I mean it, Sir. One rupee as my gift to your younger wife. One for the elder. One rupee to buy betel leaves for the elder wife. And one for the younger. That makes four. The fifth rupee for your funeral rites” (GD 202). This exchange of dialogues between the money-lender and the peasant symbolizes the pathetic condition of the peasants, who lead a miserable life under the burden of debt all through their life. The peasants work hard all through their life, but are not able to re-pay the loan taken by them.

Hori is a superstitious person. He believes in the past life, and that whether one becomes rich or poor, is decided by the acts performed by one in the past life. He thinks that without the community, the life would be very difficult. He says that “We are all limbs of the community,” he said, ‘How can we break away from it? You must submit to the decision of the Panches. Death is any time better than leading a life with a blot on your name” (Gd 110). He tries his level best to follow all the rules and orders of the community. He repents for the wrong-doings of his son, and pays a heavy fine which leaves his children almost starving.

Hori struggles very hard all through his life, but he is not able to improve his condition. His life is full of struggle and hardships. He has no hope in his life. He is left with no option by the society. This novel clearly exemplifies the life of poor Indian peasant, who has to face many

difficulties in making both the ends meet. Hori is not an individual, but he becomes a symbolic figure representing sufferings and hardships of all the poor, helpless peasants of India, who live a very difficult life in the face of the exploitation by the money-lenders and the Zamindars.

Hori is an orthodox person who believes in the ages old social conventions. Though, Pandit Datadin tries to cheat him by demanding two hundred rupees in return of the thirty rupees which, he had given to Hori. But even then Hori does not want to have an argument with the Pandit, and is willing to pay him two hundred rupees as he does not want to take the curse of the Pandit. He believes that "had it been a Thakur's or a *Bania's* money it would not have mattered. But a Brahmin's money. God keeps him from a Brahmin's wrath"(GD 204). On this point, he has an argument with his son Gobar, and the latter leaves the house in anger. Hori believes in maintaining good relations with the community. He has to give away all he has. He mortgages his house and gives the money as a fine imposed on him by the village Panchayat as penance for the wrong doings of Gobar.

Hori is exploited by the rich of the village as he is innocent and believes in the old ways of the society. Pandit Datadin gives him seeds to sow Hori's fields. And in return he demands to divide the crop half and half. Hori is reduced to the status of mere a labourer who works for Datadin without payment, and Datadin gets "good workers free of charge"(GD 163). Hori agreed "to go half and half with Pandit Datadin; but he [Datadin] manipulated the cost of labour and seeds with such shrewdness that Hori did not get more than one-fourth of the crop. And he had had to pay the full land revenue on his own"(GD 240). All the villagers decide to sell their crop of sugar cane to the mill in hope to get some cash money, but Jhenguri Singh makes a settlement with the mill manager and the villagers get the payment after deducting the full amount they owe to Jhenguri Singh. Hori gets only twenty-five rupees out of one hundred and twenty rupees which are also grabbed by Nokhey Ram. Hori expresses his grief over the situation "we don't want luxuries. We want plain food, some cloth and life with honour. Even these we are denied."(GD 166)

The novel depicts the average condition of the peasant under the exploitative system of feudalism, with the protagonist Hori facing social and religious biases and exploitation. In this work, with every page we "get the same sinking feeling that Hori gets when his spirit is crushed every waking moment by the machinery comprising of the Zamindari system, the police, the money lenders, the religious zealots, the caste system and prestige."² The cow is the symbol of

prosperity, prestige, and purity in the rural areas. Hori also wants to own a cow, but this small desire of his ruined his life. The arrival of cow which is considered a symbol of good luck accelerates his misfortunes. But, this is the only desire that Hori has in life. He is eager to have a cow, but this desire destroys his life. In the end, when he is dying, he is still thinking about a cow that he is milking a cow, and giving the milk to Mangal. The death scene of Hori in the end of the novel, is very moving. "His being religious and magnanimous, the family does not possess the adequate means even to complete his final rites. The novel thus ends in a tragedy."³

Through the character of Gobar, the condition of the mill workers is depicted in the novel. He works as worker in a sugar mill in Lucknow. But, while working as mill worker Gobar is not happy because "...the speed and deafening roar of the machines made him high strung. In addition was the constant fear of being pulled up for laxity or mistake in performance of duty. This state of mind was not peculiar to Gobar alone; it affected all the workers. They drowned their bodily fatigue and mental trauma in toddy"(GD 263). Mr. Khanna the director of the mill gets the salary of "a mere one thousand a month"(GD 272), but he cuts the wages of the workers as the workers should "realise that those were lean times for business, and unemployment was growing. Even three-fourth of what they legitimately deserve should satisfy them"(GD 272). He thinks that the directors work harder than the workers, so the directors are more important than the workers for the mill. "The workers only put physical labour but a director gave brains, experience, and influence. Both could not be treated at par" (GD 272). Pandit Onkarnath and Mirza Khurshed the masterminds behind the strike, who provoked the workers for the strike, did this "for personal gain and cheap popularity, made these gullible fools [the mill workers] dance like puppets. They never paused to think that fun for them, meant ruination of thousands of working class families." (GD 272)

Gobar works as factory worker in the town, and he is not satisfied with his job. Here, he "served one employer only, and earn enough to make both ends meet" (GD 330). But, the condition of the villagers live a much more difficult life.

...the peasant was imposed upon by so many masters that he could not eke out even a bare existence: he was a slave who constantly starved in spite of backbreaking work. This was not Hori's tragedy alone. They all suffered. The peasant moved about, worked, wept

and put up with oppression without a murmur, as if to suffer was part of his destiny. He had neither hope nor great joy, as if the wellsprings of his life had permanently dried up. He saw no future ahead of him; his sensibility had incurably dulled. (GD 330)

The villagers in the novel live under the burden of debt. These people have no hope in their life to get through the debt. The sorrowful state of the peasants is explicit in the scene in which Girdhar, a peasant is drunk. Jhenguri Singh took away all the money which he got by selling his crop to the factory owner, and he is left with absolutely nothing. He has not even a pice to buy food, but he somehow manages to hide an *anna* in his mouth. He says to Hori, in a state of intoxication:

Yes, I admit it, I slog the year round. I deserve an *anna's* worth of toddy. Believe me, I'm not drunk. Believe me. How can I get drunk on an *anna*? I'm just pretending. Haha. I'm so happy, uncle. I've paid back the loan. I took twenty and paid back a hundred and sixty. (GD 170)

This scene is very moving. It shows the pathetic condition of the peasants and the menace of the debt.

Women live in a pathetic condition in this male-dominated society. They work with their husbands in the fields, and they also manage the household. "They worked the whole day, went without food, and yet they put up a cheerful front. With their love, they had made others their own and effaced themselves for the sake of others. They lived for their children, their husbands, their relatives." (GD 290)

Hori is an embodiment of peasant-virtue, simplicity and truth. He leads an inconsistent life with his wife Dhaniam, and his three children. Their unstable financial situation always tends to lend them frustration and despair. A tension-free life is not theirs. If they spend a quarter of their lives in starvation, they spend the rest paying unwarranted loans.⁴

The title of the novel shows the desire of Hori to have a cow for his family. All through

his life, he works hard so that he would be able to buy a cow, but this desire remains unfulfilled, though he works very hard. Even at his death-bed, he is imagining about a cow. “The act of donating a cow in charity, or *Godan*, is considered to be an important Hindu ritual, as it helps in absolving one of sin, and incurring divine blessings.”⁵ So, even at the last time of his life the question of a cow again pops up. But, he again has no cow to give away in charity. Premchand presents a commentary upon the social, economic and religious conditions of the society. He gives a vivid description of the life which the peasants and the poor sections are compelled to live in society, where the money dominates. The rich people control the life of the poor people, and the poor have to submit themselves to the rich. “Themed around the socio-economic deprivation as well as the exploitation of the village poor,”⁶ the novel deserves to be called an epic of the rustic life.

End Notes

1. “*Godan* by Munshi Premchand.” blog.flipgraph.com. 5th August 2010. Web. 19th April 2010.<<http://blog.flipgraph.com/2010/godan-by-munshi-premchand/>>

2. "Godan by Premchand". dhimant.blogspot.com. 5th August, 2010. Web. 3rd January 2006.<<http://dhimant.blogspot.com/2006/01/true-and-vivid-picture-of-india.html>>
3. MK, Rukhaya. "Social Criticism in Premchand's *Godan*." associatedcontent.com. 5th August 2010. Web. 23rd January 2009.<http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1413159/social_criticism_in_premchands_godan_pg2.html>
4. MK, Rukhaya. "Social Criticism in Premchand's *Godan*." associatedcontent.com. 3rd August 2010. Web. 23rd January 2009.<http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1413159/social_criticism_in_premchands_godan.html>
5. *Godan*. Wikipedia. 27th July 2010. Web. 10th January 2010.<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godaan>>
6. *ibid*.

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