

Hermeneutics of Societal Fabrication in Munshi Premchand's Short Stories: A Critical Evaluation of *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well*

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Received: 20 Sep 2026; Received in revised form: 19 Oct 2026; Accepted: 21 Oct 2026; Available online: 23 Oct 2026
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“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”

— Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

Abstract— In this research paper, we discuss social awareness and reformist spirit of Munshi Premchand in his short stories. The short stories are *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well*. The study examines, via a close textual analysis, the manner in which Premchand uses the ordinariness of rural life as a canvas to depict the entrenched realities of caste, class and gender oppression in early twentieth century India. These two narratives are interrogated in the paper to reveal the complex nature of marginalized identities, resistance and the transformative potential of empathy and agency. The analysis is located within the wider literature on his contribution to Hindi-Urdu literature and suggests the continuing relevance of his critique of social hierarchies. In contrast, this paper contends that his short fiction is ultimately a testimony of the struggles of his time, and is still a source of inspiration for discussions on social justice, individual dignity and reform in our society today. He is regarded as the father of the modern Hindi-Urdu short story and one of the most influential voices in Indian literature. Premchand's output of more than three hundred short stories was prolific and not only pioneered a new realism in Indian prose fiction but also established the short story as a potent vehicle for social critique and human empathy. His works continue to resonate, offering timeless insights into the struggles, hopes, and resilience of ordinary people.



Keywords— *Hermeneutics, Hindi literature, Societal Fabrication, Social Justice and Realism, Caste Class and, Gender, Indian Social Perspectives, Narrative Art, Dignity and Reform in Contemporary Society, Realism, Powerful Vehicle and Resilience of Ordinary People.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian literature in all its ramifications has always reflected the realities of society. Among the outstanding Indian novelists, Munshi Premchand occupies a significant place because of his realistic portrayal of social problems. Through self-study, he was also continuously expanding his knowledge of Hindi, Urdu, Persian, and English. In February 1921, Gandhiji visited Allahabad. He was calling upon the nation to join the Non-Cooperation Movement.

Premchand, too, resigned from his government job and joined the movement. Initially, he worked alongside Mahavir Prasad Poddar to promote the 'charkha' (spinning wheel); subsequently, he taught at several private institutions. He first edited the magazine 'Maryada', and later became involved in the establishment of the Saraswati Press. It was from this very Saraswati Press that the magazines 'Hans' and 'Jagran' were subsequently published. Later, he also contributed as a literary advisor for the 'Ganga Pustak Mala' series, as the

editor of the magazine 'Madhuri', and as a council member of the Hindustani Academy.

He also served as the first president of the Progressive Writers' Association. His first novel was published in 1901, followed by his second in 1904. At that time, he wrote in Urdu under the pen name 'Nawab Rai.' He also began writing short stories in 1907. These early stories were published in 'Zamana', a renowned magazine of that era. His first collection of short stories, 'Soz-e-Watan', was published at a time when preparations for the First World War were in full swing.

This collection was perceived as a threat by the British authorities, and the author was compelled to burn all five hundred copies of the book. It was at this juncture that he abandoned the name 'Nawab Rai' and began writing under the name 'Premchand.' This name was bestowed upon him by the Urdu writer and editor, Dayanarayan Nigam.

During the war years, he wrote his first major novel, 'Sevasadan', and by the time the war concluded, he had also completed 'Premashram'. When 'Sevasadan' was published in Hindi, it created a sensation throughout the Hindi literary world. 'Bazaar-e-Hussan' had not received such acclaim in Urdu. Following this pattern, Premchand first authored the novel 'Rangbhumi' in Hindi and subsequently had it published in Urdu.

He is also an immensely popular short-story writer in Hindi; alongside Jaishankar Prasad, he marks the inception of a distinct epoch in the evolutionary journey of the Hindi short story. He penned purpose-driven stories that reveal the truths of life through language characterised by its naturalness and simplicity.

He was convicted with a keen interest in the dramatic arts; consequently, he authored three original plays and translated several others. During the early stages of his writing career, he also translated stories by Rabindranath Tagore. Premchand produced a prolific body of discursive prose, which was regularly published in the leading periodicals of that era. His works have been translated into various languages, both within India and abroad. His literary creations have served as the basis for films and television series, and his plays have been staged for theatrical performance.

Hermeneutics is primarily considered as the study, theory and scientific interpretation of written, verbal, or non-verbal communication. Etymologically, this word has originated from Greek, *hermeneuein* (to interpret), signifying Hermes, the Greek messenger god responsible for translating messages from gods to mortals. The expansion of this term in the context of literature, art,

history, law and culture is beyond the stereotypical interpretation of religion.

According to modern philosophical concepts and thinkers like Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, it is the study that comprehends understanding and interpretation through the hermeneutic circle (understanding a part through the whole, and the whole through the part). In the contemporary scenario, hermeneutics is concerned with the understanding of human action, especially human action through political, cultural and economic structures of society and institutions.

Philosophical hermeneutics refers to Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of knowledge, expressed in truth and method, and sometimes to Paul Ricoeur. In its broadest perspective, hermeneutics applies the interpretation of meaning on three levels — explanation, analysis, commentary. Originally, it was applied to the interpretation of the Bible, comprising the method of reading included with exegesis (primarily the practical application of the theory). The "hermeneutic circle" is a key idea. According to interpretative hermeneutics, the circle or movement involves a constant interpretation of an author's intended meaning.

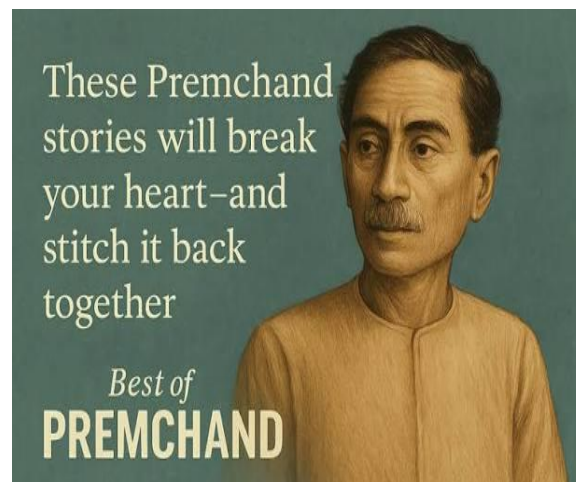


Fig.1

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The present research article is an attempt to study the social consciousness and reformist zeal in the works of Munshi Premchand with special reference to his short stories *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well*. Premchand uses the setting of everyday village life to demonstrate the deep-rooted harsh realities of caste, class and gender oppression in early twentieth century India.

The present article demonstrates the complex nature of marginalised identities, resistance and the transformative potential of empathy and agency through these two selected stories.

Premchand (1880-1936) was one of the most important writers of modern Indian literature. He was acclaimed for his sensitive depiction of rural India and his passionate concern for social justice. His extensive body of work includes novels, short stories and essays that highlight the sensitive contemporary issues including caste discrimination, poverty, gender inequality and the moral decadence of the privileged class.

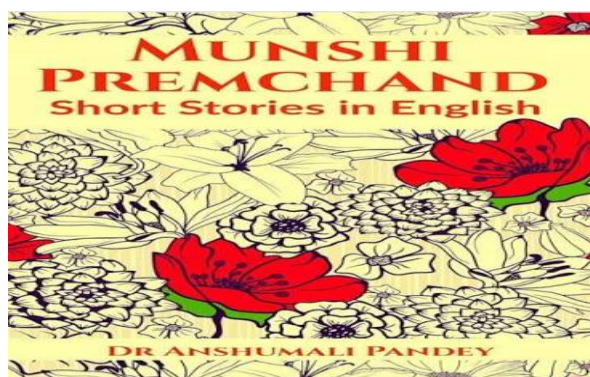


Fig.2

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Premchand's literary genres were inspired by his own experiences of hardship and social stratification with his visionary perspectives. He used fiction by combining realism with humanistic values not only to entertain but to awake the conscience of society. His stories often revolve around ordinary people like—peasants, women, and Dalits whose lives are determined by the invisible, yet unyielding, forces of tradition and power. Premchand's vast oeuvre includes two short stories which are remarkable for their incisive critique of gender and caste hierarchies: *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well*.

The Thakur's Well is a grim depiction of caste-based denial and the everyday heroism of the marginalised while *Rich Daughter-in-Law* explores the dynamics of wealth, humility and adaptation within the joint family. The present research paper entitled, *Hermeneutics of Societal Fabrication in Munshi Premchand's Short Stories: A Critical Evaluation of Rich Daughter-in-Law and The Thakur's Well* is an attempt to analyse the two short stories as microcosms of Indian society's enduring struggles with inequality and injustice.

By contrast, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer insist on the historicity and temporality of interpretation. For them, the meaning is always codetermined, and the reader's and writer's horizons of expectations are attempting to fuse with each other. Gadamer argues that an inescapable relativity and indeterminacy is eventually introduced into the notion of interpretation.

The argumentative perspective of the past and present literature is simultaneous existing forces helping each other to interpret contextually. In this insightful view, the reader's important role is to interpret the literary text according to their own respective contexts. The text of every author is better appreciated with the cultural backdrop, the then contemporary scenario of the text, and tremendous impact on the reader also.

The societal fabrication in Premchand's stories is the created, maintained, exercised and experienced collective human agreement, social interaction and cultural scenario working as a shared framework of reality rather than a false and malicious falsehood.

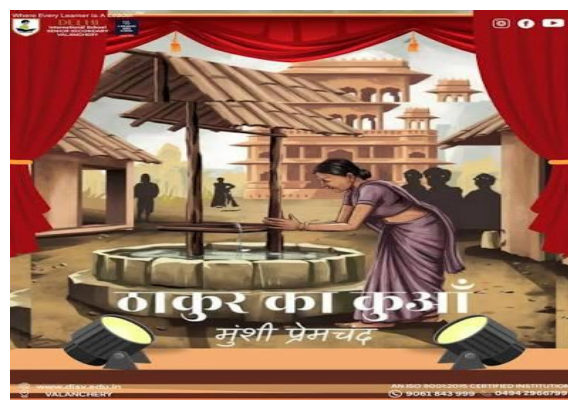


Fig.3

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The study will contextualise Premchand's work within the broader framework of social reform and literary criticism, emphasising the author's enduring relevance and unique ability to transform individual stories into universal calls for empathy and change. Premchand is often credited with the introduction of a new literary paradigm of social realism in Hindi and Urdu literature.

His stories are primarily dealing with the rural and downtrodden society of India. This is a radical departure from the romantic and fantastical themes that were the order of the day in earlier fiction. As Meenakshi Mukherjee (2002) notes, Premchand's narratives are

“rooted in the daily lives of ordinary people” with realism not as a mere technique but as a tool of ethical and political engagement. A large body of research underscores Premchand's ongoing critique of the caste system and class oppression.

Scholars such as Harish Trivedi (2015) and Alok Rai (1982) contend that stories such as *Sadgati*, *Shudra* and *The Thakur's Well* directly challenge the dehumanisation of Dalits and complicity of upper-caste landlords. Premchand represents the untouchable as the protagonist who are compassionately and indignantly depicted for the presentation of social exploitation by the hegemony of social fabrication. He avoids didacticism, choosing to employ subtle irony and gentle humour to communicate his critique.

Gopal Rai (1977) writes that Premchand “lets the story speak for itself”, allowing readers to derive moral lessons from the lived experiences of his characters. Scholarship on Premchand's major works or on his overall social concerns is voluminous, but there are still relatively few focused comparative studies of stories such as *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well* in English-language scholarship.

This paper seeks to fill this gap by providing a nuanced analysis of these two narratives and locating them within the larger debates on caste, class and gender in Indian literature.



Fig.4

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Premchand's literary career is inextricably linked with his personal experience of adversity and marginalisation. Born in 1880, Premchand was brought up in a modest Kayastha family and saw the bitter realities of poverty, illiteracy and social stratification in colonial India. The social consciousness was brought up through his loss of parents at a very young age, his struggles as a

teacher and civil servant and exposure to the Indian independence movement.

Premchand's biography is deeply informative to his writing. As a child he had witnessed the suffering of peasants, labourers and lower caste people, which provided the source of the characters and settings of his stories. His own experiences of bureaucratic corruption and caste-based prejudice gave an authenticity to his critique of Indian society including the polished social fabrication. “I want to show the pain and struggle of the common man,” he famously declared.

The narrative style of Premchand reflects his dedication towards realistic revelations of the social hypocrisy and patriarchal politics. His language is simple and direct, often using rural dialects for authenticity. The protagonists of his stories are enriched with the innate characteristics of boldness, decision making power the sense of social justice, the resilience, empathetic behaviour, forgiveness and wisdom.

His Characters are complex, morally ambiguous, flawed and virtuous. The village is not just a backdrop, but a living entity in the narrative, shaping destinies and moral choices. Ordinary objects such as the well in *The Thakur's Well* become potent symbols of exclusion and resistance. The hypocrisy of social customs is exposed through irony. Premchand's works are driven by a deep ethical responsibility to establish justified and sometimes open ended climaxes. The open-ended climaxes are relevant in modern day scenario of the 21st century as they provide the space to the reader response theory also.

Premchand believed literature should be “a mirror of society, not an escape from it.” Premchand's stories centralised to speak for the voiceless victims. His stories became the tool for speaking for Dalits, women and the poor. He is regarded the critique of social hierarchies and his stories are persistently questioning the validity of caste, class and patriarchal structures.

Premchand's stories include foster empathy and social reform which became the idea to explore the social injustice in the society. His stories are encouraging readers to look at their own prejudices and to envision a more equitable society. His vision was not utopian but profoundly pragmatic; he saw the permanence of suffering, with its logical reasons, but he believed in the possibility of change through compassion, education, and moral action.

Both *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well* are microcosms of Indian society, portraying the deep-rooted issues of inequality, exclusion and resistance. But they are different in their approach: *Rich Daughter-in-Law* deals with the themes of class mobility and gender

dynamics of the joint family system. Anandi's self-respect due to her affluent family background restricts her to accept the humiliation by Lal Bihari but her wisdom adaptation and empathetic nature saves the social institution of marriage.

The Thakur's Well fights caste oppression and systemic injustice with extrinsic, physical obstacles. It portrays the hegemony structure of socially accepted fabrication of Thakur society in the village. The exploited class of the society is bound to suffer due to the caste and class struggle prevailing in the village. The protagonist's humility and intelligence gradually chip away the prejudices, allowing change to come from the inside out.

Zokhu was dying with thirst and persistently asking for the water to Gangi, but as she served the water it was stinking very badly. Gangi assured him to bring fresh water from the well as the contaminated water was telling the story of some animal's death in it. But Zokhu being the caste and class conscious victimisation prohibited her to fetch fresh water by uttering the following words:

“जोखू ने आश्चर्य से उसकी ओर देखा-दूसरा पानी कहाँ से लाएगी ? 'ठाकुर और साहू के दो कुएँ तो हैं। क्या एक लोटा पानी न भरने देंगे ?' 'हाथ-पाँव तुड़ा आएगी और कुछ न होगा। बैठ चुपके सो। ब्राह्मणदेवता आशीर्वाद देंगे, ठाकुर लाठी मारेंगे, साहू जी एक के पाँच लेंगे। गरीबों का दर्द कौन समझता है ! हम तो मर भी जाते हैं, तो कोई दुआर पर झाँकने नहीं आता, कंधा देना तो बड़ी बात है। ऐसे लोग कुएँ से पानी भरने देंगे?’”

In *The Thakur's Well*, agency takes the form of direct resistance, but ultimately thwarted. Gangi's heroic attempt to cross caste boundaries fails in the face of entrenched social forces. Both stories feature female protagonists who, although marginalised, demonstrate remarkable strength to subvert the prejudiced established norms in order to seek the justice.

Rich Daughter-in-Law exercises agency through adaptation, emotional labour, and moral example. The adaptation process of Anandi is succinctly appreciated in the following words:

“आनंदी अपने घर से नए घर में आई, तो यहां का रंग-ढंग कुछ और ही देखा। जिस टीम-टाम की उसे बचपन से ही आदत पड़ी हुई थी, वह यहां नाम-मात्र को भी न थी। हाथी-घोड़ों का तो कहना ही क्या, कोई सजी हुई सुंदर बहली तक न थी। रेशमी स्लीपर साथ लाई थी, पर यहां बाग कहा। मकान में खिड़कियां तक न थीं। न जमीन पर फर्श, न दीवार पर तस्वीरें। यह एक सीधा-सादा देहाती गृहस्थ का मकान था; किंतु आनंदी ने थोड़े ही दिनों में अपने को इस नई अवस्था में ऐसे अनुकूल बना लिया, मानो उसने विलास के सामान कभी देखे ही न थे।”

‘The well’ in *The Thakur's Well* symbolises hope and aspiration in the eyes of Gangi. *A Rich Daughter-in-*

Law symbolises exclusion—its inaccessibility is a metaphor for the broader social order. In this story material possessions and behavioural choices, and it symbolise the true nature of wealth and the transformative power of character. Both stories remain profoundly relevant to contemporary India and beyond the time.

By portraying both the possibilities and limits of resistance and by foregrounding marginalised voices, his work keeps encouraging reflection and debate on social justice, both in India and globally. Through a close reading of *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well*, this paper has demonstrated Premchand's remarkable ability to illuminate the complexities of caste, class, and gender in Indian society.

Gangi the female protagonist of *Thakur's Well* is symbolic representation of rebelling conscious lower class of the society negotiating about their rights in the following words appropriately:

“गंगी का विद्रोही दिल रिवाजी पाबंदियों और मजबूरियों पर चोटें करने लगा- हम क्यों नीच हैं और ये लोग क्यों ऊँच हैं ? इसलिए कि ये लोग गले में तागा डाल लेते हैं ? यहाँ तो जितने हैं, एक-से-एक छँटे हैं ? चोरी ये करें, जाल-फरेब ये करें झूठे मुकद्दमे ये करें। अभी इस ठाकुर ने तो उस दिन बेचारे गड़रिये की एक भेड़ चुरा ली थी और बाद को मारकर खा गया। इन्हीं पंडित जी के घर में तो बारहो मास जुआ होता है। यही साहू जी तो घी में तेल मिलाकर बेचते हैं। काम करा लेते हैं, मजूरी देते नानी मरती है। किस बात में हैं हमसे ऊँचे। मुँह से हमसे ऊँचे हैं। हम गली-गली चिल्लाते नहीं कि हम ऊँचे हैं, हम ऊँचे हैं ! कभी गाँव में आ जाती हूँ, तो रसभरी आँखों से देखने लगते हैं। जैसे सबकी छाती पर साँप लोटने लगता है, परंतु घमंड यह कि हम ऊँचे हैं !”

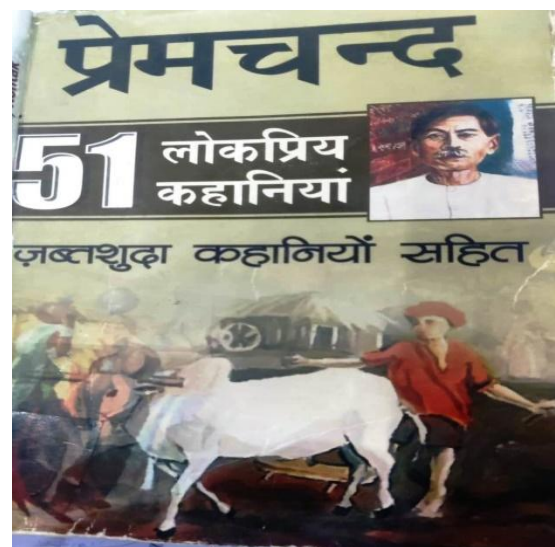


Fig.5

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By crafting narratives that centre on ordinary individuals—especially women—Premchand exposes both the subtle and overt forms of oppression that persist across generations. His blend of realism, empathy, and ethical engagement not only critiques the status quo but also invites readers to imagine pathways towards justice and reform.

The well-educated Shrikanth dwelling in the city used to come to the village at weekends and was considered a rational citizen to provide the solutions to the problems of village people and he admits his opinion in his family matter with assertive mood precisely:

“श्रीकंठ-इतना मैं जानता हूँ, आपके आशीर्वाद से ऐसा मूर्ख नहीं हूँ। आप स्वयं जानते हैं कि मेरे ही समझने-बुझने से, इसी गांव में कई घर संभल गए पर जिस स्त्री की मान-प्रतिष्ठा का ईश्वर के दरबार में उत्तरदाता हूँ, उसके प्रति ऐसा घोर अन्याय और पशुवत् व्यवहार मुझे असह्य है। आप सच मानिए, मेरे लिए यही कुछ कम नहीं है कि लालबिहारी को कुछ दंड नहीं देता। अब बेनीमाधव सिंह भी गरमाए। ऐसी बातें और न सुन सके, बोले-लालबिहारी तुम्हारा भाई है। उससे जब कभी भूल-चूक हो, उसके कान पकड़ो लेकिन...। श्रीकंठ-लालबिहारी को मैं अपना भाई नहीं समझता। बेनीमाधव-स्त्री के पीछे ? श्रीकंठ-जी नहीं, उसकी क्रूरता और अविवेक के कारण।”

The enduring relevance of these stories lies in their refusal to offer easy solutions, instead demanding sustained reflection and action from both characters and readers alike.

As early as the 1930s, critics such as Ram Vilas Sharma and Amrit Rai recognised Premchand's unique ability to merge artistry with advocacy, describing him as a writer who “gave voice to the voiceless” and who mapped the “inner and outer worlds of rural India.” Over the decades, scholars have continued to explore the social, historical, and psychological dimensions of his writing.

Rich Daughter-in-Law centres on a young woman from a prosperous background who marries into a financially struggling joint family. Despite her personal wealth, the new daughter-in-law (bahu) chooses humility over ostentation. She observes the household dynamics quietly, refrains from asserting her affluence, and adapts herself to the family's limited means. Over time, her genuine kindness, resourcefulness, and respectful demeanour win over her initially skeptical in-laws.

Gradually, the atmosphere in the home changes: conflicts diminish, harmony prevails, and even the family's fortunes begin to improve, largely due to the daughter-in-law's wisdom and tact.

The story ends with the family recognising her true worth—not for her money, but for her character. She in form of the daughter-in-law is the narrative's emotional centre—a woman of means who displays empathy,

patience, and adaptability. Rather than flaunt her superiority, she chooses humility and quietly initiates positive change. Initially wary and somewhat resentful, the mother-in-law fears being eclipsed by her daughter-in-law's wealth. Over time, she learns to respect and love the ‘bahu’ for her virtues.

Other family members, siblings, father-in-law and other extended relatives are observers and, ultimately, beneficiaries of the daughter-in-law's influence. It is their slow evolution towards the greater social change Premchand envisages. In the contrasts external riches with character wealth.

The daughter-in-law's restraint revealed the emptiness of material pride. The story suggests gently that women can be agents of change in family situations with tight controls through wisdom and empathy. Her flexibility, rather than her rigidity, is demonstrated to be her strength, not her weakness. It considers the tensions and possibilities of bringing together people of different socio-economic backgrounds.

Ironically, the rich daughter-in-law does not save the family from its initial anxiety; the meek one does. Premchand's natural, everyday dialogue builds authenticity and reveals character. The daughter-in-law's behaviour, the little sacrifices and the resistance to ostentatious luxury become symbols of a moral uplift.

Premchand's, *Rich Daughter-in-Law*, condemns the rampant materialism in Indian families and suggests humility and emotional intelligence as a life changer. The story shows that entrenched biases, especially against women and foreigners, can be overcome by patience, tolerance and the ability to adapt. Rich' is a character for him, not possessions. “This is what Premchand said about patriarchal society: “Beni Madhav Singh's eldest son and Anandi's husband, they thought that women to-day refusing to live in the family was bad for caste and country. They hated them for it the village lalanas! Others viewed them as enemies.

His wife disagreed with him also. She did not hate her in-laws, brother-in-law etc but she thought that if one cannot support the family after tolerating and behaving in a certain way, then it is better to cook one's own khichuri than to ruin one's life with daily quarrels.

Gangi is a poor Dalit woman, wife of Jokhu. She falls gravely ill after drinking the polluted water from their only well, the Thakur's Well. The high caste landlord Thakur does not allow the Dalits to draw water from the only well in the village. Gangi knows the dirty water will kill her husband. Desperate and loving she goes at night to the Thakur's well for clean water.

Gangi's unsuccessful attempt to bring her husband fresh water when he is sick is better told here:

उसने रस्सी का फंदा घड़े में डाला और दाएँ-बाएँ चौकन्नी दृष्टि डालने लगी, जैसे कोई सिपाही रात को शत्रु के किले में सूरख कर रहा हो। अगर इस समय वह पकड़ी गई, तो फिर उसके लिए माफी या रिआयत की रत्ती-भर उम्मीद नहीं। अंत में देवताओं को याद करके उसने कलेजा मजबूत किया। और घड़ा कुएँ में डाल दिया। घड़े ने पानी में गोता लगाया, बहुत ही आहिस्ता, ज़रा भी आवाज न हुई। गंगी ने दो चार हाथ जल्दी-जल्दी मारे। घड़ा कुएँ के मुँह तक आ पहुँचा। कोई बड़ा शहजोर पहलवान भी इतनी तेजी से उसे न खींच सकता था। गंगी झुकी कि घड़े को पकड़कर जगत पर रखे, कि एकाएक ठाकुर साहब का दरवाजा खुल गया। शेर का मुँह इससे अधिक भयानक न होगा। गंगी के हाथ से रस्सी छूट गई। रस्सी के साथ घड़ा धड़ाम से पानी में गिरा और कई क्षणों तक पानी में हलकों की आवाजें सुनाई देती रहीं। ठाकुर 'कौन है, कौन है?' पुकारते हुए कुएँ की तरफ आ रहे थे और गंगी जगत से कूदकर भागी जा रही थी। घर पहुँचकर देखा कि जोखू लोटा मुँह से लगाए वही मैला गंदा पानी पी रहा है।

Gangi visited to fill her vessel but is seen by the Thakur's household and is chased away. Her venture ends in failure and disgrace. Gangi goes back to her hut with the same dirty water that still haunts her family. Gangi means courage, resourcefulness and silent heroism of the subjugated. Her actions bear testimony to the perseverance of Dalit women, driven by hope and necessity.

Gangi's husband, Zokhu, became the muse for the voiceless and weak, stands for the helplessness born of systemic injustice. The Thakur and his family are the brutality and arrogance of upper caste power, insensible and brutal in their enforcement of caste lines. The main conflict is caused by the caste system that denies the Dalits their basic human rights.

Gangi's attempts to draw water are an extreme resistance to fear and threat of violence. The story demonstrates how bias becomes part of the system and how it affects the simplest things like getting water.

Gangi's work is homage to the dignity of the marginalized and to the despair of unbending social structures.

The well is a complex symbol of purity and exclusion, of hope and impossibility. The polluted water is a symbol of the poisonous effects of casteism. Premchand's simple and straight forward style depicts the daily struggles of the rural poor. The story arouses empathy leading the readers to the emotional world of the oppressed.



Fig.6

https://www.google.com/search?q=Munshi+premchand%27s+story+images&sca_esv=65b7e97ddd6b1b65&hl=en&xsrf=APpeQntWU7htoNTXtVEfu5sMkz0PBA2JYQ:1791112531259&source=

In *The Thakur's Well*, Premchand severely criticizes the discrimination based on caste and the dehumanization of lower-caste people. This is not just a tale of individual suffering. It is an indictment of a society that accepts injustice. Gangi's suffering can be interpreted as the suffering of millions of people whose basic rights are denied and Premchand's sympathetic portrayal of her struggle is a plea to the conscience of the readers.

By focusing on the resistive act of a woman, the story also foregrounds the intersection of gender and caste in constituting oppression. Within his vast oeuvre, the short stories *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well* stand out for their piercing depiction of gender and caste hierarchies. *Rich Daughter-in-Law* deals with the dynamics of wealth, humility and adjustment in a joint family and *The Thakur's Well* is a stark account of caste-based exclusion and the everyday heroism of the marginalised.

In Premchand's *The Thakur's Well* and *Rich Daughter-in-Law*, caste, class, and gender are intermingled social forces that determine the opportunities, relationships, dignity, and ability to exercise power of the characters. Premchand does not present these categories as isolated problems; rather, he shows how social hierarchy is reinforced through every day experiences. The mundane suffocation of female in combatting daily pursuits is better appreciated by Rajkumari Amrit Kaur succinctly:

We are aware of necessary of finding and being judged by our own standards as free human beings; voluntarily accepted; we are determined

to face the of life, to fight the battle of our sex and take the risk. (p.19)

In *The Thakur's Well*, the interaction is particularly clear through Gangi, a woman belonging to a socially oppressed caste and economically disadvantaged household. Because of her caste, the Thakur's well is not open to her and her family has to depend on limited and unsafe sources of water due to poverty. Her gender further restricts her ability to challenge the dominant social order openly.

Gangi is oppressed, then, as a woman, as a member of a lower caste and as a poor person. The well is more than just a water source. It is an indication of social privilege, of exclusion, of control over basic resources. The story also shows how class and caste are connected.

The Thakur's social power rests not just on his personal wealth, but on his place in the traditional hierarchy. Poor and low caste, Gangi finds it hard to resist, even when she sees how unjust the situation is. Fear of punishment reveals how social power works through formal and informal mechanisms of control. *Bade Ghar Ki Beti* (Rich Daughter-in-Law) is more about class, family status and gender relations.

“आनंदी एक बड़े उच्च कुल की लड़की थी। उसके बाप एक छोटी-सी रियासत के ताल्लुकेदार थे। विशाल भवन, एक हाथी, तीन कुत्ते, बाज, बहरी-शिकरे, झाड़-फानूस, आनंदी मजिस्ट्रेट और क्राण, जो एक प्रतिष्ठित ताल्लुकेदार के भोग्य पदार्थ हैं, सभी यहां विद्यमान थे। नाम था भूपसिंहा”

Anandi comes from a relatively well-off family, but she is brought into a home of different economic status and family expectations. As a daughter-in-law she is situated in a patriarchal domestic sphere where she is expected to maintain family honor and harmony. At the same time, her upbringing and social status give her a degree of confidence and moral agency.

Thus, Premchand represents gender not only as victimhood, but as a site for women to negotiate family relationships and affect social outcomes. Together, the two stories show that social identity is multi-dimensional. The character's experience is a blend of economic position, caste hierarchy and gender expectations. Premchand employs common situations — water availability, domestic strife, family honor, poverty and human relationships — to expose larger structures of inequality.

The present research paper titled *Hermeneutics of Societal Fabrication in Munshi Premchand's Short Stories: A Critical Evaluation of Rich Daughter-in-Law and The Thakur's Well* is an endeavour to explore how these two stories are the epitome of India's age old struggles of inequality and injustice in society.

By situating Premchand's work in the larger context of social reform and literary criticism, the study will focus on the author's lasting significance and his unique ability to convert personal narratives into universal pleas for compassion and reform.

Premchand's *The Thakur's Well* and *Rich Daughter-in-Law* remain relevant to contemporary discussions of social equality, human dignity, caste, gender, economic inequality, and access to social resources because the stories focus on forms of discrimination that are expressed through ordinary social and domestic experiences.

Although the stories were written in a different historical context, the questions they raise about dignity, power, exclusion, and equality continue to have significance.

The story can be read in the contemporary times given that there are ongoing discussions on caste discrimination, social inclusion, access to public resources and dignity of marginalized communities. The importance of the novel is not that it suggests that modern society is same as the society portrayed by Premchand but that it shows how unequal social structures can impact human dignity, even something as elementary as that.

The story matters for another reason, too: Gangi's poverty and caste status are mutually reinforcing. The family does not have the economic power to break out of their immediate situation. Caste prejudice limits social freedom. This makes the story relevant to current debates on intersectionality, where different forms of disadvantage can compound each other. Her experience shows that social barriers are not necessarily not present in life if there is formal recognition of equality.

Rich Daughter-in-Law by Premchand is a study of social inequality, primarily through the lens of family relationships, economic disparity, gender roles and patriarchal authority. Anandi's role as a daughter-in-law is representative of the expectations that women are subjected to in a patriarchal society. Her response to conflict demonstrates that women can exercise agency even within restrictive social structures.

Anandi was brought up in culturally enriched and ethically inculcated with moral values in the society and she epitomises this in her character as presented in the following lines:

“आनंदी ने लालबिहारी की शिकायत तो की थी, लेकिन अब मन में पछता रही थी। वह स्वभाव से ही दयावती थी। उसे इसका तनिक भी ध्यान न था कि बात इतनी बढ़ जाएगी। वह मन में अपने पति पर झुंझला रही थी कि यह इतने गरम क्यों होते हैं। उस पर यह भय भी लगा हुआ था कि कहीं मुझसे इलाहाबाद चलने को कहें, तो कैसे क्या करूंगी। इस बीच में जब उसने लालबिहारी को दरवाजे पर खड़े यह कहते सुना कि अब मैं बाहर जाता हूँ,

मुझसे जो कुछ अपराध हुआ, क्षमा करना, तो उसका रहा-सहा क्रोध भी पानी हो गया। वह रोने लगी। मन का मैल धोने के लिए नयन-जल से उपयुक्त और कोई वस्तु नहीं है। श्रीकंठ को देखकर आनंदी ने कहा-लाला बाहर खड़े बहुत रो रहे हैं। श्रीकंठ-तो मैं क्या करूँ? आनंदी-भीतर बुला लो। मेरी जीब में आग लगे? मैंने कहाँ से यह झगड़ा उठाया। श्रीकंठ-मैं न बुलाऊंगा। आनंदी-पछताओगे। उन्हें बहुत ग्लानि हो गई है, ऐसा न हो, कहीं चल दें।”

The story therefore remains relevant to contemporary discussions of women's dignity, domestic equality, emotional labour, family authority, and the changing position of women within Indian society. The two stories are particularly valuable when read together.

The Thakur's Well focuses more directly on caste and material exclusion, whereas *Rich Daughter-in-Law* concentrates on gender, family, economic status, and interpersonal power. Together they demonstrate that dignity is not determined by economic prosperity alone. It is also determined by social recognition, freedom of choice, access to resources and how individuals are treated in their communities and families.

There are a number of themes that help us understand why these stories still resonate. They ask readers to challenge systems that provide greater access to resources and respect and authority for some groups than for others. Gangi's fight demonstrates that dignity is intimately connected to the ability to access basic necessities without humiliation or discrimination.

The Thakur's Well is a literary portrayal of how caste hierarchy can affect everyday behavior and access to resources. *Rich Daughter-in-Law* opens up a space for discussion about women's position in patriarchal family structures and the ability to negotiate social expectations. Both stories problematise, in different ways, how economic circumstances influence individual choices and social relationships. The stories show that caste, class, and gender can work together rather than functioning as completely separate forms of inequality.

Premchand encourages readers to look beyond social status and recognise the common humanity of individuals who occupy different positions in society. The justified climax of the story *Rich Daughter-in-Law* establishes Anandi as a daughter of highly ethically sound family transformed into a cultured and sophisticated daughter in law of Beni Madav Singh as she resolves the tension of the relationship between the brothers by her wisdom and generous behaviour for which she was entitled as 'Bade Ghar Ki Beti.' The closing dialogues of the story are as follows:

“लालबिहारी-जब तक मुझे यह मालूम न हो जाए कि भैया का मन मेरी तरफ से साफ हो गया, तब तक मैं इस घर में कदापि न रहूँगा। आनंदी-मैं ईश्वर को

साक्षी दे कर कहती हूँ कि तुम्हारी ओर से मेरे मन में तनिक भी मैल नहीं है। अब श्रीकंठ का हृदय भी पिघला। उन्होंने बाहर आकर लालबिहारी को गले लगा लिया। दोनों भाई खूब फूट-फूटकर रोए। लालबिहारी ने सिसकते हुए कहा-भैया, अब कभी मत कहना कि तुम्हारा मुँह न देखूँगा। इसके सिवा आप जो दंड देंगे, मैं सहर्ष स्वीकार करूँगा। श्रीकंठ ने कांपते हुए स्वर में कहा-लल्लू ! इन बातों को बिलकुल भूल जाओ। ईश्वर चाहेगा तो फिर ऐसा अवसर न आवेगा। बेनीमाधव सिंह बाहर से आ रहे थे। दोनों भाइयों को गले मिलते देखकर आनंद से पुलकित हो गए। बोल उठे- बड़े घर की बेटियाँ ऐसी ही होती हैं। बिगड़ता हुआ काम बना लेती हैं। गांव में जिसने वृत्तान्त सुना, उसी ने इन शब्दों में आनंदी की उदारता को सराहा-‘बड़े घर की बेटियाँ’ ऐसी ही होती हैं।”

Thus, the selected stories remain highly useful literary texts for examining contemporary debates about social equality and human dignity, not because the social conditions of Premchand's time can simply be equated with those of the present, but because the fundamental questions raised by the stories remain significant: ‘Who has access to resources? Who possesses social power? Whose dignity is recognised? How do caste, class, gender, and family structures influence individual freedom?’

Premchand's lasting importance lies in his ability to transform these questions into human experiences rather than abstract social theories. Through Gangi's struggle for water and Anandi's negotiation of domestic conflict the reader comes to understand inequality through the lives of individuals. Consequently, the stories continue to provide a productive literary framework for discussing equality, dignity, social justice, inclusion, and the relationship between individual agency and social structures in contemporary society.

A Rich Daughter-in-Law signifies the enduring contemporary significance by exhibiting the patriarchal setup of Indian joint family, gender roles and psychological up rootedness in society. The resilient protagonist, Anandi maintains the integrity of the fracturing domestic bond through forgiveness, wisdom, restraint, and projects the grim conditions even in modern society still expecting disproportionately women to absorb domestic conflict and sacrifice personal dignity for the peace and harmony of family.

Premchand's short stories are not romanticizing the joint family as a moral ethical escapism rather it represents the ego clashes of colliding patriarchal, economic frictions in family. The trivial domestic arguments transforming into the devastating egoistic warfare between brothers and class insults regarding Anandi's affluent background. The emotional intelligence, forgiveness and virtuous behaviour of 'bahu' is debatable issue in the modern contemporary scenario. The ending of this story can be alternatively interpreted and result like

If she had subverted and reacted extremely either by breaking the marital relationship or by resulting that dispute into the nuclear family. But the present climax as suggested by Premchand is revolutionary and preservative of relationships and empowering Anandi through her mature, rational, powerful emotionally intelligent reaction. She successfully reverts the locus of grace, humanism, and dynamism in her decision of forgiveness. She patches and heals the rift rather than widening it establishing the values in the universal empathy, humanism, resilience, patience, positive mindset, creative rather than destructive and scattering.

Objectives of the Research Paper

The present research paper titled *Hermeneutics of Societal Fabrication in Munshi Premchand's Short Stories: A Critical Evaluation of Rich Daughter-in-Law and The Thakur's Well* aims to examine how Munshi Premchand uses the short-story form to represent the social realities, inequalities, and conflicts of Indian society.

The Thakur's Well particularly foregrounds caste-based exclusion, poverty, gender, and unequal access to basic resources, while Premchand's family-centred narratives also reveal the pressures of patriarchy, social customs, and economic relations and following main objectives of this paper are highlighted as:

· To examine the representation of social realities in Premchand's *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well*, with particular attention to everyday social relationships and inequalities. · To discuss the caste discrimination and untouchability in *The Thakur's Well*, especially in terms of Gangi and Jokhu's experiences and limited access to clean drinking water.

- To study gender relations and the role of women in the selected stories, focusing on women's duties, social restrictions, domestic expectations and reactions to oppression.
- To learn about intersections of caste, class and gender, and how social identities can lead to multiple marginalization as in the case of Gangi's experience.
- To examine the impact of poverty and economic inequality on the characters' lives, choices and relationships.
- To study the depiction of social hierarchy and power relations including the relationship between the privileged and the marginalized parts of society.
- To understand the depiction of Indian rural society, social customs, community ties, traditional hierarchies and everyday struggles in Premchand's works.

- To examine literary realism as a mode of social criticism in the selected stories and analyse how Premchand transforms ordinary incidents into representations of wider social problems.
- To analyse Premchand's characterisation and narrative techniques in presenting the experiences of socially disadvantaged characters.
- To explore the relevance of the selected stories to present-day conversations about social justice, while still distinguishing the historical context depicted in the stories from present-day social conditions.

The main objective of the research paper is to highlight how Premchand uses literary realism to expose and question caste, gender, class, poverty, patriarchy and unequal power relations in Indian society through the lived experiences of ordinary people. Both stories *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well*, in particular, have been studied by scholars in relation to caste oppression, poverty, resource denial, gender discrimination, and social power.

Literature Review

The literary legacy of Munshi Premchand has been the subject of extensive scholarly attention, particularly for his pioneering role in bringing social realism and reformist ethos to Indian fiction. Decades of scholarship have further explored the social, historical, and psychological implications of his writings.

Rich Daughter-in-law tells the story of a woman from a rich family, who marries into a joint family that is financially struggling. The new bahu, despite her own wealth, chooses to be humble rather than ostentatious. She observes quietly the ways of the household, does not boast of her riches and puts herself on the level of the family's limited means. In the end, her sincere kindness, creativity and respectful attitude win over her skeptical in-laws. The story ends with the family recognising her true worth—not for her money, but for her character.

Rich Daughter-in-Law is the emotional center of the story—a woman of position who is at once compassionate, patient and flexible. She doesn't boast about her superiority; she chooses humility and silently sparks good change." Mother-in-Law is at first suspicious and a bit resentful, fearing that her daughter-in-law's wealth will overshadow her. Over time, she learns to respect and love the bahu for her virtues.

Premchand contrasts external riches with the inner wealth of character. The self-control of the daughter-in-law is a sign of the hollowness of material pride. The story whispers that even in the constricted space of the

family, women can be agents of change through wisdom and empathy. A strength, not a weakness, in the protagonist is her willingness to adapt rather than impose her will.

The story looks at the tensions and possibilities in encounters between people of different socio-economic backgrounds. The family that worships the rich daughter-in-law ironically finds salvation not in her wealth but in her modesty. Premchand uses speech that is natural and every day to reveal character and create authenticity.

Her behavior, her small sacrifices, her refusal to flaunt her wealth, is moral elevation. In *Rich Daughter-in-Law*, Premchand criticises the obsession of Indian families with material status and advocates the power of humility and emotional intelligence to change society.

Gangi's work talks about the dignity of the marginalized and the despair of unbending social structures. The well is a multifaceted symbol; purity and exclusion, hope and unattainability. The polluted water represents the poisonous effects of casteism.

Premchand's language is simple and direct and his descriptions of the daily struggles of the rural poor are poignant. The story builds empathy, pulling the reader into the emotional lives of the oppressed.

In *The Thakur's Well*, Premchand makes a vicious attack on the caste system and denial of dignity to the lower castes. This is not just an image of personal pain, but a critique of a society that normalizes injustice. The case of Gangi is typical of millions who are denied their basic rights. Premchand's sensitive depiction of her plight is a wake-up call for the readers' conscience. The story focuses on a woman's act of resistance to highlight the intersection of gender and caste in the making of oppression.

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