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# Thematic Study of Munshi Premchand's Nirmala and Godan

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**ABSTRACT:** In the novel, *Nirmala*, Munshi Premchand highlights the plight of women in a male-dominated society, emphasizing the struggles they face and the sacrifices they make. *Nirmala's* character embodies the struggles of countless Indian women who are trapped in oppressive marriage and denied basic rights. On the other hand, *Godan* portrays the stark realities of agrarian India, highlighting the exploitation of farmers and the division between privileged and underprivileged. The novel serves as a powerful critique of social and economic inequality prevalent in Indian society, providing a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by the rural populace during a crucial period in India's history.

**KEYWORDS:** Plight of women in male dominated society, Struggle of countless Indian women, Trapped in oppressive marriage, Reality of agrarian India.

## INTRODUCTION OF THE AUTHOR

Munshi Premchand, born as *Dhanpat Rai Srivastava*, was one of the most acclaimed and influential Indian writers of the twentieth century. He is renowned for his realism in depicting the social and economic struggles of the Indian masses in his works. His literary career spanned over three decades, during which he wrote a plethora of novels, short stories, essays, and plays. Premchand was born on July 31, 1880, in the town of Lamhi near Varanasi, into a poor family of a postal clerk. His mother died when he was young, and his father remarried, leading to a strained relationship between Premchand and his stepmother. Despite facing financial difficulties, he completed his Bachelor's degree from Muir Central College in 1899, further obtaining a Bachelor of Education degree from the same institution in 1901.

Despite facing numerous challenges and setbacks in his personal life, including financial struggles and the loss of his wife, Premchand remained dedicated to his craft and continued to write until his death in 1936. His legacy continues to live on through his timeless works, which have inspired generations of readers and writers alike.

He began writing under the pen name "Nawab Rai", but subsequently switched to "Premchand". A novel writer, story writer and dramatist, he has been referred to as the "Upanyas Samrat" (Emperor Among Novelists) by Hindi writers. His works include more than a dozen novels, around 300 short stories, several essays and translations of a number of foreign literary works into Hindi.

Premchand started taking an interest in political affairs while at Kanpur during the late 1900s, and this is reflected in his early works, which have patriotic overtones. His political thoughts were initially influenced by the moderate Indian National Congress leader Gopal Krishna Gokhale, but later, he moved towards the more extremist Bal Gangadhar Tilak. He considered the Minto-Morley Reforms and the Montagu-Chemsford Reforms as inadequate, and supported greater political freedom. Several of his early works, such as *A Little Trick* and *A Moral Victory*, satirised the Indians who cooperated with the British Government. He did not specifically mention the British in some of his stories, because of strong government censorship, but disguised his opposition in settings from the medieval era and the foreign history.

In the 1920s, he was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's non-co-operation movement and the accompanying struggle for social reform. During this period, his works dealt with the social issues such as poverty, zamindari exploitation (*Premashram*, 1922), dowry system (*Nirmala*, 1925), educational reform and political oppression (*Karmabhoomi*, 1931). Premchand was focused on the economic liberalisation of the peasantry and the working class, and was opposed to the rapid industrialisation, which he felt would hurt the interests of the peasants and lead to oppression of the workers. This can be seen in works like *Rangbhoomi* (1924).



In his last days, he focused on village life as a stage for complex drama, as seen in the novel *Godaan* (1936) and the short-story collection *Kafan* (1936). Premchand believed that social realism was the way for Hindi literature, as opposed to the "feminine quality", tenderness and emotion of the contemporary Bengali literature.

After leaving Bombay, Premchand wanted to settle in Allahabad, where his sons Sripat Rai and Amrit Kumar Rai were studying. He also planned to publish *Hans* from there. However, owing to his financial situation and ill-health, he had to hand over *Hans* to the Indian Literary Council and move to Banaras.

In 1936, Premchand also published "*Kafan*" ("*Shroud*"), in which a poor man collects money for the funeral rites of his dead wife, but spends it on food and drink. Premchand's last published story was "Cricket Match", which appeared in *Zamana* in 1938, after his death.

## II. MAJOR THEMES OF MUNSHI PREMCHAND'S NOVELS

Premchand wrote on a wide range of topics, but the themes that he explored in his work often centred around social and political issues. His writing focused on the struggles of ordinary people, particularly those from marginalized communities, and his stories often highlighted the injustices they faced in society.

One of the most prominent themes in Premchand's work is the idea of social inequality. He wrote extensively about the caste system in India, and his stories often portrayed the discrimination and oppression faced by lower-caste individuals. For example, in his famous novel *Godan*, he depicted the life of a poor farmer who struggles to make ends meet and is ultimately crushed by the oppressive social system. Through his work, Premchand sought to raise awareness of the injustices faced by marginalized communities and to advocate for their rights.

Another important theme in Premchand's writing is the struggle for women's rights. He wrote extensively about the challenges faced by women in Indian society, particularly in terms of their lack of autonomy and control over their lives. In his stories, women often find themselves trapped in restrictive social roles, unable to pursue their own ambitions or make decisions for themselves. Premchand's work highlighted the need for greater gender equality and challenged traditional patriarchal norms.

Overall, Munshi Premchand's work was characterized by a deep commitment to social justice and a desire to improve the lives of marginalized communities in India. His stories explored a wide range of themes, but always sought to shed light on the challenges faced by ordinary people and to inspire readers to take action for positive change. Today, his legacy remains an important influence on Hindi literature and a source of inspiration for writers and activists around the world.

## III. ABOUT THE NOVEL NIRMALA

*Nirmala* is a novel by Munshi Premchand, one of the most renowned Indian writers of the 20th century. The novel was first published in 1928 and is set in rural India during the early 20th century.

The novel introduces us to the protagonist, *Nirmala*, a young girl from a poor family who is married off to a man much older than her named *Shukla*. The marriage is an arranged one, and *Nirmala* is hesitant about marrying a man she hardly knows. However, she is forced to go through with it as her family needs the financial security that the marriage will provide.

As the novel progresses, we see *Nirmala* struggle to fit into her new household. She is constantly belittled and made to feel inferior by her husband's relatives, who are always finding faults with her. *Shukla* himself is portrayed as a narrow-minded, selfish man who only cares about his own needs and desires, and who treats *Nirmala* as a mere object to be used for his pleasure.

*Nirmala*, on the other hand, is a young woman with dreams and aspirations of her own. She loves to read and is fascinated by the world outside her small village. However, her dreams are constantly dashed by the harsh realities of her life. She is unable to pursue her education, and her husband's family forbids her from going out.

As the novel nears its conclusion, we see *Nirmala*'s life take a tragic turn. She discovers that her husband is impotent and that he has been hiding this fact from her. She is devastated by this news and feels betrayed and used. She is also plagued by guilt, wondering if her physical imperfections contributed to her husband's problem.



The novel ends on a bitter note, with Nirmala dying in childbirth. The book leaves the reader with a sense of sadness and despair, as we see the main character's dreams and aspirations crushed by an uncaring world.

#### **IV. ABOUT THE NOVEL GODAN**

Godan is one of the most famous novels of Munshi Premchand, a prominent Hindi-Urdu writer. The novel that was first published in 1936, is set in the pre- Independence era of India .

The novel is a masterpiece of Indian literature. It is considered a classic in Hindi literature. It depicts the harsh realities of peasant life in rural India, the struggles of poor and oppressed and the deep- rooted caste system that has plagued Indian society from centuries. The novel is set in a rural village in North India, and it explores the themes of poverty, injustice, and social stratification, as well as love, family, and tradition.

The novel tells the story of Hori, a poor farmer, who dreams of owning a cow. A cow is considered a symbol of wealth and prosperity in Indian society, and owning one would make a huge difference in Hori's life. However, he is unable to afford one due to his poverty, and he struggles to make ends meet.

The novel begins with Hori's desire to own a cow. He is constantly reminded of the benefits of having a cow, and he becomes increasingly obsessed with acquiring one. His wife, Dhanias, is supportive of his dreams and encourages him to work hard to fulfil them.

Despite his hard work, Hori is unable to save enough money to buy a cow. He is constantly exploited by the wealthy landowners and by the moneylenders, who charge exorbitant interest rates and trap him in a cycle of debt. Hori's struggle against the injustices of society, and his determination to overcome them, is a central theme of the novel.

As the novel progresses, Hori becomes increasingly desperate to acquire a cow. He takes out loans from the moneylenders and puts himself deeper into debt. Finally, he is able to purchase a cow from a wealthy landowner. However, tragedy strikes when he is unable to take care of the cow properly, and it eventually dies. Hori is once again plunged into despair, and the novel ends on a somber note, highlighting the injustices and complexities of Indian society.

Overall, "Godan" is a masterful piece of Hindi literature that explores the realities of life in rural India during the early 20th century. It shows the struggles of a poor farmer and highlights the exploitation and injustices faced by the lower classes. The novel also explores themes of love, family, tradition, and the caste system, making it a timeless classic that resonates with readers even today.

#### **V. THEMATIC STUDY OF NIRMALA BY MUNSHI PREMCHAND**

Nirmala by Munshi Premchand is a novel that explores themes related to the oppression of women, the injustice of the caste system, the poverty and neglect faced by the lower classes, the powerlessness of women in arranged marriages, and the challenges of social reform. Among these themes, the novel gives primary attention to the position of women and the patriarchal system that serves to maintain their oppression, as well as the caste system and the poverty that inflicts great suffering on the common people of India during the 19th and 20th centuries.

One of the dominant themes of the novel is the position of women in Indian society. The novel portrays how women are subjected to a variety of oppressions from men. The protagonist, Nirmala, is married off to Shukla, a man much older than her, without her consent. The novel highlights how Nirmala is constantly humiliated and mistreated by Shukla's family and is expected to fulfill the role of a passive and submissive wife. She is rarely allowed to question her treatment or express her desires, as she is forced to subject herself to the will of her husband's family.

Moreover, the novel highlights the importance of education as a means of empowerment for women that allows them to become independent and resist their oppression. Nirmala craves education and literature, expressing her desire to read and access knowledge, but societal constraints and discrimination towards women deny her access to education.

Poverty and financial struggles are another central theme of the novel. Nirmala's family is poor and is forced to arrange her marriage to an abusive man due to financial strain, highlighting how poverty can push families to desperate measures. The novel showcases how financial pressures force people into immoral and unethical decisions that further their misery and oppression.

The novel also underscores the issues of arranged marriages in India and how women are often powerless in these relationships. Nirmala is forced to marry a man who is twice her age and who she hardly knows, as her parents believe it will provide financial stability for the family. The novel indicates how in India, family status and financial stability are valued above individual feelings and personal choices, which not only create a hampering and oppressive environment for women but also impedes their growth and development.



Finally, the novel highlights the need for social reform in Indian society. It portrays the society as corrupt, oppressive and rigid, where centuries-old traditions have been so internalized that social change seems impossible. Even though the novel ends on a tragic note with Nirmala's untimely death during childbirth, it indirectly serves as a call to action for social reform and to challenge the existing social norms and traditions. The novel underscores the urgent need to address social issues in a comprehensive manner to avoid devastation and abuse at the hands of the dominate power structures that constantly push back against reform efforts.

## **VI.THEMATIC STUDY OF GODAN BY MUNSHI PREMCHAND**

The novel is set in the early 20th century in a small village in Uttar Pradesh, India. The protagonist of the story is a poor farmer named Hori who dreams of owning a cow. He believes that owning a cow will bring him prosperity and happiness. However, due to his poverty, he is unable to buy a cow. He is constantly struggling to make ends meet and provide for his family. His wife, Dhaniam, is a hard-working woman who supports him in his struggles. Hori's eldest son, Gobar, is a lazy and irresponsible young man who is more interested in playing cards than working on the farm. His second son, Sona, is a hard-working and intelligent boy who dreams of going to school and becoming a teacher. Hori's daughter, Rupa, is a beautiful young woman who is married off to a man from a wealthy family.

The theme of poverty is central to the novel. Hori is constantly struggling to make ends meet and provide for his family. He is unable to pay off his debts and is constantly harassed by moneylenders. His poverty also affects his relationship with his family. He is unable to provide for their basic needs and is often forced to make difficult choices. For example, he is forced to sell his bullocks to pay off his debts, which leaves him unable to plow his fields. This leads to a decline in his crop yield and further deepens his poverty.

The theme of casteism is also explored in the novel. Hori belongs to the lower caste and is constantly discriminated against by the upper-caste people in the village. He is not allowed to enter the temple or participate in religious ceremonies. This discrimination is also reflected in the treatment of his daughter, Rupa, who is married off to a man from a wealthy upper-caste family. The family treats her poorly, and she is forced to do menial work in the house.

The theme of corruption is also explored in the novel. The village is ruled by corrupt officials who exploit the poor farmers for their own gain. The moneylenders charge exorbitant interest rates and often seize the property of the poor farmers when they are unable to pay off their debts. The police and the judiciary are also corrupt and often side with the rich and powerful.

The struggle for human dignity is another major theme in Godan. The novel portrays how the poor peasants are robbed of their dignity by the rich landowners. Hori's struggle to buy a cow is symbolic of his struggle for dignity. The novel also shows how the poor are forced to compromise their values and principles just to survive. The ending of the novel, where Hori dies while trying to save his cow, is a testament to his unwavering commitment to his values and principles. The novel explores the significance of the cow in Hinduism and its impact on the lives of the characters. The cow is not just a source of milk and food, but is also considered a symbol of wealth, prosperity, and status. The gift of a cow is believed to bring good fortune and blessings to the giver. Hori's desire to own a cow reflects his aspirations for a better life and his belief in the power of the cow to bring him prosperity and happiness.

In conclusion, Godan is a novel that explores several themes, including poverty, casteism, corruption, and the struggle for survival in a society that is deeply divided along social and economic lines. However, the central theme of the novel is the concept of 'godan' or the gift of a cow, which is considered a sacred act in Hinduism and is believed to bring prosperity and salvation to the giver. The novel explores the significance of the cow in Hinduism and its impact on the lives of the characters. It also explores the themes of redemption and salvation and the belief in the power of good deeds to bring one closer to God.

### ***The relation between Godan and Nirmala***

Both Nirmala and Godan conclude on a bleak note, where the protagonists are unable to overcome the societal norms and structures that oppress them. The novels highlight the issue of poverty, casteism, and the oppression of women, which were prevalent in Indian society at the time. Munshi Premchand's writing is powerful and vivid and he portrays the harsh realities of life with great sensitivity and empathy.

## **VII.CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, Nirmala and Godan are two of the most important novels in Indian Literature, and they continue to resonate with readers even today. The novels showcase the struggles of the marginalized and oppressed sections of



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Indian society and highlights the need for social change and reform. The bleak endings of the novels serve as the harsh realities of life and the need for empathy and compassion towards our fellow human beings.

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