

THE URDU PREMCHAND AND THE HINDI PREMCHAND

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RESUMO: Atribui-se a Premchand (1880– 1936) a distinção única, na história literária da Índia, de ter fundado e consolidado o romance moderno em duas de nossas maiores línguas: Urdu e Hindi.

PALAVRAS CHAVES: Literatura Comparada; História literária da Índia; Premchand (1880– 1936)

ABSTRACT: Premchand (1880– 1936) is accorded the unique distinction in Indian literary history of having founded and consolidated the modern novel into not one but two of our major languages, Urdu and Hindi.

KEY WORDS: Comparative Literature; Premchand (1880– 1936); Indian literary history

Besides being acclaimed for his literary genius, Premchand (1880– 1936) is accorded the unique distinction in Indian literary history of having founded and consolidated the modern novel into not one but two of our major languages, Urdu and Hindi. Yet, curiously, those who know the Urdu Premchand hardly acknowledge that he also moved on to write in Hindi, while those who know the Hindi Premchand like to pretend that Premchand did not even exist before he ventured into Hindi. Thus, in his pioneering and immensely influential history of Hindi literature (1929; rev. 1940), Ramachandra Shukla begins his discussion of Premchand with the Hindi short stories he published in 1916, while Premchand in fact had been publishing novels and short stories in Urdu since 1903. Shyam Sundar Das in his equally important work on Hindi language and literature (1930) describes the Hindi *Sevasadan* (1919) as Premchand's 'first original novel' while in fact he had published five novels in Urdu before then, and as late as in 1977, in the

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comprehensive 16-volume history of Hindi literature, we find the plain and forthright announcement that ‘The Age of Premchand’ begins in 1918, again more or less with the Hindi *Sevasadan* (Shukla 1940: 505; Das 1930: 505). Conversely, through some unconscious misappropriation, Syed Ehtesham Hussain writing in 1963 claims the Hindi *Godan* (1936) to be the Urdu *Gaudan*, which was in fact published three years after Premchand’s death in someone else’s translation in 1939. In sharp contrast, Masood Hussain Khan, for this very reason, wants to throw *Gaudan* out of Urdu literature altogether. He wrote that ‘*Gaudan* has no place in the history of Urdu fiction.’ Similarly, Jafar Raza in a book published in 1983 insists throughout, against the force of much of the evidence he himself cites, that Premchand went on writing equally in Urdu and Hindi to the end of his days, while Muhammad Sadiq, swinging to the other extreme in his magisterial *History of Urdu Literature* (1964; rev. 1984) cautions his readers: ‘It is not generally known that Premchand’s novels have all been translated from books originally published in Hindi’ (1984, 439).

Such partisan or purblind misrepresentations of the other Premchand are due probably to that secular piety or benign bigotry, which has regulated most utterances in our century about the Hindi-Urdu or indeed the Hindu-Muslim question. It is the purpose of this paper to confront and critically appraise the indisputable facts that after having published five novels and approximately sixty short stories almost exclusively in Urdu over the first twelve years of his writing career, from 1903 to 1915, Premchand moved steadily but surely towards Hindi. He at first published in Hindi journals some of his stories that were originally published in Urdu and then during 1918–19, he rewrote and published, first in Hindi, his sixth novel under the title *Sevasadan* while its original Urdu version *Bazar-e-Husn* lay unpublished for another four years due to the lack of a publisher. Finally, starting with *Kayakalpa* in 1924, he settled down to write all his subsequent novels originally in Hindi, which were then first published in Hindi as well. Though Premchand would occasionally, and only occasionally, write some of his shorter pieces, both fiction and nonfiction, in Urdu even beyond 1924, Hindi became overwhelmingly the vehicle of his major fiction after that date right up to his death, months after the publication of *Godan* in 1936.

This linguistic transition effected over the middle decade of his writing career was of crucial significance for Premchand as a writer,

both for the reasons that caused it and for the consequences that flowed from it. In what follows, an attempt is made to elaborate and analyze these causes and consequences in a not only strictly literary but also a wider linguistic, cultural, political and ‘communal’ perspective, in order to appreciate their full import.

II

Premchand himself explained time and again that the reason why he moved from Urdu to Hindi was that in Urdu there was a dearth of publishers, and that by switching to Hindi he would not only ensure ‘prompt and profitable publication but also gain many more readers.

That he was only too right about this fact is borne out by the history of his publications throughout his career, as amply documented by himself in letters to his friends and editors’ (Rai 1982: 103–04, 110, 125–26, 191, 205, 206).

The point of interest here is that even ten or fifteen years before Premchand actually said so, i.e. around the turn of the century, it would have been preposterous to imagine that there could be a dearth of Urdu publishers for a writer of his abilities, especially in comparison with Hindi publishers. In the meantime, however, a lot had changed, as is borne out by the figures in Tables 18.1 and 18.2.

18.1: Number of books published in U.P. in Urdu and Hindi, 1881–1910

	1881–90	1891–1900	1901–10
Urdu	4380	4218	3547
Hindi	2793	3186	5063

Source: Francis Robinson, ‘Table VII’ *Separatism Among Indian Muslims* Cambridge, 1974, p. 77.

TABLE 18.2: Number and circulation of newspapers in U.P. in Urdu and Hindi, 1891–1911

	1891		1901		1911*
	No.	Circ.	No.	Circ.	No. Circ.
Urdu	68	16,256	69	23,757	116 76,608
Hindi	24	8,002	34	17,419	68 77,731

Source: Francis Robinson, 'Table VII' *Separatism Among Indian Muslims* Cambridge, 1974, p. 78.

The reasons for such a dramatic reversal can be traced back to the year 1837, when, together with the introduction of English as the official language at the higher levels, Urdu had been officially adopted as the leading North Indian vernacular so that all individuals, whether Muslim or Hindu, simply had to learn it if they wanted to get on in the world. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, Urdu found itself increasingly besieged by a persistent and populous demand for its optional substitution or even complete supersession by Hindi, and a fateful blow was dealt in the year 1900 when the government conceded the optional use of Hindi in the Nagari script for official and judicial purposes in Uttar Pradesh (UP). The curt response of Lord Curzon, then Viceroy, to the protests against this decision indicates his perception of the wider sectarian implications of this apparently innocuous issue: "The howls of Mussulmans merely represent the spleen of a minority from whose hands are slipping away the reins of power, and who clutch at any method of arbitrarily retaining them (Curzon to Anthony MacDonnell 1965: 259)".

This crucial breakthrough for Hindi had been achieved by the sustained efforts of many individuals and organizations spearheaded by the Nagari Pracharini Sabha (established 1893)¹ which has been justly described as 'a political promoter for the cause of Hindi' (Gumperz and Das Gupta, 1971, 138) during this period. Shortly afterwards, in 1910, the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan was founded, which developed and sustained very close links with the Indian National Congress at least until 1935, during which period Hindustani or Hindi gradually came to be adopted by the Congress

as the *rashtrabhasha*, and not only as a vehicle of nationalism but indeed as one of its major planks, so that if one could not go to jail in the cause of *swaraj*, one could learn Hindi or wield the spinning wheel as the next best contribution to the great struggle. Finally, at a controversial meeting of the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad at Nagpur in 1936, which Premchand attended and over which Gandhi presided, the Mahatma laid down the ruling that the language of the Parishad, and by implication the language of the country, was going to be not 'Hindustani' in which the now much reduced Urdu could still have claimed a half-share, but 'Hindi or Hindustani' in the Nagari script (Rai 1982: 354–7).

That this struggle for supremacy between Urdu and Hindi had a strong economic dimension as well, again running broadly along communal lines, is reflected in a statement made by Bharatendu Harishchandra to the Education Commission for the North-West Provinces and Oudh. He wrote that 'If Urdu ceases to be the court language, the Mussulmans will not easily secure the numerous offices of Government, such as peshkarships, sarishtadarships, muharrirships, etc., of which at present they have a sort of monopoly' (Qtd. In Robinson 1974: 75–6). This point proved prophetically true, as indicated by the statistics that the proportion of subordinate official jobs held by the Muslims in UP, where they constantly constituted around 14 per cent of the total population, went down from 63.9 per cent in 1857 to 45.8 per cent in 1886–87 to 34.7 per cent in 1913 (Brass 1974: 143; Robinson 1974: 46).

In the larger context of these inextricably interrelated linguistic, political and economic developments, it can be clearly seen that Premchand's switch from Urdu to Hindi was less an individual, personal choice and more a historical compulsion.

III

Even at the specifically aesthetic and literary level, Urdu did not have, by way of a congenial literary tradition, much with which to hold Premchand back. It has been determined that of the fourteen major Indian languages, Urdu was distinctly the last to emerge out of its 'medieval' period into the 'modern' (Majumdar 1987: 46). In fiction, there had been only two novelists of any note before Premchand, Ratan Nath Dar 'Sarshar' (1846–1902) and Abdul Halim 'Sharar' (1860–1926),² who again represented between them,

as it happened, some of the fissures which were forming from within the reputedly 'composite' identity of Urdu language and literature. Sarshar, a Hindu, had in his *magnum opus*, *Fasana-e-Azad*, celebrated with great relish the common life of an incredible variety of people found among the Lucknow of the Nawabs, while Sharar, in novel after novel set in the Spain of the *jehads* or the Arabia of the early centuries of the Muslim era, had attempted to revive the pristine glory of Islam in a mode of fiction which, in imitation of Hamlet's list of hyphenated hybrid literary forms, may well be called 'the historical-fantastical-political'.

So palpably different were these two contemporaries that sporadic skirmishes would break out between their respective admirers in the Urdu literary journals of the day, in which each party would argue for the superiority of its idol with an almost theological fervour and resourcefulness. Premchand himself intervened in one such running battle in 1906 (in which Chakbast, incidentally a Hindu, according to Premchand, had written a critically just account of Sarshar, in reply to which one Hakim Barham Sahab Gorakhpuri had not only run Sarshar down but also 'extolled Hazrat Sharar to the high heavens'); he came down comprehensively in favour of Sarshar, and in the process once referred to his favourite writer not by name or pen-name but as 'Panditji', as Sarshar was by birth a Kashmiri Brahmin (Premchand in Rai 1962: 59–72).

The all-too-brief tradition of the Urdu novel, which Premchand inherited had, thus, already developed communal overtones. Premchand's perception of the situation would have been especially acute, for in the early part of his career he had been, even as he wrote in Urdu, something of a Hindu revivalist-patriot, as his early stories of Rajput or Bundelkhand valour bear out. In any case, the existence of a Hindu writer in Urdu had always been a rarity and something of an anomaly, and Premchand seems to have been conscious of it. In an astoundingly frank appraisal of his situation in 1915, he wrote: "I am now practising to write in Hindi as well. Urdu will no longer do ... Has any Hindu ever made a success of writing in Urdu that I will? (Rai 1962: 104)."

To Premchand's anguished rhetorical question, Grahame Bailey provides a statistical answer in the concluding chapter of his history of Urdu literature, which contains the following passage:

About 250 authors have been mentioned in this work. Apart from Premchand, only eight are Hindus, the rest are Muhammedans. The only famous writers among them are Daya Shankar Nasim, Ratn Nath Sarshar, and Durga Sahae Suroor. Hindu authors of real ability prefer to write in Hindi. (Bailey 1979: 102).

Another more extensive history of Urdu literature further corroborates Premchand's sense of being an unwanted alien in the domain of Urdu literature, and it does so from the other side of the fence, as it were: '... this much will have to be admitted that Muslims continued to treat him more or less as an outsider (Sadiq 1984: 439).

On the other hand, when Premchand did cross the gulf of this 'cultural-communal divergence' (Brass 1974: 134) to begin publishing in Hindi, he was welcomed on the other side with a warmth that was distinctly more than literary. In his 'Preface' to Premchand's first book in Hindi, a collection of seven short stories under the metaphoric title *Sapta Saroj* (Seven Lotuses), Pandit Mannan Dwivedi Gajapuri wrote in terms highly redolent of Hindu culture:

Premchandji occupies a very high place among the Hindu virtuosos of Urdu literature.... It is a matter of joy that mother-tongue Hindi has of late attracted his heart. Premchandji has entered the Temple of Nagari to offer worship and the Mother has adopted this glorious loving son Prem by embracing him to her bosom (1917).

IV

Moving beyond the apparently personal and straightforward, but in fact, highly symptomatic and complex historical reasons for Premchand's switch from Urdu to Hindi, we can now examine the consequences of this switch, its significance, and how and where they are manifested in his works.

It may be argued that the consequence of Premchand's literary 'code-switching' was to effect a sea-change in the original connotation of that word, 'a sea-change/Into something rich and strange' (Shakespeare 400-01). By moving to Hindi, Premchand appears to have obtained a metamorphic release from an inappropriate and constraining literary situation, in which his own

perceptions of life and his literary inclinations had run in one direction, while the grain of the language he had been trained to use by early education and social expectations, as well as the grain of the literary tradition inhering in that language, had run in quite another direction. The tradition of Urdu language and literature had throughout been urban and urbane, while Hindi, clearly more the language of the common folk at least at this stage of its evolution, related Premchand back to the only life he knew and which alone could form his proper subject-matter, his true quarry. Significantly, at the height of the Urdu-Hindi controversy at the end of the nineteenth century, Urdu had been described by its own partisans as 'the language of refinement and of upper and civilized classes of people', and it had been urged to be 'the duty of Government ... not to consult the whim of the peasantry' who were identified as the champions of Hindi (Anon 1900: 69).

In a broader perspective, Premchand's entry into Hindi, already emerging as the adopted national language, put him squarely in the mainstream of national life and nationalist politics. It is no coincidence that Premchand's active and practical conversion to Gandhian nationalism should have occurred almost right in the middle of the final phase of his other conversion from Urdu to Hindi, which can be dated from 1918 (when he completed the Urdu *Bazar-e-Husn*) to 1924 (when he started *Kayakalpa* in Hindi). On 15 February 1921, a week after he had heard Gandhi address a public meeting to promote Non-Cooperation in Gorakhpur, Premchand resigned the comfortable government job, which he had held for twenty-two years. These two departures may be regarded as major turning points in his life and writing career. The sense of liberation that Premchand felt on resigning government service is caught in all its thrill and exhilaration in two short stories he wrote within the next few weeks, 'Lal Fita' (Red Tape) and 'Vichitra Holi' (A Special Holi). The liberation that Hindi afforded him is captured not in one or two works that immediately followed, but writ large over the rest of his career.

V

The significance of Premchand's switch from Urdu to Hindi can be best appreciated in the evolving context of his career seen as a whole. Some indication of the direction of this evolution may be understood by looking briefly at his first novel and his first short

story, both of course in Urdu—the transitional novel *Bazar-e-Husn/Sevasadan* and a short story from the same period, and finally by outlining a pattern of thematic progression as reflected in the final phase of his career following *Sevasadan*, to which all his major novels belong.

Premchand's first novel, published serially in 1903–04, was *Asrar-e-Ma'abid* whose title was later translated by its Hindi editor as *Devasthan Rahasya* or, literally, *The Secrets of the Sanctum Sanctorum*. It is written in the sprightly, pert and even internally rhyming Urdu prose style, which was generally current at the time and which Premchand had derived basically from his favourite Sarshar. It has for its subject the moral degeneration of brahmin temple-priests and young Hindu widows, both of whom find religious worship a convenient pretext for the pleasures of the flesh. However, such is the dichotomy here between the received form and the intended content that an acute social evil never rises above being a lovers' ruse, and the tone that could have been expected to be scathingly reformist turns out to be merrily salacious.

Another remarkable feature of this work is an abruptly erupting purple patch in the middle of Chapter Two, which is heavily loaded with Arabic and Persian. Here is a brief sample:

Is do angusht ki zaban men vo qoowat-e-goyai au zor-e-bayan kuja ki us qudarat-ekamila ka ek shimma bhi mariz-e-bayan men la sake jisake mahaz adna ishare par yah gulzar sarapabahar wajoodpizir hua. Is deeda-e-kor men wah teziy-e-bisarat kuja ki us sana'at-e-ezadi ka mushahira kar sake jisaki jat se yah gunagoon khilaqut zahoor men ai. (Anon, 1900, 69)

This passage goes on for nine pages and is meant to depict a self-contained episode involving the Hindu holy trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh! The Hindi editor, obviously nonplussed by this passage, suggests that it is a parody of such a style, but there is not the slightest trace of any such ironical intention in the text. A more probable explanation for this oddity may be to regard it as a virtuoso piece performed by an unknown new writer in his maiden work in order to establish his credentials. And if it turns out to be a trifle overdone, it is because all such show-off performances are liable to be so if undertaken out of a sense of insecurity. Interestingly, in the very last year of his career as now in his first, Premchand once again

produced a remarkably Persianized piece, this time meant to be delivered as a speech, because he had mistakenly assumed that his audience was going to be composed exclusively of highly literate Muslims. When one member of the prospective audience quaked before such heavy literary artillery at a pre-view, Premchand laughed one of his famous loud laughs and said: ‘Well, I said to myself—let me write a language that will show them ...’. After a pause he added, ‘After all, I am the son of a kayastha, am I not!’ (Rai 1982: 347).³

Premchand’s first short story, ‘Duniya ka Sabse Anmol Ratan’ (1907; *The Rarest Gem in the World*) begins, as per Urdu tradition, in a remote ‘pan-Islamic’ setting, with a languishing-lover hero and a cruel-mistress heroine stereotypically called Dilfigar and Dildareb—the kind of stuff that would have warmed the cockles of Sharar’s own revivalist heart. But the denouement, curiously, is as heavily revivalist Hindu as the beginning was Muslim. In conclusion, it is the last drop of a dying Rajput warrior’s blood, which is acclaimed as the rarest gem in the world by both Dilfigar and Dildareb, while the point is deftly skirted that this particularly precious drop of Rajput blood might very likely have been shed in battle with a Muslim army!

Of *Bazar-e-Husn* or *Sevasadan*, the transitional novel, the titles themselves are symptomatic of the shift in Premchand’s sensibility. Amorous beauty and the marketplace are highlighted in the Urdu title while in contrast, more austere concepts of home and social service constitute the Hindi title, for a novel which is substantially the same in both versions. The Urdu title promises one more variation on the popular theme of the life of a prostitute, treated sometimes naughtily and nearly always amorally in Urdu, as in Mirza Muhammad Hadi Ruswa’s classic *Umrao Jan Ada* (1899), while *Sevasadan* connotes idealistic reformism as it also recalls by half-allusion such contemporary social reform organizations as the Bharat Sevak Samaj and the various Seva Samitis.

The radical transformation of the title is fully matched by innumerable minor and local, but culturally consistent changes, through which Premchand rendered this novel from Urdu into Hindi. Thus, in the opening paragraph of the novel, a reference to the ‘*pak daman*’ of a character is replaced by plain ‘*satcharitrata*’ in Hindi for the lack of a comparable metaphor, while a female character is described as ‘*satisaddhvi*’ in Hindi when she was understandably no

such thing in Urdu. Elsewhere in the novel, ‘*Bankebihari*’ in Urdu (referring to Lord Krishna) is devoutly turned into ‘*Shribankebihariji*’ in Hindi, ‘*begar-zana andaz*’ becomes in an overkill of translation ‘*nishkama bhava*’, while ‘*majlis khatm hui*’ becomes ‘*sabha visarjit hui*’. ‘*Usne intezam-e-khanadari ki nahin, khat-nafs ki talim pai thi*’ is altered completely to become ‘*Usne grihini banane ki nahin, indriyon ke anandabhog ki shiksha pai thi*’.⁴ The accumulative effect of numerous such changes is not only a ‘Hindification’ of the Urdu version but, through subtle cultural connotations, also a ‘Hinduisation’, which may seem artistically apt enough in a novel where all the major characters are Hindu, whose social ambience is comprehensively Hindu, and whose prota gonist Suman is not only a Hindu but indeed a brahmin with a mother piously named Gangajali! Conversely, the emotive significance of even the name Suman (which means ‘flower’ in Hindi) is liable to be lost in Urdu where it is so spelt that it can be read as the mean ingless ‘*Samau*’—which is indeed how one Urdu critic consistently refers to her. (Sadiq 1984: 440–41, 444).

In the same year that *Sevasadan* was published, Premchand sat down to write a short story for the Urdu magazine *Kahakashan* of Lahore but found, when he had finished it, that he could not really send it there. As he explained to the editor Imtiaz Ali Taj: ‘I have recently written another story, “Atma Ram” It has turned out to be so utterly Hindu that it is not suitable for *Kahakashan*. I may take *you* to be a Hindu but your readers certainly are not Hindu’ (Rai 1962: 107). This story is about an aged, devout village goldsmith, Mahadeva, who is attached above everything else in the world to a parrot eponymously and symbolically named Atmaram, literally embodying the popular Hindu belief that the soul, the *atman*, is like a bird which flies out of the body upon death, as in the common Hindi phrase ‘*prana pakheru ur jana*’. Mahadeva is best known in his village for chanting at all hours of the day and night two lines from his favourite *bhajan*: ‘*Satta Gurudatta Shivadatta Data/Rama ke charan men chitta laga*.’ The climax of the story occurs when Atmaram, the parrot, escapes from his cage, and Mahadeva follows it high and low to try and tempt it back. As Premchand describes it in Hindi:

[The parrot] would now come and settle on the top of the cage, and now sit at the door of the cage and look at its bowls for food

and water, and then fly off. If the Old Man was *moha* incarnate, the parrot was incarnate *maya*. This went on till it was evening. The struggle between *maya* and *moha* was lost in the darkness (Premchand, n.d., 122–9).

As is evident, Premchand significantly plays on essentially Hindu concepts like *maya* and *moha*, which can hardly be translated into any other language, and on submerged metaphysical metaphors of the bird and the soul. No wonder the story proved to be a little too much for the Urdu-Muslim readers of *Kahakashan*. If Premchand was to go on writing more such stories when the spirit moved him to write them, he could hardly have gone on writing them in Urdu.

VI

In conclusion, we may survey briefly the distinct thematic development of Premchand after his transition to Hindi. His five Urdu novels before *Bazar-e-Husn* had been slight, formally derivative or undistinguished, and altogether less than successful, as Premchand himself later acknowledged. However, immediately after completing *Bazar-e-Husn* in May 1918, he began *Gosha-e-Afiyat* (first published as *Premashram* in Hindi in 1921), his first novel extensively concerned with peasant life, while his first short story dealing with a peasant hero, 'Balidan', also appeared in 1918. In his authoritative biography of Premchand, Amrit Rai has described with great vividness the process of sudden illumination through which Premchand now came to see that his true and proper theme, his forte, had not been the kind of urban-social issues he had written about before, so much as it was the life of the villages and villagers which he himself knew best through his upbringing and observation.

Next, and directly following his resignation from government service, he produced his grand epic of the Gandhian nationalist movement, *Rangabhumii* (1924), which remained till the publication of *Godan* his own favourite among his novels. His next novel, *Kayakalpa* (1926), though it contains some twaddle about rebirth, also has his most forthright and up-to-date depictions of the Hindu-Muslim communal riots. This book was followed by *Nirmala* (1925–26), a poignant tale of the suffering of a young wife mismatched to a man old enough to be her father, with stepsons old

enough to be her lovers. The novel is far more authentic in its attack on some aspects of Hindu society than any of his previous efforts in Urdu had been, such as *Hamkhurma-o-Hamsawab* (1906), *Kishana* (1907?), and *Jalva-e-Isar* (1912). Next came *Ghaban* (1931) a novel, which is abruptly jerked away from excoriating another social evil, the greed for jewellery, into a sub-plot involving patriotic terrorists. *Karmabhumi* (1932) with its predominantly nationalist concerns, formed a companion piece to the similarly titled *Rangabhumi*, and finally came *Godan* (1936), the classic account of subhuman misery, fatalistic resilience and the crippling subjugation of the Indian peasantry. It is in these novels and the short stories of the later phase that Premchand found the fulfilment of his true sensibility and genius—it is in these works that the essence as well as the substance of his achievement lies.

In his *History of Urdu Literature*, published in the middle of Premchand's career in 1928, T.G. Bailey had prophesied of Premchand: 'He will never attain the heights which are within his reach unless he goes back to his tales of the village life which he has lived, and the Hindu villagers whom he understands. Those tales alone ring true, and only they enable him to express his soul'.

Thus, according to Bailey, the path to creative truth for Premchand lay through the lives of Hindu villagers. It needs to be added that Premchand's path to these Hindu villagers, as well as to the mainstream of national and nationalist life, lay through Hindi, and that it was only after his metempsychosis, the transmigration of his creative soul from one linguistic body to a more naturally appropriate one that he fulfilled himself as a writer.

VII

The case of Premchand's transition from one language to another raises some further questions, which may have implications of a wider, theoretical nature of some relevance to a comparative study of Indian literatures. First, it prompts us to ask to what extent a writer's worldview is determined by the language he writes in, and whether such determination is more sharply highlighted rather than less so if the writer happens to be bilingual. Second, does a writer switching from, say, Oriya to Bengali, or from Gujarati to Marathi, require such pervasive cultural adjustments as were necessary for Premchand? If not, is Urdu then something of a special case among

Indian languages, comparable in its non-Sanskritic non-Dravidic provenance and composition not to other Indian languages but, say, to Indian English?

Third, since Premchand is not the only Indian author to have moved from a smaller and declining language into a more widely spoken and vigorous one in order to gain a little more money and many more readers, and since we have some Indian writers today who are probably making more money and winning more admirers in a more widely spoken language into which they are translated than in the smaller one in which they originally write, are we here studying in fact not one isolated case but a social and economic force of centripetal tendency, which may eventually prove to be of tremendous consequence in the development of Indian literature? And, lastly, is Premchand's case at all comparable to the cases of some foreign writers who have moved not only from one language to another but also from one country to another (or several others), and who may or may not have found the language of their later adoption creatively as congenial as their first language? Among the more notable of such writers are, of course, Vladimir Nabokov and Samuel Beckett.

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Notes

1. For two illuminating accounts of the campaign for Hindi, written from distinct points of view, see Robinson (1974: 69–78) and Brass (1974: 127–38).
2. A possible third could have been Nazir Ahmad (1836–1912), 'if he could have been persuaded to write novels rather than improving tales' (Russell 1970: 122).
3. The speech was Premchand's presidential address to the first conference of the Indian Progressive Writers' Association held at Lucknow on 9 and 10 April 1936.
4. The quotations here are taken from the Hindi *Sevasadan* (1919, pp. 1, 19–20, 21 and 25), and from the corresponding passages from the Urdu *Bazar-eHusn* (1923; repr. 1954).

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The Urdu Premchand: The Hindi Premchand Afterword 2014

The essay reprinted here was presented at the first conference of the Comparative Indian Literature Association (CILA) held at the University of Delhi from 5 to 7 January 1984. In this Afterword, it may be useful to take stock of how Comparative Literature has played out and developed in India over the last three decades, by surveying its institutional history as well as its thematological evolution.

CILA had then only recently been founded by Professor Sisir Kumar Das, Tagore Professor of Bengali in the Department of Modern Indian Languages, University of Delhi, and that Conference was its first notable activity, its coming-out party. The session (or 'panel') on the last day in which I presented my paper was chaired by another luminary of the field, Professor Amiya Dev of the Comparative Literature Department, Jadavpur University, Calcutta, who was then the President of the Calcutta-based Indian National Comparative Literature Association (INCLA). He was also the editor of the *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature* for which he promptly appropriated my paper as soon as I had finished reading it.

These details are worth recounting because they represent a formative phase in the development of Comparative Literature in India. Das had set up CILA in 1981 mainly to signal and consolidate a groundswell for the sub-discipline of Comparative Literature in Delhi that had been visible since 1977. Until then, the one and only home of Comparative Literature in India had been the Comparative Literature Department founded at the Jadavpur University in Calcutta in 1956. There was between CILA and INCLA (established 1982) the utmost cordiality and collegiality. Sisir Das and Amiya Dev had for long been the best of friends, and anyhow, the forest of Comparative Literature in India was far too small for two lions to stake out distinct and separate turfs within it. So, at a joint conference co-convened by the two associations in 1988 in Hyderabad, CILA and INCLA merged to form an association under a new name and banner, the Comparative Literature Association of India (CLAI).

The present nomenclature is a definite improvement on both the old ones. INCLA suffered from the paradox that it called itself both 'National' and 'Comparative', thus, flouting a basic tenet of

Comparative Literature that it must go beyond a single language and a single nation. And though less flagrantly, CILA too seemed guilty of the same fault, for it was dedicated not to 'Indian Comparative Literature' but rather to 'Comparative Indian Literature', the latter formulation signifying that it was within the domain of Indian Literature that all the comparative study was to be undertaken.

The present name, 'Comparative Literature Association of India', seems more liberal or at least non-committal in this regard. But it may be acknowledged that in practice, Comparative Literature in India continues to be perhaps no wider in scope now than ever before, and what we do is in effect Comparative Literature within and among the Indian languages and literatures. This may seem narrow and ghetto-like but when one looks closely, it is perhaps hardly more so than what goes on in the name of Comparative Literature elsewhere in the world.

An episode that Sisir Das often recounted is illuminating in this regard. When Das (who had a Ph.D. from London, had been a post-doctoral fellow at Cornell, and knew Greek) first met one of the doyens of Comparative Literature in the West, René Wellek, he asked Wellek why Western comparatists like him paid so little attention in their work to 'Japanese Literature, or Chinese, or Persian'—and Wellek here interrupted to complete Das's question, 'or Sanskrit?' He then put a hand on Das's shoulder and said, 'One should do what one can' (qtd. in Trivedi 1997a, 5).

I think that cured Das and all the rest of us of any supposed obligation to try and do the kind of Comparative Literature that would also involve the West. If they don't, can't, and won't do us, why should we slavishly hanker to try and do them? India has as many major languages, both classical and modern, as Europe, each with a rich literary history, and that should suffice for us, as their languages and literatures suffice for the West. (There are, of course, some honourable exceptions on both sides but they only prove the rule.) This may explain why I never did get round to comparing Premchand's bilingualism with that of Nabokov or Beckett, a follow-up project, which I mention towards the end of my essay above. Nor, to the best of my knowledge, has anyone else, from either the East or the West. One does what one can.

So, I too have gone on doing what I can, and this has meant in part that I have, since 1984, returned more than once to the rich quarry.

I identified here, Premchand and bilingualism, in order to dig more deeply and open up other seams. This was my second comparative paper, while my first too, in 1978, had concerned Premchand, being an analysis of his wholesale adaptation into Hindi of George Eliot's minor classic *Silas Marner*. Later, I examined another adaptation by Premchand of a Western work, Anatole France's *Thais*, from an explicitly postcolonial point of view (Trivedi 1997b). On another occasion, with new evidence and arguments, I revisited the explosive question of Premchand and Urdu and Hindi, placing it in a longer chronological perspective as part of a broader narrative of the evolution of Hindi language and literature in the twentieth century (Trivedi 2003).

The question of Urdu, Hindi, and Premchand, which I had more or less wandered into, was indeed highly combustible and had become abundantly clear to me as soon as I had finished reading my paper out at that conference in 1984. A long discussion then ensued, which it would be an understatement to call heated. A lady academic from the Aligarh Muslim University Dr Zahida Zaidi (who taught English and was a well known poet and playwright in Urdu, as I came to know later) stood up at the back of the auditorium and castigated me at length for even daring to suggest that Premchand had ever moved on from Urdu to Hindi.

Then, Dr Kamal Kishore Goyanka, a Hindi scholar from my own university, Delhi, got up from his seat, strode up to the stage, occupied the lectern, and began denouncing me for sullyng Premchand's status as an iconic Hindi writer. He went on and on, getting more and more agitated and angry, until the chairperson Amiya Dev (who is short and slim as Goyanka is tall and sturdy) left his chair, went up to Goyanka, put an arm round his waist, and physically escorted him off the stage, down the steps, and back to his seat. Dr Goyanka and I have since come to know each other better. He has also proved to be over these decades one of the most assiduous and prolific Premchand scholars of our generation. He has published among other works a pioneering dual-language Hindi Urdu edition of a selection of twenty-five of Premchand's short stories, thirteen of which were first published in Urdu and twelve first published in Hindi (Goyanka 1990). This selection is, of course, only a sample of Premchand's oeuvre, but it is significant that of the thirteen stories included here, which were first published in Urdu, ten had appeared by 1920, while of the twelve stories first published in Hindi, ten appeared after that date. This chronology cogently

substantiates the case I had already argued in my paper above that Premchand wrote and published in Urdu up to a certain point in his career, and thereafter, moved to Hindi for writing most of his short stories and all his novels.

In any case, this paper delivered in 1984 was my baptism of fire into Comparative Literature. Actually, what proved controversial and provocative was not so much any issue concerning Comparative Literature itself as the question of Urdu and Hindi, and by obvious implication (as indicated by my two major interrogators) of Muslims and Hindus, and the great and separatist gulf between them that already existed in Premchand's time and that ultimately led to Partition, the division of India on the basis of religion into two nations, India and Pakistan. The relationship of one language and literature to another was apparently no mere academic matter, but could have been, at least in some particular historical contexts, momentous and even have had cataclysmic consequences.

In fact, so deeply ingrained were the issues I dared to discuss in this essay that they found subliminal manifestations in the unlikeliest of places. In late December 1983, Sisir Das asked me to go over the draft programme of the forthcoming conference, written out in his own bold and fair hand, before it was sent to be typed on those stencil sheets from which one made cyclostyled copies in those antediluvian pre-computer pre-photocopy days. Das was as meticulous as he was erudite, and I could detect only one error: he had put down the title of my paper as 'The Urdu Premchand; the *Hindu* Premchand'. The word 'Hindi' as misspelt here forms a beguiling rhyme with 'Urdu', and that may have been part of the explanation for the error. But there was also possibly a subconscious reason for this 'Freudian slip', which related to the vexed and deep-rooted Hindu-Muslim history of the sub-continent, subtly internalized and hardly distinguishable in many accounts from the Hindi-Urdu divide. Hindi and Urdu are commonly taken to be the languages of Hindus and Muslims, respectively—especially by the speakers of the other language—and it is a pertinent part of a wider comparative agenda to investigate the sources and the cultural history of these beliefs, perceptions and (mis) apprehensions (Trivedi 2012).

To go back to the present state of Comparative Literature in India (as indeed worldwide), it now exists under two kinds of threats of encroachment: one, from Postcolonial discourse, which has been around for at least a couple of decades and has won many converts,

and two, from the trending conceptualization of a new field of study called World Literature, which is just now heaving into view. Postcolonial discourse has in part stolen the thematological thunder from Comparative Literature, by providing a common platform for exploring connections and comparisons, both cultural and political, between the various literatures of the vast and far-flung parts of the world that were once under colonial rule. But it is World Literature, which appears to pose a greater challenge to *Harish Trivedi* Comparative Literature as it has essentially a similar agenda as Comparative Literature and claims to be even broader in scope. World Literature is, thus, in direct contestation with Comparative Literature for the same (inter)disciplinary space.

In India, unlike in the West, World Literature is yet to make waves, but for one substantial exception. In a new collection of nineteen essays on Comparative Literature, five essays are grouped together in a section titled ‘World Literature and Comparative Literature: A Dialogue’, both the essays in the opening section, ‘Introduction’, also participate substantially in this dialogue, and two more essays later in the volume in another section also feature the term ‘World Literature’ in their respective titles (Ramakrishnan et. al. 2013: 3–103, 107–16, 125–33)—and that adds up to nearly half the book.

Judging by past indications, these disciplinary contestations (or turf wars) will first be staged and resolved in the West, and will then be followed by a largely cloned but partially modified resolution in India. Indications of this localizing process are already to be discerned in the volume mentioned above. It would appear that World Literature is an attractive proposition for some eminent Indian comparatists partly because it may offer an opportunity to reconceptualize and appropriate ‘the World’ to India’s advantage! Thus, T. S. Satyanath posits against the Western English-language canon of World Literature a very different canon as visualized by an Indian poet, Kuvempu, in his own language Kannada in 1947, in which he evoked right at the beginning (as a pious cosmopolitan gesture?) Homer, Virgil, Dante and Milton, and then proceeded to name three classical Kannada poets, four Sanskrit poets, and one poet each from Hindi, Bengali, Persian, Tamil, and Indian English, all within a space of five lines (cited in Satyanath 2013: 71–2). This roll call of great epic poets comprising mostly Indian writers may seem hardly more lop-sided than some Western anthologies of World Literature of the past.

But the last word here belongs perhaps to Amiya Dev, who ostensibly is content to fill his basket of World Literature with just one egg, really, in an essay titled ‘Tagore as World Literature’ (Dev 2013: 107–16). He evokes in it a whole range of the greatest writers of the world—Dante and Goethe, Maupassant and Chekhov, Schiller and Mann, Tolstoy and Gorky, Sa’di and Hafez—with regard to some aspect or the other of the multifarious achievements of the ‘vishva-kavi’ (world-poet) Tagore. The bottom-line appeal of the new conglomerate called World Literature, thus, would seem to be that we in India can now aspire to claim a bigger slice of the world cake. And Premchand too may prosper for, unlike most great authors of the world, he wrote in not one but two languages and may possibly be entitled to two bites of the cherry!

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