



PREMCHAND'S *GODAAN*: A SUBALTERN READING



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ABSTRACT

Premchand's *Godaan* (1936), the exemplary Indian novel in Hindi, displays a study of Hindu religious conventionality, network situated governmental issues, the questionable job of English instructed urban middleclass and Hindu majoritarianism, which are decisively the confinements of Indian patriot talk, and furthermore the qualities of the socio-political portrayal of the dairy animals with reference to the Cow-Protection development in 1890s and 1910s in the Bhojpuri talking territory (comprising of the district of *Godaan*). In this manner the unexpected decrease of the untouchable relic to the profane religious universality in *Godaan* is a subaltern investigate of Indian patriot talk.

KEYWORDS

Subaltern, Hindi, Indian novel, humanism, religion

RESEARCH PAPER

Premchand's *Godaan* (The Gift of a Cow) (1936) in Hindi offers its entering investigation of Indian rustic existence with different books of the post-freedom Indian writing during the 1930s like Kalindi Charan's *Maatira Manisa* (The Man of the Soil) (1934) in Oriya, Tarashankar's *Dhaatri Devataa* (The God of the Land) (1939) in Bengali and Pannalal Patel's *Maanavi ni Bhavaai* (The Droll Human Saga) (1940) in Gujarati. *Godaan* presents an evaluation of Indian patriot talk just as the untouchable relic as a socio-political portrayal from the perspective of subaltern proletariat through the exchange of the hallowed and the profane. Further, it is expected here to peruse *Godaan* from an abstract perspective, upheld by a couple of journeys into history and humanism to come back to

Godaan.

Durkheim brings up the social starting point of religion: Religious power is just the assessment propelled by the gathering in its individuals, yet anticipated outside of the consciousnesses that experience them, and typified. To be externalized, they are fixed upon some item which subsequently winds up hallowed; yet any article may satisfy this capacity. . . Subsequently, the consecrated character expected by an item isn't inferred in the natural properties of this last mentioned: it is added to them. (Durkheim, 1961: 261, accentuation is Durkheim's)

Durkheim characterizes the expressions: "Sacred things are those which the interdictions protect and isolate; profane things, those to which these interdictions are applied and which must remain at a distance from the first" (Durkheim, 1961: 56). Further, "heterogeneity" between the hallowed and the profane is "outright," as no other two classifications in "all the historical backdrop of human idea" restrict one another so fundamentally (Durkheim, 1961: 53). Furthermore, it isn't that "a being can never pass from one of these worlds into the other: but the manner in which this passage is effected, when it does take place, puts into relief the essential duality of the two kingdoms" (Durkheim, 1961: 54.) Thus, the bovine as a holy creature has a social birthplace, and it could move to the classification of the profane, every one of the class meaning either great or malice.

The bovine (or "go" in Sanskrit) arranges the classes of the sacrosanct and the profane in *Godaan* in religious, monetary and sensual settings. The dairy animals is mostly a consecrated item for Hori concerning him "the cow was not only an object of worship and devotion; it was also the living image of prosperity" (53). Hori's significant other Dhaniya contrasts her and "Lakshmi," the goddess of riches and flourishing, attesting her hallowed status. In the profane settings, Hori's girl Sona and Rupa love the dairy animals. Rupa would not take "a bite of food without first giving some to the animal" and announces that her calf will "sleep with her," and both the sisters would be "insisting that the cow loved her more" (128). Further, Mangal, Hori's grandson and Gobar's

subsequent child, requires milk, and Hori's old energy for the dairy animals restores itself, he exhausts at burrowing at eight annas every day as a temporary worker starts quarrying rock to manufacture a street. In the long run, his head starts spinning, he heaves, his body gets cold, and he imagines the cow "like the celestial cow which grants all wishes," "the cow turned into a goddess" (435). The cow raises herself to the sacrosanct.

Specialist Mehta, a college teacher of reasoning, while at the same time examining conjugal constancy of a life partner, portrays love as "a ferocious lion, which lets nothing set eye on its prey," it is "not a meek and gentle cow" (382). Correspondingly, Ramsevak, a well off single man, tells Datadin: "Being meek as a cow doesn't get you anywhere in this world" (424). The famous accommodation of the dairy animals, much the same as that of the obligation ridden poor worker Hori, is very suggestive. Further, the cow is situated in sexual settings too. Jhuniya, the herder Bhola's bereft little girl, while conversing with the sweetheart Gobar, remarks on man's impermanent sensual unions. She ponders the way "men can keep changing their affections every day": "Have they become more fickle than even cows or goats?" (68). Further, Hori's deal with Bhola for getting the last's dairy animals works in sensual setting. Hori has pined for a cow for a considerable length of time, however has not figured out how to get one. It is "his life's ambition, his greatest dream" (17). He detects the single man Bhola's serious want to remarry, his "enthusiasm" for a lady of the hour, and Gobar's "down to earth worker wisdom" finds a chance to get a dairy animals (19). He offers Bhola a planned lady of the hour at his "in-laws' place: "No children ... good-looking ... talks nicely ... a real goddess!" (19). Bhola promptly offers him a dairy animals at eighty rupees, at the value he had gotten her, without requesting money. Thus, it is regarding getting the bovine just that Gobar much of the time visits Bhola's town, plays with his bereaved little girl Jhuniya and leaves her five months pregnant. Further, the cow additionally represents religious universality and abuse of the poor proletariat in an entrepreneur economy. Hori nearly biting the dust, subsequent to workaholic behavior at burrowing rock from a fruitless land, passes on, and his significant other Dhaniya is advised to blessing a dairy animals, a custom to help Hori in the other world cross the stream Vaitarni. Dhaniya, powerless yet noble, plays out the custom, saying to Datadin:

'Maharaj, there is no cow nor calf nor money in the house. There are only these few coins. This is his *godaan*, his gift of a cow.' And she collapsed on the ground, unconscious. (437)

In any case, what unfurls subalternity in differed shapes in *Godaan* is, in M. M. Bakhtin terms, "heteroglossia":

Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [*raznorečie*] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links

and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization—this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel.(Bakhtin, 1988: 263)

Heteroglossia in *Godaan* alludes the dairy animals to different locales in Indian culture, history and legislative issues.

The dairy animals as a holy creature found a decent place in the in all respects early period of Vedic writing (ca. 1500 B. C.) in Hinduism and gained apotheosis:

The RV [*the Hymns of the Rigveda*, various translations] frequently eulogizes the cow and attributes to it a heavenly origin (I. 73, 6), ... terrestrial cows came to be the counterpart of Indra's celestial cows, whose 'secret' was guarded by Agni in 'Vishnu's highest heaven' (V. 3,3). When the cow became identified with the life-giving and life-sustaining mother-goddess, its paramount importance was established. Aditi, the goddess of nature, is called the 'perfect cow,' the bountiful giver (VIII. 90, 15); similarly the goddess Vāc is called the divine milchcow who gladdens mankind with reinvigorating food (VIII. 89, 11).

(Stutley, 1977: 99)

Further, the "dairy animals exhibited to the administering minister during a funerary ritual, was accepted to convey the dead man over the waterway of blood and foulness (Vaitarni) which isolates the earth from the home the dead," reverberating the interest of 'godaan' (the endowment of a cow) at the hour of Hori's passing (Stutley, 1977: 100).

Further, the dairy animals was one of the significant variables which offered ascend to the 1857 uprising in Indian opportunity battle. R. C. Majumdar notes:

The immediate cause of the Mutiny was the introduction of the Enfield rifle for use by the sepoys. Early in January, 1857, a rumour was sedulously spread to the effect that the cartridges of these rifles were greased with lard made from the fat either of the hog or of the cow, and the ends of these cartridges had to be bitten off with teeth. It was a sacrilegious act, both for Hindus and Mussalmans, involving loss of caste in this world and perdition in the other. . . The contagion spread and on 29 March Mangal Pandey, a sepoy of the 34th N. I. at Barrackpur (near Calcutta), openly mutinied and called upon his comrades to join him.(Majumdar, 1971: 129-30)

Additionally, control of the unpredictable Hindu reasonableness around then likewise required an exacting prohibition on the dairy animals butcher, in case it should erupt into a shared mob. As Mahmood Farooqui informs, one finds "almost obsessive mentions of the pig and the cow in a large number of proclamations and placards produced in 1857," and "the ban on cow slaughter imposed

by Muslim leaders of the uprising” was one of the most effective ways of displaying “solidarity between Hindus and Muslims” (Farooqui, 2010: 155).

As Gyan Pandey remarks, Hindus continued to be obsessed with the Cow-Protection idea in Bhojpuri-speaking areas of east UP and west Bihar (which includes the locale of *Godaan*) after 1910, with violent expressions in 1912, 1913, 1915, 1916 and 1917 (Pandey, 1983: 61). The peasant also came to be focussed in the same period in the intellectual discourse. Francesca Orsini comments: “From the late 1910s the focus of theoretical discussions shifted from land productivity and drainage of wealth to the peasant as an economic and political subject” (Orsini, 2002: 329). Further, "Gandhi's mediation in Champaran," "the successful Russian Revolution," the "agitation in Bijaulia in 1919 and the movement in Avadh between 1920 and 1922" were significant variables to welcome scholarly consideration regarding the laborer (Orsini, 2002: 329-30). Premchand started composing *Godaan*, focussing on the peasant and the cow, probably in "1932" (Rai, 1990: 392). It

isn't far expelled in time from these occasions.

For Premchand, poetics and legislative issues were coterminous with one another. As Amrit Rai, Premchand's child and furthermore his biographer, takes note of that Premchand was impacted by "Gandhi" just as "the Russian Revolution" (Rai, 1990: 139). He remarks further: “Writing for him was a form of serving the nation and serving the people” (Rai, 1990: 81). *Godaan* as a political novel uncovered the hero Hori's misuse by the arrangement of gathering income and that of cash loaning. Gyan Pandey remarks on the poor predicament of the workers or under-owners around then:

Generally it was laid down that under-proprietors would pay the Government revenue plus a further 10 to 50 per cent. Thus they bore the entire burden of any enhancement of revenue while the taluqdars escaped any new obligations. In the years after the first round of settlements and sub-settlements had been completed, the smaller under-proprietors lost more and more of their remaining rights to the taluqdars and, to some extent, to money-lenders and other men from outside. Many groups of once privileged tenants also suffered losses in the general process of enhancement of rents. The Government contributed fully to these developments. (Pandey, 1982: 145)

As Hori tells Bhola, his gaining from his field is removed to a great extent by the zamindar (land proprietor) Rai Sahib, and the moneylenders—Dulari, Mangaru and Pandit Datadin. Tricky computation of the enthusiasm of a chief could never enable a worker to satisfy the obligation completely. Subalternity in *Godaan* is financial, identified with class in the public eye. Further, however Hori weeps over his destiny and Bhola goes along with him, both have submitted themselves to exploitation with quiet submission to destiny . However, there are a couple of

occurrences in *Godaan* of subaltern challenge against the entrepreneur framework. Gobar differs with free enterprise, yet in addition uncovered the development of God which is to the upside of the zamindar, and in this manner rejects the hallowed likewise (31). Further, Gobar, who comes back from the city more extravagant and all the more experienced, plays host to the residents at the hour of Holi, the Indian celebration of shading, and stages dramas, parodying Jhinguri Singh's desire in perspective on his two spouses, and his tricking the rancher crediting out less cash than concurred on. Different exploiters like Nokheram, Pateshwari and Datadin meet a similar destiny. Gobar speaks harshly to his dad, when the last is pardoning himself to Datadin (269). He challenges Pandit Nokheram, the Rai Sahib's specialist in the town, pronouncing that his dad has paid back all the back lease and he can't owe to him for a long time (275). Unfortunarely, Gobar's dissent does not understand in the end as he later surrenders to the clouded side of the city.

Godaan gets subalternity in connection network in a less determined manner aside from Hori's dread of banishment from his standing after Gobar's undertaking with Jhunia and Matadin's constrained blasphemy by chamars. Matadin, the youthful Brahman child of Datadin, has spurned Siliya, a chamar young lady, having had an illicit relationship with her for around two years, and treats her as a worker as it were. Siliya's dad Harkhu requests fairness of station as their respect, his girl, is given to the Brahman Matadin: "You can't make brahmans out of us, but we can make chamars out of you" (305). Harkhu's better half offers vent to her outrage all the more firmly to Datadin's protection: "You're so pious—you'll sleep with her, but you won't drink water from her hands" (305).). The chamars revolt by tearing off Matadin's "sacred thread" and stuffing "a big piece of bone in Matadin's mouth," breaking the brahman's taboo of not eating non vegetarian food, turning the sacred into the profane (306). It is prominent that the subaltern challenge in the account surfaces for the most part as far as ladies and the low rank chamars, the underestimated voices in a general public. Furthermore, this places in sharp alleviation Hori's quiet misery. To value Hori's dissent in the novelistic talk, one needs to investigate heteroglossia of *Godaan* - Premchand's evaluate of conventionalism, network arranged legislative issues, the overwhelming voice of the English taught urban class and majoritarianism, which epitomize Indian patriotism and portray the bovine as a socio-political portrayal.

Negotiating traditionalism, religious hypocrisy signifies evil in *Godaan*, the sacred meaning evil. A few villainous characters are invariably religious hypocrites. Pandit Datadin, the elderly Brahman, was "the village troublemaker" and though he had never committed a theft, which would be "too dangerous," "when it came time for the loot to be divided up, he was always present" (154). Further, he was "quite a profligate in his own youth, but he'd never neglected his religious rites and duties" (301). Datadin's son Matadin, a brahman, flirts irresponsibly with a low-caste chamar girl Siliya, but his "caste mark on his forehead," the reading of "the holy books," recitation from "the

scriptures,” “bathing frequently in the Ganges” could save his reputation (154). For both Datadin and Matadin, religion is summarized by “ritual worship, fasts and scripture lessons, and the observance of taboos about cooking and eating” (301-2). Lala Pateshwari, government revenue official in the village, is “well known in the village for his piety, going every full moon to hear the story of *Vishnu* recited,” but as revenue clerk he would “conscript workers without pay to plough and irrigate his fields, and he would play off the farmers against each other so as to make a profit for himself” (155). Pandit Nokheram, the zamindar’s agent in the village, is “a very high caste brahman” with an illustriously pious ancestral history (157). His grandfather, who was quite well placed, had become “an ascetic” and his father “had also spent his life singing praises to Rama and Nokheram had inherited the same piety,” as he would sit at prayers by dawn, and “until ten would go on writing the name of Rama,” but once away from “the presence of God” he would “throw off all restraints and let loose venomous thoughts words and deeds” (157). Premchand wrote in the *Hans* (a journal) in 1934, criticizing the conventional Hindu gods, as they are not “working class gods,” being “luxury-loving and adventuresome” (Rai, 1990: 310).

Godaan appears largely to focus on the issue of class. The English educated voice also is insincere in *Godaan*. The village Belari and the city of Lucknow present a kind of dichotomy. Sisir Kumar Das notes that in view of “urbanization” and “the technological intervention in the rural space” such dichotomy is characteristic of Indian literature of the first half of the twentieth century (Das, 2010: 406). The critique of urban decadence exposes the insincere participation in national politics by a few urban characters. Though the Rai Sahib Amarpal Singh lives in the village Semari, it is an extension of Lucknow for him, given his urban resources and ambience. He has taken part in “the last civil disobedience campaign” and has become “quite a hero by resigning from the Provincial Council and going to jail” (23). But he remains an exploitative *zamindar*: “Not that they [tenants] had been shown any special concessions, or that the harsh fines and forced labour had been reduced” (23). *Godaan* opens suggestively with Hori’s going to meet the Rai Sahib. Chandra Prakash Khanna, bank manager and sugar mill managing director, has been “to jail twice” during the freedom struggle, who is now interested in making money only (111). He confesses to Prof. Mehta after his sugar mill is burned down about “how many bribes were given, how many bribes were taken” (357)

Pandit Onkarnath, the editor of the daily paper *Lightening*, holding strong views on self respect and journalistic ethics and independence, would like to die “defending truth and justice” but takes recourse to opportunism and blackmailing (213). When Pateshwari, along with Nokheram, Datadin and Jhinguri Singh, send an anonymous letter to Onkarnath about the Rai Sahib collecting the fine of eighty rupees from Hori only because his son has begun living with a widow, Onkarnath gets a weapon to blackmail the Rai Sahib, who anyway pays “five times the regular subscription price” to

his paper (213). Finally Onkarnath agrees to the latter's bribe of an addition of "a hundred people" to the "list of subscribers" (216). Shyam Bihari Tankha, a lawyer, works as a broker in county elections, settling "a pay-off" between candidates like Raja and the Rai Sahib (283). Doctor Mehta, a university professor of Philosophy, and Miss Malti, a medical doctor, do serve the poor in the village, but they appear more as individuals and less a social force. Miss Malti, for instance, appears less authentic compared to the "jungle girl," the latter with "a spirit of service" and "great practical wisdom" (106). Mirza Khurshed, a Muslim businessman, is probably the only city character with an authentic social role to play, forming "a theatrical troupe of the city's prostitutes" (396).² Further, Hori remarks about Gobar: "Coming in contact with the city has changed the boy's outlook" (297). Gobar's mechanical routine of working in a sugar mill corrupts his mind, he takes to drinking, beats his wife—his downfall and decadence take place in his city life only, making him an irresponsible husband and father, an insensitive drunkard. Premchand never had sympathy for Hindu majoritarianism, evidenced by his critique of Hindu orthodoxy. Notably the only urban character in *Godaan* to have authenticity and nobility is Mirza Khurshed, a Muslim businessman. He knew well the way the focus on caste and community would camouflage the issue of class. He wrote in the *Jagaran* (a journal) that "in the world today there is neither a Hindu culture nor a Muslim nor any other culture but only an economic culture" (Rai, 1990:293).

Premchand had misgivings about Indian nationalism. He remarked: "Nationalism is the plague of the modern age, just as religious fanaticism had been the plague of the Middle Ages" (Rai, 1990: 291). Sudhir Chandra observes: "The dilemma facing Premchand was caused by the duality of nation and class. . . . In his short stories he was an unabashed propagandist of nationalism, presenting it as an irresistible force with nothing shady to soil its beautiful face. But in none of his major novels, from *Sevasadan* (1919) to *Godan* (1936), did he portray nationalism without highlighting its underlying seaminess. (Chandra, 2002:

84-85)

The Cow-Protection movement also embodied the same demerits. Gyan Pandey's study explores the Cow-Protection agitations in the Bhojpuri-speaking region, which also includes Awadh to which the locale of *Godaan* belongs. It focuses "particularly on the clashes of 1893 in Azamgarh and the adjacent districts of Ghazipur and Ballia, and in Shahabad a quarter of a century later" (Pandey, 1983: 64). He comments that the initiative for "the establishment of Gaurakshini Sabhas [Cow-Protection Societies]" came from "teachers, lawyers, clerks, officials," supported by "a motley crew of swamis, sanyasis and faqirs," but mainly strengthened by "the great Hindu trading and banking classes, who are bigoted Hindus, and several prominent Hindu Rajas" (Pandey, 1983: 96). In his concluding remarks, Pandey observes that "the sectarian strife of the 1890s and 1910s involved a clash chiefly between a number of the higher Hindu castes and a small and isolated Muslim

community is a fact that is not easily brushed aside” (Pandey, 1983: 125). The sacred status of the cow in Hinduism was appropriated by the Cow-Protection movement of the 1890s and the 1910s, directed by the majoritarian Hindu urban upper class and land owners, to protect or further the interests of the Congress and zamindari system along with other reasons and which are, more or less, the constituents of Indian nationalist discourse.

In contrast with elitist historiography, *Godaan* attempts subaltern (“un-historical”) historiography, narrating, what Ranajit Guha calls, “the *politics of the people*,” turning the sacred status of the cow profane, a shift from the evil to the good in this context (Guha, 1982: 4, emphasis is Guha’s). The harrowing coldness of the dead Hori’s palm, holding ironically a few coins only for the ritualistic gift of a cow is a subaltern critique of Indian nationalist discourse which failed to address reality during the 1930s in India.

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