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## Colonial Outlook and Human Values: Postcolonial Preoccupations in Munshi

Premchand's *Karmabhumi*

Ashish Kumar

### **Abstract:**

*Colonization has been an integral part of human culture and civilization. Indian society is not an exceptional case owing to the British inheritance and dominance upon the minds of youth. The colonial outlook is still perpetuating the roots of imperialism in India. Though the people have got political freedom; yet the strategies of imperialist are still twisting the cultural setup of indigenous people. Premchand has experienced all these means of meaning business only. According to him, the*

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*native people have lost their ideals and traditional values of humanity. They all are running after money owing to the impact of Western education. Youth is expecting only degrees not education; because the present norms of education have nothing to do with developing their characters. So they are facing frustrations and tedious problems in their lives. Moreover, the women have lost their faith in traditional rituals of marriage. They justify their freedom on the basis of Western ideologies of Freud and Darwin. This disruption of values has developed a spirit of resistance between the east and the west. The whole substance is the major part of Premchand's *Karmabhumi*. It does not mean that Premchand has no respect for the western culture but he satirizes those norms of cultural setup which discard the human values and have become the means of perpetuating imperialism. Premchand's fiction has its own relevance in the present age of globalization where colonial outlook has shaped itself according to changing life styles; but one must not think of its complete end. Premchand tries to highlight that part of colonization where there is a profound need of decolonization.*

*The present paper seeks for the basic part of colonization and decolonization with reference to the changing paradigms of the present cultural setup.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Colonization, Hybridization, Mimicry, Orientalism, ambivalent, globalization*

Every person in this world is colonized somewhere because he has certain systematized thoughts in his mind. Man, in other words, appears to have freedom, but is in custody of a cruel system everywhere. These chains belong to an immense and immanent social setup in which man lives and spends his time. Actually, man and this social structure are not two different things because a fish into the water and the water into the fish are not apparently separate. Instead, they are parts of a single phenomenon which appears to have dualism but there is not any actual duality. So, it is the spirit of the social or traditional

phenomena which develops certain attitudes in the personality of a person. These attitudes actualized by a community, become the civilization or cultural heritage of that particular region. The people of that community consider that cultural heritage as a natural part of their life. They do not want any kind of disturbance with it. Any reaction to it becomes a resistance or a revolt to the oppositional part. Indian society has been developing by certain attitudes, values and morals for a long time. But all this has been affected by the political dominance of the British. Actually, all this was not only political but social, cultural and psychological also, which tried to dislocate the traditional heritage of this community. Premchand being a pure Indian writer had experienced all this, having the vision of his own ideal cultural values alive in him. So, he has highlighted the negative aspects of the British's dominance over India. At the very opening of the novel, *Karmabhumi*, the novelist satirizes the crucial process of western education which is only based upon the idea 'business is business' wherein one has to pay for everything in the educational process. Nobody is free from it. The protagonist, Amarkant, has to run away from the school owing to the shortage of money to be paid in the form of school fees. This money is not being collected to cultivate ideal values among the students, but to exploit them and to perpetuate the roots of the cruel system. The following lines can be taken as a fit instance: "Even land taxes are probably not collected as ruthlessly as school fees are collected in our schools and colleges. They are not institutions for education, they are institutions for fines" (1).

Thus, Premchand's works clearly explore the spirit of nationalism concerning the aspects of cultural and political fields. The British deliberately declared English as the national language of Indian society for their own benefits disrupting the native sources of communication. So, the Western education shaped the contemporary people's minds to such extent that they forgot their own cultural and social values. The modern education given to the Indians by that imperial process has led them to the Epicurean philosophy of 'eat, drink and be merry'. Having influenced by this education, the Indian

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women themselves don't believe in the traditional rituals of marriage and consider it to be unnatural and obsolete propaganda. On the other hand, they continually believe in the Western ideology of marriage like "Live in Relationship" or the like. They justify their freedom on the basis of the Western thinkers including Freud and Darwin asserting "Survival of the fittest" and following the concept of "Libido". They also put questions like "Is sex unreal?" breaking the traditional rituals of the Indian society. So, all this dislocation is the result of that Western education which is still in the minds of the colonized people having an enlarged image in their minds. By popularizing the standard of the Western education in the colonies, the imperialist rulers had been shaping the minds of the colonized masses, establishing a new form of capitalism in which the Indian or the colonized were being exploited under the strategy of their business. In this sense, capitalism and imperialism were not different things but two phases of a single project.

Premchand is a brilliant novelist to understand the roots of the imperialistic system. So, he regarded the British as "Traders" who believed in utilitarian and inhuman activities for the sake of their business. He also depicts how the native people were forced to perpetuate this system by being the puppets in their hands. This approach of discussing the human beings as puppets under that system proves to be a kind of 'Catharsis' for the colonized people having the feeling of decolonization. Here, Premchand's approach is similar to that of Frantz Fanon, who also thinks that the imperial process had been a brain-washing methodology over colonies which created inferiority complex among them. Then, there is a need to decolonize them from that strategy in which they have to live. Premchand focused upon the use of native things for this purpose. Drinking, women-dance in the marriages, and

flirtation with girls have been the hallmarks of the Western education which had disintegrated the Indian values. The trend of friendship day is common to the Westerners, but it is in an ambiguous stage in India today. The colonized have come to a stage where they are neither Indian nor Western. This is the hybridization of the culture resulting from the impact of western education during the colonizing process. The school teachers themselves have become businessmen, who are bothered about fees and not about education or values. This changed attitude in teaching-learning process is a resistance to Indian *Gurukul* system, where teacher and taught have been builders of an ideal society, and where education goes to the students for the sake of good life and not for inculcating business life. This cultural resistance reminds the scholars of the theme of the novel *A Passage to India*, where friendship between the Indian and the British is depicted as an impossible and unsuccessful project because there is something in their cultural and social system that does not like this unity. The Western norms appear to be lacking in a framework and suitability viable for Indian cultural setup. This very scenario of encounter between the East and the West is being depicted by Premchand in the first chapter of the novel *Karmabhumi*. His philosophy sharply touches the minds of the people who are being colonized in this rat race of the westernization. Whether his appeal for changing this mode of society would be successful or not in the age of globalization in which one country has to depend on others is not clear. But Premchand obviously has revolted against the Western system of inhumanity, which to the Westerners is a routine course of doing and meaning business. He dismisses the trend of cutting the throat to win the competition, which the worldly wise and successful people, fashionably and cunningly and beguilingly, term as 'cut-throat competition'. Premchand, it seems, is able to see through this sharp practice.

Premchand as human being has been influenced by the spell of the *Arya Samaj*, Gandhism and the Indian values, which, in a sense, can be seen in the personality of his ideal characters, who become

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the heroes in his novels dismantling the Western ideology of doing business over upholding humanity. Amarkant, in the present novel, justifies the above argument and testifies to it, because he does not have faith in the practices and preaching of his father, Lala Samarkant, who is an industrious man having the influence of Western methodology, which appears to the readers very much inhuman and invalid in the Indian value system. If Amarkant and Samarkant are considered to be the two poles of the whole story manifesting the Eastern and the Western values respectively, it would not be a wrong thing because both have different values most unlike each other's. And this gulf is not resolved until Lala Samarkant understands the significance of Amarkant's values, which are purely Indian, Gandhian and rooted in the ideals of Indian cultural heritage incarnating the human and social norms of this country. Premchand obviously writes about the conflict between father and son: "Whatever Lalaji did, his son would reject.... He would assiduously pray and read scriptures, his son considered it hypocrisy; his greed knew no bounds, his son despised money" (5-6).

So, Premchand clearly explored that the root-cause of the social evils was the process of imperialism in India. It had been exploiting the people so much that women had to go on the streets and sell their honor in the market-place. It will be wrong to call such a society democratic, that great and greatly eulogized ideal for which the imperialistic powers fought the bloody World Wars. Capitalism had disrupted the concepts of equality and fraternity to such an extent that it would be impossible even to recognize them anymore. The sole value of a human being lies in his/ her usefulness as a means of making money, as a commodity to be marketed. It values a human in terms of the price of his/ her flesh, the sheer yield. The dishonesty, the injustice and the hypocrisy are at the

roots of such a society having the flavour and fervour of the British Raj in India. So, the spirit of nationalism and the critique of colonialism are clearly reflected in the pages of Premchand's corpus, and very brilliantly in *Karmabhumi*. Most critics believed that the nationalist movement in India had been borrowed from English books. In this regard, Ania Loomba, a postcolonial critic, summarizes Anderson's views in her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*:

Indians learnt their ideas of freedom and self-determination from English books, including the plays of Shakespeare; Nationalism is thus a 'derivative discourse', a Calibanistic model of revolt which is dependent upon the colonizer's gift of language/ideas. (158-159)

But Premchand's character Amarkant is a good reply to this description, because his nationalist movement is not only a political propaganda but also a resistance to the British Raj drawing his energies from indigenous sources. For instance, 'Amarkant's spinning wheel' is not a 'Calibanistic model of revolt' but a heightened philosophy to resist, counter and reject the British ideology. It had dawned upon Gandhiji after deep meditation and realization of spiritual power. It was none an ordinary political or military tactic to combat the imminent enemy or competitor. If Premchand is talking of exploitation, or equality and fraternity, then the critics can very well attach it with the ideology of Marxism also which originated in Europe or in the West. But Premchand's approach goes into this process in a different manner. Marxism believes in the philosophy of 'dialectical materialism' and in the concrete reality of the matter, especially the economic, social and political matters. On the other hand, Premchand does not reject the traditional significance of Indian spirituality. His character Amarkant replies to his father about the spinning wheel: "We don't spin the wheel for money... it is a means to self-purification" (10). So, Premchand's nationalist spirit against the British Raj is "old wine in new bottle" which takes up the Indian sensibility in its original form. He, however, enlivens it with new force.

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The European countries try to justify their own superiority upon the colonies without understanding the true value and significance of their cultural heritage. Edward Said calls it as 'the discourse of Orientalism', in which the colonies are defined in negative terms in comparison to the West. Actually, some single line taken just arbitrarily from the *Quran* becomes a sufficient source for the Westerners to represent the whole significance of Islam in their discourse on Orientalism. But Premchand appears to have sharp reaction to it in the present novel. Munni's rape by the British soldiers in the novel shows the real face of the imperial process. Dr. Shantikumar, Salim and Amarkant satirize upon the Western culture saying this incident a very much shameful act, because honour of a woman in Indian culture is considered to be invaluable and priceless or the supreme aspect of her dignity. Salim rebukes the Indian people who were looking at this incident:

There are so many of you and you just stood there gaping. Don't you have any sense of shame? You don't even protect the honour of your daughters and daughters-in-law. You may think that it was not your daughter or daughter-in-law, but indeed all the daughters of this country are your daughters; all daughters-in-law are your daughters-in-law; all mothers are your mothers. You all witnessed this evil act and still stood there gawking like cowards. Why don't you all go and drown yourselves. (23)

Premchand has shown these white soldiers as men of the lowest class in England. That is why their culture cannot be regarded as something superior which it brings out such degraded progeny. Indian cultural values where the woman has a place of goddess and is worshipped everywhere have been depicted in that light. This description makes Premchand a postcolonialist, writing back to the

imperialist who has disrupted the indigenous culture. ‘Premchand and the spell of Gandhian philosophy’ has been a matter of ambiguity and susceptible to much critical debate, for Gandhiji does not believe in violence. But the British soldiers are beaten by Salim, Amar and Dr. Shantikumar. So, it seems to be diversion from Gandhism. However, apart from this, one does not see any gap between Premchand and Gandhism. The impact of Gandhiji upon him has been very much profound and dominant in its ambiguous and deep form. Step of violence at the time of Munni’s rape must not be taken as an inhuman activity, because Premchand’s vision is not separate from the philosophy of non-violence and truth. On the other hand, he follows Gandhism in its real sense. Though he respects Gokhle, Tilak and the Army Samaj, yet he does not criticize Gandhism. Gandhiji himself declares the spirit of his philosophy, changing the phrase from the *Bible* slightly: “Hate the sin but love the sinner”, which echoes much ambiguity on the face of it. Yet it is a consistent philosophy, notwithstanding the fact that one cannot isolate the sinner from the sin. Even so, the Indian characters after the incident of Munni’s rape can be seen following the same philosophy showing a soft attitude towards the British. Dr. Shantikumar emphatically says to Salim, “It is inhuman to hit someone who is down” (23). Here, Premchand clearly justifies that violence is not a bad thing for the defense of one’s dignity. Sometimes peace is to be won through war. Dr. Krishna Chander Panday quotes Gandhiji in his book *Premchand ke Jivan Darshan ke Vidyak Tattva*:

When a woman is assaulted, she may not stop to think in terms of Hinsa or Ahimsa; her primary duty is self protection. She is at liberty to employ every method or means that comes to her mind in order to defend her honour. God has given her nails and teeth. She must use them with all her strength if need, be die in effort. (212-13)

So, non-violence does not mean to stop someone to defend one’s dignity, but it must not disturb any human being without any particular cause. Premchand is a very brilliant writer to show that self-

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defense should not be considered as the means of violence or a display thereof. So, the above description is a sharp revolt to the false value-structure of the imperialists who emphasize the superiority of their own cultural values with respect to colonial culture. Madan Lal in his book *Munshi Premchand: A Literary Biography* clearly writes:

If Germany is proud of her might, France of her culture, and Britain commerce, India is proud of her chastity. Isn't it a matter of shame for Europeans that not one of their top most poets-neither Homer nor Virgil, neither Dante nor Goethe, neither Shakespeare nor Hugo-has been able to create a character like Sita's or Savitri's. The European society has no such ideals of chastity. (53)

So, dignity and honour of a woman are the supreme qualities of her being in this world, according to Indian culture. She considers it to be more valuable than her life. That is why Munni does not want to go back to her husband after the incident of her rape by the British soldiers. She spends her life at Haridwar renouncing the world and serving the people. But Premchand as a liberal novelist tries to show that chastity must be measured in terms of the purity of the spirit not that of physicality. Because Munni's rape is not intentional but a situational incident, therefore, the novelist provides a new way of thinking towards that particular concept of chastity in Indian culture. But it does not mean that Premchand satirizes the Indian culture and civilization. On the other hand, he blames English education for the cultural disintegration. Note, for instance, the following:

This borrowed English education system is destroying our character. We have made education a business. The more capital you invest in business, the more profit you make. It is the same with education, the more schooling you receive, the higher the office you obtain. (66)

To justify the impact of this education upon the Indian women, Salim clearly says to Amarkant:

Bhai-Jaan... There are virtuous women as well as prostitutes among both Hindus and Muslims, and your wife is a modern woman – educated, freethinking and pleasure loving. She goes to the cinema, and reads newspapers and novels. God save us from such women: They are influenced by European culture. There is hardly anything that these modern women won't do. In former times the man used to take the first step, flirtation used to be initiated by men; now flirtation is started by women. (118)

Premchand's purpose in his postcolonial approach is not only to show encounter between the East and the West concerning with their cultural gulfs. But he also wants to disrupt any kind of colonialism which becomes inhuman in its pursuit of earthly happiness and its natural creativity, be it is biological or psychological or cultural or whatever. He also knows that there is big difference between a man and being a man. Because "a man" is the product of this constructed system in which he lives and sustains it without having awareness about his own colonial mentality. He, in a sense, develops such concepts which are thought to be natural parts of his behaviour, but it is not so. On the other hand, "Being a man" is also the part of the same system but does not follow blindly into this world; because such a subject has experienced the ways of the system, and is aware of himself moving into the system, and does not compromise with it. The difference in modes of resistance between a man and being a man can be seen in the personalities of Lala Samarkant and Amarkant. This conflict

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sufficiently justifies the above description. Amarkant himself articulates about the traditionality of the religion:

What had religion to do with eating habits and customs... I may commit theft or murder or deceive someone, but my religion won't disown me, but if I drink water from the hands of an untouchable, I lose my religion. What kind of religion is this? We cannot relate at the level of the soul to anyone outside our religion. Religion has tied down souls, has restrictions even on love. This is not religion, this is a disgrace to religion. (82)

Obviously, Premchand is trying to end these false ideals which have detached man from man, soul from body. Amar himself is the follower of the ambiguous frame work of real and ideal views in his own life concerning with simple living and high thinking. He remarks: "I am not a slave to the ideas of the world....This is what the world calls justice. I can't live in this world"(117). He, therefore, has a desire to start a new life away from this colonial system and the colonial ideological paradigm, wherein man is not free even to think. Note, for instance, the following: "I am going to start a new life where manual labour is not a shameful thing and ... I don't want to remain a slave to custom and property" (120). But Samrkant, his father, is not a follower of such ideals because he simply believes in the theory of profit and loss and considers no business away from it. So, Amar has to leave that place in search of a suitable place for his soul.

The whole description of the story is clearly a hint to the political freedom in India, because the people themselves have experienced the dominance of the British. But Premchand's appeal is not only

political but also cultural; because the dislocation of the Indian culture is a big and heavy effect of the imperialism, which has deviated the Indians away from their real values. So, Premchand's ideal characters are not simply fictional devices; they, in a sense, appear to represent the deep and liberal phenomena of Indian culture where there is no exploitation, no false ideals. Therefore, the spirit of their character represents the significance of an ideal society. Premchand, in a wide sense, is not against the West comparing it to the East. Besides this, he is using this comparison as a device to show values of an ideal culture. He does not want to see any kind of exploitation between man and man, man and woman, the rich and the poor, etc. He turns postcolonial, destroying the constructed binarism which has its roots in dishonesty and inhuman acts. The title of the present novel *Karmabhumi* shows values and vision of the Geeta articulating that performing one's duty in the service of humanity is supreme to all the deeds of human life. In short, the novel obviously highlights much potential meaning ascribable to the arena of Pre-Independence era and the movements going on then. The relevance of this line of thinking and study is very much there even with relation to the present Indian socio-political and cultural situations and setup.

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### **About the Author:**

**Ashish Kumar** is a PhD Research Scholar in the Dept. of English & European Languages, Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Post Box-21, Dharamshala, Dist. Kangra.