

ISSUES OF LOVE AND MORALITY IN 'GODAN'

Prem Chand is among the leading novelists in Hindi literature. He has given a new direction to Hindi literature by introducing the element of realism and social commitment. Though his novel *Godan* centres around social themes, yet through his characters like Mr. Mehta, Miss Malti, Mattadeen, Gobar, Seliya, Hori, Dhanial and Rai Sahib, Prem Chand projects his vision of a life where love and morality, freedom and taboo form the two opposing polarities in a rigid social set-up. The emphasis of Prem Chand has been to highlight the different social issues in his contemporary society. It is due to this reason that the focus on the inner life of the characters is not sharp and convex in nature. The microscopic view of things has been replaced by the macrocosmic. The characters of Hori, Dhanial, Rai Sahib, Dattadeen present the novelist's idea of morality in the Indian social set-up whereas Miss Malti, Mr. Mehta, Mattadeen, Seliya and Govindi become Prem Chand's spokespersons to project his views on issues like love, marriage and individual freedom.

Hori is a poor farmer who has a firm belief in the sanctity of the social institutions like marriage and family. Any step against traditions and the system is an act of blasphemy for Hori, and he even can not think of going against them. He cannot leave his goodness and nobility of soul.

His wife Dhaniam warns him against the injustice and exploitation by the greedy money-lenders in the village. Hori feels helpless before the people with authority in their hands. He is fully aware of their acts of villainy, yet he suffers without any sign of resistance on his part. On the other hand, Dhaniam is a very worldly-wise woman but she fails to inspire and reform her husband. He is too honest to be taught the lessons of worldly wisdom.

Dattadeen, the greedy money-lender of the village does not follow any moral code of conduct, and ironically, his own son Mattadeen flirts with an outcaste woman Seliya; a son is born to her. His father Dattadeen, a brahmin organizes a yajna to purify his son and pundits are called from Banaras. But Mattadeen is now a changed person for he has understood the meaning of life in the embraces of a beautiful woman, though an outcaste, like Praneshacharya in *Samskara*. Mattadeen has become capable of comprehending the meaning of love, dharma, issues of morality and life. Now he has enough courage to accept his son and his beloved Seliya openly, without any sense of shame.

In the sub-plot of *Godan*, the reader learns about the story of Miss Malti and Mr. Mehta. They happen to meet in a meeting where Mr. Mehta speaks on the status of woman in modern society. He asserts that woman should not forget her feminine qualities and should never try to go against her feminine nature. They discuss matters like love, family, freedom and the meaning of life. Both of them share common views on these subjects. They believe that love is pious and a sacred feeling. It depends upon a healthy understanding of each other. Their notions of love are Platonic. In the beginning of the novel, Miss Malti is shown as a young lady under the influence of western ideas and moves around in parties and society like a butterfly. But after meeting Mr. Mehta, she has to revise her opinions regarding the role and the status of women, the concept of love and the

validity of the institution of marriage. Through these two characters, Prem Chand advocates reforms in social set-up by introducing radical and progressive ideas of equality and social justice.

The relationship between Miss Malti and Mr. Mehta is unique and is a part of Prem Chand's vision. Both of them realize that though they are in love with each other, but marriage still seems to be a distant dream. They agree that marriage would hamper the healthy growth of their relationship. Miss Malti takes charge of Mr. Mehta's household affairs, and finally takes him to her house as a paying guest. They decide not to marry and like together as true friends. Their love relationship remains on the Platonic level. Prem Chand has given a new treatment to the concept of love and marriage in those days. It shows the progressive attitude of Prem Chand. It also reflects the spirit of change in contemporary society. Miss Malti and Mr. Mehta represent those socio-cultural forces active in the elite of Indian society which are capable of moulding and shaping the ethos in a tradition-loving society. Thus, in *Godan*, one finds the progressive outlook of Prem Chand with his socialist and Bolshevik ideas making efforts to create an ideal social order.