

CHAPTER XV

PREM CAND AND HIS IMITATORS

Prem Cand is the most illustrious writer of short-stories in Urdu. He began writing round about 1917 and continued to do so right till the time of his death in 1937. There are more than six or seven volumes of his collected short-stories. His works were published in four volumes under the names of 'Prem Paccīsī' and 'Prem Battīsī', a later collection was entitled 'Prem Cālīsī', and the works of the last few years have been gathered up and published in several volumes entitled 'Vārdāt', 'Ākhrī Toḥfa', 'Dūd kī qīmat', 'Khāb o Khayāl' and 'Zād i Rāh'. 'Zād i Rāh' contains the very last stories written by him.

The short-story, which is now so popular, was in its infancy when he began writing. He brought an entirely new conception of, and an entirely new approach to, the short-story. He was the pioneer, and he remained the best exponent, of the style he had introduced. Prem Cand was the first to go to the villages for his material, to make the uneventful life of the simple villagers the theme of his short-stories and to show the workings of the mind of these simple sons of the soil, the toilers in the fields, clerks and insignificant "Munshīs" of big business houses.

He completely understood the peasant, the lower middle class and the middle class. He knew of their struggles, temptations and weaknesses, their hopes and fears, their innate and deep religiousness and silly superstitions. The mind of the peasant was an open book to him and he understood their every heart-beat. Every aspect of the peasant's life is described in his stories. The stories in 'Prem Paccīsī', 'Prem Battīsī', 'Vārdāt', 'Zād i Rāh' actually paint a complete

picture of village life and make a strong and eloquent appeal on behalf of the villagers. He has shown in his subsequent stories the importance of little things and the grave consequences of small acts of thoughtlessness and neglect, things which might be decisive in the life of others though they might appear to us of no consequence. The poverty of the poor that so often leads them to wander from the path of honesty is the theme of several of Prem Cand's stories. But the poor are innately honest, they have a distaste for swindling, for abusing a trust, for appropriating others' belongings. They are led against these promptings of their nature, they are forced to wander away from the strict path of honesty. But they are never happy about it, they cannot revel in their ill-gotten gains. Millowners may sleep peacefully after taking away the bread from a thousand workers, and bankers and stock-brokers may make hundreds lose their employment, but the heart of the poor is more tender, less hardened than theirs. They cannot rest if they have taken even under duress that which did not belong to them, they are always being reproached by their conscience and must needs restore what they have gained by illegal means to secure their peace of mind.

That is the theme of one of his earliest stories, 'Imān kā faisla'. Seth Narāyan Lāl is the trusted manager of the local zemindar. He has been in his service and enjoys his absolute confidence. On the death of the zemindar, his widow, Bhān Kunvar, makes him the trustee of the estate and he has absolute power. For a few years he carries on with absolute honesty and manages the affairs with such interest and ability as to enable Bhān Kunvar to make considerable improvements in and additions to the estate. But though Bhān Kunvar gives him a lot of praise, she is not generous in the matter of reward. This, coupled with the lack of supervision, gradually undermined his integrity, and he could not resist the temptation when an opportunity presented itself of transferring a village

to his own name. For some years the swindle remained undetected, but when it was discovered, *Seth Narāyan* wanted to brazen it out and deceive *Bhān Kunvar* into thinking that she was mistaken. But she was not to be fooled; she decided to fight the case. *Seth Narāyan* had managed to do away with all the papers that were compromising, but *Bhān Kunvar* still persisted in fighting the case. In the absence of proof it was decided in favour of *Seth Narāyan*. After the decision of the court, *Bhān Kunvar* took permission to put one question to *Seth Narāyan Lāl*. The permission was granted to her, and she said to him :

ایمان سے بتا دو، گاؤں کس کا؟

The reply was :

آپ کا

This was the decision of the conscience and not of the court.

'*Īmān kā faiṣla*' is an extremely well-written story. The characters of *Bhān Kunvar*, *Seth Narāyan Lāl*, and his simple, God-fearing wife and mother, are extremely well brought out. How gradually and for what reasons *Seth Narāyan Lāl* turns from an honest man into a cheat, the struggle between his conscience and his greed before he commits the crime, all these psychological matters are superbly dealt with. The contempt and disgust with which his wife and his mother hear the news of his defection and the rising tide of public opinion against him gradually make him realise the futility and the heinousness of his actions. By the time *Bhān Kunvar* puts the question :

ایمان سے بتا دو، گاؤں کس کا؟

Seth Narāyan is no longer in the same mood of brazen dishonesty in which he openly justifies his conduct to his wife and to his mother. His mood had changed from that of brazen dishonesty into one of regret. It is by displaying such knowledge of the workings of the human heart that Prem Cand has

made the story immortal. '*Īmān kā faiṣla*' is one of the best stories he has written. It has an almost dramatic quality about it. The interest of the reader is raised to a high pitch and the *dénouement* is very dramatic.

'*Durgā kā mandir*' is another story in which the innate honesty of the poor is shown to triumph over the temptation to dishonesty. In the '*Zevār kā dībba*', written much later, the same theme is used. The poor might flounder into dishonesty but they never feel happy about it, and more often than not they seek to make amends. In '*Durgā ka mandir*', *Bhān Nāth*, a very ill-paid clerk, happens to find eight sovereigns. He does not intend to appropriate them, but feels strongly tempted to do so, and therefore, instead of going straight to the police and handing over the money to them, he takes it home. His wife on seeing it feels a passing temptation, but both so far intended taking it to the police next day. Next morning a friend borrows Rupees thirty on promise of returning them the following day. The day turns into a week and the week into a month, but there is no sign of the money; nor have the sovereigns been deposited with the police, for they could not replace the Rupees thirty they had lent out of them. *Bhān Nāth* is not happy about it and fretting over it makes him ill. In his illness this delinquency preys on his mind. His wife, *Bhāma*, gets worried and goes to the "Temple of *Durgā*" to pray for his health. There she sees an old woman praying that whosoever has taken her money might suffer. *Bhāma* tells the woman that her husband has found the money and begs her to forgive them. *Bhāma* goes home and returns the money to the old woman.

The deep religiousness of the poor is also illustrated in '*Durgā kā mandir*', as well as their honesty. The faith that is dead amongst the rich and the city-dwellers is alive amongst the simple folks of the villages and the poor. Religion has become meaningless to the sophisticated and the wealthy ;

it is a reality to the simple and the poor. It is a source of strength to them, a stand-by. *Bhāma* turns to “*Durgā*” when her heart is troubled, and when she hears the old woman saying at the feet of the deity :

دیوی، جس نے میرا دھن لیا ہو اس کا ستیاناس کرو!

she shudders. When the old woman after her money has been returned says :

دیوی، ان کا کلیان کرو!

she feels that a weight has been lifted. These simple people still believe in right and wrong, in rewards and punishments. Their philosophy of life is still not complicated by hypothetical suppositions and far-fetched theories.

The reverence for religion in the heart of the poor is again illustrated in ‘*Iṣṭāh*’ which comes immediately after ‘*Durgā kā mandir*’ in ‘*Prem Battīsī*’. The “*mālī*” might be dishonest to the extent of stealing a few of his master’s plants, but he does not take a false oath by all that is holy, even though it means losing the job, which for these people spells starvation. Still such is the faith of the poor and they will not enrage the deities by taking a false oath. This burning faith of the poor and the illiterate, the fact that religion is a reality and not a convention to them, is the theme of ‘*Śirf ek Avāz*’.

Pandit Raushan Singh is a staunch orthodox Hindu. He has never missed a bath in the Ganges on a day when there has been an eclipse of the sun or the moon. This time there were so-called reformers preaching against this practice and calling it superstition. No one seemed to mind it one way or the other. Everyone was indifferent except *Pandit Raushan Singh*. His voice rang in the air :

میں پرتگیہ کرتا ہوں، اور مرتے دم تک پرتگیہ کرتا رہوں گا۔

People turned round to look at him, they thought him an eccentric fellow. To be earnest was not fashionable. No one

took such things seriously, they were just the means of passing the time. No one thought of making rules and regulations as a result of them. *Raushan Singh* belonged to an age when people were not indifferent to their religion, which was the thing most worth fighting for. He could not stand what he considered an attack on his religion and so he raised his voice in protest. But this was the one voice, the one heart that took religion seriously, to whom religion meant something. The poor are honest not only in money matters but in other ways also. They cannot sacrifice their conscience, their faith is everything to them. ‘*Pancāyat*’ is in illustration of this. The poor are not only honest and deeply religious, but are proud and sensitive also. There are things they will not do, no matter what happens, and one of them is touching a daughter’s things. When *Sukkhū Caudhrī* is forced to do so, his humiliation is terrible, he feels like a murderer. It is a thing which is not done. And even the village “*banyā*” feels it to be such a sacrilege that he advances a loan without the jewels being left as security. To these people their code is as important as is to people in society their code of social etiquette, and the violation of it shakes them as much.

Prem Cand’s understanding of human nature was profound. He seemed to have had an insight into the working of human hearts, especially did he understand the heart of a woman. In ‘*Soth*’ he shows how large a woman’s heart is, and yet how small, how much she can endure and what little things can break her. The heroine of the story is not a young and beautiful girl but a homely middle-aged woman. *Godāvarī* having lost all hopes of ever having a child herself forces her husband to marry again. There is an attractiveness in martyrdom and *Godāvarī* is for the time being greatly attracted by it. She was quite sincere too at the time in thinking that she was doing this for her husband’s sake, and above all she was confident that her fifteen years of love would stand the strain of a young and beautiful rival. But soon after the demon of jealousy

began to raise its head, *Godāvarī* began to nag and bully *Gomṭī*, the new wife. *Pandit Deo Dat*, her husband, an extremely peaceful and inoffensive sort of man, was eventually drawn into the conflict. *Godāvarī* had expected him to side with her, but his sympathies seemed to be for *Gomṭī*. *Godāvarī* played her trump card and gave up the keys of the household, knowing that *Pandit Deo Dat* was one of those men who hated responsibility and power and were prepared to pay any price for a peaceful life. *Godāvarī* had thought that this would bring him to his knees, but it did not. He hated to have the bother; he found the chaos of the once smoothly running household extremely distressing, and further it seems to irritate him. He did not criticise *Gomṭī*'s bad management as *Godāvarī* had hoped he would, but was irritated with *Godāvarī*. She finds that her devotion, efficiency and good housekeeping have not succeeded in winning the affection of her husband and so makes a foolish attempt to emulate *Gomṭī*. She also will be extravagant, she also will have "pān", scents and sweets, she also will go about in an "ekka", and not bother about the household and the observance of religious rites. But the tables were turned now; *Gomṭī* was now the mistress and she taunted *Godāvarī* in the very words the latter had used to her before.

This heart-burning could not go on longer and *Godāvarī*'s self-respect would not allow her to live in a house on sufferance where she had been the mistress. She beseeches the Ganges to relieve her from her humiliation as she stands on its bank. Hope still flickers that *Pandit Deo Dat* might come after her, might have seen her note and run to save her; but no one came. Too late *Pandit Deo Dat* saw the note. Too late he and *Gomṭī* felt sorry for poor *Godāvarī*.

'*Soth*' is a remarkable piece of workmanship. It is only a short-story but its "characters" are so well-defined that they remain fixed in the mind. The greatness of Prem Cand lies in this that he never makes his "character" black or white. He

knows that human nature is not constituted like that, but is an extremely complex mixture of good and bad. In '*Soth*' the "characters" of *Pandit Deo Dat*, *Godāvarī* and *Gomṭī* are all shown to be extremely human, and, in consequence, creatures of extremely mixed feelings. *Gomṭī*, the new wife, has not been painted a vamp or a vixen as is the wont of most authors; she is not deliberately cruel; her relationship is such that in spite of herself she becomes the cause of *Godāvarī*'s misery. *Godāvarī* more or less forces her to become what she in the end does become. *Pandit Deo Dat* is also not a faithless husband of fiction; he wanted nothing better than to be left alone, and his routine not to be disturbed. He did not want to marry again. *Godāvarī* made him do so and then turned against the new wife.

Best of all is the drawing of *Godāvarī*'s "character". Her attitude was by no means an easy one to explain; it was a real Freudian case of repressions, inferiority complex and lack of self-confidence. *Godāvarī* had denied herself everything, she had lived frugally and carefully, without the luxuries she was sub-consciously always wanting. She had done all this not because of abstract goodness, but with the object of gaining the love and respect of her husband and she thought that she had it. She had got him to remarry, sub-consciously thinking that the shortcomings of the new wife together with the sacrifice she herself had made would only enhance her value in the eyes of her husband. But that does not happen. Silly and inefficient *Gomṭī* does not seem to annoy *Pandit Deo Dat* nor does her own sacrifice gain any praise or recognition. *Godāvarī*'s self-confidence is shaken; her self-respect had already suffered by not having any children. She needed encouragement and praise, she wanted to be told that she was worth ten such *Gomṭīs*.

It was this craving for praise, this lack of self-confidence that corroded her heart, and she criticised *Gomṭī* because she wanted some one to recognise her own efficiency by con-

trast. *Gomti* might be young and beautiful but she had many other qualities ; why did not she get any recognition ? She begins to indulge in frivolities she has so far ignored. Prem Cand is never analytical but descriptive. His method is to show the "characters" in action and let the reader draw his own conclusions. Therefore there are no long descriptions, no deliberate explanations of ideas in '*Soth*'. Complex though the character and working of *Godāvarī's* mind are, they are yet shown in her actions and not by explanations.

'*Mālkan*' is another extremely good character sketch. *Rām Piyārī*, the widowed daughter-in-law of *Shām Dās*, is made mistress of the house by her father-in-law by way of consolation. Her pride and self-respect in assuming the role of "*mālkan*" makes her forget her sorrow. She throws herself heart and soul into the running of the house. While up till now she had been thoughtless and extravagant, she now economises and saves. She examines every detail and makes sacrifices for the sake of the house. Her brother-in-law and his wife, because they are not responsible, continue to make unreasonable demands ; they seem to think that she is being unnecessarily niggardly. She denies herself to meet the expenses of the household. But still there is pride and joy in her heart because she is the mistress. The sense of power is very sweet and *Rām Piyārī* is drugged with it, and does not often realise the emptiness of her life, though at times she feels a nauseating sense of loneliness.

But such moments were not many. She was filled with a sense of responsibility and got pleasure out of the fact that the entire well-being of the household depended on her. The years passed, children were born to the brother- and sister-in-law. She loved them and denied herself further to provide them with luxuries. The old father-in-law and the brother- and sister-in-law got tired of her control and left on the pretext of bettering themselves. It was a terrible blow for *Rām Piyārī* ; she had to have people dependent on her. She slowly recovered

from the blow. She had lived so far for others, now she began living for herself. She began bothering about her looks and her clothes. She redeemed the jewels that had been mortgaged to provide for others. Life began to have meaning for her again, and she found that the pleasure of having power was nothing compared to the joy of being loved and wanted for one's own sake.

Rām Piyārī in '*Mālkan*' is psychologically as interesting as *Godāvarī* in '*Soth*'. They show the contrariness of the human heart, especially the heart of a woman.

Prem Cand chooses the most obvious events to write about. But he could invest the most commonplace occurrences with interest. '*Bhūrī Kākī*' is a study of the pitifulness of old age. Old age is not always as dignified and detached from petty considerations as it is depicted. Very often the mind begins to wander, and there is a relapse into childishness.

All pleasures having become impossible, food begins to take on the same importance in the lives of the very old as in that of children, and that is what had happened in the case of *Bhūrī Kākī*. She was very old, and blind, and she had lost all her loved ones ; there was nothing in life she cared for except food, food was her one passion. She lived with her nephew, *Budh Rām*, and his wife, *Rūpā*, to whom she had given all her money. They found her a burden, her whines irritated them, her greed annoyed them, and her presence humiliated them. *Pandit Budh Rām* neglected her, *Rūpā* scolded her, and their boys teased her ; the only one in the house who cared for the unfortunate "*Kākī*" was *Dulārī*, their little girl.

There was a feast in celebration of the thread ceremony of *Budh Rām's* eldest son. To *Bhūrī Kākī* it meant only one thing : that she would get food to eat. She lay in a little room thinking of all the good things she was going to get. The smell of the food began to creep in and it became impossible for her to wait any longer. "Surely they must have begun eating now," she thought, "they might have forgotten me in the

rush"; and she started creeping to the part of the house in which the guests were assembled.

Rūpā who was in a state of dither was furious at seeing "*Kākī*" in the midst of the guests and scolded her soundly. Poor "*Kākī*" returned dejected to her room. She waited patiently, she waited for what seemed to her hours, she tried so much to go to sleep, but the smell of "*pūrīs*" and rich "*kacaurīs*" would not let her rest. Surely the dinner must be over and surely they have forgotten her, they expected her to come by herself. *Rūpā* must have thought that she was not a guest to be sent for and so "*Kākī*" ventured forth once more. But alas, she had again miscalculated for dinner was still in progress. *Budh Rām* was serving his guests with great attention. He saw *Bhūrī Kākī* crawling in to the "*cauka*". The guests began to look at her in distaste. It made *Budh Rām* furious; he took the poor creature by the shoulder and dragged her back to her room. Then after many hard words he more or less threw her down and returned to his guests.

Poor "*Kākī*'s" heart was broken and the hope of getting lovely "*pūrīs*", rich "*kacaurīs*" and delicious "*halvā*" disappeared. Clouded as her mind was, it occurred even to her that these people were living on her money though treating her with such heartlessness. "Poor unfortunate me," she thought; "could they not have been a little kinder, a little gentler?" Weeping softly for fear of being heard by the guests, she tried to go to sleep.

Dulārī, her little friend, had seen all that had happened. Her little kind heart ached for poor "*Kākī*". Why were her parents so hard, why didn't they give poor "*Kākī*" a lot of "*pūrīs*"? But *Dulārī* did not express her thoughts. She stored away her own share and intended taking it to her when everyone had gone to sleep. It was ages before she dared get up and go to her with the "*pūrīs*". Poor "*Kākī*" had given up all hope. She was overjoyed; but it was too little to satiate her appetite, she polished it off in no

time. Could *Dulārī* get her a little more? she begged. *Dulārī* said she could not, her mother was asleep and would be furious if awakened. "*Kākī*" then begged her to lead her to where the dirty plates were stocked. *Dulārī* did so. Poor demented "*Kākī*" began eating the "left-overs".

Rūpā heard some noise and got up; she missed *Dulārī* and began looking for her. What she saw sent a pang of remorse through her heart. The sight of a "*Brāhmanī*" eating "left-overs" was too much for her; it was her fault, and she was responsible for this sin. *Rūpā* was bad-tempered but had a kind heart, and moreover she was religious. The fact of a "*Brāhmanī*" being compelled to pick dirty plates, through her negligence, shocked her deeply. She went and got a plateful of "*pūrīs*" and "*mīthāīs*" and put them before "*Kākī*" and said, "*Kākī*, forgive me, I had forgotten." Childlike, simple "*Kākī*" was delighted. Her heart was filled with joy and she forgot all the insults and humiliations as she wolfed the delicacies *Rūpā* had put before her.

It is not possible by mere outlines to show the charm of Prem Cand's stories. He used the simplest of phrases, his words were never far-fetched; yet his stories have an appeal and interest that no writer of ornate style has been able to achieve.

The tyranny of society and the "*samāj*" have been the subject of many of Prem Cand's stories. '*Zād i Rāh*' the story which gives its name to the last collection of his short-stories is an indictment of this tyranny of "*samāj*".

During the years when the movement of Civil Disobedience was at its height, Prem Cand wrote several stories dealing with picketing, strikes and illegal processions and so forth. '*Ākhrī Toḥfa*', '*Āshyān barbād*', '*Dāmīl ka qaidī*', are the stories on these subjects. But they are not amongst the best that he has written. The strikers and picketers are shown such perfect beings. This is not like Prem Cand. It is the fact that he shows his "characters" to be so human which

makes his stories great. In those which deal with the struggle of peasants and down-trodden labourers for independence, he has allowed his sympathies to overcome his artistic judgment. The "*Harijan*" movement also finds an echo in the later works of Prem Cand. But '*Kafan*', '*Dūd kī qīmat*', '*Nijāt*', which show the raw deal an "*achūt*" gets from the higher castes, are in his best style.

'*Nijāt*' shows the contrast between an "*achūt*'s" attitude towards a "*Brāhmin*" and a "*Brāhmin*'s" attitude towards an "*achūt*". The "*achūt*" treats him as if he were a god, he regards serving him as the means of his salvation. He meekly submits to the invidious distinction made by the "*Brāhmin*" in respect to him.

How readily *Dukhī Camār* accepts the fact that the Pandit cannot be expected to sit on his charpoy even if it is washed! He cannot expect anything to be lent by anybody in the neighbourhood. He himself admonishes his wife against touching and thus polluting anything that has to be used by a "*Brāhmin*".

There is no rancour in his heart when he hears the "*Panditānī*" storming against his having stepped on the threshold, rather he blames himself:

مچارہ پچھتا رہا تھا کہ ناحق آیا، سچ تو کہتی ہیں پنڈت
کے گھر چار کیسے چلا آئے۔ یہ لوگ بڑے پاک صاف ہوتے
ہیں، تب ہی تو اتنا مان ہے، چرچار تھوڑے ہی ہیں۔ اسی
گاؤں میں بوڑھا ہو گیا مگر مجھے اتنی اکل (عقل) بھی
نہیں آتی۔

Centuries of insulting treatment have destroyed all pride, all sensitiveness, all consciousness of human dignity. It has reduced human beings to a worse state than dogs. Even a dog bites the leg that kicks him, but the "*achūt*" kisses the feet of the "*Brāhmin*" who treads upon him. The "*Brāhmin*",

in spite of this, treats him not only as something low and mean but as if he has no feelings at all. The Pandit makes *Dukhī* work all morning on an empty stomach. He does not think he might be getting hungry. The "*Panditānī*'s" fleeting feelings of kindness cannot rise to the extent of cooking a few "*roṭīs*" for the unfortunate beggar. *Dukhī* chops wood all day, he fetches "*bhūsa*" all afternoon and is scolded when found resting for a few moments. He gets up again and begins chopping the log. The poor, half-starved body could not stand the strain any longer; as the last blow falls on the log cutting it into two, *Dukhī* falls dead. It does not concern the Pandit that he has killed a human being. He was worried because the body of a dead "*achūt*" was polluting his grounds, so he dragged it to a field and left the vultures to tear it:

وہاں سے آ کر فوراً نہاٹے، درگاپاٹ پڑھا، گھر میں گنگا
جل چھڑکا۔ ادھر دکھی کی لاش کو کھیت میں گیدڑ، گدھ
اور کوئے نوچ رہے تھے۔ یہی اسکی تمام زندگی کی بھگتی،
خدمت اور اعتقاد کا انعام تھا۔

IMITATORS OF PREM CAND

Prem Cand raised the Urdu short-story from insignificance into prominence. He gave it substance, dignity and character. The popularity which the short-story enjoys to-day is due to Prem Cand. Success is bound to produce imitators and, as Nazir Ahmad's '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*' and '*Taubat un Nasūh*' had been the models for all writers immediately after him, stories in the style of '*Prem Battīsī*' and '*Prem Paccīsī*' began to be written galore. Every young writer tried his hand at depicting village life; and the simple joys and sorrows, hates and loves of the peasant became the most popular subject for the short-story. Imitators rarely achieve the excellence of the original and the short-stories of most of the imitators of Prem Cand are absolutely flat and lifeless.

Amongst the earlier writers Sudarshan achieved some distinction, and in recent years there has been excellent work done in imitation of him.

Sudarshan wrote the stories published in a collection entitled '*Sadā Bahār Phūl*' when he was only sixteen. These are simple, straightforward domestic tales. They take their plot from the everyday incidents of life and their "characters" are mostly from the same strata of society as Prem Cand's. Sudarshan's stories are not so good as the latter's, because for one thing they lack the flash of humour that every now and then lights up Prem Cand's stories, and for another he is a more conscious reformer than the other. Prem Chand aimed at reform as well, but he told a story for the sake of the story. In him the reformer was lost in the story-teller. Sudarshan never loses sight of his didactic purpose, here the reformer is more obvious than the artist.

Sudarshan enjoys prominence amongst the writers of short-stories because he was the first imitator of Prem Cand and at that time short-story writers of any merit were so scarce. Otherwise his work compared with that of later imitators of Prem Cand or with other modern writers is poor. The stories in '*Sadā Bahār Phūl*' are each of them written with a view to correcting some defect of character, or illustrating a creditable aspect of it. '*Inṣāf kī kursī*', '*Pās i sukḥun*', '*Namak khār*', '*Mā kī māmtā*', show that there are human beings to whom justice is dearer than anything, who keep their word under any circumstances, that there is still loyalty to be found in the world, and that a mother's love forgives and forgets all.

'*Garīb kī āh*', '*Śīla e nekī*', '*Rāstī kī fath*', '*Ranj o rāhat*' illustrate the fact that crime does not pay, that oppression always ruins the oppressor, that to return bad for good is the most despicable of acts, and that truth always triumphs in the end; that the good is rewarded and the wicked punished is the repeated theme of these stories. Some of them have

the promise of better workmanship in them. '*Shaitān kā hathiyār*', '*Parmātmā ke nām*', '*Pānc hazār*' show imagination, ingenuity in construction and knowledge of character and its reactions. The stories of '*Sadā Bahār Phūl*' were written by Sudarshan at a very early age. Considering the fact that the general level of short-stories became even lower than it was at the time of '*Sadā Bahār Phūl*'s' first appearance, it can be regarded as a creditable accomplishment. Sudarshan's later achievements, '*Bahāristān*' and '*Bangāl Būī*', show maturity of style and a greater mastery in the construction of plot. The "characters" are also less shadowy but they still continue to be pale imitations of Prem Cand.

In some of the stories of '*Sola Singhār*', the latest of his publications, faint echoes of socialism are found. These are: '*Mazdūr*', '*Śarvat kā nasha*', '*Ṭarz i 'amal*'. Sudarshan, like all other authors of the past, had advocated the cause of the poor. In the later stories an appeal was made to the oppressors; they were told that oppression does not pay and that heaven frowns on tyranny, but in '*Śarvat kā nasha*', '*Ṭarz i 'Amal*' and '*Mazdūr*' the oppressed are indirectly incited to defy. They show that tyranny feeds on submission and can only be destroyed by opposition. '*Śarvat kā nasha*' is an indictment of the tyranny of zemindars and their heartless treatment of their poor tenants; the obligation to work for the zemindar is virtually slavery. '*Mahābīr kahār*' is forced by his zemindar to go with the "barāt" of his son to the next village. His wife is lying dangerously ill and there is no one to look after her; he begs to be excused, but his reluctance is taken to be a sign of independence, so he is thrashed and then taken with the other "kahārs" to the next village. He begs his sister to stay with his wife, but she also is ordered to come and help with the grinding of gram-flour as they are short of hands. Her excuses are all rejected and she is forced to go, and the poor unfortunate woman is left to die alone. '*Mahābīr*

returns ; he is full of hope as he was given some medicine by a " *Hakīm* " in the next village, but *Gangā* had passed beyond need of medicine. The wedding procession and the funeral meet on the narrow village lane. The bier-carriers are ordered to leave the road by the leaders of the wedding procession. Even the worm turns—the down-trodden villagers cannot tolerate this ; they refuse to leave the road ; threats do not move them, and in the end they win the day. Tyranny is always chicken-hearted.

In ' *Tarz i 'Amal* ' also so long as *Prem Gopāl* gives into the bullying of his English boss the latter further humiliates him. But when he at last turns round and returns the insults with a sound thrashing, the result is an apology and an increase of respect in the eyes of the chief.

In ' *Mazdūr* ' the wretchedness of the lives of workers in mills and factories is shown. The contrast between their lot and that of the overpaid managers and shareholders is stressed with irony. Illness, the constant dread of unemployment, the debtors' fear of tyranny that goes towards making the life of these unfortunates a misery,—an effective picture of this is drawn in ' *Mazdūr* '.

Amongst the more recent imitators of Prem Cand to achieve distinction are Aḥmad Nadīm Qāsmī and 'Alī 'Abbās Ḥusainī. Aḥmad Nadīm Qāsmī's collection of short-stories called ' *Caupāl* ', and 'Alī 'Abbās Ḥusainī's collection entitled ' I.C.S. ', both contain extremely well-written stories that are at once an imitation of Prem Cand and have a distinctive quality of their own as well. 'Alī 'Abbās Ḥusainī's collection entitled ' I.C.S. ' has fourteen short-stories mostly about simple villagers and village life. They are written in a simple, straightforward style and are generously sprinkled with humour. The stories are not avowedly didactic in purpose. But they show the amount of courage, honesty, and loyalty that uncouth and apparently uncivilised people possess. How lovable they are, yet how quarrelsome, how sensitive

and idealistic are their hearts under their rough exteriors ! How they fight but do not bear malice, and how loyal they are in their friendship ! They do not have the glitter of town-dwellers but have the solid worth which these lack.

' *Milāp* ', ' *Do Sharīfō kā muqābila* ' and ' *Shekh Karīm kī nafrat* ' are all about family feuds, which are all too common in the villages. They often result in bloodshed and are the cause of daily bickerings and quarrels. But because human nature is still in its pristine simplicity, there is under all this never any real enmity, or one should say that the fount of nobler feelings and thoughts has not dried up and comes to the surface when appeal is made to it. In ' *Milāp* ', for instance, the families of *Thākūr Damnūt Singh* and *Mīr Qādir Ḥusain* have been enemies for generations and the age-old quarrel at last terminated in a servant of *Mīr Qādir Ḥusain* being killed by *Thākūr Damnūt Singh*. *Thākūr* is thus in danger of being hanged ; the only thing that can save him is that *Mīr Qādir* should not bear witness against him. *Damnūt Singh*'s mother comes to *Mīr Qādir Ḥusain*'s mother and asks her to intervene with her son for the life of *Damnūt Singh*. With what dignity and restraint the conversation is carried on ! *Mīr Qādir Ḥusain*'s mother orders her son to withdraw. To disobey a mother's orders is an idea that does not yet occur to a village son and so he does not appear as a witness against *Damnūt Singh*. When *Damnūt Singh* piqued at being beholden to his life-long enemy for his life transfers his lands to *Qādir Ḥusain*, the latter's mother goes to the " *Thakurānī* " and the two mothers order their sons to make up their quarrel, which they did.

The standards of village life do not admit of the paltriness and meanness the city has given birth to. A fallen enemy is respected and trust is returned with trust. This too is illustrated in ' *Do Sharīfō kā muqābila* '. *Bihārī*, a " *banyā* ", and *Amjad 'Alī*, a zemindar, do not get on together. Each is always trying to put a spoke in the other's wheel and

matters reach the point where they find themselves involved in a lawsuit. While the suit is in progress, *Mīr Amjad 'Alī's* daughter dies, and *Bihārī* feels it to be incumbent on him to go and find out if there is anything he can do. Though everyone tells him not to go, he goes, and even forces the brother of *Mīr Amjad 'Alī* to accept a loan to keep for the expenses of the rites. On the day of the girl's "soim", firewood runs short, and *Bihārī* gives it from his factory. This comes to the knowledge of *Mīr Amjad 'Alī*, who is so touched by it that he comes and makes up the feud with *Bihārī* and gives him the field about which the case was being fought. Thus easily do the simple villagers forget their quarrels and forgive their enemies. In '*Qānūn i Bātīl*' also, a family feud which however does not prevent either side from acting nobly is the theme.

In '*Shekhū Cacā*' the sincerity and loyalty of village friendship is illustrated. *Hamūd*, a young man from the village would have been all but ruined by his so-called smart friends of the city had it not been for the timely, though at that moment unwelcome, intervention of *Shekhū Cacā*. *Shekhū Cacā* is drawn very convincingly; he is shabbily-dressed, unwittingly boring and good-natured; he becomes a very real person from the start. We have known somebody like him and felt irritated at his unwanted appearance at most inopportune moments, but have seldom realised the solid worth of such a person. '*Mulk i Khudā tang nest*' and '*Sharīf Mazdūr*' depict the fate that very commonly befalls small zemindars. The feckless indifference and extravagance of such people, which are mingled with an unusual amount of sensitiveness and pride, are illustrated very well in both the stories; also their extraordinary code of social hierarchy which entitles the heavily indebted zemindar to talk with arrogance to his wealthy creditor because the latter is a "banyā" and the former a "sayyid"; and their pride of birth and regard for blood which make them choose penniless but well-born

families rather than alliances with the *nouveaux riches*; and most of all their innate self-respect and decency which forbid them to accept defeat or charity and make them go out to earn their living if need be as common labourers.

'*Bailō kī jorī*' is a delightful little story of the naïve and almost child-like cunning of the villager. Even the villain of a village is simple and innocent. One cannot really feel angry with *Shidho* for his far from honest means of securing the promised prize of a pair of oxen, or with the other villagers who competed with each other in getting arrested, for while under arrest the good-natured zemindar gave them excellent feeds.

'I.C.S.', the story that gives the collection its name, is just an illustration of the fact that the veneer never survives amid one's natural surroundings and that it is difficult to put on airs before those who have seen one making mud-pies. Mr. *Vāhid*, I.C.S., feels all his superciliousness dropping from him when he reaches his village Muhammadpur. And he begins once more to relish competing with his brother as to who can chop the more logs of wood or run the faster.

'*Dil kī āg*', '*Piyā kī jogan*' and '*Jhūt*' are all very well-written stories against village background and setting.

Aḥmad Nadīm Qāsmī's stories in his collection called '*Caupāl*' are also exclusively about the life in the villages. But his tone is different from that of 'Alī 'Abbās Ḥusainī, and his object also. Ḥusainī aims at showing the simplicity, the connivance, the honesty and decency of the villager, showing his joys and sorrows, his little feuds and his petty villainies, in fact, at showing his life as a whole. Qāsmī aims at stressing the miserable lot of the villager, his poverty and his helplessness, his ignorance and his exploitation by the rich. He also wants to show that under the rude and uncouth exterior burn fires of love and hate; and to quote his own words:

ان کچے گھروں میں، تنگ گلیوں میں، غلیظ جوہڑوں،

کہلے میدانوں، بل کھاتی ہوئی مہین پگڈنڈیوں میں، نہہے
چرواہوں کے دلربا گیتوں میں، رات کو چہتوں پر نوخیز
دوشیزاؤں کی ترنم ریزیوں، اور سرد راتوں میں الاؤ کے
ارد گرد گاؤں کے خوبصورت نوجوانوں کی گپ شپ میں،
ہزاروں جانگداز افسانے پوشیدہ ہیں۔

To bring to light the romance of these dumb millions and to give their sufferings a voice is the object of these "fasānas". He, as he himself admits in the Introduction, was much affected by the style of Prem Cand, but he is much more intense in his attitude than the latter, and his stories lack even a faint touch of humour while Prem Cand's stories may now and then make one smile.

From the fact of Urdu being primarily the language of the United Provinces a tradition had been established that whoever wrote in it made the U.P. the background of his story, and used the idioms and described the customs of those who live in the vicinity of Delhi, Lucknow, Agra and Moradabad. Even the village life described by Prem Cand and his imitators is the village life of the U.P., which, despite its crudeness and its simplicity, is not as raw and as rugged as that of the Punjab. By taking Punjabi village life as the theme of his stories Qāsmī set up a landmark in Urdu literature. Urdu has now for a long time been the language of all India and not of the U.P. only, and therefore it was necessary that the life and thought of each province should find expression through it.

The Punjabis are more warlike, more independent and more fiery in temperament than the dwellers of the fertile plains of Hindustan. They are also less inclined to put up with rudeness or opposition, and are quick to retaliate.

In 'Begunāh', 'Gairatmand betā', 'Haq bajānib', 'Gurūr i nafs' and 'Intiqām' the defiant attitude of these proud peasants is illustrated. There is an epic grandeur about these

stories; the odds are so much against these proud sons of the soil, yet this fact does not prevent them from making a stand against injustice and oppression. In 'Gairatmand betā' Qāsmī shows how unequal the fight is between the rich and the poor, yet to what extent the latter can and do endure for the sake of their pride. It might not occur to the rich that those who do not get a full meal for weeks might also have pride that hurts and self-respect that can be wounded. The mother and son in 'Gairatmand betā', because they were proud and because they refused to lower their dignity as human beings, could never look upon such meagre comforts as fall to the lot of others less sensitive. They kept their head high and as a result had to starve. But there is something which is stronger than pride and that is love, and it is this which at the last moment makes the son beg the "Hakīm" to come and treat his mother free. His agonized cry of petition to the "Hakīm" rends the heart, for the spectacle of broken pride is the most pitiful scene in the world to witness.

In 'Begunāh' the straightforwardness of the peasant's character, his courage and patience, together with his ignorance of the complicated machinery of the law, which makes him so obstinate and fearful, are very well illustrated. Rahmān retaliates for the "Zaīldār's" unjustified insults by giving him a sound thrashing. In his simple mind that is the end of it; it does not even occur to him that the "Zaīldār" would be sure to retaliate and that his fields have been burnt in consequence. Nor does it occur to him that the revolver has been deliberately given into his hands to be used as evidence against him. The complicated machinery of law and society is beyond the comprehension of these simple folk and so the "Zaīldār" gets him arrested and he is sent to jail for two years. The poor have to pay a heavy price for keeping their self-respect.

In 'Dehātī Dāktar' Qāsmī shows how the poor are exploited and ill-treated. Qāsmī comes from a village himself and he seems to have really and keenly felt the sufferings of

the poor villagers, their helplessness, their dumb and ineffective defiance, for his stories have a quality of throbbing realism. They succeed in getting the reader's sympathy and in stirring his heart against the injustice of it all.

Like the men, the women of the Punjab are more fiery in temperament and more vindictive when their pride is touched. In '*Haq bajānīb*', the daughter of a village zemindar revenges herself in a terrible way on the man who dared to trifle with her affections,—“and who would blame her?” asks the author by entitling the story '*Haq bajānīb!*' The right will certainly be with the girl and her race does not know how to forgive or to endure in silence. In '*Gurūr i nafs*', a girl sacrifices her love to her pride. Though deeply in love, she does not allow herself to meet or encourage her lover for she thinks that beneath her dignity. She hears he is ill, and still her heart does not melt, and it is only when he is dying that she agrees to go to him. But it is too late; for her pride she gets the news that she now need not ever go.

'*Būrhā Sīpāhī*', '*Harjār*', '*Ārām*', '*Voh jā cukī thī*', '*Diya kawn jalāe*', all show the romance and poetry that are hidden in the ragged and rugged existence of the peasant, and that in the life of many, such as the *Būrhā Sīpāhī* and old Alice, there are broken fragments of romance to be found.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MODERN SHORT-STORY WRITERS

(i) *Writers with Socialist Tendencies*

The last ten years have been most fruitful in the production of short-stories. There has been a positive surfeit of short-stories and short-story writers; while in the days of "*Makhzan*" and "*An Nāzīr*" and the earlier magazines, the publication of a "*fasāna*" was an event and was reserved for the Special Numbers, now no magazine comes out with less than three or four short-stories. Most of these undoubtedly can be regarded as such only on the ground that they are short in length. They possess none of the other qualities that distinguish the short-story as a separate art form. But a considerable amount of excellent work is also being done, especially in very recent years. Rashīda Zafar, 'Alī Sardār Ja'frī, Aḥmad 'Alī and Ḥayātullāh Anṣārī have produced such work as can be put beside the best that can be found in the European languages.

This is a remarkable achievement because the short-story as the medium for the expression of a single mood or impression and as the offshoot of the impressionistic tendencies of the nineteenth century, is an entirely European product, introduced into the Urdu language only about forty years ago.

Amongst those who chronologically can be grouped as the "Moderns", there can clearly be discerned two different schools of thought. There are those who follow the style of Prem Cand, that is, who lay the stress on events rather than on character; their "characters" are rather types than individuals, and the story is made up of a sequence of events. Aḥmad Nadīm Qāsmī, 'Alī 'Abbās Ḥusainī, and 'Ābid 'Alī, are