

Ideological Engagement in a Colonial Society: A Case Study of Premchand's Children's Literature

Compromiso ideológico en una sociedad colonial: un estudio de caso sobre la literatura infantil de Premchand

Compromís ideològic en una societat colonial: un estudi de cas sobre la literatura infantil de Premchand

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Abstract

This paper highlights the importance of locating ideological engagement in children's literature within a particular historical and socio-cultural context. It focuses on the literary works for children written by the prominent fiction writer of colonial India, Dhanpat Rai (1880-1936), better known as "Premchand". The paper offers a textual and historical analysis of his body of work by situating its subject-matter within the larger context of his views on nationalism and literature, evident in his private correspondence, writing and biography. Premchand was a strong proponent of socially and politically engaged literature. He believed that literature of an unfree country like India should educate and offer advice to its people. This greatly reflected in his children's literature written mainly for male children. He sought to develop their character by teaching them certain values and virtues. The main purpose of his works was character development. This paper argues that the values and virtues that Premchand sought to inculcate in his child readers were laden with a strong patriotic fervour. He sought to advocate national consciousness amongst his readers by instilling in them values of patriotism, self-reliance, bravery, courage and justice. In turn, this would enable them to actively participate in the freedom struggle and hold them in good stead in an independent India of the future. The paper contextualises Premchand's children's literature within the nationalist discourse on childhood prevalent in early-twentieth-century colonial India and explores the relevance of Sutherland's conceptual framework in understanding ideological engagement in Premchand's works.

Key words: children's literature, ideology, nationalism, colonialism, Premchand

Resumen

Este artículo destaca la importancia de situar el compromiso ideológico en la literatura infantil dentro de un contexto histórico y sociocultural específico. Se centra en las obras literarias para niños escritas por el destacado escritor de ficción de la India colonial, Dhanpat Rai (1880-1936), más conocido como "Premchand". El artículo ofrece un análisis textual e histórico de su obra al situar su temática en el contexto más amplio de sus opiniones sobre el nacionalismo y la literatura, evidentes en su correspondencia privada, escritos y biografía. Premchand fue un fuerte defensor de la literatura

comprometida social y políticamente. Creía que la literatura de un país no-libre como la India debería educar y ofrecer consejos a su pueblo. Esto se reflejó ampliamente en su literatura infantil, escrita principalmente para niños varones. Buscaba desarrollar su carácter enseñándoles ciertos valores y virtudes. El propósito principal de sus obras era el desarrollo del carácter. Este documento sostiene que los valores y virtudes que Premchand buscaba inculcar en sus lectores infantiles estaban impregnados de un fuerte fervor patriótico. Buscaba promover la conciencia nacional entre sus lectores inculcándoles valores como el patriotismo, la autosuficiencia, la valentía, el coraje y la justicia. A su vez, esto les permitiría participar activamente en la lucha por la libertad y los prepararía para un futuro India independiente. El artículo contextualiza la literatura infantil de Premchand dentro del discurso nacionalista sobre la infancia prevalente en la India colonial de principios del siglo XX y explora la relevancia del marco conceptual de Sutherland para entender el compromiso ideológico en las obras de Premchand.

Palabras claves: literatura infantil, ideología, nacionalismo, colonialismo, Premchand

Resum

Aquest article destaca la importància de situar el compromís ideològic en la literatura infantil dins d'un context històric i sociocultural particular. Se centra en les obres literàries per a infants escrites pel destacat escriptor de ficció de l'Índia colonial, Dhanpat Rai (1880-1936), més conegut com a "Premchand". L'article ofereix un anàlisi textual i històric de la seua obra en situar la seua temàtica dins del context més ampli de les seues opinions sobre el nacionalisme i la literatura, evidents en la seua correspondència privada, la seua escriptura i la seua biografia. Premchand va ser un fort defensor de la literatura compromesa social i políticament. Creia que la literatura d'un país no-lliure com l'Índia hauria d'educar i oferir consells al seu poble. Això es va reflectir àmpliament en la seua literatura infantil, escrita principalment per a nens mascles. Buscava desenvolupar el seu caràcter ensenyant-los certs valors i virtuts. El propòsit principal de les seues obres era el desenvolupament del caràcter. Aquest document argumenta que els valors i virtuts que Premchand buscava inculcar als seus lectors infantils estaven carregats d'un fort fervor patriòtic. Buscava promoure la consciència nacional entre els seus lectors inculcant-los valors com el patriotisme, l'autosuficiència, la valentia, el coratge i la justícia. Això, a la vegada, els permetria participar activament en la lluita per la llibertat i els mantindria en bon estat en una Índia independent del futur. El document contextualitza la literatura infantil de Premchand dins del discurs nacionalista sobre la infantesa prevalent a l'Índia colonial del principi del segle XX i explora la rellevància del marc conceptual de Sutherland per entendre el compromís ideològic a les obres de Premchand.

Paraules clau: literatura infantil, ideologia, nacionalisme, colonialisme, Premchand

1. Introduction

Scholars in the field of children's literature studies have variously identified children's literature as a source of socialisation and enculturation (O' Dell, 1978; Zipes, 1981), emotional socialisation (Frevert et al., 2014) and ideological engagement (Hollindale, 1988; Hunt, 1991; Stephens, 1992; Sutherland, 1985). This line of thought recognises that "literature for children is script coded by adults for the information and internalisation of children which must meet the approbation of adults" (Zipes, 1981, p. 19). It posits that this "script" introduces social and emotional norms, cultural values and political beliefs to child readers and enables them to internalise these norms and values. "Literature, then, is a significant resource that supports collective sociocultural activity, in which the author and other gatekeepers (publishers, parents, librarians and teachers) actively participate in the process of transmitting societal values to the reader" (Bingle, 2018, p. 147). Socialisation, enculturation and ideological engagement through reading children's literature are "socio-historical processes that have many levels of discourse and effect" (Zipes, 1981). It is important to recognise that these processes have socio-cultural nuances which can be fully understood when the text is contextualised within the milieu that it is produced in. This paper seeks to particularly deal with one of these socio-historical processes, namely, ideological engagement in children's literature.

Scholars who have theorised ideology in children's literature have built upon developments in literary theory that recognise "the omnipresence of ideology in all literature, and the impossibility of confining its occurrence to visible surface features of a text" (Hollindale, 1988/1992, p. 23). Sutherland (1985) was the first to engage with this premise. He aptly pointed out the subjective position of the author of the children's text, by arguing that "like other types of literature, works written especially for children are informed and shaped by the authors' respective value systems, their notions of how the world or is ought to be" (p. 143). He thus argued that "books express their authors' personal ideologies (whether consciously or unconsciously, openly or indirectly)" (Idem). Through his theorization, Sutherland laid a "groundwork for future exploration of political ideologies in literature for children" (p. 144). Hollindale further established "the complexity of these issues" (1988/1992, p. 18). Hollindale's intervention is critical since he problematised the debate amongst scholars on whether children's literature should promote ideology at the cost of aesthetic value or reject ideology altogether to uphold its literary and aesthetic value. Instead, he aptly recognised the very categories of 'book' and 'child' as "seductive abstractions" (p. 27). He argued that there is no single universal, theoretical notion of the 'book' and the 'child' because of which the production and reception of children's literature differs across social contexts. "Ideology is an inevitable,

untamable and largely uncontrollable factor in the transaction between books and children, and that it is so because of the multiplicity and diversity of both 'book' and 'child' and of the social world in which each of these seductive abstractions takes a plenitude of individual forms" (p. 27). Hollindale's argument makes it clear that ideology in children's literature can be better understood if the ideological engagement and its reception is placed in its particular context. Thus, this paper seeks to analyse ideological engagement in children's literature in a colonial society through the case study of children's literature produced by prominent fiction writer of colonial North India, Premchand.

Having established that the presence of ideology is an inevitable aspect of children's literature, it is important to enquire into the different ways in which ideology is present in children's literature. The views of Sutherland (1985), Hollindale (1988) and Stephens and McCallum (2011) are relevant in this regard. Though the levels of ideological engagement put forth by each of these scholars have their own conceptual nuances, if I were to conflate these levels, the two broad categorizations would be as follows: The first category is where the ideological engagement by the author is intentional and quite apparent. In the second category, the author and reader are largely unaware of the ideological engagement at work. Here, the author unconsciously re-produces their assumptions about social structures and norms which the reader internalises as a given. These levels of ideological engagement need to be juxtaposed with the argument of John Stephens (1992): "there cannot be a narrative without an ideology" and that "ideology is formulated in and by language, meanings within language are socially determined, and narratives are constructed out of language" (p. 8). He demonstrates this argument through his analysis of different fictional modes such as picture books, historical fiction, fantasy amongst others. He argues that these modes are "special site[s] for ideological effect with a potentially powerful capacity for shaping audience attitudes" (p. 3) because ideology is present in fiction "as an implicit secondary meaning at two levels" (Idem): at the level of significance, whereby the reader derives a larger meaning from the text on account of the "theme, moral, insight into behaviour" (p. 2) offered by the text and at the level of the story, whereby the reader interprets seemingly unreal "narrative sequences and character interrelationships" (Idem) from an intelligible, real-life reference point. "There is a considerable conceptual distance" (Hollindale, 1988/1992, p. 19) between Stephens' argument regarding the inextricable relationship between language and ideology and the one initiated by Sutherland regarding the political implications of ideology. This "indicates how rapidly interest in this area has developed" (Idem).

2. Historical Background of Premchand's Children's Literature

"Children's Literature is a reflection of the status of childhood in the society that produced it" (Nikolajeva, 2009, p. 15). This premise has been aptly illustrated in Christopher Kelen's analysis of the *Pegmen Tales* written by Australian children's writer Ella McFayden in 1940s-1950s. By contextualising McFayden's work within the political and socio-cultural milieu of the time, Kelen argues that the work "is representative of the Australian psyche of the 40's and 50's, and of attitudes to childhood in Australia, as they were evolving at that time" (2019, p. 180). Thus, as a methodological sidenote, Kelen's study implicitly brings out the importance of studying the discourse on childhood prevalent at the time so that it enables us to understand the overarching trends and concerns of children's literature. Premchand wrote his children's literature in the early twentieth century which was "a period of colonial Indian history that was marked by the rise of nationalist thought and activism" (Nijhawan, 2004, p. 3723). Premchand's children's literature thus needs to be contextualised within what Nijhawan refers to as the "nationalist discourse" (pp. 3723-3725) on childhood. It envisioned "children as the future citizens of a future nation... Children were expected to meet the requirements of a colonial society in transition. They were taught obedience and socialised into their future roles as women and men of an independent nation" (p. 3724). This discourse emerged as a result of contestation with the colonial discourse on childhood. Historian Satadru Sen posits that from the 1850s-1940s, childhood became a rallying point of contestation between colonial administrators and nationalists (2005, p. 2). This contestation unfolded in a "set of experimental and institutional spaces", such as "schools, reformatories, laws, committees of inquiry, [and] children's literature" (2004, p. 1), where the efforts to colonise and decolonise the native child were carried out by the colonial state and nationalists respectively. Supriya Goswami argues that children's literature became a prominent site of contestation of this kind: "Nineteenth century British, Anglo-Indian and early twentieth century Bengali children's literature" (2012, p. 3) established children as active political agents in the colonial and anti-colonial enterprise who were capable of consolidating and challenging colonialism respectively. Thus, Goswami puts forward the "notion of empowered childhoods from both sides" (p. 4), whereby child protagonists in the texts were "shown to exhibit tremendous agency and transformative power over the politically volatile environment of colonial India" (Idem). In turn, this was meant to inspire the child reader to exercise agency in the real world. This paper subscribes to Goswami's concept of "empowered childhoods" (p. 4) to foreground Premchand's assumption of the child reader as an agentic being capable of actively participating in the freedom struggle, which will be explored in the last section.

Having established the context in which Premchand wrote his children's literature, it is important to shed light on the life and works of Premchand. Dhanpat Rai (1880-1936), better known by his pen-name, "Premchand", was one of the most prolific fiction writers of colonial India who wrote in the two most ubiquitous vernacular languages of North India, Urdu and Hindi. "His work has the same historic significance for India as that of Dickens for England, Balzac for France and Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky for Russia" (Gupta, 1991, p. 88). Dhanpat Rai was born on July 11, 1880 in the village of *Lamhi*, on the outskirts of Benaras located in United Provinces in colonial North India (Gopal, 2006). His father, who was a clerk in the postal department, died when Premchand was seventeen years old (Idem). Fraught with financial difficulties, he sought employment as an assistant teacher at a government primary school in 1899 (Idem). From thereon, he began his long stint of employment in various capacities as a government school teacher and official with the education department.

He "oscillated between his profession of writing and that of teaching" (Abidi, 2022, p. 17). In 1908, his first collection of "aggressively patriotic" (Chandra, 1982, p. 603) short stories, *Soz-e-Watan* (Dirge of the Homeland), written in Urdu was published. Deemed as "seditious" by the local colonial authorities, Premchand was forced to "surrender the unsold copies of the book" (Idem) and was strictly instructed to not write without prior permission. Consequently, "Dhanpat Rai, who was till then writing as Nawab Rai, had to adopt the new pen-name of Premchand to circumvent these instructions" (Idem).

A pioneer of "social realism" (Orsini, 2004, p. xiii), Premchand, advocated that "literature is best defined as the criticism of life; whether in the form of an essay, story or poems, the chief function of literature is to present an honest and critical view of life" (Premchand, 1933, as cited in Coppola, 1986, p. 25). In lieu of this, he extensively wrote about social inequalities, injustices and exploitation in his novels and short stories, covering a wide range of issues, such as "widow remarriage, dowry, untouchability, the rich-and-poor divide, the problem of landless labour, the inequalities of the caste system, etc." (Rubin, 2001, as cited in Jalil, 2014, p. 103). He is thus credited with creating "the genre of the serious novel and the serious short story in two languages, Hindi and Urdu" (Rai, 1978, p. 25).

Premchand was an ardent supporter of the Indian freedom struggle and a strong critic of the colonial state. In 1921, he resigned from the post of Deputy Inspector of Schools after twenty years of government service in support of the Non-Cooperation movement (1920-22)¹ against

¹ The Non-Cooperation movement was a political mass struggle against the British government to gain *Swaraj* (Self-Rule). It was led by Indian freedom fighter, Mahatma Gandhi. One of its many programmes was the boycott of government services, government schools and colleges, law courts, legislative

the British Government led by Gandhi (Gopal, 2006). From then on, “he intended to devote the rest of his life to serving the nation, not by joining any political movement, but through his literary works” (Ranganathan, 2023). In March 1930, he launched a literary-political weekly magazine titled *Hans* (1930-Present)², aimed at inspiring Indians to mobilise against British rule (Sigi, 2006, p. 53). Towards the end of his life, he lent his support for the Progressive Writers Movement, a literary movement which sought to express the voices of the marginalised: the colonised, peasants and the working class. At its inaugural session in 1936, he delivered an iconic speech on the imminent need to re-invent literature to make it socially and politically relevant. Thus, he “comes packaged with all the right definitions: realist, humanist, secularist, social reformer, politically engaged, etc.” (Orsini, 2004).

Premchand approached the enterprise of writing children's literature from the vantage point of a teacher. Premchand's biographer, Madan Gopal notes: “since [he] was employed as a schoolteacher in different schools for twenty years, he deemed it important to write for children” (2004, p. 1). According to Abidi, “his association with schools and students gave him a unique insight into the world of education” (2022, p. 17) and shaped his understanding of the needs and interests of children. Thus, “Premchand wrote stories for children keeping in mind the psyche of children and the desire to produce suitable literature for them” (p. 2). While scholars of Hindi (Goenka, 2002; Giri, 2020; Ramesh, n.d.) have provided a significant overview of Premchand's children's literature, their works have been largely written from a literary standpoint. This paper, while drawing upon their work, seeks to conduct a textual and historical analysis of Premchand's children's literature.

Before delving into the analysis of Premchand's children's literature, it is important to delineate his views on the purpose of literature in a colonial society. A strong proponent of “purposive literature” (Jalil, 2017), Premchand was of the opinion:

Till the time India is unfree, its art cannot soar to extraordinary heights. This is the reason literature of a free country is different from that of an unfree country. The political and social circumstances of our country demand that we educate our people

councils, government honours and titles. Premchand responded to the call of the Non-Cooperation movement by resigning from his government service.

² *Hans*, from the very outset proved to be a financially unsuccessful venture for Premchand. In 1935, it was handed over to the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad (Indian Literary Council), which was then under the chairmanship of Gandhi. *Hans* became defunct in early 1950s due to financial constraints. In 1986, it was revived under the editorship of the noted Hindi writer, Rajeev Yadav. It continues to be published till date.

wherever the opportunity arises. The stronger the emotions, the more didactic the writing will be (Gopal, 1967, p. 187).

Thus, Premchand implied that literature of an unfree country like India should educate and offer advice to its people. It cannot afford to be merely aesthetically pleasing. In lieu of such ideas, Premchand wrote many patriotic narratives where he gave a “clear call” to “plunge without any reservations into the freedom struggle” (Chandra, 2006, p. 619). Chandra traces shifts in the trajectory of national consciousness expressed and espoused in his short stories: beginning from an “elemental urge for freedom” (p. 603) expressed in *Soz-e-Watan* (Dirge of the Homeland) in 1908 to “pointedly anti-imperialistic” (p. 604) narratives written during “the midst of the Non-Cooperation movement” (Idem) which reflected a more nuanced understanding of “what it meant in actual life to be under foreign subjugation” (Idem). The nature of national consciousness expressed in his writings has been subject to considerable debate on grounds of his recognition and critique of the vicissitudes of the Indian freedom struggle and the inherent class inequalities that lay at the very roots of its inception (Chandra, 2006). Engaging with this debate is beyond the scope of this paper. What is relevant to note here is that one of the important rallying points of Premchand’s literature was to awaken patriotism, raise national consciousness amongst his readers and mobilise them to actively participate in the freedom struggle.

Taking cue from his views on the purpose of literature in a colonial society, this paper seeks to argue that Premchand sought to develop the character of his child readers by teaching them certain values and virtues. These values and virtues were laden with a strong patriotic fervour. Premchand thus sought to advocate national consciousness through his children’s literature by inculcating in his predominantly male child readers values of patriotism, self-reliance, bravery, courage and justice. This would enable them to actively participate in the freedom struggle and would hold them in good stead in an independent India of the future.

3. Methodology

The paper makes use of Sutherland’s conceptual framework to foreground ideological engagement in Premchand’s children’s literature. It establishes the relevance of the concept of “politics of advocacy” (1985, pp. 145-147) put forth by Sutherland in understanding Premchand’s attempt to raise national consciousness through his children’s literature. The paper subscribes to Goswami’s concept of “empowered childhoods” (2012, p. 4) to foreground

Premchand's assumption of the male child reader as an agentic being capable of actively participating in the freedom struggle. I have conducted a textual and historical analysis of Premchand's children's literature by contextualising its subject matter within his views on nationalism and literature, evident in his private correspondence, writing and biography. Thus I have utilised a wide range of sources to illustrate how Premchand utilised children's literature as a source of ideological engagement in a colonial society.

4. Analysis

Children's literature written by Premchand had a strong "educational component" (Mínguez-López, 2014, p. 28). This can be attributed to two factors: his vantage point as a schoolteacher, and the inherent nature of children's literature at large. "Literature for young readers is related to education at two different levels: the general education of children through literature, on the one hand, and literary education, on the other" (Mínguez-López, pp. 29-30). This means that, at the level of general education, literature has the potential to be utilised as a pedagogical tool, aiding the process of learning and, at the level of literary education, children's literature can be utilised as a means to foster literary competence amongst children. Mínguez argues that literary competence is based on the following three elements: the ability to decode meanings in a text and coherently interpret it at large, acquire a wide range of knowledge: "encyclopaedic knowledge, historical and genre knowledge and knowledge of literary conventions" (p. 37) and most importantly develop an attitude which fosters interest in and enjoyment of reading.

4.1. Overview of Premchand's Children's Literature

Premchand wrote many narratives where he featured child protagonists and characters and delved into their inner worlds. However, the literature he wrote specifically for a child audience is limited. The paper thus restricts its scope to the texts that Premchand wrote for children, brief details of which have been provided in the table below. Since majority of these texts will be explored in a later section, it is sufficient to mention here that *Kutte ki Kahani* and *Jungle ki Kahaniyan* fall in the category of fiction, *Mahatma Sa'adi*, *Ram-charcha*, *Durgadas* and *Bākamaloṅ ke Darshan* qualify as biographies.

Title of Work	Theme	Year of Publication
Mahatma Sheikh Sa'adi [The Great Sheikh Sa'adi]	Life-story and works of the Persian literary scholar, Sheikh Sa'di (1210-1291)	1917
Ram-charcha [Discussing Ram]	Simplified version of the Ramayana, an ancient epic of religious importance in Hinduism	Urdu (1928), Hindi (1938)
Durgadas	Historical account of the Rajput resistance against the Mughals spearheaded by Durgadas Rathore (1638-1718) ³	1936
Jungle ki Kahaniyan [Stories of the Jungle]	Collection of short stories rooted in the wild	1936
Kutte ki Kahani [The Story of a Dog]	Autobiographical narrative of a dog	1936
Bākamalon ke Darshan [View of the Greats]: Two Parts	Collection of biographies of historical personalities	Urdu (1929), Hindi (1940)

The characters and personalities featured in Premchand's children's literature as well as his intended audience were predominantly male. *Ram-charcha*, *Kutte ki Kahani* and *Durgadas* were directly addressed to male child readers. *Bākamalon ke Darshan* [View of the Greats] solely featured male historical personalities. There seems to be a disjuncture between Premchand's literature for adults and children when it comes to female representation and writing for a female audience. In the literature written for adults, "Premchand makes women a focus of enquiry, a subject of the story, an agent of the narrative" (Gupta, 1991, p. 89) and deals with issues of their oppression and autonomy (Vanita, 2008). Such a concern does not translate into his children's literature. The reason why Premchand did not write for a female audience can be partly explained by his recognition of relatively low female literacy rates at the time. In his article, *Sanyukt Prānt mein Shiksha ka Prachār* (Promotion of Education in United Provinces), dated May 1933, Premchand citing data pertaining to education from the Census of 1931, noted that the female literacy rate in India was 10 % per mile when the male literacy rate was 80% per mile (1933/2022, pp. 79-80). He remarked that "though there [was] commendable progress in the last decade, when compared to other nations, it [was] still less" (Idem). However, this does not discount the fact that Premchand was largely concerned with instilling love for the nation amongst boys as well as their upbringing, as evident in his Preface to *Durgadas* and his essay, *Bacchon ko Svadheen banao* [Make Children Self-Reliant] respectively, both of which will be discussed later. This can be read as a limitation of Premchand's children's literature. However,

³ The Rajputs were a regional warrior class and land-owning elite that wielded power in North-Western India. They were organised into various clans and kingdoms. They were often at loggerheads with the Mughal dynasty that ruled over large parts of South Asia from the early sixteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. Their conflict emanated from the territorial expansion of the Mughals. Durgadas Rathore, a member of the Rathore clan, was the General of the kingdom of Marwar. He led the resistance against the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb who sought to annex Marwar.

this should be considered a tentative critique since the issue is subject to further historical enquiry.

Premchand took to writing literature for children at a time when children's literature had become a commercially viable venture. In a private correspondence dated 27th May, 1933, Premchand cited his agent who informed him that "the demand for children's books and textual content for schools was quite high" (Gopal, 1967, p. 259).⁴ This indicates that children's literature had a substantive audience at the time. Though it is difficult to ascertain the exact demographic share of the readership of Premchand's children's literature, it might have consisted of school children who could read independently, parents who read out the texts to children as well as school teachers who engaged with the text in a classroom setting (applicable in the case of *Sheikh Sa'adi*). Based on this, it can be argued that the access of Premchand's children's literature was limited to children from the middle and upper class families who had access to formal education and could afford to buy these books for educational and recreational purposes.

4.2. Character Development: Premise of Premchand's Children's Literature

Premchand was also closely involved in the preparation of textbooks. Mahatma Sheikh Sa'di [The Great Sheikh Sa'adi] was circulated as a textbook since Abhay Pratap, the editor of a much later edition of the text tells us that the first edition "was rewarded by the United Provinces Textbook Committee" (2000, p. 9). Qasmi (2016) informs us that textbook committees set up by the colonial government initially prepared and published textbooks. However, with increased demand, private firms were contracted who then sought local intelligentsia in preparing textbooks according to guidelines given by the education department (pp. 230-231). These books were then submitted for approval to the committees, which recommended three options for school headmasters to choose from (Idem).

Textbooks written by Premchand belonged to the latter category, where his works were submitted to the Textbook Committee for approval. For instance, in a private correspondence, dated October 25th, 1932, Premchand stated that he had submitted *Bākamaloṅ ke Darshan* [View of the Greats] to the Textbook Committee but it was rejected (Gopal, 1967, p. 244). He speculated that it might have been rejected on grounds of lack of representation of Muslim personalities and further noted that after having made the relevant addition, he was hopeful

⁴ That Premchand took cognizance of this can be gauged from the fact that the Hindi edition of *Ram-charcha* [Discussing Ram] and *Kutte ki Kahani* [Story of a Dog] were published by his own publishing firm called Saraswati Press.

that it would be approved by the committee and would be thus included in the school syllabus (Idem).

In addition to the Textbook Committee, publishers also influenced the content of textbooks. In

In fact, the major premise of Premchand's children's literature was to develop the character of his child readers by teaching them certain values and virtues. Thus, character development was the main purpose of Premchand's children's literature.

a private correspondence, Premchand discusses a compilation of stories in Hindi edited by him, known as *Galp Samuchay* (Gopal, 1967, p. 189). He notes that he did not have the liberty to select the writers since they were selected by the publisher. He further writes: "Stories written in a difficult language and reflecting mature content were not needed for school [students]. Concern with character should be the most important in this field" (Gopal, 1967, p. 189). This statement directs our attention to two important points pertaining to children's literature at large and Premchand's pedagogical agenda

respectively; first, to the fact that the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in the production and/or circulation of children's literature, such as editors, publishers, educational institutions, writers lead to the multiplicity of educational messages conveyed through children's literature (Mínguez-López, 2014, p. 30). Secondly, to Premchand's pedagogical concerns which were centred on character development.

This can be illustrated by means of an example. In the introduction to his story, *Kutte ki Kahani* [Story of a Dog] which presents an autobiographical narrative of a dog, Premchand writes:

Boys! You must have heard a lot of stories about kings and bravehearts; however, you must not have heard a dog's life story. You would wonder whether anything worth hearing about ever happens in a dog's life. He does not fight with gods, nor does he go into the world of fairies, nor does he win great battles. Thus, I fear that you might throw this story away. However, I reassure you that events that never happen in the lives of even the greatest of men have happened in my life. Thus, I now embark to narrate my story. Do not ignore my story the way you often reprimand dogs. You will learn a lot of useful values here and good values should always be acquired wherever the opportunity arises (1936, p. 2)

Thus, here Premchand implicitly espoused literature as a medium of teaching "good values" to children and thus building their character.

4.3. Ideological Engagement in Premchand's Children's Literature

In this section, I shall analyse how Premchand sought to inculcate national consciousness through his children's texts, namely *Durgadas*, *Ram-charcha* [Discussing Ram], *Bākamaloṅ ke Darshan* [View of the Greats], which are biographies and *Kutte ki Kahani* [Story of a Dog] which is a story. In *Durgadas*, Premchand provides a historical account of the Rajput resistance against the Mughals spearheaded by Durgadas Rathore (1638-1718), the General of the kingdom of *Marwar*. In the Preface to the text, Premchand hails Durgadas as the epitome of "self-sacrifice, selfless sense of service and glorious character" (Premchand, 1936/2004, p. 574). He writes: "No other form of literature can ever be as useful for young boys as the life stories of the sons of the nation. These stories not only strengthen their character but also instil in them love for the nation and courage" (Idem).

Driven by a similar spirit, *Bākamaloṅ ke Darshan* [View of the Greats] is a collection of biographies of the following historical personalities:

- Rana Pratap (1540-1597): Ruler of Rajput kingdom of *Mewar*
- Man Singh (1550-1614): Ruler of Rajput kingdom of *Amber* and general of the Mughal army
- Ranjit Singh (1780 –1839): Founder and ruler of the Sikh state in Punjab
- Badruddin Tyabji (1844 – 1906): Lawyer and political activist of the Indian freedom struggle
- Gopalkrishna Gokhale (1866-1915): Political activist of the Indian freedom struggle
- Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) : Socio-religious reformer and educationist
- Ramakrishna Bhandarkar (1837-1925): Scholar-reformer and educationist
- Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902): Socio-religious reformer and philosopher
- Rana Jang Bahadur (1817-1877) : Ruler of Nepal
- Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792): English painter
- Garibaldi (1807-1882): Italian revolutionary

Though these personalities belong to different time periods in Indian as well as world history, a common theme explored in most of these biographies (except the biographies of Reynolds and Sayyid Ahmad Khan) is the selfless love these 'greats' had for their homeland. These biographies glorify the courage, bravery and spirit of sacrifice the personalities exhibited in resisting and challenging foreign rule in their respective contexts either through direct confrontation or through intellectual and political pursuits. These personalities are depicted as role models for

children to emulate. Through this collection, Premchand sought to awaken consciousness and desire for freedom amongst child readers (Giri, 2022, p. 15).

Establishing the importance of freedom seems to be one of the premises of another children's text by Premchand, *Kutte ki Kahani* [Story of a Dog] (1936). Premchand presents an autobiographical narrative of the courageous and relentlessly loyal dog named *Kallu* [Blacky] who narrates 'his' eventful life story replete with adventure, drama and social satire. The narrative swiftly traverses through different encounters and landscapes experienced and inhabited by *Kallu* respectively: starting with a description of his family life in a village, moving onto his increased closeness with his first master, *Pandit ji* on account of the lengths he goes to protect his family and wealth, followed by his adoption by a *sahab* (most likely a British official) who invests in his care and whose life *Kallu* saves on multiple occasions. In the end of the story, though *Kallu* is rewarded for his outstanding bravery and loyalty towards his master in the form of "immense love and respect from people around him and is even treated like a deity" (Premchand, 1936, p. 95), he yearns for his freedom despite all the care and affection he receives: "All this respect and honour has started to annoy me now. It is no less than a prison for me. My heart yearns for the time I could roam around freely" (p. 98). Thus, Premchand sought to assert the importance of freedom to his child readers.

Through his literature, Premchand also sought to implicitly make child readers aware of the state of India's lack of freedom under colonial control. *Ram-charcha* [Discussing Ram] (1938), a simplified version of the 'Ramayana' for children is a case in point. While describing the ideal, just and prosperous reign of King *Dashrath* (*Ram's* father), Premchand strikes a contrast between the contemporary colonial milieu and a mythical past: "Unlike the courts of today, no false lawsuits were filed back then" (p. 5). Thus, according to Premchand, tenets of justice were disregarded in the contemporary colonial rule. His emphatic description of *Ram Rajya* (the reign of Ram) and its espousal of the values of justice and equality can also be understood within this context: "*Ayodhya* progressed to such an extent under the rule of Ram and the people were so happy with Ram's rule that the term *Ram Rajya* [Ram's Reign] became a popular phrase such that it is now used to denote a particular time period" (p. 175). As Giri argues, "the structure of *Ram-charcha* and the selection of essays can be contextualised within the needs and understanding of the time that Premchand was living in" (2022, p. 17). "Like other writers,

He sought to instil in children values of patriotism, self-reliance, bravery, courage and justice which would enable them to actively participate in the freedom struggle and would hold them in good stead in an independent India of the future.

authors of children's books are inescapably influenced by their views and assumptions when selecting what goes into the work and (what does not)" (Sutherland, 1985, p. 144). Thus, Premchand's perception and critique of the contemporary colonial milieu made its way into the literature he wrote for children. Analysis of the aforementioned texts indicates that Premchand had a discernible intention of inculcating national consciousness amongst his readers through his children's literature in order to inspire them towards the cause of the ongoing freedom struggle.

4.4. The 'Politics of Advocacy' in Premchand's Children's Literature

This section explores the relevance of Sutherland's conceptual framework in understanding ideological engagement in Premchand's children's literature. The central premise of Sutherland's framework is that children's books act as "purveyors of [the author's] politics (1985, p. 144). A children's book is inherently imbued with the ideology of the author either consciously or unconsciously, as a consequence of which it promulgates the author's values (pp. 143-144). The very act of publishing such a work in a society which is already ideologically charged constitutes "a political act" (p. 143). Sutherland argues that there are three ways in which ideologies are expressed in children's literature: "the politics of advocacy, the politics of attack and the politics of assent" (p. 145):

The politics of advocacy "seeks to persuade readers of its ideology; to promote the authors' world views and notions of what is or ought to be; to influence readers' thinking, feeling, and behaviour" (p. 147). The politics of attack directs attack against social attitudes, institutions, practices and beliefs, "world views and value systems" (p. 147) that are against the author's perception of "right and wrong, good and evil, justice, fair play, decency or truth" (p. 147). The politics of assent "is an author's passive, unquestioning acceptance and internalisation of an established ideology, which is then transmitted in the author's writing in an unconscious manner" (p. 157)

Sutherland's framework highlights the political aspect of ideology. Significant time has elapsed since Sutherland first put forth his framework. Since then, scholars such as Hollindale have argued that ideology is not just a "political policy" but a "climate of belief" (p. 37), whereby the author's ideology is greatly shaped by the common perceptions and way of thinking prevalent in the world inhabited by the author. Despite these advancements in understanding, this paper argues for the relevance of Sutherland's framework in providing a suitable lens for analysing the politically charged historical context in which Premchand was writing. The political struggle for India's independence was at a peak and Premchand was strongly influenced by it. In 1921, he

resigned from government service in support of Gandhi's Non-Cooperation movement and decided to devote his literary endeavours for the service of the nation (Ranganathan, 2023). Besides, his views on literature were imbued with a political tone.

It is on this ground that Sutherland's framework has been utilised to engage with Premchand's ideological engagement in his children's literature, which shall be discussed hereon.

According to Sutherland, "the politics of advocacy seeks to persuade readers of its ideology; to

Premchand believed that literature in a colonial society ought to have a social and political purpose of educating its citizens, by virtue of which it might not have great aesthetic value. Thus, he implied that literature in such a society would inevitably be ideological, considering the state of lack of freedom its people were in.

promote the authors' world views and notions of what is or ought to be; to influence readers' thinking, feeling, and behaviour" (p. 147). This means the author directly advocates a particular ideology that they seek to consciously inculcate amongst child readers. Firstly, that Premchand sought to consciously inculcate patriotism in his readers is evident from his Preface to *Durgadas* where he establishes the importance of introducing male readers to stories of 'national heroes' which facilitates character development and instils love for their homeland. Secondly, Sutherland's argument that

the politics of advocacy "frequently sets up attractive role models for the young, inducing admiration, and extolling certain values as virtues" (1985, p. 146) seems applicable to Premchand's text, *Bākamaloṅ ke Darshan* [View of the Greats], a collection of inspirational biographies of great men which highlights and glorifies the values of patriotism, self-sacrifice, courage and bravery embodied by these men. Thirdly, the politics of advocacy "promote the authors' world views and notions of what is or ought to be" (p. 147). This is evident in *Ram-charcha* [Discussing Ram], the narrative and content of which is shaped by Premchand's perception of the contemporary colonial milieu and his critique of it. It is important to note that the politics of advocacy is relatively prominent in Premchand's biographies as compared to his stories. The texts mentioned here are all biographies. This can be related to the inherent nature of the genre. Sutherland, illustrating the ideological nature of biographies, points out: "Biographies of famous people tend to simplify, or adulate or indoctrinate" (1985, p. 144).

On the other hand, children's stories written by Premchand align more with the "politics of attack," posited by Sutherland. The "politics of attack" directs attack against social attitudes, institutions, practices and beliefs, "world views and value systems" which are against the author's perception of "right and wrong, good and evil, justice, fair play, decency or truth" (p.

147). For instance, in his story, *Kutte ki Kahani* [Story of a Dog], Premchand calls out the hollowness and hypocrisy of caste inequalities prevalent in India in a specific subplot. Thus, Premchand's attempt to advocate national consciousness and instil patriotism in child readers through the "politics of advocacy" needs to be juxtaposed with his attempt to make children aware of social issues prevalent within their society through the "politics of attack." Thus, genre seems to be a major factor determining the level of ideological engagement in Premchand's children's literature. Nevertheless, this paper argues that the "politics of advocacy" is a prominent feature of his children's literature, whereby he sought to advocate national consciousness amongst children. This argument can be substantiated by examining non-fiction written by Premchand which according to Abidi (2022), "carries the quintessence of his ideology" (p. 15).

One such non-fiction piece is an essay titled *Bacchon ko Svadheen banao* [Make Children Self-Reliant], published in his magazine *Hans* [Swan] in April 1930, where he openly expresses his views on the education and upbringing of children. Addressing the essay to parents, he asserted the need for them to enable their young boys to become self-reliant. According to him, being self-reliant meant being self-disciplined so that they could distinguish between right and wrong on the basis of their discretion and be capable of protecting themselves, independent of parental supervision.

He opined:

Children should be taught to become self-reliant. In the past, when obeying and respecting elders was the most sought after rule and every low caste bowed down in respect to the upper caste, then it was appropriate to teach boys right from their childhood to respect their elders. However, to teach the boys of today to obey the orders of an external power is to turn a blind eye to the greatest need of boys. Considering the situation that the youth is facing today, the need of the hour is independence of thoughts and actions rather than etiquette and courtesy...The objective of the boy's life is to find employment, rather than obeying orders. In reality, the boy who blindly obeys his parents' orders lacks self-confidence. He always waits for someone or the other to give orders (Premchand, 1930, pp. 15-16)

By stating that boys should not blindly obey the orders of their parents nor an external power, he made the case for boys to act independently and think for themselves in two spheres: the domestic and the political. While the former is directly evident since the essay is directly addressed to parents, the latter is more implicit. It can be argued that Premchand was alluding

to the colonial government through his usage of the term, external power. This can be understood by contextualising the political ideology of the magazine *Hans* [Swan] which was aimed at inspiring Indians to mobilise against British rule (Sigi, 2006, p. 53). It is in this context that the patriotic undertone behind his plea against teaching boys to obey the orders of an external power should be understood. He further argued that:

Children of rich, indulgent families, steeped in luxury who were dependent on their servants for every small chore or errand and had every facility for travel and entertainment at their disposal had the tendency to harm their brothers at the cost of their self-interest and become government sycophants (Premchand, 1930, p. 17)

Though it cannot be said with certainty that Premchand was hinting at one's 'countrymen' through use of the term 'brothers', it can be sufficiently argued that Premchand's attempt to raise national consciousness amongst male children went hand in hand with his appeal to their parents of enabling them to become self-reliant by steering them away from becoming subservient to the colonial state.

The implicit assumption behind Premchand's appeal to enable young boys to become self-reliant was that they were agentic beings who should be encouraged to exercise their discretion and realise their potential. This reflects in his aforementioned works. He seeks to awaken patriotism amongst his readers through his text, *Durgadas*. In *Bākamaloṅ ke Darshan* [View of the Greats], he presents role models for children to emulate. Through *Ram-charcha* [Discussing Ram], he seeks to make his readers aware of the state of India's unfreedom under colonial control. In *Kutte ki Kahani* [Story of a Dog], he inspires his readers towards the cause of freedom by establishing its importance. These texts seem to be governed by the common assumption that children had the potential of supporting the cause of freedom and participating in the freedom struggle. Thus, Premchand's children's texts can be placed under the category of "British, Anglo-Indian, and Bengali children's literature of empire" which "not only engage in political activism, but also seek to empower children (both real and fictional) by celebrating them as active colonial and anti-colonial agents" (Goswami, p. 3). Thus, Supriya Goswami's concept of "empowered childhoods" (2012, p. 4) is useful in foregrounding Premchand's assumption of male children agentic beings capable of actively participating in the freedom struggle.

5. Conclusion

While a wide range of scholars have substantively theorised ideological engagement in children's literature, it is important to acknowledge it as a "socio-historical process" (Zipes, 1981), the nuances of which can be fully understood only when it is placed in its specific context. Thus, this paper highlights the importance of locating ideological engagement in children's literature within a particular historical and socio-cultural context. It is based on Hollindale's premise that ideology is an inevitable and unavoidable factor in the interaction between books and children because of the multiplicity and diversity of both 'book' and 'child' and of the social world inhabited by them (1988/1992, p. 27). Taking this argument into consideration, this paper has sought to analyse ideological engagement in children's literature in a colonial society through the case study of children's literature written by Premchand. His children's literature enables us to understand how an author with strong views on colonialism creatively utilised literature as a medium to channel and propagate his ideology amongst his child readers.

Premchand was a strong proponent of "purposive literature" (Jalil, 2017) i.e. literature written with the purpose of bringing about social change. He was of the opinion that literature of an unfree country like India should educate and offer advice to its people. This greatly reflected in his literary texts written for children (predominantly male) through which he sought to develop their character by teaching them certain values and virtues. The main purpose of Premchand's children's literature was character development. The values and virtues that Premchand sought to inculcate in his child readers were laden with a strong patriotic fervour. He sought to advocate national consciousness through his children's literature by instilling in his readers values of patriotism, self-reliance, bravery, courage and justice which would enable them to actively participate in the freedom struggle and would hold them in good stead in an independent India of the future. His emphasis on these values needs to be contextualised within the "nationalist discourse" (Nijhawan, 2004, pp. 3723-3725) on childhood prevalent in early twentieth century colonial India.

The intricacies of ideological engagement in Premchand's children's literature can be effectively understood through Sutherland's conceptual framework on the levels of ideological engagement. The paper has established the relevance of the concept of the "politics of advocacy" (1985, pp. 145-147) in understanding Premchand's attempt to advocate national consciousness through his children's literature. The politics of advocacy is evident in Premchand's biographies for children, namely *Durgadas*, *Bākamaloṅ ke Darshan* [View of the Greats] and *Ram-charcha* [Discussing Ram], where he seeks to inculcate patriotism in boys,

present role models of men dedicated to the cause of freedom and make his readers aware of the lack of freedom under colonial control respectively. This argument can be substantiated by reading his children's texts along with his essay titled 'Make Children Self-Reliant' which can be referred to as an ideological declaration of sorts. Here, amongst other exhortations, he urges parents to enable their male children to become self-reliant by steering them away from becoming subservient to the colonial state. Having stated this, it is also important to acknowledge that genre is a major factor determining the level of ideological engagement in Premchand's children's literature. While Premchand's biographies align with Sutherland's concept of the "politics of advocacy," his children's stories gravitate more towards the "politics of attack," whereby he cast an implicit critique on social inequalities prevalent within Indian society.

It is important to note that Premchand's children's literature should not be read in isolation. Rather, it should be juxtaposed with the literature that he wrote for adults on two grounds; firstly, a comparative analysis will facilitate understanding differences, "correlations and similarities" of "values, attitudes, and assumptions" (Sutherland, 1985, p. 156) conveyed in the two bodies of work. This will contribute towards acquiring a comprehensive view of ideological engagement in Premchand's literature at large. Secondly, though this paper has restricted its scope to texts written for children, analysing adult writings written by Premchand that featured child characters, their inner worlds and their relationships with the family and society at large will help gain a layered understanding of Premchand's views on childhood, upbringing and socialisation of children.

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