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On the Path of Moral Conflicts and Social Critique: Mantu and Premchand's Theory

Ahlaki Çatışmalar ve Toplumsal Eleştirinin İzinde: Mantu ve Premçand

Aykut KİŞMİR[1], CananYOĞURT[2]

[1]Ankara University, Faculty of Languages, History and Geography, Department of Eastern Languages and Literatures, Division of Urdu Language and Literature, Ankara, Türkiye
[2]Çukurova University, School of Foreign Languages, Adana, Türkiye

ORCID: A.K. 0000-0003-3686-9229, C.Y. 0000-0002-6841-108X

Corresponding author/Sorumlu yazar:
Aykut Kişmir (Assoc. Prof. Dr.),
Ankara University, Faculty of Languages, History and Geography, Department of Eastern Languages and Literatures, Division of Urdu Language and Literature, Ankara, Türkiye
E-posta: kismir@ankara.edu.tr

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the literary identity of Saadat Hasan Mantu, a leading Urdu writer, and Premchand, an influential Hindi-Urdu author celebrated for his socially aware narratives that capture the hardships of rural India and explore themes such as poverty, injustice, and resilience in the human spirit during the 20th century. Saadat Hasan Mantu was influenced by Russian literature through English translations. What distinguishes Dostoyevsky is his inclination to feature the outcasts and deviants of Russian society in his works, individuals regarded as taboo, peculiar, and negative. Influenced by Dostoyevsky's subjects and motifs, Mantu also illuminated the deviance, negativity, cruelty, and stark realities of society in the Indian subcontinent. He witnessed the events of the partition of India and opted to portray bloody depictions of plunder and violence in his works. These narratives often depicted the harrowing circumstances that compelled people to migrate. Similarly, Premchand, a pioneering figure in Hindi-Urdu literature, depicted the plight and struggles of marginalized communities in rural India, addressing issues such as poverty, social injustice, and moral dilemmas. Through his socially conscious stories, he sought to raise awareness of the hardships faced by the rural poor, which resonated with Dostoyevsky's focus on societal issues. In this context, this study explores the traces of Dostoyevsky in both Mantu's and Premchand's stories and examines how these influences were utilized to reflect their respective societies.
Keywords: Indian subcontinent, Partition, Dostoyevsky, Saadat Hasan Mantu, Premchand

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Hindistan Yarımadası'nda Urdu dilinde eserler kaleme almış önde gelen isimlerden Saadat Hasan Mantu ile Premçand'ın 20. yüzyılda Alt-Kıta olarak Hindistan'ın kırsal kesiminin zorluklarını ele alırken yoksulluk, adaletsizlik ve insan ruhunun tahammülü gibi temaları işleyen sosyal farkındalık anlatılarıyla edebi kimliklerini incelemektedir. Saadat Hasan Mantu, İngilizce çeviriler aracılığıyla Rus edebiyatından etkilenmiştir. Yaşadığı dönemde Dostoyevski okumaları yapmıştır. Dostoyevski'nin eserlerinde Rus toplumunun tabu, tuhaf ve olumsuz olarak kabul edilen bireylerine, dışlanmışlarına ve sapkınlarına yer

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verme eğiliminden ve kaleme almayı tercih ettiği konu ve motiflerden etkilenen Mantu Hint Alt-Kıtası'ndaki sapkınlık, olumsuzluk, acımasızlık ve toplumun katı gerçeklerine ışık tutmuştur. Hindistan'ın bölünmesi olaylarına tanıklık etmiş ve eserlerinde yağma ve şiddetin kanlı tasvirlerini resmetmeyi tercih etmiştir. Tercih ettiği anlatılarla genellikle insanları göçe zorlayan üzücü koşulları tasvir etmiştir. Benzer şekilde, Hint-Urdu edebiyatının öncü isimlerinden Premçand da Hindistan'ın kırsal kesimindeki kıyıda kalmış, yöneticilerce önemsenmeyen toplulukların insani ve medeni kötü durumlarını ve mücadelelerini tasvir ederek yoksulluk, sosyal adaletsizlik ve ahlaki ikilemler gibi konuları ele almıştır. Her iki yazarın da toplumsal meselelere odaklanmasına benzer bir şekilde, toplumsal bilince sahip hikâyeleri aracılığıyla kırsal kesimdeki yoksulların karşılaştığı zorluklar hakkında farkındalık yaratmaya çalıştığı gözlenmiştir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma hem Mantu'nun hem de Premçand'ın öykülerinde Dostoyevski'nin izlerini araştırmakta ve kendi toplumlarını yansıtmak için edebiyatı araç olarak nasıl kullandıklarını incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hint Alt-Kıtası, Bölünme, Dostoyevski, Saadat Hasan Mantu, Premçand

Introduction

This study aims to explore the influence of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's literary themes and character portrayals on Saadat Hasan Mantu and Premchand, two iconic writers of the Indian subcontinent. Understanding this influence is significant because it provides insights into how Eastern and Western literary traditions intersect in exploring complex social and psychological issues. Both Mantu and Premchand delved into the darker facets of society, from individuals' psychological struggles to the social injustices that impact entire communities. This study sheds light on how these authors addressed universal human conflicts within their unique cultural contexts by comparing their narratives with Dostoyevsky's themes. The research employs a comparative literary analysis approach, examining selected Mantu and Premchand works alongside Dostoyevsky's writings. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the shared and divergent themes, characterizations, and social commentaries that emerge across these texts.

In India, the romantic period, which had declined as of 1935, gave way to new literary movements. Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Benedetto Croce, and Carl Gustav Jung's ideas had a profound effect on Hindi and Bengali literature in particular. Because of this interaction, literary works gained a new dimension in line with the received inspirations. In India, young writers who called themselves "Progressives" gave an important direction to literature. In this way, concepts such as religion, god, spirituality, virtue, and sin were pushed aside in the literature, and more current issues were focused on. Social realist analytical solutions were tried to be brought to issues such as the difficulties of city life, social inequality, and injustice faced by women.[1]

Amarnāth says that Premchand saw the realism movement that emerged in the "Literature and Art" branches in France in the late 19th century as a naked depiction of weakness, cruelty, and abnormalities.[2]

Mantu is known for his in-depth exploration of the dark and complex aspects of human nature. The India-Pakistan divide and the human tragedies in this process are particularly prevalent in the stories of Mantu. The psychological depth and moral conflicts in Dostoyevsky's characters are also felt in Mantu's works. Mantu's characters are generally individuals who are considered "marginal" by society, and his style of narration has a sense of internal conflict and reality similar to Dostoyevsky's character analyses. In this respect, Mantu's narration style shows a clear affinity to Dostoyevsky's psychological and existential themes.

Premchand, on the other hand, addressed the socio-economic problems of society, particularly focusing on peasant life and the hardships of the poor. Premchand's works deal with themes of social injustice, class differences, and moral corruption; this shows some parallels with Dostoyevsky's characters in search of moral and social justice. However, Premchand's narrative

1 Yoğurt, Canan. *Premçand'ın Öykülerinde Kadın Motifleri* (Woman Motifs in Premchand's Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (in Turkish) (Ankara: Ankara University Institute Of Social Sciences, 2021), 9-10.

2 Yoğurt, Canan. *Premçand'ın Öykülerinde Kadın Motifleri*, 10.

style has a more direct and communitarian perspective; in this sense, he is closer to Tolstoy. However, in Premchand's works, a deep search for the individual's place in society, moral questions, and character conflicts overlap with Dostoyevsky's existential themes.

Poets and writers generally craft literary subjects based on what they wish to convey within the expansive realm of literature. The author's choice of one or more "subjects" holds significance in transmitting and interpreting emotions and thoughts within the work. feelings, ideas, and information are conveyed to the reader through the stories, all intended to be expressed through the chosen "subject." Elisabeth Frenzel elucidates the concept of "subject" in her work titled "Stoffe der Weltliteratur" as follows: "The German concept of subject (Stoff) is called "theme" in French and English. It includes content-related elements, motifs, subjects, and themes. The fact that subjects always take on different forms, appearing or disappearing in varying periods, lends them novelty and distinctiveness. The subject has an impact and reflects the political and social life of that time. Character and mobility in the structure of the subject entail a process of development"[3] In literature, the study of "motif" is one of the most common literary techniques used in text analysis. Recurring motifs in literary works are consciously used by authors to strengthen the work's plot.[4]

What sets Dostoyevsky apart is his focus on the downgraded and deviant individuals of Russian society, who are often perceived as strange and negative in his works. Saadat Hasan Mantu (1912-1955), influenced by the writings of various taboo subjects, personally witnessed the events that followed the partition of India. In his works, he predominantly employed graphic depictions of looting, rape, and harassment that occurred in the aftermath of partition, illustrating the forced migration of people. The author endeavors to unveil the demonized aspects of humanity through vivid descriptions of violence.

According to Frenzel, the subject is akin to a melody, while the motif serves as its tuning. The plot relies on specific names and events, and the author resolves any mysteries or gaps. The motif is distinguished by unnamed individuals and situations, offering multiple potential explanations.[5] Since Expressionism, there has been a rise in resistance to political and social rebellion, with human rights activists standing up against violence and carnage. Among them are the victims caught between the two opposing sides. By using important motifs and symbols, the author takes the main subject from a familiar point and fictionalizes the novel by benefiting from the reader's prior knowledge. In particular, he enhances the symbols that exist in literature by adding his own special meanings to them.[6] In the literary work, the author employs the motif of the "rebel" to address conflicts. Essentially, the author illustrates how

3 Frenzel, Elisabeth. *Stoffe der Weltliteratur*. (Stuttgart:Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1963) VI-IX.

4 Yoğurt, Canan. "Premçand'ın Öykülerinde Beylik Motifler" (Common Motifs in Stories) of Premchand), Ankara University Journal of Oriental Languages, (2021a) 6(2): 108–17.

5 Frenzel, Elisabeth. *Motive der Weltliteratur*. (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1988.

6 Kişmir, Gonca. "Uwe Timm'in Sıcak Yaz Adlı Romanındaki Motif ve Sembollerin Gelişim Romanı Bağlamında İncelenmesi." The 12th International Language, Literature and Stylistics Symposium Volume (1) (Trakya University 2014, 168-172. p. 169.

characters become integrated into society through this motif. Ultimately, the rebellious figure finds reconciliation with life, avoiding a tragic end to their struggle[7].

Mantu was often labeled a "commune lover" by many intellectuals who disapproved of his literary works. In reaction to this criticism, he embarked on the mission of delving into the inner world of unskilled workers, prostitutes, bookmakers, bullies, and alcoholics—individuals marginalized within the social hierarchy. He drew inspiration from Russian literature, particularly Dostoevsky, whom he greatly admired. Like Dostoyevsky, who received posthumously the recognition he rightfully deserved during his lifetime, Mantu also garnered the recognition he deserved in South Asia years after his death.

Saadat Hasan Mantu was influenced by the classics of Western and Russian literature through English translations. He also translated himself. For instance, in 1933, he translated Victor Hugo's "The Last Day of a Condemned Man" from English into Urdu. After the book was published and gained popularity, he continued to translate short stories from French literature, particularly Russian literature. He translated into Urdu works by Victor Hugo, Lord Lytton, Maxim Gorky, Anton Chekhov, Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Leonid Andreyev, Oscar Wilde, and Maupassant. Mantu encountered legal issues due to the translation he undertook. After completing the translation of "Vera", a play by the Irish writer and poet Oscar Wilde centered on Russian Nihilist revolutionaries, promotional brochures of the book were distributed, and posters were plastered all over the city. According to Jalal, the text on the poster, quoted from the play, reads as follows:

"The terrible ends of unjust and oppressive rulers are coming."

The streets of Russia echo with screams of revenge.

"It puts the final nail in the coffin of the Romanov dynasty."[8]

Mantu frequently engaged in discussions and shared observations with his friends about ways to address the distortions and disruptions he witnessed in the Indian society. Inspired by Western literature, he harbored hope in his heart for a future imbued with love and peace for the societies of the Indian Subcontinent.

Literary Influences

Mantu, whose literary readings focused on Russian literature during his student years, curated an issue dedicated to Russian Literature in the literary magazine "Humayun"[9] in the mid-1930s, featuring the translations of Russian writers. Mantu's translations from Russian literature enabled him to gain experience in writing short stories. Drawing inspiration from his translations, the author embarked on crafting his own stories. Notably, he captivated attention by combining the influences he derived from Dostoyevsky and Chekhov with his lived experiences in India. Mantu intertwines his readings with the shortcomings he observes in his

7 Frenzel, Elisabeth. *Motive der Weltliteratur*.

8 Jalal, A. (2017). *Bölünmenin Acısı*. (İstanbul: Zoomkitap, 2017) 53.

9 Çiftsüren, A. "Tobe Tek Singh ve Saadat Hasan Mantu." Şarkiyat Mecmuası Sayı 25 (2014-2) 193-207. P. 194.

society through English translations of Dostoyevsky's works. Considering Dostoyevsky's works such as "Notes from the Underground," "White Nights," and "Poor Folk," one can observe parallels in Mantu's short stories, which often revolve around oppressed and marginalized individuals. This shows that the characters created by Dostoyevsky not only left an impact on Mantu's works but also left traces on his life and choices. Mantu explains how people in South Asia who have the love of God in their hearts and desire to live in peace suffer because of the social hatred that results in division. Mantu's narratives depict the plight of helpless individuals who witnessed the massacre of innocent people by fanatics, irrespective of gender and age, with descriptions of misery previously unseen in the Indian Subcontinent. Mantu was accused of obscenity, immorality, and alcohol consumption. He endeavored to articulate the pain, emotions, and yearnings of individuals—both men and women—who, like him, were compelled to leave their homeland. They grappled with feelings of having compromised their honor and dignity, influenced by the unsettling atmosphere of division and the hypocrisy prevalent in society. Mantu aimed to mirror the shifts occurring in the Indian subcontinent's social and political landscape. He sought to liberate literature and art from the grip of the conservative elite, advocating the dissemination of scientific rationalism in literary works and championing progressive movements. His efforts were geared toward democratizing literature, making it more accessible to the masses, and leveraging its power to affect social change. Mantu strived to tackle fundamental life issues such as hunger, poverty, and societal backwardness, making them central themes in literature[10]. Sharma[11] portrays Premchand as a rationalist, adhering to a mixture of nationalism, Gandhism, and Marxism.[12]

Saadat Hasan Mantu's depiction of oppressed, powerless, and victimized people in the Indian Subcontinent and the way he presents them alongside characters with so-called civilized but corrupt souls greatly impresses his readers. Among those affected by Mantu's writings, some criticized him negatively. Mantu responds to criticism by emphasizing the depth of his stories as follows: " If you find these stories intolerable, it's because our era itself is intolerable... I write on the blackboard not with black chalk, but with white chalk, so that the darkness of the board becomes more apparent" (Ahmad 366). Mantu was aware that he had opened the curtain behind which Indian society hid and expressed his reaction to those who criticized him harshly, as stated by Kumar: "If you find my stories dirty, it means the society you live in is dirty." With my stories, I only reveal the truth."[13]

Mantu especially wrote about the trivial human characters he focused on, the conflict between men and women due to taboos, the jealousy caused by unrequited love, and the

10 Soydan, Celal. "Urdu Edebiyatında Fesadat Dönemi ve İlerici Yazarlar." Ankara: Nüsha, 2001. P.55-56.

11 Sharma, A. 1986. "Gold, Dust, Or Gold Dust? Religion in the Life and Writings of Premchand." Journal of South Asina Literature, (1986), Vol, 21, No, 2, sf. 112-122. Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University p.113.

12 Yoğurt, Canan, and Aykut Kişmir. "Boycott of Foreign Goods in Premchand's Stories". South Asia Research 2024. Vol. 44(2): 1–17. p.5.

13 Kumar, Rakesh. "My own personal Mantu': A tribute to Saadat Hasan Mantu from across the border," Sunday Magazine Feature, The Express Tribune, May 13, 2012.

subsequent violence suffered by women. According to Karaca, "In Russian literature, people who represent the lower status person are generally depicted as individuals who can only be consoled by small happiness, who are closed to themselves, away from the attention of their surroundings, who are poor, humiliated, and who die for nothing."[14] Inspired by this, Mantu blended his inspirations from Russian literature with his observations in South Asia and concentrated on the trivial human characters of this region. It did not take long for Mantu to recognize that women among these characters faced even greater hardships. Fearlessly, he wrote about women's unvoiced desires in Indian Subcontinent society and the sexual assaults they endured, serving as their advocate. For this reason, he faced severe criticism, accusations, and insults—mostly from men—which persisted even after his death. His persona was often caricatured and exaggerated, forcing him to defend himself in courtrooms.

However, today, he is considered one of the greatest representatives of freedom of expression in South Asian countries. Mantu aims to delve into human psychology and explore the delicate nature of the feminine spirit behind the seemingly obscene subjects he writes about. Simultaneously, he engages in an ongoing battle with individuals whose unchecked ambitions have led them away from their humanity. When Mantu's works were identified with sexual innuendos by his contemporaries, many literary figures and critics ignored his identity as a writer. However, according to Gatt[15], Mantu is a genius. We could argue that through the characters he selects, he grapples with the tormented souls residing in various strata of Indian society. In a sense, it appears that he is waging a battle against the barriers that perpetuate discrimination and the multitude of violence inflicted upon women. Moreover, he seeks to shed light on the plight of female characters who lack agency and are reduced to societal labels. Characters from diverse social backgrounds, such as Muslims, Sikhs, Marathas, and Hindus, are depicted in Mantu's short stories. There is a particular focus on the mistreatment of women from opposing communities by men.

Interestingly, if the victims belong to the same community as the perpetrators, the men often exhibit shame. The author is troubled by the notion that while men may respect women from their own culture, they adopt a mindset of "anything goes" toward women from cultures they perceive as hostile. The common trait among these men, as chosen by Mantu, is their cultural identity—Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, or otherwise. Regardless of their background, they are portrayed as irrational and immoral individuals harboring hostility. According to Mantu, these men prove their superiority by attacking the women of societies they see as enemies, and at the same time, they take revenge for the wrongs done to them. However, the ultimate victims are always the same. Regardless of their culture, women lose their pride and honor. In men's war, women may be considered easy targets by men to inflict pain and humiliation on

14 Karaca, Birsen. "Oğuz Atay'ın Yarattığı Tutunamayanlar Tipinin Evrensel Genleri." Folklor/Edebiyat, Cilt 17- 67 2011/3 (2011) 29-36. p.33.

15 Gatt, Dashrat. "Feministic Concerns through Fleshy Designs: A Revisit to Saadat Hasan Mantu's Short Stories." The Criterion, Vol. IV, Issue VI, December 2013, p. 62

the enemy. However, we should not overlook that women are as human as men and have hope for their dreams to come true. The author's contradictory persona reflects his concern about the objectification of women. He depicts scenarios in which women assert themselves, often inflicting harm on men who view them solely as objects of revenge or sexual gratification. Hence, Mantu's realistic approach, which delves into taboo subjects that unveil men's hidden frustrations, disturbs men the most. Conversely, in Dostoyevsky's works, male characters are often portrayed as compassionate and willing to make sacrifices for women.

Mantu knows that the Russian cultural fabric differs from that of South Asian culture. According to Mantu, if the Russians succeeded, then societies in the Indian Subcontinent could also forge their path and ultimately find success by following that trajectory. However, someone in India must reveal the reality of what is happening in its true form without distortion or embellishment. Mantu, aiming to liberate this vast peninsula from the cycle of exploitation in which it is trapped, seeks to impart to the people the existence of equality and justice. He emphasizes that salvation lies not in an imaginary hero but within themselves, asserting that they can achieve this if they truly desire it. In addition to gaining insights into Russian culture from Dostoyevsky's translated works into English, Mantu draws inspiration from the expression and language employed by Dostoyevsky. He endeavors to apply Dostoyevsky's techniques in his works, drawing inspiration from Dostoyevsky's letters and diary writings.

Furthermore, Mantu is influenced by Dostoyevsky's skill in giving voice to his characters and the polyphony he masterfully creates in his narratives. For instance, upon immersing in "White Nights," one accepts Dostoyevsky's invitation and meticulously traverses Petersburg, observing the architecture of the houses and the residents of various neighborhoods and streets. From these observations, he draws socio-economic inferences, enriching his understanding of the city and its inhabitants. The discontent he experiences in the city deepens as he observes well-dressed men alongside emaciated servant women. Even witnessing genteel individuals migrating to summer houses accentuates his sense of displacement, making him realize that he has no refuge or sanctuary to seek.[16] Mantu's events and characters when reading Dostoyevsky reflect his society. Through them, he mirrors the realities and complexities of the society in which he lives. As literary expert Astrid Erll[17] asserts, the central focus of a text is how individuals within a society perceive their experiences, encounters, and events. Through literary texts, the past is endowed with meaning by exploring themes such as "religion, ideology, origin, and gender," which are the pivotal coordinates of collective memory in contemporary society.[18]

Mantu gazes at Joan Crawford's hair, depicted on the poster adorning the wall of his living room in Dar-ul Ahmar, where he finds solace in thinking freely. His hand hesitates as

16 Dostoyevski, Fyodor. *Beyaz Geceler*. (İstanbul: Yılmaz Basım, 2021) 7-10.

17 Erll, Astrid. *Mit Dickens spazieren gehen. Kollektives Gedächtnis und Fiktion. In: Gerald Echterhoff und Martin Saar (Hrg.). Kontexte und Kulturen des Erinnerns. Maurice Halbwachs und das Paradigma des kollektiven Gedächtnisses.* (Konstanz, UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2002.) 256.

18 Erll, Astrid. *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*. (Stuttgart:/Weimar, Walter de Gruyter, 2005). 2.

it reaches for the bottle that is nestled among the books on his desk. Averting his eyes from the stern and disapproving gaze of his father, Ghulam Hasan, captured in a photograph hanging on the opposite wall, Mantu grasps the shelf and continues reading, "He goes out of the city and finds people in the fields, in the meadows, in the fields, unlike in the city." "He witnesses the arrival of spring in the countryside of St. Petersburg."[19] Then, it comes to mind that this happiness is temporary. With weariness and sadness, he thinks dreams are deceiving, and reality is full of pain. "Why don't people treat each other with frankness? "Why do people hide their thoughts from each other?[20]" Mantu, in his quest for answers regarding the people of South Asia, later encountered "Notes from the Underground." As bloodshed ravages the Indian Subcontinent, Mantu grapples with questions about civilization. Dostoyevsky's works leave him to confront social criticism alone. "Have you ever observed that those who display the most refined skill in murder are civilized individuals? As civilization draws to its close, if people do not become more bloodthirsty, they certainly become more despicable and detestable murderers. In the past, blood was spilled in the name of justice, and people were dispatched with ease and tranquility. Although we deem the shedding of blood an abomination in our era, we nonetheless partake in this abomination more fervently than ever before".[21]

Mantu, who began having health problems in 1935, was diagnosed with tuberculosis. The doctors advised him to seek refuge in Kashmir and recuperate amidst the refreshing mountain air to alleviate the inflammation in his lungs. In May 1936, he settled in a small village called Batote in Kashmir to receive therapy with some money he had borrowed from his sister. During the three months spent there, he regained his health and met his first love. She was an ordinary peasant girl from Kashmir who Mantu admired and who made a living by selling her body to tourists. Ayesha Jalal[22] suggests that what captivated Mantu about this girl, which led to his infatuation, was her innocence. The impact of a Kashmiri girl on Mantu inspired him to write the stories "Mısri ki Dali," "Beego", "Latlain" (Lamp) and "Aik Khaat" (Letter). Mantu's semi-autobiographical work called "Aik Khaat" (Letter), reminds us of the letters written to each other by Varvara Alekseyevna and Makar Alekseyevich in Dostoyevsky's Humanities (1846). Mantu, figuratively merging with Dostoyevsky's characters, observes with astonishment the events unfolding in South Asia. Similarly, Mantu addresses his prostitute lover in his work, stating: "You don't understand why I write stories, and neither do these people." The concluding sentence, "I will tell you about this another time"[23] coupled with his relationship with the Kashmiri girl, evokes parallels with the dialogues between the narrator and Liza, whom he encounters in a house of prostitution, in Dostoyevsky's "Notes from the Underground"[24]

19 Dostoyevski, Fyodor. *Beyaz Geceler*. (İstanbul: Yılmaz Basım, 2021) 7-10.
20 Dostoyevski, Fyodor. *Beyaz Geceler*. 53.
21 Dostoyevski, Fyodor. *Yeraltından Notlar*. (İstanbul: Yılmaz Basım, 2021). 28.
22 Jalal, Ayesha. *Bölünmenin Acısı*. (İstanbul: Zoomkitap, 2017). 64.
23 Jalal, Ayesha. *Bölünmenin Acısı*. 64.
24 Dostoyevski, Fyodor. *Yeraltından Notlar*.

Premchand, whose real name was Dhanpat Rāi and who lived between 1880 and 1936, is an important writer who is known and studied worldwide through translations as well as in India and Pakistan. His full name is Dhanpat Rāi Šrīvāstava. He was born in a small village called Lamhī near Vārāṇasī. Premchand is an important writer in Hindi literature for understanding India's modern period and interpreting social realist approaches. When evaluating Premchand's works within the context of literary movements in India, he emerges as a writer rooted in realism and social realism. Interestingly, his early works, initially penned in Urdu, reflect a distance from realism and occasionally exhibit imaginative elements. Nevertheless, Premchand manages to balance objectivity and subjectivity as he addresses India's social phenomena and cultural aspects in his writings. The themes he explores are essentially mirrors of the conditions prevalent in Indian culture, making it inaccurate to label his texts as purely fictional. Furthermore, Premchand stands out as a significant figure who introduced realism to both Hindi and Urdu literature. However, regardless of how realistic or socially realistic an author's works may be, and even if these works are grounded in real-life subjects, they often undergo some adaptation before reaching readers. In essence, the author possesses the creative freedom to shape his work according to his intentions, drawing from his own imagination or experiences. Through this approach, Premchand aims to comment on societal issues or highlight continuing injustices, thereby distinguishing right from wrong. This makes Premchand a quintessential writer of Hindi literature.[25]

In addition, Özenç[26] says the following about his storytelling, style, and the values he added to literature: "The highest point in Premchand's storytelling is seen in his last period works. The most important factor is his writing style and scientific consciousness. Partition, turmoil, migration, the end of property, agricultural developments, workers' agitations, the spread of education and training, wars with neighbors, injustice applied to minorities, favoritism and unemployment, and increasing violence had a deep impact on common human life, and innovations in expression, style, and technique were tried in Urdu storytelling of this period to present human psychology. The tendency toward depicting and narrating the introverted life of man increased. Premchand, who established his own connection with social-realist literature, established this in a style unique to himself."[27]

Premchand and Mantu have acted with a similar sensitivity to writers who focus on the sharp divisions in India's social structure, moral hypocrisies, and the difficulties experienced by marginalized individuals. Mantu's seeing a deep humanity in a prostitute during his first love affair reflects an approach that questions society's prejudices. Mantu does not hesitate to emphasize that this woman, whom society despises, also has human values such as innocence,

25 Yoğurt, Canan. "Premçand'ın Öykülerinde Beylik Motifler" (Common Motifs in Stories) of Premchand), Ankara University Journal of Oriental Languages, (2021a) 6(2): 108–17.

26 Özenç, N. "Praym Çand ve Hikayeciliği", Selçuk Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi, 1999-13. p. 409.

27 Yoğurt, Canan. *Premçand'ın Öykülerinde Kadın Motifleri* (Woman Motifs in Premchand's Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (in Turkish) (Ankara: Ankara University Institute Of Social Sciences, 2021), 58.

love, and sacrifice. Premchand, on the other hand, took a similar approach by challenging social stereotypes, marrying a widow for the second time, and questioning society's perspective on divorced or widowed women. Both writers challenge the moral standards imposed by society and highlight individuals' human side. This partnership is embodied in the bond between Mantu's human perspective on the motif of prostitution in his stories and Premchand's understanding of the social norms in his second marriage[28]. Both writers criticize social injustice by trying to find the purest aspects of humanity in people who are ignored or judged by society.

Yoğurt mentioned that in Premchand's story Veshyā, a prostitute who commits suicide because her love is not reciprocated[29]; the plight of prostitutes in her novel Sevāsadan[30] .

When Premchand's works are examined in terms of female portraits, he is different from his contemporaries. He has a unique way of looking at women. He witnessed a period when the women's awakening movement was on the rise. He sees women as those who look after, nurture, and protect them. From this perspective, he does not see women as mere sexual objects like his contemporaries. According to him, women play various respected roles, such as daughter, sister, lover, wife, and mother. He mentions various female characters in his stories and novels. These female characters can be summarized as widows, oppressed, women who devote themselves to their spouses or children, political activists, actresses, prostitutes, educated, workers, women who are against women, and women who stand against men. [31]

In Āgā-Pīchā, it is narrated how a prostitute named Kokilā doted on her daughter Shraddhā from the moment she was born. Although Shraddhā lived a decent life, she was told in school that her mother was a prostitute, and therefore, her daughter would also be a prostitute. One day, her mother asked her daughter, "Are you ashamed of me?" The girl said that she was proud of her. Although her mother was a prostitute, she wanted her daughter to have a regular life. Kokilā, who thought that her daughter could not get married because of her, asked her daughter if she was thinking of getting married. "Shraddhā lowered her eyes and said, 'Can't I live without marriage?" I want to live my life as a virgin. When I finish my schooling, I will enter university, and in two or three years, we can live independently in separate houses. I can be a doctor and a lawyer; all the paths are now open for women."[32] While saying that the path to professions such as doctors and lawyers has now been opened for women, she also expresses her desire to live independently of her mother. Since Kokilā is a mother who

28 Premchand's second marriage was with Şivrānī Devī. This marriage was simple. Şivrānī was also a woman who was fond of literature, just like Premchand. She was also imprisoned twice because she actively participated in the national resistance movement (Yoğurt, 2021b: 17).

29 Yoğurt, Canan. *Premçand'ın Öykülerinde Kadın Motifleri* (Woman Motifs in Premchand's Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (in Turkish) (Ankara: Ankara University Institute Of Social Sciences, 2021), 66.

30 Yoğurt, Canan. *Premçand'ın Öykülerinde Kadın Motifleri* (Woman Motifs in Premchand's Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (in Turkish) (Ankara: Ankara University Institute Of Social Sciences, 2021), 90.

31 Sharma, 2017: 1-2 as cited in.Yoğurt, Canan. *Premçand'ın Öykülerinde Kadın Motifleri* (Woman Motifs in Premchand'sStories) [Unpublished Doctoral Thesis] (in Turkish), (Ankara: Ankara University Institıteof Social Sciences, 2021), 92.

32 Premchand, (2014), मानसरोवर, (भाग – ४), दिल्ली: भारत पुस्तक भंडार, 88.

favorably looks upon having someone in her daughter's life, she asks her daughter, "Isn't there any other desire in your heart?" Don't you desire to love someone?" Shraddhā, on the other hand, Shraddh says that she does not take a stance against love, that for her, the love of God is superior to all loves, and that she does not want to get married and be despised by her husband. "Shraddhā took a deep breath and said, 'Mother, who is there in the world who lives without love?" Love is the most important aspect of human life. Can you see God's love with your eyes? He is there. When I find someone who does not despise me, who is after my heart, then I will worship him wholeheartedly, but before whom shall I beg him to give me his love?"[33] while saying that they will not be happy even if someone wants to marry her because they feel sorry for her. Through this story, Premchand reflects the perspective of a woman with a modern mindset who is against marriage and wants to get the education she wants, practice her profession, and stand on her own feet. The story demonstrates how reading can change a person's life, especially in a woman's life, and that a woman does not need a man to continue her life and can live on her own.[34]

Premchand described his novel Sevāsadan (1918) as the best in Hindi. Before Premchand, prostitutes were always mentioned with hatred in Hindi novels. Premchand took it upon himself to focus on the social and economic reasons underlying this situation[35]. In this novel, where prostitutes were treated as a problem, bride price, wrong marriage, lack of education, and the negative situations caused by these were also mentioned.[36] At the first conference of the progressive literary movement, he said:

"Literature that can stand the test of time is thought-provoking, freedom-loving, artistically attractive, capable of spiritual purification, reflecting the realities of life, able to mobilize, develop, enlighten and transform people. In this way, people wake up from a deep sleep and become more conscious"[37]

Conclusion

Mantu stands out as a courageous writer within the tradition of Urdu storytelling, renowned for his distinctive style and unreserved honesty. Mantu's works testify to his enduring influence on contemporary Urdu literature. His literary work has brought him to courtrooms, often accompanied by unpleasant and inappropriate debates. One reason for this is that the subjects Mantu chooses to explore in his stories provoke moral corruption and elicit sexual connotations in readers' minds. It is important to note that discussions about sexuality, which today's South Asian societies approached with hesitation, were even more challenging to express in literary

33 Premchand, (2014), मानसरोवर, (भाग – ४), दिल्ली: भारत पुस्तक भंडार, 88.

34 Yoğurt, Canan. *Premçand'ın Öykülerinde Kadın Motifleri* (Woman Motifs in Premchand's Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (in Turkish) (Ankara: Ankara University Institıte Of Social Sciences, 2021), 150-152.

35 Nāgendra. *Premchand An Anthology*. (Delhi: Bansal. 1981), 58-59.

36 Yoğurt, Canan. *Premçand'ın Öykülerinde Kadın Motifleri* (Woman Motifs in Premchand's Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (in Turkish) (Ankara: Ankara University Institıte Of Social Sciences, 2021), 204-205.

37 Saleem Akhter. *Urdu Adab ki Mukhtasir Tareen Tareekh* (Lahor: Sang-e Meel Publications, 2009), 228.

works during Mantu's era. Despite vehement criticism and attempts at suppression from many quarters within the scholarly community, Mantu remained steadfast in his commitment to frankness and realism. His critics accused him of encouraging society to prostitution and trying to legitimize pornography based on the content rather than the artistic quality of his works. Although Mantu was acquitted of all the lawsuits filed against him, some literary figures mention Mantu's name in their discussions about sexuality. The author has many works that do not touch on sexuality. Mantu conducts in-depth studies on identity conflict in his works such as "Mozel", "Babu Gopi Nath", "Naya Qanun" and "Hoshiya Na'ra" ect.

Mantu's choice to imbue his writing with a realistic attitude and rationality within the Indian Subcontinent distinguishes him as an author. As he gazes upon the night sky and observes the stars, he senses a closeness with the Russian outlook, which contrasts with the perspectives of German and French writers.

As Dostoyevsky articulated: "The hallmark of romantics is to comprehend everything, to perceive everything, often to the extent that even our most imaginative minds cannot rectify; to not compromise with anyone on any matter, yet simultaneously not to affront anyone."[38] The commonality between the two writers lies in their recognition of the preciousness of time and the imperative for creative minds to unveil the truths that remain known but unspoken in society. Mantu adopts a critical stance in his portrayal of social reality, eschewing the veil of imagination. In general, he maintains a non-conciliatory approach in his works and displays no apprehension about challenging the society where he resides, even if it means offending.

When Premchand moved from his village to a big city like Kanpur during his childhood, rural life became a part of his identity. His originality as a realist writer drew attention to the problems and social challenges faced by all people belonging to a nation, caste, sect, and religion. He realistically portrayed the conflicts in rural society, the industrial system spreading to the cities, the social problems prevalent at that time, the turbulent and public struggle of political, economic, and social life, the oppression of the feudal capitalist system, and the problems arising from religion, dharma, and caste. He also dealt with issues such as hunger, disease, unemployment, illiteracy, and homosexuality in his stories. He tried to emphasize mental breakdowns, social disabilities, emotional disorders, the joys and sorrows that come with them, and the suffering and inhuman treatment of Indian women. The subjects, motifs, and symbols in Premchand's novels and stories are among the unique examples of realism. In his works, the author criticized British politics and protested against the mistreatment of laborers by industrialists.

38 Dostoyevski, Fyodor. *Yeraltından Notlar*. (İstanbul: Yılmaz Basım, 2021). 28.

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