



## Pratidhwani the Echo

A Peer-Reviewed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science

ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)

Impact Factor: 6.28 (Index Copernicus International)

Volume-XIV, Issue-III, April 2026, Page No. 292-297

Published by Dept. of Bengali, Karimganj College, Sribhumi, Assam, India

Website: <http://www.thecho.in>

DOI: 10.64031/pratidhwanitheecho.vol.14.issue.03W.109



### A short Review of Premchand's 'Ghaswali' and Other Stories

Raj Kumar Mandal, *Independent Research Scholar, Malda, West Bengal, India*

Received: 17.04.2026; Accepted: 27.04.2026; Available online: 30.04.2026

©2026 The Author(s). Published by Dept. of Bengali, Karimganj College, Sribhumi. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

#### Abstract

Feminism is a socio-political ideology that advocates equality, freedom, and justice for all genders by challenging discriminatory social structures. It emphasizes equal access to rights, opportunities, and resources, thereby contributing to both individual empowerment and societal development. As Ramanika Gupta argues, true empowerment lies in a woman's autonomy and her ability to make independent decisions free from male dominance.

The roots of feminist consciousness in Indian literature can be traced in the works of Munshi Premchand, whose stories present a realistic portrayal of social inequalities. This paper evaluates Premchand's short story *Ghaswali* as a powerful expression of feminist discourse, while also referring to stories like *Mandir* and *Sadgati*, which highlight caste oppression and Dalit marginalization.

Written in 1929, during the period of the Civil Disobedience Movement, *Ghaswali* reflects Gandhian ideals of non-violence and moral transformation. The protagonist Mulia, a woman from a marginalized caste, resists both gender and caste-based oppression through courage, self-respect, and rational argument. Her resistance leads to the transformation of the oppressor, demonstrating the power of ethical and intellectual strength over violence.

Through its portrayal of Mulia's character, *Ghaswali* emerges as a significant feminist text that also intersects with Dalit discourse. The story remains relevant in contemporary times, as it highlights enduring issues of gender inequality and social injustice while promoting dignity, equality, and human values.

**Keywords:** Premchand, Feminism, Ghaswali, Chainsingh, Mandir.

"Feminism" is a social and political ideology that advocates complete equality for all genders. It primarily attacks the discriminatory structure of the gender system and emphasizes equality, freedom, and all kinds of human rights between women and men, along with a fair distribution of opportunities and resources. In other words, it stresses the development of the individual and, through the individual, the development of society. In this sense, it is often said that if a woman in a family is educated, the entire society becomes educated.

Ramanika Gupta writes:

"A woman must take decisions for herself... a woman must attain autonomy, in which she has the freedom to organize her own life; equality between woman and man means the absence of discrimination on the basis of gender... resistance to and rejection of male dominance and male violence."<sup>1</sup>

Feminist discourse emerged from the womb of postmodernism. However, the roots of feminist consciousness can be found even before its formal emergence, particularly in the stories of Premchand. Although Premchand is revered in Hindi fiction as an idealist writer, he is also regarded as a global literary figure.<sup>2</sup> His stories encompass not only peasant discourse but also child discourse, feminist discourse, Dalit discourse, and contemporary social discourse.

Regarding the vast canvas of Premchand's stories, Kamal Kishore Goyanka writes:

"Premchand is the first Indian storyteller who created a vast universe of Indian life in his literature. The scale of this vastness can be gauged from the fact that it includes a world of nearly three thousand characters, encompassing their joys and sorrows, struggles and compromises, rebellion and reconstruction, rise and fall, creation and destruction. The writer portrays the real-life stories of characters belonging to almost all major religions, castes, varnas, classes, professions, age groups, urban and rural settings, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, exploiters and exploited."<sup>3</sup>

About 300 of Premchand's stories are available in seven volumes under the title *Manasrovar*. Recently, Dr. Kamal Kishore Goyanka has presented 298 stories in six volumes titled *Premchand Kahani Rachanavali*. The special feature of this collection is that all available stories have been arranged chronologically, with sincere efforts made to present their earliest authentic texts.<sup>4</sup>

Within the scope of the present article, Premchand's story *Ghaswali* is described and analyzed as a powerful feminist story. First, let us briefly consider its plot.

*Ghaswali* is a deeply poignant story by Munshi Premchand. It is the story of the self-respect, consciousness, and resistance of a poor woman belonging to a so-called lower caste. The resistance here aligns with Gandhi's principle of "change of heart." The influence of Gandhian ideology is clearly visible in the story.

The story was published in 1929, in the December issue of the magazine *Madhuri*. The year 1929 is historically and politically significant. Globally, it was a period of economic depression, while in Indian history, 1929-1930 marked the Civil Disobedience Movement. A major feature of this movement was the active participation of women along with men, who boldly defied British laws and made it clear that Indians would no longer tolerate injustice. This form of resistance was unique because it opposed oppression with humility and moral strength. As Gandhi asserted, injustice should not be answered with injustice.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Plot and Characters of *Ghaswali*:**

The main character of the story is *Mulia*, a woman belonging to a so-called lower caste (*Chamar*). Her husband is *Mahavir Chamar*, whom she married a year ago. *Mahavir* has taken a loan of three hundred rupees from a moneylender to buy a cart and a horse. *Mulia* lives with her husband and her mother-in-law. *Mahavir* earns just enough to repay small installments of the loan and provide two meals a day. Therefore, *Mulia* is compelled to go daily to the fields to collect grass for the horse. If she fails to do so, fodder worth twelve annas must be purchased. Thus, collecting grass from the fields is not a choice but a compulsion for *Mulia*.

**The antagonist of the story is Chainsingh:**

Mulia is beautiful. Many people long for just a glimpse of her. She is poor yet attractive, but her heart is devoted entirely to her husband, Mahavir. Describing Mulia's character, the author writes:

"Mulia was like a rose blooming in a barren land. She had a wheatish complexion, deer-like eyes, a slightly drawn chin, a faint redness on her cheeks, long pointed eyelashes, and a strange moistness in her eyes, reflecting a deep sorrow, an underlying pain. ... Even in that village there were people who would lay their eyes at her feet, who yearned for a single glance from her, and who would have felt blessed if she spoke even one word to them. But in over a year, no one had seen her looking at young men or talking to them. She would walk with downcast eyes, carrying grass, and go straight on her way."<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note that this story was written in 1929, a time when rigid caste barriers dominated Indian society. Dalits were subjected to double oppression – first under British rule and second under the dominance of upper castes within Indian society. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar often referred to this internal untouchable society.

In *Ghaswali*, Chainsingh represents this oppressive upper-caste dominance. When he sees Mulia cutting grass in the fields, he becomes infatuated with her. One day, losing control, he grabs her hand and says, "Mulia, don't you feel even a little pity for me?"<sup>7</sup>

Mulia shows no fear or hesitation. She firmly warns him that if he does not leave her hand, she will scream and gather the people working nearby. Chainsingh is immediately ashamed and lets go. Mulia returns home in tears.

For Chainsingh, this is a completely new experience. For the first time, he realizes that even a woman from a so-called lower caste can possess such courage and sharpness of speech. Until then, he had exploited many women without resistance. The next day, Mulia refuses to go to collect grass alone. However, under the taunts of her mother-in-law, she is forced to go again.

That day, frightened, she walks along the ridges of the fields. Seeing green grass, she begins cutting it, hoping to leave within half an hour. Suddenly, she sees Chainsingh standing before her. Her heart skips a beat. She thinks of running away but cannot move. Chainsingh reassures her, claiming he has not come to harass her and pleads for forgiveness, presenting his lust as love.<sup>8</sup>

Mulia listens carefully and then questions him about his marriage. When Chainsingh dismisses his marriage lightly, Mulia responds sharply:

"If my husband spoke to your wife the way you speak to me, how would you feel? Would you not be ready to cut his throat? Do you think that because Mahavir is a Chamar, he has no blood in his body, no sense of honor? ... You seek pity from me because I am a Chamarin, a woman of a so-called low caste, whom you think can be subdued with a little threat or temptation."<sup>10</sup>

Chainsingh is rendered speechless. He is forced to confront a truth he has never faced before. Mulia continues with powerful logic, asserting her dignity, loyalty, and self-respect.<sup>11</sup> Her words bring about a transformation in Chainsingh. He realizes his mistake, and his heart changes.

This is the true success of feminism – not violence, but awakening the conscience of the oppressor. Mulia's rational arguments bring about Chainsingh's moral transformation. He becomes compassionate and humane, abandoning his earlier oppressive behavior.

In Premchand's story "Mandir," the storyteller raises poignant questions for society by exposing the caste-based discrepancies prevalent in contemporary society. Sukhiya is the main Dalit character in the story. She has already lost two children, whom she immersed in the Ganges. Her husband is also dead. Her only support is her son, Jivan, who has been ill for several days. In a dream, Sukhiya sees her husband standing near her son Jivan's head. He says, "Don't cry, your child will be fine. He will help you after worshipping Thakurji tomorrow."<sup>12</sup> The next day, she picks flowers from somewhere. But lacking money for the offerings, she seeks help from many people in the village, but finds no help. She sells her bracelet and buys the offerings from a merchant's shop. But when she reaches the temple, she waits for the crowd of so-called elite to leave. She knows everyone will avoid the Chamar woman. When the ban on entering the crowd was lifted, she went to the temple, but some people objected. Even the priest himself said, "What nonsense are you talking? Have you gone mad? How will you touch the Lord of the Lord?"<sup>13</sup> Despite Sukhiya's repeated attempts, she was denied entry. After standing for a long time, when no one showed mercy, she devised a solution. Finally, she hid under a tree in the dark, away from the temple, and waited for everyone to leave. When everyone had left, and the priest was nowhere to be seen, Sukhiya went to the temple. Seeing the priest, she pleaded with him and told him what she had dreamt. One rupee from the bracelet had already been given as *prasad*, and she gave the other to the priest. The priest, taking pity on her, refused to let her touch the Lord of the Lord, nor did he allow her to touch the Lord. However, out of pity, he gave her a talisman and told her to return. Sukhiya returned home, but when her health deteriorated halfway through the day, she remembered her master's words. Finally, carrying Jivan, she ran to the temple. The temple door was locked. Unable to resist, she tried to break the lock for the sake of her only child. But the blow on the door made the priest think it was a thief. She screamed. Hearing the commotion, the people nearby began attacking him. But when the priest soon realized what was happening, instead of showing mercy, he began abusing her. He said, "By entering the temple of Thakurji, she had defiled it and Thakurji."<sup>14</sup> The priest pushed her so hard that Sukhiya's child fell from her hands. The child neither cried nor screamed. Sukhiya's only son, he too, was no more. Sukhiya, clenched her fists in anger and gritted her teeth, said, "Sinners, why are you taking my child's life? Why don't you kill me along with him? Has my touch infected Thakurji? Iron turns to gold when touched by the philosopher's stone; the philosopher's stone cannot turn to iron. Thakurji will be defiled by my touch!" If you make me, won't you get infected? Look, I'll never come to touch Thakurji again. Keep it locked up, and put a guard on it."<sup>15</sup> (51) Similarly, in the story "Sadgati," the Brahmin forces Dukhi Chamar to do forced labor by threatening him with religious intimidation – bringing grass, then moving the straw, sweeping, and then splitting bundles of wood – which ultimately leads to Dukhi Chamar's death. This is precisely why the biggest problem arises after his death: the people of the Chamartoli refuse to take Dukhi Chamar's body, calling it a police case. They also know that Pandit Ghasiram forced him to do excruciating forced labor. To avoid further complications, they tie a rope around Dukhi Chamar's feet in the middle of the night during the rainy season, tying the rope in such a way that their hands don't touch his body. Here too, the fear of becoming untouchable is clearly visible. Tying a

rope to the feet of the distressed Chamar, they drag him away in the middle of the night, throwing him far away from home into the forest where dead animals are dumped. What is this if not an irony? One should feel compassion and guilt for the fact that they were forced to do forced labor. They were scolded and taunted in exchange for food. They were forced to work. But this story, which shames humanity, also reveals the helplessness and helplessness of the Dalit community, as it shows no rebellion from the Chamar community.

The roots of casteism are so deeply ingrained in Indian society that various forms of caste-based violence are still witnessed. Recently, after the Indian President entered a temple, a Dalit woman was insulted for waving a flag. Even today, a Dalit groom in Rajasthan is prevented from riding a horse. One form of caste irony is also visible here: incidents of attacks on the identity of Dalit women go unreported in newspapers or make headlines on news channels, while incidents involving non-Dalit communities immediately make headlines.

In stories like "Poos ki Raat," "Sawa Seer Gehun," and "Do Bailon Ki Katha," the storyteller Premchand exposes the plight of farmers in Indian society and the exploitative policies of moneylenders. In "Poos ki Raat," Halku is an ordinary farmer. He guards the crops in his fields. Due to a poor harvest last year, he has been unable to repay the moneylender's debt. He has to guard the fields in the bitter cold. His wife, Munni, has struggled to save a few rupees for a blanket, but is helpless in the face of the moneylender's threats. The author depicts that situation in a heartbreaking manner: "Halku took the money and walked out like this. He was carrying his heart out."<sup>16</sup>

The story Ghaswali remains relevant even today. Mulia emerges as an ideal and inspirational figure for feminist movements. She resists injustice without shedding a single drop of blood, transforming the oppressor through moral strength. In conclusion, the protagonist Mulia embodies courage, a powerful language of resistance, respect for family, autonomy, fearlessness, and above all, Gandhian principles of change of heart. Considering these collective aspects, Ghaswali can rightly be regarded as a powerful feminist story. 'Ghaswali', on the one hand, is a powerful story representing feminist discourse, while stories like 'Poos Ki Raat' and 'Mandir' are significant works of Dalit discourse that sharply expose the contradictions and ironies of society.

### **Bibliography:**

1. Gupta Ramanika, *Women's Liberation*, Samayik Prakashan, New Delhi, First Edition, 2012, p. 27.
2. Goyanka Kamal Kishore, *Premchand: Collected Short Stories*, Compilation, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi-110023, First Edition, 2010, quoted from the flap.
3. Goyanka Kamal Kishore, "Premchand" Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, First Edition, 2013; Reprint, 2020, pp. 109-110.
4. Goyanka Kamal Kishore, *Premchand: Collected Short Stories*, quoted from the flap.
5. Anamika, p. 16.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
9. *Ibid.*

10. Ibid., pp. 191-192.
11. Ibid., p. 192.
12. <https://premchand.co.in>
13. Premchand Dalit Jeevan KI kahaniyan, - 47
14. Ibid.
15. IBID; p.- 51
16. <https://www.hindi.org>