

## The Middle Class World of Godan: The Clientele

**Laxman Kumar Jain**

Zakir Husain Evening College, University of Delhi

Email Id: [laxmanjain1965@gmail.com](mailto:laxmanjain1965@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** This paper seeks to explore the middle class world, their ideology, paradoxes, contradictions, their habits of logic chopping and finally their limits that they were incapable or unwilling to affect the social transformation through the literary lens of Premchand's masterpiece Godan.

**Keywords:** Premchand's Godan, Doctor, Professor, Capitalist, Landlord, Broker, Election, Money, Jealousy, Envy, Competition to befriend a woman, Journalist, Democracy, Colonial officialdom

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### Introduction

What inspired me to write this paper was the comment made by noted scholar Alok Rai who considered the world of city in Godan as utterly disjointed theme.<sup>1</sup> According to him the representation of the urban character by Premchand represents a crisis in Godan. To my mind without knowing one thing you can't understand the other. To know Hori's world better it is necessary to understand its corollary, i.e. the other world.

The other world is constituted by congeries of character, separated in time and space, provided a corollary to the first world – Hori and his surroundings. This emerges as a contrast and opposite, the limit to the first world, showing us what exactly the latter is. In unfolding the discursive discourse of the second, their ideal contradiction, paradoxes of their cultural, economic and emotional world, in short their being and thinking we come to know what is generally said as the emergence of professional middle classes<sup>2</sup>, doctors, lawyers, brokers, financiers, industrialists, professors along with a group of declining and indebted landlords. And finally we encounter the sad truth of a blighted path of social transformation in the whole gamut of happening<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Alok Rai, "A Kind of Crisis: Godan and the Last Writings of Munshi Premchand", *Journal of School of Languages*, JNU, Monsoon, 1974.

<sup>2</sup> Mishra, B. B., *The Indian Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times*, Oxford University Press, 1979

<sup>3</sup> Sen, Ashok, *Ishwarchandra Vidya Sagar and His Illusive Milestone*, Calcutta, 1977, see also; Seal, Anil, *Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in Late Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University press, 1968

## The Clientele

Rai Sahab Amar Pal Singh is the central dramatist personae which clusters around him the host of other characters – Mr. Chandra Prakash Khanna, his ex-classmate, financier and capitalist, Mrs. Malti, the Oxford-returned doctor, Mr. Mehta Philosophy professor of University, Omkar Nath, the editor of Flash (Bijli), Mirza Khurshid, the prosperous businessman, Tankah, an ex-lawyer turned into broker. All of them had found rendezvous at Rai Sahab's place. The series of exchanges and dialogues that pass among them significantly brings into light, their mutual envy, showmanship, exhibitionism and tendency to excel each other in logic chopping, behind the veneer of a semblance of friendship much typical of middle-class milieu in colonial world.

Omkar Nath, the editor, on hearing Rai Sahab's composing a play cast a strong doubt on his creative capacity and takes pleasure in thinking that knowledge and creative brilliance like a glow one shining in the darkness of night is the exclusive monopoly of the poor of course a real surrogate for his own deprived state of existence. Mr. Tankah who did not have any flavour of play also wanted to exhibit his knack appreciating an art, "however profound the play may be, if the actors failed to depict it its likely to flop."

Each one was up in arm to distract the other. Mehta gave a counter to Tankah showering praises on Rai Sahab's interpolation in Parliament. Only expostulating about peasant's grievances or problem, i.e. tenancy rights without the gift, free-grazing lands, fix-revenue etc. will not be of any avail, and if he does not feel any worth about the people whose action and speech is divided by yawning chasm and who talk about communism but fixed in luxurious prosperity.

Tankha came to Rai Sahab's rescue and said he is always nice to his tenants. But Mehta's armoury was in full brim; food cooks well in slow fire and its more effective to kill with sweet words than poison; disrobing all the trappings of charity; goodness and philanthropy; in the hegemonic stature of Rai Saheb. Rai Saheb gave a lengthy reply to Mehta's accusations in a curious blend mixing of pragmatism and reason; the paternalistic suzerainty of the lord and their ongoing misfortune leading to the sale of the states and the harassment at the hands of the officials. "It is true in deed very difficult to change from one ideological stand to another - - - he was brought up in a culture when the king is considered as a God and the Zamindar his regent---

his late father was magnificently generous in waving rents; helping out the tenants in all possible ways but as long as the tenants held him in high veneration; not a single pie would slip to them as a matter of right; ----- my entire class has been parasitic and lethargic despite the fact that I have changed very much from the older lot the officialdom or the bureaucracy take us always for a ride and heralding doom awaits to descend upon my class.”<sup>4</sup>

Rai Sahab got absolved after sly joke of Mehta, so much of intelligence of him does not fructify in deed. Then it was Mehta’s turn. Omkar Nath threw the gauntlet. Mehta himself coolly pocket 800 Rs. per month. To which Mehta replied that he believes in the institutions of society. The arguments veered around that validity of the present system Mehta showed his belief in the social system and vehemently argued against Omkar Nath’s case for equality. For him, equality was not a new catch word since Plato and Buddha also had talked about it and he attributed ignorance to Omkar’s surprise. Mehta strengthened his case by saying that “unlike others he does not have a gap between words and deed. One can distribute wealth but not intelligence and beauty, the richest prostrate before the saintly one. Russia’s example does not dispute this. Yesterday’s capitalists have taken over the present bureaucracy.”

Ideas were freely available to cross swords with each other but Rai Sahab offered a conclusive remark, “Knowledge without self interest is just the thing that one cherishes to uphold, richest continues after the rich but knowledge dies with the man.” Thus went the platitude. The arrival of Malti and Khanna surcharged the place with Malti playing pranks on Mehta, the idea of a philosopher self-indulge by drawing an analogy with professor at Oxford.

Omkar picks up a short conversation with Mrs. Khanna and evokes her fringy, poetic sensibility for contributing to his newspaper. Mrs. Khanna hesitates and suggests Malti’s name as poetess which would add up hugely to the newspaper subscriber. But Omkar shows up his adoration for the rarified traits of a poet, pious sentimentality, and a conscience and benumb feeling which absolutely lacks in Malti and also in course of conversation walks eloquent on his commitment to truth, sacrifice, virtue generally demanded of an editor. Rai Sahab brought Omkar’s attention to Malti’s side, he in his usual style again declared his commitment to truth

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<sup>4</sup> Whitcomb, Elizabeth: *Agrarian Condition in Northern India*, vol. 1, New Delhi, 1971. About indebted landlord, see also; Chandra, Bipin, *Colonialism, Stages of Colonialism and the Colonial State*, Journal of Contemporary Asia, vol. 10, no. 3, 1980.

for which he was prepared to pay any price. On Malti's idea, to come to down jibes at government and thereby ensure a pretty fortune but Malti came down on him more accurately pointing out how his newspaper was giving a larger coverage to advertisement of foreign goods. But initially, Omkar's smugness was caused by the very fact that Governor had brought his name even acrimoniously. But Rai Sahab intervened in Omkar's favour, he had to make his living and there is no way out. The subject was always taking a swift turn, now the discussion started on the traits of a philosopher. And Rai Sahab withdrew Mehta's identity of Mehta's claim as a philosopher. Mehta completely refrained from establishing his credential and only stressed uniqueness of different craft and the dull compulsion of earning a living. Omkar was ready to seize the opportunity to pounce on Mehta. Every labourer can demand as much money and wealth for his work. New thread was added to it with the question of women and question of marriage. While Mehta supported the idea of free love, he clarified that he was no way hobnobbing with marriage and divorce syndrome. For him, the free love was only for those free from the bonds of marriage. Malti slights with at Mrs. Khanna, that she should be prepared for a divorce as Mrs. Khanna was supporting Mehta's ideas, brought her intemperate look. Then came the most humorous event – the gathering decided to defy Omkarnath's dharma who was asleep helping him with fruits, milk, and Malti was to carry out the task and had Rs 1,000 was on bait. The enchanters of Laxmi had to cast its magic spell on devout puritan. Mirza had engineered the plot however any amount of clairvoyance might and irradiation can't be immune from its intoxicating effect of flamboyant panegyric. Omkar gave in easily to the euphemistic effusion for Malti devi, the exceptional contribution made by Omkarnath in the literary realm was inimitable and it was not too late that future generation will record to with utmost gratitude, naming streets after him; and the hanging his portrait in celebrated public places and his followers at the moment were little forward to his adroit leadership in ruler uplift program.

Omkarnath's heart went into the raptures. A new dawn broke for him; for the first time in life the city's clientele held him in so much veneration. It was for the whole world to see editor of Swadhin Bharat has turned and come to sense. Putting on self-effacing tone, he attributed all his achievement to the cause he stood for and appeal for most renowned persons to be nominated for the Presidentship but Mrs. Malti further extolled him; there is no parallel to the charismatic personality of Omkarnath. And with the aptness and sounded the death knell of the rule of the riches and ushered the reign of tenant. She further sharpened her logic; it is for Omkarnath's

greatness only that they pinned their hopes for him otherwise they could have asked for a takeover or any rich person and made a good fortune over the years. They have also proposed to make all provisions for the increase of circulation of his papers up to 25,000. Mrs. Malti again inflated his ego by putting forth her Sangha resolutions to opt Omkarnath as a candidate for the council membership. Finally, she clinched the issue; we have now discovered true leader with path-finding ethos and should give up all our self arrogance and vanity, egoism at the altar of this auspicious occasion that they got. “We now disown all differences and discrimination on the basis of religion, caste, creed and taste.....and anyone differing should quit the place”. Even in all spirit of conviviality she climaxed with amorous squint interceding Omkar for a peg of wine. In the triumph of national solidarity and the beauty of a woman, Omkar found enough rational to follow suit, so stigma and orthodoxy, bigotry crumbled into pieces. Omkar vowed to break his religion twenty times under the benevolent care of Malti devi, deep down in wine Omkar burst out, “Malti devi, you are my Laxmi, Saraswati and Radha.”

Mehta slipped away and came incognito as an armed Afghan, claiming Rs. 1000 and shiver ran through all of them, their cowardice came out<sup>5</sup>. He made some playful comments on Malti as his love in the great Afghan tradition. Rai Sahab finally got determined in a chivalrous tradition of a feudal to rebuff him. Hori, the loyal tenant came in and fell Mehta on ground<sup>6</sup> and his moustache coming out. Then came a hunting scene next to it divided into 3 groups: Mehta-Malti, Khanna-Rai Sahab, and Tankah-Mirza Khurshid. It was a moment of more intimate reflection and exchange of views; once ideas and views on various things, in short ways of the world. Khanna much interested in Malti’s company got disappointed but for the other thing, Rai Sahab’s company was not a bad choice. The most exciting among the partners provocative in conversation tinged with a flicker of love were the educated one; Malti and Mehta, on their way for hunt; toning of the dialogue, Malti broke her coinage, “ Tell me why did you tease me last night, I was angry, do you remember, come with me my love,. How naughty tell me, would you really have carried me away.” Mehta proved quite obdurate, didn’t yield to her request to sit for a while unless the prey is in hand. She looks at him indignantly, “I have seen more heartless men,

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<sup>5</sup> Guha, Ranjit, *Neel Darpan: The Image of a Peasant Revolt in Liberal Mirror*, Journal of Peasant Studies, 1974. Pg. n. 1-46. See also; Guha, Ranjit, *Elementary Aspect of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, 1983, (where he argues the timidity of middle class in another context, middle class attitude in relation to peasant rebellion).

<sup>6</sup> It shows the extreme moment of loyalty of a small tenant to the feudal landlord who was double body in relation to zero body of peasant. He could have tamed an bad elephant if his master have ordered. See; Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of Prison*, London, 1977

your heart is strong, torment me, wound me, I'll get my chance someday" clearly reveals to us the sublimated feelings of mixed anger. Malti seizes every opportunity to make her heart more clearly by passing through stream, sitting on Mehta's shoulders and hiding her happiness, she said, "If someone sees us we will find it very odd." Mehta made proud confession about his failure in love, "you are right Malti, I'm not much of a success with women. If woman is false, I can see through her then I lose interest in her." He went to the moralistic theorizing, "Sincerity, first and last. Good looks and glamour are secondary. I want food for soul. I don't much care for spicy things." Mehta proved his off mundane for extraterrestrial breadth. He loaded her intelligence, veracity and wit but found her lacking in the art of love. The encounter with jungle girl drove the last nail in the coffin. Her carefree, natural and sensuous existence far from the madding crowd gnome's style enchanted Mehta to the very core. It makes no difference to us while told not to go for calling Malti at a distance, she said, "We belong to the jungle, we stand in sun and rain and work the whole day. Mehta, a veritable lover of country life, the mountain range stretched before time, unending, impenetrable, the symbolic repository of the wisdom of the ages was absorbing thoughts when the women arrived with Malti. One flash as a wild lower in full bloom and the other one as weak and small as a potted plant. But Malti grew irritated with the rustic ambience of the girl's hut and accused Mehta for making her on all the way, dumping in the wretched hole. Mehta's admiration for the girl when she went to fetch herb or Malti's headache further annoyed her and she bloated out, "These herbs are only for jungles and not for me, they would bring no good to me, but why have you fallen for this girl, how shameful." There was a clear undercurrent of envy. Mehta again teased her, "If you had some of her qualities, you would have become a goddess." Malti's heart-groaning was full. "If you like, you can pass the night here." Heightening and deepening her envy and spurned all requests to touch anything cooked by her and to all her hospitality threatened to lung her she refuse to go or calling the car. Mehta was puzzled that the girl like Malti so open-minded, jubilant and modern would have such profound and vicious jealousy.

Rai Sahab and Khanna made the second party. Khanna had turned it into a hunting suit tailored for the occasion. A man whose time is mostly taken up in hunting down clients would hardly find any time to run after animal. Khanna wanted Rai Sahab in a troupe against Mehta. He said, "Mehta is a pure bard. Rai Sahab who otherwise considered Mehta a straight and upright man, because of business relation with Khanna had to play safe, "I don't like Mehta,

seriously.....I am no match for his forensic skill but I do get amused if a man who has so practical experience of life starts trotting out eccentric theories. What else he can do to kill time but philosophize. He played the tune to Khanna's test. Khanna was really crushed with falling from Malti's test when Rai Sahab suggested Khanna that the more he fawns on her, the more she neglects him and ignoring only she will run after him. Mehta applied the same to Rai Sahab. Rai Sahab poured out his anguish, Me, I'm not in this game.....I have cut off from the smart sake. All my brains and energy is consumed in looking after my state. All members of my family are absorbed in frivolous pursuits. Some in mending their souls, some in indulging their bodies, I have to provide for their maintenance of all these parasites. If you bemoan miserable plight of the zamindars deep down in debt and feel crushed that he had some faint glimmerings of conscience still stir him to serve the country and his fellow men. When the Satyagraha movement was launched and all the zamindars were busy in wine and women, I responded to the call of my country and went to jail and suffered financially several lakhs.<sup>7</sup> A man like me can never run after Malti or any girl for that matter, of course a little fun now and then is quite another thing. Then Khanna shifted focus towards more business relations and tipped off Rai Sahab to purchase a few shares around thousand selling briskly these days from his sugar mill. Rai Sahab expressed his feeling, failing short of fund, Khanna showed him the ways to borrow from his bank and open up insurance policy, carefully study the market, take my advice and go for speculation. He tried to lure him away these millionaires that you come across everyday are filthily rich through speculation. Rai Sahab was drowned in thoughts. His bitter experiences in an earlier venture in the company resulted in failure. Khanna's meteoric rise and the usefulness of his company to steer through the vicissitudes of business world attracted him all the more. Business was instinctive in Khanna. He bought some ordinary plants from a villager on his way to sell it in the market. Since he had to deal with many people of which some believed in the great curative value of plant. That is why with one rupee he would fool a dozen of dills and earns their gratitude. The example of a Sanyasi is brought forth to impress upon Rai Sahab – a Sanyasi who rejected renunciation and believed in the worldly ways of life. Rai Sahab's troubled heart fallen on bad days often trying to break out of the worldly dungeon, found a solace in it. In the midst of a hunting spree, Khanna again came round to the point. He would have liked to complete the

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<sup>7</sup> The contradictory nature of nationalism is revealed here. See; Dutt, R. P., *India Today*, Bombay, 1974



application form for insurance and shares then only. To his disappointment, Rai Sahab took time to think over the matter.

The third party consisted of Khursheed, Mirza and Tankah. The former, a jovial, candid and bit Bohemian, the latter of a Machiavellian kind, expert in concluding business deals, settling disputes, float boat on sands and grow grass on the rock. Mirza's gravity in legislative council was no match to latter's smooth-sailing in its fraudulent manoeuvres in electioneering and multi-faces. When the nationalist Congress was in ascendancy, he supported the Congress candidate, when capitalists had upper hand, he sided with Hindu Mahasabha.<sup>8</sup> Tankah, a cunning marksman came to the target. His plan about contesting the election, Khursheed came heavily on him on the futility and upper caste bias of the democratic system. Elections are a nuisance; it's a good smokescreen to delude the public what we call democracy. It is nothing than a cloak or the machination of monopolist and landlords.<sup>9</sup> Only those with money win elections.<sup>10</sup> Democracy is organized loot, he concluded, a self-critical revelation of truth indeed, a liberal democratic sentiment revealing itself.

Mirza shot the mark, a black deer staggered and fell and oblige a wood-cutter to carry the animal for a feast for the entire village. Tankah again came to business requesting Khurshid not to divulge about his absenting from the fray by which he (Tankah) would touch this rival candidate for quiet a neat sum. At the election time he could get his withdrawal. To this, Mirza bluntly refused and the last straw in Tankah was to use his name for insurance company also misfired. And Mirza befooled him by asking him to carry the load of the carcass for which he would oblige in conceding the request. Though in a very bad shape, weighed down by the load, the greed of money like an iron beam supporting a ramshackle structure – kept him on his feet but not for long. His head reeled, darkness clouded his eyes and his feet wobbled, he hit the rocky ground and was pinned under the weight of the carcass. Mirza felt ecstatic in the company of the village folk and thick warmth of their hospitality.

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<sup>8</sup> Pandey, Gyanendra, *Ascendancy of Congress in Uttar Pradesh: A Study of Imperfect Mobilization*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1978

<sup>9</sup> The fact that Nationalism was dominated by upper class is revealed here. And anti-feudal revolution was off the card because landlord represents no threat to the capitalist. See, Dutt, R. P., *India Today*, Bombay, 1974. See also; Sarkar, Sumit, *Modern India: 1855-1947*, Macmillian, Delhi 1983.

<sup>10</sup> The role of money in elections has also been documented in various writings. See; Chandra, Sudhir, *Premchand – A Hystriographic View*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XVI, No. 15 April 1981. See also; Chandra, Sudhir, *Premchand and Indian Nationalism*, Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 16, No. 4, 1982



## Conclusion

The other world was an arena of discourse of elite. The actor in this arena wanted to befriend a woman Malti. She was misperceived by most of the character operating in the city society of Lucknow. There was mutual jealousy among them, typical of the middle class milieu. Problem and tension here was in their understanding and ideological world, not in the actual life as it was there in the First World (Hori and His Surroundings).

The domain of knowledge and capacity of abstraction was instrumental in power relation. Diversified by their different professional activities, they were united on the one point, their distinction from common man. The contrast was between a huge estate and a small plot of land and ambition of possessing a cow and not car and bank balance becomes clear. The relationship between banker and Zamidar, professor and doctor, a broker and council member was that of one and of all and one for of all was typical of this milieu. Their mutual struggle to be friend woman Malti also reveals to us the crucial barometer of niceties of their cultural world. Their participation in national movement was called for by the desire of self elevation rather than any altruistic desire to serve the nation. Their contradiction, paradoxes are clear to us in the narrative that we have followed in the text. And finally we encounter blighted path of social transformation.

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