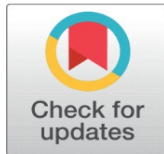
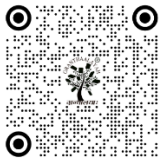


# ANIMAL ABUSE AND COLONIAL OPPRESSION IN PREMCHAND'S SHORT STORIES: A POSTCOLONIAL READING

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## ABSTRACT

Munshi Premchand, one of the most prominent authors of early 20th-century Hindi and Urdu literature, often used animals as protagonists in his short stories. These figures are not just illustrative characters but also symbolic beings in the social, moral, and political structures. His stories portrayed how animals are subjected to neglect, exploitation, physical violence, and emotional abandonment, imitating substantial systems of domination in colonial India. This article investigates short stories such as *Kutte ki Kahani*, *Do Bailon ki Katha*, *Sailani Bandar*, *Gubbare Par Cheetah*, and *Sher aur Ladka* to discuss that Premchand's representation of animal suffering can be interpreted as a literary reflection of colonial abuse and the dehumanization of India's vulnerable classes. Through a postcolonial and antrozological lens, the article demonstrates that animal characters in Premchand become areas where power, violence, and resistance are performed, corresponding the experience of colonized Indian subjects under British imperial rule.

**Keywords:** Premchand, Animal Abuse, Colonialism, Postcolonial Literature, Anthropomorphism, Oppression, Human-Animal Relations

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The early 20th century in India saw the domination of the British, marked by economic exploitation, social inequality, and largescale suffering among farmers, laborers, and marginalized sections of the society such as women, children and poor. Literature during this period thus responded to the present realities of that time, by portraying the suffering of vulnerable beings caught within oppressive systems. Among the most eminent literary voices of this era was Munshi Premchand, whose fiction consistently addressed injustice, poverty, exploitation, and ethical decay.

Although Premchand is widely studied as a realist writer concerned with human suffering, his treatment of animals has received comparatively less critical attention. Animals in his stories are not just passive background figures but

sentimental beings capable of suffering, loyalty, fear, resistance, and emotional attachment. Their abuse often reflects systems of domination parallel to the colonial structure in India or elsewhere in South Asia.

This study discusses that Premchand's depiction of animal abuse may be interpreted as symbolically resonant with colonial oppression. Just as colonial subjects were exploited, controlled, and denied agency by imperial power, animals in Premchand's stories are often subordinated to human authority, forced into labor, deprived of freedom, or subjected to cruelty. Their suffering becomes a literary medium through which Premchand critiques broader structures of power and exploitation.

## 2. ANIMAL ABUSE AND COLONIAL POWER

During the time of Premchand a lot of events occurred such as Partition of Bengal, Swadeshi Movement, Non-Cooperation movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, etc. Premchand like other politically inclined writers was extensively influenced by his surroundings. Postcolonial theory, thus, can be used to examine how colonialism operated through systems of domination, objectification, and control. The indigenous or native were often reduced to people that could be disciplined, exploited, and denied rights. Similarly, animals in human societies have historically been treated as property, laboring bodies, or disposable lives.

This equates does not imply that human colonial suffering and animal suffering are identical, but rather that both emerge from hierarchical systems in which the powerful dominate the vulnerable.

Animal studies scholars such as Cary Wolfe or Peter Singer, argue that violence against animals often reflects larger cultural attitudes toward domination and hierarchy. In Premchand's colonial context, the abuse of animals may be read as part of a broader critique of exploitative structures, where the powerless, whether human or nonhuman, become victims of systems controlled by the powerful.

### 1) Exploitation of Laboring Animals in *Do Bailon ki Katha*

In *Do Bailon ki Katha (Story of Two Oxen)*, the oxen Heera and Moti are displayed as hardworking, loyal beings whose labor sustains human life. Yet despite their dedication, they are subjected to harsh treatment, displacement, hunger, and physical abuse.

The oxen are treated as laboring bodies rather than individuals with feelings. Their worth is mapped through utility, echoing colonial economic systems in which Indian farmers and workers were similarly valued primarily for productivity.

The forced labor of the oxen recalls colonial extraction, where bodies become instruments of production under coercive authority. Their suffering reflects the condition of colonized subjects whose labor enriched imperial structures while they themselves endured deprivation.

At the same time, the resistance of Heera and Moti suggests a symbolic rejection of domination. Their emotional solidarity and refusal to completely submit raise anti-colonial resistance and the desire for autonomy.

### 2) Domestic Neglect and Violence in *Kutte ki Kahani*

*Kutte ki Kahani (The Story of a Dog)* presents the life of a dog who experiences hunger, mistreatment, indulgence, and emotional suffering within human society.

The dog's experience reflects a world where vulnerability invites exploitation. He depends upon humans for survival, yet receives cruelty rather than compassion. This condition parallels the precarious existence of the poor and marginalized under colonial rule. Like colonized subjects, the dog occupies a dependent position in a hierarchy where power belongs entirely to others. The animal's suffering reveals how domination operates through everyday neglect and structural inequality rather than only through spectacular violence. Premchand hence changes animal suffering into a critique of societies that normalize abuse against the sub-altern.

### 3) Captivity and Forced Performance in *Sailani Bandar*

In *Sailani Bandar (The Wandering Monkey)*, the monkey is treated as an object of entertainment and display. Its body is controlled for human amusement, deprived of natural freedom, and reduced to performative usefulness. Such treatment resembles colonial exhibitionary practices in which colonized subjects were often objectified, displayed, and controlled through imperial power. The monkey's loss of agency mirrors colonial subjects whose cultural and bodily

autonomy were subordinated to systems of domination. Premchand's portrayal critiques the reduction of living beings into instruments of pleasure or profit.

#### **4) Spectacle and Animal Vulnerability in *Gubbare Par Cheetah***

In *Gubbare Par Cheetah*, the cheetah becomes part of a spectacle that places the animal in an unnatural and exploitative situation. The story exposes how humans manipulate animals for fascination, entertainment, and symbolic display.

Colonial power often transformed bodies, human and nonhuman, into objects of spectacle, classification, and domination. The cheetah's forced participation in human schemes reflects the vulnerability of beings deprived of control over their own existence. Premchand uses this absurd scenario to reveal the violence hidden beneath entertainment and mastery.

#### **5) Fear, Violence, and Domination in *Sher aur Ladka***

In *Sher aur Ladka (The Lion and the Boy)*, Premchand explores human-animal confrontation in a context shaped by fear and power. The lion, though dangerous, is also a being caught within human narratives of control and domination. Animals in such stories often become targets of violence because human society constructs them as threats requiring discipline or elimination. This logic resembles colonial narratives that justified domination through representations of the colonized as dangerous, irrational, or in need of control. Premchand subtly interrogates such mechanisms by complicating simplistic notions of animal savagery.

### **3. ANIMAL ABUSE AS A METAPHOR OF COLONIAL HIERARCHY**

Across these stories, Premchand repeatedly portrays animals as beings trapped within hierarchical structure of relationships characterized by:

- 1) Forced Labor
- 2) Captivity
- 3) Neglect
- 4) Emotional Abandonment
- 5) Commodification
- 6) Physical Punishment
- 7) Denial of Agency

These experiences resonate with the structures of colonial domination in which Indian subjects were similarly subordinated through economic exploitation, surveillance, coercion, and social control. Animals in Premchand's fiction are not merely metaphors, but their suffering reveals the ethical logic of oppressive systems. By showing cruelty toward animals, Premchand exposes how domination normalizes violence against those considered weak, dependent, or inferior.

### **4. RESISTANCE, AGENCY, AND ETHICAL CRITIQUE**

An important feature of Premchand's animal stories is that animals are not portrayed only as passive victims. Heera and Moti resist injustice. Dogs express loyalty despite betrayal. Monkeys and wild animals reveal emotional individuality beyond human expectations. This agency challenges anthropocentric hierarchies and complicates human claims to moral superiority. Premchand's stories suggest that violence against animals is not merely cruelty toward nonhuman beings but a symptom of broader ethical corruption in society.

In colonial India, where exploitation structured both political and social life, such representations acquire deeper symbolic significance.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

Premchand's short stories offer a rich literary space in which animal suffering reflects broader structures of domination, exploitation, and ethical violence in colonial India. Although these stories do not always explicitly equate

animal abuse with British colonial oppression, they portray systems of hierarchy in which vulnerable beings are deprived of agency and reduced to utility. Through a postcolonial reading, the abuse of animals in Premchand's fiction can be understood as symbolically resonant with the condition of colonized Indians under imperial rule.

Premchand thus extends his humanistic critique beyond human society, revealing how domination operates across species boundaries. His stories challenge readers to recognize that violence against animals and oppression of humans emerge from similar structures of power, making his work deeply relevant to postcolonial animal studies and antrozological literary criticism.

## **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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