

---

# Modern Hindi-Urdu Literature: Munshi Premchand And Poornachandra Tejaswi

## Munshi Premchand

Dhanpat Rai Shrivastava, whose pen name was Munshi Premchand was an Indian writer best known for his modern Hindi-Urdu literature. He was known to be one of the greatest Hindustani writers of the early 20th century. He was a novelist, short story writer and dramatist, who penned over a dozen novels, hundreds of short stories, and numerous essays. He also worked as a translator, translating a number of books of other languages, into Hindi. He began writing under the pen name 'Nawab Rai', but later changed it to 'Premchand', with the honorary prefix 'Munshi'. He has been conferred the title 'Upanyas Samrat' ('Emperor among Novelists') by writers.

Premchand lived an isolating and lonely childhood, as his mother died when he was eight, and his sister had already gotten married. His grandmother died soon after his mother's death. He gained less affection from his stepmother after his father's remarriage. He learnt Urdu and Persian from a maulvi in a madrasa. He sought solace in fiction and became fascinated with books.

His first literary work was never published and is currently lost. It was a farce on a bachelor falling in love with a low-caste woman. It is thought to be a revenge on his uncle, who used to scold him for obsessively reading fiction. The character is supposedly based on him.

His first job was that of a teacher in a missionary school, with a monthly salary of eighteen rupees.

His first short novel was 'Asrar e Ma'abid' ('Secrets of God's Abode', Devasthan Rahasya in Hindi), which explores corruption among temple priests and their sexual exploitation of poor women.

Premchand's first published story was 'Duniya Ka Sabse Anmol Ratan' ('The Most Precious Jewel in the World'). The story explains that the most precious 'jewel' was the last drop of blood necessary to attain independence. Many of his early short stories were subtly patriotic, influenced by the Indian independence movement.

In 1906, Premchand married a child widow, Shivarani Devi, the daughter of a landlord from a village near Fatehpur. This was an outrageous act taken by him, according to most of society and thus, he faced a lot of social opposition. Shivarani Devi wrote a book on him, titled Premchand Ghar Mein ('Premchand in House'), after his passing.

Premchand was elected as the first President of the Progressive Writers' Association in Lucknow, in 1936. He died on 8 October 1936, after days of sickness.

Godaan upanyas (The Gift of a Cow), Premchand's last completed work, is supposed to be his best novel, and is considered as one of the finest Hindi novels. The story is about Hori, a poor

---

peasant, who desperately longs for a cow, a symbol of wealth and prestige in rural India. Premchand was not that well appreciated outside India. Possible reasons for this are the absence or lack of good translations of his work, or his elusiveness, with respect to travelling outside India, studying abroad, or mingling with foreign literary critics.

Premchand's last published story was Cricket Matching.

Premchand is considered to be the first Hindi author who wrote realistic, pragmatic literary works. His novels describe the problems faced by the poor and the urban middle-class. His works view religious values as something that allows powerful hypocrites to exploit the weak. He used literature for raising public awareness about national and social issues and often wrote about topics related to corruption, child widowhood, prostitution, feudal system, poverty, colonialism and on the Indian freedom movement.

In his last days, he focused on village life as a stage for complex drama, as seen in the novel *Godan* (1936) and the short-story collection *Kafan* (1936). Premchand believed that social realism was the way for Hindi literature, as opposed to the tenderness and emotion of contemporary Bengali literature.

Premchand translated several non-Hindi works into Hindi. These included the writings of, Charles Dickens (*The Story of Richard Doubledick*), Oscar Wilde (*The Canterville Ghost*), John Galsworthy (*Strife*), Sadi, Guy de Maupassant, Maurice Maeterlinck (*Sightless*) and Hendrik van Loon (*The Story of Mankind*).

He wrote a film script for *Mazdoor* (1934). He wrote two biographies – Durgadas and Mahatma Sheikhsadi (biography of Sadi). He also penned three children's books – 'Bal Kahaniyan Sumpurn', 'Manmodak' and 'Ram Charcha.'

There were several adaptations of his works like *Sadgati* and *Shatranj ke Khiladi* filmed by Satyajit Ray, *Kafan*, played by The Actor Factor Theatre Company, and *Gaban*, directed by Hrishikesh Mukherjee.

## Poornachandra Tejaswi

Kuppali Puttappa Poornachandra Tejaswi was a prominent Kannada writer, novelist, photographer, publisher, painter, naturalist, and environmentalist who played a vital role in the 'Navya' period of Kannada Literature and inaugurated the *Bandaaya* ('Protest Literature') with his short-story collection *Abachoorina Post Offisu*. He is 'Rashtrakavi' Kuvempu's son.

Tejaswi wrote poems in his career early on, but later concentrated on short stories, novels and essays. Poornachandra Tejaswi has a distinguished style of writing which has heralded a new era in Kannada Literature.

Tejaswi was born on 8 September 1938 in Kuppali, in Shimoga district of Karnataka. Despite being the son of Kuvempu, who was regarded as the greatest Kannada poet of the 20th century, he emerged out of his father's shadow. His first short story 'Linga Banda' depicted the rainy Western Ghats from the eye of a boy, for which he received the best story award in the competition held by *Prajavani* Kannada newspaper on Deepawali.

---

Apart from literature, he was actively invested in painting, photography and philosophy. He was a keen naturalist, enjoying trips into the Western Ghats.

Tejaswi was versatile when it came to writing styles of literature, like poems, short stories, novels, travel literature, plays and science fiction. Nature is a recurring theme in most of his works. He's dipped his hands in translation as well, translating a number of English books into Kannada, like the series on Kenneth Anderson's hunting expeditions and Henri Charrière's Papillon.

He has 2 daughters Susmitha and Eshanye who are software professionals. His spouse Rajeshwari stays in Niruttara, Mudigere.

Tejaswi wrote his first novel, Kaadu Mattu Kraurya, when he was a 24-year-old. He was inspired by visiting his wife Rajeshwari's maternal home in the forested Malnad region of Karnataka. The novel, whose manuscript was prepared by Rajeshwari, is the story of Linga, a migrant bonded labourer from north Karnataka who moves to a remote Malnad village where he struggles to cope with his new life and surroundings.

"He may have revised it later, but the one I had preserved was the manuscript that I had copied for him," said Ms. Rajeshwari, according to an interview. "He had never published it in his lifetime saying he was still in the process of revising it." In the first letter he wrote to her after returning, he says: "On my way back in the bus, I have made up my mind to continue the novel... I will be happy only when I finish the novel and dedicate it to my Rajesh [Rajeshwari]." In a series of following letters, printed in the memoir, he describes the travails of creative writing. In one of the letters, he writes: "The prospect of becoming non-creative is a scary thought..." Elsewhere he says: "I am not really sad that the novel is not progressing. The slower the process, the more meaningful it emerges."

He talks about the novel's progress, interspersed with the love confessions, descriptions of the book he is reading and events such as his meeting with the socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia. In a letter written to Ms. Rajeshwari in July, 1962, Tejaswi says that he had decided to name his novel 'Kadu Mattu Kraurya' and not 'Nalini' as he had earlier planned, reasons of which are unknown. He asks her to hurry up on making a fair copy of the manuscript. In his letter the next month, he thanks her for the manuscript, but complains of her untidy handwriting.

He is known to love food.

He has criticized works like Vyaktivishishta Siddantha, Vimarsheya Vimarshe, and Hosa Vicharagalu.

He has written a travelogue titled Alemariya Andaman Mattu Mahanadi Nile.

He died, of cardiac arrest at the age of 69.

Books like Nanna Tejaswi by Rajeshwari Tejaswi, Poornachandra Tejaswi Baduku Baraha by Karigowda Beechanahalli, Poornachandra Tejaswi Avara Sahitya Vachike by Karigowda Beechanahalli, and K.P.Poornachandra Tejaswi by Maheshwaraiah

Kaadina Santa Tejaswi by Dhananjaya Jeevala

---

Annana Nenapu is one biography on Tejaswi which discusses his days with his father, Rashtrakavi Kuvempu, revealing the actual lifestyle of the Kuvempu and his bonding with his family.

He has won many awards like Sahitya Academy Award for 'Chidambara Rahasya' (1987), Karnataka Sahitya Academy Honorary Award for Lifetime Achievement (1985), Pampa Award (2001) and Rajyotsava Award.

The one thing I liked about both authors is that they make their written works seem as realistic as possible, in a very relatable way. Premchand and Tejaswi make us sympathize as well as empathize a lot with what we read. Yet their interests seem very different, with patriotic subtleties in Premchand's work and nature themes in Tejaswi's.