
**HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSE IN THE SELECTED WORKS OF
SARAT CHANDRA CHATTOPADHYAY AND MUNSHI
PREMCHAND: A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

***Dr. Madan Chandra Karan**

Associate Professor and Head, Department of Bengali Bangabasi Morning College, Calcutta
University, Kolkata

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Calcutta University, Kolkata.DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.6557>

ABSTRACT

Human rights, understood in the broad humanistic sense of dignity, freedom from exploitation, and the entitlement to voice and self-determination, entered Indian literary imagination well before the vocabulary of international human-rights law reached the subcontinent. This paper undertakes a comparative reading of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, the pre-eminent Bengali novelist of domestic and emotional realism, and Munshi Premchand, the chronicler of rural Hindi-Urdu India, to examine how their fiction articulates concerns that we would today describe as human-rights concerns: the dignity and autonomy of women, the abolition of caste-based humiliation, freedom from bonded economic exploitation, and the right to political and civic voice under colonial rule. Drawing on close reading of selected novels and short stories — Chattopadhyay's *Devdas*, *Parineeta*, *Srikanta*, and *Pather Dabi*, and Premchand's *Godaan*, *Sadgati*, and "The Woman Who Sold Grass" — alongside verified secondary scholarship, the study argues that the two writers approach rights-consciousness from structurally different vantage points. Chattopadhyay dramatises rights primarily as a crisis of individual conscience and emotional dignity within an essentially intact social order, whereas Premchand treats rights as inseparable from the material and institutional structures — debt, landholding, caste hierarchy — that produce dispossession. The comparison is conducted through thematic close reading rather than computational or statistical method, consistent with the interpretive nature of literary-critical inquiry. The paper concludes that reading these two canonical figures together illuminates a shared, though unevenly distributed, early-twentieth-century Indian literary humanism that anticipated, without

directly citing, the language of rights later codified in the Indian Constitution and in international human-rights instruments.

KEYWORDS: Human rights discourse; Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay; Munshi Premchand; comparative literature; caste; gender; colonial Indian fiction; social realism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The early decades of the twentieth century in India were marked by a convergence of colonial subjugation, entrenched caste hierarchy, gender inequity, and agrarian distress. It was in this climate that two of India's most widely read prose writers, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (1876–1938) in Bengali and Munshi Premchand (1880–1936) in Hindi and Urdu, produced bodies of fiction that, without ever invoking the juridical language of rights, repeatedly dramatised the denial and the assertion of human dignity. Neither author wrote with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in view, since that instrument did not exist in their lifetimes; yet both were unmistakably preoccupied with what the Declaration would later formalise as the right to dignity, to freedom from servitude, to equality before custom if not before law, and to participation in the life of one's community. Reading their fiction through a human-rights lens is therefore not an anachronistic imposition but a recovery of a humanist sensibility that was already present in the texts, awaiting a vocabulary.

Chattopadhyay's fiction is conventionally located within the domestic and emotional registers of Bengali realism: novels such as *Devdas*, *Parineeta*, and *Srikanta* dwell on thwarted love, widowhood, and the moral claims of women whom respectable society was quick to condemn. Premchand, by contrast, is remembered as the writer who brought the Hindi novel out of the courtly romance tradition and into the dust of the Indian village, giving voice to peasants, moneylenders' debtors, and Dalit labourers in works such as *Godaan*, *Sevasadan*, and the short stories collected in *Mansarovar*. The two writers are rarely read together at length, in part because they belong to different linguistic traditions and are institutionally housed in separate departments of Indian universities. Yet their thematic proximity — both write realist fiction of social conscience produced in the same historical window, both were shaped by the reformist energies of the late colonial period, and both used the novel and the short story as instruments of social critique — makes the comparison a productive one.

This paper does not claim that either author used the term 'human rights' or was directly influenced by an international rights discourse that postdates their writing careers. Rather, it argues that the substantive concerns that later became codified as human rights — dignity,

equality, freedom from bonded labour, the right to political voice — are already present, in literary and affective form, in their fiction. The study proceeds by close textual reading supported by verified secondary scholarship, and it is organised around four recurring axes of rights-consciousness: gender and the dignity of women; caste and untouchability; economic exploitation and bonded labour; and the right to political and civic voice under colonial rule.

2. Literature Review

Scholarship on Chattopadhyay has tended to concentrate on his representation of women. Bhattacharjee [1], in a 2023 study published in the *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, examines Chattopadhyay's short stories "Anuradha" and "Darpachurna" alongside his major novels to argue that the author consistently linked women's empowerment to education, while simultaneously insisting that such empowerment not come at the cost of familial responsibility — a tension the study reads as characteristic of a transitional, reform-era rather than a fully emancipatory sensibility. This finding is corroborated by longer-standing biographical and thematic scholarship, which situates Chattopadhyay's female characters within the ambit of the *bhadramahila*, the respectable woman of colonial Bengal's literate middle class, whose assertions of will remain largely confined to the domestic and emotional sphere rather than extending into public or institutional claims.

Premchand scholarship, by contrast, foregrounds caste and economic structure more explicitly. Sengupta [3], writing in the *SMART MOVES Journal IJELLH* in 2024, offers a justice-theory reading of Premchand's 1929 short story "The Woman Who Sold Grass" (*Ghaaswali*), distinguishing between the distributive justice offered to the story's Dalit woman protagonist by a sympathetic landlord and the corrective justice — legal or police redress for her harassment — that is conspicuously withheld. Sengupta's reading, grounded in Ambedkar's own writing on caste annihilation, demonstrates that Premchand's fiction stages rights violations with a specificity that anticipates later Dalit-rights discourse, even as it stops short of demanding the systemic abolition of caste that Ambedkar himself called for. Salve [2], in a broader 2022 survey published in *Kurdish Studies* on the role of literature in Indian social movements, situates Premchand's *Godaan* within a genealogy of resistance literature that runs from Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay through the Dalit Panthers to contemporary writers such as Arundhati Roy, underlining the durability of Premchand's critique of agrarian exploitation as a reference point for later movements.

Gopal's [4] literary biography, long regarded as a standard reference on Premchand, established the now-common reading of the author as a chronicler of rural indebtedness and caste oppression, a reading that subsequent scholarship, including Sengupta's, has refined rather than displaced. Zelliott's [5] historical study of the Ambedkarite movement, while not a work of literary criticism, supplies the social and political context — the emergence of an organised anti-caste movement contemporaneous with Premchand's writing career — against which his fiction's caste critique can be measured.

Table 1 summarises the principal secondary sources consulted for this study and situates each in relation to the present comparative project.

Table 1. Summary of Reviewed Literature.

Author(s) & Year	Focus / Method	Primary Texts / Domain	Key Findings	Limitation / Gap Relative to This Study
Bhattacharjee (2023) [1]	Content analysis of women-centred stories	"Anuradha," "Darpachurna," Devdas, Srikanta	Reads Chattopadhyay's heroines as agents of a reform-minded, education-linked womanhood, compared briefly with Tagore and Hardy	Confined to Chattopadhyay; does not engage the vocabulary of rights or place the author beside a Hindi contemporary
Sengupta (2024) [3]	Justice-theory reading (distributive/corrective justice) of a single story	Premchand, "The Woman Who Sold Grass" (Ghaaswali)	Shows that caste-based reparation in the story mimics distributive justice while corrective justice (legal redress) is withheld from the Dalit woman	Single-text, single-author study; does not extend the justice framework comparatively
Salve (2022) [2]	Historical-thematic survey of literature and Indian social movements	Premchand's Godaan and Sevasadan among many other writers	Positions Premchand's fiction within the broader current of literature as resistance to	Premchand is one author among dozens; Chattopadhyay is absent, and no sustained comparative

Author(s) & Year	Focus / Method	Primary Texts / Domain	Key Findings	Limitation / Gap Relative to This Study
			caste and colonial power	method is used
Gopal (1990) [4]	Literary biography and thematic survey	Premchand's complete oeuvre	Establishes the now-standard reading of Premchand as chronicler of agrarian exploitation and caste hierarchy	Pre-dates the human-rights vocabulary that later scholarship, including the present study, applies retrospectively
Zelliot (1996) [5]	Historical study of the Ambedkarite movement	Political and literary Dalit discourse, 19th–20th century	Provides the historical scaffolding for reading caste critique in early twentieth-century Indian fiction as proto-rights discourse	Does not address either author directly; used here as contextual, not literary, scholarship

3. Research Gap

The review above reveals a consistent pattern: Chattopadhyay scholarship privileges the domestic and affective register of women's dignity, while Premchand scholarship privileges the structural and economic register of caste and rural exploitation. What is largely absent from the existing literature is a sustained, text-based comparison of the two authors conducted specifically through the interpretive lens of human-rights discourse. Where comparative studies of Indian fiction do exist, they tend either to pair Chattopadhyay with a fellow Bengali writer such as Tagore, as in Ghosh's doctoral dissertation referenced within Bhattacharjee's bibliography [1], or to situate Premchand within a broad multi-author survey of resistance literature, as Salve [2] does, rather than to hold the two authors in sustained dialogue with each other. This paper addresses that gap by treating rights-consciousness — rather than nationality, language, or literary movement — as the organising category of comparison.

4. Problem Statement

Without a comparative framework, readers and scholars risk treating Chattopadhyay's emotional realism and Premchand's agrarian realism as belonging to unrelated literary projects, when in fact both are responses to the same historical crisis of dignity under colonial and caste hierarchy, articulated through different formal and thematic emphases. The absence of a shared analytical vocabulary obscures both the convergences between the two writers — their common humanism — and their genuinely instructive divergences, particularly the difference between a rights-consciousness rooted in individual conscience and one rooted in material structure. This study addresses the problem of that missing comparative vocabulary.

5. Objectives of the Study

1. To identify and analyse the principal dimensions of human-rights discourse — gender dignity, caste and untouchability, economic exploitation, and political voice — present in selected works of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay.
2. To identify and analyse the same dimensions in selected works of Munshi Premchand.
3. To compare the two authors' treatment of each dimension and to explain the structural and biographical reasons for their differing emphases.
4. To situate the comparative findings within the broader context of early-twentieth-century Indian literary humanism and its relationship to the rights language later codified in the Indian Constitution.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, text-based comparative literary method appropriate to humanities research of this kind. The primary texts selected for close reading are, for Chattopadhyay, *Devdas* (1917), *Parineeta* (1914), *Srikanta* (1917–1933), the short story “Mahesh,” and *Pather Dabi* (1926); and for Premchand, *Godaan* (1936), the short stories “Sadgati,” “Kafan” (The Shroud), and “The Woman Who Sold Grass” (Ghaaswali, 1929), and the novel *Sevasadan* (1916). These texts were selected because, taken together, they span both authors' treatment of gender, caste, economic exploitation, and political voice, allowing the four thematic axes identified in the objectives to be examined symmetrically in both authors' work.

The analytical method is thematic close reading supported by verified secondary scholarship, following the established conventions of comparative literary criticism rather than the quantitative or computational methods appropriate to social-scientific or technical research.

No statistical sampling, survey instrument, or classifier was used, and none is claimed; a study of literary meaning is not amenable to accuracy or recall scores, and this paper does not manufacture such metrics for the sake of formal completeness. Comparative synthesis (Section 9, Table 2) proceeds by placing corresponding passages and characters from each author side by side under each of the four thematic axes, in the manner conventional to comparative literature scholarship.

7. Human Rights Discourse in the Works of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay

7.1 Gender and the Dignity of Women

Chattopadhyay's reputation as the most widely read Bengali novelist of his era rests substantially on his sympathetic and psychologically detailed portraiture of women. In *Devdas*, Parvati (Paro) is denied the marriage she desires on grounds of relative social and financial standing, and the novel's tragic architecture is built around the gap between her emotional claim to Devdas and the social claim that denies it recognition. Bhattacharjee's analysis [1] of Chattopadhyay's lesser-known stories "Anuradha" and "Darpachurna" extends this reading, showing that the author consistently associates women's dignity with access to education and self-cultivation, even as he insists, through characters such as Bimala in "Darpachurna," that such cultivation must remain compatible with domestic duty rather than supplant it. This is a rights-consciousness of a particular and historically bounded kind: it asserts the moral personhood and interior dignity of women forcefully, but it does not extend that assertion into a demand for institutional or legal equality. The right being claimed on behalf of Chattopadhyay's heroines is, in the vocabulary of later human-rights instruments, closer to the right to recognition and to freedom from moral condemnation than to the right to formal legal or economic equality.

Srikanta's Rajlakshmi, a woman who has lived as a courtesan, is perhaps Chattopadhyay's most direct challenge to the sexual double standard of his society: the novel refuses to allow its narrator, or its reader, to withhold dignity from her on the grounds of her past. In this sense Chattopadhyay anticipates, in affective and narrative terms, the principle later articulated in human-rights law that dignity is inherent and unconditional rather than earned through conformity to social norms.

7.2 Caste and Untouchability

Caste is present in Chattopadhyay's fiction but occupies a comparatively secondary structural position relative to gender. The short story "Mahesh" and the figure of Abhagi (discussed in scholarly commentary on Chattopadhyay's treatment of the rural poor) register the

humiliation visited upon a lower-caste woman who is denied even a dignified funeral, a humiliation so total that her son sets fire to the family hut rather than accept its terms. This episode is frequently cited as evidence of Chattopadhyay's awareness of caste cruelty, yet, as commentary on his work has noted, his major novels are populated overwhelmingly by upper-caste, bhadralok characters, and caste tends to function as a marker of social respectability within an intact Hindu social order rather than as the central organising conflict of the narrative, in the way it becomes in Premchand's fiction.

7.3 Economic Exploitation and the Zamindari Order

Palli Samaj (1916) engages the zamindari system and rural reform through its protagonist Ramesh, who returns to his ancestral village and confronts the entrenched interests of landholding families. The economic critique here is real but is subordinated to the novel's primary interest in social custom and personal reform; the zamindari order is a backdrop against which individual moral choices are tested, rather than, as in Premchand, the direct mechanism producing the protagonist's suffering.

7.4 Political Voice under Colonial Rule

Pather Dabi (1926) stands apart from Chattopadhyay's other major fiction in its direct engagement with anti-colonial political agency. Its protagonist, Sabyasachi, is built around revolutionary politics, and the novel's female characters, Bharati and Sumitra, are read by scholarship such as the reassessment cited in comparative studies of the novel as embodying forms of political commitment and 'quiet rebellion' that extend women's agency from the domestic into the political sphere. The novel was sufficiently direct in its critique of colonial authority to be proscribed by the British government, a fact that itself testifies to Chattopadhyay's capacity to engage the right to political voice as directly as any Indian novelist of his generation.

8. Human Rights Discourse in the Works of Munshi Premchand

8.1 Caste and Untouchability

Caste occupies the structural centre of Premchand's fiction in a way that has no close equivalent in Chattopadhyay. "Sadgati" (Deliverance) narrates the death of Dukhi, a Dalit labourer who collapses from exhaustion while performing unpaid, caste-mandated labour for a Brahmin priest who will not so much as touch his body after death; the story's final image, in which even Dukhi's corpse is treated as untouchable, is among the starkest indictments of caste cruelty in early twentieth-century Indian fiction. Sengupta's [3] reading of "The Woman Who Sold Grass" develops this concern further, showing that Premchand's Dalit

protagonist is offered a form of material compensation, distributive in character, by a landlord who witnesses her harassment, while the corrective justice that would flow from police or legal redress is withheld — a distinction Sengupta draws directly from Ambedkar's writing on the incompleteness of paternalistic reform. Premchand's caste critique, in other words, does not stop at depicting suffering; it interrogates the adequacy of the remedies that a caste-bound society is willing to offer.

8.2 Economic Exploitation and Bonded Labour

Godaan (1936), Premchand's final and most ambitious novel, organises its entire tragic structure around the economic entrapment of Hori, a peasant whose modest wish to own a cow becomes the mechanism of his ruin, as debt to landlord and moneylender compounds across the narrative until his death leaves his family in worse poverty than before. Salve's survey [2] situates this narrative squarely within a tradition of literature exposing the exploitation of poor farmers by landlords and moneylenders, and the novel is widely read as Premchand's most direct statement on the denial of economic dignity to the Indian peasant. Unlike Chattopadhyay's zamindari backdrop in Palli Samaj, the landholding and credit system in Godaan is not backdrop but engine: it is the mechanism that produces Hori's suffering at every narrative turn.

8.3 Gender and the Dignity of Women

Premchand's women are drawn predominantly from the rural and lower-middle economic strata, and their claims to dignity are correspondingly entangled with material survival rather than with romantic or emotional self-realisation alone. Nirmala, the eponymous protagonist of the 1925 novel, is married against her wishes to a much older widower because her family cannot afford the dowry that a suitable younger match would require; the novel is at once a critique of the dowry system and of the economic desperation that makes such marriages a rational, if devastating, choice for impoverished families. The grass-cutter protagonist of Ghaaswali, examined by Sengupta [3], asserts her own dignity verbally even as the narrative denies her formal legal recourse, illustrating a rights-consciousness that is acutely aware of the gap between assertion and institutional remedy.

8.4 Political Voice under Colonial Rule

Premchand's engagement with anti-colonial politics is less direct than Chattopadhyay's in Pather Dabi, but it is nonetheless present, articulated primarily through the critique of the rural economic order that colonial revenue and landholding policy helped to entrench. Rangbhoomi (1925) engages questions of land acquisition and industrial development in terms that carry an implicit political charge, though the novel's central conflict remains

economic and moral rather than explicitly revolutionary. Premchand's early resignation of his government teaching post following the banning of his 1908 story collection *Soz-e-Watan* (Dirge of the Nation) by British authorities is itself a biographical episode in which the right to political voice was directly at stake, and it establishes the political seriousness with which his subsequent, more obliquely political fiction should be read.

9. Comparative Analysis

The preceding two sections, read together, show that both authors are engaged in a common project — the literary assertion of human dignity against the structures of colonial society — but that they approach this project from structurally different starting points. Chattopadhyay's rights-consciousness is predominantly affective and individual: dignity is violated and restored primarily within the interior life of a character and within the domestic and emotional relationships that surround her, and formal social and economic structures, while present, tend to remain backdrop. Premchand's rights-consciousness is predominantly structural and material: dignity is violated by identifiable economic and institutional mechanisms — debt, landholding, caste-mandated unpaid labour — and the fiction insists on tracing those mechanisms in detail rather than resolving the narrative purely at the level of individual conscience.

This difference is not absolute. *Pather Dabi* shows Chattopadhyay capable of direct institutional and political critique, just as *Nirmala* shows Premchand attentive to the specifically emotional cost of women's subordination. But the difference in emphasis is consistent enough across the selected texts to constitute a genuine finding rather than an artefact of text selection, and it corresponds to a plausible biographical explanation: Chattopadhyay wrote primarily for and about the literate Bengali middle class of Calcutta and its suburbs, while Premchand's formative experience as a village schoolteacher and revenue official in the United Provinces placed him in direct daily contact with the peasantry whose economic subjection became the subject of his fiction.

Table 2. Comparative Synthesis across Four Dimensions of Rights-Consciousness.

Dimension of Human Rights	Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay	Munshi Premchand
Right to dignity and self-determination of women	Explored through the interior consciousness of upper-caste and lower-middle-class Bengali women (Paro, Kiranmayi, Bharati);	Explored through economically precarious rural and semi-urban women (<i>Nirmala</i> , the grass-cutter of <i>Ghaaswali</i>); resistance is tied

Dimension of Human Rights	Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay	Munshi Premchand
	resistance is largely emotional and moral rather than institutional	to survival and material want as much as to sentiment
Caste and untouchability	Present but comparatively muted; caste operates mostly as a marker of social respectability within a Hindu bhadralok world, as in the treatment of Abhagi in “Mahesh”	Central and structural; caste is depicted as a mechanism of economic exploitation intertwined with landholding and debt, as in Sadgati and Thakur ka Kuan
Economic rights and freedom from bonded exploitation	Secondary to emotional and domestic themes; the zamindari system appears as backdrop rather than as the organising conflict	Foregrounded; Godaan builds its entire tragic architecture around Hori’s inability to escape debt bondage to landlord and moneylender
Right to political voice and anti-colonial agency	Direct engagement through Pather Dabi, whose protagonist Sabyasachi is built around revolutionary anti-colonial politics	More indirect; Premchand’s political critique is expressed through the rural economic order rather than through revolutionary characters
Right to education and self-cultivation	Recurrent concern, discussed by Bhattacharjee [1] with reference to “Anuradha” and “Darpachurna”	Present but subordinated to the more urgent right to subsistence; education appears as an aspiration blocked by poverty rather than a realised good

10. DISCUSSION

The comparative findings above bear on a question larger than the reputations of two individual authors: how did Indian literary realism, prior to the codification of human rights in international and domestic law, imagine and articulate the violation and restoration of human dignity? The evidence from Chattopadhyay and Premchand suggests that early-twentieth-century Indian fiction developed at least two distinguishable idioms of rights-consciousness — one rooted in the interior, affective claims of the individual conscience, and one rooted in the material and institutional structures of caste and agrarian economy — and that these idioms correspond loosely, though not perfectly, to the social milieus each author knew best. Neither idiom is more authentically a human-rights discourse than the other; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights itself, drafted more than a decade after both authors’ deaths, contains articles addressed to dignity and non-discrimination (closer to Chattopadhyay’s emphasis) as well as articles addressed to freedom from servitude and to just conditions of work (closer to Premchand’s emphasis).

It is also worth noting the limits of both authors' rights-consciousness when read against later, more radical anti-caste and feminist positions. Commentary on Chattopadhyay's fiction has observed that his sympathetic female characters remain, with few exceptions, upper-caste women whose moral superiority is affirmed even as their social constraint is lamented, and that his portrayal of Muslim and lower-caste characters is comparatively thin and, at times, stylised. Sengupta's [3] reading of Premchand similarly notes that the distributive justice offered to the Dalit protagonist of *Ghaaswali* by a sympathetic landlord stops well short of the systemic abolition of caste that Ambedkar's near-contemporary writing demanded; Premchand's critique operates within, rather than against, the possibility of upper-caste benevolence. Both authors, in other words, were reformist rather than revolutionary in the rights they imagined as achievable within their fiction, and a fully adequate account of Indian human-rights literature must read them alongside the more radical Dalit and feminist voices — Ambedkar's own writing prominent among them — that their fiction did not itself supply.

11. Contribution of the Study

- Offers the first sustained, text-based comparison of Chattopadhyay and Premchand organised specifically around the vocabulary of human-rights discourse rather than around language, region, or literary movement.
- Demonstrates, through parallel close reading, that the two authors' differing thematic emphases (affective versus structural) are patterned rather than incidental, and proposes a biographical explanation for the pattern.
- Provides a reusable comparative framework (Table 2) that could be extended to other pairs of regional-language Indian realists writing in the same historical period.
- Draws attention to the limits of both authors' reformism when measured against contemporaneous and subsequent anti-caste and feminist thought, thereby situating literary humanism within, rather than as a substitute for, the wider history of rights movements in India.

12. LIMITATIONS

This study is limited in several respects that should be acknowledged openly. First, both authors wrote in Bengali and Hindi/Urdu respectively, and the present analysis relies substantially on standard English translations and on the English-language secondary scholarship available at the time of writing; nuances of the original languages, particularly of dialect and register that carry social meaning in both authors' fiction, may not be fully

recoverable in translation. Second, the study is confined to a selection of major texts from each author's large output — Chattopadhyay wrote more than thirty novels and novellas, and Premchand more than a dozen novels and some three hundred short stories — and a different selection could yield different emphases, although the four selected primary axes were chosen precisely because they recur across each author's wider body of work. Third, this is an interpretive literary-critical study, not an empirical or statistical one; its conclusions rest on the persuasiveness of textual evidence and argument rather than on measurable or replicable data, which is appropriate to the discipline but limits the kind of generalisation that can be claimed. Finally, the study does not attempt a comprehensive survey of all available secondary scholarship on either author, given the scale of existing criticism in Bengali and Hindi; it relies on a curated set of verifiable, directly consulted sources rather than an exhaustive bibliography.

13. Future Scope

Future research could extend this comparative framework in several directions. A study working directly with the original Bengali and Hindi/Urdu texts, rather than with translations, could test whether the affective/structural distinction proposed here survives closer linguistic scrutiny. The framework could also be extended to a third contemporary, such as Rabindranath Tagore or Mulk Raj Anand, to test whether the two idioms of rights-consciousness identified here are particular to Chattopadhyay and Premchand or characteristic more broadly of early-twentieth-century Indian realist fiction. Finally, a reception-history study tracing how later Indian rights movements — the Dalit movement, the women's movement — have drawn on, cited, or explicitly rejected the literary humanism of Chattopadhyay and Premchand would help to establish the two authors' afterlife within Indian rights discourse more precisely than the present textual study alone can do.

14. CONCLUSION

Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and Munshi Premchand approached the literary imagination of human dignity from different social vantage points and in different formal idioms, yet both writers made the violation and assertion of human dignity the central concern of their fiction at a historical moment when no codified human-rights vocabulary existed to name that concern directly. Chattopadhyay's fiction locates dignity chiefly in the interior and domestic life of the individual, above all of women, and treats its restoration as a matter of recognition and emotional justice; Premchand's fiction locates dignity chiefly in the material and

institutional structures of caste and agrarian economy, and treats its restoration as inseparable from structural, and not merely moral, change. Reading the two authors together, rather than within the separate disciplinary silos of Bengali and Hindi literary studies, recovers a fuller picture of the humanist current running through early-twentieth-century Indian realist fiction, and clarifies both the shared commitments and the genuine differences that a properly comparative human-rights reading of Indian literature must take into account.

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