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The “Fallen” Woman
in Two Colonial Novels: *Umra’o Jan Ada*
and *Bazaar-e Husn/Sevasadan*

(IN MEMORY OF RALPH RUSSELL (1918–2008))*

This essay is not an attempt to compare every aspect of the two novels nor to judge their relative merits, but to compare certain key areas—the way in which the two novels trace the decline in status of the courtesan in Indian society, the treatment of Umrao and Suman as the two “heroines” and the attitudes of the authors toward (fallen) women. In addition to these main themes, I want to examine some of the differences in the Urdu and Hindi versions of *Bāzār-e Husn* and *Sēvāsadan*.

Introduction

Mirzā Muḥammad Hādī Rusvā’s *Umrā’ō Jān Adā* and Premchand’s *Bāzār-e Husn/Sēvāsadan* were written and published within twenty years of each other. The societies they portray, however, seem in many ways, to be worlds apart. *Umrā’ō Jān Adā* was published in 1899 and, although the Urdu version of Premchand’s novel was written first in Urdu in 1916–17, it was the Hindi version that was published first in 1918, with the Urdu not appearing until 1924. The two novels share the common theme of the “fallen” woman who becomes a courtesan. In examining the two novels together I will seek to establish the various points of similarity as well as the obvious differences.

Like the novels, Rusvā and Premchand were born twenty years

* I count myself as extremely privileged to have been taught by him and in writing this essay his profound knowledge and understanding of Urdu literature, his wise advice and honest criticism have been sorely missed.

apart—Rusvā in 1858 in Lucknow, Premchand in 1880 in Lamhi village near Benares. Rusvā was very much an urban man who spent most of his adult life in Lucknow, whereas Premchand, although he spent much of his life in towns, was never really comfortable there. Both men were educated in the Persian and Urdu tradition. As Oesterheld observes, “Rusvā was a man with an extraordinary education and experience in many walks of life, a classical education in Urdu, Persian, mathematics, logic and astronomy; English; sciences; medicine; engineering” (2004, 202).

Premchand, as a Kayasth, also received his early education in Persian and Urdu, reading the Persian classics, and strongly influenced by the Persian literary tradition. His staple reading as a young man was the newly emerging novel. He says: “I had a passion for reading Urdu novels. Maulana Sharar, Pandit Ratannath Sarsar, [*sic*] Mirza Rusva [...] were the most popular novelists of that time” (qtd. in Swan 1969, 55).

Both men earned a living through teaching and writing and both men were prone to spend their hard-earned money on passions which left them financially less than secure—Premchand on his printing press and journals and Rusvā on his chemical and astronomical experiments. Their approach to writing, however, was very different. Whereas Premchand saw it as a vocation and a social duty, Rusvā wrote more out of financial necessity, although Oesterheld’s description of him as a “hack writer” is somewhat harsh given the sheer quality of his Urdu prose in *Umrā’ō Jān Adā* (2004, 202).

For both authors, these were their first novels to meet with any real success. Rusvā had discarded his first incomplete attempt, *Afshā-e Rāz*, and salvaged some of the characters for *Umrā’ō Jān Adā*. Premchand had published a couple of novels under his previous pseudonym, Nawabrai, but they had not made much impact and it was as a short-story writer that he first made his name. In fact, *Bāzār-e Husn* itself was not originally intended as a novel. In a letter dated January 1917 he tells Daya Narayan Nigam: “[...] while I started it as a short story, I find now it is assuming the proportions of a novel. In fact, I have already written nearly a hundred pages and am so engrossed in it that I don’t feel like doing anything else” (qtd. in Gopal 1964, 127).

Another interesting shared aspect of these two novels is their place in Urdu and Hindi literature. Whilst there are several contenders in both languages for the coveted title of “first novel,” each of these books has been hailed by critics as the first “real” novel. M. Asaduddin says of the Urdu novel: “[...] it is only Rusva’s *Umrā’ō Jān Adā* that can be called a novel in every sense” (2001, 96).

Interestingly he also remarks that it remained “a singular achievement

with no worthy successor until the emergence of Premchand, who moved on a different terrain" (*ibid.*). Ralph Russell also refers to it as "the first true novel" and says "with it a real novel, in the internationally accepted modern sense of the term, at last makes its appearance in Urdu literature" (1992, 106).

Thus *Umrā'ō Jān Adā* is acknowledged as the first "real" novel in Urdu and in the same way *Sēvāsadan* is hailed as the first "real" novel in Hindi. According to K. B. Jindal, "*Sevasadan* was the first real, modern literary novel with vivid character studies and interesting sidelights thrown on the problems of prostitution" (1993, 212). Both books attracted a great deal of attention in literary circles when published and sold out very quickly. *Umrā'ō Jān Adā* was "an immediate and thunderous success. [...] Several editions of the novel were sold out" (Singh and Husaini 1970, 10). *Sēvāsadan* also "attracted considerable attention from the Hindi reading public, projecting Premchand into great prominence" (Swan 1969, 22).

Despite this, both novels came in for criticism from some quarters. Saksena says of Premchand, "His long novel Bazar Husn or 'Beauty Shop' in two volumes covers a wide canvas and loses some of its interest" (1927, 344). Sadiq was equally critical of *Umrā'ō Jān Adā*, remarking, "For all the praise lavished on it *Umrā'ō Jān Adā* does not strike me as a successful novel. The characters are indifferently portrayed, and there are very few gripping moments in the story" (Sadiq 1964, 356).

Though their aims in writing were undeniably different, both authors also expressed their views on writing fiction very clearly, and I think both would have shared Begum Akhtar Suhrawardy's opinion that "Novels are made of the ordinary stuff of life, they are commentaries on the contemporary life, a portrayal of the manners and men of the present date. Their events are such as happened, or can happen to anyone [...]" (1945, 1).

Rusvā himself expressed his opinions thus: "I have made it a principle in my own writing to record in my novels those things which I have myself seen, and which have made an impression upon me, believing that these things will make an impression on others also" (qtd. in Russell 1992, 106–7). In the concluding sentence to his novel *Zat-e Sharif*, he says, "My novels should be regarded as a history of our times, and I hope it will be found a useful one" (*ibid.*, 107).

Premchand also set his ideas out very clearly not least in his essays on "The Aim of Literature" (*Sabītya ka Uddeshya*). For him as for Rusvā, literature was a history of his times and a "mirror of life" but he saw its function very much in terms of social reform. For him the duty of the artist was to "strike a blow for the poor, to fight tyranny and injustice..." (Sharma 1999, 50–51). The artist was the conscience of society whose duty

was to serve literature (*ibid.*, 51).

Whilst the two novels clearly have a certain amount in common in terms of theme, their structure is entirely different. In *Umrā'ō Jān Adā*, Rusvā uses the device of an autobiographical account by the heroine through a series of mainly chronological flashbacks and remains there as the author/narrator while she tells her story. By interspersing the narrative with dialogue (and his somewhat mediocre poetry), he is able to question her, adding to the illusion of reality and asking questions that Suhrawardy (1945, 167) suggests the reader would have liked to ask, but which Mukherjee (1985, 96) finds too intrusive. The dialogue also allows Rusvā, as author or narrator, to give his opinion on events or issues which emerge.

Umrā'ō Jān Adā is an episodic novel but the plot is well constructed and coherent. It covers a long period and actual dates are rarely mentioned, but Rusvā uses various other markers such as Umrā'ō mentioning her age at particular points, historical events, or how many years passed between one event and another. Towards the end of the novel as Mukherjee points out it “loses its episodic structure and the loose threads begin to be tied up” (*ibid.*, 97). Some of these may appear coincidental but Rusvā has clearly intended them from the start. Umrā'ō Jān Adā mentions, for example, that Dilāvar Khān “got the punishment he deserved” and tells us “I met my mother once again” well before these events actually take place (Rusvā 1970, 30).¹

Amina Yaqin throws some useful light on the way in which Umrā'ō's own character is portrayed.

Umrao Jan herself is a complex character whose story is narrated mostly through dialogic interaction between the biographer Rusvā and herself. [...] Rusva's use of the personal pronoun allows us to read the novel as Umrao Jan's autobiography rather than a story mediated through a biographer. [...] As the story unfolds, the personalizing main “I” shifts between Rusva and Umrao Jan projecting a slippage of narrative voices [...].

(2007, 384)

In addition to this, as Asaduddin points out, “The discerning reader must distinguish between Rusva the man and Rusva the narrator because he appears in different masks at different times” (2001, 95).

A careful reading of the novel with these comments in mind leads me to the conclusion that *Umrā'ō Jān Adā* could be called a polyphonic novel, not in the wider sense in which it is usually used, but in the original Bakhtinian sense as applied to Dostoevsky (Morris 1994, 89–96).

¹All references to the English translation are from the 1970 edition translated by Khushwant Singh and M.A. Husaini unless otherwise noted.

Both *Umrā'ō Jān* and *Rusvā* the narrator are very much there on equal terms with *Rusvā* the author and *Rusvā* the man, and at times it is very difficult to tell whether the views expressed are those of *Rusvā* the narrator or *Rusvā* the author.

Sēvāsadan/Bāzār-e Husn is also an episodic novel but, in contrast to *Umrā'ō Jān Adā*, it is Premchand who is both author and narrator. It is the only novel Premchand wrote that is situated mainly in the city, and his ability to depict city life has caused some disagreement amongst critics. Govind Narain Sharma claims that it shows him to be “equally at home in the village and town” (1999, 76), while Sadiq, predictably negative, says “he has no feeling for urban life” (1964, 350).

In addition to the main plot of Suman's fall from grace and her partial redemption, there is the second plot, linked to it, of the removal of the courtesans from the center of the city—although Sadiq amazingly thinks the novel “touches brothels [...] only incidentally” (*ibid.*, 351). As in *Umrā'ō Jān Adā*, the loose ends are neatly tied up at the end with all parts of Padamsiṅgh's resolution being finally passed, the courtesans removed from the city, Sadan and Shānta married and reunited with Sadan's family, and a suitably repentant Suman safely installed in the orphanage for the daughters of courtesans. As in *Umrā'ō Jān Adā*, there are a number of coincidences, (too many for Sharma) often involving Gajādhār/Gajānand, Suman's husband-turned-sadhu, who has a knack of appearing at moments of crisis (Sharma 1999, 78).

Bāzār-e Husn was initially published in two volumes, and there is again some disagreement amongst critics as to whether Premchand manages to sustain the reader's interest throughout. Concurring with Saksena, Suhrawardy comments that “his grip of the story becomes loose in the second volume, the tempo of interest begins to get slower and the story begins to drag” (1945, 193). Sharma, however, disagrees and argues “Premchand's art shows “a surprising maturity in his first novel. As usual he is a master storyteller who captures our interest from the beginning and keeps it till the end. The story proceeds at a rapid pace and with an even rhythm” (1999, 76). Whilst I would agree with Suhrawardy that there is some slowing up in the second part, I think the novel does succeed in maintaining the reader's interest throughout.

The novel contains a large number and variety of characters most of whom are drawn from the new urban middle class. Characterization is achieved through a good mixture of dialogue and Premchand's descriptions, often with some parody and double voicing, but still very much from Premchand's standpoint. Vasudha Dalmia suggests that the action is viewed through “at least three perspectives which seem diametrically

opposed to one another” (2005, xx). There are undoubtedly many voices expressing many different views, so the novel can certainly be seen as polyphonic in the later and wider sense that Bakhtin uses it, but I would be more cautious about suggesting that a novel with such clear didactic aims really allows the characters to be “at odds with the professed auctorial stance” (*ibid.*).

The Decline of the Courtesan as Traced in the Two Novels

From Reynolds’ Rosa Lambert to Hardy’s Tess of the D’Urbervilles, the theme of women who fell from grace was a favorite in nineteenth-century English novels. Not all of the women in these novels became prostitutes, but there was invariably a binary approach of the “virtuous” woman who had a respectable place in society against the “fallen” woman, and in particular the prostitute (Watt 1984, 3). This attitude toward prostitution, born largely out of puritanical Victorian morality, was not one which had always existed in society. In many societies and cultures, from the hetærae of ancient Athens and the courtesans of the Renaissance to the geishas of Japan, courtesans occupied a position of prestige. Highly educated in poetry, music and drama or dance, and skilled in the art of conversation, their function extended well beyond mere sex.

Although *Umrā’ō Jān Adā* and *Bāzār-e Husn/Sēvāsadan* were written less than twenty years apart, Rusvā’s novel begins somewhere around 1840 and therefore the period covered by the two novels is much longer. Taken together, the two trace the decline in status of the Indian courtesan from its zenith in the 1840s, almost to the level of common prostitute by the 1920s, and in doing so reflect the sea-change in social attitudes that occurred during that period.

In India there was a clear hierarchy of prostitutes, at the top of which were the *ṭavā’ifs* or *bā’is*, courtesans who had occupied an elevated place in society for hundreds of years. As Jyotsna Singh observes, “Dancing girls, or courtesans, were a feature of both Hindu and Muslim society, and this tradition continued until well into the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries, till the last vestiges of the landed aristocracy were stamped out” (1996, 105). According to colonial observers, these girls were educated and also received government protection. They were free from stigma, recognized as a distinct professional class, and taxed according to their income. The space they occupied in society was “outside the domestic sphere and yet close to the power centers of the aristocracy” (*ibid.*). Bredi describes their position well,

At the courts of the various Indian rulers and princes [...] the courtesans, *tava'if*, constituted a very influential group. They associated with princes, nobles, merchants [...]. They dictated the laws of fashion, etiquette, music, dance, they enjoyed the regard of the court [...].

(2001, 112)

It was also the custom for young noble men to frequent the most famous *kōṭhās* to learn good manners, the art of conversation and to cultivate a taste for poetry (*ibid.*, 113).

Whilst courtesans flourished in cities all over Mughal India, and in both Hindu and Muslim courts, probably the most famous example is that of Lucknow which had risen to prominence as Delhi declined. According to Sharar, the courtesan culture in Awadh had evolved during the reign of Shuja ud Daula (1975, 34–35). By Umrā'ō Jān's time, during the reigns of Amjad 'Alī Shāh and Vājīd 'Alī Shāh, it had reached a peak of sophistication and culture. According to Russell,

In those years courtesans of Umrao Jan's class [...] besides being expert singers and dancers were also highly educated in the traditional culture of their day and were quite often poets, as Umrao Jan herself was [...] and through her experiences one really does see something of the social and cultural history of the times.

(1992, 107)

At the beginning of *Umrā'ō Jān Adā* we see the courtesan in all her glory. We have the description of the luxury of Khānum's establishment, its noble clientele, performances attended by the élite of Lucknow society, the singing of the *marṣiya* by Umrā'ō at the Navābī court during Muḥarram and the recognition of her poetry. Khānum, like many “madams” of the time, not only amasses great wealth, but also wields enormous power. In her hands is the fate not only of her “girls,” but also of many respectable men and their families.

This remains the situation until about half way through the novel when, in 1856, Vājīd 'Alī Shāh is deposed by the British who, according to Charu Gupta, “deployed the existence of courtesans [...] as part of their excuse to annex Awadh” (2002, 112). At this time Umrā'ō is at the height of her success. From this point on, however, the future of the courtesan culture is an uncertain one. With the exile of Navāb Vājīd 'Alī Shāh the courtesans lost their royal patron, and as a result of loss of lands and income there was also a decline in the patronage of the feudal aristocracy.

Umrā'ō does not refer to this event in any detail in her narrative but says “I had continued singing songs of lament in the court of Begum Malika Kishvar till the end of the kingdom of Oudh” and tells us that

when she left for exile in Calcutta, “my association with the royal households came to an end” (162). Lucknow society had barely had time to adjust to these new and straightened circumstances before, as Umrā’ō Jān puts it, “The mutiny broke like a grand catastrophe. Our city like the rest of the country was in a state of turmoil” (*ibid.*). We hear little additional detail about subsequent historical events in Lucknow as Umrā’ō, after a brief stay in the royal palace, and a performance at Birjīs Qadar’s birthday, flees the city to safety in Faizabad.

According to Bredi, it was “the watershed of the mutiny which irrevocably marked the end of a world in which courtesans had a recognized social role” (2001, 110). Until 1857 courtesans were “a part of society, of life, and were largely accepted and tolerated by people,” but after the rebellion “the position of the prostitute became increasingly precarious [...]” (Gupta 2002, 108). As exemplified in the novel *Nashtar*, the British too had patronized “dancing girls” but this patronage also underwent major changes in the post-Mutiny period (Dang 1993, 175). When Umrā’ō returns after the “Mutiny” there is still a semblance of the old culture remaining. She says, “Once more it was the same *Chowk*, the same room and the same girls.” But she acknowledges that “some of our earlier patrons had left for Calcutta or other towns,” so it is clear that the role of the courtesan has already undergone some change (173). Umrā’ō herself, who during the heyday could surely have opened her own *kōṭhā* on a par with Khānum’s, lives much more modestly and takes in only one girl to train.

Umrā’ō Jān Adā opens with a picture of “feudal Lucknow” in which “values of an earlier age continued into a decadent milieu of nawabs and *tawaiṣ* in a glittering but fragile texture of music and poetry” (Mukherjee 1985, 91). As the novel continues, we see the decay and near-demise of this “decadent” culture. Asaduddin, describing Lucknow as having been “ravaged” by the end of the book, echoes Khurshidul Islam’s suggestion that “the real hero of *Umrā’ō Jān Adā* is the city of Lucknow and its culture, and that the novel is an elegy on its demise” (qtd. in Asaduddin 2001, 92).

British attitudes towards courtesans in India had always been at best ambiguous. Whilst the old system of patronage continued they chose not to interfere, but the takeover of princely states, the loss of this patronage and the arrival of more British women saw a hardening of their attitudes and, after 1857, the colonial state embarked on a series of “reforms” as part of their “civilizing mission.” As Oldenburg has shown, the change in the status of courtesans in post-Mutiny Navābī Lucknow was “linked to British policies and legislation concerned with regulating, sanitizing and cleaning the city” (1984, 132–42). Once renowned for their aesthetic accomplishments, courtesans now became “demonized as repositories of disease”

(*ibid.*). In a move to provide prostitutes for soldiers, but also to ensure that the army stayed as disease-free as possible, the British insisted on prostitutes being registered and undergoing regular inspections. Those who contracted venereal disease were sent to lock hospitals, something we see with Ābādi in *Umrā'ō Jān Adā*. As a combined result of the British “clean-up,” which ignored their traditional hierarchies, and the decline of the urban aristocracy, “courtesans now found themselves mostly inhabiting the same space and bazaar as regular prostitutes” (Gupta 2002, 111).

The position of courtesans in Benares in their heyday corresponded almost exactly to that in Lucknow, and Dalmia gives an excellent picture of this, which I think is worth quoting in detail.

The courtesans of the city had long occupied a central place in public life [...]. The gentry had ever flocked to the best known among them, in search not only of the more obvious pleasures but also to enjoy the best in the arts: music, dance, poetry, and to luxuriate in an atmosphere radiating refinement in matters of aesthetic taste and judgment. Once a courtesan had acquired a reputation for beauty and mastery of the arts, she could attain high social standing. She would be asked to appear not only at the court of the Benares Maharajas, in the mansions of the rich and the powerful, but also in the most prominent temples and on the banks of the holy river on important religious occasions.

(2005, IX–X)

By the second decade of the twentieth century when *Bāzār-e Husn/Sēvāsadan* was written there had already been significant changes. “The new voices in the city were seeking to create an image of Kashi which was far removed from the one which was socially and ritually centered around the courtesans” (Dalmia 2005, xiv). As a result of the decline of court and aristocratic patronage, courtesans also had to find new clients. Whilst the lower classes of prostitutes were attached to cantonments, or catered for soldiers in the city, higher-class courtesans looked for their clientele amongst the new urban élite and the middle classes. With this new clientele came a downgrading of the skills of the courtesan. Whereas Umrā'ō spent many years perfecting her musical repertoire, Bḥōlī Bā'ī tells Suman, “You don't really need to know classical forms and *raags*. Popular *ghazals* are fashionable here” (Premchand 2005, 45).²

Charu Gupta has argued that the changing problem of prostitution has generally been associated solely with the colonial government and points out that “indigenous patriarchal nationalism and revivalist/re-

²All references to the English translation are from the 2005 edition translated by Shingavi unless otherwise noted.

formist movements of the period” had an equally profound impact on attitudes towards prostitutes. Upper caste and middle class Indians also wanted their respectable areas clean from all “filth” and whilst challenging colonial rule adopted a position, which she says was “often complicit with British attitudes” (2002, 111–12).

She also suggests that whilst both Hindu and Muslim middle classes were united in their desire to marginalize prostitutes, the Hindu campaign had additional dimensions in terms of the language used, which was similar to that regarding Muslim butchers’ shops. In *Bāzār-e Husn/Sēvāsadan*, this is reflected in Padamsiṅgh’s conversation with Bējnāth, regarding the dancing girls for Sadan’s wedding. Padamsiṅgh likens the fact that if people did not eat meat, there would be no need to slaughter goats, to the demand for prostitutes (123). Gupta also contends that the “attack on prostitutes and the courtesan cultures of the precolonial period became another way of condemning the supposed decadence and sexual lewdness of Muslim kings [...]” (2002, 112). In the Hindi version of the novel, the reformer Viṭṭhaldās suggests that the custom of courtesans may have “started during the reign of sensual Muslim *badshahs*” (98). Interestingly, this sentence has been omitted from the Urdu version of the novel, indicating that Premchand was fully aware of the Hindu bias in this regard.

By this time the attitude of the Hindu urban middle classes toward courtesans was also completely different from that of the nineteenth-century élite. The emphasis was on the ideal of the Hindu woman propagated by the Arya Samaj and the nationalists. The prostitute began to be viewed as a source of disease and corruption rather than refinement and artistic skill. “The presence of prostitutes in the most frequented and populous quarters of cities was seen as among the principal causes for the ruin and demoralization among innocent, affluent young men; [...]” and “contact with prostitutes was regarded as the reason for a decline in the virtues of respectable, homely women” (Gupta 2002, 115–16). In *Bāzār-e Husn/Sēvāsadan* Premchand depicts both of these problems in his portrayal of Suman and Sadan.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the Arya Samaj and various caste associations adopted resolutions against dances by prostitutes during marriages and social ceremonies. In 1898 restrictions were imposed on courtesans in Benares and Lucknow, and subsequently in Agra in 1917 there were proposals to remove courtesans from the city center. “Arguments and values of modernity, civilization, cleanliness and purity were selectively appropriated by the dominant Hindu castes and classes to put pressure on local governments and municipal corporations” (*ibid.*, 114).

The prostitute was displaced in terms of moral ethics and also “from the municipal city and confined to a zone of the ‘other’” (*ibid.*, 113). All these issues form part of the narrative of *Bāzār-e Husn/Sēvāsadan*.

In Francesca Orsini’s view, the novel “revolves round one question: where should we keep prostitutes?”—a question she sees as both literal and metaphorical (2002, 293). The desire to move the courtesans out of the city results from the disappearance of the traditional distance between the courtesan and the respectable woman in terms of physical proximity. Whereas in *Umrā’ō Jān Adā*, the private space of the houses of respectable women and the public space of the *chauk* had been worlds apart, in *Sēvāsadan* they literally collide. In *Umrā’ō Jān Adā* even common-law wives and concubines, such as Ram Dei, live far away from the “courtesans’ quarter.” The only time we see a “respectable” woman come into contact with a courtesan is when Umrā’ō herself “invades” Akbar Ali’s *zenana* at the invitation of his wife, with disastrous results.

In *Bāzār-e Husn/Sēvāsadan* the situation is entirely different. Western education had led to increased employment in government administration and other professions, and to rapid urban growth. The wealthy elite could still afford to keep their distance from the *chauk*, whilst frequenting brothels if they so chose, but poorer middle-class Indians such as Gajādhār were forced to live in areas of cities where prostitutes openly conducted their business. Suman thus lives opposite Bḥōlī Bā’ī exposed to her immoral influence and seduced by her lavish lifestyle—something that could not have happened in Umrā’ō Jān’s Lucknow. Premchand’s repeated description of the stench of the sewers outside Suman’s house is, I am sure, intended as a physical one, but the metaphorical meaning cannot have escaped him.

Suman and Umrao: The “Heroines”

The “heroines” of *Umrā’ō Jān Adā* and *Bāzār-e Husn/Sēvāsadan* in many ways could not be more different. They come from different communities and religious backgrounds, Umrā’ō a Shī‘a Muslim, Suman a high-caste Hindu. They also have little in common in character or in the manner of their downfall. Umrā’ō, kidnapped as a child, had no control over her destiny; Suman, a married woman, chose of her own volition, albeit in difficult circumstances, to become a courtesan. What would Umrā’ō have thought of Suman? In her conversation with Rusvā at the beginning of the novel she partially excuses girls who are born into the homes of prostitutes and who, therefore, have only examples of degradation in front of

them, but her views on girls like Suman are pretty unequivocal.

That is not the case with girls who are born of respectable parents. If they run away from their homes and take to the path of evil, they have no excuse whatsoever and deserve to be slaughtered like sheep—but without even the drops of water to slake their thirst before their throats are cut.

(23)

She would, however, have had some sympathy for Suman's plight as a girl married without her consent to a much older man and forced to live in unaccustomed poverty. Her condemnation of parents who put girls into this position is equally unequivocal, and it is their desire to be rid of the burden of their daughters at any cost that she sees as the reason for the fall of many respectable women:

“[P]arents do not give thought to matters like the disparity of age, looks or temperament and throw their daughters into the arms of any man they can find. As soon as the girl finds that she cannot get on with her husband, she leaves him.”

(24)

Of her own entry into the profession of courtesan she says, “I was just born unlucky. The buffetings of fate and chance left me stranded in a wilderness” (*ibid.*). This is crucial to an understanding of Umrāʾō. Whilst she never shies away from what she has done and completely accepts the position this gives her in society, she is at pains to point out that it was not her choice. The child Amīran, who later became Umrāʾō Jān, grew up in a comfortable middle-class home. She had loving parents and a little brother whom she adored. Despite her childish pestering of her father for small gifts, she appreciates the clothes she wears and the food she eats. She is completely contented with her life with her family and looking forward to her impending marriage. Of that time she says: “I was happy. I could not believe anyone was luckier than I” (21). She is not vain but has a balanced view of her looks: “I was also better looking than my companions. Although I was never a beauty” (19). (Something the directors of the films should perhaps have read before casting Rekha and Aishwariya Rai in the role of Umrāʾō!)

When she is kidnapped and sold into prostitution, her world is turned upside down but she very soon learns to make the best of it. Mukherjee seems to criticize her for this fortitude saying: “It is not clear whether young Ameeran, before she became Umrao Jan, resented being sold like cattle, but she *confesses* [emphasis added] that it did not take her very long to begin to enjoy her new life” (1985, 95). The use of the word “confess” implies that Mukherjee, unlike Rusvā, seems to think Umrāʾō has some-

thing to be ashamed of. At the age of nine she cannot have understood what she had been sold into and the kindness with which she is treated also helps her to adjust quickly to her new situation. Talking of Būvā Ḥusainī she says, “She gave me much affection that within a few days I forgot my home and my parents” (37). But as she explains to Rusvā, this was not an indication of indifference or hard-heartedness but of resignation to something she was powerless to fight.

“Although I was of a very tender age, as soon as I entered Khanum’s house, I knew that I would have to spend the rest of my years there [...]. I had also suffered so much at the hands of the villainous dacoits that Khanum’s house appeared like paradise to me. I had realised the utter improbability of seeing my parents again; and one ceases to long for something which one knows is out of reach.”

(*ibid.*)

This attitude is one which is seen again at the end of the novel. Speaking as a mature adult of the things that she did which she now considers to be sinful, she says “in the atmosphere that prevailed in Khānum’s establishment I could not understand their real nature” (219). Another point of course, is that marriage *itself* was a form of being “sold like cattle” albeit to one man, something recognized by Suman in *Bāzār-e Ḥusn/ Sēvāsadan*.

Umrā’ō’s positive outlook and her acceptance of her lot in life stand her in good stead as she enters the world of the courtesan. She appreciates the education she gets from the maulvi who, because of Būvā Ḥusainī, “paid special attention” to her and taught her with “love and care” (42) and she seizes the chance to develop her skills in dancing, singing and poetry. The description of her singing lessons in particular reveals that she is not only someone who has a good voice, but who also loves classical music and has a real desire to learn to sing well. This is particularly evident in her questioning of her Ustad and in her pestering of Bēgā Jān to sing scales for her (38–41).

As Meenakshi Mukherjee quite rightly says, (although it seems intended as a criticism), “In her youth she gets into the spirit of the courtesan’s world with eagerness and gusto” (1985, 94). As many young girls would be, Umrā’ō is entranced by the beautiful clothes, the jewelry and lifestyle on offer in Khānum’s establishment. She also enjoys the company of the other girls and of Gauhar Mirzā with whom she develops a special relationship. The picture painted by Rusvā of life in Khānum’s Kōṭhā is similar to the one described by Lucknow courtesans to Oldenburg (1990, 269–71) many years later, one of camaraderie and of a close-knit group which in many ways resembled the family she had lost.

When Umrāʾō becomes a fully-fledged courtesan she is able to adopt a practical approach to the profession and to tread a middle path. Rusvā uses the characters of Bismillah and Khurshid very effectively as foils for her. She is neither heartless like Bismillah who ruins her lovers, nor sentimental like Khurshid who just wants to be loved and is therefore unhappy and unsuccessful. She treats people with courtesy and compassion whilst retaining a necessary emotional detachment from her various lovers. The one exception seemed to be Nawab Sultan, of whom she says, “There is no doubt that I loved Nawab Sultan and he loved me. Our tastes were so similar that if we had had to spend the rest of our lives together, neither would have had any cause for regret” (82). She contradicts this, however, later in her story when she tells Rusvā that she has never loved any man nor has any man loved her (101).

For Umrāʾō, life is very much the art of the possible and is there to be enjoyed as far as she can. She relishes her public performances, becoming an expert in the *sōz* and *marsiya* and she appreciates the sophisticated atmosphere of Nawabi Lucknow. As she matures, she develops an independence which leads her to break away from Khānum’s establishment, and during her time in Kanpur and Faizabad demonstrates considerable resourcefulness. She experiences a great deal in her eventful life—some good, some bad—and she learns from those experiences. But fundamentally she remains the same—generous, humorous, warm-hearted and pragmatic. She realizes, of course, that there is a price to pay for her lifestyle, in terms of her personal relationships with men. At the end of the novel, giving advice to other courtesans, she tells them, “O foolish women, never be under the delusion that anyone will love you truly. Your lovers [...] will never remain constant because you do not deserve constancy” (231–32).

According to Mukherjee, “Umrao is *never* [emphasis added] shown to be repulsed by the kind of life she is forced to lead” (1985, 94), a statement with which I would not entirely agree. Certainly “the philosophic reflections about sin and god” do belong to her middle age (*ibid.*) but she makes it very clear that she considers the things she did to be “of an evil nature” and explains that when she was in Khānum’s establishment “[t]here was never any occasion to ponder over questions of ethics or morality” (219). She fully endorses Rusvā’s praise of virtuous women and expresses her envy for them. However, despite perhaps wishing she could have led the life of a respectable woman, she shows a “complete absence of maudlin self-pity” (Russell 1992, 110).

Mukherjee also casts doubts on the genuineness of Umrāʾō’s repentance suggesting, “Though she insists time and time again that she was

driven to becoming a courtesan by circumstances [...] when she calls herself a sinner she merely bows to conventions of rhetoric: her matter of fact tone of narration seldom betrays any serious feeling of guilt" (1985, 95). Asaduddin agrees to some extent with this when he says,

Though she makes ritual obeisance to the tenets of religion and regrets that she is living in sin, these seem to be mere rhetorical flourishes. [...] When the narrator asks her what punishment she anticipates for her sinful existence which has required hurting many hearts, she says, "There should not be any. In the way that I harmed hearts there was also much pleasure, and the pleasure makes up for the pain."

(2001, 95)

I am not convinced, however, that her attitude towards sin is mere rhetoric. Talking of her childhood life she says:

"After we had finished [the evening meal] we gave our thanks to God. Father said the prayer for the night and we went to bed. He rose early to say his morning prayers [...]. After the morning prayer, father told his beads."

(18–19)

From this it is evident that she comes from a family where religious practice is an important part of daily life and this clearly has an influence on her in later life. Shī'a Islam was a major part of the culture of the court of Awadh and Umrā'ō was closely involved in this with her singing of the *sōz* and the *marṣīya* during Muḥarram. She also tells us that it was several years earlier, while she was involved with the lawyer Akbar 'Alī Khān, that she began saying her prayers regularly (175). Her later repentance and piety, therefore, seem genuine to me and Rusvā is portraying an entirely convincing return to her religious and cultural roots.

Mukherjee describes the mature Umrā'ō as "a solitary woman without moorings [...] one who faces loneliness at the end of a life artificially filled with laughter, music and protestations of love, [...] who turns to books and religion because her life lacks the warmth of human relationship." She suggests that "she deliberately takes a cynical and detached view of the man-woman relationship, and that there is "a touch of cynicism in her talk of the solace of religion and literature when youth is over [...]" (1985, 96–97). She thus paints a rather dismal picture, one which does not accord with other critics, and one which I believe is a complete misreading of Umrā'ō. Whilst Umrā'ō is entirely honest about the artifice in her relationships with her clients, she portrays her relationships with Būvā Ḥusainī and the Maulvī, and with Gauhar Mirzā and the other courtesans in the *kōṭhā* as warm and genuine, as was the laughter they enjoyed

together.

In her later years Umrā'ō retains her love of singing and poetry and is able to live comfortably and peacefully. She maintains contact with friends, and books and newspapers are a source of enjoyment to her. Speaking of the male friends with whom she can still enjoy poetry, music and conversation she says: "I like them from the bottom of my heart [...]. Unfortunately none of them desires to live with me permanently. So why should I hanker for it? It would be like wanting one's youth to return" (222). This is almost an exact echo of her attitude toward forgetting her parents and her home, so it would appear that the ability to make the best of life is a quality that she has always had. As she tells her story, Umrā'ō is able to look back on her life with equanimity and even a certain amount of nostalgia. Although perhaps not what she would have chosen, it has been rich and eventful and has given her pleasure and a measure of fulfillment. Her attitude is one of resignation and acceptance rather than cynicism.

The heroine of *Bāzār-e Husn/Sēvāsadan* also grew up in a comfortable home with loving parents. She is also educated and beautiful, but, unlike Umrā'ō, even then was not always contented with her life. She is described by Premchand thus:

The older daughter, Suman, grew up to be beautiful, flighty, and arrogant; [dainty, playful, lively, proud and elegant in the Urdu] the younger one, Shanta, was innocent, quiet and polite [soft-spoken, innocent and of a serious disposition in the Urdu]. Suman expected to be treated better than those around her. If similar saris were bought for both sisters, Suman would sulk. Shanta was content with whatever came her way.

(2005, 2)

Like Umrā'ō, Suman's comfortable life is suddenly shattered. Her father's imprisonment forces her and her mother and sister to live off an uncle's charity. The uncle, Umānāth, unable to pay the dowry required for a suitable husband for her, becomes desperate in his desire to rid himself of this burden. "A year later Umanath hadn't found a husband for Suman. [...] He had begun to overlook prestige, education, looks, and moral qualities and was holding out only for someone of a high caste. That was one requirement he would not give up on" (13).³

In an action which would have no doubt incurred Umrā'ō's wrath, Umānāth marries Suman to an older man who lives in poverty in the city.

³The Urdu, interestingly, is less detailed: "Oma Nath now retained only one condition—that of good breeding. For him good breeding was the most desirable attribute of all" (Premchand 2003, 11–12).

After her marriage, Suman understandably feels sorry for herself and at this point the reader begins to sympathize with her to some extent. Even Sadiq is unusually charitable towards her saying, “her only failings are vanity and love of display, venial enough in one who has seen better days” (1964, 347). She tries for a short time to cook and clean the house and “even began to find some joy in it” (15), but when her husband Gajādhar criticizes her for spending too much money she gives up. Nevertheless she retains her arrogance and sense of superiority and cannot accept her lot in life. Premchand describes her attitude towards the women who are her neighbors.

Suman would look down on them and try to avoid meeting them. [...] She thought—these women buy new ornaments and new clothes, and in my house we can barely afford roti. Am I the most unfortunate person in the world? *As a child, she had been taught only to please herself and enjoy life. She had not learnt the moral lesson nor acquired the religious education that plants the seeds of contentment in one's mind.*

(16)⁴

Her discontentment leads her to flirt with the young men who pass her house on their way home.

Even if Suman was busy, glimpses of her could be caught through the curtain. Her innocent heart received endless pleasure from this kind of flirting. She played these games not out of wickedness, but to show off the lustre of her beauty, to win over the hearts of others.

(17)

But her naiveté is shown in her attitude towards the courtesan Bḥōlī Bā'ī “who lives in great style opposite her humble dwelling” (Sadiq 1964, 347). She has been brought up to believe that such women were “wicked and depraved” and is surprised to find that “respectable” men find it acceptable to attend her performances. She also “slowly realizes that no matter how much she considered Bholi to be beneath her, Bholi was much better off” (18).

Suman then develops a conflict in her attitudes. Whilst feeling that she, as a chaste woman, is superior to Bḥōlī Bā'ī, she is envious of Bḥōlī's status and lifestyle. She tries her hand at piety, but it is not a genuine religious feeling, but rather, a desire for recognition and respect. When it becomes apparent that Bḥōlī is accorded a respect both in religious circles and in public life which Suman herself can never hope to receive, she becomes even more resentful. Her meeting and subsequent friendship

⁴The part in italics does not appear in the Urdu version of the novel.

with Subhādra and Padamsiṅgh provides her with a model of respectable society, but Suman is eaten up by her desire for nice things and her envy of people who have a higher status than she does. For Suman life simply isn't fair!

At Padamsiṅgh's Holi party we again see the vanity and envy in Suman when she compares herself with Bhōlī Bāṅī. "She is dark; I am fair. She is plump, I am slender" (32). After examining herself in the full-length mirror she comes to the conclusion that if she had the same clothes and jewelry, she would be far more attractive than Bhōlī Bāṅī, and her voice is better too. Watching the way men are bewitched by Bhōlī Bāṅī, she is extremely envious, not just of this, but of Bhōlī Bāṅī's freedom as well. It would appear, therefore, that at some level (possibly subconscious), she is already considering the idea of becoming a courtesan.

When she is thrown out by her husband and turned away by Padamsiṅgh, she is presented with little other choice. When the moment of truth arrives, however, she again finds it difficult to decide what is most important to her. She genuinely prides herself on her chastity and has severe misgivings when she approaches Bhōlī's door. Even as Bhōlī persuades Suman to stay with her, she is reluctant because "she possessed the natural human aversion to wrong-doing" (45), but as soon as she sees herself in the mirror dressed in a new sari her old vanity reemerges and triumphs over her doubts. "Suman stood in front of the mirror. It seemed as if the idol of some beauty stood before her. Suman had never realized she was so beautiful. Shame-free pride had made her lotus-blossom face bloom and there was something absolutely intoxicating about her eyes" (47).

For Suman however, the grass on the other side is always greener. As a courtesan she finds the comfort she was seeking, but discovers that the respect she thought went with it is really only an illusion. Consolation comes in the form of Sadan, Padamsiṅgh's nephew, who falls under her spell. It is here, for the first time, that Suman shows herself in a different light. Although in love with Sadan, she now considers other people before herself. Out of respect for Subadhra and Padamsiṅgh, she denies herself the happiness of a relationship with him, and we subsequently see her behave with considerable courage and dignity when she returns the bracelet that Sadan has stolen for her to Padamsiṅgh.

In her conversations with her would-be rescuer Viṭṭhaldās, we see that she is intelligent and articulate and quick to see through the hypocrisy of the "*hindū jāti*." When he accuses her of having shamed the whole Hindu race she points out how many respectable Hindu gentlemen have come to hear her sing. Viṭṭhaldās is nothing if not persistent however, and he manages to make her see things differently. "She had thought that sen-

sory pleasure and respect were the prime objectives in life. She realized for the first time that *happiness was born out of contentment, and respect out of service*" (72).⁵

When Suman is about to leave for the widows' ashram, we see another side of her as she gets back at her "clients" by playing a series of tricks on them. Sadiq is critical of this scene saying,

the author's psychology is at fault in the scene where the heroine, immediately after her repentance, plays wild pranks on her lovers. That a woman with Saman's charity should succumb to horseplay, at a moment when she is feeling most humble, is entirely out of character.

(1964, 348)

This is interesting when considered in the light of Suhrawardy's general comments on Premchand's characterization. "He cannot develop his 'characters' consistently over any length of time. His touch becomes uncertain and the action and reaction of 'characters' cease to be in keeping with their personality as depicted in the early part of the story" (1945, 193).

This more "feisty," mischievous Suman disappears as quickly as she has come. After entering the widows' ashram she undergoes a complete character transplant. Gone is the arrogant, vain, shallow Suman and in her place a paragon of virtue. Viṭṭhaldās describes the transformation thus:

It seems as if she is trying to repent for all of her sins [...]. She is ready and willing to do any work. Most of the women sleep all day, but Suman cleans out their rooms for them. She has been teaching a few of the widows to sew, and some have been learning how to sing from her.⁶ [...] She has also started reading and well, only God knows what she feels, but she seems a completely changed woman.

(157)

When Sadan sees her at the river, however, it is apparent that she is far from happy: "no laughing rosy lips, no sparkling eyes [...]. He could see the heaviness in her gait and the lines of despair on her face" (171).

When later she moves in with Sadan and Shāntā, she fares little better. Although now happy to work and serve them, she still craves recognition for her efforts, and the lack of it makes her life unbearable. Despite the transformation she has undergone in certain ways, Premchand makes it clear that she still craves the respect and recognition that led to her downfall.

⁵Emphasis added. This is a crucial sentence to which I will return below.

⁶In the Urdu it is "cook" rather than "sing," which perhaps seems more appropriate.

Suman was, by nature, a haughty and proud woman. All her life she had lived like a queen. In her husband's home, even when she endured hardships, she was still queen. In the brothel, everyone listened to her. In the ashram, her piety and service had made her most respected.

(243)

“Therefore it distressed her extremely to live as a non-entity in this household” (Premchand 2003, 228). Her solution to this, just as when she was put in the position of having to face her sister Shānta, is to attempt to drown herself. When Gajādhar/Gujānand saves her for the second time and offers her the chance to work in the orphanage she undergoes yet another transformation: “Wonderful feelings of faith and devotion dawned in her heart” (264) and “[s]he hadn't in her wildest dreams believed that [...] she would be given such a great opportunity to serve” (265).

If we compare the two heroines, it is apparent that although Umrā'ō matures during the course of the novel, her character remains, in essence, the same. Suman on the other hand, has many incarnations and by the end, notwithstanding certain contradictions, becomes an almost totally different character. Umrā'ō is someone who, whatever life throws at her, always sees the world as a glass half full, whereas Suman sees it as a glass half empty. Umrā'ō, whilst regretting that she could not have lived as a respectable woman, is able to look back at her life with some degree of fulfillment and satisfaction. She manages to achieve independence, self-reliance, self-respect and an inner composure. Asaduddin sums it up well when he says, “Through the vicissitudes of her life Umrā'ō acquires a deep knowledge of human nature and this brings her wisdom and peace” (2001, 95).

Suman, although she has escaped the worst degradation that could have been her lot, is still a sad and pathetic character who is never destined to be happy. Dalmia suggests that “Suman's [...] closing words of gratitude speak more of her loneliness and isolation, and her need to be connected to the world she once knew, than of any real satisfaction derived from being [in the orphanage]” (2005, xxxvi). She has, in fact, found the “respect born out of service” even to the point of glowing articles about her in the newspaper, but she has not found the “happiness born out of contentment.” Umrā'ō on the other hand, achieves this contentment because she is someone who “has the courage to change the things she can change, the serenity to bear the things she cannot change and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Didacticism and Attitudes Toward “Fallen” Women

Whilst acknowledging that the author’s opinion about what he writes is of great importance, Suhrawardy says that “no author should deliberately sit down to write a story with the object of illustrating his point of view.” She does concede, however, “Didactic novels, whether their purpose is obvious or implied, do help in removing social evils that they condemn” (1945, 9, 11).

Both Rusvā and Premchand made their views on didacticism very clear. In the preface to *Zāt-e Sharīf*, in what was probably a criticism of Nazīr Aḥmad, Rusvā said,

It is the practice of some contemporary writers to frame a plot in order to prove a particular point and then fill in the details accordingly. I make no objection against them, but I shall not be at fault if I simply say that my method is the opposite of theirs. I aim simply at a faithful portrayal of actual happenings and am not concerned with recording the conclusions to be drawn from them.”

(qtd. in Russell 1992, 106)

Sadiq, however, does not think he succeeds in this in *Umrā’ō Jān Adā*, observing that, “Before the end is reached the didactic element begins to emerge, and so Rusva can indulge his taste for the unconventional without flying into the face of public opinion” (1964, 355).

Premchand had no such qualms about didacticism in his work, as his speech at the inaugural conference of the Progressive Writers’ Association shows. Rejecting the idea of “art for art’s sake” he is convinced that, given the political and social circumstances obtaining in India at the time, literature needed to serve a social (and political) purpose. This decision, according to Swan, had been made “during the period 1907–1920” (1969, 81) and is clearly reflected in *Bāzār-e Ḥusn/Sēvāsadan*. It is no surprise, therefore, that Premchand enjoyed writing this novel, as he mentioned to Nigam. In it he is able to express, through various characters, all his own criticisms of society’s ills. Amrit Rai says: “In *Bazar-e-Husn*, Premchand has found the kind of subject that suits him best. It will henceforth be his individual distinction to write stories that expose and attack the dishonesty, the corruption, the injustice and the hypocrisy prevalent in the society” (1991, 130). His purpose in writing the novel is also made quite clear in a letter to Imtiyāz ‘Alī Tāj, when he tells him, “In this story I have launched an attack on the social disgrace of prostitution” (*ibid.*, 129).

In *Umrā’ō Jān Adā* Rusvā stands back and lets Umrā’ō portray herself in a matter-of-fact and unsentimental manner, yet in such a way that it is obvious that his sympathies are with her. He treats her as an equal and

allows her to express her opinions even if he disagrees on some points. Umrā'ō, unlike Suman, does not retain her chastity. Yet she operates within a code of honor which Rusvā understands and respects. As Mukherjee points out, Rusvā's sympathies are very much with the individual who has suffered misfortune and risen above it rather than with efforts to reform the ills of society in general. Referring to Khānum's purchase of Umrā'ō for 125 rupees, and to Umrā'ō's later purchase of Ābādī for one rupee during a famine, Mukherjee observes that "Ruswa in no way questions the social system that allows the buying and selling of girls, although he is full of sympathy for the plight of individual victims" (1985, 95).

He did not, however, sympathize indiscriminately with "fallen" women. Ābādī too had been sold into prostitution through no fault of her own, but it is the way in which she lived her life which determined whether she gained Rusvā's sympathy or not. For him she was not only a whore but also depraved. Having given a scathing description of the behavior of Ābādī's friend Miss Ḥusnā, Ābādī's own behavior is then cataloged. She conducts herself inappropriately with Būvā Ḥusainī's grandson, attempts to poach Umrā'ō's own clients, and then, having eloped with one man, runs off with another. After a spell in a low-class brothel, she takes up with a new man, is seduced by yet another, and then ends up in an apartment "entertaining" her boyfriend/pimp's friends. Rusvā with his authorial power accordingly gives her what she deserves—syphilis!

Neither does he sympathize with Umrā'ō when she complains of being humiliated by the Senior Begum, the mother of Akbar 'Alī, the lawyer in whose house she was staying. His view is that, "There are three kinds of women: the virtuous, the depraved and whores!" (Rusvā 1996, 162). Speaking of virtuous women he says:

[T]hey are women who live their whole lives within four walls and put up with all kinds of affliction. [...] They put up with hardship, and have to make the best of it. Do they not have good reason to feel proud of this? And that is why they look [...] so harshly on the depraved class.

(*ibid.*)

In words reminiscent of the wife in *Qissa Aurat Mard* (Anonymous 1882), Rusvā goes on, "... their stupid husbands get infatuated with prostitutes, even though the whore may be much less attractive than their own wife" (*ibid.*).

This speech has been labeled by various critics as Rusvā moralizing, being didactic or even hypocritical. Asaduddin describes it as, "no more than a kind of pandering to conventional morality" (2001, 96). Mukherjee,

who seems to have little time for Rusvā, says that he “holds forth self-righteously” and that he dismisses Umrā’ō’s questioning of the responsibility of men towards women (1985, 95–96). She sees “an ironic gap between his pious lecture on the superiority of mothers and wives in purdah and his familiarity with all the courtesans of Lucknow” (*ibid.*, 95). Rusvā did indeed have an “intimate acquaintance with this life” (Asaduddin 2001, 94), but this, perhaps, misses the point and ignores the polyphony of Rusvā the narrator, Rusvā the man, and Rusvā the author who is also the portrayer of Umrā’ō Jān herself.

Similarly, Bredi sees the distinction Rusvā draws between respectable women and prostitutes, as

confirming the division of space into public and private, that the social structure of his time rested upon, and that he did not question. According to this logic, respectable women belong to the internal, private space which is their domain, and they must not be mixed up with those who, like men, belong to the external, public space.

(2001, 112)

Although the assigning of men purely to the “public space” is not entirely correct, as men were able to inhabit both the public space and the private space, Bredi’s analysis of the courtesan’s position reflects Rusvā’s viewpoint quite accurately. The courtesan, she says, “is able to participate in the social life of men [...] and she has a precise social position, blamable on the theoretical plane, but recognized and esteemed on the practical one, constituting as it does the means that permits this type of society to remain intact” (*ibid.*).

This, of course, is the crux of the difference between Rusvā’s view of the “fallen” woman or courtesan and Premchand’s. Quite simply, by the time Premchand was writing, this society had *not* remained intact. Huge changes had taken place and these were clearly reflected in Premchand’s attitude. Interestingly, Urdu literature after Rusvā, in its attitude toward women, took a very similar line to the Hindu reformists and nationalists—in the hands of writers such as Rāshidu’l-Khairī, the nephew by marriage of Nazīr Aḥmad. Referring to the vision of women in Khairī’s novels, Gail Minault says his heroines are “always dutiful, even to the men who oppress them. They are victims, incapable of defending themselves because they are devoted to the overriding ideals of obedience, fidelity, and self-sacrifice” (1998, 137). Khairī’s goal, she says, was “to bring about a change of heart among their oppressors, not to rouse women themselves” (*ibid.*, 139). This is very much the stance Premchand himself seems to take in his fiction, and it is, therefore, not surprising that on Rāshidu’l-Khairī’s

death, Premchand wrote an article paying tribute to him in Khairi's journal *ʿIṣmat* (qtd. in Minault 1998, 147–48).

The “woman question”—the position of women in society—had been a constant preoccupation since the early nineteenth century, both of social reformers and of the colonialists. The appropriation of this territory by the nationalists, as a project which could only be undertaken by Indians, was clear by the latter part of the nineteenth century. Orsini, drawing on Partha Chatterjee, says, “Debates on the ‘woman question’ [...] were also profoundly affected with the symbolic identification of womanhood with ‘Indianness,’ i.e., with India’s peculiar spiritual essence, that which made it superior to and essentially different from the West” (2002, 244). It would, of course, be facetious to suggest that either Rusvā or Premchand had been reading Partha Chatterjee, but both authors make a clear distinction between the “inner” and “outer” space with regard to women.

Orsini says “the values of ‘Indian womanhood’—modesty, sexual chastity, and moral purity; steadfast self-sacrifice and nurturing (whether in *seva* or maternity)—were conspicuously present in the work of male and female writers” (*ibid.*, 306), and Premchand is clearly one of these writers. There has, however, been some disagreement among critics of Premchand’s work as to his stance on women. Geetanjali Pandey’s view is that, whilst “Premchand showed an abiding and sensitive interest in the plight of women” he nevertheless “cherished the ideal of the traditional Hindu woman. His fiction always created as supreme the ideal(ised) self-effacing Hindu woman [...]. If his heroines are led astray initially, they reform themselves by the end of the narrative and do nothing to disturb the image of the ideal Hindu woman” (1986, 2183). This ideal is clearly reflected in the views expressed by Viṭṭhaldās in *Bāzār-e Ḥusn/Sēvāsadan*. In his conversation with Suman he says, “It is the true duty of Brahmin women to remain firm in tragedy and to endure hardship” (70). Pandey argues, that “even in his most radical moments” Premchand remained basically attached to the traditional ideal of the Hindu woman (1986, 2185). “In the final analysis, it is clearly a conservative ideal that Premchand upholds for women. [...] They are the perpetual givers. The takers among them remain the counter-ideal” (*ibid.*, 2183). One of these counter-models of womanhood was the so-called apparently modern, Western woman, “against whom Premchand betrays a particular prejudice” (Gupta 1991, 93). Premchand, like many of the nationalists of the time, was very anti-Westernized, educated women who acted like “mems” and he depicted them as having lax morals and a shallow character. We see something of this view in his brief but tongue-in-cheek depiction of Miss Kānti in *Bāzār-e Ḥusn/Sēvāsadan*.

Various other critics have seen Premchand in a similar light. Gita Lal says that for Premchand “[...] woman is the visible image of service, self-denial, self-sacrifice, purity, love, affection, self-control, courtesy, forgiveness, firmness, forbearance, modesty, pride, and other beautiful and generous emotions” (qtd. in Swan 1969, 99). According to Swan, when Premchand did portray women who were not the ideal they offered him “new subject matter from which to hang an old attitude” (Swan 1969, 119) and that:

It is with women who have gentleness, are long-suffering, and who practice self-denial that Premchand has his heart. He takes them through many sufferings as wives, widows, prostitutes; he disguises them as brahman women or chamarins, but whatever their identity they are generally put there to draw the reader's pity and to plead for a reform.

(*ibid.*, 101)

Swan asserts:

[O]ne sees many of his women characters put into difficult situations [...]; and there, as if with well-practiced movements, they go through the exercises of service, self-denial, self-sacrifice, purity, love, affection. Premchand's heroines [...] are often hemmed in by social circumstances that are weighted against them. They become literary pawns.”

(*ibid.*, 99)

This is echoed by Pandey, “To win respect and be idealised, women in Premchand's fiction have to pay a heavy price. They are deprived of their individual faces” (1986, 2187).

Charu Gupta is critical of this branding of Premchand as conservative and reactionary in his attitude toward women, yet many of the points she makes are very similar to those made by Pandey. She says, for example, “The feudal values of chastity, forgiveness, etc., are portrayed with a certain conviction and firmness” in his work (1991, 91). “Thus for women service is ideal, pleasure for oneself the counter-ideal; the image of woman as a selfless giver the ideal and the one who demands or takes is a shallow character and the counter-ideal” (*ibid.*). And she acknowledges that whilst he has a good grasp of the social problems concerning women, “the solutions and reforms advocated by him are relatively mild [...] and are not a shock to prevailing attitudes” (*ibid.*, 100).

This is very evident in his solutions in *Bāzār-e Husn/Sēvāsadan* where Suman is condemned to a life of service in a home for the daughters of prostitutes, and the prostitutes themselves are removed from the city. Both are safely consigned to areas outside “respectable” society. When he does hint at more radical reforms, he is careful not to offend his

readership. Bḥōlī Bāṛī the prostitute expresses highly articulate views about “the uncivilized custom of treating women as though they were second class citizens” (44). She tells Suman, “In every other country, women are independent. They can marry according to their own wishes and if there is no love left in their marriages, they can divorce their husbands” (*ibid.*). The virtues of the love marriage are also extolled by the “Christian” women who share Shāntā’s railway compartment (203). By putting such ideas into the mouths of characters who are seen as outside the respectable Hindu “*jāti*,” Premchand ensures that these views do not have to be taken too seriously.

Gupta compares Premchand’s view of women with that of Gandhi, focusing on their nurturant rather than their sexual capabilities and seeing them as “passive sexual objects but dutiful wives and mothers” (1991, 92). Subhādra is clearly one of these women, but one who has not quite fulfilled her role since she is unable to have children. That this is viewed as a failure on her part is evident when Premchand says of Padamsiṅgh, “He didn’t have the same love for Subhādra any more” (188). Although Premchand acknowledges that Subhādra was hurt by her husband’s changed feelings towards her, he makes no attempt to understand, from her point of view, what it would be like not to be able to have children. He merely puts it down to sins committed in a past life. Later, after she has shown an unexpected level of understanding and support for her husband, he says that Padamsiṅgh realized that “*even a childless woman* [emphasis added] can be a strong source of peace and happiness for her husband” (211). Leaving aside the patronizing tone, it is not clear how being childless would affect a woman’s ability to support her husband.

Premchand’s attitude toward Suman is completely the opposite of Rusvā’s toward Umrā’ō Jān. Umrā’ō clearly does not maintain her chastity and yet Rusvā is still tolerant and generous towards her. Suman does retain her chastity despite living in a brothel. Madan Gopal suggests: “In her mind there is a conflict between what is sin and what is virtue, and she resolves this conflict by deciding not to sell her body and by remaining only a nautch girl. She retains her orthodoxy and cooks her own food” (1964, 130). Or is it rather, as Sadiq maintains, that Premchand needs her to remain chaste in order to keep his readers on side. According to Sadiq, “Premchand has impaired the realism of the story by insisting on the technical purity of his heroine during her fall. Not quite certain how far he could carry the reader with him he has made a timid compromise” (1964, 348).

Despite this Suman cannot escape her punishment. According to Sharma, “A little lapse, the slightest indiscretion, can damn the Hindu

woman for life; not only her but anyone who is related to her or who tries to do anything for her" (1999, 74). Francesca Orsini observes that "once a woman lost her ritual purity there was literally no place for her in Hindu society" (Orsini 2002, 293). Of *Sēvāsadan* she says it examines the "dilemma of how a 'fallen' woman could be restored to some place within Hindu society [...]" (*ibid.*, 294). For Suman to achieve even partial redemption in Premchand's eyes, however, she will have to pay for her mistake for the rest of her life—there is no real forgiveness, no way back to respectable society. His view, according to Pandey, is that "a woman having once fallen could, unlike fallen men, not be fully taken back into society. That she had truly repented and completely changed her ways did not matter" (1986, 2185).

Orsini says of Suman, "Her odyssey and only partial retrieval through a new socially useful role [...] is long and arduous" (2002, 294). This is somewhat of an understatement. First she is married to an older man who subsequently throws her out. With nowhere to go she seeks refuge with friends who also turn her out to save their honor. After being lured into becoming a prostitute she is "rescued" by the would-be reformer Viṭṭhal-dās and "allowed" to live in a widows' ashram. When the truth about her emerges, she is forced to leave there too. She is not even allowed to live in respectable society as a domestic servant for her sister and brother-in-law. Finally she is offered a solution in the form of the orphanage for the daughters of prostitutes. For this "great opportunity to serve," she is pathetically grateful" (265).

That she had truly repented is clear for all to see, from her tireless work in the widows' home, her pious habits and her devotion to Shāntā. In spite of this, Premchand's punishment of her, both mental and physical, is relentless. Sadan, Shāntā and Subhādra all comment on the results at various times. Sadan seeing her at the river says that "she had changed dramatically, no long flowing hair [...] no laughing rosy lips [...] no sparkling eyes" (171). Shāntā asks, "[W]here are those playful, always smiling eyes? Is this Suman or her corpse?" (204–5). At the end of the novel Subhādra, taken aback at seeing Suman with "her head shorn and simply attired," also comments that she "no longer had her [...] smiling eyes and laughing smile" (268–69).

It can, of course, be argued that not all the views expressed in the novel are those of Premchand himself. It is also possible to see Premchand in different characters at different times—for example in Padamsiṅgh with his compassionate attitude towards the prostitutes, and in Suman when she exposes the hypocrisy of the Hindu "*jāti*." But whilst the novel can be viewed as polyphonic at this level, there is never any real

challenge to Premchand's views as author. In the final analysis it is Premchand who decides on the solution to the problems of both Suman and the courtesans. And it is Premchand as author who expels them from the city and places them where they are allowed little or no contact with "respectable" society. That Premchand's solution is not an effective one, can be seen in Ghulam Abbas's beautifully ironic story "Anandi" (2003, 324–49).

Given the similarity of the subject matter in the two novels it is interesting to see how far the authors' attitudes to it differ. From the above discussion it would appear at first sight that they are poles apart, but on closer examination it is clear that this is not the case. Despite the fact that Premchand's views regarding the "virtuous" woman are expressed very much in the language used by reformists and nationalists to describe the ideal Hindu woman, there is little real difference between him and Rusvā. Rusvā too sees the virtuous woman as long-suffering, ready to endure hardship, existing patiently within four walls and faithful to her husband whatever he does—the guardian of the inner sanctuary of the home.

As regards virtuous women who have "fallen" into prostitution, again both have remarkably similar views. Like Premchand, Rusvā has little sympathy for the respectable woman who, out of choice, follows a path of sin. His views are expressed by Umrā'ō Jān at the beginning of the novel where she says they should be "slaughtered like sheep," and by Rusvā as narrator towards the end where he talks of "depraved" women. They also seem to share the concept of "death before dishonor" as is shown in the scene with Umrā'ō's brother who suggests that it would have been better for her to have taken poison than dishonor her family (171). This is paralleled in *Bāzār-e Husn/Sēvāsadan* where Krishnachandra tells Gajādhār, "If you had only ended her life, it would never have come to this; there wouldn't be this stain on my family's reputation" (180).

There is nevertheless a significant difference in their attitudes and this is reflected in their choice of heroine. It is perhaps futile to speculate how Rusvā would have portrayed a respectable woman who became a courtesan of her own volition and how Premchand would have treated someone who was kidnapped and had no choice. I think the answer is that they could not, and would not, have done so. The difference between the two authors is ultimately to be found not so much in their attitudes toward women, but their attitudes toward society in general. For Premchand, intent on social reform, courtesans are necessarily a "bad thing." Rusvā, whilst acknowledging some of the negative aspects, is far more tolerant of their existence as part of the social order. By choosing a respectable woman who has deliberately strayed, Premchand can set out

to reform her, but also needs to punish her. By choosing a woman who, through no fault of her own, was forced to become a courtesan, Rusvā can treat her with admiration, affection and respect.

In addition to Premchand's didactic, reformist agenda, there is, perhaps, another reason Suman is treated so harshly by him, in comparison with Rusvā's treatment of Umrā'ō. This lies in the concept of different types of sin. In conversation with Umrā'ō, Rusvā says,

“Wise men have divided sinners into two categories—those whose deeds are limited to themselves and those whose acts affect other people as well. In my humble opinion, those in the first category are lesser and those in the second category are the greater sinners.” [...]

Take to drink or worship idols; burn the Kaaba or the Koran
These the Lord might perhaps forgive, but not that you hurt a man.

(176)

According to Rusvā as author, not even God can forgive the sin of hurting one's fellow man.

Umrā'ō's sins, therefore, are in the first category. She was forced, rather than chose to become a courtesan and, unlike Bismillāh, has never set out to ruin anyone or cause harm to her fellow human beings, especially her family. Suman's sins, however, are of the second kind. She makes a deliberate choice in becoming a courtesan and the fallout from this decision is catastrophic for her family and others around her. She acknowledges this herself when she says: “There is not another witch like me in this world. I have destroyed my family with my longing for pleasures. I am my father's murderer. I have put a knife to Shanta's throat” (196).

Bazaar-e Husn versus Sevasadan

If a combined reading of *Umrā'ō Jān Adā* and *Bāzār-e Husn/Sēvāsadan* proves illuminating, a similar reading of the Urdu and Hindi versions of Premchand's novel yields some equally interesting results. One of the difficulties, however, of comparing the Urdu and Hindi versions of any of Premchand's works is expressed best by the man himself talking of *Bāzār-e Husn*. In a letter to Imtiyāz 'Alī Tāj dated 3 September 1918 he writes: “I shall begin making a fair copy only if you can take on such an extensive work [...]. I shan't give you the trouble of fairing it out, *for while I do it I often change whole scenes* [emphasis added]” (qtd. in Rai 1991, 129). This, therefore, makes it impossible to know whether he added/

deleted certain parts when he wrote the Hindi version which was published in 1918, or if he made the changes to the already existing Urdu version when he produced the “fair copy” in 1918–19. Why would he not want the Urdu and Hindi versions to be identical? The answer is perhaps to be found in the differences in his prospective audiences.

The first interesting thing about the Urdu and Hindi versions of the novel is the title itself. It is tempting, as Harish Trivedi observes, to see this in terms of their differing literary cultures (2004, n.p.). For Urdu readers already acquainted with *Umrā'ō Jān Adā*, the Urdu title was hardly likely to offend, but for Hindi readers, many of whom, like Premchand, were influenced by the Arya Samaj and involved in social reform and the nationalist “project” on women, it would perhaps have signified some kind of forbidden attraction. As Dalmia points out, the “sober and uninspiring” title *Sēvāsadan* underlines the final redemption of the heroine and her role in “The House of Service” for prostitutes’ daughters, (as well as the play on words with the service given by courtesans and with Sadan’s name) rather than focusing on the courtesan’s quarter itself (2005, viii). In Dalmia’s opinion, it was the most apparent reading of the Hindi title, “the puritanical rather than that which suggested the lurid, which accounted for the initial appeal of the novel” for Hindi readers (*ibid.*). Despite this, Premchand did not change the title of the Urdu version. Maybe (given the problems he was having with publishing and selling work in Urdu) he thought that the Urdu reading public needed some kind of “titillating” title to interest them. If so, it did not work! Whereas the Hindi version of the book took everyone by storm when it came out and was universally acclaimed, the first edition selling out within a year, *Bāzār-e Ḥusn* achieved no great success. Amrit Rai suggests that this was because “[f]or Urdu readers, there was nothing new in an account of the life and the problems of prostitutes. Among others [...] Mirza Ruswa had already written on the subject, and written very well too” (1991, 132).

Throughout the two versions of the novel there are slight differences of vocabulary which lead to subtle differences in the portrayal of characters. For example: The older daughter Suman, grew up to be beautiful, flighty and arrogant (Hindi), dainty, playful, lively, proud and elegant (Urdu). The younger sister Shāntā was innocent, quiet and polite (Hindi), soft-spoken innocent and of a serious disposition (Urdu). (Premchand 2005, 2; 2003, 2). Sometimes, however, there are more marked differences in sentences and in the impression given between the Urdu and Hindi

versions.⁷ Take, for example, this section from Chapter 5 of the Urdu version describing Suman's actions when the young men pass her house each day:

No matter how busy she was, when she heard their voice Suman would come and stand behind the cane blinds. Her bold nature enjoyed such coquetry. She would do this merely to show off her beauty, and provoke others.

(2003, 15)

سمن چاہے کسی کام میں مشغول ہو، پران کی آواز سنتے ہی چتھ کی آڑ میں آ کر کھڑی ہو جاتی۔
اس کی شوخ طبیعت کو اس تاک جھانک میں ایک عجیب لطف حاصل ہوتا تھا۔ وہ محض اپنے حسن
کا جلوہ دکھانے کے لیے، محض دوسروں کو بے قرار کرنے کے لیے یہ کرشمہ دکھاتی تھی۔

The Hindi version reads:

[...] Even if Suman was busy, glimpses of her could be caught through the curtain. Her innocent heart received endless pleasure from this kind of flirting. She played these games not out of wickedness, but to show off the lustre of her beauty, to win over the hearts of others.

(2005, 17)

सुनम कोइ काम भी करती हो, पर उन्हें चिक की आइ से एक झलक दिखा देती। उसके चंचल हृदय को इस ताक-झाँक में असीम आनन्द प्राप्त होता था। किसी कुवासना से नहीं, केवल अपने यौवन की छटा दिखाने के लिए, केवल दूसरों के हृदय पर विजय पाने के लिए वह यह खेल खेलती थी।

There is a clear difference here in terms of Suman's intentions and hence her character. In the Hindi an "accidental" glimpse of her could be caught; in the Urdu she quite deliberately comes and stands where she is bound to be seen. In the Urdu version Suman seems to be more of a flirt, more deliberately out to attract men, whereas the Hindi makes her actions seem much more innocent. There are also certain sections that are present in one version of the novel but not in the other. When describing her feelings about the neighborhood women Premchand writes:

⁷All of the Urdu extracts are taken from (Prēmčand 2000) and the Hindi extracts from (Prēmčand 1994).

Suman would look down on them and try to avoid meeting them. [...] She thought—these women buy new ornaments and new clothes, and in my house we can barely afford roti. Am I the most unfortunate person in the world? *As a child, she had been taught only to please herself and enjoy life. She had not learnt the moral lesson nor acquired the religious education that plants the seeds of contentment in one's mind.*

(2005, 18)⁸

Chapter 15 begins with Premchand philosophizing about the different stages of life and man's desires. He compares the attempt to keep wine shops and gambling dens outside the city center, with the fact that brothels are there waiting to ensnare young men and he laments men's weakness and depravity. The first few paragraphs are the same in both versions but there is then an extra paragraph in the Hindi which is missing from the Urdu. It reads as follows:

That's why it is necessary to keep these venomous serpents away from the population, in a separate location. Then, we will have to think twice before going near such loathsome places. As long as they are kept away from the population and there are no good excuses to wander off there, fewer shameless men will dare to set foot in that relocated Minabazaar.

(2005, 65)

This difference is significant, not only because of the strength of the sentiments expressed in the passage, but because they are expressed by Premchand as author/narrator, rather than by one of the characters in the novel. In the Hindi version he would appear to be expressing his *own* view that the prostitutes should be moved out of the city whereas in the Urdu he expressed no such view.

There are two further differences in the two versions on the very last page of the novel. Subhadrā having visited Suman at Sēvāsadan is about to leave when a group of girls sings a song. The Hindi and Urdu versions of this song, as seen below, are completely different. The Hindi focuses on the idea of being “rid of desire,” an obvious reference to the occupation of courtesans, whereas the Urdu (which is not translated for some reason in Premchand 2003) is a patriotic song by the famous poet Iqbāl.

⁸The section in italics does not appear in the Urdu version.

سارے جہاں سے اچھا ہندوستان ہمارا
ہم بلبلیں ہیں اس کی یہ گلستاں ہمارا
گودی میں کھیلتی ہیں جس کی ہزاروں ندیاں
گلشن ہے جن کے دم سے رشکِ جناں ہمارا

हे जगत पिता, जगत प्रेभु,
मुझे अपना प्रेम और प्यार दे।
तेरी भक्ती में लगे मन मेरा,
विषय कामना को बिसार दे।

Whilst this difference seems simply a matter of the Urdu having a Persian feel which might not have seemed appropriate to Hindi readers, a far more important difference is found in the final parts of the conversation between the two women.

सुभद्रा: अब आप बैठिए, मुझे आज्ञा दीजिए।

सुमन: आपके आने से मैं कृतार्थ हो गई। आपकी भक्ति, आपका प्रेम, आपकी कार्यकुशलता, किस-किसकी बड़ाई करूँ। आप वास्तव में स्त्री समाज का शृंगार हैं। (सजल नेत्रों से) मैं तो अपने को आपकी दासी समझती हूँ। जब तक जीऊँगी, आप लोगों का यश मानती रहूँगी। मेरी बाँह पकड़ी और मुझे डूबने से बचा लिया। परमात्मा आप लोगों का सदैव कल्याण करें।

Subhadrā: You sit down, give me leave to go.

Suman: I am grateful that you came. Your devotion, your affection, your extraordinary efforts—which shall I praise? You really are the ornament of the community of women. (With moist eyes) I consider myself your servant. For as long as I live, I will be grateful to you. You caught my hand and saved me from drowning. May God always grant you good fortune.

[my translation]

If you compare this with the Urdu, the difference is immediately apparent. In the Hindi, Suman says the words that are spoken by Subhadrā in the Urdu, putting an entirely different complexion on what is said.

سہدرا: اب آپ بیٹھیے، میں چلتی ہوں۔
 سمن: آپ نے یہاں آ کر مجھ پر بڑا احسان کیا۔
 سہدرا: اور میں تو آپ کے درشنوں سے تر ہو گئی۔ آپ کی سرگرمی، آپ کا حسن انتظام،
 آپ کی مروّت اور اخلاق، کس کس کی تعریف کروں۔ آپ واقعی اپنی جنس کا سنگار ہیں۔
 سمن نے آنکھوں نے میں آنسو بھرے ہوئے کہا، ”میں تو اپنے تئیں آپ کی وہی لونڈی
 سمجھتی ہوں۔ میں جب تک جیوں گی، آپ لوگوں کا جس گاتی رہوں گی۔ آپ لوگوں نے میری
 بانہہ پکڑ کر بچا نہ لیا ہوتا تو اب تک میں کبھی کی ڈوب گئی ہوتی۔ پر ماتما آپ لوگوں کو سدا خوش و
 خرم رکھے۔“

Subhadrā: Now you sit down, I'm going.

Suman: In coming here you have done me a great kindness.

Subhadrā: And I'm also gladdened from seeing you. Your zeal, your good management, your fortitude/humanity and your virtue [morality!] which shall I praise? You truly are the pride of womanhood.

Suman, her eyes filled with tears said, "I will always consider myself your humble servant. For as long as I live I'll sing your praises. I wouldn't have been saved if you hadn't caught my hand. I would have been drowned. May God give you good fortune always."

[my translation]

What makes this so striking is that in the Hindi version Suman is portrayed at the end as the repentant sinner, pitifully grateful to Subhadrā for bothering to come and see her, and the praise is completely one way. In the Urdu version, the picture of Suman is different. She is still extremely grateful to Subhadrā, but Subhadrā herself also recognizes Suman as a worthy human being. In this version Premchand is giving Suman far more respect. What is even more striking is that in both the Hindi and Urdu versions Gajādhār/Gujānand has previously expressed virtually identical sentiments about Suman. "I am confident that one day she will be a jewel of the women's community" (2005, 181; 2003, 171).

This raises certain questions. Did Premchand not notice this difference? Was it a mistake? Or did he not feel that Suman would be thought worthy of such praise by Hindi readers? It is impossible to answer this, but it is clear from the next example that, in compiling the two versions, some mistakes were very definitely made.

In the chapter where Padamsiṅgh's resolution regarding the removal

of the courtesans is debated there is a paragraph which makes *perfect* sense in the Urdu version, but *no* sense at all in the Hindi version.

حکیم شہرت خان نے کہا، ”مجھے سید تیغ علی صاحب کے خیالات بجا معلوم ہوتے ہیں۔ پہلے ان خبیث ہستیوں کو شہر بدر کر دینا چاہیے۔ اس کے بعد اگر وہ جائز طریق پر زندگی بسر کرنا چاہیں تو کافی اطمینان کے بعد انہیں امتحاناً شہر میں آباد ہونے کی اجازت دینی چاہیے۔ شہر کا دروازہ کسی پر بند نہیں ہے۔ مجھے کامل یقین ہے کہ ترمیم سے اس تجویز کا مقصد غائب ہو جائے گا۔“

A literal translation of this is as follows:

Ḥakīm Shuhrat Khān said, “Sayyid Tēgh ‘Alī Ṣāhib’s thought seems to me to be *proper/suitable/true*. First these depraved low-class women need to be expelled from the town. After that, if they wish to lead their lives in a proper manner, then, after a fair amount of assurance, they should be given permission to settle in the city *on trial*. The door of the city is not closed to anyone. I am *completely* sure that with the amendment the intention of this resolution will be *lost*.”

[my translation]

The words in italics are incorrect in the Hindi version. As a result it makes no sense either grammatically or in terms of its argument. The opening sentence directly contradicts the final one.

हकीम शोहरत खाँ ने कहा – मुझे सैयद तेगअली के खयालात बेजा मालूम होते हैं। पहले इन खबीस हस्तियों को शहरबदर कर देना चाहिए। इस के बाद अगर वह जायज़ तरीके पर ज़िनदगी बसर करना चाहें, तो काफ़ी इतमीनान के बाद उन्हें इम्तहान शहर में आकर आबाद होने की इजाज़त देनी चाहिए। शहर का दरवाज़ा बन्द नहीं है, जो चाहे यहाँ आबाद हो सकता है। मुझे काबिल यकीन है कि तर्मीम से इस तजवीज़ का मकसद ग़ायब हो जाएगा।

A literal translation of the Hindi reads as follows:

“Ḥakīm Shuhrat Khān said—Sayyid Tēgh ‘Alī’s thoughts seem to me to be *out of place*. First these depraved low-class women should be expelled from the city. After that, if they wish to lead their lives in a proper manner, then, after a fair amount of assurance, they should be given permission to settle in the *examination/test* city. The door of the city is not closed, who-

ever wants to can settle here. I am *capable* belief that with the amendment the intention of this resolution will *be lost*.”

[my translation]

What has happened here is a matter of carelessness or misunderstanding when Urdu has been written in Hindi script—“*bajā*” meaning “appropriate” or “suitable” has been written in Hindi as “*bējā*” which means exactly the opposite. “*Imtiḥānan*” with *alif tanvīn* as in the Urdu version means “*on trial*” but the Hindi simply reads “*imtībān*” meaning “*exam*.” Somehow “*kāmil*” (completely) has been written as “*kābil*” (Urdu “*qābil*”) meaning “capable.”

The final sentence of the paragraph in the Hindi is correct, but in what is, presumably, an attempt to make sense of a nonsensical paragraph, Shingavi translates the opposite of the original Hindi: “I am certain that the amendment is *in line* with the intention of the resolution” (2005, 207). In doing so, however, he puts the council member Shuhrat Khān on the wrong side of the debate!

Conclusion

Taken together, *Umrā’ō Jān Adā* and *Bāzār-e Husn/Sēvāsadan* create a fascinating picture of the position of women in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century India. They show the evils of the dowry system, the caste system, and criticize the selling of women into marriage to unsuitable men by unscrupulous (or desperate) male relatives. Against the background picture of the perfect, chaste, pious, self-sacrificing wife idealized by men and yet neglected by them, they depict the life of the courtesan over a period of approximately eighty years and trace the decline of her status in society.

Whilst differing in their views on didacticism and the social purpose of literature, some of Rusvā’s and Premchand’s messages in the two novels are remarkably similar. Both comment on the plight of women forced for various reasons into prostitution/dancing/singing and portray the hypocrisy of a society where courtesans are given status in public life but are considered to be beyond the pale of respectable society. They also both draw attention to the discrepancy, and again hypocrisy, in society’s attitudes toward men and women who stray from the respectable path. In *Umrā’ō Jān Adā* we see navābs, lawyers, and even maulvis come and go with complete ease between the *kōṭhā* of the courtesan and the private “inner” sphere of their respectable home without damaging their reputations. In *Bāzār-e Husn/Sēvāsadan*, Sadan is welcomed back into

the arms of his family whereas Suman is condemned to a life of loneliness outside respectable society.

In addition to these social issues, both novels deal with the universal themes of good and evil and sin. Premchand, however, is constrained by the historical and social context and his desire for reform. His views on women, as we have seen, are firmly rooted in the nationalist ideal of the Hindu woman of the time, and Suman must be judged against that ideal. In *Umrā'ō Jān Adā*, by focusing on the individual rather than society, Rusvā succeeds in transcending the historical and social context of his time and making these themes truly universal. □

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