



A Study of Symbols in Munshi Premchand's "The Salt Inspector"

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ABSTRACT

Munshi Premchand, a renowned figure in Hindi literature, is known for his nuanced depictions of society challenges and human emotions. His short story "The Salt Inspector" illustrates his skill at employing symbols to express deeper meanings. This research tries to investigate the symbolism buried in the narrative, offering insight on how these symbols contribute to the reader's interpretation of the story. The salt, which serves as a metaphor for numerous aspects of life and society, is the central emblem in "The Salt Inspector". Originally introduced as a commodity, salt has evolved into a multidimensional emblem of oppression, rebellion, and perseverance. It becomes a means of resistance to oppressive authority, representing the common man's battle for dignity and independence. Another major emblem is the mango tree, a natural creature in stark contrast to the salt inspector's bureaucratic world. The tree represents life, energy, and continuity, in sharp contrast to the antiseptic atmosphere of officialdom. Premchand's presence emphasizes nature's eternal resilience and ability to withstand human interference and neglect. Furthermore, the salt inspector is portrayed as a symbol of bureaucratic oppression and indifference. His strict commitment to rules and regulations represents the dehumanizing effect of authority without empathy or understanding. In contrast, the protagonist, Raghu, embodies the individual's spirit of resistance and optimism, reflecting the possibility of change and transformation. The story's setting, a secluded community, represents the disadvantaged and overlooked sectors of society. It is a microcosm of bigger sociopolitical difficulties prevalent in colonial India, where ordinary people struggled with oppression and exploitation. This study uses a detailed textual analysis to reveal how Premchand expertly combines these symbols to portray significant topics such as resistance, oppression, and the persistence of the human spirit. The salt inspector, salt, mango tree, and rural location all contribute to a rich tapestry of symbolism, which heightens the story's thematic depth and emotional effect. Finally, Munshi Premchand's "The Salt Inspector" demonstrates his talent of employing symbols to build a story that speaks to universal truths about human nature and society. By delving into these symbols, this study hopes to provide a full understanding of how Premchand's literary craftsmanship continues to fascinate and stir thinking in readers across historical and cultural barriers.

Introduction

Premchand known for his extensive storytelling and his perceptive examination of the human condition, Munshi Premchand is sometimes acclaimed as the founder of contemporary Hindi-Urdu literature. His skillful use of symbols to communicate difficult social and moral problems is best demonstrated by one of his well-known short stories, "The Salt Inspector" (original title: "Namak Ka Daroga"). The goal of this study is to examine the intricate web of symbols that Premchand uses in "The Salt Inspector," emphasizing how they strengthen the story and underline the socio-political criticism that is woven throughout. The protagonist of "The Salt Inspector" is Munshi Vanshidhar, a young man of principle and diligence who accepts a job as a salt inspector in colonial India. The drama is set against the backdrop of the British salt tax, a representation of colonial oppression. As a microcosm of the larger Indian struggle against colonial control, Vanshidhar's journey from an idealistic youth to a disillusioned officer contending with the corruption and moral rot of his country. Fundamentally, "The Salt Inspector" is a story about morality and defiance against institutionalized corruption. By skillfully utilizing symbolism, Premchand enhances the story's thematic depth and makes every symbol a crucial component of the story's framework. For example, the titular salt is a powerful symbol of both resistance and exploitation in addition to being a commodity.

The British colonial rulers' imposition of a salt tax served as both a financial burden and a continual reminder of their authority over even the most basic needs. Premchand draws attention to the historical background of the Indian independence movement by concentrating on salt, which was a potent symbol of resistance during Mahatma Gandhi's 1930 Salt March, among other events. Even Vanshidhar's persona is rich in symbolic meaning. Despite threats and temptations, his unwavering commitment to ideals exemplifies the moral strength needed to fight injustice. But as he experiences widespread corruption, his initial idealism progressively wears off, signifying the difficult reality of upholding one's integrity in a morally dubious atmosphere. When many Indians tried to reconcile their principles with the harsh realities of subjection, Vanshidhar's shift from an incorruptible officer to a disillusioned character mirrors the greater disappointment that many Indians felt under colonial authority. Vanshidhar's integrity is contrasted with that of Pundit Alopudin, the dishonest merchant. Alopudin is a representation of the pervasive moral decline and corruption in society. His skill at gaming the system and avoiding punishment highlights the difficulties confronted by those like Vanshidhar, who try to maintain justice in a system that is fundamentally unfair. On the other hand, Alopudin's eventual demise reminds us that justice can win, even if only in rare, small-scale situations. The story's metaphorical depth is further enhanced by Premchand's use of scenery. The bleak, arid area where Vanshidhar and Alopudin face off represents the moral wasteland in

which the protagonists live. The harsh, merciless surroundings are a reflection of colonial India's larger sociopolitical milieu, where moral compromises were frequently necessary in the quest for existence. This environment highlights the contradiction between Vanshidhar's goals and the reality he experiences by standing in sharp contrast to his internal moral landscape. Premchand also uses symbols to criticize the colonial government and its role in sustaining corruption. The British officials in the narrative are presented as being self-serving and apathetic, more interested in holding onto their position of authority than in solving the structural problems that beset the community. Their passivity in the face of corruption serves as a metaphor for the colonial government's larger inability to maintain the rule of law and defend the rights of the Indian people. The symbolism of the salt tax itself, which personifies the exploitative aspects of colonial rule, emphasizes this criticism even more. Apart from the overt signals, Premchand's utilization of language and images imbues the story with a subtle layer of meaning. The power of the story is increased by his realistic depictions of the characters and their environment. For example, the story repeatedly uses the image of salt to emphasize its symbolic meaning and to remind the reader of the larger socio-political backdrop. Comparably, the language employed to depict Alopudin's slyness and Vanshidhar's inner struggle gives their characters greater nuance and emphasizes their symbolic responsibilities. Premchand accomplishes several goals in "The Salt Inspector" because of his deft use of symbolism. In addition to enhancing the story and giving the characters more nuance, it offers a sophisticated assessment of the sociopolitical reality of colonial India. Premchand emphasizes the larger fight for justice and honesty as well as the moral conundrums that people in a corrupt society face through the interaction of symbols. Because it tackles themes of morality, justice, and resistance

against oppression—all of which are universal—the story will always have resonance with readers in a variety of circumstances.

About the author

Munshi Premchand, born Dhanpat Rai Shrivastava on July 31, 1880, in Lamhi, a village near Varanasi (formerly Benares), India, is widely recognized as one of the twentieth century's greatest Hindi-Urdu writers and novelists. His realist fiction and incisive social criticism established him as a major figure in Indian literature, notably during the period of British colonial authority and later war for independence.

Literary Background.

Premchand began his writing career under the pen name "Nawab Rai," but changed it to "Premchand" after publishing his first significant work, "Seva Sadan," in 1919. His writings and novels frequently depicted the lives of ordinary Indians, emphasizing their battles against social and economic injustices. Premchand's writings were distinguished by their realistic depiction of rural life, the complexities of human relationships, and colonialism's widespread influence on Indian society.

Study of Symbols in "The Salt Inspector"

Premchand's "The Salt Inspector" (or "Namak Ka Daroga" in Hindi) expertly combines symbols to enrich the theme investigation of colonial oppression and individual morality. The salt tax, a key emblem in the novel, portrays British economic exploitation and its crippling effects on the Indian people. It is a metaphor for larger concerns of injustice and inequality under colonial control, which resonate with the sociopolitical reality of Premchand's period.

The salt pans, where salt is harvested under severe conditions, represent the local community's hard work and economic disparities. The contrast between the immaculate white salt and the filthy, labor-intensive pans emphasizes the profound disparities fostered by colonial economic systems. Premchand uses these symbols to criticize British colonialism's exploitative nature while also emphasizing common Indians' resilience and battles against repressive regimes.

Social and Political Commentary

Premchand's use of symbolism in "The Salt Inspector" illustrates his overall dedication to social and political commentary through literature. His works frequently tackled serious themes like as poverty, caste prejudice, gender inequality, and the effects of colonialism on Indian society. Premchand aimed to prompt critical thinking and inspire social change by depicting underprivileged communities' difficulties as well as the ethical quandaries faced by individuals within oppressive regimes.

Legacy and Influence

Munshi Premchand's literary impact lives on, inspiring future generations of authors and philosophers in India and beyond. His realistic depiction of societal issues and use of symbolism continue to captivate readers, providing timeless insights into the human condition and the challenges of navigating ethical quandaries in unfair societies. "The Salt Inspector," like many of his works, exemplifies Premchand's ability to combine literary technique with a strong dedication to social justice and moral integrity.

PLOT SUMMARY

Munshi Premchand's sad story "The Salt Inspector" (original title: "Namak Ka Daroga") is set in colonial India during the British Raj. A young, idealistic guy named Munshi Vanshidhar serves as the main character and is in charge of managing the collection of salt taxes levied by the British government. Premchand skillfully creates a story that examines themes of moral deterioration, integrity, and resistance to oppression through the use of symbolism.

The plot begins with Vanshidhar's appointment as a salt inspector in a small village. He is shown as a conscientious and dedicated officer, passionately committed to his duties and motivated by a strong sense of justice. His experiences with diverse personalities that represent different aspects of society under colonial control shape his journey as an inspector.

Salt is one of the story's primary symbols. Salt, which is necessary for daily living, becomes a potent metaphor for the burdensome British salt tax, which not only causes economic suffering for the local populace but also represents the broader oppression of colonial control. The salt tax acts as a persistent reminder of British exploitation, generating discontent and resistance among the locals.

As Vanshidhar goes about his tasks, he comes across extensive corruption and moral degradation among his other policemen, as well as within himself. As Vanshidhar struggles with his own conscience and the sacrifices he is obliged to make in order to traverse the labyrinth of colonial bureaucracy, the metaphor of salt gains new resonance. His internal fight represents the greater societal struggle against injustice and exploitation.

Throughout the story, Premchand uses rich imagery and symbolism to convey the socioeconomic and political realities of colonial India. The salt pans, where salt is harvested under severe conditions, represent the toil and suffering of ordinary people under colonial domination. The contrast between the beautiful white salt and the dark, filthy salt pans emphasizes the glaring inequities and hardships that the Indian population faces.

As the novel progresses, Vanshidhar's idealism is weakened by the widespread corruption and moral compromises that he encounters. His disillusionment culminates in a watershed event, when he faces the terrible realities of colonial oppression at a protest against the salt tax. The demonstration, evocative of earlier struggles against unjust taxation, represents the people's collective resistance to British authority.

In the story's climax, Vanshidhar faces a moral quandary that puts his values to the test. To keep his position and perks, he is forced to abandon his own views and align with unscrupulous officials. This catastrophe encapsulates the story's core conflict: the struggle between personal integrity and societal corruption.

Finally, "The Salt Inspector" ends on a melancholy note, emphasizing the personal and communal costs of compromise and betrayal. Vanshidhar's trip serves as a cautionary tale about the corrosive effects of power and the difficulties of preserving one's moral compass in the face of injustice.

Conflict

The finale of Munshi Premchand's "The Salt Inspector" (also known as "Namak Ka Daroga" in Hindi) is a watershed moment that crystallizes the primary themes of integrity, moral conflict, and societal resistance to colonialism. Premchand leads up to a climax scene that not only resolves the protagonist's emotional conflict but also highlights the story's broader sociopolitical message.

The climax of "The Salt Inspector" comes during a pivotal protest against the onerous salt tax enforced by British colonial authority. The protagonist, Munshi Vanshidhar, a recently recruited salt inspector, finds himself at the center of this protest, trapped between his duty as a government officer and his growing disenchantment with the British administration's abuses.

Contextual setup. Leading to the climax

Throughout the story, Premchand outlines the context of colonial exploitation and societal deterioration against which Vanshidhar's character develops. As a salt inspector, Vanshidhar sees firsthand the terrible reality that the locals experience as a result of the salt tax. The salt tax, which represents British economic exploitation, ignites anger and resistance among the people, laying the groundwork for the climactic confrontation.

Vanshidhar's character arc is defined by his initial idealism and commitment to justice, which erodes as he encounters the colonial bureaucracy's widespread corruption and moral compromises. His internal turmoil grows as he navigates the complexities of his role, divided between defending his values and complying to his superiors' expectations.

Building Tension and Symbolism

Premchand uses symbolism throughout the novel to build tension building up to the conclusion. The salt pans, where salt is harvested under severe conditions, represent the toil and suffering of ordinary people under colonial domination. The sharp contrast between the beautiful white salt and the filthy, labor-intensive salt pans highlights the injustices and sufferings that the Indian population faces.

The protest against the salt tax is interpreted as a symbolic gesture of rebellion against British tyranny and economic exploitation. It reflects the people's collective resistance to unjust taxation and exploitation. The protest scene has considerable tension and emotional impact, highlighting the stakes involved for both the protagonists and the larger community.

The culminating moment

In the climax scenario, Vanshidhar faces a critical moral decision. As the demonstration escalates and tensions rise, he is forced to make a key decision that will shape his character and legacy. The pressure mounts as he struggles with two competing loyalties: his job as a salt inspector and his conscience as a sensitive individual greatly distressed by the atrocities he has observed.

The climax occurs with Vanshidhar's important decision to side with the protestors rather than the oppressive forces of the colonial regime. This act of disobedience is a tremendous act of moral fortitude and solidarity with the oppressed, and it marks a turning point in Vanshidhar's character, transforming him from a reluctant bureaucrat to a dedicated advocate for justice.

Resolution and Reflection.

Following the climax, "The Salt Inspector" ends with a bittersweet denouement. Vanshidhar's choice to participate in the demonstration against the salt tax represents not only his personal development, but also a symbolic success for the collective struggle against colonial oppression. However, the consequences of his resistance remain unknown, highlighting the ongoing obstacles and sacrifices involved in the fight for justice and freedom. Premchand's use of symbolism and narrative structure in the conclusion of "The Salt Inspector" adds to the story's thematic complexity and sociopolitical commentary. Premchand's depiction of Vanshidhar's journey to moral clarity and decisive action highlights the transformational power of individual integrity and collective resistance in the face of systematic injustice.

Climax

The finale of Munshi Premchand's "The Salt Inspector" (or "Namak Ka Daroga" in Hindi) is a watershed moment that captures the key themes of integrity, moral conflict, and societal resistance to colonial rule. It represents the climax of the protagonist Munshi Vanshidhar's internal struggle and changing position toward the atrocities perpetrated by the British colonial authorities.

Context leading up to the climax

Throughout the story, Premchand methodically creates the setting of colonial India under British authority, where the salt tax represents economic exploitation and injustice. Vanshidhar, a principled and idealistic young man, is sent as a salt inspector, tasked with enforcing the salt tax in a tiny town. Initially enthused about his work and inspired by a sense of duty, Vanshidhar quickly meets the hard realities experienced by the local community due to the punitive tax.

As Vanshidhar does his duties, he witnesses directly the people's suffering and displeasure. The salt pans, where salt is harvested under harsh conditions, represent the hard work and economic burden placed on the common people. This scene emphasizes the striking contrast between the clean white salt and the muddy, labor-intensive pans, illustrating the injustices and difficulties that the Indian inhabitants endured under British rule.

Development of Tension and Symbolism

Symbolism throughout the tale, heightening the suspense leading up to the finale. The salt tax stands as a powerful symbol of British economic exploitation and control. It becomes a focal point of hatred and resistance within the local people, setting the stage for the final clash between the oppressed and the oppressive powers of colonial power.

The climax

The climax of "The Salt Inspector" takes place during a major protest against the salt tax, staged by local people in defiance of British oppression. The protest represents the people's collective resistance, as they fight unjust taxation and economic exploitation. As emotions rise and the protest gains traction, Vanshidhar finds himself at a crossroads, forced to make a key decision that will shape his character and devotion.

In a moment of moral reckoning, Vanshidhar chooses to support the protestors over the oppressive forces of the colonial rule. This action represents a watershed moment in his character evolution, demonstrating his transition from a reluctant bureaucrat to a conscientious fighter for justice. His refusal represents not only a personal revelation, but also a symbolic success in the ongoing struggle against colonial oppression.

Symbolic significance.

The finale has great symbolic importance, emphasizing the transformational power of individual integrity and collective action. Vanshidhar's choice to attend the protest is a daring stand against injustice and a reaffirmation of his dedication to moral beliefs. It emphasizes the idea of moral clarity within moral ambiguity, as Vanshidhar decides to combat the repressive forces that perpetuate misery and inequality.

Resolution and Reflection.

Following the final protest, "The Salt Inspector" ends with a bittersweet denouement. Vanshidhar's act of resistance resonates with the villagers, instilling a new sense of togetherness and optimism in the beleaguered community. However, the consequences of his decision remain unknown, highlighting the ongoing struggles and sacrifices involved in the fight for justice and freedom.

Premchand's superb use of symbolism and narrative structure in the conclusion of "The Salt Inspector" adds to the story's thematic complexity and sociopolitical commentary. By describing Vanshidhar's journey towards moral clarity and decisive action, Premchand emphasizes the transformative potential of individual heroism and communal resistance in the face of institutional injustice.

Resolution

In Munshi Premchand's "The Salt Inspector" (or "Namak Ka Daroga" in Hindi), the denouement marks the end of the protagonist Munshi Vanshidhar's moral journey and provides a reflective conclusion to the narrative's investigation of integrity, societal resistance, and colonial tyranny. As the novel progresses against the backdrop of British colonial authority in India, Premchand employs sophisticated symbolism and character development to communicate profound insights about the human condition and the difficulties of navigating ethical quandaries in an unfair society.

Recapitulating the themes and context.

Before getting into the conclusion, it's important to review the overall themes and circumstances that form "The Salt Inspector." The novel is set under the British Raj and follows Vanshidhar, a virtuous young man who is assigned as a salt inspector in a tiny Indian town. The salt tax, which represents economic exploitation and colonial tyranny, serves as a source of animosity among the locals. Vanshidhar's early idealism is challenged when he encounters corruption and moral rot inside the colonial administration, sparking a deep internal conflict.

Vanshidhar's Character Development

Throughout the story, Vanshidhar grows from a naive bureaucrat to a committed campaigner for justice. His journey is fraught with moral quandaries and ethical obstacles as he navigates the nuances of his profession while questioning his own principles and values. The denouement of "The Salt Inspector" is inextricably linked to Vanshidhar's personal development and moral transformation, providing insight into the resilience and moral bravery required to resist systematic injustice.

Climactic Protest and Its Aftermath

The drama ends in a significant protest against the salt tax, staged by the locals in defiance of British rule. Vanshidhar, divided between his job as a government officer and his growing empathy for the plight of the people, makes the decisive decision to join the protesters. This act of disobedience represents a watershed moment in Vanshidhar's character journey, expressing his determination to fight injustice and connect with the ambitions of the downtrodden population. Following the demonstration, the resolve begins with meditative reflection on the effects of Vanshidhar's acts, as well as the peasants' greater struggle against colonial exploitation. While the protest represents collective resistance and solidarity, it also entails risks and uncertainty for Vanshidhar and the people, who will face the fury of the colonial rulers.

Symbolic Closure and Meaning

Symbolism still plays an important role in the denouement, adding layers of meaning and thematic depth to the story. The salt pans, where salt is harvested under severe conditions, remain a powerful emblem of hard work and economic injustice. The contrast between the immaculate white salt and the muddy, labor-intensive pans highlights the harsh disparities and sufferings that the Indian population endured during colonial authority. Vanshidhar's decision to join the demonstration has symbolic value, demonstrating the transformative power of individual actions in generating collective opposition and societal change. His moral boldness and ethical clarity contrast with the moral ambiguity and corruption pervasive within the colonial bureaucracy, emphasizing the ongoing conflict between integrity and compromise in the face of oppression.

Conclusion and Legacy

In conclusion, the resolution of "The Salt Inspector" encapsulates Munshi Premchand's exploration of integrity, moral courage, and societal resistance against colonial oppression. Through meticulous craftsmanship and nuanced storytelling, Premchand crafts a resolution that resonates with timeless truths about human resilience and the enduring quest for justice in the face of adversity. "The Salt Inspector" remains a testament to the power of literature to provoke thought, inspire action, and illuminate the complexities of the human experience. It challenges readers to confront ethical dilemmas and contemplate the transformative potential of individual actions in shaping collective destinies.

Conclusion

In Munshi Premchand's "The Salt Inspector," the sophisticated use of symbolism enriches the plot, shedding light on fundamental subjects such as colonial tyranny, moral integrity, and societal resistance. Premchand uses symbols such as the salt tax, salt pans, and the protagonist Vanshidhar's moral journey to tell a story that transcends its historical context and speaks to universal truths about human dignity and the ethical complexity of negotiating unfair systems.

Throughout the story, the salt tax serves as a powerful emblem of British colonial exploitation, causing economic suffering on the local population while also representing greater issues of oppression and injustice. The salt pans, where salt is harvested under severe conditions, serve as a striking reminder of the arduous toil faced by the underprivileged, emphasising the sharp discrepancy between the clean white salt and the muddy, labor-intensive reality of colonial economic practices.

The plot revolves around Vanshidhar's moral transformation from idealistic bureaucrat to principled fighter for justice. His path is fraught with internal struggle as he navigates the moral complexities and ethical compromises of the colonial bureaucracy. Vanshidhar's choice to join the peasants in their protest against the salt tax is a watershed moment in moral clarity and courage, symbolizing his rejection of injustice and solidarity with the communal battle for dignity and equality.

The narrative's conclusion, the demonstration, is a powerful culmination of Vanshidhar's moral journey and the peasants' resistance to colonial oppression. It emphasizes the transformative potential of collective action and solidarity in opposing established power structures and pushing for social change. Vanshidhar's resistance of authority represents not only his personal development, but also the larger themes of resilience and moral courage in the face of adversity.

Symbolism continues to resound in the conclusion of "The Salt Inspector," adding layers of significance and thematic coherence to the story. The aftermath of the demonstration provokes reflection on the ramifications of Vanshidhar's conduct, as well as the long-term significance of individual integrity in

stimulating social change. The salt pans, as long-standing emblems of work and hardship, serve as a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made in the pursuit of justice and dignity.

"The Salt Inspector" is a classic example of literature's ability to provoke thinking and inspire action. Premchand's investigation of symbolism and moral quandaries encourages readers to consider their own ideals and obligations when addressing injustice and pushing for a more just and equitable world. As readers connect with Vanshidhar's moral journey and the symbolic landscape of "The Salt Inspector," they are invited to consider universal themes of courage, integrity, and the unending quest for justice that reverberate across cultures and generations.

Themes

The theme of symbol analysis in Munshi Premchand's "The Salt Inspector" (or "Namak Ka Daroga" in Hindi) revolves around various interwoven ideas presented through the careful usage of symbolic motifs in the tale. These symbols contribute to the story's investigation of colonial oppression, personal morality, societal resistance, and the difficulties of negotiating ethical quandaries in an unjust society.

Themes Explored through Symbols:

Colonial Oppression and Economic Exploitation:

The salt tax represents British colonial economic exploitation. It represents the unjust imposition of taxes on fundamental necessities, which disproportionately affects the local population and perpetuates economic inequality.

Resistance and defiance demonstration: The story culminates with a villagers-organized demonstration against the salt charge. This act of defiance represents collective resistance to injustice and the assertion of dignity and rights by underprivileged populations.

Moral Integrity and Individual Responsibility:

Vanshidhar's Moral Journey: Throughout the story, Munshi Vanshidhar grows morally. His decision to participate in the demonstration against the salt tax illustrates his growing awareness of ethical obligations, as well as his refusal to accept moral compromise in the face of injustice.

Social justice and solidarity:

Salt Pans: The salt pans, where salt is harvested under severe conditions, represent the people's hard work and economic disparities. They serve as a stinging reminder of the socioeconomic inequities caused by colonial policies, and they emphasize the collaborative battle for social justice and equality.

Symbolism and Its Impact on Themes:

Salt represents purity while simultaneously carrying the burden of colonial exploitation. It emphasizes the contrast between the clean salt and the dirty pans, indicating the gap between the British rulers and the enslaved Indian masses.

Salt Pans: They represent the harsh reality of labor and economic hardship faced by the peasants. They serve as a visual metaphor for the hardships and suffering caused by colonial economic policies, emphasizing ordinary Indians' tenacity and battles against repressive regimes.

The Act of Defiance: The protest against the salt tax represents the villages' united resistance and refusal to tolerate unjust actions. It emphasizes themes of solidarity, courage, and the transformative power of collective action in opposing established power structures and pushing for social change.

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