Premchand in World Languages

Translation, reception and cinematic representations

Edited by
M. Asaduddin

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PREMCHAND IN WORLD LANGUAGES

This volume explores the reception of Premchand's works and his influence in the perception of India among Western cultures, especially Russian, German, French, Spanish and English. The chapters in the collection also take a critical look at multiple translations of the same work (and examine how each new translation expands the work's textuality and annexes new readership for the author) as well as representations of celluloid adaptations of Premchand's works.

An important intervention in the field of translation studies, this book will interest scholars and researchers of comparative literature, cultural studies and film studies.

M. Asaduddin is Professor of English and Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Languages at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India, and Director, Jamia Centenary History Project. He writes on literature, language politics and translation studies. He was a Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence at Rutgers University, New Jersey, USA (2008–9), and Visiting Professor/Fellow at several universities in India and outside. His publications include *Filming Fiction: Tagore, Premchand and Ray* (2012), *A Life in Words* (2012), *For Freedom's Sake: Manto* (2002) and *Lifting the Veil: Selected Writings of Ismat Chughtai* (2001). He has received several prizes for his translations including the Katha Award, the Dr A. K. Ramanujan Award, the Sahitya Akademi (National Academy of Letters) Award and the Crossword Book Award.

'The name Premchand inspires affection, a feeling of one's ownness, more than anything else. He is, and has been, respected and admired perennially: as a writer of an India that was in turmoil and transition. More than almost any other writer, Premchand was aware of both.

Any examination or re-examination of Premchand is always welcome. He has been translated copiously, sometimes into languages which have little in common with the Urdu/Hindi that he wrote in. He himself ventured into the world of films (with scant success) and films based on his fiction have been made (though with scant success, again).

From all points of view: translation, interpretation, mediation through performing arts, the instant collection of chapters is a valuable contribution to Premchand studies.'

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, Urdu writer,
poet and critic, Allahabad, India

'World writers become so by fame or through translation – sometimes both. To what extent is Premchand a world writer? This volume brilliantly opens up the question by exploring the many dimensions of translation across media and across languages – English, other European languages, Soviet Russian – as well as paying attention to Premchand's own multiple translation practices. A path-breaking book, meticulously researched, it brings the most famous Hindi–Urdu writer of the early twentieth century bang into current debates on translation and world literature. A must for students of translation studies, comparative literature and world literature.'

Francesca Orsini, Professor of Hindi and
South Asian Literature, School of Oriental
and African Studies, London, UK

'*Premchand in World Languages* tells a captivating story about the uneven fortunes of an Indian vernacular author on the global stage, offering startling insight into the creation of national literary culture in colonial and post-colonial India, and the currency of world literature in its many avatars (including in television and film). M. Asaduddin has assembled a rich array of contributions that treat translation as a dynamic, multidirectional negotiation. Together these articles demonstrate how Premchand's popularity in Russian vs. Spanish, German or French reveals as much about the shifting ideological commitments of the home audience itself as the quality of the source text or the translated versions, and likewise force us to question the terms we should use when the "translation" is never called that as such but skillfully mediates political differences and artistic visions both nationally and internationally. This volume promises to edify both specialists of South Asia and non-specialists alike, especially anyone interested in the complex circulations of world literature.'

Christi A. Merrill, Associate Professor of
South Asian Literature and Postcolonial Theory,
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA

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M. Asaduddin

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INTRODUCTION

M. Asaduddin

Premchand (1880–1936), the iconic Indian writer, belongs to the literary culture and tradition of two language literatures, namely, Urdu and Hindi, and pioneered modern fiction writing in them. He divested fiction's preoccupation with romance and fantasy in the two languages and gave them the hard texture of realism. Further, he etched the Indian countryside – villages and small towns – on his fiction in such vivid and arresting details that they became a pioneering mode of representation of the spaces not represented earlier in Hindi–Urdu fiction. The peasant characters and the tenor of daily life in villages and small towns depicted in his novels and short stories still continue to be the talking point for both writers and historians and sociologists. The way he represented the life worlds of peasants and their ethos has still remained unrivalled in the two languages he wrote in, particularly Urdu. In addition, the practice of a particular brand of realism which he somewhat tautologically calls 'idealistic realism' and the anti-imperialist thrust of his works provide different axes of entry into his work attracting both translators and critics alike.

Reading Premchand in two tongues: the complexity of dual authorial presence

In the history of world literature we have instances of writers who began writing in one language, mostly their mother tongue, and then switched over to another. The most celebrated cases that one can recall are Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov and Milan Kundera. In each case, the writer chose a different language because of change of his or her location and the change in perceived readership. To make a comprehensive or definitive assessment of these writers one must take their works encompassing both the languages, and assess them in their totality. One's understanding of them will remain incomplete

if one knows only one version of their work and not the other. In the case of Premchand, the situation is somewhat complex. The languages in which he wrote or translated in, that is, Hindi and Urdu are not entirely separate. They have similar origins, even though they evolved into two separate languages. Without going into the history of how one language, because of a peculiar combination of social and political factors, gradually evolved into two languages and scripts, one has to acknowledge that Premchand handled both of them ambidextrously and left his indelible stamp on their fictional literatures. That is why to understand Premchand's creative process, it is necessary to look at both the versions in Hindi and Urdu. Yet, those who read Premchand only in Hindi hardly acknowledge that Premchand was a Urdu writer to begin with and his Urdu corpus is as significant as the Hindi corpus, and those who read Premchand only in Urdu scarcely appreciate the fact that he moved on to write in Hindi prolifically and profoundly and that one cannot appreciate him in his totality unless one knows the extensive body of work he wrote in Hindi as well.

Premchand began writing in Urdu and he produced a substantial volume of output in the first twelve years of his career (1903–15) – five novels and about sixty short stories to be precise – before the thought of writing in Hindi occurred to him. His switchover from Urdu to Hindi was gradual and painstaking, though irreversible, given the social and political circumstances prevailing at the time.

Now, the question is, are the Hindi and Urdu versions of his stories exact replica of each other? No, and Premchand knew it too well, as he was aware of the changes that he made along the way. In a letter to Imtiaz Ali Taj, dramatist, translator and editor in Urdu, he mentions the fact that he changes entire scenes while transcribing the text from one version to the other.[1] As usually happens with writer-translators, whenever they translate their own work, the creative impulse often comes to the fore so that translation is often turned into rewriting. In the case of Premchand, one finds many minor changes that are done sometimes for stylistic embellishments, and at other times for difference in perceived readership. There are also some rare cases where significant and radical changes have been effected in the process of translation so that the stories could, after the changes, be amenable to different interpretations altogether.

There is another dimension to this issue. It was not always Premchand himself who translated his work between Urdu and Hindi. Often he took help from others in this endeavour, and might have had the time to look over it only cursorily. Still, the entire corpus of his work was not available in both the versions. The Urdu version of

his magnum opus *Gaudaan* first appeared three years after the death of Premchand in someone else's translation in 1939. His younger son, Amrit Rai, excavated several stories in the Urdu version after his death of which there were no Hindi versions. Amrit Rai published such stories in a two-volume anthology with the appropriate title *Gupt Dhan* (Secret Treasure). In the introduction to this anthology he writes about the kind of changes he has effected while transferring the stories from one version to the other:

> I thought it unfair to Hindi readers to publish these stories in their original form. So I clothed them in Hindi, in the style of Munshiji, as far as it was possible for me. How far I have succeeded in this effort to not only preserve the soul of the story but the language and style as well will be judged by you. As for me, I feel satisfaction in the thought that I have pulled all my resources in the endeavour.[2]

It is a clear indication of the fact that Amrit Rai felt that, for the sake of readability in Hindi, the stories must undergo changes. This also throws up the question of ethics and authorship, as to whether anyone, be it the writer's own son, has the right to change the original works to make them suitable for a particular readership.

Sometimes, these changes have resulted in radical transformation of meaning. This can be illustrated through the two versions of Premchand's famous story, 'Poos ki Raat'. The story is about a poor, destitute peasant, Halku, who, as happened with peasants, was in permanent debt to the village moneylender. Halku spends the severe winter nights in the field to save the harvest from marauding wild beasts. But ultimately he is unable to save the harvest when one night a horde of wild beasts descends on the field and despoils the harvest. In the Hindi version which was first published in the Hindi journal *Madhuri* (May 1930), the story ends on a note of seeming relief for Halku who decides to transform his life of a peasant by becoming a worker in a factory. However, in the Urdu version which was published later in *Prem Chalisi* II (1930), Premchand has added a section at the end where Halku ponders over the challenges of peasant life but nevertheless decides to stay a peasant, because turning himself into a day labourer would mean an insult to the land and to his forefathers who were peasants. Thus, the two endings of the story admit of two radically different interpretations.

It is clear that not only the Urdu version is an expanded version of the Hindi, but also it radically alters the perspective of the protagonist.

Halku comes across as giving up the challenges of being a peasant and surrendering to the fate of a wage earner in the Hindi version, whereas the Urdu version stresses his resistance to any such shift in his career. He faces the challenges in a peasant's life and stands face-to-face with total ruin as the marauding animals destroy his harvest, but none of it could destroy his spirit, and he is convinced that he should continue to be a peasant to carry on the legacy of his forefathers. Thus, while the Urdu version maintains the status quo in Halku's life, the Hindi version envisages his transformation into a factory worker. Changes of the kind signalled above, with variations and different degrees of emphasis, can be found in a number of short stories.

As far as the novels are concerned, the most telling illustration of this difference between the Hindi and the Urdu versions is provided by the novel *Bazaar-e-Husn* which has become *Sevasadan* in Hindi. The first difference that strikes the reader immediately is the change in the title and its differing resonances in both the versions. The title 'Bazaar-e-Husn' in Urdu conjures up the image of the mystique and romance of the courtesans' lives, in the legacy of Mirza Hadi Rusva's novel *Umrao Jan Ada* written about two decades earlier, whereas 'Sevasadan' conjures up the image of a dull and uninspiring house of reform. If the accent of the Urdu title is on pleasure and passion, the accent of the Hindi title is on instruction and correction. The Hindi title also seems to be a calculated response to the prevalent atmosphere of social reform undertaken at the time by such social organisations as the Arya Samaj and others. Vasudha Dalmia points out how the 'sober and uninspiring' title 'Sevasadan' underlines 'the final redemption of the heroine . . . rather than focusing on the courtesan's quarters itself'. In her opinion, for Hindi readers, it was the most apparent reading of the title in the Hindi version, 'the puritanical rather than that which suggested the lurid, which accounted for the initial appeal of the novel'. In contrast, when the novel came out in Urdu four years later with the title 'Bazaar-e-Husn', it did not have similar appeal for the Urdu readers.

It is not simply a matter of the change of title; in fact, throughout the two versions there are both obvious and subtle differences that give a particular spin to characters and situations. In the Urdu version the protagonist Suman comes across as a flirt, out to grab attention to herself, whereas in the Hindi version, she has been depicted as more restrained and her actions appear modest and demure. Moreover, there are several important sections that are present in one but not in another. For example, Chapter 15 contains an additional paragraph in the Hindi version in which Premchand himself seems to be speaking

as the omniscient narrator on an important moral issue. The chapter begins with the author-narrator writing in a philosophical vein about the different stages of human life. He reflects on the wisdom of keeping liquor shops and gambling dens outside the city centre but the brothels in the chauk area at the heart of the city, ready to trap young men. The first few paragraphs are more or less the same in both the versions, but there is a paragraph in the Hindi version that is not there in the Urdu version. The additional paragraph in Hindi reads as follows in English translation:

> That is 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 Minabazar.[3]

The language is very strong in its denunciation of the profession of the prostitutes, and in its strident advocacy of keeping them outside the pale of civilised and decent habitation. Here Premchand does not hide behind the mask of a narrator, but comes out in the open to make his opinion public, which must have gone down very well with the climate of the prevalent public opinion. In the Hindi version his urge for reform seems to be paramount while the Urdu version does not show similar urgency. Further, in *Sevasadan*, there are indirect comments on the state of Hindi literature – how it was derivative and parasitical as it depended on indiscriminate translations from other literatures, reading habits of people that needed improvement and so on. In *Bazaar-e-Husn*, these comments are less urgent or muted.

Thus a combined reading of the short stories and novels in both the versions reveal several significant facts and assumptions. In many cases, the Urdu version is larger than the Hindi version, showing the use of traditional rhetorical embellishments. This would encourage us to make a couple of speculations: (a) Urdu was Premchand's first love, and as he professes in his essay 'Sahitya ka Uddeshya', it came more naturally to him than Hindi and (b) as a language, Urdu, or its more popular version Hindustani, lends itself to finer and intimate shades of feelings and emotions in Premchand's hand in a way that Hindi does not do; in comparison, Hindi is somewhat stark and unadorned. In the Urdu versions one can find virtuoso passages, passages of purple prose designed to dazzle the readers into an admission of the author's full control and command over the language. It is interesting to speculate

whether language determines themes and styles or, at least, whether language and themes are intimately connected. Alok Rai says, 'Aisa lagta hai ki kai baatein Hindi mein zyada swabhavik dhang se kahi ja sakti hai, aur kai Urdu mein. Is pratyaksh anubhav ki jad mein kya kya chhupa hua hai – itihaas, sanskritik-samajik purvagraha, sahityik parampara – ye shod ka vishay ho sakta hai . . .'.[4] He further says that the communalisation of these two languages is evident, as one could see that in Hindi if the characters are given Hindu names, in Urdu they are given Muslim names. But this is not a general rule and from this one cannot deduce that Premchand had a communal bent of mind. Nothing could be more rash than such a conclusion. Premchand's anti-communalism and anti-sectarianism, despite his admiration for reformist programmes of the Arya Samaj, are writ large in his stories and novels, and in his assertions in his essays and addresses and in his practices in real life. That is why the reasons for the differing versions must lie elsewhere. It should be traced to the different readership that Premchand was addressing. And these two groups of readership were different not only in their religious practices and cultural traditions, but also in their class differences, in their reading habits and in the literary tradition they inherited.

Premchand in and through translation

The above section underlines the complexity of translating Premchand. As the reception and reputation of a writer in the receiving culture depend on the quality of translation and the version the translator has chosen from, one needs to be sensitive to this complexity to arrive at a balanced judgement. The current volume not only addresses Premchand's reception and translation in world languages and celluloid versions, but also looks at this complexity from multiple perspectives.

We live in a world where translation plays a crucial role in transnational literary transactions and reputations. Writers now are read more in translation than in their original tongues. In fact, quite often the number of readers in translation is staggering compared to the number of readers in the author's original language. Just think of writers like Gabriel García Márquez, Milan Kundera, Umberto Eco, Murakami and Orhan Pamuk. If their readers in their original languages run in thousands, their readers in translation in world languages run into millions. Translation also becomes the primary instrument to earn them the highest literary award of the world, the Nobel Prize. Here, I am thinking of translation not only in interlingual terms but also in inter-semiotic terms, when literary works are turned into

films (or indeed, other forms of art), which helps authors reach a still wider audience. A film based on a literary work can be instrumental in reviving the work that may have been out of public view and trigger new interest in it.[5]

Among all Indian writers writing in the first half of the twentieth century, Tagore was best served by translators in India and abroad. He also fashioned himself as a world poet, and a band of dedicated translators felt that his works had a universal message that needed translation and dissemination. He himself undertook translation of his work, mainly poetry, in English. On the contrary, Premchand focused on Indian countryside and the village populace of North India, and it was felt that his works were too rooted to travel across cultures. Hence translation of Premchand's work was slow to pick up in world languages, with a single notable exception, which is Russian.

Premchand began writing at a time when prose fiction in Urdu and Hindi – novels and short stories – was at a formative stage. In fact, he fashioned both the genre of fiction as well as the language in which that genre had to be written. Talking in pan-Indian terms, fictional literature was dominated by translation from Bangla where Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and Rabindranath Tagore had honed the art of fiction to a considerable degree, and writers in other Indian languages grew up reading those writers in translation and in their own languages and drawing inspiration from them. Premchand himself started off as a translator before he embarked on his own creative journey. Of course, later in life, he translated European and Russian writers, as well as reflected on the art and craft of translation. Avadhesh Kumar Singh's chapter, 'Premchand on/in translation', deals with the entire gamut of Premchand's views, contested and controversial, about this craft and what it meant for him. It also throws light on Premchand's unease with the climate of indiscriminate translation by Hindi translators from all sources rather than trying to produce creative work of merit in Hindi. This latter point has been expanded and articulated most forcefully by Snehal Shingavi in his chapter, 'Premchand and the politics of language: on translation, cultural nationalism and irony'. Through a rigorous textual analysis of *Sevasadan* and *Bazaar-e-Husn*, he builds the strong argument that 'Premchand as a writer . . . only makes sense under the sign of translation, as a writer whose intellectual concerns are only made manifest by putting his translations (and translations of his works) at the center of our attention.'

Madhu Singh's chapter, 'Translation as new aesthetic: Premchand's translation of *Shab-e-Tar* and European modernism', shows his actual

practice of translation when he had translated Maurice Maeterlinck's (1862–1936) symbolist-absurdist play in French *Les Aveugles* from the English version. She makes the argument that Indians first came in contact with modernism through translation of European works in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She also tries to locate Premchand's choice of the Maeterlinck text as a possible but camouflaged protest against British oppression and censorship, coming as it did after four months of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

Baran Farooqi's chapter, 'Experiencing Premchand through translation of three stories: culture, gender, history', deals with the problem of cultural translatability when a translator translates a writer in a historical period different from the author's, through her experience of translating three stories by Premchand.

Translation, mediation and reception

Premchand's revival and reception in contemporary times are largely propelled by the translation of his work in English, because the bulk of Premchand translation now is happening in English. Two chapters, by Harish Trivedi and by M. Asaduddin, address the issues and challenges involved in the English translation of Premchand most comprehensively. Provocatively titled, 'Premchand in English: one translation, two originals', Trivedi's chapter takes the reader to the history of textual research in Premchand in order to determine the definitive versions, signalling the fact that how a scholar of his stature could also prove inadequate if he depended only on one version of the text. Asaduddin's chapter, 'Premchand in English translation: the story of an "afterlife"', endeavours to chronicle the history of Premchand translation in English, pointing out milestones along the way. It also makes a comparative study of those translations where multiple translations are available.

Translation and reception of a writer may have ideological underpinnings, besides the intrinsic merit of the work. There are circumstances that can make a culture more hospitable to translation. There are certain historical conjunctures that might propel writers to the gaze of the world and help them achieve statures that otherwise wouldn't be theirs. If we have to look for reasons why Tagore's reputation eclipsed outside India after a certain period or why Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poetry no longer has the same kind of resonance in Afro-Asian countries that it once enjoyed, we will have to look at these historical conjunctures. They will also make it possible to understand why Premchand was translated so enthusiastically in Russian and published in volumes and

figures much greater than even in Hindi or Urdu, and much before he was picked up by translators even in Indian languages. Guzel Strelkova's chapter, 'Premchand in Russian: translation, reception, adaptation', makes a comprehensive survey of Premchand's translation and reception in Russian and allied languages from as early as the 1920s up to the contemporary period.

Often, the reception of a foreign text may depend on, besides historical and literary conjunctures, how it is introduced to the target audience. The question that often bothers cultural translators is, what is the most desirable and effective way of introducing a foreign text that is culturally remote from the receiving culture? The view that a literary text must stand alone without surrounding/supporting materials to aid entry into a culture is a self-defeating one. A particular literary text is de-contextualised from a tradition not known to the target readers and requires to be re-contextualised, through what Gerard Gennete calls paratext, to the receiving tradition to appear in its full plenitude and textuality.

Christina Oesterheld makes a detailed study of Premchand translations in German and discusses what kind of paratexts the translators have used to make Premchand accessible to the German readers. She makes a comparative study of several Premchand titles in Hindi, English and German that contains several insights. Then she makes a comparative study of the several versions of 'Shatranj ke Khiladi' sourced from Hindi, Urdu and English, before embarking on an overview of all German translations of Premchand's work up to the present. Her chapter, 'Premchand in German language: texts, paratexts and translations', provides a fairly comprehensive view of the nature of Premchand translation and his reception in German. Sonya Gupta's chapter, 'Beyond orientalism: Premchand in Spanish translations', is built around a reading of the paratexts supplied by the translators in two recent anthologies of Premchand translation in Spanish. She analyses the contemporary situation in Spain and Latin America that led to the packaging of these anthologies in a certain way and comes out with the formulation: 'translation, whatever be the way in which you look at it, that is, as a product, a social process, or a semiotic or hermeneutic act, occurs in certain conditions of knowledge production in a given culture and any rewriting or representation of a source culture into a target culture is closely linked to the episteme of a given time.' The chapters by Sharad Chandra and Faizullah Khan chronicle the history of Premchand translation in French.

Two of Premchand's stories, 'Sadgati' and 'Shatranj ke Khiladi', have been mined by Satyajit Ray, the famed film-maker and director,

for films. In their chapters, Nishat Haider and Fatima Rizvi have dealt with different aspects of this inter-semiotic translation, commonly known as adaptation. In her chapter, 'In quest of a comparative poetics: a study of *Sadgati*', Nishat Haider evaluates the transformation of the literary work into its celluloid version for Doordarshan, the Indian government television channel, through the comparative perspectives of literary and film criticism. She also deploys some formulations of Dalit aesthetics and contemporary insights in the field that lend density to her study. Fatima Rizvi, in her chapter, 'Politics of language, cultural representation and historicity: "Shatranj ke Khiladi" in (self-)translation and adaptation', takes into account the three literary versions of the story – in Hindi, Urdu and English – in the context of the complex linguistic history of the subcontinent, and then combines the film version by Satyajit Ray, to demonstrate how these four versions of Premchand's texts are layered by various political considerations surrounding language, cultural representation and historicity, thereby exhibiting subtle differences and/or lending themselves to alternate interpretations.

Two thematic chapters by Vasudha Dalmia and Shailendra Singh represent translation, in a discursive sense. Dalmia's 'Kashi as Gandhi's city: personal and public lives in Premchand's *Karmabhumi*' combines literary analysis with a sociological study of the city of Banaras to underline how the characters' lives are enmeshed in the historical and political circumstances of the time. Dalmia's favourite method of studying fictional texts in conjunction with the dominant historical and ideological forces of the time is in full display in her chapter, as she has done earlier through the 'Introductions' that she has written to the English translation of *Sevasadan* and *Godaan*. Shailendra Singh, in his chapter, 'Demystifying the sanctity of the village council: "Ghareeb ki Haye" as a counter-narrative to "Panch Parmeshwar" ', makes a study of the two short stories to examine how effective and just the traditional village council was in the resolution of disputes, as opposed to modern courts. It suggests that the representation of the village council as an alternative institutional paradigm of justice in the latter is already demystified by its counterpart in the former so that both of them act as counter-narratives to each other. That this happens much before the more definitive and convincing delineation of the village council in *Godaan* also demonstrates how 'idealistic realism' was not merely a desirable aesthetic category for Premchand but also an inevitable outcome of the conflict that existed between his chronicler's aspiration on the one hand and his reformist impulse on the other. The

chapter also treats the complex issue of caste, in the context of the current Dalit discourse on Premchand, and examines whether Premchand's village council was capable or willing to deal with it in any meaningful way.

Notes

1 Premchand, *Chiththi Patri* [Letters], Amrit Rai and Madan Gopal (eds), vol. II, Allahabad: Hans Prakashan, 1962, p. 105.
2 Amrit Rai (ed.) [in Hindi: 'prastutakarta', i.e., presenter], *Gupt Dhan* [Hidden Treasure]*: Premchand*, Allahabad: Hans Prakashan, 1962, p. 6.
3 Premchand, *Sevasadan*, Snehal Shingavi (trans.), Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 65.
4 Alok Rai and Mushtaq Ali (eds), *Samaksh: Premchand ki Bees Urdu-Hindi Kahaniyon ka Samantar Paath*, Allahabad: Hans Prakashan, 2002, p. ii.
5 The television serial on *Nirmala* increased the book's sale by several fold. The sale of Premchand's short stories went up when Gulzar had made a television serial that was shown on Doordarshan, the national channel. Bhism Sahni's *Tamas*, which readers had barely taken note of earlier, registered unprecedented sales when an eponymous film based on the novel made by Govind Nihalani was shown on Doordarshan. There are quite a few other instances, the most notable of which is perhaps Vikas Swarup's novel *Q & A* which readers barely knew about before the film *Slumdog Millionaire* was made on it.

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Part I

PREMCHAND IN TRANSLATIONS

Surveys, histories, receptions

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1

PREMCHAND IN ENGLISH

One translation, two originals

Harish Trivedi

Premchand in translation

Perhaps the first thing to say about Premchand (1880–1936) in English translation is that he appears to be not even a shadow of what he is in the original. This may sound like blasphemy but it is also a truism, for the same seems to hold true of most writers of the world. It is said, for example, that Homer sounds like a fairly ordinary poet in most languages other than Greek and runs in the rest of the world mainly on reputation. In the University of Delhi where *The Odyssey* or *The Iliad* have been taught in the Penguin prose translations for the last forty years or so as part of the BA English (Hons.) syllabus, he does not even come across as a poet, much less as a great poet; students in examination scripts routinely refer to either epic as 'this novel'. Given the less than level playing field of Orientalism, such diminution in translation works to even greater detriment of Valmiki, Vyas or Kalidasa.

The question here seems to be: what is one translating, and just how much can one possibly translate? One translates the text and, through explication and para-textual supplementation, also something of the context. But can one ever hope to convey in translation the historical significance that accrues to a text in the original language over decades, and in some cases, centuries and even millennia, of constantly evolving reception? Can one begin to translate the canonisation that a text earns and sustains through the interplay of complex cultural factors over a long duration? And – in what is probably the biggest issue in the slippage between an original and its translation – can one ever begin to hope to translate 'addressivity', that is, the relationship of the author with his primary, implied readership, with which he shares a cultural universe and a whole host of assumptions about everything in