

= Nirmala ( novel ) =

Nirmala ( Hindi : निर्मला ( virtuous or pure ) or The Second Wife ) is a Hindi fiction novel written in Hindi and Urdu writer Munshi Premchand . The melodramatic novel is centered on Nirmala , a young girl who was forced to marry a widower of her father 's age . The plot unfolds to reveal her husband 's suspicion of a relationship between her and his eldest son , a suspicion that leads to the son 's death .

A poignant novel first published in 1927 , Nirmala 's reformist agenda is transparent in its theme which deals with the question of dowry , and consequently mismatched marriages and related issues . The story uses fiction to highlight an era of much needed social reform in 1920s Indian society . Nirmala was serialized in 1928 in Chand , a women 's magazine in which the novel 's feminist character was represented . Nirmala is somewhat like Godaan ( published in 1936 ) in that it deals with the exploitation of the village poor , and was translated by multiple scholarly translators . It was first translated in 1988 as The Second Wife by David Rubin , and in 1999 as Nirmala by Alok Rai , Premchand 's grandson .

= = Plot = =

Udayabhanu Lal , a lawyer by profession , arranged to marry off his 15 @-@ years @-@ old daughter Nirmala to Bhuvanmohan Sinha , son of Bhalchadra Sinha . Lal was later murdered by his rival Mathayi , who was once tried in court by Lal and sentenced to jail . The death of Lal caused Bhuvanmohan and Bhalchadra to withdraw from the arranged marriage since there was no longer a large dowry as anticipated prior to Lal 's death . Financial hardship forced Nirmala 's mother , Kalyani , to marry her off to Totaram , a lawyer 20 years her senior . Totaram tried his best to seduce his beautiful young wife but to no avail . She had no feelings for him other than respect and a sense of duty , which fell short of the love he expected to receive from his wife .

Totaram had 3 sons from his first marriage . His eldest son Mansaram was only a year older than Nirmala . It wasn 't long before Totaram grew suspicious of Nirmala and her relationship with his son Mansaram . Jealousy and suspicion caused him to send Mansaram away to live in a hostel , a decision they all soon came to regret . Mansaram 's health soon deteriorated in the hostel environment . It was Bhuvanmohan who treated Mansaram at the hospital . When Bhuvanmohan learned about Nirmala , he arranged for his brother to marry Nirmala 's sister , Krishna , as penance . Bhuvanmohan was haunted by his thoughts of Nirmala and her distress . Mansaram eventually died of tuberculosis . Totaram was heartbroken and guilt ridden over his role in his son 's death . It wasn 't long thereafter when his second son Jiyaram absconded with Nirmala 's jewels and fled from Totaram 's house . He later committed suicide . Totaram 's third son Siyaram also fled , having been lured away by a false saint . Depressed over the loss of his sons , Totaram set off on a mission to find his only living son , Siyaram .

Meanwhile , Bhuvanmohan was back in Nirmala 's life as the husband of her friend , Sudha . He tried to seduce Nirmala , but his wife learned of it and criticized him harshly . Bhuvanmohan became emotionally distressed , and out of sorrow and his love for her , he committed suicide . Depressed by the sad turn of events and her own failing health , Nirmala gave her daughter Asha to Rukhmini , Totaram 's widowed sister , and died . A much older Totaram returned home to discover Nirmala had died .

= = Characters = =

Nirmala , the protagonist ; a 15 @-@ year @-@ old girl , married off to Totaram who is 20 years her senior .

( Munshi ) Totaram , Nirmala 's husband , a lawyer of 35 .

Mansaram , Totaram 's eldest son from his first wife ; his father suspects him of having a relationship with Nirmala , and forces him out of the house to live in a hostel where he eventually dies .

Jiyaram , Totaram 's second son from his first wife ; he blames his father for the death of his older brother and flees from home after absconding with Nirmala 's jewelry . He eventually commits suicide .

Siyaram , Totaram 's third son from his first wife ; he is lured away from his father 's house by a false saint .

Bhuvanmohan Sinha , former fiance of Nirmala . After the death of Nirmala 's father , he learns there won 't be a dowry and withdraws from the marriage .

Sudha is Bhuvanmohan 's wife and the companion of Nirmala . It is through her , Bhuvan comes to know about Nirmala ; that it is the same girl whom he has earlier left off . Her criticism sends him into commit suicide .

Udayabhanu Lal is Nirmala 's father .

Kalyani , Nirmala 's mother , who was forced by circumstances to marry Nirmala to Totaram .

Bhalchandra Sinha is the father of Bhuvanmohan Sinha .

Pandit Motaram , a man of wisdom , as a priest .

Rukhmini , Totaram 's widowed sister .

Bhungi , maid in Totaram 's house .

Asha , Totaram 's daughter from his second wife Nirmala .

= = Background = =

Set against a background of pre @-@ independent India , Nirmala depicts a realistic and picturesque portrait of the 1920s , the language and milieu of the era . It characterizes the evils of the dowry system , and in doing so reflects the author 's desire to bring about social reform and raise the status of women in society . The author 's words illustrate his country 's poor , and paints a picture of rural India consisting largely of a static society , the clashes of castes , its poverty and exploitation , and the rich character of its people . The novel covers a time span of about six years during which time Nirmala transitions from student to wife and thereafter , a mother . It was an era when self @-@ respect and public image were of fundamental importance in the society . Eating meals was observed with an extreme ritualistic importance . In traditional homes , women did not eat with the men , and waited for them to finish before they were permitted to eat . There was also a fear of hospitals [ and also of blood transfusion ] which explains the hesitation of the character Totaram and his guilt over sending his son to a hospital . The generations that have passed since the novel was first written have seen dramatic changes in " attitude , sensibility and aspiration . " Nirmala is a reflection of a time in Indian society when a young girl 's " greatest sin was to require a husband who would accept her without a dowry . "

= = Publication = =

Nirmala was one of Premchand 's most popular novels of its time in India , a time of oppression for women in Indian society that drew increasing attention from writers and poets . Prior to being published in its entirety , Nirmala was serialised in the magazine Chand over the course of a year , beginning in November 1925 . It was during the time when Premchand first embarked on writing fiction based on contemporary social issues . Unlike his other works , Nirmala has a darker tone and ending , and its characters are less idealised . It was translated into English for the first time in 1988 .

= = Legacy = =

Francesca Orsini called it a prime example of Premchand 's combination of social realism and drama . Gulzar believed the novel was a little outstretched , and had a tendency to repeat many emotions , but also had its diversions and contradictions . He further explained that Premchand specialised in subjects that revolved around a young girl under 18 years old who suddenly becomes a woman after marrying a man who is much older .

Many films based on the story 's theme were also produced , such as Tehreer Munshi Premchand Ki directed by Gulzar and shown in Doordarshan . Nirmala 's role was played by the Marathi actress Amruta Subhash who received many accolades .