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# The Flawless Commitment of a “Flawed Progressive:”<sup>1</sup> Krishan Chandar and His Art of Storytelling

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**Abstract.** The article attempts to undertake a critical-textual study of select short stories and novels of Krishan Chandar (1914–1977), who, along with Sa’adat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai, and Rajinder Singh Bedi, emerged as a major prose writer in Urdu literature during the early to middle decades of the twentieth century. All of them were collectively inspired by the Progressive Writers’ Movement taking place in the 1930s and sought to imbibe the principles of the movement in writing stories and novels that drew attention to the social-political predicaments of the times, and addressed them with a vision towards bringing about radical transformation within an Indian society besieged by the woes of communal violence and religious polarisation. The study will also deal with the major features of Chandar’s writings, particularly his dual engagement with romanticism and progressivism, and how these thought-processes were synthesised within/through his masterful art of storytelling, thereby enabling him to explore the varied dynamics of human character and action in the course of his long writing career spanning over four decades.

**Keywords.** Krishan Chandar, Urdu literature, Progressivism, short story, novel

## Setting the Context: Rise of the Progressives

The 1930s, particularly towards the latter half, witnessed the

<sup>1</sup> The term “flawed progressive” for Krishan Chandar appears in Rakhshanda Jalil’s *Liking Progress Loving Change: A Literary History of the Progressive Writers’ Movement in Urdu* (2014). The present study is an attempt to contest the stated appellation in order to explore the diverse range of issues and subjects addressed by Chandar in the course of his long public career as a writer.

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culmination of a set of events, across the globe, which had their beginnings in the early 1920s. One major event was the beginning of the Second World War after a period of twenty years since the end of the first one in 1918. The Russian Revolution (1917–1923) and the Great Depression (1929–1939) were two among the major events that attracted global attention in the intervening years between the two World Wars. The economic crisis of the 1930s and the consequent socio-political instability was also instrumental in the growth of anti-government sentiments among the people, which was soon capitalised upon by the fascists in Italy and Germany. In India, the 1930s saw the gradual intensification of the freedom movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and also a growing polarisation of the Hindus and Muslims along religious and linguistic lines. The 1917 Russian Revolution was instrumental in instilling hope and courage in the minds of the people the world over to raise their voices against tyranny and oppression of all kinds; and this also facilitated the rise of Communism as an ideological alternative to the combined nemesis of capitalism and fascism.

The ideal of social transformation, as espoused by the Russian Revolution, was conducive to the growth of a new spirit of progressivism which, in the Indian context, found a new expression through the publication of a collection of writings entitled *Angārey*, comprising nine short stories and a one-act play, in 1932, which caused a major uproar in the Hindi-Urdu literary-cultural milieu of the time. However, the spirit of progress directed towards creating a new literature advocating social reform caught on with the new and veteran poets and writers alike, and, in due course of time, led to the formation of the All-India Progressive Writers' Association (AIPWA) and the holding of its inaugural conference in April 1936 with Munshi Premchand as the president. The conference was well-received and well-attended by writers and intellectuals from across the country and writing in various Indian languages, all of who saw within the movement a new potential to bring about transformations not only in the social-political outlook of the people, but also in the aesthetic dimensions of literature.

Urdu, being the language in which *Angārey* had appeared and also being a language with a widespread literary-cultural presence across north India at that time, became the torchbearer of this new spirit of progressivism, and this was signified by the emergence of a new generation of writers each having distinct views regarding their aesthetic predilections but united by the common purpose of redefining the contours of Urdu literature in the middle decades of the twentieth century. It is against this background that Krishan Chandar (1914–1977) emerged, along with Sa'adat Hasan Manto (1912–1955), Ismat Chughtai (1915–1991), and Rajinder Singh Bedi (1915–1984), as one of the major prose writers espousing the spirit of progressivism in twentieth-century Urdu literature.

### **Krishan Chandar: The Constant Progressive**

As a progressive who “remained associated with the movement till the end of his days and, more importantly, the only one who was consistently

praised by fellow progressives for being one” (Jalil, *A Literary History of the Progressive Writers’ Movement* 459), Krishan Chandar had thirty collections of short stories, in addition to twenty novels and many radio plays, spanning over a long career of writing that began in the mid-1930s and continued till the last day of his life. Inheriting a romantic predisposition characteristic of Hindi-Urdu writings of the times at the turn of the twentieth century, most notably seen in the early writings of Premchand, and a spirit that he retained in his writings all throughout his life, Krishan Chandar was nevertheless able to integrate the same with the progressive engagement with social realism, as evident from his short stories and novels written in the immediate aftermath of the Bengal Famine of 1943 or the Partition of 1947.

This article endeavours to analyse this integrative principle in Chandar’s writings through a critical-textual study of his select short stories and novels, particularly those written in the spirit of the Progressive Movement during its heydays in the 1940s and 1950s. The movement saw a gradual decline in eagerness and participation in the years following the Independence of India and Pakistan; yet Krishan Chandar remained its faithful soldier, in both ideological and official capacities, till the 1970s. The article will also undertake a brief evaluation of the involvement of Chandar in these latter years of the movement, and, in the process, also understand how his dual engagement with romanticism and progressivism coalesced and matured over the years as crucial underpinnings to his prolific writing career spanning over four decades.

Having spent a greater part of his childhood in Kashmir, Krishan Chandar’s sensibility was deeply influenced by the paradisiacal beauty of the region as witnessed through his own eyes and found expression in a number of stories based on his reflective assessment of the changing political situation in the valley in the years following the Independence and Partition of the country. In one of those stories called “Kashmir ko Salām” (A Salute to Kashmir), he visualises the region as a paradise located deep within his heart, and laments the fact that the paradise outside is one inhabited by humans and hence prone to the frailties of human nature. He writes, “Even in that era, I had seen the burning embers of the hell of that paradise, the albums of misery and hopelessness, the imprints of poverty, I had known about the buying and selling of the paradise’s beauty, these burning embers will become a volcanic crater one day and this lava will spread far and wide in the gardens and valleys of Kashmir” (Chandar, “From Krishan Chandar, a Salute to Kashmir”). This is romantic idealism juxtaposed with a keen sense of social reality with its inevitable snare of violence and volatility. However, as is evident from the story, he is hopeful of better days to come as he wishes to revisit the region accompanied by his childhood visions of paradise and to reread Maxim Gorky’s novel *Mother*—the latter emblematic of his progressive vision for the greater good of the society.

Chandar’s stories on Kashmir reflect his deep concern regarding the position of the region as a point of contention between India and Pakistan,

and emphasise the geographical uniqueness and physical beauty of the region sadly subjected to the whims and fancies of the political powerhouses. This concern also finds representation in his first novel *Shikast* (defeat), published in 1943. Writing about this work, Rakhshanda Jalil states that, “[a] novel like *Shikast* (Defeat) showed a young Krishan Chandar depicting a world cleft by social and economic injustices and inequalities with all the ardour of a romantic” (*A Literary History* 459). His first short-story collection *Tilism-e Khayāl* (the enchantment of thoughts) similarly reflects his ‘romantic’ aspirations for making the world as it exists here and now a better habitation for one and all. For this to happen, there was an urgent need, as felt by Chandar, to extricate the literary sensibility in/of Urdu from the stranglehold of feudalistic tendencies. The voices of the dispossessed find no resonance in the expressions of the poets and writers still stuck in the longings and desires reminiscent of the past. The progressive-romantic persona within Krishan Chandar is behind such assertions as when he says, “Our poetry does not refer to the working woman’s broken comb with wisps of hair entangled in it; ... it does not reverberate with the sprightly and bold love songs which the rural women hum for their menfolk while carrying food for them across the uneven pathways” (quoted in Akhtar and Zaidi 153). This is an indication of the social role, as envisioned by the Progressives, that poetry, and by extension the other genres of literatures, was expected to perform in the context of changed political circumstances during the 1940s and after.

### More Questions than Answers: The Mature Art of Krishan Chandar’s Storytelling

The close brush of romanticism with reality finds a new reflection in Krishan Chandar’s “Ek Tawāif kā Khat” (letter from a courtesan), a short story written in the aftermath of Partition, in the form of a letter from a courtesan and addressed to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Qaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. It was published in 1949 as part of the anthology called *Hum Wahshi Hain* (we are bestial). In the letter, she narrates the tales of Bela and Batool, two girls who have come to stay with her in the highly unliveable habitation of Farris Road in Bombay. Bela is from Rawalpindi, and Batool from Jalandhar; and both have witnessed the atrocities committed by Hindus and Muslims alike, during the communal riots that ensued in the wake of Partition. The girls are subsequently bought by the narrator from the bazar, and given refuge in her house located close to her place of business. However, she has kept them away from the lascivious gaze of her customers, but for how long? She, therefore, entreats both Nehru and Jinnah to take responsibility for the safe upbringing of the two adolescent girls. She implores them to action with these closing words: “Just for once, extricate them from the clutches of Farris Road, keep them in your homes. Pay heed to the laments of the lakhs of souls, that dirge that resounds all the way from Noakhali to Rawalpindi, from Bharatpur to Bombay. Is it only in the Government House that it cannot be heard?” (Chandar, “A Letter from a Prostitute”). She finally wonders if they

are ever going to hear her voice. It is through this epistolary intervention via the agency of a social outcast that Chandar brings to the fore the naked realities of the times—his progressivism lies both in the audacity of allowing a prostitute to address the highest authorities of the two nations on the one hand and investing her, on the other hand, with the moral authority of carrying out what the Hindus and the Muslims, and the high offices of the governments, have collectively failed to do.

While Manto chooses to hold up a mirror to reflect the realities of the times as they have existed, Chandar goes a step forward to suggest a more active agency on the part of the oppressed and the downtrodden. Ali Sardar Jafri highlights this difference between the stories of Manto and Chandar by stating that “Manto’s heroes are mutilated men, therefore they cannot be representative.... Krishan’s heroes [on the other hand] are courageous and conscious builders of life. They express evolution...” (quoted in Jalil, *A Literary History* 447). The courtesan-narrator in “Ek Tawāif kā Khat” is a crucial instance of Chandar’s relegation of agency to a character inhabiting the fringes of the society and yet striking at the heart of communal politics.

The narrative agency in Krishan Chandar finds a unique expression in his short story called “Peshawar Express,” anthologised in the aforementioned collection *Hum Wahshi Hain*, and published in 1949. In the story, the eponymous train acts as the narrator recounting with a detached yet terrifying objectivity the bestiality witnessed by it as it moves from Peshawar in the newly created Pakistan carrying Hindus towards safety to their new homeland in Hindustan. Published a few years before the appearance of the historical novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956) by Khushwant Singh, this story by Chandar told through the inanimate agency of the train is one among the earliest narratives to provide a realistic visual mapping of the mass exodus across the two countries and the incidents of violence that ensued in the process. It is a pity that the story has remained relatively underrated/undervalued in comparison with such other stories, most notably by Manto, which have appeared in multiple English translations in addition to being routinely anthologised along with other Partition narratives. The particular metaphor of the train as a technological innovation created by human beings to enhance civilisational mobility but instead reduced to a carrier of dead and butchered bodies across the newly created borders only intensifies the apprehension that the death of civilisation is fast approaching. The lifeless bodies loaded into the train go on multiplying as it is forced to halt at stations like Taxila, Wazirabad, Lahore, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, and Ambala, on its way to Bombay. As noted by Chinmayee Babbal, “[t]he anthropomorphised train is concerned for its passengers, and at some level feels responsible for their safety;” however, the paragon of mechanical progress of humankind only stands witness to the barbarous degeneration of its progenitor and can only run away with its futile attempts to safeguard its passengers.

Among the many persons killed mercilessly in the story, there is also the

girl who was reading *The Theory and Practice of Socialism* by John Strachey—she was ruthlessly stabbed despite protestations by her to be not killed and instead allowed to live by marrying any one amongst the perpetrators. The book she was carrying is smeared red with her blood as she dies writhing in agony upon the grass in the nearby forest. This death of intellectualism signifies, for Chandar, another aspect of the humanistic and civilisational decay mournfully yet vividly recounted through the ‘persona’ of the train. It finally reaches Bombay and is scrubbed clean off all the dirt and stains of blood accumulated in the course of its horrendous journey from Peshawar—but the ‘soul’ within its inanimate body is still haunted by the apparitions of the passengers butchered to death. Unlike humans whose conscience is wiped off all guilt and memories of the massacre by the seemingly happy prospects of independence and new nationhood; the train, representing the sensibility of the masses whose burden it is accustomed to carry on its back, wishes no more to undertake another journey of the kind it had. The story ends with its fervent hope of venturing out at a future time when the religious animosities will give way to the spirit of fraternity and peaceful cohabitation among the warring humans, and of renewing its benevolent functions of serving humankind by carrying coal, oil, and iron for the industries as well as agricultural implements and commodities for life and sustenance. As a master storyteller, the multimedial sensibility of the Chandar is at play through this story by his constant focus of the ‘visual’ aspect of his description—the reader is continually provoked to visualise the gore and inhumanity of the rioters. In this regard, the train as the narrator also provides a linear and diachronic view of the landscape it passes through in its journey, very much like a cinema reel displaying images in succession.

The other stories in the collection *Hum Wahshi Hain* similarly reflect the larger preoccupation of Krishan Chandar with the agency of the oppressed in articulating resistance to the wielders of power and violence, and how often the incitement to violence as well as the resistance to it emanate from unexpected agents and circumstances—as in stories like “Andhe” (blind), “Jackson,” and “Amritsar.” from the said anthology. Furthermore, the stories are also significant for the particular emphasis on the women characters, most notably in “Ek Tawāif kā Khat,” as part of their endeavour to set things right in the aftermath of the great tragedy, which affected them in the worst possible manner (cf. “Peshawar Express”).

Prior to the publication of *Hum Wahshi Hain* in the late 1940s. Krishan Chandar produced another heart-rending narrative in the form a series of three short-stories collectively titled “Anna Dātā” (giver of grain), published in 1946, and based on the catastrophic event of the Bengal Famine in 1943, in the midst of the raging Second World War. The stories depict the wide disparity between the rich and the poor, and the latter dying on the streets even as the former remain preoccupied with their privileged ways of living, often bearing an air on nonchalance regarding the pitiable condition of the people ravaged by the famine. The first story is in the epistolary form

consisting of a series of letters written by one foreign ambassador based in Calcutta and addressed to his superior detailing him, in an evident tone of subordination, about quotidian matters regarding life in Calcutta and the Bengal province, with news of the gradually spreading famine interspersed with the description of the extravagant lifestyles of the colonial officers in the country. It is evident from the narrative that the Britishers have chosen to remain in a state of denial *vis-à-vis* the raging famine in Calcutta and the countryside—even when there are people dying of hunger right outside the office of the ambassador. Much like “Peshawar Express,” the storyteller in Chandar engages here in detached observation thereby not desisting from being brutally honest about conveying or describing scenes of death and starvation. Nevertheless, the readers do get a sense of the implied pathos in lines like these where the ambassador has literally reduced the natives dying of hunger and starvation to animality: “I have nowhere seen rats more polite than Indians in this world. If any community is ever given the Nobel Prize for peace, then it could be awarded only to the Indians. In other words, lakhs of them die out of hunger, but never a word of complaint ever appears on their tongues. They just gaze at the skies with their eyes devoid of light, as if they are uttering, ‘O giver of the grain! giver of the grain!’” (Chandar, “Anna Dātā” 16; translation mine). The letters dabble in absurd technicalities with respect to the official procedures to be undertaken for declaring Bengal as a famine-stricken area and the possible repercussions arising out of a situation like that.

The second story depicts an unnamed native upper-class character going over the news of the Bengal famine while enjoying his breakfast and also remembering the previous night rendezvous with his beloved at a party. However, his attention is constantly drawn towards the increasing number of deaths happening all over Calcutta and the countryside, and he makes up his mind to do something worthwhile for the amelioration of the social conditions around him. At this point, his beloved arrives, and, in the ensuing conversation about her lovely appearance and the previous night’s party, interspersed with his gentle reminder to do something for the famine-stricken people, they finally decide to organise a grand party where they will collect funds for the latter purpose. However, the fund-collection activity only remains as a secondary exercise, and lovers get reunited in their exploration of sensual pleasures. The story ends with a reference to dying—while the people outside are dying of starvation, the unnamed character undergoes a death of conscience in the arms of his beloved. The third story, the most poignant one in comparison with the first two, is told from the perspectives of a musician who is no more, who dies as a victim of the famine, and who is narrating the story from the other side of life. In this story, Chandar strikes powerfully at the hypocrisy of the rich and exposes the hopelessness/helplessness of the poor, the latter seemingly having no alternative but to abandon all hopes for living and embrace death. However, life after death proves empowering for the poor, since they are not ‘poor’

anymore and no more craving for a mere grain of rice for sustenance. Therefore, in a poignant note of sarcasm, the narrator of the story exclaims that a grain of rice holds more value than the human body itself, and it is only appropriate that one should pray to the Almighty for the sake of being born not in the form of a mortal human, but instead as a grain of rice (Chandar, “Anna Dātā” 31). There are three characters in the story: the narrator, his wife, and their little child; and all of them are travelling towards Calcutta seeking respite from the widespread starvation in the countryside. Tragedy, however, awaits them on the way, and all three of them, one by one, perish due to hunger, the narrator being the last who dies on the steps of the foreign ambassador’s office.

It is noteworthy that all three stories comprising “Anna Dātā” have an inherent streak of romanticism that serves to both offset and underlie the pervasive tone of social critique made evident through the narrative style of the storyteller. In the first two stories, the evocations of love seem incongruent to the sensibility of the readers, as they go against the dominant flow of the narrative centred on describing the woes and ill-effects of the famine. The third story, however, strikes right at the heart of the reader’s consciousness, as the love between the narrator and his beloved emerges against a background of ideal courtship, then confronts the ordeal of the changing times, and finally succumbs to the fateful consequences of the famine that likewise has devoured a thousand families like them. Narrated in the first person, the main character remains unnamed and hence represents the face of those nameless victims whose travails have failed to garner any attention from the government authorities—the story ends with the nameless narrator questioning this blatant nonchalance on the part of the latter and, in fact, turns the table by calling them dead and accursed with the lifelong burden of accounting for their gross and unpardonable misdeeds.

There is another story, anthologised in the same collection, called “Mahālakshmi kā Pul” (the Mahalakshmi bridge), where Krishan Chandar makes use of an unusual metaphor—that of a few faded and worn-out sarees—to narrate the trials and tribulations of the have-nots in society. In a highly telling imagery of a bridge running over a dirty canal which separates the habitations of the rich and the poor. The narrator, himself an inhabitant of the poor’s colony and a clerk working in the fort, draws attention to a line of six sarees hung out for drying and thereby fluttering in the wind. He identifies each of them by their colours and then goes on to describe the life-stories of their respective owners. It so happens that the narrator is actually waiting to catch a glimpse of the Prime Minister’s car which is scheduled to drive past Mahalakshmi Bridge, and, as he waits, he decides to utilise the time by telling stories of the women who own the sarees. One of these belongs to Shanta Bai, a mother of three and whose husband works in the mill, and she works as a maidservant in the houses of the rich on the other side of the canal. Another one belongs to Jiwana Bai, a widow whose husband had once beaten her so badly that he blinded her in one eye. It so happens that he is thrown out of



the mill where he has worked for thirty-five years, and gets no recompense post his dismissal. He passes away six months later, and, all this while, his wife looks after him despite her visual disability. Their only daughter runs away from her house to prostitute herself—she appears on the day of her father’s death, and it is then that Jiwana Bai realises that, along with her husband’s mortal death, her daughter has undergone a moral death. The third saree belongs to the narrator’s wife who has given him eight children, and he is finding it terribly difficult to manage his family with his meagre income. Savitri, his wife, has lost all her mirth, and her husband—our narrator—often bears the brunt of her anger and frustration. The fourth one belongs to Ladiya who is married to Jhabbu, and the couple has no children. One day it so happens that Jhabbu picks up a fight in the mill he works in, and is subsequently fired and beaten up by the owner’s goons. Without a job, it falls upon Ladiya to start earning for the family, and she has since been working as a vegetable-seller. It is difficult for her to manage working outside and at home wearing the same piece of saree, and the future looks uncertain since her husband, being blacklisted, is unlikely to get another job for being blacklisted in the nearby mills. The fifth one belongs to a young widow called Manjula, and it is the same saree—of a dark blue colour—that was bought for her wedding. She continues to wear that—instead of a white one supposedly appropriate for her social position as a widow—but she has no wherewithal to procure another one signifying her changed marital status. And the sixth one, being the most unusual one, belongs to a dead woman. The saree has a perforation, not induced by wear and tear due to constant use, but caused by a stray bullet fired during a workers’ protest and which accidentally kills the poor women in the process.

The narrator gets so engrossed in the stories of these women that he misses to notice the Prime Minister’s car which passes by and does not stop to notice the sarees hanging by the side of the canal. Towards the end of the story, he draws our attention to the opposite side inhabited by the rich and characterised by the presence of new and fashionable sarees signifying the affluence of the owners’ families. The narrator leaves a question to the readers—will they ever bother to cast a glance at the sarees hung on both sides of the canal. If yes, then which side will they prefer to go or rather on which side will they choose to be? (Chandar, “Mahālakshmi kā Pul” 99–100). Through these questions, Chandar once again leaves the readers with a sense of unease—the stories he tells or writes, the romantic imagery or allusion he creates by his mastery of the craft of storytelling all signify his engagement with his vision of social transformation, not merely by external manifestations of revolutionary change as advanced by socialism, but by constant introspection from the depths of human conscience and consciousness.

### **Enriching the Genre: The Novelistic Oeuvre of Krishan Chandar**

Besides being a master storyteller, Krishan Chandar’s expertise in the

novelistic art runs parallel in excellence to the former. Among his notable attempts within the genre of the novel, two novels stand out in terms of his engagement with the idea of progressivism in its manifestation as an attribute of human conscience as well as an external drive to bring about radical transformation in the society. They are *Jab Khet Jāgey* (1949, when the fields arise) and *Ghaddār* (1960, the traitor), both written in the aftermath of Indian Independence and addressing the necessity of standing up against violence and social injustice as an assertion on one's progressive spirit. The years following the Independence of 1947 marked a gradual change in the policy of the ruling Congress Party *vis-à-vis* the Communists whom it started to perceive as antisocial and detrimental to its vision of a post-Independence new Indian society. Summing up the predicament of the progressive writers in the said period, Talat Ahmed states that, “[p]rogressives might have expected Nehru [as the Prime Minister of independent India] to deliver a radical agenda for the reorganising of society. But he could not act independently of the Congress machinery of which he was an integral part. It was this contradiction and the harsh realities of the late 1940s and early 1950s that progressive writers had to contend with” (Ahmed 156). We see a similar concern reflected in the short story “Mahālakshmi kā Pul” discussed in the preceding section. Furthermore, Chandar's *Jab Khet Jāgey* was written in solidarity with the peasants uprising in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana against the ill-appropriation of land by the landlords through mass evictions in the region and the resultant mass persecution of the workers who revolted against the reign of terror and injustice unleashed by the state under the central leadership of Nehru, the once-favourable friend of the Progressives.

The aforementioned novel is centred on a character called Raghav Rao who is spending his final night in prison as he is going to be hanged at daybreak for protesting on the side of the peasants against the brutalities of the state. Embedded in the narrative is also an intellectual engagement with the twin ideas of labour and ownership, as the novelist seeks to underline the peasants' organic relationship with the land that essentially belongs to them—there is, therefore, no rationale behind the so-called landowners granting them access to land (what he calls “bhudān”), especially when there is always a subsequent mechanism on the part of the owners to wrest the control of the land back into their hands (Chandar, *Jab Khet Jāgey* 15). The novel is written from the perspectives of the young revolutionary who, as a character, is envisioning not only the return of the land to the rightful ‘owners,’ but also the propagation of a new radical sensibility amongst the masses sinned against for centuries now. Raghav Rao refuses to believe in the approach advocating optimism of good times to come, but rather seeks to mould time itself as if it is a “raw metal in the hands of the humans, which can be shaped in accordance with the wishes of the latter, which could be used by the latter—along with their own hard work—to change the world for the better” (Chandar, *Jab Khet Jāgey* 19; translation mine). Lodged in prison, he ruminates over his life from his earliest memories to see if he has been able

to execute this philosophy of life into action. As the novel draws towards its close, Raghav sees his conscience clearing him of any supposed misdeed for which he has been imprisoned and awarded punishment by death; he in fact carefully turns over the pages of his bygone days and feels absolutely at calm with his own self and the actions committed by him—he is ready to face death with happiness and contentment in his heart (Chandar, *Jab Khet Jāgey* 116). The novel ends with this optimism and the call for action—inspired by the resolute martyrdom of Raghav Rao—towards upstaging the monopoly of the landowners and asserting the peasants' rightful ownership of the land.

The questions about self-conviction and conscientious thinking also feature prominently in Krishan Chandar's unique treatment of the trauma and violence of Partition in his 1960-novel called *Ghaddār*. Caught in the whirlwind of vindictive emotions overpowering rioters across religious divides during the heights of Partition days, Baijnath—the carefree protagonist dilly-dallying in rural romance—is confronted with uneasy choices between the calls of conscience and the dictates of his own community intent on wrecking vengeance upon the friends-turned-foes. Growing up amidst the company of friends who belonged to all religions, he is unable to capture the pulse of the changing times, and, is plunged into further grief when told of his son's death at the hands of Muslim rioters. Soon, grief gives way to a desire for revenge, and he finds himself as another participant in the mayhem that ensues. He runs away from the scene where a Muslim girl is getting raped in turns and is about to kill an old Muslim man when the latter reminds him of his own father. He desists from killing the old man, and, therefore, is reprimanded by his fellow Hindu rioters for being a 'traitor,' for not adhering to the call for action motivated by communal hatred and animosity. This storm within his conscience pricks him further when he sees a Muslim child clinging to the chest of his dead mother—he sees the look of fear and disbelief in the eyes of the child, and he chooses to be a 'traitor' again as he picks up the child and decides to adopt it in place of his already-dead son. Therefore, vindictiveness once again gives way to empathy and kindness, yet both these acts on the part of Baijnath seem treacherous in the eyes of his fellow perpetrators on the Indian side of the border. Nevertheless, he does what would redeem his conscience for the rest of his life, and sets himself as an example of what could have been the situation had all his fellow companions done what he does himself.

As Jalil notes with great elan, “[n]ot a conventional hero to begin with, Krishan Chandar's Baijnath nevertheless emerges as a man with sterling qualities. Braver than the brave-hearts who fight battles and win wars, he has slain the demons inside him and gained victory over every baser instinct that man is prey to. He is not a traitor; he is a stalwart, a loyalist loyal to goodness and humanness” (Chandar and Jalil). This is where Chandar excels in his art of juxtaposing progressivism with his romantic sensibilities—Baijnath is not an escapist, nor is he an unerring idealist; he is instead a thoughtful realist who possesses the emotional stability to discern the fragility of momentary

impulsive actions. Baijnath succeeds where a character like Ishar Singh from Manto's "Thandā Gosht" (cold fresh) fails—he does not fall prey to the diabolical lure of the precarious situations during the times of violence. Where Manto stops short of providing a way out of such situations, Chandar takes a step ahead to find out a method to resolve the worst propensities of the times.

### Conclusion and Implications

Considering the sheer volume of Krishan Chandar's works across a period of four decades, it is beyond the confines of a single article to undertake a detailed examination of his oeuvre in its entirety. However, from a brief sample of his writings analysed in the course of this study, it is apparent how he not only sought to redefine the contours of modern Urdu writing in the context of the social-political transformations witnessed through the 1940s and 1950s, but also expanded the horizons of progressive Urdu literature within the major prose genres of short stories and novels. His lifelong association with the Progressive Writers' Association remained a constant factor in the development of his craft of storytelling across the decades. Even after the activities of the association somewhat waning in the years towards the close of 1950s, he continued to produce narratives of extensive social involvement, often resorting to satire and humour to bypass the rigours of state vigilance in the immediate post-Independence years. His novel, written in the autobiographical mode, called *Ek Gadhe ki Sarguzasht* (the autobiography of a donkey) and published in 1957, signifies a major intervention in this regard. He was also engaged in film-writing in the course of his long public career, and is associated with the one and only film produced by the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) called *Dharti ke Lāl* (Children of the Earth), which came out in 1946 and which was loosely based on his story-series "Anna Dātā." He also wrote a number of scripts for the radio.

Taken together, Krishan Chandar's approach towards the art of writing and, by extension, towards literature is one involving constant experimentation with his own limits and capabilities. Beginning his career steeped in the exuberance of romantic idealism, he eventually subjects this outlook to the hard realities of his times and accordingly modifies the expressive features of his art, yet never losing sight of his romantic temperament. He is called a "flawed progressive" (Jalil, *A Literary History* 576) for his apparent failure to retain the same intensity of intellect and purpose throughout his major writings. However, what is possibly lost in intensity is gained in expressivity—his writings encompass a range of emotions and sentiments hard to discern in the writings of his contemporaries in Urdu literature. His commitment towards his craft is also reflected in his endeavour to preserve and articulate the relevance of the Progressive Writers' Association during the 1960s and 70s, when it seemed to somewhat lose its focus and intensity *vis-à-vis* the revolutionary spirit

exhibited in the earlier years around Partition and Independence. Cinema emerges as a major site of progressive engagement in post-Independence, and most writers of the Progressive Generation, including Krishan Chandar, show interest in the multimedial possibilities afforded by the genre of filmmaking. Writing, whether for the print or for the cinema, continued to be his major preoccupation till the end, and it hardly comes as a surprise that he was just completing the first sentence of a new satirical essay when he had a massive heart attack leading to his death.

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