

**SOCIAL REALITY IN CREATIVE IMAGINATION :
A STUDY OF PREMCHAND'S WORKS**

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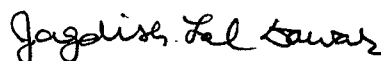
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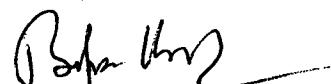
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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In his Presidential address to the first convention of the Progressive Writers' Association, Premchand had emphasised the social purpose of literary creation¹. He had then pointed out the writer's quest through his writings, to "end the oppressive social conditions so that the world become a better place to live"². In doing so, he was not simply underlining the "purpose" but he was also highlighting the relationship between the "intensity of experience" and "the force and sincerity" of creative endeavour³.

Premchand had the "insight to see the identity between the demands of society and the demands of literature"⁴ and precisely because "he could perceive this identity", he succeeded in creating works that

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1. See "Sahitya Ka Udeshey", Presidential address at the first convention of the Progressive Writers' Association, in Sahitya Ka Udeshey, Hans Prakashan, Allahabad, 1967, pp.9-26.
 2. Ibid, p.17.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Sudhir Chandra, "Premchand and Indian Nationalism", Modern Asian Studies, 16, 4(1982), p.601.

"combined social purpose and artistic excellence"⁵.

Premchand, however, chose to view these demands from the angle of the "oppressed, persecuted and deprived"⁶. He was "committed to the underdog"⁷ be they women, workers or peasants.

This study is a modest attempt to understand Premchand's perception of social reality and how it came to be depicted in his literary works and thus tries to explore the relationship between creativity and social experience. Within the limited scope of this dissertation, the problems relating to peasants and women have been taken up for consideration to demonstrate "how the true essence of reality" is depicted by Premchand.

The term "the true essence of reality" may be clarified at this point. True essence of reality

5. Ibid.

6. "Sahitya Ka Udeshey", op.cit., p.13.

7. Sudhir Chandra, "Premchand : A Historiographic View", E.P.W., Vol.XVI, No.15, April 11, 1981, p.669.

is not the photographic naturalism⁸, but an exploration of the "essential forces hidden behind the appearances"⁹, or, in the words of Brecht, a penetration to the causal nexus in the society¹⁰. It is a dramatisation of a process¹¹. Premchand presents reality in the form of historically significant social and ideological trends¹². These trends are

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8. "photographic realism or naturalism" says John Somerville "in the realm of art is analogous to what formal logic is in the realm of science, or mechanistic materialism is in the field of Philosophy. It fails to see & things what they are being transformed into. It transfixes reality, and in so doing, devitalizes and kills it. It accumulates minute details, but discerns no patterns, sees no forest, only trees; no whole, only fragmentary parts. It is blindly empirical, fruitlessly static". Quoted by Howard Fast, Literature and Reality, PPH, Bombay, 1953, p.54.
 9. George Lukacs "Appearance And Essence" in Gaylord C. Le Roy and Ursula Beitz (ed), Preserve And Create, New York, 1973, p.8.
 10. See Werner Mittenzwei "The Brecht-Lukacs debate" in Gaylord C. Le Roy and Ursula Beitz, op.cit., pp.199-229.
 11. See Raymond Williams, "Literature and Sociology", New Left Review, 67, May-June 1971, p.14. Premchand himself states that a writer writes a story but keeping the reality in view, "he makes a statue, but it is full of movement..." See "Sahitya Ka Udeyshay", op.cit., p.14.
 12. According to Premchand the duty of a creative writer is to create such situations in which we see that due to "what internal and external causes we have reached this condition of death and decline, and strive to remove them", "Sahitya Ka Udeyshay", op.cit., p.17.

represented by portraying typical characters. A typical character is one "in whom particular traits are combined with a high level of generalisation"¹³. Thus Falstaff (in Shakespear), Don Quixote (in Cervantes), Tom Jones (in Fielding) are all types, but they "are types in whom the social characteristics constantly reveal the individual and in whom personal hopes, hungers, loves, jealousies and ambitions in turn light up the social background"¹⁴.

An individual with strong, positive values comes into conflict with a society which either condemns or allows little possibility for the expression of those values. There is a dialectical interaction between such an individual and the objective social reality and out of struggle between the values represented by that individual and that of the society, between the old and the new, emerges

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13. Gaylord C. Le Roy and Ursula Beitz, op.cit., p.5.
14. Ralph Fox, The Novel and the People, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1956, p.66.

the new order.¹⁵ But this new order retains at the same time the characteristics of the old order, too,¹⁶ and this creates certain ambiguity or contradictions within the individual. This is an important dimension of Premchand's creative universe.

The question whether reality depicted in literature coincides with the objective nature of reality has been the subject of considerable attention. What is at the centre of this discussion is the nature and limitations of the autonomy of art in relation to the reality which forms its source. Bertold Brecht points out "A work which does not exhibit its

15. Here we may refer to the remarks made by Lucien Goldmann:

"For a dynamic thinker...whole of reality is a dynamic whole which progresses by the conflict between thesis and anti-thesis to a synthesis which both integrates and goes beyond them...this is the clearest possible expression of the dilemma: all human order is inadequate, and yet man must never give up his quest for adequate order".

The Hidden God, Translated by Philip Thody, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1964, pp.194, 199.

16. As Ralph Fox points out "The changes take place, men become conscious of them, they "fight out" the conflict between the old and new in their minds, but they do so unevenly, burdened by all kinds of past heritage, often unclearly, and always in such a way that it is not easy to trace the changes in men's minds". op.cit., p.62.

sovereignty vis-a-vis reality and which does not bestow sovereignty upon the public vis-a-vis reality is not a work of art¹⁷". But at the same time the world represented in a literary work is not merely a world of fantasy and illusion. It contains "nothing that does not also exist in the given reality, the actions, thoughts, feelings and dreams of men and women"¹⁸.

This dissertation seeks to explore some aspects of these questions with reference to Premchand's literary works. It is arranged under five heads :

- (A) Premchand's Intellectual Evolution;
- (B) Perception of Peasant Exploitation;
- (C) Changes in Rural Society;
- (D) Emancipation of Women : Problems and Solutions and
- (E) The Characters As Protagonists of Social Change.

17. Quoted by Herbert Marcuse: The Aesthetic Dimension, towards a critique of Marxist Aesthetic, Beacon Press, Boston, 1978, p.32.

18. Herbert Marcuse, op.cit., p.54.

CHAPTER - I

PREMCHAND'S INTELLECTUAL EVOLUTION

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PREMCHAND'S INTELLECTUAL EVOLUTION

This chapter is an attempt to trace the various intellectual and socio-political influences which went into the making of Premchand. While no direct relationship between these influences and his creatively or even views is intended, they serve as a useful background to his creative efforts.

EARLY LIFE AND FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

Premchand was born on 31st July, 1880 at Lamhi,¹ a village about four miles from Benaras. His Parents had named him Dhanpat Rai, but his uncle, who became very fond of the boy, called him Nawab Rai.² Premchand's grandfather, Gur Sahai Lal, had been a Patwari, and his father, Ajaib Lal, a clerk in the local post office, earning twenty-five rupees a month.³ Ajaib Lal, was

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1. There is difference of opinion among the biographers of Premchand about the actual date of birth. Amrit Rai, Premchand's son, has given 31st July, 1880, whereas Madan Gopal ascribes 10th August, 1881. Premchand, Bookabode, Lahore, 1944; P.H. The former seems to be correct, for he had not only direct access to the records but also his argument is supported by Shivrani Devi Premchand, Premchand Ghar Me, Atma Ram & Sons, Delhi, 1956, p.1.
 2. Shivrani Devi Premchand, op.cit., p.1.
 3. Prekash Chandra Gupta, Premchand, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1968, p.4.

"an honest person, straightforward, balanced and soft-spoken".⁴ Though he was acquainted with the Gita and Shastras, he did not believe in rituals.⁵ Most of the religious ceremonies, he thought, were sham; to him true religion only meant good deeds.⁶ Premchand was born and brought up in a family of which the norms and values were set by such an individual.

Whether the Kayasth Caste⁷ to which the family belonged had any appreciable impact on Premchand's early

4. Madan Gopal, Munshi Premchand : A Literary Biography, Asia Publishing House, Delhi, 1964, p.1. Now-onwards mentioned as Biography.
5. Amrit Rai, Premchand (an abridged version in English of Amrit Rai's Kalam Ka Sipahi, Translated by Harish Trivedi), PPH, 1982, p.9. Now-onwards mentioned Eng.Tm.
6. Madan Gopal, Biography, op.cit., p.1
7. The Caste Status of the Kayasths has been in dispute. Certain segments of the Caste trace their origin to Brahmins, but the Brahmins repudiate the connexion, and given them only the rank of the Sudra. Wilson, in his Glossary, states that they sprang from a Kshatriya father and a Vaishya mother. Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya points out "whether Kshatriyas or Sudras, they belong to the Upper layer of Hindu Society."
- These views have been summarised from the following writers :
 - (a) Rev.M.A. Sherring, Hindu Tribes And Castes (Cosmo Publications, Delhi, 1974, Vol.1, p.305;
 - (b) Kanan Isaksen Leonard, Social History of an Indian Caste : The Kayasths of Hyderabad, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1978, p.12;
 - (c) Hari Vansh Rai Bacchan, Kaya Bhulun Kya Yed Karun (What to forget and what to remember), Rajpal & Sons, Delhi, 1977. Hari Vansh Rai Bacchan provides a genealogy of his family and concludes that his ancestors descended from a Brahmin family;
 - (d) Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya, Hindu Castes And Setts, Editions India, Calcutta, 1896, p.139.

life is difficult to reckon. Traditionally a service caste,⁸ Kayasths were "probably the first among the Hindus to take up the study of Persian."⁹ During the Mughal rule, they worked as scribes¹⁰ and were closely associated with the rulers which affected their outlook and life style.¹¹ They contributed significantly towards the prose and poetry of the era.¹² During the British regime, they picked up English education in order to seek employment under the new rulers of the land.¹³ Thus their hereditary profession made the Kayasths more catholic in their outlook and developed in them the love for belles letters. Karan Isaksen Leonard notes a more important attribute in this caste. The Kayasths, he remarks, "have long been associated with social change, whether as products or agents of it."¹⁴ Judged from the attitude of his parents, it is reasonable to assume that Premchand's family had imbibed

8. Karan Isaksen Leonard, op.cit., p.7.

9. Aziz Ahmed, Studies in Islamic Culture in The Indian Environment, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1964, p.106.

10. Ibid. Also see Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya, op.cit., p.139.

11. Karan Isaksen Leonard, op.cit., p.14. Also see Aziz Ahmed, op.cit., p.106. He says "Compared to other Hindu communities they (Kayasths) were less observant of the Orthodox ritual, and under Muslim and Shakti influences less conscious of Caste distinctions."

12. Karan Isaksen Leonard, op.cit., p.14.

13. Hari Vansh Rai Bacchan, op.cit., ~~p.~~

14. Karan Isaksen Leonard, op.cit., p.14.

in good measure qualities associated with this wider participation and that Premchand was an heir to them.

By the time Premchand was eight, his education had started; the usual education in Kayasth homes those days, which meant learning Urdu and Persian.¹⁵ A little over a mile from Lamhi was the village of Lalpur, where lived a Maulvi who, though a tailor by profession, ran a school.¹⁶ Premchand's formal education started under the Maulvi. Later when his father was transferred to Gorakhpur he joined the Mission School¹⁷ from where he passed the 8th standard. He completed his school education from Queen's College, Benares.¹⁸ He wanted to pursue higher education but due to weakness in Mathematics he could not seek admission in a higher class.¹⁹ He passed B.A. as a private candidate along with his job as a school-teacher.

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15. See Hans Raj 'Rahbar', Premchand : His Life And Work, Atma Ram & Sons, Delhi, 1937, p.8.
16. See Kamal Kishore Goyanka, Premchand Vishva Kosh (An Encyclopaedia of Premchand's Life and Literature, Delhi, 1981) in five volumes, Vol.1, p.26.
17. Amrit Rai, Kalam Ka Sipahi, Hans Prakashan, Allahabad, 1976, p.31.
18. Ibid., p.34.
19. Ibid., pp.34-36.

Premchand was destined to a lonely childhood which perhaps heightened his sensibility towards the natural and social environment. He was the only son of his parents²⁰ and naturally received much affection, particularly from his mother.²¹ But it was short-lived. His mother passed away²² when he was only eight years, a loss which "pierced to his heart's marrow."²³ His

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20. See Amrit Rai, Kalam Ka Sipahi, op.cit., p.22 (Now-onwards mentioned as KKS). He had an elder sister also who was older to him by eight years.
21. For a detailed study about the mother-son relationship in Hindu families, see
 (a) Sudhir Kakay, The Inner World : A Psycho-analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1978, p.74;
 (b) S.S. Dube, Indian Village, Routledge & Regan Paul Ltd., London, 1961, p.142;
 (c) Dharendra Narain, "Interpersonal relationships in the Hindu Family", pp.454-480, in Reuben Hill and Rene Koning (ed.) Families in East And West, Mouton, Paris, 1970.
22. Amrit Rai, KKS, op.cit., p.22.
23. Hans Raj 'Rahbar', op.cit., p.4
 In several of his works, Premchand pays tender, dignified and affectionate tributes to maternal love. According to Madan Gopal, "Her life of service and sacrifice went as a long way in influencing Premchand's conception of love." Premchand, The Bookabode, Lahore, 1944, p.15.
 For a sense of loss of his mother, see particularly the stories "Prerna" ("An impulse", Mansarovar, 4, 5-17); "Ghar Jewai" ("Son-in-Law at home", Mansarovar, 1, 144-155); "Alagyojha", Mansarovar, 1, 13-34; "Vimata" ("Step-mother", Mansarovar, 8, 139-143) and Premchand's later novel Karambhumi.

father, harassed by repeated transfers and overwork²⁴, in addition to his bereavement, could not give young Nawab Rai the attention and care a motherless boy needed.²⁵ Then Ajaib Lal married a second time, just two years after the demise of his first wife.²⁶ The arrival of a step-mother did not, however, alleviate Nawab's loneliness and misery, it only served to accentuate it.²⁷ He could no longer stay with his grandmother in Lamhi and forget himself in the fairy tales told by her.²⁸ His newly married father had now even less time for him and the step-mother's harsh treatment aggravated his misery.²⁹ The absence of the grandmother, memories of the loving mother, father's moodiness and neglect, step-mother's harshness and lack of any companionship made Nawab miserable.³⁰ The wife became wayward which made him yet more miserable.³¹

24. See Amrit Rai, KKS, p.22.

25. See Madan Gopal, Biography, op.cit., p.14.

26. See Kamal Kishore Goyanka, op.cit., p.27.

27. Amrit Rai, Eng.Tzn., p.16.

28. Madan Gopal, Biography, p.14.

29. See Shivrani Devi Premchand, op.cit., pp.3,5,6. Also see Madan Gopal, Biography, p.15.

30. Hans Raj 'Rahbar', op.cit., p.7.

31. See Amrit Rai, KKS, op.cit., pp.23-25.

Adolescence

Newab spent most of the period of his adolescence at Gorakhpur. His life at Gorakhpur was important for arousing his interest in literature. It was here he read some of the works which had an abiding influence on his young mind. For instance, he read the romantic stories from the volumes of Tilasm-i-Hoshruha³². This is a "never ending story which by virtue of its large scope, purity and multiplicity of themes leaves far behind the medieval spiritual stories of Europe"³³. These romances^a gripped the young Nawab by their "mystery, romance, chivalry and adventure"³⁴. He found in them an escape from the harsh and bitter miseries of his personal life. While they soothed him, these

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32. While at Gorakhpur, Nawab had a friend whose father was in the tobacco business, and both boys would hide themselves in a corner of the shop and smoke tobacco on the sly. While the smoke made merry circles around their heads, the tobacconist's son used to read aloud the romantic stories from volumes of this book.

Premchand describes these experiences in a story "Meri Pehli Rachna" ("My first Composition", Kafen, Hans Prakashan, Allahabad, 1980, pp.48-52.

33. Raghupati Sahai, "Reminiscences" in Amrit Rai (ed) Premchand Samriti, Hans Prakashan, Allahabad, 1980, pp.175-188.

Ralph Russel translates the title Tilasm-i-Hoshruha as "The Enchantment which steals away one's senses". "The Development of The Modern Novel in Urdu", in T.W. Clark (ed). The Novel in India George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1970, p.107.

34. V.S. Naravane, Premchand : His Life and Work Vikar, New Delhi, 1980, p.16.

romance, left a powerful influence on his mind.³⁵

These tales "awakened his self-conscious and in fact provoked him into indulging in 'pen-pushing'.³⁶

He developed a taste for reading and was drawn "into the immense treasure of books and magazines."³⁷

But how did he manage to get other books?

Premchand throws light on this matter in his story

"Meri Pahlī Rechna" ("My first composition") :

By the bank of the river lived a bookseller named Buddhial. I would go and sit in his shop and there read the novels stocked by him. As I could hardly have been allowed to sit and browse there all the day, what I did was to take Notes and Keys to English textbooks from the shop and hawk them to my school-mates, while in recompense I enjoyed the privilege of bringing home novels to read. In this manner, in just two or three years I must have gone through hundreds of novels.³⁸

Thus by the age of thirteen he had already poured over the writings of Mirza Ruswa, Pandit Ratannath Sarshar, Maulana Sharar, Maulvi Mohammed Ali Harsoi and a host of other Urdu writers.³⁹ He also read

35. As Raghupati Sahai 'Pirāq' remarks : "In fact he had heard those stories with such an interest and diligence that their spirit had entered into his own interesting stories and the qualities of flow and sustenance of interest in his descriptions originated from these very stories." op.cit., p.177. Translation mine.

36. Madan Gopal, Biography, p.17.

37. Hans Raj 'Rahbar', op.cit., p.11.

38. Quoted by Amrit Rai, See Eng.Trn., op.cit., p.18.

39. Premchand, "Meri Pahlī Rechna", op.cit., p.48.

Urdu translations of scores of volumes of Reynold's Mysteries of the Court of London.

Besides these he read Puranag of which the Naval Kishore press of Lucknow had published an Urdu translation.⁴⁰

It will be useful to discuss these writers so as to have an idea of the impression they left on Premchand's adolescent mind.

Mirza Muhammad Rusva (1858-1931) the writer of half a dozen short novels, is best known today for his Umrao Jan Ada (1899).⁴¹ Rusva gives his own view of fiction.⁴² According to him a fiction-writer is a kind of historian.⁴³ He says "I have made it a principle in my own writing to record in my novels only those things which I have myself seen, and which have made an impression upon me, believing that these things will make an impression

40. Ibid.

41. Muhammad Sadiq, A History of Urdu Literature, Oxford University Press, London, 1964, p.355.

42. See R. Russell "The Development of the Modern Novel in Urdu" in T.W. Clark (ed.), The Novel in India : Its Birth and Development, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1970, p.133.

43. Ibid., p.133.

on others also...My novels should be regarded as a history of our times, and I hope it will be found a useful one."⁴⁴ In Umrao Jan Ada "he showed that he could not only enunciate these principles but also apply them in practice⁴⁵ as well. Umrao Jan Ada is the study of the life of a kidnapped girl who is bought by a Courtesan of Lucknow⁴⁶ and trained for prostitution.⁴⁷ Rusva depicts in detail the "life of prostitutes, their education, habits and customs, their clientele, and their dealings with them."⁴⁸ It also brings before us the disorder and decadence characteristic of the 19th century Indian States. Its other merit lies in some well-drawn character-sketches belonging to different classes of society.⁴⁹

44. Quoted by Russel, Ibid., p.133.

45. Ibid.

46. Prof. Ziya-Ul-Hasan Faruqi, in K. Santhanam (ed.), An Anthology of Indian Literature, Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1969, p.652.

47. Muhammad Sadiq, op.cit., p.355.

48. Ibid.

49. Prof. Ziya-Ul-Hasan Faruqi, op.cit., p.652.

Pandit Ratannath Sarshar (1846-1902)⁵⁰

has left a large number of novels, long and short.⁵¹ But he is renowned for his monumental work Fisana-i-Azad,⁵² a huge medley extending over nearly two thousand pages.⁵³ Sarshar has portrayed the life and manners of Lucknow society⁵⁴ with his scintillating humour.⁵⁵ Defending the writings of

50. See R. Russel, op.cit., p.111. Muhammad Sadiq says that he was born in Lucknow, in or about 1845, op.cit., p.326.

51. Muhammad Sadiq, op.cit., p.326.

52. Premchand translated this novel into Hindi and titled it Azad Katha. The first instalment of Fisana-i-Azad "appeared in the columns of the Qudh Akhbār and it took the Urdu reading world by storm." Ram Babu Saksena, A History of Urdu Literature, Allahabad, 1970, p.328.

53. Muhammad Sadiq, op.cit., p.328.

54. Ram Babu Saksena, op.cit., p.329. According to Muhammad Sadiq "Sarshar" unfolds before the reader a teeming world of men and women, of all sorts, the effete nawabs and their retainers, drunkards, opium-eaters, thieves, idlers, doctors, quacks, pandits, ascetics, beggars, dancing-girls, darvishes, fools, wrestlers, swash-bucklers, adventurers; and wherever we witness, the muharram ceremonies, the preparation of marriage, or a dancing party; and wherever we are, in the street, the market, or the seraglio, there is the tang and savour of life, and an air of verisimilitude obtained by local colour and a reproduction of the language peculiar to those people..." op.cit., p.330.

55. "He is not so much put out by the vices of his age, as tickled by its follies...Sarshar long held the field as our humorist par-excellence." Muhammad Sadiq, op.cit., p.334.

Sarshar against the attack by Hakim Behram Saheb Gorakhpuri on the writings of Sarshar, Premchand says :

The fact is that his books are honest pictures of the contemporary world. If some one reads Fasana-i-Azad a hundred years hence, he will get life-like glimpses into the culture, thought processes and love for literature of the common folks who lived twenty-five years from now. Such descriptions may not be available from the study of history, howsoever deep and detailed it may be. In other words, Sarshar has shown the magic of his magic pen in describing whatever is contained in Zamane Ki Tasveer.⁵⁶

Muhammad Sadiq compares the two works Don Quixote and Fasana-i-Azad : "Both are picaresque in form and satirical in purpose; both attack outgrown institutions, one the romances of chivalry, and the other the decadent medievalism of Lucknow."⁵⁷

Regarding Sarshar's attack on evils, Premchand says: "...Sarshar undertook to cure the society of the maladies which were killing it, and like other experienced doctors he mixed his bitter and tasteless potions with sugar to make them palatable."⁵⁸

56. "Sharar Aur Sarshar", Vividh-Prasang, vol.I, pp.60-61. Also see p.64 where Premchand says "Sarshar's carefree sarcasm is more effective than Dichen's serious humour".

57. op.cit., p.328.

58. "Sharar Aur Sarshar", op.cit., p.63.

But R. Russell feels that "Sarshar has nothing of Cervante's mature wisdom, or of his intellectual and artistic power. His modernism is of the most crude and uncritical kind..."⁵⁹

In spite of the realistic portrayal of contemporary life, Fasana "harks back to the old ideals" in its preference for "the fantastic and the ultra-romantic."⁶⁰ As Raghupati Sahai points out :

But it does contain unnatural and miraculous episodes. This work presents before us a world which does not have a palpable reality but only a vivid picturization of a dream world⁶¹

Abdul Halim Sharar (1860-1926) was the pioneer of the historical romances in Urdu,⁶² and a strong supporter of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's ideas. A visit to Aligarh and the study of Hali's Musaddas brought home to him the need for reform, making him a life-long supporter of the Aligarh movement.⁶³

59. op.cit., p.112.

60. Muhammad Sadiq, op.cit., p.336.

61. op.cit., p.184.

62. R. Russell, op.cit., p.123. Also see Zabalda Yaseen Ali Khan, "The History in Urdu Literature" in K. Santhanam (ed.), op.cit., p.107. And also see Premchand, "Sharar Aur Sarshar", op.cit., p.61. Premchand says that Sharar tried to imitate Sir Walter Scot, but he could not achieve the height of Scot. Ibid. p.62.

63. Muhammad Sadiq, op.cit., p.339.

All his writings are geared "to serve the cause of the New Light."⁶⁴ He was one step ahead of Sir Sayyid in his opposition to Pardah system.⁶⁵ The theme of his historical romances is "the portrayal of the glorious past of the Islam and of the great superiority of Islamic civilization in its heyday over that of contemporary non-Muslim (especially Christian) powers."⁶⁶ Faiz Ahmad Faiz writes of him :

Sharar's age is ...an age when the Muslims had just awoken to a consciousness of their decline. These romantic tales in the first place helped them to forget the bitterness of everyday life. Secondly, the recital of past conquests partly inspired them with self-respect and partly with emotional solace, with the thought that even if they were not heroes at least their forefathers had been. And thirdly, the description of vices of other peoples provided them with a way of taking mental revenge for their present subjection...This is why Sharar's novels are so popular..."⁶⁷

In spite of the reformist zeal of Sharar, the overall atmosphere of his works "is unmistakably

64. R. Russel, op.cit., p.123.

65. Ibid. One of his novels Badr Un Nisa Ki Musibat is designed to show the disastrous effect which the Parda system could produce.

66. Ibid. This critic discusses Flora Florina in detail in order to illustrate this method of contrasting the glorious past with the decadent present. The book was first published serially, from 1893 and appeared in book form in 1899 and is "generally agreed to be one of his best books". Ibid.

67. "Mizan", Nashirun, London, 1962, Quoted by R. Russell, op.cit.

that of a dastan.⁶⁸ There is the same evocation of the heroic age of Islam, the same battle of unalloyed virtue against unalloyed vice, the same dependence on exciting episodes and the same spicing of the story with erotic detail.⁶⁹ And then, says Muhammad Sadiq, "He is excessively tainted with the false and sickly emotionalism of the Old School of Urdu Poetry; and in his heroes we at once detect the effete and tearful lover of the Urdu Ghazal."⁷⁰

Another writer whom Premchand was fond of reading was Devikinandan Khatri (1861-1913), the author of ChandraKanta (1891) and ChandraKanta Santiti.⁷¹ Khatri's novels were romantic love stories of the type of Aesop Fables,⁷² full of miracle and enchantment.⁷³ The simple style of his works made its language as congenial as its subject matter

68. R. Russel, op.cit., p.132.

69. R. Russel, op.cit., p.128.

70. op.cit., p.343.

71. Amrit Rai, Kalam Ka Sipahi, p.36.

72. R.L. Handa, History of Hindi Language And Literature, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1978, p.341.

73. K.B. Jindal, A History of Hindi Literature, Kitab Mahal, Allahabad, 1955, p.234.



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was exciting.⁷⁴ The novels gained instant popularity like Arabian Nights.⁷⁵ The ChandraKanta series became so popular that "thousands of persons are said to have learned the Devanagari Script for the sole purpose of reading ChandraKanta."⁷⁶ His novels "did more to popularise Hindi in the country than all the memorials, pamphlets and discourses of his predecessors had done."⁷⁷ Ram Chandra Shukla points out "In the beginning ChandraKanta Santati inspired many young men and women to write in Hindi. ChandraKanta took them to other kinds of literary books and with experience they started writing as well."⁷⁸ It also paved way for the Hindi work of Premchand.⁷⁹

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74. Ronald Stuart McGregor, A History of Indian Literature, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1974, p.100.
75. R.L. Handa, op.cit., p.341.
Writing about ChandraKanta, McGregor points out "Its subject matter is typical of the romances that flourished from this time : love (often, as here, that of a Prince and Princess); family embroilment; magic and wizardry; melo-dramatic and often violent adventure; and eventual marriage of the partners." p.100.
76. McGregor, op.cit., p.100. Also see R.L. Handa, op.cit., p.341; K.B. Jindal, op.cit., p.234; Dr.Nagendra (ed.), Hindi Sahitya Ka Itihas, National Publishing House, Delhi, 1976, p.486. Also see Ram Chander Shukla, Hindi Sahitya Ka Itihas, Nagar Pracharani Sabha, Kashi, Sarvot, 2029, pp.340-341.
77. K.B. Jindal, op.cit., p.234.
78. op.cit., p.341.
79. McGregor, op.cit., p.100.

The influence of all these writings discussed above "seeped into Premchand's creative centre, and slowly nourished it during the lean years at school.⁸⁰ This influence is intelligible in Premchand's early writings.⁸¹

Marriage

When he was mere fifteen years of age, Nawab Rai was set for getting married.⁸² He was happy at

80. Han Raj 'Rahbar', op.cit., p.30.

81. Ibid. "His first efforts, like the efforts of most young writers, are not remarkable for artistic beauty. He tended to imitate elder Urdu writers by going in for lumbering words and ornate phrases; the influence obscure and blobby of Pandit Ratannath Sarshar is especially visible." p.32.

Also see Manohar Bendopadhyay, Life and Works of Premchand, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 1981, p.6.

Also see Robert O.Swan, op.cit., pp.56-60. The stories in which the influence of these writings can be seen are listed by this critic: (i) "Duniya Ka Sabse Annol Ratana" ("The most precious gem in the world", 1907); (ii) "Sok Ka Puruskar" ("Reward for Distress", 1907-1909); (iii) "Nasihato-Ka Daftar" ("Office of Counsel"); (iv) "Triya Carita" ("Female Wiles", 1913); (v) "Gairat-Ki Katar" ("The Dagger of Modesty", 1915); (vi) "Manavan" ("Reconciliation"); (vii) "Amrit" ("Immortal", pre 1914); (viii) "Dhokha" ("Deception", 1916) and (ix) "Anoth Larki" ("Fatherless Girl", 1916)

82. See Amrit Rai, Kalam Ka Sipahi, p.32.

the prospect and "had himself cut the bamboos for the marriage pavillion."⁸³ He looked forward to the realisation of the romantic notions of marital bliss which he had derived from the books he had read.⁸⁴ But between his dream and reality fell a shadow. His wife was dark, ugly and pock-marked⁸⁵ and she limped.⁸⁶ It was a marriage of convenience arranged by the father of his step-mother and the elderly people in the family. There was no question of the consent of the bride and bridegroom.⁸⁷ Nawab's father expressed his chagrin to his wife "Your father has pushed my son into a well. Such an unseemly wife for my handsome son."⁸⁸ Premchand might have reconciled

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83. Robert O.Swan, op.cit., p.6.
84. Amrit Rai, Kalam Ka Sipahi, p.32. Also see V.S. Naravane, op.cit., p.16. "He had been reading novels in which the heroine was always beautiful and mysterious."
85. See Shivrani Devi Premchand, op.cit., p.7 and also pp.8-9.
86. Amrit Rai goes into greater detail. "Her appearance was unpleasing-coarse, fat, slaternly. Not only this, on her face were deep scars of small/pox and one leg was shorter than the other so that the unfortunate girl moved in a jerky manner". Quoted by Robert O.Swan, op.cit., p.6.
87. Indernath Madan, Premchand, (An Interpretation), Minerva Book Shop, Lahore, 1946, p.22.
88. Amrit Rai, Eng.Tr., p.26.

himself with his fate but for the quarrelsome nature of his wife.⁸⁹ She was always at logger-heads with his step-mother. Her behaviour with Nawab also was rude.⁹⁰ The marriage proved an unqualified failure, and "it was not long before young Mrs. Premchand left her husband, who, it must be added, sent her regularly a maintenance allowance that lay within his means for several years."⁹¹

Within two years of Nawab's marriage, his father died. This was yet another blow to him. At the tender age of seventeen⁹² he was left with the heavy burden of a large family.⁹³ And he was

89. See Shivrani Devi Premchand, op.cit., p.9.

90. Amrit Rai, Kalem Ka Sipahi, p.33.

91. Madan Gopal, Premchand, op.cit., p.16. Also see Premchand's letter to Nigam, dated June, 1905. See Chhithi Patra, vol.1, p.3.

92. See Amrit Rai, op.cit., p.34. According to Indernath Madan, Premchand was hardly fifteen when his father died, op.cit., p.21. Also see Raghupati Sahai, 'Firaq', who remarks that Premchand was just fifteen years old when his father passed away, op.cit., p.178.

93. The experience described in his story "Jeevan-Sar" ("My Life"), Kafan, op.cit., p56-55. Also see Shivrani Devi Premchand, op.cit., 9. Also see Premchand's story, "Veemata" ("Step-mother"), op.cit.

then only a student earning a few rupees a month through private tuitions.⁹⁴ But this paltry sum did not suffice for his requirements.⁹⁵ Premchand went on a borrowing spree. Unable to repay the loan in time "he had to put up with great agony and had to avoid the notice of money-lenders for fear of public insult."⁹⁶

The circumstances must have made a powerful influence on the hapless young man. Through his marriage he learnt to his dismay how a boy and a girl without knowing each other and without having even a glimpse of each other are yoked together to live a life of perpetual misery. Through his widowed

94. According to Raghupati Shai,^a he was earning just Rs.6/- out of his tuitions, op.cit., p.178.

95. See V.S. Naravane, op.cit., p.19. "Out of the five rupees he earned, three were sent to his stepmother. His own expenses had to be limited to the remaining two rupees."

96. Manohar Bandopadhyay, op.cit., p.9. See for further detail, Amrit Rai, Kalam Ka Sipahi, pp.36-38; Madan Gopal, Biography, pp-25-26; and the story, "Jeevan Sar", op.cit.

In fact Premchand had to face the problem of debts throughout his life, particularly in the later years. The problem of debts is also a recurring theme in his creative works. It is the dominant theme in Godan.

step-mother he must also have realised the consequences of an older man getting married a second time to a woman much younger to him in age. But these tribulations were only symptoms of a deeper malady. In striving to diagnose the malady, young Nawab was well on the way to becoming Premchand.

INFLUENCE OF SOCIO-RELIGIO-REFORM MOVEMENTS

One of the decisive influences on Premchand seems to be the ideas of the 19th century social reformers. Of these Swami Vivekanand, Dayanand and M.G. Ranade seem to be the most important.⁹⁷ These ideas did help to kindle his indignation against social injustice and turn his mind against social evils.

Swamy Vivekanand endeavoured to achieve in the sphere of Philosophy and Religion what Raja Ram Mohan Roy had done in the sphere of social thought.⁹⁸ Much of the tragedy of his countrymen lay, he perceived, in their quest for Mukti.⁹⁹ which was

97. Amrit Rai, KKS, p.29.

98. V.S. Naravane, Modern Indian Thought, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1964, p.95.

99. See Charles H. Heimsath, Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform, Princeton, 1964, p.26.

but a euphemism for escapism. Rituals, superstitions and vices like "don't touchism"¹⁰⁰ confounded further the woe-begone nation. By bringing to the people the true meaning of spirituality,¹⁰¹ Vivekananda wanted to take the masses out of the morass of degeneration.

According to Vivekananda one of the major causes of downfall of India is the neglect of the masses.¹⁰² It is in fact the great national sin.¹⁰³ He says "so long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold everyone a traitor, who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them."¹⁰⁴ Education for all and¹⁰⁵

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100. See, The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1964, Vol.3, p.167.
101. See, Prof. Belarani De, "Swami Vivekananda : His Message to India and to the World," in Swami Vivekananda Centenary, 1963-64, Rama Krishna Mission Ashram, Narendrapur, Bengal, p.47.
102. Vivekananda, Rebuild India, Rama Krishna Math and Rama Krishna Mission Convention, Calcutta, 1980, p.10.
103. Complete Works, Vol. 11, p.192, op.cit.
104. Rebuild India, op.cit., pp.20, 26, 39. Also see Complete Works, Vol.111, op.cit., p.432.
105. Complete Works, op.cit., Vol.4, p.482. Also see Rebuild India, op.cit., p.28.

emancipation of women¹⁰⁶ were the corner-stones of Vivekananda's programme of regeneration of the nation.

Thus at a time when the whole nation lay supine under a foreign rule, Vivekananda roused his people to their pristine glory and instilled a sense of confidence among the Indians.¹⁰⁷

The vigour and masculinity of Vivekananda's ideas appealed to Premchand.¹⁰⁸ He wrote an article "Swami Vivekananda"¹⁰⁹ in which he quotes Vivekananda :

My young friends, be strong! That is my advice to you. You can attain Mukti more easily by playing football than by studying the Bhagavadgita! You can really practice what the Gita teaches, only if your muscles are strong. The teachings of the Bhagavadgita were not imparted to cowards. They were all given to Arjuna, who was brave and fearless.¹¹⁰

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106. Rebuild India, op.cit., p.13. Also see Complete Works, op.cit., Vol.VIII, p.214.
107. See Ainslie. T. Embree, "Vivekananda And Indian Nationalism", pp.519-524; in R.C. Majumdar (ed.). Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume, Swamy Vivekananda Centenary, Calcutta, 1963, p.523.
108. V.S. Naravane, Premchand: His Life And Work, op.cit., p.44.
109. See Kamal Kishore Goenka, Premchand Vishv Kosh, op.cit., p.35. This article was published in Zamana, May, 1968.
110. Quoted by V.S. Naravane, quoted above, p.44.

Amrit Rai gives three reasons which brought Premchand under the influence of Vivekananda.¹¹¹ Firstly, he "saw in him the true Hindu"¹¹², secondly, Vivekananda's selfless service to humanity and especially his concern for the poor and the downtrodden,¹¹³ and lastly "his robust and vigorous patriotism."¹¹⁴ Writing about Vivekananda's attitude to social reform Premchand points out :

While a staunch support of social reform, Vivekananda was not happy with the current rate of progress in this regard. Most of the efforts made in this direction at this time were aimed at the higher and the educated class. The Purdah system, widow-remarriages, and the caste-system are the greatest social problems of our times which are crying out for reform, and each one relates to the educated classes. Vivekananda had a loftier ideal, of raising the downtrodden and educating and adopting them. They are the roots of Hindu society, and the educated classes merely its branches, to make it flourish one must water its roots."¹¹⁵

111. Kalam Ka Sipahi, pp.94-95. Also see its English Translation, op.cit., pp.68-69.

112. Ibid., p.68, (Eng.Tr.)

113. Kalam Ka Sipahi, p.94.

114. Ibid. Eng.Tr., p.94.

Also see Robert O.Swan, op.cit., p.18. Summing up the influence of Deyananda and Vivekananda on Premchand, Robert O.Swan points out "It was because Saraswati and Vivekananda turned to the uplift of the poor and the illiterate that they appealed to Premchand. Furthermore, that they seemed to do it in an Indian way pleased him. The influence of Arya Samaj and of Vivekananda is evident in Premchand's life and in the special mark of his work."

115. Quoted by Amrit Rai, Eng.Tr., op.cit., p.69.

Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) was another socio-religio-reformer who impressed Premchand. Dayananda was a real "Hindu Luther"¹¹⁶. As the Hindu religious and social structures are organically interwoven, caste hierarchy, sex inequality, untouchability, and social taboos have flourished because of the sanction of religion¹¹⁷. Therefore, Dayananda first of all, completely rejected the religious validity of many social taboos that were prevalent among the Hindus.¹¹⁸ Dayananda attributed India's degradation chiefly to the Hindus' preoccupation with superfluous rituals, sponsored by Brahmin priests.¹¹⁹ In Satvarth Prakash, his main attack is at the priestly class, idol-worship¹²⁰ and superstitious beliefs and practices.

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116. J.T.F. Jordan, "Hindu Religious and Social Reform in British India" in A.L. Basham (ed.), A Cultural History of India, Oxford, 1975, p.371.
117. A.R. Desai, Social Background of Indian Nationalism, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1976, p.295.
118. See Charles H. Heimsath, op.cit., pp.119-120.
119. Ibid., p.121.
120. See Satvarth Prakash (Light of Truth), translated by Durga Prasad, Jan Gyan Prakashan, Bombay, 1976, pp.346-347.

Like Swami Vivekananda, Dayananda also gave importance to education. He considered education as the most potent instrument of social change. Ignorance, according to Dayananda, was the major cause of India's backwardness. Education was a major tool to banish social wrong.¹²¹ He was dissatisfied with the existing system of education and while reacting to it he gave his own alternative : a liberal and enlightened system of instructions, the essence of which was to bring about physical, mental and spiritual development of the students.¹²² It is one of the significant aspects of Dayananda's educational ideas that despite his obsession with Vedic knowledge, he recognised the importance of science education.¹²³ Dayananda advocated mass and compulsory education for all boys and girls, irrespective of their caste.¹²⁴ He was also very keen on women's education. If the mother is not educated how can she bring up her children in the proper way, he queried. For

121. See Satyarth Prakash, op.cit., Chapters 2 & 3.

122. Ibid.

123. Ibid. Chapter 3, p.68.

124. Ibid. p.40.

a nation to prosper, women's education is very essential.¹²⁵ His advocacy of education for women originated from the genuine respect he had for fair sex. The opposition by his movement (The Arya Samaj) to child marriage and their plea for widow-remarriage were a natural, and welcome, outgrowth of the fight for women's cause.

Dayananda founded the Arya Samaj in 1875¹²⁶ and it "proved the most impressive and influential religious and social reform movement of the era."¹²⁷ In spite of the split between orthodox and liberals in 1893, the Arya Samaj "grew as no reform body ever grew : by the end of the century its members were fast approaching 100,000.¹²⁸ By 1901 nearly three-quarters of the members of Arya Samaj were located in the United Provinces (present Uttar Pradesh).¹²⁹ By the time of

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125. Ibid, p.74. "It is the proof of your ignorance, selfishness and stupidity that you prohibit woman from studying..."
126. J.T.F. Jordan's, Dayananda Sarasvati : His Life and Ideas, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1978, p.284.
127. J.T.F. Jordan's, "Hindu Religious And Social Reform in British India", op.cit., p.380.
128. J.T.F. Jordan's, "Hindu Religious And Social Reform in British India", Ibid, p.376. Also see Charles H. Heimsath, op.cit., pp.294 & 302.
129. Charles H. Heimsath, Ibid, p.303, quoted by Robert O. Swan, op.cit., p.10.

Premchand's residence, in Partapgarh, 1900-1903 and
¹³⁰
 1904-1905, Amrit Rai writes :

At this time there was a great deal of movement among the Arya Samajists. Preachers travelled about. At place after place there were meetings, gatherings, debates with orthodox pandits. The evils of child marriage were exposed, the wrongs of ill-matched marriages were shown, and arguments assembled from the Shastras approving the marriage of widows.¹³¹

Premchand was a member of the Arya Samaj¹³² and its ideals made profound influence on him. The influence of Arya Samaj is evident from many of his earlier novels and stories where "leaders of the Arya

130. Robert O. Swan, Ibid, p.10.

131. Ibid, p.10. He points out the questions regarding marriage customs appears to have been very prominent in the proceedings.

132. That Premchand was the member of Arya Samaj is evident from his letter written to Nigam, written on 6th Feb., 1913 :

I owe ten rupees to the Hamirpur Arya Samaj. They have asked for the sum many times but I have not been able to pay because of my tightness. Please send rupees ten, if you can afford, to the Secretary Arya Samaj, by Money-order on my behalf. I'll be grateful. You will have to bear this hardship for me, as they are going to have a meeting, shortly. I repeat my request : please do send Rs.10/-.

Chhithi Petra, ed.by Amrit Rai, Hans Prakashan, Allahabad, 1962, Vol.I, p.17. Also see Amrit Rai, KKS, op.cit., p.45.

Samaj were introduced as important characters.¹³³

One of these earlier novels is Prema. Robert O. Swan feels that "such circumstantial evidence as the Arya Samaj preacher in the novel Prema, who induced the hero of the story to go out and marry a widow, makes it clear that Premchand himself was impressed by the reform group's activities."¹³⁴

Interestingly, Premchand himself remarried Shiv Rani Devi, a widow, in March, 1906.¹³⁵

What brought Premchand so close to Arya Samaj were his own bitter experiences, his own unhappy marriage and the widow-hood of his step-mother.¹³⁶

133. V.S. Naravane, op.cit., p.24.

134. op.cit., p.10.

135. See Kamal Kishore Goyanka, op.cit., p.34. Amrit Rai, KKS, op.cit., pp.70-75, and Madan Gopal, Biography, op.cit., p.58. However, Madan Gopal says the year of second marriage was 1909.

According to Indernath Madan, Premchand married against the wishes of his relatives. He "alienated the sympathy of several friends and relations by his radical action. He also lost the customary dowry which would have been a timely help", op.cit., p.23.

136. See Amrit Rai, KKS, p.45. "He was sincerely inclined towards this new phenomenon on the basis of whatever he had himself experienced in his life and seen or heard about such incidents in his neighbourhood."

Thus outside influence of the socio-religio-reform movements synchronized with his inner need. He himself had been groping as if in the dark, to find an answer to these problems and the Arya Samaj showed him the way. The questions of reform raised by the 19th century movements were topics of discussion at the evening sessions he had with his friends.¹³⁷

INFLUENCE OF NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Nationalism seems to be an equally important influence on Premchand. The first glimpses of this influence can be discovered in Premchand's popular monthly column in Zamana.¹³⁸ Some of the articles which

137. Ibid, pp.65-68.

139. This journal was started by Sheobrat Lal Varman in February, 1903 from Quaisari Press, Bareilly and Munshi Daya Narayan Nigam, had been editing it from Kanpur since November-December 1903. Premchand developed his acquaintance with Nigam in 1903, through correspondence. Two years later Premchand was transferred to the Government High School in Kanpur, and soon a close friendship developed between Munshi Daya Narayan Nigam and Premchand. The latter started writing popular monthly column entitled "Raftar-i-Zamana" ("The March of Time"). These views summarised from Medan Gopal, op.cit., pp.44-45 and Hans Raj 'Rahbar', op.cit., p.39 and Amrit Rai, KKS, op.cit., pp.65-68.

appeared in these columns are : "Deshi Cheeron Ka Parchar Kaise Bahh Sakata Hai" ("How to Spread Propaganda of Swadesh Articles"¹³⁹); "Swadeshi Andolan" ("Swadeshi Movement"¹⁴⁰); "Aine Kesari Aur Meharibate Azim" (a review articles of two books written by Maulvi Zadaullah). In the last article Premchand attacked the author for his anti-nationalist views. Premchand defended the aims, methods and activities of the early nationalists. He refers to Gokhale's Budget Speeches in order to refute the author's views.¹⁴² By reading this article one can form an opinion of Premchand's understanding of economics of Imperialism. He supports his views from Ramesh Chander Dutt's book Maharani Victoria Ke Shasan Kal Me Hindustan. The views expressed by the early nationalists on drain, and poverty due to exploitation through trade, industry and finance, are echoed by Premchand, here. That Premchand in the hey-day of early nationalists appears to have

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139. Zamana, June, 1905. See Vividh-Prasang, in three volumes, Hans Prakeshen, Allahabad, 1962, ed. by Amrit Rai, op.cit., pp.17-20.
140. However, this article was published in Avaz-i-Khalag, 16th November 1905. See Vividh-Prasang, Ibid, pp.21-22.
141. Zamana, April, 1905. See Vividh-Prasang, Ibid, pp.33-44.
142. Ibid, pp.35-36.

been influenced by Gokhale¹⁴³ as is indicated by one
of his articles in Zamana.¹⁴⁴ He quotes from Gokhale's
speech :

The present set-up of administration is sapping our physical and mental energies. We are forced to accept a life of want and humiliation. At every step we are reminded that we belong to a backward race. Our freedom is throttled ruthlessly so as to reinforce the foundations of the current administration... We are fast losing the moral force which is the hall-mark of every independent race. This condition will eventually result in the extinction through disuse of our ability to govern and wage a war ourselves; and our race will fall so low that we would be rendered unfit to do anything except the most menial tasks.¹⁴⁵

Again, in the same article he gives an account of Gokhale's politics :

It did not escape a man so wise and learned as him that an alien government must ever do without public sympathy and be subject to constant misunderstanding. It must very carefully consider each step it takes. Bearing this in mind, he has never done anything to demean or to disparage the government in the public opinion, but, on the other hand has, whenever the

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143. As Amrit Rai points out "there is no doubt that Prenchand was taught his first lesson in the politics of patriotism not by Tilak but by Gokhale."
Eng.Tr. p.65.
144. See Kamal Kishore Goyanka, op.cit., p.33. Also see Amrit Rai, Kalam Ka Sipahi, pp.88-89. I could not trace this article since it is not included in any of three volumes of Vivich-Prasang.
145. Quoted by Amrit Rai, Ibid., pp.88-89. Translation by me.

opportunity arose, talked with great pride of the enormous benefits that have accrued to us due to the British rule.¹⁴⁶

But with the march of times this faith in British rule was eroded. In 1905 Lord Curzon divided the Bengal in two parts. It "produced a wave of resentment.¹⁴⁷ This anti-partition agitation "grew into the Swadesh movement which gave cohesion and vigour to scattered and timid forces¹⁴⁸". This movement gave a "stimulus to cottage industries and even large scale enterprises of various sorts¹⁴⁹". In the realm of culture also it heralded new movements. A new type of "nationalist poetry, prose and journalism, surcharged with passion and filled with idealism, was born¹⁵⁰". The remarks of Dr.K.N. Panikkar about the national liberation struggle are very very pertinent :

"It is undeniable that national liberation struggle is not simply a political struggle. The ideology of nationalism is a highly ennobling spirit which inspires creativity, helps transform social institutions, ushers in new values and enables the growth of new perspectives of social relations."¹⁵¹

146. Quoted by Amrit Rai, Eng.Trn., op.cit., p.66.

147. Sumit Sarker, The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908, PPH, 1973, p.43. Also see by the same author Modern India, 1885-1947, MacMillan, Delhi, 1983.

148. Bipin Chandra, Freedom Struggle, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1972, p.88.

149. Ibid, p.89.

150. Ibid.

151. "Roots of Cultural Backwardness", Mainstream, Nov., 7, 1981, p.18.

What did the Swadeshi movement mean to Premchand? Firstly, Premchand considered Swadeshi movement as a great driving force for promoting indigenous industrialisation.¹⁵² He furnishes his own ways and means to develop the indigenous industries. Secondly, he took Swadeshi movement as a great source of inspiration for creative writers, as he points out in the Preface to Saus-i-Vatan :

The literature of a nation reflects the march of time...The partition (of Bengal) has awakened ideas of revolt in the hearts of the people. These ideas cannot fail to influence literature. The few short stories presented here mark the beginning of this influence. It is hoped that, as our ideas take shape, literature of this type will also become increasingly popular. Such books are needed by the country badly in order to impress the imprint of patriotism on the coming generations.¹⁵³

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152. Premchand wrote two articles on Swadeshi movement (see this dissertation, Chapter I, p.31) where he gives his own views on Swadeshi and also methods to spread the propaganda of indigenous industries.
153. Quoted by Madan Gopal, Biography, op.cit., p.65.

The spirit of Swadeshi also gave impetus to the era of militant nationalism. It led to the formation of two factions within the Indian National Congress, the Moderates and the Extremists. This led to the struggle between these two groups culminating in the Surat Split of Dec., 1907. Premchand was more inclined towards the extremists.¹⁵⁴ Their methods and strategies of political action appealed to him as more regarding :

Premchand held in distrust the very idea of conciliation in an unequal fight. He believed that nothing could be gained without a hard struggle and that the public must be prepared for it at the earliest. He believed that there was no other way except direct confrontation with the Government.¹⁵⁵

154.: As Dayanarayan Nigam recounts :

"Politically Premchand was inclined towards the extremists rather than the moderates. We had both attended the Ahmedabad Congress as observers and had stayed together there though he was partisan of Mr. Tilak and I a supporter of Mr. Gokhale and Sir Pherozeshah Mehta. We would constantly debate the question, but each stuck to his guns. He regarded minor reforms as inadequate and wasn't at all reassured by the Minto Morley or Montague-Chelmsford Schemes."

Quoted by Amrit Rai, Eng. Translation, op.cit., p.67.

155. Ibid.

The patriotism and sacrifice of the revolutionary terrorists also deeply touched his sensitive mind. When Khudiram Bose, who was just fifteen years old, was hanged on 11th August, 1908, Premchand seems to have been highly moved. He bought a picture of Khudiram Bose and hung it in his house. Amrit Rai records :

When, on August 11, 1908, Khudiram was hanged, thoughts of agreement departed from his (Premchand's) heart, any kind of agreement...A very deep hurt filled his heart, but also there was not a little pride, and Munshiji who never had hung pictures of anyone in his house, went out and brought back a picture of Khudiram and hung it with great love in his room.¹⁵⁶

The influence made by the nationalists is evident in many of his works. His very first short-story "Duniya Ka Sab Se Annol Ratan" is an example.¹⁵⁷

156. Quoted by Robert O. Swan, op.cit., p.65. According to Madan Gopal, "It was an act which a Government servant in those days could not think of, even in his wildest dreams." op.cit., p.65.

157. This was included in Sog-i-Vatan which was a collection of five short-stories. The book was published in 1908. The stories are : (i) "Duniya Ka Sab Se Annol Ratan" ("The most priceless jewel of the World", Zemans, 1907); (ii) "Sheikh Makhmoor" ; (iii) "Mahi Mera Vatan Hai" ("This is my country", -1907/1909); (iv) "Shak Ka Furuskar" ("The reward of Penance"); (v) "Sanserik Prem Aur Desh-Prem" ("The Worldly Love and the Love for Country", 1908).

The story poses and answers the question : what is the most priceless jewel in the world. The tears of a father who is going to be hanged? No. The ashes of a wife who burns herself on husband's funeral pyre? No. It is the last drop of blood shed for the freedom of one's country.¹⁵⁸

In yet another short-story "Sheikh Makmur", (included in Sos-i-Vatan) a vanquished king on his death bed entrusts his crown and sword to his son, with the dying wish that the successor defend his country even at the cost of his life :

...This country, this crown, this public are yours. Try to take them under your control till your death and if all of your efforts fail and unfortunately you also meet the same fate as I have, then hand over the crown to your son and ordain your son to set upon the same wish.¹⁵⁹

These stories were written to evoke the feelings of patriotism.¹⁶⁰ This book stood as a land-mark in author's

158. Saus-i-Vatan, pp.1-19.

159. Ibid, pp.22-23.

160. The Saraswati of Allahabad mentioned this book of short stories in its column of book reviews for Dec., 1908. : "...The stories are recreational and full of message. A reading of these stories makes a deep imprint of love for country. Such stories are badly needed these days. Those who read them can benefit immensely..."

Quoted by Madan Gopal, Biography, p.67.

life, "because from this book his struggle against the foreign rulers began¹⁶¹." These stories had the "effect of a small but well placed bomb under a tank."¹⁶² Naturally the book was considered a seditious work and its young author was asked to deliver all the volumes to the government and also to submit, whatever he wrote afterwards to the authorities for scrutiny before it was given for publication. About 500 copies were burnt by the authorities.¹⁶³ It was then that the author adopted the pen-name of Premchand.¹⁶⁴

161. Hans Raj 'Rahbar', op.cit., p.43.

162. Firaq Gorakhpuri, quoted by Rahbar, Ibid, p.43.

Writing about Saus-i-Vatan (Burning Patriotism) Firaq points out "Thirty years ago, saw the publication of Saus-i-Vatan. We are used to better stuff than what this volume contains. Its chief merit lay in its vivid treatment of patriotic emotion. We may go through these stories now without being affected in any extraordinary manner, but thirty years ago they had the effect of a small but well placed bomb under a tank."

163. See for full details, Shivrani Devi Premchand, op.cit., pp.21-22 and Anrit Rai, Kalam Ka Sipahi, pp.104-106.

Also see Premchand's letter to Nigam, dated 13th May, 1910, Chhithi Patra, Vol.I, pp.7-8.

Premchand gives a dramatic account of the seizure of Saus-i-Vatan in his mail autobiographical ~~memo~~ story, "Jivan-Sar", op.cit.

164. Anrit Rai, Kalam Ka Sipahi, p.107.

Secondly, Premchand supplemented these stories with the stories from legend and history of Rajasthan.¹⁶⁵ By writing these stories,¹⁶⁶ Premchand wanted to show that

165. During this period Premchand was Sub-deputy Inspector of Schools in the education department of Hamirpur District. According to Madan Gopal "the folklore of the regions around Hamirpur also provided rich material on the traditions of Rajput warriors who fought the foreign invaders to maintain the independence of India in difficult circumstances, and of Rajput women who made great sacrifices for the preservation of values such as honour, bravery, fidelity, faith, love, the will to triumph over difficulties, admiration for the husband, self-respect and the religious conventions". opp.cit., p.73.

166. These stories, to mention a few; are : (i) "Rani Sarandha", (Zamana, Sept., 1910); (ii) "Alha" (Zamana, Jan., 1912, included in the Gupat-Dhan, Vol. I, pp. 72-83); (iii) "Raja Haraul" (Zamana, April, 1911).

"Rani Sarandha" was the first such story in which the Rani offers supreme sacrifice in the cause of freedom. The plot of the story, as pointed out by Bhisma Sahni, "is charged with intense feelings of patriotism and synchronizes with the emotional temper of the times". ("Premchand as Short-story writer", p.135, in an anthology Premchand ed. by Dr. Nagendra, Bansal & Co, Delhi, 1961.

The story "Alha" attempts to recapture the atmosphere of Chandela bravery and patriotism. Alha and Uddal are two brothers in the service of Raja Parmaldev, the last of Chandela Dynasty. By their valour the two brothers subjugated many kingdoms for their lord. But on account of a court intrigue, they are exiled and come to take up service in King of Kanauj's Court. Miseries befell the kingdom of Raja Parmaldev. In the absence of these stalwarts King Prithviraj attacks the enfeebled kingdom and the desperate Raja Parmaldev despatches messengers to Alha and Uddal to come to his succour. Recalling their humiliation at his erstwhile master's court, Alha expressed his unwillingness to defend the besieged kingdom. But his mother exhorts both her sons to fight for the freedom of their motherland. Patriotism eventually prevails upon the hurt ego of Alha and Uddal and they both proceed to rebut the invasion on their native country.

the projected action has a precedent in the nation's annals. He did it because men who wish to maintain status quo can fight the new idea by calling it demonstrably alien to the spirit of the people. Secondly, it is the patriotic pride rather than culturistic self-justification that animates Premchand's tribute to Rajput heroes and heroines.¹⁶⁷ Since our whole culture and system of values was in crisis, there was a burning need to arouse the sense of national dignity.¹⁶⁸ By invoking the Rajput heroes he wanted to awaken pride among the Indians and forge an emotional bond between the men seeking change and the heroes of the past.¹⁶⁹

INFLUENCE OF GANDHIJI

Premchand's ideas were more strongly shaped by Gandhiji. On 8th Feb., 1921, Mahatma Gandhi while

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167. According to Robert O. Swan, Premchand tried to teach nationalism "under the disguise of Rajput history instead of describing the current scene." op.cit., p.65.
168. This was also a part of the struggle against the hegemony of Coloniser's culture. "It is generally within the culture that we find the seed of opposition, which leads to the structuring and development of the liberation movement."
 "National Liberation and Culture", Speech by Amilcar Cabral, Return to the Sources, selected speeches; ed. by Africa Information Service Monthly Review Press, New York, 1973.
169. Idea derived from Levenson, Joseph R. Liang Ch'i-Ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China, Thames and Hudson, New York, 1965.

making a tour of North India reached Gorakhpur and addressed a huge gathering of about two lakhs. There he advised the people to leave government jobs, colleges, universities and join the non-cooperation movement. Premchand was one of the many conscientious Indians who took the call and resigned his government job. On 16th Feb., 1921 he was relieved of his duties.

170. "To know what the masses of students, lawyers, Kisans and ornament-sacrificing women did at this time allows us to see that Premchand was not the only one who resigned his job in Feb., 1921. The scene impinged upon every individual which helps to explain, the intensity of his thinking, feeling and writing about these events of national uprising." Robert O. Swan, op.cit., p.27.
171. See Dr. Kanai Kishore Goyanka, op.cit., p.61. Also see Shivrani Devi Premchand, op.cit., pp.47-52. Also see Amrit Rai, KKS, op.cit., p.234; and Madan Gopal, op.cit., pp.173-175.

Premchand himself mentions about his resignation in a letter written on 15th Feb., 1921 to Munshi Dayanarayan Nigam "Yesterday I resigned from government service. My resignation was accepted today. I propose to bring out an Urdu Weekly from here. I am looking for a printing press, and am hopeful of arranging the money. I have had this in mind for a long time, and it seems as if my ambition may now be fulfilled." Chhithi Patra, I, p.111. Quoted by Amrit Rai, Eng. Trn., op.cit., p.157.

Other possible reasons for Premchand's resignation might have been : (i) Premchand being a creative writer must have been feeling how difficult it was to write against Imperialism while remaining part of the bureaucratic machinery. Thus Hans Raj 'Rahbar' remarks that "flattery irritated him, that is one of the reasons why he resigned from job which demanded boot-licking." Rahbar quotes one of his letters written to Nigam "My sense of frustration is not prompted by anything more than having to do what I think I should not do. I want to strike out on my own, and take orders, only from myself. Work when I want to, and take leave only when I want to", op.cit., p.76. (ii) Second, while making a survey of the schools in rural areas he had been getting a direct experience of the exploitation of poor masses by government officials. Shivrani Devi states that wherever he went the villagers were ready to give begar as well as gifts to him because it had been an established practice. Premchand always refused such offers; (iii) Third, he felt himself free after quitting bureaucracy. This in fact was a form of protest against Colonial State.

What attracted Premchand to Gandhiji was the latter's efforts to identify himself with the commonman. Gandhi had been drawing the attention of the Congress Party towards the villages. He started non-cooperation movement making peasants as the base of the movement. Premchand had already depicted the miseries of Kisans in Premasharam even before Gandhi came to the forefront of Indian politics. Therefore, Premchand found in Gandhi a man who was eager to solve the problems of peasants. Amrit Rai brings home the point :

With the coming of Gandhi, Premchand's sharp eyes focussed on him. "With his instinctive knowledge he saw that this man would do something. How different from the chair-sitting politicians, this man was who believed that the first meaning of politics was service of the people, who went amongst suffering people, who tried to understand their problems, and shared in their pain and sorrow, and arousing them led them into the struggle."¹⁷²

Gandhiji's and Premchand's interests became synchronised here.¹⁷³

There was, however, a vital difference. While Premchand had been depicting both the Zamindars and the Colonial State as enemies of the Kisans, to

172. Quoted by Robert O. Swan, op.cit., p.23.

173. Premchand points this out to his wife in one of their conversations. See Shivrani Devi, op.cit., p.93.

Gandhi Imperialism was the main enemy. Gandhi tried to subdue the secondary contradictions of the society and organise all the classes of the Indian society against Imperialism.

Since the non-cooperation movement was at its height, Premchand considered his duty "to propagate in fiction what Gandhi was doing in politics."¹⁷⁴ It is from his stories of 1921-1922 and 1930-1932 written during the non-cooperation movement and civil disobedience movement that earned him the right to be called "the story-teller of the Independence Movement."¹⁷⁵

Premchand hailed the non-cooperation movement led by Gandhi in the article "Varatman Andolan Ke Raaste Main Rukawatien" ("The obstacles to the Present Movement") published in October-November 1921 in Zamana. The article was a shot in the arm of the non-cooperation movement. At that time the commonman's interest in the non-cooperation movement was flagging. More and more people were coming to think that movement had failed to achieve any results. The students had

174. Robert O. Swan, Premchand of Lamhi Village, p.85, Duke University Press, 1969.

175. Ram Vilas Sharma, Premchand Aur Un Ka Yug, Raj Kamal Prakashan, Delhi, 1955, p.133, quoted by Robert O. Swan, opz.cit., p.85.

not left their schools and colleges, the government employees had not resigned their jobs, and the lawyers had not relinquished their profession. But Premchand's article refuted these remarks with its very opening sentence, "Till today the current movement has been advancing with success but the situation is getting dangerous every day". Though the students might not have bid farewell to the colonial educational institutions collectively but the movement did instil in them the consciousness of truth, the feelings of service and sacrifice which would be very useful for the nation in future.¹⁷⁶ The government servants and the lawyers might not have boycotted the Colonial State in the form of resignation in large numbers but it is certain that fifty per cent of persons belonging to these professions look upon their profession with dejection.¹⁷⁷ They no longer take pride in their status. Those who find some alternative device to feed their family, immediately resign their jobs.¹⁷⁸ This is the achievement of this movement. "There is no aspect of life which has been left unaffected by the non-cooperation movement", says Premchand.¹⁷⁹

176. Vividh-Prasang, Vol.2, p.22.

177. Ibid, p.22.

178. Ibid.

179. Ibid, p.23.

But there is an inherent threat to the movement that can abrogate its impact. Premchand perceives this danger in the apprehensions of the supporters of status quo-landed gentry, government employees and others—who are over-anxious "to protect their life and property, chastity and honour."¹⁸⁰ For too long these minions of the Raj have lived a sheltered life, much like the worms in their cocoons, and now the riots at Ara, Kartarpur and Mopalah have jolted them from their complacency.¹⁸¹ As individuals, many of them may be upright men having a fair understanding and even sympathy with the motives of the mass-movements. But as a class, they find that their interests lie more in strengthening the tyrannical hands of the colonial power to suppress the movement rather than to join their compatriots in the struggle for freedom.¹⁸² They would like to reap the benefits of the freedom without having to participate in the ruff and tumble of the turmoil.

Premchand warns the people of India in general and this class in particular of this untenable stance. The goal of swarajya, he says, calls for sufferings, sacrifice and whole-hearted dedication from one and all.¹⁸³ The lackadaisical approach of the liberals can only inspire feelings of selfishness, greed and opportunism, thereby further strengthening the hold of the oppressors.¹⁸⁴

180. Ibid.

181. Ibid.

182. Ibid. p.24.

183. Ibid. p.25.

184. Ibid.

The next obstacle is the conflict between the self-interest of Zamindars and capitalists on the one hand and the peasants and workers on the other. The non-cooperation movement is based on truth, justice and the principles of democracy.¹⁸⁵ The trends in the world are indicative that future lies with the peasants and workers.¹⁸⁶ The sympathy of the Congress is also with the downtrodden.¹⁸⁷ Surprisingly, the Zamindars and capitalist find their self-interest threatened by this movement. Therefore, they may create hindrances to this struggle for Swaraj.¹⁸⁸

The most intricate issue is the question of Hindu-Muslim unity.¹⁸⁹ In spite of the rancor which affected the communal amity in the last two decades, there is a tremendous element of unity between the two communities at present and the Khilafat movement is cementing the ties.¹⁹⁰ Premchand dispels the doubt of the Hindu communalists that the Indian Muslims are sacrificing more for the Khilafat than for the struggle for Swaraj.¹⁹¹ He sums up this issue of communal unity with the remarks "briefly speaking, all this suspiciousness and criticism is an idle one. For the Hindus Khilafat is the best opportunity to

185. Ibid.

186. Ibid.

187. Ibid.

188. Ibid.

189. Ibid.

190. Ibid.

191. Ibid.

win the hearts of the Muslims and they should wholeheartedly support this issue and in this way establish the base of a permanent unity.¹⁹²

But in spite of Frenchand's optimism and wishful thinking about the Hindu-Muslim unity this problem takes a serious turn when in February 1922, Gandhiji suspends the non-cooperation movement and a number of communal riots occurred in North India.¹⁹³

At this juncture Frenchand sets two tasks before himself : (i) continue keeping people in the mood of struggle against the Colonial State by inspiring them with unflinching courage. In this vein he wrote Sangram a play (published in 1923) and Rangbhumi (which he started writing on Oct., 1, 1922

192. Ibid.

193. According to Jawaherial Nehru "...this sudden bottling up of a great movement contributed to a tragic development in the country. The drift to a sporadic and futile violence in the political struggle was stopped, but the suppressed violence had to find a way out, and in the following years this perhaps aggravated the communal trouble. The communalists of various denominations, mostly political reactionaries, had been forced to lie low because of the overwhelming mass support for the non-cooperation and civil-disobedience movement. They emerged now from their retirements. Many others, secret service agents and people who sought to please the authorities by creating communal friction, also worked on the same theme..."
An Autobiography, London, 1939, pp.86-87.
 Also see, p.134.141.

and completed it in April 1, 1924 and published in January 1925); (ii) devoting his full energies to the theme of communal amity. The problem of communalism is the recurring theme of Premchand's creative works written mainly between 1920 and 194
1927.

INFLUENCE OF INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

International events had exerted abiding influence on Premchand. Of these, the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution were perhaps the most important. These events led Premchand to reflect on a variety of problems relating to the World Political Order and social developments, both on India and outside. Their impact is discernible in his article

194. Robert O. Swan rightly points out that "Premchand during this period and to the end of his life, fought the battle of communal unity with the argument that without it there could be no national unity and without national unity there could be no independence." opp.cit., p.92.

Also see V.S. Naravane, opp.cit., p.66.
Also see Madan Gopal, Premchand, opp.cit., p.31. He points out "He was the ambassador of unity; he preached reconciliation and amity even in the darkest days of communalism. Fearlessly and boldly, he expressed the hypocrisies of all parties, thus alienating many people."

"Purana Zamana : Naya Zamana"¹⁹⁵.

In this article Premchand sets out to find the reasons for the exploitation of the poor and weak nations. It is, in his understanding due to the growth of modern nationalism and the development of capitalism. Nationalism, in spite of being a progressive ideology, yet provides vested interests in the world :

It (The Modern Nationalism) wants to corner riches all by itself and does not like to share with others. It will stuff its belly when others are starving and laugh when others shed tears of anguish. If it wants to clad itself in red and if the colour of blood be red, it will not hesitate to slaughter others to dye its clothes red. If a piece of man's heart can invigorate it, a thousand men will be seen butchered with its dagger. It accords its own existence the supreme importance in the world and would not bother even if the rest of the world is destroyed. Selfishness is its religion, its Bible and its path. All humane sentiments and moral questions give way to this insatiable lust.¹⁹⁶

195. See Vividh-Prasang, op.cit., Vol. I, pp.258-269. This article was published in Zamana, Feb., 1919.

This article is indicative of the qualitative change in Premchand's vision of society. Here, Premchand, contrasts the value system prevailing in the ancient civilisation with that of prevalent in the modern times. According to him the governing factor in the ancient times were : unselfishness, ethical values, spiritualism and human values; while in the present times all the human relationships are governed by the dominant value of money. He presents the past rather as a standard to judge the present than as an alternative of it.

196. Ibid, p.260.

It is this nationalism based on capitalism which has led to Imperialism,¹⁹⁷ which in turn has brought forth an all-out struggle for existence in the world:

The modern nation has set a gory of struggle for existence in the world. And such communities as have not so far assumed the form of a nation are the targets of attack of Imperialism. It goes forth to Africa and cleanses its forests and vales of the Pagan blacks. It comes to Asia and raises the slogan of culture and education. No one can doubt its good intensions. It does not enslave any one nor does it burn to ashes any city but it is a strange coincidence that the life of any 'non-nation' that falls into the clutches of this nation comes to be pestered with dismay and humiliation.¹⁹⁸

It is true that the inter-action between nations has strengthened human relations.¹⁹⁹ The whole of England raises a hue and cry if there is any injustice done to an English businessman in China. There is cry for blood and litigation.²⁰⁰ If a French paper is banned in a certain State the entire French world is set aflame with indignation. Was there ever such a feeling of unity and sympathy?²⁰¹

197. Ibid., p.264.

"The new age belongs to the traders and to banias. He has mountains of wealth and is traversing the land and the seas in his pursuit of riches, he has reached the limits of the skies. Now the whole world forms his domain of work..."

198. Ibid., p.261.

199. Ibid., p.263.

200. Ibid.

201. Ibid.

But the truth is that this unity and agreement is based on the relative sovereignty of nations rather than the considerations of humanity.²⁰² How is that a whole nation is roused on hearing about the humiliation of a single individual in a far-off place but we are hardly moved by the starvation and penury of our own neighbours and friends?²⁰³ Why is the European capitalist, lolling as he is in his magnificent boat of luxury and riches, does not bother about those hapless orphans who are caught up in the whirlpool of poverty and indigence?²⁰⁴ Capitalism has brought about inequality in society. There is an ever-widening disparity between the rich and the poor; the industrialist-capitalist and the proletariat.²⁰⁵ For all the talks of equality no real effort is made to remove the inequality and other ills of the modern society. In the inimitable words of Prenchand, "the leprous body is being garbed in a gaudy attire."²⁰⁶

In spite of the destructive aspect of the First World War, it has, objectively, created a situation which has brought forth "the manifestation of the

202. Ibid., p.263.

203. Ibid.

204. Ibid.

205. Ibid., p.262.

206. Ibid.

might of the dumb humanity.²⁰⁷" Premchand hails the new awakening among the masses of the world. "The masses are the real victors of this war. This world war has done for masses what even the French Revolution could not do."²⁰⁸ Even a starving worker has come to recognize his worth and he does not have to go abegging before the agents of capitalism.²⁰⁹ He knows he is the backbone of his nation's prosperity and the builder of his nation. He has become aware of his fundamental rights and knows how to fight for them.²¹⁰ No longer can the bourgeoisie take the working class for granted. For the capitalism to retain its hold on the workers, it has now to bribe them with a host of reforms.²¹¹ Another fruitful "outcome of this World War", feels Premchand "is that oppressed nations have started asserting themselves against their subjection by the stronger nations."²¹²

207. Ibid., p.264.

208. "Swadesh Ka Sandesh" ("The Message of Motherland"), The Swadesh Basant Panchami, 1975, roughly 1918, Vividh-Prasang, 2, p.20.

209. "Naya Zamana : Purana Zamana", opp.cit., p.265.

210. Ibid.

211. Ibid.

212. "Swadesh Ka Sandesh", opp.cit., p.20.

"League of Nations" is also the result of Second World War. Frenchand hails the formation of the "League of Nations" and pins great hopes on this organisation. He regards it a great achievement of the people of the world. On the question of India joining the body, Frenchand opines that the inner contradictions within our society will have to be resolved first. Untouchability will have to be banished and the urban bias of the social reform organisations removed. Due care will have to be paid to the upliftment of the rural India. India's salvation lies in the emancipation of its masses.

But who is to perform the task of upliftment of the masses? According to Frenchand it is the duty of the educated people to remove the mass illiteracy and ignorance and thus inculcate social and political consciousness among the masses. It is this "educated and moneyed class" which is leading the Swaraj movement. But these educated men, the advocates and landlords keep themselves engrossed in their own selfish motives

213. "Naya Zamana : Purana Zamana", opp.cit., p.267.

214. "Swadesh Ka Sandesh", opp.cit., p.22.

215. Ibid.

216. Ibid.

217. "Purana Zamana : Naya Zamana", opp.cit., p.267.

218. Ibid.

while paying lip service to the sufferings of the masses.²¹⁹ The poor peasants, though illiterate, can see through the political veneer of the leaders and turn a deaf ear to the empty slogans of Swaraj chanted by them.²²⁰ But Premchand sees hope in the coming age. The contemporary happenings portend the arrival of the age of "workers and Peasants".²²¹ The Indian politics cannot remain unaffected by the world events and not even the Himalayan peaks can prevent the invasion of the new winds.²²² The Russian Revolution and the First World War have brought an awakening of the Indian masses.²²³ In near future, lakhs of Indian

219. Ibid.

220. "There is no reason why they should prefer your rule to that of the foreign rulers. The peasants crushed as they are in the jaws of tyrannical and selfish landlords all the time...cannot for any understandable reason desire to see them as their rulers. Is there any surety that once your claws are upon them, their condition would not really get worse? Today you have given no evidence to the effect that you are their well-wishers. If there is any evidence, it is to the contrary, it is an evidence of your selfishness, your greed, your meanness..."

Quoted by Amrit Rai in the article "The Contemporary Relevance of Premchand" in the book Premchand : A Tribute ed. by Dr. Bhisham Sahni and O.P. Paliwal and published by World Peace Council and Premchand Centenary Celebrations Committee, New Delhi, 1990.

221. "Naya Zamana : Purana Zamana", op.cit., p.266.

222. Ibid.

223. Ibid.

workers, artisans and soldiers will be returning home, bringing with them the stirring experiences of the free countries of the West.²²⁴ They will motivate their compatriots to fight for freedom.²²⁵

Thus, Premchand's intellectual formation had gone through a period of continuous evolution, shaped very much by the socio-political circumstances. His creative endeavours had clear stamp of these influences. They were not the products of certain received ideas, but were firmly rooted in his own life experiences. For example the theme of women's emancipation in his works was not simply the literary expression of the 19th century reform ideas, nor the peasant exploitation an outcome of the influence of the Bolshevik revolution alone. They were equally borne out by his own life and experience.²²⁶ It would be useful to understand the works of Premchand within the context of this general background.

224. Ibid.

225. Ibid., pp.268-269.

226. As Robert O. Swan rightly points out "The greatest influence upon Premchand was his birth and growth in an Indian village. When this ultimate influence entered his works, it gave them their "Premchandness" and their "Indianness." The social messages tacked on were literarily incidental..." Op.Cit., p.77.

According to Indernath Madan Premchand "never missed an occasion of knowing the poor peasants in his village. He made earnest efforts to mix with them, live with them and know their hardships." Op.Cit., p.227.

One of Premchand's friends comments "He smelt the masses, he saw into them". Quoted by Hans Raj 'Rahbar', Op.Cit., p.69.

CHAPTER - II

PERCEPTION OF PEASANT EXPLOITATION

CHAPTER - II

PERCEPTION OF PEASANT EXPLOITATION

An imaginative recreation of the condition and exploitation of the peasantry is one of the central concerns of several works of Premchand. Some of his works like Premasharam, Karambhumi and Godan are significant from the nature of perception of the unbridled tyranny let loose on the peasantry by various interests. Perhaps very few Indian writers have equalled Premchand in this respect. Premchand is truly a bard of rural India - a bard who did not idealise the Indian village, but exposed its inequities in a very effective manner. This aspect of Premchand's fiction forms the subject of this chapter. For the sake of clarity it is discussed under four heads :

The exploitation of peasants by

- (A) Zamindars
- (B) Moneylenders
- (C) Village Council or Biredari and
- (D) The Bureaucracy.

(A) Exploitation of Peasants by Zamindars

The Zamindari system is perceived by Frenchand as the central cause for the misery of the peasants. The Zamindars adopt various ways to exploit the tenants. One of these is the persistent increase in land-rent. The tenants are repeatedly threatened with law-suits for augmentation of rent¹. This is practised by the Zamindars ostensibly to evict the tenants. The rising rent is a constant drain on the resources of the peasant economy². Half-finished already, the peasants are unable to pay the rent. How can they? They have hardly anything left with which to quell their hunger³. The tenants wonder why

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1. See Premasharam, Hans Prakashan, Allahabad, 1977; Karanbhumi, Hans Prakashan, Allahabad, 1981 and Godan, The Gift of A Cow, translated from Hindi by Gordon C. Roadarmel, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1968.
 2. See Premasharam, op.cit., p.47.
 3. In Premasharam, no tenant except Sukhu Chaudhary, gets even a square meal to eat. This is evident from a tete-a-tete among the tenants. Balraj poses and answers the question "Can you name any one except Sukhu Chaudhury who eats meals twice a day? There are tenants who have to live on just Chabena (Miscellaneous parched grains) and that too only once a day, there are others who maintain themselves on just a small quantity of Satu (barley), do not get enough food to satisfy their hunger." p.49.

this increase in rent irrespective of the produce of the land.⁴ The rent has been increased by such a high proportion that it often exceeds the value of the produce.⁵ The cultivators are convinced that the cultivation does not provide them even with sufficient food to eat.⁶

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4. As Balraj, in Pramasharam, questions his fellow tenant Depat Singh: "Is it anarchy? On what ground this increase of rent?" And the later replies "Have not the price of grain gone up?" To this Balraj counters "If the prices of grain have gone up, then the wages of the labourers have also been increased, the prices of bullocks have also spiralled, iron-ore and wood are also costlier now, from whose coffers these will come?" p.53.
 5. See Karambhuni, Pranchand points out about the miserable conditions of tenants as a result of persistent increase in rent : "Cursing their fate, remaining naked and starved, and dying like dogs, people continued to till their fields. What else could they do? Many had migrated to the cities and taken up employment there. Some had become labourers, but still there was no dearth of tenants. In a predominantly agricultural country farming is not merely means of earning livelihood it is also a status symbol." Quoted by Sudhir Chandra, "Pranchand : A Historiographic View," E.P.W., April 11, 1981, p.670.
 6. See Pramasharam, p.53.

Nasrana is another oppressive measure adopted by the Zamindars to exploit the tenants. Along with this Nasrana the landlords make several exactions such as ghee, milk, etc.⁷ The story of Premasharam proceeds from an incident when Giridhar Maharaj, the Chaprasi of the landlord Gyanshankar, orders the villagers to provide Ghee on the occasion of the death anniversary of the Old Zamindar. In the market, ghee sells at Rs. 1/- per Chhatank while tenants are asked to supply the provision at the rate of Rs.1/- per seer (16 chhatanks). For every eight seers of ghee they 'sell' to the household of the Zamindar, they get paid only for five seers. It is a strange world where the seller actually gets poorer by selling his wares.

7. "The number of such tributes can be multiplied until it covers virtually all the various kinds of agricultural produce and their by-products. Sugar-cane juice, sugar-cane leaves (for fodder), garlic, coriander, gur, hides, blankets, wood and several other items were taken as tributes. Thus the entire cultivating population added to the coffers of the landlords in one form or another." Majid Hayat Siddiqui, Agrarian Unrest in North India, The United Provinces, 1918-22, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1978, p.106.

The Zaminders extract money from the tenants even on the occasion of festivals.⁸ The Zamindar of Godan adopts subtle methods to extract money from the tenants to celebrate the festival of Dussehara. He does not entrust this job to his Karinda whom he knows to be dishonest. This may besmirch his good image as well, therefore, he entrusts it to Hori, an humble and honest peasant. Hori has a good image amongst the tenants and the Zamindar knows that the tenants will not consider it as an act of extraction if he collects money through Hori in the name of religious Celebration. The effect is further mellowed down by giving Hori a role in the Ramaleela, even if that of a gardener of King Janak. Hori is then used to "Urge all the tenants to show up with the proper donations."⁹ In fact Rai Sahab of Godan extracts everything

8. See Godan, op.cit., pp.35-36. The economic condition of Hori is already turning from bad to worse and the donation for festival of Dussehara further deteriorates his economic condition. When Shola asks him "But have you scrapped up any money to present for the occasion...?" Hori replies "I'm worried to death about that, brother. My grain was all weighed out at the village barn. The master took his share and the moneylender his, leaving me just ten pounds...."

9. Ibid., p.24.

from the tenants be it the occasion of festivals or Council elections or gifts to the officials and bribes to the editor.¹⁰

(B) EXPLOITATION BY THE MONEYLENDERS.

The excessive land-revenue demand, Nasrana and other tributes exacted by the landlord severely affected the economic condition of the tenants. The entire system was such that he was compelled to borrow from the moneylenders. The moneylender³⁰ as depicted by Premchand in his works, is a heartless tyrant, and yet he is indispensable.

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10. As Gomti, the wife of Pandit Onkarnath, the editor of Billi rightly tells her husband about Zamindars in general and Rai Sahab in particular "...For every pice they give you, they extort four times that amount from their tenants..." Godan, p.218.

Also see p.209. When Rai Sahab comes to know that the village Panchayat has imposed a fine of Rupees hundred upon Hori and the amount has been misappropriated by the village elders themselves, he calls his Karinda, Nokheram and shouts at him "...What right does the village Council have to come between me and my tenants? The only income I get from villages comes from these fines and penalties. The rent that is collected goes to the government, and the tenants make off with everything else. So what does that leave me..." And he extracts this fine from the Village Elders but Hori is not spared. He had to pay his fine to the Village elders, by mortgaging his house to Jhinguri Singh, and putting the entire grain of his crops from his barn to the house of the Elders of the village, to pay off his fine.

The moneylenders belong generally to Upper Castes: Brahmans, Thakurs, banias etc. But there are moneylenders who belong to lower-castes as well.¹¹ In fact, the villagers are so hardpressed that anyone who possesses ten or twenty rupees can set himself up as a moneylender.¹²

Frenchand has depicted such moneylenders, who also act as agents of rich moneylenders in the city. Jhinguri Singh in Godan is one such character who has several men under him in the neighbouring villages. The Karindas also do moneylending business besides their job as agents of Zamindars. Pandit Nohheram in Godan is the Karinda of the estate owned by Rai Saheb. Besides his salary and extra money swindled from the tenants by illegal methods, he runs a flourishing business of moneylending to the tenants.¹³ The Patwaris (revenue clerks) also are running this

11. See Godan.

12. Ibid. p.126.

13. Ibid. p.323.

business. Lala Pateshwari in Godan is such a character who is a "worshipper of conflict."¹⁴ He always tried to "inspire a life of conflict, setting of fireworks of one kind or another."¹⁵ He makes a profit out of the conflict among the villagers. He deals in moneylending and amasses a huge fortune out of this business.¹⁶

But the most infamous and wicked of all the moneylenders, as depicted by Premchand, are the Brahmins, the village priests.¹⁷ Premchand has depicted one such character in detail in Godan, Pandit Datadin. He makes a profit from all sides and sucks the blood of the tenants

14. Ibid., p.330. Premchand describes him thus: "Lala Pateshwari was a living example of all the virtues of that class of men known as Patwaris. He couldn't bear to see a peasant encroach even an inch on some one else's land, nor could he bear to see a peasant hold back a debt to a moneylender...", p.330.

15. Ibid.

16. "By loaning five or ten rupees at a time to the poor, he had built up a fortune of thousands. Taking produce from the farmers, he would present it to the court officials and Police, thereby building up a great reputation throughout, the region..."

Also see the comments of Gobar about Pateshwari "He's a sneaky one-setting fathers against sons, and brothers against brothers. He teams up with the Zamindar's men and cuts the throat of the tenants. They can plough their own fields later; first they have to plough his. They can do their own irrigating later; first they have to do his", p.261.

17. See Godan, "Sava Ser Gehan", Mansarovar, Vol. 4,

like a leach. He will pose as the champion of religion but in reality is evil incarnate. Whatever be the occasion he is bound to get something from the tenants.¹⁸

Hori is in the clutches of Datadin.

Whenever Hori is in trouble and is starving, Datadin comes running to him with a show of sympathy and

18. Gobar on his return from Lucknow, remarks to Pandit Datadin:

"How could there be a shortage of anything in your house maharaj? As a family priest, you can go to anybody's door and come back with something in hand. You peopple get something whenever there's a birth, a death, a marriage or a funeral. You work the fields. You lend the money. You act as brokers. And if anyone makes a mistake, you set a fine and ransack his place. With all that money, your bellies still are n't full? What good would it do you to pile up still more? or have you worked out some way of taking it with you to the next world? p.260.

Pandit Datadin himself boasts to other moneylenders:

"...May be you think of the Patronage system as begging, but I consider it as good as lendowning or banking. Property may be wiped out and banks may fail, but the Patronage of priests will last forever. As long as there are Hindus there'll be brahmans and there'll be Payments to them. During the marriage season we can easily rake in two or three hundred just sitting at home; and with a real lucky break, I've knocked off four or five hundred at times-- and that's not counting the clothes and kitchenware and feasts. There's always something coming up at one home or another. Even when there is nothing going on, I still get offerings of a few annas and a meal or two a day. Neither Property nor moneylending offers that kind of security...". pp.302-303

lends him something to keep him alive. He does not want Hori to die because in that case he will lose a hen who lays golden eggs. That is the reason why Datadin helps Hori whenever he is in trouble.¹⁹ He advances him grain, seed and money and in the process appropriating the land and making Hori a hired labourer.

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19. One of such incidents is when Hori's fields remain without being fallowed because his bucclocks were impounded by Bhole and for Datadin this is a golden opportunity. But he has to prepare a ground in order to keep Hori in his grip. He comes to know that Hori and his family have not eaten anything for many days because there is no grain left to eat in the poor peasant's hut. Therefore Datadin comes running to Hori's house and offers him sympathy and obliges him: "What"! Datadin chided him gently, "Nothing to eat in the house and you did n't even tell me? It's not as if I were your enemy. This is what provokes me about you. My dear fellow, what is there to be embarrassed or ashamed about? We're all one, after all. What if you are a Shudra and I a brahmin? We're all one family. All of us have our ups and downs..." And then he offers him seeds and grains. Not, of course, free but by weighing down the quantity and inscribing it in Hori's account. See p.221 Datadin offers him seeds and is ready to do the sowing done on the condition that he will get one half of the produce. But Hori is "in a quandary" and accepts the proposal after a great deal of thought. And Datadin gets all the work done for nothing. Hori's whole family pitched in as wholeheartedly as though the whole crop were to be theirs. This step puts Hori in the clutches of Datadin for the rest of his life, making him a hired labourer of Datadin and ultimately his land is appropriated by him.

The way the moneylenders squeeze tenants is indicated in a farcical drama (mock-play) enacted by the villagers of Godan on the occasion of festival of Holi. Let us quote one of the scenes here :

The scene opens with farmer coming and falling weeping at the master's feet. The Thakur agrees very reluctantly to advance the loan. After the document has been prepared, the moneylender hands five rupees. The farmer taken aback and says :

'But it is only five, master.'

'That is not five. It's ten. Go home and count it'.

'No, your honour, it's five.'

'One rupee goes for my tip, right?'

'Yes, your honour.'

'And one for writing up the note?'

'Yes, your honour.'

'And, one for the official form?'

'Yes, your honour.'

'And one for my commission?'

'Yes, your honour'.

'And one for the interest'.

'Yes, your honour.'

'Plus five in cash. Does that make ten or doesn't it?'

'Yes, your honour. Now please keep the other five also.'

'Are you crazy?'

'No, your honour. One rupee is a donation to your younger wife, and one rupee is for your senior wife. One rupee is to buy betel leaves for your younger wife to chew, and one is to buy them for your senior wife. That leaves only one rupee—and it can go for your funeral arrangement.²⁰

There are two episodes in Godan which illustrate the callousness of the moneylenders and the manner in which the peasants' misfortunes are turned into situations of advantage for themselves. The first relates to the poisoning of Hori's cow by his younger brother and the consequent visit of the Police-Inspector for enquiry²¹. The Police-Inspector and the Village elders join together and exploit the ignorance and sense of family prestige to extract money from him²². The moneylender becomes his

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21. This is Hori's first appearance before the police, and he is frightened as though being led to the gallows:

"...While beating Dhaniya that morning, his limbs had swelled with excitement, but in the presence of the Inspector, they shrank up like the legs of a turtle. The Inspector's critical look penetrated all the way to his heart. The Inspector was highly experienced in evaluating men's nerve, and expert in practical psychology though he knew nothing of the subject academically. One glance at Hori and he was sure this would be one of his good days. Hori's face showed that one threat would be sufficient." p.137.

22. Heera, the culprit, has already fled away from his house and the Inspector seizes upon this opportunity to grab something. He threatens to make a search of Heera's house. Hori's heart palpitates to hear the word 'search': "His brother Hira's house to be searched while he was away! Well, any such search would be over Hori's dead body." Ibid, p.137.

It is now that the village elders Datadin, Jhinguri Singh, Mangaru and Lala Pateshwari come to the rescue of Hori. This is a golden opportunity for these village elders to plunder Hori by joining hands with the Police-Inspector. They lead Hori away from the crowd and suggest to him to pay some money to the Police-Inspector. But Hori shows his helplessness because he does not have even a single pie. The elders consult each other and then Jhinguri Singh advances him a loan of thirty rupees to pay as a bribe to the Police-Inspector.

"benefactor" and helps him out by advancing money to bribe the official. Through this incident Premchand lays blame on the system which provides no justice to the peasant.

Godan contains vivid account of the extent to which the peasants are in the clutches of the moneylenders. While the villagers are harvesting the crop the moneylenders surround them from all the directions.²³ The sugar-cane is taken to the mill²⁴ and

23. "...When the moneylenders saw the cane being harvested, their appetites sharpened as though mice were gnawing their entrance. Dulari came running from one direction, Mangaru from another, and Matadin, Pateshwari and the henchmen of Jhinguri Singh from a third." p.226.
24. The tenants had already sold the standing crops of sugar-cane to the sugar-mill since they were in need of cash-payment, "some had bullocks to buy, others had to pay off the rent, and some wanted to get out of the clutches of the moneylenders...". p.224.

All the tenants were in debt to Jhinguri Singh, and their chief concern was to keep the "money from falling into his hands. Otherwise it would all be gobbled up, and the next day the tenants would have to go asking for money again which would mean new papers, new fees and new gratuities" When Shobha says "let us devise some means to avoid Jhinguri Singh", and "offer some commission to the foreman" Hori replies, "Jhinguri Singh is twice as clever as you and I together, Shobha. He'll go and get the money straight from the cashier and we'll be left gaping. That Khanna who owns the mill is the same Khanna who has a moneylending business. He and Jhinguri Singh are in the same racket." p.225.

"as soon as the weighing began, Jhinguri Singh stationed himself at the gate of the mill²⁵. He gets each person's cane weighed, takes the payment slip, collects the money from the cashier, and then deducts whatever is due to him and the balance he hands over²⁶ the concerned tenant. The tenants ^{to} "cried and shrieked" but he "paid no attention"²⁷. Hori receives hundred and twenty five rupees. Jhinguri Singh "deducted his full dues with interest²⁸ and turned out some twenty-five rupees to him. Hori throws away this amount in anger at first but then realising his helplessness picks it up but just then he is accosted by Nokheram. Hori "handed him the twenty- five rupees and, without a word, walked quickly away. His head was reeling."²⁹ In fact Girdhar, Shobha and all other tenants meet the same fate. Some take to weeping, others to cursing their fate, but Hori consoles himself as "though a fire

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25. p.226.
 26. p. Ibid.
 27. Ibid.
 28. Ibid.
 29. Ibid.

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had burned up the sugarcane?

The moneylenders keep the tenants in their grip and harass them by charging exorbitant rate of interest because they are aware that the government

30. Girdhar conceals one anna in his mouth and takes to drink.

With the money received out of the sale of sugarcane, Hori has been able to clear off the debts he owed to Jhinguri Singh only but there are other moneylenders also who are always pestering him. Mangru is one who loaned him fifty rupees five years back and now it has added up to three hundred rupees (The principal amount is fifty rupees and the rest is interest).

There is Dulari. Hori had borrowed thirty rupees from her five years before, "in three years the loan had reached a hundred, and then an official note had been signed. In the next two years the interest had grown to fifty rupees." p.226.

He has to pay to Datadin as well. Gobar points out to Hori "...he gave us thirty rupees. So now he will collect two hundred, and on top of that give you a telling off, get you to work for him, and keep you slaving away until he's killed you." p.271.

cannot help the tenant.³¹ They know that "law and justice belong to those who have money."³² Therefore, they can easily bank upon the helplessness of the tenants. Their helplessness is pathetic. For, they are caught in a net and the more they struggle the more entangled they get. They are so much

31. It is clear from the discussion among the moneylenders :

Pt. Datadin asks Jhinguri Singh "Have you heard? The government is telling the moneylenders to cut their rate of interest or their claims won't be accepted in the court."

Jhinguri Singh replies "I know only one thing, Pandit. When people are in need, they will come to me a hundred times for a loan, and I'll charge interest as I please. As long as the government does n't work out some system of providing loans to the farmers, the law won't have any effect on us. We'll write down a lower interest rate, but from every hundred rupees we'll deduct twenty-five in advance. What can the government do about that?" p.300.

32. Ibid.
Jhinguri Singh states "...It is already a law that a moneylender can't be too severe with a debtor and that no Zamindar can use violence against a tenant. But what actually does happen? You see it everyday the Zamindar has beaten them with their hands tied behind their backs, and the moneylender does his talking with kicks and shoes..." p.301.

disillusioned that they do not hope to get out of the clutches of the moneylenders in this life.

To this helplessness, Premchand does not suggest solutions outside their own world of experience. They are angry, indignant and resentful. But all that they do, at least in Godan, is to wish for some calamity to befall³³ the moneylenders.

(C) EXPLOITATION BY VILLAGE COUNCIL OR BIRADARI

Biradari is another institution which is the enemy of peasants. Linked with it is the question of the consciousness of the peasants i.e. their slavishness to customs, conventions of the Biradari and caste and peasants' fatalistic outlook.

In Godan Premchand has admirably brought out all these problems and he has done so around the question of fine imposed upon Hori by the village elders for giving shelter to his daughter-in-law who was illegally married to his son. What the village elders raised was the question of morality.

33. As Shobha, Hori's younger brother, says "Can't you find some way to make Jhinguri Singh catch Cholera? That would finish him off for good." p.225.

But how shallow is their morality is exposed by Premchand by providing insights to their own life and character.

The prominent members of the Biradari are Pandit Datadin, Matadin, Lala Pateshwari, Jhinguri Singh and Nokheram.

Pandit Datadin³⁴ is a "village trouble-maker" poking his nose into everybody's business³⁴. Datadin's son, Matadin himself "took on a chamar girl" and the whole village knew about this affair but "nobody did anything about that,"³⁵ because he puts

34. Premchand comments : "...He had never committed a theft that was too dangerous. But when it came time for sharing the booty, he was always present. Somehow he always managed to get off unscathed. He'd not yet paid a single pice of rent to the Zamindar. When the bailif showed up, Datadin would threaten to throw himself into the well, leaving Nokheram helpless. Yet Datadin always managed to have money to loan out at interest to the tenants...He play friend to both thieves and their victims. No one in the village trusted him, but he was such a shrewd talker that even those who'd just been deceived walked back into his trap..." pp.154-155.
35. Dhaniya says to Datadin "...Rich people do the same thing and no one says anything to them. It doesn't affect their standing. It's only when the poor do something that their reputations are ruined. The rich prefer to save face even at the cost of others' lives, but we don't." p.154.

on a caste mark on his forehead and reads the holy books, and does "penance for his son by bathing rites."³⁶ Therefore, his reputation does not suffer.³⁷ Matadin himself had lost his caste, as the Chamars of the village had thrust a piece of bone in his

36. And what are these religious rites? These are related to the religion of kitchen. Datadin himself explains to Jhinguri Singh "...Siliya has never once crossed the threshold of our house, not to speak of touching the pots and pans..." p.301.

And Fremchand comments "Datadin had been quite a profligate in his own youth, but he'd never neglected his religious rites and duties. Matadin, like a worthy son, was following in his father's footsteps. The crucial elements of religion were ritual worship, fasts and scripture lessons, and the observance of taboos about cooking and eating. When both father and son held tight to these crucial elements, how could anyone call them wayward?" pp.301-302.

Also see p.222 for a comment : "...Piety is judged by the observance of rules about eating. If these rules are followed meticulously, a person's piety cannot be questioned. Food habits become a shield protecting us against any accusation of unrighteousness." p.222.

37. Hori has realised that "low people were actually low only in name-it was the upper classes who were really low-minded...if rich people had no sense of shame, the poor folk would have to bear the shame for them." p.147.

Hori's reaction to Matadin's appearance is : "That butcher! displaying his caste-marks as though he were God's truest devotee. The painted Jackal! who'd touch the feet of a brahman like that?" p.364.

³⁸ mouth for ill-treating a Chamar girl, Siliya,
 whom he had taken possession "body and soul". Yet
 he is a respectable member, since he could afford
 expiation through purification by Brahmins. ⁴⁰ Lala
 Pateshwari's record is no better. He is lecherous
 and has illicit relations with his maid servant who
 is a widow. ⁴¹ Jhinguri Singh had two young wives
 whose amorous activities were an open scandal in the

38. As Siliya's father Harkhu thunders at Matadin "...You can't make Brahmins out of us, but we can make Chamars out of you. If you're willing to make us Brahmins, out of whole community is agreeable. As long as that's not possible, then become Chamar. Eat with us, drink with us and live with us. If you're going to take away our honour, then give us your caste". p.305.

Siliya's mother shouts at Datadin "...We're Chamars, though, so of course, we don't have any honour! We're not taking Siliya away alone, we're taking Matadin with her - the one who ruined her. You're pious- you'll sleep with her, but you won't drink water from her hands". p.305.

39. Ibid, pp.303-305.

40. "...An elaborate sacrificial fire had been arranged for the occasion, great number of Brahmins were feasted, and lots of sacred verses and formulas were chanted. Matadin was also required to eat pure cow-dung and drink cow's urine. The cow-dung was to purify his mind, while the urine was to kill the germs of impurity in his soul". p.414.

41. Ibid, p.323.

village⁴². He had married them after the death of his first wife from whom he had five children. The last of the elders, Pandit Nokheram, had a mistress whose husband he had enticed to his house by providing shelter when thrown out of his own house.

These are the illustrious men who sit in judgement over the morals of Jhuniya, the daughter-in-law of Hori. It was they who gave the verdict that "by taking this whore into his house" Hori is "spreading poison in our society"⁴³ and that a woman like that should have her head chopped off". One of them, Jhinguri Singh had even suggested that Hori should be exiled from the village because he will

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42. "...but people were too scared of Thakur Sahib to say anything openly, and there was no opportunity for open scandal anyway. With the husband as a front, the woman could get away with all kinds of things. Only those with no such protection have a problem. The Thakur Sahib ruled his wife with an iron-hand, and prided himself that no outsider had seen even their veils-but he knew nothing of what was going on behind those veils". p.157.
43. As Lala Pteshwari pronounces "...Just think what the effect of such insolence will be on the village. Won't other widows in the village start following Jhuniya's example? Today this happened in Bhole's house, tomorrow it may happen in yours and mine too. After all, society is based on fear. If it loses that weapon, imagine what chaos would be let loose in the world?" pp.156-157.

pollute the whole village and if this "kind of wickedness is tolerated in the village, no man's honour will be safe."⁴⁴

A council of such self-righteous and morally bankrupt men decides unanimously that Hori should be fined a hundred rupees and four bushels of grain. Approval of the whole village is taken to complete this farce. Though, Dhaniya refuses to accept the judgment⁴⁵ but Hori accept it without any demur. Why does he do so? We are faced here with the question of Hori's slavishness to traditions, customs and conventions of his community. To Hori the village council is "the voice of God. Whatever they think fair must be accepted cheerfully"⁴⁶. Hori cannot think

44. p.157.

45. Dhaniya rejects the judgment outrightly, "They are no judges-they're devils, absolute devils. They just want to grab our land and possessions for themselves. Calling it punishment is just camouflage." p.160.

46. p.158. He says that "if it's God's will that we leave the village, there's nothing we can do about it".

of a life outside the caste. He refutes Dhaniya's argument who says that she has nothing to do with caste.⁴⁷ Hori tries to calm down Dhaniya by explaining that they are "all bound to the caste", and that they "can't break away from it!"⁴⁸ The fear of caste "was so strong that Hori was carrying away his grain on his own head, as though digging his grave with his own hands". He works whole night carrying his grain sack by sack from the barn and stacking it at Jhinguri Singh's place. Nothing is left behind, even a handful of grain for his children.⁴⁹ But all this material, the

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47. Dhaniya shouts at the village elders "...We don't have to stay in the caste-staying in the caste won't bring us salvation. We're living by our own sweat now, and we'll keep doing so even if you outcaste us". p.158.
- She is not prepared to pay even a single cowrie to them.
48. "...We must bow to whatever punishment they give. It would be better to hang ourselves than to live so shamelessly. If I were to die today, the people of our caste would carry our bodies to the pyre. Our salvation depends completely on the caste...". p.159.
49. Premchand comments: "...Zamindar, moneylender, government - none of them could have inspired such awe. He was sick with worry as to where his children's next meal would come from, but fear of the caste and community kept goading him like a demon. Life outside the caste was unthinkable. The marriage sacrament, tonsure and ear-piercing rites, birth and death ceremonies-all were in the hands of the caste. His life was like a tree rooted in the caste, bound to it heart and soul. Outcasting would throw his life into complete chaos-he would be utterly shattered." p.159.

oilseeds, peas and wheat, fetches him a paltry sum of twenty rupees. To have the balance of eighty rupees, he is forced to mortgage his house to Jhinguri Singh.

Hori's sense of adherence to ⁵⁰dharma and traditions also is responsible to make him a victim of Datadin's cunning. And it is precisely because of his sense of dharma that he falls in the clutches of moneylenders. He does not ask for receipts because of his faith in their sense of dharma. Gobar tries to convince Hori that he should not pay back Pandit Datadin more than what is due to him. But Hori cannot hold back even one pice because it is sin to keep brahmin's money.⁵¹

50. Madan Gopal rightly points out, "The past is Hori's only argument. He is slave to custom, he is superstitious, he acts and behaves exactly in the same way as did his forefathers. And he does so because they did so". op.cit., p.429.

51. "...but a surge of conscience swept through Hori's heart. If it had been the money of some lower caste landowner or merchant, he wouldn't have worried much, but a brahmin's money! Hold back even one pice and it would have to be paid back in blood. God forbid that anyone fall victim to a brahmin's fury. The whole family would be wiped out, leaving no one to light even a single lamp or offer even a drink of water in the home". p.270.

Hori's financial condition is already in a mess, deteriorates further when this fine is imposed upon him. He is so burdened with debt that his jacket and blanket are tattered,⁵² and he is not able to replace them. Hori does notice that Dhaniya's Sari is in shreds and it has been "mended so often" that it is "nothing but a mess of patches". But where is the money to buy her a new sari? He cannot recall "a single day when there had been something left over after paying the rent and the moneylender".⁵³ And the fine ruins him completely. Now he has no grain to feed his family and himself.⁵⁴

52. Hori recalls, "The jacket had been made five years ago. Dhaniya had practically forced him to get the material that time when the Afghan peddler had come around selling cloth. What trouble it had brought on, and what curses they'd had to suffer from him on account of the debt! As for the blanket, it was even older than Hori. As a child, he had slept under it huddled next to his father. As a young man, he'd shared it with Gebar during the winter months. And now, in old age, that same ancient blanket was still his companion, although like a decayed and painful tooth, it was no longer of much use." p.146.

53. Ibid, p.146.

54. "Hori's entire crop had gone to pay the fine. They somehow struggled through May, but by the beginning of June not a grain was left in the house. Five months to feed and the food supply utterly exhausted. Even if two meals a day were not possible, there had to be at least one. If stomachs could not be filled, they must at least be half filled. After all, how many days could one live without food? ...But a man couldn't work very well on an empty stomach..." p.165.

In fact Hori is not the only one in this hopeless condition. The whole village is in misery and there is "not a man" but wears a gloomy expression as though suffering has "drained the life from him" and is "making him dance like a wooden puppet."⁵⁵

(D) EXPLOITATION BY BUREAUCRACY

The other most important institution that exploits the poor peasants is the colonial bureaucracy. Premchand has consistently exposed this institution.⁵⁶ He regarded it as an coercive instrument of the State. In almost all of his works this machinery is depicted as a symbol of the repression by the State.

Premasharam affords/a classic example of the manner in which the peasants are exploited by government officials particularly the low paid, like the cheprasis, orderlies, constables. The forced labour

55. "They moved about, did their work, were crushed and suffocated only because this was written in their fate. Life held neither hope nor joy, as though the springs of life had dried up and all greenness had withered away...The future loomed darkly ahead with no path in sight, and their spirits had become numbed. The mounds of garbage piled up by the doors filled the air with stench, but no odour reached their noses and no light their eyes. They ate whatever scraps came their way like engines taking in coal...Flavour made no difference, as they'd lost their sense of taste. And life had lost all flavour too..." p.427.

56. The various institutions of State coercion as depicted by Premchand, are : police, courts, prisons, revenue officials, etc.

(free labour) or begar is the most conspicuous manner the government officials, exploit the villagers.

In the village of Lakhanpur the locale of the story ⁱⁿ Premasharam, there are two encampments, a Deputy Collector's and the other that of a top police officer. Both these camps let loose their minions, chaprasis, orderlies, constables, etc. to peck at the poor villagers like so many birds of prey. The characteristic phrase used by Premchand for these officials is vultures.⁵⁷

The very opening of Premasharam indicates how the poor villagers are pestered by these "insects".⁵⁸ After a day's forced labour in the camps, a group of exhausted men are talking in the evening. During their chat, it is revealed that this is the camp of the officials. The embittered villagers reckon that the native officers are more repressive and inhuman than their English

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57. This type of animal imagery is repeated in many of his later novels also. In Karambhumi : Dr. Shanti Kumar says about these officials, "I don't see even a single good man. Like vultures, all are snatching the slices of flesh out of the corpses of the poor". p.190.
58. This is the proper word used by Premchand for the officials in later part of the novel.

supervisors.⁵⁹ They grumble about the laziness and corruption of the spineless petty bureaucrats.

Before describing in detail the Deputy Collector's (Jwala Singh) encampment, Premchand takes pains to comment on it.⁶⁰ The author states that the ideal

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59. (a) As Manohar says : "Brother, if English would not have been in this country, the officials of this country would have devoured us". And Dukharam Bhagat agrees with his view. p.9.
- (b) Even Jwala Singh, the Dy. Collector gives such an argument about his colleagues. He tells Gyanshanker : "I'll tell you, there are, such gentle people who go to the extent of worshipping even the house-stewards and orderlies (attendants) of their superior officers (English men) to ensure that they (the attendants) may praise them before their sahibs. Whoever gets a little authority he considers himself a boss. He ceases to have anything to do with public and his country-men. In the presence of English administrators they will become the incarnation of politeness, humility and virtue as if they are standing in the presence of God but when they go on a tour their demeanour with common-men and even Zamindars becomes overbearing and officious as if they were the sole arbiter of the destiny of common folks." Ibid, p.35.
60. Premchand comments: "...As a certain type of living beings who are neither animals nor birds, come out in search of their livelihood after sun-set, cover the terrestrial sphere with their sprawling rows; in the same way a different type of creatures come in the villages from the very start of the month of Kartika and cover the whole of the village with their tents. In the beginning of rainy season the Raisik (pertaining to arrogance, excitement, rage) insects and moths originate and at the end of rainy season the Tamsik (pertaining to ignorance & darkness) insects and moths come into existence. With their advent a sort of earthquake comes to the villages and the people hide themselves for their lives..." p.54.
- In Rangbhumi also, the similar resentment against the officials is voiced by Veerpal Singh. Describing the officials as a "Pack of Voracious animals, hunting and devouring their prey together", he bemoans that there is nobody to listen to the problems of the people. P. 202.

behind these tours of authorities is doubtlessly the welfare of the public. The idea is to investigate the real conditions of the villagers, to take justice to their doors, to listen to their miseries to see to their necessities, to know their thoughts etc. But none of these purposes is solved. But in actual practice these tours have become visitations of the oppressors. Instead of ameliorating their conditions these visits bring untold miseries upon the villages. The officials eagerly look forward to the good days when they will get full opportunity to whet their appetite. While on tour in the rural areas they can have anything for asking : Ghee, milk, vegetables, meat, fish, chicken, things they yearn for in the town and cities. But at what cost? Naturally, by plundering poor villagers, by beating them and by taking forced labour from them.⁶¹

The second encampment in Lakhanpur is that of high ranking police officer. He brings along a hundred strong retinue of Karancharia, revenue officers, constables, chowkidars, etc. All the

61. As Kadir Khan say to his fellows "Is it the tour of the officials or our death. The goat I had brought up for Bakrid has been taken by Lakshar" p.56, Ibid.
 In the similar tone Manohar tells his fellows "These people really create havoc on us. They come here for the purpose of arrangement, to deliver justice but instead they cut our throats..."
Ibid, p.56.

provisions for this camp are extracted from the poor villagers of Lakhanpur.⁶² The Tehsilder orders the villagers to cut grass and then mix it with dung in order to prepare a playground for Polo. The men belonging to upper-castes, refuse because they feel it is the work of Harijans. They are beaten up severely with lathis for the non-compliance. They work throughout the day on empty stomach, their bellies aching in pain and humiliation. This is perhaps the most shocking episode of the novel.

The most repressive and therefore, the most corrupt part of the colonial bureaucracy is the department of police.⁶³

62. At the time of departure of the officials from the village, the shopkeepers like Bisheshwar Shah, Teli etc. come for payment but nobody pays them anything as most of the cheprais and orderlies had taken credit under fictitious names. But when the shopkeeper insists on payment, he is threatened and is asked to bring his Account-book.

The wily underlings, however, evade the payment by blackmailing the bania with the threat to increase his income-tax.

63. In Gedan ; Ramsevak, son-in-law of Hori, says about the police and law-courts: "The law-courts and police and soforth are supposed to be for our protection, but not one really protects us. There is just looting all around. People are always ready and waiting to cut the throat of anyone poor and defenceless. Everyone around here considers the farmer fair game. He can hardly stay on in the village if he does not pay off the Patwari...The police chiefs and constables act like sons-in-law. Whenever they happen to be passing through the village, the farmers are duty-bound to entertain them royally and provide gifts and offerings lest they get the whole village arrested by filing a single report. Someone and the other is always turning up - the head record-keeper and the revenue official and the deputy and the agent and the Collector or the Commissioner - and the poor peasant is supposed to attend him on banded knee. He has to make arrangements for food and fodders, for eggs & chickens and for milk and ghee..." p.424.

The police has created such a terror in the minds of the people that they become nervous even to see their faces. They arrest people in false cases.⁶⁴ Innocent men are arrested for no fault of theirs and the actual culprits are never caught. If the man resists he is threatened with dire consequences. In Gaban the police-men entrap Ramanath and he is forced to become an approver.⁶⁵

It is not that the poor peasants are cowards, they are, on the other hand, as full blooded and courageous as anyone. It is rather the devious means

64. In a short story "Updesh" ("Advice", Zamana, May, 1913), the Daroga (Sub-Inspector) himself explains to a landlord the methods adopted by him and other policemen to hood-wink the common-man. He says "If there is any dacoity, it is a great boon to us because we will have enough wealth then...We are the real dacoits...We will sweep all the villages around and loot them...I make up false dacoities, arrest innocent people but give them real punishment..." Mansarovar, Vol.6, p.292.

65. The Deputy says "We will not leave you even though our case may be spoiled, we will give you such a lesson, you will remember it for whole of your life". p.226.

And when Ramanath says "Will you make me approver forcibly?" The Deputy replies "Yes, we will force you", Ramanath says it is an interesting joke. And the Deputy replies! "Do you consider it a good joke to deceive police. I can prove just by arranging two witnesses that you were talking of sedition. That is all and you will be put behind the bars for seven years." Ibid, p.226.

The police is such a terror that the dwellers of the Basti of Pandepur in Rangbhumi are afraid even to make an appeal to the police that they are being evicted from their houses without being paid compensation.

of police oppression they find themselves unable to cope with. Hence, their impulsive reaction to shun confrontation with the minions of law. Hori in Godan pounces unarmed on the Pathan dacoit who is toting a gun in his hand. But this same Hori becomes nervous in the presence of a police-man.⁶⁶ Sangram a play published in 1923, depicts how the officials and the police indulge in corrupt practices. All the questions : the oppression by Zamindars, the cruelty of policemen, bribes, the coked-up cases⁶⁷

66. Premchand comments that "Hori was illiterate. Though he used to beat a strong bullock with a stick but becomes nervous even to see the red turban. He was not a coward, he knew how to kill and be killed; but he could not do anything in the presence of the intrigues of the police, who would walk handcuffed? Where was the money for bribes?" p.63.

Hori's cow is poisoned by his brother Heera. Inspector comes for investigation and Hori is summoned. Premchand comments here that "This was his first appearance before the police, and he was frightened as though being led to the gallows. While beating Dhaniya that morning, his limbs had swelled with excitement, but in the presence of the Inspector, they shrank up like the legs of a turtle. The Inspector was highly experienced in evaluating man's nerve, an expert in practical Psychology though he knew nothing of the subject academically. One glance at Hori and he was sure this would be one of his good days. Hori's face showed that one threat could be sufficient."

67. As the Inspector himself says to Thanedar (Sub-Inspector) "I can easily extract a sum of Rupees one thousand from Sabal Singh by implicating him in a concocted case...What is needed is two or three witnesses...And even if the witnesses are not available it is not difficult to trap even the big people now-a-days..." p.131.

and the forged statements which the witnesses are made to mug up like parrots⁶⁸, the loot by police in the name of search⁶⁹ - all this has been dealt with in this play.

68. The Daroga entraps some villagers as witnesses against Sabal Singh and makes them remember by heart the false statements :

Daroga : Thakur Sabal Singh used to say that the courts need to be uprooted. Never should one go to them. But the Raj itself is based on courts. The rejection of courts will shake the foundations of the Raj.

(This is repeated by everyone)

Daroga : Decide your cases in the Panchayats.

All : Decide your cases in the Panchayats.

Daroga : He had directed you not to do forced labour for any officer.

All : (Similarly this is repeated by everyone). ACT IV, Scene 1, PP. 136-137.

69. Sabal Singh, a Swarajist, shows the pictures through magic lantern to the villagers. Let us quote one of the scenes:

"The Third picture : The Sub-Inspector of Police is sitting on a cot in the village. Many constables in uniform are standing. Houses are being searched, and each article lying there examined. Any policeman who fancies an object grabs it for himself. Even the ornaments worn by the women are snatched away from their bodies.

The two characters decry this day-light robbery of the police :

Fatu : God save us from these tyrants!

A Kisan: They have come here to fill their bellies and the excuse is that they are investigating the case.

Fatu : God's wrath also does not fall on them. See! the poor men's houses are being searched.

Halidhar: What sort of search! It is a robbery. In spite of this it is claimed that the police protects us, our life and property. Act I, Scene 1, p. 27.

IICAUSES OF EXPLOITATION(A) BUREAUCRACY

What are the causes of corruption in bureaucracy or in other words what is the objective social situation which drives them to exploit the commonman?

A close reading of Premchand's works has enabled us to discover the various causes of corruption. An attempt is made to discuss each point briefly.

The police department dehumanises police-men. In Premasharam, Prabhashankar, the uncle of Premashankar, comments on the nature of the police department. According to him this department wipes out the noble feelings of man. His comments are reliable since his own son, Dayashankar, is also a police-man and he has given an impartial judgment about his son.

70. When Premashankar is put behind the bars on the charge of inciting the villagers, Prabhashankar requests Gyanshankar, the younger brother of Premashankar to plead before the officials for release of his brother. But Gyanshankar expresses his inability to do so. Prabhashankar is worried about his nephew and feels that the police would be harassing him. It is then that he comments on the inhuman nature of the policemen: "...By joining this department men become animals. How gentle was my son Days Shankar, but having joined the police department, his nature has completely changed. He does not talk even to his wife. In case I am trapped in some Mukadama, he will not hesitate to accept bribe even, from me..." p.216.

What happens to Salim in Karambhumi when he joins the bureaucracy? Before he joins the establishment he is very critical of the inhuman ways of the officials, especially the police officers. When asked by Dr. Shanti Kumar whether he would also exploit the poor, Salim replies, his sympathies will always be with the poor, to whatever extent his character may degenerate. He wonders self-righteously how is it that the officials suck the blood of the poor.⁷¹ Salim is an idealist and even participates very actively in collecting money from people in defence of Munni. He makes a round of villages in the company of Dr. Shanti Kumar and tears roll down his eyes when he observes the misery of the poor. But the noble character of this idealist⁷² youngman undergoes metamorphosis when he actually joins the bureaucracy.

71. Salim says that "If it is in his power he will send all these corrupt officials to Kalapani". p.289.

72. Salim is posted as Magistrate, in the same District where his fast friend, P^remashankar is leading the peasant movement. It is here that his transformed nature is revealed. He arrests Amarkant and leads a reign of terror over the agitating peasants. Intoxicated with power he severely beats the old woman (Siloni) with whom Amarkant was staying and injures her badly.

In Premasharam the low paid officials make a havoc of the villagers. Balraj, a conscious peasant narrates this to the Deputy. Here we get some idea of the cause of this high-handedness of the officials. Premchand's comments are revealing here.⁷³ Balraj puts the question to Ijaid Hussain (a keeper of records in the court of Jawala Singh) that "Is there anarchy that the government will punish the innocent" and to this Ijaid Hussain replies that "Yes, of course. The Government servants have always been getting begar (forced labour) and they will continue to get it. If you do not give your carts to us, do you think we will carry out luggage on our head? Whatever we need, we will take from you people, whether you give us with pleasure or by weeping."⁷⁴ The Deputy, after listening to Balraj's report, orders his subordinates not to take forced labour from the villagers but these

73. "Jawala Singh had kept camel for carrying his luggage but he knew that the orderlies and chaprasis and other subordinate officials require carts for carrying their luggage. The Government does not pay any allowance to them for this purpose. Therefore, if they do not stop carts (and take them forcibly) how will they carry their luggage...". p.65.

74. Ibid., p.65.

officials (Chaprasis, Dagtaris and Orderlies) are so cunning that they hold a meeting and try to mislead Jawala Singh. They excite his ego by telling him that these villagers do not open their tongue in the presence of English officials. It is because he is an Indian that they pay no heed to him. This design had desired effect upon Jawala Singh.⁷⁵

In Gaban the basic question of inequality is raised. Ramesh Babu says that a petty employee and a big official take the same food but why difference of pay. He himself is a head clerk and get, Rs.150/- while Ramnath is a petty clerk and gets only Rs.30/- a month. Ramesh Babu points out that naturally the petty clerks will accept bribes because Rs.30/- is insufficient for his living.⁷⁶

75. Frenchand comments: "Jawala Singh had adopted the English way of living to increase his decorum and propriety. He never considered himself less than an Englishman. While going to meet Englishmen he used to keep hat in his hand. He used to save himself from the insult of putting off his shoes. He used to sit only with Englishmen while travelling in train. The people used to address him as Saheb in their discourse. It was an abuse to him to call him an Hindustani...", p.94.

76. Gaban, p.38.

In one of his articles Premchand says that a major cause of corruption indulged in by the low-paid officials is that their salary is very less in proportion to that of the higher officials.⁷⁷

77. Hans, April 1930 in Vividh-Prasng, Vol.2, p.44.
 "...The officials at present get two-thousand or three thousand rupees while a constable gets Rs.15/- a month and a clerk only Rs.30/- a month."

There is further insight we get into this aspect from the conversation between Dr. Priyanath Chopra and the constables, in Premasharam. Dr. Priyanath is treating Sub-Inspector, Dayashankar, in his sickness. An old Chowkidar (also a constable) request him to give the Inspector such a medicine that he may recover soon, and in turn all of them will serve the Doctor. Priyanath replies in a jocular manner if they give him promises that they will never trouble the poor and will not accept forced labour from anyone he will cure their officer. Since this conversation gives an insight into the miserable condition of the low paid Chowkidars, and the various aspects of it, let us better quote it:

- Chowkidar: 'Sir, how, then we will survive? We have our children to look after. What is the value of Ten or fifteen Rupees?
- Priya : Then why don't you ask your officers to give you promotion? All of you go unitedly and make an appeal to them. You are employed to protect the public, and not to trouble them. In leisure time, you can do some other work to increase your income..."
- Munshiji : Your excellency! The Govt. rules are very said strict in this regard. The Police-karamchari is not allowed to do any other work other than the official. If we start doing part-time work we will be dismissed from our jobs.
- Priya : You are mistaken here. Nobody can stop you from threads and stitching clothes during leisure time. Yes, the Govt. work should not be disturbed. Why don't you narrate your miseries to the authorities?
- Munshi : Sir, if there is anybody to listen! To plunder, to exploit commonman, to take forced labour, is not such a big crime in the eyes of our authorities, as making an appeal for redressal of our grievances. Immediately we will be charged with conspiracy and unionisation, p.391.

(B) ROLE OF COLONIAL STATE

Premchand seems to attribute the misery of the peasantry to the system brought into existence by colonialism. This is indicated by the views of Premashankar, a social reformer, in Premasharam. While expressing his views on the economic distress of the peasants, Premashankar does not explain away this problem by blaming the prodigality, laziness and illiteracy of the peasants or their ignorance of the laws of agriculture. He feels that "there is no one more hardworking"⁷⁸ than the peasants. They are adept at economy, self-discipline and running the household. "The responsibility of their poverty" says Premashankar "lies not with them but with the circumstances under which they spend their lives"⁷⁹. And what are these circumstances? Their internal discord, selfishness and the flourishing of such an organisation as has become a manacle for them.⁸⁰ Obviously, Premashankar is referring to the institution of Zamindari. He further delves deep into the source of all these problems and arrives at the conclusion that "all these branches" appear "to be stemming from the same sources the existence of which

78. Premasharam, p.207.

79. Ibid, p.207.

80. Ibid.

depends on the blood of the peasants.⁸¹ And this source is the colonial state :

Why is there rift amongst them? Because the mala-administration of the existing regime. Why is there no mutual love and trust? Because the Raj considers such noble feelings dangerous and not let them flourish." 82

That the colonial state is the main cause of miseries of peasants has also been perceived by Zamindars

themselves. Rai Kamalanand, a Taluqdar in Premasharam concedes that the Zamindars are in fact so many brokers-collecting revenue for the Raj on a good commission

for themselves.⁸³ But Zamindars too have been castrated⁸⁴

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

83. "It is a misnomer" says Rai Kamalanand, "even to call this an 'estate'. The British Government appointed my ancestor as its agent, merely to collect the revenue and keep a fat commission for ourselves. It is for this commission that we dye our hands in blood, glory in trampling the poor under our feet, and walk with our noses in the air. The government describes us as proprietors merely to suit their own purpose. But we have to pay Malguzari to the government twice a year, so how can we regard ourselves as masters? The whole thing is a gigantic fraud...We have sold our independence for a few pieces of sweat-meats."

Premasharam, p.289. Quoted by V.S. Naravane, op.cit., p.111.

84. As Rai Kamalanand says "The system has made us lazy, dependent. We have pampered ourselves with luxuries, and now we have become utterly worthless. We are like caged birds, our wings have lost their power and now we cannot fly. We are constantly eyeing with greed the little plate of food and the little water-dish in our cage..." Ibid., p.289.

by the all powerful colonial machinery.

That the colonial state machinery exploits the Zamindars as well, who in turn are left with no alternative but to extort everything from tenants, has been stated by Gayatri Devi, a taluqdar in Premasharam. In her estate the tenants requested for hundred per cent remission of rent because there had been no rains during that particular year. But Gayatri is unwilling to make such a concession :

...If I exempt the rent in this particular area, I will have to incur a loss of twenty to twenty-five thousands of rupees. Out of ^{fear} riot, if I remit rent in other regions also, I will be left nowhere. It is true that I won't have to pay land-revenue to the State but I have to pay money in so many other forms i.e. in the forms of gifts to the officials. From whose coffers will it be paid? Were I to exempt the rent, the cost will still have to be borne by the tenants.⁸⁵

Another landlord feels that it is the "high standard of living" and "the rising cost of land" which constrains them to plunder the tenants. As

85. Premasharam, p.78.

In Godan, Rai Saheb, a Zamindar also provides a similar attitude "We're forced to plunder our tenants. % We don't give expensive gifts to the officials, we're branded as traitors. If we don't live in luxury, we're called misers..."
op.cit., p.72.

Gyanshanker in Premasharan says :

It was a different matter in olden times. The struggle for life was not so much dreadful as it is now-a-days. Our needs were limited then, the standard of living was not so high, but the most important fact is that the cost of land was not so exorbitant. Many of my villages were sold merely at the rate of two thousand rupees a village while any of these villages would now fetch me twenty thousand rupees. In those days it was difficult even to find tenants but now for a single plot of land hundreds of tenants are anxiously waiting. How can the Zamindars remain unaffected by this economic condition.⁸⁶

In fact even some tenants also feel that it is the colonial system which is responsible for their miseries. To illustrate this we can refer to one episode from Sangram. The crops of the villagers of Madhuban have been destroyed completely due to heavy hailstorm and all the tenants are in a quandry how to pay the rent. They hold a meeting. Saloni, an old

86. Premchand has depicted the character of Gayanshanker in its complexity. There is a divorce between his private self and public self. He is very fond of rationalizing his self-interest. This particular utterance comes in the presence of his crony from the college days, Jwala Singh, now the Deputy-Collector. Gayanshanker has just now picked up a quarrel with his uncle Prabhashanker, a feudal landlord. The dispute ranges on the question of oppression of the tenants. Prabhashanker is bent upon piling up his wealth. Therefore, it is difficult to trust his statements because most of the time he is indulging in self-justification. However, the above statement suggests the oppressive conditions of all the classes of India under colonialism.

woman suggests them to make an appeal to Zamindar to remit the rent and since he is a noble man, says she, he would definitely consider their case. But Fatu replies that the Zamindar has to pay land revenue to the State, therefore it is better to make an appeal to the government. But in the same breath he adds that they should not expect anything positive from the government :

An exemption by the Zamindar is hardly an exemption unless the government approves of it. Otherwise the Zamindar himself will have to pay the revenue tax. There is then no hope of exemption by the government. The revenue officials will be sent for inspection. If they get heavy bribes, they will show the loss; if not, they will write that there has not been much damage. The most government will do is to declare an exemption from tax. When three quarters of the sum is to be paid, then there is no harm in paying one more quarter. We will at least be saved from having to pay bribes and running to the court. The government is interested in filling its coffers and not in welfare of its subjects. It may be thinking when all of the subjects cease to exist, even then their brothers will remain. The land will never be barren..." 87

In fact all other tenants, particularly an old man, supports Fatu's argument that the State will not exempt anything and, even if it does, it will extract everything in the following year. The tenants are disillusioned with the working of the colonial state.

IIIALTERNATIVES

The alternative that Premchand suggests for the remedy of the peasants' misery is that the peasants themselves must rise in defence of their rights and human dignity.⁸⁸ But the instrument for fighting for their rights, as suggested by Premchand, is non-violence. This is clearly indicated in the works Premasharam, Kayakalp and Karambhumi. Let us examine this aspect with special reference to these works.

In Premasharam there are two ways in which the peasants of Lakhapur launch their struggle : (a) non-violent and (b) violent. There are two important

88. Premchand speaks through Haldhar's (in Sangram) angry rejoinder :

"...Why is there such degradation for us? Everybody abuses us, hits us. The minions, the Zamindars, all consider us lowlier than dogs. It is because we have become shameless. We have come to love our skin. Had we too possessed pride and a feeling for our dignity, no one would have dared affront us. It is heard that in other countries people come to blows if abused. There none can abuse others... What do we have here? We are kicked and cursed most execrably, we see with our own eyes, without a blush or batting an eye lid, the declension of religion. To save our skin we tolerate every kind of humiliation, so dear has life become to us. I would thousand times prefer death to this life. Take it from me the dearer a man holds his life, the lowlier he is..." pp.166-167.

incidents in the novel where struggle against the free labour is waged. The first is on the occasion of the encampment by Deputy Jwala Singh and the other when a police officer is on the tour of the village of Lakhanpur.

In the first case Balraj, as the representative⁸⁹ of the peasants of Lakhanpur meets the Deputy and narrates the woes of the villagers.⁹⁰ Ironically, the courage of Balraj invites more sufferings on his fellow-villagers.⁹¹ But the whole situation is saved

89. Balraj knows the importance of his class. He has gleaned knowledge of international happenings from the newspapers. He knows how the peasants have struggled and gained importance in Russia:

"You are making fun of me, as though peasants are nobodies, and were made only to drudge and slave for the landlords; but in newspaper that comes to me it is written that in Russia it is the peasants who rule the country, they do what they please. And somewhere close by there is a country called Bulgaria, there quite recently, the peasants have dethroned the king, and the country is now ruled by a commune of peasants and workers." p.53.

90. This can be termed "as a movement from below". See M.H. Siddiqui, Agrarian Unrest in North India, (The United Provinces, 1918-1922), Vikas Publishing House, 1978.

91. The subordinates of Deputy are so cunning that they dupe him and try to ensnare Balraj into the clutches of police. The Sub-inspector is ordered by Deputy to make an inquiry and the former being a corrupt man wants to extract bribe from all the villagers. Otherwise, he threatens them to file personal bonds.

when all the villagers are united and refuse to speak against Bairaaj. Premchand suggests that if all the villagers are united they can easily fight for their rights.

In the second incident, when the villagers refuse to do begar, they are beaten severely by the police. They plan to retaliate but Premashankar saves the situation by his peaceful intervention.⁹²

The peasants of Premasharam use violent method⁹³ when their right for using the pastures for their animals is usurped. The use of violence by Manohar invites trouble on the whole village. Though, Manohar surrenders himself to the police but with the instigation of Gayanshankar all the villagers⁹⁴ are

92. This can be termed as "Organisation from above". See M.H. Siddiqui, op.cit., p.111.

93. The peasants had been using the pastures for their animals since generations past. Gaus Khan, the Karinda stops them from using the pasture and beats Bilasi (the wife of Manohar) when she refused to budge even an inch from the pasture. And the very next day Gaus Khan is murdered by Manohar.

Gayanshankar says to Dr. Priyanath "...murder has been committed whether this has been the job of one man or many. Problem, for me, is more intricate. The major question is the question of Zamindars versus Kisans. If the murders are not given proper punishment then this type of incidents will occur frequently and it would be difficult for the Zamindars to save themselves..." p.236.

arrested and sentenced to jail. The peasants lose the case in court because the police was able to create a rift among them. But at the end of the novel Premchand shows how with the unified efforts of the people the case is reopened and the villagers are released from jail. The conclusion derived from the reading of Premasharam is that ^{it} is ~~not~~ possible to achieve rights by means of struggle, if it is launched in a non-violent form and if the people are conscious enough to unite themselves.

What is the alternative to the institution of Zamindari in Premasharam? Premchand suggest the abolition of this institution^{or}. However, here Premchand

95. At the end of the novel the elections are held, Premashankar, as the representative of the peasants of Lakhanpur, is elected to the Council. He intends to raise the question of land reforms, but is hesitant because he does not want to annoy Gyanshankar, his brother, who is a Zamindar himself. However, when Mayashankar takes the charge of Riyasat he declares that the land belongs to the tiller:

"...I forgo all the privileges and prerogatives that have been bestowed on me in accordance with custom, law and social norms. I liberate my subject from the obligations to me. Neither are they my tenants, nor am I their landlord. All of them are my friends, my brothers and from today they own the land they till..." p.417.

has used the technique of change of heart. Mayashankar has been conceived as the Utopian Zamindar who declares that the land belongs to the tiller.

The solution offered by Premchand here, to the institution of Zamindari is similar in its structure and form,⁹⁶ relying largely on the acts of individual charity and good will, to the solutions offered by Gandhi. Premchand belonged to the social group of "educated middle class" and this social group was swayed by the hegemony of the dominant ideology of the time, i.e., Gandhism. Therefore, the limitations of Premchand are the limitations of his class.

Premchand has depicted the peasants' growing consciousness about their rights in Kayakalap. But this consciousness has been inculcated into them by outside force i.e. by Chakaradhar, a social reformer. As a result of this critical consciousness the peasants (Chamars) decide to refuse to do begar for anyone.⁹⁷ They realize that they "have been trampled upon, have been pestered"⁹⁸ and they want to fight against

96. Idea derived from Lucien Goldmann The Hidden God, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1964, Translated from the French by Phillip Thody.

97. Kayakalap, p.43.

98. Ibid, p.121.

their inhuman treatment. Therefore, they give vent to their pent-up feelings in open revolt and are ready to take violent means⁹⁹ but Chakaradhar intervenes and channelises their energies into peaceful and non-violent form of struggle.

In Karambhumi the peasants (tenants) are made aware of their rights by the educative efforts of two kisan leaders, Amarkant and Swami Atmanand. The peasants launch a "non-tax campaign" which takes the shape of a powerful movement. They remain non-violent throughout the struggle. The colonial state resorts to severe repression and the general genocide of the masses.

What is the positive achievement of the movement? At the end of the novel, Amarkant, the leader of the movement, is very doubtful of the method adopted by him. He is sad because this method has invited the wrath of the colonial state and caused heavy loss of life and property. He laments that he could have continued with the strategy of petitioning¹⁰⁰. But Sakhada,

99. As one peasant cries out "Brother, you are harping about peace but do you know what it leads to? Anyone who fancies it, beats us, crushes us. Are we to keep sitting in peace? To keep sitting in peace only worsens our condition. Don't teach us to keep peace. Teach us to kill. Only then you will be able to liberate us." Ibid, p.122.

100. Karambhumi, p.258.

Amarkant's wife, gives a different interpretation to the movements launched in the villages and the city. She is very happy at the end. She feels that without launching a non-tax movement among the peasants it would not have been possible to inculcate the political consciousness which they have been able to induct into the minds of the people.¹⁰¹

Before starting the movement Amarkant had adopted all possible peaceful methods to draw the attention of the government towards the miserable conditions of the Kisans but the authorities were not prepared even to listen to him. Later when the movement is in its initial stage, Salim submits a report to the authorities, about the true conditions of the Kisans. But his superior, Mr. Ghaznavi, disagrees with his views and his report.¹⁰² It is when the mass-movement rises to its peak that the colonial state is compelled to climb down. It seems that Premchand highly appreciated the Gandhian strategy of launching

101. Ibid.

102. As Mr. Ghaznavi says "All that we have to do is to obey the orders of our superiors. When they ask us to collect revenue, we have to carry out the orders. Whether it means hardship to the people or not, is none of our concern". Ibid, P. 302

a movement and then withdrawing it at its peak, in order to force the colonial state to accede to their demands.

To sum up : Premchand has depicted the most important, burning problems of the peasantry and has demonstrated how the exploitation of the tenants by mutifarious forces have led them to pauperization. Though the institution of Zamindari is the cause of their sufferings yet the main evil, according to Premchand, is the colonialism. Therefore, the alternative that Premchand suggests, is the struggle against Zamindars as well as against the colonial state.

CHAPTER - III

CHANGES IN RURAL SOCIETY

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The introduction of private property in land brought about certain transformation in agrarian relations. The new relations of production gave rise to new patterns of social relations, new values and norms and new cultural ethos. This new social and material existence made a powerful impact on the structure and organization of rural society.

Premchand has depicted in his works, how new social and material conditions destroyed old forms, old practices and old ways of feeling. He has represented the changing relationships between husband and wife, father and son and so on, as a result of new material and social reality.

(A) CHANGING ATTITUDE TO TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND VALUES

During the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the traditional institutions and values were in a state of flux. Many of them were under severe strain. Premchand's works could not but be sensitive to this issue. Premchand's works give fascinating insights into how the traditional values

around which the joint-families existed and functioned underwent changes in rural India. Some of his short stories and novels like "Bare Ghar Ki Beti" ("Rich daughter-in-law"), Premasharam and Godan revolve around this question.

Premchand's main concern was to demonstrate how the values on which the joint-families existed were becoming anachronistic in the changing social and economic situation in the country. While generation after generation lived to sustain the marvade of the family, the new generation steeped in new ideas and influenced by their changing social needs did not hold it as sacrosanct.¹

Premasharam is a good example of this conflict and how it ends up in the disintegration of the family. Premchand brings out this through a fascinating portrayal of contrasting attitudes of Geyanshankar and Prabhashankar. The head of the

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1. For an idea how the family organization and marriage system were in flux during colonial period, in Kerala, see K.N. Panikkar "Land Control, Ideology And Reform : A Study of The Changes In Family Organization And Marriage System In Kerala" Indian Historical Review, Vol.IV, No.1, 1977, pp.30-46 and Kathleen Gough and David M. Schneider (ed). Matrilineal Kinship, Berkeley, California, 1962.

family, Prabhaskar, is a staunch advocate of the maryada of the family and has spent his entire life in maintaining it.² His concept of the maryada is a mixture of several things : an emotional and sentimental adherence to the honour of the family and a feudal-paternalistic attitude towards the tenants &

2. Shakespeare in his history play Henry IV, Part I and Part II examines three concepts of honour. One is that of Hotspur which is historically dying and belongs to the feudal times. The second that of Prince Hall who believes in the new values of calculation, greed and power. The third that of Falstaff which is a critique of both Hotspur's concept of Honour and that of Hall. Hotspur like Prabhaskar of Premasharam can give up his life for the honour. He has a consuming passion for honour and it is the yardstick by which Hotspur himself measures every action and event :

"Send danger from the East unto the West,
So honour cross it from the North to South,
And let them grapple...

*** *** *** *** ***
By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap
To pluck bright honour from the Pale fac'd moon;
or dive deep into the bottom of the deep,
Where fathom-like could never touch the ground,
And pluck up drowned honour by the locks...

-Henry IV, Part I, Act, scene iii,
lines 195-208.

other adherents.³ Prabhashankar's vision is limited by the considerations of this maryada and his life attitudes are ordered for its maintenance. In a way, he lives in a world of his own, removed from the changing realities of the society. Obviously, he is committed to the preservation of the family, for the family symbolised the ideal for him.

Gyanshankar, on the other hand, is the product of the new system of education and is keen on taking advantage of the available opportunities. He is ambitious and is intent on becoming a Taluqdar. He does not look at the family with the sentimental veneration of maryada but from the point of view of economic advantage and viability. Is it advantageous for him to be a member of a family, the expenses of which is shared by several others? The ability to raise this question denotes the ability to overcome the ideology of joint-family which demanded sacrifice

3. Prabhashankar believed in the value of obligation, of charity and of the open door to the needy neighbour. Property in his eyes was a means of protecting the maryada. As Premchand comments "He could even give up his life to protect the 'prestige of the family'. He had that much love for honour that he could starve himself but would consider his good luck to welcome a guest! But alas! this tradition has flown away from the country!..." Premasharam, op.cit., p.216. Also see p.377.

and adjustment. Premchand has caught the nuances of this ability and has admirably brought it out through several incidents.

Gyanshankar is an advocate of the individual's freedom of thought and action which was constrained by the maryada. He says to his uncle :

You will bow yourself in the face of any difficulty out of fear of public censure while I give precedence to my freedom of thought than to public opinion and do not care for the latter at all where my freedom of thought is concerned...The very basis of your decency is suicidal. In your house even if there is nothing to eat. You would give a warm reception to a guest though you have to burden yourself with a debt. I would keep away such a guest from my house...5

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4. Gyanshankar has discarded the old age-practice of helping the tenants in distress or on the occasion of marriages etc. On this issue he picks up quarrel with his uncle, Prabhashankar, who adopts a paternalist attitude to the tenants.

Also see the story "Sabhayata/Ka Rahasy" ("Secret of culture", Mansarovar, Vol.4, pp.197-204,] in which the younger generation of the landlord stops to celebrate the festival of Janamashtimi. He has stopped the age-old paternalist attitude to his tenants, as he himself explains:

"Oh, it was a great non-sense. There is a marriage anywhere in the village and it is I who have to pay for the fuel. This tradition lasted for generations together. Was it foolish or not on part of my father who had even to purchase trees from others to observe this custom? I stopped the issue of fuel wood immediately. People raised a hue and cry. But should I listen to others' cries or watch my own interests? The fuel wood alone makes an annual saving of Rs.500/- now. Today nobody dares to pester me with such demands".

5. Premnasharam, op.cit., p.46.

In spite of the contrast thus provided, Gyanshanker has not been drawn as representing just the ideal—one who is representing the new values, interminably fighting the old. Instead, he vacillates between the two. He is not able to liberate himself entirely from the traditional consciousness⁶. He is like a pendulum swinging between the two opposite value systems. Premchand's sense of reality is remarkable here. He is conscious of the struggle inherent in such situations and therefore does not create ideal stereotypes. As Raymond Williams has pointed out :

...Many old forms, old practices and old ways of feeling survived into period in which the general direction of new development was clear and decisive.⁷

Premchand's sympathy is with "the general direction of new development." He clearly indicates how the historically dying concept of maryada has no place in a society dominated by cash-nexus.⁸

6. Ibid, p.46.

7. Country and City, Chatto Windus, London, 1973, p.35.

8. In fact the dying of this old order is symbolised by the type of images that Premchand has used while giving the physical description of the house of the landlord. He uses images of sickness, of old tattered objects etc. Premasharam, op.cit., pp.12-13.

There is a growing conflict between Prabhashankar's concept of maryada and the social reality surrounding him. The process of narrative goes on to undermine or question his idea of maryada.

Premchand depicts in the novel how Prabhashankar responds subjectively to the objective situation existing in the society i.e. the relationship between the self-conception and the lived reality. In Prabhashankar the desire of self and the claims of society frequently come into conflict. He feels these contradictory pressures operating on him. Prabhashankar tries to sustain himself against these forces that threaten him and at the same time he adjusts himself to what objectively exists. He is both a subject that wills and an object which is controlled and restricted by environment⁹. He tries to dissuade Gyanshankar from breaking the joint-family with the arguments of maryada but ultimately has to compromise with the reality and throughout the novel he suffers the pangs of separation. In spite of Gyanshankar's callousness and indifference he helps him in times of difficulty or

9. Idea derived from an article "Self And Society in H.G. Wells' 'Tono-Bungay'", Linda R. Anderson, Modern Fiction Studies, Vol.26, Summer, 1980, p.206.

distress. While on the other hand Gyanshanker deserts his uncle and his family whenever they are in trouble. Prabhashanker had never been to a police-station, or a court because it is against the maryada of his family. But when his elder nephew, Premashanker, is imprisoned he breaks this code and flatters even the petty officials to get his nephew released from jail. The comic treatment of Prabhashanker and the ridiculousness of his hopes reveals Premchand's consciousness that his old world is no longer viable.

Godan brings out another aspect of the changing values in rural society. Peasants have lived in villages not only with a certain element of awe and fear but also with respect for the landlords. This is a dominant factor in the subjection of the peasants. How the peasants came to believe and rationalise this subjection is a question which Premchand has explored with consummate artistry. Hori is a classic example of this. He justifies inequality on the basis of Karma and takes refuge in the will of God.¹⁰ Through

10. See Godan, op.cit., pp.28-31.

According to Hori: "God creates men great or small". Wealth is a reward for "penance and devotion". Thus "rich people" says Hori "are enjoying happiness because of their good works in the last life." "We built no merit" says^{nc} "so, how can we expect pleasures now".

Hori and several other characters, Prenchand points out perceptions and beliefs which help to maintain the existing system.

Girdhari in "Balidan" and Damadi in "Sabha-yata Ka Rahasy" also highlight different aspects of the same issue, the peasants' attachment¹¹ to land. The peasants are conscious of the fact that the land is not enough to feed them and their families and though at the brink of starvation they would not

ii. In "Balidan" Prenchand shows how Girdhari is emotionally attached to fields :

"The fields were a part of Girdhari's life. Every inch of that soil was identified with his blood, and every particle of that earth was saturated with his sweat. Each one of the fields was named, and these names came to the tip of his tongue in the same manner as did the names of his three children: one was 'twenty-four hundred', another 'twenty-two hundred' and third one the 'irrigated one', and another one 'the shallow one'. The very mention of these names meant a picture of these fields in his mind's eye. He spoke of fields as if they were animate objects which shared his joys and sorrows. His hopes and aspirations, his dreams, his castles in the air were all built on the foundations of these fields. Without the fields, he could not imagine the purpose of life." -"Balidan" ("Sacrificed") in Madan Gopal (Translation), Prenchand : The Shroud And 20 other stories, Sagar Publications, New Delhi, 1972, p.40.

give up the land¹². It is because the land is the symbol of status in the rural society. Thus Danadi in "Sabhayata Ke Rahasya" has just six bighas of land but he has to support an equal number of dependants on it. His two sons, two daughters and wife keep themselves busy in the farm but even then they do not make both ends meet. How can this much land make them rich. "If all of them had started doing manual labour they would have earned sufficiently to live in comfort", comments Premchand, "but then, a part-time farmer could not stomach the insult of being a manual labourer"¹³. The family has kept two oxen to escape such ignominy. Danadi is working as a chaprasi on daily wages, in a government department. A major share of his wages is spent on feeding the bullocks. But they bear all these hardships rather than leaving the profession of a farmer to become a labourer. "Can a labourer, even though he earns a rupee a day",

12. As Hori in Godan says to his son Gobar "...What do we get out of our land? Not even an anna a day a piece. A servant making ten rupees a month eats and dresses better than we do. But we don't give up our field. And we still have our prestige to uphold. There is a kind of dignity in farming that is not found in working for someone else." op.cit., p.30.

13. Mansarovar, Vol.4, p.199.

comments Premchand "have the prestige of a farmer? It is not bad to earn something through manual labour while being a peasant : The oxen yoked at the threshold protect the prestige. But once the oxen are sold away, there is no place for a farmer to hide his face from shame"¹⁴. Damadi does not possess warm clothing for winter and his employer, Rai Sahab questions him :

"Why are you shivering? Why don't you get yourself clothes?"

Damadi : Sir, I don't have enough to eat. How can I have clothes for myself?

Rai Sahab : Why don't you sell away your oxen?

Damadi : Sir, I won't be able to face my Biradari. Nobody will accept my daughter in marriage. I will be ousted from the hearth and home.

Rai Sahab : These very idioticities bring ruin to you people. It is a sin to have pity on men like you. ¹⁵

To retain this prestige, this status symbol, Damadi, one day, steals fodder for livestock at night from a field in order to feed his famished bullocks, is apprehended by a police constable and is put behind the bars.

The question arises why should land be so important to one's status? What is the social significance of owning the land? We have already discussed

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

above the question of the land as a status symbol. But this symbol is governed by economic factors. In an agricultural setting, land is the major commodity for establishing relationships of continuing dependency. Thus in a family which controls land would control in part the lives of those who ultimately depend for their survival on that land—agricultural labourers, artisans, such as blacksmiths, carpenters and washermen and any who trade their services for grain. Thus when Girdhari's land goes out of his hands he wails over the fact that now since he is no longer a cultivator, "the barber, the carpenter, the potter, the priest, the bhat and the watchman" all of whom were indebted to him, will no longer give him respect.¹⁶ Hitherto he was a householder, was counted among the respectable of the village and "though he was not a panch he had a right to express his views on all matters affecting the village and be heard".¹⁷ But now, thinks Girdhari, he has forfeited "the right to sit in the ranks of the respectable to express himself in disputes between villagers".¹⁸ Though Girdhari has not yet taken to

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

labour he takes it for granted that he has fallen in the eyes of all.¹⁹ The day his bullocks are sold away to pay off the debts,²⁰ Girdhari departs from this world for ever.

Thus the attachment to land based on both economic and psychological factors, prevented the peasants from becoming labourers.²¹ But Premchand possessed as he was with realistic imagination depicted the tension within the peasants' psyche to stick to the land on the one hand and how harsh economic realities that force them to become

19. Ibid.

20. While handing over the bullocks Girdhari puts his head on the neck of the bullock and cries bitterly. Premchand comments "He was like a bride who, while leaving for the husband's home, clings to the feet of her parents. He would not leave the bullocks and cling to them like a drowning man holding on to a straw." Ibid., p.44. That same night he does not take his dinner. He lay on his bedcot wide awake that night and in the morning he leaves his home and dies.

21. The attachment to land applies even to non-cultivating rural folks. Bechu, in "Lokmat Ka Saman", Mansarovar, Vol.7, pp.280-288, is an honest, hardworking washerman, yet he is not able to earn enough for both ends meet. Though he is oppressed by Karinda and is also forced to do begar yet he is not willing to migrate to the city because he is emotionally attached to the village.

labourers on the other. Thus Hori in Godan in spite of his persistent struggle to remain attached to his land, is forced by harsh and cruel economic realities, to become a wage labourer. He takes to working for a road contractor with the aim of accumulating sufficient money to wrangle free his land from the clutches of the moneylenders. Hori's death in this futile enterprise symbolises the death of the old type of peasant and village utopia.

The futility of the village utopia and the values held by the older generations is explained by Premchand by contrasting this with the attitudes, perceptions and beliefs of the younger generation. This is embodied in the persons of Gobar in Godan and Girdhari's son in "Balidan". Gobar has developed critical consciousness toward his oppressors. He understands the hypocrisy of Rai Sahab, the taluqdar and tears his mask away²². As opposed to Hori's views

22. When Hori defends Rai Sahab and argues "Even now the master spends four hours a day singing hymns to God.", Gobar questions him "whose labour supports that hymn-singing and charity-giving?" and replies Hori "His own, of course," Gobar, then exposes the real face behind Rai Sahab's mask:

"Oh nonsense work of farmers and labourers. But he has trouble digesting that sinful money. That's why he has to give out charity and sing hymns to God. I like to see him naked and hungry and still singing hymns. If I could get two square meals a day I wouldn't mind reciting the names of God day and night myself. One day in the fields hoeing sugar-cane and all his piety would be forgotten".

Gobar is of the opinion that God creates everyone equal and the inequality is man-made. Thus Gobar's attempt is a struggle to overcome the prevalent ideology.

To Gobar and Girdhari's son "farming is nothing but a waste of man's life."²³ Therefore they do not harbour any false illusions about land and thus do not have any scruples in becoming a labourer. There is a comparative prosperity in the house.²⁴ But, despite this prosperity, Girdhari's son "commands little respect" in the village. He is a mere 'labourer'. It does make a difference in the status of his mother, too. Subhagi's pride and aggressiveness is gone. She becomes a "dog outside its beat." She neither appears in the panchayat meetings nor holds darbars. Her visits to the neighbours come to an end. She is now a mere mother of a 'labourer'.

But Gobar who takes to city in search for work, commands more respect in the village when he pays back a visit to the village. Everyone in the village thinks him to be a rich man.

23. Ibid.

24. Thus Girdhari's son now "puts on a shirt and a British made shoe. Vegetables are cooked in the house twice a day. The family now eats wheat instead of jawar". p.46.

(B) SOCIAL MOBILITY

Every aspect of life and organisation of rural society during Prenchand's time was undergoing change. And social mobility is one of the important indicators of this general and broad process of social change. The term 'social mobility' refers to the process by which individuals or social groups move from one position to another in the society. The change can be in terms of occupation, status, income, wealth, power and social class. We will focus our discussion on two aspects of social mobility : (i) occupational mobility and (ii) migration from village to the city. An attempt has been made to inquire into the causes of mobility and consequences of mobility. While making a survey of migrants we would also try to examine their attitude to their former social groups, the influence of outside world on their behaviour and psychology.

(i) Occupational Mobility :

Prenchand has depicted how the old occupational categories die out and new ones are created. Some groups become prosperous and others decline in status.²⁵

25. See "Mukti-Marg" ("The Path of Deliverance"), Mansarovar, Vol.3, pp.242-253.

Thus, Pandit Chintamani in the story "Neki"²⁶ is a brahmin but takes to moneylending and later after having accumulated enough wealth shifts to Zamindari. This shift in the occupation has also been represented in the story "Banka Zamindar"²⁷.

Affluence brings about change in the status of an individual in the society. A person who moves up in the social hierarchy will tend to change his friends and in some cases he changes his name also, as Premchand comments in "Balidan" :

The name by which a man is popularly known is an index of his status in life. When Mangaroo Thakur, of village Bela, became a head-constable of police, he came to be called Mangal Singh. None dared address him as Mangaroo. Similarly, ever since the day he made friends with the police-inspector of the area, and was appointed a Mukhia of the village, Kaloo, the shir, has been addressed as Kalikadin. If some one were to address him as Kaloo, now, he would frown at him.²⁸

On the other hand Harakhu Chand, a prosperous gur manufacturer becomes plain Harakhu when his business gets a severe set back due to import of sugar from abroad.²⁹

26. See Gupat-Dhan, Vol.1, pp.149-157.

27. Zamana, Oct.1913, See Gupat-Dhan, Vol.1, pp.158-165.

28. "Balidan", op.cit.

29. Ibid.

(11) Migration From Village To The City :

The onslaught of modernisation from above or colonialism brought about certain structural changes in the rural society. These changes led many rural folks to migrate to the cities. The causes of migration were various but we would discuss two sources of this type of mobility :

(a) education and (b) great expectations.

(a) Education as a source of mobility has been described in the stories like "Sauhaq Ka Shav"³⁰ and "Unmad" ("Madness")³¹. Education, here is tied to social advancement. Thus Manharath in "Unmad" migrates to London for higher education. The city of London creates in him new aspirations and new ways of satisfying them :

For Manhar England was a different world, where the chief means of progress was to have a beautiful wife. If the wife is attractive, lively, clever, a good conversationalist, bold, then her husband will have gained a gold mine, he has reached the pinnacle of progress. Not on strength of his mind or his self-discipline, but on the strength of his wife's influence and attraction...³²

30. Mansarovar, Vol.5, pp.207-231.

31. Mansarovar, Vol.2, pp.113-131.

32. Quoted by Robert O. Swan, op.cit., p.115.

A year's contact with English society raises a tumult in Manhar's mind. He recognizes now culture and affluence as alternative aims. The commercial world overpowers his mind and he loses his spontaneity, nobler and gentler feelings. Vageshwari (his Indian wife) had served him day and night and it was because of her self-sacrifice that he was able to achieve education. But now she cannot be of any help in raising him to higher positions of power. The self-sacrifice and self-denial of Vageshwari is forgotten by him and the materialist culture of England is now his alternative aim in life. He is attracted by an English girl, Jaini and marries her. By virtue of this alliance he obtains a high government position in India and avoids his family and first wife.

(b) Another source of this type of social mobility is the Great expectations, that is, the illusion that the city affords better prosperity as illustrated by the delightful fancies revealed in by Gobardhan in Godan on his way to the city of Lucknow :

He had heard that labourers in the city were earning five or six annas a day. If he could make six annas a day and live on one anna, he'd be saving five, which would add up to ten rupees a month, or a hundred and

a quarter in a year. If he came back with a purseful like that, no one would dare say anything against him. Those Datadins and Pateshwaries would fawn over him, and Jhuniya would burst with pride...of course people in the village would sneer at him for doing common labour. Let them sneer. That kind of work was no sin...This farming was nothing but a waste of man's life. First of all he'd buy a good western cow, one that gave four or five quarts of milk a day; and then he'd tell his father to look after her, bringing the old man happiness both in this world and the next...³³

Behind the consciousness of Gobar is working the ethics of bourgeois society or the myths engendered by bourgeois society, that is, "Hard work pays", "thriftiness" etc.³⁴ Though all these illusions harboured by Gobar are shattered to pieces when he actually observes the city life and himself experiences it, yet the city life brings about a transformation in his world outlook. The city life does accentuate Gobar's growing consciousness of the outside world. He has "seen something of the world and has begun to understand its ways"³⁵. By attending some meetings of the congress party he comes "to know something about politics" and begins to understand the concepts of

33. Godan, op.cit., p.166.

34. Also see Premasharam where Gyanshankar while he is the manager of the estate owned by Gayatri, by virtue of these ethics is able to raise a huge profit for the owner.

35. Godan, op.cit., p.246.

nation and social class. He no longer has respect for outmoded social conventions nor he cares now for public criticism.³⁶

What is the attitude of Gobar, the migrant, towards his former social group? When Gobar pays a visit to his village we find that the relationship between his social values and that of his parents and other villagers undergoes a change. This relationship is manifested even in the type of language Gobar uses. His dialect now is full of legal terminology.

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36. Premchand comments "...Attending the Council meetings almost daily had built up his self-confidence. The thing which had made him hide out in his place far from home - or rather such worse things - went on all the time here, and no one ran away." Ibid., pp.246-247.

The question arises : does Gobar learn radicalism when he comes to the city or was there already a potentiality within him of developing a critical consciousness while he was in the village. Here we may refer to the remarks made by Raymond Williams, regarding migration of rural people to city as depicted in English Literature :

"...The displaced labourers and craftsmen and small farmers did not learn radicalism when they came to the cities. They learned, in altering conditions, new kinds of organization, new directing ideas, which confirmed and extended a long spirit of bitterness, independence, and aspiration..."

- Country and City, pp.cit., pp.270-271.

Gobar's behaviour with the village elders reveals his superiority to them. Most of the village elders are usurers. When all of them come to know that Gobar has been able to earn money what they are not able to extract from their clients even with so much cruelty and oppression they, at once, pay respect to him and even go to the extent of flattering him. But Gobar's attitude towards them is overbearing. He comes to know that Hori has been fined just because he gave shelter to his daughter-in-law, he takes each village elder to task and ridicules them and exposes their character and their dealings in a farcical drama. He knows that it is money that "runs the world" and if one has money "there is no problem about caste or social approval"³⁷.

While talking to moneylenders and even his father, he often uses the terms like law, court, suit etc. He opposes his father's standards of justice and virtue and on this issue he picks up a quarrel with his father as well as with the

37. Godan, op.cit., p.268.

money-lenders³⁸.

In spite of Gobar's radicalism, the city has left its negative mark on Gobar's outlook. Now his social values are more governed by money. This affects his relationship with his parents also. He tells Hori, indignantly that he has not "taken up life in a strange city just to keep you being robbed at my own expense"³⁹. He decides to migrate to city

38. Ibid. See pp.268-280.

When Datadin comes to Hori's house to remind him to work for him at his land, Gobar lashes at Datadin. This makes the latter furious and he claims his money as well as his interest of one anna on the rupee. Gobar takes him to task: "We will give you one per cent a month, not a cowrie more. If that suits you, you can have it. Otherwise, take the matter to the court. One per cent interest every month is plenty." Datadin then turns to Hori "...I am a brahmin, and there will be no place for you if you swindle away my money. Very well, I will write off the seventy also, and I would not even go to court". This has a desired effect on Hori and "a surge of conscience" sweeps through his heart. How can he hold back the money of a brahmini and he runs after Datadin and clutches his feet and promises him to pay him back every cowrie. When Datadin departs, Gobar looks at his father contemptuously. "So you want to appease your god! It is people like you who have spoiled them. He gave his thirty rupees. So now he will collect two hundred, and top of that give you a telling off, get you to work for him, and keep you serving away until he has killed you!" But Hori defends the rightness of his position. "We must not lose our integrity, son. Every man is responsible for his own actions..." Ibid. p.232.

39. Ibid. p.276.

for good⁴⁰ along with Jhuniya and the baby. Dhaniya expresses her anxiety about Jhuniya and the baby. Gobar rejoins "the world is a selfish place," and "one can get a friend by just writing off a four-pice debt. If you are broke, even your parents do not bother about you."⁴¹ This snub plunges Dhaniya in deep grief and a wave of resentment sweeps through her. "So you consider even your parents among those who love you for your money?" She asks her worldly wise son. Gobar unmoved as ever, replies in the affirmative. A family feud ensues first between the son and mother and then between the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law. It culminates in a final break between Gobar and his parents. Dhaniya characteristically blames Jhuniya for this rift.⁴² Gobar takes

40. He tells Dhaniya "What could I do sitting around here, work and die. What else is there to do here. Any one who has a little brain and is not afraid of work will never starve in the city. But brains are no use at all here..." Ibid, p.258.

41. Ibid, p.276.

42. "Obviously Jhuniya must be behind all this trouble-sitting back and poisoning his mind. She was getting no chance here to deck herself out and lead a gay life, and there was always some work to be done around the house. There, she had have money, and she could enjoy herself, eating in style, dressing in style, and going to sleep in without care in the world..." Ibid, p.278.

away his wife Jhuniya and the baby to the city. And when, Dhaniya does not hear about their well-being for months together, she curses poor Jhuniya for her waywardness.⁴³ Hori tries to console her by rationalising the stony silence of their son as an outcome of the city life and the ways of the world.⁴⁴⁴⁵

(C) DESTRUCTION OF THE COMMUNITY RIGHTS OF THE RURAL MASSES.

The introduction of modern notions of property and land tenure by British destroyed the equal rights of the villagers with regard to common woods and pastures.⁴⁶ In pre-British India the common ownership

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43. "...The witch had come and smashed her mansion of gold into the dust, while Gobar never even answered back to the woman. That wretched widow had won him over and taken him away. No telling what tune she had have him dancing to the ~~drum~~..." Ibid, p.299.
44. "...Coming in contact with the city has changed the boy's outlook. Why do not you realize that." Ibid, p.297.
45. "...And even if the girl did lure Gobar away, why are you so worked up? He is only going what the whole world does. He has his own family now. Why should he bring his misery on himself for our sake? Why should he take our burdens on his head?" Ibid, p.298.
46. RadhaKamal Mukherjee, Land Problems Of India, Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., London, 1933, p.44.

in the case of meadows, pastures, ponds or tanks⁴⁷ was not allowed to be usurped by the landlords. The villagers considered their common right over these lands. But with the emergence of the new type of landlords encroachment of these lands either to sell to industrialists to establish factories or for the cultivation of cash crops started. But the rural-folks felt the disposal of meadows and grazing-grounds to be usurpation of their rights⁴⁸. Therefore, the villagers were resisting and were struggling to retain their control over these pasture-lands.

Premchand has depicted this process of usurpation of these rights and the struggle of the villagers to retain their control over the pasture-lands in Premasharam and Rangbhuni. In Premasharam the peasants at first struggle for these rights in a constitutional way but take to violent means when one of women-folks is assaulted by the karinda⁴⁹. Premchand

47. Ibid, p.36.

48. Ibid, p.44.

49. Manohar's wife, Bilagi is beaten by Gaus Khan, the oppressive karinda, on her refusal to take away her cattle from the common grassland. This leads to the murder of Gaus Khan, by Manohar.

does not, however, advocate individual terrorism because in this novel it leads to the arrest of all the villagers. The villagers lose the case in the court as the police is able to create a rift among them. At the end of the novel Premchand demonstrates how with the unified efforts of the people the case is reopened and the villagers are released from the jail. Premashankar, a reformer, and Mayashankar, a benevolent landlord help restoring the rights of the villagers for grazing cattle. But this ending of the novel does not take away the reality depicted in the rest of the novel. The ruthlessness with which the Zamindar destroys these rights is very effectively depicted.

A transition from the method of reform to an organised struggle could be discerned in Rangbhumi; Surdas valiantly fights against the destruction of the rights of the Basti. But he is up against very powerful forces and John Sevak, an industrialist establishes a cigarette factory. With that the community rights are destroyed for ever. But Premchand is sensitive to the basic human problem that is at the centre of the failure of Surdas. He is conscious

of the significance of the new forces emerging in India and what they meant to the age-old rights and institutions. Surdas is bold and courageous, but his is a lost cause. The pathos and tragedy is well brought out, symbolised as it is in the vain search of the children for the ruins of their houses amidst the ruins of the village.⁵⁰

50. See Ranobhumi, p.552.

CHAPTER - IV

EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN : PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

CHAPTER - IVEMANCIPATION OF WOMEN : PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONSIntroduction

A concern for the oppression and exploitation of women in society informs most of Premchand's works. But Premchand never hesitates to bring out the failings and short comings in women themselves, and to inspire them to get rid of their own weaknesses to achieve emancipation.

A gradual progression in Premchand's thought towards women's emancipation could be perceived. He starts with attacking the more apparent shackles that restrain women in the society : their orthodoxy, fear of slander and ill-conceived prejudices. Then he attacks social institutions which play an oppressive role like family, husband's authority and religion. And finally, he questions some of the accepted norms and laws of the traditional society like women's perpetual dependence and denial to widows their right to live decently.

This chapter is divided into five parts describing, with the help of examples derived from Premchand's works : (A) CONDITIONS OF WOMEN; (B) REASONS FOR WOMEN'S PLIGHT; (C) ALTERNATIVES; (D) IMAGE OF NEW WOMEN AND (E) LIMITATIONS OF PREMCHAND'S IDEAS.

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(A) CONDITIONS/WOMEN

The world in which the women lived in 20th century India perhaps find the best description in Premchand's works. The various bonds which kept her enslaved are p-ortrayed in a manner which arouses both sympathy and indignation.

Subjection within the Family

The subjection to male domination was perhaps the severest problem that woman faced. It is a domination to which she is subjected throughout her life. Premchand has brought to focus the question in its different dimensions. "The female human infant", remarks Germaine Greer, "gains admission to the society which "has been lying in wait for her since before her birth and seizes her before her first cry, assigning to her fixed destination."¹

1. Quoted by Branka Magas in "Sex Politics : Class Politics" in New Left Review, No.66, March-April, 1971, p.70.

The moment the daughter grows up to adolescence her parents start worrying about her marriage. The pressure of the neighbours and the Biradari weighs upon the grown-up female's parents to get rid of her by marrying her off. If there is a delay of a year or two in a girl's marriage the family "becomes a laughing stock in the whole community."² But no one cares if boys don't get married.³

The worst aspect of the life of a girl is that she is forced to marry a boy without taking into considerations her wishes or Will. If she refuses to obey she is threatened with dire consequences. Premchand illustrates this in Rangbhumi, through the travails of a Christian family. By choosing a girl belonging to a community other than Hindu, Premchand seems to suggest that all the communities face the same problem. Thus Sofia in Rangbhumi is compelled by her mother to marry Mr. Clark, an English bureaucrat, whom Sofia detests from the very core of her heart. Mrs. Sevak, Sofia's mother, tends to regard her daughter as a serf with

2. Purna, a female character points this out to Sumitra in Pratigya, Hans Prakashan, Allahabad, 1976, p.92.

3. Ibid, p.92.

no right or Will of her own. She demands from Sofia, complete submission. When Sofia becomes interested in the "new ideas" her mother finds her disobedient. Somehow, Mrs. Sevak refuses to acknowledge (indeed she does her best to crush) the separate identity and aspirations of her daughter. She unleashes a reign of terror on Sofia for her disobedience. Mrs. Sevak is a religious bigot. In fact she compels all the members of her family to follow the conventional doctrines of Church. Sofia who doubts each and every word of Bible⁴ is the special target of her mother's wrath.⁵

The question arises : why women are cruel towards women themselves or why mothers are oppressive towards their own daughter? We may refer here to the

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4. Sofia is forced to read Bible for her grandfather, against her Will. She tells her brother Prabhu Sevak "Now-a-days he is making me read the fable of Genesis and I doubt each and every word of it and if I protest I am rebuked..." op.cit., p.31.
 5. Confrontation between mother and daughter ensues on the issue of belief in rituals, superstitions. Sofia has no belief in the rotten superstitions invented by Christ's disciples while on the other hand her mother compels her to believe in each and every word of Scriptures. Somehow she is not prepared to accept Sofia's rational outlook. op.cit., p.32.

explanation provided by Robin Blackburn:

...It is more likely to be the case that women are somewhat more responsible than men for Parental authoritarianism since the familial socialization of children is part of their bondage. The fact that the attitudes of working class 'housewives' and 'mothers' are, in conventional terms, more reactionary than those of workingclass men could well relate to this socialization nexus. The work of the housewife and mother is not in essence less oppressive than that of her husband, but it is less evidently so. The power of the mother over the children furnishes a false compensation for this oppression which is very difficult to refuse, especially since it is inextricably bound up with a copious stock of traditional sentiments on the joys of motherhood. Whereas the worker is unlikely to have an illusion that he controls or owns the fruit of his labour, both Parents, and perhaps especially the mother, are culturally encouraged to feel that in some sense they have special rights of possession over their biological product⁶

One of the tragic aspects of the marriage system among Hindu families was that the boy and girl in question were not even allowed to see each other before getting married. Thus Bipin in "Stri Aur Purush" ("Woman and man") insists on seeing the girl but when his uncle persuaded him that he had seen

6. Comment on Branka Magas's Review article, New Left Review, op.cit, p.92.

hef with his own eyes and that the girl was exceptionally pretty, Bipin relented.⁷ But what happens when he gets a chance to see the bride? She turns out to be an ugly woman:

He was dumb struck with feelings of hatred, anguish and despair. Here was no charming beauty which he had imagined and dreamt of for years. She was an ugly woman with wide mouth, flat nose and swollen cheeks. She was fair but her fair complexion carried more white than a healthy pink. And complexion even if it is very clear cannot compensate for bad looks. Bipin's enthusiasm vanished.

But who really suffers from this bad match is the woman. A man can enjoy himself anywhere, can take to another woman, to liquor etc. but for a Hindu woman it is her husband who is everything for her. In this story too, the real victim is the woman. She tries to please him by all means, serves him, without any return, all the hours of day and night but Bipin is never pleased with her. Not only this. ← In his heart he "wished that if she died it would be a good riddance. Next time he would be more careful in having a mate of his choice."⁹

7. Mansarovar, Vol.3, p.31.

8. Ibid., p.32.

9. Ibid., p.34.

WOMAN AS DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.

In Hindu families the married woman was considered a slave to the whole family. She is subjected to "family despotism". For a newly-married girl life becomes intolerable since she comes into a different home and an alien environment. Her actions are supervised by mother-in-law, father-in-law and sisters-in-law. This is illustrated in a story "Swarag Ki Devi" ("The goddess of heaven");

From the day Lila put her foot in the door her testing began. All the things for which she was praised at home were forbidden here. She had been taught all her life to love the fresh air, but here it was a crime to uncover her face before¹⁰ it.

Women in Indian society were raised to be family creatures. Her identity was a functional derivative of her role not only as a wife but also as a daughter-in-law, and a sister-in-law. Her own interests remain subordinate to the family as a whole. She had to lead a life of subjection to the will of everyone in her husband's home. She is not considered an individual human being with a personality and feelings of her own. She was looked upon as an "inessential being". She had to live in a sphere preponderantly suffering, drab and domestic. She was subjected to all the petty tyrannies of household

10. Mansarovar, Vol.3, pp.72-81.

duties. She may try her best to please her mother-in-law but the latter does not cease to be oppressive. How-so-ever oppressive the mother-in-law may be to her daughter-in-law she expects her to be meek, modest, mild and submissive. This has been demonstrated in a number of stories like "Do Sakhian" ("Two girl friends"), "Swarag Ki Devi" ("The goddess of heaven") etc. These facts have been perceived both by women characters themselves as well as by the male characters. But it is self-perception by women that is more important.¹¹

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11. As Chand in "Do Sakhian" ("Two girl friends", Mansarovar, Vol.4, pp.211-278) writes to her girl-friend Padma: "I am afraid my mother-in-law doesn't like me. I make all efforts to make her happy, sister. I do for her what I had never done before. I warm up water for her bath; I bring forth her worship stool; I wash her Dhoti when she has bathed; I massage her feet when she lies down for sleep and when she has gone to sleep I fan her... My only wish is that she would speak^{to me} genially. But I don't know why does she castigate me on the smallest ruse.", p.245.

An educated daughter-in-law was subjected to sundry kinds of harassment. Her sisters-in-law if they happen to be less educated and less beautiful than her, create a havoc for her. They take delight in spying over her. She is not even allowed to read her books.¹²

WOMAN AS WIFE.

But the worst type of subjection of a woman in Hindu society as Premchand demonstrates, is her enslavement to her husband's authority. Premchand repeatedly focusses attention on the tyranny of husbands over their wives. All of his works are replete with such instances.

The whole existence of women depends upon pleasing their husbands. Their entire life is spent waiting for and on them. In fact their sole justification rests on male approval. Their desire for

12. Ibid. Chand writes to her friend about her sister-in-law: "She is jealous of me without any rhyme or reason. To tell you the truth, sister, I have almost forsaken tidying up myself. I don't touch books to avoid criticism on my reading habits. Some of the books, I brought from my father's house, are really good and I yearn to read them. But I am afraid to do so lest someone should taunt me for that. Both my sisters-in-law espy me performing my chores, relaxing or speaking-as if they were spies commissioned to report on my every move. I can't say why these two ladies take a delight in defaming me. Perhaps they don't have anything else to do these days." p.246.

independence and self-assertion is quelled by men. Jaini in Prem Ki Vedi compares the life of a married woman with her Tommy, a pet dog. As a dog is to his master so is a woman to her husband. Jaini remarks:

A man marries a woman and becomes her lord. A woman marries a man and she becomes his hand maiden. Everything is here till she keeps humouring her man money, ornaments, silk robes...Man cannot forgive her for being herself. A woman does not dare utter a word against a man who is out and out wicked. It is her bounden duty to regard her man as her god.¹³

It is the "role-conditioning" and centuries of male-dominated history and culture which have

13. Prem Ki Vedi, op.cit., p.5.
 Also see "Kusum", op.cit., p.18. Sumitra in Pratigya also gives similar views. See p.55. Also see "Thakur Ka Kua" ("Thakur's Well", Jagaran, August, 1932) women belonging to high caste Hindu society describe their positions:

"They (men) just order us to get it (water) as though we were slaves?"
 "If you're not a slave, what are you? You work for food and clothes and even to get nothing more than five and six rupees you have to snatch it on the sly. What is that if it is not being a slave?"

-David Rubin(Translation), p.72.

*enslaved women in a mass of misconceptions about herself and insured her passivity and powerlessness.¹⁴ A woman in Hindu-society is thoroughly indoctrinated to accept and enjoy her oppression.¹⁵ Thus in "Kusum" Premchand attempts to show the complex manner in which familial, social, biological and cultural influences subtly combine to make the life of a newly married woman miserable. Kusum is a living testimony to man's tyranny on his wife. She is a woman who is rejected by her husband soon after her marriage for no fault of hers. She writes a number of letters to her husband. She does not leave any religious sentiment untouched : Pity, shame, rejection, justice, in order to arouse her husband from his apathy towards her. But her husband does not reply to any of her letters. Kusum's letters unveil her tragic helplessness. These

14. Jean Leighton : Simone de Beauvoir on Women, Associated & University Press, New Jersey, England, 1975, p.220.

15. Jaini in Prem Ki Vadi points out how the woman is still considered a Private Property as she was in ancient times and how she is thoroughly indoctrinated to consider her husband as her god, op.cit., p.8.

Also see the story "Kusum", op.cit., p.19 and the story "Do Sakhian", op.cit.

letters do convey to us how a woman is indoctrinated from her childhood to idealise her husband. Kusum expresses this in no uncertain manners:

...a woman starts dreaming about her man (husband) from the moment she begins to think cogently. I also did the same... You have been with me from my childhood. These feelings have entwined with my very being...I was brought up in an environment where the essence of a woman's life is devotion to her husband. And not even envy or jealousy can drive out this feeling from my heart. I am guardian of your Kul-Maryada and prestige!¹⁶

The remarks made about the patriarchal family, by Kate Millett, can very aptly be applied to Kusum's upbringing as well. Branka Magas sums up the views held by Kate Millett:

The Patriarchal family is the agent of the Patriarchal order in that it socializes the individual along the stereotyped lines of sexual categories. But the family does more than that: it educates the child to fit into the existing social structure and its authority, system of values, modes of relation between people, attitudes to Property etc. All these become the very foundation of the individual personality because, from a strategic point of view, the family is extremely well placed: it seizes the individual from the very moment of its birth!¹⁷

16. "Kusum", op.cit., pp.18-19.

17. "Sex Politics : Class Politics", op.cit., p.89.

The worst aspect of a wife's subjection to her husband is that she is made the instrument of an animal function contrary to her inclinations. The male-dominated culture transforms woman as an "object" who exists primarily as a source of his sexual gratification. Premchand condemns this tendency through one of his female characters in Prem Ki Vadi. Lady Doctor Wilson upbraids Yograjs:

You have also committed the same folly which your brothers are prone to committ. A woman for you is merely an object of sex for them. They can inflict any tyranny on women and turn enemies to any woman who may perchance do something unpleasant to them. The poor soul is prepared to tolerate anything to keep her husband happy. I watch this in every home!¹⁸

Man applies this double-standards to all the aspects of women's life. A man may spend his time outside his house, in the company of friends and may turn up late at night but a woman is not allowed even to step out of the house without the permission of her husband. If she, perchance, happens to come late at night she is suspected of infidelity, as in the case of Suman in Seva-Sadan and Maryada in 'Nirvasan'¹⁹.

18. op.cit. p.23.

19. "Nirvasan" ("The banishment") Chand, June, 1924, Mansarovar, Vol.3, p.52.

Woman is not forgiven whereas a man in similar situation is forgiven by the society.

A woman who wants to get rid of her miseries by leaving her husband's home has no alternate arrangement in the absence of any alternative for women in the larger world. She is not even accepted back by her parents because they are afraid of public censure. Instead the parents advise the daughter not to leave her husband's house.²⁰ This makes women curse their existence.²¹ Thus Kusum reflects on her conditions

The bitterest experience I ever had in my life was to know that the life of a woman is one of degradation for one self, one's Parents and one's husband. The worth of a woman is neither apprehended in her Parents' home nor in the home of her in-laws.²²

20. See Pratiqya, op.cit., p.32.

21. Ibid., p.31.

22. "Kusum", op.cit., p.19.

CONDITION OF WIDOWS.

Several of Premchand's stories and novels discuss the plight of widows.²³ The picture of Indian widowhood that emerges from reading these works is one of misery and horror. The death of their husbands cuts off the luckless women from every comfort and enjoyment; and their life becomes an unending round of fasts and vigils. Tasteless food becomes their diet and drab attire the insignia of their status.²⁴ They are doomed to lead a life of stern privation. But the most trying

23. Some of the stories and novels which deal with the life of widows are : HanKhumra or Hamsayab in MANGALCHARAN (a collection of Premchand's earlier novels, collected by Amrit Rai) Hans Prakashan, Allahabad, 1978; Prema (1907), in Mangalcharan; "Nairashya Leela" ("Sport of despair", Chand, April, 1923, Mansarovar, Vol.3, pp.54-67); Pratiya (Published serially in Chand, from January, 1923 to November, 1927); Gaban (1931), Hans Prakashan, Allahabad, 1980; "Maritak Bhoj"; (Mansarovar, Vol.4, pp.155-174); "Swamini" (Vishal Bharat, Sep., 1931, Mansarovar, Vol.1, pp.123-139); "Beton Wali Widwa" ("A widow with Sons", Mansarovar, Vol.1, pp.66-68); "Dhikkar" ("Condemnation", Madhuri, Feb, 1930, Mansarovar, Vol.1, pp.213-230) etc.
24. In Prema, Ramkali, just widowed, says to Purna "...In widowhood I have been turned into a common drudge. I am sentenced to perform the function of a cook. In spite of this I am beaten in by the shoes...Then ordered to abide by the instructions: do not apply Kajal, don't apply oil to the hair, don't wear colourful Sarees, don't eat Paan etc., etc...", p.280.

evil to which they are obliged to undergo is the perpetual celibacy to which they are subjected. In this regard the condition of child-widows is very pathetic.²⁵ But even widows have their bodies and the urges of the body are such that the less upright among them are driven to adultery and even prostitution.²⁶ Those very rare women who dare remarry are finally made to repent or regret their bold step by the society. This is demonstrated in the story "Dhiker"²⁷.

25. See "Nairashya Leela", op.cit.

It is an exposition of the sad plight of a child-widow. The parents of the child-widow try to provide diversions for her. This invites comments from the neighbours. The helpless widow then takes refuge in religion and renunciation of earthly things and becomes a sanyasi; but here too she is made subject to public criticism. She then takes recourse to social work. She opens a school and starts ministering to a seriously ill-child. But her father closes the school as it means her keeping away from home and the resultant jibes of the community. Exasperated, she cries out in anguish, "Tell me, so long as consciousness abides with me how can I become inert? It is beyond my power to consider myself a pathetic creature. Let the community say what they will, I don't care. I can keep my self-respect...I feel humiliated on being suspected at every step. I can't stand this for long."

26. See Prema, op.cit., and "Narak-Ra-Marg" ("The Way to Hell", Chand, March, 1925, Mansarovar, Vol.3, pp.23-30).

27. Mansarovar, Vol.1, pp.213-230.

The worst aspect of the problem faced by widows was that they did not automatically inherit their husbands' property in the joint-family system. Thus Ratan in Gaban is deprived of everything she had by her late husband's nephew immediately after the death of her husband. Manibhushan, the nephew, tells her "In a joint Hindu-family a widow has no right to the property of her deceased husband."²⁸ And Ratan cries for reform of this Law :

I don't know which depraved soul made this Law. If there is a God and if He is just, I will ask that sinner in God's presence whether he didn't have a mother or sisters of his own. Did not he feel remorse on humiliating them? Had I been able to spread my message across the country, I would have told my sisters never to get married in the joint families and to strive their best to have separate house sheds²⁹ if they had already done so. I would have told them not to hope that they would have any respect in the joint-family, once their husbands are no longer around²⁹

28. Gaban, op.cit., p.232.

29. Ibid.

(B) REASONS FOR WOMEN'S PLIGHT

Premchand diagnoses the various causes for the plight of women—pernicious customs of marriage, dowry, economic dependence of women on man etc.

The root cause of most of the evils is the marriage custom, which is the target of attack in several stories of Premchand. Through one of his male characters, Vinod, in "Do Sakhian", Premchand points out the two major defects of this system:

(i) First, the greatest defect in it is that it gives religious form to a purely social question or problem,³⁰ (ii) second, it is a hindrance to the freedom of individual. It constricts our soul by imposing the pretence of loyalty towards the consort.³¹ This tradition, feels Premchand, has become obsolete in the present context.

The most pernicious and obnoxious custom of this marriage system is the heartless custom of dowry. This is represented by Premchand as the main culprit

30. op.cit., p.241.

31. "It presented us with false morals and we keep on going through the old rut to this day. The marital vow is nothing but a useless bondage. By giving it such a grand name we have accorded it religious sanction...I regard the marriage custom as the source of all evils".
Ibid.

for the woes of women. Premchand has denounced the monstrous custom of dowry in his various works.

In the opening pages of a story "Udhar" ("Deliverance") Premchand comments:

The marriage customs of Hindu Society have become so defiled, so troublesome and so dreadful that no one knows how they can be reformed.³²

The reason for this is simply that "the fear of dowry rises, double by double, fourfold by night like the rush of monsoon water"³³. Premchand mentions this practice in editorials with disdain:

Everyone denounces the custom of dowry, but that gentleman who shouts the most in public meetings, asks the most dowry and swallows up the largest amounts...If this year you have to marry off your daughter, you join the organization and weep loudly about dowry payments, but tomorrow when the time comes for your son's marriage, then you become a reincarnation of greed.³⁴

In "Ek Anch Ki Kasar" ("A False Fame") Premchand illustrates this.³⁵

32. Mansarovar, Vol.3, p.38.

33. Ibid.

34. Vividh-Prasang, op.cit., Vol.3, p.255.
Quoted by Robert O.Swan, op.cit., p.105.

35. Mansarovar, Vol.3, pp.89-94.

Premchand depicts husbands who are indifferent to their wives because their father-in-law were unable to provide enough money to them for pursuing higher education abroad. Kusum's husband in "Kusum" is such a character who does not reply any of her letters and is completely apathetic towards her because he could not get enough dowry.³⁶

It is this fear of dowry that leads to humiliation of women by their parents-in-law and husbands, for bearing daughters and no sons.³⁷

But the most trying evil that dowry system leads to is the marriage of old men to girls young enough to be their daughters.³⁸ Such mismatch results in untold misery to the protagonist of the story "Narak-Ka-Marg" ("The Way to Hell"). There can be no conjugal love and domestic felicity in her married life. In the prison of her husband's house she is doomed to pass her days in sustained misery and confinement. This story is narrated by the protagonist herself in the first person. She is married off to an

36. op.cit. p.22.

37. See "Nairasya" ("A desperate case", Chand, July, 1924, Mansarovar, Vol.3, pp.115-125).

38. See Nirmala, Hans Prakashan, Allahabad, 1976. This system culminated in the tragic end of Nirmala. Here is a sombre tale of sufferings of a young woman unrelieved by any gleam of hope.

old man who always supervises her actions, suspects her of infidelity.³⁹ The young wife detests him from the very core of her heart. She does not want to see even his face.⁴⁰ But she lays the entire blame on the custom of marriage.⁴¹ She feels sadistic pleasure over his illness and his death is a liberation from dungeon. Though her husband has left behind enough property for her she feels choked in that house and relinquishes that house at midnight but unfortunately is trapped by an old woman who happens to be a pimp. Though she detests the profession of a prostitute yet she prefers this life to the one she had been leading with the old man. She points out that she is writing her autobiography to warn those who marry

39. रिश्ते में निहित विधवा का लेशमात्र
 from her step-son who is 21 yrs. old. Tota Ram, her husband starts suspecting her of incestuous relations. This leads to the tragic end of the whole family of Tota Ram.

40. "Narak-Ka-Marg", op.cit., p.24.

41. "Damn this tradition which makes it compulsory for the luckless girls to be given away to one man or the other. Countless young women ruefully curse this custom-their delicate hearts being trodden over casually."
op.cit., p.24.

their daughters to men old enough to be their fathers:

I would not have written these lines but for the hope to awaken the world with their help. I tell you again that while choosing a match for your daughters, do not be led astray by the show of wealth, Property or lineage. Instead, see whether the groom himself suits the girl. If you cannot get a suitable match for her let your daughter be unwed. You may even kill her by poison or throttle her to death but don't marry her to a man who is old and wasted. A woman can tolerate anything, go through the most calamitous agony; but what she cannot bear is the smothering of her youthful desires.⁴²

That the dowry system leads to the discordant marriage and consequent misery of women is also illustrated in Sevasadan.⁴³

Another source that makes daughters a liability on their parents is the various customs related to marriage rituals. The bride's father is supposed to provide all the amenities, even if it is beyond his means, to the marriage party. Whatever is demanded has to be procured at once. In case he is unable to

42. Ibid, p.30.

43. Suman in Sevasadan is beautiful, educated and intelligent girl. Because of the lack of means to procure enough dowry, she is married off to a poor man who is not only much older to her in age but also, intellectually inferior to her. She is enslaved and confined within four walls of her house. He suspects her of infidelity and exiles her from his home and she is compelled by circumstances to take to prostitution.

provide he is threatened with dire consequences by the father of the bridegroom. This is illustrated in the story "Paipuji".⁴⁴ When the protagonist of this story questions bridegroom's father why does he demand so much from bride's father, he replies :

It is not a joke. We have come here for the marriage of our son, and the girl's side would have to meet our requirements in full. They will have to provide all that we demand. They will bleed through nose...⁴⁵

The next important cause of women's subjection to men is the lack of economic independence. Because the husband is the sole wage-earner he dominates the family.⁴⁶

44. Gupat-Dhan, Hans Prakashan, Ilshabd, 1978, Vol.2, pp.252-256.

45. Ibid, p.254.

Also see the story "Do Sakhian", op.cit., p.219. Here the marriage party departs back without performing the marriage rituals and leave behind the bride, because the breakfast which was sent for the groom's party was insufficient in quantity and the father of the bride cries : "It behoves the bride's side to be hospitable to the groom and his party, but hospitality should not be demanded under threats and as a matter of right."

46. This has been perceived by women characters themselves. Thus Suman in Sevasadan feels that her husband tyrannizes over her husband because he thinks that he is the bread-earner.

Also see "Thakur-Ka Kua", op.cit.; "Nirvasan", op.cit., and "Pratigyā" op.cit., Maryada in "Nirvasan" tells her husband just as Suman told her husband "You are throwing me away only because you are the owner of the house and you think that you are feeding me". p.52.

Purna and Sumitra in "Pratigyā" discuss with each other about the economic dependence:

Purna : Man earns and feeds. Why should not, then, he show his impudence?
 Sumitra : Enough, you have said the best thing. I too feel that way. Poor woman, she cannot earn and is humiliated". p.93.

Another cause responsible for husband's hold over their wives is the need for protection⁴⁷. It is in the very nature of human beings to torment the weak⁴⁸. "We have taken away from women" comments the author, "their self-respect and self-confidence by constantly preaching them the lessons of duty and sacrifice"⁴⁹. Man knows that woman is bound up in the shackles⁵⁰ of traditions and customs, that she has no alternative but to sob herself to death. Therefore, he goes on perpetrating cruelties on her.⁵⁰

47. Thus Sumitra in Pratiqya questions her friend, Furna : Sister, can you understand, why does man overcome over woman?

Furna said with a mysterious smile : "It is not a recent development. Why shouldn't man overcome woman when he has always shielded her?..The question is of protection. Who will protect her?"

Sumitra : What protection? Is there someone going to gobble them up?

Furna : The libertines will make their lives difficult.

op.cit., p.93.

48. See "Kusum". The writer comments "People shun the dogs which bite but the gentle dogs are stoned at by street urchins for fun". op.cit., p.17.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

(C) ALTERNATIVES

Whatever be the reason for the dismal conditions of women, Premchand is not without hope for their liberation. But he demonstrates, the women themselves will have to take initiative for improving their lot.

Premchand suggests various methods to ameliorate the conditions of women.

Premchand seems to suggest the importance of self-consciousness among women about their conditions. What are the ways and means by which Premchand's women characters become conscious of their being oppressed? There are two ways : (a) consciousness born out of the nature of their oppressive conditions; (b) The role of "new ideas" in inculcating radical consciousness among women. It is worthwhile to discuss, in brief, these two factors.

(a) Premchand has depicted such women characters who have begun to realize their inferior status in their husband's family. This growing consciousness is not the result of any outside agency but born out of the

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nature of their oppressive conditions. They have begun to think independently and started asserting themselves as individuals. However, this growing consciousness of their rights surfaces through various stages. They are not conscious of being oppressed in the beginning. They consider it natural that a woman should follow their husbands how-so-ever they ill-treat them. But seeds of rebellion take roots in them steadily

51. Suman in Sevasadan soliloquises : "Why do I bear all these sufferings? I sleep on a broken cot, take rough chapatis and work like an animal. In spite of all this I get rebuffs from my husband. Why? Only to abide by restrictions imposed by morals? But who cares for my sufferings?" op.cit., p.34.

Also see Pratigya, op.cit., p.97. Sumitra explains to Purna about her behaviour to her husband: "After all why should I be brow-beaten by him? Had he ever spoken to me with love I would have put up with his threats as well. But how is one to tolerate a man who is always brandishing about his sword?"

52. Thus Indu's husband, Raja Mahendra Kumar, in Rangbhumi looks down upon her as a household slave and treats her with a degree of superciliousness. In the beginning she has not been able to protest against him but the seeds of rebellion take roots in her steadily. Her rebellion against her husband surfaces through various stages : At first it takes the form of a murmur: "If this is not injustice what is it then? Terrible tyranny...In theory I am a Rani but in practice even the servants are better placed than I. I don't have even the right to go out of my house..." op.cit., p.183.

Next this simmering revolt expresses itself in Indu's soliloquy, "How can I respect such a man from my heart?...I want to worship him, but how do I force my heart to do so!" Then it erupts forth in a heated argument between the couple. "You want to make me dance like a puppet", protests Indu, "now this way and then that way...I have married you. I have not sold my soul to you." And finally Indu leaves her husband's house for good.

and they rise from their passivity and indifference and break the chains which enslave them. They finally triumph over their subservient conditions.⁵³

(b) Premchand has depicted those women characters who are completely passive but assert their individuality as a result of the inculcation of new ideas. These new ideas spread by the feminists sow the seeds of discontent and lead women to question the ascendancy of masculinity over femininity and discontent becomes a rebellion.

53. Thus Kusum in "Kusum" achieves this realization when she comes to know that her husband had been indifferent and cruel to her just because her father could not procure enough dowry to enable him to pursue higher education abroad. Her father raises a loan to fulfil his son-in-law's desire but the moment Kusum comes to know of this fact, a sudden realization dawns upon her consciousness and she forbids her parents to send this money to her husband because she feels "it is plainly a dacoity". It is like "forcibly taking away a person from his house" says she "and then demand a fat amount for his ransom". Her mother reminds her that her "god has come round at last after so many days" and she is again "irritating him". But this same Kusum who had been pining away for her husband's love cries in angry tone: "It is better to have such a god annoyed. I can't put up with a man who is so selfish, arrogant and mean. If you send money there, I'll take poison. I warn you. Please don't take it lightly. I don't want to see such a man. I have decided to remain independent."
op.cit., p.24.

Meenakshi in Godan is such a woman. She was married off to a man, Digvijay Singh, who was a libertine and an alcoholic. There is no love between husband and wife. Meenakshi "pined inwardly and tried to divert her thoughts through books and magazines."⁵⁴ She starts attending the women's club,⁵⁵ where she comes in contact with feminists. On the advice of one of these feminists, Meenakshi "filed a suit against her husband for separate maintenance".⁵⁶ Though she is the daughter of a Talukdar and needs no money but she "wanted to blacken the reputation of her husband".⁵⁷ Digvijay Singh in return "filed charges of immorality against her". But his suit is dismissed and she is awarded separate

54. Godan, op.cit., p.393.

55. About the members of this club, Prenchand comments "...There was lots of talk amongst them about voting and rights, freedom and female enlightenment, as though they were creating some deadly weapons to use against the men. Most of the women were ones who did not get along with their husbands, who had received a modern education and as a result wanted to break down ancient traditions. There were also several young ladies who had earned college degrees and now, considering married life a destroyer of self-respect, were searching for jobs. One of these was a Miss Sultana, who had returned after being admitted to the bar in England and was now employed in giving legal advice to women kept in seclusion."
Ibid, pp.393-394.

56. Ibid, p.394.

57. Ibid.

maintenance. She starts living in a separate house of her own and plunges herself into social reform movements. But the "fires of resentment" continue to smoulder within her. She takes her revenge against her husband thus :

One day whip in hand, she went in a fury to Digvijay's bungalow. A ribald bunch was gathered there and a prostitute was dancing. Descending like a warlike Kali on this assembly of filthy devils, she poured out chaos and destruction. Lashed by the whip, people ran in every direction, base creatures helpless in the face of her fury. When only Digvijay remained, she took the whip to him until he fell unconscious.⁵⁸

Now-onwards Digvijay Singh went around with a revolver, keeping an eye out for her, and she "hired a couple of wrestlers to guard her wherever she went".⁵⁹ This in fact can be termed as "war⁶⁰ of sexes".

Thus the characters like Kusum, Indu and Meena-kshi after liberating themselves from husband's tyranny decide to lead independent lives. This creates self-confidence among them and it also results in the growth

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid, p.395.

60. See Barbara Bellow Watson : A Shavian Guide to The Intelligent Women, Chatto & Windus, London, 1964, p.28. Barbara has made use of the terms "duel of sexes" and "war of sexes" and makes a distinction between the two :

"The duel of sex can take place only between individuals interested in each other. The war of sexes is a mass phenomenon of the unacquainted. The duel of sex is all about love, and its action moves toward settlement. The war of the sexes is all about resentment, and hostility, and its action moves towards a victory and a defeat."

of their self⁶¹.

But Premchand has put the question of women's decision to lead lives independent of their husbands, in the context of the existing social conditions. In the absence of any alternative for women⁶² in the society during Premchand's time, women, once discarded by husbands had no alternative but to take shelter in their parents' home. But the parents, generally, admonished their daughters to endure the sufferings and dissuaded them from taking recourse to any bold step⁶³.

61. As the narrator in "Kusum" comments : "One is surprised to see how firmly self-sufficient she has become. In place of the palar of despondence and agony, what one discerns on her face is the resplendent pink of self-confidence and freedom." op.cit., p.24.
62. This applies only to women belonging to lower middle and middle castes and classes. The women belonging to lower castes and classes could work and feed themselves. This has been brought out in the stories like "Saut" ("Co-wife"), Gupat-Dhan, op.cit., Vol.2, pp.228-236) and "Subhagi", Mansarovar, Vol.1, pp.257-266. These stories demonstrate that women are capable of transcending their inferiority which is man-made and that women both mentally and physically are not inferior to men.
63. See Pratiqva, op.cit., p.32. Kusum and Indu were fortunate enough to have liberal-minded parents who unlike Sumitra's did not deliver long lectures of docility, sacrifice and duty to their daughters, when the latter decided to lead independent lives.

Therefore, once a young woman had her freedom, where was she to go, and what was she to do with it? It is true family relationships often confined women but they also provided the sort of protection and support that women had great difficulty finding elsewhere. Thus Suman in Sevasadan, having liberated herself from husband's authority is faced with a new set of problems. She is refused shelter everywhere. She thinks of establishing her household all alone but then she risks the sexual harassment. Therefore, Suman is forced by her circumstances to take to prostitution. She finds this as the only alternative to achieve liberty.

Therefore, in order to save women from the disgrace of leading infamous life, Premchand strongly advocates women's economic independence. Women must make themselves completely independent of men through work. The importance of bread-winning job is not an end in itself but a means to achieve emancipation, as

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64. Govindi in Godan, who tries to thrust off the yoke of a stifling milieu of her family to forge her own independent life, soliloquizes "...She'd live off the sweat of her own brow and then no one could lord it over her. The only reason this bigshot could be so arrogant was that he supported her. Now she would support herself." op.cit., p.239.
Govindi decides to work as paid labour in order to gain independence.

Simone de Beauvoir^a rightly points out :

To earn one's own living is not an end in itself; but it is only in this way that one can attain a substantial inner-freedom... To sustain oneself materially is to feel that one is a complete person...⁶⁵

(D) IMAGE OF NEW WOMAN

Woman as a "complete person" is portrayed by Premchand in his concept of "New Woman". In order to illustrate this we will revolve our discussion around the four women characters : Jaini in Prem Ki Vedi, Miss Padma in "Miss Padma", Padma in "Do Sakhi" and Malti in Godan.

These "new women" are conscious of the inferior status of the women in society.⁶⁶ They realize that women's subjection to the will of men is caused by the hegemony of dominant traditional values and institutions in the society. Therefore, these institutions come in for special criticism by these women.⁶⁷ They

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65. Quoted by Jean Leighton, Simone de Beauvoir on Women, Associated University Press, England, 1975, p.42.
66. See Prem Ki Vedi, op.cit., p.5.
67. As Padma in "Do Sakhi" writes to her friend Chanda, about the evils of traditional customs "...Just see, all this is the result of the tradition you admire so tirelessly. The masonry has rotten and mere plastering over it won't do. A new wall will have to be constructed afresh." op.cit., p.221.

feel that in the twentieth-century world of freedom and women's self-reliance, the qualities like docility, submissiveness and passivity are things of past history and have no relevance in the changing times.⁶⁸ They look forward to the age of "science and technology" with optimism.⁶⁹

Marriage, as an institution binds women to endless serfdom,⁷⁰ therefore, it is considered an obstacle to their self-development.⁷¹ This institution

68. Ibid., p.270.

69. Padma in "Do Sakhi" writes to her friend Chanda : "...You are sailing your ramshackle boat of five thousand years antiquity and I in my fast moving new motor-boat. With me are the opportunities, science and technology. And even if a calamity befalls me I would rather drown with this boat. Countless people die in rail accidents but none prefers to travel by bullock-carts. Railways are ever spreading out. That's all." p.222.

70. Prem Ki Vadi, op.cit., p.8.

71. As Jaini says to her mother :

"I feel those women should get married who have no personality, enthusiasm or ideal. But those who have their own ideas, personality, will power and desire for appreciation and fame should remain unmarried. To merge my entity with that of my husband is a great sacrifice which I can not make."

Ibid., p.10.

becomes a target of mockery.⁷² If compelled by their mothers to marry the men chosen by them (their mothers) these women simply reject their suitors by putting forward certain conditions which allow them to have their emotional independence after marriage. Thus Jaini in Prem Ki Vadi puts these conditions before William, her suitor :

- Jaini : My first condition would be to ask you to get out of the house the day I see you talking to another woman.
- William : (gleefully) : Yes, I agree, Jaini.
- Jaini : My second condition would be to have, after marriage the right to talk with anyone, go anywhere I like and love anyone I desire. Tell me, do you agree?

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72. Jaini in Prem Ki Vadi exposes the large lies of conventional marriage. Her mother has fixed up a match for her, Mr. William. But Jaini does not want to marry him. She questions William why does he want to marry? And William replies "because everyone desires to get married". Jaini explains the causes of his desire to get married :
- (a) "You want to get married only to have a toy to entertain you at home";
 - (b) "You want to get married so that when I, clad in a nice saree, ride the motor-cycle with you, people may say happily "There goes the lucky Mr. William";
 - (c) "So that when you invite your superiors to a banquet, I please them with flattery and they may promote you";
 - (d) "So that you may father children to be successors to whatever little wealth you have amassed".

William : How can it be possible, Jaini?
You are joking. If a man dares
to even look at you then I would
bury him alive.

Jaini : Then you are not the one for me.⁷³

These women try to evolve a new code of love and marriage, a code which would involve equality of sexes, a code of shared ideals and companionship, a code which does not bind man and woman into cages. This code involves staying together or living together without involving bonds of marriage.⁷⁴

73. Prem Ki Vedi, op.cit., p.27.
Also see William Congreve, The Way of the World, in Herbert Davis (ed). The Complete Plays of William Congreve, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1967, pp.449-450.

Congreve has depicted a woman character Millamant who like Jaini, also puts conditions to her lover, Mirabell; She would accept him as a husband only on conditions which allow her to keep her money, her privacy, her wits, and her emotional independence. She puts three conditions.

74. As Jaini in Prem Ki Vedi says to Yograaj, her lover : "In my view marriage is a spiritual relation. It is sinful to entangle it in the tradition. Marriage is meeting of two hearts. To tie up a man and a woman in the bonds of tradition is like harnessing two hearts with a rope. The relation which has foundations in the fear of society or religion can never give happiness. The basis of happiness is not bondage but freedom. Love also wants to be free like the flow of a river. Obstructions create vermin in it and it becomes fetid. I feel, love becomes lifeless when restrained by bonds-like a plant dying for want of sun-light. I can stay here throughout the night of my own free will but if someone closes the door I would be anxious to escape immediately. "op.cit., p.39.

But Frenchand puts this new woman in its historical specificity. In spite of the new ideas and values imbibed by these women, they were not able to transcend their traditional consciousness. What happens when these ideas are put in actual practice by new women? What sort of dilemmas they feel? A study of "Miss Padma" and "Do Sakhi" brings about a discord between their ideas and feelings, thought and deeds, intentions and results, lofty aims and less than lofty behaviour, and egoism disguised as generosity.

Thus Miss Padma is economically and sexually a fully liberated woman.⁷⁵ She offers, one of her lovers, Mr. Prasad, to come over and stay with her in

75. She is a well-established lawyer and has amassed wealth. She "had nothing against the pleasures of love, but she was against the subjugation of women, and she loathed the debasement of marriage into a business. She felt it was infinitely better to remain single and enjoy the delights of unencumbered existence. She had no moral compunctions about sexual indulgence; to her it was merely a hunger of the body."
Translation, Nandini Nopany & P. Lal,
op.cit., p.134.

her bungalow. But Mr. Prasad replies:

I don't want to lose my freedom, and you don't want to lose yours. When your admirers visit you here, do you think I'm going to like it? When my girl friends turn up, do you think you're going to like it? It will be the same old story—first friction, then bitterness, then the split, and before I know what's happened, I'm kicked out. It's your house after all. How do you expect this friendship to continue after that?

After some discussion they enter into a pact to regard themselves as belonging to each other and live together on the condition put forward by Mr. Prasad.⁷⁷

But as the time passes Padma realizes that Mr. Prasad neglects her, flirts with his girl students. When she gives birth to a baby and

76. Ibid., p.135.

77. Prasad puts forward: "I'm not a guest in your house, I'm going to live here as the master of the house." And Miss Padma affirms "Not just the master of the house, but the master of my heart, my lord and master, my husband. And I'll be your devoted wife". Ibid.

while she is still confined to bed in hospital, Mr. Prasad withdraws all her money out of the bank and flees away to a tour of Europe with one of his young girl students. Miss Padma feels very miserable. She experiences the terrible human realization that one cannot force the emotions of another and it is what one feels, not one says, that matters. The poignancy of her suffering is manifest in the last lines of the story:

A month passed. Padma was standing by her bungalow gate with her baby son in her arms. Her anger had subsided into a grief-stricken hopelessness. Her feelings for the infant alternated between pity, and love, and loathing. She saw a European couple going out for a stroll with their baby in a perambulator. She looked at the happy husband and wife with poignant longing, suddenly her eyes brimmed with tears.⁷⁸

The example of Miss Padma brings out the fact that economic independence may be necessary but it is not a sufficient cause of real freedom.⁷⁹ Padma is not traditionally feminine, in the sense of being docile, fluttery-bound. She has cultivated all of her gifts of originality and intelligence, she is economically independent, and yet she is prey to

78. Ibid., p.139.

79. See Jean Leighton : Simone de Beauvoir on Woman, op.cit., p.72.

extreme emotional fragility. She expects to find her *raison d'etre*, her value and her very being from man. As Jean Leighton points out:

To live for love, even the most exalted, entails a kind of slavery and self-debasement because of the ultimate dependency entailed.⁸⁰

Therefore Miss Padma is not a "positive" heroine because of her dependency and weakness.

But even those new women who do not undertake any such pacts and actually marry a man of their choice based on love and friendship, are dominated by traditional 'feminine psychology' in spite of their advocacy of equality of sexes and their lofty disdain of conventional morality. One such woman is Padma in "Do Sakhia". She measures her husband up against the standards of conventional love. What are these standards? That a man should come home and make presents to his wife, get her new ornaments day and night, get new clothes stitched for her and be ever busy in procuring laces for her.⁸¹ The wife would have then no complaints against him and he would be called an ideal husband, "whose love for wife is above any doubt."⁸²

80. Ibid., p.54.

81. "Do Sakhia", op.cit., p.257.

82. Ibid.

Second, she wants to be dominated by her husband.⁸³ But her husband, Vinod, is a "supporter of absolute freedom for both husband and wife."⁸⁴ He wants to see "that sort of love between man and woman as may exist between two independent persons. It is not love that thrives on dependence."⁸⁵ Though Padma does believe in equality of sexes yet in practice she is unable to transcend the traditional feminine psychology. As she herself writes to her friends:

Vinod himself wants to be free and let me be free as well. He does not interfere in whatever I do, and does not like to be interfered with. I think this freedom is poisonous to both of us. Freedom may be priceless in the world but at home it is inter-dependence that prospers. I want to own Vinod as I own my ornaments. If Vinod gives away any of my ornaments without my permission I would quarrel with him. I want to have those rights on Vinod and him to have the same rights on me. He should be watchful about my activities. The people I meet, the places I visit, the books I read, the way I spend my life—he should clearly observe all these matters.⁸⁶

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83. As Padma herself writes to her friend "I want that he should rule over me. I want to see his firmness, his impetuosity and his strength. I have had enough of his love, humour and confidence. It does not satisfy me." *Ibid*, 238
84. *Ibid*, p.242.
85. *Ibid*, p.255.
86. *Ibid*, p.238.

POSITIVE WOMAN

All the weaknesses faced by the "new women" are overcome by the 'positive woman' as depicted by Frenchand. What is Frenchand's concept of the 'positive woman'? If we club the positive features of the new women and that of the emancipatory aspects of Sofia in Rangbhum and Sukhada in Karambhum, what finally emerges is the coherent and emphatically positive conception of woman, embodied in the person of Malti in Godan. Let us discuss Malti's character in order to arrive at an idea of Frenchand's concept of 'positive woman'!

Frenchand has portrayed development of Malti's character in two phases. In the first phase she is depicted as a 'new woman', an ideal of women's emancipation in the context of the western culture.⁸⁷ She is practising physician who had studied medicine in England. She makes the men-folk dance to her tunes.

87. Frenchand describes her thus: "...She was the living image of modernity—expertly made up, delicate but full of life, lacking any trace of hesitation or shyness, a wizard at sharp repartee, an expert in male psychology, a connoisseur of the pleasures of life, and a master in the art of charm and enticement. In place of conscience she had glitter; in place of heart, coquetry. And she put a strong block on her feelings that checked all desires and passions." op.cit., p.76.

And she appears to be deriving a suppressed pleasure out of it. Mr. Khanna, a capitalist, is one of Miss Malti's devotees. He hovers "round her like a bee, trying constantly to talk to her, unable to take his eyes off her."⁸⁸ She believes that the new social order is based on wealth and education, therefore she too cares for the rich only.⁸⁹

It is the social and economic constraints or compulsions that motivate Malti to be a coquette. She is gay because she knows the price for gaiety. Her "twittering and glittering" does not mean she "thought life to be all fun or the world intended only for her enjoyment",⁹⁰ on the contrary, her light heartedness "was an attempt to ease the burden of her responsibilities a little".⁹¹ She was the lone working woman in the household. Her father is a paralysis patient and because of his addiction to alcohol and

88. Ibid., p.76.

89. "Take my case" she says to Mehta, "If some poor woman comes to my clinic, she may not even be called for hours. But if a lady shows up in a car, I go greet her at the door and wait on her as though some goddess had appeared."
Ibid., p.179.

90. Ibid., p.194.

91. Ibid., p.194.

most has piled up huge debts. Besides, she has to bear the expenses of her sisters' education. The full responsibilities fell on Malti. All this financial burden drives her to flatter the rich man.

The second phase of Malti's personality growth begins when she comes in contact with Dr. Mehta, a university teacher by profession and a researcher in Philosophy. Malti's character and personality undergoes a gradual transformation in contact with Mr. Mehta.⁹² All the men Malti had met previously had "encouraged her sensual instincts" and any inclination to service and sacrifice had been wasting away until "it was revived by Mehta". Now she is inclined towards philanthropy, self-sacrifice, service

92. Fremchand comments: "...She'd made fools of any number of learned and important men with just a smile, a stare or a sultry look, and had them dropped then, unable to build her life on those foundations of sand. But today she had found rugged, solid, rocky ground, the kind that gives off sparks when struck by pick axe. And its roughness became more and more fascinating."
Ibid.

In the later part of the novel she herself remarks about Mehta: "...he displays a more attractive image of manhood than I ever saw in my previous circle of acquaintances. A man so attractive, so kind-hearted..."
Ibid, p.354.

of the poor becomes her goal in life.⁹³

Mehta, too, in turn, gets influenced by her transformation. Until now he "had spent most of his time in study and meditation? After trying everything and "carefully investigating various schools of philosophy", he "had concluded that the path of service, lying between those of activity and inactivity was the only thing that could make life meaningful", that could elevate and ennoble it.⁹⁴ Having discovered this truth, "he could no longer rest in peace. It had become necessary for him to act without self-interest as much as possible."⁹⁵

Thus there is a dialectical relationship between Kalti and Mehta and out of this there evolves a new

93. "She was beginning to discover the joys of a life of service. In the days of self-indulgence she had never known the pleasures and delight she experienced now in relieving the suffering of others. Those desires were like flowers which had faded away as the fruit appeared. She had passed beyond the stage where people consider gross pleasure as the greatest happiness. That pleasure now seemed superficial and degrading and rather disgusting. What pleasure was there in that big bungalow when walls of distress seemed to be rising from the mud huts all round? Riding in a car was no longer a matter of pride..."
Ibid., p.409.

94. Ibid., p.373.

95. Ibid., p.374.

love, based on higher values. It is also a manifestation of the new morals. It is a love based on equality, shared ideals and companionship. This does not lead to an end in itself but a means to achieving a higher goal of transforming the society. It is with this higher goal in her mind that Malti rejects the traditional marriage with Mehta because she does not want to confine the soul of a man as intelligent and gifted as Mehta, in that dungeon of marriage. She tells Mehta that the world needs dedicated men like him :

...Fear, injustice and terror reverberate all over the earth. The fires of blind faith, religious humbug and self-interest are raging. You've heard that cry of distress. If you won't listen, who will? But you can't turn a deaf ear the way corrupt men do. You'll shoulder the burden. You must push forward on that path with even more drive and enthusiasm in your intellect and learning, in your enlightened love of humanity, all I'll follow along behind.⁹⁶

Thus she subordinates her personal life to social concerns. They decide to live together as friends, and work for transformation of society. Thus they bring about a superior relationship unfettered by the sordid concerns of jealousy and possessiveness, so that

96. Ibid, p.413.

the resulting harmony will be richer and more humanly interesting than the accord of a well-tuned couple. We can get an echo of Mehta and Malti's love, in the lines that W.B. Yeats wrote to Florence Farr:

You cannot think what a pleasure it is
to be fond of somebody to whom I can talk...
To be moved and talkative, unrestrained,
one's own self, and to be this not because
one has created some absurd delusion...but
because one has found an equal, that is the
best of life.⁹⁷

But Malti and Mehta's love reaches beyond this level too. It is something meant to transform the whole society.

(E) LIMITATIONS OF PREMCHAND'S IDEAS :

On the one hand Premchand advocates equal rights for men and women, women's struggle against their husbands for their rights, advocates even autonomy as an alternative to marriage, and on the other hand he preaches through one of his spokesmen, Mr. Mehta in Godan, the ideology of familism, exalts motherhood, women's sense of sacrifice, self-surrender and their devotion to husbands. As Gita Lal sums up the chief

97. Quoted by Barbara Bellow Watson, op.cit., pp.81-82.

characteristics of Premchand's women characters :

Premchand regards women as higher than men because of their lofty and spiritual qualities...Service and affection are their basic nature and love is the foundation of their life. The woman's heart is made of the subtle principles of service. Mother-love is so predominant in a woman that if it be said she is only mother, that whatever there may be beyond this is all a prelude to motherhood, it would not be an exaggeration. In her is such a strong mother-love and as she grows older it becomes so deep, that she begins to regard to young man as a son and her heart is not touched with the flavors of desire. The life principle of a woman is love and she is unmatched in her upholding of its highest ideals-self-sacrifice, unselfishness, absence of passion. In one sentence, woman is the visible image of service, self-denial, self-sacrifice, purity, love, affection, self-control, courtesy, pride and other beautiful and generous emotions.⁹⁸

Mehta in Godan, attributes all these qualities to women.

Mehta upbraids those women who want to adopt the masculine roles and who want equality of sexes. According to him women are as superior to men as light is to

98. Premchand-Ka Nari Chitra, Delhi, 1965, Quoted by Robert O., Swan, op.cit., p.99.

Robert O.Swan objects to the absence of sex in Premchand's women characters "...All strong human urges are sublimated to the presentation of Premchand's ideals for society. Love contains no sex...and sex is fictionally ignored. In place of dialogues of real lovers there is an exposition of ideal love." op.cit., p.107.

darkness" :

...The highest ideals of human race are forgiveness, sacrifice and non-violence. Women have already attained that ideal. Men, on the other hand, have been struggling for centuries to reach that goal, supporting themselves with spirituality and a sense of duty and the help of the sages. But they've not been able to succeed. I tell you - put all men's spirituality and religious discipline on the one side of the scale and it will be outweighed by the sacrifice of the women on the other." 99

Mehta feels that women have reached a higher stage in the evolutionary process than men, just as "love, sacrifice and devotion are superior to violence, warfare and discord"¹⁰⁰. "Motherhood" says Mehta "is the greatest accomplishment in the world" involving the greatest "self-denial, the greatest sacrifice, the greatest victory."¹⁰¹ Therefore, preached Mehta, that women should prefer a life of home, of nurture than that of the life in the larger world, the masculine role. Mehta echoes the words of Greer who in turn echoes Rousseau:

...If women understand by emancipation the adoption of masculine role then we are lost indeed. If women can supply no counter balance to the blindness of male drive the aggressive

99. Godan, op.cit., p.199.

100. Ibid, p.198.

101. Ibid, p .244.

society will run to its lunatic extremes at ever-escalating speed. Who will safeguard the despised animal faculties of compassion, empathy, innocence and sensuality?" 102

Ashley Montague also, gives similar views :

Civilization is the art of being kind, an art¹⁰³ that women have learned much better than men.

At the surface there may seem to be a contradiction in Premchand's ideas. If it is a contradiction, then it is rooted in the society of Premchand's time. What Premchand condemned is the blind imitation of the ideas¹⁰⁴ of the West. He was critical of the negative aspects of the feminist movement in western countries. The sexual emancipation of women in the West has remained as an end in itself. It has not contributed much towards changing the status of women. They continue to be

102. Quoted by Branka Magas "Sex Politics : Class Politics", op.cit., p.71.

103. Ashley Montague, The Natural Superiority of Women, New York, 1970, Quoted by Jean Leighton, op.cit., p.222.

104. As Mehta says "It saddens me to see our sisters adopting the ideals of the West, where women have surrendered their rightful position as mistresses of the home and have fallen to a level where they are mere sexual playthings. A western woman wants independence so as to indulge herself fully in worldly pleasures...Blind imitation is a sign of mental weakness...Western woman...is sacrificing the modesty and dignity which is her crowning glory on the altar of frivolity and amusement... What greater degradation can exist for a woman?" op.cit., p.202.

regarded as an object of sex, as Barbara Bellow Watson points out :

...The sexual revolution of the nineteenth century and the sexual counter-revolution of the twentieth century have made no radical change in the status of women. The divinity may have gone. The dream-world ideal of chastity may have been replaced by a dream-world ideal of lubricity. From the point of view of women's status, it does not matter what the sexual standards may be, for as long as they are regarded as defining her, the real definition of her status is unchanged.¹⁰⁵

To sum up, Premchand not only raised his voice against the dismal condition of women but he went on to suggest measures to improve their lot. And while he counselled, the gamut of our society badly needed an overhaul, it was for the women themselves to strive for their rights. In short Premchand argued that women's liberation must be the work of women themselves. But Premchand does not advocate battle of sexes. He pleads for the recognition of the superior and noble qualities of women and hence to stop oppressing them and to treat them as human beings. Finally, he feels that the need of the hour is the companionship of men and women to transform the society. This ideal is embodied in the relationship between Mehta and Malti which is Premchand's ideal too.

105. Barbara Bellow Watson, op.cit., p .81.

CHAPTER - V

CHARACTERS AS PROTAGONISTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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CHARACTERS AS PROTAGONISTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

In the last three chapters we have examined Premchand's perception of rural exploitation, changes in rural society and the women's problems. In this chapter we propose to study how the enlightened men try to bring about change in the society. The discussion would focus on the (a) Problems of peasants and (b) Problems of women and how some of the protagonists¹ perceive these problems and bring about changes in the society. In discussing these characters we will rely upon various cues such as (i) their dialogues with other characters, (ii) their actions and (iii) the authorial comments of the omniscient author.

(A) CHANGES IN PEASANTS' WORLD : A STUDY OF CHARACTERS LIKE PREMASHANKAR (IN PREMASHARAM), CHAKRADHAR (IN KAYAKALAP) AND AMARKANT (IN KARAMBHUMI) :

Premashankar, Chakaradhar and Amarkant are idealist educated young men who can be termed as

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1. The characters that we propose to discuss are : Vithaldas and Padam Singh Sharma in Sevasadan, Premashankar in Premasharam, Chakaradhar in Kayakalap and Amarkant in Karambhumi.

problematic individuals². They are problematic in the sense that their values are at variance with those of society in which they live. Thus Premashankar returns home from America, with the aim of improving the methods of agriculture, but his hopes are shattered when the tradition-bound society boycotts him as he has flouted the taboo of crossing the sea³. Thus Premashankar's problem is how he can live in a society governed by the forces and constraints of obscurantism and superstition⁴ and simultaneously try to change it.

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2. The term 'Problematic individual' is applied by George Lukacs in The Historical Novel, Penguin, 1962.
 3. He says to his younger brother Gayanshankar "It is said that for all your intelligence you remain a slave to the Biradari, especially when you concede that the Biradari's intervention in the matter is absolutely irrational. Education should make you a path-finder for your community and endeavour to reform; not that you should sacrifice your own principles under its pressure." Premasharam, op.cit., p.117.
Premashankar upbraids his brother for divorce between his theory and practice.
 4. Similarly Chakaradhar and Amarkant are not at peace with their family. Amarkant's problem is how he can live in a family governed by exchange values.

Their's is not a passive disagreement with dominant social values but they are involved in a search for authentic values. Thus Amarkant is searching for authentic values in the context of what Lucien Goldmann describes as "a degraded society"⁵. By the phrase "degraded society" we mean the dominant value structure prevailing in Amarkant's family. His problem is how he can live in a family governed by exchange values.

And what are these authentic values? These values are : identification with the peasants and then devise the means to bring about a change in their conditions. They make a survey of the villages and try to establish a degree of rapport with the villagers. It is this type of activity-the attempt to transform society and relationships - that give a meaning to their lives. By engaging in practical work they strive to purge themselves of the emotional and ideological incrustations of the past.

By studying the problems of the peasants they find that the social as well as economic conditions of the peasants is very miserable. Thus the village where Amarkant is working is inhabited by Harijans. They are at the same time poor peasants (tenants).

5. See Towards Sociology of Novel, London, 1975, p.8. Translated from French by Alan Sheridan.

He feels that the social conditions of the Harijans is very miserable. Therefore, he sets before himself a programme of social reform. The main aspects of this programme are : (a) spread of education, (b) cleanliness, (c) removal of the evil of drinking i.e. prohibition; and (d) the removal of the custom of eating the meat of a dead animal. Amarkant wants to implement this programme in order to bring about radical change among the untouchables. Amarkant's educational programme aims at casting away the colonial hegemony from the minds of the masses. He feels that in order to emancipate the peasants, autonomous education is very important because the later frees the minds. He is successful in inculcating social consciousness among the peasants.

The worst problem of the peasants is their miserable economic conditions. What is the cause of their poverty? "The responsibility of their poverty" says Premashankar "lies not with them but with the circumstances under which they spend their lives.⁶" And what are these circumstances? Their internal

6. Premasharam, op.cit., p.207.

discord, selfishness and the flourishing of such an organisation as has become a manacle for them.⁷ Obviously, Premashankar is referring to the institution of Zamindari. He delves deep into the source of all these problems and arrives at the conclusion that "all these branches" appear "to be stemming from the same sources the existence of which depends on the blood of the peasants.⁸ And this source is the colonial state.⁹

Thus these characters have grasped the reality and then they want to transform that reality. In the process of transforming this reality they vacillate,¹⁰ get themselves transformed by that reality. Thus there is dialectical

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. "Why is there rift amongst them? Because of the maladministration of the existing regime. Why is there no mutual love and trust? Because the Raj considers such noble feelings dangerous and does not let them flourish. What is the said result of this internal strife? The division of land into increasingly smaller portions and consequently the immense rise in the land-rent." Ibid.

10. We would discuss this aspect later.

intersection of the individual and the objective reality.

What are the ways and means adopted by these characters to ameliorate the miseries of the peasants or how do they transform the reality. First of all they make efforts to inculcate consciousness among the peasants about their rights. They adopt various methods to perform this task. Premashankar's first step in this direction is to create public opinion against division of land into fragments which are not viable economically. He expresses his opinion in this matter in the newspapers to "inspire someone more experienced, skilful and gifted to take the matter in his hands"¹¹. Chakaradhar organises various Kisan sabhas. This is the result of this inculcation of critical consciousness among the peasants by these Kisan sabhas they (the peasants) decide to refuse to do begar for anyone.¹²

Thus these characters channelise peasants' energies into a constructive, peaceful, non-violent and constitutional form of struggle. But when the

11. op.cit., p.207.

12. Kayakalap, op.cit., p.43.

constitutional form of struggle is not able to produce any positive results the non-violent, non-constitutional form of struggle is also not ruled out. Thus Amarkant, in Karambhumi adopts both of these strategies, one after the other. The demand in question is the reduction of rent.¹³ Amarkant makes petition to the Zamindar and to the colonial bureaucracy but does not achieve any results. Thereafter he launches a 'no-tax campaign' and it takes the shape of a powerful movement. There is severe repression and the general genocide of the masses by the colonial state.

Amarkant does achieve a positive result in terms of inculcating political consciousness among the Kisans by leading this movement.¹⁴

THEIR LIMITATIONS

These characters are constrained by certain limitations which to some extent hamper their efforts to bring about reform in the society. Let us examine some of these limitations.

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13. See Karambhumi, op.cit., pp.242-258.
 14. See this dissertation, Chapter-II, pp.110-111. for further details.

The most important aspect of these characters is their vacillation between the two pulls: the pull of the social ideal and the pull of social linkages. Thus Premashankar's dilemma is that the village of Lakhanpur where he is actively working among the peasants, belongs to his younger brother, Gayanshankar. Though he has cast away his association with the institution of Zamindari¹⁵ and lives among the peasants, yet his social linkages do hinder to some extent his efforts to implement his programmes. It is worthwhile to quote two episodes from Premasharam to illustrate this aspect.

One such incidence is when he starts propagating among the peasants the need to put an end to the tendency of fragmentation of land by force of law. A friend tells him that "it was his illusion if he thought it was possible to put an end to this custom by force of law". The root of "this poisonous weed" says his friend "lies in the very core of man's heart", and unless uprooted, the custom "would continue to

15. He tells his brother "I don't want even to hear that I am the Zamindar of that village. I want to earn a living by my own sweat, not be a middle man, a broker...Think yourself, what kind of a justice it is that we should pile up money while others toil for it..."
op.cit., p.146.

thrive¹⁶". But Premashankar refutes his argument by pointing out "Law can bring some sort of a reform¹⁷". To this the gentleman rejoins emphatically that it is absolutely not possible, "on the other hand" he asserts, "the selfishness will assume a more heinous form on not getting a chance to come out in the open¹⁸". At this point Premchand by a mere dramatic device turns the whole argument against Premashankar by making a poor peasant, who had returned from the court after moving an application for division of land, speak out :

I say, nothing will happen. We only follow you people. When even brothers can't pull on together amongst you, what will happen to us! God has given you everything and yet you are living away from your brother.¹⁹

These uncouth remarks pierce into the heart of Premashankar. He bows down his head. The peasant realizes that he has "uttered something improper" and begs to be excused for whatever fault he might have committed, yet Premashankar instead of explaining the ideological differences which led to his separation from his

16. Ibid., p.207.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., pp.207-208.

brother, accepts that the peasant has not said anything improper²⁰. He lays the entire blame on himself²¹. For a moment he is prepared to sink all the differences with his brother and make a compromise with him. This would naturally involve compromise at the cost of his social ideal. He relies on the acts of good will to win over Gyan-shankar but fails.

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20. "...I needed this plain-speaking. You have taught me a good lesson. There is no doubt that rancour and envy prevail amongst the educated as much as it does in the illiterate people and I am myself at fault in this matter. I don't have any right to lecture others." Ibid, p.208.
21. While left alone Premashankar ponders over this question. The more he thought, the more blameworthy did he find himself. "It is all my doing" he soliloquizes, "If he had a quarrel with the tenants, it did not behove me to side with them. Knowing that Gyanshankar had unleashed tyranny, I should have lived away from him or brought him around with brotherly love. This I couldn't do. On the other hand I have picked up a quarrel with him. I concede that there is an acute divergence in ^{his} principles and mine but why should the difference in principles infect brotherly love. Granting even that he has always ignored me, to the extent that he has bereft me of the love of my wife, I, too, have not ever tried to be with him, to forget his ill-treatment or to tolerate his bitter jibes. If he slipped one finger away from me, I moved away by palm. Love of principles does not imply that one should become hostile to one's near and dear ones. This is a good opportunity for me to clear my heart for him." Ibid, p.208.

That Premashankar, thus, wavers between the two pulls : the pull of the social ideal and the pull of social linkages, is very well illustrated in another episode. At the end of the novel, Premashankar is elected a member of the Council. He wants to raise the question of land-reforms in the Council. But somehow he is hesitant to do so because of the fear of Gyanshankar. Though Premchand contrasts the attitude of other members of the Council and that of Premashankar yet two years pass away in this manner and although the "friends group had charmed the Assembly", Premashankar still cannot muster enough courage to present his proposal, the purpose of which was to take away from the Zamindars their right to eject the tenants. Why Premashankar

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22. Premchand describes the attitude of other members of the Council thus: "...People came to the Assembly to amuse themselves and went away after raising a few silly questions and showing off their gift of the gab... but doubtlessly, they were devoid of the purpose of serving the masses. The motive and endeavour; the means and the end all merged in the privileges..." Ibid, p.411.

But for Premashankar and his group Premchand lavishes praises "But Premasharam did not have that laxity...People were already devoted to service here. Now they got an opportunity to broaden their scope of work..." Ibid.

is hesitant? Premchand comments :

...He himself belonged to a Zamindar family. Jwala Singh too was a Zamindar. Lala Prabhashankar who he adored like his own father, could not tolerate the diminishing of his rights even by a hair's breadth, on account of these reasons he hesitates to bring his proposal before the Assembly. Though the Assembly had a large number of landlords, Premashankar did not fear the Assembly, as he did his own relatives. At the same time he felt sad²³ on diverting from the path of his duty...

This sums up Premashankar's vacillating attitude.

Second, these characters' attitudes are governed by middle-class Psychology. They are egoists, at times, they care for their name and fame, are jealous of their co-leaders. This is very well demonstrated in the case of Amarkant in Karambhumi. It is worthwhile to give some examples from this novel.

Amarkant meets the chief district official, Mr. Ghaznavi, in order to petition on behalf of the peasants. When the latter starts cutting cheap jokes about girls with Amarkant his ego gets boosted²⁴. Then Mr. Ghaznavi seeks Amarkant's opinion whether to arrest Atamanand who is creating trouble for them by

23. Ibid, p.412.

24. Karambhumi, op.cit., p.255.

inciting the Kisans to adopt non-constitutional form of struggle, Premchand comments:

Such a high official was talking on equal terms with Amar then why should not it go to his head. 'Atmanand is in fact spreading fire' thinks Amarkant. 'Peace will be established in the region if he is arrested. Swami is courageous, a good orator and a true servant of the country but at this juncture it is better he is arrested.' He replied in a manner to ensure that his feelings are not exposed but at the same time blow is aimed at Swami.²⁵

And Mr. Ghaznavi is able to fathom Amarkant's inclinations. Amarkant, though devoted to social reform, yet becomes vainglorious and conceited when Ghaznavi offers him lift in his car and drops him to his village:

In the morning Mr. Ghaznavi sent Amar to the village in his own car. Amar's pride and joy knew no bounds. The company of officials had lent to him an officious majesty. He told the villagers: 'The administrator of the Pargana is arriving to investigate into your condition. I warn you, no one should make a false statement. Whatever he asks should be replied to accurately. Neither should you hide your condition, nor exaggerate it. The investigation should be factual. Mr. Salim is very noble and sympathetic man. There is bound to be delay in the investigation. But there is always delay in administration. It is such a vast region, months may be spent in touring through it. Till then you start your Kharif operations. I assure you eight annas exemption for a rupee. Patience is required.²⁶

Ye W a r d i n g .

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., p.257.

This, also has an effect upon his co-leader Swami Atamanand who "saw that Amar was cornering all the credit to himself and there will be nothing but discredit in Swami's lot.²⁷ Therefore, he changes his sides. Amar and Swami "spoke from the same platform. Swami bent a little, Amar offered his hands and then there was cooperation between them²⁸". This clearly indicates that they were serving the Kisans for getting fame.

Third, though these characters are motivated by idealism and their values are at variance with those of the society, yet their efforts to bring about change in the society, in the beginning are only half-hearted. It is because the force of circumstances than their conscious decision that they eventually plunge into the movement of social reform whole-heartedly. Thus Amarkant is forced to leave his city by his circumstances. His infatuation with Sakina, a poor girl from a Muslim family leads him to flee from the city. And how does he take a decision to launch a non-constitutional form of struggle? It is also decided by him not consciously but out of a sudden impulse. When a meeting was being organised

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

to discuss the situation arising out of the new
²⁹problem, both Amarkant and Swami take a moderate
stand. But amidst this process of meeting,
Amarkant receives a letter from his sister inform-
ing him of his wife's arrest while leading a
strike in the city. Amarkant is fired with enthu-
siasm to read this news : "Ah! she is behind the
bars and I am lying here. What right do I have to
remain free."³⁰ And he delivers a fiery speech
advocating a mass-movement. He is not even cons-
cious of what words he spoke in the meeting "nobody
knows who said what in the meeting. He, too, does
not know what he himself spoke."³¹

But in spite of all these weaknesses and
caught up in the continuous struggle between the
two opposite pulls, these characters fight a
consistent battle with the social reality and strive
to transform that reality. In this process they
themselves undergo evolution. Lastly, we may point
out that the contradictions that they are beset^e with,

29. This new problem was : no action is taken
by Zamindar and the colonial bureaucracy
in regard to reduction of rent and the
Karindas start exacting arrears of rent
from the tenants, with ruthlessness.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

were the contradictions of the society of Premchand's time. Premchand as a creative writer does not depict them as single stereotype but as human-beings with all their weaknesses, contradictions and limitations. There is continuous struggle between the ideal ^{and} the real in Premchand's creative process while portraying the social reality.

(B) WOMEN'S PROBLEMS AND ROLE OF VITHALDAS AND PADAM SINGH SHARMA

We will confine the discussion to the two characters, Vithaldas and Padam Singh Sharma in Sevasadan.

Vithaldas is an active social worker, though limited by the lack of education and means at his disposal. He runs an organisation for removing prostitution from the society. He has a two-fold programme : (a) eradication of the practice of dancing and singing in public by the prostitutes; (b) removal of prostitutes from the public places. To him the main cause of the deterioration of the youth is the custom of Mujra - traditional singing and dancing of the prostitutes. If, somehow, the Mujra is banned and the prostitutes removed from the public places, Vithaldas believes the curse of prostitution itself will be lifted from the society.

When Vithaldas comes to know that Suman has taken to prostitution, he tries to persuade her to give up this profession, assuring her that alternative arrangements would be made for her livelihood. At the same time Vithaldas starts making frantic efforts to provide for Suman's livelihood. Being himself a poor man, he has to depend on rich men for donations for the purpose. To his dismay no financial help is forthcoming. Against the requirement of Rs.50/- Padam Singh agrees to donate Rs.20/- a month, but there is still a balance of Rs.30/- every month and for this Vithaldas has to knock at the doors of men who are not only wealthy but also command respect in the society. A mention may be made in brief about the character of these honourable men of the society, in order to illustrate the difficulty of a reformer.

There is Seth Balbhadar Das, Chairman of the Municipal Board and an honorary Magistrate. He donates thousands of rupees to the Rama-Leela Committee and does not mind spending huge sums on entertaining the English officials. But to Vithaldas he refuses to pay even a single pie for Suman's reformation. As if this was not enough the Seth takes pains, in his capacity as a member of the managing committee of the widow Asharam, to bar Suman's admission there, ostensibly for the reason that the widows will have to move out if a

prostitute, albeit a reformed one, were to be sheltered with them. Ironically, the Seth himself is a frequent visitor to the red-light areas.

Seth Chiman Lal, another would-be leader, is the Chairman of the Rishi Dharam-Sabha and a manager of Ram-Leela Parishad. He considers politics as poison and hates newspapers also. Fond of meeting high government officials, he wields great respect among the English officials. He squanders thousands of rupees on the Ram-Leela show but when Vithaldas requests him to donate for a noble cause of Suman's rehabilitation, he smells politics in the affair³² and refuses to help Vithaldas.

Then there is Doctor Shyam Charan, a prominent political leader of the city and a famous lawyer. He is ready to raise the question of prostitution in the Council. But in the matter of donations, he firmly refuses to contribute even a farthing for the cause.

Vithaldas gets disillusioned with all these moneyed men. In his frustrations we perceive the contrast between the hypocritic pretensions of the educated 'leaders' and the sincere efforts of the uneducated and feckless public spirited men. Men like Doctor Shyam Charan may be progressive in theory but

32. Sevasadan, p.75.

in practice they are not only conservative and reactionary but also apathetic towards social-reform. Vithaldas fails to understand why this educated class is so selfish.

Padam Singh Sharma is another interesting protagonist. Before we discuss his role in bringing about change in the society let us demonstrate how he vacillates between his middle-class propensities and his ideal for bringing about reform. This is important because we perceive the limitations faced by these protagonists in bringing about the change in the society.

There is a sustained conflict between his social-ideal and his private desires. His vacillation emanates from his social linkages. He belongs to the land-owning class and is a lawyer by profession.

Padam Singh is elected a member of the local municipality after many years of unsuccessful attempts. His pleasure loving friends persuade him to celebrate this success on the occasion of the festival of Holi. They propose to invite Bholi, a famous prostitute for performing Mujra. Subhadra, his wife, also backs up this proposal. Padam Singh is in a real fix. Performance of Mujra on any social occasion is

considered a symbol of social prestige in Eastern Uttar Pradesh.³³ But being an active member of organisation run by Vithaldas, Padam Singh is supposed to abstain from such shows. Like a pendulum Padam Singh swings between the desire for social prestige on the one hand and the ideal for bringing about reform in the society on the other. And, finally, he succumbs to the pressure put by his wife and friends by holding the Mujra with gusto.³⁴

The second incident which brings out Padam Singh's vacillation and where again he gives way to the pressure of conventions and traditional order of society is when Suman seeks shelter in his house on being thrown out of her house by her husband. Gajadhar, Suman's husband and Vithaldas, who has been angry with Padam Singh since the day he celebrated the

33. Padam Singh belongs to the Brahmin landowning group, which is steeped in these customs and conventions.

34. Premchand comments on the vacillating mind of Padam Singh: "He wanted to host a banquet, but his friends were pressurising him for a Mujra. Though he himself was a very virtuous man yet he lacked the strength to remain firm on his principles. Partially, out of geniality and partially out of his simple nature and fear of sarcasm of his friends, he could not stick to his position."
Ibid, p.30.

Mujra, malign him in public. Soon it reaches the ears of Padam Singh through his servant, Jitan who hears from the shopkeepers that his master has kept Suman as his mistress. Padam Singh becomes afraid lest his image is tarnished. He is aware that Suman will have no place for shelter anywhere. For a moment he is torn between sympathy for Suman and fear of social defamation. Ultimately, it is the fear of ignominy that triumphs over sympathy for a homeless woman and he orders Suman to be sent away from his house.³⁵ But after Suman has actually left the house, he feels sorry for her. He realizes his blunder and makes up his mind to help her.³⁶

When he comes to know that Suman has already taken to prostitution, he lays the entire blame on himself. But later, he shifts the responsibility to

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35. "But if I expel her from here where would she go? I don't think she has any place for shelter in this city. It seems Gajadhar will not keep her in his house because even after two days he has not cared to look out for her. She may think me cruel man, devoid of sympathy. But there is only one way to escape defamation. There is no other alternative except to expel her." p.38.
36. He soliloquizes "I have committed a blunder. Observance of decorum will not do now. She must be sinking and I must save her." Ibid, p.46.

Vithaldas. But this does not stop him from assuring Vithaldas of all the help when the latter comes up with a proposal for reformation of Suman. In practice, however, his support is feeble. Not until he finds his own nephew frequenting the red-light area does he plunge into the movement wholeheartedly. Non-onwards he devotes himself completely to the programme launched by Vithaldas.

And he makes a start in his own house. At his nephew's marriage, Padam Singh is determined not to allow the dance of prostitutes, though this custom is deep-rooted in his social group. He prepares himself for criticism against lack of pomp and show with the idea that "the reform should start from within the family and only then can it be widespread in the society". Vithaldas advises him to be economical in other expenses also but Padam Singh is not willing to cut back on the other expenses. He is faced with real dilemma when he confronts his elder brother, Madan Singh, on the question of dance of prostitutes on the occasion of Sadan's marriage. What follows is an interesting debate regarding customs, conventions and the idea of reform, between Padam Singh on one side and Madan Singh and Munshi Baijnath on the other side.

For Madan Singh, performance of Mujra at the marriage is more a matter of prestige in society than personal satisfaction. Though Padam Singh has to face strong opposition from his brother³⁷ yet finally he is able to convince his brother to forego the idea of Mujra.

Soon after, Padam Singh joins hands with Vithaldas for removal of prostitutes from the city. Vithaldas is thrilled with joy. His followers had been common men so far but the moment Padam Singh actively starts participating in the movement this organisation becomes very popular and eminent men also join it.

In order to arouse the masses they circulate pamphlets and hold a series of lectures. Secondly, they move a resolution in the meeting of the Municipal Board so as to remove the prostitutes from

37. His brother says "you are talking as if you don't hail from this country and have come from some foreign land. Why to talk only of this custom, there are many other customs which we consider to be evil but still we have to observe them. Take for example the singing of abuses by the women belonging to bride's party to the men belonging to bridegroom's party. Is giving of dowry good? But if we don't abide by these customs, people start pointing fingers at us. If I don't celebrate the singing session of prostitutes, people will charge us of miserliness, our Maryada will be lost." Ibid, p.113.

the city.³⁸ But Padam Singh, at the same time expresses to Vithaldas his doubts about the effectiveness of mere legislation. He feels unless existing social and economic conditions are improved, legislation alone cannot be of much help. This is the time when discord sets in between Vithaldas and Padam Singh. Finally Padam Singh is instrumental in establishing an asharam outside the city, where the daughters of prostitutes are imparted an all-round education.

To the readers of today such an asharam may not appear to be the best solution to the complex problem of prostitution. But even this type of reform was progressive in the time-frame of the novel. Premchand could not suggest any other alternative due to the constraints imposed by history.

38. The resolution as moved by Padam Singh is divided into three parts : (a) The prostitutes be kept away from the main parts of the city, (b) they be not allowed to visit public places of the city, (c) a tax may be imposed on the performance of Mujra, and it should never be performed in open places.

One member, Sayyid Shafkat Ali proposes an amendment to the effect that a prostitute can stay on in the city provided she gets married within nine months or learn some skill or craft to lead a normal life. This resolution, with amendment is passed with majority of one vote. The other two parts of the resolution are rejected because of Hindu-Muslim division and petty jealousies of the members.

The question of reform of prostitutes is also raised in Godan. Here it takes a heated argument between Mirza Khursheed and Doctor Mehta, an intellectual. According to Mirza Sahib the women who are forced to take to prostitution are the ones who either are humiliated at home and thus are forced out of their homes or ones who are compelled by economic necessity. Therefore, if these two problems are resolved, feels Mirza, the prostitution can be eradicated.³⁹ Therefore, he starts forming a "theatrical troupe of the city's prostitutes" in order to solve their economic problems. In this regard he seeks advice of Mehta. Mehta, "like other thoughtful men, had speculated a lot about this question."⁴⁰ He feels that this "kind of troupe won't be of any value unless the social system is transformed from top to bottom".⁴¹ The bane of prostitution, according to Mehta is capitalism and this type of reform, that is, reform at the level of individual, does not remove this evil, unless the capitalist culture

39. Godan, op.cit., pp.396-397.

40. Ibid, p.397.

41. Ibid.

itself is eradicated :

...but as long as there are rich men in the world there'll also be prostitutes... Trimming off the leaves won't accomplish anything. You have to put an axe to the roots. Occasionally some wealthy person turns up who sacrifices everything and devotes himself to God, but wealth goes on ruling as firmly as ever. It's not weakened one bit.⁴²

But Mirza feels that one can't wait for the overhauling of the social system. It may take centuries. It does not mean, feels Mirza, that attempt at reform, should be discarded.

Godan was written during the last period of his life. Premchand himself had by this time, seems to have been disillusioned with the techniques of individual reform. This is manifested in the works written during his last years of life.⁴³

42. Ibid, p.398.

43. See Mangalsutra (unfinished novel), "Mahajani Sabhayata" ("The Capitalist Culture") etc.

CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSION

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The central problem of Premchand's art is the problem of peasantry. Premchand has exposed the unbridled tyranny let loose by Zamindars, moneylenders, Village Council and the colonial bureaucracy on the poor peasants. The Zamindars adopt various ways like increase of rent, nazrana, exaction of tributes and imposition of fines, to plunder the poor tenants. The system of brutal exploitation of the tenants by the landlords, thus, impoverishes them and they are compelled to borrow from the moneylenders who take undue advantage of tenants' helplessness and charge exorbitant rates of interest. The interest goes on piling up and the Peasants' whole life is spent in paying off their debts to the moneylenders. The landlords and the moneylenders are aware of the tenants' traditional ^mconsciousness, their slavishness to customs, conventions of the Biradari and their sense of adherence to Dharma and thus do not find any difficulty in making them their prey. It is in collusion with the landlords and the moneylenders that the colonial bureaucracy is able to exploit the peasants with ruthlessness. The officials on

tour to the villages exact begar and Rasad from the villagers. The most inhuman part of the colonial bureaucracy as depicted by Premchand, is the department of police. The policemen have created such a fear among the peasants that they get nervous even to see their faces. Innocent men are arrested for no fault of theirs and the actual culprits are never caught. Thus the corrupt bureaucracy, the ruthless police, the rapacious moneylenders and the landed gentry have together built a gargantuan megalith with its base firmly set on semi-clad and starving peasants. Premchand further explores the origin of these institutions and concludes that the original sin is committed by the colonial state. But Premchand is not without hopes. He invests his peasants with growing consciousness to fight for their rights. Though the consciousness among the peasants, to some extent, is inculcated by the outside forces (by the educated leaders) yet Premchand is of the opinion that the peasants themselves have to fight for their rights. The struggle, that he mirrors in his works, is of dual nature : anti-land-lord and anti-imperialist. Thus Premchand has depicted the life-like and true picture of the peasantry. He could do so because

he looked at it from the viewpoint of the struggling peasantry. It is deep connection of Premchand's creative vision with the struggling peasantry that gives profundity to his art.

A great deal of Premchand's work is concerned with the nature of social change. He has depicted how the changes in rural society were producing its effects on all the aspects of rural life and organisation. Premchand's works give testimony to the fact of growing disintegration of traditional institutions and values. The tension generated by the conflict between the older and younger generations over the sanctity of joint-family, attachment to land, has been pictured in all its poetry. Thus Prebhashankar in Premasharam is faced with a continuous struggle between his self and the lived reality and ultimately has to compromise with the harsh reality, revealing Premchand's consciousness that this old world is no longer viable. Even the 'new men' are not exactly the new men but an amalgam of the traditional consciousness and the new values. Thus Gyanshankar in Premasharam swings like a pendulum between these two opposite value systems. In fact all aspects of life in rural society were undergoing changes and 'social mobility' is one of the aspects of this broader and general social change.

The old groups were withering away yielding place to the new ones. A large number of rural folks were migrating to the cities in search of work. Premchand has examined the influence of the outside world on the migrants and how it generated the radical consciousness in the characters like Gobar in Godan. The new material and social reality also impinged upon the community rights of the rural society. The communal ownership of the pasture lands was being destroyed. But the rural folks were at the same time struggling against these forces to retain their control over the community rights.

Premchand expressed his concern with the oppression of women in contemporary society. From his works we get a complete picture of women's slavery to the institutions of religion and family. All the stages of a woman's life : her childhood, adolescence, youth, and old age are replete with misery. She is ill-treated as a daughter, as a wife, as a daughter-in-law and finally as a widow. She has to lead a life of subjection to the will of everyone in the male-dominated society. Premchand diagnosed the various causes of women's sufferings : marriage customs, dowry system, her economic dependence etc. Premchand feels that the weaknesses of women are not

inherent but due to their "situation". Women have been indoctrinated by the centuries of male-dominated culture to enjoy their oppression. Premchand suggests various ways to ameliorate the conditions of women. He feels that since women are victims they must become conscious of the fact. Therefore, first of all, he invests his women characters with the consciousness of their being oppressed. The role of 'new ideas' is one of the most important factors in their growth of consciousness. Premchand exhorts women to rise from their passivity and indifference and break the chains which enslave them. He feels that in order to benefit society women would have to defend their rights in the same way that the farmers had to sacrifice some of their saintliness to defend their lives. Therefore, he portrays such women characters who throw off the yoke of their stifling milieu to forge their own independent destiny. In this regard economic independence of women is important because it is one of the primary means for women to lead autonomous lives. This is demonstrated by Premchand in the portrayal of 'new woman'. But Premchand does not delineate the 'new woman' as a stereotype ideal but depicts

them as products of a specific historical situation. Though these women characters are fully emancipated yet in their practice they are unable to transcend the traditional feminine psychology. Premchand does recognize the specificity of women's struggle but at the same time he also provides a critique of the dominant ideology of women's liberation movement in the West. Premchand's alternative to this ideology is his conception of the 'positive woman' embodied in the person of Malti. In the relationship between Malti and Mehta we get an ideal man-woman relationship: a relationship based on shared ideals and companionship, a marriage of minds against carnal appetite, living together without any bonds of traditional marriage. Premchand envisions this relationship not an end in itself but a means towards achieving higher goal in society : a goal of transforming the society. Premchand recognized that a drastic change in the social order is necessary to liberate women and he does identify this change with something concrete as overthrow of Imperialism, Colonialism, Semi-feudalism and Capitalism.

Lastly, we have discussed the role of characters in bringing about change in society. While discussing these characters we have used the concepts 'problematic

heroes' and 'authentic values' employed by Lukacs and Lucien Goldmann respectively. Thus Prens-shankar, Chakaradhar and Amarkant were at odds with their milieu. They were impatient in search for some alternative values and they found these values in the peasants' sufferings and struggles. They gave a coherent shape to the peasant's sufferings and inculcated critical consciousness among the peasants and thus prepared them for struggle to achieve their rights. Though these characters are governed by certain limitations yet they struggle and wage a continuous battle with the ideological incrustations of their past lives and grapple with social reality and in the process of transforming that reality they themselves become shaped by that reality into nobler human beings. Thus there is a dialectical inter-relationship between these characters and the objective social reality.

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