C O N C L U S I O N

CONCLUSION

The historian, placed decades after Premchand, has the advantage of hindsight. He is in a position to view in larger perspective the issues that Premchand and his contemporaries felt urgently called upon to 'solve' in the midst of what Paul Ricoeur has described as 'the blind complexity of the present as it is experienced'.[1] Besides making greater objectivity of perception possible, distance in time enables the scholar to discover causal interconnections by following back the course of subsequent developments. But this retrospective glance is not without its traps. As Ricoeur has so perceptively pointed out, such a glance 'is made possible by the teleologically guided movement of our expectations'.[2] Hence the fact that, given a particular view of the present, Premchand has been described, categorically, as belonging to one or another clearly defined categories. He has been variously labelled, as we have seen in the 'Introduction', as a Gandhian and a socialist. Considering the opposing views on a given issue that could be easily gleaned from his writings, and isolated to build one kind of case, he could plausibly be called communalist and revivalist or secularist and progressive.

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1 Paul Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, Paris, 1981, p. 278.

2 Ibid, p. 277.

To the extent it is possible to struggle consciously against the underlying teleological design of any retrospective glance - and history cannot but be such a glance - our study has consistently shown the need to steer clear of neat categorisation and emphasised the ambivalence of Premchand's work and also the representative character of this ambivalence insofar as it was shared, or betrayed, more or less by the liberal nationalist intelligentsia in general.

Premchand, we have seen, consciously and sincerely opted for all that was progressive and promised good to the overwhelming majority of his society. Committed to the twin ideals of swaraj and _suraj_, and aware of the social role that a creative writer in a colonial society had per force to discharge, he could not but look upon writing as a mission. The ideals of swaraj and _suraj_ could, indeed, be said to have symbolised both the problems and the goals of a subject country. The insistence on _suraj_ as an essential condition of swaraj, in fact, reflected a critical mind that was unwilling to be swayed by the shibboleth of political freedom. This insistence offered a measure of his political maturity and ideological clarity.

But while taking note of the refusal to entertain the ideal of swaraj unless built into it was the notion of _suraj_, a retrospective glance must also examine, in terms of their concretion, the explication of the relationship between the twin ideals. And this examination, in order to be objectively

meaningful, must rest not on the teleological preference of the historian but on the underlying assumptions of the exploitation. Premchand, in other words, ought to be examined on the basis of his own concretion of his own ideals. For it is the structure of this concretion that reflects the structure of his thought and the hidden constraints to which his consciously held and celebrated ideals, ideas and values were subject.

Both in terms of swaraj and suraj, studied separately and in relation to each other, the preceding chapters have shown a pattern. Whether it was the question of political emancipation or that of so restructuring his society as to make it just, progressive and egalitarian, Premchand invariably took a position that was decidedly radical. But sooner or later his radical thrust got subordinated to pragmatic considerations. We have emphasised all along that it would be misleading to attribute his reversion from a radical position to cowardice or insincerity. We have, indeed, suggested that his eventual retreat into pragmatic compromise was a function of inadequate understanding of the social reality. Part of this inadequacy lay in the nonrecognition of the role of his own social locus in limiting his vision. Be that as it may, the inadequacy of understanding sustained his romantic idealism and faith in the efficacy of pragmatism.

The tension inherent in the complex of different, even diametrical, strands indicated basically the aspirations of

the liberal nationalist intelligentsia. It reflected what the intelligentsia generally deemed necessary, thought was possible, and dreamt of as the ideal society. It is significant that the recoil from the implications of a radical or progressive stance occurred at a point where these seemed to acquire inconvenient proportions. But this happened in such a way that the advantages of the radical or progressive rhetoric did not have to be surrendered. In some cases the recoil came earlier than in the others. And almost always it occurred without much contrition. Rationalisation invariably followed. Minds had been immunised to the tension caused by diametrical pulls. These pulls were both ideological and material.

If with his sensitivity and deep concern for the poor Premchand could not transcend, in the final count, the constraints of his social situation, so much more inescapable must have been the hold of these constraints on those who were obliged, in their capacity as nationalist leaders, to forge a national consensus in a differentiated colonial society. The more distant they were from the reality, the more radical could be their rhetoric, and the easier the reversion from it for considerations of pragmatism.

In retrospect this may have been an exercise in rationalising the dominance of vested interests in society. For, in the immediate present, dominant interests got suitably accommodated as a result of the inevitable reversion from radicalism. The

future envisaged for the janata threatened to become more distant and uncertain. The dominant classes, it would seem, are rendered by their placement in society incapable of seeing the true interests of the subordinate classes. Implicit in socio-economic differentiation are limits of collaboration for mutual benefit between different classes. Through successful socialisation the limits of collaboration generate, and are ensured by, limits of perception. Thus it happened, in Premchand's case which was decidedly representative of a larger group, that even if at the level of consciously acquired and articulated positions some of the basic contradictions of society could be faced by the more sensitive and clear-sighted members of the intelligentsia, there invariably occurred a blurring of the radical insight that this understanding provided. The liberating possibilities of a radical ideology had to coexist with, and were considerably neutralised by, the constraints within which it operated. For all his sensitivity and creative innovativeness, Premchand remained basically tied to the perceptive and conceptive structures of his class. Both in his ability to transcend the limitations of his social situation and in having remained constrained by it, he was representative of the liberal nationalist intelligentsia of his times.

The ambivalence that constitutes the recurring theme of this study revealed also the essence of a colonial mind. At this level it demonstrates something more than a specific

Indian situation even though the specificities of the Indian society influenced the actual operation of this colonial essence. One cannot but recall in this context the point made by Frantz Fanon about 'the extreme ambivalence inherent in the colonial situation'.[3] Besides the ambivalence caused by the material aspects of the colonial network, which we have discussed in the second chapter, there was also the more subtle and powerful influence exercised by the hegemonic intellectual control that the colonial dispensation sought over the minds of the ruled. It is an index of the effectiveness of this hegemonic control that to the colonial intelligentsia the comprehension of its societal problems and the possibilities of new alternatives appeared in terms provided by the rulers. The latter's perception of India, as also their conception of 'progress', left, after all, a deep imprint on the colonial literati. More and more, consequently, India and its development tended to be viewed in terms of categories derived from the West.

In a traditional society with a rich plurality of religion, region and language, key terms like nation and community could, indeed did, possess connotations different from the meaning invested to these terms following the more uniform western conception of the nation-state. In a traditional plural society nation-building had to have healthy components

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3 Frantz Fanon, Black Skin White Masks, New York, 1968, p. 83.

of regionalism, community consciousness and sectarian separateness. But affected by western ideas, the liberal intelligentsia tended to see these as anathema to the ideals of secular democratic nationalism. And yet the lure of tradition and the habit of social identification along venerable indigenous lines continued. The resultant tension found manifestation in attitudes towards issues relating to the very conception of a free regenerate India. Hence the tension, as we have seen, that underlay Premchand's attitudinal ambivalence with regard to industrialism, social reform and the Hindu-Muslim question.

The 20th century Indian liberals, perhaps more than their forebears in the preceding century, constituted a deracinated class. Their counterparts in the West were organically related to inasmuch as they had been a product of, a particular course of historical development. Here, even while connected with a specific historical situation, liberalism was an off-shoot of colonialism and, therefore, not rooted in indigenous traditions. Modern Indian liberals could only have, consequently, an ambivalent relationship with the ideals and ideas that they intellectually obtained from the West as also those of their own society. They felt drawn to and repelled by both.

With all their desire for 'progress' these liberals were not able to choose a path that would not branch off into opposite directions. 'Progress' became a term that could mean

revivalism in one context and industrialism in another or socialism in yet another. In fact, as we have seen, even industrialism and socialism could, at one level, be reconciled with revivalism; though, at another level, the latter could even be conceived as a desirable counter-ideal to the former.

The complex web of these discrete elements was woven together with the silken threads of romanticism and sentimentalism. It is in this context that the causality of ideological and material factors that made these threads effective calls for further analysis. But that calls for greater intellectual competence than has gone into this modest study.