Chapter II

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Continued confrontation of Indians with the British Raj had led, by the first decades of the 20th century, to a powerful national movement. The movement contained within its ranks, aspirations and ideologies that were of varying kinds. What they had in common was the identification of the British as the enemy and, generally, the conception of the nature of alien domination. The economic critique of British rule was primary in this conception, and it followed faithfully the lines etched out by early Indian nationalists like Dadabhai Naoroji, G.V. Joshi, M.G. Ranade and R.C. Dutt. It was on the bedrock of this economic critique that different kinds and shades of ideologies, tactics and programmes ultimately rested.

Premchand, essentially a liberal nationalist, combined in him strands of the ideological, tactical and programmatic multiplicity that was typical of the national movement. His views, in sum, are reminiscent of the comprehension of the general middle class public. In particular he represents the mental make-up of the liberal nationalist intelligentsia that has, during the freedom struggle and later, played a significant role in shaping the destiny of modern India.

This chapter discusses Premchand's understanding of the nature of the Raj, dealing, in turn, with his views of the purpose of the British presence in India, the twisted policies

of the government to serve that purpose, and the structure devised to sustain the colonial regime. For reasons of convenience, the cultural, including the racial, dimension of the Raj, with which Premchand was only too familiar, is not discussed here.

Premchand's conception of the nature of British rule is that of the trader ruling for the sake of his commerce and upholding for the purpose a system that gives the highest priority to the bureaucracy and the armed forces, and the lowest to the masses of the subject population. Through the metaphor of trader he encapsulates the supremacy of the economic aspect of imperialism. Besides the bureaucracy and the armed forces, the trader has created an elaborate network of henchmen within the Indian society itself. Depending upon the need of the moment, as also upon the bent of mind of a particular official who may happen to be in charge of a particular operation, official policies get channelised along three ways: duping or blunting the edge of popular struggles and protests by pushing the opponents' energies into useless conferences and enquiries; dividing the Indians in all possible ways - as Hindus and Muslims, caste Hindus and untouchables, Moderates and Extremists, Democrats and Socialists, peasants and zamindars, etc. - to prevent the formation of a formidable united front of the people; and, to use Premchand's untranslatable original expression, dandashastra or brute force intended to ruthlessly crush all resistance. The Raj existed for and off commerce; all its efforts were directed to this single overriding interest.

Such understanding of the essence of British rule had, in fact, become an essential ingredient of political consciousness. So effective and sustained had been the early Indian nationalist propaganda that even while fine arguments and detailed figures were not always followed, catch-words like 'drain' and swadeshi successfully transmitted the substance of the nationalist critique. It is but natural that Premchand, then only twenty-five and beginning to struggle as a free-lance writer, should have given expression to this critique without having treated it as a main theme. Even in his later writings, not surprisingly, such ideas were not discussed directly and as the main theme as often as these provided the context, the colour and the background to all that was being said.

Rangbhumi (1925), however, is a significant exception. It provides an elaborate and systematic indictment of the colonial regime. The sarkar is here to rule; and its rule is based on commerce, not on justice. It is always on the look out for novel ways to squeeze the wealth of the people. No means, fair or foul, would be spared to silence or get rid of those who impede the pursuit of imperialist interests.[1] India must be held in eternal bondage. Ways and means to ensure this may vary. But the ideal is pursued with single-minded devotion. Obviously conceived by Premchand in the image of Mrs Annie Besant, Sophia

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1 Premchand, Rangbhumi, Ilahabad, 1971, p. 397.

says about British attitude towards India:[2]

> The English wish to have India as a part of their empire forever. Be they Conservatives or Liberals, Radical or Labour, Nationalist or Socialist, in this regard all of them follow the same ideal.... Dominance is not something to be renounced.... All of them are imperialists. The dissimilarity lies only in the policy each party desires to adopt in order to strengthen its control. Some believe in strict administration, others in a benevolent one, and still others in talking sweet. In fact, there is no policy but the purpose of continually tightening our hold.

As in his fiction, in his journalistic writings also Premchand dwells on the basic unity, irrespective of party or ideological affiliations, of the British position vis-a-vis India. The Conservatives unabashedly declare their intention to stay put in India, while the Labourites and Liberals take recourse to winsome phrases for the same end. The latter, he even says, are more dangerous because of their deviousness and cunning, capable as they are of giving lessons, for days to come, in Machiavellian-ism to the Conservatives.[3]

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2 Ibid, pp. 421-22.

3 Vividh Prasang, vol. II, p. 289. In this article of 1932 Premchand further says - "For India the only difference between all the parties is as between a cobra and another snake.... Yes, one point has to be admitted, Conservatives act as they speak. Liberals and Labourites speak sweet and then act as Conservatives do. Thus, in fact we should be more wary of Liberals and Labour rather than of the Conservative". See also pp. 214-15 for Machievellian policies of Labour.

Whether as an explicit statement or as an implicit assumption, the conviction informs all Premchand's writings that the British would in no case deviate from the pursuit of economic exploitation and brook no threat to the imperial system that makes this exploitation possible. There is, consequently, little sense in reposing faith in the British with regard to the welfare of the subjects. They are here for business. The best among them cannot forget this. They can be only as kind, so it follows, as a master towards his servant. The limit of the sarkar's kindness is defined by the point where its own interests are not hurt:[4]

> ... no official now has the face to say that the British are ruling over India to educate her in civilization and justice. Their rule has but one objective, and that is to expand their trade and offer cushy jobs to their educated unemployed. That is why Britain is saddled over India's neck, and she cannot suffer even an iota of loss to her interests.... Should you dare cast a threatening glance at her interests, you have had it! All her justice, humanity and civility would disappear, and you would be confronted with the monstrous aspect of the administration.

Naturally enough, the interests of the masses get the lowest priority in the government's scheme of things. 'Don't forget that India is ruled over by England. The king first

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4 Ibid, pp. 67-8.

feeds himself, his officials and his cats and dogs. If something still remains, the public must reckon itself lucky.'[5] Even when the government requires additional funds, it is the poor masses whose meagre incomes are channelised into official coffers. 'The national after all, exists only in order that it may waste away and the bureaucrats may relax.' 'The poor may not get even a coarse meal in the day, but our sahebs must have butter and eggs, fruits and wine five times a day. Let the world go to the dogs. We must live.... The sarkar does not care a whit for the state of the country. It has the power of danda.'[6] Referring bitterly, almost despairingly, to the futility of pleading with the government to mend its ways, Premchand comments: 'What government is it that heeds any advice.'[7]

It is but a measure of the exploitative nature of British rule, and of its utter unconcern for the welfare of the poor masses, that such a basic commodity as salt was taxed in order to siphon off to the exchequer a part of the earnings of even the poorest in the land; an act that would have been unthinkable in any other country.[8] But such measures seemed necessary so that the bureaucracy and the armed forces, the two arms of the government, could be kept in comfort and granted immunity from

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5 Ibid, p. 175.

6 Ibid, pp. 83-84.

7 Ibid, p. 174.

8 Ibid, p. 46.

increased taxation. But for these two arms, the government could hardly persist in its ceaseless operation of robbing the people, in spite of growing popular discontent, by its policy of duping, dividing and coercion.[9]

Duping, according to Premchand, is a device to check the nationalist stirrings which threaten not only Britain's profits but also her colonial possessions. It includes the holding of conferences and appointment of committees and enquiries so that the agitating nationalists could fritter away their energies. The government employs these tricks to delay the implementation of reforms and to highlight and encourage divisions among Indians:[10]

> To procrastinate the real issue by means of committees and enquiries is an old game of politics.... The moment there is a complaint and as discontent simmers further, immediately an enquiry committee will be instituted. Those who were complaining loudest are admitted to the committee. A year or two sweep by in enquiring and by then the complaint has lost some of its fervour. If per chance the committee makes strong recommendations, then yet another committee is instituted to review these inconvenient recommendations.

If reforms come at all, Premchand asserts, they have little value apart from the advantage reaped by the government by making

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9 Ibid., pp. 212-14. See also pp. 247-49.

10 Ibid, p. 86.

an exhibition of them. Indians enter the assemblies and councils, but power eludes them. Finance and defence are never placed in their charge. The government talks of federation and swarajya, but increased representation in the legislatures alone would not invest Indians with greater powers and authority; for the governor-general and the provincial governors would continue to make a mockery of increased Indian representation by means of their exceptional powers.[11] The 'democracy' the British have introduced in India is no democracy. The legislatures have a few more members. But the people are where they were. Besides, the legislatures are impotent; or just costly nonsense.[12] England is bereft of all discrimination and consideration. As is clear from moves such as the Simon Commission drama, she can only think of brute force as her sole help in maintaining her imperial structure.[13] The feeling was further deepened by the White Paper of 1933. Resorting to pun, involving a bilingual play upon the word 'white', Premchand commented sarcastically that the White Paper was 'truly white' (blank). Judging by the reaction of the Conservatives, led by Churchill, it was evident that even a sop like the White Paper was not acceptable to British imperialists. By making ominous comparisons with Ireland, they were trying to forestall even a semblance of fresh reforms.[14] Not realising that they were living

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11 Ibid, p. 114.

12 Ibid, pp. 188-89.

13 Ibid, p. 62.

14 Ibid, pp. 147-51.

in the 20th century, and that India, too, would go in the direction that the rest of the world was taking, the Conservatives were determined to oppose all reforms.[15] Not even as a ruse to deceive Indians would they agree to reforms. But these were Premchand's angry reactions to the resistance put forward by the Conservatives to schemes and proposals of reforms for India. In reality he knew that, in spite of their relatively open opposition to Indian reforms, even the Conservatives were a party to the duping game that was played upon Indians. The three Round Table Conferences, too, were for him related to the duping tactics of the British. Considering the disappointing proposals put forward at the end of the third Conference, no other interpretation seemed possible.[16]

To the category of duping belonged also the efforts of the British to delay constitutional concessions on the facetious plea of Indians' unfitness for self-government. Here duping relied on divisive tactics rather heavily. Pretending to act the honest broker, the British often pleaded their inability to grant reforms because there was no consensus on the question among Indians. With different sections making demands that were irreconcilable, the British could just sit back and defy Indians to forge some kind of an agreement among themselves instead of accusing their rulers. Premchand could see that divisions obtained among Indians. But he could also see that in a great

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15 Ibid, p. 221.

16 Ibid, pp. 110, 116, 120-22 and 212-14.

measure these were caused directly or indirectly by foreign rule. In no case did these divisions constitute a reason for the rulers to deny Indians their due rights. Since the British did just the opposite, Premchand accused them of deliberately magnifying Indian differences to serve their own imperialist ends.[17] 'Communalism', he wrote, 'is the best weapon of the government, and until its last breath it will not let go of it.'[18] This, however, was not the only weapon. The British had forged similar other weapons by creating and countenancing all kinds of dissensions among Indians. With remarkable brevity he exposed the policy of divide and rule: 'The country wanted to become a nation. It was thrown into sectarianism.' Through sectional interests the government was trying to drive out nationalism.[19]

Duping and dividing were tactics that afforded the British the chance of serving their interests without disturbing the facade of justice and fair play and humanity. But they were not beyond using brute force whenever occasion demanded that. Danda-shastra was, in fact, their great invention which they had perfected in cooperation with their slavish Hindustani bureaucracy. Ruling out all necessity for laws, this method offered the perfect answer to every problem: workers' unions agitate for increased wages, wield the stick; the corps have failed and the kisans are unable to pay land revenue, wield the stick; notice a glimpse of nationalism, awakening or sense of dignity, immediately

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17 Ibid, pp. 30-34, 112 and 375.

18 Ibid, pp. 115, 118.

19 Ibid, p. 116.

wield the stick. 'The danda reigns supreme. There is peace in the country.'[20] Premchand wrote with devastating sarcasm about the British support, at an international disarmament conference, to a proposal banning the bombing of civilian populations during war. While supporting the proposal, Britain had insisted on its right to bombard its frontier regions as a substitute for police action. He wrote: 'The English government does not wish to bombard its enemies. This is beastly and barbaric. But it has the right to bomb its own subjects. Who can check this? After all, a mother beats her child, doesn't she? But beat the neighbour's child, and we shall see'.[21]

Premchand's fiction often portrays government repression, particularly the violence perpetrated on peaceful satyagrahis.[22] A rule such as this - so blatantly exploitative and based on brute force - cannot bring prosperity and progress to the country. Nor can it remain a useful part of the British empire. 'No', says Premchand, 'it will be a carcass of a nation, surviving only so that vultures may tear it bit by bit to eat.'[23]

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20 Ibid, pp. 57-59. In this article Premchand remarked - "... but the most fantastic invention it (England) has made with the help of the Indian bureaucracy, and which will forever hold aloft its flag of glory ... is called the science of the stick." (dandashastra). Also pp. 192-93.

21 Ibid, p. 182.

22 Premchand, Mansarovar, Ilahabad, 1976, vol. VII, Juloos, pp. 49-60; also see Samaryatra, pp. 66-79.

23 Vividh Prasang, vol. II, p. 172.

This is an aspect of the Raj with regard to which, like most of his contemporaries, Premchand often wrote in anger and not without an element of exaggeration. In any case, there was little in this description that was not widely shared by Indians. But there was an aspect of the British presence in India in the understanding of which Premchand reflected great insight and discernment. This aspect related to the network of collaboration that the colonial power had carved out within the Indian society, especially with reference to the zamindars and the educated middle classes, as also the capitalist class.

Among the indigenous pillars of the Raj the easiest to identify were the feudal remnants, such as the 'native' rulers and landlords, who for their loyalty were allowed reasonable free play in the exploitation of their subjects and ryots, or were rewarded with titles and seats in the councils. The fast emerging Indian capitalist class was also categorised by Premchand among the henchmen of the Raj. But he had the perspicacity to see that its was an ambivalent relationship with the Raj. As against the masses, the capitalist tended to side with the imperialists, and for this he got nominated to the councils. But as a shrewd man of business he was also able to see how his interests were sacrificed by the British; a fact that made him slip into the ranks of the nationalists as well. This ambivalent relationship grows even more complex when Premchand comes to the third indigenous pillar of the Raj, the English educated middle classes. They are accused of slavish, imitative mentalities, ruined by

their training at 'modern universities' which Premchand calls breeding houses of slavery. As professional men, lawyers, doctors, teachers and bureaucrats, they aid the British in exploiting the people. But they also constitute the very sections that man and lead the nationalist ranks.

At various places in his work Premchand discusses the class imperatives and the resultant behavioural dynamics of these three pillars of the Raj. In the process, especially while writing about the middle classes to which he himself belonged, he was often carried away by the immediate occasion or the impulse of the moment that led him to write. For example, carried away by the brilliance of Gandhi's move in launching the salt satyagraha and obviously unhappy with the response of the English educated, Premchand wrote to his friend Dayanarain Nigam who was himself by no means enthusiastic about the movement:[24]

> It has been shown yet once again on this occasion that if two per cent of the English educated are with the movement, the remaining 98 per cent are opposed to it. The money spent on schools and universities, from the point of view of the nation, has virtually been wasted. These people are with the government, not with the nation. It is the non-English-educated, business and professional people who have injected life into the movement. The country would not attain freedom till the Doom's Day, perhaps, if it were to rely on the educated.

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24 Chitthi Patri, vol. I, pp. 178-79.

> The lawyers, doctors, professors and government servants have betrayed a slavish mentality that I could hardly have apprehended. They see their welfare in maintaining the government's authority. They cannot neglect their own conveniences, comforts and material benefits even for a moment. Money is their religion. Either they do not desire freedom or they consider it consonant with their dignity to lord it over others instead of themselves paying the price of freedom. Or maybe they are happy in the thought that freedom will come on its own. They dreaded the Congress during its first as well as the second phase. They can see clearly that whatever they have obtained, and now consider theirs as a matter of right, has been obtained through sacrifices made by others. Still they would not join in these sacrifices. This is bourgeois mentality. This is what makes the poor the enemy of the rich.

Such passionate outbursts are by no means rare in Premchand's writings, be these personal letters, essays and comments, or fiction. Yet the overall picture that emerges from his work is that of a portrayal that brought in the diverse pulls of class imperatives and dealt with a degree of sensitivity with the resultant ambivalence. This is what makes Premchand's portrayal rich and complex; and so different from the sweeping generalisations that are often attempted along class lines.

Made as it is of a multi-tiered bureaucracy with a network of relationships spreading out into the Indian society, Premchand's description of the exploitative colonial set-up suggests a pyramidal structure. Comprising a whole series of strata, the structure sustains a system of corruption and exploitation; a system in which the one above exploits those below, and in turn is exploited by those above. This leaves scope for only two unadulterated roles: the Raj as pure exploiter at the pinnacle, and the lowliest masses, the poor peasants, as pure exploited being crushed at the base. All the intermediate strata are, in varying proportion depending upon their placement in the system, both exploiters and exploited.

It is this grasp of the complex fusion into one of the roles of exploiter and exploited that enables Premchand to see that within the Indian society the collaborators of the Raj are not mere collaborators and, similarly, its enemies are not pure enemies. In his description of the zamindars, for example, he shows the diverse pulls felt by them between the Congress and the Raj; though as a class they tend to drift more towards the Raj than towards the Congress. The zamindar characters in his novels, prior to Godan (1936), often emerge as yes-men of the government. Rai Kamalananda in Premasharma (1922) is a 'flattering mule'.[25] Raja Mahendra Singh and Kunwar Sharat Singh in Rangbhumi, appearing three years later, are, however, more

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25 Premchand, Premashram, Ilahabad, 1979, p. 265.

complex. They are men who try to maintain two opposite faces in order to have the best of the nationalist as well as the official worlds. Alternating between nationalism and loyalism, they find it useful to wear the badge of patriotism even as, for love of property, they stay attached to the government. Mahendra Singh is a taluqdar and also the chief of the local municipal board. He wants to convince people of his love for the motherland, but without losing the trust of the government. He bribes the editor of the local paper to prevent any criticism of his loyalism, and rushes to appease the government when its suspicions are aroused. Kunwar Bharat Singh, too, spouts nationalist slogans and ultimately accepts government protection for the sake of his love for property.[26] In the characterisation of the two Rangbhumi taluqdars, in spite of greater roundedness in comparison with the portrayal of Rai Kamalananda, there is an obtrusiveness in the operation of cold calculations that makes this depiction rather unconvincing. In creating Rai Saheb, in Godan, Premchand presents a realistic and very convincing picture of the dual role of the zamindars. Rai Saheb resigns his membership of the council during the civil disobedience movement, but is back into the game of seeking election to the council soon after. To this aspect we shall return in a later chapter.

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26 Rangbhumi, pp. 181, 189, 193, 482-83 and 485.

In the case of the Indian princes, however, no such duality seems to operate. Relics of a bygone age, they are bolstered up by the British for whose rule they act as props. While condemning their generally oppressive and tyrannical rule, Premchand holds the British responsible for this sorry state of affairs. Employing a remarkably telling image, he makes the dewan of an Indian state say in Rangbhumi: 'You might consider the native states to be the British Indian government's harem.... Without the Resident's approval we cannot as much as move a straw.'[27] With the government pulling the strings and the princes acting the puppet, the poor ryots get increasingly crippled.[28] Though pretending to be concerned about proper administration in the Indian states, and possessed with the right to take over a state or remove its ruler on the ground of mismanagement, the government exercises this right only to deal with inconvenient princes. Otherwise it lets them wallow in their luxurious and tyrannical ways.[29] That alone explains the government's attempt to have a law passed to make it a punishable offense to oppose the rulers of Indian states.[30]

Yet more complex is the equation between the Indian capitalist and the Raj. More craftily than the zamindar, the Indian entrepreneur extends a hand each, almost simultaneously,

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27 Ibid., p. 214.

28 Ibid, p. 28.

29 Ibid, p. 425.

30 Vividh Prasang, vol. II, pp. 227-28.

to Indian nationalism and British imperialism. Profit is the only god he worships, and worships blindly. The poor of the country, be they workers or peasants, are indiscriminatingly exploited by him. His nationalist politics does nothing to mellow his attitude towards the poor of his own country. In fact, his European competitor in India shows greater concern for business ethics. Representing the Indian and the European entrepreneurs in India as Seth Punpunwala and Mr Bull respectively, Premchand says that the poor Indian would rather have dealings with the latter than with the former who is no better than a dangerous beast.[31] Even in the context of swadeshi, an idea that Premchand had supported all along since he started writing during the swadeshi agitation, he could see that the Indian capitalist was, with supreme unconcern for the poor consumers of the country, busy reaping the advantages of the boycott of foreign goods without making the slightest effort to produce cheaper goods. Knowing that swadeshi meant for the freedom struggle and realising the strength of feelings in this regard, Premchand had the boldness to ask as to why the Congress should persist in the picketing of shops selling foreign goods: 'Merely to sustain the luxuries indulged in by the capitalists of this country who oppose the entry of cheap imported cloth and loot the poor by selling their own cloth at arbitrarily fixed prices? They are not at all interested in producing cheap cloth, encouraging skilful artisans and making them happy in order that

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31 Ibid, p. 332.

they may work hard.' He wondered if the Congress would keep sending its volunteers to jail for the sake of such selfish businessmen.[32]

Having forged alliances with both the nationalists and the imperialists, the capitalist stands to gain either way. He wrings concessions from the rulers on the strength of the national movement. And he so manages to control the movement as to have its programmes and policies framed in ways that would benefit him. In fact, complains Premchand, the nationalist leaders themselves are tending to develop a vested interest in business. What is to be done when the nationalist leaders and capitalists are the same? He notes with concern the adverse effect of this new convergence of interests on the hopes and aspirations of the poor who had looked up to the nationalist leaders for the amelioration of their miserable lot.[33]

Premchand's fiction, too, brings out the devious nature of the Indian capitalist. The whole story of Rangbhumi, with John Sevak manoeuvring to acquire the land of Surdas for building a cigarette factory, unfolds in a way that cannot but expose the ways and designs of capitalists.[34] It is, however, in Godan that the double face of the Indian entrepreneur is most elaborately drawn. It may, though, be noted that in this depiction Premchand

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32 Ibid, pp. 216-20.

33 Ibid, p. 496.

34 In his design to wrest from Surdas the latter's land and build on it a cigarette mill, John Sevak turns to the Municipal Chief, Mahendra Singh and to the D.M. Mr Clark as and when it suits him.

does not give evidence of the kind of empathy that has obviously gone into his characterisation of zamindars, especially Rai Saheb. Khanna, then, is the nationalist-capitalist monster whose sugar mill, not the demands made by the zamindars, proves the ultimate bane of the poor peasants of the region. There is, in Godan, the moving portrayal of the kisans cutting their sugar-cane and wondering how they could sell it direct to the mill and avoid the mahajan to whom they were indebted. The discussion is summarily, and decisively, terminated by Hori who says resignedly: 'The Khanna Babu who owns the mill also owns the mahajan's kothi.'[35] And so the vicious noose tightens its grip on the poor peasant's throat.

But Khanna considers himself a man of the people. In the last national struggle, he recalls with pride, he had gone to jail twice. He had, moreover, also spent thousands of rupees. Premchand adds with gentle sarcasm: 'Even today he was prepared to listen to the workers' complaints. But it was not possible that he cease caring for the share-holders' interests.'[36] Godan, it may be noted, is no ordinary novel. The exploiter is no longer necessarily a blatant villain. There is scope in his mental make-up for idealism. All that Premchand does is to suggest its fragile sentimental quality. Very often the constraints of the social class situation get the better of personal idealism.

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35 Premchand, Godan, Ilahabad, 1975, p. 174.

36 Ibid, p. 272.

Yet, it seems, Premchand's aversion to capitalists as a class must have been very strong. Even in a work as mature as Godan, he could barely manage to make Khanna just a shade less of a villainous 'type' than Seth Punpunwala or John Sevak. At the literary level, this certainly was a failure in that Premchand could not make Khanna half as vibrant and life-like as Rai Saheb. But so far as his appraisal of the role of the Indian capitalist class is concerned, its basic duality cannot be historically questioned.

Finally, Premchand underlines the role of the English educated classes within the colonial set-up. Colonialism works at its subtlest here. Through a collective osmosis that education makes possible, its culture seeps through the very being of the English educated Indians. They emerge as cheap imitations of their patrons. Premchand's wrath is at its pious most when directed against the universities. These are for him not educational institutions but factories that produce traitors and slaves. He wishes that these had either not been opened or been ground to dust; for nationalist sentiments are systematically and determinedly strangled among their students.[37]

Premchand laments the fact that most of the English educated keep off the national movement. In other countries, he complains, students lead freedom movements. But here they consider the British as their god.[38] What upsets him even more

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37 Vividh Prasang, vol. II, p. 50. Also p. 61.

38 Ibid, p. 49.

is the fact that their participation in nationalist politics is very often motivated by selfish considerations. Politics for them is a means to improve their own bargaining position vis-a-vis their rulers. Every concession that they are thus able to wrest makes Premchand unhappy. He is afraid that as lawyers they have sucked people's blood, but with increasing concessions they would, as officials and men in authority, cut people's throats.[39]

The double face of the English educated classes appears in Premchand's fiction also. Worrying for their name, fame and fortune, these men have their own calculations about how far they are prepared to go in their confrontation with the Raj. Of course, there are no fixed limits for all of them. Some are always willing to go farther than the others. Thus there are persons like Dr Shyamacharan in Sevasadan (1918) who would not express their genuine opinion on any issue in the council; they would rather wait to see what the government, which has nominated them, wants them to say.[40] But, then, Shyamacharan is a particularly timid case. He is operating in the years prior to the watershed represented by the 1919 Reforms and the Non-co-operation movement. For the whole tenor of Indian politics undergoes a significant change during the early 1920s. Yet the change does not bring about a qualitative transformation in the attitude of the English educated classes. Their double face stays. They

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39 Chitthi Patri, vol. I, p. 93. Also p. 178.

40 Premchand, Sevasadan, Ilahabad, 1978, p. 148.

remain amenable, as in Premashrama (1922), not only to the lure the government can offer - and does offer - but also to the purchasing power of its aides, the zamindars.[41] Rai Kamalananda admits: 'We, the zamindars, sahukars, and lawyers, traders, doctors, bureaucrats, have all exploited the people. Me and you, both Moderates and Extremists, are enemies of the people.'[42] Even Premshankar, the self-abnegating idealist protagonist of Premashrama, fails to live up to his ideals after he has reached the council; he submits to the exploitative system by refraining from introducing his radical schemes with regard to the zamindars.[43] The picture of the English educated nationalist is drawn in greater details and depth in Rangbhumi. Once again the essential outlines remain unaltered. No wonder that Sophia is obliged to comment: 'Education begets scoundrels.'[44]

The English educated nationalist leaders continue to be susceptible to manipulation by the official machinery in Karambhumi (1932) also. Like Vinay in Rangbhumi, Amar, the protagonist of Karmabhumi, is swayed by such factors as personal ambition which seriously compromise his nationalist fervour and idealism. That both Vinay and Amar, as we shall see later in a different chapter, ultimately manage to redeem themselves - and

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41 Premashram, p. 265.

42 Ibid, pp. 265-66.

43 Ibid, p. 398.

44 Rangbhumi, p. 551; p. 248; p. 280.

Vinay does so by no less a radical step than killing himself - does little to question the validity of Premchand's basic point about the dual role of the English educated middle classes. As in other respects, Godan illustrates this with greater finesse. It captures the close ties, as also the tensions, that obtain among the educated nationalist leaders, industrialists and taluqdars, highlighting thereby the duality of their relationship with the Raj. In some of his short stories also, e.g. 'Viyoga aur Milap', Premchand brings out the constraints within which the English educated nationalists operated and shows how the Raj exploited these in order to use them as props for itself.[45]

Premchand, like Gandhi, could see that the British existed in India as rulers because of the cooperation they were able to get from sections of Indians. But he saw something more. The Raj was able to turn even nationalists into its supporters. This aspect of his work we shall discuss at length in a separate chapter.

If as nationalists they could align with the Raj and be used by it, the English educated middle classes constituted a more direct prop in their capacity as members of the bureaucracy. For their own benefit, in this capacity, they kept the people low and the system going. To this theme, too, we shall come back in a later chapter.

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45 'Viyog aur Milap' in Premchand, Solah Aprapya Kahaniyan, Ilahabad, Dilli, pp. 130-42.

Thus England ruled over India. In the network of relationships that had been devised to sustain the colonial regime, the alien masters had reached out fairly extensively into the Indian society. Fissures had begun to appear in the system, and the masters had begun to feel nervous. But they would not give up easily. They would make the best possible use of the art they had developed of enlisting, on changing terms though, their own opponents. As a creative writer whose dream it was to have his country freed from foreign domination, Premchand seems to have been frustrated and fascinated by this aspect of the colonial set-up. How he as a writer could comprehend with great clarity the dynamics of the national movement, and how, in spite of this clarity, he could at times betray the very limitations and weaknesses to which the movement was subject, constitutes the main theme of our discussion in the pages that follow.