CONCLUSION
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Premchand believed that it was essential to eliminate various social and religious practices that were obstacles to the progress of society, if the nation were to achieve social and political liberation. The religious practices that he attacked were: superstitious practices like ritual worship, fasts and scriptural lessons and the observance of taboos about cooking and eating, practices like bathing in the Ganges and other rivers on the occasion of eclipses. The practices, according to him were irrational and were obstacles in the way of achieving scientific temperament. He attacked the priestly class, mahants and sadhus who were responsible for perpetuating these practices in the society for their own vested interests. Premchand's writings are full of venom against religious hypocrisy, superstitions and wickedness. He was attacked by the Hindu communalists for his attack on brahmins and for portraying them as
leeches but he did not stop exposing this class. Premchand, in fact, stated the real meaning of religion that means selfless service, renunciation and discarded the false meanings attached to religion. In this way he reinterpreted religion in the light of rational belief.

The untouchability was another practice which kept the society backward. He wanted this abhorrent practice to be removed from society. It was important to remove this practice not only for liberation of the individual but also for national liberation. But Premchand's attitude to the removal of untouchability was an ambivalent one. He sought sanction from scriptures for removal of this practice and at the same time rejection of scriptures if they advocate irrational practices. Premchand recommended sanskritization for the untouchables to regain their self-respect and human dignity. According to him one of the most important ways to eliminate untouchability was an identification of the reformer with them. This identification itself would eliminate the evils like drinking alcohol,
uncleanliness and eating of carrion beef. Another course to achieve equality was to allow the untouchables to enter the temples. But mere temple entry in itself would not remove untouchability. The most important was to improve the economic conditions of the untouchables. He envisioned that nationalism would eliminate untouchability.

Premchand made it a mission of his life to fight against communal forces. He diagnosed the causes of communalism and also prescribed some antidotes to cure this malady. The colonial historiography, according to him played a very vicious role in creating a gulf among Muslims and Hindus. It created certain myths about Indian history and culture that were responsible for generating communal consciousness. Premchand condemned the communal organisations for unleashing communal propaganda. The leaders of these organisations had no interest in ameliorating the economic conditions of the poor masses. Their only interest was to serve their own purpose. They in fact were the stooges of imperialism.
The shudhi movement and Hindu Sangthan were also creating communal tension. The champions of shudhi, in fact, were not the well-wishers of the Hindu community. They had nothing to do with equality.

The communalists took recourse to culture. Premchand believed that culture has nothing to do with religion. If there is any culture it was the economic one. The masses had no interest in culture. Their main interest was in economic issues.

Premchand made a distinction between religion and communalism. For him religion was self-sacrifice, generosity, tolerance, selfless service, righteousness etc. Religion according to him is a matter of private concern of the individuals. It should not be used for the advancement of political interest. His conception of secularism involved respect for each other's religious sentiments.

For Premchand communalism and nationalism were two binary oppositions. But he was critical of the ambivalent attitude of the Congress to
communal question. He believed that with the growth of nationalist consciousness communalism would be eliminated. Premchand's attitude to history and culture was coloured by communal perspective, though unconscious.

The opposition between country and city had been the recurring theme of Premchand's fictions. The country for him represented the traditional Indian culture and the city stood for western culture. Dharma was the predominant feature of ancient Indian culture. Dharma included positive qualities: contentment, renunciation, self-sacrifice, service, humility, self-abnegation, altruism, selflessness, self-effacement, non-violence etc. On the other hand city represented western culture thereby full of selfishness, conflict, materialism and enslavement to worldly needs. The western culture was the embodiment of capitalist culture. For him western culture and bourgeois culture were synonymous terms. All the human relationships are governed by cash nexus. It has eliminated nobler feelings like humility, sympathy, consolation, magnanimity, generosity, love etc. All
evils like jealousy, coercion, dishonesty, lying, prostitution etc. are the result of quest for money. Premchand embodied the contrast between western/industrialist/capitalist culture and traditional Indian culture in the personality of John Sevak representing the former and Surdas representing the later. He also portrayed wealth and luxury as a corrupting influence. His fictional characters belonging to the upper class families suffer from a sense of moral guilt.

But Premchand did not confine himself to the clichés, spiritualism versus materialism, traditional Indian culture versus western/capitalist culture and the country versus city. He might have been sympathetic to the traditional values at ideological level but as a creative writer he was aware of the changes taking place in the countryside. In fact there is tension between ideology and reality in his works. He has depicted how the changes in rural society were producing its effects on all the aspects of rural life and organisation. His 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 Prabhashankar in Premasharam was faced with a continuous struggle between his self and the lived reality and ultimately had to compromise with the harsh reality, revealing Premchand's consciousness that this old world was no longer viable. Even the 'new men' were not exactly the new men but an amalgam of the traditional consciousness and the new values. Thus Gyanshankar in Premasharam swang like a pendulum between these two opposite value systems. In fact all the aspects of rural society were undergoing changes and migration from village to city was one aspect of this broader and general social change. A large number of rural folks were migrating to the cities in search of work. Premchand examined the influence of outside world on the migrants and how it generated radical consciousness in the characters like Gobar in Godan.
The peasant question had been the leitmotif of Premchand's works. He exposed the unbridled tyranny let loose by Zamindars, moneylenders, village council and the colonial bureaucracy on the poor peasants. The mechanism through which the landlords enforced control over peasants was rent and its frequent enhancement, nazrana, exaction of tributes and imposition of fines. Besides this, the landlords terrorised the peasants by using violence against them. Premchand depicted the perceptions of intimidation in the minds and experience of the peasants themselves. The peasants had rationalized their subjection to the landlords not only out of fear of them but also out of respect for the landlords. They justified their domination by the landlords on the basis of karma and took refuge in the will of God. Though the old type of landlords were more benevolent to the peasants than the younger ones yet they were magnanimous as long as the peasants accepted their hegemony. The system of brutal exploitation of the tenants by landlords, thus, impoverished them and they were compelled to borrow from the moneylenders who took undue
advantage of tenants' helplessness and charged exorbitant rates of interest. The peasants' whole life was spent in paying off their debts to the moneylenders. The landlords and moneylenders were aware of the tenants' traditional consciousness, their servility to customs, conventions of the biradari and their sense of adherence to dharma and thus did not find any difficulty in making them their objects of prey. It was in collusion with landlords and moneylenders that the colonial bureaucracy was able to exploit the peasants with ruthlessness. The officials on tour to the villages exacted begar and rasad from the villages. The most inhuman part of the colonial bureaucracy as depicted by Premchand was the department of police. The policemen created such a fear among the peasants that they got nervous even to see their faces. Innocent men were arrested for no fault of theirs and the actual culprits were never caught. Thus the corrupt bureaucracy, the ruthless police, the rapacious moneylenders and the landed gentry had together built a gargantuan megalith with
its base firmly set on semi-clad and starving peasants. But Premchand blamed the colonial state for the original sin since all these institutions derived their raison d'être from the colonial state. The colonial state was perceived by the peasants through the mediation of the Zamindars and the colonial bureaucracy. Thus Premchand 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 was deep connection of Premchand's creative vision with the struggling peasantry that gave profundity to his art.

For Premchand peasants' struggle for their rights and the struggle for swaraj were one and the same. For him national question was essentially a peasant question. He invested his peasant characters with growing consciousness to fight for their rights. But they could not achieve any success in the absence of unity and an organisation. Therefore, they were united and led by the educated middle class leadership. Premchand's attitude to the educated class was an
ambivalent one. He denounced the educated middle class for leading a luxurious life, for selfishness and for its antipathy to suffering masses. Therefore, Premchand created such leaders in his fictional world who possessed the qualities like sacrifice, renunciation, self-abnegation, service, self-control, simplicity etc. For him inculcation of these qualities was the first step towards national liberation. He believed that only such a leader could lead the masses in the right direction. He embodied these qualities in Premashankar, Vinay, Chakradhar and Amarkant. These characters established empathy with the villagers and inculcated a sense of self-respect and human dignity among the peasants. They gave a coherent shape to the peasants' sufferings and inculcated critical consciousness among them and thus prepared them for struggle to achieve their rights. Though these characters were governed by certain limitations yet they struggled and waged a continuous battle with the ideological incrustations of their past lives and grappled with social reality and
in the process of transforming that reality they themselves became shaped by that reality into nobler human beings. Thus there was a dialectical inter-relationship between these characters and the objective social reality. These characters prepared the peasants for peaceful and non-violent form of struggle. Though the struggle was waged broadly within Gandhian paradigm yet there were instances when this paradigm was forsaken. Though Premchand was under the hegemony of Gandhian ideology as far as the question of strategy was concerned yet as a creative writer following realism as a form he had to conform to the principle of reality. Therefore, he depicted the tension between Gandhian ideology and reality in his works. Premchand made distinction between Gandhi and congress leadership. In fact, Premchand's attitude to the Congress Party was ambivalent. He was a sympathizer as well as a critique of its leadership. His works derive much of its complexity from the double perspective that he developed. He believed that the Congress and its leaders had made sacrifices for the nation but there were a large
number of leaders who were serving their own self-interest in disguise of service and sacrifice. He was very doubtful whether these leaders would serve the masses on attainment of swaraj. He believed if the existing social-structure is retained on the attainment of political freedom the conditions of the peasants will not change appreciably. Therefore, he was in favour of radical changes in the society. He recommended the elimination of private property. Therefore, we find struggle against Feudalism, Capitalism and Imperialism in Premchand's works.

Premchand expressed his concern with the oppression of women in contemporary society. Their oppression was legitimized by means of patriarchal ideology. The familial, social and cultural influences exercised hegemonic control over female mind and conditioned her into acceptance of her subordinate position. A female was assigned her fixed role even before her birth. As a child she was socialized by the family along the stereotyped lines of sexual categories. Marriage subjected a woman to life-long tyranny.
Her own interests, personality and feelings were subordinated to the needs of the family. Liberation from this bondage, according to Premchand's understanding, could be achieved only by granting equal rights to women. He exhorted women to rise from their passivity and indifference and break the chains which enslave them. He felt that 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 portrayed such women characters who threw off the yoke of their stifling milieu to forge their own independent destiny. In this regard economic independence of women was important because it was one of the primary means for women to lead autonomous lives. This was demonstrated by Premchand in the portrayal of 'new women'. But Premchand did not delineate the 'new woman' as a stereotype ideal but depicted them as products of a specific historical situation. Though these women characters were fully emancipated, yet in their practice they were unable to transcend the traditional feminine psychology. The liberation, Premchand demonstrated, was an extremely complex process in which the desire for independence and
the internalized conventional social values were continuously in conflict. For the resolution of this conflict Premchand did not reject the traditional cultural values. On the contrary he tried to relate the process of transformation to the specificity of Indian culture, an effort in which his notion of femininity had a crucial place. Premchand embodied his idea of femininity in the values: love, sacrifice, devotion and non-violence. He regarded these values as the highest ideals of human race. He represented these values in many of his women characters. These women characters resisted male oppression through these values. Related to these qualities was Premchand's concept of marriage. The premise of this concept was 'spiritual' as opposed to the 'material'. It was opposed to the western ideal of marriage. It placed emphasis on continence as opposed to incontinence. These ideas reflected patriarchal bias. This was in contradiction to the feminist ideals of struggle against patriarchal ideology as represented in some of Premchand's women characters. This contradiction was rooted
in the cultural compulsions of a colonial society. Premchand felt the need to create an alternate ideal derived from traditional culture as a counter to the colonial cultural hegemony. But Premchand did not categorically reject the western culture. He was opposed to the blind imitation of the west, at the same time was not averse to the positive aspects of western culture. Premchand recognized the specificity of women's struggle but at the same time also provided a critique of the dominant ideology of women's liberation movement in the west. He rejected sexual liberation since it was not the same as female liberation. Instead he recommended creation of space for women in public life. He tried to integrate feminism and femininity in his quest to define the personality of Indian woman. He embodied this in the personality of Malati. In the relationship between Malati 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 envisioned this relationship not as an end in itself but a means towards achieving higher goal in society: a goal of transforming society.

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