CHAPTER - V

PEASANT EXPLOITATION
CHAPTER - V

PEASANT EXPLOITATION

An imaginative recreation of the condition and exploitation of the peasantry\(^1\) is one of the central concerns of several works of Premchand. Some of his works like 
\textit{Premasharam, Karambhumi, and Godan} portray the nature of unbridled tyranny let loose on the peasantry by various interests. Perhaps very few

\(^1\) The category "Peasants" has been used by us in the sense Walter Hauser has used it: "...All those on the land and in the villages who rely primarily on the land and its products to maintain subsistence, which may also, incidentally, include commercial production for the market, and who stand in a subordinate relationship to super-ordinate claimants of rent or revenue, whether intermediate tenure holders, Zamindar-type land-holders, or the state. The term I use here to incorporate these meanings is "peasant/tenant"..." 


\textit{In the words of Teodor Shanin:}

"The peasantry can be defined as small producers on land who, with the help of simple equipment, their own labour, and that of their families, produce mainly for their own consumption and for meeting obligations to the holders of political and economic power, and reach nearly total self-sufficiency within the framework of a village community."

\textit{-Teodore Shanin, The Untoward Class, Oxford, 1972; p.39.}
Indian writers have equalled Premchand in this respect. Premchand was 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:

(A) PEASANTS AND ZAMINDARS

(B) PEASANTS AND MONEYLENDERS

(C) PEASANT CONSCIOUSNESS, VILLAGE COUNCIL OR BIRADARI AND

(D) PEASANT AND THE COLONIAL STATE.

I

(A) PEASANTS AND ZAMINDARS

The relationship between landlords and peasants/tenants as perceived by Premchand was a relationship of dominance and subordination. The landlord controls the primary means of production i.e. the land. Land is an instrument in the hands of the landlord to achieve and maintain, economic and political power over the tenants. What is the mechanism through which the landlord enforces control over land, product and the peasants. According to Premchand rent was only the
top of the iceberg. Besides rent there were several other demands on the peasant, mostly in the form of illegal cesses and services.\(^2\) **Mazrana** is one of these oppressive measures.\(^3\)

---

2. **Premosharam** is the classic example of such cesses. The story of this novel proceeds from an incident when Girdhari Maharaj, the chaprasi of the landlord Gyan Shankar, orders the villages to provide ghee on the occasion of the death anniversary of the old Zamindar. In the market, ghee sells at Rs.1/- per chhatanka while tenants are asked to supply the provision at the rate of Rs.1/- per seer (16 chhatanka). For every eight seers of ghee they "sell" to the household of Zamindar, they get paid only for five seers. It is a strange world where the seller actually gets poorer by selling his wares.

3. "The number of such tributes can be multiplied until it covers virtually all the various kinds of agricultural produce and their by-products. Sugarcane juice, sugarcane leaves (for fodder), garlic, coriander, gur, hides, blankets, wood and several other items were taken as tributes. Thus the entire cultivating population adds to the coffers of the landlords in one form or another."

---


\(^3\) In a story "Balidan" Girdhar, a tenant, is unable to pay **mazrana** to Onkarnath, the landlord, he is evicted and the land is rented to a higher bidder. Girdhar commits suicide when he is evicted from the land and his bullocks are sold away to pay off the money-lender. See *Mansoorover*, Vol.VIII, pp. 63-71.
The Zamindars exact money from the tenants even on the occasion of festivals. The Zamindar of Godan adopts subtle method to extract money from the peasants/tenants to celebrate the festival of Dussehra. 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 donations". In fact Rai Saheb of

4. See Godan, op.cit, pp.35-36.
6. Ibid, p.24
Godan extracts everything from the tenants, be it on the occasions of festivals or Council elections or gifts to the officials. And on top of all the landlords do not issue receipts to the tenants for rents received from them.

7. As Gomti, the wife of Pandit Onkarnath, the editor of Bili rightly tells her husband about Zamindars in general and Rai Saheb in particular "For every pice they give you, they extract four times that amount from their tenants." Godan, op.cit., p.218.

Also see p.209. When Rai Saheb 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 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.

8. See Premesharam, p. 252; Godan, op.cit., p.272.

Nokheram, the Karinda (agent) of landlord says to Pateshwari, the revenue clerk about Gobar: "I'll fix that brat by filing a suit for the back land rent. This is going to be one bout he'll never forget." 'But he's paid the rent, hasn't he?' 'I didn't give him a receipt, though. What proof is there that he's paid? Besides, who ever checks the account books around here? I am going to send a man for him right now.'

Also see p.275.
How did the peasants/tenants perceive these rising demands of rent and other exactions? Premchand lets his peasant characters speak in their own terms. Thus the Peasants/tenants in Premasharam are distraught over the augmentation of rent by the landlord:

Balraj: Why this increase in rent irrespective of the production? Why this persistent demand for increase of rent? Is there anarchy?...
Dapat: Have not the prices of corn risen?
Balraj: True the price of grain has risen, but then do you know how much the prices of bullocks, wood, and iron have spiralled up? Who would pay for these? 9


Premchand has dealt with this theme, i.e. the augmentation of rent, extensively in **Premasharam**.

In this novel, peasants sit down around fire at dusk, and begin to chat of their troubles and sorrows, of oppression and exploitation, of eviction and dispossession, and of bribery and corruption.
The high rate of rent and infinite range of gifts are a constant drain on the resources of the peasant.\textsuperscript{10} According to Eric R. Wolf the primary needs of the peasant are "The caloric minimum", "replacement food" and "such ceremonial payments as he must make to maintain the social order of his narrow present world."\textsuperscript{11} And these needs are "both functionally and logically prior to the demands of the outsider, whether lord or merchant."\textsuperscript{12} But to the peasant/tenant of Premchand's fictional world the needs of the external world become primary and they have to balance the demands of the external world against their need to provision their household by curtailing their own consumption. In fact they are not able to satisfy even their 'caloric minimum'. Thus in \textit{Premaghran}, no tenant except Sukhu Chaudhury.

\begin{itemize}
  \item[10.] Thus in \textit{Gadan Bhole} asks Hori whether he has "scrapped up any money" to present to the landlord on the occasion of \textit{Dussehra} and 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..."
  \textit{op. cit.}, pp.35-36.
  \item[12.] \textit{Ibid.}
\end{itemize}
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
live on just a small quantity of Satu (barley), they
do not get enough food to satisfy their hunger.13

The rent has been increased by such a high proportion
that it often exceeds the value of their produce.14 This
is practised by the Zamindars ostensibly to evict the
tenants and they rent the land to the higher bidder.15

The landholders take undue advantage of the fact that
there is a flux of tenants in the villages. Thus in

Karambhum Premchand comments:

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.16

13. Premasharam, p.49.

Also see Godan, p.15. Dhaniya's "twenty years of
married life had taught her that however much she
cut corners, skimmed on food and clothes, and clung
to every cowrie, it was still hard to pay the rent."

In the story "Vair Ka Ant" Premchand comments:

"in a village anyone who can afford meal twice a
day is considered a rich man". Mansarover, Vol.VII,
p.211.

Chandra, "Premchand: A Historiographic View",
And then the landlords resort to coercion, intimidation, harassment, threat and violence as ultimate weapons for enforcing control. How did Premchand


In this story i.e. "Neki" the landlord is bent upon bending the tenant Takhat Singh to his will and the later refusing to do so. The tenant is ejected from the land. The landlord ruins him financially but even then the tenant refused to bend and finally he dies, but does not bow before the landlord.

In the story "Pachtava", *Mansarover*, Vol.VI, pp.227-240 the landlord boasts: "I bound many tenants upside down on this door itself and no one made the slightest protest", p.232.

The Zamindar Udey Bhan Dubey in the story "Vidhvans" exacts begar from Bhungi the gond woman without even giving her food to eat.

"She was not only obliged to work without pay for Pandit Udeybhan but she also had to fetch the water for his house...In his opinion if she received food for working for him, how could it be considered as work done without pay? The peasant has a full right to tether his bulls without feeding them after they've worked a full day in the fields. If he does n't do this, it's not from any kindness of his but only concern for his profit. Panditji did not have this worry because Bhungi was n't going to drop dead after staying hungry for a couple of days. And if by chance she should die, then some other gond could very easily be found to fill her place. He was doing her a favour, as a matter of fact, letting her live in the village at all."


Also see the story "Beti Ka Dhan", *Mansarover*, Vol.VIII, p.30.

Also see Sangram, *op.cit.*, p.12.
express perceptions of the intimidation in the minds and experience of the peasants themselves? In fact the peasant characters themselves tell us much about their attitude and feelings. How is this coercive relationship as seen by the peasants depicted in Premchand's literary world?

Hori in Godan often pays a visit to his landlord's house just to salute him and do some begar for him. Dhaniya argues with her husband that "why should they have to flatter the landlord or lick his feet when they have been paying the rent regularly." But Hori thinks differently:

It's thanks to all these visits of mine that we're still alive. God knows what would have become of us otherwise. You know how many people here in the village have been thrown off their land or had their property taken away. When someone's heel is on your neck, it's best to keep licking his feet.18

When Hori comes back from the landlord's house after obeisance Gobar who had been controlling his anger burst out:

Why do you go flatter the master everyday? His man still comes and curses us when the rent's not paid up. We're still made to do forced labour, and everyone gets fat off your gifts, so why should we go grovelling to them?

18. Godan, op.cit, p.15. Also see p.17.
Hori replies:

And just where would we be without that grovelling? God made us slaves. There's nothing we can do about it. It's thanks to such bowing and scraping that no one objected when we built a hut against our wall. All Ghure did was drive a stake in the ground outside his door so as to tie up his cow, and the authorities fined him two rupees. Just think of all the dirt we've dug from the pond without the agent saying anything. Anyone else would have had to buy him off. I go and play up to them in order to get what I want. It's not as though Saturn's in my feet, forcing me to run around just for the fun of it. Nor do I get any great pleasure out of all this. I stand around for hours before the master is even informed, and then he sometimes comes out, but other times he just sends word that he can't be bothered."

Gobar sneered:

"Well there must be some pleasure in being a yesman for the authorities. Otherwise why should people run for office in the local elections?"

'Say what you please now, son. You'll see what it's like when the responsibilities fall on your shoulders. I used to talk that way myself, but I've found you can't be unbending or put on airs when someone's foot is crushing your neck."


Hori again says to Gobar "When you live in the water, you can't offend the crocodile."

Ibid, p.274.
The peasants/tenants in *Premasharam* are aware of the harsh truth that it is foolish to defy landlord's authority because they can be evicted from the land. Therefore, they flatter the landlord's Karinda.\(^\text{20}\)

But Manohar is full of self-respect. He believed that when they are paying the rent even to the last cowrie why should he succumb to a threat.\(^\text{21}\). But he uttered this to landlord's chaprași out of anger/impulse and later when he regains self-control and poise he repents.\(^\text{22}\) Manohar in fact is torn between the two opposite pulls: defiance and submission, throughout the novel. The peasants realize that it is futile to rebel against the landlord since they have no alternative means of subsistence.\(^\text{23}\) They are in the

---

20. *Premasharam*, p.19. In fact Babu Lal a small landlord himself explains to an absentee landlord, Sharma Ji in the story 'Updesh' "For centuries, they (the tenants) have been oppressed, trampled, tortured to this much extent that the independent qualities have been eliminated from them. They consider Zamindar as a bugbear who would gulp them." *Mansarovar*, Vol.VIII, p.286.


landlord's grip and can be crushed anytime. Moreover the rebellion would create hereditary hostility. They realize that it may be possible for them to antagonise the officials, policemen, revenue clerk and even moneylenders but to create animosity with the landlord would mean creating pitfalls for themselves. Their very livelihood depends upon the Zamindars. Thus "Hori's peasant nature usually fled from quarrels, considering it better to swallow a little abuse than to get involved in a fight. A fracas only meant police and then jail...getting locked up...grovelling in front of everyone...being dragged through the courts while the farm went to hell." This is further corroborated by the tenants

27. Godan, op.cit, p.60.
in *Sangram*:

A Peasant: What if we refuse to do begar?

Fatu: The landlord can do anything. He can harass us, make our life miserable. Let alone other considerations what can you do if he refused to issue you a rent receipt? Where would you lodge a complaint? Who would listen to your petitions? How long would you visit court? And who would lend you a support there too, in front of them?

Many tenants: Who has the time to visit court when we don't have even a moment's respite? It is ripe time for harvesting, sugarcane is to be planted and then we have to separate grain from chaff. It is better to comply with Zamindar's orders than to suffer the indignities in the court.28

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 is imbued with sense of subordination to his superiors, which tradition had made into his dharma. He conceptualizes the authority of the landlord as

28. *Sangram*, op.cit, p.34.
quasi-divine. Consequently, he tended to look upon man's domination of man not as a process governed by the laws of this world but by those of the other world. Instead of seeing in it the operation of human will he saw an expression of divine will. He justifies inequality on the basis of Karma and takes refuge in the will of God. When Gobar tells Hori that "God created us all equal" Hori replies:

That's not so, son. God creates men great or small. Wealth is a reward for penance and devotion. Those rich people are enjoying happiness because of their good works in the last life. We built up no merit, so how can we expect pleasures now".29

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

29. Godan, op.cit, p.31; also see the story 'Nasha', Mansarover, Vol.I, p.115. In fact the landlords take full advantage of peasants' traditional consciousness that the tenants were born to serve their masters, as a landlord's son in this story explains to his friend that his "parents subject their tenants on this claim that they were born to serve them. And the tenants also believe in this assumption. If someone teaches them (the tenants) that basically there is no difference between the tenants and landlords then later would be wiped out."
Premchand contrasted the old type of zamindars with that of the younger ones. The old type of zamindars as perceived by the peasants themselves were more benevolent than the younger ones. Thus Sukhu in *Premasharam* feels that the old landlord never resorted to such harsh methods for rent collection as the younger one has been doing.\(^{30}\) Kadir feels differently. He points out that they had to do *begar* even at the time of old landlord too.\(^{31}\) But Manohar adds it is true they had to do *begar* but the old landlord used to help them too in time of distress and marriage of their daughters.\(^{32}\)

The contrast between the old type of landlord and the younger one is also felt by the landlords themselves. Thus younger generation of landlord

\(^{30}\) *Premasharam*, p.10.

\(^{31}\) *Ibid*, p.18.

\(^{32}\) *Ibid*, p.18.
in the story "Sabhayata Ka Rahasy" stops the age-old paternalist attitude to his tenants. He 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 the 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 make an annual saving of Rs.500/- now. Today nobody dares to pester me with such demands.33

This was the perception of the younger generation of landlord. Prabhashankar, the old type of landlord who is a benevolent one and follows traditions says to Manohar, one of his tenants:

You are amongst our old tenants. Your happiness is vital to our prosperity. You know that we have never been hard on you. In times of needs we have asked you to give us free labour, and you have always gladly done so. Till now we have got alone somehow. But it will be different with our children."34

It was indeed different. Gyanshankar thought differently.

33. 'Sabhayata Ka Rahasy', Mansarovar, Vol.IV, pp.197-204.

34. Quoted by Madan Gopal, op.cit, p.167.
But even the old benevolent landlord was generous as long as the tenants did not question his suzerainty, as his son, Rai Saheb points out:

I was brought up in a tradition where the king was God and the Zamindar God's minister. My late father was so benevolent that in times of frost or drought he would waive half or even the whole rent. He'd distribute grain from his own storehouse to the tenants and would sell the family jewellery to help with the marriage expenses of the village girls, but only as long as the people acknowledged him as both ruler and divine representative, and worshipped him as such. Taking care of the people was his religion, but he wouldn't surrender one particle of his authority.35

Rai Saheb himself is an enlightened person. In the civil disobedience movement he "had become quite a hero by resigning from the Provincial Council and going to jail."36 And he banks upon this. It did not mean that he did not exploit his tenants, but all the "evils were blamed on his agents."37 He mixes with the tenants and talks sweetly, cuts jokes with them because he knows the value of good behaviour, "of course a lion has to hunt, but if he can talk sweetly instead of growling and roaring, he can just stay home and catch what he wants instead of having to roam the jungle in search of it."38

35. Godan, op.cit, p.73.
37. Ibid, p.23.
38. Ibid, p.23.
As Mehta rightly points out to him:

I admit that you're very good to your tenants, but the question is whether selfish motives are involved or not. Maybe it's because food cooks better over a slow fire. Killing with sugar can be deadlier than killing with poison.39

There is a divorce between his words and deeds. He is lauded because he raises the peasant question in the Council but Mehta tells him bluntly:

I think it's more important to be able to act on one's principles. Now you're a supporter of the farmers, wanting to give them all kinds of concessions and to lessen the authority of the Zamindars, whom you go so far as to call a curse on society. And yet you yourself are a Zamindar, and no different from thousands of others. If you're convinced there should be peasant reforms, then start them yourself—write out deeds without having to be bribed into it by your tenants, abolish forced labour, eliminate rent increases and release land for grazing. I have no sympathy for people who talk like communists but live like princes in selfish luxury.40

39. Ibid, p.73.
40. Ibid, p.72.
But Rai Saheb rationalises the oppression by pointing out that unless system is changed the individual goodness is of no use:

I've come to believe that the condition of farmers cannot be improved by mere good will, but only by granting them concessions as their inherent right. It would be incongruous for us to give up our interests voluntarily, though. However good my intentions, I can't ignore my welfare. But I wish that either the government or the law would force us Zamindars to surrender our selfish concerns. You may call this cowardice; I call it helplessness. I agree that no one has the right to grow fat off the labour of others. Exploiting them is absolutely shameful. Work is every man's moral obligation. This situation in society where a few people have it easy while the majority sweat and slave can never bring happiness. The sooner the fortress of wealth and education, which I consider as one form of wealth is shattered, the better...41

Divorce between Rai Saheb's words and deeds is exposed in an incident. He is talking sweetly with Hori and narrating his own domestic problems, and also criticising the Zamindars in general when a servant appeared and announced,

Sir, the men on forced labour have refused to work. They say they won't go unless they're given food. When we threatened them, they quit their jobs and left.42

41. Ibid, pp.73-74.
42. Ibid, p.27.
Rai Saheb glowered at him: "Come with me," he declared, eyes bulging:

I'll put those troublemakers in their place. They've never been given food in the past. Why this new demand today? They'll get the anna a day they always get, and they'll damn well do the work whether they like it or not.  

Then Rai Saheb went off fuming. Hori was puzzled—
all this talk about right and goodness, and then such a sudden outburst of anger.  

II  

(b) **PEASANTS AND THE MONEYLENDERS**

The excessive land-revenue demand, Nazrana 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 moneylender, as depicted by Premchand in his works, is a heartless tyrant, and yet he is indispensable.  

The moneylenders belong generally to upper castes: brahmans, thakurs, banias etc. But there are moneylenders who belong to lower castes as well. In fact, the villagers are so hardpressed that anyone who possesses ten or twenty rupees can set himself up as a moneylender.

Premchand 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 Nokheram 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. The Patwaris (revenue clerks) also are running this business. Lala Pateshwari in Godan is such a

45. See Godan.
46. Ibid., p.126.
47. Ibid., p.323.
character who is a "worshipper of conflict." He always tried to "inspire a life of conflict, setting of fireworks of one kind or another." He makes a profit out of the conflict among the villagers. He deals in moneylending and amasses a huge fortune out of this business.

But the most infamous and wicked of all the moneylenders, as depicted by Premchand, are the brahmans, the village priests. Premchand has

48. 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 someone else's land, nor could he bear to see a peasant hold back a debt to a moneylender...", p.330.

49. Ibid.

50. "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.

depicted one such character in detail in Godan. Pandit Datadin. He makes a profit from all sides and sucks the blood of the tenants 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 tenant. 52

52. 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 people 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 money-lenders:

"...May be you think of the Patronage system as begging, but I consider it as good as landowning 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 make 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.
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 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. He advances him grain, seed and money and in the process appropriating the land and making Hori a hired labourer.

---

53. One of such incidents is when Hori's fields remain without being fallowed because his bullocks were impounded by Bhola 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.54

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 enquiry. The Police-Inspector and the village elders join together and exploit the ignorance and sense of family prestige to extract money from him.

**56. 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.

57. 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'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 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.

**55. Deleted.
"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 villages are harvesting the crop the moneylenders surround them from all the directions. The sugarcane is taken to the mill and "as soon as the

58. "...When the moneylenders saw the cane being harvested, their appetites sharpened as though mice were gnawing their entrance. Dulari came running from one direction, Manguru from another, and Matadin, Pateshwari and the henchmen of Jhinguri Singh from a third." p.226.

59. The tenants had already sold the standing crops of sugarcane 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.
weighing began, Jhinguri Singh stationed himself at the gate of the mill.\textsuperscript{60} 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 over to the concerned tenant.\textsuperscript{61} The tenants "cried and shrieked" but he "paid no attention".\textsuperscript{62} Hori receives hundred and twenty five rupees. Jhinguri Singh "deducted his full dues with interest and turned out some twenty-five rupees to him."\textsuperscript{63} 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."\textsuperscript{64} In fact Girdhar, Shobha and all other

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{60} p.228.
  \item \textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid}.
  \item \textsuperscript{62} \textit{Ibid}.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} \textit{Ibid}.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} \textit{Ibid}.
\end{itemize}
tenants meet the same fate. Some take to weeping, others to cursing their fate, but Hori consoles himself as "though a fire had burned up the sugarcane." 65

The moneylenders keep the tenants in their grip and harass them by charging exorbitant rate of interest because they are aware that the government cannot help the tenant. 66 They know that "law and justice belong

65. 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 money-lenders 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.

66. 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.
to those who have money." 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 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 befall the moneylenders.

67. 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.

68. 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.
III

(C) PEASANT CONSCIOUSNESS, 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. 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 Datadin is a "village trouble-maker" poking his nose into everybody's business. Datadin's son, Matadin, himself "took on a chamar girl" and the whole village knew about this affair but "nobody did anything about that," because he puts on a caste mark on his forehead and reads the holy books, and does "penance

69. 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 bailiff 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.

70. 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.
for his son by bathing rites." Therefore, his reputation does not suffer. Matadin himself had lost

71. 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 Premchand 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. Good habits become a shield protecting us against any accusation of unrighteousness." p.222.

72. 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 true devotee. The painted Jackal who'd touch the feet of a brahman like that?" p.364
has caste, as the *chamers* of the village had thrust a piece of bone in his mouth\(^{73}\) for ill-treating a *chamar* girl, Siliya, whom he had taken possession "body and soul."\(^{74}\) Yet he is a respectable member, since he could afford expiation through purification by *brahmins*.\(^{75}\) Lala Pateshwari's record is no better. He is lecherous and has illicit relations with his maid servant who is a widow.\(^{76}\) Jhinguri Singh had two

---

73. As Siliya's father Harkhu thunders at Matadin "...You can't make *brahmins* out of us, but we can make *chamers* out of you. If you're willing to make us *brahmins*, our whole community is agreeable. As long as that's not possible then become *chamers*. 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 *Chamers*, 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.


75. "...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.

young wives whose amorous activities were an open scandal in the village. 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 moral 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" 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

---

77. "...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 wives 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.

78. As Lala Pateshwari 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 Bhola'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.
the village because he will pollute the whole village and if this "kind of wickedness is tolerated in the village, no man's honour will be safe."79

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 judgement80 but Hori accepts 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."81


80. Dhaniya rejects the judgement 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.

81. P.158. He says that "if it's God's will that we leave the village, there's nothing we can do about it."
Hori cannot think of a life outside the caste. He refutes Dhaniya's argument who says that she has nothing to do with caste.  

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." 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.  

But all this material,  

---

82. 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.  

...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.  

83. 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.
the 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 dharma 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.

85. 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 fore-fathers. And he does so because they did so", op.cit., p.429.

86. "...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, 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." And

87. 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 to suffer from him on account of debt! As far 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 Gobar 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.

88. Ibid. p.146.
the fine ruins him completely. Now he has no grain to feed his family and himself. 89

IV

(D) PEASANTS AND THE COLONIAL STATE

Colonial State was perceived by the peasants through the mediation of (1) The Zamindars who were the creations and puppets of the colonial state and (b) the colonial bureaucracy - "The only form in which the state is perceived" 90 is in terms of the officialdom of Sahibs.

89. "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.185.

90. Quoted by Ranjit Guha, Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency In Colonial India, Delhi, 1983, p.25.
(1) ZAMINDARS AND THE COLONIAL STATE

That the Zamindars are agents of the Colonial State to collect land revenue from the peasants has been perceived by characters representing nationalist leaders, Zamindars, colonial officials and tenants in Premchand's fictional world. Premashankar, in Premasharam considers the landlord as a 'middle man', 'a broker'.\(^{91}\) When asked "You think all our eminent Zamindars, Taluqders and the aristocrats have no place at all in the society? All of them are dacoits?"\(^{92}\) Premashankar replies:

They are not to be blamed. It is the fault of the tradition. The extent to which this tradition is bringing spiritual and moral degradation in our country cannot be imagined. The very cream of our society which is foremost in power, wisdom and intelligence; and which is blessed with qualities of heart as well as of the brain is enmeshed in the ties of idleness, luxury thoughtlessness because of this tradition.\(^{93}\)

\(^{91}\) Premasharam, op.cit, p.146.
\(^{92}\) Ibid, p.156.
\(^{93}\) Ibid, p.156.
Thus 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"\(^94\) 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".\(^95\) And what are these circumstances? Their internal discord, selfishness and the flourishing of such an organisation as has become a manacle for them.\(^96\) 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 source the existence

\(^94\). _Premasharam_, p.207.
\(^95\). _Ibid_, p.207.
\(^96\). _Ibid_.

of which depends on the blood of the peasants.\textsuperscript{97}

And this source is the colonial state:

Why is there rift amongst them? Because of the mal-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.\textsuperscript{98}

That the colonial state is the main cause of miseries of peasants has also been perceived by Zamindars themselves. Rai Kamalanand, a Taluqdar in \textit{Premasharam} concedes that the Zamindars are in fact so many brokers collecting revenue for the Raj on a good commission for themselves.\textsuperscript{99} But Zamindars too have been

\begin{flushright}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{97} \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{98} \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{99} "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 \textit{Malq\textsuperscript{a}sari} 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 sweatments." \end{itemize}
\end{flushright}
castrated by the all powerful colonial machinery. Similar views are expressed by Rai Sahib, a Zamindar in Godan:

I know very well how dissolute, how immoral, how dependent and how shameless we Zamindars have become in these circumstances... My feeling is that we can't even justify ourselves from the point of view of self-interest. In order to sustain such ostentation we have to destroy our consciences to such an extent that we're left without a trace of self-respect. We're forced to plunder our tenants. If 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. At the slightest suggestion of progress, we start trembling and run to the authorities appealing for help. We no longer have faith in ourselves or in our abilities. We're like spoon-fed babies-fat on the outside but weak inside, debilitated and impoverished.

At another place he tells his tenant, Hori:

The payments, of course, are extracted from you and your brothers at the point of dagger. I'm surprised that the blaze of your anger does n't burn us to ashes. But no, there's no cause for surprise. It does not take long to be burnt to ashes, and the agony would be short-lived. Instead

100. 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.

we're being consumed slowly-knuckle by knuckle, joint by joint, finger by finger. We seek shelter from revenge with the police, the officials, the judges and the lawyers; and like beautiful women, we become mere playthings in their hands. The world thinks us very happy - we have estates, mansions, carriages, servants, easy loans, prostitutes and what not. But a person without moral strength and self-respect is not a man, whatever else he may be. A person who can't sleep at night for fear of his enemies, who finds everyone laughing at his troubles and no one sympathizing, whose head is crushed under the feet of others, who's so drunk with dissipation that he completely forgets himself, who licks the feet of the officials and sucks the blood of his people - I don't call him happy. He's the most unfortunate creature in the world. What's more, when the British Sahib comes here on a tour or a hunt, it's my job to trail along after him. One frozen from him and our blood runs cold. We Zamindars would go to any lengths to please him. But if I were to tell you all the complications, you probably wouldn't even believe me. Presents and bribes are to be expected, but we don't even hesitate to prostrate ourselves before him. Our parasitic existence has crippled us. We've lost every spark of faith in ourselves, just wagging our tails before the officials and hoping to win enough favour to get their help in terrorizing our tenants. The flattery of our own hangers-on has made us so conceited and high-handed that we've lost all sense of decency, modesty and service... We've fallen prey to the system, a system.

that's completely destroying us... 103

Another landlord, Onkarnath in the story

'Balidan' tells one of his tenants, Girdhari:

You think that we keep with us what you
give us and sing songs of prosperity.
We only know what we have to go through.
A donation here, prize there. These
ground us to paste. In addition, hundred
of rupees are spent on presents on X-mas
day. If I don't send one to anyone
important, he would just make faces. For
weeks, I go round beseeching the Khansamas
and bearers from morning till evening.
I get from outside all that my children
are starved of and fill the gift pockets.
Sometimes there is the Quanungo on tour,
or the Tehsildar or may be the Deputy
Collector. They come with entourage and
I have to play the host. If I don't
entertain them, I not only cut a sorry
figure but also create enemies. A
thousand or twelve hundred are spent on
such entertainments. This is in addition
to the expenses on the home.104

103. Ibid, p.27.
Ramsewak, a middle peasant narrates
to Hori and Datadin:

"Just the other day, the Zamindar levied
a tax of two rupees on every plough. He
was putting on a feast for some big
official. The farmers refused to pay so
he just raised the rents of the whole
village. And the officers always side
with the Zaminder. It never occurs to them
that the farmer is also a human being, that
he too has a wife and family, and some
honour and status to maintain." Ibid, p.425.

104. "Sacrificed" in Madan Gopal, Premchand: The
Shroud And 20 Other Stories, New Delhi,
1972, p.38.
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 Gayatari 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 of 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. 105

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 Gyaneshwar in Premasharam 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

105. Premasharam, p.78.
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.106

Even the colonial officials believe that the landlords are the agents of the colonial state to collect the revenue from the tenants. Thus the superintendent of police (an Englishman) in Sangram addresses Sabal Singh, a nationalist landlord:

We pay you commission to collect land-revenue from the tenants and you want to undermine us. You are starting Panchayats in the villages, propagating prohibition and stopping our rasad and begar. You are

106. Premchand has depicted the character of Gyaneshankar 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, Jawala Singh, now the Deputy Collector. Gyaneshankar has just now picked up a quarrel with his uncle, Prabhashankar, a feudal landlord. The dispute ranges on the question of oppression of the tenants. Prabhashankar 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.
our slave and casting threatening
look on us. You are eating from our
hands and behaving thus! You are making
a hole in the same vessel from which you
take water. Govt. can ruin you in a
moment. (snaps his fingers). 107

And Sabal Singh replies:

Assuming that the State created us, but
it adopted this policy for its own defence
and selfishness. It is through the grace
of Zamindars that this Govt's reign is
established. Whenever the Govt. was in
trouble the Zamindars supported and helped
it. You are mistaken to believe that you
can rule by eliminating the Zamindars. 108
Your existence depends upon the Zamindars.

And Superintendent of Police further addressed him:

We want you to use you for suppressing
the subjects... It is rebellion to start
panchayats in the villages, to propagate
prohibition, to stop Govt. officials'
rasad and begar. (To open Panchayats in
the villages, to propagate prohibition, to
stop rasad-begar to Govt. officials is
rebellion). 109

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 hailstrom and all the tenants are in

a quandry how to pay the rent. They hold a meeting. Saloni, an old woman suggests to them to make an appeal to Zamindar to remit the rent and since he is a noble man, 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...“110

In fact all other tenants, particularly an old man, support Patu'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.

(ii) COLONIAL BUREAUCRACY

The other most important institution responsible for the exploitation of peasants is the colonial bureaucracy. Premchand has consistently exposed this institution. He regarded it as a coercive instrument of the State. In almost all of his works bureaucracy is depicted as a symbol of the repression by the State.

Premasharam offers a classic example of the manner in which the peasants are exploited by government officials, particularly the low paid, like the chaprasis, orderlies, constables. The forced labour (free labour) or begar is the most conspicuous manner the government officials exploit the villagers.

111. The various institutions of State coercion as depicted by Premchand, are: police, courts, prisons, revenue officials, etc.
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, chaurasis, 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.\textsuperscript{112}

The very opening of Premasharam indicates how the poor villagers are pestered by these "insects".\textsuperscript{113} After a day's forced labour in the camp, 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

\begin{itemize}
\item[112.] 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.
\item[113.] This is the proper word used by Premchand for the officials in later part of the novel.
\end{itemize}
their English superiors. They grumble about the laziness and corruption of the spineless petty bureaucrats.

Before describing in detail the Deputy Collector's (Jwala Singh) encampment, Premchand

114. (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 Gyanshankar: "I 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 countrymen. 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.
takes pains to comment on it. The author states that the idea behind these tours of authorities is doubtlessly the welfare of the public. The aim 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

115. 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 Rajsik (pertaining to arrogance, excitement, rage) insects and moths originate and at the end of rainy season the Tamsik (pertaining to ignorance and 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.
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. 116

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

116. As Kadir Khan says 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 Lasha Kar". 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 Lakhampur. The Tehsildar 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 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.

117. At the time of departure of the officials from the village, the shopkeepers like Bisheshwar Shah, Telé etc. come for payment but nobody pays them anything as most of the chaprasis 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 banias with the threat to increase his income-tax.
The most repressive and therefore, the most corrupt, part of the colonial bureaucracy is the department of police.\textsuperscript{118} 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.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{118} In Godan, Ramsevak, son-in-law of Hori, says about the police and law-courts: "The law-courts and police and so forth are supposed to be for our protection, but no 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 bended knee. He has to make arrangements for food and fodder, for eggs and chickens and for milk and ghee..." p.424.

\textsuperscript{119} In a short story "Updesh" ("Advice", Zamana, May, 1913), the Daroga (Sub-Inspector) himself explains to a landlord the method adopted by him and other policemen to hoodwink the common men. 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...", Mansarover, Vol.VIII, p.292.
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 policemen entrap Ramanath and he is forced to become an approver.\(^{120}\)

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 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

\(^{120}\) 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 Pandopur in Rangbhumi are afraid even to make an appeal to the police that they are being evicted from their houses without being paid compensation.
on the Pathan dacoit who is toting a gun in
hand. But this same Hori becomes nervous in
the presence of a policeman. Sangram, a
play published in 1923, depicts how the officials
and the police indulge in corrupt practices.
All the questions: the oppression by Zamindars,

121. Premchand comments that “Hori was illite-
rate. 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 psycho-
logy 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."
the cruelty of policemen, bribes, the cooked-up cases\textsuperscript{122} and the forged statements which the witnesses are made to mug up like parrots,\textsuperscript{123}

\begin{quote}
\textbf{122.} 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
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textbf{123.} The Daroga entraps some villagers as witnesses against Sabal Singh and makes them remember by heart the false statements:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{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)

\textbf{Daroga} : Decide your cases in the Panchayats.

\textbf{Ali} : Decide your cases in the Panchayats.

\textbf{Daroga} : He had directed you not to do forced labour for any officer.

\textbf{Ali} : (Similarly this is repeated by everyone).

Act IV, Scene i, pp.136-137.
\end{quote}
the loot by police in the name of search——
all this has been dealt with in this play.

124. 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 daylight 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.
Haldhar : 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 iv, p.27."
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. This leaves all the tenants miserable. In [Godan] 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".

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 greatness 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..."

But there is obviously an ultimate economic limit beyond which rent/debt perquisite demands cannot realistically go; in other words, peasant misery is not 'infinitely increasable'. There is a limit beyond which peasants cannot remain silent and cease to remain passive bystanders. However, this aspect would be discussed in the next chapter.