

I SHALL NOT HEAR THE NIGHTINGALE : AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

I shall Not Hear the Nightingale is entirely free from novelistic blemishes, which tend to detract from its merit. It begins with the indications of developing into a political novel, with a focus on the pre-partition activities of the revolutionaries and the terrorists. Politics remains the background for putting into relief other statements. The reason for this perhaps could be the sub-conscious predilections of the artist in Singh which made him expand the thematic horizon and turn the novel into a more encompassing study. Singh exposes the innate smallness of most of the people who camouflage their petty desires under righteous idealistic facades. They manage to convince themselves about the genuineness of the purity of their pursuits and the ennobling image it would create for them among their relatives, friends and masses. At the deeper level, the novel turns into a clash between and evaluation of two sets of values, two ways of life : conventional, non-violent, staunch faith in religion and God and pure, he ascetic, unostentatious but dignified and moral life on the one hand and the modern, sexually promiscuous, morally loose, hypocritical, opportunistic and violent ways on the other. This juxtaposition of the two modes of life – the old and the modern.

Key Words - Patriotism, Revolutionary, mass, nation, grief, political etc.

Introduction

The story of *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* revolves round a Sikh Senior Magistrate, Buta Singh, in the Punjab in the Pre-partition days, and his family, and their relationship with the white deputy commissioner, Mr. Taylor and his Wife, Joyce Taylor, another Hindu Magistrate, Wazir Chand, his son, Madan and shy, but academically bright Daughter, Sita. Buta Singh's family comprises his intensely religious, illiterate wife Sabhrai, his sexually inadequate, but politically ambitious Son, Sher Singh, Sher Singh's Wife Champak, Buta Singh's Daughter Beena, maid servant, Shunno, boy servant, Mundoo and an Alsatian dog, Dyer (he is treated as a member of the family in terms of affection he receives and the services he renders.)

Narration -

In *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, Khushwant Singh with his intense awareness of the Punjabi life, religion and culture deals with issue of tradition versus change and raise socio-political, ethical and moral issues and exposes religious hypocrisy bringing in the scenes of overriding physical urge for sex in the secret affairs of Shunno, widowed servant, and Muslim Peer Sahib, who by religious and social tradition and command of God, are the least expected to indulge in clandestine sex.

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Plot

I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale published in 1959, three years other the earlier one, *Train to Pakistan* (1956), is the second novel of Khushwant Singh. While *Train to Pakistan* has partition as its central theme, *I shall not Hear the Nightingale* has its roots in the freedom movement of the 1942-43 period. Though it does not probe deep into any political ideology and also does not subscribe to any political point of view, besides giving a very inadequate detail about the freedom movement, It does give us a peep into the life and atmosphere during that period. It does give some details about the countrymen's longing for freedom and attempts by some enthusiastic young men preparing for terrorist activities to free the nation from the foreign yoke.

Singh in the novel has captured the trivial to make it significant with his uncommon treatment of the theme, structuring its plot on contradictions and conflicts in the minds of the representative types he has selected to portray the feeling and doings of the Englishmen, of the Indian bureaucrats in service of the British, the cunningness of the village Lambardars, conflicts in the minds of the western-educated youth who wanted to force the British out by the power of the gun.

Singh treats the plot realistically, with stretches of humor and irony, flirting by both men and women, sex scenes, selecting suggestive symbols for an absorbing narrative. It appears that the success of his earlier novel, *Train to Pakistan*, goaded him to look into the past, a period when the quit-India Movement had been launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1942 with bewildering experiments in non-violence. *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* Singh has successfully forced his point about a near-total discord of the theory and practice of non-violence, as preached and

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practiced by Mahatma Gandhi, on the eve of the fractured freedom India attained. The fabric of non-violence was instantly torn to pieces when a large-scale violence with Mass killings erupted in India and Pakistan in the wake of partition.

The novel give a vivid picture of the agonizing past. While non-violence was practiced by the countrymen as an article of faith during the national fight for freedom, the fractured freedom saw that what was known as an invincible weapon against the British was instantly buried deep and replaced by violence.

Sikhism

I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale is more a story of the Sikh culture, faith and life than the story of the Quit India movement dating back to April 1942, The novel gives exhaustive knowledge about a traditional Sikh family. He has graphically pictured how the New years day is celebrated in every faithful Sikh family. Sabhrai, magistrate Buta Singh's wife, is a pious lady. She has a Gurudwara in her house, Since it is a traditional faithful Punjabi family. It is the Guru who is the guide in all matters and whatever progress in the family is achieved is by the grace of the guru only. In her deep moments of crisis, Sabhrai seeks guidance from the Guru spending the entire cold night in the gurudwara. There she recalls the picture of the last warrior Guru to her mind and the thoughts that come to her.

Truly it has been said that for the faithfuls it is the faith that sustains them in moments of crisis and agony. The good thoughts that came to Sabhrai through prayer cemented her decision that she would not advise her son to name his friends and this was final. Singh has detailed the traits of a true Sikh in Sabhrai receiving the Guru's guidance after her night-long stay and prayer for the welfare of her son in the Gurudwara. She goes to meet her son in the lock-up. Sher Singh wants to know from her about the Guru's direction as to what he should do in the given situation.

This expression is in conformity with the Punjabi definition of a Heman is Singh's first novel, Train to Pakistan. Thus, one may infer from the character of Singh in his novels that despite their waywardness they finally conform to the basic tenets of the Sikh religion, as in the case of criminal Juggat Singh in Train to Pakistan, which places on the individuals responsibility of service to friends above self.

Conclusion -

I shall Not Hear the Nightingale is set in Pre-Independence India of the 1940s and traces the lives of two families of the Punjab – one Sikh and the other Hindu. Through them, we are exposed to the political scenario of that time. Post colonial theory presupposes the existence of the colonizer and the colonised - the former usually a distant white power and the latter a relatively less-developed economically but more populous non-white county. In the case of India as Khushwant Singh describes it, the British colonizer succeeded so well in invading the mind of the colonized that Buta Singh considers it to be a matter of pride that he is a loyal follower of the British crown.

In Sanskrit literature, there is the description of a male bird making love with its mate at an isolated place on a riverside. Sage Balmiki who then was having a dip in the river heard the painful cry of the female bird moaning the loss of her companion. This incident touched the inner chord of the sage releasing a floodgate of poetry from his mouth. Here in this case, after shooting the crane, Sher Singh is torn between a sense of pride on his marksmanship

and of grief and guilt at the senseless killing which separated a pair leaving the other in deep agony.

This incident leads to a chain of events which have been narrated with a gripping detail. The story of the novel progresses on the folly of Sher Singh who in excitement and grief forgets to pick up the six empty cartridges which fall into the hands of the village Lambardar, Jhimma Singh, who happens to reach the spot on hearing the shots for an on the spot knowledge of what had really happened.

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