



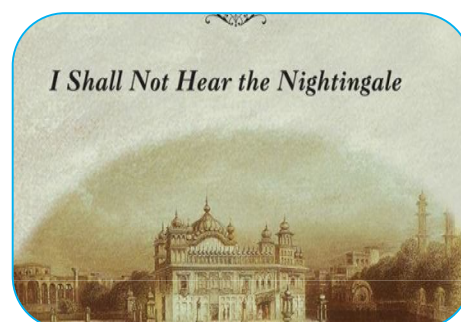
SIKHISAM IN *I SHALL NOT HEAR THE NIGHTINGALE*

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ABSTRACT

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 Year Day is celebrated in every faithful Sikh Family.

KEYWORDS : Faith, Love, Life, Guru, Gurudawara, Moral, Attitude, prayer, religiosity.



Sabhrai, Magistrate Buta Singh's wife, is a pious lady. She has a Gurudwara in her house. The novelist gives a picture of the New Year Day celebration in Sabhrai's house:

It was the New Year's Day by the Hindu Calender. Sabhrai was expecting all the family in the temple for the first-of-the month ceremony. Shunno, the maid servant, came twice to say the others are waiting. Sher Singh had a quick bath and hurried to the room set apart for worship. His father and sister sat cross-legged on the floor facing the Granth. Buta Singh wore his magisterial dress of grey turban, black coat and white trouser. A band of Muslin ran round his chin and over his turban (it was meant to press his beard in shape.) His grey drooping moustache fell on either side of the band. Both his sister, Beena, and his mother, Sabhrai, wore bright pink headpieces above their white Punjabi dresses.

And the look of the prayer room has been described thus:

The prayer room also wore a festive appearance. The holy Granth had been specially draped in silk for the occasion, with roses, marigolds and jasmines strewn in front of it. From the four points of the

velvet canopy above the holy Book hung chains of
colored paper. From either side, sticks of incense
sent spirals of scented smoke upward to the canopy
till the breeze of the ceiling fan scattered them about
the room.

Since it is a traditional faithful Punjabi family, it is the Guru who us 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 crises, Sabhrai seeks guidance from the Guru spending the entire cold night in the Gurudwara. There she recalls the picture of the lass warrior Guru to her mind and the thoughts that come to her are:

There was a man. He had lost all his four sons
and refused to give in to injustice. She was to lose only
one.....

She began to recite the stirring lines:

Eternal God, who art our shield.
The dagger, knife, the sword we wield
To us protector there is given
The timeless, deathless Lord of Heaven.

Sabhrai in true Sikh tradition felt:

She was a Silkh; so was her son. Why did she ever
Had any doubts?

Truly it has been said that for the faithful's it is the faith that sustains them in the moments of crises 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 theGurus'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 know from her about the Guru's direction as to what he should do in the given situation. Sabhrai replies:

He (Guru) said that may son had done wrong. But if
he named the people who were with him he would
be doing a greater wrong. He was no longer to be
regarded as a Sikh and I was not to see his face
again.

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

The Sikh religion and traits of a true Sikh are so popular that even Mrs. Taylor, a foreigner, knows about the valour of Sikhs. She tells a perplexed Buta Singh who is shaken to the root on the arrest of his son, Sher Singh, on a charge of Murder:

Mister Buta Sing, pull yourself together and have
a drink. I was told the Sikhs were brave people.
This is not being very brave, is it?

In *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, the suggestions of Sabhrai to her husband to thank the Guru for the success of Sher Singh in the student union election and prayer for the success of Beena, her daughter, at the examination is indicative of a typically Sikh faith:

Will you say the supplicatory prayer? She asked.....
Don't forget to thank Him for Sher's success at
The election. Also mention Beena's examination:
If the Guru wills she will pass even if her papers
Have not been good.

And after the death of Sabhrai, the tradition goes on. Her place in reading the Granth had to be taken over by Buta Singh and it was for the first time in "living memory of any one of them, she was missing and yet mysteriously present. She seemed to pervade the Gurudwara like the incense which rose spirally from the stick and then scattered lazily all over the room."

Since it was Buta Singh, the head of the family, having taken the place Sabhrai enjoyed in the house, he had to make a brief sermon on how the family should be run after Sabhrai is no more. The sermon is moving and truly reflective of the Sikh way of life. Buta Singh tells:

I hope and pray that all of us will live up to the
ideas of truth Sabhrai stood for. She was like
the gold the Guru speaks of. She has left us and the
light is gone out of our home. We must try to find
our way in life in the same way as she did: through
the Guru's words.

The irony is that but for Sabhrai all others in her family, including the maid servant Shunno and the male servant Mundoo had only a cover of religiosity, which was almost forced upon them by Sabhrai. As a keen observer, Sabhrai had not missed this point when she was alive. She had capacity to maintain her calm even after being suspicious of their behavior in her firm belief that the Guru's words would ultimately purify them and take them on the right path.

Sabhrai, however, was steadfast and remained true to the Guru till her last. When she senses that her end was coming closer and closer, she tells her son whispering in his ear:

I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, my son. May
The Guru give you long life.

This sends shock waves in the family. Crying and wailing starts. And maintaining her composure for day of fulfillment, Sabhrai commands: "what is all this noise?"

And she protests:

You want me to go with the noise of crying in my
ears; say the morning prayer-all together. And do
not stop till it is not over.

This explains fully her strong sense of surrender to the Guru and her will to conquer death even.

Singh in his narrative technique of contrast excel others. In the *Train to Pakistan*, the Sikh youth who plans violence chants Guru's words:

By grace of God, we bear the world nothing but
goodwill.

On the other hand when Juggut Singh in the same novel takes a decision for sacrifice, he asks Sikh Priest Bhai Meet Singh to invoke Guru's blessings for him. Bhai Meet Singh reads:

By hought and deed be judged forsooth,
For God is true and dispenseth Truth.
There the elect his court adorn,
And God himself their actions honor's.
There are sorted deeds that were done
And bore fruit.

SheoBhushanShuklanadRiniShukla in their article "Khushwant Singh: The Novelist", also maintain that the major creative impulse behind Singh's novel has been his faith in the basic tenets of Sikhism.

They observe:

In spite of his disbelief in the superficialities of religion, The novelist is essentially religious and his faith in true Sikhism is the major creative impulse, behind his novels. Khushwant Singh adds an explanatory note about Sikhism and its followers to both the novels and makes it clear that they cannot be properly appreciated without it. The central character of *Train to Pakistan*, Juggat Singh, is cast into the image of a Sikh martyr and his sacrifice is motivated by personal love expanding itself into the love of an entire community.

The basic tenets of Sikhism, it may be stated here, emphasize action as against contemplation and indiscriminating love for all. Sikhism itself was born to promote unity between Hindus and Muslims.

The two critics, referred to above, also detect an objective correlative in Sabhrai's sacrifice in *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*.

They said:

Sabhrai's sacrifice too is prompted by the basic ideals of Sikhism. Khushwant Singh is more explicit in his novel in stating that Sabhrai's heroic act was inspired by the noble example of the last Guru, Guru Givin Singh.

As to the Punjabi way of life, Singh, being himself a Punjabi, details the Punjabi code of morals through reformist Iqbal in his novel, *Train to Pakistan*. Iqbal who is already puzzled at the countrymen's code of morals, finds:

The Punjabi code of moral is even more baffling. For them truth, honour and financial integrity were “all right”, but these were placed lower down the scale of values than being true to one’s salt, to one’s friends and fellow villagers. For friends, you could lie in court or cheat, and no one would blame you. On the contrary, you become a-nar-admi-a he man who had defied authority (magistrate and police) and religion (oath on the scripture) but proved true to friendship. It was the projection of the rural society where everyone in the village was a relation and loyalty to the village was the supreme test.

The above cited para gives a peep into the Punjabi ‘he man’ and on this scale was based the philosophy of Magistrate Hukumchand:

Although he accepted gifts and obliged friends when
They got into trouble, he was not corrupt. He
Occasionally joined in parties, arranged for singing
And dancing-and sometimes sex-but he was not
immoral. What did it really matter in the end? That
was the core of Hukum Chand’s philosophy of life,
and he lived well.

Even the Sikh priest Bhai Meet Singh extols the qualities of HukumChnad as a naadmi. He says:

Hukum Chand is a naradmi-and cleaver. He is
True to his friends and alwyes gets things done for
Them. He has had dozens of realtives given good
Jobs. He is one of a hundred. Nothing counterfeit
About Hukum Chand.

Singh also details the traits of Punjabi policemen saying:

But Punjabi policemen were not the sort who
Admitted making mistakes. They would trump up
Some dort of charge: vagrancy, obstructing officers
In doing their duty.Or some such thing.

The pun in these observations about policemen is that inside the police station there are placards stating.

Bribery is a crime. Honesty is best policy.

Judged by the Punjabi yardstick of morals, Jugga, Badmash number ten, the central character in *Train to Pakistan*, has also been cast in to the mould of a naradmi who is true to his love, Nooran, and who makes the supreme sacrifice to save her expanding his love for her to the entire trainload of refugees who are saved.

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