

**PANORAMA OF DILEMMA AND DIFFERENT SOCIO-CULTURAL
IDEOLOGIES OF CHARACTERS WITH REFERENCE TO
KHUSHWANT SINGH'S *I SHALL NOT HEAR THE NIGHTINGALE***

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Abstract

The present research paper mainly deals with Khushwant Singh's famous novel *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*, a story of pre-colonial India that comprises a big range of novelty of characters. These characters serve the pro-British and anti-British mentalities and create dilemma while on the other hand they are full of differences as their attitudes, thoughts, upbringings, companionships provide a chain of different socio-cultural ideologies among them. The major concern of this research paper is to analyze such different situations of dilemma and different socio-cultural ideologies of characters those made the novel unique and gave new concepts to the literary field. The paper also shows a strong binary opposition of contradiction of ideologies between the father Buta Singh and Son Sher Singh in the novel that represents the clashes between the old society and the new society.

Keywords: Dilemma, Pre-colonialism, Pro-British attitude , Anti-British attitude, Socio-cultural ideologies, Domestic clash.

Legendary literary writer Khushwant Singh gave a creative range consists of a large number of celebrated masterpieces, and *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* is one of them. The conflict between the Britishers and Indians happens to be a major thematic concern in English novels, these concerns may be protest, submission, love-hate relationship and compromise. In the novel *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* Khushwant Singh has revealed an unexplored side of Indian history, which is very painful. *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* deals with the joys and sorrows of a joint Sikh family residing in Amritsar. It also deals with the nationalist movement recording the reactions of many of the characters to the freedom struggle of 1942.

It is an example of his specific style of storytelling and contains much dilemma, different socio-cultural ideologies of various characters along with little humor. The story of the novel is about the different ideologies of different characters belong to Hindu and Sikh families of colonial India in which common civilians give an improved perspective as a chain of important events in chronological order.

I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, mainly deals with a Sikh family in which Buta Singh the head of the family and a British servant has political ambitions and his ideological stand is a

fickle one. For most part, he wishes to keep up the ancestral tradition of unflinching loyalty to the British, but not without a selfish ulterior motive. Here is what he says to his son during one of their arguments: *“The English have ruled us for over a hundred years, and I don’t care what you say, I believe they have treated us better than our own kings did in the past; or the Germans, Italians, or Japanese will do if they win and take over India. We should stand by the English in their hour of trouble.”* (Singh 23)

Buta Singh knows that his sympathy for British rule in India may earn him the scorn of his own countrymen. But he does not mind being unpopular among them as long as he has the patronage of the British ruler, as District Commissioner, Mr. John Taylor. Buta Singh’s attitude to life is opportunistic. He wants to accept contingencies of political life and turn them to his own best possible advantage, so that he can lead a life of security and ensure happiness for his family. He has a great faith and admiration for the British rule in India as he says: *“Loyalty to the Raj had been as much as an article of faith with him as it had been with his father and grandfather who had served in the army. He, like them, had mentioned the English king or queen in his evening prayer, ‘O, Guru, bless our Sovereign and bless us their subjects so that we remain contented and happy.’”* (Singh 23)

He instructs his son Sher Singh that the Indians should help the British in their war against the Germans and other European powers. He further explains: *“I do believe that in this war our interests and that of English are identical. If they lose, we lose, if we help them to win, they will certainly give us more than we have now. We should know who are our friends are and who are our enemies.”* (Singh 23) Sher Singh is not influenced by his father’s loyalty to the British as he reacts very strongly to his father: *“We are far too concerned with other people. Our communist friends are only worried about what will happen to Russians; others think only of what will happen to Britain. Very few of us are bothered with our own future.”* (23)

The central irony of the novel is evident in the dilemma that both the pro-British and anti-British ideologies are cherished by different members of the same family as Basavraj Naikar writes: *“There had always been a mixed reaction among Indians towards the British Raj.”* (147)

The Ideological conflict between father and son continues all through novel. When Buta Singh habitually suggests to his son about Britishers that: *“We Indians have a lot to learn from them.”* (Singh 77) Sher Singh boldly crosses his father and argues that the British too have to learn something from people of India as he comments: *“Like hospitality...tolerance...”* (77) Further Naikar writes: *“The characters in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale can be broadly classified into two groups: one, Sardar Buta Singh, Wazirchand, John Taylor and Lambardar are pro-British in their attitude; two, Sher Singh, Madan and other student leaders are anti-British in their attitude.”* (148) and *“The conflict between pro- British and anti-British ideologies continues all through the novel”* (150) in the form of different socio-cultural ideologies it also *“delineates the paradoxical picture of the colonial encounter between the Indians and and the British including both the positive and negative aspects”* (160).

As Dilemma and different socio-cultural ideologies between these male characters is the basic idea of the novel, but the women characters of the novels are not much bothered about the political life and different attitudes of men folk except Sabhrai the head woman of Buta Singh’s family. Though Sabhrai too is concerned with the security of family like other women characters, yet apart from this she is struck between different perceptions and different thought orientations of her husband Buta Singh and her son Sher Singh.

Sabhrai is a very religious lady and believes in the *Guru Granth Sahib* and the supremacy of Guru Govind Singhji. She is a Punjabi lady and her counterpart is Mrs. Joyce Taylor, a

Britisher. Joyce Taylor shares the same qualities of modesty and benevolence of Sabhrai, Joyce too is concerned with the security and love for the family as Sabhrai does.

Sher Singh's wife Champak represents the lady of high society who always filled with lust for sex. She gives the image of a lady who has an extra marital affair with her husband's friend Madan. The illegal relationship between Champak and Madan cannot be regarded as a usual thing in Indian society, perhaps these two are highly impressed by the attitude of Western society towards marriage.

The illicit relationship between Sabhrai's servant Shunno and Peer Sahib depicted contemporarily to the affair between the upper class Champak and Madan. Here Khushwant reveals the fact that the sexual and sensual urges are very common in all the classes of society. Shunno as being a maidservant always dominates a child servant of Buta Singh's named Mundoo. Mundoo represents the category of child labour, as being a senior Shunno always orders and instructs Mundoo to bother him. Mundoo takes revenge as he offers a medicine to Shunno that creates a gynec problem to her.

Shunno does not consult any doctor, instead she goes to a Peer Sahib. Peer Sahib is not less than a pervert, but he is a hypocrite who takes advantage of Shunno and on the name of her treatment he makes physical relationship with her. The description of hypocrites like Peer Sahib and orthodox like Shunno are the glimpse of social evils prevailing in Indian society.

All the time in the novel Buta Singh always busies himself admiring Britishers like John Taylor and Sher Singh always dreams about India's freedom and his own identity as a freedom fighter, often create dilemmatic situations for Sabhrai. Sabhrai can neither go against her husband's will and nor can support to her son's desires, this dilemma of Sabhrai comes to its end with Sabhrai's death. Subhash Chandra comments upon the death of her in novel: "the deceptively structured surface of the book contains underneath a message or lament." (167) And the dilemma ends here within the death of Sabhrai.

Khuswant Singh dexterously handles the emotional dilemmas and different socio-cultural ideologies of his characters, and shows how they react differently to the same circumstances. Novel is full of socio-cultural aspects of various characters and amongst them dominant is Sikh society and culture as: "Khushwant is known for his stark realism and evocation of the Indian, especially the Sikh culture, in the novel." (Naikar 161)

Thus *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* provides the reader a window to peep into the dilemmatic world of this family caught up in changing times and to understand the turmoil it endures. It is a unique look at the relationship of the British masters with those Indians who were loyal to them, the dilemmas between those Indians and anti Britishers. This helps a lot to those who are interested in Indian history, culture, and psyche. All Britishers, Indians and Pakistanis should read it. It helps the readers to open up their mind and to get the thing what is what.

Works Cited

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