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Depiction of Love in Khushwant Singh's *I Shall not Hear the Nightingale*

Waseem Akram
Lerow Kulgam
J&K, India.

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Abstract:

Khushwant Singh's novel *I shall not hear the nightingale* deals with maternal, conjugal and sexual love. The setting of the story is in pre-independence era. The novel deals with political situations, yet it cannot be termed as a political novel. It deals with motherly love whose matriarchal strength sustains the family in times of crisis. Simultaneously there are some fervent youthful men preparing for revolutionary activities to free the homeland from alien domination. Moreover love can be found in birds also as when one bird is killed, the other dies of grief. Besides love, patriotism can also be found in countrymen as they are engaged in revolutionary activities.

Keywords: Love, Sacrifice, Patriotism, Independence.

While reading Khushwant Singh's novel love can be found in different ways, firstly we found love in country's youngmen who are engaged in revolutionary activities in order to liberate their country from foreign occupation. These young men have formed groups and Sher Singh was elected as leader of the group. These young indians are very much enthusiastic about the liberation of homeland and they believe that they can attain their cherished goals through violence and bloodshed. As we see in the opening scene these people have picked arms and now starts target practice. In order to baptize their arms, Sher Singh kills a crane. Its comrade followed and tried to attack for the reason, ultimately dies of grief. The sarsus crane has been presented here as a symbol of love and sacrifice. Conjugal love infact can be seen in birds also and really an emotional scene to notice crane's love for its lifeless mate in the following lines:

Before they got clear of the swamp the other crane flew back and started circling over them. They saw it high above in the deep blue sky catch the light of the setting sun then heard its cries piercing

the stillness of the dusk. Sher Singh ignored requests to have another go at the flying bird, in any case it was too high and the light was failing fast. When got to the canal bank, it became dark. The cranes flew lower and lower till they could see its grey form with its long legs almost above their heads. They shoo'd it off. The birds disappeared in the dark only to come back again and again". Its crying told them it was there all the time, trying to reclaim its dead, mate (Singh 7).

Sher Singh who is completely failure in his own conjugal relationship with his wife hardly understands the feelings of crane's for its dead mate. Khushwant Singh has indirectly pointed out that neither Sher Singh nor Madan Lai comprehend as to what love is and what man's feelings for woman are. Madan Lai who is a friend of Sher Singh has a very different view about love, as he is obsessed with sexual desires and he indulges himself at the same time with several women.

Secondly we see sexual love in the novel through the character of Champak, Sher Singh's wife. Khushwant Singh was a contemporary novelist, being inclined by western lifestyle, has used bizarre sexual traditions in the novel through Champak. Champak is a sex greedy female as she is exclusive lady in the complete array of indian narrative in english. She is remarkable woman, who all times indulges in sexual activities. She candidly shows her beauty, even on Baisakhi Day the new year day, her mother-in-law Sabhrai was engaged in pious activities, Champak was indulged in sensuous and sexual activities. She took off her garments and stood in front of mirror to think a lot about her amorous body. Khushwant Singh has accurately puts the picture as under:

She loosened her hair and turned round to see how she looked from behind. Her hair fell to the point at which her buttocks rose like softly rounded water melons. There are dimples on either side of rear waist. She turned round once more, inhaled deeply and lifted her breast with the palms of her hand and then ran her fingers round her nipples till they became round like berries. She clasped her arms above her hand and wriggled her hips in the manner of

hula-hula dancers. She drew her belly in as much as she could and stroked it with her hand down on either side to her knees. She studied her face and figure in all the postures she had seen in all the postures she had seen in photograph of nude models. She found the reflection in the mirror to her satisfaction (Singh 49-50).

Sher Singh who is head of the rebel group completely neglects his wife's desires. He doesn't think about her private feelings, hobbies and likings. His discussion with his wife contains recurrent references to his political happenings and he takes it for granted that Champak loves this. Sher Singh is no counterpart for her in sex as he is an imperfect man who fails to satisfy her sexual desires. Sher Singh's father Buta Singh, a superior magistrate in the British Raj has hastily married his son with Champak, who is energetic in sex. Sher Singh completely fails to satisfy her sexual thirst as he is of no match with her. At one event when her wife openly invites Sher Singh for sex, Sher Singh was ashamed and he hurriedly switched off light as writer has appropriately described it in the following lines:

Champak had taken off her Kimono and lay stark naked on her belly she had the pillow between her arms, her legs were stretched apart. Sher Singh knew what this meant 'my God I feel flagged out' he said wearily and switched off the light (Singh 48).

She tries to draw attention of Sher Singh towards sex, but each time he talks about political meetings. At times she pretends to be in the throbs of a nightmare and so contrive herself into Sher Singh's arms and in other times she brings up the topic, that neighbours are gazing her breasts. And in the last when she fails to arouse his passion she takes recourse to other illegal alternatives and this often happens. Khushwant Singh has given reference to a book named as Kama Sutra a historical book on eroticism (sexual activities) but the message and wisdom has taken by Greeks and other people who translated it into different languages to learn methods of getting carnal pleasures prescribed in it. But in India, wedded couple hardly gets opportunity and seclusion to perform its plans. Like D. H. Lawrence, Khushwant Singh also believes that repression of sex has always negative results. He writes:

Unfulfilled sexual impulses result in an obsession with sex and in many perversions which result from frustration, sadism, masochism and most common of all exhibitionism (Singh 48).

Champak at last manages to satisfy her sexual thirst with Madan Lai, a friend and neighbour of Sher Singh and whenever she gets time she feels immense pleasure in the company of Madan Lai. She is more candid and open with him than her husband who is not taking much attention in such things as he is engaged with revolutionary activities. Khushwant Singh believes that there is no relation between sexual fulfillment and morality or loyalty. In this context, comparing Champak with D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley*, Ranjan Kumar Says:

In Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* the wife is very much loyal to her handicapped husband but for the fulfillment of her sexual urge she goes to another person (Kumar Ranjan 60).

The erotic and loving scene between Madan and Champak rightly supports the above said point.

He undid the top buttons of her shirt and let his hand slip on to her warm, rounded breast. She turned her face up to him, their mouths met with hungry passion. Madan gently pushed her against the wall on the side and kissed her on her eyes and glued his lips on hers. The breath in his nostrils became heavy (Singh 127).

Sexual love also found between Madan Lai and Beena, who is daughter of Bhuta Singh and sister of Sher Singh. Madan Lai who is famous cricket star of the college and who have a good figure easily seduced Beena. One particular night Beena went with Madan Lai to see film in the theatre and when the light went out Madan Lai takes opportunity to touch her body and she didn't resist his actions and easily allows him to touch her body and she herself feels pleasure in his actions and the writer has described the scene in the following lines:

As soon as the lights went out, Madan put his hand in the arm of Beena's Chair. This time she knew that it was not an accident. She could hardly believe that anyone, let alone Madan, wants to make a

passionate plain and simple girl like her. It was unbelievably flattering. But he was married and it was obviously wrong. Beena had no doubt about Madan's intentions as his fingers closed round her elbow.....Madan began to caress her arm. Beena did not move. Then his hand brushed against her breast. She shrank away into the farther corner of her chair (Singh 41).

Another incident worth to mention to support the said point is also the sexual encounter between Shunno, maid-servant in Buta Singh's house and Peer Sahib. Shunno was suffering from mysterious ailment and she was suggested by other inmates to go to Peer Sahib who will cure you. Peer Sahib, a muslim saint was a shrewd person who delivers sermons on morality, ethics, celibacy and religious virtues but who acts contrary to his own words. When Shunno approached him to get rid of the strange disease, he attempts to seduce her by calling 'daughter' and slowly, step by step he was found to be enjoying sensual pleasure with her and ultimately seduced her, and he was twenty years senior to her. The writer has portrayed his character in a realistic manner and one believes that such type of incident happens in our society. Peer sahib the so-called muslim saint was in real sense a hypocrite, who violates the chastity of innocent Shunno, and shunno in return hardly resists and one full night Peer Sahib enjoys her body and she reluctantly believes that she might be brought on the right path by doing so. Peer shaib was a sex-hungry person who don't know the meaning of love and who always looks for an opportunity to satisfy his carnal desires and whenever opportunity avails he seduced his followers. The sexual encounter between Shunno and Peer Sahib has been narrated by the author in these lines:

The two lay on the hard brick floor of the starlit courtyard till the early hours of mornings.....Not a word of affection or explanation passed between them (Singh 159).

The Illicit sexual encounter with Peer Sahib and Shunno run counter with the illicit affairs of Champak and Madan, the only difference is that Champak and Madan Lai belongs to the upper class and Peer Sahib and Shunno belongs to the lower class of society and these illegal affairs happen in both classes but the carnal desires are same and universal and their repression yields such results. Lust is an uncontrollable thing and both the sexes cannot repress it beyond

normal limits. Man-woman whether they wear rich clothes or tattered clothes, whether they live in mud huts or concrete buildings, but their inner urge for sex is same. They have same sex organs, same way to give birth to child and other ways of life in this universe.

Lastly we found maternal love through the character of Sabharai who is a pious lady and always a source of comfort in times of distress. She is highly religious and always quotes lines from Guru Granth Sahib which shows her steadfast faith on Guru. She finds her own comfort in her worship of her Guru and reading of Guru Granth, the holy book everyday. We see her love for son, Sher Singh when he was arrested and her mother spends a chilly night in Gurudawara praying, in order to save her son's life. She is ready to sacrifice her life to son, displaying a true mothers love spending an entire cold night outside. Her unwavering faith on God and her devotion towards religion, as only source for her son's release. The following lines clearly depict her faith and her motherly affection:

Not many people stay in temple after the evening service is over.....Only those stricken with sorrow spend the midnight hours in different corners crying and praying for peace....Sabhrai washed he hands and feet in the cistern and went down the marble stairs gripping the silver railing on the side..... she sat down on the hard marble floor. An icy wind blew over the water, through the trellised fence, into her bones..... Sabhrai did not know what prayer one recited during the night; so she went through all she knew by heart. When she had finished the clock had struck two. But the tumult in her mind was not stilled. They were going to hang her son if he did not mention the names of the other conspirators....She felt he son's presence between her arms and more tears flooded down.....so the tumult continued and the tears continued and to course down her cheeks. Her grey head was full of few and her limbs stiff with cold and damp.... by the time the prayer ended, the grey light of dawn had dimmed the lesser stars- only the morning star shone a pure, silvery white. At last there was

peace in her soul. The water was bitter cold and she shuddered as she went down the steps (Singh 226-227).

Sabhrai is very simple indian woman who is devoted to her family, looking after the desires and comforts of every family member. Infact we see her globe limited within the lives of her husband and her children, even though she doesn't know know her son's actions. When Sher Singh was in jail and Sabhrai went to meet her, it was an emotional scene to see the motherly love as the novelist vividly describes the poignant picture as follows:

Mother and son clasped each other in a tight embrace Sher Sing's pent up emotions burst their bounds and he began to cry loudly in his mother's arms Sabhrai his unmanly tears by holding him to her bosom. She kissed her forehead again and again (Singh 231).

After her son's release Sabhrai recovers her health temporarily and spends some happy moments with the family. Although illiterate she did not forget to thank Mrs.Taylor who had persuaded her husband to release her son. Mrs.Joyce Taylor is european counterpart of Sabhrai and she is embodiment of benevolence and moral goodness. Sabhrai's health was failing day by day and she knows that her life is very short but before she wants to see her son's release. So after she can go to God's abode peacefully. It is her love for children that seems to cure her from pain and grief. Sabhrai and sher singh's relationship gives a silent message to the reader that even the time of crisis and disappointment, it is infact love which gives courage and fortitude to the victim to face the loss and suffering.

Khushwant Singh's treatment of love is different in *I shall not hear the nightingale*, is more artistic as compared to what one finds in his other novel *The company of women*. In *The company of women* all most all the women are sexually hungry and always looks for an opportunity to satisfy their sexual desires and even don't know the difference between love and sex, where as in *I shall not hear the nightingale* Sabhrai is an elderly and spiritualist, who always quotes from holy scriptures. She is a pious, religious lady, for whom Guru Granth was the source of all understanding and inspiration. Madan's sister is unconcerned about sex, while Beena sister of Sher Singh was once trapped and is passionately hungry for sex, but later she repents finding

Champak her sister-in-law with Madan Lai. There are different types of women characters in the novel and the novelist had portrayed them minutely. Some characters are pragmatic and life-like.

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