Chapter III

\[ I \text{ Shall Not Hear the Nightingale } \]
CHAPTER III

I SHALL NOT HEAR THE NIGHTINGALE

I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale (1959), Khushwant Singh’s second novel, capturing the zeitgeist of the tumultuous pre-independence days, concentrates on the ‘inner tensions’ and ‘external movements’ of an upper middle-class Sikh family in the Punjab.

Though there are two families contributing to develop the intensity of the novel, the family of Buta Singh, the Senior Magistrate plays the major role. The family of Wazir Chand too supports the novel but not to the extent of Buta Singh’s.

Buta Singh’s family consisted of Sabhrai, the mother, Sher Singh, the son, and Beena, the daughter and Champak, Sher Singh’s wife. Apart from them are Shunno, the maid servant and Munndo the boy servant.

Wazir Chand’s family consisted of his wife, son Madan Lal, a good cricketer and Sita, the daughter, a university rank holder.

In the very beginning of the novel we find Sher Singh, a university student, Madan Lal, son of Wazir Chand and the cronies engage in target practice and rifle shooting in a remote area near a swamp. It seemed to be a preparatory act of their initiation into the revolutionary creed aimed at driving the British out of India through terrorist means. The boys desire to perform a ‘baptism of blood’ in conformity with the ancient Hindu custom of dipping sword in goats’ blood and laying them before the Goddess Durga or Kali.

Sher Singh who is afraid at the sight of blood shoots a Sarus crane with the support of Madan Lal.
While they are happily celebrating the kill, a village headman named Jimmha Singh, a paid informer to the British comes there and condemns the boys for having killed the poor crane. He also demands the licence, to be shown to him. Sher Singh shows the man his father’s licence and also gives him a five rupee note to settle the affair. They give false names of the youngsters to the headman and try to quit the place, while Madan out of curiosity tells the man that Sher Singh was the son of Buta Singh, the Magistrate. The man shows his respect to Sher and lets them go. In their excitement, the boys forget to pick up the six empty cases of bullets, an act which finally leads to nemesis.

Buta Singh, is a hypocrite always towing along the British and declaring that he would not betray them for having eaten their salt. He is a man who is always concerned about his job and promotion. To get the same he stoops to any extent. He always sided the British for their favours.

Sabhrai, the wife of Buta Singh is the only individual becomes the saviour of all these lost souls. She is a highly religious woman pinning her faith in Guru.

Beena, the young daughter of Buta Singh is a student of the university who befriends Sita, the daughter of Wazir Chand. Her frequent visits to Sita’s house bring her into contact with Madan, a well built, famous, handsome, cricketer who is married and has a child. He is portrayed as a womanizer in the novel.

Champak, wife of Sher Singh, is presented as a sexy, erotic lady who is always seen floating in a dreamy world and admiring her physique. Sher’s inadequacy in the sexual life makes her enter into an illicit affair with Madan. She is false and hypocritical towards her husband and professes great love for him for she pretends to love Sher very much.
Sher Singh aware of his grave impotency, diverts his interest towards politics. His only ambition was to be a leader of the Socialist Republic Party. Days pass by and Sher too is on the verge of accomplishing his goal. He leads many movements against the British which leads him into the bad books of the British authorities.

Meanwhile Jimmha Singh, the village headman, starts blackmailing Sher for the incident that had taken place in the beginning of the novel. He starts extracting money from Sher repeatedly. This comes to an end when he is secretly murdered by Sher and his gang. But this makes matter worse.

Taylor, the Deputy Commissioner, asks Buta Singh to bring his son to have an informal talk with him. This makes Buta Singh very happy and he sends his son to meet Taylor. Meanwhile Sabhrai and Mrs. Taylor become close. Sabhrai is much admired by the latter.

One day circumstances support Madan to take Champak and Beena to Shimla where he seduces Champak. Beena comes to know of their relationship. The sixth sense of Sabhrai and her faith in Guru sounds a warning her that something was wrong and at once she feels an urge to save her daughter Beena.

By this time a surprise search is done in the house of Buta Singh in his absence and Sher Singh is arrested for a suspected crime – the murder of Jimmha Singh. Taylor tells Buta Singh that if Sher Singh becomes the approver he would be let free. Buta Singh is much held in favour of the Taylors, and to show his straightforwardness, he refuses to meet Sher Singh in the prison and instead sends a telegram to his wife Sabhrai in Simla.

She returns from Simla with Beena and Champak and is shocked to hear the news of her son being arrested. She arranges for a non-stop reading of the Holy Granth and
goes to meet her son Sher Singh in the prison. The dejected Sher Singh cries. She tells him that she had gone to the Golden Temple the previous night and the message that she got from the Guru: "He said that my 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." (Nightingale, 330-331)

Sabhrai returns after seeing her son in the prison and falls ill. She keeps praying for the well being of her family members and especially for her son Sher Singh. She becomes too ill and the whole family is struck by sorrow. The news of her illness reaches the Taylors and Sher Singh is released by the Deputy Commissioner as a token of gratitude and gift to Sabhrai on the day of Christmas.

This enhances Sabhrai's faith in the Guru. In spite of her illness, she goes on praying to the Guru and asks her family members to join her. This aggravates her illness. "Sabhrai joined her family in the recitation. She seemed to be at complete peace with the world. An earthly radiance glowed in her pale face. A few verses before the epilogue her voice became faint and then her lips stopped moving." (351)

The novel ends on a happy note with the erection of a memorial for Sabhrai and a familiar quotation inscribed with: "All's well that ends well." (359)

History has always provided a staple context for fiction, but a novelist takes a great risk while depending on it for structuring his fictional narrative; the risk seems greater when the history includes a part of the novelist's life. Although history invests fiction with what Henry James calls 'solidity of specification,' over-dependence will limit the novelist's perspective and cripple his vision. And when a novelist exploits a history that is not too distant, he tends to burden his narrative with factual irrelevancies and to
turn his fiction into documentary. In the welter of facts, history is likely to lose its philosophical significance. History can be a useful context only when the novelist knows how to constitute it properly in the frame of his narrative. The raw, unprocessed material of history gets refined in the crucible of fiction where it acquires the properties of an allegory.

A good novelist uses historical material to the extent that it serves as a model for fiction. He takes from history, broad ideas and patterns, and blends them into his narrative in such a way that they become a part of his fictional world. History loses its circumstantiality and becomes a timeless presence in fiction. Raymond Federman suggests that history is ultimately fictional. He evolves a pattern of human destiny from his individual experience and turns his own history into a hallucinatory phenomenon involving all mankind.

It is true that the thought and experience of the novelist comes in the form of a novel. Of course, it is a blend of the experience and imagination of the novelist. Metaphorically speaking, literature is a mirror that reflects the contemporary society. The novel is a literary genre and under the skill of the artist, it attains shape, idea and expression that is thoroughly Indian, though it bears the stamp of universality. In the Indian context, the ideas of literature and social criticism have always been intimately connected. It is a means of expression for the writer and it is ultimately born of the concern of the author towards the characters. The novelist is a man and an artist and hence what he writes can comprehend all that comprises man's life and can project all the grace and freedom of art. But what he writes must neither merely outrage humanity nor
totally deny the imperatives of art: “The most paying and interesting subject of study in this world is what happens to human beings, not only their behaviour, but also their inner feelings and thoughts. These can be depicted through a novel.” (Realism, 188).

The vicissitudes of life is the crux of Singh’s second novel I Shall not Hear the Nightingale. Against the background of the joys and grief of a Sikh family, this novel deals with the nationalist movement recording the reactions of the many of the characters to the freedom struggle of 1942. The novel very subtly portrays the distinction between love and hate in one’s fight against an alien government.

The novel offers insight into the life, and the customs of the Sikhs against the background of a politically resurgent India. The central situation allows Khushwant Singh to explore moral questions of family ties, faith, loyalty and betrayal within the context of the relationship between the British colonizers and their independence seeking subjects. The writer gives the typical products of the modern world–culture, sophistication, divided loyalties, self-centredness, opportunism, servility and sex hunger.

The autobiographical elements of Khushwant Singh in the novel are apparent. The predicament dealt by him is in fact the problem of mankind as a whole. His irony is pervasive. It comes down heavily upon the bloated notions of racial-chauvinism and religious bigotry. It spares neither the Sikhs nor the Muslims. Nor do Hindu pretensions about spirituality and other worldliness escapes Singh’s irony. Like many other novels taken for study, this novel can also, in a sense, be called, a political satire.

Although the novel substantially deals with India’s concurrent political situations in Punjab, it is not quite a political novel since the politics in it apparently lack a deep involvement with the situations, interest and commitment to the political motives and
even the political philosophy. The novel has a limited range and a restricted milieu and it does not go beyond an obvious limit of a socio-political narrative interest, though it has substantive elements of intensity and fullness of passion. Khushwant Singh has no apparent political motive of involvement as such as found in R.K. Narayan’s *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1953) and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938).

Like *Train to Pakistan*, it is not merely a record of real theme, real characters and real incidents, but goes further into making it a creative rendering of the real. In *I Shall not Hear the Nightingale* the novelist portrays realism photographically and satirizes the frailties of man. It is a vivid and exciting depiction giving a panoramic view of contemporary life. This is, in particular, based on the story of a Sikh family living in Punjab during World War II. The time of action of the novel is precisely from April, 1942 to April 1943. *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* attempts to display a deep insight into the human psyche of that period. Haydn Moore Williams describes rightly:

Khushwant Singh followed it up (*Train to Pakistan*) with a novel that deals with the lure of violence and the paradox of heroism. *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* centres on a middle class family in the Punjab during World War II. Where *Train to Pakistan* had been all action, passion and a hymn to the heroism of simple peasants and wild bandits, the new novel was a complex and disturbing study of adolescent psychology. (Doomed, 72)

The empire builders always had the intention to expand their reign by exploring new vistas of land, discover new areas of influence and embark upon voyages in quest of new colonies. Whatever be the pretext for its justification, “colonization dehumanizes even the most civilized man.” (Cesaire, 20) His senseless notions of racial and cultural
superiority tend to pervert his thinking and taint his conduct with arrogance and
snobbery. In his anxiety to lay the foundation of the empire strong and to bring about its
glory, the colonizer sets into motion a process which eventually leads to a total
suppression of the native, a denigration and dislocation of his culture and to a humbling
of his racial pride. Made spineless, the native develops a dependence complex which
results in the loss of his innocence and identity. He starts looking upon the colonizer as
his master. Knowingly or unknowingly, he begins to mimic the colonizer’s mode, manner
and way of life. His determined loyalty to the master breeds mental servility in him.
His dedicated devotion and respect become identical with sycophancy. The dynamics of
this master-servant relationship, depending upon their respective ideas and attitudes that
get expressed in their actions, reactions and behavioural patterns, tend to determine the
growth of colonial consciousness in them.

The only consolation is that the colonizer-colonized attitudes keep changing.
The growth of colonial consciousness among the natives brings about a greater socio-political
awareness of their plight in them. And this political consciousness eventually grows into an
urge for nationalist struggle for freedom from the colonial yoke. On the contrary, the desire to
conserve the gains of colonization makes the colonizer alternate his attitude of ruthlessness
towards the colonized with a policy of caution and conciliation. But, nothing, not even a
conciliatory attitude or a friend gesture, can stem the tide of nationalism. The irrepressible urge
for freedom among the colonized eventually leads to the retreat from the captivated colonies.
This is the story of the rise and fall of colonialism. The British colonial rule in India was an
actualization of the institution of colonialism, an actualization that led to a deprivation of
identity of the natives. It has left an unsavoury taste behind:
Let no one (therefore) cite India as an argument in defence of colonialism.

... He (the Briton) has conferred some benefits upon India, but he has
exorted a tremendous price for them. While he has boasted of bringing
peace to the living, he has led millions to the peace of the grave; while he
has dwelt upon order established between the warring tribes, he has
impoverished the country by legalized pillage. (William Bryan, 20)

The Contemporary literature expressed in it the socio-political reality of India
under the British colonial rule. The twentieth century pre-independence Indian novel in
English replicates the imperial mood, captures the displeasure of the times and describes
the escalating colonial consciousness. It acquainted the freedom – loving people all over
the world with the nationalist aspirations of the Indians, instigated the demoralized
natives with a sense of pride in their cultural heritage and strengthened them with a
determination to fight out the British colonial rule. The twentieth century Indian novelists
in English, like many of their counterparts in other Indian languages, have used the
novel-form as a means to suggest the major need of freedom from social evils, economic
ills and colonial exploitation. It is due to this that 'Freedom' became the major theme and
treated in their own way by some of the Indian English novelists like
K.B. Venkataramani, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Khushwant Singh. Their novels
highlight the growth and spread of political consciousness that changed the Indians’
attitude towards the colonial rule from dependency to nationalism.

A great artist is of his age as well as of all ages. He thinks ahead of his times.
So does Khushwant Singh in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale. Even though India gained
political freedom from British Colonialism over four decades back, “the idea of
colonialism is still triumphant in many sectors of (our) life.” (Nandy, 2) Even in the post-colonial India. And colonial psychology still continues to cloud the Indian consciousness. The British have left and the Indians have taken over. Yet they still ape the modes and manners of their one-time colonial masters. Buta Singh and Sher Singh still continue to be the bane of Indian polity. The former are ingratiating as ever, the latter, adventurist par excellence. The stream of our consciousness still continues to be muddied by the colonial ethos. It is in this context that Khushwant Singh’s lampooning of Buta Singh and his “extremely unsympathetic version of a national hero in Sher Singh” (Gomathi, 50) become significant. “That which begins in the minds of man must also end in the minds of man,” says Ashis Nandy. So does the novelist seem to suggest. He seems to have been prompted by two desires: a fear of what things would be like in free India and a desire to debunk the pretensions that have come to cloud our consciousness and poison our relations even in free India. I Shall not Hear the Nightingale, then, is a plea for freedom from the British colonial legacy which has outlived its time.

Khushwant Singh’s I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale is, “based on a true incident which happened in my family in the ‘Quit-India’ movement.” (Suresh Renjen Bald, 28) It is a fictional re-creation of the colonial theme from the Sikh viewpoint. “The Sikh element,” says S.C. Harrex, “is the most central aspect of Singh’s novels.” (Fire, 181) The novelist has used his characters, Sikh and English, as metaphors to suggest various shades of colonial consciousness. The Sikhs represent the colonized viewpoint and English that of the colonizer. Besides, there are certain minor characters, Indian and Anglo-Indian, who represent the two polarities.
The novel is a vivid saga of terrorism in an up-country Punjab District in 1942. John Taylor is a young British Deputy Commissioner, the Chief Civil Administrative and Police Officer. His role is to hover as the omniscient, manipulative, suggestive representative of an alien Raj whose power and prestige, although damaged by Japanese victories in Malaya and Burma, is still without term and boundary. He rules over a country where the major Indian communities like the Sikh, the Hindu, and the Muslim, are already, in dreadful competition for five years even before partition. The Indians led their life in mutual suspicion and hatred appeased by a wide web of local support and corruption woven mainly by the British. The atmosphere is not a healthy one. The local communities are united only in their fearful hatred of and strong respect for alien English authority. Through Taylor's eyes the sins and weaknesses of this community are ruthlessly exposed.

Khushwant Singh, a committed writer, is a satirist who is quite sensitive to the gap between what might be and what is. He, in this novel, satirizes selfishness and the lust for power and position. Buta Singh, a Magistrate, is the natural leader of his Sikh community; his commitment to the British Raj is complete. His loyalty to the British is maintained by a steady stream of small courtesies, favours, honours, and threats. Sikh magistrate, Buta Singh, and his son Sher Singh, stand as representatives of those Indians who exhibit extreme servility.

His son, Sher Singh, a disaffected student, is the leader of a gang of well-armed but aimless nationalists who exercise their weapons, by futile demonstrations. They shoot rare birds out of season. Finally, to exhibit their strength, they murder a village headman, who has been blackmailing Sher Singh. Taylor knows but cannot prove Sher's guilt.
However, Sher, whom one knows from other evidence about his marriage to be a posturing sexual inadequate, is summoned to an informal interview with the all-knowing, all-seeing, terrifyingly omnipotent English Deputy Commissioner John Taylor. Sher has visiting cards made especially for the occasion. He agrees to his father’s suggestion to wear his father’s silk suit, so that he may look neat. The scene is set for a racial cringe. Taylor is a successful operator. His knowledge of human psychology inspires him to open the interview by praising Sher’s success as student leader. “A kind word from anyone hates or fears has quicker and greater impact than it has from another person – and he, Sher Singh, felt both fear and hatred for Taylor…” (I Shall, 242)

Sher Singh is released without immediate charge. He explores the dregs of self-contempt, mortification, humiliation, and terror. In the end, John Taylor, inspite of his certain sense of Sher Singh’s guilt, lets the matter slide. There is no point in excessive zeal. Partition and the total withdrawal of British authority are too close. True justice and the operation of the law are for quieter times. It is now more important to leave the father Buta Singh, in his complacent self-esteemed, his petty sense of honour. Taylor foresees that nemesis will work cruelly, with the certain collapse of the Sikh community in this Muslim-dominated area that is destined for Pakistan.

Hypocritical to the core, Buta Singh mistakes Taylor’s magnanimity of manner and liberal attitude for a friendship, and flaunts it before his colleagues and family alike. Buta Singh has come to ape the mode and manner of the colonizers. His patronizing attitude towards his colleagues and the local populace, his disdain of rustics like Jhimma Singh and his strong views about such people coming to see him in his house reflect the grafting of the colonial culture on the native tree. Like the Taylors, Buta Singh too didn’t
like “the people invading the privacy of their home.” (213) Khushwant Singh has used him as a metaphor to suggest the split loyalties of the bourgeois among the Sikhs who had compromised their racial pride and dignity to get petty material gains from the English sahibs. This is not to deny the presence of such people in other communities. But the Sikh Magistrate comes handy to the novelist who says that he writes more about the people whom he knows best.

Buta Singh, as his name suggests, is a physical embodiment of the cult of vegetation and the psychology of self-aggrandisement. His actions do not justify the traditional Sikh character. A fictional negation of the Sikh suffix “Singh”, Buta Singh breaks down during moments of crises, and sobs like a helpless woman. No wonder, he cuts a pathetic figure and Mrs. Joyce Taylor has to remind of the traditional Sikh bravery: “Mister Buta Singh, pull yourself together and have a drink. I was told the Sikhs were brave people! This is not being very brave, is it?” (309, 310) The anxiety to prove his loyalty to the English Sahib makes Buta Singh virtually disown his son whose seditious activities and murder of the police informer Jhimma Singh have brought infamy on his father. While the son is languishing behind the iron bars of the prison, the father is worried about his own public image: “My nose has been cut; I can no longer show my face to anyone.” (315) His wife Sabhrai reprimands him for his self-centredness: “You are concerned with yourself. Don’t you want to save your child’s life?” (316) For the sake of petty material gains, Buta Singh can stoop low. His bourgeois ambitions have even dried up the springs of affection in him. Sabhrai’s illness and the consequent death serve as a boon for him to further ingratiate with the English sahib and his wife.
At last the "loyalist" is amply rewarded for the services rendered to the British Crown. Little wonder that the English Commissioner says that the Sikhs have a long tradition of loyalty to the British and that they trusted them more than any other community in India.

On the contrary, the Sikh magistrate’s pampered son, Sher Singh, has cast his lot with the nationalists. Together, the father and the son represent two conflicting facets of colonial consciousness: the loyalist and the nationalist. Their ideas and attitudes are characterized by the generation gap between them. In Sher Singh, the author has suggested militant nationalism. Sher’s bluster is characteristic of the Sikh bravado: “We are Sikhs who do not fear any enemies. We shall destroy all those who stand in our way.” (195) At the same time it symbolizes the general impatience of the younger generation of Indians: its mood, its temper and its attitude of hostility towards the colonial rulers. For all his Sikh bravado, Sher Singh, like his foxy father, uses his nationalist stance as a excuse to satisfy his ambitious nature which reflects itself in his attempt to make a political capital out of his release from the police lock-up. Militancy for him is a psychological defence-mechanism to hide his physical inadequacy. Sher’s failure to satisfy his nymphomaniac wife Champak leads him to wear the posture of a militant nationalist, a posture that can also help him hold out visions of a successful political career by which he would take Champak to dizzy heights of eminence along with him. The novelist makes a perceptive comment in his context: “The more his physical inadequacy gnawed his insides, the more daring he became in his political activities.” (317) Sher Singh, twice a lion, lacks the strength and stamina of a Punjabi Youth, let alone the passionate fire and virility of a Juggut Singh. Even his hatred of virile Punjabi Mussalmans, characteristic of the attitude of his community though, is, in
the main, sparked off by his physical inadequacy. The author gives a negative image of Sikh ethos in him: a jackal trying to play the lion. His name itself has symbolic-ironic connotations. Khushwant Singh doesn’t endow him with fearlessness and obdurate endurance, qualities generally associated with militant leadership. A spurious militant, Sher Singh is as muddled as his father Buta Singh. His hatred of the British obviously leads him to name his Alsatian, Dyer, yet his immense love for Dyer sounds mysterious.

Sher Singh doesn’t possess the resilience of a Debi Dayal, - militant nationalist in Malgonkar’s *A Bend in the Ganges*. The novelist calls him “a hot-house plant blossoming in a green house.” (317) His worship of tough men, his love for symbols of strength like swords crossed over a shield and his possession of guns, pistols, cartridges and the handsomely masculine Alsatian constitute his martial padding which finds expression in his bluster and attitude of hostility towards the British colonialists: “I am not against them: I am for my own country. If they stayed in England, I would have nothing against them ... Who eats whose salt? They suck our blood.” (227)

The construction of plot presentation of situations, modes of presentation of events, description of a character and nature, climax, sequence of events etc., are quite conventional and traditional in the form of a common nineteenth-century novel in English. Commenting on Singh’s style of fictional writing, Mr. Phoebe Adams says:

> Mr. Singh is a business like writer, not given to frills or subtlety. Even so, the novel is not entirely sober. There are mischievous caricatures, of minor officials. ... and a scandalously funny episode in which the family’s mistreated boy-of-all-work takes a rebelaisian revenge. Mr. Singh gives
Santha Rama Rau writes:

Khushwant Singh is direct to the point of brutality, unsentimentally observant, and in his bold characterizations he is ready to explore the least appealing aspects of human nature and relationships. His humour expertly integrated with an essentially sad and cynical story is wild, broad, unsparing. (NAAC, 106)

The novel in its first chapter begins with a meaningful slogan of national movement "baptism in blood", the idea which is apparently contrary to the social atmosphere symbolized by the title. In fact, Khushwant Singh being a wise and professional fictional craftsman, has wanted to exploit the most popular theme i.e. national movement, concurrent during the immediate pre and post independence days. The freedom fighters, Sher Singh and his friends, are shown engaged in target practice and rifle shooting in a lonely rural area near a swamp. They seem to be engaged in a preparatory act of initiating a revolution against the British to oust them out of India through the terrorist and non-violent ways. The young boys, a group of immature college students, plan to perform a "baptism in blood" in the manner of ancient Hindu religious custom of dipping swords in the blood of sacrificed goats and laying them before the Goddess 'Kali' or 'Durga'.

The son of Wazir Chand, Madan Lal, tempts the boys to kill a deer or a duck in the course of shooting practice. The boys move ahead and see a sarus crane. Sher Singh,
the leader of the gang is reluctant to shoot the sarus crane as he believed that ‘if one of a pair is killed, the other dies of grief.’ (I Shall, 167) However at the request of his friends, he pulls the trigger of the gun and “the bullet hit its mark. A cloud of feathers flew up and the bird fell in the mud.” (168) Dyre, the tamed Alsatian dog, quickly runs after the wounded bird and Sher Singh is torn between a sense of guilt and a pleasure of his accurate shooting. He further walks towards the bird and shot again “with revolver”. Sher Singh tries to kill its pair too but failed. The killing of the crane by the young boys symbolizes the existing recklessness and aggressiveness of youth, engaged in violence in the course of struggle for freedom. The painful cry of the male crane for the female one brings out an extraordinary touching and pathetic sense of the two birds, their permanent separation caused by the sudden demise of its mate. After the shooting practice and killing of the sarus crane and meeting the village headman, Sher Singh does not have a good sleep that night. He is disturbed psychologically.

The next day being New Year’s Day by the Hindu calendar, Buta Singh’s family, like all other Sikh families celebrate the day by reading the Granth (Holy Book) and distribute pershad to small children living nearby.

Khushwant Singh here very diplomatically portrays the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law conflict that prevails in the modern Indian families with a touch of sarcasm. Sabhrai was reading the Granth quietly and then she looked up and spoke to her son:

   We have been waiting for you for the last hour. Your father is in a hurry. He has to go to see the Deputy Commissioner.’ ‘How was I to know this was New Year’s Day?’ answered Sher Singh. ‘Nobody told me.’
Everyone knew that Sabhrai’s remarks were really meant for her daughter-in-law. Before Champak could make her excuses, Buta Singh intervened.

‘Let us get on with the service instead of arguing,’ he said. (178)

It was a usual practice of the Buta Singh’s family to have their breakfast after the Granth reading session is over. Buta Singh always made use of this occasion to discuss politics and expose his self-appreciation nature. Sher Singh sided with the Nationalists and Buta Singh with the British. This often led to heated arguments between the father and the son.

Don’t talk like a child,’ replied Buta Singh also warming up. ‘What does their willingness amount to? Nothing. Are the British short of recruits? Despite your Gandhis and Nehrus more turn up than are wanted. And what are you to do with your Muslims? They don’t want a free India until the country is cut up and they get their Pakistan. One should bargain with knowledge of one’s weakness. (181)

Singh throws light on Buta Singh’s loyalty towards the Raj and also attacks the politicians who lacked the far-sighted knowledge on the consequences of independence. Singh also comments on the dishonesty and cunningness of the Muslims who wanted a separate state. The same kind of comment can also be seen in Train to Pakistan.

Khushwant Singh strongly satirizes persons like Buta Singh, who like chameleons, perform a dual role according to their need and safety. He calls Buta Singh a double-faced man. His loyalty towards the British Raj and his own people changed very often.
When he was with English men he protested his loyalty to the Raj. ‘At my age, I cannot change,’ he would say. When he was amongst his own countrymen he would be a little critical of English ways. He let his son cast his lot with the Nationalists and did not object to his organizing the students and making political speeches. He explained his son to Taylor as ‘of your way of thinking’. By many people, Buta Singh was described as double-faced; any compromise in a situation like the one in which Buta Singh found himself would appear to unsympathetic people as double-faced. (182)

Khushwant Singh’s Sikh characters are “highly representative of their social types.” (Mehta, 95) Buta Singh, a senior magistrate of a district in the Punjab, represents the elite among the Sikhs – a segment among the Sikhs notorious for its moral duplicity and politics of opportunism. Buta Singh is unlike his ancestors who became staunch loyalists of the British Empire. Of late, he has suffered a conflict of loyalties. He is a hypocrite playing a dual role to safeguard his status. His bourgeois thinking manifests itself in his self-seeking nature; his mental servility, in his not infrequent sycophancy of the English Deputy Commissioner, John Taylor and his wife Joyce Taylor. Although the Sikh magistrate’s manner towards the English is submissive and although his tone reeks of an ingrained inferiority complex yet he has latent sympathies for the nationalists. He lets his son mingle with them. “don’t say anything which may cause trouble. Remember my position. I do not mind you hobnobbing with these Nationalists – as a matter of fact, it is good to keep in with both sides – but one ought to be cautious.” (183)

After breakfast Buta Singh goes to meet Taylor who had asked Buta Singh and some other Magistrates to meet him to have a discussion. It was the Bhaishaki Day when it is a
holiday to everyone. The Magistrates assemble at Taylor's office. Khushwant Singh here brings to light the double-facedness of the Indians who really are frightened of the British but pretend to be very bold and courageous. The duplicity of the Indians is very clearly exposed. "Don't you know that I told the last Deputy Commissioner? He kept sending for me on every religious festival saying, "Duty first, duty first". I told him plainly: "Sahib, duty or no duty I am going to the Gurudwara. If you do not like it, here is my resignation." (185) But when the orderly asks Buta Singh to get inside to meet Taylor he enters very fretfully. When Taylor offers him a cigarette without knowing that it is considered a sin to smoke in the Sikh community and asks excuse for having done the same, Buta Singh says, "That is all right, Sahib. Just a superstition, explained Buta Singh. His reaction to a similar indiscretion by a fellow Indian would have been a little more emphatic." (185) Instead of getting angry with Taylor he feels odd and pretends to be very happy to work on holidays to get the petty favours of Taylor.

Singh criticizes the duplicity of the British who extract the needful from the Indians by flattering them. By the way they induce into the minds of the Indians what they wanted to convey.

I wish other Indians talked like you, Buta Singh! I rely on you to guide them. I do not anticipate any trouble today but one never knows. A small incident may lead to a major riot. There are some politicians looking for trouble. I am told there are many meetings this afternoon. . . . The Superintendent of police informs me that your son has also organized a meeting of students. I told him not to bother about him. "If he is Buta Singh's son," I said, "we can trust him, even if he is a Nationalist or a Communist or any thing else. (186)
Thus stating, he asks Buta Singh to leave and that he would be meeting him later at the fair. This enlightens the attitude of Buta Singh who feels happy to be in the company of Taylor which would be seen by many of his people.

One of the hypocritic and silly notions of men is to consider themselves to be great while in the company of higher officials and eminent personalities. This is being satirized by Singh in his novels. Buta Singh, when told by Taylor to meet him at the fair, he “was not going to lose the opportunity of being seen in Taylor’s company by milling crowds. Almost the entire Sikh population of the district turned up to see the procession and the fair outside the walls.” (186)

Khushwant Singh while introducing the lifestyle of the Wazir Chand’s family makes a dig at some of the Hindus who don’t give much importance to the rituals and consider human beings to be one among Gods.

Wazir Chand’s home was very much like Buta Singh’s except that it was Hindu instead of Sikh and not so concerned with religions and rituals. As a matter of fact the only evidence of religion in the house was a large colour print of Krishna whirling a quoit on the mantle-piece of the sitting room. Wazir Chand’s wife occasionally put a garland of flowers round it and touched the base of its frame as a mark of respect. She did the same to a portrait of Mahatma Gandhi which was kept discreetly away in the bedroom. (187)

There is a touch of sarcasm about the tradition of early marriage. People arrange marriage for their sons and daughters at a very early age when they are not both physically and mentally ready for the same. As a result of this, the youngsters encounter
problems. Both Madan and Sher Singh belong to the same category. Sher Singh not being able to quench the sexual thirst of his wife turns to politics and Madan voluntarily captured in the sexual world becomes a flirt.

Wazir Chand's son, Madan Lal, who was not so good at studies, is married at a very early age. "Being the only son, he had been married as soon as he had finished school. He did not progress much in his studies." (188) Contrary to Madan, his sister, Sita who was good at studies, attracted Beena, the daughter of Buta Singh. Beena frequents Wazir Chand's house to study together with Sita. She falls a prey to Madan's flattery. He tries to initiate her to sex. His initiation becomes obvious when he says, "Father has gone to see the Deputy Commissioner. Mother is in the kitchen. Sita is studying. Lila is in her room; she is not feeling too well. And yours sincerely is at your service. Madan got up and bowed." (189) Later in the cinema hall he strengthens his advancement.

As soon as the lights went out, Madan put his hand on 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, would want to make a pass at a 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. (193)

Singh attacks those who draw the youngsters into illicit sexual relationship. Perhaps it was due to personal experience that Singh had when he went to England for his higher studies.

Champak, the wife of Sher Singh, is presented as an erotic character. Belonging to a joint family Champak desired to be alone. As soon as the family members went out and
Champak remained alone in the house she made herself nude and posed before the large mirror admiring her own beauty. This sort of attitude develops in people who live in joint families who lack privacy.

Khushwant Singh is certainly a writer of social concern. Like Mulk Raj Anand, Singh too brings out the problems faced by the domestic servants who are ill-treated by the rich and the high in whose household they are employed. The small boy Mundoo is very often scorned and sometimes tortured physically by the fat maid servant, Shunno who takes care of Buta Singh's family in the absence of Sabhrai. And Champak, the exhibitionist, asks Mundoo to bring hot water for her to take bath. She keeps the door unlocked and when Mundoo enters she scolds him of being mannerless. And after taking bath she comes out wearing a thin kimono cloth and lying on the bed asks Mundoo to press her calf muscles. All these are emphasized to reveal the life style of the affluent class. The writer, through Sher Singh, brings to light the real struggle experienced by young labourers and the way they are treated.

Oh, yes, I have,' interrupted Sher Singh impatiently. 'He is just a poor, underpaid boy. The condition of domestic servants is one of the most pressing problems of urban society. We work them twenty-four hours of the day, underpay, underfeed, and underclothe them. Their living ... They are abused and beaten at will. They are dismissed ... I will stop it. (I Shall, 201)

It is also true that when individuals don't get sexual satisfaction they tend to behave strangely. This sort of behaviour is discerned in Shunno too, who becomes normal after having a sexual encounter with the Peer Sahib.
Sex is a part of life and has to be experienced by every one. The urge is prevalent in both the sexes. Khushwant Singh comments on this aspect in India where Indian women don’t enjoy sex to the fullest. They really don’t understand the true meaning of sex. He says:

As newly married girl’s first few experiences follow a soulless pattern. After some days… the girl will go to a tryst in the fields after dark on the pretext of answering the call of nature. She will be brutally ravished by her impatient husband equally anxious to hurry back home to keep up the appearance of having gone out to ease himself. That is all most Indian women knows of sex – an unpleasant subject to men’s desires – necessary in order to have sons bearable because of its brevity. (197)

It is a fact that Khushwant Singh is a spiritualist apart from being a social reformer. He mocks with a light touch of sarcasm the declining trend that every religion is facing. He is sad that man is going astray when his trust in religion starts deteriorating. On the Baishaki day Sabhrai with Shunno goes to the temple leaving Champak in the house. When the crowd had become too much for them in the procession they stay in the temple to wait for its return. “By sunset the mammoth mile-long procession of the afternoon had been reduced by half; an hour later only a few hundred people remained. When it came to the temple there were just the men carrying gas lamps, some volunteers, and the five men who had marched with drawn swords all the way. A last quick prayer was said and the Granth was laid to rest.” (203)

Khushwant Singh being a keen observer of society has clearly presented the workings of society. Gone are the days when on festive days people did not go to work
and involved themselves in rituals and entertainments. But now the trend has changed and people are more concerned about their welfare and give less importance to activities related to religion. This is what Khushwant Singh regrets.

Flattery is one of the tools that the Indians are experts in making use of. Many of the characters in this novel fall prey to this. Buta Singh praises and blows his own trumpet. He says that “These English are funny. . . . Yesterday the Deputy Commissioner offered me a cigarette. I said, “Sahib, today you have done this and I do not mind because we are old friends, but don’t do it again.” Then he started apologizing.” (205) Further when asked by Sabhrai whether he had told Taylor not to call on duty on Baishaki day, he replies: “He apologized himself. He said since I was the only one who really knew the people in the city, he had to rely on me. He also tried to bribe me with promise of a title. I said, “Sahib, you keep your titles. I don’t care for such things.” (206)

Another interesting incident involving flattery is when once a group of Hindu merchants go to Buta Singh’s house to get permission for a procession that was banned during the period. When Buta Singh arrives, “The visitors got up quickly, slipped their feet into their shoes, and greeted him: ‘We touch your feet. . . . You order and we obey. You are the emperor, we are your subjects.’” (211) Buta Singh gives his consent to help them in getting the permission only when he comes to know that they had already gone to Wazir Chand who had refused and had said, “If you want to get anything from Taylor Sahib, ask Sardar Buta Singh.” We would not have put you to this trouble if we hadn’t been told by everyone in the world that the only man who can do it is Sardar Buta Singh.” (212)
It is true as Khushwant Singh says that the Indians are eccentric by nature. They neither made friends nor considered themselves as equals. Singh criticizes the Indians who suffer from inferiority complex within themselves. Though Mr. Taylor and his wife wanted to maintain a good relationship with the Indians, their attempts were in vain. “The Indians refused to be treated as equals; they refused to be frank and outspoken; and at some stage or other they tried to exploit their association.” (213)

Buta Singh goes to meet Taylor to get permission for the procession that the Hindu merchants had sought for. To get permission he uses flattery. He sees Taylor who had come just after having his breakfast and was still in his riding dress which was wet with sweat. When Taylor asks him to sit Buta Singh says, “No, thank you, sir. You have not had your bath. Your shirt is wet and you might catch a cold if you don’t change quickly.” (215) And when Taylor tells Buta Singh that he had misunderstood his temper he says:

Sir, I have to work with you every day. If I started misunderstanding your anger – which I must say is very rare – our work would stop. I have always said, and will say again, that it is a subordinate’s duty to understand his officer’s moods as well as his method of work. When you tick me off, I consider it a privilege because then I know I have made a mistake and have been given an opportunity to correct myself. (216)

Finally he gets the permission for the procession.

Another interesting character that Singh has presented in the novel is Shunno the maid-servant. The regular instigation by her to Sabhrai regarding Madan’s character makes Sabhrai more cautious in her daughter’s life. Hence she asks Beena to not to go to
Sita's residence but rather ask Sita to come over to their house. After a slight remonstration by Beena it is agreed that Champak should go along with Beena for the combined study.

Singh exposes the nature of women who pretend to be too modest. When Champak is asked to accompany Beena she did not protest much for she was inquisitive to know much more about Wazir Chand's household and Madan, in particular, whom she had only seen play against the English Eleven. "I am not at all lonely here. She said in the dutiful tone she adopted in speaking to her mother-in-law. 'But if you want me to go with Beena, I will." (217)

Champak's arrival at Madan's house makes things worse. Madan who had been trying for Beena diverts his attention to Champak who on the other hand, too is ready to offer herself. Singh here exposes the immorality that prevails in society. Neither Madan nor Champak realize that they are betraying their counterparts.

Champak who returns from the house of Madan shares the day's event with her husband Sher Singh. She later says, "You are telling me! He's a big rascal. The way he looked at me! My God, it made me feel as if I had no clothes on. He had his eyes fixed on my breasts all the time. I couldn't look-up." (221) It is not only Madan that she complains about, but also Mundoo, the small boy, who once brings hot water to her for taking bath. "I know. And today he burst into the bathroom on the pretence of bringing in the hot water. I didn't have a stitch on me. Not one thing! My God, I nearly died of shame." (202)

Khushwant Singh has introduced of Shunno as a gossip monger who has an important role in developing the course of the novel. Gossip mongering is certainly not a
healthy habit and has always brought disrepute. Though Singh satirizes this attitude, he makes it his tool to reveal the relationship between Madan, Beena and Champak.

Buta Singh, as usual in his self-pride makes sniding remarks on his fellow Indians. And whenever he did so he excluded himself. He starts praising the English and states that the Indians had to learn many things from them. Sher Singh retaliates when men like Buta Singh praise the English for their courage and chivalry while the Indians are branded as boot-lickers. Sher Singh says:

This has come because of centuries of slavery. Our country has never been free and we have developed a servile mentality. We are frightened of power. Rarely do we get someone who can stand up to it; someone like Shivaji, or Rana Pratap, or our own Guru, Govind Singh'. ‘Sher Singh’s heroes were the tough men of Indian history who had fought the Muslims.’ (225)

However the words of Buta Singh bring out the evils that exist in the society that Khushwant Singh vehemently attacks. When Sher Singh talks about the hospitality and tolerance that exist in Indians, Buta Singh shouts, “Rubbish! Ask the eighty million untouchables what they think of the tolerance of the caste Hindus. Ask the Hindus and Sikhs about the tolerance of the Muslims.” (226)

The friendly family discussion turns into an acrimonious debate. Sabhrai who intervenes to convince both, of her innocence says, “Well, Don’t say that in this house. We eat their salt, and as long as we eat it, we will remain loyal.” (227)

Khushwant Singh makes an attempt to make the readers feel the merits and demerits of independence.
Such a patriotic personality, Sher Singh, was once summoned by Taylor, the Deputy Commissioner through Buta Singh. Sher who had a grudge against the British, refuses at first but later goes to see him. Though he had the youthful blood with a touch of hatred towards the British, he was not able to speak to Taylor. He also sees the three empty cartridges lying on his table. This aggravates his fear.

He walked aimlessly down the road till he found a quite spot. He sat down on the grassy curb with his head between his knees. He was angry, humiliated, and frightened. He wanted to cry but no tears would come into his eyes. He sat like that for a long time till the anger and humiliation receded to the background and only fear remained. Fear of what Taylor might do to him, fear of what the whole family would have to say for the way he had disgraced his father. For the first time in many years, Sher Singh went to the big temple in the city to pray. (243)

Meeting with Taylor brought fear and confusion. Sher Singh is in a dilemma not knowing whether to support the terrorists or the English. But, “he visualized scenes where his Nationalist and terrorist colleagues honoured him as their beloved leader, where Taylor read an address of welcome, and his father proudly looked on.” (258)

Sher Singh is a strange combination of youthful bravado and vested self-interest. He suffers from the weakness of his father’s power and privileges. He longs to take undue advantage of his father’s position of authority as well as the new source of political power. He had somehow believed that he would muddle through, getting the best of the two world: the security provided by his father who was a senior magistrate, and the other
full of applause that would come to him as the heroic leader of a band of terrorists. Now for the first time he realized how utterly incompatible the two were and he simply had to make a choice.

In such a situation, Madan, along with Sita, Beena and Champak goes to Simla. Though Madan’s first target was Beena, he till the end is unable to seduce her. Instead he finds it very easy to entice Champak. Madan had sent his wife to her parent’s house and indulges in sexual activities with Champak and on the other hand Champak leaves Sher Singh and has a good time with Madan at Simla. Such illicit affairs are normal and natural in the upper middle-class families.

The sixth-sense of Sabhrai warns her of some mishappenings that is likely to occur to some of her family members. After a long deliberation she goes to Simla to find Beena severely attacked with cold. The clever pair, Madan and Champak, manages to convince Sabhrai that nothing out of the ordinary had taken place.

In the absence of Sabhrai, Shunno became the mistress of the household. She resumed bullying Mundoo. Tired of Shunno’s ill-tempered behaviour Mundoo plays a trick. He takes the gum and red ink from Beena’s table and poured them into the jug of water that Shunno usually took when she went through her morning routines. For her ailments she did not resort to “Western-trained doctors and their bitter medicines. She had faith in vaids and hakims brought up on ancient Indian and Arabic systems. She had more faith in the prescriptions of holy men who combined spiritual ministrations with medicine. Peer Sahib was such a man.” (272)

The Peer Sahib was a young man under thirty tears of age and had inherited the guardianship of the tomb of an illustrious ancestor – respectfully referred to as Hazrat Sahib – who had made many converts to Islam in the days gone by.
Khushwant Singh mocks at both, the ones who have faith in men wearing a spiritual guise, and men who cheat the innocent. Shunno waits for the arrival of the Peer Sahib and gives her offerings.

Five rupees was many tomes more than the measly copper pice the faithful had offered. Peer Sahib saw them from a corner of his eye; but he was not one to express interest in money – particularly when it came from an infidel woman. He looked up into the sky and said: ‘May Allah be merciful to you, my daughter, and fulfill your wishes. The offerings are not for us; we have nothing to do with money. If you want to give in the name of the Almighty, place it on the tomb of our revered ancestor, now sitting in the lap of Allah.’ (274)

Shunno reveals her ailment to the Holy man only to be seduced by holy instinct. “Shunno repeated the visit several times with several shining silver rupees. Her temper improved: she stopped nagging or beating Mundoo. Instead she bought him sweets from the bazaar. There was no reason for Mundoo to take recourse to bottles of gum and red ink. The cure was a complete success.” (277)

Meanwhile in Simla, neither her intuition nor her shrewd insight into human character gave Sabhrai a clue as to what had passed between Beena and Champak for Madan completely won her heart with his attentions. A month later, events took place which not only shook the country but almost destroyed Sabhrai’s family. Neither her sixth sense nor the Guru speaking through the Holy book gave her any warning. She learnt of them from the headlines of the daily newspaper read out by Madan that the negotiations between the British and the Indian leaders suffered a breakdown and that the police had begun to arrest demonstrators.
Champak in a pretentiously concerned way says, “Then I must get back to my husband. He mixes with such queer types and gets excited very quickly. Bibiji, don’t you think that I should go back? I will do exactly as you tell me.” (279) The next day Madan and Champak arrive at the Kalka railway station which is crowded with English soldiers and coolies. Having found that all the first and second class accommodation had been reserved for the officers and soldiers, Madan buys two second class tickets despite the clerk’s warning that he would find no berths. He refuses to go for the inter and the third class because there were no reservations – nor any privacy.

Madan slips a ten rupee note into the ticket collector’s hand. “The collector gave the note a quick glance and thrust it into his pocket. A ten rupee tip for a man whose monthly salary was 50 rupees was nothing to scoff at.” (281) They board the train. “Madan switched off the light and came to her. ‘No, I have never seen one with absolutely nothing on-never,’ he said hoarsely.” (284)

Sher Singh receives an anonymous letter stating to revolt against the British. A boy comes into the house and tells Sher Singh that they must do something. The same evening the boys try to blow up a small bridge near the canal as a rehearsal. Sher Singh returns home late after having his favourite chappaties with onions to find Champak at home. She says, “I’ve been waiting for you all day. I nearly died of worry. . . . You must not be out late these days. These are dangerous times.” (289) On the other hand, “Only Champak kept thinking how different this was from the evening before. That man’s breath was perfumed with cardamoms and scented betel nuts; and this man’s! She could not avoid smelling the onions even when she breathed through her mouth.” (289)
Khushwant Singh mocks at the racial discrimination that prevailed even in the educated men. Even men who were magistrates like Buta Singh had this attitude in their mind. The Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Taylor had summoned Buta Singh and many other magistrates. When Buta Singh arrived, his fellow magistrate, a Muslim, welcomes him and asks for some news to which the narrator tells, “It was not wise to be honest about politics. They pretended to be against the idea of Pakistan when they were with non-Muslims but gave it their support in every way they could.” (289) Another magistrate says, “The police brought papers of some of these Gandhi disciples to my house yesterday, continued the Muslim a little maliciously. ‘I sentenced them to six months’ detention under the Defence of India Rules.” (289) Buta Singh knew that, “If the papers had concerned a Muslim supporter of Pakistan, the same magistrate would have argued with the police. In that case the police would undoubtedly have arranged to bring the papers to somebody like Wazir Chand or himself and they would have taken pleasure in locking up the Muslim for six months. That was the accepted method of dispensing justice from the lowest tribunal to the highest.” (289, 290) A little later, “Four magistrates, including Wazir Chand, arrived together. The newcomers greeted the others very cordially and took their seats – the Muslims with the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs with the Hindus and Sikhs. That sort of division took place automatically.” (290)

Taylor detains Buta Singh and very diplomatically tells him that he expected some trouble from his son Sher Singh. While leaving he also gives Buta Singh a licence for a rifle that Sher Singh had asked for. Inspite of Buta Singh’s repeated attempts to talk to his son, he could not. Though this incident shows the concern that Taylor had for Buta Singh, it also exposes the tricky nature of the British.
Once on the first day of the month after several attempts made by Buta Singh to talk to his son, made everyone assemble for the prayer. When the time was nearing, the village headman comes in which angers Buta Singh a lot. The day also slips away without Buta’s enquiry about his son. The headman keeps pestering Sher Singh to tell him all the names of the boys who had accompanied him on the day when he shot the sarus crane and tried to blow up the bridge. He also says that one of his bullocks broke its leg while crossing the bridge due to the hole created by the blast. He demanded three hundred rupees as compensation. As a result of this he is shot by Sher Singh, Madan and his cronies. Singh here exposes the typical Indian who tries to make money in any way they can.

The news reaches the Police Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Taylor. He summons Buta Singh and in his absence in his house Taylor issues order for a search of the house and to arrest Sher Singh.

Singh, through this incident, tries to expose the true nature of men like Sher Singh who puts up a false show of courage before the police. It also brings out the cruel nature of the police who worked for the British. Singh depicts how the Indians were treated by them.

Sher Singh slumped on the floor of the verandah with his arms covering his face and began to cry. He hated himself for crying but he could not stop. The two people he feared and loathed most, Anglo-Indians and Muslim policemen from northern Punjab, had insulted and beaten him in his own home and all he could do was to cry like a child. Even his dog had shown more fight. (305)

Meanwhile Taylor enquires Buta Singh about his son and his revolutionary ideas. “It may be hard things to say, but, despite the close living in joint families and the formal
respect paid to the elders, there is less contact, understanding, or friendship between parents and their children in India than in Europe.” (308) Taylor also tells about the missing headman who was also a police informer and that he had reasons to suspect his son for the incident.

Buta Singh sank back in his chair and covered his face with his hands. “Large tears rolled down his cheeks and disappeared in his beard. ’My nose has been cut. I can no longer show my face to the world’,” (309) Taylor also says that if Sher Singh gives the names of his companions, he was ready to make arrangements for the King’s pardon.

He sends a telegram to his wife Sabhrai at Simla to start immediately. She arrives the next day and is received by Mrs. Taylor at the railway station. Later she comes to know about the arrest of Sher Singh. Being shocked she asks Buta Singh whether he had met Sher at the prison which Buta Singh had not. Sabhrai arranges a non-stop reading of the Granth. Buta Singh neither met his son at the lock-up nor let any of his family members do it.

Later an officer in charge brings him the news that Sher Singh had expressed his desire to see his father before making a statement and that Mr. Taylor had especially requested Buta Singh to comply with his son’s wishes. But Buta Singh refuses to comply. “He thought that, in the circumstances, the refusal to obey Taylor would more than ever prove his loyalty to the government and disapproval of his disloyal son.” (322) He also once says that if Sher Singh refuses to make a confession, “What will happen? As far I am concerned, my service, pension, and the land granted by the government all go. But that is a small matter; in addition, the boy will be hanged.” (323)
Sabhrai informs the officer that she would be visiting her son after four days. For three days she keeps praying to the Guru and on the fourth day night she goes to the Golden temple to get the blessings of the Guru and to know what message he had for her son. She meets Sher on the fifth day and tells him what the Guru had said: “He said that my 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.” (330, 331)

The cold atmosphere that Sabhrai had been in the night before in the Golden Temple makes her feverish which results in pneumonia. Mrs. Taylor visits her. The good relationship between them makes Mrs. Taylor talk to her husband about Sher Singh’s arrest. Perhaps due to Mrs. Taylor or lack of evidence against Sher, the latter is released on Christmas day.

As soon as Sher gets the message of his release, he writes a letter to Madan thus:

Dear Madan,

You will be glad to hear that I am being released tomorrow. Please convey this information to all my friends in the University (but not to my parents for whom I want it to be a pleasant surprise).

The police did their worst to get information from me but they failed. I am proud to have been able to serve my God and my country. We should exploit this little service I have done to our best advantage. Greetings to all the comrades in arms.

Long live the Revolution.

Your brother,

Sher.
Sher Singh was flushed with excitement. At long last it had come. "An imprisonment and a heroic stand against torture by the police. What more could anyone ask for? He would be the hero of the city for the next few days. If he kept up the citizens' interest and faith in him, a political career was his for the asking." (342)

Sabhrai's health deteriorates and one day, "She joined her family in the recitation. She seemed to be at complete peace with the world. An earthly radiance glowed in her pale face. A few verses before the epilogue her voice became faint and then her lips stopped moving." (351) never to hear the Nightingale again.

Buta Singh finally goes to meet the Taylors to express his thanks for the help rendered by them and for erecting a memorial for Sabhrai, as well as to get a government job for his son, etc.

The novel ends with the cheerful Sardar Buta Singh thanking Mrs. Taylor by quoting the lines of a famous English poet, "All's well that ends well." (359)

Though the novel just informs of the happenings of a family it is loaded with many issues which needs reformation. Khushwant Singh with his creative talent and the prevailing sources has given what people needed.