Khuswant Singh is the true representative of India literature - Singh’s creative oeuvre consists of ‘Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories’ ‘Train to Pakistan’, ‘I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale’, ‘The Voice of God and other Stories’, ‘Black Jasmine and Other Stories’. ‘A Bride for the Sahib and Other Stories’ and his latest historic fictional work is ‘Delhi’. It is surprising that of the two novels, ‘I Shall Not hear the Nightingale’ (1959) has not received as much critical attention and acclaim as ‘Train to Pakistan’ (1956) did. The latter, in fact, earned for Singh a place in the galaxy of Indo-English fiction writers of the fifties. So much eulogy and scholarship have been devoted to these novels came to be over-shadowed by the farmer’s sprawling popularity and got relegated to the secondary position in the hierarchy of the two novels. There were certain factors, contributing of the resounding success of ‘Train to Pakistan’: the intensity of the traumatic event of partition, the topicality of the theme, and above all the dramatization of the transforming and ennobling power of love which is a life-sustaining and life-
furthering force. The triumph of the ideal appeals to the noble instincts of the reader, makes him believe in his own innate goodness and gives him hope in a world darkened by bestiality, violence and evil. But the fictional process by which the triumph of the ideal is achieved is not altogether flawless (to which I shall revert later). The intention of the present Chapter is to suggest that ‘I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale’ is an equally great work of art in its own right and is a better-crafted novel than ‘Train to Pakistan’.

**REPRESENTATION OF SIKHS AS HISTORICAL HERITAGE**

The story of ‘I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale’ revolves round a Sikh senior magistrate, Buta Singh, in the Punjab in the pre-partition days, and his family, and their relationships with the white Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Taylor and his wife, Joyce Taylor, another Hindu magistrate, Wazir Chand, his son, Madan, and shy, but academically bright daughter, Sita. Buta Singh’s family comprises his intensely religious, illiterate wife Sabhrai, his sexually inadequate, but politically ambitious son, Sher Singh daughter, Beena, maid-servant, Shunno, boy servant, Mundoo and an Alsatian dog, Dyer (he is treated as a member of the family in terms of affection he receives and the services he renders).
Not that ‘I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale’ is entirely free from novelistic blemishes, which tend to detract from its merit. First of all, it begins with the indications of developing into a political novel, with a focus on the pre-partition activities of the revolutionaries and the terrorists. But it does not. Politics remains the background for putting into relief other statements. The reasons for this perhaps could be the sub-conscious predilections of the artist in Singh, which made him expand the thematic horizon and turn the novel into a more encompassing study. The loosening control of the artist over his materials and parameters is a well-known phenomenon of which E. M. Forster and D. H. Lawrence talk in different contexts. Something akin probably happened in the case of ‘I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale’ during the course of its composition and Singh found himself dealing with a much larger theme than he had originally envisaged— the realization of the political ambition of Sheer Singh, coupled with the complications arising for him and his family from the peculiar mould of his character and his sexual inadequacy.

The second flaw in the novel is the incorporation of a rather superimposition of overdoz of sex, which is not surprising, coming as it does from Singh. This is a journalistic stance he has adopted sex sells and he cannot help introducing a lot of sex, whenever he can. The latest novel, ‘Delhi’
confirmatory example, and Singh does not mince words when he says, "I am a dirty old man, I will remain a dirty old man and I will write as a dirty old man." It appears Singh delights in baring as many female bodies and buttocks as possible, and getting as many females laid as he can during the course of the novel, Champak, Sher Singh's wife, is constantly in quest of quenching her excessive sex desire. Besides getting her buttocks massaged (actually caressed) by Mundoo (the boy servant) who goes into convulsion because of rising sex in his body (he is fourteen), has lots of sex with Madan, Sher Singh's friend. Madan, a married man, seduces Beena, Sher Singh's sister who gets a "feverish longing in her body" for the tall, handsome Madan whom she imagines "stripping her and talking her as a man should take a woman." Beena is prevented from copulating with Madan (she does get up from her bed at night with that desire) because he at that moment was ravishing Champak. Though it would have been equally probable, if the author had sent Beena into Madan's room, who disprovable, if the author had sent Beena into Madan's room, who discovered Champak there and both, promising to keep each other's secret, had taken to experience sex once again after a lapse of thirty years and the young holy mullah, leading a celibate life, guarding the tomb of a sacred soul and praying a dozen times a day, justifies his mating with Shunno.
But these flaws notwithstanding, the novel's artistic stature remains unostentatious but dignified and moral life on the one hand and the modern, sexually promiscuous, morally loose, hypocritical, opportunistic and violent ways on the other. This juxtaposition of the two modes of life the old and the modern is comparable with Aldous Huxley's 'The Brave New World' in which the author pours fun on the ultra-modern values through the Savage.

Singh exposes the innate smallness of most of the people who camouflage their petty desires under righteous idealistic facades. They manage to convince themselves about the genuineness of the purity of their pursuits and ennobling image it would create for them among their relatives, friends and masses. Sher Singh is pertinent example of this type, who professes patriotism, practices terrorism with a view to bringing about an armed revolution to throw out the British, but gets exposed as a coward, who cringes shamelessly at the first blow that sis struck on him. He weeps and sheds tears when a white sergeant kicks him in his groins. He feels helpless, loses self-esteem, because "Even his dog had shown more fight." Sher Singh "did not realize that strength was not a natural development of his own personality but nurtured behind the protection provided by his father's position as a senior magistrate and a respected citizen. He was like a hot house plant blossoming in a greenhouse." When the village headman
questions him, Jhiman Singh, about the license of this shooting gun, he gets and pathologically frightened. His conduct during his incarceration, especially during his questioning is ignominious, and presents him shorn of all that is worthy in man. He “knew that if they used any violence, he would tell all he knew without considering the rights and wrong of making a confession.” A significant feature of the modern literature, beginning with James Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’ is the anti-heroic hero it portrays, and Sher Singh fits the bills, though I would like to suggest that ‘I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale’ is not hero but a heroine-oriented novel and that Sabhrai, the true heroine is in the classical mould of the hero. Sher Singh’s moral corruption and his political rise (glorying in the mantle of leadership which falls on him by default) become symptomatic of the malaise afflicting the modern society (in India or elsewhere). Madan, Beena, Champak epitomize the unbridled lust which has replaced the classical concept of love, reducing the relationships to mere body contact, devoid of deeper emotional fulfillment. This is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot’s depiction of the joyless sex in ‘The Waste Land.’ Buta Singh is a double-faced sycophant who professes his loyalty to the British, when he is in the presence of his superior, Mr. Taylor, the Deputy Commissioner, but changes colour when he is in the company of his son or the natives.
Against this bunch of moral midgets, who represent one way of life, is posited the heroic figure of Sabhrai whose mode of life is totally different. She is a repository of towering moral strength and emotional warmth. She valorizes religiosity, integrity, quiet dignity and unpretentious steadfastness to the principles of selflessness, love, loyalty to the family, she displays indomitable courage, integrity of character and sacrificing spirit. Having prayed all night at the Golden Temple for the Guru’s guidance in the matter of advising her son whether or not to disclose his accomplices’ names and get pardoned by turning into Crown’s witness, she tells her son that she would not set eyes on him ever again if he got his friends implicated. She loved her son dearly; she fondly recalled the joys of motherhood, when Sher Singh was an infant and a boy. But she does not flinch from the right course, once she has seen the light by the grace of the Guru. Sitting through the cold night on the bare floor and facing the chilly winds while praying at the temple, she catches pneumonia and dies. Her courage, her sacrificing spirit, her suffering and her death make her a heroine of tragic stature. Love, not the narrow familial love, but the love for humanity and faith triumph. K. R. Srinivasa lyengar’s words about Sabhrai are significant, in this context: “Sabhrai wholly redeems the dimness and murkiness of the general
atmosphere. The fever of sensuality is easier to describe than the radiance of
Paith and this is the reason why Shabhril ‘steals’ the novel.”

Now let us compare the victory of nobility of love in ‘Train to
Pakistan,’ which results in saving the lives of a whole trainload of Muslims,
leaving for Pakistan. First, Juggut Singh’s love is confined to his beloved,
Nooran, whom he wants to save from death. Sabhril’s compassion is all-
enveloping and it disregards the safety of her beloved son. Hence, in ‘I Shall
Not Hear the Nightingale’ the moral vision is broader in its horizon.
Secondly, the final act of compassion in the case of Sabhril springs from her
religiously, selflessness, and kindliness, which are fundamental aspects of
her personality. There is no discordance between what she does eventually
and what she has been. But Juggut Singh (Jugga) has been a budmash, a man
devoid of finer feelings. The change in him, is too sudden and, therefore,
largely incredible. It follows the pattern of the popular Bombay cinema,
where the protagonists, immersed in degenerate ways, abruptly
metamorphose into noble characters. Thirdly, Juggut Singh is more in the
nature of wish fulfillment of the novelist than a probable hero. This is borne
out by Singh’s own words: “The beliefs that I had cherished all my life were
shattered. I had believed in the innate goodness of the common man. But the
division of India had been accompanied by the most savage massacres
known in the history of the country,” 3 and “I thought it was time one exploded this myth of the innate goodness in man. There is innate evil in man. And I just wrote about it, and I did create one character whom I stuffed with the so-called innate goodness of man and he is the only character which is entirely fiction. 3

A lingering sadness envelops the end ‘I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale’ which is not merely the result of the death of the good woman, Sabhrai. It is the novelist’s strident awareness of a world passing, a set of values getting eroded and a “brave new world” (with a new connotation of ‘brave’) emerging in which people like Sabhrai and all that they uphold in the midst of trying and unnerving situations will become either strangers, out of place or extinct. Her death is marked by as much dignity as was her life; and her life was the embodiment of life-sustaining virtues. The title of the novel clearly suggests the brooding, somber vision of the author and can be interpreted in two ways) as Sabhrai’s lament that she will not be able to witness the Independence of the country, and ii) as the death of beauty and goodness of the nightingale-symbolized by Sabhrai.

Thus, the deceptively structured surface of the book contains underneath a message, or a lament far more profound and shocking that can be discerned by a rapid, superficial reading of the novel. ‘I Shall Not Hear
the Nightingale’, excelling in artistic qualities and thematic expansiveness needs to be place alongside, if not higher than its counter part, ‘Train to Pakistan’.

PRESENTATION OF THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF INDIA BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

‘I Shall not Hear the Nightingale’ relates to a period of history in which discipline and administration made more stringent owing to the war put any formidable violence, other than that related to a crime, out of question, but a big question mark seemed to be forming at all established institutions and values. Most of the details relating to the uncertainties and the violence pertaining to the period have been mentioned in the course of the discussion of that novel. One thing, however, has not been specifically mentioned. In the wider context of violence as the major theme of the novel other motifs like the one to be taken up here became only the minor issues. When we come to I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale this subdued theme of falsehood and uncommunicativeness comes to the fore. There cannot be any naked blatant violence in the well-placed and cultured Sikh family of Buta Singh. By venturing a generalization, it may be said that in the times in which institutions and values are on a slippery ground men loose their
rectitude, veracity and credibility. Their loyalties are shaken. They cease to be upright men but not violence for a remedy. Naturally the precautious state of war, the indefinite future of the nationalist movement, the unpredicted shape of things coming up, the fast changing equations at the international front made it difficult for the ordinary man to pin his fate firmly to any cause. The way Hitler was leveling one countryman after another it was difficult to foresee what could happen to India’s Independence at the end of the war. Shall it have to be negotiated with the British or the Germans or the Japanese? Even a firm anti-British reactionary like Debi- Dayal was at his wits end at this confused hour.

Looking to the initial loses in the war the chances that the British will emerge victorious from the melting pot appeared not very bright. Similarly the success at the political front at home could not be a foregone conclusion. In short, the malady of indecisiveness generates, not clear violence, but only subdued surrogate of violence i.e. undecidedness of character. Undecidedness when it gets tangled with the demands of everyday life, people are bound to wobble and lapse into deceitfulness, lying, simulating and withdrawing into their shells. Gian in ‘A Bend in the Ganges’ who is by and large a noble character suffers from the ravages of this shaky ethos.
Later when his cousin in a family feud killed his brother over property, he forgot his vow to non-violence and murdered the assassinator of his brother. He confessed his guilt to the police and was dispatched to the Andemans on a life sentence. Starting from this point his life would be bundle of lies and a series of deceitful deed.

Outrageous violence would have been out of place in ‘I Shall Not Here the Nightingale’ also because Singh has traced the same predicament in the Sikh family. The fact that it is a story of a Sikh family has added yet another tangle to the confusion of the times, namely the chivalric heritage of the Sikh community caught in the conflict with not so chivalric way of life. In the life style of Butta Singh and his family there is internally little scope of violence but the uncertainties of the times push each person in the direction of violence but the uncertainties of the times push each person in the direction of violence, instead of being violent they can only suffer from split personalities and ambivalent social entities. There is a tug of war between the warrior element within the non-violence politics around; the former Sikh loyalty to the British and the present challenge to it.

Thus one more dimension of violence arising from uncertainties and conflicts got to the problems of the family. Singh has delineated the violence
arising from these complexities through different characters allotting different issues to different persons. Ordinarily any one person’s mind, like that of ‘Mrs. Dalloway’ in Virginia Woolf’s novel could be the battle ground of the upheaval of the times, but Khushwant Singh has been more artistic in his handling of this unfinished pictures of the times.

The male characters particularly Buta Singh and the Headman bear the burden of lying, simulating and practicing deception, whereas the Sikh heritage is personified in Sabhrai and by transsevance of the ideal violence to some extent in Sher Singh. However, each character shares the violence of uncommunicativeness. It would not be an exaggeration to say that in this “Novel of Character” the bond of uncommunicativeness, which includes lying, deceiving and concealing is a stronger bond than familial contiguity. As regards women other than Sabhrai they have their share of uncommunicativeness but otherwise stand for the general drift of the sex without any special reference to the violence in the time.

To enumerate the instances of lying and hiding like that of Champak about Mundu and the bucket of Buta Singh viz. his colleagues or the letter that went with the Christmas gift of oranges from our garden bought from the bazaar, would amount to tenuous duplication. It all fairness a novel of character should be given the dignity of a novel of character. But a word
here about the community element i.e., Sikhism would not be out of place, because it goes a long way in determining the psychology and the nature of violence of its surrogates must be viewed in the light of the artistic, religious devotional, traditional contents of their psyche which tended more towards agitation than towards conformity. To some extent their martial identity ill-at ease at present was to a certain extent responsible for drawing in their tentacles and they clung closer and closer of the Granth Sahib. The violence in the novel is therefore a compromise of the inherited Sahib. The violence in the novel is therefore a compromise of the inherited psyche, the race subconscious and the present trend separatist, factional communal behaviour. The two elements are well worked out in the impulsive history of the Sikhs and in the allegiance to the British. Sher Singh and his mother touch to the fringe of the former impulse and Buta Singh falls between the two stools.

Buta Singh true to the arboreal associations of his name should be sheltering Patria-protestus of the family. He is the first of the blissfully ignorant lot poor ironically enough supposed to run the domestic administration as well as the government of the district. The secret of his success at home lies on his defense to the deeds and thoughts of the members of the family as if resigning all caves into the hands of a
propitiated, all protecting Guru. Out of home, he works in the dazel of the aura that falls naturally around him by virtue of his singular official position. His sole endeavour has to be able to keep his immediate superior (Mr. Taylor) impressed with his loyalty and thereby earned a title for himself. He keeps his colleagues good humouredly conscious of his comfortably softer nearness to the English Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Taylor—the nerve-centre of the body corporate.

We first meet Buta Singh the Baisakhi day prayer at his home, long after the activities of his only son Sher Singh have emphatically shown that he knows nothing of son’s terrorist pretensions. He let his son cast his clot with the nationalists and did not object to his organizing the students and making political speeches.  

Buta Singh’s unsuspecting liberality at home made the resultant freedom rather enigmatic to the erring. As the family sat in silence waiting for Buta Singh to say something Sher Singh was particularly nervous. Would his father ask him about misusing the government jeep for a private outing? It is in the same spirit that superseding the refusal of the mother aroused the daughter to go to his colleague Wazir Chand’s house to see Sita.

Instances of such independent, almost enigmatic behaviour are quite numerous. As said above Buta Singh was not likely to be grossly violent.
Under the stress of the times the predictions to violence had to flow down the vicarious channels of lies and falsehood. Why should he present to his family a distorted version of his conversation with the Deputy Commissioner? We know the conversation ran as follows:

Taylor received him in his dark, air-cooled office. The shook hands and Buta Singh took a chair on the other side of the working table. Taylor helped himself to a cigarette and pushed the box in front of his guest. Buta Singh shook his head. Beg your pardon, Buta Singh. I keep forgetting I mustn’t officer a cigarette to a Sikh. Taylor stubbed his half-smoked cigarette. Buta Singh understood that the interview was over. “What are the orders for the day sahib?” he asked, standing up. “No order, Buta Singh,” answered Taylor, coming up “just tell the magistrates to leave information of their movements so that we can get them as quickly at short notice; you can organize that I will be the fair. Shall I see you there? Well, see you later, Buta Singh. Your excellent work in the collection of war funds and in recruiting soldiers will not go unrewarded. I will speak to the Commissioner. Thank you, Sahib. Thank you. You are most kind.” Buta Singh knew that this was a reference to the next Honours list. That sort of thing still mattered although other things mattered more. “Sir, I have a small request to make”. “Yes.” “You know, Sir, I do not ask for personal
favours.” “Yes, yes Buta Singh. Anything I can do for you, I will what is it? Sir, my work in collecting funds and furthering the war effort has caused a lot of envy. I receive letters threatening my life. I am not afraid, but it I could get a police guard at my house for few days, it would stop evil designs. If it is at all inconvenient. No, no. I will speak to the Superintendent of Police; this is a very small matter. Well, good-bye, Buta Singh and thank you once more.” There is nothing to thank me about sir, I thank you. Sir. Good-bye Sir. 6

This conversation is central to the reading of the violent and deceptive behaviour of Buta Singh before the Deputy Commissioner called him into his room. Buta Singh was waiting with his colleagues, the other magistrates in the ante-room. Buta Singh had been trying to provoke them to resent duty on festival days. He said:

I am quite willing to tell the Sahib; I don’t care, answered Buta Singh. 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 don’t like it, here is my resignation. 7
Needless to say that there is no physical violence here, the tone and meaning is unmistakably ‘violence’. When his colleagues refused to be provoke, Buta Singh came forward with a rationale, he said:

Mr. Wazir Chand it is not leadership we lack but unity. I say one thing to the Sahib and another goes behind my back and says something else. 

When it fails to have the desired effect the violent propensity comes out more openly. Buta Singh is angry. He could come out more openly with his temper had the orderly not interrupted. Before he could retaliate, the Deputy Commissioner’s orderly interrupted them and his anger vanished. The conversation with the Deputy Commissioner that followed renders it very doubtful that Buta Singh could say the words, and in the tone to the previous Deputy Commissioner. He talked to his efforts he made in collecting war-funds and requested for his name to be put in the list of Honours. But when he came out he again told a lie and announced triumphantly.

Chutti”! ... Holiday! Go home or wherever you like.”

“Why, what happened?” asked his brother magistrate getting up from their chairs,” “Why do you want to know? I promised you a holiday and I have go you a holiday. Haven’t I been true to my word? 

114
What he says is in direct contradiction to the instructions of the Deputy Commissioner. He had said that the magistrates should leave information of their movements so that they could be contacted easily at short notice, not that it was a holiday and they could go wherever they liked. Obviously the implied mood is that of triumph. His excessive politeness at parting is ironical. The purpose is to get his superiority recognized. This superiority is again asserted in not letting Wazir Chand to obtain the permission for the Hindu procession. Wazir Chand recognizes it though ironically but exclaiming, “Long live Sardar Buta Singh!”

The conversation is willfully distorted when he communicated to the family at the breakfast table. He says:

These English, they don’t know about our customs. 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.” The family took Buta Singh’s stories of his candor with English officials with a pinch of salt. “Did you tell him that Baisakhi is a big day for us and he should not ask people to be on duty?” asked his wife making flies away with a hand towel. ‘He apologized himself. He said since I was the only one who really knew people in the city, he had to
rely on me. He also tried to bribe with a promise of a title’ I said, "Sahib, you keep you titles. I don't care for such things."

When Shunno announces the arrival of the police wallah, which Buta Singh had requested the Deputy Commissioner to provide as a personal favour he makes another tall claim:

"Oh yes I had almost forgotten that part of Mr. Taylor's orders," Buta Singh said in a loudly way. "The senior most official in the district is to have a sort of decorative guard outside his house just like the one outside the Deputy Commissioner’s. I don't think the other magistrates will like that."

Buta Singh is not meant to be presented as a clownish character. No fun is intended from the distortions made by him. It is an attempt for sublimating the violence within him. He could not be true to himself while standing on the shaky ground in a disturbed world. Buta Singh’s habit of quoting things distorting meaning were a part of his effort to find some sort of substitute for his resentment. He resented his colleagues, he resented the public and did not like the idea of his son, (Sher Singh), mixing with the village folk:
Buta Singh said to Champak with his suppressed wrath: "I don’t understand the sort of people your husband mixes with! How third class types! He should use his intelligence a little more."

Violent resentment and the inclination to keep aloof from everything go hand in hand here. His uncommunicativeness is very pervasive. When he is not resenting or lying about things he conceals them. When the Deputy Commissioner gave him the license for Sher Singh he doesn’t hand it over to him nor does he tell Sher Singh about it. It was the headman, Jhimma Singh, who enlightened Sher Singh about it.

Again you hide thing from friends! When we first met you said you had a license and now I discover you have been given one only a fifteen days ago. You ask the Big Sardar your father.

From these shortcomings and weaknesses there may arise an erroneous presumption that these weaknesses are personal to Buta Singh. Buta Singh is so uncommunicative that he could not meet Sher Singh for several days for telling him that Mr. Taylor wanted to see the later.

The confused and uncertain nature of the times creates ambivalence in Buta Singh’s character. On the one hand there is the traditional Sikh heritage
of bravery and loyalty, which are now symbolized in his aspirations for a title on the New Year’s Day; and on the other there is an awareness that established order might crumble into pieces. Either way his lapses are germane to the prevailing ethos. The traits of his character neither individualise him nor do they single him out—they run across the whole tissue of characterization and serve as a bonding force among the family. Each member is secretive, uncommunicative, false and self-styled. Buta Singh is just one among them.

Buta Singh’s futile wait for Sher Singh for several days together counts not so much towards procrastination on the part of the father, but proves that Sher Singh is the busier body. One may be induced to believe that his preoccupations which college studies or politics, meetings, election, S.V.C., terrorism, all rolled into one might to be keeping him busy. Far from it, he was not keen at studies. His concept of nationalism was nebulous. His terrorism has a quixotic flavour about it because it is as much out of place in India of his day as knight errantry was when Cervants paid his homage to it. Singh had not reason to embroider his narrative with lacings of vote catching nationalistic, jargon, sugar coated with songs and sentiments of patriotism. Such chicanery came in vogue much later however, the dates (1942-43)
given, the impinging ethos cannot be overlooked, and certainly it was not conducive to terrorism, at least for two reasons.

1. The strength, confidence and sympathy that the British government had attained during the twenties and thirties and the sense of moral rectitude it had inculcated had almost obviated recalcitrantism. It was this time when, writes Singh, people prayed, “O Guru bless our sovereign and bless us their subjects o that we remain contented and happy”.

2. Gandhi adumbrated an antipode to terrorism for he had personally found that the later would not work. His substitute for terrorism and violence though often to a vast variety of interpretations was a forcible, perhaps, more powerful than violence itself.

Gandhi’s appearance, on the political scene, in fact, brought so many changes:

Things shad began to change. Gandhi had made loyalty to the British appear like disloyalty to one’s own country and traditions. Larger and larger numbers of Indians and begun to see Gandhi’s point of view. People like Buta Singh who had been proud of being servants of his Britannic Majesty were made to feel apologetic and even ashamed of themselves. Loyalty became synonymous with servility, respect for English officers synonymous
with sycophancy. What shook the faith of people like Buta Singh would have withstood the scorn of his countrymen, but he could not withstand the affection of the people like Taylor. Other English officers had kept their distance from Indians to set up the patterns of the rulers and the ruled. Taylor’s professions with suspicion. When he was convinced of the English man’s sincerity, he began to look upon him as an oddity—an oddity he respected and liked.  

Sher Singh on this point is more akin to his’ fighting grandfathers as on the family genealogy. When a prayer “the only lines that had significance were those asking him to discount delusions that caused fear and panic”.  

Madan in this respect is a contrast to him for he has no ancestry to bequeath some heart for his temper. Then, there is a faint suggestion, too faint to stand unsympathetic arguments, that there is a faint to stand unsympathetic arguments, that Sher Singh could be in his element if he had an opportunity to serve in the fighting forces. It is found in the following conversation:

Why don’t they let us help them? Gandhi is willing. Nehru is willing”, said Sher a little warmly.  

The suggestion got lost on Buta Singh in the general drift of non-communication—particularly when domestic considerations had made such a
career for Sher Singh inconceivable. His violent propensities could neither be turned nor channelised:

Being the only son Sher Singh had been pampered in his childhood and allowed to have his own way in his adolescence. Despite this, the two things hankered after were affection and esteem. The one he sought through popularity amongst his colleagues was off-set by his early marriage. Champak, despite her expressions of admiration, gave him uneasy feelings of being a failure. To impress her obsession. The form it took out was to hold out visions of a successful political career by which he would take her to dizzy heights of eminence along with him. The more his physical inadequacy gnawed his insides, the more daring he became in his political activity... with the possession of his guns, pistols, cartridges, and the handsomely masculine Alsatian as a companion, completed his martial padding. Living with those symbols of strength and among people who vaguely expected him to succeed, Sher Singh came to believe in his own future and his power. He did not realize that strength was not a natural development of his own personality but nurtured behind the protection provided by his father's position as a senior magistrate and a respected citizen. He was like a hot-house plant blossoming in a green house. The abuse, beating and arrest were like putting that plant out in a violent
hailstorm. His bluster and self-confidence withered in the icy, cold atmosphere of the police station.  

In psychoanalytical terms the ‘ego’ here clashes with the ‘mock ego’. He should not compromise his father’s patriotism, must impresses his wife, and need not escape his mother piety, yet he cannot suffer himself to become a cipher among the fighters in the college and among his friends. However, Sher Singh’s patriotism has to be (as usually terrorism is) a clandestine adventure. From target practice to bird shoot in, is an innocent transition, but this whole thing comes to be put in a sort of moral balance and ‘mystification’.  

With utility and compunction on one scale, and on the other urge to shoot for terrorism, it is in urge that we have the large chunk of the violence corpus—the cruelty to the crane shot and the response to its haunting mate. The crux of the issue lies in the urge to be violent, bloody. Sher Singh’s fondness for arms and blood together gets a handy mystification in the so-called ceremony of ‘baptism of blood’. If he is too soft the nation has to pay.  

Likewise Madan says:

If you are going to funk shooting birds, you will not do much when it comes to shooting Englishmen.”...You will say, why kill this poor chap, his widow and children will weep, or His mother will be sad. Sher Singh ji, this is what is meant by baptism in blood, get used to the idea
of shedding it. Steel your heart against sentiments of kindness and pity. They have been undoing in our nation. We are too soft.  

By a safe leap of imagination, as the bird approximates to human dimensions, his violence attains to terrorism. The spirit is the same as in his challenges hurled at the short carne’s mate: “Your dear mate is in heaven. Don’t cry. Go and find yourself another wife.” But other unforeseen complications came up. The Vail of the secrecy got pierced not at one but several places. The first is the village headman an unwelcome it ruder asking for the gun license and then there is a canal gateman with log book detecting how Sher Singh had entered a wrong number in the register.  

Sardar Sahib I do not know English but I am not an illiterate. You have put in a wrong number for the car. I will have to report it to the canal officer.  

Sher Singh’s friend Madan is an analogue of Lord Krishna of the Mahabharata as his name suggests that, the veritable Krishna is the family is Wazir Ghand’s son Madan Lal, not that Krishna who is the all perfect god, nor the softer, playful child Krishna who is sometimes thievish and sexually playful but the Krishna who could communicating blend with everyday life, an adolescent who was simultaneously politically and socially sensitive,
practical activist, operating but not identifying with the company of his friends. He stands aloof and away from the turmoil of this struggle, yet never be sparing the guidance and help when higher occasions demand. He occasionally withdraws from the scene because it is the most convenient way for a communicative man to accommodate a non-communicative set up. He more often than not is conspicuous by his absence. The boys remember him when they are faced with the problem of storing arms: They (the arms) have to be either with you or Madan, and Madan is way.  

Then again his absence is felt when they are going to decide to ‘do something’, and they agree to blow up the culvert near the place where Sher Singh had shot the crane. It would be a matter conjecture whether such a decision could be arrived at if Madan had been there.

All the boys who had taken part in the shooting practice were there; only Madan was missing. Since he was in Simla and there was no time to waste, they got down to business. 

Then again Madan’s absence felt when Sher Singh is being interrogated. Keeping Krishna analogue aside there are two distinct aspects of his character, the personal, largely sexual and the altruistic, both equally amoral and disinterested. Singh imaginatively well nigh defies him. As for
his violence, it can be best understood by posing a question. Was Lord Krishna violent? Likewise should Madan be violent? Krishna’s was a selfless stance, and so is Madan’s. He wants no crown of leadership of the terrorists’ gang though he has his strongest say in it; he does not clearly approve the killing of neither a crane, nor a row with the headman and the gateman. Among the college students he commands great influence. But instead of it for his main benefit he lends support to the candidature of Sher Singh more or less in the same spirit in which he plays and brings glory to his own country in the cricket match against the English team. Although Sher Singh had assumed the leadership of the group, Madan was its backbone.

Madan was the strong man of university. He had won his colours in many games and has played cricket for the province. His performance against a visiting English side- he had carried his bat after scoring a century- had made him a local hero. He had brought other boys with him and would have been the leader of the band except that he knew little of politics. 26

He was Sher Singh’s chief supporter and rival, one whose presence was and encouragement and a challenge at the same time. Madan says to Beena with full confidence about the election of Sher Singh.
"Our brother, Sher will go far. He is almost certain to be elected President of the student’s union. He is the best candidate and I am getting all my friends to vote for him." But Beena says, "Your name alone should win him the election everyone knows you in the city." 27

Even in the matters of sex he maintains the same selflessness that fully harmonises with the general lovelessness in all the instances of sex we have in the novel. Needless to say that it is the sort of love that can fit in well with the violence of the non-communicative sort. It is noteworthy that sex in the novel is not a passionate romantic activity. It is loveless and mechanical. For Sher Singh it is a daily routine. Willy-nilly, he has to sleep in a closed room, and discharge his spousal obligation night after night. In Sher Singh’s case this prosaic loveliness of sex is an important and natural corollary of general non-communicativeness among the family, but sometimes a little outside the spectacle in this scene.

Shunno is as good as a member of the family. She has spent a night with the Peer Sahib who did everything but without any show of love. It is pointedly brought out that his intercourse had justification quite different from love.

Shunno complied once more. Peer Sahib came over and examined more carefully. His scrutiny was no longer
confined to clinical ends. With the vows of celibacy to which he was committed, sex got little chance of natural expression. He had to be satisfied with his own devices. These were not the normally accepted expressions then. Neither did intercourse with an infidel woman who might in this way be brought on the right path. And so it was obvious she had come with something of the sort in mind. So the Peer Singh put the other lamp also on his ancestor’s grave and obliged. Shunno made a nominal protest at the start... and then accepted the inevitable... The two lay on the hard brick floor of the starlit courtyard till the early hours of the morning with only the slumbering sparrows and the winking oil lamps on the Hazrat Sahib’s tomb to witness the going on. Not a word of affection or explanation passed between them... the cure was a complete success. 28

Likewise Madan’s sex acts were escapades not love affairs. It was originally Beena, the sister of Sher Singh who was to come to Madan’s room at Simla. The promise to come did not arise out of love as such but an obligation willfully invited.

Beena stood up. Madan took her hands in his and pressed against his heart “you don’t love me”. Said Madan with a leer. How can you say like that? I like you more than any one else... I also like your wife and your sister. I am very fond of
you all.” She replied. She could not bring herself to utter the world “Love.” Madan let go her hands and assumed very hurt expressions. “Let’s go back.” “Please don’t be angry with me” Plead Beena. She came up to his side and took his hand. He did not reply: he withdrew his hand from hers and started to walk back. “Please don’t be angry with me, Bhraji, please!” she pleaded tearfully “I will do anything you want me to do, but don’t be cross with me. I will do anything... Madan stopped and turned to her, he held her firmly by her arms. “You swear you will do anything I ask”! “I swear” “Come to my room tonight everyone is asleep.”

True to her world she does start to go to Madan’s room but Champak has stolen precedence and is already with Madan inside the bolted room and for Madan one is as good as the other. It is concupiscence and just that and no more. On the other occasion with Champak in the railway compartment the stark-naked champak aroused ‘great wonder’ in Maddan that he had never seen one with absolutely nothing on. The next night Champak is with Sheer Singh and for the point of distinction between the husband and Madan is not ecstatic but dirtiful exercise in sexuality.

At the face of it, such loveless sexuality might seem innocuous, but for the novelist it is either a problem or an instrument for it amounts to a distorting denial of an instinct. It calls for exceptions by low-keyed social
milleu in which the motivating urges get weak blunted or seek vicious expressions. If we take into account the various novels there seems to be operating a natural law, means that amorous instinct run high parallel to the instincts for violence. Inversely the two decline together into low key.

That man's (Madan's) breath was perfumed with cardamoms and scented with betel nuts; and this man's! She could not avoid smelling the onions even when she breathed through her mouth.  

Jhimma Singh's violence consists mainly in clever overawing and gentle blackmailing, hence the informer's job suits him the best, rather, naturally arises from his life history and circumstances:

Jhimma Singh was one of many brothers. Being the eldest, he inherited the official function of headman of the village from his father. Thereafter he acquired possession of most of his father's property. He loved his brothers and arranged marriages and employment for them as farm labourers in newly colonized lands a few hundred miles away to the North -West. Malicious tongues spread poison and turned the brothers against him. They took him to court to get possession of their share of land. But providence, assisted by clever lawyers, triumphed over their evil designs. Then they tried violence. That too went against them. They were
imprisoned on charges of attempted murder and Jhimma Singh was given a revolver to defend himself. He gained the confidence of the local police officials by his hospitality, they let him look after the affairs of the village and Jhimma Singh became virtually its ruler. Anyone who has had to live the hard way, literally fighting for survival at every step, doesn’t set much store by values like truth, honesty, loyalty or patriotism. Neither did Jhimma Singh. Each little success meant more and danger from the envious. He had to seek the help of the police to protect him. It turn they expected him to keep an eye on the miscreants. He became a paid informer. Jhimma Singh’s only failure in life was the inability of any one of three wives to produce a child. After the first had remained barren from five years, he married her niece; he cast his protective mantle on a young widow, whose provocative figure and dark eye had given Jhimma Singh visions of many sons. She also let him down. Now that land he formed, the land he leased out to tenants, his own brick built house, his wives jewelry and his account in the savings bank, which was said to have grown from some hundreds to fabulous thousands, was his to give away or squander. This prosperity hurt to fabulous thousands, was his to give away or squander. This prosperity hurt his fellow villagers, particularly, his relations. Although everyone
feared him and some even sided with him in his lawsuits, not one of them loved him. 31

Jhimma Singh has appeared thrice in the novel: twice when he comes to Buta Singh’s house and largely succeeds in working into some secrets of Sher Singh’s terrorism. Sher Singh had grossly underestimated the peasant’s cunning and expected him not to reveal the shooting incident before Taylor Sahab but the headman has his own designs and says:

I tell Taylor sahib about you? Sardaji, how can you say such a thing? The headman looked utterly scandalized...Taylor had empty bullets lying on his table and I though they might have been mine. No Sardarji they are my those Hindu boys with you that day? Asked the peasant taking Sher Singh’s hands in his... They were not all Hindus, he added quickly. He recalled introducing them with Muslim names...You know the boy who introduced us! Yes he is an important officer, a lieutenant in the army. “Wonderful”! Exclaimed the headman. Big people like you should have big friends. After a pause he remarked, He looked like a college boy. 32

Jhimma Singh makes his unwanted appearance just when they have deposited the terrorist arms at Sher Singh’s place. Buta Singh does not like
rustics coming to his residence: "Haven't I told you a hundred times not to allow peasants in this house!" 33

His inquisitiveness, though masked over with politeness, provoked desperation and nervousness in Sher Singh. The six-fired cases of the rifle cartridges left behind by the party were picked up by him to provide him a handle. He allots three for his informer's job to pass them to the Deputy Commissioner and reserves other three for further extortion of money and information from Sher Singh. Jhimma Singh's real significance in the organism of the novel surfaces in his visit to Buta Singh's house. He is a communicative man, the only communicative Indian in the novel and such an unwelcome intrusion into the uncommunicative world sheltered under Buta Singh's roof. A clash is imminent, and such a clash could be complexities do however begin to arise when there is an encounter of two men, of two such adverse mental dimensions: Jhimma Singh picking every world like counter in a game, and Sher Singh feeling every question like stab in the mantel of secrecy and reserve. During his second visit to Sher Singh's house, his inquisitiveness is still more aggressive. He opens his dialogue with the mention of the gun license about which Sher Singh himself does not know.
The headman belched again and stroked his bearded pertinently “Oh, congratulation!” He said as he had just recalled something. “Congratulations for what?” “Congratulations for what! This is now way to talk to friends. You know very well; the gun license. Taylor sahib’s clerk told me he had issued one for you and given it to your revered father.” “Oh, when”? Again you hide things from friends… He continued after a significant pause. “Tell me, you know how to make bombs?” Bombs?” “Bombs… “Our little canal bridge is full of holes. Had the poor thing done any harm to anyone? My best bullock broke its leg in one of fits holes.” Sher Singh felt cornered once more. It was humiliating for a well-to-do, educated, rising politician like him to be put on the spot by an illiterate, uncouth, peasant informer…Sher Singh wanted to yell like a madman. Instead he maintained a sullen silence.  

Jhimma Singh has been able to get in from the horse’s mouth; Sher Singh and his companions threw the bombs. It could mean an unqualified triumph for Jhimma Singh, but for the superimposition of a lust for a handsome blackmail. It goes to the credit to Khushwant Singh’s vision and art that he has grafted the blackmail motive on the informer’s job. Had Jhimma Singh not being stung with a desire to extort, his character would
have been different and in several respects unvulnerable. It could have presented artistic problems in eliminating him, for as things stand he gets into fatal circumstances not so much for being an informer pursuing terrorists, as for making a wrongful demand of three hundred rupees. In the final stage the conversation runs as follows:

You want us to pay you 300 rupees for a damaged bullock. We have brought the money but we must have proof before we pay. Show us the hole in the bridge and your lame bull." For a moment the headman believed the money was in his grasp. Then his shrewd rustic sense told him they were bluffing. "I don’t give any proofs. This is not a court of law". The tone cleared the atmosphere. They all stood up. "In one breath you call Sher Singh brother", said Madan sharply, "In the other you want to make money off him. What sort of bastard in this?  

Prior to this, Jhimma had most gently and effectively put forth the demand along with the cunning bait for more information about the incident and the persons involved in the incident. He was repeatedly asking Sher Singh the names of the ‘babus’. He could get the money himself. His armament of a leather belt charged with cartridges with a holster of a revolver sticking out added to his gorilla like appearance, tall, fat and full of
hair. His weapons have always been tools of violent overawing and intimidation, but they do not stand a match to the trigger happy boys who pride in self-styling themselves terrorists and are determined to maintain secrecy even against odds:

The lumbardar's hand went to his holster. Before he could draw his weapon two of the boys fell on him. He shook them off like a wounded wild bear, shakes off dogs at the end of a chase. Madan and Sher Singh covered him with their pistols. 36

---

There is yet another variety of the lack of communication and it is embodied in Sabhrai. Her whole time devotion to the Granth Sahib proclaims her piety as much as her detachment and non-communication. As a member of the family, she is naturally interested in the welfare of all but when it comes to expressing anything that gives an idea of her interest, the communication is never direct but the Guru and the Granth always interpose. Sher Singh would be elected if the Guru so wishes, Beena will succeed even if she does not answer her question well in the examination if the Guru is kind:

A lot of things are going to happen this month, she said, Beena is going to take her examination; Sher...the election of the University Union. We ought to have a
complete reading of the Granth Sahib. All of you must help. 

A part from her interest in her religious duties there seems to be little in the family set up that might call for her attention and interference. Everything is passing on peacefully, each man to himself and Sabhrai to her Granth. There are two occasions, which need a special mention. When Beena is at Simla the sixth sense in Sabhrai prompts her to reach for her help. Here again the communication passes through the medium of verses from the Granth:

O, Black Buck, why loveth thou
The pasture of fenced in fields?"
Forbidden fruit is sweet, but for a few days
It entices an ensnares then leaves one sorrowing...

But when it comes to conversing face to face there is once again usual non-communication-Beena troubled with cold and Sabhrei having nothing to say. The other occasion arises from Buta Singh’s refusal to do anything for his son in his prison. Sabhrai has to act. This is the occasion when her non-communication has to give way, and it gives way to a sort of violent rectitude, which has been inspired in her by violence that pertained to the Gurus she meditated upon, the fateful night in the Gurudwara.
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 struck two. But the tumult in her mind was not stilled she began to sob. She stifled her sobs and tried to meditate. How could she meditate with Shera crying for help...? Tears coursed down her cheeks... The tumult continued and tears continued to course down her cheeks. Her gray hair was full of dew and her limbs stiff with cold and damp. Why did the Guru not guide her in her hour of need? Had she lost faith? She recalled the time when she had come to the very temple to take part in the cleaning of the sacred pool... People said that he hawk of the Last Guru will come to see the cleaning... with her own eyes she had seen it swoop down from the heavens... It had perched on the pinnacle of the golden dome... People with faith had seen: those without faith neither saw nor believed that others had seen... word had gone round that whenever a band of passive resisters prayed with faith, the Guru himself would appear in their midst and all the lathi blows the police showered on them would fall on him and not on them... She tried to dismiss all other thoughts and bring the picture of the last warrior Guru to her mind. He came as he was in the colour print on her mantelpiece: a handsome cavalier in a turban riding his roan stallion across a stream. On his right was perched his white falcon with its wings outspread. There was a
man. He had lost all his four sons and refused to give in to injustice. She was to lose only one. How had the Guru faced the loss of his children? She began to recite his 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." It went on in short staccato lines infusing warm blood into her chilled veins and making her overhead hot with anger. She was a Sikh; so was her son. Why did she ever have any doubts? 39

Ultimately it is the vision of violence that chastens. Sabhrai who never steps out of the general tenor of non-communication steps into violence. Being unused to it the transition recoils on her. She is confined to her bed and it proves to be her deathbed. Her long cherished desire to see and hear the children of Sher Singh remains unfulfilled. ‘She will never hear the song of Nightingales’. Sabhrai’s uncommunicative nature is pointedly brought at in her contact with Shunno. Shunno, whenever she has an odd opportunity of pouring information and opinion into the ears of her mistress, she never lets it go, but Sabhari indifferently hears her and not a word penetrates her credulity. Like his own novel ‘Train to Pakistan’ that ultimately dodges destruction, Khushwant Singh’s theme is not actual is not mean that there is no violence in ‘Train to Pakistan’, there is surfeit of it, but it is in retrospect
and reflection. The present interest in the man-woman relation, not illusory enough to be called love not selfish enough to be called lust.

Singh is famous (no question of notoriety) for his lifting sex to the pedestal of fine art but here in this novel he takes violence along with sex or to be more exact he has explored the identity of the two. Love as death is a common rather commonplace metaphor. Anand’s male characters might use the expression like ‘you have slaughtered me, your eyes have killed me.’ and so on.

Urdu poetry, a hand made of Khushwant Singh, is much to blame for it, and such instances as having the same expression there can be counted into hundreds. The idea that violence and death have vital associations with sex the man-woman nexus, throws light on violence in many ways. There is a seeming contradiction between them, by reason of which there is a figurative link between them, by reason of which there is a figurative link between them, there is a factual correspondence between the two (sexual violence is not the issue here) there is a simultaneity in the two, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that the two are inter-dependent and complimentary.

In the present context of investigation of historical violence, it would be good starting point to say that violence and sex go hand in hand, whether
we see in phenomenon full in force or glance essence at the mischief of sexes. No one has been able to ignore the vital relationship of the two-Khushwant Singh took an initiative and exclusive note of it, that is all. The central theme in this novel is obvious historical violence, has not omitted this aspect of etymological intimacy between sex and violence, love and death. The statues in the museum at the Kerwad House evoke an exotic response. Singh presented the history in this novel with the different aspect of the history.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Interview with Ashok Chopra, The Hindustan Times (Sunday Supplement), 14 January 1990, p.2.


3 K.R. Srinivasa Lyengar, Indian Writing in English (Bombay: Asia, 1973), p.504

4 From the transcript of a talk for the Australian Broadcasting Commission's Guest of Honour Programme broadcast on 15 April 1964.


7 Ibid., pp. 29-30.

8 Ibid., p.27.

9 Ibid. p. 28.

10 Ibid., p.30.

11 Ibid., p.53.

12 Ibid. p. 54.

13 Ibid., p.63.

14 Ibid., p. 164.

15 Ibid., p. 23.