



Untold War of Independence in The Role of Mahatma Gandhi

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The Glass Palace is a thorough researched presentation of the lesser known theatres of Indian independence war and the role of Indian National Army and the Indian independence movement in it. Ghosh reveals how these factors have the impact on the families, individuals and the soldiers serving the Indian British Army. Ghosh presents the humiliation experienced by the Indian sepoys, the awakening of their conscience regarding the independence of India, the birth of Indian National Army and the contribution of the lesser known people to the Indian independence movement. There is very little writing about the Indian National Army and no one has examined the racism and self-hatred among the Indian British soldiers which sprang up from colonialism. Ghosh examines these things in this book.

Arjun an eager young man gets recruited in the British Indian army and feels very proud of himself in the beginning. He behaves like the colonial masters, but he gets frustrated when he learns that the Indian soldiers are being insulted by the British officers. Even the civilians say that "the [I] Jats- weren't real soldiers; they were just hired killers, mercenaries." (GP, 347) The word mercenary means the soldiers who are paid for their work. Hardy reveals the meaning of mercenary to Arjun that it means a 'fool' who fights from neither enmity nor anger, but in submission to orders from superiors, without protest and without any conscience. Arjun and Hardy undergo a huge upheaval in conscience when they realize that serving the oppressor and thereby gaining some personal status is morally indefensible. They come to know that the Indian sepoys are used to subjugate Indian themselves and others, in the name of England to the economic, ecological and moral devastation wreaked in Burma. Ghosh focuses on the Indians serving in the British army and doing the British Empire's dirty work. In the beginning chapters of the novel Ghosh reminds the readers that in the invasion of Burma two thirds of the soldiers were the Indian sepoys. The role of the Indian sepoys in the British Empire remains significant. As the cries for Indian independence grows louder the role of Indian spays become more crucial and controversial as well. In Bombay, a Sikh unit- a squadron of the central India horse- mutinied, they laid down their weapons and refused to board the ship that was to take them to North Africa. As a result two men were executed and dozens of others were exiled to the prison of the Andaman Islands.

In January 1941, Indian troops were given the task of advancing along the Burmese coast to the port of Akyab. This was done by the battalion of Arjun and Hardy. The real problem for them was the environment. Burma was criss- crossed with jungle, mountains, rivers and mangrove swamps. Moving in such atmosphere was a nightmare experience. There was a constant threat of diseases. Arjun and Hardy appear in confused state of mind, their bewilderment and state of mind is revealed by Ghosh,

It was strange to be sitting on one side of a battle line, knowing that you had to fight and knowing at the same time that it wasn't really your fight... It's strange to be sitting in a trench holding gun and asking yourself; who is this weapon really aimed at? (GP, 406)

The emphasis here is on the passivity of Arjun and his comrades, on their inability to make moral decisions. They become disempowered figures, moved involuntarily by the impersonal forces of colonial history. The implication is that Arjun like other educated Indians behave like English shaped by them unconsciously. While the uneducated soldiers like Kishan Singh were conscious



about their role in British Indian army and how they were being used by the British Empire. English general- Munro quoted about the British Indian army: "The spirit of independence was spring up in this army long before it is even thought of among the people..." (GP, 119) The soldiers those who were conscious regarding the British policy felt that their "loyalty" to the British Empire rang hollow. They grew more and more uncomfortable. In the background there were examples in front of them- the Indian rebel, known as the great mutiny of 1857- Rani Lakshmi Bai, Nana Sahib, Tatyasaheb, Rao Tula Ram, and Mangal Pande who fought the first independence war against the British Empire. There were many violent uprisings laid against the British.

In 1943 the first Indian National Army was founded by Captain Mohan Singh, it came into existence when the English surrendered to Japanese in Burma. The Indian National Army was resurrected by Subhash Chandra Bose, when Captain Mohan Singh disabandoned it. Thousands of the population and many British Indian soldiers joined this army.

The major stream of independence movement was laid by Mahatma Gandhi. Many soldiers from the British Indian army were influenced by the thoughts of Gandhi. He said that "the country can only benefit from having men of conscience in the army. India needs soldiers who won't blindly obey their superiors..." (GP, 258) Number of people followed the path of Gandhi- non-violent resistance to colonialism, while others joined the Indian National Army. The purpose of Gandhi and Indian National Army was the same- to get independence but their means to achieve independence was different. Gandhi used to say that the struggle for independence can not be separated from the struggle for reform. People should not be deceived by the idea that imperialism is an enterprise of reform. To reform the society the evils like caste system, the mistreatment of women, ignorance and illiteracy in the society should be ended. Uma was influenced by the thoughts of Gandhi:

The movement against colonialism was an uprising of unarmed Indians against those who bore arms- both Indians and British- and that its chosen instruments were the weapons of the weaponless, its very weakness its source of strength. (GP, 254)

In 1942, Mahatma Gandhi launched the Quit India Movement. Uma and thousands of supporters were imprisoned. With the backing of the masses Gandhi galvanized the nation and finally forced the British to leave India. Thus Gandhi and his followers achieve the independence for India. Dipesh Chakrabarty talks about the significance of history in relation to the subalterns as Ghosh writes the history of subalterns his "aim is not to reinstate the marginalized groups into history" but to acknowledge the marginalized figures those who contributed for the Indian independence movement.

Ghosh also points out the contribution made by the Indian National Army in India's ultimate independence. It does not mean that Ghosh wants to make the indifference to the non violence resistance of Gandhi against colonialism in achieving independence. The triumph and integrity of Gandhi is unquestionable. In this novel Ghosh intertwines the lives of the fictional characters with the real people and events. Arjun, a British Indian Officer in the novel is Ghosh's instrument for investigating the motivations of those, who join the Indian National Army. Many British Indian soldiers join the Indian National Army for achieving the independence. Arjun, Hardy, Kishan Singh, Ilongo and many others join the Indian National Army. After the end of the World War II, the members of the Indian National Army were brought back to India as prisoners of war. The British Empire regarded them as traitors, because they thought that Indian National Army was an extended Japanese army. Ghosh here wants to suggest that these soldiers were not the traitors but the real heroes. In 1945, the British brought the charges against the members of the Indian National Army, the famous 'Red Fort Three' Shah Nawaz Khan, Gurubaksh Singh Dhillon and Prem Sahgal, a Hindu, a Muslim and a Sikh. There was the protests and demonstrations, strikes against the British.



Numbers of people were shot by the police, thousands of men came on the roads to protest, in spite of the curfew orders. Thus the members of the Indian National Army fought for the cause of independence, ultimately the Indian National Army is responsible for India's independence, and they epitomize patriotism. History writing in India is very much part of "India's Nationalism" as Ghosh brings the comprehensive change in the historical discourse of India by writing subaltern history.

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