

Is Niyaz Khan A Propagandist? - An Exposition Of The Novel Confessions At Black Grave

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Introduction

Propaganda is spreading of rumours, correct or incorrect information or an idea to influence the opinion of society. It may advance an idea or bring into disrepute an opposite idea. In literature, propaganda is used as a technique to manipulate public opinion for or against one idea or another. There is a plethora of literary works which have been used as propaganda to shape public perceptions and direct their behaviours to get a response. Propaganda is a device to convince people which is usually misleading, and promotes a false viewpoint. Turning over the pages of history, one finds that propaganda has played a very prominent role in almost all the revolutions and other prominent world occurrences.

In literature, propaganda is deployed to focus the author's viewpoint. In *Animal Farm* which was written after the Russian Revolution, George Orwell has used anti-communist agenda as its major theme. The author exploits and manipulates the speech of the character Squealer, a pig who has been portrayed as Napoleon's spokesperson. Squealer's role as a propagandist is evident when he uses manipulated speech to disapprove of Snowball's part in the uprising revolt after his banishment from the farm. He exploits the stupidity of animals for his benefits, and plays with their minds by describing a different side of events in the battle of cowshed. Similarly, Adam Johnson's novel *The Orphan Master's Son* deals with the theme of identity, state, power and propaganda in North Korea.

The story deals with two North Koreans who revolt against the tyrannical government of their country. The device succeeds in creating an impression that the leaders of North Korea are selfish, for they kidnap their people, steal their money and cheat them. Historical plays of Shakespeare are also Tudor propagandas, as they depict civil war dangers, and commemorate the Tudor dynasty's founders. In *Richard III* Shakespeare uses propaganda to shape the reader's perceptions. Richard gains the sympathy of the people when he declares that deformity is the root cause of his wickedness. Thus, deformity has been used as a device to control, injure and manipulate other people for his personal gains. In *Lord of the Flies*, William Golding introduces the concept of a beast, using propaganda by his character Jack who plans to take control of a totalitarian government. His propaganda is directed by manipulating the cognition of the young boys, frightening them about the existence of the beast in that area. He holds Ralph guilty, for he does not carry out his duty to provide protection to the children, and then takes charge of a new tribe that would follow his tyrannical rules. In *Little Dorrit*, Charles Dickens uses Circumlocution Office as a device to satirize bureaucracy. The novel situates Dickens's depiction of the Circumlocution Office amid mid-Victorian debates on liberalism. It is through this device that the novel beautifully brings out the tension between ascendant ideals of representative government and the acknowledged importance of a non-elected but competent bureaucracy. It is through the use of

propaganda that the novelist has succeeded in opening up the possibility not only of rethinking the role and place of bureaucracy but also of the boundaries between bureaucratic and literary sensibilities as well.

Indian English novel has travelled a journey acquiring exuberance and artistic perfection in the hands of the trio- R K Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. Besides, the proliferation of Indian Fiction has covered almost every aspect of life including India's bumbling bureaucracy exposing the lethargy and incompetence of both the elected Members of Government and the Government Workers in India. There are several ex/civil servants who have authored novels and memoirs, and have laid bare the inner workings of the 'system'. Their stories tend to show what a civil servant experiences in his or her life; however, some of these writers have made the literary writing a means to project their agenda, such as Niyaz Khan, Narendra Jadhav, etc. The prominent bureaucrat writers include M K Kaw (Bureaucracy Gets Crazier: IAS Unmasked), Vinod Rai (The Diary of the Nation's Conscience Keeper), Bhaskar Ghose (The Service of the State: The IAS Reconsidered), Narendra Jadhav (Untouchables: My Family's Triumphant Escape from India's Caste System), C G Somiah (The Honest Always Stand Alone), Upamanyu Chatterjee (English August), Anurag Mathur (Inscrutable Americans, Making the Minister Smile), Amitabh Bagchi (The Householder), Vipul Mitra (Pyramid of Virgin Dreams), Niyaz Khan (Confessions at Black Grave), etc. These bureaucrat novelists analyze the matrix of existence in post-independence vis-à-vis post-modern India and finds it to be largely woven with the warp and woof mainly political in nature; they also trace the perversions and total loss of values in national as well as individual life. Their writings focus on the embarrassing ill-politics which control the nature and quality of every democratic action. It has resulted into corruption, gloom and frustration in every walk of life. As a consequence, there is corrosion of our identities and degeneration of moral values.

In a way, these bureaucrats are the novelists of disillusioned age. They have acquired a vibrant and energetic expressive space in the literary genres of 21st century. Their central agenda is to redefine the stereotypes and the politics of acculturation. These bureaucrats do not grapple with the essentialist binaries. However, the dichotomy still forms the basis of much of the Indian English novels. There are obvious divides in the matters of economy, gender issues, caste, religion, spirituality, love and sex. There are some writers such as Niyaz Khan who seem to have written to push their agenda ahead by using propaganda as a major literary device. The article explores how Niyaz Khan has forwarded the propaganda against him/Muslim Officers in the novel Confessions at Black Grave.

The novel Confessions at Black Grave authored by Niyaz Khan, deals with the present social, political, bureaucratic and religious life of India. One of its major highlights is the discrimination against Muslim Officers. He denigrates Indian cultural ethos because according to him it spreads evils. The story runs in Mumbai, Kanyakumari, Gwalior and Switzerland. The novel's protagonist Sameer Hasrat and his friend Kalyan Karigar come from a slum area. Sameer's ambition to clean his past paves him a solid way to ascend the ladder of success. Only with a few years of service, Sameer becomes a rich man of the town with a lot of money that he earns through corrupt practices. Likewise, Kalyan Karigar also becomes an affluent politician as he amasses a lot of money through illegal practices and muscle power. Sameer Hasrat, being a Muslim is discriminated against and humiliated by all the leaders he comes in contact and the District Magistrate he works with. The mystery of Sameer's life remains clouded and the wishes unfulfilled until the last page of the novel.

In Indian Bureaucracy literature, like other literatures propaganda has been used by the authors to project their likes, dislikes, whims, opinions, desires, perceptions, etc. which are

either in contradiction or in consonance with public opinion. Niyaz Khan, an M P State based bureaucrat is a propagandist- his major propaganda being the so-called discrimination against Muslim Officers. Niyaz Khan who has penned as many as five novels including *Confessions at Black Grave* sent ripples in M P's administrative circles by accusing his senior officers of discrimination and misbehaviour. He posted a message on Twitter saying that the surname 'Khan' hounds him like a ghost; he wrote-“17 years in government service, transfer in 10 districts and 19 shifting, I was always made feel untouchable, like a German Jew, Khan surname hounded me like a ghost.” (at 7.11 a.m., Jan 10, 2019)

Niyaz Khan uses 'Discrimination' as a propaganda device in the novel. Niyaz Khan, a whistleblower bureaucrat, as he claims has transformed all discrimination against him into creation. He tweeted “There was a time when I had reached on the verge of depression but literature saved me from fall. I have transformed all discrimination against me into creation and now I am English novelist with five novels (at 7.21 a.m., Jan 10, 2019). The protagonist starts his life amidst extreme poverty. He decides and resolves to melt the hard stone of his luck by becoming an Administrative Officer-Subdivisional Magistrate. The black money that he earns by misusing his authority soon makes him rich, but he feels that his corruption drowned life have snatched from him his ideas forever. It is his “ten-percent corruption theory” that paves the way for his final downfall. The constant discrimination against him makes him a sexless man and he finally dies on a small railway platform. After his burial in a black grave, an atheist namely Aashirwad Kumar, takes to high profile killings across the country. He commits seven murders and then enters the world of 'Bharatiya Babas' (hypocrite Indian spiritualists) and becomes an international godman. He also kills his lover Renee Andress and his friend Sanjay Raj, for which he is imprisoned. After he is released, he goes straight to Sameer Hasrat's Grave for his

confessions. It is notable to see as to how the author relates Sameer with Aashirwad Kumar (known as A K), a high-profile murderer turned into an international godman.

The discrimination propaganda constitutes the major theme in the novel. The novelist presents the theme of discrimination against the backdrop of Sameer's government service and his love affair with Pinky Khanna. Sameer accuses that the “fucking government service and Pinky Khanna” has brought a doom's day to his fertility. He has been squashed, says he, because of fucking love and liberal democracy. Sameer chooses administrative services for money, power and social status. He is certain that only the petty government officers are caught red-handed, not the ministers and top-officers. Liberal democracy provides them a big protection. On the other hand, the poor are only the vote banks or earth worms creeping for shelter; these people have been covered with the black magic sheet of democracy and are completely blindfolded by the “stenching system”.

To heighten the effect of the propaganda of discrimination, the author uses the binary- the Hindus and the Muslims. Sameer is too naïve to prepare or execute the schematics. Contrarily, Kalyan takes to illegal means and methods to earn his livelihood. He sells opium and hemp during the night and acquires the name “ganjawala bhai”. He takes to religious hypocrisy which, according to the author works well in India and turns into a baba-politician but Sameer despite the consistent insistence of Kalyan to join politics declines his offer. The binaries in the novel cut across hypocrisy vs honesty, sincerity vs insincerity, true love vs fake love. The District Magistrates under whom Sameer has to work are drowned deeply into corruption whereas Sameer accepts only “ten-percent Corruption” theory, that too when he is much insisted upon by the prevailing corrupt practices, executed by the District Magistrates and to fulfil his needs. Sameer is rebuffed even by the Muslim Politicians for showing little favour to the Muslims of the area. The author's delineation of the District Magistrates in terms

such as “watermelon like head, fearful large eyes, black complexion and a rhino like neck” speaks of his hatred for the counterpart officers, usually Hindus. The naïve Sameer and the over-smart District Magistrate (D M) are in complete contrast with each other. It is evident the way the D M educates Sameer in administrative professionalism:

“My child we are living in a system where all powers are in our hands. It is very

clear. The leaders are only the makers of the laws. We can often kick them, but in reality, they are the real masters of the nation and the master of our destiny

too. They can transfer us in the jungle or in the goonda areas. None can challenge

them by God. Twenty- five years of my service is not useless or ordinary. I have a lot of experience in the chair power and the political world. You are a fresh pitcher and I would shape you into an exact shape which will be suitable to the new system. Go and enjoy your life and take the training lightly like a light lunch.

It is not very useful in the actual work. The real training, I will give to you, OK”

(Confessions at Black Grave, p58)

The author has employed the domination versus subordination dialectics in the delineation of Hindu-Muslim Officers. The exaggerated superordination of D M is deliberate and purposeful so that the discrimination propaganda may be forcefully employed.

To focus the propaganda of Discrimination, the author foregrounds the Arabic Culture comprising primarily the Islamic Culture. The novel abounds in Islamic Culture. The author mentions azaans, mosques, maulvis but rarely is mentioned the Sanatan rituals, Parampara, temples, etc. except in the sense of a ridicule. The protagonist is an Islamic character. He is controlled and misguided by the non-Arabic

corrupt people; the author makes these people say to Saleem that he must always be flexible like a rubber doll and that double standards must constitute the quintessence of his existence in the over-corrupt world that they are dwelling in. Here, nepotism and embezzlement decide the course of the day and an individual’s progress. The non-Arabic culture has been kept in complete contrast with the Arabic Culture- It is the non-Arabic which, as the author delineates has made the Arabic vis-à-vis Islamic followers divert from the path of piety. The D M suggests the S D M Saleem “So my child, how you work at your job is in your hands. You can sit in your chair and be righteous, and only earn your salary, or you can earn crores of rupees without even moving out of your office” (Confessions at Black Grave, p63). The conflict between the values cherished by Saleem and other people is made evident when Saleem says, “However, my mother’s basic moral teachings never left me for a second. Love for the people was my mother’s daily gospel.” This is further emphasized when Saleem says, “I knew what I was doing was wrong...” The contrast between the Arabic and the non- Arabic Culture reaches its climax when Islamic sense of piety is shown as a remedy to all the ills of the world. Even the notorious murderers such as A K visit the grave of Saleem Hasrat for peace and quietude. Non-Arabic Sanatan world is projected as something vicious that revels in hypocrisy, babadom and spiritual bankruptcy whereas the Arabic-Islamic World is delineated as virtuous and gracious.

The juxtaposition of discrimination with worldly/sexual love is the other device employed by the novelist to heighten the effect. This discrimination makes Hasrat sexless. The author as a propagandist obviates the fact that acts of sex be not delineated in such a detail. Rather he gives a full account of love projected by Christy and Pinky Khanna. The art has been denigrated to such a low level that one feels ashamed to read the novel in the company of elders, for the fear that they might by chance read from the book. It is this sexual love that

spoils him then; he is exploited and robbed of his modesty and money by Pinky Khanna.

The Journalists-bureaucrats-democrats nexus as delineated in the novel is another device to project discrimination. Sameer's gratification for both Shanti Shanti and Ajgar in the initial phase very well brings out as to how the two goaded Hasrat on a path of vile designs. Shanti Shanti, a practical and seasoned media savvy, admits Hasrat gave him real existence in the fiend world. He enabled him to earn lakhs of rupees in bribe but he polished his personality so deftly that the people took him as a saint. There is a constant suggestion from the D M to be a practical man, otherwise he will be crushed into dust. The author exposes the media hypocrisy when Shanti Shanti says:

Look at me, how big philosopher am I! But I was never an egomaniac. God does not like snobbery. I sit daily with your D M for the gossip, but I have no conceit at my achievements. In true sense I am equal to a sage. I pray two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening in the temple. My heaven is hundred percent safe. The world is a chimera, a big illusion, Sameer Sahab. Only those get success here who are able to mix the religion with the mundane things. My face is always happy because of this philosophy I am clinching hard.

(Confessions at Black Grave, p85)

It is the media persons who shape or spoil the image of a bureaucrat, and train these bureaucrats in taking bribe from the "bewakoof" public, who are innocent people of the imported democracy. The journalist Shanti Shanti says to Saleem, "Money is must for a smooth life. The bribe works like the grease. It lubricates the wheels of our life." (85) Besides, Sameer blames that the leaders and his boss have exploited him to their hearts' content; they blotted his soul and kicked at his values. He was repeatedly snubbed for his unpractical ideas and for his honesty. It caused pain in his lower

part, alleges Sameer. Shanti Shanti also assures him that the Hindus will not rise in rebellion. He says, "I think there will be no riot in the town after this intricate marriage. Our Hindu brothers will cooperate with you. I think so. You look like a Hindu, actually." (94) The narrative depicts the Hindus as culprits and the Islamists as gullible people. The novel exposes that a senior bureaucrat always tries to crush the junior bureaucrat if the former fails to fulfil his demands. Sameer's deterioration begins after he fails to fulfil the demands of the D M. His powers are withdrawn and he is given the charge of maintaining the hygienic ambient in the office. Ten sweepers and ten peons are put under his command. The D M Mast Ram mumbles:

This fucking world has changed, my boy. Gone are the Gandhian days. Everywhere, there are heaps of false morals. We are living in a world drowned in self-interest, deception, dishonesty, conspiracy and what not yaar. Thank God we have secured a strong position in the power system in the Liberal Democracy. My son, now I am going to give you some suggestions. If you follow them with your heart, in Your ling journey of life, you will never fail in the bureaucratic system.

(Confessions at Black Grave, p105)

It is only fundamentalism that decides and determines every course of action in the country like India. Sameer is isolated, and faces discrimination against him because he is a secular human being. Sameer when rebuffed by the Member of Parliament of his own community Aftab Mehdi, tells him:

Sir, I am a Secular man. I never work on the basis of religion. My mother was a Christian. The Muslims I have punished were the law violators. The same had happened with my Hindu brothers if they would have erred, Janab. The blame is quite blank, logic-less, janab.

(Confessions at Black Grave, P127)

The author very deftly pin points that Sameer is discriminated against by his own community members, for he does not believe in fundamentalism and he is a secular Musalman. He is snarled even by a crone who is around eighty, "You are a Muslim, but crueller than a Satan. Have some mercy on us, we are insaan. We are very poor. If you demolished our homes, we shall become stray dogs. Fear Allah and stop the destruction." (134) The Muslims rebuked Saleem and sent their maledictions. He was called Kafir. In the Juma Namaz of the town, Saleem was declared a haramzada, enemy of Islam by the Maulana.

One of the out striking binaries in the novel is the delineation of Hindu and Muslim politicians. It seems that the author's undue hatred for the polity he does not like, makes him delineate the Hindu leaders in a gloomy perspective. It is for this reason that the MLA NagpatiNaag's soot-black beard looks ferocious, his enormous nose looks dirty, his bull-neck appears like a trunk of a tree and his Adam's apple is sticking out noticeably. His pudgy legs have very strong muscles, he wears the wooden clogs.

The author's realization is attributed to Sameer when the latter grumbles that Muslims are not so bad; neither have they done any wrong to the land. Likewise, that he was never involved in any of the religious activities, and have perpetrated cruelties on the Muslims also. Despite his being a secular and sincere Muslim, he is punished. The propaganda of discrimination is further emphasized by providing an implicit comparison between Kalyan Karigar, a Hindu and Sameer, a Muslim-Sameer is spirited, honest, sincere, dutiful whereas Kalyan is dishonest, hypocrite and liar. Being a spirited person, Sameer's soul reproaches him when he thinks to become like Kalyan Karigar. Kalyan is crooked and have attained heights of success. He wants to associate Saleem with him but Saleem explicitly denies. The contrast between the two is noticeable when Saleem tells Kalyan "No interest in the politics, really! I cannot jump into the fucking dung. I have no ambition in my

heart." Muslims, says the author are considered nothing but the "malignant tumour" over the chest of Indian nation.

The primary causes of Sameer's impotency are deception in love, the Liberal Democracy and that he is a Muslim. Sameer is deceived in love by Pinky Khanna. He thought her to be a loyal girl but she proves a prostitute. She robs him of his money and prestige and then leaves him alone on the street. His misfortunes are the outcomes of her "ghatiya" love. He calls her a bitch and curses her that she will die like an "infamous whore". Sameer's ideals of democracy are also shattered and he leaves the world with zero confidence on the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. Sameer is hated because he is a pakka Muslim. Pinky Khanna also says in an affronting tone "I will not touch anything of your house... we do not drink or eat in Muslim's home." In a serious and sincere discourse, even the DM admits that Sameer has been a victim of grave discrimination because of his religion. Christy is also made to vouchsafe the "untrue truth". Saleem is depicted as a victim of deformed democracy and is harassed, kicked and bugged by the officers and the leaders.

The novelist forcefully brings into light the propaganda of discrimination when the protagonist says "No Sir! I am a Musalman, so I have been deprived of the powers in the liberal democratic country, Sahib." (159) The unnaturalness of the phraseology used by the MLA for Sameer Hasrat throws light on the fact that Niyaz Khan wrote the novel with inherent political motives. The MLA says to the DM "Sameer Hasrat, a Muslim is living over our chest like a king. However, he is not fully corrupt, but his religion is intolerable to my followers. How the Muslim officer entered the administration is an enigma over the selection system.... Muslims cannot be trusted. They are nothing less than terrorists." (171) Sameer whines that he is being tortured again and again for being a Muslim. The novelist makes an old man comment when Sameer is dismissed and is asked to vacate the quarter, "This is a proper treatment for a Muslim who snatched the power

from us.” (182) Ranveer informs Saleem “They said they don’t give their house to a Musalman.” (183) The author says that no one is ready to employ Saleem even as a clerk, for he is a Muslim. The words “Muslim” and “Musalman” occur in the novel more than hundred times that speaks of the fact that the writer is preoccupied with this agenda of discrimination.

Liberal Democracy, one of the causes of Saleem’s impotency, is a form of government wherein the style and pattern of life make a person win. All depends on the art of befooling the people. Kalyan becomes a high-profile politician by masquerading as a sage. Public worships him like a God. Bringing out the contrast between his way and that of Sameer’s way of life, Kalyan says, “You and I started our life from Nagpur, and today how big the gap is! I always persuaded you to throw the morality in the trace, but you never took my suggestions gravely.” (185) Sameer is misfit for liberal democracy because he is not crooked, dishonest, hypocrite as Kalyan is. Kalyan suggests Saleem, “You have still a lot of time to put on the garb of hypocrisy. It suits to our liberal democracy. If you make up your mind to join me, contact me immediately.” (185) In the world of liberal democracy where hypocrisy and dishonesty prevail, honesty, morality and values do not matter. Sameer repents that he carried their weight over his head to some extent, but no one respected these values. He feels that an honest officer’s value is lesser than a prostitute.

The novelist uses the Flash Back Technique to emphasize the agenda of discrimination culminating into Saleem’s impotency. The recurrence of abusive phraseology such as “mother-fucker”, “sister-fucker”, “fucking democracy” communicates the novelist’s exasperation. The use of binaries such as liberal democracy versus fundamental democracy, genuine love (of Christy) versus fake love (of Pinky Khanna) Muslim (protagonist Saleem) versus Hindu (Kalyan Karigar) is outstriking and deepens the effect of the propaganda of discrimination. The projection of cultural

contrast and the manifestation of the superiority of Arabic vis-à-vis Islamic culture is another device to strengthen discrimination. A K, a hypocrite, a high-profile murderer, a goonda commits all the indecent acts in the garbs of a Hindu ‘Baba’ and seeks shelter for salvation at the grave of a Muslim.

However, the narrative does not correspond with reality; the writer has utterly failed in giving the account of discrimination a true colouring. The episodizing of the Plot is also not sequential; the messing of events through indecent sexual discourse has degenerated the novel to a repository of learning vocabulary related to sex and sexual intercourse. The narrative is overflowed with artificial panorama-one simply fails to believe that an administrative officer becomes impotent because of liberal democracy, deception in love and for his being a Muslim. Moreover, the Section II seems to have been superimposed. As a result, the Plot does not adhere to the “organic structure of growth” as propounded by Aristotle.

As a consequence, unlike the prominent British writers such as George Orwell, Charles Dickens, the novelist could not do justice even to himself as a Propagandist.

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