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ADVENTURISM AND COLONIALISM IN FAR FAR THE MOUNTAIN PEAK

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ABSTRACT

Far Far the Mountain Peak is the sixth novel on the Indian theme in the order of publication, which covers the period between 1902 and 1922. After the bitter experience of the Sepoymutiny, the British attitude towards India undergoes radical changes in terms of administration and reformation. The queen's rule



laid stress on reforming education, health and other civic amenities. Masters shifted the theme to mountaineering. He wanted to narrate 'the Indian Saga of the British rule'.

KEYWORDS : Adventurism , Colonialism , Mountain Peak .

INTRODUCTION

A magnificent novel, perhaps

Masters' finest work. While this departs somewhat from the continuity sequence in the saga of the Savages, one recognizes in Peter much of his grandfather, Rodney, of Nightrunners of Bengal. Peter has chosen the British civil service for his career in India; he elects further to be the world's greatest mountain climber, not for love of the mountains, which dominates his friends' passion for climbing, but because in the unattainable he can realize to the full his ruthless ambition. His is a violent, a wholly egotistic nature; he uses what comes his way; he dominates the two men closest to him, one an English peer, the other an Indian patriot and prince; he might have married the girl who worshipped him, but he chose instead Emmy, who thought she hated him. He sweeps obstacles human and physical- aside, and it takes a disaster to bring him to recognition of himself. The book has everything, the immense sweep of penetrating character development, the sharply etched minor characters, the pace of story, the strange lure of the mountains, the swift shift from Cambridge and Wales to Switzerland and to India, where most of the story is laid, the challenge of war years, the probing analysis of a marriage, the ultimate search and finding of a new self. I was spellbound- from start to finish.

Adventurism is one of the colonial attitudes. As young friends, Peter, Gerry and Adam Khan

share a common dream to achieve something to steal the limelight. Peter Savage is very active and naturally the most dominating of the three. The ignorance of the British citizens about India and Indians is depicted in the conversation between Emily, Peggy, Gerry Harry and Peter. When Adam Khan was introduced for the first time in England, the response from Peggy was a bit disappointing because the way Adam looked, dressed and spoke was hardly different from any other Englishman. His upbringing in England had totally transformed him.

The English group has a preconceived picture of India. The members have heard of big cities like Delhi, Calcutta and Bombay and yet they are ignorant about their geographical locations. They have heard of big rivers like Ganges but ignorant about the size of the river when compared to the Thames. When Adam speaks of river Maghra in his native district of Rudwal in Punjab, Emily asks him if it was bigger than Thames. She did not know where Punjab was located. She asks him innocently whether he visited Calcutta quite often, assuming that both should be close to each other.

Major part of the novel is dedicated to the adventurous hobby of mountaineering. Their experience gained in the Alps is described as a mere training ground for the ultimate climbing of Meru in the Himalaya. The plot has many other twists and turns, shocks and surprises. They all add to make the reader sustain his interest. The emotional ups and downs in Peter, Gerry or Harry Walsh suggest the stress and strain in the Anglo-Indians. They are torn between the obligations to keep up the superior status on the one hand, on the other, the personal sacrifices they had to make in order to keep up their obligations. Peter represents the true Anglo-Indian officer. Gerry exhibits the qualities of aristocratic intellectuals in England unable to decide and act. His problem is that he is too sensitive, cultured and mild act. He could not survive since he could not act. Adam Khan is depicted as a victim of the generation gap.

The Ravi Lancers is set against the background of the first world war. The Indian soldiers helped their British masters to face the challenge in Europe. There was a mixed response from the Indian nationalists as to whether the Indians should assist their colonial masters at all. Some resisted it tooth and nail. Their opinion was that it was the best opportunity to teach their masters a fitting lesson by humiliating them in the international arena. But there were moderates, including Gandhi who towed a softer line and said that it was not the time. The moderates felt that by helping the British in a critical moment they (Indians) would create an environment in such a way that the British would be, at least on the moral grounds, obliged to free India from the shackles. Ultimately, the Indian cavalry did participate in the war.

Masters devotes this novel to put forth the arguments from both the sides. The Britishers were slowly beginning to realize the inevitable fact that the ground beneath their feet is collapsing. The hard-line approach mixed with adamant attitude would work no longer in containing the developments. The Ravi Lancers were actually a part of cavalry maintained by an independent kingdom in the northern part of India at the foot hills of the Himalayas. The king was not at all under the mercy of the British to oblige them by sending his own army especially in the dire threat of facing death and destruction at the hands of enemies in a totally hostile and strange environment. But the young Yuvaraj, the heir to the throne, takes the side of the British and takes his men to the battle ground in Europe.

The plot of the novel briefly runs like this: Warren Bateman is an English soldier who is promoted as the commanding officer to lead the Ravi Lancers in Europe. He represents the old guard of the British colonial establishment and yet suffers from dilemma of love-hate relationship with the country and its people whom he rules. He somehow wants to instill discipline, moral values, honesty and other good qualities among the Indian soldiers. A strict disciplinarian, holding steadfast to his convictions, he feels it irritating to learn that the things are going out of control right under his nose and

yet he is unable to contain the process. His own wife Joan, sister Diana, step-brother Ralph – all oppose his way of approach and action. They even go the extent of revolting against him. The young yuvaraja, Krishna Ram – who is second-in-command, who he thought was very humble and subservient, dares to contradict him and criticise, makes Warren self examine to convince himself whether he was going in the right direction or not. He finds all around him a decadent and rotten world stinking around him.

The novel gives a good deal of debate taking place speaking far and against the colonial forces. Masters has successfully analysed the subject from both the coloniser's point as well as from the colonized point of view. A plot of introspection and self-study has gone into the plot of the novel. The first hand experience of Masters who saw the colonialist trends inside India, and his advantage of looking at the English view from an American point of view, has given him much insight into the subject. But there are some usual pitfalls too. The treatment of sex by Masters, especially in this novel, goes a little too close to the level of pronography. It seems unnecessary and unwarranted. If one has to consider the sensuous exploitation, may be Masters has a justification. But, at the outset the matter appears as an inevitable personal obsession for Masters.

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