



SCANDAL POINT: A QUEST FOR LINEAGE

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Scandal Point, a novel by Manju Jaidka, is the craftsmanship of her historical sense by which she has recreated a historical event that might have been happened in 1892 in colonial India using her imagination and gathering information from the folk as well as from the historical records. The novel deals with an incident that had happened in 1892 during the colonial India. It delineates the character of Rajinder Singh, whom the author has herself made it clear after the verification of historical records available, “a handsome young ruler of an Indian princely state particularly Patiala”. In the novel, Rajinder Singh popularly known as ‘Rajen’ has fallen in love with Viceroy’s daughter. He has eloped with her to Patiala by whisking her away on his ‘black sleek’ horse angering the British rulers.

During the British Raj, it is not an ordinary romance but, as the author has herself pointed out, “a serious event that resulted in the elopement of 1892 has far-reaching

consequences”. The elopement has resulted in a child of British origin mother, Beatrix known as Betty in the novel and Indian born king of princely state, Rajinder Singh. The couple named their child privately as ‘Sri Richard Ram Rahim Singh’ (p 138, **Scandal Point**) taking the tri-religious confluence (Hinduism, Islam and Christianity). Due to the authoritative and political turmoil, the eloped-couple were separated leaving their dear child, Bhupinder Singh whom the people of Patiala had adored but he had to be grown as ‘Kunwar Kartar Singh’ instead of ‘Rajkumar Ram Rahim Robert’ (p 203, **Scandal Point**) alias RRR due to colonial reasons under the four take-carers- ‘the first was, of course the maharaja himself, who would supervise my upbringing but from a distance. The second was my baba, Jivan Singh of Lahore. Attar Singh of Amritsar was the third.....the fourth was Maharaja Jagatjit Singh of Kapurthala’ (p 200, **Scandal Point**).



Thus the novel not only delineates the character of Rajinder Singh of Patiala but also throws light on the protagonist, Kunwar Kartar Singh who actually muses over the various stages of his life- “first a baby in the maharaja’s palace, born to the chhoti maharani; second the supposed son of Attar Singh of Amritsar; third, the adopted child of Jivan Singh of Lahore; and fourth, the ward of the Maharaja of Kapurthala” (pp 201, **Scandal Point**).

In the story, he was unaware of his lineage but one day, “like Oedipus, he discovers the truth and *embarks* on a journey seeking his roots” (**Jaidka**) and was searching for the evidence, he could find no concrete evidences which witness his doubts about his lineage. In his nostalgia, having worked for insurance company and then went on to Burma to work as a forest contractor for ten years, he found no concrete records, no documents, no witnesses, and no evidence. Only stray bits of information and semi-reliable clues with the help of which, he pieces together the almost incredible tale of his mother’s elopement with his father, their separation and the tragic death of his father who was suspected to be poisoned in the Forest-hunting, an annual sport of hunting by the

king and his men for his favourite wild boar.

The protagonist takes us back to Lahore in 1900, when he was a student at Aitchison College along with his adopted parents Bibi Bachtiar and Jivan Singh’s children. One day, his adopted mother told him that she was about to die and continued to say, “I want you to do me one last favour..... Go and meet Sardar Attar Singh of Amritsar. He will tell you why I have sent you to him” (p 4, **Scandal Point**). Thus the novelist set the protagonist on the quest to know. He thinks many a time, “why should I go and meet him?” Finally, he decides to obey the words of Bibi to go to Amritsar to meet Sardar Attar Singh. When he knocked on the door of Sardar Attar Singh, he was not at home. Then he goes to Amritsar to the riddle. Finally, Sardar Attar Singh took out something wrapped in a blue silk cloth. Inside the ivory-inlaid carved wooden box were a few official looking papers, a leather-bound red note book, a large shining red stone which is a part of a brooch that could be pinned to a dress. Then Attar Singh handed him all. The protagonist, Kartar Singh after examining the jewel and the dateless diary with spidery hand that seemed to be a woman’s with a surprise he



asked Attar Singh what he wanted to do with them. His mind started brooding over and asked Attar Singh many questions to which Attar Singh answered that official record would tell him that he was his son from his first marriage. This answer again aroused in him the quest which was yet to be known to him. Then he thought, “I had imagined that I was close to the object of my quest but now I realised that it was not the end but the beginning of a quest” (p 10, **Scandal Point**).

Attar Singh told him, “the reality is known to just a handful of people. And very soon it will be known to you as well. The contents of this box here will shed some light on the truth. It will tell you whatever I know. And I certainly do not claim to know all” (p 9, **Scandal Point**). He also realised that Baba and Bibi were not his real parents. They had taken on the role of parents when he was just a baby. He got his story in the narrative of Attar Singh- “a bejewelled king in shining robes on a sleek dark horse, a beautiful, fair maiden with flashing eyes and blonde hair. A dreamy city on a mountain top, tall trees, winding roads, music and laughter in a magical sky. Wafting clouds and whispering winds. An elopement, hue and cry, excitement, suspense, thrills. Followed by pain,

sorrow, intrigue and death...” (p 11, **Scandal Point**). When Attar Singh said that he was his son ‘only on paper’ confused him even more.

Finally, he gathered most of the details of his story from Attar Singh on one fateful night. Then he managed to piece together over the years, a clue, a hint, a scrap of information at time from various sources. Then he put together all the fragments he had gathered and tried to arrive at a complete picture. The protagonist felt, “the picture has many gaps and holes but I can now see something of a pattern in it” (p 201, **Scandal Point**). According to Attar Singh’s story, he was a little prince who had been sent away following an intrigue in the palace. Although his parents, the maharaja and his wife, loved him very much, for political reasons, they were unable to keep him with them. They felt he was not safe- his life was in danger. He was a prince- the thought kept going round his brain. So he felt, “they tossed me out to the seas” (p 202, **Scandal Point**).

The diary along with a bundle of loose papers tied up with a string given by Attar Singh gave a different version of the story of his lineage. While referring the dog-eared pages of the red leather-bound



notebook, he went back to the places where the events took place in the story. Among all the papers, one paper had five distinct signatures of the maharaja's, the rajamatha's, the viceroy's and two others that he did not recognise. He thought those signatures probably of Attar Singh and Maharaja Jagatjit Singh. There were some clauses in the paper.

Clause 1 stated that the chhoti maharani of Patiala would be returned by the Maharaja of Patiala to Her Majesty, the Queen of England, 'Returned'.

Clause 2 stated that the Rajkumar Richard Ram Rahim henceforth be referred to as RRR would not be told the secret of his parentage. RRR who is now known as Kunwar Kartar Singh, son of Attar Singh of Amritsar would be formally adopted by Jivan Singh and Bachtiaar Kaur of Amritsar and he would be brought up as their child.

Clause 3 made it mandatory for RRR alias Kunwar Kartar Singh, to grow up as a devout Keshadhari Sardar. He would not cut his hair or beard and he would wear a turban all his life.

Clause 4 forbade RRR alias Kunwar Kartar Singh to leave the Indian subcontinent. He was never ever to try going to England; he was never to seek his

biological mother, the chhoti maharani, Harnam Kaur alias Beatrix.

Clause 5 stated that RRR's upbringing and education would be looked after jointly by the Maharaja Jivan Singh, Attar Singh and Jagatjit Singh. They would ensure that he received education fit for a prince.

Clause 6 dealt with financial arrangements for RRR's upkeep. It made it mandatory for the State of Patiala to allocate a certain sum for RRR's education and of future prospects. This Privy Purse was to be given to him until he attained the age of eighteen for responsibility of claiming the money would be the guardians but thereafter he would deal directly with the State of Patiala.

Then he headed for Kapurthala for the first time in his life with a note from Attar Singh to meet Maharaja Jagatjit Singh. He married the niece of the maharaja.

When he met Jagatjit Singh of Kapurthala, he asked him his intention to meet his biological mother, he said, "No, I am afraid not. She went back to England. Her Majesty's officers made us sign an agreement that you would not try to seek her" (**p 213, Scandal Point**). He further said, "the British rulers would not allow it. Two, the lady in question probably has her



own life now in England. She must be long married, perhaps the mother of six or seven children. Would you like to complicate matters for her? After all, like you she too has been a pawn in a bigger game. Life has not been fair to her either” **(p 214, Scandal Point)**. Jagatjit’s words, “today, you are single. You can think only of yourself. But tomorrow you will have a family of your own. You will have daughters and would need to find grooms for them. What would you say then about your lineage? Would you say your mother....”**(p 215, Scandal Point)**.

With this remark of Jagatjit, he made up his mind to realise all over again the inevitability of events that had taken place and the futility of trying to change the situation now. It would only mean more trouble. Better far to reconcile to the circumstances and move on. The whole night in Jagatjit’s house, he could not sleep. His mind was churning over his doubts. He smashed the mirror in his room and banged his head to the wooden frame. He was bleeding profusely. When he came to the senses, he realised that he was in a different room. In the course of his stay in Kapurthala, he was introduced to the niece of Jagatjit, Harbans Kaur whom he married.

The protagonist has realised that he was perhaps one of the extremely rare individuals in the world who had four different sets of parents at different stages of his life. Not that he had any choice in the matter. He had changed hands almost as though he were an unwanted burden that should be got rid of before it weighed them down. He also felt that though he were a ball of fire that would scorch his parents or guardians if they held him for too long. It was like a game of passing the parcel, one set of guardians handing him over to the next. Washing their hands off him. Putting him out of their lives. Whatever did he do to deserve it? “I wish I knew” **(p 201, Scandal Point)**.

Then the protagonist said, “I finished my education and worked for an insurance company, then I went to Burma where I worked for ten years as a forest contractor. Earning a regular livelihood was important for me because the Privy Purse that I was supposed to get from the royal house of Patiala could not be depended on.....Today, in 1952, I look back and realise that life has not always been easy but God has been kind. Living in free India, I have the satisfaction that all my children and their families are doing well. I have not been able to go out of the country



but my children and grandchildren are scattered all over the globe. They do not know my story and I doubt if they ever will” (p 224, **Scandal Point**).

The words, thoughts, a feeling of disillusionment, a sense of rootlessness and alienation that linger, churn, flow, wave and gush in the mind of the protagonist of the novel must have been the same in many minds of human history.

REFERENCE

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