

‘The Peace Maker’ – An Historical Novel

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Abstract

The Peace Maker is a novel which is mainly about the Vietnam War and the outrage during it in America. This book shows the period of before, during and the after war effects from a soldier and his family point of view. Many of the historical events such as The Tet offensive, Assassination of Bobby Kennedy, Jesus Movement, Democratic National Convention, The My Lai massacre, Billy Graham held a Revival in Anaheim stadium in 1968, Place Descriptions like Vietnam, The massacre of the village, ‘La Jolla Shores’, etc are all real life events embedded in this novel.

Keywords: Historical, war, Peace.

Introduction

‘The Peace Maker’ is a novel which is mainly about the Vietnam War and the outrage during it in America. This book shows the period of before, during and the after war effects from a soldier and his family point of view. Let’s look at its Historical Dimension and see how the author has merged the historical events into the novel.

Historic Dimension

“We are not makers of history. We are made by history.” says Martin Luther. A past incident that has happened in reality becomes a history. According to the importance, either the history is forgotten or written to be remembered. An incident in a common man’s life is not remembered much or may be remembered for one or two generations at the most by the person’s family. Whereas, a king’s or a ruler’s actions whether good or bad are recorded to be recalled as a history. The author Jack Cavanaugh has recorded these real incidents in the novel and has made the novel a historical novel. The author also recollects that it was his high school days when Vietnam War took place. He remembers scenes from Vietnam intruding into his living room via television. Since the novel is a historical novel, the author has portrayed every essential event possible. He has done justice in bringing out the real feelings and actions that took place in the war. Let’s look at them one by one.

1) Chaos and Riots - The Author in his Afterword tells that He also remembers drugs on campus, underground newspapers and hearing about the demonstration and riots on the college campuses. (423) and he has used them in the novel. It was this riots and demonstrations that the protagonist has seen in her college campus spoken by Del and Allen. Though Del’s companionship and dictatorship was for a good cause in the initial stages; and everyone liked to follow his commands, as the days went on, Del’s violence created chaos in their lives.

The first event in the campus in which Paige joined was a demonstration in which a serious statement against the war was made to make people understand that this war is totally a destruction. Everyone who took part in the demonstration did their part. But Paige’s action of scratching her nose has turned “a serious statement into a comedy relief”. Other than Del being unhappy about the reaction, no one was hurt.

The second event in the campus was the protest in the Dean’s office. Though one part of it was a calm and a silent protest; Del, as a second part has organised and welcomed many people for a larger protest, which was the second group. He divided the second group into three and kept the toughest men at the third gang. As the police was trying to remove the silent protesters, the second group entered in

for their support, gang by gang, as Del has arranged. But the third part that Del has designed was what no one had thought of including Allen, Paige and Natalie. As the third gang marched in, Del randomly opened fire at the group. Though there was shooting going on from the police force as well, one died and many including Natalie was injured, but there was a lot of chaos and pain involved in it.

The third event was a riot which was not in the campus, but in Colorado, the Democratic National Convention. As both Natalie and Paige were coming for the convention, they had the thought of enjoying the music but Del had a different plan. He fired the gun and opened a riot. People started running here and there and many lives were killed including Natalie and many injured. Paige was devastated by Natalie's death, her arrest and Del's veered behaviour. It was a total chaos filled with shedding of blood, pain and agony. Though Del had a good cause, yet he took the authority in hand in a wrong way, for which Allen, Paige, Natalie and many innocent people became the pray.

2) Jesus Movement - Jack Cavanaugh's Afterword gives us the source from which the author has taken the materials about the Jesus Movement. He tells, "In a writer's conference I had the good fortune of meeting Roger and Andrea Palms. When sharing the status of a current project (The Peace maker) I learnt Roger had written a book on Jesus moments, that he had travelled extensively interviewing the people involved in it. He graciously sent me a copy of the book." Using his work, influence of a few and the author's creativity and imagination together, has brought out the final path of the novel for the protagonist Paige to move towards and get involved into the spiritual realm which has provided peace for her and those who have longed for it.

The representation of the Jesus movement is largely historical and more real because it has been in existence. This is also explained by the Wikipedia as, "the **Jesus movement** was an Evangelical Christian movement beginning on the West Coast of the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s and spreading primarily throughout North America, Europe, and Central America, before subsiding by the late 1980s." The author has used the term 'Catacombs' instead of the terms 'Jesus Homes' or 'Jesus movement' except for few places. In his Afterword, he tells, "While the catacombs in this novel are a fictional house, it is representational of Jesus houses across the nation. Many of the scenes are based on real events. The quotes are real. My research into the Jesus people was one of the joys of writing this novel." (427) But here and there, the sentences like, "The Jesus movement was real. She seemed so happy and contented at the Jesus Home." (409), "This is the regular activity of Jesus House in Hollywood" (407), etc. with the word 'Jesus Movement' are also found.

The negative attitude about it is also brought out by the author, like, "The Jesus Movement is a fad. The shallowness and quackery of it ought to be exposed." (404) It is this statement made by a pastor, stirred the mind of Nat with a to explore them. He explores and confirmed in the novel that this movement is real with many testimonies about youngsters doing witnessing work in all possible ways. Since Nat has seem the purity himself, He prays in the last chapter, "Lord, I have a run away. Could you steer him toward one of these Jesus Homes." (410) The true work of the people in Jesus homes has brought in confidence in Nat and the longing father prays for his boy to get into one of these homes, get comforted and return home safely.

More clearly, the first striking words about a book and its exposure about the movement even before reading the book is given in the book's back cover. It says "Paige finds a cause worth living for when she encounters the Jesus Movement and begins a personal journey with God." A brief summary of the whole novel, tells that everyone has a purpose in life and Paige, the protagonist has found it when she got in touch with the people of this movement. Thus she also becomes one among them and begins her personal journey with God. Moreover she brings the whole family a little more closer to God.

3) Billy Graham and his Revival in Anaheim stadium - The author of the novel Jack Cavanaugh says that "Billy Graham held a Revival in Anaheim stadium in 1968. It was one of those serendipitous

find for me. I was pleased that it could become the setting for the stories climax and the reunion of the modern family.” (427) Billy Graham was the real life spiritual evangelist who worked to rescue people in distress and show them the way to attain Peace from God. Similarly, in the novel, Nat is stopping at the convention to have a feel of it and to take few snaps. Being fully satisfied about his study on Jesus Movement, Nat also wanted to witness the convention.

Moreover the whole family is trying to find Travis. Since, Moose – a person from Jesus movement has come across Travis and describes his fear of darkness; they all get an idea of his situation and are trying to find him in brighter places. This is when Allen guesses, “Its a Billy Graham’s revival. ... The place where Billy Graham is preaching. It is called Angel Stadium.” (414) A stadium with lights all over and since there is a convention, there is a possibility of finding Travis there. So Paige, Allen and Allegra headed towards the stadium. And once inside it, there was a large crowd and they started searching him. “She even considered going to the platform and trying to talk to Billy Graham into calling Travis forward.” (417) The author of the book brings in his idea of a convention. It is a place where

- 1) The distressed minds of many are lead towards God.

- 2) Particularly, in this novel, Travis who is afraid of darkness moves into a place which is filled with light. And the convention by Billy Graham, the powerful preacher was mainly to bring light in the lives of people who long for true love, cure, a relief from the bond of darkness and a personal union with God.

- 3) This convention also united the family together.

- 4) It also made the fear of Travis known to the family and the understanding that developed among them created a tight bond within the members of the family.

Thus the convention became a place where the broken hearts are comforted or treated with the word of God and the broken families are united to be bound together in God’s love.

- 4) Assassination - This novel is a part of a historical story called the Vietnam War (1954 to 1976) which has the portrayal of many cruel unhappy instances that has occurred both in Vietnam and America, like the assassination of John F Kennedy in 1963 George Wallace, Ngo Dinh Diem, many other leaders, massacre of many Vietnam civilians, US army men, etc. “They’d killed Martin Luther King Jr. and now they’d killed Bobby Kennedy (Robert).” (182) The author has captured the historical events - merged it appropriately in the story and has portrayed the essence of it clearly.

- 5) The Tet offensive - History.com under the title Vietnam War explains the attack known as Tet offensive. It is a coordinated series of fierce attacks on more than 100 cities and towns in South Vietnam. It is a sudden attack on South Vietnam by the North Vietnam and its allies. It is the forceful action which goes against the war rules. Though North Vietnam might have planned it for quite some time and executed with proper planning, they weren’t able to last long. Even though, U.S. and South Vietnamese forces were taken by surprise, they had the capacity to manage and strike back quickly and effectively that the communists were unable to hold any of the targets for more than a day or two. The protagonist Paige’s brother Travis mentions that, Parts of the city they had passed were nothing more than rubble. Broken, ragged walls, now useless, jutting out of mound of debris. This was the results of the Tet offensive (124)

- 6) Democratic National Convention - “Democratic National Convention - candidate personalities- Chicago Mayor Richard Daley - the balloting, and riots in the park and the street are all based on historical accounts. The personalities Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin and Tom Hayden are historical.” (Cavanaugh, 426) The author has taken the historical event and places his characters with the descriptions related to the novel. The purpose of the convention was for the good. But the death of the three presidential nominees has brought in detached opinion among people. This event has been registered in the novel by the author.

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7) The My Lai massacre - Wikipedia under the title the My Lai Massacre has described the incident as, “The My Lai Massacre was the Vietnam War mass murder of unarmed South Vietnamese civilians by U.S. troops in Son Tinh District, South Vietnam, on 16 March 1968. Victims included men, women, children, and infants.” Many people including children were killed blindly and heartlessly without any mercy. It was a real life incident that is historical and has taken place in Vietnam. This work was done by the soldiers who were upset and fed up about the fierce war. The author has brought in the whole incident representing the real massacre along with its feelings in a small scale.

8) Survivor’s plight and their Memoirs - When Jack Cavanaugh had shared the idea of writing a novel about the period, many survivors have volunteered to share their experience during the war as veterans or people who lost their beloved ones or those who are living handicaps, etc. “Family and friends all knew someone who has been in Vietnam whom I could talk to.” (Cavanaugh) Many have poured out their experience, their fear, the reality and their distress to the author as historical inputs, intrigue in formations, advices, etc.

9) Place Descriptions like Vietnam, the towns, villages, Jungle descriptions, military tactics and the underground network of caves are all based on history. “The large cave in which Travis stumbled upon a cache of American military supplies are based on an actual find during the war.” (426) “The massacre of the village, while fictional, is representative of the My Lai massacre. ‘La Jolla Shores’ is the name of a real shore in our world.

Conclusion

Novels or any literary work written during a period of time speak more truth and gives more information about the historical events. Similarly, this book not only contains the events of history in it, but also the first-hand experience of the people who have experiences or heard about the war from some of the relatives who were involved in it. Thus it is very clear to see that the novel is very much historical and so can be called as a historical novel because of all the historical events embedded in it.

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