



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

English

### CHAMAN NAHAL'S AZADI: A NEW HISTORICAL APPROACH

**KEY WORDS:** New Historicism, Partition, Religious Conflicts, Freedom Struggle, Violence.

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#### ABSTRACT

Azadi presents an intensive picture of the consequence of the traumatic experience of partition and history. Chaman Nahal has depicted the horrors of partition by focusing on the life of Lala Kanshi Ram of Sialkot. The novel highlights the positive as well as the negative side of the complex problems. Lala Kanshi Ram, the protagonist of Azadi becomes a spokesman of the Hindus who are intensely troubled by the unprecedented political event. The greatness of Chaman Nahal lies in his fair and impartial picture of the Hindu-Muslim hatred and love, their emotional and political relationships and the ambivalent relationship between Indian and British people in a very practical and highly structured manner.

Chaman Nahal is one the legendary writers of history in Indian English fiction. He ranks after the three great masters - R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. Chaman Nahal is hailed as a sparkling Indian English novelist. He has enriched the field of political fiction and historical fiction. Nahal has portrayed Gandhiji as the protagonist in his three novels. The novels are *The Crown and the Loincloth*, *The Salt of Life* and *The Triumph of the Tricolour*. These three novels can be labeled as pure Gandhian novels. They generally focus on Gandhi's personality and his political movements. In the novel *The Crown and the Loincloth*, Sunil is the torch bearer of Gandhian beliefs. The political wisdom of Gandhi finds their best expression in his Salt Movement. It is the main concept of the novel *The Salt of Life*.

The present research article focuses on the treatment of new historical elements in Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*. The research article gives an account of various ingredients that Chaman Nahal uses to embellish *Azadi* from a new historical perspective.

Nahal is known for his notable masterpiece *Azadi*. It has been considered as an epic novel portraying on tragic partition of Indian in 1947. The novel is massively popular and it has been translated in several Indian languages. The novel has established Nahal as a reputed writer of Indian English writers. He has captured the real pictures of the tragic partition. Every page of the novel gives the realistic account of the grim tragedy of the partition on the eve of India's independence. The novel is noteworthy for its tragic intensity, trauma and horror. In fact, *Azadi* is full of gloomy realities of partition. The love of one's own motherland has emotional touch. This love and emotional touch acts as a pivotal motive behind the creation of this novel.

Though the novel has been written from an omniscient point of view, it pictures life as seen through Lala Kanshi Ram's consciousness. Lala Kanshi Ram has been leading a contented life in Sialkot as a grain merchant. He has also bought a few acres of land in his native village. He has a devout and gorgeous but illiterate wife, Prabha Rani whom he aims to educate her gradually. He has a daughter, Madhubala and a son, Arun. Lala Kanshi Ram has been living in a rented house belonging to Bibi Amarvati. Lala Kanshi Ram is a vigorous Hindu who has great respect for Vedic philosophy. He knows Sanskrit, Hindi and Punjabi well. Being a member of Arya Samaj, he has great respect for Hindu culture.

Since Lala Kanshi Ram has been living in a colonial situation, he has an ambivalent attitude towards the British Raj. Although as a Hindu patriot he hates the British people and their Government in general, he admires the discipline and precision of the British Raj. He takes his son Arun to the Hurrah Parade and inspires him to watch the discipline of the British officers. The British soldiers' parade is troubled by the stray dogs. The British sergeants, therefore shoot the dogs deftly after the parade is over. Lala Kanshi Ram tries to see the

principle of spiritual unity in human life and therefore thinks that even a British man is created by God. He believes that All created matter was one, man and beast and bird, and the flowers and the trees to boot. And these Angrez were another aspect of the same Brahman who constituted total reality.... Their Hurrah Parade had been ruined by these nasty dogs, which no one owned and which were a nuisance to the entire community. They must help them to corner these scavengers and destroy them. (AZ 23)

The communal hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims which was latent so far becomes blatant and expresses itself in so many details. The Muslims burn down countless houses of the Hindus, burgles their houses, rape the Hindu women and murder the Hindu population indiscriminately. But unfortunately Hindus cannot retaliate strongly and properly because of lack of solidarity among themselves. There is a similar hatred between Muslims and Sikhs also. The Sikhs murder many Muslims mercilessly. Sometimes they compromise with the situation by shaving their beard and removing the paraphernalia of Sikh symbols like turban and kangan etc. Thus there is a general atmosphere of mutual hatred, fear and distrust among the Muslims, the Hindus and the Sikhs. All of them undergo some kind of psychological restlessness, anxiety and insecurity.

The emotional connection between man and woman is not at all affected by the communal hatred. Arun, son of Lala Kanshi Ram has been in love with Nur (Nisar Nurunnisa), sister of Munir. Both of them are students in the same (Murray) college. They often meet secretly. Sometimes, they kiss and hug each other. They share their love for each other. Arun even goes to the extent of being ready to marry her. Being a helpless girl, Nur has no courage to convert herself into a Hindu. She therefore, suggests to Arun to become a Muslim in order to marry her. Thus their love remains pure and unaffected by the communal frenzy happening around them. But Munir, Nur's brother, suspects that the inter-caste love affair between Nur and Arun may trigger communal agitation. He warns Arun to stop seeing Nur and moving with her. But the young lovers dream of uniting with each other in spite of all the barriers.

The traumatic experience of psychological separation between Hindu and Muslims is inevitably followed by the physical separation between the two. Politically the border between India and Pakistan has to be fixed. The Hindu of newly created Pakistan has got to leave for the newly created Pakistan. The government appoints a Boundary Commission to decide the precise boundaries of Pakistan and India. Lala Kanshi Ram wishfully hopes that Sialkot may never go to Pakistan. The Sikhs demand and hope that the boundary line will be at the Chenab basin. But Arun knows realistically that the boundary is going to be at Ravi basin and not at Chenab. Lala Kanshi Ram and his companions are deeply disappointed by the geographical line of partition. Once the boundary line is decided, the pent up anger and disgust are vented out violently and shamelessly everywhere. The Muslims of Sialkot

begin to agitate the peace and happiness of the Hindu by stabbing them, looting their houses and shops and raping their woman. K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri explains the horror of partition in the following words: "Azadi Portrays vividly the horror of the partition, the colossal violence that still haunts the Indian psyche. It concentrates on the exodus of millions of refugees from Pakistan, and on the aftermath of the partition" (3).

The life of Hindus becomes utterly miserable and infernal. Although Kanshi Ram has been a harmless merchant, he is intensely upset when his shop is looted by Muslims at night. Lala Kanshi Ram and his Hindu neighbours have to undergo the throbbing experience of displacement and migration. In spite of their profound emotional attachment to their land, home and shop and region, they are compelled to leave them and go in search of new places for final settlement. The government has approved many refugee camps to facilitate the process of mass migration from one country to the other. Lala Kanshi Ram feels a tremendous anxiety for having to become a landless, homeless and rootless man.

Chaman has a unique skill to portray the characters very skillfully. Lala Kanshi Ram feels crestfallen and grows pale. He is forced by the conditions to leave Sialkot. His good friend Barkat Ali who thinks of Lala Kanshi Ram's safety suggests him to leave the town. But Abdul Ghani, the fanatic Muslim enjoys the sight of Lala Kanshi Ram's plight. The communal frenzy continues in the city. The Hindu Deputy Commissioner is shot dead by his Muslim bodyguard. Compelled by the insecure atmosphere, Lala Kanshi Ram finally decides to leave his house and to move to the Refugee camp. Consequently all the members of his family like Prahba Rani and Arun and his neighbours like Bibi Amar Vati, Suraj Prakash, Sunanda, Padmini and Chandni and many others accompany him in the truck which takes them to the Refugee Camp. Bill Davidson brings two trucks in the evening and transports them to the Refugee Camp. Thus the process of Lala Kanshi Ram's dislocation has started. He has become totally homeless and rootless and forced to undergo the experience of insecurity and uncertainty. Lala Kanshi Ram is given a separate tent for his family in the Refugee Camp.

The author has beautifully mixed personal life with public tragedy. In addition to Lala Kanshi Ram's personal tragedy, he has to bear the public tragedy also happening around him. The communal chaos and murders do not cease in spite of the government effort to maintain peace in the region. On the whole, the refugees are physically and psychologically shattered. The admirable thing in Lala Kanshi Ram's life is that he has developed a philosophical and almost a yogic calmness of vision in spite of all the traumatic experience he and his family have undergone. He knows that Muslims alone are not to be blamed and that Hindus are equally guilty. Although Prahba Rani is very furious with Muslims for killing her daughter, Madhu, Lala Kanshi Ram tries to silence her by his yogic vision: "I can't hate the Muslims any more.... What I mean is, whatever the Muslims did to us in Pakistan, we're re doing it to them here! ... We have sinned as much. We need their forgiveness" (AZ 335).

*Azadi* is an important novel which deals with various aspects of the traumatic experience of partition of the country into two. Chaman Nahal shows his remarkable powers of observation of the human nature in general and the political behaviour of Hindus and Muslims in particular. Though the novel is tragic in its tone; it is epic in its vast canvas. The greatness of Chaman Nahal lies in his fair and impartial picture of the Hindu-Muslim hatred and love, their emotional and political relationships and the ambivalent relationship between Indian and British people in a very practical and highly structured manner. The novel is a landmark in the Indian English political fiction providing solid material both to the literary critic and the political psychologist for aesthetic enjoyment and dispassionate research.

There is nothing unusually complex in the plot and structure of *Azadi*; it is linear and sequential. The story opens on June 3 1947 with an announcement by the then Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten's declaring the division of the country into two parts—India and Pakistan; it ends with the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1948. *Azadi*, thus deals with eight tumultuous months in the history of the Indian subcontinent. The impact of some other historical events proceeding this period is also perceptible. Interspersed in the novel are references to the Jalianwala Bagh tragedy, Quit India Movement, the Cripps Mission, the Radcliffe Boundary Commission, the interim Government with Nehru as Prime Minister and the Sikh demand that the river Chenab should be the boundary between India and Pakistan. There are frequent references to Gandhi's offer to Jinnah for a home-land for Muslims within an independent India itself. *Azadi* clearly deals with a momentous period of our history. *Azadi* gives us a historical document. The great persons involved in the drama of this—Mountbatten, Rajaji, Jinnah, Gandhiji, Nehru and a host of other national leaders are all present but none of them appears in person in the novel. They are all described through the reactions of the people. Parvathi N. Rao explains the relationship of Hindu and Muslim hatred in the following words: "Lala Kanshi Ram and Abdul Ghani's relationship is an example of a disrupted co-existence owing to partition. A man of little knowledge and no education, this petty businessman Abdul Ghani starts suspecting Lala Kanshi Ram because he has been told by the Muslim League to distrust the Hindu" (14).

*The Cambridge Guide to literature in English* assesses the work in these words: "His most considerable novel, *Azadi*, describes Hindu, Muslim and Sikha living together peacefully in the Punjab until Partition turned neighbours into enemies, citizens into fugitives" (Ousby 704).

*Azadi*, meaning 'freedom', takes into account the various events leading to the partition, the actual event itself and its aftermath. The story is related to certain historical events of great importance and their impact on ordinary people—thus creating two narrative levels, the historical and the human, both merging at crucial points to make the narrative effective.

## REFERENCES

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