

“AZADI”: A NIGHTMARE

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Abstract: Chaman Nahal is one of the prominent writers of Indian English literature. He has penned eight numbers of novels. *Azadi* (Independence) is one of the four novels which constitute the Gandhi Quartet. It is a modern classic presents a comprehensive vision of life demonstrating the mayhem that partition played on the people of the country at the socio-cultural, economic and individual levels. It portrays the realistic historical records of the horrible incidents caused by the partition through literary perspectives. The novel is about the theme of partition of Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. As a refugee Nahal writes with remarkable penetration and realism. The novel is political, historical and above all a great work of art. The three parts of the novel ‘Lull’, ‘Strom, and ‘Aftermath’, make it clear that it is about the peaceful atmosphere before the partition, the terrific incident caused by the partition and the plight of the uprooted refugees after the partition. The novelist has used the seven families of a Muslim dominated city Sialkot to represent thousands of sufferers like them. He himself was one of those sufferers who were forced to leave Sialkot for India. Thus he wrote life pictures of that event. This paper is an attempt to highlight the inexplicable sufferings of those refugees during the time of partition.

Keywords: *Partition, Refugees, Horrible, Mayhem, etc.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Literature play an important role in portraying the history, growth, development and all other related activities of man and society. Being responsible to the society the writers try to portray the records of their society, nation or the country in their writings. Fiction being an effective genre includes the historical events to be recreated truthfully. The tragedy of partition encounter has given rise to fictional explorations with an attempt to define the inner turmoil and social complexes that plagued the sub-continent. Discussing the treatment of partition and its effect in fiction; Shashi Tharoor observes;

By representing the Partition in ‘Universal’ terms as outrageous, and its effects as a metaphysical disorder that can be restored to equilibrium only by the artist who is imaged as a magician-healer, these texts inaugurate a narrative and a subjectivity that translates history and politics into a failure of humanity. (P.6)

The partition of India and the associated bloody riots inspired many creative minds in India, Pakistan and modern day Bangladesh to write literary depictions of this event. The moving issue of partition and the holocaust that followed it stirred the feeling of the writers who thought it their responsibility to recreate the events through their writings.

In Indian sub-continent a large number of writers have been written their works dealing with the theme of partition. Among them Chaman Nahal ia a prominent one. He is a novelist of painful odysseys presented in different contexts. His five novels have made their bow in quick succession: *My True Faces* (1973), *Azadi* (Independence) (1975), *Into Another Dawn* (1977), *The English Queens* (1979) and *The Crown and The Loincloth* (1981). Of these, ‘*Azadi*’ (*Independence*), which won Sahitya Academy award for the year 1977 is a much more ambitious undertaking. Many of the partition writers were direct witness and even victims of the partition holocaust. Chaman Nahal was a direct victim of partition. He was an inhabitant of Sialkot and had to leave his own home for India. He witnessed and suffered himself all the agony of partition. As a refugee of partition he underwent unfold sufferings caused by the partition. He reflected:

I was born in Sialkot and after 1947 we were driven away to India I can understand the suffering and loneliness that such an exile imposes on the persons; involved in a classy by itself. (Dhawan96)

2. OBJECTIVES:

The main objective of this paper is to highlight the sufferings of those refugees during partition through Chaman Nahal’s novel *Azadi* (*Independence*).

3. METHODOLOGY:

The research methodology applied here is an analytical one. It is based on both primary and secondary sources i.e. data collected from books, internet etc.

4. DISCUSSION:

Azadi (Independence), is the masterpiece of Nahal and one of the more satisfying imaginative records of the partition of India that held the subcontinent in nightmare of horror for months and left a trail of phenomenal bitterness and misery. Even at this distance of time, the wounds bleed afresh at the prod of memory. Like Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, *Azadi (Independence)*, too is done with rigorous and resolved selectiveness. This account of the migration of Lala Kanshi Ram, a Sialkot grain merchant and his family to India at the time of the dismemberment of colonial India into two nations in 1947, is easily one of the most comprehensive fictional accounts of the partition holocaust in Indian English literature. Nahal concentrates not only on Lala Kanshi Ram's family, but also like a computer, multiply the horror and the pity of a million fold, and try to get at the measure of the total holocaust. Suicide, forced conversion, resigned acceptance, precipitate flight, muted despair- all the varieties of the horror of the times are projected in the novel.

As a piece of fiction, *Azadi (Independence)* is cleverly contrived and the interior stitching and the general coloring are beyond cavil. The plot of the novel is divided into three parts- 'lull', 'storm' and 'aftermath'. All the three parts are well- arranged and well-connected. The titles of all the three parts have their own significance and symbolic meaning. The beginning part 'Lull' mainly tells us about the peaceful life and silent atmosphere in Sialkot before the announcement of partition and how after the announcement –'lull' has gone from Sialkot. Though Sialkot was a Muslim dominated city, there was unity among all the classes. This can be realized through the friendship of Lala Kanshi Ram and Choudhary Barkat Ali and the love relationship of Arun and Nur. Lala Kanshi Ram and Choudhary Barkat Ali were not only friends but just like brothers. Both families shared each other's happiness and sorrows. Influenced by Gandhi's speech, Choudhary Barkat Ali says to Lala Kanshi Ram;

You are my brother from today. (P.101)

Then, we see the love relationship of Arun and Nur, the son of Lala Kanshi Ram and the daughter of Chaudhary Barkat Ali. Arun is ready to become a Muslim for her sake. Munir's advice to him too shows the harmony between Hindu and Muslim.

The second part i.e. "Storm" presents really a furious storm and it comes like a nightmare to Sialkot. This part gives detailed description of the atrocities. As K.R.Srinivas Iyengar writes:

The 'leaders' had sowed the wind of communal suspicion and partition was the result; like a whirlwind, the mad act of partition was uprooting masses of humanity, mangling them and throwing them across the border heap after heap. (P.498)

When the storm breaks out in the city Lala Kanshi Ram, Choudhary and even Bill Davidson get depressed. In the refugee camp Kanshi Ram receives the news of the death of his daughter, Madhu, who while coming from Wazirabad to Sialkot by a train, is attacked and killed by some frenzied Muslim in addition to the news of the murder of her husband. It becomes very difficult for the Hindus and Sikhs even to walk on the open street. In spite of several difficulties, Arun and Suraj Prakash go to Barkat Ali and then to the railway station to find out Madhu's dead body. Chaman Nahal gives the horrifying details of the atrocities as below:

...dismembered limbs, dozens of them legs and arms, and hands and thighs, and feet. The fire had consumed other parts of the bodies; it was the part which had not fully burned that stood out. And there were the skulls... Many lay face down; the others faced the sky or looked sideways... Very often a skull cracked open with a popping noise, its bones disintegrating into the heap around. Since it was a quite night, the sound came like the crack of a rifle; it was an unnerving sound. (PP. 183-84)

Kanshi Ram, who had so far been insisting on staying at Sialkot, now insists on leaving for India as early as possible. He himself with his family had to leave Sialkot with his entire property and bosom- friend like Barkat Ali. Arun his son too had to leave Nurul Nishar and sacrifice his love during this time. The Muslim started celebrating the creation of Pakistan with drum beating and firecrackers. Then they started burning one Hindu 'mohala'(residential area) every night. Lala Kanshi Ram's shop was looted. All the Hindus were forced to leave for refugee camp. Then the families of Lala Kanshi Ram and others had to move in foot convoy to India. Although wounded in spirit the convoy moved towards the Indian border. The march was attacked thrice. Sunanda became widow and Chandini was abducted in the refugee camp. *Azadi (Independence)* very truthfully refers the social troubles through an account of the atrocities committed by the fanatic Muslims upon Hindu women in the parade at the bazaar (a marketplace) of Narowal to prove the fact that how fatal and nasty could be the outcome of communal hatred:

There were forty women, marching abreast. Their ages varied from sixteen to thirty... there were two women... who must have been over sixty. They were all stark naked... They were all crying; though their eyes shed no tears... the bruises on their bodies showed they had been beaten and manhandled. Their masters walked beside them and if any of the women sagged or hung behind, they prodded her along with the whips they carried... The procession moved through the bazaar (marketplace) and along with the procession moved a river of obscenities- foul abuses, crude personal gestures, spurt of sputum... As soon as the women came near, that section of the crowd became hysterical 'Rape them', 'Put it inside of them.'... Many men in the front rows of the crowd lifted their lungis (a coloured piece of cloth wrapped round the waist) to display their genital to them... (PP. 292-294).

In this way, Nahal effectively establishes how Partition affected the two nations in general and women in particular. Urvashi Butalia raises a pertinent question about the predicament of women during Partition:

Why was it that we heard so little about them? How had they experienced the anguish of the division, the euphoria of the newly-forming nations? My assumptions were simple: firstly, that these questions had remained unasked because of the patriarchal underpinnings of history as a discipline. I also believed (and this view has been considerably qualified since) that in times of communal strife and violence, women remain essentially non-violent, and are at the receiving end of violence as victims, and that they are left with the task of rebuilding the community. (P. 55)

Thus, the society was affected too much in moral and cultural sphere. People's morality was so degraded that they had completely forgotten the honour and dignity of 'women' of whom they were born. The cause of such degradation was nothing but communal hatred grown by the partition. Finally, they reach India. The families of Lala Kanshi Ram and Bibi Amar Vati are given a hut like camp to live in.

The third part 'Aftermath' depicts the events after the partition and independence like Mahatma Gandhi's assassination and the contrasting reactions of the people on it. The priest of non-violence is killed by violence. Except a few refugees like Kanshi Ram and Sunanda all blame Mahatma for the partition tragedy. The mood of frustration and anger with reference to Gandhi was a common experience in those days. The discussion among Arun, Sunanda and Bibi Amar Vati after Gandhi's assassination is worth studying,

Well, it is a good thing he is gone. He brought nothing but misery to us...It all happened because of the partition. And it was Gandhi who sanctioned the partition. 'That's not true'. Arun felt he had to put the record straight. 'It was the Congress leaders, like Nehru and Patel'. 'They were his stooges'. 'No, auntie. You are wrong there. In the final days they didn't listen to him. (PP. 366-367)

Thus, there is a controlled tension in Nahal's narratives and his envenomed memories as a victim of partition have not, however, warped his sensibilities. *Azadi* (Independence) indeed lives in many levels – political, religious, social, cultural, and historical – and certain images haunts the reader. Niranjan Singh, straight as a sword, committing self-immolation, Sunanda's fierce gesture of defiance confronting Rahmat Ullah, threatening to kill him if he touch her; Isher Kaur's giving birth to a daughter in the refugee train just as another refugee train passes it by creeping towards Pakistan full of dead and dying. It is hardly possible to exorcise these images which are very realistic. The plot of the novel through these images refers to the time just before the partition and depicts the ill-effects of the partition and ends with what happens to the refugees just after the partition and the independence. It also shows the contrasting characters like Barkat Ali who tries his best to give company to his friend Lala Kanshi Ram and his family in their nightmarish moments and Rahmat Ullah Khan who as an officer instead of giving shelter and protection tried to rape Sunanda Bala.

A nightmare with an exciting finish, one closes the novel with a sense of relief; the lie has become the truth, the unbelievable has happened. In *Azadi* (Independence) two episodes like the procession of jubilant Muslims in Sialkot when partition is announced, the queer parade of naked Hindu women in Narowal and the immolation of Niranjan Singh stand out by their realism. And there is enough evidence to convict both the British administrators who, after two hundred years of trusteeship, could only prepare for the holocaust, and the national movement led by barristers, thinkers, Mahatmas (an illustrious or eminent man) and Moulanas (a title of a Mahomedan scholar) that could celebrate the baptism of freedom only with mass murder and revolting bestiality.

5. CONCLUSION:

Chaman Nahal has succeeded in communicating to his readers a hint of grossness, ghastliness and total insanity of the two nation theory and the partition tragedy. The whole horror is there but humanity and compassion are there too and the novel adequately conveys them both. Thus, though the events of the novel seem to us like a nightmare, it is the reality which every Indian of that time had to face and till now in the 21st century it is a living wound. However, the novelist here tries to show a note of hope in the end of the novel after the nightmare i.e. the re-settlement of the families of Lala Kashi Ram and other tenants.

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