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The Impact of Partition on Love in Chaman Nahal's Azadi

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Abstract

Like Train to Pakistan, Chaman Nahal's Azadi also focuses mainly on Partition – the factors leading to Partition and its ghastly aftermath. Azadi dramatizes the dehumanization of life and the collapse of all values. The novel written on an epic scale, offers a most comprehensive account of Partition. Also, it is a Partition novel with a difference, as Nahal stresses through the protagonist Lala Kanshi Ram the necessity of human forgiveness, laying due emphasis on "the affirmation of life" to which he is "committed" through his stark realism gets dissipated by a heavy dose of romantic love and sex. M.K. Naik's observation on Partition novels in general and Azadi in particular is at once momentous and interesting: Why must Hindu heroes of Partition novels fall, with monotonous regularity, in love with Muslim girls alone? And in describing with intimate detail the liaison between Arun and Chandani, the Charwaoman's daughter, the author (Chaman Nahal) appears to be aiming at killing with one stone the two birds of sex-interest and social reform. Another serious flaw is the mixing up of the point of view of the protagonist, Lala Kanshi Ram and that of Arun, which destroys the unity of impression. In this article, an investigation is made to understand, assess and justify the contribution of especially the younger generation novelist like Chaman Nahal to Indian English fiction.

Key Words: Love, Azadi, Arun and Chandani.

Introduction: Indian writings in English which depicted the freedom struggle, socio-political discontent and Gandhian principles of non-violence shifted to the theme of holocaust of partition, after the attainment of independence in 1947. This horrendous tragedy of partition gave rise to a new corpus of literature. The blood-curdling colossal event stirred the minds of the Indian writers and as a result of it, a number of novels were written. Most of the writers witnessed this gory catastrophe that gave vent to their expressions in the form of novels. The tragedy of partition which resulted in complete chaos and destruction provided the writers with rich source of treasure for their pen.

The partition of India in 1947 was the worst colossal incident that took place immediately after the attainment of freedom. It came as a rude shock with its horrifying consequences which one had not thought, dreamt or imagined. This historical event made a friend turned into a foe over night breaking all the barriers of good relationship that was

built up since ages. The memories of horror, arson, murders, rapes, lootings, haunted the minds of the people giving a feeling of shock, terror and insecurity. Millions of people were uprooted and migrated across the new frontiers to face hardships and difficulties. The novels that deal with the theme of partition directly or indirectly are Khushwant Singh's "Train to Pakistan" (1955), Balchandra Rajan's "The Dark Dancer" (1958), Attia Hosain's "Sunlight on a Broken Column" (1961), Bonophul's "Between Dream and Reality" (1961), Padmini Sengupta's "Red Hibiscus" (1962), Manohar Malgonkar's "Distant Drum" (1961) and "A Bend in the Ganges" (1964), Chaman Nahal's "Azadi" (1975) and H.S. Gill's "Ashes and Petals" (1978). Among all these novels, Khushwant Singh's "Train to Pakistan" and Chaman Nahal's "Azadi" depict the theme of partition directly. These novels tell about the problems and the turbulence that defaced India because of partition.

Indian novelist in English, Chaman Nahal has to his credit eight novels. His novels in chronological orders are "My True Faces" (1973), "Azadi" (1975), "Into Another Dawn" (1977), "The English Queens" (1979), "The Crown and the Loin Cloth" (1981), "Sunrise in Fiji" (1988), "The Salt of Life" (1990) and "The Triumph of Tricolour" (1992). He has portrayed Gandhiji in his Gandhi Quartet. Nahal's Gandhi Quartet comprises of four novels, "The Crown and the Loin Cloth", "The Salt of Life", "The Triumph of the Tricolour" and "Azadi". This article deals with the impact of partition on love in Chaman Nahal's novel, "Azadi". "Azadi" is a master piece of Nahal's creative genius. Nahal being a native of Sialkot had himself witnessed the horrors and holocaust created by communal frenzy. The story of the novel covers the period from the announcement of the Cabinet Mission Plan on June 3, 1947 up to the period after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi on January 30, 1948. This momentous event of history focuses its impact on few individuals and the family of Lala Kanshi Ram, a grain merchant. The country's partition throttles down the love of young lovers like Arun and Nur and later on his love with Chandni.

The novel, "Azadi" depicts the tragedy and atrocities at the time of partition of India which was the worst ever incident in the history of India. India was very cruelly divided into two parts, that is, India and Pakistan, which left a deep scar in the minds of millions and millions of people. It was the darkest period in the annals of Indian history and though so many decades have elapsed since then, this incident cannot be easily wiped out of memory, as it left a tale of massive destruction and massacre. According to a critic, Sisir Kumar Das, the partition of India left with it –

The memories of horror, looting and arsons, murders and rape haunted the people intensifying their sense of shock and insecurity. Millions were uprooted and migrated across the new frontiers to face hard lives. Before the people could realize the political implications of the partition they were blinded by the unprecedented atrocities and cruelties of man against man

Ambuj Sharma, another critic, says that the partition of the country was *heart-rending, unpleasant, regrettable, unpardonable, undreamt of event in the annals of Indian history – the division of India.*² Besides the geographical division of the land, the partition also built

wall between people and people. The wall of religion, caste, colour and so on. The army, the bureaucracy, the neighbours who were friends till yesterday became sworn enemies at that time. The vast surgical operation of the proverbial Siamese twin, the partition of the country, resulted as it were, in terrible bloodshed.

The novel, "Azadi" by Chaman Nahal describes both pain and pleasure during the attainment of freedom of India in 1947. When India was free from the clutches of the British rule, it was a time of triumph, an occasion of rejoice and celebration, but what followed after it was the worst and shameful act that went into the pages of the history books to be read with remorse. Ambuj Sharma further says that the novel, *Azadi is about the freedom struggle of India ending into a tale of woe – a holocaust, genocide, mass destruction, arson, rape, carnage and turbulence, gerrymandered by the British and the Muslim League.*³ Though the action in "Azadi" centres on the political frenzy at the time of partition of India into India and Pakistan, in fact it tells about the impact of the worst tragedy in the history of modern India. "Azadi" depicts the role played by Indian politics in the lives of both the Hindus and the Muslims in general and its impact on the lives of the lovers, like Arun and Nur and later on again the former with Chandni.

The love between Arun and Nur is quite transient and short-lived. The partition of India acts as a backdrop in the lives of both Arun and Nur due to which their love is torn apart. Just like the partition of the country into two, there is a kind of division in their lives too, that is, the separation of two hearts. Their love is completely crushed and shattered. The lovers are forced to separate from each other due to the dominant political turmoil as a result of which their future appears too bleak to them. Arun, who lives in Sialkot with his parents, has to leave the place because it becomes a part of Pakistan.

Nurul Nisar is the daughter of Chaudhari Barkat Ali with whom Arun falls in love. It has been only two years since Arun and Nurul Nisar known as Nur spoke of love to each other. *And yet every time he approached her, wherever he approached her, belonged for her as if it were the first encounter. There was ever a flutter in his heart. Will she come or won't she? Will an enemy be hiding somewhere to report back on them? Will she be able to make it --- or won't she?*⁴ After the announcement of partition of India, Arun, a Hindu boy, having affairs with a Muslim girl is watched menacingly by other Muslim boys. The political crisis based on religious barriers stands as an obstacle between these two young lovers who belong to two different religions and both become quite helpless. Arun earlier assures Nur that he will embrace Islam for her sake, but the whole picture gradually changes with the occurrence of partition. He demands why Nur can not embrace Hinduism. Nur is stunned to hear this which is beyond her anticipation, beyond her wildest imagination and dream. Amidst tears she says to Arun that she is a defenseless girl and cannot force her will on her family. She pins her hope on Arun to make sacrifices for her, he being a man and thereby more independent. According to Mohan Jha,

In the usual course of events, in spite of their differing religions Arun and Nur might have got united in marriage, but with the outbreak of communal violence

*everything goes topsy-turvy. However, in the flush of his youthful romance Arun could have elected to go in for Nur in preference to his parents, but the communal holocaust suddenly makes 'a man' of him, and he chooses to share the joys and sorrows of life with his parents.*⁵

The family of Arun decides to leave for Delhi from the refugee camp. Munir, the brother of Nur, hands a letter to Arun written by Nur to him. The letter is smudged all over with tears which itself shows Nur's sorrowful state. The content of the letter is a tearful reflection of Nur's mind. It reads thus,

*I'm weeping when I write this to you, will I ever see you again? God alone knows why people are so full of hate. I wish they were not to part souls that love each other. But I'll think of you till the day of my death. May Allah protect you. Khuda hafiz.*⁶

Nur's letter has a pessimistic tone of their bleak future, with no hope of meeting each other again. The partition of the country and the political turmoil has a gloomy picture of the future for these two lovers.

Arun's love is unfulfilled because of the political agitation and more so because of the religious disparity which causes havoc in his life. Arun and Nur, a Hindu boy and a Muslim girl respectively, become helpless victims and are caught quite unaware by the unexpected partition of India. They did not have the least notion that one day their love life will end thus abruptly. The oaths and promises of love made by both remain unfulfilled.

However, fate takes a different turn in the life of Arun. One day while in the refugee camp Arun happens to see Chandni, the daughter of Padmini, the charwoman. Chandni in the blissful lap of sleep is unaware that she is being watched. Arun feels an acute pain surge up in his heart. He soon falls head over heels in love with her and believes that god had sent her to him at the right time. *Chandni had seeped so deeply into his consciousness. Nur now seemed only a milestone – a milestone which he remembered, but had left far back on his path.*⁷ Arun's change of love from Nur to Chandni makes one feel whether Arun's love for Nur was a mere infatuation? Or was he trying to fill up the vacuum created by Nur? His attention towards Chandni's "heaving breasts" makes one feel that whether his love for Chandni was not a true love, but a mere physical attraction. In all, it appears that Arun is indeed trying to escape from the unpleasant past – a gloomy debacle. He is in a way trying to forget Nur by giving Chandni a place in his heart.

The love between Arun and Chandni does not grow gradually, but comes upon them so suddenly that they are taken quite unaware by it. Arun is least bothered about Chandni's education, her status, her breeding or her poverty. He finds a new identity for himself in his love for Chandni. But Chandni fears and doubts whether their love will reach a fruitful culmination. She is afraid that her poverty and caste would prevent her from marrying Arun. She staggers in fear as she fancies the thought of being married to him. Though their whole life pattern is different she still clings to him with hopes. She trusts Arun's words and her

complexion glows with the profession of his love which acts as a magic potion in her psyche. One day Arun overwhelmed with emotion blurts out before his mother that he desires to marry Chandni. Though nervous his voice appears to be steely and decisive. This shy and pimply youth of twenty seems to be quite determined. But his mother is only amused by it.

However, even the second woman, Chandni, who comes in his life, is also snatched away from Arun due to the turmoil of partition. His promise to make her his wife when they reach India is a mere promise of distant future. She is abducted from the camp at Narowal when Pakistan attacks the refugee camp. It is a second major blow to Arun when Chandni is abducted. Now Arun loathes both his father and Padmini. He believes that they were responsible for the separation of Chandni and himself.

From the refugee camp Arun and his parents proceed towards Delhi. Arun does not know where he is heading for. All he knew is that he is leaving behind both Nur and Chandni. *Nur was only the beginning, he had walked only the foothills with her. But Chandni had taken him up the slopes to the summit. What would he be without her, without his hamrahi?*⁸ Arun realises the depth of loss of Chandni only on reaching Delhi. Life seems to pull on too mechanically for him day by day. He wants to end his life, but that would only mean cutting off his relationship with Chandni. Arun tries to survive only by feeling the pain over the loss of his second love and by cherishing those thoughts he wants to retain that relationship till his death and sever all other relationships.

The novel, "Azadi", on the whole describes how partition of the country plays havoc in the lives of lovers like Arun, Nur and Chandni. Both women, Nur and Chandni, create a void in Arun's life, a life of unfulfilled love, a life filled with gloom. Arun remains a disappointed lover till the end of the novel. He wants to remain alive only to keep in memory Chandni. Arun, though frustrated is still trying to survive the crisis by clinging to the hope that one day or the other his Chandni would return to him. Mohan Jha says that,

*Chaman Nahal's Azadi is an epoch-making book which describes not only the terror and tumult that accompanied, in fact, darkened, the attainment of freedom I 1947 but does also envisage man's Azadi or freedom from beastliness, from moral, psychological and Spiritu l malady.*⁹

Thus through this novel "Azadi", Chaman Nahal has portrayed a realistic event of a tragedy which took place in 1947, immediately with the freedom of India to be remembered as a red letter day and the partition that followed it as a period of shame, cruelty, destruction and a black period to go into the annals of history. Chaman Nahal's "Azadi" depicts hopeful dawn of the Indian Independence and of the greedy politicians whose inhuman decision ruined families and killed half a million innocent people. How the partition has destroyed peaceful co-existence and also human relations, can be seen through the frustrated love stories of Arun-Nur and Arun-Chandni. On the whole, the novel "Azadi" depicts that the cosmic pain and bloodshed are a prelude to a birth of new humanity and new relationships.

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