

Socio-psychological Issues in the Novels of Chaman Nahal

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Abstract

This paper deals with the partition between India and Pakistan. After partition how people became mentally sick and psychologically depress. Chaman Nahal depicted a photographic detail the catastrophic episode that was enacted on the Indian soil immediately before and after the declaration of the British decision in June 1947 to vacate India after partitioning it. Nahal showed how people of Pakistan have been living together with peace and harmony, but after the partition world is shaken by the creation of Pakistan.

Keywords: human psyche, massacre, bloodshed, partition, trauma, anguish, rape, violence

Socio Psychology is the scientific study of how people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others. Social Psychologists therefore deal with the factors that lead us to behave in a given way in the presence of others and look at the conditions under which certain behavior/actions and feelings, thoughts, beliefs, intentions and goals are constructed and how such psychological factors, in turn influence our interaction with others. The term socio-psychological means factors which are related to the society and psychology which are ultimately related to the life. The society and psychology are deeply related to each other. So we can say that when the writer is able to highlight his psychological matters that surely mean that the society around him has put the effect upon his mind, by which he discloses it in the form of his volumes. Any writer whatever he writes is called as the voice of time especially of his contemporary time, because he is the testimonial of the happenings around him.

Azadi is the major novel by Chaman Nahal. The novel, *Azadi* deals with the theme of partition of Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. As Chaman Nahal himself was a refugee, he writes with remarkable penetration and realism. The novel is historical, political, and above all, a great work of art. It offers the most comprehensive treatment of the colossal tragedy to date. *Azadi* won the Sahitya Akademi Award. The novel depicts in photographic detail the catastrophic episode that was enacted on the Indian soil immediately before and after the declaration of the British decision in June 1947 to vacate India after partitioning it. *Azadi* is certainly perhaps the most comprehensive presentation of the partition holocaust in Indian English fiction. It contains some moving episodes. But there are some serious limitations like conventional romantic touches, an over plus of sex and a faulty narrative strategy. It is a matter-of-account of a well-to-do Hindu grain merchant and his family.

The Partition of India was the route of separating the sub-continent along parochial lines in 1947 as India achieved its independence from British Empire. It led into a Muslim dominating northern state of Pakistan and Hindu predominating southern part became the Republic of India. Partition however demolished both India and Pakistan as it averted many lives in riots, rapes, murders and looting but also about 15 million people were displaced from their homes. The two countries commenced their independence with bust economies and lands without an entrenched, competent system of government. Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* is a modern classic which conceals an inclusive revelation of life signifying the chaos that partition played on the people of the country both at the social and individual levels. It portrays the realistic historical documentation of the atrocious confrontations caused by the partition through literary perspective. As Chaman Nahal himself was a refugee, he writes with incredible ingress and realism. Therefore he has written his own experience through the character of Lala Kashiram and his son Arun. The novel is about the mum environment before the declaration of Partition, the awful incidents caused by the partition and the wretched circumstances of the deracinated refugees after the Partition.

Azadi is the story of Lala Kanshi Ram and his family living in Sialkot, and on the universal plane, of the people exaggerated by the Partition. Lala Kanshi Ram, the protagonist. A wholesale grain merchant in Sialkot has earned name, fame and destiny by working very hard. His son Aruna college student and his beloved wife, Prabha Rani makes his familial life quite happy. The lull very closely accustoms us with Lala Kanshi Ram who is a distinctive Indian of the time and whose idol is Mahatma Gandhi. Through statement of belief he is a nationalist Hindu living in the Muslim – majority Sialkot. He loves his land and it is at this juncture in Sialkot that his father and forefather lived. The British, according to him be obliged to quit India and give Azadi to the Indians he writes:

—Like any other Indian, he had a prejudice against the British. He hated them for what they had done to his country and wanted Azadil. (Nahal 18)

However, the social atmosphere in the country is in utterly chaos the Punjabis are kept under perpetual

tension and the Muslims as well as the Sikhs fail to guess anything about the Partition. The selfish leaders play their role very shrewdly, only few men sitting and deciding the fate of the millions. The Arya samajist Lala hopes to achieve freedom with an undivided India.

The Lala speaks in Panjabi and writes in Urdu. For him Urdu is not the language solely of Muslim. In his mind there is no grudge against the Muslim, but he is aware of their attitude towards Hindus and Sikhs. He has firm faith in Gandhi and is sure that he will never agree to a division of the country. However, he is deeply worried that, —everything will be ruined if Pakistan is created.

Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims have been living together in peace and harmony for many decades in the Punjab city of Sialkot. Kanshi Ram's world is shaken by the creation of Pakistan and he stands as a shattered individual, his cherished beliefs and values not giving him support. Events are presented through the consciousness of Lala azadi hurriedly. As a result, Arunand Nur, and also Barkat Ali and Lala curse the hastily achieved freedom and the instantaneous Partition. It is on the 24th June, that the Muslim friends of the Lala kill a number of Hindus, and then it becomes a daily ritual. It is reported that Muslim refugees from India come to Sialkot in a heartbroken condition, telling the stories of molestations and massacre by Hindus and Sikhs. This provokes the Muslim to kill the Hindus who began to go to the refugee camps and then to India.

“Whatever the Muslims did to us in Pakistan, we're doing it to them here He feels miserable and repentant and seeks to apologise all the Muslims on behalf of all the Hindus when he says —we have sinned as much. We need their forgiveness!! the novelist, however, demonstrates that even after Partition, some Muslims stand for communal harmony. Chaudari Barkat Ali is one such large hearted person who does not support any anti-Hindu violence. O.P. Mathur opines that Lala:

Takes a stance which clearly demonstrates his freedom from commitment to anything except love, compassion, tolerance and forgiveness, in a word 'freedom of spirit and mind' which alone makes political freedom meaningful. The superficial differences of religion peel off and reveal the essential humanity of man and the idiocy of the evil that seeks to raise artificial walls of hatred between one human being and another.

(Mathur 90)

Thus Lala realizes that forgiveness is the only way to recover one's sanity, one's humanity and to live in peace with oneself. It is not only story of Lala but millions of people like him. —...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. J.M. Purohit endorses this view when he says, “ —All most all his novels end with optimistic vision”

(Purohit 130).

Partition resulted in the monstrous holocaust ever witnessed. There was wholesale destruction due to communal frenzy and the whole balance of human relationships is upset. Yet the novel reveals a ray of hope and regeneration before it closes. This prompts Asha Kaushik to remark that —...although beginning on a note of ambivalence and uncertainties of national integrity in the face of religious fanaticism, moral degradation and political fragmentation. Azadi closes with the affirmation that a nation out lives even annihilating tragedies. (Kaushik, 69)

The Partition of the sub-continent in 1947 was the most inauspicious incident in the history of Indian freedom struggle. Tens of thousands of people were killed and an equal number of people were rendered homeless and injured. The extraordinary migration that took place during those days has no parallel in history. Whereas taking a brief assessment of the Partition it becomes clear that it was the Muslim communiqué launched by the Muslim League's Two – Nation theory that gave birth to Partition. In advance the Congress was not ready for any kind of division of the sub-continent. Nevertheless finally the leaders of Congress party were also circumstanced to accept it as it became an 'inevitable Alternative'. Thus the genuine responsibility of the Partition goes to Jinnah and his Muslim League, of course, Jinnah was not the first person to sow the seeds of separatist tendencies. It was smooth before 1867 that Muslims like Sir Sayed Ahmad, Choudhary Rahmat Ali and Muhmad Iqbal, tried hard to create a separate Muslim nation. The Congress, on the other hand, tried to maintain synchronization between the two communities. But unfortunately the Indian leaders failed to keep the Hindus and the Muslims together and in 1947 the vast Indian sub-continent was partitioned.

In *Azadi*, Nahal's purpose is to describe the impact of the Partition on ordinary people. He portrays the pain Lala Kanshi Ram and his family of Sialkot, now in Pakistan, goes through due to Partition and their alienation from their own homeland. This reflects the suffering of the millions of people who are uprooted and forced to migrate to India. People sadly realize that they are unwanted in their own native places and that *Azadi* brings only untold misery and an uncertain future. Nahal describes the excruciating experiences of the uprooted people in refugee camps and on their way to India, travelling on foot, in convoys and submitting themselves helplessly to violence of all sorts – arson, murder, abduction and rape. After arriving in India, much suffering awaits them, in their own free country, at the hands of an indifferent and callous bureaucracy. He does not take sides and blames both Hindu and Muslim communities for their sadistic animalism. However, what can be

perceived underlying these harrowing experiences is the projection of the novelist's optimism. Punjabis grieve more for loss of identity than the loss of life and property. Nahal understands this crisis of identity and portrays it profoundly than other Partition writers who either treat it superficially or ignore it totally.

Azadi, the last novel of *The Gandhi Quartet* "highlights the psychological consequences of the partition." It is centred round the Hindu family of Lala Kanshi Ram, a grain merchant in the city of Sialkot. It is also deals with "the political, social, economic, religious, psychological and cultural implications of Azadi 'which India achieved in 1947.' (Goyal, 124)

In this novel, Nahal has projected the image of Gandhi as a contrast to the other national leaders. Through Lala Kanshi Ram, Nahal voices the confidence and faith of a common man in Gandhi. Kanshi Ram believes that Gandhi will never let partition happen. He says:

The Congress had a promise to keep with the people. For the last thirty years, since that wizard Gandhi came on the scene, it had taken the stand that India was a single nation, not two. And Gandhi was not only a politician, he was a saint. He had his inner voice to satisfy, too. Would that nagging voice of his let him accept the slaughter of so many? That's what it would mean, if Pakistan did come into existence. And Gandhi was shrewd-surely he saw it all. He wouldn't give in to such butchery. If nothing else worked, his fasts unto death always did. (*Azadi*, 42)

In *Azadi*, Pandit Nehru comes in for severe criticism when there is fear of Partition. He is blamed and held responsible for the partition. This sentiment is expressed through Lala Kanshi Ram. He reacts furiously to Nehru's role in the partition politics. In this respect he says:

What stupid thing was he talking about? Was he really Nehru? The drawl was the same, the emotion in the words was the same, the disjointed, queer Hindu syntax was his alone, but what had happened to his akal, his mind? Have partition if there is no other way, have it that way- we're willing to make sacrifices. But what nonsense was this of no panic, no violence, full protection from the government, peace the main object! Had he gone mad? Didn't he know his people? Didn't he know the Muslims? And why the partition in the first place? What of your promise to us, you Pandit Nehru? (*Azadi*, 56-57).

On the personal plane, *Azadi* is the story of Lala Kanshi Ram and his family living in Sialkot, and on the general plane, of the people affected by the Partition. Lala Kanshi Ram, the protagonist, a wholesale grain merchant in Sialkot, has earned name, fame and fortune by working very hard. His son Arun a college student and his beloved wife, Prabha Rani make his familial life quite happy. The first four chapters of the first part „The Lull“ very closely acquaint us with Lala Kanshi Ram who is a typical Indian of the time and whose idol is Mahatma Gandhi.

By creed he is a nationalist Hindu living in the Muslim – majority Sialkot. He loves his land and it is here in Sialkot that his father and forefathers lived. The British, according to him must quit India and give Azadi to the Indians.

Like any other Indian, he had a prejudice against the British. He hated them for what they had done to his country and wanted Azadi (p.18)

In this regard, K R. Srinivasa Iyengar says: "*Azadi* is about the partition of India that held the subcontinent in a 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". The division of the novel into three parts 'Lull', 'Storm' and 'Aftermath' makes it clear that the novel is about the silent atmosphere before the announcement of the Partition, the horrible incidents caused by the Partition and the pitiable conditions of the uprooted refugees after the Partition. Nahal has used the seven families of a Muslim-dominated city Sialkot to represent thousands of sufferers like them. Lala Kanshi Ram is an ardent follower of Gandhi's principle of non-violence. He is a grain merchant in Sialkot, now in Pakistan. The time in the novel is 1947 just on the eve of Indian freedom when migration of people from both sides of this country starts taking place.

Nahal was not at all happy with the Partition of India and how deep his anguish and anger were, are vividly expressed in the novel, *Azadi*. His purpose in this novel is to present the most comprehensive account of the Partition. Lala Kanshi Ram knows that the Viceroy is to make an important announcement over the radio on the evening of 3 June, 1947 and this puts an end to all speculations. He looks tense and dreads the horrible consequence, "if the English agree to give Pakistan to Jinnah." Lala Kanshi Ram fears the division of the country. He sees in it the shrewd British plan. He knows the British policy of encouraging the Partition. His faith in Gandhi's oath of not accepting the Partition looks shaken. Partition disturbs the peaceful and complacent life of the people and the novelist explores this disturbance with profound sympathy and condemns the inhuman atrocities perpetrated on the innocent people. Kanshi Ram's world is shaken by the creation of Pakistan and he stands as a shattered individual, his cherished beliefs and values not giving him support. The account of his migration to India along with his family, in the words of M.K.Naik:

"...is easily one of the most comprehensive fictional accounts of Partition holocaust in Indian English Literature".
(Naik 232)

This shows that the novelist was not happy with partition of India and he poignantly expressed the

feelings of anguish and anger about it in *Azadi* which is predominantly a political novel, for example Lala Kanshi Ram, the protagonist, is against the partition. He blames the English, as saying: "Yes, they (the British) are the real villains, they had let the country down, and they had let him down, he who put such faith in them".

The news of the Partition is taken differently by the different communities. Muslims go wild at the news. They celebrate it by exploding the firecrackers. The noise and light of these crackers torments the Hindu and Sikh population, and makes them lose their appetite. The Muslim homes and their roof-tops are lit with earthen lamps, and more and more lights come on as if the earth had suddenly erupted in a volcanic explosion, cutting so many holes in the surface of the city. They display their joy of dancing, mock fighting and singing and by forcibly taking the procession through the Hindu Mohulla where Lala Kanshi Ram and his friends live. The Police Superintendent and the Deputy Commissioner try their best to control the situation. The Hindus and the Muslims begin to hate and tear each other.

Independence brings more violence and killings. Lala's daughter Madhu and her husband Rajiv have been killed when they are in a train on their way to Sialkot to her parents in one of the train massacres. Through the character of Madhu, Nahal narrates his pain when he lost his sister, Kartar Devi, during Partition. The death of Madhu and her husband is based on Nahal's real-life experience. It is obvious that the novelist clearly suggests that the rioter were deprived enough to dishonor the Hindu women folk and to subject them to beastly atrocities. The administration does not interfere in such incidents. The news of the parade of naked Hindu women by the Muslims in the bazaar of Narowal in the afternoon numbed the Hindus and Sikhs in the camp. Commenting on Nahal's portrayal of the horrid scenes of inexplicable violence, K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri writes :

"*Azadi* portrays vividly the horrors of the Partition, the colossal violence that still haunts the Indian psyche". (Sharma 89)

Many years after the partition, the two nations are still trying to heal the wounds left behind by this incision to once-whole body of India. Many are still in search of an identity and a history left behind beyond an impenetrable boundary. The two countries started off with ruined economies and lands and without an established, experienced system of government. They lost many of their most dynamic leaders, such as Gandhi, Jinnah and Allama Iqbal. India and Pakistan have been to war twice since the partition and they are still deadlocked over the issue of possession of Kashmir. The same issues of boundaries and divisions, Hindu and Muslim majorities and differences, still persist in Kashmir. Overall Chaman Nahal ended his novel with a sadly depleted family trying to begin a new life in Delhi. *Azadi* has none of the sensationalism of other novels about India's partition, such as Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* or Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*. Nahal shows the cruelty as well as the humanity of both sides.

Conclusion

Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* is the authentic record of horrible incidents caused by the partition. It is not less than any tragic novel. It should be also added that, Chaman Nahal in his novel did not try to criticize one religion against other (Muslim against Hindu) in this way Nahal not only objectifies the personal experience but also presents a deliberate contamination of the historical with didactic and situational discursive elements. Almost at the end of the novel this fact had been cleared by him. He wrote: In Delhi Lala Kanshi Ram and others had to see the Muslim abducted women's parade, they felt bad. Soon they saw that a train of the Muslim refugees was attacked and many Muslim were killed. Nahal through his protagonist gave his idea that he did not hate the Muslims because what they did in Pakistan with the Hindus, the Indians did the same with the Muslim in India. These horrible episodes have not only invited cannibalistic waves for the humanity but they have deeply attacked the sociology and the psyche of social members not only in those times but alongside till now. This was the traumatic time which has sprouted the seeds of frustration and social chaos, as a result the entire social setting of both the sides turned so in yells. The two nation theory has negatively harassed the psyche of people with which the whole society got gripped in the trauma and the communal frenzy attained the way to put the negative effects upon the life-process.

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