
***Azadi* by Chaman Nahal: A Book Review**

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ABSTRACT

Azadi is one of the novels of *Gandhi Quartet*. It is considered as Chaman Nahal's best novel. In 1977, it won for him Sahitya Academy Award and also The Federation of Indian Publisher Award. Nahal was encouraged to compose this novel from his own experiences of having lived in Sialkot during the period of Partition. Nahal calls "*Azadi* as a hymn to one's land of birth, rather than a realistic novel of partition" (Nahal *Writing a Historical Novel* 40). He elaborates by saying that this fact "does not absolve the novelist's obligation to history; paradoxically, it increases that obligation, where the novelist should be able to dramatize actual events. For historical fiction to carry a deeper meaning, it must succeed at the realistic level first" (Nahal *Writing a Historical Novel* 41). The novel is the story of the terrors of the partition and the holocaust created by the communal agitation and it also gives an intensive picture of the effect of partition on the lives of the people living in the border town of Sialkot. Nahal's *Azadi* begins with the announcement of the partition and this is where Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* ends. So it appears that Nahal has picked up the thread of partition from where Manohar Malgonkar has left it.

Azadi is a novel written by Chaman Nahal. It has many editions. Firstly, it was published in the US by Houghton Mifflin in 1975. This edition contains 371 pages. Later it was published in India by Orient Longman in 1979. This edition also contains 371 pages. Also, it was published in India by Penguin Books in 2001 with 317 pages.

Chaman Nahal is one of the exceptional authors of the seventies (1970's). He worked as a professor of English at Delhi University. He composed eight books. Four of them constitute the *Gandhi Quartet*. *Azadi* is one of these four books, and is included in the Epilogue which serves as the Epilogue to the whole Quartet. Nahal's other novels are, *Crown and the Loincloth*, *The Salt of Life* and *The Triumph of the Tricolour*.

Nahal was not in the slightest degree content with the partition of India and how profound his anguish and outrage were, are clearly communicated in the novel, *Azadi*. His motivation in this novel is to exhibit the most extensive account of the dreads of the partition. Lakhmir Singh rightly observes that "Nahal's purpose is not to depict history but to describe the impact of the historical tragedy of the Partition on ordinary people" (226). The novel exhibits a greater amount of reality regarding partition and is exceptionally noteworthy and elegant. It is dramatically and realistically narrated piece of art, deals with a memorable journey. It is one of the uncommon grievous accounts in Indian Writing in English. It is a general shattering adventure of the giant disaster and disturbance that went with the partition and independence in the Indian subcontinent.

Nahal's another novel, *The Triumph of the Tricolour*, one of the *Gandhi Quartet* raises serious doubts about the triumph of Indian freedom and Independence. *Azadi* even more seriously questions the meaning and significance of the kind of freedom that India wins and the price paid for it. As Nahal himself was a refugee, he wrote with remarkable penetration and realism. Nahal's *Azadi* deals with the dawn of freedom, the tragedy of Partition and its aftermath, the mass migration and the massacre and also the arrival of large numbers of people as refugees to both India as well as Pakistan. *Azadi* not just mirrors the brutality and monstrosities of the partition,

additionally tests into the factors that brought about the disaster. The genuine subject of the novel is man, his expectations and fears, his affections and abhors, the eternal pull of God and the Devil in him.

The setting of *Azadi* is in Sialkot in the West Punjab which is presently in Pakistan and it covers a time of around eight months from 3 June 1947 to the passing of Mahatma Gandhi's on 30 January 1948. As we are aware that Nahal himself was the victim of partition and a refugee and he faced off bitter experiences throughout the journey across the border. In this way he has composed his own involvement through the character of Lala Kashiram and his child Arun. Along these lines some critics formed their decision that the novel *Azadi* is a sort of personal or an autobiographical novel.

The novel is divided into three parts which are Lull, Storm and Aftermath. These three parts of the novel describe the silence prevailing before the advent of partition, the dreadful and atrocious happenings resulted by the events of partition and the conditions of the people as a result of partition which are wretched, miserable and pitiable. Nahal takes the help of seven families living in Sialkot in which Muslims are living in majority to show the account of thousands of victims and sufferers like them.

The protagonist of the novel, Lala Kanshi Ram was a wholesale grain merchant living in Sialkot. He worked very hard throughout his life to earn good name, reputation and a happy life. He had one son Aruna who was studying in college. He along with his wife Prabha Rani and son Arun was living a very contented life. Lala Kanshi Ram was a distinctive Indian of the time and he had made Mahatma Gandhi as his ideal. He worshipped him as an idol. He adored his land property and it was at that point in Sialkot where his dad and ancestor lived. He wanted the British to leave the subcontinent and to give freedom to people living there. Nahal 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 Azadi" (*Azadi* 18). The social conditions of the country were miserable and in complete chaos. The Punjabis were kept under ceaseless pressure and the Muslims and the Sikhs failed to guess anything about the partition. The narrow minded and selfish leaders assumed their part sagaciously, just couple of men sitting and choosing the destiny of the millions. Lala hoped to achieve freedom with an undivided India.

Lala talked in Panjabi and wrote in Urdu. For him Urdu was not the language exclusively of Muslim. In his mind, there was no resentment against the Muslim, yet he knew about their state of mind towards Hindus and Sikhs. He had firm confidence in Gandhi and was certain that he would never consent to a division of the nation. In any case, he profoundly stressed that, everything would be demolished if Pakistan was created. Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims had been living respectively in peace and amicability for a long time in the Punjab city of Sialkot. Kanshi Ram's reality was shaken by the making of Pakistan and he stood as a shattered individual, his cherished beliefs and values not giving him support.

As a result, Arun and Nur, and also Barkat Ali and Lala cursed the hastily achieved freedom and the instantaneous partition. It was on the 24th June, that the Muslim companions of the Lala murdered various Hindus, and after that it turned into an everyday custom. It was reported that Muslim refugees from India came to Sialkot in a grief stricken condition, recounting the stories of attacks and slaughter by Hindus and Sikhs. This incited the Muslim to execute the Hindus who began to go to the refugee camps and then to India. Thus Lala realized that forgiveness was the only way to recover one's sanity, one's humanity and to live in peace with oneself.

It is story of Lala as well as a great many individuals 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" (130).

Chaman Nahal has come close to answering the question of the slaughter of the innocents in the convincing novel, *Azadi*. India is portrayed flamboyantly, stridently and distressingly. He vividly draws a representation of a war-torn country and of one family striving to bring peace and protection to their lives. The unforgettable expedition has been significantly and practically represented so as to attract more to heart than to remembrance. There is strength and continuity in this novel. Nahal's complete account of the everyday lives of seven families demonstrates how they were swept along by events. Hindus and Muslims spoke and wrote one Punjabi language, implicitly respected each other's religion, inter-married, shared business interest, attended mixed classes in schools, joined a mixed police force and mixed armed regiments but in 1947 it all disappeared. The novelist succeeds in bringing out a simple and moving story.

Critics have given very positive and optimistic views about this novel. In the words of K.S. Ramamurthy, Nahal's concerns in *Azadi* "are not only the socio-economic and humanistic implications of the tragic exodus of

suffering millions from the lands of their birth but also the deep psychic disturbances and emotional transformation brought about by that traumatic experience in the inner lives of individual men and women” (131). Christopher Ricks comments that the novel “encompasses a vast world of geographical and historical and cultural consideration yet it is strictly economical in a way that embodies a sense of disciplined order in heartfelt opposition to the violent disorder which it has to contemplate. This simple difficult economy protects it from the prurience when it tells of appalling atrocities” (The Sunday Times). Novel *Azadi* deals with “the political, social, economic, religious, psychological and cultural implications of Azadi which India achieved in 1947” (Goyal124)

Thus through this novel *Azadi*, Chaman Nahal has depicted a realistic incident of a tragedy or disaster 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.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zunera Bukhari is a lecturer of English at Government Sadiq College Women University Bahawalpur. She is both Urdu and English fiction writer. Her two books of short stories *Chandravati* (2018) and *Migraine aur Mohabbat* (2019) are published by IIm o Irfan Publishers Lahore. She has recently completed her MPhil in English Literature from Forman Christian College University Lahore. Her research interest is about critically analyzing the hidden aesthetics and social aspects of literary texts with the application of critical and literary theories. Her prominent area of research are trauma, interpellation, translation studies and aestheticism. Her favorite area of literature are literary theory, prose and short story. She is an active presenter in various International Conferences of research throughout Pakistan.

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