

Tribhuvan University

Partition Violence and Refugee Experience in Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*

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## Abstract

The present study downplays the recent cultural politics approach to Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*. It attempts at concentrating on the refugee experience as obtaining in the novel. What makes this Sahitya Academy Prize winning novel in 1978 a partition classic, it is concluded, is its capturing of the specificity of the refugee experience. Lala Kanshi Ram's experience of trauma results in a disintegration of his ego and a rupture in the continuity of being. He and others like him face a twin challenge: physical uprooting and psychic trauma. While the older generation seems to be succumbing under the weight of the psychological scar, the younger generations like Arun and Sunanda mature through the traumatic experience. They not only rediscover a sense of meaning but they also lead the older generations towards a path of recovery. The particular theory of Partition Violence and Refugee Experience comes from Miranda Alcock's *Refugee Trauma- the Assault on Meaning* and Miriam George's *A Theoretical Understanding of Refugee Trauma*. By thus dramatizing the delineation of the refugee trauma in *Azadi*, the thesis concludes that it is one great refugee novels.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction: Partition, Nahal, and Thesis Construction

The partition of India in 1947 is a defining moment in the history of the sub-continent. It echoes through the socio-political and cultural discourses of India. There exist various historiographic positions vis-à-vis its representation. Both liberal and secular nationalistic historiographies that emerged in response to secular versions of the national movement and as an answer to the colonial historiographic constructions, conceive of the popular Indian cultural-civilizational evolution as essentially syncretism, catholic and pluralistic. Mainly inscribed along either the idealistic/rationalistic and humanistic Nehruvian-Gandhian paradigms or the left-liberal modernistic enterprise, these approaches posit communalism as a recent and an alien category in the Indian social history, an aspect of the ideological dimension of the colonial interventions — its cultural assumptions and the kind of discourse it introduced into colonial consciousness. They negate the colonial claim of Hindus and Muslims ever being homogenous monolithic collectivities with overarching religious entities. Hindus and Muslims are rather defined as heterogeneous entities, whose day to day, and hence real, interactional worldview is shaped by more mundane economic and social considerations. Partition is, thus, viewed as a result of the false consciousness, introduced into the Indian socio-political discourse by the British.

The Hindu nationalistic historiography, though anti-British in orientation, diverges from the secular-nationalistic view in its assumption of a

fundamental religious divide between Hindus and Muslims as the basic fact of Indian history. It argues that partition was the result of the secularist (Gandhian) and the imperialist pampering of an essentially intolerant Muslim bigotry and their pan-Islamic (and hence anti-Indian Hindu) worldview. Advocating an apparently hegemonic (Brahmanical) brand of cultural-nationalism, it thinks of Muslims as the hostile other. This historiographical construction, thus, places the sub-continental reality in the communal context.

Another communal historiographical version, taking its cues from the ideological necessity of the Muslim League's two-nation-theory politics, like its Hindu nationalist counterpart, traces the contours of the sub-continental socio-cultural landscape in terms of overarching and antagonistic "us vs them" religious nationalities. Conflating religion with politics, it validates the creation of Pakistan as the natural logic of the past.

Both of these methods, the self consciously secular and the apparently communal, arrange Indian history along two diametrically opposite poles. The former, mainly in its anxiety to reveal the baselessness of two-nation theory, finds enough evidences—like Bhakti and Sufi traditions—to prove that since the medieval encounter the Hindus and Muslims are "not divided along any cultural or psychological lines except in the narrow area of personal faith" (Sudhir Kakar 18). The latter has enough evidences to show that deep-seated horizontal and vertical schism and incompatibility existed between the two communities. Being mutually exclusive, these antithetical conceptions of history, thus, enter into an ongoing struggle to appropriate the truth of the past.

The fiction on Partition, being an aesthetic intervention in response to partition holocaust, is embedded in the thematic of communal or national discourse. This fact is acknowledged by various critics. For example, Sisir Kumar Das says: “Thematically these writings are culmination of the communal discourse in the colonial period” (370). It implies that the historical consciousness of these writers, in confronting the question of Partition, is implicated in constructing/explicating the nature (reality/truth) of pre-Partition Hindu-Muslim interactional reality. And in doing so their narratives tend to become the site of either-or historiographic positions as detailed above.

The echo of the historiographical positions also contaminates the literary imagination of the sub-continent. The literary renditions, like its contending histories in India and Pakistan are inflected with Hindu Muslim cultural politics and ideological idioms

Though comparatively late in responding as compared to other languages like Urdu and Hindi to Partition, the emergent fictional corpus in English virtually evolved into a kind of sub-species, a “separate category—partition fiction—within the larger matrix of Indian fiction in English. The initial creative efforts such as *Train to Pakistan* (1956) by Khushwant Singh, *The Dark Dancer* (1958) by B. Rajan, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) by Attia Hosain, *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) by Manohar Malgonkar, *The Rape* (1974) by Raj Gill, *Azadi* (1975) by Chaman Nahal and *Ashes and Pateis* (1978) by H.S. Gill have captured the immediacy of the horrors of this traumatic and tumultuous historical reality. Later novels such as *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie, *When Freedom Came* (1982) by Sharf

Mukaddam, *Yatra* (1987) by Nina Sibal, *The Shadow lines* (1988) by Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) by Sashi Tharoor, *A Fine Family* (1990) by Gurcharan Das and *Looking Through Glass* (1995) by Mukul Kesavan have continued to revisit the scenario of the violence, bloodshed and agony the from the vantage point of contemporary mindset. The fiction on Partition, thus, constitutes at ever evolving literary complex with a distinct problematic and poetic of its own.

The literary criticism that this literary corpus has evoked so far has taken little notice of politics. A few book-length studies, incorporating these novels, that have appeared so far, roughly fall into three broad categories. The first of these may be termed as aspect-specific, the second author-specific and the third category consists of those works which focus on the historical or thematic evolution of Indian Literature in English and discuss Partition as one of the many generative constituents of this evolution. The author-specific studies like *Manohar Malgonkar* by G. S. Amur or *Khushwant Singh* by V. A. Shahane are mainly concerned with the analysis of these novelists' growth as artists within an overall context of their fictional output and the evaluation of their skills in terms of the basic elements of the novelistic art—characterization, emplotment of themes, narrative styles and linguistic excellence. For example, though G. S. Amur in his critique of Manohar Malgonkar takes up *A Bend in the Ganges* as a case study of anatomy of *ahimsa*, yet this framework is mainly employed to understand the character code of its chief protagonist. Similarly, V. S. Shahane studies *Train to Pakistan* as a “realistic epic.” The socio-cultural and historiographic problematic of Partition—as these in actuality obtain in the Partition novels—

in these critical works either remain on the fringes or are diluted by the general nature of their critical exploration. As a result, in such studies, this aspect is not well investigated and integrated within the overall oeuvre of these writers.

Beerendra Pandey's *Historiography of Partition*, which is an exception to the above trend, unravels the politics of the trauma of the partition violence as textualized in Indian English partition fiction. Other critics do note the presence of the trauma in partition fiction. For example, the histories of Indian English literature like R. S. Singh's *The Indian Novel in English* and K. R. S. Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English* see Partition novels as documentation of trauma and displacement, but do not spend much energy on problematizing the qualitative import of this representation as Beerendra Pandey does.

Apart from Pandey's *Historiography of Partition*, a full-length study exclusively devoted to the study of the Partition fiction in English is *The Partition in Indian English Novels* by K. K. Sharma and B. K. Johri. The book is an attempt to make a comprehensive appraisal of the theme of Partition in Indian English novels. To facilitate this, they begin by drawing up an elaborate classification based upon the way various novelists take up the Partition problem. Under the scheme *Waiting for the Mahatma*, *The Dark Dancer* and *Sunlight on a Broken Column* are classified as novels which treat partition as the side issue, *Train to Pakistan* as the one which treats it in naturalistic mode and *Azadi* as one that enters the issue on epical and psychological plane. In contrast to *The Partition in Indian-English Novels*, Jagdev Singh's *Bonds and Borders* is, conceptually a more rigorous and purposeful exercise. Whereas Sharma and Johri are engaged in a horizontal

assortment of different themes traversing the Partition fiction, Jagdev Singh picks up one item of this catalogue, that is, communalism and concentrates on the study of the changes in the patterns of communal relations as it emerges in the partition novels.

The present study, unlike the cultural politics approach of Beerendra Pandey and the spotlight on communalism by Jagdev Singh, is a modest attempt at concentrating on the refugee experience as obtaining in Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*. What makes this Sahitya Academy Prize winning novel in 1978 a partition classic, it is assumed, is its capturing of the specificity of the refugee experience.

*Azadi* is a moving saga of the division of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan and the accompanying disaster that hit these two newly-declared independent countries in 1947. Apart from the necessary details and a picture of human cruelty and perversity that we get in this chronicle novel, it contains a well-executed and gripping narrative, clearly-realized and readily-identifiable characters and a kind of grisly, macabre atmosphere that has its own sharp appeal. Chaman Nahal seems to have put his very soul into the writing of this book, and it is absolutely no surprise that, besides receiving wide acclaim almost all over the English speaking world, it did also get the Sahitya Akademi award in 1978. Nahal renders his own forced uprooting from Sialkot and re-settling in India remarkable penetration and convincingness.

The plot of *Azadi*, although conventional in nature, is, structurally speaking, symmetrical and well organized. The novel is divided in three parts entitled as The Lull, The Storm and The Aftermath—all suggestive and

symbolic of the three distinct stages in the narrative. “The Lull” describes the peace and communal harmony among the people of Sialkot before the idea of partition captures the imagination of some Muslim zealots. It also registers the reactions of common people to the imminent partition, and describes the simmering tensions underlying the calm.

In fact, the first three chapters effectively describe the slow building up of tension and the psychological responses of a variety of individuals involved in the situation. They all wait, with almost suspended breath, for the all-important announcement of Mountbatten for a division of the country. Kanshi Ram who normally does not talk to anyone while going through the daily ritual of 'reading' his newspaper excitedly asks his wife's views although she has none. Shopkeepers—Hindus and Muslims—all close their shops early, to be on time in their homes to listen to the broadcast. Prabha Rani and Isher Kaur rook early. Kanshi Ram, Prabha Rani, Isher Kaur, Arun and Nirranjan Singh, all gather in their landlady Amarvati's room who alone owns a radio. Although they know what it is going to be, they still hope that the demand for Pakistan will not be conceded. And when the announcement (in English) finally comes, nobody except Lala Kanshi Ram's college going son Arun understands a word of it. So stunned is Arun himself that he lifts his two fingers instinctively and mutters the word 'Partition'. Everybody in the room mutters the word 'Partition', keeps his thoughts to himself, and clings to the one nearest as if seeking some kind of protection. A sense of betrayal grips one and all. They do not listen to Nehru, Jinnah, and Baldev Singh who speak after the Viceroy. Nehru sounds so unconvincing, so incredible. A thousand

thoughts cross Lala Kanshi Ram's mind. What have the leaders done? Have they not thought of the security of millions?

The same announcement is greeted with glee and rejoicing by the Muslims who celebrate the occasion with fireworks. Their jubilation is in sharp contrast to the eerie silence that prevails in the Hindu localities. Abdul Ghani, the Muslim hookah manufacturer abuses the Hindu shopkeepers in the choicest Punjabi words. The Muslims get so wild at the announcement that they take out a procession—not yet to kill Hindus but to humiliate them. The processionists pass through various Hindus localities, processionist's pats through various Hindus localities, dancing the bhangra, shouting slogans. Hindus and Sikhs only sit helplessly in their homes.

“The Storm” describes the excruciating experiences of the uprooted people in refugee camps and on their way to India. This part unfolds the drama of violence of all sorts, of the atrocities committed on these innocent people, arson, murder, abduction, rape. Also described is the none too-pleasant experiences of these people in their own free country and the indignities they face at the hands of an indifferent and callous bureaucracy.

“The Aftermath” attempts to delineate the inevitable reconciliation of these people to their lot. The prosperous merchant of Sialkot is happy to get a single room with a roof of corrugated sheets where at least he can sleep. Even this little favour is denied to hundreds of others. By and large, the refugees are treated as outsiders; some people may be sympathetic but feel all the same that these quarrelsome Punjabis should look for their livelihood in some small

town in Punjab and not in the capital city of Delhi. *Azadi*'s dramatization of the partition violence with a perspective of the refugee experience is laudable.

Chapter Two develops the methodological framework in the light of the historiography of the partition of India, to which Nahal's *Azadi* is a literary response. It discusses an understanding of violence and refugee trauma which have found treatment in the novel. Chapter Three analyzes the novel in order to capture the delineation of violence and the accosting refugee experience. Chapter Four concludes the thesis in order to make the point that there is a transcendence of the trauma.

## Chapter Two

### Understanding Violence and Refugee Trauma

Violence constitutes one of the most obvious images of Partition. It is thematic. The nature of violence, the forms of socio-cultural and political embedding, its impact on the society and the individual inescapably engage the aesthetic sensibility of its writers. Consequently, among other things, the novels on Partition can also be interpreted as narratives of violence.

Violence is a ubiquitous but a problematic fact of life. The problem of violence in every society or culture is perceived, presented and regulated within an elaborate structure of ideas. One of the salient features of the writer under study is that in his exploration as to the nature of the Partition violence he takes recourse to the structure of ideas embedded within Indian socio-cultural location. These structures not only define the moral closures of violence but also provide it with a language of legitimacy or illegitimacy. While legitimate violence leads to regeneration or advancement of civilization, the illegitimate one leads to moral decay. Within the Indian context, three distinct languages through which violence finds legitimacy are those of sacrifice, feud and vivisection. Before taking up how Chaman Nahal employs these languages as comparative or evaluative tools in his delineation of Partition violence as a breakdown of significance, it would not be out of place to define the broader conceptual parameters governing his discourses.

The idea of sacrificial violence constitutes one of the dominant discursive strains within the Indian tradition by which it seeks to understand

and streamline violence. However, this tradition does not perceive all types of sacrifices as morally regenerative. It distinguishes between the Vedic and the demonic modes of sacrifices and places the latter on a lower rung. It is the Vedic sacrifice that provides a regulatory structure by which the omnipresence of violence is not only contained but is also transformed into a generative agent. Both modes of sacrifice involve violence. But it is the style of violence and the relationship between the sacrificing and the victim of sacrifice that privileges the one over the other. The Vedic sacrificial order gets its meaning because of the special relation between the actors involved. Veena Das and Ashis Nandy explain it thus:

In Vedic sacrifice, the victim was a domesticated animal, the Vedic word *pasu* designating five kinds of domestic animals. . . . In other words, that which was sacrificed was one's own and every sacrifice could be viewed as a symbolic self-offering. In the *asuric* form of sacrifice, the victim was essentially a wild animal and when humans were sacrificed, they were strangers who were trapped unaware and killed" (178).

Moreover, the "Vedic sacrifice does not deny the subjectivity of the victim. Even the animal in Vedic sacrifice is implored to forgive the violence to which it is being subjected" (179). The regeneration through sacrificial violence is premised on the willing cooperation of the victim. This is illustrated by the story of Nachiketa that appears in *Kathopanishad*. Here, the son is offered in sacrifice not in obedience to God but out of his own volition.

The language of feud also legitimizes the exchange of violence. It “may be defined as a pact of violence between social groups in such a way that the definition of the self and the other emerges through the exchange of violence . . . The victim of feud is simply a bearer of the status of the group. He is the means through which the pact of violence may continue to be executed” (179).

The scientific rationality of the modern times seeks legitimation of violence in the name of advancement of knowledge aimed at the higher good of society. It differs from the other two structures of legitimation in two fundamental ways. First, its moral closures are provided by institutionalized state or scientific spaces such as medical discourse, where violence is not seen as an aggression but as an instrument of objective and positive knowledge for the welfare of the patient. Secondly, this violence denies the subjectivity of the victim. “It is the victim, devoid of all subjectivity—and who paradoxically, is not a victim but an accidental focus of universal scientific structures and processes—who provides the basic element of the model” (180). However, the containment and regulation of violence within these discourses may not always lead to an unambiguous defence or legitimation of violence. This aspect of violence becomes clear the moment it is located within the perspective of the actors. Within all these discourses the victim, towards whom the aggressive drive is directed, is not chosen randomly. He is seen as a bearer of certain values, as in sacrifice; or as a bearer of a particular social status, as in feud. In either case, the definition of the victim is complementary to the aggressor as a bearer of another set of values. The moment this reciprocity is ruptured, the violence unleashed enters an ambivalent terrain.

According to Das and Nandy, violence from the point of view of the actors can also be justified when, “(1) it is counter-violence, that is, it is a response to unjust or legitimate violence; (b) when violence is imposed as part of an ideology of salvation or liberation on those who are the subjects of knowledge, for the latter’s own good; and (c) when one has journeyed through the experience of self- imposed violence and thereby acquired right to demand austerity or suffering from others” ( 181).

Chaman Nahal, in *Azadi*, visualizes Partition violence in terms of Nature’s calamity. The narrative is conceived around images of “the lull”, “the storm” and its “aftermath,” which correspond to three stages of its “eruption.” “The Lull” prepares the ground for the impending storm by building up an ambience of uncertainty, tension, fear and suspicion, i.e. the forms through which the violence was kept on a simmer by the political and social forces in the wake of Independence. It also offers a sociological and psychological critique of the working of these forms. “The Storm” describes how the grotesqueness and the destructive intensity of the actual violence had swept away the props of civilization. The graphic details of the atrocities and the styles of violence that the opposing communities had heaved on each other, underline the fact that this violence was not a simple case of the breakdown of law and order but a perversion that could neither be transmuted nor understood within the parameters of culture. Hence, the author tries to understand it within the framework of Nature. “The Aftermath” analyses the consequences of this violence the individual and the society.

The connotative potentials reverberating through the naturalistic term “The Lull” strike an ominous keynote. The term suggests the presence of a dormant yet potentially violent tension lurking below the social surface. Nahal sees it as a cumulative result of the communal politics that had split the religions into two: faith and ideology. This rupture had very subtly disturbed the moral fibre of the pre-Partition heterogeneous living. Its various repercussions are delineated through the personalities of Kanshi Ram, Abdul Ghani and inspector Inayat-Ullah Khan. Whereas “religion as faith” (Ashis Nandy 70) gave fluidity to Kanshi Ram’s self, making it non-monolithic and plural, “religion as ideology”(70) made him declare Hindi as his mother tongue, thus, bringing politics of language (a form of communal identifier) to bear upon the differences between Hinduism (Arya Samaj) and Islam and sowing the seeds of separation and suspicion. Measured against the overall drift of his character, this artificial split went against the grain of his basic nature, i.e., his robust relatedness and spontaneity with his environment. It was dehumanizing. Partition, according to the author, not only hastened this tendency but also gave it an official sanction. With the foregrounding of the communal, people lost their individual attributes and became geographically delimited religious abstractions. Abdul Ghani’s personality is constructed as a living testimony to this fact:

Those days had passed and Abdul Ghani was no longer friendly with the Hindu businessmen of the bazaar... the Muslim league had slowly made him aware of the threat to him in a free Hindu India. It was not a question of his personal views; the League or Jinnah Sahib knew better. They said, view your Hindu neighbor

with suspicion, and he did that. They said there should be a Pakistan, and he shouted for Pakistan ( Nahal 56).

The Hindus became synonymous with India and Muslims with Pakistan. Any accidental transgression of the equation invited fear, frustration and suspicion in the minority and repulsive yet celebratory hatred in the majority. The procession episode is an evocative interpretation of the socio-cultural warping within the two communities and its ominous working (69-90). The “wild sight” of the “mob,” its “transport which exceeded panic or hysteria” (72) is experienced by the targeted group, i.e., the people of the Fort Street as a pre-historic monster. The impress of its sheer sensual frenzy activates their instinctual fears: “Padmini came up to Lala Kanshi Ram and said ‘Lalaji, they might dishonor us!’ . . . Lala Kanshi Ram knew not what to say to Padmini. Fear took hold of him and he had a severe constriction in the chest” (74-75). For the Muslims, the celebration was an amplification of their ideological egos: “The drummers were in a madness of purest kind. And why shouldn’t they be? Today their Pakistan had been sanctioned — the land of the pure. Today they had become pure, at the last. And they bent their backs, projecting the drums far in front of them, and went daga dug dum!”(77)

It was also a means to prove a point to the “banyas”:

The organizers of the procession were aware of the Hindu heads watching them from atop the houses by the side of Trunk Bazaar, and the sight of the wooden gate leading off the bazaar into the interior of the mohalla seemed to excite them further. They had passed other mohallas on their way, but the presence

of the Fort on their right, with the police flags fluttering on top of the Fort, was too dramatic a situation to be missed. They did not want to harm the Hindus — at least not today. Today they were only celebrating the acceptance of Pakistan by the British. But they had to make the meaning of that acceptance apparent enough for these banyas, the traders who had long dominated the business affairs of the city. (73)

The slightest overture of infidel resistance in refusing to open the gates turns this sensorially and sensually overcharged collectivity into a raw and sadistic consciousness. In its urge to utterly subjugate the other, it bespeaks itself in a primordial language that ironically reduces its own self to the reactivity of the flesh alone:

The din that ensued was deafening. There must have been about thirty to thirty-five drummers there, wearing multicolored lungis and going crazy in the madness of the sound. They bent backwards in their frenzy, crazily balancing themselves on their feet, and their drums projected in front of them like cancerous growths, something that was a part of the body and was inescapably joined to it. . . . As the frenzy rose, the first and the second beat were repeated many times over, like stretching out a live wire, when in the end came the explosion, the final powerful stroke of the right hand — ‘dum’. The ‘dum’ was the full stop of the foot of the rhythm and had the key to your heartbeat, as it were. For when it fell, when the juggler with the

sticks had concluded his run, you rose up like a maniac, and along with you, with each fall of the 'dum', rose up other weird spirits which came and stood by your side (76-77).

The psychological transmutation of inspector Inayat-Ullah Khan delineates another facet of this "lull." His acts symbolize the breach of the moral boundary that hitherto had balanced the professional and the personal in him. It also trespasses the moral boundary separating the innocent from the criminal. The impetus is provided by the official notification of Partition and the physical proximity of the mob. Nahal portrays it thus:

But he too had listened to the broadcast, and things had ceased to have a legal right or wrong for Inayat-Ullah Khan in the past few hours. It was a matter of conscience. For years he had ordered lathi charges on Muslim processions at the command of the British government. He hated doing it, they were his own brethren, but orders were orders. The only consolation he had was that when the lathi charge was to be on a crowd of Congress Muslims, he made it as violent as he could. But on his own Muslims, the Muslim League Muslims — Allah! Allah!

And he had lived with the heavy burden of his conscience, not knowing how to atone for it. He was certain Allah would never forgive him! Today came the chance (79).

The Partition announcement, thus, led to the emergence of a genie, which held the individuals and the communities' hostages to the psychosis of fear. The inherent violence insulated one from the other. It circulated through rumours

and spectacles, the nightly arsons and macabre stabbings (127), that openly defied all social and cultural conventions. This “unearthly and defiant” (160) force, that kept every one “spellbound” both at home and in flight, in *Azadi* finds its spatio-temporal objective correlative through the reactions of Mukunda’s mother and its violent impact on Bibi Amar Vati’s tenants thus:

They stood there spellbound. The houses did not have to wait for the evening to be taken over by other forces; a force had already come and dominated them. Starting from the little cell in the basement, where it had lived imprisoned for so many years in the company of old cans and bottles, this force had issued forth like a genie. And like smoke it had spread through the two houses, before taking on the physical appearance of the genie. And having spread itself through each room and each nook and corner, its first word or cry was a demonic, defiant laughter. . . . In the dusk of the evening, the uncanny laughter of Mukanda’s mother followed them a long way. It seemed to be defying everyone - those who were leaving, and those who were to come there that night. (161).

“The Storm” focuses on the impact of Partition violence on the victims. It also diagnoses the significance that various styles of violence had, both for its perpetrators and victims. If in H. S. Gill the impact of violence on refugees breeds a sense of callous indifference, in Nahal it leads to a more variegated response. While on one hand, the violence distorts people’s sense of proportion, as is apparent from the weird behavior of Dr Chander Bhan and

his wife as the carrier of the news of Madhu and her husband's death to Kanshi Ram (16-169), on the other, the degree of victimization spawns a certain emotional hierarchy within the camp:

There were many other families which had been hit in the camp, and a new kind of caste system had grown up. Everyone lost property. That was nothing. But if you had lost a limb, or if a member of your family had been killed or raped or forcibly abducted, you won a medal for yourself. Your neighbors in the camp spoke to you deferentially, the Camp spoke to you differentially, the camp commandant was ready to receive you in a personal interview, and in the matter of dry rations or other physical facilities you straightway received a preferential treatment. Not that the others were out to atone for what fate had done to you. Only you wouldn't let them forget for a second that while everyone had suffered, you had suffered the most (212).

Still in persons like Kanshi Ram and Arun, it manifests itself differently. It affects Kanshi Ram ambivalently. Whereas Madhu's murder shatters his will to live and start afresh, this loss when put in a broader perspective also enables him to achieve philosophical equilibrium and shed hatred:

And suddenly, in a flash, the rare sensation of seeing through the humbug of existence flooded him once again, and he saw before him clearly the bare, basic meaning of living, shorn of trimmings and embellishments. He at once squirmed a little,

shrugged his shoulders and pulled himself together . . . and he felt utterly perceptive, utterly knowledgeable. He took out one of the ends of his turban and pulling it tight tucked it back in, giving the turban a trimmer look and a more solid, square hold on his head (270).

Like the rest, Lala Kanshi Ram in his mind was busy adding up his losses. They were numerous. As the city vanished from his sight, he became more concerned about what lay ahead. The problems that loomed in the future were a thousand fold more complex and bewildering than what he had gone through. Hitherto he had only died - in various ways. It involved no act of the will on his part; the death came suddenly and swiftly and offered no alternatives. The act of creation on the other hand demanded a slow nursing, a careful watch, which in spite of the long effort might or might not blossom into fruit. Many parts of him had died but there were others still alive, forcefully and affirmatively alive, and he knew he was not defeated. But the tasks ahead of him were multitudinous and he faltered and fumbled in his steps (274).

For Arun the suffering and loss in the wake of independence, becomes loaded with new possibilities. He sees Partition violence as a purification ritual:

The appalling misery they were going through had to have some meaning. They had to emerge different, modified, and reborn. Otherwise one might as well shut up about being a man.

His young mind saw no impediments which could restrain him.

The shape of things to come was altogether in his hands (232).

Similarly Nahal's diagnosis of the styles of violence operates at different levels. As is apparent from "The Lull" he perceives communal violence as a breakdown of significance. Yet at the same time, he puts Niranjana Singh's self-immolation on a different pedestal. But this does not involve any contradiction on his part. His appreciation of Niranjana's act derives its rationale from the subtle differentiation the writer makes between "religion as faith" and "religion as ideology." Niranjana's act is directed at the preservation of one's way of life. It is a vindication of one's own faith without encroaching upon the identity of the other. It is delineated in the language of martyrdom.

In *Azadi*, the chaos and bitterness unleashed by communal violence is contained by the sacrifice of Gandhi. Like Delhi, even here, the news of Gandhi's assassination is narrated in the language of sacrifice. He is depicted as a patriarch, the head of a nation, a part of Kanshi Ram's extended (National) self. Gandhi being a bearer of certain moral values, his martyrdom is seen as a vindication of those values. And most importantly, it does not lead to dehumanization but a cathartic release, re-establishing the, moral poise not of Kanshi Ram alone, but also of the Nation.

Nahal succeeds in forging a narrative style which is able to fuse the experiential with the clinical in such a way that both the crassness of violence and the import of suffering are transmitted without one suppressing the other. In *Azadi*, it is achieved with the technique of flashback at critical junctures in the lives of the protagonists. For example, the crassness of Madhu's death is

brought to the fore by super-imposing it with the sense of loss it generates in Arun. His present sense of alienation when contrasted with his nostalgia of a shared sense of the past enables the reader to fathom the extent to which violence has fractured his consciousness.

Nahal, like most of the writers, locates the ultimate explanation of this violence in communalism. It is seen as the most virulent form of conflict: “Generally a blend of religious, political, and economic aims, [it invariably] becomes imbued with religious ultimacy” (Sudhir Kakar 53). And the psychological dynamics of communal propaganda during the closing stages of colonialism had turned the issues at stake [the necessity of a separate homeland for Muslims, the fear of Hindu Majority-ism, the exigencies of politics of power camouflaged in the garb of cultural exclusiveness etc.] into life and death issues “through an arsenal of ideational and ritual symbols” (53), leading to heightening of “group salience,” which ultimately split the social and individual selves of people. This aspect of communalism—the tendency to reduce people into abstractions, to be guided by the form rather than the content or to treat human beings as generic entities rather than as individuals—finds expression in Nahal. In *Azadi*, the marauders, are always from the other villages or Mohalla. Nobody kills a person of his village. This is because they, being close acquaintances, acknowledge the individual identity of the other and hence are not able to reduce him/her into abstractions. The procession scene in *Azadi* reveals how the information received “sensorially and sensually, linguistically and subliminally” (57) influences the psychic processes of the people in the crowd, suspends their individual

judgment and instigates violence. In other words, these episodes bring out how communal consciousness in a crowd leads to refocusing of Identities.

Yet another aspect of communal consciousness, that is, its narration in terms of religious, racial or cultural memory, is dwelt upon, though in varying degrees, by Nahal. The recycling of the atavistic and archetypal symbols, as an identity-endowing tool becomes evident in the self-immolation of Nirranjan Singh in *Azadi*. People reckon these symbols as truth and live and die for them. Nirranjan Singh is under constant pressure from his wife and other relatives to shave off his beard and cut short his long hair. But for him, removing these would not only deny the religious content but also negate the entire Sikh tradition. It will mean snapping links with his atavistic past. He prefers death to a life of ignominy.

Communalism is established as a fact that leads to dehumanization, shrinkages of human sympathies and snapping of meaningful communication among people. Nahal recognizes it as a brute force that created disjunction between passion and reason, between man and society, man and nature and man and civilization. However, in Nahal, these features of communalism get delineated more as descriptive set-pieces, than as consciously and analytically thought of manifestations. This becomes apparent if we see *Azadi* from the perspective of violence on women. Though he describes the styles of violence women were subjected to, yet they, of course with some exceptions, fails to see it beyond the limits of his male gaze.

Nahal shows a strong propensity to counter the debilitating effects of communalism. Hence these narratives can also be seen as suggestive

blueprints for exorcising communal partition violence. In *Azadi*, the answer to communal hatred lies in the symbolic transformations of Arun and Kanshi Ram. It is achieved through love, forgiveness, personal sanity, intelligence, reason and connection. Kanshi Ram, instead of passing judgment on his fellow brethren, asks his wife to “Forgive. That way you can make peace with yourself” (Nahal 339). And again he reiterates, “I have ceased to hate . . . I can’t hate the Muslims any more” (Nahal 338). And Arun becomes a means through whom this message is sought to be propagated. The narrative graph of *Azadi* is, by and large, bound within the limits of communalism and secularism. Communalism is the most conspicuous cause responsible for the holocaust and can only be countered through humanism inherent in refugee experience.

As defined by the UNHCR 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is an individual who is outside the country of their nationality and is unable to return owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of religion, nationality, race, etc. The global refugee problem represents men, women, and children, from diverse income levels, living arrangements, cultural backgrounds and histories. Refugees face common hardships such as traumatic experiences from war, concentration camps and torture. Some chronic stressors which refugees face include socio-economic disadvantages, the collapse of social support, and poor health and psychological distress. The interpersonal repercussions of posttraumatic stress symptoms of a trauma survivor can affect the survivor’s family in the form of divorce, separation and marital dissatisfaction and can ripple down to future generations. No wonder, Miriam George states that “the effects of trauma refugees are immeasurable,

long-lasting and shattering to both their inner and outer selves” (379). George continues, “The conditions associated with refugees clearly put them in the category of risk for physical and psychological distress, because embedded within them is the often-unspeakable violence associated with the refugee experience (383).

Because refugees embody an ambiguous status, they inherently raise questions about the limits of community and the human condition. As Giorgio Agamben notes, “The refugee must be considered for what he is: nothing less than a limit concept that radically calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state” (134). Refugees, who are both expelled and given refuge and who have internationally sanctioned asylum rights, not only push the boundaries of the nation-state, but also the limitations of communal belonging and hospitality. Fictional work by and related to forcibly displaced persons reflects similar concerns about the privileges and restrictions specific to the refugee trauma which, according to Mirinda Alcock, “profoundly compound[s]” “the meaning of life [which] can seem to disappear with loss of home, culture, family and status. This can lead to a sense of confusion and purposeless[ness], in which inner resources dislocated or seem lost” (291). Refugees, however, recover a sense of meaning by “look[ing] forward to a future which holds some promise and purpose for themselves and their children” (292). Although they recognize that “what has been broken cannot be mended,” they “make new connections and construct new meanings” (306). As Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* shows, refugee-ness can reflect forms of meaning-making, can move beyond material limitations through the imagined world.

## Chapter Three

### Treatment of Violence and Refugee Trauma in *Azadi*

*Azadi*, as the very title suggests, is about Azadi, the attainment of independence of the country and it dramatizes, enacts what it means and does to the people of the Western parts of the country. The immediate effect is partition of the country and this had a traumatic effect on the people of Sialkot—now a part of Pakistan—where the novel is set. Chaman Nahal achieves a comprehensiveness of vision in the manner in which he demonstrates the havoc that partition played on the people of the country both at the social and the individual level. Nahal wrote *Azadi* as a hymn to his land of birth. It is an outcome of his personal acquaintance with that historical period. Therefore, a strong thread of nostalgia runs through its narrative. But this nostalgia is qualified among other things, by Nahal's admiration for Gandhi, his rejection of the two-nation theory and his sense of responsibility as a historical novelist.

Temporally *Azadi* covers a period of eight months. The narrative begins on June 3, 1947 in Sialkot with Mountbatten's announcement confirming the Partition of India and its acceptance by Nehru, Jinnah and Baldev Singh and ends with Mahatma Gandhi's assassination in Delhi on January 30, 1948. This period is placed in a broader historical context through references to historical events which pre-date freedom and Partition. These include Mahatma's meeting in Sialkot in 1929, the Champaran agitation of 1917, and the mutiny of 1857. The more recent political history is

incorporated through the discussion Arun and Munir have with Bill Davidson, the sympathetic English sergeant. By placing the fictional story of Bibi Amarvati's tenants within this historical context, Chaman Nahal not only participates in the history of the times but also tries to understand the meaning of freedom. His historical predisposition is betrayed in his conception of Lala Kanshi Ram's and Arun's character and the way they are made to respond to the historical signposts embedded in the novel.

Chaman Nahal uses the persona of Lala Kanshi Ram to give his impressions of the socio-cultural relations of the pre-Partition Sialkot. Kanshi Ram, the registered grain merchant of Sialkot, is a proud member of the Arya Samaj. It has instilled in him a sense of status and made him aware of his true heritage:

And the Samaj taught him in no uncertain terms that the true heritage of an Indian was the Vedic heritage, and the true language of an Indian, Sanskrit—the language of the Vedas. Since Sanskrit was an ancient language, its modern derivative Hindi would do if you were unable to get that far back. So when the census was taken by the government every tenth year, Lala Kanshi Ram dutifully entered against the column for mother tongue, the word 'Hindi'. (Nahal 13)

The way this reference to Arya Samaj is handled by the author, makes it amply clear that he is aware of the divisive tendencies of such reformatory religious politics. However, he does not see it as an essential aspect of the

Kanshi Ram's overall identity. His overall identity is an unconscious amalgam of his syncretic though complex acculturation:

But he neither spoke Hindi nor ever wrote it on paper. When he opened his mouth he spoke Punjabi, the rich and virile language of the province to which he belonged. And when it came to writing, whether the entries in his shop ledger or a note to the vendor down the road, he wrote in Urdu. Who said it was the language of the Muslims? . . . The upshot was that every morning, after his breakfast, he spent at least a half hour reading through the Urdu newspaper he took. No one in the house was allowed as much as to whisper during this sacred half hour (13-14).

Chaman Nahal also hints at the truth of common Punjabi cultural identity which binds the different communities of Sialkot together in a harmonious relationship. This is reflected in the similarity of the household arrangements and living conditions in Lala Kanshi Ram's and his Muslim friend, Chaudhari Barkat Ali's homes respectively:

Whenever Arun came into this room, he thought it was no different in character from the room in their house where sat his father. The only distinction was instead of the family pictures or pictures of Hindu gods on the walls, they had pictures of the word Allah in Arabic . . . But the two rooms in the two houses looked quite identical. They both indicated thrift, Puritanism and hard work. A stranger would have seen at a glance the

families living in them had a common background and a common ideology. (179)

There are three other axes—topographical, cultural and vocational—along which this composite Punjabi identity is delineated as an essential aspect of pre-Partition Indian reality. Jagdev Singh very succinctly sums up this aspect, thus:

The fact that Ghani is a Muslim and Lala Kanshi Ram, a high-caste Hindu never enters their heads. If they worship different gods, it is in the privacy of their homes, except when Ghani joins the Tazia marches at the time of the Muharram once a year beating his breast in public. But then, Lala Kanshi Ram also joins other Hindus of the bazaar in throwing colour on them during Holi. The very fact that Ramlila ground is adjacent to the old Christian cemetery is indicative of the composite culture of the town. Moreover, this Ramlila ground itself has witnessed Hindu-Muslim amity prior to the announcement of the Partition. Every year, huge effigies of Ravana and his associates are burnt. Dussehra ‘was a Hindu festival, but the effigies were made by the Muslim workmen; the crackers and the fireworks, too were supplied by the Muslims.’ So they were not separate. ‘They were not Muslims or Hindus, they were Punjabis’ (72).

But Jagdev Singh’s interpretation of this Punjabi culture as “superficial” (72) is not convincing. It misinterprets Chaman Nahal’s emphasis. Nahal does not

depict the pre-Partition reality in utopian terms. His narrative from the very beginning, places the communal tension within the socio-political scape of Sialkot. He, nevertheless, posits Punjabi identity as the reality of this part of India despite this communal consciousness. By taking the reality of communal consciousness into account, he makes the historical veracity of *Azadi* more inclusive. But the introduction of this duality in the inter-communal pattern does not amount to his denying the possibility of co-existence.

Such an imaginative delineation of the pre-Partition social arrangement, despite its palpable religious tension, negates the two-nation theory propounded by the Muslim League. This is also apparent from Chaman Nahal's faith in the nationalistic politics of the Congress under Mahatma Gandhi. Whenever Kanshi Ram reflects over the anti-British freedom movement, he analyzes it in terms of Indian-British struggle and not Hindu-Muslim struggle against the British. Though Kanshi Ram is imbued with a nationalistic urge, he does not shy away from giving the British their due. He, in fact, shares an ambivalent relation with them. Being a businessman he "enjoyed the safety of the British Raj and hugged it lovingly" (Nahal 18), yet at the same time disapproves of their politics: "And you know these English, they would rather divide than leave behind a united India" (39). He also admires the British administrative integrity and sees them as the architects of modern Indian nation:

All said and done, the British had brought some kind of peace to this torn land. Think of the Sikhs after Maharaja Ranjit Singh—or the Marathas. Think of the Muslims in Delhi or in the Deccan. When had

this country ever been united? Who let down warriors like Porus or Prithvi Raj Chauhan? For that matter, who let down the Moguls in their fight against the British? Always our own men, our own kith and kin! (18)

This ambivalence of Kanshi Ram is not without purpose. It once again gives the author enough leeway to bring in a more integrated and balanced view of the history of those times. By making the main protagonist see both the positive and the negative aspects of colonialism, Chaman Nahal seems to be discharging his duties as a responsible historical novelist. The same comprehensive grid is brought to bear on his understanding of Gandhiji. Through Kanshi Ram, Chaman Nahal holds Gandhi in great esteem. He acknowledges his contribution in awakening national consciousness among the masses (18) by identifying his personality with the aspirations and psyche of the common masses:

For them Gandhi was a mahatma, a religious figure, and they had come only to pay homage to a saint. (104)

For the last thirty years, since that wizard Gandhi came on the scene, it [the congress party] had taken the stand that India was a single nation, not two. And Gandhi was not only a politician; he was a saint. (49)

However, he also holds him responsible for abetting communal politics and the demand for Pakistan by pampering Jinnah. It is his way of acknowledging that this policy of appeasement had negative repercussions in the long run. It

put the faith of the masses in Gandhian charisma under stress in the wake of the politics of two-nation theory:

Didn't Gandhiji and Rajaji themselves as much as offer Pakistan to Jinnah in 1944? They were the ones who put the idea in his head, if you ask me. Take a section in the East of India and a section in the West, they said. Only let's have a common defense and foreign policy. Until then Jinnah had talked of Pakistan, but he did not quite know what he meant by it. Gandhi, by going to him, not only gave Pakistan a name, he gave Jinnah a name too. Who took Jinnah seriously before September 1944? It was doubtful if he took himself seriously, either. Ever since then he had been sharpening his teeth and becoming more and more menacing (40).

But Chaman Nahal does not place the ultimate onus of Partition on Gandhiji. Neither does he visualize it in terms of religious differences. The meanness and hostility that Abdul Ghani displays towards Hindu businessmen is shown to be the consequence of Partition and not its cause. And his callousness is more to do with economic opportunism than religious fanaticism. Earlier on he had lived in harmony with his Hindu neighbors. They were not *kafirs* for him but dependable patrons then. His transformation is the result of communal politics.

Nahal locates the increasing marginalization of Gandhi from the Congress by his politically fatigued and power-hungry lieutenants. The dialogue between Arun and Bibi Amar Vati is very pertinent in this context:

‘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 other Congress leaders, like Nehru and Patel.’

‘They were his stooges.’

‘No auntie. You are wrong there. In the final days, they did not listen to him’. (367)

The blood-shed that followed Partition is attributed to the hastiness of the British in pushing on with Partition, the political miscalculations of the Congress and the religious politics of Jinnah. The people were, thus, betrayed not by their religion or their cultural differences but by the power politics of those whom they trusted.

This humanistic, secular and nationalistic thrust of Nahal’s historiography also comes to the fore in his delineation of the ultimate repercussions of the two-nation theory. The hasty decision to create Pakistan is not seen as a solution to the communal question but as an aggravation of it:

How do you cut a country in two, where at every level the communities were so deeply mixed. There was a Muslim in every corner of India where there was a Hindu. And then so soon, at such a short notice? The broadcast had said nothing at all about the fate of the minorities . . . Pakistan wouldn’t solve the problem of minority, it was going to create new minorities - minorities which would be hounded out with a vengeance . . .

How were they going to cut up the machinery of the government? There were Hindus and Muslims at every level of that machinery (85).

Nahal, thus, implicates the perpetrators of two-nation theory, the Muslim League and the colonial power for the division of the country. Masses are absolved. The violence is seen as a reaction to this absurdity and the lack of bureaucratic and political foresight in heeding to this reality and making necessary administrative arrangements to stall the consequences of communally engineered violence and make adequate arrangements to rehabilitate the refugees. The people truly felt cheated by the nature of this political transfer or truncated independence which could not provide social security to them: “If unwilling the government is party to murder. If incapable, we Indians had no right to ask for freedom” (145). For Nahal, communal nationalism is the false other of the Indian reality.

Communal nationalism is, however, not the spotlight of *Azadi*: its real beauty is the depiction of refugee trauma which it textualizes through the character of Lala Kanshi Ram, a brave man, who emerges in the course of the novel as a larger than life figure.

Lala Kanshi Ram initially reacts out of shock. His reactions are woven into a web of feelings by the novelist to convey their complexity. When the moment of truth for him arrives, that is, when he has to leave Sialkot for a refugee camp after the onset of communal violence, he says, “Refugee, refugee, indeed! .... I was born around here, this is my *home*—*how* can I be a refugee in my home?” (124). He wonders whether the government is incapable

or unwilling to control the situation: “If unwilling, the government is a party to murder. If incapable, we Indians had no right to ask for freedom.” (124). For one who had completely identified himself with Sialkot, it is not only impossible but also inconceivable that “he should have to give up this land, this earth, this air. That’s where the hurt ay!” (126). In this connection, Miranda Alcock’s remark gives us an insight into Lala Kanshi Ram’s trauma as a refugee:

Our earliest sensations, and certainly our memories, come from the smells and the sounds of home. We experience the temperature and humidity of the air on our skin, moist or dry, the sound of rain, dust storms, waves breaking, the silence of snow. We then learn to recognize and make sense of tones of voice, behaviours and gestures as expressing emotions, of music and song, of food to mark special occasions, of dress as information. We are born into a culture that we absorb through every pore. (293)

Lala Kanshi Ram’s reflections on home constitute his trauma—the trauma of the undoing of his identity that had been shaped and reinforced through his earlier cultural experience of habitation in Sialkot—an experience that is indivisible from the development of his self. Therefore, the loss of Sialkot as home creates for Lala Kanshi Ram, to put it in the words of R. K. Papadopoulos, “a deep sense of lack, of disorientation and absence which is not easily definable either in terms of its nature or its effects” (17).

Hope, however, is one of man's strongest impulses and that makes Lala Kanshi Ram assert, "No, it was irrational, it was madness incarnate, this violence, and it had to stop" (Nahal 130). The pain of leaving is as intense. As Lala Kanshi Ram and his family begin to pack, he feels an immense tightening of the heart. His wife Prabha Rani, and son Arun were stripping the walls bare, and Lala Kanshi Ram feels as if "they were stripping his flesh from his body. The bone was showing—whichever way he turned" (138). What interestingly makes him finally leave is the hope that they might be able to return to Sialkot once the troubles are over. The human mind is known for its penchant for fantasy and he imagines his own death and begins to fantasize over it. He visualizes a decent, dignified burial for him at Sialkot. This is all that he wanted and "that would be the very pinnacle of his delight" (143-144). Such is the power and strength of one's roots.

The major part of the rest of the novel enacts for us in a most moving manner the long, difficult, arduous march of the Hindus of Sialkot to the Indian border at Dera Baba Nanak. The incessant attacks on them by the Muslims—the arson, looting, killings, rape—emerges from the novel in powerful, distinct, clear-cut details. Along with this, the major human drama as revealed in the story of Lala Kanshi Ram and the members of his family unfolds in all its vividness. Nahal has shown how documentary realism and human drama can be fused successfully. In fact, in *Azadi* the two are complementary to each other. They are not mutually exclusive as in *Train to Pakistan*. The novel goes beyond the historical period-piece in the way in which Lala Kanshi Ram's situation is rendered as a deeply human predicament in artistic terms. *Azadi*, at this point, becomes a novel that tells

the story of Lala Kanshi Ram, a man displaced out of his roots, his conflicts between his fond hopes and the harsh realities, love and hatred, the Aryal Samajist that he professes to be and the superstitious Hindu that he actually is. It is here that we see how a historical event is shown affecting the lives of an individual and his family. What really shatters the man is the killing of his daughter, Madhu. This is a deeply personal tragedy for Lala Kanshi Ram. But with this tragedy, life does not end for him. It is not the end of the road, it is only the beginning:

The problems that loomed in the future were a thousand fold more complex and bewildering than what he had gone through. Hitherto he had only died—in various ways. It involved no act of the will on his part; the death came suddenly and swiftly and offered no alternatives. The act of creation on the other hand demanded a slow nursing, a careful watch which in spite of the long effort might or might not blossom into fruit. Many parts of him had died but there were others still alive, forcefully and affirmatively alive, and he knew he was not defeated. But the tasks ahead of him were multitudinous and he faltered and fumbled in his steps. (269)

This offers not only an essential clue to the character of Lala Kanshi Ram but also to the vision of life of the novelist. Partition is almost like death to Lala Kanshi Ram. But the human spirit is tenacious and it struggles, fights every attempt made to destroy it. Even so the process of revival is slow. It is this slow process which ultimately leads to new self-awareness in the man.

Very appropriately the recognition of new truths of life comes to Lala Kanshi Ram as he is passing through Kurukshetra. In fact, it has been a veritable battle, a Kurukshetra, for every one of them, for the Hindus as well as the Muslims. But what has the battle resulted in? Hatred, animosity, revenge, destruction and scant regard for human values on either side. As in the ancient Kurukshetra, even here comes the moment of awareness—of the stupidity, the futility, the utter meaninglessness of all that has happened, that makes him realize, “I have ceased to hate” (334). But Nahal does not simplify. This is clear when we see that his wife Prabha Rani can never reconcile to the loss of her daughter and she retorts, “I’ll hate and curse them as long as I live” (335). Lala Kanshi Ram goes on, “Forgive. That way alone can you make peace with yourself. . . . Forgive fully” (336)

Nahal perceptively shows how suffering, pain and death is only a prelude to a new life, full of affirmation and hope. This is symbolically brought out in the birth of child to Isher Kaur on the train. He also shows that Delhi is not really, a “Brave New World” for the refugees. Nor does he believe that a spiritual awareness of the self can compensate completely for one’s material losses. Life is too complex to make such easy equations.

Despite the new birth of awareness in Lala Kanshi Ram he is seen in Delhi as a man who is almost totally lost. To him, officialdom and the bureaucracy look menacingly threatening. And his moment of humiliation comes when he breaks clown in front of the officer in the refugee camp while imploring him for a small house. This had never happened to him before. Finally they settle in Kingsway camp. He sets up a little shop and sells

groceries. Befitting his humbler circumstances, he now wears only a cap and sometimes nothing, instead of the earlier turban. In trauma theory, such an individual is defined as melancholic,

as somebody who expects to be cast out and punished. He feels slighted and treated with great injustice, and to some extent even relishes and flaunts his suffering. . . . He has felt abandoned or discarded by the beloved. . . . His previous deep attachment to this object has been shattered, due to rejection, indifference or disappointment. (Alcock 297)

At the end, of the novel, we see Lala Kanshi Ram as a man who has suffered intensely, has also perhaps learnt of life more fully, but the consequence of it all, is that he no longer can communicate his inner feelings either to his son or to his wife. Something has snapped somewhere. Azadi had made him lose the ability to communicate with his family (Nahal 363). Suffering as made them all withdraw into themselves, which in turn has incapacitated them to share their sorrow with each other and they all feel “stifled and crushed” (363). But then life goes on. This is suggested through the sewing machine which is still running. It is Sunanda who is sewing: “The machine went whirring on, its wheel turning fast and its needle moving up and down, murmuring and sewing through the cloth” (364).

More significant though is the fact that as the father, Lala Kanshi Ram, loses courage and resolution, it is precisely the younger generation—Sunanda and kanshi Ram’s son, Arun who seem to grow in so far as rediscovering meaning is concerned. We may mourn Arun’s loss of innocence and

gentleness in his murder of his neighbor's assaulter. But the force and immediacy with which he acts in that instance shows decisiveness that promises authentic leadership. And by the time the family reaches Delhi Arun's leadership becomes still more effective. It is he who guides his father on the interminable rounds of the government offices, where they must seek the illusory housing or employment that has been promised. It is Arun who comforts his father when the older man breaks into tears at his disappointment. It is the son who physically supports Lala Kanshi Ram when fatigue and exhaustion threaten to undo him. Arun under his own initiative decides to continue his education in Delhi. And this enterprise of the son is one more indication that he has taken over the role of leadership in the family.

So if *Azadi* is to be considered primarily a narrative of refugees' traivails, secondarily perhaps it could be regarded as *bildungsroman*, as a story of growing up, of self realization. If it brings defeat and frustration to the old father, it brings to Arun a sense of self image, a discovery of a role he can fulfill even in the midst of illusion and despair. In this manner the story of Arun does take over and usurp the novel from the story of Lala Kanshi Ram. We suspect that Chaman Nahal deliberately allows this to happen, for increasingly as the narrative develops, it seems to be told from Arun's point of view, from the stance of how Arun reacts to and is affected by the somber events of those post-partition days. While *Azadi* fits comfortably into the paradigm of refugee literature, it also suggests hope.

There is, however, a central irony operating in the novel about the concept of Azadi. Azadi has ironically brought everything else except real azadi to the

people. What was expected from it and what have the people got in actuality? The irony emerges with a telling effect throughout the novel as this discrepancy is revealed in situation after situation. But Nahal is aware of the other effects of Azadi on the individual lives of people. It is not as if Azadi, in effect partition, only makes men suffer intensely. Azadi makes, for instance, a martyr of the young Sikh Niranjjan Singh. When they were stationed in the refugee camp in Sialkot, he is asked by everyone including his father-in-law to shave off his beard so that they can reach Amritsar by train avoiding recognition in order to save trouble for Isher Kaur, his wife who is in an advanced state of pregnancy. But to him, as to every true Sikh hair on the head and the beard “was a kind of a badge of courage” (239). He cannot bear to lose this and sets fire to himself crying, “I belong to Waheguru, Waheguru is great.... Life I’ll gladly lose, my Sikh dharma I won’t” (256-57). Life throws up not only tragic figures and martyrs but also men of common clay for whom mere survival and existence matters as nothing else does. Azadi affects Gangu Mal, Bibi Amaravati’s husband in a different way. He gladly becomes a Muslim, changes his name to Ghulam Muhammed in order to retain his ownership over his two buildings in the Fort Street at Sialkot even after partition. For him living is more important than a sense of or a search for one’s identity.

*Azadi* achieves a density and a depth of experience as independence is viewed from multiple perspectives. It is the novelist’s recognition of the presence of various attitudes to independence that gives his view of life comprehensiveness. Within the limited world of the novel, Nahal is able to

create an illusion of completeness; such is the authenticity of the world that is portrayed in the novel. There is no nostalgic yearning for the united India. Partition was perhaps sad but an inevitable event that is what the novelist seems to say. But it has also conferred upon the people of India a dignity which is conspicuous at the time of Gandhi's assassination, "Today the men stood in pride—evenly balanced, firm, sure of themselves. Unlike the past, there was no leader urging them to demonstrate their feelings. The feelings had their own recourse. Lala Kanshi Ram raised his head with pride and stretched back his shoulders. He was unrestricted now, he was untrammelled." (362).

Summing up, *Azadi* may be looked upon as an integral part of what has now come to be known as Refugee Literature in English, and in this sense it is an epoch-making book which describes not only the terror and tumult that accompanied, in fact, darkened, the attainment of freedom in 1947 but does also envisage man's freedom from beastliness, from moral, psychological and spiritual malady.

## Chapter Four

### Conclusion: From Trauma to Transcendence

*Azadi*, the Sahitya Academi award winning novel in English, is a significant work. It deals with the political, social, economic, religious, psychological and cultural implications of independence which India achieved in 1947. The unpalatable and cruel truth that India's independence was achieved at the terrible cost of its unnatural dismemberment and tremendous human suffering points to the political unwisdom of partition, which was a great betrayal of the people who were directly affected by it. This political theme of the novel is reinforced by the socio-economic consequences of the partition which uprooted the simple, hard-working; honest and upright people from their homeland and turned them into unwilling beggars begging for small pittances and favors of the corrupt and inefficient bureaucrats and government officials.

In terms of religion, partition resulted in the most obnoxious and monstrous holocaust ever witnessed in this country. Religion, which is supposed to be an embodiment of human and spiritual values, became an instrument of hatred, rapaciousness, evil, exploitation, sadism, torture, murder, rape and wholesale destruction. Psychologically, the partition upset the whole balance of human relationships, snapping the ties of love and communication, and making people strangers to their fellow-compatriots as well as to themselves. And culturally, the whole rhythm of life was disturbed. All the aesthetic beauty that lay in one's environment and institutions and cultural

vigour that sprang from the fragrance of the soil got crushed under the iron heels of political expediency.

Chaman Nahal displays great powers of perception in dealing with such a wide-ranging theme in his novel. His understanding and treatment of the characters and situations is truly remarkable. The formidable theme of India's partition and its tragic and devastating consequences is such a fiery stuff that it can easily lead one into adopting an intensely partisan attitude. But Nahal tones down his perceived partiality towards India through a foregrounding of the refugee experience of the partition survivors.

Nahal unfolds the refugee experience through the consciousness of Lala Kanshi Ram, a grain merchant of Sialkot, who is forced to quit his home and dearly-loved place because of the monstrous perversions that followed in the wake of partition, Sialkot went to Pakistan and in the midst of the terrifying scenes of looting, arson and murder, Lala Kanshi Ram found himself giving up his all and forced to seek shelter somewhere in free India which presented to him rather bleak prospects of a difficult existence. But this too not before he had undergone the traumatic experiences of his erstwhile Muslim neighbors like Abdul Ghani going berserk with communal frenzy, the murder of his daughter and son-in-law, the make-shift and insecure life in the camps and the piling of horrors upon horror during the long march from Sialkot to Dera Baba Nanak. Lala Kanshi Ram's son, Arun, not only loses his beloved Nurul-Nisar, the sister of his friend Munir and daughter of his father's bosom friend, Chaudhari Barkat Ali, but also his new-found love, Chandni. He witnesses the hair-raising scene of the rape of beautiful Sunanda, the daughter-

in-law of his land-lady, Bibi Amar Vati, and finds himself murdering the rapist, Captain Rahmat-Ullah Khan, his one-time college mate and now a Pakistani army officer. Sunanda loses her husband, Suraj Prakash, who is killed; Isher Kaur loses her husband, Niranjan Singh, who prefers to immolate himself rather than give up his religion by cutting his hair to escape the fury of the Muslims; Bibi Amar Vati loses her husband, Gangu Mull, who embraces Islam to be able to become the sole proprietor of his wife's property. Innumerable men and women on both sides lose their dignity, self-respect, modesty and sanity. There is no one who does not lose something or the other. Thus the novel becomes an orchestration of various kinds of losses to which men and women were subjected owing to the indecent hurry of wily politicians to capture power and to their inadequate preparation to meet the situation arising out of the brutal act of partition.

Nahal's character-delineation is authentic and his characters' are obviously based on real men and women who underwent the shattering experience of an extraordinarily fluid and tense situation, Though they have all the natural flavour of the region to which they belong, yet they in their trial and suffering, seem to transcend the narrow confines of place and achieve a resonant oneness. Some of his characters even achieve a sort of poetic transcendence when they are imbued with the spirit of a higher vision that helps them cope with the trauma of being refugees.

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