

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

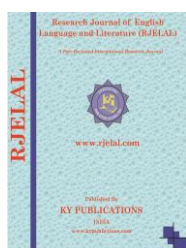
2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

PARTITION IN CHAMAN NAHAL'S *AZADI*

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ABSTRACT

Historical and socio-political change in the context of the Indian freedom struggle under the leadership of Gandhi in pre and post-Independence era has been a subject of major concern for the Indian English novelists. Chaman Nahal has handled historical and fictional elements with delicacy & prudence. He seems to be successful in projecting Gandhi and Indian Freedom Struggle within the framework of fiction. In *Azadi*, Nahal's purpose is to describe the impact of the Partition on ordinary people. He portrays the pain of Lala Kanshi Ram and his family in Sialkot, now in Pakistan, go 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. Thus the present paper attempts to analyse how far the theme of partition works in Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*.

Keywords: *pre-independence, freedom struggle, alienation, homeland*

Note: The following abbreviations are used after quotations: *Azadi* – A; *The Crown and Loincloth* – CL

Historical and socio-political change in the context of the Indian freedom movement under the leadership of Gandhi, both in pre-and post-independence era has been a subject of major concern for the Indian English novelists. Freedom struggle has been over after independence. However the nationalist movement which has dominated the life of a whole generation's historical and socio-political theme occupies the central place in the works of the major Indian novelists of this period. The post independence Indian English novelists have presented this theme in their works and Gandhi being the moving spirit and the guiding force of the freedom movement naturally occupies the central position in many of these works.

Chaman Nahal's sequel of four novels namely *The Crown and the Loincloth*, *The Salt of Life*, *The Triumph of the Tricolour* and *Azadi* is based on the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi. It is a

landmark in the annals of Indian English fiction. The novelist presents Gandhi as a colossus figure who has shaped the course of history of his age. These novels present the stupendous drama of the Indian Freedom Struggle under Gandhian leadership in all its aspects. The portrayal of the formative period of the Indian history has been provided authentic support of social situations through a variety of characters through these novels.

The action of the novel centers round Lala Kanshi Ram, a wholesale grain merchant in Sialkot and his family and how they are affected by Partition. Nahal unequivocally states his views about Partition "In *Azadi* I was largely concerned with showing how the Partition of India in 1947 destroyed an existing harmony which had prevailed for centuries" (A xii). Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims have been living together in peace and harmony for many decades in the Punjab city of Sialkot.

The novel depicts the tragedy and atrocities at the time of partition of India which has been the worst ever incident in the history of India. India is very cruelly divided into two parts – India and Pakistan, which has left a deep scar in the minds of millions and millions of people. Lala Kashi Ram tells Prabha Rani, “If Pakistan is created, we’ll have to leave. That is, if the Muslims spare our lives.” (A 28) It has been the darkest period in the annals of Indian history and though so many decades have elapsed since then, this incident cannot be easily wiped out of memory, as it has left a tale of massive destruction and massacre.

Azadi describes both pain and pleasure during the attainment of freedom of India in 1947. When India was free from the clutches of the British rule, it was a time of triumph, an occasion of rejoice and celebration, but what followed after it is the worst and shameful act that went into the pages of the history books to be read with remorse. The novel is about the freedom struggle of India ending into a tale of woe – a holocaust, genocide, mass destruction, arson, rape, carnage and turbulence, gerrymandered by the British and the Muslim League. Though the action in the novel centres on the political frenzy at the time of partition of India into India and Pakistan, in fact it tells about the impact of the worst tragedy in the history of modern India. The novel depicts the role played by Indian politics in the lives of both the Hindus and the Muslims in general and its impact on the lives of the lovers, like Arun and Nur and later on again the former with Chandni. If *Azadi* makes people free from alien rule, the partition and the havoc it causes results in the loss of ability to communicate in private life. But Nahal, the positivist, tells us that suffering, pain, death are only a prelude to a new life, full of hope.

The harmonious atmosphere and co-operation among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs which prevails in the Muslim dominated city of Sialkot is affected by the Partition. Lala recalls how Muslims helped the Hindus in making preparations for their festivals like Dussehra “...when effigies were made by Muslim workmen; the crackers and the fireworks too were supplied by the Muslims”. (A 75) 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 has 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 has been a refugee, he writes with incredible realism. Therefore he has written his own experience through the character of Lala Kashi Ram 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. “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 short notice? The broadcast had said nothing at all about the fate of the minorities in the two new countries”. (A 68)

In *Azadi*, Nahal’s purpose is to describe the impact of the Partition on ordinary people. Lala feels frustrated. “The two new governments were parties to the fratricidal war, and how could unarmed men and women withstand organized slaughter?” (A 183-184) 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, rape and the fires – are started in the different corners of the city at night. It creates an impression that “...the way these fires were spread out, it looked as though some planning went behind them, for the fire engines were harassed to the limit in running from north to

south and east to west. But no, the arson too at this stage was only sporadic." (A106)

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.

Thus, *Azadi*, like other novels dealing with the holocaust of India's partition, occupies a special place in Indian English fiction. At a time, when extreme inhumanity often finds its justification in religion and when we seem to be returning to the world of the partition, with its massacre of innocent people, it would be worth the while to read these novels depicting the "sweeping shattering saga of the colossal tragedy and disruption that accompanied the partition and independence in the Indian sub-continent." (CL 299) They help us to recollect the past and may induce us not to repeat it. Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it.

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 is clarified. In Delhi, Lala Kanshi Ram and others have to see the Muslim abducted women's parade, they feel bad. Soon they see that a train of the Muslim refugees is attacked and subsequently many Muslims are killed. Nahal through his protagonist gives his idea that he does not hate the Muslims because what they have done in Pakistan with the Hindus is done by the Indians with the Muslims 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 which prevail in the countries even today. This is the traumatic time which has sprouted the seeds of frustration and social chaos, as a result the entire social setting of both the sides turns so in yells. The two nation theory has negatively harassed the psyche of people with which the whole society gets gripped in the trauma and the communal frenzy attains the way to put the negative effects upon the life-process.

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