

Contextualising Partition and Post-Independence Politics in Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*

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Abstract

This paper discusses the historical pre- and post-partition riots during the period of independence as well as the predicament faced by Lala Kanshi Ram and other Hindu families during their convoy ride from Pakistan to India and their subsequent settling in Delhi after arriving in India in Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*. It is the tale of a whole country, of millions who had to flee their homes and to whom *Azadi* only brings unimaginable suffering and an uncertain future. The division, which resulted from the goals and objectives of political groups, exposes the suffering of the populace. The experience is demonstrated while the migrants are leaving Sialkot for the convoy's first camp and often glance back at the city's streets. Nahal was unable to express his opinions about individuals and historical issues in the novel, but *Azadi* opposes the two-nation doctrine despite not commenting on history because he was also a victim of partition.

Keywords: Partition, Victim, Hindu, Muslim, Politics, Independence.

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Chaman Nahal, one of the prominent authors of the contemporary India, is a scholarly person, highly academic and man of letters. He is endowed with the ability to examine himself critically in addition to the foolishness and vices of other people. His fictional works portray India's social and political landscape. He has presented a simulation of India's social ills, including casteism, alcoholism, superstitions, harassment of women, communalism, and exploitation of the working class. He has portrayed Gandhiji, an advocate of love, truth, and nonviolence, in a way that is incredibly realistic, persuasive, and unusually honest. His portrayal of the political situation, which includes the fight for freedom, the awakening of the nation, the various movements started by Gandhiji, the achievement of independence, the terrible conditions that existed before and after independence, the division of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, and several issues that arose after the division, is incredibly poignant and admirable.

The Indian subcontinent's history is permanently scarred by the atrocities and indescribable grievances of fanaticism of the 1947 partition. The accused and victims of the rioting are members of three different religions as well as newly constituted nations. The author of *Azadi*, a Pakistani refugee with firsthand knowledge and experience of the atrocities of the 1947 partition, is not a writer who relies on media accounts or writes about the suffering of people from afar. Millions of people's tales are reflected in Nahal's portrayal of Ram's family and their struggle to travel from Sialkot, Pakistan, to India. The terrible hardships and sufferings of refugees are not the main subject of the story: "...it looks at the factors that contributed to tragedy in an interpretive manner" (Asha Kaushik's *Politics, Aesthetics and Culture*, 67). Even though the historical story spans eight months, it depicts more than just cruelty and heinous murders; it also shows love, friendship, exploitation, deceit, and martyrdom. The novel conveys the idea that one must stop hating and learns to forgive, something that few modern novels do.

The documentary *Azadi* offers a vivid account of the plight of Indian immigrants from Pakistan, even though it contains fictional people. Nahal readers will recognise Ram as the grain dealer of Sialkot. He went to the crowing ceremony festivities of Amit, son of Kusum and Vishal Chand, alongside his son Arun. Ram is a successful grain merchant who resides in Sialkot with his wife Prabha Rani and son Arun, who is a college student. He is well-liked by everyone in Sialkot for being a gentleman. He and other Hindu families have been residing in the mohalla for a considerable amount of time, and neither Ram nor the other Hindu families can predict the chaos that will ensue from the division of the subcontinent. He firmly believes in Gandhi, who just months before the subcontinent gained its freedom, promised the safety of the lives of its minorities. This is where the novel begins.

On June 3, 1947, Lord Mountbatten's pronouncement of India's independence and the consequent division of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan was eagerly anticipated by everyone in the subcontinent. The Cabinet Mission report, which Mountbatten possessed, made no recommendations for partition. Unfortunately, some Muslims desired to identify as Pakistanis under Mahammad Ali Jinnah's leadership. Ram is quite interested in the daily happenings of national affairs. Indians were more interested in learning about their independence than the Second World War, even though America's bombing of Japan was the hot subject at the time. Every family in the mohalla, including Sialkot landlady Bibi Amar Vati, gathers in front of her radio to hear the Mountbatten statement in the evening. Family members include Gangu Mull, her husband Suraj Prakash, their adopted son, and their daughter-in-law Sunanda Bala.

Twenty-year-old Arun, who is pimply, pays close attention to the English transmission of Mountbatten on the radio. Curious, the others examine Arun's face and enquire about his words. With the announcement, their previously terrified

looks are now filled with panic. There is a lot of tension between them, and they are unable to predict what the future holds. Jinnah's voice could be heard clearly: "Pakistan Zindabad! Long live Pakistan!" (56) Suraj immediately switched off the radio. However, they had heard Jinnah's plea, and it contained only pride rather than mercy.

Muslims in Sialkot start celebrating their win as soon as they hear the news of Mountbatten. Some groups of people light fireworks and stroll joyfully from street to street. The noise from the neighbouring Muslim residential areas is audible to the residents of the mohalla. A procession of joyful young people arrives at the mohalla, where Ram and other residents reside. The main gate is closed by the mohalla's Hindu youngsters. As the mohalla's youth yell as the throng tries to burst through the gate, Nirajan, a resident, reassures them, saying, "I suggest we stay here and we fight the bastards if they try to enter the street." However, they are extremely few in comparison to the Muslim crowd. "We should be able to kill a few before we get killed" (60). The crowd shouts for the gate to be opened, kicks it with their feet, and declares, "We won't leave until we cross the street" (65). The cops, armed with weapons, rush to the scene in the meantime.

Ram agrees to provide safety from any violence when Inayat-Ullah Khan, the City Inspector, requests that he open the gate. Mr. Khan, the Muslim inspector, was garlanded by the Muslim leaders. The inspector has been waiting for an opportunity to take action that will win over his community. The police are told to open the gate by the inspector. However, some Sikh and Hindu police officers take a long time to react. They are threatened by the inspector. The Deputy Commissioner, a Hindu named Pran Nath Chaddha, and the Superintendent of Police, a Muslim named Asghar Ahmad Siddiqui, have now arrived on the scene and assured the residents of the mohalla that they will be protected from the mob. The mob is thus permitted to enter the street under police escort. The parade proceeds without incident, despite some windowpanes being smashed. A Hindu boy and a Muslim girl, or vice versa, fall in love, just like in several partition novels. Arun, is Hindu, and he has feelings for his college classmate, Nurul Nisar, who is Muslim. Unexpectedly, Munir, Arun's buddy and Nurul Nisar's brother, supports their relationship.

Ram's simple-hearted friend Chaudhri Barkat Ali is the father of Nurul Nisar and Munir. Munir suggests that they keep their relationship a secret and avoid public appearances together. When they meet in secret at Ramlila Ground that day, Arun asks Nur, "I love you, will you marry me?" while he is in his hug. "Ja, Ja!" (80) was her standard response. Arun is fully aware that, as a Hindu, he cannot reside in Pakistan. He so states, "They won't let us" and "We may have to go away from here" (80). Nur's remark captures the love shared by these two families. However, Sikhs and Hindus make up a small portion of Pakistan's Muslim population. Therefore, Barkat Ali is unable to guarantee Ram's family's safety.

The source of fanaticism, Arun's remark, is not a good enough excuse to go elsewhere. He is reminded by Nur of his promise to convert to Islam for her. In turn, Arun asks her, "Why shouldn't you? If you love me, that is (81). Here, Nur expresses her opinion on the status of women in society and her resolve to wed Arun no matter what. Their love is dominated by their fondness for their families. For love, neither of them is prepared to give their lives. Arun is constantly expected to make sacrifices by Nur, but she never does. Additionally, Arun makes no guarantees about their marriage. He is merely trying to comfort her by saying that he might return and wed her as she desires. He is accused of being a shy Hindu by Nur, who then exits the garden.

Arun and Munir are friends with William Davidson a British sergeant. He has been residing here for three years and supports the British leaving, India. David, Munir, and Arun talk about current events and daily politics. Hindu Deputy Commissioner Nath Chaddha works diligently to maintain control over Sialkot. However, at least four or five fires and four or five stabbings occur every day. The rioting and murders are out of the government's control. 'Refugee camp' is where the Sikh and Hindu families start to relocate.

Ram's Trunk Bazaar grain store is looted. Hundreds of Sikhs and Hindus depart Sialkot every day. From there, Ram and the Mohalla convicts are prepared to proceed. Munir and Bill Davidson set up vehicles to transport to camps for refugees. A few members of the Mohalla community, including Ram's family, Bibi's family, Padmini, a servant maid, and her daughter Chandini, have been relocated to the refugee camp. Regretfully, his Muslim security kills the Deputy Commissioner. Ram learns in the refugee camp that their son-in-law Rajiv, a reader in the Wazirabad civil court, and their daughter Madhu Bala were killed by the fanatics while travelling by train from Wazirabad to Sialkot. Prabha Rani and Ram are shocked by this sad news.

Suraj and Arun pose as Muslims and visit Barkat Ali's home, asking for his assistance in securing Madhu Bala's body, at the very least. Barkat Ali's wife weeps deeply after learning of Madhu's murder. Arun and Suraj have arrived at the railway station, where several deceased people are being cremated next to the station, with the assistance of Barkat Ali and Munir. It is piled high with skulls and bones. The body of Madhu Bala is nowhere to be found. Even their attempts to retrieve Madhu Bala's body, whose remains are disposed of close to the Sialkot train station, have been unsuccessful.

The August 15th Independence celebrations are ended. The news from New Delhi has been shut out by the Pakistani administration. The refugee camp provides shelter to Ram's family, Bibi Amar Vati's family, Suraj, Sunanda, and their two kids, Padmini and her adolescent daughter Chandini. Meanwhile, the border between India and Pakistan is declared. Everyone knows where he stands - in a region of India or Pakistan - after the Boundary Commission's award is made public on August 7. The decision to move the minority from one side to the other is ultimately made by both administrations. The Punjab Boundary Force, which was established in August to safeguard the province's minorities, is commanded by General Rees. Members of the Indian Army from the Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu minorities make up the military.

Many women are among the more than 3,000 persons in the camp who are either dead or missing. Major Jung Bahudur Singh is positive that the Pakistani army was involved in the attack that night. Six of his commanders and many of his own troops are killed. Arun asks them if they have ever seen Chandini and provides them with specifics about her appearance. The following day, Suraj's body is discovered. At Narowal, one of the heinous and ignominious incidents takes place. The Sikh and Hindu women are forcibly abducted by the Muslim zealots, who then parade them around the street's nude. Half a mile from the camp, at a small bazaar, Arun and Suraj watch the procession. Arun sits on the shop front where a hakim, a physician using an indigenous medical system, practices because he is unable to see the parade. The hakim sahib hides his face and asks God to pardon these ruthless individuals. Suraj, however, likes the setting.

Among the most regrettable incidents in human history is this one. No conflict or incident on any continent in world history may involve this kind of humiliation of women. Religious conflicts are not acceptable to humanity, not to animals or even to fellow humans. The women are raped in public. Where such marches are planned, no local government, law enforcement, or military forces may intervene.

Arun loses his beloved once more. His blossoming love is snatched away before it can blossom. Arun frantically searches for Chandini in an Indian army jeep, but to no avail. Between Dera Baba Nanak and Narowal, there is another Muslim village called Jassar. Surprisingly, rather than attacking the convoy, the villagers provide water to the passengers. The convoy arrives at the Indian border after crossing the Ravi River. To commemorate their deliverance, many people kiss the Indian soil, and others take a bath in the Ravi River. Ram's family quickly relocated from Dera Baba Nanak to Amritsar, and then to Delhi. Sunanda, Teja Singh, Ishar Kaur, and Bibi Amarvati travelled to Delhi with Ram's family. In the hopes that Chandini will recover, Padmini remains in Amritsar. The train stops frequently during the trip.

Ram comes to know of the Muslim women procession in the bazar of Amritsar. He hears the news that several hundreds of Muslims are slaughtered in India to take revenge against the killings of Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan. Ram also witnesses on the route to Delhi the counter attacks by Hindus in India. Ram and others again see many dead bodies at Ambala train station. Ram grieves at the counter murders, though Prabha Rani feels glad about the payback. He adds, "Yes, I can't hate the Muslims any more" (283). With a plain heart he forgives the Muslims.

Ram is not pleased to learn that Muslims have been slaughtered in India as a kind of retaliation. Despite losing his own daughter to their zeal, he is a good man who forgives the Muslim extremists in Pakistan. When he arrives in the motherland, his troubles do not end. In Amritsar, his family is not protected by relatives. After arriving in Delhi, he applies for housing and resumes his career as a grain merchant. Even though Ram is a major character in the novel, it would be hard to label him the protagonist. It is difficult to determine if Arun or Ram due to the action's lack of coherence.

Although he is an opportunist, Arun may be considered the novel's protagonist. In his life, he takes things easy. He had a romantic relationship with Nurul-Nisar while he is a college student. Despite his initial intense love for Nur, he is unwilling to give anything up. Their love is cut off by the divide. Nahal introduces the love story of Arun and Chandini against the backdrop of the dire circumstances of the convoy's passengers. Despite her initial lack of desire, Chandini eventually expresses her willingness to wed Arun. Unfortunately, though, this love affair also fails because of the following events in the novel. Sunanda is rescued from Rahmat-Ullah Khan by his valiant action. Once more, he enrolls in a college in Delhi. At the start of the novel, he is presented as a college student, and by the novel's conclusion, he is still enrolled in college. However, neither college is in the same country.

Ironically, Ram is likewise presented as a grain merchant at the start of the novel and is still a grain merchant at the end, but not as wealthy as Sialkot. A typical Hindu homemaker is Prabha Rani. When she learns that Madhu Bala was slain in a massacre, she is not readily comforted. She believes that the onslaught on Muslims in India is motivated by retaliation. After her brothers arrive in India, she considers visiting Kanpur, where they currently reside. Ram, however, refuses to travel there because he believes it is far from Delhi. A symbol of the refugees' new life in their homeland is the birth of a child to Sunanda in a small train on their journey to Delhi. Some innocent people became scapegoats for the political decisions of partition, and she lives her life with the aid of a sewing machine, re-stitching old garments to rebuild their lives in the new locations. One of the greatest tragedies in human history, according to historians, was the partition riots. The two countries did not go to war.

After much sacrifice, the Indian subcontinent also succeeded in achieving its aspirational goal of independence. This is the first "bloodless revolution" - a struggle for independence. However, the subcontinent's history has a terrible scar from the riots and massacres. Nahal did not identify anyone as the cause of the disturbances. Political leaders who oversaw the partition should bear the guilt because the riots were a result of it. He only documented the episodes since he was directly aware of the hardships faced by refugees travelling from Pakistan to India. Military trucks transport the Hindus and Ram's family from the haveli to the refugee camp. Nahal paints a realistic picture of the suffering endured by the refugees in the camps. The lovers' separation serves as the novel's presentation of the love theme. Arun's classmate Nurul-Nisar, a Muslim girl and the daughter of his family friend Barkat Ali, is the object of his affection. Arun's love is purposeful. He is labelled timid by Nur. Both are asked to surrender their religion to make their love fruitful. But both have displayed selfish pretexts for their sacrifice. Both government officials make elaborate plans to move refugees to the other side. But some of the Muslim military officers have been partial in giving an opportunity to Muslim radicals to assault the convoys and slaughter thousands of either Hindus or Sikhs in the novel.

Azadi is a realistic documentary on the partition riots. It is the story of political hatred and bloodshed, of the public passions during the turbulent and fatal days in the wake of partition, where people are overtaken by communal frenzy. Nahal has

infused the historical novel with unvarnished facts based on first-hand knowledge and his experience as a refugee from Pakistan to India. The partition riots, a terrible scar in human history, and the Indian independence movement were overlooked by the historians.

To write a historical novel, Nahal uses real events that occurred during the time of the partition and adds creative fictitious characters. Compared to other Indian novels written in English, *Azadi* may be the best novel for describing the partition riots. The historical elements are enhanced by actual events such as the flight of various communities, the rumblings of the Indian-Pakistani border, the arrival of Gandhi on the political arena, and the striking images of the Raj. The anguish of millions of men and women whose settled lives were uprooted into a completely degrading state - that of a Pakistani refugee pleading for a place to live in his own nation - is reflected in the novel, despite the story of a single person named Ram.

Nahal's skill in *Azadi* to portray the profound psychological disruptions and emotional changes brought about by that traumatic event in the inner lives of individual men and women marks a new dimension of the author's point of view on the partition novels, even though many novels had previously been published on the subject and the theme had been repeated in Indo-Anglian fiction. This novel is free of pride or personal bias. The novel's ability to successfully translate history into art is facilitated by the various viewpoints in which the poignant deeds and actual events are presented with sensitivity and cunning. Despite being a refugee himself, *Azadi* does not contain any autobiographical elements. Nahal documents the events while remaining detached from the narrative.

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