



SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES AND HISTORICAL TRAUMA IN CHAMAN NAHAL'S AZADI

GOPALKRISHNA SURESH JOSHI

Ph. D. Scholar

Dept of English and Languages

Sandip University

Nashik (MS) INDIA

DR. SHARAYU SONAWANE

Asst. Professor & Research Guide

Dept of English and Languages

Sandip University

Nashik (MS) INDIA

ABSTRACT

The present research paper attempts to highlight how literature voices the atrocities inflicted on innocent people during the partition of India and Pakistan and forces human beings to reflect upon the actions undertaken in a rage of anger. Chaman Nahal's Azadi portrays the socio-political and religious conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims during the partition period and reflects the extreme extent of inhumanity shown by both Muslims and Hindus in the name of religious sentiments. The paper explores Lala Kanshi Ram's experiences and views on the happenings during his journey from Sialkot to Deslhi with a view of underlining the consequences of the political ideology behind the partition and the wounds which are still open.

Keywords: atrocities, Great War of Britain, socio-political, partition novel, Migrated people

INTRODUCTION

India gained its independence, after more than a century-long hard-drawn freedom struggle, on 15th August 1947. The day marked the end of the exploitative British era in India which every Indian celebrated with pride. Simultaneously, the Muslim leaders demanded a separate



country for Muslims on the pretext that it would be difficult for Hindus and Muslims to live together in one nation as they both practice different cultures and religions. According to the nation theory, the Western part of Punjab with a Muslim majority was separated as Pakistan and the eastern part of Bengal was separated as Eastern Pakistan, which later on came to be known as Bangladesh. Further, the separation was not limited to the political and geographical division of the country but it turned out to be a violent massacre and exemplified the cruelty of human beings at its worst. As the nation was separated based on religion Hindus from Pakistan migrated into India and Muslims from India into Pakistan to preserve their respective ethnic identities in the hope of leading a peaceful life. The migration during the partition period is remembered in history as a period of massive violence, rapes, murders and savagery. P. Roy compares the intensity of the partition violence with that of the bomb attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki of Japan and the Great War of Britain. He says, "It is very difficult to give an exact account of the people who became the victim of the partition trauma but its impact can be compared to that of the Great War on Britain or the Second World War on Japan and France" (Roy 365).

The partition trauma is remembered for the Hindu-Muslim socio-cultural and religious complexities prevailing in the subcontinent, rather it increased more than before. The consequences of the tortuous event not only darkened the hearts of the victims but also struck the witnesses. The feelings and views towards this partition period, its victims, the politics of partition, massacres in refugee camps, aftermath of the partition, socio-cultural impact and the violence inflicted by both Hindus and Muslims on each other have been reflected in the literature of Indian regional as well as international languages. Literature like Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956); Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980) Hyder's *River of Fire* (1959); Jhumpa Lohiri's *Interpreter of Maldives* (1999); Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (2001) and many more novels, short stories and plays depict the human cost of independence and partition paid by both Hindus and Muslims in India and Pakistan. Among these Indian writers, Chaman Nahal stands out as a partition novelist as he was born in Sialkot, Pakistan and has experienced and witnessed the period of partition as a refugee. He is famous for the 'Gandhian Quartet' of 1993 which includes the novels- *The Crown and the Loincloth*, *The Salt of Life*, *the Triumph of Tricolour* and *Azadi*. The quartet depicts Mahatma Gandhi as a complex character with human failings. It also presents The painful experience of the partition. He received the 'Sahitya Academy Award and the 'Federation of Indian Publishers Award for his novel *Azadi* in 1977. The novel depicts his first-hand experience of partition and explores more socio-political issues raised during the historical event of Indian independence and partition. Readers of the partition literature remain horror-struck to know the massive violence, murder and rape of innocent women and girls, burnings, lootings and killings of men in communal riots. The partition literature highlights the cost paid by both India and Pakistan in terms of loss of lives during the partition.



The novel *Azadi* portrays eight months from 3rd June 1947 to the death of Mahatma Gandhi exploring the politics of independence and massive massacre in the name of religious sentiments. The plot is segregated into three parts- The Lull, The Storm and The Aftermath. Through the ideas, feelings, views and experiences of the protagonist of the novel- Lala Kanshi Ram, Chaman Nahal is trying to portray a realistic picture of partition while exploring the socio-political and religious issues raised during the partition and their impact on people in both India and Pakistan. The first section, 'The Lull' begins with the declaration of the scheme of partition by Lord Mountbatten and all the political parties gave their approval on the line of partition. When Lala heard the announcement of partition- the division of India into India and Pakistan, Lala commented that the announcement had brought glory and popularity to Jinnah or it is rather a personalized victory to a Muslim leader, in getting a separate state for Muslims. Mockingly in anger, he further says, "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 alarming. If the congress would give this much, why not go for complete separation?" (Nahal 27-28). British ruled over India skillfully and tyrannically for more than a century. During this period Indians had developed and accepted slave-like status in their own country due to the policy of the British Raj. While leaving the country in 1947 they divided India into two states and gave partition wounds that can never be cured. The politics of separatist ideology based on religious identity divided the Indians into Hindus and Muslims and further into Indians and Pakistanis. Lala Kanshi Ram blames Congress for supporting the partition move and comments that Jinnah must have felt proud to have his dream come true as his community was granted a separate state. Among this people had mixed opinions; characters like Lala Kanshi Ram and Chaudhari Barkat Ali show sensibility and humanitarian attitude towards each other, however, Abdul Ghani, a hookah-maker, represents an example of foolish and fanatic Muslims who are delighted with the announcement of partition and hates the Hindus, even Lala Kanshi Ram who had lived with him in Sialkot.

A political division of the nation was formally accepted in the Punjab legislative assembly in Lahore and immediately a day after that on June 24 Sialkot had its first riot. Hindus in Pakistan were massacred by Muslims but the counter-offensive actions were not launched by Hindus looking at the atrocities and social hatred among people in North West India during partition Lala Kanshi Ram reflects that people who fight like atrocious animals do not have any right to demand independent because many freedom fighters for generations have sacrificed their lives to gain independence and Hinduism Muslims are inflicting atrocities on each other as if hard and freedom after long drone struggle holds no importance for them when it comes to protect their religious identities when they had no enemies before which they created the freedom struggle of India is an enormous event that holds important in the history of the of India as well as world history in the history the need for partition was never felt however the partition of 1947 separated to community away from each other forever and



friends became enemies. Hindus and Muslims were living in every part of India and after partition, they started moving into the refugee camps and thereby towards their allotted States atrocities were inflicted on the defence less innocent people young boys and girls like Madhu, Chandni, and Arun were separated for no apparent reasons. The animosity generated due to partition destroyed the long-standing peaceful coin coexistence between Hindus and Muslims.

Lala Kanshi Ram was born and brought up in a Hindu-majority area in Sialkot, Pakistan. After the declaration, Muslims believed that they would have a better future as they received a separate state- Pakistan. Muslim crowd gathered in this Hindu majority area and started telling Hindus that they should leave their place. He cannot believe the things happening at the place where Hindus and Muslims were living happily. He, being born and brought up in a colonial setting, is well aware of the British government and he had some respect for its accuracy and discipline in work. He also suggests his son, Arun, observe their discipline in their marching style. However, as a Hindu nationalist, he despises the British government in its entirety. Lala wishes to experience the spiritual unity in human existence because believes that God has created all the creatures and human beings, including Britishmen, Hindus, Muslims and all. Lala's son Arun is in love with Nur, but religion has become a hurdle in their relationship and they have to face the consequences. As things worsened his friends suggested that he should make a decision and leave for India with his family. He could not believe that he had become a refugee in his own country where he was born and brought up. He had become a kafir for the Muslims like Abdul Ghani who had a lot of things to say to Lala but he couldn't. The partition affected the lives of women. The atrocities they experienced were numerous. The description of the kind of treatment Rahmat-Ullah Khan gave to Sunayana was heartbreaking. The helpless women were at the mercy of the ferocious impulses of criminals. To safeguard themselves they made a respectful attempt to identify with a single guy but this was insufficient to shield themselves from systematic and pervasive abuse. The height of cruelty and inhumanity was experienced in the description of the way radical Muslims inflicted atrocities against Hindu women during the parade at the Narowal bazaar. The refugee camp at Narowal Bazar was attacked by Muslims at night. Captain Rahmat- Ullah Khan raped Sunanda and her husband, Suraj, was stabbed to death. Chandni was kidnapped, raped and was never seen again. Lala Kanshiram and the group left the Narowal camp for survival but Padmini stayed back to wait for Chandni. In anger, Arun also killed Captain Rahamat-Ullah Khan. The deadly and nasty communal animosity was experienced when the women marched through the Narowal bazaar, the river of profanity flowed with including offensive remarks, abusive gestures, sputum spurts, strange objects like small pennies, faded flowers, cigarette butts and bidis were hurled at the women. As the women's march got close the crowd went hysterical.



Chaman Nahal has also reflected on the other side of the Hindu-Muslim relationship through the friendship of Barkat Ali and Lala Kanshiram and their sons- Munir and Arun, respectively. Partition was a difficult moment for them to face and as a token of love for Lala and Arun Barkat and Munir accompanied them for a long distance to bid goodbye, when Lala's family was leaving for India. The separation of lifelong friends was very painful. The word would fall short of picturing the terror that Hindus experienced in Pakistan. At the end of the first section, Lala decides to leave for India along with his family.

The second section 'The Storm' opens in a refugee camp where Lala is seen with almost twenty thousand other people. Lala was completely broken to hear about his daughter, Madhu, and her husband's death. He sent Arun to bring their bodies but when Arun went there, he found that Abdul Ghani, Lala's once friend who had become an enemy now, had already burned them. 15 August is being celebrated in India but people in camps had no chance or means to celebrate the independence. They were still striving for survival. They were completely demoralized and felt insecure. The horror they experienced due to kidnappings, women marching in their undies, rapes and murders were so terrifying that they had become numb to give any reaction in the hopeless and helpless conditions. Even children had shocking looks but they did not cry. Lala feels that General Rees would look after their safety but the things happening in the camps forced them to take a 44-mile journey on 24 September from Sialkot towards Dera Baba Naka, India. Lala exclaimed 'Vande Mataram' when they reached their destination. Arun is demoralized as he loses his love twice in this huddle for survival. Among the dead bodies of the people around, a woman, Usher Kaur gives birth to a baby girl during this horrifying situation. This event symbolizes the birth and death prevailing at the same moment. Lala Kanshi Ram hated Muslims for the atrocious and inhuman treatment of Hindu women in Pakistan but when he experienced the same happenings to Muslim women in India, he stopped hating Muslims. He saw his daughter-Madhu, who was lost during riots in Pakistan, in each helpless Muslim woman in India. He says, "We have sinned as much, we need their forgiveness" (Nahal __).

When Lala and other people reached Amritsar they had to live there for almost two months where they experienced the same that they had seen in Pakistan. And they are shifted to Delhi by train. Here also the torturous experiences are not yet over. The officers were corrupt and local people did not accept the refugees with open hearts and felt that the refugees could not be trusted. Lala and his family settled on the outskirts of the City and started a grocery shop for survival.

In the last section of the novel- 'The Aftermath', everyone is busy with their work. All the news of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi was spread like a fire. Different people have differences of opinion on Mahatma Gandhi's death. Migrated people are so burdened by the question of survival after migration that they are not in the mental condition to express any opinion on this event.



CONCLUSION:

The novel *Azadi* portrays how the politics of separatist ideology based on religious identity divided the people of a nation into Hindus and Muslims and further into Indians and Pakistanis. The novel depicts the holocaust erupted after the partition and it had a deep impact on the psyche of the people from both countries. In this regard MK Naik's comment is worth mentioning: "In the political sphere, the traumatic experience at the birth of the new nation was that of Partition. The lack of adequate preparation and safeguards, when the country was hastily Partitioned into India and Pakistan, led to a communal carnage of unprecedented proportions resulting in 6000,000 deaths and 8.5 million refugees" (Naik 187).

Thus, Chaman Nahal in his novel, *Azadi*, presents his views about the political ideology behind the partition and how this political move threw two communities into the fire of hatred and enmity forever to a great extent, where the socio-political and religious differences between the Hindu and the Muslim communities are not yet resolved.

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