

# POLITICS OF DISPERSION : A CRITIQUE OF CHAMAN NAHAL'S AZADI

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Chaman Nahal is a well known Indian novelist and short story writer. He began his literary career as a short story writer by contributing stories to the **Illustrated Weekly of India** in 1957. His collection, **The Weird Dance and Other Stories** was published in 1981. He wrote eight novels namely **My True Faces** (1973), **Azadi** (1975), **Into Another Dawn** (1977), **The English Queens** (1979), **The Crown and the Loincloth** (1981), **Sun Rise in Fiji** (1988), **The Salt of Life** (1990), and **Triumph of the Tricolour** (1993). In his novels, Chamal Nahal delineates the culture and social problems of India. **Azadi** (one of the novels of **Gandhi Quartet**) holds an important place and it deals with the history of partition. In 1977, Sahitya Academy Award was given to him for **Azadi**, and it established him as a major writer of Indian-English fiction. In **Azadi**, Chaman Nahal delineates the dawn of freedom, the partition and its aftermath. While reading about the brutal murders, merciless massacres, cruel rapes, burning and looting of properties, one could feel horrified. It depicts the unprecedented and ugly event which has caused havoc in the lives of people and their suffering. After the partition, there is a large scale migration of people from both the sides of the border between India and Pakistan. The novel is divided into three parts such as "Lull," "Storm" and "Aftermath." In "Lull," the author portrays the silent atmosphere before the announcement of the partition. In the second part "Storm," he presents the horrifying story of the merciless killing of the Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs after the partition. The third part "Aftermath," he portrays the assassination of Gandhi and how people have suffered due to it. This study aims at an analysis of Chaman Nahal's **Azadi** so as to bring out his treatment of the partition of the country, the divisive politics practiced by the politicians and the indescribable suffering of people.

The novel begins with the Viceroy's announcement of the partition of Indian subcontinent into two nations: India and Pakistan. Before the announcement of partition the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs have lived amicably but after the announcement, Muslims celebrate the news. They think that the creation of Pakistan will bring them a new life and they hope for great change in their life. The communal violence breaks out both the sides of the border. Hindus and Sikhs are targeted in the Muslim dominated Pakistan and in the same way Muslims are attacked in India. There is mass exodus of people and they seek safe shelter to save their lives. The protagonist, Lala Kanshi Ram is a wholesale grain merchant and lives in Sialkot, a Muslim dominated city. He is an ardent follower of Arya Samaj and he lives with his wife, Prabha Rani, their son, Arun and their daughter Madhu along with other families in a rent apartment, which belongs to Bibi Amarvati.

Chaman Nahal adeptly brings out the nationalistic spirit of the character Lala Kanshi Ram. Gandhi, Nehru and Bhagat Singh are the national heroes who have spent their time in prison for the freedom of the country. They never like the division of the country on the basis of religion. Kanshi Ram is frightened a lot by the announcement of partition because he

knows very well about the consequence of it. He loves unity among people. He wants to emulate the great leaders of the nation and takes part in the freedom struggle. The author presents his desire:

He too wanted to claim for himself the role of a revolutionary. I've even been to prison,' he would boast before his listeners, real ones or imaginary. It mattered little if the only night he had spent in prison was in connection with a Sales Tax strike, where along with the merchants of his trade he had taken part in a hartal. (9)

It clearly presents his quest for the freedom of the country and his desire to take part in the revolutionary activities. The passage expresses his nationalistic spirit and even he is ready to spend his time in prison for the liberation of the country.

Sialkot is a Muslim dominated city and some Hindus have made gates to defend themselves from the Muslims. They request police protection when they heard the announcement of partition. Hindu youngsters are trained by some Hindu organizations about the usage of stick and they ask everyone to carry acid-filled bottles to defend their houses. After the announcement of partition, Muslims are celebrating the new nation, Pakistan. They organize a procession which arrives the Trunk Bazaar and they shout the slogans, "Pakistan zindabad!" and "Long live Pakistan." The entrance gates of Trunk Bazaar are locked by the Hindus who feared for the Muslim procession and get together for self-defence. In this commotion, experienced person Lala Kanshi Ram advises the youngsters and brings down the anger of them in stating that they should trust the police: "Patience, boys. We don't want to lose our heads. We'll let the police handle it for us" (61). He has faith in police and law enforcing authorities.

Inayat-Ullah Khan, the Muslim city-inspector is posted in Trunk Bazaar gates for protecting the Hindus. When the procession arrives, Bazaar gates are locked and the Muslims shout to open the gates. City-inspector is flattered and garlanded by a Muslim leader headed the procession. Since, he is a Muslim, he supports the procession and orders Lala Kanshi Ram to open the gates but Hindus refuse to do it. Therefore he commands his constables to break the gates. The Hindu Deputy Commissioner Pran Nath has come there for vigil and he stops it. Pran Nath allows the procession to cross the Bazaar after ensuring the protection of Hindus. Lala prays to God that the processionists should not destroy the lives of Hindus. Chaman Nahal effectively shows the communal frenzy of Ullah Khan:

Inspector Inayat-Ullah Khan had no response to his order and the gate remained shut. That incensed him immensely.

'Listen, ohai, Kanshi Ram. If the gate is not opened in five minutes, I'll order my men to force it open.'

'How can he do that?' Arun whispered to his father.

Lala Kanshi Ram craned his neck to see if the Deputy Commissioner was coming.

Not that he put much faith in him. In the last few years. (64)

Though Inayat-Ullah Khan is a police officer, he takes side and supports the Muslims. He endangers the lives of Hindus. It shows that how people are affected by the communal hatred. The disciplined police officer is influenced by the communal forces to act against humanity. Such is the impact of communal frenzy. Chaman Nahal portrays adeptly the harmful effects of divisive politics played by the politicians and the religious leaders.

Chaman Nahal portrays the love affair between Arun, a member of Hindu family and Nurul Nissar, the daughter of Barkat Ali, a Muslim girl, who are studying in the same college. The crisis of partition affects the love of Arun and Nurul. Nurul is asked to convert Hinduism by Arun but she refuses to do so. Nurul wants him to change his religion but she does not say it to him. Both Arun and Nurul are not ready to abandon their respective religions but they want each other to convert. When she asks him openly to convert to Islam, he becomes anxious. Chaman Nahal adeptly brings out their state of mind:

He heard himself say:

‘Why should I become a Muslim?’

He was harsh in his voice, as if it was Nur who had created the new states.

‘Why shouldn’t you? That is, if you love me.’

It sounded like anger, but she was only pleading.

Arun was cruel to her:

‘Why shouldn’t you become a Hindu?’

For a while Nur was stunned. She looked at him in anger, her passive, pleading eyes lit up with fire. (78)

Their conversation obviously presents their reluctance to convert the religion and they are not ready to do so. They expect each other to change the religion. Chaman Nahal has portrayed skilfully their dilemma in their conversation.

The religious frenzy reaches its zenith when riots take place at large scale. Hundreds of men die daily. Hindus and Sikhs are targeted by the Muslims. Kanshi Ram’s shop is burnt and he and his wife Praba Rani are frightened very much. They reach the refugee camp according to the advice of Barkat Ali, who is a Muslim friend of Lala. He comes to know about the death of his daughter Madhu and her husband Rajiv. Lala sends Arun along with Suraj Prakash to find the body of Madhu at the spot of violence. While Arun searching the body, Abdul Ghani, friend of Lala declares that Madhu and her husband are burnt alive by him.

Abdul Ghani is the manufacturer of hookah, a long-time friend of Lala Kanshi Ram and other Hindu businessmen in the area. Without having any religious bias, he leads life amicably in the Bazaar. The divisive politics played by Jinnah and other politicians make the people feel hatred and enmity between them. Abdul Ghani is the good example for how the religious fanaticism corrupting the mind of a good person. He goes to the extent of killing his friend’s daughter and son-in-law. It is due to the vested interest of the politicians and they fan the religious fanaticism among the people. Abdul Ghani becomes selfish and has an eye on Kanshi Ram’s shop. He becomes a puppet in the hands of Muslim leaders who have influenced him greatly to go against the Hindus.

Chaman Nahal blames the politicians who are responsible for the division of the country. Initially Gandhi and Rajaji have sown the seeds of separate country for Muslims in the name of Pakistan. Later they do not opt for the division of the country. Jinnah insists the Congress to create Pakistan exclusively for Muslims. K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri in their work, “The Epic and Psychological Delineation at the Theme: Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi*” observe Jinnah’s role in the partition: “Jinnah had become the ideal of the Muslims: they followed him blindly. Nahal finds that the political leaders guilty of the horrid consequences of the partition” (93). Barkat Ali is always a good friend of Lala and he is very much interested in Gandhi’s principles. He is the true follower of Gandhi. When Gandhi has visited Sialkot, he insists the importance of non violence and “Purna Swaraj.” “Purna Swaraj” is nothing but complete freedom for the people. Chaman Nahal describes it “Azadi.” Barkat

Ali who has travelled along with Lala to the meeting of Gandhi is highly impressed by Gandhi's insistence on Hindu-Muslim unity and non-violence. From this meeting onwards, he has become a member of congress party and starts to wear khadi. He turns to be a true follower of Gandhi. He is a Muslim and always he stands for the Hindu-Muslim unity. He proves it practically by his friendship with Lala Kanshi Ram:

And he talked of peace in place of war and he talked of non-violence in place of violence, and yet he also talked of fights with the British on his own special terms. Chaudhri was at heart a rebel; in his family they believed one of his forefathers had taken an active part in the Delhi uprising of 1857 for which he was later executed by the British. So Barkat Ali waited eagerly for this man who said he knew of a new way to Azadi. (84)

The observation clearly shows Barkat Ali's love for Gandhian principles. He loves non-violence and the unity among the Indians.

In the refugee camp, Rahmat Ullah Khan is appointed as the captain of Pakistan Army to take care of the Hindus and send them safely to India. Rahmat-Ullah Khan is the classmate of Arun. Arun has informed Rahmat about his sister Madhu and her husband's death due to the communal violence. Even though Rahmat-Ullah Khan is the classmate of Arun, he does not have interest to listen to him. He wants to seduce Sunanda, the wife of Suraj Prakash. After becoming an army officer of Pakistan, his attitude is drastically changed and he has become a lascivious man. Ullah Khan asks Arun that if he brings Sunanda to him, he and his family will be sent to India safely. Ullah Khan has tried to exploit Arun but he does not yield to it. Later Sunanda is abducted and raped by him at Narowal. Arun becomes furious as the result of this event and he kills Ullah Khan as revenge. It displays the intensity of hatred among the Hindus and Muslims. The politicians are responsible for creating enmity between these two communities. Friends turn themselves as foes and destroy each other and it is due to their religious fanaticism. Chaman Nahal brings out the conversation between Arun and Rahmat Ullah Khan in which the latter's treachery is revealed:

‘If you promise to bring that woman here—’

He stopped and stopped and steadied himself.

‘By the way, what's her name?’

‘I don't know.’

‘You expect me to believe that?’

‘No.’

‘All right, we'll let that pass. But as I was saying, if you promise to bring her here of an evening, I'll personally take you and your parents to the Jammu border in my jeep. You people will reach safety in less than half an hour.’(198)

This conversation obviously presents the bitter truth that communal hatred makes people worst and even they will go to the level of stooping themselves as animals. Though Arun and Rahmat Ullah Khan are friends, Rahmat dictates him to leave the woman to him to escape from the riots. He is not ready to help his friend rather he wants to exploit the situation. The communal fanaticism which is fanned by the political leaders is responsible for such cruelties.

After the announcement of partition, Gangu Mull, the husband of the landlady Bibi Amarvati plans to stay in Sialkot itself to own his property. After coming to the refugee camp, Gangu Mull disappeared for a few days and later Lala has found him among the Muslim spectators. Chaman Nahal depicts the selfishness of some people through the

character of Gangu Mull. He has converted to Islam and changes his name as Gulam Muhammad for possessing his property. He stays in Pakistan and leaves his family marooned. It tells the message to the Hindus who want to live in Pakistan. They have to convert themselves to Islam to remain there and own their properties. The wife of Gangu Mull does not accept it and she expresses her contempt for the action of her husband. Chaman Nahal brings out Gangu's greediness:

'Now I own out two buildings in Fort Street.'

'You don't say.'

'Well, they were my property, and I have decided to stay on here as a Muslim. They will continue to remain my property.' (236)

This conversation clearly reveals the opportunism of Gangu and there are people like him who can change their colour often for their survival. Lala and other family members are forced to leave from their properties and they start to move towards the border of India to save their life. They reach Dera Baba Nanak. Lala sees every day hundreds of men are killed. There are so many disappearances and large scale rapes. His neighbour Chandini disappears and Suraj Prakash is murdered. He watches the Hindu women who are paraded nakedly on the streets. These horrible incidents are the result of the partition of the country on the religious basis. Chaman Nahal has blamed that the politicians and their divisive politics are responsible for the indescribable sufferings of people belong to Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. At the end, Lala and his family members reach India. Lala stays in the Kingsway camp on Alipur Road and starts a small business. He hears the news about the assassination of Gandhi. Mahatma is killed due to the communal hatred and Nehru has announced his dead as the country is pushed into darkness. Chaman Nahal skilfully portrays that the politicians are responsible for the division of the country and their divisive politics is the reason for the suffering of the people.

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