

Mysterious Silence, Brutality and Sense of Irreparable Loss: Dominant forces in Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*

- Saikat Banerjee

Abstract: The term *Partition* is normally used in the sense of division or separation. But historically it refers to a dark and ugly event of the Indian history, which took place in the wake of India's freedom. This paper focuses on mysterious silence, brutality and sense of irreparable loss, the three parts – *The Lull*, *The Storm* and the *The Aftermath* as depicted by Chaman Nahal in his novel *Azadi*.

Keywords: Partition, Indian history, Human Values, Brutality, Loss.

Partition was the defining event of modern, independent India and Pakistan, and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that partition continues to be the defining event of modern India and Pakistan. The partition was traumatic to those people who, having faced physical violence, humiliation and sexual assault, were compelled to leave their homeland. The story of the making of nations and their histories can be told in many ways; for there are obviously differing, and changing, points of view both within and outside the nation, and differing degrees of access to the rights of citizenship (and of history). It is one way of telling this story of Partition which Chaman Nahal another Post-Partition novelist has beautifully recreated the theme of the partition in his most celebrated novel *Azadi* (1975). This novel presents a lively and detailed account of the happenings which took place about mid 1947. *Azadi* is divided into three parts – *The Lull*, *The Storm* and the *The Aftermath*. Keeping this in mind, the present article would intend to capture the tone and nature of reminiscences of a few uprooted people in the novel *Azadi*. For the sake of our analysis of the nostalgic analysis of these uprooted people the present article would be divided into three parts – mysterious silence, brutality and sense of irreparable loss. The first part of the novel, *The Lull* mentions the mysterious silence gripping the minds of Hindus and Muslims living in the city of Sialkot, just before the announcement of the partition i.e. on June 3, 1947. Lala Kanshi Ram an affluent businessman is the central figure of the novel. He is a man of modest education, but experiences of life have made him much wiser. Prabha Rani is his wife. His conjugal life is quite but happy. He has a son Arun. His daughter Madhu is married to Rajiv. Like other freedom fighters and nationalists, Lala Kandhi Ram too earnestly craves for India's freedom. In the heart of his heart he hates the British and wishes that they should leave India as early as possible. To him, the usurpers of Indian freedom were the British. So when they are defeated at the hands of Germans, he feels elated. He is an ardent supporter of freedom fighters like Gandhiji,

Nehru and Bhagat Singh. He also wishes to join in the band of India's great revolutionaries. Once he had been to jail in a different case. However, he feels proud for the period spent in the jail. However, the thought of the partition always unsettles his mind. He sees an insidious design behind it. He thinks that the British are interested in the partition. His faith in Gandhiji's oath against partition becomes slack. On being reminded about Gandhiji's oath he tells his wife. "That's true. But what if there is no other way out? And you know these English, they would rather divide than behind a united India"¹⁴. He is sad to think that his efforts of making a comfortable home steadily during a period of last twenty five years would be undone at the creation of Pakistan. He knows that terror, tempest and tumult would follow in the wake of the Partition. Pointing to the rooms of his house he exclaims: " Everything will be ruined if Pakistan is created." (Azadi, 39)

Lala Kanshi Ram refers to the promises made by Gandhi and other Congressmen in the past. He recalls Gandhiji's vow of non-acceptance of the Partition at any cost. Other Congress leaders also had similar views: "We should shed the last drop of our blood, but we would not allow India to be partitioned." (40) The thought of the partition unhinges him because there would be much killing. In the playground Arun is stunned to hear his friends talking about the creation of Pakistan. On returning home, he conveys the feelings of his friends to his mother who hardly believes it. To Arun, the Partition would be a kind of betrayal. He tells: "It is a betrayal, Ma ! It is a betrayal!" (48) Finally the news of the partition is broadcast at 7 p.m. on the All India Radio. Subsequently Nehru confirms the news of Partition and the creation of an independent Pakistan. This appears as a thunder bolt to Hindus and Sikhs. They become anxious and start discussing about their fate in independent Pakistan. Mukunda's old mother asks them about their fate in independent Pakistan. Mukunda's old mother asks them the fate of her son, locked in the jail of Sialkot. On the other hand,

Muslims in the city were celebrating from all over the city huge fire crackers shot up into the sky and exploded into billions and trillions of the little lights of red and green. The Muslim mohallas, the neighbourhoods where the Muslims lived in strength, were far off, but they could hear the noise right here and they could see the lights. Food remained unswallowed in the mouth of Prabha Rani when the first cracker exploded. And they all looked upwards as light after light blazed into the dark sky." (69)

In the changed scenario Hindus and Sikhs are in panics. They pull down their shutters and return home much early. They also discuss among themselves about their safety, in the event of probable attack of Muslim miscreants. Sialkot is a Muslim majority city. In many Hindu Mohallahs gates are installed for their protection. Some Hindu organizations are also formed to give necessary training to Hindu youths in respect of personal protection and safety. The youngsters are trained in respect of guerrilla activities and the use of acid – filled bottles, bricks and heavy sticks. The supported of Jinnah are given to unprecedented rejoicing. They express their joy by beating drums and bursting crackers. They also

wave flags of Pakistan and shout slogan, "Pakistan Zindabad". They are not in mind to harm the Hindus and the Sikhs. However, precautionary measures taken up by the Hindus aggravate the situation. Many policemen march along the procession. Some processionists insist on getting opened the gate of the Trunk Bazaar area. They try to allay the suspicion raging in the minds of the Hindus:

Listen, ohai, Lalas! We don't wish to harm you. We only want to take the procession through this street. So come down and open the gate!" (73-74) Their request falls flat on the apprehensive Hindus and Sikhs who remain irresponsible at all. The Hindus and Sikhs look to the policemen for preventing rowdies. Niranjana Singh and some other youths are in favour of direct action against miscreants and processionists. Niranjana Singh wishes to "throw an acid bottle on them." (75)

The mob goes on swelling in number. The processionists become more vocal and their shouts and slogans become shriller. In the meantime a large posse of policemen headed by Inayat Ullah Khan, the city Inspector appears there. He is notorious for his underhand dealings due to which "he had been in Sialkot all his life", had grown rich on the crime in the city, and was feared in the city as no criminal was." (78) Prior to this he had been harsh with the Muslim processionists on a number of occasions. At present he is a changed man. He has eye on the Hindu's property. Somehow he wants to be benefitted. So he is rather soft with the miscreants. In the meantime the Deputy Commissioner Pran Nath Chaddha and Ashghar Ali Siddique, the Superintendent of Police arrives there on receiving telephonic complaint about disturbance in the city. Their presence makes a difference. Soon the yelling mob falls back into silence on the realization that the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police intelligently tackle the mob in the changed situation. They politely ask the Hindus, specially Lala Kanshi Ram to open the gate to let the procession pass. These officials are upset at the division of the country. They are vexed to think how the partition would be executed when Hindus and Muslims live in every corner of India and Pakistan. That night the procession passes off peacefully without causing any death and destruction. However, the atmosphere is surcharged with horror, tension, hatred and happiness. The Hindus in Sialkot fear doom after the creation of Pakistan. But the Muslims are cheerful and impatient to fall on the Hindus. Their hatred against Hindus becomes conspicuous when Abdul Ghani spits on the ground and abuses the Hindus loudly. Communal harmony become a matter of past. Hatred and fanaticism are roused by cunning politicians. Chaman Nahal probes deep into the inner recesses of Niranjana Singh. He makes an interesting psychological study of this young Sikh, burning with a strong passion to retaliate. Fears in the Hindus minds are excellently highlighted through Isher Kaur, the young pregnant wife of Niranjana Singh, Padmini, a destitute woman, and others. The communal frenzy, fired by the partition, has been depicted effectively. Through the two government officers- the Deputy Commissioner, Pran Nath Chaddha and the Superintendent of Police, Asghar Ali Siddique – the anomaly of the

partition has been brilliantly portrayed. Violence is writ large on the faces of the people, and the whole situation looks grim and awful. The dirty and selfish game of the politicians and its impact on the people at large is beautifully delineated in *Azadi*. In the wake of such ugly developments Lala Kanshi Ram behaves like a tortured soul. He is extremely worried to read the sign of coming dangers. He is not at all surprised when there is massive violence in Sialkot after the Partition. Nahal's *Azadi* successfully presents the inner pain and charging of the partition victims uprooted from the soil in which they were born and brought up. Lala Kanshi Ram is the representative of such victims.

The second part of *Azadi* is entitled as the *The Storm*. Nahal presents a horrifying account of the brutality and butchery that followed the Partition. The refugees living in tents and camps are exposed not only to dangers but also to the vagaries of nature. In the Rainy season they often buffeted with torrential rains which make their lives all the more miserable. Their suffering often causes retrospection in them. But when they are free from these problems, they feel proud and elated to be the citizens of free India. Intermittent pouring of sad news pain them frequently. The news of Hindus and Sikhs being singled, out from passengers and butchered mercilessly has a sagging effect on their souls. This leads to great mourning. The refugees don't have anything of the kind of personal joy or sorrow. Anyone's joy or sorrow is everyone's joy or sorrow. They have developed a broad outlook towards life while living in the refugee camps. Community's interest and welfare are supreme to everyone. Almost similar kind of treatment is accorded to Muslims in some parts of India. The Muslims who have fled to Pakistan do not look so cheerful. This becomes conspicuous when Arun and Suraj Prakash visit Sialkot from the refugee camp. They fail to understand why the Muslim victims are not happy in the land of Allah. Searching the dead body of Madhu Bala when Arun visits the railway station, he is disgusted to notice the pathetic sight of the burning corpses. The dead lay together, the way cling one another when death overpowered them is very touching. When Chaudhuri Barkat Ali accompanied by Arun reaches the station where the massacre of Hindus and Sikhs passengers had taken place, he finds Abdul Ghani busy in burning the corpses. On Chaudhuri's enquiry about the corpse of Arun's sister, he gives a provocative reply: "I put her and her husband into the fire with my own hands, and they're now on their way to dozakh, to hell- where I hope they rot forever!" (185) Arun's confirmation of the news of Madhu's death, crushes Lala Kanshi Ram and his wife greatly. There is no end to their sorrow. The dubious role of the British becomes conspicuous when the British Chairman of the Boundary Commission goes out of India two days before the announcement of the award. The announcement of the award gives birth to unprecedented violence. The work of partition and the creation of boundary seem humanly impossible. It is not possible for anyone to satisfy the demands of both the communities for a particular city or area. Realising this the Chairman of the Boundary Commission leaves the country to let the two communities fight with each other and settle their claims:

It was an impossible assignment; to cut a country in two in five week's time, especially when your fellow Indian judges on the commission were warring with each other on communal grounds. He had ignored their claims, and as impartially as he could, divided the country – and then left leaving it to the communal parties to fight it out among themselves. (214)

This creates confusing situation for the governments of the countries as to their rights and privileges. The migration of the refugees and their rehabilitation also suffer a setback. Local authorities of either country start creating deliberate hurdles and problems. Lechery and indifference of some army officials also come to light during the partition time Rahman-tullah, the Camp Commander of the refugee camp is Arun's classmate. He recognises Arun and exchanges formal greetings with him in the camp. However, he does not condemn the killing of Madhu Bala. On the contrary he wants that Arun should procure Sunanda as his mistress. In course of time Chaman Nahal also presents an episode of unique martyrdom in his *Azadi*. During the hard days of the Partition majority of the people are seen busy in devising different ways and means for their safety. Some prefer conversion to death. However, there are a few people like Sardar Niranjan Singh, who are true to their faiths regardless of the risks to their lives. Niranjan Singh rejects the suggestion to part with his hair and beard for the sake of his personal safety as well as that of family. Instead of leading a life of agony and humiliation he decides to die like a Sikhs martyr. One day he sets himself on fire and crying: "I belong to wahe guru, wahe guru is great." (262) His views concerning his hair were quite clear. This martyrdom "was something they had heard of but not seen it happen" (262). His cry of pain while in flames reveals his attitude to religion clearly: "Life I'll gladly lose, my Sikh dharma I won't." (262) Opposite to Niranjan Singh, are persons like Gangumal who accepts conversion for the sake of retaining his property in the city of Sialkot. He also agrees to have a Muslim wife.

In the third part of the novel Nahal presents an account of the difficulties faced by Lala Kanshi Ram in making a claim for the compensation of his lost wealth. There is a broadcast about Gandhi's assassination. Bibi Amarwati gloats over the news because she holds Gandhi's responsible for their suffering and misery. But Lala Kanshi Ram and his family members are sad at Gandhi's death. They mourn his death by observing fast. Lala Kanshi Ram appreciates for the first time the blessing *Azadi* had brought to the Indians. He recalls that people could not feel publicly for the death of an Indian leader during the Pre-Independence days because there was an apprehension of betrayal, violence and persecution. But today "the men stood in pride – evenly balanced, firm, sure of themselves 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." (369) However, their moments of elation are rather short. When exposed to the vast and hostile condition world the partition victims begin to suffer from distressing and depressing effect of life. They are not able to overcome irreparable sense of loss. The shadow of disappointment

begins to grow denser. There seem to no end to their sorrow and sadness. In such states of mind Lala Kanshi Ram, Prabha Rani and Arun are placed in. There is rare communication between them. More or less the same kind of thought occupies the minds of Prabha Rani and Arun. Despite their great inclination to communicate with Lala Kanshi Ram, they are not able to do it. It seems there stands an invisible wall which has partitioned the husband from the wife, son from father and mother. Thus freedom for which Indians fought and struggled for so many years bring untold misery and suffering to Lala Kanshi Ram and his dependents. It, causes not only irreparable loss of fortune but also creates a partition wall between their communicating selves. During the independence struggle they thought that in free India they would be able to live a life of dignity, respect and love. But independence brought Partition in its company which resulted in loss of Lala Kanshi Ram's turban, symbol of his respect and dignity. Tender feeling and originality almost disappeared from the lives of the partition victims. Now they find themselves placed in a mechanical world devoid of genuine feelings and emotions.

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Un(met) Twains

- Jasmine Anand

The twain shall never meet!
 Why the twain shall never meet?
 Is meeting innocently incidental or artfully political?
 Playing the jigsaw of bonding, pastiching the various nuances of relation..
 Certainly the twain shall never meet.

Dueling between the dichotomy
 Forgetting, the duality came from the single origin
 Where the opposite shreds were actually conjugated.
 Now origin would be questioned again with suspicious intellectualism!
 Which origin? Whose origin? The voice says:
 No origin just shreds in abyss
 A labyrinth.

But the impossible possibility is, the origin is there, even vast than the fancy!
 The origin would be cranky without the creative chaos
 And one day the twains shall meet
 As the impossible possibility.

