



CHAMAN NAHAL'S AZADI: UNFOLDING OF AN ENIGMA

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ABSTRACT

Chaman Nahal's magnum opus Azadi is a saga of partition blues of India and Pakistan. Though the novel is a record of inexplicable pains, pangs and travails that the people of both the sides experienced, yet the writer has tried to discern out romance even in the crisis of the situation. The present paper explores this very element in the story of Azadi.

Keywords - 1. Magnum Opus, 2. Pangs, 3. Travails, 4. Romance.

INTRODUCTION:

Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 is one of the greatest but saddest event of South East Asia. Greatest because it divided a Sub-Continent into two parts and saddest because a large number of human massacre took place on both sides of the two ill-fated Countries. And, at the root of all the British rule was extremely instrumental. Their basic policy was 'divide and rule' and when a time came that they cannot rule anymore, they divided India into two countries and departed. But, the pang of separation still haunts the dwellers on both the sides.

It is this very pang that we can come across in the highly popular fictional work of art AZADI written by Chaman Nahal, who was born in Sialkot (now in Pakistan) and settled in Delhi (now in India) after partition. Since he had witnessed the events of separation from the close range in his youthfulness, his work is really close to the facts of history. Although, it's a fictional composition, yet many portrayals take us to true blues of the coast while time. Azadi is perhaps, an extremely thought provoking novel after Khushwant Singh *Train to Pakistan*

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so far as Indian English Fiction is concerned. Romantic inputs are part and parcel of human life and, therefore, they too have got suitable spaces in Azadi.

Chaman Nahal is one such novelist who made the history of Indian Freedom Movement a delectable story by incorporating the eye-witness accounts of that time in his series of “The Gandhian Quartet”. The Quartet’ consists of three novels respectively entitled *AZADI* (1979), *The Crown and the Loincloth* and *The Salt of Life*, but *AZADI* earned wider popularity than the rest two as this novel brings out the crude realities of the erst-while society of the fore.

The present paper intends to study a queer aspect that is quite in contrast to the original theme of the novel *AZADI*. The novel has three parts: *The Lull*, *The Storm* and *The Aftermath* and it chiefly records the psyche of the people who yearned for freedom of India and Pakistan. Thematically, longing for freedom is the main motto of *AZADI*, yet the novelist has also depicted sensual moments of the individual characters to give variety to the theme. Fortunately, the moments painted by the novelist sounds compatible so far as individual dispositions are concerned.

Sexuality is something that doesn't fit well in the context of Independence. But, then, it is an element that has got to do with individual temperament - be that person an octagenarian grain - merchant of Sialkot Lala Kanshi Ram or Captain Rahmat - Ullah Khan - a Pakistani Army Officer. Sensuality is always present in human nature and it expresses itself both positively and negatively. This is what we find very often in *AZADI*. Lala Kanshi Ram, an aged person, loves his wife Prabha Rani a great deal. Even at this age Lala Kanshi Ram get filled with his old longing for her. In flashback he recalls:

“They had not known each other as man and wife years. Lala Kanshi Ram wondered if she still removed the hair from her vulva. There was a time when she kept its surface smoother than his chain. Every other week she went down to the bazaar, and come back with a new cake of hair removing soap. And when she came to him in the night and he mounted her, it was like riding on vulvet.” (Azadi 36).

Lala Kanshi Ram and Prabha Devi live as a tenant in the house of Bibi Amar Vati. A dry fruit merchant of Sialkot also lives in her house as tenant along with his son Sardar Teja Singh, daughter Isher Kaur and her husband Niranjan Singh. Isher Kaur is a beautiful lady; her skin is white and crimson. While delineating her physical beauty in contrast to Prabha Rani the novelist gives a new height to the flight of sensuality:

“Prabha Rani was nearing fifty, but her breasts stood out almost as magnificently as those of Isher Kaur. There was a difference, there certainly was. Isher Kaur was soft and delicate and her eyes were what the Punjabis

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call salty, namkeen, which means they were more liquid and more devastating, for there was so much more sensuality in them.” (Azadi 46).

Meanwhile, the tension for achieving freedom is brewing. People know that independence is not very far. They are awaiting the format announcement. Creating of Hindustan and Pakistan is in the offing. Lala Kanshi Ram, his wife and all the dwellers of Sialkot are listening to radios for the announcement. Finally, the Viceroy’s speech is aired. He declares the “partition” of India and everyone feels exhausted. Then follows the defeated voice of Nehru which tries to console the listeners that there is not way out. The radio has been switched off for sometime. But again Arun switches on the radio. At this moment they hear Jinnah’s crisp voice, “Pakistan, Jindabad”! Long Live Pakistan! (Azadi 66).

The echo of “partition” booms in Muslim-dominated Sialkot. The Muslims begin to celebrate their independence. The Hindus are spending their hours in tension. They are afraid of probable riot, that may ensue as an extension of Muslim’s joy. They prepare themselves to protect with whatever resource they have with them. The ‘street’ in which Lala Kanshi Ram lives is now facing danger of attack. Arun, Suraj Prakash, Niranjan and other tenants, families of Bibi Amar Vati etc. gear themselves up against any untoward incident. As per anticipation, the Muslims of Sialkot crowd together in various groups in different roads and streets and start shouting ‘Allah-O-Akbar’. They have spears and swords in their possession and their spirits are soaring high with joy. The drummers were playing ‘daga-dug-dum’ on their drums frantically. They are dancing like maniacs. All these abnormal gestures create a fear psychosis among the Hindus who are in minority. Lala Kanshi Ram and his men shut the gate of their street but the Muslims break open the gate at the behest of Inspector Inayat Ullah Khan who is a Muslim to the boot. The crowd shout “Ya Ali! Ya Haider!”. There exists a complete chaos.

The Sikh population of that street still try to check the Muslims by standing behind the beam of the gate. But inspector Khan orders his own Sikh constables and Sub-Inspector Hardit Singh to push those Sikhs behind. The situation turns unpredictable. Meanwhile, the Deputy Commissioner along with the Superintendent of Police comes there to control the situation. The procession passes through the same area but peacefully, barring some stone-throwing incidents.

The decision of partition kills a ‘love-story’ that is blooming between Kanshi Ram’s son Arun and Chaudhary Barkat Ali’s daughter Nurul Nisar. Arun loves to call her ‘Nur’. Both Lala Kanshi Ram and Chaudhary Barkat are bosom friends. Munir, Nur’s brother, has been a great friend of Arun too. It is but natural that the love between Nur and Arun multiplies in a friendly environment. Both love each other so intensely that they sometimes forget the world around them. Nur is exquisite – both in terms of physique and mien. She always possesses a

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soft and seductive smile on her lips. She is tall and there is a tempting resilience in her shoulders and her torso. She walks aristocratically and her feminine gait can make any-body mad. Arun is lucky that Nur is his lady-love.

Arun becomes worried about the inevitable division of his country into India and Pakistan. He once asks Nur, "How can Pakistan stand in our way". (Aazadi 95) To discuss the future plans he takes her to a cemetery. Loneliness ignites their intimacy:

"...he took her in his arms and was kissing her wildly. He held her mouth and almost bit her in his frenzy. And She returned the kiss without shame." (Azadi 94).

Unfortunately, their love story dies in the bustle of riot which occurs on 24th of June in Sialkot. Riot engulfs the entire city of Sialkot. The Muslims are on the rampage. The Hindus are being butchered like chicken here and there; Hindu girls are being raped every now and then; Hindu houses are being burnt. Trunk Bazaar, where Lala Kanshi Ram and other Hindus and Sikhs live, also becomes the target of riot. Hence, most of the inmates have been taken to a safe refugee camp by Bill Davidson – an English sergeant of the inmates of the family of Lala Kanshi Ram and that Bibi Amar Vati and tenants of Bibi Amar Vati reach the refugee camp safe. It is after this juncture in the novel that the real storm begins.

Though the storm refers to all round exploitation of the Hindus by the Muslims in Sialkot, yet, another connotation lies in too. The storm also hints at Arun's longings for flesh that is the dire demand of big youthfulness. Hunger for sex in man always persists - more so when he becomes adolescent and advances ahead. Arun's urge for opposite sex is quite natural:

"...He had just started growing his pubic hair and had only just discovered how to take pleasure of his own body..." (Azadi 152)

Now that he has already missed the bends of Nur, he becomes sexually explosive in his desire. And, to give meaning to his satyriasis he haunts for flesh of women in the camp itself. Even the killing of his sister Madhubala in the riot does not deter him from his mission. He exploits an opportunity by coming close to Chandni - the daughter of a Charwoman Padmini who has been the tenant of Bibi Amar Vati. Once when he is searching his shoes, he encounters Chandini's body :

"As he groped for them he saw the exposed bosom of Chandini. The girl was lying on her back, her mouth slightly open. Her being quivered ever so gently as the breasts heaved up and settled down, like waves ebbing and flowing against the shore. He forgot his shoes and stared at her for a long while, at her warmth and her tenderness. She was sleeping soundly and he could see the



outline of her legs beneath her sari. She was all limp and insouciant, and seemed so filled, so saturated with ripeness (Azadi 188).

Arun gets changed. He is suddenly reminded of his closeness with his sister Madhu who was now dead. It was Madhu who had told him how an adult girl is different from a boy, how does a woman menstruate once in a month and how does a wife and a husband behave in bed. He postpones the idea of going away from Chandini's vicinity. Suddenly,

"Raising himself on his elbows, he placed a hand firmly on one of Chandini's breast and planted a kiss on her open lips." (Azadi 208)

Chandani is caught unawares. She looks panicked. She wants to withdraw but Arun does not:

"Arun held tight to her. He found his heart welling up, his emotions totally engulfing him. Now was the moment and should he let it slip? For years he had tortured himself about it. Now, now he was close enough to unravelling the mystery. His eyes were fixed on her breasts, which were this minute heaving fast in frenzy. Yes, it was right there. Somewhere inside. The entry might be denied to him but should he not make himself clear? The time, the place and the loved one might not come together in a similar configuration again!

Trying not to alarm her, he looked into her eyes and said affably:

'I love you, Chandani'. (Azadi 57)

While delineating the Camp-life of the Hindus in Muslim ruled Sialkot, Nahal further records a chivalrous Captain of Pakistani Army Rahmat-Ullah. A friend of Arun during College days, he is now a staunch Pakistani. He is sensuous from tip-to-toe. He develops a crush for Sunanda, the daughter-in-law of Bibi Amar Vati. To have her glimpse and to speak to her he frequents to the camp everytime. He is even stirred to see the backward contour of Sunanda's body:

"He could only see Sunanda's back, she resolutely refused to turn when he stood there. But the back was more than enough for Rahamat-Ullah Khan, nay those ribs of that softy curved back he found an even finer cradle of sensuality than her front and he was just about ready to die." (Azadi 229).

Arun, who tells Rahmat-Ullah that Sunanda is like his sister, also tames sensuous feelings about her as she is an exquisite piece of God's creation. But as she is the wife of Suraj Prakash who is elder to Arun in age and relationship, Arun does not dare to advance. Hence,



Arun switches over to Chandani. On the pretext of searching his shoes, he still lies close to her. His orgasm makes him mad:

“Unfastening her blouse Arun put his hand inside and her nude breasts went hard under his touch, her nipples rising like tulip buds.

‘Please don’t’.

‘Not yet you mean?’

‘Yes’, Her head hung low and she was looking at the ground.

‘Oh, my beloved!’ He did not remove his hand. (Azadi 233-234).

Chandni's features make Arun rash. Though she bears dark complexion, she possesses a winsome appeal. After this maiden encounter they begin to meet each other stealthily in the afternoon at the fence near the watertaps. Even in the state of refugee Arun haunts for private moments when he can be close to her and satisfy his carnal urges. He is not even afraid of her mother Padmini who may make much ado about this thing. Another might he sneaks up to Chandni against her fears:

‘But the experience of holding Chandni as they lay with his naked feet touching hers in an embrace and the front of his legs touching her front, was so gratifying to him, so deeply gratifying, no risk for its sake was so great... He dug into her flesh all over, finding limitless delight in that voyage of discovery;’ (Azadi 235)

Arun, finally, gets the silent approval of his mother for marrying Chandni after reaching India from the Camp. But, unfortunately, while on way to India he loses Chandni for good at Narowal. At Narowal itself Arun kills Capt. Rahmat-Ullah as he had kidnapped Sunanda from camp to a remote area and raped her to satisfy his long-pending desire. The novel ends up after photographic description of ghastly episodes of the Hindu's exploitation, their killing and insult in the hands of the Muslims.

Thus Chaman Nahal's *AZADI* is a superb example not only of the politics of independence but also the politics of sex and sensuality. He has tried to advance the fictional theory of Lawrence, Freud and Jung by depicting sensual encounters in different circumstances. If the sexual moves of Arun towards Chandni is labelled natural and positive, that of Capt. Rahmat-Ullah towards Sunanda is outright negative. Lala Kanshi Ram's romantic images about the youthful days that he has spent with Prabha Rani is no less colourful. Nahal goes up to the extent of describing the contours of her pubic zone and breasts. Thus, sex in



man is a drive that always persists and haunts to express itself this way or that way. Kate Millet in the book *Sexual Politics* observes:

“Should one regard sex in human as a drive, it is still necessary to point out that the enormous area of our lives, both in early "socialization" and in adult experience, labelled” sexual behaviour, is almost entirely the product of learning. (Azadi 32).

The sexual peccadilloes of Nahal's characters in *AZADI* are not amateur. They are different kinds of Learning. Yet the sensuality that Nahal presents in this novel is not very free - rather it is choked. Arun's romantic encounters with Nur halts in the midway because one is Hindu and one is Muslim and because one now belongs to Hindustan and the other belongs to Pakistan. Partition of INDIA rips their Love apart. Capt. Rahmat-Ullah's undue encroachment into the privacy of Sunanda and his dare-devil successful ‘rape’ attempt speaks of how an individual turns sadist when his sexual urges remain unanswered. Moreover, when Madhu fails to find a suitable partner to pour out her desires, she asks his brother Arun to fondle her naked back and in excitement catches hold of him and squeezes his tongue into her mouth. She makes him impassionate, but before he could do something to her in fits of passion, she realised her limit and withdraws.

Thus, an incestuous attempt also remains incomplete in the novel. It can, therefore, be established that Nahal’s *AZADI* is a saga of choked sensuality.

Undoubtedly, Chaman Nahal’s *AZADI* is a classic novel of the fictional world of India and elements of joys and sorrow’s are befittingly interposed here.

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