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Autobiographical Elements in Chaman Nahal's Azadi

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Abstract

Chaman Nahal like Khushwant Singh and Salman Rushdie is a political novelist, was born in 1927 at Sialkot, now in Pakistan. *Azadi* (1975), the best known of his novels, received Sahitya Akademic Award in 1977. *Azadi* is one of the four novels which constitute the Gandhi Quartet. It is a modern classic which present havoc that partition created on lives of the people both at social and individual level. It turned the simple, hardworking, honest and upright people into unwilling beggars. While writing *Azadi*, Nahal strongly felt that the partition of India was unfortunate, and full of forced exile. So he carries all his personal opinions and presents them through the characters, whom he makes his mouthpieces. This paper investigates how the private experience of Nahal are elevated very skillfully to public consciousness.

Keywords: Partition, peace, communal frenzy, emotional damage, havoc.

Introduction

Nahal is one of the most significant writers in the field of contemporary Indian-English novel. He was born in United India in 1927 and migrated to India from Pakistan during the partition of India. He was, thereafter, brought up in an Indian environment and culture. He was educated at the Universities of Delhi and Nottingham. Both Indian and

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western traditions shaped his mind. Though he deeply rooted in his own soil and culture, he was molded by the western education that he receives in India and other countries. He is most revered for his monumental work *Azadi* (1975). It is one of the four novels which constitute *The Gandhi Quartet.* Nahal seems to have put his very soul into the writing of this book and it has received a wide acclaim and Sahitya Akademi award in 1977.

Chaman Nahal , like Kushwanth Singh and Salman Rushdie, is a political writer and also has made a specific use of history. He was a witness to the holocaust that followed in the wake of partition of the country. This was at the time of partition, he was greatly moved by the harrowing events. These experience of partition made Nahal restive and in order to give vent to his feelings he took to writing and hence *Azadi.*

Azadi is a modern classic which demonstrates the havoc that partition played in the lives of the people and the emergence of India and Pakistan as two independent states. The political theme of the novel is reinforced by the socio-economical consequences of the partition which was indeed one of the bloodiest upheavals of history. It uprooted the simple, hardworking, honest and upright people and turned them into unwilling beggars. Religion is an embodiment of human and spiritual values but it became an instrument of hatred, evil, exploitation, sadism and wholesale destruction. Psychologically, the partition upset the whole balance of human relationship. It snapped the ties of love and communication and made people strangers to their fellow companions as well as themselves. The aim of the paper is to bring out the autobiographical elements apparent in the novel *Azadi* and it also investigates how the private experiences of Nahal are elevated very skillfully to public consciousness.

Nahal seems to pen down this novel with his own blood and tears because he has firsthand knowledge of this sordid partition. The novel is so realistic in its description.

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Nahal's role in the novel is to carry his personal opinions and experiences of partition through the characters, whom he makes his mouthpieces. In an interview with B.S. Goyal, he states that: "I think that historically, politically, ethically and morally partition was wrong. I believed and still believe that we are one nation, one culture." [22] Almost these words have been reflected in *Azadi* through the character Arun:

> Jinnah and Liaqat Ali Khan were coming into an estate; as was Nehru. Why else would they rush into Azadi at this pace- an Azadi which would ruin the land and destroy its unity? For the creation of Pakistan solved nothing. (Azadi, 96)

Nahal was nineteen years old at the time of division like Arun in the novel Azadi. Nahal opted for English and Arun also studies English in Murray college, Sialkot. His love for the city of Sialkot is echoed through the character of Lala Kanshi Ram. This sentiment plays an important motive behind the creation of this novel. Nahal has mentioned this fact explicitly in his essay *Writing a Historical Novel:*

> One of the theme that I came to be occupied with after the Partition of India was that of forced exile. I was born in Sialkot and after 1947 we were driven away to India……. I have always rejected the two nation theory; the creation of Pakistan in no way solved the problem of minorities. And till this day, I pined for the city in which I was born and raised. I see this as a typical yearning of all in voluntary exiles. Hence I wrote *Azadi* as a hymn to one's land of birth, rather than a realistic novel of partition.

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Nahal makes Lala Kanshi Ram as his mouthpiece and expresses his resentment against the leaders who "had neither the power nor the intention of maintaining in their homes" and "should have devised means of mass migration to being with, before rushing to Partition" (Azadi, 211). The top leaders of the Indian National congress and the Muslim league acceded to the division of the nation without considering the pathetic situation of the minorities living in the both sides of the borders. He does not even spare the British government who had "the biggest hand in butchery" (Azadi, 148).

The division made myriads of children orphan and large number of women were abducted, converted, and killed. Hindus living in Pakistan were forced to exile and they were no longer deemed to dwell on their motherland. Because they were stigmatized as kafirs in west Punjab, the part owned by Punjab. The Muslim minority had to face the same tragic intensity in East Punjab, the part owned by India. Lala Kanshi who has seen the heinuous crimes committed by the Hindus and the Muslims in the name of religion says what could have been said by Nahal himself:

> I can't hate the Muslims any more… whatever the Muslim did to us in Pakistan, we're doing it to them here! We are all guilty…we have sinned as much. We need their forgiveness. (Azadi, 340)

The inner turmoil of Lala Kanshi Ram reflects the turmoil faced by Nahal himself. When Lala leaves his house, he shouts, "I was born around here, this is my home…"(Azadi, 130). When Prabha Rani and Arun pack the luggage and strip the walls bare as if they were "stripping the flesh from his body. The bone was showing whichever way he turned" (Azadi,

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144). Nahal has beautifully expressed his own homesickness through the character of Lala Kanshi Ram:

> The pinch was he should have to give up this land, this earth, this air. That's where the hurt lay!He breathed deep, filling his lungs with the air of the town to their utmost capacity, and tears welled up in his eyes. How could he give up this earth?- and again he ran his hand over the wall. Some of his earliest memories, the memories of his remote childhood, came back to him as he stood there. (Azadi, 111)

Nahal is concerned with the deep psychic disturbances and emotional transformation brought about by partition. Before leaving for the camp, Lala is brooding over the desire for peace and prosperity which represents the ultimate desire of Nahal himself, Lala says," forgive the English and the Muslims all their sins-if only could return. Return and die here and cremated by the side of the river Akk." (Azadi, 48)

Nahal projects his personal and private affairs through the fictional characters Arun, Nur and Chandini. He weaves the love affair between Arun and Chandhini and the love story of Arun and Nur within the horrifying picture of the holocaust and it linked with the communal bitterness and hatred.

Nahal's remarkable sister, Kartar Devi, who perished in the communal riots aggravated after the partition. The character of Madhu in Azadi is partly based on her. She lived in the village called Wazirabad. When she was travelling with her husband to reach Sialkot, they were both cruelly murdered, as were others on the train. Nahal figures her in some of his short stories and articles as well. Her life reflects countless other sisters who were also done to death, raped, or whisked away in a similar fashion.

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-4-October-December-2019

Conclusion

In this way Nahal presents a deliberate contamination of the personal experiences by condensing the whole holocaust within the walls of Lala Kanshi Ram's family. He delineates the complete picture of his own private emotions with accuracy. To register further cultural collapse of the time, Nahal decided to show how the emotional damage caused by partition occurred within each family itself, no matter what their ethnic identity is. Lala Kanshi Ram, Arun and Prabha Rani feel together isolated and can hardly communicate with each other when they reach Delhi towards the end of the novel. It should be also mentioned that chaman Nahal in his novel Azadi did not try to criticize any religion but one of those refugees, he writes what he had observed when he was compelled to leave Sialkot.

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