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Broken and Divided Souls: Tragedy of Partition and Aftermath

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Abstract

Present paper aims at analyzing physical and psychological trauma created by partition of India and Pakistan where a nation was divided into two leaving a perpetual effect on the citizens who were doomed to death, cruelty and homelessness. Azadi , the Sahitya Akademi awarded novel , written by Chaman Nahal has been selected for the scrutiny of the research subject. Tragedy of partition did not stopped at mass killing, riots and violence but it had larger, never diminishing influence at psychological level. Most cherished dream of independence was ruined

Key words : Partition, history, uprooted, massacre, violence, collective experience.

Partition of India and Pakistan, is perhaps the most painful event in the history of India, showed brutality hidden within humans, revealed that man still has the primitive instincts of the beast. Even in present times the wounds created by partition are not healed. More than fifty years have passed till the tragedy took place yet the horrible event keeps haunting mind of an average Indian. As Denning comments: "History is not the past; it is a consciousness of the past used for present purposes." (Denning, 170) Present is formed from the fabric of past and the blood stained past of India is recreated by Indian English novelists."The events surrounding Indian independence have had a profound effect on modern Indian writers and Indian Society as a whole." (Reilly, 22) Sharad Rajimwale voices similar pain regarding partition in these words:

From the killings, rapes, kidnappings, looting and banditry, the South Asian populace continues to suffer from psychological wounds etched by partition. Arguably before the Indian partition, the twentieth-century had not excruciating migration of people.(Rajimwale ,197)

Tragedy of partition did not stop at mass killing, riots and violence but it had larger, never diminishing influence at psychological level. Most cherished dream of independence was ruined:

So many of those who lived through the trauma of partition were unable to comprehend how a nation, built around certain common symbols and shared ideals was so easily fragmented. So many more could scarcely understand why their dream of a united and secular India was destroyed by religious fanaticism" (P. Rao 01)

Millions of Punjabis and Bengalis were affected with the news of partition. Uprooted from their ancestral homes and pushed for massive migration, these people were the most miserable one. One can never have real static of how many people were brutally murdered during migration or how many helpless women were abducted from convoys.

Manohar Malgonkar *A Bend in the Ganges* (1962), Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975), Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) Bhisham Sahani's *Tamas* (1988) are the novels which recreates the trauma of partition. Noteworthy thing is that even though these novels have similar themes, their exposure, context and events are varied. While *Train to Pakistan* deals with Indian Scenario, Nahal's *Azadi* deals with the condition that was created in Pakistan with news of partition. Nahal has woven many crucial aspects of freedom within a single thread. The novel reflects the massacre, migration, sexual-violence and condition of refugees after reaching India. Nahal has confessed the autobiographical nature of the novel in following words: "..... a hymn to one's land of birth, rather than a realistic novel of the partition." (Nahal ,10) Born in Sialkot, Chaman Nahal was forced to migrate to India after partition. Nahal has elaborated private experiences into collective with this novel. The novel:

is not simply a recreation of a historical event but an imaginative re-visioning of a historical epoch; it chooses the issue of the past not nostalgically but critically; it contains a deliberate contamination of the historical with didactic and situational elements; and, above all, in this novel private experiences are elevated very skillfully to public consciousness. (Tak ,114)

The novel opens with dual representation of scenario that is peaceful present and upcoming stormy future. There is anxiety about announcement of India's independence and partition going to be done by Lord Mountbatten. Grain merchant, Lala Kanshi Ram is a mouthpiece of the author and also represents the shock felt by the people on the declaration of partition. Hindus feel betrayed by Nehru; so feel the Shikhs by the Akalis. The tenants of Bibi Amarvati could not believe their ears when they heard the news of partition on the radio.

They wondered with fear:

What nonsense was this of no panic, no violence, full protection from the government, peace the main object! Had he gone mad? Didn't he know his people? Didn't he know the Muslims? And why the partition in the first place? What of your promises to us, you Pandit Nehru? (Azadi , 65)

At the beginning of the novel, Nahal has deliberately portrayed the peaceful life of Sialkot, harmony and unity between the two communities and above all highly established life of Lalakashi Ram. A detailed description of his fixed routine, minute and beautiful portrayal of household is given which reflects the life before partition and enhances torments created by it. Nahal writes:

Lala Kanshi Ram looked through the door to the far end,... the peace of the house came to him with something of pain... for about three decades had he been living there, and what he saw today had all been put together by him and Prabha Rani bit by bit through their own efforts. How loaded with goodness it was everything! (A. 34)

News of partition swept away all peace. Here Lala Kanshi Ram is a symbol of millions of people who were uprooted from their homes and home-lands. Nahal gives similar views regarding partition. As he avers, while writing this novel he was; "largely concerned with showing how the partition of India in 1947 destroyed an existing harmony which had prevailed for centuries." (Nahal ,xii) Before the news of partition broke out, Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims have been living together without realizing the religious difference among them. Nahal has presented exemplary relationship of Barkat Ali and Lala Kanshi Ram and their sons Munir and Arun. Nahal portrays their friendship in following words:

Chaudhari Barkat Ali turned towards Lala Kanshi Ram and said seriously: You're my brother from today. Lala Kanshi Ram had always regarded... (Him) as a brother, he did not need a Gandhi to make him aware of that. (A. 107)

Even though a pious Muslim, Chaudhari Barkat Ali was very much impressed by ideologies of a Hindu leader, Mahatma Gandhi and with full commitment he wore khadi "the home- spun cotton." In similar way Munir and Arun never failed in extending help to each other as good friends. Their friendship begins with minor games and got mature with time and turned into a strong bonding that can't be broken with communalism. In games, during their childhood, "Arun protected Munir when they were on the run and

someone else was chasing them. And when it was Munir's turn, Arun shouted encouraging directions to him.(89)

Another description of friendly atmosphere is given with an account of celebration of Dussehra Festival. "It was a Hindu festival but the effigies were made by Muslim workmen; the crackers and the fireworks too were supplied by the Muslims. (94) To run a good economy both community is required. Even in remote areas many Munirs and Aruns can be found who are unaffected by fanatics. Without any prejudice Lala Kanshi Ram was taught Urdu by his Hindu teachers. Urdu, which was the first language he had learned to read and write. And when it came to writing, whether the entries in his shop ledger or a note to the vendor down the road, he wrote in Urdu; "Who said it was the language of Muslims?" He had learned it from his father and from the primary teacher in his village a few miles out of Sialkot, neither of the two was a Muslim." (Azadi, 14) Thus, with news of partition long cherished harmony between Hindu-Muslim was interrupted. Hindu, Shikh and Muslims suddenly became conscious about their religious-ethnic identity. Lala Kanshi Ram is highly critical of Jinnah. He regrets that before the revealing the news of partition, Jinnah and Nehru; "Should at least keep their mouths shut and not misled the poor, credulous people." (Azadi 210) Attitude of Lala Kanshi Ram towards the failure of British Government in curbing the partition reflects sentiments of many Indians of the time. His condition has been described with following words:

What in the end broke Lala Kanshi Ram's heart was the inability of the Boundary Force under General Rees to maintain peace in the province. An Englishman unable to keep law and order!.... It was like the sun rising in the west. (Azadi, 211)

Nahal has portrayed atrocities, savagery and tragedy at two levels - at individual level and at collective level. But often individual sufferers in the novel are symbolic representations of mass. With a Muslim celebration on the declaration of individual Pakistan, mean side full of communalism is revealed:

"It was late in the night that the procession came. The mob was in a transport, which exceeded panic or hysteria... They had passed other Mohallas on their way,.... They did not want to harm the Hindus at least not today... But they had to make the meaning of that acceptance apparent enough for these banyas, the traders who had long dominated the business affairs of the city" (73)

But when the procession was not allowed to demonstrate in a Hindu Mohalla, whole of the mob was caught into frenzy. "We're telling you, open the gate!" And a huge cry of 'Allah-o-Akbar' rose from the head of the procession... soon the sky was filled with many echoes of 'Allah-o-Akbar, Allah-o-Akbar, Allah-o-Akbar ... Allah-o....' (74) Further the scene goes on with more frantic description that aroused fear in Hindu community:

"And another cry arose from the procession, louder and more menacing than the daga-dug of drums and which could be heard clearly above which said, 'Torh do! Torh do!' 'Break it open! Break it Open!' They also shouted, 'Pakistan, Zindabad!' (77)

This whole episode takes an ironical turn when city inspector Inayat- Ullah Khan appears at the scene. Instead of carrying on with his duty, he supports the mob on communal reasons. He actually wanted the mob to spread chaos in Hindu locality. He desired that mob should set fire to their homes and loot their property. The scene has increasing chaos. He tries to humiliate Hindu and Shikh by ordering Shikh constables and Havaldars to break open the gate with a beam. But at the end entire circumstances was taken in control by The Deputy Commissioner.

Above scene is important in the course of the events that took place in the novel as it reveals the sudden bitterness between different communities. Nahal has critically given account of asserted fanaticism and orthodoxy into Muslim working class by political leaders. Abdul Ghani is a representative of poor Muslim masses who easily carried away by the Muslim communalists. Rao Prasad has aptly remark:

The leaguers successfully made him 'aware of the threat in a free India'. It was with little difficulty that they made forays into his thought because unlettered as he was he could not act on his own land, and he was very gullible like many of the poor belonging to the Muslim masses easily carried away by the oratory of their leaders. (Rao, 47)

Partition, at individual level, affects various relationships. At first place comes the innocent romance of Arun and Nur who fell prey at communalism with the news of partition their identity, was restricted to 'a Hindu' and 'a Muslim'.

At the end of the August, Boundary commission's award was announced and to people newly existing borders of India and Pakistan became clear. None of the community was satisfied with their portion of land. The Sikhs had missed their fertile lands. Muslims were "aggrieved over the award of sections of Gurdaspur district to India, Which gave India as contiguous border with Kashmir State". (214) Two governments failed to make proper arrangements to transport the minorities from both countries. People were left to move either by trains or by convoys. Both the mediums of transport were bitterly targeted by the communalist. Mass- migration often turned into mass-killing as innocent people were helpless to protect themselves. Kanshi Ram feels frustrated: "The two new governments were parties to the fratricidal war, and how could unarm men and women with and or agonized slaughter?" (183-84) Lala and his family choose the direct route from Sialkot to Amritsar. Leonard gives picture of those brutal riots and Killing:

In the nine months between August 1946 and the spring of the following year, between fourteen and sixteen million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims were forced to leave their homes and flee to safety from blood-crazed mobs. In that same period over 6, 00,000 of them were killed. If they were children, they were picked up by their feet and their feet and their heads smashed against the walls. If they were female children, they were raped and then their breasts were chopped off. And if they were pregnant, they were disemboweled. (Mosley, 9)

Wherever the convoy moved, there were heart fainting scenes of killing. Foot convoys were attacked deliberately with the help of Pakistani army. Young women were raped and abducted. Women and children are easy targets as they are physically weak and unable for self protection. Smark swain remarks: "If you look closely at communalism, ethnic conflicts, caste conflicts and fundamentalism, you will know that whatever be the reason for same, the victims are mostly women, and children." (Swain,12) Nahal has given realistic yet appreciatively limited picture of abducted women and their pitiful plight. He, however, maintains a very thin line between indelicacy and delicacy .Women were abducted and were used as a private property:

A number of abducted Hindu and Sikh women were in their custody... A lone Muslim dragged a woman away, and kept her for his own exclusive use. The rest were subjected to mass rape... the rape was followed by other atrocities... The survivors were retained for repeated rapes and humiliations, until they were parceled out to decrepit wrecks. (Azadi, 293)

Communal ire gives birth to such Barbary and female became the first and easy target to such savagery. No one tried to stop such parading. The local authorities, the police and the military, did not interfere in such parades. Abducted women remained faithless and they were not welcomed by the family. Family members feel it embracing to have such a woman with them who was dishonored. These unfortunate women were left with no other options. Many of them died as future does not have anything to offer them. During riots and war rate of rape increases. Brownmiller points out about the injustice committed on Women:

Once we accept as basic truth that rape is not a crime of irrational, impulsive, uncontrollable lust, but is a deliberate, hostile, violent act of degradation and possession and the part of a would be conqueror, designed to intimidate and inspire fear... (Brownmiller, 324)

Hence, this become clear that woman became a tool to the conquerors to assert their masculinity and power.

After reaching Delhi, migrants are forced to face other miseries. And these issues are portrayed in the experiences of Lala Kanshi Ram and Arun. Refugees from Pakistan were not welcomed but seen with suspicion and disgust. These people had reach to India after harsh Journey of months, loosing everything behind. Yet they were treated worstly by Indian officials. The Rehabilitation officers, at the Delhi station, misbehaved with Lala KanshiRam and asked him:

'Why to Delhi? The officer was harsh and overbearing.'

'I hope to settle here'

'Why not in East Punjab? why do you Punjabis lift your faces and march on to Delhi?' (341)

Instead of feeling sympathy and compassion, refugees were treated as beggars. Note worthy thing is that one can see spread of corruption in newly independent country. To get a resident, a job or a shop it was necessary to bribe respective officers. Here Nahal has given heart melting picture of refugees in India. These refugees remained unwelcomed by relatives. There is no hope of survival is left to them. Even politicians failed to provide organized help to the refugees:

There was a huge crowd outside Nehru's residence. The police would allow no one in. He waited for hours... It was no organized demonstration; each man stood only for himself... 'Don't you read the newspaper? Panditji has gone to Bombay on tour,' said one police official. (345)

Arun and Lalakanshi Ram searched out every area in Delhi where they can stay on rent but failed. 'Lala Kanshi Ram was feeling scandalized only because the bribe demanded was beyond his means:

'They do,' said the clerk with a dull smile. 'for a thousand rupees you get a refugee flat...'

'And a Shop?'

'May be another thousand,' said the clerk nonchalantly" (348)

Whole class of middle class people was driven away from his native soil without any fault of theirs and now future was totally bleak. Utter rootlessness is portrayed by Nahal. Lala has lost his dignity and he ceased to wear the turban. He starts a small grocery shop, under the pressure of a cut-throat competition, at his brick hutment in the Kingsway camp. Sunanda, who had lived up a life of luxury and dignity, was left with no option but making livelihood with tailoring work.

Their dislocation and rootlessness had pushed them towards unending silence. Lala Kanshi Ram and his family have lost causal way of conversation. They keep awake whole night yet could not share pain with each other.

He wanted to talk about it to Prabha Rani or to Arun. That was another ruin Azadi had caused. He had lost the ability to communicate with his family. He couldn't establish a contact either with his wife or with his son. The affection was there. The concern was there. Their respect for him was there, too. Yet the contact was broken. Something had driven them apart. No, he couldn't reach them. (370)

A vast gulf is left between the family members in reference to sharing of emotions. Arun too joined college and other activities but he could not forget traumas of partition. He chooses to remain alone, hardly he mix-up with anybody else. Basavaraj Naikhar aptly remarked:

All of them suffer from a sort of existential loneliness... displacement, loss of land, home, roots, friends and relatives, death of his daughter and soon have awakened in him the deep seated Hindu Philosophical feeling of vairagya or detachment... (He) experiences the essential spiritual loneliness... (Naikar, 59).

Thus, Nahal has artistically reflected the psychological impact of partition. Freedom not only brought with it massacre, violence, brutality but also isolation, alienation and rootlessness. It has been portrayed at the end of the novel that how painful it is to start a life without anything when one has already spend whole life in gathering and settling the things.

Yet, as many critics have noted, the novel had affirmative note at the end. O.P. Mathur comments: Azadi is also a work of deep human significance. Its pre dominant colors - the red and the black- and the dizzy whirr of events are but foils to the white flame of the eternal human values of love and sympathy steadily burning through the novel and the necessity and fruitfulness of individual action with which it ends. (Mathur, 90)

Undoubtedly, Nahal has inclined to the Indian Philosophy of 'Karma'. Man's deed leads him/her to Ultimate salvation. Whirling of Sunanda's Machine can be read as a symbol of this philosophy. However big the trauma can be, wheel of life keeps on moving ahead.

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