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Partition: A Line between the Hearts with reference to Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*

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Abstract:

The present research paper is the outcome of the sensitive issue re-raised in mind after watching recently released movie *Begum Jaan*, directed by Srijit Mukherjee, where partition has played a mortal role in the life of group of prostitutes. Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* is the finest examples of pre and post partition activity and movement. The novel gives the full account of horror of partition and the tragedy of massacre created by the communal frenzy. There is the depiction of the village Sialkot -a border town and the intensive effect of partition upon the villagers. Nahal's *Azadi* deals with the partition, its tragedy and the aftermath. The present research paper will explore how Partition has dig a line between loving, lovely and loveable hearts.

Keywords: Partition, Azadi, Riots, Communal Harmony.

Azadi is one of the best novels by Chaman Nahal, which has won The Sahitya Academy award in 1977, well known among the best novels of Gandhi Quartet. The novel also won the Federation of India Award. The autobiographical element can be seen in the novel as it has been cultivated from personal experiences of the author, Chaman Nahal, as he calls it, "...a hymn to one's land of birth, rather than a realistic novel of the Partition". (Nahal, 10)

The novel starts from the early days when there was some movement going on for freedom and partition together. It is said that British people split India apart and gave the heart breaking stock, which bleed even today. Before the partition declared the two communities – Hindu and Muslim living together with brother hood suddenly became rivals to each other. People started to migrate haphazardly in large numbers. Each community intended to attack on another that caused the tragic massacre both in India and Pakistan.

While writing *Azadi*, the author strongly felt that partition was unfortunate and even harmful to both India and Pakistan. As he stated, "*More than fifty years after that event the scars still show, in my reaction to ethnic violence, ethnic insults and ethnic demands which surface every now and then in the same divisive, unwholesome vein.*"(Nahal, 11) He has experienced the same event as a native of Sialkot and migrated to India in that very days.

Following the subjective element, the novel has the setting in Sialkot, West Punjab and now in Pakistan after the partition, covers the time span from 3 June, 1947 to the death of Mahatma Gandhi -30 January, 1948. Sialkot had the majority of Muslims, but Sikh, Hindu and Muslim communities lived peacefully before the partition. The novel has woven around the central character Lala Kanshi Ram, the wholesale grain merchant in Sialkot. His family lived there in Sialkot with other Hindus. The life of people was going steadily and happily, but the tension arose due to the announcement of partition by Lord Mountbatten.

Partition disturbed the peaceful living of people and the disturbance explored in the profound way. The unhappy and frustrated author aguishly presents the picture of partition and emergency of the time. Lakhmir Singh observed that, Nahal's purpose is not to depict history but to describe the impact of the historical tragedy of the Partition on ordinary people. *Azadi* is infect, the story of millions of people uprooted from their homes for no fault of their own and this story is symbolized in the person of Lala Kanshi Ram and his family and the pain that they go through during the process of this upheaval in their lives and their alienation from their own home-land. (Singh, 226)

The same native place seems to be unsecured for Lala Kanshi Ram and the other family members and neighbors. From heart, they never wanted to leave the place very dear to heart, but the circumstances made them to leave it. He became the representative of Hindus, and the events presented through his consciousness. As the novel opens, there is the description of Lala's quiet life with wife and children. His daughter Madhubala is married and the son Arun is the college boy, studying in Sialkot. They live in the rented house; the owner of it is Bibi Amarvati –a Sikh woman. In the house, there are different families dwells, seems the atmosphere of communal harmony and religious concord. All of them possess the healthy relationship with each other. Nahal explains that Lalakashi Ram is not much literate, “...*But life had rolled him around, misfortunes come and gone, and this had given an edge to his intelligence.*” (Nahal, 03) He had the great faith in Gandhiji, who had taken the oath that partition would not take place, but it was shaken after the announcement of Viceroy. He knew that the decision of partition is the shrewd plan of British rulers as he sadly avers, “*Everything will be ruined if Pakistan is created.*” (Nahal, 27) He felt that congress is responsible for partition and criticized Jinnah. “...*Jinnah had talked of Pakistan, but he did not quite know what he meant by it. Gandhi, by going to him, not only gave Pakistan a name, he gave Jinnah a name too.*” (Nahal, 27)

Like an ordinary Indian, he worried about the division of the country, as he knew the consequences of it –violence and massacre. After the declaration, the only subject remained to talk about -in home, in streets and in market. Lala anxiously thought about the carnage and fate of million people. He told Pabha Rani, “*We'll have to leave. That is, if the Muslims spare our lives.*” (Nahal, 28) It was because he knew that if Muslims would come in power there would be the bloodshed. But all the Hindus at that time had the similar faith upon Gandhiji and his 'Shakti'. Nahal has truthfully depicted the scene of 'announcement listening' of Lala Kanshi Ram and other neighbors. While listening, they looked each other's faces to get the things. They show fear and tension on their faces after looking at each other.

Nahal describes, “...they looked at each other and more than regret, more than fear, on the face of each one of them was disbelief.” (Nahal, 50) After that Bibi Amarvati asked Lala and he answered, “I suppose we’ll continue here. Why can’t Hindus and Sikhs live in Pakistan? why should they wish us harm? he said, without much conviction ...why can’t we live in Pakistan? They certainly would like to have us, have our business. Their whole economy will be ruined if they drive us out.” (Nahal, 51) Hindus in Pakistan were afraid, but they had the sharp faith in the national leader like Gandhi. Nahal reveals the safety steps taken by Hindu community that many of Hindu Mahollas put the gates to be protected as Sialkot had majority of Muslims, but Muslims were in the mood of celebration as they arranged procession.

The procession came down Trunk Bazar, and stopped outside the eastern entrance to the street. It was a wild sight. The mob was in a transport, which exceeded pain or hysteria. As far as you could see, the bazaar was a sea of heads. They split into many small groups, and before each group, here were two or three drummers. ...Many of them were dancing the Bhangra, the Punjab dance of Victory. ...And together they shouted, ‘Pakistan Zindabad! Long live Pakistan’. (Nahal, 55-56). The city inspector is Muslim who supported Muslim community and ordered Hindus to open the gates of the society, but one of the Hindu Deputy Commissioners stopped him to use the power and force. He and one Muslim Superintendent of Police defended the Hindu community and took safe decisions. This show that two fellow are from the rival community but they are very honest and perfect to their duty. Hindus in Pakistan were thinking that Sialkot would never go in Pakistan.

The harmony among three communities, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh prevented Sialkot in beginning from the effect of partition. Lala Kanshi Ram and Chaudhari Barkat Ali were friends for long, and their children Arun and Nur respectively were in love as they were studying in the same college. The partition affected their love relation at some extant in initial stage and then it was ultimately closed. Chaudhari Barkat Ali helped Lala Kanshi Ram until he left the place.

It was on 24 June, the first riot took place in Sialkot. The communal riots spread in all over the country, “...Many cities of the Punjab had been aflame for months; there were large scale killings and 148 lootings in Lahore, Gujart, Gujranwala, Amritsar, Ambala, Jullundur Rawalpindi, Multan, Ludhiana and Sargodha”. (Nahal, 104) There is the horrible description of the riot and bloodshed. “The fires were started in the night, and four fire engines the city had were kept rushing from one fire to the next. More than murderers, it was fires that were frightening and demoralizing.” (Nahal, 105) It was the awful sight that murderers were yelling loudly ‘Hai hai!’, ‘Allah-Allah’, ‘Hai-they’ve killed us!’ They killed people so cruelly that the intestine of the man would have spilled out from the body and there seemed the pool of his blood.

After the massive night, Hindus of Sialkot moved to refugee camp, the word became familiar in those days. There was one British Army officer, William Davidson, who was the close friend to Munir, a son of Chaudhari Barkat Ali and Arun. He was the good guide and supporter of peace. He helped Lala and his neighbors to escape safely from their home. He

sent trucks to take them and their luggage to the refugee camp. Before the day they left, Lala could not sleep in night and the thought lingered in his mind, "*I was born around here, this is my home-how can I be refugee in my own home?*" (Nahal, 108) It hurt him, not only he, the other were not happy to leave, but they were helpless.

Sialkot immersed in to the flames of communal riots. Many innocent lives slaughtered without the reason. Fearfully confusing atmosphere pervaded in the whole city as if it was the ghost land. Homes and shops of Hindus looted and burnt. The violence reached at their edge when the Hindu Deputy Commissioner –the situation controller in the city was been murdered by his Muslim bodyguard. Violence spread on the both sides. The condition revealed with Chaudhari Barkat Ali's words,

... Everyday hundreds of refugees from India continue to arrive with tales of terror and disgust. Whatever is happening here in Sialkot, things very much like that are happening on the other side too - let us make no mistake about it. It is not the collapse of Congress Muslims in Pakistan; apparently, it is the collapse of Hindus in India also. When refugees with stories of personal misfortunes land here, the politicians use them to their advantage to fan up further hatred. (Nahal, 118)

The position of Hindus became very insecure in Sialkot, they were been stabbed and killed openly, and women raped. In spite of their deep relation with the land, they forced to leave the place along with their precious property and business. They left with the total uncertain and black future, but the thought of leaving the native place was more painful for them. Lala left with the little hope that he could return to Sialkot after the things become normal.

Lala Kanshi Ram with his wife and son along with the neighbors took shelter in the refugee camp. The refugee camp was the good option as it provided security and protection as one can sleep peacefully in night. One day in the camp, Mr. Chander Bhan visited and gevt the sad news to Lala Kanshi Ram, "We have heard your daughter Madhu Bala is killed." Lala, Prbha Devi and Arun stared at the visitors and could not trust their ear. Madhu Bala along with her husband Rajiv was coming to Sialkot to join Lala, she sat in the train from Wazirabad to Sialkot, in which the rioters came and butchered people. Madhu Bala killed with her husband. The incident has the subjective reference to the author. The book is dedicated to Kartar Devi 'a remarkable sister' to him. Nahal wrote in the introduction, "*Kartar Devi, my remarkable sister, who perished in the riots and whose scare memory in this novel is most humbly and respectfully dedicated, was twenty-seven when she died.*" (Nahal, xii)

After the shock, Lala told bitterly to Chandra Bhan that he should inform him first. Prabha Rani firstly could not speak anything then started whispering to her. After the incident, the fellow dwellers in the camp started to visit Lala and his family. Arun sent to railway station to find the corps by taking the help of Suraj Prakash and Chaudhari Barkat Ali. They went to the station.

They had to get off the platform and cross a number of railway tracks before they could reach the clearing at the back. The stench was un-bearable as they approached the area. The four heaps piled high and fires were roaring and hissing with great force, the flames climbing

many feet in to the air. What they saw there was only dismembered limbs, dozens of them—legs and arms, and hands and thighs, and feet. The fire had consumed other parts of the bodies; it was the parts, which had not fully burned that stood out. (Nahal, 158)

Government tried a lot to avert the riots and took steps, but ultimately failed to sustain the peace. People were angry upon the failure but they were helpless at both the sides. Madu's death affected Lala rather anything else. He started to think of leaving for India. General Rees proved his inability to maintain peace in the province. Minor communities in East and West Punjab killed unkindly in front of the Army.

Everyone has lost property. That was nothing, but if you lost a limb or if a member of your family had been killed, raped, or forcibly abducted, you won a medal for yourself. Your neighbors in the camp spoke to you deferentially, the Camp Commandant was to receive you for a personal interview and in the matter of dry rations or other physical facilities, and you straight away received a preferential treatment. (Nahal, 184)

The description seems strange but the fact of the time. Rahmat-Ullah, the captain had the bad vision upon the refugee women, as he wanted Arun to take Sunanda for him. It shows that people became helpless in every way; they were just in refugee camp but treated as slaves rather refugees. It was the sixth sense of Sunanda who told Arun, *"Tell him I'll kill him, if he ever tries to touch me."* (Nahal, 200)

It was the responsibility of the government that the refugees should be safe. At the same time when the riots emerged, the Government even could not control the situation. The local authorities were compelled to take all necessary steps but could not avert the circumstances. Muslim show their anger towards Sikh, so to hide the original personality they cut their hair. Niranjan Singh, the Sikh neighbor and refugee in Lala's camp also told to do so as they had to walk towards the next refugee camp in the way to India. He preferred to lose life rather to cut the hair.

It was decided by the Government that the refugees would have been taken to the India from Pakistan by arranging a convoy on foot. Therefore, the large body of Gurakha troop arrived from India to escort people. With them, there were olive green jeeps and three-ton trucks. They were fully equipped with guns and rifles. Men inside the camp cheered repeatedly and shouting 'Jai Hind'. A young Gurakha major headed the whole troop.

The convoy from Sialkot to India, the first Indian Territory situated inside India was forty-seven miles, Dera Baba Nanak. It is necessary to go on foot to the place from where the train is available for Delhi, Amritsar to Delhi. Every day they decided to walk six mile as women, children and old-aged people were there. Major was hopeful that they will reach to India in fifteen days. The army for their village provided the vehicle. The Major decided to leave on twenty forth of September, as it was the first day of lunar month and the Major wanted to take the advantage of the light during the convoy. When they left, Lala saw Gangu Mull, husband of Bibi Amarvati who changed into a Muslim with the name Ghulam Muhammad.

Mukunda's mother, whose son is in jail, a renter at Bibi Amarvati's house, hadn't joined them in the refugee camp was also killed. Muslim butchered all remaining Hindus and Sikhs. Sialkot was burning in the fire of communal violence, in which all of them passed the past years by celebrating the festivals together and by helping each other in their trouble.

In each village they passed, they found the remains of parties attacked and butchered. In many cases, the dismembered human limbs and skeletons were still lying there, and the stench was intolerable... The Hindu population had been completely driven out or completely exterminated. Hindu and Sikh places of worship had obviously been defiled... In one small village of twenty houses, every single house been destroyed and there was not a soul in sight (Nahal, 248-49)

On the way, weak people died of illness and exhaustion. They were cemented at the roadside and left to rot. The picture was more dreadful, but the others had to keep the walk continuous, as they had no other way rather to reach at the safe place with the remaining family members and fellow people. The partition had made the life of people chaotic. There remained no other goal for them rather to reach to the safe place.

Still there was the string of sympathy remained between Chaudhari Barakat Ali and Lala Kanshi Ram. He and Munir walked along with the convoy for six miles. When they departed, tear flashed in the eyes at both the sides. Lala greeted him by taking Chaudhari Barakat Ali's hand into his, "*These have been good years.*" (Nahal, 241)

After the division, Nankana Sahib mingled in Pakistan, faced the brutal violence, Sikhs were butchered everywhere in the village. People started to become dumb and hopeless day by day. Major Jung Bahadur Singh tried to cheer them up but they had seen the disaster on their way. People were killed ruthlessly as their limb were scattered and the skeletons were still there. There was the sight of Muslim faces; no Hindu and Sikh were seen.

Nahal succeeds admirably in recapturing vividly one of the most haunting nightmares of the blackest period in Indian history, the refugee caravan, the atrocities perpetrated on the unoffending, battered and dilapidated dregs of humanity, that Dante's moving *Inferno* that the refugees find themselves plunged in, exhausted but still tottering on as if towards the promised land. Their pitiable plight can move even their enemies to gesture of sympathy and compassion. (Asnani, 47-48)

The men in convoy stepped over the bodies in their way and hurried along. The women covered up their faces with their *dopattas*, though yet there was no stench. Most of the dead lay fully dressed. Only a few women lay with their breast exposed, with dead child next to the breast. Most of the children lay with their faces downward. The men lay on their backs or on their sides, their mouths open. Some women lay doubled up like bundles. While there were splash of blood on the ground, and in the few cases on the tree trunks, the bodies themselves were relatively clean. Only their unnatural postures gave out they were dead. (Nahal, 252)

The description affects the mind a lot. It leads toward the thinking that what devil entered in the mind of that people who killed these many innocents who already on their way to leave Pakistan. After reaching Qila Sobha Singh, they found the tragic stories. People looted and killed; girls and wives were been taken away by mob. The kidnapped girls and women were forced to parade naked in the open market. That was irritating that the innocent women forced to parade in the market full of spectators, but they did. This is an unexpected matter for one who knows Indian culture and its principles. The position of women at the time as described by Nahal, *“a number of abducted Hindu and Sikh women were in their custody. Many of kidnapped women were disappeared into private homes.”* (Nahal, 258)

Some of these women were been taken to Narowal to do naked parade and the thing painfully astonishing that police, military and local authority did not interfere in such gathering. The restriction they put only was the procession must not be taken to the refugee camp or that side. The description of the procession reveals how bizarre act it was! *“They were stark naked. Their heads were completely shaven; so were their armpits. So were their public regions. Shorn of their body hair and clothes, they looked like baby girls; or like the bald embryos one sees preserved in methylated spirit. Only the breast and the hips gave away the age.”* (Nahal, 261) They were weeping but no tears were running from their eyes. Their bodies marked to show that they had been beaten badly. The disgusting sight was- *“Foul abuses, crude personal gestures, spurt of sputum, odd articles like small coins, faded flowers, cigarette butts and bidis that were thrown at the women.”* (Nahal, 261)

That was the shameful act ever done in the history of partition of India. India, the nation where women are holy and similar to goddess, had the naked women parade in market disgracefully. The bad words like ‘The filthy Hindu bitches’ and ‘The kafir women’ were showered on them and then the spittle. At Narowal, there was the massive attack on the camp at night and was totally unexpected. Many Muslims came there and attacked the camp. The cries of ‘Nara-E-Takbir’ and ‘Allah-o-Akabar’ were heard. There were the repeated bursts of machine-gun fire heard and the atmosphere of panic pervaded everywhere. Arun ran to his tent but found no one there, not even in the nearby tents. To save his own self he ran in the fields and found himself in the field of sugar cane. Passing through many difficulties, he continued to run and walk on. There came the group of trees and to his surprise he found the army jeep there. Arun slowly and alertly walked towards the nearest home. He felt some movement inside and heard the cry of Sunanda- *‘Leave me, you brute. Have pity on me.’* (Nahal, 269) He showed the scene that left his limbs cold. It was Captian Rahmat-Ullah-Khan lied upon Sunanda and was rapping her. Arun, with the wooden spike, gave the hard blow on the head of the culprit and he died. He freed Sunanda and consoled her. Both were afraid about the condition of their family members. After some time, they heard the announcement if any refugee hid there, they should come out, the situation is under control. So, Arun and Sunanda left that home and ran towards the announcement, but unfortunately the jeep left. They then went to the camp again to search the other members. They found all safe rather Chandani, a beloved to Arun and Suraj Prakash, Sunanda’s husband. The other day, along with many deadbodies Suraj Prakash was found dead. *“He was stabbed through the abdomen; his face was also mutilate-both his eyes were taken out.”*(Nahal, 280)

Chaman Nahal had experienced the partition movement, which he wrote in *Azadi*. People from both the sides suffered in the hand of rioters. Innocent people were killed and women were kidnapped and raped. *"Nahal establishes his objective posture in this manner, signifying that during times of chaos, man irrespective of religion or caste or creed, becomes a brute without any regard for civilization or culture."* (Patole, Ch 6, 20)

Some incidents like the people of Jassar and their sympathy and Chaudhari Barkat Ali and his help has been drawn paradoxically. One can never understand the nature of humanity and the way a man's mind work. Even the unexpected thing is that how only the boarder across the land can divide human hearts, how that become the only reason that love and sympathy towards each other washed off and how the fellow residents become the rivals to each other that they kill each other cruelly. These brutal things really exist in the history of India and Pakistan as well.

After they reached Delhi, they continually faced painful things. They had no much money. There was not much arrangement done by government. The officers were giving nonsense answers to migrated people. Lala, hopefully pleaded for a shop and flat, but the officers gave rude answers and scoffed at him. He informed Lala mercilessly that all the houses left behind by Muslims were allotted or forcibly occupied by the refugees. At last, they only got the place in one tent, all together.

After a lot exercise by Lala, and at last he wept in front of the officer in the refugee office. Arun felt a shock to find his father weeping. He led him out. Lala weep there, not in Pakistan but in In free India, the so called his own land. They fortunately moved into Kingsway camp on Alipur. They were no tents but brick hutments. They were given two rooms. Bibi Amarvati and her family, the other by Lala Kanshi Ram and his family occupied one. Lala then started to visit the rehabilitation office to set is household in Delhi. By passing through troubles and in his old age, he craved for the home to set his family. He was too compassionate to Bibi Amarvati and Sunanda as he took the charge like a family member to them. Lala opened the little shop in that area, just at the end of the wall of the hutment to feed the family. Sunanda took a sewing machine to earn the bread. *"The novelist describes the aftermath of the Partition in the novel. While stipulation the horrors of the Partition were not enough, tragedy of Gandhi's assassination takes place. The priest of non-violence is killed by violence"* (Patole, 23, ch 6)

Some of the refugees blamed Gandhiji for the bloody partition, but then it was taken to the resolution that it was due to the other conguess leaders, Gandhi was rarely responsible for it. There was the deep impact of Mahatma Gandhi upon Lala as on the day of Gandhi's death, he didn't want Prabha Rani to cook anything.

Last lines at the end of the novel is too significant, "The machine went whirring on, its wheel turning fast and its little needle moving up and down, murmuring and sewing through the cloth. The doors of both the rooms shook with its vibration." (Nahal, 327) The words show the motion of life; the wheel keeps moving on, nothing is permanent. These lines reveal the deep thinking of Naha and his philosophy towards life came out of the tragic experience of

his life. By Lala Kanshi Ram's character, Nahal shows the tragic experience of any Hindu living in Pakistan or vice versa. Nahal has not only given the physical pictures of the whole event, but he has revealed the psychology of his characters too. His characters are not only wooden but they are embossing their personality throughout the novel. He even kept the setting in his mind; there is the pure portrayal of nature and villages. Sometimes his words are sophistic and sometimes they are horrifying. The description of love between Arun and Nur or Arun and Chandani is too affective that the reader absorbs in their sweet relationship. He explains all the incidents in details that the picture fully come in the reader's mind as the film is playing on. The one who has not witnesses partition can feel the horrifying atmosphere and panic loss of the time. In short, while reading *Azadi*, the reader of it passes through the partition movement. "*Azadi is a novel which is at once documentation and drama – picturesque and poetic, real and ideal, true and great – considering the novelist's treatment of the essential aspects of the novel like plot, characterization and language, Azadi deserves the first place among all the novels considered in the study.*" (Patole, 26) The novel had the deep sensation woven in to it. Many times the reader burst into tears. Its tragic presentation, murder and bloodshed, molestation to women move the reader and make him feel the awful incident even today.

The Partition movement has lined the geographical boundary and divided the line between the hearts. The recently released movie *Begum Jaan- A story of group of prostitutes living on Indo-Pak border suffers due to partition and the central figure Begum Jaan when utters that we never ask caste to our customer and why should we part on the basis of caste or culture ?* When Vidya Balan utters in sheer sense of against Partition *My Body, My House, My Country, My Rules* (Mukherjee) The story of Lala can easily compared with the story of Begam in a different connotative meaning. This subtle striking question has really challenged the real meaning of *Azadi*.

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