

**CHAMAN NAHAL'S AZADI: ACCULTURATION AND ENCULTURATION IN COURSE OF FREEDOM MOVEMENT**

**Ms. Reena A. Desai**

Assistant Professor,  
Dollyben Desai Institute of Computer  
and Allied Sciences, Palsana,  
Surat - 394315  
[rad.jhdp@gmail.com](mailto:rad.jhdp@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

*The Freedom Movement has left an indelible impact on the social, political and literary arena. The chief leader of this movement was Mahatma Gandhi. His relentless struggle for liberty inspired literary genres and a great number of writers. The initial of Satyagraha movement and Quit India movement hastened the contemporary milieu to be free from the British subjugation. The positive impact of writers like Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, and theosophist Madam Blavatsky bolstered young Gandhi in his formative years. Gandhi by his different activities created whirlwind in contemporary era for national consciousness. Later on the era was remarked as Gandhian era. Amid a host of Indian English writers, Chaman Nahal is the most significant contributor who made Gandhi and his philosophy as the central theme of their works. He belongs to the second generation of Indian English novelists. He made a mark in the writing of historical novel with par excellence work. He excelled in many areas, amongst the writers of his time such as Kushwant Singh, K.A.Abbas, Bhabhani Bhattacharya, and Manohar Malgonkar. As Basavaraj Naikar comments for him, "Chaman Nahal is hailed as a brilliant Indian English novelist of the second generation. He has enriched the field of political fiction, which was very poor as compared to the other forms of Indian English fiction" (153).*

**Key Words:** Azadi, subjugation, freedom, Gandhij, Lala kanshi Ram, culture

The novel *Azadi* begins with the narration of high caste Hindu Lala Kanshi Ram's happy going life with family at Silakot. An Aryasamaji, Lalaji feels honour for his country's past and culture as well as respect for all religions and castes. He respects Sanskrit language and considers Hindi as his mother tongue but can speak Punjabi and write Urdu. He hates the British as the rulers of mother land, but admires their modus operandi and impartial behavior. Though not interesting in politics, he supports independence movement who feels that freedom is their right. He had a son Arun, a college going boy and a daughter Madhu,

married to a boy named Rajiv. In the first few pages of the novel, Gandhi's personality has been described not as a political leader but as a virtuous person. It was 3<sup>rd</sup> of June and Lala Kanshi Ram eagerly waits for Lord Mountbatten's declaration about India's independence. He is confident that Gandhi would never let the mother land be divided. His image of Gandhi a patriot as well as an incarnation of Saint satisfies his inner voice for freedom. He believes that as the chief of masses, he would foresee the aftermath of partition and would not sanction it at any cost: "Gandhiji was shrewd- surely saw it all. He would not give in to such butchery. If nothing else worked his fast unto death always did" (Nahal 48). As Ambuj Sharma describes: "Though, Gandhiji is not present in the novel as a Character, but as a result of Nahal's subtlety, craftsmanship and excellent style of presentation, Gandhi always remains in the novel- in the minds and hearts of the characters like Lala Kanshi Ram, Chaudhary Barkat Ali, Kusum and Vikram"(Nahal195).

Lala Kanshi Ram's business friends with very little knowledge of the political situation of the nation believe that the English are afraid of Gandhi, who has a divine power to deal with any situation. For village folk, he is like a saint. When Gandhi emerged on the dais and folded his hands with great love and broad smile on his lips, half of the mass got up to have a good look of him. For these naive classes of people he was a 'Mahatma' and his shadow is also enough to purify their soul, they were not interested in politics. "For them Gandhi was a Mahatma and a religious figure, and they had come only to pay homage to a saint" (104).

Nahal has tries to depict the principles of Non-violence, through the life of Lala Kanshi Ram who initially has a superficial belief in Gandhian path. As he gets matured, emerges as a true Gandhian being. He considers Gandhian ideology of wearing homespun clothes as a mean of Swadeshi serve the poor. When he takes the vow with determination he would wear Khadi for the rest of his life. " For Lala Kanshi Ram the decision was a god sent, for wearing khadi was cheaper and he could enjoy thrift while being patriotic"(107).

Lalaji does not get impressed by Gandhiji as he is a great admirer of British management, its loyalty and impartiality. It is Chaudhary Barkat Ali's friendship and curiosity to see a man who in ten year's time moulded the spirit of the nation that leads him to the public meeting of Gandhi. Being an Arya Samaji he is against violence and animal killing. He listens to Gandhi's speech at Ramtalai about Hindu-Muslim harmony as a basis for self discipline, non-violence and sacrifice. So far as Hindu-Muslim harmony is concerned, he always regarded Chaudhary Barkat Ali his brother and it never occurs to him that Abdul Ghani, a fellow businessman is a Muslim.

The fact that Ghani was a Muslim and Lala Kanshi Ram was a high-caste Hindu never entered their heads. They spoke common tongue, wore identical clothes, and responded to the weather, to the heat and the first rains, in an identical manner....No, thought Lala Kanshi Ram; they were not Muslims or Hindus. They were Punjabis... (Nahal54).

When the communal anger fired by partition spurts hatred between the two communities, Lala Kanshi Ram and his family has to accept the consequences being Hindu. The leader follows communal hatred in their personal concern and violence follows violence. In Sialkot, because of violence the Hindus feel unprotected in the newly stated land for the Muslims. Lala Kanshi Ram had to leave his home and take shelter in a refugee camp due to state affairs. Later when violence leads to murder of his daughter and son-in-law, he decides to migrate to India. By the time he reaches Amritsar, after witnessing scene of, arson, abduction, loot, rape, murder and parade of naked Hindu women, he feels disgusted. Being a Hindu he feels regret for the Hindu women. He witnesses involvement of Hindu and Muslim in violence, it changes his approach towards the Muslims community. Now he realizes the bearing of Gandhi's speech and his principles of resisting the British as well as maintaining peace between the Hindu and Muslim communities. The moment Lala Kanshi Ram comes to know that Hindus are practicing the same as Muslims in counterparts of Pakistan, he stops hating them. He tries to convince his wife that hatred will only increase the enmity: "We are equally guilty – each of those girls in that procession at Amritsar was someone's Madhu, and there must have been many amongst the dead you saw at Ambala" (Nahal 339).

Kanshi Ram believes in Gandhi's tenet of forgiveness. He believes only by forgiving enemy, one can forget the immoral done to him and dissipate the feelings. He believes only forgiveness can bring peace so he pleads with his wife to forgive the Muslims. Gandhian conviction that God is one can be traced in Kanshi Ram's talk with Abdul Ghani. Ghani: 'I want you to leave because you are a Hindu, and don't believe in Allah'. Kanshi Ram: "You know that's not true, I believe in god as much as you do" (154). Then he understands its vain attempt to argue with Ghani because the essentially good elements of human relationship have been shattered and replaced by religious fanaticism and political opportunism.

Chaudhary Barkat Ali, a true follower of Gandhi tries to preserve Gandhian ideology of Non-violence, Love, Hindu-Muslim unity, and Universal brotherhood not only by his words but also by his actions. His kinship with Kanshi Ram is an example of Hindu-Muslim integration. As Nahal said, "Let each Muslim accept one Hindu as his brother and the Hindu do so. India was divided in to geographical not communal entities and the whole of India was a single nation. A Muslim in India was more an Indian than anything else. The same was true for a Hindu" (106).

Gandhiji was aware of the situation of the Indians, that they are divided on the basis of caste and religious dogma. At the same time he was also conscious of the common culture that bound them together. He arouses the nationalistic sentiments of the people with awakening the mass about Indian ethnicity. As Indian culture believes in unity in diversity is based on the notion where the individual or social differences in physical attributes, castes, skin colour, cultural and religious practices, etc. are not looked upon as a divergence. Rather, these distinctions are looked upon as varieties that enrich the society and the nation as a

whole. He said: "Islam came from outside but later the immigrant Muslims settled here as the English never did. A Muslim in India was more an Indian than anything else" (Nahal106).

Chaudhry Barkat Ali is influenced by Gandhiji's speech and fully aware that the Britishers have ruined India economically by destroying cottage industries such as hand spinning. This has increased the poverty and one can think of Azadi only when one's hunger is satisfied. So he becomes a part of the congress committee and starts wearing Khadi. As a good Muslim he practices namaz five times a day, visits the mosque every day, gives alms to the poor and observes fast in the month of Ramzaan. He believes in unity of all religions that makes him a better Muslim and a true Gandhian. He firmly believes in the Quran which does not preach otherwise: "His job was to live the life, God had given him in friendship and love, and the Hindu next door was as much his brother, more his brother than an unknown Muslim living elsewhere" (102).

Lala Kanshi Ram and Chaudhary Barkat Ali both become ardent followers of Gandhi not only by their exterior but also by deeds. When Arun comes to know that Abdul Ghani has insulted his father he cannot control himself and reacts aggressively. It is Lala Kanshi Ram who stops him from beating Abdul Ghani. Barkat Ali has a height over six feet two, powerfully built man, with broad shoulders and muscular arms. But Gandhi's teaching of Non-violence has made him kind hearted and he goes around in home-spun cotton shirts and loose pajamas. Although a follower of Ahimsa, he goes berserk when Abdul Ghani boasts of imposing violence upon Kanshi Ram's daughter Madhu and son-in-law Rajiv: "I put her and her husband into the fire with my own hands, and they're on their way to Dozakh, to hell – where I hope they rot forever" (Nahal185). Knowing it from a fellow Muslim, Barkat Ali cannot control himself. He holds Ghani by the neck and shakes him. The police officer manages the hassle with difficulty. When he regains his self-control in tranquility, he feels remorse and later apologized to the officer for his offensive behavior. This episode projects Gandhi's influence on Barkat Ali, who is ready to fight against inequality even with his fellow Muslim for the sake of a Hindu. It also proves that the path of non-violence demands greater amount of strength and discipline to follow.

Barkat Ali put his best efforts to protect Lala Kanshi Ram and his family from the criminal issues. He even fights with the Muslim community but when he fails, he comes to Kanshi Ram to notify him of the next attack on their street. Arun, son of Kanshi Ram and his friend Munir are also Gandhians as they never indulged in any kind of hostility when riots broke out in Sialkot. They retained their friendship without being affected by the communal riots. Because of their love for Gandhi they refused to admit Bill Davidson's use of the word 'bloody' which used in kind word for comment. They take it impolitely and compel Davidson not to use the word. They also use word religion in broader sense with faith and believe in one almighty; only the ways which lead us to him are different. Munir finds nothing wrong in his sister Nur's love for Arun and he says:

Arun: I am going to marry her as soon as I have a job.....

Munir: Why not?

Arun: I will become a Muslim, if your father insists.

Munir: You don't have to.

Why can't you keep your separate religions? (Nahal 138).

Munir's approach to religion makes him a Gandhian. Arun also doesn't consider caste system. He decides to sacrifice his love to protect his father during the family's crisis due to communal strife. In this incident we also find Arun's quality of sacrifice and family values. After the pang of separation with first love later he attached to a poor girl Chandni. When he expresses his wish to marry her, his mother Prabha Rani tries to dissuade him but he shows his oppose in the true Gandhian spirit: "I find nothing wrong in marrying Chandni. She may be poor but I don't need anybody's money. And as far as caste is concerned I don't subscribe to it. My whole being revolts against it"(241). Hakim is another Gandhian character, who has Gandhian conviction of religion. Hakim is sad with the plight of the Hindu women, who were being paraded naked. He shuts his eyes and prays to God to defend them and forgive those cruel men. He lies on his knees and spreads his hands before him as if praying for Namaaz. Author describes: "There was the look of infinite pain on his face. His thin, frail, eyelids rested on his eyes as if they would never open again. And moving his outstretched hands, like begging alms, he murmured in Punjabi 'Rabbul – Alamin, forgive these cruel men. And, oh, my Allah, oh Rabbah, protect these women'" (298).

The sight of a Muslim lamentation and praying for Hindu women reduces the annoyance and hatred which Arun feels for the Muslims. Nahal has portrayed the humanitarian facet of the Gandhian creed. He has conveyed the message that hatred gives birth to hatred and violence leads to violence only. It can only be surmounted by love, compassion and concern for the evil doer. Through these diverse personalities in his fiction, Nahal has tried to project that Gandhian principles of non-violence, love and compassion are the weapons which can face the vice of violence and help restore peace.

Nahal has made an effort to explore the Gandhian faith in Dharma through Sardar Niranjana Singh husband of Isher Kaur,. Sikhs can be easily recognized because of their long hair and beard. During partition they were the target of communal violence as these distinguished them from rest of the crowd. So Sardar Niranjana Singh is suggested by everyone to cut his hair and beard to cross safely through Pakistan. But he refuses because he believes it would divert him from the way of Dharma as the Sikh faith urged him against shaving off the hair and beard. It was also a symbol of courage which in older days distinguished them as warriors. As a man of strong spirit, he is not ready to compromise with his conscience just to survive. He remains obstinate not to cut his hair and beard because he believes that his life is completely in Guru Maharaj's keeping and cutting the hair would be denying the power of the Guru, he is certain that Guru Maharaj would care for his life so he decides to keep his long hair. Lala Kanshi Ram, on knowing about his dispute, comes forward to persuade him:



Listen, Son, I admire your faith. Only don't forget for a moment, the religions of men are the invention of man himself – these religions are meant to be practiced only where human life exists. You can't practice them when beastly times prevail. You may safely cut your hair under these circumstances and you'll not be denying on religion....it is giving religion chance to work again through you and do good on earth. If you perish, your religion will perish with you (Nahal 251).

Lala Kanshi Ram's understanding of religion is Gandhian in the sense that it doesn't stick to the religious dogmas. Gandhiji no doubt was a holy man but his thoughts about religion were much deeper. Lala believed that religious conviction is not static ideal, unrelated to time and place but an active system of duties which evolves with the evolution of milieu. Lalaji believes that religion is not the blind following of custom. He himself is an Arya Samaji which firmly forbids idol worship but he used to adore the idol of Lord Krishna at home because he finds mental tranquility in reverent. Niranjana Singh's understanding of religion is totally different. He cannot understand that spiritual thoughts develop from the heart and have nothing to do with exterior appearance. Unable to cope with the dilemma, one morning he sets fire to himself saying: "I belong to Waheguru, Waheguru is great.... Life I'll gladly lose my Sikh dharma I won't." (262)

The other extreme of physical appearances has been described through Gangu Mull, husband of Bibi Amaravati. He is a lethargic man, dependant on his wife for money. When the dream of Pakistan becomes a reality, the fanatics start proselytizing Hindus and Sikhs to Islam by force. Gangu is attracted by the idea that if he becomes a Muslim, not only his life would be broadened but he would also become owner of their buildings. He is not giving importance to religion. He never notices that his indifference to religion would make him a stranger in the eyes of his own people. When the day comes convoy is supposed to leave Sialkot, a crowd gathers to see the Hindus and Sikhs leaving. Lala Kanshi Ram's attention is worn by someone from the crowd of Muslim spectators. He is staggered by the unfamiliarity of that familiar face with Muslim fez on the head. Gangu Mull also becomes Mohammad. His is an un-Gandhian step because Gandhi was against proselytization. As Gandhi believes that, man cannot change his religion like garments. It is a matter of life and death. Man takes his religion beyond grave. Gandhi was against tearing away a man from his own religion and forced him to convert in alien religion. He also believed that no religion is great in the world and all traditions need the help of others to make it perfect. Gangu Mull is a sub human being devoid of all the ethical and spiritual values, where life is confined only with body and its need without soul.

Bibi Amravati is with others few who feel happy at the news of Gandhiji's assassination because like others she believes that Nehru and Patel were Gandhiji's stooges, consequently he could have stopped them from accepting the proposal of two separate nations. There are also characters like Prabhavati and Sunanda who despite their personal loss and suffering lament Gandhiji's death as a great loss to the country. At Narowal, Sunanda

loses her husband and she was defiled by Captain Rahamatullah, but she bears her losses in dignified manner. She never blames anybody for her agony. Prabhavati also loses her daughter Madhu and her son-in-law Rajiv in the communal riots but she never blames Gandhiji for the partition and its tragic consequences. Both the ladies represent Gandhian values of tolerance and forgiveness.

All the major partition novelists have discussed Gandhian ideology of non violence, swadeshi, truth, religion, self reliance, from different perspective. Manohar Malgonkar has different opinion about Gandhiji's 'non violence as a creed for life'. When any man judge something two things play very important role – one is individuality and the other is the social circumstances. Malgonkar was in the army where soldiers are taught to react and answer a blow for a blow. Another important thing, he had seen partition from an armyman's point of view, as compared to Khushwant Singh and Nahal, who experienced the violence and insanity from close quarters. They belonged to the community and to that part of the nation which was in tumultuous situation during partition. Malgonkar seems to have overlooked the fact that Gandhiji's faith in non-violence was to encourage the inactive people to show courage when one knows that he is going to be beaten up, but is not going to strike back even when one is able to do so. Gandhiji said that we can follow the path of non-violence only when our heart is purified with all the evils. When we have any malice for our neighbor, we cannot be tolerant and forgiving. For Gandhiji, the ends and means were strongly related and could not be divided.

Khuswant Singh and Chaman Nahal have described the Gandhian ideology of religion. In *Train to Pakistan* Iman Baksh and Bhai Meet Singh and in *Azadi* Lala Kanshi Ram and Chaudhary Barkat Ali propagate Gandhian principle of religion in man's life. Nahal has examined deeply the role of religion in man's life during time of crisis through characters like Niranjan Singh, Gangu Mull, Lala Kanshi Ram, Abdul Ghani and Barkat Ali. In the novel *Azadi* novelist has provided solution to victims of partition while the other two novelists have only discussed the problems. Nahal has effectively conveyed that forgiveness and compassion are the only Gandhian way to restore man's sanity and control the situation. All the three novelists however agree that Gandhiji was a great soul who sacrificed his life for his principles of love and universal brotherhood. Nahal shows that he was not an inactive preacher but a realistic philosopher who paved the way for freedom of individual and nation.

The overall reading and critical analysis of the novels in question lead me to conclude that the authors have perceived Gandhi from their individual perception, and have woven incidents from contemporary milieu, which has conferred it a universal significance. No ideal or ideology in its own seems to be interesting and fruitful, unless it is put under practical perspective, and real life or lifelike situations. It is one of the functions of literature to make the local, contemporary and individual – global, eternal and universal. Gandhi has been rightly percolated through these novels.

**Work Cited:**

- Deb, Bijoy. *The Influence of Gandhi on Indian Writing in English*, Aadi Publication, 2015.
- Iyengar, K R Srinivasa. "R.K.Narayan." *Indian Writing in English*. Sterling Publishers, 2003.
- Nahal, Chaman. *Azadi*. Houghton Mifflin Company Boston, 1975.
- Naik, M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature*. Sahitya Akademi, 2014.
- Naikar, Basavaraj. "The Trauma of Partition in Azadi," *New Ruminations in: Indian English Literature*, edited by M.F. Patel, Vol. 1, Sunrise Publishers and Distriutors, 2011.
- Sharma, Ambuj. "The Saga of Gandhi: Chaman Nahal's The Gandhi Quartet." *Gandhian Strain in the Indian English Novel*. Sarup and Sons, 2004.