Chapter III
Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* (1975) effectively rends the veil of the honour of Partition in the wake of Independence, a colossal indictment of the power hungry politicians who put their own vested interests at the forefront – leaving the masses on both sides of the divide to suffer the ghastly atrocities in millions: mass murder, mass rape and mass humiliation, solely on the basis of religion. The author nowhere tones down the honour and carnage, leaving a distinct, disturbing impress on the reader of the even-till-now unparalleled man-made tragedy in the annals of the subcontinent. The communal carnage, which engulfed the subcontinent, is so vividly and realistically rendered that the reader is left benumbed at the magnitude and scope of the tragedy, it being a chronicle of human bestiality or, rather, man’s inhumanity to man – which staggers the imagination and jolts us out of our complacency. With respect to the communal aspect, which assumed, holocaust proportions, the subcontinent’s Partition is the most significant historically – a theme explored, therefore, by numerous Indo-Anglian novelists. This is borne out by R.K. Dhawan thus:

...the most important historical event of our age, as evident from the writings of Indo-English novelists, was the partition of the sub-continent. The English in 1947 left the country bag and baggage, after dividing it into two parts. The religious and political differences between Hindus and Muslims, which climaxed with this event led to widespread disturbances, causing destruction of human life on a scale unprecedented in the recent history of the sub-continent.¹

So, the novel’s chief focus, for the most and vital part, is on the communal hatred and resultant violence which suddenly found an outlet in blood and gore of
unparalleled proportions – despite the overall communal amity and brotherhood that largely prevailed for centuries, at least during British rule (as Lala Kanshi Ram, the central character for the most part, at least believes).

_Azadi_ is a straight narrative, observing strict chronological order, largely speaking, though there is one important and detailed flashback of Arun and Madhu (the young son and elder daughter of Lala Kanshi Ram respectively). The author uses the omniscient mode, the prime focus is on the following, a loosely, with respect to author of importance: Lala Kanshi Ram and family (wife Prabha Rani, son Arun); Arun’s first love Nur and her brother Munir; Bibi Amar Vati (their landlady) and her family (husband Gangu Mull and son Suraj Prakash and his wife Sunanda and children); Isher Kaur and her husband Niranjan Singh; and Chandni, charwoman Padmini’s daughter. Other major pivotal characters are devout and tolerant Muslim Chaudhri Barkat Ali (Nur and Munir’s father) and initially tolerant but later communalised Abdul Ghani.

_Azadi’s_ focus stems from Lala Kanshi Ram; grain merchant of Sialkot, West Punjab (now in Pakistan), and his family plus other loved ones. The novel is in the omniscient mode, its unwinding is somewhat, in terms of consciousness of character, localized. However, this cannot be said to be the case in the absolute sense as a fairly vast gallery of characters play themselves out in the plot, the pace, at least insofar as impacting on the reader’s consciousness, being fast and often lucidly delicious. _Azadi_, possibly one of the finest Indo-Anglian novels exploring insightfully the gory theme of partition, is a valuable social document chronicling the horrendous period from 3rd June 1947 to 30th January 1948.
Within this ambience Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* (1975), an excellent condemnatory Indo-Anglian novel on the theme of Partition effectively renders the ominous state of suspended animation prevalent before Partition – a valuable social document of the Indian history when India attained freedom in 1947 after “aeons” of slavery. Nahal’s work is an outstanding rendering of the subcontinental trauma – with detailed epic sweep of panoramic proportions, particularly emphasised in its Punjabi communal amity and its sundering. In great detail the saga unfolds, beginning with the brotherly love between Hindus and Sikhs on one side and Muslims on the other due to the shared culture. Historically speaking, the three communities were grounded in the same language and culture, were tolerant of each other’s faith, and, not infrequently, even intermarried (as between Hindus and Sikhs for most part). In addition, the three communities even attended, for the most part across the board the same educational institutions, joined religiously mixed government organizations (the police, the army, the higher and lower echelons of administration, etc.). But the inexorable tide of tumult and terror of horrendous scope and magnitude was just waiting in the camouflaged political vicissitudes to unleash its violent vortex – most inhumane in dimension – the unthinkable partition in 1947, sundering all bonds established and nurtured down the ages. It is precisely this human aspect (the mass trauma on both sides of the divide) of the multitudinous tragedy that Nahal lays bare, shocking the reader and jolting him out of his complacency – the direct fallout of colonial and postcolonial sensibility in all its insensitivity. So, the novel’s action unwinds round the tempest – tossed masses of humanity forced to abandon their very roots and livelihood, and migrate for sheer survival. The
communal maelstrom with all its concomitant echoes of misery and deprivation, along with the hope that springs eternally in the human breast even in the face of extreme, mindless blood and gore (in the name of religion), are brought to the fore with deft scathing realism in the detailed etching of the lives of seven families. The intensity-drenched sweep of the theme of Partition with a human-painted face – despite the gruesomeness abounding and pervasive inhumanity – is initiated right at the outset (though the lull is in place) and sustained till the end. The pathos and poignancy of violence-riddled Partition reverberates throughout the relevant part of the action.

Now that the basic introductory has been laid, and proper grounding established, a brief summary of Azadi would be in order for readerly facilitation before the exegesis proper. However, before beginning, it is necessary to qualify that though the main theme is Partition and its horrors, the last section of the work in particular also contains some elements of the apathetic postcolonial psyche.

Azadi is divided into three parts: “The Lull”, “The Storm”, and “The Aftermath”, signifying the beginning, middle and end of Partition experience. “The Lull” shows the communal brotherhood among the three principal communities – Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims – in the city of Sialkot, West Punjab (now in Pakistan). Lala Kanshi Ram, a fairly well-to-do grain merchant, believes in British justice, integrity and fair play. But, as shown at other times, theoretically, at least, he is anti-British – two contrary opposing states. He, somewhat apprehensively, awaits Viceroy Lord Mountbatten’s evening radio broadcast on whether or not India will be partitioned. However, it is still early in the day and Nahal thus goes on to describe the Lala’s routine, notions, and his
physical-emotional-psychological bond with wife Prabha Rani. A detailed rendering of neighbours’ strong bonds of brotherhood – male and female – follows, the focus largely now on females Prabha Rani, landlady Bibi Amar Vati and Isher Kaur. They all intensely hope the country remains united, putting absolute faith in Gandhi and the Congress to this end. Arun, the Lala’s only son, and the poor Muslim hookah manufacturer, Abdul Ghani, are shown as affectionate to one another – there is yet little obvious shadow of the communal divide.

All three communities use the same water tap, illustrating the lack of segregation and emphasising the amity. The question of religion is confined to the purely personal aspect of life, not spilling over into public. But the Muslim League plants the saplings of hatred and divisiveness soon enough and encourages suspicion and distrust on the part of Muslims towards Hindus – Abdul Ghani eventually succumbs to this vitriolic diatribe, though previously a great friend of Lala Kanshi Ram.

The rambling scene of memories ends with Kanshi Ram’s return home to listen to the broadcast with family and other tenants like them in Bibi Amar Vati’s house. Partition is declared, all condemning it practically in unison as betrayal by the Congress and British – but the stark facts still have not hit them, they still clinging to the hope of continuing to live in Sialkot. But rabidly communal Muslims – the majority in Muslim dominated Sialkot – celebrate Partition and Pakistan with processions and bursting of crackers, compelling Hindus and Sikhs to contemplate defensive measures against fanatic, frenzied mobs – the schism is largely complete: psychological, emotional, spiritual, even adversely affecting
most of the mixed administration. Inspector Inayat-Ullah Khan openly supports
the fanatical processionists in giving them permission to ram through the gate of
the Hindu Mohalla and celebrate. Violence is sure to erupt but Deputy
Commissioner Pran Nath Chaddha and Superintendent of Police Asghar Ahmad
Siddiqui reach in the nick of time and with the force of true authority embedded
in character, prevent violence, but the Muslim mob does celebrate by taking a
largely peaceful procession through the mohalla. “The Lull” is assailed on the
eges – Abdul Ghani, a social inferior, taunts Lala Kanshi Ram the very next day.

The influx of refugee Muslims with stories of mass Hindu atrocities on the
Indian side results in a feverish build-up of communal tension. Sporadic murder
and arson against non-Muslims erupt into massive, organised violence – discord
and bloodshed are now firmly rooted, Hindus and Sikhs being systematically
targeted and killed in homes, trains and in the open. The communalists become
completely unrestrained when the Deputy Commissioner’s Muslim bodyguard
murders him – the last pillar of protection – and a tide of violence is unleashed
with the resultant total administrative collapse. Some Hindu families shift to a
refugee camp but soon must begin the long foot march to India.

Lala Kanshi Ram clings to his home but is soon advised by friend Barkat
Ali to depart for India (first to the camp), as that very Mohalla is the communal
target that very night – effecting agony and a sense of uprooting. At the camp
sorrowful news reaches of Lala Kanshi Ram’s daughter Madhu and husband
Rajiv’s murders by communalists. Ghani, it turns out, burnt the bodies with
vicious glee, sending them to dozakh (hell).
The novel shifts to Arun’s flashback of sister Madhu and how she guided him onto the steps of adulthood – emphasising the bond they shared. By this time the refugee camp is guarded by Indian troops. Nur is just a sweet memory, soon replaced by Arun’s second love Chandni – of low caste. But as the bond begins to reach the point of fruition, she is abducted by Muslim communalists, much to Arun’s sorrow, he being quite manly now, progressively gaining greater and greater strength.

Lala Kanshi Ram broken by Madhu’s death, now earnestly wants to leave Pakistan. Arun’s former classmate, Captain Rahmat-Ullah Khan, comes into the picture as the new camp Commandant, soon lewdly eyeing Sunanda (Bibi Amar Vati’s daughter-in-law), Suraj Prakash’s wife, trying to lure Arun – albeit unsuccessfully – to escort him and his parents across the border if she is delivered to him (Rahmat-Ullah Khan). Arun declines and Sunanda, aware of the Captain’s lecherous looks, tells Arun she will kill him. Arun hopes to get the better of the Commandant, incensed as he is.

Another pivotal episode unfolds in the camp. Niranjan Singh, pregnant Isher Kaur’s husband, refuses to cut off his hair and shave his beard so that the refugees can safely reach India. But he firmly, constantly refuses, viewing hair as a part of the Sikh tradition, as emblem of valour. Unable to do so after repeated insistence, he immolates himself.

Traumatised by the torrential tornado of events, the foot convoy (the main characters being Lala Kanshi Ram, Prabha Rani, Arun, charwoman Padmini, Bibi Amar Vati, son Suraj Prakash and wife Sunanda, Sardar Teja Singh and daughter Isher) finally sorrowfully leaves Sialkot. The dream has been shattered – the
British and their postcolonial successors have cut the nation in two. The route is strewn with corpses and dismembered human limbs and skeletons and human belongings.

As the action progresses, the convoy is repeatedly ambushed – illustrating tacit and often open administrative and political support. At one climactic point, Sunanda is raped by Rahmat-Ullah Khan but Arun kills him. She swears him to secrecy. The kidnapped Hindu women are made to march naked by communal forces. Some received the worst fate: incessant rape and tearing open wombs of the pregnant – the pinnacle of insensitive savagery. A Muslim hakim is horrified at this scene but Arun cannot deal with the contrary states of his goodness and the barbarousness of the mob. Once the convoy reaches the village of Jassar, the Muslim residents prove different, give them water and say *Khuda Hafiz* – an island of human concern amidst the sea of uncivilised, brutal inhumanity.

Once across the border, similar Hindu atrocities are evident, the administration colluding like their Pakistan counterparts. Shelter is a problem for the extended family. Lala Kanshi Ram – renounces hatred of the Muslims, hatred in totality, condemning both Indians and Pakistanis, holding both equally responsible.

"The Aftermath" draws the true dimensions of what followed Partition as portrayed in Lala Kanshi Ram’s despair, breakdown, loss of stature and dignity, and later, slow upward movement with his extended adopted family as a small-time grocer. The uprooting and resultant alienation – with the inability to now even communicate with Arun and Prabha Rani – show and emphasise the
trauma: physical, psychological and spiritual. There is a vacuum in his life but he and the other members of the extended family must existentially carry on.

In *Azadi* love and hatred in both individual and general aspects are the opposite ends of the spectrum. Connected directly to this is Partition – the sundering of the nation (all for vested political ends in general and, to a certain extent, their rapacious postcolonial aspect) – and its immediate, poignant link to roots in all their variant and variegated aspects: the strength and importance of roots, their violent physico-psycho-spiritual uprooting due to Partition (initially inducing a state of psychological denial), and the attempt (successful or not) to retransplant them. All three are enmeshed within and bound up with identity.

Within the context of the novel, the last is the most important as this is the point of culmination.

Now let us briefly examine roots within the textual and critical framework.

Lala Kanshi Ram has firm, strong roots in Sialkot, he viewing it as his home in all its psycho-spiritual quintessence, “the finest city in the world”, from which he initially cannot contemplate or even bear leaving, no matter what, despite how gorily the reality has changed due to the rabid communal human beast unleashed – all because of the ill-conceived and even worse executed state of Partition. When the facts finally rear their head and confront him – he prior to this acting like a disturbed ostrich with its head in the sand (denial and clinging in psychological terms) – he is like a river-fish suddenly thrown into the salty ocean with all its novel perils to the point of delirium. This disorientation can be seen within the vista of loss of roots – roots, as already clear, having much more than a mere physical dimension and orbit, connected as they are to work, family, friends
as well as enemies, and the overall social and societal fabric, along with the particular individual’s place therein. It is essential here to point out and re-emphasise that roots in their variant and variegated aspects are connected to Partition in all its varied forms and, therefore, the point assumes significant relevance – the illustration of which is forthcoming. In Lala Kanshi Ram’s case Erich Fromm’s words – as a telling comment on his psycho-spiritual crisis during the highly traumatized period of migration and subsequent attempted retransplantation – are of vital import:

> If man loses his natural roots where is he and who is he? He would stand alone without a home; without roots; he could not bear the isolation and helplessness of his position. He would become insane. He can dispense with the natural roots only in so far as he finds human roots and only after he has found them can he feel at home in this world.\(^3\)

So, to carry the point further, Fromm carries the essence of roots as lying within rootedness, the anchor which was violently rocked, effecting a violent upheaval in the lives of millions during the traumatic Partition and all its torrential vicissitudes, it too being one, the main, the progenitor. This has relevance and linkage to Azadi’s postcolonialism as an indictment of the powers that be, they sanctioning Partition (still ensconced within their ivory tower roots while uprooting millions callously, mildly put). This linkage is reflected in Arun’s thoughts thus:

> He knew the conspiracy of politicians behind the whole move. Jinnah and Liaqat Ali Khan were coming into an estate; as was Nehru. Why else would they rush into azadi in this pace – an azadi which could ruin the land and destroy its unity? For, the creation
of Pakistan solved nothing. One would have to go around with tweezers through all the villages to separate the Muslims from Hindus. (p.96)

Though these are Arun’s youthful fiery thoughts, they have a more direct bearing on his father, as he feels the brunt of the Partition most in the whole family and, to a certain psycho-spiritual extent, the most even in the adopted family that attaches itself to him and he gets attached to during the exodus. Insofar as the direct impact of Partition on Lala Kanshi Ram is concerned, R.K. Dhawan’s words are of special significance.

It was however, the partition of the country that brings about an enervating change in the placid life of Lala Kanshi Ram. When he hears such terms as ‘minority community’ and ‘refugee’ for the first time he gets shocked.4

Therefore, Lala Kanshi Ram suffers from an intense sense of rejection and loss of identity – previously solidly anchored in and within roots, rootedness and its concomitant of relatedness – all due to the Partition engendered by the colonialists and their successor postcolonialists with their insidious designs.

Now, to refocus on Fromm’s concept of roots and rootedness, the latter more important as the psycho-spiritual social plant; the former merely the seed. Fromm’s concept of rootedness is necessarily anthropological embedded within culture specific ethnicity and race. This is to be seen within the orbit of Lala Kanshi Ram’s Punjabi identity in the widest terms of culture and resultant personality as well as in terms of his familial and social life, not, however, forgetting its most important fact – that of him as an individual.
Now let us examine Lala Kanshi Ram as, largely speaking, an epitome of a good human being overall, despite the Partition trauma and the ravages wrought on him, his family, his adopted family, and his community too at the hands of Muslim communalists — truly of heinous proportion in its gruesome, bloodcurdling aspect. Naturally, this is the direct and indirect fallout of the largely apathetic politico-administrative colonial and postcolonial machinery, whose leaders cannot escape responsibility. But to desist from further digression, let us keep Lala Kanshi Ram’s goodness as a human being mostly under the spotlight — at this point examining it to a little extent, chiefly from the perspective of Fromm. In this light, love and its inherent trait of caring are paramount. This is of major importance especially in today’s world with rampant wreckage of meaningful institutions (as opposed to facades), erosion of worthwhile traditional values, and general attack on man as an individual being within his own culture with all its culture-specificity. In the light of the preceding, Partition was exactly such an event. Time honoured cultural values were perverted and inverted to satisfy the basest instincts in man, the chief catalyst being organised religion with all its virulence and subsequent elevation in some nation-states to the status of a demigod. Pakistan after Independence and subsequent coups (some would say such an anti-human, inhumane condition is still ongoing) — ironically pure state — is an example in point. But to return to Fromm. Fromm views love and relatedness as two inseparable parts of the same sphere. He views relatedness ontologically thus:

If I love, I care — that is I am actively concerned with other person’s growth and happiness; I am not a spectator. I am responsible, that is, I respond to his needs, to those he can express
and more so to those he cannot or does not express. I respect him, that (according to the original meaning of respicere), I look at him as he is, objectively and not distorted by my wishes and fears.\(^5\)

In the case of such as Lala Kanshi Ram such loving is an inescapable conclusion, though, to get back to hatred, it does surface during the degradation he and his loved ones and his community are subjected to at the hands of communalists. However, to illustrate Lala Kanshi Ram’s deep sense of caring first, let us take a few illustrations from the text. To begin with, Lala Kanshi Ram is deeply in love with his wife Prabha Rani despite her illiteracy and the long years – she never losing the luster of attraction in his eyes. Though he acts knowledgeable and informs her of the national and international news while on an intellectual pedestal, their banter, before Partition has been announced, amply reveals his affection as well as hers. This is evident in the following description by Nahal:

Pontifically he lurched forward and took hold of the opportunity (with both hands, as it were) of revealing the mysteries of the universe to this peasant woman, whom he had married when she was only thirteen and who could not tell an ‘alif’ from a ‘bai’ – who till this day thought they lived on a flat earth and not a round one. He had since taught her many things, including how to sign her name, though she still could not read and write. He would teach her more, he said to himself complacently. (p.16)

Another instance of this is a description of their sexual, emotional life: “He was hale and hearty and only last night had emptied his water into Prabha Rani” (p.25). But this is before the horrendous announcement. However, even during the lengthy, arduous, horrific period of suffering due to Partition and resultant riots and marauding on the long trek to India, he still remains, for the most part, a
genuinely caring being in essence, the upsurge of hatred for the Muslims notwithstanding. Of course this becomes somewhat and relatively localised to his loved ones, other members of the foot convoy, and his own community. Nevertheless, hatred for Muslims does not well up in, lodge within and consume his whole being – he still retains the discriminative faculty and sensibility.

Now to touch upon and examine Azadi's postcolonial and partitional aspect, the latter predominating but the former not entirely absent. Lala Kanshi Ram, the chief protagonist for the most part – though Arun does assume this role later – can be said to oscillate and flit between the two poles of Gandhian and Congress nationalism on the one hand and admiration of the British on the other. At times he is firmly anti-British, at others somewhat pro-British, and more often than not, intensely nationalist – indeed ironic, reflecting his political confusion, at least at the theoretical level. An instance of antipathy goes thus:

He hated [the British] them for what they had done to his country and wanted azadi. Throughout the Second World War, he had prayed they be defeated by the Germans. The news of German victories, at front after front, had pleased him beyond measure, and when eventually they were held and contained by the British, Lala Kanshi Ram did not give up. (p.18)

He goes on to think of them as the monkey or "bunder race" (p.18). Yet, in the very next breath his admiration is deeprooted, enjoying as he does "the safety of the British Raj", believing they "had brought some peace to this torn land" (p.18) within the context of the nation's history of disunited India with its Sikhs, Marathas and Muslims. In his mind he is somewhat confused as to who had made the Indian people into a nation – the British or Gandhi. But he affirms that in
addition to bringing peace, the British “had brought justice” (p.18). Though he mocks inwardly their religion and its conversional aspect, he still feels “that in impartiality they were miles ahead of any Indian he knew of” (p.19). The last in particular is a telling illustration of Lala Kanshi Ram’s colonised psyche, the wavering mindset notwithstanding. But largely he is of the colonial bent, as he believes strictly in the espoused British sense of justice, fair play and integrity – a notion suddenly shattered with the announcement of Partition.

Lala Kanshi Ram’s nationalism is not unreal, despite his colonised bent of mind. As such, his belief in Gandhi is genuinely founded and true in essence. His unwavering faith in the unique political icon of the era who strode large even on the world stage assumes great importance in the narrower Indian as well as wider historical context textually: “For the last thirty years, since that wizard Gandhi came on the scene, it [the Congress] had taken the stand that India was a single nation, not two. And Gandhi was not only a politician, he was a saint”(p.48). Gandhi as a towering spiritual and political colossus in the history of India cannot be denied. The importance of Gandhi, though textually marginal, as he only makes a brief appearance, is still major as Nahal himself comments in an article:

...the figure of Gandhi, who in himself and the movement he lead, signified the power the meek could muster. Right till 1947, when the British finally left, our struggle against the British was no war of revolution. It was a war no doubt, but Gandhi posed it as a ‘moral’ war. The British should quit since their occupation and exploitation of India was immoral. No human being had a right to degrade another human being. And the British had done precisely that for nearly 200 years.6
So, it is precisely the morality of the Gandhi-led freedom struggle with its firm entrenchment in employment of just moral means for just moral ends that draws Lala Kanshi Ram and others connected to him to believe in the spiritual-political leader.

The humanistic and humane aspect of the era (despite the widespread communal carnage) stands firm in the unshakeable, unbreakable bond of brotherhood that Lala Kanshi Ram and Barkat Ali and their respective families share. Barkat Ali it is who informs Lala Kanshi Ram and family and his friendly neighbours of the impending communal attack on the mohalla, an instance of ultimate camaraderie and love at the dire risk of his own and his family’s life. To an incredulous Lala Kanshi Ram at the turn of events, he secretly states, "... what I have come to tell you, brother Kanshi Ram [... is that] this street is going to be looted and burned tonight. You must leave at once" (p.138). The reaction is one of gaping, horror, laying the tone and direction of the foreboding atmosphere in all its perverse inhumanity, soon to be manifested in unimaginably abominable form – a vile excrescence. Recovering, Lala Kanshi Ram’s query as to what the Congress Muslims are doing in response is met with:

“Either the Congress Muslims were a fraud to begin with, or they have changed sides. I’m afraid there is no organized body of Muslims denouncing what is happening in the city.” (p.140)

Almost immediately, Barkat Ali continues:

“But it is of no avail: the poison has seeped in. Add to that is the fact that every day 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’s make no mistake about it. It is not the collapse of
Congress Muslims in Pakistan, apparently it is the collapse of Congress 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” (p.140).

So, it is crystal clear that Nahal equally blames both sides of the divide on both borders and lets neither off the hook – stark objectivity, stark realism. The British, leaving an incipient gory mess – incapable of being swept under the carpet – for the subcontinent’s natives to clean up, are also not spared the author’s acidic ink of forgoing responsibility, for which Lala Kanshi Ram blames them in no uncertain terms – disillusionment with them finally scorching his being of colonised bent, colonial/postcolonial viewpoint, the betrayal of the Congress too like a sledge hammer which shatters to rubble instantly the false motives of all leaders’ espoused idealism. With respect to the effect of communal flare-up on the Hindus (and Sikhs too), K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri comment:

There was acute fear and confusion among the Hindus in Sialkot. They found no help from police, and to their dismay, the military men disappeared from the scene. The Hindu shops were looted. The Hindu Deputy Commissioner who had handled the situation with a firm hand, was murdered. The Muslim constable, his bodyguard, shot him dead.7

This viewpoint is rather matter-of-fact in its obviousness. But V.P. Sharma contends quite rightly on the unleashing of the monster (dehumanised communalism) thus:

The most debilitating effect of communalism is dehumanization. Communalism brings to the fore the virtually inconsequential or surface differences between the people of two or more communities to the total exclusion of their common humanity
which can foster understanding, sympathy, compassion, and fellow-feeling. It also underplays social and economic differences and foregrounds racial, cultural and religious similarities. In both aspects, it promotes emotionalism and irrationality.\(^8\)

This applies largely throughout to the novel’s context and content and to its theme and plot as well — stamped and unreeling with great realism of a very high order, degree and an extremely exact sense of detail. Both of the preceding features touched upon speak volumes on the colonisers and colonised and the postcolonial successors and their subjects in their exploitative, self-serving grotesqueness. Both features are a harsh yet realistic indictment of politically expedient colonialism/postcolonialism in its most virulently horrendous form of mega-proportions. Specifically, with respect to the British role as pointed in *Azadi*, Brahma Dutt Sharma and Susheel Kumar Sharma aver:

“... Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* [says] that the British let the minorities down when they resolved to partition the country on communal grounds as partitioning a country on this ground implies withdrawing the assurance of security given to the minority and leaving the members of the minority community at the mercy of the majority community.”\(^9\)

This view is absolutely genuine in the present researcher’s eyes and should be seen as weighty, the critics being rather forthright and direct. Within the historical context of Partition’s haste and resultant communal bloodbath, it is highly difficult to dispute the above observation. Only an absolute neo-coloniser and/or absolute racist can have the temerity to do so.

To return to and concentrate specifically on the mentality of the colonised, in the initial part of *Azadi* Lala Kanshi Ram has this in great abundance, his
nationalism notwithstanding. The two opposing inner forces reveal an inward schism, quite marked. Lala Kanshi Ram’s reaction to the British Victory Parade of 1945, celebrating the Allied World War II triumph over the Axis power, is ambivalent, though he conceals it with the double entendre of Punjabi abuses. To quote the text:

So the British had won once again; so the Germans had in the end lost and the Japanese too. ‘Eh, behan chode!’ said Lala Kanshi Ram slowly, not making it clear whether the abuse was meant for the British or the Germans. That was a subtlety of the Punjabi language he enjoyed immensely. Abuse could mean a thousand different things, depending on the way you said it. (p.21)

Such ambiguity of meaning and purport amply lays bare the schism between nationalism and a colonial/postcolonial mentality as a subject. Still, across the board there was, nevertheless, a mass upsurge, largely speaking, in the mass consciousness to see (undivided) India liberated. Regarding the widespread nationalism as activated in the longing for freedom in its widest context, K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri, while dissecting Azadi, cogently argue,

The longing for the defeat of British forces revealed the Indian curiosity to embrace freedom – their impatience to see the fall of usurpers of freedom. This was the feeling of almost every patriot during the pre-Independence, pre-Partition days.¹⁰

Therefore, texturally referenced within the perspective of the actual historical background, it is a massive mass desire.

Now to spotlight another instance of communal amity and brotherhood wherein Gandhi is of importance. During an address in (Ramtalai), Sialkot which Lala Kanshi Ram and Barkat Ali attend, Gandhi underlines Hindu-Muslim
brotherhood, arguing for all people’s oneness and unity and the urgent need “to put up a united front against the British, the common enemy” (p.106), boycotting foreign-manufactured articles which deprive natives of livelihood. He has already prefaced the address with, “Let each Muslim accept one Hindu as his ‘brother’, and the Hindu that Muslim as his ‘brother’” (p.106). When the address ends, Barkat Ali seriously says, “You’re my brother from today” (p.107). Lala Kanshi Ram chuckles as he “had always regarded Chaudhri Barkat Ali as a brother, he did not need a Gandhi to make him aware of that. Yet moved by the intensity of the moment, he took Chaudhri Barkat Ali’s extended hand and shook it actively” (p.107). The strength of the vow on Barkat Ali’s part is most evident after the murder of Madhu and Rajiv when Ghani declares with fanatical passion to Arun that he has cremated them, saying “I put her and her husband into the fire with my own hands, and they’re now on their way to dozakh, to hell – where I hope they rot for ever!” (p.185). Barkat Ali’s frenzied reaction is to grip and shake the puny violator by the neck with extreme violence, erupting, “you shaitan – you shaitan – you blot on the name of Islam!” (p.185). The fact that his reaction is completely his anti-Gandhian creed shows his belief in genuine love and loyalty for friends – Lala Kanshi Ram, Arun and their family – and reflects that a friend in need or pain is a friend indeed. So, friendship and linked loyalty is the base, crux and basis of existence in the Punjabi code etched by Nahal.

One strikingly important example of the British rulers’ colonial psyche with its callous behaviour is the revoltingly sterile killing/shooting of stray dogs on every New Year Day during the parade. This is a parade which Lala Kanshi Ram enjoys – the spectacle and pageantry being magnificent. In fact, even the
shooting to death of the poor animals is a spectacle in itself, a symbol – no matter how apathetic as to its effect on most natives – of supreme British authority.

Unlike the annual New Year’s Day parade where Lala Kanshi Ram can relax, he cannot do so during Arya Samaj meetings, tense and worried as he is of the possibility of political interference. The clinical manner in which stray dogs are shot is highly illustrative of colonial apathy in all its cruelty. Nahal links this to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 when the British shot hundreds of innocent people, “out of hand with machine guns at Jallianwala Bagh. But times had changed for that kind of revenge, so now they only went after the dogs” (p.28). The clinical description of the execution goes thus:

“The sergeants held the cycles with one hand, leaving the other free to carry the gun. They appeared to be cool, they even whistled an old British tune, but the crowd knew the storm brewing inside their minds”(p.28)

This is aptly telling of the mindset. The actual executions are described in a cool, callous manner.

...[as] this bastard had ruined the entire decorum of the parade and deserved instant death. So he lifted the gun, took aim and fired, and the dog went straight up into the air six feet high, eight feet high, at times ten feet high, with the impact of the bullet, and then dropped lifeless with its neck broken and curled up hopelessly on its chest. (p.30)

Lala Kanshi Ram approves of the killing because he believes that, “a spectacle like a stray dog being shot by a stray Tommy was different (p.30). The New Year Day’s killings Lala Kanshi Ram secretly enjoys, admitting this only to himself. In general, the cutting off of the dog’s tail (especially at New Year’s) brings to his
mind the remarkable precision of the Raj, even visible in such an apparently minor incident. The entire operation in its swift, sterile precision induces him to think, "No wonder they ruled the world over, no wonder, he said to himself. There indeed was no Raj like the Angrez Raj!" (p.31). Obviously, this reflects the colonised component of his colonial psyche. The fact that he adores Viceroy Mountbatten further emphasises this aspect, he viewing previous Viceroy Wavell as the cause of the tide finally turning against British domination because of the supreme official's unattractiveness and single eye. Lala Kanshi Ram's Arya Samaj connection has, at least ostensibly, rid him of such ingrained prejudices but deep down he wonders, "Why of all the persons at their command, did the big sahibs have to send him [Wavell]?" (p.31). By contrast he views Mountbatten as majestic, even his words sending "a thrill through his [Lala Kanshi Ram's] entire body." (p.32). Lala Kanshi Ram's view of Wavell stresses Indian superstition. In general, this aspect is linked to the colonised bent of mind and is also part of the inherent fatalism of the masses of Indian subjects at the time. This feature is still, to a certain extent, dominantly prevalent among the rural populace. However, this is markedly less than before, particularly since V.P. Singh's era.

The Nur-Arun relationship is of prime significance against the background of communalism and, finally, resultant partition. As to how most people's general view of this is concerned, becomes evident from the following quotation:

"Their classmates had long known of their romance, but after the announcement of Pakistan they had both become suspect. He was now a 'Hindu' boy carrying on with a 'Muslim' girl. And the Muslim boys in the college stood watching them menacingly" (p.91).
This is in marked contrast to earlier pre-Partition festival occasions like Dussehra, a Hindu festival in which even the Muslims took part and played a major role. To quote the text: “It was a Hindu festival but the effigies were made by Muslim workmen; the crackers and the fireworks too were supplied by the Muslims” (p.93).

Arun and Nur’s romance is of poignant dimension, but once partitioned Pakistan becomes an immutable reality, it is assailed. Arun’s desire to leave Pakistan is met with the response, “why can’t you keep living here?” (p.95). Arun’s answer and Nur’s counter answers go as follows: ‘They won’t let us’. ‘Who won’t? My father would be heartbroken if you left!’ ‘But the fanatics.’ ‘They don’t count’ (p.95).

Insofar as converting to Islam is concerned, Arun, not at all of formal religious bent, thinks of it as inconsequential, willing to even embrace death for Nur’s sake. However, the political significance of the tumultuous event changes everything overnight, Jinnah and Liaqat Ali Khan being the chief mechinators as is Nehru. This is amply evident in the frantic pace of internecine Azadi – victimising Nur and Arun and others like them. Therefore, even Arun is driven to irrationality asking Nur as to why he should convert. Nur’s reaction is that if he loves her, why shouldn’t he, to which Arun responds that why shouldn’t she convert to Hinduism. Nur’s tearful response reflects the circumstances of the perceivedly weaker sex:

‘Because I’m a girl and am defenseless and cannot force my will on my family and because you’re a man, more independent than me, and I expect you to defend me and make sacrifices for me, that’s why!’ (p.97)
Arun argues that personal love will cease to matter as a point of significance, adding to his difficulties; the age of his parents and the related fact that he will have to help them to resettle, promising to may be return and marry her as per her wishes, form and customs. The exchange during this incident is illuminating as to the schism wrought by political events and by consequently changed circumstances: ‘Oh, go and die somewhere. ‘You’re a Hindu, after all – a Hindu. Too timid!’ ‘It is not that, and you know it’. ‘No, I don’t know it!’ (p.97). She adds extremely angrily, ‘You are only a timid Hindu. Go put your head in your mother’s lap!’ (p.98).

So, for the first time a strong element of bitterness has now polluted the relationship of pure love. Therefore, the event of Partition has greatly affected Arun and Nur’s love even though neither of the two are at all of a communal bent or mindset. K.K. Sharma and B. K. Johri incisively and insightfully comment on the changed situation thus:

The partition caused a crisis in the lives of the two lovers – Arun and Nurul Nisar, the daughter of Chaudhri Barkat Ali. Nur with her unreasoning youth and love, felt that Pakistan should not stand between the lovers. But Arun’s approach to the whole situation was realistic one; he knew the fanatics and felt that Hindus would be forced to leave Pakistan.

So even man-woman love becomes a casualty in the charged atmosphere. The relationship eventually becomes just a wispy poignant memory for each of the two lovers – possibly a sustaining memory for Nur, especially. Arun, however, still emerges stronger, though marked, because of his pragmatism as also because of being a male in the then male dominated society. This should not be viewed as
a chauvinistic comment but taken with the formalistic context of *Azadi* as well as the actual social context of the period under focus.

The bond between Arun and Munir (Nur’s brother) also changes, not to the point of tension. During the Nur-Arun encounter just previously mentioned Munir is, for the first time a secret onlooker, apprising Arun after Nur’s departure of the danger of meeting Nur openly any longer, adding, ‘you know what the temper of the college these days is – the Muslim boys will lynch you if they see you with her’ (p.98).

Thus one can see that the specter of communal violence hangs and lurks heavily in the atmosphere – despite the two friends’ life long bond of affection, Arun having taught Munir the steps of childhood. So the presence of the communal monster is now an indisputable fact. The two friends’ final parting is of prime importance, it being poignant.

When the announcement of Partition does come finally, Arun’s reaction is one of anger:

“Arun had understood it all only too well, and in a shaken voice he said, ‘Partition! and made a gesture with his hands of chopping a thing in two. ‘Partition!, many voices shouted out aloud and the mouths remained open. ‘Yes, partition!’ said Arun” (p.63).

However, its effect on the leaders of India, especially Nehru, is in contrast to his former personality. To quote the text:

“Nehru spoke with much feeling, and with a sense of exhaustion rather than triumph. He had been acting as Prime Minister of the interim government since September 1946, and his voice had boomed on the air many times in the last nine months” (pp. 63-64).
Therefore, one can see that ominousness has finally taken on a palpable and distinct form and Nehru’s exhaustion is well reflective of the tragedy of Partition and the horror that is sure to ensue in its wake – the mass exodus on both sides of the divide certain to be horrendously violent, both groups of migrants (Hindu and Sikhs on one side and Muslims on other side) to be unavoidably targeted by fanatics. So the novelist quite effectively sets the tone of Partition with a very human face – a particularly true aspect of human suffering in all its socio-economic and humanistic implications for millions uprooted from the soil of their birth – uprooted even psychically and spiritually by the cataclysmic trauma.

Though *Azadi* begins with a somewhat localised perspective as to locale, it assumes definitely much more magnitudinous proportions once the arduous terror filled foot march to India begins (with all the brutal violence en-route). C. N. Srinath has captured *Azadi*, in a nutshell from beginning to end, especially with Lala Kanshi Ram as the focus but also millions like him, as follows:

“*Azadi* ... opens gracefully with an unfolding of Lala Kanshi Ram’s small world, his beliefs, superstitions, mature and poised relationship with his wife, children and neighbours around. It is the story of an individual, who is no doubt the representative of millions of men and women, whose, settled life is dislocated now into a totally humiliating state – of a refugee from Pakistan begging for a dwelling in his own country.”¹²

To refocus on Lala Kanshi Ram’s roots and rootedness as a Punjabi, the initial part of the text is rather relevant, although that this portion is an example of rootedness before Partition has been announced. This is because it has direct
bearing not only on his character but also millions of others like him. To quote the text:

So when the census was taken by the government every tenth year, Lala Kanshi Ram dutifully entered against the column for mother tongue, the word ‘Hindi’. But he neither spoke Hindi nor ever wrote it on paper. When he opened his mouth he spoke Punjabi, the rich and virile language of the province to which he belonged. 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 the Muslims? (pp. 13-14)

This speaks volumes of the till then uncharged communal atmosphere, it being nowhere evident on a mass scale. More specifically, it is pivotal as to the Punjabi identity in and with all its cultural connotations. Even the use of Urdu in its written capacity, especially as he views it as not exclusive to Muslims, shows that both languages – Punjabi and Urdu - fall into the domain of the Punjabi culture before Partition. Even till date Urdu words still abound in Punjabi – unable to be purged from it at the living level by both purists and language fanatics.

Communal violence has finally erupted across the length and breadth of the subcontinent. But Sialkot is still an island of calm, chiefly due to the dynamic duo of Deputy Commissioner Pran Nath Chaddha and Superintendent of Police Asghar Ahmad Siddiqui. Their uprightness and force of authority ensure that violence does not erupt on a unmanageably large scale. The manner in which they prevent violence in Lala Kanshi Ram’s Hindu mohalla despite their forces being badly outnumbered by the Muslim mob – though Inspector Inayat-Ullah Khan has virtually ensured Muslim communal rage by siding with the potential rioters – shows that their authority is still greatly feared. Chaddha, as the chief
executive government authority in Sialkot plays naturally a larger role than Siddiqui. He is the visible face of power with his deputy, his jeep constantly moving about as and when necessary, the symbol of authority, which necessarily sees that the situation does not reach crisis proportions. But rioting does finally begin in

The first riot took place in Sialkot on the twenty-fourth of June. Many cities of the Punjab had been aflame for months; there were large scale killings and lootings in Lahore, Gujrat, Gujranwala, Amritsar, Ambala, Jullundur, Rawalpindi, Multan, Ludhiana and Sargodha. Sialkot remained quiet all this while, largely because of the vigilant eye of the Deputy Commissioner. (p.125)

Thus we can see that Pran Nath Chaddha in his integrity cannot be compromised to ignore the crisis when it finally does break out and is amply aided by Siddiqui, his right hand.

Yet the question of different religions still does have a distinct effect on the two, though neither of them is communal in any form or degree. This is clearly evident in their first exchange against the background of the two nations, two major communities. It is as follows: ‘You will perhaps opt to serve in Pakistan?’ asked Pran Nath Chaddha, the Deputy Commissioner. ‘Will I have a choice?’ replied Asghar Ahmad Siddiqui, the Superintendent of Police (p.86). So, even the uncommunal elements among the authorities cannot escape the reality of their respective religions and how they would thus be consequently categorized and compartmentalized socially and especially religiously – all due to the communal divide, even though they themselves do not find it of importance with respect to their own respective jobs and related roles.
It is only a matter of time before large scale violence erupts in Sialkot—the catalyst being Muslim refugees in mass numbers from East Punjab with stories of how they had been attacked and driven out of their homes by the Hindus and the Sikhs ... And that night occurred the first massive violence in Sialkot, and Mohalla Dharowal was looted and burned down. Around eleven in the night the noise from that part of the city became overpowering. And the sky was lit up with a number of fires, all in the same mohalla. (p.128)

This lights a communal wildfire that cannot be prevented so the words “refugee camp” finally find themselves etched in the average human consciousness. Curfew is finally violated by rioters, but largely controlled due to Chaddha. However, the scale of violence at this stage is too great to be effectively controlled on a manageable scale as even the authorities do not have the means and the manpower. Nevertheless, the Deputy Commissioner still does whatever he can. Arun finally explains to his father that “refugee camp” means a camp to shelter people. But Lala Kanshi Ram is still too overwrought to relax and unrealistically unwilling to leave his roots and home despite entreaties. His attitude is illustrated in the exchange with Arun:

‘Refugee, refugee, indeed!’ he shouted, when he had understood the word. ‘I was born around here, this is my home – how can I be a refugee in my home?’ Father, we’ll have to leave – Arun said. Before he could finish his sentence, Lala Kanshi Ram cut him off. ‘Why will we have to? Why? ‘Well, the government seems unable to protect us and we’ll have to go to save our lives.’ (p.130)
The dialogue reflects the overall anguish and agony of loss of home, possessions, and overall attack on the identity of those uprooted. Lala Kanshi Ram, however, still clings to the view with a strong hope that the crisis just begun will blow over, hoping with the strength of desperation that he will not need to either permanently leave nor begin a new life in an alien city. But Arun’s realism of perception shows the much greater adaptability of youth. Insofar as roots and their loss is concerned, Azadi is an extremely skillful rendering of the charged tumultuous atmosphere with all the pains of separation portrayed with skillful poignancy with an adept interweaving of fact and fiction. Nahal’s realism is particularly striking with respect to Partition’s effect on Lala Kanshi Ram, Arun, Nur, Sunanda and Chandni.

There is a strong sense of community among Lala Kanshi Ram and his family and the six other families connected. Their solidarity comes strikingly to fore once the crisis of uprooting has begun, first in the shift to the refugee camp and later as part of the ten mile long, twenty thousand odd refugee foot convoy to India. This strong bond, largely speaking, endures throughout, despite the blood and gore and even Niranjan Singh’s self-immolation. Niranjan Singh’s immolation is of course initially an incident causing anguish in the entire refugee camp. But soon afterwards innumerable members of the camp pay him a tearful, yet strength-filled tribute and collect his ashes for holy immersion in the Ganga at Hardwar. The site of his suicide is made into a “Samadhi”. This sudden elevation of Niranjan Singh to the rank of a martyr is the first openly emotional response to the tragedy of partition, “the martyr” becoming and serving as a rallying point – an anchor for the terror-stricken camp inmates. After great emotional turbulence,
an extreme, though temporary, feeling of calm begins to manifest itself in inmates’ consciousness. Their awareness, already heightened by the communal divide, further intensifies. In Arun’s case gritty stoicism begin to take hold as he is now on the way to becoming a man, a man of will – in its aspect of determination and necessary linked action. However, his new love – of great delicacy and sensitivity – Chandni is shaken to the core, Niranjan Singh’s suicide being the first unnatural and gruesome death she has witnessed firsthand. Earthy Sunanda is made of much stronger mettle and stoicism and has in the capacity to bear great suffering and extreme misfortune. In fact, this is clearly visible in her response to Captain Rahmat-Ullah Khan’s vulgar sexual overtures, she conveying to Arun that she will kill the Captain if he so much as touches her. The insecurity of the minority community is aptly brought out in K. K. Sharma and B. K. Johri’s following comments:

Violence followed violence. Minority community stood very vulnerable. The communal riots worse poles apart from the preceding ones. The English could put down the earlier riots with firmness. But now the government looked unwilling to control the rising storm. The Hindus felt unprotected and forlorn in the declared land for Muslims.  

The almost complete sudden turn of the events for the worse take on either of the three forms – the sheer will to survive (sometimes after a state of numbness), or complete psychological paralysis, or inability to accept the facts and thereby physically as well as emotionally to move on in the game of dice that life is. Once the divide comes to the fore, the Hindus and the Sikhs are the first to contemplate self-defensive measures in the face of the communal monster
unleashed and stalking about, indiscriminately blood thirsty and most inhumane. So the minority community is suddenly, with undue preparation, face to face with the evil chimera, breathing down its all-consuming malevolent fire on. Thus is the schism between Hindus and Sikhs on one side and Muslims on the other side — which is, largely speaking, all-pervasive with respect to the minority community’s insecurity and vulnerability and the suddenly apparently erected barrier between them and the majority community (Muslims). R.K. Dhawan quite rightly observes:

... the Hindus and Sikhs think only of how to defend themselves against the impending attacks of frenzied and fanatical mobs of Muslims. Not unnaturally, the division of the country on a blatantly communal basis does bring about a psychological wedge, an emotional and spiritual rift among the civil, police, and military personnel of undivided India.¹⁴

However, it is necessary to realise and emphasise that the wedge had always been present in the historical context, despite Hindu-Muslim communal amity. In the first place, the wedge was latent among those of fundamentalist orientation and those easily swayed by their rhetoric. This factor was used and manipulated by the British for their policy of divide and rule in order to perpetuate their rule as long as possible in their postcolonial successors. Not only the avowedly ‘religious’ Muslim League but also the ‘secular’ Congress, but even the secular Muslims retreated to the safe, murky shadows rather than speaking up for the Hindus and Sikhs. Lala Kanshi Ram’s reaction is one of impotent sage, directed against both the Congress and Muslim League, even now unable to reconcile to Partition and its consequences. The suddenly changed political and geographical reality is like
a sledge hammer shattering the sliver-thin ice-sheet of communal amity into innumerable shards, incapable of being pieced together again. The major part of the blame was laid on the Congress due to its giving in to Partition. Jinnah’s role is also of permanent importance, historically speaking. Even at this juncture, Nahal’s *Azadi* brings the tragedy of Partition into sharp focus, emphasising its perverse and gruesome aspect. In this and a more general sense as well, Mohan Jha accurately comments:

Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* is a monumental novel, a moving saga of division of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan and the accompanying disaster that hit these two newly-declared independent countries in 1947. Apart from the necessary details and a picture of human cruelty and perversity that we get in this chronicle novel, it contains a well executed and gripping narrative, clearly realized and readily identifiable characters and a kind of grisly, macabre atmosphere that has its own sharp appeal.\(^\text{15}\)

It is precisely the macabre atmosphere, as well as the sharp focus on it being maintained all through the narrative with gripping intensity, that is its hallmark. The transition from a relatively localised atmosphere (locale-wise) to a wider canvas is effected quite smoothly – giving the work a much greater panoramic sweep of Partition as a whole, particularly brought out in the mayhem and carnage during the exodus on foot. Therefore, its realism is of a high order whereby the communal malaise is clearly depicted. *Azadi*, according to K.K.Sharma and B.K.Johri

...criticises in clear terms, the Hindu and Muslim leaders [politicians] responsible for the partition and the bloodshed that dazed everyone. The English, too, have not been spared; their wild and unholy game has been fully exposed. The people of the
subcontinent, too, stand equally responsible for the tragic events.\textsuperscript{16}

So, realism and objectivity — as Nahal spares neither Hindu nor Muslim politicians, nor Hindu nor Muslim rioters, nor those who failed to help — are Nahal’s literary pillars.

Now to briefly focus on the exodus and ambushes en-route. The journey is horrific, what with the potential and actual threat of the marauders and rapists and abductors lacking even the very basic semblance of a human face, and thus marked by the most base, most gross inhumanity. When the refugees finally depart from Sialkot’s refugee camp, they march through Gunna Kalan, Pasrur, Qila Shobha Singh, Alipur, Saiyidian, Manjoke, Narowal and Jassar before finally reaching Indian soil – Dera Baba Nanak. In addition, the tortuous journey is marked by intense privation and, in some cases, delirium. The trauma of Partition is depicted by indiscriminate onslaughts at Pasrur, Alipur Saiyidian and finally Narowal. The communal carnage is simply unimaginable, Nahal stressing through both action and character the rapacity and horror at their most bestial. At Pasrur the convoy is fired upon with tumultuous fanatical shout of “Allah-o-Akbar”, even the Indian soldiers (the guards of the convoy) suffering heavy casualties as well as, of course, the migrants. The disarray and death in all its grisliness is realistically described, the road and the orchards being “littered with articles, discarded turbans and female headgear, shoes, umbrellas, sticks, and cans of food … strewn diagonally – from the road to the orchards – as though a wind coming from the right had carried them over to the left”(p.287). In addition the
magnitude of the horror is realistically laid bare in the gruesome sight of the atrocities:

Most of the dead lay fully dressed. Only a few women lay with their breasts exposed, with a 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 splashes of blood on the ground, and in a few cases on the tree trunks, the bodies themselves were relatively clean. Only their unnatural postures gave out they were dead. (p.287)

The second attack occurs between Qila Shobha Singh and Narowal near Alipur Saiyidian – a notorious Muslim stronghold. Even though the Indian forces respond gallantly, the convoy sustains heavy losses. To quote the text: “… over two hundred Hindus and Sikhs were killed, many women abducted and the number of wounded climbed to several hundred” (p.288). But the extent of the losses sustained becomes clear only when the convoy’s survivors reach Narowal (the site of the refugee camp):

The refugees there lined up to see them come in. They had lost over fifteen hundred of their number. No one had shaved for the last few days, none had had a bath since they left Pasrur. Food had run short and many had not eaten for a couple of days. And to the last person they looked demoralized. (p.289)

At this point, therefore, the refugees are broken in both mind and spirit, overwhelmed by shock, retreating to the comfort of deathly sleep.

Nahal then makes Arun the chief protagonist, who through firsthand experience of communal degradation and degeneration witnesses firsthand with Suraj Prakash unfathomable inhumanity. This is during their secret forays into 105
Muslim dominated places while still in Pakistan. Naturally, the duo is disguised as Muslims. A telling instance of dehumanization is the parade of naked non-Muslim women:

There were forty women, marching two abreast. Their ages varied from sixteen to thirty, although, to add to the grotesqueness of the display, there were two women, marching right at the end of the column, who must have been over sixty. They were all stark naked. Their heads were completely shaven; so were their armpits. So were their pubic regions. (p.296)

The tormenters as well as onlookers are not at all moved to compassion by the persecuted women’s sorrow, many of them having been previously beaten and manhandled. In Arun’s eyes the atmosphere is decidedly malevolent. The scene is therefore “…evil incarnate... and darkness was added to darkness and a strange terror was let loose on earth” (p.297). The reaction of the crowd shows their approval of the tormentors’ act in their evil exhortations and gestures, which are as follows:

‘Rape them.’ ‘Put it inside of them.’ ‘The filthy Hindu bitches.’ ‘The kafir women.’ Some said worse things. Then came the shower of spittle. Almost everyone spat, and hundreds of tongues were pushed forward inside of their teeth and hundreds of lips twisted into ugly openings and hundreds of uplifted faces cannon-like fired the saliva. Bits of the saliva fell on the crowd ahead, but no one minded, so long as the main salvo hit the women. (p.297)

However, humanity is still present in the anguished prayer of one onlooker, a Hakim who sorrowfully prays and acts thus:

‘Allah, Allah, Allah!’ And then he [the Hakim] knelt on his knees, raised his arms and spread his hands before him as while saying
Namaaz. 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, of Rabbah, protect these women!' (p.298)

Yet the Hakim's prayer, coming as it does against the gory sight, unhinges Arun. He cannot reconcile such contrasts—pure evil and pure piety—so quickly, these being too much to digest. The parade therefore and thereby has the effect of making him steel himself and he is finally and irrevocably on the hard path to manhood. However, inwardly he feels a strange vacancy of being—the direct result of the deplorable parade.

The third and final attack is massive—on the Narowal refugee camp. At night strangely the rabid elements are still not satiated, but rather even more evilly enthused. Nahal observes that "the procession of women, instead of pacifying the communal venom, had plainly fanned it further" (p.302). Amidst the gunfire Arun runs to the safety to fields, soon climbing a fence and reaching a railway yard with many buildings. From this vantage point Arun witnesses hand-to-hand fighting with the attackers wielding guns, sticks and knives, shouting "Allah-o-Akbar" (p.304), actively supported by the Pakistan authorities. Worried about his parents and Chandni, his heart in his mouth, he soon comes to a barn next to which strangely is an army jeep. Sunanda's tearful voice reaches him: 'Leave me, you brute. Have pity on me' (p.306). Calmed but delirious he stealthily enters and identifies the ravisher by his laugh, before he has even spoken—Captain Rahmat-Ullah Khan. He stealthily kills the rapist with a handy wooden spike, rapidly striking him. When the deed is finally done, he looks at the body.
and the weapon uncomprehendingly. To quote the text: "It seemed certain to him he had killed a man. He shuddered at the thought of it. And he threw the spike away in a corner of the barn, where the hay was. And shaking his head, he went and sat next to Sunanda" (p.309). His transformation is complete – his act showing that violence begets violence and that evil breeds evil. He consoles Sunanda and the two leave the dangerous place, she disguised as a man.

Back at the camp the terrible news of Chandni's kidnapping and Suraj's failure to return makes everyone gloomy. Arun is benumbed soon afterwards Suraj's body is found, stabbed through the abdomen, his eyes gouged out. The scale of the tragedy is so horrific that the toll is two thousand corpses with three thousand more either dead or missing. The barbarousness is illustrated thus: "So savage had been the vengeance, every single body had been badly mutilated" (p.317). But when the convoy finally reaches Jassar, the last border village, the Muslim inhabitants' attitude towards the refugees is remarkably different, one of abundant compassion – they offering water and finally bidding "Khuda-Hafiz", before the final leap into the safety net of security in Dera Baba Nanak, India. This is a highly poignant and pathos-drenched moment for the refugees, "many kissing the Indian soil" and "others bathing in the Ravi to mark their deliverance (p.320). The effects are most striking in Lala Kanshi Ram's behaviour, observed by Arun: "[He] saw him bend low, pick up a little earth and rub it with his fingers. He saw tears in his eyes and found he was breathing heavily." (p.321) This culminates in his shout of "Vande Matram" (p.323) with raised hands. However, Arun, too marked by the gory sights he has seen and the deed he has done, cannot share his father's enthusiasm especially due to the fact of Chandni's kidnapping.
for whom he longs yet, though at the same time stoically accepting her disappearance. By now he is a complete man of solid pragmatism, able to take great misfortunes in his stride, thinking, "she was gone, her recovery a remote possibility, so why make an issue of her?" (p.322). But temporary disturbance does surface as to identity, he having become uniquely individual. He rapidly recalls the tumult of the past few frenetic days:

"Communal or mass destiny ceased to worry him. Where was he heading - he, Arun? Nur and Chandni he was leaving behind. Nur was only the beginning, he had walked only the foothills with her. But Chandni had taken him up the slopes to the summit. What would he be without her, without his hamrahi?" (p.322)

Finally he makes a powerfully heroic existential gesture by going back across the border and urging and helping others to hurry across the border - with the repeated exhortation of "you bloody fools" (p.323), even kicking stones to impel the remaining refugees. He even shouts while brandishing a stick "Get to your mother India - quick!" (p.324). So, in this heroic act he becomes compassionate again, though of course still stoic - having undergone baptism by fire.

From Dera Baba Nanak, Lala Kanshi Ram and family, along with adopted family, proceed to Amritsar to catch the train to Delhi. Here they witness another parade of naked women and their tormentors - the women of course being Muslims. Lala Kanshi Ram is struck by extreme pain and pity, remarking, "I can't hate the Muslim anymore" as "whatever the Muslim did to us in Pakistan we're doing it to them here!" (p.338). However, Prabha Rani is completely antipodal to her husband because unlike him, she remains circumscribed by her personal loss and pain. She vehemently states: "I'll hate and curse them
[Muslims] as long as I live” (p.339). Lala Kanshi Ram however sees all, including himself, as equally guilty, viewing each naked woman in the Amritsar’s procession as “someone’s Madhu”. Hope comes to the foreground in the form of a newborn in India – Isher Kaur’s daughter, born in the railway compartment after prolonged labour during a prolonged halt at Ambala railway station. They finally reach Delhi amidst rain when they step out of the train, Lala Kanshi Ram viewing it as ominous. The chief reason he and his entire clan are in Delhi is because of greater business opportunities but the refugee only sees unfriendly faces and Arun is forced to carry all the luggage because the porters shun the Punjabi refugees’ lack of money and consequent haggling.

The rehabilitation officer’s attitude is markedly apathetic and hostile. Lala Kanshi Ram is at a loss for words as to the choice of Delhi as his new abode instead of East Punjab. His request for a house and a shop, “refugee property” (p.343) is mocked and derided with

‘Lalaji, what fool’s paradise are you living in? It is the middle of November. Six hundred thousand Hindu and Sikh refugees are already in the capital. Do you think there is a house and a shop left waiting for you? They’ve all been allotted to refugees, or forcibly occupied by them.’ (p.343)

Yet, Lala Kanshi Ram maintains dignity in humility still and the officer therefore, albeit reluctantly, permits him and his clan to be accommodated in a Delhi refugee camp in Kingsway Camp. Imminent penury makes its presence felt:

“They had lost everything – everything. The three thousand rupees in his pocket had dwindled down to two. How much longer would that hold out? Surely everyone here couldn’t be so unsympathetic. But who, who as the last, the final resort, should he go to? He
brooded and he brooded, and paid little attention to what went on around him” (p.344).

Quite ludicrously – though full of pathos and poignancy – the head of the clan decides to meet the Prime Minister himself, only to discover that thousands of others wait outside the August leader’s residence with the very same idea. The police effectively controls the situation and no one is able to meet the leader. In a totally strange environment, not yet adapted, he has, in addition, no direct or indirect contacts and cannot afford to bribe the concerned officials either. But the clan still avoid, the camp, preferring a hotel and look for rented accommodation. They are rudely and callously rebuffed at every door – no landlord willing to take Punjabis.

The head of the family confesses his till now concealed pain and anguish over Madhu’s loss, the breaking point manifesting just before this is Lala Kanshi Ram’s tearful pleas to the rehabilitation officer with Arun as the unobserved witness to his father’s agony. However, hope does begin to take palpable form finally when they move to the camp which turns out not to be of tents but brick hutmments with two small adjacent rooms at their disposal with a verandah. Once he has furnished it Lala Kanshi Ram proclaims to Bibi Amar Vati: “you are my responsibility now ... she responding smilingly but sadly. Sunanda will find work”(p.355).

The final part describes Lala Kanshi Ram’s and Arun’s hardship and endeavors. Lala Kanshi Ram becomes a small-time grocer and Arun starts his Masters in English Literature, afresh, forced to repeat the first year. Gandhi is assassinated. Bibi Amar Vati views this as good, stating “he ruined us”(p.362).
Nahal takes recourse to the actual historical context — Nehru’s speech on the tragedy stating that the extraordinary light has been extinguished and adding that Gandhi was now gone and India was plunged into darkness.

Arun cannot forget Chandni, in spite of the presence of so many girls in his college who are “like marionettes to him — lifeless. He preferred his memory” (p.365). Arun and Sunanda strongly disagree with Bibi Amar Vati’s condemnation of Gandhi as the chief agent of Partition, Arun stating that other Congress leaders like Nehru and Patel were actually responsible. Bibi Amar Vati’s anger cannot comprehend the fact that even Sunanda does not condemn Gandhi even though she lost her husband. Bibi Amar Vati is certain that a Punjabi is the assassin but they learn that the actual assassin is a Maharashtrian and a rank communalist. Prabha Rani feels sorrowful over the murder of the leader. As a mark of respect to the departed colossus Lala Kanshi Ram tells Prabha Rani not to light the fire that day declaring that he won’t eat and that she and Arun may. They all agree and they pass the night awake in silence. The novel ends and comes full circle with Lala Kanshi Ram’s perception of Azadi as a blessing and his liberal salute to the Punjabi refugee spirit in their willingness to openly show emotion over loss — unthinkable during the British Raj because of the threat or fear of the colonisers’ violence as well as of their informers. The turbulence of the emotion is aptly illustrated with respect to Gandhi’s loss and the overall solid Punjabi spirit thus:

They wept too loudly or they shouted too loudly. Today the men stood in pride — evenly balanced, firm, sure of themselves. Unlike the past, there was no leader urging them to demonstrate their feelings. The feelings had their own recourse. Lala Kanshi Ram
raised his head with pride and stretched back his shoulders. He was unrestricted now, he was untrammelled (p. 369).

However, he is alienated from both his wife and son due to the trauma of Partition – an irrecoverable loss. In the next room Sunanda’s sewing machine – a source of income – whirrs. The sound makes Arun visualise her beautiful movements. Yet Arun has lost contact with her. The whirring of the sewing machine is a potent symbol of inexorable time, which must be harnessed, the magnitudinous tragedy notwithstanding.

Now to briefly delineate Arun’s relationships with the opposite sex. He is inexperienced with women, his sister Madhu initiating him into this world – much to his discomfort but at the same time awakened curiosity. Therefore, there is a strong and distinct element of incest in the brother-sister relationship – Madhu being the initiator with revelations like, “All women wear such a bandage once a month” (p.191). It is important to remember that Madhu is four years older than Arun. Strangely despite her home environment Madhu is sexually liberated Arun knows “… she had the least sense of remorse” and “Also she was the most impetuous, the most animated, the most spontaneous” (p.203). When she is a teenager, the sister-brother couple even touch each other’s tongues at one instance at Madhu’s urging – much to Arun’s shock yet titillation. However, Madhu undergoes a marked and adverse transformation once married and, “in place of the raw, rough look of an unwedded girl, acquired the seasoned look of a woman who has known physical passion”(p.204). Her laughter and spontaneity desert her. As her in-laws are unhappy over her childlessness, it drains away the very force of her personality and even Arun cannot relight/revive her spirits, her
infectious flame of eternal cheerfulness. She even succumbs to superstitions despite previously being skeptic earlier in the very core of her very being. So, Madhu exits the scene.

Sunanda, the delicate Kashmiri beauty with highly attractive figure and chiseled features after Madhu, becomes Arun's love. In Arun's eyes, "she was not a human being. She was a presence"(p.151). Therefore, Arun views her as a goddess. His affection for Sunanda as his principal love continues till being attracted by Nur. The Nur-Arun relationship is one of clumsy love but passionate - though never requited to the point of consummation - is definitely present in great degree on both sides. However, this is torn as under finally by the tumultuous Partition, its last vestige being a mere paper - a letter from Nur being the form, she reduced to a mere memory. Arun then falls head over heels for low caste Chandni, he, feeling an urgent need to consummate the relationship. Initially, timid Chandni does not know what to make of this but eventually reciprocates hesitatively in stages - denying the final act but eventually agreeing. As to the positive impact of this relationship, "Chandni flowered strangely under the impact of Arun's love (p.235). Nahal describes their longing as follows: "It was the inevitable summit of man and woman; in its own time, in its own reason" (pp. 237-238). As the relationship grows, "Chandni had seeped so deeply into his consciousness Nur now seemed only a milestone"(p.267). Finally, Chandni agrees to consummation telling Arun, "I want you to take me (p.301), but this is not to be – she is abducted and her fate is unknown. Yet till the very end Arun cannot forget her. Lastly but certainly not least is Arun and even Sunanda's apparently transient and concealed attraction – which erupts into real form after
Arun rescues her from Captain Rahmat-Ullah Khan. Traumatised after the rape and grateful to Arun beyond words. His vow to keep her degradation secret is met with sudden passion mixed with inexpressible gratitude. “Sunanda searched his eyes, her body trembling in her need for reassurance. Raising herself on her toes, she gently kissed him on the lips”(p.315). The matter ends and the two move on – later on moving on in life as well in the refugee camp in Kingsway Camp in Delhi. As already stated, but as reiteration is necessary, Arun does fantasise about her but there is an unavoidable loss of contact in the sense of possible friction of love. So do Arun’s encounters with the opposite sex come full circle.

Lala Kanshi Ram is the one who feels loss of roots to the utmost degree in comparison to the other major characters (i.e., among the refugee convoy): Arun, Sunanda, Chandni, Prabha Rani and, to a lesser extent, Amar Vati. His loss of faith in the authorities, particularly the “just and impartial British”, is so sudden that he is reduced to great anguish amidst a state of numbness. His home and shop and family and others connected are suddenly threatened by the imminent disaster in the wake of Partition – “the admirable British” being the target of his sorrow and rage, no matter how powerless these emotions are with respect to the overall British role in both the textual as well as larger historical context, a colonial/postcolonial facet already condemned earlier by B.D. Sharma and S.K. Sharma (in and within the macro-context), and thus, unnecessary to repeat but important to keep in view.

It need not be stated that Lala Kanshi Ram and his loved ones are of the minority community in newly created Pakistan – thus necessarily sure to face the
ire of the Muslims. But he still clings to the illusory hope of staying on – he being insulated against the dark side of human nature and, therefore, unable to come to grips with the resultant communal violence for quite a long time. But Prabha Rani proves his anchor and steadily manages to convince him of the reality of communalism – she being much more pragmatic despite illiteracy. She is thus a pillar he could not have done without.

After the horrifying violence, in which hardly one fourth of refugees manage to reach India, Lala Kanshi Ram is invigorated psychologically and spiritually. But though the terrors have been left behind on Pakistani soil, suffering does not yet end. However, one important point which needs to be stressed is the cementing power of religion for Lala Kanshi Ram, he taking the picture of Goddess Laxmi with him during the exodus. But Arun, much more objective, possibly due to education as well as the reaction of youth, is not at all of a religious inclination – formal or otherwise. Nevertheless Lala Kanshi Ram too goes through baptism by fire though it is greatly different from that of Arun’s. Yet, its importance cannot be denied as he is suddenly insecure and threatened monetarily and of course psychologically, even after reaching India. The most heroic aspect of his personality is his compassion towards humanity at large – he even ultimately forgiving the Muslims, despite their inhumanity towards both Hindus and Sikhs. He sees quite clearly that all three communities are equally guilty of mindless communal genocide. Such forgiveness is very much in the nature of the divine – all the more remarkable as he and his loved ones have experienced firsthand and directly, in one form or another, the brunt of blood and gore – his daughter Madhu and her husband Rajiv’s murder, Niranjan Singh’s self
immolation, Suraj Prakash's gory maiming and murder, Sunanda's rape and finally, Chandni's abduction.

Of course, by the time the refugee family is in India Lala Kanshi Ram is decidedly a transformed individual as are the other surviving members of his entire family – both blood and adopted. He struggles in the face of great odds to rebuild his own life and support his dependents. In a much larger sense, he represents millions “whose settled life is dislocated now into a totally humiliating state”.\(^{17}\) – due to his refugee status, pleading for meaningfulness in his own country, according to C.N. Srinath. This must be seen in his arduous attempt to retransplant lost roots of which relatedness is an inextricable component of his being – vibrating within its very core. Since he has renounced hatred, his quest becomes less difficult, though suffering is still inescapable. In this context it is important to mention Lala Kanshi Ram’s identity crisis – and the resultant attempt to rediscover and remould identity in a totally new environment.

Nahal’s *Azadi*, indubitably, has a strong human face even as its sweep is wide – a literary feature crafted with extreme sense of detail with great realism. According to K.S. Ramamurti:

... Chaman Nahal’s concerns in this novel are not only the socio-economic and humanistic implications of the tragic exodus of suffering millions from the land of their birth but also the deep psychic disturbances and emotional transformations brought about by that traumatic experience in the inner lives of individual men and women.\(^{18}\)

The critic goes on to salute the unique nature of Nahal’s narrative. The trials and tribulations of all the characters in the novel are reflected and highlighted in terms
of the varied reactions of Lala Kanshi Ram and Arun to the traumatic happenings.

To quote Ramamurti once again:

Though all the characters in the novel experience the same traumatic effects of cataclysmal event marked by brutality, violence, bloodshed, mass murder and rape, it is the varying reactions of Lala Kanshi Ram and Arun to these happenings which become the centre of interest in the novel. It is in their minds which provide two significant perspectives in which all the actions and events are to be viewed.\(^{19}\)

Lala Kanshi Ram is reborn, as an icon of compassion. On the other hand, Arun is personally marked by an active violence – Captain Rahmat-Ullah Khan’s bloody and impassioned “execution”. He cannot, therefore, recover his lost innocence, even though he is virtually responsible for reincarnating Sunanda from despair and degradation into a woman of the pristine nature. K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri:

Nahal’s Azadi exquisitely depicts the psychology of the victims of partition; Lala Kanshi Ram and other characters fully bring it out. Kanshi Ram had a very great love for Sialkot. But under the changed circumstances he was made to understand the implication of the word ‘refugee’. The people had to go to the refugee camp to protect their lives. Lala Kanshi Ram faced the predicament of being a refugee in his own house. It sounded ironical and baffling, and was unbearable for him.\(^{20}\)

Even though this commentary focuses largely specially on Lala Kanshi Ram and his rootlessness. It applies in a general sense to all of the surviving clan as “refugee” is a new word and new predicament that confronts them and they must come to grips with it.

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The reference Lala Kanshi Ram makes to *the Mahabharata*—naturally illustrating the struggle between good and evil to Prabha Rani while passing through the site by train—is an incident of spiritual awakening as to sin’s all pervasiveness. This can be seen as being necessary to the human condition, this life on earth.

Though the event of Partition is largely familiar to Indian readers and even a sizable number of others across the globe, reference to the historical context of communalism should be briefly focused on going as far back as Chaudhary Rahmat Ali’s original envisaging of Pakistan—a land for Muslims. He reinvented the word minorityism within a narrow Muslim context. In this vein and to this end he espoused a separate Muslim state, stressing the need to avoid "minorityism" and instead advocating to his own community that "we must not leave our minorities in Hindu lands even if the British and Hindus offer them the so-called constitutional safeguards. For no safeguards can be a substitute for nationhood which is their birthright." Historically viewed, this shows that the roots of Pakistan—a Muslim nation—were sown much before it became feasible. Instead, its creation can be seen as the direct fallout of World War II, a weakened Great Britain and the coming to power of the Labour Party with Atlee as the new Prime Minister. It also needs to be viewed against the background of the rise of the Muslim League after the secular forces were jailed pre-emptively upon the announcement of the Quit India Movement and Bose’s INA “traitors” not being strictly dealt with. Both events take place during Churchill’s reign.

By now the Partition aspect of *Azadi* with respect to theme in its vivid realism, has been adequately dealt with. Politically, there is also an element of
colonialism/postcolonialism in it. This comes to the fore a few times in those vested with power and overtly or covertly siding with communal elements during atrocities. Some of these merely turn a blind eye to the grisly carnage. Some other elements of authority even inhumanly bleed refugees for simply self-enrichment. This aspect is all the more striking in its cruelty as some of the officials themselves are former refugees. Lala Kanshi Ram comes across this situation and is shocked that the powers that be are so vile. The transgressors of authority, though vested with it ironically, are, to restate Inayat-Ullah Khan, Rahmat-Ullah Khan and the rehabilitation officials. In addition, various unnamed and often hidden officials of the administration, police and military condone and even encourage active communalism against the opposite respective minority communities on both sides of the divide.

_Azadi_, definitely can be classified as a postcolonial work decidedly created by the catalyst of traumatic Partition. It embodies a response to the subcontinental holocaust with the very real threat of extermination and complete annihilation at the hands of the communal forces. _Azadi_ is thus a strong voice protesting through the chief characters' ideas and actions the savagery of the tumultuous event with all its spiritual ugliness. This was, indeed, of epic proportions on a hitherto unparalleled scale in the complete annals of the subcontinent's history – the Asian holocaust. Nahal, through his characters, vividly brings the trauma to the fore. His voice is definitely and definitively Indian or rather subcontinental and can be even included in the cast of an Asian protest narrative – certainly of the genre of postcolonialism.
Chaman Nahal does not take recourse to "high art" – faithfully true as he remains to both postmodernism and postcolonialism – and relies instead on easily comprehensible "mass culture" in character portrayal and the main characters’ almost ceaseless suffering due to Partition and its resultant tragedy of forced migration amidst communal bigotry and communal carnage. The refugees are thus targeted indiscriminately time and time over again the horror conceivable only when it manifests itself in the real form of the attackers and their grisly deeds.

Now to concentrate specifically on Azadi's postcolonialism in the literary sense. Nahal finds and moulds his own idiom as well as his counter-cultural and counter-historical view of people and events which is opposed to the colonial and successive postcolonial view of the 'sane'. It must be mentioned in passing that besides Asia, other Third-World countries like Africa, South America and the Caribbean Islands have produced powerful writers of postcolonialism like Chinua Achebe. To refocus specifically on Azadi and Indo-Anglian postcolonialism, Nahal is, indeed, a master storyteller who protests against the colonial/postcolonial political mindset of both the rulers and the ruled, neither sparing the British nor the Congress nor the Muslim League. All of these three are firmly condemned by the entire clan, (Nahal’s major characters), Gandhi drawing a mixed reaction. Some view him as also guilty of Partition and put him in the dock for the same. For others, like Lala Kanshi Ram, Arun and Sunanda he never loses his halo – his assassination being viewed as a tragedy almost equal to Partition since he was the Father of the Nation.
The low-key character of Lala Kanshi Ram as well as the philosophical view of the tumultuous events on Nahal’s part serve to heighten the narrative appeal. *Azadi* is not at all pretentious, the major characters being very ordinary individuals with very real human concern – the chief one being safety and survival amidst the virulent fundamentalist monster unleashed in the wake of Partition and resultant mindless atrocities. Nahal firmly castigates and condemns cultural imperialism of the colonists and their successors. He protests strongly their sweeping powers – which they use for their own self-interest, by and large. As Nahal is one who has experienced Partition firsthand, he is able to bring his remarkably simple narrative – language-wise – to the point of unique descriptive power. It can, therefore, be reasonably surmised that the novel contains an intense autobiographical element. The novel is certainly anti-Eurocentric and anti-compradore class that took over the reigns on the eve of the departure of the British successors of the British. However, virulent condemnation is not part of his viewpoint even though it is of the protest mould. But the natives of the subcontinent in *Azadi*, though marginalized do combat their way to a uniquely subcontinental sense of history. The protest is inordinately strong in content and rendering but still low-key – making *Azadi* a postcolonial counter-text with its native view of history, brought effectively and very emotionally to the fore in the thoughts and actions of Nahal’s characters. In no way does the author let objectivity fall by the wayside, always retaining remarkable objectivity of a very high standard. Nahal as the author is thus the agent of resistance instead of fatalistic acceptance of the circumstances wrought by Partition at colonial and postcolonial hands.
What is remarkable is that as the omniscient narrator Nahal is able to maintain and sustain a distanced view of the historical event – prejudice being strikingly absent – a hallmark of his simple style, he having taken simplicity as the essence of expression to heart. His idiom is his own and extremely different from Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*. His flavour is uniquely Indian in its Punjabi aspect. The continuous stream of narrative is not jolted to a jerkiness because he does not even italicize Punjabi words, even abuses like “behan chode”, “maan chode” being spared this interruption for the sake of the reader and the interests of run-on simplicity. For the benefit of the larger non-subcontinental world he does however state the meanings of most native words and expressions. So his style, with its absence of unnecessary italics, flows with great precision – which is deftly handled.

To briefly return to the actual historical context it is important to remember that communalism goes far back in the subcontinent’s long history. Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre in their *Freedom at Midnight* which is a fictionalised account of Partition and is painstakingly interwoven with actual historical facts, comment on how Partition finally saw the light of day.

The root of the problem was the age old antagonism between India’s 300 million Hindus and 100 million Muslims. Sustained by tradition, by antipathetic religions, by economic differences, subtly exacerbated through the years by Britain’s own policy of Divide and Rule, their conflict had reached the boiling point. The Muslim leaders now demanded that Britain rip apart the unity she had painstakingly erected to give them an Islamic State of their own. The cost of denying them their state, they warned, would be the bloodiest civil war in Asian history.
This state of divisiveness thus makes Partition an inescapable reality. Yet with respect to the humanity present amidst the blood and gore in Azadi, one is reminded of W.B. Yeats’s “Second Coming”:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.23

Though Azadi has been told omnisciently, Lala Kanshi Ram emerges as a chorus character in that the reader identifies with his concern and compassion and makes allowances for his clichéd confusions because the latter are widespread during the traumatic Partition. At the same time, it is a mistake to view Partition solely as divide and rule conspiracy of the English because Hindus and Sikhs on one hand and Muslims on the other historically were antagonistically violent even before British rule, the nation never actually being one even during prolonged Muslim domination. Viewed from this perspective, Partition despite holocaust and untellable suffering may be argued to be, albeit with a grain of salt, as a blessing in disguise. This view is, however, too controversial to be taken in entirety to the point of infallibility. What assumes importance is that communal harmony was ruptured by frequent skirmishes and periodic riots even during the Raj. India, since the founding of the Muslim League, bore this state to a marked degree. Of course, today’s India, possibly due to secularism as opposed to theocracy (the state in Pakistan) may be said, arguably, to be moving in the
direction of harmony. However, the Gujarat riots of 2002 and other similar
happenings do make this point questionable.

_Azadi_ is essentially an epic novel on the partition theme. It is unexcelled
among the novels and stories in English written on the Partition theme. Chaman
Nahal has focused on Lala Kanshi Ram and his family against the background of
pre-partition days culminating in partition and their rehabilitating themselves in
India through sheer grit and hard work. There is no background. The story of
Lala Kanshi Ram is specific, rich and varied in graphic detail. But it is also the
story of innumerable others like him who had to endure rioting and resultant mass
migration. Through the background and in the ensuing maelstrom he shows the
bestiality of humankind; but he balances it deftly with the kind acts of individuals,
here and there, which shows that light shineth in darkness.

Perhaps, if Chaman Nahal had interspersed the forward-moving
narratology with flashbacks into Punjab's communal history at the sub-surface
level, he could have avoided his annals to paradisial peace and harmony. Besides,
technically speaking, he would have thus imparted viscosity to the novel. This
reservation aside, _Azadi_ is a novel with range and magnitude, depth and
resonance.

Chaman Nahal has consolidated himself as a historical novelist after his
novella, _Into Another Dawn_. In _Azadi_ he has taken a representative slice of actual
historical material on Partition and woven it skillfully into the narration, leaving
the horrifying magnitude staggering the imagination and thus sinking into and
imprinting greatly the reader's heart and soul with great pathos and poignancy,
effected by raw power through a realistic penchant for ghoulishness.
Though *Azadi* is a historical novel, its capturing of the inner pain and anguish, love and loss, confusion and disillusionment, recovery from death and attrition is of high order. Lastly, it rings with Hemingway's affirmation that "A man can be destroyed but not defeated."\(^{24}\) – visible in great measure in Lala Kanshi Ram, Arun and Sunanda. The calling forth of the Hemingway outlook and code is solid in its genuine human and humanistic aspect, struggle at all costs being *Azadi's* hallmark. Lala Kanshi Ram, Arun and Sunanda resurrect themselves in the face of colossal suffering and odds as does the protagonist of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Likewise, Nahal's three characters do not collapse to the point of no return – the abyss – but courageously face all adversity and misfortune – making *Azadi* a valuable socio-historical document with the very core and essence of existentialism.
References:


15. Ibid. p.117.


19. Ibid. p.132.


