Chaman Nahal's 'Azadi'

Chapter 4
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Nahal’s _Azadi_ delineates the psychological consequences of the partition. It points out how the ugly event caused havoc in the minds of the people and highlights the predicament of the souls, shattered by the unprecedented tragedy. The novel makes a moderate attempt to diagnose the malady, leading to the inhuman catastrophe. It criticises, in clear terms, the Hindu and Muslim leaders 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 sub-continent too, stand equally responsible for the tragic events. It excels other novels on the subject in scrutinising the cause of partition and the tragedy accompanying it.

The masses are shown as the mere puppets in the hands of clever, selfish and power-hungry politicians, who exercised profound influence on the thoughts and deeds of men during those fateful days. Violence, the result of mad communal frenzy, has been objectively depicted. _Azadi_ stresses how even the mildest of men was spurred on to engage himself in the ghastly acts of violence. Even an ordinary tradesman, Abdul Ghani, was transformed into a Muslim Leaguer. He, like millions of others, was misled by the crafty politicians, hungry to grab power. The novel shrewdly unfolds the conspiracy of the politicians. But amidst the horror scenes of inexplicable violence, it
also indicates the rebirth of, and hope for, a new guilt-free identity; the appalling misery must have some meaning.

Azadi portrays vividly the horrors of the partition, the colossal violence that still haunts the Indian psyche. It concentrates on the exodus of millions of refugees from Pakistan, and on the aftermath of the partition. The novel is very suitably divided into three parts; Part I, “The Lull”; Part II, “The Storm” and Part III, “The Aftermath”. The suitability and the symbolic significance of the titles of the three sections of the novel are explicit.

The novel opens on the third of June, 1947 when the Viceroy was awaited to make an important announcement in the evening. Lala Kanshi Ram, who was not too literate a person but had grown intelligent by experience, led a quiet life with his wife, Prabha. This quietness indicates the appropriateness of the title, “The Lull”, of the first part of the novel. It is the quietness before “the storm” to be followed by “the aftermath”. The horrors of the partition, creating havoc in the human mind, are depicted through the protagonist of the novel - - Lala Kanshi Ram. He was influenced by Arya Samaj. He knew Urdu, but his professed mother tongue was Hindi. He spoke Punjabi, and wrote in Urdu, which he learnt from his father and from a primary teacher in his village and “neither of the two was a Muslim.” (14) From the beginning of the novel, it has been convincingly shown that Urdu was very much the language of the Hindus, and thus the Hindus and the Muslims were one. Even an Arya Samajist,
whose language was supposed to be Sanskrit, wrote in Urdu. Thus there was no prejudice against any language, and there was complete harmony in this regard.

Lala Kanshi Ram hated the British, and felt elevated at the news of the German Victories during the Second World War. He prayed for the victory of the Germans against the British. Lala Kanshi Ram’s hatred for the English introduced the theme Azadi – independence. The longing for the defeat of the British forces revealed the Indian’s 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. Lala Kanshi Ram felt proud of the national heroes - - Gandhiji, Nehru, Bhagat Singh. He, too, “wanted to claim for himself the role of a revolutionary.” (20) He, too, had been to jail, although in a different context and that too reluctantly. But he felt proud of having spent a night inside the four walls of a prison.

The merciless killing of the stray dogs shows the cruelty of the British soldiers. The reference to Jallianwala Bagh spotlights the inhuman acts of the British. Nahal points out satirically that the killing of dogs for their crime was an act of British inhumanity: “Left for themselves the sergeants would have made men pay for that crime - - as they did as recently as in 1919, when they shot hundreds of them out of hand with machine guns at Jallianwala Bagh.” (28) But in the changed times, the sergeants went only after dogs. Lala Kanshi Ram saw the precision of the British Raj in as small an act as the killing of the stray dog, an felt that there: “indeed was no Raj like the Angrez Raj.” (31)
Lala Kanshi Ram informed his wife that morning that the Viceroy was to make an important announcement that evening from All India Radio. Any announcement of the Viceroy would thrill Lala Kanshi Ram. But that particular day he was not jubilant and gay; he looked timid. He looked around and there was silence and peace in the room. He looked at his achievement in Sialkot from his seat., He held Prabha Rani’s hand in his hands, and felt unutterably nostalgic. He intuitively felt the dangers that were to follow the announcement. He looked worried and feared the consequences, “if the English agree to give Pakistan to Jinnah.” (39) Prabha Rani consoled him, saying that would never happen. She relied on the words her husband had uttered to her: “Gandhi would never agree to a division of the country…” (39)

Lala Kanshi Ram feared the division of the country. He saw in it the shrewd British plan. He knew the British policy of encouraging the partition. His faith in Gandhi’s oath of not accepting the partition looked shaken. He said to his wife when she reminded him of Gandhi’s strong stand against the partition. “‘That’s true. But what if there is no other way out? And you know these English, they would rather divide than leave behind a United India’”(39) He felt that all his efforts of making a comfortable home steadily for over a period of more than twenty five years would be ruined at the creation of Pakistan. He knew that terror, tempest and tumult would follow in the wake of the partition. Making a vague gesture towards the rooms, Lala Kanshi Ram sadly exclaimed: “‘Everything will be ruined if Pakistan is created.’”(39)
Lala Kanshi Ram scented trouble ever since the British had set a time limit for independence. The British commitment that they would leave India by June 1948 in any case embarrassed him. He could not understand why they were in a hurry to go and their designs to hand over power to any constituted authority or authorities further confused him. He was critical of Gandhi – Rajaji offer to Jinnah in 1944. It almost amounted to conceding a ‘homeland’ to Jinnah; it encouraged him to work for the creation of Pakistan vigorously. The Congress was responsible for bringing about the partition. The offer was a tragic one for the country. The talk of giving to the Muslims a section in the East of India and a section in the West made Jinnah aware of realising his dream. It only spoke of a common defence and foreign policy, and gave Jinnah a vision of a separate state: “Until then Jinnah had talked of Pakistan, but he did not know what he meant by it. Gandhi by going to him, not only gave Pakistan a name, he gave Jinnah a name too.” (40) Lala Kanshi Ram believed that the offer crowned Jinnah with undue glory and popularity, and imparted tremendous strength to the disruptive forces -- the Muslim League. It was a personal triumph for the leader of the League. He thought:

Who took Jinnah seriously before September 1944? It was doubtful if he took himself seriously, either. Ever since then he had been sharpening his teeth and becoming more and more menacing. If the Congress would give this much, why not go for complete separation? (40)

He feared that the British had decided to execute the partition of the country.
The conversation between Lala Kanshi Ram and Prabha Rani introduced the theme of the partition into the novel. Like an average Indian, Lala Kanshi Ram was apprehensive of the division of the country and of the brutal violence that might follow it. His pondering over the delicate situation gave an idea of national scene - - the Gandhi-Rajaji offer to Jinnah, its pernicious results, the February 1947 announcement of the British saying that not later than June 1948 India would be free, their hurry to quit India, and the hollowness of the Congress’ promise to shed the last drop of blood before conceding the partition. The announcement from the AIR by the Viceroy filled the protagonist with a sense of unutterable fear, justifying the famous proverb ‘coming events cast their shadows before.’

Lala Kanshi Ram was greatly grieved and disturbed to think of the horrible consequences of the proposed partition. He was primarily concerned with the fate of the four hundred million people, if partition took place. He feared that he would have to leave his property behind if the new nation came into existence. He said to Prabha Rani: “ ‘If Pakistan is created, we’ll have to leave. That is, if the Muslims spare our lives.’ ”(41) He was deeply upset to think about the consequences of the brutal violence, if the Muslims came to power. Stating emphatically that there would be a lot of killing at the partition, he told his wife: “ ‘Don’t you know the Muslims> There has been much killing going on for the past many months. Imagine what will happen once they’re in power’ ”(41) All this upset him immeasurably, and made him restless. He dreaded the announcement which he was too eager to listen to. It was not only Lala
Kanshi Ram’s concern, but “In each home, on each street corner, this was the only subject discussed that day.” (47) Arun thought that the Congress had betrayed people by conceding Pakistan, for Gandhi and Congress had earlier said, “India was a single nation, not two.” (48) Kanshi Ram’s only hope was Gandhi; in fact, most of the people lived in the illusion that Mahatma “would never let that happen.” (49) But the Muslim Hookah merchant, Abdul Ghani, was contemptuous of the Hindu merchants, and knew that Pakistan was a certainty. He looked cheerful. Earlier he loved Arun and lived on the generosity of the Hindus but in the last three or four years he had become imprudent. Before the unfortunate developments, there was complete harmony between Ghani and Lala Kanshi Ram:

The fact that Ghani was a Muslim and Lala Kanshi Ram a high-caste Hindu never entered their heads. They spoke a common tongue, wore identical clothes, and responded to the weather, to the heat and the first rains, in an identical manner. If they worshipped different gods, it was in the privacy of their homes, except when Ghani made a spectacle of himself by joining Tazia marched at the time of Muharram once a year and beating his breast in public. But then, didn’t Kanshi Ram make a spectacle of himself too, when he joined other lalas of the bazaar in throwing colour on others during Holi? No, thought Lala Kanshi Ram, they were not Muslims or Hindus, they were Punjabis - - or at least they were till the other day. (54)
The ‘two-nation theory’ was to create two nations out of one and hence it was tragic indeed. It created barrier between man and man, between brother and brother. There was a definite change in the Muslim attitude, and “Abdul Ghani was no longer friendly with the Hindu businessmen of the bazaar.” (54) Jinnah had become the ideal of the Muslims; they followed him blindly. Nahal finds the political leaders guilty of the horrid consequences of the partition. Abdul Ghani had lived in peace and harmony with his neighbours, who treated him as an equal. But under the sway of Jinnah he changed and became a Leaguer. The League spit hatred. Ghani, too, started hating the Hindus. The Muslim League “had slowly made him aware of the threat to him in a free Hindu India. It was not a question of his personal views; the League or Jinnah Sahib knew better. They said, there should be a Pakistan, and he should speak for Pakistan.” (54) Ghani, like million others of his kind, became a puppet in the hands of his leaders, and followed them faithfully. The atmosphere was surcharged with horror, tension, worry, hatred and happiness. The Hindus in Sialkot feared doom, if Pakistan came into being. On the other hand, the Muslims were cheerful and were impatient to all on the Hindus. Their hatred for the Hindus was conspicuous in such small acts as Ghani’s spitting on the ground and abusing loudly enough to be heard by the Hindus. Harmony became a thing of the past and hatred was let loose by the political leaders.

The Viceroy’s announcement, scheduled for the evening, created tremendous excitement in the people. It led to a variety of speculations. The Hindu businessmen in Sialkot hoped that their leaders would never give into the demands of a separate state for the Muslims. The Muslims knew things better, and did not doubt the creation of
Pakistan. A safe homeland for them was a certainty. Their firm conviction was explicitly stated by Abdul Ghani, the proud Muslim Leaguer:

When the businessmen were arguing in Lala Kanshi Ram's store, Abdul Ghani watched them in disdain. No power on earth could now stop Pakistan. He knew the noise they were making would be short lived -- they would see this evening when the broadcast was heard.(56)

The wave of excitement led people to surround the radio-sets. Lala Kanshi Ram, along with the members of his family and his neighbours, sat eagerly in the room of his landlady, Amar Vati, waiting for the announcement. Everyone there looked gloomy and embarrassed. The thought of Pakistan and the tragedy that would come in its wake shook them. Then came the much awaited, much feared announcement. It was in English but everyone heard it attentively; perhaps they could know the meaning. The partition came as a shock. The moment Arun explained the Viceroy's speech in a word, the audience felt sad and shocked: "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" (63)

People heard Nehru with utter disbelief. They questioned his senses when he talked of peace and non-violence. His ignorance about the Muslims was lamented. The
beloved leader sounded dull and dry that evening. His thought of peace and peaceful
transaction looked a complete nonsense. His voice had lost its effect and charm:

This day he said no abrupt words to them. He sounded meek and gentle, he
sounded in sorrow. And in spite of that he could win no sympathy from this
group gathered in the mirror-studded living room of Bibi Amar Vati. What
stupid things was he talking about? Was he really Nehru? The drawl was the
same, the emotion in the words was the same, the disjointed, queer Hindi syntax
was his alone, but what had happened to his *akal*, his mind? Have partition if
there is no other way, have it that way -- we're willing to make sacrifices. But
what nonsense was this of no panic, no violence, full protection from the
government, peace the main object! Had he gone mad? Didn't he know his
people? Didn't he know the Muslims? And why the partition in the first place?
What of your promises to us, you Pandit Nehru? (65)

By the repeated use of the marks of interrogation, the omniscient author
emphatically holds Nehru and other leaders responsible for the partition. The people,
specially the Hindus, looked with dismay and disbelief at their leaders' going back on
their word; their hopes that Gandhi and his associates would never give in to the
demand of Pakistan were completely dashed. The repeated promise of their leaders not
to agree to the division of the motherland suddenly crashed. The thought of the reality
of Pakistan gave the audience a feeling of fear and each "family instinctively drew its
members together, as a gesture of protection against the danger." (65-66) To allay his
fears, Lala Kanshi Ram spoke of the possibility of the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims living peacefully in Pakistan. He himself did not look convinced about his argument, but felt that perhaps the Muslims needed them for their economy. His baseless hopes, were however, vanished by his son Arun, who wanted him to be realistic and to see things in their true colour. He knew that the Muslims, “‘can have our money without having to keep us’” (65-66)

The news of the partition was taken by the different communities. While the Hindus and Sikhs of Sialkot read their doom in the announcement of the partition, the Muslims, who were in joy and grief upto recently, were jubilant and gay. They went wild at the news. They celebrated it by exploding the firecrackers. The noise and light of these crackers tormented the Hindu and Sikh population, and made them lose their appetite. The Muslim homes and their roof-tops were lit with earthen lamps, and more and more lights came on “as if the earth had suddenly erupted in a volcanic explosion, cutting so many holes in the surface of the city.” (69)

The Hindus feared the Muslim procession shouting slogans, and got together in self-defence. The gates of the streets, installed a few months back for safety purpose, were locked. A few Hindu organisations were giving training in the town in self-defence. The Congress was distrusted and in the wake of its failure, the Muslim attack was feared. The atmosphere for a considerable period in the past was surcharged with suspicion and fear in this largely Muslim-dominated city of Sialkot. The Hindu youngsters were trained to guard themselves, their dear ones and property against the
possible Muslim attack: “By now the youngsters in the street were trained in the use of the stick and other guerrilla activities and each house had its store of acid-filled bottles, bricks and heavy sticks.” (71) The Hindus had a sense of protection and security because of the well-armed police.

The procession was organised mainly by the professional wrestlers, the meat-sellers and the butchers of the Muslim community. It stopped at the entrance to the street. They wanted the gates of the streets to be opened to take the procession through the street. They saw the Hindu heads watching them from the tops of the buildings. They had a design to humiliate the Hindus, though they did not want to harm them that day:

Today, they were only celebrating the acceptance of Pakistan by the British. But they had to make the meaning of that acceptance apparent enough for these banyas, the traders who had long dominated the business affairs of the city. (73)

The hatred of the Muslims for the Hindus was apparent. The city, like the nation, was obviously divided into two sections. The shouts of ‘Pakistan Zindabad’ and other slogans were deafening. The Hindus were baffled to find the police passive. The processionists insisted on getting the gates opened. The Muslim city-inspector sided with the Muslims, and upheld their demand of entering the street. He had disliked the idea of beating his Muslim brethren at the command of the British government: “For years he had ordered lathi charges on Muslim processions at the command of the
British government. He hated doing it, they were his own brethren, but orders were orders. The only consolation he had was that when the lathi charge was to be on a crowd of Congress Muslims, he made it as violent as he could. But on his own Muslims, the League Muslims -- Allah, Allah! (79) So far, the Muslim City-Inspector had lived with the heavy burden on his conscience. He was garlanded by his Muslim fellows. He ordered Lala Kanshi Ram to open the gates, but the negative response from the Hindu irritated him. All attempts were now made to throw open the gate. Inayat-Ullah was obviously supervising the operation with an evil intention to harm the Hindus. It was at this stage that the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police reached the place and saved the Hindus.

Inayat-Ullah created a sense of complete chaos when he tried to throw open the gates forcibly. His activities were, however halted by the arrival of the Hindu Deputy Commissioner and the Muslim Police Superintendent, who were trained in England and were above the politics of the day. Inspite of their belonging to two different communities, they remained true to their profession. It is through the conversation between the two senior police officers that Nahal pointed out that it was puzzling as to how the division of the country into two, of one people into two, was to be executed; and how the demarcation line was to be marked. Both these police officers were bewildered by the contents of the partition; the announcement over the radio was quite baffling to them:
How do you cut a country into two, where at every level the communities were so deeply mixed? There was a Muslim in every corner of India where there was a Hindu. And then so soon, at such short notice? The broadcast had said nothing at all about the fate of the minorities in the two new countries. If the logic behind the creation of Pakistan was accepted, there was no place for a minority, anywhere. Pakistan wouldn't solve the problem of a minority, it was going to create new minorities - minorities which would be hounded out with a vengeance. And what of the civil service to which they belonged? And what of the army? How were they going to cut up the machinery of the government? There were Hindus and Muslims at every level of that machinery! (85)

In fact, the creation of a new nation was as confounding to these police officers as to the millions of people of the country. The writer probes deep into the inner recesses of Niranjan Singh's mind. He makes an interesting psychological study of this young Sikh, burning with a strong passion to retaliate. The fears in the Hindus are excellently highlighted through Isher Kaur, the young pregnant wife of Niranjan Singh, Padmini, a destitute woman, and others. The communal frenzy, fired by the partition, has been depicted effectively. Through the police officers -- the Deputy Police Commissioner, Pran Nath Chaddah, and the Superintendent of Police, Ashgar Ali Siddique -- the anomaly of the partition has been brilliantly portrayed. Violence was writ large on the faces of the people, and the whole situation looked grim and awful. The narrow game of the politicians, who threw the country into fire to serve their end, is beautifully delineated.
The announcement of the creation of Pakistan bred communal feelings. The long-known romance of Arun and Nur—“now a ‘Hindu’ boy carrying on with a ‘Muslim’ girl” (91)—was watched menacingly by the Muslim boys of the college. There were wild speculations about the boundary line between India and Pakistan. The Hindus and Sikhs hoped against hope that the dividing line at Chenab Basin would ensure “a clean sweep for India right uptoo Gujarat, including such important cities like Lahore and Gujranwala.” (91) Sialkot, in such a case, would automatically remain in India. Arun, however, was very clear about the line of partition, and knew that the Sikh demand was a flimsy one and that the boundary was going to be at the Ravi Basin. These speculations expressed the Hindu-Sikh fear of the tortures, if they stayed in Pakistan. They dreaded the very thought of falling into the hands of the Muslim might. Their fears were founded on the events that following the Viceroy’s broadcast. Hostilities and tensions came to surface and hardly a day passed without an untoward happening. The whole look of Sialkot had undergone a sudden change. The Ramlila ground had witnessed the fine Hindu-Muslim harmony prior to the announcement of the partition. Every year huge effigies of Ravan and his associates were burnt on the ground. Dussehra was a Hindu festival, but the effigies were made by Muslim workmen; “the crackers and the fireworks too were supplied by the Muslims.” (93)

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 a realistic one; he knew the fanatics and felt that the Hindus would be forced to leave Pakistan. Nur wanted Arun to stay behind and to embrace Islam. Embracing Islam for Nur had never meant anything to Arun. But now in the light of the creation of Pakistan, he developed a sense of bitterness, and asked Nur to become a Hindu. It stunned her. She expressed her feminine frivolity, and wanted Arun to act boldly. He anticipated displacement and felt that in a new place he would need to support his family. He saw the possibility of coming back and marrying Nur, when his parents settled safely in India. This made Nur label him a ‘timid Hindu’. Arun was a ‘torn’ boy; he was torn by Azadi which meant the partition of the country. He, like millions of others, was sore at the dirty game of the politicians and saw that the newly created nation was the result of their conspiracy. Nahal gives full expression to Arun’s feelings and belief:

The cry of the new state, the name of Pakistan shouted repeatedly before him as insult, had split Arun asunder. He knew the conspiracy of politicians behind the whole move. Jinnah and Laiquat Ali Khan were coming into as estate; as was Nehru. Why else would they rush into azadi at this pace - - an azadi which would ruin the land and destroy its unity? For the creation of Pakistan solved nothing. One would have to go round with tweezers through all the villages to separate the Muslims from the Hindus. Arun knew this, the game of which he and Nur and millions like them were only victims. But politicians gave ideas legs, even though they were the wrong kind of ideas. And Arun too at the moment was driven by the irrational part of his being. (96)
It was the newly won freedom which resulted in conflict and bitterness between the two lovers. Munir, Nur’s brother, told Arun that in the new context it was not safe for him to meet Nur in the open. He apprised him of the temper of the college and warned him to be careful, for “‘the Muslim boys will lynch you if they see you with her.’” (98) The locality where Munir lived had the mixed population. The parochial distinctions, exhibited by the different schools — Arya Samaj, Islamia, Khalsa and the Mission — were, perhaps, made by the British or by the communities. There was no fight among these schools on the parochial grounds. It never begins as communal battle, but later on communal shape was given to it.

Munir-Nur family, headed by Chaudhri Barkat Ali, was an ideal one. They were good Muslims, who believed in the unity of all religions. Chaudhri Barkat Ali was soaked with the spirit of nationalism. He was a devout Muslim, but he respected the Hindus. He lived a life of friendship and love, and did not distinguish between man and man. “And the Hindu next door was as much his brother, more his brother than an unknown Muslim living elsewhere.” (102-103) Chaudhri Barkat Ali was, thus, a strong critic of religious fanaticism. He was the right man with the right kind of ideas. The locality he lived in Mohalla Maniapura — stood for harmony. Munir shared the goodwill of his father. He read the pulse of the moment, the excitement of newly announced Azadi correctly. The eternal friendship between Chaudhri Barkat Ali and Lala Kanshi Ram and the harmonious relationship between the two families, belonging to two different communities, was well known. The partition tore people to pieces
emotionally and intellectually. Munir wanted Arun to stop meeting Nur altogether. If it was possible he could meet her only in his presence, preferably at home and never in public. The advice certainly was given in the interest of Arun. The agony of the young lovers, created by the situation, could be easily felt. Munir and Arun went to meet their English friend, Sergeant Davidson, in the cantonment to know his views on the partition. The British Sergeant declared that “the partition was the most stupid, most damaging, most negative development in the history of the freedom struggle here!” (122) He blamed the British for this development, and held that for the Indians the hard days were ahead. He looked at the situation in the right perspective, and feared the partition and its dreadful consequences.

The announcement of a new country for the Muslims overjoyed and excited them. The first riot took place in Sialkot on twenty fourth of June, a day after “the Legislative Assembly of the Punjab formally decided in Lahore to opt for the partition of the province.” (125) Nahal describes, in detail, the communal fire that engulfed the country: “Many cities of the Punjab had been aflame for months; there were large scale killings and looting in Lahore, Gujarat, Gujranwala, Amritsar, Ambala, Jullundar, Rawalpindi, Multan, Ludhiana and Sargodha.” (125) On twenty fourth of June, the Muslims at Sialkot killed some Hindus in their excitement. Since then the killings of Hindus became a daily ritual, and the killers were not pointed out. These stray cases could make one shiver by their sheer brutality:
In no case was the victim allowed to survive the attack and tell what happened; he was stabbed to death. The killing was invariably done with a knife, and often the knife, the large blade driven clean through, was left in the body of the victim. Where the victim survived the first blow, he was repeatedly stabbed in the chest and abdomen. Faces were not disfigured, but the killers had a macabre fascination for ripping open stomachs. In each case, the intestines of the man would have spilled from the body and would be lying next to him in a pool of his blood. (126)

The brutal acts were followed by frightening and demoralising fires. Fires were more ghastly than murders, and flared up in the different corners of the city and created an impression of their being well-planned: “The way these fires were spread out it looked as though some planning went behind them, for the fire engines were harassed to the limit in running from north to south and east to west.” (127) These fires, in the initial stage, were only sporadic. The scene suddenly changed with the advent of the suffering Muslims from the eastern part of the Punjab. They were driven out of their homes by the Hindus and Sikhs. The cries of these weeping people were whimpering, smouldering and blood-curdling.

Lala Kanshi Ram was extremely worried. He feared that it did not augur well, and read the signs of doom. There was little surprise when first massive violence broke out in Sialkot. The Hindus were made to leave their homes and run away. This crowd of badly beaten Hindus was carried away by the police to the refugee camp. The
situation had become unimaginable. Nahal maintains remarkable impartiality in narrating these ugly scenes. He puts the blame squarely on the two warring communities. The Hindus were in dire straits in the burning West Punjab, but the Muslims, too, were in miserable plight in the eastern part of the Punjab. These fearful incidents exposed the folly of the partition and showed, in detail, the shameful bloodbath that preceded and followed it.

Violence followed violence. Minority communities stood very vulnerable. These communal riots were 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 the Muslims. The leaders were hollow and uncertain, and the government appeared to be against the people. Lala Kanshi Ram felt grieved at the strange role of the government, and said to Arun in a state of complete embarrassment: "‘If unwilling, the government is a party to murder. If incapable, we Indians had no right to ask for freedom’" (130) Sialkot turned into a riot-torn city. The Hindu Mohallas were burnt systematically. The Punjab and the Bengal were filled with incidents of murder, arson and rape. There was acute fear and confusion among the Hindus in Sialkot. They found no help from the 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. The communal elements in the government were apparent. Their intentions were revealed by Chaudhri Barkat Ali when he said to Kanshi Ram:
'Let me put it like this, either the Congress Muslims were a fraud to begin with, or they have changed sides. I’m afraid there is no organised body of Muslims denouncing what is happening in the city' (140)

Individuals appeals for solidarity by the important Muslims were of no avail. The tales of woe from India fanned communal frenzy. Violence was widespread on both sides of the border. This fact was made clear by Chaudhri Barkat Ali when he stated:

‘... that everyday hundreds of refugees from India continue to arrive with tales of terror and disgust. Whatever is happening here in Sialkot, things very much like that are happening on the other side too - - let'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.’ (140)

The violence was uncontrollable and unimaginable. It completely destroyed the atmosphere of brotherhood, harmony, trust, love and solidarity and replaced it by hatred, disgust, murder, fire, rape and arson. The trains, too, fell a prey to violence: "Trains had been as much victims of violence as individuals. Many of them were stopped on the way and the Hindus butchered. "43 It was tragic indeed. The Hindus felt utterly insecure in Pakistan, and the Muslims suddenly became thirsty for their blood.
The Muslims freely looted the Hindu houses and shops, and felt jubilant at these acts. Chaudhri Barkat Ali lamented this tendency of his brother Muslims, when he said to Lala Kanshi Ram: “All my arguments for peace have failed with my brother Muslims; they have ceased to be Muslims and have become shaitans” (138)

All those tragic incidents spotlight the madness of communal fanaticism. Millions of innocent people were subjected to unbearable torture; confusion and embarrassment gripped them in the riot-hit places. Nahal’s Azadi exquisitely depicts the psychology of the victims of the 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. He shouted agitatingly: “I was born around here, this is my home - - how can I be a refugee in my own home?” (138) He felt weak and old, and the thought of having a fresh start again at an alien place among strange faces was very depressing. In sheer disgust and disappointment, he said to his wife, “Arun’s mother, I’m an old man and I cannot begin all over again!” (132) But the thought of leaving his home was far more distressing to him than that of starting business anew. He felt pangs of separation, and faced a deep psychological crisis: “The pinch was he should have to give up his land, this earth, this air. That’s where the hurt lay! He breathed deep, filling his lungs with the air of the town to their utmost capacity, and tears welled up in his eyes. How could he give this earth up?” (132) He remembered his remote childhood,
and cried in agony: “ ‘We aren’t leaving yet’ ” (132) He even thought of becoming a Muslim and of staying in his hometown.

Lala Kanshi Ram felt offended when Abdul Ghani wanted him to leave and to make him a partner in his business. He knew that the decent part of Ghani was destroyed and “Argument couldn’t restore his sanity to him; only a calamity could.” (135) Lala Kanshi Ram told this the day his shop was looted. He was greatly shocked, and fell into a state of indecision. Everything looked changed, and he was an alien in his own house: “He now stood motionless, unable to decide what to do, as though he had come to the wrong house or were not the same man.” (137) He reflected that the mass violence was “ ‘really a failure of man’ ” (140) He thought of the causes of the tragic upheaval and concluded that “ ‘the English have let us down.’ ” (140) He believed that it was the duty of the English to protect people: “ ‘If today the man in the street feels insecure and if the government is powerless to protect his life and property, I hold the English responsible for that crime;’ ” (141) His agony at leaving his home found an outlet in his outburst against the Britishers. He said to Davidson very frankly: “ ‘...all that I had taken nearly thirty years to build is being lost because you refuse to protect me!’ ” (147) Lala Kanshi Ram blamed the English for having the biggest hand in the butchery.

The grain merchant felt very sad to find his wife and son packing for the refugee camp. He was greatly hurt, and his delicate feelings were stirred and shocked. He “watched them with an immense tightening of the heart. They were stripping the walls
bare, and Lala Kanshi Ram felt they were stripping his flesh from his body. The bone was showing - - whichever way he turned.” (144) The sight of the people leaving their homes and going to the refugee camps was very touching. Strong were the pangs of separation. The insistence of Mukunda’s mother on not going away, leaving her son behind, is symbolic of the attachment one has for one’s home. All efforts to drag her away failed, and she returned to her home in a state of frenzy.

Part II, entitled ‘The Storm’, graphically portrays the tragic brutality that followed partition. Life in the refugee camp in rains was a difficult one. But in spite of personal problems they faced, they felt happy and proud at the dawn of freedom. Lala Kanshi Ram lost his daughter and son-in-law in one of the many train-tragedies. There were horrifying accounts of what had happened to the train: “Hindus and Sikhs in the train were singled out and mercilessly slaughtered.” (171) The Hindus read their own tragic fate in these incidents. All of them were in mourning: “No tragedy was an isolated tragedy these days; it hurt each one of them, since the range and dimension of the blow was applicable to them all.” (171) The Hindus and Sikhs were cruelly butchered on the other side of the border. Their houses and property were set on fire. They were either annihilated or converted to Islam. But then similar was the tragedy of the Muslims in India; they, too, had fallen victims to the communal violence. The Muslims, who ran away from India and settled in Sialkot, did not look cheerful. Arun found them very sad, and he wanted to know the cause of their sadness: “They all looked unbelievably miserable. Now why in the name of Allah were they so sad? They
had got what they wanted, their Pakistan. Why this gloom?” (178) The burning of corpses produced a pathetic sight.

The dead lay together; the way they clung to one another when death overpowered them was very touching. The description of the communal frenzy moved all the sensible people with shame and sorrow:

The dead had been removed from the train and dumped there without sentiment or concern. It so happened many of them had their arms around each other or they were holding each other with their legs. And in the disintegration the fire brought to them, there was a constant movement in the heaps. Arms were climbing up or they were sliding down. Legs were yielding their hold or they were burying themselves deeper. And the eyes of one skull seemed to look into the eyes of another and send unspoken messages. For the other skull would nod, in a way saying it had quite understood. (184)

All these details — the massacre in train, the burning of the selected houses, the heap of corpses and their burning without sentiment or concern — show the immediate consequences of the partition. The communal venom is evident in Ghani’s hatred and his barbarous statement about Madhu, Arun’s sister: “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!” (185) It was enough to send a sensible man like Chaudhri
Barkat Ali into a fit of anger and excitement. These actions and utterances are an indelible blot on humanity.

The death of Madhu crushed Lala Kanshi Ram. He lost all hopes and heart in entertaining the thoughts of returning to the land he loved. He was angry with the leaders for their failure to read the whole situation correctly. He felt agitated at the call of the leaders, asking the minority to stay where they were. The loud appeal of Kripalani annoyed him very much. He lamented and felt aggrieved at the enormous bluff and helplessness of the leaders: “They had neither the power nor the intention of maintaining the minorities in their homes; they had not the power of saving their lives. They should have devised means of mass migration to begin with, before rushing to partition.” (211) The failure of General Rees, an Englishman, was a great setback to Lala Kanshi Ram, for he had put his faith in the English General. The army men under him suffered from strong communal feelings. The communal loyalties made the men of the Boundary Force inactive. He heard with disgust “how the minorities in East Punjab and West Punjab were slaughtered while men of the Boundary Force looked on.” (211) Even the governments were found to be involved in this mass massacre, and hence people were unable to save themselves: “The two new governments were parties to the fratricidal war, and how could unarmed men and women withstand organised slaughter?” (212)

The announcement of the Boundary Commission’s award gave rise to unprecedented violence. Everyone knew “where he stood -- on a part of Pakistan, or of
India.” (213) The award pleased nobody: “Both sides felt they had been shabbily treated.” (214) The British Chairman of the Boundary Commission went out of India two days before the announcement of the award. He had performed an impossible task, and left the country, leaving the people to fight among themselves:

It was an impossible assignment; to cut a country into two in five weeks’ time, especially when your fellow Indian judges on the Commission were warring with each other on communal grounds. He had ignored their rival claims, and as impartially as he could, divided the country - -and then left, leaving it to the communal parties to fight it out among themselves. (214)

Consequently, there was complete chaos. Neither of the governments knew its right and privileges in the area of the other. To bring its refugees safe to the homeland became the responsibility of the government. The local authorities offered all kinds of impediments to prevent the other government from functioning effectively.

Rahamathullah, the Camp Commander and an old classmate of Arun, showed no sympathy at the brutal killing of Madhu, and did not condemn it. When told of the ghastly train butchery, he remained unmoved and “sat stonily in his chair staring at the wall above Arun’s head, as if he saw on that blank wall explicitly spelled out a justification for what was happening.” (219) Prabha Rani studied Rahamatullah correctly. He criticised the Hindu code of conduct exclaiming with utter disgust: “‘Why must you Hindu boys go round making a sister of every woman?’ ” (225) He had
his eyes fixed on Sunanda, and he unsuccessfully sought Arun’s help in achieving his heart’s desire. He was unpardonably vulgar.

Arun promised Chandni, the chairwoman’s daughter, to make her his wife. He thought that he could do so in the changed context of the partition: “The appalling misery they were going through had to have some meaning. They had to emerge different, modified, reborn. Otherwise one might as well shut being a man.” (232) Arun had found a new identity for himself. In his present disposition, nothing — Chandni’s education, her status, her breeding, her poverty — mattered to him: “He had found a new identity for himself, an identity which had partly been thrust on him by the surge of events, and which partly he had worked out for himself metaphysically.” (233) It was the confidence in him that led him to say to his mother that he would marry Chandni. But the partition had a different impact on Sardar Jodha Singh; it made him mute: “His reaction to the partition had been typical of the men of his age: he had gone utterly mute.” (243)

The violence in the trains made Lala Kanshi Ram give up the idea of going by train, and so he decided to join the foot convoy. There were the reports of brutal violence at Nankana Sahib, “The town where Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, was born and which was the holiest of holiest for the Sikhs.” (247) After the partition it had fallen in Pakistan, and it was reported that “All the Sikhs were massacred there and the shrine was closed.” (248) The convoys were attacked on the way. It was common knowledge that only half the number of any convoy would reach
the destination safely. There were also starvation deaths: “They perished of hunger, or disease, or exposure or they were killed by violence.” (259) The partition threw millions of people in flight. They were running away In search of a safe land, and their plight was miserable. Convoys of ten miles were not unusual, and they were common in both directions: “Virtually the entire five hundred and fifty miles of the border between East and West Punjab was used by the minorities to cross from one side to the other, the people heading for the points nearest to their own homes.”(257)

The psychology of Sardar Niranjan Singh has been very brilliantly portrayed by Nahal. He was advised to cut his hair to escape being killed by the Muslims, for a man with hair was to be identified very soon. The safety of his family depended on his parting with the hair. But for Niranjan Singh it was a difficult proposition, for the thought that shaving off was a deflection from “the path of Dharma.” (245) He was prepared to lose his life rather than to get his hair cut. All sincere advice to prefer safety to keeping of hair proved abortive. One day suddenly he agreed to get his hair cut. But he was in great agony. He could not reconcile himself with this humiliation. He gave himself up to flames shouting “in agony but distinctly and clearly: “‘I belong to Wahe guru, Wahe guru is great.’ ” (262) Sardar Niranjan Singh became a martyr. His views concerning his hair were quite clear. This martyrdom “was something they had heard of but not seen it happen.” (262) His cry of pain while he was in the flames showed his attitude clearly: “‘Life I’ll gladly lose, my Sikh dharma I won’t!’ ” (262)
There were reports of the mass killing of Hindu prisoners inside the prison. Nur’s letter to Arun on his departure from the refugee camp regretted the merciless killing. She wrote: “‘God alone knows why people are so full of hate.’” (266) The villages presented a deserted sight. People saw “with their own eyes the extent of the havoc.” (283) The Hindu population had been almost completely wiped off. It “had been completely driven out or completely exterminated. Hindu and Sikh places of worship had obviously been defiled, because outside of them there were obscene words written in Urdu.” (283) When the Indian army officers inquired about the Hindu families there “the bearded Muslims smiled insolently and said: ‘Look for yourself.’” (283) Nahal gives, in detail, the picture of such villages to emphasise the dreadful consequences of the mad communal feelings: “In one small village of twenty houses, every single house had been destroyed and there was not a soul in sight. It looked a phantom village, the men were gone, the collapsed mud walls revealed broken charpoys and household goods in disarray, even the stray dogs had vanished from its only street.” (283)

Lala Kanshi Ram was surprised to find Gangu Mal accepting Islam for the sake of retaining his property in the city. He decided to stay on there as a Muslim because India held no promise for him. Gangu Mal’s conversion indicated the conversion of innumerable people; it spoke of the only possibility that was left for them, if they wanted to stay in Pakistan. Gangu Mal’s conversion brought a great change in Bibi Amar Vati; she became extremely serious. Gangu Mal’s conversion to Islam and his intentions to take a Muslim wife dawned upon Lala Kanshi Ram “the bare basic meaning of living, shorn of trimmings and embellishments.” (270)
There was the thought of creating a new life in Lala Kanshi Ram. He did not accept defeat. The “tasks ahead of him were multitudinous and he faltered and fumbled in his steps.” (274) The novel makes a very close study of his psychology. The death of his daughter was a great blow to his shattered psyche. He had lost his home that he dearly and deeply loved. After Madhu’s brutal murder, he decided to travel to India, abandoning all hopes of ever returning to Sialkot. The loss of the brave spirit in Bibi Amar Vati deeply shocked him. He had now harder tasks ahead. As he went through the fields in a convoy, he was smitten by the beauty of the fields. The Punjab was in his blood, and he loved it immensely. The landscape, with an intensely Punjabi character, made him feel curiously invigorated.

Nahal describes, in detail, the shameful acts done by the people out of communal frenzy. The parade of the naked Hindu women at Narowal was a brutal tragedy. It highlighted the communal ire and showed how men touched the lowest ebb. The Muslims completely demoralised and humiliated them. Azadi furnished a very realistic and horrible account of these savage acts:

A number of abducted Hindu and Sikh women were in their custody. Many of the kidnapped women disappeared into private homes. A lone Muslim dragged a woman away, and kept her for his own exclusive use. Or he took her with the consent of other Muslims, converted her to Islam, and got married to her. The rest were subjected to mass rape, at times in public places and in the presence of
large gatherings. The rape was followed by other atrocities, chopping off the breasts, and even death. Many of the pregnant women had their wombs torn open. The survivors were retained for repeated rapes and humiliations, until they were parcelled out to decrepit wrecks -- the aged, the leftovers who couldn't find a wife, or those Muslims who wanted an additional wife. In the meantime more women were abducted and the cycle was repeated all over again. (293-94)

Women were paraded through the streets and the local authorities, the police and the military did not interfere in such matters.

When Arun reached near his new country, he was not excited and elated. Other refugees, including Arun's father, were overjoyed at the sight of their motherland. In a moment of intense excitement, Lala Kanshi Ram chanted "Vande Mataram" loudly. But there were no such emotions in Arun. He had lost all strong emotions for independent India after such a ghastly tragedy. He had left his love behind, and had lost his Chandni forever. There was a strong storm in Arun, and he behaved in an abnormal way. He cried and shouted, and ran at the head of the convoy and again at the rear of it. All these acts symbolised the storm that raged within him.

From Dera Baba Nanak, Lala Kanshi Ram and his family moved to Amritsar. The relations did not offer them shelter, and so they feared that they would be turned into wandering gypsies. They were disillusioned, for their troubles were not over the moment they reached Indian territory. The houses of the relations were already
overcrowded. Local people resented the presence of refugees. There was confusion. The
government had not made adequate arrangements to receive the refugees. Whatever
practical help the refugees received came from the private charitable trusts. The
government proved a failure: The government was ill prepared and ill equipped to
handle them. Nearly two months after independence, it still had not come to grips with
the situation.” (326)

Amritsar presented a fearful look. The Muslims were driven out of the city. Their
houses were destroyed. The house of the Hindus and Sikhs were also damaged. At
Amritsar there was a procession of the Muslim women paraded through the Bazar. It
was a sequel to the Narowar incidents. All kinds of shouts and insults were hurled
down at these hapless women. At the station, Muslims were mercilessly massacred in
the train. The Indian soldiers, like their counterparts in the Pakistani army, failed to
protect the victims. At these tortures many refugees were gay and elated, but Lala
Kanshi Ram felt sorry and guilty and looked at the ground in humiliation. The tragic
scene did not end there. The Hindus and Sikhs were thirsty for the Muslim blood. A
train of the Muslim refugees was derailed at Ambala and the Muslims were mercilessly
put to death: “They were laid out beside the track, one dead next to another, and they
were covered with sheets. It was clear from certain sheets there was only a child below;
the corpse was so small.” (334-35)

The description of the terrible slaughter of the Muslims speaks of the objectivity
that Nahal maintains in recording the dreadful deeds. The Muslims in Pakistan
attacked the foot convoys, looted and burnt the Hindu houses, abducted, raped and insulted the Hindu women and massacred the people in trains. They, too, paraded the Muslim women through the market and hurled all kinds of humiliation at them. The Hindus in India were as guilty as the Muslims in Pakistan. This fact was very well stressed by Lala Kanshi Ram when he said: “‘We are all equally guilty.’” (339) He averred that the Hindus, too, had indulged in the shameful acts of butchery when he said to his wife Prabha Rani: “‘Each of those girls in that procession at Amritsar was someone’s Madhu, and there must have been many amongst the dead you saw at Ambala.’” (339) He ceased to hate the Muslims because he knew that “‘whatever the Muslims did to us in Pakistan, we’re doing it to them here!’” (338) He felt guilty and looked for forgiveness: “‘We have sinned as much. We need their forgiveness!’” (340)

The plight of the refugees in overcrowded trains, carrying people on the roofs and in engines and on every imaginable part of them, has been very vividly portrayed in the novel. It was a terrible travel by train that brought Lala Kanshi Ram and his family to Delhi among unfriendly faces. The behaviour of the officer at the crowded station was very shocking. Lala Kanshi Ram faced the problem of resettlement. He knew the difficulties the partition had brought, and the inefficiency of the government to cope with the situation. He thought of his moral responsibility to find a solution to the problem: “They had been pushed into this partition, they didn’t ask for it, didn’t sanction it in any form whatsoever. And no arrangements had been made to meet the consequences.” (345)
Tired of the camp life, Lala Kanshi Ram thought of living under the cemented roof. His efforts to find a private home in Delhi proved futile. The Custodian officers were unfriendly and hungry for bribe. They were refugees once, but now they did not understand the difficulties of the displaced. Frustration, futile search for a home day after day, the hard attitude of the officers, and the big bribes the officers wanted made Lala Kanshi Ram look pallid and helpless. Nobody in Delhi appreciated the idea of letting out rooms to the Punjabis; they were feared to be very quarrelsome. Delhi looked gay and showed no signs of the towns in the Punjab and Bengal that lay in total ruin. The difficulties tore Lala Kanshi Ram to pieces and made him feel weak. The man, who had never accepted defeat in his life, burst into tears before the Custodian Officer, but to no avail. The difficulties faced by Lala Kanshi Ram throw light on the crisis that was created by the partition. His was a shattered soul. The only feeling of establishing understanding and intimacy with his wife after a long interval was on the way to Delhi at Kurukshetra where he was actually able to converse with Prabha Rani. Otherwise he was a man, crushed by the weight of the hour.

The third part of the novel, named ‘The Aftermath’, shows Lala Kanshi Ram facing tremendous difficulty in putting in his claim for the lost wealth. His regular visits to the officer yielded no substantial result. Bibi Amar Vati felt happy at the news of Gandhiji’s assassination; she thought that it was good he had gone: “‘He brought nothing but misery to us.’” (354) She felt that all their troubles came as a result of partition, and “‘it was Gandhi who sanctioned the partition.’” (367) Arun held other Congress leaders, like Nehru and Patel, responsible for the partition. He said they had
turned a deaf ear to Gandhiji: “ ‘In the final days, they didn’t listen to him.’ ” (367) In Lala Kanshi Ram’s family every one was sad at Gandhi’s death; no one ate anything. In “the pride with which each man stood,” (368) Lala Kanshi Ram notices for the first time the blessing Azadi had brought to the Indians. In the pre-Independence days people could not feel publicly and openly for the death of an Indian leader. There was the fear of betrayal, violence and persecution. But 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.” (369)

The once well-to-do grain merchant of Sialkot and the family and friends grouped around him formed his little world whose fate reflected the true dimensions of the partition, which brought untold misery, put an end to the neighbouring bonds of friendship irrespective of religion, forced separation of the young lovers, and brought destruction to the millions of people. Lala Kanshi Ram lamented the haste the leaders showed in embracing freedom, conceding the dreadful partition: “Freedom was on its way and nothing could have stopped it. If only they had not given in so easily to partition.” (369) The partition made Arun feel lonely. Family ties were snapped and even thinking about Sunanda did not work: “Arun had lost contact with her too” (371) Lala Kanshi Ram underwent tremendous loss which “could never be made good, never atoned for.” (369) Nahal portrays effectively the small world of Lala Kanshi Ram and his family and friends, their placid, easy and happy lives before the partition, their
terrible misfortunes during the undeclared civil war, and their completely changes lives after the storm was over.

Obviously, the novelist fully succeeds in delineating the true dimensions of the events that accompanied the partition, showing their physical and psychological impacts on human life. The novel brings out not only the irreparable material losses, but also the loss of personality caused by this tragic event. The immediate after effect of the gruesome historic event on man is shown through the condition of Lala Kanshi Ram: "He felt himself standing before a tunnel, where he could not see the other end. How long was the tunnel? And it all looked so unnecessary, so superfluous, to him - - what they were going through." (369) Nahal is the only writer who has been able to evince the tremendous psychological impact of the event on the people - - viz., the complete loss of contact and communication with one another throwing them into a state of complete isolation and alienation, and making each a prisoner of his own "single self." The last few paragraphs of the novel are highly significant in this regard. Lala Kanshi Ram, Prabha Rani and Arun - - the three major characters, belonging to one family - - all suffer immeasurably from this malady: "The three of them lay fully awake. Not being able to fathom their minds and feeling restless about it. Not being able to talk to each other and feeling guilty about it. Not being able to go to sleep and feeling angry about it. A sadness weighed on their hearts, and each felt stifled, crushed." (370) Lala Kanshi Ram felt that he had lost all contacts and communications with his wife and son, and was unable to lay bare his heart to them, and the other two also felt the same:
That was another ruin *azadi* caused. He (Lala Kanshi Ram) had lost the ability to communicate with his family. He couldn’t establish a contact either with his wife or with his son. The affection was there. The concern was there. Their respect for him was there, too. Yet the contact was broken. Something had driven the apart. No, he couldn’t reach them. For a few moment he had succeeded in the train - - with his wife. That wouldn’t come again.

In their beds, Arun and Prabha Rani too were awake... Arun wanted to sit up and speak to his father, but he couldn’t. He to felt a wall between them, a hostility of a kind, he didn’t know for what. His father had been superb throughout, he had carried his pain nobly, and Arun loved him for that... Yet he could not form a connection with him.

Prabha Rani knew her husband was awake, but she did not feel like calling out to him. She was caught in the same snare. She had lost the ease that was between them, and had become confined to her own single self. (369-70)

Inevitably, the vivid description of the loss of contact and communication in people creates a depressing effect on the reader, marring much of the heartening and uplifting note of the closing section of the narrative. The last three paragraphs of the novel, describing Sunanda’s sewing machine at top speed, are highly suggestive and significant; they present symbolically the mechanised life without real feelings and contacts. But the sewing machine, with all its continuous, rhythmic movements, sounds
and vibrations, also suggests the continuous, rhythmic flow of life. These last paragraphs of the book, indeed, have more layers of meaning than one:

In the adjoining room, Sunanda's sewing machine was still running at top speed. Occasionally it stopped. Occasionally it made only a slight noise, as when the wheel had moved only a circle or two. And then it went wheezing on at top speed, as though it would never Stop.

Arun tried to imagine her. She must be biting the thread with her white teeth and with those delicately sensuous, delicately curved lips. She must be running the wheel back and forth with her hand. Now the tender hand with its tapering fingers must be on the handle attached to the wheel, for she was running it real fast...

The machine went whirring on, its wheel turning fast and its little needle moving up and down, murmuring and sewing through the cloth. The doors of both the rooms shook with its vibration. (370-71)

The partition made Lala Kanshi Ram feel the loss of his dignity and respect. He discarded wearing the turban: "A turban was a sign of respect, of dignity. He had no dignity left. He now wore a forage cap. Or he sat bareheaded, advertising his bumble position to the world. (366)