CHAPTER 5
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CHAMAN NAHAL

On account of immaturity of Indian leaders and because of the 'Divide and rule' policy of the English the people of the Indian subcontinent were constrained to purchase the transfer of power at a very high cost, i.e. the partition. 15 August 1947, symbolises a complex and contradictory reality in Indian history. Independence was achieved but not without profuse bloodletting, and the division of the country tore the fabric of the emerging nation. During India's fight for freedom the Congress had a two-fold task of structuring the nation and wresting independence for the people. It succeeded in organising Indians under its banner to pressurise the British to quit India but could not successfully weld the nation. This paradox was reflected in duality characterising the independence and partition — the glorious freedom followed by the bloody partition. It was with a tired gesture that partitioned freedom was accepted. Chaman Nahal seems to suggest that in different proportions responsibility for the event has to be fixed on the people of the subcontinent as well. But he does not denigrate the freedom of the subcontinent. In spite of everything independence was an immeasurable qualitative gain. Nahal stressed: "I think that historically, politically, ethically and morally partition was wrong. I believed and still believe that we are one nation."¹ Nahal himself was a victim of partition and had faced

involuntary exile, which led him recreate the most traumatic event of Indian history very comprehensively and sympathetically. He traces the birth of the beast in man during the fatal days of 1947, but asserts firmly that human love is the only ray of hope for survival.

Nahal portrays in vivid detail the feeling of insecurity suffered by the minority community during those fatal days. He registers in great detail the horrid consequences of partition. "Azadi synthesizes the portrayal of dilemmas of innocent victim by forces beyond their control, and the emotional impact felt by the divided communities." But Azadi is a story not only of savagery and atrocity but also of variables that precipitated the tragedy.

The epoch-making year of the Indian history backed up by a row of resounding events including the lively pictures of the Raj, the failure of Gandhi, the advancement of the expected date of transferring power, the apprehensions of minority community, the whimsical truncation of India, the communal riots, the colossal failure of the Punjab Boundary Force, and the problem of rehabilitation of dislodged community has found expression in the writings of Nahal.

Nahal has very thoughtfully divided the novel Azadi into three sections: 'The Lull', 'The Storm', and 'The Aftermath'. The suitability and the symbolic significance of the title of the three sections of the novel are explicit. The peaceful and harmonious lives of the Punjab people indicated

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'The Lull', which got disturbed by 'The Storm' of unwanted partition, that followed the dislodgment of innocent people who were thrown towards the dark and unknown future showing 'The Aftermath' of the horrid partition of India.

The protagonist of the novel, Lala Kanshi Ram, a grain merchant of Sialkot, has great respect for the British Royal family, but he despises the English rule. Though he enjoys the pageantry and the safety of the British rule, his hatred for the English rule justifies and introduces the theme of the novel. The shameful fate of subjugation by the foreign rulers is the crux of the problem. The English rule, a menace to the liberty of millions of Indians, has reduced an average Indian to the state of slaves. The struggle for freedom is symbolic of desire to live honourably. Lala Kanshi Ram feels happy over the defeat of Britain by Germany during the first phase of World War II. Nahal very exactly describes the burning desire of independence propagated by the severe hatred in the hearts of the Indians. This fact reveals the great desire of the Indians to embrace freedom, most of them being impatient to see the fall of the British empire. When the fight for freedom starts gaining momentum, timid Kanshi Ram also feels anxious to participate in it because it would end colonial rule and would win freedom for the country.

Lala Kanshi Ram leads a peaceful and prosperous life with his wife Prabha Rani and son Arun. He is in harmonious and amicable terms with his neighbours and fellow tradesmen. His friend circle includes Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs without any discrimination. Nahal has shown that there
is no hatred even in the illiterate populace of the Hindus and the Muslims. This is borne out by the fact that Lala Kanshi Ram writes in Urdu and speaks Punjabi, though being an Aryasamaji he is expected to favour Hindi.

The story of the novel Azadi opens on 3 June 1947, on which date the Viceroy is going to make an important announcement with regard to the freedom of India and the suspected partition of the subcontinent. This announcement is awaited impatiently and this restlessness viciates 'The Lull' of one and all. On the morning of 3 June Lala Kanshi Ram looks very gloomy and sullen. He takes a nostalgic and caressing look at the things he has achieved by hard work, after he migrated to Sialkot from Sambarhial village. He has gained name, place, prestige and a separate identity. The rumbling of 'The Storm', that was the fear and the suspicion of partition, has been dealt with vividly by Nahal. Lala Kanshi Ram is not highly educated, but he has grown intelligent by experience. Therefore, he can feel the dangers that are lurking in the announcement by the Viceroy. The fear of the horrible consequences is writ large on his face. He looks extremely worried about the consequences in case the English agree to give Pakistan to Jinnah. Though Prabha Rani tries to console him by saying; "Gandhi would never agree to a division of the country", yet Lal Kanshi Ram apprehends some shrewd British plan in the announcement because he knows the British policy of encouraging partition. His faith and confidence even in Gandhiji's oath of not accepting partition at any cost are shaken. He says to his wife: "That's true. But what if there is no other way out? And you know

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3 Chaman Nahal, Azadi (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1975), p. 34.
these English, they would rather divide than leave behind a united India." Lala Kanshi Ram feels that his efforts to make a comfortable home for a period of more than thirty years would be ruined by the partition. Lala Kanshi Ram visualises serious trouble ever since the British had set a time limit for setting India free. He cannot understand why the British are in a hurry and want to leave India by June 1948. He even denounces the fallacious simulation of Lord Mountbatten, who, by his charming personality, takes the Indian leaders to his stride. Lala castigates Gandhi-Rajaji offer of 1944 to Jinnah because it almost concedes the deleterious proposal of a 'separate homeland' to Jinnah and it encourages Jinnah to try for the creation of Pakistan. The talk of giving to the Muslims a section in the East of India and a section in West, of course with a common defence and foreign policy, makes Jinnah aware of materialising his dream of Pakistan. Lala Kanshi Ram observes: "Until then Jinnah had talked of Pakistan, but did not quite know what he meant by it. Gandhi, by going to him, not only gave Pakistan a name, he gave Jinnah a name too." With each year that passes the demand for Pakistan becomes stronger and insistent. The slogan "Pakistan or Perish" grips the imagination of the Muslims and gradually it becomes apparent that Jinnah would settle for nothing less than Pakistan. Nahal criticises the Congress' appeasement policy because it had negative reactions on the communal situation. Lala Kanshi Ram believes that Jinnah is crowned with undue glory by this offer. He thinks:

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4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., pp. 34-35.
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? 6

The appeasement policy of the Congress forced Jinnah to get the Congress compromise on its secularism and secure from the Congress an acceptance of partition, on the basis of the two-nation theory. The Congress' acceptance of Pakistan, however unfortunate, did not amount to an acceptance of the two-nation theory on which the demand for Pakistan was based. The Congress accepted partition as unavoidable, but it neither accepted defeat in the battle against communalism nor did it sacrifice its secular principles. Hindu communalists had taken up the battle where their Muslim counterparts left off and tried to subvert the building of a secular, free India. But Indian leaders succeeded in building a secular polity despite ravages caused by the partition. But it is also true that the Congress leaders failed to stop the bloodbath in the riot-torn cities of the Punjab.

The conversation between Lala Kanshi Ram and Prabha Rani introduces the theme of the partition into the novel. Lala Kanshi Ram's pondering over the serious situation gives an idea of the common man's suspicion of the impending national scene. The references to Pakistan appear frequently in their conversations. Lala is primarily concerned with the fate of 400 million people, if the partition takes place. He is equally upset to think that he would have to leave all his property in Pakistan and there

6 Ibid., p. 35.
would be brutal killing by the Muslims. He says to Prabha Rani: "If Pakistan is created, we'll have to leave. That is, if the Muslims spare our lives!" In fact, it is not only Lala Kanshi Ram's worry; in each home and on every street corner this is the most discussed subject of the day. Arun remorsefully tells his mother and Isher Kaur that Pakistan is a certainty. He is of the view that the Congress and Gandhji have betrayed people, although they had earlier said: "India was a single nation, not two." Most of the people lived in illusion that Mahatma would never let that happen. But people like Abdul Ghani knew that Pakistan was a certainty.

The Viceroy's announcement, scheduled for the evening, starts a chain of discussion. The people surround the radio-sets, to hear the announcement. And now, Lala Kanshi Ram's peaceful life actually receives a jolt when he listens to the announcement of 3 June announcing the partition of the country. The declaration brings an abrupt end to all speculations and apprehensions of the people. It shatters all the hopes the Punjabis were cherishing. They feel cheated by their leaders, who had promised them a united India. Those very leaders are now advocating the cause of the partition. The gathering at Bibi Amar Vati's house can hardly believe that Nehru is speaking to them:

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

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Ibid.
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?8

The faulty politics of the day was held responsible for the partition. Indian masses had not asked for it. They knew that the creation of a new Muslim state was not the answer to the existing problem. This political imprudence betrayed the people, who had almost blindly relied upon their political leaders.

The decision of bifurcating the country rocked the people of Punjab. All of a sudden they became aware of their religion and ethics. Until the announcement they were only Punjabis, "coming from the same racial stock"9 and sharing a common Punjabi culture, but the announcement made them conscious of their belonging and loyalty to their religions and their communal identities. The next moment they were Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs. The emotional rift among the various strata of the society was evident. The awareness of the difference grew and the consciousness of synthesis lost its ways. It was a sudden and rude shock.

The two-nation theory built an unbreakable wall of suspicion between the Hindus and the Muslims. The early concept of the Punjabi culture in

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8 Ibid., p. 59.
which different religions did not militate against the essential unity of people, was now challenged. The rhythmic cultural fabric of the Punjabi way of life was completely destroyed by the partition. There was a definite change in the Muslim attitude. Adbul Ghani, a hukka maker, in Azadi has good relations with the Hindu businessmen of the bazar. But when the peace parleys between Jinnah and the Congress fail to bring any concrete results and Jinnah starts advocating in favour of Pakistan, under his sway Abdul also started hating his old neighbours.

... 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, view your Hindu neighbour with suspicion, and he did that. They said, there should be a Pakistan, and he shouted for Pakistan.  

The rumours spreading misinformation and a superficial acquaintance with political events on the part of the common people muddled and exacerbated the communal situation. And when Pakistan actually came into existence the whole pace and rhythm of life was disturbed, "All the aesthetic beauty that lay in one's environment and institutions and cultural vigour that sprang from the fragrance of the soil got crushed under the iron heels of political expediency and historical foolhardiness."

The creation of Pakistan had different effects on different communities. The Hindus read their dark future in Partition, whereas the Muslims were gay and jubilant. The Muslims of Sialkot celebrated the occasion and organised a procession to express their happiness. The Hindus

10 Azadi, p. 50.
11 Goyal, Culture and Commitment : Aspects of Indian Literature in English, p. 127.
feared attacks from the Muslim mob. The whole atmosphere was charged with distrust and suspicion. It was quite tragic that one community of Sialkot city was celebrating the event, whereas the other community of the same city was mourning over the same event. The Hindus feared that their honour and their property might be attacked by the Muslims, and therefore "... the youngers 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."\textsuperscript{12}

The Muslims of the city organise a procession to express their joy. They are hysterically beating the drums and dancing the virile Punjabi dance—Bhangra. When the procession organised by the professional wrestlers and the meat-sellers reaches the eastern entrance of the Fort street, the closed gates and the presence of the Hindus and the Sikhs on their roof tops, timidly watching the procession, infuriates them:

They did not want to harm the Hindus—at least not today. 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.\textsuperscript{13}

The causes of rift between the two communities were several, the economic causes being the foremost. The Punjabi Sikhs and Hindus were wealthy and the Muslims were generally poor. The lavish life style of the Sikhs and Hindus had created jealousy in the minds of the Muslims. The desire for wealth necessitated defence of possessions on the part of the Sikhs and

\textsuperscript{12} Azadi, p. 65
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 67.
Hindus, which ultimately resulted in strife. The economic motive corrupted personal dealings. The conflict of interests may be regarded as one of the prime causes of the partition. The economic inequalities resulted in selfishness and covetousness which were the expressions of the lust for power. This covetousness was the greatest menace to peace because the people were roused to temptations by the spectacle of luxury in their so-called neo-paradise on the earth.

The bitterness of racial prejudices also mounted because of economic reasons. Racial antagonism, propagated by fanatic Muslim and Hindu leaders, was one of the potent causes of riots. The feeling of bitterness generated in them hatred for the people of the other community. The race prejudice, the origin of which is traceable to men's inhumanity to man, only denied basic human rights and multiplied tension.

The people of the Fort Street, in Azadi, feel a sense of security because it is near the City Police Station. They are sure that police would not let the mob commit atrocities and would be able to control the situation and avoid untoward incidents. But Inayat-Ullah Khan, the City Inspector, siding with the Muslims, orders the Hindus to open the gate. But the Hindus are not ready for it because they suspect attack from the frenzied mob. Therefore, enraged Khan orders his posse to break the door open. The inhabitants of the Fort Street are petrified at the impetuous behaviour of the City Inspector. Khan knows the municipal law which allows the citizens to close the side lanes and mohallas to general traffic at night. But after listening to the broadcast, he wants to favour the Muslims. But when the
police is about to batter the huge gate, the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police arrive and the whole operation comes to a halt. The Deputy Commissioner admonishes him for his shabby deed. But assessing the situation properly he appeals to Lala Kanshi Ram and the other tenants of the street to let the procession go through the mohallah. He assures the inhabitants that no harm would be done to them by the mob. Therefore, the two panels of the gate are flung open. The morbid sounds of the drum become alive again and the mob squeezes into the street, gloating over the helplessness of the trembling Hindus and Sikhs.

The Deputy Commissioner, Pran Nath Chaddha, and the Superintendent of Police, Asghar Ahmad Siddiqui, had received training in England and are above the vulgar and heinous politics of the days. The announcement of the partition on religious ground bewilders both of them. For these officers the bonds of brotherhood are far more stronger than the bonds of religion. For them one's conduct is a question of aesthetic preferences and not of political involvements. The announcement of the division of services bewilders them, for "... they would be herded together and colour dyes put on their heads, as they did with cattle, and some would be sent to one side and some to the other. The country was to be split up down to the last peon..."\textsuperscript{14} They are unable to comprehend the dialectics of the partition and unable to understand how the division of the country would solve the minority problem. They are aware of the fact that

\textsuperscript{14} ibid., p. 80.
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.\textsuperscript{15}

The discussion between the two police officials reveals the true nature of the malady and anomaly of the partition. The whole scenario is characterised by bewilderment and confusion, and the new political loyalty and new political equations only stupify the masses.

The fate of the cities of the Punjab being undecided, after the appointment of the Boundary Commission the Sikhs demand the boundary line at the Ravi basin. Their claim is staked on the ground that many important places of Sikh worship are in that part of the Punjab. Lala Kanshi Ram, too, is in favour of the proposal but Arun knows it fairly well that this ground would not be accepted and the boundary line would be at the Chenab basin. Thus, Sialkot would fall into Pakistan. But for Arun "None of that interefered with his love for the city of his birth. If it became a part of Pakistan, it would continue to be his city still. It will continue to be my city, whether I live here or not . . . ."\textsuperscript{16} He roams through its streets fearlessly from morning till evening, although the entire tenor of living has changed after the Viceroy's broadcast. There are hostilities and tensions, which were previously under the surface, now come into the open, and hardly a day

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., pp. 79-80.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 85.
passes without an untoward happening. His mother is afraid for him, but he says to her, "... ma, don't worry, these are not riots, these are local brawls. We've always had things like these — it is the Punjabi temperament. It could happen between a Muslim and a Muslim." And Arun keeps himself busy with his old routine regardless of the changing mood of the place, people and time.

The Arun-Nur affair transfers our attention from the political problems to personal crises created by the partition. They knew each other from their childhood, and now they are madly in love with each other. But the announcement of 3 June creates crisis in their lives. Though they themselves are not aware that the changed circumstances demand a new definition of their relations—to them, everything is as usual—yet for the watching eyes of fanatics it is the question of a 'Hindu' boy carrying on an affair with a 'Muslim' girl. In the new situation Nur wants Arun to embrace Islam for her sake, and Arun himself was previously ready to do so. Embracing Islam for the sake of Nur is no problem for him. He feels it is the lowest price he could pay to have Nur as his wife. The sincere, unreasoning love of Nur demands that Pakistan should not be a barrier between the two lovers and if the partition of the country is at all inevitable, Arun should adopt Islam and should stay at Sialkot. But realistic approach of Arun shattered Nur's dream, and she vehemently accuses him of being a timid Hindu who cannot sacrifice his religion for his love. But for Arun it is more than merely a question of love. He realises that his parents need him more

17 Ibid., p. 86.
than Nur. He is also aware of the fact that the new boundary line would be set-up at the Chenab basin and Sialkot would go to Pakistan, and in that condition Muslims would definitely expel the Hindus from their native place and they would be left destitute in some unknown place to re-establish themselves. They would have to start all the things right from the scratch and in that situation his father would all the more need his support. Therefore, he asks Nur to embrace Hinduism, but her feminine frivolity is a big hurdle to this proposal. Stuck in the mire of loyalty, Arun sees through the dirty game of the politicians:

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 Liaquat Ali Khan were coming in to an 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 around 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.¹⁸

The newly born situation fills the lives of the two lovers with bitterness. Nur's brother Munir, who knows about their affair, warns him to be careful.

The changed situation reminds Arun of the time when he and Munir were school students. Arun used to go the Arya Samaj School and Munir to Islamia School, but this fact never came in the way of their friendship, and when they joined the same college it became even more strong.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 90.
Arun's father, Lala Kanshi Ram and Munir's father, Chaudhri Barkat Ali were bosom friends. Chaudhri Barkat Ali, was an ideal Muslim filled with the spirit of nationalism. He was a devout Muslim but he respected the other religions. He did not differentiate between man and man. To him "... the Hindu next door was as much his brother, more his brother than an unknown Muslim living elsewhere." Barkat Ali despised bigotry and religious fanaticism. Munir, his son, inherited these virtues from his father. During those fateful days it were people like Chaudhri Barkat Ali who were the torch bearers of humanity. D.R. Sharma maintains: "Nahal, seeks to distinguish between the sanity and neurosis of life. He seems to suggest that life is purposeful because it produces men like Chaudhri Barkat Ali who rejected bigotry and opt for humanism." In the novel Barkat Ali stands as a symbol of humanity, who hates religious fanaticism. Though Nahal has not paid much attention to the delineation and development of the character of Chaudhri Barkat Ali yet he emerges as an embodiment of human values.

Arun and Munir, very much worried after the announcement of the partition, go to meet their friend Sergeant Bill Davidson and to know his views on the partition. Bill Davidson had once accused Indian leaders of pushing the things too fast but the arguments made by Munir and Arun had made him realise that he had offered

... the old imperialist reason for the slavery of India. According to the British the Indians must arrive at their freedom slowly. They must get there by stages. They must first educate themselves to be free. He knew that line of

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19 Ibid., p. 97.
reasoning smacked by hypocrisy. All the handicaps were nothing compared to the exhilaration of freedom. To be free, to be left alone to sort out their problems, to breathe, exist and function not in fear but in joy—what preparation was necessary for that? And the British used all these arguments only to prolong their stay here—not in the interest of India, but in their own interest.21

Davidson now believes that the partition was "... the most stupid, most damaging, most negative development in the history of freedom struggle here."22 He opines that the Cabinet Mission Plan was the best framed plan for the freedom of India but Indian leaders refused the plan. Bill Davidson feels bad because it is his community which brought about the partition. The Sergeant blames the English for this shameful deed and cautions his friends about the dreadful consequences that might rock their lives in near future. He feels that hard and dark days are ahead for the Indians. Though Arun and Munir were good friends, yet

The old feeling of easiness was gone. The event had hurt them in the ways they couldn’t understand, but while the sense of disappointment was common, the localised injury, the convulsive reaction of the myriad of cells that constituted the psyche, was different in each case. Even Munir and Arun felt a tension towards each other. When they left Bill Davidson, they cycled to the city in total silence. It was not rudeness; it was the slow absorption of the unexpected into their systems.23

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21 Azadi, p. 113.
22 Ibid., p. 117.
23 Ibid., p. 118.
Though an Englishman, Davidson blames Wavell of mismanaging the things. He is even more critical of Mountbatten, who persuaded the Congress leaders to accept the inevitability of division of India:

You may sing songs in honour of Mountbatten, as I believe you've started doing. But he has duped you into a division of the country. Even Gandhi and Nehru failed to hold their balance before him—Jinnah I never counted for much. They have all fallen for a handy prize, not realizing the misery it will heap on the masses.  

Mountbatten failed to visualise that partition would be followed by massive violence, bloodshed, and unprecedented carnage. Miscalculatingly Mountbatten had depended on the Indian army to put down the communal disturbances.

The first riot takes place in Slalkot on 24 of June. And then onwards it becomes a daily routine. There are four or five cases of stabbing each day, and at least four or five cases of arson. "It was not mass killing or organised killing—not yet. The average rioter was still not certain how far he could trifle with the law, and how determined the government would be in putting down trouble."  

The macabre fascination of the hooligans, the frightening red glow of fire, the bell of fire engine, the menacing smoke—all these create numbness and terror among the Hindus and Sikhs. But mass killing is yet to take place.

The whole Punjab is terribly in the grip of violence. Nahal writes:

"Many cities of the Punjab had been aflame for months; there were large scale killings and lootings in Lahore, Gujrat, Gujranwala, Amritsar, Ambala,

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25 Ibíd., p. 119.
Jullundur Rawalpindi, Multan, Ludhiana and Sargodha." On 24 of June 1947 some Hindus are killed by some Muslims in Sialkot and from that date the chain of killing starts:

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 the 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.

Besides killing the Hindus the Muslims start setting fire to the Hindu properties. It is all a part of the well - thought - out plan. "The way these fires ware 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." These fires start when the suffering Muslims, dislodged from the eastern Punjab, start pouring into Sialkot.

The blood - curdling stories of sufferings, told by these evacuees, initiated the retaliatory act. The Muslims fell upon the Hindus with a rage that knew no bounds, and it did not make any difference to them that the Hindus of Pakistan had done no harm to them. The alignment with distant and unknown member of one's own community became more important then old "neighbourly comaraderie." In their opinion, they were all their

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 120.
28 Ibid., p. 121.
enemies, their only crime being born as Hindus. The Muslim evacuees from India joined their brethren of Pakistan in their retaliation. The Muslims organised themselves into groups, collected weapons and attacked the Hindus. They drove them out and took over their properties. The growing ill feelings between the two communities eventually culminated in an orgy of bloodshed, arson and loot. These large scale communal riots were encouraged by the inactiveness of the military and administrative machinery. The majority community acted to overawe and demoralise the minority community. The most virulent anti-Hindu proclamation was made and an open incitement was perpetrated by the Muslims. The communal contagion spread rapidly in Sialkot. The first target was Mohalla Dharowal. The Hindus were attacked and driven out of their houses. The injured people were crying hysterically. These untoward happenings revealed the vulnerable position of the minorities. Lala Kanchi Ram remembered the days when the English used to control such situations very quickly, but now the things had changed. They were pulling out of the country and they remained unconcerned with the changing situation of the country. Though curfew was imposed on the city yet Muslim marauders ignored it. The government machinery failed to manage the situation arising out of emergencies. The Hindu Mohallas became the natural, almost legitimate targets of the mob fury of the Muslims. The desperate hurry to dismantle the British rule, vitiated the government's power to control the spreading violence in the country.
No preparation whatsoever was made by the government to meet large-scale disturbances. Every night a police jeep went through the streets announcing over the amplifier there was a curfew on in town and anyone coming out would be shot. People ignored that warning and violence at night had occurred for several weeks. But the situation had become unmanageable. The refugee camps mushroomed overnight for the unfortunate Hindus whose homes were burnt and who were forcibly evicted from their houses. This unprecedented suffering of a large part of humanity exposed the folly of the partition. Nahal maintains a remarkable impartiality in depicting the ghastly incidents. He blames both the communities for perpetrating heinous crimes. What the Hindus did to the Muslims in the East Punjab was a reverberation of Muslim atrocities committed on their brethren in the West Punjab. The human beings ceased to behave like humans. Every imaginable indignity and cruelty was practised on the people of another community. The blind retaliation victimised the innocent and the guilty without any discrimination. Religion ceased to have a humanizing effect; rather one community perpetrated barbarous crimes on the members of the other community in the name of religion.

The Hindu community of the riot-torn Slalkot city could not find any safe refuge. They found no protection from the police, and the military, too, had disappeared from the scene. The Hindu shops were looted, the Hindu houses were burnt down, and the Hindu people were massacred. The English government had controlled several such situations in the past, but

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30 Azadi, p. 123.
now they looked unwilling to control the situation. The Indian leaders were inactive and uncertain. Lala Kanshi Ram felt very grieved at the role played by the government. He accused the government of being a party to murders. He asked his son whether the government was unwilling or incapable to protect the minorities, and added: "If unwilling, the government is a party to murder. If incapable, we Indians had no right to ask for freedom."  

The Hindu Deputy Commissioner, Pran Nath Chaddah, who was working to bring peace and solidarity to riot-torn city, was shot dead by his own Muslim bodyguard. The communal elements in the government were highly active. The situation in Sialkot exacerbated with the influx of the Muslims from India who brought with them stories of heinous crimes perpetrated on them by the Hindus.

The polarization along communal lines made people feel that loyalty to religious community was important than neighbourly or friendly relations. Therefore, those who belonged to the other community became legitimate target of revenge. The rioters lauded and justified their descent below human standards on religious grounds.

People were forced to go to refugee camps to save their lives, leaving behind not only their property, their ancestral land but also their dignity and identity. Lala Kanshi Ram, like millions of others, bore the predicament of being a refugee in his own motherland, his birthplace. This ironical and

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31 Ibid., p 124.
baffling situation was unbearable for him. He shouted in agony, "'I was born around here, this is my home—how can I be a refugee in my own home?"" 32

Chaudhri Barkat Ali's family represented a fine Muslim household. He and his wife were staunch Muslims but also "... believed in the unity of all religions. There was not a single ayat, a single verse, in the Quran which preached otherwise. God is great and Muhammad is his prophet. But the same God is the God of the Hindus as well, and if they preferred to worship his another form that was their business." 33 The close affinity between Lala Kanshi Ram and Chaudhri Barkat Ali turned into bosom friendship when they listened to Gandhiji in 1930, in a public meeting that was held at Ramtalai. There Gandhiji pleaded in favour of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood. He said: "... let each Muslim accept one Hindu as his 'brother', and the Hindu that Muslim as his brother." 34 Gandhiji further asserted that India was divided by the barriers of geography and not by the communal entities. Gandhiji's appeal had highly influenced the two friends and their sons too inherited the good-will of their fathers. But the news of partition bewildered them.

Lala Kanshi Ram was aware of the fact that he was growing old and at this stage of life he did not have the courage and strength to build up all the things that he had achieved in the last thirty years. 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!" 35 The sense of helplessness brought tears in

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., p. 97.
34 Ibid., p. 100.
his eyes. For the first time in his life he felt like an alien in his native place.

The pangs of uprootment and dislodgment was too acute to bear:

Lala Kanshi Ram ran his hand over the wall of his room and something in him snapped. No, he couldn't just give it up. Behind these walls lay years of labour and hope. He was young though, he was only fifty, he could start a business somewhere else, in some town on the other side of the border. But could he? Could he, really? He looked at his wife and Arun, and he knew how tired his arms and shoulders were. You mean, to begin right from scratch? Wasn't that asking a little too much of a middle-aged man? And where precisely would he begin? In what city? How much capital did he have in cash? How early, at how short a notice, could he withdraw it from the bank? What of the shop—the grain stored there? How would he dispose of it? Would anyone give him any price for it in such times?36

The dark future in an alien land without any kind of resources and the problem of settlement of property were the major problems that were rocking Lala Kanshi Ram's mind. His attachment to his earth and its air was so deep that he wanted to incorporate his land in his person and wanted to eat earth like his childhood days. To him his identity as a Hindu was not as important as his being a Punjabi. He was even ready to get converted to Islam if he was allowed to stay in his land.

One day when Lal Kanshi Ram opened his shop Abdul Ghani started jeering and laughing at him and obstinately asked him to leave Sialkot. But cool voice and soft words of Lala Kanshi Ram ashamed him. Though Abdul Ghani looked beaten yet insolently he asked Lala Kanshi Ram to make him his partner. This disgusting proposal shocked Lala Kanshi Ram but he

politely turned down the proposal. The negative answer of Lala Kanshi Ram infuriated Abdul Ghani and he intimidated Lala Kanshi Ram of severe consequences. Lala Kanshi Ram knew that the decent part of Ghani was destroyed and "Argument couldn't restore his sanity to him; only a calamity could." Abdal Ghani represents the type of people who were swept off their feet by the deceitful concept of a neo-paradise offered by Jinnah.

The proposal made Lala Kanshi Ram burst into laughter because "Ghani's audacity, his insolence, far exceeded his expectations . . . " Ghani's proposal to Lala Kanshi Ram was symbolic of his lust for money. He was pinning for Lala Kanshi Ram's wealth. After the declaration of creation of Pakistan the general feeling was that if Pakistan was for the Muslims so should be the property owned by the Hindus. The arson loot and murder that started on the twenty-fourth of June continued night after night. The cries of 'Nara-e-Takbir, Allah-O-Akbar!' terribly shook the Hindu population of Sialkot. The newspapers and the Muslim evacuees told horrible stories of murder, arson, loot and molestation that was taking place in the Punjab and Bengal. Each day hundreds of Muslims poured into Sialkot and hundreds of Hindus and Sikhs left Sialkot. Though the morale of Lala Kanshi Ram was quite low yet he did not want to leave. He knew that the situation of the city was very grim yet he believed that leaving the home "... was irrational, it was madness incarnate, this violence, and it had to stop." His hope was

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37 Ibid., p. 129.
38 Ibid., p. 128.
39 Ibid., p. 130.
rekindled when on the twenty-second of July the Hindu and the Muslim leaders together declared that the minorities will be given full protection.

One afternoon Lala Kanshi Ram clumsily entered his house and informed his wife that the shop was looted. He looked crestfallen and stood transfixed. The news brought tears in the eyes of Prabha Rani. When Lala Kanshi Ram saw her dejected and tearful — "... she who was so strong and determined and was the absolute centre of their domestic life. ..."40 Lala Kanshi Ram forgot his own pain and started consoling her. In the meanwhile Chaudhri Barkat Ali entered their house. He expressed no surprise when he heard the news as though he knew it was inevitable. In a sorry note he informed that the Muslims had made plans to loot the Fort Street that night. The news heavily shocked them. He informed them that all his efforts to pacify the fanatic Muslim leaders went in vain and the Muslim hooligans were planning to attack their mohalla that very night. Lala Kanshi Ram was taken aback to hear the news and all the tragic scene of suffering and lamenting people began to dance before his eyes.

He realised that communal tension had mounted rapidly and sporadic violence had metamorphosed into massive violence. The blind retaliation did not see the fact that the Hindus of Pakistan were not the villainous culprits behind the sufferings of the Muslims of India. The bonds of religion gained prominence and the old cultural fraternity lost its vigour, and this resulted in a fanaticism alien to India. The appeals made to abandon the path of violence were of no avail. The tales of woes flowing from India accelerated

40 Ibid., p. 132.
the communal violence. Both sides of the new border witnessed identical cases of crimes. Both the communities perpetrated similar kinds of indignities on the other community. As Chaudhri Barkat Ali points out,

'... 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.'

The leaders could have halted, the wave of communal violence in the East and the West Punjab by undertaking a moral crusade to bring about a change of hearts in the embittered communities, but they remained ambiguous and inert.

The ghastly sight of looting and burning of the Hindu Mohallas, people evacuating their houses, levying of curfew and the mushrooming of refugee camps revealed the vulnerable condition of the minority community. This sense of helplessness brought tears to the eyes of Lala Kanshi Ram. He felt marooned and forlorn in the sea of troubles. He sat helplessly on his chair. Barkat Ali advised Lala Kanshi Ram and the other tenants of the street to move to the refugee camps for their safety and the latter sadly acquiesced to the proposal. The grain merchant felt very miserable as he saw his wife and son packing. He thought that the refugee camp was only a makeshift arrangement to save their lives against the storm that was

41 Ibid., pp. 134-35.
hauling and that after the storm was over they would be able to come back to their house. But he felt hurt when he "... watched them with an immense tightening of the heart. They were stripping the walls bare, and Lala Kanshi Ram felt they were stripping the flesh from his body. The bone was showing—whichever way he turned." He felt alienated in his own house as he stood motionless, unable to decide what to do, as though he had come to the wrong house or was not the same man. Lala Kanshi Ram alleged that: "... the English have let us down..." It was their job, their obligation, to see that freedom came smoothly. 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." His agony at leaving his home found an outlet in his outburst when he said to Bill Davidson: "'All that I had taken nearly thirty years to build is being lost because you refuse to protect me!'" At another place angrily he told Davidson: "'Freedom to be sure, we welcome it. But why the violence? It is a denial of what the English stood for during two hundred years in this country! And it is the English who have the biggest hand in this butchery.'"

Lala Kanshi Ram had achieved a prestigious place and a secure future for himself and now the sole desire of his life was to spend rest of his life in Sialkot, die there and be cremated by the side of the Aik River. He wanted to roll down in the dust of fields of Sialkot from where his body was

42 Ibid., p. 138.
43 Ibid., p. 135.
44 Ibid., p. 142.
45 Ibid.
raised. The unwilling evacuation took him to a state of trance, his eyes being "fixed on the wall ahead but actually were centered nowhere."\footnote{46}

Though the British troops were not allowed to enter the city yet Bill Davidson managed to get trucks through his native friends. When Lala Kanshi Ram saw an Englishman standing before his door he could not control himself. Though Davidson did not understand Urdu, he could still understand the language of disappointment. Davidson saw him "... stood hunched up in his sorrow, as though his whole body was badly lacerated. And there was a distress in his eyes which was deadly a distress which needed no language to communicate itself."\footnote{47} Very pathetically the Lala unfolded his dilemma: "You were our sirkar, our masters, and I and millions like me gave you our complete loyalty. While striking a deal with these "leaders", did you ever think of us? Did you for one moment consider what might befall us?\footnote{48}

The tenants of the Fort Street were getting into the trucks with their luggage. The sight of exodus was pathetic. The most touching sight was the departure of Sunanda Bala, the daughter-in-law of Bibi Amar Vati, who was very beautiful and sensitive lady. She even kept herself isolated from rest of the Punjab ladies. The same Sunanda was forced to face a whole gathering of people:

As Sunanda emerged from her house, holding her children by the hand, a quiet fell on the audience. She walked with majesty even in grief, and floated out into the street like a tableau; her face pensive her eyes downcast, her

\footnote{46}{Ibid.}
\footnote{47}{Ibid.}
\footnote{48}{Ibid.}
shoulders soft and sagging, her fingers firmly gripping her children. 49

She was never before exposed so mercilessly to unfamiliar eyes. She maintained nevertheless her regal composure, fortitude, dignity, demeanourness and self-assurance. All the other tenants were seated in the trucks but Mukunda’s mother was missing. Lala Kanshi Ram went to persuade her but she refused to move away without her son. They even tried to take her forcefully but she struggled hard and ran back to her room. At last, the gathering decided to move to the refugee camp without her. The people were silent and sullenly looked at the two buildings that were their houses, "...they were not houses of architectural beauty. And yet every single person in those two trucks was yearning to run back into them and fill them up." 50 With heavy hearts the tenants of Bibi Amar Vati’s house moved towards the refugee camp, cherishing the false hope that they would soon be able to come back to their houses.

In the camp, one day Dr. Chander Bhan and his wife informed Lala Kanshi Ram about the tragic death of Madhubala, his [Lala Kanshi Ram’s] married daughter, and Rajiv, his son-in-law in a train ambush, in which “the Hindus and Sikhs in the train were singled out and mercilessly slaughtered.” 51 The news shocked everybody and a crowd gathered outside the tent of Lala Kanshi Ram. The entire displaced community read their own tragic fate in these incidents. "No tragedy was an isolated tragedy these days; it hurt each one of them, since the range and dimension of the blow

49 Ibid., p. 149.
50 Ibid., p. 155.
51 Ibid., p. 163.
was applicable to them all." Prabha Rani, who was the centre of her family and who took charge of the family when even Lala Kanshi Ram failed to maintain his balance, gave "...a metallic cry, wrung from the depths of her being." In spite of her sturdiness she lost her mental balance and became mute when she heard of Madhu's death.

Since the thought of Madhu's body decaying a few miles away was unpalatable, the Lala asked Arun to go to Chaudhri Barkat Ali to seek his guidance and help. Though other people of the camp prohibited him to send Arun to the city, where the Hindus who were left behind were either converted to Islam or were annihilated. Yet Arun and Suraj Prakash went to the city. The city of Sialkot was quite quiet but

The area used to have a Hindu majority and every single house in that bazaar had been burned down. Mianapura was a mixed area — Hindus and Muslims both lived there. So the mob had carefully selected the Hindu homes and set fire to them alone, with the result that much of Mianapura looked like a pair of jaws with many teeth missing.

Arun told all the details to Chaudhri Barkat Ali and he decided to go to the station to inquire the details.

The station presented a deserted look. The passengers and the coolies were absent, only the police officials were supervising the cremation without sentiments. Chaudhri Barkat Ali and his party saw that

The four heaps were piled high and the fires were roaring and hissing with great force, the flames climbing many feet into the air. What they saw

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52 Ibid., p. 164.
53 Ibid., p. 163.
54 Ibid., p. 169.
there was only dismembered limbs, dozens of them — legs, and arms, and hands, and thighs, and feet. The fire had consumed other parts of the bodies; it was the parts which had not fully burned that stood out.

And there were the skulls. Again, dozens of them. Many lay face down, the others faced the sky, or looked sideways. Bare jaws, scooped out eye-sockets, gnashing teeth. Very often a skull cracked open with a popping noise, its bones disintegrating into the heap around. Since it was a quiet night, the sound came like the crack of a rifle; it was unnerving sound.  

Lala Kanshi Ram had sent Arun to the city out of his sentiments for his daughter. When they reached station all the bodies had been cremated by the volunteers. There Abdul Ghani confirmed, in a poisonous tone, that he himself had cremated Madhu and Rajiv.

When after the tiring visit to the station Arun came back to the tent he was petrified. When he reclined to take rest his imagination reverberated the memories of Madhu. He felt a deep hollowness inside his being, when he remembered the days he had spent with Madhu. But the quivering body of Chandni, the daughter of the Charwoman Padmini, brought him back from his thoughts making him aware of the fact of continuity of life:

No, Madhu had gone, but life was continuous. The sky and the earth as ever were throbbing with possibilities. Right now, this minute. Death had hit them, and yet all around him was the flow of a force which would not be brought to an end. It was the continuity of life. It was the continuity of the will in the being of things. And never had this urge for survival, for self-assertion, manifested itself in Arun so powerfully as at this time of death. It was as if he would himself perish otherwise. He suddenly felt he needed a meal, he felt enormously hungry. Squirm though he did at the thought of it,

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55 Ibid., p. 176.
the feeling of hunger grew upon him. The cells of his body were asserting their own reflex want, made more pronounced in the face of death.\textsuperscript{56}

Arun now felt his bodily necessities. The urge for survival, and self-assertion manifested itself even more powerfully at this time. Though the calamity that had befallen them demanded the denial of self, yet Arun’s entire being wanted fulfillment and not the renunciation of self. Thus, he found his new love in Chandni.

Lala Kanshi Ram bore all the discomforts of the refugee camp rather bravely in the hope of returning to Sialkot, where again he would get back his house, his shop and the other assets, but after the assassination of his daughter he lost all interest in the badly burning Pakistan. He decided to migrate to India. Because memories of Madhu were still very alive in his old house — her ringing laughter, her wildness, her companionship, and her transformation from a wild girl to a grave woman were brought back by each and every object of the house. Madhu’s death was a major loss of Lala Kanshi Ram’s life and it deeply shook him. Though he had hardly expressed or shared his grief with any other person, his countenances expressed his grief and all the untold pains he was bearing. After Madhu’s death Arun found "... him become indifferent to the generosity of others, even suspicious of that generosity."\textsuperscript{57}

When on the seventeenth of August Sir Cyril Radcliffe's report on the settling of the Boundary Line was finally announced the communal violence reached its worst. Both the nations felt that they had been deprived of their

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., pp. 200-01.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p. 206.
lands. In both the sides of the boundary the old amicable relations between
the two communities became impossible and a chain of rioting started:

The chaos was so absolute neither of the
governments knew what rights and privileges it
had in the area of the other. In most refugee camps
dry rations, like flour or lentils, were given out free
to the refugees for their daily use by the
authorities. After the fifteenth of August, the two
governments argued about the cost. During the
month of August, armed escorts for the refugees
were provided by the Boundary force. Now they
were made the responsibility of each government,
and units of the army were sent from one side to
the other to cover their respective refugees.\(^{58}\)

Captain Rahmat Ullah Khan, the new camp Commandant, was captivated
by the dazzling beauty of Sunanda. He wanted to approach her through
Arun. He gave Arun alluring proposal of reaching to safety if he helped him
in his amorous design. But Arun did not let his conscience droop even at the
face of such an alluring proposal and firmly refused to help Rahmat.

In the fast-changing situation, "He had been growing up too fast,
shedding his past too fast. One thing which had become clearer to him was
that asking too many sureties form life didn't help."\(^{59}\) This made him unduly
bold. Sunanda Bala was fully aware of the hungry eyes of Rahmat. She
revealed to Arun her dislike for Rahmat but Arun was too engrossed in his
love affair with Chandni to pay attention to any other problem. Now none of
the impediments—either of caste or of status—existed for him; for they were
all refugees. After going through shocking experiences a great realisation
dawned upon Arun that the tragedy of the partition had smashed all the

\(^{58}\) Ibid., pp. 207-08.
\(^{59}\) Ibid., p. 220.
social barriers that alienated human beings form one another. Thinking that
the partition would abolish all barriers that divide man from man, he
accepted Chandni without reservations:

None of these things, her education, her status, her
breeding, her poverty, mattered to Arun in his
present disposition. 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. He did not want to give that
identity up.60

Though the inmates of the refugee camps were going through ordeals, yet
the cycle of nature continued with its own pace. Everyday new babies opened
their eyes in the tents and the old died. Nahal seems to suggest that even
such great annihilating tragedies hardly make any difference to the cycle of
nature.

Soon the date of the foot convoy to Dera Baba Nanak was fixed and a
large body of Gurkha troops came from India to escort the convoy. The
refugee column was expected to be nearly ten miles long including twenty
thousand refugees in it. That was not unusual and convoys of ten miles were
common in both direction. "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 point nearest to
their own homes."61 Rana Jang Bhadur Singh, the Gurkha major, was sent
by the Indian Government to escort the convoy along with his troops. The
whole convoy was split in ten units under the leadership of a camp inmate.

60 Ibid., p. 227.
61 Ibid., p. 251.
Each group was given a vehicle to carry arms and disabled. The convoy was supposed to move six miles everyday and only a night's stop was scheduled. When the convoy was announced the inmates of the camp were ready to bear all sorts of ordeals because they knew it was going to be a hard subsistence-level march. They were to carry their own rations with them or buy stuff locally if they could. Many starvation deaths in other convoys were reported, and it was common knowledge that only about half the number of any convoy reached safely.

But before the convoy could get ready a great tragedy befell on Isher Kaur. Niranjan Singh, her husband, was a volatile person. He wanted to fight back the Muslims instead of bearing the indignities cowardly. He was a determined devotee but fanatical Sikh. The other people of his group were forcing him to have his hair cut for safety, but he was not ready to do so because he believed it was against his Sikh religion. He tried to convince his wife but when he felt weak in front of her teary eyes he immolated himself at the Sialkot refugee camp. He embraced death instead of abandoning his manhood just for the sake of survival. He did not even care for his pregnant wife and placed his loyalty to religion over his liability.

The day when the convoy was supposed to leave Munir and Chaudhri Barkat Ali came to the camp to bid farewell. Munir handed over a letter to Arun written by Nur. She had given a simple but tearful farewell to Arun: "Will I ever see you again? God alone knows why people are so full of hate. I wish they were not to part souls that love each other. But I'll think of you till
the day of my death." The private lives of the two innocent people were pathetically affected by the political expediency.

The good-for-nothing husband of Bibi Amar Vati, who was missing for sometime, reappeared on the scene when the convoy was about to leave. He informed Lala Kanshi Ram that he had turned Muslim, for his logic calculated a dark future for himself in India. In order to retain his property in Pakistan he embraced Islam. Gangu-Mull alias Ghulam Muhammad also abandoned his family to face hardships whereas he himself stayed back for the sake of a luxurious life. This decision of Gangu-Mull shattered Bibi Amar Vati and Lala Kanshi Ram who had known "... Bibi Amar Vati as a lioness, fierce and unyielding... He saw her now as a scare-crow. ..."

The convoy started flowing from the camp. Most of the men carried their luggages on their back, on bicycles or on bullock carts. The Indian army was trying to encourage the refugees but they were all very desperate. Like all the other refugees:

... Lala Kanshi Ram in his mind was busy adding up his losses. They were numerous. As the city vanished from his sight, he became more concerned about what lay ahead. The problems that loomed in the future were a thousandfold more complex and bewildering than what he had gone through. Hitherto he had only died—in various ways. It involved no act of the will on his part; the death came suddenly and swiftly and offered no alternatives. The act of creation on the other hand demanded a slow nursing, a careful watch which in spite of the long effort might or might not blossom into fruit. Many parts of him had died but there were others still alive, and he knew he was not defeated. But the tasks ahead of

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62 Ibid., p. 261.
63 Ibid., p. 268.
him were multitudinous and he faltered and fumbled in his steps.⁶⁴

Dera Baba Nanak, the border town on the Indian side, was forty-seven miles from Sialkot. The convoy was supposed to pass through Pasrur, Qila Sobha Singh, Narowal and Gunna Kalan. Major Jang Bahadur Singh was hopeful of taking these people to India in fifteen day's time. But the convoy moved very slowly. The first camp for convoy was made at Pasrur. The men and women kept half the night with vigilant eyes and alert ears. The refugees witnessed phantom villages and scene of decay and destruction all along the road. In the roadside villages occasionally presented men and women of all ages in shambles. Many could not bear the strain and stress and perished. The weak and the disabled were left on the way side. The population had been completely driven out from these villages. The Hindu and Sikh places of worship had been defiled. These sights very much disappointed the refugees. The convoy met with an accident after it reached a few miles away from Pasrur. Unit two and unit three were ambushed by the Muslim marauders, and the India army was of no help because they were afraid to shoot at the mixed up crowd. The frenzied Muslim mob attacked the convoy with all sorts of weapons. The hooligans bayoneted the refugees and shot them. After blood bath they took away with them a large number of innocent Hindu and Sikh girls. The spot where the Muslims had ambushed the convoy was "... littered with articles, discarded turbans and female headgear, shoes, umbrellas, sticks, and cans of food."⁶⁵ The convoy faced the

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 269.
⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 282.
second attack near Alipur Saiyidian. Only half of the number of the units survived the attack. But they survived only to bear another attack and suffer indignities and difficulties on their way to their new homeland.

The tired and exhausted herd of refugees were camped next at Narowal. The suffering lot of Hindu and Sikh refugees excited the Muslim population of Narowal, who in order to hurt the sentiments of the Hindu and Sikh refugees, announced to organise a naked parade of the abducted Hindu and Sikh women. The shameful parading of women highlights the degeneration of humanity and human values. The women were treated most shabbily. They became victims of lust of men because of the "...unnatural world of hate and violence generated by the partition..." The local police and the military were all aware of the tension that was mounting, but they did not interfere. Nahal describes the situation in the following words:

It was the most unwholesome gathering Arun had ever seen. Not only did the men there looked unclean and vulgar. There was an indecorous thickness in the air and the whole atmosphere was smeared over with smut, as if a brush of some grisly substance had been run over the men, the buildings, and the bazaar.67

The women who had been stripped naked were forced to march in columns. The naked parading of Hindu and Sikh women at Narowal was a brutal act. Humanity sank down to the lowest ebb. The women who were marching in the parade were completely shaven of their hair. The bruises on their bodies showed that they had been treated very badly. When the procession moved through the bazaar amidst the spate of obscenities "... not a single shred of

67 Azadi, p. 291.
decency was left. It no longer remained a lewd scene; it became evil incarnate. Darkness was added to darkness and a strange terror was let loose on the earth." Most of the people in the mob were shouting insults upon the poor creatures who were marching stark naked. In the prevailing atmosphere of racial hatred, the act of the hakim sahib was an amazing exception, who was praying for the poor women with infinite grief on his face.

The Chandni-Arun affair was flourishing against all the hardships. Chandni and Arun were absorbed in each other. Though sometimes Chandni felt scared because of atrocities and crude exposure to the difficulties, and Arun felt dead inside, yet they were devoted to each other, but before they could get united in marriage a massive attack at the Narowal camp snatched away Chandni from Arun. He felt very lonely without her: "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?" At Narowal Captain Rahmat succeeded in his lecherous pursuit and Sunanda lost her dearly cherished chastity. The helpless cries of Sunanda shook Arun and he killed the Captain for his filthy deed. Another major loss for Sunanda was the death of her husband, Suraj Prakash.

The Indian military discovered some of the abducted women but their family members felt ashamed of them because those poor women had been

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68 Ibid., p. 293.
69 Ibid., p. 319.
molested and dishonoured. Arun spoke in favour of these poor women. He was even ready to accept Chandni as his wife if she was discovered. "Lala Kanshi Ram quite agreed with Arun in his mind. But he wasn't going to let this piddling slip of a boy confront him with a discomforting truth..."

When the convoy reached India each family had lost something or someone:

Innumerable men and women on both sides lose their dignity, self respect, modesty and sanity. There is no one who does not lose someone something or the other. Thus the novel becomes an orchestration of various kinds of losses to which men and women were subjected owing to the indecent hurry of wily politicians to capture power and to their inadequate preparation to meet the situation arising out of the brutal act of partition. At all these places the Hindus had clashed with the Muslims. The loss of life and property was enormous on both the sides. Immediate steps were needed to handle the explosive situation.

After reaching India Lala Kanshi Ram's family knocked the doors of many of their relatives but no one responded favourably. Now they were trying to settle down, though they had only a precarious future before them. The hellish life at the refugee camps doubled their troubles. There were inadequate facilities in the camps. The hurry with which the partition and migration was precipitated bewildered the government machinery. The influx of refugees was so enormous that arrangements made by the government proved inadequate. The refugees

... had imagined their troubles would be over the moment they reached Indian territory, [but] they were sadly disillusioned. Not only were the arrangements to house and feed the refugees inadequate, their very presence was resented by

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70 Ibid., p. 318.
71 Goyal, Culture and Commitment: Aspect of Indian Literature in English, p. 11.
the local people. Their number had exceeded all expectations and the food was running short. The winter was approaching and there were not sufficient blankets.\textsuperscript{72}

On reaching the other side of the border Lala Kanshi Ram witnessed the same kind of beastly horrors perpetrated on the minorities. The same shameful and filthy treatment, the same naked parading of women, and the same burned Muslim mohallas. Nahal maintains objectivity in recording the dreadful deeds committed on Muslims by the Hindus. Lala Kanshi Ram averred: "We are equally guilty."\textsuperscript{73} Hindus treated the Muslim women in a shameful way, killed their men and occupied their property. He saw that his co-religionists were as unsympathetic in India as were Muslims in Pakistan. His experiences on this side brought to him a great revelation. He told Prabha Rani: "I can't hate the Muslims any more"\textsuperscript{74} He realised that good and evil existed everywhere.

Ultimately, Lala Kanshi Ram and his family decided to go to Delhi. But the Delhi bound train was not ready because a train full of dead corpses of the Muslim evacuees had arrived in the Amritsar Platform and the platform was being cleared. The Indian soldiers were deployed by the government; "but they were only a facade — like their counterparts in Pakistan. They had failed to protect the Muslims."\textsuperscript{75} When the train got ready there was a stampede on the platform. Hundreds of refugees struggled and scuffled to board the Delhi-bound train.

\textsuperscript{72} Azadi, p. 322.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., p. 335.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 334.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 324.
In Delhi Lala Kanshi Ram and his party found the behaviour of the rehabilitation officer degrading and callous. Even the sorrowful tales of suffering of refugees did not move him. The refugees were not a welcome guest anywhere—especially in Delhi. After much humiliation the officer accommodated them in the Kingsway camp. Lala Kanshi Ram also went to the office of the Area Custodian of evacuee property but the officers were not friendly: "Many of these officers were Pubjabis, who had themselves migrated from the West Punjab. But they looked a different breed from the refugees who came and lined up before them. Drunk with the power of their office, they were impatient and intolerant — at least with most of the refugees." 76 When the Lala reached Delhi it was already the middle of November and the evacuee property had been either allotted to the refugees, who had come earlier or had forcibly occupied it. The rehabilitation officers asked for bribes for petty favours. The hardships on the other side of the border made Lala Kanshi Ram a pathetic figure:

Lala Kanshi Ram became pale by degrees and now it seemed there was no blood left in him . . . . Never before in his life he had felt so exposed, so naked, so defenceless. He was not born to riches and it was not the material comforts he missed. Yet he was used to, he had got used to, warmth. Out of the dark cave that life was, Prabha Rani had carved a sunny patch for him and then sealed it off. Prabha Rani was still with him but the seal had been smashed. There were too many eyes peering in on them at these camps, too many ears listening. 77

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76 Ibid., p. 344.
77 Ibid., pp. 346-47.
Now Lala Kanshi Ram wanted solitude for himself and his wife. He never wanted a public display of his emotions but wanted to feel the presence of his deceased daughter in his memory. But no Delhite was ready to give them house, for they considered the Punjabis to be very quarrelsome. Thus, neither the rehabilitation officer nor the Delhitis could provide them shelter. Inadequate rehabilitation facilities only exacerbated problems of the displaced masses. The fact highlighted the lack of political sagacity of those who engineered and controlled the move.

The enormity of the refugee problems was unimaginable. The population of Delhi had doubled with the influx of refugees, but the great number of refugees was not the only problem — they were angry, tired, embittered, desperate masses of humanity. They were victims of the most barbaric cruelties and atrocities. Now they wanted the return of their sufferings—a safe shelter for them in free India. They had suffered a lot and now they wanted security. There were, at a rough estimate, seven million refugees in India, and of these a million were concentrated in Delhi. Here they discovered that their miseries were far from over. They were herded like cattle in barbed enclosures, and even these enclosures were so overcrowded that those who came later were ordered to move into the other parts of India. In free India refugees bore enormous hardships in putting their claims for the settlement of property they had left behind in Pakistan. Even Lala Kanshi Ram's frequent visits, sorry gesture and enormous suffering yielded no results.
For the rich grain merchant of Sialkot his family and friends round him constituted his small but happy world, which was destroyed in the wake of partition. Chandni and Padmini they left behind, and Isher Kaur and Teja Singh went to live with their relative. Their small world was shattered into shreds. Bibi Amar Vati held Gandhi responsible for their ruination and expressed her happiness at the news of his assassination. Bitterly she said: "...it was Gandhi who sanctioned the partition." 78 But the other members of the family, even though they had been victims of the most cruel crimes, felt hurt to hear the news. All through the novel Chaman Nahal has presented a bleak picture of the divided independence and has raised the question as to why the geographical division caused the division of hearts and why the people of the subcontinent were forced to achieve freedom along with a bloodbath. He answers the question when he describes the feeling of the great loss felt by the country at the death of Gandhiji. Now masses were able to express their feelings openly, which was not possible during the British rule. It was an entirely new experience. They realised the value of self-pride that freedom brought with it.

Lala Kanshi Ram welcomed the independence but lamented the precipitation of the event. He opined: "Freedom was on its way and nothing could have stopped it. If only they had not given in so easily to the partition." 79 The partition definitely had brought deliterious results with it, and people suffered due to communication gap and were confined in their

78 Ibid., p. 360.
79 Ibid., p. 364.
cocoon woven by themselves. Their own suffering was too heavy a burdan for them to share the burden of others. Lala Kanshi Ram, Prabha Rani, Arun, Bibi Amar Vati, Sunanda and her two children were living under one roof but their earlier heart-revealing intimacy was absent. All the members of the family felt:

That was another ruin azadi had caused. He[ the Lala] had lost the ability to communicate with his family. He couldn't establish a contact either with his wife or with his son. The affection was there. The concern was there. Their respect for him was there too. Yet the contact was broken, something had driven them apart.\textsuperscript{80}

Arun and Prabha Rani also failed to establish any kind of soothing relation with people. They cared for each other but could not share their hurt feelings. Sunanda sitting with her sewing machine symbolises the mechanical routine led by the members: "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."\textsuperscript{81}

Nahal muses over the absurdity of the partition and through Chaudhri Barkat Ali expresses his wish that the folly of the partition would be undone one day. Himself a Punjabi, the novelist has tried to acquaint his readers with the Punjabi heritage by explaining the cultural milieu of the Punjab unfamiliar to others. His narration is deeply rooted in politico-cultural and historical consciousness and this awareness has been amalgamated without asserting his ethnic identity to expose the corruption and coercion that went

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., pp. 364-65.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., pp. 365-66.
into the creation of Pakistan. He believes that cultural, religious, political and economic differences were deliberately created and fostered to achieve selfish goals. He hopes that the people of the two countries would some day understand the folly of the partition and would smash the barriers dividing hearts.

Though the entire novel, Azadi, has been woven around the stories of loot, arson, molestation, murder and evacuation and though people had to go through many hardships and ordeals to achieve the freedom, yet through his characters Nahal underscores the blessings of freedom. Asha Kaushik notes:

Thus, although beginning on a note of ambivalence and uncertainties of national integrity in the face of religious fanaticism, moral degeneration and political fragmentation, Azadi closes with the affirmation that a nation, resolved to persist with her quest for identity, outlives even annihilating tragedies.  

Nahal admits that political freedom is meaningful and significant only when it ensures the dignity and respect for the lowliest and humblest of men and brings the freedom of spirit and mind. With some reservations he accepts the ordeals that came with the partition. The novel has been rightly regarded "as a celebration of the baptism of freedom though with restraint and reservation."  

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