Chapter III

Love Beyond Borders

Into Another Dawn
Into Another Dawn, written after Azadi, is Chaman Nahal’s third novel. However, since Azadi is discussed along with the other novels of the Gandhi Quartet, Into Another Dawn is discussed earlier than Azadi.

Into Another Dawn deals with the theme of universal love, which transcends all social, economic, racial, and national considerations. The epigraph, taken from the Panchatantra, aptly sums up the relationship between Ravi and Irene, the two major characters in the novel:

‘Is he one of us or is he an outsider?’

So speak the small.

Those of noble heart

Take the whole world for family.

As O. P. Mathur remarks, “...it is a powerful statement of the theme of the meeting of the East and the West at the level of human emotions”.¹ The novel presents an affirmation of love and understanding between people of different regions, nationalities, and cultures. Chaman Nahal himself says that the novel “is an attempt at bringing together two different cultures. ...It attempts to tell how in spite of cultural and religious differences, a ground for affirmation can be forged, within which human bonds are very vital.”²

Into Another Dawn is about the passionate union of two highly sensitive individuals, Ravi and Irene, who are outwardly different, Ravi an
unmarried Indian student and Irene a married American woman. But as O. P. Mathur points out, "the heart knows no East or West, brown or white."³ Nahal, of course in a lighter vein, seems to suggest that complexion is only skin deep when Ravi says about himself, "I'm not particularly dark. On occasion I have been mistaken for a Greek, or an Italian, or a Spaniard. ... No, I'm not as dark. But, it would be apparent to anyone I am not white" (11). This statement shows that Ravi is an embodiment of cosmopolitanism, his chief identity being that of a human being.

For Chaman Nahal sun, sunrise, and dawn seem to be very significant symbols of rebirth and new life. In his Silent Life, he writes,

The greatest joy to me without doubt came from early mornings – from dawns – before the sun had arisen, when everything around you was just about waking up. There was a freshness in the air, and little angels were fluttering in the sky and beckoning us to move ahead.⁴

He also writes, "All my novels have been written during those pre-dawn hours, which according to Indian mythology is a most sacred time – amrit vela."⁵ In Sunrise in Fiji Harivansh Batra’s journey to Fiji is in search of the dawn of the truth of life. In Into Another Dawn Ravi Sharma experiences not one but two dawns:

For the hero, nagged by his family in India, America is but another dawn which leads him to love and fulfilment, and the
prospect of early and certain death by blood cancer holds out for him the prospect of yet another dawn. The novel is a powerful allegory of the human soul, the sun, the ‘Ravi’, moving on from one dawn to another, from the East to the West, from this life to the next, ever radiating the warmth of love and ever ready to welcome the future.⁶

In this context it is very interesting to notice that while in My True Faces a man and a woman who belong to the same country, the same religion, and even the same caste cannot lead a happy married life, in Into Another Dawn Ravi and Irene, though they belong to different races, different countries, different religions, and different cultures, find love between them. Thus, “If Nahal’s first novel, My True Faces, is about marriage sans love, his Into Another Dawn is about love sans marriage.”⁷

Nahal uses the first person narration in this novel and therefore the story is presented from Ravi’s point of view. It begins with Ravi’s recapitulation of the various events in his life. Ravi was born in a poor Brahman family in the city of Hardwar. His father was in charge of a dharmashala. Ravi’s mature thinking is apparent when he says, “My father was a Brahmin, a high-caste priest. His father was a Brahmin too and I believe his father’s father too. So I too was a Brahmin, by that reckoning” (23). He seems to suggest that one does not become a Brahmin by birth but by one’s knowledge and wisdom. This statement of his
reminds us of Ramaswami’s statement in *The Serpent and the Rope*: “I was
born a Brahmin – that is, devoted to Truth and all that. ‘Brahmin is he who
knows Brahman,’ etc., etc.”\(^8\)

Chaman Nahal, like some of the other major Indian English
novelists, gives a graphic description of a typical middle-class Brahmin
family, especially one dominated by the second wife of the head of the
family, and how many a young Brahmin feels suffocated in it. That is why
when Ravi won a scholarship to the College of Commerce in Roorkee, he
felt immensely happy: “Those three years were like heaven for me….The
hostel had its regulations, but they were nothing compared to the harsh
bullying of my stepmother. … I worked hard, and played hard, and ate
hard – for those three years of grace” (25).

From start to finish, Ravi is presented as one who is interested in the
internal rather than the external. When he read the Indian religious texts,

...they left me more baffled than I previously was. The
duplicity that surrounds one, the split between the thought and
the deed, the void when speech altogether fails one or when it
comes blundering on unasked, the lure and dismay of chance,
I was all too aware of these. The scriptures made matters no
easier. (25)

Again, when he failed to get any job, he was not worried. He knew that
All physical miseries have an end to them; they cease, sooner or later. What badgers the individual incessantly is his own secret self, the bud within. I live and die not whether or not my mouth is fed, but whether or not the bud receives some nourishment. (26)

The passages quoted above clearly reveal the fact that Ravi has an outlook which is entirely different from that of many other young middle-class Brahmins. Sometimes in this novel the attack on such families becomes very pungent. For instance, Ravi feels that he should be grateful to his stepmother for not trying sincerely to get him married. He says why he feels happy about it:

For what can the tie-up of two persons with each other mean in a society which is so promiscuous, which is so incestuous! *Behind the bogy of dharma — the invisible ‘enemy’ — every Hindu household is a mess of stinking rottenness.* Too many things are mixed together, too many are vaguely held up, too many slurried over. There are far too many people around, and no one quite knows who owns whom or what. Obligations and privileges are defined conspicuously enough, but that’s only in the code of conduct book. What it comes to in practice is that everyone owns everyone else. And everyone uses everyone else, including sexually, since
Like Kamal in *My True Faces*, Ravi is also against blind belief in the so-called dharma. If for Kamal dharma is a "monster" (165), for Ravi it is an "enemy." However, they are not against the concept of dharma but against making dharma a mere ritual.

When he could not get a job with his degree and could no longer suffer his stepmother's attitude towards him, Ravi left for Rishikesh to earn his living by taking up the traditional profession of priesthood. Here again Nahal gets an opportunity to satirize superstition:

> There were five or six prayers which I had committed to memory. The pilgrims themselves were ignorant of the texts; they wouldn't know if I substituted the ashes immersion mantras for the head shaving mantras. All they wanted was that I subject them to some ritual. (31)

It is in Rishikesh that the most important event takes place in his life, important not in itself but in the sense that it leads to a memorable phase in Ravi's life. The event is his accidental meeting with Steve Cogney, an American Professor of History at Columbia University, and his wife, Liz Cogney. Steve is the first person to exercise an influence on Ravi: "He was absolutely wild with enthusiasm. And he cast the same magic on me as he had on her [Liz]" (51). On their advice, Ravi applied to colleges in
Ravi succeeded in his attempts when Rider College in Trenton took him in for a Master’s degree in Business Management. Thus began Ravi’s journey towards the dawn. It may sound paradoxical that Ravi goes to the West and experiences a dawn there, but this is in terms of human relationships. As Usha Rani observes, “From the darkness of Hardwar he moves to the bright day of America. His aimless and drifting life acquires a sense of direction. What takes him to that country is not the pursuit of higher studies as much as the urge for freedom from an inhibiting, constricting and hostile environment.” As Ravi reached America, he was overjoyed that “I was coming to a land of strength and power, where things didn’t just sprout haphazardly but were pursued with vigour, where life had a motive to it and where its course was chalked out with care and with
concern” (90). However when he reached New York, he was shocked at the chaos and confusion at the airport:

There was before me the worst kind of disorder imaginable. While I enjoyed the confusion, temperamentally tuned as I am to it, I felt trapped by the callousness that went with it. It was an insensitive, unfeeling, a selfish kind of confusion. A mad race was on for every conceivable objective, whether it was clearing the customs or hailing a cab, and no one cared a damn for anyone else. In the midst of crowds I stood totally alone. With none even to tell me how to make a local phone call. (90)

The passage quoted above gives a picture of life in the United States. However, Nahal’s purpose seems to be to suggest that human relationships are based on personal qualities rather than on societal interactions.

Chaman Nahal draws upon his knowledge of America, especially Princeton, where he stayed for three years, and makes Ravi’s description of the country authentic. Through Ravi’s description of the various places he visits, Nahal seems to suggest that human behaviour is the same wherever one goes and what looks a beautiful place from a distance becomes ugly when looked at from a close point. In other words, appearance and reality are not always the same. Before going to America Ravi had built an
extravagant picture of American affluence: “Vastness all around – and an abundance of material objects” (92).

Another aspect of American life that disturbed Ravi was how the not-so-rich Americans lived. If America has its riches, it also has its poverty:

We drove through the heart of Harlem. Negroes everywhere. Packed like sardines, as the cliché goes. Round, black, chubby children, with frightened eyes. Much noise and shouting at certain crossings. Restaurants with neon lights blinking even during the day. Negroes selling household articles on the pavement. Old Negro women, walking alone with stick in hand, but dressed in dignity, with white knit stoles around their shoulders. Young women with deep-red lipstick and no stockings. (94) Grand Street, Spring Street, Prince Street. Fine names! But the area was deserted and very dilapidated. Buildings were huge but they were stripped bare. Plaster was peeling off, you could see the unevenly cemented brickwork, the windows were without glass, in places without frames, the broken doors were patched with rough wood or old newspapers and many houses looked as though no one lived in them....Not many men in sight, and those you saw looked extremely poor,
poorer than the Negroes (it was a white neighborhood). We saw two young men, unshaven and dirty, wearing what could be called clothes only as a euphemism, sprawled flat on the ground next to each other....Another man was eating out of another garage can. He too was in rags, but he was not old—around forty. He also had a wild beard. He was sifting and resifting the contents of the can with a piece of wood. (95)

The kind of life led by many Americans is similar to the kind of life Ravi led in Hardwar:

I lost my mother when I was two, and I have no recollection of her. All my brothers and sisters are from my other mother: my father must have remarried soon, as my next brother is only one year younger to me. Then there was a widowed sister of my stepmother who lived with us. And a brother of my stepmother, with his wife and three children. We were thus fourteen persons who lived together in two rooms of a vast dharamshala, an inn for pilgrims, of which my father was the caretaker. (24)

The three passages quoted above indicate that the socio-economic conditions have a great impact on the life of the people, whether they are Indian Brahmins or White Americans or African Americans. These sights disturbed Ravi and made him sleepless throughout that night. He learned
that America is the most lonesome city in the world. He realized that America is a country of contrasts:

Not only are its extreme contrasts shattering – of poverty and wealth, of health and sickness, of cleanliness and dirt – the pace of living is so fast, it turns you insensate. If it has the tallest buildings on the face of the earth, it has also the deepest snake pits – many of them. I saw more desolate people in those seven days than I had seen in all my life in all the other places put together. Men mumbling to themselves, men making gestures to themselves, men striking at an imaginary foe with clenched fist, men fending themselves off with a terror-stricken look, men drinking by themselves in public.

And women too, solitary women – doing the same. All over.

In the streets. In restaurants. In lavatories. (97)

These passages are an attack on modern man, who has quarantined himself from fellow human beings and is interested in his own welfare and is not bothered about the lives of others. When we read these passages, we are reminded of the following lines in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*:

Unreal City,

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,

A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,

I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.¹⁰

As mentioned earlier, Chaman Nahal’s view is that a novel must have a social purpose. When we read these passages, we can notice that Nahal, thorough his novels, expresses his anger at the outdated traditions of India and the extreme materialism of America. The two major characters in the novel, Ravi and Irene, are drawn to each other because they find themselves aliens in their respective societies.

Ravi’s other friends, in addition to the Cogneys, are Dick Bloomfield, an African American from Alabama, and Jerry, an immigrant Jew from Yugoslavia. All the three considered themselves outcastes: Dick because of “his sense of isolation in the society in which he lived” (69) and Jerry because of his paranoia.

It is during a football mach that Ravi met Irene for the first time. In a few moments he realized that “I was absolutely bewitched. I was finished. I was in her bag before I knew it” (56). Irene, thus, became the first woman in his life and remains to be the only woman till he leaves America for India. Maybe one reason for their coming together was that both were leading a miserable lonely life:

When I first met Irene, I was running in my life. She was running too. A domineering husband, a stillborn child, corroding and grinding loneliness. That had been her undoing
largely. I was fighting a worse enemy, a sinister, sneaking beast, who never quite showed itself fully in the open, yet whose filthy snout was visible everywhere. You went near it and hit the snout with all your might. It immediately withdrew itself into the underground chamber where the beast was hiding. But soon the snout was sticking out again – and only a couple of yards away from where you were standing. You went and hit it again. Again it disappeared. Yet out it came again, soaking you with its stench. In the end you either ignored it or you bore with it. Or you ran away. (23)

When Ravi found life in America unbearable, Steve assured him that “in spite of all the surface anomalies – the greed, the lust, and what you will – there is another America. And thank God, there will always be another America” (108). The “another” America which Ravi started to experience was Irene’s deep and selfless love. This romantic relationship at a deeply human level transcended all considerations of colour or nationality. Ravi’s life with Irene transformed him, a rebel against domestic tyranny, into a true human being – sensitive, affectionate, and cosmopolitan.

What is unique about the love between Ravi and Irene is that it is neither purely romantic nor just platonic. For them love is the highest expression of their individual freedom:
Any talk of subjugation, or surrender, or giving and taking is repugnant to us; there are no serfs around here....We become one composite entity, united from end to end. And parts in the entity seek out and grope with each other, but none yields to the other; they only take on. Irene in the act of love becomes my absolute equal, my co-sharer. And we cease to be lovers, we become brothers. The man ceases to be a man, the woman a woman. We are true brothers then, agog, incandescent, eager to be enriched further. (21)

For Ravi and Irene love is the motivating power. It enables one to give strength and power and freedom and peace to another person. It is not a useless strong-scented burden that is thrust on somebody. It is not a result; it a cause. It is not a product; it produces. Ravi and Irene are two sensitive and unconventional beings who find a remarkable affinity between them. Of course, there are differences between them: they are “like two comets blazing across the sky, perpetually breaking into splinters and yet continuing with redoubled velocity” (148). However, these differences also contribute to a better understanding between Ravi and Irene. As John Gray says,

Very few people, indeed, are to grow in love. Yet, it does happen. When men and women are able to respect and accept their differences then love has a chance to blossom.

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Through understanding the hidden differences of the opposite sex we can more successfully give and receive the love that is in our hearts. By validating and accepting our differences, creative solutions can be discovered whereby we can succeed in getting what we want. And, more important, we can learn how to best love and support the people we care about.

Love is magical, and it can last, if we remember our differences.

Another incident which gives a true picture to Ravi of the world in general and America in particular is his visit to the Wood Stock Music and Art Festival, where he experiences universal love and amity. Steve Cogney visualizes: “We had no idea who those people were. No questions were asked, no confidences shared, no addresses exchanged. We were just people, chunks of the human race, coordinates of a single spectrum” (112-113). Ravi realizes what freedom is and how hard one has to work in order to achieve it:

Freedom meant the right to protest, the right to question, to vary and to change, howsoever high the authority or noble the concept. And by God, we were going to have it, whatever the price. Political freedom. Social freedom. Freedom of race and colour. Personal freedom. (117)
As O. P. Mathur rightly points out,

The West has made the potential humanistic features of the early Ravi’s personality explicit and positive. The West is almost at its best in this novel – not a wonderland of science and technology but a region where men, released by affluence from the daily worries of bread and butter, are free to mix with one another and establish a community of man. The West in this novel is an area of light and men like Ravi are its prophets.¹²

But his happiness and excitement disappear when he learns that he has blood cancer and he has only a short time to live. Here we come across another important character in the novel, the African American doctor. He represents people who can smile even in great sorrow, people who grin and bear it. When Ravi asks him whether something could be done about his disease, the doctor gives the example of his own son who suffers from a terminal disease:

Twenty years had gone by and the boy was still alive through medication….the most the boy could expect to live was another ten to fifteen years. And those hands of his had been able to do nothing for him.

‘That boy is my son,’ the doctor added after a pause, smiling bravely but despondently. (147)
Ravi, taking the doctor’s words as the guiding principle, comes to the conclusion that

There are certain things the memory of which you carry beyond the grave. I have no grandiose illusions of what you become after death; I think you become only an abstraction, and you don’t remember then by rote or formula. Something of you surely survives, and I know something of me will survive too. Indeed there will be yet another dawn, many other dawns, I’m certain of that. The possibilities are endless. In the end, the spirit of man is greater than all the gods and the goblins put together. And that spirit will refuse to be blotted out. But maybe for a long while I’ll lie only in an in-bound, dormant form before I take on another shape. (Emphasis added) (147)

Two powerful feelings well up in Ravi. He wants to die in his native place. His return to India will enable him to sit on the banks of the Ganges and watch the evening prayer and “converse with the Ganges in my own language” (162). His second desire is to save Irene from the agony of witnessing his death. Ravi knows that the Ganges, Irene, and the African American doctor have made an indelible impression on him:

...several things will be inseparably intertwined in my consciousness, howsoever nothing or dispossessed it
becomes. Of the myriad of sense impressions I have been exposed to, I cannot say how many will remain with me. But three of them will always be there wherever I go, whatever I turn into. And they are the Ganges, Irene, and this black doctor. (147-148)

The novel ends with once again referring to the true love between Ravi and Irene:

I said to Irene this morning:
‘Everyone is asking me for a gift. What would you like me to bring back for you?’

...  
‘Just yourself.’
‘Ask for something else too.’
She shook her head.
‘It’ll be blasphemy – after the way I have loved you.’ (164)

Ravi’s leaving for India reminds one of the lines in R. K. Narayan’s A Tiger for Malgudi: “No relationship, human or other, or association of any kind could last forever. Separation is the law of life right from the mother’s womb. One has to accept it if one has to live in God’s plans.”13

In conclusion, to quote Srinivasa Iyengar, “Dear India is India and exotic America is America; and yet human beings everywhere are the same in the raw and in their souls. While indicating the differences, Chaman
Nahal hints also at the possibilities of transcendence 'into another Dawn'.”14
REFERENCES


2. Chaman Nahal, Interview, by B. S. Goyal 68.


