CHAPTER III

"A WIPED-OUT DREAM" : AZADI

Chaman Nahal’s second and Sahitya Academy Award winning novel, Azadi (1975), is a major work of art among the notable novels on partition like Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan, Raj Gill’s The Rape and Nanohar Malgonkar’s A Bend in the Ganges.

Taking Lal Kanshi Ram’s story as an objective correlative, the novel seeks to reveal how ‘azadi’ or freedom, in the real sense of the term, fissled out to be ‘a wiped-out dream’ and a ‘false dawn of freedom’ at political, social, religious and personal levels. Politically, ‘azadi’ has balkanised the country and created an artificial border between India and Pakistan. Because of unimaginative handling, partition, which trailed ‘azadi,’ has only ruined the refugees. Nahal excels in presenting in artistic terms the holocaust of communal violence ignited by the partition of the country in the wake of independence.

Azadi is a novel with a difference on the theme of India’s partition stressing its profound human significance and providing an integral view of life. It is neither a romantic nor political tale but an intensely moving human
tale of displacement and loss of identity. What the novel seeks to present is how man is the victim of forces of history. None the less, there is a note of hope and affirmation of life. Underlying the awful irony of the stupendous drama of history is the author's positive attitude manifested in the showing of futility of hatred and triumph of love.

Agadi dramatizes the woeful tale of five families but the fictional focus is on Lala Kanshi Ram's family. He is a grain merchant in Sialkot in West Punjab. He shows a love-hate attitude towards the British: "Like any other Indian he had a prejudice against the British ... He hated them for what they had done to his country and wanted Agadi ... But deeper down, he also admired the British—in any case he enjoyed the safety of the British Raj and hugged it lovingly." He fails to understand the need of partition when Nehru asks people on radio to be prepared for it if there is no other way.

And why the partition in the first place?
What of your promises to us, you Pandit Nehru?

(p. 59)

He wonders whether it is possible to divide the country so soon:

1Chaman Mahal, Agadi (Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1975), p.12. All further references are to this edition and the page numbers will be given parenthetically at the end of the quotations.
How do you cut a country into two, where at every level the communities were so deeply mixed? There was a Muslim in every corner of India where there was a Hindu. And then so soon, at such short notice? The broadcast had said nothing at all about the fate of the minorities in the two new countries .... (p.79)

Yet he smelt no danger:

.... Well, why can't we live in Pakistan? They certainly would like to have us, have our business. Their whole economy will be ruined if they drive us out. (p.60)

He understands the potential danger of Muslims only when they celebrate the formation of Pakistan and insist on taking their procession through the Hindu mohalla.

The first riot on the twenty fourth of June gives a rude shock to Lala Kanshi Ram's complacency. This is followed by the looting of his shop by Muslims. He is forced to move to the refugee camp with his wife Prabha Rani, his son Arun, and his neighbours. He feels disgraced to become a refugee in his native place. He says:

Refugee, refugee, indeed' ...... I was born around here, this is my home - how can I be a refugee in my home? (p.124)
"The pinch was he should have to give up this land, this earth, this air. That's where the hurt lay." (p.126)

He thinks that either the government or the people are responsible for the situation: "If unwilling, the government is a party to murder. If incapable, we Indians had no right to ask for freedom." (p.124) He blames the British government for not providing adequate protection:

Then 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. (p.135)

Lala Kanshi Ram's son, Arun, is in love with Nur, the daughter of Chaudhri Barkat Ali, the friend of Lala Kanshi Ram. The division of the country inevitably leads to the separation of the lovers. Arun refuses Nur's plea to leave his parents to gain her hand and live in Pakistan.

During his stay in the refugee camp, Lala Kanshi Ram receives the news of the death of his daughter and son-in-law in the hands of Muslims: "Madhu's death crushed Lala Kanshi Ram's will and he now insisted they leave for India at the earliest possible occasion." (p.203) With his separation
from Nur and the death of Madhu, Arun is drawn towards Chandri, the daughter of Padmini, a char woman who lives with them. He promises to marry her.

The family joins the armed convoy moving towards India. By the time they reach India, they are buffeted by a whirlwind of ghastly events. They witness armed attacks of Muslims on the convoy, abduction of women, parading naked Hindu women and so on. Arun kills Captain Rahmat-Ullah Khan for raping Sunanda. Chandni is abducted shattering Arun's dreams. On the Indian soil, similar atrocities are perpetrated on the Muslim refugees. In Amritsar there is a parade of naked Muslim women and a train with massacred Muslims passes on. Landing in Delhi, Lala Kanshi Ram manages to settle with his wife, son and Sunanda after many efforts.

Though Lala Kanshi Ram's story forms the basis of the novel, it is deftly interwoven with the episodes and fortunes of a few other characters, chiefly, Arun, Sunanda and Niranjan Singh. Their individual accounts are blended with that of Lala Kanshi Ram as they are commonly affected by the partition of the country. Thus, the sub-plots are fused with the main plot so as to bring out the theme of the novel, namely, to
present how man is the victim of the forces of history effectively. Besides the individual accounts of characters, the events in the novel are structured in such a way as to keep artistic integrity. The events are arranged in three parts— "The Lull," "The Storm," "The Aftermath"— with the image of sea running through them. In the first part, the author slowly leads and prepares us for the catastrophe. The viceroy's announcement on the radio followed by Nehru's speech, the victory march of Muslims, the gruesome murders and, finally, Kanshi Ram moving to the refugee camp— these incidents reveal the storm slowly picking up. In the second part, the storm presents itself in all its fury and turbulence. All events that take place from the refugee camp till the convoy reaches the Indian soil prove to be a staggering experience to the people involved. Notable events during the long march for forty-seven miles are— Niranjan Singh's self-immolation, two armed attacks on the moving convoy one near Pasrur and another at Alipur Sajyidian, a major attack on the stationed convoy at Narowal resulting in the rape of Sunanda, the murder of Rahmet-Ullah Khan and the abduction of Sunanda, parade of naked Hindu women, a similar parade of Muslim women in Amritsar finally leading to Lala Kanshi Ram's
settlement in Delhi. In the third part, the death of Gandhi is reported and a semblance of domestic normalcy is indicated in Lala Kanshi Ram's house.

Commenting on the third part, P.P. Mehta says:

"This part is not exactly a necessary organic part of the story and could have been artistically left out. But, a close view of the novel reveals that the third part serves more than one purpose. First, after 'The Lull' and 'The Storm,' "The Aftermath" brings the symbolic meaning to a logical close. Secondly, this part enables the author to present the social and individual viewpoints on azadi by juxtaposing the new awareness of political freedom in public life and the loss of 'ability to communicate' in private life. Thirdly, and more importantly, it contributes to the author's philosophy of positive affirmation of life that suffering, pain and death are only a prelude to a new life, full of hope. It suggests tenacity of human spirit and a life of action in the sound of Sunanda's sewing machine. Thus, the indispensability of the third part is self-revealing.

The time scheme of the novel lends veracity and gives a historical touch to the narrative. The story begins on the 3rd June, 1947, the day the viceroy makes an important announcement. On 2nd August, Lala Kanshi Ram goes to the refugee camp. The convoy leaves for India on 24th September. The march takes place for two weeks. Thus, by the second week of October, his family sets foot on the Indian soil. The novel comes to a close after the assassination of Gandhi which took place on the 30th of January, 1948. Thus, the novel roughly covers a period of eight months.

Chaman Mahal seems to be at his best in delineating the characters in Asad. In the words of Radhakrishnan, "he presents an earnest study of a people who are caught up in the whirlwind of communal frenzy and for whom every moment means death and doom." As the fictional consciousness is focused on Lala Kanshi Ram, he emerges in the course of the novel as larger than life. Every character is suitably placed to serve the thematic purpose.

Lala Kanshi Ram is a complacent grain merchant in Sialkot. He is 'not too literate' but "life had rolled him around, misfortunes had come and gone, and this had given

an edge to his intelligence." (p.7) What he wants is an end without partition. He believes that a wait for a few more months could have avoided partition. He carries this opinion till the end: "Freedom was on its way and nothing could have stopped it. If only they had not given in so easily to the partition." (p.362) Even if partition were to become inevitable, he does not understand why he should leave Sialkot. He says: "I suppose we'll continue here. Why can't Hindus and Sikhs live in Pakistan? Why should they wish us harm? (p.60)

After the first riot on 24th June, Hindu-Muslim feuds become common in Sialkot. The arrival of Muslims from the Eastern part of the Punjab and their woeful accounts fan the fury of Muslims. Lala Kanshi Ram does not mind as to who started the killings — be it Hindus or Muslims. He disapproves of violence with anguish. He is forced to go to the refugee camp but he hopes to come back soon after the troubled days are over.

'When troubles come, they come not in single but in battalions'. This is true in the case of Lala Kanshi Ram. While he is trying to face his present predicament, the news
of the death of his daughter and son-in-law stuns him. But he does not betray his grief to his son and wife. He has his own way of accepting life. "But one after the other many adverse things befell him these three months; circumstances in which he was a loser. And yet not once did Lala Kanshi Ram acknowledge defeat. He was benumbed by the event, he fretted, but in the next instant Arun could see him pulling his shoulders up." (p.203)

The armed convoy leaves on 24th September. Gangu Mall's decision to change his name as Ghulam Mohammad and to take a Muslim wife surprises Lala Kanshi Ram. He gets at the other side of life.

And suddenly, in a flash, the rare sensation of seeing through the humbug of existence flooded him once again, and he saw before him clearly the bare, basic meaning of living, shorn of trimming and embellishments. (p.265)

While he is amused by the stooping down of human nature in Gangu Mall, he is later astounded by the contrast in the sacrifice of life by Miranjan Singh for the values cherished by him.
What makes Lela Kanshi Ram a fascinating character is his fortitude in the face of mounting sorrows.

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 .... Many parts of him had died but there were others still alive, forcefully and affirmatively alive, and he knew he was not defeated. But the tasks ahead of him were multitudinous and he faltered and fumbled in his steps. (p.269)

On the fifth day of the march, there is an armed attack on the convoy followed by another major attack at Narowal where the convoy is halted. These attacks and the subsequent parade of naked Hindu women heavily weigh against them. But in Amritsar, Lela Kanshi Ram hears about a similar parade and watches a train pass on with massacred Muslims. While his fellow-passengers feel a vicarious pleasure of vengeance, 'he looked at the ground in humiliation.' He is shuddered at man's in-humanity to man. He declares to his wife:

'I have ceased to hate'

Hate?
'Yes. I can't hate the Muslims any more' (p.334)

It is because 'hating won't bring anything back'. He thinks that Hindus are as guilty as the Muslims. "What I mean is, whatever the Muslims did to us in Pakistan, we're doing it to them here!" (p.334) He rightly feels that forgiveness is the need of the hour.

'Forgive. That way alone can you make peace with yourself.' (p.336)

He further declares:

'We have sinned as much. We need their forgiveness.'

(p.336) O.P. Mathur rightly comments:

Lala Kanshi Ram thus takes a stance which clearly demonstrates his freedom from commitment to anything except love, compassion, tolerance and forgiveness in a word 'freedom of the spirit and mind' which alone makes political freedom meaningful.4

In Delhi, it is a great disappointment for Lala Kanshi Ram that the Indian officers in charge of refugee rehabili-

Situation show their empty hands in his search for a habitation. It is a qualitatively different experience for him. He is driven from pillar to post. "Four months of that had shrunk his heart. Never before in his life had he felt so exposed, so naked, so defenceless." (p.346) At last he breaks down before the Bare Tutti officer begging for a house. Fortunately for him, the problem is at last satisfactorily solved.

Thus, buffeted by events, Kanshi Ram's thinking and outlook of life are moulded. After every bout of misfortune, he rises with cool courage and quiet strength. N. Radhakrishnan says:

His faith in Abdul Ghani, his decision not to leave Sialkot, the shocks he receives one after another from various quarters, Chawthri Barkat Ali's help, the noble and generous gesture of Davidson, the death of Madhu, the mass insanity he witnesses on both the sides, the inhuman attitude of the bureaucracy and, above all, the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi—are all different stages in his quest of identity, a search for himself and his country.⁵

Among the Muslim characters, Chaudhri Barkat Ali, Abdul Ghani and Captain Rahmat-Ullah Khan stand out displaying the best and worst of human nature. Chaudhri Barkat Ali is hailed as the voice of the reason in the novel. He is as noble as Lala Kanshi Ram. His commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity endears him. It is he who advises Lala Kanshi Ram to go to refugee camp to save himself from the wrath of Muslims. Again, Madhu's death moves him as it does Lala Kanshi Ram. On the other hand, Abdul Ghani is an average Muslim who is avid to loot the property of Hindus soon after they are driven out of Pakistan. While religion is a personal matter for Chaudhri Barkat Ali, it is a factor of segregation for Abdul Ghani.

Why do you want me to leave Abdul Ghani?
said Lala Kanshi Ram ......... I want you to leave because you're a Hindu, and you don't believe in Allah. (p.126)

This is how Abdul Ghani replies. He bursts out with violent anger when Arun and Barkat Ali go to find out the dead bodies of Madhu and her husband: "Who told your sister was killed, my boy? But don't worry. I put her and her husband into the fire with my own hands, and they're now on their way to dosakh,
to hell—where I hope they rot for ever!" (p.177) Unable to control his anger with this inhuman language, Barkat Ali catches hold of Abdul Ghani's neck and shakes him violently. Barkat Ali's parting words to Lal Kanchi Ram stand out as a monument of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood:

If not in our life-time, Insha-Allah in the life time of our children this folly will surely be undone: we are one people and religion cannot separate us from each other. (p.271)

Captain Rahmat-Ullah Khan is a sensuous, lusty philistine. He is not a 'convincing' character like Barkat Ali. Apart from this, Miranjan Singh is a contrast to Abdul Ghani and Gangu Mall. While Abdul Ghani is a fanatic Muslim, he is a fanatic sikh. He has as much hatred for Muslims as Abdul Ghani has for Hindus. When the Muslims take out a procession and demand to pass through the mohalla, Miranjan Singh declares: "I suggest we stay here and we fight the bastards if they try to enter the street. We should be able to kill a few before we get killed." (p.64) He is uncompromising in matters of religion unlike Gangu Mall who conveniently takes a Muslim name and stays in Pakistan. He is not prepared to cut his hair to conceal his identity as a sikh. He pleads to Jodha Singh: "Please, grandfather, I'll give my life for your sake. Only
please don't ask me to cut my hair." (p.251) As he sets himself in flames, he loudly but proudly proclaims: "My life I may lose, my sikh dharma I won't." (p.258)

William Davidson provides the British point of view towards the Indian situation. He is against the British imperialism. He supports the cause of freedom. He is only against the way the Indian leaders have proceeded. Asked by Munir and Arun about his opinion on the partition of India, he speaks out honestly: "If you must ask me, I think this is the most stupid, most damaging, most negative development in the history of freedom struggle here." (p.117) He says the Indian leaders "have fallen for a handy prise, not realizing the misery it will heap on the masses." (p.117) He does not mistake Lala Kanshi Ram when the latter finds fault with the government for not preventing the violence: "For you had the power to prevent it and you did not use that power!" (p.142) He arranges a truck for him to take his family to the refugee camp safely.

A close study of the characters reveals that Lala Kanshi Ram, Chaudhri Barkat Ali, Arun and Sergeant William Davidson are round characters and the others are flat characters in the Forsterian sense. In characterizing the persons
in the narrative, Chamun Nahal follows more or less the traditional 'telling' method rather than the 'showing' method. This is in keeping with the historical nature of the subject and also because of the externalised conflict in the novel.

As regards the narrative technique employed in *Aazadi*, Nahal chooses the omniscient point of view. The narrative chiefly flows from the points of view of Lala Kanshi Ram and Arun, his son. M.K. Naik points out:

"Another serious flaw is the mixing up of the point of view of the protagonist, Lala Kanshi Ram and that of Arun, which destroys the unity of impression."^6^  

But, in employing the omniscient point of view, the author is "entirely free to move as he will in time and place, and to shift from character to character, reporting (or concealing) what he chooses of their speech and actions ...."^7^  

Secondly, the shift of point of view serves more than one purpose in the novel. Arun's point of view in the novel helps dramatise the throes of partition with added intensity. It also helps bring in William Davidson and through him present the British attitude to partition. Above all, it helps the readers have

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In narrating incidents that took place immediately after the announcement of partition in June 1947, Mahal takes every care to keep the narrative within the boundaries of realism. He describes the disaster and tragedy with detachment, brilliance, compassion and great humanity. He is interested in the human side of events. Through the woeful tale of five families, Mahal recreates the suffering of the masses who carried the cross in the fateful days. Among the incidents presented in the novel, the episode of the procession of Muslims in Sialkot, the long march of the convoy, the parade of naked Hindu women at Narowal, the chaos following the armed attack on the convoy at Narowal, and the self-immolation of Mianjan Singh are realistically presented. K.C. Bellappa comments: "Mahal has shown how documentary realism and human drama can be fused successfully."8 Agadi excels not only in realism but also in maintaining a detached tone and total objectivity throughout. The author objectively registers the whole range of responses to Lord Mountbatten's broadcast on the partition

of the country. While Lala Kanshi Ram feels let down and does not understand the need of partition, Miranjan Singh is angered: "He was young and he was strong, and what he wanted to do was to take out his sword and hack Nehru to pieces." (p.60) Arun shouts that the partition is 'a betrayal'. In Sardar Jodha Singh the news "brought about a slight stoop in the eighty year old back." (pp. 61-62) Bill Davidson thinks that Mountbatten has duped the people into a division of the country.

In presenting the events, the author's viewpoint is always on the essential nature of man -- his weaknesses and strength, his divine and devilish nature. When Arun goes to Mianapura in Sialkot along with Suraj Prakash, he looks at the shops once owned by Hindus but occupied by Muslims now. He wonders to see the Muslims feel miserable. "Now why in the name of Allah were they so sad? They had got what they wanted, their Pakistan. Why this gloom?" (p.170) At Narowal, Arun and Suraj Prakash go to see the parade of naked Hindu women. As the procession goes on, Arun sees the hakim Sahib with 'the look of infinite pain on his face', murmuring in Punjabi: "Rabbut Alamin, forgive these cruel men. And, oh, my Allah, Oh Rabbat, protect these women!" (p.295) Later, Hindus take out a similar procession of helpless, naked Muslim women in Amritsar. Arun remembers the Narowal incident.
"He saw the dome of the Golden Temple in the background and wondered if any Sikh there was weeping for these women." (p.323) Apart from this matching hatred, the swelling of spontaneous compassion rising above religious hatred is also recorded. At Jassar Village, the Muslim villagers are moved to pity at the sight of the demoralized Indian convoy.

Even anti-Hindu or anti-Sikh slogans were not shouted by them. The men stood astounded, as group after group of disabled, wounded or weeping and lamenting men and women turned the bend, came before them, and trudged on to whatever lay ahead of them .... Instead of attacking the convoy, some of the inhabitants of Jassar ran inside their homes and brought water for the thirsty. Some waved and said, 'Khuda hifiz'. Most only locked on. (p.317)

Nahal's use of language in the novel is of particular interest. He freely uses the native Hindi words. A few sentences containing such words would bear testimony to this.

Oh, they're kutai, they're dogs–these Angres. (p.14) You are too damned concerned with nafasat, with geniality, to be able to say anything effective. (p.16) Are you all right beti? Are you doing well? (p.39) I guess you're right, abba. (p.96)
The author makes use of the Punjabi swear language in toto.

Let me be, you sister-fuckers, you motherfuckers, you. (p.153)

You shaitan— you shaitan— you blot on the name of Islam! (p.178)

Difficult to say, chachi, I hope they don't—these badmash. (pp. 39-40)

Another touch of native colour in Chaman Mahal's language is the typical addressing of wife by her husband. Lala Kanshi Ram calls his wife Prabha Rani not by her name but as 'Arun's mother! Another typical conversation is as follows:

Is anything the matter? asked Lala Kanshi Ram.
No, nothing is the matter. Said Mrs. Rana (p.159)

At times, Chaman Mahal's language turns lyrical. We have two exquisite pen-pictures of Sunanda and Madhu Bala, both drawn in recapitulation. The description of Sunanda as a bride is certainly a charming piece of prose. Putting her beauty and grace in a nutshell, he writes:

"She was not a human being, she was a presence."

(p.146)

The portrait of Madhu Bala is memorable. Unlike the dignified Sunanda, Madhu is a playful girl. She is an extrovert as
seen in her playing several trifling games with her brother, Arun.

Chaman Mahal's hand is equally deft at recreating pathos, bitter agony and misfortune. Referring to Nur's letter to Arun brought by Munir at the time of the convoy's march, he writes:

The letter was not only smudgy with her tears; the whole paper seemed to have been dipped in the sadness of her heart. (p.261)

Describing the scene of the parade of naked Hindu women at Narowal, the author writes movingly:

It was the most unwholesome gathering Arun had ever seen. Not only did the men there look unclean and vulgar. There was an undecorous thickness in the air and the whole atmosphere was smeared over with Saut, as if a brush of some grisly substance had been run over the men, the buildings, and the bazaar (p.291)

It no longer remained a lewd scene; it became evil incarnate. Darkness was added to darkness and a strange terror was let loose on earth. (p.293)

Chaman Mahal makes use of many fictional devices in Asadi with a view to achieving artistic effect. In the
intensely dramatic novel, there is a central irony operating on the concept of azadi or freedom at several levels—political, social and personal. At the political level, the novel seems to raise a few basic questions on the nature and validity of freedom itself. What sort of freedom that the country got? Is it freedom to kill one another letting loose barbarity? And freedom at what cost? What happened to the preaching of non-violence? Is it not a mock-freedom? Debi Dayal’s reflections in A Bend in the Ganges are pertinent in this regard:

How had they come to this? After living as brothers over so many generations, how had they been suddenly infected by such virulent hatred for each other? .... Had Gandhi ever envisaged a freedom that would be accompanied by so much suffering and release so much hatred? Had he realised so much hatred? Had he realized it might impose transfers of population unparalleled throughout history?

We are also reminded of Tagore’s poem kept as an epigraph for the novel. Is it not a travesty of ‘heaven of freedom’ that we have got? Has not the clear stream of reason lost its way in dreary desert? Has not the country been broken

up into fragments by walls of religions? However, the novelist does not express any nostalgia for the undivided India.

At social level, though the refugees undergo untold miseries owing to partition, they are thrilled at the dawn of independence on 15th August, 1947.

Most people in the camp sat together on that day and while they were aggrieved at their personal fate they also felt inexplicably proud. (p.157)

A similar outburst of emotions is witnessed in the convoy of Indians as they enter into the Indian border at Dera Baba Nanak. Lala Kanshi Ram, who tirelessly talked about Sialkot since he left it, now feels deep love for his new roots. He picks up a little earth and rubs it with his fingers. He raises his hand in exultation and shouts 'Vande Mataram.' Many others in the convoy kiss the Indian soil and bathe in the Ravi river as a mark of 'their deliverance'. Azadi has also emboldened people to express themselves freely. At the time of Gandhi's assassination, people come on to the roads and express their grief to one another freely.
For the first time Lala Kanshi Ram became aware of a blessing asadi had brought them ... what impressed Lala Kanshi Ram was the pride with which each man stood .... Today the men stood in pride — evenly balanced, firm, sure of themselves. Unlike the past, there was no leader urging them to demonstrate their feelings. The feelings had their own course. Lala Kanshi Ram raised his head with pride and stretched back his shoulders. He was unrestricted now, he was untrammeled. (op. 361-362)

Asadi, which has made people exulted at the social level, ironically makes people desolate at the personal level. Watching the division of the country and the resulting miseries of people, even an Englishman like Bill Davidson feels "as if he was hurt inside, as if a dream of his own had miscarried." (p.118) Socially, people have lost their property, social position and their very identity. Religiously, asadi has only resulted in rancour between Hindus and Muslims. Speaking at the personal level, the hopes, dreams and aspirations of all noteworthy characters in the novel are belied in the wake of freedom. Lala Kanshi Ram's dreams are shattered one after another. He becomes a refugee in Sialkot, loses his dear daughter and is exposed to the worst of human nature. For Arun, his dream of happy marriage with Nur at first and
with Chandni later is unfructified. For Sunanda, it is the loss of her chastity. For Chandri Barket Ali, it is the dream of Hindu-Muslim unity that is wiped out. For Niranjan Singh, his dream of perpetual allegiance to Waheguru is made impossible by the hostile circumstances. Above all, each individual is made desolate with no communication possible with the near and dear. At the end of the novel, Lala Kanshi Ram, his wife and son are lying on their beds. They want to open their hearts to one another but fail to do so. Each is confined to his or her own self. The contact is snapped.

That was another ruin asadi had caused ....

The three of them lay fully awake. Not being able to fathom their minds and feeling restless about it. Not being able to talk to each other and feeling guilty about it. Not being able to go to sleep and feeling angry about it. A sadness weighed on their hearts, and each felt stifled, crushed. (p.363)

Chaman Nehal's use of imagery and symbolism in Asadi compels our attention. As discussed earlier, the captions of the three parts of the novel — 'Lull,' 'storm' and 'Aftermath' — indicate the image of sea in its three stages, namely, calm before storm, storm, and calm after storm. The
image of sea rightly fits in the theme of epical dimensions in the novel. A similar image of turbulent flow of water is also seen in *A Bend in the Ganges*:

Two great rivers of humanity flowing in opposite directions along the pitiful inadequate roads and railways, jamming, clashing, colliding head-on, leaving their dead and dying littering the landscape.  

The chief symbols in the novel are the fire-crackers, Kurukshetra, the birth of a child in the train and the whirring machine of Sunanda at the end of the novel. After the announcement of Pakistan, the Muslims in Sialkot take out a procession firing crackers and beating drums with their sounds chilling the spines of Hindus and Sikhs living in the city. N. Radhakrishnan points out:

The procession the Muslims take out within hours of the announcement is an ominous portent and the crackers the processionists fire are symbolic of the cleavage that has come into existence irrevocably.  


The other symbols in the novel establish the author's philosophy of affirmation of life and the triumph of values like forgiveness and compassion over hatred and violence. Isher Kaur gives birth to a female child in the train. The birth of a new life in the midst of death and sorrow powerfully symbolizes hope against despair.

The train slowly inched forward, and while they all mutely looked at the dead outside, the exu- rant and powerful screams of the baby repeatedly asserted that it was alive, it was very much alive. You better pay attention to me, it seemed to be screaming. Pay attention to me.' (p. 331)

The running sewing-machine of Sunanda at the end of the novel symbolizes activity as opposed to passivity and the defiance of the human will.

The machine went whirring on, its wheel turning fast and its little needle moving up and down, murmering and sewing through the cloth. The doors of both the rooms shook with its vibration. (p. 364)

Kurukshetra, the battlefield of Pandavas and Kauravas, refers, by association, to the present conflict between Hindus and Muslims, or between Indians and Pakistanis, so to say. Remembering the mighty battle, perhaps, Lala Kanshi Ram is
convinced about the futility of hatred.

Contrast is another powerful device employed in the novel. This is at two levels—first, contrast among characters, and second, contrast among events. Among the characters, there is a contrast between the uncompromising Mian Singh and the all-compromising Gangu Mall. Another notable contrast is between Chaudhri Barkat Ali, a man of noble nature and a champion of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood, and Abdul Ghani, a religious bigot and an opportunist. The friendship of Lala Kanshi Ram and Chaudhri Barkat Ali is a contrast to the friendship between Lala Kanshi Ram and Abdul Ghani.

There are contrasts between events also. There is a contrast between the pre-partition days and the post-partition days regarding the Hindu-Muslim relationship. Earlier, Hindus and Muslims spoke and wrote one Punjabi language, implicitly respected each other's religion, intermarried, shared business-interests, attended mixed classes in schools, joined a mixed police force and mixed arms regiments. But it all disappeared in 1947. Partition has rooted out the existing harmony. It has separated lovers like Arun and Mur and friends like Lala Kanshi Ram and Chandhri Barkat Ali. Even the army and police personnel are divided into rival camps.
Besides contrasts, there are parallels too. The convoys of refugees on both sides, their similar suffering, parades of naked women on both sides, half-hearted protection provided by police personnel on the two sides are some of the notable parallels in the novel.

As said earlier, Chaman Mahal seeks to forge through his novel a profound philosophy of life, namely, affirmation of life. It instils moral courage, the courage to fight back misfortunes, and to rise like the phoenix from the ashes. Giving no place for anger, hatred or sentimentalism, the author establishes values such as forgiveness, love and a life of action. Mahal's unobtrusive display of these values gets him close to Bhabani Bhattacharya. Amadi, in this sense, becomes a purposive novel, an ideal dear to Bhattacharya.

As Lala Kanshi Ram takes the stance of forgiveness "the superficial differences of religion peel off and reveal the essential humanity of man and the idiocy of the evil that seeks to raise artificial walls of hatred between one human being and another."

Arun crosses the Ravi to reach India but he carried the 'river of love' with him in spite of his sorrows:

Crossing the Ravi, he would be leaving three of these great rivers behind him for ever. Not for a minute was he sorry for it. He was sorry for that other river he was leaving behind, a nameless subterranean river, brisker than them all, more sparkling than them, sweeter than them, more exhilarating. But no, he was not leaving that river behind. He was going to carry it along with him to wherever he went. For it was a moveable river, the river of love. (p.320)

Lala Kanshi Ram refuses to be crestfallen and shows exemplary fortitude whether in going to the refugee camp, or in receiving the news of Madhu's death or in searching for a habitation in Delhi. A similar spirit is also seen in Sunanda who strikes a note of hope by deciding to live on with hope and stubbornness driving away despondency. The author seeks to substantiate that suffering, pain and death are only a prelude to a new life, full of affirmation and hope.

It (Aasai) is a story of a people who kill and get killed but are never defeated.13

A comparison of Aasai with other notable novels dealing with partition, chiefly, Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan, would highlight its unique qualities and Manohar Malgonkar's

A Bend in the Ganges. In all these novels, the historical incident of partition is recreated in terms of fictional art. What distinguishes Asadi from them is the treatment given to the theme. It 'invokes the setting in all its totality through the use of details.' The author's basic concern is man and his emphasis is on the human side of the events and not just the events. The novel achieves universality as it displays 'an integral and unified vision of life'. In Train to Pakistan, the author's view is more journalistic than artistic. Hence, the novel turns out to be a documentary and a period-piece. Further, the tone of the novel in Asadi is kept a political and detached throughout. No single political leader is censured. The reason for the ills of partition is said to be 'the failure of man'. Unlike Asadi, A Bend in the Ganges acquires political overtones as it seeks to discuss non-violence as a valid political weapon. It also gives more importance to events than characters. "A Bend in the Ganges is not so much a story of men and women as of places and episodes, not an integrated human drama but an erratic national calendar." 14

Unlike Chaman Nahal, Manohar Malgonkar "aims, not exhausting the subject with an overwhelming mass of detail, but at the random sampling of something of the horror of the event—the horror, the pity and the futility." While Asadi starts with the event of partition, it occurs only at the end in A Bend in the Ganges. Keeping in view the unique qualities of Asadi, K.C. Belliappa comments:

...the novel as my analysis, hopefully, has revealed—answers to a great degree the various definitions of a modern classic earlier attempted in the paper. We become increasingly aware of the impressiveness of Nahal’s achievement when his Asadi is read in relation to Train to Pakistan. 16

Interestingly enough, in all the three pairs of lovers in the three novels, the men are invariably Hindus or Sikhs and the girls Muslims. In Asadi, it is Arun and Nur. In A Bend in the Ganges, it is Debi-Dayal and Mustas, and in Train to Pakistan, it is Juggut Singh and Nooru. In all the three novels the lovers are separated. Debi-Dayal and Juggut Singh are killed. In spite of their separation, their love transcends the barriers of religion and the artificial borders between nations.
