CHAPTER V

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The Post-Independent and Post-Modern novels written by many Indian writers in English mark a striking deviation from the conventional types by ushering in a new dignity and status to the existing genre. Not merely being novels of a reflective kind, they tend to offer positive directions toward shaping a future based on global consciousness. The need for towering above individual consciousness, transcending national consciousness and achieving global consciousness is the greatest truth that is imparted by these creative writers through their works. These creative writers help us, as Radhakrishnan puts it, "to develop friendship and fellow feeling among the peoples of the world" (228). Just as T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' promises salvation at the end of the poem, these novels show a promise of the emergence of a new world. Chaman Nahal is one among these writers who assure the continuity of life on earth. He is on the side of Life and reveals himself an avowed propagator of a positive approach to life, from an individual and a collective point of view. Life's meaning has to be realised, in order to attain self-realization. Bhatnagar explains Virginia Woolf's conception of life. He says Virginia Woolf feels that reality is not something insubstantial and imaginary,
and life, which is the essence of this reality, will continue to exist.

Though we continue changing, we perpetually exist. Life continues. This very abstract idea has been made alive by using the metaphors of waves and sea. Every object returns to its origin... Even after death, life continues. (52)

In his journey through Existence, to attain knowledge and experience Bliss, an individual has to chalk out certain principles which would guide him as a beacon light in total darkness in a storm tossed sea as does the mariner’s compass, the chartless ship crew. These principles based on Dharma, which in reality means a way of life, can be interpreted as rigid principles which the orthodox people adopt to enforce discipline in the family and the society. Violating these codes of conduct would bring retribution according to them. These strict laws are passed on in the form of injunctions from the elders to the younger generation to preserve the respect and the priority attached to the patriarch who dominates the entire family. The elders in Kamal’s family and their relatives are illustrative examples of this kind.

In its onward march towards evolution and growth, the society makes necessary changes in its system. The changes are noted in various developmental activities and fields. Education brings about a change of attitude and outlook in people. As a result, a revolt against orthodoxy, which
hinders progress of any kind, is seen among the younger generation. Expectation on the part of the older generation to see implied obedience on the part of the young and repulsion on the part of the young for being unnecessarily subdued, lead to conflicts between the two, resulting in the segregation of the family set up. Such incompatibility between these two groups is focussed in My True Faces (1973) by Chaman Nahal. Incompatibility on account of lack of understanding between the husband and the wife is also highlighted in the same novel by the writer. But the protagonist is able to wade through these existing currents of conjugal and familial bonds and emerge a liberated being when he is able to see all faces to be the true faces of God. Once the realisation is achieved, there is no hatred, no passion and no attachment. As Mathur, in his article on Chaman Nahal says, Kamal, the protagonist of My True Faces (1973), has realised that “true and authentic life consists in moving from the rigid and orthodox dharma to a true worship of God as a principle of life and death, synthesizing and transcending both” (89). His role in the novel signifies universal affirmation.

Lala Kanshi Ram, the central character in Azadi (1975), who realises a commitment towards life, prepares himself for all kinds of sacrifice and like Kamal, rises above individual concern, to embrace all humanity as belonging to one family. In spite of belonging to a conservative Hindu family and being
one among the uprooted people by pressure of circumstances, he does not hate the Muslims but envisages man’s freedom from communalism, hatred and violence. He embodies love, compassion and understanding, which are unifying factors, which are forces of life. He too works for the affirmation of life, but rises above individual consciousness to achieve national consciousness. Where the mind is absolutely free, there is universality of outlook, when the whole world is conceived of as a family and the people as members of this single family. This greatest truth is explicated by Chaman Nahal through his third novel, *Into Another Dawn* (1977). The East-West encounter resulting in the emergence of a world family is the main theme of the novel. If this cherished ideal of an individual taking shape from his felt experiences were to find fulfilment as a practical truth, destructive forces in any form can be totally wiped out from the earth is what Chaman Nahal tries to impart through this novel. The protagonist of the *English Queens* (1979) is quite a different character. He is an avatar of Lord Chetna, come to the world, to perpetuate a classless society devoid of any ‘deculturation’, a term used by Daniel P.Kunene in *Africa Today*, (1968, p.19) where all the people preserve their cultural values but remain united, unmindful of the differences in their social set-up. Love, which ensures life, is the binding force that paves the way for the two opposing forces, the members of the Bide-a-wee colony and the
Basti Wallahs to enter into an agreement to conduct the marriage of Rekha with Pradeep. Pradeep, who is Lord Chetna in disguise, discloses that his mission is to create an awareness of commitment and sacrifice, which alone can remove class differences and promote understanding and love for the masses. The practical application of this mission is found in Sunil, the protagonist of The Crown and the Loincloth (1981). Coming under the preacher and practiser of truth, Mahatma Gandhi, he dedicates his life to save the life of Ashby who represents the dominating authority, the British. Sunil's sacrifice knows no barrier of caste, creed, conviction or national and international divergences. His sacrifice is based on man's devotion to humanity in general.

Thus Chaman Nahal, through the perspectives of the individual fictional characters, stresses the need for the adoption of certain Dharmic principles, through which a positive approach to life culminating in its affirmation is realised.

After realising the meaning of life from an individual point of view, Chaman Nahal ponders over the collective approach to life, especially in terms of society, nation and the world at large.

Radhakrishnan states:
In the progress of societies, three stages are marked: the first, where the law of the jungle prevails, the second, where there are rule of law and important justice with courts, police and prisons, and the third, where we have non-violence and unselfishness where love and law are one. The last is the goal of civilized humanity; and it can be brought nearer by the increase in the numbers of men and women who have renounced reliance not only on force, but on other benefits the state can confer or withdraw from them, who have literally left home and sacrificed personal ambition, who die daily that the world may live in peace. (238)

The world has witnessed many social, political and religious upheavals, all on account of small-mindedness and sinister objectives, creating mistrust and hostility and encouraging policies of separatism, and thereby victimizing innocent people bringing in its train, destruction and death.

The widespread communal frenzy in the wake of Independence, resulting in, alongside the partition of India, people fleeing the country they had considered their native soil, to an unknown destination, forms the crux of the problem, highlighted in the novel Azadi (1975). At the same time the novel is, to quote O.P.Mathur, “a work of deep human significance” (90), and
it also reveals “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”. (90). The sacrifice made by a few individuals to set things right reveals that their attachment is, as Radhakrishnan puts it, “not local, racial or natural but human” (17). They are calm in the midst of storm, like Lala Kanshi Ram, in Azadi, and plunge into selfless action because of their conviction that, if life on earth has to continue, people should be united amidst diversity so that all can live in total freedom and happiness. The matrix of the expanding universe is projected in the converged microcosmic screen, in order that the vision of a world family can be realised, provided the principles of non-violence, temperance and spirituality are considered the basis, means and end of any action. Chaman Nahal reveals himself to be an ardent believer in the ideology of Gandhiji who, to quote him, “was a symbol of moral and spiritual strength triumphing over physical odds” (42).

Admitting the need for such an outlook, Chaman Nahal introduces Gandhiji as one of the characters, who acts as the guiding principle, motivating the protagonist and those who accept his point of view, to dedicate themselves to their country in particular, and humanity at large. Sunil (the protagonist of the Crown and the Loincloth, 1981) is a case in point. He is on the side of the moderates and acts according to the dictates of the Mahatma and when the
situation arises, sacrifices his life to save Ashby, the representative of the ruling, imperialistic power, namely the British.

Radhakrishnan aptly remarks:

Social growth is a continually evolving creative process demanding both fidelity to the ideal of perfect love, and sensitivity to the concrete situation in which we have to work. Perfect non-violence is undoubtedly the ideal. In a world ruled by love and justice, there will be no need for the use of force. (205)

This greatest truth is what is imparted through his novels by Chaman Nahal. From the concept of the building up of a stabilised society based on life giving principles, Chaman Nahal then envisages a future when the whole world is conceived of as a single family, which thought is echoed in Tagore’s novel *The Home and the World* (1923). This novel of Tagore, according to K.V.Suryanarayana Murti, “echoes his [Tagore’s] sermon of peace and freedom and love of humanity and service...” (27).

*Into Another Dawn* (1979) deals with the life experiences of Ravi, the hero, who moves from one dawn to another and ultimately realises the significance of cosmopolitanism, which outlook drives away differences of any kind among human beings. What matters is the love that exists in its perfect
form among human beings, drawing all of them together, to constitute one world family. Where there is faith in one single family, the world becomes devoid of differences in terms of religious dogmas, class conflicts, political rivalries and international misunderstandings, and helps in the prevention of the extermination of the human race, and assures the continuation of life on earth, where the people, in spite of their linguistic, cultural and religious identities, live a composite life. This appears to be the major concern and consideration of Chaman Nahal, explicated through his novels.

The artistic structuring and expression of the human experiences in a fictional mode depend on powerful techniques adopted by a novelist. Chaman Nahal’s novels acquire significance, not only because of their themes but also because of the techniques that have gone into their making. The modern novelist, in the words of Miriam Allot, “is very much alive to the inspiration of selecting the angle of vision from which, he will be able to illuminate and interpret his material and most important of all, make it seem authentic” (196). The success of Chaman Nahals works rests on the techniques employed by him to suit his varied themes.

In My True Faces (1973), a novel on the search for truth and real identity on the part of the central persona, Nahal adopts the stream of consciousness technique, which does not follow a linear progression of events
according to the chronological sequence of time in order to have a free access to the psyche, to understand and analyse the thought currents which give an insight into the characters who are responsible for the movement of the plot and the development of the novel.

In *Azadi* (1975), multiple points of view are adopted as the main technical device to give shape to the character and the story. The two main centres of consciousness are Lala Kanshi Ram and Arun, and it is through the perspectives of these two characters that all the events and actions are to be perceived.

The advantage of having two centres of consciousness lies in the deft projection of the contrary views adopted by the main characters. It also depicts two different approaches to life depending on the age and the mental make up of the father (Lala Kanchi Ram) and the son (Arun) but as the novel develops, both the characters acquire total maturity in that their understanding of humanity proves to be the same. Both Lala Kanchi Ram and Arun realise that humanity can thrive only on the rock foundation of faith, love, tolerance, compassion and spirituality; giving room for destructive forces to have sway over the people of the world, the morrow will be just a valley or a field of dry bones, as is described in the 'Book of Ezekiel' of the Old Testament in the following words:
And I will put the carcasses of the sons of Israel before their dungy idols and I will scatter your bones all around you altars (ch.6.5).

The concept of Life as a wheel, whose cyclic movement, like the revolution of the sun from one dawn into another, anticipates the protagonists of the novel *Into Another Dawn* (1977) to experience a cyclic movement through life, from one dawn to another, culminating in his realisation that all belong to the world family, enables Chaman Nahal to adopt the stream of consciousness technique, which promotes Virginia Woolf’s belief in life being a luminous halo. It is a global consciousness that he achieves at the end, by proving that love’s power lies in sacrifice, and this readiness to sacrifice himself makes him achieve life’s fulfilment in realising his own self. Utilising the advantage of the first person narration, the author is able to freely express, what passes in the psyche of the hero.

Chaman Nahal also makes effective use of irony with regards to the themes of the novel, as for instance, it is a large heart that considers the world to be a single family; smallness of the heart leads to seeing only differences as is exemplified in the novel *Into Another Dawn*. The use of appropriate symbols to describe a person, or the theme adds to the greatness of his novels. The mythological figure of Lord Krishna with his multiple forms creating the satisfaction in the Gopis with the belief that she is in the company of Lord
Krishna is a symbolical representation of the eternal truth that all are faces of the Lord, thereby creating a feeling of oneness in all.

The technique of parallelism and contrast is employed by Chaman in novels like *My True Faces*, *Azadi* and *The Crown and the Loincloth*. *My True Faces* deals with several contrasts as quoted by O.P.Mathur, namely, modernity Vs. orthodoxy (symbolised in 'this house' and 'that house') (69), ‘modernity Vs. the authenticity and freedom of the self (113), “East Vs. West” (113), Western manners Vs. Western values” (111), and above all, the Krishna of popular imagination and myth (a synonym for the constructing Dharma) Vs. the real Krishna of the Gita (a synonym for God in all his glory and magnitude)(88).

One other aspect which has raised a few controversial remarks is the excessive use of sex one finds in the novels of Chaman Nahal, R.K.Dhawan justifies the use of sex, stating that it relieves the tense situation by describing the physical intimacy of the characters. The same idea is voiced forth by Mohan Jha. But a close analysis of the novels shows that the application of excessive sex as a technique, to relieve tension, has yet another purpose to serve. History, mythology, and religion have evidences of great heroes like Asoka, the Buddha and the like, who have shown great interest in their material pursuits but when there is a sudden transformation in their lives, they
do not regret having renounced what they valued most in their lives. In the same manner Chaman Nahal's protagonists also transcend the intensity of physical pleasures when they enter the moment of spiritual awakening. It is to emphasise this greatness in his heroes that Chaman Nahal introduces sex in his novels.

That Chaman Nahal is very conscious of his linguistic identity is expressly stated when he criticises the aping tendency of the English Queens, who are not even aware of the fact that, by imitating the language of the West and adopting their manners, they are spiritually colonised. The need for the promulgation of Indian English is stressed in the striking passage from The English Queens.

After all, to be able to speak an additional language is no handicap; it is an advantage. And over the years, the Gods waited for the Indians to evolve a special English of their own, having its own peculiarities and eccentricities. Indeed, when some of the Indians began producing creative writing in English, the gods were overjoyed. These writers had checkmated Mountbatten; the Indian would employ a variety of English, a shade finer than the original. The gods would
still allow them the use of Indian English if they so wanted.

But the cheap imitation of English mannerisms, the gods could
not tolerate. (156)

He also uses local idioms to convey the different shades of meaning.  
S.C.Bhatia, in his review of Azadi (The Literary Criterion, Vol.XII, 1976) 
observes:

He (Chaman Nahal) uses the Punjabi idioms to convey the
subtle shades of meaning. He uses the Punjabi idiom to
preserve the complexity of human relationships, at the same
time, he often gives the English equivalents in the same
sentence. This is presumably done with a dual purpose in
mind: to serve the needs of the foreign reader and to retain the
original sensibility, which is being rendered in a non-native
medium... He has his narration using such words as 'upshot'
(in place of 'outcome') 'quaked' (in place of tremble) and a
half hour (in place of half an hour) to convey a convincing
insight into the narrator's sensibility as well. (371)
Thus Chaman Nahal can claim to be the ‘Kohinoor’ in the ‘Crown’ of the Goddess of Indian English Literature, by virtue of the clear directions he presents through his affirmative principles, which find explication in his novels, for the building of the future on the rock foundation comprising love, faith, compassion, tolerance, non-violence, truth and spirituality, and also by virtue of his innovative techniques, which match the themes, thereby rendering his novels valuable and meaningful.