

COMMUNAL HARMONY IN CHAMAN NAHAL'S AZADI – A STUDY

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Abstract: The present paper is an attempt to study the Hindus and Muslims community relationship with each other in Nahal's novel *Azadi*. The picture of cordiality and friendship which was found everywhere in pre-independence India. Though *Azadi* is being partition novel; still it is regarded as one of the well-known novel of the communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims community. Lala Kanshi Ram and Chaudhari Barkat Ali, both are an intimate friend. The Hindus and the Muslims never considered themselves different but stayed together in perfect harmony.

Introduction: Lala Kanshi Ram is a grain merchant in Sialkot. His wife Prabha Rani is a good woman of decent taste. She is mightily conscious to her domestic obligations and religiously devoted to her husband. Lala Kanshi Ram was greatly grieved and disturbed to think horrible consequences of the partition. He feared that he would have to leave his property behind if the new nation came into existence. He said to Prabha Rani : "If Pakistan is created, we'll have to leave. That is, if the Muslims spare our lives."1 (p.41) The two nation theory was to create two nations out of one and hence it was tragic indeed. It created barrier between man and man between brother and brother.

In *Azadi* we can see that though Chaudhari Barkat Ali was a Muslim he was a close friend of Lala Kanshi Ram. He was good Muslim, who believed in the unity of all religions. He lived in a Mohalla which had a mixed population. He would come to Lala's house, squat in the kitchen in Indian fashion and talk with his friend's wife like a member of the family and ask, "Now sister-in-law, how are you? But first tell me what is there to drink". (p.99). He lived a life of friendship, love and did not distinguish between man and man. He was a strong citizen of religious fanaticism. He was the right man with right kind of ideas. The eternal friendship between Chaudhari Barkat Ali and Lala Kanshi Ram and the harmonious relationship between the two families, belonging to the two different communities, was well-known.

Abdul Ghani was a poor hookah manufacturer, who had his shop in Lala Kanshi Ram's stores. The shelf in the wall was all his store consisted of yet his neighbours considered him as an equal and he lived in peace with them. If he needed money he would borrow it from Lala Kanshi Ram and return it soon :

So there was utter harmony among them, and the fact that Ghani was a Muslim and Lala Kanshi Ram a high-Caste Hindu never entered their heads. They spoke a common tongue wore identical clothes and responded to the weather, to the heat and the first rains in an identical manner. (p.54)

In *Azadi* we realize that the Hindus living there were well at home with Urdu. Their own language was Hindi but they knew one language fairly well and that was Urdu. This was the first language in which they had learnt to read and write. Lala Kanshi Ram never regarded Urdu as different. "... whether the entries in his shop ledger or a note to a vendor down the road, he wrote in Urdu." (p.54) Muslims participated in celebrating Hindu festivals. We find that much enthusiasm is shown during the celebration of festivals. During Dusshera festival huge effigies of Ravana were burnt which were made by the Muslims workers. "It was a Hindu festival but the effigies were made by Muslims workmen...." (p.93)

Muslims and Hindus were so deeply mixed in every part of the country that it was a difficult task to divide them from each other. The British never understood them. We have an example where Arun and Munir visited Bill Davison, who was surprised to find a Hindu and Muslim boy to be such good friends. Arun told him that this case existed everywhere in the villages. He said, "You should visit the villages and see for yourself..." (p.93)

Arun is Lala Kanshi Ram's only son. He is "shy, pimply youth of twenty with very long hair." (48) Being a college-going boy, he constantly keeps a watch on the day-to-day happening in the country. He is eager to know when India is going to have independence. As a young man of open and free mind, he does not believe in the man-made caste and creed system. This becomes obvious, when he endearingly asks Abdul Ghani, petty Muslim shopkeeper why he uses "a dirty hookah", (54) when he has a number of new and fine ones. He believes in the pervasive nature of love which every religion preaches. Difference in the mode of clothing, eating, worshipping and some other habits, does not matter much to him, though he belongs to a traditional Hindu family. He is secretly in love with Nural-Nisar, the daughter of Chaudhari Barkat Ali. He knows her since her childhood. When he proposes to her for marriage she intelligently asks whether he would "embrace Islam for my sake." (96) In reply, he says that he is ready to embrace death not to talk of Islam for her sake. His rational and modernist approach to religion and to life is well expressed:

What was Islam any way? Seen as faith it was
as good as any, seen as Intellectual enquiry it
was as superstitious and wanting. If by
switching a few rituals he could
hold Nur next to him in bed every
night(96)

To an intriguing situation of the time makes him slightly suspicious when he asks her a similar question, "Why shouldn't you become a Hindu" (97) His suspecting query leaves Nurul stunned, but he remains firm in view of the changing situation. However their love remains unabated and they keep meeting in lonely places of the college campus. Arun's broadness and tolerance become quite clear from the fact that he and Munir are bosom friends. Like him Munir is also a young man of open and modern ideas. Even on knowing that his sister is in love with Arun, he does not object to it but lends protection to their affairs by suggesting to meet in safer places when Arun asks him whether he is spying on them,

Munir thells, "I didn't. I was only concerned about your safety." Friendship is more valuable than any other thing in the world. He accompanies Arun to Bill Davidson to seek help for shifting Arun and his family to the refugee camps. Violent incidents in the wake of the partition, do not cause any change in their attitude. This reveals that his knowledge of the essence of Islam which wishes good and happiness to every neighbour irrespective of his caste or creed.

Conclusion: In brief, *Azadi* presents the partition-politics in a right perspective. Nahal does not raise any accusing finger towards any political party or a group of individuals for the unfortunate event of the partition of the country. Lala Kanshi Ram and Chaudhari Barkat Ali remains friends to each other even during the troubled time of the partition. They are not required to shun their religious to preserve their friendship. On the contrary, they believe and practise the right spirit of their religion. Even Arun, Munir and Nurul-Nissar remains kind and considerate to each other by observing their respective religions. Their friendship remains unaffected and stands the test of the time.

References

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