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CONFIDENTIAL



ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL

E. M. FORSTER

Deb Dulal Halder

STRUCTURE

1. Learning Objectives
2. Introduction
3. The Author and His Works
4. Aspects of the Novel: Summary
5. Aspects of the Novel: A Critical Appreciation
6. The Novel as a Reflection of Society
7. Summing Up

1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit will enable you to learn about–

- E. M. Forster and his works
- Forster's *Aspects of Novel* as a critical text on how to read a novel
- Different aspects of a novel as enumerated by Forster
- Novel as a reflection of society

2. INTRODUCTION

E. M. Forster's influential work *Aspects of the Novel*, published in 1927, is an early but significant attempt to analyse the genre of the novel. It is a canonical text for understanding the methodology of reading a novel critically. In this unit, an attempt has been made to familiarise you with the genre of the novel and its various aspects. Forster provides insightful interjections to reading a novel as he does not merely deal with the historical development of



reading the novel but focuses on the general pattern of reading a novel critically and comprehensively. In the authorial note he writes, “since the novel itself is often colloquial it may possibly withhold some of the secrets from the graver and grander streams of criticism, and may reveal them to backwaters and shallows” (p.21). It would be best to read *Aspects of the Novel* in the original before moving forward with this self-instructional material. *Aspects of The Novel* was originally Clark Lecture series delivered by E. M. Forster at Trinity College, Cambridge University. Therefore, the work is very lucid and conversational in tone and tenor and can easily be understood.

3. THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORKS

E. M. Forster is regarded as one of the finest twentieth-century critics. His essays, reviews, articles and poems are collected in two volumes titled *Abniger Harvest* and *Two Cheers for Democracy*, where many of his ideas and critical tenets about fiction, art, and literature can be found. He is also a celebrated novelist whose novels are popular even now and read across the world. Forster argues in his works that the novel lacks the rigid structures that characterise poetry, drama, and other literary forms. It would be accurate to say that the novel in terms of writing is the most free-form of the literary genres. Novels are unique in that the author has more leeway and opportunity to express himself through his characters. The novelist can paint a picture of his or her protagonist's outer self by depicting them in a way that addresses their personal and lives.

Additionally, the novelist can conduct in-depth mental explorations of himself. The novelist also has access to a wide range of writing methods, from which s/he can select and even mix and match to produce a finished product that can be enjoyed for its own sake. In a similar vein, s/he explores a wide variety of topics, which allows him or her to accurately portray the period while providing background details about the culture and customs of the period in an unobtrusive manner.

Significant Works by E. M. Forster
Novels
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Where Angels Fear to Tread</i> (1905)• <i>The Longest Journey</i> (1907)• <i>A Room with A View</i> (1908); <i>Howards End</i> (1910)



- *A Passage to India* (1924)
- *Maurice* (written 1913-1914, published posthumously in 1971)
- *Arctic Summer* (1980), (posthumous, unfinished)

Plays and Pageants

- *Abinger Harvest* (1934)
- *England's Pleasant Land* (1940)

Literary criticism

- *Aspects of the Novel* (1927)
- *The Feminine Note in Literature* (posthumous, 2001)

Biography

- *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson* (1934)
- *Marianne Thornton, A Domestic Biography* (1956)

Travel writing

- *Alexandria: A History and Guide* (1922)
- *Pharos and Pharillon (A Novelist's Sketchbook of Alexandria Through the Ages)* (1923)
- *The Hill of Devi* (1953)

4. ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL: SUMMARY

4.1. Introductory

E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* is one of the earliest efforts in studying the genre of the novel. This book is a published version of a series of Clark lectures (1927) delivered by Forster at Trinity College of Cambridge University in England. A novel, Forster opined, can be delightful and provide aesthetic pleasure to the readers when combined with good content and style. To enumerate this, Forster uses examples from many classic English novels. In the Introductory of *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster defines novel as 'a fiction in prose of a certain extent'. Right at the start, Forster expresses certain reservations regarding the mandated scope of the Clark lecture series, which is, 'on some period or periods of English literature



not earlier than Chaucer'. This he laments limits the scope of discussion on the novel, as the fiction in other languages, Russian and French in particular, cannot be made a part of the discussion. He writes that English poetry is 'triumphant' in both quality and quantity but the same cannot be said of its fiction. In a rather candid assessment he writes, "No English novelist is as great as Tolstoy- that is to say, has given so complete a picture of man's life, both on its domestic and heroic side. No English novelist has explored man's soul as deeply as Dostoyevsky. And no novelist anywhere has analysed the modern consciousness as successfully as Marcel Proust" (p.26). A critic, he cautions, must have a wide outlook and "provincialism in a critic is a serious fault" (p.26).

Since the lectures fall in the domain of literary criticism, he shifts his focus to the then prevalent scholarly method of classifying novels by chronology or by subject matter. This according to him is a useless exercise because the critic here is "moving round books instead of through them" (p.30). The only way to critically engage with books is by reading them and discovering what they contain.

Finally, Forster turns his attention to the word 'Aspects' in the title. The word has been chosen primarily because it is 'vague and unscientific', and allows the reader/critic a lot of freedom and flexibility to analyse and understand the novel in different ways.

Check Your Progress

1. How does Forster define the novel?
2. What is Forster's assessment of the English novel?
3. What according to Forster is a serious fault in a critic?
4. What is Forster's reason for using the word 'Aspects' in the title?

4.2. The seven aspects of the novel

Forster in the next seven chapters focuses on the seven aspects of the novel: the story, character, plot, fantasy, prophecy, patterns and rhythms. These are dealt with in short in the following paragraphs.

- **The Story:** Forster states that at its core, a novel tells a story by sequencing events in a way that keeps the reader curious as to , "What happens next?" In other words, the story is central to the novel. A good tale, however, must also be instructive or entertaining. He uses the example of *One Thousand and One Nights* to illustrate this



point. The narrator in the story Scheherazade is trying to save her life from her tyrannical husband by telling stories. She survives not because of her wonderful stories, but because she kept the king, her husband in a state of suspense as to ‘what would happen next’ (p.41). Each morning when she saw the sun rising, she would abruptly stop in the middle of a sentence and left him wanting to know the rest of the story. All readers are basically like Scheherazade’s husband when it comes to reading stories.

- **People/Characters:** In the chapter “People,” he uses Charles Dickens's works to illustrate the distinction between “flat” and “round” characters. Characters who are “flat” have only one or two distinguishing traits. In 17th century such characters were called ‘humours’, and also referred to as ‘types’ and ‘caricatures. ‘Flat’ characters, Forster writes, can be summed up in a single line and are easily recognizable. The novelist finds them convenient and useful “since they never need re-introducing, never run away have not to be watched for development, and provide their own atmosphere – little luminous discs of a pre-arranged size, pushed hither and thither like counters across the void or between the stars; most satisfactory” (p.74).

“Round” characters on the other hand have many facets. However, a story cannot exist without either. Forster claims that nearly every one of Dickens' characters is flat, “whom we recognize the moment they re-enter, and yet achieves effects that are not mechanical and a vision of humanity that is not shallow” (p.76). However, Jane Austen's stories centre on round characters. There is no problem picturing these characters living out their lives by the time she wraps up her novels, even though she typically does so before they have had a chance. Forster argues that fictional characters must resemble real people to be believable. They may seem more natural to the reader than the people they know. To do this, a writer must expose the inner workings of the protagonist's mind. Forster notes that while mundane tasks like sleeping and eating are under-represented in fiction, the theme of love is often over emphasised.

- **Plot:** According to Forster, a story is a recounting of events, while a plot is a recounting of events with an emphasis on cause and effect. Intelligent readers, who can keep track of details and follow multiple strands of reasoning, are a must for plots. Because of this, the author can build suspense by leaving key details vague until later in the story. A plot must strike a balance between the events and the characters. If the characters do not exert their personalities on the story, they will be swept away by Fate.



For More Information – Difference Between Story and Plot

The Russian formalists distinguish between “a plot is an artful disposition of incidents” and “a story is a raw material which is artfully disposed to make it a plot,” respectively. The story (*Fabula*) is the poet's or writer's raw material—the actual events that inspired the work—while the plot (*Sjuzet*) is the creative ordering of those events into a narrative structure that best serves the story.

- **Fantasy and Prophecy:** To achieve a magical effect, Forster says, authors often employ fantasy elements; however, not all fantastical works involve magic. It is also possible to discover it in the extraordinary nature of commonplace objects and people. Additionally, he touches on parody and adaptation, which allow multiple authors' interpretations of the same story. Forster claims that the characters in Prophecy are more than just characters because they embody the book's universal themes and the author's voice from long ago. To illustrate this point, he cites Dostoyevsky, in whose works the characters always stand for something larger than themselves. The meanings of prophecy are less precise but more universally applicable than the meanings of symbolism.
- **Patterns and Rhythm:** The pattern resembles the outline of a book. The shape can be a circle (where a character ends up back where they started) or an hourglass (where one character's rise and another's fall in the social status meet). Thanks to the pattern, the book can be understood in its entirety. However, Forster cautions that the pattern must develop naturally. The narrative's authenticity and depth suffer when the story's characters are compelled to follow a formula. The story's rhythm is represented by a motif that recurs with slight modifications.

Check Your Progress

1. In what sense are all readers like Scheherazade's husband?
2. Explain 'Flat' and 'Round' characters.
3. How is a plot different from the story?

5. ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL: A CRITICAL APPRECIATION

According to Forster, “the basis of a novel is a story, and a story is a “narrative of events arranged in time-sequence” (p.42). The events should be presented to make sense of the



novel's plot. The story's ability to pique the reader's interest and leave them wondering what happens next is crucial to keeping them engaged. For the novel to make sense and be logical, the author must incorporate both the temporal and value-based aspects of life. While reading the story silently is fine, Forster claims that it will be more enjoyable when reading aloud. Novels, unlike most prose, have a unique appeal to the ear and have much in common with the art of story-telling, which is why they are best experienced when read aloud.

Character writes Forster, is “that simple and fundamental aspect of the novel”. Forster titles this section “People” and makes the following declaration at the outset: Not “what happened next,” but “to whom did it happen?” (p.54) is the pertinent question here. Given that “the novelist will be appealing to our intelligence and imagination, not merely to our curiosity” (p.54), Forster emphasises the importance of value in the novel. Through the characters, an author establishes his or her voice and values, however subtly.

Forster provides a compelling defence of his decision to use “people” rather than “character” when referring to the protagonists and antagonists of the stories. A novelist’s skill can be displayed in several ways; one is through the author's ability to highlight values; another is through the originality of the author's characterisations. In addition, the author and the character develop a special bond through the process of the latter's thoughtful analysis. Novelists, like artists, reconstruct reality through their imaginations, but unlike artists, they artificially combine fact and fiction to give their characters life

Forster argues that the following five human activities are necessary to understand a novelist's characterisation of humans. Birth, eating, sleeping, loving, and dying are the main facts of human life – “birth, food, sleep, love, and death”, as he puts it. Fiction writers have a propensity to make their characters go through experiences that are not typical of real life. The fact that they share names begs how real-world events and actions can be reflected in fiction. This issue is handled expertly by Forster, who draws attention to the disjuncture between the natural world and the novel's canvas. Love and other emotions, not birth, death, eating, or sleeping, should be emphasised in fictional works. Most people can feel more deeply for the characters in a book than they can in real life. A novelist, however, as the creator of these characters, has full authority over how they act and interact in the novel. As a result, coming up with new characters is a difficult task. If the author has too much freedom, the characters may seem unrealistic. But they will cease to be alive if he puts too many restrictions on them.

To escape this problem, the novelist needs to employ two technical devices—the use of multiple characters and the deft manipulation of the viewpoint in question. Forster classifies his protagonists as either “flat” or “round.” According to Forster, “flat characters.”



include stereotypical figures, comic relief, and caricatures. Round characters are complex or multi-dimensional, grow and change outward and inwardly as the story progresses. It should come as no surprise that the protagonists of Forster's novels are multifaceted, given the symbolic nature of his writing.

The narrator's involvement in the story influences the novelist's point of view. The narrator may act as a dispassionate observer, immerse himself in the character's minds, or switch back and forth between the two. At the same time, Forster argues that “the whole intricate question of method resolves itself not into formulae but into the power of the writer to bounce the reader into accepting what he says...” (p.82). Forster cites Dickens' *Bleak House* to illustrate this point of view:

Look how Dickens bounces us in *Bleak House*. Chapter I of *Bleak House* is omniscient. Dickens takes us into the Court of Chancery and rapidly explains all the people there. In Chapter 2, he is partially omniscient. We still use his eyes, but for some unexplained reason, they grew weak: he can explain Sir Leicester Dedlock to us, part of Lady Dedlock but not all, and nothing of Mr Tulkinghorn. In Chapter 3, he is even more reprehensible: he goes straight across into the dramatic method. He inhabits a young lady. . . . Logically, *Bleak House* is all to pieces, but Dickens bounces us so that we do not mind the shifting of the viewpoint (p.82).

Dickens is widely regarded as one of the finest novelists to write in the English language due in no small part to his mastery of this technique, which he calls “the shifting of the viewpoint”.

After discussing character development, Forster shifts gears to discuss the novel's plot. Before anything else, he disentangles the story from the plot. He insists that the plot, rather than the story, is the most critical aspect of the novel. He writes that the story is “a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality” (p.87). In “The King Died, and then the Queen Died,” both the king and queen meet an untimely end. “The king died, and then the queen died of grief; is a plot. The time sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it” (p.87). Whereas the story is all about ‘And then- and then’ and satisfies a reader’s curiosity, the plot demands intelligence and also memory. Since the author cares about the aesthetic satisfaction of the reader, the plot should be well-organized and leave no loose ends. As a means of assisting the novelist in reaching his destination, he provides explicit directions:

The plot-maker expects us to remember; we expect him to leave no loose ends. Every action or word in the plot ought to count; it ought to be economical and spare; even



when complicated, it should be organic and free from dead matter. It may be difficult or easy, and it may and should contain mysteries, but it ought not to mislead. And over it, as it unfolds, will hover the memory of the reader (that dull glow of the mind of which intelligence is the bright advancing edge) and will constantly rearrange and reconsider, seeing new clues, new chains of cause and effect, and the absolute sense (if the plot has been a fine one) will not be of clues or chains, but something aesthetically compact.... (p.88).

Drama relies on action to convey its story. However, the reader of a novel needs to be able to think critically to appreciate the story because the means of expression and exposition are different. Insight into the mystery, which plays a vital role in the plot, is beyond the capabilities of casual readers.

Two additional themes that Forster identifies in the novel are fantasy and prophecy. Consider the novel's characters and plot; his description can bring them to life and reveal the truth at its core. Fiction writers can take inspiration from anything, whether real life or folklore. The "Fantasy" genre is known for its frequent use of mythological deities, forgetfulness, puns, and coincidental turns of phrase. According to Forster, there are hints of oneness in the mythology of prophecy, which combines elements of physical reality with those of the universal. Reader's 'humility' and humour suppression are necessary for the novel's prophetic aspect to be fully appreciated. If his prophet lacks humility, the reader will not hear his message. Readers must suppress their sense of humour to thoroughly engage with the prophet's message.

E.M. Forster claims that "Pattern" and "Rhythm" define the novel's aesthetic quality. The arc of the story is essential to a narrative and influences the pattern. A novel's overall cohesion is an example of a pattern; rhythm, on the other hand, is more subtle and challenging to identify. Forster classifies rhythms as "easy" or "difficult." One way for a novelist to establish rhythm is through recurring phrases or images with minor alterations. The result is akin to an echo or a memory due to repetition. Like a musical symphony, the work's existence grows as its various parts come together in perfect harmony.

E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* is conversational in tone, which makes reading it so exciting. This book is a must-read for anyone with even a passing interest in English literature because it covers nearly everything a student or scholar of the field should know.



Check Your Progress

1. Briefly summarize all the major points made in the critical appreciation.

6. THE NOVEL AS A REFLECTION OF SOCIETY

Literary narratives reflect the cultural norms and values of the society in which the narrative is contextualised. Just as a mirror reflects, it can be said that a novel also reflects the society it is representing. However, the comparison is problematic as often novels are also a critique of society and offer us a better version of the world than the one existing. Factual details are often the raw materials of fiction, but they are necessarily not what fiction is all about. From the earliest times, recording culture has been an endeavour of humankind, such as cave paintings. And when writing took form as a means of expression, creativity knew no bounds as poets, dramatists, and novelists flooded the literary world with abstract philosophical ideas, realistic depictions of the existing world, and utopian/imaginative representations of society as they should be. Socio-political, historical, and cultural concerns have always been the purview of literature. All writers — poets, dramatists, novelists, and essayists — reflect the values and mores of their time and place in their work in overt and recognisable ways.

For example, when we look at the novel *Anandamath* by Bankim Chandra Chatterji, it not only tells us about the society of then Bengal when the Sanyasis rebelled to gain back freedom for their motherland but also shows how the inhuman governance had caused many hardships for ordinary people during the Bengal Famine of the 1770s. The society of the those times is reflected through the fictional narrative, though the events narrated in the novel are based on historical truths. Indeed, fiction is not history, but it is no less than history to understand the society and culture of that period. An author is a product of his or her age, and knowingly or unknowingly, s/he represents society.

When E. M. Forster was writing, there was a debate about how far realism or fantasy could be taken to decode the seriousness of a novel. At the same time, Henry James in *The Art of Fiction* emphasises that detachment, objectivity, and seriousness should be taken as a criterion for judging the worth of a novel and that a novel should be akin to history in the sense that it should provide an illusion of portraying reality. If this is one of the views of looking at literature, then the other was that of looking at fantasy and imagination as the key to poetic creativity, where the poets/novelists/dramatists aspired to create a better world than the world in which they lived. P. B. Shelley, the famous Romantic poet, spoke about poets as “the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” So, if, on the one hand, people spoke in terms



of realism as a mode of writing a novel; then, on the other, others thought that fantasy is equally justified in portraying the society as when one writes a literary text, one is not just copying the world as “it is” or “it was” but also trying to portray the world as “it should be.”

It is, thus, evident that literature reflects the society that we live in, as the authors are products of this world. They necessarily portray or critique the reality they live in. Novels, as narratives, also do the same – whereas the realist writer tends to look at the uglier aspects of society and portray them with a commitment to purge the society of those undesirable elements, the fantastical writers try to take the readers to an imaginary world through their narratives to manifest to them a better world than the world they inhabit. This, both the bright and shadowy sides of reality, finds expression in literary narratives, making them social products where the culture of the time is primarily reflected.

Literature is the collective and individual voices that shape societies. For the claims that literature accurately reflects and depicts communities, it must encompass a wide range of cultural practices, philosophical tenets, and personal qualities. Literature’s evocative vocabulary makes it possible to describe the customs of various human communities. Literature, as defined by its cultural connotations, provides information or context that is both fascinating and affluent. The reader can better comprehend and describe the feeling by referencing literary works and vocabulary from those works. Literature can, thus, serve as a portal to the past, transporting readers into the protagonist’s thoughts and feelings at a specific time, or can take the reader to a portal that one aspires to.

Check Your Progress

1. Literature reflects cultural norms and values. Elucidate.
2. How far is it justified to say that a novel reflects society? Write a critical note with reference to one novel that you have read in this course.

7. SUMMING UP

Reading a novel for aesthetic pleasure is different from reading a novel for academic purposes. As students of literature, we do not just read but also critically analyse literary texts. If we know the basic aspects of the novel, then we can in a structured, systematic manner progress with the task of interpretation and analysis.



Forster's lectures make literature students aware of the seven basic aspects we need to look into while reading a novel. The novels *Anandamath* and *Azadi*, are prescribed in this course and you need to read them from the perspective of E. M. Forster's theoretical premises on the genre of the novel. It is not that Forster's seven aspects of looking at the novel are the only ones; there are many other aspects to be considered while studying a novel; but for someone who is a beginner to literary studies, E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* can be a good entry point to understand the genre of the novel critically.

All references are from:

Forster, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel*. London, Pelican, 1984.



BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJI: ANANDAMATH

Deb Dulal Halder

STRUCTURE

- 1.1 General Introduction
- 1.2 Learning Objectives
- 1.3 About the Novelist: Bankim Chandra Chatterji
- 1.4 Plot Summary of *Anandamath*
- 1.5 *Anandamath: A Critical Commentary*
 - 1.5.1 Patriotism and Nationalism
 - 1.5.2 The Song “Bande Mataram”
 - 1.5.3 Elements of History
 - 1.5.4 Issues of Gender
 - 1.5.5 Natural Calamity
- 1.6 The Genre of Text and Feature Film
- 1.7 Summing Up
- 1.8 Recommended Readings

1.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Anandamath was serialised in Bankim Chandra Chatterji’s journal *Bangadarshan* from 1881 to 1882. It was published as a book in 1882. The *Sanyasi* Revolt in Bengal, following the Battle of Plassey in 1757, inspired *Anandamath*’s plot. The novel’s setting is Birbhum, and most events in the novel occur inside the forest. It is often thought to be the first political novel which brings to the fore the nationalist discourse.

Anandamath is a narrative about the sanyasi rebellion against the Muslim rulers and the British tax collectors. This revolt has not been celebrated as the first national movement



historically because of the localised nature of its spread in certain parts of Bengal in the 1770s during the Bengal famine. The history textbooks generally celebrate the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny as the first Indian national movement to gain independence because of the scale of its spread across India. However, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, in the novel *Anandamath*, portrays how the sanyasis, reeling as they were under the oppressive British regime of taxation and the famine with its consequent diseases and starvation, of the then Bengal fought for the cause of India and its. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's narrative portrays the rebellion and its nationalist spirit, probably one of the earliest displays of Indian nationalism in modern times. The song "Bande Mataram" from this novel later becomes our national song. It suggests the extent to which the novel is significant for critical study to understand the rise of Indian nationalism and how it relates to anti-colonial resistance. This unit on *Anandamath*, therefore, will focus on nationalist discourse along with a particular emphasis on the song "Bande Mataram." The unit will also delve into other aspects of the novel, the historical context of its writing, the historical backdrop it is centred on, the gendered paradigm of colonial discourse and other facets. It is advised that before reading the study material further, you should read the novel first-hand to gain a thorough understanding of the narrative.

1.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will learn about Bankim Chandra Chatterji's novel *Anandamath* and after reading this lesson it is expected that you will have some understanding of some of the pertinent issues that the novel deals with, such as:

- Patriotism and Nationalism
- The song Bande Mataram and its significance
- Elements of History and how Bankim has treated history in the novel
- Issues of Gender and Bankim's representation of the same
- Natural calamity
- The genre of Text and Feature Film

1.3 ABOUT THE NOVELIST: BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJI

Bengali poet, novelist, essayist, and journalist Bankim Chandra Chatterji (June 26, 1838 – April 8, 1894) is mostly known for writing the patriotic anthem *Bande Mataram*, which was



sung by liberation fighters in India and ultimately made into the country's national song. His father worked his way up the government ranks to become the Deputy Collector of Midnapur, and his family was devout. He received his Bachelor of Arts in 1857 from Presidency College and subsequently went on to study law. He followed in his father's footsteps and served the government as a Deputy Collector and then a Deputy Magistrate before retiring in 1891.

Bankim is sometimes called "the father of modern novel in India." Although he was not the first to pen Bengali novels, he did much to legitimize the novel as an essential form of Indian literature. *Rajmohan's Wife* was his first published work of fiction. It was likely a translation into English of a novelette that he wrote in Bengali. His first Bengali romance, *Durgeshnondini*, was the first Bengali novel to be published in 1865. Chattopadhyay's first significant work, *Kapalkundala* (1866), was also his first major publication.

In *Mrinalini* (1869), his next romance, he makes his first attempt to place his plot in a broader historical framework. In the political book *Anandamath* (1882), Sanyasis (Brahmin ascetics) lead an army against Indian Muslims working for the East India Company. *Devi Chaudhurani*, the next novel by Chattopadhyay, was released to the public in 1884. His last work of fiction, *Sitaram* (1886), is about a Hindu ruler who rises against Muslim tyranny. Bankim, a religious nationalist, saw Bengal split between conservative reformers wedded to the past and liberal reformers who sought to imitate the West mindlessly. He thought that reforming Hinduism from the inside was the only way to make it strong and independent.

Check Your Progress 1

1. When was the novel *Anandamath* published as a book?
 - (a) The 1770s
 - (b) 1882
 - (c) 1881
 - (d) 1857.



1.4 PLOT SUMMARY OF ANANDAMATH

The novel *Anandamath* is set against the backdrop of the Bengal famine of 1770. The novel begins with the characters of Mahendra (zamindar) and his wife, Kalyani, contemplating leaving their village Padachinha. As the famine becomes severe, where hungry men are even ready to consume human flesh, the couple (Mahendra and Kalyani), along with their daughter, Sukumari, decide to leave their village. They start their journey amid much apprehension and are soon separated. Kalyani is forced to run through the forest with her newborn to avoid the robbers. She passes out on a riverbank after a long chase. Mahatma Satya finds them and rescues them. Sanyasi Satya asks Bhavan to find out about Mahendra, but the British soldiers take him into custody as he is suspected of conspiring with other priests to incite a rebellion against British rule. Bhavan finds Mahendra in the group of people rounded up by the same soldiers earlier. He along with Mahendra and others manage to fight off the soldiers and escape. The Sanyasis provide sanctuary to Mahendra.

After looking at the widespread suffering all around and the revolutionary zeal of the Sanyasis to fight for their motherland, Mahendra becomes interested in joining the monastic brotherhood. Jiban, another sanyasi, rescues Kalyani's daughter and hands her to his sister, Nimi. On the other hand, Bhavan relocates Kalyani to a safer place, though he later becomes captivated by her beauty. Mahendra was initiated into the brotherhood by Mahatma Satya and given the duty of building a formidable castle at Padachinha and manufacturing firearms there.

In the meantime, we meet the character of Shanti, Jiban's wife, who takes a vow to join the brotherhood, being cross-dressed as Nabin. Days pass, and the Sepoys of the East Indian Company surround the forests to attack the Sanyasi rebels. The sanyasis in thousands face the British canon bravely; many die and fall wounded. But at last, with Mahendra's reinforcement army, the British soldiers are cornered and defeated.

The victory becomes an occasion for reunions and Mahendra finally meets Kalyani and their daughter, Sukumari, as both are brought back to Padachinha. But the then Viceroy Warren Hastings finds out about the defeat of the British forces and sends a large troop to annihilate the Sanyasi rebels. This time, the unruly rebels were no match for the British forces and their canons. Brother Jiban shows extreme courage amidst adversity and charges towards the British troops, which inspires other rebels to follow him. Though the defeat of the rebel army is almost inevitable, Mahatma Satya's and Mahendra's armies suddenly join the battle and defeat the British troops. At the novel's end, Nabin (Shanti) is seen looking for



Jiban's body on the battlefield. She finds him with the help of a mysterious sage, who revives Jiban with his magical herbal potion from the forest. Shanti and Jiban take a vow to be together but lead an ascetic life.

1.5 ANANDAMATH: A CRITICAL COMMENTARY

“Bankim Chandra Chatterjee...besides being a genius in imaginative literature, was certainly the most powerful intellect produced by India in the 19th century.” - Nirad C. Chaudhari

“Bankim never clamoured for place or power but did his work in silence for love of his work even as nature does, and just because he had no aim but to give out the best that was in him, he was able to create a language, a literature, and a nation.” - Sri Aurobindo.

Adversity leads to courageous acts when determination is high. Courage and determination mould character to go beyond selfish pursuits and attain greater good for the community and often for the nation. When famine and consequent starvation and diseases forced people to even think of eating human flesh, the Sanyasis of Bengal showed extraordinary courage to fight the misgovernance, free their motherland and establish a right over their resources.

When the government officials relentlessly and cruelly taxed the people, even when the villagers were dying of starvation and diseases due to famine, the people of Bengal left their personal interests to join the order of “Children” of Mother India. Even though the novel champions the spirit of nationalist ethos and dedication to fight and die for one’s nation, an individual’s passionate desire to gratify sensual delight has also been the novel's subtext. Therefore, if, on the one hand, adversities caused by the famine serve as the backdrop of the novel, the nationalist sentiment of the sanyasi, which made many, like Mahendranath, leave their household and join the order of the mother, is the other end whereas passionate desire is also part and parcel of the novel. Thus, the novel *Anandamath* can be termed as providing a picture of the 1770s Bengal. However, as it was written during the colonial period in the 1880s, the political context of the novel is British Colonialism. In many ways, the novel champions the nationalist spirit necessary to fight the colonial regime.

1.5.1 Patriotism and Nationalism

Meenakshi Mukherjee characterises *Anandamath* as one of the earliest political novels. It is overtly political as it deals with the issue of nationalism at its core. When Muslims were



ruling Bengal and the British tax collectors were exploiting people, the Hindu Sanyasis come forward to fight against the misgovernance that was aggravating the hardships of the people at a time when the famine had already made human beings suffer like never before. It is believed that Bankim attempted to awaken the country to an “idealistic romanticised regeneration of the Hindu ethos” (Mukherjee, 1982: 903). Bankim was one of the earliest to define the Indian nation and to usher in a sense of nationalism amongst Indians with his literary outputs. Bankim Chandra Chatterji in *Anandamath* and his other works consciously tried to awaken Bengalis, if not the whole of India, to the new idea of the nation, which was necessary not just to drive away the foreign rulers but also to form a nation where veneration for the nation as a mother was a necessary condition. The nationalists in India later used Bankim’s veneration for the nation as a mother to successfully inspire the masses, especially during the Swadeshi movement and the later phases of intense confrontation with the British.

For More Information

Many believe that the creation of the first “nation-state” in France in 1789 is synonymous with the birth of nationalism. States with national borders that also serve as state borders existed before 1789, but these states did not make as much use of the situation as France did. This is where nationalism first entered the public discourse in a significant way. As Walter Bagehot stated, Nation-building “was the essential content of nineteenth-century evolution.” Even though most European nations did not come into existence until the twentieth century, the groundwork for their creation was laid in the nineteenth as empires began to fall apart. In the same century, nations like Italy and Germany established their first states with the explicit intention of creating a unified nation.

It can be said that, in *Anandamath*, Bankim Chandra Chatterji blended nationalism with religion by invoking an image of a goddess as Mother India; it worked wonders to inspire people to imagine the Indian nation and come together to fight the colonial British. In this, he puts forward certain tenets of militant nationalism. In this context, Ashish Nandy, in his book *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under colonialism*, argues that the Modern



colonial west tried to define themselves as masculine and the colonised as feminine. The Indians could not accept the feminine position ascribed to them and thus reacted with the masculine (Kshatriya traits) traits of Indian culture. As a reaction to the western binary, the initial Indian reaction was a celebration of Indian masculinity. The rise of militant nationalism was, perhaps, necessarily a direct response to western domination.

Check Your Progress 2

1. The novel is set at a time when a natural calamity had happened. Which calamity is being referred to in the novel?
 - (a) 1770s Bengal famine
 - (b) The battle of Plassey
 - (c) Sepoy Mutiny
 - (d) None of the above
2. Which place did Mahendranath and his wife decide to leave to reach Kolkata?
 - (a) Padchina
 - (b) Puri
 - (c) North Bengal
 - (d) Patna
3. Who termed *Anandamath* as the first political novel?
 - (a) Mulk Raj Anand
 - (b) Nirad C Chaudhuri
 - (c) Meenakshi Mukherji
 - (d) Rabindra Nath Tagore

1.5.2 The Song “Bande Mataram”

The song “Bande Mataram,” written by Bankim Chandra Chatterji as a part of the motivating song for the members of the order of Children of Mother India, has become India’s national song. The song is included in the novel to ponder over its significance and the context of its composition. The people needed an image that would make concrete the idea of a nation as mother. Bankim provided that desired image in the song. So, the song “Bande Mataram” becomes crucial in the novel. The past grandeur of Mother India is invoked and is set to contrast with the shameful misery that the motherland had been reduced to by exploiters. This once-glorious mother is now reduced to abject suffering and begs her sons to restore the former splendour. Bankim associates the mother with the concept of “shakti,” which is mentioned in the song *Bande Mataram*. The weapons she carries in her ten arms, her seemingly limitless strength, and her razor-sharp swords convey an impression of enormous



power. In addition to having maternal and feminine traits, this mother is also "extremely violent and stimulating, invincible yet vulnerable when she needs to challenge her enemies." (Das 2012)

The Sanyasi movement was paved with such a potent image, creating strong feelings. It is essential to see how Bankim's perspective changes from patriotic concerns confronting the west to a more theocentric outlook, which has not been adequately addressed. (Ray Chaudhuri, 2002, 132). He seems engaged in promoting "true" Hinduism in the later years of his creative life. He set out to elevate nationalism to the status of religion because he realised how nebulous the feeling of nationalism was. Hinduism was viewed as an excellent way of life, and patriotism was the highest religion. For instance, he was using the earlier analogy between Krishna and Jesus. He was fascinated with the comparison to the point of obsession.

A thorough analysis of the well-known song *Bande Mataram* is necessary because this is where Bankim's perspective on nationalism is best reflected. The song reiterates the motherland's initial wealth and fosters the image of Durga, the goddess known for defeating demons, who begs her sons to restore that power. Perhaps for the first time in Bengali literature, Bankim transformed a despicable region into a sacred place deserving of sacrifice and veneration. The earth was transformed into a "feminine ground of sustenance;" the other was a ferocious Hindu goddess. Because it successfully integrates nationalism and religious tropes, the book quickly gained popularity outside Bengal. *The Bhagvat Gita* is credited for motivating nationalists in the early stages of the movement to carry a copy of the Gita along with their pistols and the phrase *Bande Mataram*. The song is filled with a lot of strong emotions.

In addition, Bankim formalised the nation as a mother and employed the goddesses Durga and Kali to define the mother, combining two essential elements. This nation's association with Durga would stoke religious feelings. This deification would have profound effect not only at the time, but we can also witness its effects today. It suggests that nationalism has become as important as religion and is effective in influencing the religiously inclined minds of the Indian populace. It is also claimed to have released a previously untapped spiritual force. Nationalism was a confession and a religion, not just something to think about or feel. The mother India image was the clearest example of how nationalism in the nineteenth century was heavily influenced by religion.

1.5.3 Elements of History

Bankim Chandra Chatterji was a well-read man, and he was very much influenced by the historical novels of Walter Scott, which made him write many historical/semi-historical



novels. One of the significant ones among them is *Anandamath*. To state that *Anandamath* is historically accurate would be an exaggeration, but, as stated earlier, it was based on a historically accurate incident. It was based on the Sanyasi rebellion in the 1770s when Bengal, especially the district of Burdwan, was going through a famine which had caused widespread devastation.

Bankim Chandra Chatterji's historical or semi-historical narratives - *Durgeshnandini*, *Rajsinha*, *Kapalkundala*, *Devichaudhurani*, *Anandamath* - were primarily inspired by the Scottish novelist Walter Scott's use of history to portray the state of the nation. *Anandamath* is a special one among them as it tries to fashion the Indian nation in the image of Mother India and mould its future by ousting foreign rulers. In his famous book, Benedict Anderson defines a nation as an "imagined community" whose manifestation needs to be there in the people's psyche. Bankim, through the concrete image of the nation as the mother goddess, was able to appeal to the people, not just in Bengal but across India. His appeal was such that the future nationalist leaders took this image of mother India and could popularise it and instil it in the hearts of millions of Indians, which ultimately paved the way for India's freedom in 1947.

The Sanyasi "rebellion" against Bengal's ruler Mir Jafar and the British tax collectors inspired *Anandamath*. The 'historical' fight between the Children of Mother Earth and the Muslim king of Bengal, who controls but does not rule in concert with the British, is shown on the literary canvas. The socioeconomic setting for the conflict is the devastating famine that struck Bengal in 1770 and its aftermath: "The low-caste and those who lived in the forests started to eat dogs, mice, and cats" (Chatterjee *Anandamath*, Trans. Lipner, 132). Those who fled to unknown locations perished there from starvation, while those who stayed "died of disease, either because they ate the uneatable, or for want of any food at all" (132). The novelist depicts the ruthlessness of "the haves" during the crisis.

Hunter's *Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868) provided the source material that Bankim used for *Anandamath*. It is important to note that the work strictly does not adhere to history. The emotion behind it, however, seems to embody Bankim's vision of a free India, as Rabindranath Tagore notes in his chat with Mulk Raj Anand: "This novel is a legend of the struggle for freedom." To support his ascetic nationalist theme, Bankim uses this historical incident; nonetheless, the nationalist rhetoric is entirely his creation. Since the novel creates an alternative history of Indian nationalism rather than just representing it, it is difficult to place it in the country's history of nationalism.

Bankim was influenced by his socio-cultural forces, and he tried to (re)construct history in an apparent effort to free his contemporaries from their captivity and collective amnesia. The



storey resonates with the historical past and the political issues that were highly important throughout Bankim's lifetime; however, it pulls more from imaginative truth than factual reality.

Check Your Progress 3

- (a) By which western novelist was Bankim Chandra Chatterji influenced?
 - (b) Walter Scott
 - (c) Mary Shelley
 - (d) Charles Dickens
 - (e) Jonathan Swift
1. To what extent do you think Bankim Chandra Chatterji's *Anandamath* can be read as the first political novel in India?
 2. What is the significance of the song "Bande Mataram" in the novel and present times?

1.5.4 Issues of Gender

"One peculiarity of the images of women throughout history is that archetypes have reinforced social stereotypes. Another way of putting this would be to say that in every age, women have been seen primarily as mothers, wife, mistress, sex-object, and their role about men."

–Mary Anne Fergusson

Though the novel, *Anandamath*, is about the patriotic sensibilities of the Sanyasis of Bengal during the Bengal famine yet when we look at the novel, it explores different aspects of the social order and how different communities are affected by the natural calamity as well as the nationalist fervour in different ways. Women have been the worst victims of any calamity in a patriarchal order. Women are given a secondary status compared to men, but Bankim does not see women as secondary. In his realistic portrayal of society he shows women to be sufferers, but when it comes to nation-building, Bankim believes that women have a similar role to play as men.

In this context, it is crucial to understand how and why Bankim Chandra Chatterji represents the masculine and feminine in these terms in the novel. Indian society has



traditionally been patriarchal, where women are seen as subordinate to men. When the colonial west (British) arrived in India and other colonised nations, they celebrated their masculinity in terms of their martial strength and looked at the orient or the colonised as feminine. Indians reacted to this male chauvinist viewpoint (the relationship between the coloniser-colonized) by celebrating their own masculinity, as pointed out by Ashish Nandy in his book *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*. The initial reaction of the Indian writers to this patriarchal-colonial homology was to celebrate instances and myths from Indian history and mythology to celebrate Indian masculinity in terms of *kshatriyahood*. Nandy points out how Mahatma Gandhi later tried to question this colonial homology and looked at the humanitarian aspect as much more significant than the masculine-feminine dichotomy. However, before Mahatma Gandhi could do so, Bankim Chandra Chatterji was already celebrating the feminine in his portrayal of the nation in terms of the “mother” and all its sons to be her devotee.

Bankim Chandra Chatterji, significantly for his times, pointed out that women have a more significant role to play in nation-building than men. Though Bankim was a magistrate in the colonial administration, he wanted his writings to inspire the youth to come forward and join the order of the mother to free Indian from the clutches of the oppressors, whether they be the Muslim rulers or the British tax collectors.

1.5.5 Natural Calamity

Natural calamities are common in the history of human civilisation. There has been constant effort to mitigate the devastating effects of the calamities and have the preparedness to deal with them. In literary studies, the eco-critical academic engagement in recent decades has gone beyond profound veneration for nature to critically gauge and fathom how the anthropogenic ways and human selfishness has caused more harm to nature and humankind when men tried to dominate nature instead of co-existing with other species in nature.

Though Bankim Chandra Chatterji's *Anandamath* does not deal with the causes of natural calamity, the famine of Bengal in the 1770s works as a backdrop. The novel's first part portrays how famine had devastated village after village in Bengal. Mahendranath and his wife decide to move to Kolkata (Calcutta) from Padchinha to save themselves from the onslaught of famine. This forced migration not only occasions the narrative but also becomes the cause that makes Mahendranath realise how he should dedicate his life for the greater good of the nation.

Furthermore, natural calamities are also testing times for people. Communities either perish due to their selfishness during natural calamities, or they fight together to reclaim what



is lost during the calamity. If, on the one hand, the Bengal famine led to the starvation of people to such an extent that they were ready to eat human flesh, then on the other, “the order of the children” found its zeal and courage to fight the colonial British tax collectors because the adversities had made them so. The adversities had made the courageous and conscientious people come together and establish a righteous nationalist order and stop the drain of wealth from the commoners.

Calamities are also times when good governance should be at its best to use the available resources equitably so that the adverse effects of the calamities can be mitigated in the best possible manner. Governments should take proactive steps and roles not just in saving citizens’ lives but also see that the concerns of the downtrodden are taken care of. Due to the Bengal famine in the 1770s, as represented in *Anandamath*, the colonial administration, along with the Muslim ruler of the then Bengal, carried out its most authoritarian taxation regime that aggravated peoples suffering from starvation and dying from diseases.

The motivation for people to come together and join the order of the “children” to free their motherland came from the experience suffering during the calamity. The same is true of Mahendra and his wife. When the natural calamity made them come out from the comfort of their home and experience the people's insurmountable sufferings, they dedicated their lives for the nation's sake.

1.6 THE GENRE OF TEXT AND FEATURE FILM

Anandamath (1882) is a novel, a more extended narrative dealing with the history of the Sanyasi rebellion. The novel has been translated many times – the two authentic ones which are most popular are the ones translated by Sri Aurobindo and another by Lipner. There are two Bengali and two Hindi film adaptations of the book *Anandamath*. Directed by Satish Dasgupta, the Bengali version was released in 1951. In 1952, Hemen Gupta adapted the novel into the Hindi film *Anand Math*, which starred Prithviraj Kapoor, Bharat Bhushan, Pradeep Kumar, Ajit, and Geeta Bali. Hemant Kumar scored the music for the film, and Lata Mangeshkar's rendition of *Vande Mataram* became a fan favourite.

Anandamath has caught the attention of film makers and others because not only does it help understanding Indian nationalism but has also shaped the Indian national sensibility. We must remember that before the British came to India, Indians did not have a notion of nation as we know nation today. There were kingdoms whose boundaries and allegiances were never fixed. However, people living in India had a sense of belonging to their soil. Often people think about nations merely from a western point of view and believe that



modern nations grew up with capitalism and the rise of colonialism. However, such a view of the nation has its limitations. How India came together cannot be understood merely if one thinks of the nation from a western point of view. Tagore, in his lectures on nationalism, had stated, “Form yourself into a nation to stop the encroachment of the Nation.” The Western colonial powers approached the colonised as a Nation, and they exercised political and cultural hegemony over the colonised, which needed to be countered with a different idea of nation and nationalism. Bankim, in his novel *Anandamath*, provided a counter-discourse to colonialism.

1.7 SUMMING UP

More than ever, in today’s context, *Anandamath* has become significant when many try to read the novel as a representation of the first nationalist discourse of Hindu nationalism. The Sanyasis of Bengal took up arms to safeguard Indians from the oppressors. But their taking up of arms should not be seen as a justification of violence in the name of the nation. The Sanyasis took up arms because that was the only option available. At unusual times, the Sanyasis found it justified to take up arms to rebel against the autocratic order to deliver justice and take control of the resources so that the commoners could be saved. *Anandamath* remained a crucial text for the Indian revolutionaries. We must revisit, read, and reread the novel to figure out the context in which it is situated and in the context in which it is written to understand the actual manifestation of the nationalist discourse it celebrates.

Check Your Progress 4

1. Do you think Bankim Chandra Chatterji is reacting to the colonial paradigms in projecting the nationalist sentiments of the Sanyasi rebellion?
2. The novel *Anandamath* is occasioned by the suffering of ordinary people during the Famine of the 1770s in Bengal. How does the novel deal with natural calamity?
3. Do you feel that the novel *Anandamath* is significant to read now? Why do you think so?
4. Critically comment on the issue of Gender in the novel *Anandamath*



1.8 RECOMMENDED READINGS

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AZADI BY CHAMAN NAHAL

Akansha Goswami

STRUCTURE

1. Learning Objectives
2. Introduction
 - 2.1 A Brief Note on Indian Fiction in English
 - 2.2 About the Writer
3. *Azadi* – Detailed Summary
 - 3.1 The Lull
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4. Themes and Analysis
 - 4.1 Violence and Trauma
 - 4.2 Autobiographical Elements
 - 4.3 The Historical and Political Element
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 - 4.5 The Gandhi Quartet
5. Important Characters
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7. References
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1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After having gone through this study material you would be able to:

- Understand the novel as an example of Indian fiction in English and Partition literature.
- Familiarize yourself with the concept of violence and trauma in Partition literature.
- Identify and analyze the autobiographical elements in the novel.
- Examine the novel's personal, political and historical elements.
- Explore the question of identity and a redefinition of it in the novel.

2. INTRODUCTION

Azadi is a novel written by the Indian writer Chaman Nahal who was born before partition in Sialkot, Pakistan, on 2 August 1927. The story is a journey of multiple characters, who all have to leave their home in Sialkot after Partition and move to the new free India during the ongoing riots between Hindus and Muslims. The main protagonist is the grain merchant Lala Kanshi Ram who lives on rent in a shared house with his wife and a college going son along with seven other families.

Critics appreciate Nahal for writing a blunt and vividly detailed account of the Partition days. As the title suggests the story is about *azadi* or freedom. More specifically it is about the strife-torn times in the history of the Indian sub-continent when Partition happened, and the Indian sub-continent was divided into two separate countries on religious lines with just one announcement on the radio. Tracing the lives of a few characters, the novel takes us through the build up to the Partition, the unprecedented violence and horrors that it unleashed upon innocent people and also its aftermath – the dislocation and the exile that millions of them had to face. The novel is also about the inability of the people to accept the Partition, to actually go through it and finally reach India, where they would now have to start a new life. It is about the loss and quest for their identity and home in a strange land. Divided into three parts the novel takes us through the historical, political circumstances that led up to the division of the two countries, the resultant riots and the aftermath marked by Mahatma Gandhi's death.

Bharatender Sheoran writes in “Tyranny of Partition: A Retrospective Analysis of Chaman Nahala’s *Azadi*” that *Azadi* has none of the sensationalism of other novels about



India's partition, such as Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* or Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*. Nahal shows the cruelty as well as the humanity of both sides. The novel also consists of autobiographical elements as the writer himself had lived through the partition and was a victim as well as a survivor. *Azadi* is focused on physical trauma and violence associated with one of the most brutal historical and political events in Indian history.

2.1 A Brief Note on Indian Fiction in English

Having lived under British rule for over two hundred years Indians had been exposed to the English language for a long time. The debate over the medium of instruction in India had been going on for long. The traditionalists advocated the promotion of Sanskrit and Persian languages while the Anglicists urged that English be adopted as the medium of instruction in India. The latter group was led by Thomas Babington Macaulay who presented his Minute on February 2, 1835, to the Governor General of India in which he laid down strong arguments in favour of adoption of English as the primary medium of instruction in India. Macaulay's Minute was officially adopted by the British colonial administration making English the language of instruction in India. Consequently, English became an official language known and read in every part of the country. Many educated Indians had begun writing in English and their writings variously came to be known as Indo-Anglian Literature or Indian English Literature or as it finally emerged – Indian Writing in English. As the name suggests, Indian Writing in English, includes the writings of Indian writers who write in English, such as Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, R. K. Narayan, and Raja Rao from the pre-independence era. Today the list of famous writers under this category has extended to include many more names. Notable amongst these are R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Meena Alexander, Anita Nair, Jhumpa Lahiri and Vikram Seth and many more. The main themes are Indian culture, social values and tradition and Indian history through the portrayal of life in India and Indians living elsewhere. However, recent Indian English fiction is more about the post-modern, neo-colonial experiences of Indians. The earlier works have the dominant themes of nationalism, freedom struggle, social realism and individual consciousness. Chaman Nahal's novel *Azadi* also shares similar themes. Post-Independence writers focused on the themes like East-West conflict, multiculturalism, social realism, gender issues, existentialism, spiritual humanism, ecological problems, magic realism, and the Indian diaspora. What is distinct about this writing is that it focuses on the Indianness of an experience and conveys it through Indian characters mostly in an Indian landscape.



Nowadays, writers focus on the decolonization of the English language in Indian Writing in English. Not only have the themes become universal, but the experience of decolonizing English and using it as another Indian Language is similar to the experience of other post-colonial nations like Africa and Australia. Interestingly, Chaman Nahal's work is already appreciated by critics for being different from the stereotypical portrayal of English by the West. A straightforward example is his choice to write about realistic middle-class Indian characters and not to translate some words into English. For this reason, one finds a generous sprinkling of Hindi and Urdu words in his novel.

2.2 About the Writer

Chaman Nahal, famously known as Chaman Nahal Azadi, was born in Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan. He migrated to India after Independence with his family. He received his university education from the University of Delhi with M.A. in English in 1948. Later, he studied at the University of Nottingham as a British Council scholar from 1959 - 61 and did his PhD in English in 1961. He married Sudarshna Rani and had two daughters. He received the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award in 1977 and the Federation of Indian Publishers award in 1977 and 1979. Besides writing novels, short stories, and critical essays, he also taught as visiting lecturer at several universities in India, the U.S.A., Malaysia, Japan, Singapore, Canada, and North Korea.

His other famous novels are *My True Faces* (1973), *The English Queens* (1979), *The Crown and the Loincloth* (1981), *The Salt of Life* (1990), and *The Triumph of the Tricolour* (1993). He has also written short stories, and one of his well-known collections is *The Weird Dance and Other Stories* (1965). He has also published various essays as a critic.

In 1991, in one of his interviews, he said, "I have largely concerned myself with two themes in my novels: the individual vs. the joint family system in India, and my historical identity as an individual, as an Indian. For the latter theme, I have drawn extensively on history, especially our freedom movement, 1915-47. *Azadi*, *The Crown and the Loincloth*, and *The Salt of Life* are part of a quartet on that theme. I'm working on the fourth volume of the quartet now. I use Gandhi as the ultimate symbol of that identity." Besides the theme of freedom, he has also touched upon the issues like caste, sexuality and gender. Most of his characters share their internal thoughts with readers, and Nahal has been bluntly honest in the portrayal of internal monologues of his characters. This kind of honesty adds a realistic element that is common in his writing.

Nahal had himself faced the cruelty of the partition and migration. The murder of Madhu, Lala Kanshi Ram's daughter, and her husband, has a direct bearing on Nahal's life as



he too lost his sister in a similar manner. K. Nageswara Rao writes about the autobiographical elements that “*Azadi* is a masterpiece of Nahal’s creative genius. Nahal being a native of Sialkot had himself witnessed the horrors and holocaust created by communal frenzy.” (56) He also notes that Nahal has written both about the pleasure and pain of the partition. People rejoiced at the thought of being free from British rule but their joy soon turned into pain when they realized that this freedom has come at a terrible cost – a division that plunged their country into times of unprecedented horror, pain and trauma. Nahal relived that trauma when he wrote about it in his novel on that theme.

Check Your Progress

- Which historical event does Nahal discuss in his novel *Azadi*?
- Who are the main characters of the story?
- What is Indian Writing in English? Give examples.
- What are the common themes of Indian Writing in English?
- What do you expect to read in the novel *Azadi*?
- Why is the theme of Partition so close to the author’s heart?

3. AZADI – DETAILED SUMMARY

The story is about the migration of Hindu families during the partition of India and Pakistan. The plot begins on the 3rd of June 1947 with the announcement of the Viceroy who declares the partition in the evening. Before the partition, by and large, the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs lived together in harmony and peace. Lala Kanshi Ram is one of the oldest tenants of Bibi Amar Vati and the main protagonist of the novel. He lives in a three-room set with his wife Prabha Devi and twenty-year-old college-going son, Arun. Lala Kanshi Ram is a grain merchant, a follower of the Arya Samaj but he is also fascinated with the British Raj. Just opposite their house lives a Sikh family which includes the pregnant Isher Kaur, her father, grandfather and husband. The landlady Amar Vati lives with her husband, an adopted son, a beautiful Kashmiri daughter-in-law Sunanda and two grandkids. On the ground floor lives the charwoman Padmini and her daughter Chandani. The building also houses Mukanda’s mother, whose son is in jail. The lives of these characters are ripped apart the day the



Partition is announced. Through their experiences, we as readers, relive the horror and the pain of the partition.

3.1 The Lull

A sense of foreboding hangs in the air as Part I - 'the Lull'- begins. Life however is still going on as usual for the inhabitants of Sialkot. The omniscient narrator takes us into the life of Lala Kanshi Ram who reads his morning newspaper and educates his wife about the atomic bombs, World War, and Gandhi's fast unto death. He loves his mother tongue but still mentions Hindi as his official language in the census. We get a peep into Lala's hard-earned comfortable life which he is afraid to lose. The narrator describes his nationalistic spirit and dilemma as he adores national heroes like Gandhi, Nehru, and Bhagat Singh but is also impressed with the discipline of the British officers. On one hand, he calls the British 'Kuttai angrez' and compares himself with national heroes when he spends a night in prison for a strike. On the other hand, he is fascinated by the grandeur and facade of the British parades, uniforms, and authority. He recalls taking his son to the Hurrah parade where the writer describes the authority and cruelty of the British when they make a spectacle of killing stray dogs with bullets. He worries about the political turmoil but Prabha consoles him and sends him to work.

In Prabha Devi and Isher Kaur's friendly chat, the narrator describes the harmonious environment between the Sikh and Hindu communities and the rising tension with Muslims. They talk about cooking, family love, share jokes, and of course discuss the impending possibility of the division until Arun returns from tennis practice with news that they (political leaders) are going to divide the country. The news generates an urgency and fear in everybody's mind. However, in the market, Lala Kanshi Ram and other Hindus discuss how Mahatma Gandhi will not accept the division. They show their faith in Gandhi as for them, he is not only a politician but a saint.

The narrator weaves in the story of Abdul Ghani, a hookah maker, in a flashback. In the past he had been on amicable terms with the Lala, indulging Arun from time to time and coming to Lala for small loans which he always repaid. Once the partition is announced he becomes a perfect example of how political leaders exploit the masses for playing their own divisive politics. It takes him no time to turn from friend to foe under the influence of Muslim leaders whose only aim is to spread hatred between the two communities. The narrator recounts how Abdul Ghani, though a paltry hookah maker was treated as an equal by his neighbouring Hindu businessmen in the bazar and he had lived in peace with them. "But 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 Pakistan, and he shouted for Pakistan” (P 56).

Lala Kanshi Ram returns home and prays to Lord Krishna before the radio announcement. A vague sense of doom spreads in the room as everyone waits for the news with bated breath. Before the announcement, the narrator talks about Nehru as a political leader who has important work to do and discipline to follow instead of helping the poor. Finally, the Viceroy and Pandit Nehru announce the partition of India and Pakistan. The first reaction is disbelief! How could their leaders betray them in this callous manner? Total confusion and fear soon follow. What will happen now is the question on everybody’s mind. It is impossible to understand how with just one announcement can a country be divided and its people’s lives severed. As Lala Kanshi Ram and his neighbours have dinner in fear, the Muslims celebrate the victory of Pakistan with firecrackers and drums.

On the same night, the Muslims in the area take out a procession and demand to take it from Fort Street. Under the hysteric crowd’s slogans and drums, Lala Kanshi Ram and other tenants wait for the police in dread. However, to their disappointment, the Muslim inspector sides with the other Muslims. Fortunately, the Deputy Commissioner of police, a Hindu, arrives to ensure their safety as the procession passes through their street.

In the next few days, the tension rises not only in Sialkot but all over India and Pakistan. Arun gets a chance to meet his girlfriend Nur but they end up having an argument about their future in the current political and religious unrest. In a flashback, to the past, the narrator gives us the story of Chaudhari Barkat Ali and Lala Kanshi Ram’s friendship and also the beginning of Arun and Nur’s love story. We are told that Barkat Ali and Lala both attended Gandhi’s rally in Ramtalai once. For Barkat Ali, Gandhi’s status is beyond any religion. He is a true follower of Gandhi and believes in non-violence, Hindu-Muslim brotherhood, Swadeshi, and also thinks that Purna-Swaraj is possible. Lala on the other hand believes that Gandhi is only a saint but the British are the true rulers.

Disappointed after an argument with Nur, Arun and Munir visit Sergeant Bill Davidson. The narrator describes the background of their friendship. Bill condemns the partition and calls it a stupid decision. However, he suddenly calls Gandhi ‘Bloody Gandhi’, at which both Munir and Arun feel offended. They confront him but he replies that he has no intention to insult Gandhi. With disappointment and tension, Arun and Munir return home.

On June 24, the first riot happens in Sialkot after the Legislative Assembly of Punjab accepts the partition. Thereafter begins a daily ritual of murders, rapes, loot and fires.



Mohalla Dharowal is looted and burned when a train arrives from Amritsar carrying the mutilated bodies of massacred Muslims and some survivors who look dazed and in shock bewailing the loss of their loved ones and of the only homeland they had known. The train from Amritsar becomes the metaphor for spreading violence. It is like the train has brought disaster to the city. Similarly, the newspapers become a source of spreading trauma and violence. The murder of the Deputy Commissioner is like the final declaration of communal violence. Kanshi Ram's inability to accept the partition is symbolic of any other Indian's dilemma to accept such an arrangement. Like any other ordinary person, he blames the government, the British and the political leaders for causing this failure. His simple desire to live and die peacefully in Sialkot with a name, is a desire shared by many others, but cannot be fulfilled. Also, the flashback of Suraj's marriage with Sunanda keeps the balance between the mood of the text.

The writer makes sure that it does not become overwhelming to the extent that readers become incapable of understanding the bigger picture of the progression of themes in the novel. The hysterical laugh of Mukanda's mother at the end shows the spreading hysteria and trauma. She is laughing at those who are leaving in the hope that they will return one day and also at those who will come to burn and loot the houses they call a part of their own country.

Lala's shop is also looted. The afraid and weak Lala tells Prabha Devi that he is not ready to leave and start afresh. Meanwhile, Barkat Ali arrives and informs them that they need to leave as the rioters have planned an attack on their street that night. Bill Davidson comes to escort them to the refugee camp. He faces the heartbroken Lala Kanshi Ram who blames the British for not saving them from the disaster.

The story starts with Lala Kanshi Ram's morning and ends in the first part with the evening dusk and a hysterical laugh. The laugh also indicates the upcoming storm, which is the title of the next part. After the lull, a temporary interval of quiet comes a dark storm, literally and metaphorically. The literal storm is the violence that would be unleashed on innocent people, and the metaphorical storm is the upcoming challenges both nations will face at the social, political and economic levels.



Check Your Progress

- When does the story begin? Why is the date important?
- What important announcement is made on the radio?
- How do people react to the announcement?
- Who is Barkat Ali and what role does he play in the first part?
- How does partition affect the love between Arun and Nur?
- What makes the Lala decide to leave his homeland?
- In the eyes of the common people who is responsible for the division of the two countries?

3.2 The Storm

For the next three months, Hindus of Sialkot live in inhumane conditions of the refugee camps during the rainy season, totally unaware of Delhi's freedom celebrations. Lala Kanshi Ram receives the sad and shocking news of the murder of his daughter Madhu and her husband while the two were on their way to Sialkot. A devastated Lala sends Arun and Suraj to seek help from Barkat Ali to recover Madhu's remains. As the two make their way back to Sialkot, the narrator paints a dreadful picture of the destruction and vandalization of the Hindu homes.

At Barkat Ali's place, he, and his family console Arun. Nur is also shocked and sad about Arun's situation. Barkat Ali and Munir go with Arun and Suraj to inquire about the dead bodies. However, they meet Abdul Ghani as a khaksar volunteer who claims that he has burned Madhu's body with his own hands. Unable to bear Ghani's beastly and inhuman act, Barkat Ali beats him.

A grief-stricken Arun recalls his childhood days with Madhu, her marriage and her struggles to become a mother. He replaces his grief with his attraction for Chandni. Meanwhile, Lala Kanshi Ram, once again, faces heartbreak when General Rees, the Commander-in-chief of the Punjab Boundary Force, betrays him like other leaders. The narrator gives an account of the unfair distribution of land, army and resources by the committee and how it further escalates the violence.

Arun meets his class fellow, Rahmat-Ullah, who is now in the Pakistan army. He recalls the Rahmat-Ullah from his college days who had been a romantic poet. In the current scenario, however, he is no friend to Munir but rather wants to exploit him in the most



corrupt and shameful manner by offering him a deal for escorting him and his family to safety in return for seducing Sunanda. He continuously visits the camp to look for an opportunity to meet Sunanda. One day, Sunanda warns Arun that if his friend ever dares to touch her, she will kill him. Ignoring Sunanda's issue, Arun focuses on his relationship with Chandani. Meanwhile, Isher Kaur's husband, Niranjana Singh, takes an extreme step to commit suicide with fire. He chooses death over cutting his sacred hair to ensure the safety of his family. People call him a saint who dies for his religion.

After months of struggle and fear, every Hindu feels a sense of relief when the Indian army under Major Rana Jang Bahadur Singh arrives at the camp. They initiate a plan to securely bring refugees in a foot convoy to India via the Dera Baba Nanak border. The convoy of hundreds of families stops at Gunna Kalan, six miles out of Sialkot. Barkat Ali, Munir and a few other Muslims visit their friends and say goodbyes at Gunna Kalan.

They next stop at Pasrur tehsil where Lala feels nostalgic looking at the Punjabi surroundings. However, Major Jang Bhadur worries about the intentional delay caused by Pakistani officers. His doubts prove right when the convoy faces an ambush at Qila Sobha Singh, seven miles from Pasrur. When the mayhem gets over, the narrator describes the mutilated bodies and destruction all around as physical evidence of the attack.

On the ninth day of the journey, by the time they reach Narowal which is thirty-six miles from Sialkot, 1500 people have already lost their lives. The convoy stops just eight miles away from the border. Arun still fantasizes about Chandni. Suraj brings shocking and shameful news of Muslims parading naked Hindu women. The narrator gives a dark, disturbing and detailed account of the disfigured and beaten bodies of naked and shaved Hindu women. On one hand, Suraj enjoys the show and laughs at the plight of women. On the other hand, a shocked Arun looks at the crying Hakim who prays for forgiveness for the sins of Muslims. The narrator here tries to point at a faint glimmer of hope when he pits the bestiality of the mob against the heartfelt compassion of the Hakim.

After returning to the camp, Arun promises to marry Chandni when they reach India. However, the following night, the convoy faces a surprise attack. Arun runs away in the fields away from his family. There he witnesses Rahmat-Ullah raping Sunanda. In a fit of anger, he kills him. He and Sunanda take his revolver and decide to search for their family in the camp. Arun receives the news that Suraj Parkash is dead and Chandni is missing. Devastated Arun tries to search for her but remains unsuccessful. He blames himself and everyone around him for not protecting her.

The wounded and lost convoy, where everyone has lost someone, reaches the last village Jassar. The elderly people of the village cry looking at the devastation, some people



offer water and some say goodbyes. Everyone rushes to cross the river Ravi like they are rushing for their deliverance. Lala Kanshi Ram shouts ‘Vande Mataram’ and salutes his new motherland. Arun, as opposed to his father’s joy, is upset over his loss of Nur and Chandni. Partition has snatched his love from him twice.

In new India, they arrive at Amristar but their quest does not end there. They face rejection from all their relatives and decide to move to Delhi. Lala hopes that he will live peacefully where leaders like Gandhi and Nehru live. The train journey is full of delays, and they witness the Muslims leaving India in similar fear and difficulties. Their train stops at Ambala for more than twelve hours as Hindus derail a train going to Pakistan. En route, Kanshi Ram offers words of wisdom to Prabha Devi about the land of Kurukshetra. He hopes that he will start a new life in Delhi with his wife and son. Meanwhile, Isher Kaur gives birth to a baby girl on the train with everyone’s help. The narrator creates a contrast between life and death as on one side a new baby is born in free India and on another side, on the track lie the mutilated dead bodies of hundreds of Muslims.

In Delhi, they face trouble and corruption in getting assistance from the government authorities. The reality once again hits Lala Kanshi Ram when officers ask him to pay thousand rupees to get a house and another thousand for a shop. He struggles for days going from one office to another, even visiting Nehru’s house where he faces betrayal once again. After days of struggle, Isher Kaur and her father decide to go and live with a relative in Shahdara. Lastly, Kanshi Ram and others settle in the Kingsway camp on Alipur road in two rooms.

Check Your Progress

- Describe the life in the refugee camp.
- What disturbing news does Lala receive?
- Who is Chandni?
- What happens to Niranjana and why?
- How do we know that the Pakistani authorities are hand in glove with the rioters?
- How are the people in the refugee camp finally taken to India?
- What difficulties do they face on arriving in India?



3.3 The Aftermath

In the last part, the Aftermath, Lala Kanshi Ram struggles at the Rehabilitation Centre, and Arun gets admission to Delhi University. Sunanda begins to earn a living by stitching clothes. Lala Kanshi Ram travels by bus in Delhi and reminisces on the tiring government system of getting a house. He enjoys the hustle-bustle of Delhi and reaches camp at 7 in the evening. They have just begun to achieve a semblance of normalcy in their life news of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination is received.

The radio announcement is just like the announcement about the partition but Lala Kanshi Ram is only focused on Gandhi's death and ignores the insignificant words. Bibi Amar Vati blames Gandhi for the partition but Arun defends him that Nehru and other political leaders are responsible for it. They speculate that the shooter must be a Punjabi. The narrator gives a glimpse of how they earn their livelihood through a small stall of groceries in the camp and face tough competition. Lala has stopped wearing a turban which was a sign of dignity. Now he is focused on earning a livelihood only. Along with Arun, he goes to Bazar to listen to the news of Gandhi's death which is like a personal loss for him and others. Gandhi's death is shown as the Nation's loss. At night, Lala feels scared and thinks about his loss to gain this freedom. They all remain awake at night, fearing another riot or betrayal from their own people—the fear of an announcement that can change their lives forever. The story ends with the noise of Sunanda's sewing machine which reminds them of their unending struggles and loss.

Check Your Progress

- What are the difficulties faced by Lala Kanshi Ram on arriving in India?
- Where do they finally find shelter?
- What do they do to earn a living?
- Does the Lala still feel betrayed by his leaders? Why?
- What important announcement is made in this part of the novel?



4. THEMES AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Violence and Trauma

In 1947, India achieved its freedom though at a terrible cost of being divided into two. The Muslim-dominated northern part becomes Pakistan and the rest the Republic of India. The hasty decision was responsible for the migration of lakhs, the deaths of thousands, rapes, displacement, and riots affecting more than 15 million people. This horrific event gave birth to a new type of Literature in which writers explored the trauma and violence at different levels like physical, sexual, and psychological. K. Nageswara Rao talks about this phenomenon as he says that “The blood-curdling colossal event stirred the minds of the Indian writers and as a result of it, a number of novels were written.... The tragedy of partition which resulted in complete chaos and destruction provided the writers with a rich source of treasure for their pen” (55).

Many writers and critics like Chaman Nahal, looked at it as an act of selfishness by political leaders, religious gurus, and the British Government. Bharatender Sheoran in his essay “Tyranny of Partition: A Retrospective Analysis of Chaman Nahal’s Azadi” writes that “The two countries commenced their independence with bust economies and lands without an entrenched, competent system of government” and continues to say that the novel portrays a “realistic historical documentation of the atrocious confrontations caused by the partition through a literary perspective” (173). Nahal writes a very physical or graphic account of the chaos and destruction that resulted in an aftermath of the Partition. He gives disturbing visual details while describing, the slaughter of men, women and children, the mutilated bodies, vandalized properties and other hateful acts. The frenzy and hysteria of the mobs is captured well by the writer. For example, the narrator describes a stabbing in graphic detail- “the intestines of the man would have spilled from the body and would be lying next to him in a pool of his blood” (126). Another example of this physical portrayal of violence is the description of the burning bodies. Nahal writes about the smell, sound, and colour of the scene. Readers can actually visualize the horror with words like “the unbearable stench”, “heaps of bodies”, and “fires were roaring and hissing” (183). He further writes:

they saw there was only dismembered limbs, dozens of them - legs, and arms, and hands, and thighs, and feet... parts which had not fully burned 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.
(184)

The novel is full of similar horrible visual accounts of the painful events.

Chaman Nahal is not the first writer to write about Indian history and partition. Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* (1981) and Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* (1955) also use the chronicles of the history of India to create fictional tales. Rushdie's novels are allegorical and examine historical and philosophical issues. His characters are surreal with a brooding sense of humour. He is known for his controversial religious portrayals. Saadat Hasan Manto is another writer who has written extensively about the partition. However, in his works such as the short story "Toba Tek Singh", Manto focuses more on the psychological aspects of the violence and trauma on the mental asylum inmates. Dr Mohan Radhakrishnan's *Manto's Legendary Contribution to Partition literature of India*, argues that his works have been more controversial for his explicit portrayals of violence including rape, murder, abduction of women, violation of holy places, loss of life, kidnapping and the distorted identity of a generation (34). In his works, Manto explores what this trauma did to the psyche of individuals.

Like Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* (1955) also tells the story of migration after the announcement of the partition. However, Nahal's graphic narratives of physical violence and destruction are different from Khushwant Singh's portrayal of the nation's situation of physical torture and psychological outburst. Bilquees Dar opines in "The Theme of Partition in Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan*", "Singh weaves a narrative around life in this village, making the village a microcosm representing a larger world" (22).

In *Azadi*, there is ample depiction of the violence that engulfed the entire nation after its division on religious lines. The trauma that results from the horrifying scenes all around is also evident in the sounds of wailing that rend the skies. There is however another kind of trauma that the characters experience. This is the trauma of being dislodged from their roots overnight. It is the trauma of losing one's home, one's homeland, one's livelihood and all that one had loved and treasured. Partition thus not just resulted in physical violence and trauma but mental as well for it irreparably affected the psyche of all those who lived through it and would affect all who relive it in times to come through narratives like these.

4.2 Autobiographical Elements

Like Kushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal is also a partition survivor. He was just nineteen years old in 1947 and like Arun, he had to face the death of his sister Kartar Devi. The death of



Madhu is also symbolic of the death of multiple other sisters lost or killed in riots. The chronicle of the horrific political and historical event is personal for him as he had to go through similar dilemmas which Lala Kanshi Ram and Arun have faced. Nahal's famous quote is that "the study of history is a study of the alternative choices open to a people at a particular time". Further in his autobiography, *Silent Life: Memoirs of a Writer*, he accepts that he has put a strong sense of place in *Azadi*.

The novel is a quest for Lala Kanshi Ram and Arun to lose and find their new identity and home, similarly, Nahal too had to forge a new identity in the wake of dislocation and exile from his place of birth. In "Autobiographical Elements in Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*", H. Asharafunisha and Dr A. Glory explore how "the private experience of Nahal are elevated very skillfully to public consciousness" (6354). Nahal not only recreates past trauma but also relives it through his characters. He shares his confusion as a young boy who wanted to contribute to the bigger picture of the nation's freedom like Lala Kanshi Ram. He raises his voice to criticize all political leaders and Gandhi, irrespective of his respect and belief in Gandhi's ideology. In his interview with B.S. Goyal, he says that "I think that historically, politically, ethically, and morally, partition was wrong. I believed and still believe that we are one nation, one culture."

Unlike Salman Rushdie, Nahal does not side with any religion. He uses Kanshi Ram's voice to explain that both Hindus and Muslims have faced the consequences of the selfish and foolish decisions of political and religious leaders. Kanshi Ram's statement that "I have ceased to hate. ... Yes I can't hate Muslims anymore. ... Hating won't bring anything back" is more like Nahal's own statement to forget his hatred (388).

Nahal's love for his birthplace Sialkot is evident when he chooses to establish his character in Sialkot. Like Arun and Lala Kanshi Ram, he dreams of living in Sialkot forever. In his essay "Writing a Historical Novel", he says:

One of the themes that I came to be occupied with after the Partition of India was that of forced exile. I was born in Sialkot and after 1947 we were driven away to India..... I have always rejected the two-nation theory; the creation of Pakistan in no way solved the problem of minorities. And till this day, I pine for the city in which I was born and raised. I see this as a typical yearning of all voluntary exiles. Hence, I wrote *Azadi* as a hymn to one's land of birth, rather than a realistic novel of partition. (6355)

Praising the writing style of Nahal, Bharatendra Seoran explains that he has objectified his personal experience of trauma and violence. Also, he has not spoiled the historical chronicle



with situational discursive elements (181). Yet the autobiographical element of the novel brings us even closer to the horror that is being described because all the time we are aware that the same is being written by someone who lived through it himself. Fiction thus comes very close to reality.

4.3 The Historical and Political Element

Nahal skillfully weaves into the narrative the history that led up to the partition, the politics that engineered it and the human tragedy that resulted from it. References to historical personages and events are interspersed in the narrative. Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, Wavell, Mountbatten, General Rees and many others appear in the tale though not personally but through a recounting of some event involving them or a reaction of people towards their stance. From Gandhi's call for 'purna swaraj,' and a united India, we journey through the demand from Muslim League for a separate Muslim State, the failure of the Cabinet Mission and finally the Viceroy's announcement declaring the Partition. Through a fictional representation of history, the novel includes a reference to all the main events that brought about the calamitous change in the history of the two nations. At the same time, it gives us a perspective on how the common man feels betrayed by his leaders as clearly, they go forward with the division in haste and without any preparation. Lala Kanshi Ram is representative of the common man's thoughts on the issue when he observes:

“What the leaders of India were offering the people of Punjab was an enormous bluff, he felt. They had neither the power nor the intention of maintaining the minorities in their own homes; they had not the power of saving their lives. They should have devised means of mass migration to begin with, before rushing to partition. Now they should at least keep their mouths shut and not mislead the credulous people. Jinnah and Nehru were villains enough Kriplani was the worst offender. More than the others it was he who was so loud about minorities staying where they were” (211).

Nahal is known to have believed that history is all about alternative choices and Bill Davidson underlines one alternative clearly in his discussion with Arun and Munir. He firmly believes that The Cabinet Mission plan would have been the best plan for the future of India. But the Indian leaders threw it away foolishly. Quite indignantly he tells them both: “You may sing songs in honour of Mountbatten.... 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” (123).



The politicians and the religious leaders play their disruptive politics with not a single thought for the millions who would be affected by their decisions.

4.4 The Quest for Identity

The novel begins on 3rd June 1947 and ends with the assassination of Gandhi on 30th January 1948 thus taking us through eight months of a traumatic journey that ends with a redefinition of the identity of the millions who crossed both sides of the border. For some like Gangu Mal survival matters more than identity. Opportunism dictates his actions. He converts to Islam and stays behind in Sialkot. As against that, we have Niranjana who refuses to compromise, is not willing to sacrifice his identity and immolates himself rather than cut his hair and shave his beard to survive. Born a Sikh he chooses to die a Sikh. For Lala Kanshi Ram and his family and millions like them, their identity is lost when they become refugees in what had been their homeland till then. The only identity they still have is that of being Hindus. Uprooted and exiled from their place of birth they try to find a foothold in a strange land which they will now have to call home.

Their hope of finding a new identity helps them survive the months of violence and trauma. However, Nahal shows how challenging it is to do so in real life. In Amritsar, they face rejection from all relatives because of their lost identity, no one is obliged to help them. They are only refugees who have suffered, nothing more. Lala Kanshi Ram stops wearing a turban on his head, he understands that he is no longer the grain merchant Lala from Sialkot, just a refugee like many others where “each was a curiosity to the other, but no one had any identity” (350). He struggles to find a place to live and survive in this new land where the easiest way is to gain the sympathy of officials to get some assistance. All that this one-time well-to-do businessman from Sialkot now desires is to “have a name for himself once again -- - not fame, just a name” (350).

4.5 The Gandhi Quartet

Chaman Nahal has dedicated almost twenty-five years of his career to this project. He has delivered four novels – *Azadi* (1975), *The Crown and the Loin Cloth* (1981), *The Salt of Life* (1990), and *The Triumph of the Tricolour* (1992). *Azadi* is the fourth and last novel of the *Gandhi Quartet* even though it was the first to be written. All four novels deal with Gandhi’s personality, his philosophy, his fight for freedom, his insistence on non-violence, his sway over the Indian people and traces the various historical and political events connected with him. To devote four novels to Gandhi is itself evidence of his influence on Nahal. He met Gandhi once at Birla House in 1947, after the partition. Gandhi’s words “the ability of a



person to face any threat to his integrity through an inner strength”, become a mantra for Nahal to overcome his loss and grief.

The influence of Gandhi’s ideologies is a common theme in Indian English Writings. The principles of non-violence, Hindu-Muslim brotherhood, Satyagrah, Purna-Swaraj, and Swadeshi, all have been easily visible in pre-Independence and Post-independence India. However, not everyone looks at him in a positive light but Nahal, sure, has respected and supported Gandhi.

In the story itself, from his meeting in Ramtalai to the news of his death, Gandhi’s presence and influence on all characters is visible. The ardent follower of Gandhi, Barkat Ali, becomes an example of an ideal friend, father, and nationalist. In Barkat Ali’s case, Gandhi’s ideologies protect him from the religious frenzy and political mass hysteria.

Gandhi is more than a politician; he is a saint for both Nahal and Kanshi Ram. He is an inspiration for youth like Arun and Munir and he is an enemy of the British. Although not every writer portrays Gandhi as a hero, he definitely is one in this story. Nahal writes about why women waited for hours for Gandhi’s arrival but they all leave when he arrives - “They were not interested in politics, nor Gandhi’s speech. For them Gandhi was a Mahatma, a religious figure, and they had come to pay homage only to the saint” (104). His death is called “a personal loss” for everyone. In the beginning, Lala Kanshi Ram is sure that Gandhi will never accept the partition and slaughter. He says that “The Congress had a promise to keep with the people. For the last thirty years, since that wizard Gandhi came on the scene, it has taken a stand that India was a single nation, not two” (48). For him, Gandhi is “shrewd” and “a mahatma”, he has no selfish interest so he can never betray them.

Bill Davidson's remark “That bloody Gandhi wants us to quit at once”, is like water on a hot pan. Arun and Munir forget their worries and confront him for referring to Gandhi Ji as ‘bloody’. There is also an urgency in Bill’s remark which shows the powerful influence of Gandhi on the British also.

In the end, Bibi Amar Vati blames Gandhi for everything but Arun immediately protects him saying that it is not his fault but Nehru's and other leaders’ selfishness. Gandhi’s death is like the final blow to Lala Kanshi Ram and others. Once again, with the announcement of his death, they fear another betrayal especially now that their saint is dead.



Check Your Progress

1. Write about at least two different writers who have worked on the theme of partition.
2. How are the violence and trauma shown in Nahal's work different from Salman Rushdie and Khushwant Singh?
3. What are the autobiographical elements of the novel? Give textual examples.
4. How many novels are there in the Gandhi Quartet?
5. How is Gandhi portrayed in *Azadi*?
6. What are the fears that resurface with Gandhi's assassination?

5. IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

Lala Kanshi Ram: The main protagonist and a grain merchant in West Pakistan's city of Sialkot. He is the oldest and chief tenant of Bibi Amar Vati. He is not well-read but shares the common middle-class mindset to elevate the status of his family with education and follows a trendy nationalist spirit. The story is about his loss of identity, home, and family members and a quest to find them again in new India. He firmly believes in Gandhi and cries after his death but he also admires the British government. He feels happy about Germany's loss and thinks of the British as the ultimate rulers. His fears and dilemma are shared by Nahal himself as a riot survivor. Nahal has boldly portrayed his kindness, confusion, duality, hypocrisies, fear, and courage.

He loves his language Urdu and his motherland Sialkot. However, he easily calls India his motherland, after crossing the Ravi. His duality and confusion make him realistic and interesting. Bharatender Sheoran talks about his binary ideology, he writes:

Lala Kanshi Ram has dual feelings towards the British. He admires them for their qualities but criticizes them for their faults. He says: "They are a nation which cannot be easily beaten, he thought. A handful of them have kept us under their feet for over two hundred years and now that Hitler too has met the same fate at their hands." ... he had great faith in General Ress ... blames the British for not protecting the refugees. ... If the British were going to lose India, it was not because of Gandhi or the



awakening amongst the masses, it was because of the tactical error they made in sending out an ugly Viceroy in the crucial days of their Raj (175).

Prabha Rani: She is Kanshi Ram's wife and an ideal example of a good Indian woman. As a forty-year-old woman, she is mature and clever enough to manage her home well. She also has her own superstitious beliefs, and a collection of perfumes, sarees and jewelry. As a dutiful wife she worries about the health of her husband and feels proud that he is so well-versed in current affairs. Like an ideal wife from any classical text, she complains to others about how difficult it is to make her husband happy. She fakes ignorance when Lala tries to impart worldly knowledge to this peasant woman.

She is the ideal wife who knows how to be docile and when to be brave and take care of the situation. Lala Kanshi Ram looks around his house and feels how much hard work she has put in to make this place home. The narrator uses Kanshi Ram's perspective to describe the well-maintained house with washed clothes, clean ironed covers and well-arranged possessions. Kanshi Ram calls her a "strong woman" (35). She maintains good communication with Lala until they have to leave their home and live as refugees. Kanshi Ram feels upset, at the end of the story, because he can no longer communicate with her. She wisely neither agrees nor disagrees with Arun's request when he introduces Chandni as his lover. Overall, she is an ideal middle-class wife with a open mindset and traditional values.

Arun Kumar: Kanshi Lal and Prabha Rani's twenty years old son. He studies at Murray College, Sialkot. At the age of twenty, he studies English Literature and plays tennis. His character is partially inspired by Nahal's life. He also shares the role of the narrator with Lala Kanshi Ram. Like any other young boy, he has a fair share of romantic relations and sexual desires. He does not like Gandhi but gets offended when someone else insults him. Like Nahal, he matures immediately to protect his family during the riots.

Chandni: Young girl of eighteen years old. Padmini's daughter and Arun's second girlfriend. She dreams of marrying Arun and living a peaceful life. Her end remains unclear and she is symbolic of all women lost during the riots. Her fate is not shared but it is clear that she will not have a good life. First, she serves as a distraction for Arun to not think about Nur and Madhu. Nahal writes "Chandni had seeped so deeply into his consciousness. Nur now seemed only a milestone – a milestone which he remembered but had left far back on his path" (267). When Arun tries to find her frantically it shows his love and responsibility towards her. Her love which is born in a war-torn place cannot be fulfilled. Unlike Nur, she has not even been given a chance to say goodbyes.



K. Nageswara Rao writes that “Both women, Nur and Chandni, create a void in Arun’s life, a life of unfulfilled love, a life filled with gloom. Arun remains a disappointed lover till the end of the novel. He wants to remain alive only to keep in memory Chandni. Arun, though frustrated is still trying to survive the crisis by clinging to the hope that one day or the other his Chandni would return to him” (59).

Chaudhri Barkat Ali: He is a Muslim friend of Lala Kanshi Ram. His son Munir is best friends with Arun, and his daughter Nur is Arun’s first girlfriend. He is the perfect example of an ideal Gandhi follower. Unlike other Muslims whose fanaticism leads them to hatred, hysteria and frenzy, he keeps his friendship and brotherhood till the end.

He is a good father, who believes in his daughter and son’s education. He does not stop Nur from singing, because she likes it. Without caring about others’ opinions, he follows his heart and tries to give his best in everything. He is finally unable to stop himself from beating Abdul Ghani when he sees the burning heaps of human bodies both alive or dead. He firmly believes in Gandhi’s words that “A Muslim in India was more an Indian than anything else” (106).

Sergeant Bill Davidson: He is a British soldier who lives in the cantonment area and is friends with Arun and Munir. He thinks of India as a place of exotic experience but still helps Arun a few times. He became friends with Arun and Munir, only because he wanted to have such an experience. He is astute enough to realize that the division of the country has been a hasty step. As he tells Arun and Munir “I think this is the most stupid, most damaging, most negative development in the history of the freedom struggle.” (122) Holding the British equally responsible he says that they should have stood their ground even if the Indian leaders had rejected the Cabinet Mission. That was the best plan and needed probably just six more months of negotiations. He is sensitive to the pain of the common man and is ready to help whenever he can and finally escorts Lalaji’s family to the safety of the refugee camp.

6. SUMMING UP

The novel shows the horrors of violence, the plight of refugees, the frenzy caused by religious and political aspirations, and both the bestial and humanitarian side of mankind. Nahal does not blame any religion for the chaos but he completely agrees that the partition was a wrong and hasty decision and holds the politicians and religious leaders responsible for the mayhem that followed in the wake of the division of the country. He carefully portrays how people have thought of Gandhi as a saint who can fight against the British and at the same time shows up the other political leaders as confused, helpless or selfish and inhumane.



The graphic portrayal of the pain, the chronicles of history, the political opinions, and the religious frenzy, make the novel one of the best additions to Partition Literature in India.

Nahal's fictionalization of history gives a face to the innumerable statistics one reads about in connection with the colossal event. It forces one to introspect and lest one loses hope in the essential goodness of man Nahal includes people like Barkat Ali or the Hakim of Narowal who prays for protection of the Hindu women and for forgiveness for the brutality of the mob. Seeing the atrocities that have been committed on both sides, Lala Kanshi Ram's admits to his wife: "I can't hate the Muslims anymore... What I mean is, whatever they did to us in Pakistan, we're doing it to them here" (338). The writer seems to suggest that this attitude and realization is probably the only way forward because the azadi or freedom that has been thrust on people has ended up creating only divisions amongst them.

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