

Chaman Nahal and His Craftmanship: A Study in Theme and Structure of his Major Novels

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Abstract

Chaman Nahal is a household name in the Indian writings in English. He has under his belt dozens of outstanding literary achievement which need deep sense of understanding if they are accounted for. In the literary circles, he is mostly acknowledged as a novelist who has devoted himself to the theme of freedom. However, that is just a half of it, rather he also worked out with many other themes in his novels apart from the theme of freedom. Therefore, the present paper extensively takes his major novels to study in the backdrop of other themes such as untouchability, Hindu-Muslim unity and others. The paper also examines simultaneous the structure of his novels in tandem with themes.

Keywords: *Freedom, Untouchability, Partition, Lucidity, Unity*

In any country across the globe, in expansion of its society in terms of social, political and cultural growth, the literature has a significant role to play so that man and society form a impervious bond with each other. The other side of this process is that writers are the backbones of literature because their writing stem from deep and profound intellectual understanding in different genres. Of all this genres, fiction has been regarded as the most popular form of expression their ideas covering almost all aspect of society. Indian fiction writings in English takes into account various themes including social history of India since the independence. Chaman Nahal ranks among the best of novelists who has cultivated the realm of Indian fiction drawing on his experience of partition and its aftermaths. Shashi Tharoor reflects

By representing the Partition in 'Universal' terms as outrageous, and its effects as a metaphysical disorder that can be restored to equilibrium only by the artist who is imaged as a magician-healer, these texts inaugurate a narrative and a subjectivity that translates history and politics into a failure of humanity. (Tharoor, 6)

Chaman Nahal is the name of a school of thoughts in himself for the reasons that he has numerous literary achievement under his belt. His literary career spanned many decades during which he brought out eight novels

which are the manifestation of valuable details about social life and are packed with different themes, the dominant of which obviously has been the theme of freedom. In addition to that, his artistic range encapsulates other themes as well like depiction of social and cultural life, treatment of communalism in the country, and many more. The present paper is a reflection of examination into major novels of Chaman Nahal in the background of theme and structure. Richard asserts:

According to Richard Church, the novel like the poem, is after all a flower of individual personality, and its variety, therefore, must be as infinite as the characteristics of men and women demonstrated not only in their social relations, but also in their moments and moods of solitude (Church, 126)

Needless to say, his novels exhibit the best of artistry along with his stupendous workmanship while creating set of characters in his each novels. Nahal worked so insightfully on each of his novels that the subject matter discussed therein takes exceptionally significant form. While assessing his novels from this perspective, Lubbock comments:

The best form (of novel) is that which makes the most of its subject. The well-made book is the book in which the subject and the form coincide and are indistinguishable - the book in which the matter is all used in the form, in which the form expresses all the matter. (Lubbock, 40)

Chaman Nahal has been acknowledged as one of the most accomplished Indian novelists who depicted different social themes and in his novels which are eight in number including “My True Faces” (1973), “Azadi” (1975), “Into Another Dawn” (1977), “The English Queens” (1979), “The Crown and the Loin Cloth” (1981), “Sunrise in Fiji” (1988), “The Salt of Life” (1990) and “The Triumph of Tricolour” (1992). He did possess deep inclination for the welfare of people of India in post-independence period that is why in most of his novels he brought out agony and pain of people who had borne the brunt of partition and suffered in numerous ways.

There is no denying of the fact that no writers can never be understood in their proper context until their age is deeply studied and a proper account of their social, political and economic activities is taken into critical examination. In other words, a writer is the product of his times, therefore, while carrying out his literary work, he juxtaposes issues in his work in some direct or indirect manner. This explanation goes well with the writings of Chaman Nahal because he brilliantly deals with the social problems of his times to an extent that he merges his own being with his writings and what comes out of this process are his splendid novels.

There are reasons to put it in that his novels are packed with such powerful stories and imagination that they provide the readers with sense of deep understanding in terms of themes and structure. A critical analysis of his novels like *Azadi*, *My True Faces* and *Into Another Dawn* significantly sheds light on his brilliant workmanship about crafting stories. Therefore, his fictional work is not about entertaining his readers but also stuffed with great motivational force which generate social consciousness by deciphering the meaning of life. To bring out the best in him, he strongly put himself under the moral supervision of the inner reserves of strength and power of

Gandhiji which emanated from his moral conviction and devotes a quartet to exemplify Gandhian principles. This temper of India in the first half of twentieth century is wonderfully captured in his works. His other novels like *The English Queen*, *The Salt of Life* and *The Crown and Loincloth*, belong to a different category from other works for reasons that the characters in these novels have been designed to demonstrate the attitude of people towards community, culture and after all, the nation. Moreover, his experimentation with a wide range of themes covers national as well international boundaries putting across his different perspectives on Indian ideology studied in dharma itself. Speaking more specifically, his obvious artistic skills facilities him to come up with vivid characters which are amazingly close to the real world deepening the faith of people in God.

Any writer of any genre is largely judged by the style and technique he employs to his work, and in this sense Nahal has been a successful novelist because his style is overwhelmed by lucidity, clarity of thoughts and preciseness of subject matter. David Lodge also speaks along similar lines:

Not a decorative embellishment upon subject matter, but the very medium in which the subject is turned into art. (Lodge, 80)

Therefore, Chaman Nahal strikes as the writer if studied in light of what David Lodge speaks because the integrated structure of his fiction deeply feels human sentiments and thus, highlights the vices and weakness of human life with calculated narrative technique. The vast range of his treatment with the contents of story largely hinges on the matter taken from the objective realities of society. Worsfold says:

What manner is to the individual, style is to the writer. It is right therefore, to say that 'style is the man', in the same sense, and with the same reservations as we say manners maketh man. (Worsfold, 151)

As has been discussed previously, his novels are constructed to portray by far the theme of freedom as the main theme, however, he also undertakes other themes as well which provide interesting reading and understanding of his works. He goes to great lengths to stick by the principles of Gandhiji and pull off in his treatment of flashing the temper of post independence India. For instance, in *Azadi*, he captures the mood of exhausted and anguished youths following Gandhiji's assassination:

Well, it is a good thing he is gone. He brought nothing but misery to us...It all happened because of the partition. And it was Gandhi who sanctioned the partition. 'That's not true'. Arun felt he had to put therecord straight. 'It was the Congress leaders, like Nehru and Patel'. 'They were his stooges'. 'No, auntie. You are wrong there. In the final days they didn't listen to him. (*Azadi*. 366-367)

For the most part, as is seen in this passage, he equips his characters with loads of qualities and virtues that they appear real, and this feature of his novels straightly stems from a powerful theme. The stories woven around different themes pertaining to freedom, social and moral consciousness, political activism and untouchability not only ends up in great success but also bring about awareness in the society. Hence, his novels are full of passion

for readers of every segment so that they could feel their perception to be transformed for the good. It could be further observed that awakening brought about by such means ends up making people more and more conscious about the day-to-day happening in their lives. The evidence supporting the present argument could be found in question raised by Urvashi in the *Azadi* about debilitating situation of women:

Why was it that we heard so little about them? How had they experienced the anguish of the division, the euphoria of the newly-forming nations? My assumptions were simple: firstly, that these questions had remained unasked because of the patriarchal underpinnings of history as a discipline. I also believed (and this view has been considerably qualified since) that in times of communal strife and violence, women remain essentially non-violent, and are at the receiving end of violence as victims, and that they are left with the task of rebuilding the community. (*Azadi*, 55)

Chaman Nahal relentlessly works on a couple of themes and he also in the same pursuit he ventures himself experimenting with the theme of Hindu-Muslim unity. For example, he portrays this unity in *The Crown* and the *Loincloth* in an exquisite manner:

The members of all communities, "broke their bread together, drank water out of the same container and embraced each other in streets. And the police felt powerless. (*The Crown*, 140)

The message conveyed here is that there was no aversion or any element of communal gap between these two ethnic groups until the political parties like the Muslim League sowed the seeds of division by playing a foul game. Additionally, he further provides instances of joint meal session between Hindu and Muslim communities. Sunil, who is a Hindu, has been portrayed as having his meal with Muzahhar, a Muslim character in the same novel.

Another vicious practice prevailing in his times since ages has been the evil of untouchability. Like all writers of belonging to any period of literary genre who have committed themselves in eradicating it, Chaman Nahal also weaves the story of his novel on the same theme. As a writer and humanist, he was flabbergasted with this heinous caste discrimination, therefore, he highlights the negative and horrible aspects of it in his novels with primary reference to *The Gandhi Quartet* and *The English Queens*. In the *Gandhi Quartet*, the novelist attempts to display untouchability as a sin against God. *The Crown and the Loincloth* has been also packed with dozen of episode where the Chaman Nahal puts across his views on the same evil. He comes down heavily on the proponents of this system and also expresses his anguish through its protagonist that "no Muslim treats a Muslim with contempt; no Christian, no Sikh, Hinduism alone was infested with the cancer and he hated for being a Hindu". The theme is further taken to its climax in the *The Crown and the Loincloth* where Sunil, the main character, is deeply moved by the fate worse than death:

"Every where he (Sunil) found them in conditions that could only be called inhuman. As he entered their enclosure, they lined up in the street and bowed in obeisance. It was not their poverty that him appalling though it was. It was the abject manner in which they seemed to accept their status without protest, without murmur, with their heads lowered as though they deserved nothing better than this. He asked them for a glass of water and they were afraid to serve it to him. He asked them for a cup of tea and they begged him to think better of it. He wanted to spend a night with them in their huts and they resolutely refused. (*The Crown*, 18)

As far as the significance of style in works of any writer is weighed up, style stands as a characteristic of writers through which they are drawn towards something and then find themselves immersed in that matter so as to write about it later. Keeping it in mind, Nahal perceives crucial issues, disparities, social discrimination and vice of untouchability prevailing in the society and put across his ideas wrapped in wisdom in the form of novels. Not only the themes, he is also very selective in using the language of common man so that his message is received by every man in the street. In other words, his novels are rested on the raw material taken from everyday life. Showering praises upon him, Forster comes up with beautiful remarks:

Whereas the story appeals to our intelligence, the pattern appeals to our aesthetic sense, it causes us to see the book as a whole. (Forster, 138)

Another aspect of thematic evaluation of his works, which has not been investigated as much as it should have been, is the ever pervasive spectrum of social and moral consciousness which he weaves around the main theme. Critics of Indian fiction in English of course approached to his novels by digging deep into the theme of freedom or theme of affirmation, however, the theme of consciousness also props up the main theme side by side because his characters in the novels like *Azadi*, *The Triumph of Tricolour* and *The Salt of Life* sharply reacts to a particular kind of consciousness. Additionally, his technique of employing theme of consciousness is so remarkable and brilliant that it opens up many sphere for further clinical studies reflecting over social life.

Having said that, it might not be any exaggeration to say that Nahal has been endowed with an amazing insight and imagination through which he creates animated characters and splendid scenes in his novels. His later novels give him away as a visionary novelist who decorates his stories and characters in exquisite manner.

For the most part, critics have asserted their views about technique of novel as a process of thoughts formation in writer's mind. Uzzel categorically cast light on the technique of novel:

Technique is at work in all that happens from the moment of the first inspiration to the completion of the design and indeed is involved in the actual writing in so far as the writing is the fulfilment of the design. (Uzzell, 21-22)

However, it has a larger area even than the defined one covering the area of events and plot construction. Evidently, all novels of Chaman Nahal have been brought out with meticulously knitted plots. Generally speaking, his artistic qualities qualifies him to take every single incident or episode of the story into harmony that collectively they all come up as an organic whole plot. His masterpiece novel *Azadi*, if taken as an instance, opens with a complex plot and brimmed with loads of issues and problems in the wake of independence. Nonetheless, when the story approaches towards its end, most of the problems are addressed with matching remedies. Along similar lines, *The Sunrise in Fiji* could be categorized followed by *The English Queens* and *Into Another End*. On top of that, the plot structures of *The Triumph of Tricolour* and *The Salt of Life* have been so dexterously worked out that even minor incidents in the novels appear far significant. O'Connor observes

The technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; It is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying his meaning, and finally evaluating it. (O'Connor, 22)

In the light of whole preceding argument, it might be worthwhile to believe that Chaman Nahal comes across as a versatile novelists loaded with a great vision of life. As far as his strength of creating magnificent themes and structures is taken into final analysis, no amount of words seem enough to describe that. However, while doing so, he takes into account every moment major or minor to imbue the story of and he never drifts away from the established literary norms and rules. Taking all ins and outs of his craft of fiction into analysis, it has been observed he achieves literary perfection by focusing on the social and political life of Indian in particular by using relevant themes. He is far ahead of his contemporary novelists in painting the two separate pictures of pre-independence and post-independence India. Being a dexterous craftman, he highlights ample of social evils like untouchability, communalism, alcoholism, and exploitation through different set of characters. Apart from that, legendary characters like Mahatma Gandhi, Moti Lal Nehru, Subash Chander Bose and Jaya Parkaash Narayan have also been dealt with by Chaman Nahal with utmost artistic skills who tie in well with the social realities of his times.

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