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The English Rulers in Chaman Nahal's Azadi

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Abstract: *Chaman Nahal, born in 1927 at Sialkot in Pakistan, is one of the most popular Indian English novelist of recent times. He was a Professor of English at Delhi University. He is author of about sixteen books on English Literature out of which eight are the novels. Chaman Nahal is a very optimistic writer. His novels are embodied with ethical and moral values, which are the very soul of human life. Almost all his novels end with an optimistic vision. The thematic study of his novels give sufficient evidence of variety, depth and artistic integrity. His thematic content is highly suggestive and contain qualitative excellence. In the present extract we can see how the protagonist 'Lala' is much influenced and fascinated by the English rulers, their way of their culture and behaviour.*

Keywords: *Professor, optimistic, thematic, artistic, depth*

I. INTRODUCTION

The novel of Chaman Nahal's, 'Azadi' is predominantly political and it deals with the recent history of our country. Consequently, in this novel the English is portrayed at considerable length. It is remarkable that nowhere in the novel does the author in his own person express any view of the English as a people or of the British Raj in India. He does not bring them before the bar of his judgement and pronounce any verdict on them. Though he himself does not open his mind to us, he makes his characters speak out. But it must be clearly understood that they are not his mouthpieces; their views are not necessarily his views. For example, it is obvious that he could not have made Lala Kashi Ram, who is the most outspoken in his praise and censure of the English, echo his own voice. In the early part of the novel Lala is a victim of his creator's own ridicule and satire. We are made to smile at his naiveté and half-baked and borrowed views. Such a character would certainly not have been made the novelist's mouthpiece.

In the novels of Chaman Nahal we see the English only as some of his characters saw them. Of these the most important is Lala Kashi Ram. He is ambivalent in his attitude towards the conquerors of his country. For some of their qualities he has the highest admiration. But, at the same time, he is equally critical of their many faults and failings.

Lala admired the British for bringing some kind of piece to India, for their pageantry, precision, impartiality, their efficiency in controlling situations and taking action during crisis. He "enjoyed the safety of the British Raj and Hugged it lovingly". He believed that, in spite of everything, the British "had brought some kind of piece to his torn land". He knew that the country had been united by them. The Sikhs, the Marathas, the Muslims-all these rulers had given only trouble. He could not trust any of these."....Who let down the Mughals in their fight against the British? Always our own men, our own kith and kin!" It was the British who brought peace and justice to the land.

His school boyish passion for pageantry attracted him towards the British. He was sent into raptures by their bands and their parades and the colour of their uniform. He could never forget the pomp and the grandeur of their formal functions, their parades and processions.

Lala remembered with the latest show-the Victory Parade in 1945. He watched the Tommies march through the street, their tanks rolling ahead of them and he thought: They are a nation which cannot be easily beaten. ... 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. An absolutely invincible race.

Another parade that had greatly impressed him was the one celebrating the coronation of King Edward VIII. Lala never missed the New Year's Day parade which was an annual event which the people of the town called the Hurrah Parade. When his son Arun reached his sixth year Lala began taking him also. "For shouldn't the boy witness the magnificence and grandeur of the British Raj from an early age?" Lala would explain to his sleepy son that every word of command used there "had been approved personally by His Majesty himself, sitting bolt upright five thousand miles away in London on the Peacock Throne and wearing the Kohinoor Diamond".

Lala always praised the precision of the British soldiers. During a parade Indian dogs ran across the grounds and a sergeant had to shoot a dog dead with his rifle. Lala was impressed by his aim. What mattered to Lala Kashi Ram was the precision of the British Raj, which was seen in as small an act as the killing of the stray dog. No wonder they ruled the world over, no wonder, he said to himself. There indeed was no Raj like Angrez Raj! Lala believed that the English could control any situation very well. When he

heard about the communal riots, Lala thought how his friend the English Superintendent receiving a medal for bravery at a colourful parade afterwards.

Lala imagined the crisp voice of the Englishman coming to him soon after he had received the medal, “Lalaji Thik Hai?” He had no confidence in the Indian soldiers and after independence when he saw them standing in the chowk he felt: They did not know even how to stand properly. They should have been English military in a situation like this! The white sahibs, Lala was sure, knew what they were about. After the partition while he and many Hindus were on the move to India, he put his trust in General Rees, the Commander-in-Chief of the Punjab boundary Force which was set up in August to protect the minorities in Punjab. Lala had great faith in General Rees and the officers under him. They were not like the Indians who had wooly minds, who said one thing and did another. General Rees had declared categorically that no harm would be allowed to come to the minorities. Lala thought: Unless the world was coming to an end, an Englishman could not be taken lightly. He had to be obeyed. Lala was also impressed by their impartiality. He knew that in impartiality they were mile ahead than Indians. Moreover, it was not possible to bribe an Englishman. “Lala quaked at the mere thought of it”. Lala was the great admirer of the British King, Mountbatten and the English Superintendent of Police who was later transferred. He firmly believed that for the last several centuries no one had dared to flout the authority of the potentate who presided over an empire in which the sun never set. Lala was in raptures when the announcement of Lord Mountbatten’s Viceroy ship reached his ears. “He fell in love with the new viceroy the day he saw his picture in the newspaper”. He had no love for the one-eyed Was well with his bulky frame and baggy trousers. He thought that if the British were going to lose India it was because of the ugly Viceroy. But the new viceroy Mountbatten, tall and thin, with his beautiful wife seemed to restore a resemblance of the earlier dignity. Moreover, he was related to His Majesty whom Mountbatten referred to as Badshaha Salamat.

Another British official whom Lala admired much was the English Superintendent of Police. Lala tried to send him fruits and bottles of Scotch Whisky as gifts on occasions like Diwali and Dussehra. But they did not reach the Englishman for on the way they were taken by the Muslim City Inspector. Once when the English Superintendent of Police bought some wheat from Lala, he refused to accept its price entreating, “I am only your servant” but the Superintendent of Police left a reasonable account which the Muslim Inspector pocketed. However, after this meeting the Superintendent of Police could not ignore Lala at public functions. “While he walked around, swishing do his cane and curling his thin moustache, he would all at once become aware of a small figure in the crowd who was pinning to do his obeisance”. Though the Englishman tried to avoid him Lala would do everything to draw his attention and finally-he would give in. Once during a period, the Superintendent asked Lala, “Is this your son?” and Lala replied, “No, Sir, no. He is your son only”. Lala was proud of his son’s knowledge of “all the causes why Henry VIII broke up with the Pope”. In spite of his admiration for the English Lala disliked their religion and politics. He thought that they were “pagans” and had no religion worth the name, that all their church services were a fraud, and that the padres moved about with stupid smiles to ensnare the unwary and convert a few more into Christianity. Like any other Indian” he had a prejudice against all that the British did”. He spoke of them with contempt as the Angrez-the English. He hated them for what they had done to his country and wanted azadi”. He had prayed throughout the Second World War that the British be defeated by the Germans. In 1944 when there was again the chance of a British defeat he proclaimed loudly that he had known all along that “one day Germans would defeat this bunder race, the monkey race”. Under the influence of Baljit Raizada, the nationalist editor of the Urdu Daily Inqilab, Lala would shout: “Oh, they are Kutai, they’re dogs-these Angrez,” he would repeat “Kutai! Kutai! Kutai!” After the announcement of Partition as Lala and his family were getting ready to leave, Sergeant Davidson came to see them. Normally Lala would have jumped up to welcome him – an Englishman in his house – he had not thought of the possibility in his wildest dreams. But Lala said with belligerent eyes, “We have been let down by you people”. He added: You were our Sirkar, our masters, and I and millions like me gave you complete loyalty... Did you for one moment consider what might befall us? It is a denial of what the English stood for during two hundred years in this country! And it is the English who have the biggest hand in this butchery.

So far we have seen the English through the eyes of Indians. Nahal has given us an Englishman’s estimate also his countrymen. Sergeant Davidson who lived in the barracks near the Hurrah Parade Ground was a broadminded Englishman. Once after a film show Arun and Muslim friend Munir tried to go out before the British national anthem was over for they told Davidson whom they had not known before that they did not owe any allegiance to the British flag. But Davidson was very reasonable with them, and invited them to his barrack for a cup of tea. Because of his friendly talk the two young men forgot their hostility towards the British. Though he was an Englishman Bill Davidson liked India and he felt that continued British rule was a great injustice. He was certain that it would end soon. He had always been against imperialism and foreign possessions. He also knew what his people had done in Malaya and Africa before he came to India. “Local cultures had been destroyed everyone. More so in India which had such a long history and tradition”.



II. CONCLUSION

The significant thing in his novel is that the novelist do not bring the characters before the bar of their judgement and pronounce any verdict on them. Though they themselves do not open their mind to us, they make their characters speak out. But it must be clearly understood that they are not their mouthpieces. This novel has superb blend of facts and fiction together. The characters may be fictitious, novelist may differ in their interpretation of history, but they do not differ regarding its components, or is conjunction of statements.

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