



# Nationalism, Communalism and Patriarchy: an Analysis of Anis Kidwai's *Azadi ki Chhaon Mein* in the Perspective of Humanism

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## ABSTRACT:

Anis Kidwai, while serving the displaced people at refugee camps as a social activist, directly experienced the brutal and the most inhuman effects of the partition of India in 1947. In *Azadi ki Chhaon Mein*, Kidwai narrates her personal responses to the debris of the total collapse of a 'human civilization' as an inevitable consequence of the partition of the country and also for the absurd decision taken by the national authority for the exchange of population. With a noble mission of 'seva' or service Kidwai, a devotee of Gandhian humanism spent day and night in refugee camps in Delhi. The vast 'material reality' of human suffering that Kidwai presents in her memoir tends to put pressure on the discursive domains of conservative nationalism, communalism and patriarchy. The academic objective of this paper is to analyze the text of *Azadi ki Chhaon Mein* in the perspective of Humanism and for this the study is sure to be interdisciplinary and will borrow from history, culture study, philosophy and sociology etc.

**KEY WORDS:** humanism, material reality, trauma, nation, patriarchy, anguish

## I. INTRODUCTION:

India is that country which in a span of about five thousand years, has synthesized several waves of immigrants representing different ethnic straits and linguistic families which have merged into its population to contribute to its diversity, richness and vitality. Its culture through the ages has absorbed outside influences, but retained its ancient heritage marvelously. In the preface to the *Cultural Heritage Atlas of India*, the Editor Dr. P Nag rightly observed, "The Indian culture lies in humanitarian values, equality, eternity and fraternity. Its culture and philosophy provides firm background to mankind so that man can follow love in place of hatred, non-violence in place of violence, impartiality and

welfare of all in place of partiality" (vii-viii). Ramananda, Kabir, Tulsidas, Mira Bai, Sree Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and many others spread the message of unconditional love and fellow feeling towards others and thereby paved the way for a rich and strong base of Indian humanism. In spite of such a long tradition of love and mutual respect, India faced the total collapse of its civilization in 1947 with the partition of the country. In *Azadi ki Chhaon Mein*, Anis Kidwai raises some basic humanistic questions that could have needed much more attention of the decision makers of India than the narrow and selfish thought of the partition.

## *Azadi Ki Chhaon Mein* (2011)-

Anis Kidwai, a social activist wrote *Azadi ki Chhaon Mein* in 1949. It was first published in Urdu in 1974, long after its writing in 1949. The book has translations in Hindi in 1981 by National Book Trust and in English in 2011 by her granddaughter Ayesha Kidwai. In translator's introduction Ayesha wrote, "Azadi is a gift of memory that both inspires and liberates" (viii). Ramchandra Ghuha remarked, "Begam Anis Kidwai's memoir captures the social anguish of Partition and its aftermath far better than any novel or academic study" (Back cover of the book). The text, in its wide circumference, tries to capture the issue of internal displacement with a renewed conviction for a social justice for the human beings. With a force of truth, Anis Kidwai narrates the stories of the thousands who were driven away from their homes in Delhi and its neighbouring areas by eviction or abduction or the threat of forced religious conversion. In the preface to the 1978 Edition, the writer reiterated the purpose of this book. She told about her ambition of humanism across the borders for universal peace and prosperity, "The call to humanity, the imperative of love for the nation, the foundations of world peace and the unity of the nation itself depend on the strength that moral and



ethical values and religious tenets infuse into the new generation and the new world” (xxiv). So it is clear from the author’s note that she was in search of the practical implementation of Gandhian humanism before writing her eye witnessing record in this book, and so a humanist approach must only be the best perspective to analyze and justify the text properly.

Modern Indian concept of humanism received a new direction from Gandhiji who practically showed the way to make a good balance of spiritualism and materialism. Humanism, for Gandhiji, in a word, is a service to all creatures, to act as a savior, to wipe every tear from every eye. His relentless service for the weak, the sick and the oppressed is the perfect example of what humanism is. ‘Niskam Karma’ or selfless service is the keynote of his concept of humanism. Religion, for him, was essentially ethical and *Bhagbat Gita* was the controlling force in his life. One cannot deny the material life yet, he said that a passive attachment is necessarily required through proper education which only can liberate a human being from ignorance and incompleteness. He put emphasis on moral purity, a complete control over the senses and the mind to know the Truth. It was his “struggle for human decency” (24) that Mulk Raj Anand called him a humanist.

Anis was first instructed by Gandhiji to work with Sushila in a Muslim Camp in the Purana Quila. It was an area settled by the injured, ill, aged, children and women who had fled from Paharganj, Karol Bagh, Multani and around. Before the arrival of Doctors and medicines, the camp came out acutely chaotic with the cries of mothers, curses of fathers, irritations of midwives and the sighs of the camp workers. Every day fifteen and every night ten infants used to find their way into the world and there was “no one to look after these infants, to bathe them. As the midwife on night duty, cursing loudly, savagely severed the umbilical cord and dunked the child in water, mothers had to look on helplessly, hearts gripped by panic” (37; ch. 3). Even the human babies were treated as unwanted to the outside world which was in the grip of a great turmoil. They were not given the proper warm welcome which was natural to them. Thus, the writer showed that while the adults became intoxicated and playful with the communal instincts and ego, the newborn babies could not escape its wrath from the very first day of their lives. It wounded the human mind to a great extent so as to affect generation after generation. The whole camp was attacked by thirst and hunger, typhoid, cholera, dysentery, fever and many other diseases were wide spread. The human existence was made more severe with the fear of snake bites and heavy rainfall. About

80’000 refugees crammed in the Quila in a dilapidated state.

While working at camp, Anis had observed that pure human sympathy could build up a bond even between two strangers, and here the co-called conservative notions of nation, communalism and social oppression of patriarchy prove nothing. She told the tale of a young girl who lost all her relatives. She was a ‘refugee’ (without any national or personal identity) with her two year old girl and was to give birth to another. The call of humanity was so strong that an unknown young man shouldered the burden of the whole family later on. Anis was so pleased to see their union that she began to believe that the human had not yet turned into a beast. The heartrending cries of the people in the camp seemed to her a ridiculing laughter of irony towards the socio-political tricks of the ‘powerful’ human. The narrator describes:

“Scores of children had died of starvation and cholera. Filthy bodies, faces wizened like monkeys, spindles for limbs, bellies ballooning, these little frogs spent days lying in wait, yearning for that brief, beautiful moment when the hunger whimpering in their stomachs would be hushed by a few drops of milk” (49; ch. 3).

Anis reiterates the question of good living not only in a spiritual sense but also in terms of medical science. In Purana Quila Camp as well as in Humayun Tomb camp where she worked with severe dedication, she raised the question of good health and sanitation necessary for human living. She described the actual situation the refugees were in. The camp’s cleanliness vanished very soon. Tents erected everywhere and anywhere. “Only those who spent night and in the open, huddled under a mere sheet for a tent, in that bitter November and December, can tell of what they underwent. Pneumonia and influenza swept through the camp, everywhere bodies were racked by coughs” (68; ch. 4). The wretched condition of the human beings was intolerable. Begam Kidwai went to Dr. Zakir Hussain for his advice. While working in Humayun Tomb Camp, Anis Kidwai had experienced a common tendency among the people to search for fellow human beings on two different purposes. Firstly, as people from different corners flowed into Delhi but on each face was etched the same anxiety of finding one of his or her same group. She added, “Before this, who’d have ever thought of trying to determine whether a person on the street was Hindu or Muslim, but today, I was searching every visage for a sign of its religion, looking out for skullcap or the distinct groomed beard that marked a Muslim man” (66; ch. 4). Secondly, there were few who were in search of



those who were responsible for the death of their nearest and dearest ones in the riot. Anis still remembered one man who had lost half of his left arm. She asked him whether he was leaving for Pakistan on the train that day. His answer was remarkable, "Why should I go there? My wife and children have been murdered, my hand has been hacked off" (58; ch. 4). The desire for revenge was still burning in his eyes and therefore, without taking the revenge he was not ready to leave for another place. Anis became stunned to see the reactions as a mark of his faithlessness in human civility. She had already begun to think that the greatest weapon and the truest armour against brutality and domination was Gandhiji's Ahimsa. A human life can only be fulfilled by love, compassion and forgiveness.

Anis had a rare and precious experience of visiting the refugee camps for children as well as the wounded children in different hospitals in Delhi. She dedicated one whole chapter (chap 5) to describe in detail about the actual truths of the children's undue sufferings as a consequence of the division of their country. She herself along with Jamila began visiting hospitals to locate stray and orphaned children who were deprived of good living and education at the very crucial stage of their lives. As she narrated her experience at Irwin Hospital in Delhi, she wrote:

In Irwin Hospital, the children sat together, sunning themselves on an upper veranda. Some had injured heads, others had broken legs, and on a tiny cot lay groaning a nine-month-old with wounded head and hands. A little girl's shoulder drooped because her forearm had been severed and a little boy was recovering from the wounds of a stomach split open. (72; ch. 5)

The description can move any human heart and leave a permanent scar in his mind, leaving no room for peace for the rest of the life. It was also difficult for Anis to forget about a woman's tear in utter helplessness. The young woman lost both of her two hands, and beside her lay her twelve year old daughter swathed in bandages and was groaning in pain. But the hands that had ever comforted her little one were helplessly inactive to soothe her pain. She remembered afresh, the story of Rashida, a girl of eighteen years of age. She ran for life when they were attacked. But she was caught and swords went through each of his limbs. Rashida used to call Anis, 'Ammi' as she had no one left. She wanted to eat bananas, gajak and rewadi from Anis Kidwai.

The writer's description did not escape a natural goodness of man too. She especially remembered of a middle aged Sikh who became a close-hearted relative, 'Baba' (father) to all the orphans in Irwin Hospital. He brought back all the

normal sensibilities of love, affection, joy to them. He used to bring sweets on each of his visit for those innocent children and shared love and laughter with them. The children did not know his name or where he came from. They simply knew him as their beloved Baba. In the desert of division and distrust at that time, the Sikh man did a lot to bring back their rare and precious childhood.

A person's religious identity may be important to his religion, but this identity cannot be his sole identification. Religion can not permit its follower to invade other's domain of faith. Religion is one type of education of love that involves no passion, rather spreads piety and affection. When it encourages passion, it leads to diversions and fundamentalisms and communalism. In *In Freedom's Shade*, Anis Kidwai showed a large number of Muslims were converted to Hinduism. In Jaipur, the amity between Hindu and Muslim remained in harmony because of Rajmata and Maharaja's intense effort to maintain law and order. But as soon as Jaipur was passed, from Kishan Gargh to Ajmer, there appeared same experience of conversion, humiliation, torture and abduction and a common penury of starvation during the journey of leaving home.

Mridula Sarabhai wanted to implement a programme for the rescue of the abducted women in India and Pakistan. Under the head name of Central Recovery Organization, thousands of girls were recovered. Anis recorded that until 1954, for just fifteen months "17000 women were rescued from Pakistan and were sent to India, and 20,000 Muslim woman the other way" (146; ch. 9). The record must bring out the extent of suffering that the women had undergone before their rescue. Abduction of women posed many humanistic questions. Firstly they were deprived of all civil rights, especially the right of living they liked. And secondly, they were treated not as human, but as animals who could be abducted, humiliated and tortured the way men may wish. They were treated as hot commodity which could be sold at higher rates from one hand to another, from the police to the common attackers. Those who were with children took intolerable pain to see the brutal treatments with the babies. More ironic was the fact that those innocent girls were unaware of the conspiracy around them and used to take their abductors as angels of mercy. A long time would pass before she could understand that she was kept alive not by human but by beasts of her opposite gender for their own enjoyment.

In the patriarchal Indian society, one burning question that emerged from their effort to rescue the abducted women was, as Anis Kidwai had



written, "...when these abducted women were brought back, would their relatives accept them?" (148; ch. 9) In their fieldwork, the narrator had found that most abducted girls did not want to return because they were well known that they would not be accepted as their abduction had, no doubt, disgraced their whole community. Parents would accuse them for blackening the honour of their family. None would consider the matter as, why should the girl be faulted for the offences of others? The author had pointed out a disparity in the attitude of the parents, "As for the sons, the one sentiment that moved them was a desire for revenge and anger at their sisters" (149; ch. 9). Thus, the abducted women have never got appropriate respect or dignity from their society and proper affection from their family. They were nowhere to be accepted as 'human'. They were thrown away forcibly from getting the minimum requirements of a normal human being to live on this earth. Sometimes they killed their abductors, sometimes they killed themselves and sometimes they were compelled to sell their dignity to the strange men for months. If they were given the chance to return, a deep sense of misgiving and a fear of rejection would drive them to refuse the offer.

In most cases Anis had observed, "In India and Pakistan very few educated girls were recovered. The overwhelming majority was always with the uneducated daughters of farmers, workers and middle classes, primarily from the rural areas" (153; ch. 9). This observation is very significant in the sense that it brings out a fact that the educated women had become conscious of their humilities, importance of their dignities and also had grown that ability to decide about their own fate and future. So considering the situation they decided not to return and kept faith on a new idea of intermarriage. On the other hand, those who were uneducated could not decide about their future and were willing to go back to their known place anyway.

## II. CONCLUSION:

India's independence was achieved at the cost of the partition of the country. The struggle for independence culminated into an anarchy where there were more deaths than lives. It resulted in division and distrust among two countries. The noble mission of the long freedom struggle ultimately adds to an unforgettable chapter of human tragedy and Barbarism. Men began to lose faith in friendship, neighbourhood and humanity. The concept of a 'nation' with a border remains alive with its people broken in body and mind. In a word, Partition means in a sense, the 'death of humanity' in a land where humanism had long been worshiped traditionally

with full dignity and respect. Yet, Anis kidwai had still a great faith upon humanity, "Man did not die. He can never die". (311; ch. 18)

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