PUNJABI LITERATURE

I. Serebryakov

The book deals with one of the most interesting and less studied literatures of the world—Punjabi literature. The author gives an account of the 12 centuries of its history, traditions, national and artistic features.

U.S.S.R. ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
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A BRIEF OUTLINE

to Professor Harnam Singh Sha
with best regards
and sincere respect
from author
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The Heritage of Heroes

FIVE RIVER LAND

The Punjab—the Five River Land—is a bright green patch on the map of India and Pakistan. The name derives from the five mighty tributaries of the Indus—the Ravi, the Bias, the Chenab, the Jelam and the Satlej. Born high up in the icecrusted Himalayan mountains, these rivers strain impetuously towards the Indus, breaking their path through rocky ground, then flowing swiftly across the plane until they reach their destination. Together with the Indus, they provide abundant irrigation for the Punjab fields—too abundant at times!—turning the country into India's granary, rich in wheat, rice, sugar cane, and cotton.

The majestic mountain ranges hemming the Punjab from the north-east and north-west and holding invaluable treasures that yet await discovery, serve to stay the monsoon clouds compelling them to discharge their beneficial rains upon the Punjab fields. Embedded in their mountain-framed valley lies the water-reservoir of the Bhakra and Nangal whose hydro-electric power-plant feeds the young industry of this ancient land. To the south-west, where the Indus, swelled by its tributaries, flows towards the ocean, strips of semi-deserts separate the Punjab from Belujistan and Sind. The Punjab's western neighbour is mountainous Afghanistan, far beyond the Indus. Its south-western fringe merges into the Rajasthan steppe, while the eastern parts touch the fields of the Uttar Pradesh.

The inhabitants of the territory, the Punjabis, number over thirty million. Their main occupation is agriculture.

Their language is Punjabi, though, in intellectual circles, Urdu, Hindi, and English are current.

This valley, irrigated by the Indus tributaries, was the cradle of one of the most ancient civilisations in the world. As far back as in the IV millennium B. C., Harappa culture was blossoming here on the basis of an elaborate class society with highly developed productive forces and a remarkable standard of urban life. Later, in the middle of the II millennium B. C., the so-called Aryan tribes came to settle in this valley. As time went on, they merged with the indigenes of the Five River Land, and a new epoch started in the country's development. By the end of the I millennium B. C., tribal communities took shape, and separate states sprang up. It is with one of these states—Takshashila—that the first authentic information about the culture of the present Punjabis' ancestors is linked.

The Punjab was repeatedly subjected to foreign invasions. In the V century B. C., the Persian ruler Darius annexed the lands along the right bank of the Indus. Alexander of Macedonia swept the Punjab in his triumphant forward drive, but, checked by the peoples inhabiting the Punjab and the Indus valley, was forced to resign from his plan to conquer all India. Plutarch writes of this: "The battle with Poros damped the Macedonians' ardour and discouraged them from penetrating into the heart of India." [1]

During the subsequent centuries, the Punjab experienced the rule of the Mauryan emperors (IV—II centuries B. C.), was invaded by the Scythians and the Kushans, was annexed by the Gupta Empire (IV—VI centuries A. D.) and the Harsha Empire (VII c. A. D.), beat back the Huns, battled against the Moslem invaders, and against the British conquerors. Thus, the Punjab soil is drenched with the blood of its heroic people.

The specific circumstances of the Punjab's history, added to the country's natural peculiarities that determined its comparatively uniform economic development, enhanced the consolidation of individual tribes and the formation of states that in cruel battles staunchly defended their independence. The Arjunayana and Yaudheya republics mentioned in ancient Indian epos undermined the foundations of the Kushan Empire of the I—II centuries with

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[1] Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. II, Moscow, 1963, p. 440 (in Russian).

their tenacious resistance. The kingdoms and republics of the Punjab that were incorporated in the Gupta and Harsha Empires apparently managed to retain a certain degree of autonomy.

The development of feudalism in the Punjab was conducive to the formation of more independent states, simultaneously leading to a further breaking up of the territory. The crisis of early feudal society, feudal disintegration in the country, conditioned its comparatively easy conquest in the XI century by the Moslem feudal lord Mahmud Ghaznevi who had consolidated his position in Ghazna, the southern part of present-day Afghanistan. For seven centuries the Punjabi remained subjected to the oppressive rule and bravely fought against feudal conquerors.

In their struggle against a common enemy the various tribes and nationalities of the Punjab gradually fused into a single nation, united by social and economic conditions as well as by a common language and a common culture. This process manifested itself in the emergence of the first national state, that resulted from a powerful anti-feudal movement among the Punjabi peasantry and the lower strata of the urban population. This state was governed by the *khalsa*—a Sikh religious community.

It was thanks to their national integrity that the Punjabis were able to hold out against British invasion right into the middle of the XIX century. Even then it was only due to the treachery of some feudal lords who offered their services to the conquerors, that the British colonisers finally enslaved the Punjabi people.

For a whole century the Punjabis fought alongside the other peoples of India for their country's independence, until in August 1947 this common struggle was crowned with success: the British were forced to withdraw from India; India finally won her liberation!

However, the Punjabis paid heavily for their freedom: the land was divided according to the principle of religion. Territories with a Moslem majority were given over to Pakistan; those parts where the majority profess Hinduism (to whom the Sikhs were also added), fell to the Dominion of the Indian Union, which on January 26th, 1950 was proclaimed the Republic of India. The borderline cuts across the living body of the Punjab people, as it were. In the face of all principles of tradition and national in-

tegrity, the Sikh and Hindu Punjabis have been separated from the Moslem Punjabis. Despite this borderline, despite all efforts on the part of reactionary forces, Punjabis on either side are conscious of belonging to a single cultural entity. They uphold the purity of their native tongue, maintain cultural links, and consider themselves children of the same country—the Land of Five Rivers.

AT THE FOUNT OF PUNJABI LITERATURE

The roots of Punjabi literature are sunk into the ancient past; they trail off in the opening centuries of our era. The first mention of the Punjab epic legends occurs in the records of the Greek historian Arrianos (95—175). Reporting on Alexander's Indian campaign he dwells at great length on the customs and habits of the local population, and chapter X of his book "*India*" opens as follows: "They also say that the Indians do not erect monuments to their dead, but consider that the noble deeds of the deceased, and the songs sung of them are enough to keep alive their memory."

Archaeological findings on the territory of the Punjab testify to a rich culture and a high standard of art. Monuments of Gandhar art, for example, belonging to the I century A. D. bespeak not only a remarkable appreciation of physical beauty, but also an understanding of deep human emotions. The roots of some literary monuments in Sanskrit and Prakrit can presumably be traced in the Punjab. The most interesting among them was the fantastic epic poem *Brihatkatha* ('The Great Tale') originally written in the Paishachi Prakrit, considered to be one of the forerunners of the contemporary Punjabi; it has, however, came down to us in later Sanskrit variants.

Till quite recently, fifty years ago or so, Punjabi literature was generally considered to be of little significance and to have originated only in the XVI century with the Sikh sacred book *Adi Granth* ('Primary Book'). First voiced by the English Indologist Grierson in 1915, this view became so firmly established that it took years and years to disprove it. In the nineteen forties, the prominent Indian literary scholar Madan Gopal wrote: "One often hears the question: 'Is there such a thing as Punjabi literature?'

My answer is affirmative, emphatically so, since it is a literature of a clearly defined quality, embodying the genius of the Five River Land people as no other literature could possibly embody this genius."

That such a statement should be necessary in the 'forties is indeed preposterous, considering that some years before G. Grierson's theory, a noteworthy Punjabi enlightener Budh Singh published a history of Punjabi literature, where he finds its origins in the XI century.

Today we can state with every assurance that these origins belong to remote antiquity.

Folklore that has not only kept alive plots and images from the ancient past, but that also reflects the people's attitude to historical events and personalities, may be of great assistance in this respect.

Among the oldest documents of Punjabi folklore are the legends about Rajah Rasalu. Legends, tales, stories, songs and ballads are linked with this name. Plots centred around him occur in every genre of Punjabi folklore. However, as it often happens in folk legend, the real image of Rasalu is lost in them, while the character created by the people's imagination personifies instead their reverence for him as an historical figure, and all their dreams of a just ruler. With the lapse of centuries different traits accreted to this image reflecting various epochs, and rendering it increasingly more manifold and complicated. This elasticity of folklore images, their capacity of absorbing new traits born out of new times, accounts for the great vitality of legends. Rasalu is alive not only in folklore, but in Punjabi poetry as well; while poets, resorting to his image, in their turn affected folklore. This is the reason why in the ancient legends that are still extant memories of battles with the Scythians and Huns are quaintly interwoven with events referring to the time when the Moslem feudal lords—Arab, Iranian or Turk—were establishing their power. And yet, much that is contained in these legends does belong to the dim past; and it is this that enables us to recreate, in general outline at least, what the forefathers of today's Punjabis had striven to perpetuate through the magic of the poetic word. The basic legend on Rajah Rasalu amounts to the following.

Rajah Salvahan (Shalivakhan, Satavahan in *Brihatkatha*) had a son by the name of Puran; his mother was the

rajah's eldest wife, and she was called Ichran. The rajah's youngest wife was called Lunan. And she grew passionately enamoured of Puran, but he rejected her ardent pleas. Then Lunan resolved to take revenge. She came before the rajah and slandered Puran, and Salvahan ordered that his son be executed. But the hangman did not kill Puran; he cut off his wrists and feet and threw him into a well.

It so happened that a hermit, by the name of Gorakhnath was passing these parts in his wanderings. He rescued Puran, and healed his wounds. Puran became a hermit too, and gained wide fame under the name of Puran Bhagat.

Meanwhile Lunan could not beget a child. Try what she may, it was of no avail. But once when Puran Bhagat appeared in his native town, a miracle happened: Ichhran, who had gone blind with grief and tears, regained her eyesight. On hearing of this extraordinary event, Lunan came before Puran entreating him to pacify the gods so that they may bestow a son on her. And Puran Bhagat promised her that she would give birth to a son, and he would grow up to be a mighty hero. And thus, thanks to Puran's blessing, Lunan bore the rajah a second son. And he was named Rasalu.

The astrologist foretold such a fate to Rasalu, that the rajah was frightened and ordered his son to be immured in a dungeon for twelve years. And he sent him for company Shadi, the parrot, and Foladi, the colt.

Eleven years went by—one year remained to the end of Rasalu's term of confinement. But the parents' hearts were yearning for their child, so Salvahan and Lunan released him from his dungeon.

Before showing himself to the world and embarking on some occupation, Rasalu had to perform an ablution. So he set out for the river. It must be noted here that on the day when Rasalu was born the daughter of a rajah swore an oath that if ever she married it would only be him, Rasalu. And she had ordered that a palace be built for her on that very river. From there she beheld Rasalu just as he was preparing for his ablution. On seeing him, the rajah's daughter spoke to him thus:

> The day thou wast born I built this palace
> and lived in it
> If thou be the prince then show me thy face.

But the time of love had not come yet, and Rasalu left and went home.

Rasalu mounted a high tower, and out of pure mischief began to throw stones from a sling, smashing the jugs the girls were carrying to the well. The townsfolk took their complaints to the rajah, and Salvahan ordered the earthen jugs to be replaced by others, made of copper or iron. Then Rasalu took to piercing the jugs with steel-tipped arrows. The rajah was wrathful but could do nothing: had he not himself released Rasalu from his dungeon a year before his time? And Salvahan was compelled to exile Rasalu from the town for twelve long years.

To keep him company on the way, Rasalu took along with him the son of a goldsmith, and the son of a carpenter, his wise parrot Shadi, and his grey mare Foladi, and they set out upon the road. Before parting, his mother spoke to him thus:

> Thy mother doth advise thee, son;
> Stow it carefully away in thy wallet!
> Thou wilt reign in the four quarters
> But keep thyself good and pure.

The wanderers walked for a long time, and then the goldsmith's son and the carpenter's son could endure it no longer and they turned back, but Rasalu with Shadi and Foladi continued on their way. He saved a goose from getting burnt in a fire, and it became his friend; he rinsed the eyes of a snake, and the snake, too, became his friend.

For a long time Rasalu wandered through the woods, and he saw many a marvel, and performed many a good deed. Thus, one day he came to the town of Hodi. When the rajah saw him he wanted to give him his daughter's hand in marriage. On learning that the princess loved another, Rasalu arranged for her to marry the man of her heart.

It so happened that Rasalu entered the country ruled by rajah Sirikap. There he got to know that the rajah was a cruel tyrant, who knew no pity for his subjects, and whose very name meant: 'he who cuts people's heads'. And Rasalu decided to kill the rajah. On his way to the palace he was met by Sirikap's daughter. When she learned that she was confronting Rasalu, who was going to play dice with the rajah, she offered him to have a game with her first, and

only then with the rajah himself. But Rasalu refused to play with her: "Has it ever been heard of, that a man should play dice with a woman?!"

Having killed two giants on his way to the rajah, Rasalu finally reached Sirikap, and they settled for a game of dice, whereby Rasalu laid down three conditions: "The first stake will be the whole kingdom, the second—all the wealth of the earth, and the third—our heads!"

The game was long and close, but Rasalu was aided by all the animals he had helped; he won, and he freed Sirikap's captives.

Then Rasalu married Sirikap's daughter, but she betrayed him with the ruler Hodi. Rasalu was informed of it by his parrot, while he was out hunting. So eager was he to reach his home that he rode his faithful horse to death. After great hardships Rasalu arrived at his palace, to see Hodi leaving it. A bitter single combat ensued. They fought very long. Then rajah Hodi begged Rasalu for mercy. . . But Rasalu fought on until he killed the rajah.

There are variations of the legend in which Rasalu quarrels with his father, and to take revenge accepts Islam and sets out for Gujarat to ask the rajah for help against his father. There he meets old Faqir who instructs him not to raise his sword against the poor, not to lift his hand against the faqirs.

The image of Rasalu is vivid and manifold: at times, it is that of a mischievous youth, then that of a strong warrior, then again he appears as a tender son and husband. His character is brought out in collisions with others. The hero's personality is built up gradually: everything is significant—the story of his birth, the astrologist's forecast, the mother's admonitions, his interrelations with people, and the circumstances of every happening. A vivid narrative style contributes greatly to the effect. A battle is raging, horses wade fetlock-deep in blood. New fortress walls are erected, and to render them impervious to the enemy's assault, a youth is killed by the astrologists' behest, and his head immured in the wall. Feudal lords trample down the fields and ransack peasant homes, Moslem and Hindu hordes descend upon the peasants, and the earth is soaked with peasant blood. And in each of these pictures appears the heroic figure of rajah Rasalu, a gallant fighter for justice.

All the main genres of literature are, in their incipient form, contained in folklore. Punjabi literature has been drawing on the live source of folklore throughout its history—and it is this source that turns literature into the people's creation. It is the people who strove throughout to defend their land and adorn it with the toil of their hands, and in this process they laid the beginnings of poetic language; they perceived the beauty of their native fields and mountains, the fathomless velvety vault above, studded with a myriad glittering stars, they apprehended the grandeur of violent storms, the majesty of the eternal mountains crowned with gleaming crystal snow; they made poetry of the ear of wheat, of the golden mango fruit, of the slender sugar cane; they discovered beauty in the heavy slow-moving bluish-grey buffalo, and in the swift steel-grey steed. They compared the young girl with the ear of wheat, and the youth with a blade of steel or with a slender tree. The songs and tales of the people mirrored the picture of their life.

The genres of folk poetry were engendered by life itself, by the process of work and its seasonal cycles. The twelve months of the year are filled with various occupations, and poetry's task was to tell of them, to sing of the toils and the passing days. Thus in folklore developed the genre of lyrical poetry which bears the name *barahmah*, i. e., "twelve months", and in which Punjabi poets compose even today. Each day is pregnant with its very own, unique tasks and is therefore worthy of being immortalised in poetry. An other genre blossomed forth—the *chaturdashi*—"fortnightly". With written language, a new lyrical genre came into being—the poem, whose every stanza begins with the next successive letter of the alphabet.

Rhythmical speech was born out of collective effort. Various rhythms echoing diverse working processes and incidents of daily life, were recaptured in folk poetry, and linked with certain emotional states—the *rasa*. The *dohra*—couplet, and the *chaupai*—quatrain, are the most popular and pliable forms of national poetry, which aided by metre and *rasa* lend themselves to a vast range of emotional expression.

In addition to metre and *rasa*, the poem was adorned by rhyme—at first only a through-rhyme, then gradually growing in complexity. Alliteration and assonance soon

added new shades of colour to the verse. Different devices of versification appeared, etc.

Plots and images, rhythms and metres, diverse means of artistic expressiveness, all conceived in folklore—this is the soil of Punjabi literature.

POETRY OF PROTEST

Though the legends on Rasalu are centred around events referring to the IV—V centuries, if not earlier, their composition belongs to a period of time when feudal relations had established themselves in India.

The disintegration of India into feudal states as the basic type of political organisation began after the collapse of the Harsha Empire, i. e., in the middle of the VII century. Far from eliminating the social contradictions that had characterised the epoch of the Maurya and Gupta Empires, the new production relations intensified these contradictions and gave rise to new ones. In its new form, the exploitation of the masses was an almost unbearable burden upon the people. The social contradictions were intensified by contradictions of religion and caste: society was divided into a number of social and professional groups—castes. Transition from one caste to another was precluded by religious precept or principle by the aristocracy and priesthood for the exercise of their power, and if performed, such transition was severely punished.

Fierce exploitation and spiritual oppression provoked spontaneous protest among the masses. This protest acquired, however, the form of sectarian movements, directing the struggle against the dominating religion.

In the Punjab, the situation was more complicated, since the feudal relations frequently collided with the prevailing traditions of tribal democracy: numerous tribes had retained a certain degree of autonomy. In North India, including the Punjab, the formation of nationalities was affected by the continuous influx of new tribes striving to retain their autonomy and remain economically and culturally independent. These tribes invariably came into collision with the feudal lords who attempted to subject them to their power, to feudal exploitation. In the Punjab,

the final assimilation of these tribes was not completed before the XV—XVI centuries.

The social shifts resulting from the process of feudalisation that swept the whole of India, found reflection in literature. Of the literary records belonging to the VIII—X centuries, particular interest is attached to those linked with the so-called *nath* movement. The *nath* (meaning "protector") was the head of a Hindu or Buddhist sect. The teachings of the *naths* combine features of Brahmanism, Buddhism, of various other philosophical teachings, and of Hinduism, mainly in its *shaivite* interpretation. A certain rationalism, faith in the power of reason was characteristic of the *naths*. They held, for example, that chemical investigations may lead to the discovery of substances that would render the human body eternal and prevent it from ageing. At the same time the *naths* denounced the institutions of Brahmanism, the caste system, and moral and spiritual depravity in the higher circles of Indian society. The *nath* movement was, thus, a peculiar manifestation of social protest, which accounts for its wide popularity.

The movement was, however, distinctly individualistic in its essence: the main emphasis was laid on individual physical and spiritual perfection by means of various ascetic feats, resignation from worldly pleasures, and the like.

The foundations of these teachings were laid by Gorakhnath (809?). Legends describe him sometimes as a weaver, sometimes as an oil-presser by profession, but there is no documentary evidence for either supposition.

Nath ideas were reflected in Punjabi folklore and literature, and the creative writing of some *naths*, in *Sadh Bhasha*—a literary language close to the spoken language current in the Punjab at the time, constitutes the earliest literary document of Punjabi literature proper. The place of pride among the *nath* poets belongs to Charpat (890—990).

Charpat wrote verses of two, four, or six lines, aphorisms that resemble jocular utterings popular among the people, proverbs and sayings. They express the poet's scathing criticism of his contemporary society. He censures the self-interest of the powers that be, and mocks at the priesthood:

You may put on white dress
Or change it for blue; whatever faith you assume,
You pray only your own stomach.

Raising his voice against the rampant social inequality of his time, Charpat attacks those who hold the reins of government power, even the rajah himself:

Equally true is a jug of copper
And a simple cup of gourd.
But yogi is higher than the raja.
The jug of copper sinks,
The cup of gourd swims,
Yogi will be saved but raja will die!

The same attitudes characterise all *nath* poets: Jalandharinath, Chauranginath and so on. True, very little of their poetry has reached us—perhaps several hundred lines all told, but it is enough to appraise the general tendency of their writing.

The radical ideas expressed by Charpat and the other *nath* poets voiced the views of the merchant and artisan castes, and of the peasantry, and gained the widest response.

The Punjabi *nath* poets turned to the language of the people, and drew upon the images and forms of folk poetry. Besides, they expressed acutely felt social problems, and all this determined their significance for Indian literature in general. Their poetry flowed into the main stream of Indian literature and gained popularity outside their native places—in Nepal, Bengal, Gujarat, Assam. This is only natural: living conditions being very similar the people easily accepted all poetry expressive of their own ideas.

THE VARS AND THEIR HEROES

Alongside *nath* poetry, VIII—X century Punjabi literature also produced the so-called *vars*, or epic poems. If *nath* poetry voiced the tendings current among the common people, the *vars* expressed the aristocratic line in literature. They show primarily the circles of feudal lords, and rajahs with their close environments, and deal with tournaments, battles, violence and treachery. Some *vars* are linked with concrete historical events and personages; in others the factual historical material is hard to discern. The names of the poets have remained unknown. Their

poetry is steeped in folklore and is woven of mythological concepts, themes from heroic epics, various legends, historical facts and other elements.

The influence of folklore is clearly evident in the *var* about Asraj—*Tunde Asraj di var.*

Asraj's stepmother is infatuated with him, but despite all her efforts he will not reciprocate her love. Incensed by this, she charges him with having attempted to encroach upon her honour. This arouses the indignation of Asraj's father, the powerful rajah Sarangh, who orders his son to be killed and the body thrown into the river. The hangman takes pity on Asraj, so he cuts off one of his wrists and lets him off. After long wanderings Asraj arrives in a country of which he eventually becomes the rajah. There the news reaches him of a terrible disaster that has befallen his father's country, his own motherland. Sarangh appeals to Asraj for help. Father and son join forces, overwhelm the enemy and kill their leader rajah Sardul. Asraj tells his father of his stepmother's perfidy. In his contrition, Sarangh resigns from his throne ceding it to Asraj.

The plot is doubtless linked with the cycle of legends on rajah Rasalu and his elder brother Puran Bhagat. A number of other popular epic poems resemble the *var* about Asraj, e. g., *Sikandar Ibrahim di var* ('Var about Sikandar Ibrahim'), *Ral Kamal di Mauj di var* ('Var about the Feud between Kamal and Mauj'), *Lala Bahklima di var* ('Var about Lala Bahklima'). The hero of a *var* is usually a rajah or the chieftain of a tribe, and the plot is centred around his feats. As a rule, incidents, referring to defence of the motherland against invaders are given prominence.

This is significant, since the *vars* were created at a time when the threat of Arab invasion was looming over the country. In 712, the Arabs occupied Sind and moved relentlessly into the depth of India. In the IX century, they captured Multan which lies within the boundaries of the Punjab. The Arabs brought Islam to India in its heretic Qarmathian form. Qarmathianism sprang up in Arabia in the IX century as the ideology of the antifeudal peasant movement. The Qarmathians rejected official Islam and did not observe the rituals of the Moslem cult [2]. Their

[2] On Qarmathianism, see E. A. Belayev, *Moslem Sectarianism*, Moscow, 1957, pp. 55—63 (in Russian).

followers settled in Multan in the IX—X centuries, and gained quick popularity among the Hindu population of north-west India at the time through their championship of equality, and their appeal to all creeds and all castes.

Towards the end of the X century, a powerful Moslem state was set up on the territory of present-day southern Afghanistan. Between 986 and 987, its ruler Sabuktegin invaded Bhatinda, one of the Punjab principalities. This started off a series of events that eventually led to the conquest of India by the Moslems. The sultan Mahmud who followed Sabuktegin made 17 predatory attacks upon India. He advanced as far as Allahabad and Gujarat. Each time his hordes passed through the Punjab which he finally succeeded in annexing.

Grief and devastation became the country's fate. This is how Mahmud's Indian campaigns were described by Abu-r-Raihan Biruni, a Khwarizmian encyclopaedist: "... he destroyed completely what was flourishing in the country and perpetrated such shattering deeds that the Hindus turned into atoms of ashes cast to the winds."

However, Biruni's pessimistic appraisal is hardly justified. The very fact, that Mahmud's last campaign was undertaken for the sole purpose of suppressing the Jats, bespeaks the attitude of the "defeated" to their new ruler. Or were these the "atoms of ashes" rising against their oppressors?

Multan, where Qarmathian sentiments still prevailed, was a centre of opposition and a source of permanent trouble for Mahmud and his successors. Turned into a place of exile for undesirable characters, and those defying the sultan, it frequently proved a hotbed of oppositional movements. Throughout the rule of the Ghaznevids, who succeeded Mahmud, revolts and mutinies would flare up incessantly in the Punjab.

The Indian feudal rulers tried to offer resistance to the Moslem invaders, but were forced to succumb. The heroic feudal rulers whose staunch defence of their lands was glorified in the *vars*, were in actual fact helpless in the face of the Moslem conquerors. Worse than that, they would often pass over to the invaders' camp as enemies of their own people.

This does not, however, diminish the importance of the *vars*. They remain great records of Punjabi literature, and

exerted a notable influence upon its further development. While *nath* poetry enriched this literature with lyrical expression, presenting personal interpretations of great social phenomena, and imbued it with a spirit of protest, the *vars* initiated the epic genres. They introduced patriotic ideas as well as new forms of versification, such as the epic pentastich that the Punjabi poets called *pauri*. The *var* remained one of the leading genres in Punjabi poetry up to the mid-nineteenth century, resorted to whenever poets turned to events of social significance.

THE FIRE OF SUFFERING

The Moslem invaders brought a new culture to India—that of the Arabs, Persians, Tadjiks and Turks; the culture of Rudaki, Biruni, Firdawsi,—men of noble minds, scientists and poets of genius. The influence of this culture upon India engendered what was subsequently called the Hindu-Moslem synthesis.

The historical background against which this synthesis was proceeding, was marked by turbulent events. By the XIII century, Moslem feudals had firmly entrenched themselves in north-west India and established a powerful Moslem state—the Delhi Sultanate. Reciprocal attacks by Indian and Moslem feudal rulers continued, while simultaneously various groupings of Moslem feudal lords were fighting each other for power.

There were times when the whole of the Punjab was integrated in the Delhi Sultanate, and times when the bulk of it was incorporated, and its territory frequently became the scene of bitter warfare. The XIII century was a cruel period for the Punjab, due not only to internecine wars, but also to foreign invasions. In 1236, the Monghols broke into the Punjab; they sacked Lahore in 1241—1242 and repeatedly raided and ransacked Multan. They renewed their invasions in 1292, 1296, 1297, and even in 1299 when they attempted to capture Delhi. In 1328—29 the Monghol hordes again swept into the Punjab; and even at the end of the century, in 1397—98 they gave the territory no peace, this time invading it under the leadership of Timur.

The effect of all this upon the life of the peoples and tribes inhabiting the Punjab can well be imagined. For all their efforts to extol their masters, and sometimes by dint of these efforts, the Moslem historians reported tales of horror about them. Zia ud-din Barani (1286—1356), for example, writes of Sultan Ala ud-din Khilji (1296—1316): "He shed more innocent blood striving not only to suppress the resistance of the Hindu princes, or quench possible plots hatched by the Moslem nobility, but also to stifle any possibility of popular resistance." And further, he refers to the results of this policy: "The people were so preoccupied trying to eke out an existence, that the very word 'rebellion' never came to their lips. . . ." Rules were implemented "to turn to ashes and deprive of their wealth and property Hindus who might be capable of nourishing hatred (to the sultan). . . . Not one Hindu dared to raise his head, nor was there a vestige of silver or gold in their homes . . . or any sign of well-being."

And yet the people did not submit, and time and time again, risings would flare up in desultory spots of the vast Sultanate aimed at throwing off the yoke of the Delhi Sultans or the Hindu rajahs. When revolts were rendered impossible, the protest manifested itself in mystical teachings, that sought ways of religious liberation in rebellions against religious orthodoxy, Hindu or Moslem alike. This spirit of protest became the spirit of the time; it explains the salient note of opposition to the official ideology prevalent in the literature of the Hindu-Moslem synthesis.

The fusion of Hindu and Moslem cultural traditions found its first literary manifestation in the poetry of Ratan Nath (1000—1120), in which he followed the *nath* tradition. Unfortunately, none of his poems are extant. We can appraise them only from separate references.

The most significant expression of early Hindu-Moslem synthesis literature was given by Sheikh Farid Shakarganj (1173—1266). He was born into the highest aristocratic circles and enjoyed a traditional Moslem education. Most of his life was spent in Multan which was an important cultural centre where Qarmathian influences still prevailed. He also visited such important Moslem centres as Baghdad and Khurasan.

Of Farid's poetry, one hundred and twenty three so-called *saloks* have come down to us, i. e., couplets in diverse metres,

as well as the *Nasihatnamah*, a poem of about forty lines written in Multani—the literary language of the medieval Punjab.

The influence of Hindu poetry is strongly felt in his writing, especially that of *nath* and *bhakti* verse whose system of imagery bears affinity to that of sufi poetry. Sufiism taught that salvation was attainable only through cognition of God which man could accomplish by becoming a *dervish*, i. e., withdrawing from the world and passing through a succession of spiritual states that would finally lead the soul to a fusion with the Divine Essence. The devout could not, however, cover this path by himself—he needed a guiding teacher or *pir*. It was a course open only to those whose love of divine cognition was so truly powerful, that they were prepared to resign from everything secular for the sake of it. In this sufiism has much in common with the teachings of the *bhaktas*. These ideas are reflected in both sufi and *bhaktas* poetry. Hence the similarity of imagery in both. Earthly life is illusory, it is evil, it is poison, a spark kindling the fire of passions, a fire smouldering beneath the ashes. Salvation lies only in the soul merging with the divine which is ever present in each manifestation of existence. Only the preceptor can guide man across the stormy ocean of existence, the infinite river of life; his skilled hand will steer the vessel towards the yearned—for goal. To reach this goal, man must have faith that is pure and undivided, like a passion, like reviving sleep, like devotion, purging him from the sins of rapacity, idleness, parasitism.

Farid's lyrics is impregnated with these ideas. Many scholars consider him primarily a religious poet. The correspondence of his imagery with the religious poetic tradition is frequently so generalised, that mystical meanings are read into his most common lyrical verses. This is hardly justifiable. Much of his poetry is imbued with simple earthly lyricism, such as:

> Today I did not spend a night with my beloved,
> Every bone in my body is aching,
> Would he come I ask him
> Why he did not come this night?

In sufi and *bhakti as* poetry the beloved signifies God, apprehended as the soul's beloved; the soul of the devout is, in its turn, apprehended as the wife or the ideal mistress

striving to merge with God. If, however, this interpretation is not superimposed on Farid's simple, artless and sincere lines, they still retain their poetic ring, while the mystical religious associative content is not essential.

In another poem, obviously suggested by meditations on advancing old age, the poet says:

> The birds who had inhabited this pond have left,
> O, Farid! The whole tank will dry
> Only one tired lotos will be left alone.

Life is drawing to a close, and Farid laments the inevitability of death, realising its relentlessness. The vivid images, the contemplative mood evoke no thoughts of God, except through deliberate interpretation.

Thus, through the time-conditioned mystical and religious surface, the most characteristic traits of the epoch seeped into Farid's poetry. The poet himself declared his position quite unequivocally. In his admonitions to his disciple Sayidi Maula, for example, he wrote: "Do not keep the company of kings and nobles. Remember that your visits to their homes are deadly to your spirit." This attitude to the aristocracy was naturally accompanied by certain sympathies for the people, and an awareness of their plight.

> O, Farid! I thought I was the only unhappy one on this earth
> But I found that the whole world is unhappy.
> When I came to the top of a mountain
> I found that every household is burning in the same fire.

Clad in a form close to folklore poetry, the message of these lines gained popularity among the people. Farid achieved his aesthetic effect by selecting highly expressive and euphonious words. His artless language and simple syntax suggest his desire to be comprehended by the people, to speak to them in their own terms. This was typical of all poetry connected with confessions that stood in opposition to orthodox religion.

POETRY OF WEAVERS AND TANNERS

It was the Delhi Sultans' firm belief that a good enemy is a dead enemy, and they acted accordingly. However, the more ruthlessly they dealt with the people, the more tightly they turned the screw, the stronger grew popular

resistance. If at times the popular resistance movements subsided, it was only to gather strength for renewed assaults.

Information in hand concerning the national-liberation movements in the Delhi Sultanate comes from chronicles whose authors were inimical to the "crowd", as they would term the masses. The sentiments of the people were expressed by people's poets who were linked with the acute ideological struggle.

In the given period, feudal ideology developed along two basic lines: Hinduism and Islam. Though antagonistic to each other, both religions voiced the interests of the feudal class, while the strivings of other social groupings, including the lowest strata of society, manifested themselves in diverse oppositional sects. From these lower strata stemmed the most interesting and radical teachings, engendered by the life conditions of the feudal epoch.

Hinduism has never been a religion based on a single canon and a unified ecclesiastic organisation. Its adherents fell into numerous sects grouped around two main doctrines: *vaishnava* and *shaiva*. In their opposition to Islam as the religion implanted by foreign invaders, and to Hinduism with its hateful caste system and its suppression of the human individuality, the people sought a new, "rightful" creed, that would accept men as equal, in heaven if not on earth. Gradually they came to integrate individual traits of Hinduism and Islam.

The teachings born out of the popular movements in the Delhi Sultanate are marked with this kind of combination of Moslem and Hindu ideas.

One of these endeavours to create an appropriate new religion is connected with the *bhakti* movement, that sprang up in the VI—VII centuries. Its fundamental premises may be formulated as follows: all men are equal before God, and the merits of each man's religious devotion are measured by the degree of *bhakti*, i. e., his personal dedication to God. Two trends can be clearly traced in *bhakti*: a conservative and a democratic one. The adherents of the former demanded an unqualified return to Hinduism, complete with all its establishments; it was in essence a reaction of Hindu feudal rulers against Moslem domination. The democratic line, on the other hand, had absorbed some ideas of Islam and its sects, and voiced the people's longing for a unification of all antifeudal forces.

The most outstanding spokesman of the democratic trend was Kabir (approximately XV century), a thinker and poet of real genius. His teachings as well as his creative writing exerted a considerable influence upon the further development of Punjabi literature. Kabir wrote in *braj*, one of the dialects from which contemporary Hindi evolved. His poetry is considered an integral part of medieval Punjabi literature. The most authentic of his poems are those included in the sacred book of the Sikhs, the *Adi Granth.*

Kabir addressed his teachings to the simple people, whatever their creed. There is no one personified God, he proclaimed, looming like a monarch high above a gathering of subordinate gods and saints. There is neither a Vishnu nor an Allah. God is in every living creature, in every manifestation of nature. All men are equal before God. Not only that—they are equal among themselves too. Kabir denounced castes as well as sects, and raised his voice against religious obscurantism, fanaticism, cults and rites, protesting that no religion could claim sole and supreme righteousness.

He himself belonged to the caste of weavers, and worked in his profession throughout his life. His songs and hymns included in the *Adi Granth* belong to different periods of his life and express various stages in the development of his teaching. Yet he remained invariably the poet of the oppressed, of those who produce all material values.

No one knoweth the mystery of me, the weaver
Though the world cometh to me to get woven the cloth
When ye folks hear the Vedas and Puranas
Then I see the whole creation stretched out like the
Lord's workshop.
Of the earth and the sky the Lord hath made a loom
And the Sun and the Moon the warp and woof
So I pray and my mind is pleased with the Lord
And I, the weaver, realised the Lord within my own home
Sayeth Kabir: When the loom breaks
Then the thread merges in the thread of the world.

Solely man's personal virtues and not his caste, entitle him to call himself human!

The whole universe is the creation of Brahma
Tell me, o Pandit, since when have Brahmins been created.
Don't waste your life by crying (that you are a) Brahmin
at every step.

If you are a Brahmin because a Brahmin woman gave birth
to you,
Why are you Brahmin and why are we Sudras?
Why are we blood (unclean) and you are milk (clean)?
Kabir says that (the man) who really worships Brahma,
We call only him the (true) Brahmin.

Sometimes Kabir words his social protest even more directly. Through the religious colouring of his poetry rings the clear voice of a toiler's passionate condemnation of social and economic inequality.

They who wear *dhotis* of three and a half yards,
and *three fold sacred cords*
And display rosaries on their necks and in their hands
are the polished jugs:
They are the cheats of Benares, not the Saints of the Lord.
I can not respect such saints
Who devour trees along with all their boughs
They scour their vessels before being placed on the hearth
And wash the wood before it is lighted
And digging out the earth they make double fire places.
But devour the whole man
They live as sinners and transgressors
Yea, they abide ever in ego and all their kindreds are
drowned with them.
They follow the lead of their minds and so do the deeds.

Here Kabir expresses the mood and sentiments of all people whose lot was equally hard, whether they lived in the regions of the upper Indus, or in the Ganges valley. This accounts for his great popularity, and his influence on Punjabi literature.

Though Kabir is traditionally considered to have been illiterate, those of his works that have come down to us illustrate the depth of his philosophical thought, and the magnificence of his poetic talent, and more than that—they show exceptional erudition in the canonical monuments of Hinduism.

Towards the end of the XV century, a new movement developed in the Punjab—Sikhism, whose initiator was Nanak (1469—1539). A small grain merchant, like his father before him, Nanak travelled a great deal, visited Persia, and according to documentary sources, went as far as distant Mecca. He knew Persian and Arabic, had read the Koran and studied sufi treatises. Neither these, however, nor Hindu treatises could offer him answers to the questions

that moved him so deeply. Since his attitude to social and religious issues and his teachings in general largely continue Kabir's, legend has it that the two men had met.

Nanak's teaching is one of the various manifestations of the Hindu-Moslem cultural synthesis. It intertwines all the most vigorous aspects of the trends opposing orthodox Hinduism and Islam. Without challenging the authority of vedas and puranas, he denied the existence of a personified deity, and condemned idolatry, for there is but one divinity, he claimed, and this is truth embodied in the world's infinite manifoldness. All the gods of Hinduism, all its sacred writings, and those of Islam and other creeds too, are but separate manifestations of this all-embracing deity, in whose presence all are equal. And there is no distinction between human beings—either of caste, or of social adherence, or of sex. In this Nanak's ideas are a direct and consistent continuation of Kabir's.

To put these ideas into practice, Nanak founded a community that recognised no distinctions of caste or creed, and whose disciples strove to live according to the word of their master—the *guru*—Nanak himself. The majority of these disciples or Sikhs ("Sikh" means "disciple") came from the Jath tribe.

Nanak's teaching is essentially active, its central figure is not the hermit but the *grihastha*—head of a family, engaged in a craft, or trade, or agriculture. The cult of the master indicates the influence of the Moslem dervish orders, as well as that of some *bhakti* conceptions. Nanak's teaching is, in actual fact, a compromise between Hinduism, Islam, and the religions of various sects. In a philosophical poem *Japu ji* ('Prayer'), Nanak ascerts:

> Words do not make men sinners or saints
> Only deeds are being written down in the Book of Fate,
> One will reap what he sows
> O, Nanak, choose your path!

While attributing supreme significance to action, to deeds, and claiming that men should be appraised by what they do, Nanak retained some vital ethical principles of Hinduism, such as *karma*, i. e., predestination of fate determined by good or evil deeds perpetrated in previous existences. Nanak endeavoured to unite all doctrines and sects of both Hinduism and Islam—maintaining that there

is but one supreme divine essence for all to worship. This idea rendered his preaching abstract and gave rise to organisational weakness within the Sikh community.

Like a number of other spokesmen of *bhakti* and sufiism, Nanak expounded his teachings in the language used by the people, applying poetic forms close to those of folk poetry.

He took to writing at an early age. Not much of his poetry has come down to us: *Patti* ('Alphabet'); *Dakhni omkar*—a mystical poem; *Siddh goshti* ('Argument with the Siddhites') — a polemic, in poetic form, with Gorakhnat, Charpat and other *naths*; a number of religious poems, including *Asa di var* ('Song of Morning'); the epic poem *Barahmah* ('Twelve Months') remarkable for its picturesque description of the Punjab scenery.

The poetic mastery of Nanak's verse is particularly apparent in his epic poem *Barahmah*. The *Barahmah* is one of the most ancient and, presumably, among the most popular of poetic forms to have come down to us. It consists of twelve stanzas or parts, each dedicated to its respective month of the year. It may begin with any month, but then proceeds in strict chronological sequence. Apart from the obligatory twelve stanzas it may contain an introductory and concluding one. It is not restricted to any particular metric form. Genres similar to the *Barahmah* occur in other Indian literatures. Their essence lies in the following.

Every month has its specific character determined by the work performed in it, festivities falling on it, and natural phenomena typical of it. The poet dwells on the frame of mind of either a separate hero, or man in general in a particular month, attempting to motivate it. In doing so, he lends his verses either a local, or social, or lyrical, or religious tonality, thus introducing elements clearly linking it with folklore.

> *Asadh* is hot for those who are away from God,
> Who had forsaken the God who gives life to
> the entire world,
> Who (because of having forsaken God) are bereft
> Of milk, death has caught whose neck in its clutches,
> As they sow, so they reap, that is written in their fate,
> (They are like a woman) who has wasted the night (did not
> enjoy her husband), now full of sadness, leans (on the bed)
> disappointed.

Though who get in contact with (real) *sadhus*, they reach
God and are forgiven.
When God is kind he satisfies the thirst of union with Him.
O God, there is no one except you in Nanak's prayers.
Asadh is beautiful for those, in whose hearts is God.

As may be seen from the above, Nanak employs the *barahmah* genre for propaganda. Yet, as was the case in Farid's verses, the real world with its blatant contradictions breaks through the basically religious content.

Some are fed on meats, some on grass
Some are provided with delicacies of all kinds
Some abide in the earth and eat the dust.

Nanak's imagery derives from daily life and from the scenery of his native land. His poetry abounds in pictures linked with the occupations of the peasant, the artisan, the merchant, and images suggested by the luxuriant vegetable and animal world of the Punjab. Yet imagery linked with Hinduism also occurs.

As was mentioned before, Nanak made deliberate use of his poetry to propagate his teachings. He introduced serious philosophical motives into Punjabi poetry. It is for this reason that a number of polemic poems are attributed to him. He laid down a tradition subsequently followed by all the *gurus*—Sikh spiritual leaders: disseminating his teachings in poetic form, and resorting to genres, metres, and images current in folk poetry.

In the mid-sixteenth century, a prominent place among the first Sikh *gurus* belonged to Arjun (1567—1606), both poet and political spokesman.

Arjun recognised Nanak's teachings as supremely important and highly relevant to the demands of the epoch, and ordered his works to be collected in one book. Thus he laid the beginning of the *Adi Granth*, which also comprised Arjun's own interpretations of Nanak's teachings. The compilation of the *Adi Granth* was entrusted to Arjun's most brilliant disciple, the poet Bhai Gurdas (1558—1637), and work on this compilation continued after Arjun's death (from 1604 to 1661). It embraced poetry not only in medieval Punjabi, reflecting the dialects of Lahnda, Pothohari, Pahari, and Malvai, but also in Sadh Bhasha, Braj, and Avadhi.

The *Adi Granth* numbers sixteen thousand lines. The bulk naturally belongs to Sikh *gurus*: to Nanak (2.949 verses), Arjun (6.204 verses), Amar Das (2.522), Ram Das (1.730); next follow Kabir (1.146), Namdev, Sheikh, Farid, Tukaram, Ravi Das, and others. The composition of the book is not directly conditioned by the content of the poems and lyrics included. The poetry is grouped, in the first place, according to the musical structure (the so-called *raga*) in which the respective verses are to be performed, secondly according to either the metre or theme, thirdly according to authorship.

From the very outset, it became a tradition to arrange the material within each separate *raga* in the following order: 1) *chaupadas*—quatrains; 2) *ashtapadas*—octaves; 3) long poems and epic poems; 4) *chhants*—six-line verses; 5) short verses; 6) *vars*; 7) poems outside the norms of Punjabi prosody and poetics.

The *Adi Granth* consummates a considerable process of development in the literature of the Punjabi people, and is thus a literary record of invaluable importance. Multilingual as its period, it marks the beginning of a new stage in Punjabi literature, the period when its language becomes standardised approaching widely popular usage. The *Adi Granth* presents a summary, as it were, of the whole preceeding development of Punjabi literature, laying bare its links with the literatures of peoples whose historical fates bore certain affinities with the fate of the Punjab peoples, or whom economic or political circumstances had brought into contact with the Punjab. All this is evidenced not only in the ideological tendency of this book, but also in its versification.

The authors included in it are peasants, artisans, tradesmen. Their writing stems straight from folklore. This accounts, firstly, for the wealth of rhythms and metres not yet canonised at the time and therefore allowing for great freedom of the creative imagination, and, secondly, for a predilection in this poetry for onomatopoeia as a favoured device of artistic expressiveness. The poetic genres represented include the *bavanakhri*, the *painti*, the *barahmah*, and the *pandrahtitth*, whose emotional pitch depends on the theme and melody selected by the poet. In addition, the *kafi* genre, i. e. elegies, appeared in the *Adi Granth*. Alongside the *salok* metre, long known in Punjabi versification,

we encounter the *beyt*—a couplet, rhymed or unrhymed, expressing a complete thought.

Through the *Adi Granth* runs the basic idea that the summits of religious and philosophic thought are accessible not only to Hindu pandits and Moslem theologians, but equally well to weavers and tanners, and that the beauties of the world and the magnificence of life are comprehensible to all.

BY WORD AND BY SWORD

By the late XVII century Sikhism had grown to such significance, and the Sikh community to such power that the Moghul emperors in Delhi saw themselves compelled to devote not a little time and strength to the Punjab affairs. Their attitude to Sikhism was getting from bad to worse and though tolerant at times, yet never—not even under Akbar—were they benevolent to it. Led by its first *guru*, Sikhism was still weak, unsupported by a broad mass movement, altogether too moderate to be able to assume ideological guidance of such a movement.

Nanak's teachings, however, attracted increasing numbers of adherents. Putting to clever account the lands they received from the Moghul rulers, and the money collected from their adherents, the Sikh *gurus*, while rising against the mighty feudal state of the Moghuls, themselves acquired some features characteristic of feudal rulers. Simultaneously, they continued engaging in trade: Arjun, for example, traded in horses with Afghanistan, Bukhara, and Samarqand. The Sikhs' growing wealth and their active interference in political affairs disconcerted the Moghul authorities. Presently Jehangir took issue with some verses included in the *Adi Granth* alleging them to be contradictory to Islam, and demanded that the *guru* Arjun should eliminate them from the book. Arjun refused, whereupon he was tortured to death, bequeathing the defence of his teachings to his followers.

In the first armed clashes between the Moghuls and the Sikhs, the Sikh warriors were put to rout. The struggle grew particularly bitter under the rule of Aurangzeb. He captured and executed the ninth Sikh *guru* Tegh Bahadur (1622—1675). Only under Gobind Singh (1660—1708), son of Tegh Bahadur, and the tenth Sikh *guru*, did Sikhism grow into the mighty force that was instrumental to the

collapse of the Moghul empire, and conducted the most persevering and effective resistance to the British invaders in the Punjab; a force that furthered the consolidation of the Punjabi people.

Aurangzeb's policy rivalled in cruelty that of Mahmud Ghaznevi at his worst, and of other forerunners of the Moghuls. Driven to despair by religious persecution and unbearable taxation, the peasants and artisans began to rally round the Sikhs. This determined the line of action embarked upon by Gobind Singh, who had set himself the aim of assuming leadership over all the anti-feudal forces in the Punjab, and of reorganising the *khalsa* (the Sikh community) on more democratic lines, turning it into the body of temporal and spiritual power. Gobind daringly presented his own interpretation of the ideas carried by the *Adi Granth.* His precepts are devoid of any contemplativeness, they are a challenge to defence of the people's truth by use of force, to active struggle against social evil.

He is of the *khalsa*
Who protects the poor
Who combats evil
Who remembers God
Who achieves greatness
Who is intent upon the Lord
Who is wholly unfettered
Who mounts the war horse
Who is ever waging battle
Who is continually armed
Who lays the Turks
Who extends the faith
And who gives his head with what is upon it.

Gobind had moved a long way from his predecessors' concept of the *guru* as the emanation of the Divine Essence, as the focal point of spiritual and temporal power. He proclaimed that all power should belong to the *khalsa*—the Sikh community, which he deemed the rightful *guru.*

He who speaks of me as of the Lord
Will fall into the fire of Hell!
Consider me as the slave of God
Of that have no doubt in thy mind
I am but the slave of the Lord
Came to behold the wonders of creation.

Gobind's addresses to the Sikhs, his letters, his creative writing—all this forms a remarkable chapter in the history

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of Punjabi literature, both in content and form. His writings are collected in the *Dasama Granth* ('Book of the Tenth Guru'). It is a mixed kind of book, regarding both ideological tendings and genres. It comprises hymns as well as the *Bachittar Natak* ('Unusual Drama')—Gobind's autobiography, into which are inserted his genealogy and various legends, a ballad on the goddess Bhagvati, the epic poem *Gyan prabodh* ('The Light of Knowledge'), which reproduces several ancient legends, a number of poems in different metres, the *Tiriya charitar* ('Feminine Pranks'), a collection of folklore stories, and Gobind Singh's poetry in Farsi.

The problem of the authorship of the *Dasama Granth* cannot be considered as solved, although orthodox authors are inclined to ascribe all works included in it to the *guru* Gobind Singh. It should be born in mind that this magnificent work was finally accomplished only in about 1730, when Bhai Mani Singh (1669—1739) finished editing it. Some of the works *Dasama Granth* comprises are, with a great deal of probability, ascribed to authors belonging to the close environment of the *guru* Gobind Singh. To the Ramaist — Vishnuit motifs that prevailed in the poetry of the early *guru*, Gobind added *shaivite* motifs and themes, thus not only extending the subject matter and enriching the imagery of literary expression, but also attracting the Shivaits to the Sikh movement. In addition to the writings included in the *Dasama Granth*, the translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* into Punjabi is also ascribed to Gobind.

The *Dasama Granth* is a significant landmark in the history of Punjabi literature—it opens a period in which literature becomes an important means of shaping social consciousness. Moreover, it testifies to the fact that the evolution of a Punjabi as a national language was already an accomplished process.

Rich in aesthetic values and ideas, the *Dasama Granth* and the poetry of Gobind Singh's time, infinitely variegated in genres and individual styles, were of decisive importance in the development of Punjabi literature. It was the time when the creative writings of Sikhs, Moslems and Hindus merged into a single mainstream of national Punjabi literature.

Gobind Singh's autobiographic poem *Bachittar natak* was conceived as the ideological centre of the *Dasama*

Granth. It is a poem not only of remarkable literary value, but also rich in authentic historical information where it dwells on events contemporary to the poet's life. The word *natak* signifies in Sanskrit any piece of writing in the dramatic genre. In this particular instance it is merely intended to underscore the scope, significance and dramatic tension of the events described. Its genre is that of an epic poem, and although the poet lays repeated stress on his religious vision, yet the epic element prevails throughout, in plots as well as in versification. From the very outset, the reader is aware that the poet is a warrior: traditionally, the poem was to contain a dedication to divine power, yet in actual fact it is the sword that is glorified. The clang of swords reverberates through the opening lines:

> Invincible that sword
> Which in fierce combat
> Disperse hordes of enemies
> Handle of which can not be broken
> And which has a sharp blade
> Glittering brighter than sun.

With polemic vigour, the poet then proceeds to elaborate on Nanak's concept of a single all-pervading divine essence comprising all the deities of the Hindu pantheon. He gives an account of the Creation in the way it is presented by the *puranas*, whereupon he passes over to his own genealogy tracing it back to Rama. The descendants of Rama's two sons—Lava and Kusha—came to hate each other, for they could not divide their land and property. Ever since then the world has been rent asunder by similar feuds.

> From time immemorial enmity started
> Because of greediness for country and money.
> Haughtiness and greediness rule over the earth
> And mirage of gold intoxicates everyone.

Eventually the feud between the two lineages of the old family ends in reconciliation, with the prediction that the head of the Kusha family will re-appear on the earth when *kaliyuga* ('The Kingdom of Evil') sets in.

The fifth chapter of the poem is dedicated to Kusha's reincarnation in Nanak, and his presence in all Sikh *guru* preceeding Gobind. The subsequent chapter dwells on Go-

bind's contemporary India. It opens with a description of religious strife, and condemning Hinduism and its canons, Gobind proves the righteousness of Nanak's teaching which alone transcends the contradictions of Hinduism. It must be noted that Gobind makes no attempt to incite hatred of those who profess a different faith. On the contrary, he conveys his reverence towards all existing teachings, and emphatically attributes all unworthy misconceptions to erroneous interpretations of these teachings.

The seventh and eigth chapters relate the story of the poet's birth, which is presented as a manifestation of the divine soul, of his conduct in life, and of how he comes to be a *guru*. This is followed by a description of how Gobind founded the town of Paonta and of his struggle against the Moghul vicegerents. He gives a frank account of how he went any length so as to rally the people against the obnoxious Delhi Sultans, sometimes crossing the will of Hindu feudal rulers. The final victory he ascribes to divine power:

> Supreme God is my father
> Primeval force is my mother
> My teacher is all pervading spirit,
> whose spouse is
> godly will,
> Taught me to make good.

Gobind Singh's epic poem was a distinctively new phenomenon in Punjabi literature: it is a specific kind of confession by a child of his epoch—one of its greatest figures—presented in autobiographic form. The *Bachittar natak* is an authentic historical image of the period, penned by a veritable master of the word, whose perception is quickened by thorough knowledge of the cultural heritage of ancient and medieval India.

The book *Tiriya Charittar*, also called *Charittar Upakhyan* was also included in the *Dasama Granth.* The title *Tiriya Charittar* means "Feminine Ruses", and is sometimes associated with the apocryphal legend about the beautiful widow Anup Kaur who tried to entice the *guru* Govind Singh. When the *guru* had successfully escaped the temptation, he is alleged to have ordered the *Tiriya Charittar* to be written, so as to teach his followers how to resist the charms of women. The more than four hundred tales col-

lected in this book are doubtless linked by one purpose. It opens with the story of king Chittar Singh ordering his minister to kill his son because the son had fallen in love with his stepmother (a theme familiar in the Punjab since the Rasalu cycle, and recurring in the *vars*). Convinced of the prince's innocence, the minister tries to persuade the king that the queen had slandered the lad. To prove his words, the minister tells all the subsequent stories. Though the majority of them really centre round feminine tricks, it is not meant as an indictment of women. Some of the tales speak of heroic women, faithful in love, courageous in battle.

The stories include the widely popular *Heer and Randjha*, *Mirza and Sahiban*, *Sohni and Mahinval*, *Yusuf and Zuleikha*. Epic and historical plots are prominent, and so-called 'vagabond themes' also occur. This points to certain sources, such as the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and the *puranas*, yet a source of no mean importance was the oral lore of the Punjabis. Even where the plot can be traced down to some ancient work of literature, it is supplemented by such details in the *Tiriya Charittar* that were previously unknown and impart an entirely new colouring to the narrative. The tales concern a situation typical of the Punjab, the acting personages are Punjabis, and if borrowed plots are introduced, the narrative acquires, as a rule, a clearly expressed Punjabi colouring.

We shall quote one of the tales from the *Tiriya Charittar*, whose plot occurs in the folklore of many peoples, yet is presented here in a Punjabi setting, attached to a concrete place:

"In the town of Sirhind there lived a *yogi* named Svarganath. In the same town, there lived a woman by the name of Shri Chah Man Mati, who grew ardently enamoured of Svarganath. One day, when her husband had left their home on some business Svarganath came to her. Soon she was informed that her husband was about to return, and she said then to her lover: 'Take this sword and cry as though in fury: "The thief who has just robbed me has entered your house. You are hiding him. Drive him out at once. I shall kill him!"' Having ordered him to act thus, she immediately hid in the house the *yogi's* disciple who would usually accompany him, and guard the gate while the *yogi* was enjoying himself with his beautiful mistress.

"While she was arranging everything her husband came hurrying home, and the *yogi* rushed out of the house exclaiming the words the beautiful woman had ordered him to exclaim, and brandishing his sword.

"'My dear husband!' his wife spoke to the astonished husband. 'The *yogi* is angry because of an error committed by his disciple. He wanted to kill him and would have done so, had I not concealed him. I have concealed the *yogi's* disciple in our house, otherwise his master's wrath would have had sorrow consequences. Let us set him free now. This is where I hid him.' And she showed her husband where the *yogi's* disciple was, indeed, hidden.

"The husband was pleased at his wife's wisdom and goodness. The young lad, happy to leave his place of hiding, hastened to join his venerable master, the amorous *yogi*, who in his turn was happy the whole story had ended so well."

Many more plots are presented in a similarly playful, frivolous tone. Hence, it is not surprising that soon after the *Dasama Granth* was completed, the place in it of the *Tiriya Charittar* was questioned. The reason was its immense vitality that allegedly contradicted the 'sacredness' of the *Dasama Granth* that was ascribed in its entity to the *guru* Gobind Singh.

In our time it is conjectured that not only the *guru* himself, but several more of the fifty two poets who lived at his court in Anantapur, participated in the creation of the *Dasama Granth*, and that two of them, Rama and Shama, had penned the *Tiriya Charittar*. . . .

To the period between the compilation of the *Adi Granth* and the *Dasama Granth* falls the emergence of such poets as Hafiz Barkhurdar, Damodar, Suthra and many others. Literature was lavishly enriched by the folklore of numerous tribes and peoples that were assimilating themselves with the Punjab people throughout the XIV—XVI centuries. This found vivid expression in the development of the *kissa* genre—the lyrical-epic poem. The *kissa* is defined by the contemporary Arab scholar Khanna al-Fahuri as "a literary genre; this genre was used to narrate authentic historical or imagined events. . . it is a harmonious integration of well-knit plot, psychological analysis, fascinating narrative and perfect composition", it is a "poetic narration

of some length whose theme is derived from events of a national scale. . . ." [3]

The *kissa* in Punjabi literature usually centres around two lovers belonging to different tribes. Their infatuation collides with tribal traditions, and the conflict usually ends in tragedy. The death of the lovers, however, serves as a grim lesson to those who remain alive, and the conclusion, whether implied or stated, is that peace and friendship among tribes is an essential necessity.

Tribal differences between the two main heroes are sometimes superseded by social ones, yet the poets dwell not so much on these distinctions as on the heroes' personal virtues and sublime emotions.

According to origin the plots of *kissa* fall into two main groups: those created in the Punjab, and those borrowed either from ancient Indian literature (*Nal and Damayanti*, for example), or from Arab literature (*Laila and Majnun*), or else from Persian-Tadjik literature (*Farhad and Shirin*). At the time when the *Dasama Granth* came into existence, the *kissa* of the first group presumably already existed in Punjabi oral lore. At any rate, it was the *Dasama Granth* that initiated this genre in Punjabi literature. Among the worthiest of its masters were Damodar (1556—1605) and Hafiz Barkhurdar (XVIII cent.).

To Damodar's pen belongs the *kissa Heer and Randjha*. The poet had to observe certain traditions. The *kissa* had to open with a dedication to God, a meed of praise to love, an address to friends, a statement of the poem's purpose, a description of the heroine's life from her birth and up to the events described in the *kissa*, and the life-story of the hero. It had to depict the meeting between hero and heroine, and the story of their love that formed the basic plot and provided the dramatic conflict. These, however, were traditions and not a canon, and the poet was completely free to pay as much or as little attention to them as he deemed necessary.

Damodar omitted the initial elaborate dedication to the gods, demonstratively addressing one couplet to the Divine Essence pervading all nature, the deity proclaimed by Kabir and his followers. Further, he declares himself

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[3] Khanna al-Fahuri, *History of Arab Literature*, vol. 2, Moscow, 1961, page 190 (in Russian).

an eyewitness of the events described in the poem, thus claiming their truthfulness.

He chose a plot widely popular in the lore of the Punjabis, Sindhis, Belujis and Afghans. The story of the poem runs as follows.

Once upon a time there were three brothers—Nur Khan, Chund Khan, and Randjha. The two elder brothers were married, while Randjha was too young for marriage as yet. Randjha did not want to work in the fields: he tended the cows and the goats and played his flute to them. In order to force Randjha to do proper work the brothers resolved to divide the land their father had left them.

The part that fell to Randjha's lot was so unyielding that he could make nothing grow. Utterly exhausted he dropped down on the ground and fell asleep. When his sisters and sisters-in-law found him thus, they rebuked him for not being able to earn his own bread. When his brothers did the same he left home.

From the kindness of their hearts people would offer him sometimes food and sometimes shelter. Presently Randjha arrived at a blacksmith's who asked him to lend him a hand. But Randjha proved helpless. It was the same when a woman who was baking bread appealed to him. In the evening Randjha reached the river Chenab. He fell asleep on its bank and five light *pirs* appeared to him in his dream asking him for a drink of milk. He could not satisfy their request because his cows were not with him, and he did not know where to get the milk. Using their magic power, the *pirs* conjured up a cow that had grown out of the calf Randjha had once presented to the beggar (Faqir). Randjha milked it and offered the milk to the *pirs*. When they had satisfied their thirst they prophesied that Heer, daughter of Mahr Chuchak, would be Randjha's future wife.

Randjha awoke to find himself in a magnificent garden. This was where he met Heer. On hearing that he had abandoned his home and had nowhere to stay, Heer begged her father to engage Randjha as a shepherd. Then the prophet Isa appeared to her in her dream and informed her that the five *pirs* had wedded her to Randjha.

In the morning Heer set out for the island where Randjha was tending buffaloes. They revealed their knowledge to each other and resolved to stay on the island and live together.

On learning this, Heer's father sent his brother Kaido, who was lame and covetous, to see whether it was true. Heer being away, Randjha who was simple-hearted and did not know Kaido, treated him to wedding *churi*. Kaido returned to his brother and told him what he had found out.

Mahr Chuchak sent out Heer's brothers to kill Randjha, but their efforts were vain, Randjha being guarded by the *pirs*. . . . They managed, however, to persuade Randjha to let Heer return home for two days.

Neither Mahr Chuchak's wrath, nor her mother's entreaties, nor the *qazi's* exhortations could prevail upon Heer to leave Randjha and become the wife of Kher to whom she had been promised long before. Her one answer was:

> If Randjha goes into battle
> To fight the bitter foe,
> I shall shield him with my body,
> And avert from him each blow!

After long and fruitless remonstrations, the parents decided to marry Heer to Kher by force.

She succeeded to escape to the island and tell everything to Randjha. However, instead of taking action, he merely staked his hopes on the *pirs*.

No sooner had Heer returned home when she was forced into a palanquin and dispatched to Kher. At once, the five *pirs* interfered: they transferred Randjha to where Heer was and riveted the palanquin to the spot. With the help of their magic power they then lifted the palanquin into the air and carried Randjha and Heer to Mecca. "It is said," the *kissa* concludes, "that they are still alive on one of the Arabian islands."

This is the story about Heer and Randjha, which formed the core of Damodar's epic poem. He did not merely render it in verse, but elaborated each image with great artistic mastery. Where the traditional story mentions in passing that a daughter was born to Mahr Chuchak, he describes the circumstances of her birth, and dwells on little incidents of her life at the age of two, and three, and twelve that are as vivid as a narration from personal experience. Heer whom the poet put into the centre of his poem, is treated with warm sympathy. She is courageous and freedom-loving. She rises above all obsolete traditions, and stops at nothing to fight for her love. She has enough

daring to confront her kinsfolk, the *qazi*, and the indolent Randjha, and she defies the regulations imposed by religion. This romantic image of a Punjabi woman is still alive. Both in the folklore version and in Damodar's poetic rendering the story ends with a *hajj*, i. e., a pilgrimage to Mecca. Heer and Randjha cannot find happiness in their native country. In the subsequent renderings of the same plot by Muqbal, Varis Shah, Fazil Shah and others, the lovers die a tragic death.

The poem, the only one by Damodar extant, is so magnificently constructed that it still makes fascinating reading. Its charm lies not only in masterful dénouement, but also in subtle psychological character drawing, in humorous passages that take the reader unaware, and in its succulant, vivid, dynamic, truly national language. No fixed metre cramps Damodar's verse; the rhythms are pliable, changing wherever this is required by the emotional pitch. Each quatrain is held together by a euphonic nominal or verbal rhyme; sometimes, though sparingly, the poet resorts to alliteration or assonance. He intersperses a variety of Persian and Arab words, lending them Punjabi forms. All aesthetic devices, all images, and the very plot are realistic and spring directly from the concrete life of the XVI century Punjab. This is evidently a conscious subordination of form to a realistically conceived poetic task; Damodar may be considered the father of the realistic trend in Punjabi literature.

Another type of literature developed in the XVII century Punjab—that of satire. Its spring was the ancient popular theatre tradition; poignant farce, pithy proverbs, the scathing mockery of the *Bhand* or *naghas* at fairs or on the market-place—these are its roots.

With the poet Suthra (1615—1670), satire entered written literature.

Suthra was one of the most vigorous and talented advocates of Sikhism. He played his shafts of satire upon the Hindu canon, its rites, and its priests. He was witty and caustic. He was firmly convinced of the fallacy of both the competing religions—Hinduism and Islam.

> Both hell and heaven are false
> All the four Vedas are meaningless!

He deprecated the Islamic and Hindu establishments

of priesthood and dervishhood, and inveighed against hermits and the parasitism indulged in by the numberless fraternities of monks.

To make the people afraid, you have adopted this disguise,
You have named yourself *baba* (ascetic) so that you may
get food without effort.

Incensed by the interference of the Brahmins in every sphere of a Punjabi family's life, he scoffed at the costly rites. Thus, he writes of weddings:

To the hearing of drums, the house was looted,
And yet people call it marriage.

His terse aphoristic verses are close to proverbs, or proverbial sayings, and remarkably concrete.

During the same period prose literature began to establish itself in Punjabi writing. This was conditioned by a desire to pass on to posterity the utterings of Sikh *guru*, and instances from their lives. Early in the XVII century, substantial prose works of an apocryphal nature appeared called the *Janam sakhis*, i. e., life stories, that, with a sparse sprinkling of factual material, constituted either imaginative tales, or, more frequently, adaptations of popular legends on Nanak or later *gurus*. The narrative is not consistent prose: it is rhythmical at times, and reads like poetry in bad prose rendering. The *Janam sakhis* paved the way for the prose of Gobind Singh and other early writers, as well as for later biographies of great personalities among ecclesiastic and lay Sikhs.

However, the *Janam sakhis* were of utmost importance for literary prose, since by elaborating individual plots concerning the life of the *guru*, or by introducing some story for illustration—either as a parable, or a folklore tale, or simply a fairy-tale, their authors prepared the development of narrative genres—the story, the tale, the novel.

The XVII century was thus a remarkably fertile period in the history of Punjabi literature. It witnessed the appearance of prose writing, and of the first efforts in satire. The period has been immortalised by such writers as Gobind Singh, Damodar, and Suthra who played a vital part in the formation of Punjabi literature.

In the early XVIII century, the Moghuls made vain attempts to save the past glory of their empire. Powerful anti-feudal movements were shaking its very foundations with the impact of an ocean surf and the relentlessness of an avalanche. The vicegerents of many provinces hastened to separate while the Delhi rulers were preoccupied with successive losing battles against the Marathas, and the Sikhs, and the Jats. Whoever could, turned the disintegration of the state to good account. However, invaders like Nadir-shah or Ahmed-shah Durrani were not so menacing to India, as was the British East-India Company. For a century and a half, this company persisted in utilising every loophole to gain advantage, getting the better of any competitor, fanning discord among the numerous rival princes, and at times setting itself up in the role of conciliator, imposing shameful agreements and thereby steadily multiplying its own capital, possessions, and trading stations, and thus tightening its tenacious grip over India. It followed perseveringly in the footsteps of the Great Moghuls, aspiring to rule over the whole of India, from north to south.

The victorious march of the East-India Company across Indian territory was, however, stayed for a considerable period of time.

At the opening of the XVIII century a powerful anti-feudal movement was gaining momentum in the Punjab. The seeds sown by Gobind Singh had fallen on fertile soil. The democratisation of the *khalsa* he had initiated continued, and under Gobind Singh's follower Banda, himself a peasant, administrative offices were bestowed on artisans and peasants who were also endowed with feudal lands, while the feudal lords were either done away with or forced to flee. In the vanguard of the movement stood the Sikhs.

Moslem and Hindu feudal rulers joined in the struggle against the Sikhs, but were powerless to quench the conflagration of the peasant war. Not even the campaign started in 1748 by the Afghan ruler Ahmed-shah Durrani could diminish its force.

In the XVIII century the *khalsa* was a power strong enough to offer active resistance to feudal rule.

Jassa Singh, of the carpenters' caste, who in the middle of the XVIII century stood at the head of the *khalsa*, proved a talented organiser, and despite some tactical errors, he regained from the Moghuls part upon part of the Punjab territory. In 1762, the Sikhs entrenched themselves firmly in Amritsar, in 1763—in Malerkotla, in 1764—in Sirhind, in 1765—in Lahore. Ahmed-shah Durrani's endeavours to re-establish his power in Lahore remained unsuccessful; the Sikhs stood staunchly in defence of their motherland, barring the conqueror's path into India.

In the second half of the XVIII century, the Sikh state was a factor all neighbouring countries had to reckon with seriously.

In the early XIX century, the great Punjabi statesman maharajah Ranjit Singh (1780—1839) succeeded in uniting the whole country under his rule, and turning it into a state of considerable influence. An absolutist policy, radical internal reforms strengthening government centralisation, the building up of a strong regular army—all these factors furthered economic improvements and national consolidation in the Punjab. Ranjit Singh's policy enjoyed the support of the rural and urban population alike, which enhanced the moral and political unity of the Punjabis and contributed to attainments in the field of culture as well.

In the meantime, the East-India Company had rooted itself firmly in Bengal, swallowing up increasing portions of land, and turning into a territorial power. If Ranjit Singh succeeded in maintaining state independence, then his successors under whom struggles for power flared up anew among the influential feudal lords, could no longer muster the forces to withstand the mighty company, and the British colonisers availed themselves of the first opportunity to subject the Punjab as well. In 1849, it became part of the British possessions in India.

In the century and a half between the death of Aurangzeb (1707) and the seizure of the Punjab by the British, the social, economic, and political development of the country proceeded towards increasing national consolidation. It is only natural that this process should have had a beneficial effect upon cultural life. Every aspect of it experienced a period of blossoming. This applies equally to literature. The most outstanding Punjabi writers belong

to the XVIII and early XIX century: Bullhe Shah (1680—1752), Sayed Varis Shah (1735—1784), Hashim Shah (1751—1821), Ahmed Yar (1768—1840), Najabat (dates unknown). The main merit of their literary attainments is that they gave ultimate moulding to Punjabi literary tradition, and created the foundation on which the edifice of a national Punjabi literature was erected by writers and poets of the period in which the peoples of India fought for national independence. One of the symptoms of the Moghul empire's disintegration was the strengthening of various tendencies directed against orthodox Islam. Sufiism in particular was revitalised.

Sufi literature was most characteristically represented by Bullhe Shah. He was born in 1680 into a family of landowners. Judging by his name—Muhammed Darvesh—his father must have belonged to one of the orthodox dervish orders. Billhe Shah received a thorough education, and became a sufi under the impact of circumstances obscure as yet, and against the will of his kinsfolk. According to implications in Bullhe Shah's poetry, their main objection was that his selected master originated from a low caste.

Sisters and sisters-in-law came to Bullhe to advise him
(They said) you belong to the family of the Prophet and
are a direct descendent of Ali, you have insulted them,
O Bullhe, listen to what we say and give up living in
uninhabited places.

The poet's answer was decisive:

He who calls us *said* will be tortured in Hell
The one who calls us *arain*
Will enjoy a life of bliss in Heaven.

About one hundred and fifty verses and several small epic poems belong to Bullhe Shah's pen, mostly written in the *kafi* genre, and one in the *barahmah* genre. He was a lyric poet of sufi type.

I have been caught and bound,
I am experiencing a great ecstasy (beyond all
description)
I have forgotten everything and all doors have
been opened
Some lover has left me.
Sorrow is eating me up, breaking my bones,
Separation (from my beloved) has me in its clutches.
Bullhe Shah, if you want to reach your beloved
Be prepared for a search longer than life.

Deep sorrow at unrequited love rings in these lines, and though this is common among sufi poets, Bullhe Shah conveys it so forcefully that the reader is drawn into intimate participation.

Many of his poems refer directly or indirectly to his epoch, in which he finds little indeed to gladden his heart.

> Punjab had fallen on bad days,
> Those (who claimed to be) supporters, have proved treacherous.
>
> . . . .
>
> Something is saved if I tell a lie,
> If I tell the truth, the flames burn stronger.

He calls his time "upturned", mourns the injustice that reigns throughout, that "the hares have devoured the falcons". This pessimistic note is not ungrounded: Bullhe Shah was a contemporary of Aurangzeb, Gobind Singh, Banda Bahadur, and Nadir-shah. His was a time of contradictions, of bitter battles, of tragic events. The poet never tried to adjust himself to conditions, he firmly adhered to his views. He writes of himself with a touch of humour:

> Bullhe, you have become a lover of God,
> Everywhere people malign you a hundred thousand ways.
> If people call you *kafir*,
> You say yes to them.
>
> . . . .
>
> Bullhe you became a *kafir* the day before
> And yesterday you worshipped idols,
> I came and sat down in my home,
> because there (where people were maligning me) I did not have
> a chance to say anything.

Bullhe Shah holds a place of his own in the history of Punjabi prosody. No poet before him had shown such virtuosity in manipulating all the current poetic forms, none had achieved such organic fusion of the devices used in Arab and Persian versification with those known to Punjabi prosody. Rhyme, though not new to Punjabi poetry, acquired new qualities in his verse. He favoured inner rhyme even in so laconic a genre as the *kafi* or the *dohra*, thus demonstrating the infinite possibilities of poetic expression inherent in the Punjabi language.

Hafiz Barhurdar was an outstanding late XVII century epic poet, author of a number of works on canonised Moslem

theology, famed for his *kissas Yusuf and Zuleikha* and *Sassi and Punnu*, and *Mirza and Sahiban.*

The stories of these *kissas* are very close to their folklore prototypes. Hafiz Barhurdar was a great scholar of folklore, and enjoyed wide popularity. His language is rich in borrowings from the Persian, but these are predominantly words that had entered popular speech.

Mirza and Sahiban is a typical sample of his poetry. The plot of this *kissa* is one of the most exquisite love-stories created by the Punjabi people. Hafiz Barhurdar found the most appropriate form of expression and specifically vivid imagery to convey his interpretation of this folklore tale, and bring it home to his listeners.

Here is the brief content of the *kissa.*

In the town of Gulvalla on the bank of the Chenab river there lived a rajah, Khiva by name, and he ruled over the Sayal tribe. He had a daughter called Sahiban. Till the age of twelve she was allowed to go nowhere except to the mosque where the *qazi* taught her to read and write. At the appropriate time, Khiva married her off to Taha Khan of the Chandan tribe.

Far away from Gulvalla, on the bank of the Ravi, there lived a tribe called Kharrans, and among this tribe there was a man called Dadu Khan. He had a son called Mirza. And it was Mirza's uncle who ruled over the whole Kharran tribe. So fond was Mirza of hunting, of reckless riding, of single combat, mounted or unmounted, that he was nicknamed travelling blade by some, while others called him half-crazy. It so happened that the pursuit of a quarry took him a long way from home, yet even then his ardour did not cool, until presently he found himself close to the town where Sahiban resided.

This is when Sahiban met Mirza. When she asked him who he was and wherefore he had come to her land Mirza merely asked her for a drink of water, for he was parched with thirst. He insisted that she herself should bring the water to him. Sahiban handed him the cup, warning him that the Chenab water was a love potion and Mirza should beware of drinking it. But the girl's warning had come too late: Mirza was already in love with her. Nor was Sahiban indifferent to him. She begged him to stay, but he went back to his own country, after promising her to return in ten days.

Left by Mirza, Sahiban told her mother of her love. Though the mother disapproved, yet she helped the lovers to meet. Mirza then promised to return once more in another ten days. Sahiban longed for him so much that she fell ill with pining. Nobody, not even the *qazi*, could help her. And Mirza came again. He stopped outside the apothecary's shop. At that very time Sahiban was sent there by her mother to get oil for her hair. On seeing her, Mirza turned all customers out of the shop, and the apothecary too, whom he gave as much money as he would have earned in two days.

It was late at night when Sahiban returned home. Her mother scolded her and beat her. "You left in the morning to get some oil, and where have you been all this time?"

"You sent me for oil," Sahiban replied, "and I went to the apothecary's. When I came I found three people there—a Brahman and two Jats. But none of them knew how to hold the scales, nor how to measure the silk, and I had to stay and help with the trade. And then I saw Mirza. I bought no oil, but I received love instead abundantly!"

Several days went by, and the time came for another tryst. Sahiban made great preparations, and proudly she showed her beloved what she had arranged for him, and she set to persuading him that he might stay. Mirza agreed. But Sahiban's mother allowed him to stay for eight days only. When these were up he would have to leave never to return, as Sahiban was promised to another in marriage. She sent her daughter to the *qazi*, and Mirza went with her, having obtained the permission of Sahiban's mother. The *qazi* allowed Mirza to study with him, but invited him to tell him first everything he had learned. But Mirza pronounced: "In the name of the Lord who is merciful and just," and then could utter nothing but the name of his beloved: "Sahiban Sayal, Sahiban Sayal, Sahiban Sayal, Sahiban Sayal!"

Thereupon the *qazi* ordered Sahiban to say her lesson, but all Sahiban could utter was: "In the name of God and his prophet Mirza Khan, Kharran from the river Ravi! Mirza Khan, Kharran from the river Ravi! Mirza Khan, Kharran from the river Ravi!"

Incensed by them, the *qazi* started beating Sahiban, but Mirza seized him and flung him outside.

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When the disciples asked why he had done this, Mirza replied: "The *qazi* beat his pupil! But why did he beat me too?" And he slipped off his coat and showed everybody three bruises the whip had left upon his body.

There was much amazement. "How is that? We all saw the *qazi* beating the girl, and the bruises are on the lad. It must have something to do with love!"

Then the *qazi* secretly wrote to Taha Khan: "Mirza Khan has fallen in love with the girl engaged to you, and he is going to carry her away from here. If you want to take her for a wife, the wedding must be prepared within eight days and no later." Then he went to see Sahiban's father Khiva Khan, and informed him of what had happened in the mosque.

Sahiban's father ordered Mirza to go home, and Sahiban to prepare for her wedding. Meanwhile the *qazi's* letter had reached Taha Khan, and he, too, began preparations for the wedding.

And again Sahiban fell ill with pining, and she implored her mother to call Mirza to her. The mother refused to do so, and Sahiban dropped a casket into the flowing river with a letter to Mirza.

When Mirza Khan received Sahiban's letter, he begged his uncle to help him, but the uncle had no desire to quarrel with his powerful neighbour. So Mirza set out, and came to Sahiban, and together they prepared to elope. They were ready, and left the town. And all would be well, had not some Brahman noticed a man's boot showing from underneath the woman's attire that Mirza had donned. The Brahman sounded the alarm.

Exhausted from their travel, Mirza and Sahiban stopped at a sacred place to rest. Mirza fell asleep, but Sahiban heard the sounds of pursuit, and decided that only flight could save them, for the enemy numbered thousands, while the arrows in Mirza's quiver numbered but one hundred and forty. It also came to her mind that the first to encounter them would be her two brothers, and they would be sure to be pierced by Mirza's arrows. So she pulled the quiver from under Mirza's head and scattered the arrows.

Thereupon she woke Mirza, but the pursuers had come very close, and the lovers barely managed to hide behind the walls of the *Mazar*.

Then Mirza noticed that his quiver was empty, and bitterly did he reproach Sahiban, for now he was unarmed. And he took the one and only arrow left in the quiver and let it fly at the enemy. And the arrow sought out its victim—it pierced two: Khanshi Amir and Laksir, Sahiban's two brothers. And then, dagger in hand, Mirza hurled himself at the enemy and fought until his fingers grew into the halt. And already five hundred and fifty Sayals were killed. Then Khiva Khan conceived an evil idea. He rode up to the front and started persuading Mirza to retreat. And while he was talking Taha Khan crept up from behind and hit Mirza on the head with his spear. Mirza dropped from his horse. Then Khiva Khan approached him, as though to propose reconciliation, but he was holding his dagger concealed: "Many a man have you killed, Mirza, but don't forfeit your own life. I shall give the Chandans another girl, and you may take your Sahiban. Proffer your right hand Mirza, in token of reconciliation!" But when Mirza put forth his right hand Khiva clasped it and drove the dagger into Mirza's body. Such was the death of Mirza of the Kharran tribe.

The Sayals seized Sahiban and took her home. When they were some distance from the ill-fated spot Sahiban noticed the ravens circling over Mirza's body. She snatched out the dagger that was suspended from her farther's saddle and stabbed herself in the heart. This is how Sahiban died.

And Mirza's and Sahiban's bodies lay each in a different parts of the valley, and his blood ran down the slope mingling with hers, and the people who saw it said it had been a wicked deed to let two such young people be killed.

Before she died Sahiban had pulled a feather out of the raven that had descended on her shoulder, and had dipper it in her blood, and written down all that had happened and sent the letter to Mirza's uncle, the chieftain of the Kharrans.

The raven took the letter to the Kharrans, and they set out to avenge Mirza's life upon the Sayals and Chandans. And hundreds of Sayals and Chandans lost their lives that day. Not a stone remained of the town of Khiva Khan. And the Kharrans took the bodies of Mirza and Sahiban to their country, and built a sepulchre for them. This is where the two bodies lie to our day.

The poet's interest in the legend lay not in the bare plot, but rather in the heroes' inner world. He dwells at great length on their emotions and thus heightens the tragic sounding of the story. He had chosen a plot through which he could reveal the deep tragedy of human fates, and this kind of selection became characteristic of many poets, especially those who were conscious of the social significance of their creative writing. In this the spirit of the epoch is clearly evident. Death was a frequent incident in the *vars* as well, yet it never evoked such sympathy, since the victims never came so close to the reader or listener. In the *kissa*, the narrative concerns images alive and comprehensible, connected with definite tribes, endowed with clearly defined character traits, convincing, because they were people you meet in daily life. The *kissa* reflects the daily life, the customs and habits of the Punjabi family. The sincerity and artlessness with which Hafiz Barhurdar revealed his heroes' intimate world endeared them to readers and listeners, making them live through the vicissitudes of the tragic lovers' fate.

Hafiz Barhurdar's tradition was taken up by Varis Shah, who in 1765 wrote a *kissa Heer and Randjha*. The date could be ascertained by the poet's mention in the *kissa* of the assaults by Nadir-shah and Ahmed-shah Abdali, so that the poem cannot belong to an earlier period.

Information on Varis Shah's biography can only be derived from allusions. All we know from his own words is that he was born in the village of Jandial Sher Khan, and that his master was the sufi Makhdum Kasur. From his description of studies at the mosque, his references to books read by young men and girls, we can conjecture that he was well acquainted with Persian literature. He mentions *Gulistan* and *Bustan* by Sa'di, *Halikbari* by Amir Khosrow, *Hikayat*, *Anwar-ul-Hakk* and other books. Hindu literature was also familiar to him—its characteristic devices appear in his style. In drawing his heroes' portraits, he elaborates them in detail. Yet this serves a deeper purpose—to bring to the fore their tastes and habits, to lend depth to their characterisation. Varis Shah centres his attention on the most salient incidents of the plot, omitting what is of minor importance and irrelevant to the evolution of the heroes' fates. This lends dramatic force to the conflict and poignance to the tragedy. The poet modifies the plot to ren-

der it more realistic. The comparatively happy ending of Damodar's story, in which Heer and Randjha are carried to an Arab island, Varis Shah supersedes by a different outcome—the death of the two lovers. This death is, however, a triumph of powerful human love over obsolete tradition, over intrigue and baseness, over all the circumstances that hinder the way to progress. Varis Shah's poem vindicates the rights of the individual in the face of caste tradition and religious dogma. He formulates his poetic concept in the following way:

> My friends asked me,
> Write a new story of Heer's love.
> The whole story of the love
> Should be told in beautiful words.
> Through beautiful and good poetry,
> Randjha and Heer should be brought together.
> Sitting together with friends in company.
> We should enjoy again the story of Heer's love.

So warm is the poet's sympathy for his lovers that he seems to be with them throughout the story of their love. The characters are of his own creation, original. The only traits he took over from Damodar are Heer's active attitude to life, and Randjha's tendency to wait and let love take its own course.

Varis Shah paints a truthful picture of the Punjabi people and local scenery. Actual contemporary life is the fount from which he derived his aesthetic imagery and devices. His characters are generalisations of his contemporaries, the background is the events of his time.

The same generalised image of man in this complicated and eventful epoch occurs in the poetry of Varis Shah's younger contemporary, the lyrical poet Hashim Shah. His lifestory is obscure, and despite persevering investigations few data have been ascertained regarding its events. Some hold that he was born in the village of Jagdeo near Amritsar, into the family of a carpenter called Kasym Shah. Others claim for him aristocratic origin of parents belonging to the court of Ranjit Singh. Still others derive his descent from the Arab tribe of the Qureyshits, maintaining that the poet's father was born in Medina.

Hashim Shah was highly educated, and had command of the Persian and Arab languages as well as of Hindi. He entered the history of Punjabi literature with the lyri-

cal epic poems *Shirin and Farhad*, *Sohni and Mahival*, *Sassi and Punnu*, *Heer and Randjha* and *Laila and Majnun*, all based on traditional plots taken not only from his native literature and folklore, but also from Persian, Tadjik and Arab literatures.

Hashim Shah's love lyrics and philosophic poetry present considerable interest and contain social motifs. More than two hundred lyrical poems in the *dohra* genre belong to his pen, in addition to poetry written in other genres. A sufi poet, he could naturally have been expected to devote his main attention to the theme of mystical love, love of God, which alone is called by the sufi "ishqi haqiqi", i. e., real love. However, Hashim gives preference to the theme of earthly love, human love, the kind of love called "ishqi majazi" in sufi terminology, which means love that is imperfect, only sensuous. To the poet, love is the very foundation of the world, its moving force.

As to the generalised hero-image, Hashim elaborates it with greater depth than did any of his predecessors. He probes into the spiritual life of his characters, he shares their emotions. The incidents of the plot are so vivid, the acting personages so graphically presented, that the reader is persuaded of the biographic nature of the poetic narrative.

Sassi and Punnu enjoys special popularity. The story was widely known in the folklore of the peoples inhabiting the Indus valley—the Kashmiris, Sindhis, Balujis and Pathans. This is Hashim's rendering of it.

Adim Jam, ruler of Bhambor, had no descendants. After many prayers and rich gifts to the mullahs, a daughter was finally born to him. But the astrologist predicted that when the girl grew up she would bring disgrace and misfortune upon her kin. Adim Jam did not have the heart to kill her; he put her into a trunk and floated her down the river. Three bags were placed in the trunk beside her, containing precious gifts: one to reward whoever would receive the girl and bring her up, the second to cover the expenses of her upbringing, and the third to be her dowry when she was married.

The trunk floated a long, long way, until presently it fell into the hands of a *dhobi*. Childless as he was, he adopted the girl and brought her up, and the money he found by her side served him to build a good house. The girl grew up to be so lovely that whoever set eyes on her was infa-

tuated with her, yet she rejected all her wooers, whoever they might be. In the meantime it had come to Adim Jam's ear that the girl was behaving as though she were a rajah's daughter. This was how Adim Jam's wife came to recognise her for her child and both she and her husband—the king and the queen—begged the girl to return to them. But Sassi—this was how she was named—refused: for had they not abandoned her to death?

It so happened that in a merchant's garden Sassi beheld the portrait of Prince Punnu, and lost her heart to him. About a year went by, and the merchant returned from Kach. Sassi heard of it and demanded that he bring Punnu to Bhambor. The ruler of Kach heard of this, and refused to let Punnu go. So desperate was Sassi that her beauty began to fade. News of this reached Punnu, and he hastened to Bhambor. No sooner did he set eyes on Sassi, than love of her flared up in him, and he refused to return to Kach.

Thereupon, Punnu's kinsmen came to Bhambor to plead with him, but he would not leave Sassi. And they resorted to treachery: they made him drunk and abducted him by night, returning him to Kach.

When morning came, and Sassi awoke, she saw that Punnu was no longer by her side, and she rushed after him. Nor would she listen to dissuasion or entreaties—she would search for her beloved. The scorching sun beat down upon her as she followed the tracks of the camel along stone-covered roads and through sandy deserts. And the sweat was pouring all over her body, and she was all exhausted. It was here in the desert that Sassi breathed her last. Her spirit appeared to Punnu, and he rushed to find Sassi's grave. When a shepherd told him what had happened, Punnu was struck dead by his sorrow. The end is tragic, and tragic is the fate of radiant, pure emotion. Yet through the poem reverberates an overtone of optimism — of love triumphing over death.

> Those who remained true to their love, became
> immortal in this world,
> Consider as though Punnu and Sassi have not died,
> Both went together to heaven and became immortal
> in the world.

The poem is not long—it comprises one hundred and twenty five quatrains, written in the *davaya* metre, widely

applied in narrative poetry. According to tradition, the last line of each quatrain was to include the poet's name or pen-name without diverting from the plot. Taking advantage of this tradition, Hashim used the respective lines to express his attitude to the incidents or episodes contained in the respective quatrain, while occasionally he ignored the tradition.

In selecting the above plot, the poet set himself a complicated task. The story about the love between Sassi and Punnu had been poetically expressed before him, among others by poets of great prominence, such as Hafiz Barhurdar and Varis Shah. Each of them had added some individual touch to the denouement. Hashim's rendering was novel too. He was the first Punjabi poet to choose his heroine's inner life for the focal point of his poem. To attain this, he eliminated all minute, sometimes over-elaborated details some of his predecessors had included into the story. This treatment of the plot necessitated a new approach to poetic form. Hashim weighed every word and retained only those poetic elements that carry an aesthetic function. In this way he created a poem of great emotional tension, chiselled in construction, unadorned. He avoids alliteration and assonance, while rhyme—one for all four lines of the quatrain—is used not for decorative purposes, but to round off each line and lend unity to the quatrain.

The power and the vivid emotional quality of Hashim's Sassi and Punnu place is among the most interesting creations of Punjabi poetry in the late XVIII—early XIX centuries.

Alongside lyrical poetry, patriotic poetry began to flourish, developing into a separate literary trend.

This was obviously a corollary of certain phenomena in the development of the Sikh state and its imminent collisions with the British colonialists. Occasional references to these began to occur in the lyrical poetry of Hashim and others. However, in the late XVIII and early XIX centuries Punjabi poets did not perceive in them yet an impending menace to counter which the people should be roused.

In 1837, Kahir Yar wrote an epic poem in the *var* tradition (*Hari Singh Nalwa di var*—'Var on Hari Singh Nalwa') on an armed clash between a military leader Ranjit Singh and Afghan tribes. Its interest lies in the challenge for

national unity that resounds here for the first time. This is the more significant since the *var* on the Sikh commander was composed by a poet who himself was a Moslem, and a peasant by origin. Kabir Yar refers to himself as an "illiterate *dehqan*". Though from the literary and aesthetic point of view the poem is inferior to its average contemporary poetic creations, yet it is of interest in that it bears witness to the close link between folklore and literature, typical of all Kabir Yar's writing.

National sentiments find much more vivid expression in the poetry of Shah Muhammad (1780—1862) who penned the heroic poem *Jangnama sikhan te farangian da* ('Legend on the War Between the Sikhs and the British'), dedicated to the first Anglo-Sikh war (1845—1846). It is a poem of great literary and historical significance. In the first place, its author was an eye-witness who stood close to the highest circles of Lahore. In addition, it is the first literary narrative on the Punjabi people's struggle against their colonisers, in which the poet expresses his attitude to the most important and most deeply tragic event in his nation's history. Shah Muhammad is not an impassive recorder of events. He speaks with heartfelt bitterness on the objective reasons that had led to the defeat of the Sikhs. These he considers to be the policy of the British, and the treachery of the Sikh Sardars, who betrayed their people.

Shah Muhammad manifests a sense of historic perspective in his just appraisal of the rule of Ranjit Singh who had united the land of the Punjab and created a powerful state.

> The great warrior Ranjit Singh was born
> With his power he shook the whole land
> Multan, Kashmir, Peshawar, Chamba,
> Jammu and the great fort of Kangra, he forced to bow before him
> Apart from that the land of Ladakh and up to China,
> He brought under his sway.

The poem opens with a detailed narration of the events previous to the war, of the discord among the feudal rulers, and the attempts made by the Council of Sikh community to reconcile the hostile groups with one another. Thereupon the poet dwells in chronological sequence on the crucial events of the war itself. His description of the battle at Mudki evidences his personal participation in the war.

The poet's sympathies lie with the people. He proudly proclaims himself a Punjabi, and emphatically stresses that the Punjabi people are one.

> Hindus and Moslems both we live happily,
> (Now) a great calamity before both of them.
> Shah Mohammad, in the land of the Punjab,
> A third party had never appeared up to now
> . . . .
> Shah Mohammad, the Sikhs drew the blood of the British
> Like a lemon-crusher crushing a lemon.

However, the heroes' enthusiastic efforts are vain. The poet's conclusions are sorrowful indeed: the Sikh commanders proved unable to exploit their armed forces or to use to advantage the surge of patriotism among the people who had risen in defence of their independence. And blood flowed like red wine, soaking the earth, and then perished the glory of the great heroes of the past—the heroes of the Mahabharata and other legends. And many a fate took a new turn, and Shah Muhammad himself is no longer poet or even gunner, but a servant of the usurers: collecting money for them. The poem closes on a sad note—never will the heroes rise, and no one can tell what fate has in store for the people.

Shah Muhammad's poem is a truthful romantically coloured rendering of actual events, of a vital moment in the Punjab's history. Its dominating theme is that of national feeling; it speaks of a deeply perceived national tragedy, and attempts to single out its causes. This is the seed from which Punjabi literature of the new era was soon to grow. This new literature was heir to great cultural wealth: the democratic traditions of poetry stemming from the anti-feudal movements, philosophic verse and love lyrics, epic poetry, as well as various rudimental genres of literary prose, and finally, a literary language that was closely knit with that spoken by the people.

In Search of New Ways

ON THE EVE OF THE TURN

The triumphant roar of British guns clinched the *de jure* recognition of the Punjab as a British possession, and on March 29, 1849 it was officially made public in Urdu, Persian and English. India's enslavement by the British colonialists, was completed.

A new chapter started in the history of India, involving the Punjab as well.

British domination affected every aspect of the Indian people's life, including culture. The British colonial authorities adopted an openly negative attitude to the culture of the Indian peoples. This manifested itself in legislation, and in a radical modification of the educational system in India aimed at eradicating from it every vestige of national culture and securing the training of loyal citizens for the British crown. There was, however, a reverse side to this medal. The Indian intellectuals came in touch with British culture and through it with that of other European nations; development of book-printing and journalism helped this process; natural sciences and progressive social thought seeped into India, if only in their most rudimentary forms—and all this led inevitably to progressive developments. Moreover, the very fact of their country's colonial state induced the Indian intellectuals to take an interest in the progressive and revolutionary tendings of European culture.

The people of the Punjab embarked on this path somewhat later than the other nationalities of India. The Bengalis, Marathas, Tamils and Hindis absorbed the archievements of European literatures through translations from

English into their own languages; the Punjabis, however, acquainted themselves with these literatures via intermediary translations into Urdu and Hindi.

The works of European literature that reached the Punjabis represented diverse trends—sentimentalism, romanticism, classicism, realism.

Socially, the Punjab was developing in a rather specific way during the XIX century. The British colonialists endeavoured to disrupt the country's national unity beyond repair, and all measures taken by the British administration in the Punjab—economic, social, political—were directed towards this one aim. The country was divided into a few feudal principalities. Moreover, special territories were singled out to be administered directly by British authorities. Deliberate efforts were made to incite the Sikhs and Hindus against the Moslems, the activities of various religious communities were encouraged. The Punjabi language was forbidden at schools, and superseded by Urdu, Persian, and English. The Punjabi intellectuals were thus compelled to use alien languages which inevitably retarded the development of Punjabi literature.

The freedom-loving Punjabi people could not reconcile themselves to this state of affairs, and between the fifties and eighties of the XIX century desultory movements directed against the British sprang up.

The most significant among them was the *namdhari* movement. *Namdhari* was a Sikh sect that took shape in the 1830ies. The *namdhari* proclaimed an anti-feudal programme that included a point making work incumbent upon everybody. In the 1860ies this sect began to play a perceptible role in the country's life. The *namdhari* leaders had rallied about them a considerable followership and launched a struggle for freedom under the slogan of a Sikh religious renaissance.

They were brutally suppressed by the colonialists, and the sect was subverted, yet the idea of a restoration of the Sikh state acquired the significance of a national symbol and as such gained broad popularity.

A large number of organisations that stood for religious reforms based their activities on a desire to return to the past, with due consideration to contemporary experience. One of them—the Arya Samaj society—grew to be so influencial among Punjabi merchants and craftsmen, that

in 1877 its all-India headquarters was transferred to Lahore.

Moslem nationalists in the Punjab, inspired by Sayed Ahmad Khan, also stirred to activity. The Shri Guru Singh Sabha society was established in Amritsar. All these organisations pursued the aim of a cultural and political renaissance of the respective religious communities, and directed their efforts towards spreading the idea of the necessity of religious reforms.

The impact of some of these organisations, the Shri Guru Singh Sabha in particular, upon the development of Punjabi literature in the new era was very notable. Through propaganda for a return to the past, all phenomena connected with national history acquired the significance of an ideal norm, an obligatory model. Literature prior to 1849 was considered an all-national heritage, a tradition, which the literature of the new era was to follow up. A group of traditionalist poets appeared. They rendered anew the plots of ancient and medieval literature in their authentic traditional forms, familiar to the listeners. It would be more precise to call them poets-storytellers, who fulfilled the great task of preserving the treasures of their native poetry. Fragments of their tales were recorded and published later. Among the most outstanding of these poets are Fazil Shah (?—1873), Maulvi Gulam Rasul (?—1873), Hidayatulla (?—?), Kalidas Gujranwalia (?—?), Kishan Singh Arif (1836—1900).

Their poetry was, however, confined to reminiscences of the more or less distant past, with no response to the urgent problems of their contemporary time. During the same period, Bengali literature already constituted a weighty social force. Literature in Urdu, in the development of which Punjabi writers participated as well, also showed traits relating it to living reality. Hindi literature was following a similar course. These literatures were absorbing the forms of European literature, and linking them with their own national ones. What characterised them as the national literatures of the peoples of India in the second part of the XIX century was a prevalence of great social problems, above all that of the national-liberation struggle. The development of journalism in the Indian languages occupied an important place in literary developments.

A decisive turning point in the further fate of Punjabi literature came towards the nineties of the XIX century, and was caused by a complexity of processes: social and economic developments in the Punjab, growing political and national consciousness among the peoples of India, the national-liberation movement that was gathering momentum, and finally, the influence of literatures in Hindi, Bengali and Urdu. This turning point expressed itself most vividly in the poetry and writing of Vir Singh (1872—1957), Puran Singh (1881—1931), Dhani Ram Chatrik (1876—1954), and Charan Singh Shahid (1891—1935).

POET OF THE MOON AND OF TEARS

By origin, Vir Singh was connected with the upper circles of the Sikh clergy. Both his parents were highly cultured people. The poet grew up in an atmosphere of reverence towards India's ancient culture, of which Sikhism became in his eyes the supreme manifestation. In 1891, he finished a missionary school in Amritsar. On leaving school he engaged in a variety of activities: he founded a society for the study of Sikh texts, a printing house "Vazir-e Hind Press", and a weekly newspaper. By the middle of the nineties he was a prominent figure in Punjab cultural life. His leading idea was the dissemination of Sikhism; to this he dedicated his literary talent from the very outset.

Starting with journalism, he soon tried his pen in literary prose genres, his first work being a trilogy of novels *Sundari* (1898), *Bijai Singh* (1899), and *Satvant Kaur* (1900).

Punjabi prose dates back to the time of the *naths.* The foundations of historical and philosophical prose narrative were laid by the *Janam sakhi*, and the development of the prose genre was furthered by translations of the *Upanishad* into Punjabi, and by the canonised writings of various Sikh sects.

All this formed a good basis for the evolution of different prose genres. Yet Vir Singh's novels were the first prose works of artistic value, the opening of modern Punjabi literature.

The plots of all three novels are ingenuous enough. The author's purpose can be conjectured from the very

start—to show the unquestionable moral superiority of the Sikhs and the power of Sikhism as a religion. The novel *Bijai Singh* tells of a young Hindu who marries a girl fanatically dedicated to the teachings of Sikhism. Continuous spiritual intercourse with her, quickened by his ever increasing love, induce the young man to forsake Hinduism and turn to Sikhism, whereby he changes his Hindu name Ram Lal to the Sikh name Bijai Singh.

The action takes place in the XVIII century, but this has no bearing upon the story, since actually the personages are lifted above concrete historical conditions. The character delineation is traditional in its devices: the author endows his favourite heroes with all the positive qualities in existence.

In the twenties, Vir Singh returned to the novel genre endeavouring to create the image of a positive hero in the spirit of Sikhism. In 1921 he published a novel under the declarative title *Subhag ji da sudhar hathin—Baba Naudh Singh* ('Reformation of Subhag at the Hands of Baba Naudh Singh').

It tells of the fate of Naudh Singh, a hardworking peasant, as the author calls him, owner of fifty *bighs* of land, which he tills together with his son. The novel consists of a series of collisions between the hero and preachers of different creeds, and encounters with those who had brought the western way of life to the country. The breath of the period is unmistakably felt in the political polemic quality of the novel: from the position of the Punjabi landowner, various tendencies of the national-liberation movement are appraised with a special view to their social concepts. The author unfolds before his reader a panorama of his contemporary India, uncovering her social, moral, economic, and political problems and evaluating them from the point of view of a Sikh. Naudh Singh is the author's mouthpiece; his confrontations with other personages are merely used as pretexts for different situations in which the hero can express his conclusions and judgements. Here the tendency to idealise the central hero is brought to such an extreme that Naudh Singh has no contact with reality whatever. In denouement and composition the novel is equally weak. In addition to this, it has remained incompleted. By trying to turn the novel into a sermon for Sikhism, the author has defied his own purpose.

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In the twenties, Vir Singh turned to lyrical poetry, and his contribution in this genre is indeed considerable. His three volumes of lyrical verse *Lahiran de har* ('Wreaths of Waves', 1921), *Matak khulare* ('Impulses', 1922), and *Bijlian de har* ('Wreaths of Lightning', 1927) show his poetic mastery and his deep sense of natural beauty.

Vir Singh's very individual, peculiar vision of the world, his exploration of all the latent possibilities of words, his subtle feeling for rhythm and metre—all this earned him the rightful fame of Punjab's first modern poet. Compared to the purposeful Sikh propaganda of his prose, his lyrical poems appear demonstratively neutral. Yet it is only seemingly so. In actual fact, they are a poetic interpretation of the world concept inherent in Nanak's teaching, but rendered in a form that enables the poet to eschew poignant social conflicts. He speaks of the eternity of beauty, and of its indifference to humans: beauty, like moonshine, serves indiscriminately both rich and poor—

At the doors of all,
The rich and the poor,
The sinners and the saints,
It is shedding light.

Therefore nature's beauty evokes elegic moods in his heart: the past is irrecoverable, the present brings regret.

Many (women) like you came and touched us before,
I wanted to kiss them, my heart rose to them,
But Noor Jahan, that sweet taste of love,
Which you have given me, is not there in the hands
of any one else.

Nature's beauty is great and majestic, but the poet conceives it as a manifestation of some divine power. At the same time, Vir Singh acknowledges that man can adorn nature, can render nature's beauty yet more perfect. Enraptured by the loveliness of Veri Nag's palace, he writes:

All (the memories) have fallen and become ruins,
Some have been fallen down.
The beautiful garden of the king
Is forced to sell its fruits.
Time is breaking the sinew of fountains,
bara-daris and everything else.

It occurs to him, that by their very labour humans may become inimical to nature, may ruin its beauty. True, there is justification for it—man's plight is hard.

> When I see the sorrows of the world,
> My heart feels sad,
> My heart melts (at this plight)
> And my eyes shed tears.
>
> But, even if you sacrifice yourself,
> The sorrow of the world will not grow less.
> Yet you cannot become a stone,
> When you see this sorrow, you feel pained.

These lines may well serve to define the poet's attitude to social problems. He loved his native Punjab, he loved India, but what he loved was the picture of his imagination—the magnificent country of an idealised past. He deliberately shunned issues and phenomena incomprehensible to him, or alien to his world outlook. The poet's blossoming period coincided with events of paramount importance not only in the Punjab, but in the whole world. Bitter wars shook its very foundations, the thunder of three Russian revolutions reverberated in India, the struggle of the Indian peoples for their independence was gaining intensity. A revolutionary party was established in Vir Singh's native Punjab. Punjabi youths were dying by the thousands in the First World War. On April 13, 1919, General Dyer of the British Army was responsible for savage reprisals in the poet's native town of Amritsar. Vir Singh could not withdraw from life, from politics. His social position was unequivocal. After 1930, he practically discontinued his creative writing to dedicate himself to political activities. He was well known at that time as a leader of the upper circles of Punjabi feudal landlords. Thus, the ideas he conveyed in literature reflected his political views. This explains his idealisation of the past, and his inadequate delineation of a contemporary positive hero.

THE JATS—THEY ARE MY FRIENDS

Another outstanding poet was Puran Singh. Unlike Vir Singh, he came from a well-to-do peasant family; like him, he received his education in a missionary school. For his higher education he went to Japan where he speciali-

sed in chemistry. He returned to his homeland, and worked for a time at the Dehra-Dun Forest Research Institute, then tried his hand at agriculture, but was little successful in either.

Puran Singh's world outlook underwent a complicated evolution. Born into a Sikh family, he fell under the influence of Christianity at the missionary school he attended. During his study years in Tokyo he became a Buddhist. Back in India, under the influence of the widely known Hindu religious reformer Svami Ramatirtha, he became an adherent of the Vedanta, a medieval philosophy, and finally, after having made the acquaintance of Vir Singh, he reverted to Sikhism.

It was not an unusual sort of development in his time, evidencing primarily the absence of a solid social basis for Indian intellectuals. We may recall here the incessant searchings of the heroes of Tagore's novels.

Puran Singh's poetry conveys ideas similar to those of Vir Singh's lyrical verse. He, too, admires the grandeur and beauty of nature. However, the distinction between the two poets lies in essential concepts. While Vir Singh regards nature as a manifestation of a divine essence, separate from man, above him, Puran Singh, on the contrary, humanises nature. He calls the sun *tilak*, a mark painted on the forehead in token of a good wish, the colour of the dawn he compares to the saffron on the bride's palm. Moreover, nature is concrete in Puran Singh's poems: it is the Punjab with its fields and hills, its rivers and mountains. It is the country of Punjabi peasants and shepherds, potters and coppersmiths, warriors and poets. He sees his native land as personified in the image of a reckless Punjabi youth:

> These carefree youth of the Punjab,
> Cut jokes with death,
> They are not afraid of dying.

The poet's motherland is full of beauty, but a hostile civilisation has penetrated into it. Though considerably influenced by European bourgeois ideology, Puran Singh never became an advocate of western civilisation. On the contrary, he saw a horrible, anti-human force in everything this civilisation had introduced into his motherland's social development and spread among his people. Contemporary European civilisation, embodied in colonialism, evokes in

him the image of an enormous all-consuming oven (*Purane Punjab nun avazan*—'Appeals to the Ancient Punjab'). He hankers after the time of Sassi and Punnu, Heer and Randjha. Yet he does not merely abandon himself to romantic dreams of the past; he also expresses his positive ideal in the present. This ideal is enshrined in the patriarchal life of the peasant, with its daily cares and simple, artless pleasures. It finds vivid expression, for example, in the short poem *Kirsan nun* ('To the Ploughman').

> My friend, I have given up all study,
> My heart is given to farming,
> Fields have become my books,
> The illiterate peasants are my friends!
> Give me a huge bowl of butter-milk,
> A loaf of Bajra,
> A big ball of butter,
> Bowls of milk,
> Give me some vegetables and parched grains,
> Maize, jawar and corn-cobs.
> Cold water from the wells,
> Happiness to drink and plough the earth.
> All the dunes they level and make plain,
> These people are the fields of my God,
> Till their fields and sow seed,
> Work hard, as hard as they can.
> Eat little, dress in coarse clothes,
> And again and again they scan the clouds.

Along with poems of this kind, Puran Singh has others, where the prevailing mood is one of despondence, despair, yearning for love and happiness, for spring that "has come to all, while my spring has disappeared." This frame of mind is coloured by mysticism, the wish to withdraw from people, be it to a deserted river bank, and "laugh, and weep, and sob like one demented" (*Darya kinare*—'On the River Bank').

To Puran Singh's pen belong also some books on Sikh philosophy and a number of articles collected under the title *Khulle lekh* ('Openhearted Essays'). The articles (*Piar*—'Love'; *Mazhab*—'Religion'; *Vatan da piar*—'Patriotism'; *Art*—'Art'; *Kavita*—'Poetry'; *Kavi da dil*—'The Poet's Heart'; *Vot te politiks*—'The Right of Vote and Politics', etc.) contributed greatly to the development of Punjabi prose literature. Some of them contain poignant criticism

of the principles of bourgeois democracy; the article *Right of Vote and Politics* in particular reveals the false and deceitful nature of bourgeois democracy that serves the interests of the exploiters. The author concludes here that "as long as private property holds sway, humanism and equality will never become reality."

Puran Singh realised, however, that under conditions of colonialism and a bourgeois social structure humanist ideals were not to be implemented, but he could not discern the forces that could have turned these ideals into living reality.

ON THE ROAD TO INSANISTAN

The country called Insanistan is not outlined on any geographic map. Its name means "Country of Humaneness", and its discoverer was the dreamer and poet Dhani Ram Chatrik (1876—1954).

He was the son of a small merchant who struggled with poverty all his life. His mother died when he was a child. His childhood passed in backbreaking landwork from dawn to dusk. The few pleasures he knew were religious festivities and fairs, old men's yarns about days of yore, the swift *bhangra* dance on a holiday or wedding, and the temperamental songs of the girls.

His father taught him to read in Punjabi, in his village school he learned Urdu. In Amritsar he entered a Moslem school where he acquired Persian.

In October 1893 Dhani Ram took employment with the Vazir-e Hind Press printing works, his job being copying texts in Gurmukhi for litography. In 1896 he started servicing a book shop attached to the printing works. This enabled him to get acquainted with Punjabi literature and its outstanding figures. Soon he mastered the rudiments of prosody; his earlier poems were written with no knowledge of classical versification.

His first publications appeared in the *Khalsa samachar*—first poems, then stories and novels. His themes were traditional. In 1905 Chatrik published the story *Bharathari Hari*, in 1906—*Nal and Damayanti*. His poems in the *Khalsa samachar* were usually signed "Hari Dhani", but these two stories were signed with his full name.

Beginning with 1905, he worked for the *Khalsa kumar patra*, a journal for youth connected with the *Khalsa samachar*. In 1912 he published two collections of verse—*Phulan di tokari* ('Basket of Flowers'), and *Dharm vir* ('Heroes'). After 1912 the publishing-house and literary organisational activities absorbed him completely. The first letter foundry for Gurmukhi in the Punjab owes its existence to his efforts. However, Punjabi literature owes him a yet greater debt of gratitude for his active work in the first organisation of Punjabi writers—the *Punjabi sabha* founded by another remarkable representative of Punjabi literature Maula Bakhsh Kushta.

Initiated in 1926, it rallied all writers concerned with the development of the Punjabi language and literature, irrespective of religious and communal adherence. Among its most active members were Hira Singh Dard, Charan Singh Shahid, Professor Teja Singh, Devi Das Hindi, Lala Guran Ditta Khanna, Lala Lakhmi, Chand Saudagar, Ustad Mushtak Sahib, Munshi Muhammad Huseyn Hushnud. Till 1930, Dhani Ram was so preoccupied with organisational work that he had neither strength nor energy nor time for creative writing.

At the end of 1931 he published a selection of poems *Chandanavari* ('Sandal-wood Grove'); in 1940 appeared a collection of poems written between 1932 and 1940 under the title *Kesar kiari* ('Saffron Flower Bed'); in 1942—*Navan jahan* ('New World'), in 1944—*Nur Jahan Badshah Begam*, in 1950—*Sufikhana* ('Wisdom').

This does not seem much for a period of fifty years, but in creative work it is the quality and essence that matters. From this point of view, the attainment of this modest, hardworking toiler of the pen is clearly evident. His verse embodies the thoughts and yearnings of the broad working masses: of peasants, craftsmen, and workers. Nor does it contain even a hint at the moods of religious prejudices. Chatrik is rightly considered the father of the realistic trend in modern Punjabi poetry.

The Punjab, in his eyes, is a part of India, prominent in the country's history since ancient days. He recalls:

> Arrows of Lav and Kush continued to rain,
> Fierce battle of Mahabharata continued.

And his passionate wish is:

> May your house always flourish, may your people live long,
> The mosque, the temple and the Sikh *gurdwara* are yours,
> Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs are (all) yours.

The Punjab's fate is blended with that of India; India's sorrow is her sorrow. The poet sees the reason for the country's pitiful state in her deeply rooted prejudices, and in the ignorance, swamping a country that had once offered the world such a wealth of culture. He sees it in the hard life of the peasants (*Garib kisan* means 'The poor peasant'). Nature threatens the peasant with draughts and floods. And even if he gathers a crop he must give the best part of it to the tax-collector, the usurer and the landowner. Others drink the cream, while he himself is lucky to have the whey. And if the harvest perishes, the peasant falls into debt and is either deprived of his land, or forced to mortgage all his property, and his daughters remain unmarried, while the sons are threatened with conscription, for they cannot find work, not even in town!

Whereas Vir Singh claimed that nothing could be changed in life, Dhani Ram Chatrik declares with assurance:

> Tragedies happen
> And I, Chatrik, am
> responsible for all.

These lines express his great and noble understanding of the purpose and message of literature, and his demands to the writer. The poet's task is not perfection of form for form's sake, not detached contemplation of nature, but active interference in the process of life. This is how Chatrik sees the poet's vocation:

> You are the pilot of those ships,
> Which lead nations to salvation.
> You are that cool breeze of spring,
> Which makes the garden of patriotism flourish.
> You are that touch which puts life into dead souls.
> One stroke of whose pen can overturn thrones. . . .

Chatrik summons the poet to put his pen at his nation's service.

> . . . That peace and justice be established
> In your country, as in your own home!

Chatrik had every right to voice this appeal: he was a Punjabi poet, and a patriot of India, yet for all his love towards the Punjab and India, never did he become a narrow-minded nationalist. His social ideal was broadly human. This is how he himself worded it (*Insanistan*):

Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians,
All appear to be brothers.
Handicraftsmen, workers, peasants,
All live a common life.
Poverty, penury, worries and unemployment,
The disease of fear come to an end.
All the religions and beliefs merge into each other,
This will be a real human state.

This was the poet's dream, for his heart-beat merged with that of his nation. He adorned nothing, nor did he seek grandeur in the past. He discerned true greatness in the life of his contemporary—the peasant, the craftsman, the worker. Romantic idealisation of the past was superfluous to him; he looked at life with the sober eye of a realist, as its creator and judge, as an artist and a fighter.

All his writing is impregnated with humanism. He was repelled by the forces that are hostile to man and wither the fruits of the toil of man's hands and man's reason. And he acclaimed all that serves man.

Throughout his life he called men to action, to militant resistance to evil, to unity in this struggle.

Awake my child,
Awake and become alert,
Get up my young man,
The entire world has awakened,
China, Russia and Iran
Have become alert.
Turks, Arabs and Pathans
Have started becoming angry (with their lot).
The fates of all (of them) have awakened,
My beloved son, you too must get up.

The poet thus conceived his task as a socially minded, humanistic thinker. His purposefulness, his desire to give the fullest possible expression to the vital problems of his time left an imprint on his style and language. He strove for aesthetic perfection and clarity so as to be understood by the simple people, and therefore turned to folklore from which he derived his imagery and his artistic devices. The

language of his poetry is that of his people, of the whole Punjabi nation. Hence his wide scope and vivid colour, hence his great variety of genres, comprising those created in Punjabi literature—the *dohra*, the *chaupai* and others borrowed from the literatures of different nations, and assimilated by him, for example the *ghazal* and the *ruba'i*.

The most salient trait of Chatrik's writing is his deleneation of a positive ideal, his deep probing into the spiritual world of his contemporaries, especially of the true builders of life.

THE SCOURGE OF SATIRE

A positive ideal can be conveyed by various means—including that of satire. This was the way chosen by Charan Singh Shahid (1891—1936), outstanding master of the word, both as a journalist and as a poet.

He entered literature much later than Bhai Vir Singh and Dhani Ram Chatrik who had already established themselves as writers when he was a child.

He came from a widely respected and well-to-do family. His great grandfather received a *jaghir* at the time of Ranjit Singh, but the decline of the Sikh state and the subsequent events disrupted the position of his family, and Charan Singh had to start earning his living as soon as he left school, at the age of fifteen. His first employment was with the *Khalsa samachar* publishers, as a proof-reader and translator. A year later, he published a story *Sham Sundar* based on a historical plot. This was in 1907, and his creative career continued for almost thirty years.

Charan Singh wrote stories and novels of an historical-detective genre: *Sham Sundar*, *Daler Kaur*, *Chanchal Murti*, *Ranjit Kaur*. In addition, he translated or rendered works by Confucius, Bhartrihari and other classics of world literature. He wrote for various newspapers: *Khalsa samachar*, *Khalsa sevak*, *Bir*, *Jathedar* and others. His literary talent unfolded itself with particular brilliance in the sphere of journalism, especially since 1926, when he started a journal of his own, the *Mauji* ('Jester')—the first political satirical journal in the Punjab.

In 1915, Charan Singh assumed the office of court chronicler, first with the ruler of the Nabha principality, then

at the Patiala principality. Honours and rewards of every kind and manner showered upon him, he was awarded honorary titles—that of *rajkavi* (the poet of the king), and that of Malik-ush-Shuara (King of Poets), he was presented with a sword as a token of honour, and awarded various orders. However, his court career ended as abruptly as it had started: in 1926, he launched the journal *Mauji*, that was to win well-earned fame.

The *Mauji* carried satirical sketches, stories, scathing lampoons in prose signed Baba Variama ("variama" means "gallant") and acid barbed verses signed Suthra. The stories, sketches, and verses thus signed constitute the most considerable part of Charan Singh's contribution to his native literature.

His satirical stories are told in the name of Baba Variama—a venerable old man whose keen eye detects everything that warrants derision, and who speaks the truth no matter who it may scathe.

Baba Variama goes to the market to pass the time of day with his friends and learn the latest gossip, and runs into the *thanedar*—the police officer. At this point, Baba Variama steps into the *thanedar*'s shoes and tells a curious story through him (the story *Thanedar*).

In a small town, the police officer holds all but supreme power. He struts through the market place, inflated with the knowledge of his own might. Presently, a shriek of anguish arrests his steps: somebody has been bitten by a dog. Whose dog? The case is very intricate, and the *thanedar*'s grave judgments change according to the respective alleged owner of the ill-fated dog.

The story calls to mind A. P. Chekhov's *Chameleon*, and the associations are so vivid that it may almost seem as though we were reading a Punjabi translation of the story on police officer Ochumelov's dilemma. Indeed, the incidents and the composition of the two stories, their separate situations, bear close affinity. However, though Charan Singh was undoubtedly familiar with the English translation of A. Chekhov's story, yet his was an original tale. True, the central hero, the *thanedar*, is also a police officer, and the situation in which he finds himself is analogous to that of Chekhov's hero, but the treatment of the character is original. The *thanedar* has no name—he does not need one, he is God Almighty in his area (the *thana*),

supreme judge and maker of fates. Intoxicated with his own grandeur and omnipotence, he refers to himself only in the first person plural. Thus, his image becomes a satirical generalisation. He is the embodiment of supreme social evil in the concrete setting of contemporary India.

To lend satirical poignance to this character, Charan Singh centres all his attention on him. All other personages are somewhat simplified and lack concrete outline. This is a deliberate device on the author's part, to create a background against which the satirical image of the policeman stands out the more saliently, as the symbol of a docile servant of the colonial power, of the heartless, impersonal machinery of oppression.

The influence of A. Chekhov on Charan Singh's manner of writing is clearly evident, and yet both character delineation and composition are Charan Singh's own.

The story is the first obvious tribute to the influence of classical Russian literature upon contemporary Punjabi literature.

Baba Variama continues his wanderings, and despite his age his eye loses none of its sharpness. It will fall upon the official who committed theft, and hold him up to general ridicule ('Encouragement'), or on the intellectual who has forgotten his native tongue ('Astrologer'), or on the rich who has crammed his home with foreign treasures and bruised his forehead in devout prayer to the trademark "Made in England" (*Kanjus mama*—'The Stingy Uncle') or on the hypocrite and bigot veiling his filthy deeds with quotations from the Holy Scripture (*Piri*—'Sanctity').

Baba Variama's satirical stories are collected in a volume entitled *Shahid takoran* ('Shahid's Poultices', 1932). These poultices were so efficacious that the colonial and local authorities perceived in them more than innocent mockery. The book was repeatedly banned and its publishers fined.

The reaction to Charan Singh's poems signed Suthra was similar. Suthra was a satiric poet who lived in Aurangzeb's time. Behind his mask, and in Aesop's tongue, transferring the incidents of contemporary life to the period of Akbar and earlier into remote history, Charan Singh slew the enemies of the Punjabi people with the deadly shafts of his satire.

At times he would resort to allegory. He ridiculed the British Prime Minister, who endeavoured to strengthen Britain's positions in India on the eve of the round table conference (*Khitab*—'The Title') by lavishing titles on landowners and feudal rulers. He decried the colonial authorities that claimed the municipal elections to be national (*Umedvari ya membari*—'Candidate or Member'), and the colonial bureaucrats (*Hai Hai*—'Laments'). The poet took a passionate interest in the life of his people; every one of their problems, each situation held significance for him. The slightest detail was to him a matter of concern. A simple-minded peasant comes to an occulist and asks him to prescribe him a pair of eye-glasses, hoping that if he dons them he may get a job (*Ruzgar*—'The Livelihood'). To all appearances—the simplest of plots. Yet in Charan Singh's rendering it turns into an indictment of those who force a poor humbled man into resorting to all kinds of tricks so as to eke out an existence. In a verse entitled *Ban gae*? ('What Have They Become?') the poet exclaims:

> By sucking the blood of the workers,
> They have become capitalists.
> By breaking the heads of the weak
> They have become honoured people.

Princes, feudal lords of all degrees, bigots and hypocrits—all those who tried to keep the people enslaved—are the poet's enemies. In his verse *Mera kalam* ('My Pen') that opens the collection *Badshahian* ('The Book of Kingdoms'), he formulates the purpose of his writing as follows:

> My pen is the shield of the weak, the victim, the troubled.
> My pen burns to ashes the cruel story!

Against these enemies he mustered the whole power of his talent, and put into use the rich store of satiric devices accumulated by the people. In delineating his satiric images he drew on Hindu, Moslem, and Sikh plots and personages taking them from literature in Punjabi, Sanskrit, Persian and other languages; but above all, he drew directly on life itself.

Charan Singh's sparkling wit was complemented by simplicity of language and poetic form. His verses rang familiar to those who had listened to the *kissa* by a campfire

at night, or stopped at a fair to enjoy the witty repartees of the *maskara*, who followed the best traditions of Suthra's satire.

Every issue of the *Mauji* carried verses by Charan Singh, and these verses were later collected in several separate volumes: *Badshahian*, *Shahinshahian* ('Book of Kings'), *Beparvahian* ('Carefree Verses'). Of special interest are *Badshahian* and *Beparvahian* that comprise the most poignant of his political poems. So great is their popularity among the Punjabi readers that both collections have gone through several editions.

Charan Singh's literary heritage is passionately contested. The feudal landowner circles endeavour to put it to their service by cloaking it in religious interpretations, and presenting him as merely another expounder of Sikhism as a religion, thus glossing over its social essence and the national sounding of his creative writing. However, the poems speak their own ideological message. The purpose of his outstanding satire, which he formulated with such deep sincerity in his poem *Mera kalam*, determined the content of his poetry and prose alike, and consequently, his place in modern Punjabi literature.

A SEED OF THE NEW

Puran Singh, Dhani Ram Chatrik, and Charan Singh Shahid created a solid foundation for modern Punjabi literature. Proceeding from older traditions, they marked out new roads, enriched their people's artistic experience, showing that poetry can concern itself with everything pertaining to the people's life. They introduced new heroes into literature, from all strata of Punjabi society. They developed new genres of prose in their own, independent manner, genres previously unfamiliar to the Punjabi reader. Though diverse in literary manner and social position, they had one thing in common: they were all inspired by the great idea of humanism. Alas, their beautiful dreams of a world of justice, of life without wars or oppression, of a world that might nurture the best qualities latent in human nature, that might open to man the gates to happiness—all this could not be materialised. Criticism of the present, dreams of a better future were not enough; a revo-

lutionary attitude to life was necessary, an active desire to transform the existing world, to crush the anti-humanistic colonial bourgeois order, and build in its stead a new society, free from exploitation of man by man.

This attitude to literature was first voiced by the revolutionary clandestine Punjabi press. In the first place, mention must be made of the *Gadar di gunj* ('The Thunder of Revolt'), organ of the Gadar (Revolt) party, that appeared between 1916 and 1920, and was illegally distributed in India. Continuing the tradition initiated by the *Khalsa samachar*, this journal carried political articles and satirical sketches in verse. True, it was published in Canada and was thus unable to respond immediately to the burning questions of the day. Nevertheless, twelve issues of the journal contain the first samples of truly revolutionary poetry in modern Punjabi literature. Its anonymous authors strove to wake their fellow countrymen to class consciousness and inspire them to action against the British authorities by filling old traditional genres of Punjabi poetry with new revolutionary content. The first printed poems appeared in the second number of the journal—the *Painti Bharat mata di pukar* ('Call of Mother India'), the short poem *Gulam di durdasha* ('The Slave's Misfortune'), *Piare vatan valian nun sandesa 'Kamagata Maru' de hindian valon* ('Message to our Dear Compatriots from Indians on Board the *Kamagata Maru*')[4], *Soch vichar* ('Meditations'). This last poem opens with the words:

> Open your eyes and become alert,
> Hindus and Muslims, the dwellers of Hindustan,
>
> False quarrels have finished us off.
> White men, the sons of devils, exploit us.

These poems were followed by others, close to them in spirit, such as *Mauka sambhalo* ('Use the Opportunity'), *Gadar di benti* ('Plea for Rebellion'), *Hindio nind ko tyago* ('Indians, Wake from your Sleep'), *Bharat mata di pukar faujan valian nun* ('Mother India's Appeal to her Soldiers'), *Hind de surbiran di yadgar* ('Glory to India's Heroes'); poems in the *kafi* genre, containing renderings of the Gadar

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[4] In 1914, a group of members of the Gadar party on board the *Kamagata Maru* attempted to land in India with a view to preparing an anti-British rising.

party's programme of action, and brief verses dedicated to concrete propaganda tasks.

The subsequent issues of the journal were similar in content. Later, in the twenties, the left-wing press continued occasional publications of revolutionary poetry. Even if this had no direct influence upon Punjabi literature as a whole, it yet prepared ground for further development of a literature that reflected the revolutionary sentiments of the democratic layers of society.

A breaking point came in the middle of the thirties—with the appearance of the All-Indian Association of Progressive Writers (1936).

An active part in the work of this Association belonged to the young generation of Punjabi writers, those who had grown up in the period when the Punjab and other parts of India were witnessing important shifts in the balance of social forces. During the First World War, large numbers of Punjabi youths were recruited into the Anglo-Indian army. They were Sikhs, and Moslems, and Hindus—all fighting for interests alien to them, for the British imperialists. They returned not only enriched with life-experience, especially in the political sphere, but also with some knowledge of the revolutions in Russia, Germany, Hungary, and aware of the criminal senselessness of the wide-scale massacre initiated by the imperialists. Back in the Punjab, they became active fighters for national independence. In the meantime, the young Punjabi proletariat was gathering strength, displaying increasing activity in the national-liberation movement in which the left-wing revolutionary forces held key positions. In the period between 1919 and 1922, when the national-liberation struggle was at its height in India, the Punjab stood in the vanguard of the movement. This was particularly stimulated by the savage reprisals perpetrated by the colonialists against the participants of a peace meeting in Amritsar on April 13, 1919, an event that roused all India to indignation.

The Punjabi intellectuals were beginning to realise that the struggle for the freedom of their country was part and parcel of the All-India struggle for national liberation. The mood among them was growing increasingly radical during the twenties, and in the 1929—1933 period, when the national-liberation movement was soaring high. It was

leavened with socialist ideas that were penetrating into India, and furthered by the achievements of socialist construction in the Soviet Union and in the Republics of Central Asia and Transcaucasia in particular.

The effect of all this was particularly notable among the young. The British yoke was unbearable to the people, and to youth in particular, and they sought ways of discarding it.

The mood of revolt carried away those of the Indian youth who were studying in Britain. Life in London offered them opportunities to gain better comprehension of the events taking place in India, by relating them with what was happening throughout the world. Their world outlook was influenced by contact with the greatest representatives of progressive European culture. Some among them managed to outgrow the influence of bourgeois ideology and realise that the people are the "moving force and the maker of all the main political, cultural and social transformations".[5] To this group of Indian students belonged the initiators of the Indian Progressive Writers' Association. Punjabi literature was represented in the group by Mulk Raj Anand, Iqbal Singh, later joined by Kartar Singh Duggal, Mohan Singh and others. The movement launched by the Association was supported by prose and poetry writers as well as by journalists in Urdu: Faiz Ahmad Faiz (born 1911), Akhtar Shirani (1905—1948) and others. Lahore became the centre from which the movement of progressive writers spread across the country. The birth of the Association was welcomed by such titans of modern Indian literature as Rabindranath Tagore (1861—1941) and Premchand (1880—1936).

The aims and tasks of this first All-India writers' organisation were formulated by Premchand in his speech "The Aim of Literature" at the first conference of the Association held in April 1936. This speech can be likened to a Manifesto of democratic progressive literature. Its conclusion reads:

"We must now create a literature imbued with depth, love of freedom, a sense of the beautiful, a spirit of creativeness, a comprehension of reality. Our literature must wake in us energy, satiate the air with revolt and restlessness,

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[5] Sajad Zahir, *Selected Works*, Moscow, 1960, p. 230 (in Russian).

and not lull us to sleep, for at this moment sleep is for us tantamount to death." To the Punjabi writers and poets these words became a programme for action.

NEW HEROES

In the thirties, the Indian reading public was by and large confined to intellectuals and the so-called medium layers of the population. The task that the Association of progressive writers had set itself was rendered particularly difficult since it could reach the people only through the intellectuals, owing to exceedingly wide-spread illiteracy and the desperately low economic level of the vast majority of the population. And the people had to be not only reached, but won over too. What somewhat facilitated the task was the fact that the position of the intellectuals differed but little from that of the workers, in consequence of which not only radical, but even revolutionary sentiments were rampant among them. These sentiments had to be conducted into the mainstream of the all-national struggle for the country's independence.

The state of the national-liberation movement in the nineteen thirties furthered confessional division among the Indian intellectuals, and this in its turn affected the development of national culture. In literature, for example, the result was that those of the writers and poets who were influenced by Moslem nationalism expressed themselves not in their native tongue, but in Urdu that claimed not only the role of a common language among the Indian Moslems, and used the Arab script, but also became very common among the peoples of Northern India; writers taking their bearings from such organisations as the Hindu Mahasabha, and from Hindu nationalism in general, resorted to Hindi. Since the mid-nineteenth century, some writers had been electing English for their literary language. All this refers to Punjabi writers as well.

In the circumstances, it could not be otherwise: the intellectuals of colonial countries as a rule received higher education in the language of their colonial rulers. And as the intellectuals constituted the bulk of the readers, the national literature of such countries inevitably included works by national authors in European languages. More-

over, to separate writers the respective European language became their basic means of expression, and they endeavoured to continue the traditions of their native literature through the alien tongue. In India, this tongue was English.

Some Punjabi writers used several languages—their native Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi and Farsi, and, additionally, English.

This led to the existence of various points of view in attributing a writer to one or the other native literature. One opinion holds that Indian writers expressing themselves in Urdu, Hindi, or English should be attributed, accordingly, to the literatures of Urdu, Hindi, and what is called Anglo-Indian. However, the point of view shared by the author of the present book maintains that the writer's use of one language or the other is determined by the objective conditions under which the spiritual life of the given people is developing. The language does not separate his writing from the national literature of the people with whom he is linked by the cultural and literary traditions that moulded his creative personality, his art. This is why we refer such writers to Punjabi literature, irrespective of whether they write in Urdu, or English, or Farsi, etc. To exemplify this, let us consider the work of Mulk Raj Anand (born 1905), and Krishan Chandar (born 1914).

To Mulk Raj Anand's pen belong stories, novels, essays on cultural history. To this very day he continues to be an active worker of a progressive movement in literature. Son of a soldier who succeeded in working his way up to a fairly high rank in the Anglo-Indian army, Anand was fortunate enough to enter Oxford University and complete his higher education there. His first stories being published in 1933, Anand has been writing for over thirty years now. Stories, novels, various investigations, publicistic articles, social activities fill the life of this indefatigable person.

World fame came to Anand through his novel *Kooli* (1936). It is centred around the typical fate of a boy from the lower strata of society, and traces the development of conscious thought in him. This novel was followed by a trilogy: *The Village* (1939), *Beyond the Black Waters* (1940), *Sword and Sickle* (1942). It is an epic dedicated to the fate of the Punjabi peasant. These four novels are the first in Punjabi literature whose heroes are not gallant warriors and pious peasants, but toilers, moreover, toilers who are

beginning to realise their own significance in life. What the writer brings out is the development of class consciousness in workers who have not yet shed their concepts of caste division.

The same theme runs through the novel *A Great Heart* (1945), which holds particular interest, since it reveals Anand as a writer who is organically linked with the Punjabi people, their tradition, and their literature. Anand disproves here the frequent assertion that the very specific social development of the Indian nationalities allegedly renders it radically different from that of European nations, and he shows that bourgeois relations are invading all aspects of life in the Punjab. The central problem in the novel is the collision between the caste traditions and the capitalist order. The author defends neither, and merely demonstrates the growing protest among the toilers and artisans, and the birth of a new ideology, of a new class consciousness that begins to triumph over the obsolete human relations based on castes, an ideology opposing capitalist relations and bourgeois ideology. It is the first Punjabi novel on the young working class, and on the awakening of class consciousness not in an individual, but in the working masses.

The hero of the novel—Ananta—is a craftsman of the *tatthiar* (copper-smith) caste who gains his rich life experience in the bitter class struggle in Bombay. Ananta learns to understand the essence of hypocritic bourgeois morality and rebels against it. He is a thinking worker, a fighter for the solidarity of the toilers against their exploiters, for the liberation of his comrades and brothers from the influence of bourgeois nationalist ideology, advocated by the politician Hans Raj and the student Satyapal—both lackeys of the owner of an armaments factory.

The action develops in the throes of the war. The Volga battle is over. An encounter flares up in the craftsmen's district in Amritsar between the craftsmen whose supplies of raw material have stopped, and the factory owners who have received military orders. The bosses are trying to prevent the organisation of a trade union that would unite craftsmen and workers, whose interests are the same. Hans Raj incites the craftsmen to demolish the factory, persuading them that the machine is to blame for their sufferings. The machine is man's enemy. Ananta perishes in an effort

to restrain the craftsmen from reckless action. His death opens the eyes of many, including his poet friend Puran Singh Bhagat (an allusion to the old legend about Puran Bhagat is obvious here), who has already arrived at a correct appraisal of the events and their true causes, whose whole heart goes out to the people, the toilers, but who has not always been consistent in implementing his convictions.

With the precision of a historical record, the novel depicts the collision of social forces. Mulk Raj Anand shows through the events in one craftsmen's district of Amritsar a broad process typical not only of the Punjab but of the whole country. He shows how the logical development of social life involves diverse groups of the population in this process, even the most backward of all—the women. Janaki, Ananta's wife arrives at an awareness of her social duty, and takes up the task for whose sake her husband perished. Anand's merit lies in having been able to reveal the essence of this process, in having discerned in the life of the Punjab the basic problem of all India. The language the Punjabi author Mulk Raj Anand chose to use is a question of secondary significance. What matters is the story itself, the process he reflects, the problems he raises, and the light in which he presents them. Hence, the regret expressed by the critic Madan Gopal is unjust. "Unfortunately,—Gopal writes,—the Punjab cedes its literary talent to literature in other tongues, such as Urdu or English. Look at the list of outstanding Punjabi writers of today, and of the recent past: Doctor Mulk Raj Anand, Doctor Iqbal, Krishan Chandar, Rajendar Singh Bedi, Malik, Dharam Prakash, Anand and Manto...." In reality, all the above-named writers and poets are inalienably linked with Punjabi literature; their writing is part of the literature of the Punjabi people. Most of them belong to progressive literature, the literature of great problems pertaining to India as a whole. This fully applies, for example, to Krishan Chandar, the greatest contemporary Indian prose writer who expresses himself in Urdu.

Krishan Chandar's novels and stories are imbued with revolutionary romanticism, his poignant political satire is ruthlessly aimed at all reactionaries. His style and language derive from Punjabi folklore tradition. The plots of many of his stories are taken from the life of the Punjab — the history of the people's struggle against the colonialists

(*Amritsar*), events following the division of the Punjab in 1947 (*Mr. Jackson*, *Lyallya Ghasita Ram*), or the daily life of the Punjabis (*Khuni nach*—'The Bloody Dance'). In the forties and fifties, Krishan Chandar's interest turned to important developments in the life of India—the working class movement (*Phul lal hain*—'Flowers are Red'), the sailor's rising (*Tin gunde*—'Three Hooligans'), the peasantry (*Jab khet jage*—'When the Fields Awake'), the problem of the caste system (*Kalu Bhangi*).

All-India's problems inevitably led the author to broad social generalisations. Indignantly, he exposed the murderer of the simple people—of those who perished in Amritsar in 1919 at the hand of the British punitive detachments, and of those who lost their lives during the Hindu—Moslem pogroms. This murderer is imperialism. However, imperialism is not merely a problem concerning India, or the mutual relations between colonial India and her British goalers. It is a phenomenon concerning the whole world, it is equally to blame for the death of American soldiers in Korea.

The writer addresses the first American soldier to be killed in Korea (*Nae gulam*—'New Slaves'). His aim is to show that the fates of all common people in the capitalist world are interlinked: whether they are Koreans, or Americans, or Indians, they are all victims of big business. Yet exposure in itself is not Krishan Chandar's purpose. He is intent on reminding people that the world's fate is in their hands. The world is a marvellous workshop where "man turned Man and will occupy his place in the centre of the Universe."

In this way, Krishan Chandar, who writes in Urdu, and Mulk Raj Anand, who uses the English language, both represent the same trends in Punjabi literature, that part of it through which the experience and wealth of Punjabi writing enriches all literatures of India.

BORN IN BATTLE

The thunder of World War Two subsided. More than two and a half million Indian soldiers had participated in it, more than seven hundred thousand of them were Punjabis. Yet—the victory over German fascism and Japanese imperialism brought no change to India's position,

Imperialist exploitation and political oppression had even increased during the war years. As a reaction to it the national-liberation movement soared as never before, now involving even the armed forces. The political situation grew tenser day by day, until pressed by such events as a broad peasant movement, with armed risings, the revolt in the navy, unrests in the army, the growing wave of strikes, and the spreading peasant movement, the British colonialists were forced into concessions, and ceded political freedom to India, on condition, however, that the country be split into Moslem Pakistan and Hindu India.

On August 15th, 1947, India was proclaimed an independent country, and Jawaharlal Nehru, its first Prime Minister, raised the saffron-white-green banner over the Red Fort in Delhi, thus putting an end to the two hundred year period of British domination. Rabindranath Tagore had written at the close of his life: "The wheels of history are forcing the British to resign from their Indian Empire. But what kind of India are they leaving, what shattering poverty! When the flow of their two hundred year long rule dries up, what abominable filth and disgrace will they leave behind!" Only the Indians themselves could clear up this abominable filth.

New borderlines rent the Punjab in two, and the religious communities of Moslems, Sikhs, and Hindus were plunged into fratrecidal massacres. The events in the Punjab in the second half of 1947 are described by an eyewitness in the following way:

"August, September, October and November were the worst months in the history of the Punjab, and perhaps in that of the Indian people as a whole. No one historian, not even a group of historians, could fully appraise the unspeakable sufferings brought upon millions of innocent people—Hindus, Sikhs, and Moslems, by the division. The Punjab, and the North-Western frontier province, and Sind, have experienced such horrors the like of which man cannot find in all the history of the civilised world. At times people were literally forced to eat the flesh and drink the blood of their dear ones. Whole districts of Amritsar and the Dehra Ismail Khan were razed to the ground. Lahore has turned into a dead city. As from August 12, 1947, this most flourishing of Indian towns, with a peaceable population, with 20 colleges and dozens of schools, with palaces

and parks, industrial enterprises and craftsmen's districts, was transformed into a vast cemetery, a place of horror and death. . . At one point, the railway station turned into a battle field where Moslem civil servants slaughtered their Hindu and Sikh comrades, where Sikhs and Hindus fought off Moslem hooligans, who wanted to massacre them, where soldiers of the Balooch regiment were firing at soldiers of the Dogra regiment."[6]

The economic hardships of the population in both parts of the Punjab—Indian and Pakistanian—were aggravated by vast numbers of refugees seeking shelter with those who shared their creed. To tackle the national problem, carry out an agrarian reform, secure economic development, raise the cultural level of the population, etc. it was essential to prepare the ground by liquidating the bitter heritage of colonialism and the consequences of the division, and above all, by eliminating feudal principalities.

These acute problems of home policy were supplemented by difficult international problems arising from the disintegration of the whole imperialist colonial system and the consolidation of the socialist countries.

All this doubtlessly affected the development of Punjabi literature, especially its ideological content.

What, then, are the most significant new phenomena in Punjabi literature in the nineteen years of India's independence?

In the first place—a rapid development of all prose genres, especially that of the short story; then—the emergence of new themes, such as that of national unity, of the struggle for peace, for social justice, for national culture; also—the publication of literary journals, and the appearance of an all-national democratic writers' organisation, and the realisation on the part of writers of their enormous social responsibility.

The short story genre has gained particular prominence, since it enables writers to respond immediately to any new event, to pose acute social problems, and combine this with great artistic expressiveness. The soil on which the short story flourished was mixed of national tradition and the best traditions of the European critical realistic short story,

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[6] Quoted from A. M. Dyakov, *India during and after World War Two* (1939—1949), Moscow, 1952, p. 115 (in Russian).

including the Russian story. Punjabi prose literature was also affected by prose writing in Hindi, Bengali and Urdu.

Other prose genres developed as well—the novel, the sketch, memoir and biographical novels. Among the most prolific of the prose writers, mention should be made of Gurbakhsh Singh (born 1895).

He turned to literature first of all as a means of transforming society. He graduated from an engineering college at Rurki, and worked for ten years as a junior inspector on the railroad. Since it was impossible for him to complete his higher education at home, he went to the USA where he entered Michigan University. Between 1919 and 1923 he lived partly in Canada and partly in the USA. This choice was not fortuitous: many Indians and Punjabis considered the USA a country where the human personality has every opportunity to blossom out, where democracy has really established itself. Struck by the amazing level of industrial development in America, Gurbakhsh Singh could not at first discern the true essence of its "democracy". The great men of America, the contry's glory—Washington, Franklin, Lincoln, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman—appeared to him the embodiment of a culture created by the people; their ideas exerted a decisive influence upon the formation of his world outlook.

The writer's social ideal is expressed in the story *Desh-bhakta* ('The Patriot'): the hero of the story says: "To establish democracy in the country, the peasant must be well equipped, the tractors we have must be produced in hundreds and thousands in our country. May no one suffer from heat or cold, may our deserts begin to flourish, may every peasant learn to read and write. Each must become an independent farmer, nobody should be compelled to be a tenant, and each should own the fruits of his labour." This is his ideal. Yet it is not easy to materialise. In the author's understanding, somebody must manifest good will, so as to carry this ideal into life, and thus he decided to demonstrate such a manifestation of good will. He quit his job on the railroad and settled first in Naushehr, then near Lahore to devote himself to agriculture. His whole enterprise assumed a very peculiar form, typical of India: he set out to reform society proceeding from a model community.

Gurbakhsh Singh's views and concepts at that time were determined by a variety of influences: Sikh traditions,

Christianity, the ideas of Thoreau and Emerson, the philosophies of Gandhi and Tolstoy, as well as the ideological climate of the national-liberation movement of his epoch.

To propagate his views, he started a journal *Prit Lari*, which was to serve definite purposes: to struggle for a literature that could rise above all prejudices of caste, creed and nationality; and to inculcate in its readers a sense of humanism and fraternity of people the world over. Though at the time when the journal was launched these ideas were somewhat abstractly conceived, its importance was invaluable. It immediately attracted general attention and before long it became the centre of social and cultural life in the Punjab. In this, a great role belongs to Gurbakhsh Singh's personality, and his authority among writers that made itself felt already in 1933.

Gurbakhsh Singh's literary career dates back to 1911, when the *Khalsa samachar* published some of his poems. These did not distinguish themselves particularly, and were devoted either to the beauty of nature, or to platonic love, whereby the influence of Vir Singh was clearly evident.

In the nineteen twenties, Gurbakhsh Singh already participated in the leading literary journals of the Punjab: *Pritam* and *Phulvari*. To this time belongs his play *Rajkumari Latika* (1923), characteristic of a certain stage in the author's development. It testifies to the immaturity of both his social views and his aesthetic method, and yet it also reveals his serious striving to comprehend the basic problems of life.

The content of the play is as follows:

Mandhir, a peasant boy, and Latika, a rajah's daughter, fall in love with each other. At first the rajah objects to marriage, but realising the power of his daughter's love, and her unyieldingness, he gives his consent. However, this proves to be a ruse: before the wedding, he intends to make Mandhir ruler of one of his estates, so as to separate him from his own people whose interests Mandhir strives to defend. The two lovers reject the rajah's offer, for Latika loves in Mandhir also the fighter for the people's rights. The rajah is infuriated, and when one day he finds the lovers together he kills his daughter. Mandhir commits suicide.

The acting personages fall into two antagonistic groups: the feudal lords and landowners on the one hand, and the peasants who are Sikhs and Moslems, on the other. The focal

problem of the plot has not lost its poignance even today—it is the peasants' struggle for their land, against the feudal landowners. The composition of the play is subordinated to this main idea: it goes back to the *kissa*, the narrative epic poem, but the social theme is deliberately brought to the fore. It is the background against which the dramatic action develops and the heroes' fates are played out. The play is an attempt to transcend the illusions of the so-called national unity outside class contradictions.

Gurbakhsh Singh's stories are also centred on social conflicts.

In the stories belonging to the twenties and thirties, the hero is usually the author himself speaking through various personages. Indian literary criticism sees in them the expression of so-called reformatory individualism, i. e., a striving to attain great social transformations by way of personal example. However, the collision between the hero and life in these stories usually ends in a failure of good intentions; the hero's attempts to help the downtrodden are vain. In the story *Prem Pungara*, for example, the central personage comes to the starving to bestow presents on them, and instead of gratitude he is rewarded with blows: the people want help, and not charity. Interestingly, the author explains the collapse of his heroes' ideals by an absence of bonds between man and man, a lack of mutual respect and assistance.

Under the impact of World War Two and the upsurge of the national-liberation movement the writer's world outlook underwent an evolution. American imperialism exposed its true attitude to the peoples of Asia first in the atomic explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, then in Korea, and the writer revised his appraisal not only of the policy of the U.S.A., but of the American way of life in general. In his searchings for the right way of social development he came to study the experience of the Soviet peoples, which soon led him to studies of Marxism. Life unfolded before him in a new light, he discovered his place in it and the significance of literature. New plots entered his stories, and their very construction changed. His personages acquired concrete social outline, formerly supporting characters moved from the background into prominence. The fates of the simple obscure toilers became his passionate concern, since he realised that their lot is that of the people,

This resulted in a complete change in his attitude to the people. They are no longer an abstract concept to him, but living, real workers and peasants. He defines his relation to them with great clarity: "I—a writer of the worker, a defender of the peasant—share in the widow's sorrow, listen to the orphan's lament. I declare, that before happiness comes to the workers in their factories, and to the peasants in their fields, there will be no happiness for anybody."

The story *Sada jagdi jot* ('The Eternal Flame') is obviously autobiographical.

The hero of the story, a writer, feels he has nothing to say to his readers, is unable to answer their questions, and he resolves to leave his home and travel over the country. He encounters very different people, a broad picture of life unfurls before his eyes, a life of hardships and privations, and of the day-to-day struggle for existence. Once he meets a blind old man, who tells him his story. Throughout his life he has been fighting against injustice. Even now the fire of this battle is driving him onwards. The story ends with the writer's own words:

"The People's Soul! Boundless are its sources, uncountable its burning lights, and among them burns the lamp of my soul. I tried to uphold the flame by adding to it flashes of moonlight, I tried to fan it, yet the oil ran out, and the flame dwindled, and horrified I fled—so this was my fate! But what an inexhaustible flame is the people's soul! I approached it, and my lamp lit up anew!. . ."

The people's soul is inexhaustible. Its stores of vitality and creative power are enormous. Gurbakhsh Singh sees this soul in the songs of the boy Anjhu Garu (*Anjhu Garu*) from Andhra. And he feels their closeness to his own poetry. His choice of a non-Punjabi hero is deliberate. No matter if he does not know the language in which the boy sings his songs—the air itself, the rendering speak as eloquently as words. There is nothing remarkable about Anjhu Garu. There are millions like him. An ordinary scenery, a simple plot serve to underscore this common, usual nature of the hero. Yet it is a significant image Gurbakhsh Singh has created, for it symbolises the creative power inherent in the people.

The conclusion of the story is noteworthy, too. The writer turns to Anjhu Garu: "You are the whole of the story, and I am merely its writer. Your songs, and my stories too,

will have to wait until the people win full victory over fate, and gain acknowledgement of their human rights."

Whatever Gurbakhsh Singh undertook to do was directed to one purpose—to serve his people. His journals, the publishing house he directed, his participation in the peace movement, his extensive correspondence with readers—all this contributed to his reputation.

Today, he still continues working with equal intensity. His creative writing, his literary criticism and publicistic articles invariably go through several editions.

His influence upon the style of contemporary Punjabi prose is invaluable. At times, he is accused of what some critics hold to be undue tendenciousness, or of inadequate plot development, or of poor composition. Yet his language and style are unanimously acknowledged to be unique in Punjabi literature. The source of this linguistic and stylistic perfection is undoubtedly his consciously cultivated proximity to his people's life, culture, literature and language. He uncovers the unlimited possibilities latent in national spoken language. There is no need for him to resort to artificially constructed imagery or other artistic devices manipulated by the few Punjabi modernistic writers: the purpose he follows is clear to him.

Gurbakhsh Singh is the initiator of a whole movement in the social and cultural life of his people, a movement named Prit Lehir. It involved the majority of writers and other intellectuals of the older generation, and their evolution, both ideologically and creatively, generally speaking proceeded in the same direction as did Gurbakhsh Singh's.

Among the members of this movement is the father of the modern Punjabi novel, Nanak Singh (born 1897).

He stepped upon the literary scene in the mid-twenties, first as a poet. Though his poems are traditional in form, their content, their ideological tending is new: they are quickened by the poet's passionate adherence to the national-liberation movement, in which Nanak Singh participated very actively. He suffered persecution, and served long terms of confinement. It was in prison that he got acquainted with the novels of Prem Chand and was deeply impressed by them.

In the early thirties, Nanak Singh first took up novel writing. As distinct from his predecessor Vir Singh, Nanak Singh based his novels on great social problems concerning

his contemporary Punjab. He raised his voice against the caste system with its statute of untouchability, its veto on marriage for widows, its prostitution, its feuds between Hindus and Moslems. Life abroad was of little interest to him, except where it had direct bearing on the Punjab and the Punjabis. His themes, plots and images all derive from his native land, which is the soil that feeds his writer's inspiration, his very essence.

His first novel, *Matrei maan* ('Stepmother') was written in 1930. Fame came to him as a novel writer two years later, in 1932, with the publication of *Chitta lahu* ('White Blood').

The heroine, Sundari, comes to grips with society that had maimed her mother's life. Breaking the Punjabi novel tradition that had estabilshed itself under the influence of Vir Singh, Nanak Singh endows his heroine with truly human qualities, instead of making her the embodiment of an abstract idea. Her every action is caused by the actual conditions of life, and justified by them. Sundari is the author's contemporary, and the problems she encounters are those of every Punjabi woman. Each day, each hour of her life, she is forced to realise that as a woman she has neither social nor economic rights; she is faced with the problem of caste, and with the law of untouchability. Neither can she combat society single-handed, nor is she prepared to conform. In her conflict with society, Sundari goes through a bitter spiritual crisis, and is finally forced to admit herself defeated.

The novel not only indicts contemporary society, but also reveals the fruitlessness and hopelessness of the heroine's individual protest.

In 1933, Nanak Singh got closely acquainted with Gurbakhsh Singh and fell under the influence of his ideas. This friendship still continues, and it marked the opening of a new stage in Nanak Singh's writing. The novel *Piar di dunya* ('The World of Love', 1939) is devoted to Gurbakhsh Singh's much advocated idea of all-embracing love that links all people. It was followed by the novels *Garib di dunya* ('The World of the Poor Man', 1939), dealing with class struggle in a village; *Pavittar papi* ('The Saintly Sinner', 1942), dedicated to the urban workers, and *Dur Kinara* ('Distant Shore', 1946) where the author returns to the problem of woman's emancipation. All these novels

are pervaded by the spirit of the National Congress Party's id ology of non-violent resistance.

The year 1947—the year of the country's division, was to Nanak Singh what it was to many Punjabi writers: a fatal date, marking the collapse of all beautiful illusions. Though the writer showed himself incapable of comprehending and exposing those responsible for the tragic events, the novels dedicated to them manifest his unshakable faith in the unity of interests of the Punjabi people—Hindus, Moslems, Sikhs—irrespective of their religious creeds. In this period, a number of novels came from his pen revealing the reasons of the Punjabi peasant's sorrowful plight (the novel *Adamkhor*—'Man-eater', 1953). He was also aware of the importance of organisation as the only means of a people's struggle against their enemies.

To Nanak Singh belongs the place of primacy in the history of the modern Punjabi novel. He perceived the vast possibilities offered by this genre, which allowed for a truthful and elaborate depiction of the people's life, and enabled the writer to uncover the material basis from which a person's inner world evolves. Nanak Singh largely prepared the subsequent blossoming of the Punjabi novel and of Punjabi prose writing in general, after India won her independence.

The nineteen thirties were great years for prose literature. Not only the novel but the short story too experienced a noteworthy development. It is a genre that lends itself well to immediate evaluations of current happenings. The short and long story became the chosen genre of numerous writers, old and young.

Among the writers of the older generation, a place of prominence belongs to Professor Sant Singh Sekhon (born 1908)—a master of realistic narrative, one of the finest scholars and investigators of the history of Punjabi literature. He embarked on his literary career in 1936, when the journal *Prabhat* whose editor-in-chief was the widely known progressive writer Sohan Singh Josh, published his first stories. Sekhon's stories were subsequently arranged in four collections—*Samachar* ('News', 1943), *Baran siddhan* ('Twelve Sidhs', 1949). *Addhivatt* ('Halfway', 1951), *Tija pahir* ('Third Guard', 1958). Their interest lies in their critical characterisation of the whole of society, and not of some separate social spheres. Sekhon strives to give

utmost social poignance to his narrative. Therefore he attaches great importance to the plot and elaborates it with special care.

The nineteen fifties and sixties have been witnessing even greater attainments in the Punjabi short story genre. Scores of stories have been appearing every month, collections of them come out in quick succession, most of them distinguished by artistic mastery as well as contemporary interest. The Punjabi writers follow up the fates of their contemporaries in diverse situations, delineate colourful and truthful portraits, describe the lives of men and women in the midst of their family, in society, or at work, confront them with people of other nationalities, and lead them to think not only of their own personal fates, but of the fate of their nation, of India, of mankind.

The short story is the most popular genre in Punjabi literature today. Writer upon writer takes it up, and the general achievement is so high that it is difficult to single out the most talented among the authors.

To characterise the specific traits of the Punjabi short-story in the fifties and sixties, an analysis of the works of any contemporary short story writer is quite enough.

Santokh Singh Dhir (born 1920) and Jaswant Singh Kamval (born 1923) may well represent the young generation of Punjabi short story writers.

Santokh Singh Dhir writes of the Punjabi countryside. In his three collections of stories—*Sitian di chan* ('In the Shade of Corn Ears'), *Saver hon tak* ('Before the Dawn'), and *Samjhi kandh* ('The Common Wall')—he makes a scientific investigation of the peasant's spiritual world, analyses the sources of his hardships, showing clearly that the basis of all is the state of the Punjabi village—money that rises like a wall between neighbour and neighbour, lover and beloved, friend and friend. Even religion—is it not, in the final issue, a matter of money? (*Mera ujjaria gavandhi*—'My Impoverished Neighbour'). Who else needs religion except those who cheat at the fair, disgrace the peasant's daughter and wife, enrich themselves at the expense of the toiler's sweat and blood (*Jathedar*)?

Dhir's stories bring the reader to the conclusion, that the wall separating man and man must be demolished. The author does not formulate it in so many words—it is implied through the action, through the development

of the stories. Plot, composition, style equally serve to bring out the author's underlying thought.

Jaswant Singh Kamval's stories embrace a wide range of urgent problems—from the woman's struggle for her place in society and the peasant movement, to the struggle for peace. In his basic tendencies, he stands close to Dhir. However, whereas Dhir strives to clarify, through his literary work, the foundations of human relationships in a capitalist society, Kamval sets himself a wider aim. His searchings are directed towards ascertaining the purpose of human life, the meaning of our contemporary epoch, the leading tendency of historical development. In his preface to the collection of stories *Rup de rakhe* ('Defenders of Beauty', 1960), he formulates the task of short-story writing in the following way: "If the story cannot reproduce truthfully human feelings and passions, and defend the interests of man, then it is unable to reveal the historical truth and cannot be considered real literature. Only if a story reflects the development of life, and calls for peace and happiness, can it rightfully count on the gratitude of our contemporary."

The poetry of Sudjan, Kamval, Dhir and numerous of their colleagues clearly indicates that contemporary Punjabi literature is greatly influenced by the traditions of Prem Chand and Maxim Gorky. It is from this angle that Kamval apprehends the simple daily incidents of life, thus lending them deep significance. In the story *Sahitak vot* ('The Voice Sounded by Literature'), for example, the author describes a seemingly very trifling happening. In one of the electoral districts a woman votes for the Communists, because a book she has read persuaded her that what they claim is right. The book is written by a man who on the day before the elections came out with a speech in the district where she lives. Quite simple, on the surface of it. Yet behind this simplicity you can divine the hard and bitter plight of the Indian woman, and discern the thorny path that has led her to vote with all conviction for the Communists.

Kamval frequently resorts to the aesthetic devices of folklore material. In the story *Te prem maria gia* ('And Love Was Killed'), for example, the plot is based on the life-story of an Indian Communist who perished for his cause.

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One evening, a group of peasant lads are listening t the *kissa* on Heer and Randjha. They are joined by Harbans friend of the Communist Prem Singh who died in prison Harbans feels he must tell the truth about his friend' death. The lads receive him mistrustfully, they suspec that he is a Communist. True, when offered to partake c their food, he says "Vahguru!"—what a devout Sikh is sup posed to say before a meal. Perhaps he hasn't been a Com munist long—just a greenhorn? Well, let him tell his tale And Harbans proceeds to tell them what the Communist want, what Prem Singh was killed for. "Prem" signifie "love" in Punjabi. Hence the double meaning of the title it may also be translated: "This is how Prem was Killed" The story's imagery is based on the tale about Heer an Randjha. Those who participate in the national-liberatio struggle find themselves in the position of Randjha, th colonialists are likened to Chuchak, the monopoly capita lists are associated with the Kher tribe by whom Randjh was killed. Chuchak and the Khers unite to incarcerat Randjha—Prem Singh—and others like him. Before hi death, Prem Singh addresses the nation's leaders exhortin them to be vigilant, reminding them of the exploiters inveterate hatred of the people, and of the imperialists enmity to mankind.

In this way events of his time intertwine with a popula legend in Harbans' story, and it cuts deep into the liste ners' consciousness. It cannot but touch the reader or liste ner, something is bound to linger in his memory, changin his attitude to life.

Such force of impact is typical not only of Kamval' stories, but of the Punjabi short story in general.

The problems preoccupying Dhir and Kamval are clos to the majority of Punjabi writers today. They approac them from different angles and various aesthetic positions There are many who share the proclaimed views of Suja Singh: "The progress of mankind depends on the progres of the toilers on our planet—this I always bear in mind Life provides me with plots for my stories... I a linked with the workers and peasants, I am a toiler my self!"

The leading method in contemporary Punjabi stor writing is realism, since it is best suited to solve the task life has put before the writers. Critical realism predominates

though individual writers lean towards the positions of socialist realism.

It ought to be stipulated here that entirely different tendencies may also be observed in Punjabi prose writing. Some writers are carried away by Freudian ideas, supplanting a realistic comprehension of life by psychoanalysis; others strive to reproduce the incidents of life with such accuracy that they slip into naturalism. Yet neither the one nor the other of these tendencies has grown into a literary trend as yet. They can rather be defined as features typical of the present stage of development in Punjabi literature—the stage of formation and searchings. The leading place, we may repeat, belongs to realism. This is the reason why the short story has reached its remarkable level. It is not merely a truthful rendering of life; it also accomplishes a synthesis of all that is best in the short story genre in Hindi, Urdu and Bengali and of the finest achievements of West European and Russian masters in this field—especially A. P. Chekhov and A. M. Gorky.

Compared to the magnificent developments in poetry, the story genre, and the novel, drama is poorly represented as yet in Punjabi literature. Like other Indian nationalities, the Punjabis follow the great dramatic traditions of ancient India—they maintain and continue various popular theatre genres. Absence of a professional national theatre, however, has had its inevitable detrimental effect.

The founder of the contemporary Punjabi theatre, and, accordingly, of modern Punjabi drama was Nanda (1892—1966). In 1920, his one-act play (*Dulhan* 'The Bride') was staged, written in 1913. Nanda wrote on problems of morals and daily life; apparently consciously, he eschewed great political and social issues.

In 1923, Gurbakhsh Singh's play *Rajkumari Latika* was published, the conflict of which is distinctly social. In this respect, the play signified a step forward. Other authors also turned to the drama genre, yet none succeeded in producing a play of significance. A real revolution in this sphere came after 1947.

The prose writer Sant Singh Sekhon, mentioned above, came to the fore as one of the outstanding new dramatists since 1940. He has penned several plays touching upon important social problems: *Hartal* ('The Strike'); *Muzara* ('The Lease-Holder'), and on the question always prominent

in his mind—that of the artist's role in life—*Kalakar* ('The Artist'). Other writers are also trying their hand at drama, for example Harcharan Singh (born 1917), Roshan Lal Ahuja (born 1921), Kartar Singh Duggal (born 1917), and others.

Of greater significance are the plays of Balwant Gargi (born 1916).

He entered literature at an early age, as a student, when he composed poems in Urdu and English. Under the influence of Rabindranath Tagore, he turned to his native tongue and essayed to write in different genres. His first one-act plays belong to 1943. Ever since then, for over twenty years now, he has been working in the field of drama. His literary output amounts to eight full-length plays, and thirty five one-act plays. The problems he has been persistently working at are the contemporary Punjabi village, the struggle against cumbersome traditions, the artist's place in society. He was the first Punjabi playwright to dramatise the movement in defence of peace (*Kesro*).

So far, Balwant Gargi is the only Punjabi dramatist staged outside the borders of India,—also in the USSR. The Soviet theatre-goer is acquainted with the plays *Kesro* (1952), staged by the Tadjik drama theatre, and *Sohni and Mahival* (1956) at the "Romen" Gipsy theatre in Moscow.

Kesro is a landmark in the development of Punjabi drama. The title heroine is a young peasant girl, who embodies all the new qualities engendered by life itself. The plot seems to keep within the framework of India's contemporary literary tradition—we may encounter similar plots in the works of numerous authors: an ordinary village, an ordinary usurer, his permanent clients—the villagers he holds in bondage. Yet one man in the village proves stronger than the usurer, and before long the whole village follows him. As regards the scope of business the traditional usurer turns out to be on a par with any practised monopoly capitalist. He has made capital out of the division of the Punjab speculating for grain at the expense of people's calamities. It is only natural that the people's hopes and aspirations, their longing for a peaceful life, concern him not at all. Kesro who has learned to read and write, unmasks his machinations, and thanks to her efforts he is driven

out of the village. Her common-sense, perseverence, and life-wisdom help her overcome all hardships and obstacles and win general respect for herself. Yet she is not an exceptional personality. A woman of the new Punjab, she is also akin to Sohni, Sahiban, Sassi—the heroines of national legends, except that her range of interests has widened beyond compare. Kesro lives for her social interests; it is obvious to her that personal interests can only be defended in defending those of society. It is Gargi's aim in this play to show that the Indian village can emerge from its state of poverty and find a way of development if it rids itself of the exploiters and gets down to its task in unison and mutual understanding. The artistic devices and composition testify to the author's thorough knowledge of European classical and contemporary drama, and his endeavours to make the play correspond to contemporary demands.

Noteworthy and interesting are also the plays by Kartar Singh Duggal. He has written several one-act plays: *Diva bujh gia* ('The Light is Out'), *Pandrah agast* ('August fifteenth'), *Sharanarthi* ('The Refugee'), and others. They were written for radio broadcasts and published in 1955 in a separate volume entitled *Naun natak* ('Nine Plays'). In theme as well as style they are close to his stories, and are examples of contemporary problem plays.

Two plays by Duggal, however, stand apart and deserve special attention: *Mitha pani* ('Sweet Water', 1957), and *Kohkan* ('The Crusher of Mountains', 1958). The theme is the same in both—water means life, it alone brings happiness and joy to man. This is an eternal theme in the East and has brought to life one of the most poetic of legends—that on Farhad and Shirin. No wonder Duggal, in taking up this vital theme, resorted to the legend on Farhad and Shirin, though approaching it differently in either play, creating different heroes and situations.

In *Mitha pani* he tells of the fate of an Indian peasant family that has left the part of the Punjab given over to Pakistan, and has come to settle in India. They abandoned all their property and their land to start life anew on a plot that used to belong to a Moslem peasant who in his turn had abandoned his accustomed place and moved to Pakistan. Jwala Singh, the hero of the play, and his wife Jwali cannot dismiss the memories of their deserted home, and of the sweetness of the water in their old well. Their son Baldev

disapproves of this—the new soil is good too—all it needs is water!

Quite unexpectedly, the daughter of the former landlord Sakina appears—she has strayed from her family and is now forced to go into hiding since she is a Moslem. She begs for shelter. Jwala Singh and Jwali decide to help her—they, too, lost a daughter in their wanderings. Let Sakina be their daughter, especially since their son does not want to stay with them—he has made up his mind to go and work on the hydroelectric power station under construction in Bhakra—Nangal.

Three years elapse. Life is hard for the family. The well has dried up. The usurer pesters Sakina with his attentions.

But there is joy in the family, too—the letters they get from Baldev. He tells them of his work that absorbs him completely. He writes of the joy of labour, of the great place it occupies in his life, of the canal that will run through their village from Bhakra—Nangal.

The canal is finally completed. Jwala Singh's farm is transformed: there is more cattle now, and well-being everywhere. Baldev returns from the construction site. He teaches the villagers to read and write. Sakina and he fall in love with each other.

One fine day, government officials bring back Savitri, Jwala Singh's daughter whom they had considered dead. Jwala will sooner send away his own daughter than Sakina. He is prepared to declare Sakina his son's bride, but the law is inexorable—she has to leave.

Sakina is in tears—she loves Baldev, her Farhad, the crusher of mountains, her Randjha. It is of no avail—the family have to part from the girl.

The emotional tension of the play, the psychological subtlety of each image, the poignance of the issues touched upon, render this play outstanding in Punjabi drama. The personages are live people, the author's contemporaries, people whose world outlook has undergone an enormous evolution. Duggal depicts life in a Punjabi village with amazing realism. The language is excellent—succulent and vivid, close to daily speech.

Though the plot is distinctly, sharply contemporary, its treatment bears evidence of the *kissa* tradition, that can be traced in construction as well as in character drawing.

The influence of tradition is even more strongly felt in the play *Kohkan*, also derived from the legend on Farhad and Shirin.

The time of action is the present, the place—a farm on the eastern fringe of the Punjab, seventy kilometres west of Delhi. The personages are the estate owner Sarkar, his daughter Shirin, Farhad, an engineer, and a gardener and his wife who embody the people. The plot is quite simple.

Shirin has returned from England where she completed her education. Her father tells her of the disastrous division of the country, and of the tragedies experienced by refugees. Sarkar disapproves of this division, he has shown by personal example—as he had promised to Mahatma Ghandi himself—that a Moslem can live peacefully among Hindus. Shirin is delighted with her father's firm principles, and admires him for having planted a magnificent garden on a bare plot of land. "But we need water here," she says. At this point Farhad appears.

The image of Farhad is thus linked with that of water—the people's dream. As the play proceeds these two images interlink more and more. Farhad speaks of the great construction in Bhakra—Nangal, that will provide the peasants with water. He speaks with passionate enthusiasm of the hydro-electric power-station and of the canal:

> A few miles from Bhakra, there is a place,
> Where the Sutlej heaves the hills
> And starts its journey on the plains.
> And there is a village called Bhakra,
> It seems as if the hills have been cut into two
> with a sword,
> And the river has been passed through the gap.

This is where the canal will take its source conducting water to Shirin's garden:

> And to give water to this canal throughout the year,
> We are raising a dam at Bhakra.
> The highest dam of its type in the world,
> Man's knowledge, man's labour,
> Will create another part of the hills at Bhakra.
> Man's dedication and his courage,
> Will create a sea of water at Bhakra
> And the waters of this sea
> Will remove the dirt of ages from our land.
> Every drop of the water in this sea
> Will laugh in the ears
> Will smile in every electric bulb shedding lights.

There will be so much water in the canals of Nangal,
That the Punjabis will drink their full, use it
as they like
And give it to their neighbours, too.

The affinity between Duggal's play and the legend on Farhad and Shirin manifests itself in every aspect. It is not only an inner affinity. The author resorts to a very interesting device: in the second parts of the first and second acts he presents a specific kind of reminiscence of the legend on Farhad and Shirin. In the first part of the act, the personages are the author's contemporaries; in the second part he transfers the action to the distant past. The ancient legend is thus shifted to the present, acquires a contemporary ring.

In the third act there is no such transference. The link between legend and contemporaneity is internal. For love of Shirin, Farhad remains on the farm. Meanwhile, an accident occurs on the construction—the canal Farhad has built bursts its embankments. Farhad hurries away, to the place where he is needed by the people. He does not consider himself entitled to think of personal happiness while many suffer. The play is concluded with the words:

Man's war against nature is ancient,
By digging one canal no Farhad has
fulfilled all his duties.
Those who struggle against stones
Are courageous like the hills,
In this age of humanism,
One has to sacrifice his own case every moment
To ameliorate the land of his neighbours,
At every step you have to become singed in
The heat that is singing strangers.

The parallel plot development on two simultaneous time levels is well chosen here to demonstrate the essential oneness of human fates in past and present. However, Duggal's heroes are not always capable of accepting the new. Their actions are touched by a certain indecisiveness and inconsistency. This is not due to the author's failure to reveal his heroes completely. It is a phenomenon typical of present-day life in the Punjab, weighed down as it is by traditions and contradictions. Duggal has succeeded in reflecting this in his plays, and in demonstrating its typicality.

Duggal's dramatic work, and that of other Punjabi playwrights, shows an ability on the authors' part to respond to the most vital problems of the present, and a capacity for broad generalisations. A national professional theatre will without doubt further the development of Punjabi drama.

THE VOICE OF THE EPOCH

In the fourties, poetry continued developing alongside prose. And as in prose, the democratic line remained prominent. The traditions of Chatrik found ever new followers.

One of them was Mohan Singh (born 1905). Taking his start from the traditional themes and artistic forms of Punjabi poetry, he soon fell under the influence of classical Persian poetry, and finally created a style of his own, distinguished by a great variety and pliability of aesthetic and linguistic devices. Impregnated with romantic motives, his poetry is integrated in the life of the Punjab, of his people. He is acutely aware of social inequality, particularly blatant under colonial conditions.

The beauty of his native land and his people unfold before Mohan Singh's poetic eye, but the people suffer: neither beauty, nor perfection, nor knowledge can give happiness under prevailing conditions: the money bag dominates the world, and decides what is exquisite. The poet cannot accept this, and expresses his protest by showing the true beauty—physical and spiritual—inherent in the simple people.

To them belong the poet's hopes which is particularly vividly expressed in the poem *Pothohar kuri* ('The Girl from Pothohar').

> Even today, when the water of grief,
> The water of sorrows, troubles and tears,
> Starts to rise and reaches my middle,
> Rises to my neck, to my head,
> When, foaming, removing my feet from
> the ground it rises,
> With a load of straw on her head,
> Walking with a rare grace,
> Moving from side to side,
> Calling me, saying "May you live long my brother,"
> She comes and catches me by the arm,

By the arm, which is surrounded by waves of sorrow.
And she pulls me out of the flood,
The maiden of Pothohar.

The image of a girl leading the poet to the right path recurs in many of Mohan Singh's poems, symbolising the voice of his conscience. This is to some extent in keeping with an ancient tradition in Punjabi poetry, where the woman embodies the creative, active essence. Heer, Sassi, Sahiban—these are the predecessors of the girl from Pothohar.

After 1947, Mohan Singh's poetry was enriched by new traits. The country's division aggravated its social contradictions, while American aggression in Korea made it clear to the whole world that imperialism may plunge mankind into a new destructive war. The struggle for peace has thus become the immediate need of every human being. The theme of peace rings outloud in Punjabi poetry.

Like many other poets, Mohan Singh lays great emphasis on this theme. In his poetry, it merges with severe criticism of the very foundations of capitalist society as the source of wars. Yet there is not a shadow of pessimism in his verses. On the contrary, they radiate assurance in the future, optimism. He is aware that the real, history-making power lies in the people. They alone are capable of preventing a war.

Millions of red bangles (symbols of a maiden's recent marriage) cracked,
Millions of brides lost their husbands;
Smiling children, the fruits (of life)
Were burnt to cinders by the two world wars.
Now we are not prepared to throw
This garden into the furnace of a third war.

And further:

The caravan of peace starts marching,
The whole world is with it,
The workers and peasants are with it.

Mohan Singh is not only a poet, but also the author of many stories, and a journalist and teacher as well. Since 1938, he has been publishing a journal *Panj darya* which is a source of inspiration for realistic, progressive literature. Generally speaking, the participation of poets in the evolution of prose genres and literary criticism is a typical feature of recent Punjabi literature.

In the vanguard of contemporary Punjabi literature is also the poetess Amrita Pritam. Although her first publication belongs to 1935, her blossoming period falls to the late forties. The period between 1935 and 1947 may be called her formative period. She had started out with religious love lyrics, but her evolution led her to a realisation of the poet's duty to his people. Under the impact of World War Two she revised many of her views, and the division of the Punjab came as a terrible shock to her. Her response was the poem *Akhan Waris Shah nun* ('Invocation to Waris Shah'), which vividly reflects the sentiments and experiences of a Punjabi woman.

> Today I call upon Waris Shah
> To get up from the grave and speak
> And request him to open another page of the book of love.
> One daughter of the Punjab had cried
> And you had keened at her sorrow.
> Today thousands of crying daughters,
> Call upon you, o, Waris Shah,
> O you, the sympathiser of wounded in the heart,
> Arise and see your Punjab.
> The forest is full of dead bodies
> And Chenab is full of blood.
> Someone has mixed poison with
> the water of the five rivers
> And that water has spread over the land.

In twenty-six lines she paints the picture of her country ravaged by fratricidal massacre. The poem spread far and wide—it was copied by hand in hundreds and thousands of copies, and memorised. Amrita Pritam became the voice of the Punjab, expressing the tragedy of millions of families in highly artistic terms.

The metre of the poem is close to that of the *kissa*. It is addressed to the XVIII century poet Waris Shah whose *kissa* on Heer is known throughout the Punjab. Amrita Pritam knows the Punjabi literary and folklore tradition and uses masterfully its wealth of forms and expressive devices, but directs them towards contemporary aims.

> My voice should become
> The voice of the world!

she exclaims in the poem *Main geet likhdi haan* ('I Write Songs').

One of her leading themes is the position of the woman. The woman bears the brunt of oppression in colonial India. Her fate demonstrates how contradictions of various kinds converge in the country. The poetess devotes her talent to the struggle against these contradictions, and from it springs the deep humanism of her poetry.

Emotion born out of life itself predominates in her poetry. Therefore, outward adornment is immaterial to her. In this respect she is never bound by tradition.

Amrita Pritam is above all a poetess. However, she is also authoress of six novels, three collections of stories, four literary investigations, and three books of memoirs comprising reminiscences and correspondence.

The problem matter of the novels is similar to that of her poetry. The novels *Doctor Dev*, *Pinjra* ('Prison'), *Alhna* ('The Nest'), and others deal with the position of the middle-class woman, but they also touch upon the problem of the artist's, the writer's, the intellectual's place in society. Her great merit is her exquisitely poetic language. A somewhat narrow scope of problem matter accounts for her comparatively limited success as a prose writer.

Mention should be made of two of Amrita Pritam's books on Punjabi national art: *Mauli te mehndi* ('Ribbons and Colours', 1955), and *Punjab di avaz* ('The Voice of the Punjab', 1952). She sees the people as the fount and creator of all that is beautiful. This is why in her collection of poems *Patthar gitte* ('Stones and Pebbles', 1945) she says that the class of exploiters is hostile to culture, hostile to the noble ideas that have always inspired the great minds, and among these great ones she mentions in the first place Lenin and Nanak.

The literary movement represented by the writings of Mohan Singh and Amrita Pritam has a large number of followers, among them some outstanding poets and prose writers—Prabhjot Kaur, Bawa Balwant, Santokh Singh, Piara Singh Sehrai, Ajaib Chitrakar, Sukhbir, Haribhajan Singh, Tera Singh Chann and others. Each of them has his own poetic handwriting, yet what they have in common—a democratic world outlook, historical comprehension, social aims—is important enough for critics to group them together as *pragativad*, i. e., "progressive".

The *pragativad*, dominating in Punjabi literature today, has put an end to this literature's seclusion, and has led it upon the literary arena not only of all India, but of the world. This is its main significant trait, in this lies its great merit.

The emergence of such a trend is not fortuitous. Under the conditions prevalent in India today, Socialism is no longer an academic notion. It has become the ideal of every thinking person, the ideal instinctively accepted by the peasant, the worker, any toiler, the ideal extolled and dreamed of by Punjabi poets and prose writers. The writers discern the slightest symptoms of new attitudes in human relations, as can be seen, for example, in the work of Nawtej Singh (born 1923), young author of three collections of stories: *Des vapasi* ('Return to the Motherland', 1955), *Navin rut* ('New Climate', 1959), *Basmati di mahik* ('The Fragrance of Rice', 1960).

One of his best stories is *Navin rut*. It tells of peasants ploughing and sowing the field of one of the villagers who was arrested for political activities. They are doing it in the name of solidarity: they share his ideas, approve of his activities. The hero of Nawtej's choice is the toiler, the fighter, who is not exceptional but a common man from the people.

The young author poses a question: did the people struggle for their national independence to gain police persecution and poverty? Can the people reconcile themselves to the capitalist order strangling man, as it did before? (*Manukh de pio*—'The Fathers of Man', 1950). He sounds the alarm as he observes the frantic attempts on the part of the colonialists to maintain their position in the countries of Asia, be it at the cost of thousands of human lives (*Malaya kuri de nam chitthi*—'A Letter to a Malayan Girl', 1952). Nawtej Singh strives to prove to his reader that the only possible wayout for mankind in general, thus naturally, for the Indian people, and the Punjabi people as well—is the way of Socialism. He does not indulge in illusions—it is a long and hard way, and the first step must be the establishment of stable peace on earth, a decisive struggle against the threat of war. This idea absorbs him so completely, that at times when he starts on a story he turns it into a passionate appeal. This applies, for example, to the miniature *Kahanian di rakhi lai* ('Protect

the Stories', 1950), where the peace theme merges with the author's reflections on the importance of literature under contemporary conditions, and with other vital issues of Indian life today.

Socialism has become the guiding idea in the poetry of Bawa Balwant (born 1915). His writing shows that it has entered Punjabi literature organically. Basing himself on Indian tradition, cherishing the cultural heritage of the past, he also values the whole of world culture. Bawa Balwant's poetry calls to active struggle with life's contradictions, the positive ideal contained in it is that of a new kind of social relations. In this lies the reason for its broad popularity among his Punjabi readers.

Bawa Balwant's latest collections—*Bandargah* ('The Harbour', 1951), and *Sugandh samir* ('Fragrant Wind', 1959) aroused particular interest. The former ends with a lyrical poem *Samajvad* ('Socialism'), the significance of which is selfevident. To the poet socialism is the harbour for which life's ship is bound.

The imagery of the poem is interesting. While applying the images long since traditional in Punjabi poetry, Bawa Balwant applies them to new notions, to historical events and historical personages. Imperialism is expressed by maharani; the Russian Revolution is a birthday; Puran Mard (compare Puran Bhagat), i. e., the perfect man, stands for Lenin; divanah, i. e., the demented—are Hitler and Mussolini.

In the collection *Sugandh samir* intimately lyrical motives are intertwined with broad historical generalisations. In the chapter *Eternal Spring*, Bawa Balwant sings of the grandeur of toil, of the people's creative genius, that is eternally alive breaking its way through the most formidable stone walls, turning the desert into blooming gardens. Dead stones, crumbled temples rediscovered by archeologists help the poet not only to comprehend the past, but also to sense the future. He is firmly convinced that spring will come to all, in the face of the forces that are trying to stay its advent.

> In the battle-field,
> There are thousands of different tricks,
> Every day new horrible arms are born,
> Only for the sake of profit,
> The death of innocents,

Earns huge profits of interest,
Delectable dishes of rent.
This is the palace of selfishness.

The same problem matter runs through the poetry of Pritam Singh Safir (born 1916), although his genre is mainly intimate lyrical poetry. His book of verse *Adi Jugadi* ('Beginning and Eternity', 1957) expresses the poet's conception of the history of mankind that must be crowned, he claims, with the triumph of humanism, with the materialisation of all possibilities latent in human reason. He challenges his contemporary to action. Deeds, active interference in the course of history can alone further social progress. Man must break out of stagnation and rise above those circumstances, that, in the poet's view, prevent him from realising his duty before the people and before history.

Break the threads,
Do not drop one tear,
Break the taps of temptation
And rise high.

The struggle for the future, for peace unbroken by wars, peace without capitalist slavery, without the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, demands this.

Nagasaki and Hiroshima,
Raise the cry of revolution
and cry for help.
The difference between visible and invisible,
Today is far away from Hasrat
He is compelled to think of a weapon
Stronger than atom and hydrogen bombs.

. . . .

In the inner heart of humanity,
There is the shining light of thousands of worlds
A changing taste has its place there,
It can change into whatever it wishes to be.
In the temple of this star,
Atoms have become the pearls of the start of peace.
They should not end like
Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

Life-ascerting optimism is characteristic of another poet—Gurcharan Singh Rampuri (born 1930). His poems, published in the volumes *Kanakan di khushbo* ('The Smell of Wheat', 1953), and *Kaul karar* ('The Oath', 1960), are dedicated to the most urgent problem of the present. His

social stance is clearly defined. To him, poetry is "stronger than a bayonet", "Our pen brings destruction to the enemies!"

Who are his enemies? In the first place, the "Limited Company", the "maneaters, Mac Arthur's bosses", those advocating the atomic weapon, the millionairs. Against them he wants to protect Life.

(We are) marching forward
To carry the cortege of this exploitation,
You set fire to this smiling garden,
You burn the flight of the swing, the beauty of the spring.
(We are) marching to end the business of blood.
Our tomorrow is with the flourishing construction.
What gun is pointing towards our Taj?
Who is caught by the madness to burn Paris?
(We are) marching to expose these sinners.

This is the aim Gurcharan Singh holds up to his readers. Only by common effort can it be attained.

O Sailor, storm is fast approaching,
(But) your arms are silent,
Apart from your own strength,
Do not look for the help of anyone else.
Today beauty and love are both helpless,
But do not look for any signs
Except those made by the eyes.
The clouds of storm blacken the sky,
It is a moonless night,
Do not look for stars
To light your way.
Even to end this age of exploitation
Do not look for any help except from unity.

And along with this urge for unity he also strèsses eternity of the noble idea of international solidarity embodied for him in the concrete deeds of a fighter—Patrice Lumumba.

O blackskinned Sun,
Although you have gone away from our eyes,
But your light has not been put out,
On the broad shelf of the sky, only your light twinkling
Borrowing light from you, many Moons
Are spreading light on this broad Earth
Although a bayonet has broken the thread of
The fire of thought they could put out.
You are that book,

After reading which,
Even skeletons remove all signs of oppression,
People worship the words of a martyr.
This university is your life,
Thousands come to study here.
A beacon is alight and thousands
Come here to get a light
For the torches of their courage,
Which were going out.

These are the salient sentiments and thoughts in Punjabi poetry today, the poetry of the nineteen sixties.

It must be borne in mind, however, that Punjabi literature is developing in a country where bourgeois relations are growing and consolidating themselves, where the ideological expansion of the imperialist powers, especially of the U.S.A and Britain, is exerting its destructive influence upon all cultural processes. Developing bourgeois relationships inevitably engender individualistic moods, a tendency to withdraw from the broad problems of life into the narrow world of personal experience. Thus, various literary tendencies spring up, that advocate apolitical attitudes, and confine the writer's responsibility to himself alone. Writers following these trends are indifferent to the people and their problems, claiming that the writer's sole task is perfection of form.

Among these tendings, that of *prayogvad* (Experimentalism) should be singled out. It first appeared in literature in Hindi, under the influence of West-European and American decadent tendencies. Its adherents consider that the essence of creative writing lies in formal experimentation, they stress the purely personal, even individualistic nature of the creative process, denying the existence of humanism and social significance in literature. Despite the support of reactionary forces both inside and outside the country, this trend holds little sway in Punjabi literature.

The first book of poetry that may be referred to *prayogvad* appeared in 1959. It is a collection of verses by Sukhpalvir Singh *Hayati de some* ('Sources of Life'). What this poetry represents can be judged by the poem *Karfiu ton pahilan* ('Before Curfew Time').

A sip of coffee, a kiss of your lips,
The ring of the telephone, smells of promise,
The patter of feet carries in it the laughter
of clinging

A small piece of cloth,
Is still slipping off the nude body.
The hotel room is very well decorated,
This is the time for flowers to open in the garden;
Let us walk arm in arm, for a while,
After ten the curfew time starts.

Spiritual devastation, escape from the hardships of life into the sphere of erotic relations, very dubious ones at that, reverberate through these lines. Even in referring to great and generally recognised human achievements, such as the sputnik, poets like Sukhpalvir Singh contrive to introduce obscure and muddle symbols.

Our age—the age of the sputnik
The age of dark night.
In the flicker of the television screen
I see your image.
One moment—and no more
Shall I see you.

Such poets are, however, few. They are outside the mainstream of Punjabi poetry.

Such sentiments are more widely current in Punjabi poetry in Pakistan, which seems to us not fortuitous. Social contradictions, the country's prolonged participation in the U.S. political actions in Asia, the danger of being involved in a military clash—all this has evoked in many writers and poets the longing to escape inexorable, menacing reality. Munir Niyazi, for example, captures in his poems an atmosphere so oppressive that it is an effort for man to exist in it. The only link between man and man is, in the poet's view, a common fear. This can be exemplified by a poem from the collection *A Night of Wanderings*:

To live in this world
You must do something
Float on canals filled with blood
The blood that runs through your veins
And abandon yourself to fear,
When in the silence, in the dead of night
A door creaks wistfully.
Each day brings a new grave
For you to sigh over.

Or:

Red splashes appear to me on walls
Behind the threshold at midnight the wail of witches
Round the corner like the hissing of snakes

Secret love's whispers and strangled laughter
From the city outskirts
Are wafted like sombre scent
Clouds of rotten smells
The cries of nightwatchmen
Lead off to the graveyard.

Alienation, fear, general despair must be overcome, poets cannot find as yet the path leading from man to man. Anam Adib paints the following scene from city life:

The air is aflame—it stifles your breath!
Through the streets the snake-charmer drags his feet
Charming his snake, getting a coin here, a coin there.
Drags the hopelessness of life,
Twists his beloved into a knot,
Silently, drags himself on.
Do I know his thoughts?
My heart is burnt up by its own flame,
My heart gives out its own sighs.
Silently, he drags his feet
From street to street, the charmer of snakes.

This sombre atmosphere, the estrangement among people, are born of individualistic psychology which is the inseparable companion of bourgeois ideology. However, different notes resound in Punjabi of Pakistan as well—attempts to appeal to human dignity. Muhammed Azim Bhatti, whose poetry reveals a certain kinship with that of Munir Niyazi and Anam Adib, reminds his reader in the poem *Dry Leaves*, that a different attitude to life should be sought.

The heat is merciless.
Its fiery breath
Drains all life
From arid leaves.
They break
From drooping twigs
And flutter to the ground.

Yet theirs is a lighter lot than ours—
Unburdened by consciousness
Silently they die.
We are not dry leaves!
We are humans—
Endowed with reason and feeling,
We must not die thus!

There are also others who simply close their eyes to social life, and to the problems confronting mankind under

contemporary conditions. They are filling their poetry with thoughtless trivialities, e. g. the following verse by Zafar Iqbal:

Swiftly changing into
Brand-new boots,
Feeling the tender
Callous heel,
Donning a new robe
You hurry
To launch out first
As the girls go tripping
On their way to school
You trail them.

These sentiments of Punjabi poetry of Pakistan are counterbalanced by fearless verses calling for peace, freedom and democracy. Among their highest achievements are the poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz who writes in Urdu. While the followers of modernism find in themselves barely enough strength to moan and weep, the progressive poets of Pakistan courageously proclaiming the truth on life's bitter pain, declare their hope, calling to new struggle for the happiness of their native country. In a poem entitled *We Die on Dark Roads*, dedicated to the American patriots Ethel and Julius Rozenberg, Faiz writes:

And others, their ardour inspired by passion for you
Will take up the banner you held with devotion so true.
The path will be brighter, and straighter their new-trodden way,
Your suffering, your death and your love they will never betray.
Forever our glorious country, our love and our pride
We shall praise and extol. And these heroes shall guide
Our battle, whose path led through darkness and night.

* * *

The literature of the Punjabi people has been living for twelve centuries. Throughout its history it has not only been the mirror of its people's life, but also a means of rallying the people in their struggle for a better future, their weapon. In many respects, this literature has been unfortunate. The Punjab has always been the scene of bitter battles either against foreign invaders, or against native oppressors. With the arrival of the British, a dark period set in. Yet the people resisted the foreign invaders, and

little by little they retrieved what they had lost, and once more their voice rang out. The growing national-liberation movement, and the wakening self-consciousness of the people, infused new energy into literature. The leading part was played by the democratic forces within the national-liberation movement in the Punjab. They were the fertile soil on which literature developed. From these forces Punjabi literature derived its romantic purposefulness, its concreteness, its realism.

The tragic events connected with the country's division cast a dark shadow upon the life of the Punjabi people. The mournful sounds running through the writing of Punjabi poets and writers are accompanied by notes of wrath against those who provoked fratricide and made a fortune out of it. If writers cherished another feeling too—that of optimism, there is nothing strange about it. Their optimism springs from the implementation of a great dream, the dream of independence.

A new life has come to the Punjab's hills and plains, and literature has blossomed forth anew. It draws from the fount of traditions inherited from the past, and from all that is best in the literatures of other Indian peoples, and from friendly contact with progressive literatures of other countries.

Since 1947, Punjabi literature was quickened in its development by the activity of various literary organisations, of which the most important role belongs to the Department of Language attached to the government of the State of Punjab, the Academy of Punjabi Language and Literature, and the Central Union of Punjabi wirters. On their initiative, and on that of other organisations, annual conferences are held, and gatherings of Punjabi writers and representatives of other cultural spheres. These gatherings are also attended by writers of Pakistan, and those writing in Urdu and Hindi. The conferences adopt no binding decrees, but their work, and the seminars, and symposiums held in connection with conferences, contribute greatly to the development of literature. An event of great importance was the programme adopted at the V All-India Conference of Punjabi writers held in December 1961.

Gatherings of this kind enjoy wide popularity and frequently rally enormous numbers of listeners. When the journal *Prit lari* celebrated its twenty fifth anniversary,

for example, more than five thousand people were present, mainly peasants, craftsmen and workers. Equally popular are the *Kavidarbars*, or poets' competitions, and various cultural programmes with dramatic performances, musical items, and dancing. All this strengthens the ties between writers and poets and the people.

Before 1947, Punjabi writers had but casual contact with writers of other countries of the world. It was basically confined to translations. Now such contacts are wide and representative. Punjabi men of letters participate actively in the peace movement in committees for the solidarity of the countries of Asia and Africa, in various meetings with representatives of all countries of the world. This intercourse with writers of the world has had a beneficial effect upon Punjabi literature.

Punjabi writers study the treasures of world literature, also devoting attention to the achievements of national literatures in the Soviet Union. Translations of Soviet writers, especially the works of M. Gorky, M. Sholokhov, N. Ostrovsky, B. Lavrenyov, S. Antonov, S. Ayni, A. Mukhtar, Mirso Tursun-zadeh, Zulfiya and others find a broad reading public in the Punjab.

Literature occupies an important place in the life of the Punjabi people. It expresses their ardent desire to turn their country—on either side of the border—into a land of peace and prosperity. This is why Punjabi writers resist the penetration into their literature of anti-popular, reactionary influences emanating from the enemies of peace and democracy, from those who are striving to maintain the influence of nationalism. Defending humanism and realism in literature, the Punjabi writers and poets dedicate themselves to the service of their people who are struggling for a new life, peace and happiness.

Игорь Дмитриевич
Серебряков

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