Aspects of Punjabi Literature HARBANS SINGH

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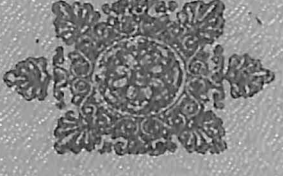

Harbans Singh

ASPECTS OF PUNJABI LITERATURE

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by

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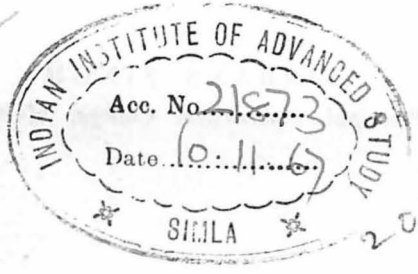
BAWA PUBLISHING HOUSE

FEROZEPORE CANTT



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TO THE MEMORY
OF MY REVERED FATHER

Contents

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H. S.

I

Trends in Modern Punjabi Literature

MOHAN SINGH, the poet, occupies the central place in Punjabi letters today. One of his recent collections of verse was published under the title *Kach Sach* (Illusion and Reality). The poems, dealing with themes such as love and romance, he placed in the first category and those dealing with social inequality and injustice in the second. This growing faith in the sovereignty of social values is the predominant trait of modern Punjabi literature and almost all eminent writers today share in this newly awakened interest in contemporary environment.

Until about three decades ago, the mould was severely conventional admitting of no new ideas and forms. The writers who had derived their inspiration from the religious renaissance at the beginning of the century set the pattern of literary writing. The religious poetry of Guru Nanak, who, in the 15th century, used Punjabi as a poetic medium, mysticism—as represented by the Muslim Sufi poets—and romantic lore consisting of love tales and folksongs, were the main ingredients of literary tradition in the Punjab and these remained the guiding principles of all creative function till recently. Even Mohan Singh in his earlier verse was not free from this traditional influence. His first collection of poems *Sawe*

Pattar (Green Leaves), published in 1936, is in spirit closer to the old school than to his own later work. Mohan Singh had undoubtedly devised new verse patterns and a distinctively individual style, but the dominant note of the same self-indulgent romanticism was apparent.

Mohan Singh has since developed consistently and undergone a complete spiritual and intellectual regeneration. With him has changed the tone and substance of Punjabi literature. The process was quickened by a fast shifting political scene conditioned by events like World War II, the Congress movement, national emancipation and the attendant upheavals in the Punjab. A whole generation of young writers felt the impact of these happenings and a new social awareness coloured their outlook and vision. Most of them were well versed in Western learning—Sant Singh Sekhon, Gopal Singh Dardi, Kartar Singh Duggal, Kulwant Singh Virk and Surinder Singh Narula all having studied formally for a Master's degree in English literature—and this contact with European thought and trends influenced their minds. Some of them were particularly responsive to the ideas of Marx and Freud.

Mohan Singh, whose early love poetry is characterized by exuberant lyricism, in one of his later poems, says:

How does it matter
If unfulfilled remains my love?

Traversing the oft-beaten path
Torn are the feet of Time.
The heavens are tired of endless journeying,
And tired are the day and the night.

Countless stars in ceaseless motion
Have finally fallen apart.
Wearied are the mountain-sides;
Wearied the sorrowing woods,
Lying in deep trance
And performing single-legged penance.

The oceans have given birth to many an island,
The earth to lakes and valleys.
From the moth to the star,
The whole universe
Wails in pangs of birth and death.
Adam's son has been given to too much slumbering;
His daughter to procreation.
They are both weary of brain-racking . . .
Without thought they would be lost.
Non-violence has wasted itself away;
So has violence.
Impenetrable is the pall of ignorance;
Invisible the dawn of light.

Unfulfilled remains the thought;
Unfulfilled the heart.
Unfulfilled remains faith;
Unfulfilled is faithlessness.
What does it matter
If unfulfilled remains my love?

This poem belongs to the middle stage of Mohan Singh's poetic evolution and was published under the title *Adhwate* (Midway), which lent its name to the whole collection of poems written during this period. Mohan Singh is trying to interpret his personal sense of disappointment in terms of the larger perspective of human affairs and existence. In his latest poetry he has gone a stage further and affirms that the collective well-being of the whole of society is the essential condition of personal happiness.

The same process of inner development characterizes another distinguished contemporary poet, Amrita Pritam. Twenty years ago she was writing didactic verse, emphasizing human virtues such as mercy, honour, charity and unselfishness

and preaching love of the Punjabi language and letters. Through themes like India's freedom movement and national unity, she has now come to a subtler realization of the significance of social and economic forces in the domain of human affairs. In her love poetry, which forms a substantial portion of her total verse, she is ever conscious of the factors which thwart fulfilment. She has written songs about peasants and workers which recapture the spirit, spontaneity and rhythm of folklore.

Pritam Singh Safeer's poetry has a unique significance in Punjabi literature. It is marked by a deeply intellectual tone and concentrated thought patterns. Safeer's commitment to social themes is not as decisive as Mohan Singh's or Amrita Pritam's. His intellectual consciousness and individual philosophic outlook bestow upon him a more comprehensive and integrated vision. He, of course, is not altogether oblivious of the social purpose. In his poem *Hastinapur* he foresees the inevitability of the change that would one day 'illumine the mud-huts'.

The same elements of intellect and realism pervade modern Punjabi fiction. Romantic, fanciful and religious stories are no longer the vogue. This change was brought about by Sant Singh Sekhon, who charged the medium with the sharp polarities of ideas. His short stories portrayed life in faithful and minute detail and were remarkable for their social content and psychological interest. His novel *Lahu Mitti* (Blood and Soil) is the story of a Punjabi peasant, with a background of vast agricultural and economic

changes. Sant Singh Sekhon, who also writes verse and drama, has by his perceptive and informed criticism guided literary taste and implanted new values and standards.

Surinder Singh Narula is the most consistent exponent of these new trends in the Punjabi novel. His first novel *Peo Puttar* (Father and Son), which was accepted as a major work of fiction, was the story of the city of Amritsar in its different phases coinciding with successive religious and political movements in the Punjab. *Rang Mahal* is the story of a middle class family, with a constant subtle accent on the social background.

Nili Bar is an historical novel set in the West Punjab of the colonization period. It reproduces with sympathy and sensitiveness the life of the tribes living between the Chenab and the Jhelum and foreshadows the suffering and exploitation they would be subjected to by local aristocracy aided by the foreign rulers under the new schemes of development. The mutual feuds of the aristocratic families, their intrigues and foibles are deeply probed into. Surinder Singh Narula's novel *Lok Dushman* depicts the struggle between landlordism and peasantry in PEPSU, a designation which, after Independence, represented a short-lived Indian State comprising the territories of former Princely rulers of the Punjab.

Nanak Singh, who has written more novels in Punjabi than any other writer and who enjoys great popularity, represents the traditional values of novel-writing. His chief concern is to tell the story and he does that with considerable ease.

He is wedded to no particular ideology and has no political axe to grind. He has not, however, isolated himself completely from contemporary life and its problems. He has written novels giving ideas about religious and social reform (*Chitta Lahu* and *Matreyi Maan*) and has built up stories round themes like the partition of the Punjab (*Kalakar* and *Manjhdhar*). But his inspiration is primarily romantic and his instincts essentially imaginative and idealistic.

Narindarpal Singh is another novelist who cares more for the story than any premeditated doctrine. He has written some half a dozen engrossing tales. He has a vivid historical imagination and excels in resurrecting the scenes and the spirit of days gone by. His forthcoming novel *Ikk Sarkar Bajhon*, dealing with the Anglo-Sikh wars of mid-nineteenth century, has aroused much eager expectation.

Like Surinder Singh Narula, Jaswant Singh Kanwal uses the novel for a social *exposé* of human problems and situations and is, in this sense, a representative of the current trends. He does not have the former's intellectual finesse, but his direct and intimate experience of village life is his great advantage. His novels have a rural setting which he exploits with sufficient self-assurance and skill.

With I. C. Nanda begins the modern phase of Punjabi drama. Instead of old legends and mythological tales on which playwrights before him had based their dramas, he found his themes in the daily life around him. His targets were the prevailing evils in society which

he highlighted in his plays with the object of reform. This social awareness acquired a firm, dialectical basis in Sant Singh Sekhon and Balwant Gargi.

Balwant Gargi is the most prolific and accomplished Punjabi playwright today. The theatre is his great passion and what especially marks his plays out from the work of his contemporaries is his unerring instinct for the requirements of the stage. Another quality for which his plays have often been applauded is his mastery of the language spoken in the neighbourhood of his native Bhatinda. His dialogues are always apt and crisp.

Roshan Lal Ahuja, Harcharan Singh, Amrik Singh and Gurdial Singh Phul are other prominent playwrights. Roshan Lal Ahuja has achieved his best success in the historical play. Amrik Singh, whose plays are alive with a progressive social conscience, has a natural sense of the craft. He brings a vigorous and acutely sensitive mind to the working out of the dramatic values of his themes. For their technical accomplishment alone, some of his plays will take precedence in the literature of the drama in Punjabi. Kartar Singh Duggal, well known as a writer of short stories, is the author of some lively plays dealing with contemporary topics. Gurdial Singh Khosla and Balwant Singh Bawa are among those who have made efforts to activate the Punjabi theatre. The former has written a few plays, too.

On the whole, Punjabi drama is still in an undeveloped state and lags behind other literary forms. Most of the plays lack real human passion

and intensity. They are either too abstract—bare ratiocinative expositions of some modern social maxims—or too sentimental. The plots are indifferently made: the characters are no more than pithless, incipient human models.

Partition is the theme which inevitably recurs in Punjabi literature today. Amrita Pritam in her poetry has rendered the tragedy of the Punjab happenings with poignant tenderness and effect. She pours out the agony of her wounded soul into a long ode addressed to Warris Shah, author of the immortal Punjabi romance *Heer Ranjha.* Warris is taken to be the symbol of harmony and unity, and a tale describing incidents from the day of Indian emancipation is recounted to him. It first offers him felicitations on the dawn of independence in the country and proceeds to relate the subsequent sorrowful events in the two Punjabs. In another poem *Majbur*, the son of an abducted woman expresses his sense of disgust and revulsion in accents of deep anguish and power. Says he:

I'm also of humankind . . .
I'm the sign of that injury,
The symbol of that accident,
Which, in the clash of changing times,
Inevitably hit my mother's forehead.

I'm the curse
That lies upon man today.
I came into being
When the sun had been quenched
And the moon darkened.

I'm the scar of a wound;
The abuse that attaches to my mother's body;
The weight of inhumanity
That my mother involuntarily held up for months.
My mother's nostrils were burning
With the stench from within.

Who can guess
How difficult it is
To nurse barbarity in one's belly;
To consume the body and burn the bones?
I'm the fruit of that season
When the berries of independence were coming into blossom.

But Amrita has not lost her vision of faith and optimism which is reaffirmed in her novels *Doctor Dev* and *Pinjar*. Kulwant Singh Virk and Kartar Singh Duggal have also written some intensely moving stories about the division of the Punjab and the consequent upheaval in human affairs.

Another characteristic of the modern phase of Punjabi literature is a return to ideas of form and restraint. A few years ago when Punjabi literature was breaking away from the old tradition, a general licence to say what one pleased and to say it in the manner one liked was considered the badge of modernity. Chaos in literary values was the natural result. Subjects like sex began to be dealt with in a most outspoken way. Poetry and other literary forms lost all sense of construction. But there was soon a reaction against these trends and today Punjabi literature follows in the main a cultured and regulated pattern.

A tendency to assessment is another apparent feature. There has never been such abundance of critical writing in Punjabi. The process has been aided by some good literary journals and the introduction of a Master's degree in Punjabi literature at the Panjab University. Mohan Singh publishes his own magazine, *Panj Darya*. The Language Department of the Punjab Government

has a periodical, *Punjabi Duniya*, devoted to research in Punjabi literature. Amrita Pritam's *Arsee;* Pritam Singh Chahal's *Jiwan Preeti;* Jiwan Singh's *Sahitya Samachar;* Punjabi Sahitya Akademi's *Alochna; Punjabi Sahitya; Chetna* and *Kavita* are a few of the other well-known journals. Some university scholars have also made notable contributions to the study and criticism of Punjabi literature. Among them may be mentioned Attar Singh, Diwan Singh, Gopal Singh Dardi, Harnam Singh Shan, Kirpal Singh Kasel, Parmindar Singh and Gurcharan Singh. Professor Pritam Singh has done much pioneering and useful work in the field of research. His criticisms are marked by sober judgment and immaculate taste and scholarship. Scholarly research is also the domain of Piara Singh Padam and Shamsher Singh Ashok. Dr Mohan Singh Diwana, who for many years was Head of the Punjabi Department at Panjab University, wrote in English the first history of Punjabi literature. This book has since proved the basis of several other works on the subject and deeply influenced the course of Punjabi literary criticism.

With his first published work, Attar Singh has established himself as a penetrating and well-equipped critic and his position today is next only to Sant Singh Sekhon's. His work has a philosophical unity which is something sadly lacking in modern Punjabi criticism. Much of the writing in this *genre* has a tendency to pointless prolixity, and well-fed, serious-looking tomes turn out, on scrutiny, to be no more than mere *nugae.*

It is difficult to distinguish the permanent from the ephemeral in the large mass of Punjabi writing that is being produced today: a large number of publishers are kept busy all the year round and they still receive more material than they can fit into their annual schedule. Emphasis on social and intellectual elements sterilizes the inspiration in the case of some writers. Their vision lacks coherence, for this quality is absent from the society they seek to portray. The process of creation in which the personal impressions passing through the regenerating fire of imagination gain significance and communicability seldom takes place. This balance between individual and public values achieved so successfully in the last generation by authors like Bhai Vir Singh is generally lacking in present-day writers.

II

Punjabi Poetry: Its Roots and Present-Day Tendencies

Here are vast expanses free,
Here is a joyous impulse flooding the hearts of men,
Here the mountains melt in love.
Here is a celestial disembodied song
Echoing in the field and the meadow.

THUS sang Puran Singh, Punjab's ardent and inspired bard, of the beauty and romance of the Land of the Five Rivers.

Puran Singh was well versed in Western lore, especially the work of Walt Whitman from whom he borrowed his *vers libre* which he introduced in Punjabi poetry. He had studied science at a Japanese university. A chemist by profession, he was irresistibly overwhelmed by the vitality and picturesqueness of his native Punjab. How spontaneous was Nature's impact on simple, responsive souls of farmers, cowherds and curd-churning maids can well be seen in the rich and variegated treasure of folk poetry in Punjabi.

Folklore, inspired by the romantic character of the people living in close proximity with a happy, bountiful Nature, is a vital and most genuine component of the poetic tradition in the Punjab. Allied to it is the vast store of love legends woven round real or imaginary characters which have an inexhaustible appeal. These have been resurrected again and again by poets of successive generations and retold every time in

a fresh poetic idiom. These songs and tales are a perennial source of joy for the Punjab's population, at work or at play.

This folk consciousness has taken such a powerful hold of the Punjabi genius that it has been fashioning exquisite, anonymous verse right up to modern times. There are songs about the two world wars which have the natural and spontaneous tone of real folksong. The newly married young woman, whose husband has gone away to serve in the army, tauntingly asks his British masters:

Who told you, O Ferringi (Englishman),
That the married ones ever won battles?

Wishing her loved husband to be returned home, she suggests:

Take away the unmarried ones to the war, O Ferringi,
For then you would assuredly win.

Religious verse represents another distinctive strand in the poetry of the Punjab. It brought to the Punjabi language a cultured form of expression and revealed its literary and poetic possibilities. Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, chose the spoken language of the people as a medium for rendering religious thought and feeling. His poetry is characterized by a deep mystic ardour, vivid natural imagery and verbal felicity. His successors wrote poetry in the same tradition and their work along with Guru Nanak's forms the bulk of the Sikh scriptures, the holy *Granth.*

The Muslim Sufi poets, representing a synthesis of Hindu and Islamic cultures which came into

contact with each other on the soil of the Punjab, also wrote religious poetry cast in an intimately personal idiom. God was the eternal object of their quest and they sang of their love for Him in intensely passionate terms. Their fervent lyric emotion expressed in symbols of a woman's love for her lover invested their verse with a wide human appeal. This mystic tradition of poetry is preserved by Bhai Vir Singh. In a mood of transcendent self-annihilation he realizes that it is his Divine Master who is the source of his poetic inspiration. Says he:

Spoke the lyre to the lyrist:
'I give form to your songs'.

The lyrist put the lyre away,
Enwrapped in her cover.

Then she realized:
'I was only a piece of wood,
'A mere string!
'A frame without soul!!
'It was my Master's resistless magic,
'Which filled me with music,
'Which thrilled every fibre of my being.
'Then I sang love!
'My master sang with me too,
'And became entranced hearing the tune.
'Yes, he sang and he joyed,
'And he was lost in the melody'.

Wondrous is your art, my Master!
Eternal your song.
You are the song, the music and the thrill:
You the joy, you the enjoyer, you the joyed!

Modern Punjabi poetry is much influenced by English education and literature. The British who annexed the Punjab after the Anglo-Sikh war of 1849 started schools and colleges where Punjabis learnt the English language. This

brought them in touch with Western thought and literature and inspired new ideas and trends. The old literary themes and moulds were given up in favour of the new ones. The Punjabi verse form underwent a revolutionary change. The poets borrowed smaller and more rapid metres from English and adapted them for use in Punjabi. This gave them a freedom which the rigid classical schemes of versification never allowed. Influenced by the English romantic poets like Wordsworth and Keats, they tried their hands at new subjects such as Nature, birds and flowers.

The Western ideas of freedom and democracy gave rise to a new social and political movement and poetry became a vehicle for the promotion of its aims and ideals. Patriotism, love of the motherland and of one's mother tongue, education, equality of sexes and so on were themes which dominated the Punjabi verse of this period. Gurmukh Singh Musafir and Hira Singh Dard were the leading Punjabi poets who gave a dynamic expression to the inner national urge of the people. Charan Singh wrote humorous verses propagating ideas of social reform. Dhani Ram Chatrik brought an earthly touch to the poetic manner by adopting the language of everyday use and choosing themes within the sphere of common experience.

Punjabi poetry thus broke away from its traditional moorings. Its spirit was leavened by the introduction of new poetic values. Instead of the long narrative form, it adopted a more subjective tone. Its range of theme widened. It was not the same love legends told over and

over again. A tendency towards realism and an increasing interest in the immediate surroundings were clearly visible.

But poets' enthusiasm for reform and their excessive concern with contemporary public affairs resulted in the enervation of their true poetic imagination. None of them was sensitive or creative enough to impart any individual characteristic or significance to his work. This poetry was incidental to its own time, but it served an important purpose: it inaugurated new modes and tastes. Old, traditional themes and attitudes became obsolete. Punjabi poetry imbibed a progressive spirit which guided and moulded its future career.

This new trend—the writer's involvement with his time—finds its best fulfilment in the poetry of Mohan Singh and Amrita Pritam, two most eminent Punjabi poets of the present generation. Their work is characterized by a steadily growing intellectual consciousness, but it reveals at the same time a vehement imaginative insight. In spite of a strong social purpose which informs it, their poetry has the authenticity of a genuine inspiration.

For Amrita Pritam the tragic happenings in the Punjab, consequent upon the partition of 1947 when the people were seized by a mad communal frenzy, meant an intense and painful spiritual experience. Her heart was deeply touched and in her mood of lacerated susceptibility she broke into song, deeply tender and poignant. But her spirit triumphed and she reached out to new, glorious horizons and her later poetry enshrined

a message of hope for the oppressed and the down-trodden.

Punjab's other noted woman-poet, Prabhjot Kaur, has also undergone the same process of change. Her feeling has gradually come to be charged with an awareness of external reality. Even her songs communicate, with charming elegance and effect, her social sympathies and precepts.

The same preoccupation with contemporary themes is also a characteristic of the poetry of Pritam Singh Safeer. A refined intellectual approach and a highly evolved subjective idiom give a rich and distinctive tone to his verse. He is also capable of an occasional note of pungency as is evident from the following lines from his poem on Manu, the law-giver of ancient India:

The followers of Manu,
Chained to an endless formality,
Age from black to grey.
When did they know
What faith was,
These purveyors of God and religion?
They take charge of the souls
Of their sons and daughters.
They seek to find love
In stone-idols,
Sprinkling them with saffron-water of ancient custom.
They mock the love of Ranjha and Heer,
And, wallowing in the slough of gross temptation,
They undertake
To turn your sins into virtue serene.

Other leading poets who share in this concern with the existing social order are Bawa Balwant, Santokh Singh Dhir, Takhat Singh, Piara Singh Sahrai and Gurcharan Singh Rampuri. Santokh Singh Dhir's feeling springs from a more direct

and practical experience and there is a sting of sarcasm and irony in his poems dealing with prevalent maladjustments. Bawa Balwant's expression has greater finesse and maturity and embraces a wide range of emotive nuance and sensitiveness. Like Santokh Singh Dhir, Piara Singh Sahrai is forthright in his denunciations. Takhat Singh pours out his burning idealism into well-chosen, meticulous patterns reminiscent of his apprenticeship in Urdu poetry.

A poet who stands outside the current tradition of Punjabi poetry is Jagjit Singh Guleria. Guleria pursues a poetic style which in modern Punjabi literature achieved its highest excellence in the work of Bhai Vir Singh. His verse lacks the assurance and poise of the great seer, but there is no mistaking its direction and the consummation it seeks.

Guleria's latest book has been published under the title *Aunsian*. 'Aunsian' are lines wistfully drawn on earth by unsophisticated, chaste fingers in wait of one dearly loved. If the lines thus drawn make even pairs, the wait will not be long and one who is awaited should arrive soon. An odd line left signals a message of far less cheer. This nostalgia, this mood of quest and longing which the word 'Aunsian' signifies pervades Guleria's poetic imagination. His search is for the divine grace which he awaits in a spirit of humble devotion. He wishes to probe and transcend the mystery which hangs between man and his Creator. But for fulfilment he trusts more to His benignity than his own merit or endeavour. Meanwhile, he is happy in the pursuit:

The journey knows no destination,
It is all journeying day and night.
The distance is long, without bourne or limit;
It is all journeying morning and evening.
Where does the traveller halt?
Human intellect can make no answer.
But beat of the heart declares,
Journeying is love's destiny.

The poet aims at establishing communion with the divine spirit which, according to him, is the condition of human happiness. Of man's social obligations and destiny he shows little awareness. On the contrary, he thinks that, in spite of the material advance he has made, man is far from realizing himself yet. Says he:

Man has made imitation moons
And successfully scoured the skies.
But he has not kissed yet
At Beloved's threshold.
The soul remains yearning as before,
And life as sterile and sapless.

Even such remote and indirect recognition of contemporary reality is rare in Guleria's poetry. He is solely occupied with what is beyond and a mystical apprehension of the transcendent is the focus of his poetic experience. Yet in this characteristically personal utterance, there is a compelling note of faith and sincerity. Because of this and because of its lilting and gripping music, it evokes a spontaneous response in the reader's heart. Some of his poems are ecstatic little songs, full of lyrical ardour and musical verve.

Avtar Singh Azad, though more versatile, is happiest when dealing with heroic aspects of the Sikh tradition. The theme of his best known

work is the life of Guru Gobind Singh. This epic poem evokes most effectively a stirring period in the history of the Punjab, and the hero's personality and its impact on it are brought out with deep insight. Avtar Singh Azad's natural sense of history, his spirit of enthusiasm, his power of vivid characterization and his unhalting, eloquent style, aided by ample technical resource, are his chief advantages as an epic poet.

Among poets who have shown extraordinary promise in recent years are Jaswant Singh Neki, Harbhajan Singh, Tara Singh and Sukhpal Vir Singh Hasrat. Of these, Jaswant Singh Neki and Harbhajan Singh might prove as significant to the coming generation as Mohan Singh and Amrita did to the present. They have both evolved distinctly individual mediums for themselves and their outlooks have a philosophical integration which their predecessors, constantly tossed from one creed to another, scarcely achieved. In their attitude of warm humanity, faith and inner poise and their belief in the aesthetic and artistic principles of creation, they anticipate the future trend of Punjabi poetry.

Jaswant Singh Neki's utterance possesses amazing self-assurance and beauty. His poetic intuition has a transcendent quality and his capacity to penetrate to the fundamental verities of life is truly remarkable. He is well read in philosophy and science and uses his wide knowledge and delicately mystical perception to put in its perspective the present state of man—his triumphs, which are the result of his eternal spirit of curiosity and enquiry, his problems and dilemmas. The

novelty of Neki's themes has given a new dimension to Punjabi poetry: his language has elemental simplicity and charm and vividly recaptures his subtle cerebral patterns and concepts. This is a poetry most readable in its style and, intellectually, most alive and sensitive.

III

The Mystic World of Bhai Vir Singh

Delay not now, my lord!
Yes, come you will;
On this hope
Have I spun out the thread of my life.
(Bhai Vir Singh in *Mere Saian Jeo*)

LIKE W. B. Yeats, whose verse became invigorated as he grew older, Bhai Vir Singh had lost nothing of the freshness and intensity of his poetic genius to his advancing years. At the age of 81, the great Punjabi mystic poet published a new collection of his verse, called *Mere Saian Jeo* (O! my Lord). This last specimen of his poetry had the same morning-dew's distilled beauty, the same deeply felt longing of the heart and the same sensitive energy of expression as his precious Rubaiyats (quatrains) or haunting Kashmir poems, written in the beginning of the century.

Such was the integrity and vitality of Bhai Vir Singh's early poetic experience, which touched the strings of his being to eternal music, and so faithful his adherence to it that time made little difference to the vehemence of his creative spirit. His lyrical ardour and artistic powers remained unaffected. So remained the ideal which he had set before himself as a young man in his early twenties. The great changes around and the violent doubts and tensions to which the human mind has been subject over the past few decades

failed to ruffle his calm and peaceful temper or to draw him away from the chosen pursuit of his heart. This is at once a tribute to the firmness of his belief and the enduring validity of his poetic ideal.

The poet's original experience was derived from a religious inspiration, which took deep root in his tender, responsive soul. His strong faith and his intuitive grasp of the spiritual verities of life preserved for him the glorious vision. All his poetry was an attempt at essentializing and recapturing this beatitude.

Why it came into being and how?
The sages have racked themselves over the question.
Why should you, my soul, pursue the path
Which is in others' keeping?
Give up your rovings; light up a single love;
And then rest in eternal inebriation.
Drunkenness is better far than soberness,
For it keeps you ever in sanity.

Thus the poet pined for a life of the sensations. But he was not unaware of the more intellectual functions of poetry. As he himself said, it could, like philosophy, be used for interpreting the secrets of life. In a long symbolic poem, 'What is Life?' written in 1922, he proceeded to answer the question. But in his own way.

A woman, young and beautiful and tall like a reed, comes upon a lake 'as white and shiny as a ball of mercury'. She is so much taken with its charm that she feels she can read the eternal secret in its transparent waters. But the lake unfolds no mysteries. She comes back again after a few days and sees some lotus leaves upon the surface of the lake. Next time she comes she sees lotus buds. Finally, she finds the whole lake filled

with lotus-flower. The sight is too overwhelmingly beautiful for the visitor. Her own heart blossoms forth into exquisite sweetness and it begins dancing with the flowers. She awakens to a new ecstasy and forgets her question and all her melancholy imaginings. 'This is life itself', she sings to herself.

This joyous vision of life Bhai Vir Singh was ever seeking: this joyous feeling he recreated and shared with his readers. This was not turning one's back upon life, but an attempt at discovering and extending the limits of its spiritual content. Bhai Vir Singh believed that this was the only way to real understanding, to breaking through the crust of illusion. This spiritual contact with Reality was the surest means to self-fulfilment and to the realization of truth and beauty.

Preoccupation with the divine theme and all the soul's aching and yearning in the quest of its ideal gave a delicate tone and a unique ethereal grace to Bhai Vir Singh's verse. Highly individualized poetry, this! But it had the validity of genuine emotion and authenticated experience. It led to the enrichment of sensibility like any other work of art. And it never failed to bring joy to the reader.

Normally, verse couched in such personal language would not be popularly interpretable. But Bhai Vir Singh related his inner experience to the outer world of reality in terms of such simple imagery that the process of communication was always vivid and easy. Most of his poetry was woven round natural objects like flowers, birds and trees. Characters from the romantic lore

of the Punjab such as Heer and Ranjha, Sassi and Punnu, Sohni and Mahiwal, became living figures of flesh and blood in his fancy and they helped in giving a concrete shape to the outpourings of his soul. Sometimes places of history such as Guru Gobind Singh's shrine at Paonta Sahib, on the bank of the Jamuna, the Qutab and Roshan Ara's mausoleum laid hold of his imagination, touching it with earthly reality.

His deeply cultivated intellect and classical instinct for form kept his emotion in control and moulded it into well-defined and easily-recognizable patterns. He had a natural gift of music. The liquid harmonies of his verse fall gently and soothingly on the soul. Many of his smaller poems had, in his lifetime, become part of Punjab's popular poetic tradition: such was their natural grace, music and finish.

I grow low that my spring may remain obscured.
I hide myself in the hills that no envious eye may
Look upon me.
I have taken my complexion from the skies, and it is of no loud hue;
I came into the world begging the gift of humility from my Creator.
I drink heavenly dew and feed on the sun's ray,
And I play with the moonbeam by night.
I live happily enwrapped in my own fragrance
And feel shy of meeting the bee by day.

When the winds come blowing sportively to twine round me,
I shake not my head, nor produce a sound.
It is my wish to remain unknown and thus to cease in anonymity.

This is the song of a Banafsha flower on a Kashmiri hill-side. But it renders the poet's own mood of tremulous joy, his vague hope that he may not be deprived of this felicity and his desire for an humble, anonymous existence. Humility and self-surrender are essential to the

evocation and enjoyment of blissful feeling. How completely the poet had submerged his personality will be borne out by the following quatrain:

Thou touched, and I broke into song
Like a lyre freshly stringed;
Thou left off, and I became silent
Like one who is dumb.
Magic abides in thy hand;
Its touch fills me with life.
Part me not away from thee,
Ever—I am a daily suppliant at thy door.

The poetic inspiration is divine in its origin. It is the secret invisible hand which shapes the moulds of song and music. This theory of artistic creation found expression in one of his later poems, 'The Amorphous Stone'. Said the poet:

There lay a stone,
Amorphous and shapeless.
A carver chanced upon it,
Who perceived in it a picture,
Smothered by unwanted mass of rock.
He took a chisel in one hand,
Hammer in the other.
Carving and cutting,
He took off the unwanted mass.
Behold, it turned into handsome form,
That formless piece of stone.

Similarly,
My mind's slate
Is shapeless, formless, like a piece of rock.
Carve upon it your image,
My Lord!

You, my Lord, are the artist;
Your art is love-inspired.
Give me the power to understand this!
Let the pall of ignorance drop from my eyes!!

Bhai Vir Singh's ideal—his God-Master—was thus the source of all art, love and beauty. 'Just as light comes from above and is reflected in the mirror, beauty descends from the heavens and

shines through the beautiful', read one of his couplets. This God, the Creator of all beauty, he loved and adored. He was a real, living entity for him and communion with Him was the eternal quest of his soul. Separation from Him was a torment. The remote visions gave greater poignancy to his longing:

Thou came in my dream,
And I clasped round thee.
But it was all an effulgence which slipped from my grasp!
My wrist was left a-tremble!!

The poet, of course, never lost his patience or composure. Besides self-surrender, he had also learnt the lesson of resignation. He cheerfully accepted whatever his Master proposed for him. His spirit of submission and equanimity distinguished him from the Sufi poets who showed a more impatient and restless state of mind.

A warm-hearted optimism ran all through Bhai Vir Singh's poetry. He was sure that he would realize his object one day. Time did not matter. The real thrill lay in the thought of Him and in the act of seeking for Him.

Bhai Vir Singh thoroughly enjoyed his contact with Nature. This was for him another means of achieving transport of feeling. He felt the divine influence in natural objects and surrendered himself completely to it with a view to getting closer to the Creator.

His descriptions of natural scenes, especially of the valley of Kashmir with which he had been greatly in love, had a ravishing charm and they evoked a strangely primeval feeling in the heart of the reader. Kashmir's springs, mountains and

flowers—Guldaudi, in particular—were very familiar to him and they had so gripped his imagination that he turned to them again and again. He could recollect the joy he derived from them long after he had seen them, for he said:

The heart sorrows when parting from loved ones,
But parting from you, Kashmir, I sorrow not.

In his last collection, Bhai Vir Singh turned from the sensuousness of the Kashmir scenery to describing the autumn in Mashobra:

Tell me, brother Mashobra,
If you are the same who was once laden with flower,
Whose gardens were full of fragrance
And whose grasses were greenly luscious.
Palely that grass looks now,
And sadly.

Your flowers have decayed
And drooped are their heads.
Like a mother parted from her child,
The trees, sans fruit and flower,
Seem soaked in sorrow.
The leaves have changed their colour, too,
And they are dropping with every airy surge.

This represented no change in the attitude of the poet. His poetic values were unchangeable. They proceeded from a transcendent ideal which was beyond all human limitations—an ideal through which sensitive and evolved souls in all times and in all countries have sought expression.

This poetry may be lacking in social significance. But it has that elemental beauty, that rare creative quality and that universality of appeal which are the marks of the most perfect and genuine utterance of the human spirit.

IV

Conflict of Illusion and Reality in Mohan Singh

AFTER Warris, the author of the popular romance *Heer Ranjha*, Mohan Singh is the most widely read Punjabi poet. Three decades ago, his four long poems, which, as a young man in his late twenties, he had written for and recited at successive annual sessions of the Punjabi Conference at Simla, were finding a most enthusiastic response among readers in the Punjab. The spontaneous music and the delicately nostalgic sensitivity of this group of verse made it extremely popular; the birth of a new poetic mode was discovered in its freshness of expression.

Mohan Singh assembled these poems under the title *Char Hanjhu* (Four Tear-drops). Between this work and his latest, *Wadda Vela* (The Dawn), lies a period of profound inner development and culture. Except for their characteristic mastery of words, these two volumes are entirely dissimilar in aim and spirit.

A widening of the poet's inner horizon, maturing of his instincts of love and sympathy and a growing realization of the problems and realities of life were the features of this evolution. Today, Mohan Singh is perhaps the most significant Punjabi poet. His verse, a model of perfection in its verbal precision and euphonic grace, is instinct with the enlivening power of a positive philosophy. By the influence he has exerted on the style of

Punjabi poetry, he has come to occupy a central position among the poets of his generation. His lyric genius has bequeathed to literature songs and poems of abiding beauty and strength. By his subtle and exquisitely delightful metrical innovations, he has extended the scope of Punjabi prosody.

A personal sorrow—the death of his wife Basant while he was at college—was the first experience which stirred Mohan Singh's poetic sensibilities. He had done some versifying before, but the real creative vision was intensified around the beautiful, though transient, figure of Basant. He offered his tribute of love to her memory in a tender and highly imaginative poem and ascribed the discovery of his poetic gift to his deep suffering. The idea is conveyed in Basant's words:

How would you have become a poet, Mohan,
If I had not died?

The same ideal of womanly love, beauty and sacrifice is presented in two other poems in *Char Hanjhu*. The poet's fancy is aroused by two beautiful women from Mughal history. 'Nur Jahan' is a lament on the dilapidated condition of the famous queen's mausoleum in Lahore and 'Anarkali', a poignant tale of unfulfilled love. These poems were cast in an old Punjabi verse form, and their decorative and sentimental style, which was the result of the poet's knowledge of Persian and Urdu poetry, appealed to the popular taste. 'Basant', especially, enjoyed a great vogue; and it still does.

Sawe Pattar (Green Leaves—1936), including the poems of the first collection, contained verse of much artistic distinction and finish. Its most

distinguished and authentic ingredient was the songs which by their intense imagination, rapturous emotions and metrical lightness attained something like the universality of folklore. 'Under the Mango Tree' is sung with zest and abandon. It is the song of a young woman separated from her husband. Such is the rhythmical freedom and movement of this verse that, while reading it, the outline of the story fades into an ethereal world of fancy and romance. What is left is a feeling of pure lyric joy and ecstasy.

The poet's longing for beauty continues, but he no longer seeks it in queens or princesses. More earthly characters—a Guleli beggar-woman selling needles and spindles, or women going to the village well to fetch water—attract his notice. The Guleli's plight moves him to sympathy and he has a realization of her hard, cruel fate. But he is still too preoccupied with his personal quest to protest against it or to relate it to the social perspective. He takes a delight in describing her beauty which her ragged clothes fail to eclipse. He says:

So delicate was her (Guleli's) neck
That one could see the breathing inside it.

'The Blind Girl' is another poem which describes feminine charm with all its pathos and tragedy.

'I Will Not Stay in Thy Village' represents the conflict between the poet's social self and emotional instincts. He finds the actual reality of existence hostile to love and beauty. Certain contemporary problems such as discords on the basis of religion and political oppression make him unhappy.

But he has no solutions to offer; he only seeks to escape from his difficulties and is even prepared to give up his love. He does not wish to stay in her world

Where brother kills brother,
Where tons of steel
Have turned into irons and chains;
Where gaols and prisons
Spread over acres and acres of land;
Where in the name of religion
Rivers are filled with blood;
Where patriotism is a sin;
And where poets dare not speak!

Mohan Singh also shows a remarkable narrative gift in *Sawe Pattar*. 'Desh Piar' and 'Saida te Sabzan' are two charming ballads. The former is a tale of Pathan patriotism and courage, the latter of romantic love. Both poems are marked by a high aesthetic sense of construction, powerful and realistic imagery and metrical design appropriate to the theme. The influence of Persian and Urdu is still perceptible in the sumptuous quality of the poet's vocabulary.

In style and content *Sawe Pattar* is, on the whole, closer to the common standards of appreciation than Mohan Singh's later works. It is still his most popular collection. Twenty editions have so far been printed in Gurmukhi characters, besides those in Devanagri and Persian, the last being much in demand in Pakistan. Altogether, 50,000 copies are estimated to have been sold. This, for a Punjabi book of verse, is a remarkable figure.

In the next collection, *Kasumbhra*, Mohan Singh sheds the more traditional aspects of his style. There is greater restraint and economy in

his descriptions and his pictures achieve a more subtle, symbolic quality. A conscious purpose invigorates his verse, but in spite of his declaration that 'his poems no longer sang of any princess or of the valley of love and beauty', he returns to this theme again and again. Some of his songs in *Kasumbhra* excel those in *Sawe Pattar* in simple melody of words and spontaneity of emotion. The poet himself says in one of his songs:

> *I am completely neither in a state of sanity*
> *Nor in that of inebriation.*

The vision of a peasant woman fording a brook with a load of grass upon her head—the poet's country of Pothohar, Rawalpindi district, now in Pakistan, is strewn with such streams and rills—takes hold of his imagination and a delicately vivid poem, 'The Girl of Pothohar', is born. The portrait of the Pothohar girl, remotely reminiscent of Wordsworth's solitary reaper, is a most tender, yet clearly defined, image in Punjabi literature. For the poet her memory has a healing touch; it acts as an antidote to his moods of sorrow and suffering. The poem is written in *vers libre*, which, by ingenious rhythmical variations and repetitions, has been manipulated to produce a fascinating musical effect.

That the poet has not yet been able to break away completely from his original theme is also apparent in his poem 'Kashmir'. He creates an eerie world of fantasy round a dream in which the real sights and sounds of the valley of Kashmir are charged with a supernatural air by the arrival of seven heavenly fairies. These celestial beings

enthrall the poet with their long, black hair. This enslavement makes him uncomfortable and he longs for freedom. The conflict is at last resolved by a 'flashback' to the solid world of reality. The thought of his wife's wistful, tired eyes breaks the magic and the poet regains his consciousness and equanimity.

Such moods of uncertainty are the result of the poet's spiritual discord. He is sometimes persuaded to believe that a return to the old values of faith is the only way to overcome them. In his poem about a woman burning candles before a tomb, he contrasts his own doubts with her spirit of tranquil devotion. He suggests to himself that such inner certitude can only come from belief.

Mohan Singh's most representative poem in *Kasumbhra* is 'Taj Mahal'. Those who have seen the Taj by moonlight will realize the gentle charm and power of this description. That overpowering scene of hushed, chaste beauty, that atmosphere of dreamy languor and magic have been evoked with great imaginative perception. But, just when the poet is lost in his admiration for Shah Jahan's love of art and beauty, the spell breaks. The poet sees the dome of the building shatter to fragments. A tumult follows in which the cries and shrieks of labourers, who were pressed into work under royal command, become distinctly audible. Their lean, wearied figures emerge from the womb of time and the poet is left wondering:

Whether beauty,
Fed on the tears of millions,
Is beauty at all!

'Rani Sahib Kaur' is an excellent example of Mohan Singh's narrative power. His style has an amazing fluency and raciness and the verbal splendour aptly brings out the heroic character of the tale. The precision of idiom, and the beauty of simile and detail have earned for this poem a unique place in Mohan Singh's work.

World War II created in the poet a sense of dreariness, of inadequacy, which finds expression in *Adhwate* (Midway). He reflects on the impasse which has overtaken man's affairs and arrested his progress towards knowledge and happiness. In such an environment he gives up hope of his own self-fulfilment, which he has been seeking through love.

A certain amount of cynicism and irony characterizes the more serious verse of this period. 'Satsang' presents an incisively realistic picture of women gathered in a congregation to pray, with fans in one hand and prayer-books in the other. The poet's keen observation is lacking in reverence and is ruthless in uncovering the hollowness of the assembly's devotions. 'Animals', in the same collection, is an effective political satire.

Adhwate also contains some typical songs. The poet's use of his native dialect Pothohari gives them a peculiar flavour. In spite of an increasing brevity of style, the easy movement and music of these songs remain unimpeded.

In *Kach Sach* (Illusion and Reality—1950), Mohan Singh uses decisive terminology to describe his duality of mood. He considers his poems dealing with social and political themes more essential and would classify them under the title

'Reality'. He dismisses as an illusion his subjective verse dealing with his favourite themes of love and beauty. That he still hugs the illusion is evident in *Kach Sach*. This romantic element is an integral part of Mohan Singh's poetic nature and he would not be true to his inspiration if he were wholly to deny it. But his experience of life and growing intellectual concentration have added to his social awareness and his verse has acquired a new significance. He realizes that his personal ideal is impossible of attainment in a society afflicted with inequalities, inhibitions and exploitation. So the first task he sets himself is the rectification of such shortcomings and the creation of an environment in which love and beauty will prosper. In a poem, entitled 'Property', he says:

At the door stood she—a piece of property;
Beside her stood the owner, her husband;
And in front, the lover!
At the door stood she,
Silent and still
Like a lily-white marble pillar.
Her breasts were like two caged doves,
Her eyes like two bits of luminous stone,
Her lips like two rubies,
Silent and helpless!
Ended was her speech and her smile.
Woe to this benighting shadow of convention!
Woe to this bloodthirsty ogre of custom!

Beside her
Stood the husband.
Placing his hand upon her shoulder,
He said:

'This is my property;
I am the master.
Manu's law favours me;
So does man's;
So does my rank;
The religion,
And the custom!

The heart?
That matters not.
I shall see
How this handsome edifice
Can refuse to give me shelter,
Or deny me warmth in winter,
And coolth in summer!'

In front, the lover,
Resolute in thought.

'A piece of property,
Yes,
She is.
A silent rock
Which the fire of my love
Cannot melt today.
I shall further inflame this fire.
Changing this world,
I shall return some day.
I shall recall her to life'.

In order of sequence, love still retains its primacy. And this, in spite of the poet's earnest supplication:

Unfasten my wings, beloved!
I hear a voice calling me!

Mohan Singh's yearning for beauty, which, for him, is symbolized in human form, also remains undiminished. But his perception has deepened. In 'Unattainable' he is no longer interested in describing physical beauty, but probes the mind behind it. He brings a deep psychological insight to the study of woman's character.

The thought-content in these poems is deeper. The style is maturer and more trenchant and the language is more compact. Some songs and the quatrains in *Kach Sach* are traditional in form, but the really representative verse of this period consists of poems having a social meaning. In these poems Mohan Singh appears in his new role of a revolutionary, a messenger and a prophet.

This new-found ministry is fulfilled with greater purposiveness in *Awazan* (Intimations). This collection contains poems of challenge, and of hope for the future. Their unfaltering music and recitative quality give them a tremendous mass appeal. There is, however, no attenuation of the poet's imaginative verve. He is still capable of producing verse of pure romantic charm and *Awazan* offers in the form of lyrics and ghazals some very good examples of this type of poetry.

It is in lyric poetry that Mohan Singh's genius has attained its highest expression. His power is at full vigour and his poetry has the excellences and attributes of a genuine and great work of art. But it seems that part of his poetic energy lies in reserve. Perhaps he will discover his true *metier* in an epic poem of a vaster scope and design than anything he has so far attempted. With his commanding vocabulary, his uncanny intuition for the appropriate word, his gift of imagery, his capacity for sustaining his inspiration at a high pitch, his sense of mystery and of the historical processes and his knowledge of the life and lore of the Punjab, he is well fitted for an undertaking of this nature. He has already given promise of such a talent in his poem, 'Rani Sahib Kaur', and in his masterly translation in verse of Arnold's *Light of Asia*.

V

Amrita Pritam's Lyric Sensibility

DISRUPTION of life in the Punjab in the troubled days of 1947 was a vivid experience for a poet of Amrita Pritam's sensibility. This demolished her world of youthful poetic fancy and deepened her consciousness by bringing her into touch with a reality of profound tragic significance. She externalized her intense spiritual experience in poignant images of concrete impact and became a most sensitive and articulate exponent of the anguished soul of the Punjab.

Her mind matured in the process and her verse idiom was quickened by the urgency of the newly released creative energy. In this mood of injured susceptibility and widening sympathy she burst into songs of tenderness and beauty and fully realized herself as a poet. Never before had the sorrows and longings of the land of the Punjab found such telling expression in the delicate voice of a woman.

Amrita was 17 when she published her first collection of verse which not only compelled notice as a work of promise, but was also prescribed as a course of study in poetry for various university examinations in Punjabi. She has since written consistently and published more than a dozen volumes of verse.

She was born Amrit Kaur on August 31, 1919, in a home with a literary tradition and culture.

Her father, Kartar Singh Hitkari, was a man of letters and wrote about hundred pamphlets on Sikh religion and philosophy. He was well versed in Sanskrit lore and prosody and also wrote verse in Hindi and Punjabi. His only daughter imbibed from him the art of writing poetry. He revised her first poems and acted as a guide and teacher. Amrita gratefully acknowledges her debt to her learned father.

Within a year of writing her first poem, Amrit Kaur published the first collection of her poetry, *Amrit Lehran* (1936). This early verse was remarkable for the correctness of form, obviously the result of apprenticeship under the guidance of her father. The choice of words showed the same carefulness. Within this framework of almost classical precision, Amrit Kaur copied some new verse metres which were being popularized by older and better known Punjabi poets such as Dhani Ram Chatrik and Feroze Din Sharaf. She also wrote some songs in delightful, racy tunes.

Her father's influence was apparent in the limited range of her themes as well. Most of the poems had a direct didactic import and were written to extol virtues such as faith, charity, mercy and honour. A common subject was adoration of the Punjabi language: in a long poem devoted to this theme she recalled with gratitude all those writers who had helped in the enrichment of Punjabi literature. She called upon the people to take pride in their literary heritage. This was in keeping with the prevailing trends advocating the cause of the regional language.

But Amrita's poetic prowess was shown to better advantage in poems in which her romantic genius had a freer play. She was particularly sensitive to Nature and recaptured its beauty in scenes of graceful simplicity and chastity. Her inquisitive mind perceived the Creator's hand in all natural objects. Singing of a pleasure spot in Dalhousie, she said: 'The Maker has painted these pictures to persuade the hearts of men'.

Her first collection also contained poems on love, separation, sorrow and freedom. These represented the deeper traits of her inner being and foreshadowed the future theme of her poetry. At that early age she displayed awareness of the power of destiny 'which can fill those who are empty and empty those who are full'. Love can be thwarted and beauty can come to grief. 'Greater beauty than Yusuf's', she said, 'lies entombed in earth's breast'. To her, love consisted in self-sacrifice and surrender and, despite its disappointments, her faith in it had an air of child-like enthusiasm and freshness.

Her second collection *Jeonda Jiwan*, published three years later, was entirely different from the first in form and content. Amrita seemed to have made a deliberate effort to shake off the earlier influences. Belief and faith by which she had laid so much store earlier were now treated with unabashed cynicism. She completely overcame her subservience to moral purpose and violently rebelled against the staid and solid values she had earlier applauded. But in the absence of an alternative form of belief and philosophy she was groping in the dark towards an unknown

destination and singing of new worlds and horizons in a vague and indistinct manner. Her poetry was now undefined and ineffectual, but it had the freedom of a spontaneous emotion and uninhibited expression. Her natural lyric gifts were more clearly visible. Her quest of love had become more personal and real.

Amrita also abandoned the old verse patterns and tried new rhythms and metres. She portrayed in some of her songs the haunting music of folklore and of Mohan Singh's newly devised measures. The range of her vocabulary also emphasized the imaginative quality of her poetry.

Amrita's challenging attitude offended the orthodox taste. The poem she read at the Sikh Educational Conference at the Khalsa College at Amritsar in 1939 raised a storm of criticism and opposition. Some Punjabi periodicals wrote long, angry articles indicting her style and ideas. Her poetic longing to break through all restraint in search of a world of love and freedom was not appreciated by the old school.

She was undeterred, although the consciousness of opposition to the realization of one's dreams affected her subsequent verse. This social orthodoxy and jealousy, she thought, also tried to cross human love. To this theme she returned again and again in her next collection, *Dew-washed Flowers* (1941).

In this collection, Amrita discovered her full scope as a songstress. She showed better command of language and emotion. Her songs about a girl's separation from her parents after marriage were enchantingly beautiful and eloquent. 'Amri

Da Vehra' (Mother's Courtyard), with its tender poignancy and rich melody, is one of the finest songs in Punjabi. Some songs in this collection conveyed the ecstasy and abandon of woman's love. Amrita's attitude towards Nature became more subjective and, like Coleridge, she interpreted it in terms of her own personal feelings.

Lok Peer (People's Anguish), published in 1944, marked another decisive stage in the development of Amrita Pritam's poetic genius. A note of sharp realism had entered her verse. From the ethereal regions of disembodied fancy and romance she descended to the harsh reality of life. She gave up such devices as the poetic conceit which she had abundantly used in her *In the Wraps of Clouds* (1942). Her expression became more precise, direct and economical.

'Talk of love and beauty', she affirmed, 'belonged to another time'. Her mind was overwhelmed by events like war and Bengal famine and she sorrowed over the suffering and misery that came in their wake. Her song became the voice of the distressed people—profaned, deprived men and poor, helpless women. It had the bitterness of injured feeling and irony of a sharp tongue. But the inherent vitality of her poetic spirit did not let her inspiration cool down. Her world of fancy served as an escape from the problems of actual life and this world she was desperately trying to preserve from the shocks of outer reality. But her effusive romanticism had been tempered by a sense of realism and she was trying to achieve a balance between the elements of reason and imagination.

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In her next collection *Pathar Geete* (1946), Amrita again completely withdrew herself into the world of poetic isolation. Her social experience had obviously lacked immediacy and integrity; so her affiliation to contemporary themes proved short-lived. She turned back to the perennial subject of her poetry—love. This time it was married love in which woman was the unequal partner. The woman's spirit of devotion and self-immolation, her fears and anxieties and her trials and sufferings were expressed by Amrita with the depth and sincerity of personal feeling. At times she was bitter and ironical. 'The Bread-giver' was a merciless satire on the artificial and routine nature of human relationships. But this was only a passing mood. Amrita discovered an answer to woman's difficulties in a re-dedication to love. She wrote:

More will thy heart melt
With the fire of love
That I shall forever keep ablaze.

In her poem 'Sati', Amrita was confident of the efficacy of her remedy. Her words were charged with the authority of an oracle; her message with the force of genuine self-assurance. Here she triumphed over her self-doubt, hesitation and despair.

My faith awakens
And awakens my Truth
How can I ever fail
To win my love?

There was now greater maturity and subtlety in her expression. The language was appropriate and suitable to the theme or mood of the poet; at places it was boldly sensuous. Lines and

quotations from the scriptures blended naturally with the harmony of her verse. This variety of style was a new feature of her poetry.

Apart from love, nothing else had so deeply stirred her soul as did the fateful events of 1947. Great was the impact of this emotional experience. A painful protest was voiced by her saddened heart. Through an apt poetic vein it was directed into a traditional mould; an old metrical pattern, which had been the favourite of Punjabi poets and which Amrita had discarded after her first collection, was used. This served as a reminder of the old, recognized standards of social behaviour which had now been flagrantly violated. In this mood of desolation and self-torture Amrita thought of the author of *Heer Ranjha*, Warris Shah, who for her symbolized the values of harmony, love and culture. She addressed her lament to him in a long, moving ode (1949). She said:

A daughter of the Punjab (Heer, the beloved) wept,
And thou immortalized her sorrow in deathless song.
Thousands of such daughters today
Seek utterance through thee, O, Warris!

O, thou friend of the distressed,
Wake, and see thy Punjab!
See how the corpses cover the pastures!
How blood overflows the Chenab!!
How poison has polluted the five rivers of the Punjab!

Amrita's other poems on the subject had the same intensity of feeling. She brought out the tragedy with tender, homely touches. The effect was always powerful. For boldness of conception and for the force of impact her poem 'Majbur' (translated into English under the title 'The Scar of a Wound') is perhaps incomparable in modern Indian literature.

Her response to tragedy was not sentimental; correct intellectual appraisal was an essential part of it. Nor did she allow her mind to be embittered or sullied. Her faith in human nature remained unshaken and she was hopeful of man's future. The Warris ode ended on a note of optimism. A new vision was arising from old ruins and she foresaw the 'face of new worlds'. She had no doubt that humanity would redeem itself.

This concern with immediate problems was now an integral part of Amrita Pritam's outlook. Her grasp on reality gradually enlarged and her insight became wider and deeper. Her attachment to the theme of love was unaffected, but her description of it was not as effervescent as it used to be.

In 'Your Thought' she repeated that love was restrained and restricted by existing social conditions and prejudices. She raised her voice against these curbs. Her personal sense of pain lost itself in an awareness of general unfulfilment and she found her 'sweet love song turning into challenge'. In her poem 'Pledge', she said:

Engraved with the lines of agony,
My palm enshrines a pledge:
The line of faith outstrips
The line of longevity.

You enquire
How long my love will live.
Teach not love the habit of speech,
For who has yet learnt to hear?
Love prospers without the wealth of words.

My breath is at the mercy of my body
And can at any time cease.
But the inscription of our love
On the breast of time
Can never be erased.

Heer is no imitation of Laila,
Nor Majnu the model of a Ranjha.
Love does not repeat its story
Its every page is fresh and unparalleled.

The arrows of anguish
Pierce the palms and tips of my fingers;
But somewhere on the lacerated fringes
A hope is awakening to life.

I swear by the purple morning,
The waves of the Chenab are not my end.

Engraved with the lines of agony,
My palm enshrines a pledge:
The line of faith outstrips
The line of longevity.

Song has been Amrita's *forte* from the very outset. She has always excelled in this medium, for she has the woman's lightness of touch and sense of rhythm. Her songs have fluency and music and they recapture handsomely the natural grace and vitality of folk-spirit.

In her latest collections, *Ashoka Cheti* and *Kasturi* (The Musk), Amrita's restless spirit seems to have attained poise and tranquillity, though traces of a painful experience are still visible. Her language has become mellower and the imagery, somewhat restricted in scope now, has gained in expressiveness. She appears to have shed for the while some of her previous themes which were rather extraneous to her temperament, and sings of love with greater assurance and single-mindedness. In 'Chaitra', she says:

There came,
In the month of Chaitra,
A traveller in perfumes,
Carrying his sachet of goods on his back.
I bought of him a quantity of
Love-musk,
While the world looked on.

I rejoice in the bargain I made.
The world that scoffed yesterday
Has come to me today
To borrow a pinch of the scented ware.

In the crystal mortar of separation
I pounded the antimony of my being.
Every night the heaven comes
To borrow a needle-touch of it
For its eye.

In the water of my two eyes
I dissolved
My world of dreams.
The earth today has come
To my court
To dye in it its faded scarf.

In this hut of stalk and straw
Where shall I put the pedestal
Of my being?
The luminous ray of thy remembrance
Has alighted in my home
As a guest today.

I rejoice in the warmth
Of my blaze.
The sun waits at my door.
Borrowing the spark from me today,
He has kindled his own fire.

The sun is the dominant symbol in this poetry. This is the sign of the poetess's undiminished imaginative ardour and of her striving for a far-off vision, though an excessive dependence on one image-pattern tends to create at places a repetitive and rhapsodic effect. But Amrita has been able to preserve the essential elements of her inspiration and to derive fresh sustenance from every little experience of life. About the other great contemporary Punjabi poet, Mohan Singh, there can be some question whether or not he is past the prime of his poetic achievement. About Amrita there can be none: her capacity to renew the sources of her artistic experience is unlimited.

VI

The Punjabi Short Story

THE first short stories in Punjabi were translations from Tagore. Stories were not uncommon in old religious books and romantic lore, for the Punjabis love story-telling as much as any other people. But the first literary short story as it is known and written today appeared in Punjabi only in translation. And that was not long ago—not more than 35 years ago, at any rate.

During this interval the short story has established itself as a well formed piece of writing. It is a living and growing artistic medium which truly symbolizes the new trends and consciousness that inform and inspire Punjabi literature today.

The Punjabi short story answers the taste which has a background of Western literature. Most practitioners of the art are persons well read in English literature. Others not as directly in touch with European literary traditions have automatically accepted and adopted the standards and pattern popularized by the modern school. Not that there is no variety or scope for individual expression. The wide range of subject is, in fact, the main characteristic of the Punjabi short story today. But, in spite of its variety and suppleness, its appeal is limited to those who are familiar with and appreciate modern literary principles and values.

The modern short story is realistic in its subject-matter. It concerns itself primarily with man, his problems and difficulties, his spiritual urges and mental stresses. It delves deep into his mind and studies his nature and behaviour. It reflects, as far as its scope and canvas permit, contemporary social problems. But the deliberate outspokenness and zeal to reform that were the dominant motives of earlier attempts have gradually been subordinated to a more artistic awareness of its function. The coarseness that characterized the Punjabi short story a few years ago has given place to culture and urbanity; mere propaganda to natural, aesthetic effect.

The accent being on human character, the plot in the modern Punjabi short story has been relegated to a secondary place. In some stories there are hardly any incidents. The interest centres on a character whose mind and spirit are the subject of the story writer. He throws a powerful searchlight on these and discovers the mainsprings of human action and attitude. A story with a predominant plot interest—a story in which things happen and incident follows incident—is all too rare today.

A subject which crops up frequently and which shows the healthy outlook and constructive spirit of writers is the calamity which befell the Punjab in consequence of the partition of the country in 1947. Some very striking and convincing stories dealing with this theme have come from the pen of Kartar Singh Duggal. His story 'Nawan Ghar' (New Home), which gives one of his collections its title, is symbolic of the continuity

of life and invincibility of human spirit. The ultimate core of the story is man's love of life which transcends all evil, conflict and destruction. Desolation and darkness envelop the house which has apparently been evacuated in a tragic hurry—the fan is still revolving; the food at table is unfinished; the tap is dripping on the overflowing bucket below fretfully recording the passage of time. The unopened letters—invitations to marriage parties and peace meetings ironically rubbing shoulders with threatening letters—accentuate the sense of tragedy.

The atmosphere reproduces the gloom that has settled upon the souls of the new occupants of the house, themselves uprooted from their home. But in spite of this disorder in human affairs, the oranges in the orchard are temptingly ripe; the vegetables grow in the garden unmindful of the vast upheaval. Nature restores the newly arrived family's link with life. The wife brings cauliflower from the garden. The servant has cleaned up the place a bit. There is smoke rising from the chimney once again. The man sets about fiddling with the radio to see if he can put it right. A new vision of life opens up. Even the dim eyes of the old mother who is resting on a charpoy could not have failed to catch it.

On the whole, Kartar Singh Duggal's stories represent a close liaison with life and its realities. They interpret the contemporary Indian scene with penetration, subtlety and sympathy. The tumult in the outside world is emphasized by the repose and peace of Duggal's private life, which

provides unconsciously sometimes the background of some of his stories. This autobiographical interest makes the stories more human and intimate.

In the hands of Kartar Singh Duggal, the Punjabi short story has grown in stature. He has brought to the form maturity and an enlightened outlook. For their finish and craftsmanship, his stories are unequalled in Punjabi literature. His style, rather sophisticated and mannered, has influenced younger writers and the Punjabi short story today unmistakably bears the imprint of his genius.

There is a unique air of authenticity and sincerity about Kulwant Singh Virk's stories about partition. He has a deep realization of the tragedy. In recapturing the dreariness that overtakes man's soul and his environs his story 'Ulahma' ranks among his best. But Virk retains his faith in man's nature and generosity. The people of the village still look upon Balkar Singh, who is now in a refugee camp, as their friend and leader. In his inimitable story, 'The Grass', Virk, like Duggal, presents the same triumphant view of the human spirit. Just as grass will burst forth however careful the weeding may be, natural human urges and desires will break through the pall of tragedy and suffering.

Virk has an acute sense of character. He can create and bring to life a character with sovereign ease. Ala Singh, Chacha and Bholanath are persons who will live in Punjabi fiction. They are so vital, so true to life. Ala Singh, an old man, who has had a successful and prosperous run of

life—a singular achievement of his career of which he is very proud is the post office he had installed in his village through his own influence—finds himself up against the problems and ideas of modern life. In spite of his old age, he is not heard with the respect he was wont to give to age when young. His advice on matters like the elections is ridiculously simple. 'Last time membership went to the Shere-ki-Patti; this time it should be ours', said he. This logic did not appeal to the people who were thinking in terms of political and economic programmes and party nominations. He does not understand what the Azad Hind Faujis and others say. He is bewildered, but does not give in until he sees an old bullock who is helpless against the crows that come to peck at him.

Chacha—the uncle—is an old bachelor. He lost the only chance of marriage that came his way. Chacha was never convinced of the argument that some men have to go unmarried for the simple reason that there are fewer women in India than men. However, when Chacha went to a fair he never missed the opportunity of giving himself the satisfaction of bringing home toys for his 'children'. He would tell his friends the adventures of his journey with his 'wife' to a distant city and describe with gusto his visits to his 'father-in-law's' house.

In his latest collection *Dudh da Chhappar* (Pool of Milk), Kulwant Singh Virk's narrative has gained conspicuous facility and strength and his stories now are free from the blemish of sketchiness which marked some of his earlier work. His style

of writing, always precise and trenchant, has acquired suppleness and his epigrammatic flashes and figures have become more eloquent and expressive.

Human relationships have been portrayed in these latest stories in a variety of permutations. The apparent contradictions and underlying motives are laid bare in a frank, but genial and engaging, manner. Much shrewd comment on men and their actions can be garnered from these stories which shows the author's ability to penetrate to the deepest recesses of the human mind and his genius for subtle generalization.

The husband-wife relationship has inexhaustible possibilities in Virk's hands. In 'Professor Sahib', which is the story of a maladjusted couple, the husband and wife keep falling out over small, insignificant matters: the real reason, of course, is the wife's nervousness and mistrust. A sense of personal prestige on either side tends to bring things to a head on many an occasion, but social and domestic compulsions and the woman's innate sense of dependence prevent a burst-up.

How their hidden, deep-seated affection for each other prevents things from coming to a head between two cousins who have fallen out after having been the best of friends is the theme of another story 'Dudh da Chhappar'. The husband, a sturdy hard-working peasant, is inwardly conscious of the fact that his wife is the more ambitious of the two and more jealous of the family honour. He has the peasant's common sense not to challenge his cousin who has secretly milked his buffalo and who, on that occasion,

has the balance of power distinctly in his favour with two of his brothers-in-law staying with him. With a view to saving his face and keeping the secret from his wife the husband deliberately spills the little milk he has been able to draw from the animal. The liquid sprawls widely over the rain-soaked ground. The spot looks like one big pool of milk.

'Dudh da Chhappar' is one of the finest stories in Punjabi literature. It has a striking originality of theme and is remarkable for its charming evocation of the rural ethos and for its chaste narrative.

Kulwant Singh's stories are like portraits, each with a sharp focus. His characters are clearly delineated; the situations well marked. He picks his themes from small happenings around him and his stories—terse, pointed and neatly constructed—present an acute and perceptive analysis of human behaviour and the psychological motives, needs and inadequacies hidden behind it.

Surinder Singh Narula is a prominent name in Punjabi fiction. His stories, not altogether as successful as his novels, have a distinctive quality. He is a master of detail. His knowledge of the city life of Amritsar, which is the theme of one of his best known novels, is deep and intimate. Amritsar's streets and markets, lanes and bylanes, business men and brokers and, especially, their womenfolk, pale, superstitious and apprehensive, he knows and describes with a sure vividness. He can also write with the same familiarity and facility of the lives of such diverse characters as a fisherman, a Kashmiri labourer, a contractor or a clerk in a government office. This wealth of

detail, combined with an imaginative style, makes his stories interesting and convincing.

Sant Singh Sekhon is a law-giver as well as artist. He set the standard of the modern short story writing in Punjabi. In the early thirties, when he lectured on English literature at the Khalsa College at Amritsar, he had some of his stories published in English and American magazines. The new Punjabi short story was born when he turned from English to Punjabi.

Sekhon's stories reveal a deep sense of intellectual and social purpose. Problems are presented and studied with a rare depth and minuteness. But whatever he has to say is transformed in the ardent process of creation: the result is a finished piece of art.

Sekhon has a strict idea of form and constructs his stories with great care. He never fails to give an impression of unity and completeness. His prose is always appropriate to the theme or mood that he is rendering. He reproduces with telling effect the language of the village folk and their surroundings and his pictures of rural life are genuine and real.

Sekhon's story, 'Pemi's Children', has a perfection, a poetic quality about it, which defies analysis. It is a delightful study of two innocent young minds reflecting the atmosphere of superstition and inhibition in which they, as children of an average rural family, have grown. But it is light and simple even as the hearts of the eleven-year-old girl and seven-year-old boy who are the subject of the story. Their inherent courage, expressed in a childish device, overcomes their

complex temporarily and gives a quietly dramatic twist to the story which makes of it a work of joy and beauty. A more beautiful picture of fraternal affection could hardly be found.

Dr Mohan Singh's stories are a strange mixture of personal reminiscence, philosophic meditation and subtle comment, but he seldom fails to achieve a dramatic effect. Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir finds time from politics for writing stories and has published several good collections. Devinder Satyarthi, who has published several volumes of short stories in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi, draws upon his wide experience of life in various parts of India gained through travel in search of song—he has made a valuable collection of folklore from all over the country.

Sujan Singh, Navtej, Santokh Singh Dhir, Mohindar Singh Sarna, Swinder Singh Uppal, Balbir Singh Dil, Gurmukh Singh Jit and Kartar Singh Suri are established writers. Gurnam Singh Tir has distinguished himself as a writer of humorous stories. Mubarak Singh shows in the few stories he has written a remarkable genius for this form of literary art. Mohan Singh, Nanak Singh and Gurbakhsh Singh have their place as its promoters in the earlier stage of development. Balwant Gargi, the well-known playwright, has published some admirable stories quite a few of which have been translated into English and other foreign languages.

It will, however, be difficult to endorse the many tall claims which are generally advanced in behalf of the Punjabi short story. An oft-repeated platitude is that it can match the best in any

language. In spite of the complacency and vanity of many authors, a really good story in Punjabi is extremely rare to come by. Most Punjabi stories give the impression of artificial contrivance: even recognized practitioners are not exempt from this blame. The theme precedes the plot and characters, and does not grow naturally out of these. The result is that most stories remain plain, lifeless sketches. At their best, they read like elaborations of some hints on human nature picked from a textbook on psychology.

VII

Humour In Punjabi Literature

THERE is an old story.

A Jat and a Teli (oilman) once fell to argument and decided to settle the issue by a bout of versification. The Teli, having the advantage of attacking first, delivered thus:

Jat, re, Jat! Tere sar par khat!!
Jat, o, Jat! On thy head is a khat (charpoy)!!

The Jat promptly extemporized:

Teli, re, Teli! Tere sar par kohlu!!
Teli, o, Teli! On thy head is a kohlu (oil-crusher)!!

'But kohlu does not rhyme with Teli as khat does with Jat', said the Teli.

'Rhyme or no rhyme, kohlu is the heavier of the two and should serve you right', rejoined the Jat.

The Jat with his arbitrariness and spontaneous spirit of mockery is the typical Punjabi. Love of banter and an inexhaustible capacity for laughter are native to the Punjabi character. The people of the Punjab relish making jokes. They are shrewd and quick to perceive pomposity and pretentiousness. These they laugh at and lampoon with much rustic good sense and gaiety. A consciousness of physical superiority makes them deride those whom they think deficient in courage and magnanimity. Frailties associated with certain groups—the timidity of the weavers, for

instance, or the miserliness of some mercantile classes—are subjects of perennial fun-making.

But this jesting is without malice. The idea always is to raise a laugh and illumine the passing moment. The joke is meant to entertain, not to hurt anyone. At its worst, it might attempt to prick the bubble of idle vanity—and that, too, as agreeably as possible.

The Punjabis are thus a good-humoured race. Their innate rusticity, common sense and self-assurance give them a peculiarly balanced outlook. The slightest oddity anywhere arouses their wonder and touches their merry vein.

The unwritten, traditional folklore preserves the best specimens of Punjabi humour. There is plenty of shrewd observation and good-natured fun in the old tales, in romantic songs of the peasant girls and popular proverbs and couplets. Some of the aphorisms are classic examples of the genial wisdom of the people. The folk tradition also contains some familiar, but deliciously comic portraits—the cantankerous mother-in-law, the gullible husband, the faint-hearted barber, the miser and the glutton. Rivalry between various clans and regions is another source of jokes and witticisms. Incisive, crisp composition characterizes many such rhymes. For example:

Shor Shorkoton; te koor Lahauron;
Jhagra Chinioton; peo puttar te chughli kare
Dipalpur de koton.

(Shorkot is the place for uproars; Lahore for falsehoods; Chiniot for quarrelling; and the town of Dipalpur is the place where the father tells tales on his son.)

In literature, however, this genius for humour has not found full scope. As a medium of expression Punjabi prose has limitations. It has yet to attain refinement and suppleness capable of rendering subtle shades of meaning. Poetry, which is in a fairly advanced and mature state, remained, in its earlier stages, under the influence of the Sufis. This precluded any levity or light-heartedness. Even Warris omitted incidents responsive to humorous exploitation. On the other hand, Damodar, who wrote the story of Heer and Ranjha long before him, portrayed several such situations.

As Damodar tells us, once Ranjha, the lover, after leaving home, stopped for the night at a mosque. He was overtaken there by a batch of Jat travellers who were in need of food as well as rest. The daughter of the village water-carrier fell in love with Ranjha at first sight. Her mother came to the mosque and made enquiries about the young fugitive. The hungry Jats at once grasped the situation and pretended that they too were water-carriers by caste, and that Ranjha was the son of one of them. The woman fed them lavishly on sevian, shakkar and ghee. When she came to the mosque next morning, however, she discovered that her 'guests' had already departed. Ranjha, who was not known to any one of them, was still there. Seeing him, the woman's regret redoubled. She told herself, says the poet, that had he (Ranjha) been slightly older she herself would have married him.

According to Warris also Ranjha passed the night at the mosque, but the event described by

Damodar is eliminated. Instead, there is a long-drawn-out, angry argument between Ranjha and the Mullah.

The launching by Charan Singh and Bakhshish Singh nearly forty years ago of the *Mauji*, a journal professing to imitate *Punch*, started a new vogue of humorous writing in Punjabi. Charan Singh was the first Punjabi writer to adopt this style and he achieved considerable distinction in his chosen field. He created a delightful character by the name of Baba Waryama, a slightly eccentric but good-hearted old man who enlivened the pages of the *Mauji* week after week by some innocent, amiable *faux pas*. Baba Waryama, distantly resembling Addison's Sir Roger de Coverley, is the most vivid comic character in Punjabi literature. Two minor roles beside him were provided by Lambardar Sukha Singh and Gango who are also affectionately remembered by the older generations of the *Mauji* clientele. In the days of Charan Singh its readership was larger than that of any other Punjabi journal.

Charan Singh also wrote humorous verse. Here, writing under the pseudonym Maha Kavi Suthra, he employed his powers of satire and irony to castigate evils such as caste feeling, bigotry, drunkenness, modernity, and so on. His poetic works were published in book form as *Badshahian*. The collection contains 101 poems, each holding up to ridicule some point of departure from accepted personal or social standards and elliptically driving home a moral.

This comic verse tradition is kept alive by Bakhshish Singh and Ishar Singh Bhaiya.

The former, who was one of the founders of the *Mauji*, writes poems bringing out the contradictions, harshness and unhappiness to which human life is subject. He eventually laughs these afflictions away, pointing out every time a useful, philosophical moral. Bakhshish Singh has also published collections of humorous essays.

Ishar Singh is a popular writer much in demand at poetic symposiums and his Bhaiya is a favourite. The keynote of Ishar Singh's art is his ability to laugh at himself. Verbal parody is another very effective weapon in his hands.

A lively poetic form, borrowed from Urdu, is the political ghazal. It is essentially a journalistic item. For its humorous effect, it depends on a deliberately incongruous admixture of traditional romantic symbolism and trifling topicalities. In Punjabi, Sadhu Singh Hamdard manages to recapture occasionally something of the charm and delicacy which Haji Laq Laq introduced in his Urdu compositions.

Gossip columns in newspapers yield a varied crop of humour. There are nearly a dozen Punjabi dailies, each having its own gossip-writer. Poking fun at political opponents is the main object. With a few exceptions, it is generally a matter of broad raillery and badinage. No quarter is given to the adversary and those engaged in polemics vie with one another in being unsparing and merciless in their jokes.

A truer brand of humour is represented by Suba Singh of the *Parkash*. Of all Punjabi columnists he is the most accomplished, sensitive and

entertaining. He is deeply rooted in the tradition of the soil and has a keen eye for the contradictions in human motive and character. His apt quotations from folksongs to reinforce his argument lend colour and piquancy to his style. A most unassuming innocent-looking man, Suba Singh is capable of scintillating and, not infrequently, lethal flashes of ironic wit.

He is now engaged in writing the romance of Heer and Ranjha in a humorous style. The instalments which have so far appeared in print are an excellent example of gay burlesque and unerring good sense.

Most humorists are grim, serious persons in private life. But not Gurnam Singh Tir. He is one Punjabi writer for whom humour is a whole-time occupation. His sole purpose is to make people laugh. Yet this is no consciously assumed attitude. Joviality is his natural gift. His physical robustness, a healthy mental apparatus and unshakable optimism give him a cheerful temperament and a propensity to hearty laughter. Full of breezy titbits and stories, he is as lively an anecdotist as one could hope to meet.

The same vivacious and exuberant personality is easily recognizable in his writing. With his gift of puckish laughter and his sensitiveness to the incongruities of life, he enlivens all that he touches. His literary output—radio plays, skits, journalistic features and verse—far exceeds that of any other comic writer in Punjabi. His strong point, however, is the story in which he portrays some personal idiosyncrasy of a character or the inherent oddity of a situation. While singling

out such persons or situations for critical observation, his approach is always marked by sympathy and indulgence. Pure, effervescent humour is the result.

Gurnam Singh's faculties of wit and persiflage have been lately enlisted in the cause of social enlightenment. His humorous poems comment on the foibles of village society and point the way to reform. He is Punjab's most popular poet at community development parties and his comic verses, designed to win people's support for programmes of national reconstruction, have a tremendous mass appeal.

Piara Singh Data is another consistent writer of humorous tales. He has published several collections of which 'April Fool' is a typical title. His work, however, lacks finesse and some of his jokes do not come off at all.

The informal, light-paced essay, with a touch of satire, which, ultimately, is the main source of contemporary humour, is still lacking in Punjabi literature. Among the few writers who have tried their hand at this form are Harindar Singh Roop, Narindarpal Singh, Harkirat Singh, Ishwar Singh, Giani Gurdit Singh and Gurbachan Singh Talib. Most of the products are of a tentative and rudimentary character. There is, however, much genuine humour in Giani Gurdit Singh. His essays, intimate and personal, possess a delicious undercurrent of irony, wit and eccentricity. Some of his characteristic titles are: 'My Village', 'The Idols of My Village' and 'The Gossips of My Village'. These essays gain their distinctive quality from the keen and delightfully malicious

comments of the author and his lively, home-spun style.

Balwant Gargi's vignettes of some of his contemporaries in the field of Punjabi literature represent another typical category of humour. A subtle, ironic insight tempered by a tolerant view of human failings and contradictions is its main source. Gargi's witty and polished style of writing and his eye for minute detail, coupled with his vivid strokes of description, make his sketches interesting and life-like.

Harkirat Singh is an essayist of outstanding promise. He has an inborn genius for humour. He has written essays for the radio as also for some of the leading Punjabi periodicals. His work, though scanty in volume, reveals his power of humorous contemplation and intuition.

A very welcome addition to the Punjabi literature of humour is a collection of essays by Shri N. V. Gadgil, the Punjab Governor, which have recently been translated from the Marathi. Even in translation they retain their freshness and liveliness of spirit. The core of these essays is the personal anecdote. Each essay is built round some incident picked by the author from his rich and eventful life. In reconstructing it, he displays true poetic insight and an exquisitely refined sense of humour and wrings from it the lyrical spirit of nostalgia and genial reflection. The narrative rambles along in an engagingly discursive manner and is illumined by shrewd and witty observations. These cheerful, light-hearted essays, with a marked personal nuance, make delightful reading. They are as much distinguished for their prodigality of

confidence as for their charming, idiosyncratic tone, wit and humour. To Punjabi literature they bring new elements of style and perception.

In the few essays that Gurbachan Singh Talib has written, Punjabi humour reaches its highest manifestation. With his truly cultured wit and fluent and sensitive style of writing he recaptures the rhythm and flavour of the English romantic essay. His 'Of Tea' is a sheer joy to read.

VIII

A Century of Punjabi Journalism

ALTHOUGH Punjabi journalism has not been able to keep up pace with modern developments in the technique of the craft, its history is long and varied. The number of newspapers and journals that have appeared in Punjabi from time to time is legion. Few of them have survived, and fewer have attained any sizable circulation. But they all tell an interesting story and form a valuable record of the social and political life of the Punjab. Another feature of Punjabi journalism has been its quick responsiveness to popular trends and its readiness to adopt a public cause or movement.

The first Punjabi newspaper was born about the middle of the last century. It was sponsored by the Ludhiana Christian Mission, which had set up its own press and had Gurmukhi characters cast for the first time for printing books in Punjabi. By the forties of the last century the Mission Press at Ludhiana had become a centre of literary activity in the Punjabi language. Paradoxically, Punjabi printing was unknown in the trans-Sutlej Punjab, then ruled by Ranjit Singh.

The Ludhiana Mission at its annual meeting in 1841 entrusted the Rev. J. Newton with the task of preparing a dictionary in the Punjabi language. A Punjabi grammar had already been

issued in 1838. The Mission foresaw the prospect of an increasing demand for books in the language of the people of the region and published a geographical description of the Punjab in 1850. This was followed by another grammar of the Punjabi language a year later. In 1854 the Punjabi Dictionary was published. Just as the first Punjabi grammar and Punjabi dictionary originated from the Ludhiana Mission Press, the first Punjabi newspaper also emanated from there.

Nearly two decades after the first Punjabi newspaper came the second, which appeared from Amritsar in 1867. This was known as *Akhbar Sri Darbar Sahib*, and bore on the front page a drawing of the Golden Temple. Gurmukhi type was still not available in Amritsar and the paper was printed from hand-written copy.

The newspapers born under the influence of the Singh Sabha movement were closer to the life of the people. They were more in sympathy with the public sentiment and represented the general urge for social and religious reform. The last decades of the nineteenth century were a period of a world-wide reform movement of which Bahai'ism in Iran, Brahmo Samaj in Bengal, Arya Samaj in Maharashtra and Singh Sabha in the Punjab were the various manifestations.

The Singh Sabha movement, which aimed at rediscovering the essentials of the Sikh doctrine and practice and eliminating superstitious customs and ritual, provided a new impulse for creative activity in the Punjab. Newspapers were started to further the cause of reform. In 1880, Bhai Gurmukh Singh, who was a professor of Punjabi

in the Oriental College at Lahore and who was one of the founders of the Khalsa College, brought out the weekly *Khalsa Akhbar* which appeared from Lahore under the editorship of Giani Jhanda Singh Faridkoti. This paper ultimately passed into the hands of Giani Dit Singh, who was a great scholar and revelled in argument, never yielding to anybody a point in polemics. He was also a poet and sometimes wrote the leaders and editorial comments in verse.

Some of the other papers of this period were *Singh Sabha Gazette*, *Loyal Khalsa Gazette*, *Vidyarak Punjab*, *Bharat Sudhar*, *Sudhararak* and *Khalsa Samachar*. This last has survived to this day, and represents the best of Punjabi journalism. It has throughout maintained a characteristic dignity and evenness of tone. It bears the impress of the highly cultured and accomplished personality of Bhai Vir Singh, the great Punjabi poet and philosopher, whose father Dr Charan Singh founded the journal in 1899. Today *Khalsa Samachar* is a model of restrained and reliable comment, genuine scholastic taste and purity of Punjabi idiom.

These early papers were either weekly or monthly journals and their object was mainly reformist. They concerned themselves with religious, social and educational matters. In politics they were conservative and wholeheartedly supported the government. Their tone sometimes was ruffled because of the religious argument in which they frequently engaged. But they aroused interest in Punjabi language and letters and established the form of Punjabi prose writing.

The partition of Bengal and the Colony agitation in the Punjab for which Sardar Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai were deported gave political bias to newspaper writing. The Komagata Maru incident and the demolition of the outer wall of the Gurdwara Rikab Ganj in Delhi to clear the site for the proposed Government Secretariat created widespread public awareness in the Punjab. Politically conscious newspapers like the *Shahid*, *Panth Sewak* and *Punjabi Surma* were born. The *Shahid* which started publication from Amritsar on December 4, 1914, was the first Punjabi daily. Its editor, Charan Singh, was a fine proseman and, by the standards of the times, an extremist in political ideas.

The Government sponsored official publications to publicize its own view. The Punjab Government started the *Haq* which appeared from Lahore under the editorship of Khan Abdul Aziz. The Government of India started *Fauji Akhbar* in Simla in 1914. This paper is still in existence and is now published from Delhi.

Numerous papers devoted to old themes like social and religious reform, women's education, indigenous medicine and caste interests kept coming up. Among these were *Amritsar Patrika*, *Bir*, *Punjab Kesri*, *Punjabi*, *Sutantra*, *Vidya*, *Gurmat Parchar*, *Istri Sudhar*, *Istri Samachar*, *Punjabi Bhain*, *Vaid Raj*, *Temperance Magazine*, *Namdev Pattar*, *Ramgariah Patrika* and *Mehra Patrika*.

The next phase of Punjabi journalism was dominated by the Akali movement which aroused a great deal of popular enthusiasm. Public

feeling had been strengthened by the Jallianwala Bagh incident of 1919. New papers expressing the prevailing temper of the people started. A note of warning and resistance entered their voice and they propagated the cause of Gurdwara reform as well as political advancement. The people of the Punjab were awakened to a new consciousness by these papers.

The journalism of this period brought into public life many people who later became well known in the political sphere. Sardar Sardul Singh Caveeshar, Master Tara Singh, Sardar Mangal Singh Akali, Bhai Jodh Singh, Master Mota Singh, Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir and Sardar Sohan Singh Josh, now a communist leader, all gained their first experience of political affairs as editors of the different Punjabi journals. Sardar Sardul Singh edited his own weekly, *Sangat;* Mangal Singh was editor of the *Akali*; Sohan Singh Josh of the *Sansar* and Bhai Jodh Singh of the *Khalsa*, a daily newspaper of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, representing moderate opinion.

The daily *Akali* was the central organ of the new movement and enjoyed a real vogue in those days of fierce agitation. A series of incidents such as the Nankana tragedy, Guru-ka-Bagh and the deposition of the Maharaja of Nabha imparted heat to the political atmosphere. The *Akali* came into conflict with Authority on several occasions and suffered forfeitures and suppression. Once it had to seek asylum under a baker's roof from where it was published secretly every morning. Passing through many vicissitudes and changing its name several times to overcome legal difficulties,

it has continued to this day. It counts among its editors well-known names such as those of Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir, Sodhi Darbara Singh, Sardar Partap Singh Kairon, now Chief Minister of the Punjab, and Mubarak Singh.

A change from political writing was provided by magazines devoted to education and literature. The *Pritam*, started in 1923, created taste for light reading. It began publishing short stories and poetry for the first time. This was something new in Punjabi journalism and there was soon a considerable demand for such literature. The *Pritam* became a popular family paper. A new class of writers was born and new literary values were introduced.

The *Phulwari*, another monthly magazine started a year later, encouraged research in literature and history and published specialized material on these subjects. Both these journals are in existence today. The *Pritam* is now published from Delhi and carries on the same tradition of popular writing. The *Phulwari*, now at Jullundur, has forsworn letters in favour of Marxist philosophy.

Charan Singh Shahid's *Mauji* bequeathed a rich tradition of humour to Punjabi literature. His interesting character, Baba Waryama, was a favourite of the people who every week looked forward to meeting the charming old man and laughing at the new situation he had landed himself in. The spontaneous love the Punjabis gave to the *Mauji* has not fallen to any other journal's share. The paper ceased with the death of Charan Singh in 1935. It was subsequently resurrected

under different managements, but for want of a writer of Charan Singh's originality and brilliance it languished. The latest attempt at revival made by Bakhshish Singh, one of Charan Singh's old colleagues, may prove more fruitful.

The birth of *Preet Lari* was a significant event in Punjabi journalism. America-educated Gurbakhsh Singh launched the journal in fulfilment of new ideas and longings cultivated during his stay abroad. The *Preet Lari* with its modern philosophy of the art of living and reassessment of social and religious values soon established itself as an institution of enlightenment and knowledge. What is more important, it introduced a new prose style which was readily accepted and emulated by Punjabi writers. Short sentences, frequent and telling paragraphing, unexpected turns of phrase and figures of speech reproducing the effect of modern English style of writing were used. The *Preet Lari* also introduced certain innovations of the format which became the fashion for all other newspapers and magazines. Smaller type, better paper and accent on the general quality of get-up were some of the characteristics of *Preet Lari* printing. There is a vast difference in the look of Punjabi journals before *Preet Lari* and those after it.

In 1931, Colonel Bhola Nath tried a new experiment when he started from Lahore a Punjabi magazine *Sarang* in Persian script. It became fairly popular but did not last long. Gurbakhsh Singh Narang brought out *Punjabi Punch* in imitation of the famous English paper of that name, but it was a poor imitation. The *Likhari*,

a quarterly publishing criticism of Punjabi literature, gathered weight and authority, but failed to achieve financial solvency.

For many years Amritsar remained the chief centre of the Punjabi Press, the Guru Ramdas Sarai bazaar being the Fleet Street of the city. It was the home of a large number of newspapers and magazines. Gradually with the development of the English and Urdu Press in Lahore, many Punjabi papers shifted to the State capital. After partition they spread to cities like Jullundur, Ludhiana and Delhi. Many newspapers have since appeared in these and other centres.

At Jullundur are published two well-established and influential daily papers—Sardar Amar Singh Dosanjh's *Akali Patrika* and Sardar Sadhu Singh Hamdard's *Ajit*. A common feature of both is the incisiveness of their political comment. Giani Gurdit Singh's *Parkash* was the first Punjabi journal to shift to the State's new capital, Chandigarh. It is an efficiently run daily which has won recognition for its independent and enlightened editorial policy. The *Ranjit*, Patiala; *Desh Darpan*, Calcutta; *Khalsa Sewak*, Delhi; and *Nawan Zamana*, Jullundur, are among other well-known Punjabi daily newspapers.

The weekly paper which used to be so popular before World War II has lost much ground lately. Just a few of the old weeklies such as *Khalsa Samachar*, *Khalsa Advocate*, and *Sukh Jiwan* survive. Among those newly started, *Punjabi Rattan* of Ludhiana occupies a place of distinction. Edited by one of the most seasoned Punjabi journalists, Giani Nahar Singh, it publishes

original material on Ghadr and other Indian revolutionary movements. Growing interest in Punjabi literature has resulted in some high-class literary magazines such as *Panj Darya*, *Arsee*, *Alochna*, *Punjabi Sahitya*, *Sahitya Samachar* and *Chetna*.

There are quite a few Punjabi papers published outside the Punjab. Calcutta claims an old daily, which has been in existence since 1930, widely read monthly *Atam Science* (Spiritual Science) and some weeklies. Some years ago the *Kavi*, a magazine devoted to poetry and criticism, was also published in Calcutta. Similarly, Bombay, Lucknow, Cawnpore, Rangoon (Burma) and Kuala Lumpur (Malaya) have their Punjabi papers. There was also a monthly—*Nava Jug*—published in Los Angeles (California) in the United States of America until its editor, Dr Gyanee Bhagwan Singh Pritam, returned to India two years ago.

In spite of this enterprising spirit that has throughout characterized Punjabi journalism, the circulation of the various papers and magazines is extremely scanty. The quality of writing and printing is poor. Narrow partisanship, a tendency to use strong language and lack of objectivity are some of the obvious shortcomings. But now, with the recognition that Punjabi is receiving, papers with wider readership and higher standards of journalism should be possible.

IX

Chandi-di-Var

FEW poems in Punjabi literature equal Guru Gobind Singh's *Chandi-di-Var* in virility of tone and structure. This is an epic poem which depicts the titanic contest between the gods and the demons. Its magnificent martial cadences and vivid imagery aptly recapture the sounds and fury of battle-scene. The emphasis is on the image of Goddess Durga which, through the poetic imagination and fervour of its creator, attains reality and firmness belying its mythical origin. Such is the impact of this poem that people in the Punjab have a superstition and will be chary of reciting it first thing in the morning, lest it should arouse them to martial action. But the Nihangs and others heroically inclined read it regularly and derive great inspiration and spirit from it.

Of course, Guru Gobind Singh had chosen the Puranic story of Durga's valorous fight against the demons with a view to infusing martial ardour into his people. His narrative follows in the main the original source, the Markandeya Purana, but a dominant interest of the poem lies in the character of Durga which has been drawn with real artistic insight.

The eight-armed Durga, so the story goes, was born of Vishnu. When Brahma, attacked by a demon Madhya Kantaba by name, wiped off perspiration from his forehead into the ocean,

another demon, Jallandur, sprang to life from the drops. Pursued by the demons, Brahma sought shelter with Vishnu who was then sitting in deep meditation. As Madhya Kantaba advanced towards Vishnu, out came Durga splitting open the latter's side to fight the demons.

According to another tradition, Durga was the daughter of the king of Ujjain. Being the only daughter of her father, she succeeded to the throne on her father's death. She was brave and handsome. Thus is she described by Guru Gobind Singh in his Hindi poem, *Chandi Chritra:*

Luminous like the moon is her face, and a sight of it charms away many a woe.
Her hair hangs like Shivji's serpents, her eyes are the envy of both lotus and the gazelle.
Her brows are in the manner of a bow; her lashes like the arrows.
She has the waist of a lion and marches with the majesty of a royal tusker.
She abides on the mountain-top; none can resist the splendour of her charms.
She holds a sword in her hand and rides a lion;
Flaming like gold is her presence.
In another hand she carries a bow of war.
The fish are shamed by her restless energy;
The lotus and the gazelle by the softness of her eyes;
The parrots by her nose;
The pigeons by her neck;
The cuckoo by her voice;
The pomegranate by the pearly row of her teeth.
Touching the person of the goddess,
The moonbeams have become more lustrous than before.

The story in the Punjabi poem *Chandi-di-Var*, by Guru Gobind Singh, begins with the demons overthrowing the gods and establishing their own sway where the gods once ruled. The Satyuga, the age of truth, is past and it is now the time of not-so-true Treta. Great discord prevails in the world; Narada—famous for his ability to stir up passions—is abroad.

The gods in their helplessness turn to Mount Kailash where Durga lives. Their leader, King Indra, supplicates the goddess for help: 'Thy shelter we seek, Goddess Durgshah!' Riding her demon-devouring lion, Durga at once sets out to annihilate the evil-doers.

A fierce battle ensues, and the heavens are torn by the beating of drums, blowing of shells and the piercing cries of war. The sun becomes invisible in the dazzling brilliance of shiny swords and spears.

In the awesome confusion of battle, the long-haired heroes fall to the ground, in agony, like drunken madmen. Those pierced with spears lie motionless like olives on the branch of the tree. The fallen warriors look like so many domes and turrets struck down by lightning. The demons fight with dreadful determination and not one of them has been seen fleeing the field. Their womenfolk watch the bloody scene from their towers, amazed at the goddess's wondrous valour.

Durga's sword seems dancing in her hand raining death on the dauntless foe. The demons, full of wrath, close upon her roaring like the black clouds. The mighty Mahkhasur comes in great fury. But Durga smites him with such force that her sword, breaking the helmet to pieces and piercing through the body of the rider, the horse and the earth, rests on the horns of the bullock (who supports the earth). The Queen, upon her stately lion, tears through the battle-ranks of the demons demolishing them with her deathly

sword. 'Durga, with God's grace, has won the day'. Restoring to the gods their lost kingdom, she returns.

But the troubles of the gods are not yet ended. The demons again rally under their chiefs, Sumbha and Nisumbha, and march upon the kingdom of Indra. The gods are again undone and are forced to seek Durgshah's help. The goddess is ready for another battle.

Chandi—another name for Durga in the poem —flashes upon the battle's dread array like lightning. Warlike heroes such as Lochan Dhum come forward to match the goddess's prowess, but they all fall to her fatal sword one by one. Sumbha sends out fresh armies to face the fight. The goddess meets them with an angry charge of arrows sending many a hero to eternal sleep.

It is now the turn of another, Sranvat Vijay, who brings a mighty host of iron-clad, vengeful soldiers. Durga mounts the lion as she hears the fiendish din, and, flourishing the mace of battle in her hand, leads her army on. But deathless is Sranvat Vijay. As the drops of his blood fall to the ground, hosts of demons arise from them to join the strife. Many more are born every instant than Durga and the gods can destroy. The goddess, in a rage, remembers Kali, who bursts forth from her forehead in a flame of fire. Durga and Kali both spread ruin in the enemy's ranks with their bloodwashed swords. At last, Sranvat Vijay is surrounded and 'the swords around him look like a crowd of fair maidens eagerly gathered to see a newly arrived bridegroom'. Kali drinks the blood falling from Durga's blows so that no

drop touches the earth, thus preventing the birth of more demon-warriors.

Great is Sumbha's anguish when he learns of Sranvat Vijay's death. The wrathful demons prepare for revenge. The firm earth trembles under the marching heroes like a vessel upon stormy seas. But resistless is Durgshah on the field of battle. She cuts up the foe-men like a hewer cuts the twigs. Those who were never tired of fighting have had more than their fill today. Mounting his fiery steed comes Nisumbha with a heavy bow he had specially sent for from Multan. But before he can take aim, a deadly blow from Durgshah's sword bears him down. The same fate awaits Sumbha.

Seeing their chiefs fall in this manner, the demons raise a loud lament of woe. They leave their horses and fly with weeds of grass in their mouths in token of surrender.

Durgshah restores to Indra his crown. 'Hail to the Jagmaat—the Universal Mother!' cry all the worlds.

Durga emerges from this account triumphant, high-spirited and glorious. She is the symbol of divine power, indignation and retribution. To the virtuous, she is a ready and kindly friend and protector.

In *Chandi-di-Var*, the different names used for the goddess are Durgshah, Chandi, Devita, Rani, Bhavani, Jagmaat and Maha Mai—the Great Mother.

The chief point of *Chandi-di-Var* lies in its warlike temper which is evoked by a succession of

powerful and eloquent similes and a dignified, echoic music of the richest timbre. The poem, though not the size of a true epic, has a remarkable breadth of sweep and intensity and a heightening rhythmical tempo with well marked climactic patterns. On the reader's mind it has a most stirring and invigorating effect.

X

The Finger-Glass of Memory

ARSI, or finger-glass, is a delicate woman's ornament. Its quick-moving, quivering reflection portrays the restlessness of youth and proclaims elegance and charm. A lover of art and letters, at 58, used the finger-glass of his memory to illumine recollection and resurrect in its glow his past life. The result was a delicately shaded pattern in which soft and mellow colours mingled to produce an effect of exquisite harmony and balance.

A gracious and kindly figure, radiating warmth and friendliness, emerges from the pages of this book.* The lineaments, without any effort at emphasis or embellishment, stand out clear and well marked. They reveal a sensitive and luxuriant personality registering its impressions with a pleasant touch of humour and liveliness.

Principal Teja Singh presided over cultural and literary activity in the Punjab for more than two decades. Punjabi letters and Sikh history and philosophy were his special fields of study. In the former he exercised pontifical influence and initiated new values and standards. With his vast background of oriental learning combined with a deep study of Western literature, hew as an ideal critic and arbiter of literary excellence. His writings helped to fix the form and structure of Punjabi idiom. He encouraged and introduced

* Teja Singh: *Arsi.*

to readers many young writers and it was accepted custom for all new practitioners to first show their work to him. Perhaps no other writer was called upon to write introductions for such a variety of books as was Teja Singh. Among the writers introduced by him were Mohan Singh, the poet, and Nanak Singh, the novelist. The former he patronized only after he had agreed to burn on his advice the first manuscript of his verse.

As Professor of English literature in the Khalsa College at Amritsar, where he worked for nearly 30 years, he informed and nursed the creative instincts of many young authors. As a scholar of Sikh religion, he wrote copiously and authoritatively on the subject. Some of his renderings of the holy texts have already established themselves as classics. Side by side with his literary work, Teja Singh cultivated the art of living. His warm and expansive nature won him a large number of friends and many were infected by his spirit of enthusiasm, tolerance and hearty laughter. The story of this vivid and rich personality is unfolded in this autobiography with a generous-hearted friend's ease of confidence and an artist's grace and delicacy of touch.

Those whose memory of Teja Singh is confined to his later career of smooth felicity and uninterrupted devotion to letters will learn from this book how hard and adventurous his early life was. Since his father could not afford to send him to school, he absconded from home in search of education. His urge for knowledge and his strong will triumphed against all difficulties. As he

attained to the university standard, he went to Khalsa College where he found time from his scholastic preoccupations to play tennis. Something incredible for those who knew him only as a scholar! This is, perhaps, why he mentions this fact in the book with pronounced relish and accent.

The schoolboy's pranks were not unknown to him. He once daubed himself over with all the black ink his school could provide and started circumambulating the charpoy of his sleeping teacher at night to test his claimed powers over evil spirits. The teacher sat up in fright and tried all invocations against the visitant, but without effect. In the morning he related with triumph the night's experience and told his pupils how he had caged up a ghost in a casket. The boys knew the real story. One of them could not hold the secret and quite irreverently, though innocently, informed the teacher that the visitor was one of his own students and not a ghost.

Teja Singh's sensitive nature was sucking poetry from the babbling brooks of Pothohar. The stories of the Gurus and heroes aroused his imagination. In his seventh form, he wrote in English a treatise on painting and depicted in a drama the noble and heroic martyrdom of the sons of Guru Gobind Singh. He painted pictures, and, although he had to work to pay his way through college, he had engaged a musician from a neighbouring village to come daily to his hostel to play the sitar for him.

He recalls with gratitude the persons who moulded his early life. When still a small boy, he took

Pahul from Baba Sir Khem Singh Bedi and was converted to Sikhism. The middle school headmaster, Lala Kundan Lal, initiated him into English literature helping him outside the prescribed course of study with books like *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Hereward the Wake*. Later, at Rawalpindi, he came into touch with Giani Sher Singh who gave him his enthusiasm for Sikh literature and history. His imaginative mind was inflamed by Giani Sher Singh's dynamic zeal and uncommon intellectual gifts. As a young lecturer at Gordon College, Rawalpindi, he was greatly influenced by the noble character of Professor Peter Ponsonby. At Khalsa College, his idol was Bawa Harkishen Singh whose dignity of mind, wide learning and gift of speech and writing he greatly admired.

The story achieves intensity and a breadth of canvas as the author, under the impact of the new religious and political movement in the Punjab, withdraws himself from the seclusion of academic and literary environment. He was among the 13 Sikh professors of Khalsa College who resigned as a protest against Government's hand in the management of the institution. This gave rise to a widespread agitation and the Government was forced to replace all eleven official members of the Khalsa College Committee by non-official Sikhs. The Punjab Government was so annoyed with Teja Singh that once the Governor, requesting Mr G. A. Wathen, Principal of Khalsa College, to suggest the names of two Sikhs for nomination to the University, warned him not to mention 'those anti-British professors, Teja Singh

and Harkishen Singh'. Mr Wathen, in his characteristic manner, wrote back: 'They are the only pro-British professors on my staff, because they love Shakespeare and Wordsworth and so lovingly teach them'.

Principal Teja Singh was also connected with the Sikhs' long-drawn struggle in the twenties for the release of their holy places from the control of an effete and corrupt priestly order. He was arrested during this campaign and served more than one year in gaol. On his release for reasons of health, he returned to Khalsa College and his old profession of teaching. But he retained his contact with public causes through his writing and lectures. He undertook a lecture tour of Malaya and delivered nearly 300 speeches in two months' time.

The story ends on a note of sadness. The peace and happiness of his domestic life were shaken by the untimely death of his youngest daughter, Manjit Kaur. Teja Singh describes the sad event with an acute sense of poignancy. For simple pathos and power this description is unsurpassed in Punjabi literature.

The vignettes of some of the personalities in this narrative are remarkable for their fresh and clear delineation. The author's grandfather Sardar Narain Singh; his devoted wife Dhan Kaur; Master Kundan Lal; Sardar Nihal Singh, father of the well-known writer, St Nihal Singh; Sir Sunder Singh Majithia and Professor Diwan Chand Sharma are all realized with graceful, vivid touches.

Unencumbered with heavy detail, these rapid

recollections adequately render a sensitive and passionate spirit—one who was completely at peace with himself and the rest of the world, enjoying and utilizing every moment of his existence.

The story has been told in an easy, lucid style. Clear narration aided by simple, but eloquent, language, bestows upon it a delightful facility of movement. It is a model of chaste and crisp prose; Punjabi has not been better written.

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