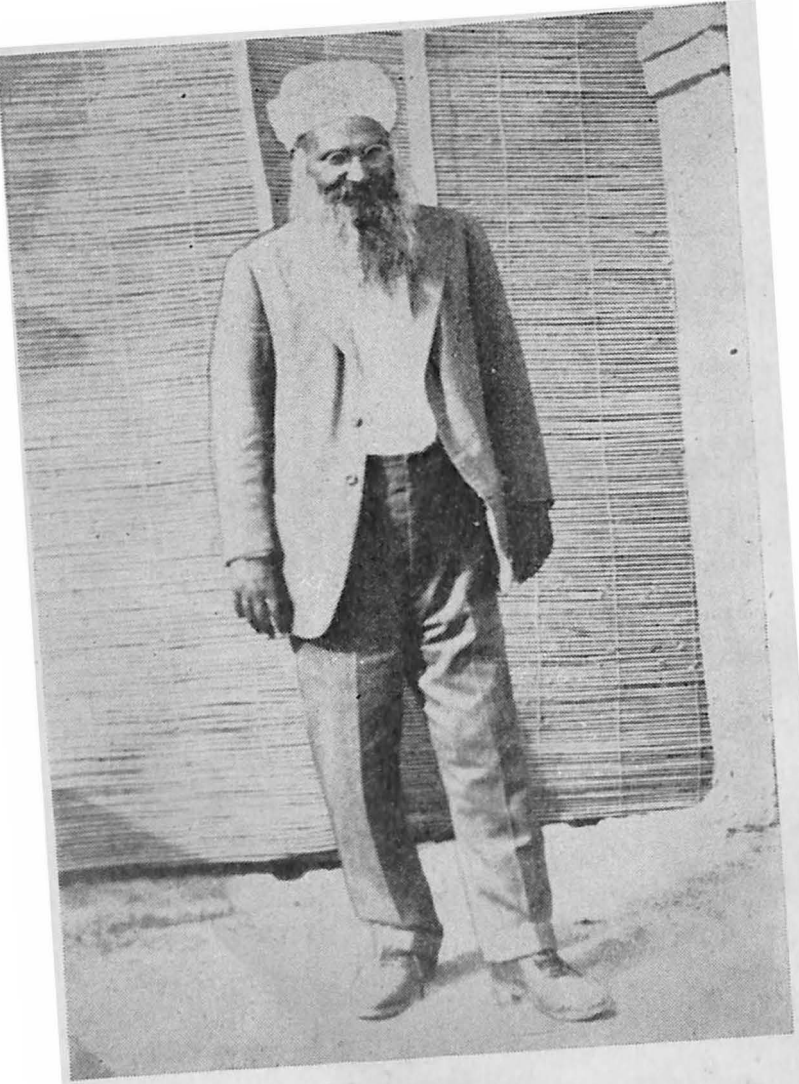


Prof. Puran Singh
Chak Unni, 1927-28, (Distt. Sheikhupura)

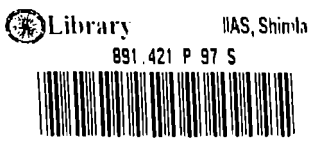
[Frontispiece

REMINISCENCES OF PURAN SINGH

by

BASANT KUMARI SINGH

PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA



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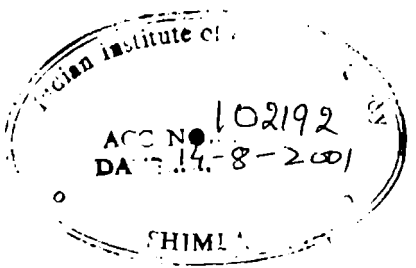

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DEDICATED
TO MY HUSBAND
MADAN MOHAN SINGH
WHOSE PRESENCE IS
FELT IN EVERY PAGE
OF THIS BOOK

—Basant Kumari Singh

FOREWORD

Neither scholarly, nor critical, these fragmentary pieces are just an offering of mine in remembrance of what I had lived, seen, and heard during the years 1924-31. Perhaps they are like picture slides illuminating the wall screen for a moment and then flickering away into darkness, but if they can bring the same scenes as vividly as I saw them to the mind's eye of the reader, my purpose is served.

Puran Singh, a man of versatile interests and variegated moods, had always been a riddle to others as well as to himself. He could not be understood nor could he understand himself. I have not made an attempt to analyse the intricacies of his personality, but I have given an account of what he seemed to me while I was staying with him and his family at Dehra Dun.

Born in Hafizabad on January 8, 1908, I am his eldest daughter-in-law, and the widow of his son, Madan Mohan Singh who retired as a District and Sessions Judge. My parents, Bulaki Ram Chopra of Hafizabad and Janki Devi (nee Johanne Nielsen of Copenhagen, Denmark) had

been close friends of Puran Singh and his family ever since 1912. Hence, we spent a good deal of our time together; that is how I have been able to recollect and write these early reminiscences.

Simla, June 1977 BASANT KUMARI SINGH

PURAN SINGH : AN INTRODUCTION

by

NILAMBRI SINGH

Puran Singh, often called 'the Wonder Poet of Punjab' is well known among literary circles as a distinguished litterateur who wrote essays, poems, and dissertations in English, Punjabi, and Hindi. Born in 1881 near Abbottabad in the Frontier District of Hazara, he rose to fame in the first two decades of this century. His literary career began in Japan with the editorship of *The Thundering Dawn*, a monthly magazine, which was later continued in Lahore. Thereafter, his essays appeared in *Saraswati*, and his dissertations were published in *Indian Forest Records* and *Indian Forest Memoirs*. *Sisters of the Spinning Wheel*, an anthology of devotional poems derived from Sikh Scriptures, *The Book of Ten Masters*, *Khule Maidan*, *Khule Ghund*, *The Spirit of Oriental Poetry*, *Khule Asmani Rang*, *On Paths of Life*, and *The Spirit Born People* followed after 1920. Ceaseless writing played havoc with his health, and, finally, on March 31, 1931, he died at Dehra Dun, leaving behind several manuscripts which have been handed over to the Punjabi University.

Puran Singh was born and brought up among

Pathans. "I grew up," he says, "like a little 'Pathan' child with a Hindu mind, that learnt the Song of the Guru in its cradle; and in my younger days looked just like a Pathan." From the very beginning, he held his mother in great esteem for her remarkable individuality and extraordinary courage. Unlettered and uneducated, she had an instinctive wisdom and "the mind of a modern man-woman." The society in which she lived, however, found it difficult to accept her views, and she died "fighting with the inclemencies of society" which never knew her worth.

Puran Singh inherited her vigour and her "strangeness". He rose far above the middle-class standards that had imprisoned her, and he wrote with a ferocious grace and tireless speed. At times he wrote for days and nights at a stretch, and when the manuscript appeared, it shone through with the innocence of a child and the profundity of a sage.

Among his contemporaries and good friends were Bhai Vir Singh, Sarojini Naidu, and Dr. Khudadad. His personal and literary friendship with Bhai Vir Singh was a rewarding one that proved fruitful for both the poets and brought out the best in their writings. His house overflowed with *sanyasis* and *bhikshus* much to the discomfiture of his family who were often taken aback by their sudden and untimely visits.

Puran Singh wrote like a mystic with the heart

of a child. His words were always filled with emotion, and at the slightest pretext, love bloomed in him. He found it easy to laugh and cry. His anger flared up without a moment's notice. He was often sad at the separation of a dear one, and, like Rama Krishna who felt keenly hurt when his Vivekananda failed to come, Puran Singh shed tears of sorrow when he found the evil in man showing through the veil of pretentious righteousness. At a time when he felt surrounded by a vast sea of malevolence, he went to his Guru and searched through a concept of anthroposophy to find the 'other worldliness' of the human soul. The Sikh Scriptures filled him with a new life, and the Bible was a source of perpetual inspiration. His mind was a respository of Japanese art and poetry which developed in him a love for the Bonsai and Okakura. The Japanese culture became deeply embedded in his heart, and he never really forgot the exciting time that he spent in Japan an account of which is given in his autobiography, *On Paths of Life*.

The influence of the American Transcendentalists may be seen very clearly in the works of Puran Singh. It is said that one of his most cherished books was Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. The American genius suited his mysticism, his search for the Unknown, and the realm of the Unutterable. Like the American poet, Puran was the pioneer of free verse in Punjabi poetry to which he

gave a new elasticity, refreshing and invigorating. The young girls of the Punjab villages, wearing red ivory bracelets and glass bangles, bloom in his poems with innocent charm and grace. We find in them a love of the pastoral—the countryside, the cows rich in milk, and the fields waiting to be ploughed by the farmer. He depicts a tradition and a culture born from the lashing waters of the monsoon, and the scorching heat of the Punjab sun. His music—a toneless harmony rising from 'Prose Poems' and *vers libre*—takes in the sound of every whisper that arose from his beloved earth. With Whitman he 'sings' of the Soul, with Emerson he becomes one with the Soul, and with Thoreau he always finds a desire to go back to his soil and his Punjab which was his first love. In his heart he hears the folk songs sung through countless generations, and becomes the devoted disciple of his beautiful land and culture, or the poet of pure, rural Punjab and the bare earth.

His interests varied from Pharmaceutical Chemistry to Vedanta, and we see him as a brilliant student sent on a scholarship to Japan, and also as an ascetic, who forsook everything to join monkhood and the Vedantic order formed by Swami Rama Tirath. Throughout his life Puran remained a Vedantic monk at heart. In spite of renouncing sanyas at the request of his sister who lay on her deathbed, he went through life "sharing his joy with the whole world" thus living up to the ideal

of monkhood as expressed by his mentor. The going was difficult. He led a chequered career moving through many vicissitudes. He enjoyed the luxury of the court of the Rajah of Gwalior where he was appointed as the Chief Chemist, but he also saw the utter devastation of his entire estate caused by the ravages of a flood. We see him enamoured by the songs sung by Gauhar Jehan at Gwalior, and we see him sitting on a height, watching the water rising in his fields, and singing snatches from folk songs. The varying circumstances and the people he met all became eventually a part of himself :

> "I see a hundred souls blend in me and I interchange my blood and brain thus with a hundred more in a single breath, and calm in solitude, I find a society."

The Vedantic strain never really died and thus made him a stranger even to the ones closest to him who failed to understand his search for identification with the human paradox. "I seem a strange misty Form," he says, "Like vapour, I pass into the being of others, and they passing within me become my guests."

The essential charm of Puran Singh's poetry lies in its immense variety and freshness. The series beginning with *Khule Maidan* gives us in free verse the traditional folk-lore of Puran Bhagat, a medley of devotional poems, an interpretation of communication between the Ego and the Con-

sciousness, a depiction of the tribal life and people of the North West Frontier, and a vivid account of the simple peasants of Punjab. The tone varies from being child-like in its simplicity to one that defies analysis due to abstruse thought. It gives scope for several interpretations and provides newer facets with every fresh reading.

The beginning of the twentieth century is known for its revolutionary upheavals in the literary world. Puran Singh too, was a child of his age and reacted to the winds of change that blew over the generation of poets and writers of the nineteen twenties. He revolutionised the poetic concepts of his time and in spite of the deep debt he owed to German and American writers, he remained an Oriental at heart. He showed to the people of his land the vast treasure they possessed in their tradition, their folk lore, and their culture. He brought out the essential character of his people, the inherent *Joie de vivre* combined with a grim tenacity and determination of purpose that has become so well associated with the Punjab.

On March 31, 1931, Puran Singh died of tuberculosis at Dehra Dun. Many of his works have yet to be published; the manuscripts are at present with Punjabi University, Patiala, and a good deal of work still remains to be done. The first of the series, *Khule Maidan*, from which the following extract is taken, is one of his earlier writings. The essential love of the land is brought

forth in beautiful simplicity which has in it a strain of nostalgia. This is a translation of the last stanza of *Punjab nu Kookan Main :*

"Come back, come back my land of the five waters,
My Punjab of the cheerful mien and blossoming brow of the days gone by,
Come back to me a thousand fold, a million fold, come back my land,
Come and dwell in the innermost sanctuary of my heart
My sacred soil of a myriad hues.
Punjab—the all-pervading spirit of my soul, come !
Announce yourself with that bounteous clang;
Come as the sweet buzzing of a thousand honey bees
Over beds of blossoming flowers.
My whole being goes out to you with arms outstretched
In the affluence of love and sacrifice.
Return to me, my own.

(Translated from the original*
by Basant Kumari Singh)

*ਪੰਜਾਬ ਨੂੰ ਕੂਕਾਂ ਮੈਂ—(ਖੁਲ੍ਹੇ ਮੈਦਾਨ ਵਿਚੋਂ) The Original

ਆ ! ਪੰਜਾਬ ਤੂੰ ਮੁੜ ਆ ! ਖਿੜੇ ਖਿੜੇ ਮੱਥੇ ਲਾ,
ਕਰੋੜਾ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਆ ! ਇਕ ਆ, ਹਜ਼ਾਰ ਆ !
ਦਿਲ ਦੇ ਵਿਚਕਾਰ ਆ ! ਰੂਹ ਖਲ੍ਹੀ ਟੰਕਾਰ ਆ ।
ਭੌਰਿਆਂ ਦੀ ਗੁੰਜਾਰ ਆ ! ਫੁਲਾਂ ਦੀ ਗੁਲਜ਼ਾਰ ਆ ।
ਧੁਰ ਦੀ ਫੁੰਕਾਰ ਆ ! ਆ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਸਦਕੇ
—ਤੂੰ ਮੁੜ ਫਿਰ ਆ—

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I

FIRMAMENTS IN SPATE

"Kiun ki eh meri ambri kangh hai," he replied in emphatic Panjabi.

"Ambri kangh, ambri kangh," I repeated, wondering, unable to fathom what he could be meaning by that.

Then he smiled indulgently, looked around at all of us—his own and his friends' children—gathered round his bedside, and said, *"ambri kangh* : *ambri* means the firmaments, and *kangh* is a flood. The firmaments are in spate, and their overflooding means *inspiration*. Now, at this moment, this little nine-day old cherub is my inspiration, my *ambri kangh*."

I do not know what manuscript he was writing at the time, but the pen in his fingers was moving with intense rapidity, and leaping, page after page, faster, ever faster, with the lightning speed of an inspired poet. Watching him thus, we also imagined that the firmaments were actually in spate, and that it was not possible for his fingers to keep pace with the overflooding rush of his mental inspiration.

While he was writing, his chubby little nine-day-old niece Kirna was lying fast asleep, cuddled up beside him. He was very fond of relaxing in bed, writing for hours and hours, and sometimes even days on end, like this.

It was an afternoon at Dehra Dun, in the year 1924, in the verandah of "Ivanhoe", his residence, which he had bought a few years back. Two large piles of sheets of paper were strewn on his bedside table. As he paused for a moment, half reclining on the pillows and looked up, there was a radiant expression on his face. We were all watching, wondering, waiting for him to lift his pen for a while so that we could ask the question, "Why is this little infant here ? Does she not disturb you ?"

"No, no," he answered, laughing heartily, "she is my inspiration, my *ambri kangh.*"

.....

As I look back, his whole life appears as a life athrob with inspiration, pulsating, vibrating, overflooding its bounds.

Sometimes the cherub—like expression of a tiny infant would lift his mind to wonder and contemplation, and, at others, he would read poetry in the naive little replies of his other niece, Bina, when she would answer his loving and oft—repeated queries in her lisping tongue. The little girl was about two years old. Her father, S. Wazir Singh, was an officer in the Forest Depart-

ment of Baraich, U. P., and having been brought up there, she could talk only in the Purbi dialect.

One day, he asked her, "Little One, tell me how does the rain fall ?" "*Are Tayaji,*" she replied with great confidence, "*gagan mein jo rat ko boondi latki rahit hain, wahi to parat hain nanh* (Oh Uncle, don't you see the little drops dangling from the skies at night ? It's these very drops that fall as rain)."

She used to watch the stars twinkle at night, and imagine them to be shimmering drops of rain dangling from the heavens. Then he would say to all of us, "Just listen to what she says; is'nt it perfect poetry ?"

She used to be very fond of her uncle, and would keep telling him in so many of her simple childish ways that she was happiest when she was with him at Dehra Dun. Then she would relate how her mother used to rebuke her at home. Furtively, looking up into her mother's face when she was relating such incidents, she would say, "*dekho, Tayaji, ab bhi to akhian se mujh ko daravat hain* (Even now she is trying to scare me with her eyes)."

II

JAPAN AND THE LURE OF THE EAST

Being one of the most brilliant students of his time, he was sent to Japan for studying Industrial Chemistry by the Rawalpindi Community. There also, he showed remarkable aptitude and ingenuity and his achievements in this field turned out to be vast and versatile. The Palm Rosa Oil which he distilled in Sheikhupura, Chak 19, was unique in its purity and excellence.

In Gwalior, when he was working as Chief Chemist for Maharaja Scindia, he turned the scorching desert into an oasis, a beautiful and fragrant eucalyptus grove, interspersed with fruit trees. He worked with a keen intuition, and he rightly guessed that once the plants had taken root, the sun's rays could not kill them. After planting the eucalypti with special manure, he got each one of them encircled separately by khus fences, several feet high, and *mashkis* were told to keep sprinkling water on the fences throughout the day. For six months the eucalypti were nourished in this manner, and then they took firm root.

When he was working in Saraya Sugar Factory, he discovered a special method for purifying sugar without having to mix charred bones, which he called *rang kapp*. The finished product of this sugar shone crystal clear in its transparancy. These, and many more, were his achievements in Industrial Chemistry.

Besides his professional achievements, however, his sensitive mind was deeply impressed by the beauty of Japan and its people. They made such an impact on him, that we could always feel the constant yearning inside him for Japan. It was a perennial source of inspiration, a living memory of what had been, that nurtured the longing for beauty in his soul. His early reminiscences of Japan would arouse him again and again, and rekindle the flame of his longing. In his talk, in his work, in his writings, we would always feel the magnetic lure of the East. When he related to us how, at the break of dawn the Japanese knelt down in worship to the shimmering snowcapped peak of Fujiyama, his face would suddenly light up with rapture as though he were actually witnessing the whole Japanese scene all over again. The memory of the cherry trees in blossom, or of the sanctity of Japanese home life, would always thrill him. I recall the sparkle in his eyes when he pictured to us a story of their almost religious hospitality in honouring a guest : their Bonsai art of rearing

miniature ornamental fruit-bearing orange trees which they would keep as their most cherished treasure, but which, when the need arose, they would willingly and ungrudgingly burn up in order to warm any stray guest who might chance to visit them in the cold winter evenings.

The young Japanese girls, their emotions as subtle and evanescent as the fragrance of the citron in bloom, the recollection of all this was not only a redolence of the East, but a perennial source of inspiration to him. It was always with him, in him, naturally and spontaneously a part of his being, throughout life. He loved Okakura, Yenshiro Noguchi, and others, as if they were his closest and dearest friends. It was here that he met Swami Ramatirath and became a Vedantic monk, donning the saffron-coloured robes of *sanyas*.

III

THE VOICE OF GANGA : RELINQUISH RENUNCIATION

So there she lay dying in his arms, his favourite sister, Ganga, the younger one.

A few days back, his father and mother had come to know that from Japan he had landed in Calcutta, and that from there, he would shortly be leaving direct for America. He had many friends and a great following wherever he went, and at the time, he was staying as the honoured guest of a millionnaire of Calcutta. His whereabouts were kept secret so that his parents may not be able to locate him. Somehow, however, they came to know of his landing in Calcutta, and suffering lots of privation and discomfort, his simple village-bred parents struggled from door to door in the alien city of Calcutta, in search of their beloved son, Puran. Eventually, one afternoon, they found him in a dramatic manner.

They coaxed and cajoled the guards and went stealthily into the Seth's palatial courtyard. There they found him lying fast asleep. He had covered himself up with a large bedsheet, but the cloth from over his feet had blown aside. His mother

immediately recognised the feet of her beloved son and fell upon him. She could not contain herself. Puran woke up with a start, and a great reunion ensued. But he sternly refused to go back home. He was adamant and declared that he would go to America and continue his life of renunciation over there. He would not give up his *gerua*, the robe of the Vedantic monk. Then his mother said, "Puran, your sister is almost on her death bed after child birth. She cannot survive for long now. She is pining for a sight of you. So come and see her just once, and then you may return and go to America."

So, that was how she lay dying in his arms, his favourite sister, Ganga, the younger one. As he looked into her upturned face, the tear drops kept falling from his eyes on to his saffron-coloured robes.

"Brother," she pleaded, "I have a last wish. Will you fulfil it ?"

"I will," he replied, in a choking voice.

"Then relinquish *sanyas* and marry your betrothed Maya," she said.

"I promise," replied Puran.

After that, his sister died peacefully.

IV

A DILEMMA

Now Puran, the saffron-robed monk was facing a dilemma. This was to be his second renunciation.

At first, after meeting Swami Rama, he had become a Vedantist, embraced *sanyas*, and renounced worldly life. But now, for the sake of his dearly-loved, dead sister Ganga, and the promise given to her, he would have to relinquish even this unworldly life of *sanyas* that he had learnt to cherish so dearly. I do not know what could have been his feelings at that time, but there is a contemporary second cousin of his living in Delhi, Mrs. Uttam Chand Bhagat of Abbottabad, who used to relate to us how he visited his relatives in Rawalpindi, and met his betrothed, Maya Devi. She relates how he came there in the garb of a *sanyasi*.

The novelty of the situation created a great stir and excitement in the whole of Rawalpindi. Puran, the Vedantic monk, was roaming about in the homes of his relatives, dressed in this unique manner. Mrs. Bhagat relates how fast and nimbly he used to move about in his flowing robes, with

such remarkable agility that it seemed as if he had been born and bred in them. The youth of Rawalpindi were so fascinated that they would always gather round him wherever he went.

Meanwhile, some time before his return to Rawalpindi, after he became a *sanyasi*, Maya Devi's mother and her other relatives suggested that she should now be engaged and married to someone else. But Maya Devi would not hear of it. She was resolute in her decision, and declared that if they tried to carry out any such plans, she would jump from the housetop and kill herself. Then, as a result of all this, for the time being, things were left as they were.

I am told that Puran's mother was a woman of indomitable courage, understanding, and willpower with a broad outlook on life and a readiness to help people out of their difficulties.

Now, I do not know whether this meeting was arranged by his mother, or whether it was the spontaneous upsurge of a *sanyasi* turned romantic but the fact is there, that in those very days, Puran went, dressed in the same manner, to meet his betrothed, Maya. He told her that he would marry her on the condition that she be willing to lead the life of a *sanyasin* with him. She replied in the affirmative and said that she was enthusiastically prepared for all that.

Then Puran suggested, "Why not come along with me immediately, as you are ?"

"No, I will not sully the name of my saintly grandfather, Bhagat Jawahar Mal," replied Maya firmly, "you come with the bridal party and only then will I accompany you."

So, all these happenings created even a greater stir in the community. Some very close relatives of Puran Singh told me that the young girls of Rawalpindi would compose love songs about the controversial couple, and sing them in his presence.

.....

Amongst the *Potholharis* of Rawalpindi, there is a ceremony called *Chhandalian*. Just on the eve of his marriage, the bridegroom is expected to compose a poem and to recite it in the presence of the veiled bride-to-be, who is seated, encircled by her friends, with five earthenware oil lamps lit in front of her. Puran hardly ever wrote in metre or rhyme, but this one that he recited to the veiled Maya was his own composition, in metre and rhyme, with a dash of the Vedantic *Aham Brahm Asmi* in it :

Khuda ki khudai hai tor dali,
Kali nazni ki maror dali,
Wahdat ke burkhe ka dar phat gaya,
Hue ham jo shahad, Khuda mil gaya.

(The omnipotence of God has been rent asunder,
The delicate half-open flower petals have been twisted and torn,

The veil of the encircling *boorkha* has blown away
and the portals of Ultimate Reality flung wide
open;
In bearing witness have I attained the Supreme
Godhead.)

V

STRAY RAMBLINGS INTO THE PAST

Puran was one of the most unusual, unpredictable, and spectacular persons that you could ever come across. In fact, I sometimes feel that only Emil Ludwig, Andre Maurois, or Romain Rolland could have done justice to his biography, to portray him in his true light, showing all the different facets that synthesized to make up his dynamic personality—each facet separately shimmering in its own scintillating radiance.

First come his deeply-cherished childhood, his mother, maternal uncle, and other relatives, his home and hearth, and what they meant to him, with the poignant subtleties of the environment that was to leave such a deep impact on his mind. Then, we see him as a student, the brilliant enthusiast, the industrial chemist enamoured of the beauty of Japan and its people. Later comes the meeting with Swami Ramatirath, his renunciation, his monkhood, his decision to go to America, his landing in Calcutta, the dramatic meeting with his parents, spectacular changes

and upheavels in his life, his marriage and his becoming a householder—a rather unique one—his publishing the paper *The Thundering Dawn*, his becoming an author, poet and chemist of keen perception and great intuition, and eventually his convincing the government (I think it was the Fazaldin Ministry) about his capabilities of running a Rosha Grass farm and factory for the distillation of Palma Rosa Oil. His winning over the government to grant him sixteen squares of land in Sheikhupura district was a great achievement, because in those days a non-agriculturist could not hold any land. That was regarded almost an impossibility. Then come his working against all odds, and with superhuman efforts rearing the farm and making it function successfully, the coming of the floods that wrought so much devastation everywhere that they destroyed the entire Rosha crop, his climbing up the spiral staircase leading to the boiler and witnessing the floods uprooting and carrying away his beloved grass; thus standing on the dais with his flowing locks, and his form silhouetted against the horizon, the *Jaanglies* heard him singing this Panjabi couplet at the top of his voice :

Bhala hoya mera charkha tuta
Te jind azaibon chhutti

(It is good that my spinning wheel has broken And my life has been freed from the bondage of worry and work.)

Then the prices of Palma Rosa suddenly going down and other unsurmountable difficulties resulted in his inability to pay the government dues, the government's taking over the farm from him, his dejection, disillusionment and illness, his homecoming, medical treatment, his being so tenderly and lovingly looked after by his wife and dearest friend, Dr. Khudadad, and subsequently his passing away.

Sometimes, my friends ask me, "Tell us what was he, and what was the universal appeal that people found in him ?" Such questions have often set me thinking.

At times, I even reply to their questions by saying, "If you could just tell me what he was not, then I could tell you what he was."

However, I do wonder if anyone ever really understood him, anyone except his wife Maya Devi or his mother—and that also when he was young, for she too died early—or the greatest of his friends, Khudadad, who had devoted his entire life and work to him. Even with him, there had been bitter fights and differences off and on, but a few days before his death, Puran paid the most glowing tribute that anyone could ever have paid to a friend; when mentioning something about him to Maya Devi, he said, "you know whom I am talking about ? It is Khudadad, the man with the Christ-like personality."

VI

A PARENTHESIS

My friends have very often insisted that I write down these incidents which I used to relate to them, and that is how they have now come to be printed.

I have often been set thinking as to what it is that makes some of the great men so lovable. Is it their quality of greatness, loftiness, saintliness, literary ability, genius, or what; and every time I get the same answer : none of these qualities go to make them as lovable as do their shortcomings, their faults, and their weaknesses; most of all, it is their being so human, and on the same footing with the rest of us, their giving away of themselves to others, that makes them so much loved. We can certainly revere and admire a perfect person of lofty aims and ideals, highlighted above our heads on a pedestal, but we can never love him like our own.

And Puran was intensely human, holding implicit faith in those around him and his fellow beings; but when that trust was somehow belied, his reaction would be stormy and violent. At times the outbursts of his temper would be almost like

volcanic eruptions, and then no one could withstand him.

The literal meaning of the name Puran is "The Perfect One", but he was far from perfect. That is why we all used to feel that he was also like us, and therefore, one of us.

Retrospectively, looking back into the days gone by, the years 1924-31, I still picture him the way we saw him, surrounded by all of his—his own and his friends'—children. The image that comes before my eyes is always the same; he was one of us, taking active part in our childish joys and sorrows, even to the extent of fighting and quarrelling with us like other children. In fact, we never thought of him as one of the elders at all.

He lacked patience and could not brook a single moment's delay. As soon as he had got started on writing a new novel or poem, he would call out loudly to us to come and listen to him reading, and we would come bounding bare-footed from the spacious velvety garden lawn where we loved to lie in supreme relaxation, listening to the twittering of the birds. Then, immediately, he would start reading aloud to us. Usually, we were his ever-ready audience, giving him genuine appreciation, or rather the real *da'ad* that he always needed, not in the traditional style, but the silent applause of understanding, the spontaneous response of our wrapt express-

ions, the delight of the deep attentive concentration of our eyes as we looked at him while we listened.

Sometimes I would feel that the attitude of the elders to his writings was one of protest and discouragement. That was but natural, because they were deeply concerned about his physical well being, for he would go on writing, at the expense of his health, giving himself solely and wholly up to it, with the reckless abandon of a lover, forgetful of all else, life, health, diet, everything. He would, so to say, consume himself up in writing.

So, we were his ever-ready audience, and also his palmists and fortune tellers. I still remember the way he once held up his palm to me with a twinkle of childish merriment and expectation in his eyes, asking, "Tell me, will I be getting the Nobel Prize this year ?"

He was intensely emotional and explosive, highly impulsive, extremely sensitive, and very easily hurt. He was very stormy in his outbursts of temper, and on top of it all, most unpredictable by nature.

It seemed that in his mind, he was forever searching for something in people, some very rare quality, some spark of inner beauty, or the *paras* touch of our mythology, a something that could transform the whole being of man and imbue him with radiance and grandeur.

He would always keep searching. Sometimes he would see a spark of that something in a person one day, and overwhelm him with love and be ready to make any amount of sacrifice for him. But the very next day, meeting the same person and seeing that now that spark was missing, he would be completely disillusioned and would be even ready to turn him out of doors. But with all this, I still say that he was most lovable and human, never remote or aloof.

While sitting amongst literary men and poets, he was unassumingly one of them, but he would also identify himself completely with the labourers and their children; that was an inborn quality in him. He gave away of himself to all and sundry, whoever came in contact with him. That, I think, was the secret of his being loved so much.

VII

RAJ YOGA

> In the inmost sanctuary of our soul, we nestle the secret of life, the purest beauty, the loftiest love and the mightiest power, that transcends all features and forms.
>
> (An Afternoon with Self)

Thus began the life of the wedded *sanyasi;* I am told that it was a colourful one. When he started keeping house, they say that the place would be teeming with guests and visitors—people from all walks of life—Vedantis, sadhus, poets, revolutionaries and scientists of great renown from all corners of the world. They would flock to him, and his table would always be laid sumptuously for everyone. He would receive them, one and all, with open arms.

He first took up some work in Lahore where he also continued the paper called *The Thundering Dawn.* Later, he joined government service in the Forest Research Institute of Dehra Dun and became the Chemical Adviser over there. Here he showed great ingenuity and produced a good

deal of inventive work in the field of horticultural research; but he just could not brook injustice or stand an insult. They tell me that one afternoon, he suddenly returned home quite early after having resigned from his post in the F. R. I. That day, some differences had led to an altercation with his boss. When he came home after the resignation, he said that he had been overlooked in favour of someone else. Puran had quarrelled with his boss, given him a piece of his mind, resigned immediately, and came back home.

When he felt indignant about an act of injustice, he would get quite enraged, and then he would brook no interference. It was with the utmost difficulty that his closest friend, Khudadad, who had devoted his whole life and work to him, could prevail upon him to reconsider the issue, and apply for an early retirement instead of resignation. That was eventually done in order to make him avail of the government pension that would normally be due to him.

Those who have even once listened to his public speeches can never forget them. During my childhood, I heard him twice, speaking in the grounds of a large mansion. The congregation was vast and multitudinous. His vibrant, living voice was so loud and clear that the words could reach each one without the jarring medium of the inanimate microphone. The audience listened to him with rapt and spellbound attention. When his voice, clear and resonant,

rose louder and louder from its deep contralto to a higher crescendo, there reigned pin-drop silence. There was something very simple, yet convincing and magnetic in his words which appealed equally to the hearts of the elite, the connoisseurs of literature and poetry, and to the masses. The walls seemed to vibrate with the resonance of his oratory.

I was very small when I first heard his speech, but I still remember its effect on me. I felt as if I had been transported, and was soaring into realms hitherto unknown to me. During those days of my teens, we used to hear a lot about Einstein and the Timeless-Spaceless world of the Fourth Dimension; then I would imagine that in that world, the atmosphere must be very much like what we felt when listening to him.

There were many ups and downs in his life. He would often declare straight away that he could not tolerate hypocrisy of any kind just as he could not tolerate an insult. That is why he had to brave many vicissitudes in his life. At first, during his student days, he rose higher and higher. Then, after his training abroad, his merits were recognized and rewarded. He got prestige and position, and was usually blessed with abundance and affluence. But then, time and again, whenever the situation arose, he would declare categorically that it was not in his nature to compromise with hypocrisy and injustice. Then came quarrels with his bosses and resignations; there would naturally follow

struggles, adversity, insecurity, and disillusionment.

Such ups and downs kept occurring and recurring. Although he led the life of a householder, attached to his family, with the profession of a research chemist of outstanding ability, absorbed and engrossed in the experiments of his official work, yet somehow, I would keep feeling that he was always a monk at heart. He was forever giving away what he possessed, and his home and hearth belonged to one and all, whoever came in. Grand opportunities and big jobs were given to him just for the asking; they brought him prosperity and abundance. Yet looking at him, I could feel that in his innermost self, he was still a monk.

From time to time, in his life, his mental horizon would be overcast and bedimmed by the gathering clouds of bitter disillusionments. Then, he would stay sad and hurt like a little child rebuked by its mother. It seemed so strange seeing him that way, the inspirer of joy and hope so despondent and downcast himself, the consoler of hearts sitting lonely and desolate, but such sadness was short-lived and vanished very soon.

Then, time and again, from amidst the darkest and blackest of clouds, he would come out radiant and buoyant, his saffron-robed innermost self gleaming through his eyes—the portals of his soul—emerging resplendent in all his pristine glory, untrammelled by the shackles of civilization.

VIII

RAMA

"Alwida meri rayazi, alwida,
Alwida ai pyari Ravi, alwida,
Alwida sabh dost-o-dushman, alwida."

(Farewell my mathematics, farewell,
Farewell O dear Ravi, farewell,
Farewell all my friends and enemies, farewell.)

Sang one of the greatest of monks-to-be as he sauntered down the banks of the Ravi on the eve of his renunciation.

Love of mathematics, they say, was the most cherished treasure of Swami Ramatirath; next came his beloved river Ravi, his wife and family; thereafter came his friends and enemies; but the deepest pang of separation that he felt on renouncing the world was for his mathematics when on the eve of his becoming a monk and donning the *gerua*, he composed and sang the above stanza while walking down the banks of the Ravi in Lahore.

In Puran's book, *The Story of Swami Rama,* while narrating the incident of his first meeting with Rama and its enchanting effect upon him,

he writes :

> As the younger Swami asked me, "Where is your country ?" I replied with tears in my eyes, in soft loving accent, "The world is my country." And the elder Swami looked up into my eyes and said, "To do good is my religion."
>
> Thus we met each other in two sentences.
>
> .....
>
> "I want a person of your type who prepared his splendid speech in absolute rest of his mind while whirling through the Tokyo streets, in the noisiest *Ganza* street of today. Yes, this rest is the secret of life. This is concentration of mind, this is lyrical silence, from where all great ideas come, all dreams that have led humanity onward in its progress are dreamt here, all flashes of inspiration before the human mind in this region of ecstasy. It is natural relaxation of body into complete mental rest. This is the Vedantin's Yoga."

Rama had beckoned to Puran telling him that it was exactly such a person whom he needed, and so, then, he also became a Vedantic monk.

But now, Puran, the saffron-robed monk was facing a dilemma. This was to be his second renunciation. He may have felt similar pangs in relinquishing *sanyas* as Rama did while singing his famous lyric, "*Alwida meri rayazi, alwida.*"

After meeting Swami Rama, he had become a Vedantist, embraced *sanyas* and renounced all worldly life. But now, for the sake of his dead sister, Ganga, and the promise given to her, he would have to relinquish even this unworldly life of *sanyas* that he had learned to cherish so dearly. This renunciation was to be a super renunciation, not figuratively speaking, a stripping of himself naked in order to attain monkhood, but a sort of giving up his own little individualistic world in order to attain the whole cosmos and to gain it.

Looking at Puran, I felt that his relinquishment was entirely different, rising above the limits and boundaries of monkhood, not an abnegation of self, but a sort of attaining and gaining of the whole world.

Then I also used to feel that his world was a much vaster, richer, and more spacious one than our so many separate little cocoon worlds, so individualistic and egoistical, for he would completely lose his own identity in the lives of others, and be inebriated with their joys, or wounded by their sorrows, as if he were himself experiencing them. In this way, his mind would be enriched a thousandfold.

IX

'RAMAN OF THE RAMAN RAYS'

There was great excitement in the house when we came to know that Dr. C. V. Raman was coming to "Ivanhoe", Puran's bungalow in Dehra Dun, situated near the end of Nimmi Road in Dallanwalla.

Puran used to encourage us in our childish attempts at writing, and this time he suggested that the three of us—his daughter, Gargi, eldest son, Madan, and I—write a short play of our own, and each one of us stand up and read aloud his or her part in the presence of Dr. Raman. Our morale was greatly boosted and we were all aflutter with the excitement of new ideas and themes. At that time we did not know much about Dr. Raman; all that we knew was that he had discovered certain rays, and so, we used to call him "Raman of the Raman Rays."

I do not clearly remember what we wrote, but the setting was Kabul, the country that we had never seen, only read about here and there. It must have been a multi-coloured medley of a

play written by three separate childish authors, their imaginations all running riot. However, when we showed it to Puran for his final approval, and asked him to improve upon it wherever necessary, he was greatly intrigued, and started working on it right away. In about an hour's time, he called out to us to see the manuscript of the corrected play, but there was a twinkle of merriment in his eyes as he laughingly said, "Oh, it is best that you keep your play as it is, for I was unable to improve upon it; I have turned out an entirely new play in the bargain, so let it be; you keep your own."

That was done, and the great day came. Raman and Puran sat talking together about science and literature for quite some time; during their conversation Puran came to know that Raman's hobby was music, and that he was keenly interested in it.

After that, Puran called us and we were asked to read out our parts. Raman listened to us and responded admiringly to our childish efforts and finally he remarked, "It is indeed a unique play."

All of us felt very proud for weeks after that.

.....

There was one of Puran's friends, Mahant. Takhat Singh who had his *taus* (a stringed instrument played with a bow) always nearby. It was an inseparable part of his being, for wherever

you saw Mahant Takhat Singh, you could be sure of his *taus* lying somewhere near about. He was an unconventional singer of *shabads* from the *Guru Granth* which he sung without the orchestral retinue. He would sing solo, with the *taus* resting straight on his left knee. There was a lot of feeling in his voice, and his face would light up with an ineffable smile as he would get absorbed and wrapt up in the melody. You could feel the subtle Sufi lyricism reflecting itself in the smile on his face as he sang; he looked an entirely different person for he sang with his soul in his voice.

He was a very jovial person. His inner circle of friends used to poke fun at him, but he would take it all very sportingly. Once, some friend of his asked him, "This tune that you have just sung is wonderful, where did you learn it ?" "Oh," he replied laughing and winking, "How can I tell you to what kind of places we had to go in order to learn all these tunes." Then, those around him insisted on knowing the source, saying, "Sing to us the lines that you learnt in the original." He smiled, took up his *taus*, and started singing the original love song exactly as he had learnt it, to the utter amazement and merriment of his friends.

Well, now, when Puran called him in for Raman, he sang one or two of the *shabads* in his characteristic lyrical style. Raman listened to him with deep concentration. When he had finished, he said to Puran, "The song that he sang, it was

out of tune and out of *tal* (beat), but the effect of it all has been wonderful and uplifting."

Puran then, recited and interpreted the meaning of the following lines of the Urdu poet Nazeer to Raman :

Hain rag unhi ke rang bhare, aur bhav unhi ke sache hain,
Jo begat be-sur tal hue, bin tal pekhavaj nachai hain.
Tha jin ki khatir nach kiya, jab surat un ki ay gayee,
Kahin nach gaya, aur tal kahan, aur taan kahan lehrai gayee.

(The songs of those are full of colour and the feelings of those are true,
Who sing in tuneless harmony, and dance without beat or rhythm.
When I saw the face of the One for whom I danced
My steps were lost, my rhythm left, and my melody fluttered on its own.)

X

A FEW SKETCHES FROM THE PAST

(i) Crystalline Personalities

Sometimes, while talking about people, Puran would indulge in scathing, sweeping criticism, and when we asked him what was wrong with them he would reply, "They are big humbugs; their personalities are not crystalline."

I recollect a few of such "crystalline personalities" belonging to minds that could be seen through like perfect, transparent crystals, saying, doing and being exactly what they were.

(ii) Vishnu Digambar

Maya Devi told me that when they started life together in Lahore, Puran expressed his most earnest desire that she should learn music regularly and systematically—even before her training she had a beautiful voice—and when she started he used to accompany her to Vishnu Digambar's house early every morning. There, she learned classical vocal music.

She related to me an incident which she had witnessed herself at Vishnu Digambar's place. Once, it so happened that as the great musician was completely absorbed in singing to the

accompaniment of the *tanpura* (a stringed instrument with two notes), a cobra came spiralling up the stairway and stood up half erect, almost motionless as if spellbound and magnetised. Vishnu Digambar was wrapt up in his world of music, he never saw it and continued singing, but his students all gazed at it petrified and deathly pale, tense and transfixed. Eventually, as the song was over and he stopped singing, the snake quietly slid down the staircase and went away, without causing harm to anyone.

So, their home life in Lahore started with music, and recollecting, or rather pushing myself into the past, I notice that it played a very important role throughout.

(iii) Sarojini Naidu

They tell me that Sarojini Naidu and her brother, Harindra Nath Chattopadhyaya, used to come to Puran's house off and on. That was before I was there, and so this incident was related to me by Puran himself on his large dining table in "Ivanhoe", Dehra Dun, where so many interesting conversations used to be held.

During one of her visits, Sarojini Naidu and Puran were sitting together, discussing some poem from his recently published *Unstrung Beads* and *Sisters of the Spinning Wheel*. He told me that her voice, when she talked, was full of music, like the warbling of birds or the bubbling

of a spring. She spoke on and on as if she were singing a beautiful song.

Maya Devi poured tea into the cups and placed one of them near Sarojini's plate on the table. She also kept a sugar bowl which was filled with sugar cubes along with a pair of sugar tongs near her. Sarojini was so absorbed in conversation that she kept heaping her cup with sugar cubes unaware that the tea was overflowing and spilling on to the table. It was only after it was heaped up like a mound and the tea-cloth was quite wet that she noticed what she had done. Then she had a good laugh, and so had Puran and the others who were sitting with her.

(iv) GAUHAR JAHAN

"The bridegroom with the bridal party has already arrived at your door,
And what are you all doing now, trying to pierce the lobes of the bride's ears
So that she may wear earrings for her marriage ?
The Fair One holds a fan in her hand,
And the pendant of her nose—ring is indeed beautiful."

She sang just a snatch from some oft—repeated Punjabi folk song, but there was something in her voice that made Puran keep repeating her words almost for months after she had gone.

She had come to Gwalior where Puran was working as Chief Chemist, and she sang this simple, Punjabi lyric on the stage. Puran was sitting with the Maharaja Scindia and the *Durbaries*. He suddenly rose and walked straight up on to the stage. The great singer was rather startled. She greeted Puran with folded hands, and asked him, "What do you desire, Sardar Sahib ?"

"Sing the whole song all over again," he replied.

She smiled, and started singing. Puran went back to his seat.

When he came to Dehra Dun and met us all there, he was still repeating :

Bulé té āyee ai janj loko,
Té vinho kuri dé kan loko,
Pakhi gori dé hath loko,
Té sohni gori di nath loko.

(v) LACCHI

Puran was fond of music and would greatly appreciate those who could sing and create a special lyrical atmosphere with their beautiful voices. He would often marvel at how people could write in rhyme and metre, because no matter how hard he tried, he could not achieve it; his writings were usually prose poems written in free verse.

When he accepted the offer of Maharaja Scindia to work as Chief Chemist in Gwalior and started working there, his originality, ingenuity,

and his instinctively unique way of doing things were greatly appreciated. He was given a beautiful mansion, and as a matter of course he had to attend most of the state functions that were held in the *Durbar*. There, he got very intrigued by the music that usually used to play a predominant part in the *Durbar* functions—the Gwalior Gharana is one of the oldest and most famous of sangeet gharanas in India. So much so, that he employed a musician to come to his house and teach him music, rhyme and metre. He used to tell us how he gave himself up to learn and achieve the lilt of song and rhythmical melody, and eventually he got into the spirit of the muse. The creative outcome of all this inspired effort, was a soulful and unique collection of Punjabi folk songs written in the *taraz* of *Lacchi*, a very popular though rather unorthodox folk song of those days.

When it was all written, he was elated at his success, and when he came to Dehra Dun where the family was staying at the time, he was all excitement at having written so well in rhyme and metre. Full of enthusiasm, he brought his little manuscript of poems which he wanted to have published immediately. I remember, then, that there was some difference of opinion and some altercation at the uninhibited tone of the folk song. The opinion was in keeping with the times when the frank openness of the present decade

could hardly be imagined; Puran, who was ahead of his times, could not but see through the dual-faced hypocrisy of his contemporaries.

What happened was very sudden and dramatic; Puran bundled up the manuscript he had written and set fire to it. They all tried their best to dissuade him, but he would never brook any interference.

I often think that that set of poems must have been a storehouse of Punjabi folk lore, because I remember one couplet which, when he returned from Gwalior, he sang aloud to us; it ran thus :

Karnā khiriā wich Punjābān,
té Mahram hālé door,
Tu buk buk karnā pā Lacchié,
téri lapat sadā manzoor.

(The citron trees are now laden with blossoms here in the Punjab,
But my beloved is still far away.
Keep showering me with your cupped handfuls of Karna blossoms, O Lacchie
Their beautiful fragrance is welcome; it inebriates and enchants me.)

(vi) NIHANG SINGH

It was about five in the evening when the Nihang Singh came into Puran's courtyard in Saraiya. A tall, impressive six-footer, his head-gear was a simply wound *khaddar* turban from Hazoor Sahib, yellow ochre in colour, encircled by a large, shining, steel quoit. He was attired in a thick, blue, homespun *choga* reaching up to his knees,

with gondola shoes on his feet. Around the waist, he had knotted a *patka* (scarf) of ochre cloth from which hung a long sword enclosed in a black, leather scabbard. He appeared a true replica of what the old Sikh warriors of Guru Gobind Singh's times must have been; he was swarthy and sunburnt, strong and stalwart, in his early thirties.

The traditional Nihangs are known for their true community spirit. Every home is theirs and their own home belongs to whoever comes in. He pushed open the door of the courtyard, and as he stood on the doorstep, erect and upright, his ochre turban touching the arch of the doorway, we were all filled with wonder. Puran went up to him, greeted him very respectfully, and brought him into the courtyard. There was a big armchair where Puran asked him to be seated. The rest of us sat on a cot in the courtyard.

Puran started talking to the Nihang, but he hardly spoke a few sentences; he started singing in his deep, sonorous voice, magnificent, reminiscent of bravery and battles. He created a unique atmosphere in the courtyard of Puran's private residence in Saraiya Sugar Factory where he was working at the time.

Suddenly he changed the theme of his song to that of Lord Krishna's *Ras Lila* from *Dasam Granth*. I still remember the song : Krishna has been dancing with a gopika, Chandra Bhaga; that makes his beloved Radha furiously jealous.

Krishna tries his utmost to call her back, but she does not come. Then, he sends a *sakhi* (friend) to call her; messages are sent to and fro, but Radha is adamant; she protests saying, "Why did Krishna go with Chandra Bhaga ?" The *sakhi* again tries to coax Radha saying :

Brij Nāth bulāvat hain chaliyé, kachu jānat hain ras
baat eeyāni,
Tohi ko Shyam nihārat hain, tumré bin ri nahin
peevat pāni;
Tu ehe bhant kahé mukh té, 'nahi jāoongi main
Hari pé ehe bāni,'
Tāhin té jānat ho sajni, ab joban paye bahi
hain divāni.

The Nihang, then, sang another song in which Krishna goes to Radha disguised as a tatoo girl *(lallihari)* with colours in a small trinket, and asks her what name she wants tatooed on her arm.

At this moment, too, Radha is sulking because of Krishna's attentions to some other gopika, but she is longing for a sight of him; she is sitting remote and sullen. Again and again the *lallihari* asks her what she wants tatooed on her wrist.

Suddenly Radha wakes up as if from a trance and cries out to the *lallihari* to tatoo her all over with the different names of Krishna : Krishna Murari on her forehead, Murlidhar on her shoulders, Damodar on her lips, and Banwari

on her bosom.

The *lallihari* then takes the tatoo prick and, startled by her touch, Radha quivers all over tremulously; she suddenly realises that it is Krishna himself in the guise of a tatoo girl :

".....méré bhavan pé likhiyo Krishna Murāri
Méré dant pé likhiyo Dāmodar, méré joban beech
likho Banwāri."

We all listened spellbound and the Nihang observed the expressions of delight on our faces. When he had finished, Puran tried to draw him into conversation, but he just smiled, folded his hands, and went away.

After that, he was a frequent visitor to Puran's house, coming always at the same time, sometimes even every evening, singing whatever he liked, but his favourite ones were extracts from *Ras Lila*. We would always look forward to hearing his melodious voice. At times he would start singing even from a distance and would know that he was coming, a man of few words, but fiery and full of spirit.

(vii) The Wandering Minstrel

"My beloved has gone away and left me on the couch of love," sang the Wandering Minstrel, "tell me, oh my *sakhi*, my dearest of friends, what am I to do, how am I to call him back ?"

It was a song of unrequited love and thwarted passion in the midst of *Shravan*, the most wonderful and auspicious of months, the

month of reunion of lovers, when the courtyards of homes are humming with music and song, when the notes of the *bulbul* mingle with the "*pihu pihu*" of the *papiha*, when *jhulas* (swings) are strung up on the branches of the *peepal* and mango trees and villages resound with music and jubilation, when in each *angan* there is a bevy of radiant maidens swinging higher and higher on their *jhulas*, touching the mango branches with their tinkling toe-nails, carmine with henna.

The song that he sang, was of deep longing and separation. First, we would hear the restlessly piercing notes of his *sarangi* from some distance, when as he rushed through the streets, coming like a storm and like a whirlwind blowing away, we would catch the strains of his broken, wounded voice, wild and vulnerable, full of anguish and yearning :

Mori séj sé uth gayé sānwariā.

And it would always be the same, the very same song, poignant and magnetic, filled with deep pathos, as if sung by one stung to death or one possessed. We would all run to the verandah to listen to him.

Once, as a line from the song fell into Puran's ears, he suddenly sprang up from his reverie, rushed out to the verandah, and impatiently shouted to someone to run and call the singer from the streets. The servant ran and brought him along.

The minstrel then stood in the compound on the gravel path near the verandah, and sang the whole song all over again :

Karoon kaun yatan ai hāi ri sakhi,
Mori séj sé uth gayé sānwariā.

When he came to the line :

Mérā dil chhatian vich dharkat hai,
Kadi mil jā ré méré bānwariā.

Puran started repeating it over and over again, and said to us, "The greatest poetical music is that of discord. The singer's voice is broken and hoarse, and the line that he is singing is a mixture of Poorbi, Hindi, and Panjabi, but it is beautifully expressive and deeply erotic. True poetical music must break all bounds and limitations, and rise above them, must it not ?" he asked.

The minstrel continued his song of thwarted love with wrapt absorption as if he were actually living it. He sang of an Uttar Pradesh *angan* in the month of *Shravan*, the month of reunion, when cool moist breezes play havoc with the hearts of lovers, the time when it rains incessantly, when the clouds rumble and when the separated one feels that she can ever hear the lonely pounding of her own heart against her bosom.

Puran would always give away generously, and a lavish sum of money was thrust into the hands of the singer, but he hardly looked at it as he shoved it carelessly into his pocket. There was the same far-away, restless look in his eyes.

Immedialely, he again started twanging the *sarangi* and rushed towards the gate while his wounded voice rent the air with the strains of the song :

Karoon kaun yatan ai hāi ri sakhi, mori séj sé uth gayé sānwariā,
Karoon kaun yatan kyā reet karoon, méré nainan barsé bādariyā.
Charhi rain piyā ke āngan men, sabh sakhion né rang rachai liye,
Karoon jhool sakhi kyā savan men pardés sidhaye sānwariā.
Din rain badariā barsat hai, piyā dékhan ko jiya tarsat hai,
Merā dil chhattian vich dharkat hai, kadi mil ja ré moré bānwariā.
Udi kāli ghatā bādal garjé, chali thandi pavan morā jiā larzai,
Aa bhar dé rangeelai re Madan, dhari khāli hamāri gāgariā.

XI

DR. KHUDADAD

They were the greatest of friends, Puran and Khudadad, yet their temperaments were diametrically opposite; Puran, quick and impulsive, being carried away and swept off his feet by his emotions, always in great hurry, often rash and careless of consequences; Khudadad warm and visualising, a man of deep thought, very slow in making decisions, pondering over things and analysing the consequences beforehand, always tackling a problem from different angles with consummate skill and German thoroughness—a quality which he had imbibed from his professor under whom he had studied for his Ph. D. in Germany—of very unconventional and cosmopolitan views; Lord Buddha, Diwan Hafiz, and Goethe's *Faust* were the inspiration of his life, from the reading and relating of which, he would derive ecstatic joy and impart it to others as well. We picked up quite a lot of German listening to him translating and interpreting Goethe's *Faust*, and sometimes, other German poets.

Diwan-e-Hafiz was a favourite with him. He

would keep humming couplets from it for hours sometimes. Then, he would call all of us and ask, "Do you want to ask any questions from Hafiz Sahib ?" We would always reply in the affirmative because we were very intrigued by the oracular replies that we used to get from the *Faals* of *Diwan-e-Hafiz.*

He would then hold the book straight up in both his hands with its back resting on the table, and say to one of us, "Now, close your eyes, concentrate, and ask the question that is uppermost in your mind, you may say it out aloud or keep it in your heart, and then open the book with both your hands."

Then he would read out the first couplet from the top of the right hand page that was opened up, and translate and interpret it to us from the original Persian; that would be the oracular reply to our question. We were all very interested in these *Faals.* It was surprising how frequently we would get correct and appropriate answers. Once, I remember, we kept on asking him to read out our *Faals;* he tried to discourage us, but we would not listen. Eventually, one of us got the reply; I forget the Persian couplet, but it meant that "His ears are not for every fool that comes across His way." Khudadad laughed and we felt badly rebuked. He said, "You all really deserved such a reply for disturbing Hafiz Sahib with all your silly questions. It has served you

right." However, we did not desist, but continued asking for *Faals*, though with much deeper concentration.

Khudadad's devoted friendship was one of the greatest sobering influences in Puran's life (he would call him 'Bhapa Da' ad', meaning "my brother, the Giver"). Although there did crop up differences and disruptions, yet, he remained loyal and devoted to his friend, and to his friend's family, right up to the very end, identifying himself completely with them all and working whole-heartedly for them. When Dr. Andre performed the pneumothorax operation on Puran, it was Khudadad and Maya Devi who tended him night and day.

It was he, who after Puran's death, poured night and day over law books and searched all the rulings and findings—he did not have any legal degrees, but fighting cases was one of his hobbies—mustered up all his self-acquired legal acumen, and got back the sixteen squares of Sheikhupura land from the government for Puran's children. He served devotedly and unostentatiously as an iron bulwark to Puran's personality. He was a man of real worth, full of self-sacrifice, working behind the scenes for the good of Puran and his family.

Khudadad was one of the most unforgettable characters that I have ever come across. He had a vast treasure load of stories, incidents, and

anecdotes to relate, and besides, his self-composed parodies, somewhat like those in the *Oxford Book of Poems* used to keep us spellbound. I remember how often the servants would get exasperated when we would start listening to him close to meal times, for they knew that once he started with them, he would go on for at least two hours, or even more, and none of us would be willing to rise, thus delaying the meals indefinitely. It was an age of relaxation and learning through leisure, indefatigable, vital, exuberant leisure, completely free from boredom.

On the dining table he would often set us puzzles like these :

(a) There is a six-letter word, a noun, starting with 'B'.

(b) Out of the four elements, it is made out of earth.

(c) It belongs to the mineral world.

(d) It is a chemical compound, not a mechanical mixture...and so on.

Finally he would say, "Guess what it is." We would all start guessing, our minds working more and more sharply as he kept giving us the clues. Eventually, one of us would guess the right word amidst roars of laughter. In a short time we all became experts at this game, and sometimes we ourselves would set some puzzle for Khudadad, and he would thoroughly enjoy it and keep racking his brains to find out the correct solution.

He was usually very cheerful, and emanated joy to all around him, welcoming them with his hearty unforgettable laugh.

Study of mathematics was another of his great hobbies. I remember how he used to spend hours wrapt up and absorbed in the "Timeless, Spaceless, Fourth Dimension" of Einstein. So much so, that when we were children, "Fourth Dimension" and "Relativity" were bywords in our home. After so many years, I can still vividly recall how we would all go boisterously running to his room, clamouring for a game of *geetas*, cards, or puzzles, but how often we would find him poring over Einstein with concentration in his deep-set eyes and a wrapt expression on his face; we would then tiptoe back noiselessly, whispering "Shh..... Fourth Dimension..... mustn't disturb."

Whether children were more fond of Khudadad, or he of them, is to me still a mystery. For hours he would stand in his laboratory, laughing and talking, with an admiring group of youngsters gathered round his table. Pencil ends, scraps of paper, iron filings, glass rods, celluloid combs, glass tubes filled with mercury, and other strange odds and ends would be strewn about. In the twinkling of an eye, he would transform them into things vibrating with life, or so it would seem to us. Of course this would all be "magic" and many of us thought of him as a

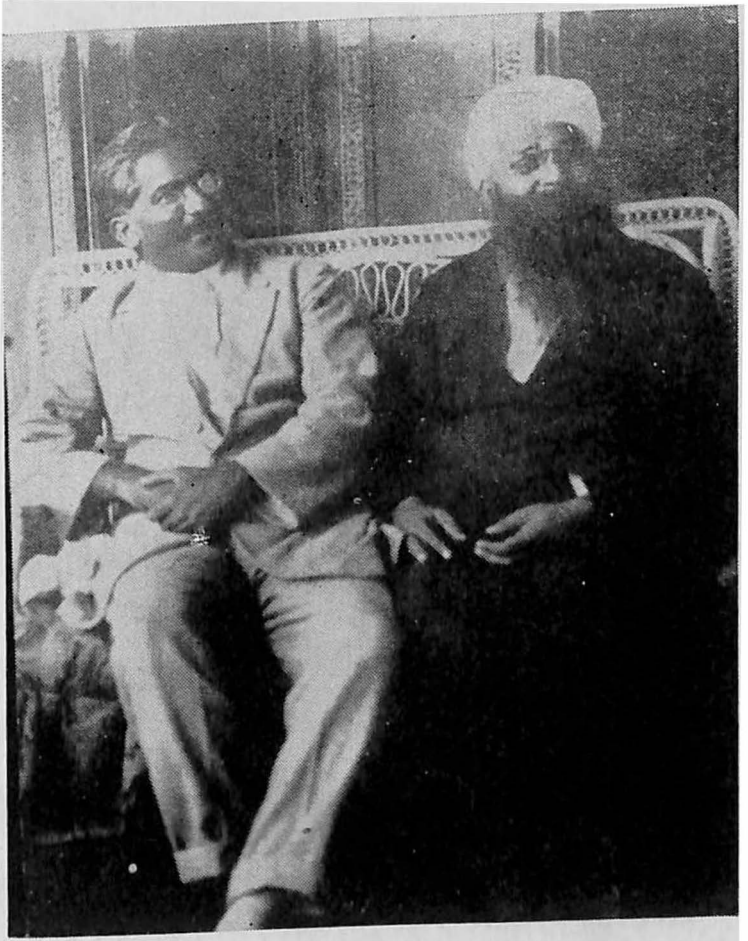
magician.

One of the children, Kirna, a little girl of four, used to be very fond of lemon drops in red coloured bottles. She would call them *Lal Botal*. Now, in the house, there was a special door leading from Khudadad's room to the drawing room whereon hung a woollen curtain made of thick sage green felt. This was the place of hypnotic magic for calling the *Lal Botal*. Kirna would come to him and entreat him to tell the *Parda* to give her the *lal botal*. Khudadad would rise, go to the drawing room and stand by the same curtain opposite his own room. With all the seriousness of a conjuror, in mesmeric gestures, he would command the spirit of the curtain, calling aloud in his deep, sonorous voice, "Chalo, parda, chalo !"

It used to be a sight worth seeing. By this time, the sound of his loud invocations would bring the whole household to the scene. They would all stand looking expectantly at the curtain, but most of all Kirna. She would stand spellbound, gazing upwards, her chubby innocent face aglow with the thrill of the magic curtain. Sometimes, Khudadad would keep up this conjuring invocation for an hour on end, till Kirna's eyes would almost well up, and the ends of her long slanting lashes glisten with unshed tears. Then a little significant cough from Khudadad, and from the opposite side the curtain would start whirling itself. Sometimes there would also be the sound of a

Dr Khudadad, Dehradun, 1927-28

Prof. Puran Singh, Dr Bhai Vir Singh and Smt. Maya Devi
Panchvali, Dehradun, 1926



Dr Khudadad and Prof. Puran Singh
Dehradun, 1916

Front Row : Prof. Puran Singh, Dr Bhai Vir Singh and Madan Mohan Singh

Middle Row : Mrs R.R. Puri, Mrs Vir Singh, Bhai Sahib's Aunt and Smt. Leela Ji

Back Row : Nirlep Singh, Jagjit Singh, Mrs & Mr Gopal Rao and S. Narain Singh

Amritsar, 1926-27

little suppressed laugh inside the whirling curtain. *"Parda chalo.....lal botal.....abhi chalo"* would be the final thundering command, and thereon, out of the folds of the muffled curtain, right into Kirna's upheld frock would roll down the *lal botal*!

Khudadad was never quite satisfied with his achievements. He would go on correcting and re-correcting his own writings and poems. He sought perfection everywhere. In this world—an amalgam of good and evil, where nothing is ever wholly good or wholly bad—he would reach out for perfection. Because of this idealism in his nature, the others would always hesitate to consult him where a quick decision had to be made.

His methods were scientific. After washing his hands for meals, he would not let them touch anything except the food which he was to eat. If he had to pull back a chair from the dining table, he would drag it with his elbows. We were quite used to seeing such things, but once, when Birbal Sahni came to stay with us, he was very amused. After Khudadad had washed his hands and was sitting down to dine, instead of the serviette, he offered him a steaming hot *chapatti*, suggesting thereby that this being clean and sterilized by the fire, should be used in place of a serviette.

Khudadad was an authority on science, literature, poetry, medicine, and even law, which he had acquired by self-study. Goethe's *Faust*, Omar Khayyam, and Hafiz were the great inspirations

of his life. In his magnificent voice he would recite passages from them, and keep the listener's mind enthralled for hours. Such was the effect of his recitations.

Spontaneity, confidence, and a spirit of comradeship were inborn in him. A child with a scientific trend of mind would discuss turbines and the theory of perpetual motion with him. Serious-minded grown-ups would ask him about religion and philosophy, and go satisfied with his answers. The poor would come to him with their grievances and seek arbitration for their disputes. Friends would come to him for the solution of their problems; even married ones, with domestic troubles, would seek his advice. They would return happy and contented.

The writing of poetry was another of Khudadad's talents. He had a great love for India and his countrymen, and a number of poems that he wrote were inspired by patriotism. However, he never got them published and they used to lie around in his room; often, he used to read them out to his friends and to all of us.

Maya Devi told me how he came to be inspired to write some love poems in Urdu. She often used to recite them to us in the original, and I still remember a few lines which I am just going to quote. She told me how one of Puran's relatives, a young man from Rawalpindi, fell

passionately in love with a girl who was engaged to be married to some other young man. The forlorn young lover was deeply frustrated and pined away for his love. He knew that his case was hopeless, and that even if he tried to contact the girl's parents, or the girl, nothing would come out of it, for the man she was to marry came from a very wealthy family and held a high position. The sorrowful young man deeply felt the futility of his existence, and was tormented by the torture of unrequited love.

For some time, this dejected young man was a guest in Puran's house, and when Khudadad saw him pining away like this, he felt very sad; so much so that he completely indentified himself with the disappointed lover, and also became as sad and frustrated as he was. It was in this mood that Khudadad was inspired to write a poem. Maya Devi told me that this quality of identifying himself with others, and taking their sorrows as his very own, greatly helped the downcast lover to get over his frustration. The lament of the lover that Khudadad had written, voicing his feelings and woes, made the young man feel that he himself was the real poet, and after some time he overcame his dejection.

The few lines that I remember out of the poem Maya Devi recited to us ran thus (the original version follows the English rendering of

the poem) :

Oh you who are the ultimate aim of my life,
The be-all of my existence and the blossom of my longings,
Tell me, in the name of God, why do you
Stay away, why are you not with me ?
Unburden your pent up bosom, dear nightingale,
And sing to me of the pangs of separation;
Even my heart, like yours, is bleeding.
For my flower-bed of blossoming roses
Has been forcibly snatched away from me.
Why do the birds twitter so sweetly
When I, the messenger of love, am breaking my heart with sighs ?
You, of wondrous and incomparable beauty,
You, who have the Elixir of life, where have you gone ?
Yearning for you night and day, oh Leila,[1]
Have I become a veritable Majnoon.

Original wordings of the Urdu poem :

हस्ती मेरी के मकसद, ऐ गुन्च-ए-मुरादम,
मुझको बता खुदारा, मुझसे तू क्यों जुदा है।
.....

ऐ अन्दलीप, नाला अपना सुना तू मुझको,
मेरा चमन किसीने, जबरन छुड़ा लिया है।
.....

ऐ तायरो चमन में ये चहचहाना कैसा
जब हम-सफ़ीर का दिल आहों से फट रहा है।
.....

1. The girl's name was Leila.

है आब जिससे सींचा वो हुस्न के अजूबे,
लैला कि जिसने मुझको मजनूं बना दिया है।

Emotional by nature, Khudadad could not see anyone in pain or trouble. Once, while he was at Doiwala, near Dehra Dun, one of the grown up boys (Puran's eldest grandson, my son, Udain) was to have his tonsils operated upon in Delhi. During that time, for nearly a week, Khudadad did not shave. Everyone was wondering what could possibly be the cause, but no one dared to ask him. Finally, one of the elder members of the family asked him, "Please tell us why you do not shave ?"

At this, he knitted his brow and replied in a very serious tone, "How can I shave, my mind is in suspense, my hands are not steady, I am waiting for the telegram about the operation."

.....

Before he left us, he knew the end was coming. He was calm and serene. There was not a tremor of emotion in his voice. It was as strong and magnificent as ever. He had no regrets or worries. To those around him he would say, "I am perfect, why do you feel anxious ?"

Almost up to the last day, he walked. Every afternoon, he would go out and sit in the verandah; but on the last day his strength failed him. He tried but could not walk. Then very softly and gently, eight loving arms carried him up like a child, and laid him on a bed in the

verandah. He was serenely calm and composed, spoke a few words, then breathed his last.

About half a mile from our house in Doiwala, is a tiny graveyard surrounded by green fields and wild bushes. Here they laid him to rest.

When they went there on the third day, they were filled with wonder to see something that had not been there before. They found a freshly-made grave, a child's grave, nestling close to his.

XII

AHMED MEHSOOD ABBASSI

Abbassi was a great friend of Dr. Khudadad and Puran. Both of them were very fond of him; but at the same time, there also used to be quite a number of fights with 'Abbassi Sahib' for he was one of those persons who invite trouble for themselves. Impulsive and paradoxical, he was at the same time extremely courteous and full of feeling, very easily ruffled and ready to flare up into a burning flame ignited by the tiniest spark of provocation. Very often he would come to "Ivanhoe", and sometimes, when Maya Devi asked him, "What have you been doing today, Abbassi ?" he would reply, *"Aaj Bhabhi ji, main char admion ko tameez sikhla kar aya hoon* (today I have taught manners to four men)", meaning thereby that he had actually had four real good fights that day. For him, *tameez sikhlana* always meant a thorough good fight; and I still remember how, when one of us, on being angry with some outsider or the other, would go up to him and say, "Abbassi Sahib, such and such a man is badly in need of being taught manners," he would promptly reply, "I

shall certainly give him a dose of that."

But in spite of all their differences, Abbassi had great respect for Puran and would do his best to keep his own temper cool when Puran lost his; sometimes it was quite admirable the way he bore the brunt of Puran's violent outbursts.

'M' asood Sahib' as we used to call him, or 'Abbassi' as the elders did, was a frequent guest at Puran's bungalow, "Ivanhoe" at Dehra Dun. Whenever he could get a few days off from Delhi, where he was working as an engineer, designing and supervising the palatial buildings of the old Raisina, he would run up to Dehra Dun to meet Puran and Khudadad.

Puran was trusting by nature, and would easily believe and deeply sympathise with people relating their tales of woe; he could not see through their cunning schemes and machinations. Now, M'asood Sahib had an enemy, I shall call him Hassan, who was a flatterer. During Abbassi's absence he would come to Puran and poison his ears against Abbassi. Once he came running into Puran's room, threw his turban on his feet dramatically, and started weeping, telling him how cruelly and atrociously Abbassi had behaved. Puran believed him and was furious with Abbassi. Then Hassan left and M'asood came; he was upbraided for his behaviour. Abbassi listened with patience, for he guessed the sequence of the havoc that Hassan had wrought in Puran's mind. Later,

when Puran had calmed down a little, he smiled and said, "Sardar Sahib, shall I tell you the full story ?" Puran nodded, and then followed the true version of what had happened which gradually disclosed Hassan's mean manoeuvres. Puran was very sorry, and felt repentant for having belaboured Abbassi unnecessarily. Finally, he was overcome with remorse for his violent outburst. That was the end of Hassan, and after that Puran never let him enter his house. I am told that the children would often tease him and ask, "M'asood Sahib, what happened about Hassan ? Tell us the whole story again", and with great hilarity Abbassi used to relate the incident all over again.

I am told that during the 1914–18 War, when for the first time influenza broke out almost all over the world, it was terrible; whole families were lying ill in practically every house. At "Ivanhoe" too they were all laid up bedridden with flu and high temperature. Abbassi was also there at the time, and was the only healthy person moving about. Due to the epidemic there was a great shortage of nurses in Dehra Dun, and so Abbassi had to work single handed running about from bed to bed in "Ivanhoe". During the nights, since he was tired and sleepy he found it difficult to tend to the ailing ones. His sleep-overpowered eyes found it quite impossible to keep awake and rise to the needs of the patients. However, he suddenly came out with an ingenious brainwave. He brought his

own bed to the large central room with all the other rooms adjoining and opening into it. Before finally going off to sleep, he tied a thin rope to the side of each patient's bedstead. The other end of the rope was tied to his arm, so that whenever any patient wanted something urgently during the night, he had only to pull his side-rope gently, and that would wake up Abbassi. A second stronger pull would indicate the identity of the patient who had called him, and he would rise and attend to him. This ingenious idea of silent communication, without the disturbing sound of a metallic bell, was greatly appreciated by all.

The buildings that Abbassi designed in Raisina were artistic with a tinge of the old Mughul architecture in them. He also built a beautiful mansion for himself which had well lit lawns on three sides, edged all round with Damascus roses filling the air with their fragrance.

XIII

MULA SINGH

Tall and hefty, Captain Mula Singh had lost his right leg in World War I, but he had found for himself a name, a characteristic limp, and along with it, a warm place in the hearts of all his friends. He had a wooden leg with which he used to walk strides ahead of the others, negotiating stiff climbs, and scurrying down the hillsides with remarkable agility; his inseparable crutch was always tucked under his arm, giving you an impression of its being more or less a part of his body. Sometimes we felt that he was far more active than any of us, with his animal-like speed and agility.

He was one of those heroes of the war who had not got in through the Military Academy, but had voluntarily enlisted at a time when soldiers were urgently required.

He had a remarkable spontaneity of spirit which even the war could not dampen. He distinguished himself there, and came out as buoyant as ever.

I do not know how much he had ever studied,

or how literate he was; but I guess he had not done much that way, because although he was one of the greatest admirers of Puran's prose and poetry, Puran would often pull his leg and jocularly call him *nirakshar bhattacharya* (the illiterate connoisseur). Captain Mula Singh's rejoinder would always be a big, broad smile along with an enthusiastic, intelligent remark about one of his poems, thereby showing to Puran that whether he was literate or not, he had the ability of appreciating the best in prose and poetry, and that this was an inborn quality in him, quite independent of higher education or literacy.

Mula Singh would insist on Puran's reading out his books to him and the response that the *nirakshar bhattacharya* gave him was keen and intelligent. It was worthy of even the most learned scholar.

They say that war usually frustrates a man and that his outlook on life entirely changes, but if ever there was an unfrustrated man returned from the war, it was Captain Mula Singh with his wooden leg, full of enthusiasm and zest for life, welcomed everywhere, his presence emanating a certain joy that was infectious.

XIV

STRINGING AND UNSTRINGING THE INSTRUMENTS

Puran never liked preparation. Everything that he did, he did extempore and with spontaneity, on the spur of the moment. I still remember how irritated he would feel when we would make preparations for some coming occasion.

"All the time you keep stringing and unstringing the instrument," he would say, "when are you going to play the tune ?"

However, before his daughter Gargi's marriage, preparations were afoot. One morning, he woke up very excitedly and called out to his wife saying, "Maya, last night I had a wonderful dream. First I saw six beautiful trees in bloom, their branches all blossoming with flowers. The trunk of a tree was russet, the foliage a beautiful green, and branches all full of cherry blossoms, cherry pink with vermilion drops. Then I saw an orange tree and others all covered with karna blooms. There were six different kinds of trees, all of different hues. Then in my dream I brought an offering to my daughter for

her marriage—six different dresses. The *chunnis* were the colour of the flowers, the shirts of the green foliage, and the *lehngas* of the russet. This will be my present for Gargi. I shall give her six different dresses of this kind. She will look so beautiful, decked up in these, will she not ?"

XV

THE JĀNGLĪS OF THE BĀR IN CHAK UNNĪ

"So when will you marry him, Nurjehan ?" we asked a beautiful *Jāngli* maiden in the bloom of her youth; with a strange coincidence her lover's name was also Jehangir. His jet black hair was cut low and the matted locks fell just below his ears. He was tall, handsome and dark, lithe and graceful in his movements with the agility of an antelope grazing in the forests.

Nurjehan smiled knowingly and replied, "Not as yet, he has still to get his turban."

"Then why doesn't he start wearing one ?"

"Because he has still to prove himself. Over here amongst us, men are allowed to wear turbans only after they have proved themselves."

"Then how does he do that ?"

"By fighting four battles with his enemy and wounding him, thereby receiving four or five big cuts and scars on his face. Only by proving that he is not afraid of danger and death, will he be worthy of wearing a turban, and till then, will not be considered fit for marriage or for protecting his wife."

The entire *Jānglī* village of *Chak Unnī* knew that Nurjehan and Jehangir loved each other, and there was nothing to gainsay or to feel ashamed of in that. The only hitch was that Jehangir was waiting for an opportunity to prove his mettle in an encounter with his adversary.

These *Jānglīs* of the *Bār* had nothing to hide or conceal in their personalities. Their faces were crystal clear wherein every emotion was reflected distinctly. When it was love, it stood marked out on their faces in all its primitive spontaneity; if hate, then also it was there, its flaming fire smouldering in their angry red eyes. An insult would never be swallowed or go unanswered. The law of *Ham murabi*, 'a tooth for a tooth and a nail for a nail', seemed to prevail among them. Yet, in spite of all this, life did not lack a sense of security and discipline. We all lived there right amidst the storm and stress of this warring tribe, unafraid, and in comparative calm and peace. The answer to this was one man—Baba Mura'ad, a tall, henna-dyed grey-haired man in his sixties, the chief headman of the tribe. He was broad-shouldered, strong and stalwart, inclining slightly to the heavy side; a man who had gone through much, fought, won, and also lost many battles, and gained maturity of experience with suffering writ large on his deep-set eyes and battered face. His word was law there, for he inspired them as well as all of us with profound faith and con-

fidence in himself. Whenever there was any trouble amongst the people, it would show on his face. His eyebrows would knit closer, and the furrowed lines on his forehead would increase. Then, like this, he would keep wandering in the sandy wilderness with deep concentration written on his face. After a few hours, he would return home, and having worked out a solution in his mind, he would call all the men of the warring tribe. They would gather around him and he would start a conference which used to last for a couple of hours. Then he would come back to Puran, his face again relaxed and happy, and say to him, "things are alright now," and when he said so, he was proved true; such was the organizing power of his wonderful, though uneducated mind. And so it was that Baba Mura'ad's word was law in this *Jānglī* settlement of *Chak Unnī*.

Puran had great regard for him and loved him like an elder brother. Sometime they would sit together on the steps or in the large courtyard on a *vaan* charpoy tackling some difficult problem or the other. Whenever they feared that some trouble was brewing, Baba Mura'ad would always stay very calm and cool-headed. His brain was a store-house of resourcefulness and ability for on-the-spur-of-the-moment decisions and prompt action. It used to be heart-warming to see them together, exact opposites by nature, Puran, a poet, emotional, explosive and high-strung, Baba

Mura'ad, calm and composed, like the still waters of a deep lake. In fact it would not be wrong to say that in the settlement where we lived amidst the warring tribe, Baba Mura'ad was virtually Puran's legal adviser, and naturally and spontaneously, all of us also respected him and called him 'Baba'.

AN OFFERING

"Oh, let us forget and forgive," is the usual way, but not the *Jānglī* way of making amends. Their *modus operandi* was quite different and unique. It was not in their blood to bend, bow, or even atone for some act that they later realized should not have been done.

Once, very early in the morning, we were surprised to see two stalwart, swarthy and sunburnt men—they must have been in their thirties—followed by Baba Mura'ad, walking up our stairs. They came straight to our mud-plastered *kotha* and stood in the small upper courtyard where we used to sleep during the summer nights. One of them was holding up a pink muslin *chunni* in both his hands. He came forward and placed that *chunni* gently on the shoulders of one of us, a girl in her teens, and then stepped back. We were all rather startled and taken aback. Puran was just going to say something. We could see that his eyes were red with anger. Immediately and suddenly, Baba Mura'ad made a sign from the back where he was standing just behind the man

who was holding up the *chunni*. Puran saw and understood. He came up to the girl and wrapped the *chunni* lovingly around her shoulders, and then pressed the *Jānglīs* to sit. Puran's eyes were moist and he was deeply moved. He asked Maya Devi to bring some sweets and requested the *Jānglīs* to stay, but they did not. They just lowered their eyes, bowed their heads slightly, and walked down the stairs followed by Baba Mura'ad.

After they had left, Puran explained, "This, I guess, must be the *Jānglī* way, their own special way of making amends; it is the warrior tribe's way of doing things. Yesterday, when we were all working in one of the Rosha plantations, the behaviour of these two men had been extremely wrong and revolting, and they had been very rude to me. But now I guess that afterwards they must have realized their mistake and asked Baba Mura'ad to accompany them for making amends."

Later on, in the afternoon, Baba Mura'ad came alone and sat for some time. He said to Puran, "It is good you accepted the *Chunni*. If you had refused, these men would never have forgotten their disgrace, and would have become your sworn enemies. Now you can count on their friendship and unswerving loyalty."

JATTO

There was a great abundance, or rather an overflowing of human communication in Puran's personality, especially where simple, unlettered

people were concerned, and the people of this warrior tribe were to him like his own kith and kin. We felt that ourselves as well.

Baba Mura'ad's eldest daughter was called 'Jatto'. She had inherited most of the qualities of her father and was developing more and more like him. She was about twenty-two years old when we were there, but she had refused to marry for she said, "I have no brothers and if we all marry and go away, then who will took after Baba and Amma ? I will not marry but will look after my parents." That was her final declaration, and there amongst the *jānglīs* no one had the power to veto her, for Jatto was the indomitable daughter of Mura'ad.

Jatto was held in great esteem by all of them and was regarded as Mura'ad's eldest son, and whenever the occasion demanded, she rose up to it. Whenever we wanted to roam around the vast Rosha plantation, or wanted to ride the camel, she would be sent along with us. A good many of the workers there had camels and Jatto also was very fond of her two small baby camels which she used to take out to graze with two ropes tied to their nose-strings.

The *Bār* land of the Punjab—the old one before its vivisection, the Punjab that belonged to the Punjabis, irrespective of caste, creed or religion; the Punjab in which Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs were

all just Punjabis, and real Punjabis to the core of their beings—used to be that long stretch of land sprawled along the Western border and in the rural parts of Sheikhupura, Layallpur, Multan Chichawatni, Montgomery, and adjoining districts. In these, you would find the same hardy tribal race of primitive habits, their language the same, their fighting spirit of 'might is right' the same. Above all, their spirit of *camaraderie* was unique. Such were these brave *jānglīs*.

Jatto would often sit with us for hours, and if there were any delicacies on the table, like Kashmir apples which were not grown locally but had come from outside, she would not eat them with us, but would just pick up a handful and take them with her to the large central courtyard encircling which all the little mud huts were built. Then she would call all the children from their separate huts and hold the delicacy to their lips; only after they had all taken, would she eat the remainder herself.

Puran used to tell us that this nomadic tribe of the *jānglīs*—these people of invincible courage were supposed to be the descendants of the Greek soldiers who came over with Alexander the Great. Sometimes, we would believe him, but quite often we thought that he was just joking, knowing that a poet's imagination is quite capable of running riot. However, to prove his theory,

he would take us round to their little mud huts and show us the few-days-old babies and also the slightly bigger infants. Normally, they used to be very fair, cherub-like and beautiful, their features, high foreheads, arched aquiline noses, artistically formed chins denoting determination, resembled somewhat the chiselled features of the ancient Greeks that we had seen in paintings and sculptures. Later on, as they grew older, they would change. The scorching rays of the sun would make them dark and swarthy, and the toil and turmoil would even change and transform their faces and expression.

They worked very hard on the Palm Rosa farm and they all loved Puran beyond measure, although they would often blame and upbraid him for his outbursts of violent temper. Jatto would often tell Puran in her *jānglī* dialect :

Sardār, unj tān toon badā changā ein,
par toon kāvid badi karena ein.

(Sardar, otherwise, you are very good, but you have got a very bad temper.)

When they loved a person, they would do so whole-heartedly and unreservedly.

Sometimes we would also seriously imagine that they were the descendants of the Greeks and of Alexander the Great. "These invincible people," we reasoned, "are really an ancient race whom no one could conquer in the past."

Well now, coming back once more to Nur-jehan and Jehangir, about whom we were all very much concerned, we never really came to know whether Jehangir got his turban or not, because we left *Chak Unnī* and lost touch with what happened there afterwards.

XVI

THE IMMORTAL CHHANNA

I had been told that whenever he got enraged, Puran would thunderously bring down the furniture and smash up all the crockery in the house, and that such occurrences used to take place quite frequently.

When we were in Saraya where Puran used to work in the sugar factory, it so chanced that somehow or the other, the glasses and cups all got broken, and in order to buy fresh ones, someone had to be sent to Gorakhpur, for Saraya was just a village with a farm and a sugar factory. So, for some days we were without glasses, tumblers, or cups; there were plenty of metal and brass tumblers, but Puran would not drink out of them. He would say, "This is an *andha* glass (a blind glass). Neither can I see the world through it while I am drinking, nor does it throw back my own mirrored image to me. How can I drink out of this blind tumbler?" We told him that all the glasses and cups were broken. "Then bring me something else, which is not *andha* so that I may drink out of it and quench my thirst."

Thereupon, his daughter Gargi and I went to the kitchen and started rummaging the shelves and cupboards in search of some cup that should not be 'blind'.

Eventually, we found a large bronze *chhanna* shimmering and resplendent in the light. We looked into it and saw our faces mirrored inside the concave burnished platter of the base, and also on the turned-in convex edges all around. We saw our faces mirrored all over as in a prism. We filled it with cool water from the *ghara* and took the *chhanna* to Puran.

Being thirsty, he took it to his lips and quaffed off the entire bowl in one draught. After he had drunk, he kept looking at it. He seemed so fascinated that even after having quenched his thirst, he kept holding the *chhanna* reverently to his lips. For some time, he was lost in thought. Then, he told us about an incident of his monkhood days in Japan, when along with his vedantic friends and other monks, he went climbing up the steep mountain to reach the temple on the summit of Fuji Yama, and how one of the votaries of that temple prepared *sake,* and gave each one to drink out of beautifully painted Japanese bowls. These were like an offering, and the travellers held them reverently in both hands, bent their heads, and drank out of them. He became deeply emotional whenever he used to reminisce about this drink from the bowl of *sake* in the

temple of Fuji Yama.

He was so thrilled and fascinated that this enchantment for the shining bronze bowl became infectious, and we all three, Puran, his daughter Gargi, and I, came under the spell of the golden-edged *chhanna*. Even when the crockery and glass tumblers did eventually come from Gorakhpur, each one of us still wanted the *chhanna* to drink out of, and whenever the meals were being served, there would always be a mad rush for the kitchen followed by a lot of hubbub and hurried scampering of naked feet on the floor. Each one of us would try to be the first one to grab the *chhanna*, and the others had to be satisfied with drinking from glass tumblers, looking on jealously and grudgingly. It would, of course, again be followed by a scuffle at the next meal, and whoever won, kept it for that time.

Once, during a meal, when Puran had just raised the *chhanna* to his lips, and was going to drink out of it, one of us jokingly asked him with a twinkle of merriment in her eyes, "Now, this *chhanna*, even you cannot break, can you?" He understood the joke and smiled back at us as he replied, "No, I cannot, how can I? This is the immortal *chhanna* from the land of the five rivers, out of which, on the banks of the Chenab, the famous lovers have drunk and redrunk the elixir of life. It is the *chhanna* in which the devoted mother serves *lassi*, all brimming over with frothy

butter flakes along with maize bread and *sarson sag* to her beloved children when they come running to her after play time. It is this Punjabi *chhanna* that the wives fill with their tastiest food and take to their ravenously hungry men toiling in the fields.

"For obeisance, on ceremonial occasions and in places of worship, this *chhanna* is carried, filled with ambrosia (Amrit) and a circular disc of jasmine petals keeps rocking on a bed of Damask roses, its fragrance wafted in the cool breeze, which mingles with the incense—sandal and *dhup*—of the temple."

"It is so deeply symbolic of our land of the five rivers; so much of folk lore, romance, song, music, and mysticism are woven around it. It is a vital part of our beings. It has been running in our blood since time immemorial! How can I ever break it?" He exclaimed, "O, it is the immortal *chhanna* of Punjab, the *chhanna* of the golden rays."

XVII

THE END

I was called by my elder sister to stay with her in the year 1931. She lived in Aira Estate in Lakhimpur district, U.P. and I went there for a couple of months.

When I returned to "Ivanhoe", Puran was ill with tuberculosis of the lungs. As soon as I came, his wife, Maya Devi, related to me how Puran kept asking her again and again, "Maya, tell me, is it Saturday today?" to which she kept replying, "Yes, it is Saturday."

"Do you know why I am asking this question?" he said as he looked up at her.

"No, tell me why," she replied.

Puran smiled softly and said, "Can't you guess? Don't you know it is because Tulie is coming home today?"

(Tulie is my pet name, and my friends and family have always called me by this name.)

When I entered his room and sat down on the chair by his bedside, I was greatly disturbed to see him so ill and weak. I tried my best not to show how deeply I was moved; then he started

talking, and I found that his spirit was undaunted and he was as enthusiastic as ever. Even in this serious condition he talked of many things as exuberantly as ever.

He was being tended very lovingly and devotedly by Maya Devi and Khudadad, his life-long friend. Dr. Andre, a French surgeon, performed the pneumothorax operation on his damaged lung in order to collapse it temporarily, and thus give it time and relief to get cured, and also to arrest the spreading of the infection to the other lung; but then Dr. Andre found that there were so many adhesions that it could not be properly collapsed. The disease spread and took a galloping form. We all came to know, and even Puran must have known that now it was a matter of just a few days.

Both his brothers and many of his friends came to see him. I remember those last days distinctly. He was entirely bedridden but we all found him as cheerful and buoyant as ever, taking keen interest in alf that was going around.

He was not allowed to write because of his declining health, and papers, pens, and writing material, were always kept away lest he should exert himself and grow weaker. Those attending on him were vigilant about this. However, in spite of everything, he was still vitally interested in writing, and whenever he could do so, even for a

few moments, he would keep scribbling something or the other on any odd scrap of paper lying about. He would even use temperature charts for writing.

He passionately loved his writing, and never, never would he give it up, whether he was in pain, ill, or bedridden. He would always be alertly waiting for a chance to write.

I still remember the last scene very vividly. Puran was very seriously ill. We all went to his bedside, and when I stepped across the threshold of his room, and he saw me, he motioned to me to take up a pen and paper. Then he started dictating something. I wrote a couple of lines, but his voice was extremely weak, almost inaudible. I could not catch what he was saying, and so I hesitatingly asked him to repeat. His immediate reaction was to try to get up and speak out loudly and emphatically. I felt greatly perturbed because of his weak condition. Then, his youngest brother, Ram Singh, took the pen and paper from my hands and started writing something. Puran was satisfied, and lay back on his pillows relaxed and smiling.

A man of indomitable courage, he never gave up writing, not even when he knew that he had only a few hours more to live. The Muses were with him till the very last.