

DHANI RAM CHATRIK (1876-1954), the celebrated Panjabi poet, essayist and short-story writer used the language of everyday life. The occupations and pastimes of the Panjabi villagers serve as the leitmotif of most of his poetry. His choice of words was apt and he had an ear for music, which makes most of his short poems a delight to listen to. He was conscious of his poetic gift and deliberately used it to make his readers aware of their social responsibilities. His prose works extol tolerance, love for truth, and simple living and high thinking.

Chatrik's writings have served as models for others and some of the later Panjabi poets looked upon Chatrik as their mentor.

SURINDER SINGH NARULA (b. 1917), Panjabi novelist, short-story writer and critic, is the recipient of many literary awards. In this monograph, meant for non-Panjabi readers, he traces the outline of the life and work of Dhani Ram Chatrik and evaluates his contribution to Panjabi literature.



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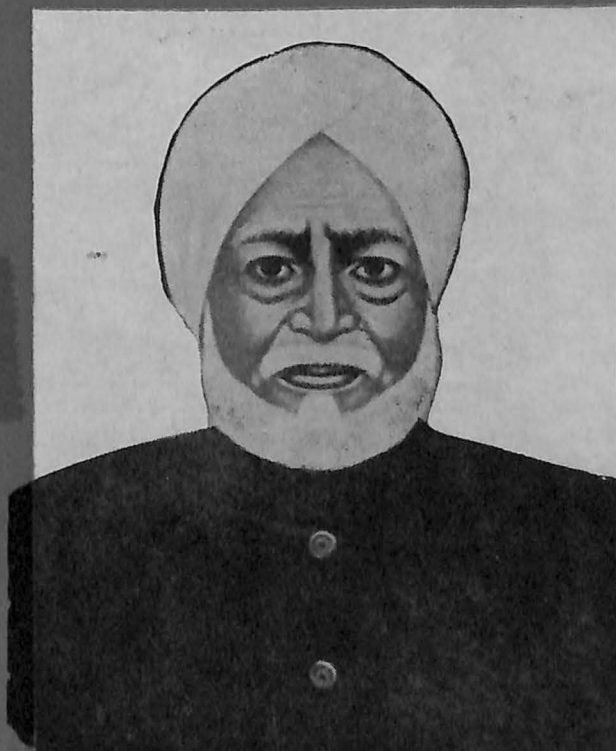
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DHANI RAM CHATRIK

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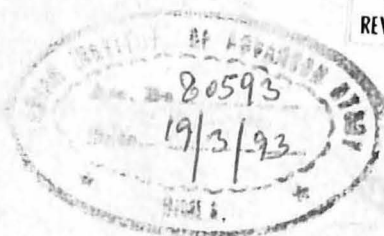
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First Published : 1985

891.4210924
C 392 N

SAHITYA AKADEMI
REVISED PRICE Rs. 15.00



Published by the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi
and printed at Sanjay Printers, Delhi 110032.

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Introduction

When the British occupied the Panjab, there was a sudden shift in their attitude towards the Panjabi people. Earlier the Europeans who had been serving Maharaja Ranjit Singh had adopted the Panjabi ways of living. They dressed themselves in the Sikh way and some of them even kept long beards and wore Panjabi turbans. But after the annexation of the Panjab, the British deliberately cultivated what may be described as colonial culture, which was a modified form of European civilisation and as a result the policy of "divide and rule" was adopted, and the Panjabi identity became "a split identity".

However, the impact of the West could not but bring about its catalytic change. Instead of creating a composite substance, the impact of the West affected the different communities (Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs) in different ways. The only common factor was that each community wanted to advance ahead of the other, and avail of the advantages of the new technology for itself, rather than think of the Panjabi people as a whole.

Each community had its own values, attitudes and inner drives but under the rule of Ranjit Singh, before the coming of the British, the Panjabi people had maintained their cultural unity. The upper classes of Panjabis during the rule of Ranjit Singh had affected a highly selective merging of the different worlds of Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. When Guru Nanak founded Sikhism, his insistence upon the true deed rather than the ritual word had created a bond of unity between the different communities inhabiting the Panjab. His task had been made

considerably easier by the efforts of the Hindu saints and the Muslim Sufis who had preceded him. His belief in monotheism and the spirit of social tolerance preached by him was not an arbitrary adoption of either the Muslim or the Hindu view of life in a doctrinal way. He studied the existing religions, their theories and practices in a rationalistic way and arrived at certain principles which should regulate the life of an individual in relation to God and society.

His successors Guru Angad and Guru Arjan, had institutionalised the principles preached by him. The former had placed the Gurmukhi script, originally refined and adopted by Guru Nanak, on a scientific basis, and the latter, by compiling the Holy Granth of the Sikhs and giving it its place of high importance in worship. After Guru Arjan, the Sikh gurus were obliged to take up arms against the Mughals but their struggle remained free from communal rancour and personal vendetta. When Ranjit Singh ruled the Panjab, he followed the instructions of the illustrious Gurus. It was, therefore, possible for the Panjabi people to preserve an element of unity in diversity—a social phenomenon thrust upon the Panjabi people by the quirks of history. But the situation changed after the British annexation of the Panjab.

Dhani Ram Chatrik, though a devout Hindu, was inspired by the high ideals of the Gurus in thought, word and deed, and he became an ardent devotee of the composite Panjabi culture. As time passed after the annexation, the Panjabi people belonging to different religious faiths and opportunities to adopt new forms of occupation and communication, influenced by the colonial culture introduced by the British. The elite of all the classes and communities was eager to avail of the new educational facilities offered by the British, so that they could provide the administrators needed by the British. The lower strata of their communities fell prey to the proselytising activities of the Christians. Thus, the Panjabi people of all communities felt alienated from their own tradition.

The elite of all the classes accepted the new concepts readily since they believed that it was the only way to retain their individual identity. They could not do so without honouring their commitments to the new rulers. This social and cultural change had been affected by the British in the rest of India by

the closing years of the forties of the nineteenth century. India's First War of Independence (1857) had abruptly ended it outside the Panjab but it had a new lease of life in the sixties of the last century. By the 1880's the Panjab had a sufficient number of young men educated in English and these young men manned the administrative offices of the new Government. The impact of the West had made them search for new ideas and the Arya Samaj, the Aligarh movement and the Singh Sabha movement provided them with these ideas.

Each community was discovering its new individual identity and the old concept of the co-existence of the different individual identities as part of the composite Panjabi identity was no longer there. They developed new social relationships and life styles and they turned their backs upon the traditional values of service above self and failed to follow the teachings of the Hindu, Muslim and Sikhs saints. Instead of being socially homogeneous, the different individual communities became social stereotypes and mutually exclusive. Each community adopted the benefits of Western technology and education to its own particular needs and transformed the newly adopted concepts into a complex ideology which was based upon an odd mixture of the past and the present.

Each community elaborated, dilated upon and differed acutely or mildly with the new ways of living. Each reformist movement launched by one community or the other tried in its own way to explain the complexity of the contemporary world and to lay down psychological and cultural guidelines for its members. Each tried to provide a conceptual relevance to its propaganda by appealing to the religious life of the community's past, rather than understand the problem from a broader economic and historical viewpoint.

These reformist movements had resulted in specific benefits for each community. The economic commitment channelled their actions in specific directions, yielding fruitful results. There was a healthy competition between the different communities for the spread of education and it helped to abolish social evils like child marriages and the burning of widows. However, the reformist movements of the communities inhabiting the state of Panjab set them against one another. By the close of the nineteenth century, each community in the Panjab had organised

itself in an aggressive way, each considering its own ideology better than that of the other and labouring hard to establish a distinct identity of its own. The educated Panjabis could not even remain good neighbours and the seeds of later communal strife were laid by these reformist movements. The Arya Samaj became very powerful with the Hindus of the Panjab. It had met the influence of the West by asserting its dignity and honour, by conjuring visions of past glory and a return to the days of the Vedic age. This assertion led the Panjabi Hindus to separate themselves from the other religious communities of the Panjab. The modern history of the Panjab is replete with polemical quarrels between Hindus and the Sikhs wherein each tried to assert its own identity at the cost of the other. The individual Panjabis had forgotten the teachings of the Hindu saints, Sufis and the Sikh gurus, with the result that communal strife grew out of the colonial schism created by the British rule, and the average Panjabi was unwilling to rise above narrow communal considerations.

Each reformist movement, whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, had its moderate and militant wings. The moderate section was less devotional and more secular. The moderates of each community would combine with the moderates of the other communities to fight a natural calamity like famine or to help in the spread of education, but even these moderates, like the intellectual, conservative Zionists, would never give up their own distinct communal identity. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the average Panjabi exhibited a complex pattern of loyalties. He had an acute awareness of being a Hindu, a Muslim or a Sikh and he could hardly see beyond the level of his identification with a particular caste or a group of families constituting the sub-caste.

It was for these reasons that the Panjabi culture was split into various sections. The Hindu, Muslim or Sikh writers chose to plough their lone furrow and the temptation to receive wide recognition made them take to writing in Urdu or Hindi or English instead in their mother tongue Panjabi.

Both in Pakistan and in East Panjab, there are writers devoted to their mother tongue but their existence is largely the result of the political changes that followed in the wake of India's attainment of freedom and the establishment of Pakistan.

Even though in post-Independent India, the problem of identity and rival religious consciousness was there, people were increasingly becoming aware of the sense of a composite Panjabi identity.

Dhani Ram Chatrik was always aware of this Panjabi identity and he has rightly been described as the most Panjabi of all Panjabi writers. He was a God-fearing man and believed that God was the true source of all knowledge, truth and beauty. Though a Hindu by birth, his early contact with Bhai Vir Singh had turned him into an ardent admirer of the Sikh faith. He was equally at home with his Muslim friends and was greatly influenced by the Sufis of Panjab. He, therefore, aimed at improving the physical, spiritual and social condition of all men, irrespective of their caste or community, through his writings. He would treat each individual, whatever his religion, with love and due regard to his merits. He stood for the acceptance of Western technology and in his closing years stood shoulder to shoulder with the progressives of the day. He earnestly believed that the welfare of one individual depended on the welfare of all, but he advocated individual freedom in personal matters.

2

Life

Dhani Ram Chatrik was born on October 4, 1876, in Pasianwala, a village of District Sheikhpura (now in Pakistan). His father Lala Pohu Mal, moved to Lopoke, a village situated near Preetnagar in Amritsar. His father had shifted to the new place in search of better economic prospectus, and one of the main attractions for him was the fact that his younger brother was a man of property and influence in the new place.

Lopoke was situated in a fertile tract of land, and the gay round of seasons showed nature at her best. During the months of March and April, the variegated pattern of the wheat crop made beautiful scenery and during the rainy season mango groves presented the beautiful spectacle of brightly clad village belles in swings from the high branches of trees and the air was thick with folk songs. Dhani Ram's uncle would take him on a round of all these festivities, girls on the swings, boys on their wrestling bouts or playing Kabaddi in the open or the elderly minstrel singing of things forgotten and of long ago. These memories of early childhood became an inseparable part of Dhani Ram's psyche. Later when he took up the theme of village life, these pastimes and occupations of the Panjabi villagers served as the leitmotif of much of his poetry.

Dhani Ram was still a boy when the family fell on bad days and he could not complete even his schooling. Education in those days was different and there was no strict syllabus prescribed. Each child was supposed to learn the three R's, but a greater emphasis was laid upon what may be described as ethical

education. This was imparted by the head of the family and the mother played an important role. It was she who sat near the family hearth after the evening meal had been served in the long wintry nights and narrated folk-tales, which were mostly tales from the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Panchtantra. These tales were related by the mother to the incidents of everyday life and quite often the disputes of the young were settled in the light of these tales. It is interesting to note that Dhani Ram Chatrik displayed later in life an unusual mastery of poetic diction and developed a literary style which is free from all sophistication. The reasons are to be found in his early acquaintance with the language of the common people and the fact that he had been taken away from school at an impressionable age.

Dhani Ram Chatrik was married at a very early age. He had hardly completed his primary education; but he picked up the rudiments of Hindi, Urdu and Panjabi in the Gurmukhi script. He was a precocious child and a short stay in the city of Amritsar gave him an opportunity to learn English. His father was a petty shopkeeper and Dhani Ram Chatrik helped him. But the shop was no running concern. At the age of fifteen, Dhani Ram Chatrik was obliged to seek some employment on his own, and he chose to become a court scribe (Wasiqa Navis). But this proved abortive. He was of too tender an age to be entrusted with the task of preparing official documents. When he was eighteen, he decided to go and seek employment in Amritsar, a neighbouring town, which was fast becoming the centre of industry and commerce. He called upon S. Wazir Singh, the proprietor of Wazir Hind Press, which was the main press publishing tracts and booklets on behalf of the then popular Singh Sabha Movement. It was here that he came into contact with Bhai Vir Singh, the pioneer of modern Panjabi literature, who advised him to take to Kitabat (engraving of letters on stone slabs in the inverted order for litho printing). Thus began a long period of association with Bhai Vir Singh, the partner of the Wazir Hind Press and Chatrik served the press and the paper, the *Khalsa Samachar* for many years. This association proved to be of immense advantage to Chatrik. It introduced him to a literary set, which had received acclaim, and the *Khalsa Samachar* proved to be a good window to display his poetic

wares. Whereas Bhai Vir Singh had taken upon himself the task of expounding the Sikh scriptures both in letter and spirit, Chatrik quite early became aware of the need of secular literature for the Panjabi people.

He could not readily accept the literary tradition. He kept aloof from communal controversies and struck to the secular path till the end of his life. It is this secular attitude to life which distinguishes Dhani Ram Chatrik from his contemporaries like Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, S.S. Charan Singh and even such writers as Sir Shahabuddin. When the last named poet translated Hali's *Musadas*, he was actuated by a desire to bring it to the notice of his co-religionists that Islam had entered a period of decadence. Similar was indeed the attitude of all his contemporaries. It has been the tragedy of the Panjabi speaking people that the ruling British were successful in creating disunity in their ranks by sowing seeds of communalism.

Dhani Ram Chatrik's father died in April 1905 and it meant for him a total break with his past. He had been married in his early teens, but was not pulling on well with his wife. Both were temperamentally ill-matched and he thought that his future would be jeopardised if he had an uneasy home. He went in for second marriage and shifted permanently to Amritsar, to start life completely on his own. When S. Wazir Singh died of cholera, Bhai Vir Singh purchased the Wazir Hind Press and Chatrik continued in the service of the new proprietor. He served the Wazir Hind Press for eleven years, and during this period he worked in close collaboration with its proprietor. Bhai Vir Singh was very charitable towards him and he wrote for the *Khalsa Samachar* quite frequently, but his poems written during this period did not show any originality. He merely echoed the usually accepted ethos of those days and his short poems were of a didactic nature. He played second fiddle to his great master. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the spirit of tolerance which is so evident in his poetry and which later on took a distinct secular turn was founded upon his study of the Sikh scriptures, under the benign guidance of Bhai Vir Singh. In addition he struck to his own liberal interpretation of Hindu thought using myths and Puranic tales.

Thereafter, he spent about four years in Bombay learning to set type of moulded lead, and by 1914, he had cast the Gurmukhi type, which was to revolutionise the printing of Panjabi books. This distinctive contribution of Dhani Ram Chatrik, to place Panjabi printing on a scientific basis, is of a pioneering nature. It facilitated the production of books in their thousands and considerably increased the number of Panjabi readers. Chatrik founded the Standard Foundry and started the Sudarshan Press. The press brought out the special editions of many Panjabi books, and set up high standards of printing and get-up. It was the Sudarshan Press which undertook the printing of the Encyclopaedia of the Sikh Religion, the famous 'Mahan Kosh' compiled by Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha. The venture was financed by the erstwhile Patiala State at a cost of fifty thousand rupees. This economic prosperity gave him the necessary leisure to cultivate his literary taste and he sums up his life in a poem entitled, 'Dili Walwale' (The Heart Speaks Out):

I came into this world for a sojourn
 lasting a few days,
 To be in the company of the gentle,
 and to learn the human ways.
 I wrote patriotic songs, or to
 heal the wounds.
 I was a bird earth bound
 and could not get to the heavenly heights.
 I have no fear of Hell, and possess
 no desire to be admitted into Heaven.
 I believe in humanism and I
 decry the exploitation of man by man.
 I have exposed those who wear
 the mask of piety and trade in
 the name of God.
 I have no desire to carry the
 achievements of this world to the next.
 (From 'Sufi Khana')

Maulana Hali was Dhani Ram Chatrik's favourite poet. He not only translated some of Hali's poems into Panjabi, but learnt from him the art of using verse for a professed ideal.

Chatrik was a committed poet, but his commitment was not like the commitment of the progressive poets of the late thirties and early forties of the present century. He was never enamoured of a particular political ideology, and he preferred to propagate a broad based ethos through his writings. This ethos as pointed out earlier had a secular basis. His collection of poems entitled 'Chandanvari' (Valley of Sandalwood) contains many translations of such eminent Urdu poets as Iqbal and Suraj Narain Mehar. He, however, failed to imbibe Iqbal's dialectical intellectualism or cultivate the elegant diction of Suraj Narain Mehar. Similarly, some of his prose works like 'Do Uttam Jiwan' (Two Ideal Lives) and 'Othello' were adaptations from Urdu originals. His prose works 'Bhai Prabudh Singh' and 'Pardha Ki Hai' (What is the Veil) were adaptations from the writings of the Urdu novelist Abdul Halim Sharar. The Indian middle class all over Northern India was reassessing its native culture, and this reassessment is evident in these writing. What is remarkable about Dhani Ram Chatrik is that he never turned sectarian or communal and he did not give up his firm faith in the cultural traditions of his country, based upon the ideals of goodness, beauty and social justice.

All this is reflected in his writings. Although in his long narrative poems, he talks proudly of the heroes of the past, there is no trace of jingoism. He would urge emulating such of their qualities as stood for humanism. He is best remembered for his lyrical poetry contained in such collections as 'Chandanvari' (1931), 'Kesar Kiari' (1940) 'Navan Jahan' (1942) and 'Sufi Khana' (1950). Chatrik died on December 18, 1954, but his major works had been completed before the fifth decade of the present century began. He continued writing till the end and only a few days before his death he wrote:

You have forgotten me Oh God
 But I cannot forget you
 I am about to die
 at doorsteps
 You come O God and take
 me to my new home.

A devout God-fearing man as he was, he had probably a foreknowledge of the journey from which no mortals ever return.

All these collections contain short poems, which give vent to his feelings of joy or sorrow, not as the mood takes him but as he reacts to a given personal or social problem. He always struck a balance between objective reality and its subjective appraisal. He was very meticulous in the matter of poetic diction. His choice of words is fastidious and he has an ear for music, which makes his short poems a delight to listen to. Dhani Ram Chatrik's early acquaintance with Panjabi folk songs had stood him in good stead, and his frequent visits to the Ras Dharias (professional minstrels), and participation in Bhajan Mandalis had attuned his ear to the music.

For long his more famous contemporary, Bhai Vir Singh, almost overshadowed him, but after the forming of the Panjabi Suba, Panjabi readers searching for a lost identity have found in Chatrik an individual who represents the best traditions of Panjabi culture, embodying the monotheistic views of Islam, and the spirit of tolerance and goodwill, which marks the Hindu way of life since times immemorial.

3

Lyrics

Dhani Ram Chatrik's genius is essentially lyrical. We do not find any evidence from his biography of his having received training in classical or popular music but his practice of the art, as is evident from his lyrical poetry, clearly shows that he had more than a nodding acquaintance with the art of music. The musicality of his lyrical poetry is born of the interplay of vowel and consonant sounds and his mastery of the alliteration enhances the lyrical intensity of his songs. A song by Chatrik possesses an inherent structural unity. For example his lyric, "Sakhi Aj Hori Manao Ham Ghar Aae Murar" (Oh friend, let us celebrate the Holi festival today for Murar Lord Krishna has come to our house) is a lyric, which in the very opening stanza prepares the reader for what is to follow. He recalls the ancient Gokul streets, Krishna's playing on the flute, its magnetic notes and thereby makes the reader's imagination blossom forth into the garden of Hope. What follows is an account of the wiles of Krishna, and how all the milkmaids are enticed across the river Jamuna for a tryst with him. The thought of the ultimate union with the Lord steadily develops into a longing which makes the singer surrender herself completely. Could this be the result of a spontaneous overflow of feelings or did the poet like a skillful singer arrange his notes in a manner bound to end in ecstasy and surrender?

If one studies the structural pattern of songs by Chatrik—'Marae Kainat de Malka' (Oh Lord of my universe).

‘Bhorae Preet di Rangi Chaer’ (Sing, honey bee, the song of love)—one finds that in each song there is a single thought which runs through the various stanzas of the song, and it is a thought which is projected to the reader, through similes and metaphors, which, though taken from every day life, have an extraordinary importance because of their association with mythological motifs and the echoes of folk poetry. The question arises as to whether or not this has been done deliberately by the author. A reading of any one of Chatrik’s songs will show that the poet makes no deliberate effort to do so. The spontaneity is self-evident. It may be that Chatrik has retained the sense of curiosity and amazement which, according to many of his biographers, was characteristic of the man in his childhood. The singers and the professional Ras Dharias, made him develop an ear for music, which greatly helped him in enriching the musical assonance and consonance of his songs. In later life, when Chatrik participated in the various poetical symposia, arranged on several occasions under the auspices of the Central Panjabi Sabha, it was his lyrics, which won for him the acclaim of vast audiences.

From the very beginning of his career as a poet Dhani Ram Chatrik had been catering to the literary tastes of vast audiences. When he started writing short poems on topical subjects for the *Khalsa Somachar*, the official organ of the Singh Sabha movement, he knew the appeal of alliterative verse to the common man. He devoted special attention to poems or songs, strictly adhered to the rules of Panjabi prosody. He must have made a systematic study of the old Panjabi Qissas like ‘Heer’ by Waris, ‘Heer’ by Mubal, ‘Sohni’ by Fazal Shah, and ‘Sassi’ by Hashim. This not only enriched his vocabulary but also gave him a thorough practice in what is generally known as the poetry of Sringara Rasa. It is interesting to note that he was greatly influenced by the ancient Indian writer Bhartari Hari (Skt. Bhartrihari) and apart from the philosophical outlook of the sage, what impressed him most was his poetic diction, which emphasised the use of Alankaras, to drive a point home to the reader, and the cultivation of a chaste classical style.

Throughout his poetic career, Dhani Ram Chatrik was writing lyrics and many of them were his responses to specific

situations. He was a highly sensitive person and felt intensely about a personal or public event, but he never varied the technique of writing his lyrics. There is the usual choice of words taken from everyday life, sometimes echoing the familiar snatches of a popular folk song; there is the usual repetitive line vibrating through the song, and above all the usual mythological references particularly to Krishan Lila, are there. Does this mean that the poet could never outgrow the technical devices which had charmed him in the very beginning? It is very difficult to explain this, but the poet always aimed at creating a harmony between meaning and form in his lyrics. It is a heritage from the days of yore, when the music of a poem was an aid to memory and was used as a means to convey the meaning. Considered in this context, it should be possible to explain Bhai Vir Singh writing short lyrics wherein symbolism seems to cloud the message, or Prof. Mohan Singh developing from a mere singer of doggerel into a lyrical genius of objective sensitivity.

The consistency in Chatrik's lyrical genius suggests another thing. He had studied the early Sufi poets of the Panjab and learnt their devices and he could imitate them with ease. There is, however, nothing derivative in his adoption of the old technique. He used it merely as a catalytic agent, to create a new substance, a new approach to life. It was like holding a piece of crystal in one's palm to see the hues of the rainbow in its whiteness. The fault with some of his contemporaries was that they were too much conscious of the crystal and as they could not strike a balance between objective reality and its subjective appraisal, the whiteness was predominant and the rainbow hues were seldom visible. His contemporary, Vidhata Singh Tir, had this weakness, while Baldev Chander Bakel's songs were too derivative of folk songs. This would become clear if we study the lyrics of 'Chandanvari', 'Kesar Kiari' and 'Navan Jahan'. Whereas in 'Chandanvari', the lyrics display a sense of personal investment with the theme, in 'Kesar Kiari', the poet develops a sense of detachment which makes him take an objective view of a personal predicament, but in 'Navan Jahan', the poet reaches out to the public for a sharing of his pensive or happy mood.

A lyric presents essentially a personal view of life but the personal view should not be merely egocentric. The view is indeed regulated by the norms which prevail in society, but a

personal element enters when the lyric poet makes a judicious selection of the accepted norms. It is the individual choice which is the determining factor and not merely the intensity of the poet's feeling about a particular problem. This aesthetically expressed emotion ceases to be purely personal and is presented in the context of a broader social experience. This is true of most the lyrics written by Chatrik. One of his better known lyrics is "Radha Sandesh" (Radha's message) from 'Chandanvari'. The rhyme scheme of this lyric has been traced to the Dohras, sung by the Rasdharias, by Dr Surjit Singh Sethi in 'Kavi-Chatrik'. Similarly "Ni Mariae Heer Salaetiae" from 'Kesar Kiari' has been traced by the same author to a popular musical tune. Ever since the introduction of Panjabi as an elective subject at the college level, Chatrik's lyrics have been included in the anthologies for the study of modern Panjabi poetry.

4

Nature Poetry

The longing for freedom that pervades nature has been depicted in folk literature, particularly folk poetry, which always attracted Chatrik in his childhood. During the early decades of the present century, Urdu was quite popular with all classes in the Panjab because it had replaced Persian as a court language, and under the influence of the renaissance movement ushered in by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Urdu poets like Altaf Hussain Hali, had started writing reformist verse. One of the ways in which it was done was to use similes and metaphors to bring home to the readers the simple truths of every day life. The example had been set by the Victorian romantic poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats and these were the poets who were prescribed for the college students of these days.

Chatrik had been introduced to Hali when he met Sir Shahabuddin at the first conference of the Panjabi Central Sabha at Amritsar in 1926. Sir Shahabuddin was translating Hali's famous 'Musadas' into Panjabi in those days and he is said to have recited excerpts from his translation of the poem on the historic occasion. Thereafter Chatrik studied Hali in depth and it was the Urdu poet's attitude towards nature which impressed him most. Hali's poetry is marked by description of nature but his avowed objective was to draw some lesson or the other from his study of nature, and the lesson generally veered round the fall of man from his state of natural bliss. We do not find any such description of nature in Chatrik's poetry but the vignettes of natural scenery do remind one of Hali's Urdu poetry.

Chatrik considered Bhai Vir Singh an ideal poet. Bhai Vir Singh wrote many short poems, 'Veri Nag' (The Spring), etc., in which he explains the riddles of nature in a mystic way. We find Chatrik giving expression to his feelings in a similar vein in his poem 'Jharna' (Waterfall).

As pointed out by Dr V.N. Tiwari, Chatrik is an extrovert in his description of nature. This objectivity is undoubtedly due to his sense of detachment. A comparative study of Chatrik's Kashmir poems with Bhai Vir Singh's poems as given in 'Matak Hularae' will lead one to the conclusion that Chatrik possessed the quick eye rather than the discriminating mind. The reader is not to make an effort in between the lines, and he is made to use his visual eye to enjoy the beauties of nature. Chatrik's poem 'The Himalayas' is so objective that the reader can visualize the rocky regions, the mountainous terrain, the vast undulating green heights, the rich growth of herbs and deposits of mineral wealth, but the poet makes no effort to endow his experience with the legendary lore associated with the green mountains.

Iqbal was a popular poet with the Panjabi readers when Chatrik was writing his nature poems. When we compare the two poets, we cannot but notice the lack of elegant style and subtle philosophy in Chatrik's nature poetry. This should not be taken as a drawback or a literary flaw. Chatrik was more down to earth and was the poet of the popular Kavi Darbars (poetic symposia). Iqbal at his best always appealed to the elite and even his 'Shikva aur Jawabi Shikva' (Complaint and Counter Complaint), had a vast appeal because they came in the wake of a movement for revivalism amongst the Muslim community. Chatrik scrupulously stood aloof from all such movements pertaining to his own community or to the Panjabis in general. This made him pander to the needs of his admirers, but he stooped only to conquer the hearts of the general Panjabi public. He makes a conscious effort to humanise nature in terms of the hopes and aspirations, fears and forebodings of the common man.

In his poem 'Basant' (Spring), we find that the season is presented as a beautiful belle scattering blossoms all around her, breathing the breath of life in dead souls. In his poem 'Sandhya' (Evening), we find the poet presenting a word-picture of the evening scene. The details chosen by the poet, the relationship

that he establishes between one detail and the other has been so skillfully done, that the poem reminds one of the famous Panjabi landscape painter G.S. Thakur Singh. As the shadows of the coming evening lengthen, the poet notices that only a few shreds of the lingering sunshine remain; the short moon is peeping through the sky; the birds fly back to their nests; the labourer returns to his hut with weary feet, the farmers drive their oxen home, where the filled trough awaits the oxen; the bells ring in the temples and the dust gathers on the path going round the village. All these details are accumulated till the poet narrator retires for the night under the canopy of the stars. If one were to visualise [the scenery portrayed in the poem, one could imagine the variegated pattern and the mixing of mellow colours. He begins the poem with a look at the skyscape, and then, led by the birds returning to their nests, he notes the coming of the evening. All his poetry, particularly the narrative poetry contained in 'Kesar Kiari' (Saffron Field), is full of descriptions of landscapes or skylines: the blooming fields, the ripe corn, the many coloured palette of the evening sky, the splendour of the rising sun, and the shimmering glory of the moonlight nights unlikely find evocative expression.

Chatrik was undoubtedly inspired by the long narrative poetic form Qissa of the Punjab to write about the beauties of natural scenery. In Waris, Qadaryar and Hashim, we have long passages describing nature as a background to the stories of the Qissas. Sometimes this description heightens the tragic effect of the story and sometimes it shows the helplessness and insignificance of man before an inevitable Fate. Chatrik does nothing of the sort. Most of his nature poems are isolated pieces, and as such there are not directly or indirectly related to human experience. They simply record the poet's emotional response to a happy or unhappy aspect of nature. As the poet was essentially a liberal minded humanist, he generalises his experience of nature to sing of her glories and praise the Lord.

In one of his poems, Chatrik states that given the life of a poet one should pass one's time in the company of the gentle, do good to the poor and cherish such values of civilisation as truth, goodness and beauty—'Kavi di Joon' (A Poet's Life), quoted by Dr Gurcharan Singh Mehta in his book on Lala Dhani Ram Chatrik; Panjabi University; 1973, p. 74). He was conscious of

his poetic genius and deliberately used his poetic faculties for social reform. This predilection for social reform made him avoid problems of abstract philosophy and he never fully exploited his faculty of observing nature as a means for presenting the problems of life in a symbolic way. Whenever he turned to legend and lore for inspiration, he did not reproduce the legend on an epic scale. His method always remained anecdotal in character and as such the meaning could be easily read on the surface. This made him quite popular with his readers and on his part he made a conscious effort to be within the reach of his readers.

Such an awareness made him broaden his ethical approach. He adhered to the Indian view of life. It was not the Hindu way of life, as Bhai Vir Singh pursued the way of Sikh faith. His approach, though inspired by the cultural values of India's past, was one of social realism since his objective had always been to observe critically and to comment. Even when he raises fundamental questions relating to metaphysics like being and becoming, life here and the life hereafter, the existence of God and the problems of fate, he treats them as if he is addressing a Sat Sang (gathering of truth seekers) and he keeps himself within the comprehension of the average reader both literate and illiterate. His style is often colloquial, but his use of such a style is no deliberate revolt against an existing classical style. When he had started writing poetry all the learned Panjabi poets were inclined to use Brij Bhasha as their medium. When Bhai Vir Singh gave it up for the sake of giving free expression to his ideas he was conscious of giving up the language and not the style. It is for this reason that he made deliberate use of alankaras, alliterative rhythmical patterns, and figures of speech, of a deliberately cultivated style. Chatrik had no ambition to write erudite poetry and his avowed aim was to be within the reach of the average reader and to make him aware of his social responsibility. His poems, e.g., 'Sukhi Jiwan di Kunji' (Key to Happy Living), 'Aekae di Barkat' (Blessings of Unity), 'Bharat Mata' (Mother India) show his approach to problems as topical.

When he talks of the Panjab, he does not talk the way Puran Singh talks of the land of the five rivers. He has no doubt expressed his love of the land with lyrical intensity but he seldom romanticises it. Puran Singh's poetry is a cascade of overwhelming feelings. But Chatrik knows how to canalise his feelings for

social ends, how to portray a well-laid-out tank, a reservoir of clean water. When India became free and Panjab was partitioned, Bhai Vir Singh did not take up this momentous theme but Chatrik wrote a number of poems on it which are notable for their objectivity in depicting the social and the political scene. His objective view however did not make him give up the old touchstone of the humanistic tradition. He never tried to understand the complexities of the modern way of living or the class structure of society. It was because of this limited vision that he praised the pastoral way of life or the enlightened view of life of the God-fearing rich. His poem 'Aaceli' (Shepherd) sings of the glories of a poor but free way of living. It was Chatrik's indirect indictment of the greed and meanness which prevailed in urban society but he never understood the real evils of the society and how these resulted in the exploitation of the poor and the downtrodden. Chatrik had a blind eye for this social phenomenon.

Prose Works

Chatrik was primarily a poet, but quite early in his literary career, he was obliged to write for the *Khasla Samachar*. Those were the days of religious controversies and literary efforts were directed towards extolling one's community and more often than not running down the other communities. The columns of the *Khasla Samachar* were generally free from religious rancour and the editorial staff usually laid emphasis on raising the moral standards of the Sikh community rather than on taking the offensive against the militant sections of the Hindus or the Muslims.

Chatrik therefore wrote various prose works to extol such virtues as tolerance, love of truth, simple living and high thinking besides an insistence upon personal ethics and hygiene in the interests of community living. His introductions to different books written by him, the literary pamphlets and tracts, the novelettes, short stories and essays all aim at this.

Many of Chatrik's prose works are to be found in manuscript form. Luckily these are now in the safe custody of the Panjabi University, Patiala, and plans are under way to publish annotated editions.

In such prose works as 'Do Uttam Jivan' (Two Ideal Lives), 1903, we find Chatrik following the moralistic tendencies of the day. In those days journalistic tracts were being published with a view to bringing about reforms in society. A new morality was emerging in the land, as a result of the impact of the West upon Indian society. A section of the enlightened opinion of the day

wanted to safeguard the cultural and ethical heritage of the past. This section believed that it could be done only by preserving one's Adhyatam Dharam, i.e. the spiritual values which were dear to the forefathers. The Panjabi people professed different faiths and each section of the people insisted upon safeguarding its own sectarian values. Most of Bhai Vir Singh's works inculcate the moral values based upon Sikh religion. Chatrik had a broader outlook and his viewpoint is seen generally as secular. As in 'Do Uttam Jivan', in his other prose works like 'Bhai Parbudh Singh da Jiwan Sudhar' (1907) and 'Ramaya Seth' (1907), he preaches a more broadbased morality than the Hindu way of life. Such a secular approach to life is very significant in the social and political context of the times. By 1907, both the sections of the Arya Samaj (the Gurukul section and the College section) had created an atmosphere in the Panjab, through their movement for revivalism and through their Shudhi (Purification and Reconversion) of those who had given up Hinduism and turned Christian or Mohammedan, in which the concept of a common Panjabi culture suffered grievously. The Sikhs started the Singh Sabha movement as a counterblast to the Arya Samaj movement. Polemical tracts and propagandist fiction extolled the glorious past of the Sikh community and regretted the decadence of the present times. Chatrik insisted upon a humanistic and secular approach rather than any chauvinistic glorification of the past.

Most writers of the Panjab cared more for the theme than the niceties of literary prose. Chatrik on the other hand, was scrupulous in the choice of words, the arrangement of the paragraphs and the use of idioms and metaphors which were within the easy reach of the average reader. His poetry has overshadowed his prose works, and his stature as a prose writer has not been fully realised. It is for this reason that many of his prose works have remained unpublished even after his death. There is no doubt that man speaks in rhyme first, and that progress in poetry always precedes advancement in prose. Even though his great contemporary Bhai Vir Singh too was primarily a poet, his prose works like 'Sundri', 'Baba Nodh Singh', etc. became popular, but it was primarily due to their religious appeal. Chatrik was scrupulous about the literary aspects of his prose as he was in the case of his poetry. It was the fashion of

the Kavi Darbars which made him popular as a poet but his prose works never caught the public eye.

Before Chatrik wrote his prose works which initiated a simple, natural and fascinating prose style, Panjabi prose was encumbered with Brij Bhasha and the prose tradition in Panjabi was rhetorical in character since it presented mostly religious polemics or homilies suggesting ethical norms. The introductions Chatrik wrote for his various collections of poems are samples of his effortless writing where he shines with a lustre which is peculiarly his own. He wrote as if he was speaking. He seems to address his readers face to face. He gives expression to his innermost feelings in a bold way.

His prose work 'Phullan di Tokari' (The Flower Basket), 1904, is a collection of short essays on various aspects of the social life of the Panjab. He takes up the problems of marriage, poverty, family life, Queen Victoria's reign, gambling, etc. The essays included in this collection are not the conventional literary essays like the essays of Bacon or Montaigne. These essays are brief comments about problems of everyday life, but even though conversational in character, the unity of impression created by them makes them literary and the style elegant and chaste. Chatrik expresses his opinions upon many topical matters quite fearlessly and frankly and there is a certain amount of flow and rhythm about these prose pieces which give the essays a distinct literary character.

None of the modern writers of Panjabi, except Teja Singh had admiration for Chatrik's poetry but in his critical evaluation he failed to do justice to the prose writings of Chatrik. Chatrik's essay 'Vidya' (Education) may be taken as a typical prose piece to evaluate Chatrik's prose style. As pointed out by Dr Gurcharan Singh Mehta, Chatrik laid the foundations of the literary style in Panjabi prose, and if Puran Singh could develop an excellent prose style in his book 'Khulaa Maidan' (Vast Fields), it was perhaps due to the fact that Chatrik had provided a model as early as 1904, in 'Phulan di Tokari' (The Flower Basket). In his essay entitled 'Vidya' Chatrik stresses the need for education to be imparted both to the rich and the poor. The rich need it all the more, because education is riches which can neither be stolen nor destroyed. The poor, on the other hand, can hope to go up the social ladder only with the

help of education. There is nothing new in this line of argument but the plea for education has been put forth with an earnestness which is free from clichés. Chatrik's advocacy of the cause of education arises from his sincere desire to propagate the higher values of life.

His essay on Queen Victoria is not an assessment of Queen Victoria as the Empress of India or the blessings that her reign is said to have brought to the Indian people. It gives the readers a glimpse into the family life of Queen Victoria and Chatrik shows that the queen was first and last a woman. Many years after Chatrik's essay on Queen Victoria, Lytton Strachey wrote a new kind of biography of the queen. Chatrik wrote in a similar vein long before him, but his efforts passed off practically unnoticed. It was probably due to the fact that essay as a literary genre, had not as yet come of age in Panjabi literature.

In one of the stories called 'Istri Dukhdashi' Chatrik deplores the sad plight of women in those days, especially the widows. In the story a widow's prejudices, her superstitious relatives and a hostile society harass her. The story has been built with skill and the scenic background has been deftly drawn. The story develops through effective dialogue and the character of Dukhdashi has been well drawn. It is a pity that Chatrik did not devote more time to fiction, otherwise Panjabi fiction would not have waited for so many decades for the emergence of the realistic novel. Chatrik's treatment of the problems of widowhood is realistic and nowhere does he betray any sentimentalism.

'Bhai Prabudh Singh da Jiwan Sudhar', is a domestic novel. Avoiding the religious controversies of the day, Chatrik suggests that true joy lies in a happy family life. This can be acquired by concentrating upon basic virtues like honest living, character building and cultivating the spirit of tolerance towards the other members of the family. The novel has been divided into five parts, and in each part we find Bhai Prabudh Singh grappling with a particular individual or social problem. Each situation finds the hero well prepared for the task assigned to him by fate and on each occasion we find that he braves cheerfully even the most adverse circumstances. When the city of Amritsar is infested with cholera,

Bhai Prabudh Singh acts with an earnestness which is rare even in a professional social worker. The second and the third parts of the novel take up the problem of growing young people who are guided on the right path by Bhai Prabudh Singh. No 'generation gap' existed in those days and it was possible for Bhai Prabudh Singh to assert his authority as the elderly member of the family.

In 'Ramaya Seth' we find Chatrik giving a harsh criticism of the domestic life of the rich people. He makes an effective use of wit and irony to expose the foibles of the rich.

Chatrik had translated Aesop's Fables and Shakespeare's play Macbeth. The choice of these two books for translation is quite significant. Aesop's Fables were originally the European adoption of the Tales of Panchtantra, and instead of going to the original sources, which must have been available in those days, Chatrik chose to translate Aesop's Fables primarily because of the novelty of the adventure and also because of the fact that Aesop's 'Fables' is a book which is easier to follow than the subtle and difficult Panchtantra tales. As regards 'Macbeth' his translation of the Shakespearean play was more or less a professional assignment and perhaps Chatrik had no choice in the matter. His translation of the play, however, is quite elegant and the idiomatic rendering of a difficult Shakespearean play is no mean achievement.

Chatrik wrote a number of short stories but they remained practically unnoticed. Whatever prose was written by Chatrik, was marked by an elegant style, a judicious choice of words, wit and irony.

6

Content and Form

Chatrik was a widely acclaimed poet, and whenever he participated in a Kavi Darbar, he was wildly cheered by large audiences. It has often been alleged by his critics that he was just a clever rhymster playing to the gallery but a close study of his poetry will reveal that he was scrupulously careful in the choice of his themes and he deliberately cultivated a poetic style that was easily comprehended by his readers or audiences.

Those were the days when education was spreading fast in the Panjab through a network of schools, and a new educated middle class was rising in search of jobs in the liberal professions. But Chatrik was denied the opportunity of going in for any of the liberal professions since he could not pursue his studies beyond the primary stage because of the poverty of his father. He therefore, had no opportunity to gain first hand experience of the upper middle class and despite his study of Urdu writers like Nazir Ahmed and Hali, the world of the struggling upper middle class remained a closed book for him. But this proved to be blessing. Instead of a mere cerebral interpretation of the social themes, we find in his poems themes which may be described as down to earth.

As a logical corollary to this he chose such forms of poetry which were traditional and already current in the land. It was for this reason that he wrote 'Qissas' to begin with 'Bharatari Hari' (1905), 'Nal Damyanti' (1906), 'Dharambir' (1912), and it was only later on in the thirties of the present century that

he took to the writing of the short poems and the lyrics—'Chandanvari' (1931), 'Kesar Kiari' (1940) and 'Navan Jahan' (1942). By this time, education had spread widely in the Panjab, and after the communal strifes of the first two decades of the present century, a distinct class of the Panjabi people started thinking in terms of Panjabi identity. So, when in 1944 Chatrik wrote 'Noorjahan Badshah Begum,' he did not choose the old Qissa form of narration. Instead he chose a form of narrative poetry which was akin to the western short ballad.

Chatrik's choice of the form and content of his poetry was therefore determined by the necessities of the hour, and unlike Bhai Vir Singh he was never consciously imitating a particular genre of western poetry. When Bhai Vir Singh wrote 'Rana Surat Singh', he modelled his long poem of epic dimensions on Milton's 'Paradise Lost', and he was a success, because he did make a deliberate effort to achieve his ideal.

Chatrik used the language of everyday life, and his readers felt that the poet was talking of things nearer their hearts, their own longings, hopes and fears. Whenever commentaries are offered on the works of a poet like Bhai Vir Singh the reader feels grateful, for such commentaries help him appreciate the subtleties of the poetry. But Chatrik's poetry needs no such explanatory comments. Everything lies on the surface, and any attempt to disturb the reader; would be like disturbing the arabesque on a piece of marble or disturbing the original design of a masterly mosaic.

Although Chatrik was not a well read man in the conventional sense, he did possess insights into the mysteries of being and becoming. From his very childhood, he had enjoyed roaming about in the milling crowds of a village fair or the jostling passersby on a busy street. Through an innate faculty it was possible for him to present all these scenes in an impressionistic way relying on description as well as suggestion, and using a colourful vocabulary, familiar yet strange. It seems as if he retained the curiosity of a child even in the adult days of experience. This rare combination of a child-like curiosity and the discerning eye, which could transcend the transitory and the superficial made him one of the most successful writers of descriptive poetry in Panjabi. Any reader of 'Mele vich Jat' (Jat at the Fair), 'Basant' (Spring), 'Panjab', 'Radha Sandesh'

(Radha's Message), 'Sawan' (Rain), 'Sandhya' (Evening) and other descriptive poems cannot but be impressed by his acute power of observation and the mastery of minute detail as in (Mele vich Jat) (see English translation on pages 53-55).

The scene of the fair is evoked with effortless ease, and it is this spontaneity of expression which is the most distinctive feature of his narrative short poems.

The objective approach of the poet gives an authenticity to his descriptive poems but his poetic art is to be seen at its best when he is trying to externalise an intensely felt inner experience. When Puran Singh tried to do so, he completely ignored the necessities of the poetic form which he considered to be shackles on his imagination. Chatrik accepted the challenge, and he made an ideal work within the framework of the poetic form. With him the poetic vocabulary was only a means to clothe the essence of his thought.

A comparative study of two of his poems, one descriptively emotional and the other emotionally descriptive, 'Panjab' and 'Radha Sandesh' (Radha's Message) will reveal Chatrik's approach to the problem of form and content in poetry. Whereas in his poem 'Panjab', he describes the beauty of Panjab; life as it is lived on the surface; the Panjab belles with their bangles, and well dressed tresses; the churning of milk in the hour of morning; their playing of the spinning wheel; their long sittings preparing 'Phulkaris' in groups; their swings hung from the branches of old banyan trees; their *Gidha* dance in the moonlit night and the young Panjabis playing upon their rustic flutes or reciting old Qissas; the men's daily chores in the fields wherein the furrows are laid out and the woman carry food to the fields—all these are good descriptions of Panjab life, which will always have a nostalgic appeal for the Panjabi people. This, however, is no great poetry and the passages lack the powerful descriptive qualities characteristic of such English poets as Goldsmith and Cowper.

On the other hand, whenever Chatrik has an opportunity to reflect upon the changing patterns of the Panjab landscape or whenever he uses nature as a background to describe the sorrows of mankind, his poetic skill is seen at its best. Most of the poems in his collection 'Kesar Kiari' reflect this. In such poems as 'Teri Yad' (Your Memory) or 'Kithe Luk Gya Ranjan Mahi?'

(Where Has My Beloved Gone?), we find the poet in tune with infinity, using nature as a means to probe deep into the dark recesses of the human mind. When the evening comes and dust settles on the roads, when the sun has gone down and small clouds scatter in the sky, when the Khangah lamps are seen from a distance, when the stars are again seen in the sky, it is the hour of bliss and calmness. It is this hour which makes one turn inwards and have communion with the still small voice within.

Chatrik tried his hand successfully at different poetic genres. He was at his best in such genres which were traditional in form, but at the same time provided him with an opportunity to give expression to his individuality. Of all the traditional forms of poetry, the 'ghazal' provides the widest scope for an author's individual genius. The necessity of adhering to a strict metrical pattern may restrict to some extent the expression, but each stanza of a ghazal is usually taken to be an independent unit and the use of metaphorical language being freely allowed, a poet has definitely more elbow room in a ghazal than in a quatrain. Chatrik knew this and he made very effective use of this freedom in his ghazals.

The Panjabi ghazal, which was introduced to our literature by the middle of the nineteenth century by such poets as Fazal Shah, Hidayat Ullah, Ghamukhan, Agha Ali and others, was made popular by the pioneering work of Moula Bux Kushta. We have a preponderance of Urdu vocabulary in Kushta's ghazals and he carries on the old tradition of suggesting mystic experiences (Ishqae Haqiqi), through the experience of mundane and physical love (Ishqae Mizazi), but his orthodox view of life made him cultivate the moralistic tone and hampered the lyrical appeal of his ghazals. Besides this, his scrupulous adherence to the formal technique of ghazal made him less imaginative and appealing.

Another contemporary of Chatrik, Babu Ferozedin Sharaf, closely followed the models set by Kushta. It was possible for Chatrik to overcome these shortcomings by making greater use of Panjabi vocabulary, and even though he scrupulously observed the established metrical patterns, he never became a mere imitator. He freed the Panjabi ghazal from slavishly following the classical masters of Urdu ghazals like Dag and Zauq. He

used Panjabi idiom, Panjabi folklore, Panjabi flora and fauna to bring home to his readers the highest reaches of lyrical flight. It is regrettable that recent ghazal writers of Panjabi have once again sought inspiration from Dag, Zauq and the Delhi school of Urdu ghazal writers rather than follow the lead provided by Chatrik. As in the short poem, so in the matter of composing ghazals, Chatrik was influenced by Hali and Iqbal, but he avoided the rhetorical overtones of both and wrote in an idiom which is native and true to the Panjabi genius.

He used the traditional doha and the quatrain to reflect upon the deeper problems of life and death. His dohas remind one of the mediaeval Bhaktas and his quatrains are his means to reflect upon the problems of life like a true Sufi.

Chatrik never led the life of a recluse and the Sufistic thoughts expressed by him do not indicate his attachment to a particular school of thought. He never claimed acquaintance with any Sufi Silsila. His approach was more of Bhakti Marg than the old Sufi way of meditation and self-abnegation. It is likely that in matters spiritual he owed more to the Sikh gurus and the Hindu philosophy of the Bhagvad Gita.

Chatrik and His Critics

Dhani Ram Chatrik received recognition quite early in his literary career. Principal Teja Singh was the first distinguished Panjabi critic to assess the work of Chatrik in a fair manner. He praised the calm equipoise of the poet's mind and pointed out that Chatrik always tried to steer clear of the social, religious or political controversies of the day. According to Teja Singh, Chatrik's poetic genius was essentially lyrical and he made a greater appeal to the heart than to the head of his reader. Dr Gopal Singh, another noted Panjabi critic gave high praise to Chatrik for his excellent poetic diction, for his faithful portrayal of nature, and for the beautiful vignettes of Panjabi village life. He too, like Teja Singh, praises the musicality of his verse and the immense emotional appeal that it possesses. Giani Hira Singh Dard, a believer in the social purpose of art and literature, praised the reformistic zeal of Chatrik and emphasised the fact that Chatrik's great achievement was a break from the idealistic tendencies of the earlier Panjabi poetry of Bhai Vir Singh and Puran Singh. It was Chatrik's realistic approach of life which made such a great appeal to Hira Singh Dard. Dr Surinder Singh Kohli talks of the patriotic content of Chatrik's poetry and praises its secular approach.

Dr Parminder Singh praises Chatrik's fidelity to life, his beautiful nature poems, his hatred of slavery and his unabated zeal for social reform, for a better future for the downtrodden and the oppressed. Amrita Pritam opines that Chatrik inherits the best traditions of Panjab's romantic poetry, which had

reached the acme of its glory in the times of Waris Shah and it is to the credit of Chatrik that he knows the correct relationship between tradition and the individual talent, between the past and the present.

Principal Gurbachan Singh Talib says that Chatrik's poetry is the index of his own mind, which is the repository of the best that is there in Panjabi culture. He is all praise for the lyrical genius of Chatrik, and says that Chatrik possesses a rare instinct for the choice of the apt word, and the relationship inherent in the word and its meaning.

Dr Mohan Singh describes Chatrik as the poet of the right word and the right poetic medium. He describes him as a poet who is conscious of the highest bliss, which comes to a man who can place service above self. He emphasises the fact that Chatrik is the poet of Saundarya (Beauty), Prem (Love) and Sahirdya (Tolerance). He refers to the mystic undertones which are to be found in Chatrik's longer poems and is of the opinion that this trait of his poetry places him in the front rank of Panjabi Sufi poets.

All this high praise and critical acclaim is surprising, in view of the fact that a majority of the poets who, like Chatrik, belonged to the convention of Kavi Darbari were decried by these very critics. Many of the contemporaries of Chatrik like Sharaf, Vidhata Singh Tir, Sunder Das Assi and others, though popular like Chatrik, could never catch the discriminating critics' ear. They were applauded by large audiences. Sharaf was lionised by fans. Their poetic diction also indicated a meticulous choice of words, their manipulation of the various poetic patterns and metres was flawless. They wrote about the burning problems of the day and some of their most popular poems were topical. But it was Chatrik alone who stood the test of time and stands shoulders high above Kavi Darbari poets.

The reasons are not far to seek. Whenever Chatrik took up a topical theme, he probed it with a rare insight and it was possible for him to present the essence of the thing in such a manner as to divest it of its topicality. It became universal. What was the catalyst possessed by Chatrik that it was possible for him to create a totally new compound out of the old and common ingredients? How did he bring about this sea change?

In order to answer these questions we have to study the

psychological make up of Chatrik the man and how he made use of the old poetic traditions of the Panjab and the collective consciousness of its people. When the British came, they started playing one community against the other, and patronised each communal movement under the garb of extending the cause of enlightenment. Whereas many of Chatrik's contemporaries were taken in by this game, Chatrik saw through it and raised the slogan of Panjabi first and last. He rendered yeoman service to the cause of Panjabi, through his organisational work connected with the General Panjabi Sabha in the twenties of the present century, and it was his exemplary zeal which drew such prominent non-Sikhs as Joshua Fazaldin and Sir Shahabudin to the cause. Besides this he encountered bravely the fanatical zeal of the different communal organisations and kept up the flag of a composite Panjabi culture.

The wonder is that he could do all this without ascending the pulpit or taking part in controversies. He believed that the cause of Panjabi life and letters can be advanced best by creating Panjabi literature of the highest order. He was scrupulous in this matter. His own writings served as a model for others. Some of the best Panjabi poets of our times, Mohan Singh and Harinder Singh Rup looked upon Chatrik as their mentor and he never failed them. Harinder Singh Rup has paid a glowing tribute to Chatrik for the great pains that he took to guide poets of the younger generation. He could advise them in matters of poetry, because he himself was a poet and his achievement lay in the fact that he could make an excellent use of his experience of life to inspire others. Perhaps the experience of a poet is not as important as the fact that the poet makes proper use of it.

Chatrik and Ancient Indian Thought

When Dayanand Saraswati came to the Panjab—at the invitation of Lala Sain Das, Lala Jiwan Dass and Lala Mulraj¹, who were the opponents of the Bengali intelligentsia advocating the adoption of the English ways of living and thought—he found that the ground had already been prepared for him. The Brahmo Samaj had been established in Lahore in 1863 and its branches had been opened in Simla and Ferozepur. The Brahmo Samaj stood for a radical change in social outlook and a full utilization of the Western revivalist movement. During Dayanand's public debates with his opponents he had declared that all the evils of Hindu society arose from the fact that the springhead of wisdom and knowledge, the Vedas, had been ignored and that after the Mahabharata which caused the destruction of the wisest elite of Indian Society, the Hindus had fallen on evil days.² Dayanand had started his life as a sanyasi, almost a recluse from society, but his views on life and the hereafter changed when he met his guru Virajnand³, who

1. Sarda: *The Life of Dayanand*, pp. 179-190
2. Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya: *The Light of Truth*, English Translation by Satyarth Prakash (Allahabad: The Kala Press, 1956), pp. 392-393.
3. Graham: *The Arya Samaj*, p. 131. J.N. Farquhar: 'The Modern Religious Movements in India' (New York: The Macmillan Company 1919).

happened to hail from the Panjab. Dayanand's mission proved a great success in the Panjab, and the orthodox sections of the Hindu community decided to challenge him. A society named Sat Sabha (Truth Society) was set up under the leadership of Sri Sharda Ram Phillauri, who joined many debates to prove the authenticity of the Sanatan Dharama. He was quite influential in the districts of Jullundur, Gurdaspur and Ludhiana but in the districts of Amritsar and Lahore, the Arya Samaj was more popular.

It was natural for Dhani Ram Chatrik to be influenced by the social changes around him and a study of his early poetry reveals two facts; he assessed the ancient Indian heritage in a liberal way and he never joined issue with one party or the other. This was probably due to the impact of Bhai Vir Singh's personality. As is clear from the prose writings of Bhai Vir Singh, his attitude towards the current religious polemics was one of tolerance. Besides this, the Arya Samajis of those days were not as rigid as they became later. When Dayanand Saraswati was touring the Panjab for the first time, on many occasions he stayed with Muslims.¹ Dhani Ram Chatrik's liberal interpretation of the ancient Indian thought and culture, should be noted in the context of the prevailing circumstances. Chatrik's religious and cultural outlook is characterised by a spirit of tolerance towards all and enmity towards none. He refused to be drawn into any religious polemics. He sincerely believed that God is manifested through the prophets of all religions and it was a customary for him to treat Rama, Krishna, Nanak and Mohammad alike. He was a devout Hindu and believed in the theory preached in the Gita that God sends His avatars to lead man to the right path, whenever he happens to go astray. In his poems he calls upon Lord Rama like a devoted Bhakt. Lord Rama is 'the repository of all comfort,' Lord Krishna is 'the true guide' and reminds his readers that Dhanna Bhakt got salvation because of his faith in Lord Krishna. About Guru Nanak, he says 'Sri Guru Nanak Dev ki mehmasa upar upar Kalu undheri jhuldi hoai jaasavtar' (Guru Nanak's greatness cannot be described in words; the blinding wind of Kaliyug was moving with tornado fury, when

1. Sarda: The Life of Dayanand, pp. 181-182.

he was born). He believed that God's spirit was manifested in the whole universe, and that this universal spirit was above all change. He says 'Nas hon lok, parlok, bhraham lok sabh Nas hon devta na atma da nash hai' (This world and the here-after or the heavenly abode may be destroyed; neither the gods nor the Eternal Spirit can ever be destroyed). This eternal spirit is to be found in the heart of man, who unfortunately is ignorant like the deer searching for its own musk.

According to the Hindu view, life is a period of a short stay on the road of Bhakti to the House of Bliss, which is the universal spirit. Various means have been suggested to ensure the final union with God, and the most popularly accepted one is to leave everything to God Himself who, out of His benignity will accept the devotee into His august company. This path, simple as it may seem, is paved with all sorts of rituals, which according to the tenets of the ancient Shastras, can be performed only by the accredited priestly class. The four Vedas, the Manu Smriti, and scores of other commentaries upon the ancient scriptures more often than not confirm the ascendancy of the priestly class. There is no doubt about it that right from the days of Brahmagupta, Chandra Kirti, Dharmakirti and others of the schools of Nyaya—Vaisesika and of Vijnanavada—attempts have been made to challenge the authority of this class, through such movements as Buddhism, Jainism the Bhakti movement, the Sufi movement and in our times through such organisations as the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj. The Sanatan Dharma of the ancient priestly class has however, asserted itself time and again and ultimately succeeded in the creation of a priestly class even in the different reformist movements. The Mahayana of Buddhism, the different Sufi Silsilās, the Karam Kand and the sanctity attached to the havan ceremony of the Arya Samajists show this. It is to the credit of Chatrik, that he could see through all these swing-back movements and always emphasised the essentials of the progressive religious movements.

He believed that man was made in the image of God, and that one could be one with God, if one could find the identity between Self and the universal Self. Whether a transcendental being exists beyond the material world, is a question which has baffled the intellectual ingenuity of philosophers since

Uddalka of the Brahadaranyaka and Chandogya Upanisads instructed his son Svetaketu in the mysteries of the universe. When this became a controversy during the days of the Bhakti movement, all the bhakts, Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas and many others firmly rejected the institutionalism based upon the ascendancy of the priestly class of the Brahmans, and advocated the Bhakti Marg, based upon submission to God in a spirit of humility. This was a course of action which sharply contrasted with the earlier Jnanamarg and the Yogamarg which had held sway in India for a very long time.

When Chatrik wrote his poetry, he was facing the same problem. The impact of the West and the march of science through India, as symbolised by the steam engine and the first industrial units in India, created a climate of doubt. The confusion became worse confounded because of the religious controversies of the day in which one religious community did its worst to run down the other community. Under the circumstances, Chatrik expounded his faith in humanism tinged with a belief in the Omnipresent God. He wanted his readers to look within themselves and assured them that they shall see God. "The deer searches for musk, here and there, but forgets that it lies in its belly. The mother holds the baby in her lap, but makes the crier go round announcing the loss of the baby. O Chatrik, search for Rama within your heart. One can get butter only if one were to churn the milk properly." He takes common examples from everyday life, to bring home to the readers the knotty problems of philosophy.

Even though he did not believe in any institutionalised religious rituals strictly, there are numerous instances in his short and long poems wherein he suggests that he was a Karm Kandi, a person who believes that all our evils are due to our acts in a past life and if one goes wrong in the world one would have to pay for it in the next. Pt. Kirpa Sagar Sharma in his critical dissertation 'Mahakavi Chatrik te Hindu Vichar Dhara' (Mahakavi Chatrik and Hindu Thought) has quoted extensively from his works to prove that "Chatrik did not go to Socrates, Aristotle, Nietzsche, Julian Huxley, Freud and others. His source of inspiration was the Gurbani and the Hindu Shastras."

9

Conclusion

As pointed out by Gurbachan Singh Talib, Chatrik's poetry is the manifestation of the different facets of his personality. He was a gentle person, possessing a liberal outlook on life, and his poetry is free from sectarian or communal attitudes, which were characteristic of many of his contemporaries. Even though some of his narrative poems are masterly in diction and exposition he will be best remembered for his lyrical songs. Each one of his lyrics suggests more than meets the eye in his verse. Love is the usual theme; but instead of merely distinguishing the physical and mystic aspects of love, he notes the different aspects of the very experience of love in subtle suggestions. Chatrik is]probably the first Panjabi poet to have freed the theme of love from its purely sufistic or sprititual bondage. Dr Mohan Singh ably described Chatrik as a perfect poet, because according to the learned scholar, "Chatrik is a perfect artist, the singer of the songs of joy; a person eager for social reform, who always kept service above self. He is the embodiment of beauty, truth and goodness and each one of his poems is only a vehicle for conveying to readers the ancient message of Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram." He enjoyed living a purposeful life but he had also developed that spirit of detachment which made him comment upon the ways of world with a sense of assurance. There is a mystical element in his poetry, but his mysticism is no barrier to the enjoyment of the pleasures of life. The poet denounced those who wore a mask, but he always admired those who enjoyed the blessings of life and praised the lord for having bestowed those blessings of man.

Dhani Ram Chatrik struggled throughout his life for the realisation of those ideals which were dear to his literary career. He realised that success did not come easily. He believed that God helped those who helped themselves. This simple philosophy of life is manifested in many of his early poems such as 'Himmat di Fateh' (Victory comes to the Valiant), 'Jharne nal Gallan' (Talking to the Spring) and 'Bailan di Kahani' (The Story of an Ox). He did not believe in any institutionalised and conventional morality. Even to win God all that he considered necessary was the simple rule of being good and the observance of humility and selfless service. These are the virtues which have been praised again and again in most of his didactic poems. In his poem 'Kavi da Rab' (The Poet's God), he states that "God is not imprisoned in temples and mosques. He cannot be bound down in stones or found merely in books. He is not scared by the band wagons or by the Mullah's Azan (call to Prayer). He does not condemn the Muslim by calling him Malech (impure) or the Hindu by calling him Dozkhi (hell bound). He is the fountainhead of all. Oh Chatrik bow before such a Lord." The rhetorical element here makes the poem an exhortation and lacks the subtlety of his other poems on the theme; but the poet felt strongly about the spirit of intolerance which prevailed in his times and every line in the poem speaks of the poet's just indignation against those who would interpret God by the prescribed word of their own religious book only.

This broad-based outlook on life made him come out of the narrow shell of communal or sectarian consideration and despite his realistic description of the woes of the common people 'Gharib Kisan' (Poor Peasant), he did dream of 'Nawan Jahan' (New World), which is not the Brave New World of Huxley, where life becomes too mechanical to be worth living. His romanticism sometimes makes him escape into the lap of nature wherein he can forget "the fever, fret and weariness" of the world but more often than not it is expressed in the utopian world of brotherhood of man which is free from want and wherein all the inhabitants observe the rules of decency voluntarily. In his poem 'Samae di Navion Navi Bahar' (The Eternal Spring of Time), he declares that the new times have brought new joys, new sights, new youthful adventures, new fairs, new beauties and a new spring. The old stories need not be repeated

since 'the new people have their own stories to tell; the old have been left behind, and the new have their own targets to achieve. He concludes the poem, emphatically declaring that the times have changed and it is advisable that the people take cognizance of it.

The most characteristic feature of Chatrik's poetry is its fidelity to the experience of everyday life. But nowhere in his writings do we find his personal experience turning into a prejudice. He does not merely narrate his experience through his poetry, he presents it in the context of the social changes of his times. He wrote in the best tradition of the Panjabi poetry, which, beginning with Baba Farid and Guru Nanak had always approached life in a rational way without ignoring intuition or imagination. Chatrik always rationalised his experience, but while doing so, he did not follow the conventional methods of deductive or inductive analysis. He always assessed his experience through his intuition and imagination. Dhani Ram Chatrik has been much admired because he successfully attempted to catch and articulate the significant moments of his experience of life. His mastery of the Panjabi language and his acquaintance with the old masters of the language made him a narrative poet par excellence.

Some modern Panjabi critics, particularly the academicians, who have been educated in the tradition of western critics like T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards, Rene Welleck, have pointed out that Chatrik never probed his experience of life at a deeper level and did not explore fully the depth and dark recesses of human mind.

He never used poetic symbols and images in the modern way so as to enable his readers to detach, reform and reshape his own experience in the light of the imaginative vision of the poet himself. Modern Panjabi poets like Mohan Singh, Pritam Singh Safir, Amrita Pritam, Harbhajan Singh, Shiv Kumar, Ravi, Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia and Hasrat do use symbols and images in the modern way but Dhani Ram Chatrik always sticks to the conventional way. They often successfully reshape their experience in an autonomous and self-sufficient manner making their symbols and images go beyond what these ordinarily stand for.

Dhani Ram Chatrik, throughout his life remained tied to the conventional forms of writing poetry and was the master of the

poetic technique but the modern critics look upon the mastery of technique as mere craftsmanship. His mastery of the conventional Panjabi poetic idiom is his bane too. He fails to explore fully the potentialities of the growing Panjabi language, particularly in the post-independence era. He quite often slips into a pedestrian use of language and he never made any experiments of diction as some of the modern Panjabi poets have done. The modern Panjabi poets (particularly Neki, Ravi and Ahluwalia) have tried to circumvent the irreversible process of Time; to clip its wings and freeze it in an ever alive but immobile present. Chatrik always views the present from the steady angle of the past, with the result that his imagination was always overpowered by the memory of things past and long ago. His dependence of memory made him ignore the psychological compulsions of the modern age. He ignored the fact that going deep in to the past, a creative writer should at the same time be projecting into the future. In this way alone can a creative genius bend the straight line of Time into a closed circle, where everything returns to itself and the whole is self-sufficient unto itself.

Chatrik failed to achieve this end, because in his writings he never developed his experience beyond the sensory level and did not articulate, explore or create new levels of experience as Amrita Pritam does in 'Kaghaze te Canvas' (Paper and Canvas).

Chatrik has his limitations but in his own field of reviving the great conventions of classical Panjabi poetry and in presenting his rich experience of life in terms of traditional values of Panjabi ethos, he successfully presented the feeling counterpart of the conceptual universe of the Panjabi people; their origin, tradition and genius.

In his poetry and prose, feeling is not dissociated from living, emotion from impulse and sentiment from action. He does so because of his classical poise. He does not inflame emotions to arouse merely the impulse. He makes an earnest effort to provide instruction, moral elevation and religious exaltation. Even his worst critics do not deny the fact that in this earnest endeavour he was eminently successful because he does not moralise directly. His poetry merely illuminates the moral conflict, hence its eternal appeal.

Select Poems

Panjab

Panjāb karāñ ki sift teri Shānā di Sabh Sāmān tere
Jal paun tera, haryol teri, daryā parbat maidān tere
Bhārat de sir te chhattar tera, tere sir chhattar Himālā dā
Moḍhe te chādar burphan di seene vich saik jawāla da
Khabbe hath barchhi jamuna di sajjae hath khadaḡ Attack
da hai
Pichwāḍe bund chattānā da, koi veri toḍ na sakda hae
Arshi barkat rūñ vāḡ uttar chāndi da dher lagāndi hae
Chāndi dhal ke vichdī hae to sona bandi jāndi hae

From 'Chandanvāḍī'
(Valley of Sandalwood)

Panjab

I find it difficult to praise Panjab's glories. The climate, the greenery, the rivers, the mountains and the plains, all are peerless

The Panjab is the glorious canopy over India's head, and the Himalayas are the Panjab's canopy

The snowy peaks are the scarf flung over his shoulders

The volcanoes are the fiery spirit of his heart.

He holds in his left hand the scimitar of the Jamuna and in his right hand He holds the double-edged sword of the Attack

The mountainous terrain is the defensive covering of his back

None dare attack him from that side

The sky showers his silvery blessings upon him like cotton balls moving about in the air

The silvery blessings turn into gold as these spread over the earth

Mele vich Jat

Turi tund Sānbh, Hāri Vech Vat ke
 Lambrdāñ te Shāhāñ da hisāb kat ke
 Mīhāñ di Uddīk te siār kadh ke
 Māl dhanda sām̄bhane nu chūra chhaḍ ke
 Pag jhaga chaddar nave sivāe ke
 Sumāñ vali dāng utte tel lāe ke
 Kachhe mār vanjali anand chhāh geā
 Mārda damāme jaṭ mele ā geā.

Hāñiāñ di dhāni vich laḍa sajdā
 Baggh Baggh Baggh bāl, sher gajda
 Hire nu ark nāl hūjāñ mārda
 Saene ta de nāl Rāamm nu vangārda
 Chhang jehi sad lā de balle
 Tumba zara khol khāñ jawāñ teliā
 Sarū vāng jhūl vanjali suna geā
 Mārda damāme jaṭ mele ā geā.

Jat at the Fair

He disposed of his Hari¹
 Stored carefully the husk
 And settled the accounts with the Sahukars² and the
 Lambardar³
 Having ploughed the fields
 And hoping for timely rains
 And having entrusted his kine to the sweeper long
 He donned the new tailored shirt
 and Chadra⁴
 He tied the newly bought turban
 He oiled the long stick which was clubbed with iron pieces
 He felt happy at heart with the flute under his arm.
 The jat came to the fair shouting with joy

He looked like a bridgeroom in the company of his friends
 He roared like a lion
 He elbowed his friend Hira
 He cast glances all around and talked to Ramu through
 there
 Sing a nice tune, Oh friend
 Oh young oil man stung up the tumba⁵
 As he played upon the flute, his
 body was swaying like the cypress trees
 The jat came to the fair shouting with joy. . . .

1. Hari : the Rabi crop
2. Sahukar : money-lender
3. Lambardar : village headman
4. Chadra : cloth tied round the waist
5. Tumba : stringed musical instrument

Tumba nāl bhanto bhant boli boliān
 Haḍ vich jaṭān nae maniān holiān
 Chin di tiāri hoi dhol vajde
 Kas ke langote sher gajde
 Lishkde ne pinde ghune hoe tel de
 Mārda ne chhālān dūje ḍanḍ pelde
 Kisu nu Suraena pachle hath dhe geā.
 Mārda damāme jaṭ mele ā geā.

Vāri huñ ā geā je khān pīn di
 Reodiān jālebiān de ahu lahan di
 Haṭṭiān de val ā pae ne tuṭ ke
 Hūnj leian thālian jawana juṭ ke
 Khul gaiān botalān gilās phirāe
 Telian te ḍomān da kalaēja ghirāe
 Bukan te kamina nu maza chakha geā
 Mārda damāme jaṭ mele ā geā.

From 'Chandanvāḍi'
 (Valley of Sandalwood)

The jat celebrated the Holi
 Singing short couplets to the tune of the tumba
 The wrestling match was arranged
 It was announced by the beat of the drum
 The wrestlers came into the arena dressed in
 loin cloths only
 Their bodies sent off sparkles
 Their bodies were richly smeared with oil
 They stretch themselves on all fours
 Kissoo overcame Suiena in the first bout
 The jat came to the fair shouting with joy

It is now time to eat and drink
 And to taste sweets to one's heart's content
 They advanced towards the sweetmeats
 The jats ate platefuls like gluttons
 The wine bottles were uncorked
 The wine glasses went round
 The oilman and the buffoon could not
 stand the heady wine
 The land labourers and other dependents
 had their taste of wine
 The jat came to the fair shousing with joy.

Sandhya

Jhauḷa jeha reh gea é dhup di nuhār da
 Nikka jeha chand vichon jhatiān é mār da
 Panchhiān ne alḡe nu māriān uḡariān
 Jhuggi val majoor ne kitiān teāriān
 Hikk lea vagg nu charānd vichon pāliān
 Tōd lea khurliān nu ḡag vachhā bāliān
 Pind de duāle dhur dangran dhumai é
 Mandari Pujāriān ne ṭalli khadkāi é
 Rāhiān tikaṇeā te thāwān ānn maliān
 Haṭṭiān toṇ sande diān chungā muk chaliān
 Batiān te nadhian di bhiṛ maṭhi ho gae
 Bhonian di chik chik khuaṇ te khalo gae
 Pattanī malahān bhaann dittiān ne bediān
 Mithiān mahin surān nadiān ne chediān
 Ambarr te nur dian khuliān paṭariān
 Pāniaṇ vich tāreān ne litiān ne tāriān

From 'Kesar Kiari'
 (Saffron Fields)

Evening

The sunshine gets dimmed as it lingers on.
A small orb moon is looking askance at the earth.
The birds make for their nests,
And the labourers turn to their hutments.
The cowherd leaves the field for the cowshed,
And the farmers drive the cattle homeward.
There are gales of dust blowing around the village.
The worshippers ring the sacred bells in the temples.
The passersby reach places of safety,
And the shopkeepers have put down their shutters.
The village belles no longer throng the parched grain
ovens.
The wheels of the well string have cried a halt.
The boatmen have tied their moorings at the shore.
The streams are warbling soft tunes.
The sky is displaying its ware baskets of radiant light.
The stars as reflected in the streams seem to swim.

Āo Ral Mil Ke

Āo Bhai Sajana kaṭhiān bahie
 Dukh sukh bhāg ghair pae rahie
 Mae te dūr baḍi hae jāṇa
 Tera kidroñ hoe aona
 Dho lae paer thakewa lah lae
 Ae the hi pae ja manji dha lae
 Gal kar koi jee parchāie
 Āo ral mil ke rāt langhāie.

Tu dhaḍa hasmukh hae yārā
 Keda laganā to peāra.
 Khabre ki jādu tu kīta
 Do gallān vich mann moh lita
 Roti sāde pās baḍi hae
 Teri bhi hae meri bhi hae
 Kolo koli bach kae khāie
 Āo ral mil ke rāt langhāie.

Chhaḍ de khdera sharra dharam da
 Baetḥ mukāie qissa gham da
 Mae bhāman tū Sayad hoñveñ
 Att Assi pāndhi hāñ dowaeñ
 Tū maenū mae taenū sachṇa
 Din chadīe behāe te nahiñ rachṇa
 Hālli hass hass jee parchāoe
 Āo ral mil ke rāt langhāie.

Let us Sit Together O Friend

Let us sit together O Friend
Let rest a while,
And share each others' sorrow and joy
I have miles to go
Where do you come from
Wash your feet O friend
Spread your bed and take rest
Let us talk pleasingly to each other
And thus pass the night

You can talk pleasingly O Friend
You have a charming face which I love
Your magical glances have me
A few words you uttered and I was won over
We have food enough and to spare
Let us pool together our repast
Let us sit together and eat of the same plate
And thus pass the night

Let us forget distinctions of caste and creed
Let us end our sorrows indeed
You a Syed, I a Brahmin riven by an indifferent fate
Let us overcome foolish conventions at any rate
We have to bear each others presence anyway
And we are not here for eternal stay
Let us enjoy the present meeting
And thus pass the night

Aes sarān vich dera pa ke
Tur jānde hāñ lok ā ke
Har koi raehnda rāh vich milda
Saṇe dhar ke bahān Sarhane
Din chadde nu sāñ jāñe
Kis pase val munh partāñe
Āo ral mil ke rāt langhāie.

Life is a Serai¹ where people meet to part
We meet on the way and then depart
Let us sleep soundly tonight forgetting all wrath
Since in the morning we go on our preordained path
And thus pass the night.

.

¹Serai : Inn

Saun

Saun mānhā jhaḍiān garmi jhāḍ suttī
 Dharti pungari tehkian dalian ne
 Rāh rok lai chappran tobeān ne
 Nadiān nāleān juhañ hungāliān ne
 Dhāi usre nisari chaḍi makki
 Te kapah na jan sambhāliān ne
 Jāmmu rase anār vich āi shtri
 Chaṛiān subzian to giṭ giṭ lāliān ne
 Tirran tidkiān patthiān lehar lāi
 Dangar chhaḍ dittaē khulae pāliān ne
 Vaṭṭān baddiān jotere khol ditte
 Chhāve manjiān dhahian hāliān ne

When The Rains Come

The rains came in the month of Sawan
It was no longer hot
The earth became green
And the branches of the trees brought forth blossoms
The ponds and the tanks overflowed the roads
It was difficult to travel.
The rivulets and the streams drained the waterways
The rice plants grew up, the maize and the fodder crop
spread the shoots widely
There was an abundant cotton crop
The jaman¹ became delicious
The pomegranates were sweetened
The vegetables ripened into red maturity
The grass was shoulder high and broke its granular texture
The fodder crop waved all around
The herdsmen let loose their cattle
The furrowing of the fields was completed
The ploughs were set aside
And the peasant spread their charpais under the shady trees.

¹Jaman : An Indian fruit

Pekin behtthian tãī dehar ne
 Te shingār leāe sohre āiāñ ne
 Vanghan chutiāñ pehniāñ kuñwāriañ ne
 Rang chuniāñ mehndiāñ lātāñ ne
 Khiran rijhian puraeān dung lahae
 Kudiāñ voṭian ne pīngāñ pāiāñ ne
 Gide wajde kilkali machdi é
 Ghattan kāliāñ vekh ke chhāiāñ ne
 Sonchi khade ghabroo, pīrran ander
 Chhinjāñ paunde te challāñ launde ne
 Loki khushi ander khlwe hoe Chātrik
 Sauñ manhā de sohele gaundhe ne.

from 'Mājhe de ik pīnd vich'

The women who returned to their parents celebrated the
 tiar² fair
 Those who were with the families of their husbands put on
 their ornaments
 The unmarried girls put on the bangles
 They dyed their scarfs and decorated their hands and feet
 with Mehendi³
 Khir⁴ was prepared and sweet pancakes were there to eat
 platefuls
 The married and the unmarried girls began
 to rock themselves in the swing
 Gidha goes round, and kikli⁵ sounds are loud
 The sky is overcast with clouds
 The young are playing at Saunchi
 They wrestle with each other and make long jumps
 The people feel ecstatic and sing songs of Sawan⁶.

*Tiar : a village fair, where the girls form singing parties

*Mehandi : henna

*Khir : a sweet dish of rice and milk

*Giddha and Kikli : group dances

*Sawan : the rainy months of July and August

Important Dates

- 1876 Birth of Dhani Ram Chatrik
- 1891 Start of professional life as a court scribe
- 1896 Start of a bookshop at Amritsar
- 1898 First marriage
- 1905 Bhartari Hari Bikramajit (poems)
- 1906 Nal Damyanti (Narrative poem)
- 1906 Changes pseudonym from Hari Dhani to Chatrik
- 1907 Second marriage
- 1909 First child (daughter) born
- 1911 Left Amritsar for Bombay
- 1912 A translation of Aesop's Fables under the title Lukman Hakim dian Kahanian
- 1914 Start of Standard Type Foundry on return from Bombay to Amritsar
- 1920 Balwant Rai (son) born
- 1921 Dharambir (poems)
- 1923 Jaswant Rai (son) born
- 1926 Organises Central Panjabi Sabha
- 1928 Brijmohan (son) born
- 1931 Chandanvari (poems)
- 1940 Kesar Kiari (poems)
- 1942 Navan Jahan (poems)
- 1944 NoorJahan Badshah Begum (a narrative poem)
- 1950 Sufi Khana (poems)
- 1954 Death of Dhani Ram Chatrik

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(By Dhani Ram Chatrik)

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Dharambir	(1912)
Chandanvari	(1931)
Kesar Kiari	(1940)
Navan Jahan	(1942)
Noorjahan Badshah Begum	(1944)
Sufi Khana	(1950)

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Othello (Panjabi version)	(1904)
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Istri Dukhdashi	(1905)
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