South Asian Ensemble

A Canadian Quarterly of Arts, Literature and Culture
Vol. 2, Number 2, Spring 2010, ISSN 1920-6763

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$8 (US & CDN) 8/Rs. 40//EURO 5/UK Pound 5
Annual Subsciption (including postage) for individuals:
$60 (US & CDN)/Rs. 200/Euro 40/UK Pound 40
Annual Subscription (including postage) for institutions:
$ 100 (US/CDN)/Rs. 300/Euro 70/UK Pound 70

Editor India Office
Rajesh Kumar Sharma
23, Sahib Enclave, Near Urban Estate-1
Patiala - 147002 (Punjab)
Cell +91-9316226890, Landline +91-0175-2281777
E-mail: sharajesh@gmail.com

For subscription, please contact:
Kafla Inter-Continental
3437 Sector 46-C,
Chandigarh 160047, Ph. + 98728-23437
E-mail: editorkafla@yahoo.com

Publihed by: **Gurdev Chauhan**
Goreway Drive PO Box 59168
Mississauga ON Canada, L4T 4J1
www.southasianensemble.com
Phone 905-956-1724 Cell 647-808-1724
E-mail gurdev.chauhan@gmail.com & editor.sae@gmail.com

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Editorial

When we began to publish this literary magazine, we had hardly imagined what shape it would gradually acquire, and whose writings it would carry on its pages. We simply knew that it would have some pages for poetry, some for fiction and some for prose, critical and creative. Arts and culture were on our agenda too, but we were not yet sure of what kind of reading in this respect we would be able to offer.

After two issues and quite a few months, we now have come to accept the fact that literary magazines are averse to hard planning in the sense that writing is not custom-made; so, no hard lines, just a balancing act between prose, poetry, fiction and other cultural productions. So we have learnt to take it easy, and intend to travel light. No tailor-made fabrication. For us, every issue shall be a fresh beginning.

We at SAE share the sense of pride of all South Asians in Surjit Patar, the most renowned poet in Punjabi today, being honoured with the *Saraswati Samman* for 2009 for his book of poems *Lafzan Di Dargah*. As a tribute to his immortal contribution to poetry, we publish in this issue some of his poems in translation along with an article by Rabinder Powar on two of his best known poems. Badri Raina, Sutapa Basu, Amarjit Chandan, Archna Sahni, Mary Mendes, Raminder Grewal, Harbhajan Singh Hundal, Inde and Harminder Dhillon are the other poets whose work adorns the pages of this Spring number.

If poetry is what flowers are to Spring, prose is what foliage is to flowers. As our discerning readers tell us, the wide spectrum of the prose section of the Winter number has been greatly liked. We are glad to again offer a range of substantial and well-crafted prose writing. The veteran essayist M. L. Raina in his piece recreates fond memories of Nadim, a Kashmiri poet and incorrigible Marxist. Brian Mendonça elaborates the revolutionary credo of José Saramago, the Nobel prize winning Portugese writer. In

"Paldi", Jaswant Deed recaptures the wistful rise and fall of the only town built by a Punjabi in Canada. Shikha Kenneth makes a scholarly study of Saadat Hassan Manto's fiction, reading it in terms of some contemporary theories. 'Golmalization' which is fast becoming the fate of indigenous cultures in the global space is the focus of Rajesh Kumar Sharma's article.

In our fiction section we have two stories, "The Martyrs" by Gulzar Singh Sandhu and "Fauji Banta Singh" by Sadhu Binning. Sandhu's story is a tragic-comic tale of the partition, while Binning's is a tongue-in-cheek portrait of an aging man torn between two fugitive realities. The section also has "the first chapter" of Swaran Chandan's Kanjakan, a novel in Punjabi about the struggles of Punjabi immigrants in UK.

There are three book reviews this time. The books are Sonata for Four Hands by Amarjit Chandan, Commonwealth by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, and The Sikh Memory by Gurbhagat Singh and Deepinder Jeet Randhawa, reviewed by Ajmer Rode, Dharamjit Singh and Rajesh Kumar Sharma respectively.

- Gurdev Chauhan

Seven Poems by Surjit Patar

Foreword

These sad letters,
the script of my blood
words of my darkness
subliminal utterings, a solemn
Upanishad, a history half burnt
a smoldering narrative,
are a footpath

from my village
to the blurry text of my book

from my mother's dim eyes
to father's wandering feet.

This is a footpath
from blind Ishran's shaking hands
to Puran's face,
from the doorsill of morning
to the shrine of evening.

Evening: a silent prayer
of melancholy trees,
a river stretching
from a trickle to a tender sound.

Today at the bank of this river
I float candles
of my heart's flame,
float the remains of my memories,
the flowers of my blood.

This river flows
from the distant hill of my ancestors
to the land of my successors.

The journey of the water is endless,
of the candles a few moments!

But I yearn to see my candles float
and burn as far as my eyes can
see in this foggy evening.
God of the morning, forgive me for
this selfishness.

This poetry is nothing
but the harmonized agony of my chaotic ego,
a lamentation of my lonely mind,
a few drops brewed off my soul.
A testimony that this writing
is a writing of my somber darkness.

Upanishad: A Vedic scripture.
***Ishran and Puran*: A queen and her son in Punjabi folklore

The Old Witch Says

I shall name you too,
put a dagger or a medal
on your chest also.
First be worthy of a name
I shall finish you too.

(This old witch knows many tricks.)

The chest I decorate
ticks like a clock. The man I
garland once changes to a statue.
The youth I call my son once, forgets
his mother's name.
The hand I squeeze once
becomes a twig
bends to the prevailing wind.

My stomach laughs
at the mirror's lie -
when do witches grow old?

I know all kinds of chests.
Some cool down with medals
some with the song in my milk.
For the rest
the dagger in my hand is enough

Have patience
I'll figure the kind of your chest too.
Shall stick a fate over there too.

The Player

He passes by the music shop
lowers his head, walks on.
All these instruments -
they sit in his house too.

There was a time
when he often stopped by,
asked a mandolin's price,
plucked the strings and said,
"The instrument is not his who buys
but his who plays it."

Then one evening a mandolin
did reach his house.
But many evenings, nights, days
passed, the tunes in his head refused,
did not descend to his fingers

It was then he realized
not every instrument suits every player.
Mine has to be some other.

Second, third, seventh…
many instruments he did try.
The tunes in his head
did not buzz to move his hands.

These instruments
now appear in his nightmares
and utter mournfully:
release us, we don't belong to you.

He wakes up,
finds the instruments asleep,
shiny, tuned, his very own.
But he doesn't touch any of them,
afraid, if he did the instrument would cry,
"Thief, thief, a stranger…."

His hands shake like a criminal's - the
coward hands.
He raises them and whispers:
You inert things, how would you know, all these
tunes that convulse in my head?

He whispers on and on
hoping some instrument will listen,
some divine thing will happen,
a tune will emerge.

He gives up, lies down,
rests his shaking hands on the chest.

A melody sleeps in his hands, he senses.
Only a small difference! He utters.

The Bridge

People for whom I bent
to become a bridge so they could cross over,
I heard them say: Where is he, a kind of quiet man?
Perhaps went back, we knew he had no guts.

Two Trees and Their Dialogue

Will you make a crucifix
or a violin of me, sir,
or shall I just stand like this all my life
keeping track of seasons with my leaves, sir,
any answer?

How do I know?
I am just a tree like you.
I better look at today's newspaper.

Nothing in the paper,
just a few fallen leaves, sir.

Then look at some book.

Nothing but seeds in the book.

Then think.
Thoughts have cuts, teeth marks,
footprints of travelers gone by,
or of my long nails dug into the earth.

Think, think… think more.

Thoughts imprison, scare. Seems I am
bound to the ground.

Then go, break yourself.

What difference will it make?
From a tree I'll become ashes,
if not ashes, sand;
if not sand, steam….

Alright then, be quiet.

When did I speak?
It is just my leaves shivering in the wind.

The Watch

It has missed its journey, is stuck
in a cycle. My life is a strange watch
with no destination,
speeding up for no reason.

A temporary or permanent job,
promotion, food, home, office,
letters, telegrams, newspapers,
small wins, small losses…
these are the digits on this watch.

On and on it goes in a circle,
no other passage.
Like a prisoner in a cage
it just wants to get over its age.

The dead made it, follow this line.
Spirits and ghosts designed its dial.

One day, if it goes on like this
its gears will wear out.
It will get stuck in its own teeth.
Despite the reminders of hope, and temptation,
it will stop on a digit or between.
But good, it will find salvation at last.

Now it is running on some mission,
urgent but vain.

When He Becomes A Statue

No crucifix needed, not a pot of poison,
every body is innocent in your town.

But what should I tell the poison in my brain,
what should I do with this surge of pain

that trusts not the number of your breaths
nor the talk of your weariness.

The mind is drowned in weird thoughts too
as if you did not die, someone killed you.

Tomorrow your statue in this intersection
will be the city's decoration and promotion.

To show its respect and love for the citizens
It will keep smiling
to all the faces, happy and sad;
It will keep smiling
on all protests and parades,
for the handicapped and the blind
in dark nights, in full moon shades,

on every accident on all the dates,
on every moral and immoral conduct,
on all good and bad fates.

The statue will keep staring,
the statue will keep smiling.

The anger will never come near,
the statue will never have a tear.

Now even your killers will have
a great affection for your statue
because the statue is going to smile
at everything false or true.
The anger will never come near,
the statue will never have a tear.

[Translated from the original in Punjabi by Ajmer Rode]

***

The Martyrs

Gulzar Singh Sandhu

India had been split into two countries: Hindustan and Pakistan. Though other villages bordering Hoshiarpur had seen a lot of bloodshed, our area had been peaceful until then. I was sitting with Noora under a mango tree in the Masjid and we were memorizing some answers from History. Noora's sister Rehmate was reaping fodder from our martyrs' field. The Masjid and the martyrs were separated only by a little green plot of land. But at that time I was not as much scared of the Masjid as I was of the martyrs. The martyrs were believed to have great miraculous powers. From first to eighth class I didn't take a single examination, either term or final, without seeking the blessings of the martyrs by promising an offering. And my grandfather believed that it was the reason that I had never failed in any of my exams.

I used to be crazy about Noora's sister Rehmate. And to corroborate my feelings, I asked Noora that day, "Which of your two sisters you like more, Rehmate or Zena?"

"Zena," Noora named his elder sister, who had been married for four or five years.

"Why don't you like Rehmate more than Zena?" The words involuntarily escaped my lips. Then it occurred to me that Noora might read some other meaning in what I had said. I felt ashamed of myself.

"That is because Rehmate used to beat me when I was young and Zena loved me and used to play with me." I felt relieved on hearing Noora's reply because he had read in my words the meaning I had intended.

Noisily flapping its wings a peacock flew out of martyrs' peepul tree and a bright new feather floated down swinging in the air.

In those days I had a great passion for collecting peacock

feathers. Handing over my book to Noora when I went running to pick up the feather, I found that it was already in Rehmate's hand.

"I wanted to pick up this feather," I told Rehmate a little disappointed.

"But I have already picked it up," Rehmate replied.

"In any case, you'll have to give up this feather," I was adamant.

"Then I will not give it at all," she said smiling.

"You give me the feather at least," I too said smiling, "I haven't asked for anything else."

"Take your feather," she said frowning.

She threw away the feather, picked up her sheaf and turned towards the village.

For a long time I kept looking in her direction, my eyes riveted to her yellow *chunni*. I was unable to decide whether she had admonished me out of affection or hate.

Carrying the feather, when I returned to the Masjid, Noora's father, Badru Sai, was performing his evening namaaz. Standing beside him, Noora was displaying a deep devotion like his father. He had a yellow scarf around his neck. His father too had one.

Yellow scarf? Why that? You would surely ask. This too is an interesting story.

Two days ago a *Nihang* Singh had declared in all our villages that only those Muslims would be allowed to stay back in Hindustan who chose to become Hindus or Sikhs. All other would be sent to Pakistan. Most of the inhabitants of our village were Muslims and then they were orthodox Sunni Muslims. But what option those poor people had? There were twenty-two big Muslim villages near Hoshiarpur. Even in those villages, whosoever protested was torn apart with spears. The Muslims of our village agreed to be baptised as Sikhs.

The day after the declaration, our grandfather arranged one hundred and fifty iron bracelets and the same number

of combs with symbolic double edged swords engraved on each, the long under-wears and yellow scarves to be brought to the village *dharmshala*. When the cauldrons were being readied for the *amrit* for the consecrated *parsaad* which was to be distributed and consumed at the baptism ceremony, some elder shouted from the back, "What is the use of such baptism? How can you believe that these Muslims would not tomorrow throw away the iron bracelets and everything else and once again become the Muslims that they are?" I turned and looked in that direction. Baba Phuman Singh was speaking. Saying so he took out one pellet from his opium box, put it in his mouth and gulped it down with a draught of water.

"Then what other baptism can be used?" asked one of the village elders.

"Serve them *jhatka* rather than *hallal* mutton as is the custom with the Sikhs," the old man said, rising up with the support of his staff.

"Absolutely correct," agreed all the elders.

"Our Sikh brethren on the other side of the border have been made to eat beef." Someone pointed to the persecution of the Hindus and the Sikhs on the other side of the border.

The poor Muslims heard everything without a word. Within minutes, five or six goats were slaughtered. In all the villages of Hoshiarpur, wherever Muslims were baptised as Sikhs, they were served the *jhatka* as *parsad*. Podhi, Posi, Kitna, Majra, Binjo and all the other remaining villages were going to adopt the same procedure. The Muslims felt very distressed, but they could do nothing.

Interrupting Baba Phuman Singh, my father said in a hushed tone, "Guruji had baptised only by serving the sacred pudding as *parsad*."

"Learn to remain silent, young man. Don't try to find faults everywhere." Baba silenced my father and then, with his staff in his hand went on to survey the containers filled with mutton. I observed carefully that Babaji was not

carrying a sword. He used to carry his staff instead of a sword. Consequently, he was a Sikh who observed only four 'k's rather than five. [Sikhs are required to observe five 'k's: *kara* (a bracelet), kes (hair), *kanga* (comb), *kachha* (long underwear) and *kirpan* (sword)].

Within minutes all the Muslims put on combs, bracelets, long underwears and swords. And they started eating morsel by morsel the mutton served. "We too were Hindus earlier. It was father-in-law Aurangzeb who forcibly converted us and made us Muslims." Sunni Muslims were talking to their Hindu-Sikh brethren, putting those chops of mutton into their mouths. Baba Phuman Singh and other elders sat proudly as if they were their bosses. They would swallow a chop of mutton or a pellet of opium.

Distancing himself from other ordinary Jats of the village, my father was explaining to other men the significance of his being a Sandhu. "The sub-caste of Maharaja Patiala is Sidhu. And Sidhus and Sandhus are equal. The only difference is that with our estate we can only afford opium and poppy husk while the Maharaja still has his royal splendour. He is a devout Sikh, and so are we. If we were not there, what harm could you do these Muslims? They were not going to be baptised as Sikhs under your directions."

All the Muslims got baptised. Only a few families that had decided to shift to Pakistan were left. None of the members of Noora's family was present.

"Noora's family is not going to be baptised?" I asked my father.

"Do not shout, young man. I have sent combs and iron bracelets for them to their home and they have already adorned themselves. Noora's father is a saintly person. He is reluctant to eat the mutton prepared in the Sikh way. Anyway, I'll take care of that. The poor man has a lot of respect for us. He made you pass the first six classes along with his son Noora. Other boys of your age are still languishing in the fourth standard and you with God's

blessings are in the eighth. This is all because of the goodwill of Badru Sai." Father explained the whole thing to me, whispering into my ear, and got busy with his work.

When father was asked about the baptism of Badru Sai, he concocted a few stories to convince the village panchayat that he was a witness that Badru Sai had consumed a chop of *jhatka* meat. When grandfather doubted his contention, father had to swear in the name of god to hide his lie.

In this way Badru Sai's whole family had become a baptised Sikh family. And what was wrong in that contention? Today when I asked Rahmate for that plume near the martyrs' peepul tree, she had that bracelet on her wrist and yellow *chunni* on her head. It was a different matter that a yellow *chunni* had taken the sheen away from Rahmate's beauty. Only a black *chunni* suited her fair complexion. When Badru Sai was saying his namaaz prayers, he had a bracelet around his arm and a yellow scarf around his neck. Noora too wore a yellow scarf.

They now avoided saying namaaz if anyone was around. At that moment only I happened to be with them, and I was Noora's classmate and an old pupil of Badru Sai, a student whom Badru Sai never punished, even if he did not memorise his lessons. And Sai was a person who did not spare even Noora when he misbehaved and had to be disciplined. If Noora ever asked the reason for this special treatment, his father argued, "This poor fellow is the only son of his parents. Why worry about you? - You are five. If something untoward befalls one of you, it won't matter much." And saying this, Sai would give Noora another slap.

When we reached the seventh standard, Noora and I started travelling to Mehalpur. And this daily companionship as commuters to Mehalpur brought us even closer. Otherwise also my father had a very warm friendship with Sai. So there was no need for them to be apprehensive. I was not going to tell any villager that Noora and his father still said their namaaz.

I was in my thirteenth year at that time. Noora must have been fifteen. Rehmate was elder to Noora by two years. I remember that up to the third standard I used to seek Rehmate's help to solve most of my problems. And now she was walking away, carrying a sheaf of fodder. Badru Sai was saying his namaaz. Noora stood by his side, brimming with devotion. Sai's dark brown beard was touching the ground, his loose shirt was soiled with dust, Sikh war cries of "*Bole So Nihal, Sat Shri Akal*" could be heard in the distance.

It was about four in the afternoon. Instinctively, we all began running towards the village. Even the namaaz could not be completed. Frightened to our bones, none of us was able to really run as well as we would. Noora stumbled and fell. A glinting spear pierced through him. A handful of his intestine popped out of his belly. Terrified, I looked at his attacker; he was a man in blue, riding a horse. Sai said, "Sardarji! We have converted to Sikhism. We have undergone baptism. See, my yellow scarf and bracelet...." A moustached Rajput cut his bracelet with a single swipe of his sword. As he tried to raise his other hand to beg for mercy with folded hands, it was also chopped off.

"Send him to Pakistan," someone else said pointing towards me.

"He belongs to a Sikh family.... You fool!" the Nihang Sikh who had run the spear through Noora scolded them. He lifted me up and carried me away on his mare's back. I don't know what happened after that. I became unconscious.

The following day when I regained my senses, I was lying in the veranda of our house. My mother's eyes were swollen and red from weeping.

"He is safe now. Don't worry. He was frightened and in a shock. After all, he is still a child, poor fellow!" Inside, someone was saying. I recognised the voice. It was my grandfather.

"It was so ordained by God. The disaster has struck."

The mother spoke through her tears and, taking me into her lap, began to pat and massage me. "Were you frightened, my son? May I die so that my son may live!" Mother wiped her tears with her *chunni* and began wiping my face.

"Die you later – but first make an offering to the martyrs with whose grace his life was spared." Grandfather suggested the wise course from inside the room.

"Mother, Noora was stabbed with a spear in front of my eyes." I recalled and told my mother. "And where is Rehmate?" I enquired.

By now I was fully in my senses.

Weeping, mother told me that Noora's sisters Rehmate and Zena were abducted by the raiders. They had taken away also many other Muslim girls. Both hands and a leg of Sai were chopped off. Noora had died there and then. Twenty one Muslims had been slaughtered in the village. No one who came their way and sported a yellow scarf, a bracelet or a new long underwear was spared. The eyes of my mother narrating those incidents turned into stone.

When we left in the evening to make an offering to the martyrs, the shadow of terror was visible on every face. Even grandfather could not think of anything to say. Somebody revealed that grandfather's bosom friend Ghansham Dass of Posi was on his way to hand over a yellow scarf to a Muslim friend. Someone had mistaken him for a Muslim and stabbed him. They had been in too great a hurry to even make any enquiries. They had to plunder the next village after they did ours. How, for a five or six hundred strong mob of marauders, could sufficient booty be gathered from a small village such as Suni?

Grandfather was so utterly shaken by the news of Ghansham Dass's death that his feet were unsteady even as he said his prayers after reaching the martyrs'. As for death, Ghansham Dass was anyway going to die one day. Grandfather too was not going to live forever. Ghansham Dass had got killed just by mistake. But even those people

were not able to escape who had undergone baptism and in barely two days, abjuring the Muslim invocations, had learned to swear by the God of Hindus and Sikhs, had adorned themselves with combs, bracelets and long underwear. In sharp contrast, those Muslims had not even come to the notice of the marauding gangs who had decided to leave the village and go to Pakistan rather than become Hindus. They had not sported yellow scarves or new long underwear. In uttering the prayer "four sons, five loved ones, forty liberated martyrs," the voice of grandfather was transforming for some mysterious reason. By the time he reached near the end of the prayer "those who recited your name, shared their food, started community kitchen, fought with sword, sacrificed themselves in service of the faith...," he staggered and the staff in his hand dropped. Father completed the remaining prayer.

Then, as directed by father, I went and placed a little offering of *parsad* at the shrine of each of the five martyrs. It was consumed in front of my eyes by the crows living in the martyrs' peepul trees.

After completing all the other rituals, when father started distributing *parsad* among us, grandfather stopped him.

"What is the matter?" father asked.

"Give a little *parsad* to the boy to make an offering at Sai's grave," grandfather suggested and pointed towards the Muslim graveyard. The Martyrs were separated from the Masjid only by a small plot.

Looking at the Masjid, I remembered Noora, and the peepul reminded me of Rehmate. Standing under the peepul tree, Rehmate had looked at me with a frown on her face. I don't know if it had been out of love or hatred. Now she had been abducted by the mob. I don't know why?

"What do you mean?" father asked the reason for making an offering at the grave in the monastery.

"You remember yesterday's massacres?" Grandfather

whispered to father after guiding him out of the martyrs' premises with his hand on father's shoulder. Perhaps he did not utter a word within the martyrs' territory because he was afraid that he might invite a curse upon himself by doubting within their own premises their power to perform miracles.

"I do remember," father answered.

"Haven't those who became Sikhs been killed?" grandfather questioned.

Father nodded in agreement.

"And those who continued to pray at Sai's grave, did they survive or not?" Here grandfather paused.

"I can't get your point," father repeated.

"If you can't understand, then don't," grandfather responded with irritation. "Who knows what would happen tomorrow? If tombs turn out to be more potent and capable of miracles than the shrines, then?" These words grandfather whispered very low into father's ear so that the martyrs may not overhear them.

I ran to Sai's tomb and placed the offering there. Father did not object.

I do not know whether he had, or not, understood what grandfather had said.

(Translated from the original in Punjabi by Paramjit Singh Ramana)

***

A poet's autobiography is his poetry. Anything else can only be a foot-note. - Yevgeny Yevetushenko

The trouble with fiction is that it makes too much sense, whereas reality never makes sense. - Addous Huxley

Sexy Cancan at Moulin Rouge

Ben Antao

Would you pay 154 euros for dinner and cabaret at the famous Moulin Rouge in Paris? Well, given four days, it depends on how much of Paris you want to soak in and the size of your wallet, of course.

Marinella and I had signed up for a ten-day tour of France with Globus in September 2009. Seeing that two days in Paris with the guided tour wouldn't be sufficient to cover the essential sights in that eternal city of lights, we flew in from Toronto two days early to explore the museums and the city on our own. After a day at Versailles and another in the vast museum of Louvre, we joined the tour group on September 19 at the hotel Pullman Paris Bercy (1 rue de Libourne) in the southeast on the left bank of Seine. During the drive to dinner at the restaurant Montebello Place in the Latin Quarter, Filipe, the tour guide, told us what we were going to do the next day. After a morning tour of the city with a local guide, he suggested an optional visit to Versailles in the afternoon and a cabaret show at the Moulin Rouge at night. As we had already visited Versailles on our own, we spent the afternoon at the D'Orsay museum where the works of the French impressionist painters are showcased.

Both of us were excited for the opportunity to check out the legendary Moulin Rouge situated in the bohemian section of Montmartre in the north, about 45 minutes from our hotel. During the drive, Filipe gave us some background to the red windmill (Moulin rouge) that began its act on October 6, 1889 with a group of young girls dancing the Quadrille with boisterous movements and rhythms, lifting their frilly and flowing skirts, showing their legs and revealing their panties in a brand new dance now known as the French Cancan. The place is always full, he said, with

two shows every night, six times a week. The dinner show that night had attracted 1000 patrons and another 1000 would come in later for the 11:30 performance paying •92 each sans dinner of course.

The burgundy plush theatre was humming with ineffable excitement when we entered and took our seats at the tables reserved for our group flush to the stage where a quintet of musicians played mood music, with a smiling female singer warming up the audience with her Parisian songs. The three-course dinner began at 7:30, giving the patrons enough time to dance if they wished on the floor close to the stage prior to the 1 hour and 45-minute show to begin at 9 pm. Filipe had earlier encouraged us to dance a bit if only to say that "you've danced at the Moulin Rouge." The dinner came with an appetiser (pätė de foie gras), grilled chicken or salmon with vegetables, chocolate mousse or ice cream, and coffee. Red and white wine was included as well as a complimentary bottle of champagne at each table. After dinner Marinella and I engaged in a foxtrot or two. Yes, there's something special about dancing at the Moulin Rouge, I thought, agreeing with Filipe, suddenly seeing the famous stage and floor as an occasion to celebrate, to announce we've been here for such opportunity comes but once in a lifetime. Either you take it or pass it.

Precisely at nine the cabaret opened with a clash of cymbals and fast-paced rousing music followed by male dancers in tights and leggy women in leotards zipping across the stage in a frenzy of high kicks, arms flailing, torsos twisting, as if affected by sheer lust for living, daring the audience to feel their energy and zest for love. Each dance routine was followed by another, at once more extravagant in movement, colourful costumes, feathers flowing from top hats, women in wide-brimmed dish-like covers over their heads, dazzling rhinestones and sequins, high boots and wild headgear like fluffed outsized nests for wigs, each bejewelled dancer gyrating, high stepping, and landing in splits to the

gorgeous syncopation of choreographed symmetry.

While the principal dancers and performers changed their costumes, the stage was given over to circus acts, clowns doing acrobatics, Siamese twins, weird wild animals, a juggler showing off his skills by twirling not three but five clubs in the air, and a ventriloquist regaling the audience with bird, dog, and horse talk. Suddenly, the section of the stage where we'd danced earlier was transformed into a green pool of water with pythons swimming in it. Even as the audience was gasping with amazement at this ingenious contraption, the principal female dancer dove into this pool, played with and caressed the snakes, and emerged appearing wildly exhilarated with her daring act. This sideshow felt surreal in the midst of the magical dance and song of the main cabaret, but it was all part of the play, done in good fun and entertainment.

Still, after this came the rousing high-energy Cancan performed by 28 chorus girls in frilly white, red and blue petticoats, literally stepping up their joie de vivre in elegant style, high-kicking and splitting as if there's no other time to be alive than now. A ten-minute-long Cancan was more than enough to send the absorbed audience into bursts of applause.

As if this were not enough, another chorus of 20 "nude" girls followed the Cancan dancers to titillate the voyeurs with their topless shakes and shrugs, their young bodies and shapely legs in net stockings moving sinuously, joyously, with dramatic intensity yet flowing free-spiritedly as if propelled by a conscious tsunami of sexuality.

Earlier on our way to the Moulin Rouge, Filipe had told us that the origins of the Cancan began in the 1820s when a free-spirited young woman would enter a café, have a drink and dance to her heart's content, lifting her skirt high and showing her legs. When the owner saw that the male patrons loved her erotic dancing and applauded her, he invited her to come in every day and dance in his bar, for which he

paid her. As time passed, the woman became an alcoholic and eventually disappeared from the scene. However, the individual dance that she performed was later choreographed for a group of women and that's how the Cancan began in 1889, the first centenary of the French Revolution.

The cabaret ended on time at 10:45 and when we emerged from the sexed-up theatre, I could see a long line of young people on the boulevard de Clichy for tickets to the next show. In answer to a question, our guide said most of the dancers were in their 20s, no one over the age of 35. To get a shot to dance at Moulin Rouge is a great achievement for the girls, many of whom came from Russia and eastern Europe. "It's a chance for some to make it to Las Vegas," he said.

That night I couldn't sleep until 3 am, my body and mind throbbing with the sounds and images of the Cancan until merciful Time forced the issue. And when at breakfast at 7:30 the American woman, in her fifties, asked me how was the Moulin Rouge, I answered, still perked up, "It was sexy." She was open-mouthed and smiling for she'd passed on the show.

The above essay is from the author's forthcoming travelogue Tour de France, *which he visited in September 2009.*

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Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent. - Victor Hugo

The business of a citizen is to keep his mouth open - Gunther Grass

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent. - Wittgenstein

Four Poems by Mary Mendes

Deaf But Not Mute

You ask why I look at your lips
and not your eyes.
If your eyes could speak my language
I would.
But my ears don't hear your eyes,
they read your lips;
and I understand and hope you can
understand the world of the deaf.

My world is mute. But I am not.
I try to discern the words you
speak,
by the movement of your lips.
My eyes stay focussed,
and my mind stays stressed
till that what you speak,
my eyes absorb, and replay it back.
And sometimes when words
are garbled,
and sentences twisted
my mind somersaults and vaults
over possibilities;

I can pick and choose
what I choose to hear,
and what I wish to replay.
And sometimes there is pity,
sometimes jeers.
And sometimes, impatience plain,
as you turn on your heels
and walk away;
it's too much to repeat
or explain what you say,
again!

Alone

loneliness echoes
in the chambers of my heart
like whispers of the long-dead
in an old abandoned home
I count days
but the elastic weeks stretch
Till my resolve breaks
And I beckon my shadow
'stay close to me, till he returns'

Envy

There she goes
With her scarlet thoughts
Globes shimmering behind her
Breasts audaciously thrust
Her sex shouts loud and clear
I'm red all over
I'm hot
I'm your tiffin
Eat me!

Senses

Hot and scarlet
Hot to look
Hot to taste
She burns me!

***

Fauji Banta Singh

Sadhu Binning

I was disappointed not to see Banta Singh by the stairs in front of his house where he always was with his aged and slightly bent body, supporting the weight on to the cane in his hand. I never saw him without that cane. Banta Singh was known as Fauji, meaning soldier even though he retired from the army a long time ago.

I was off work for ten weeks due to a foot injury. I thought he might be sick or gone to live with his younger son in Williams Lake as he had done two years ago. When I saw his grandson, I asked him about Banta Singh. “Oh he died a month ago,” he said without stopping or showing any emotion. I was annoyed at his behaviour. Banta Singh had made my working life colourful by simply being there.

I also knew his son Kartar Singh and I went to his house the same evening after work to convey my condolences. Kartar Singh was busy watching TV. His wife was in the kitchen preparing dinner. Naseeb Kaur, Banta Singh’s wife, was sitting in a small sofa chair in one corner of the living room. With a string of beads in her hand, she was softly reciting gurbani, the verses from the Sikh scripture.

Kartar Singh and I exchanged a few customary words about Banta Singh and then there was complete silence. I was hoping to learn more about the circumstances of his death and ask Kartar Singh about Banta’s favorite walking stick that he sometimes used as a stool to sit on. I wanted that stick as a memory of my friend. However, I didn’t have the nerve to ask him because he seemed bored with my presence. I decided to leave when he said, “It was good to have him around the house and the hundred dollars that he paid for the little room.”

Rain or shine, Banta would be outside the house waiting for me as I came around after delivering mail to other homes

on both sides of the street. He would be there even when it was snowing, which he hated with a passion. From September to the mid-April, he wore a heavy blue jacket with a hood showing its red lining underneath. In warm weather, he would wear the old black suit that he had brought from India years ago, or sometimes he simply wore his khaki kurta and pajama. He had an elegant face made larger by his gray beard. It became a habit for me to spend a few minutes chatting with him each morning, no matter how late or rushed I was. I often found myself running to get to his house so I could talk to him.

Due to the dramatic increase in the numbers of Punjabis living in Vancouver in the late sixties and early seventies, they became the target of racism from the local white community. In 1971, I was the only Punjabi postman in the area and many white residents did not hide their prejudice. They would complain to my superiors if I was late a few minutes or let their dogs loose in their front yards. To feel secure I always looked for familiar things and friendly people. About twenty homes, out of the four hundred on my route, belonged to Punjabis. The familiar smell of Punjabi cooking from these homes always gave me a sense of belonging. I had special feelings about Banta Singh and his house because he was the only one who came out to talk to me. The other well-kept homes and tidy green lawns held no more charm for me than did the sawmill, where I worked before I joined the Canada Post.

In his happier moods, Banta Singh would act like a child. Often he saluted me using his right hand as he had done with his superiors in the army and he did this quite solemnly. Once he was holding the cane in his right hand and he used the left hand to salute. He presented an amusing picture and I couldn’t control my laughter. To my pleasant surprise, he didn’t mind and actually laughed with me. Later, he would often use this as a trick to make me laugh.

One day he had a new stick in his hand. He was excited

like a six-year-old child with a new toy. This stick was actually an army field stool, its one end was sharp so it could push easily into the ground, and the other end opened up to make a small stool-top. He met me a few houses away from his home, happier than I had ever seen him. Pushing the sharp end into the ground he opened up the stool, sat on it with his legs opened wide and his hands on his knees. His white-bearded face glowed with joy.

Surprised, I stood in front of him.

Jerking his head up and down, he said to me, "What do you say now, Mister? Is this not the greatest thing in the world? This damn thing has been on my mind for the last fifty years. Our white officers used to have these, and they could sit anywhere with their asses supported comfortably, while we stood at full attention waiting for their orders. I finally found one in a downtown second-hand store yesterday."

One morning when I was still half a block away from his house, he came running towards me and said, "Saab ji, Saab ji, you are so late today. I have been waiting for more than an hour." He kept on calling me by this honorific, even though I requested him repeatedly to call me by my first name.

I looked at my watch a bit surprised and said, "I am on time, not late at all; you sure seem to be in some kind of a rush today." And I kept walking past him to drop the mail next door. He looked quite restless standing there.

"What is the matter"? I called back.

"Since you are an educated person, I thought you would know whether what I've heard is true or not," he said, walking hurriedly to catch up with me.

"What have you heard?"

"This letter came from the government yesterday." He showed me the letter and continued, "My grandson read it to me and he says that they are coming to check out how much money I spend on food and shelter, and how much I

have in the bank." He paused for a few seconds and motioned me to come closer to him where he was standing on the sidewalk in front of his house now.

In a lower, secretive voice he said, "Son, I have some money in the bank. I thought if there was any danger I could withdraw and hide it somewhere else." Fear written all over his face while he stiffly stood leaning over his cane, held firmly in both hands.

I didn't quite understand what he was trying to tell me, or the reason for his fear. To calm him down I said, "Oh they are probably doing some kind of survey to raise pensions for you old-timers. Nobody will touch your money. Don't worry about it."

My response didn't satisfy him at all. Again in a secretive tone which sounded unreal and comical, he said, "Son, you don't know about these white people, they must be thinking of stopping the pension for us immigrants. They know that we don't spend much money and they do not want to give us more than we need."

I started to laugh at what he had said. He looked at me strangely as if I was deliberately being unreasonable. He said with added seriousness and fear in his voice, "It is not a laughing matter, Saab ji; it has happened to me once before. I used to be in a cavalry regiment in Patiala. Oh, it must have been around 1932, three years before I retired. We Indian soldiers used to save all of our pay each month, and the white soldiers used to spend all of theirs. The English commander thought, 'These Indians don't spend much, so therefore they don't need any extra money.' Sure enough, they started to pay us less, and more to the white soldiers."

I was taken aback for a moment. Then I tried my best to reason with him that here in Canada, no one can look at your bank balance, and even if you were to tell them how much you had, they could not touch your money. Though he calmed down a little, the fear of losing the money and having his pension reduced still covered his face.

Banta Singh had served in the British Indian Army for sixteen years. Though it had been over thirty-five years since he retired, the way he talked and moved showed his army training. This led to problems with other older Punjabis who gathered in the local gurdwara, the Sikh temple, where Banta Singh went at least once a day. Most of them were village folks who had spent their lives working on family-owned farms. Banta Singh demanded special respect from them for being an ex-army man. The village elderly knew quite well how to read and handle a person like him. Often he became the butt of their collective ridicule for his snobbish attitude. Banta Singh would leave in frustration, muttering obscenities. He would continue to grumble until he arrived in his small basement room. I saw him on his way back from the gurdwara on one such occasion and asked him, "Baba, you seem to be in a bit of a bad mood today! What happened?"

"These bloody old people are really rotten. They sit in the home of God and aren't afraid of anything, but He watches all and will make them pay one day soon. God will cut out their dirty tongues soon enough." In his angry mood, he kept on walking towards his home.

Later I asked Teja Singh, "Baba ji, what happened today? Old Fauji Banta Singh was really mad."

Teja Singh, an old-time Canadian who always wore the small black turban, chuckled at my question. "What could be the matter, young man? Banta Singh doesn't let anybody else talk once he starts telling his tales of army days. He was doing the same thing today. And you know the type of person Bishna is - a real dirty-minded old man. He said to Banta Singh, 'You think you are such a big shot and treat us like we are a bunch of village idiots. Now tell me, has your son ever allowed your old wife to come down to the basement to see you?' Banta Singh is very sensitive about this issue - he started to hurl names at Bishna and just ran out of the place."

Teja Singh paused for a few seconds and added, "You know, all of these fellows get together and give the Fauji a hard time."

In fact, I knew that Banta Singh's marital situation had not been going smoothly. He was extremely touchy about the subject and very bitter about his son's behaviour. He once told me, "This son of mine is a real *maan choad*, mother fucker. He has ordered his mother, the old woman, to stay upstairs and never to come down to the basement where I live. He takes her cheque every month and keeps the whole amount. The poor soul sits in a chair chanting gurbani all day. I also used to hand him my entire cheque and as a result, I used to sit at the table and eat my roti with the rest of the family. Now, since I only give him a hundred dollars a month, he is always angry with me. He sends my roti downstairs. I used to sit in the bathtub upstairs once in a while. Now I can only take a shower if I get a chance at the right moment, since he has rented out the bigger part of the basement to white people. He owns two other homes in the city. I don't know what he is going to do with all this money."

Banta Singh lived with his younger son in Williams Lake for a few years. He couldn't get along with his daughter-in-law there and came to live with the older son here in Vancouver. When he saw me delivering mail on his street for the first time, he didn't speak to me right away. For a couple of days he just watched me from a distance. Then one day while I was climbing down the stairs of his house after delivering the mail, he hesitantly acknowledged me with a slight movement of his head, and then said 'hello' in English in a low, unsure voice.

Understanding his dilemma, I smiled and said in a loud voice, "Baba ji ki haal ai, how are you?" He was overjoyed at hearing me speak Punjabi. Excited, he came towards me, energetically shook my hand, and kept on shaking it for a few seconds. He happily tapped my shoulder and said, "I thought that you were probably from Fiji or something. But

you are really one of us - this is really great. Where is your village back home?"

"Baba ji, my village is close to Jalandhar," I told him, staring straight at him, wanting to know his reaction because I knew that he belonged to a different region of the Punjab. He seemed a bit disappointed, as I expected. Then he suddenly became cheerful again and exclaimed, "It doesn't matter. We are all in a foreign land anyway."

We became instant friends, forgetting the huge difference in our ages. Each day we met and talked about everything from the politics of India to the young generation of Punjabis growing up in Vancouver. He related stories about Punjabi people of his own age group that played cards in the local park. He knew all the important people and the inside politics of the Ross Street gurdwara, which was close to his house. It was considered the most important religious place for the Sikhs in all of Canada. Its management had ongoing conflicts, which often evolved into open fights. Banta Singh recounted these in-fights in detail and cursed the leaders for their conduct. I sensed that he was genuinely concerned about the damage that was being done to his Sikh religion.

Occasionally, he would have sudden outbursts of anger against the gurdwara leaders. He became terribly upset when he found out that a few years back the administration had sold Vancouver's oldest gurdwara that used to be on 2nd Avenue in order to build a new one on Ross Street. "Saab ji, only God can save a community that cannot look after the important places where their forefathers made history. That was the first religious place built in North America by the Sikhs in 1907. I can't understand how these idiots think. Do they have no sense, no shame?"

Once in a very secretive tone he invited me to come to the gurdwara, "Son, you must come to the guru-ghar this coming weekend." I thought there must be a wedding in the family, or perhaps his family had initiated an

Akhandpath, the non-stop readings of the scriptures. Just to make sure I asked him, "Is your family doing something special on the weekend, Baba ji?"

"No, it is not a family matter, it's much more important. You must come."

When I asked again, he looked around suspiciously and said, "There is big election on Sunday. It is rumored that the Communists are trying to take over the gurdwara. We must never let them take over the home of the Guru."

"Aren't you always criticizing the leadership? Now let there be change once and for all," I said to find out more from him.

"Son, I know that these leaders aren't ideal people, and one day they will surely suffer for their ill deeds but at least they have faith in the Guru Granth Sahib, while these Communists don't even believe in God. They will turn the gurdwara into their political headquarters." I felt like arguing with him, but looking at his sincere face, I decided to keep quiet.

At times Banta Singh irritated me by his pretentious tone and high tales of the army days. Reacting one day to his bragging ways, I said, "Baba, when the British massacred Punjabis in Amritsar in 1919, you were in the army; when they massacred the Sikhs during the Jaiton Morcha, you were in the army; when they hanged Bhagat Singh, you were in the army."

He stood there a bit hurt and speechless at my sudden turnaround. Feeling guilty, I quickly changed the topic. After that though, he never talked about his army days in the same tone with me.

He often complained about members of his family. He disliked the way his grandchildren behaved. One day his fourteen-year-old grandson walked by us while we stood chatting. Looking at his long flowing hair, Banta Singh said with displeasure in his voice, "Look at him. Look how he has grown his hair, and the style of his clothes, isn't he a

disgrace? He could be straightened out in a minute with a strap but it is a totally different game here, in this country." In his voice, there was a sense of real loss and defeat.

His loneliness became much more pronounced when he talked about his wife, which he did very rarely. "As long as I was in the army, she used to be happy with me; especially when I came home on my annual two months leave. That is when we had our kids - two boys and a girl. Since then, she has never spoken to me properly or shown any affection towards me. Now we live here in the same house, but she never speaks to me. She recites gurbani twenty-four hours a day. I sometimes wonder what sins she might have committed that she needs to pray all the time." He spoke about his wife as if he was talking about a total stranger.

One day I met him when he was coming from someone's home after doing a ritual reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture. He looked very tired, which was a bit unusual because he was always upbeat after reading gurbani. He said to me, "Son, I feel so homesick these days, here in this foreign land. I often wish that when I open my eyes in the morning I could get up in my village. Life was not so bad there in the fields, spending time with people that I had grown up with. I never felt like this even in the army when I was away from home for so long." I could see in his eyes the burning desire to go back to the village, and the love a birthplace holds for people.

"Go for a while - the airfare is cheap these days."

"I really would like to, but you have no idea of the situation, and the danger I face from close relatives. Everyone will have an evil eye on my money. You never know, some idiot could simply finish me off to steal my money. You can't trust people anymore. With God's will I am going to spend the rest of my days in this land now."

To cheer him up, I said, "How about if we find a white woman for you to have a good time with, Baba ji?"

Spontaneously, that child-like smile spread on his face. Almost blushing he said, "No sonny, why become sinners at this age? I have just a few more years now and I will spend them by singing the name of almighty God."

After a short pause he said, "Sometimes I do feel the desire to experience the touch of white skin at least once in my lifetime. You know, this country is really awful that way - it is so hard for a person to remain pious. Nobody hides anything. I just returned from reading the Guru Granth at Karnail Singh's house. His youngest son got married a couple of weeks ago - the bastard kept on making noises with his wife in the next room. You know how thin the walls are in these homes. It is hard not to have sinful thoughts, even while one is reciting the sacred text - forgive me, my dear God." He looked up to the sky as he always did when addressing God.

We both understood that we were only kidding; still he seemed to have enjoyed my suggestion. He said, "Come over to my basement after work some time and we will have a drink or two, and I'll tell you some stories of my younger days. I have not just saluted the English; I have done some wild things too, you know."

I accepted his invitation. I wanted to listen to his stories and see his small room in the basement, but I hurt myself during that week and our plan for a party never materialized.

Banta Singh did everything in his life that an Indian man is supposed to do. He worked hard all his life to raise his children. In his old days, he fulfilled his religious duties by reciting the holy book countless times and prayed for the well-being of his children and grandchildren. Now he was gone. I was filled with a strange sadness for my friend Fauji Banta Singh. "And how I wished I could have his stool-stick." I am convinced his son does not deserve to keep it.

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Four Poems by Amarjit Chandan

To Father

As you taught me to write the first letter
of Gurmukhi – the Punjabi script
holding my nervous hand in yours
you taught me to hold the camera
to focus on faces in the pupil of the eye
and to press the button holding my breath
As if it were a gun
loaded with bullets of life.

Where are you now father?
Can you take some time off from death?

I'd like to take my self-portrait sitting next to you
with a glint in my eyes.
Remember that photograph you took with the self-timer
of us together many years ago
you holding me cheek to cheek?

The photograph doesn't show the lump in your throat.

We'll exchange pictures I have taken
of faces you haven't seen
and of places you never visited
and you can show me yours taken in the valley of the dead.

[Originally written in English]

The Bird

The jay sowed the seed of oak in the soil
the seed of the fruit of the tree.

The bird planted a tree.

In the seed are hidden
sunshine shadows suns and moons
clouds dewy nights
the threshold of the house of the squirrel.

The bird sowed the fire
which bakes the bread warms the bodies.

The bird built its nest.
It came back home.
It all happened out of script
When the bird sowed the word.

[Translated by John Welch and Stephen Watts]

At the Riverbank

The stone was washed by water
the water by the sun.
The tree on the riverbank
stood in silence.

A child skimmed a pebble over the water
it skipped on and on
then disappeared.

A bird in flight descended
to check the skipping pebble,
it kissed the water, resumed its flight

[Translated by Ajmer Rode and John Welch]

The Paper

Man made the first ever paper with the skin of his soul.
That is why it is blessed.
Nanak scribbled the word on it.
May you be forever paper.
May you be forever the papermaker.

A tree is sacrificed to bear the paper.
So many nests lie in it.
All the birds' names are inscribed on it.
In it you can hear the wet rustling of green leaves.

The paper sees with the eye of the pen.
It speaks with colours.
It hears with alphabets.
The language is the soul of the paper.

It is a piece of the sky
lying in the desk.
Even when it is burnt and reduced to ashes
the alphabets still remain.

It is a strange bird
Who has landed in my lap to rest.

It evolved out of stone.
It was *tarhpatra* tree bark, the leather and the tusk.
I feel we are one family when I see the paper.

The paper is the window to the present moment in time.
It is the gateway to the possibility.

When there was no paper, poetry was there.
Where there was no man, poetry was there too.
A blank paper challenges
like the woman lying naked.
It pulsates like the temples of the aroused man
and shakes like the bodies coming together.

The paper –
A kite flying for the first time
A passport of no return
The cards the prisoners play
A letter lost on the way to its destination
A newspaper of the century thrown on the street.

(Translated by Julia Casterton)

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Poetry tough and guff— Remembering Nadim

M. L. Raina

Place: Lal Mandi Garden near Srinagar museum. Occasion: A mushaira of Urdu and Kashmiri poets held on a summer day in early fifties of the last century. Dina Nath Nadim rises to recite the poem that was to become a battle-cry of all the green-horn revolutionaries like myself: "Wushun Wozul, Wozul Wushun yi khoon myon—hot and red, red and hot rushes my young blood".

There is something magnetic about the man. Tall, sloping presence, hanks of black hair matted over a broad forehead, voice resounding through the microphone - the man holds us in thrall for better part of the evening. Children of poverty and deprivation, we respond with an approving roar. To a stripling of sixteen he comes over as the culmination of a dream of redemption. From that day onwards I became his acolyte.

A fortnight later I took my poem for his *iislah*. Written in English and disdainfully returned in the book in which I had presented it to my long-yearned-for classmate, Nadim looked over the paper and pronounced his judgment: "All guff, barkhurdar, all sob-syrup. Love poetry doesn't have to be a suicide note. The lover should be tough, ready to do battle". With fallen face I slink away from his presence. Had Nadim Saheb been Dr Johnson and I the poet Denham, he might as well have retorted: "If he woos her in Latin verse, he deserves to lose her". My fate sealed, I gave up writing verse in English and took to Urdu prose instead.

At a meeting of the Kashmir Association of Writers days later, I read a story based on my father's experiences as a school teacher (Nadim himself was a school teacher). Nadim Saheb was stern but affectionate: "Your prose leaks emotion like a mud wall dripping water. Cut out the crap and get

down to the job in hand". After several attempts at the short story, I hung up my fiddles -much to his annoyance- and started translating from the Kashmiri in the hope of making good my deficiencies as a creative writer.

Soon I left my translation of his poem 'I have to Ask' at his house and waited for his whiplash. When I saw him after a few days all a-tremble he was serenity itself, "You should translate the whole host of my ravings. But don't write jellied verse. Be tough and choose the right words." I went over the top with joy and sat down to turn in more translations of his and other poets' works. I heard the word 'guff' many more times thereafter, but he seemed to have been generally pleased with my efforts. His approval, though not without caveats, was enough of a reward.

Nadim Saheb's revolutionary zeal drew us to him like moths to a flame. An inveterate Marxist without much grounding in Marxian classics (a trait he shared with many a Teflon Marxist in Srinagar), he managed to hold out a vision of paradise now. This was in the early fifties when the Iron Curtain had already fallen and the Cold War had begun and Stalin had just died. We fancied ourselves as worthy of the Generalissimo's mantle. A bedazzled poetaster named Haroon even wrote a paen titled 'Stalin the flag-bearer of the proletariat'. One of its lines went something like this - "The enemy is the crown-holder, the capitalist, but Stalin is the worker's leader'. Of course we weren't the only ones duped by the great strategist. Pablo Neruda wrote his epic 'Let the Rail Splitter Awake' in which he showed Stalin working through the night for "the worker's welfare". Communism, like religion, is also "opium of the people". But then Khrushchev's 1956 speech had not darkened the dictator's looming shadow yet.

Already star-struck, I heard Nadim read out his poem 'I Shall Not Sing Today' to a large gathering of people in down-town Srinagar. True, nothing like this poem had happened to Kashmiri poetry. Nadim had adapted

Mayakovsky's staccato rhythms to write a searing indictment of war. The poem was a rage for months on end.

Soon I tried translating it, but its irregular half-rhymes and chain-lock word order beat me hollow. I gave up in despair. More anti-war poems came, less intractable in translation, but nothing like the syncopated beat of the earlier poem could be captured. In the event this poem is still a landmark, albeit a lonely one, in Kashmiri verse.

Nadim captured audiences at street-corner mushairas and we, his faithful devotees, clapped in inebriated frenzy. Looking back at it now, the poem sounds fake in sentiment, compared with the anti-war poetry of Brecht, Owen or Paul Eluard. At that time no one had heard of them.

One memory will never be erased. Our hero had just returned from a visit to People's China, barely three years after Mao's revolution. This enhanced his appeal for unweaned radicals like me and several of my friends. Recalling Webbs' commendation of Lenin's Russia, we thought Nadim had seen the future in China and it worked! When I met him, I was impressed by his newly acquired Mao jacket (was it black in colour?) and a heavy-duty overcoat that gave his lanky frame some awkward stoop. He talked animatedly of the places he had seen and the people he had met. Did he meet Mao, Chu Teh, Chou En Lai? No, he replied. They were busy building socialism in their country. There was total sincerity in his words, though years later he might have wondered why Tiananmen Square happened. I tried to please him in my own naïve way by saying that I had recently read Lu Hsun's 'The True Story of Ah Q'. I don't know if he paid any attention, but he talked of the great revolutionary opera 'The Red-Haired Girl' that every official visitor to China was obliged to watch. Though I found the opera insipid in print, I didn't tell him for fear of losing my revolutionary caste with him. Such was the hypnosis he exercised over callow youngsters who flocked to him for inspiration.

Around this time Mahjoor, the *eminence grise* of Kashmiri poetry, died at his home in Pulwama district. On that particular day I met Nadim on my way to college. He had been invited by Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammed, the Deputy Premier of Kashmir, to accompany him to the poet's funeral at his village. When I expressed a desire to go too, Nadim Saheb willingly agreed to take me. On the way to Mahjoor's village I discovered that the Bakhshi's ignorance of things literary was more than matched by his overweening arrogance and all-knowingness. In between his conversation with the Bakhshi (I crouched at the back of the official jeep), Nadim turned to me and asked, "Moti Lal, can you recite Mahjoor's 'Come Gardner?'". Without further prodding I began to unwind: "Come gardener, scatter the glory of early spring… If you want to awaken the sleepy abode of flowers and meadows, unleash upheavals, thunder and hurricane". I am sure the Deputy Chief must have thought me uppity, yet he did smile condescendingly at my rendering of Mahjoor. After some deliberation Nadim Saheb said: "Poetry is revolution and revolution poetry. There is no half-way house. Mahjoor said so much without consciously knowing it". I wondered what the Bakhshi made of this, considering that his schooling was dismal, but this certainly was Nadim's own poetic credo and I took it in that sense. We paid our tribute to the dead poet and I realized what Nadim's poetry was all about. It was saddening to read his later poetry now denuded of the former ardour. But then didn't Masyakovsky end his life when his Bolshevik fire died down?

Our next collaboration was on his 1953 opera *Bumboor Te Yambirzal* (*Narcissus and Bumblebee*). He wanted portions of it translated, but much to my dismay, didn't like my renderings. I marvelled at his inwardness with the English language even though he was not extensively read in its literature (He had has quirky judgments: such as dubbing all American literature as imperialist).

Though I failed his test again, his fulfillment came when the opera was staged to entertain Bulganin and Khruschev on their visit to Kashmir in 1955. Its concluding lyric "Come Let Us Protect This Garden" was sung for years at school assemblies.

Nadim's revolutionary enthusiasm lasted long enough while mine dwindled after the Hungarian uprising. I remember it was in May 1961 that I told him I was leaving for England for my doctoral studies. He informed me that my English teacher, Apurab Som Nath (the only genuine Marxist scholar in the state)), had brought Blake's 'Jerusalem' to his attention. "Come back home and we shall build Jerusalem here" was his parting command.

I didn't return to Kashmir and Jerusalem, his, mine and everybody else's, foundered all around us.

Surprisingly, he did have a premonition of this since in one of his later poems he brooded ominously: "Bozow pagah tam koos rozi baqi/halas chhu rotun halas chhu praroon (Wonder who survives till tomorrow/ Meanwhile there is the night, the frightening wait).

I never met Nadim Saheb again.

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Writing is struggle against silence. - Carlos Fuentes

Americans like fat books and thin women. - Russell Bake

Satire is moral outrage transformed into comic art. - Phillip Roth

José Saramago – The Prophet of Our Times

Brian Mendonça

Portuguese writer José Saramago is considered today one of the most outstanding writers in the world. Not only for his commitment to his art but also because of his espousal of social causes and of the amelioration of the condition of the human being in this world.

Awarded the Nobel prize for Literature – the first writer in Portuguese to do so — Saramago has been undeterred by fame or fortune and remains the person he always was. He says, 'I am the same person I was before receiving the Nobel Prize. I work with the same regularity, I have not modified my habits, I have the same friends.'

This nonchalance was however not shared by his Portuguese editor Zeferino Coelho. When the Nobel announcement came in October 1998 Saramago was just about to board a plane out of Germany after the Frankfurt Book Fair. With his characteristic wryness he said, 'I was not born for all this glory.' Zeferino however replied brightly 'You may not have been made for this glory, but I was!' Since then Saramago's work has been translated widely from the Portuguese into English and several other languages giving him a globalized following.

Born in 1922 in the village of Azinhaga in the province of Ribatejo about 60 miles north-east of Lisbon, Saramago had to abandon his high-school studies to earn a living as a mechanic. But he never forgot his land, his roots, nor, sometimes on hot summer nights, after supper, sleeping under the fig tree with his grandfather. 'With sleep delayed, night was peopled with the stories . . . my grandfather told: legends, apparitions, terrors, unique episodes, old deaths, scuffles with sticks and stones, the words of our forefathers, an untiring rumour of memories that would keep me awake while at the same time gently lulling me.'

In his Nobel lecture he says, 'If my grandfather had been a rich landowner and not an illiterate pig breeder, I wouldn't be the man I am today. If I could choose my own background – even with the cold of the winters, the heat of the summers, sometimes going hungry – I wouldn't change a thing.'

It is difficult to define Saramago's work - because he is so polyvalent, 'playful' and creative. He has published plays, short stories, novels, poems, libretti, diaries, and travelogues. Almost always, the backdrop is Portugal. Saramago's first book was a collection of poems Os Poemas Possiveis / Possible Poems (1966) when he was 44. His first novel was published 11 years later. In this novel, Manual de Pintura e Caligrafia /Manual of Painting and Calligraphy (1977) he spans the canvas of a painter as well as a writer, unfolding the genesis of art.

Italian composer Azio Corghi based his opera Blimunda on Saramago's novel Memorial do Convento / Baltasar and Blimunda (1982). With sounds from Domenico Scarlatti's harpsichord, the story is about 'three Portuguese fools from the 18th century in a time and country where superstition and the fires of the Inquisition flourished.'

In O Ano da Morte de Ricardo Reis / The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis (1984) he resurrects the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) and uses the aliases of Pessoa to comment on historical events of the time, viz. Franco's crushing of Spain's Republican government, Mussolini's conquest of Abyssinia, Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia —all this while under the dictatorship of Antonio Salazar in Portugal, a regime which lasted 48 years since 1926.

Portugal's exclusion from Europe is the subject of Saramago's next novel A Jaganda de Pedra / A Stone Raft (1986). A series of supernatural events results in the Iberian peninsula (Spain and Portugal) breaking free so that it starts to float into the Atlantic initially heading for the Azores. Saramago is not bound by traditional conventions of the novel

as one can see, 'The novel is not so much a literary genre,' he says, 'but a literary space, like a sea filled by many rivers.'

Saramago's writing is sometimes referred to as magic realism. This is because he has combined in his work, myths, the history of Portugal and a surrealistic imagination. Consider his delightfully bizarre opening of Viagem a Portugal / Journey to Portugal (1990). Almost in the mock-heroic vein of Cervantes Don Quixote, Saramago stands exactly on the Spanish-Portuguese border over the river Douro, to address the fish beneath, and – he, being atheist – asks for their blessings for his travels:

'This was the first traveler ever to pull up in his car, with the engine already in Portugal but the petrol tank still in Spain . . . Then across the deep dark waters . . . the traveler's voice could be heard preaching to the fish in the river:

"Gather round, fishes, those of you to the right still in the River Douro and those of you to the left in the River Duero, come closer all of you and advise me what language you speak when you cross the watery frontiers beneath, and whether down there you also produce passports and visas as you enter and depart"'

The subtitle of the novel Journey to Portugal is 'A Pursuit of Portugal's History and Culture.' It was nevertheless a curious turn of fate that forced Saramago to leave Portugal in protest in 1992 and settle in the Canary Islands of Spain. This when the Portuguese government, apparently under pressure from the Catholic Church, scuttled attempts to nominate his controversial novel The Gospel According to Jesus Christ (1991) for a European literary prize. Some feel his exile has made him less relevant, but to others he is now the voice of a more universal conscience.

He does have a foothold in Portugal, so to speak — an apartment lined with the books he has written — in Lisbon, which he visits occasionally with his Spanish wife, and

official Spanish translator, Pilar del Rio. 30 years younger than Saramago they married in 1988. Ilda Reis was his first wife. Their only child, Violante, was born in 1947.

Saramago has always been in the forefront of political struggles, be it Spain, Portugal or Latin America. 'I can't imagine myself outside any kind of social or political involvement' – he said. A member of Portugal's communist Party since 1969, he has been an impassioned espouser of the Palestinian cause and sees eye to eye with the views of Venezulean President Hugo Chavez.

In a speech in Paris entitled 'For Whom the Bell Tolls' (2002) he castigated the 'bureaucratised trade unionism' which he said 'is largely responsible for the social torpor that has accompanied economic globalisation.' 'Unless we intervene in time,' he continued, 'and that time is now – the cat of economic globalisation will inevitably devour the mouse of human rights.' Saramago believes, 'As citizens, we all have an obligation to intervene and become involved – it's the citizen who changes things.' Even some of his poetry espouses this cause, in spite of a streak of the surreal:

Poem to the Shut Mouth

I shall not say:
That the silence suffocates me — and gags.
Silent I am, silent I shall be
Because the language I speak is of another kind.

Words consumed, accumulate,
They stagnate, a cistern of dead waters,
Acid anguish turns to lime
Leaks below where crooked roots lie.

I shall not say:
That it deserves the effort to name them,
Words that do not say how much I know
In this retreat where no one knows me.

Not only mud is dragged, also sludge
Not only animals float, dead, fears
Turgid fruits in branches entwine themselves
In the dark well where fingers climb.

I shall only say
Crisply, secluded and mute
that whoever keeps silent when I was silent
Cannot die without saying everything.
(Translated from the original Portuguese by Blanche Mendonça)

Brazilian director Fernando Meirelles has made a film of Saramago's novel Ensaio Sobre a Cegueira / Blindness (1995). An epidemic of blindness starts to spread in a nameless city. People are forced to rely on each other when their natural faculties have left them. The ensuing experience of quarantine and the subsequent degradation leads the reader to a concept of blindness, allegorical, if not misleading.

The slow elliptical style of Saramago's narrative sucks the reader into the vortex of the novel. It demands much from the reader. Long sentences often with no punctuation or paragraphs stretch into pages. The process of the making of meaning is as important as where the narrative leads us. This self-referentiality makes the novels many-layered, and virtually an exercise in epistemology or the theory of knowledge. In both form and content this is a master at work.

In a weekend interview Saramago angered the Portuguese by predicting that Portugal would become Spain's 18th semi-autonomous region. There was, he felt, 'everything to gain from a territorial, administrative and structural integration.' Portuguese poet and Socialist Party founder Manuel Alegre said Saramago had won the 1998 Nobel Prize by writing in the Portuguese language 'which is part of our soul and will never be integrated into Spain.' The issue has been resolved thanks to the European Union, wrote Pedro on a Spanish website.

The Portuguese government is now considering a standardization of the Portuguese language which would require hundreds of words to be spelled the simpler Brazilian way. The debate has been passionate between the erstwhile colonizer (Portugal) and the erstwhile colonized (Brazil), but Saramago nimbly commented 'We have to get over this idea that we own the language. The language is owned by those who speak it, for better or for worse.' For a person who preached the 'sermon of the fishes' on the river Douro this was unremarkably astute.

At 84 Saramago was planning his next novel. 'Maybe it is my last book,' he had said. 'When I wrote Pequenas Memorias (2006) I wondered if the cycle was now complete. I had for the first time in my life a sense of finitude, and it was not a pleasant feeling. Everything seemed little, insifignicant. I'm 84. I could perhaps live another three, four years. The worst that death has is that you were here and now you are not.' And later 'I can't complain. The things you think are a big deal are not so big. I've won the Nobel prize. And so?'

In autobiographical mode, in his last novel Pequenas Memorias / Little Memories Saramago returns to his childhood. 'I have written memoirs of my youth,' he says, 'and I felt young as I was writing them; I wanted readers to know where the man I am today came from. So, I focused on the years from four to fifteen.'

Almost 10 years before that Saramago, in his Nobel Laureate speech recalled his childhood and the final moments with his grandmother and grandfather who were dying. It used to be so cold that they used to sleep with the piglets to keep them warm. It is a world which redeemed itself – simply because 'in it lived people who could sleep with piglets as if they were their own children, people who were sorry to leave life just because the world was beautiful; and this Jeronimo, my grandfather, swineherd and story-teller, feeling death about to arrive and take him, went and

said goodbye to the trees in the yard, one by one, embracing them and crying because he wouldn't see them again.'

Throughout his life Saramago looked to see that vision of humanity in the world. There were many times when he had to open his mouth against what he felt was wrong. It could have been a still small voice in the wilderness but it is the voice of the prophet for our times 'who with parables sustained by imagination, compassion and irony continually enables us once again to apprehend an elusory reality' (Nobel Prize citation).

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When human beings are forced to work in the factory of scholarship and become useful before they are mature, then in a short time scholarship itself is just as ruined as the slaves who are exploited in this factory from an early age. I regret that it is already necessary to make use of the jargon of slave owners and employers in order to describe such conditions, which in principle should be conceived free of utility and freed from the necessities of life. But the words 'factory,' 'labor market,' 'supply,' 'utilization'— along with all the other auxiliary verbs that egoism now employs — involuntarily cross one's lips when one seeks to depict the youngest generation of scholars. Solid mediocrity is becoming more and more mediocre, and scholarship more and more useful in the economic sense. Actually, the most recent scholars are wise only in one respect, but in this they are wiser than all past human beings; in all other respects they are merely infinitely different — to express it cautiously — than all scholars of the old school. […] To those who tirelessly mouth the modern cries to battle and sacrifice, 'Division of labor!' 'In rank and file!,' we have to say clearly and bluntly: if you want to further scholarship as quickly as possible, then you will also destroy it as quickly as possible, just as the hen that you artificially force to lay eggs as quickly as possible also perishes. - Nietzsche

A Poem by Sutapa Basu

Manipur Dance

Gliding on tip toes enters the breeze
Tenderly it caresses
Young shoots of nodding green rice
And waves adulate an emerald sea

Purple hills walk distant horizons
Coyly emerging now and then from veils
Of diaphanous diamante mists

Rice carpets are polka-dotted
With swaying coconut groves
That lovingly encircle
Deep dark velvet ponds
Jade ovals inlaid with the mosaic
Of pink and white lotus pearls

The stage is set…

I see
Hunched up, absorbed
An old man sits by the pool
delving the mystery of the silver dancers within
Soon he joins them
Bending backwards
With years of skilled perfection
He twists his arm in an arc
Throws out the fishing line
It falls, floats, then tautens,
Becoming a static rock
His craggy profile stills
Willing the fish to bite

Above the enclosed bushes sundrunk bees buzz
Weaving dazed musical circles

In rhythm to the silent dance below
Lethargy seeps into my limbs watching
This tableau unfold as
Man and fish move slowly
Matching *mudra* to *mudra*

Patience is a virtue,
I tell myself

Sudden staccato cracks rip the air
My head jerks up,
Bile rises choking my throat
Fear petrifies me
Overhead parrots flutter up squawking loudly
Angry complaints at the rude awakening
From their slumbering dreams

My fisherman just stares awhile
Into the greenery
At the invisible intrusion
Then returns to his meditative *mudras*
I relax.
Must also get used to this
Endless fear, a modern leitmotif
of Manipur

The calm stillness settles in
Prevailing on all, bird, fish, or man
I fight the sleep that weighs down my lids
Is the dance on or have the dancers tired out?
Through half-closed eyes, I crave a closer look

Then one long stutter, bullets flash
In the foliage
Wide open, my eyes can hardly follow
The quicksilver pace of the new dancer
All I see is
The hunched up figure topples over
In the final *mudra*
Dark and smooth the waters part

Accepting the last whirl of dance
The embrace of Death

Screams stifled in my chest
I lie flat
Damp dust clogging my nostrils
Unfeeling the sharp pricks of dry twigs
I bury myself into the undergrowth
Feigning invisibility
To the unquestioning
Shooting hot violence
Of pragmatic injustice

Shocked my gaze is pinned
To soft rustling verdant leaves
Can beauty hold so much terror?
I gasp…

Disturbed by the antithesis
Of a fisherman among his fish
Their dance sequence half-done
Disoriented shadows dart here and there
Rippling the mossy pool
Has the dance ended?

Only a moment is allowed
For Death to reign
And then it passes…

The stage returns…

Waters slip back into their jeweled silkiness
Bees continue their lazy buzz
Far away a bird tries out a trill or two

Missing not a beat
Life goes back to pursue its meandering way
Twisting , turning, performing arabesques
Gracefully, ageless Manipur dances on…

Only I, cannot return.

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A Poem by Harbhajan Singh Hundal

Exile

You carry the threat of law,
of discipline
- to bully and frighten
when you need!

You will pronounce exile
on the poet,
on poetry.

You will pull and throw away,
like some feeble-rooted creeper,
the poet from among his people.

He will writhe and squirm until he dies,
will cry
for the scent of mother soil,
will beg and forswear all he did -
but who knows
he may just choose to stand up.

It is very difficult
for the poet to be cut off
from his people.

You can exile
the poet,
but poetry – it can never be exiled!

(Translated from the original in Punjabi by Rajesh Kumar Sharma)

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In this possibly terminal phase of human existence, democracy and freedom are more than just ideals to be valued – they may be essential to survival. - Noam Chomsky

Paldi

Reminiscing about the only town established by a South Asian in Canada

Jaswant Deed

Camera in hand, I went abroad exploring. I can't stay rooted at one place. It just makes you crazy. One of my poems says, 'I don't feel any one place my home… I'm here in this city today; it will be in another tomorrow.' The voyages of Baba Nanak deeply inspire me and invite me to go places. I set out to explore the lives of people, big or small, who went on their journeys, hundreds of years ago, in my own country or abroad, crossing the high seas, and vanished….

In earlier times when someone went abroad, the family would shed tears. His relatives would garland him and accompany him to the railway station to see him off. They hugged him and cried. Here I was, just geared up, and venturing out with a smile on my face, with nothing but a camera around my neck. No tear fell for me.

I first went to the Great Britain, then to the USA and finally to Canada; the three must-see countries on your world tour. One, two and three! Lo! I landed up in England.

I had visited England and America before but Canada was a first time for me. So I was thrilled like a bird on the wing. England seemed to me a crammed-up place, and its people no less insular. America just freezes you with fear. But Canada was a sheer joy. Perhaps my enchantment owed in part to the fact that it was my first time out there. The new thing always catches your fancy. But not quite that in my case! I'm enamored of lakes and their swaying waters; I remember how elated I was when I saw for the first time the many-hued waters of Lake Pamgang near Leh in India. But the Canadian lakes were just symphonies of color, the waters seemingly cut to the desired sizes, transparently green, blue and emerald. The names of lakes also sounded beautiful like the names of girls. My heart longed to laze at

the bank of a Canadian lake, and to put up a small hut at a quiet place by its side. I'd sit out there and recall the names of Canadian lakes one by one, like beads on a rosary: Oaknaagan, Wheeler Hill, Winnipeg, Peter Pond, and Saint Player. I wanted to capture things in my camera for what they really looked.

On landing, I went to meet my old friend, Lal Padhianvi. He was delighted to see me and hugged me in an open-armed welcome to Canada. I said, "You'd show me Victoria." He said, "Okay!" We made preparations to visit Victoria Sunday. We cruised first to Nanaimo from Vancouver. From there our two friends drove us to Victoria. On the way, Lal Padhianvi kept telling me about the places we were passing through. "On this side is Nanaimo city, right across are the lakes. This side shows the woods of famous mountains… from here you can look out over all Canada. The Queen of England visits this place every year…. Close to this place is Paldi, named after a village in Hoshiarpur, in Punjab. Look! Over there are sawmills. Airplanes take off from across those waters."

Paldi – the word stuck to my tongue, its sound sugary like the sound of the word 'toffee'. I began to suck on the word 'Paldi'.

"What? Did you call this place Paldi?" I asked the sardar who was at the wheel.

"Yes! Paldi", he said in a low voice.

He spoke in a low voice, always. Of slender build, he was Charanjit Singh, a Patialavi Sardar, a likeable person.

I murmured the word 'Paldi, Paldi'. One of them said, "We would show you Paldi on the way back from Victoria." I said, "Yes! Yes! You must."

"He was Mayo Singh from Paldi in Hoshiarpur. He founded this village in Canada, the first ever founded by a South Asian in Canada. He had come to Canada all alone way back in 1902 and he later set up Paldi in Canada. It is not a small thing to do, Bhai Sahib."

Charanjit Singh went on narrating to me all this, my eyes moistened by then.

"Can't we see Paldi first and then proceed to Victoria?" I said.

"No! What's there to see in Paldi now? It's all in ruins. No use wasting time on such a deserted place?" someone said.

My heart heaved a sigh hearing the word 'ruins'. I wonder why I'm always drawn towards the places in ruins; they seek me out; they seem to me so pulsating with life. The wrecks, the remains of what once were old palaces, buildings look beautiful to me. Was I a pigeon in my previous life? It's said that a pigeon yearns for ruins. I love the ruined people… mostly the deserted womenfolk. Baba Nanak wished the good men to 'flee their villages and inhabit new places' so that more and more places are peopled by good persons. I giggled.

First we went to Victoria, the most beautiful city in the world… filled with flowers of many colors. The Canadian flag fluttered over the majestic building that housed the provincial Parliament. Horse-driven carts plied on the wide beautiful roads. Wonderful horses and gorgeous white women! But I could not tear myself from the thoughts of Paldi, from the people who came here almost a hundred years ago. On our way back, Padhianvi said, "Paldi was the village of people of Minhas fraternity. All its residents came from the Minhas clan. In Hoshiarpur District, there are lots of them. Mayo Singh was also a Minhas." Our car stopped at Paldi. The deserted village was bathed in somber blue of the twilight and it lent the surroundings a peculiar awe, a forlorn beauty. The roads sadly reminded of the glory of bygone days. On one side of the road could be spotted abandoned decrepit wooden houses. Only one house appeared to be standing intact right amidst the foliage of wilderness.

"Here Mayo Singh lived."

On the other side of the road, the lumber lay in a heap. Here and there were mounds of rusted iron, and of rotten

sawdust of gnarled logs. At places the ground had been burnt black.

"Here fire had once broken out. The woods catch fire on their own," said one of our companions.

Paldi reminded me of Delhi at the times of the riots. The picture of a blazing gurdwara in the Delhi riots clicked in my mind like a digital frame**.**

I pulled my attention away from the riot-hit Delhi to the ruination that had overtaken Paldi. The burnt and dead wood was scattered around, and the ground had caked at places. I looked up at the blue-rimmed sky, and then my eyes fell on the yellow nishan sahib, the Sikh community's flag that fluttered undaunted. On the front wall the words 'Sikh Paldi Temple' were written and on the round concrete pedestal on which the yellow flag-post was mounted the years '1902-1919' were painted in yellow. We entered the gurdwara to bow our heads in reverence to the holy book kept there. The granthi gave us parshad. On a clasp by the wall hung a big-sized book in English, titled *Paldi Remembered*. I cast a hurried glance at the book in its hung position. The front cover featured the photo of a middle aged person. It was Mayo Singh's photo. The back cover carried the photo of a white lady, the author of the book, Joan Mayo.

"This book was written by Mayo Singh's daughter-in-law. She is an English lady. Mayo Singh's son is a profligate, a waster. He doesn't give a hoot to what the others say about him. It is said he used to fly to the USA in his own aircraft just for having a cup of coffee. He squandered the whole money. He took no interest in his father's mill business," informed one of the group.

"Is he still alive?"

"Yeah! He lives here. Just in front. The house towards the road is his. A white woman is living with him. They have five or six children," he said.

"Can we meet them?" I grew curious to see the writer of the book.

"Now it is late. Maybe he's not available at this late hour. We'll see him tomorrow." He said and then called him on his mobile.

"Rajindi, I'm Minhas speaking, your uncle's son. Someone from India wants to come over to meet you. Can we come now? He wants to take your picture for an Indian TV channel."

"Come over, come over, my brother. Right now!"

"My friend it has worked." He said excitedly.

"We're coming right now"

The picture of Paldi started to take on a concrete shape in my imagination.

Rajindi Mayo was a tall and lean man of 70-75 years. A striding white lady, of 65 or so, got off the car. She was Rajindi's wife, the author of *Paldi Remembered*. We hugged them one by one. I was introduced. By now a deep understanding seemed to have developed between us.

I asked Rajindi, "Can you speak Punjabi?"

"I can speak idiotic Punjabi."

We all burst into laughter on hearing the word 'idiotic'. I told him about my intention to shoot a documentary on Paldi. It pleased them greatly. I spoke to the white lady. She said, "You read my book. You would know much more about Paldi." It was thus resolved that the documentary would be made. I decided to begin shooting the very next week. Everyone promised to help me. The news created a favorable ambiance. I took the book and returned to Vancouver. I was staying with Sadhu Bhaji. I told him about the film. He was overjoyed. I began reading the book, underlining the lines that were rich with the kind of information I needed.

The book fired my curiosity about Mayo Singh. I turned a page - there was his photograph in a three-piece suit with a bowtie, the hair permed, the face clean shaven but with a full moustache, a round face neither smiling nor frowning, a quiet man looking you right in the eye. He appeared to be

a strong and sturdy young man of about 50. I read all about Mayo Singh.

Mayo Singh was born in the village Paldi in District Hoshiarpur in the year 1888. His father was Bhulla Singh and mother Rali Kaur. He arrived into Canada when he was just 17. In 1925 he returned to Paldi and married Bishan Kaur. They had eight children. Out of them, a son and a daughter died while still young. Mayo Singh founded Paldi in Canada. His wife passed away in 1953 when she was 42. Two years later, in 1955, Mayo Singh also passed away. He was 67 years then.

I was about to put the book down, back side up, when I happened to see the photograph of a young man with his turban with folds – in the style of the day. He had unshorn hair, beard and moustaches. He was then just new to Canada. I tried to match this photo with that of the clean-shaven person with moustaches intact. Indeed I could read a good deal in these two photographs. I wished I could talk to Mayo Singh! I read more about him. I asked about him from the Minhas people of his village. Mayo was too profound to fathom. His tale had the marks of a great story of endless human struggle.

After taking short notes about him, I turned to learning more about the history of Paldi. Paldi is located in the most beautiful part of British Columbia. The village hugs the waist of Victoria, the most enchanting part and the capital of British Columbia.

Paldi in Hoshiarpur, Punjab (India), is located near Kot Fatoohi. It was established hundreds of years ago by some unknown man.

The forests of British Columbia provide valuable lumber. The Canadian Paldi was the village of workers who logged wood, sawed and prepared it in its final shape.

Mayo Singh had first reached San Francisco in a ship in 1906. At that time his elder brother Ganna Singh and nephew Doman Singh were already working with the Canadian

Railways in the province of British Columbia.

Queen Vitoria celebrated her 60th birth day as the Queen of the British Commonwealth in Victoria in the year 1900. Some Sikh battalions were dispatched from India to participate in those festivities. In this way, so many Sikh military men entered England. Instead of returning to India, most of them went onward to Canada to earn a better livelihood. In those days laborers were in great demand in Canada. The whole of Punjab was abuzz with the news that Canada needed laborers. Mayo's elder brother was among those who reached Canada in the first flush. Shortly after, Mayo Singh followed. The original names of the two brothers were Maya Singh and Ghanayia Singh, which they later changed to Mayo Singh and Gena Singh.

Mayo Singh is said to have been part of the first groups of Sikhs to have arrived in San Francisco. The Gadar Party movement was quite active in those days in San Francisco. Mayo Singh started his career with the Pacific Railways. Then he crossed the border clandestinely and entered British Columbia. He ultimately succeeded in joining his elder brother. The three men - he, his brother and his nephew - worked in the saw and shingle mills, cutting and sawing wood in the forests of the British Columbia. Mayo Singh was just 5 feet 3 inches. He was also not cut out for doing hard labor. He didn't know English either and was illiterate, but he was surely gifted with a sharp and perceptive mind. At 29 he became one of the 34 partners in the lumber business, and later rose to the position of the chief of mill workers. He was deputed by his partners for searching a suitable site for setting up a saw mill in the forests of Denken. He found suitable land and the group started buying land in small chunks as suited their pockets. He chose sparsely grown forests for cutting, sawing, planking and disposing of the wood without paying any tax to the government, a practice that resulted in the government frequently taking possession of their land. However, he succeeded in

ultimately retaining 800 acre piece of land – on which he later founded Paldi.

Overnight, I read the entire book, took notes and got a script ready for the shooting. Having started his life working in saw mills, Mayo had set up his own mill in 1918. Soon afterwards his mill had caught fire, but he had rebuilt it in 1919. By now the Canadian newspapers had begun to take notice of his mill. A railway siding was laid, as also a pond to store logs and planks. Many workers - Chinese, Japanese and Indian - started working in the mill. Mayo constructed shanties, shacks and later the 'quarters' for his mill workers. The groups of people working and living together in bunk houses most of the time led to their speaking a mixed language understood by all of them. Mayo became a father figure for all children raised there. People called him Santa Claus. In 1937, the population of Paldi rose to well over 1500. Whosoever arrived in Canada from India came to Paldi in search of work. Visit to Paldi offered the person two incentives: work and a place for stay. Slowly, Paldi began to develop into a full-fledged township with all the usual pomp and show. In 1919 Mayo had raised a Gurdwara, the Paldi Sikh Temple, for devotees. The first gurdwara in Canada had, however, come up in Vancouver in 1906. The foundation stone of the Paldi Sikh Temple was laid on 1st July, 1919. The gurdwara infused life into Paldi. Every year a festival was organised on the 1st of July. Incidentally, this day happened to be the foundation day of Canada and also the birthday of Mayo Singh. Such congregations as used to be held then are still held on the 1st of July every year.

In 1921, Mayo Singh brought up at the place a school for children. Another school followed in 1937, along with a post office and a store. Moreover, people from Duncan and Nanaimo started using this spot for picnicking. Soon, a lot of fun and bustle were seen in Paldi.

Mayo Singh now bought another 15000 acres of land for Paldi; his elder brother Gona Singh and a business

partner helped him in this. The arear came to be known as Mayo Singh Estate. Earlier it was suggested that the local post office be named after Mayo Singh, but the name could not be approved because another post office already existed by the name of Mayo in the records of the postal authorities. At last, the Postal Authority of Canada registered this place under the name of Paldi. The papers carried this news far and wide, and soon Paldi became a household name in the whole of Canada.

Circumstances suddenly changed for the worst and Mayo Singh had to close the mill in October 1930. There was a worldwide slump in logging industry. Mayo Singh died on 23rd February 1955. Four years later the gurdwara was gutted in a devastating fire, though it was soon rebuilt. In 1969, the Paldi School was closed. Later the other school in Paldi too was destroyed in a fire. Paldi now began to rot. The gurdwara was extended between 1978 and 1983. But by the end of 1980, most inhabitants of Paldi had gone away. In 1994, the kitchen and washrooms of the gurdwara were destroyed in a forest fire. Several workers living in Paldi went away to look for houses elsewhere and to work in other places; some returned to their native countries. In 1997, the Japanese and Chinese workers too went away.

Now Rajindi Mayo, the son of Mayo Singh, was living there with his wife Joan and children.

I was staying in Bha Sadhu Singh's house. He knows how to make words come alive. His vibrant company tones you up like a musical instrument and makes your blood dance so that you feel like bursting into a song.

I completed the script, and went to sleep at daybreak, the time Sadhu Bha got up for his morning yoga exercises.

I assembled the notes. The screenplay was ready. The first person who now came to my mind was the lean Patialvi Sardar, Chatarjit Singh Minhas. It was he who had offered to help me with my proposed film about Paldi. The second person to help me in getting through this work was Sadhu

Singh. He had motivated and persuaded me to make the documentary. He said the making of this documentary would make my journey worthwhile and a real accomplishment. The third person was Lal Padhianvi, who showed abundant love.

I confirmed the date for the beginning of shooting. We took a cameraman along. We carried the stands and all necessary equipment and went to Paldi. The cruise cut the waters away as it sped from Vancouver to Victoria. Different shots flashed in my head: Paldi, the gurdwara, the school, the railway line, Mayo house, the ruins, mouldering buildings, the fluttering nishan sahib, Rajindi Mayo, Joan Mayo, the ruins to which Paldi had been reduced, and its fascinating history. Shot after shot… the breaking of waves ... cut… cut… my mind was crowded with images. During the five-hour cruise, I had almost prepared the full outline for the documentary. I was distressed that I had a small, regular camera. This documentary needed better, more advanced cameras. But our fraternity does not give a damn to such documentaries… they can only splurge on gurdwaras, mandirs, marriages, houses, liquor.

We reached Nanaimo. Chatarjit was in his element. We stayed at his place for the night. With daybreak we reached Paldi. We told the Bhai Sahib of Gurdwara about shooting the film. He was greatly enthused and offered to arrange not only breakfast for us but also two first-class rooms for overnight stay.

The first shot we took was a long shot of the sprawling ruins of Paldi. The second shot showed the Nishan Sahib atop Paldi Sikh Temple. We then took a close shot of the letters "1902-1919" written with yellow varnish. Slowly people began to congregate. The sun was up. The Punjabi women had turned up in new suits, with husbands and children. It looked like a festival. The gurdwara was brimming with a joyous crowd. The visitors were mostly drawn from the Minhas families. In the hall of the Gurdwara,

gurbani recital began. Devotees sat with heads bowed in reverence to the guru's words. Women and girls wore head scarves of bright hues. Men and boys sported brown, blue and biscuit-colored turbans. On all sides we were surrounded by beautiful women and lovely children.

Shooting the movie was a sheer delight. We took shots of Joan Mayo (the daughter-in-law of Mayo Singh), her English-Punjabi sons, daughters and of course Rajindi. Everyone was cheerful. All partook of Langar, the community kitchen food. The English lady was hugged by her visiting Punjabi relatives. All day we shot the film. In the evening, we filmed the inside of the gurdwara walls, which were adorned with pictures. Some pictures were really amazing: one showed May Singh standing with his wife… in another he was posing with his children, yet others showed him on an engine, in his car, with the Minhas fraternity, with workers. And in one, which was from the time soon after India won freedom, he appeared next to Jawaharlal Nehru. I captured Paldi's bygone times in my camera.

In the fading light of the evening, the camera caught the splendour of the setting sun and the descent of the night.

Charanjeet arrived with his carful of friends. "You must be tired," he said. The Minhas group took us with them to 're-energize' us.

We returned very late in the night, and went to sleep. The silence of the night echoed through the ruins of Paldi.

I arose with the first glimmer of dawn. The sun was still beneath the horizon. Maple leaves drifted on the wind. Suddenly the leaves began to fall like raindrops. I was beside myself with joy. The falling leaves sent a delightful thrill through my body. I was reminded of a scene of the film *Arzoo*, in which Sadhana in her chooridar pajami and a flowing scarf sang…"the pathways we strolled on together on singsong roads… it's autumn and the leaves of chinar are falling". I could hear the heartfelt throbbing voice of Lata. The camera panned... a tilt, a long shot and a close-up.

I was overjoyed handling the camera myself. I thought of Mayo Singh tending those trees in his time.

The cameraman also woke up and joined me. I asked him to take some shots. I walked with him through the undergrowth. We stopped near a dilapidated house. Once Mayo Singh had lived there; now the house was choked with tall grass and shrub. The broken doors, the cracked glazed windows… it looked like a house of ghosts. Suddenly I felt as if Mayo Singh would pop in from somewhere near and shout, "Who has given you the permission to shoot this film?" It is said that the whole village of Paldi quaked before him.

I took shots of all the places as needed by my shooting script: the railway siding, the gurdwara, the cookhouse, the school, the store, deserted houses. The ruins carried invisible shadows of the things they once were. However, the gurdwara alone stood intact. All who had seen the previous glory of Paldi were plunged into deep melancholy now.

We stayed for two nights. It was pure rapture: the sadness and nostalgia arising from the sprawling ruins of Paldi. The ruins raised a question in my mind: Why did Mayo's sons not do anything to save Paldi? Someone told me that everything depended on Rajindi, but he turned out to be a just spendthrift. He used to fly to America in his Twin-Beach Croff for just a cup of coffee. I made up my mind to ask Rajindi about this. We fixed up an appointment with him, and met him right in the morning. Joan was watering the flowering plants in the lawn. Rajindi stood by her, puffing at a cigar. I went up to him with my cameraman. Joan led us into the drawing room. The English people's houses looked different from our houses. But this was not a typical Englishman's house. It was half like that and half like ours. It had more spacious rooms and high ceilings as in the palace of some king of a little territory. The sofas placed in the drawing room and the dining table looked antique. We did the shooting of the house. The lady told us about everything in detail. We photographed all the old

pictures. Then we set the camera at an appropriate angle and interviewed Rajindi. He told us about his father and his family. Sometimes he would doze off talking to us. He was a strange kind of man. He would doze off, sit up and put the smoking pipe in his mouth. I aimed some direct questions at him. His eyes opened wide at this, and he sat up on his sofa somewhat worked up. I said, "All say that Mayo Singh's son has turned out to be useless, that you are responsible for the ruin of Paldi, that you didn't take care of the estate of your father, that you would fly to America in your aircraft just to drink a cup of coffee. You have squandered all his money. Is it true?"

Rajindi lost his temper; he stood up and said, "This is all crap, all nonsense. Everything is just as it was. All the property including land is there as it was left by my father. Sawmills have failed everywhere in the world. My father too had to bear losses due to the downturn in logging industry. Maybe I could not take much care of the mills. My wife is an English lady. I'm also Canada-born. My children too are product of this system. We aren't after making money. We believe in better life. We're happy the way we are. What have we to get from anyone? I have not made any property after my father's death. But neither have I sold anything. The whole land of the village is ours as it always was. These Punjabis are busy accumulating property. They don't know how to live. We're enjoying our life. I have six sons and daughters… all are very happy and contented. I don't care what they say behind my back. This coffee thing is just a cooked up story. I went once or twice. It was *my* father's money. What has that got to do with those who talk this crap?"

I said, "Cut", and Rajindi lighted his pipe again. I looked around. About a hundred different kinds of smoking pipes were hanging on the wall. Joan remarked, "Rajindi is very fond of smoking pipes," and threw a smile. Rajindi turned to me, "Don't shoot it, yaar!"

"We, Rajindi and I, have a love marriage. We met here,

in Paldi, in 1948. I was expecting before marriage in 1950. Neither his nor my parents agreed to our marriage. My parents sent me to a foster home in Nanaimo. Rajindi's parents dispatched him to India. I gave birth to a son, but he was snatched away from me. They gave the child to someone I don't know whom. Rajindi's mother was ill in India and he married an Indian girl acoording to his ailing mother's wishes. His mother died, and he left India just three days after his marriage. He came here to be with me in Canada. And we married in Washington on 27th April 1953 – without informing our parents. My father-in-law was annoyed with his son, and he remained annoyed for months. But after some time, he took Rajindi into his house. I'd meet my father-in-law occasionally. I gave birth to a son, Darshan, on 23rd February, 1955. After Mayo Singh's death, Rajindi took over his father's business. Ours is, of course, a story with a happy ending. We were celebrating the 25th birth of our son on 20th March, 1987 when the telephone rang. It was from a child adoption institute; we were informed that the son we had lost before our marriage had been found. So we now have six children - Devinder, Robin, Jail, Dorcey, Sherry and Dale.

Joan also told that she was interested in preserving the history of Paldi. That's why she had written *Paldi Remembers*, several editions of which have since come out. I gazed fondly at the book, which was lying on the table. Outside the house, children were laughing and playing. All posed for a family photo later. We also clicked quite a few individual pictures of the children. And then we took leave of our hosts.

We returned to the gurdwara and packed up, securing all our tapes and bags.

We retired to Nanaimo for the night. I interviewed some old people who had long back worked with Mayo Singh or had been his partners or relatives. This was an area of sawmills of Canada. Cut and finished planks dropped at a mind-blowing speed. The English manager had me dressed as a sawmill worker: red and yellow, with helmet, big safety

shoes and eye-protecting glasses. He had the cameraman dressed the same way. We took a mill worker from the Minhas family along. Mayo had once worked as a laborer in these mills and then he had become an owner. We spoke to more people in Nanaimo. The interviewees included Doman Singh, Mayo Singh's nephew and partner. He was a billionaire now. His house looked as capacious as a shipyard, spreading over many grassy acres and with water on all its sides. In one part, some English persons were partying; in another, children played. The sheer size and ambience of the house were deeply satisfying. We also met Doman Singh's son, an English-speaking tall, handsome son of a wealthy father. A brown-eyed baby girl clung to my legs. Perhaps she was the grand-daughter of Doman Singh. I took her up in my arms. We entered the house.

I noticed that Doman was afflicted with severe paralysis; he could neither speak nor move his body much, but could only listen to us. My companions told him about the purpose of my visit. He kept looking out the glazed window. A billionaire now, he had only a small peephole to look out at his estate. From his place, he could see only a small strip of the vast green grounds that undulated like waves. When he heard about the making of a documentary on Mayo Sigh, he could not hold back tears. There had been a time when he and Mayo Singh had together run the mills. We took some close-ups of Daman Singh. He kept gazing at the speck of sky that filtered through the window, apparently lost in thoughts of the old times together.

Having captured Paldi and its history in my camera, I cruised back to Vancouver. After returning to India, I went to see the original Paldi, the real village of Mayo Singh, in District Hoshiarpur. I took pictures of his ancestral house, interviewed a few persons, and returned home.

I previewed all the tapes. Looking at the rushes, the whole scene of Paldi reeled back before my eyes. When, after editing the film, I put it back in the box, it seemed it contained

a whole kafla, a kafla comprising only one person – known by the name of Mayo Singh. It was amazing how the Punjabis went over the whole length and breadth of the world in search of livelihood. The seeds of their breath have sprouted in all corners of the world and have prospered. Who knows what wild flowers – of what color and kind - may blossom from those seeds in times to come? Sometimes it seems Mayo Singh, in his heavy coat, would walk out of the sealed tapes, trudging the windswept paths, crossing jungles and seas, waving his goodbye with his heavy rough hands from the deck of a ship. He would appear to be harking to thousands of hard-working people, those residing in villages back home in India and also those who live abroad and are part of his kafla, the kafla of one lone man, Mayo Singh.

Mayo Singh's Paldi is a gutsy tale – of more than a hundred years. It is a historical document of complicated, direct and proud struggles of Punjabis, of their conquest and failures. My documentary is just a small effort to capture this great achievement, an amateur attempt at best. The historical adventure called Paldi demands the making of a full-length feature movie by professional hands. I'm visualizing the Mayo's kafila caught on the 76 MM screen and shot on a regular film camera. I wish to watch Mayo Singh's close-up and hear the thud of his heavy feet resounding in the whole cinema hall, with the right background music. I visualize Mayo Singh's impressive face slowly captured in a close-up. His Paldi is slowly dissolving. His face is fading out, until it dissolved totally, and the screen shows the vast ruins of Paldi. The movie should end with Mayo's rough, heavy hand covering the entire screen, waving a goodbye.

(Translated from the original in Punjabi by Gurdev Chauhan)

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Rajindi Singh Mayo, popularly called Bubba or just Bub, the owner of Mayo Lumber and a prominent figure of the Cowichan valley died peacefully Sunday September 07, 2008, at age 75 -Editor.

Kanjakan

First Chapter

Swaran Chandan

This was the second week of January in 1970, and it had been snowing constantly since the start of the year. The roads were covered with almost six inches thick sheet of snow. The trees stood frozen on both sides of the Great West Road looking like Christmas father wearing heavy and thick cap of snow over head and a glaciated long beard hanging down the chin. The temperature must have been far below zero degree, for the feet felt frozen and bloodless, utterly chilled and numb.

The dawn had long dawned and the time was now five minutes to eight. Sujan took off his blue boiler suit, folded it carelessly into a small bundle and placed it on the stool beside *his* lathe machine. He cast a cursory glance around at other workers with a fatigued face and deep somnolent eyes and then made his way to the washing room. There were quite a few nightshift workers washing their hands and faces at the sinks while a couple of them had opened up their shaving kits and were busy shaving their overnight grown stubbles. The giant washing room had more than a dozen sinks, which were all grimy, sooty and hopelessly greasy. Sujan gazed at them with contempt and felt repelled.

'Tell them to fuckin' get these bastards scrubbed clean some time,' he said in Punjabi at the sight of Gurdip Virdi, who was washing his hands at the last sink.

'Did you say something?' retorted John from the sink next to Sujan's with his machine shaver held in the midair, the whirring still going on.

'Fuck off,' pouted Sujan in a derisive laughter while splashing a handful of warm water on to his face.

'Bloody cunt,' John said and began to shave again.

'He's talking about the filthy wash basins, you twit,'

Virdi said and burst out laughing.

'Yeah … they're getting black like you, aren't they?' John snapped and cracked up, too.

'White things are always scared of turning black, my boy,' the Kenya-born Virdi hit the nail on the head.

'That's it, that's it.' It was Scotty, a West Indian from Granada. And then all three guffawed. John felt bashful and embarrassed.

Having washed his hands and face and dried up with the roller towel, Sujan got out and found Panesar waiting for him.

'Give me a lift in your car, Sujan,' he said.

'Why, what happened to yours?'

'It didn't start last night, so I'd to come by bus.'

'Throw that tin box in a scrap yard and buy something better. Don't be a miser,' Sujan berated him, leading him to the clock.

'I might sell it, *yaar*.'

'Sell it? Who's going to buy that scrap … a model manufactured before you were even born? … You're a right miser, I tell you,' Sujan said while clocking out his card.

Then both, Sujan still in the lead, went out through the small door dug at the bottom of the big gate and made their way to the car park. The snow was still falling. The soft snow on the ground gave way to the feet, which left a deep imprint on it.

'It seems we'll have a lot of snow this year,' commented Sujan, looking around vaguely at the white heads and torsos of trees.

'We've had more than this in the by-gone years, man,' reacted Panesar.

'You're quite right *yaar*, the year I came from India the snow knew no bounds. Have got used to it now, but then the whole body froze like metal. I always wished to run back to India… The white weather's fuckin' no good, no good at all.'

They meandered their way to the car. Sujan took out

his keys from his pocket and tried to unlock the door after removing the snow from the keyhole with his hand. But the key didn't even go in. It got stuck at the mouth of the keyhole.

'The fuckin' ice seems to have blocked the keyhole,' Sujan said, and tried to force the key in but it didn't work.

'Hang on, I go and fetch some hot water from the factory,' Panesar suggested. He was about to leave when Sujan stopped him and said, 'Wait a sec, I know what to do.'

He took out his box of matches from his jacket pocket, lit a match and heated up the key until the matchstick was extinguished. Then he pushed the key into the hole and found it gone in smoothly. Immediately, he turned the key and the door was unlocked.

'Well, it's not without benefit to be a smoker. At least you've got some fire with you,' Panesar said and smirked.

'Take out the fuckin' scrapper from the glove box and scrape the ice off the wind screen, you son of fire,' Sujan mock-railed at him.

Forthwith, Panesar found the scrapper and began to scrape the windscreen while Sujan took to key-starting the engine. He made four attempts but the engine didn't start. Then he hung on lest another push on the accelerator should cause flooding.

'Throw this old junk away and buy yourself a better car. Don't be a miser,' Panesar took his revenge and laughed heartily. Sujan made another attempt and the engine was started. He pressed and repressed the accelerator a few times and the engine began to roar like a lion.

'There it goes, your *maasi*,' said Sujan poking his head out of the driver-side window. Panesar felt embarrassed once again.

Once the engine heated up and Panesar was inside the car, Sujan reversed the car and then putting it in the forward gear took to the small factory road flanking the river. It was quite a job to keep the car from skidding, for the whole snow

remained solid owing to no traffic on this small road.

'All four tyres are new yet they lose grip over the snow,' Sujan mumbled.

'Well, it'll remain so for weeks now, it seems,' Panesar predicted.

Having reached the end of the small snow-laden factory road, they turned left at the Great West Road. Owing to persistent traffic the snow on the Great West Road had turned into slush, mud and mire. The road seemed less slippery while the footpaths were still glassy with ice and could make you slip and fall if you were reckless. The commuters walking to their workplaces trod with utmost care. Many white young women wore skirts in such cold weather. They wore skin-coloured transparent stockings. Sujan wondered how the thin stuff kept their legs warm to stand the freezing chill.

'They seem to feel no cold no matter how high the snow mounts. Even if it touches the Big Ben,' Sujan commented and laughed, and then took his packet of cigarettes out of the pocket.

'They do feel cold but don't seem to care. Maybe to seduce men,' Panesar replied in giggles as though he understood the inner logic.

'Give your wife a chance to wear them,' mocked Sujan.

'O no, man, no way! She's better covered neatly. To begin with, she won't know how to walk with bare legs and secondly, you know our menfolk, don't you? They'll whistle her dead. It'll be like "pick up, pick up" you know.' Sujan cracked up at his last words. The inhaled smoke nearly choked him, resulting in a sharp cough, and his eyes bulged.

'Can't you smoke slowly, you idiot?' Panesar mock-berated him.

When they approached the Lucas factory on the left hand side, they found quite a crowd of women gathered there. The traffic slowed down to a crawl. The cars, trucks, vans and buses all moved like ants. Sujan was in the middle lane. He

took to the first lane, reached the outer entrance of the Lucas factory and stopped the car, leaving the engine on.

There were, in front of the factory's offices, about a hundred or so women who had organised a picket. They seemed to be from all nationalities: English, Irish, Indian, West Indian and Chinese. A large drum had fire smouldering in it and about half a dozen women stood around it while others were scattered all over the place with placards in their hands. The placards read: 'Equal Work, Equal Pay,' 'We Want Justice,' 'No Wage Difference For Equal Work,' 'Down with – Sexism,' and 'Men Are No Superior to Women,' etc.

Just about then they raised a slogan: "Equal value for – Equal work".

'How about that then? … They're claiming equality with men?' Panesar asked tauntingly.

'Why not… are men any superior to them? If there's equal or the same kind of work then money should be equal too,' Sujan elucidated his conviction.

'Well, if it happens like that then what difference will be left between a man and a woman?' Panesar questioned in scepticism.

'There was none in the first place. Only people like you have made it.'

'Why, am I a factory owner?'

'Maybe not, but you think like one,' Sujan chided him jestingly and looked again at the enthusiasm of the picketing ladies.

'It's sheer nonsense… If I'm not one how can I think like one?'

'Factory's there in your head, boy. Looking for profit in everything… You should've told your old man to dispatch you the factory owned by him in Phagwara… But never mind, some day you too will establish a workshop here… And then, you'll pay the womenfolk half of what they take now. I bet you'll do that one day 'cause I can see through

your way of thinking.'

'But be frank and tell me… Can a woman work equal to a man?' Panesar grew serious.

'What do you mean by *can*, they're already doing it, you idiot. If you have to do the homework as your wife does then only would you know the value of women.'

'They've to do that, anyway. It's *their* responsibility.'

'Why? Is that written in the *Guru Granth*?'

'Maybe not, but this is how it has been going on for ages.'

'My foot - '*has been going on for ages*'. How about their working in the factories? Has it been going on for ages, too?'

'There you're right perhaps… In fact the women should only take care of home while men should earn the living.'

'Then why don't you get your wife to stop working in the J. Lyons and take care of home?'

'Well, she began working only recently after the kids grew up. Prior to that she didn't,' Panesar tried to justify his situation.

'Could she work with a nine month's child in her womb?' Sujan asked furiously.

The whole conversation was so heated and engaging that they lost trace of when they had left the Lucas factory, took the Boston Manor Road leading to Hanwell, reached the Uxbridge Road and turned left to go to Southall.

When they reached the St Bernard Hospital on their left, Sujan began to laugh hysterically and said, 'The government and their protectors are going to madden the whole nation one day. Some are already here while others are getting ready to find admission.'

'Why, does the government give them some kind of pills to eat and go mad?'

'Not pills but balls… this big.' And just as he took his hands off the steering wheel to show the measure of a ball the car went skidding and nearly hit the kerb.

'Be attentive boy, your car was going to become the

shape of a ball, too,' Panesar reprimanded him joyously.

The traffic on the Uxbridge Road was badly stranded. The vehicles crept inch by inch. It took them nearly twenty minutes to reach the Iron Bridge. The time was now quarter past nine and they had only covered a mile and half. When they crossed from under the Iron Bridge and reached the other side they found a broken down Austin A-40 standing in the middle of the road blocking the flow of traffic. Its owner was trying to start it with a lead connected to someone else's battery.

'That's what it was. These English cars are a heap of rubbish,' remarked Panesar, looking above to the sky.

'Look at the fuckin' weather, man. What can cars and vans do?' retorted Sujan, manoeuvring his car past other vehicles.

Instead of going straight on the Uxbridge Road, Sujan took to the left at the Park Avenue. He knew the traffic would be less there, and so it was. But the cars parked on both sides of the road seemed totally frozen. They all looked like a heap of snow perching beside the snow-laden footpath. Some people were trying to self-start their cars but did not succeed.

When they reached the wooden railway bridge they found a thick traffic jam on the Park Avenue long before it met the South Road. They were to go straight to the Beaconsfield Road. There was no way out except to wait and watch till the traffic moved.

Many Asian women were coming from the opposite side to go over the wooden railway bridge to reach their place of work – the Wall's Meat factory. They seemed to have been delayed while taking their kids to schools. Glassy footpaths must have posed a big problem for children. The meat factory normally started at eight, while it was half past nine now.

'Look man, Pinki's coming!' Panesar exclaimed, his face blushing like a young boy.

'Which Pinki?' Sujan quizzed.

'She lives on our road … She's Paul's sister. Look how

she comes dancing like a peacock. She's just gorgeous, as though made from white marble. The English girls are no match for her. I fancy her, *yaar*…'

'Who's Paul?' Sujan asked.

'Don't bother, you don't know him,' replied Panesar and kept looking at the girl coming closer every second. Sujan too, began to look at the approaching slender figure.

She was undoubtedly beautiful, slim and trim. She had small sharp eyes, vase-like long neck, semi-golden hair tied behind in a ponytail, dangling, as she walked. Her face displayed a glossy radiance. And just as she passed by Sujan's car, Panesar thrust his head out of the window and was about to pass some rude remark when Sujan lunged at him, 'Behave yourself you crazy man.' Panesar stopped short of uttering a single word.

'Fuckin' hell, you scared me, man!' Panesar exclaimed.

'If you've any sense, go out and talk to her affectionately. This is not manly to cut uncouth remarks at a girl,' Sujan reprimanded him. And Panesar felt so embarrassed and foolish that he froze into a bundle, with his head hanging down in shame.

Having crossed the traffic lights Sujan parked the car at the entrance to the Hanson Gardens to let Panesar get off. He got off and walked away without a word. Sujan cast a cursory glance at the Beaconsfield Primary School on the right and found its vast yard completely empty save for the small footprints of children stamped on the snow. He was unable to guess which footprint belonged to his daughter Anu. She had joined school four months ago when she had reached her fifth year. She loved her school unlike many children of her age.

If it were not for the snow Sujan would have reached home a long time ago and would have enjoyed chit-chatting with Anu. But now, having left Anu at school, Bhinder herself would have already left for her work. And the only person waiting for him at home would be Pardeep, three

years younger to Anu. With his eyes fixed on the door he would be anxiously waiting. There was no other person in the household except the four of them. The rest of the family was in India.

'How difficult it is to live without your own blood relatives!' he said in his mind and heaved a long cold sigh. It was the kind of life they had begun some seven years ago. Nostalgia was very painful - too intense in the early days and then growing a little less distressing as years passed. It was as though they had become accustomed to it, like a blinkered ox walking round and round in a mill – an unending ordeal.

"Professor Sujan Seekeri" – The phrase flashed through his mind and he felt his heart pouring out. His colleagues in his college would address him as *Seekeri Sahib*, the students as *Professor Sahib* and his friends and comrades as *Professor Sujan*. But now all those varied addresses had gone void. He was only Sujan Singh and nothing more. For his employers and others in the factory except his Indian mates he was Mr Singh. His mates would call him Sujan, yaar Sujan or Sujan yaar.

And the name - Seekeri – it had been made redundant forever. Professor Seekeri was a lecturer in history. And he began to recollect the tale of having this title attached to his name. He was doing his M.A. in History in those days. Professor Randhir taught history as though history was no more than a count of the dead kings and queens, an account of their defeats and victories, and that was all. His mode of teaching would never reflect the real life lived by the people of that era. It would tell nothing about the then society, culture and philosophy. You could get no clue to the direction in which things moved or were directed to move subsequently. You got to know no causes that generated a certain trend, state or tendency in history. One felt as though the enumeration of graves of the dead was what history was all about. Sujan regarded it all as utterly preposterous. He

would indulge in serious and sometimes offensive discussions with his teacher. He would put forward his strong opinions and would offer solid arguments in favour of a dialectical method of reading history. He would concentrate on cause and effect, particularity and generality, content and form, part and whole, appearance and essence of a phenomenon, necessity and chance, necessity and freedom, possibility and probability, and many other modes of knowing the course of history. And although Prof. Randhir often objected to his offensive behaviour, he did accept his aptitude and named him 'A seeker after truth', which his friends later modified to 'Seekeri'.

But now he was neither *seekeri* nor *professor*. In fact, he never was a professor. In the college register he was a lecturer. It was, in fact, a weird Indian way of calling even a lecturer a professor. Even a laboratory demonstrator was called a professor in India. And like all others, Sujan too had accepted this unearned status without demur.

But now he was either Sujan or Mr Singh, a lathe setter/operator in a factory. His Master's degree in History had been treated like a bad coin in Britain. He couldn't even get a teacher's job in a school, let alone getting a lecturer's in a college. And at long last he had to get work in a factory like many of his other mates. The belly needed food, a necessity which defied any freedom, even a relative one. But he was lucky to have been able to find his very first job at a place where he was trained as a lathe setter/operator in a year.

He had been working on the night shift in this factory for the last five years. Most of his Indian co-workers were from the Ramgarhia clan – a clan known for its skills all over the world – and were good workers. Sujan had learned quite a few skills from them and had proved to be an excellent turner.

He reached home, parked his car on the roadside and unlocked the door. Deep had long since woken up and, from his bed, was looking towards the outer door, waiting for it

to open. And just as Sujan entered the hallway, Deep began to whimper and shed tears. Sujan picked him up, kissed and hugged him, and began to tickle him to make him laugh. And the child eventually did laugh, and so did the beads of tears on his eyelashes.

'O, my son's hungry… My son wants to drink milk… Won't take it long dear, won't take long at all,' he said as he headed towards the kitchen. He kept Deep glued to his chest and began to heat the milk.

Although the paraffin heater (Alladin) was on in the sleeping room, it still was quite cold. Probably Bhinder had lowered its wick before going to work just for the sake of safety. He raised the wick, and just as he attempted to put Deep back into the bed, the boy began to cry again.

'All right, all right! I won't put you in, I'll keep you with me, okay?' Sujan pacified him, went back to the kitchen, filled the bottle with lukewarm milk, handed it to Deep and then began to warm up his own food. He was still eating when Deep finished his milk. 'I want to go to the toilet, Dad,' Deep said. Sujan took his nappy off and put him on the toilet seat, and said, 'Let me know when you've finished, okay?'

'Okay, Daddy.'

Sujan felt an irresistible desire to get into the quilt owing to the cold, tiredness and sleepiness. The food he had just eaten had its lethargic effect, too. And just as he got into the bed and pulled the quilt over, his eyes began to close. And when an hour or so after he heard Deep whimpering and crying 'Daddy … Daddy', he opened up his eyes at once and found his throat and nostrils choking progressively. A side of the quilt had fallen on the paraffin heater and had caught fire. It was smouldering, and the room was all filled with black acrid smoke. The incident shook him to his bones and his heart went pounding like a drum.

At once he leapt up, picked the quilt, half dragging it on the floor, and put the burning side under the sink tap in the kitchen. Then he rushed to the room, splayed out the

large window to let the smoke out. An icy wind rushed in to take the place of the dying smoke and chilled him. Deep was still crying. He had finished using the toilet long ago but was unable to get off the seat on his own. Sujan ran to him, cleaned him with toilet paper, held him to his chest and brought him back into the room, trying to mollify him with a soft loving lisping voice.

'Blimey, the whole house could've been reduced to ashes!' he exclaimed to himself and kissed a dozen times the forehead and cheeks of Deep who had actually rung the alarm bell by his loud whimpering. If it were not for him, the worst could have happened. And Sujan suddenly felt that the circumstances were enormously oppressive and atrocious and that they were at the mercy of the circumstances.

And when he was kissing and hugging Deep, he began to regret the day he had decided to move to this country. 'It's a never-ending torture,' he mumbled. And then his eyes began to doze off while Deep went on playing by his side with his miniature cars, making all kinds of noises to imitate the fast cruising motor cars.

***

Literature is not mere juggling of words; what matters is what is left unsaid, or what may be read between the lines. - Jorge Luis Borges

Perversity is the muse of modern literature. - Susan Sontag

A novel is an impression, not an argument. - Thomas Hardy

A Poem by Badri Raina

The Human Condition

When "human voices" were drowning
Prufrock,
A mass of common riff raff
Were making a revolution in Russia,
And peasant loins were seating
Their muscle
On the Romanov throne.

When the world was "wasteland"
To Eliot,
Bhagat Singh and Gandhi were
Demolishing Britannia,
And setting its sun.
Millions knew for once that their
Condition was not fixed in the Fall
But could change for the better
If they so willed.

When on Ash Wednesday
The penitent was pining for the condition
Of the bone,
Shorn of sin and flesh,
A subterranean world of famished bone
Was aspiring to put on some flesh.

When the cleansed soul was viewing
The rose garden,
Nehru had a rose in his button hole,
Proclaiming the joy of living and making.

"The human condition," my arse.

If that was true,
Why the despair of the learned now?

***

A Poem by Archna Sahni

Lady Hanuman

Not to bring a healing herb
to a wounded hero,
but to save myself

I must turn you,
my triangular homeland,
upside down,
and carry you
like a hill on my palm
across the oceans
and gently put you down
on prarie land

I must pray
for muddied sacred waters
to flow over setting ice,
peaks of older and newer
mountains to not collide,

for familiar smells and sounds
to make familiar a land
to which I must return
but is not yet home.

And that you remain a soothing
presence in my thought
is my way of knowing
that you exist.

***

A Poem by Raminder Grewal

Sonf, Ajwain, Elachi

A soothing tea
Made with thick milk
Which makes me cry out
For our tea ceremony

Tiny tin metal cups
Hot to the touch

It was India, Punjab 1999
I was there , drinking,
Swatting flies from my cup

Can't all of South Asia be united
By tea ceremonies?

The hot tea transmuted into
Togetherness, love, understanding
Wisdom

A precious ether
A sort of platonic love potion
To be used
So nobody could see caste, creed, religion
or Gender
Only into each other's hearts

***

A Poem by Harminder Dhillon

Tomato Pickers

A dirty-white beaten up cargo van
crawls the streets of Mississauga
pulling up near stop signs, they
pile up on the metal seatless floor.
They belly laugh, grumble
pressing moisty paled beards, they stare
at beautiful ladies in skirts
waiting at the bus stop.
Nobody smokes but the van smells of
body odor, bad breath, soiled socks,
smell of raw onions, spilled motor oil, unwashed sweat
from last evening's tomato pick.
The van rumbles down Four-O-One west, turbans
roll, heads bump against the ceiling
they fall on each other, tickling, giggling
their talk rubs against women's soft white legs,
looking out through windowless metal frame.
One-fifty miles of singing, humming, late, they arrive
at tomato fields, under the blistering sun
of humid Ontario June, they bend, they crawl
heavy chests pounding, under a maple tree, they scarf down
left over *chapatis* with lemon pickle, *lassi*.
Sun slips down behind corn fields
their backs baked pink red, they count
tomato bushels, smile at Queen's face, heap into
slumberous van on Four-O-One-east to Toronto,
dreaming of the whisky their families won't let them
enjoy their snoring mingled with sweat, tomato
syrup thick-layered on their draggled *kurtas*
On street corners, limping away, disappearing behind
rusty brown storm doors of basement apartments.

***

A Poem by Inde

Now You May Say Goodbye to Us!

You may now say goodbye
Darkness is deepening its shades
Even the soulful melodies
Are beginning to fade
The listeners have walked away
Even the chairs are looking the other way
And the walls appear to be closing in
Scrambling along the walls, I'll find my way out
And in this wide, wide world, I'll be alone
Had you been around
I'd have felt much better
We'd have taken a few steps more
And walked across to the stormy sea-shore
At night, the waves are loud and clear
Waiting to offload your hidden secrets
And beckon you, in a long deep voice, saying,
"Night has deepened its shades
Now rest here and here, amidst us."

(Translated from the original in Punjabi by Rana Nayar)

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Journalism is literature in a hurry. - Mathew Arnold

Literature is news that stays news. - Ezra Pound

In literature nothing that is not beautiful has any right to exist. - Willium Butler Yeats

The Stigmata of Patriarchy

Female Body as the Site of Violence in Saadat Hassan Manto's Fiction

Shikha Kenneth

According to Michel Foucault, the body manifests the stigmata of past experiences as the inscribed surface of events, the locus of a disassociated self, and a volume in perpetual disintegration ("Nietzsche," 148). He describes human body as the space where cultural hierarchies are inscribed and reinforced. He states that the essential components belonging to the domain of history such as desires, failings and errors efface each other or combine and express themselves in the body. In fact, the entire mechanism of power, Foucault argues, becomes successfully operative only after it comes to be written on the bodies of individuals.

For the same reason, the oppressive functions carried out by the power-knowledge relationship can be exteriorized with the help of genealogical analysis. Here, the genealogist focusses on exposing the "hazardous play of dominations" that is involved in the process of history's destruction of the body (148). However, Foucault says that an exposé of these violent developments on the body is a futile endeavour if one considers discourse to be an exercise carried out in uninterrupted continuity; on the other hand, these developments need to be viewed and analyzed as individual episodes in a series of subjugations. This requires focussing on subtle, singular and sub-individual marks on the body denied expression in a dominant discourse, thereby forming a network that is difficult to unravel. Here, Foucault echoes Jacques Derrida's idea of an individual's disassociation from the authorized, dogmatic and phallocentric discourse in order to highlight a history filled with "paradoxical laws, non-dialectizable discontinuities, absolutely heterogeneous islands, irreducible singularities, unheard-of, and

incalculable sexual differences" for the specific purpose of re-appropriation of the essence of the repressed 'other' ("Choreographies," 67).

Moreover, Derrida terms this phenomenon as deconstruction which, according to him, involves deliberate disambiguation of the structural unity supposed to underline the philosophical and literary texts to reveal the oppressive ideology that is morphed into reality and presented as the truth. He states that deconstruction always takes place at the level of writing where due to the absence of any authorial interpretation, the individual reader is forced to recreate, negotiate and translate the meaning of the text. In the appendix to *History of Madness* titled "My Body, This Paper, This Fire", Foucault criticizes Derrida's limited explanation of deconstruction and further elaborates the concept by pointing out that no text can or should be interpreted without taking into consideration the various external factors, such as historical, ideological, biographical, material et cetera, which contribute to its production (573). However, both the reader and the academic need to be aware that all these factors are historically contingent and must not be viewed as the immutable facts of human existence. An analysis of the views of Derrida and Foucault on deconstruction thus highlights that this particular concept needs to be understood as an intellectual's attempt to account for those heterogeneous varieties of seemingly insignificant and illogical contradictions that form fissures in an otherwise structured and homogeneous discourse. Moreover, both Derrida and Foucault insist that these insights needed to be extended to the reading of literature.

Literature is, according to Jean Paul Sartre, the most effective form of social action (xiv). Sartre envisages literature as an important means for guiding man towards the path of freedom and consciousness. In his view, a literary work is never dead or finished because its meaning changes whenever the world changes. Hence, for the purpose of

locating the relevance of the written word in a given age, the author and the reader need to make a collective endeavour to deconstruct, clean up and reinvigorate language. Both Derrida and Foucault, in fact, stress on the critical analysis of literary texts by way of deconstruction. In Derrida's view, knowledge, identity, truth, meaning — all established concepts of western literary thought — achieve their status by overlooking or repressing other elements in their derivation. Derrida states that the aim of a literary analyst is to reveal the "metaphysics of presence" that prevails in literature in order to represent certain 'lack' as well as the supposed fullness of *logos*, thereby exposing and deposing the logic that lays claim to reality (*Of Grammatology* 131). On the other hand, Foucault views the critical analysis of literary texts as "problem[at]ization by thought" (*Foucault Reader* 388). Foucault defines thought as a motion by which one "detaches oneself from action, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem" (388). In fact, this problem[at]ization of thought motivates researchers to combine varying discourses of literature, law and dominant culture in order to illuminate the violence that underlies the intersection of the multiple axes of power operative in society.

The American philosopher Richard Rorty adds another dimension to the concept of deconstruction. In his paper titled "Feminism, Ideology and Deconstruction: A Pragmatist View", he weighs the usefulness of deconstruction in relation to feminist philosophy. In his view, feminist studies need to be more pragmatist than reformist while appropriating deconstructionism in their critique of theory and literature. Feminists, Rorty argues, need to disassociate deconstruction from the critique of distortion and "anti-representalionalism" by the prevalent masculinist ideology in philosophical and literary texts (230).

I shall make use of Foucault's idea of problem[at]ization of thought and Rorty's counsel to take a pragmatist view of

philosophical and literary tradition in reading Saadat Hassan Manto's partition narratives. I shall try to formulate new insights into the violence that Manto tries to capture and represent in these narratives as experienced by Indian women at the time of Partition. My aim will be to argue that the image of the tortured body of woman in Manto's fictional narratives presents varied forms taken by violence. In fact, the representations of the ravaged body of the female in Manto's partition stories signify the 'stigmata' of violent experiences in a phallocentric society.

Manto wrote during the era of modern Indian history fraught with religious/communal tensions which resulted in the bifurcation of national politics. His writings are realistic and satirical observations on violence-laced cultural inscriptions that manifest in the blood-thirsty behaviour of a large number of people in the Indian subcontinent. He explores the controversial themes of love, sex, incest, prostitution, rape, murder, patriarchy, et cetera in the specific context of the dismal socio-cultural climate of the Partition. In his fiction, Manto reveals the suffering of individuals who bore the brunt of communal violence during Partition. Prominent among Manto's account of these individuals is his portrayal of the plight of woman. Here, the author does not highlight woman as the symbol as well as the means to avenge national honour. On the contrary, he seeks to show that this aggressive jingoistic fervour was simply a façade meant to give free rein to the power ascribed to the phallic subject by the dominant ideology. Moreover, Manto places the violence directed against women at the heart of his Partition narratives, thereby indicating that it is in these acts of deliberate and conscious brutality that violence in its entirety becomes visible. He explores the manner in which Partition is inscribed and enacted upon human bodies. Indeed, the victim may remain mute but her body becomes the signifier of the various forms of violence inflicted upon her.

In the essay "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation", Louis Althusser states that ideology insinuates itself into the lives of individuals and transforms them into subjects against their will. He equates ideology to "misrecognition" for it makes them submit freely to their subjection (196). In the postscript to the aforementioned essay, Althusser hints at a solution to the problem posed by ideology: an in-depth analysis of class struggle in order to understand the functioning of ideology in society. In his work titled *The Plague of Fantasies*, however, Slavoj •i•ek presents a new approach to interpreting the ideological apparatuses that operate in society. Contrary to Althusser's concept of ideology, •i•ek states that revelation of the oppressive social operations does not herald an individual's freedom from or resistance to ideology. He argues that ideology's crucial mystifying move is its own demystification. In other words, the essential paradox of ideology today is that it maintains its misrecognizing power over subjects by exposing its own operations. In return, the ideological subject reacts to ideology's demystification according to the fetishistic logic of disavowal. It means that the individual realizes that his/her actions are meaningless; nevertheless, he/she persists in indulging in them. One can say that, it is this fetishistic logic of disavowal that is highlighted by Manto in his account of the riots that ensued Partition. In his short stories revolving around the communal riots, Manto unfailingly mentions that his protagonist participates in wreaking violence upon others not because he is driven by religious or nationalistic fervour but by the need to indulge his desire for meaningless violence. One of the stories in which this happens is "Colder than Ice".

In the story, Ishwar Singh – the protagonist – decides to take the advantage of the golden opportunity that communal riots have provided to every hot-blooded man: to kidnap and rape any girl of his choice. First, he joins the

gangs in looting shops and houses, after which he goes back home to present the spoils to his mistress Kalwant Kaur. Then during the night, he leaves her house to prowl the deserted streets in search of some beautiful girl in order to satisfy his sexual fantasies and perversions. Ishwar Singh finally enters a house where he murders six men, makes a grab for a young pretty girl and carries her some distance for the purpose of raping her at a deserted place. It is only after penetrating the prostrate girl's body that Ishwar Singh realizes that he has commited rape on a dead girl. In this short story, the lifeless body of the dead girl can be seen as what •i•ek calls the "real". Here, the "real" is not reality but refers to something constitutively absent from reality, that is, to the impossibility of anything being fully itself. The dead body of the girl is, in fact, a self-obfuscating "screen" meant to function as an obstacle that prevents the direct and violent access of a subject (*The Puppet* 77). Moreover, the corpse serves as a sign of resistance against the extremity of violence directed at woman by the phallocentric male subject. Ishwar Singh is a •i•ekian pervert who craves for excess in every aspect of life. The pervert, •i•ek argues, is a man obsessed with sexuality more than is natural; moreover, he follows drives with an excess far beyond natural; and, this excess of drive has to be "gentrified" as second nature through the mediation of man-made institutions (*The Plague* 135).

In *The Plague of Fantasies*, •i•ek states that the confrontation with the real that eludes one's grasp poses the threat of symbolic castration for the perverse patriarchal subject. This causes him to stage a "disavowal of castration" primarily as a defense against the motif of death and sexuality (34). Consequently, he enacts a universe in which a human being can survive any catastrophe; and, in which sexuality is reduced to a game. Ishwar Singh too tries to grapple with the *jouissance*[1] that has been introduced into his subjectivity through his encounter with the "real" other

in the form of the dead girl. He goes back to Kalwant Kaur's house, indulges in flirtatious banter with her where they both refer to sexual foreplay as a game of cards. Ishwar Singh then proceeds to be sexually aggressive with his mistress (something which the author indicates is a common occurrence between them). Kalwant Kaur admonishes him for physically hurting her. Ishwar Singh, however, warns her to be prepared for there is going to be "a lot of brutality" that night (Manto 26). In fact, Ishwar Singh is not able to disassociate violence from his actions. Patriarchy, that is to say, survives on the torture of another being. Here, the protagonist is a patriarchal subject whose previous attempt to possess the defenseless 'other' has been thwarted because the victim turned out to be already dead, thereby escaping her subjection to violence. As a result, Ishwar Singh finds himself floundering from his confident stance as an aggressor. Hence he seeks to escape this feeling of inadequacy by transferring his violent intentions towards his mistress, Kalwant Kaur: another 'other'.

He ogles Kalwant lasciviously, kisses her roughly, pinches her black and blue, and tries to forcibly penetrate her. And all the while, Kalwant Kaur allows herself to be subjected to his brutal ministrations. Here, the bestial treatment meted out by Ishwar Singh to the two women suggests that for the patriarchal subject every woman is an object, that is, the passive recipient of his sexual objectification. In *The Parallax View*, however, •i•ek states that the fundamental mode of an object's passive presence is that it annoys, disturbs and traumatizes the subject (17). This disruption of the smooth running of the subject's life by the objection of the object (at its most radical) calls for a reversal in their positions, whereby the subject needs to be viewed as passive and the object as active. In the above-mentioned short story, Ishwar Singh – mortified by the radicalized form of resistance reflected in the corpse of the raped girl – indulges in "false activity", where he tries to

fake sexual ardour with his mistress (*The Plague* 115). However, he is unable to consummate the act because the image of the immobile, frozen girl comes alive as an apparition before his eyes. This image – which stands as a frozen point of immobility in Ishwar Singh's field of visibility – is so potent that it renders him impotent. This angers his mistress who, upon hearing his confession about his deliberate infidelity, plunges his *Kirpan* (a phallic symbol of power, justice and truth) in his neck. Hence, Ishwar Singh becomes doubly the victim of his own phallus – for it causes the symbolic death of his sexuality and, later, his physical death. The character of Ishwar Singh thus represents the phallocentric self who always depends on violence to assert his subjectivity. On the other hand, the bodies of the two women, the corpse and Kalwant Kaur, become the agency through which Ishwar Singh supplements his subjectivity. Suffice it to say that the conventional notion of the phallus as the siege of aggressive, penetrative, essentially masculine, potency power is, in actuality, contingent upon the terror that is evoked in the gaze of the 'other'. The moment that the decentered 'other' (the corpse) offers resistance to the terror induced by the violence of the phallic subject, the entire fetish crumbles to reveal that the spontaneous, natural power of the phallus is, in fact, an "artificial prosthetic element" (*The Plague* 36). Hence, a close reading of "Colder than Ice" reveals that the existence of phallocentric male relies on violation of the body of the 'other' woman to maintain its illusion of power.

Another short story by Manto titled "The Woman in the Red Raincoat" illustrates that violence need not only be physical to make woman a victim of its wrath. In this fictional account, Manto narrates the experience of his friend during the violent upheaval of the partition. Here, the author does not assign a name to the protagonist, preferring to call him 'S'. He introduces 'S' as an ordinary, average, aesthetically inclined, innocuous young man. However,

Manto's further delineation of the character of 'S' shows that the protagonist is essentially a paradox. 'S' is fond of games but hates sports; he is not cruel by nature but cannot resist being the first person to get into an argument or fight; he never plays fair but is an honest fighter; he is interested in arts but willingly opens a bicycle shop. Manto's contradictory representation of the nature of 'S' suggests that reality can never be grasped in entirety, for everything construed as an evidence of authenticity is essentially a delusive masquerade. In the aforementioned story, the protagonist's shop is burned down. And so with nothing constructive to do, he decides to join the same band of arsonists and looters who have snatched the means of his livelihood. The narrator is, however, quick to assure the reader that 'S' indulges in plundering houses and shops not because he is driven by the thought of communal revenge but because he is looking for diversion as an escape from the miasma of violence. In fact, there is so much violence in the atmosphere that his sensibility has been totally numbed.

Manto sketches out a scene of brutal chaos in the story: frequent occurrences of murder, arson and rapes, houses set on fire, streets littered with corpses, stench of death in the air, a large pile of looted goods collected and stored by 'S' in his house. And against it, the author presents the image of the protagonist – calmly smoking a cigarette on his balcony. 'S' seems to be comfortable with the dry and barren silence that surrounds him. He feels no anger towards the arsonists who destroyed his shop because he knows that expressing frustration in the face of absurdity is futile (Camus 5). In fact, 'S' seems to be comfortable with the notion that the world is a foreign, strange and an inhumane place. In the course of the story, Manto portrays 'S' as the paradoxical absurd man: amoral but with a hint of integrity, embracing the notion of freedom to act by choice which is always directed towards the constructive goal of enjoying life. 'S' – the absurd man, however, reveals himself to be a

patriarchal subject who is willing to resort to any tactic to lure and deceive the 'other'.

In the above-mentioned short story, dazed by the meaningless violence taking place around him, 'S' is struck by the idea of picking up a girl. The narrator, however, does not elaborate the protagonist's real intentions for kidnapping. After loitering through the deserted streets, 'S' comes across a crashed car and immediately kidnaps the woman driver emerging from it. He drags the hysterical and terrified woman back to his darkened house where he proceeds to comfort her with soothing words. He does not employ any physical force in order to overpower the kidnapped woman and bend her according to his will. Instead, he seduces her with words, thereby revealing himself to be a sophisticated but nevertheless predatory and manipulative man. Control is not exercised merely through the use of brute force. The extreme kind of victimization and manipulative control may be achieved through discourse also – the typical vector for patriarchal ideology. Moreover, patriarchy is primarily a paradox. It shows itself as normalcy whereas its sole purpose is to sustain violence. The phallocentric subject thus carries out the ruse to successfully perform the phallic function of living up to the ideal-ego of masculinity that battles the accusations of the suppression of the 'other' for the sustenance of his subjectivity. 'S' finally manages to triumph over the denial and resistance of the hysterical woman.

In his essay "Woman is One of the Names of the Father", •i•ek states that theorists should discard their clichéd interpretations of hysteria, such as the view that the feminine hysterical subject is a confused babbler unable to confront reality, or the false interpretation of hysteria as a protest, through woman's body language, against male domination. Hysteria, •i•ek argues, needs to be comprehended in the complexity of its strategy as a radically ambiguous protest against the Master's interpolation which,

simultaneously, bears witness to the fact that the "hysterical subject needs a Master, that she cannot do without a Master". In the story, the kidnapped woman is Miss 'M' – respected art teacher and a self-proclaimed man-hater. However, this hatred towards men is just a masquerade as it becomes evident through her passionate and almost suppliant stance towards 'S'. However, Miss 'M' is ready to submit to 'S' only when he concedes to her request of making love to her in the dark. The reason is that Miss 'M' is actually an old woman. Jacques Lacan states that "it is for what she [woman] is not that she expects to be desired as well as loved" (*Écrits* 221). Miss M's projection of hatred and indifference towards the male species is, in reality, a farce. She has finally been presented with the chance of being accepted despite her physical shortcomings. However, her offer is rejected by 'S' when he gets a glimpse of the 'real' Miss M – wrinkled and white haired. In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, Judith Butler states that 'other' is the 'real' of abjection, that is, exclusion. The notion of abjection, in fact, designates a "degraded or cast out status within the terms of sociality" (243). After taking a good look at Miss M, 'S' refuses to look at her again and tells her that she is no longer his captive. The old art teacher reluctantly leaves his house only to be killed outside in an accident. Manto insinuates himself into the fiction at its conclusion to label his friend 'S' as the culprit who carried out dual murders the night he kidnapped Miss M. According to the narrator, 'S' murdered the famous artist known to the world as well as the vulnerable and real woman he encountered on the night of her abduction. In this short story, Miss M is both abducted and rejected because of her bodily appearance. She falls prey to the whims of the phallocentric 'S'. Here, Manto unravels the violence underlying the asymmetrical relationship between the phallic subject and the 'other'. The reverent and loving attitude of Miss M towards 'S' transforms him into a full phallic presence, thereby giving him the power. For 'S',

however, the purpose of the possessing the power is primarily to reduce Miss 'M' to an object of desire. Her body thus becomes a mere object – studied, measured, judged by the violent, patriarchal gaze of 'S', but then quickly afterwards relegated to the realm of abjection.

In the short story titled "The Price of Freedom", Manto explores the manner in which phallocentric operations wield control and violence over the female body. The author demonstrates the manner in which patriotic rhetoric and nationalistic ideals and ideology are, actually, an exercise by patriarchy meant to generate a group of people in order to manipulate them to submit to their victimization. In this story, Manto describes the plight of his childhood friend Ghulam Ali who is forcibly held prisoner to a hollow and unfulfilling life while participating in the nation's fight for freedom. He is an active participant in the civil disobedience movement during which he falls in love with a fellow revolutionary: a girl called Nigar. Being a resident of Amritsar and a good orator, Ghulam Ali is chosen as a "dictator" by the revolutionaries for the prime purpose of addressing a rally at Jallianwallah Bagh and then getting himself arrested and thrown into jail as a sign of bravery and rebellion against the British rule (60). Ghulam Ali wants to marry his beloved before going to prison, and for this conjugal union he seeks the blessings of a religious sage known to the public as Babaji. The character of Babaji seems to be modelled upon Mahatama Gandhi – a visionary who professes practicing abstinence from the material things in life. The writer, however, reveals that Babaji's proclamation of disinterest in worldly things is, in fact, a ruse. Manto narrates that Babaji is renowned for his piety and scholarship and has a legion of followers belonging to different religions. On his occasional visits to Amritsar, he resides at the palatial house of a local jeweller. Also, despite his proclivity towards religious activities, Babaji nurtures an avid interest in politics and continually but subtly drops hints and discusses

political strategies with people who come to pay homage to him. Even though he lives in an Ashram, Babaji is a man accustomed to living a comfortable life where people cater to his every whim and fancy and follow his orders. His disciples are more like his slaves, with lifeless and ashen appearance, whose life decisions are made and manipulated by their spiritual leader.

The character of Babaji represents the violence and power that characterize the panoptic function of patriarchy. The concept of panopticism has been investigated and theorized by Michel Foucault. He identifies body as the principal target of power. He says that modern power – disciplinary in its nature – operates in a capillary fashion throughout the social body which can be best grasped in the everyday practices which sustain and reproduce power relations. In his seminal work *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault studies these practices which, according to him, are an exercise in disciplinary power. He suggests that these practices were first cultivated in isolated institutional settings such as prisons, military establishments, hospitals, factories and schools but were gradually applied more broadly as techniques of social regulation and control. Their aim is to simultaneously optimize the body's capacities, skills and productivity and to foster its usefulness and docility. It is not, however, only the body that the disciplinary techniques target. Disciplinary power which is initially directed toward disciplining the body, Foucault argues, gradually takes hold of the mind as well to induce a psychological state of conscious and permanent visibility. Here, control is achieved by the means of subtle strategies of normalization carried out through the medium of constant surveillance and discourse.

In the above-mentioned short story, Babaji's ashram appears as a form of Foucault's idea of the 'prison' which, in turn, is his metaphor for modern disciplinary society founded on the concept of power, knowledge and body.

Here, Babaji projects himself as a revolutionary who is not enamoured of politics. Instead, he wishes for the spiritual enlightenment that will bring freedom to the citizens of the nation. However, Babaji frequently deviates from his proclamations by dropping hints about the tactics to be followed to the political leaders who were among the group of his followers. Moreover, he couches his political ideology in his influential rhetoric about youth and revolution. Babaji is, in fact, a power-hungry individual who maintains his dominant position in society by devising new means and tactics of control over a legion of followers. He has opened several ashrams and persuades his disciples to come and reside there. These ashrams are, however, more like reformatories where the activities of residents are closely monitored and controlled (as in a panopticon[2]) by Babaji. He declares that his purpose is to guide them towards higher life; so, he prescribes to them a life devoid of any comfort whereas he enjoys all the luxuries provided to him courtesy his blinded disciples. The residents of his ashram have a "lifeless" and "pallid" look about them, an after-effect of the hard life they are forced to endure on the command of Babaji (Manto 67). Yet they submit quietly to their oppression because they have been completely overwhelmed and brain-washed by Babaji's ideology. Ghulam Ali too is one of the willing victims of Babaji.

He goes with his girlfriend Nigar to ask for Babaji's blessings before their nuptials. Babaji expresses extreme displeasure at Ghulam Ali's decision to marry. He advises Ali to send his fiancée to live in his ashram and then go and get himself arrested in order to show his patriotism. Later, Babaji changes his mind about their wedding and agrees to give them his blessings the next day at the Jallianwallah Bagh. The narrator writes that Babaji, with the makings of an astute politician, declares in front of riveted audience about his gladness over Ghulam Ali and Nigar uniting in wedlock. He states that procreating rather than dedicating

one's life to the cause of the country's freedom is evil, indulgent and abnormal behaviour. Babaji, with his cleverly devised rant, quickly inveigles Ghulam Ali to promise to the entire congregation that he will not have children with his future wife and they shall spend their married life as friends. When Ali comes out of his revolutionary stupor, he realizes that he has made a mistake by allowing his life to be controlled by another individual and, ultimately, he breaks his vow to Babaji and resumes living a full life.

The most obvious yet mute victim in this narrative is Nigar. Manto describes her as an educated, self-assured, and compassionate woman. Nonetheless, she remains voiceless in the face of the manipulation and oppressive dictums of Babaji. Moreover, she does not have any opportunity to take any decisions; she keeps moving between the ideology and the wishes of both Ghulam Ali and Babaji. In effect thus, both are the perpetrators of violence against Nigar. For Babaji, the body of the woman stands as a symbol of indulgence and evil; he considers female body to be a deliberate distraction and obstacle that diverts the freedom fighter from his "normal" calling and conduct. Hence he advises Nigar to join the ashram in order to move Ghulam Ali away from the path of temptation. However, Ghulam Ali is not able to adapt to a life devoid of abstinence. So, he skirts his promise made to Babaji by deciding that he will have sexual relations with his wife but will not beget any children from her. However, he soon begins yearning for children – something to call upon as his legacy. Also, he is agonized on behalf of his wife for he knows that she craves motherhood. Ghulam Ali thus decides to ditch his promise to Babaji and produces a couple of children with Nigar. When Manto meets Ghulam Ali years later, he notices his friend's hatred towards anything made of rubber – be it rubber soles or a deflated balloon. For Ghulam Ali, rubber alludes to condoms: a reminder of stunted and barren marital life. Ghulam Ali seeks transcendence from this

desolate existence through natural contact with a woman's body. In this story, Nigar's body is reduced to a mere womb, an object, a means for Ghulam Ali to achieve the goal he considers to be his life's true purpose. Hence, Ghulam Ali is the primordial phallic subject who represses the subjectivity of the associated 'other' by violating her body. This violation by Ghulam Ali has, in fact, no visible brute force attached to it. However, Ghulam Ali reveals himself to be a perpetrator of violence against woman because he unwittingly stamps her with the status of an entity whose existence is contingent upon the wishes, decisions and actions of the phallic subject.

According to Hélène Cixous, writing is a conspiracy of languages to produce tragic responses to the repetition of evil (x). She states that literature is scarry for it maintains and reanimates the traces of the wound inflicted upon the body of the individual. Cixous refers to such works of literature as Stigmatexts[3]. The present essay critically analyzes the female body – represented in Manto's fictional narratives – as bearing the stigmatic of patriarchy. A close reading of the above-mentioned stories reveals the scars inscribed upon on the body of the woman which, in turn, highlight the multifarious forms of violence directed against her. In this essay, each narrative is shown to present a varied image of woman's victimization. In "Colder than Ice", Ishwar Singh's violent treatment of the two women reveals that the existence and survival of a phallocentric man is contingent upon the torture of another human being. Moreover, a victim's resistance to violence directed against her has a disintegrating impact on the subjectivity of her aggressor. An analysis of "The Woman in the Red Raincoat" unravels the violence underlying the asymmetrical relationship between the phallic subject and the 'other'. Here, the body of Miss 'M' is objectified and, subsequently, discarded to the realm of abjection by the violent, patriarchal gaze of 'S'. Manto's narrative titled "The Price of Freedom"

highlights the manner in which the phallic subject controls and reduces the female body to an object and uses it to achieve transcendence. Each of the aforesaid instances of violence shows woman's mute acceptance of or resistance to the stigma of the 'other' that has been inscribed upon her body by patriarchy. An in-depth analysis of the violence directed against women in Manto's narratives thus reveals that female body is the site upon which patriarchy carries out its violent operations. Manto's fiction is, in fact, a "Stigmatext" where the author invokes varied images of the scarred and ravaged body of woman, thereby highlighting that her existence is inextricable from violence.

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1. In his work titled *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* Jacques Lacan presents his concept of the opposition of *jouissance* and pleasure. In his view, the subject continuously tries to transgress the prohibitions on his enjoyment. However, the consequence of these transgressions is not more pleasure but pain since the subject can take in only a limited amount of gratification. Beyond this limit, Lacan argues, pleasure transforms into pain. And, he calls this pain *jouissance*.

2. In *The Panopticon Writings*, Jeremy Bentham presents panopticon as an idea of a new principle of construction devised primarily for penitentiary houses which, he argues, can also be applied to other establishments. Here, the incarcerated individuals are enclosed within walls but remain isolated from one another, and are subject to scrutiny by an observer who remains unseen. Michel Foucault considers the panopticon to be a discipline mechanism which induces in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.

3. In her work titled *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*, Hélène Cixous sheds light on the concepts of stigma and stigmata. According to her, stigma is the hallmark of the wounds that are inflicted upon the body. Moreover, stigma is the mark that signals out an individual for exclusion or election. However, Cixous interprets stigmata as the formation of an alliance between stigma and the trauma that is associated with it. The stigmata, she argues, engenders literature. In other words, literature reveals the stigma associated with the infliction of the wound and relives the trauma of the individual's encounter with violence.

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Salvaging the Remains of Language, Culture and Identity

Reading Surjit Patar's 'Marr Rahi Hai Meri Bhasha' and 'Aia Nand Kishore'

Rabinder Powar

Control over language to subjugate the natives has been one of the main forms of imperial oppression. It is through the medium of language that the "...hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated and through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order' and 'reality'"(Ashcroft 7) are established. That is how English came to reign supreme during the British regime in India. As it enjoyed the patronage of the ruling authority, it was soon institutionalized. The imperial education system was impressed on India in the garb of civilizing mission for vested interests. It is evident in Macaulay's 'Minute on Indian Education' as he reports,

> ...the dialects commonly spoken among the natives....... contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are, moreover, so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them... I am quite ready to take Oriental learning at the valuation of Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia...We must at present do our best to form a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern,— a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. (www.english.ucsb.edu)

Gauri Viswanathan has reiterated how "British colonial administrators, provoked by missionaries on the one hand and fears of native subjugation on the other, discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of liberal education"(17). This happened not only in India; even the

Caribbeans felt such impositions in their education system as, according to Kamau Brathwaite, the system is maintained through "the language of the conquistador... the contours of an english heritage... Shakespeare, George Eliot, Jane Austen, the models which had very little to do, really, with the environment and reality of non-Europe...People were forced to learn things which had no relevance to themselves"(388).

The result of this endeavour in India produced an elite class for whom the English language and literature became 'the norm'. In Edward Said's terminology this was a "conscious affiliation proceeding under the guise of filiation" (cited in Ashcroft 4). Desirous of complete assimilation the new elites tried to be more English than the English by adopting the foreign culture and rejecting their own. The prime, privileged status of the English language did dissuade the natives from expressing in their native language as the superiority of one highlighted the inferiority of the other. Above all the native language was the language of the slaves who were "conceived of as inferiors - non human in fact" (Brathwaite 387).

With the decline of colonial regime came the realisation that to counter the supremacy of the canonical codes it was imperative to wrest the control over language. But certainly an irreparable damage had already been done because of the profound linguistic alienation caused by the imperial powers with which we are struggling even today. The need to replace the language of the centre raised the questions of abrogation and appropriation. Raja Rao's feeling to "convey in a language that's not one's own the spirit that's one's own" (v) perhaps is the feeling of every suppressed being. As Bill Ashcroft states that it is not possible to return to the pre colonial bliss of cultural purity as post colonial culture is a hybridized phenomenon which is the outcome of "a dynamic interaction between European hegemonic systems and 'peripheral' subversion of them" (220). Language becomes

the site of struggle and the play of these subversive maneouvers on this site is clearly evident. As Kobena Mercer puts it, "The subversive force of this hybridizing tendency is most apparent... where creoles, patois and Black English decenter, destabilize and carnivalize the linguistic domination of 'English' - the nation- language of master discourse- through strategic inflections, accentuations and other performative moves in semantic and lexical codes" (255).

If the native language has to have the potential to transform the language of the centre, and if, as Chinua Achebe suggests, it has to 'bear the burden', then there are two ways to enrich and develop it. In this regard that I would like to focus on a developing language that was found to be an apt medium of expression not only for Sheikh Farid's *Shalokas* or for scriptures like Guru Granth Sahib but also one that could adorn the spiritual experiences of Sufi Saints like Bulleh Shah and Shah Hussain. Of course I mean Punjabi, our mother tongue that had been affected by the imperial strategies in many ways directly or indirectly than any other language.

A glance at some important happenings and shaping influences would not be out of place. After 1850, the installation of printing press in Ludhiana created a divide between the folk and urban literature which led to further classifications between *Niman* (lower) and *Vishisht* (higher) literature. Communal division of Punjabi speech community into various sections played havoc with the cultural unity of this group. This also brought to the fore the desire to control which in turn led to the emergence of *Sahit Sabhavan* (literary associations), which in fact became the centres of power and ultimately turned into political pedestals. The most unfortunate fact was that not only language but even the script got fragmented in the myopic power struggle. The vested interests of various groups proved very harmful for the language. Blaming its proponents for hampering the development of language is certainly justifiable in this

context. Bearing the onslaughts of the colonizer from outside, intellectuals and leaders at home, it has suffered many setbacks. How the dying language which presupposes the death of a particular world view becomes one of the moving concerns in the poetry of Surjit Patar, an eminent poet in Punjabi literary world, shall be examined in the paper.

What bothers Patar is that Punjabi Language is in doldrums today because of the neglect, firstly as we take it for granted that as a mother-tongue we acquire it naturally and there is no need to learn it, and secondly because of insincere concerns like using it for pursuing political demands. Considering that it is not impressive and is not in consonance with the stylized modern way of life, it is deliberately pushed in the attic as something outmoded, obsolete and a thing of the past. But the tragedy becomes two-fold as the neglect of language also presupposes the neglect of our cultural repository as well. As Surjit Singh in his article on Surjit Patar has put it very aptly, "... in adapting ourselves to the current way of living, we are turning our back on the learning of this language and thereby on our cultural heritage" (275). The state of crisis in which we find our language today makes the poet reflect on this issue. Its rich glorious past, lost to the present that forebodes a bleak future pains the one who has tasted the sweetness of the mother-tongue. The poet expresses his deep concern and anxiety in a very moving manner in his poems 'Marr Rahi Hai Meri Bhasha' (My Language is Dying) and 'Aia Nand Kishore' (Nand Kishore Came).

'My Language is Dying' opens with the acute awareness and assertion of the fact that Punjabi is on the verge of death, on way to its extinction. Whether these are smaller structures like words or bigger structures like sentences, they are all falling structures. To illustrate this point Patar quotes eight different expressions used in Punjabi Language to denote different times of the day-

ਧੰਮੀ ਵੇਲਾ, ਪਹੁ ਫੁਟਾਲਾ, ਛਾਹ ਵੇਲਾ, ਲੌਢਾ ਵੇਲਾ
ਦੀਵਾ ਵੱਟੀ, ਖਉਪੀਆ, ਕੌੜਾ ਸੋਤਾ, ਢਲਦੀਆਂ ਖਿੱਤੀਆਂ

[Early morning, dayspring, morning meal time, late afternoon/The lighting of the lamps, evening meal time, early hours of sound sleep, setting of the starry constellations]

Who can doubt the bounty and richness of a language in which such subtle distinctions are made between different times? One remains marveling how beautifully the wheel of time covers a complete cycle of day and night of twenty-four hours beginning with *dhammi vela* and ending with *dhaldian khittian*. Interestingly an equal number of different times are ascribed to day and night which suggests that the division is not simply an arbitrary division. Looking at it carefully, one can discern the transformational changes in every category apart from two liminal periods when day and night meet.

ਘੜੀਆਂ, ਪਹਿਰ, ਬਿੰਦ, ਪਲ, ਛਿਣ, ਨਿਮਖ ਵਿਚਾਰੇ
ਮਾਰੇ ਗਏ ਇਕੱਲੇ ਟਾਈਮ ਹੱਥੋਂ ਸਾਰੇ
ਸ਼ਾਇਦ ਇਸ ਲਈ ਕਿ ਟਾਈਮ ਕੋਲ ਟਾਈਮ–ਪੀਸ ਸੀ

[Poor minutes, quarters, moments, seconds, an instant, a trice /All these have been devoured by 'time' /And the simple reason perhaps is time's possession of 'timepiece']

Another ubiquitous fact that comes to the fore is that the division of time is perfectly in consonance with the daily rhythms of the agrarian mode of life. *Chhah vela, laudha vela, khaupia* refer to the time of meals, when a farmer working around the clock relaxes for a while and enjoys his food. Interestingly the progression of time is not a linear concept in Punjabi Society as it is in the West, rather it is cyclical. Man seems to be in tune, completely adapted, absorbed as a part of this natural inevitable movement of time. Hamlet's feeling "Time is out of joint" (Act I, Scene v, 210) seems almost inconceivable in this context as there is no feeling of displacement. The desire is not the desire of super human attempts to stop and control the inexorable march of time rather it is more akin to the Zen philosophy; it involves

moving in accordance with movement of the mighty time or *Kaal* as we refer to in Punjabi.

The same kind of complex richness is visible in the six different denotions used to represent the various lengths, of time - *gharian, paher, bind, pal, chhin, nimakh*. But what a pity as all these stretches are lost in the mist of modernity. The broad engulfing term 'time' has swallowed all these, thus putting an end to the subtle nuances contained in the various divisions. The answer to all the hows and whys related to the vanishing terms clicks to the writer in the last line of this part as he thinks that it can be perhaps attributed to time's possession of timepiece. The very words 'time' and 'timepiece' show the shift from the agrarian to the capitalist society. Guided by timepiece, a mechanical device the life of man too becomes mechanical in which the element of clever manipulation of time cannot be ruled out.

The ordered, natural, harmonious movement turns into a mechanical movement. Time keeping, book-keeping has been considered to be the distinctive technical feature of capitalism. There is a lot of stress in keeping all kinds of records. The typical example is that of Robinson Crusoe, a representative of capitalism. Interestingly the sole survivor of the wreck, marooned on an uninhabited island where survival is at stake, does not forget to keep the records. Along with his notes about his activities he cuts with a " knife upon a large post, in capital letters... making it into a great cross... up on the shore where (he) first landed – ' I came on the shore on 30th September,1659' " (www.online-literature) so as not to lose his reckoning of time for lack of pen and ink. According to the capitalistic outlook, with its emphasis on individualism, these are perhaps major factors with which "Crusoe turns his forsaken estate into triumph"(Watt 51) He may be more attractive as *homo economicus* to many but as Coleridge has put it very aptly, "Crusoe rises only.... in religion, in resignation, in dependence on and thankful acknowledgement of the divine

mercy and goodness" (300). It is this acceptance and resignation which makes Coetzee's Cruso in the counter-canonical text, *Foe* not to bother about keeping any such records. "Nothing is forgotten... Nothing I have forgotten is worth the remembering" (17), he tells Susan asserting his anti-capitalist stance. The simple reason is that he feels a part of the structure of the deserted island, absorbed thoroughly in it. In fact the image of Coetzee's calm, quiet Cruso hefting stones to build terraces for agriculture seems very close to any Punjabi farmer investing and working on his land. Both move naturally with the wheel of time rather than feeling tied to the wheel of time.

However, the most evident reason why the Punjabi words enlisted by Patar are going into oblivion is the power of English language, the language of the colonizer. Time, the ruler's expression maintained by 'timepiece', as important symbol of capitalist ideology silences all the voices with sounds like *dhammi vela... dhaldian khittian* thus eroding the very bedrock on which the cultural identity rests. Though the heyday of colonialism has receded, yet it dictates and dominates even today. We are still suffering from the feelings of inferiority we developed towards our own native languages as a result of making a fetish of English language. It is a sorry state to say that we have still not been able to slough off the colonized skin long after the British have left. It is understandable that now English has become world language and words like 'time' have become a part of our daily usage and culture: but how do we explain the injustice that is being done to our language in the process of modernization? The tragedy is that adoption of the word 'time' does not in any way enrich the treasure of our heritage, it rather depletes it.

The way the economy of the word time has finished the Punjabi terminology used to denote time, likewise the poet informs how the gushing water of tube well in its flow has washed away all such expression like-

ਹਰਹਟ ਦੀ ਮਾਲ਼ਾ, ਚੰਨੇ ਦਾ ਉਹਲਾ, ਗਾਡੀ ਦੇ ਹੂਟੇ
ਕਾਂਜਣ, ਨਿਸਾਰ, ਔਲੂ
ਚੱਕਲੀਆਂ, ਬੂੜੇ, ਭਰ ਭਰ ਡੁੱਲਦੀਆਂ ਟਿੰਡਾਂ

[The chain of buckets, the cover of the columns supporting the beam of the well, the swings of the bullock-driver's seat with the moving shaft /the resting beam on the side pillars of the well, the aqueduct channelizing the water, trough / the vertically rotating gear, the teeth of the gear, the spilling over of the filled buckets.]

Tubewell, again a symbol of modernization, severs man's ties with nature. Its mechanical operation with press button on/off, dependence on electricity hints at the indifference that is involved in its use as contrasted with *khooh* (well) though even *khooh* (well) is a mechanical device, yet here mechanism involved is very simple. All the devices used in case of *khooh* are home-made which presuppose a relationship with the carpenter, the blacksmith, the mason etc. etc: above all it presupposes dependence upon oxen without whose help water cannot be drawn. Everything personalized in it turns into the impersonal in tube well. The involvement and the pleasure in its slow working are lost in the flooding tube well. Given the rapid pace of modern technological development, Patar feels, this was bound to happen; it was destined as the forceful, corrosive stream of tube well water was bound to disintegrate the ensemble of *khooh* (well) and wash its parts away.

Anyways, if a concept like that of 'time' or some material object is lost to the ravages of time, it is not as shocking as the loss of terminology related to human relationships. Deeply shocked Patar refers to the lost terms of endearment like *ammi...abba...biji* and *bhapaji.* Not only that, broad terms like 'auntie' and 'uncle' have altogether replaced the well-defined kinship structures on which Punjabi society is based. Is it the lure of the West that makes a community based society follow the West blindly as a model knowing fully well that it is a highly individualized society unaware of the intricacies of the human

relationships? The fact is that the feeling that the westerns are superior to us is embedded deep in our minds. As such our minds still continue to remain colonized even when we have been able to overthrow the colonizer politically. Making one's self free from these mind-forged manacles seems to be a real tough task.

From words the poet moves to sentences pointing to the shocking impurities and deterioration which in no way can be referred to as flexibility or productive features of the language ready to borrow, assimilate and develop it. In a sentence of ten words four key words have been picked up from English-

ਤੇ ਕੱਲ ਕਹਿ ਰਿਹਾ ਸੀ ਇੱਕ ਛੋਟਾ ਬਾਲ
ਪਾਪਾ ਆਪਣੇ ਟ੍ਰੀ ਦੇ ਲੀਵਜ਼ ਕਰ ਰਹੇ ਨੇ ਫ਼ਾਲ
[And yesterday a little child was saying
/"Papa, all the leaves of our tree are falling"]

Except a pronoun the remaining words are only conjunctions from the native language. Let me put it in another way; English words are at the centre and Punjabi on the periphery. Such a jumbled expression clearly brings out the pitiable plight not only of Punjabi language but even of English. Nevertheless the world language does not face a threat from minority community as there are masses to save it; the real danger is to the language of the minority.

In a state of utter helplessness, the speaker turns to *Rabb*,

ਹੁਣ ਤਾਂ ਰੱਬ ਹੀ ਰਾਖਾ
ਮੇਰੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਦਾ
[Now only God save
/My Language]

but only to discover that he too is in the same desolate, deserted state facing the threat of extinction. Here Patar points to the compulsions out of which the most important is hunger that makes people migrate and take shelter in 'God'. How natural and spontaneous our responses have become is exemplified when Patar swears by God in a consciously unconscious way-

ਮਰ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ ਮੇਰੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ
ਮਰ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ ਬਾਈ ਗੌਡ
[My language is dying.
/'By God', It's dying]

This suggests that we have travelled a long way and reached a point where at times even the need to be conscious of this fact is not really felt. The poet deliberately uses the imagery of destruction, disintegration, fall and death to draw our attention to the way the language is being overshadowed by English, neglected by its own people impulsively or compulsively and hence is on its way to death.

In the second section Patar argues with his alter ego which tries to answer so many unsaid but implied queries. A counter argument is given saying that where there is a question of survival, the question of language does become quite secondary. When survival is at stake, then the issue of language or for that matter even of identity becomes insignificant. But it doesn't resolve the issue rather raises another counter query:

ਕੀ ਬੰਦੇ ਦਾ ਜਿਉਂਦੇ ਰਹਿਣਾ
ਜ਼ਿਆਦਾ ਜ਼ਰੂਰੀ ਹੈ
ਕਿ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਦਾ?
[Whether the survival of human beings is important
/Or the survival of the language?]

Language no doubt is made for man, so he must survive whether his survival comes first or later as a corollary to the survival of language. However what worries Patar is that if our struggle for survival has become the struggle of the primitive man in the modern day then what kind of a development is this that would put an end to the human element in man?

ਉਹ ਜਿਉਂਦਾ ਤਾਂ ਰਹੇਗਾ
ਪਰ ਕੀ ਉਹ ਬੰਦਾ ਰਹੇਗਾ?
[No doubt he will survive
/But will he remain human?]

Man's endeavour throughout has been not only to live but to live meaningfully which is the real impelling force behind all his struggles. Another answer comes though in the form of a question only when Patar tries to explain the impulsions of the younger generation and compulsions of the older generation who cannot mercilessly force youngsters to board the doomed ship of Punjabi language as now he feels even God has failed in resisting tide of English and has adopted it as His official language:

ਤੁਸੀਂ ਆਪ ਹੀ ਦੱਸੋ
ਹੁਣ ਜਦੋਂ
ਦਾਣੇ ਦਾਣੇ ਉੱਪਰ
ਖਾਣ ਵਾਲੇ ਦਾ ਨਾਮ ਵੀ
ਤੁਹਾਡਾ ਰੱਬ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਹੀ ਲਿਖਦਾ ਹੈ
ਤਾਂ ਕੌਣ ਬੇਰਹਿਮ ਮਾਂ ਬਾਪ ਚਾਹੇਗਾ
ਕਿ ਉਸ ਦੇ ਬੱਚੇ
ਡੁੱਬ ਰਹੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਦੇ ਜਹਾਜ਼ ਵਿੱਚ ਬੈਠੇ ਰਹਿਣ?

[You only tell me
/Now when
/Your God too inscribes the name on each grain in English
/Then what ruthless parent would wish that their children
/Stay in the sinking ship of language]

If this is the Almighty's state, then one can well imagine the powerlessness of the common man. A mother's short-sightedness which is but an outcome of emotionality is quite understandable when she wants that her offspring should survive irrespective of the survival of language. Her condemning words though are excusable as they are surcharged with her motherly love,

ਜਿਉਂਦਾ ਰਹੇ ਮੇਰਾ ਬੱਚਾ
ਮਰਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਮਰ ਜਾਏ
ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਬੁੱਢੜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ

[May my child survive!
/Let your aged language die
/If it's to die]

Yet one wonders where is that true sacrificing spirit like

that of Mata Gujri gone? The truth is that the old values are vanishing fast. Whatever may be the justifications, the reality is that we are being ruled by the Western ideology with its stress on individualism thus striking at our own roots and demolishing the hard built societal structures.

Whatever may be the reasons social, political or economic, the fact is that we alone are responsible for the crumbling structures of our language. Though Patar is worried not only for Punjabi language, but for its people as well yet he doesn't despair; he rather hopes and prays for its bright future in the last and the third section of the poem. The true fighting spirit of Punjabis, fighting to the hilt manifests itself in this part. Suddenly, he is able to free himself from the polemics that occupied his mind in the first two sections and becomes optimistic thinking that if God cannot help; *Satiguru* (True guru) would come forward as its saviour-

ਸੂਫ਼ੀ, ਸਤ, ਫ਼ਕੀਰ
ਸ਼ਾਇਰ
ਨਾਬਰ
ਆਸ਼ਕ
ਯੋਧੇ
ਮੇਰੇ ਲੋਕ

[*Sufis*, Saints, *Fakirs*
/Poets
/Rebels
/Lovers
/Warriors
/My people]

They will be the pillars of strength. Surjit Singh aptly says, "Patar.... is not a prophet of doom but concludes the poem on a characteristic hope"(276). Patar firmly holds on to the belief that in crisis these Messiahs would save it. This in any way doesn't mean that the responsibility is of the select few only whe are devoted and ready to sacrifice and that there is no role that the common people have to play.

One should not miss the last two words of this para *Mere Lok*. Who are these? - People imbued with heroic sprint, committed, ready to lay down even their lives to secure their dignity. As long as these guardians are there, they will shield the language-

ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੇ ਮਰਨ ਬਾਅਦ ਹੀ ਮਰੇਗੀ
ਮੇਰੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ
[Only after them
/My language will die]

This language will vanquish only after they vanquish. The hope is endorsed with the possibility of the idea that it may emerge more powerfully with a renewed vigor after facing all these threats and challenges. Being the language of self sacrificing people like them, he feels, it has the potential to rise as phoenix does from its ashes-

ਇਹ ਵੀ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ
ਕਿ ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਮਰਨਹਾਰ ਹਾਲਤਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਘਿਰ ਕੇ
ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਮਰਨਹਾਰ ਸਥਿਤੀਆਂ ਦਾ ਟਾਕਰਾ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ
ਹੋਰ ਵੀ ਜਿਉਣਜੋਗੀ
ਹੋਰ ਵੀ ਜੀਵਿੰਤ ਹੋ ਉੱਠੇ ਮੇਰੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ
[This is also possible;
/ That besieged by such killing conditions
/To counter these killing situations
/It may leap to life
/Become even more vibrant]

Apart from colonization, the movement across borders in search of greener pastures has forced Punjabis to turn away from their mother-tongue. The poet wonders at the sweeping social change that is coming in Punjab and Punjabi language. In this context 'Aia Nand Kishore' is more important. Interestingly more important than the coming of Nand Kishore are the intentions of the Punjabis to leave Punjab and settle abroad. As such two comparative narratives go into the construction of the poem making it thematically very profound and rich. The author is very clear that it is the economic compulsions that have forced Nand Kishore to migrate along with his family from Bihar to

Punajb. It is a movement from a poor state known for scarcity to a rich, prosperous and one of the top ranking states in the country. An obvious, simple reason in this case is to earn his living and fulfill the basic needs. As Surjit Singh puts it very aptly that Nand Kisore "... comes to Punjab with the modest expectations to make both ends meet..."(275). It is relatively a restricted kind of a movement across state borders within the same country for sustenance. As the poet says-

ਪਿੱਛੇ ਪਿੱਛੇ ਰਿਜ਼ਕ ਦੇ
ਆਇਆ ਨੰਦ ਕਿਸ਼ੋਰ
ਚੱਲ ਕੇ ਦੂਰ ਬਿਹਾਰ ਤੋਂ
[In pursuit of livelihood
/Came Nand Kishore
/All the way from Bihar]

The real motive is to fight hunger and earn bread and butter. The other avenue that opens with migration is education for the next generation. When Madhuri his Punjab-born daughter starts learning ??? ??? (*oora, aira)* in the village school, the poet relates it with the need.

ਕਿੰਨਾ ਗੂੜ੍ਹਾ ਸਾਕ ਹੈ
ਅੱਖਰਾਂ ਦਾ ਤੇ ਰਿਜ਼ਕ ਦਾ
[How thick is the relationship
/Of''alphabets' and 'livelihood'?]

The movement, the mode of adaptation, learning language other than the mother-tongue, desire for assimilation, everything is justified as survival at stake. In contrast are the grandsons like Achhar Singh who are materially affluent, and are sent to a convent school to learn the English language indicating a deliberate refusal to learn Punjabi. However even this choice is not without compulsion though the relationship worked out here is not between that of ਅੱਖਰਾਂ ਤੇ ਰਿਜ਼ਕ ('alphabets' and 'livelihood') ਅੱਖਰਾਂ ਦਾ ਤੇ ਰਿਜ਼ਕ ਦਾ ('alphabets' and 'ambition'). This, according to T.S. Gill, is ".....careerism, desire to migrate to the greener pastures for making the best of the globalization, privatization and liberalization that are largely responsible

for the desertion of Punjab and Punjabi" (208). This is the visible impact of globalization impelling people to look for better futures in alien lands. No doubt this is a process of social change but a change that is impacting not only our language, but our world view, our culture and our identity. The tragedy is that the remains of cultural heritage saved from the colonizer are being eroded in the emergent play of globalization which perhaps is only another name for colonization/ imperialism. This does make one wonder – how far have we succeeded in our postcolonial agenda to wrest control over language from the colonial authority after sixty years of independence?

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Human beings have a great chance in a novel. - E. M. Forster

The poet is a liar who always speaks the truth. - Jean Cocteau

Poets die in different ways: most of them do not die into the grave, but into business or criticism. - Robert Frost

A poet is not an author, but the subject of a lyric, facing the world in the first person. -Boris Pasternak

'Golmolization' of the Punjabi Ethos
Simulation as Representation in *Bride and Prejudice*

Rajesh Kumar Sharma

The Punjabi diaspora has almost colonized the representational space of Punjabi film in recent years. The reasons are obvious. Historically poor in resources, the Punjabi film has found a redeemer in the NR(P)I, the Non-Resident (Punjabi) Indian. The conversion rates of currency being quite high, a low-budget film can bring a good deal of pounds and dollars. And for bonus, you can relish the gratification of being in the international circuit. At home too, people enjoy the spectacle of diasporic experience: it catches their inflammable fantasies of the lands of plenty beyond the seven seas, even as it brings them live the sorrows of their beloved people in exile. And so the films often succeed commercially even when they are cinematographically amateurish. *Ji Ayan Nu* and *Asa Nu Maan Watanan Da* are cases in point.

In the diasporic context the destiny of the qualifier 'Punjabi' is unlikely to emerge out of the shadows in the foreseeable future. The dispersal of 'Punjabiat', or Punjabi ethos, along the axes of deterritorialization and globalization evokes ambivalent sentiments. While the Punjabi culture appears to be an important stakeholder in the emerging global cultural order, the skeptics would have the costs calculated, arguing that the so-called global conquests of the Punjabis necessarily come at a price. And the price could be incalculably high and difficult to assess because it is intangible. It could mean spiritual attenuation, cultural contamination, or plain homogenization. Ostensibly there is space for the articulation of differences, but this is so only within permissible limits and only within an economy of

sameness. Dissemination, or desemenation, or (de)same/nation? The emerging condition forces a severe crisis of signification.

Since the world, to a postmodern mind, is not supposed to exist *essentially*, one may – out of respect for the discursive protocol – not speak of any Punjabi essence. Yet it can be a lesson for cultural survival, with reference to the historical formation called the Punjabi ethos, to read the order of appearances for the sign of things to come.

The hybrid neologism "golmolization" in the title of this short essay is intended to capture simultaneously the operations of homogenization, erasure and evasion in the politics of cultural globalization. The Punjabi and Hindi proverbial expressions such as "*gol kar jana*"' and "*golmol jawab dena*", respectively meaning "to gobble up something or make something disappear" and "to evade a clear reply", interlock quite suggestively and productively with "globalization" to afford a critical insight into the nature of a certain "global" kind of cinematic representation of the Punjabi ethos in our times.

The idea of a Gurinder Chadha, a global filmmaker of Punjabi descent, re-scripting the *firangi* Jane Austen's canonical novel into a popular film of romantic cultural-racial encounter seems at first thought to be endlessly flattering to the Punjabis in particular and the South Asians in general.[1] Some postcolonial theorists are likely to even sight here a rich harvest of contestatory cultural production.[2] But a close look even at the title of the film – not to speak of the film itself – hints at rather ominous undertakings: what is potentially postcolonial discourse of resistance is co-opted in the service of a neoliberal, neocolonial global cultural order.

The traffic of signification in *Balle Balle: From Amritsar to L.A.* (the hybrid title of the Hindi version of the film), for instance, has a direction that implies not only the relatively unequal positions of Amritsar and Los Angeles in the global hierarchical order but also a celebration of departure *from* a

particular location and arrival *at* another. This operation (of signification) is part of a larger and subtler movement that is indicated by the substitution of "pride" with "bride" in the title of the film in English: Jane Austen's ironic take on the patriarchal investment in the institution of matrimony in the English society of her time is suppressed in the interest of a vacuously interesting mating game with elaborate ethnic frills. The conflict – that attends on the playing out of the game – and its resolution reduce a wider historical conflict to a mere "prejudice" that is not so much overcome as brushed quietly under the conscience. Lalita's (Aishwarya Rai) unsettling questions about racism and Western hegemony posed to William Darcy (Martin Henderson) never get answered. They just evaporate when Darcy's personal character is discovered by her, curing her of her "prejudice" against him in particular and against the West in general. This conflation of the historical with the personal covers the event of colonial (and neocolonial) rape with the non-event of an inter-racial wedding performed with the paraphernalia of a typical Western tourist itinerary: the man comes beating a dhol on his friend's wedding to carry away his own bride-prize on an elephant through the lanes of – no, not Kerala, but – Punjab. In the process, the various historical, cultural and racial conflicts that the film had managed to expose are suppressed in the patriarchal resolution of wedding. It is as if nothing else matters so long as a man and woman's *supreme destiny* can be realized. Indeed, Lalita's critical acumen seems – in retrospect – to have existed for one purpose only: to qualify her to be a white man's bride.[3]

The two establishing shots of the film are emblematic of the underlying cultural-ideological structure of the film. The first is the opening shot of the Golden Temple. This is a long-distance shot, taken from a stationary position but moving quickly in time. The illusion of movement in time, from an early dark to a bright morning, is obviously

managed through digital manipulation of the image. The image rapidly transforms pixel by pixel into daylight. Here is the technologically simulated time. And since the reverse sequence too could be manipulated equally well, you will not ever know which image is the real one – that in the first frame or the one in the last. The other establishing shot is of the famous agricultural fields of Punjab. Mr. Bakshi (Anupam Kher) is giving some instructions to an old-looking man, a rural Punjabi Sikh, and addressing him as Bhaiyya-ji, not Bhaiya-ji – as the correct mode of address should be (the former is used in Punjab to address an immigrant labourer from the eastern states of India). Significantly, this is the only time we see Mr. Bakshi against a background of fields: elsewhere he is throughout shown living in a bungalow – with a colonial façade – in the heart of the city, without even so much as a hint of a farmer's lifestyle and manners. Indeed, the bungalow serves as more than a nostalgia item for the white English audiences. It metaphorizes, in reverse, the heart of the film as a contemporary diasporic artifact: the façade of critical postcoloniality with colonial interiors.

The fabrication doing duty for the Punjabi ethos in the establishing shots paves the way for the entire film's unrolling and makes its representational value suspect. Indeed, it can be argued that simulation has been used here to produce the effects of representation. As a result, what you get to glimpse is not the Punjabi ethos (as in Gulzar's *Maachis*) but a designer ethos for global consumption, on display in a cultural shopping mall of exotic ethnicities. Having been "designed" for niche audiences, it can conveniently accommodate *garba* alongside *bhangra*. And it has space for guitars and Goan nightclubs but certainly not for traditional wedding songs of Punjab.

Perhaps it would not be incorrect to describe Chadha's film as an exemplar of the Indian diaspora's version of Orientalism. A careful spectator can see Chadha's own

prejudices in her discriminatory framing of spaces. The camera catches the landing at Amritsar airport from behind the concrete limbs of buildings under construction. Later you see the bazaars of the city with their squalor and chaotic traffic. Nowhere in the film do you see the well-planned urban spaces of Amritsar. In comparison, London is first captured aerially and then on its exclusive tourist circuit. And Los Angeles is no more than a luxury hotel owned by the Darcy family and an eerily quiet neighborhood. The underside of Western urban spaces never finds its way into the diegetic frame.

The representation of characters too is determined by Chadha's diasporic-Orientalist gaze. All the four Bakshi daughters are stereotypes. Lalita is intellectually sharp, Jaya docile and conventional, Maya unselfconsciously silly and Lucky juvenile. Mrs. Bakshi is a perpetually anxious mother whose single aim is to find husbands – suitable or unsuitable – for her daughters. Mr. Bakshi is a liberal-minded, loving dad. Mr. Kohli is an extreme caricature: an idiot who has made it big in the U.S. but nevertheless the dream of parents who have marriageable daughters. Darcy is a cardboard cutout, with an immobile face and the awkward movements of a still photographer's model who has been coaxed into acting.

It is intriguing that the Western characters are all working people. Even Darcy's mother is a successful business woman. Darcy himself remains extremely busy, even when he is holidaying. The Bakshis seem to be, in comparison, born idlers. There are muted hints of Mr. Bakshi's occupation, which seems to be farming, but it is never emphatically brought out as it is in the case of the people from the other side of the world.

The meeting ground between characters from the East and the West is Lalita, played inevitably by Aishwarya Rai. Lalita takes interest in her father's work, carries herself with dignity, and is well-informed in history and cultural politics. And Rai, with soft green eyes, extraordinarily fair skin and

fluent English, is the closest an Indian woman could get to represent the Western stereotypes of feminine beauty.[4] As the former Miss Universe, she is – symbolically – a racially and culturally globalized but disenfranchised Indian. A global ambassador of a global order. Her wedding to a white man does not really threaten either the Asian subject or the Western, because her action would not provoke sharp prejudices in either part of the world.

How do Lalita and Darcy solemnize their wedding? With Christian rituals or with Hindu rituals? The film passes silently over this fact and shows instead the two riding a decked-out elephant with a JUST MARRIED poster. The feudal princely India, the British Raj and the post-reform India with its resurgent tourism come together in the spectacle. But they come together only as depthless images without histories. Like the actors who represent Punjabi characters in the film, but who are themselves anything but Punjabi.

Notes

1. A reading of Gurinder Chadha's interview (with its subtext) in which she identifies herself should be instructive: "I am English. When I speak in Punjabi, I seem very Indian."
2. Suchita Mathur is of the opinion that the film enacts, through its specific intertextuality as hybridity, "postcolonial subversion" or "reversal". Nevertheless, it fails as a "politically enabling" project because it is constrained by "contemporary Bollywood's implicit ideological framework" which is defined by patriarchy and cultural nationalism. My argument, among other things, is that it is mainly the film's neocolonial complicity that undercuts its critical-postcolonial pretensions.
3. Mathur's reading that "[the] cultural snobbery of the West is effectively challenged by Lalita" is not convincing as it does not address the implications of Lalita's inconsequential "challenge".
4. Mathur's contention that "[the] East-West union in Aishwarya Rai's portrayal of Lalita as a modern woman destabilizes the stereotypes" is very insightful. But Mathur does not address the nature of the destabilization, which is not emancipatory but only reinforces the inequalities of the neocolonial global cultural order.

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The soul of man does violence to itself, first of all, when it becomes an abscess and, as it were, a tumour on the universe, so far as it can. For to be vexed at anything which happens is a separation of ourselves from nature, in some part of which the natures of all other things are contained. In the next place, the soul does violence to itself when it turns away from any man, or even moves towards him with the intention of injuring, such as are the souls of those who are angry. In the third place, the soul does violence to itself when it is overpowered by pleasure or by pain. Fourthly, when it plays a part, and does or says anything insincerely and untruly. Fifthly, when it allows any act of its own and any movement to be without an aim, and does anything thoughtlessly and without considering what it is, it being right that even the smallest things be done with reference to an end; and the end of rational animals is to follow the reason and the law of the most ancient city and polity. - Marcus Aurelius

You wretched mockers! do you take pleasure
When someone suffers whom you once thought great?
And do you take him to be easy booty,
The strong one, once he's weakened?
His fruit has fallen ripe upon the earth; it tempts you;
Believe me, not all ripens for the likes of you. -
Holderlin, *The Death of Empedocles*

Book Review

Ajmer Rode

Sonata for Four Hands
By Amarjit Chandan

Arc Publications, 2010
Pages 130 (soft and hard bound editions)
ISBN 978 1906570 35 4

Sonata for Four Hands is a bilingual anthology of poems by Amarjit Chandan, a leading Punjabi writer with several volumes of poetry and prose to his credit. *Sonata for Four Hands* is his second book in English – the first was a chap book, *Being Here* - and is published by Arc Publications of the UK in soft and hard bound editions, something not very common in poetry publishing these days. The cover painting is done by UK artist Gurvinder Singh.

Sonata, in western music, is a piece played on one or more instruments. Beethoven's Sonata #5 can be played with four hands: two on piano, two on violin. Amarjit's poetic sonata also employs four hands; two for Punjabi, two for English, and seems richer than the two-hand one: English readers can have a feel of the Gurmukhi script besides enjoying the poetry. Those engaged in translation can see how the collaboration of the author with translators turns into a beautiful work. The book is introduced and edited by London based English writer Stephen Watts who digs into Chandan's poetry and brings out nuggets we had not seen before.

One of the delights of the book is the foreword by John Berger of the *Ways of Seeing* fame. It is no pat-on-the-back preface by a great writer. Berger tells us that a poet can extend a felt moment to oceanic dimensions or reduce it to a reflective crystal. But Chandan, says Berger, does none of these: Instead, he folds time in a way that "the listener or reader is encircled by a multiplicity of times." Berger compares these folded times to curled-up space-time

dimensions of the String Theory loops. To illustrate his point he picks up Chandan's poem "To Father" which may strike a conventional reader as a sentimental lyric moving back and forth in Newtonian space and time, not even in Einstein's space-time continuum. Berger, however, has his own 'ways of seeing' things and surprises us by drawing on the String Theory whose curled-up dimensions, if proven, will be billion times smaller than Chandan's folded times. It is perhaps the first time someone has seen poetry so vividly in the dance of sub-atomic loops. The great thinker inspires us wander the deepest level of our existence however scary and uncertain it seems.

These poems express Chandan's experiences in Punjab as well as in the UK and represent his poetry and world view fairly well. They seem to balance intelligence, intellect and sentiment, and urge the reader to go slow. The author seeks his roots, acknowledges his ancestors, respects his background, loves his mother tongue and reflects on culture and happenings around him. However, his poems written during his early revolutionary days are not represented in this volume. In my view some of these poems are among his best - not loud political ramblings as one would expect.

Prison: some impressions

A dozen steel rods
four walls
and a piece of the sky above.
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This is not a day but a djinn!
We stare into each other's eyes
He doesn't give up
Nor do I.

(Translation: A. Rode)

Several translators, Julia Casterton, Shashi Joshi, Amin Mughal, Ajmer Rode, Stephen Watts and John Welch have contributed to the work. Most of the translators themselves

happen to be poets. Stanley Kootz (in his note on the translations of *Poems of Akhmatova*) says when the translator is a poet he faces a paradox: One voice enjoins him: "Respect the text!" The other simultaneously pleads: "Make it new!" Fortunately in the case of *Sonata For Four Hands*, Kootz' paradox did not hamper the work as the author himself collaborated with the translators to strike the right balance in most cases.

And there is the famous quote by Robert Frost: "Poetry is what gets lost in translation." It is hard to disagree with Frost, but then translation is the only art that enables poetry to cross the language barriers. In some cases the original does lose a lot, in others the translation could be as good as the original or even better. The English language seems to have done very well in translating poetry from other languages. Some years ago, I asked a Sanskrit scholar teaching at the University of British Columbia to recommend me some good Hindi translations of the Upanishads. He said the recent English translations are better than the Hindi ones. As is well known, Upanishads are in Sanskrit poetry. I think translations in *Sonata For Four Hands* read as good as the originals.

Chandan has written a lot in recent years and has composed some of the best poems in contemporary Punjabi poetry; they deserve an international audience. The publication of *Sonata For Four Hands* is very welcome indeed. I would like to quote Stephen Watts' last para that best sums up this brief introduction:

"It cannot yet be said that Chandan's work holds the place it deserves within British poetry. But *Sonata for Four Hands* – the first bilingual volume of a Punjabi poet ever published in the UK –will give readers wider access to his work, and allow a deeper assessment of his place as a writer of international stature and his significance as a poet living in Britain today."

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Book Review

Dharamjit Singh

Commonwealth

By Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt

Published by Belknap Press, Cambridge, 2009
Pages: 434

The world is in the midst of a global economic meltdown. The logic of 'financialization of capital' which has been sustaining the global economy for the last three decades has finally collapsed (Foster 77). As a result the efficacy of free market policies is being questioned once again. Simultaneously, the crisis has also proved those critics' right who have been opposing the policies of neoliberalism but whose voices have somehow been ignored consistently.

The neoliberal juggernaut gained momentum with the implementation of "structural readjustment policies" introduced by the World Bank and the IMF in response to the Keynesian welfare state model which was going through a phase of economic stagnation during the 1970s. Since then, the crisis has been spreading like an epidemic across the globe, wreaking havoc wherever the structural readjustment program was adopted. The program has basically resulted in a crisis of agricultural production and land, and of availability of clean drinking water. Most important of all, the neoliberal logic of the program has culminated in a global ecological crisis. In response to the crisis, which is essentially economic, the "multitude" has again and again come out on the streets to look for alternatives to the capitalist mode of social production.

In these dark times a book like *Commonwealth* by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt rekindles a hope among the people to make yet another attempt to build a better and safer world. The book gives them a chance to think that "another world is possible". The need is to act responsibly

and collectively. In the introduction to the book, the authors make it clear that the aim is to delineate the possibilities of constructing "an ethics of democratic political action within and against Empire" together with new "social relations and institutional forms of a possible global democracy" (Negri and Hardt vii). Their overall project, starting with *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004), does not provide any ready-made solutions, yet it is capable of providing an orientation and an approach which are needed by social movements spread across the world at the present juncture.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of really existing socialism during the 1990s, the liberals truly went on the offensive to rebuke those who talked about any kind of alternative to capitalism and, in haste, proclaimed the "end of ideology" (Bell xi). Capitalism seemed to have won the Cold War, and since then it has been hailed as the only possible economic and social mode of organization that is capable of delivering goods to people all over the world. In a world hostile to anyone who criticized capitalism's neoliberal logic, spoke of any alternatives, a number of studies, both for and against capitalism appeared on the scene. Amidst the debates and analyses coming from various strands of Marxism to make sense of the current state of capitalism in terms of what has changed and what has remained the same in its internal dynamics, Negri and Hardt's works in the shape of *Empire* and *Multitude* has hit the intellectual and radical circles like a tsunami.

Negri is an Italian Marxist Philosopher, one of the founding members of theoretical groups like *Operaismo* and *Autonomia*. Hardt is an American literary critic who specializes in Italian literature and is a former student of Negri. The two have collaborated over the last decade on a project to articulate the present global capitalism-induced problematic, its contradictions, fissures, the changing nature of the production process and its implication for social modes of life, and the possible ways of resistance.

Empire was arguably the first book which, after a long wait, systematically attempted to theorize the post-communist capitalist world from a leftist perspective. In this much discussed and widely debated book, Hardt and Negri developed their argument about the rise of a new kind of global economic and social order which they termed as 'Empire'. According to the authors, Empire consists of dominant nation-states, global economic and political institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, and the United Nations, multinational corporations, NGOs and media conglomerates all working together and constituting this new global order with no centre or sovereign power to direct the logic of exploitation from the top. In this new world order, power is dispersed and located among different nodes in a network. In 2004, Negri and Hardt came out with their second book entitled *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire,* which carried forward their project. In this book, they attempted to theorize and articulate the nature and structural organization of popular struggles taking place within the confines of Empire. Their argument was that the political subject who is capable of radical transformation in today's world is not, as was traditionally the case, the working class, but it is the emerging *multitude*. *Multitude* is defined as a "multiplicity of singularities"; sharing, collaborating and associating in a social field (represented by the metropolis in contemporary society), and participating in a social mode of production. It is immanent to any contemporary social field of collective participation and organization. Multitude has been traditionally thought of as chaotic and, as a concept, it is usually set against the classical notion of 'people', as conceptualized by Hegel, Thomas Hobbes and Jean Jacques Rousseau. The notion of people assumes a unity which can be represented by a sovereign power above and beyond people, be it a person or a party. Hardt and Negri differentiate the *multitude* from the crowd, the masses and other forms of collectivities also.

Commonwealth is thus the third book of a trilogy. The

central issue with which the book deals is the issue of private property as central to Empire. This is argued on the basis of an analysis of how the three great bourgeois revolutions of eighteenth and ninetieth centuries, namely the English Revolution, the French Revolution and the American Revolution gradually degenerated into "republics of property" through the establishment of the rule of law and the constitutional order. This is significant insofar as the analysis of private property as intrinsic to capitalist relations has been under wraps in most of the recent Marxist debates. Moreover, the book explicitly brings to light the class character of the neoliberal revolution taking place throughout the world. David Harvey corroborates Hardt and Negri when he defines neoliberalism as nothing but the restoration of class power. Secondly, the book sees slavery and colonialism as constitutive of the logic of modernity and capitalism. The authors speak of the rise of an alter-modernity based on this dangerous dialectic of modernity and tradition. Thirdly, the authors argue for the emergence of "the common". This "common" is different from "the natural common" which may be defined as the material wealth of the world, like the air, the water and other natural resources. The common can be understood as a construction of ideas, codes, information, knowledge, shared values and relations, modes of existence and affects as a consequence of the collective effort of the multitude, which are mandatory for any kind of social interaction to take place. The common should not be, or rather cannot be privatized or owned in any way. And lastly, the most important of all is the question of how to structurally organize diverse social struggles across the social plane into the force of multitude without lapsing into some kind of hegemonic party dictatorship and the building of institutions suitable to this "multiplicity of singularities". The book dwells on the changing nature of capitalist organization and production as both are mutating into new forms. The capitalist production is increasingly becoming biopolitical and its organization largely takes

place around the new metropolis. Now this biopolitical production is not about the production of commodities or goods, but about the "production of subjectivity" itself. For any kind of social change, the multitude, as the argument goes, has to invent new ways of social cohesion and participation so that alternative forms of the "production of subjectivity" can be fostered.

We can say that *Empire* offered an analysis of the global capitalist order, *Multitude* attempted to theorize the social agency capable of taking on this oppressive Empire, and *Commonwealth* argues for re-appropriating the common that has been constructed by the multitude and for demolishing the reign of private property. Acknowledging the novelty of their analysis in foregrounding the changing dynamics of capitalist mode of production and the social way of life organized around this 'biopolitical' mode of production, one should not however get carried away by the newness of capitalism. Some of the points which should be examined carefully are how far the nature of biopolitical production is actually global. In Latin America and most of the Third World, the nature of capitalist logic is quite different. The complexity of the political forces battling against this logic and their subsequent political configurations in these marginalized countries have to be taken into account to visualize any kind of emancipatory project. As Randhir Singh, invoking Marx, says, there are the countries which suffer from the development of capitalism proper and there are also other countries which suffer from the lack of capitalist development. If we look at the case of India, the so called emerging economic power of the twenty-first century, the reality is far more complex and mind-boggling. The logic of globalization has unleashed a new kind of re-organization of the economy where the service industry and knowledge economy are pressurizing the old economic structures. We are witness to the growth of industrial production, the presence of underdeveloped agrarian production and the much acclaimed rise of "weightless economy", all at the same

time. Although Hardt and Negri do acknowledge the fact that their argument is not that industrial production is unimportant or is absent from the recent logic of capitalistic production, what they seem to suggest is that the dominant mode of capitalist production is biopolitical. To what extent this is true in a place like India is debatable.

The point we need to take into account is that as a dynamic system of production, capitalism has the power to sustain itself in multiple forms across the world. The strength of capitalist dynamic is that it has the capacity to re-structure and reproduce itself through various resources, means and social relations. So the challenge is how to understand the present capitalist world in its "dynamics" across the horizontal plane of the society. We have to concentrate on the basic contradictions on which the logic of capital structures itself, and if we can dent those basic contradictions, we may be able to wage a struggle against the multiple forms of capitalism across the globe.

In the recent international Marxist scholarship, Hardt And Negri's book will be a valuable addition, and it adds to the list of excellent books on contemporary reality, namely William I. Robinson's *A Theory of Global Capitalism* (2004), David Harvey's *Spaces of Neoliberalism* (2005) and *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2007), Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2008) and Giovanni Arrighi's *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century* (2009). *Commonwealth* must be read alongside these books as it will enable a better understanding of capitalist dynamics and the political struggles that can be waged against the rule of capital in these times.

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Review Essay

Rajesh Kumar Sharma

The Sikh Memory: Its Distinction and Contribution to Mankind

By Gurbhagat Singh and Deepinder Jeet Randhawa

Published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 2009
Pages 144
Price Rs. 225

When Gurbhagat Singh told me a few months ago that he and Deepinder Jeet Randhawa had just brought out a book on "Sikh memory", I could not but again admire his untiring commitment to a life of the intellect. He has been producing, year after year, serious scholarly work. I told him I would soon read the book.

Read it I did, though not very soon. I went through the Introduction the day I got hold of the book. But then it lay there, on my bedside, for untold nights, unfinished and shut like some intrusive old gossip's mouth, making faces at me. I would have loved to read it to its last page with keenness, awe and thirst (such expectations I had of its principal contributor!), but the Introduction had left me distressed and too dehydrated for further adventure anytime soon.

There were minor irritants (but then is it not a minor irritant that can annoy you to the point of suicide?), such as a font-begotten sufficiency, an inelegant mixture of font sizes, bad proofreading, lack of a consolidated bibliography, and a structure that looked like uneven beads strung together by some clever vendor to overawe poor rustic kids. Besides, the translations of various terms made me uneasy. These looked like elaborate interpretations in the guise of exact translations. I am inclined to think that words are more than stand-ins for concepts and a translator has to beware of the temptation to conceptually overload a term. Should

he succumb to the temptation, he may end up depleting the term of its specific performative energy altogether.

Occasionally, yet not rarely, I came across sentences that had the appearance of notes hurriedly scribbled: "His son, who was educated in Europe, when comes to know that his father is not being allowed the death that the gods sanctify, to save family "honour", he himself dies" (35). Or the following:

> *By "traumatic events" here means, using the words of Hinsie and Campbell in their Psychiatric Dictionary, those events that cause "stimulation of such intensity that it cannot be mastered or adequately discharged". (65)*

Syntactical monsters of the kind sampled above are not mere slips of the finger on the keyboard. In other words, they are inexcusable in a book co-authored by a former Professor of English.

So I took my time to read, and then re-read, the book. I obviously had to – if only to overcome unforeseen and overwhelming allergies.

*

I have often felt that the kind of work Gurbhagat Singh has been doing deserved far better (and polemical) notice than it has received. Arguably, it never found the right intellectual climate. To make sense of the long and ostensibly complex 'project' of Gurbhagat, one requires the skills of a conceptual cartographer. Not many are perhaps equipped with the necessary skills, while most of those who are show little inclination to direct their energies to the unraveling of this project. In this short review essay, I cannot do more than indicate that German idealism, European (particularly post-War French) romanticism, avant-gardism, theological hermeneutics, Stalinism, postmodernist ethnocentrism and neo-racism are some of the principal sites which underlie Gurbhagat's intellectual-political itinerary. To make sense of *The Sikh Memory* as another milestone (if it is one) in that itinerary, one needs to register the linkages among these

and other sites. One would then notice that a certain postmodernist "depthlessness" (6) - to use Fredric Jameson's term - marks his itinerary as a functional requirement. And this carefully adopted "depthlessness" is the principal ingredient of the witch's brew to which Gurbhagat's project finally boils down – in the superficially amorphous but essentially crystal clear form of a certain kind of politics, a romantic politics of courted catastrophes.

There are several major problems with the way the book has been conceptualized and executed as a project. The foremost among these is its discursive paradigm, which may be best described as militaristic-managerial and which finds its clearest demonstration in Chapter 1 (particularly, page 29). It may be *the* current paradigm for neoliberal 'think-tank' intellectuals, but it sits rather ponderously and unnaturally among other contributions to the study of Sikhism. Hostage to adversarial and competitive binarism, the paradigm does not accommodate the supreme values of love, humility, service, generosity and popular (in the best sense) accessibility which, to my mind as a layman, are the glory of Sikhism as the lived faith of millions of people.

If combat and control are the key tropes of Gurbhagat's discourse in the book, its ruling flavour is a recycled version of avant-gardist theory, with the result that Sikhism is made to appear less as a practiced faith and more as a theoretical riddle answering solely to some 'intellectuals' wedded to drifting islands of the post-1960s Western theory. An expected consequence of such intellectual reduction of Sikhism is the *rational* mind's hubris from which gushes out a stream of verdicts unsupported by scholarly testimony or argument. These verdicts mark the Introduction and are also dispersed throughout the book:

> *The irreverent treatment of small cultures in the first part of the 20th century and the resistive but creative response that it invoked, [sic] have engendered a vital development. That development has activated cultural memory as a new and vigorous way of remembering. (9)*

A little further, one reads this: "Cultural memory, therefore, has been accepted as a new way of remembering and distinctly organizing knowledge" (9). Undocumented assertions like these violate the very preliminary norms of scholarship. Another scholar would have advanced them as tentative hypotheses and then proceeded to test them, instead of investing them with a questionable axiomatic aura which evaporates the instant these are exposed to attentive reading.

The central argument of the book is that "Sikh memory" (an infelicitous phrase, like "Sikh God", also employed by Gurbhagat, on page 10) constitutes a distinctive way of remembering. For one thing, the term "memory" is often used so loosely and non-specifically in the book that it often remains indistinguishable from "consciousness", leading to the impression that the choice of one term over the other is somewhat arbitrary. What, however, is totally arbitrary is the way collective cultural memory is conveniently conflated with individual memory. Whether it is a canny leap of scholarly faith or a routine sleight of hand, I cannot tell:

> *If we extend Endel Tulving's elaboration of individual memory, cultural memory can be defined as a "neuro-cognitive capability" of a collective that its members share to bring back to their minds/narrative/context, the past experiences, for re-determination. (19)*

It is significant that Gurbhagat does not mention the grounds on which one may "extend" Tulving's observation on individual memory to collective memory. In a similar vein, he 'decisively' speculates yet again: "The subregions of the frontal lobes that mediate the individual autonoesis, *we can believe*, also mediate the collective autonoesis" [*italics mine*] (36). A discerning reader would notice a quick slide from the individual to the community along a mythical passage that has been secretly laid in the form of the notion of the organic community implicit here.

The tendency to make unfounded assertions conceals

and therefore exposes the fragile and untested assumptions on which Gurbhagat's project stands and founders. The question, then, is: Why make such assumptions? What do these assumptions signify and reveal?

It is not difficult to see that treating a community of people as an individual preempts the challenges that would beset a rigorous scholar at the inaugural moment of such a seemingly scientific and historical project. (Georg Lukács points out in *The Destruction of Reason* how Gobineau used "pseudo-scientific phraseology" in the service of "purely intuitive, irrationalist, historical myth" to bring back the long discredited racial theory which culminated in Hitler (675). The empirical and theoretical challenges of 'collectivizing' memory can be conveniently overlooked with the help of an apparently innocuous metaphorical move which secretly installs organicism as a given in the very genesis (and hence elaboration) of the project. *Communities, like persons, are organic beings*: this founding myth of the project is supposed to 'answer' – by foreclosing – most of the fundamental questions that would trouble a more forthright scholar and problematize his study.

But that is not all. The strategically political nature of the metaphorical move becomes sharply clear when one remembers that organicism actually functions as a password for the installation of various (but all related) essentialisms, including vitalism, biologism, primitivism, blood, soil, birth, and their less indecent avatars in nationalism, culture, history and tradition. (Bataille's romantic predilection for primitivism, violence and blood, interestingly, fascinates Gurbhagat no end; see, for instance, page 23). The slippage between culture, history, blood and genes is too outstanding to be passed over in Gurbhagat's discourse:

> *... cultural memory is meta in the sense that it recognizably influences the individual memory of the members of its genetic culture to contradistinguish it from the individual memories belonging to other cultures. In psycho-physiological terms*

> *it can also be said that this memory is a non-volitional reflex, a conscious content that has become unconscious, it remains in the neural system of the individual as a differential survival mechanism, ready to be activated by a slight stimulus. [italics mine] (21)*

The text quoted above is a fairly representative specimen of Gurbhagat's discourse. Among the things one may note here is that he takes it for granted that culture is genetic; as such it is supposed to be made of genetic material; the material is believed to be deposited as sediment in the body; it remains there as a latent mechanism subject to a command-and control information system; and lastly, its identity is differential, not communitarian, with difference conceived as opposition.

Indeed, this route is traced by Gurbhagat's discursive logic again and again. The essential steps in that logic, insofar as it constitutes the fundamental structure of the present book also, are three: religion > culture > postmodernist ethnocentrism/neo-racism. Not that certain logical structures are forbidden; the problem here, instead, is that the structure in the present instance is not logical but arbitrary and self-contradictory. Gurbhagat wants to write about memory of the Sikhs as a religious community but he substitutes religion with culture – without going into its implications for his project. Religion and culture are not coextensive. The distinctions of religions do not hold as sharply in the domain of culture; in fact, a culture often accommodates several religions.

But the exigencies and protocol of current academic and political discourse obviously make him speak culture when he would feign speak religion. After all, culture is the most acceptable term used in our day to allude to the most unacceptable phenomena and modes of conduct. Sundry latter-day racisms, that I previously referred to as neo-racisms, nest comfortably in the capacious lap of culture. As Kevin Passmore remarks, with biological racism having

fallen into utter disrepute after the abominable acts of the Nazis, cultural racism has come to occupy its place in discourse. The racists no longer introduce themselves as racists but as champions of cultural difference (108). What obviously distinguishes them from the rational and democratic defenders of cultural difference is their tendency to assert this difference as essential, mystical and biological (for example, neural). They appear to affirm that difference is the precondition for democratic agency, yet they preempt agency by reducing the agent to a given essence.

If tradition and ruptures happily sit next to each other in Gurbhagat's discourse and if he commemorates Derrida's "devastating act of dememorization" (35) while simultaneously fetishizing memory, history and tradition, there is nothing surprising about it. Contradictions are the stuff such discourses are made of: José Ortega y Gasset has put it tersely, "Whichever way we approach fascism we find that it is simultaneously one thing and the contrary, it is A and not A..." (qtd. in Passmore, epigraph, n.p.). However, there is also a larger rationale in which the contradictions dissolve: in the discursive universe of this kind of logic, "dememorization" can be reappropriated as a peculiar kind of memory (but now it is termed "tradition"). Of course, the reader is expected to *naturally see what is obvious* – that this memory, or tradition, has only internal continuity; externally, it is separated from everything else by "ruptural violence" (a jetlagged borrowing from the avant-gardists) and exists in a vacuum (23). The problem with such an exercise in logic, however, is that the arbitrariness of the act of choosing or rejecting the continuities/ruptures cannot be covered by any mask of formidable jargon or pseudo-prophetic utterances. Just as no intellectual acrobatics can cover up a misappropriation of "difference", which in the Derridean scheme is constitutively disseminated/contaminated, as some pure essence!

The love of absolute, violent ruptures explains

Gurbhagat's stance towards other religions. In the process, Foucault's critique of *historical narratives* on behalf of the difference of and in *history* as such stands betrayed for the sake of a long dead metaphysics of origins. In order to proclaim his idea of the distinction of Sikhism, Gurbhagat merrily runs down Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. He likes to see these as monolithic, oppressive religions whose fate is sealed – and identically so – because they are all alike, even as the Sikhism of his reading is different *because* it is *unlike* them. The rich and enormous testimonies of the blossoming of the human spirit that the arts, philosophies and sciences inspired by these and other religions including Christianity have passed on to the world does not penetrate his carefully bounded field of vision. He reduces Hinduism to Shankara's commentary on *Brahmasutra* known as *Brahmasutrabhashya*, and that text to his own reading of it. He not only ignores Shankara's devotional and Tantric works, such as *Saundaryalahari*, but also the other schools of mainstream Hindu philosophy and the numerous lived forms and little local narratives of Hinduism. The poetry of *Rigveda* does not exist for him because he has either not read it or does not want to acknowledge its evocative power and this-worldly sublimity. While the British scholar Kim Knott, writing in 1998, recognizes that Hinduism is not a static and monolithic religion but "a matter of constant negotiation" (110) in which "various hinduisms exist in tension with one another" (113), Gurbhagat is content to reduce it to one particular Vedantic concept. Even Warren Hastings, needless to say, had a more open and liberal understanding of Hinduism, as evident in his note on Charles Wilkins' translation of *Bhagvad-Gita* (70).

Likewise, when Gurbhagat comes to Buddhism, he collapses all Buddhism into Nagarjuna's exposition of it (did Buddhism not exist before Nagarjuna?), before conflating Shunya with void, and sees Shunya as "co-dependently originated in the principle of Pratityasamutpada" – a sort

of Platonic formulation that makes no sense in the context of Buddhism, as even a primer on Buddhist philosophy will enlighten you. Furthermore, he proclaims – still without a ghost of reason – that "[t]his is the Absolute of Buddhism, the ultimate form of the world", and goes on to make probably the weirdest interpretation in the history of Buddhist hermeneutics, robbing the Buddhism of Nagarjuna of its distinction from Vedanta: "Only merging into this Absolute world formation with necessary transformation can lead to *Nirvana*" (42). In fact, he treats Buddhism the way he treats Hinduism – as homogeneous and monolithic formations, shorn of any internal diversity.

The worst treatment is reserved for Islam. (Is it because Islam is being shown by vested interests as standing today on the wrong side of history as that history is being written by the American empire?) To quote Gurbhagat:

> *From this angle of multiplicity and difference, the Islamic meta-sign of Allah was equally unitive or totalitive, in fact the word totalitarian can be used to describe it. (42)*

He yet again shuts his eyes to the vast internal diversity and wealth of a religion that no inventory can ever exhaust.

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In Gurbhagat Singh's hands, memory comes to look like a machine that recycles, reinvents, invents and erases data in response to requirements of the occasion: an almost flawless 'retrojective' apparatus of production and reproduction under late capitalism.

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The better part of the book for me are the two chapters on Sikh ardâs and Harimandar Sahib, both authored by Deepinder Jeet Randhawa. The chapter on ardâs has a section on the theory of memory. It largely repeats the contents of the first chapter written by Gurbhagat Singh, but in Randhawa's hands the theory of memory has more more clarity and coherence. I wish this chapter had been put at number one or two. Randhawa's writing has

conviction, modesty and rigour. Gurbhagat Singh deserves praise for having groomed a scholar who promises to contribute significantly to Sikh studies in particular and religious and cultural studies in general.

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Monumental history deceives through its analogies. It attracts the spirited man to daring acts with its seductive similarities and the enthusiastic man to fanaticism. If we imagine this history really in the hands and heads of the talented egoists and the wild crowds of evil rascals, then empires are destroyed, leaders assassinated, wars and revolutions instigated, and the number of the historical "effects in themselves," that is, the effects without adequate causes, increased once more. No matter how much monumental history can serve to remind us of the injuries among great and active people, whether for better or worse, that is what it first brings about when the impotent and inactive empower themselves with it and serve it. - Nietzsche

Contributors

Ajmer Rode has published several works of poetry, drama, and translation in Punjabi and English. *Leela*, co-authored with Navtej Bharati, is more than thousand pages and is included among important works of the twentieth century Punjabi poetry. He has written and directed about a dozen plays and is considered founder of Canadian Punjabi drama. He was awarded the best Overseas Author Award by the Punjab Languages Department in 1994. He lives in Vancouver with his family. (www.ajmerrode.ca)

Amarjit Chandan is a famous Punjabi poet who has published five collections of poetry, two books of essays in Punjabi and two collections of poetry in English. He has also edited and translated into Punjabi over thirty anthologies of poetry, fiction and creative non-fiction. He was selected by Andrew Motion, the British Poet Laureate, for the National Poetry Day celebrations in 2001. He lives in London, UK.

Archna Sahni has lived and studied in Kuala Lumpur, Mumbai, Toronto, Patiala and Chandigarh. Her doctoral thesis was on women in the Mahabharata. *First Fire* is her maiden book of poetry. Her poems have been published in leading literary journals such as *The Bombay Literary Review, Kavya Bharati, Poetry Chain, The Brown Critique,* etc. She is a recipient of the Agha Shahid Ali Poetry Prize (2001). Her interests include revisionist Indian history, spirituality, and Vedic astrology.

Ben Antao, a Canadian Goan based in Toronto, is a journalist and novelist. He has published five novels, several short stories, and non-fiction. *Blood & Nemesis, Penance, The Tailor's Daughter, Living on the Market, Images of the USA, Goa – A Rediscovery* and *The Lands of Sicily* are among his books.

Originally from Goa, **Brian Mendonça** is a traveler poet based in New Delhi. His debut volume was *Last Bus to Vasco: Poems from Goa* (2006). He is currently working on his second volume of poems, *A Piece of India: Poems in Transit.*

Dharamjit Singh is a research scholar with the Department of English, Punjabi University, Patiala (Punjab). He is working on the theory and practice of writing in the new media.

Gulzar Singh Sandhu is among the finest Punjabi writers. He received the Sahitya Akademi award in 1982. He has been a professor of journalism and mass communications also.

Harbhajan Singh Hundal is a prolific poet, writer and translator. He has introduced several great poets and writers to Punjabi readers through his translations.

Harminder Dhillon was trained to be an engineer, dabbled in journalism and publishing, and then studied law. He currently lives in Mississauga and practices law. He writes essays, prose-poems and verse poems in English and Punjabi.

Inde is a well-known Punjabi literary critic. After a stint as a teacher of English in a college, he worked for *Soviet Des* in New Delhi. He lives in New Delhi, leading a retired life dedicated to arts and literature.

A leading Punjabi poet. **Jaswant Deed** is a Bhartiya Sahitya Akademi Award recipient. He is currently working in a senior position at Doordarshan Jalandhar.

M. L. Raina is former Professor of English, Panjab University, Chandigarh. He is an eminent critic, famed teacher and brilliant literary essayist and reviewer.

A development worker by profession with the United Nations in New Delhi India and a Goan by birth, **Mary Mendes** is a woman of rare spirit who is always turning up situations for the cause of children. The monsoons have been a source of inspiration, and her passion has driven the course of her life. The plight of children and her relationships have inspired the writings. She writes under her maiden name and can be reached at <malyanpereira@yahoo.com>

Paramjit Singh Ramana is Professor of English at Punjabi University Regional Centre, Bathinda. He has translated several short stories from Punjabi into English. He has recently completed his translation of famous Punjabi novelist, Gurdial Singh's autobiography.

Rabinder Powar is Associate Professor, Department of English, Punjabi University, Patiala. She writes on diasporic literatures and multiculturalism. She has presented her work in various international and national conferences in Canada, US and India.

Raminder Grewal is a second generation Indo-Canadian writer. She lives in Richmond, British Columbia.

Rana Nayar is Professor of English at Panjab University, Chandigarh. He is a renowned critic, translator, poet and theatre artist.

Sadhu Binning has published fourteen books that include poetry, short stories, plays, novel, translations and research. He edited the literary monthly *Watno Door* and now co-edits *Watan.* He is the founding member of Vancouver Sath, Punjabi Literary Association and Ankur. He also founded Punjabi Language Education Association in Vancouver.

Shikha Kenneth is currently working on her PhD on literary representations of violence against women. She lives in Patiala (Punjab).

Swaraj Raj heads the Postgraduate Department of English, Government Mohindra College, Patiala. A doctorate in diasporic literature, he also writes on education, culture and theory. He is an amateur photographer whose work appears on and inside the covers of this issue. He lives in Patiala.

Surjit Patar is arguably the most celebrated poet writing in Punjabi today. He has recently been honoured with the *Saraswati Samman.*

Sutapa Basu is a writer, publisher, anchor, educationist and corporate manager. Currently, Head of Publishing, Encyclopaedia Britannica Pvt. Ltd., India.

Swaran Chandan is a renowned Punjabi novelist, poet and literary critic. He has published eight novels, six collections of short stories, two of poetry, and six books of literary criticism. He is the author of *The Volcano*, a novel in English on the Partition of India. He lives in UK.