

**LITERATURE AND SOCIETY : AN APPROACH TO  
THE NOVELS OF BHAI VIR SINGH.**

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment  
of the Requirement for the degree of -**

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**of the**

**CENTRE OF HISTORICAL STUDIES  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY**

**1981**

CENTRE FOR HISTORICAL STUDIES  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY, NEW DELHI.

DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled, Literature and Society: An approach to the Novels of Bhai Vir Singh, submitted by Harjot Singh Oberoi is in fulfilment of eight credits for the degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University and is his own work.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
Chairman

  
Supervisor.

Those who are shut in within one society, one nation or one religion, tend to imagine that their way of life and their way of thought have absolute and unchangeable validity and that all that contradicts their standards is somehow 'unnatural' inferior or evil. Those, on the other hand, who live on the borderlines of various civilizations comprehend more clearly the great movement and contradictoriness of nature and society.

Issac Deutscher: The Non-Jewish Jew and other Essays

This is the final blasphemy, the blight  
On all pure purpose and divine intent  
To dress the selfish thought, the indolent,  
In the priest's sable or the angel's white.

Gerald Gould.

Works of art however are like unattainable heights. We do not go straight toward them, but circle around them. Each generation sees them from a different point of view and with a fresh eye; nor is it to be assumed that a later point of view is more apt than an earlier one. Each aspect comes into sight in its own time, which cannot be anticipated or prolonged; and yet its significance is not lost, for the meaning that a work assumes for a later generation is the result of the whole range of previous interpretations.

Arnold Hauser: The Philosophy of Art History.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	1-11
I. LITERATURE AND SOCIETY	1-15
II. THE MAKING OF AN IDEOLOGUE	16-34
III. SOCIAL BASIS OF VIR SINGH'S FICTION	35-55
IV. IMAGES OF BHAJ VIR SINGH	56-81
V. BHAJ VIR SINGH'S NOVELS	82-103
VI. CONCLUSIONS	104-122
APPENDIX	123-124
BIBLIOGRAPHY	125-129

\* \* \* \* \*

\_A\_C\_K\_N\_O\_W\_L\_E\_D\_G\_E\_M\_E\_N\_T\_S\_

The debts which I owe both to individuals and institutions are far too many to list here, but some of them must be acknowledged. To be born within a tradition and question its socio-historical roots is not easy. One either tends to accept a tradition or rejects it outright without looking for any scientific/historical explanations. For me the choice was neither acceptance or rejection but the need to have an understanding of the culture (the totality of life) in which I was born.

I am not sure if I could have managed to do this on my own, but the opportunity to study at the Centre of Historical Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University certainly prepared me for such a task. Within the Centre I am especially indebted to Prof. Bipan Chandra who introduced me to the problems of historical research and helped me at many a critical juncture. An initial course by Prof. K.N. Pannikar on the History of Ideas, helped in the choice of a conceptual framework for the present thesis. The topic for the present dissertation came up during my discussion with Dr. Amrik Singh on the problems of Punjabi Literature.

The staff of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, the Indian National Archives, the Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, the Punjabi University Library and the India Office Library were extremely helpful. My special thanks go to Ms. Batalri and Sethi who introduced me to the Mohan Singh Collection at the Punjabi University. My personal thanks go to Professors Harbans Singh, Ravinder Ravi and Dalip Kaur Tiwana, who provided criticisms and suggestions for parts of this manuscript.

CHAPTER I  
LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

Increasingly it is being recognised, almost as an axiom, that a close relationship exists between society and literature. All literary endeavours bear the impression of the society from which they have emerged.<sup>1</sup> This is one reason which would obviously account for the differences between the literature produced in late nineteenth or early twentieth century England and the literature produced in India at this time. But what precisely is the relationship between society and literature? This innocent sounding question has aroused over the last two centuries a heated, acrimonious and to-date an almost unmanagable debate among writers, literary critics, historians and sociologists. Out of this debate has emerged what is commonly referred to as the sociology of literature.

The roots of this sub-discipline may be traced to the Ancients; but more directly to the Modern controversy which raged in late 17th century France and England. It was debated whether the literary creations of modern Europe

- 
1. For a detailed examination of relationship between literature and society see Hugh D. Duncan, Language and Literature in Society (Chicago, 1953), Ian Watt, "Literature and Society" in Robert N. Wilson ed., The Arts in Society (New Jersey, 1964) pp. 300-318 and Richard Hoggart "Literature and Society", The American Scholar, Vol. 35, no. 2, 1966, Milton C. Albrecht, "The Relationship of Literature and Society", American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 59, 1953-54, pp. 425-36.

were comparable to the masterpieces produced during the classical period in Greece and Rome. The debate was followed by the German idea of Kulturgeschichte, which looked at human culture as a whole, from a historical position.

In 1796, De Donald made his classic statement: "Literature is an expression of society".<sup>2</sup> Four years later a Frenchwoman Madame de Stael wrote an influential work, De la litterature considerée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales. Published in 1800, this volume discussed the relation of race and climate to literary styles, as well as effects of women and religion on art.

Under the sway of the doctrine of progress and a belief in the stages theory of development, Madame de Stael asserted that the literature of a society should be brought into harmony with its prevailing political beliefs. She believed that the rising republican spirit in French politics should be reflected in literature by introducing the figures of citizens and peasants into serious works, such as tragedies, rather than relegating them to comedies. In her view, literature should portray important changes in the social order, especially those which indicate movement towards the goals of liberty and justice. Her writings on this topic had wide influence during her life and for decades afterward.

---

2. Quoted in Ian Watt, op. cit., p. 301



Since Madame de Stael's work, a great deal has been written on issues concerning the linkages between society and literature, but the major propositions have been advanced by three schools. On the one hand are those who would avidly deny any linkages between society and literature.<sup>3</sup> They would argue against any mediation between social institutions, audiences, educational opportunity, nature of communication systems, available methods of living and literary activity.

This school, in its most elaborate form is represented by the Russian formalists and linguistic structuralists. Concerned with language as a social phenomenon, they deny that literature can be a social object. Fundamental to their literary methodology is the text itself, exclusive of reference to anything outside it.<sup>4</sup>

For a Formalist, a living language can do without literature, even though literature has its basis in the living language. To put it more explicitly, the Formalist school considers social relationships, myths and

---

3. F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis, Lectures in America (London, 1969), and Valdimar Nabokov, Lectures on Literature, ed. Fredson Bowers, (Harcourt, 1980).

4. T. Todorov, Preface to translation of Henry James, Ghost Stories (Paris, 1970), M. Foucault, R. Barthes, J. Derrida, et.al. Theorie d'ensemble (Paris, 1968), G. Genette, Figures I and Figures II (Paris, 1966).

ideologies as having no reality other than what obtains in a language or in everyday speech, which is the medium to express relationships, myths and ideologies. Yet in everyday experience, such meaning lies at the implicit level, most people act or live out their lives without considering it. Out of this duality of living experience, emerges literature, to unveil meaning and therefore the world of actuality. The act of telling a story can appropriate from the language of everyday use its hidden meaning, and hence the actual objects to which it refers, whether these be events, ideas or feelings. Literature expresses and brings to life the living content of words.

A further development of this argument is found in the schools of "new criticism" and semiology which contend that the life of the author, the producer, is irrelevant to interpret a literary text. Any attempts to focus on the author-as-source is to commit the "intentionalist fallacy", to deny "the richness of the text in its openness, its readability in the meanings that can be produced from it".<sup>5</sup> Indeed Ronald Barthes has gone so far as to insist that :

the author is a modern figure, a product of our society in so far as, emerging from the

---

5. Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, Language and Materialism (London, 1972), p.42.

Middle-Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, 'the human person'. It is thus logical that in literature it should be this postivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology which has attracted the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author'.<sup>6</sup>

Opposed to this viewpoint are those who staunchly profess and seek to demonstrate a direct, virtually a one to one relationship between society and literature, author and text.<sup>7</sup> Such an approach is supposed to be the hallmark of Marxist aesthetics. Although Marx himself "never fully developed a cultural theory"<sup>8</sup>, vulgar Marxists tend to portray all art as a direct reflection of the material basis of a society. The classic formulation in such an interpretation is that of base and superstructure.<sup>9</sup> An economic base it is argued determines all artistic production, which is part of the

---

6. Ronald Barthes, "The death of the Author" in Image-Music-Text (Glasgow, 1977), pp. 142-43.

7. For such a view within the Marxist tradition see Mao-Tse tung, "on Literature and Art", in Bevel Lang and Forvest Williams ed. Marxism and Art: Writings in Aesthetics and Criticism (New York, 1972), pp. 108-19. Leo Trotsky in an influential work on literature writes: "Before even a tremor of revolutionary presentiment could pass through Russian literature at the end of the last century and the beginning of this, history had to produce the deepest changes in the basis of economics, in land tenure, in social relations, and in the feelings of the masses" "Proletarian culture and Proletarian art" in Bevel Lang and Forvest Williams ed. Ibid., p.61.

8. R. Williams, Culture and Society (London, 1960), p.269.

9. For a learned discussion of base-superstructure model and its place in Marxist literary theory see R. Williams Marxism and Literature (Oxford, 1977), pp.75-82.

superstructure. For instance, Christopher Caudwell describes all modern poetry (that is, since the 15th century) as "capitalist poetry".<sup>10</sup>

Parallel to the explicitly economic aesthetic theory are those who project a relationship between arts and life in general. A recent sociological work by Joan Rockwell, asserts that "the patterned connection between society and fiction is so discernible and so reliable that literature ought to be added to the regular tools of social investigation". Literature can be shown to be "a product of society" she insists rather than "simply entertainment" or the result of private fantasy". Fiction is not only a representative of social reality" but also an agency of "social control" for it is important in the "socialization of infants, in the expression of official norms such as law and religion, in the conduct of politics" and it provides "symbols" in the domain of norms and values<sup>11</sup>.

---

10. Christopher Caudwell, Illusion and Reality (London, 1964), p. 55. Also see Max Raphael, Prundhan, Marx, Picasso: Three studies in the Sociology of Art (New Jersey, 1979).

11. Joan Rockwell, Fact in Fiction: The use of Literature in the systematic study of society (London, 1974), pp.3-4. For similar view see Pitrim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, (Boston, 1957), pp. 369-70 and The Crisis of our Age (New York, 1941), p. 30.

Fiction according to the non-Marxists who seek a mediation between the social and the literature is said to reflect society in that it provides a record of what certain people did - how they loved and married, grouped themselves into social classes, conducted various enterprises, and set up homes. Fiction has also revealed how people have thought about themselves and other matters, such as God, the family, politics and race. Fiction is further said to affect people's lives by helping them to form their own attitudes and values towards what has existed and what should exist.

Fiction seeks to be more than a picture of life. Novelists have wanted to point a moral directly or indirectly and offered a critique as well as a portrait. Novelists claiming to offer a "pure" portrait have necessarily limited points of view and goals, which limit their portraits correspondingly. When they offer critiques, however, they consciously select aspects of life that they want to comment on, such as poverty, hypocrisy, and the capacity for love or hatred. They deliberately emphasise these aspects at the expense of others. Thus, while revealing much of value concerning those elements of life that interest them, novelists necessarily ignore other elements that may interest their readers or other novelists. Fiction becomes a

compendium of what writers thought it important or even profitable to bring to the attention of prospective readers. As such it shows what authors take life to be and what they want their audience to take it to be.

Disillusioned by a straitjacketed view of literature, of late there has emerged a third approach, which flatly denies that literature is in anyway, economic or otherwise a direct reflection of society. According to one of its leading proponents, Raymond Williams, "There is no single relationship between the nature of a society and the character of its literature, but there are significant and possibly significant relations, which seem to vary with actual history .... the relations between literature and society can be seen to vary considerably, in changing historical situations. As society changes, its literature changes, though often in unexpected ways, for it is a part of social growth and not simply its reflection".<sup>12</sup>

Within India, except for efforts at what may be called, catching up with western paradigms,<sup>13</sup> no major indigenous effort has been made to study these issues.

---

12. Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution (London, 1975, reprint), p. 265. A similar viewpoint is expressed by Micheal Zereffa, Fictions: The Novel and Social Reality (Harmondsworth, 1976).

13. For such an attempt see M.P. Kohli, The Influence of the West on Panjabi Literature (Ludhiana, 1969).

This is understandable because the most influential genre of literature, the novel, has been imported from the west and, as a corollary, the critical apparatus to approach it has also been adopted from outside the country. Two disciplines, history and sociology, besides literature, which are eminently suited to study the linkages between Indian society and literature have failed to do so.

A possible explanation for this lag is that, firstly, the issues of Indian sociology and history have been formulated in the context of the British impact on Indian society. Consequently, the crucial areas which have been identified are political, economic and more recently social. The concentration of scholars on these issues has resulted in only a partial attention to the social responses in the form of literature<sup>14</sup> and consequently our understanding of the past has in many ways been one-dimensional. Secondly, the deep-rooted positivism among Indian social scientists has always given greater credibility to studies, which are based on archival records, like government reports, notings of British bureaucracy, private correspondence, census records and contemporary newspapers. Such records, it is firmly believed, will allow the historian to get hold of that elusive character

---

14. Yogendra K. Malik, ed. Politics And the Novel in India (Delhi, 1978).

in history, called facts. This fetish for conventional sources, in search of facts, is evident in most recent works on Indian history and also in the course structure of Indian universities, which still concentrate on drum and trumpet history.

Thirdly, the water-tight compartmentalization of social science disciplines has confined literature to the corridors of language departments. It is believed that the hard headed social scientist does not possess the required sensibility, expertise and aesthetic exposure to appreciate, understand and analyse the nuances in the works of an artist, who does not function under restrictions of imagination, sources and social query, as does a sociologist or a historian.

It is not surprising that except for two major monographs<sup>15</sup> which seek to study the images which India and the Indians evoked among British novelists especially during the colonial period, and a few secondary

---

15. Allen G. Greenberger, The British Image of India, A Study in the Literature of Imperialism, 1880-1960 (London, 1969), and Benita Parry, Delusions and Discoveries: Studies on India in the British Imagination 1880-1930 (New Delhi, 1974).



references to literature<sup>16</sup>, the historian/sociologist in India have insulated themselves from issues which should be as much of their concern as that of the high priests of literature.

The present work by no means aspires to restructure this legacy. It has a limited task to point out the immense possibilities for a historical analyses of literature. For this purpose an attempt has been made to study the interaction between literature and social developments through the novels of Bhai Vir Singh. In this endeavour the present thesis is guided by the belief that if we analyse the artistic achievements of a particular age while taking into account the stylistic and formal problems and the dominant style, above all we must study the social conditions, movements, and conflicts of the period, the class relationships and struggles and the resulting ideas-religious, philosophical and political - in order to see the art of that period in a real, not an imaginary context. At the same time we must beware of reading into every work

---

16. Sumit Sarkar, The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (Delhi, 1976), pp. 497-501, Bipan Chandra, The Social Roots of Communalism (Forthcoming), Also see K.N. Pannikar, Presidential Address at the Indian History Congress, Aligarh, 1975. Although there is a lack of literary studies by historians in the so-called modern period, ancient Indian history has a better record. This is largely because of shortage of sources for the study of ancient Indian history, which has led historians to depend on literary studies of the Vedas, Upanishads and the two epics Ramayana and Mahabharata.

of art, or element of style, a direct and unambiguous expression of a class or a social situation. We must take care not to judge a writer's, artist's or musician's work solely according to whether it is 'progressive' or 'reactionary' (for the two may intermingle, as Lenin pointed out in his analysis of Tolstoy and besides, the question of quality must enter into every judgement). But unless we apply history to the arts - unless we examine the social causes for its changing subjects, forms and content - we are bound to end up in abstract speculation and aestheticism, miles from reality. An analysis of style however intelligent it may be and however brilliant its insight into specific problems, is bound to fail unless it recognizes the content that is to say, in the last instance, the social element is decisive .

Bhai Vir Singh has been widely acclaimed as 'the father of modern Punjabi language'. He is credited with having pioneered in Punjabi the genres of prose, novel, epic and drama. In a life span of eighty-five years he wrote more than sixty books amounting to twenty thousand pages. All this work was done at a time when Punjabi was considered a gramin-bhasha (rustic language), ill-suited to express literary aspirations. To further the cause of Punjabi, Bhai Vir Singh set up in 1892 the

Mazir-i-Hind Press, which was the first printing press in Amritsar. He founded the Khalsa Samachar - the only surviving Punjabi newspaper of the nineteenth century. His devotion of a life time to the development of Punjabi literature has earned him unceasing recognition. In 1949, the Punjab University, at its first Convocation, conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Oriental Learning. In 1950 Bhai Vir Singh's admirers formed the 'Bhai Vir Singh Commemoration Volume Committee', under the chairmanship of Sir Teja Singh Malik. The very next year it brought out an Abhinandan Granth. It contained letters in his honour from scholars, poets, philosophers, diplomats and saints from all over the world. In 1952 Bhai Vir Singh was nominated to the Punjab Legislative Council. A year later the first Sahitya Akademi award for Punjabi was given to his work: Mere Sain Jee. Just a year before his death he was awarded the Padam Bhushan.<sup>17</sup> For many years his books were selected as the best books of the year and they have been made a part of the university syllabus in Punjab. His novel Sundri is said

---

17. For biographical details, see Maha Singh, Padam Bhushan Bhai Vir Singh Ji da Sankeep Jivan (Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar, 1958), and Padam Bhushan Bhai Vir Singh Ji da Gurmukh Jivan (Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar, 1969), and Harbans Singh, Bhai Vir Singh (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1972).

to have sold more than a million copies. Soon after his death in 1957, Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadn was set up, which has constructed two palatial memorials at Amritsar and Delhi. At the time of his first birth centenary, the Punjab Government instituted a chair of Bhai Vir Singh studies at Panjab University, Chandigarh. No other Punjabi writer has been so profusely written about as Bhai Vir Singh. All the journals dealing with Punjabi literature have brought out special numbers on the life and works of Bhai Vir Singh. A hurriedly brought out bibliography by Panjab University in 1974 has nearly seven hundred numbered entries either by Bhai Vir Singh or about him<sup>18</sup> and the list is still growing.

It is not surprising that Bhai Vir Singh became a legend during his life time and today there are numerous Sikh families, which worship before his portrait. His birth celebrations have become an annual ritual. A growing mythology has enveloped his life and work with a constant flow of honorifics: the father of Punjabi literature; the father of Punjab prose and poetry; the Sixth river in the land of five rivers; herald of the new dawn; a river of culture and learning, scholar of

---

18. Vishvanath Tiwari, Harinder Pannu and Jagtar (eds.) Bhai Vir Singh Sandarbh-Kosh (Chandigarh: Publication Bureau, Panjab University, 1974).

history and many others.<sup>19</sup> There is an urgent need to demythologize Bhai Vir Singh and look into the assumptions behind this mythology. This will not only enable us to study Bhai Vir Singh as Vir Singh, but also provide a sharper focus on Punjab's social history as also enable us to explore the relationship between society and literature in a specific instance.

---

19. These and numerous other platitudes have been extensively used in Harbans Singh (ed.), Bhai Vir Singh Abhinandan Granth (New Delhi: The Bhai Vir Singh Abhinandan Grant Samiti, 1954) and Bhai Vir Singh Shatabdi Granth (New Delhi: The Bhai Vir Singh Shatabdi Samiti, 1972); Harbhajan Singh (ed.), Bhai Sahib Vir Singh Ji te Una di Rachna de Darshan Jhalke (New Delhi: Bhai Sahib Vir Singh Study Circle, 1959) and J.S.Guleria (ed.) Bhai Vir Singh The Sixth River of Punjab (New Delhi, n.p., 1972).

## CHAPTER XI

### THE MAKING OF AN IDEOLOGUE

Bhai Vir Singh was born in December 1872 in a highly established family of Punjab.<sup>1</sup> By this time, Punjab had been a part of the British Empire for almost quarter of a century. Each year of Bhai Vir Singh's life and family history is a detailed impressionistic relief of what was happening in Punjab.

At the high noon of the empire, the British administrators, filled with confidence and imbued with a messianic zeal, sought to make Punjab into a colonial haven where none would be dissatisfied with the Raj.<sup>2</sup> Starting with Henry Lawrence's three member Board of Administration, a distinct Punjab School of administration emerged. Distrustful of court procedures and laws, the Punjab administration established a direct personal rule, in which all the subjects were to be encouraged to look upon the Sarkar as Ma-bap.<sup>3</sup> Punjab was to become a model state for the rest of the empire.

- 
1. For biographical details see Maha Singh, Padam Bhushan Bhai Vir Singh Ji da Sankhep Jivan (Amritsar, 1958); and Padam Bhushan Bhai Vir Singh Ji da Gurmukh Jivan (Amritsar, 1969) and Harbans Singh, Bhai Vir Singh (New Delhi, 1972).
  2. Eric Stokes, The English Utilitarians and India (Oxford, 1959), pp.244-45, 248.
  3. For an extremely well researched work on the Punjab School of Administration see P.H.M. Vanden Dungen, The Punjab Tradition (London, 1972).

The expansion of British activities in Punjab, brought in its wake: English education, Christian missionaries, printing press, anglicized Indians and new influences in living, dress and social values. All Punjabis, especially urban, in order to be successful, were compelled to contend with the waves of the 'new world' suddenly brought to their door steps.<sup>4</sup>

The need for lower level government functionaries, the desire to 'civilize' the local population and win them over to the British side by instilling in them values of loyalty and respect towards the Raj made the government set up a new educational system, which gradually replaced the indigineous one.<sup>5</sup> The first government school in Central Punjab was set up at Amritsar and an annual grant of Rs.5,000 was sanctioned for it.<sup>6</sup> The Amritsar School provided instruction in English as well as in Oriental

---

4. For a personalised account of such a process in case of one Punjabi family, see Ved Mehta, Daddy (Oxford, 1972).

5. A detailed examination of the educational institutions and trends in Punjab is available in G.W. Leitner, History of Indigineous Education in the Punjab since Annexation and in 1882 (Calcutta, 1882).

6. J.F. Bruce, A History of the University of Punjab (Lahore, 1938), p. 1.

languages. Reading, speaking and writing of English, arithmetic, geometry and geography constituted the course of study. Within one year (1850-51), the daily attendance increased from 107 to 153.<sup>7</sup> About one-fourth of the students admitted in the school pursued their studies in English.

On the model of the Amritsar school, government sponsored schools were opened at Rawalpindi, Gujarat, Shahpur, Multan, Jhelum and Jullundur.<sup>8</sup> By 1856 there were thirty-five such schools.<sup>9</sup> The same year the Educational Department with a Director-General, two Inspectors, eleven Deputy-Inspectors and seventsen Sub-Inspectors was set up in Punjab. The new department, funded by a one per cent cess on landowners, set up 563 schools in one year, out of which 456 were located in villages.<sup>10</sup> In addition, normal schools were set up at Rawalpindi and Lahore to train teachers. In 1860, a medical school was set up at Lahore and four years later, the Lahore and Delhi Colleges were set up. The Panjab University College established in 1870 was raised to university level in 1882.

---

7. G.W. Leitner, Indigineous Education in the Punjab, p.157.

8. H.R. Mahta, A History of the Growth and Development of western education in Punjab (Lahore, 1929), p. 30.

9. Y.B. Mathur, British Administration of Punjab (Delhi, n.d.), p. 80.

10. Ibid, p.84.



The new educational facilities were extremely popular with all sections of the Punjabi society. In a despatch the Deputy Commissioner of Jullundur remarked about a new, "... school at Kurturpoor. The late Guru Sadha Singh had paramount influence there, and objected to a government school being established in the town. Since his death the people themselves have come forward and petitioned for one, and there is now a small school of fifty boys".<sup>11</sup>

To pass out of a government school or college with a knowledge of English was both a qualification for status and a better-paid job. English education ensured better jobs than Vernacular training. In 1882 those who cleared the Entrance examination in English started with a salary of Rs.24 a month; those who passed it in the Vernacular were paid only Rs.11. English education at the District School without completing the secondary education promised a salary of Rs.17, while a similar education at a Vernacular school would secure a job worth Rs.9 a month.<sup>12</sup>

---

11. Cited in G.W. Leitner, op. cit., p. 17.

12. Educational Department Survey reported in letter No. 1443, Lahore, 23 February, 1883. Director of Public Instruction Punjab to Secretary Punjab Government in Punjab Home General Proceedings, January, 1884, No. 19.

Western education was accompanied by books in English, which gradually became a rage among the educated. The poetry of Wordsworth, Byron and Thomas Moore, the fiction of Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, George Elliot and Lytton, and the writings of Voltaire, Mill and Bentham were widely read.<sup>13</sup> A prominent contemporary writes in his autobiography : "The remarkable books, as they appeared both to Gutu Datta and myself (Ruchi Ram Sahni) we also read together in our spare hours in the college verandah .... These were Mill's Utilitarianism and Bentham's Theory of Legislation. They were, of course, not included (in) the college course, but that was of little consideration for both of us. We read and re-read Mill's small book line by line or paragraph by paragraph, discussing, arguing, differing or agreeing in the end, as we went along. Now and again, we could not do more than a sentence or two in the course of an hour, for either we could not agree as to what the author's real meaning was or, for some other reason, the whole time was taken up by a discussion about all the implications of the passage or how far could ourselves accept his lead".<sup>14</sup>

---

13. Lajpat Rai, Autobiographical writings (Delhi: 1964, reprint), pp. 26, 169.

14. Ruchi Ram Sahni, "Self-Revelations of an Octocentarian", ms, p. 75.



Initially a few among the urban Punjabis swiftly adopted the values and the life-style of the new world and scorned at their past traditions and heritage. But for the vast majority the transition was not to be so simple. They could at best draw a bridge between the old and new. To do so they could depend on the numerous associations set up in Punjab.

In 1863 a small group of Bengalis, with a few Punjabi enthusiasts, founded the Brahma Samaj of Lahore.<sup>15</sup> Over the next two decades branches were opened in Rawalpindi, Amritsar, Multan, Ropar, Simla and Dere Ghazi Khan.<sup>16</sup> In 1876, the Brahma Samaj founded a society to translate their literature into Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu, and in 1877 the Brahma's established one of the few Brahma presses outside of Bengal. Proselytization rested upon literacy. Brahma tracts and the monthly journal, Hari Hakikat, brought their message to the literate few, to the new elites of the Punjab, as did the continued travels of Brahma missionaries and leaders.<sup>17</sup> From Bengal came Keshab Chandra Sen in 1867 and 1873, Debendra Nath Tagore in 1867, 1872 and

---

15. Sivanatha Sastri, History of the Brahma Samaj (Calcutta, 1911), Vol. II, p. 394.

16. G.S. Chhabra, The Advanced History of the Punjab (Ludhiana, 1962), p. 348.

17. S.D. Callet, ed., The Brahma Year Book for 1876 (London, 1876), p.36.



Yda 0, 153, 3, 172

MI

DUS

TH-1004

1874 and a series of lesser known Brahma figures either singularly or in groups. From the beginning a small but socially significant number of educated Punjabis participated in the Brahma Samaj and were closely linked to the Bengali community. Primarily Hindus, the few Punjab families of the Lahore Samaj were all Hindu clerks; a few Sikhs also allied themselves with Brahma Samaj and its Bengali members. Theistic, rational and syncretistic, Bengali Brahmos tended to be extreme in their rejection of contemporary Hinduism. They proclaimed widow remarriage acceptable, ate communal meals, discarded the thread of orthodoxy, and rejected established forms of Hindu worship.

The Brahma ideology could appeal only to a few, for the rest they were apostates.<sup>18</sup>

In 1866, Lala Behari Lal and Pandit Bhanu Datta Basant Ram joined Nabin Chandra Rai and S.P. Bhattacharjee to found the Lahore Sat Sabha (Society of Truth), a reform organization focussed solely on Punjabi society. The Sabha was dedicated to social reform and education, as was the Brahma Samaj, but with the one major difference -

---

18. S.P. Bhattacharjee, Memories of the official career of S.P. Bhattacharjee, Late Superintendent, Office of Superintendent Engineer, 3rd Circle, Punjab P.W. Department (Lahore, 1894), p. 220-21.

the Sat Sabha sought to utilize Punjabi as the sole medium of its work. Although Behari Lal publicly opposed the principles of the Brahma Samaj, the new society followed Brahma patterns of worship, and clearly adopted its organizational structure. So close were the two societies in form that initially the Sat Sabha was taken to be a branch of the Brahma Samaj.<sup>19</sup> Besides organizational techniques the Sat Sabha borrowed most of its ideological orientation from the Brahma Samaj. It too was eclectic and theistic and in later years came to be criticized for its willingness to borrow from Christianity.<sup>20</sup>

Movements for social reform grew both from the context of British rule and were also sponsored by British administrators, particularly during the 1850's and 1860's. The determination of the new government to suppress infanticide led to a generalized attack and whole series of marriage, customs, including the dowry system, elaborate rituals, large wedding parties and lavish rewards to those who performed the marriage ceremonies, British officials attempted to achieve reforms through pressure on the aristocrats as the "natural leaders" of society<sup>21</sup>

---

19. Ibid., p. 12.

20. S. Sastri, History of Brahma Samaj, Vol. II, pp. 395-96.

21. S.M. Latif, op. cit., pp. 600-608.

Governmental actions also delineated areas of social customs that became approved targets for later reformers whose motivations stemmed from changes within themselves and their communities. Gradually, leadership shifted from the government and its aristocratic clients to the newly educated, first the Bengalis and afterward the Punjabis.

In 1865, Dr. G.W. Leitner founded the Anjuman-i-Punjab, the most successful of European-led efforts to influence Punjabi opinion. Dr. Leitner had reached Lahore the previous year to take the position of the Principal in the newly organized Government College. He arrived as a recognized scholar of Oriental Languages and Literature, with a reputation in England and Europe. Dr. Leitner immediately began to express his views on indigenous, vernacular and classical education, their intrinsic worth and the need for their revival. The Anjuman, under his leadership, moved to reform educational policy in four directions : (1) the establishment of the University of the Punjab, (2) the revival of Arabic and Sanskrit learning, (3) the introduction of European sciences to the general population through education in the Vernacular languages and (4) raising the standards of English education.<sup>22</sup>

---

22. Joachim H. Stockquelev, A Review of the Life and Labours of Dr. G.W. Leitner (Brighton, 1875), pp.10-11.

Leitner's campaign found sympathetic support from Punjabi aristocrats and some members of the western educated community. The Anjuman, with its meetings, reading room and lectures, soon became a powerful voice in the local and provincial affairs, as Dr. Leitner's own influence expanded. In 1870, the society began publishing *Akhbar-i-Anjuman-i-Punjab*, an Urdu monthly which added an English edition in 1881. During the late sixties and early seventies the Anjuman and Leitner remained at the center of educational and cultural developments, but toward the end of 1870's a gulf appeared between Leitner, with his insistence on 'Oriental' learning and the rising Punjabi elite, who demanded expansion of English education. In the last quarter of nineteenth century, in Punjab, each individual, depending upon his social status, past associations, kinship ties, educational exposure, religious identity, was free to participate, contribute and draw from diverse ideologies of the Punjab associations, both orthodox and reformist.

Even before Bhai Vir Singh was a year-old child, the leading Sikh jagirdars, Thakur Singh Sandhanwalia, Sir Babe Khem Singh Bedi, Bikram Singh of the Kapurthala royal family, aligned with traditional sikh intellectuals, Gyani Gyan Singh, Avtar Singh Vihiria, Bhai Bur Singh, Bhai Agya Singh to found the Singh Sabha,

the most enduring socio-religious reform movement of the Sikhs.<sup>23</sup> Among the founders of the new organization were Bhai Vir Singh's father, Charan Singh and his maternal grand-father Gyani Hazara Singh. They had assembled together to persuade four Sikh students of the Amritsar Mission School, not to accept Christianity. They felt that this threatened conversion was symptomatic of what was in store for Sikh religion:

"An English newspaper writes that the Christian faith is making rapid progress and makes the prophecy that, within the next twenty-five years, one third of the Majha area would be Christian. The Malwa will follow suit. Just as we do not see any Buddhists in the country except in images, in the same fashion, the Sikhs, who are now, here and there, visible in their turbans and their other religious forms like steel bracelets and swords, will be seen only in pictures in the museums. Their own sons and grandsons turning Christians and clad in coats and trousers and supporting mushroom like caps, will go to see them in museums and say in their pidgin Punjabi, look, this is the picture of a Sikh - the tribe that inhabited this country once upon a time. Efforts of those who wish to resist the onslaughts of Christianity are feeble and will prove abortive like a leper without hands and feet trying to save a boy from falling off a rooftop". 24

---

23. Singh Sabha Amritsar, Niyam, (Amritsar 1890), pp.1-3.

24. The Khalsa Akhbar, Lahore, May 25, 1894. (Translated from the 'Punjabi'). Quoted in Harbans Singh, Bhai Vir Singh, p. 15.



To forestall any impending threats to Sikh religion and provide its adherents with a model to emulate, the intellectuals assembled at Amritsar adopted a programme, which sought to (i) restore Sikhism to its pristine purity, (ii) edit and publish historical and religious books, (iii) propagate current knowledge using Punjabi as the medium and to start magazines and newspapers in Punjabi, (iv) reform and bring back to Sikh faith the apostates; (v) interest the highly placed Englishmen in and ensure their association with the educational programme of the Sikhs.<sup>25</sup>

In founding the Amritsar Singh Sabha, the traditional intellectuals had three major aims. First the new organization would ensure the continuity of their earlier leadership and social privileges. Second, it would strive to ensure the stability of the culture which they represented as intellectuals and also determine the form in which the new social influences were to be assimilated. For this purpose the Amritsar Singh Sabha founded Gurmukhi newspapers, published numerous tracts, set up schools and initiated theological discussions. Third, the Singh Sabha which was poised to be a Sikh organization par

---

25. Jagjit Singh, Singh Sabha Lahore (Amritsar, 1974, Reprint), pp. 17-18.

excellence, would help its promoters in being accepted as the leaders of all Sikhs. Such a recognition in turn would serve as a ready made credential for the colonial state, which was willing to dole out patronage to all accepted leaders, who would help in governing the local society. As recognised leaders, the founders of the Amritsar Singh Sabha, could parley between the Sikhs and the Raj and for their role of mediators claim advantages from both, Sikhs and the new administration.

Vir Singh was to be the prophet, who would make it his life's ambition to proclaim and implement the Singh Sabha's programme. He and the Singh Sabha matured together. Each sustained the other. Both together were to leave no doubts regarding what it was to be a Sikh? And How to be a Sikh? These were two questions which vexed innumerable Punjabis, not merely those who sought to adhere to the faith but even the Punjabi Hindus and Muslims.

For Bhai Vir Singh the answers were worked out by his family genealogy, early education, the dominant influences of his grand fathers, his father and especially the Singh Sabha. The roots of Vir Singh's family<sup>26</sup>

---

26. For Bhai Vir Singh's family history see Dr. Balbir Singh, Sri Charanhari Vishay, Vol. I, Part I (Amritsar, 1964).

go back to early eighteenth century, to one Kaura Mal, who was a major figure in Punjab during the turbulent reign of Mir Manu. He is remembered and revered in the Sikh tradition, for having worked out a conciliation between the Islamic rulers and the Sikhs. Since the time of Kaura Mal the family lived at Multan, on its personal estate, a place known as the Garh Maharaja or the Maharaja's fort. Here the family worked out its vacillating fortunes, till the time of Kahn Singh, who was sixth in line of descent from Kaura Mal and who, at the age of fourteen, ran away from the ancestral estate. He was to work out a fresh elan for the family.

After incessant wanderings, which took him to Amritsar, Hardwar and numerous other places of pilgrimage and learning, he ultimately returned to Amritsar. Here he set up a Dera, practiced Ayurveda, transcribed Sanskrit manuscripts and wrote poetry in Brah Bhasha. Kahn Singh laid the foundation, on whose heritage, his grand son, Vir Singh, was to sustain himself.<sup>27</sup>

Vir Singh's maternal grand father, with whom the child spent most of his younger years, was a highly acclaimed scholar. He assisted the British civil servant, M.A. Maculiffe, to write his classic six volume history of the

---

27. Ibid.

Sikhs. An inspector of schools, Hazara Singh spent his time in translating works from Urdu into Punjabi, writing commentaries on sikh scriptures and educating his grandson Bhai Vir Singh.

Vir Singh's father, Charan Singh, was the extraordinary intermediary, who through his own learning and vision helped his son to imbibe the family tradition and prepared him for the ordeals of the future.<sup>28</sup> Charan Singh was a polygot, with command over Braj, Persian, Punjabi, Urdu and had a working knowledge of English. Besides composing poetry in Braj Bhasha, he translated Kalidasa's Sakuntala into Punjabi, authored a work on musical ragas, another one on Sikh scriptures and also wrote dialectic pieces in Punjabi prose.

Charan Singh took a keen interest in the upbringing of his eldest child, Vir Singh. As a young boy he was made to learn Persian and Urdu from a Muslim maulvi. The services of a traditional Sikh scholar, Harbhejan Singh, were utilized to teach him Sanskrit and Punjabi. A Pande taught him commercial accountancy. By the time he was eight years old, Vir Singh had finished reading the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth.

---

28. Dr. Balbir Singh, Sri Charanhari Visthar, Vol. I, Part II (Amritsar, 1964), pp.3-74.

Soon after his education at home, Vir Singh joined the Christian Mission School in Amritsar. Here was to pass his middle and matriculation examinations. In the latter he topped in the whole of the Amritsar District, a feat which earned him a Gold Medal. On leaving the school, the principal Rev. Donald J. McKenzie, handed him a testimonial, which said: "During the time he was with us, he was always one of the exemplary boys of his class and it is with the greatest pleasure and confidence that I give him this certificate of good conduct. He is a strictly honest and upright lad, comes from a good family, and gives evidence of usefulness in this world. I trust that God's blessings will follow him in all he does".<sup>29</sup>

On leaving school, Bhai Vir Singh had ample credentials - a good education, family connections and a sharp intellect - to stake a claim for a job in the Government. He surprised everyone when he refused the offer of the post of a Tehsildar. Instead, in 1892, he ventured to set up a printing press and a soda-water plant in Amritsar. Next year, he launched the Khalsa Tract Society whose aims were set up in the epigram published on each of its tracts: "Religion is the noblest

---

29. Mohan Singh, Gurmukh Jivan, p. 36.

of all things; nobler still is the preaching of Religion". This epigram was to inspire Vir Singh all his life. He was destined to act above all as a preacher of the Sikh religion.

His first step in this direction was the writing and editing of tracts under the auspices of the Khalsa Tract Society. Written in simple prose and cheaply priced, they were distributed all over Punjab. The subjects dealt in these tracts ranged from a critique of current fashions to the state of Sikh religion. Other issues which found space were commentaries on Sikh scriptures, biographies of Sikh Gurus, the need for developing Punjabi language, the impact of Christianity and defence of indigeneous culture. All these themes and many more found a powerful voice in the Khalsa Samachar, a Punjabi newspaper set up by Bhai Vir Singh in 1899.

After the tracts and the newspaper, Bhai Vir Singh experimented with all the genres in which he wrote: poetry, novel, exegesis, biography and essays. Matured by these experiments, in 1905, he wrote the first Punjabi epic, Rana Surat Singh, a work of over twelve thousand lines in blank verse.

This was followed by a play, Raja Lakhdata Singh in 1910, the first of its kind in Punjabi. A decade

later came a series of poetical works : Trel Tupke (Dew Drops), Lahran de Har (Wreaths of the waves), Bilian de Har (Wreaths of the Lightning), and Matak Hulare, an anthology of poems exclusively on the scenes and sites of the valley of Kashmir. In 1933 was published Kambdi Kalai (Wrist Atremble), a collection of songs in honour of the Sikh Gurus.

Simultaneously, along with his poetry, Bhai Vir Singh busied himself in commenting, editing and writing about Sikh scriptures, history and philosophy. Each work took him years to complete; when finished it stood unparalleled for the research which went into it, and till today each one ranks as the most authoritative, in the field of Sikh theology.

The first of these works was published in 1906 under the title Pani Granthi Steek, being a detailed exegesis of selection from Sikh scriptures. This was followed in 1912 by an edited version of Sikhan di Bhaget Mala, a Punjabi work by Bhai Mani Singh, one of the major disciples of Guru Gobind Singh. In the same series Bhai Vir Singh published edited versions of Rattan Singh Ehangu's Prachin Panth Prakash and Bhai Santokh Singh's Gur Pratep Suraj Granth. The latter

work, comprising fourteen volumes took nine years to complete and is today used as the basic manual to expound on the Sikh history and religion. These works were complimented by the biographies of the two Sikh Gurus, Nanak and Gobind Singh, published in poetical form under the titles of Sri Guru Nanak Chamatkar and Sri Kalohidar Chamatkar. Vir Singh's four novels were published between 1898 and 1921. The first one Sundari was published in 1898, this was followed by Bijay Singh in 1899 and the next year he wrote Satwant Kaur. His last novel Baba Naudh Singh was serialized from 1917 to 1921 and came out in a series of 64 tracts (See Appendix I).

These works didn't exhaust Bhai Vir Singh's genius. His scholarly genius was matched by his organizational skill. One of the founding fathers of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, he was the inspiration behind the Central Khalsa Orphanage at Amritsar (1904), the Soorma Singh Ashram (1935), a home for the blind, and a free Homoeopathic hospital, set up on the premises of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1943. Also he was instrumental in setting up the Sikh Educational Committee and the Punjab and Sindh Bank.<sup>30</sup>

---

30. Ganda Singh, "Bhai Vir Singh and his Times", The Punjab Past and Present, Vol. VI, No. 12, October, 1972, pp. 256-57.



## CHAPTER III

### SOCIAL BASIS OF VIR SINGH'S FICTION

Bhai Vir Singh published his first and most well known novel, Sundari in 1898, this was followed by Bijay Singh in 1899 and in 1900 his own press published Satwant Kaur. Between the age of twenty-five and twenty-eight he wrote three novels, which were first of their genre in Punjabi. In the preface to Bijay Singh he wrote: "At present there is no time for a detailed historical research, the community's need is most pressing and urgent....."<sup>1</sup> (Emphasis added). Why was the community's need most pressing and urgent? Why was Bhai Vir Singh in a tremendous hurry to write these novels? Why does he write: "The community is faced with a very difficult situation...."<sup>2</sup> What was this 'difficult situation'? If we could understand this 'difficult situation', it may explain why with an amazing alacrity he published three novels in three years.

These three years of the last century were a climax of an uneasy Sikh quest for a Weltanschauung :

---

1. Bhai Sahib Doctor Vir Singh Ji, Bijay Singh, (Amritsar, 1970), p. 5.

2. Ibid., p. Iv

a process which had institutionally begun with the foundation of the Amritsar Singh Sabha in 1873. The doctrines of Sikhism, as expounded by the Sikh Gurus, had long been forgotten and had become a dead tradition. All that the Sikh Gurus had preached against caste system, discrimination against women, religious superstition, idol worship - had become a part and parcel of Sikh orthodoxy.<sup>3</sup> The Sikhs were unable to interpret their own scriptures, beliefs and customs. From a position of dominance, albeit theoretical due to the sovereign being a Sikh, under British rule they found themselves at parity with others. In 1881 a bare six per cent of the Punjabi population they were a minority, compared to fifty-two per cent Muslims and thirty eight per cent Hindus.

The newly formed Amritsar Singh Sabha was of not much help. Started by traditional intellectuals the anglicized among the Sikhs initially welcomed the idea of the Singh Sabha and saw in it the possible fulfilment of their own dreams. In less than a decade they realized that left to the traditional intellectuals, the Singh Sabha had become an organ to further their own interests. Its leaders rode roughshod over all the

---

3. For a detailed background see Harbans Singh, The Heritage of the Sikhs (Delhi, 1964), pp.138-147.

aspirations of the embryonic middle class.<sup>4</sup> The leaders of the Amritsar Singh Sabha were conscious of the privileged position they enjoyed in the Punjabi society and they earnestly sought to confirm it. Baba Sir Khem Singh Bedi wanted to be regarded as the spiritual authority of the Sikhs and he used to sit on a special Gudala (cushion) in the presence of the Adi-Granth, which a few thought was sacrilege and was not sanctioned in the egalitarian paradigm of Sikhism.<sup>5</sup> The leaders of the Amritsar Singh Sabha were unwilling to obliterate caste inequalities. Its ideologies condemned other Singh Sabhas for encouraging low caste Sikhs, Mazhbis, and giving them access to the temples.<sup>6</sup> In the summer of 1900, Colonel Jawala Singh, the Government appointed Manager of the Golden Temple and a President of the Amritsar Singh Sabha, ordered the arrest of half a dozen Rahtia Sikhs, when they visited the Sikh shrine. Those who accompanied them were abused and

---

4. Gurmukh Singh Chandhar, My Attempted Excommunication from the Sikh temples and the Khalsa Community at Faridkot in 1897 (Lahore, 1898).

5. Ibid., pp. 5-6.

6. Jawala Singh, Prathana Patav (Amritsar, 1897), pp. 1-6.

finally beaten up. For future an order was issued that anyone, "known to be friendly disposed towards the Rahtias should not be allowed to enter the precincts of the Darbar Sahib".<sup>7</sup>

Ideologically the Amritsar Singh Sabha accepted the existing social frame-work of the Punjabi society. Its leadership spurned the Tat-Khalsa's aggressive efforts to spell out distinct rites and rituals for the Sikhs. They continued to adhere to the Brahmanical rites for the ceremonies of birth, marriage, death and other auspicious days. Colonel Jawaia Singh on receiving a title from the government organized a Havan in Amritsar. A newspaper reported on the festivities: "In the open space in front of the Takhat Akal Bunga, a party of Hindus, long-haired Hindus and a few Sikhs was seated. In the middle there was a Kund and a sleek skinned Brahmin performed Havan".<sup>8</sup> The Amritsar Singh Sabha's ideology was closely aligned to mass-culture. Its leaders as traditional intellectuals readily appreciated the elements of such a culture. Just like the majority of other Sikhs - they sanctioned idol-worship<sup>9</sup>, believed in the efficacy of charms,

---

7. The Khalsa, June 27, 1900, p.3.

8. The Khalsa, June 20, 1900, p.5.

9. For the Amritsar Singh Sabha's approval of idol-worship see Avtar Singh Viharia, Gurdarshan Shastay (Amritsar, 1916), pp.12-13.

amules, divine incantations and accepted the need to worship saints, especially the descendants of Sikh Gurus.<sup>10</sup> For the Amritsar Singh Sabha there was no contradiction between the Sikh doctrines of monotheism and the current polytheism. Impervious to the newly imparted ideologies, all those who professed to be iconoclasts were suspect.

After twenty-seven years of the Singh Sabha's activities a Sikh newspaper commented: "Have not our people (sikhs) relapsed into idolatry? Are not they seen worshipping hideous images of Hindu gods? Still more horrible is the fact that they are allowed in the precincts of the temple, which every Sikh holds dear to him. Are not our people seen worshipping satis, Seetla, Bhairon, Sakhi Sarvar, and C. Are not our people sunk grossly in Mantras and Jantras and similar beliefs? Are not many of us worshipping the sun and moon, the earth and the sky, the air, water and fire? Are we not worshipping the Dharamraj and Pittres and making offerings to them? And pitiable large portion of our people are losing all ideas of independent individuality, look upon their sacred books as a commentary or translation

---

10. This is explicitly stated by Avtar Singh in two of his major works, Sikh Dham Tat Darshan (Lahore, 1894), pp. 20-25; and Khalsa Sudhar Tari (Amritsar, 1898), pp. 252-57.

of the books that teach element worship, idolatory, Mantras and Jantras and amultes and transcend other practices and beliefs of savages....."<sup>11</sup>

The weak reformism among the Sikhs was accompanied by the Arya Samajist's contention that Sikhs were Hindus and they sought to establish their claim by reconverting Sikhs through Shuddhi campaigns. The Hindus and the Sikhs in the Punjab had a harmonious relationship before the Arya Samaj, due to the socio-economic conditions generated by the colonial rule in the Punjab, began its aggressive career. Though N.G. Barrier, would like to make a case for communal tension in the Punjab much before the advent of the British rule<sup>12</sup>, there is ample evidence which shows that the relations between the two communities were of a cordial nature. They had common religious festivals, Brahmin priests presided over the life-cycle ceremonies in the Sikh families, both frequented the religious shrines of each other and had common superstitions and dieties. Inter-dinning and intermarriage was practiced

---

11. The Khalsa, February, 21, 1900, p. 7.

12. N.G. Barrier, "Punjab Politics and Disturbances of 1907", Ph.D. thesis, University of Duke, 1966, p. 7; also see, "The Punjab Government and Communal Politics", Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XVIII, 1968, No. 3, pp. 528-39.

without any questioning. Prakash Tandon, a Punjabi Hindu writes in his autobiography: "We and the Sikhs had same castes and customs, and they were always members of our brotherhood - biradaris. In the villages we lived together and celebrated the same festivals ... After all, we and the Sikhs stemmed from the same stock; most Hindus had Sikh relations and inter-marriage was common. In our own family my elder brother married a girl who was a Sikh on her father's side, but a Hindu on her mother's".<sup>13</sup>

In early 1870's the Sikhs joined the Hindus in welcoming Swami Dayanand's visit to Lahore because of the Swami's emphasis on unity of God; removal of caste distinction and iconoclasm.<sup>14</sup> The site chosen for Swami's first lecture was a Sikh temple, Gurudwara Dera Sahib. Bhai Jawahir Singh, Giani Dit Singh and Bhai Moya Singh were among the enthusiastic supporters of Arya Samaj. Bhai Jawahir Singh was elected the first Vice-President of the Samaj in Punjab.

---

13. Prakash Tandon, Punjabi Century (London, 1961), pp. 10-11.

14. Bhagat Lakhmen Singh, Autobiography, Ganda Singh ed. (Calcutta, 1956), p. 58.

As Swami Dayanand toured the Punjab and his writings became available to the people, a theological antagonism took shape between his followers and the Sikhs.<sup>15</sup> In his book, the Satvarth Parkash, the Swami had laid emphasis on the supremacy of the Vedas and had criticised the founders of Sikhism, Christianity and Islam.<sup>16</sup> He called Guru Nanak a Dandi (Hypocrite) and also under-rated the other Sikh Gurus as men of little learning. Dayanand passed some contemptuous remarks against the Sikh theologians for their not possessing the knowledge of Sanskrit.<sup>17</sup> Such vitriolic remarks on Sikh Gurus infuriated the Sikhs, who joined the Muslims and Christians in demanding the banning of the Satvarth Parkash. Even though the book was banned, the trouble did not come to an end. It was the beginning of an extremely bitter theological debate, which rapidly took a new direction.

Starting in 1885 Arya Samajist newspapers and publicists questioned the originality of Sikhism and argued that the Sikh doctrines were borrowed from the Vedas as

---

15. Ganda Singh, 'The Origins of Hindu-Sikh tension in the Punjab', Journal of Indian History, Vol. XXIV, April 1961, pp.121-23.

16. Swami Dayanand, Satvarth Parkash, Durga Prasad's English translation, (Lahore, 1904), pp.492, 539.

17. Ibid., pp.162-63.



also Sikh rites and ceremonies. Incensed the Sikh journalists and pamphleteers sought to repudiate such claims.<sup>18</sup> This debate was to go on till 1920, when the strong currents of nationalism suspended many of the earlier debates. Due to the colonial nature of the Punjab economy, there occurred a disjunction between agriculture and the commercial-industrial sector.<sup>19</sup> The Hindu commercial castes - Khatri, and Baniyas - found their advancement, in whichever direction they went, constrained and blocked. Under the Punjab Land Alienation Act (1900), they were prevented from investing their surplus capital in land. Investing in industry was not profitable and neither did the government seek to promote industrial ventures. Under Lieutenant-Governor, James Lyall (1887-92), the administration consciously and actively pursued a policy of discrimination against Hindus in government employment. The solution for socio-economic frustrations was sought in the ideology of Swami Dayanand and the organization of the Arya Samaj. The Samaj in

---

18. For an extensive review of this debate see Kenneth W. Jones, "Ham Hindu Nahin: Arya-Sikh relations, 1887-1905", Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XXXII, No. 3, May, 1973, pp. 457-475.

19. Aniya Bagchi, "Reflections on patterns of Regional growth in India during the period of British rule", mimeographed (Calcutta, 1976).

order to protect the interests of its adherents increasingly adopted an aggressive posture, which was to have unfortunate consequences in the twentieth century. The Arya Samaj militancy, in relation to other communities, reached new heights, with the Shuddhi campaign, which aimed at conversion to Hinduism of Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, who had once been Hindus and had been converted to other religions.<sup>20</sup> In spite of Sikh doctrines <sup>and</sup> rejection of caste hierarchy, its adherents were as caste conscious as any other Punjabi. The restructuring of Punjabi society and creation of a new opportunity structure during the British raj made the lower castes aspire for a higher social status.<sup>21</sup> The Rahtias, who were traditionally considered outcastes by the Sikhs, asked for Arya Samajist help in purifying them. For the militant Arya Samajists this was a god-sent opportunity and they immediately set out to perform a purifying ceremony in Lahore.<sup>22</sup> On the fateful day, "when the

---

20. J.T.F. Jordens, "Reconversion to Hinduism, the Shuddhi of the Arya Samaj" in J.A. Oddie, Religion in South Asia (New Delhi, 1977), pp. 146-161.

21. For a sociological survey see Ethne K. Marengo, The Transformation of Sikh Society (New Delhi, 1976)

22. For a detailed account by a contemporary See Bhagat Lakshman Singh, op. cit., pp. 161-63.

time of initiation of the Rahtia Sikhs came, they were seated on a pulpit and their heads were shaven by half a dozen barbers before hundreds of the multitude that had assembled to witness the performance. A sprinkling of Sikhs was also present but insult done to their feelings in such a public fashion drove them mad and they withdrew from the scene".<sup>23</sup> This incident wounded the Sikh susceptibilities and led them to retaliate and condemn the Arya Samajists. Bhagat Lakshman Singh, a popular leader of the Sikhs in Lahore, declared in a heavily attended public meeting : "If men of light and lead in the ranks of the Arya Samaj did not mend their ways, they must be prepared for the retaliatory measures from a community which knew how to punish".<sup>24</sup>

Even before the Sikhs could have respite from one exasperating controversy, they were engulfed in another, the Dyal Singh Majithia Will case. Dyal Singh was an extremely wealthy aristocrat with Brahma Samajist leanings.<sup>25</sup> On his death he bequeathed his property to the

---

23. The Khalsa, July 6, 1900, pp. 3-4.

24. Bhagat Lakshman Singh, op. cit., p. 162.

25. For biographical details, see Shobhane Ramkumar, Dyal Singh Majithia (1849-1898)\*, unpublished M.A. dissertation, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1974.

Dyal Singh Trust, which was dominated by Brahma Samajists.<sup>26</sup> His wife and a cousin appealed against the will, on the plea that Dyal Singh was a Sikh and the 'Hindu Law' under which he had instituted a trust cannot apply to him. The Lahore High Court's verdict that, "the Sikhs are, at all events, at the present time, regarded only as a set of Hindus",<sup>27</sup> was a public humiliation for the Sikhs. Sikh leaders with all their <sup>erudition</sup> ~~erudition~~ challenged the High Courts verdict. Kahn Singh Nabha emphatically declared in a pamphlet: Ham Hindu Nahin.<sup>28</sup> (We are not Hindus). The Arya Samajists were unwilling to grant this status to the Sikhs and they raised the chorus : Sikhs Hindu Hain.<sup>29</sup> (Sikhs are Hindus).

The introduction of local government in 1881 further created an arena for communal competition. Punjab

---

26. Bhagat Lakshman Singh, "Singh Sabha Lehir Nal Kuch Nara Sambandh", Pani Darva, Vol. III, No. 6 (June, 1941), pp. 42-52.

27. The Khalsa, June 6, 1900.

28. Kahn Singh, Ham Hindu Nahin, (Amritsar, 1899). The Case for Sikh separateness was further argued at this time by Jodh Singh, Sachha Dharmi (Lahore, 1900) and Naurang Singh, Sikh Hindu Nahin (Lahore, 1905).

29. See Lala Thakur Das, Sikh Hindu Hain (Hoshiarpur, 1899) and Bawa Narsain Singh, Sikh Hindu Hain (Amritsar, 1899).

fought for the control of new structures as Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, instead of organizing themselves on caste or class basis. The religious consciousness of the people was consolidated by the colonial administration, which for purposes of employment, education, representation, social benefits, and in order to stall the process of a nation-in-the-making dealt with the local population on basis of religion or caste. In 1882, the Hindus of Lahore, spurred by the contemporary social circumstances, founded the Lahore Hindu Sabha. Led by Raja Harbans Singh, the Sabha sought to protect Hindu interests by "1. Adoption of measures calculated to promote and enhance brotherly feelings among the different sections of the Hindu community and to effect the removal of those obstacles which stand in the way of their union; II. Advocacy of political rights and privileges of the Hindu community at large by constitutional means; III. The establishment of schools for education of Hindu children and arrangement of Hindi, the vernacular of the country".<sup>30</sup>

The stunted and fragmentary development of capitalism had crushed in the embryo the emergence of forces of production, which could generate the conditions for the

---

30. Regeneration of Arya Varta, December 1., 1883, p.5.

breakdown of the narrow parochial links and regional or community consciousness. "Into this leisurely industrialism, the pre-industrial institutions could settle relatively easily".<sup>31</sup> The extreme unevenness of development among different communities tended to create antagonism among them. Among the Hindus, those who had been able to secure for themselves a strong position of dominance in education, professions, commercial enterprise and industry, there was understandably no willingness to sacrifice their interests for the upliftment of the Sikhs or Muslims or even the Hindus who had not made it to the top. By the mid-1880's, the Hindu commercial and priestly castes stood supreme in occupations demanding education, particularly English education. They occupied over 80 per cent of the "superior appointments" in government service and dominated as well the professions of western medicine, engineering and law. In 1885, out of 48 first-class pleaders, Hindus accounted for 29, Muslims 4, and Bengalis 7; within the 160 second-class pleaders, 129 were Hindus, 20 Muslims and 4 Bengalis.<sup>32</sup> Among the 67 Assistant Surgeons employed by the British there were 52 Hindus and 8 Muslims.<sup>33</sup>

---

31. Satish Sabarwal, "Indian Urbanism, A Socio-Historical Perspective", Contributions to Indian Sociology, Vol. II, No. I, 1977.

32. N.G. Barnier, "Punjab Politics and the Disturbances of 1907" pp. 17-18.

33. Ibid., p.18.

The Sikhs as agriculturists, with their population concentrated in rural areas, found it difficult to acquire the so-called western education, which determined the patterns of employment as well as the development of an urban professional class. The Census Report of 1881 declared: "The Sikhs are the most uneducated class in the Punjab". The acquisition of higher education in English, required a lengthy stay in a town, for which the Sikhs were ill-equipped. Principal Niringan Singh writes in his autobiography: "It was rare that a Sikh passed an M.A. Examination".<sup>34</sup> Bhai Jawahir Singh as Secretary of the Khalsa College deputation, which awaited upon the Maharaja of Patiala for financial assistance, remarked: "In peace times, the Sikhs mostly are land cultivators and artisans - poor men for the most part - and the light of western education and civilization has not reached them in their remote and ignorant villages. It is owing however to no want of energy on the part of the Sikhs, that they have failed to take advantage of these institutions, as may be seen from their readiness to join Board and indigenous schools near their homes; but partly because of their traditional surroundings (mainly

---

34. Principal Niringan Singh, Jivan Vikas, (Delhi, 1970), pp. 87

agricultural) and partly because of poverty, Sikh boys have found hitherto little opportunity for joining the larger schools and colleges. The result is that there is no well-to-do middle class among the Sikhs.<sup>35</sup>

(Italics my own). By the time the Sikhs started competing with other groups to acquire education, the constraints of the colonial economy checked their absorption into professions or bureaucracy.

The third dimension, to which Bhai Vir Singh refers as the "difficult situation" faced by the community was the simultaneous spread of the Gospel and the Raj.<sup>36</sup> Christianity had been well integrated with the British expansionism, with the result that the Christian missionaries spread into the Punjab in the wake of the British conquest. In this they received full encouragement from the government. No antagonism of purpose was seen to exist between the spiritual goals of the missionary and the social goals of the government. In fact, this unity of purpose was to be taken as one of the distinguishing characteristics of the first half century of British rule in the Punjab; quite different from the early history of Bengal, Madras and Bombay.

---

35. Bhai Jawahir Singh to W. Bell, dated 15 Sept., 1890 in Sunder Singh Majithia's private papers, in Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, hereafter N.M.M.L.



In the Punjab, British rule followed on the heels of military conquest and was administered by self-confident men of a vigorous faith, determined to make the career of the empire conform to the standards of Christian civilization. Advances in new territories were encouraged by, often partly financed by, and always protected by government officials. The mission school was the instrument into which private and public resources were put in order to achieve evangelical goals. The most effective option available to the authorities was the transfer of government schools to missionary control. Over a period of 33 years the government took such action with respect to at least 15 educational institutions, some of them high schools at important district headquarters.<sup>37</sup>

An unprecedented public demonstration of government cooperation in promoting Christianity was the Punjab Missionary Conference at Lahore in 1862. McLeod, the President of the Conference, who in a short-time was to be the Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab, declared: "If the Bible be the word of God and the books revered by the Hindu and the Mohammedan contain were fables, then it must have been intended that the Christian rule prepare the way for the spread of the Gospel".<sup>38</sup>

---

37. S. Wood, op. cit., p. 137.

38. Ibid., p. 139.

How successfully the Christian rule prepared the way for the spread of the Gospel is evident in the rapid spread of Christian Mission stations in the Punjab. The Presbyterians were the first in Punjab, with stations at Ludhiana, 1834; Sahranpur, 1835; Sabathu, 1836; Jullundur, 1846; Lahore, 1848; Ambala City, 1848; Ambala Cantonment, 1850; Rawalpindi, 1856; Kapurthala, 1860; Hoshiarpur, 1867; Ferozepur, 1869; Rupa, 1890; Khanna, 1894; Phillaur, 1897; Kasur, 1900. The Christian Missionary Society of England opened work at Simla and Katgarh in 1840; Amritsar, 1850; Peshawar, 1853; Kangra, 1854; Batala, 1878; Tarantaran, 1885. The United Presbyterians commenced their work at Sialkot in 1855, Rawalpindi, 1856; Gujranwala, 1868; Gurdaspur, 1872; Jhelum, 1876; Pathankot, 1880; Lyallpur, 1895 and Sargoda, 1905.<sup>39</sup>

Quite often Christian missionaries presented misleading interpretations of Sikh scriptures to prove the supremacy of their own faith. According to them "Sri Aakat Jagat ke Isa", a line in the Dasam Granth, a Sikh holy scripture, meant that the Sikh Guru's acknowledged the supremacy of Christ in this world.<sup>40</sup> At this time

---

39. C.H. Loehlin, "History of Christianity in the Punjab", in the Punjab Past and Present, Vol. VII, Part I? April, 1973, pp. 176-199.

40. Khalsa Akhbar, September, 1900.

Pandit Walji, a Christian convert, wrote a pamphlet, "Haricharitra or comparison between the Adi Granth and the Bible", in which he attempted to prove that Sikhism had nothing new to offer and Guru Nanak was influenced by Christianity and that some of the Sikh doctrines were borrowed from the Bible.<sup>41</sup>

The challenge of Christian proselytization alarmed the Sikhs. While the conversions of Maharaja Duleep Singh and the royal family of Kapurthala were still rankling in the minds of the Sikhs, the growing success of Christian missionaries in their evangelical work posed a major threat. The work of the missionaries was rewarded with the conversion of men like Daud Singh, who became a great champion of Christianity and Kesar Singh, a Sikh priest, who became an active worker in the proselytizing campaigns of the missionaries. By 1881, Christian converts in Punjab numbered 3,912. In the next decennial census the community expanded to 19,750. This was a 410 per cent increase. Though numerically the Christians in Punjab were a small community, the convert gains received substantial publicity and was taken as an indication of future trends; conversions extremely angered and frightened the Sikh leaders.

---

41. Ibid.

By the time Bhai Vir Singh wrote his first novel, both objective and subjective conditions existed for the production of the kind of literature, which he produced. Cases like these may be examples of what Antonio Gramsci on one occasion called "Catharsis" - meaning coming-to-consciousness, "elaboration of the structure into superstructure in the minds of men."<sup>42</sup> Here is a term too out of the way and striking to have been chosen (like some curious phrases of Gramsci) to baffle the prison censor. In spite of the peculiarity of the term, it is tempting to read a deeper conceptual significance into the word and take it as more properly denoting an eruption into social consciousness of some deeply buried conflict - like the unearthing of a neurosis by Freudian analysis. In time of revolution, as in mimic form of tragic drama, human self-discovery is most intense and swift; hence the appropriateness of Gramsci's term catharsis to explain the writings of Bhai Vir Singh and their link with the society in which they were produced.

In three years preceding the close of the last century, Sikhs had been legally declared as Hindus,

---

42. Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci edited and translated by Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith (London, 1971), p. 366.

antia Sikhs were publicly shaven and Sikh efforts for a self were spurned. The labours of the Singh Sabha movement for the last twenty seven years seemed to be still born. It was at this crucial juncture, in a state of Catharsis, that Bhai Vir Singh decided to act. So far he had only written three small books in Punjabi : Introductory Primer, Physical Geography and a Lugat.<sup>43</sup> But now, as if face to face with truth, he wrote in his first novel Sundri: "In writing this book our purpose is that by reading these accounts of by-gone days the Sikhs should become confirmed in their faith. They should carry out their worldly duty as well as their spiritual objective. Abuses might be abjured. Faith should prosper and Sikhs should learn to own their high principles. They should be disciplined and treat other people with equal love. They should adhere to their Guru's teaching: "Recognize all mankind as one". Thus might they achieve their uniqueness".<sup>44</sup> The 'Sikhs were to be confirmed in their faith' and they were to achieve 'their uniqueness'. In the next four decades, almost as if confirming Bhai Vir Singh's quest for 'Sikh uniqueness', this novel is said to have sold more than a hundred thousand copies.

---

43. Harbans Singh, Bhai Vir Singh ta Una di Rachna, p.15.

44. Translation by Harbans Singh in Bhai Vir Singh (New Delhi, 1972), p.44.

## CHAPTER IV

### IMAGES OF BHAJ VIR SINGH

Presently there are three major approaches to the writings of novels of Bhai Vir Singh - the admirers, the academicians and the Marxists. All three are widely accepted, are still growing and make use of Bhai Vir Singh's legend for their own purposes.

#### Admirers

The basic argument of this school is that Bhai Vir Singh was 'great', because (i) of his tremendous contribution to the development of Punjabi literature; (ii) his interpretation of Sikh theology; (iii) his pioneering efforts in various genres of literature, especially the novel; (iv) dissemination of Sikh ideals and philosophy and finally because of his message of mysticism and importance of mystic experience. Various combinations of these propositions are to be found in the writings of those who start from the postulate that the works of Bhai Vir Singh are not to be questioned.<sup>1</sup>

- 
1. Cf., S.S. Anol, "Bhai Vir Singh da Novel", Punjabi Duniya, Vol.I, No.11, (January-February 1951), pp.40-43; Lal Singh, "Safi Iekhak", Punjabi Duniya, Vol.II No.11 (January 1952); Diwan Singh "Amar Punjabi Patra Sundri", Punjabi Duniya, Vol.II, No.9 (November 1952), pp.1-4; Kirpal Singh Kasal, "Bhai Vir Singh", Sahit Samachar, Vol.VI, No.1 (January 1957), pp.229-42; Harinderpal Singh, "Bhai Vir Singh Ek Yug", Sahit Samachar, Vol.V No.12 (December 1957), pp.167-70; Gopal Singh, "Bhai Vir Singh da Kale Adarsh", and Pritam Singh Saefer, "Jiwan Rachna te Udash", Punjabi Sahit, Vol.XVIII, No.12 (December 1959), pp.32-34 & 13-15. Also see G.S. Dhillon, "Character and Impact of the Singh Sabha Movement on the History of the Punjab", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1972, p.294 and Prakash Singh, Continuing Influence of Bhai Vir Singh (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 1972), pp.25-44.

A start in this direction was made by Puran Singh, on whom Bhai Vir Singh had tremendous influence and had reconverted to Sikhism. In 1926 Puran Singh wrote :

Bhai Vir Singh is an epoch in himself. With him begins the most modern Punjabi language. He gives it a new style, a new rhythm and a new flow. We thank God for what he has already given us. He sits under the tree of life in maiden freshness, like his Guru. His song is vital and he imparts most of his joy to his poems. He is the representative poet of those old Sikh poets who revolved around the Beloved's throne in wonder and worship. He is true Eastern genius, still loyal to the Asiatic ideals of art, philosophy and religion.

..... His art is of the highest, not for the cleverness of the word-painting, nor for its power of story telling that conjures up past events in panoramas, nor for the delicate grace of its purity and beauty; nor, even for its great humanity. It is the deep realisation behind it, so masterly in its imperial authority that the very stones, when called by his voice, move and offer a prayer of thankfulness to their creator. He cleanses the out cast, dresses them in moonlight, so that the most abject feel like Gods. There is the mysterious halo of New spring in his poems. He adds a new universe to our soil. His voice is the voice of the beloved. The lofty, gorgeous, infinite, external melody of Guru Granth rings in his blood and his being is resonant with the song of the beloved.<sup>2</sup>

These words were to be prophetic. They set the tone for future writings of this School.<sup>3</sup> If there is

---

2. Puran Singh, Spirit of Oriental Poetry (London, 1926), p.104.

3. This particular extract of Puran Singh has been reprinted in at least four works dealing with Bhai Vir Singh.

one person, who is most responsible for the tremendous growth in this circle of panegyrist, it is Harbans Singh. He is the first person to have written a biography of Bhai Vir Singh.<sup>4</sup> Starting with a description of Bhai Vir Singh's family genealogy and early life, Harbans Singh discusses about his unique contribution in the field of Punjabi poetry and prose, his choice of language and metres; his love for nature and country and his philosophy of life. According to him, his three major novels - Sundari, Bijay Singh and Satwant Kaur, were written with two aims : firstly to enrich the Punjabi language and secondly to propagate Sikhism and Sikh way of life in a novel way<sup>5</sup> (pun unintended).

Further creditability to Bhai Vir Singh's novels is provided by S.S. Amol, editor of the Punjabi journal Likhari and by Dr. Kirpal Singh. According to the former, "As far as the stories in the novels are concerned if not hundred per cent at least ninety per cent they are

---

4. Harbans Singh, Bhai Vir Singh Te Una Di Rachna (Lahore: Lahore Book Shop, 1940).

5. Ibid., p.16. Harbans Singh argues on the same lines in "Bhai Sahib Bhai Vir Singh Ji di Vartak Rachna", Likhari, Bhai Vir Singh Ank, Vol.V, No.1 (January, 1938), pp.57-61; "Bhai Vir Singh Vartak Likhari", Likhari (April-May, 1942), pp.21-24 and "Bhai Sahib De Rachna da Udes", Punjabi Sahit, Vol.XVIII, No.12 (December, 1959), pp.18-20.



true".<sup>6</sup> For the latter ".... Dr. Bhai Vir Singh collected his material of history like a scientific historian. He has tapped every source - standard books which he has quoted in his footnotes, folk-songs depicting the times, anecdotes regarding eminent persons like Kaura Mai, and anecdotes of the bravery of the Sikhs in the days of the ruthless persecution, .... Bhai Vir Singh in these works has tried to make alive the 18th century history of the Sikhs and bring home to his readers the high character of the Sikhs of those days."<sup>7</sup> No wonder a legend has grown around Bhai Vir Singh - in the process his fiction has been declared as history. Dr. Ganda Singh, the doyen of Panjab historians, felicitates, Bhai Vir Singh's novels, for being, "the truest representatives of the lives and character of the Sikhs of the eighteenth century".<sup>8</sup> These adulators ignore what Man Singh wrote in the appendix of the 1933 edition of Sundari : "It appears that the object of writing Sundari was neither to create a novel from a

---

6. S.S. Amol, op.cit., p.42

7. Kirpal Singh, "Historical Significance of Sundari, Bijay Singh, and Satwant Kaur", The Panjab Past and Present, Vol.VI, Part II (October, 1972), pp. 319-20.

8. Ganda Singh, "Bhai Vir Singh and the History of the Sikhs", The Panjab Past and Present, Vol.VI, Part II (October, 1972), p.480.

literary point of view merely for entertainment .... nor to produce a work of investigated history".<sup>9</sup>

As admirers, this school is much more interested in nurturing the legend of Bhai Vir Singh, rather than questioning it. For them the birth of Bhai Vir Singh was ".... an event that gave the Punjab her organ voice and Punjabi language its greatest singer since the days of Warris Shah and the mystic bands of Sikhism .... It was a providential advent; a star had risen over the darkened horizons".<sup>10</sup> If disciples were to question masters, then there would be no masters.

#### Academicians

Unfortunately the line dividing the school of admirers from the academicians is very thin and except for a few exceptions they have not been able to question the fundamental assumptions behind the adulatory images of Bhai Vir Singh. G.S. Talib, an editor of a commemoration volume, brought out by the Panjab University on

---

9. Vir Singh, Sundari (Amritsar: Wazir-i-Hind Press, 1938), p.134.

10. D.S. Maini, "The Portrait of a Poet", in Gurbachan Singh Talib and Attar Singh (eds.), Bhai Vir Singh Life Times and Works (Chandigarh: Publication Bureau, Panjab University, 1973), pp. 98-94.

the occasion of the first birth centenary of Bhai Vir Singh wrote in its introductory article :

.... Towards Bhai Vir Singh the attitude of a large sections of influential and fairly well informed people is one of veneration only 'this side idolatory'. So, in this respect too, while great laudation is called forth by his truly great achievements in scholarship and his interpretation of the principles of his faith through several media of literary creation, the spirit of criticism must discipline itself into an attitude of reverential silence. May be that at a time not far (for a widely studied writer like Bhai Vir Singh cannot long be kept in the insulated and sealed temple of adoration and adulation alone) he will be objectively discussed as a writer rather than merely placed on a pedestal as a teacher. Moreover in a volume like the present, intended to present various aspects of his achievement on the occasion of the centenary of his birth, any exhaustive critical examination of him would clearly be out of place. With all this, it might be said that so far hardly any serious attempt has been made to find out and phrase forth the true quality of his total achievement as a writer and to define the principle of his intellectual being.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of these limitations and without waiting for proper occasions a brilliant start was made by Gurcharan Singh in 1952.<sup>12</sup> He argued that at the time when Bhai Vir Singh wrote his novels, the social reform

---

11. G.S. Talib, "Bhai Vir Singh's Achievement - A Brief Introduction", in G.S. Talib and Attar Singh (eds.), Bhai Vir Singh, pp.4-5.

12. Gurcharan Singh, "Galpkar Bhai Vir Singh", Punjabi Duniya, Vol.III, No.6 (August, 1952), pp. 21-39.

movements, Arya Samaj among Hindus, Aligarh Movement among Muslims and Singh Sabha among the Sikhs, were quiet about British rule and even supported it. These movements did not work for a unified India. In Bhai Vir Singh's novels British imperialism disappears. No mention is made of Sikh struggle against British Raj, for national freedom. Due to conscious or unconscious reasons, he could not transcend the communal boundaries. According to Gurcharan Singh after reading Sundari and Bijay Singh, the readers can only remember about Mir-Mannu and Yahya Khan's tortures, gruesome Muslim executioners, the hue and cry of Sikhs in pain, the killing of children and the live burning of the Sikhs.<sup>18</sup> It seems that all noble qualities and endeavour for human welfare is confined to Sikhs and the rest are demons. Thus, it was not unusual that communal struggle emerged among the readers, when the objective conditions for such a strife already existed. Gurcharan Singh is of the opinion that Bhai Vir Singh sought to confuse his readers by calling his prose as history. Through extensive footnotes he sought to give his novels a basis of historical truth. As they are not based on historical realities, they do not fulfil the definition of a historical truth.

---

18. Ibid., p.24.

In spite of these limitations, what is creditable about Bhai Vir Singh's writings is that they were successful in achieving what they wanted to a great extent.<sup>14</sup>

Most subsequent writings of this School have in a subdued vein followed the parameters set by Gurcharan Singh. They must have arrived at the same conclusions independently, but they only confirm, though with considerable restraint, what Gurcharan Singh had written. Their basic positions are that (i) the achievements and limitations of Bhai Vir Singh should be studied in their historical context, especially the Singh Sabha Movement, which sought to infuse a regenerative spirit in the Sikh community; (ii) Bhai Vir Singh has to be credited for taking to Punjabi at a time when the dominant medium was Braj Bhasa and Urdu; (iii) his novels laid the foundation of this particular genre and also of modern Punjabi prose; (iv) his novels were written to inspire the Sikh community which was faced with a serious identity crisis and (v) his overwhelming concern for the betterment of the Sikh community made him create ideal types who would do no

---

14. Ibid., pp. 26-28.

wrong and always emerge victorious, when at war with Muslims.<sup>15</sup>

The endless repetition of these propositions in numerous works, the changing trends in Punjabi literature and an end of the euphoria created by the birth centenary of Bhai Vir Singh has virtually made a closed chapter of his writings. Any attempt to pick up the trail, would be snubbed as out-dated. Consequently, numerous questions remain unanswered. Why did language, which is ultimately a social activity, started to have a communal identification? Is it appropriate to single out father figures in literature? Has this not led to our ignoring contemporaries of Bhai Vir Singh; Gyani Gyan Singh, Kahn Singh, Mohan Singh Vaid and many others; What were the exact linkages between Bhai Vir Singh's writings and Singh

- 
15. S.S. Narula, Bhai Vir Singh (Ek Sahitak Adhian) (Ludhiana, Lahore Book Shop, n.d.), pp.17-34; Piar Singh, "Bhai Vir Singh de Gad Seva", Alochana, Vol.III, No.4 (April, 1958), pp.64-67; Harcharan Singh, "Bhai Vir Singh de Vartak" and Pritpal Singh "Bhai Vir Singh de Novel", Punjabi Sahit, Vol.XVIII, No.12 (December, 1959), pp.35-37, 30-31; Darshan Kaur Grover, "Bhai Vir Singh de Itihasik Novel", in Harbhajan Singh (ed.), Bhai Vir Singh Punar Vichar (Ambala: Vidvan Parkashan, 1972), pp.59-72; S.S. Kohli, "Bhai Vir Singh's Novels", in G.S. Talib and Attar Singh (eds.), Bhai Vir Singh, pp.147-53; S.S. Uppal, "Bhai Vir Singh de Novel" in S.S. Kohli and Harnam Singh Shan (eds.), Bhai Vir Singh Jivan, Sama te Rachna (Chandigarh: Publication Bureau, Punjab University, 1973), pp.155-56.

Sabha's ideology? All these are complex issues and remain largely unanswered.

### Marxian

A third line of approach to Bhai Vir Singh's novels is based on Marxism. A start in this direction was made by a prominent and in many ways a pioneering Marxian critic - Sant Singh Sekhon. He is the first Panjabi writer to make use of the Marxist epistemology for literary criticism. It is creditable that through the historization of literary critique, he has raised many questions, which are alien to the writings of most scholars. Sekhon has been writing about the works of Bhai Vir Singh since 1948,<sup>16</sup> but the most systematic elaboration of his views are to be found in a book he wrote in 1962.<sup>17</sup> Here, first I will attempt to summarise his assessment of Vir Singh's writings :

In the second half of the nineteenth century, according to Sekhon, the Sikhs were unable to reconcile

---

16. S.S. Sekhon, "Punjabi Novel", Phulwari, Vol. XXIV, No. 2 (March, 1948), pp. 41-47 and "Bhai Vir Singh", Sahit Samachar, Vol. VI, No. 1 (January, 1957), pp. 243-49.

17. S.S. Sekhon, Bhai Vir Singh te Una da Yug, (Ludhiana: Lahore Book Shop, 1962), this was later reprinted as, Bhai Vir Singh te Una di Rachna (Ludhiana: Lahore Book Shop, 1976), References herein are from the second edition.

to the shock of loosing their raj to the British imperialism.<sup>18</sup> The Sikhs also felt threatened with the proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries and the growing opposition, of the Arya Samaj. Placed in such a milieu, the Sikhs were attracted towards their glorious past and they wanted to recreate this in the twentieth century,<sup>19</sup> - atleast in the social and spiritual domain. They perceived that the reincarnation of the past glory would enable a glorious present. Bhai Vir Singh became a spokesman of such aspirations. He belonged to the middle class, which at this juncture was closely aligned with the landed aristocracy and upper sections of the peasantry. His writings represent the social interests of these classes and the Singh Sabha Movement.<sup>20</sup>

Bhai Vir Singh was deeply disillusioned by the loss of the Sikh empire, but he realised that it was practically impossible to re-establish it. The only ideal which could be regenerated was the social and spiritual values of Sikhism. If these were restored, in that case the Sikhs could once again dominate in the

---

18. Ibid., pp.28-30, 212.

19. Ibid., p.212.

20. Ibid., p.28.



Panjab. Even earlier, for Bhai Vir Singh the loss of Sikh power was because they had failed to follow the ideals of the Sikh Gurus: if they would do so now, then at least the future would be secure. This reincarnation of the Sikh ideals was not to be in the political domain but only in the spiritual and social spheres. Only that political rule was bad for him which circumscribed the freedom of religion, especially the Sikh religion, as had been done by the Mughals. The British raj allowed freedom of religion, therefore, it was not to be challenged.<sup>21</sup> In fact, to do so would be unreligious. Such an explanation became an ideal justification for British rule.

As for the social and economic difficulties confronted by an individual, according to Bhai Vir Singh they should be resolved through following the high ideals of Sikh religion. His writings are virtually devoid of any aspirations for national freedom. He strives for a status quo and does not want the individual to alter the given social reality. A life devoted to the highest ideals of truth, meditation and charity would be highly rewarding. Bhai Vir Singh is unable to transcend Sikh denominational identity and this has considerably restricted his humanism and social vision. Thus,

---

21. Ibid., p.216.

Sekhon concludes, he was neither a revolutionary nor a humanist. But within his historical context, Bhair Vir Singh's achievements were great.

What then, according to Sekhon was the purpose of Vir Singh's novels :

1. To establish Sikh rule in the Panjab; as this was practically impossible, he strived for Sikh dominance in Panjab.
2. To propagate the message of Sikh Gurus; reform the religious and ethical life of the Sikhs and make them proud inheritors of a glorious vision of an ideal man.
3. To develop an important genre of Punjabi literature: the novel. It was only the development of this literature, which would enable the emergence of a national identity of the Panjabi people.<sup>22</sup>

Sekhon's scheme is unable to answer why social classes - middle class and landed aristocracy - which even he agrees, benefitted from the British raj, again want Sikh rule. He cites no evidence to support his claim in this regard. It is not clear if he is using class as a heuristic device or if he thinks that Panjab at this time had a fully articulate class society. If latter was the case, then he will have to show why in a

---

22. S.S. Sekhon, "Bhair Vir Singh - The father of Modern Punjabi Prose", in G.S. Talib and Attar Singh (eds.), Bhair Vir Singh, p.113.

class society, class relationships were at times based on religious identities and not in relationship to means of production and class consciousness. (His assertions would have much more weight if he would have documented them). Sometimes he writes in terms of classes and then he switches over to the Sikhs as a community - he should clarify the relationship between the two and also establish the basis of the latter concept. His treatment of the social formation is superficial. It is one thing to assert that Bhai Vir Singh belonged to the middle class and another to say that his writings reflected the social interests of this class, which was aligned with the landed aristocracy and upper sections of the peasantry. Social origins do not always predetermine social functioning. If they did in case of Bhai Vir Singh then it has to be shown, not assumed as self-evident.

Following Sekhon, S.B. Singh has by adopting a partially Marxian and partially Freudian framework argued that there were strong personal, social, historical, economic and political reasons, which compelled Bhai Vir Singh to write the kind of literature he did.<sup>28</sup> He was

---

28. S.B. Singh, "Samaj te Bhai Vir Singh", Sahit Samachar, Bhai Vir Singh Ank, Vol.V, No.1 (January, 1959), pp.207-17.

from a deeply religious family and his formative influences had been such that he was strongly inclined towards Sikh religion. For his higher education he had to attend a missionary school, where the Christian preachings hurt his sensibilities.<sup>24</sup> Historically, due to the betrayal of the Hindu Dogras to the British, the Sikhs had lost their empire. This had created a chasm between the Hindus and the Sikhs. During Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule the Jat jaigirdars were dominant. The merchants had a very low status in the villages. The Hindus faced many difficulties under this Jat raj and these tensions surfaced during Bhai Vir Singh's time.<sup>25</sup> At this stage Swami Dayanand who belonged to Gujrat, visited Panjab to make use of the conflict between the Sikhs and Hindus. Arya Samaj started the Shuddhi campaigns which sought converts from other religions. The Arya Samajists criticised Sikh religion and the Sikhs. This disturbed the Sikh leadership and gave birth to Singh Sabha Movement. It started preaching and against Hindus and other religions. The Hindu community was affluent and among the Sikhs, the jaigirdars were rich. There was no Sikh group which was concerned about

---

24. Ibid., pp.207-08.

25. Ibid., p.209.

the lower classes of the Sikhs. Consequently lower class Sikhs, started converting to Christianity and Hinduism.<sup>26</sup>

S.B. Singh is of the opinion that along with the growth of the Singh Sabha, there emerged small towns in the Panjab. These towns were inhabited by lower class Sikhs. They were mostly merchants and they were in competition with Hindu merchants. This mercantile group was to establish a capitalist society and they were busy accumulating capital. For maximising this accumulation, they sought to use religion.<sup>27</sup> Each community attacked the others religion. Muslims followed suit. All the three communities wanted that the British government should provide employment based on numerical strength. Some British administrators would grant more jobs to one community, leading to further conflict. These socio-historic circumstances compelled Bhai Vir Singh to produce Sikh literature.

The pressure of these conditions, prevented Bhai Vir Singh from being a distinguished writer. His love was not for everyone but only for the Sikh community. The Sikh belief of a glorious past is largely the result of

---

26. Ibid., p.210.

27. Ibid., p.211.

Bhai Vir Singh's writings. As far as the Sikh religion is concerned its future generations will be indebted to Bhai Vir Singh. The strategy of British imperialism was to divide and rule and thereby strengthen their own rule. If Bhai Vir Singh would have understood this strategy and opposed it, he would have had an All India stature. But he was prevented from achieving this standing by the Kuka Movement. It was essentially a peaceful movement, though at times, it was violent. In case Bhai Vir Singh had like the Kuka Lahir opposed the British, then he would have driven the Sikh community on a suicidal course. The failure of the Kukas and the difficult situation faced by the Sikhs, prevented him from having a broader outlook.<sup>28</sup> The contemporary communal strife did not allow him to pay attention to anything except religion. Though the conflict was overtly religious, it was for economic benefits. The religious-idealistic ethos of the jaqirdari society in Panjab forced every writer to take sides and confine himself to religion.

Bhai Sahib was thus an idealist-romantic writer. He could not fulfil his ambitions against the Christians in his youth. It was his desire to oppose Christianity,

---

28. Ibid., pp. 213-14.

but the socio-political conditions and British rule prevented him from achieving this. This made him neurotic.<sup>29</sup> According to him Christianity had destroyed Indian civilization, but he could only be an impotent spectator to this process, because he wanted the Sikhs to progress. Therefore, the conflict was suppressed. This emerged against Hindus and Muslims, by using historical events. His life experience and society gradually ended this neurosis. But his emotions did not achieve sublimation, because if this had happened, it was essential for him to write against the British. This sublimation was achieved after the war, when he portrays a conflict with Christians in Baba Naudh Singh and Ganga Ram which is anti-British. Now he develops a deeper insight into nature and society. He did try to keep pace with the changing times. S.B. Singh concludes by writing, "All those who have Punjabi as their mother tongue are indebted to Bhai Vir Singh".<sup>30</sup>

The line of approach which S.B. Singh has adopted can be rewarding, but he has cited no corroborative evidence for his sweeping generalisations. He has made an interesting melange of existing studies on Bhai Vir Singh. He is blissfully unaware of certain fundamental

---

29. Ibid., p.216

30. Ibid., p.217.

facts of Panjab history. The Arya Samaj did not give birth to the Singh Sabha as he claims. The Amritsar Singh Sabha had been formed in 1873, four years before the first Arya Samaj in Punjab. The development of Singh Sabha cannot be merely studied in communal digits. To explain the loss of Sikh empire in terms of the Dogra betrayal is most inadequate and indicates the same narrow approach of which S.B. Singh blames Bhai Vir Singh. To write that Hindus faced many difficulties under Maharaja Ranjit Singh is to read history backwards. The Hindus and Sikh Jagirdars were not the only affluent people in Panjab, the Sikh peasantry probably was the richest in Asia. S.B. Singh does not specify who were the "lower class Sikhs". At one stage they appear to be low caste Sikhs and at another they seem to be merchants. The latter by no means can be regarded as lower class - neither in economic terms nor in social scale. Most of the Sikh merchants were from the Khatri and Arora castes, they had a high ritual status in the Panjab. He seems to confuse caste with class and use the two concepts as synonyms.

S.B. Singh's Freudian explanation, is like putting the cart before the horse. Bhai Vir Singh was writing with a certain conviction for a specific social milieu and not because of any deep rooted neurosis. If



this was the cause, what prevented him after having written Baba Naudh Singh, with which he is supposed to have achieved sublimation, from supporting the Akalis or the latter phases of the national movement. Why did he have to pour invective against both the Muslims and Hindus. Why does he praise Christian missionaries in Baba Naudh Singh? Bhai Vir Singh was conscious of why and what he was writing for. He was no slave of the subconscious. He must be accepted as he is, without any props.

For any understanding of the Marxist interpretation of Bhai Vir Singh it is essential to have a detailed discussion of Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia's criticisms - not because they have made any original contribution or clarifications, but because they have so much confused the issues. He started his career in the government service and later became Director of the Department of Planning and Development in Punjabi University, Patiala. Subsequently, he was appointed as the first Director of Panjab State University Text-Book Board. The blurb on the jacket in his latest work declare : "Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia appeared on the literary horizon as a crusader against the traditional modes of thought and forms of expression. As such he through his poetry and criticism pioneered the correlated trends of experimentalism,

Modernity and Radicalism".<sup>31</sup> I feel it is best to quote the 'crusader', at length to perceive the basis of his 'dialectic'. Providing a background to the writings of Bhai Vir Singh, he writes :

"After the extension of the British rule over the Panjab, the big Sikh landed aristocracy was liquidated. This gave, by implication, boost to the lower grade of Sikh feudals. The British masters directed their policies to win over the loyalty of this section of the population. Gradually lands were granted in North-west Panjab to this class. Through similar policies there came into being a loyalist leisure - possessing (upper) middle class, among the Sikhs, within the feudal framework but gravitating towards urbanization and bourgeois traditions. Also contact with the West, through the given facilities of education, generated a reformist consciousness in this class. By virtue of its socio-economic make up and induced by the new consciousness on intellectual level, this class embarked upon its historical task of reformism. Within the limits imposed on it by its own class character, this class participated in the process of our Renaissance in its own way, particularly in the form of Singh Sabha Movement in the Panjab ... The Singh Sabha Movement being a projection of the upper middle class of the Sikhs, establishing itself on a reformist footing, developed a pro-British complexion ... Bhai Vir Singh the Chief exponent of the rightist ideology of the Singh Sabha and the Khalsa Diwan, exhorts the Sikhs to remain faithful to the British Government, in the preface to his Bhai Singh." 32

---

31. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia, Punjabi Literature in Perspective (A Marxist Approach) Ludhiana : Kalyani Publishers, n.d.)

32. Jasbir S. Ahluwalia, Tradition and Experiment in Modern Punjabi Poetry (Ferozapore: Bawa Publishing House, n.d.), pp.72-73.

For Ahluwalia Bhai Vir Singh, "represents the complex of consciousness constituted by the progressive as well as the regressive elements embodied in the Khalsa Diwan and Singh Sabha Movements. The progressive element manifests itself in the feudal reformist humanist tradition on the fringe of bourgeois consciousness and the regressive element asserts itself in the revivalist undertones. This complex of consciousness is aptly reflected in the choice of historical themes of his novel related to the Sikh victories against Mughal imperialism".<sup>33</sup>

On the basis of these premises Ahluwalia portrays Bhai Vir Singh as a propagandist whose writings sought to make the Sikhs loyal to the British raj. This was the reason writes Ahluwalia that Bhai Vir Singh failed to take cognizance of the Ghadr movement, the Jallian-wala Bagh tragedy and the passive resistance of the Akali movement.<sup>34</sup> In one of his recent writings he concludes with a fresh elan vital : "Starting from the feudalized Sikh thought, ethics and ethos, Bhai Vir Singh made a half-way house on the road to defeudalization

---

33. Ibid., p.73.

34. Ibid., pp.74-75.

of Sikhism",<sup>85</sup> and thereby failed to establish its original "anti-feudal dialectic".<sup>86</sup>

Ahluwalia's attempt to act as a 'crusader against the traditional modes of thought', has resulted in utter chaos and made a parody of the Marxian tradition. He seems to suffer from a delusion, that only the use of jargon can confirm his standing as a Marxian critic. It would have considerably helped if he had elaborated what he meant by: 'feudal reformist - humanist tradition on fringe of bourgeois consciousness; feudalized Sikh thought; defeudalization of Sikhism; anti-feudal dialectic; progressive; regressive and Mughal imperialism'. I must confess that some of these terms are totally unintelligible to me and others have a specific meaning only in a historical context and cannot be freely distributed for indulging in fits of fancy. Ahluwalia does not substantiate his claim that British rule 'liquidated' the Sikh landed aristocracy. Obviously, the establishment of British raj considerably weakened this

---

85. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia, Punjab Literature in Perspective, p.131.

86. Ibid., p.129.

class, but weakness does not mean liquidation. In fact, in the post 1857 period, the Sikh landed aristocracy became the most important ally of the British government. Its position was stabilised, they were given enhanced jagirs, some of them had their earlier judicial functions restored, they were invited to oriental durbars for being endowed with zealously coveted titles and gifts. Soon they emerged as a powerful social group in the Panjab.<sup>37</sup> Aitchison, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Panjab, opened a "Chief's College", at Lahore to educate the sons of the landed aristocracy.

It is not clear what Ahluwalia implies by 'lower grade of Sikh feudal', to whom he writes the British granted lands in North-West Panjab. Lands in North-West Panjab were not granted to any Sikh feudals but middle peasants from central Panjab, who did not own substantial holdings.<sup>38</sup> He has wrongly stated that Bhai Vir Singh in the preface to Bijay Singh exhorts the Sikhs to be loyal to the British. There is no such reference. Ahluwalia's comical performance reminds one of Sancho Panza tilting at the wind mills.

---

37. For details see Ian Johnstone Kerr, "The Panjab Province and the Lahore District 1849-72: A case study of British Colonial Rule and Social Change", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1975, pp.258-80.

38. Himadri Banerjee, Agrarian Society of the Punjab, 1849-1901 unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Calcutta, 1976, pp.28-55.

A decade back, a Russian Marxist Scholar<sup>39</sup> wrote a comprehensive history of Punjabi literature. His work has a brief section on Bhai Vir Singh. According to him the main purpose of Vir Singh's writings was to show the greatness of Sikh religion and for this mission he offered his entire literary genius. Like earlier critics, Serebryakov criticises Bhai Vir Singh for his cold treatment of the contemporary socio-political development and being obsessed with the past.

Literature is a part of the total culture and like culture cannot be merely identified in terms of crude and mechanistic class analysis - especially when the assumptions behind such studies are fallacious and are not established. The resulting paradigm collapses like a house of cards. The Marxian tradition within India has made no serious attempt to understand the cultural situation in a colonial period and have instead concentrated on deducing the class affiliations of Bhai Vir Singh's writings, a linkage which even when established, does not explain the social processes

---

39. I. Serebryakov, Punjabi Sahit (Amritsar: New Age Book Centre, n.d.), pp.96-101.

of which literature is a part. Bhai Vir Singh was not manufacturing ideologies and nor was he a mere class representative : a propagandist. Such economic equations ultimately reduce literature to a mere gimmick, a redundant activity. If Indian Marxists have to make any valuable contribution to literary criticism, they must steer out of their vulgar moorings.<sup>40</sup>

---

40. For an extremely valuable work in the Marxian literary tradition, see Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

## CHAPTER V

### BHAI VIR SINGH'S NOVELS

As a novelist Bhai Vir Singh probed into the social needs of his co-religionists and provided his personal prescriptions for their social afflictions. He articulated in his novels a symbolic universe which would provide to the lay Sikhs and the readers of his novels, the code for deciphering the social reality, which they actively established and perceived. By creating a mythology out of the Sikh experience in the eighteenth century, Vir Singh sought to supply a Golden Age model for human behaviour and social relationships.<sup>1</sup> Such a paradigm, if accepted, would guarantee its disciples, with a life saving manual, which charts out the purpose, value and direction of human life.<sup>2</sup>

Evidently man wants to be more than just himself. He wants to be a whole man. He is not satisfied with being a separate individual; out of the partiality of his individual life he strives towards a fullness that he senses and demands, towards a fullness of life of which

- 
1. For the use of religion as an ideological force see Stephan Feuchtwang, "Investigating Religion", in Maurice Bloch ed. Marxist Analyses and Social Anthropology (London: 1975), pp.61-82.
  2. The value of literature in concluding life is elaborated in Monroe Berger, Real and Imagined Worlds: The Novel and Social Science (Cambridge: 1977), pp.187-213.



individuality with all its limitations cheats him, towards a more comprehensible, a more just world, a world that makes sense. He rebels against having to consume himself within the confines of his own life, within the transient, chance limits of his own personality. He wants to refer to something that is more than 'I', something outside himself and yet essential to himself. He longs to absorb the surrounding world and make it his own, to unite his limited 'I' with a communal existence, to make his individuality social.<sup>3</sup>

If it were man's nature to be more than an individual, this desire would be incomprehensible and senseless, for as an individual he would then be a whole: he would be all that he was capable of being. Man's desire to be increased and supplemented indicates that he is more than an individual. He feels that he can attain wholeness only if he takes possession of the experiences of others that might potentially be his own. Yet what a man apprehends as his potential includes everything that humanity as a whole is capable of. Literature is the indispensable means for his merging of the individual with the whole. It reflects his infinite capacity for association, for sharing experiences

---

3. Maxim Gorky, On Literature (Moscow, n.d.) pp.71-95.

and ideas.<sup>4</sup> Bhai Vir Singh sketched out practical illustrations of this literary paradigm in his novels. His characters were the social types, which every Sikh ought to be, if he desired happiness and eternal bliss.

Bhai Vir Singh's reference point is not the individual but the Sikh community.<sup>5</sup> Each moment of human life, to be fruitfully spent, ought to be devoted to the service of the community. No effort for an individual identity or exploration is to be made only a communal identity should be ascribed. Human misery and dilemmas in Bhai Vir Singh's characters stem out of their lack of faith in God. The suggested cure lies in a staunch belief in God, constantly invoking his name to surmount all problems and live according to the ideals of the Sikh religion.

Bhai Vir Singh is not willing to make man the determining factor in shaping his future. It is for God to decide and sanction this future. Clearly Bhai Vir Singh is obsessed by God and religion and he wants his readers to accept the same milestones for their lives. Social reality and social differentiation for Bhai Vir Singh are

---

4. Ralph Fox, The Novel and the People (London:1948) pp. 37-38.

5. This point is fundamental to all his four novels: Sundari (Amritsar: 1972); Bijay Singh (Amritsar: 1970); Satwant Kaur (Amritsar: 1977) and Baba Naudh Singh (Amritsar: 1970).

only the reality of religion and the differentiation based on religion. He explains the evaluation of Punjabi society through a fourfold religious division: Sikh, Muslim, Hindu and Christian.<sup>6</sup> In all his four novels he strives for this communal differentiation.<sup>6</sup>

Basic to Bhai Vir Singh's characters, was their effort to practise their religion and maintain their identity inspite of social, emotional and economic difficulties. Islamic persecution made them even more staunch in their faith. Even the threat of death, would not make them renounce their religion. They left the riches and comforts of home, to wander and starve in unknown jungles. Their strength and vigour flows out of their total faith in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. They practice the Sikh trinity of Nam, Dan and Isnan. Egalitarian in their social organization, they are free from the inequalities of caste. Among them, there is no high or low born. They help each other at time of trouble. Wealth and food is shared for the welfare of all. They have a community kitchen. Women enjoy the same position as men. This utopian rendering of the past, was to encourage the Sikhs, to live according to the tenets of their faith and emulate the life-styles of their forefathers.

---

6. Ibid.

The most essential factor in developing the unity of a community is a strong sense of communal identity. Emotional identification with the heroic characters in the world of imagination reinforces his audiences feelings as Sikhs. This heightening of a distinctive self-image is further implemented by the novelists allusions to the distinguishing features of Sikhism, such as personal appearance, dress, external symbols of religion, specific rituals and belief in one, formless God. Direct sermons against some practices supposed to be assimilated from other religions are interspersed throughout the novels. Praising Sundari's adherence to the pure faith at the cost of her own terrible suffering, Bhai Vir Singh markedly contrasts her with the "superstitions" Sikh women of his day :

Look at yourself and see whether or not the decline of the Sikh nation is caused by your very own hands! Leaving your God and your true Gurus, you worship stones, trees, idols, tombs and saints. Forgetting Sikh religion, you rot in another religion. Turning your back on the true Gurus you teach someone else's religion to your offspring too. Your children will grow to be half baked like you - Sikh on the head, Brahmin around the neck and Muslim below the waist.<sup>7</sup>

Quite clearly the objective here is identical to that found in the polemics of the same period, such as Kahn Singh's Ham Hindu Nahin.<sup>8</sup> Besides raising a new

---

7. Vir Singh, Sundari, p.11.

8. Kahn Singh, Ham Hindu Nahin (Amritsar: 1972).

consciousness about Sikh existence as a separate community, these novels provided an impetus for organization by re-collecting the unity and well knit communal life style of the Sikhs in the eighteenth century. Just as important for arousing sectarian feelings is the manner in which the Muslims and Hindus are portrayed. The latter group are often selfish and cowardly, nevertheless, the Sikhs became the Hindus' courageous and selfless saviours. As a consequence, the present attitude towards Hindus is one of contempt and anger for their ingratitude. Anger is directed against the Muslims owing to oppression, therefore they are portrayed as brutal and treacherous.

In contrast to the Sikhs, the Muslims in Bhai Vir Singh's novels are the arch-villains of history. They are portrayed as power-hungry, drunkards, lecherous men, who have no humanistic ideals of life. All finer qualities of life seem to be a monopoly of the Sikhs. The Muslims want to enforce their religion on unwilling people, especially Sikhs. They imprison, torture, punish and kill Sikh men, women and children for practising their faith. After reading Bhai Vir Singh's first three novels, Sundari, Bijay Singh and Satwant Kaur, it appears that the eighteenth century State had no other purpose, except for enforcing Islam. The Muslim rulers are ~~ix~~ wicked chiefly because they are bent on destroying the symbols of the Sikh

religion. Owing to their wickedness, they are invariably defeated by the pious Khalsa.

Fundamentally these novels attempt to foster communal self-awareness, confidence, pride and aspirations for improvement among the Sikhs by recalling their heroic heritage. They vindicate a present historical role and suggest a future. The descriptions of the role of the Khalsa in the days of the Mughal rule, for instance, are supposed to be quite precise. Bhai Vir Singh cites the then standard authorities on Punjab history repeatedly in order to document significant points in his novels.<sup>9</sup> Yet, the historical accuracy is superficial as the author's purpose introduces a serious bias into his treatment of historical material, which distorts his portrayal of the Sikhs' character and achievement. The true nature of their mission appears again and again in the novels but the author never makes it his primary concern. By rationalizing the superiority of the Sikhs to Hindus and Muslims, the community becomes of greater importance than its mission. Sham Singh, a protagonist of Bhai Vir Singh says :

This house of ours is not sectarian, nor do we bear enmity towards anyone. Be one Hindu or

---

9. For Bhai Vir Singh's effort to have a historical approach in his novels see Kirpal Singh, "Historical Significance of Sundari, Bijay Singh and Satwant Kaur", in The Panjab Past and Present, Vol.VI, No.12, October, 1972, pp.313-320.

Muslim our true Gurus had no enmity for either. All mankind is equal in our eyes. Our sole aim is to destroy injustice and to provide full measure in dealings. Our purpose is to straighten the tyrannical rulers of today. To set them straight is to root out oppression.<sup>10</sup>

The humanistic commitment expressed in such avowals does not accord with sectarian aims. Justifying their existence as guardians of justice for all, they cannot be a completely self-contained group. Because the tenor of the author's time was separatism, the commitment of guardianship in the novels is particularly devoid of meaning. Hence instead of emphasising the ties that bind the Sikhs to others, the novels actually set the Sikhs apart on the basis of their superior ideals. There is far too little respect for the dignity of non-Sikhs to indicate any serious universal concern. To repeat, nearly all Muslims are wicked and while the Hindus too are oppressed, it is their own cowardice, greed and servility that is to blame.

The novelists' sectarian attitude also colours his view of what is significant in the Sikh experience. He attributes their strength of character to formal aspects of Sikhism, ritualizing the essential process involved in making the Sikhs a social factor in Punjab. Bhai Vir Singh conceives the formal adoption of Sikhism itself as

---

10. Vir Singh, Sundari, p.43.

a means of transforming a person, no matter how timid and weak, into a fearless warrior. For example: "Earlier, this Khatri was an ordinary weak and pallid looking town dweller ... Then taking Amrita, he became extremely strong and valorous".<sup>11</sup>

Satisfied by appearance rather than the essence Bhai Vir Singh's novels became shallow homilies on Sikhism replete with moralizing discourses. Both characterization and action are extremely unrealistic, not for want of documentation but because of the idealization of the effects of Sikhism. For instance, there is an episode in Baba Naugh Singh, where the reading of the Sikh scripture leads to the desired objective of stopping incessant rainfall.<sup>12</sup> Bhai Vir Singh sees a universal corruption, which according to him could only be checked through true religion, which in this case would be Sikhism.<sup>13</sup> Any writing based on such premises would produce characters who are singular, black and white images. Bhai Vir Singh's characters are no exception. There are no other shades inbetween the extremes to express or develop the personality of the characters. The virtuous are full of goodness and

---

11. Idid., p.47.

12. Vir Singh, Baba Naugh Singh, p.28.

13. Idid., p.33.



three dimensional characters. A change of heart occurs only because of religious considerations and that also on becoming a Sikh, never as a Muslim, Hindu or Arya Samajist. Characterization is over. Simplified and lacking in an ability to portray those individual attributes which are the essence of men and which distinguish them from other men. Descriptions too tend to be artificial and the novels themselves are weak in structure. The structural weakness has led some scholars to question Baba Naudh Singh's generic qualification to be classed as a novel.<sup>14</sup>

Sundari, the heroine of Bhai Vir Singh's first novel, was born as Surasti in the family of a Hindu Khatri, Shaman. On the auspicious day of her marriage she was abducted by a high ranking Mughal official. Later she was rescued from the clutches of the Mughals by her heroic brother Balwant Singh, who had converted to Sikhism and lived in the jungles, defying the Mughal persecutors. Now both brother and sister join hands in their struggle against Mughals. But in one of the fights, both of them are captured by the troops of a Mughal Nawab, who wants to convert Balwant Singh to Islam and have Surasti for his harem. They are saved from this

---

14. Gurcharan Singh, "Galpkar Bhai Vir Singh", Punjabi Duniya, vol. III; No.6 (August 1952), pp. 21-39.

dishonour by Sham Singh, who leads the jatha to which Baiwant Singh belonged. Back in the jungles, Surasti is baptized according to the Sikh rites and she is transformed into a heroic woman: Sunderi. Twice more she was to be captured by Mughals, but both times her brave Sikh brethren were to liberate her. She takes part in various campaigns and because of her help to a Hindu Khatri in recovering his wife and wealth from the Mughals, the grateful couple converts to Sikhism.

Militant Arya Samajists may go on claiming that Sikhs Hindu Hain (Sikhs are Hindus), but for Bhai Vir Singh it was Hindus who had converted to Sikhism and then lived with honour, courage, strength and hope. It was the Sikh baptizing which liberated them and endowed them with qualities of supermen. The hero of Bhai Vir Singh's second novel, Bijay Singh, was a convert from Hinduism. Impressed by the deeds and valour of the Sikhs he accepted Sikh baptism and renounced his old name: Ram Lal. He and his wife, Sushil Kaur, on numerous occasions, outwit the Mughals and succeed in maintaining their 'unique' identity - a quality which Bhai Vir Singh so much desired the contemporary Sikhs to emulate. Even the threat of death could not make Bijay Singh and Sushil Kaur to renounce their faith in Sikhism. Setwant Kaur, the heroine of Bhai Vir Singh's third novel, is enslaved during an invasion of Ahmed Shah Durrani and taken to

Kabul. Here she faces a grim struggle for survival, but as a typical Bhai Vir Singh character she comes out triumphant and in the end manages to reach Amritsar, without any harm. Once again, in this novel, there is enacted the Sikh ceremony of baptizing, and Agha Khan becomes Alamba Singh.

Bhai Vir Singh's sectarianism is most apparent in the novel in which he purports to describe the contemporary Sikh community. The full title of the novel Subhag Ji De Sudhar Hathin Baba Naudh Singh, i.e. The reform of Subhag ji by Naudh Singh suggests its proselytizing nature. It is a long ponderous novel in two parts. The first part is mainly devoted to showing the infallibility of Sikhism as a way of life, the second is mainly a litany culminating in the mystical experience of Subhag, a woman converted to Sikhism by Baba Naudh Singh, the major protagonist. The setting is a village, a modern community living happily under the tutelage of Baba Naudh Singh. Presumably the secret of their happiness is their adherence to the principles of Sikhism although the assimilation of some modern ideas is also partly responsible. They lead simple and pious lives. By hard work, sound methods of cultivation, cleanliness, chaste living, frugality, freedom from avarice and mutual concern and cooperation, they have created an idyllic way of life.

Problems arise when any of these principles are transgressed. Needless to say, the main threat to the internal harmony of this community comes from other religious groups, the Hindus, the Muslims, the Christians, all attempting to increase their individual influence and power at expense of others. In time preachers of all alien religions come to preach in the village but under the leadership of the Baba, the faith of the villagers remains unshakable. Instead, all the non-Sikh preachers except the Christian missionary are themselves converted to Sikhism. Even an atheist barrister, Madho Das, after having met with an accident and subsequently nursed in Naudh Singh's house is so much convinced regarding the verity of Sikhism that he and his wife convert to Sikhism.<sup>15</sup>

The open competition among the different religious communities is accompanied by a tacit, yet eager, acceptance of British rule. The protection provided by this rule is viewed as an opportunity for self-determination and growth. But the contradiction inherent in this new form of dependancy frequently manifests itself. As a point of fact, the Sikh desire for self-determination conflicts with British interests. The emphasis on the need for self-sufficiency of the village community is

---

15. For details on this incident see Vir Singh, Baba Naudh Singh, chapter XIV.

Symptomatic of an attempt to circumvent this conflict. Somewhat paradoxically, the novel stresses the value of remaining aloof from the centres of government control. Litigation for example is an evil not only because it creates bad feelings among fellow villagers but also because it involves them with government machinery. One cannot help feeling such influences are complicated by their agents' proximity to the centres of power. Though Baba Naudh Singh and his faction are never defeated, one cannot but notice the contrived nature of their triumph. There is a real contradiction between their aspirations and their circumstances. At times the Baba sees the world closing in on him. Sometimes he complains in utter hopelessness why "are we not left alone?"<sup>16</sup> Yet the essential problem is glossed over for several reasons.

Firstly, it is not seen as arising from the British control of India but from the irresponsibility of scattered individuals, e.g. Christian missionaries, the Western trained barrister who recklessly runs over a village child<sup>17</sup> or the young man educated in the new system, who obtains a government job only to use his position to help his family at the expense of others.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, that the

---

16. Ibid., p. 36.

17. Ibid., p. 50.

18. Ibid., p. 90.

author wishes to establish a utopian republic independent of all outside control and contact. Such wishful thinking has no correspondence with reality. Administrative intervention by government authorities can be minimized only by accepting the limitations on the possibilities of self-determination. Even the best civic-conduct cannot nullify the pressures of outside domination and intervention. Even more far-reaching are the economic and cultural forces released by colonialism that penetrated all facets of the indigenous way of life. Some cultural conflict seems inevitable since Baba Naadh Singh mistrusts all outside influences, even new beverages such as Soda water. It is his contention that the new education undermines the old values of selflessness. What he considers to be the self-righteous arrogance of the Christian preachers is especially damaging. Ultimately the conflict is resolved by making spiritual fulfilment the only worthwhile end of life.<sup>19</sup> By virtue of its very nature that spirituality cannot be thwarted by worldly impediments. Thus since the British regime ensures complete religious freedom, an illusion of complete political freedom is created. The British regime's creation of a limited number of opportunities leads Vir Singh to believe in unlimited possibilities for all. Hence the British regime is portrayed as

---

19. Idid., p. 33.

providing the freedom and opportunity for complete material and spiritual fulfilment for all. Yet, inspite of these contradictions underlying the facile optimism and exhortations of Bhai Vir Singh's novels, one must not dismiss them as inconsequential.

The quest for the Sikh Weltanschauung in which both the Singh Sabha and Bhai Vir Singh participated together, turned a full circle with Bhai Vir Singh's last novel - Baba Naudh Singh. He is convinced that like his archetypes, the Sikhs could now stand on firm ground and face the 'difficult situation'. After finishing Part II of Satyant Kaur in 1929 he does not write any other novel for the next thirty one years. It is significant that by this time the ideology of the Singh Sabha is replaced by the Akalis. One can only speculate on the coincidence that Bhai Vir Singh's career as a novelist and the Singh Sabha's direct elan over the Sikhs came to an end simultaneously.

Any interpretation which treats Vir Singh's novels as either apologies for the British rule or sheer class propoganda is questionable. Also at this stage he is not inspired by any literary ideals or zeal for writing history. He does not deliver any message for the establishment of the Sikh rule. Though he writes of the past and mysticism, he is firmly rooted in the present. His characters in

accordance with the objectives of the Singh Sabha are Catharised only after their conversion to Sikhism, either from Hinduism or Islam. He seems to derive a vicarious pleasure through his conversions. His ideal Sikhs were created at a social cost - by denying both the religion and individuality of a Hindu or a Muslim. His social harmony was only possible in a Sikh utopia - where everyone had converted to Sikhism. Bhai Vir Singh's measuring rod of good was only one: Sikh ideals.

Even a superficial reading of Vir Singh's novels immediately raises one question: why is there so much emphasis on spiritualism and religion? Each relationship, each development, each individual functions only in context of religion. From beginning to end the only purpose of life seems to be the achievement of a pure state of religion. Probably what V.I. Lenin had to say about Leo Tolstoy's works, may also explain Vir Singh's extraordinary stress on matters spiritual and religious.

Pessimism, non-resistance, appeals to the spirit constitute an ideology inevitable in an epoch when the whole of the old order has turned upside down, and when the masses, who have been brought up under this old order, who imbibed with their mother's milk the principles, the habits, the traditions and beliefs of this order, do not and cannot see what kind of a new order is taking shape, what social forces are shaping it and how, what social forces are capable of bringing release from the incalculable and exceptionally acute distress that is characteristic of epochs of upheaval.<sup>20</sup>

---

20. V.I. Lenin, Articles on Tolstoy (Moscow: 1975), p. 31.



The period of 1849-1930 was just such a period of change if not upheaval in Punjab, a period in which, before everyone's eyes, certain elements of the old order dissolved, never to be restored, a new system was taking shape, whose contradictions manifested very soon. Bhai Vir Singh and many among the class to which he belonged: the embryonic middle class, saw no clear solution to their problems.<sup>21</sup> They were not even clear about the face of the new world-colonialism-which was taking shape before them. Instead of looking into the objective situation and finding out concrete solutions, many like Vir Singh took to religion and saw in the organization of a religious consciousness the panacea to their problems. In a stagnant urban economy, communalism albeit as a false consciousness was a way out. Prof. Bipan Chandra has commented on the phenomena in a forthcoming book: "Entire groups and strata were born and developed who wanted wealth and power and who had no tradition or values which could deter them from following any and every means for acquiring them. Yet the social existence and ambitions of most of them were destined to be frustrated. This social milieu without values and full of frustration was ideally conducive to irrational philosophies and ideologies, movements of hate

---

21. For background see Kenneth W. Jones, Arya Dham (New Delhi : 1976).

and fear, crass individual strivings, and the setting of one group against another".<sup>22</sup>

The features which are common to the novels of Bhai Vir Singh - the religious moralistic scenario, uniform characterization, weak structure and the worship of a specific past, in this case Sikh - were common to the early novelists of all major Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, Marathi and Tamil. A comparison with the first novel in Bengali, Alaler Gharer Dulal (1858) by Pyerichand Mitra would not be out of place. T.W. Clark writes of it, "The structure of the novel bears the marks of its serialized origin. It is a series of episodes which follow one another in chronological sequence .... It is in the portrayal of the character that the novel is weakest. All the persons are either black or white. The majority, including the hero, are bad without redeeming features ... The remaining few ... are unbelievably virtuous".<sup>23</sup>

A striking feature of narrative prose writing on historical subjects was hero-worship, the admiration of great warriors from India's past.<sup>24</sup> The wars between Rajput kings and imperial Muslim power, which later found

---

23. T.W. Clark, "Bengali Prose Fiction upto Bankim Chandra", in T.W. Clark ed. The Novel in India: Its birth and Development (London: 1970) pp. 38-39.

24. T.W. Clark, The Novel in India, p.18.

extensive expression in Hindi works, was first treated in the novels of Bankimchandra Chatterji, whose Durgesandani was published in 1865. In his later novels Chatterji frequently came back to the Hindu-Muslim theme and lost no opportunity to vilify his Muslim characters. He represented the Muslim soldiers as paltrons.

In 1896 there appeared Jaya a Hindi novel by Karttik Prasad Khatri.<sup>25</sup> The heroine of the novel Jaya is betrothed to a Rajput princess who is coveted by the Muslim suzerian Ala-ud-din. The narrative of a hundred and fifty pages details her various adventures as the prize of the ensuing Rajput-Muslim struggle and concludes with her happy marriage to her Rajput fiance. In the novel the Rajputs of the past are presented as noble and admirable figures, but there is little of the historical romanticism of the kind we see in Walter Scott. If the Rajputs of the novel are admirable, it is as much because they serve as models of traditional Hindu virtue as recognized in the author's time as because they symbolize a glorious Hindu past. Jaya's virtue recalls that of Sita in the Ramayana not the fame of any historical Rajput princess. In contrast the Muslims are frequently described as Yayanas or barbarians. In contrast, Flora Florinda, an Urdu novel by Abdul Halim

---

25. Ibid. p.110.

Sharar, which was first published serially from 1893 and appeared in book form in 1899, had as its basic theme — the portrayal of the glorious past of Islam and of the great superiority of Islamic civilization in its heyday over that of contemporary (especially Christian) powers.<sup>26</sup>

A comparison with other contemporary novelists shows that Bhai Vir Singh was by no means a unique writer, both in the form and content of his novels. In fact he seems to be heavily influenced by the early novels in Bengali, Urdu and Hindi, which were available in translations. Instead of looking for the impact of Walter Scott's writings on Bhai Vir Singh, we should be tracing out the linkages between the various Indian languages. Only a cultural understanding of colonialism and its diffusion can explain the nature of the novels written in nineteenth century India. Novels like those of Bhai Vir Singh also became a powerful medium for cultural defence. On one end they were a warning to their readers, not to ape all that came from the West and on the other end they struck a note of optimism by reminding that Indians too had their moments of glory. But the process through which this message was delivered was highly selective. It made use of a particular

---

26. Ralph Russell, "The Development of the Modern Novel in Urdu," in T.W. Clark, op.cit. p.123.

past - that of a Hindu, a Musliman a Sikh. In the absence of any past nationalistic consciousness, the novelists must have found it difficult to develop themes of composite culture. Even a highly conscious nationalistic leadership made use of religious, cultural symbols for mass mobilization. If Tilaks Ganpati and Shivaji festivals appealed to the Hindus in Maharashtra, the novels of Vir Singh largely appealed the Sikhs. The end result in both cases was that people who participated developed an emotional linkage with a specific past, which at times would run counter to nationalistic aspirations. A reader of Bhai Vir Singh's novel writes: "Twenty five years back when I first read Sundari I had tears in my eyes, I cried and I was obsessed with a feeling of serving the Sikh community".<sup>27</sup> (emphasis added). It was such feelings which could be harnessed for communal politics or even bazar riots.

---

27. Diwan Singh Kalapani, "Amar Punjab Patr Sundari", Punjabi Duniya, vol. II, No. 9 (November: 1952) pp.1-4.

## CHAPTER VI

### \_C\_O\_N\_C\_L\_U\_S\_I\_O\_N\_S\_

Any characterization of Vir Singh merely on basis of his novels would be highly inadequate, misleading and tendentious. The diversity of his own personality, the variegated nature of his writings, the complexity of his milieu, and the pattern of literary writing in nineteenth century India defy all efforts to pigeonhole him, except for the hyperbolic or reductionist one. In all such cases, which defy simplistic comprehension, it is easy to focus on one aspect, miss the totality of an individual and seek solutions in worn-out cliches and public metaphors.

For a moment Vir Singh appears to an outright communalist, the next moment he turns into a mystic in search of truth, God and the higher qualities of life and then he dons the mantle of a social reformer, who seeks to redress the social evils of Punjabi society. At the outset his vision narrows down to his co-religionists and then bursts into verse which calls for the essential unity of men, at least at the spiritual level. In between there is even a sprinkling of nationalism in his poetry.

It is not surprising, then, that Vir Singh evokes different images among different people. For his

admirers he is no less than a God, for the academicians diffident to question established orthodoxies he is a father figure who gifted Punjabi with new genres, rhythms and metaphors. For certain type of Marxists, he is a cultural broker who sought to establish the hegemony of the Sikh landed aristocracy.<sup>1</sup> Yet if one was to isolate one strand from this kaleidoscope, it would above all be his image as an ideologue of the Singh Sabha movement. All his distortions and complexities, contradictions and mysteries, blemishes and successes are rooted in the Singh Sabha. A movement which itself had all the paradoxes of Vir Singh. Vir Singh's life is defined by the Singh Sabha and the Singh Sabha is defined by Vir Singh.<sup>2</sup> There is no other way to comprehend and explain the paradoxical amalgam of communalism and bleated strains of humanism.

Both Vir Singh and the Singh Sabha in the context of late nineteenth century Punjab searched for meanings, identities, definitions and rules in the context of the

---

1. For the different approaches to the novels of Bhai Vir Singh see Chapter IV.

2. The relationship between the Singh Sabha and Bhai Vir Singh is discussed in Ganda Singh, "Bhai Vir Singh and His Times", The Punjab Past and Present, Vol. VI, No. 12, October, 1972, pp. 241-60.

British rule.<sup>3</sup> Together in their position as leaders they had to offer explanations and solutions for a rapidly changing Punjab. From the large simmering cauldron of competing Weltanschauungs ranging from that of Brahma Samaj to Dev Samaj they choose to rely on Sikh religion, albeit through their own interpretation of what it meant to be a Sikh. The store-house of Sikh theology, history and scriptures was transformed by them into a working ideology which could easily explain any dilemma faced by the contemporary Sikhs: relationship with other Punjabis, attitudes towards new British influences, the need for a mother tongue or even life after death.<sup>4</sup>

Here ideology is the system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of man or a social group. Louis Althusser in an influential essay on

---

3. A very sophisticated treatment to the identity crisis is available in case of the Arya Samaj in Kenneth W. Jones, Arya Dham: Hindu Consciousness in 19th Century Punjab (New Delhi, 1978).

4. For the ideology of the Singh Sabha and its application by individuals see my article, "Bebas, Bhas and Gyanis : Traditional Intellectuals in Nineteenth Century Punjab", Studies in History, Vol. II, No. 2, (Forthcoming).



ideology writes: "all ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production, but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them. What is represented in ideology is, therefore, not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relations of those individuals to the real relations in which they live".<sup>5</sup> The peculiar property of ideology is the category of subject. Concrete individuals think and act in relation to their conditions of existence by means of ideologies. Ideologies constitute them as individual or collective social subjects.<sup>6</sup>

5. Louis Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, (N.L.B., 1971), p. 155.

6. On the process of ideological formation Engels writes, "Ideology is a process which is indeed accomplished consciously by the so-called thinker, but it is the wrong kind of consciousness. The real motive force impelling him remain unknown to the thinker, otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process. Hence, he imagines false or illusionary motive forces. Because it is a rational process, he derives its form as well as its content from pure reasoning, either his own or that of his predecessors. He works exclusively with thought material which he accepts without examination as something produced by reasoning and does not investigate further for a remote source independent of reason; indeed this is a matter of course to him, because all action is mediated by thought, it appears to him to be ultimately based on thought". F. Engels letter to Mehring, Selected Correspondence (Moscow, 1978), p. 434.

The ideology elaborated by Singh Sabha and its leadership was available to all those who desired it, the landed Jagirdars, the rising middle class, the peasantry and the outcasts. An increasing number of Sikhs from these classes or castes accepted this ideology, a large part of which they had already inherited in the form of external symbols, a shared past and common traditions. Those who accepted this ideology were provided with an identity, a self-image and a comfortable explanation to grasp the social processes in which they were participating. But the success of the Singh Sabha's world view, like that of any other socio-religious movement in the nineteenth century India, depended on the demonstration of its roots being embedded in the Sikh past. Vir Singh sought to establish this mediation through his writings, especially the novels. Typical of a myth, Vir Singh's novels traced out the roots of this world-view and the basis of its eternal validity and success. But its advantages would be for only those who would firmly hold it and not budge an inch, just like Vir Singh's major characters: Sundri, Bijay Singh, and Baba Naudh Singh. This myth firmly shut the door to any competing world-view, at least as far as the Singh Sabha and Bhai Vir Singh were concerned. Any dilution of belief in its sacredness would be sacriligious and its effectiveness would be destroyed. In that case the individual was to blame, not the efficacy of the myth.

To further afix the myth the Singh Sabha and Vir Singh sought to provide the Sikhs with separate schools, colleges, organizations, newspapers, literature, economic opportunities, and social ties. By the early 1900, there were 120 Singh Sabhas spread all over Punjab.<sup>7</sup> Embattled the Sikhs could take on Arya Samaj, Ahmedias, the Christian missionaries and even the Raj. The seeds of a communal identity were sown. Twentieth century Punjab provided fertile soil for its growth.

From our discussion so far it would appear that there is no distinction between ideology and literature. In one sense this is true. Between poor or mediocre literature and ideology there is no difference. The former becomes a medium to strengthen the latter's hold over individuals or societies. Immediately the novels of James Hadley Chase or Harold Robins came to my mind. These two are widely read authors among the English speaking youth within India. For the Hindi reading public we have Gulshan Nanda. All these authors don't help us in penetrating beyond the ideology of bourgeois values, but on the contrary make us aspire for them and structure our thought into a given framework. It is in

---

7. On the activities of the Singh Sabha and its expansion see N.G. Barrier, The Sikhs and Their Literature (Delhi, 1970), pp. XV to XIV.

this sense that we speak of poor literature and ideology being similar.

On the contrary 'good' literature has the capacity to "make us see, make us perceive, make us feel something which alludes to reality ... make us perceive in some sense from the inside, by an internal distance the very ideology in which they are held".<sup>8</sup> Even though ideology percolates to all domains of human activity, especially thought and writing, the basis of good art is precisely in proportion to its ability to make us see beyond a dominant ideology.<sup>9</sup> It is the tension between ideology and objective reality which a good artist seeks to explore and identify. The novels of Bhai Vir Singh do not perform such a task and in that essential sense they are ideological. Instead of raising questions, they provide readymade answers.<sup>10</sup>

Marxian studies of Vir Singh's writings tend to stress the class basis of his fiction and hold him to be

---

8. Louis Althusser, op. cit., p. 204.

9. On this problem there is a very detailed essay by Steve Burnistan and Chris Weedon, "Ideology, Subjectivity and the Artistic Text", in Centre for Contemporary Studies, ed. On Ideology, (London, 1978), pp. 199-202.

10. This has been discussed in Chapter V.

a leading spokesman of the declining Jagirdari class.<sup>11</sup> He is said to represent a feudal ethos, which put up a last fight through his writings. Such a reading of Vir Singh's novels is based on two factors. Firstly, that his fiction sought the revival of the past order, which was essentially feudal and dominated by Jagirdars. Secondly, his close associates, such as Sundar Singh Majithia, were from the landed aristocracy. If such a yard-stick was to be applied in Marxist aesthetics, novelists like Tolstoy, would become representatives of feudalism. But no one, not even a vulgar Marxist treats Tolstoy that way, even though he was a born aristocrat.<sup>12</sup>

---

11. For instance, see S.S. Sekhon, Bhai Vir Singh te Una da Yug (Ludhiana, 1962).

12. Arnold Hauser, an influential Marxist art Historian writes of Lev Tolstoy, "In spite of his prejudices and errors, Tolstoy represents an enormous revolutionary force. His fight against the lies of the police state and the church, his enthusiasm for the community of the peasantry and the examples of his own life are .... among the ferments which undermines the old society and promoted not merely the Russian revolution but also the anti-capitalist revolutionary movement in the whole of Europe". The Social History of Art, Vol. IV, (London, 1977), p. 152.

In the nineteenth century India it is difficult to operate through fixed concepts and categories. Colonialism restructured Indian society and it was a common process that members of the aristocracy moved into the ranks of the middle-class and started having similar aspirations as the embryonic middle-class. If at all any class analyses are to be made of Vir Singh's writings, one would say that they represent more the view point of the middle class rather than the landed aristocracy. It was the Sikh middle-class which was most affected by the shrinking opportunities in an already shrunk colonial economy<sup>13</sup>. To meet the situation, the middle-class, not only in Punjab, but also all over India needed an ideology which would both provide them with a means to fight it out as well as give them solace if they lost. Communalism would be one such ideology. Vir Singh was to take a step in that direction in his novels, to find a catharsis for the middle-class, not the Jagirdars.

Even in the strict economic sense of social origins and social functioning Vir Singh's aristocratic credentials are questionable. His father was a practising doctor, Vir Singh himself made substantial money

---

13. Discussed in Chapter III.

from the Wazir-Hind Press, which he himself set up and later made it into the largest printing press in Amritsar.<sup>14</sup> In 1908 Vir Singh became a founding director of the Punjab and Sind Bank which had a seed capital of ten lakhs.<sup>15</sup> Besides banking the company sought to "... buy, lease, hire or otherwise acquire and to sell, let or deal with, any goods, wares, merchandise, lands, buildings, plant, machinery, stock-in-trade, shares, or other property or rights or things in action".<sup>16</sup>

Marxian literature on Bhai Vir Singh advances the proposition that since he had personal associations with a section of Punjab jagirdars and also because he actively participated in the activities of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, a so-called aristocratic body, his world-view was feudal.<sup>17</sup> This may seem logical but such simple logic does not always operate in the realm of literature. Before any substantial refutation can be made, we would need a detailed research of the Chief

---

14. Harbans Singh, Bhai Vir Singh to Una da Rachna (Lahore, 1940).

15. Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Punjab and Sind Bank (Lahore, 1908), p. 15.

16. Ibid., p.1.

17. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia, Punjabi Literature in Perspective (Ludhiana, n.d.)

Khalsa Diwan's ideology and class basis, which does not exist for the moment.

The literary production of a writer depends not so much on his personal convictions and sympathies as on the power with which he portrays the problems and contradictions of social reality. Going back to an example from world literature, it is well recognised that Balzac in spite of his enthusiasm for the old monarchy, the Catholic Church and aristocratic society, recognizes that aristocracy itself has furthered the process, sees that the old culture has broken up and describes society in his novels in such a way as to make a return to the pre-revolutionary conditions unthinkable. In his famous letter to Miss Harkness Engels writes of Balzac as follows;

"Balzac was politically a legitimist; his great work is a constant elegy on the irreparable decay of good society; his sympathies are with the class that is doomed to extinction. But for all that, his satire is never keener, his irony never more bitter, than when he sets in motion the very men and women with whom he sympathizes most deeply - the nobles .... That Balzac was thus compelled to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudice, that he saw the necessity of the downfall of his favourite nobles and described them as people deserving no better fate; that he saw the real man of future where, for the time being, they alone were to be found - that I consider one of the greatest triumphs of realism...."<sup>18</sup>

---

18. Engels to Harkness in Marx and Engels: On Literature and Art (Moscow, 1978), p. 90.



Bhai Vir Singh's usage of the past history - the Sikh struggle against Mughals in the eighteenth century - has been construed by Marxian literary critics as a proof of his feudal ethos. Further, they argue that it was precisely this past order, which Vir Singh wanted to be revived. There is no denying the fact that the eighteenth century sikh history held a special fascination for Vir Singh. He based three of his novels on this time period. But this by itself is not enough evidence to argue that his world-view was feudal and as a consequence he wrote of the past. What needs to be studied is how the author sought to use his image of the past for his writings. For Vir Singh the past was useful because it would provide a solid foundation to construct the ideology of the Singh Sabha, whose ideologue he was. It was in that role that he wrote extensive commentaries on Sikh scriptures, and not because he wanted the revival of the past. The Singh Sabha was no feudal movement, it was a modern movement with largely modern ideals such as western education, equal status for women and democratic principles of organization. It sought to further the 'protestant ethic' present in Sikhism. And for this aim past history was a ready-made solution.

The glorification of the past has been repeatedly used for different purposes. S.N. Banerjee glorified

Shivaji and Guru Gobind Singh as national heroes for nationalistic purposes. The Russians used traditional symbols to mobilise people during the Second World War.<sup>19</sup> As Marx has put it: "The tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living. And, just when they appear to be engaged in the revolutionary transformation of themselves and their material surroundings, in the creation of something, which does not yet exist, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they timidly conjure up the images of the past to help them; they borrow their names, slogans and costumes so as to stage the new world-historical scene in this venerable disguise and borrowed language. Luther put on the mask of the apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789-1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman republic and the Roman empire; and the revolution of 1848 knew no better than to parody at some points 1789 and at others the revolutionary traditions of 1793-95".<sup>20</sup>

Studies of modern or colonial literature in India largely tend to concentrate on the form of the novel

---

19. Bipin Chandra, "National Struggle and Growth of Communalism," Mainstream, November 17, 1979, p.17.

20. Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte in Surveys from Exile (Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1973) pp. 146-7.

and the development of this genre indigineously is seen as a fruitful impact of British rule in India.<sup>21</sup> The arguments is very simple: since Indians did not have anything approaching the genre of a novel and England had a highly developed art of novel writing, the Indian authors borrowed this form from the culture of the rulers. But can we only look at the form and forget about the content? Can we only look at the advantages of railways and gloss over the fact that they also served as a conduit for the Indian raw-materials. The British agency houses not only conducted Indian businesses but also remitted large sums of money to England. The coming of the novel to India does not mean that its mere form led to the development of Indian literature. Any argument on these lines is a part of the renaissance paradigm, which sees a socio-cultural awakening in India merely as a result of the British presence.<sup>22</sup>

---

21. M.P. Kohli, The Influence of the West on Punjabi Literature (Ludhiana, 1969), pp. 145-61.

22. For a critique of the renaissance model see Barun De, "A Historiographical Critique of Renaissance Analogues in the Nineteenth Century India", in Barun De ed., Perspectives in Social Sciences, (Oxford, 1977).

The importance of novel writing in colonial India can only be understood by looking at the total implications of this transplantation and it is here that a historical approach to the studies of literature can be highly useful. The form and content of a novel should be related to the history of a society in a continuous process and only then we can see both its artistic qualities and social implications. While Bhai Vir Singh by writing the first novels in Punjabi enriched the language, at the same time his novels also provided a distorted interpretation of the past and reflected an ideology which when later combined with communalism was to play havoc in Punjab. Vir Singh's novels became increasingly serviceable as hegemonic apparatus with the rise of communal politics in Punjab. As Dr. Bipin Chandra has constantly stressed in his writings an integral part of the communal ideology is its specific interpretation of Indian history.<sup>23</sup> Take away this and hardly anything is left of the communal ideology. In case of Sikhs, Vir Singh's novels provided this specific interpretation of the past. His characters came alive only in a particular milieu, the Sikh effort to survive the Muslim persecution in the eighteenth century.

---

24. S.S. Anand, "Bhai Sahib Vir Singh de Novel", Punjabi Duniya, Vol.1, No.11, January-February, 1951, pp.40-43.

Apologists for Bhai Vir Singh contend that since he was the first novelist in Punjabi, one should't expect perfect art from him.<sup>24</sup> But he wrote novels for a period of three decades without any fundamental change. His creative career spans a period of sixty years, during which time, if he so desired, he could have well perfected his art and if not produce a masterpiece, atleast write some 'good' literature. Nank Singh, another Punjabi novelist during the same decades, tried to do so and with considerable success.<sup>25</sup> To be first in a venture does not imply poverty of artistic creation. In fact, often those who have produced the best works of art have precisely done so because they were the first ones to experiment with novel ideas in novel forms.

It is time we forget about looking for apologies to retain Bhai Vir Singh on a pedestal. It is true that he created a large readership in the Punjabi language, his setting up of a Punjabi press and the Khalsa Tract

---

24. S.S. Amal, "Bhai Sahib Vir Singh de Novel," Punjabi Duniya, Vol. I, No. 11, January-February, 1951, pp. 40-43.

25. For Nank Singh's writings see his novel Deo-Puttar (Ludhiana, 1970), and Dil Duniya (Ludhiana, 1955). Also my Inaugural address at the "Symposium on Socio-economic changes in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries in India", 7th February, 1981, New Delhi.

Society helped in the reproduction of Punjabi works and he also simplified the language. His writings were to help in doing away with the notion that Punjabi was a Gramin Bhasha, (rustic language). Along with all this, his use of Punjabi language for his writings was to have a special implication in a tri-lingual state.

Bhai Vir Singh's choice of Punjabi language was to build up an emotional link between Punjabi and the Sikhs. In time Punjabi was to become a symbol of Sikh communalism rather than one of Punjabi identity. Earlier brai bhasha and Urdu had been the languages preferred by the Sikh writers. The writings of Bhai Vir Singh made a decisive break with this literary tradition; the emotional and creative linkages which had existed for centuries with brai bhasha were snapped.<sup>26</sup> The swamp of communalism submerged all other potentialities such as emergence of Punjabi as the written and literary language of all Punjabi speaking people.

In a concluding chapter it would not be out of place to turn back from where this work started; i.e. the linkages between literature and society and the methodology needed to probe those linkages. We could

---

26. Attar Singh, Sandarbhan (Amritsar, 1975), pp.119-20 also see Amrik Singh, "Singh Sabha Lahir de Punjabi Sahit nu den", unpublished M.Litt. dissertation, Punjabi University, 1974, pp. 43-94.

have studied Vir Singh's novels in the formalist tradition and treated them as a work of art, an independent entity, the elements of which are to be explained in terms of interdependence without any recourse to circumstances of its origin or influence.

Even though a work of literature has an inner logic of its own, and its particular quality is seen in the internal structural relations of the various levels of organization and the various motifs distinguishable in it, but ultimately, the writer seeks to communicate. And for any communication-ideological or non-ideological - to make sense we have to understand the dynamics of the society to which the communication is addressed.

A mere study of textual structure, which the formalists would recommend, to appreciate its aesthetic quality, is not by itself going to make any meaning of the desired communication. It is here that a sociological/historical approach can lend us a helping hand. This approach certainly does not have all the answers (no approach has), and it would be highly undesirable to only apply such a model, but the partial answers it can supply, can be of immense value. A textual analysis of Vir Singh's novels would have no clue to why

he keeps stressing a particular ideology. A historical approach informs us of the social conditions generated by colonialism, the basis of social reform movements and the causation of their religious identification. All these factors combined together, we feel, tell us much more about Vir Singh and his novels, than a singular formalist approach would do.



APPENDIX I

A serious disagreement exists among scholars regarding the date on which Bhai Vir Singh's last novel Baba Naugh Singh was published. Estimates vary from 1921 to 1924. It seems that this confusion has arisen because actually the novel was serialized in tract form, over a period of almost four years. Here we provide details, on the chronology of tracts, which ultimately were bound together and published as Baba Naugh Singh.

<u>Tract Number</u>	<u>Date of Publishing</u>	<u>Number of Pages</u>
552	20 October 1917	1-82
553	5 November 1917	85-64
555	5 December 1917	65-94
556	20 December 1917	95-124
557	5 January 1918	125-154
559	20 February 1918	155-184
560	5 March 1918	185-214
563	20 April 1918	215-244
564	5 May 1918	245-274
565	20 May 1918	275-302
572	20 August 1918	303-332
573	5 September 1918	333-362
574	20 September 1918	363-392
575	5 October 1918	393-426
576	20 October 1918	427-460
578	20 November 1918	461-494

581	5 January 1919	495-524
582	20 January 1919	525-554
588	5 February 1919	555-581
588	5 May 1919	588-606
589	20 May 1919	607-628
636	5 May 1921	629-650
637	20 May 1921	651-672
639	5 July 1921	673-694
640	20 July 1921	695-716
641	5 August 1921	717-738
642	20 August 1921	739-760
649	20 December 1921	849-870

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PRIMARY SOURCES :

#### Pamphlets and Tracts :

Das Thakar Lalai, Sikh Hindu Hain, Hoshiarpur: Khatri Press, 1899.

Jodh Singh., Sachcha Dhami, Lahore: Balmukand Press, 1900.

Kahn Singh., Ham Hindu Nahin, Amritsar: Khalsa Press, 1899.

Narain Singh., Sikh Hindu Hain, Amritsar: Matba-Kaumi Press, 1899.

#### Private Papers :

Sunder Singh Majithia's Private Papers. Available at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

#### Newspapers :

The Khalsa: 1899-1900

The Tribune: 1890-1900

### SECONDARY SOURCES :

Ahluwalia Jasbir Singh., Punjab Literature in Perspective (A Marxist Approach), Ludhiana: Kalyani Publishers, n.d.

Ahluwalia Jasbir Singh., Tradition and Experiment in Modern Punjab Poetry, Ferozpur: Bawa Publishing House, n.d.

Althusser Louis., Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, London: New Left Books, 1971.

Apter David ed., Ideology and Discontent, London: Macmillan, 1964.

Banerjee Himadri., "Agrarian Society of the Punjab, 1849-1901", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Calcutta, 1976.

Barrier, N.G., "Punjab Politics and the Disturbances of 1907", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Duke, 1966.

Barrier, N.G., The Sikhs and their Literature, Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1970.

Darun De ed., Perspectives in Social Sciences, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Benjamin Walter., Illuminations, Glasgow: Fontana, 1978.

Brush S.W., "Protestants in the Punjab", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1971.

Chabra G.S., Advanced Study in the History of the Punjab, Vol. II, Ludhiana, 1960.

Chandra Bipan., "The Social Roots of Communalism", Typescript, Forthcoming.

Clark T.W. ed., The Novel in India: Its birth and Development, London: George Allen, 1970.

Duncan Hugh H., Language and Literature in Society, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.

Dungen P.H.M., The Punjab Tradition, London: George Allen, 1972.

Fischer Ernst., The Necessity of Art, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1981.

Forster, E.M., Aspects of the Novel, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1966.

Ganda Singh ed., Bhagat Lakshman Singh, Autobiography, Calcutta: Sikh Cultural Centre, 1966.

Gorky M., On Literature, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968.

Gramsci A., Selections from Prison Notebooks, eds. Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971.

Guleria J.S., Bhai Vir Singh The Sixth River of Punjab, New Delhi: n.p., 1972.

Harbans Singh., Bhai Vir Singh, New Delhi: Sahitye Akademi, 1972.

Harbans Singh ed., Bhai Vir Singh Abhinandan Granth, New Delhi: The Bhai Vir Singh Abhinandan Granth Samiti, 1954.

Hauser A., The Social History of Art, Vols. IV, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977.

Jones K., ARYA Dham, Delhi: Manohar Book Service. 1976.

Kerr Johnstone I., "The Punjab Province and the Lahore District", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1975.

Kohli M.P., The Influence of the West on Punjabi Literature, Ludhiana: Lyall Book Depot, 1969.

Lenin V.I., On Literature and Art, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968.

Lukacs G., The Historical Novel, London: Merlin Press, 1962.

Malik Yogendra., Politics and the Novel in India, Delhi: Orient Longman, 1978.

McLeod W.H., The Evolution of the Sikh Community, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Ovcharenko A., Socialist Realism and the Modern Literary Process, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978.

Parry Benita., Delusions and Discoveries, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1974.

Plekhanov G., Unaddressed Letters - Art and Social Life, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957.

Prakash Singh., Continuing Influence of Bhai Vir Singh, Amritsar, Singh Brothers, 1972.

Raphael Max., Erudition Marx and Picasso: Three studies in the Sociology of Art, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979.

Sarkar S., The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977.

Stephen L., English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century, London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., 1955.

Talib G.S. and Attar Singh eds., Bhai Vir Singh, Chandigarh: Publication Bureau, Punjab University, 1973.

Watt Ian., The Rise of the Novel, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963.

Webster J., The Christian Community and Change in the Nineteenth Century North India, New Delhi: Macmillan, 1976.

Williams Raymond., Culture and Society, London: Chatto and Windus, 1960.

Williams Raymond., The Long Revolution, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975.

Williams Raymond., Marxism and Literature, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Williams F. and Lang B. eds., Marxism and Art, Newyork: David McKay Company, 1972.

Wilson Robert., The Arts in Society, New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, 1964.

Zeraffer Michel., Fictions: The Novel and Social Reality, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976.

Punjabi Works :

Amrik Singh., "Singh Sabha Lahir de Panjabi Sehat nu den", unpublished M. Litt. dissertation, Panjabi University, 1974.

Attar Singh, Sandarshan: Amritsar: Raghbir Rachna Parkeshan, 1975.

Harbans Singh., Bhai Vir Singh te Una di Rachna, Lahore: Lahore Book Shop, 1940.

Harbhajan Singh ed., Bhai Sehib Vir Singh Ji Te Una di Rachna de Darshan, Jhalke, New Delhi: Bhai Vir Singh Study Circle, 1959.

Kohli S.S. and Shan Harnam S. eds., Bhai Vir Singh Jivan Sama te Rachna, Chandigarh: Punjab University, 1978.

Maha Singh., Padam Bhushan Bhai Vir Singh Ji da Sankeer Jivan, Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar, 1958.

Maha Singh., Padam Bhushan Bhai Vir Singh Ji da Gurukul Jivan, Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar, 1969.

Niranjan Singh, Mera Jivan Vikas, Delhi: Navyug Press, 1972.

Tiwari Vishvanath, Pannu Harinder and Jagtar eds., Bhai Vir Singh Sandarbh Kosh, Chandigarh: Punjab University, 1974.

Vir Singh, Sundari, Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar, 1977.

Vir Singh, Satwant Kaur, Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar, 1974.

Vir Singh, Bijay Singh, Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar, 1971.

Vir Singh, Baba Nandh Singh, Amritsar: Khalse Samachar, 1968.

JOURNALS :

Alochana :

Proceedings of the Punjab History Conference, Patiala.

The Panjab Past and Present.

Likhari.

Punjabi Duniya.

Punjabi Sahit.

Sahit Samachar.

Phulwari.

Pani Darva.

Studies in History.