

Destination

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Dedicated to
participants and the martyrs of freedom struggle
and
those committed to the transformation of
political freedom into social equality,
economic justice and dignity of individual.

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If all of us resolve to endeavour thus
To improve the world as best we can
Sorrow and suffering would fade out
The world will become heaven itself.
(Destination)

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Preface

Destination contains all of my poems published earlier in *Aspirations* (1980), *Yearnings* (1987), *Expectations* (1999) and written thereafter. I am my own publisher, hence poems comprising an earlier publication have to be included in the succeeding one so that they do not go out of print. *Destination* is last in the series.

There is difference between genius and talent. The former attracts attention. The latter has to earn it. Though I started writing poems more than three decades ago, yet no publisher contacted me ever despite the commendable appraisal of each of my books. As I could afford the cost of publication of a modest number of copies of each text, I chose to carry on of my own.

I took part in the freedom struggle during my student career. I yearned to share the lofty ideals which inspired young men like me to join the freedom movement braving the perils that lay ahead. I have also been keen to pay tribute to the pathfinders for humanity who became legends.

Being a self-supporting student, I learnt more from the ups and downs of life than books; hence the gleaned and not mere academic knowledge is reflected by my compositions.

The earlier poems have been revised here and there to improve diction and the rhythmic effect.

Destination is my contribution to the celebration of Diamond Jubilee of Independence. It also offers material to various Textbook Boards to assess the merit of native talent.

November 30, 2006

Hazara Singh

1
Where

Where equality gets seldom grudging
Dignity of individual is not robbed
And economic justice is not hampered
Such a set-up improves human wealth.

Where mere bookish merit is not weighed
Keeness to improve thrills one and all
And law strives to reform, not suppress
Such norms keep leading to excellence.

Where ritualism is not a way of life
Practice is consistent with precept
And blessings pamper not, but impress
Such a social code has healthy effect.

Where greed ransacks not mother earth
Lust exploits not the innocent beings
And prejudice overlooks not real worth
Such restraints make a nation great.

Where present is faced and not escaped
Past is not praised led by blind faith
And the mirage of future casts no spell
Such attitudes lead to a rewarding quest.

2

World Peace

How, yearning for world peace be realised
How, war as policy of State be restrained
How, the gains of peace, as well, be surveyed
Call for action that ought not be delayed.

Tolerance paves the path to universal peace
Adieu to war offers remedy for the maladies,
Inflicted by dislocation, hunger and disease
Branded as dogs of war by votaries of peace.

The war-mongers stoutly declare and defend
That war-preparedness ensures lasting peace
Wealth and talent consumed by such pursuits
Render, flocks of people, miserable destitutes.

War, a bane for humanity, is indulgence of devil
Peace, a protective bliss, reveals glory of God
Still the mighty nations despite mass protests
Rush to impose doctrine of pre-emptive thrusts

Cost of destructive weapons drains exchequers
The winner remains panicky even after victory
Hence barriers be replaced by bridges of amity
It is how, world would learn to live in harmony.

3

Non-violence

Non-violence is often scoffed at as a refuge
For cowards, escapists and the spineless folk
Tyrants are adored despite their wicked deeds
But progress during peace not paid due heed.

Violence, an eruption of malice or rash revenge
Frantic step of haughty powers, gripped by fear
Or their craze to capture new fields of wealth
Prompts them to dictate their terms or aggress.

The Buddha and Alexander held opposite views
The gospel of former based on truth and love
Still a sublime force, though, millenniums old
The realm of warrior flopped after his death.

The pithy dictum that history makes man wise
Not upheld by the continual wars, hot or cold
But men of vision opted for passive measures
Their moral moves confounded the oppressors.

World has plenty for the basic needs of all
But not enough for a few avaricious cliques
All aspire to advance free of fear and want
Co-existence alone sustains such a yearning.

- 0 -

4 Dreams

Dreams seen, while in sleep, are images
Forgotten mostly as soon as one awakes
Described by analysts as casual wishes
Many of which creep in as stray dreams.

Such dreams, being fancies, miss a link
A hotchpotch of many irregular scenes
Amuse in sleep as enchanting moonlight
But seldom impel for any firm pursuit.

Hidden fears may haunt as horror scenes
Disturbing sleep through fitful screams
Damsels meet new lovers in their dreams
The wooers, they keep looking for fondly.

Historians do not accept certain legends
Woven around themes attributed to dreams
Such myths are coined to defend misdeeds
Which keep planting many harmful beliefs.

Day-dreams which gripped the explorers
Gifted with dash for unusual ambition
Changed the world in waves and phases
Projecting human glory or degradation.

5 Closed Mind

Closed mind is compared to a stagnant pond
Hedged by inhibitions intensely destructive
Weeded with notions implanted by ignorance
Resists change, required with march of time.

Closed mind is like a dwelling, dark and dingy
That admits not fresh air and necessary light
Thus accepts not that change is law of nature
Takes pride instead in primitive ways of life.

Closed mind is cradled by sectarian beliefs
Hence clings to customary taboos and rites
Objects stubbornly to all progressive moves
Extols loudly its inhuman hindering designs.

Rejects concepts of equality and brotherhood
Brands human beings as believers or atheists
Divides them on the basis of birth and creed
Decries those not accepting his imposed code.

The fanatics incite by edicts a closed society
For sustaining their diabolical sinister deeds
Human rights are alien to their genocide game
Threat to world peace and the foes of mankind.

6

Beauty of Mind

If your conduct reflects beauty of mind
Your body is a temple of love and grace
Your deeds enthuse as a healthy precept
Influencing people with exalting effect.
You are blessed with a harmonious self
Respectful to parents, kind to all kin
Helpful and considerate for the spouse
Source of emulation for the offspring.
Your family inspires neighbours as well
Who get equally eager to behave as good
Each gets devoted to collective welfare
The nation earns a spontaneous goodwill.
Such people value the strength of peace
Do not meddle with the affairs of others
Neither scorn nor ever underrate anyone
Nations march towards broad-based amity.
If one evades accepting merit of others
One simply breeds uncalled for distrust
History bears out that humanity suffers
When petty minds guide nation's destiny.

– o –

page 6

7

Harming Trends

If one follows a virtuous path
Nature seldom lets one fumble
If one may restrain anger too
One remains strong yet humble.
If one can overcome the fear
One barely loses or crumbles
If one keeps sure of oneself
One never whines or grumbles.
Ambition lacking requisite grit,
Kicked by fits to knock some hit
Implants various harming trends
Which drag towards self-dug pit.

– o –

page 7

8 Culture

Culture, an ardently admired elegance
Has been aptly compared to the bee,
Which picks honey from tender blooms
Sweet in taste and toothsome as manna.
Soft wax obtained from a honeycomb
Is rolled to make pencil-like candles;
A source of light when darkness falls,
The bee, thus, gives sweetness and light.

Darkness often illustrates ignorance,
Whereas light is symbol of knowledge.
Sweet words and the righteous deeds
Render a person lovable and refined.
Ignorance, a grave sin as well vice
Spoils the grace; pollutes the mind.
A man of polish in quest of knowledge
Is in right earnest to imbibe culture.

‘As busy as bee’ is a golden saying
A cultured man is seldom found idle
Love as sweetness, knowledge as light
And work as worship bequeath culture.
In the march from stone age to space
Traits of culture kept elevating man.
An idle brain is the playmate of devil
A cultured man beams bright with grace.

— 0 —

9 Human Spirit

I am the ever striving spirit of man
Which seeks social change and equity
Dignity of individual for one and all
To usher in an era of love and amity.
In India, the land of enlightening saints
Caste system denied me merit-based worth
Imposing norms of life on basis of birth.
In the continent held metaphorically dark
Segregation made my life miserably harsh
Snubbed me as *nigger* with a bestial heart.

In erstwhile USSR where revolution swayed
My brain was purged and the mind estranged
On the bait of golden age in an iron cage.
Religious intolerance and bigoted beliefs
Erupt so often as violence to terrorise me
Rumours are whispered to perpetrate panic
Anarchists contrive so to harm or uproot me.
Equity eludes me still in many parts of world
Yet unfair codes and norms fail to harass me
For I keep striving for all-round excellence.

— 0 —

10 Sheikh Farid

Austere in habits but fascinating in speech
Steadfast in actions led by fervent belief
Tolerant and consistent in words and deeds
Was the sage and saint, reverend Baba Farid.

Farid-ud-Din Masud adored as Ganj-i-Shakar
Led life consonant with his glorious name
Farid-ud-Din means rare defender of faith
Ganj-i-Shakar symbolizes godown of sweets.

Masud was the pen-name, he selected later
But Sheikh, Baba and alike modes of address
Adopted by the swelling number of devotees
Overshined his all other far brilliant entities.

The faith, he professed, was service of man
The path, he chose, was disciplining of self
The conquest of mind rid him of bitterness
Implanted by anger, conceit and attachment.

The approach was new for its being pragmatic
Highlighting unity of man and oneness of God
Laying stress on harmony among human beings
Denouncing communal conflict as devilish act.

Despite his grooming in Arabic and Persian
Chose to sermonize in the native language
Plain truth expressed in familiar phrases
Installed him as pioneer of Punjabi verse.

Did not knock at royal court to seek position
Rather princes queued to invoke his blessings
Shared his humble fare and edifying thought
With the down-trodden for bettering their lot .

His foreign origin created no detraction
His message of love won devoted attention
The caste-ridden alien to human equality
Got stirred by his concept of fraternity.

Time could not fade the lustre of his gospel
His hymns and sermons enshrined in Adi Granth
Build bridges of amity for global brotherhood
Urging that religion unites, not divides mankind.

The campaign against religious bigotry
Ushered in an era of communal harmony
Hailed in history as Bhagati Movement
Which strove for a humane way of life.

Farid-ud-Din (1175-1265) a pioneer of Chishti Order of Sufis in India. One hundred twelve *shalokas* (couplets) and four *shabads* (hymns) by him are enshrined in Adi Granth, sacred scripture of the Sikhs.

11

Abraham Lincoln

The great Abraham Lincoln, torch-bearer of equality
 Apostle of global goodwill, pathfinder for humanity
 Rough diamond in appearance, noble in his feelings
 Upright in his thinking and humane in all dealings
 Laid down his life to establish for all the right:
 To live with heads high, free of scare and fright
 Colour or religion which so often depends on birth
 May not deny anyone the reward of intrinsic worth.

Lincoln could not bear that in the land of liberty
 Blacks were not citizens, rather gainful property,
 Owned by White masters, kept under social fetters
 For tiresome labour on wages of crumbs and tatters.
 With ill-gotten wealth, masters lived with pleasure
 But rose to oppose loudly each progressive measure.
 Slaves doomed to a life of endless toil and boredom
 Got lynching as justice, if bid was made for freedom.

On being elected President, Lincoln abolished slavery
 Grit shown in the Civil War bore mark of his bravery
 His friends grew cold, the opponents rose as rebels
 Indifference to liberation was seen at many levels.
 Contempt as well as ridicule hurled from every side
 Altered not his conviction, rather higher it did ride.
 Patience and calmness displayed in strife or battle,
 Are tests of greatness and virtues of rare mettle.

When the Civil War with double strength was won
 With no malice in his mind, ill will towards none
 He hastened to assure all, whether foe or friend,
 That era of hate and fear had come to a firm end.
 When all, Black or White, Red Indian or Gentile
 Shall live as brothers without any grudge or guile.
 A racist and a diehard, a man devoid of reason
 Killed out of rancour this pioneer of great vision.

Log-Cabin to White House is a historic event
 The account of a life, honest, amiable, decent
 Fatherly, fair, fearless, diligent but humorous
 Even the rabid rivals found him magnanimous
 Tall man with a big heart, destined to be great,
 Died for an ideal which altered mankind's fate.
 People singed with hatred or paralysed by fear
 Find Abraham Lincoln: a peerless guide and seer.

— 0 —

Sixteenth President of USA (1861-65) who abolished slavery and curbed the Civil War opposing that progressive measure. Assassinated by a White racist on April 13, 1865.

12 Rabindra Nath Tagore

Tagore! if you come back to the earth today
 You will be pleased to find that your dream
 That with faith and hope mankind may gleam
 Is becoming true, pursuing its rightful way.
 The yearning echoed through your famous lay
 'Where The Mind Is Without Fear', it does seem,
 Has eased a lot the puffs of imperious steam
 For peace and equality, people fervently pray. 8

Knowledge glows in the lands, once called dark
 Colonial powers which held most of the world
 As a chain of trampled domains, far and wide
 Are fading fast and people there keenly hark
 To *Song Offerings*¹, the hymns seeking to herald
 That injustice of all forms be firmly decried. 14



1 Title in English of *Gitanjali*. Rabindra Nath Tagore (1861-1941) was awarded Nobel Prize for that in 1913.

13 Gandhi in Africa

With a self-imposed obligation
 Coined as 'White Man's Burden'
 They too followed the colonists
 With beaded rosaries in hands
 Wearing loose impressive robes
 To lands either declared dark
 Or those inhabited by heathens
 For showing the heavenly light
 To bring them, thus, in Lord's fold
 As they loved the natives ardently.

The centenary of passive resistance movement based on truth, goodwill and fearlessness (satyagraha) launched by Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi against racial segregation in South Africa in September 1906 has been observed with great fervour.

The love changed soon into that for gold,
White ivory and pastures, lush and green.
Though the man, black, dark or wheatish
Did not see much of the blessed light,
After that sun did not set on the Empire.
The rosaries and pastures changed hands,
Messengers of the Lord became landlords.
White Man's Burden bonded the coloured
The obligation turned into segregation
Beloved natives got reduced to chattels.

It was M.K. Gandhi who showed them light
Truth was his guide, righteousness his path
Pride or hate was not known to his pursuits
He kissed instead the hand that slapped.
An apostle of peace, crusader for goodwill
Though frail in frame yet strong in mind
Clear about goal, given to rightful deeds
Softened racial ego with moral strength
Preached and followed the gospel of Lord:
'The lowest also has the right to equity'.

— 0 —

14 Martin Luther King

Martin Luther King was not ruler of any land
But of hearts, thrilled by his awakening dream;
Inspired by norms, basis of beneficial reforms,
Desired to be pursued to elevate human beings.

'When many, not exploited for a privileged few,
When colour lowers not an individual's worth
When talents not harnessed for a vicious loot
Depriving other people of their rightful means'.

King felt pained that the laws were inoperative
Racial prejudice in latent form still lingered
Human rights, sought abroad, were within denied
In letter and spirit the system got nullified.

The policy of moderates, to just watch and wait
Did not help as it merely lulled the depressed
A discourse on Gandhi revealed the missing link
Between tenets and practice of Christian faith.

Martin Luther King (January 15, 1929 – April 4, 1968),
Black American crusader for civil liberties.

Pathfinders

The vicious hold was not easy to be weakened
Protesting moves could be likewise resented
Non-violent approach free of hate or revenge
Would impart moral force to the mute oppressed.

Almost a century after the historic Civil War
America started simmering with racial unrest,
Organising itself as a deterrent Black Power
For exposing lapses of pioneers of New Order.

King would not endorse the counter arrogance
As it might activate, so far, dormant factions
Knowing well the fate of saviours of humanity
Wavered not in launching a passive movement.

The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to him therefor
Approving passive norms to awaken the deprived
Firmly accepted relevance of his mass campaign
Higher than war heroes, rode this peace champion.

18

Pathfinders

The testing time came for a multiracial nation
Massive rally for civil liberties was mobilised
For reminding the pioneers of lofty pledges taken,
When a fanatic shot dead the peaceful campaigner.

The swelling assemblage paid befitting tribute
By remaining peaceful, free of hate and rancour
Consonant with epitaph, epilogue of that dream,
Reading 'Thank God Almighty, I'M Free At Last'.

The martyr saved America from an ominous split
Not geographical, which Civil War firmly nipped
But a cancerous chasm, fostered by racial venom
Posing dark threat to its vast multi-ethnic fabric.

Eighteen years after that momentous martyrdom
President Reagan offered what nation owed him,
Third Monday of January, King's month of birth
Declared Federal holiday; a rare national honour.

- o -

19

15

Kartar Singh Sarabha

Sarabha! You came as a meteor to show us light
When darkness of slavery hovered on all sides.
Your conscience felt hurt by taunts and chides,
Hurling here and there by a few arrogant White
It was hard to bear national insult and slight.
In the World War First you saw favourable tides
With Indian patriots abroad made homeward rides
For ending foreign rule through a determined fight. 8

It was an ill luck that your campaign derailed
But the spark you kindled, proved to be a flame.
Bhagat Singh took the torch after you had left
Your last wish at the gallows, by him, was hailed
'Sarabha, my guiding star' he would firmly claim
In the struggle for revolution, he thus got deft. 14
□

Kartar Singh Sarabha (1896-1915) was in the U S when the First World War broke out. He firmly held the view that England's difficulty was India's opportunity. He organised a patriotic band, who on return to India, aimed at exhorting the armed forces to stage an uprising, reminiscent of 1857 army revolt against the foreign rule. The campaign derailed unfortunately. A conspiracy case against eighty accused started on April 17, 1915 in the Central Jail, Lahore. Seven of them were sentenced to death. Kartar Singh Sarabha was the youngest among them. When suggested to appeal, he retorted "Why should I? If I had more lives than one, it would have been a great honour to me to sacrifice each of them for my country". He was executed on November 16, 1915. Bhagat Singh (1907-1931) who was hardly eight then used to adore Sarabha as his mentor.

16 Bhagat Singh

Bhagat Singh! You kissed the gallows in your prime
To break the chains which enslaved the motherland
Left at an age when the young do well understand
How nice the world is with its pleasures sublime.
You decried that imperialism was a heinous crime
Against man, whatever be his colour, creed or land
For wiping it out, you raised a revolutionary band
Sulking India got upsurged by their heroic rhyme i. 8

The Great War for freedom denied us the same
Though we shared its price at a far off shore ii,
Jallianwala carnage as reward instead was paid.
You denounced the petitions as a cringing game
Sarabha was your mentor in that awakening lore
Even the deaf did hear the bang, so deftly made iii. 14

□

i. The slogan 'Long Live Revolution, Down Down with Imperialism' (Inqilab Zindabad; Samraj Murdabad) raised by H.S.R. A. created an unprecedented political awakening all over India. Bhagat Singh and a band of militant nationalists founded Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (H.S.R.A.). They believed in using every available forum for exposing the hollowness of imperialism. Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt exploded a blank bomb and threw printed leaflets on the floor of Central Assembly, New Delhi, on April 8, 1929 for staging protest against repressive legislative measures. The leaflet began as 'It requires a loud noise to make the deaf hear'. After a historic trial Shiv Ram Rajguru, Sukhdev and Bhagat Singh were hanged to death on March 23, 1931 evening in the Central Jail, Lahore.

ii Refers to the participation of India in the First World War fought in Western Europe by the Allies against the Axis Powers to save democracy from the onslaught by dictatorship.

iii Alludes to the opening line of the leaflet thrown by Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt on the floor of Central Assembly.

17

Mohammed Singh Azad

Tagore felt shocked and Gandhi was plunged into grief
One returned the knighthood conferred for Nobel Prize
The other found that trusting the Empire was not wise
In her march for freedom India, thus, turned a new leaf
When slaughter by Dyer shattered that illusive belief,
Who arrogantly led his troops determined to chastise
A public meeting held to denounce the Rowaltt Device i
The carnage was praised by O'Dwyer, his die-hard chief. 8

Udham Singh felt stung and pledged himself to avenge
The massacre to, thus, assert India's right to be free.
Patiently planned and pursued for about twenty years
Killed O'Dwyer in his den to seek the avowed revenge.
Mohammed Singh Azad! Free secular India symbolises thee
Welcomes home your sacred remains with grateful tears. 14

□

i Rowaltt Act contained suppressive measures for perpetuating the imperialist rule. They were jeeringly termed as 'No appeal, no vakil and no dalil' device.

When the British, forgetting their war time promises, perpetrated the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre at Amritsar on April 13, 1919, for teaching the Indians a lesson in loyalty, India felt shocked. Tagore returned his knighthood and Gandhi lost faith in the belief that India could get self-rule by co-operating with the British.

Udham Singh (1899-1940) vowed to avenge that national humiliation. He succeeded in redeeming his pledge on March 13, 1940 at Caxton Hall, London, by killing O'Dwyer, who as the then Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, had defended the carnage by the army. During the trial Udham Singh gave his name as Mohammed Singh Azad for symbolising his aspirations of free secular India. He was hanged to death on July 31, 1940. His remains were brought to India by his grateful countrymen in August 1974.

18

Subhas Chander Bose :

Liberator of East

Subhas! You retrieved honour by reviving our valour
When stupor of slavery made us a worthless number
Your clarion call awakened us from age-old slumber
Our heads rose high and faces shedded their pallor
You spurned the I. C. S. despite its pomp and glamour
Deeming it not a laurel, but dead weight and lumber
As the march to freedom it did intriguingly cumber.
You believed in action, not in protests and clamour. 8

‘To Delhi’ was the war cry of I.N.A. you raised
When you sought funds, people gave blood as well.
The Empire claiming that on it the sun never set
Crumbled thereafter for it was shaken and dazed.
‘Liberator of the East’¹ you rang Empire’s knell
Your glorious deeds, we Indians will never forget. 14
□

¹ Netaji Subhas Chander Bose (1896-1945), by leading I.N.A. (Indian National Army) for liberating India, weakened imperialism in the Far East.

19

Mahatma Gandhi

We had been a motley crowd, proud of caste or clan
Devoid of feelings or notions that make a nation
Your precepts and practices made you an apt mason
Clans evolved as a nation under an innovated plan.
All fears vanished, our faces no longer looked wan
Your plain words and firm deeds served to awaken
A process of integration they did inwardly hasten
In the march for freedom, you remained in the van. 8

You treated the untouchables as children of God
You raised women high in various fields of life
You gave us the Tricolour to symbolise our aims
Your spinning wheel shook off the Crown and Rod
You laid down your life to curb communal strife
Bapu, the father of nation, every Indian exclaims. 14
□

1 Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi (1869-1948) adored as Bapu, reverential mode of addressing one's father in India.

20

Tireless Tiller

I am tireless tiller of a wondrous land
Cradle of culture, robust and glorious;
Votary of trio of head, heart and hand
Vigorous, virtuous and ever victorious.

To achieve the freedom, the price I paid
Included the rivers; Jehlum and Chenabⁱ
On the banksⁱⁱ of which, legends were made
By gallant lovers and patriots of Punjab.

To overcome the big loss, thus, sustained
The Sutlej was stored in Gobind Lakeⁱⁱⁱ
The deep Beas too has been contained^{iv}
So that useful water flows not waste.

I tunnelled into the impregnable hills
Built roads to link towns with hamlets
Dammed the rivers with technical skills
Dug lined canals to reclaim the deserts.

Braving scorching sun and chilling cold
I cleared sandy mounds and bush forests
Adopted techniques, progressive and bold
Extended region-wise by farm scientistsⁱ.

The arid tracts, where once pretty damsels
Died of thirst crying for a drop of water
Love-torn, pursuing the pugmarks of camelsⁱⁱ
No more echo wails of a Punjab's daughter.

Cleared of scrubs are now fertile fields
Symbols of future, flourishing and bright
Punjab leads in many agricultural yields
My toil and valour raised nation's might.

Thus my skill set in the green revolution
To fortify freedom by economic prosperity
My tireless work and unfailing resolution
Have provided fresh avenues for posterity.

-
- i Out of five rivers of the Punjab, two viz. Jehlum and Chenab, fell to the share of Pakistan in 1947.
- ii The famous love lores in Punjabi *Heer Ranjha* and *Sohni Mahiwal* describe the romances which took place on the banks of Chenab. The resolution for the independence of India in place of dominion status was passed by the Indian National Congress in its Lahore Session held in December 1929 at the bank of Ravi, now in Pakistan.
- iii Gobind Sagar of Bhakra Dam, also called the economic temple of India. iv Dam at Talwara.

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- i Acknowledges the extension work done by Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana.
- ii Refers to the tale of *Sassi Pannu*, another love lore in Punjabi, where the beloved died of thirst in a desert while searching for her abducted lover.

Post-Independence India

Jubilees of Independence *

Celebration of the jubilees of independence
Enjoins us keep pondering 'why, how and if'.
Why did India, gifted with rare natural wealth
Enlightened by sages, guided by erudite saints
Guarded by warriors, served by the brainwashed
Get enslaved? Outwitted, looted, often disgraced.

Denial of knowledge kept the masses ignorant
Sages seeking salvation, escaped to seclusion
Warriors, led by impulsions. forgot real goals
Workers denied worth on basis of their birth
Were rendered fatalist by the cunning priests
Our past did not combine heart, head and hands.

* The Silver, Golden and Diamond jubilees of
independence were celebrated in 1972,1997
and 2007 respectively. The Platinum jubilee
will be observed in 2022.

30

The caste divide did not let nationalism grow
Pride in hallowed past overlooked the present.
Whereas the West was awakened by new ideas
Gave up narrow outlook to quest fresh avenues
Indians kept on clinging to traditional taboos
Falling victim to guiles of successive raiders.

If Hindutva objects to the plural social fabric
Denying regional urges under pledged purges
If minorities fail to revise parochial outlook
To get social justice and dignity of individual
The discords that led often to our subjugation
May only ritualize the periodic jubilee celebration .

Democracy loses direction under dynastic rules
Politics lacking ethics threatens a stable set-up.
When elections get rigged by deceitful schemes
Bullet not the ballot, the anarchists set to threat.
A vow to resist the clique of money and muscle
May complement high ideals of freedom struggle.

- o -

31

22

India : A Nuclear Partner

Jawahar Lal Nehru, the architect of modern India
Was a towering figure with an inspiring vision
Keen to impart his people rational bent of mind
To shape them into a human lot of dynamic kind.
Opposed to barren rituals, votary of innovation
Enthused by lending inspiration to perspiration
Bugbear for the orthodox, saviour of down-trodden
Led crusade against superstitious modes of life.

Planned for India an indigenous industrial base
Despite the brain drain absorbed bulk of talent
In projects of research and the advanced studies
Within a decade India became a developing nation.
Internal and external pricks often posed problems
But firm base set by him did not let India falter
His tryst with destiny left behind a robust legacy
India could maintain its valuable secular entity.

Pulls of Cold War cautioned the Nehru legatee's
To get self-reliant in their defence perception
Target had been assigned to each research centre
For basic research to modernize national arsenal.
Nation feels proud that despite political changes
They did not slacken in their assigned objectives.
Resisting various tactics of super nuclear powers
India has succeeded in becoming an equal partner.



i The Prime Ministers of India who followed the policies laid down by Jawahar Lal Nehru in letter and spirit.

23 Goddess of Justice

Goddess of Justice! it has been a solace
That you cover your eyes to be impartial
But it disappoints as well as distresses
That you have been gradually crippled too
Do not seem to move even at snail's speed
Cases in courts, lower or higher, keep piling
Not in millions but crossing even billions.
The aggrieved, thus, get caught in a swamp.

Justice delayed is not mere justice denied
Rather the wrong, seeking redress, worsens
Justice depends on how much one can spend.
The system observes not the avowed ethics
A wronged client often feels snared instead.
Judiciary finds no time to lay down case law
Its collateral role to mend any erring system.
Goddess of justice is both blind and helpless.

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24 The Netajan

Why this clamour about an olympic medal
Whether gold, silver or some other metal?
Why sprint to sweat or vigorously pedal?
Physical feats are seldom a gainful mettle.

Barbarians box and the thickheads wrestle,
In legislatures, netajan too freely grapple.
Quite artfully all shady deals they settle
Their clans they, thus, contrive to nestle.

Rathyatra, our ancient hero-adoration game
Is organised to wipe off a fictitious shame.
Now and then a city is chosen for a new name
To commemorate its eclipsed historical fame.

Whatever charges the prosecution may frame
To expose scams leading to financial drain
Are frustrated through manipulated games.
By wiles the netajan fend the unfair gains.



The netajan is a sarcastic reference to the politicians of contemporary India. The poem was written in 1996, when India, the second most populous country of the world, drew almost a blank in the Olympics. The 2000 games also witnessed the same sordid performance. The poem deplores as well the growing degeneration of our political system.

25
Whom to Criticize

Never

The young in their formative phase
Acquiring worth that in fact weighs
Inspiring people to adopt new ways
For sharing benefits of modern age.

Ever

The ageing bums who mostly fumble
And in race for power often tumble
Reluctant to quit their poll gamble
Craving still for another scramble.

The corrupt clique of power-seekers
In saintly garbs, a pack of cheaters
Mother slaying an expectant daughter
To flaunt her sway on clannish power.

Those treating religion as profession
Riding haughtily in chariot procession
Managing at the halts a huge reception
For glorifying a hidden vile intention.

Degeneration

Soliciting, thus, the favour of ballots
Misquoting viciously religious tenets
Threatening with tridents and barrels
Or alluding to similar lurking perils.

Exploiting power with crafty mettle
Usurping the funds meant for cattle
Hijack easily the electoral wrestle
Treating it as mere domestic hassle.

Researchers tuned to the leftist drums
Seldom linked with rural life or slums
Given to project ideologic din and hum
Revising their assessment now and then.

Surely
Such be condemned and criticized
Caricatured as well as satirized
Their misdeeds be firmly decried
To keep the masses well apprised.

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26

India Is Shining

The scholars with their pedantic knowledge
 Influenced by dogmas or the utopian ideals
 Are as detached from stark reality of life
 As have been our sages, wise but escapists.
 Views of the learned in compiled papers,
 Gathered from journals or archival files
 Are either not updated or are unrelated
 To many happenings being, thus, described.

Recluses regard the world as an illusion
 Preach an evasive approach towards life.
 White-collar scholars, reckless consumers,
 Know a little about the plight of workers.
 Those, who perspire to produce, get fleeced
 A few, who process to sell, roll in riches
 Run parallel economy with the black money
 Which the armchair learned fail to grasp.

Society is doomed when chasm gets widened
 Between policy makers and working classes.
 Public servants recruited on bookish merit
 Have crammed knowledge of various matters
 Quite alien to people they are paid to serve
 Ditto file notes contrived for vested ends
 To abet the privileged in their crafty ventures
 The masses get gnawed by such human vultures.

Principles of policy laid down for the State
 For establishing a progressive social order
 Seem to be a conveniently forgotten resolve.
 India which claimed to be the light of Asia
 Got graded as a poor and corrupt management.
Yatras, riots, walk-outs and loose alliances
 Are devised as the power capturing tactics
 Hurra! let us *feel good* for *India is shining*.

27

American Way of Life

United States, the sole surviving super power
Keen to flaunt all over American way of life,
Estimates poorly the other existing cultures
Slighting them as biased towards human rights.

Drunk drivers at home knock down more children
Than US men killed abroad in defensive strikes.
The family values have weakened there steadily
'Seeking Divorce' ranks as the leading civil right.

One in every ten youngsters often goes astray:
Lesbian, gay, gangster or a prowling drug-addict.
Live-in-couples defying conjugal mode of life
Offer single-parent children for State Welfare.

– o –

28

Parivar Designs

I am lord of Mumbai and the patriarch of Shiv Sena
Maharashtra Chief Minister is care-taker of my fief.
Home Minister of pseudo Secular Republic of India,
Misnomer for Bharat Varsha, land of sages and seers,
Rushes posthaste imploring suspension of my warning:
'If the cricket matches are arranged with Pakistan
Anywhere in India defying the wishes conveyed by me
Our sainaks would march openly to destroy the pitch
Police shall watch meekly that bold pre-emptive feat
Any meddlesome guy, however high, could eat humble pie'.

The office of Cricket Control Board has been smashed
In the same manner as the Babri Masjid was demolished.
Dare anybody register case against the brave sainaks
The media and opponents may keep raising hue and cry
Our detractors will be ignored or dealt with sternly.
Hurray! coalition offers us footholds of many a kind
Himachal is retrieved, drained Punjab is at our feet,
U.P is our green pasture, Bihar is next soft target,
Gujrat implements fine the Parivar's hidden designs.
To the PMO files, common agenda will remain confined.



Refers to the protest by Shiv Sena at Mumbai and New Delhi in 1998. Administration at both the places did not take notice of violence and destruction of public property. Rather, Home Minister, L.K.Advani, extolled for his iron will, rushed to Mumbai to assure the Shiv Sena Supremo that the visiting team would not play any match at Mumbai.

PMO stands for Prime Minister's Office and common agenda for common minimum programme of National Democratic Alliance.

29

Pity the Nation

A mercenary network of the global sellers
 A notorious class of licentious revellers
 A pliable lot, labelled as intelligentsia
 The hire-based media gripped by the rich

Cried in chorus that the dawn of 2000 A.D.
 Marked not only the advent of next century
 But also of concomitant Third Millennium
 The clique,thus, stirred a celebrating mood.

While cyclone-hit Orisa lay still ravaged
 And state after state was getting bankrupt
 Expensive celebrations were being launched
 Within as well as at picnic resorts abroad.

Then only five desperate aerial pirates
 Avenged the much thumped Kargil push-back
 When Foreign Minister of Union Government
 Offered them captured terrorists as ransom

At a place swayed by their callous mentors
 To have the hijacked merry-makers rescued.
 All the allies dittoed the deal sheepishly
 Pity the nation ruled by panicked partners.



Deplores the growing merrymaking waywardness of upper middle class and the acquiescence of N.D.A. Government to the demands of Pakistani hijackers of an Indian Airline plane in December 1999. Dreaded desperadoes awaiting trial in J&K were abjectively taken to Kandhar (Afghanistan) as ransom to get the hijacked plane rescued.

30

The Darkest Day

September eleven became the darkest day
 In the history of an arrogant super power
 Nay in that of all the progressive world
 Contributing to equality and brotherhood
 It clashed with the objectives of new century
 Aspiring that man would grow up in harmony
 With his self, neighbours and environments.
 It witnessed the havoc; a dark mind caused.

The invaders did not come armed from abroad,
 Were implanted to wreck America from within
 Got trained here, exploited the lax vigilance
 Hijacked local planes,ruined towers of trade
 Struck seats of power,puzzled the invincible.
 Band of vandals, butchers of innocent beings
 Bigoted minds projecting traditional precepts
 Hostile to liberal ideals and modern concepts.

The terrorists owing allegiance to Saudi born anarchist, Osama bin Laden, pitched in Afghanistan, hijacked American planes on domestic flights on September 11, 2001. Through suicidal strikes with them they ruined World Trade Centre, popularly called twin towers, at New York and damaged the Pentagon, headquarters of US Department of Defence. It is regarded the darkest day in the annals of USA.

Outbursts

Long Cold War between post-war super powers
Led to coaxing of varied incompatible nations,
Intervention by Russia to prop an Afghan ally
Prompted America to mobilize Pakistan further
For arming wild tribes to harass the Russians.
USSR was driven out, but a dormant monster,
Religious fanaticism, got consequently revived
Which threatens all progressive modes of life.

J & K fell as its next target for ethnic carnage
Proxy war was started to add to scare and fright
Strategies were laid down for spreading disorder
India alone kept warning about tempestuous times
US embassies were hit to test the fiendish might
A naval ship was attacked to expedite the strife
When USA realized that it could also be beguiled
It had become pregnable to the terrorist strikes.

i. Russian forces entered Afghanistan in 1979 to prop the tottering
republican regime there. They were made to retreat by 1988. An
internecine warfare followed leading to the revival of religious
fanaticism which had been hitting the secular democracies selectively.
ii. American embassies at Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar Es Salaam
(Tanzania) were subjected to terrorist attacks on August 10, 1998
and naval ship USS Cole was hit on October 10, 2000 while getting
refuelled at Aden (Yemen). All these strikes inflicted alarming
damage to property and the loss of human lives in hundreds.

44

Outbursts

A mighty nation enriched by spate of information
Found its own natives without adequate knowledge
About religious symbols of their fellow citizens
When Sikhs were mistaken near to terrorist Laden
Attacked and degraded despite their civil rights
Exposing the segregation in a multiracial system.
Strength of a nation depends on its weakest link
Pioneers of new order need mend all such chinks.

The operation Infinite Justice drawn for waging
First war of new century to wipe out terrorists
May lead to endemic conflict, if not broad-based.
Anarchists be not acclaimed as freedom fighters
Those who applaud them are opportunistic allies.
Terrorism is a blight not threatening USA alone;
A deep-rooted conspiracy with diabolical designs
Against the rational and equitable ways of life.

'Masses be saved from obsolete views of clerics
Women be liberated from their degrading edicts
Centres of terrorism be located and liquidated
Its breeding source; the bigotry and narcotics
Be disbanded lest it erupts as a pandemic'.
The above ought be the goals of Infinite Justice
If confined to avenge injured pride and prestige
New century may witness more terror and disorder.

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1 The remedial retaliatory invasion of terrorist centres in Afghanistan
had been named as operation 'Infinite Justice'. The apprehension expressed in
the last two lines is proving to be true.

45

31

Three Presidents : Big But Blind

Big or great is often a cover for undue fame
 Bill Clinton, the Janus-faced potential boss
 Of self-styled pioneers of a new world order
 Could invade any land even on flimsy excuse
 To divert the attention of American populace
 From long denied, but later confessed charges,
 For his improper indulgence in White House.
 Such big exploit artfully the promising youth.

Greatness of Great Briton withered further
 When John Bullⁱ wagged tail before Uncle Samⁱⁱ
 The Stars and Stripes, emblems of Great Gloryⁱⁱⁱ
 Affixed on the bombers roaring all over Iraq
 To depose a despot^{iv}, bugbear for United States,
 Got soiled with the blood of helpless beings.
 Both the Republicans, father and the son Bush
 Democrat Clinton too; immensely big, but blind.

The sporadic fits of such American Presidents
 Heading a powerful state, champion of Cold War
 Tell terrible tales of many treacherous deeds.
 The precarious protectors of universal rights
 Pat the plotters who dislodge elected regimes
 Slight the people, not useful in their schemes
 Bypass mass protests against their aggression
 A pack of predators are all such big or great.



It is commonly believed that Bill Clinton, 42nd President of USA (1992-2000) resumed the bombing of Baghdad (Iraq) in 1998 for distracting public attention from his likely impeachment. Earlier his predecessor, George Herbert Walker Bush, resorted to war against Iraq in 1991 in an abortive bid to increase chances of his re-election. Likewise his son, George Bush, 43rd President, in order to conceal the failure to capture their most dreaded enemy, Bin Laden in Afghanistan, directed his strikes against Iraq in 2003 despite world-wide protests. UK towed the line of USA tamely.

-
- i. Once a complimentary, now derogatory, reference to the English.
 - ii. A jocular expansion of US.
 - iii. Nickname for US national flag.
 - iv. Saddam Hussain, the deposed Supremo of Iraq.

Tree to Man

Man! I have been an all-round friend
While your ancestors were apes still
On me, for protection they did depend.

Plucked my leaves or dug the roots
To alleviate their pangs of hunger
Relied often on my beans and fruits.

My shade saved them from summer sun
They burnt my wood to ward off cold
None gave them such comfort and fun.

If you keep losing your care for me
Floods and storms shall rage wild
Blotting out progress made by thee.

Earth shall offer no sights to cherish
Groves and fields will become deserts
Man! you are, thus, doomed to perish.

--o--

33

Earth to Man

Man! Though you adore me as mother earth
Yet you devastate me quite thoughtlessly
Dig me widely to plunder mineral wealth
Keep deforesting me with voracious craze.
The scanty natural cover lets in erosion
The lush vales and hills become desolate.
Wild-life is deprived of natural habitat
The birds also get robbed of green abodes.

The rare flora and fauna are fast vanishing
Receding glaciers keep the sea-level rising
Imbalance in nature causes many upheavals
The industrial waste contaminates fresh air
Pollutes pure water and infects food crops.
Majestic skyscrapers towering dense cities
Send sulking signals to the adjacent slums
Man! You are inviting the predicted doom.

If the caution, I hold, is persistently ignored
The destruction to follow is bound to swallow
All that is fleeced with insatiable greed.
Big projects 'll tumble, if I quiver or rumble
Tsunamis would rise and Katrinas could strike
Super powers too will get feebled and humbled.
Hence, live and let all other creatures thrive
Lest the avarice pushes you back to stone age.

--o --

34**Natural Calamities**

Natural calamities accept no demarcated borders
 Demolish even the so-called invincible barriers
 Paying no consideration to race, colour or creed
 Imperil alike rich or poor, haughty and the meek.
 On such occasions man realises his helplessness
 Before wrath of nature, bursting in varied forms
 Blizzard, earthquake, cyclone or a deluging spate.
 Such disasters, natural or rooted in human greed
 Convey a message to all nations, foes or friends
 That mutual assistance dispels misery and grief.

– o –

35**Thus Was Born Sonar Bangla**

The high values that mankind had long cherished
 For upholding which many upright lives perished:
 ‘Peace on earth based on equality for each man
 With no mark of pride puffed by colour or clan;
 Where pulls held by religion, gender and birth
 Do not deprive a person of the rightful worth;
 Where no ill will harms a race or its language
 Contriving to wipe off a rich ancient heritage’ⁱ.

The poem narrates the liberation of Bangla Desh and the attitude of two big powers, USA and China as well as of Andre Malraux of France towards that development.

i The gist of values incorporated in the International Charter of Human Right prepared by U.N.O.

When warlordsⁱ cracked down on the unarmed people
Millions were uprooted by the madly revengeful.
When pioneers of freedomⁱⁱ and those of revolutionⁱⁱⁱ
Acquiesced to sponsor a controversial resolution^{iv}
And joined hands with tyrants in rash repression
To nullify the verdict, result of a fair election^v.
Thus, the secular texture of a non-aligned nation
Was aimed to be wrecked by an odd triple relation^{vi}.

Declaration of freedom made by George Washington,
Ideals that inspired the valiant Abraham Lincoln
Who risked Civil War to save his new-born nation
From the curse of slavery, a cause of degradation.
Moves of Woodrow Wilson^{vii} to form League of Nations,
Gospel of Four Freedoms^{viii}, improving human relations
Were forgotten or belied by Richard Milhous Nixon
When he let the tyrants crush their Bangla victim.

The call of Andre Malraux, the noble French preceptor
Whom even the awesome de Gaulle adored as his mentor
To raise a legion of thinkers, artists and the writers
To rush to Desh of Bangla to aid the freedom fighters
Just as George Gordon Byron fought for Greek revival
Malraux stood with Sonar Bangla, gasping for survival.
All hail his motherland for vistas shown to humanity
When enlightened Rousseau gave the call for equality.

That Joan of Arc, Indira, saviour of uprooted million
Jewelⁱ of a cornered nation, more than half a billion
Met boldly the challenge posed by a rabid neighbour
In her duty or conviction she did not panic or waver
Took no note of the Dragonⁱⁱ despite its loud rattling
Ignored the Seventh Armadaⁱⁱⁱ and its bluff of heckling
Gave a chastening reply to Yahya^{iv} in a planned manner
Thus was born Sonar Bangla with its sovereign banner.



-
- i The crack-down of Pakistani army on the people of East Pakistan in March 1971. ii USA
 - iii People's Republic of China
 - iv Resolution on events in East Pakistan by the U.N. General Assembly in December 1971.
 - v Denial to the elected representatives of East Pakistan to form government in spite of their majority in the central legislature .
 - vi Pakistan, a theocratic state; USA, a democratic republic and China, a totalitarian regime.
 - vii President of USA, who played a major role in the founding of League of Nations after the First World War.
 - viii Doctrine of Four Freedoms; freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear, put forth by President Roosevelt in his inaugural address in 1945.

-
- i Refers to the award of Bharat Rattana to Mrs Indira Gandhi.
 - ii People's Republic of China
 - iii The Seventh Fleet of USA which rushed to the Bay of Bengal in an abortive bid to help Pakistani army besieged in East Pakistan.
 - iv The then President of Pakistan.

36**The Wail of a Bangla Girl**

Oh ghazis and mujahids, the khans and crusaders
 Posing to be saviours, you fell on us as raiders
 Robbed Desh of Bangla, hounded hapless women
 Caused havoc and horror spreading out as vermin
 Killed our wise people, burnt places of learning
 You were fiddling while Dacca was dismally burning.
 Abductions and detentions, carnage as well plunder
 Were your vile pastime till you fell to surrender.

Why was I raped, the daughter of same religion?
 Why was I molested, a chaste promising citizen?
 Was I an aided armour procured for the trenches?
 Teased and tortured, gripped in lustful wrenches.
 Torn from kith and kin, shorn of womanly treasure
 The child, I do carry, is not my fault or pleasure.
 I curse the U N forums that backed the crusaders
 Thousands wail like me, victims of wicked raiders.

You nibbled my bosom like a wolf and a vulture
 Pushed me to your bunker disdaining my nurture
 Every house as a brothel and a crop of bastards
 Were aimed to be implanted by you wily dastards.
 My body was defiled, the spirit is still unbroken
 Genocide so perpetrated shall ever be ill-spoken
 I ask the Chinese damsel and the American maiden
 How do they treat you when I with shame so laden?

To get rid of you, my brethren shed their blood
 Our lanes and ponds got covered with red flood
 Infants got orphaned, parents lost their children
 Forget not, what I lost, oh! my valorous brethren.
 The jewel of chastity was grabbed as my share
 Thus I was humbled and put to shame and scare
 Sonar Desh of Bangla built on wails and tears
 May do all, it can, to dispel my hovering fears.

– o –

The Pakistani military junta, under the pretext of restoring law and order, killed 30 lakh people, raped 3 lakh women, drove out 10 million people and destroyed 5 lakh houses, bridges, mills and educational institutions in East Pakistan (now called Bangla Desh) during 1971.

In line (i) ghazi or mujahid is an equivalent of crusader and the khans, a sarcastic nickname for Pakistani army rulers.

37

The Unbroken Will

When the suppressed, their will unbroken and high
 Rose with one voice protesting against repression
 It was not internal problem or move for secession
 However wild was Dragon'sⁱ hiss or Uncle Sam'sⁱⁱ cry.
 The unrest simmered though hard the Khansⁱⁱⁱ did try
 Girls were raped enmasse, unheard State oppression
 Millions fled from homes scared by that obsession
 UN organs kept accepting the CIA tailored lie. 8

The idea of two nations^{iv} created by communal fears
 Which once uprooted millions^v was firmly rejected
 When Mujib^{vi} held bigotry as quite alien to culture.
 Hamlets became citadels forgetting sobs and tears
 Teenagers took up arms, with targets well selected
 Their daring deeds exceeded everyone's conjecture. 14



The sonnet is a tribute to the people of erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangla Desh, whose will could not be broken by the atrocities of Pakistani army.

- i People's Republic of China ii USA
- iii Yahya Khan, President of Pakistan, ordered General Tikka Khan to suppress ruthlessly the people of East Pakistan whose representatives in spite of their majority in the central legislature were not allowed to form government on ethnic consideration.
- iv The theory of two nations on the basis of religion put forth by the Muslim League.
- v Both ways large scale migration of people after the partition of India in 1947.
- vi Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, first Prime Minister of Bangla Desh.

38

To Our Pakistani Brethren

How long will you writhe under fear and hate?
 How long will you threaten of fire and sword?
 How long will clouds of war hang on our fate?
 How long will arms consume our toil and gold?
 Oh! pause and ponder, our own flesh and blood.

The same expansive towering range of hills
 Secures our north from winds fiercely cold
 Network of same confluent rivers and rills
 Cradled a culture, quite pragmatic and bold.
 Oh! pause and ponder, our own flesh and blood.

The poem was written on the eve of Simla Summit between Mrs Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, President of Pakistan, held in the last week of May 1972.

To Our Neighbours

Favourable tides of legendary Arabian sea
Resonate on our shores from south to west
Thus nature has linked us wherever we see
Then why let ill will torment us like a pest?
Oh! pause and ponder, our own flesh and blood.

Hymns, we chant, come from common saints
The songs, we relish, are from the same lore
Why keep harping on mere taunts and taints
Learn to live in peace, quarrelling no more.
Oh! pause and ponder, our own flesh and blood.

Poverty is the common enemy of our lands
Wars, hot and cold, render us further poor
To help each other, let us join our hands
No other pledge than this shall be truer.
Oh! pause and ponder, own flesh and blood.

--o --

39
China and India

China and India, two close natural neighbours
For mutual benefit may direct all their labours.
Both have age-old ties, cultural and religious
Cradles of civilizations tolerant and generous
Birthlands of the Buddha and wise Confucious
Who preached ways of life, stable and gracious
May follow themselves precepts of those sages
For creating goodwill, where the rancour rages.

Both strive to save mankind from degradation
Remnant of imperialism or racial segregation.
All nations big or small, people black or white
To freedom and dignity have got the same right.
All seek peace and equity, not economic favours
Authors of *panchsheel* may nip all such waivers
Aid that is given with designs quite mischievous
Dooms global peace to the whims of perfidious

32
Tree to Man

Man! I have been an all-round friend
While your ancestors were apes still
On me, for protection they did depend.

Plucked my leaves or dug the roots
To alleviate their pangs of hunger
Relied often on my beans and fruits.

My shade saved them from summer sun
They burnt my wood to ward off cold
None gave them such comfort and fun.

If you keep losing your care for me
Floods and storms shall rage wild
Blotting out progress made by thee.

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Super powers too will get feebled and humbled.
Hence, live and let all other creatures thrive
Lest the avarice pushes you back to stone age.

--o--

I am man, for whom knowlege is not forbidden
But who flies in space to explore the horizons.
I am man, master of his fate, captain of his will
Not to reach heaven, but to make one, is his goal.
Where real worth, not mere birth, gets its reward
Where the mind is broad, the head cool and clear.

I am man, who as ape frisked on hills and dales
In merry groups without any mark of high or low
I am man, equality is his heritage, not a mere right
Freedom is whose way of life, not a wistful dream.
Nature, the common weal, had no haves or have-nots
'Right to own' has marred his happy way of life.

I am man, who adores not poverty as divine bliss
But attributes it to exploitage by unfair means.
I am man, for whom colonial regimes are a crime
That violates overall equity and human dignity.
I will brook no more the pinch of race or colour
Through fairness for all,'ll work for excellence.

41 **Glory of Woman**

I am woman, not that who led to the banishment
Of Adam from Eden and his fall below on earth.
They misjudge me and wrong themselves who hold
That I am man's misfortune for I allure him oft.
They lead empty lives with minds quite depraved
I neither caused the loss of paradise nor tempt,
Those meditating aloof to be in unison with God.
I symbolise the heaven, if they care to perceive.

I am a mother, my lap is as blissful as heaven
It is a free gift; not the promise after death.
It is not denied even if my offspring go wrong
They do not pray for it, rather I yearn for them.
Love is God; my life personifies that divine trait
I give my all, I serve and suffer but never grumble
Because I am a mother; a sister selflessly sincere
A wife who inspires; a daughter instinctively noble.

I am not full of guile, jealousy is not my nature
Frailty is not my name, nor I am the cause of wars
These are the ravings of minds, petty and perverse
For they treat me as a doll lacking will or soul.
I do not want to be a better-half, but the real half
With no craze to possess him but keen to co-operate.
He only lowers himself when he distorts my image,
For I am as sacred as heaven, as pious as saints.

When wars vanish and double norms are not practised
When riches spoil not a few, poverty debases not many
When custom and law do not suppress, rather liberate
The human soul from prejudices; social and political
Then the womanly glory will reflect its latent worth.
If with a few stray chances I could show my mettle
How worthwhile I may be when I get likewise equality!
My fetters harm man as well; equity elevates us both.

42

To a Child: A Father's Pledge

Dear child, my ties with you are a solemn bond
Not of mere flesh and blood, but to groom you
As an earnest, upright and benign human being.
In anger or conceit I shall never rebuke you
For that may induce you too to berate others.
I will not let anyone be overbearing with you
As it may repress your sense of co-operation
Which extends to all a deserving consideration.

I shall cheer you to add to your confidence
May reprove you seldom, for to err is human
A child so jeered gets timid and diffident.
Even when found struck in deeds not wrongful
I will not chide you so that you may learn
To confess without any hesitation or guile.
I 'll see that acts of others, petty or vile
Do not prompt you to be relentless likewise.

I shall commend your performance on merit
Correct you at once with words and deeds,
While you go wrong, so that you learn too
To appreciate others when they excel you.
I shall be watchful to make you righteous
Not let my fondness condone what you lack
So that you do not lose sense of fairness
Which we need to refine the modes of life.

I shall arrange security only, if required
To teach you to be steadfast but truthful
May advise, if asked, but not impose my will.
Your acts in good faith may not need my nod
As the understanding, based on mutual faith
May create in you the endearing team spirit.
Thus, I shall endeavour to redeem my pledge
To bring you up as an exalting human being.

– 0 –

43 I Am Child

I am child, not a hoe that needs sharpening
I am not spoiled if love replaces the rod.
I am not a melon that grows in dust and mud
Man may be made of dust, but is not mere dust.
Oh! my dear parents and wise nation builders
Better to discard all such obsolete beliefs
Hoe is lifeless and the melon has no brain
'Child is father of man' is a meaningful saying.

The poem challenges the sayings like 'Spare the rod and spoil the child'; 'A child and a hoe, if beaten occasionally, remain sharp'; 'A child and a melon develop better while rolling in dust' and 'A child is an inevitable blessing of God', which being obsolete are not in tune with the modern outlook based on persuasion, affection and precept-based practice.

Punishment prompts me to pretend or deceive
It spoils the rare wealth that exists in me
It fills my innocent mind with fear and hate
Curbs fine instincts and the joy I could feel.
If education aims at making me good and noble
Do your precepts and acts lead to that effect?
What you preach, so often, you do its opposite
Such a gap in your words and deeds repels me.

Dear parents! If you got me by pledge or prayer
You deceived yourselves and were unfair to me.
I am neither a divine gift nor a mark of fate,
I am also not a legacy of your earlier lives,
I am a product of your social urge and needs.
I follow the path that your foot-steps mark,
If I am good, it reflects our mutual success,
If deficient, my bringing up missed something.

--o --

44

A Girl Child

I am a girl child, an endangered gender
Hailed willy-nilly by some on my birth
As Lakshmi, legendary goddess of wealth.
So often was destroyed as soon as born
As priestly rituals kept presenting me
A mere piece of property, held as trust.
Used to be married off early in childhood
To shift the onus of protection to others.
Some parents did not mind even selling me
Or offered me to a temple to appease gods.

Decries the growing evil of female foeticide in
male-ridden societies

45

The Person I Am Looking For

Progressive ideas and their gradual impact
Helped a lot to remove the unjust barriers
Right to equality restored the lost dignity
Laws ensuring overall entitlement were made
Such equitable acts created the woman power
But dowry demands and inner desire for sons
Diluted the effect of various welfare steps
Earlier widows were burnt as customary rite
Now brides are burnt impelled by dowry greed
Even rigorous laws have failed to protect me.

Science crusades against outdated beliefs
Proves hollowness of many whims and myths
Helps man to determine his precise worth
Assists law in locating mysterious crimes
Pinpoints evidence to substantiate wrongs.
Despite wonderful service it gives to man
It abets in denying me the right to be born.
Earlier gender got known on being delivered
Now scanning tests show it even in the womb
Leading to my destruction long before birth.

– o –

If you do not get lowered in your own eyes
While you raise yourself in those of others,
If you do not give in to mere gossips and lies
Rather heed them not, saying ‘Who bothers’,
You may be the person, I am looking for.

If you crave not for praise when you win
And look not for sympathy while you lose,
If cheers let not your head toss or spin
And after a set-back you offer no excuse,
You may be the person, I am looking for.

If you accept counsel without getting sore
And re-assess yourself in the light thereof,
If you pledge not to be obstinate any more
And meet others without any frown or scoff,
You may be the person, I am looking for.

If you have the will to live and courage to die
You are a beacon-light for people far and wide.
If you ignore the jeers and, thus, expose the lie
That virtue and success seldom go side by side,
You are the person, I am looking for.

– o –

46

New Year Greetings

With faith and fervour ring in the new
Ring out the old giving its proper due
The old was new when we hailed it last
The new 'll get old for time runs fast.

New and old are mere man's view of time
In fact they are cosmic rhythm and rhyme.
Time is ever young and bears no wrinkles
With a pinky tinge each morning twinkles.

Time seems hanging when man feels sad
But passes swiftly when he beams glad.
Time reflects only man's state of mind
And glistens golden when he acts kind.

Let us find out what keeps many sad
What makes a few so excited and mad?
None would look then before and after
An era of peace may, thus, dawn faster

Pride, hate and fear keep a man blind
Conceit isolates and makes him unkind
With his stiff neck and a closed mind
Peace or goodwill he does seldom find.

Pride puffing up from colour or race
Overlooks real worth, values mere face,
Is an act unjust, wicked as well base
How do people bear such deep disgrace?

May God give us men of benevolent vision
Just in dealings, gifted with sound reason.
Who are not tempted by fame, power or pelf
Think ever of mankind, not of gain or self.

Seldom led by passion, master of their mind
Strive for a purpose with no motive behind.
With such pious wishes, let us hereby greet
The new year to perform a marvellous feat.

47**Clean and Bright World**

A reformer and a man of letters
 Face nagging in mundane matters
 Snubbed as meddling or reckless
 Chided also as unwise and useless.
 Such cynics even berate a sweeper
 For them he is a stinking creature
 But if the sweeper stops to work
 Rubbish and waste gather in bulk
 The lanes and homes begin to stink
 Disease soon after may set to slink.

A reformer, the cleaner of social life
 Conducts his moves as surgeon's knife
 For curtailing useless customary rites
 Against the evil he, thus, firmly fights.
 The vicious oppose a helpful reform
 Because it confronts a wicked norm.
 The reformer is recklessly maligned
 Moves to harm him are often designed
 If he in despair loses heart and hope
 Evil perpetuates its pernicious scope.

A writer soars in higher domains
 He is seldom led by worldly gains
 He ignores what his slights say
 As the wicked are given to inveigh.
 The realms he creates with his pen
 Do not crumble every now and then.
 Treasures of learning, he discovers,
 Do not lie locked in guarded towers
 They enrich freely the world at large
 In spite of what a leg-puller bawls.

Cleanliness being next to godliness
 A sweeper improves the worldliness.
 Excellence being the motto of man
 A reformer strives the best he can,
 To ensure the pace of healthy change
 He sets to define its scope and range.
 Pen with its wide persuasive hold
 Keeps a writer watchful and bold.
 The sweeper, reformer and the writer
 Make the world cleaner and brighter.

48

Language of Colours

Colours have a language
With no applied grammar
Neither written in words
Nor conveyed with sounds
Silent yet quite expressive
Its message is seldom lost
Creates no jargon or ill will
Its thrill is a sheer delight.

Colours even when more than one
Cause neither confusion nor babel
Their sight charms, beauty sublimed
They gladden like the playful babes
Impress deeply even a stoic mind.
The Creator adopts their language
To indicate lovely moods of nature
And the annual cycle of seasons.

Colours radiate beauty as well joy
Combining, transmit transparent light
While splitting, form the rainbow.
Complexions of man in the world
Are as varied as colours of nature
Black or white, yellow or wheatish
Are the hues used by the Creator
To teach man the lesson of colours.

--o--

49

Lonesomeness

A word, which is as widely abused as love
Is lonesomeness, all idlers complain of it.
The loftiness of love, not many can grasp
Because they mistake it for craze and lust.
Recluses take the seclusion as saintliness
For they exalt self-denial to a holy quest.
In the present day world of stress and strain
Stretches of lonesomeness lead to amusement.

The fruitful company, a good book gives,
The heights, an artist or a writer scales
The introspection offered by lonesomeness
Are among the joys of this impugned bliss.
A noisy company dulls a sensitive mind
Often stuffs the brain with worthless tips.
A talkative being feels bored, if alone
A gifted person is company to himself.

Lonesomeness inflicts those with boredom
Who tune themselves not to songs of life
Watching from a corner the children play,
Strolling in the blooming parks and groves
Listening to the symphony of chirping birds
Observing the soothing beauty of setting sun
Are the pursuits that ward off boredom
If unable to create, one ought appreciate

50
Poetry

Poetry is not a romantic thrill
Sent by beauty, youth or wine
Nor it is a mode of invocation
To be inspired by powers divine.

Poetry on rivulets, birds and hills
Soaring clouds or changing season
Lovely moon or the hues of rainbow
Has waned with the growing reason.

Poetry is not choice of words
For creating rhythm and rhyme
It is a spontaneous expression
Of feelings noble and sublime.

Man is no longer a helpless tool
In the hands of chance or destiny
Despair vanishing from his mind
Lends weight to this testimony.

Released from the grip of myths
Man is evolving his new entity
His mind is getting enlightened
Under various effects of liberty.

Poetry is not the gift of a muse
But a free and precise description
Of the musings of a fertile mind
With no binding to rhymed diction.

51
The Trio

Religion promises heaven after death
Science assures it on the earth itself
Both have their vast conflicting domains
One preaches faith, the other pursues doubt.

‘By conquering the self one conquers the world’
Is the cardinal canon that religion lays down
‘Through quest for truth explore the universe’
Is the objective mode which science suggests.

Religion holds life as a predestined role
Reward or punishment of earlier births.
Science claims it as a marvellous leap
An evolution from apes to human beings.

52

On Friendship

A tug of war has, thus, been going on
Between them to improve the lot of man
Contentment is the sermon of religion
'Struggle to survive' cautions science.

Contentment creates tolerance and love
Offers a hand to help the weak and needy
Stiff struggle, the inference of science
Causes tension through pulls and pricks.

Blind faith in religion, held as a bliss
Eclipses brain for purifying the mind
Science with stress on pulls of conflict
Is infernal often despite promised heaven.

Whether East or West, we invoke the Trinity
For seeking holy light and peace of mind.
The trio of letters, science and religion
May evolve for man an exalting position.

– o –

A friend is like an oasis
In the latent desert of life
Friendless person feels lonely
Even among the jostling crowds.
A friend is a flawless mirror
Which reflects one's exact self
That is why the sages suggest
That a person is aptly judged
By the flock, he tends or fends.
A friend helps to know oneself.

Friends cover four different groups
Vast in number and varied in nature
Keep on swelling like human desires
Wisdom enjoins to assess them both.
By taming desires one mends the self.
While choosing a friend in one's life
One puts oneself to an exacting test
Whether to give way to fun and jest
Or harness a team, the possible best.
These four trends classify the friends.

While one occupies a seat of power
Friends rush to him from all sides
Like flies swarming an uncovered pot
For grabbing favours, vexing or fair.
When power like wealth takes to wings
They act like rats on a sinking ship.
Need always a patron to seek benefits,
Their loyalty, they continue to shift.
Stabs and snaps hold a useful lesson
Learn to probe the pleas of parasites.

There may be a few with an urge to serve
 But lack the nerves to crusade therefor
 Better than parasites but not steadfast.
 Such persons share gladly gain or pain
 If it is all giving, they quit bandwagon
 Convenience not conviction is their norm.
 They serve their ends by shifting trends
 Hesitate not to harass even by falsehood
 The patrons, they earlier fervently adored
 Such fair-weather friends be timely shunned.

Friendship is a selfless connection
 It ignores gains but shares pains.
 It does not play the second fiddle,
 Being a team of equally gifted souls.
 Time may come when friends separate
 On matters where judgements differ,
 Then higher principles are at stake
 Such partings generate no ill will
 None hits the other below the belt
 As each is truthful in his concept.

A person firmly clear about his goal
 Noble of mind and steady in dealings
 Puffed not by praise or hurt by gossip
 Striving always how to usefully share
 The talents he has been blessed with
 By the merciful Almighty in His Grace.
 Is never alone, even when found lone.
 Is the pole star for fellow-beings
 He is in fourth stage of friendship
 Friend of all, yet befriended by a few.

— 0 —

53

Fire: Hot and Cold

Fire, despite its dazzling flame
 Blurs seldom our power of sight
 The flame with its sizzling heat
 Lends joy to each home and hearth.

But the cold fire of envy and hate
 Though is without smoke and flame
 Yet consumes our power of reason
 Depriving life of the joy, it holds.

— 0 —

54

Forgiving and Forgetting

To forgive and forget is a godly act
 Better than prayers and mass rituals.
 Only those pray aloud to invoke God
 Afflicted by minds wavering and weak.

Appearance is often a cover for deceit
 That is why God chose to have no shape.
 Cursing is an abominable lapse or sin
 Robs worldly joys and bliss of heaven.

— 0 —

55

Enemies Within

One needs no foes to be harmed or degraded
While one succumbs to an eruption of anger
The frothy tongue shouts indiscreetly foul
Thinking turns suddenly base and perverse
The dear and near suffer lash of wordy bash
Knowing not their fault or offending lapse.
When the fit subsides and sanity prevails
Then one regrets that unbecoming collapse.

One looks serene while at peace with self
Readily inclines to share the best one has,
Earns acceptance with growing endearment
Master of self and well-wisher of mankind.
Anger and pride are enemies hidden within.
When greed and avarice sneak to abet them
Stir an insatiable lust for diabolical acts
One crumbles under a disgracing implosion.

– o –

56

Immaturity

The uneven growth of various talents
Emotions, reasoning and steadfastness
Creates deficiency, called, immaturity
Such a person remains mostly childish.

Not related with age, often, a gray-haired
Disappoints as naïve, shallow and irksome
Keeps chirping when required to be quiet
Eulogizing the past, unmindful of present.

Pampered childhood or protected teen-age
Let not the trio of heart, head and hands
Develop for facing the problems of life
A flaw which led to an imbalanced growth.

Attributes ever lapses of self to others
Curses them often for fitful acts of own.
Does not know to live and let others live
Is found grumbling at each and every step.

Yet keeps escaping to an imaginary world
Seldom learns from ups and downs of life
Given to self-praise, resents sane advice
Keeps amused by shadows and moonshine.

– o –

57
Why Blame Others

Why blame others for actions of one's own
Prompted by inflated ego and biting malice.
Ego swells the head, malice harms the mind
They cloud power to think and sense to feel
Thus loosen the tongue making it unkind
Which keeps estranging even kith and kin.
Disturbs sleep, spoils moments of leisure
Adds to tension pushing up blood pressure
Thus a person usually sensible and benign
Develops mental disorder of an acute kind.

Psychiatrists diagnose it in their jargon
Obscure in meaning, but dismally damning
Counselling, medicines and clinical tests
Make that unsocial wretch a mental wreck
Fleeced by rising bills, shunned by friends
Slighted by targets of his negative trends
Displays symptoms of insanity now and then
Removed to a mental hospital as time runs
What an end of the malady self-created
Branded as insane, battered and berated.

– o –

58
Tension

Tension or depression exhibits a weak mind
When the prey thereto gets readily shaken
Even if a routine affair goes a bit astray
Or continual remorse about any past mishap
Stirs the rise and fall of depressing waves.
A feeble mind appearing to be warm or kind
Despite the occasional emotional simmering
Learns not that firmness sustains calmness.

A steadfast person does not feel nervous
Accepts all ups and downs as part of life
Girds himself aptly for settling every strife
Remains calm even when suffers a set-back.
Self-confidence keeps him firm and serene
Gives up not till the wrong gets redressed.
Thus, inspires the shaken to keep steadfast
Applauded by one and all for his firmness.

– o –

59
Sobriety

A craze for blurting out an opinion
On every topic, even when not sought
Is an indiscreet and disgusting act
Which the indulgent seldom regrets.

Such a know-all, caring not to listen
Exposes unwittingly the shallowness
Of knowledge, he is so keen to flaunt
Becomes a laughing-stock in long run.

Restraint in formulating an opinion
Or due heed to details of each matter
Reflects sound and objective thinking
Such views are quite attentively heard.

An inclination to let everyone speak
Tendency to listen to all with care
And ability to sift all that is said
Are traits of an admirable sobriety.

– o –

60
Ingratitude

Ingratitude bites too deep
But whom, when and how?
It irks and pinches only those
Who care not to be just to all.
They pick and choose, thus, often
Are not led by equity and merit.
When the favoured act likewise
They are accused of ingratitude.

The denouncers be, as well, decried
For they are frivolous, not generous
They pamper some beyond their worth.
When the favoured show their fangs,
The unwise patron ought not grumble
Both are birds of the same feather
One acquiesced to unwisely pat
The other chose apt time to stab.

– o –

61
On Erring

He who does never err
Is God, the omniscient
Benign and omnipotent
Above human judgement.

He who after finding an error
Realises the lapse on his part
And strives not to do so again
Is a man, improving positively.

That, who keeps on defaulting
Not caring how he goes astray
Is a brute, mindless and wicked
Doomed to subhuman existence.

He who, given to flaunt an error
Without any feeling of remorse
Is a demon, vicious and callous
More harmful than even a brute.

– o –

62
Bed of Thorns

Bacchus destroys more men than Neptune
Nagging wrecks more homes than Bacchus
Backbiting embitters more than nagging
Suspicion hurts deeper than backbiting.

A person tortured by a suspicious self
Is his own foe among a host of friends
Loses clear thinking and peace of mind
Tosses on a bed of thorns all his life.

– o –

63
Hatred

Hatred is like the raging *loo* in summer
That withers the leaves, wilts the stems
Devastates greenery in parks and fields
Converts verdant places into arid tracts
Reduces rippling ponds to cracking mud
Brings dreading dust storms in its wake
Parches the tongue, staggers the brain
Inflicts hardships with spiteful might.

When hate permeates the human frame
It perverts and hardens soft feelings
Derails the reason, depraves the mind
Mars the grace with frets and frowns
The hated may escape its itching effect
But hater is singed with his own hisses.
Hatred is a vile self-implanted torture
A malevolent vice or a mental disorder.

– o –

64
Know Thyself

Air exists, is felt, but is not seen
Fire though visible cannot be caught
Water can be held but has no shape
Rocks, though solid, are not organic
The plants have life but are rooted
Birds hop and fly but have no mind
Aquatic life, reptiles and the beasts
Roam about in respective domains
But have neither feelings nor brain
Man alone combines all these traits.

If man seeks not the relative gains
Of his body, mind and the brain
He is no better than a bird or beast.
A well-kept healthy physical frame
Orderly habits with aesthetic taste
Purity of mind and clarity of thought
Lead to balanced growth of a person
All these make him the supreme being.
Truth, knowledge, love and dignity
Are the fruits of knowing oneself.

– o –

65 A Decisive Moment

One shivers with cold
Trembles under fright
Quivers with excitement
Fumbles if not truthful.

Of these four happenings
Fumbling is the meanest
It is kicked by falsehood
Which chokes uprightness.

Quivering is the lack of self-control
While feelings struggle to storm out
Emotions push off the reasoning power
Physical system, thus, loses its balance.

Trembling may start with fear of death
When one overlooks the veritable truth
That death, an inevitable physical end,
Is enjoined to be faced with calmness.

Shivering is of different sorts
Could be due to chill or fever
But if caused by feelings of remorse
Marks a decisive moment in one's life.

— o —

66 Raymond Griffith

Raymond, you came as fresh cooling breeze
When nature was at its bloom last spring
A message of hope and love you did bring
Which helps goodwill evolve and increase.
Your cheeful words made us feel at ease
Quite simple without any verbose fringe
In impressive verse you would often sing
'Love all, so that fear and hate decrease'. 8

Your baptised name with the prefix 'Ray'
Symbolises that what it literally means
Those who named you so did aptly foresee
'As sun sends light, likewise what you say
May reflect knowledge with soothing beams'.
Raymond, none will forget Jeanne* and thee. 14



Dr Raymond Griffith (1925-2005), an American, taught English at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, in an honorary capacity during 1973-74. The sonnet was written to bid him farewell on February 7, 1974 while he was on his way to South Korea to take over as Professor of English at Kyung University, Seoul.

* Mrs Jeanne Griffith, his wife an upright lady, was a paediatrician at Christian Medical College, Ludhiana.

67

**To a Grandson
On His Thirteenth Birthday**

As you observe the thirteenth birthday
Enter your teens without swing or sway
Be clear in what you undertake or say
Shedding off that which causes dismay.

Life fetches more jeers than cheers
Which lend meaning to passing years
Teaching to face all possible fears
For moving ahead sans fits and tears.

Find out that, you have the best to give
With a lofty pledge, thus, strive to live
Those who rose to be great, likewise did
From their chosen path they seldom slid.

I felicitate you with choicest wishes
More valuable than the mundane riches
Free of formal high-sounding cliches
Teaching what elevates and bewitches.

– o –

My eldest grandson Abhijit Duggal, who celebrated
his thirteenth birthday on December 17, 1989.

68

The Second Childhood

As one advances in age, rather getting old
Adoration as a senior citizen keeps rising.
Childhood endears with bubbling innocence,
A mellowed face has its own winsome charm.

A child endears for being still nearer God
In old age one invokes God time and again
Innocence of a child thrills even the stoic
Grace of old age earns esteem everywhere.

Grandchildren feel at home with grandparents
Caress their silvery hair with affectionate joy
Thus the infants and the old become playmates
Old age may be the coming of second childhood.

– o –

69

An Orphan's Outcry

It is impressed every now and then
That a mother is as high as heaven
As sacred as the motherland itself
A perennial spring of selfless love
A lighthouse in dark moments of life
An angel that foils all impish traps
A source to invoke while in despair.
Dear God, by Your Grace enlighten me
As to why while I was still so tender
You chose to recall my mother abruptly.

You, being omnipotent, need no support
I, a child, sought succour at every step.
You, being formless, seek no physical care
My tiny frame required someone nearby
To clean, to feed and to caress to sleep.
You, being omniscient, need no precept
Whereas I required advice in all my acts.
Oh Merciful! that demise lacked mercy.
How the Inevitable Will was then right?
Pray, dispel all these disturbing doubts.

As I sat one day so gloomily brooding
A soothing thrill set my mind at rest,
As if the Creator conveyed, thus, to me:
'Each clime fascinates in its own way
Drab autumn charms too as green spring
Children are like blooms of lovely hues
Gardener knows best what to sow where.
I chose you to blossom at an arid place.
Only self-help could teach to grow there'.
Thanks dear Lord, I got more than I lost.

— 0 —

The poet lost his mother in 1930. Poem was penned on Mother's Day in 1993, 63 years after her demise.

70
My Love

I am in love, quite deep and fervent
Not with a lovely damsel in her prime
Nor it is with my once conceited self
For I crave, no more, for power or pelf.

No longer tempted by palate or lust
Singed neither by base envy or hate
Need no adorning to project my charm
As my new love imparts blissful calm.

I love my old age which lends me grace
No longer enslaved by sensual desires
Lashed not by anger or stung by heresay
Heard with respect what I choose to say.

If offered again the wildly robust youth
I shall barter it not for my ageing face
My mind is serene, the head thinks clear
Oh ! old age, how eagerly I hold you dear.

--o --

71

Lord! Bless Them Too

While I look back at my adulthood days
To assess the gains or lapses on my part
I regret not my humble and belated start
For hope lit those days with cheering rays.
I heed not what, with glee, an upstart says
For he holds the virtue as a halting fault.
I live for a cause keeping self-gains apart
Being upright in life, in the long run, pays. 8

Conquest of self is my sole mode of prayer
Belief in goodness adds to my grit and will
Fearless expression is my bliss-giving gain
With that I peel the cant layer after layer
The Divine Will endowed me with this skill
Lord! Bless them too who are vile and vain. 14

— o —

72**The Poor Keep Poor**

The poor keep poor despite social change
 They starve while food exists in plenty.
 They look wretched wrapped in tatters,
 With no dearth of wool, yarn or leather.
 They swarm to slums or live on roadside
 Under scornful shadow of vast mansions.
 They accept poverty as prelude to heaven
 Which reduces earth to a veritable hell.

Poverty perpetuates if mind keeps poor
 Ignorance is a sin as well as sacrilege
 Idleness tempts devil to lay his traps
 Blind faith in fate dampens self-help
 God helps those who strive themselves
 Living on alms, they lose self-respect
 But use not their hands, heart and head,
 A unison that keeps raising self-esteem.

God is truth; truth elevates the mind
 God is love; love refines ways of life
 God is just; equity brooks no indignity
 Work is worship; defiled by the idlers.
 As cleanliness complements godliness
 Living, with filth around, keeps debasing.
 Work and knowledge develop one's self
 Revealing glory vested in a human being.

– o –

73**Empty Homes and Nests**

The carefree period of childhood is decreasing
 But that of the old age is on gradual increase.
 The children loaded with the bulging satchels
 Awakened long before they had sufficient sleep
 Dragged to bathrooms, hastily fed and dressed
 Holding lunch packets stand at the bus-stops
 Waiting for the school vans quite cheerlessly
 Aspirations of parents; hopes of golden future.

Taught in medium other than the mother-tongue
 Made to cram like parrots dull bookish stuff
 Which often their Miss comprehends not well
 But dictates directions in their report books
 What the parents are to do to assist homework.
 Though the corporal punishment is forbidden.
 Yet harsh tone of Miss hits harder than the rod.
 'Shall report to Mother' she abruptly shrieks.

The child returns home in an expectant mood
But finds it empty, mother not back from work
There is no sibling to play with or wrangle
The memories which often amuse in later life.
A working couple with their planned family
Strives to provide the innovators for future
Researchers, executives and business managers
Who leave their parents to explore new fields.

Such parents with manifold retiral benefits
May not require regular financial support
But miss with a pinch the warm filial love.
Longevity, an offshoot of the preventive care
Has deprived old age of its many aspirations
Children returned from schools to empty homes
Ageing parents learn to manage the lone nests
Empty homes and nests are altars for progress.

– o –

74 Nudity

Some project nudity as a piece of art
A few adopt it as mode of saintliness
Many hold it as whim of the depraved
But the animals possess no such sense.

Dress which is quite peculiar to man
Symbolises his march towards progress
His climbing down the trees to caves
Exploring earth and soaring in space.

Nudity does not always deprave man
But dress rates him as high or low
Even a preacher in ceremonial robes
May not be as pious as a naked sage.

– o –

75 Lolling

Lolling, indolence, laziness or idleness
Are the stages where one avoids to work.
Each mood reflects a set bent of mind
Which the indulgent manages to defend.

Flights of fancy of an ease-loving being
Aspiring to achieve without any strife
All comforts that wealth can purchase
Such castles in air are called lolling.

Indolence is a happy-go-lucky attitude
Of those born with sustaining means
They feel at home with the sycophants
Holding pleasure the sole aim of life.

Laziness is a tolerable craze for sloth
A lazy has no ambition to march ahead
Being complacent, finds plenty in scanty
Seldom commends those who are earnest.

An idler feels not like doing any work
Is crafty enough to defend his lapse
Turns deaf ear to advice and reproof
Devises to live at the cost of others.

Lolling is mostly the pastime of a human
Led by emotions, allergic to stark reason
Puffed by vanity, adoring it as self-esteem
Heaves sighs of despair when faces hardship.

Indolence is indulgence of a pampered few
Offspring of thoughtless prosperous parents
Relish to be cajoled till they can squander
Doomed to become paupers sooner than later.

An average person is inclined to be lazy
A leisurely approach is his way of life
Sticking to status quo is his attitude
Any innovation, he hesitates to accept.

An idler knows how to concoct an excuse
Gets often snubbed as minion of devil
Ordinary politicians dominate this brand
Next come beggars and all such vagrants.

– o –

76 Gifts

Lavish gifts offered in a formal manner
May not reflect feelings, warm and kind
They lend a cover to ungainly desires
Tarnish a lot their worth and delight.

Greeting a visitor with gracious smile
Sound advice given on a birthday meet
A word of cheer to a person depressed
Are peerless gifts in value and effect.

A costly gift expects reciprocal favour
In form of service for an improper gain
Its joy neither endures nor gladdens all
The donor chuckles; taker shrinks small.

Gold or diamonds, gadgets or garments
Are gifts which adorn but not inspire
A book or a painting relevant to occasion
Is a priceless gift of befitting expression.

Gifts displaying price lower their worth
Embarrass a lot rather than causing cheer
Miss often the mark tricked to be bagged
Because they are shorn of adequate grace.

– o –

77 Moods

Human moods are like changes in weather
Elated or depressed, sullen or jubilant
Depending upon the sensitivity of mind
Or modes of approach to the ways of life.

A disturbance in the elements of nature
Light or heat, dust or air or even water
Causes changes in weather, rough or fine
Affecting moods of man by their manner.

Human nature when swayed by the ailments:
Pride or anger, lust or craving or latent greed,
Changes its moods under prevailing instinct,
Exposing itself as bestial, wicked or mean.

Human beings keep keen to trace the conflict
Even in domains of religion, science and State
Between virtuous and vile, active and dormant
Exploiter and exploited, helpful and irritant.

As long as man seeks to analyse the clash
Between ego and love or might and right
His mind shall remain a complex of moods
Brutish or humane and wretched or blessed.

– o –

78
Tears

Tears rolling down the cheeks
Tell touching tales as they trickle
Depending on the state of mind
Or attitude to the ways of life
Of the person who sheds them.

Tears with wails deepen a dirge
A burst of grief at a bereavement
A child lost or the spouse snatched
Untimely demise of a sibling or parent
Such tears depict the distress of mind.

Silent tears and wringing of hands
Reflect remorse of a disturbed mind
For having done a wrong in haste
Or not being able to rectify a fault
One, thus, regrets an avoidable lapse.

Chilling sobs and tearing of hairs
Stroking the forehead in despair
A scarf wet with dripping tears
Uphold without any further probe
That the sobbing person is innocent.

Piercing sighs occasionally heaved
Tears in torrents shed when alone
A face displaying outward calm
Testify that a pioneer firmly noble
Feels let down by his wavering band.

Cries of joy and the flooding tears,
A face beaming with sudden cheer,
Incoherent expression of an emotion,
Show that a prayer having been blessed,
Hope is replacing suspense and gloom.

– 0 –

79

Retirement and Death

Retirement from service and death
 Are similar stages in one's life.
 Both mark the end of an activity
 With all its glory or indignity.
 The date of former being known
 One and all get prepared for it.
 As none knows the time of latter,
 Many inwardly pray for its delay.

The tributes paid on each occasion
 Are dissimilar in their expression
 Formal speeches at a farewell meet,
 May not mean what the orator says.
 Sentiments recorded in a condolence
 Are often spontaneous and touching.
 Retirement ends not the mundane race
 But death knells exit from the stage.

As longevity is on gradual increase
 Post-retirement odds may haunt many.
 Retirement will be a blissful gain
 If looked upon as a sort of *sanyas*,
 To devote ripe years to serve mankind.
 It may remain a bond or pinching bane,
 If one keeps searching for hired work,
 And prepares not oneself to hail death.

– o –

80

The Sunset

In this ripening period of my life
 I often muse in a corner of the roof
 Watching leisurely the setting sun
 Which lulls me into a pensive mood.

The white hairs on my wrinkling face
 Flow like flakes of snow in the breeze.
 The horizon glazed with a pinking hue
 Fascinates me with its heavenly glow.

The blissful scene becalms me deep
 The tranquil mind lets my face beam
 I feel like nearing the destined end
 Finding kinship with the setting sun.

After every sunset, the sun rises again
 Imparting light and warmth to the world
 Likewise cycle of birth and death goes on
 Ennobling mankind with knowledge and love.

– o –

81 Old Age Pastime

Old age faces often a drifting process
That pushes one away from social life
Declining energy seeks constant caution
While walking, eating and even talking
Traffic rush renders the roads unsafe
Changing food tastes are hard to relish
The ambitious young tolerate no advice
One gets estranged even with near ones.

One waits wistfully for the postal mail
Or the calls from friends once so dear
That without them life missed its cheer
The letter box so often is found empty
Or contains offers about how to invest
And what is available at reduced rates.
The isolation displays growing despair
Despite the comfort offered by gadgets.

Some people take to the keeping of pets
Dogs, cats or even the wing-clipped birds
So that wagging tails, warm purring rubs
And chirping notes ward off loneliness.
Any healthy company the pets seldom give
Seek lot of care to share their affection.
A prolific pen provides pleasant pastime
Lets not the wielder feel lone, when alone.

– o –

82 The Zest to Excel

In the mellowed evening of one's life
Gratifying phase of a worthwhile strife,
With children well-settled far and near
Empty nest at peace, mind calm and clear
Master of time to plan work or leisure
No hurry; living with a placid measure
The sole urge being to refine the self
Without any craving for fame or pelf.
Yet loneliness creeps in many a time
Disturbing the calm rhythm and rhyme.

But a visit or letter from an offspring
Gives the empty nest a thrilling spring
Recollection of events touching or sweet
Raises wrinkling hands to bless and greet
An elation is caused by the filial cheers
The eyes glisten washed with joyous tears
Bubbling affection invigorates the mind
Feelings of loneliness recede far behind
The will to improve rejuvenates the zest
With an added grit to excel in that quest.

– o –

83

Art of Life

A reliable friend in all ups and downs of life
Is one's health, enviable wealth, none can steal
Sustains strain and keeps strong to face strife.

Virtue of patience helps to restrain the self,
Is an exalting talent which all ought develop
Curbs anger and the craving for pomp and pelf.

Intellect, an inner light, whether day or night
Raises man far high among all other creatures
As it makes him rational, amiable and upright.

If man keeps too, a kind and considerate heart
To comfort with his traits the infirm and weak
He looks supreme, for he leads life as an art.

— o —

84

Prayers Smiles and Curses

Prayers soar high
Smiles beam straight
Curses tumble down;

Prayers invoke welfare
Smiles convey approval
Curses transmit ill desire;

Prayers are elevating
Smiles are blissful
Curses are suicidal;

Prayers seek 'Live and let live'
Smiles appreciate and inspire
Curses disapprove one and all;

Humanism emanates from prayers
Goodwill spreads through smiles
Discord gets kicked by curses.

--o--

85

Sweet Versus Bitter

Sweets please but tempt the palate
Making the indulgent feel infirm
Glutton, obese and prone to stress.

Bitter herbs may have a horrible taste
But possess a wonderful healing effect
Which ensures normal physical health.

Truth though adored as divine virtue
Yet is found bitter whenever stressed
Sweetness often conceals falsehood.

Bitter experience gives worldly wisdom
Sweet smiles may allure as well beguile
Bound to harm through deceptive charm.

Sweetness is not being branded as virtue
For bitter words cut deeper than dagger
Excess of either is seldom a wise course.

— o —

86

Death

A pathetic event in childhood
A bolt from the blue in youth
A welcome relief in old age;

An inevitable event for the saint
A constant terror for the weak
A reward of life for the brave;

An oblivious end for the common
An immortal life for a martyr
An exact judgement on one and all;

A device of soul for transmigration
A reunion with God for the faithful
'Dust returns to dust' says a mystic;

A festival in company with friends
Touching theme to muse for a poet
'Mere physical end' says a realist.

--o--

87 **Intelligence**
The intelligence
Gripped by greed
Loses its elegance.

88 **Age**
Ripening age
Led by restraint
Reflects grace.

89 **Truth**
Truth, however candid,
Tinged with taunts
Looks not splendid.

90 **Fame**
Writers craving for fame
Either flatter or feign
Seldom score in this game.

91 **Evolution**
Science links man to a monkey
But his sexual urges display
That he behaves like a donkey.

92 **Rainbow**
Rainbow, a fleeting bewitching sight
Not known to the creatures of night
Reveals the hidden glory of sunlight.

93 **Tolerance**
Tolerance, a beneficent trait , indeed
Reflects one to be at peace with self
Not stung by hate or tempted by greed.

94 **Modesty**
Modesty resembles the beneficial rain
Which saves land from eroding cracks
A modest person gets not vile or vain.

95 **God**
Man shapes God according to the image
Which , when in trouble, may sustain him
This subjective sway so often dismays.

96 **Religion**
Organised religion, a calamitous sin
Divides not unites the vast mankind
Lowers divine glory with ritual din.

97 **Ritualism**
 Ritualism makes mockery of godliness
 An attempt to show, not inwardly grow
 Culminating as fun or disorderliness.

98 **Fog**
 Fog, less mirksome than darkness
 Obscures viciously the sunlight
 As avarice spoils righteousness.

99 **Mist**
 When mist shrouds the human brain
 Irritates it with gainless strain
 Lets not sift the chaff from grain.

100 **Village Pond**
 A frequented place was our village pond
 Where cattle wallowed and cowherds swam
 Served rural life as a sustaining bond.

101 **Lake**
 A lake, whether in the plains or hills,
 Favourite resort of birds of passage,
 Offers sight that amuses and thrills.

102
Epitaph to a Scholar

During greater span of a scholar's life
 A few heed him, yet he cares for humanity
 While he delves in books or wields his pen
 He is often derided as a plodding dabbler.

But after his formal condolence meet
 Where verbose tributes are paid to him
 He gets reborn with a new-found entity
 Praised in reviews and quoted in texts.

Strange are the ways of literary world
 A living is ignored but a dead adored
 While alive, he braves slight and scorn
 But commended, when being mourned.

— 0 —

103 Destination

With birth, the march of life begins
It covers many custom-bound stages
A few choose a definite destination
And focus efforts in that direction.

The world assigns its rise and fall
To this sort of good or bad persons
The former seek 'what they can give'
The latter plan 'what they may grab'.

The givers listen to their conscience
They try earnestly to know themselves
The talents they may further develop,
The shortcomings they ought overcome.

I keep attempting to discover myself
To pinpoint the qualities I possess
And the defects likely to damage me
So that I may assess my solid worth.

I have precise and concise expression
Proficient also in pragmatic approach
Picked up knowledge about grass-roots
When facing the ups and downs of life.

In academic pursuits I got distinction
During career race I was often ignored
As I had the audacity not to acquiesce
And stuck fearlessly to righteous goal.

Many rightful rewards were, thus, snatched
But they served to strengthen my resolve
Though pushed back, yet kept in the track
My grit encouraged the weak and wavering.

The destination I chose is modest but firm
And devote my energy towards that goal
For making the world better and nobler
Than this one; widely ignorant and poor.

Old age problems derail me now and then
So often I miss the time-bound schedule
But that seldom upsets or depresses me
As I stand pledged to stick to chosen goal.

If all of us resolve to endeavour thus
To improve the world as best we can
Sorrow and suffering would fade out
The world will become heaven itself.



Foreword to Aspirations

Dr Jagdish Chander*

I have gone through the collection of poems *Aspirations* composed by Shri Hazara Singh with profit and pleasure. Some of these poems are attempted to recreate historical moments and others, a tribute to men and women whose achievements have become a part of history. All these poems are marked by a warm humanity and love for values that impart meaning and significance to human effort. I have been particularly impressed by Shri Hazara Singh's sensibility that can distil poetry out of contemporary situations. His firm grasp of English idiom, sensitivity to the rhythm and nuances of language, masterly use of traditional verse forms and stanzaic patterns make his poems fine specimens of poetic art.



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Yearnings : Pure and Noble

Dr Sulekha Sharma*

In Hazara Singh's poetry, the poet is supreme and is foregrounded. The reader does not think in terms of poetry but in terms of the poet and his commitments and there is something venerable there, a shadow of the lost enchanted world. The poet has arrived at a spiritual Byzantium which he populates with choice people and ideas and values.

"In this ripening period of my (his) life" he sits with a handful of gleaned memories, yearnings and nostalgia. Informing the choice is a structural moral order of piety, tolerance and selflessness. It is an exclusive world made desirable by offsetting it with a sense of lost golden age. His yearnings are peaceful, tranquil but purposeful.

Reader's yearnings are triggered off for the majestic world that produced men of the order of Netaji, Bhagat Singh, Sarabha, Lincoln, Tagore and Gandhi (Mahatma). These were socially committed men who engaged empires and changed the destinies of nations and restructured human conscience. The poet's concerns are empirical and material, this-worldly and related to the social state of man.

By reminding us of those men, of their achievements and of their larger than life predicaments, he is pointing a finger at the depraved social conscience of today's leaders, in power or out of it, of wanton killers and of brutalised condoners, scramblers after power and blindly intoxicated thereby, behaving like rogue elephants among lambs. Where is Lincoln, the :

*"Apostle of global goodwill, pathfinder for humanity
.....
Upright in his thinking and humane in all dealings",*

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who :

*"Laid down his life to establish for all the right
To live with heads high, free of scare and fright".*

He won the long tortuous war:

" With no malice in his mind, ill will towards none".

Mahatma Gandhi's :

*"Precepts and practices made you (him) an apt mason
Clans evolved as a nation under an innovated plan".*

Bhagat Singh

*" kissed the gallows in his prime
To break the chains which enslaved the motherland".*

The poet in vain looks for the person who :

*".....does not get lowered in your (his) own eyes
While you (he) raise yourself (himself) in those of others".*

The linguistic choices for poetic expression also bear witness to the stilled waters in the subconsciousness. The verbs have no movement. Almost all of them are auxiliary, delineating relationships and juxtaposing subjects and complements, objects and compliments, subjects and adverbials.

The diction is reminiscent of Popian era with its highly moral tone. Words like *envy, hate, vice, sin, bliss, wicked, bestial, doomed, flaunts, remorse, devil, incarnate, sanyas, lured, faithful, scorn, virtue, upright* (an almost forgotten virtue), *desires* and *seiges* abound.

Of course there are poetic concerns too; 'Lonesomeness', 'My Love', 'The Sunset', 'Death', 'Nudity', 'Moods', 'Bed of Thorns', and 'Tears'. There are also reflections as life's crucial anxieties; 'Culture', 'Poetry', 'A Decisive Moment', 'On Erring', 'Forgiving and Forgetting', 'Art of Life', etc.

Hazara Singh's volume of verses should be read to arrest our confounded strayings into the jungle of beastliness and to remind us of our heritage of humanity.

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The Tribune, Chandigarh, June 11, 1988.

Appraisal of Expectations

Dr Basavaraj Naiker*

It is a pleasure to note that Indian English poetry has been growing gradually and steadily in quality as well as in quantity. So many new voices are heard from different corners of India recently. Since the big publishers in India encourage only the established poets for commercial gain, budding poets or lethargic ones must either fade into oblivion or come out with their own private publications, thereby putting the big publishers to shame. Hazara Singh's *Expectations* is a comprehensive collection of his poems, including those of his earlier volumes such as *Aspirations* and *Yearnings*.

Singh, who is now in his seventies, was influenced by Rupert Brooke's war poems in his younger days. Himself a freedom fighter, he was arrested in connection with his participation in the Save INA campaign. A patriot, qualified with degrees in literature and law, he has looked at life from an idealist perspective. The form of his poetry is classical in the sense that he follows rhythm and rhyme patterns. The thematic variety of his verse holds a mirror to his deep and wide experience of life. On the whole, one may describe his poetry as reflective or philosophical. In the use of musical cadence and ebullient emotion, he appears to be romantic. The themes of his poetry range from the biographical to the cosmic, from the topical to the universal, from the historical to the contemporary, from the metaliterary to the metaphysical, and from the physical to the religious.

The collection contains sixty seven poems in all. In the opening selection, "New Year Wishes and Greetings",

Singh says:

*"New and old are mere man's view of time,
In fact they are cosmic rhythm and rhyme.
Time is ever young and bears no wrinkles
With a pinky tinge each morning twinkles"*.

A majority of his poems are philosophical in nature and romantic in style, and his themes include the *human spirit, friendship, internal enemies, forgiveness, sobriety, tension, hatred, and self-knowledge*. On the whole, the poet emerges as a dreamer and an optimist in spite of occasional elements of social satire. Some of his biographical poems pay tribute to such great souls as Abraham Lincoln, Rabindranath Tagore, and Mahatma Gandhi. His patriotic poems on national heroes like Kartar Singh Sarabha, Bhagat Singh, and Udham Singh are written in sonnet form and glorify sacrifices of the great martyrs. A few poems touch on contemporary matters such as China-India relations and project the poet's optimistic hope about better understanding in the world.

One of the striking features of *Expectations* is its inclusion of several reviews and appraisals of Hazara Singh's early poetry and an interview with the poet, under the title "Back Matter" which will help lovers of poetry and researchers alike with pointers for further study. Though Singh is not well known to South Indians, his poetry, with its serious philosophical approach, romantic ebullience of emotions, fresh imagery, and rich musical diction, cannot be ignored by any Indian English critic. His verse is easily comparable to that of Tagore, Naidu, Kashiprasad Ghose, V. K. Gokak, and others. It is high time for Indian English critics to include his verse in new anthologies for a more comprehensive understanding of the growing body of Indian English poetry. Kudos to Hazara Singh.

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World Literature Today, Winter 2000, University of Oklahoma,
U.S.A., p.242.

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Interview

Through a questionnaire by Dr Atma Ram*

Q.1. When and why did you start your creative career?

Q.2. Was there any incident/episode/motivation behind it?

Rupert Brooke, the Poet Laureate of U.K. during the twenties of this century, composed a few sonnets to express pride of his nation in the young, who laid down their lives in the First World War to save their country from the onslaught of Axis Powers. Eversince I read them in the college text-books, I had been feeling an urge to describe the valorous acts of our martyrs of the freedom struggle in a similar vein.

I was arrested for leading the Save-INA campaign and lodged in the Central Jail, Lahore. With the courtesy of R.B.Beni Chand Katoch, Jail Superintendent, I was allowed to move freely in its precincts. Just as Byron was moved on visiting the dungeons of Chillon, I got stirred likewise on seeing the cell where Kartar Singh Sarabha had been tortured. I uttered spontaneously:

“Sarabha! you came as a meteor to show us light”.

On observing the scaffold where Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru had been hanged, I exclaimed:

“ Bhagat Singh! you kissed the gallows in your prime”.

Such expressions kept buzzing in my mind. Partition of India in 1947 with its concomitant carnage, plunder, dislocation and indignities left an indelible mark on my memories of the holocaust. My feelings erupted like a volcano when the Pakistani military junta perpetrated wide-spread massacre, mass rapes and callous destruction of property in East Pakistan.

‘The Wail of a Bangla Girl’ was my first poem. The victim protests thus to marauders and the U.N. Forums :

*“Why was I raped, the daughter of same religion?
Why was I molested, a chaste promising citizen ?
Was I an aided armour procured for the trenches?
Teased and tortured, gripped in lustful wrenches
Torn from kith and kin, shorn of womanly treasure
The child, I do carry, is not my fault or pleasure.
I curse the U.N. Forums that backed the crusaders
Thousands wail like me, victims of wicked raiders”.*

Thus I gate-crashed into the domain of poetry.

Q. 3. What are your hobbies?

Gardening, story-telling to children and self-amusement through musing :

*“Watching from a corner the children play
Strolling in the blooming parks and groves
Listening to the symphony of chirping birds
Observing the soothing beauty of setting sun”.*

(Lonesomeness)

Q.4. The kind of readers/audience you write for?

During the seventies I considered it an obligation to share the thrills and aspirations of freedom struggle with the post-independence generations so that they continued to relish those lofty ideals and derive inspiration from them. Hence I wrote mostly on men and events that became legends. As one advances in age the verity of eternal values begins to impress the heart and the head correspondingly.

The poems of my post-retirement period are mostly addressed to the global fraternity for strengthening the bonds emanating from rationalism and humanism.

* Formerly Director of Education, Himachal Pradesh

Q.5. To what extent is your writing autobiographical/ symbolic?

My short stories are mostly autobiographical.

My scientific temper, influenced by legal approach to themes, renders my essays expository.

The poems are generally symbolic of my belief in the motto 'World brotherhood and understanding through poetry'. Attention is drawn to my article 'Poetry as a Vision for Humanity'. (Kavita India, Vol. V, Nos. 1-4, April 92-March 1993).

Q. 6. The writers who influenced you the most? Your favourite authors?

I could not pursue a planned educational career as I had to earn to learn. History had been my favourite subject. Law was my ambition, Mathematics was my guardian for it offered a wide field for tuition work for enabling me to be a self-supporting student, but English happened to be the only subject notwithstanding my other electives in B.A., in which I could get Master's degree without regular class attendance. My participation in freedom struggle extracted greater part of my attention to non-academic pursuits. It is a confession that I did not read any of the prescribed text-books or the suggested reference sources. The proficiency in English, which I had been developing ever since my school days, in spite of my rural background, had been an asset. Just as Charles Dickens claimed himself to be the graduate of London streets, likewise adversity had been my varsity and an optimistic outlook my tool of learning from the ups and downs of life. Dr V. K. Gokak, after going through my published work described, thus, the influences on me:

'...All these reveal an innate sensibility which is lighted up by experience and intensified by a highly sensitive temperament. All this has its roots in the solid bed soil in experience'.

During my teaching career Rabindra Nath Tagore fascinated me. I contributed the article 'Tagore and Shakespeare' during his birth centenary celebrations. I admired Bertrand Russell for his objective exposition. My science writing reflects his influence on my style.

Q. 7. Is writing spontaneous for you?

Dr Amarjit Singh who wrote Foreword for my book *Yearnings* described me as poet of the 'head' rather than of 'heart'. My writings are mostly deliberate.

Q. 8. Why do you write at all?

The opening stanza of my poem 'Human Spirit' provides an appropriate reply as:

*"I am the ever striving spirit of man
Which seeks social change and equity,
Dignity of individual for one and all
To usher in an era of love and amity".*

Q.9. How would you describe the process of creativity in your case?

The scientific bent of mind keeps me inquisitive and makes my writing both precise and concise. The legal approach lends it orderliness and consistency. The facility with which I can express myself imparts it freshness through diction. The exhortation by Robert Browning :

'The best is yet to be'

keeps me young in mind and spirit. Thus, while appreciating as well as creating

" I keep striving for all- round excellence".

(The Human Spirit)

Q. 10. How often do you revise your writing?

My writing being a deliberate expression, revision thereof, is not often required.

Q. 11. How do you define a (i) Poem (ii) Short story (iii) Novel?

Stanzas (i) and (iii) from my poem 'Poetry' exclaim:

*"Poetry is not a romantic thrill
Sent by beauty, youth or wine
Nor it is a mode of invocation
To be inspired by powers divine.*

*Poetry is not a choice of words
For creating rhythm and rhyme
It is a spontaneous expression
Of feelings noble and sublime".*

Short Story : Any touching incident/observation from day to day life, described correctly, turns out to be an interesting short story. (Refer to 'Three Questions' and 'Wedding Rings')

Novel is not my domain.

Q. 12. What is your philosophy of life?

God has blessed every creature with a distinctive quality which should be discovered and developed to make this world richer in thought and nobler in effect than the one in which one was born.

My poem 'Art of Life' describes health, patience, intelligence and sympathetic heart as requirements for a happy and fruitful life:

"He looks supreme, for he leads life as an art".

Q. 13. What according to you are the distinctive features of (a) Indian poetry in English, (b) Indian fiction in English and (c) Indian shorter fiction in English?

Q. 14. Do you think Indian writing in English needs Indian aesthetics to evaluate it properly? Your views on Indian English?

The phrase 'Indian English' is as much a misnomer as Malayalam or Tamil Hindi could be. The Constitution of India

has accepted English as an official language of the Union. The interim arrangement seems to have acquired permanence. The Sahitya Akademi awards prizes to writers in English. 'Angrezi Hatao' agitations branding English as the language of our one time rulers fizzled out gradually. Our growing contact with English speaking people in countries other than U.K. also lends a new dimension to our approach to English. We are members of an international cultural fraternity destined to play a historic role.

The Indian writers in English, most of them being bilingual, with their cultural background have not only enriched our literature in regional languages, but have played an important role also in making English a language of universal communication. My article 'Importance of Baisakhi' was translated into Assamese. Another text 'Guru Nanak as a Poet' was translated into Malayalam and published in three magazines during November, 1993. Such renderings help in developing emotional integration.

Indian Aesthetics

Appreciation of beauty, elegance and grace does not require any label of religion, region or class. As such Indian aesthetics is as much a misnomer as Indian English.

Q. 15. What is your attitude towards critics?

Constructive criticism is appreciated and the vicious one is ignored :

*"A writer soars in higher domains
He is seldom led by worldly gains
He ignores what his slingers say
As the wicked are given to inveigh".*

(Bright and Clean World)

Q. 16. What does Indian poetry in English lack?

Many poets do not take note of the improved status of woman in society and the position acquired by man in universe in the context of advances made by science. They keep

alluding to mythological beliefs and characters, thus restricting and disappointing their readers.

Q. 17. What are the major problems/ difficulties of Indian writers in English?

One problem of writers, whether in English or in any regional language, is common i.e. lack of responsive publishers.

Due to mass illiteracy, the number of readers is shockingly low. Even among them, the majority is of those who seek complimentary copies, but instead of reading merely glance through them.

The State Governments, do not extend any recognition to writers in English, considering it an official language of the Union. Hence many a writer remains unheard and unsung :

*“During greater span of a scholar’s life
A few heed him, yet he cares for humanity
While he delves in books and wields his pen
He is often derided as a plodding dabbler*

*But after his formal condolence meet
Where verbose tributes are paid to him
He gets reborn with a new-found entity
Praised in reviews and quoted in texts”.*

(Epitaph to a Scholar)

But the picture is not so dismal for those who have perseverance and merit. English is an official language in 44 countries of the world. Institutions like, International Biographical Centre, Cambridge, U.K. strive a lot in projecting the writers in English through periodical Who’s Who. Organisations like Famous Poets Society, USA, seek to publish the best poems in English from all over. My poem ‘The Sunset’ in *East - West Voices*, Mangalore, 1988, attracted

the attention of Virginia Rhodas as far away as Argentina in South America. She translated it into Spanish and published that in *Carta Internacional Poesia*, 1993 (International Poetry Letter). She processed my poem ‘Tree to Man’ likewise in the Spring 1996 issue.

Q. 18. Anything else you wish to say as a writer?

I do not contribute to the pleasure principle in poetry, but stand for literature of reality and confrontation. ‘I Am Man’ is a protest against myths and superstitions. ‘The Person I Am Looking For’ is not a mere yearning but a resolve for improvement through self- evaluation. Poetry is an art with a purpose. The adage ‘A picture is worth one thousand words’ is equally applicable to poetry. A piece of verse, in spite of its brevity, is more suggestive than a lengthy exposition in prose.

Escapism is the resort of a forlorn mind. Poetry should have a close relation to life, so that the latter is led as an art and not bemoaned as a tale of helplessness.

Poetry may recreate but it should elevate the readers. Personal longings and woes of infatuation often lead to fascinating romantic expressions but their appeal may not be universal. Sturdy values conveyed through elegant phrases constitute inspiring verse thereby upholding the axiom that a poet is next to prophet in his mode of communication.

The universal fraternity of writers in English with their faith in rationalism and humanism has tryst with destiny to wage a crusade against totalitarianism, theocracy, racial segregation and other tyrannous systems for ushering in an era, where the dignity of individual and collective glory of human race get enhanced.

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About the Author



Name : Hazara Singh

Date of Birth : November 30, 1922

Qualifications: M. A. , LL. B.

Teaching Career : Started as Lecturer

in English at Khalsa College, Amritsar on October 3, 1950.

Retired as Head, Department of Journalism, Languages & Culture, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana in November, 1982.

Educational Achievements : Was awarded Rattigan Gold Medal by Khalsa College, Amritsar for standing first in B. A. (1945).

The scholarship won on the result of Intermediate Examination (1943) was confiscated by the then Punjab Government for his having taken part in the Quit India Movement.

Participation in Freedom Struggle: Was sent behind the bars thrice during 1942-45 for active participation in the freedom struggle.

President, Punjab Students Congress (1945)

Membership of Educational Bodies:

Fellow, Panjab University, Chandigarh, (1956-62).

Published Work : Writes in English , Urdu and Punjabi.

(a) Bulletins

- 1 Guru Nanak Dev (S.G.P.C., 1969; G.N.D.U., Amritsar, 1987)
- 2 National Service by the Youth in a Welfare State (PAU, 1973)

- 3 Children Day (PAU, 1973)
- 4 Autonomy of Universities (PAU, 1979)
- 5 Reassessing the Role of Mass Media (PAU,1981)
- 6 Teaching of English at PAU, 1981

(b) Manuals

- 1 On the Use of Library (PAU, 1981)
- 2 Style in Writing Technical Papers and Theses (PAU, 1976)
- 3 Correct Pronunciation of English Words Commonly Mispronounced, 1981
- 4 Gurmukhi Te Shahmukhi Lippy Vich Punjabi Likhna Parhna, 2006

(c) Books

- 1 Sikhism and Its Impact on Indian Society (S.G.P.C., 1971, Revised 1999)
- 2 Aspirations (Poems), 1980
- 3 Yearnings (Poems), 1987
- 4 Expectations (Poems), 1999
- 5 Lala Lajpat Rai - An Appraisal, 2003
- 6 Happy Meaningful Life, 2004
- 7 Destination (Poems), 2006

(d) Wall Charts

- 1 Let Us Pledge to Reconstruct India of Their Dreams, 2004, 2006
- 2 New Man in New World, 2004
- 3 Significant Events of Freedom Struggle and Thereafter, 2004, 2006

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Preface

Destination contains all of my poems published earlier in *Aspirations* (1980), *Yearnings* (1987), *Expectations* (1999) and written thereafter. I am my own publisher, hence poems comprising an earlier publication have to be included in the succeeding one so that they do not go out of print. *Destination* is last in the series.

There is difference between genius and talent. The former attracts attention. The latter has to earn it. Though I started writing poems more than three decades ago, yet no publisher contacted me ever despite the commendable appraisal of each of my books. As I could afford the cost of publication of a modest number of copies of each text, I chose to carry on of my own.

I took part in the freedom struggle during my student career. I yearned to share the lofty ideals which inspired young men like me to join the freedom movement braving the perils that lay ahead. I have also been keen to pay tribute to the pathfinders for humanity who became legends.

Being a self-supporting student, I learnt more from the ups and downs of life than books; hence the gleaned and not mere academic knowledge is reflected by my compositions. The earlier poems have been revised here and there to improve diction and the rhythmic effect.

Destination is my contribution to the celebration of Diamond Jubilee of Independence. It also offers material to various Textbook Boards to assess the merit of native talent.

November 30, 2006

Hazara Singh