

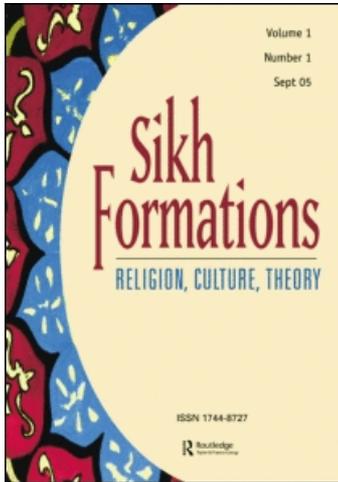
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### EXPERIENCES OF DESERTION: LOCATING THE WORKS OF HARINDER SINGH MAHBOOB

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# Prabhsharandeep Singh

## EXPERIENCES OF DESERTION: LOCATING THE WORKS OF HARINDER SINGH MAHBOOB

*This article introduces the work of the contemporary Punjabi poet and thinker Harinder Singh Mahboob. A prequel to a closer reading of Mahboob's work, this article examines the nihilistic undertones that have come to suffuse recent Punjabi poetry through its interaction with the modernist thought process. This is examined by exploring the experiences associated with the 1947 partition of Punjab and the events leading towards it. Starting with a biographical account of Harinder Singh Mahboob, the article attempts to contextualize his poetical/philosophical experience. Mahboob's sense of desertion, in his earlier poems, and the metaphysical transformation in the experience are discussed in light of prominent trends in modern Punjabi poetry. An analysis of his positioning in contemporary Punjabi literature provides a way to understand some of the ambivalent trends in the development of Sikh studies. His writings incorporate a strange combination of Western metaphysics, Sufism, and creative imagination that distinguishes his work from that of mainstream contemporary Punjabi poets and writers. The nihilistic suggestion of his work provide a fresh perspective on his creative impulse, simultaneously revealing a broad vision as well as unresolved inner conflicts.*

There is no question that at first glance, Harinder Singh Mahboob's writings – particularly his broad vision of history – reflect a modernist, and in some ways conventional, Sikh approach to the study of religion inspired by the interaction between the imperialist discourse on religion and history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the work of the Singh Sabha reformists. Though similarly influenced by European philosophy, and in particular, by Hegelian metaphysics,<sup>1</sup> the Singh Sabha writers and Mahboob developed their own patterns of engagement, language and methodology, derived from their somewhat different existential contexts. Harinder Singh Mahboob's claim of reinventing a traditional idiom is based on his critique of the approach adopted by other modernist Sikh scholars<sup>2</sup> who had inherited a rationalist vocabulary and set of categories derived from the colonial framework, particularly from the work of Ernest Trumpp and the Christian missionaries. This conceptual framework had been devised to articulate a definition of 'Sikh' thought to be very different from any that was likely to commend itself to conventional Sikh approaches in the pre-colonial period.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, instead of rejecting

this inherited framework, Mahboob tends to retain it in large measure while infusing the traditionalist Sikh terminology with a radically different content.

For over three decades Harinder Singh Mahboob wrote poetry and shared it within a close circle of friends, but published relatively little until the publication of his magnum opus, *Sahije Rachiō Khālsā*, in 1988. Mahboob started with small poems (mostly songs), gradually developed his skills to the longer poems of epic nature, and eventually took up the project to write an epic, *Ilāhī Nadari de Painḍe*.

His engagement with Hegelian metaphysics, and his intent to present Sikh thought in some well-carved-out metaphysical structure, should be seen not only as a new development in Sikh studies, but as a response to his own migration and resettlement in the post-partition East Punjab.<sup>4</sup> Mahboob deploys a framework that allows him to claim a certain authenticity in his interpretation of Sikhi, by expanding the experience of homelessness suffered by many Sikhs in 1947 (Mahboob 1990, 300). Such expansion of his poetic experience provided his work with a unique idiom that has been instrumental in the construction of his metaphysical system. Mahboob's writings convey the personal experience of desertion, but tend to relocate this desertion in a rather impersonal sphere, eventually underpinning it with a mature metaphysical logic.

Since this essay is the first of two projected papers on the work of this author, I shall focus here on providing information about the overall context and relevance of Mahboob's work. Beginning with some biographical information, the first part of this essay will introduce his first two books and elaborate on some of the main themes covered by them. The second part will begin a more serious engagement with Mahboob's work that will be taken up in a forthcoming paper.

### Mahboob's life and career

Harinder Singh Mahboob was born in 1937 in Chakk 233, a village in district Lyallpur in the western part of Punjab that is now in Pakistan. Like most Sikh families, Harinder Singh's family migrated to eastern Punjab – now an Indian territory – during the 1947 partition. He was a witness to the devastation of life and to the experience of homelessness that resulted from partition of the Punjab. This was especially the case for Sikhs, who were not afforded a moment to process their newfound nativity and foreignness. Mahboob's family arrived at Rañchnān village, stayed there for two years and finally settled in Jhūndān village where they were allotted farming land. The partition in 1947 deprived a vast majority of the Sikhs of their land, and from the sources of history and folklore.

The Sikhs were already in process of defining their language, while being in dialogue with both the British imperialists and the Hindu nationalists. Thus in the agony of dislocation, and probably because he was a product of the 'language event' that impacted Sikhs after 1849 (Mandair 2006a), Mahboob found it difficult to insert himself into his new surroundings, all the while yearning to express his agony through poetry, or just trying to relate his experience to other event(s) in Sikh memory, to Marxism, or Punjabi folklore.<sup>5</sup> Of his writings during this period, we know only three poems: 'Banbās', in *Vaṇ Vairāg*, and 'Shahīd Bhagat Singh de Aṅgiārāṇ Kōl' and 'Ve Jānglī Chhail Chhabīliā', in *Pyāre dā Des*. He included

‘Banbās’ in *Vaṇ Vairāg*, written in 1956 in remembrance of the partition experience, because he wanted to ‘develop a private bond with the personal sigh of leaving the country’:

‘ਸਿਰਫ ‘ਬਨਬਾਸ’ ਕਵਿਤਾ ਹੀ 1956 ਵਿੱਚ ਲਿਖੀ ਗਈ, ਜਿਸ ਨੂੰ ਕਿ ਲੰਬੇ ਦਿਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਵਤਨ ਛੱਡਣ ਦੇ ਨਿੱਜੀ ਹੌਕੇ ਨਾਲ ਰਿਸ਼ਤਾ ਜੋੜਨ ਲਈ ਮੈਂ ‘ਵਣ ਵੈਰਾਗ’ ਵਿੱਚ ਸ਼ਾਮਲ ਕਰ ਲਿਆ।’ (ਮਹਿਬੂਬ 1990, 4)

Mahboob includes three stanzas of this poem in his long work *Kurlaunde Kāfle*, written in 1984, suggesting a continuity of experience and notional unity in the shorter poems, and that the books be read as a single long poem.<sup>6</sup>

Mahboob finished high school in Jhūndān. After getting married at the age of 18, he began working as a school teacher, and taught at Dharamgarh and Chhājli villages. The poet inside Mahboob flourished during his early teaching years. His continuous relocation provided him with a solitude that would allow him to engage with his feelings more intensely. His sense of dislocation came from a feeling that something had been left behind that was not just a beloved face, the lost old Punjab, or the missing spiritual flavours in life, but nevertheless contained all of these. Such feelings provided the context for the first phase of his poetry, where a sense of desertion haunts the poet in many of the poems included in *Vaṇ Vairāg*.<sup>7</sup> However, there is a freshness in these poems that locates them close to the poet’s lost world.<sup>8</sup> Although the poet meditates deeply on the agony of being abandoned, this is not the sole process within his creative experience. There is another process, one of translation, where Mahboob tries to come to terms with the nihilistic reality of his time, by constructing something within a different space in the post-1947 Punjab.<sup>9</sup>

During those days, Punjab – particularly the areas of Dharamgarh and Chhājli villages, where Mahboob worked as a school teacher – was inclined towards the communist movement. As Mahboob started to relate to the secular thought process, he gradually began to consolidate a position as a Marxist poet/thinker. At first, this new direction expressed itself in the poems he wrote during the early 1960s, and a turn to the world of philosophy – in particular, the Hegelian dialectic.

While his Marxist leanings seemed to be out of tune with the aesthetics of his poetry, such bent nonetheless turned out to be another expression of Mahboob’s mode of engagement. Mahboob’s fascination for Marxism suggests more than the passing influence of a socio-political movement. In 1959, after finishing his Bachelor’s degree, he joined Mahindrā College in Patiala to pursue his Master’s in Punjabi literature. The decision to study for an MA was eventually supported by his father when he read a letter by the renowned Punjabi poet Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki in response to Mahboob’s two articles, ‘Mahān Parvāz’ on Japuji Sāhib and ‘Mahān Āvesh’ on Jāpu Sāhib, both of which were published in a magazine *Prīt Mārag*.<sup>10</sup> In Patiala, he became one of the founding members of the famous *Bhūtwarā*, a literary circle known for its espousal of romantic poetry, radical Marxist thought and a hermetic lifestyle (Tiwana 1980). It is in Patialā that Mahboob was first exposed to philosophy, and as his thinking matured, formulated the poetic idiom that was to provide an enduring form for his metaphysical speculations. During his initial years at Patiala, Mahboob’s aesthetically rich poetic idiom in his first two books *Vaṇ Vairāg* and *Ruttānī De Bhed Bhare Khat* could be seen as somewhat contrary to his Marxist

positioning. However, the echoes of transcendental idealism in those poems indicate that the medium of philosophical conceptualization was becoming more and more important to the early poet (Mahboob 1990, 72). This shift can be discerned in some of the poems in *Pyāre dā Des*, written during 1965–66 (Mahboob 1990, 220).

Upon completion of his degree in 1968, Mahboob joined Guru Gobind Singh College, Jañdiālā as a lecturer in English, but left within two months after an argument with Punjabi critic Sant Singh Sekhon. He then started teaching at Khālsā College in Garhdiwālā, where he served until 30 September 1997. His poetry acquired a new dimension with his arrival in Garhdiwālā. Mahboob composed most of his poems in the fourth book *Ākhrī Shām* by heart while taking long walks through the gardens and orchards in Garhdiwālā. He later dictated these poems to a friend, Jassa Singh, who scribed them all (Mahboob 1990, 300).

In 1972 he started writing his book *Sahije Rachiō Khālsā*, finishing it in 1979. Two longer poems included in *Jhanānī Dī Rāt*, the fifth book in the volume, were written in 1980. He finished writing his 108-page poem *Kurlauñde Kāfle*, the sixth in an anthology of seven books, in March 1984 – less than three months before the Indian army attack on Darbar Sahib, Amritsar and several other Gurdwaras.<sup>11</sup> All the poems except the tenth and eleventh in *Shahīd Dī Ardās*, the seventh book in the anthology, were written after June 1984.

Harinder Singh Mahboob's first book *Sahije Rachiō Khālsā* (1988) was a long prose work in religion and philosophy. It was followed by the publication of *Jhanānī dī Rāt* in 1990. *Jhanānī dī Rāt* won a national award from the Sahitya Academy of India. Soon after receiving the award, however, Mahboob became immersed in political controversy. His writings were condemned and burned, and the last poem, *Needānī dā Qatal ate Shahīd dā Ghazab*,<sup>12</sup> not only brought his name into the public domain but also antagonized supporters of the Indian state at a time when anti-Sikh and pro-India nationalist feelings were running high.<sup>13</sup>

Following this episode, Mahboob started to work on his epic *Ilāhī Nadari de Painḍe*, which was to be published in four volumes. The first and fourth volumes of the epic were published in 1999 and 2007, respectively; he is currently working on the second and third. In what follows, I shall focus on the new modes of relationality in Punjab and its representation in Mahboob's work. Before coming to this, it will be helpful to contextualize Mahboob's work within the literary trends in pre-partition Punjab.

## Trends in Punjabi literature: Sufi and the modern influences

Sutinder Singh Noor's<sup>14</sup> critique of Mohan Singh<sup>15</sup> strikes at the very heart of modern Punjabi poetical enterprise, namely its Sufi influences on language and experience. At the same time, however, Noor's critique also places it within the limits of secular discourse. Noor considers Mohan Singh's poetry to be the paradigm of the Sufi mode of engagement, and adopts as a framework for discussion the conflict between the language of secularism and the spiritual traditions of the Sufis. Mohan Singh, according to Noor, is fully understood only if he is situated at the crossroad of these two traditions.

Noor thinks that Mohan Singh should be read as an idealist – someone who is more inclined toward mystical poetics (Noor 1982, 24). Quoting a poem by Mohan Singh, Noor argues, *rabb* (God) is center of the whole discussion as in the entire thought process in the middle ages. He relates *husan dā jalwā* (sight of beauty), *ishaq dā jādū* (magic of love), and *mastī* with the Sufi states of *wajad* and *hāl*. *Wajad*, Noor contends, is the 29th of the Sufi stages of mystical experience, wherein the Sufi experiences the sublime. *Hāl* is a state that cannot be achieved through human effort, but through the grace of *rabb*. Ibn-al-Arabi, Noor argues, considers God to be ultimate truth, and sees transcendence and immanence as fundamental aspects of one truth (Noor 1982, 22). What Noor fails to mention here is the direct connection of Mohan Singh and Ibn-al-Arabi, as in the first verse of the poem:

ਆਪਣੀ ਜਾਤ ਵਿਖਾਲਣ ਬਦਲੇ,  
ਰੱਬ ਨੇ ਹੁਸਨ ਬਣਾਇਆ।

(Singh 1971, 22)

According to Henry Corbin, for Ibn al Arabi, God creates in order to fulfil the desire to be loved (Corbin 1969, 149).<sup>16</sup> The very perception sets the tone of Sufi language that Mohan Singh, along with others, inherits primarily as a cultural sensibility; however, Mohan Singh's knowledge of Farsi language and his studies in Sufi thought have played a role in shaping his poetic sensibility. Noor further explains Mohan Singh's shift from mysticism to romanticism, and traces the influence of mystical experience in his romantic poetic experience (Noor 1982, 25). The issue with Noor's reading, therefore, is his particular mode of conceptualization, which prefers to ground argument in a set conceptual framework and tends not to assign a value to the text itself – which, as a result, compromises variation in experience (between Sufi and Sikh, in this case). Noor's general idea of religion in the Middle Ages, with the denial of difference and inability to appreciate the singularity of any particular tradition, represents the absurdity of violence that has been prevalent in the secularist discourse. In this respect, Attar Singh's account seems to offer a more nuanced reading of Punjabi literature.

In his book, *Secularization of Modern Punjabi Poetry*, Attar Singh<sup>17</sup> argues that the essential relevance of secularization is to the history of ideas, which become the agents for ordering the poetic experience into recognizable patterns. He further suggests that the poet's consciousness enters into a dialectical relationship with these ideas, reacting against them, transforming them, and in the act being transformed by them (Singh 1988, 17). Although Attar Singh refers primarily to the European connection, he fails to develop a perspective independent of its Orientalist projection. In fact, Attar Singh's account of secularization of modern Punjabi poetry provides an insider's view, where several generations of Punjabi writers effectively romanticized colonial models without any critical engagement. Attar Singh, in his efforts to build a case for Indian secularism, commends Kirpa Sagar<sup>18</sup> and Dhani Ram Chatrik for marking a clear distinction between Punjabi nationalism and the Sikh ethos. He considers the move towards religious identification to be responsible for Punjabi nationalism's failure to grow into a viable movement. Attar Singh therefore sees the idea of Punjabi nationalism in contrast to the idea of Sikh nationalism, because he failed to notice that both Punjabi nationalism and Sikh nationalism were mere factions of the broader nationalist discourse that had become functional in the

entire subcontinent as a result of the colonial endeavor to refashion indigenous communities as representative of the colonial models (Mandair 2006a, 217).

Attar Singh portrays the Ghadar party – which he sees as a radicalized version of secular Indian nationalism that transcended the divisions created by religious traditions – as a group for building Indian unity on the basis of the future rather than the past. In Attar Singh's opinion, only secularism could transcend the particularities of Indian religious traditions, and as such was the main concern of the poets of the Ghadar movement. Attar Singh's objections to Bhai Vir Singh's 'transcendentalist worldview', and against Puran Singh's 'failure to evolve out of traditional Punjabi forms', as well as his endorsement of a radically different vision of the Punjab in both Kirpa Sagar and Dhani Ram Chatrik, therefore, revealed a facile adoption of conventional models without any original engagement. Attar Singh's account failed to depict the crudely shaped national character of South Asian peoples, governed by a tension between the sense of alienation and desire on the one hand, and the romanticism of the newly acquired space by the subaltern subjects on the other (Singh 1988, 98–103). Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair, in his deconstructive examination of this phenomenon, refutes the myth of the religion/secular binary. Mandair argues that the act of responding, in its Indian context in this case, always happens in conformity to a certain law according to which the meaning and concept of religion is universally known and accepted without resistance. Referring to Derrida's neologism, Mandair argues:

*Globalization* refers to a process which today helps Christianity to retain its hegemony due to the conceptual apparatus of international law, global political rhetoric and multiculturalism. It can be seen as the global re-Christianization of the planet through the discourse of atheistic secularism. Wherever this conceptual apparatus dominates it speaks through the discourse of religion. As a result religion is peaceably imposed (or violently self-imposed) on all things that remain foreign to what this word designates.<sup>19</sup>

In light of Mandair's post-secular critique, Attar Singh's idea of a decisive shift (Singh 1988, 116–18) – i.e. the shift that does not represent the traditionalist approach but instead reverses the traditionalist priority, coming before and restructuring the identity within the newly acquired national milieu – loses all significance. This provides support for my claim that Attar Singh was working within a neo-colonial space, inasmuch as he failed to account for the effects of secular modernity on traditional formations.

Tracing the historical roots of the literary trends in Punjab, Christopher Shackle argues that the prevalence of the romantic idiom in modern Punjabi poetry can be seen to follow colonial translations through modern Urdu poets Azad and Hali (Shackle 2001, 101–2). Shackle reveals on the one hand the chain of connections that subsist between what is claimed to be the original face of Punjabi poetry and the way these claims have been justified in a given philosophy and, on the other, the presuppositions behind the claims and their justifications (Shackle 2001, 108). While contextualizing Punjabi literary history within the cultural limits and logic of colonized Punjab in the late nineteenth century, Shackle marks 'a composite scheme of cultural reference', comprising three sources of inspiration for Punjabi

literature: 'Sikh scripture and the text associated with it; the pre-modern Punjabi poetry produced by the Sufi authors; and Western literature' (Shackle 2001, 97).

Shackle's account begins with a study of the development of Urdu models of literature to further the Orientalist design in Punjab. His study of the development of the works of Muhammad Hussain Azad (1830–1910) and Altaf Hussain Hali (1837–1910), portrays how Urdu poetry acquired a new definition under a process of translation that imported Western ideas of literature to the world of Urdu poetry. He describes how Azad's *Ab-e-Hayat* is 'differentiated from the *tazkira* tradition by the context of its production in colonized society' (Shackle 2001, 101) and further traces the Wordsworthian debt in Hali's vision of the natural poetry in his *Muqaddama-e Shi'r-o-Sha'iri*.

Shackle's portrayal of Urdu poetry as a liaison between modern Punjabi poetry and its Western source is based on his account of Maula Bakhsh Kushta. The close affinity of Punjabi literary historians with Western literature, its Urdu representation, and the Sufi experience locates them within the context of Western influences on South Asian literature, and points to the possibility of a very general agreement among modernist Sikh writers on the sources of inspiration. Thus by exploring 'the original construction of this composite scheme of cultural reference', Shackle provides a detailed account of the Western grounding of Urdu literature by Azad and Hali, and provides an account of its translation into Sikh literature in reference to Hali and their simulation in Kushta (Shackle 2001, 108). However, the presence of the Sufi idiom in this entire process provides it with another definition. Although he values Kushta's work as a deliberate attempt to confirm Punjabi in the modern polysystem, he sees its significance only as a transition between Urdu literary historians and a Sikh author, Bawa Budh Singh. Shackle thus establishes a clear connection of modern Punjabi literary history with Western ideas, and defines it as a part of the Singh Sabha project.

While touching on the issue of neo-construction of Punjabi literature in his article, Shackle has endorsed the importance of the religious concerns of the authors in Maula Bakhsh Kushta and Bawa Budh Singh's histories of Punjabi literature, thus recognizing the process of translation where these writings acquired their peculiarly modernist outlook. The chain of translations has been explained as a new trend in Urdu literature, where Shackle details the factors influencing the creative process of the works of Azad and Hali.

The work of cultural translation in modernist constructions of the Sikh ethos, which Shackle is describing in literary context, has been further elaborated by Mandair, who traces the philosophical backdrop to the passage of ideas from Trumpp to Bhai Vir Singh and helps to explain the emergence of the religion/secular binary in the whole process (Mandair 2005, 255). Mandair's work initiates a serious discussion about the colonial connections of Bhai Vir Singh's works. However, Bhai Vir Singh's poetry needs to be separated from his philosophical experience, for it is Bhai Vir Singh's poetic genius that provides a space for his philosophical work, rather than poetry originating from his philosophical positioning.

Bhai Vir Singh introduced all the literary genres such as small poem, epic, novel and prose in Punjabi. If one has to trace the origin of Bhai Vir Singh's poetic experience historically, his poems expressing love of nature could easily be linked to English romantic poets via Hali's *muqaddmah*. However, the freshness of Bhai Vir Singh's poetic experience and the novelty of Sikh experience in it should not

allow one to jump to such a conclusion. Bhai Vir Singh's poetry exemplifies a style of expressing Sikh experience in coordination with the contemporary poetic idiom. Here, we need to differentiate between poetic idiom and poetic experience. This is not to say that the poetic idiom has nothing to do with the poetic experience. The poetic experience brings an atmosphere with it that associates certain kinds of feelings with a language. Particular expressions get a space where they flourish with a special fervor. The peculiarity of Bhai Vir Singh's poetic experience is that it enriches the poetic idiom with its fervor instead of getting confined in its limits. Bhai Vir Singh is one of the few poets of this age whose poetry manifests the intensity that goes beyond the Sufi experience. The problem in the link established by Shackle between Sufi and modern Punjabi poetry is that poetry does not mean much more than a fact. This, for me at least, signals a possible problem with Shackle's mode of reading, where poetry is not being read *as* poetry, but as a text representing certain trends. If this is so, it might be pertinent to ask why, in Shackle's analysis, the mediocrity of the poetry of Hali and Azad is not given the same weight?

When Bhai Vir Singh's poetry is read as poetry, it leads to a different world where both a small poem (because of its form) and a *ruba'i*<sup>20</sup> (because of its background) cannot be contained by any conventional definition. The connection of tradition and individual talent needs to be seen beyond its immediate connections, as Bhai Vir Singh's poetry cannot simply be located in some historical lineage of poetry and poets. Bhai Vir Singh starts a new tradition in poetry, grounded in the poet's specific mode of relationality, where the poet lives within the experience of *Śabad* and which expresses itself in response to the world around him from this particular positioning. The individual talent behind the intensity and freshness of such a response lends Bhai Vir Singh's idiom a peculiarity that makes it difficult to categorize him neatly within literary history.

### **Punjab, partition, and nihilism**

Mahboob's poetic journey starts right after the partition. Mahboob witnessed the violence of 1947 and lived in its aftermath, where nihilism had gained formal control over the people of Punjab and was headed to evolve into its more institutionalized version, a process that started with the codification of ethics and moved further to develop a whole new economy of religious nationalism. The prevalence of romanticism in twentieth-century Punjab cannot be understood in isolation from this phenomenon. It is helpful to look at the rise of the phenomenon of nihilism through the lens of romantic constructions that led Punjab to the tragic situation of 1947. Partition was not a sudden accident in Punjab. The tragedy of 1947 can be seen as the culmination of a nihilistic process that began with European colonization and took hold as the South Asian mindset emerged into its modern nationalized form.

Nihilism, according to Nietzsche, consists in the devaluation of uppermost values. In the context of this study, several examples of nihilism can be adduced in relation to the Sikhs: the tendency of Sikhs after 1849 to join the British army, instead of resisting the colonial regime; the take-over and reallocation of *jaqīrs* by the British; the incorporation of Punjabi labour into the economy of

Empire; the entry of Sikhs and other South Asians into a new colonial system of education, resulting in the redefinition of 'Sikhi' under the Singh Sabha, which culminated in the nationalization of the Sikh and Punjabi ethos and the violent unleashing of sectarianism during the partition. It could be argued that the Sikhs, after the *Misl* period and prior to the British occupation of Punjab,<sup>21</sup> had been through certain transformations that provided them with some metaphysical logic to endorse the practices that were closer to Vedantic and yogic conceptions of the divine than the Sikh mode of prayer.

The Sikh prayer, which has a celebration of death and deathlessness, grounded in the Sikh conception of *maya*,<sup>22</sup> offers a new economy of giving and taking. The Sikh conception of *maya* points to a fallacy in the philosophical standing of its previously held notions, which, for their dualistic tendencies, offer a nihilistic attitude towards life that negate the socio-political activism in relation to its spiritual context. In this mode, where the *manmukh* phenomenon prevails because it initiates a tension and a contradiction between the desire and inspiration, a valuation of the prayer happens that appropriates individualistic positioning of being in the realm of the religious. During the late eighteenth century, under influence of Vedantic interpretations of Sikhi, the Sikh practices of the effortless transformation of the desire into offering were replaced with a mode of existence where desire celebrates its individuality and becomes functional as a determining factor in the prevailing mode of relationality. The religious, synonymous with the metaphysical, offers a space for devaluation of the uppermost values, which in the Sikh case can be said to have taken place during the mid-nineteenth century. The process in question seems to be the same as that revealed by Harjot Oberoi in his book *The Construction of Religious Boundaries* (1994).<sup>23</sup>

The devaluation of the uppermost values, as manifest in the above examples, portrays in Nietzschean terms the entry of nihilism into Punjabi experience. However, Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche's idea of devaluation opens up new horizons. Heidegger, according to Hubert Dreyfus, argues that the idea of devaluation of values is symptomatic of the nihilistic state we are going through. In the wake of his claim that thinking about our deepest concerns as 'values' is nihilism, Heidegger prefers 'shared concerns' over 'values' (Dreyfus 1993, 293). He talks of a cultural know-how that is embodied in our social skills rather than in our concepts, beliefs, and values. He describes a silent perception, a spontaneous process of simulation where agency of mind is rather inactive as compared to the shared celebration of the traditions (294). Dreyfus, in his explanation of Heidegger's ideas, states:

As we have noted, our cultural practices and the understanding of being they embody allow us to direct our activities and make sense of our lives only insofar as they are and stay unarticulated, that is, stay the atmosphere in which we live. These background practices are the concealed and unmastered that Heidegger tells us give seriousness to our decisions.

(Dreyfus 1993, 296)

Dreyfus's reading of Heidegger is especially pertinent to the Sikh situation in post-1849 Punjab. It could be argued that the Sikhs had shared a kind of unarticulated rhythm that was neither strictly cultural nor religious, and which could not be

reduced to representational thought. The Sikhs never defined themselves as a people based on a mere set of values. Their uniting factor was an understanding of the Guru as a living presence – in the form of both the ten Sikh Gurus in human form, and *Śabad-Gūrū*. It is love, commitment, or just a sense of belonging with the Guru that has defined the Sikh ethos.

The events that led to 1947 partition can be seen as a natural outcome of the new value system where the nationalist character of the sectarian struggles on part of the Sikhs and Muslims in particular, and Hindus in a different way, could be understood better as metaphysics functioning in the lives of different people. Going one step further, it could also be suggested that the post-1947 era represents a period during which nihilism becomes fully incorporated and institutionalized into the practice of everyday life of the nation.

### Harinder Singh Mahboob: poetry and philosophy

Before the publication of his first book, *Sahije Rachiō Khālsā*, Mahboob was known only as a poet among the literary and scholarly circles of Punjab. Due to the dominance of Singh Sabha discourse among the Sikh scholarly circles, the book was either ignored or confined to the realm of poetic literature. This is not surprising, as Mahboob crafted an idiom that was not only poetically rich and philosophically dense as compared to the prevalent idiom(s) in Sikh studies, but for which linguistic style was an essential part of his project. Mahboob's direct engagement with Hegelian metaphysics – rather than Christian missionary writings, which were the main trigger for the Singh Sabha response – was another aspect that made the book too complicated for Sikh scholars committed to the conventional Singh Sabha methodology. Moreover, his second book, *Jhanāñ Dī Rāt*, did not fit with the conventions of twentieth-century Punjabi poetry. It was considered too old-fashioned compared with the prevalent idioms of *ghazal* and blank verse. The predominance of Sufi language proved to be too obscure for the modern Punjabi poets. Subsequently, the second book was overlooked by the literary circles. Those close to Mahboob believed that a politics of silence was being deployed as a way of dealing with Mahboob, who was perceived to be a threat to the established conventions of both Sikh studies and Punjabi poetry.

In the remainder of this essay, I want to signal some of the metaphysical shifts in Mahboob's work. However, it is difficult to mark the point of transition and to decide whether the discussion should be started with *Jhanāñ Dī Rāt* or *Sahije Rachiō Khālsā*. These books complement and ground each other in an unusual manner. The seven books of *Jhanāñ Dī Rāt* have a one-page introduction. These introductions and the poetry seem to have separate points of origin, in terms of the time period and from the perspective of the poet's philosophical positioning. The later works of prose, which are considered parallel to Mahboob's poetry, are works of translation more than anything else. *Sahije Rachiō Khālsā*, a lengthy prose work on religion and philosophy, was written after the publication of the bulk of his poetry. Nonetheless, because it precedes *Jhanāñ Dī Rāt*, it needs to be read in continuity with his broader poetic impulse. The two later books in *Jhanāñ Dī Rāt*: *Kurlaunde Kāfle* and *Shahīd Dī Ardās*, written after *Sahije Rachiō Khālsā*, properly

signal the shift from poetry to philosophy that is in many ways crucial for understanding Mahboob's work.

Harinder Singh Mahboob's Marxist connection is important for understanding his works in terms of his later shift to Sikh studies. Based on the thrust of his discourse, the shift could easily be termed as a left Hegelian converting to right Hegelianism. However, that would reduce his Marxist connection to the ideological commitment of a young Maoist revolutionary. Mahboob represents a generation that had been struggling to come to terms with nihilism by engaging and appropriating different European perspectives such as Marxism, Hegelian metaphysics, existentialism, and so forth, which, as Caputo suggests, were all competing for primacy in the post-war era (Caputo 1987, 240).<sup>24</sup> In the Punjabi context, this was an era in which the Dionysian impulse was celebrated within literary circles. The Dionysian impulse reflected a nihilistic extremism that had adopted the ideological framework provided by Marxism and conveniently embedded itself within the popular unrest in postcolonial Punjab. Marxism in Punjab can therefore be seen as a result of the grounding of the South Asian politics in its modernist ethos; a shift in the nationalist movement that was committed to the cause of providing a truly popular alternative to the perceived elitism and proximity of the Singh Sabha to the colonial idiom.<sup>25</sup>

Mahboob's migration and relocation from Sāndal Bār<sup>26</sup> to Māl wā was a shift that dislocated him psychologically and existentially. Mahboob's dislocation is reflected in his poetry, which begins with a quest for the glance of a missing beloved face and thrives in the memory of the lost old country:

ਇਹਨਾਂ ਕਵਿਤਾਵਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਨਾਇਕ ਕਿਸੇ ਪਾਵਨ ਚਿਹਰੇ ਦੇ ਸੁਪਨੇ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਸਕੂਨ ਲੈ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ, ਅਤੇ ਉਸ ਤੋਂ ਵਿਛੜ ਕੇ ਗੁਨਾਹਗਾਰ ਵਾਂਗ ਉਮਰ ਗੁਜ਼ਾਰ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ। ਕਹਿ ਨਹੀਂ ਸਕਦਾ ਕਿ ਉਸ ਨੇ ਇਹ ਚਿਹਰਾ ਸੱਚੀਂ-ਮੁੱਚੀਂ ਵੇਖਿਆ ਹੈ, ਜਾਂ ਨਹੀਂ। ਪਰ ਇਕ ਗੱਲ ਸਪੱਸ਼ਟ ਹੈ। ਹੁਸੀਨ ਚਿਹਰੇ ਦਾ ਸੁਪਨਾ ਨਾਇਕ ਦੀ ਪਾਕ ਫਕੀਰੀ ਹੈ, ਉਸ ਦੀ ਅਧਿਆਤਮਕ ਜੁਸਤਜੂ ਹੈ, ਉਸ ਦਾ ਕੁਦਰਤ ਦਾ ਸਫਰ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਗੁਨਾਹ ਤੋਂ ਨਜ਼ਾਤ ਹੈ। (ਮਹਿਬੂਬ 1990, 4)

Although the lost country is clearly Sāndal Bār, Mahboob prefers to project it as a lost flavour of Punjab. His poetry starts with an innocent expression of some lost beauty, but quickly takes a metaphysical turn to (re)construct that old aesthetic:

ਸੁਣ ਨੀ ਨਾਰ ਕੁਆਰੀਏ, ਇਕ ਗੱਲ ਸੁਣਾਵਾਂ  
ਤੇਰੇ ਬੁੱਤ ਨੂੰ ਦੇਖਿਆ, ਮੈਂ ਵਿਚ ਹਵਾਵਾਂ  
ਕਰ ਗਏ ਤੋਂ ਸਿਰਾਂ ਤੇ, ਸੈ ਬੋਲੇ ਛਾਵਾਂ  
ਪੌਣਾਂ ਵਾਂਗੂੰ ਮੇਲੁਦੀ, ਤੂੰ ਕੋਲ ਝਨਾਵਾਂ॥੧॥

ਸਾਥੋਂ ਤਾਰਿਆਂ ਨੇ ਮੂੰਹ ਮੋੜਿਆ, ਰੋ ਅਉਧ ਵਿਹਾਣੀ  
ਨੈਣਾਂ ਵਾਲੀਏ ਬਖਸ਼ ਦੇ, ਫਜਰਾਂ ਦੇ ਪਾਣੀ,  
ਅਸੀਂ ਮਾਰੇ ਅੱਧੀ ਰਾਤ ਨੂੰ, ਉਮਰਾਂ ਦੇ ਹਾਣੀ  
ਦੇ ਜਾ ਰਹਿਮ ਦੀ ਕਣੀ ਨੀ, ਦਰਵੇਸ਼ਾਂ ਤਾਣੀ;  
ਹਾਰੇ ਪੁੱਤਰ ਸਿਦਕ ਦੇ ਅਸੀਂ ਪਾਪ ਕਹਾਣੀ  
ਤੂੰ ਘੁੰਡ ਨੂੰ ਚੁਕ ਕੇ ਵਾਰਦੇ, ਰਿਸ਼ਮਾਂ ਦੇ ਪਾਣੀ॥੨॥ (ਮਹਿਬੂਬ 1990, 153)

Although the process of reconstructing the old Punjab in memory is motivated by the trauma of losing it, it goes through a metaphysical transformation even before it is fully envisaged:

‘ਆਖਰੀ ਸ਼ਾਮ’ ਦੀਆਂ ਬਹੁਤੀਆਂ ਕਵਿਤਾਵਾਂ ਬੇਵਤਨ ਹੋਣ ਦੇ ਛਿਣ ਦਾ ਵਿਸਥਾਰ ਹਨ। ਅਤਿ ਪਿਆਰੀ ਵੱਥ ਦੇ ਗੁਆਚ ਜਾਣ ਦਾ ਹੌਕਾ, ਮਾਂ-ਪਿਉ ਦੇ ਦੇਸ ਦਾ ਜਬਰੀ ਖੋਹਿਆ ਜਾਣਾ, ਕੌਮ ਦੀ ਰੂਹਾਨੀਅਤ ਦਾ ਬਰਬਾਦ ਹੋਣਾ, ਮਾਹੀ ਦੀ ਯਾਦ ਉੱਤੇ ਗੁਲਾਮੀ ਦੇ ਪਹਿਰੇ, ਜਾਂ ਮੌਤ ਦੇ ਜੇਤੂ ਪਲ ਸਾਹਮਣੇ ਸੰਸਾਰ ਲਈ ਪਵਿਤਰ ਮੋਹ ਦੇ ਜਾਗਣ ਦਾ ਸਮਾਂ, ਕਵੀ ਲਈ ਬੇਵਤਨ ਹੋਣ ਦੇ ਬਰਾਬਰ ਹੈ। ਬੇਵਤਨ ਹੋਣ ਦਾ ਵੇਲਾ, ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੀ ਮਜ਼ਬੂਰ ਅਲਵਿਦਾ ਦੇ ਛਿਣ ਉੱਤੇ ਉਪਜੀ ਪਾਵਨ ਰੂਹਾਨੀ ਚੀਸ ਕਵੀ ਲਈ ਆਖਰੀ ਸ਼ਾਮ ਹਨ। (ਮਹਿਬੂਬ 1990, 300)

The metaphysical transformation and its aftermath – the construction of the lost old Punjab – will be discussed more fully in the sequel to this essay. Mahboob’s search for something lost is aptly described in the following verses:

ਰੁੱਤਾਂ ਨੇ ਪਰਦੇਸਾਂ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ  
ਖਤ ਦਰਦ ਦਾ ਪਾਇਆ।  
ਸਾਡੀ ਮੁੜ ਤਕਦੀਰ ਨਾ ਜਾਗੀ  
ਹਰ ਰੰਗ ਅੱਥਰੂ ਆਇਆ।

ਇਕ ਤਾਂ ਪੰਛੀ ਪਾਰ ਪਹਾੜਾਂ  
ਗਿਆ ਸੀ, ਅਜੇ ਨਹੀਂ ਆਇਆ।  
ਦੂਜਾ ਚਿਰਾਂ ਦਾ ਬਰਫਾਂ ਪਾਸੇ  
ਲੋਕਾ ਮਾਰ ਮੁਕਾਇਆ।

ਤੀਜਾ ਪੰਛੀ ਤੂਤ ਤੇ ਰੋਂਦਾ  
ਓਦਰਿਆ ਘਬਰਾਇਆ।  
ਚੌਥਾ ਉਮਰ ਦਾ ਅਜੇ ਨਿਆਣਾ  
ਤੇਰੇ ਦੇਸ ਸਿਧਾਇਆ।

ਕਾਸਦ ਹੋ ਕੇ ਉਮਰ ਗੁਆਉਣੀ  
ਹਰ ਸੰਗੀ ਫੁਰਮਾਇਆ,  
ਨੌਕਰ ਚਲੇ ਗਏ ਸਭ ਘਰ ਨੂੰ  
ਸਾਨੂੰ ਆਖ ਪਰਇਆ।

ਚੌਥਾ ਕਾਸਦ ਜਿਸ ਨੇ ਸਖੀਏ  
ਸਾਡਾ ਹੁਕਮ ਵਜਾਇਆ,  
ਉਸਨੂੰ ਇਕ ਤਾਂ ਗੱਲ ਇਹ ਦੱਸੀ  
ਕਦ ਸਾਜਨ ਘਰ ਆਇਆ।

ਮਹਿਕਾਂ ਦਾ ਤਾਂ ਆਉਣਾ ਜਾਣਾ  
ਧੁਰੋਂ ਹੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਲਿਖਾਇਆ,  
ਜਿਸ ਰੁੱਤ ਤੂੰ ਮਾਣ ਸੀ ਕਰਦੀ  
ਉਸ ਰੁੱਤ ਮੀਤ ਵੀ ਆਇਆ?

ਦੂਜੀ ਗੱਲ ਮੁਸਾਫਿਰ ਬਾਰੇ  
ਘਰ ਨ ਜਿਹੜਾ ਸਮਾਇਆ।  
ਦੇਸ ਤੇਰੇ ਦੀ ਕੰਦਰਾ ਦੇ ਵਿਚ  
ਚੋਰ ਅਸਾਡਾ ਆਇਆ। (ਮਹਿਬੂਬ 1990, 59-60)

ਦਿਲ ਦੇ ਸੰਗੀਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਵੈਰਾਗੇ  
ਕੋਈ ਕੱਲਾ ਪਲਕੀਂ ਆਏ  
ਨੈਣਾਂ ਦੇ ਵਿਚ ਅੱਥਰੂ ਚੜ੍ਹਕੇ  
ਮੌਤ ਦੇਸ ਢਲ ਜਾਏ।

ਬੈਠ ਪਹਾੜਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਬਰਫਾਂ ਤੇ  
ਸੁਣ ਸੁਣ ਦੂਰੋਂ ਸੋਆਂ  
ਕੂੰਜਾਂ ਵਾਂਗੂੰ ਓਦਰ ਗਈਆਂ  
ਇਕ ਜਨਮ ਵਿਚ ਛੋਹਾਂ। (ਮਹਿਬੂਬ 1990, 60)

Mahboob transposes the trauma of his migration and cultural relocation into the trauma over a missing beauty, some lost face, which, at first, seems like the lost face of a beloved or the moments of union that are lost due to the separation. This transposition is not something that Mahboob would attempt to deny, but the missing 'thing' in the poetry cannot be characterized easily. Naming this 'thing' is not possible, for such naming would be an act of violence, an acceptance of a meaning that one already has, or a denial of something the reader is not prepared to accept. Besides the face of the beloved, it could be the lost land of Punjab, the old spiritual or cultural glory of Punjab, the glorious days of the Sikh people, or an ideal mode of existence. However, the naming of the 'lost' in any of these contexts would be a denial on the part of the reader to participate with the poet. When the poet shares his experience of death and devastation, his experience lies in the voice he provides for his concerns. The poet creates a language of a particular variety that conveys the truth of what he expresses. I would suggest that language itself constitutes the missing 'thing'. The world exists in the language, and non-translatability of the language does not leave any space for the transportation of the experience. Translation would be a fresh linguistic construction, thereby locating one in a new space.

Harinder Singh Mahboob in his *Jhanān Dī Rāt* creates a language that expresses his concerns. The question, then, is: What really is this language creation? What is peculiar about the language that Mahboob creates? Could the language of Mahboob's works be taken as a singular entity? Although a proper discussion of these questions will have to be deferred for the moment, it might be suggested that perhaps there is no one language, even in *Jhanān Dī Rāt*. The language in Mahboob's poetry takes a shift very quickly. More importantly, it is a metaphysical shift, which creates a new context for Mahboob's works.<sup>27</sup>

## Notes

- 1 For a broad-ranging critique of the passage of ideas from Hegel to modern Sikh studies, see Mandair 2005.
- 2 I refer to the works of post-independence historians such as Ganda Singh and Fauja Singh.
- 3 See, for example, Mandair 2005.
- 4 The Sikh kingdom was occupied by the British in 1849, and was divided between Indian and Pakistan at the moment of decolonization in 1947. For an account of partition, see Singh 1972.

- 5 Mahboob's early readings were in Sikh history, a series of books written by Kartar Singh Kalaswalia. Kalaswalia's poetical representation of Sikh history was especially inspiring for Mahboob, and his ability to relate to some events in Sikh history helped him in his struggle with the new reality. However, Mahboob's immediate shift to Marxism hints toward the complications that were too subtle to define at the time.
- 6 Mahboob felt that *Diwan-e-Ghalib*, and two books by Harbhajan Singh, *Adhraini* and *Alwida ton Pahilan*, have the potential to be converted into long organized poems. Similarly, Mahboob's hints towards the unity of experience, in all the books of *Jhanan di Raat*, manifest his desire to demonstrate a metaphysical vision essential to his experience.

ਇਹਨਾਂ ਕਾਵਿ-ਸੰਗ੍ਰਿਹਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਜਿਉਂਦੇ ਜਾਂ ਨੇੜ ਭੂਤ-ਕਾਲ ਵਿੱਚ ਹੋਏ ਵਿਅਕਤੀਆਂ (ਜਿਵੇਂ ਰੁਸਤਮਿ ਜ਼ਮਾਂ ਗਾਮਾ) ਅਤੇ ਇਤਿਹਾਸ ਦੀਆਂ ਪਰਤੱਖ ਘਟਨਾਵਾਂ ਸੰਬੰਧੀ ਲਿਖੀਆਂ ਨਜ਼ਮਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਮੇਰੇ ਕਾਵਿ-ਅਨੁਭਵ ਦੇ ਸੁਹਜਮਈ/ਰਹੱਸਮਈ ਹਕੀਕੀ ਜਲਵਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਤੀਕ ਸਮਝਣਾ ਠੀਕ ਹੋਵੇਗਾ, ਜਿਹੜੇ ਕਿ ਆਖਿਰ ਵਿੱਚ ਮੇਰੀਆਂ ਲੰਮੀਆਂ ਕਵਿਤਾਵਾਂ ਦੇ ਨਿਰੰਤਰ ਘੁੰਮਦੇ ਬਿੰਬਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਹੀ ਜਾ ਮਿਲਣਗੇ। (ਮਹਿਬੂਬ 1990, XLV)

- 7 See Mahboob's introduction to *Van Vairag*, the first book in *Jhanan di Raat*, and three poems in the same book, 'Bharam Bhai', 'Sanjog Vijog', and 'Pachhtava'.

8

ਸੂਰਜ ਛਿਪਦੇ ਕੋਲੇ ਸਖੀਏ,  
ਕੋ ਪੰਛੀ ਕੁਰਲਾਇਆ।  
ਤਰਕਾਲਾਂ ਦੇ ਦੇਸ ਅੰਦਰਾਂ,  
ਕੌਣ ਕੌਣ ਨਹੀਂ ਆਇਆ।

ਸੂਰਜ ਤਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਤੇ ਲਾਲੀ ਵਾਰੇ,  
ਰਾਤ ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੇ ਪੱਲੇ।  
ਰੰਗ ਨੂੰ ਰੰਗ ਦੇ ਦੇਸ ਉਡਾਵਾਂ,  
ਖਤ ਕੋਈ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਘੱਲੇ।

ਕਿਸ ਜੂਹ ਵਿਚ ਹੁਣ ਡਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਮਿਲਣਾ,  
ਪੰਛੀ ਜੋ ਕੁਰਲਾਂਦਾ।  
ਪੱਛਮ ਦੀ ਰੁਤ ਮੋਹਿਆ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ,  
ਮੁੱਕਦੀ ਤੇ ਪਛਤਾਂਦਾ।

ਦੂਰ ਲਾਲੀਆਂ ਕੰਬ ਕੰਬ ਗਈਆਂ,  
ਪਾਣੀ ਕਦੇ ਨਾ ਰੋਇਆ।  
ਕੂੰਜ ਨੂੰ ਡਾਰੋਂ ਵਿਛੜ ਜਾਣ ਦਾ  
ਭਰਮ ਕਿਉਂ ਸਈਏ ਹੋਇਆ। (ਮਹਿਬੂਬ 1990, 5)

- 9 There was a new knowledge base in colonized Punjab that changed everything. For an account of the development of that knowledge base, see Mandair 2005.
- 10 Jaswant Singh Neki, a renowned Punjabi poet, wrote in his letter that the writer's state of mind was in proximity to the *Banis* he wrote about, which convinced Mahboob's father to send him for higher studies.
- 11 For details of Indian army invasion in Darbar Sahib Amritsar, see Kirpal Singh 1999.
- 12 This was the last poem in the book, and uses strong language for Indira Gandhi (the Indian prime minister who ordered the army attack on the Sikh Gurdwaras in June 1984), as well as a heroic depiction of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and S. Beant Singh. Here are some examples:

ਮੇਰੇ ਸ਼ਹੀਦ ਮਾਹੀ ਦੇ ਦਿਨ ਤੂੰ  
 ਸੁਣੀ ਕੁਖੱਤੀਏ ਨਾਰੇ।  
 ਕੌਮ ਮੇਰੀ ਦੇ ਬੱਚੜੇ ਭੋਲੇ  
 ਡੁੱਘੀ ਨੀਂਦ 'ਚ ਮਾਰੇ।  
 ਜੋ ਜਰਨੈਲ ਮਾਹੀ ਦੇ ਦਰ ਤੇ  
 ਪਹਿਰੇਦਾਰ ਪੁਰਾਣਾ।  
 ਮਹਾਂਬਲੀ ਸਮੇਂ ਤੇ ਬੈਠਾ  
 ਉਹ ਅਸਵਾਰ ਨ ਹਾਰੇ।

ਨਾਰ ਸਰਾਲ ਸਰਕਦਾ ਘੇਰਾ  
 ਹਰਿਮੰਦਰ ਨੂੰ ਪਾਇਆ।  
 ਰਿਜ਼ਕ ਫਕੀਰਾਂ ਵਾਲਾ ਸੁੱਚਾ  
 ਆ ਤਕਦੀਰ ਜਲਾਇਆ।  
 ਬੁੱਤ ਪੂਜਾਂ ਦੇ ਸੀਨੇ ਦੇ ਵਿਚ  
 ਫੱਫੇਕੁੱਟਣੀ ਸੁੱਤੀ।  
 ਜਿਸ ਦੀ ਵਿਸ ਨੂੰ ਭਸਮ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ  
 ਤੀਰ ਬੇਅੰਤ ਦਾ ਆਇਆ। (ਮਹਿਬੂਬ 1990, 827)

- 13 Members of All India Youth Congress burned the copies of Mahboob's book in Delhi.
- 14 Sutinder Singh Noor (1940–), a Punjabi critic who is known for his contributions from structuralist and postmodern points of view. See Bhatia 2003, 555–6.
- 15 Mohan Singh (1905–1978) was one of the prominent modern Punjabi poets. See Sekhon and Duggal 1992, 145–54.
- 16 'Our love for the Absolute is nothing but a reproduction of Its love for us. It is on the one hand, the love of the Creator for the creature in which He creates Himself, and on the other hand, the love of that creature for his Creator, which is nothing other than the desire of the revealed God in the creature, yearning to return to Himself.'
- 17 Attar Singh (1932–1994), a Punjabi critic who was known for his Modernist/Marxist viewpoint. See Bhatia 2003, 548–9.
- 18 Kirpa Sagar (1875–1939) was a Punjabi poet who is famous for his long narrative poem, *Lakshmi Devi*. For more information, see Sekhon and Duggal 1992, 130–31.
- 19 The Punjabi poet Dhani Ram Chatrik (1876–1954), whose poetry represents 'domestic life of the Punjabi Hindu townsman'. See Sekhon and Duggal 1992, 127–30.
- 20 This is a short composition consisting of four hemistichs. The first, second and fourth hemistichs must always have the same meter and same rhyme. The third hemistich must also have the same meter, but not necessarily the same rhyme. But there is no rule to the contrary. A *ruba'i* is always complete in itself. The *ruba'i* has 24 meters peculiar to itself. It has been in great favour among the Persian poets (Qamaruddin 2006, xiii–xiv).
- 21 See Oberoi 1994, 62–71.
- 22 ਏਹੁ ਵਿਸ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ਤੁਮ ਦੇਖਦੇ ਇਹੁ ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਰੂਪ ਹੈ ਹਰਿ ਰੂਪ ਨਦਰੀ ਆਇਆ॥ (ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਪੰਨਾ ੯੨੨).
- 23 Unlike Oberoi's approach, to which the historical development of a social phenomenon is central, I will, in the follow-up article, make an attempt to explore the idea that social processes and experience of *śabad* could have more than the arbitrary relationship that he sees as a consequence of identity formation project. His

perception of, and position against, the evolutionary process behind the *Khālāsā* identity formation is clearly problematic.

- 24 But at a certain critical point, when scientific and objectifying thinking makes an appearance, the ground gives way beneath this cultural solidarity. Competing 'world views' and 'ethical theories' emerge, each scrambling for primacy. The scrambling grows worse, not better; the disagreements spread; and positions harden, resulting in deep-set and irresolvable ethical conflicts. The authority of the old view is undermined, but nothing new takes its place. The result is the emergence of the theory of 'values'. The old idea of a shared 'good' or the common *ethos* is replaced by a marketplace of competing values posited by a plurality of competing subjects. 'Being' and 'the Good' are separated, as Being is reduced to 'factuality' and the Good becomes a 'value'. The oblivion of Being and *ethos* sets in. A philosopher appears who presides over this chaos, who understands that the old world is dead, and who speaks the most eloquently in the name of values. But his very critique of nihilism (the old values have lost their force) in the name of new, life-preserving values (the old values must be transvalued) is itself the deepest, most extreme form of nihilism, the *eschaton* (Caputo 1987, 240).
- 25 See Arvind Mandair's *Religion and the Specter of the West* (forthcoming 2009, Columbia University Press) for a fuller discussion of this.
- 26 The Sandal Bar, located in the Rachna Doab, is a region between the rivers *Ravi* and *Jhanan* in Punjab, Pakistan (see Ghazali 1987).
- 27

1968 ਉਪਰੋਕਤ ਸੁਹਜ-ਪ੍ਰਤੀਤੀ ਦਾ ਹੜ ਬਹੁਤ ਸਾਰੀਆਂ ਨਵੀਆਂ ਦਿਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਹਾਸਲ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲਾ ਹੀ ਸੀ, ਕਿ ਇਕ ਦਿਨ ਮੇਰੇ ਵਿਦਿਆਰਥੀ-ਕਾਲ ਦੇ ਇਕ ਦੋਸਤ ਸ: ਜੋਗਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਹੀਰ, ਜਿਹੜੇ ਕਿ ਬੁਲੰਦ ਖਾਏ ਦੇ ਲੋਕ ਗਾਇਕ ਵੀ ਸਨ, ਦੀ ਗੜ੍ਹਦੀਵਾਲਾ ਵਿਖੇ ਆਮਦ ਨੇ ਮੇਰੇ ਤਖੱਈਅਲ ਨੂੰ ਕੌਮ ਦੀ ਸੰਜੀਦਾ ਤਕਦੀਰ ਦੇ ਚਿੰਤਨ ਵੱਲ ਮੋੜ ਦਿੱਤਾ। ਉਹ ਦੋ ਦਿਨ ਗੜ੍ਹਦੀਵਾਲਾ ਵਿਖੇ ਰਹੇ, ਅਤੇ ਦੋ ਦਿਨ ਹੀ 'ਪੁਰਾਤਨ ਅਹਿਦਨਾਮਾ' (The Old Testament) ਦੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਦ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਟਾ (Visionary) ਵਾਂਗ ਸਿੱਖ ਕੌਮ ਨਾਲ ਹੋ ਰਹੀਆਂ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਣ ਵਾਲੀਆਂ ਬੇਇਨਸਾਫੀਆਂ ਬਾਰੇ ਚਿਤਾਵਨੀਆਂ ਦਿੰਦੇ ਰਹੇ, ਅਤੇ ਕਈ ਵਾਰ ਜਜ਼ਬਾਤ ਵਿਚ ਆ ਕੇ ਰੋਏ ਵੀ। ਹੀਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੀ ਇਸ ਨਿਰਛਲ ਚੀਕ ਨੂੰ ਸੁਣ ਕੇ ਮੈਂ ਸਿੱਖ ਧਰਮ ਦੇ ਚਿੰਤਨ ਤੇ ਇਤਿਹਾਸ ਦੀ ਪੁਨਰ-ਸਿਰਜਣਾ ਦੇ ਵਕਤੀ ਤੌਰ ਤੇ ਭੁੱਲੇ ਇਰਾਦੇ ਨੂੰ ਇਕ ਵਾਰ ਫਿਰ ਦ੍ਰਿੜਤਾ ਨਾਲ ਯਾਦ ਕੀਤਾ। ਇਸ ਘਟਨਾ ਤੋਂ ਸਾਢੇ ਤਿੰਨ ਸਾਲ ਪਿੱਛੋਂ ਸ਼ੁਰੂ ਹੋਣ ਵਾਲੀ ਮੇਰੀ ਪੁਸਤਕ 'ਸਹਿਜੇ ਰਚਿਓ ਖਾਲਸਾ' ਦੀ ਸਿਰਜਣਾ ਪਿੱਛੇ ਕੋਈ ਅਟੱਲ ਕਾਵਿਮਈ ਧੁਹ ਵੀ ਕੰਮ ਕਰਦੀ ਸੀ, ਪਰ ਹੀਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੀ ਗਹਿਰ-ਗੰਭੀਰ ਚਿਤਾਵਨੀ ਨੇ ਇਸ ਪੁਸਤਕ ਦੀ ਤਕਦੀਰ ਨੂੰ ਜ਼ਰੂਰ ਕੋਈ ਦਿਸ਼ਾ ਦਿੱਤੀ।

'ਸਹਿਜੇ ਰਚਿਓ ਖਾਲਸਾ' ਵਿੱਚ ਪੰਥ ਦੀ ਤਕਦੀਰ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਬੰਧਿਤ ਪੂਰਬ ਕਥਿਤ ਰਹੱਸਮਈ ਚਿੰਤਨ-ਅਨੁਭਵ ( ਸਾਮੂਹਿਕ ਤੌਰ ਤੇ ਮਿਟ ਜਾਣ ਦਾ ਭੈਅ ਅਤੇ ਉਸ ਦਾ ਇਲਾਜ) ਨੂੰ ਯਥਾਰਥ ਦਾ ਲੇਖਾ-ਜੋਖਾ ਕਰਦੇ ਤਰਕ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਪੇਸ਼ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ। (ਮਹਿਬੂਬ 1990, XLIII)

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