

## Appraisals

*Destination* (poems), Hazara Singh, Self-publisher, Ludhiana, 2007, pp. 142, Rs 200.00

(a) Dr Y.S. Rajan, formerly Vice-Chancellor, Punjab Technical University, Jalandhar and at present Dr Vikram Sarabhai Distinguished Professor, Indian Space Research Organisation, Bangalore, communicates:

“I was fortunate to receive your book *Destination* and relished its reading the way it ought to be done. That does not mean that it will be kept away but it is something that will be cherished in my life. Something which I will spread to others by quoting, etc.

For you the very living has been a great destination. A life which has seen great heroic struggles, a life which has great visions of India and also one where you contributed a lot.

Alas! You have also seen the vision shattered; icons falling.

The arrangement into sections helps a great deal. A remarkable quality in your measured thoughts is total absence of hopelessness – ‘pointlessness of it all’ type of attitude to life. To maintain it through ripe old age is wonderful. Thus you have become a great modern *rishi*.

Now a little bit on some of the poems.

**Where** (p. 1)

*‘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’*

encapsulates beautiful expression of a rational mind.

**Closed Mind** (p. 5)

Correct diagnosis of present day ills of the world and of India in particular.

**Culture** (p. 8)

A new interpretation. A modern definition for culture, taking it away from the narrow revivalist approach which imposes taboos and restrictions; especially on women and youth.

**Human Spirit** (p. 9)

*'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'*

This resolve be reiterated daily by one and all.

**Sheikh Farid** (pp. 10-11)

First stanza

*'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'*

and the one

*'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'*

are stirring. I had always been enthused by his verses. During the first convocation of Punjab Technical University I ended my address with a quote from him.

**Martin Luther King** (p. 19)

The stanza

*'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 plural fabric'*

reverberates within me, particularly in the context of splitist and divisive nature of our Indian polity.

**Tireless Tiller** (pp. 28-29)

It is the glory of modern Punjab without any hypocrisy of 'Jai Kisan'.

**Whom to Criticize** (pp. 36-37)

The stanza under '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'*

is exceedingly beautiful and touching even while it narrates a simple mundane truth.

The last stanza under 'Ever'

*'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'*

lashing out on our intellectual elite, who may by their hypocrisy lay foundation for totalitarian fanaticism in our country, conveys an apt indictment.

**The Darkest Day** (p. 45)

The lines

*'Masses be saved from obsolete views of clerics  
Women be liberated from their degrading edicts  
Centres of terrorism be located and liquidated  
Its breeding sources; the bigotry and narcotics  
Be destroyed to check its sporadic reoccurrence'*

echoe an ardent prayer.

**The Wail of a Bangla Girl** (pp. 54-55)

Very touching.

Both **I Am Man** and **Glory of Woman** are great humanist verses.

The assertive couplets

*'I am man, for whom knowledge is not forbidden  
But who flies in space to explore the horizon'*

and

*'I am man, who adores not poverty as divine bliss  
But attributes it to exploitation by unfair means'*

constitute the call of ethics of rationalism.

**In Glory of Woman**

*'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 symbolize the heaven, if they care to perceive'*

is an edifying expression. Each woman should read it and feel proud. I was reminded of Mahakavi Bharati of Tamil who has inspired me from my age of 9.

You should have named it **I Am Woman**. You could have rested your head a little bit and allowed your heart to throb instead.

**Poetry** (p. 78)

A new definition. You have spelt out your ideology – positive sense. That is one reason the established/ well-entrenched poets won't like you. But I agree with most of it.

**The Trio** (pp. 79-80) projects a worthwhile suggestion to the modern world for attempting a synthesis of knowledge.

**Sobriety** (p. 86)

Very much applies to today's media and the fame seekers.

**Fog** (p. 123)

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

is a superb haiku.

**Epitaph to a Scholar** (p. 123)

You will be remembered in the 21<sup>st</sup> as well as 22<sup>nd</sup> century.

As complimented by Jagdish Chander, I also admire 'the masterly use of traditional verse forms and stanzaic patterns'. It shows the great mental discipline you practise when dealing with subjects and ideas that trigger great emotion.

In the great Indian tradition I pray to the almighty to give you many more years of active life.

'Paschema Sarodassadam'.

– o –

**(b) Dr Amarjit Singh, Formerly Professor & Head,  
Department of Journalism, Languages & Culture, Punjab  
Agricultural University, Ludhiana states :**

The scholars, whose appraisals of the earlier publications of Prof. Hazara Singh have been included in the Back Matter of this text, compliment highly his mastery of English idiom, proficiency in communication and the loftiness of thought reflected by his poems. One of them even holds that his verse is easily comparable to that of Tagore, Naidu, Kaliparsad Ghose and V.K. Gokak.

The aforesaid eulogizing assessment sharpened my curiosity to probe *Destination*, which comprises all the poems written by him so far. It offers a wide spectrum of topics, classified under the captions; *Longings, Pathfinders, Martyrs, Post-Independence India, Degeneration, Outbursts*, et al. I feel that the poet has something valuable *to tell*, knows *how to tell* and above all understands well *whom to tell*. His scholarship is not of an academician, browsing in libraries, but the worldly knowledge gleaned from ups and downs of life.

*'I have precise and concise expression  
Proficient also in pragmatic approach  
Picked up knowledge about grassroots  
When facing the ups and downs of life'.*

The first poem **Whereí** enunciates broadly the goal longed to be achieved. The successive sections, despite different captions, serve as steps of the stair leading to the cherished destination: *the world becoming heaven itself*.

*'I am man, master of his fate, captain of his will  
Not to reach heaven but to make one is his goal'.*

Not caring at all about the rewarding career, his brilliance in studies assured, he displayed guts to plunge into the freedom movement; faced imprisonment and saw, during that ordeal, the dungeons and scaffold where the revolutionaries had been persecuted and executed. His awe, agony and above all the admiration for the indomitable will of patriots are resounded by the sonnets comprising the section *Martyrs*.

Almost all the worldly maladies have been diagnosed and corresponding remedies explored. The poems in the section *Introspections* contain valuable comments for self-improvement, consistent with his belief, that poetry may recreate but it ought elevate.

Those inclined to :

transform political freedom into social  
regeneration and economic advancement;

acquire rational, humane and secular values;

and

usher in an era assuring international peace,  
balanced global development and sustained human  
betterment

will find this text a rewarding reading.

I hold firmly that the Textbook Boards and the Universities in India must give corresponding heed to assess the merit of native writers. The curriculum should specifically include the contribution of pioneers and martyrs of freedom struggle. It will impart right direction to the aspirations of post-independence generations.

It is particularly gratifying that this publication which hails the Diamond Jubilee of Independence of India, synchronises with author's 85th birthday. At this quite advanced stage of his life, he illustrates still through words and deeds :

*'The best is yet to be'.*

**(c) The International Biographical Centre, Cambridge, England, got *Destination* reviewed and conveyed as follows:**

“It is at times no easy task to read the evocative poems of Hazara Singh. The section *Martyrs* in particular brings to life a dark period of Indian History with an immediacy and depth of metaphor that cuts to the bone. The language is borne by questions and demands by a questing forceful spirit that struggles to make sense of the inequities of men and nations while offering what solace and resolution it can. This is an important social document and a moving collection of poems that charts the history of a man and his country with eloquence and perspicacity and will no doubt leave its mark on all its readers”.

**(d) Austin Kehoe, Commissioning Editor, Melrose Books, Cambridge (U.K.)**

Hazara Singh who celebrated his 85th birthday at the time of the Diamond Jubilee of Independence of India, has written a collection of verse reflecting his thoughts on current events. Parts of the manuscript show thoughtful, empathetic, inspirational and insightful glimpses of the way life, love and politics influence people the world over ; for example those in the section headed ‘On Man’. In this section his ‘To a Child : A Father’s Pledge’ is particularly moving. Other verses are impressions of global situation, world leaders and of local events. A deeply thoughtful and meditative nature is clearly evidenced in this writing.

There are seventeen sections and an epilogue. Hazara Singh has titled the sections : Longings, Pathfinders, Martyrs, Post-Independence India, Degeneration, Outbursts, Environment, Historical, To Our Neighbours, On Man, Reflections, Introspections, Recollections, Realities, Old Age Moods, Tercets, and Haikos. Most of his verses have no set rhyming pattern. Usually the subject covered is grouped in lines of four, or eight, or ten.

**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 meek  
On such occasions man realises his helplessness  
Before wrath of nature, bursting in various 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.*

Changes of pace and length keep the reader interested and involved. The poem ‘Fire’ is short but the message is conveyed in verse pattern and the line length of this introspective poem :

*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.*

Some of the verses have a discernible rhyming pattern, and these vary, as demonstrated in the first verse of ‘To Our Pakistani Brethren’ which has such a pattern, consisting of five lines ABACD, but using CD as a rhyming of the eye, and with the fifth line of the verse repeated as the final line.

However, in each of the successive five verses, the pattern changes to ABABC and this is the tool which emphasises the message.

*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 the 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.*

From an interview in the form of a questionnaire set by Dr Atma Ram, Director of Education, Himachal Pradesh, we learn that the poet feels that 'The poems of my post retirement period are mostly addressed to the global fraternity for strengthening the bonds emanating from rationalism and humanism'. He also says that his poem 'Art of Life' describes health, patience, intelligence and sympathetic heart as requirements for a happy and fruitful life.

In 'Old Age Pastime' he tells us in the final verse that his pen gives him more comfort than a pet :

*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.*

By skilful use of the repetitive 'p' Hazara Singh punches out the sentiments expressed in line seven and stresses the point raised in line eight.

Hazara Singh, even at an advanced stage in life, illustrates still with words his philosophy of living.

Dedicated to 'participants and the martyrs of freedom struggle, and to those committed to the transformation of political freedom into social equality, economic justice and dignity of individuals', Hazara Singh's work should receive attention from English scholars as well as those interested in the history of India and on the emergence of its future cultural climate reflecting global current events.

## How I Became a Poet

(Hazara Singh)

I recall the incidents, episodes and motives which influenced my creative expression in verse.

Rupert Brooke, Poet Laureate of U.K. composed a few sonnets after the First World War for expressing pride of his nation in the young who laid down their lives to save their country from the onslaught by Axis Powers. Ever since I read them in the college textbooks, I had been feeling an urge to describe the valorous deeds of our martyrs of the freedom struggle in the same vein. I was arrested in October 1945 for my leading the Save-I.N.A campaign and was lodged in the Central Jail, Lahore. I was allowed to move freely in its precincts with the courtesy of R.B. Beni Chand Katoch, Jail Superintendent. 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.

The partition of India in 1947 with its concomitant carnage, plunder, dislocation and indignities left an indelible mark on my memories of that holocaust. My feelings erupted like a volcano when the Pakistani military junta perpetrated wide-spread massacre, mass rapes and callous destruction of property in the then East Pakistan. 'The Wail of a Bangla Girl' was my first poem:

*'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 tormented, 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 UN forums that backed the crusaders  
Thousands wail like me, victims of wicked raiders'.*

Thus I gatecrashed into the domain of poetry.

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 for deriving inspiration from them. I wrote on men and events that had become legends through their crusades against imperialism, fanaticism and racialism. The sonnet 'Subhas Chander Bose : Liberator of East' reads :

*'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'.*

The sonnet ' Mahatma Gandhi' concludes as :

*'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 India exclaims'.*

The tribute to Abraham Lincoln eulogizes him:

*'The great Abraham Lincoln, torch-bearer of equality  
Apostle of global goodwill, path-finder 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'.*

For impressing on our neighbours that wars do not solve any problem and it is in mutual interest to live in peace, the poem

'To Our Pakistani Brethren' begins as:

*'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'*

and concludes as:

*'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, our own flesh and blood'.*

Likewise the poem 'China and India' pleads:

*'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'.*

I do not subscribe to the pleasure principle in poetry, but stand for literature of reality and confrontation. The poem 'I Am Man' is a protest against myths and superstitions. It reads:

*'I am man, not the supreme among His creation  
But evolved gradually from monkeys and apes.  
I am man, who will himself elevate to heaven  
This earth which is not the pivot of universe,  
But a speck on the brim of astronomical disc  
To live where is not exile, but quite a thrill'.*

The scientific outlook and progressive ideas, based on equality and dignity of individual, have led to the improvement of status of woman in a marvelous manner. She has developed confidence to claim:

*'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 symbolize the heaven, if they care to perceive.*

*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 am often asked what do I write for. The opening lines of my poem 'Human Spirit' provide an opportunity to 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'.*

Through enlightened efforts and introspection I am in search of a man who strives for all-round excellence:

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

I hold firmly that poetry is an art with a purpose. It ought to recreate as well as elevate. That is why I prefer it as a mode of communication with others and my own self.

- o -

**Professor Hazara Singh interviewed by Dr Mohammed Fakhruddin, Editor, *Poets International*, Bangalore**

1) What is poetry?

*"Poetry is not 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 or rhyme  
It is a spontaneous expression  
Of feelings noble and sublime". (Destination, p.78)*

2) What/who inspired you to write poetry in English? Did you undergo any formal training?

I took part in the freedom struggle and was sent behind the bars thrice during 1942-46. I yearned to share the lofty ideals which inspired young men like me to plunge into the campaign braving the perils that lay ahead. I had also been keen to pay tribute to the pathfinders for humanity who became legends.

The indignities inflicted by partition of India left an indelible mark on my mind. The atrocities committed by the Pakistani military junta for crushing the uprising in the then East Pakistan served as an igniting point. My feelings erupted like a volcano in my maiden poem 'Wail of a Bangla Girl'. The victim protests, thus, to the 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 tormented, gripped in lustful wrenches  
Torn from kith and kin, shorn of womanly treasure  
The child I do carry is not my sin or pleasure  
I curse the U.N. Forums that backed the crusaders  
Thousands wail like me, victims of wicked raiders".*

(Ibid., p. 54)



Thus, I gatecrashed into the domain of poetry in 1971 at the age of 49 without any training or grooming. I design my own patterns for the stanzas for I do not believe in rattling in old ruts.

*“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”.* (Ibid., p.78)

3) What message you are keen to convey through your poetry?

*“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”.* (Ibid., p. 9)

4) You excel in writing patriotic poetry. What is the secret behind it?

It is likely that the section ‘Martyrs’ in *Destination* led to this observation. I am in fact a crusader against colonialism, theocracy, racialism and totalitarianism.

*“I am man, for whom colonial regimes are a crime  
That violate overall equity and human dignity  
I will brook no more the pinch of race or colour  
Through fairness for all ‘ll work for excellence”.*  
(Ibid., p. 62)

Scholars, academics and critics assess my work according to their respective inclinations. Prof. Basavaraj Naiker, Karnatak University, Dharwad, after going through my book *Expectations* (1998) observed :

*‘His (my) verse is easily comparable to that of Tagore,  
Naidu, Kaliprasad Ghose and V.K. Gokak’.*  
(*World Literature Today*, Winter 2000, University of  
Oklahoma, USA, p. 242)

Austin Kehoe, Commissioning Editor, Melrose Books, London, after assessing *Destination* conveyed :

*‘This is an important social document and a moving  
collection of poems that charts the history of a man  
and his country with eloquence and perspicacity  
and will no doubt leave its mark on all readers’.*

Dr B.K. Dubey, Vidyasagar Mahavidyalya, C.K. Town, Bengal, characterizes me as ‘Poet of Knowledge and Wisdom’. (*New Indian English Poetry and the Poets*, Foreword, 2007)

5) The writers who influenced you the most?

I could not pursue a planned educational career as I had to earn to learn. English happened to be the only subject in which I could get Master’s degree without regular class attendance. My participation in the freedom struggle directed a greater part of my attention to nonacademic pursuits. It is a confession that I did not read any of the prescribed textbooks or the suggested reference sources. The proficiency in English which I had been developing ever since my school days, despite my rural background, had been an asset. Just as Charles Dickens claimed himself to be a graduate of London streets, likewise adversity had been my varsity and optimistic outlook my tool of learning from the ups and downs of life. Dr V.K. Gokak, after going through my published work assessed, thus, the influences on me :

*‘All these reveal an innate sensibility which is lighted up  
by experience and intensified by a highly sensitive  
temperament with its roots in solid bed soil in experience’.*

Being not a voracious reader, I can not precisely tell as to who influenced me the most. But I admire Bertrand Russel for his objective exposition. My inquisitiveness and brevity of style reflect his impact on me.

6) What is your ambition in life?

Ambition rather destination of life is determined by one’s philosophy of life : attitude towards mundane affairs, because

attitudes lead to magnitude or slide towards lassitude depending on their nature. God has blessed every creature with a distinctive quality, which should be discovered and developed for making the world richer in thought and nobler in deeds than the one in which one was born.

*“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  
While facing ups and downs of life”.*

(Ibid.,p.124)

Regarding my ambition :

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

(Ibid.,p.125)

7) Being aware of the harsh reality that poetry fetches no money, what did impel you to take it up?

*“A writer soars in higher domains  
He is seldom led by worldly gains  
He ignores, what his slightsers 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 brawls”.*

(Ibid.,p.75)

Refer in this context to my reply to question 2 also.

8) Have you published any books of poetry so far?

My books in poetry include : *Aspirations* (1980), *Yearnings* (1987), *Expectations* (1998) and *Destination* (2007). I am my own publisher. The poems comprising an earlier publication have to be included in the succeeding one so that they do not get out of print. *Destination* contains all the poems written by me so far.

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

The scientific bent of mind keeps me inquisitive and renders my writing both concise and precise. 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’.*

(Ibid., p. 9)

10) Who are the living English poets who impress you?

I will use the term ‘writer’ instead of ‘poet’. Of the younger (younger than I though not still young) living English writers Mrs Chandramoni Narayanaswamy and Dr O.P. Arora impress rather fascinate me. They are superb whether they write in prose or verse. A single poem by each; ‘Sunflower’ by Mrs Narayanaswamy and ‘August 15, 2009’ by Prof. Arora are enough to impart them distinction among the living poets.

11) Your comments about the Central Government-aided institutions and their attitude towards talented writers. About the Sahitya Akademi also.

I sent a copy of *Destination* (poems) to National Council of Educational Research and Training. The Head, Department of Languages, NCERT appreciated the deep understanding of life, high ideals and the great linguistic skill which my poems reflected

but expressed inability to include any of them in the textbooks due to departmental procedures.

I have no experience of Sahitya Akademi.

A copy of *Destination* was sent to World Congress of Poets, a constituent of World Academy of Arts and Culture, approved by UNESCO. Within weeks it was intimated that as recognition of merit of *Destination* the WCP would confer on me the Honorary Doctorate Degree of Literature.

Facts speak. Comments are not necessary.

12) Have you ever attended any poets meet? Your impressions thereof.

I became a life member of International Association of Poets, Essayists and Novelists (IAPEN) in September 2008. Neither the membership card nor any notice about its meet has been received so far.

13) I learnt that you write poetry in Urdu and Punjabi also. The Urdu poets who impressed you?

In the prepartition Punjab Urdu was the medium of instruction for primary education. English was taught as a compulsory and Persian as an elective subject thereafter. I had a tendency to look distinct among my classmates. Hence for the matric exam I opted to answer the question paper of History in English instead of Urdu. History books in English at school level were not easily available in rural areas. I had to translate the lessons from Urdu into English. That improved my grammatical knowledge and enriched my vocabulary. Hence I felt at ease while expressing myself in English right from my school days.

As a hobby I translate my poems in English into Urdu and Punjabi. The readers observe that the translated pieces create a deeper thrill than the original ones.

It is an undeniable fact that cutting across the language barriers Tagore and Iqbal were the icons of my generation.

14) What are the major problems faced by Indian writers in English?

One handicap faced by Indian writers, whether in English or in any regional language, is common i.e. lack of responsive publishers.

Melrose Books, London, after highlighting the merit of *Destination*, offered to publish 1000 copies thereof at a cost of £ 4599.00, about 4½ lacs in Indian currency. It cost me 1/15th of that amount to publish the same number in my home town. For getting their books published abroad, Indian writers have to part with a major part of their savings.

An Indian publisher, after eulogizing the contents of one of my books in prose, proposed to publish its 2nd edition (500 copies) if half of the cost was paid. He assured that the subsequent editions to which I was not required to subscribe would be quite lucrative. He charged Rs. 15,000.00 in advance and sent me in a patronising tone 25 copies thereof. His stock of 500 does not seem to exhaust. I often ruefully recollect what Jomo Kenyatta, a renowned Kenyan leader, observed something like it in a pathetic tone :

When champions of the campaign ‘White Man’s Burden’ landed in Africa, the pastures were with the natives. After their self-imposed obligation had been carried out, the campaigners became landlords and the natives their serfs.

That publisher is profit earner of the book financed by me and I have the nominal claim to be its author who paid Rs. 600.00 for each copy doled to him.

15) Any suggestion for fellow writers?

No doubt the attitude of governments, whether state or central, towards writers in English is deplorable and the publishers treat them as colonies, yet the situation is not dismal for those who have perseverance and do not write for monetary consideration.

English is an official language in 44 countries of the world. My poem ‘Sunset’ in *East-West Voices*, Mangalore, 1988, attracted the attention of Virginia Rhodos as far away as Argentina in South America. She translated that into Spanish and included it in

*Carta Internacional Poesia*, 1993 (International Poetry Letter). She processed my poem 'Tree to Man' likewise in the Spring 1996 issue.

February 24 is observed as Black History Day in many parts of USA. My poem 'Martin Luther King' was recited with gusto in one such gathering there in 2008.

A researcher from Indian School of Mines University, Dhanbad, submitted the dissertation 'National Consciousness in the Poetry of Hazara Singh' in 2008-09 for M.Phil., setting the trend that new voices have something worthwhile to be assessed.

I end with one of my haikus :

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

- o -

***Apostle of Non-Violence, Hazara Singh, Self publisher, Ludhiana, 2007, pp. 38, Rs 50.00***

**Reviewed by**

**Dr Ruth Wildes Schuler, 94 Santa Maria Drive, Novato, CA 9494 - 3737 (USA)**

This small book by Hazara Singh is a marvelous text. The three individuals discussed in it are Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King. It starts with poems about Non-Violence and World Peace, followed by essays titled. 'Gandhi and Gandhism', and 'Relevance of Gandhian Thought Today'.

The highlight of this book, though for me, is the one-act play called 'Valley of Elysium'. The setting is Tolstoy Farm in a valley named by Mahatma Gandhi associating it with the great Russian writer, Leo Tolstoy. There are only three characters in the play, Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King. They all meet after their assassinations. Together they discuss their philosophies of non-violence and the state of world. They all feel that freedom is the most important goal to strive for.

Gandhi tells Lincoln "*I told my countrymen, if India was to become free, a part of her population could not be condemned as untouchable. Position of a person should be judged from his worth and not assigned according to his birth*".

All felt the importance of women and Lincoln tells Gandhi, "*It is only the properly groomed women who, as mothers, can bring up a generation free from hatred, fearless in action, and rational in thinking*".

Martin Luther King is the last to arrive in the valley and he tells others *“I cherished your dream that the day was not far off when our nation would understand in full the truth that all human beings are created equal. I longed to see the day when sons of the former slaves and those of the former slave owners would regard themselves as brothers. The hope inspired me that my nation would soon begin to judge her people not from the colour of their skin but by the content of their character”*.

Lincoln further states *“Fearless death for a noble cause is the noblest legacy for posterity. Socrates waged a crusade against sham, barren traditions and oppressive authority with his unwavering voice of truth. He had to drink a cup of poison, but his martyrdom ushered in an era of reason and truth”*.

Gandhi replies *“Reason reveals truth and truth imparts fearlessness to human souls. Socrates gave this message through his words and deeds”*.

All the three sacrificed their lives in the effort to bring freedom to all human beings by non-violence.

This book has beautiful portraits of all three men and poems about both Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King. It concludes with a thrilling episode, ‘A Day with Frontier Gandhi’. This is really a thought-provoking book and I highly recommend it.

- o -

***Seasonal Festivals and Commemorative Days, Hazara Singh, Self-publisher, Ludhiana, 2010, pp. 87, Rs 100.00***

**Reviewed by**

**Mrs Chandramoni Narayanaswamy I.A.S. (Retd.), Vivekanand Marg, Bhubaneswar**

Prof. Hazara Singh is not only a scholar and writer but also a freedom fighter and a social activist. He is the coordinator of Free Thinkers Forum, so his outlook is unfettered by dogmas and cultural barriers. The thrust of this book is two-fold — to acquaint the younger generations and the NRIS with the significance of seasonal festivals of undivided Punjab and at the same time, to sieve off the superstitions propagated by the priestly class to entrench their own vested interests. This task is attempted with an objective approach and a rational outlook.

Festivals are of two types – seasonal and religious. Holi and Diwali observed all over India; Pongal in Tamil Nadu; Naukhai in Orissa and Onam in Kerala are seasonal festivals. Ram Naumi, Janamashtami, Eid and Christmas are religious festivals. Seasonal festivals are often given, a religious colouring but this is mostly the outcome of superstitions. Essentially these are occasions for merrymaking and thanksgiving to mother earth and the elements for their bounty. This aspect is vividly brought out in this book.

The author deals at length with three most important seasonal festivals of Punjab; Lohri, Holi and Baisakhi and two minor festivals of Nirjal Ekadshi and Teean. In the chapter on Lohri (derived from till rori) which is celebrated by throwing sesame seeds (till) and pieces of country made jaggery (rori) in ceremonial fire, it is impressed that the real significance is not the blind preference for

sons but the shedding of idleness, as it is the beginning of agricultural season and the time to start working. It is stated that the preference for sons got necessitated with the continual depletion of male population due to heavy casualties in wars. But now the time has come to revive Lohri as a community festival rather than as an invocatory festivity.

The write-up on “Holi” should be an eye-opener to all who try to fan communal passions, for it reveals that “Hindu” originally meant a resident of Hindustan; so all Indians were Hindus. Thus Holi, originating from the Sanskrit word *Hola* meaning ‘ear of wheat and pod of grain’, the main ingredients of Holi feasts, used to be celebrated by Hindus and Muslims alike. It was only from the time of Aurangzeb that fanatics started disassociating themselves from the celebrations and taking exception to the festivities. The British exploited it to strengthen their ‘divide and rule’ policy. This revelation is of great relevance to communal harmony and national integration.

Baisakhi which marks the advent of the harvesting season and is celebrated as an expression of joy at the rich harvest to be reaped, acquired historical and political significance over the years. It became Foundation Day of the Khalsa and the Namdhari Sikhs and ultimately a milestone in the history of freedom movement when the Jalianwala Bag massacre was perpetrated on that day. The nation reacted as one person and the intensity of freedom struggle reached a high pitch. Even now the word Baisakhi immediately recalls Jallianwala Bagh carnage to the mind of every Indian. The author has highlighted these aspects in a very lucid and systematic manner.

Nirjala Ekadshi is a festival which ought to be ‘nationalised’ and observed by all in India because all are concerned about water scarcity and water conservation. Minimizing the consumption of water (we cannot eliminate it completely) at least for one day in a year will arouse awareness about the mindless waste of this precious commodity. The flouting of this restraint emphasized by the author should be noted particularly.

*Teean* is a charming festival meant for women in Punjab. It is interesting to mention here that all regions have festivals

exclusively meant for women; for example *Kolu* in the south and *Rajo* in Orissa.

One chapter is devoted to explaining how and why the dates of festivals keep changing from time to time. Shri Singh has given a lot of useful information about the various calendar years which are in vogue in India; Gregorian, Vikrami and Saka, how they evolved and to what extent they differ both from one another and the lunar calendar.

In the chapters on Commemorative Days the significance of Army Day, May Day, Teachers Day and Children Day is explained; that of May Day in the Indian as well as international context. The points highlighted in this part of the book should be an eyeopener for every Indian—our willing subjugation to slavery, aping the colonial masters and perpetuating the last lingering vestiges of colonial rule by incorporating them in our constitution. It is indeed unfortunate that at the Amar Jawan Jyoti the names of Indian soldiers who died fighting for Britain and her Allies in the World Wars still precede the post-independence martyrs. One can only hope that this slight to our national pride is removed quickly by correcting each anomaly. In the chapters on Teachers Day and Children Day, the author gives several useful tips to parents and teachers. While explaining the significance of Children Day he covers all aspects of child development — child rearing, family planning, education, children literature and toy industry. The Ministry of Family Welfare should take note of his observation

*‘A single child in the family suffers from loneliness, two children make it an ideal unit, three make it look like a crowd, four turn it into a mob and five or more render it a yelling demonstration’*

while promoting the two-child norm.

This is an excellent book which any book lover would love to possess. It has special relevance at the present juncture when awareness about our cultural heritage and important historical events is diminishing fast. The book should find place in every college library and approved as recommended reading for students.

# Reminiscences of Quit India Movement

(Hazara Singh)

The chapter of Fundamental Duties in the Constitution of India enjoins us to cherish the memories of freedom struggle as well as to imbibe its noble ideals for translating political independence into social justice. I am accordingly reminiscing my participation in the Quit India Movement, a milestone in our crusade against imperialism. I had been then F.Sc. (Non-Medical) student at Khalsa College Amritsar and had just crossed the teens.

## Background of the Movement

The Second World War broke out in Europe in September 1939. The leading European countries were divided into two warring groups, viz., the Axis powers and the Allies. The former comprised Germany and Italy and the latter to begin with consisted of U.K. and France. Later circumstances pushed China, U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. also into the camp of Allies. Japan sided with the Axis powers. The West had been crying itself hoarse that the war was between two clashing ideals of democracy and dictatorship, represented by Allies and the Axis powers respectively, but the people outside their fold understood it well that the leading industrial countries of Europe had resorted to arms, in spite of their being members of the League of Nations, to steal supremacy over each other in their respective pursuits of colonial loot. The Great Britain (U.K.) used to boast that the sun never set on the British Empire. Though it claimed to be the champion of democracy at home, yet it was the biggest imperialist power and was suppressing ruthlessly the freedom movements in its colonies. There was thus a contradiction in its professions and practices. France that gave birth to Jean Jacques Rousseau, father of the slogan of equality, liberty and fraternity, was criminal to the same extent in that outrage against humanity. Germany, under the command of Hitler, was craving to settle the scores of humiliation inflicted on it after its defeat in the First World

War (1914-1918). Though it had been flirting with the freedom movements in the colonies under the British and French rules, yet its real aim was to become the super power of world, because it was suffering from the phobia of being a master race.

Japan was also dreaming to become the Great Britain of Asia by snatching an equally vast empire. It attacked Chinese Mainland in the mid thirties without any provocation. The Indian National Congress showed its fraternal sympathy with China. India being herself a colony was not in a position to help the Chinese militarily. At the suggestion of Pandit Nehru a medical relief team including Dr Dwarka Das Kotnis was sent to China. Dr Kotnis died in harness there. His achievements were later screened in the form of a film 'Dr Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani'. Thus the slogan 'Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai', which was echoed by Nehru and Chou En-Lai while signing the Panch Sheel Declaration in 1954, had its roots in the fraternal and cultural ties between these two countries since ages.

Chiang Kai-shek was at that time supremo of China. The leftist elements led by Mao Tse-tung were fighting a sort of war of liberation against him. The past association of Nehru with the ousted Chiang Kai-shek who fled to Taiwan, kept a lurking doubt in the minds of leftist leaders that he was pro-Chiang Kai-shek. Hence their beaming smiles concealed their cynical scepticism.

In just a couple of years after the outbreak of War, the German forces overran France and crossing the Mediterranean began to push back the British forces at all the fronts. Aden, the invincible gateway of the British Empire to Arabian Sea was in an imminent danger.

The blizzardous advance of Japanese forces in the Far East and the falling of Singapore, considered to be invincible naval fortress of the Empire, on February 15, 1942, made the British so panicky that they formulated a scorched earth policy regarding India which included blowing up of important bridges and destroying industrial installations in order to deny them to the Japanese in the event of their invading India.

The British who were on retreat on all the fronts, were not in a position to defend India. Important cities in the U.K. were also under constant bombardment by the Nazis.

When the War broke out in September 1939, the Governor General and Viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgo, declared the participation of India into that war against the Nazis even without consulting the Indian National Congress, which had its governments in majority of the provinces in India. The Congress Ministries resigned to register their protest and Gandhiji thereafter launched the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement, which aimed at rousing public opinion against the forced participation of India in the War. The Communist Party of India so far had been very vocal in its condemnation of the British moves. When quite unexpectedly Germany attacked Russia in June 1941, the attitude of the Communist Party of India got changed suddenly. The war against Nazis was pronounced to be People's War (the name of party weekly magazine was accordingly changed from *People's Age* to *People's War*). CPI began to give a secondary consideration to the aspirations of Indian masses for freedom. Earlier in January 1941, workers of the Punjab Kirti Party, a constituent unit of CPI, had helped Subhas Chander Bose in his dramatic escape from India to Kabul. Thereafter Subhas too began to be denounced by the communist leaders.

In August 1942, the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi appealed to the British Government that :

- i as Britain was neither in a position to defend herself nor India;
- ii as the war was not between the noble ideals of democracy and the fascist aspirations of dictatorship, but was a mad race between imperialist powers; and
- iii as India was in an imminent danger from east by a massive Japanese invasion

so the British in their own interest as well as in that of Indian people should quit India.

A formal resolution to the effect was moved on August 8, 1942 by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru at a special session of the AICC called at Bombay, and presided over by the Congress President, Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad. The colonial Government of India in a pre-emptive bid outlawed the Indian National Congress and arrested top Congress leaders in the early hours of 9th August. The masses in spite of their being stunned by that sudden move by the government did not take long to recover from the shock. Ram Manohar Lohia and Mrs Aruna Asif Ali of the Congress Socialist Party, who escaped arrest in the first round, led the protest by remaining in the background. The Government suppressed the movement ruthlessly enacting the barbarity reminiscent of its 1857 retaliation. Almost every active Congress worker was hounded and arrested. The movement though nipped yet led to a sort of national resurgence.

### **Birth of Students Congress**

It pinched that the All India Students Federation became a mouthpiece of Communist Party of India. In fact the latter's attitude amounted to extraterritorial loyalty. This slip on its part kept it isolated for long from the intelligentsia as well as the masses.

In February 1943 Gandhiji went on a fast for twenty one days in the Jail. We held prayer meetings in all the educational institutions. The response of people was spontaneous and resistance by the police was not as harsh as it used to be earlier. A wave of nationalism was permeating the services even.

Though my studies got dislocated occasionally, due to my political activities, yet I won scholarship in the intermediate examination which was confiscated by the then government.

In February 1945, a meeting of those student workers who differed with the policies of All India Students Federation was held at Lahore, where a provincial unit of the Students Congress was raised. Iqbal Singh of S.N. College, Lahore was elected its first President. I succeeded him in the Rawalpindi Session held in December 1945. I was arrested on the earlier night on the basis of a warrant secured by the Rawalpindi Police.



The Students Congress responded to the call of National Defence Committee formed under the chairmanship of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru for defending the INA heroes against their proposed court-martial. It had been a yeoman's service which the Students Congress rendered to the freedom struggle. My arrest at Rawalpandi related to those activities. Not only the INA personnel were saved from gallows en mass, but the Indian National Congress got a great help also through our Save-INA Campaign in the general elections to the Central and Provincial Assemblies held thereafter.

### **Quit India Movement in Retrospect**

After a long span exceeding six decades, I reminisce the Quit India Movement as follows :

- i The ideals which led to the call of Quit India Movement became later the foundation of the non-aligned movement, because the underlying purpose of both the moves had been to caution the big powers to leave the colonies/developing countries to their own lot.
- ii Extraterritorial loyalty on the part of a political party robs it of credibility.
- iii Freedom fighters should not have felt complacent after the country achieved independence. They allowed an erroneous impression to spread that India got her independence without shedding a drop of blood. That amounted to disowning the contribution of militant nationalists, Ghadar Party, HSRA and INA to the crusade against imperialism. This indifference on the part of freedom fighters prompted the opportunists and money bags to penetrate into the political parties to share the spoils. The moral fabric of nation has been thus weakened. A welcome step was taken by Mrs Indira Gandhi to revive the memories of freedom struggle when the Silver Jubilee of Independence was celebrated at national level in 1972 and that put the surviving freedom fighters to introspection.

The Diamond Jubilee of Independence is an occasion for the nation to pause and ponder for consolidating the gains and overcoming the drawbacks.

## **Universality of Hazara Singh's Poems**

**Dr S. Kumaran\***

Indian poetry in English which covers a period of about 150 years has a notable place in the history of Indian literature. This paper attempts to analyse how Hazara Singh, a trilingual poet from Punjab, who represents the post-independence Indian English poetry, projects his vision of life and the universality of Indian English poetry through his verses. This analysis is based on the select poems from *Destination* (2007) which contains all of his verses published earlier in *Aspirations* (1980), *Yearnings* (1987) and *Expectations* (1999).

*“Hazara Singh is one of the poets of contemporary Indian English poetry who deserves to be discussed with the poets of the present scenario.... The patriots, martyrs, freedom fighters, nationalists and internationalists come to cram the pages of his poetry” (B.K. Dubey: 2009).*

Some of the prominent themes of Singh's poetry include: importance of culture, human mind, self-realisation, social consciousness, degradation of moral values, humanistic vision of life, nonsense of politics, corruption in society and the problems and benefits of old age.

Hazara Singh is a writer with purpose. The poet reveals the worth of a writer in “Clean and Bright World”. He asserts ‘a writer soars in higher domains’ as ‘he is seldom led by worldly gains’. He also compliments ‘sweeper’ and ‘reformer’ along with ‘writer’ for their contribution in making the world ‘cleaner and brighter’.

---

\* Department of English, University College of Engineering, Tindivonam, Saran-604307 (T.N.)

The poet discloses his views on poetic pursuits in “Poetry”. He believes that poetry is not a ‘romantic thrill’ or ‘a mode of invocation’ to be ‘inspired by powers divine’. He holds ‘poetry is not a choice of words’ but ‘a spontaneous expression/of feelings noble and sublime’. He affirms :

*‘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’.*

His poem “Human Spirit” spells out his yearnings which seek ‘social change and equity’ to bring about ‘an era of love and amity’. The spirit tries to shatter the ‘imposed norms of life’ in the name of caste system in India and resists ‘unfair codes and norms’ that try to ‘harass’ it. The spirit represented by the poet transcends cultural barriers and reflects universal outlook.

To monitor the activities of human spirit, the poet proposes refinement as guide in “Culture” and also cautions about its pitfalls in “Where”. He finds culture as a source of light that dispels darkness and compares it with the bee which ‘gives sweetness and light’. Moreover, he asserts that a cultured person would not sit idle as he accepts doing his duty as a sort of worship. In fact he espouses that God perceived man as a cultured being which reflects God’s own image. The poet holds:

*‘An idle brain is the playmate of devil  
A cultured man beams bright with grace’.*

The poet depicts the constant conflict between religion and science in “The Trio”. He points out that ‘religion promises heaven after death’ whereas ‘science assures it on the earth itself’. Both have contrary domains which represent faith and doubt. The poet ends the poem with a positive note :

*‘The trio of letters, science and religion  
May evolve for man an exalting position’.*

Hazara Singh deplures bigotry in “Closed Mind” and enunciates the virtues which “Beauty of Mind” bestows. He exposes evils of envy through “Fire : Hot and Cold”. He says that in spite of its ‘dazzling flame’ fire never blurs one’s ‘power of sight’ and the flame with its ‘sizzling heat’ lends ‘joy to each home and hearth’. ‘But the cold fire of envy and hate’ having no flame or smoke consumes one’s ‘power of reason/depriving life of the joy, it holds’.

The poet declares forgiveness as a ‘goldy act’ in “Forgiving and Forgetting” and extols this act over ‘prayers and mass rituals’. He considers:

*‘Cursing is a abominal lapse or sin  
Robs worldly joys and bliss of heaven’.*

The poet underscores the failings of human mind in “Enemies Within”. He avers that one harms and degrades oneself, even without having any foe, by succumbing to anger; ‘frothy tongue’ speaks improper words and turns thinking ‘base and perverse’. He holds firmly:

*‘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’.*

In “Why Blame Others” the poet advises fellow beings not be accuse others for their own shortcomings which get created by their ‘inflated ego and biting malice’. He feels that they ‘cloud power to think and sense to feel’ and spread bitterness through loose tongue which ‘keeps estranging even kith and kin’. They disturb one’s sleep, mar joys of life and ‘add to tension pushing up blood pressure’. Moreover ego and malice turn a normal person into a mentally deranged one.

The poet highlights the salient qualities of a poised mind in “Sobriety”, which involves :

*‘An inclination to let everyone speak  
Tendency to listen to all with care  
And ability to sift all that is said’.*

The poet discusses a perturbed mind in “Tension”. He holds that tension or depression *‘exhibits a weak mind’*. Each renders a person unsteady to carry on even his normal routine despite his possessing ability. On the other hand *‘a steadfast person does not feel nervous’* for he *‘accepts all ups and downs as part of life’*. By keeping tension away from oneself, one gets *‘applauded by one and all for his firmness’*.

The poet indicts the evils of ungratefulness in “Ingratitude” which *‘bites too deep’* only those who are not *‘just to all’*. They are not *‘led by equity and merit’* and resort to denouncing their proteges as ungrateful wretches when they *‘act likewise’*.

The poet adds a new dimension to loneliness in “Lonesomeness”. He reveals that lonesomeness affects only those who do not attune themselves to the *‘songs of life’*. He suggests:

*‘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’.*

In “On Erring,” the poet extols God as a never erring entity and holds erring as a part of human nature only. The man who *‘realises the lapse on his part’* and *‘strives not to do so again’* reflects God’s image and *‘that, who keeps on defaulting/not caring how he goes astray/is a brute, mindless and wicked/doomed to subhuman existence’*. Further he underlines *‘he who, given to flaunt an error/without any feeling of remorse/is a demon, vicious and callous/more harmful than even a brute’*.

In “Bed of Thorns,” the poet laments the acts of nagging, backbiting and suspicion and reveals their potent harm. A person who is *‘tortured by a suspicious self’* is his own enemy, *‘loses clear thinking and peace of mind’* and *‘tosses on a bed of thorns all his life’*.

The poet cautions against the vice of disliking fellow beings in “Hatred”. He compares hatred to raging loo that makes lovely places look desolate. It sizzles fine feelings into wickedness and chokes reason by depraving the mind. As such it is *‘a vile self-inflicted torture’* and *‘a malevolent vice or a mental disorder’*.

The poet depicts the fruits of self-realisation in “Know Thyself”. He observes:

*‘Air exists, is felt, but is not seen  
Fire though visible cannot be caught  
Water can be held but has no shape’.*

Birds and beasts have life but do not possess mind. It is man alone who combines all these attributes and, thus, tops the order of nature. The poet says further that it is the talent of reason that distinguishes man from *‘a bird or beast’*. Due to his reasoning power, man reaps the fruits of *‘truth, knowledge, love and dignity’*.

“On Friendship” reveals various aspects of this most valued human relationship. The poet avows that *‘a friend is like an oasis/in the latent desert of life’* and a friendless person is a stranger *‘even among the jostling crowds’*. He finds that friendship is based on four different considerations:

attachment with an influential person for personal gains;

forming and changing affiliations according to convenience and not conviction;

teaming with a person of matching merit and congruent inclinations for betterment and socialisation and above all

sticking to lofty principles not swayed by the expediency of changing situation.

In the last category falls the person:

*'Friend of all, yet befriended by a few'.*

The poet's analysis of the situation of post-independence India is realistic. The celebration of Golden Jubilee of Independence offered an occasion to introspect how and why India, master stroke of geological process, got enslaved and was *'outwitted, looted, often disgraced'*. He identifies some of the causes that aggravate the sad condition of Indian society and they include, casteism, *'faith in the hallowed past'* which *'overlooked the present,'* and the impairment of Indians by *'traditional taboos'*. The poet also cautions :

*'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 golden jubilee functions'.*

The poet chides *'dynastic rules'* that derail democracy, indicts the politicians without principles and stresses:

*'A vow to resist the clique of money and muscle  
May complement high ideals of freedom struggle'.*

In "India Is Shining" the poet depicts the evils ailing Indian society. He finds that the actions of policy makers do not address the needs of Indian working classes. The public servants have no attachment with the masses whom they *'are paid to serve'*. Even *'principles of policy laid down for the State/for securing a progressive social order'* are not followed. Consequently the country *'got graded as a poor and corrupt management'*. How sad!

*'Yatras, riots, walkouts and loose alliances  
Are devised as the power capturing tactics'.*

The poet makes sarcastic remarks on the politicians of contemporary India and exposes the degradation of our political fabric in "The Netajan". The poem was written in 1996, against the backdrop of Olympics in which India, the second most populous country of the world, failed to bag even a single medal.

The poet deplores the state of judicial system in "Goddess of Justice". He refers to the piling of cases which keep exceeding *'tens of billions'* but remain undecided because the Goddess of Justice does *'not seem to move even at snail's speed'*. The poet states that judicial process is a plaything of the rich whose lawyers *'observe not the avowed ethics'* but contrive delaying, thus, rendering Goddess of Justice *'both helpless and blind'*.

Hazara Singh displays rare patriotism and denounces the sinister designs of colonialism through his sonnets commemorating Mahatma Gandhi, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Bhagat Singh, Udhham Singh and Subhas Chander Bose. In "Gandhi in Africa" he praises Gandhi for having changed the plight of coloured people. Singh feels that *'Gandhi showed them light'* with truth as his guide and fearlessness as his weapon. He shunned *'pride and hate'*. He did not dislike even his enemies as he was *'an apostle of peace, crusader for goodwill'*. Though *'frail in frame'*, Gandhi was *'strong in mind'* and succeeded, not by raising armies, but through peaceful means. He *'preached and followed the gospel of Lord'*, thus, impressing *'the lowest has also the right to equity'*.

In "Mahatma Gandhi" the poet commends Gandhi for having turned *'a motley crowd'* which was *'devoid of feelings or notions'* into beings who would make a budding nation. Through precepts and practices, Gandhi moulded the attitude of people and removed their fear. He *'treated the untouchables as children of God'* and *'raised women high in various fields of life'*. Further, Hazara Singh affirms that Gandhiji gave *'the Tricolour to symbolise our aims'* and laid down his life *'to curb communal strife'*.

In “Kartar Singh Sarabha” the poet acclaims Sarabha who organised abroad a patriotic force to exhort the Indian army to rise against the British rule. The campaign did not succeed. He was hanged to death at the tender age of 19 in the Central Jail, Lahore on November 16, 1915. His last wish at the gallows was to continue to be born in India and be hanged again and again till the country got liberated. The poet commends Sarabha as a ‘*meteor*’ that showed ‘*light when darkness of slavery hovered on all sides*’. The ‘*spark*’ he ‘*kindled grew into a flame*’ and made Bhagat Singh one of his ardent followers.

In “Bhagat Singh” Hazara Singh applauds Bhagat Singh for having broken ‘*the chains which enslaved the motherland*’ and for his having ‘*decried that imperialism was a heinous crime*’ against man. Bhagat Singh also raised a ‘*revolutionary band,*’ to wipe out imperialism and consequently ‘*sulking India got upsurged by their heroic rhyme*’.

In “Ram Mohammed Singh Azad” the poet praises Udham Singh who was determined to avenge the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. Udham Singh succeeded in redeeming his pledge at Caxton Hall, London, by killing O’ Dwyer, who as the then Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, had justified the carnage by the army. Udham Singh was hanged to death on July 31, 1940 and during the trial he declared his name as Ram Mohammed Singh Azad to symbolise his aspirations of secular India.

Hazara Singh extols Subhas Chandra Bose for having restored the lost honour by reviving the valour of Indians. His ‘*clarion call awakened*’ people ‘*from an age-old slumber*’ and thus their ‘*heads rose high*’. Further, the poet says as ‘*Liberator of the East,*’ Bose ‘*rang imperialism’s knell*’ and his epochal exploits will never be forgotten by the Indians.

In “Thus Was Born Sonar Bangla” the poet hails the formation of Bangladesh but denounces the paradoxical role of both USA and China in that development.

“Wail of a Bangla Girl” is a pathetic narration of unprecedented havoc and genocide perpetrated by Pakistani military junta in the then East Pakistan :

*‘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’.*

Through “Unbroken Will” the poet salutes the people of Bangladesh who were not deterred by the cruelties of military junta :

*‘Hamlets became citadels forgetting sobs and tears  
Teenagers took up arms with targets well selected  
Their daring deeds exceeded everyone’s conjecture’.*

The poet deprecates the evil of war and suggests mutual goodwill between countries as an alternative. In “China and India” the poet reminds both the countries ‘*close natural neighbours*’ that they have age-old ties ‘*cultural and religious*’. Hence they should direct all their policies ‘*to save mankind from degradation/remnant of imperialism or racial segregation*’.

Hazara Singh’s vision of human life is inspiring and constructive. In “Art of Life” he mentions the attributes that make life happy and meaningful. He extols health as ‘*a reliable friend in all ups and downs of life*’ and ranks ‘*virtue of patience*’ as the second exalting talent. He emphasizes on intellect which shows light ‘*whether day or night*’ and suggests along with ‘*a kind and considerable heart*’ to lead life as an art.

The poet reveals his perception of ultimate end in “Death”.

*‘A pathetic event in childhood  
A bolt from the blue in youth  
A welcome relief in old age’*

but

*‘A festival in company with friends  
Touching theme to muse for a poet  
Mere physical end for a realist’.*

Hazara Singh protests against subjugation as he holds dignity as an inalienable right of all human beings. In “Glory of Woman” he delineates her sacrificing nature. The persona in the poem is a woman who falsifies the notions held by men about her. She reveals herself as a mother whose ‘lap is as blissful as heaven’ and is a ‘free gift’. Her life ‘personifies’ ‘love is God’ which is a ‘divine trait’. She gives all she has and serves and suffers without grumbling. Moreover, she declares ‘jealousy’ is not her instinct and ‘frailty’ is not her name. She is not the ‘cause of wars’ and ‘these are the ravings of minds, petty and perverse’, who take her ‘as a doll lacking will or soul’ whereas she is ‘as sacred as heaven and as pious as the saints’.

In “I Am Child,” the poet questions the sayings like ‘spare the rod and spoil the child’ and ‘a child and a hoe, if beaten occasionally remain sharp’. In this poem, a child as persona asserts:

*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’.*

He suggests, instead,

*‘Oh! dear parents and wise nation builders  
Better to discard all such obsolete beliefs’.*

The poet broadcasts parental obligation in “To a Child : A Father’s Pledge’. The father affirms to the child that their ties are ‘a solemn bond/not of mere flesh and blood, but to groom you/as an earnest, upright and benign being’. He assures that he will not rebuke his child ‘in anger or conceit’, lest it should impel him ‘to berate others’. On the other hand he would cheer his son to add to his confidence, but not hesitate to instil in him sense of righteousness.

The poet’s assertion of connection between humans and nature is timely. He traces this association in “A Tree to Man”.

The tree reveals itself to man as his ‘all-round friend’ and reminds how his ancestors were also dependent on it :

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

It also cautions :

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

Hazara Singh depicts the sad plight of present-day middle class Indian homes in “Empty Homes and Nests,” He pities the neglected condition of children in families where both husband and wife are working. In many a case, ‘the child returns home in an expectant mood’ but finds it empty, ‘mother is not back from work’. Such a condition is unfavorable for a developing society.

The poet explains in “The Poor Keep Poor” why many people remain poor in spite of social change. They do not realise the importance of human life:

*‘Living on alms, they lose self-respect  
But use not their hands, heart and head  
A unison that keeps raising self-esteem’.*

In “Lolling,” the poet reveals the situations in which one avoids to work. He classifies them as lolling, indolence, laziness and idleness:

*‘Each mood reflects a set bent of mind  
Which the indulgent manages to defend’.*

The poet brands an idler ‘as minion of devil’ and adds to that category ‘common politicians’ and ‘beggars’.

The poet analyses the varying human trends in “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’.*

In “Retirement and Death” the poet evaluates the sameness between them:

*‘Retirement from service and death  
Are similar stages in one’s life  
Both mark the end of an activity  
With all its glory and indignity’.*

But they also differ as the date of retirement is known whereas the time of death is unpredictable.

The poet extols his liking for old age in ‘My Love’:

*‘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’.*

In “Second Childhood” the poet compares old age with second childhood. Each reflects its own peculiar charm. The innocence of a child *‘thrills even a stoic’* and the *‘grace of old age earns esteem everywhere’*.

The poet unveils the solitary life of the old and their manner of whiling time in “Old Age Pastime”. Pushed away from *‘social life’* the old resort to keeping the pets:

*‘Any healthy company the pets seldom give  
Seek lot of care to share their affection’.*

As such the poet finds writing as a better option :

*‘A prolific pen provides pleasant pastime  
Lets not the wielder feel lone, when alone’.*

Mellowed with experience, Hazara Singh

diagnoses almost every wordly malady exploring along  
with the corresponding remedy;  
has something worthwhile to tell to every reader,  
whatever be the age, gender or nationality  
and

believes ardently that the collective welfare of mankind is assured by mutual cooperation and not by confrontation.

As such his poems have a universal appeal. They recreate as well as elevate.

- o -

### Works Cited

Dubey, Bijay Kant, *A Short History of Indian English Poetry : A Brochure*, 2009

Hazara Singh, *Destination*, 2007, Foil Printers, Ludhiana

- o -