UNIT 2 HARIBHAJAN SINGH : TREE AND THE SAGE
TRANSLATION : J.S. RAHI AND RITA CHAUDHRY
RAGHUVIR SAHAY : THE STARE
TRANSLATION : THE POET

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall study two poets: Punjabi poet Haribhajan Singh and Hindi Poet Raghuvir Sahay. Both are important Indian poets. We shall begin with an outline of modern Punjabi poetry. After discussing the growth of modern Punjabi poetry we shall give the life sketch of Haribhajan Singh followed by an overview of his poetry. We shall then look more closely at his poem “I am a tree walking...” (from Tree and the Sage). With Raghuvir Sahay too, we shall follow basically the same pattern, beginning with life-sketchn an overview of his literary career, followed by a more detailed discussion of the prescribed poem “Stare”. After going through our discussion on their poems Rukh te Rishi (Tree and the Sage) and ‘Taktaki’ (The Stare) you will be in a position to appreciate their contribution to their respective languages and Indian poetry in general.

2.1 OUTLINE OF MODERN PUNjabi POETRY

Modern period of Punjabi poetry starts after 1850 and first fifty years are the transitional years, when modern idiom of Punjabi poetry is emerging. Several social political and religious movements influenced the modern Punjabi
Singh Sabha movement brought Bhai Vir Singh into limelight. He was one of the pioneers of this movement. In the last decade of the nineteen century, he wrote his first novel ‘Sundri’ but in the first decade of the twentieth century he wrote his epic ‘Rana Surat Singh’. After this epic continuously he wrote short poems, which were religious and metaphysical but this poetry was different in style and form. This religious and metaphysical poetry influenced other poets also. Prof. Puran Singh was other major poet who wrote his poetry in the third decade of twentieth century. His poems in ‘Khule Maiden (Open fields) were influenced by the poetic style of American poet Walt Whitman. Puran Singh wrote blank verse and continuously he influenced the other poets. Deewan Singh ‘Kalepani’ also wrote in the same style but he was more realistic and opposed the rising fascism and imperialism. Dhani Ram Chatrik also wrote in the realistic idiom. He was different because he was concerned with the folk culture of Punjab.

2.1.1 Progressive Poetry

In 1936 the Progressive Movement came into limelight in the whole of Indian Literature. Punjabi critic Sant Singh Sekhon under the influence of Marxism advocated progressive ideology. Because Indian people were fighting against British imperialism that was also the reason that progressive movement became very strong in Indian literature. Prof. Mohan Singh became the major progressive poet. He wrote ‘Saave Pattar’ (Green Leaves), ‘Kasumbr’ (Safflower) and ‘Adhvaate’ (Half-way) before the partition. Amrita Pritam in her poetic collection ‘Lok Piran’ (Pains of People) had already written about the tragedy of Bengal. About the partition she wrote ‘Mein Twareekh Han Hind Di’ (I am the history of India) and a new consciousness created a turn in Punjabi poetry and we reached the tendencies of poetry written after independence.

2.1.2 Post-independence Punjabi Poetry

a) Continuity of Progressive Poetry

Post-Independence Panjabi Poetry inherited progressive ideology from the pre-independence developments and the partition sharpened this outlook with a sense of loss and tragedy. The significant poets established before independence were still writing. Bhai Vir Singh published his selection Lehur Hulare (Swinging waves) in 1951 and his Sahit Academy award winning last poetic work Mere Satan Jio (O Mylord) was published in 1953. Amrita Pritam’s Mein Tawarikh Han Hind di (1950), which made a voice of partition tragedy, changed the theatics and language of Panjabi poetry. She cried for Waris Shah, who wrote the Kissa of Heer-Ranjha and created a signifier of composite Panjabi culture, Partition had slaughtered this culture:

I say unto Waris Shah
Today I implore Waris Shah
to speak up from his grave
and turn over a page of
the Book of Love.

.............
Mohan Singh in his *Kach Sach* (Half Truth) (1950), remembered Baba Nanak and said “O baba come and see, your land is ruined. Amrita published *Sarghi Vela* (Morning Time) (1951), *Sunehre* (Messages) (1955) and this progressive voice created the atmosphere of futuristic socialistic idealism.

The era of Nehruism and the influence of Soviet socialism had also become significant now. Mohan Singh in ‘*Kach Sach*’ celebrated the socialist revolution in China and wrote rhetorically against imperialism and capitalism. He published *Awazan* (Voices) (1959), when in Panjab the peasant-movement and in whole of the world peace movement was strong. In his *Vadhya Wela* (Early Morning) (1958), *Jandre* (Locks) (1964), *Jai Mir* (Cheer Chieftain) (1968) also, he spoke in progressive voice.

But progressive movement was declining during the sixties. Even other progressive poets of that generation were declining. Piara Singh Sehrai published a *Same di Vog* (Strand of Time) (1951), *Van-Trin* (Wild Trees) (1970), *Guzargah* (Passage) (1974), *Batah Waqat Dian* (To converse about time) (1985), *Geet Maria Nahin Karde* (Songs cannot die) (1988), *Sangeet de Khambh* (Feathers of Music) (1992). He was one of the major progressive poet, but during this span, the atmosphere changed, the split in the movement and progressive parties influenced the destiny of this poetry.


Bawa Balwant created a distinctive voice in this progressive poetry. He published his *Bandargah* (Port-harbour) in 1951 and *Sugandh Sameer* (Sweet fragrance) in 1959. He was distinctive because of his imagery and conscious use of Indian mythology. He reinterpreted myths from Marxist point of view. Urdu poet Iqbal and Hindi poet Nirala also influenced his poetry. For him *Usha* (Morning) becomes the symbol of revolution:

**Usha**

O the diffusion of the universal light,
the darling of the day and the night!
Countless colours dissolve in the glow of the moon and the stars.
It flows like Ganga from the big eyes of the Shiva-like sky.
O Usha! O the charioteer of the suns,
Dispel my darkness!

b) Experimentalist Punjabi poetry

During sixties experimental movement raised its voice against the Romantic-progressive and traditional poetry. The poets belonging to this movement said “a new industrial metropolitan society has changed the atmosphere and previous trends are not coping with the transformations or new social-contradictions. So a conscious change is must”. A new experimental manifesto was released. These poets discussed the poetry of T.S. Eliot and other modernist tendencies in the western literature. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia,
Ravinder Ravi, Ajaib Kamal were the major poets who started this experimentalist movement. Ahluwalia published his book *Kaagaz da Rawan* (The Paper-Ravna) in 1964, and this poem also created a stir:

**Kaagaz da Ravan**

I, a Paper Ravan
The glimmering of the stars
the hustle and bustle of the streets
and the colourful company of the friends-
these bandits make away with my fortune
in the twinkling of an eye.

..............


Time has stopped
like death in the body-
even so people
were running round and around.
What sort of calm island is this?

..............

After the decline of Romantic-progressive poetry, we have the parallel developments in Panjabi poetry. Pritam Singh Safar turned towards neo-mystic trend. Jaswant Singh Neki, who emerged as one of the major poets is also a new metaphysical poet. But his two long poems ‘Simrti de Kiran ton Pehlan’ (Before vanishing the memory) and ‘Karuna di Chho ton Magron’ (After the touch of Agony) have created a new norm in the history of Panjabi long poems. He has also written his autobiography *Koi Noon Na Jane Mera* (No body knows my name) (2000) in poetry. Because you have to study Dr. Haribhan Singh’s long poem, you can also have some glimpse of Neki’s long poem ‘Simrti de Kiran ton Pehlan’ for a comparative analysis.

‘Simrti de Kiran ton Pehlan’ was written in 1965, but he published this poem after the span of ten years. This is not a narrative poem, rather a deep and philosophic poem. The poet selects symbols, themes and images from Indian classics, Indian mythology, especially Kath-Upnishad becomes the source, but thematic dimensions are new. For him the myth of Nachiketa and Yam is very significant. He is in search of Nav-Nachiketa. He raises the questions regarding the mystery of life and death:-

Even a mystery exists before death
There is a mystery even after death
and this double mystery
only Nav-Nachiketa can know
because he can be the guest of both life and death.
This Nav-Nachiketa has its roots not only in traditional mythic character, rather it transcends and becomes a consciousness beyond that mythicaity, it becomes futuristic also.

In this eternal spacio-time the poet discusses life, death, love, passion, attachment, pleasures, renunciation, penance, existence-non-existence, illusion-reality, belief- non belief, faith-doubt, eternal — non eternal, memory — non memory. The poet creates these kinds of binary oppositions in the development of this long poem.

The poet thinks that he could have the glimpse of this mystery. There is an eternal circle, and on that circle there is a sign, the eternal circularity from both sides meets at that sign. The Yum is the master of that sign. When we cross that sign we lose out memories. We can see how the poet creates the signifiers in this poem. To understand this poetic process we must know the totality of experience, because the mythic consciousness and aesthetics are merging in this creation. The poet, in the vicissitudes of experience defines beauty:

**Beauty**

Beauty is neither in flower  

nor in the eye,  

It is in desire of flower for the eye  
It is in the desire of eye  
Yearning to embrace the flower

In this poem the poet defines philosophically various things which we deal with in arts and knowledge, but the signification is in his orientalist point of view. That is the reason this poem is also important ideologically in the development of modern Punjabi poetry.

In a creative way, he rejects the traditional progressive and narrative poetries, which did not believe in this kind of neo-metaphysical and neo-orientalist ideology, he also rejects that kind of lyrical poetries which could not grasp the philosophical depths of creativity, he also transcends the traditional mode of poetry and his own understanding of the genre.

You would think that I am a narrator  
But believe it  
I am not a narrator  
The incident which I have passed through  
I have lost the control of those details.

The new genre of long poem, in its design, raises so many questions regarding the quest of man, which is eternal, but when Neki raises these questions he is not unaware about the developments in classical and modern western philosophy, he combines these roots in the unconscious of signifiers of this poem. He is able to create the foregrounding, the background is very vast and multi-dimensional. These kinds of generic complexities of the poem made it a controversial poem and the poem created a challenge to the traditional communicative poetic model in Panjabi.
After the decline of progressive movement, in parallel tendencies, S.S. Meesha brought some changes in Punjabi poetry. He published Chaurasta (Cross road) (1961), Dastak (Knock) (1966), Dheeme Bol (Whispering) (1972) and Kach de Vastar (Clothes of Glass) (1974). He was anti-romantic, with modern sensibility, progressive and against idealism. He believed in a new idiom. Another poet who became very significant was Shiv Kumar who published his first poetic-work Peera da Paraga (Grist of Pains) in 1961, but he is known for his long dramatic-poem Luna (1965). He considers this work as an epic. He reinterpreted the legend of Puran Bhagat and Luna. Shiv Kumar's cultural imagery with lyricality is distinctive in the history of modern Punjabi poetry. The dialogue between Puran and Luna: (Luna is Puran's stepmother, who wants Puran's physical love).

Luna:

Puran! This is your vanity
The earth was fruitful yesterday
and it is fruitful today too
Even if you dissect a ray today
you'll find seven colors in it
but each color like you
has lost its eye-sight
No color has died
light is still everywhere
but due to our ignorance
we are unable to recognize it
In fact, we have no color of our own
otherwise, Puran, no ray is without color
Dissect Luna and look into her
You'll find every color in Luna
You'll find the history of each color
you'll find the fragrance of each color
and you'll find the corpse of each color!

Puran:

Luna, you want the third color
to lose its existence too
in these two colors!
Who can mix the colors of fate
who can efface them?
They were present on the forehead at birth
Who can change the color of the forehead?

After the decline of Romantic-progressive poetry Amrita Pritam also came under the influence of modernist idiom and style. Her Kagaz te Canvas (Paper and Canvas), (1970) became her major work in the development. The influence of existentialism and rejection of traditional progressivism became significant in her poetry. The new feminist consciousness also made her voice more strong. Her metaphors and symbols were also not traditional and romantic. Her poem 'Blotting Paper' begins with a question and floats symbols in a rational way:
What was the real text of life?
That text was in good handwriting like
silken thoughts but hot like blood
and the blotting paper that soaked

............

d) Modernist Tendencies


Haribhajan Singh is known because of his long poems also. His _Rukh te Rishi_ (got Saraswati award) is a long narrative text, complex, philosophical based on his experiences. The structure of this poem is different from the other long poems in Panjabi. The narrative technique is not traditional and linear. Autobiographical details are there, but not in a concrete way, the style is abstract, signifiers and symbols construct a paradigm. We discover the depth of the unconscious. We cannot grasp the depth of this poem without philosophic and perceptive consciousness. This long poem has six chapters, one Aadika and Antika. The opening lines create the stylistic atmosphere and the concept of Desire which has created the thematics of this poem:

O Supreme Space!
O Supreme Time!
I desire my life be the meditation of a tree
Soil my mother, water my father
I desire to write the lines of fragrance

............

In this meditative poem the poet creates three signs: Rukh, Man and Rishi. Tree becomes the signifier of eternal nature. Rishi becomes the signifier of truth. Man is passing through the existential agonies, He is in search of transcendent truth. Between Rukh and Rishi man is becoming conscious about his destiny and the relation between Nature and Culture.

e) New Punjabi Poetry

When these kinds of transformations were happening, the new poets emerged. Some of them had sympathy with neo-progressivism. Mohanjit, Parminderjit, Amitoj, Surjit Patar are such poets. No doubt all these poets were significant, but Surjit Patar dominated the scene. He published _Kolaj Kitab_ (1973, co.ed.)

'_Vich Likhe Haraf_ (Words written in the air) (1979), _Birkh Arz Kare_ (1979)
(Speaking Tree) (1992), Hanere Vich Sulagdi Varanmala (Alphabet smouldering in darkness) (1992), and Lajen Di Dargah (The Shrine of Words) (1999). Surjit Patar is known for his ghazals, lyricism and satiric power. No doubt his poems are equally powerful, but his ghazals have created a new norm in the this genre. His famous ghazal in ‘Hawa Vich Likhe Harf’:

If I speak how will the darkness tolerate it,  
if I keep quiet what will the candle-holders say,  
if my song dies this night,  
how will my friends tolerate my living?

Jagtar also made a mark in the history of Punjabi ghazal, when he published Shesha da Jungle (The forest of glass) (1980). Other known ghazal-writers Sadhu Singh Hamdard, Deepak Jatoi, Takhat Singh, Ajaib Chitarkar, Jaswinder, Gurtej Koharwala, Vijay Vivek, Sukhwinder Amrit, Gurbhajan Gill, Mohinderdeep Grewal, Surjit Judge have contributed to this genre in a significant way. Even in Pakistan, Munir Niazi, Zafar Iqbal, Rakshanda, Tanveer Bukhari, Raoof Sheikh, almost all the Punjabi poets have written ghazals also, Ghazal, in Panjabi has encouraged the lyricality in other poetry also. The new idiom also emerged. Ahmed Saleem and Fakhar Zaman’s voice dominates this modern trend:

A Sparrow In The Drawing Room
Shut all the outlets —  
windows, doors, ventilators.  
Do not let it sit

2.1.3 Feminist Poetry

Manjit Tiwana emerged as a significant woman poet after Amrita Pritam and Parbhjot Kaur. She spoke in a strong voice against the patriarchal values and traditional man-woman relationship, she rejected the concept of husband in this society:

Pati (Husband)  
A husband is a hungry wolf  
Who shields you from all other wolves  
But himself...

Fixing you between his jaws  
He boasts:  
‘See, how safe you are!  
I don’t devour you’...

A husband is a hungry wolf  
Who shields you from all other wolves  
But himself...

A machine  
He fits in all your spare parts,  
Weeding out every hair on the body of your existence.  
Questions:  
‘Who the hell are you?’
Instantly, like Red Riding Hood
You want to run away
But like a lightning flash he catches you.
Bewildered, you search desperately for yourself.

A husband is a hungry wolf
Who saves you from all other wolves
But ultimately
Devours you.

(Dargah) (Tr. by the author)

Many other women poets have published their work. Vanita, Paul Kaur, Manjit Pal, Kuldeep Kalpana, Manjit Indra, Sukhwinder Amrit, Surjit Sakhi, Shashi Samundra, Surjit Kalsey, Amarjit Ghuman are known in this development. Vanita has become significant because she has worked on the theory and analysis of modern literature also. Otherwise also she does not speak rhetorically about social institutions, rather in a soft voice with a depth, also writes about different aspects of life and human problematic:

Varjit (Forbidden)

Mostly I remember those faces
Glimpse of which is forbidden by them
Mostly I remember those songs

2.1.4 Neo-progressive Poetry

Neo-progressive or Naxalite poetry was opposing the traditional romantic-progressive and experimentalist modernist poetry. Avtar Singh Pash emerged the leading new-progressive poet. He published Loh Katha (Iron Strong) (1970), Uske Bajan Magar (Following the flying Hawks) (1974), and Sade Samian Vich (In our times) (1978). Pash believed in Maoist ideology and he created the new language for poetry. He combined the rural sensibility with the modern idiom:

At a little distance from myself, I am asleep
In spite of the intensified dispute with those
Who have been malevolent towards me for so long.
This little distance
Is a black partridge hiding in the sugarcane fields

Jagtar, Harbhajan Hundal (Janwadi), Harbhajan Halwarvi, Amarjit Chandan, Surinder Dhanjal, Iqbal Ramuwalia, Lal Singh Dil, Joga Singh, Darshan Khatkar and some other significant neo-progressive poets also emerged during the movement. After the decline of Naxalite movement in Punjab these poets wrote neo-progressive poetry, ideologically beyond Maoism or they discussed the situation which was responsible for the collapse of the socialist Soviet Union or the communism in Europe. They became aware about the developments in the aesthetics of poetic art.

In this development Jagtar and Harbhajan Halwarvi also became the major poets. Jagtar published Rutam Ranjlian (Colourful Seasons) (1957), Talkhian Rangeenian (Pleasures Agonies) (1960), Dudh Pathri (Milky stones) (1961),
Adhura Admi (Incomplete Man) (1967), Lahoo de Naksh (Prints of Blood) (1973), Chhangaia Rukh (Pruned Tree) (1976), Sheeshe da Jungle (The forest of Glass) (1980), Jaezerian Vich Ghiria Samundar (Sea encircled by islands) (1985), Chamkri Sham (Quadrangular Evening) (1991), Jugnu Diva te Darya (Glow-worm, Lamp and River) (1992), and Parvesh Dwar (Entrance Gate) (1992), Jagtar’s journey started from lyricism and modernism, that is why he absored that language beyond neo-progressive poetry also. His ‘Islands of Silence’:

The Islands of Silence
The train stuck in the graveyard
whistles aloud.
It passed through the paddy fields

Harbhajan Halwarvi published Paun Udas Hai (The air is sad) (1981), Pighle Hoe Pal (The Melted moments) (1985), Pankh Vihuna (Without feathers) (1991) and Pulan ton Paar (Beyond the bridges) (1999). He is sad about the decline of revolutionary struggle and expresses the sad moments, also writes love poetry with aesthetic understanding, His search beyond the struggle dominates his poetry:

The Hero of the Age

When a relationship is broken
and another is yet to be formed
the story of that period’s incertanity:
who would listen to it, if not myself?

With my own hands I have broken
an old mirror which reflects no face,
glass-shards are scattered on my path:
whose hands would collect them if not my own?
The season’s eyes are tears tears
the wind’s breath is a sighing sighing
the waves in the Chenab are violent again:
who would swim them if not myself?
Every atom of the earth glows
stars burn red in the sky
and in the scorching deserts of darkness:
Whose foot would step there if not
my own, curious foot-steps?
The fresh verdure of the fields
bears red red flowers
but iron rains from above:
whose chest would shield them
if not my own?
Everywhere a fire has flared
the sparks turning into flames.
So the ages come and go...
Who will be the hero of this age?

(Pulan ton Paar, Tr. Surjeet Kalsey)
2.1.5 Punjabi Poetry Abroad

We cannot grasp the post-independence Panjabi poetry unless we understand the developments of Panjabi poetry being written abroad, because after independence a number of renowned Panjabi poets migrated to other countries. In the first decades U.K. became the center of Panjabi literary activity. Niranjan Singh Noor, Santokh Sing Santokh, Mushtak Singh, Jagtar Dhah, Baldev Bawa, Avtar Jandialvi and some other poets wrote nostalgic poetry with progressive consciousness. Now after the decline of first phase Avtar, Amarjit Chandan and Varinder Parihar in the new voice, have deconstructed the traditional language and thematics. They have become modern or post-modern poets. Amarjit Chandan has become the significant voice of new poetry:

No this isn't a memory
A memory
Brings a sparkle in yours eyes
Your heart begins to flutter.

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In Canada Gurcharan Rampuri, Ravinder Ravi, Navtej Bharti, Ajmer Rode, Iqbal Ramuwalla, Surinder Dhanjal, Sukhinder, Surjit Kalsey, Darshan Gill and so many other poets belong to different tendencies. They have written progressive, modernist, experimental, lyrical, post-modern, diasporic and poetry in other voices. After the two decades of post-independence the center of Panjabi literary activity shifted to Canada and the poets spoke in a much mature voice — Navtej Bharti and Ajmer Rode published their collection 'Leela' (Wonder-Performance) (600 pages) and created a stir in whole of the Punjabi world. Ajmer Rode experimented in new style and poetic-structure:

Blue Horse

Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of wisdom inside,
came the Guru to punjabi acadmy
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of wisdom inside,
came the Guru
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of wisdom inside, came ?
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of wisdom inside...
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of wisdom ?
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean of ?
Blue horse dances underneath, ocean...
Blue horse dances
Blue horse dances.
Blue horse.

In Sweden Sati Kumar, in Denmark Sohan Kadri and in Switzerland Dev have written in modern and post-modern idiom. When they migrated to Europe already they were writing in modern language and style. Dev has published Vidroih (Protest) (1970), Doosre Kinare di Talash (In search of second shore) (1978), Matabi Mitti (Flame-coloured soil) (1983), Prashan te Parvaz (Question and flight) (1992), and Shabdant (End of Words) (1999). Being an artist, his modern imagery and thematic spaces make him distinctive in contemporary poetry:
The Last Moments
Look! I've written the lost moments too
on the page of my senses.
Defeat is a vow of my journey,
my companion!

In America Gurumel is also a poet with cosmic consciousness, Ravinder Sehrea, Sukhwinder Kamboj writing in a new-progressive idiom. In Germany Rajwinder is writing poetry in Panjabi and Germent both.

Parminder Sodhi in Japan is another significant poet, because his Asian and orientalist voice is different from the poets living in the West. He is a zen poet, aesthetically different than the others.

2.1.6 Latest Trends

After Surjot Patar’s lyrical poetry again blank verse (Nazam) has emerged. Parminderjit, Jaswant Deed, Aasi, Darshan Buttar, Ravinder, Amarjit Kaunke, Ambish, Sarwan Minhas, Sukhchain Mistri, Sutinder Noor, Ramesh Kumar, Devneet, Gurpreet and several other poets are known because of nazam in contemporary Punjabi poetry, no doubt still some poets (Mohanjit, Anoop Virk) are known because of lyrics also.

New contemporary Punjabi poetry is beyond the post-progressive and modernist. Now, the poetry is more deep, concerned with pluralist ideological consciousness, without unnecessary metaphorical details. To conclude, I want to mention some lines from Mannmohan’s poem ‘Vision’ which shows how the new poem is taking even the themes insignificant in the past:

Merely by Shutting eyes
You can’t acquire
Vision of a blind
Who reads with tips

2.2 HARIBHAJAN SINGH — A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH:
(1920-2002)

Dr. Haribhajan Singh was born in Laming (Assam) on 18th August, 1920. His father Ganda Singh sent Haribhajan Singh to his aunt at Lahore for education. After some years, he shifted to Delhi. He had completed his graduation. He became a school teacher in 1943. In 1948 he did M.A. Hindi from Delhi University. He did M.A. English also in 1951, but he became college lecturer in Hindi. In 1953-54 he started his research on the subject ‘The study of Hindi poetry written in Gurmukhi script,’ and got Ph.D. degree from Delhi University. In 1968, he shifted to Punjabi and became Professor of Punjabi in Delhi University. He retired in 1984 as Head of the Department of Punjabi. Till his death in 2002 he was active in writing poetry and literary criticism.
Haribhajan Singh (1920-2002)

Haribhajan Singh got a number of awards for his literary contribution. In 1933 he got Punjab State Award; in 1969 Sahitya Akademi Award; in 1978 Sahitya Kala Parishad Award; in 1975 Punjabi Shromani Sahitkar Award, Punjab state Bhai Veer Singh Award, Punjabi Literary Forum Award; in 1980 Soviet Land Nehru Award; in 1986 Kartar Singh Dhaliwal Award and in 1986 Madh Pardesh’s Kabir Award. In 1984 he was awarded the K.K. Birla Foundation Saraswati Award.

In 1976, he visited Canada and USA and in 1981, U.S.S.R. to participate in the conferences on literature. In 1974, he got Sahitya Akademi Fellowship, in 1995 Punjabi University fellowship, in 1996 Guru Nanak Dev University Fellowship, and many other honours from different institutions.

2.3 AN OVERVIEW OF HARIBHAJAN SINGH’S POETRY

Haribhajan Singh published his first book of poetry Laasan (1956). At that time, romantic-progressive poetry was on the decline. Experimentalists were raising their voice for modernist experiments. Politically there was a split in the progressive movement. Laasan created a stir because of its distinctive poetic idiom. Haribhajan Singh’s lyrical and intellectual styles were both
powerful. In 1957, he published Taar-Tupka, a poetic play, which was against atomic war, but in that poetic play his poetry was again powerful and within two years, he became a major Punjabi poet. In 1962, he published Adhraein, a collection of lyrics. These lyrics were different from those of the other lyricists. He was conscious about the tradition of Indian lyric as well as the classical Punjabi lyric. Awareness of Punjabi folklore made his lyric more significant.

When in 1967, he published Na Dhupe Na Chhavan he became a modernist, T.S. Eliot and other modernist poets influenced him. The existential, anti-romantic, anti-idealistic view also influenced his poetry. The individual living in the modern culture became the centre of his poetic thought. His poetic language which was anti-metaphoric was very apt in this poetry. Absurd and other tendencies of modern poetry influenced him:

**An Accident**

I wish an accident would happen on this road
So I could go home.
I've been waiting at this crossing for a long time.
Perhaps something may happen
but nothing is broken anywhere.
The people of this city are strangely without will
they stop when the traffic light indicates
They start when the traffic light indicates
tired tired they walk, stale stale waters.
What conspiracy has tamed this whole city?
Who has put the pace of the city under a spell?
Now nothing can happen in this city.
No one's gait is his own....
I think something must happen
maybe someone run over by a car
abruptly a light of disobedience should glow
in someone's forehead.
May be I could devour the red and green lights
in a fit of savage rage.
A new creation should arise out of this thick haze
I wish an accident would happen on this road
so I could go home.

*(Tr. Surjit Kalsey)*

In 1970, he published Saraq De Safe Ute (On the Page of the Road) and continued his distinctive modernist style. This poem represents his modernist style and language and in the later works also he is known for this modern poetic language:

**On the page of the road**
I've written a letter addressed to you
and hung it on the pole
so that you can read it.
Whatever letter is written
on the page of the road
cannot be folded and put into the pocket.
My letter is not Christ
that it would willingly hang itself on the cross:
every cross is an inovation
Whoever ascends it becomes a dwarf.
The pole is a good mailman
the mail is easily distributed by it
and is read instantly.
This road wanders unrestrained
it also takes a turn
towards the battlefield,
it goes on and on with its cut head and torn feet
jumping over the heightless plains
it climbs the mountains
when it does not find any path forward
embracing a peak, it
hangs from it.
Long before the innovation
comes the end-
peace be with you!
On the page of the road
under people’s feet
my letter crushed, disfigured and
wounded but alive
written on the dust, it asks again and again:
Is there any path other than this road to see you?
Life is not a conspiracy.
Why should we see each other in a hidden place?
Friendship is not patronage.
Why should only one side greet every time?
The words of love we may read wrongly
but why should a Pandit always be the interpreter of love?
You were crazy about travelling
your sunny body touched everyone.
When you wished you became rain
and poured over everyone.
For a long time I’ve not seen you
at the public meeting place.
What helplessness has come over you?
Whose fear? What danger?
Why are you always surrounded by guards?
For the sake of a handshake
I will never enter your fort, come what may.
This side of the threshold is strictly guarded.
I would like to see you
as a rebel meets a rebel.
I am not your masses. I am your friend.
Those whom the people adore are not emperors.
On the page of the road
I’ve written a letter addressed to you
and hung it on the pole, so that it shall reach you.

(tr. Surjit Kalsey)

In 1970, he also published the selection of his poetry Mein Jo Beeji Gaya.
‘This selection is important because of its ‘Preface’, Haribhajan Singh attacked
those poets who were still writing in traditional lyrical style or were committed to traditional progressivism.

His next two volumes of poetry were distinctive because of certain reasons. In 1972, he published Alph Dupehar and in 1977 Tukian Jebhan Wala. The poems in the first volume were about the war of Bangla Desh and the poems in second volume were related to the Emergency. Haribhajan Singh wrote in a lyrical style but he did not speak in rhetorical language like the traditional progressive poets. He created satirical lyrics.

In 1982, when he published Matha Devee Wala, he wrote a long poem in a different style. Polyphonic inner voices of the modern individual create a dialogic situation. Existential tension is depicted in a paradigmatic growth. Again in Mayan Dhiyan (1989) and Niksuk (1989) Haribhajan Singh published his lyrics, but his great work Rukh Te Rishi came in 1995. This long poem was awarded the Saraswati Award.

Haribhajan Singh was also a significant literary critic. He discussed the theory of Russian formalism, structuralism, post-structuralism, semiotics and system theory. He exposed the limitations of classical Marxist literary criticism.

He also translated Aristotle's Poetics, Longinus's On the Sublime, Sophocles' King Oedipus, Camu's novel Plague, a portion of 'Rig Veda' and so many other works from Western and oriental literature.

Haribhajan Singh has influenced Punjabi poetry and criticism in a significant way. His 'Rukh Te Rishi' and some other poetic works have been translated into English, Hindi and other languages.

2.4 TREE AND THE SAGE (RUKH TE RISHI)

*Tree and the Sage* is a long narrative but complex poem, based on his experiences. The structure of this poem is different than other long poems in Punjabi. The narrative technique is not traditional and linear. Though autobiographical details are there, yet not in a concrete way; the style is abstract. Some signifiers and symbols construct a paradigm. We discover the depths of the unconscious. The experiences, through words and poetic forms create the communicative surface. We cannot grasp the depths of this poem without philosophic and perceptive consciousness. This poem is a postmodern text and in this way the poet transcends his own previous modern texts.

Dr. J.S. Rahi has said about this poem: "Tree and the Sage is a narrative woven round varied experiences of psychological and behavioural complexities. The experiences are episodic in nature, but fused into a cohesive whole by rhythm and intensity of meaning. The descriptive range of the experience is extensive but dense. The use of allusions for creating symbolic structures is profound and encompassing.

(Preface, *Tree and the Sage*, p.3)

This long poem has six Cantos, one Aadika and Antika. The opening lines create the stylistic atmosphere and the desire which has created thematic motifs of this poem:-
Long live thirst
Though all the world is for you
Yet the most precious gift of all
Is the thirst that the Creator showered on you

The blood that flows in the veins
Drop by drop
Swims like tears in the eyes
It knows you though it sees you not

(Cants I, p.15)

In this meditative poem the poet creates three signs: Rukh (Tree), Man and Rishi (Sage). Tree becomes the signifier of eternal nature. Rishi is the signifier of Truth. Man is passing through his existential agonies in search of Truth. Between Rukh and Rishi man is conscious of his destiny as well as the relation between Nature and Culture.

In the first Canto, the poet thinks that in his own home he is like a tree. He is conscious of his fragrance and fruits, though he does not know the name of his own fruits. When he goes out of his own home, he goes like a tree and people sit without inhibition under the shade of this tree.

A simple fellow battered by the sun
Sought the shade and sat
Till the shade slides into motherhood
He sat so long
That he lost the urge to wander
Like the baby clings to the suckling mother
Truth dawns by itself

(p-17)

Some children have thrown stones towards the tree, lovers have written their names on it with knives and the tree has seen many seasons.

He knows that he is not a Kalp-Brikh, though he has fulfilled desires of some people. The tree and sun rise together. The birds bring the voices of Rishis. The tree talks in the voice of flowers and fruits. Now the Tree is transformed as the Rishi :-

Who could be a Rishi greater than the tree
A stoic meditating in sun and frost
Undaunted and unshaken
In rain or drought
Fragrance is your sermon
And flowers your prasad
Fruits are your inexhaustible store
Come back, O Rishider, come back
You are the Rishidev.

(p.20)

The poet praises desire, search and thirst and that search is for Omi who was lost in poet’s own existence. In the Second Canto, the poet puts various questions to Rukh-Rishi Dev. He wants to know from where Rukh-Rishi Dev
got love, smile and devotion like a mother. Is this not the divine knowledge?
How is tree shaken unto its roots?

This kind of interior monologue or dialogue creates the paradigm of this
poem. The poet creates the multi-layers of language to express his experiential
state.

In the Second, Third and Fourth Cantos, the search is from Rukh-Rishi Dev to
Rishi Dev. The poet does not know where he resides. What is his identity?
How will he recognize him? He experiences an alienation, but he depicts his
journey of life in a city. Signifiers float onwards, time-space merge with his
search, with his desires, with his fancies. Sometimes he creates questions and
answers, sometimes only questions, sometimes only answers and we
understand the silent floating questions and answers. He speaks about love,
tradition, dreams, images, doubts, death and relations:-

Leaving the shade for visitors
I set out to seek the Rishidev
Where was his meditation and his abode?
Vainly did I trudge through the town
None knew who the Rishidev was
Was he yours or mine?
None had known or heard of him.

'Which Rishidev?
Which is his village or his home?
What is his appearance?
What are his features?
Are you seeking the one with no address?
How will you know him if you do find him?
Do we not seek the one we already know?'

Strange were the questions
Stranger still was my quest
I felt like an exile
Without foothold in sight

Then came the voice:
'He did exist in encyclopedias once
Seek him there
Who knows if he still lives there
Or has shifted elsewhere?'

I combed the city crowds, assemblies, and parties
Rubbing through the forest dense
Like an uprooted tree
My branches and shoots were torn apart
Leaves wounded one and all
Tears flooding the eyes to brim
Distance yawning in fissures every inch

(Canto II, p. 24-5)

The poet is in a search. Sometimes he feels that he should go back, but he also
feels that paths of retreat are lost. He continues his search for Rishidev:-
Where are you, O Rishidev?
I have brought God’s message
_Allah_ is keen.
To reveal himself to some _ummiyy_
Where is the _ummiyy_?

(Canto II, p.35)

In the Third Canto he remembers his childhood when a girl met him, who was
at the same time a fire to pass through and sacred like Ganges. He came to
Rishi for knowledge. He remembers Gautam and Ahilya.

Thematically Canto IV is significant when the poet thinks that in the cavity of
the tree, a serpent is residing and he is not alone. When he comes out of his
home, this serpent is always with him. Sometimes he says to the serpent that
he should leave the tree: How can he go to the Rishi with him? But the serpent
says that only this hollow is his home:

Often I said:
“_Bhai_” naga, do leave me now
How can I go to Rishi with you
How shall I be true and pure”

The _naga_ hissed back:
“The hollow is my home
We were born together
Like Siamese twins
How can I leave my home
Banish your hollow
Please, if you can
I will leave along with it”.

(Canto IV, p-53)

But now the poet, the man is awakened. He can walk like a tree. He feels that
a Deeva (lamp) burnt within him. Now he can see his inner recesses:-

Walking like a tree
I turned into a room
With slits in the door
And crevices in the walls
Once I believed
That a _deevea_ burnt within me
But now
There are no slits nor crevices
Through which
I could peep into my inner recesses.

(Canto IV, p. 62)

In Canto V, he feels his awakened self, the dawn of awakening, the
illumination of a path. He again remembers the girl who met him in his
childhood, but now she is the full moon in the sacred water. This is the Rishi-
life, this is the Rishi-style.
In Canto VI, the poet is standing like a tree before the tree. Now they are one. Knowledge has created this transformation. Now the man, the poet, speaks in the language of Rishi:-

Man at birth
Is the text original
The creator’s creation
But is then mutated
Into fences and walls
And languages barbed and strange

The same man weathers
The versions varied
Unable to know
He is one or many

The creator surprised
Anguished and bewildered
Seeks the same person in the crowd
Where is my text original?

(Canto VI, p. 81)

The poet believes in the existential reality of man. Ideologically he is not metaphysical, but realistic and modern. His symbols present the modern man in totality. But this experience creates an open text. He feels like Sidhartha, like Buddha:-

When Sidhartha became the Buddha
His body was on fire
Boils appeared all over
Hard was it to bear his own light

When he left home
Dawn was just breaking
But now the high sun was blazing
Smouldering in its light

At times he felt like a tree
Brimming with new sharp fragrance
If it broke not free
It would go crazy

At times he felt he was a pot with holes
With deeva burning bright within
Light there is
But spills not from the holes
The light thus trapped would turn into smoke
The earthen pot would crack and crumble

I wish to flow into waters and deserts
And appear before the sun rises
Even at midnight
I long to dip into oceans and streams
To light the waters with my fire

(Canto VI, p. 85)
Haribhajan Singh’s critical and creative consciousness merges in this text, and it becomes a distinctive, philosophic and significant poetic text.

I am a tree walking....
(from Tree and the Sage, Canto I, Sections 1-4)

In the first Canto of this long poem the Tree is speaking. The poet has created the symbol of Tree for his own self. This tree is walking within his house. He feels his fragrance. He has illusions. He narrates his experiences of the world. Sometimes people have enjoyed his shade and sometimes people have stoned him also. Some lovers have carved their names into the frames. He narrates how he has experienced rains, winds, seasons. Metaphorically he is speaking about the tragedies and other kinds of happenings. He has felt always fresh, new. Now he wants to move, the staying is too long.

Though he is not a Kalpa Brikh, yet he has fulfilled the desires of the people and they went away after their wants and ne xus, after picking the fruits. He has not forgotten them. The treasures of a mother never shrink. He has the wisdom of scriptures. Sparrows sing on his branches. This is his way of life. Again he speaks in metaphoric language.

He is such a tree which is free from bondage. This way is not calculating. As fruits become sweet and free, bow towards earth. He feels such a benevolence. When somebody tries to snatch the fruit, he feels as though some bird has pecked at the fruit or as a mother feels when her child suckles. He feels joy, he gives shade to the sun-scorched people. Again the Tree becomes a signifier of the self or the speaking subject.

The poet celebrates the thirst or the desire, because of Desire or Thirst, the vision of streams, waterfalls, cascades and deep wells is possible. This Thirst or Desire makes the soul go beyond the roaring whirlpools. The style, the philosophic layers of this poem open wings through this kind of metaphoric language and aesthetic thematic expansion. This kind of aesthetic expansion is distinctive in Haribhajan Singh’s poetry; it creates a lyrical style. His depths are philosophic, but lyrical and his metaphors are original.

Tree is transformed into the self and the self of the poet is transformed into the tree. Tree is very significant in Indian tradition. Buddha attained knowledge under the tree in Budhgaya. In paintings, Guru Nanak Dev, the first guru of the Sikhs is generally shown sitting in meditation under a tree. In several Indian myths and folktales tree is very significant, symbolically and otherwise also. The concept of Desire is important in metaphysics, in psychology and religious philosophy. In Lacanian psychoanalysis and Julia Kristeva’s concept of ‘Desire of language and language of Desire’ it is again significant. This suggests that we can interpret this poem in post-modern language also. Lacan is a post-Sigmund Freud thinker of psychoanalysis and he has reinterpreted ‘Desire’. Julia Kristeva has interpreted language from this point of view beyond Freud. We can interpret Haribhajan Singh poetry in that post-modern language.

2.5 OUTLINE OF MODERN HINDI POETRY

In the Medieval Hindi Poetry Kabir, Jayasi, Meera, Surdas and Tulsidas made the rich poetic tradition. They wrote devotional and religious poetry and influenced the growth of Hindi poetry. The other thing about this growth is
that these poets wrote in their dialects and in different poetic styles. This kind of development brought Maithili, Bhojpuri, Avdhi and Brij bhasha into Hindi poetic tradition still in modern Hindi we have the heritage of these dialects.

Bhartendu Period

Modern Hindi poetry starts from the times of Bhartendu (1868 — 1900). Bhartendu Harishchander and other poets based their poetry on the new nationalist thinking because the British imperialism had occupied whole of India and these poets didn’t accept the imperialist slavery. Though still most of the poets were writing in Brijbhasha yet from the thematic point of view they were concerned with the new problematics of India and they were united in their nationalist voice. These poets were Thakur Jagmohan Singh, Ambika Datt Vijas, Babu Bal Mukand Gupta and others.

Bhartendu Harishchander started the publication of “Kavi Vachan Sudha” and this magazine was committed to the new poetry. Harishchander also started “Kavita Vardhni Sabha”. The poets were writing about Rama, Krishna, Nirguna, Saguna, Atma, Parmatma, Radha, Sita and on some other subjects also. These poets were also writing about the Indian culture, Indian tradition, Indian religions and the Nation of India. They also studied the western literature and other books on western social thought and political theory. They studied these things in a comparative way but in their poetry expressed nationalist thoughts. They openly said that East India company is looting the country. They also praised the Britishers because they were doing some modern things for the growth of industry and education, but they were conscious that India must be conscious about freedom.

Dwivedi Period

The critics start the Dwivedi period from 1900 because after 1900 Pandit Mahaveer Prasad Dwivedi dominated the Hindi scene. He started the publication of “Sarasvati”. He said that the poets of Bhartendu age were not conscious about the correct language and they wrote most of the literature in Khari Boli or Brij Bhasha. Pandit Mahavir Prasad felt that the writers of Hindi language must be conscious about grammar and correctness. Pandit Mahavir Prasad also felt that the vocabulary of Hindi literature was not so wide and he took vocabulary from Sanskrit, English, Marathi and Urdu. In poetry the poets of this age had no sympathy for Shringar Ras and a voice was raised against the traditional “Shringaric” poetry. Dwivedi suggested that the poets should write on different subjects. He studied the different tendencies in Bangla and English. Rabinder Nath Tagore influenced Dwivedi. He said that we shouldn’t write only about Rama or Lakshmana but we should also write about Lakshmana’s wife Urmila. Under the influence of this voice Maithili Sharan Gupt wrote his epic “Saket”. Dwivedi refused to publish Nirala’s poem “Juhi Ki Kali” (1916) because he considered this poem romantic and said that from the ethical point of view it shouldn’t be published. But some poets revolted against this kind of formulation and they wrote poetry under the influence of romanticism or “Chhayavaad”. Pandit Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi was an idealist and in his poetry he preached idealism. Maithili Sharan Gupt became the other known poet who wrote about Indianness Indian culture and against the imperialist slavery.
Chhayavaad

Modern Hindi poetry was under the influence of romanticism or Chhayavaad from 1918 to 1938. Hindi Chhayavaad doesn’t mean exactly romanticism, but most of the romantic poetry was written by the poets who were writing Chhayavaadi poetry. Acharya Ram Chander Shukal said that this Chhayavaad was under the influence of symbolism of European poetry. Sumitra Nandan Pant said that this poetry revolted against the enlightenment of traditional poetry. The other reason for this Chhayavaadi poetry is that during “Dwivedi” period the poets were writing about the Objective reality. They didn’t write about the subjective reality or the innerself of the poet. Now the poets were writing about the innerself, that’s why they were writing about Love, Karuna, and other bhavas. Pant, Niralal, Prasad, Mahadevi wrote about the innerself and beyond objective reality also. This Chhayavaadi poetry developed the language and imagery of modern Hindi poetry. Some Hindi critics have also used another word “Halavad” which is extention of Chhayavaad. Harivansh Rai Bhachan’s “Madhushala” is the most significant creation in this kind of Hala-Balavaad. This tendency was most lyrical and was under the influence of Persian poet Omar Khayam.

Progressive poetry

In India Progressive movement started in 1936 and this movement was under the influence of Socialist Realism, Russian Revolution or Marxism. Munshi Prem Chand was the main voice for this progressive movement. He said that “.....we shall no longer tolerate a social system under which a single individual can tyrannies over thousands of human beings; then our self-respecting humanity will raise the standard of revolt against capitalism, militarism and imperialism; and we shall not sit quiet and inane after doing a little bit of creative work on pieces of paper but we shall actively participate in building that new order which is not opposed to beauty, good taste and self respect. The role of literature is not simply to provide us with amusement or recreation, it does not follow, but is one the contrary, a torch-bearer to all the progressive movements in society”.

(Munshi Prem Chand’s Message to the conference of Progressive Writers Association, 1936).

In the first conference of progressive writers association at Lucknow in 1936 the writers resolved “...We consider that literature is the heritage of the whole human races and is not divisible in national, racial or geographical boundaries. Further, we consider that collectively and individually we stand in the ranks of those who are striving to build a new social order based on equality, freedom and peace, and as such we cannot but protest against the anti cultural forces of fascism and militarism. We declare that was is a brutality and is a serious menace to human culture and progress”. This movement created a new force in modern Hindi poetry. Now poets didn’t trust Chhayavaad or romanticism. Realism became the new creative expression. Progressive movement became very strong because the Indian people were fighting against the British imperialism and now they could understand the anti-cultural forces of Fascism and Imperialism. MuktiBodh wrote his famous long poem “Zamane Ka Chehra” (Face of the time). This shows the new kind of commitment in Hindi poetry.
When the enraged sea of Asian sorrow
Merged with the Euro-American seas
On the wharfs of Africa
In the vast field of the universe
United through the threads of tears, related in pain
And the burning fire in the hearts,
When Human beings
United through love and became one
On the banks of time

Even Hira Nand Vatsyayan ‘Agyeya’ in his poetry described the horror of war. The other poets Nag Arjun, Kedat Nath Aggarwal, Trilochan Shastri wrote impressive progressive poetry. Still Hindi poets are writing under the influence of progressivism, though they are writing about the new situations, because now the situation is not of Nehruvian utopia about the socialist structure of our society.

We experienced the tragedy of the partition of 1947. This historical tragedy became the subject of modern poetry. Some poets wrote about this tragedy in a direct language and some with depth created the new idiom. Raghuvir Sahay wrote his poem “7 O’clock” during that tragic period

A fruit mellows in the east and vastness shrinks
Into red. The sun revolving like a kicked football
Leaps high and crashes in a cold ground-glass.
Again, again a day has come, by now,
We ought to have forgotten late night dance,
And early morning’s feast of wholesome dreams.

Like splashed at random pools of faded paint,
The earth brown-baked is littered with cool shades,
For all will be hot when work has half been done
    On the fields,
Where by and by the earth its remnant virtue yields
To man, Without the expected guest of one gold dream
I have played an embarrassed host all night,
The crescent which sent me all my sour sleep,
It cannot runaground in the shores of day
A puffed whitness makes tangents with tree-tops
And turns a dark green into lighter green.

A flick of match-stick light is this morn
No moments more quick more fleeting than these
The thread of last day’s work I have to catch
Adieu, I go out now but will return
Soon. In the evening: all the light of day
Tucked under my eyelids, and all the weight of sun
Borne on my shoulders, all the breadth of time
Grasped tight
In both the useful fists.

(7 O’clock)
After 1950 the progressive movement in continuity becomes neo-progressive or Krantikari movement under the influence of new situations in Marxism or under the influence of Maoism and Naxalism. Some poets and critics used the word “Janvaad” also.

**Anti-poetry or experimentalist movement**

After 1960 some poets were attracted towards “Akavita” or anti-poetry movement. This movement believed in new experiments. It revolted against the voice of neo poetry (Nai Kavita). This anti-poetry movement believed in anti-hero, decadence, frustration, alienation because they said that the traditional value system is shattered a new kind of imagery appeared. Even the significant poet Dhumil was influenced from this tendency. Jagdish Chaturvedi started this akavita movement and so many poets were under the influence of this akavita movement. But the poets like Raghuvir Sahay, Sarveshwar Dyal Sexena, Kedar Nath Singh, Paryag Shukal never accepted this anti-poetry movement. Some other poets were in search of other new styles and poetic language. Vishnu Khare, Arun Kamal, Manglesh Dabral, Rajesh Joshi, Ashok Bajpayee said that the poetry has returned and they used the word “Kavita Ki Vaaarsi”, Raghuvir Sahay, Mukti Bodh and after them Kunwar Narain, Anamika and so many other poets reinterpreted humanism also and the styles beyond progressivism.

In the contemporary poetry Kunwar Narain is the most significant poet. “En Dinon” (During these days) has become the most significant anthology of poems. He is a poet of depth but his languages is very simple and aesthetically impressive.

_Different somewhere_  
I am  
Find me  
Look for me in every word  
See where  
I am  

*(Mein Aur Tum)*

The new poetry is committed to the ordinary man, not to the superman or the idealism which prevailed in the first decades of modern Hindi poetry. The satiric style is also very powerful in the contemporary Hindi poetry. Again we can quote Raghuvir Sahay’s poem “Communication” to understand this kind of poetic style:

_I beg your leave, Superman._  
_May I not join your procession_  
_Please understand before the common dinner_  
_I, a mere poet, am a no-good-cook-and-cleaner._

_You are not a poet, you can understand_  
_How utterly stupid it would be_  
_To face the crowd._  
_And to claim familiarity with it_  
_At the same time._

_I did try once_  
_And I said I love the people._
Poetry

But my prose became a duet with a lilt.
And was left hanging over the heads
Of men on their haunches.

Then came the national call
For all to join the Operation-Destruction-Idol.
There was a choice.
You could simply keep your hand raised and vote
If you did not like to pound
The party’s hammer.

No doubt the contemporary Hindi poetry was influenced by the western thematics or philosophy, existentialism and thoughts of absurdity also influenced the poetry, yet we believe that the poets in new Hindi poetry are in search of their own idiom and style. Now most of the poets write in simple language about the reality of common man especially in the third world.

2.6 RAGHUVIR SAHAY — A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH

Raghuvir Sahay was born on 9 December, 1929 in Lakhnow. His father was in Police, but had some land also. After retirement his father served Arya Samaj and died in 1939. Raghuvir Sahai was doing Inter when he wrote his first poem. He published his first poem in 1947 and in 1948 his long poem ‘Sayankaal’ was published ‘Pratik’ a known magazine at that time. Raghuvir Sahay became Asstt. Editor of Daily Navjeevan from 1949 to 1951.

Raghuvir Sahay (1929-1990)

In 1950 he did M.A. (English) and also became interested in drama and theatre, acted in plays also. In 1951 he became Asstt. Editor of ‘Pratik’ and migrated to Delhi. In 1953 he joined All India Radio as an Asstt. Editor. In 1955 he was married to Vimaleshwari. In 1957 he resigned from All India
Radio. In 1958 he joined National School of Drama New Delhi as a Research Officer. In 1959 he again joined All India Radio.


2.7 AN OVERVIEW OF RAGHUVIR SAHAY’S POETRY

Raghuvir Sahay published five volumes of poetry. In 1951 when Dusra Saptak (ed. Ageya) was published, Raghuvir Sahay was not alone in this edited volume. His poems were published alongwith Shamsher Bahadur Singh, Bhawani Prasad Mishar, Shakunt Mathur, Harinarayan Vyas, Naresh Mehta and Dharam Vir Bhatri. In this edited volume Vatsayan Ageya included Raguvir Sahay’s early poems which he wrote in 1948 and 1949. But these were representative poems and distinctive also in the contemporary Hindi poetry. His romantic, intellectual and realistic poems were in a different idiom. His ghazals and lyrics were also included in this selection.

Raghuvir Sahay published Serion Par Dhoop Mein in 1960, but in this book his short stories and essays were also included. The poems of this book had been written from 1950 to 1959. During this decade there was a movement of ‘New Poetry’, but Raghuvir Sahay did not join that movement. He was not in favour of that kind of conscious ‘newness’, ‘The poet naturally writes new poetry. He experiments very naturally,’ this was his feeling. In 1957, He wrote his poem Hindi and satirized this movement:

We were fighting
a language battle to change society.
But the question of Hindi is not longer simply a question
of Hindi—we have lost out.

O good soldier,
know when you’re beaten.
And now, that question
which we just referred to in connection with the so-called
language battle,
let’s put it this way:
Were we and those on behalf of whom we fought
the same folk?
Or were we, in fact, the agents of our oppressors-
sympathetic, well-meaning, well-schooled agents?

Those who are the masters are slaves.
Their slaves are those who are not masters.

If Hindi belongs to masters,
then in what language shall we fight for freedom?
The demand for Hindi
is now a demand
for better treatment-
not rights-
put by the agents
to their slave-masters.
They use Hindi in place of English,
while the fact is
that their masters
use English in place of Hindi-
the two of them have struck a deal.
He who exposes this hypocrisy
will dispose of Hindi’s slavery.
This will be the one who, when he speaks Hindi,
will show us what simple folk really feel.
(Translated from Hindi: Harish Trivedi & Daniel Weissbor)

He was in search of poetry, real poetry, serious poetry. His next collection of
poetry ‘Atamhatya Ke Virudh’ was published in 1967, and there was a great
change in poetic idiom and theme. Now the poet was facing the society and
the masses, he was actively involved in Journalism. The reality of folk and
social situation had great impact on his new poetry. The language became
more simple and transparent. A new kind of poetry emerged. It was different
from the progressive poetry. This poetry also rejected the modernist idiom or
anti-poetry movement. Some critics interpreted it as the Janwadi poetry.

The next collection Hanso Hanso Jaldi Hanso was published in 1975. The
poem ‘Taktaki’ and the other poems included in this volume satirized the
establishment and the situations which became a preface to the emergency.
The poet wrote about the fear and terror in people’s mind. His language was
simple, ironic, but the awakening call was hidden and deep:

Laugh
Laugh; for you are under watch
Laugh not at yourself for the bitterness in it
Would give you away and they will get you.
Laugh; do not betray sheer joy as you do
For they may suspect you of being free
From the common guilt and they will get
You.

As you laugh do not let anyone know what is
It you laugh at
Let all of them believe that having lost your will
Like others you laugh a known laughter like
others
Who laugh in place of their speech.

Speak to yourself you may while the high dome
reverberates
But remember to laugh when the echoes die
For if they found you silent they will get you on
charge of protest
But if you laugh last, they will
Have the last laugh and
You will be able to get away.
Laugh; but beware of jokes; they are made of words
For they might carry in them a meaning given to them
A hundred years ago by someone else.

Would it not be better if you were to laugh
Before and after you spoke
So that nothing that you say is taken seriously
Or if you took care to laugh in all inevitable situations
Such as the beating of the poor by the powerful
Where none can be of help
Except the poor man himself
And he too usually laughs.

Laugh, laugh be quick to laugh
Laugh before the master leaves
Shaking hands with him
Lowering your eyes,
Assuring him that you had laughed
Yesterday when he was here.

(Translated by the poet)

In 1989 he published Kuchh Patte Kuchh Chitthian. These poems present the situation in which the man is defeated and sad in struggle. This kind of poetry was written by the ideological poets when the decline and contradictions occurred in the progressive movement and in the growth of socialism. The images of social decadence disturb the reader also.

After four years of his death Ek Samae Thha Sahay was published in 1995 and these were the unpublished poems. Images of death and other experiences of his own lonely world made these poems distinctive.

The development of Raghuvir Sahay’s poetry shows the growth of Hindi poetry. He influenced the contemporary and the next generation of poets. Critics still are evaluating his contribution to the modern Hindi poetry.

2.8 THE STAR

Raghuvir Sahay wrote this poem in 1972 and published in the same year in ‘Dharamyug’ with the title ‘Taktaki’ (State). In 1978 he published it again in ‘Hanso Hanso Jaldi Hanso’ and the title ‘Aj Ka Paath Hai’ (Today’s Lesson).

In the very first line ‘common facts about death’ are very significant words, and we underline the word death. This is the central philosophic signifier of this poem, which makes this poem deep. This central signifier gives ‘Death’ multi-meanings. Signifier makes an image, but this image is always moving, never stays at one meaning, that is why it becomes ‘Floating Signifier’. Floating signifier is always more poetic.

In Kath Upanishad Nachiketa speaks about ‘Death’ and the Upanishad philosophizes ‘Death’. Raghuvir Sahay does not philosophize but creates
multi-semantic layers. Death does not come in the same manner to all. Dead persons do not become equal after the death also. Even before death they were not equal. The dead body is a remainder after the struggle of life. Poet consciously uses the words ‘battered’ eating bowl, ‘soiled’, hair comb; the struggler had a ‘breakage’ within, only we hear the ‘cry’ from within, but how this cry escapes, we cannot explain, still this is to be studied and analysed. Poets write in their native language about this cry, about this pain. We print it, we translate it into English.

Here, the poem becomes satiric. The ‘cry’ takes expression only in ‘the poetry of native language, in folk-idiom, some times ‘cry’ is lyrical and musical, but we print it and translate it into ‘world-wide English language’ whether that cry remains same in translation, this question is hidden in this satiric expression.

How the people, critics or translaters interpret that cry, the speaking subject of this poem cannot tell, he is dead, he may have said ‘Liberty’, but now the translators or interpreters have written ‘help’. The satire is in the difference. ‘Liberty’ is ideological word, but help is anti-ideological, it creates sympathy and the spirit of ‘Liberty’ dies. The speaking subject is misinterpreted, but that tragedy is happening. Here the poet is also satirising the theory of translation. We cannot translate poetry or the poetry in native language. Ideological depths are shattered in that translation.

In this situation the literate people are passing through their own crisis, they think they are giving a direction to the half-dead illiterate persons, but this situation is very ironical, the dead man of this poem says that he would not ask the question about the hanging heads who have load of wisdom and in a religious respect they are silent about the crisis. This is the shameful situation. The dead man is only staring at their bald heads. The stare is like a dead or silent machingun, which cannot fire. The symbol of ‘machingun’ satirizes the situation of that ‘dead’ society, unconscious about the crisis. The ‘dead’ is conscious about the crisis, but the living heads are ‘bald’ ignorant and ‘dead’. This irony and satiric language makes this poem powerful and ideological. The poet has not spoken in a direct rhetorical language. He has created ‘symbolic language,’ and this symbolic language has made this poem more powerful and ideological.

2.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have studied the development of modern Punjabi and Hindi poetry. We have stressed the growth of different tendencies. We have also studied two poets and their poetic-texts. Both were contemporary poets. Haribhajan Singh’s text is the first part of the first Canto of his long poem *Tree and the Sage*. This is a symbolic poem, significant because of its philosophic depth and poetic-signifiers. The poet is conscious about the Upnishadic thematics also, speaks on the experiencial level. His transformation to the metaphysical and spiritual state of a Rishi or Sidhartha is combined with the consciousness of Gurbani. The poem is in monologic style, but the inner-dialogic situations are significative. Before *Tree and the Sage* (Rukh te Rishi) Haribhajan Singh had written ‘Matha Deeve Wala’ another long poem and two years before his death wrote another long poem ‘Registan Vich Lakarhara’, but he is known for *Tree and the Sage*. His distinctive
narrative style, his message and communicative art makes this poem significant.

Raghuvir Sahay is another Indian poet, who created a new kind of poetic-consciousness in Hindi poetry. He was a modern and progressive poet, but not in favour of western modernism. He rejected traditional progressivism also. He created new Janwadi idiom. His satiric style is very powerful. He satirizes establishment, sloganmongring and silence in social and political crisis. His poem The Stare is also such a satiric poem. We analyse this poem in a politico-cultural perspective. This poem cannot be studied without larger social context. He is telling about the shape of things to come. His poetic vision is futuristic. This kind of poem becomes powerful, ideologically distinctive in contemporary progressive and neo-progressive poetry also.

Both Haribhajan Singh and Raghuvir Sahay have found a firm footing in Indian literature. Their contribution in the making of Indian poetry is laudable.

2.10 GLOSSARY

Oblivious: not aware of what is happening around one.
Mundane needs: needs of this earthly world
Saline: impregnated with salt
Kalpa Birchh: A wish tree in paradise.
Dearth: Scarcity
Tresses: a long lock of hair
Benevolence: well meaning and kindly
Barge: a long ornamental boat
Residue: What is left over, remainder
Reverence: religious respect
Pate: head

Russian Formalism: theory of formalism developed during the year 1913-30 by the Russian thinkers Victor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum, Boris Tomasheshevsky, Yuri Tynyanov and Roman Jakobson. They believed in the autonomy of literature. They also believed in Defamiliarisation and Literariness.

Structuralism: literary theory based on the work of Saussure, Roland Barthes, Levi Strauss and other thinkers. Largely a French phenomenon, Common to all of these is an interest in structure and systems which can be studied in a Text. Saussure became the base of this theory.
Semiotics: the study of Sign-system. Sign combines ‘Signifier’ and ‘Signified’, the multi-images and meaning.

Experimentalist: who did not believe in traditional styles, rather in innovative styles and language.

Rhetorical language: loud voice, language of slogans.

Polyphonic: many-voiced, the term is associated with the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, with his idea of the ‘polyphonic novel’.

Paradigmatic growth: word is from Saussure’s Paradigm’, how changes take place in thinking.

Post-modern Text: post-second war text, Text deals with the thinking of Globalization, age of electronics, beyond the limits of modern text.

Anti-poetry movement: Akavita movement, poetry which rejected the idealism of previous romantic and progressive poetry, did not believe in rural idiom, rather in the crude realities of city life, anti-heroic life, shattered values.

2.11 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the development of modern Hindi poetry.
2. Discuss the tendencies of modern Punjabi poetry.
3. What kind of poet was Haribhajan Singh? Discuss his poetic growth.
4. Discuss the thematics and poetic-style of the poem Tree and the Sage.
5. Discuss the symbols of the Tree and the Sage.
6. How do you feel the conceptual and experiential levels of Desire in ‘I am a tree walking...’. (Tree and the Sage).
7. Discuss the metaphoric language of this poem.
8. Give the interpretation of ‘Kalpa Birch’.
9. Who is the speaker in Tree and the Sage? To whom he is speaking.
10. Annotate the following:-
   i) Never did I need to dote
       The world has no death of the sun-shriveled
       The fruit pickers made daily trips
       He who earns his bread from the depths of soil
       Never knows want
   ii) When a bird’s beak
        Pecks at my fruit
        I feel a pleasant little itching
        With a joy akin to the mother suckling her child
        The language of fruits and flowers has been mine
        The fragrance filtering through my tenders shoots
        Is my utterance
   iii) The desire for shade of some distant tree
        The vision breeds fascinating dreams

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Of streams, waterfalls, and cascades
And awakens the thrill of descending undaunted
Without the rope and the chain
Into deep, very deep wells,
Learning effortlessly
To pour down like the monsoons’

iv)  Thirst is to plunge headlong
Without learning to swim
Without a barge and a pole
Into the roaring whirlpools

11. What kind of poet is Raghuvir Sahay? Which aspect of his poetry did you find significant?
12. Discuss the satiric style of Raghuvir Sahay’s poetry.
13. How do you define ‘Stare’ or ‘Taktaki’ and why the author has titled this poem ‘Taktaki’ or ‘Stare’.
14. Discuss the thematic aspect of the poem ‘Stare’.
15. How does ‘Death’ signify in this poem?
16. Discuss this poem as a political poem.
17. Annotate the following:
   i)  Death does not come to all of us in the same manner
   nor do the dead become equal in death
   for they were not so before.
   The body is the residue of struggle
   incorporating in itself one battered eating bowl,
   one soiled hair comb and the breakage within
   the only element to escape is a cry
   which in essence, is an undetermined internal matter
   still under study.

   ii) What were the words on my lips when I died.
   You seem to know them better than I.
   You wrote: I had said ‘Help’
   May be I had said ‘Liberty’
   now that I am dead I cannot remember.

   iii) What makes one hundred fat heads hang--
   The load of wisdom?
   The weight of reverence?
   The burden of shame?
   No, I would continue to stare
   at the one hundred bald pates in silence.
   The fixed stare of my dead machinegun.

2.12 SUGGESTED READINGS


Haribhajan Singh, Tree and the Sage (tr. by Dr. J. S. Rahi and Rita Chaudhry)
Raghuvir Sahay Rachnavli, Rajkamal Parkashan, New Delhi, 2000.


Sudhindra Kumar, Hindi Sahitya Ka Itihas, Kadambri Parkashan, Delhi, 2001.
