

HEER RANJHA  
and other legends of the Punjab





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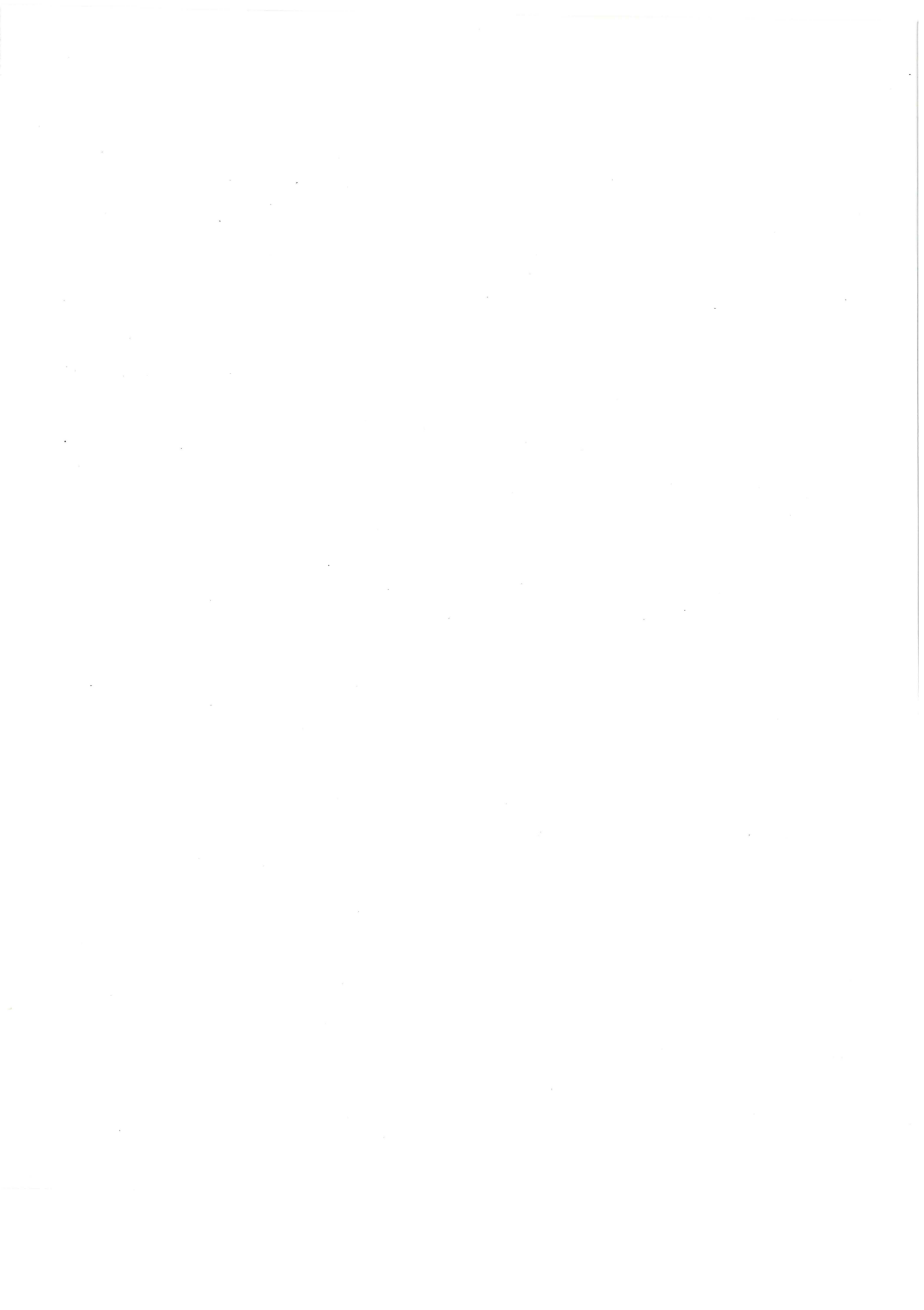
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*for all the Punjabis  
of all religions, of all nations*



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# The Cosmology of Heer

## Introduction

The legend of Heer and Ranjha in the poetic composition of Waris Shah (1710-1799) is the most popular text of millions of Punjabis, be they Muslims, Hindus or Sikhs, living in India, Pakistan and the various other countries of the globe. It is a long narrative poem of about a hundred thousand words and is probably the only text in any literature which is appreciated both by the most sophisticated literary critics and the peasants who have heard it sung by the village bards in the evening assemblies of young and old. How crystallised is this discourse may be judged from the fact that it is preceded by nearly a hundred other poetic versions since the sixteenth century. At the slightest occasion Waris indulges in generalisations on the nature of men, women, the affairs of this and the other world which has given Punjabi language a vast treasure of its

popular sayings. Within a general anthropological context of the medieval Punjab, Waris attempts at conceptual formulations which begin from the most ordinary, mundane affairs of this world and invariably move to a cosmological context where the highest principles of faith and friendship are underscored with divine sanction. But above all, it is the pristine purity in thought, word and deed on the one hand, and mind and body on the other, that mediates the conflicting ideological parameters.

### Presentation of the Text

The ideological context of the discourse is existentially situated immediately by Waris Shah with an invocation to God, who made love, the fundamental principle of this universe, who is the first lover, *āshiq*, and Prophet himself is His first beloved, *māshūq*. God blesses those, says Waris, who live and die in love.

We move rapidly to the nucleus of the narrative. In the prosperous land of Takht Hazara on the bank of river Chanab live the Ranjhas. Mauju is the Chief of the village. He has eight sons and two daughters. Dhido, the youngest son is his darling. The elder brothers and their wives are jealous of this over-indulgence. They are envious of Dhido but can do nothing in the dominating presence of the father who is respected and feared by all.

As luck would have it, Mauju passes away and immediately the conflicting desires manifest themselves in open rivalry and downright exclusion of the other. As the land is divided amongst brothers, Dhido gets the worst tract.

He is ridiculed by all and sundry. Spoiled by an indulgent father, Dhido is not able to manage his affairs. He has no interest in ploughing and irrigating his fields. He has lived the life of a dandy of the village. Playing on his flute, he moves around the assemblies of young boys and girls. As long as his father was alive, Dhido's brothers were careful and their wives were always very affectionate. But enough is enough, the old



man is gone, and now it is a matter of rights and duties, the affairs of the world with all their complex intrigues. Dhido Ranjha is a complete misfit in this new emerging social reality

The sisters-in-law taunt Dhido. They have been at his beck and call but now he will have to lead the life of an "adult", a responsible householder. They are no more his "maid-servants". If he cannot manage his affairs, let him go and marry Heer, the already legendary beauty of the Chief of the Sials, in the valley across the river Chanab. Depressed and disgusted, Dhido says farewell to his childhood, to the land of his parents.

When the brothers come to know of Dhido's departure, they hasten to stop him. It is one thing to maltreat your brother and quite another to expel him from the village, It is a matter of their "honour". What would the "others" say'? They request him to stay on, they plead in the name of their father and mother. How can one live without "brothers"? Without brothers no one cares for you. Without brothers there is no refuge in this world. Those who have brothers and their helping hands, they are strong and the world is afraid of them. Without brothers you are nobody. The world without brothers, says Waris, is a deserted world, a lonely world of the poor and the desolate.

*ākh rājhiā bhā ki baṇi tere, des āpṇa cchaḍ sidhār nāhī*  
*wīr ambṛi jāiā jāh nāhī, sānu nāl firāq de mār nāhī*  
*bhāiā bājh na majlasā sōhdiā ne, ate bhāiā bājh bahār nāhī*  
*bhāi maran tā pāediā bhaj bāhā, bin bhāiā pareh parwār nāhī*  
*lakh oṭ hæ bhāiā wasdiā dī, bhāiā jīwdiā de kāi hār nāhī*  
*bhāi ḍhāōde, bhāi usārde ne, wāris bhāiā bājhō beli yār nāhī*

But Dhido Ranjha had had enough of these "brothers". He was betrayed ; he was insulted and rebuked by the same brothers and their wives. He can stand this no more. He bids them a definitive farewell and leaves Takht Hazara for good.

Ranjha, as Dhido would now be called in the rest of the narrative, arrives at a mosque in the evening. As the melodies of his flute echo in the neighbourhood, a large number of peasants gather around him. They are all tuned to his divine rhythms. Soon the Mullah arrives and is furious to see all these undesirable folks hemming around the House of God. It is a sacrilege. He cannot tolerate this musical indulgence at this hour of prayer. He orders Ranjha to get out and find some other place for his enjoyment. Ranjha pleads in vain. He is expelled by his brothers. Desolate, he came to the mosque to spend a night in peace and tranquillity. He will play no more on his flute. He may be pardoned. But the Mullah does not entertain such vagabonds. Look at his dress, how unconventional it is. Look at his haircut and the beard. Has he followed the laws of the religion? He cannot have such young fellows in the holy precincts of his mosque where the elders and the chiefs pray, where authority reigns. As *l*ility was never the principal characteristics of Ranjha, he begins to *a*e. Are the mosques only for the rich and the corrupt? This Mullah is no priest of God, his anger and lust do not behove a man of religion. He has transformed this sacred place into a den of lust and leisure. But this is not what Allah ordained and he has every right to pass the night. As the Mullah realises that all his remonstrations will serve no purpose, this young man is not going to leave the mosque, he gives in and lets Ranjha sleep in a corner.

Early morning when the world begins to wake after the rest and the conjugal indulgences of the night, Ranjha leaves for the country of the Sials. It is daybreak. The farmers are heading towards their fields to plough their fertile lands, the sparrows leave their nests in search of food for their offsprings, the brides and sisters-in-law get busy with the churning of the milk and with the cleaning of the courtyards. The hearths are heated, the bread is baked. The shopkeepers open their shops, the village elders get ready to manage the affairs of this world, to settle disputes, to negotiate contracts, to bring peace and harmony to this prosperous land.

Ranjha arrives at the bank of the river Chanab and requests the boatman, Ludhan, to take him across. But Ludhan is a respectable businessman, he does not deal with such vagabonds who pay nothing and spoil his reputation. The poor fellow is again insulted. Humiliated, he sets himself in a corner and begins to play on his flute. The sweet melodies of his music attract the travellers who gather around him in large number. This infuriates Ludhan even more. Instead of getting rid of this hippy to save his business, he begins to lose his clients. When the travellers insist that Ranjha should be taken along with them on the boat, Ludhan has no choice.

Across the river is the country of Heer, the beautiful daughter of Chuchak, the chief of the Sials. Heer comes to the bank of the Chanab with her friends to swing and dance in the valley. There is a resting bed which Heer uses to repose and relax. Ranjha chooses this lovely place for his rest. Relaxing on Heer's bed, he contemplates on his fate and the ways of the world. As he was tired, he falls asleep. Meanwhile Heer arrives with her "sixty" friends, the young charming damsels of Jhang Sial. They are furious to see this transgression. How dare this young man rest on Heer's bed? Shouting and yelling they surround Ranjha and when Heer is about to thrash him with her stick, Ranjha awakes, and, beholden by Heer's celestial beauty and charm, says, O Dear! Heer smiles and surrenders! She regrets having made all this fuss. This archetype beautiful girl whose figure is described by Waris with all the metaphors and similes from the classical tradition of Oriental exaggeration, is taken in by this young man from Takht Hazara. Their eyes meet and they exchange sentiments of love and faith. Ranjha is sceptical, for one cannot trust women. Even the sacred texts warn that one should beware of the guiles of women. But Heer is not one of them. She invokes God, the highest principles of divine love and promises to be faithful under all circumstances, against all odds. She would die rather than relent from her faith. Nothing in this or the other world can stop her from being united with Ranjha. This is a word given in the presence of God and His chosen Five Sages.



*kūke mār hi mār te pakar cchamkã, pari ādmi te kæhrwān hoī  
rājhe uṭh ke ākhiā, wāh sajan, hīr has ke te meharbān hoī*

*mænu bābal di kasam hæ rājhnā we, mare māō je tud thī mukh morā  
khwājā khizar te bæṭh ke kasam khāhdi, thiwā sūr je prīt di rīt torā*

To continue their romantic meetings, the lovers devise a plan. Ranjha is engaged as a cowherd, *māhi*, by the parents of Heer. Every morning, Ranjha takes the buffaloes and cows of the Heer household and wanders around in the thick forest along the banks of the river Chanab. Heer joins him with his mid-day meal prepared with love and affection and all the sweetness of sugar and honey.

They share this meal, the *chūri*, together, and with the blessings of the *panj pirs*, the Five Sages, their union is sanctified. Ranjha plays on his flute whose bewitching melodies keep the herd of buffaloes bemused. They graze on the green grass of the forest and run around everywhere like young girls.

In this atmosphere of happiness and divine romance, everything seems to be in perfect harmony when an uncle of Heer, the lame Kaido, gets whiff of this affair. One day when Heer is away in search of water from the river, Kaido appears in the guise of a faqir and begs for something to eat. Ranjha is taken in by his humble supplication and offers Kaido, a part of the Churi that Heer had brought for him. When Heer returns and realises what had happened in her absence, she is furious. She runs after Kaido, and after a long chase, she catches hold of him and thrashes him with her stick, but Kaido is able to keep some of the bread, Ranjha had given to him.

Kaido goes to the mother of Heer and tells her that this cowerd Ranjha is no simple young man, he is supposed to be. He is a bandit who has stolen their Heer. Her daughter has ruined the honour of the family. It is time, Heer's parents take note of her sorties in the forest. The whole world knows what is going on. Only the parents are in the dark. This is most immoral on the part of the daughter of the Chief of the Sials. The best solution, proposes Kaido, would be to marry Heer off to the son of the Kheras, the Chiefs across the river, on the other side of the Sial country

When Heer returns home in the evening, her mother, Malki, admonishes her. Her behaviour is most objectionable. Going around with this domestic servant that Ranjha is in the guise of a cowerd, is most degrading to the chiefs. If she knew her daughter would turn out to be such a whore, she would have put her in a box and thrown in a river. If she knew, Heer would ruin the name of their family, she would have pushed her in a deep well. If she knew that her daughter would indulge in such immoral acts, she would have had her cut into pieces.

Heer respectfully replies that O dearest mother, she is doing no such thing. Her relation with Ranjha is the purest of human unions. It is sanctified by God himself. She has solemnly promised herself to Ranjha. And, as the Holy Quran itself states, there is no more serious crime than backing out from one's word. This promise of hers is the most sacred word. If she betrays Ranjha, she will be pushed into the fires of hell forever.

When Heer's father, Chuchak, and her brother, Sultan, admonish her, the same scenario is repeated. On the one hand, the honour of the family is invoked, and on the other, the sanctity of love blessed by God Himself. Heer does not believe that she is doing anything wrong against the family and the tradition. She invokes the great lovers of the religious and the secular traditions, who died for the sake of their highest principles of faithfulness and fortitude, whose actions were ultimately approved by the authorities of Church and State. But all this is in vain,

and Heer's parents negotiate a marriage proposal with Saida, the son of the Chief of the Kheras.

At the marriage ceremony, the Muslim priest, the Qazi, reminds Heer of the rules of the Islamic tradition. Both sides must willingly agree to the nuptial bond, the Nikah, in the presence of two witnesses and a legal negotiator. Heer replies that she is already married to Ranjha in the presence of the Almighty God and her witnesses are the five pirs. The Prophet Himself is her legal negotiator. The Qazi considers her story nothing but a figment of imagination. There is no religious sanction for such an argument. She must follow the will of her parents and the dictates of the sacred tradition. Heer replies that nothing is more sanctified and authentic than a solemn word given to another person. She reminds the Qazi that according to the sacred texts those who do not fulfil their promise are sure to go to hell. She invokes the highest spiritual principles of love which are supreme, which are not abandoned even by God Himself. The Qazi replies that Heer's arguments have nothing to do with this world where the honour of the family and the tradition is the only criterion. None has the right to set his or her own rules. Heer is adamant. She is not proposing another set of rules. She has the highest respect for her religion and her tradition, but above all, she has faith in the supreme ethics of divine love and the sanctity of the union approved by God Himself. The Islamic tradition clearly states that she cannot be married against her will, against her solemn promise given to another man. So it is not she who is transgressing the tradition but it is the Qazi who is misinterpreting the sacred texts. When the Qazi threatens that her parents would kill her if she did not obey them and the law of the land, she replies that what is the point of saving her life now if for her broken promise she will have to suffer the fires of hell for eternity after her death, for even if she does not die today, she will die some other day. What is the good of living a life of a damned person waiting for the punishment of God after life? Heer's revolution, if this fashionable word must be used in this context, is a revolution from within, from within the same ideological framework in which the Qazi and others are operating. It is interesting to note that while others abuse and admonish Heer in the harshest possible terms, she never even once



loses her calm. Very respectfully but very resolutely she sticks to her principles. Against the abstract tradition of honour and faithfulness to the sacred laws of the land, Heer proposes equally abstract arguments of the sanctity of the principles of spiritual love and divine promise. In fact, both the antagonists are not at all interested in a marriage to one or the other person. For example, not even once it is argued by the parents or the Qazi that Saida with whom they want Heer to be married is any better than Ranjha who is the choice of Heer. Nor does Heer make any attempt at a counter argument. This is not at all the issue. What is at stake is the social structure perpetuated by the legality of the religious tradition on the one hand, and highly abstract spiritual significance attached to the principles of love and faith, also found in the same tradition, on the other. This is why time and again, Heer invokes the great lovers of the past whose authenticity has already been approved by the sacred texts. We realise now how Waris had existentially situated the ideological context of his narrative in the very beginning with an invocation to God, the first lover, the *āshiq*, and the Prophet, the first beloved, the *māshūq*.

*qāzi sadiā parḥṇ naḳāh nu ji, naḳḳi wehār bæṭhi, nahī boldi hæ  
mæ tā māg rājhete dī hoe chukki, māō kufar de ghæb kiō toldi hæ  
asā māg dargāh thī liā rājhā, sidak sach zabān sab boldi hæ  
qāzi mæhkme wich arshād kītā, man sharāh dā hukam je jīwnā ī  
bād maut de nāl imān hīre, rākhāl wich bahishat de thīwnā ī  
kade dīn imān de rāh turie, jarḥ kufar dī jīo tō puṭie nā  
jerhe cchaḳ halāl harām takar, wich hāwie dozhkī suṭie nā  
kalbul-momni arsh allāh tālā, qāzi arsh khudāe dā ḳhā nāhī  
jitthe dhido de ishaq mukām kītā, othe kheriā dī koī jāh nāhī  
eh charḥi guler hæ ishaq wāli, jitthe hor koī char lāh nāhī  
jis jīwne kār imān wechā, ehā kaun jo āt fanāh nāhī*

When the Qazi realises that this girl is an absolute nuisance, and arguing with her is a sheer waste of time, he calls for the usual "witnesses" and marries her off with Saida. After all, this so-called condition of mutual assent is only a formality. One never really bothers about whether the girl and the boy are willing or not. Marriage is a union of the two families, it is invariably a social and economic contract held by the feudal virtues of honour and chastity. If every girl is allowed to marry the boy of her choice, what will happen to the social and cultural order without which no religious tradition can survive. If the witnesses begin to really take their witnessing seriously, the courts of the land can never function "smoothly". The socio-political order depends upon the equality of exchange. Of course, in the case of Ranjha, there is no problem. Heer knows that he is the son of the Chief of Takht Hazara even though for others he is a mere cowherd, a domestic servant. Heer is not transgressing the laws of the feudal order. Her high, abstract principles of faith and friendship fall well within the established tradition even if they do not suit others. But the problem is not just Heer. Heer can go to hell, argue the neighbourhood women with her mother, Malki, but this disease is contagious. They are worried about their own daughters. And, who knows other girls may not be so selective, may not be so blessed by the Five Sages. This would upset the whole world order as envisaged by the elders, and as perpetuated throughout the centuries. Hence, this slip of a girl must be stopped before it is too late.

Apart from the caste ridden Hindu society with religious sanctions, the Muslim social structure in the mediaeval Punjab is also based on distinctions due to what may be called the professional classes. There is a class of cobblers, a class of goldsmiths, a class of ironsmiths, a class of washermen, a class of potters, a class of fishermen and so on. These classes have no religious barriers and probably not much economic discrepancies but culturally these thresholds cannot be crossed. One is born into a certain class and stays there forever. The problem with "love", *ishaq*, says Waris Shah, is that its "current" is too strong to be confined within these social slots. If the floods of the emotions of love are not controlled, the whole world order will be inundated, and obviously, this cannot be allowed.



If the daughter of a cobbler runs away with the son of a goldsmith, the goldsmith's daughter with the son of a potter, then what will happen to the purity and the excellence of these professions, for according to Waris Shah it takes thirty-one generations to acquire finesse in art and techniques in each domain. The mediaeval Punjab is a world where only the absolutes matter, where each person is supposed to be perfect in the sphere of his activity. The transprofessional mobility is unheard of in this world of unidirectional movements.

In the celebrated passage often sung in the assemblies of young girls, *dolī charḍiā māriā hīr chikā*, the Heer of Waris cries like all girls are supposed to at the time of departure from their paternal home. As Heer is put in the palanquin, the *dolī*, she bids farewell to her father, *bābal*, that she is being taken away by the carriers against her will, forced by the Qazi and the relatives. She is going empty-handed, all her wealth is left behind, her Ranjha, her mother and father. She is desolate, for none would care for her Ranjha now.

She herself is going to an unknown country of the enemies. Her fate is sealed. With Ranjha she had dreamt of a blissful heaven of union and love, she is left with separation and frustration. She begs pardon of her father for all the mistakes she might have made during her short stay at his place, under the comforting shade of his tree. She requests to be excused by her mother whose love and affection she can never forget. She prays for her brothers. She wishes them peace and prosperity and all the riches of the world. This world is a short-lived dream and none should hope for a bright future, for God's ways are unknown to man. We desire one thing and we get another. We build imaginative heavens and we are pushed into hell. Even the prophets and the great lovers of the past could not escape God's wrath.

And, Heer weeps for his beloved Ranjha who is left alone in the care of God. The Qazi and the elders have acted like the butchers. She has become unconscious of everything. She did not have time even to bid farewell to her friends of childhood. She is leaving like a body without

its soul. The relatives, the elders and the neighbours forced her into the palanquin. The wealth of Ranjha is looted by the Kheras. Today, Takht Hazara and Jhang Sial are deserted and Rangpur is humming with celebrations. She cries in vain. What can a weak woman do against the cruelty of the strong and the powerful? She did not have time to have a good look at her Ranjha's face, she was absolutely helpless. There was time, a separation of a day would have been unimaginable, and now, nobody knows what is in store for her. She hoped for one thing and got another, these are the ways of God. The merciless God has separated the lovers. She prays for Ranjha. Even though all her hopes are dashed to the ground, she has faith in the bounty of God, who alone knows what is good for His creation.

*ḍolī charḥdiā māriā hīr chikā, mānu læ challe bāblā læ challe we  
 mānu rakh læ bāblā hīr ākhe, ḍolī ghat kahār ni læ challe we  
 merā ākhiā kadi na moḍdā sē, oh same bāblā kitthe gae challe we  
 teri cchatar cchāwē bāblā rukh wāgu, ghaḥi wāg musāfrā bæh challe we  
 sānu boliā chāliā māf karnā, pāj roz tere ghar ræh challe we  
 læ we rājhiā rab nu sōpiā tū, asī zālmā de was pæ challe we  
 jeḥhe nāl khiāl usārḍi sā, khāne sabh umæd de ḍhæ challe we  
 chāre kanniā meriā wekh khāli, asī nāl nahiō kuj læ challe we  
 kūḥi duniā te shān gumān kūḥā, wāris shāh horī sach kæh challe we*

But this physical separation cannot separate their souls. The Qazi, the parents, the brothers have strangled her but she is not going to live with the Khera. She will spend the rest of her life weeping for her Ranjha. God willing, she will one day meet him again. What an inauspicious day their love began? They could never foresee such cruel days.

Meanwhile Heer is getting used to her new state. Along with her mental purity she is able to protect her physical purity with the help of

the Panj Pirs, the five divine sages, who respond to Heer's prayers and do not let Saida approach her bed.

As the parents of Saida realise that Heer had had an affair before her marriage, they decide to not to let her return to her *peke*, her parents. This forced separation increases Heer's anguish and she laments for the good old days of love and the devastating present mental state of having to live with those she hates. To describe her state of mind Waris composes the traditional Bara Mah, the twelve months, during which we follow the seasonal variations in correspondence with the fluctuating spiritual agony of Heer.

In *Sāwan* (July) Heer expresses her helplessness. Her parents, her friends forced her to marry the undesired Saida. All other girls of the village welcome the refreshing air and the rains on the swings while Heer thinks of the days when she too was happy and could enjoy the pleasant weather and swing for hours on the sentimental horizon of love for Ranjha. Sawan is the month when every girl is happy and enjoys the romantic élan of the seasonal change. But poor Heer cannot participate in this general atmosphere of gaiety. She prays to the Panj Pirs to help her bear this intolerable situation when her anguish knows no limits.

In *Bhdō* (August) Heer cries for she cannot see her Ranjha. She cannot sleep at night. She cannot spin during day. In the absence of Ranjha, Heer spends her time weeping in seclusion, for she cannot share her grief with any one. There are dark clouds in the sky. For some they are the symbol of hope and fertility. For Heer they are threatening with gloom and disaster. She is a captive in the camp of the enemy. Other girls are busy and preoccupied with their personal and family affairs but Heer is restless. In this separation from Ranjha, she is in perpetual motions of agony and desperation.

In *Assū* (September) Heer still believes God will help her. She prays for her union with Ranjha. This separation from her love is cutting her like a sharp knife. When she sees the full moon at night, she experiences an internal upheaval. This moonlit night, this cool atmosphere only



sharpens her pangs of separation. It reminds her of the lovely moments her friends are enjoying. Poor Heer, she draws the lines of fate to see if her Ranjha would ever come to see her, to deliver her from this captivity. Her faith in God is not shaken and she tries to reassure herself that one day the things will change. God's grace would fall on her and there would be a reunion after all. But this moment of hope does not last long and she falls again into the valley of despair.

In *Kattak* (October) there are floods of sorrow. In this month she would love to go to the woods to meet her cowherd Ranjha. Dear friends, when she was at her parents, she enjoyed the company of Ranjha during these days of mild, pleasant weather. And now here at Rangpur, she would rather smear her body with dust. All her friends are away, there is none to share her pain, her anguish. Without Ranjha there is none to take care of Heer. She is ill but only the medicine-man Ranjha can cure this disease. There is no Ranjha around, none to respond to her dreams. This is the season when she would have gone with Ranjha for a swim in the river Chanab to cool her burning desires.

In *Maghar* (November) the severity of Heer's anguish deepens. She longs for her lost love. She assures him that she has kept herself pure in mind and body for Ranjha alone. For her, after the Prophet there is none other than Ranjha to whom she belongs, for whom she lives. She prays to both of them not to forsake her, for she has none other to go to. She hopes that maybe one day grace will descend from Jhang Sial to Rangpur and there will be a reunion of love after all. Ranjha is her love, her religion, her faith. Alternately, she prays to him and to the Almighty to have pity on her. Her faith will win on the day of Judgement and the Prophet will be her witness.

In *Poh* (December) Heer shivers alone in her bed. She is all alone, lonely in her thoughts and her words. She has no friend. She cries in vain for her love. The whole night she weeps and at daybreak she leaves her bed as if nothing is happening. She must suffer in seclusion, for the world is cruel and does not care for the honesty of the lovers. Her heart







is wounded. When nobody is around, she wipes her tears of sorrow, for she dare not share her secret with any neighbour.

In *Māgh* (January) Heer thinks of suicide. She can stand it no more, she would rather swallow poison than continue to lead this wretched state. In any case, all this youth and charm is only a dream of a few days. It cannot last forever. But her hope and faith do not let her die. Maybe he will after all come one day, perhaps God will finally relent and the good happy days will be there for the two lovers. She does not want to live any more in the mansions of her in-laws. She would rather be in the woods with her Ranjha. But again she relapses and realises that it is no use waiting for the one who would never come. It is better to rely on one's own faith and resolution.

In *Phagan* (February) there is spring. The flowers are blossoming all over. There is sweet smell in the gardens. Her friends are enjoying the company of their lovers but Heer is not destined to such happiness, she is being wounded by the sword of separation. She longs to be with Bibi Fatima with her hair down and on her knees praying for her grace. And, again she is sad. She curses her mother who gave her birth, to a girl who is destined to suffer and spend her life in utter misery away from her love. There are the ones who laugh and be merry. They are blessed by the Almighty. And, here she is, all burnt within, in sadness and solitude, a cursed being, whom the Prophet has forgotten.

In *Chet* (March) all the young girls and brides are dressed up for the festivals. They are all decked with beautiful dresses and jewellery. They are perfumed and their coiffures are most fascinating. They are happy with their lovers, they are enjoying their blissful unions. And here is Heer, all alone, her heart sinks, her body aches. She dare not manifest her agony to others, she does not want to spoil this atmosphere of grace and beauty and love. She is afraid. She is depressed, but above all, she is alone, so miserably lonely in this most happy surrounding submerged in romance and reunion.

In *Waisākh* (April) Heer is bewildered at her deteriorating mental condition. She is afraid, her miserable state is no more a secret. Even earth and heaven have joined hands to torture her. She consults the astrologers, the Brahmins, the yogis to find out if there is any hope in the days destined for her by God. She curses herself, the day of her birth, she inherited nothing but sorrows and sufferings. Maybe one day, all this will be an old tale, for she believes in spite of all indications of her stars that her faith will overcome all the divine and human obstacles, and, she will meet her love.

In *Jeth* (May) the temperatures have shot up. The air is burning and Heer is consumed from within. She is burning in the fire of separation. The happy young married girls have descended in the cold basements with their husbands, and here is Heer standing on the rooftop looking for her love. She waits in vain. As the sun rises and rains fire on Rangpur, Heer is all burnt, within and without. In this tortuously burning atmosphere even the birds have fled leaving Heer all alone to suffer her agony. She prays to the Almighty, to the great Sufi saints, to come to her rescue, for she has never offended them. She has always followed the path of righteousness.

In *Hār* (June) it is so hot that one cannot even breathe. Heer can stand it no more. Her breasts are burning. She is being cooked alive like a fish. She feels as if she is being pierced by a sword. The pain is cruel and continuous. She succumbs to this terrible state. She asks travellers if they have any news of Ranjha, her cowherd lover. It is hot, she is thirsty, but Heer's thirst can be quenched only by the touch of the lips of Ranjha. Only he can cool her burning fire within. She thinks of Ranjha and she vibrates with desire. She longs to meet her love. But, alas, it is not to be, she must continue to suffer, forever.

During this period of separation and utter frustration Ranjha meditates on his destiny and the ways of God. Poor fellow, he was pushed out of the country of his father only to spend years in the wilderness of the jungles. But even though he had to lead the life of a cowherd and a domestic servant of the Sials, he had had the satisfaction

of the company of Heer. The reunions of course were occasional. There was the omnipresent uncle, Kaido, and the whole neighbourhood that kept an eye on the sorties of Heer. She had to be careful. Once the secret was out, once the parents were duly warned by the society, the going became rough, and, the happy romantic days were over well before Heer's marriage to Saida. Heer had at that time suggested that they should elope but Ranjha did not want to go as far as that. He probably still thought that a straightforward union with Heer was possible. He was after all the son of the Chief of Takht Hazara and there was no reason why he could not marry Heer in the normal process. But what he did not realise was that while a regularly arranged marriage between these two feudal households was perfectly in order, it could not be so, once he and Heer, both had transgressed the prevalent social order and the scheme of things ordained by the elders.

Ranjha now conceives of another plan which is equally otherworldly. He decides to become a yogi to reach the country of Heer's in-laws. He arrives at the abode of Guru Bal Nath, the famous disciple of the great Guru Gorakh Nath. Bal Nath is pleased to see the handsome Ranjha all set to be initiated in the discipline of Yoga. In the beginning, the Guru hesitates, for Ranjha appears to be too adventurous a young man. He is eager, has all the initiative and inspiration but Bal Nath feels that the young boy may be only infatuated by the general allure of the yogis, he may not be able to stand the hardships and austerities required in the yogic Order. Above all, he is not convinced that such a young man can forsake the desires and passions of youth. The most important requirement is the avoidance of sex. For a yogi, all women are sisters or mothers. A yogi has not only to take the vows of poverty but also of chastity of mind and body. Ranjha is adamant. He is sincere in his wish to adhere to the discipline of yoga. He has left the pleasures of a feudal household. He has already renounced all wealth and vanity. There is nothing left for him in this world except to follow the path of God, and Bal Nath is the great guru who has attained salvation and who can save all who fall on his feet. Ranjha is here at the abode of the great sage in all humility. His honesty is beyond any doubt most



sincere and he would spend the rest of his worldly days in the service of the great master.

Bal Nath is pleased at this devotion and the initiation ceremony is prepared. After a ritual bath amidst the chanting of mantras, Ranjha's head is shaven. His long, beautiful, black hairs are cut off, and his ears are pierced for the yogic rings. His body is smeared with ashes. The Guru blesses Ranjha with the grace of the Almighty who has himself accepted him in the great yogic Order of Guru Gorakh Nath. Waris Shah remarks that within a few moments the Guru transformed the cowerd peasant boy into the pure gold of a yogi.

Once the ceremony was over, once Ranjha had satisfied himself that there was no going back, even Bal Nath could not withdraw his entry into the yogic Order and the blessings of the Almighty, he disclosed his real purpose. He had come to the great Guru for the gift of Heer. He could avoid all lust, all the worldly goods, all pleasures of this mundane world, even all women, but Heer was another question. He tells the Guru that it is long since he has surrendered himself to Heer. When he was young and handsome and Heer's breasts were full and she was the most beautiful girl, they fell in love, a sentiment and a union which was sanctified by the Panj Pirs, the five divine sages. It was not a worldly affair of sex and lust, theirs was the purest relation, a relation approved even by God.

Bal Nath is angry. He feels cheated by this Jat boy but Ranjha immediately replies that had he known that the Guru would forbid him from his Heer, he would not have even pissed on this so-called holy abode of the yogis. He had come to the great Guru thinking that the divine sages were omniscient, they know all, hence his honesty and purity in thought will not be questioned.

Bal Nath realises his mistake but also accepts the fact that the boy is sincere. He is not a hypocrite like all the other disciples around him. Ranjha is sincere and true to his word. His devotion and honesty cannot be challenged. So Bal Nath decides to accept him as his most favourite

disciple and prays for him for his Heer. After a long meditation when the Guru opens his eyes, he blesses Ranjha that his prayers have been accepted by God, and the Almighty Himself has bestowed on him the gift of Heer.

Blessed by the great Bal Nath, the yogi Ranjha leaves for Rangpur, the town of Heer's in-laws. When he reaches the outskirts of the habitation, he meets a shepherd, *ayāli*, who informs Ranjha of Heer's new situation, of the family of her husband, and how he can reach there. While they were so engaged in exchanging confidences, a wolf takes away a sheep. The shepherd is alarmed and furious but Ranjha calmly gets up and with one stroke lays the wolf down on the ground. The shepherd is duly impressed by this brave young fellow whose yogic garb was only deceptive. Henceforth, he becomes a willing accomplice of the yogi.

Ranjha tells the shepherd how he was deceived, how Heer, his beloved and his right by the grace of the Panj Pirs and his own righteousness, was snatched away by these folks of Rangpur, the Kheras. Now even the great Guru, Bal Nath, has blessed him with the gift of Heer. His mission is thus sanctified by the highest authorities. The shepherd agrees with his new friend and is willing to give him all the secrets of the family of the Kheras. The most important is that Heer's sister-in-law, her husband's sister, her *nanān*, Saihti, is in love with a Bloch boy, Murad, and if handled properly, may end up being an accomplice in his enterprise.

And here is Ranjha among the Kheras. The yogi encounters the young girls of the village on the common well where they have come to fetch water. They are bewitched by the handsome figure of Ranjha yogi. One such girl is Saihti, the sister-in-law of Heer.

In the now famous passage of Waris, *ghar ā nanān ne gal kītī...* Saihti describes the new yogi in the town to the bewildered Heer who cannot believe her ears. Dear Bhabi, there is in the town a new yogi with beautiful ear-rings and a necklace which sets his figure off like no one

has ever been so adorned. This yogi seems to be looking for a lost jewel. At times he smiles, at times he weeps, it is a strange spectacle to watch him move around the village. He is handsome like a moon, he is tall like a Saru tree. Some blessed mother has given birth to such a charming yogi. He is in search of something which one cannot understand. O Heer, he is not a yogi, he must be a son of a great lord, you cannot imagine, his charm is incomparable, even your beauty is no match, my dear. He is going around in the assemblies of the girls but is not taken in by any. With eyes bowed, he is a picture of humility. Some say, he is king Bhartṛhari who has renounced his kingdom. Some say, he is a thief of beauty, some say, he is from Jhang Sial. Some call him the yogi from Takht Hazara. There are all kinds of rumours but none has been able to understand his behaviour. But one thing is certain, this yogi is no ordinary fellow, he is definitely going to create some trouble. Beware, my friend!

*ghar ā nanān ne gal kītī, bhābī ik jogī nawā āiā nī*  
*kanni os de darshni mūdrā ne, gale hēklā ajab suhāiā nī*  
*phire dhūddā wich haweliā de, koī os ne lāl gwāiā nī*  
*nāle gāwdā te nāle rōwdā e, waḍḍā os ne rāg machāiā nī*  
*hīre kise rajwās dā oh puttār, rūp tud thī dūn swāiā nī*  
*koi ākhdi prem di chāṭ picche, hīre os ne sīs munāiā nī*  
*koī ākhdi kise de ishaq picche, būde lāh ke kan pariā nī*  
*koī takhat hazāre dā eh rājhā, bāl nāth tō jog lāe āiā nī*

And in the most feminine voice of the century, the Heer of Waris responds to this long awaited and yet unbelievable news. In absolute despair and anguish Heer weeps for her Ranjha. Poor fellow, what has he done for her. He got his ears pierced and head shaved to wear these rags. This prince of Takht Hazara is now torturing himself with yogic drugs. He was so young and handsome and now he has smeared himself with ashes. He has no father, no mother, no brother, no sister : who is going to stand witness for him? Accursed is the mother whose moon-like



son has covered his body with dust. Accursed is the sister whose prosperous brother has become a faqir. Accursed is the woman whose husband has renounced this world. Accursed is the girl whose handsome lover has pierced his ears to rot like a wretched beggar. She will spend the rest of her life in utter sorrow and depression. Her weeping will never end, her tears will never stop. Why don't these people let him alone? Why are they after this poor yogi?

But she would rather not believe these rumours. She wishes that this yogi may be someone other than her love. She curses herself who is such a helpless prisoner. And, it is Ranjha after all, who has done all this, who has suffered all the humiliation of a faqir to be able to reach her. Covered in her veil, Heer weeps for her love. He was such a spoiled boy, was used to such comforts, and now as a yogi, as a faqir, he is going around the houses of others to beg for his daily bread. Poor fellow, what did he get out of this affair of love, laments Heer.

*muṭhī muṭhī eh gal na karo bhænā, mæ tā suṇdiā hi mar gaī je nī  
kikū kan paṛāe ke jīwdā e, gallā suṇdiā hi jīd gaī je nī  
ohde dukhṛe rownā jadō suṇiā, muṭhi mīṭ ke mæ bæh gaī je nī  
wekhā kehṛe des dā oh jogī, us thō kehṛi piārī khus gaī je nī  
ak, post, dhatūra te bhāg pī ke, maut os ne mul kiō lai je nī  
jis dā māō na bāp na bhæn bhāī, kauṇ karegā os di wahī je nī  
jis dā chan puttār swāh lā bæṭhā, matthe lekh de mekh wag gaī je nī  
jis de sohne yār de kan pāṭe, oh naḍhṛī chaur ho gaī je nī  
wāris shāh phire dukkhā nāl bhariā, khalak magar kiō os de pāī je nī  
rab jhūṭh na kare je hoe rājhā, tā mæ chaur hoi, mænu paṭṭiā sū  
ik ag firāq di sār suṭṭi, saṛi bali nu muṛ ki phaṭṭiā sū  
mere wāste dukhṛe phire sēhdā, lohā tæe jībhe nāl chaṭṭiā sū  
hoiā chāk pīḍe mali khāk rājhe, lāh nā namūs nu suṭṭiā sū  
bukkal wich chori chori hīr rowe, gharā nīr da chāe plaṭṭiā sū*

After a series of confrontations with Saihti where Ranjha and Saihti both accuse each other of the falsehood they are spreading, of the camouflage of the yogi, who is in reality looking for his beloved, of the vain pride of Saihti who herself is not such a simpleton, being deeply involved in an affair with the Bloch merchant boy, Murad, Ranjha reaches the guarded precincts of Heer and begs alms in the name of his Guru, Bal Nath. Heer is emotionally perplexed, she does not know how to respond. Ranjha pleads that he is the true disciple of Bal Nath. His Guru has bestowed on him spiritual powers with which he can cure all diseases, change destinies, administer the impossible, and unite old lovers.

Heer replies. O Yogi, you are telling lies, there is none to remove the misfortune, none to bring back old friends. She would offer her own skin for his shoes who can perform such a miracle, who can cure the disease of her heart. God has forsaken those who indulge in amorous plays, who yearn for their loves. I would sacrifice everything, my body, my life for any person who can alter these ways of God. The dead and the departed can never meet again. This is the Order of the Almighty. A crow snatches away the game from an eagle, I wonder, what he thinks of it, how he cries for the lost treasure. The world makes fun of those, with fantasies of unions, who are wounded in love. The field of a peasant is on fire, nobody is going to extinguish it. I will lit lamps of *ghee*, and distribute sweet *churi* if ever I get the news of my love.

The yogi offers his blessings. God is great and one should have patience. For the true lovers, for the honest and the pure, the Guru is always ready to perform miracles. There is no dearth of bounty in the House of the Almighty. He has finally blessed their union and this is no occasion of remonstrations or complaints. They should rejoice in the blessings of the Guru whose yoga has enabled him to reach his love.

*hīr ākhiā jogiā jhūth ākhē, kauṇ ruṭhre yār manāōdā e*  
*asā koī na ḍiṭṭhā ḍhūḍ thakkī, jehrā giā nu moṛ liāōdā e*  
*sāḍe cham diā juttiā kare koī, jehrā jīo dā rog gwāōdā e*  
*bhalā das khā chirī wicchuniā nu, kadō rab sachā gharī liāōdā e*  
*maulā moe te wicchre kauṇ mele, æwē jiūrā lok walāōdā e*  
*ik bāj tō kāō ne kūj khohī, wekhā chup hæ ke kurlāōdā e*  
*dukkhā wāliā nu gallā sukh diā, kisse joṛ jahān suṇāōdā e*  
*ik jaṭ de khet nu ag laggī, wekhā āṇ ke kadō bujhāōdā e*  
*dewā chūriā ghio de bāl dīwe, wāris shāh je suṇā mæ āwdā e*

One day when Ranjha comes to their house on his daily rounds, Saihti is furious and breaks the begging bowl of Ranjha who curses her with eternal separation from her love. He is after all the yogi of the Order of Bal Nath whose word is law in this profane world. Saihti is scared. She realises her mistake of having annoyed the divine sage and pleads : *giā bhaj takdīr de nāl ṭhūṭhā, læ ja sathō qīmat maṭ di we ...* It is by chance that your bowl is broken, she is ready to pay for it. The yogi should have patience with ordinary householders. They are ever on the wrong path, only the yogis can alter the destinies of the poor human beings. But the yogi is adamant. Saihti is a hypocrite. She is playing all these tricks to hide her own affairs, her own intrigues. She cannot take lightly the wrath of a yogi. The accusing words of wicked women like Saihti cut very deep. These wounds are not easily healed. She must repent. She must surrender to the will of the yogi. In it is her salvation, and of course, the salvation of all, also of Heer and Ranjha.

*giā bhaj takdīr de nāl ṭhūṭhā, læ jā sathō kīmat maṭ dī we*  
*takdīr allāh dī nu kauṇ moṛe, takdīr pahārā nu kaṭdī we*  
*ādam hawā nu kaḍh bahishat wichō, takdīr zamīn te saṭ dī we*  
*sulemān jhokhe bhaṭh mācchiā de, takhat chāhr takdīr plaṭ dī we*

The yogi Ranjha settles down in the woods on the outskirts of the village where like a true medicine-man he heels the physical and spiritual diseases of the populace. Young boys and girls go to him for potions of love, the estranged women for talismans to capture their paramours, the daughters and sisters-in-law to resolve their disputes with the disciplinarian mothers and mothers-in-law.

Heer and Saihti are now friends with the common aim of reaching their lovers, of transgressing the laws of the householders. One day Heer pretends to have been stung by a "snake" and Saihti pleads that only the yogi of the black garden can cure her. The parents relent and both the girls arrive at the garden of paradise. And, Heer finally meets her lover in this wilderness of nature, in this pleasure house of God. Waris celebrates their most voluptuous union, the most rhythmic meeting of the two hearts in love who had been separated for such a long time, who had suffered at the hands of both anthropology and cosmology, and who are now being consumed by the most violent current of love, desire and passion.

*rājhā shauq de nāl uṭh kharā hoiā, wāo ishaq di dohā nu wag gāi*  
*wāo wag gāi hirs bhaj gāi, dil lag gāi khabar jag gāi*  
*yār nu yār jadō āṅ miliā, hirs dohā di ādrō bhaj gāi*  
*ik dhūā dhukhdā jogīre dā, uttō phūk ke cchokrī ag gāi*  
*dowē mast didār wich jhūlde san, zæhar rag dī dhā rag gāi*  
*rājhā shauq de nāl didār kardā, gal hijar dī dūr alag gāi*  
*yār yār dā bāg wich mel hoiā, gal ām mashhūr ho jag gāi*  
*yāro jhulli ādherrī ishaq wālī, uḍ sharm hyā dī pag gāi*  
*wāris ṭuṭiā nu rab jorā e, wekho kamle nu parī lag gāi*

Meanwhile these voluptuous reunions of the lovers stung by the snake continue in the black garden, Ranjha helps Saihti to run away with



Murad, and before the next daybreak, Heer and Ranjha also elope after a long night of celebration of their divine and profane love and lust...

After this the thread of the narrative is lost in confusion. There are several versions. One of the accounts states that Saida, Heer's husband, and his brother catch up with the lovers and they are brought to the court of the prince of that domain. The Adli Raja, the just king, awards Heer to Ranjha and they return to Takht Hazara to live happily ever after.

Another version states that when Saida and company threaten to take away Heer, she swallows poison and dies. Ranjha cannot stand it any more and grief-stricken he also collapses on the corpse of Heer and they are buried together in the same tomb to be united forever.

It is interesting to note here, however, that while the ends of other romantic legends of the region are so important, they represent the climax of the narratives, and the poets exaggerate that moment to the extreme, the end of Heer Ranjha tale is never taken seriously in any poetic composition.

### Mediatory Prospections

The narrative of Heer operates at two levels of mediatory prospections : the anthropological level and the cosmological level. At the anthropological level, we encounter the cultural infrastructure of brothers' jealousies, the disputes about ancestral property, the whole kinship system of the mediaeval Punjab, the feudal, social and economic structure with its intrigues and its exploitations. At the cosmological level, we encounter the same dramatis personae circumventing the realities of profane life with the sanctions of divine authority where all physical, social and economic factors pass through the sieve of spiritual crystallisation. Even religion which is the main undercurrent of the whole narrative is subjected to these pulls in different directions. On the one hand, we have the religious parameters which almost coincide with the anthropological cultural scheme of things, and on the other, we are



reminded of the higher, more sanctified references to the fundamental truths which surpass and transgress all thresholds of space and time. But it is interesting to note that even though these two parameters are in contradistinction with each other, one cannot operate without the presence of the other. They are bound in an obligatory framework of conceptual oppositions which derive their beings from each other. This text deals with an empirical reality which must be understood within a conceptual framework that mediates between the two planes of anthropological and cosmological spatial translocation.

When there is a dispute between brothers, Ranjha is not interested in any settlement through the mediation of the elders of the village, the normal procedure in such cases. He simply decides to leave his native place. When the sisters-in-law and their husbands, Ranjha's brothers, come to know of this drastic action, they invoke the cultural importance of the unity of brothers, their joint strength, their solitary weakness, their union, their solidarity, but Ranjha does not operate at this level of universal, fundamental values of cultural or anthropological truth. His solution is otherworldly, he simply quits, for he knows that whatever may be the proposal of his brothers, it will bind him to the norms of the village life. He is not willing for any compromise. He must have either all or nothing. When his father was alive, he was not treated like one of his several sons, it was a special indulgence. But as long as the feudal lord was alive, the sons, Ranjha's brothers, dared not question his authority or his dispensation. There was no question of equality. It was his master's voice that mattered. And, Ranjha was obviously the chosen one, the one who was supposed to, or this is what Ranjha thought, inherit his wealth and authority. Interestingly, even this preference for Ranjha had already altered the normal cultural behaviour, for generally it is the eldest son who is supposed to continue the feudal estate, and Ranjha was the youngest son of his father. The old lord had already ignored the cultural norms of his society. Ranjha's brothers are jealous but they are helpless before the old man. When they and their wives decide to assert, Ranjha does not resist, he simply gives in, renounces all, and, quits. But the brothers had not bargained for such a solution. Even though materially they will benefit, they will now get all the land

that belongs to Ranjha, they never wanted this undeserved share, for they operate within a cultural context where this is not permissible. One can quarrel with one's brother but one can never exile him. This is socially not acceptable. This is why they forget their dispute and invoke the highest principles of brotherly love and solidarity.

If the solution to the feudal dispute proposed by Ranjha is cosmological, his brothers counteract with equally powerful argument of anthropological truth. But this is not to be. Cosmology must overcome all obstacles of cultural anthropology.

On his way to the country of Heer, Ranjha encounters the priest of the mosque where he wants to spend a night and the boatman to cross the river. In both cases, he faces the same problem. Neither the priest nor the boatman welcome such vagabonds, such wordly irresponsible fellows who do not follow the normal parameters of culture. Instead of justifying in his own cultural terms, which was both legitimate and possible, Ranjha simply challenges their relation with God and Honesty, the two levels at which they are supposed to operate. The anthropological reasoning is opposed to cosmological logic. When Heer proposes a disguise of a cowherd, Ranjha accepts willingly, for this is the most ambiguous existence. To be cowherd of a feudal household is a normal occupation. So naturally, nobody has any suspicion. On the other hand, for Ranjha it does not matter. First of all, even anthropologically it is not in natural correspondence of the scheme of things of this world. Ranjha is the son of the Chief of Takht Hazara. He cannot be engaged as a cowherd in another equally important feudal household. Moreover, it is not even because Ranjha has been thrown out of his village and it is the economic compulsion that forces such a solution. As such, Ranjha is both is and not a cowherd. It is a cosmology intertwined with anthropology. Even their meetings in the woods outside the village where on the bank of the river Chanab, Ranjha grazes the buffaloes and cows of Heer, there is a geographical space which is both in correspondence with the profane village life and with the cosmological mental space which clearly presents a threshold of anthropological domain that is being constantly transgressed. It is interesting to note that

not only there is a certain interlinkage between the profane and the spiritual, the anthropological and cosmological domains almost coincide. And, this coincidence, of course, is most deceptive, even at times, indistinguishable which gives rise to a kind of ambiguity superimposed on the whole narrative.

The existential condition of Heer is quite different. She has a much better understanding and a much stronger hold over both anthropological and cosmological planes. There is a qualitative difference. Heer remains squarely within the normal cultural parameter. As a Punjabi girl, she is confined to the family and home, hence there is no question of going beyond or fighting its basic tenets. For Punjabi boys, it is different, even normally they are not expected to be such an integral part of the social structure. Their role is always peripheral. The social and cultural values are upheld primarily by the girls. The boys just fit in this overall structure but there is no conscious, deliberate effort on their part. Heer, as such, is closer to the cultural reality, closer to the bonds of family and religion. Even when all the possibilities are exhausted, all the doors are shut, she only invokes the cosmological principles but she succumbs to the ways of the world all the same. When their relation is no more a secret, when her mother and brother threaten her, castigate her, abuse her, she is most respectful. She tries to convince them with the usual arguments of love and honesty, faith and fortitude. When all this fails, she gives real historical evidence of the lovers of yonder days. Even when she is forced to sit in the wedding palanquin, she remembers the good old days she spent in affection and endearment at home, with her father, with her mother. She leaves the home of her parents, her *peke*, like any Punjabi girl would.

Heer's disputation with the Qazi, the priest, is also of the same order. The Qazi seems to have reduced religion to the most ordinary rules of village life. Heer does not challenge his arguments. She only finds them ridiculous. She argues with the same logic. She reminds the Qazi that she cannot be married against her own will. This is the most fundamental principle of Islam. And, the witnesses, the Qazi calls, have to testify of her having accepted the contract that the religious ceremony



*nikah* is supposed to be. This is simple anthropological logic. When nothing works, no reason moves the obdurate Qazi, Heer invokes the Prophet Himself and the universal principles of truth and love. Cosmology in the case of Heer is the last resort but once she has decided to force the resolution, there is no going back. The Qazi, the parents, the brothers can do whatever they like, she is a member of their social group and she understands the compulsions of the household and the family but neither anthropological nor cosmological counter arguments can weaken her resolve. She will physically submit to their will but she will never mentally accept their verdict. And, when all is lost, she invokes the Panj Pirs, the five divine sages, to protect her chastity in body and spirit, and obviously they come to her rescue.

One may conceptually perceive the two aspects of Heer phenomenon : Heer before marriage, the daughter of a chieftain, the sister of brave brothers, the spoiled child of a feudal household, an active and assertive Heer who takes all risks, who challenges all, and Heer after marriage, a bride within feudal constraints, a daughter and a sister-in-law who must submit to others' authority, a submissive and weak woman who can only weep or pray, lament or think of good old days and be more and more depressed and helpless.

Until her forced wedding, all the initiatives are taken by Heer. It is she who proposes to Ranjha to be her cowherd. She goes out to see him in the woods. Challenged by her wicked uncle, Kaido, she resolutely faces his anger. When parents question her behaviour, her sorties with Ranjha, she continues to advance one argument after another. It is another matter that they all fail. The disputation with the Qazi is most illuminating. She has a sharp wit, she is resolute, she has logic, and she knows the fundamental principles of religion. She is not only assertive, she is also a brilliant dialectician. It is within the parameters of Islam that she logically defeats the Qazi. She is not at all transgressing the threshold set by the Prophet, it is the Qazi, on the other hand, who is not true to his own mission of a priest of God. She never challenges the tenets of any parameter, sacred or secular, she always measures swords at the level of truth and logic. The only difference is that while Heer is

absolutist, she wants everyone to believe in what they profess, others always opt for a conciliatory, middle path for fear of disturbing the normal social order rather than insisting on what should be the righteous path. As such, Heer's revolution, if this term is to be used at all, is a revolution from within. She remains well within the framework of anthropological rules set by the society. She only insists on their adherence to the logical end.

As a bride at her in-laws, Heer is a different person. She is lonely, she is sad, she is depressed. She is no more active or assertive. Her only recourse now is to pray to the divine forces to come to her rescue, for she has never betrayed them. She was always true to their principles. If she gave herself to Ranjha, her love for him was sanctified, pure and honest. There is nothing she can do against her husband, her sister-in-law, her mother-in-law and all the social guardians of a bride, but she can pray to God, she can reach the One who was always most dear to him. And, naturally, the divine sages are with her. Heer's purity in thought and deed, mind and body, is preserved. And, now all she can do is wait for her love.

And when the yogi Ranjha does arrive with torn ears, shaved head, and body smeared with ashes, we hear the most feminine voice of the Middle Ages. It is as a mother, a sister, a bride, a beloved – all rolled in one being that Heer weeps for her Ranjha who has renounced all, who has tortured his mind and body to become a yogi, to descend to the level of a beggar sadhu to meet his love. Heer weeps, cries, laments at this existential condition of her lover. She invokes an accursed mother, an accursed sister, an accursed bride, an accursed beloved who have lost their son, brother, husband, lover to the yogic Order, to the group of mendicants whose only earthly possession is their begging bowl, who must suffer heat and cold, thirst and hunger, always on the move from one wilderness to another.

Ranjha is made of another clay. When there was trouble at home, he simply decided to leave. Even with the priest of the mosque and the boatman, he had but a very minor confrontation. When he meets Heer



and they fall in love with each other, it is Heer who takes all the initiatives. It is she who suggests that he should become their cowherd. She convinces her father and thereafter Ranjha simply follows Heer until her marriage. When Heer realised that she will be forced to marry Saida, she suggests that they should elope but Ranjha is not very enthusiastic. He tells Heer that love in deception is no love and they must not lead the life of dishonesty and falsehood.

But all this changes when Heer gets married and Ranjha is separated from his love. This prolonged separation transforms a lazy and spoiled Ranjha into an assertive, active lover who must plan and execute his schemes with absolute accuracy and maximum risk, for going to meet Heer at her in-laws involves a dangerous adventure in that era of feudal mediaeval Punjab. He decides to become a yogi and when Bal Nath is reluctant, he employs all the strength of his arguments and his sincerity to convince the great Guru. When Heer was active and assertive, Ranjha showed no sign of an active lover. When Heer was helpless and confined to the house of her in-laws, his existential condition changes and he is transformed into a resolute man.

His confrontations with the yogis, the shepherd outside Heer's village and with Saihti, the sister-in-law, all show how Ranjha slowly acquires a new being, a new responsibility to change this world, this world where lovers cannot meet, where the prisoner brides are confined to the dungeons of their in-laws.

And finally the voluptuous union in the *kālā bāgh*, the black garden, the black forest, the garden of Eden and the snake. The semiological contours are consistent all the way through. Ranjha crosses the river to reach the country of Heer. He becomes a cowherd and they meet in the woods on the bank of the river Chanab, and now, the black forest ; the river, the woods and the forest on the one hand, and the cowherd and the yogi on the other. The village, the society, the religion, all function within an anthropological context. The river and the forest represent both a correspondence and a threshold to be crossed. The

anthropological world is never transgressed, it is always circumvented. The lovers simply go beyond the limits set by the social structure.

This is not even an opposition of nature and culture in the ordinary sense of the term. The black forest is outside the village but as there can be no village without a forest, they are in a complementary relationship. The routine conjugal life of the householders continues and the lovers continue to meet in the garden of Eden. The union in the black forest is not a sexual reproductive union, it is a voluptuous celebration, even a violent voluptuous celebration as has already been noted in the earlier section. It is almost a confrontation of two cosmological beings separated by anthropological norms. Hence, the celebration is cosmological in every sense of the term. This is an extremely important threshold in the narrative of Heer, for after this voluptuous upheaval, the story nearly ends. What happens later is not of much importance. And, this is exactly the reason why the end of this narrative is not very clear but nobody really bothers. This voluptuous cosmic celebration is really the climax.

This also explains the existential status of Ranjha as a cowherd and as a yogi. As the son of the chief of Takht Hazara in the guise of a cowherd, Ranjha is and is not a cowherd. So is the case at Rangpur. Normally, the relation between the householder and the yogi is that the householder is stationary, the village where he lives has a fixed locale and even though the yogi depends upon the village and the householder for his living, he keeps on moving, but Ranjha is not a yogi who wanders from one place to another. He is a yogi only for Heer and for Rangpur. Hence, he is not a true yogi. On the other hand, a yogi is involved in the anthropological structure of the society, for he plays a complementary role in the whole scheme of rituals which must move within the anthropological and cosmological space. This space is not respected by Ranjha. He is not at all interested in what goes on in this interlinkage. His mission is purely cosmological. He is neither complementing the social fabric of the village nor transgressing it. He simply sets up another parameter where he meets his beloved stung by the snake of love in the black forest, which is in fact not even a forest, for it no more functions as a link between the village and the outside

world. Both Ranjha as a yogi and the black forest as a lieu of voluptuous cosmic celebration represent exactly their opposite. There is a definite conceptual divide that defines the threshold they cross, a threshold that corresponds with a movement from the worldly to the inner depths of human predicament, the predicament of a non-being and being. Going to the black forest for Heer is not going from village to the garden or going from culture to nature. This journey of Heer from the house of her in-laws where she is a prisoner, forced to marry Saida against her will, and according to her, the will of God, to the black forest where she meets yogi Ranjha, her love, is a journey from the existential condition of a non-being to the realisation of her cosmological being, for after this cosmic celebration, Heer and Ranjha simply disappear. They are dissolved in the unknown. This is why the rest of the narrative loses all semiological signification.





**SASSI  
PUNNU**





salutations to the Almighty  
who reigns over the whole universe  
whose sovereignty is writ large  
over oceans and mountains  
over earths and skies  
none can reach His limits  
His horizons are beyond the grasp  
of the wisest among men  
but with love and devotion  
with endearment and affection  
with meditation and reflection  
one acquires His grace  
His benediction !

the famous tale of Sassi and Punnu  
of divine love and sublime beauty  
is known to young and old  
to all those who dream of love and union  
who yearn for the forbidden  
who imagine the unimaginable  
who dare to cross the threshold  
of traditional taboos  
of cultures and customs  
to meet their love  
in life, in death !

the city of Bhambor  
was known for its splendour  
and the mighty ruler, Adam Jam  
whose dominion was surcharged  
with peace and prosperity  
with the beautiful gardens and palaces  
with charm and grace  
the princes and ministers  
the wise men and saints  
adorned the court of  
the benevolent ruler !

but something was amiss  
amongst all this splendour and bounty  
beauty and beatitude  
there was sadness  
the air was calm and quiet  
the atmosphere was laden with heavy burdens  
the king had no child  
to play in his gardens  
to bring charm to the sterile nature  
to render grandeur to the forlorn palace !

the whole nation prayed for new life  
the saints and faqirs were loaded with gifts  
the poor were feasted  
the grace of the Almighty was sought  
to bring light in the darkness of the kingdom  
to preserve the tradition and the lineage  
of the noble king !



Allah is great  
there is no dearth in the House of the Master  
after long prayers and the blessings of the faqirs  
there was hope  
the good tidings spread over the entire kingdom  
the queen was expecting a child !

on the appointed hour  
on the destined moment  
a child was born  
the girl was so beautiful  
so splendid  
the midwives named her Sassi  
the splendour of the sun  
the sublimity of nature  
the king was happy  
the ministers and the courtesans  
brought gifts of gold and silver  
to welcome the light of the dominion  
to celebrate the love of the Lord !

the astrologers were called  
to predict the future of the child  
to delineate the path of her destiny !

as the wise men reflected  
on the hour of her birth  
as the chastened old wisdom  
unfolded its secrets  
there was silence  
there was gloom all over  
the noble king confronted the sages  
with their truth  
with their bitter truth  
of unhappy days ahead !

Sassi the sublime  
was destined to lead the life of love and anguish  
of deception and desperation  
she would be exhausted on the sand dunes  
following her love  
in absolute helplessness  
in the unbearable heat of the blazing sun !

suddenly the celebrations were transformed into serenity  
the happy hearts began to mourn  
the light of love led to the darkness of the solitude  
there was none to console the desolate sovereign  
none to offer a soothing word  
a word of hope and harmony !

Sassi could no more embellish  
the palace of the king  
she had no more place  
in the splendour of the kingdom  
the child was bundled in a boat  
laden with gold and silver  
to sail to the unknown quarters  
to face the most horrifying destiny !

for days and nights  
in light and darkness  
through ferocious jungles  
through deserted places  
the cursed boat continued to sail  
to her predicted destination !

as chance would have it  
a washerman saw the beautiful canoe  
with splendid flags  
fluttering in desolation  
with awe and caution  
he approached the vessel  
and brought home the child  
to his poor dwellings !

the couple had no offspring  
they were poor, honest people  
who lived in the fear of God  
who led a life of honesty and prayer !

they were happy  
Allah had finally blessed them  
with the most beautiful girl that there ever was  
the splendour of the sun  
the sublimity of the moon !



the gold and silver in the boat  
was enough to build a new house  
not a palace befitting  
the princess Sassi  
but a beautiful house all the same  
where the child could grow  
into a young girl  
where she could play with her friends  
in the gardens and the wilderness  
in the lap of nature  
in the serenity of piety and prayers !

Sassi grew into the most beautiful girl of the dominion  
the wealth that her father  
the miserable king  
had laden the cursed boat with  
was enough for her to lead the life of a princess  
there were servants to follow her every gesture  
there were tutors to educate her  
in the mysteries of life  
she had all the charm  
and the wisdom of a goddess  
she dreamt of a life  
beyond the confines of a household  
beyond the horizons of this mundane world  
she lived in a universe  
of dreams and dangers  
of unknown adventures  
of unseen adversities !

that the daughter of the poor washerman, Attah  
had unparalleled beauty, charm and grace  
was soon the talk of the town  
the news spread throughout the kingdom  
princes and noblemen sought her hand  
the king himself was informed  
of the prettiest of girls  
the ministers advised for a suitable match !

when Attah showed the medallion  
with the inscription of royalty  
the king was shocked  
the courtesans were stunned  
the truth  
the bitter truth  
of Sassi's origins  
was too harsh to swallow  
the inevitable destiny  
pierced through the hardest of hearts  
the miserable sovereign  
pleaded for a reunion  
with his lost daughter  
with his forgotten jewel !

but Sassi was in no mood  
to forgive her irresponsible father  
to forget his surrender  
to the cruel astrologers  
to the dictates of the merciless courtesans  
she resolutely refused  
to abandon her foster parents  
who had brought her up  
with love and affection  
with care and attention !

a king's daughter she certainly was  
her noble lineage  
was there for all to see and admire  
but she was abandoned  
for no fault of hers  
to please the customs of the country  
to follow the orders of her destiny  
she was a princess  
she will remain a princess  
in word and deed  
in thought and action  
she will challenge the onslaught of her fate  
she will face the ordeals of men and manners !







the city of Bhambor  
was on the crossroads of the travelers  
of merchants of far away lands  
many a prince had visited  
this famous city of gardens and palaces  
of the wonders of the world  
often there were exhibits  
by the famous painters  
of Kabul and Isphahan  
from the capitals of the great kingdoms of the East !

as Sassi grew  
in the most cultured atmosphere  
she was a great connoisseur  
of arts and letters  
her tutors had surcharged their young pupil  
with the wisdom of the East  
with the arts of the great masters  
with the philosophies of renowned sages !

the young girl surpassed all her companions  
in beauty and intellect  
in learning and grace  
her imagination led her to the farthest lands  
to the mysterious universes  
where body and spirit  
thoughts and fancies  
mingled with the sublime reflections  
fused with the most beautiful horizons !

in one of her sorties  
in an exhibit organised by the Chief of the town  
she saw a painting  
of the most handsome prince  
of the legendary dominion  
of Kecham in the East  
the prince Punnu  
was the idol of the artists  
his figure, his demeanour  
his gait, his poise  
enchanted all young and old  
the prettiest of the girls  
the fairies of the divine spheres  
yearned for his love !

no wonder Sassi was taken in  
she dreamt of Punnu  
the prince of her fancies  
the ideal of her universe  
she dreamt of love and romance  
of the most sublime union  
of faith and fortitude  
of heavenly bliss  
of everlasting happiness !

she was possessed by the Idea  
by the Concept, by the Image  
of which she knew nothing  
but her learning and leanings  
had transcended the empirical  
the real of this world  
as a child she was pushed into a wild river  
that led no where  
that had no destination  
she was an unreal child  
of an unreal world  
there were nothing but phantoms on her horizon  
there were always clouds and mists  
around her body and spirit  
she was lost in meditation  
in reflection  
in the uncertain hopes of an unknown future !

day and night  
in sleep and awakening  
she dreamt of Punnu  
she constituted an ephemeral universe  
of love and union  
of affection and endearment  
of anguish and empathy  
her heart was desolate  
her body experienced  
the most excruciating pains of separation  
the princess was in love !

if Punnu was the most handsome prince  
Sassi was the most beautiful princess  
the artists exchanged the portraits of the couple  
the young and wild prince  
of the fabled land of Kecham  
was known for his bravery and adventures  
the jewel of his parents  
the darling of his dominion  
he had traversed the intractable jungles  
to hunt the most ferocious beasts  
prince of all he swayed  
he was the master of his dominion !



all this changed  
when he was shown the portrait of Sassi  
of the princess  
of the city of splendid palaces  
of the princess  
whose beauty and grace  
surpassed all earthly descriptions  
who yearned to see her prince charming !

in absolute desperation  
the restless prince  
set out to the city of Sassi  
the caravan of hundreds of camels  
travelled for days, for nights  
for weeks  
to reach the city of Bhambor  
to visit the beautiful gardens of the splendid kingdom !

it was a hazardous journey  
traversing mountains and deserts  
ferocious jungles and the bandits of the Middle Ages  
the companions of the prince  
brought with them  
the precious shawls and carpets  
of their rich kingdom  
of the land of a thousand and one tales !

the travelers camped on the bank of the river  
there were tents and canopies all over  
the floors were covered with Persian carpets  
the interiors were decorated with the finest silks  
gardens were laid  
fountains sprung every where  
a whole new city came into being  
a city of joy and romance  
of love and happiness !

the noblemen and princes  
of the two kingdoms  
exchanged gifts of their respective dominions  
their arts and crafts  
were displayed for all to see  
for all to admire the sublimity of the talents  
of the artists of their great cultures  
the jugglers and the magicians  
showed their excellence  
in all kinds of tricks  
the whole populace was overjoyed  
at this most wonderful spectacle !

amongst all these celebrations  
and festivities  
Sassi and Punnu met for the first time  
their encounter transcended  
all their expectations  
it led to the most sublime union  
to the most voluptuous embrace  
the eternal woman  
and the eternal man  
the eternal princess  
and the eternal prince  
enacted the eternal fairy tale

they were burning with desire since long  
they kissed and hugged  
and made love  
the eternal love of the union of body and soul  
their hearts mingled  
with the longings of the lovers of yonder days  
of the thousand and one tales !

the caravan of the prince  
and his attendants  
were the most handsome men of Kecham  
the brave warriors  
they had conquered many a fort  
the agile hunters  
they had laid down  
the most ferocious beasts of the jungles  
the accomplished athletes  
they displayed their strength and art  
in the vast play-fields of Bhambor !



amongst these brave and handsome folks  
the atmosphere was changed  
the princess and her attendants  
the most beautiful damsels of Bhambor  
surcharged the camp with romance and luxuries  
with the feasts of nobility  
the hunters brought games to roast  
the taverns poured the finest wines  
the tents resounded with the steps  
of the dancing girls  
the air reverberated  
with the melodies of the musicians !

the prince and the princess  
lived in a universe of dreams  
they were intoxicated with  
the headiest wine of love  
their bodies and souls  
were united for ever  
their heart beats  
resounded with the music of heavens  
with the blessings of the Almighty !

but alas there were  
black tongues and evil eyes all over  
jealousy is the deadliest poison  
that has ruined many a kingdom  
this most sublime spectacle  
this most romantic union  
could not be tolerated  
could not be allowed to continue for ever !

the king, the father of Punnu  
was informed of the indulgence of the prince  
of the dalliance and the dancing  
in the radiant camp of Bhambor  
on the bank of the cursed river  
the feasts, the wines  
the celebrations of love and romance  
were supposed to spoil the handsome prince  
they were opposed to his duties  
of a prince and a ruler  
he could not stay for ever  
in a foreign land  
in the country of old foes !

the ministers, the courtesans  
counseled the king  
to bring back the prince  
to attend to his dominion  
to stay within the bounds of his culture  
his religion, his race !

the orders of the king were immediately executed  
the dancing girls were bribed  
they poured the drugged liquor  
in the golden cups of Sassi and Punnu  
intoxicated, unconscious  
the two lovers lay in each other's arms  
destiny had its toll  
the cruel fate caught up  
with the rising ambitions  
dreams and delusions  
were fused in the hazy mist  
of unknown horizons  
on unknowable horizons !

Punnu was snatched from the arms of his love  
unconscious he did not know  
how the two hearts were being torn apart  
how the dream of the lovers  
was being shattered  
how the universe of love and faith  
was being pushed into oblivion  
the dark hour  
of merciless fate had arrived  
the eternity of desire  
of innocent lovers  
had all but vanished  
from the horizon of hope and happiness !

bundled on the fastest camel of the caravan  
Punnu was rushed to his dominion  
fastened to the royal chair  
the prisoner was traversing the deserted country  
the gardens, the celebrations  
the dances, the wines  
the kisses of love and longings  
were all left behind !



when Sassi was awakened by her friends  
she could not believe her eyes  
the caravan  
the gardens  
the camps of pleasure were all gone  
her love had deserted her  
at the height of her bliss  
at the climax of her ecstasy  
the unreal child  
of the unreal universe  
had but a dream of reality  
a moment of sublimity  
an interval of serenity  
the conflict  
the confusion  
the chaos  
took over  
the moments of tranquility  
the hours of fantasy !

suddenly the heavens broke into  
the fires of uncertainty  
she was desperate  
she tore to pieces her necklace of pearls  
her diamonds, gold and silver  
lay scattered all over the deserted ground  
her hair were flowing in the dust  
her heart sank  
her body ached  
her whole being was trembling  
with fear  
with the excruciating pains of separation  
she fell on the floor  
unconscious  
unwept  
unwed !

the foster parents tried in vain  
to console the young girl  
forget this ephemeral relation  
these Blochs are wild people  
they cannot be trusted  
they follow no code  
they bother not about innocent hearts  
uncivilised, uncultured brutes  
they behave like the beasts of the jungle !

but nothing could restore  
the peace of the troubled soul  
Sassi was desperate  
a tortured being  
she could stand no more  
she was a restless fish  
a wounded fawn  
her love was snatched from her  
at its most ecstatic moment  
at its most sublime union !

with courage and conviction  
she stood like a rock  
her eyes were blazing  
with rage and rancour  
she decided to be  
to be the eternal lover  
to go to the ultimate destination  
to follow her love  
on the hottest sand dunes  
of the merciless desert  
under the unbearable heat of the Indian summer !

the hot, burning winds swept the entire country  
even the birds and beasts could not breathe  
thirsty, their palpitating hearts  
longed for a drop of water  
for the last, lingering breeze of life

the fires of the desert  
under the blazing sun  
engulfed all life, young and old !



but Sassi was a determined being  
resolute, she faced the fury of nature  
with swollen feet and tormenting heart  
she went on and on  
she walked, she ran, she fell  
she stumbled in this absolute wilderness  
to follow her love  
to meet her Punnu !

a hundred times  
she fell, she arose  
a hundred times  
she cried : Punnu, Punnu  
she could hardly breathe  
but there was no let up  
the scorching heat  
the blistering sands  
the suffocating winds  
crushed her trembling limbs  
whipped her frail skeleton  
the jealous furies  
the cruel fate  
showed no mercy  
to this cursed girl  
to this resolute, resplendent being !

she cried : Punnu, Punnu  
the cries of anguish and empathy  
her last utterances in this mad world  
where the princess lay breathless  
her last words lost in the abysmal depths of humanity  
the humanity that never bothered  
to respond to the lamentations  
of a wounded soul  
of a being deeply hurt  
cruelly deprived of the last kiss  
the kiss of love and longings  
of heavenly bliss  
of ultimate union !

betrayed by men and manners  
customs and courtesans  
parents and fraternities  
the princess breathed her last  
to enter into the kingdom of heaven  
the dominion of eternal lovers !

when Punnu awoke  
when the influence of the drugged liquor  
did no more numb his senses  
in the dark dungeon  
he saw his own shadow  
and he was frightened !

where was Sassi  
his love  
his life  
he cried like a child  
like a mad man  
like the one who had lost all his treasure !

in a terrible rage  
of a wounded tiger  
he broke his chains  
he threw his shackles out of the window  
he crushed the door with his powerful hands  
crying : Sassi, Sassi  
he ran towards Bhambor  
to the city of his love !

for days, for nights  
thirsty, hungry  
breathless  
he ran, he walked  
he suffered heat and cold  
and finally reached the sacred place  
where his love  
Sassi  
had breathed her last  
had cried for the last time  
Punnu, Punnu !

a shepherd saw the mad man  
and came to his rescue  
he told him  
how Sassi had spent  
the last moments of her life  
the last hours of her agony  
he led him  
where  
his love was lying  
covered by a mound of sand  
her only sepulture  
the only resting place  
of the resplendent princess of yonder days !

Punnu succumbed  
to his grief  
to his terrible loss  
and fell unconscious  
on the grave of his love  
the two lovers  
separated in life  
were united in death  
the eternal lovers  
lay in each other's arms  
in the sublime kingdom  
of love's eternity !





**SOHNI  
MAHINWAL**



hail the grandeur of the Creator  
who is the basis of all love  
sacred and secular  
whose bounty  
whose beauty  
whose benediction  
are bestowed upon  
His creation  
His universe  
His devotees  
His faqirs  
His lovers !

love is the cause  
of all creation  
of all destruction  
it has been the destiny, the fate  
of all lovers of the times past  
whoever dared to challenge  
the customs and conventions  
whoever dared to cross the threshold  
of old beliefs and bigotry  
had to pay with her life  
with his life  
to love  
to be  
one has to transcend  
this empirical, mundane world  
this superstitious world of demons and dungeons !



on the bank of the sacred river, Jhanaa  
the river of lovers and faqirs  
of men and women  
of truth and justice  
of devotion and determination  
the city of Gujarat flourished  
with master craftsmen  
with the artists  
who excelled in all arts  
in all decors  
but Tullah, the potter  
was the most accomplished  
whose hands were the hands of God Himself  
who created the most beautiful forms  
most sublime curves  
with honesty, prayer and devotion  
he was blessed with the creativity of the eternal Creator  
the greatest connoisseurs of the East  
came to his workshop  
to admire and acquire his master pieces !

the divine hands of Tullah  
created pitchers and pots  
of all forms  
of all colours  
there were the most beautiful vases  
for the fragrant flowers of Gujarat  
there were sublime statues  
for the palaces of the kings  
they graced the houses of the nobles  
and enhanced the grandeur of the courts  
his works of art  
were the treasures of the richest princes  
his creations  
adorned the most sacred  
temples and mosques  
the nobles, the faqirs  
the rich, the poor  
all admired his excellence  
all yearned to see his wonders !

*Sohni – Mahinwal*

Allah is great  
and His benedictions are even greater  
Allah and the artist  
have a certain similitude  
a certain professional affinity  
both create forms and figures  
both yearn to love and be loved  
both live for others  
others who never reciprocate  
that is the destiny  
of both Allah and the artist !

blessed by the Almighty  
Tullah had a beautiful daughter  
named appropriately, SOHNI  
Sohni, the beautiful  
the prettiest of all girls  
the daughter of the artist, Tullah  
blessed by His God  
the greatest Creator  
the greatest Artist !

the daughter of an artist  
an artist she was  
she excelled all and sundry  
in aesthetics, in appreciation  
of all that was artistic  
of all that was cultural, creative  
her body and intellect  
were in perfect harmony  
a harmony achieved  
only by the most talented  
by the most blessed !

she helped her father  
in every creation  
she followed the master  
in every imagination  
she soon developed her own  
style and silhouette  
her own taste and temperament  
every thing, every element  
that passed through her hands  
through her heart  
evolved into a work of art  
a work of magnificence  
Tullah and Sohn  
father and daughter  
made a perfect union  
of the sublime and the serene  
of the transcendent  
and the transparent !

Sohni the beautiful  
was blessed by the Almighty  
her charm and grace  
were the talk of the town  
her artistic creations  
were known all over  
her gait, her demeanour  
her poise, her smile  
swayed all hearts, young and old !

as an artist  
she lived in a world of her own  
her imagination transcended  
all thresholds of cultures and customs  
her thoughts constituted  
the most ephemeral universes  
she reflected  
on the lovers and the artists  
of yonder days  
of her tradition  
her religion  
her race  
and she was often sad !



she marveled at the bounty  
at the beauty  
in the creation of Allah  
in His nature  
in His nurture  
in growth  
in decay  
in life  
in death  
and she thought of divine grace  
and sublime grandeur  
in every act  
in every gesture  
of the Creator  
of the Master !

she thought also  
of the pain and suffering  
of those who dare to live  
their own lives  
who dare to follow  
the dictates of their own hearts  
who attempt to reason  
in the affairs of religion  
who cross the thresholds of  
customs and conventions !

Sohni the beautiful  
was also a determined being  
her delicate hands  
created the most beautiful forms  
her universe of imagination  
led to the most artistic curves  
her heart followed  
every gesture of love  
every word of faith and fortitude !

she often wondered  
why men become monsters  
why the nobles and the kings  
the priests and the parents  
misuse the divine gift of creativity  
in most corrupt deeds  
in most heinous crimes  
why the saints and the sadhus  
the lovers and the faqirs  
have to suffer tribulations and torments  
and the pains of all humanity  
why the young girls  
have to pay  
for the sins of others ?

Tullah's workshop  
was frequented by the merchants  
by the connoisseurs of art  
amongst the visitors  
was Mirza Izzat Beg  
a noble of a neighbouring State  
looking for the works of art  
works of sublime creation  
by the greatest master of his times  
he saw Sohnî in the gallery  
and was immediately bewitched  
by the greatest creation of God Himself  
the most beautiful being  
the most charming girl  
subdued the noble heart  
of the handsome prince !

he was so taken in  
so deeply in love  
with the loveliest of damsels  
day and night  
he yearned to see her  
with one excuse or another  
he managed to visit  
the gallery of the artist  
to pay homage to his love  
to exchange a word, a smile  
with the princess of his dreams !

Sohni and Izzat Beg  
liked each other  
their noble thoughts  
their high ideals  
their knowledge of art and craft  
their dreams of sublimity and serenity  
mingled with their love and affection  
the two young hearts  
followed the same beat  
the same rhythm of faith and fraternity !

as the visits of a connoisseur  
could not go on for ever  
Izzat Beg decided to become  
the shepherd, the Mahinwal  
in the House of Tullah  
to take care of his buffaloes  
his cows, his sheep  
to be near his love  
his princess sublime  
his companion in thought and deed  
the two lovers  
met often in the sprawling fields of Gujarat  
in the nature  
fragrant with wild flowers and plants  
of immense variety  
of unparalleled beauty  
they discussed and discerned  
the ways of the world  
the movements of young hearts in love  
they lived in a universe  
of transcendent sublimity  
of unknown anxiety !

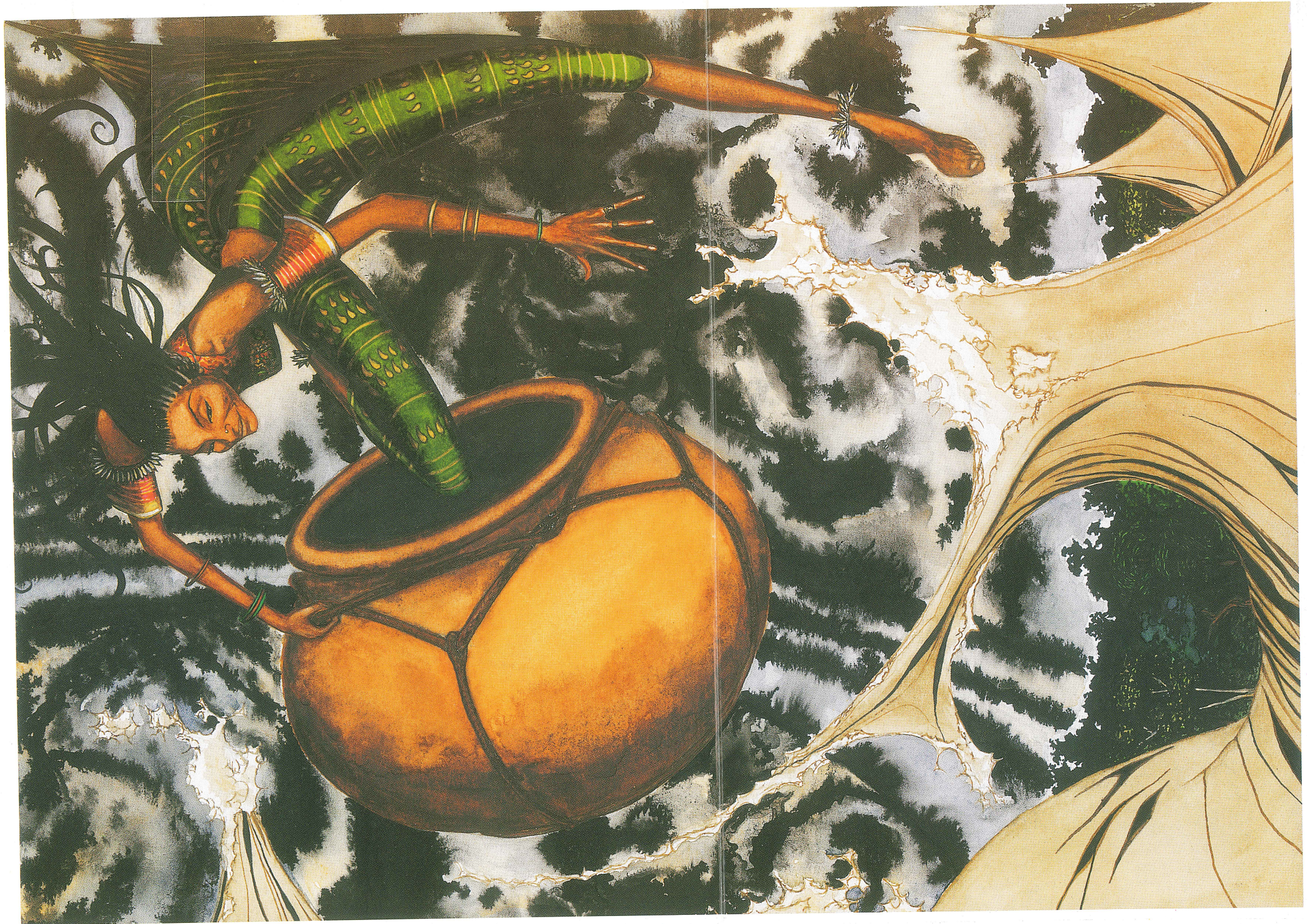


the lovers, the faqirs  
the honest men and women  
disrupt the order  
the social order  
of distinctions and deceptions  
it cannot stand  
the harmony of hearts  
the happiness of young couples  
it strives to infuse  
conflict and chaos  
in the world of concord  
in the world of human relations  
soon the parents of Sohni  
were informed of the  
secret meetings of the lovers  
of their breach  
of the customs and conventions  
of the traditional families !

the mother was furious  
she was ashamed of her daughter  
who had blackened the glorious name  
of the family of Tullahs  
who had ruined the reputation  
of the great artist  
for generations, for centuries  
the family had followed  
the rules and regulations  
the dictates and decisions  
of the high priests  
of the elders  
the young girls must obey their parents  
must follow the age old customs  
age old conventions of modesty and morality  
it is the parents  
who decide  
who should they marry  
who should they live with  
there is no question of individual assertions  
no room for personal preferences !

the young girl pleaded for understanding  
for the harmony of relations  
for the happiness of companions  
after all  
it was her life  
her disposition  
that mattered the most  
by being with a person  
she loved  
she had committed no crime  
why should the customs and traditions  
and the elders  
interfere with the affairs of the heart  
why should they impose  
their dictates on unwilling minds  
why should they introduce  
conflict and chaos  
where harmony reigns  
where the bliss of friendship prevails ?







but the parents were in no mood  
to listen to this impertinent talk  
this existential assertion  
of a slip of a girl  
what did she know of the wisdom of ages  
what did she understand  
of the golden heritage of religions and races  
the purity, the sanctity  
must be maintained at any cost  
at any price !

the parents lost no time  
in finding a suitable match  
they bundled her off  
into a palanquin  
the poor girl had no choice  
she cried in vain  
she protested  
she resisted  
but there was none to listen to her pleas  
none to care for her heart beats  
she was married with an unknown person  
she was pushed into an unknown family  
she must stay there  
she must obey the elders  
she must spend the rest of her life  
in misery, in misfortune !



restless, helpless  
she prayed to the five pirs  
the five noble spirits  
who always come to the aid of  
humanity in distress  
who come to the succour  
of young girls  
who yearn for their love  
who dream of purity and honesty  
they had helped her cousin, Heer  
they came to rescue Sohni  
she was saved by the benign spirits  
they secured  
her chastity, her purity  
her love  
for her companion !

meanwhile Izzat Beg  
went through another metamorphosis  
like his elder cousin  
Dhido Ranjha of Takhat Hazara  
he became a faqir  
a mendicant !

on the other side of Jhanaa  
the eternal river of the lovers  
the lovers, the faqirs  
who abandon the mundane world  
to attain, to acquire  
the sublimity, the serenity  
of the other world  
of the other universe  
of eternal love  
of eternal bliss !

the most sacred river, Jhanaa  
was cursed to divide  
the secular from the sacred  
the sublime from the serene  
the heart from the hearth  
but it also negotiated  
the two extremes  
the two poles of body and soul  
the two sides of love and longings  
many a lover  
since centuries past  
since times immemorial  
perished into its ferocious waters  
many a lover  
achieved eternal life  
in its pristine currents

Sohni and Mahinwal  
could not escape  
its fury  
its ferment  
its lure  
its lust  
its everlasting pull  
of desires and dreams !

Sohni used to cross the river  
on a pot, a pitcher, a *ghara*  
to meet her love  
to quench her thirst  
of eternal separation  
the two sides of Jhanaa  
represented the two universes  
of life and death  
of palpitating hearts  
of the two lovers  
who longed to unite across its strong currents  
across its unknown depths !

it was always at night  
that Sohni took the plunge  
to go beyond the world  
of men and manners  
of customs and conventions  
the darkness of the night  
covered the dirt of the day  
the fusion of light and shade  
helped the ferment of the minds  
the lover and the faqir  
lived in the lap of nature  
in the purity of the benign spirits  
of affection and endearment  
of desire and derision !

the romantic meetings of the lovers  
could not go on for ever  
the harmony of hearts  
the resonance of their beats  
disturb the social order  
the order that is based  
on discipline and division  
on obedience and tradition

the sister-in-law of Sohni  
her *nanaan*  
found out the sequence  
the secret of the pitcher  
she devised a plot  
a nefarious plot  
to replace the baked pitcher  
with an unbaked pitcher  
a *kacha ghara* !

the hour of the greatest martyrdom  
the greatest sacrifice  
had arrived  
as Sohni felt the pitcher  
her artistic instinct  
immediately alerted her  
to the ensuing danger  
on the one side  
was her love  
her life  
on the other  
the poison of black tongues  
the evil spirits  
the fury of nature  
the cruelty of fate  
her death !



Sohni had to make a choice  
an existential choice  
to be  
or not to be  
to live to the highest ideals  
of love and faith  
to dissolve in the  
absolute mist  
of ideas and imagination !

she resolved to  
follow her heart  
her ideals  
her sublimity  
her sincerity  
of absolute fraternity !

Sohni the beautiful  
the most sensitive artist  
of her times  
the most faithful lover  
of her age  
followed her heart  
her reason  
her resolve  
to plunge into  
the most ferocious waters of Jhanaa !

the night was dark  
the clouds hovered over  
the entire universe  
the clouds of calamity and cruelty  
under the most violent storm of the year  
the trees bent  
to salute the heroine  
the beloved of Mahinwal  
the ideal of all lovers !

with the unbaked pot  
the *kacha ghara* under her arm  
she plunged  
into the furious waters of Jhanaa  
the Jhanaa  
that had seen  
that had endured  
many a tragedy  
many a resolve  
of the determined minds  
the minds  
who challenge the mundane  
the superstitious norms  
of customs and conventions !

as the whirlwinds  
zeroed on Sohni  
she cried : Mahinwal, Mahinwal  
she called her love  
her friend  
her companion in thought and deed !

poor Mahinwal  
the faqir  
the beloved of the Creator  
and Sohn  
never dreamt of  
this catastrophe  
this horrible end  
this sublime moment  
of courage and conviction !

he rushed  
to the wild and ferocious  
force of currents and conventions  
to the cries of his beloved  
to the lamentations of his love  
and head on  
he threw himself  
into the abysmal depths of infinity  
the infinity  
of emotions and heart beats

which once upon a time  
followed each other  
in harmonious resonance  
in absolute correspondence  
of body and spirit  
of heart and hearth !

the eternal Jhanaa  
the fast moving river  
that had witnessed  
many an encounter  
of love and longings  
of life and death  
in the dark depths  
of this abysmal universe  
embraced both the lovers  
and hugged them to their last breath  
their purity, their chastity  
their sublimity, their sincerity  
were kept intact  
by the violence  
by the fury  
of the ferocious currents of Jhanaa



the farewell to this cruel world  
was accompanied  
by the sublime moment of eternity  
by the serene rhythm of fraternity  
of the lovers of all times  
of all nations !



MIRZA  
SAHIBAN



praise be to Allah  
the Almighty Creator of the universe  
of suns and stars  
of moons and mountains  
of sky and earth  
of all vegetation, all life  
of all men, all women  
and the sentiments of love and affection  
which unite them in eternal bliss  
in eternal happiness !

Allah is great  
but even greater are His blessings  
His gifts to mankind  
His love for young and old  
His dispensation  
for the lovers of beauty and beatitude  
for the martyrs of hearts and hearths !



amongst His magnificent gifts  
was the most beautiful daughter, Sahiban  
in the House of Khiwa  
and the most handsome son, Mirza  
in the House of Binjal !

Sahiban, the sweetest  
the lovely girl  
the jewel of her parents  
the darling of her friends  
grew into the most beautiful girl of the Khiwas  
her intellect, her incision  
in all matters  
sacred and secular  
astonished all  
the neighbours, the cousins  
all adored Sahiban  
the most gracious child !

Mirza the young, handsome son of Binjal  
the cousin of Sahiban  
was known for his bravery  
for his courage, for his poise  
all admired his intellect  
his good manners  
his skills in sports  
his adventures  
in hunting wild animals  
his excellence  
in riding the most ferocious horses !

Mirza and sahiban  
studied together in a mosque  
they pondered over  
the sacred and the secular  
traditions of the East  
the wisdom of the great sages  
the legends of the celebrated lovers  
the ideas and the imaginations  
of the great poets  
of the great masters of the past !

their minds were nurtured  
with the ideals of the golden heritage  
of centuries old traditions  
of the narratives of courage and conviction  
they studied art and culture  
of their ancestors  
they reflected upon  
the sublime and sacred concepts  
of life and death  
of love and longings  
of young hearts  
who yearn to be  
to be blessed  
with faith and friendship  
with fellowship and fortitude !

their heart beats  
mingled with their love and affection  
their rhythms followed the ideals  
of serenity and sincerity  
of a united resonance  
of the music of the minds  
of the harmony of the hearts !

they grew together  
in body and soul  
in emotions and intellect  
they followed each other  
in studies, in sports  
in ideas, in imagination  
in delusions, in decisions  
they pledged to be  
to be with each other  
for ever  
in this and the other world !

they kissed and hugged  
the kisses and hugs  
of eternal friendship  
of sublime love  
of harmonious hearts  
who follow the same beat  
the same rhythm !

they lived through  
different weathers  
different seasons  
of summer and winter  
of heat and cold

of the spring of youth  
of the rising ambitions  
of the sublime unions  
of the hearts in love  
of the hearths in longings !

they reflected upon  
the fates, the ferments  
of the legendary lovers  
of their glorious tradition  
of their tormented past  
and they wondered  
why the young palpitating hearts  
the purest minds  
must be engulfed  
in the dark clouds of destiny  
in the mist of unknown horizons  
why the lovers of the thousand and one tales  
live in anxiety and anguish  
in seclusion and separation  
in the tales  
that their grandmothers and grandfathers  
were never tired of  
recounting and repeating  
every evening !



but that is the way  
it is  
that is the way  
it was going to be  
their parents did not approve of  
their engagement  
their friendship  
the rhythm of their young hearts !

Sahiban was engaged  
to be married  
to another person  
in another family  
and a day was fixed  
by the go-betweens  
by the elders  
for the marriage  
of the unfortunate girl !

in agony, in anguish  
in absolute misery  
Sahiban sent a message  
to her love  
to Mirza  
that his treasure will be  
soon gone  
will be soon in the hands  
of the enemies of serenity and sincerity  
his love  
will be throttled  
his dreams will be covered  
with dust and disaster !

her parents  
had delineated her destiny  
in misery and misfortune  
her elders  
had decided to destroy  
her dreams of union and bliss  
of the happy life together  
with her love  
with her friend  
with the prince of her ideas and imagination !

when Mirza received  
the most threatening news  
of the ensuing disaster  
he was devastated  
he was decimated  
the Sials had stolen  
his pearl  
his diamond  
his treasure !

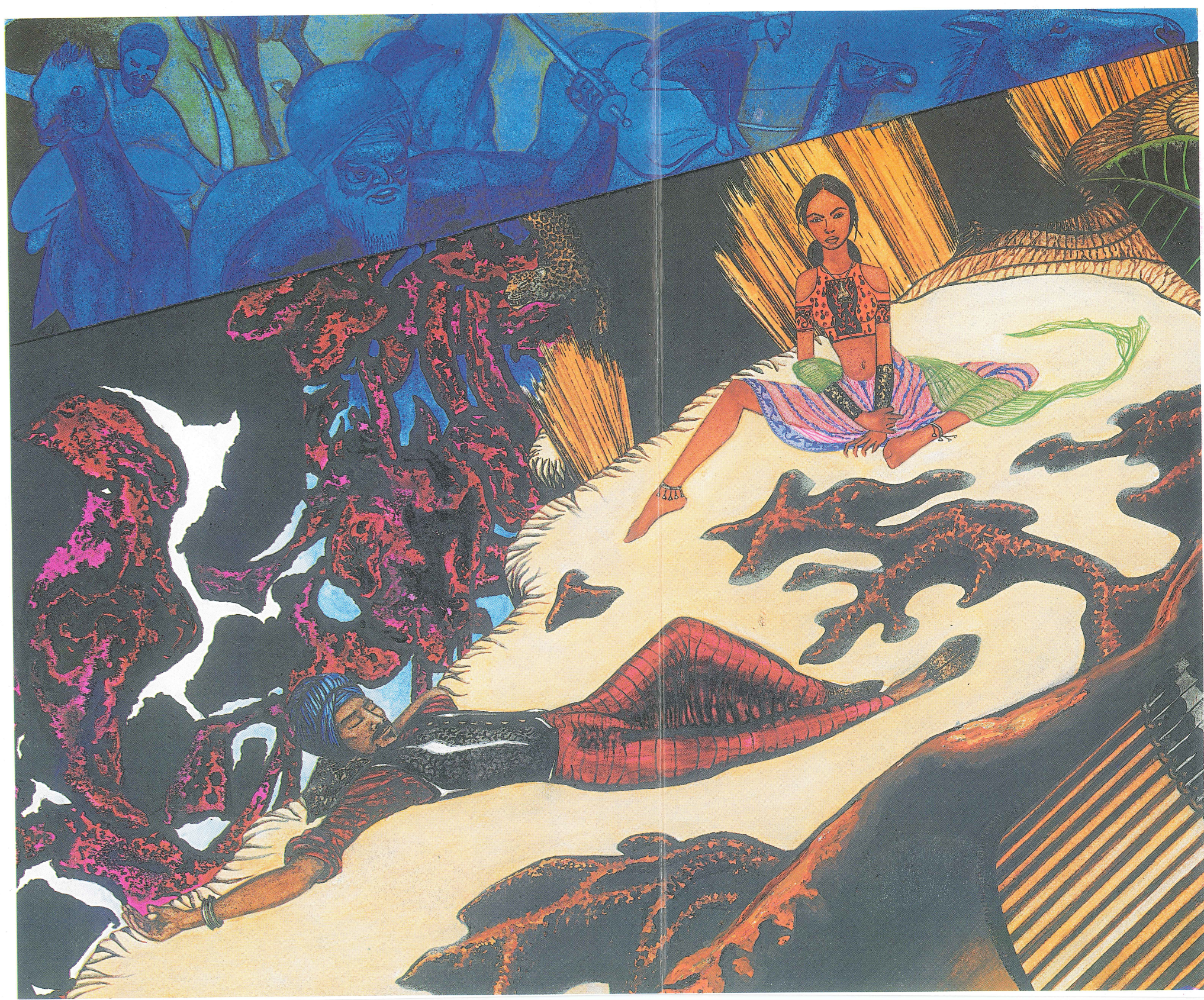
fuming with rage  
he mounted his horse  
the fastest horse of the Kharals  
to avenge his honour  
to prove his manliness  
to rescue his love  
from the butchers of his desires  
from the enemies of his dreams !

his mother was worried  
my son  
forget Sahiban  
these smart girls of the Sials  
are not dependable  
they cannot be trusted  
Sahiban belongs to a family of feudal lords  
her father is the Chief of the town  
her brothers are great warriors  
do not risk your life  
for the sake of a woman  
for the sake of a fickle heart  
the wisdom of ages  
the tradition of centuries  
warn against  
the wiles of women  
forget this girl  
there are so many beautiful damsels  
waiting for your hand  
for your love !

my dear mother  
you are right  
your sentiments are noble  
but Sahiban is not just any girl  
she is my love  
my heart  
my rhythm  
if I do not act now  
if I do not challenge the Sials  
if I do not rescue Sahiban  
from the clutches of these brutes  
I can never live with honour  
I will be the laughing stock  
of all humanity  
the Sials will mock  
at the stupid Kharals  
at our cowardly disposition

how can we live with honour  
with pride  
in our race  
in our tradition  
if we let these Sials  
loot our treasure in broad day light ?







with a sword in his hand  
and the bow and arrows on his shoulder  
he kicked his horse  
and off he flew  
like an eagle in the sky  
on the fastest horse of its times  
the bravest of men was riding  
through the sprawling fields  
through the wild forests  
he stormed into the most peaceful atmosphere  
of simple men and women  
of God's nature and nurture

he stopped near a spring  
to rest and quench his thirst

a faqir met him there  
and enquired about his restlessness  
his worry  
his anxiety

as Mirza recounted his misfortune  
the faqir was sanguine  
be careful, my child  
do not plunge into  
the fires of hell  
the wars  
for women and wealth  
have never benefited any mortal

with faith in the bounty of Allah  
rest a while  
pause for a moment  
and reflect upon the consequences  
of such hasty actions  
of such foolhardy flights !

my noble sage  
your wisdom cannot be questioned  
your advice cannot be ignored  
but you are too old  
to comprehend the compulsions of young hearts  
to follow the rhythms of love  
Sahiban is my heart  
my love  
my life  
without her  
there is no reason to live  
to linger  
in this mortal world  
I must go  
I must fight  
with the deadliest of enemies  
I must save my honour  
the honour of my ancestors  
of my race  
I must meet my Sahiban  
my love  
in life, in death !

through wind and water  
through wild storms  
Mirza's horse was flying  
into eternity  
day and night  
suns and stars  
were envious of its force and ferocity  
the fury of nature and culture  
matched with the rage  
of the bravest of the warriors

as he looked up  
as he gazed into the horizon  
Mirza saw the angel of destiny  
who beckoned him to follow the divine spirit  
young man  
you are courting death  
your days are numbered  
the angel of death and destiny  
has come to warn you  
beware  
forget your adventure  
your love will betray you  
you will be left alone  
to face the fury of nature  
your enemies will pierce you  
with arrows and swords  
you must follow my advice

and go back  
retrace your wild steps  
recover your peace of mind !

the angel of death and destiny  
I bow in reverence and respect  
you are the lord  
of life and death  
you are feared by all humanity  
you are honoured by all those  
who love life  
who want to live in peace and prosperity  
but I am Mirza  
the son of Binjal  
a Kharal  
I am condemned to follow the path  
of danger and destruction  
of revenge and resurrection  
I am a restless soul  
I am a deeply hurt being  
I cannot follow your command  
I must follow my heart  
I must face  
my fate, my faction  
I cannot run away  
I must challenge  
my enemies

if it is so  
be it so  
I must face  
the battlefield of love  
the agony of death and delusion !

Mirza arrived just in time  
on the eve of Sahiban's marriage  
there were festivities all over  
the dancing girls  
the beat of the drums  
the acrobats, the jugglers  
eating and drinking  
the whole neighbourhood  
reverberated with  
the cries of the revellers !

Sahiban was decked  
as a bride  
as a daughter of the Chief of the Sials  
bathed in  
the most fragrant perfumes  
she wore the most gorgeous dress  
with bangles and necklace  
with earrings and nose rings  
with all kinds of  
rings of gold and diamonds  
she was the most beautiful bride  
surrounded by the celestial damsels of the Sials  
her friends from childhood



with whom she grew  
into womanhood  
into the secrets of love and romance  
into the mysteries of life and longings !

but Sahiban was sad  
uncertain about her future  
uncertain about the fate of her love  
where was Mirza  
her love  
her life  
he had deserted her  
his treasure was being looted  
and he was careless  
oblivious of his fate  
his fortune

she remembered the old wisdom  
she had learnt in the mosque  
men cannot be trusted  
they enjoy the company of women  
and when the hour of decision comes  
when there is a question of life and death  
they run away  
they betray their love  
their promises of faith and fortitude !

and lo and behold  
there was Mirza  
her misgivings were set aside  
a friend of Sahiban  
brought his message  
Mirza was waiting outside  
at the threshold  
at the threshold of life and death  
of decision and departure !

quietly, silently  
with the help of her trusted friend  
she slipped away  
and fell into the arms of Mirza  
who immediately put her  
on his steed  
and flew like an eagle  
in the wilderness  
in the wilderness of demons and delusions  
of uncertain anxieties  
of uncertain agonies !

Mirza's horse flew like an angel  
through storms and streams  
through the vast fields  
of the prosperous Punjab  
through the ferocious jungles  
of Allah's creation  
the fastest horse  
that there ever was  
the envy of the bravest men  
the dream of the greatest warriors !

after a long flight  
after a hazardous journey  
Mirza stopped  
to rest  
to repose under a tree  
near a spring of pristine water  
the eternal water of harmony and happiness

the lovers  
kissed and hugged  
and made love  
the most sublime and voluptuous love  
of their life  
of their destiny !

Sahiban pleaded  
to continue their journey  
their last journey of love and longings

she was afraid  
her brothers may not catch up  
the Sials were too proud  
of their race  
of their tradition  
to let Mirza loot their treasure  
dishonour their daughter  
destroy their reputation  
of bravery  
and ruthless destruction  
of all that stood in their way  
of all  
who challenged their might !

her brother Shamir  
was the bravest of all  
he had conquered many a fort  
he had demolished  
many a mansion  
he had decimated  
whole armies !

but Mirza was in no mood  
to listen  
to this brave talk  
to this  
womanly cowardice

who could challenge  
his mighty sword  
his deadly arrows  
with one stroke  
he would destroy her kith and kin  
with one burst of arrows  
he would annihilate  
the army of her brothers  
his strength  
his might  
his bravery  
were unmatched  
unparalleled in the whole world  
none dare challenge him  
none dare confront  
the bravest of men  
the most ruthless warrior !



amidst Sahiban's pleas and protests  
exhausted  
Mirza fell asleep  
the poor, helpless girl was worried  
she was sure  
her brothers would follow them  
nurtured by her filial tradition on the one hand  
and the romantic on the other  
she was divided  
between the two loyalties  
between the two loves  
both were pure and sublime  
both were sanctified  
by the Almighty Allah Himself

she was scared  
she was horrified  
at the very thought  
at the very sight  
of the ensuing fight  
of absolute devastation  
of her body and soul  
of her heart and hearth !

there was no delay  
in the approach  
of the hordes of the Sials  
in absolute confusion  
in absolute chaos  
of her rhyme and reason  
of her heart and heaven  
in absolute fright  
she hung the arrows of Mirza  
on the *Jand* tree  
the tree of life and death !

the armies of Shamir  
surrounded the couple  
Mirza was pierced by an arrow  
of the approaching warriors  
abruptly awakened  
like a wounded tiger  
he looked for his arrows  
he looked for his bow  
and he cursed Sahiban  
who had betrayed her love  
who had preferred her brother

wounded, limping  
he advanced with his sword  
and with one shaft  
he cut down  
the brother, Shamir  
with one stroke  
he decimated  
the dreams of Sahiban

but he was alone  
he was already wounded  
the arrows of Shamir  
had pierced his body and heart  
he could stand no more  
he collapsed  
on the battlefield of love !

helpless, restless  
Sahiban was crying  
she was devastated  
she had lost  
her brother, Shamir  
she had lost  
her love, Mirza  
her world was in ruins  
her dreams were shattered

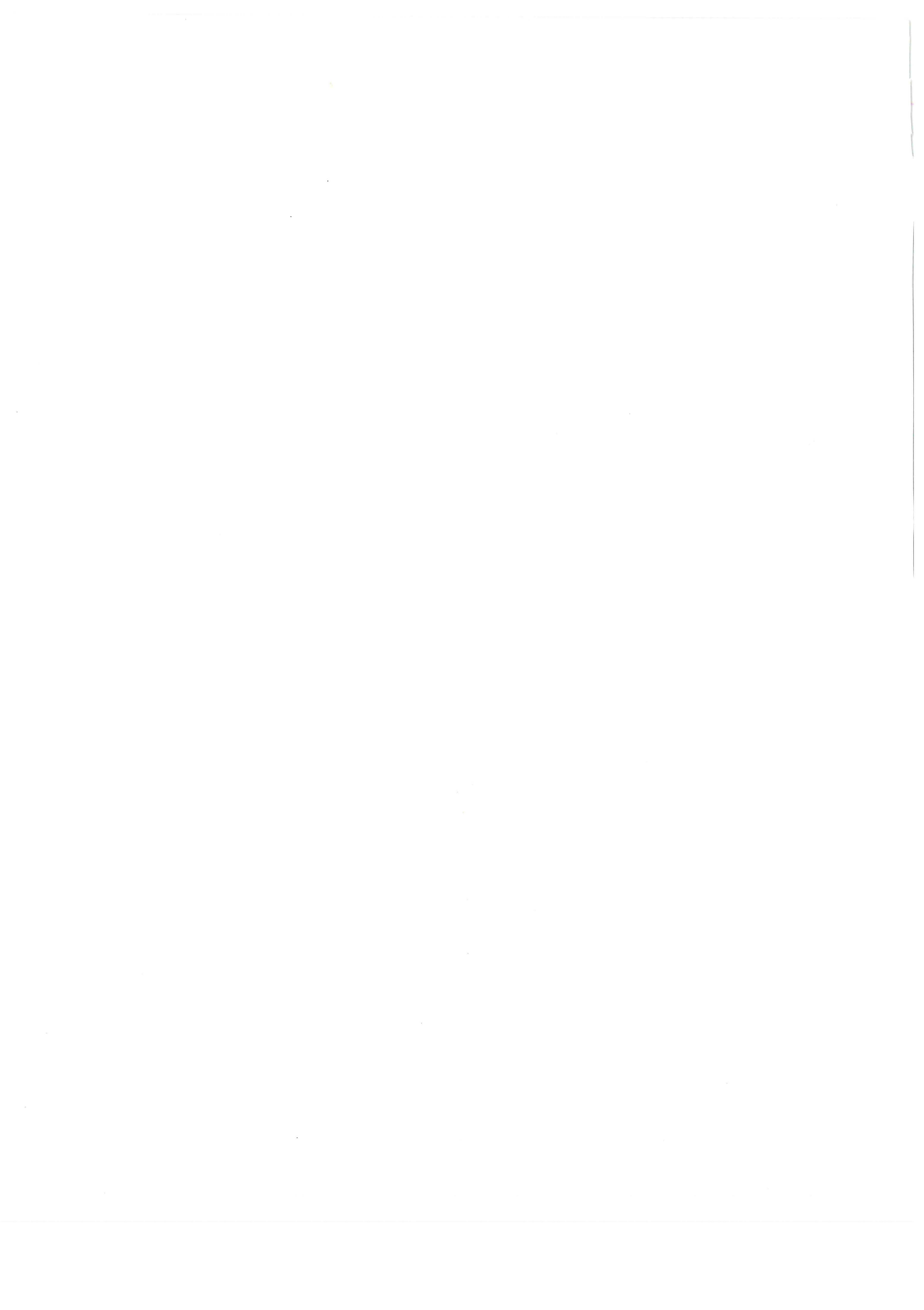
in absolute desperation  
she could not decide  
at the most crucial moment of her life  
at the most existential threshold of her destiny  
she could not move  
in one direction  
or the other  
her legend, her life  
will always remain  
a question mark  
for all the traditions and travails  
her existential trials and tribulations  
will be forgotten  
will be lost  
in the mist of confusion and chaos

she was exhausted  
she fell in the arms of her love  
in his grave  
to be with him  
with his body and soul  
for eternity !





PURAN  
BHAGAT



## The Human Condition in Puran Bhagat

In this paper I have attempted to analyse the human condition in a number of crises in the narrative of Puran Bhagat. The point of departure is the version of the legend of Puran, composed by a popular Punjabi bard, Qadiryar, in the early years of the nineteenth century.

The legend is constituted of six principal dramatis personae : Puran, his father, the Raja Salwan of Sialkot, (now in Pakistan,) his Guru, Gorakh Nath, and, the three women : the mother of Puran, Icchran; Salwan's second wife, Luna; and, the beautiful princess, Sundran. The disequilibrium caused by Luna's infatuation and Salwan's execution of Puran is sought to be balanced by the motherly affection of Icchran, and, the love of Sundran, whose gift to the psychic comportment of Puran is the supreme sacrifice of her life. This legend is an important conceptual discourse of our culture. It deals with the compunctions of public morality and collective consciousness. It moves along the development of individual psychic crises. The two meet and interact in a number of situations where the questions of duty, honour and revenge are raised, where the collective dharma confronts the existential assertions. The

logical sequencing of the narrative is highly dynamic. The events move with extreme rapidity, and, invariably lead to their logical conclusions.

Condemned by the astrologers to avoid his parents, Puran grows in the darkness and deprivation of a dungeon for twelve years. Immediately after his advent in the life of human relationships, Puran is enticed by his stepmother, Luna, who, rejected by Puran's public morality, gets him executed by his father, Salwan. And, another period of twelve years in the forlorn darkness of the deserted well begins. Then comes Guru Gorakh Nath who restores Puran his limbs and sends him to beg alms at the palace of princess Sundran. The encounter with Sundran leaves Puran a complete wreck, for Sundran commits suicide when Puran leaves her for good. Luna subjected Puran to physical torture to neutralise his mental tribulations. Sundran tortured herself to inflict the sharpest cut on Puran's psychic wounds.

It is a discourse of extreme polarities. We move from darkness to light, from treachery to affection, from extreme laxity in principles to extreme austerity and discipline of yoga, from absolute detachment to absolute involvement. There are dehumanising factors which make Puran a monster of a man. There are humanising constituents which attempt to bring Puran back to social normalcy. The cultural discourse of the narrative is not a thesis, nor a statement of facts. It decomposes the constituents within the context of a constituted whole. In other words, as it unfolds certain mysteries, it wraps up other predicaments. In the end, it manifests itself as another riddle to be solved with the help of other similar creative texts. But as I have tried to demonstrate towards the end of this paper, it is precisely the nature of the creative act that is at stake. It is a continuous dialectical process. Its contradictory strands lead to such compositions whose ends are always loose. They can be stretched in many directions. Several interpretations are possible, but each interpretation has serious consequences for our cultural development. The creative evolutionary process of a culture is not based on sentimental impulses, its development follows the incisions of intellective operations. I have attempted one such incision on the cultural discourse unfolded in the legend of Puran Bhagat.

## II

There are six basic thematic units. The first theme refers to the birth of Puran in the House of Raja Salwan of Sialkot. The moment is surcharged with the confrontation of destinies. The Brahmins tell the Raja to avoid seeing Puran for the first twelve years as the encounter of son and father portends disaster. The servants obey and Puran is taken to a closed dungeon. The poet Qadiryar aptly refers to Puran's entry from one darkness (of the womb) to another. The oppositions of light and darkness, of mysterious depths and sharp truth are obvious. Both mental and physical atmospheres are disturbed. Characters and destinies are at stake.

The second theme refers to the main crisis of the narrative. After twelve years of confinement, where he had had the usual training of a prince, Puran steps out into the world of human relationships and intrigues. There are celebrations and sacrifices. Salwan is overjoyed. The proud father dreams of the marriage of Puran and the happy days ahead. But this is not to be.

Once due reverences paid to his father, Puran is led to see his mother, Icchran, and, the stepmother, Raja Salwan's second wife, Luna. The sight of Puran so captivates Luna that she forgets the social relationship of being a "mother" and entices Puran with her charm and solicitations. Puran remains steadfast in his role of a stepson, and, withstands all temptations. Luna takes it as a challenge to her very being. She pleads gently and offers all the pleasures of the world. She argues that as she did not give birth to Puran, she could not be his mother. When all this fails to move Puran, she threatens and cajoles. Puran at once accepts the challenge. He would rather die than leave his dharma. Luna is transformed immediately into a revengeful ogress. As Qadiryar puts it : she would drink his blood to satisfy her thirst of revenge.



*kāf katal krāūgi pūrna we  
 ākhe lag ja bhala je chāhona e  
 jholi aḍ ke kharī mæ pās tere  
 hæ piāriā khær na pāona e  
 kucchar bæṭh kadō mamma chūgia i  
 æwe kūr di māo banāōda e  
 Qādaryār na sāgdi kahe lūṇā  
 kāhnu gardni khūn charāoṇa e*

*kāf kahe rājā aje samjh mātā  
 tere pālgh te pær na mūl dharsā  
 akkhī partke nazar na mūl karsā  
 æpar sūli te charhan kabūl karsā  
 kanni khichke ādrō bāhar āiā  
 ākhe dharam gawae ke nāhi marsā  
 Qādaryār wāgār ke kahe lūṇā  
 tere lahū de pūrnā ghut bharsā*

The ball is set rolling and there is no going back. The third thematic unit of the narrative is a logical consequence of the second. Luna organises a complot. She convinces Raja Sawan that Puran wanted to seduce her. She has been insulted and disgraced by his tempestuous son, of whom he is so proud, who is the darling of his mother, Icchran, the other, neglected wife of Salwan.

The Raja is furious. How dare his young son lay hand on his favourite queen? Their passions crisscross. Their ambitions are in violent confrontation. He has Puran called to his authence, and, in spite of all protestations and arguments of truth and dharma, which only infuriate the father even more, convincing him of Puran's indiscipline and disobedience, the Raja orders the executioners to delimb Puran, and, to throw him in a deserted well in the wilderness. Puran's mother, Icchran, pleads to the contrary and appeals with the most powerful argument, according to our cultural norms, that if Puran dies, who would call him

"father". The Raja's advisers also counsel temperance but none of this has any effect on the violent tempest let loose by Luna.

*he hukam na pherda koi aggō  
preshān sārā pariwār hoia  
thar thar kambde rāg mahal sabhe  
kaiharwān jadō sardār hoia  
kare sad ke hukam jalādiā nu  
dhummi khabar te shaihar hartāl hoia*

*khe khabar hoi rāni icchrā nu  
jis jammia pūran put sāi  
churā bhan ke tor hamel mālā  
bhar buk rāni sir khāk pāi  
māde ghā piariā putrā de  
rāni bhaj ke rāje de pās āi*

Puran is duly executed. He remains stuck in the deserted well for the legendary twelve years, when Guru Gorakh Nath, the great yogi, appears on the scene with his disciples. In this fourth theme, Gorakh brings Puran out of the darkness and death of the deep well into the light and life of yoga. His limbs are restored. He is initiated into the mysteries of yoga, but strangely enough, the main emphasis, as presented by the poet, is on the "honour" of the yogic discipline. Gorakh Nath is the Guru whose yoga has been "acknowledged" by the Almighty, and Puran, his disciple, is charged with upholding the high yogic tradition of steadfastness and discipline. Puran is the new prince-yogi, not just an ordinary adept. Puran narrates his tale of woes, and Gorakh realises the headstrong young fellow that Puran is. The Guru and the disciple are in tune with each other. Both deal in abstract principles and are ever willing to confront any situation of mental disturbance that comes along.

And, there is no dearth of tests. The crowd of disciples hemming around the Guru for a few loaves of bread encourage Puran to go for alms at the palace of princess Sundran, who apparently had never descended

from her palace for the little mendicants. The confrontation with Sundran is the theme of the fifth unit of the narrative.

With the permission of the Guru, Puran sets out to the palace of princess Sundran. As usual, the maidservant of the palace offers him alms, but he refuses. He would accept them only from the princess herself. The maidservant is so excited that she describes the handsome figure of the prince-yogi in great detail. Sundran is obviously curious. She invites him in, but he refuses. As Qadiryar puts it : he had already crossed one threshold in such a palace, he dare not try another snare. Sundran obliges and gives her gifts of pearls and diamonds. When Gorakh Nath sees these precious stones, he remonstrates Puran. The yogis accept nothing but ordinary food. A mendicant is not a beggar. Puran returns and Sundran accompanies him with all kinds of delicacies.

The arrival of Sundran at the Dera of Gorakh Nath creates an atmosphere of extreme velocity. The presence of such a beautiful princess amongst the sadhus surcharges the environment. All the mendicants are excited, and, as Qadiryar describes the event, only Guru Gorakh Nath and Puran are able to keep their balance. However, the Guru is pleased with Sundran's humility and grants her a boon. Sundran asks for Puran. Once the dye was cast, there was no way out. The Guru's word had to be kept, and Sundran leads Puran away to her palace. This is obviously too much of an ordeal for Puran. He slips away from the palace at the very first opportunity, and, deceived and depressed, Sundran commits suicide.

When Guru Gorakh Nath realises what had happened, he sends Puran back to his parents. Puran goes from one woman to another. At each encounter, the bewitching woman is taken in by his handsome figure and self-assurance. He tells Sundran that he is no ordinary beggar sadhu; he is a prince of high caste. He had come to see her. He would neither accept any gift from a maidservant nor would he cross the threshold of the palace. He would neither enter the palace nor accept any one other than that of the palace. The dilemma continues.

As Puran arrives in the dominion of his father, we come to the last episode of our narrative. He camps in a deserted garden on the outskirts of the city of Salwan. Puran's spiritual stepping-in gives life to the withering plants. The whole city pays homage to the new yogi whose generous touch heals all wounds and destroys all miseries. The news reach the palace. Puran's mother, Icchran, who had become blind crying for her son, arrives in the garden for the yogi's solace. Raja Salwan and his queen Luna also come to see the renowned yogi for the boon of a son. When the son and mother meet, Icchran recovers her eyesight. With Raja Salwan and Luna, the encounter is of another order. The king would like to be blessed with a son, for he had had none to play in his palace, which is deserted without the laughter of a child. Puran probes the past, and reminds him of a son, named Puran, who was executed. When Raja Salwan begins his narrative, Puran exhorts Luna to come out with the true sequence, if she desires the boon of a son. As the truth is revealed, and Luna is humiliated, Puran advises Salwan to forget the past. She did what she could, but what he, the father, did, was never done by any other father. All the same, he gives him a grain of rice, with which Luna would conceive, and give birth to a warrior son, but afterwards she would also suffer like the mother of Puran. A gift of humiliation and revenge, all wrapped up neatly, in the yogic tradition of discipline and austerity.

And finally, the identity is revealed. Salwan and Luna are in the terrible presence of Puran. The Raja pleads and requests Puran to take over the reigns of the kingdom. Puran refuses flatly : if you cannot govern your dominion, let it go to the dogs. Who cares for me? You are only ashamed of your deeds, and want to cover up your crimes. Go home, my brother would sit on this throne, who would be a great warrior. I got what was destined for me. The way I was turned out of my city, no prince was ever so humiliated. What my father did was never done by any other father in any age... And, Puran leaves Sialkot for good.



### III

The human condition in the narrative of Puran is the condition of sex and violence, of discipline and austerity, of heightened emotions and extreme egocentric personalities. Each sequence of the narrative is charged with existential crises of the being who can never forget himself. The self is above all emotions.

All the *dramatis personae* are wrapped up in the most unyielding cover of self-deceit and self-assurance. But it is also a narrative of extremely disturbed persons. It is a discourse of utter frustration and perturbed minds. Every sequence leaves a certain psychic trace which cannot be obliterated by all the physical violence that every one tries to subject the other to. There is also self-negation and torture. But the self never leaves. The ego predominates. The narrative moves from one crisis to another. It is not a discourse of resolutions. The underlying logic of physical or mental violence only pushes one sequence into another. As a cultural discourse, this narrative could be an attempt at a discursive confrontation of yogic upright steadfastness with the ways of the world, but not only Puran, all others who participate in this high drama of extreme psychic tensions, are always left high and dry in midair, with an acute sense of loneliness and frustration. The touch of the yogi Puran is not the touch that heals, it invariably ends up by inflicting another merciless sharp cut on the already open wound.

Let us retrace some of the sequences in this psychic context. Raja Salwan had been yearning for the birth of a son, but as soon as the son is born, he is told to avoid him. He is not destined to see the face of his son for twelve years. The son-father confrontation is predicted by the astrologers. And, as far as Puran is concerned, he goes from one darkness to another. As Qadiryar puts it, the father imprisons his son on the day of his birth, on the day of rejoicing. By any reckoning, Salwan is not a happy man. During these twelve years of Puran's confinement, Salwan indulges in another amorous adventure. He marries a low caste but



extremely beautiful young girl, Luna. Like any rich and powerful person, the Raja is able to have a beautiful woman at home, notwithstanding his age. But the marriage is only physical. She is not his companion. He desires her. She possesses him, but he does not possess her. As such, both Salwan and Luna are two highly frustrated beings, locked in the intolerable physical stronghold of the palace.

On the other hand, the ever prevailing absence of Puran must always haunt Salwan. The son is growing but the father is not destined to observe the developing child when he could have had an imprint on him of his fatherly affection. He would encounter only the young man with the frustration of twelve years of confinement. The son is already an adult when they first meet. And, obviously, they do not get along well. For minor enquiries of Salwan, Puran's answers are curt. As Qadiryar puts it, Puran does not hesitate to argue with his father. The ministers advise the Raja not to mind such impertinent talk. Puran would grow. He is an adolescent.

The encounter with Luna is a natural sequence. Luna is literally a captive of the wealthy king. His desire for her is obvious, but she cannot communicate with an old hog, however rich and powerful he may be. And, if there was any compulsion, the advent of Puran releases that. There is confrontation of social, conventional morality, dharma, and the psychic existence of the beings. Luna is courageous. Puran is steadfast. But there is a reason for Luna's will to cross the threshold. She has been a captive for a long time. Her human condition is miserable. She had probably been meditating on her destiny in the confinement of her palace. She is a wild bird in a cage. Puran seems to have opened the door, but apparently he shuts it back with a bang. The triangle of human relationship is, however, complete by now. Puran possesses Luna but Luna does not possess Puran. The relationships are misplaced. The desires crisscross. But, all is not lost. The logic of confrontation gets entangled. Each of them recognises his/her strength, and the desires and passions notwithstanding, they rely on the ill-gotten, false authority and possession.

Luna knows, she possesses the king. He is her prisoner mentally even though she is in his physical captivity. Rejected and insulted by Puran on the basis of conventional morality and collective consciousness, she challenges him on the basis of equally false and undesired hold on the Raja. When her existential being is challenged, she transforms herself into an ogress with the help of the man and his authority, she hates. On the other hand, condemned by the social customary authority of the astrologers and public morality, to first spend twelve years in a dungeon, and adopt a respectful behaviour towards those he has not grown up with, Puran accepts Luna's challenge, and is ready to die for his social dharma.

Salwan's mental state is no different. It is obvious from the Luna-Puran sequence that Salwan never really possessed Luna. His life with her could not have been very happy. For the first time probably, after this Luna-Puran quarrel, Luna seems to be the king's beloved queen, for whom obviously Salwan would do anything. In this absolutely false and concocted atmosphere of devotion and love, Luna sets out to practice treachery and revenge on the one she really adores.

The lopsided relationship between the father and the son cannot be easily ignored. The conventional, cultural morality obliges Salwan to consult the astrologers, and obey them whatever their prediction may be. And, what is their prediction? That the father and the son should have no contact with each other for twelve long years. But this non-contact is the most frustrating mental contact that has apparently already broken their nerves under extremely heavy strain of keeping themselves separate. This unusual situation of presence/absence is tortuous. This astrologic non-relation had already set in motion, a psychic relation, which burst into hatred at the very first occasion.

During this period of non-relation with his son, and Puran's mother, Icchran, Salwan had tried to establish another relation with Luna, mostly as a psychic cure. But the relationship was unnatural and unconventional. Luna was of low caste. She was too young to be his companion.

This only frustrated him more. Mentally, Salwan was already a wreck when Luna suddenly appeals to him in the name of love, which always escaped him. He fell into the trap, and went ahead like a mad dog to cut the roots of his own family tree. Puran's mother, Icchran, tried to bring back the balance and normalcy missing in the royal household for such a long time, but to no avail. Puran's advent was the only element that could normally harmonise the extremely unbalanced psychic situation of the entire family. But the backlog of heightened tensions was too powerful to let these dramatis personae stop, look, and, think. They were all carried away by the hurricane of passions against their own will, against their own best judgement.

And what about Puran, who is being brought up in a dungeon without mother and father? He knows, his father is the king, and he would one day inherit his throne, but he cannot have any contact with him. It is one thing for a child to be an orphan, and quite another to be very near, almost in the presence, close vicinity, of the parents, and yet to be without them. In this most inhuman situation imposed by public norm of the sacred texts of astrology, which are supposed to govern the lives of men, no wonder, Puran grows into a little monster. From twelve years of seclusion and privation, he is suddenly, without any preparation whatsoever, thrown into a world of human contact : confrontation with the authority of the father-king, and the infatuation of the young step-mother-queen. And, both these forced, sudden relations are immediately transformed into non-relations. In such a situation, violence was the only logical means of exit. In this mad house of extreme disequilibrium, nothing short of execution of Puran could pretend to resolve the problematics of the existentially blocked enclosure.

And, what a violence it is? Both Salwan and Luna are pushing their beings along the downhill. Puran who would perpetuate the House of Salwan, Puran whom Luna wants to possess, is sacrificed at the altar of passionate non-existence. In one way, it is the supreme sacrifice for both of them. Blinded by the tempestuous nerves of revenge, they temporarily seem to forget their very existence. Puran is Icchran's son. It is normal for her to plead for his life. But Salwan-Luna-Puran triangle brings about



a certain upheaval in the relational accord. Salwan loves Luna, who loves Puran. The cycle of psychic possession is obviously in the reverse order. Puran possesses Luna, who possesses Salwan. The one on whom you have authority is not the one you love. However, the relation is transparent, and none is deceived. One can only torture one's most loved one. And, as far as the resistance is concerned, which is epitomised in the discourse by the most resolute stand of Puran, it can emanate only from the being who is at the crossroads of all the three protagonists. Naturally, Puran is the nucleus. He is the nerve centre. It is he who has disturbed the equilibrium, however tangible it was, hence he must quit.

The punishment administered to Puran by Salwan's executioners is in consonance with the turbulent situation he has gone through. He is not killed. Only his hands and feet are cut, and he is hung in the darkness of the deserted well. From the darkness of the womb, he was thrown into the darkness of the dungeon as a result of his contact with the sacred books of his culture. Now, from the dungeon, he goes to the darkness of the well in complete immobility. In the dungeon also, he was immobile. He was mentally aware of the presence of his parents and the world around, but following the dictates of public morality, he was not allowed to move. After the jolts of the contacts with his father, and a woman, the two poles of human relationship, he is condemned to an immobility, where his body and mind are intact, to meditate on his destiny, his non-relations as well as his relations. The world is still around. Salwan and Luna are alive outside the well. Nothing could obviously be more tormenting than this absolute helplessness caused by his own upright defence of public morality.

In this immobility, Puran must reflect upon his fleeting but most consequential contact. He would never forget Luna. He would never forgive Salwan. Guru Gorakh Nath would come and heal the physical wounds, but these psychic wounds will never be healed. Each turn in the logical sequence of the discourse will only increase the severity of the pain which would remain hidden and unspoken until the last encounter with Luna and Salwan, when the scores are settled, when these non-relations come in violent confrontation.

The seclusion, darkness, and the immobility in the deserted well is far more severe and acute than the darkness of the dungeon. In the dungeon, Puran was a child. He was deprived of his parents, but he had had the company of his servants and counsellors, who helped him grow and acquire the necessary human awareness. In the deserted well, Puran is an adult. He has had a contact with sex, the most existential ingredient of manhood, and a confrontation with the authority of his father, an obligatory step in the development of individual consciousness. It is with this confrontation that the psychic umbilical cord is broken. Puran is now on his own. He must face the world without, and the world within, all alone. For the first confrontation, he made use of the cudgels of collective consciousness, now he must reflect upon the consequences of using this collective consciousness to assert and realise the urges of his individual consciousness. The world within the deserted well, and the world without, are in a strange contact. The extreme physical immobility, and unfettered imaginative, individual conscious psychic flights are in perfect harmony. The deserted well represents both the dark fathomless prison-hole, and the absolute freedom of mind.

The deserted well is also the symbol of nature as opposed to culture. Rejected and humiliated by culture, Puran finds himself in the world of wild plants and birds of the jungle. But it is not the traditional open free world of nature. Puran has the freedom of a prisoner. He is immobile. This is the gift of culture. His immobility is caused by human intervention. It is dictated by the norms of social consciousness. But in this immobility of cultural compunctions, he is the only witness to the wild nature around.

He observes the wild growth of plants. He watches the nesting of the birds, their births and their deaths, their amorous plays and their struggle for survival. In many ways, Puran is initiated into the order of nature which is no less ruthless than the one he has just gone through in the intrigues of the kingdom. This nursery school of nature is just the opposite of the school of the dungeon which was controlled by all the paraphernalia of culture. The contrast is extreme. In the dungeon, Puran

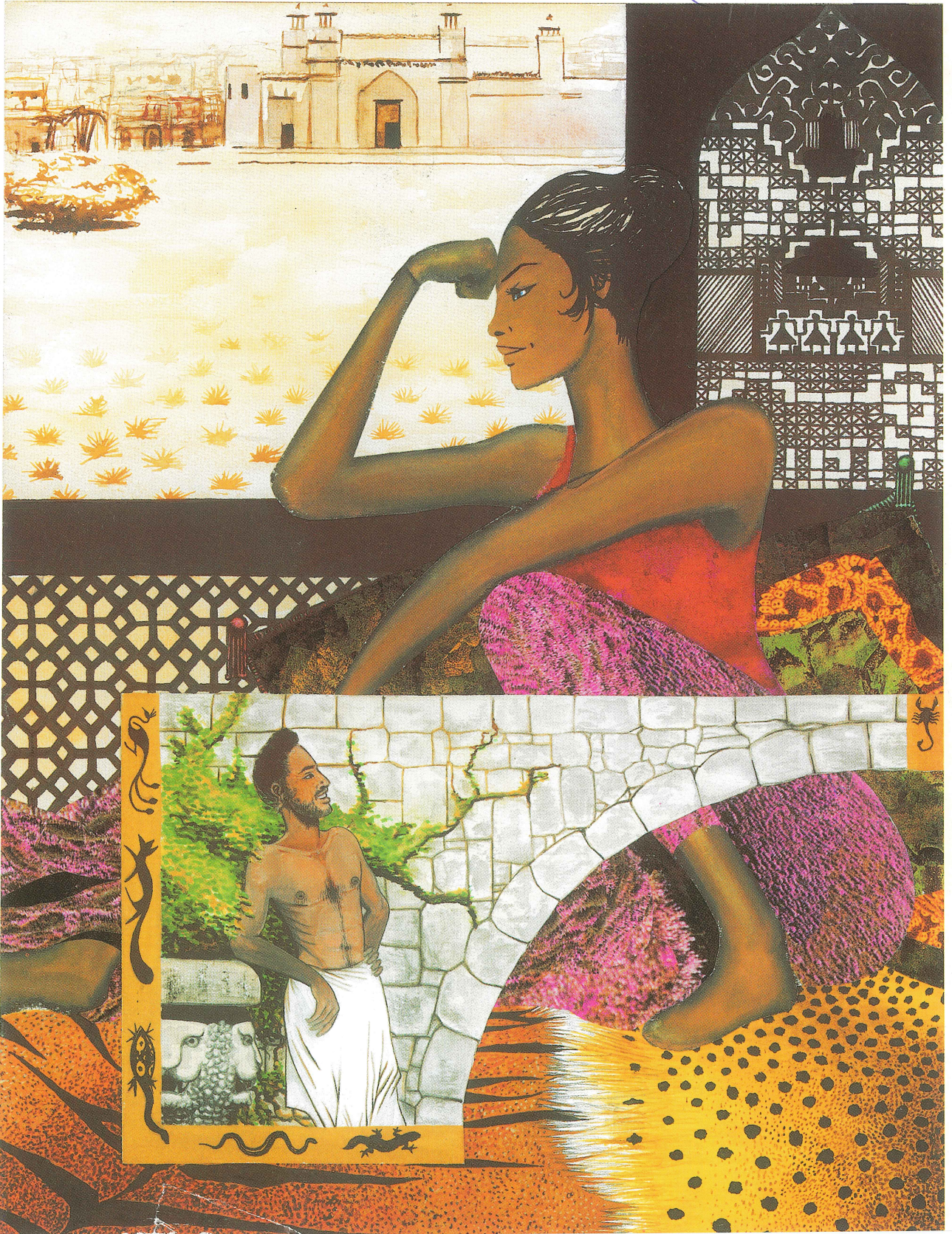


was never alone. No doubt, it was a darkness of deprivation, but it was not really the solitary confinement he is now undergoing. In the deserted well, the adult Puran meditates on honour and revenge, individual sexual urges and the taboos of the society. As such, even before he encounters Guru Gorakh Nath, Puran has been initiated into the individualistic mysteries of yogic experience. It is here that Puran acquires the power of patience and meditation. It is in the solitary confinement of nature that Puran acquires new insights into the truth of culture. But obviously, this acquisition reinforces and reintegrates the already highly individualistic, and as it happens, highly egocentric, tendencies in the psychic compartment of Puran. This contact with nature is not complementary to cultural evolution, it is in direct contradistinction to the ways and norms of ordinary behaviour. It certainly heightens the velocity of the confrontation of individual and collective consciousness. Like the twelve years of the dungeon, the twelve years of the deserted well is again a preparatory period, which both nurses and nourishes the psychic wounds inflicted by culture.

Gorakh Nath restores the limbs of Puran and brings him back to normal human condition. He asks him to go to Sialkot to see his parents, but Puran refuses. He is not yet mentally ready to face his adversaries, and pleads to be initiated into the Order of yoga. Guru Gorakh Nath accepts him in his fraternity and converts him to the yogic discipline. This step takes Puran still farther from the profane life and personal ambitions. The Order of yoga of Gorakh Nath requires extreme austerity and negation of all human impulses. In the beginning, Puran was a prisoner of public morality. Now, he is in the grip of even stronger norms of religious discipline. Gorakh preaches avoidance of all that is worldly, all that satisfies normal human appetite of sex and hunger. He is to be a mendicant for whom this world of senses does not exist. He has to follow the dictates of the highest dharma. As the disciple of Gorakh Nath, Puran has to lead a life under far more severe constraints than when he was a prince within the confines of public moral order.

And, yet he has to live in this world of flesh and ambition. As a mendicant, he is supposed to go to the city to beg for alms. There is a







clear distinction and opposition between the monastic life outside the city, and the profane life of the city, but both are related. The yogi must live away from the city but must depend on it for his physical existence. There is no cohabitation of the physical and the spiritual but both are in consonance. Both must come in contact with each other. Both must confront their respective positions in complementary needs but diametrically opposed ways and ideals of life.

The co-disciples of Puran tell him to go to the palace of princess Sundran for alms. They inform him that she never descends from her apartments and sends only her maidservants.

No mendicant of the Order of Gorakh Nath has ever been able to see her. They would be surprised if he, who claims to be a descendant of the mighty kings of Sialkot, can oblige princess Sundran to come down to his presence. And unwittingly, Puran follows their advice, and leaves for Sundran's palace with the blessings of his Guru.

At the palace, the inevitable happens. The maidservant of Sundran offers alms to Puran which he duly refuses, and insists on the audience of Sundran. The princess is furious, but relents as she listens to the description of the handsome figure of the new yogi. She invites him in. Puran resolutely refuses to cross the threshold. He was obliged by his Order to come as far as the gate of the palace, but beyond that he would not budge. He is of noble lineage. In other words, he is of the palace, but bound by the constraints of his Order, he cannot cross the threshold of the palace.

Princess Sundran is also caught in the same dilemma. She is not only of the palace, but she also leads the life of the palace. She is willing to meet Puran, the prince, but not Puran, the yogi. If she steps out into the world of Puran, she loses her identity, and then the meeting is of no consequence to her. However, as expected, Puran is steadfast in his role of a mendicant, Sundran hesitatingly condescends. She overlaid Puran with the gifts of pearls and diamonds. Puran is yet a novice. He does not realise the significance of these precious stones. These are not the usual

offerings to an ordinary mendicant. These riches are the gifts of the palace to a prince, who is only disguised as a yogi. When Guru Gorakh Nath refuses to accept these glittering objects of the profane world, Sundran plays another trick. She prepares the choicest dishes of the House of princess Sundran and accompanies Puran to the Dera of Guru Gorakh Nath.

The Guru is highly pleased at such a devotion of the princess, and grants her a wish. Sundran immediately cashes on the sacred promise, and gets Puran as her award. This is too much and too sudden for Puran. The Guru prepares him for renunciation and discipline, and at the first opportunity, thrusts him into the very illusory world, he commands him to avoid. Puran is compelled to move from one human condition to another, either by the force of public morality, or by the discipline of the highest religious Order. And, as expected, he reacts violently. No sooner than he is at the palace, he slips away, leaving Sundran high and dry, in the midst of her most ecstatic moment. No wonder, she succumbs to this terrible grief.

The same poet Qadiryar, who had blamed Luna for treachery and deceit, cannot help compose some of the most beautiful verses of his poem, describing the anguish of Sundran. Who is to blame for this tragic end? In the case of Luna, one could talk of the mother-son intrigue, the infatuated woman and the dutiful son, but no such accusation could be placed at the conduct of Sundran. Princess Sundran was enticed by the yogi Puran, however unconsciously it might have been. In the beginning, she had refused to descend from her guarded palace, but Puran had insisted on her audience. Did he want to prove to his comrade disciples that he was, after all, the prince-yogi, he had claimed to be, and princess Sundran could not refuse him his due place?

Any way, once they met, they did not want to cross the threshold of the palace. In other words, they refused to go to each other's world. And, yet none of them could resist. The first step, however, reluctantly it may have been, was taken by Puran. It is he who goes to Sundran's palace. No doubt, at the threshold, there was hesitation. The yogic discipline

reminded him of the higher obligations. But, Sundran was already there. The two beings were not only involved in a human encounter, it was also a confrontation of two egocentric attitudes. Sundran tries to resolve the dilemma by following Puran, but as Qadiryar puts it in one of the most beautiful lines of his narrative, Puran leads Sundran away with the finger of his charm.

*Qadaryār læ challiā sūdrā nu*  
*Puran husan di ūglī laeke jī*

And, whatever be the pretensions of the yogic Order, the yogi Puran, as described here by Qadiryar and remembered ever since by the Punjabi consciousness, is the fantasmatic romantic hero, who is handsome but unfaithful, who is austere and obdurate, who deceives the innocent princess. The yogis are unreliable, they are stone-hearted. Sundran warns all other girls to beware of these mendicants who loot young hearts and care not for their anguish. The whole town cries for her misfortune. When Sundran falls from the palace, the walls of the city are blackened, and the populace wails for the beautiful princess, who has been betrayed. Puran entered the city of beauty and happiness, he left it deserted and desolate.

*te tuṭha hā rāṇie māg maithō*  
*dūji wār kiha aje hæ i wela*  
*chār kūṭ de bāg bahār mewe*  
*amrit phal khāī rakkhī yād wela*  
*rāṇi sūdrā uṭhke nazar kīṭī*  
*pūran bhagat hæ amrit phal kela*

... ..

*zāl zarā na tākat rahi tan wich*  
*rāni gaōdi gamā de gīt loko*  
*mæ bhulli hā tusā na hor koi*  
*laio jogiā nāl na prīt loko*  
*jāgal gae na baore sūdrā nu*  
*jogi nahī je kise de mīt loko*



Before Puran reaches the Dera, the news of the death of Sundran had already reached Gorakh Nath, who apparently did not approve of his disciple's behaviour. Perhaps he had conceived of a more prolonged affair. It could be a test of a yogi, to both live with the world of passion, and to avoid it, as it is quite usual in the rites of initiation. But Puran was made of another clay. Once he was told to conform to certain austerities, once he had taken certain vows, he was not going to let anything slip through his fingers. In any case, the monster of the dungeon and the deserted well was only further hardened by the yogic ordeals. There could be no let up in such a mind. And, the greatest shock of Puran's life was that this desertion of Sundran was disapproved by Gorakh Nath. There was no formal remonstrance. Either Gorakh considers Puran now ripe enough for the final encounter with the world, or he is scared of this monster of a yogi, who has in a way, outstretched even the limits of Gorakh Nath's own yogic Order. Whatever the cultural or existential explanation may be, there is no more any place for Puran in the Dera of Gorakh Nath. He is too much for that assembly of ordinary mendicants. Thus shocked and baffled, Puran obeys his Guru, and leaves for Sialkot.

One can well imagine the predicament of Puran. He is being shuttled from one place to another. In each encounter, he leaves nothing but disaster. Either he is tortured, or some one else suffers because of his supposedly spiritual ideals. And, what obviously must unnerve him most, is that even his own Guru did not take kindly to his extreme posture. The sequences of events follow each other with such rapidity that he hardly has time to breathe. In the Dera of Guru Gorakh Nath, he seemed to have realised the ideal of his life. His past behavioural pattern was just the stuff that was needed for such an ideal, but this also let him down. Before he could adjust to this new way of life, he had already crossed its limits. Before Sundran, the predicament was whether or not to cross the threshold of the palace. Personally, for him, it was not a difficult step. He simply followed the rules of the book, but he never imagined the consequences. He never, even once, stopped to think of Sundran as a person. The other disciples taunted him to oblige the princess to descend from her palace. His charm and his steadfastness combined with his noble lineage could easily achieve that. But, he was not mentally prepared to

handle the psychic predicament of Sundran. It was quite easy to stand to the passion of Luna. The collective consciousness supported him all the way through. But the sentiments of princess Sundran were of different order.

Broken and disheartened by the farewell gesture of his Guru, Puran follows the road to Sialkot. When Raja Salwan asks the yogi Puran for the boon of a son, for no child plays in his compound, and his palace is deserted, Puran would have wondered on the strange opposition of the deserted well and the deserted palace. Apparently, where the son Puran is, there is life, where he is not, there is desert. But this was not so, not long ago. He was chased from the palace like plague, and thrown into the deserted well. Was the well in the wilderness, after all, not such a deserted place? Puran had taken the light of the House of Salwan with him, and had left behind, in spite of his supposed act of aggression, disobedience, and impertinence, the palace all deserted. The severest of punishments had after all satisfied none. Luna must have been tormented both for the lack of a child, and due to her guilty conscience, for she lost both her beloved, and her household. Her life with Salwan even before was not a happy one. The little encounter with Puran left her completely shattered. Salwan had waited for twelve long years to see his son. Within a day, he transformed frustration into desperation. The angry and jealous Salwan had acted in a hurry. It had left him completely empty and deserted. It was not just any palace, but Salwan's palace, which was like a desert. And, the cruelty of the situation is that he himself, however justifiable his act may be, is responsible for his tortuous state of mind.

The operation continues. Puran inflicts another cut to the wound he had just opened. He asks Luna to reveal the truth of the incident, if she desires a son to her. Luna bursts forth. The truth cannot be hidden from the yogi. What was personal torment until now becomes a public affair. For the last twelve years, she must have been tortured for the false accusation, which served no purpose, which did not yield any harmony in the Luna-Salwan relation. There was none before. Once Puran had destabilised whatever false conjugal union there was between husband and wife, there could not be any peace in the aftermath of the bloody incident.

Now, that the truth is revealed, Salwan is furious. The triangle is again complete, but the roles are reversed. Salwan would have none of Luna, but Puran counsels patience. It was not her fault. She did what she could, whatever her impulse commanded her to do. But Salwan, yes, his father, Salwan, did what no father had done ever before. Anyway, he gives him a grain of rice, the symbol of fertility, with which Luna would conceive, and give birth to a mighty prince.

Salwan must now keep his unfaithful wife, and lead a life of utter frustration. Until now, their marriage had not been consummated. The grain of rice of Puran would help the undesired union, and a son will be born, naturally a son-brother to Puran. Indirectly Luna has also achieved what she longed for. The child of Luna will be due to yogi Puran's blessing. He will be born, fertilised by the grain of Puran. There is nothing that Salwan can do about it. In anger, he had gotten rid of his rival. In helplessness, he has to accept all in utter humiliation and disgrace. When the truth was not revealed, there was emptiness in the compound, and the palace was deserted. When the truth is revealed, the compound will be filled with the laughter of a child and the palace will abound with life, but this laughter and this life will not be due to Salwan. He will now be a ghost in the resounding environment of the high walls of the palace.

When Puran's identity is revealed, Salwan asks his son to inherit his throne and bring light to the dark house of his father. Puran refuses flatly: if you cannot govern your kingdom, let it go to the dogs, I would have none of it. For all these years, I have suffered the weight of tormenting memories. Only God knows what I have borne. I will have none of you or your belongings. I am a yogi. I must go.

But what kind of a yogi he really is? A yogi, who has been nursing his wounds, a yogi who has upheld the norms of the highest exigencies of his Order, a yogi who has been completely dehumanised, a yogi who has suffered, and who now must make every one suffer for ever and ever more. The resolution to the crisis of the House of Salwan prescribed by Puran inflicts a permanent wound which will simmer and squeeze at the



slightest movement, and continue to increase progressively in the severity of its pain. His blessings of a son to Luna includes the curse that like his mother, Icchran, Luna too would be tormented when her son would leave her. He actually does in the second sequence of the narrative, not discussed here.

Puran's meeting with his mother, Icchran, is the only gentle and humane episode in the whole narrative, but it becomes a side affair in the general context of the sequences of relationships. In any case, it does not deter Puran from the path of psychic confrontations that he seems to have chosen for himself.

#### IV

This analysis of the sequences of the legend of Puran follows the constituting process of the narrative. It is quite different from the usual interpretations which move either along the collective social norms, as is the case with the poet Qadiryar himself, whose version is our point of departure, or the conditioning factors of our socio-economic course of history. All these factors have to be taken into account by any critic who ventures into such an enterprise, but for us, a cultural myth or a legend is primarily a cultural discourse, whose logic is not always apparent at the manifest discursive level.

The creative process is necessarily a semiotic process. The signs and symbols which constitute a given narrative represent, not only the traditional values attached to them, but they also derive their significance from the mutual interaction they have with each other. One can always condemn or approve a given act on the basis of the so-called public morality or collective consciousness, but this collective consciousness is constantly and obligatorily in confrontation with individual consciousness. And, this is precisely the motive force which brings about transformation.

Social change is inherent in the very constitution of the society. A social structure is never in complete harmony. Its different constituents

are invariably in a certain composition of disequilibrium, which needs to be deciphered, not only at certain specific points, but also in an entire framework. Every human impulse must, by definition, have a psychic history. One cannot just brush aside the confinement of a child to a dungeon on the basis of an astrologic prediction without properly analysing its possible repercussions. After all, Puran could not have acted the way he did, if this confinement had not taken place. If the little Puran had been playing in the garden of Salwan, he may not have even married again. Secondly, how far it is psychologically legitimate to expect of a child to have respectful attitude towards his stepmother? And, inversely, is it really natural for a young stepmother to consider another's child as her own? In any case, how can one expect normal public behaviour from a person who has been imprisoned for twelve years, who has grown up without the sight of his parents, whose psyche has developed under the curse of the traditional astrology? And, above all, what does it really mean that father and son shall not behold each other for twelve long years? The confrontation of destinies is writ large on the entire canvas of the painting, that is being slowly constituted, but whose contours are laid down on the very first day.

A cultural discourse is not a cultural resolution. It is an attempt to solve the riddle of human condition in the form of another riddle. What cannot be stated or explained in simple terms, in the form of language, is presented in the form of a semiotic constitution. As such, there are always several interpretations. After all, it is not the only legend of the culture. It is one of the several attempts at resolving the riddle of human condition which remains always an enigma in the general context of human creative activity of a given people. This is really the creative process. Man never stops constituting the logical sequences of his impulses. The process of decomposition is not only at the individual analytical level of comprehension, the collective consciousness also constantly participates in the continuous process of pulsational forces, which give rise to the evolutionary historical configurations.

The decomposition of a human situation involves the decomposition of a the psychic compartments which constitute a given personality. The



interaction is at psychic level. The psychic constitution of a being is due to the commutative process which begins from the very beginning.

This is why once Puran is condemned to the darkness and deprivation of his parents in the dungeon, and the parents are deprived of the laughter of the little child, the psychic compunctions, which will lead them from one sequence to another, are the logical consequences of the entire narrative. When Gorakh Nath restores the hands and feet of Puran and admits him to his fraternity, he should have known what was at stake. Puran was no ordinary disciple. He will not only learn and excel in the austere discipline of yoga, he would also carry with him, the twelve years of the dungeon, the confrontation with Luna and Salwan, and the immobility of the deserted well, into the traditional path of yogic constraints. One thing follows another. The interaction of impulses is double-edged. It is not possible for the human constitution of Puran to forget his contact with Luna, the only woman of his life, and the immediate consequential contact with the jealousy and the wrath of his father, Salwan. He had twelve long years to meditate on his human condition in the solitude of the deserted well. And, by the time he goes back to Luna, a logical compulsion and a sentimental journey back into the depths of his memory, he had another, but quite different, contact with a woman, in the person of Sundran. In the case of the first confrontation, he was supposedly the victim, at least at the physical level, if one ignores the tormented vacillations of Luna. In the latter case, the situation is of another order. It is Sundran who suffers physically, but how can one ignore the consequential fact that if Guru Gorakh Nath, the guardian of public morality and religious sanctions, was shaken at the demise of Sundran, Puran could not possibly escape the psychic fall-out from this tragic Sundran-Puran contact. Luna obviously did not know all this. In her psychic compartment, there is only the first confrontation and the following execution of Puran. No doubt, she also nursed her wound for a long time, but this period at Sialkot refers only to the deserted palace. It is bereft of the high drama that is now being played elsewhere. The nucleus is Puran. His scene of action changes place. The rest of the dramatis personae must wait and suffer until he comes back. But he is no more the same Puran that now Salwan and Luna meet. No doubt, he

probes the past. He makes them swallow the bitter pill of the truth of the earlier incident. He is revengeful and cruel. But his cruelty is now cold-blooded. He does no more act on the impulse of the moment. His memory is surcharged with other deeper cuts, which he is obviously not willing to share with any one

If one wants to come to this conclusion for the sake of argument, Puran emerges from this saga of internecine psychic warfare in the form of a new yogi, who perhaps not only outstretches the traditional limits of yoga, but also surpasses his Guru Gorakh Nath. This is also, of course, the only way, the tradition can continue in the dynamic confrontations of the discipline. The psychic monster of the darkness of the dungeon, hardened by the immobility of the deserted well, becomes a monster of a yogi before whom even Guru Gorakh Nath must bow in reverence. After all, in the normal process, there is always an inbuilt elasticity of adjustment in the contours of public morality, collective consciousness, and the highest ideals of spiritual austerity. No one really believes in their absolute adherence. And, here comes Puran, who not only follows them like the rules of a text-book, he far surpasses them in their uttermost outer limits.

This argument leads us to a blind alley. Do we then approve of Puran's reactions in each confrontation, and condemn and discard all other human impulses as low and unworthy of our cultural behaviour? Obviously not. If it were so, there would not have been this legend. This legend, like all legends, like all creatively constituted discourses, began with a certain problematics, it untied certain knots, but in the process of successive resolutions, constituted innumerable other riddles, which the cultural creative faculty will continue to decompose and recompose ever after.

The psychic imbalance of Puran is being restored by two women. The one is, of course, his mother, Icchran. The other is Sundran. Luna is responsible for the first major emotional disequilibrium, but she neutralises the effect with the physical torture that Puran is subjected to. In the case of Sundran, the situation is different. Not only, it is Puran who

insists on her audience in the first place, it is Sundran who tortures herself for his sake. She makes the supreme sacrifice of her life. When Luna meets Puran for the second time, he is a grief-stricken yogi. Towards Luna and Salwan he has the sentiments of revenge. A great wrong was done to him. He can justify his act. The entire cultural consciousness supports him, but no matter what justification he probably had in the beginning, in the initial response of Sundran, he cannot blame the one who is no more, who had de-existentialised herself, who has apparently freed Puran of her obstacle. But what is not manifest is immanent. Since he cannot react to Sundran, he is psychologically immobile, and in this immobility, neither nature nor culture will help him. He must suffer her memory forever. Her violence to herself has obviously cleansed her of all human impurity. If one ventures to say at this stage of the analysis, Sundran's sacrifice humanised the austere disciple of Gorakh. What the Guru could not do, she did. And, the Guru was not so wrong, after all. It is he who so willingly gives the gift of Puran to Sundran. Does it refer to one of the yogic precepts that woman is the greatest teacher of man?

The semiotic system of the legend seems to have been constituted of two main signs : distance and memory. The distance involves both space and time. The antagonists are separated in the dungeon and the palace or the deserted well and the palace, but this separation is never forgotten. Each actor of this drama is a prisoner, both physically and mentally. The distancing gives them time to think of oneself and the other at the same time. Since one cannot forget the other, the other who is present next door, who is planning and scheming, the other who is either a tyrant or a victim, the other who is there in the compulsion of the verdict, whose confrontation is also a foregone conclusion. As each period of forced separation is very clearly demarcated, one is existentially, completely, immobile. There is always the other end of the distance and the time. In other words, in this distance, the memory of the other is the immobilising factor. One is never really free even in solitude.

The spatial distance is a period of introspection, but the deep traces of the psychic wounds inflicted by the other hinder the spiritual progress, if one dare use this expression in this context. However, one cannot escape



this dilemma. After all, the hero is supposed to be a yogi or a bhakta, the one who should ponder over the absolute. The logical sequences of the narrative do not leave any door for a spiritual exit. Puran, as well as all the others, are bound to each other by the passions of love, hatred and revenge; they twist and turn each other's destiny. The apparent solution that the legend tries to provide is the deliberate separation of the opposites. The astrologers knew that the father and the son would collide, so the best way to avoid confrontation was to separate them. This is a normal judicial practice. The collective tradition could not foresee the aftermath of the slow cooking fire of twelve years. Fire is the image that Qadiryar uses again and again. When Luna meets Puran, she is consumed by the fire of sexual passion. When Salwan listens to the false story of Puran's advances, he is burnt with the fire of anger. Puran is the only one who never lets the flame of his inner fire emerge in the physical world. He controls his fire. This is the role of the yogi. But his fire burns slowly and surely, and his victims find no exit ever. Sundran is the only one who outwits Puran. She is his victim, but she is not revengeful in the ordinary sense of the term. She turns inwards, tortures herself, and quits. For once, both the arcs of distance and the memory of the other, present on the other side of the wall, are broken. Puran is freed of this constraint which helped him constitute his psychic path until now. He can go back to Salwan and Luna, and react. But no such thing is possible for Sundran. She is gone. Her absence is irretrievable.

The immobilities of the dungeon and the deserted well were existentially controlled immobilities. They were within the grasp of Puran's psychic vision. There was always another end to it. This radical disappearance of the Other is a new phenomenon in the spiritual culture of Puran, the disciple of the great yogi, Guru Gorakh Nath. Hence, there are two types of distances in this legend : the distance of the dungeon and the deserted well, which is marked, and, the distance of the physical annihilation of Sundran, which is unmarked. Puran was physically surrounded by a certain configuration in the former case. He was still a novice. The mental training of the future yogi was controlled; it followed certain specific contours. Now, he has acquired the maturity of a pilgrim. He has been freed of all collective constraints, he can wander in the

wilderness of the jungle, or in the vast spaces of the civilised world, he will always be existentially immobile. This newly acquired freedom will be far more difficult to keep within the spiritual grasp of the yogi Puran. But now he has reached a certain stage of mental conceptualisation that he does not need the other end of the spatial distance. He frees himself even of the sentimental journey into the depths of his fathomless memory. He is able to existentially dominate the situation, and with a jerk, he breaks the last thread of the umbilical chord that still bound him with the world around. Now, he must be ready to face the world within.