

## *Cosmic Symphony*

# **Cosmic Symphony**

**The Early and Later Poems  
of  
Bhai Vir Singh**

Translated by  
**Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh**



**Sahitya Akademi**

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## Preface

June 10, 2007 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of Bhai Vir Singh, and this book is my attempt to pay tribute to him. I am very grateful to Colby College for giving me the sabbatical, and to thank the Sahitya Akademi for publishing a work that has been extremely meaningful for me. My special thanks to its Deputy Secretary Gitanjali for all her interest and support. Thanks to Dr. Mohinder Singh, Director of the Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, for hosting my lectures over the years – the opportunity of being with the family and friends of Bhai Vir Singh has been inspirational for me. Thanks to Sharan Aunty for her love that comes to me in Punjabi across the oceans. And thanks to Bira, Harry and Sarah who in their own different ways help me stay in touch with my inner being where I get to hear those poetic melodies in my mother tongue.

I am profoundly grateful to my father Professor Harbans Singh for exposing me to the great poet. Actually I was quite young when he was doing a book on Bhai Vir Singh for the Sahitya Akademi. We were on our summer holiday in Dehra Dun. My father invariably ‘dictated’ the first draft of all his books, essays, letters and countless entries, which he would then revise over and over! Since he did not have access to his official secretary in Dehra Dun, I was apprenticed – rather unwillingly on my part – but something of Bhai Vir Singh’s poetry and my father’s devotion to Punjabi literature seeped into my psyche. Years later, and miles away from the Punjab, my spirit draws upon that rich reservoir – all that I lost comes back to life when I read his verse. There are other links with Bhai Vir Singh as well, which make him an extra special figure for me. His younger brother Dr. Balbir Singh and his niece Dr. Mohinder Kaur were very good family friends, and we shared delightful times both at their home in Dehra Dun and at ours in Patiala. When my brother got married, Dr. Balbir Singh graciously presented him with the pen used by Bhai Vir Singh. I am proud that the Sahitya Akademi has given me this venue to share the flow of his pen with a wide audience.

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## Introduction

After twenty years of teaching at Colby College, I took my first full year sabbatical and indulged myself by translating Bhai Vir Singh's poems. And what a wonderful experience it has been! Any poem I would enter, would seem like diving into an unplumbed ocean – where vibrant scenes, elemental sounds, sensuous tastes, sensations and smells churned out of its primordial waters leapt me far up into the boundless skies. How could a tiny lyric have such cosmic force? The poet must have profoundly felt the vibrations of the universe, and somehow, through his artistic talents, gathered them in such a way that made it possible for his readers to hear them. This book is my attempt to make that cosmic symphony available to the English speaking public.

Bhai Vir Singh is known as a 'maker of modern Punjabi literature'. Poet, novelist, editor, exegete, historian and journalist, he was the leading figure in the Singh Sabha, the dynamic Sikh renaissance movement which aspired to revive Punjabi culture. He was born on December 5, 1872 in Amritsar, within a rapidly changing social and cultural milieu. The Sikh kingdom established by Maharaja Ranjit Singh had been lost in 1849, and the Punjab had become part of the British dominion. As Western education and ideology began to circulate over the land of the five rivers, strong currents of both reform and transformation came into play. The Christian missionary activity further raised self-awareness amongst the people. Ironically, westernisation brought about the development of indigenous cultural traditions and the vernacular Punjabi language. Bhai Vir Singh profoundly participated in the exciting cross-currents of modernity and tradition: he attended the Church Mission School, he read English writers and philosophers, he absorbed Western ideas, he broke away from the constricting classical structures and tropes. Simultaneously, he learnt Persian, Urdu and Sanskrit; he went back to his own Indian roots, to his legendary protagonists Heer and Ranjha, to his Sikh heritage and to his mother tongue Punjabi. His literary production is voluminous, and includes eight collections of poetry, four novels, a play, five biographies and numerous texts that he meticulously annotated and commented upon. In different genres he tries to awaken his community to their own past with fresh and innovative insights. He set up a printing press, and even started a weekly newspaper,

the *Khalsa Samachar*, which is still in circulation. Punjabi was his medium, for he understood the powerful link between culture and language, and firmly believed that in order to change the consciousness of his people, he had to communicate with them in their tongue. Bhai Vir Singh's versatile genius modernised the Punjabi language and gave a new life to it as a literary medium. For a detailed discussion of his life and works, and his impact on Punjabi literature, see Professor Harbans Singh's excellent volumes in the Sahitya Akademi Series

Bhai Vir Singh is also known as a 'poet of the Sikhs'. He was born in a family steeped in Sikhism. Both his maternal and paternal grandfathers were scholars of Sikh sacred literature. In fact Giani Hazara Singh (maternal side) was a direct descendant of the influential line of exegetes from the time of the tenth Sikh Guru. Giani Hazara Singh was also an inspector of schools in the Church system and prepared some school textbooks in Punjabi by translating Urdu classics. Little Vir Singh who spent a lot of time with his grandfather questioned him one day as to why he only translated other people's books and did not write his own! No wonder, when he grew up, Vir Singh took up creative writing and wrote volumes and volumes to underscore the metaphysical ideals and ethical values of his Sikh faith. When he was a teenager, he wrote his first novel *Sundari* – actually the first in the Punjabi language. In the novel, Sikh ethical principles are concretely embodied in its strong and virtuous heroine. Similarly, his epic *Rana Surat Singh* (modelled on Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and longer than 12,000 lines!) presents the quintessence of Sikh mysticism through its female protagonist Rani Raj Kaur. Bhai Vir Singh wrote several biographies on the life of the Sikh Gurus, and a play *Raja Lakhdata Singh*, which again elucidates Sikh principles. Late in his career, he wrote a formal commentary on the Guru Granth, the Sikh sacred text, which was published posthumously in several large volumes. Furthermore, he revised the *Guru Granth Kosh*, a dictionary of Sikh scripture, which explains important terms and allusions in great detail. The dominant strand underlying his prodigious output was his use of poetic strategy to evoke, elucidate and expand the Sikh scriptural message. Poetically, Bhai Vir Singh grasped the Guru Granth, and made it diaphanous and alive for his readers. The Sikh poet is a glass (to use Emerson's analogy) through which later generations can see Sikh scripture in all its richness.

In my previous works, I have explored Bhai Vir Singh's usage of artistic strategy to evoke, elucidate and expand Sikh theological and ethical concepts.

At this point, however, I wish to see Bhai Vir Singh simply as a poet. As Aristotle said, poetry is concerned with the universals and so I feel we must not limit the poetic legacy of Bhai Vir Singh to the Sikhs. Its universal notes reach out to all of us across religions and continents. In this volume, entitled *Cosmic Symphony: The Early and Later Poems of Bhai Vir Singh*, I have translated two of his poetic works – *Trel Tupke AND Mere Sainyan Jio*. Though poetry was the blood throbbing in his veins constantly, these two texts mark the beginning and the culmination of Bhai Vir Singh's poetic development. *Trel Tupke* is renowned as his first collection of lyric poems. Written after 1909, it was first published in 1922 and brought out as part of the collection *Lehran de Har (Garlands of Waves)* in 1928. The collections *Matak Hulare*, *Bijlian de Har*, *Preet Veena AND Kant Maheli* followed in quick succession. An anthology of songs in praise of the Sikh Gurus was published in 1933 under the title of *Kambdi Kalai (The Trembling Wrist)*. *Mere Sainyan Jio (My Beloved)* in 1953 was the last collection of verse that Bhai Vir Singh published.

The style of the short poem that we find in *Trel Tupke AND Mere Sainyan Jio* was an innovation in Punjabi literature and became popular instantly, gaining a large audience outside the religious circle. While ushering new and quicker lyric tunes and measures into Punjabi prosody, the short poem introduced new words and images as well. Romantic poets like Wordsworth and Keats had their impact, and the new form brought about a revolutionary transformation in Punjabi poetry. Sadly, in spite of his phenomenal inspiration and the intrinsic beauty of his verse, I am amazed that much of Bhai Vir Singh's poetry is not available to the English speaking public. We have a few extracts from his poems, but no poetic book in its entirety. Even a work like *Mere Sainyan Jio*, which won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1955, has not received a complete English translation till this present work.

The task of translating his powerful verse from the original Punjabi into English is of course daunting. We all know Robert Frost's dictum, 'poetry is what is lost in translation'. A translation cannot ever replace

the original. Indeed it is a challenge to transmit the aesthetic efficacy of taste from one tongue to another. Even eminent scholars who have translated Bhai Vir Singh's poems acknowledge that their translations are not literal but rather 'transcreations'

The renderings are not all literal but, in a sense, are 'transcreations'. In view of the wide gap between the principles of expression in the Punjabi and English languages, in some places lines have been, so to say, 'telescoped' and the essence rather than the detailed expanse of the poet's theme attempted. This has sometimes been rendered particularly necessary by the poet's tendency towards prolixity. A more detailed rendering would perhaps be found to lose point and significance in English.<sup>2</sup>

I, to the contrary, found his colloquial style refreshingly familiar, and therefore relatively easy to translate. It seems to me that if we try to stay as close as possible to the original verse, and follow its movements, rhythms and syntax, Bhai Vir Singh's Punjabi verse lends itself quite well to English. In fact in this instance Walter Benjamin's thesis that 'Languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express' rings true.<sup>3</sup>

It is however absolutely necessary that the translator sincerely respect both languages – *equally*. Without the essential parity between the original and the receptor languages, we cannot have any meaningful translations. As Pannwitz remarks, 'Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign works'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the imperial English language with its own set of meanings, connotations and structures has dominated our *globtrtinised* world, and in the process of translation, a language like Punjabi has been totally subservient to His Master's Voice. But with a genuine regard for both languages, the translation from the text to the adaptation follows accurately and smoothly without much tension. Punjabi and English may be from different cultural, temporal and geographical contexts, but when a translator approaches them as equal and parallel entities, they affirm each other, voice each other, enrich each other and even tenderly embrace each other. In this translation project I realised the authentic affinity between Punjabi and English.

Punjabi is in my blood. Growing up in post-colonial Punjab I absorbed it with the arid summers and drenching monsoons. But its real value I discovered only when I left Punjab and came to the US as a high school student. It was far away that I began to long to hear the words coming from the lips of my family and friends. It was here in the US that I experienced English as a living language rather than a dead language written by poets long past like Shakespeare. So when I read Bhai Vir Singh's profoundly simple Punjabi verses, their English version came out almost instinctively.

Personally, during this translation project, memory and desire forcefully came together. Each and every poem from *Trel Tupke* and *Mere Sainyan Jio* had tremendous resonance for me. I'll share here my personal response to one of the poems. I don't know why I chose it. Perhaps I happened to work on it on my birthday? Perhaps I was identifying with the heavy absence hovering between its lines? In any case, it is from the anthology *Mere Sainyan Jio*, and it is titled '*Mashobra*', the name of a hill station tucked away in the Himalayan range. Mashobra is a geographical space, which can be pointed out on the map of India. It is also a place in my imagination, for I learnt that my parents – who are no more – had spent many a delightful summer there soon after their marriage. My translation:

My brother Mashobra! Now tell me,  
Weren't you that spectacular blossom –  
Who was rejoicing like flowers?  
Whose grass was luscious green?  
Now that grass lies pale,  
It looks so very pale,  
It looks so very sad!  
Your flowers are wilting –  
They stand sadly with their heads down,  
They shrivel and wither in pain!  
Like a mother apart from her offspring,  
They that bear fruit are fruitless  
Laying bare the agony of separation!  
Leaves too have changed their colours,  
They fall off with the touch of breeze.

## Introduction

The Fall season in Maine is full of apples. I have also begun to associate it with the lush dark purple Concord grapes that suddenly begin to appear on the vines encircling our fence outside. The New England Fall that I have now experienced for many decades is laden with the ripe fruit and swelling gourds and plump hazel shells that Keats had imprinted on my mental canvas even when I was growing up in India. Why then does Bhai Vir Singh's *Mashobra* with its impoverished imagery of decay and destitution overflow with such emotional plenitude for me?

The poet forges a filial relationship with the locale, for he addresses *Mashobra* as 'brother' (*vir mashobra*), and because of this human-nature bond established at the outset, his questions and musings through the text acquire a unique poignance. More personifications emerge: the grass is 'pale', it is 'sad'; flowers 'stand sadly with their heads down'... The landscape and humans are integrated as they go through the same motions and emotions: the paleness of the grass could be the loss of rosy hue of childhood and youthful sentiments; the drooping flowers or the fruitless fruit trees are no different from the mother psychologically shattered by the separation from her children. Furthermore, botanical and meteorological phenomena converge to augment the fragility of life: *leaves* fall off with the touch of *breeze*! We can hear a loud symphonic sigh as time past intersects dynamically with time present – intensifying the agony of loss, old age and death. The once robustly blooming scenes now transformed into a desolate nakedness are all a part of the cosmic process. In the poet's intuition, nature and humanity are inextricably woven together in the web of life. He does not think about nature in its functional role of creativity or destruction – it neither symbolises the 'womb' nor the 'tomb'; but rather, nature is his relative who shares the rarefied sensitivity and consciousness of the human mother parted from her children. With its cosmic sweep *Mashobra* opened up my losses too: Where is my home? My mother and father?

Where the original text strikes at that visceral self, the English equivalents flow out in their own momentum. Translation ultimately is a creative process. But the creativity lies in bringing out the transparency of the original and not blocking it by 'transcreations'. Though as scholars we have the tendency to explain and analyse, the role of the translator is not that of the interpreter. Keeping this distinction in mind, I did my

best to relay exactly what and how the poet was saying. Occasionally, however, I did run into problems. How does one translate culturally specific idioms? For instance '*ghar khan nun avai*' – literally, the 'home gnaws at me' is a common Punjabi expression for loneliness. Since the literal did not make much sense in English, I was forced to translate it as 'a stranger I enter my own home'. Similarly keeping up with the Punjabi culture, the poet constantly repeats his verbs like '*vekh vekh*' (seeing seeing) or '*bhar bhar*' (brimming brimming), which did not translate well into English so I just left the repetition out. I also had difficulty finding synonyms for some typical Punjabi words like '*chiddi*' – little curdled bits that we kids found floating in our glasses of buttermilk!

Bhai Vir Singh's colloquialisms create some tricky situations. For instance in spoken Punjabi, '*na*' (not) is paradoxically used after a verb to exaggerate the act. For example, '*karo na*', literally 'do it not' really means 'do it won't you'. Therefore the plea in the last line of *Essian Ratan* – '*dio na essian ratan*' produces some ambiguity, for it could be read either as 'Give us such nights, won't you!' or 'Don't give us such nights!' Bhai Vir Singh also uses words like '*ni*' – a colloquial address for a female person, added after or before the noun (for example *bhaine 'ni* – sister dear? / O sister?), or '*jio*' – a suffix for respect (for example in the title of his work *Mere Sainyan Jio*). But there are no equivalents in the English language for either '*ni*' or '*jio*' that are ubiquitous in his text. For the most part, however, the fluidity of sound and sense and the emotional thrill or anguish, flowed across Punjabi into English.

Overall, I feel I gained a lot from this project. In the words of Kenneth Rexroth, it was 'poetic exercise on the highest level':

Translation, however, can provide us with poetic exercise on the highest level. It is the best way to keep your tools sharp until the great job, the great moment, comes along. more important, it is an exercise of sympathy on the highest level. The writer who can project himself into the exultation of another learns more than the craft of words. He learns the stuff of poetry. It is not just his prosody he keeps alert, it is his heart. The imagination must evoke, not just a vanished detail of experience, but the fullness of another human being.<sup>5</sup>



## Introduction

The task of translation foremost teaches us to become intimate readers, for we can only translate after we have read the primary text slowly, very slowly and carefully. This intimacy of reading put me in touch with Bhai Vir Singh's poetic genius when at its zenith. In these poems he is not didactic as he is in many of his other writings. In his prelude to *Trel Tupke* he discloses:

These thoughts are not on any specific topic, these were not written for any specific purpose; but they show up like the dew that shimmers on grass and leaves ...<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, he is not developing or debating any theses or arguments here; the infinite surplus within seems to burst forth – delicate and shifting like the dewdrops. Consequently, when we read through his poems, we can almost see the author in tremors. I felt very fortunate to have connected with Bhai Vir Singh in his high and most creative moments. As a matter of fact, he 'infected' me with his own excitement, and I was on a high too! This process has been a sound training for my own heart, mind and imagination. Indeed, a perfect sabbatical exercise!

From his voluminous repertoire, I decided to pursue his early and late poems – *Trel Tupke* and *Mere Sainyan Jio*. They constitute comprehensive source materials in themselves, and with their wide temporal range, 'allow us to study the development of Bhai Vir Singh's style and thought. I also feel that in order to probe into the layers of his poetic construction, it is necessary that we have the collections in their entirety. Overall, the first anthology is stylistically more defined as it is patterned on the Persian quatrain called the Rubayat, which was popularized in the Punjab by the Sufi poets. Bhai Vir Singh graphically describes his style in his introduction to *Trel Tupke*: 'In the first two lines a thought rises and develops, in the third it returns like a wave, and in the fourth it reaches its conclusion'.<sup>7</sup> By emulating the undulating rhythms of the sea to jot down the movement of his thoughts, the poet consciously seeks to be in tune with the cosmic symphony. The metaphor of intoxication is more conspicuous in this collection, which again is a central Sufi expression for the rapturous experience of the divine. We also find relatively more references to Muslim figures like Ranjha, Heer and the princess Roshanara in the first collection. Heer-Ranjha and Sassi-Punnu are the

## Introduction

quintessential romantic lovers (equivalents of Romeo and Juliet), and Sufi poets like Bulleh Shah and Waris Shah had popularised them to spread the message of religious tolerance and communal harmony in the Punjab. So Bhai Vir Singh utilises them as the motif of immortal love. Interestingly, he even mentions Adam in *Trel Tupke*, and it is hard to say whether his interest in the primordial Western man comes down from the Sufi side or via British Christians. But in *Mere Sainyan Jio*, with the exception of a heroine like Sassi (in *Ojal Dachi*), we don't get proper names. We mostly come across anonymous 'women stone-cutters' or a 'yogi' or a 'lady'. In his final anthology music becomes strikingly more conspicuous. And it does not constrict itself to the Rubayat pattern. In fact, the poems in *Mere Sainyan Jio* vary greatly in their rhyming scheme and length. It seems that in his final publication Bhai Vir Singh lets go of all conventional patterns and lets his unconscious take over completely. Together *Trel Tupke* and *Mere Sainyan Jio* provide us with valuable insights into the poet's vast psychological and mystical world.

Themes important to him early on in life replay in amazing beauty in his final poetic discourse. *Trel Tupke* (Dew Drops) reveals a wonderful love for nature, and a confidence and exuberance in tone, which are naturally intensified in *Mere Sainyan Jio* (My Beloved). Written early in his career, the collection of 48 short poems in *Trel Tupke* has great relevance for our contemporary ecologically insensitive society. It does not express a romantic reverie, but a vital and complex intimacy between the poet and nature – eliciting a moral response from all of us across the globe. Nature is given a voice, a serious voice in which human oppression and exploitation are forcefully criticised. The helpless tree speaks. The delicate rose speaks. The caged bird speaks. In different tongues, these natural phenomena plead that we value and respect the earth and her powers. The poem entitled '*Brichh*' (Tree) could very well be questioning modern consumerism armed to destroy fields and jungles to set up its lucrative industries:

Oh selfish owners of land,  
Why do you fight us?  
We don't grow out  
We grow tall and straight.  
Our rings and breadth  
Extend only in space;

We take but a palm of land,  
Even then you grudge us? (33)

Nature and culture are not split, and interestingly, nature also has commercial objectives! But rather than selfish manipulation and financial gain of a few, it seeks the material benefit of all in its own 'natural' way. Says the Rose:

Please do not cut us off our branch  
For we've set up our business of fragrance.  
Were million shoppers to come by,  
Surely not one would go empty-handed.  
But if you pluck us,  
We'll be consigned only to you;  
That too a meeting evanescent:  
Out beauty and scent will soon vanish.

The Rose's rationale articulated in such a haunting tone should reach the ears of Western companies who are single-mindedly advancing into the Himalayan hills in search of delicate rose petals so that they can bottle them up in expensive perfumes.

The voice of nature remains ever important to the poet, and in *Mere Sainyan Jio* it acquires new nuances. One of the poems opens up like a riddle:

I am born of milk, but I am not yogurt.  
I am born of milk, but I am not cream.  
I am born of milk, but I am not butter.  
I am born of milk, but I am not buttermilk.

When the speaker (*Chiddi*, the curdled bit) identifies herself, she is rejected for being good for nothing. But she explains at length that she possesses the gift to soften skin, and so even things we think are useless have their intrinsic worth. In a multiplicity of ways nature instructs humans to appreciate and respect her in her countless manifestations. In these last poems we also hear the language of the sea – 'Whish! Whish! bellowed the waves'; we hear the language of the stones: '*thatt tharar tharar thatt tharar tharar...*' On the whole, the elemental language of

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nature resonates melodiously with human alliterations and artistic repetitions to produce a cosmic symphony of wondrous beauty.

Bhai Vir Singh was always perceptive to the finitude of life and the infinity of existence. With his unique consciousness he enfolds his readers into the layers of history. One of my favourite pieces from *Trel Tupke* is Roshanara speaking from her grave in the Mughal gardens in Delhi:

Around my grave  
Nature has planted a lovely garden;  
Many visitors stroll in  
But walk away from my grave.  
O' you people don't you see,  
It is not a corpse; it's me!  
Flowers, fruits, leaves, sweet-peas,  
Here they are – all me!

The flora and fauna around her grave is the princess herself! Like T.S.Eliot in the *Four Quartets*, Bhai Vir Singh makes us conscious of the cosmic cycle in space and time that we perpetually move through. In this short lyrical poem, he succeeds in transforming the mood from lamentation to celebration, the locale from grave to birth, the time from past to present, but the reality is simultaneously human and natural. We discover a breadth of vision and emotions as the Sikh male poet reaches out to identify himself with the sentiments of the historical Muslim princess. Through his mature and sophisticated aesthetic, the reader feels the immediacy and poignancy of the vibrant circular pulse of life.

The dynamic momentum of existence flows into his final collection as well. In *Mere Sainyan Jio* the poet (now eighty years old) reminds us of the universal dance that we all vigorously participate in:

Swept by the crisp breeze  
Night and day flow  
Playing their symphony  
They sing their Lover's song  
With their unstuck melody  
They choreograph their Lover's dance –

(xxiii)

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Reaching up to the trees  
Embracing again and again.  
Never does it stop  
Never does it slow,  
Constant is its flow;  
Evening and morning are on the go.

The innocence and pristine joy of childhood is another theme present in both collections. In *Trel Tupke* we see a child-like poet bouncing colourful pebbles he finds by the seashore. In this poem entitled *Jauhari* (quite reminiscent of Tagore's *Gitanjali* where the children are absorbed in gathering and scattering pebbles!) the child enjoys the sheer bouncing of the pebbles – without any care for their monetary value. In a similar scene in *Mere Sainyan Jio* the elderly poet opens up the garden of childhood where we discover a little girl playing dress-up with her dolls, playing pebbles with her friends ...When she is sleeping her baby's sleep, the little girl has a visionary dream (in the poem, *Lagg Gai Si Bali Umare*). In an exquisite analogy from *Kokan Ber*, the almighty lover is compared with a child snatching candy from the mother's hand! The excitement of childhood evokes a cosmic nostalgia; it takes us to an uncluttered life where we were once free from social tensions and psychological angst, and experienced the pure bliss of innocence.

And of course the mystical vibrations of *Trel Tupke* seethe in *Mere Sainyan Jio*. The early and the later collections of poems share not only powerful motifs and themes, but also a fundamental spiritual longing. The heightened experience of the 'mystic' Bhai Vir Singh as he is popularly known, does not come later in life; it is present in his earliest poems:

Wherever I see, there is my beloved:  
Here in a blade of grass, there – in that big forest! (*Trel Tupke*, 41)

Bhai Vir Singh palpably feels the divine within the fleeting visual and aural patterns. In fact the early Vir Singh gives a lot of importance to eyes and the phenomenon of vision. In his opening poem from *Trel Tupke*, he reminds us that we received the gift of eyes to see. In a plurality of ways he incites his readers to refine their senses so that they can have a metaphysical insight into the singular reality of the cosmos.

But we must not get caught up with the metaphysical in a way that we neglect all that is physically close. To the contrary, the poet wants us to savour the nitty-gritty things of daily life, including the curdled bits, the dew-drops, the wild berries. His short poems tune our senses to perceive the infinite beauty in *material* phenomena. Only by opening our eyes to the finite do we sense the infinite – ‘flitting on forms, they famish for more’ (*Trel Tupke*, 2). Preoccupied with our past and future, preoccupied with the big goals in life, preoccupied with a God out there, we miss out on the precious here and now and the spiritual energy in and all around us. This present volume holding together Bhai Vir Singh’s first and final pulsations offers us a glimpse into his spectacular mental kaleidoscope. In turn, we are honed to see and hear and smell and touch and taste the singular magic flowing through our universe.

That sense of the One is a real gift to us living in the dangerously divided and polarised twenty-first century. If we could feel the vibrations of the cosmic symphony, we would restructure our course of action; instead of divisions and conflict, we would work for mutual harmony and goodwill. When we hear the voice of the rose or the stone or the sea or the sun, we realise that we are but one species in an intricate and mysterious web. The realm of aesthetics is not divorced from the ethical; art is not merely for art’s sake – it has a social, cultural, political and psychological function. If we would genuinely **respond** to *Cosmic Symphony: The Early and Later Poems of Bhai Vir Singh* then we must become **responsible** for the welfare of our diverse and complex universe.

<sup>1</sup> Harbans Singh, *Bhai Vir Singh* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1972), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Gurbachan Singh Talib and Harbans Singh, *Bhai Vir Singh: Poet of the Sikhs* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976) (A Unesco collection), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator” in Hannah Arendt (ed.) *Illuminations*, *Walter Benjamin: Essays and Reflections* (NY: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Cited by Benjamin, *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Rexroth, “The Poet as Translator” in Bradford Morow (ed.) *World Outside the Window: Selected Essays of Kenneth Rexroth* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corp., 1987), p. 190.

<sup>6</sup> *Bhai Vir Singh Rachnavali*, Vol I (Collection of Poetry) (Patiala: Department of Languages, 1972), p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23.

# DEW DROPS

*Trel Tupke*

# Vision

## *Didar*

O Reality of this scene,  
Do not cast us aside!  
Deep inside you somewhere,  
Lie our music and melodies;  
If you keep us tucked in your interstices,  
You'll bloom and rejoice;  
You gave us the gift of eyes –  
May we never lose you from sight!



# Eyes

## *Ankhian*

Eyes formed from  
    The pain to see the formless  
Forged in front of our faces  
    Fashioned in form exterior –  
They see exquisite scenes  
    And savour delicious joy. But  
The hunger for the formless doesn't go:  
Flitting on forms, they famish for more.

# Smitten

## *Lagian*

Something is happening in me O friends  
That flying out of hand –  
Spinning weaving laughing playing  
Eating – has lost all meaning.  
Eyes well up with tears drawn from my heart,  
I am utterly lost;  
Our spinning world is strangely awhirl,  
A stranger I enter my own home.

## Sundered Eyes

*Vichurian Ankhian*

Like the lashing monsoon rain,  
    Scorching and surging they pour  
With longing they reveal the road,  
    They vanish, they reappear;  
As the evening slowly sinks  
    My ache to see you grows,  
In pain my hungry eyes  
Lower and lower go.

## Dew and Sun

### *Trel Te Suraj*

On grass I stay, says the dew,  
All eyes I am;  
Longing for you I welled up  
And water, sheer water, I became –  
Now a drop of desire  
With nothing of me!  
O come from your celestial seat –  
I'm spread at your feet to hold you tight.

# My Beloved

## *Mainda Piara*

I am wounded, I am pierced, O friends  
By the tips of that plume!  
I am strung along like thousands of others,  
On your string of pearls.  
The deeper it pierces, the more my heart aches,  
Pain shoots in drenching ecstasy,  
A new life arises as I see  
That diamond sparkling its rays.

# Preparations

## *Tyarian*

Ranjha sits in his village of Takht Hazare,  
    Frolicking with his sisters-in-law, –  
The cup is still raised in  
    The hand of the potter who shapes  
A slender Heer with her head bent  
    Standing by the river's bend;  
The mighty Chenab moves on  
Each little drop stands still.

# Vice

## *Badi*

Shining mirrors – grapes and raisins,  
Nature brings forth herself!  
They pour out sweet succulence,  
They garland lush vines.  
You plucked them off into your jar,  
Waiting for them to ferment,  
Their wine is bittersweet  
But you drink it to the bottom!

## Still Ranjha

### *Achal Ranjha*

Our Ranjha lives in Takht Hazare,  
He never leaves his village;  
He pierces Heer with longing  
Who is far away in Jhang Sial;  
He will neither visit nor invite,  
He draws her with his melodious flute;  
He stays still by the waters,  
Will he be disappointed? Will he be blessed?



# Immortal Drink

## *Amar Rasa*

Soft hands, carafe and cup  
    Turn sadness into smiles.  
Seeing the happy face,  
    The carafe beings to cry.  
Seeing her tears, our good person says,  
    ,This is no bitter wine:  
Immortal wine fills your carafe,  
Bringing the dead to life,

Give us a drop from your carafe –  
    Let thoughts drown in the sea  
Lift us up to the inebriated skies  
    Shatter all agendas and anxieties.  
Radiant nine colours we see  
    As our swings go round in ecstasy!  
Wafts of infinite comforts come to embrace –  
Never to return – such is their union!

# Alchemist or Honeybee?

## *Pasari Ki Makhir?*

A chemist plucked a rose,

He blended it with sugar over and over;

For sweetness he tried in vain,

But the bitterness remained.

Had he gathered a drop like the honeybee:

Neither the rose would be lost nor its flavour;

The bond with the gardener would not be severed,

The soothing drink would be enjoyed forever.

# To The One Who Plucks The Rose

## *Gulab Da Phul Toran Wate Nun*

Please do not cut us off our branch  
For we've set up our business of fragrance.  
Were million shoppers to come by,  
Surely not one would go empty-handed.  
But if you pluck us  
We'll be consigned only to you;  
That too a meeting evanescent:  
Our beauty and scent will soon vanish.

# Cognition-Inebriation

## *Hosh-Masti*

Why did it happen? How did it happen?

Questioning so, generations go.

Why do you take the path O life

Where sailors have lost their lives?

Quit wandering; anchor in that one;

So revel and live in comfort.

Better than cognition is inebriation

That keeps us harboured at our port.

# Devotion

## *Maganta*

While living in the Garden of Eden,  
Adam, they say had some fruit.  
He was charged a criminal and  
Expelled from the land of paradise.  
Had he pressed the fruit in a jar  
And drunk its nectar,  
Adam would have gone far beyond Eden:  
He would have attained the eternal seat!

# Obstinacy-Ecstasy

## *Hath-Rasa*

Don't loose your cool, O obstinate one

Don't get angry at nature!

Subtler than our hair

Hidden currents flow in her.

Get out of obstinacy, dye in ecstasy;

Be the enjoyer, the winner of joys.

It all comes in a flash of lightning

Make sure you don't lose it!

# Possessed

## *Be Khudi*

One day my preceptor gave me a drink  
    Made from the herb of inebriation –  
Soon I was whirled on a swing  
    Stroked from the skies far away  
Round and round and higher I soared  
    Not once did the grip undo!  
O our alluring Lover,  
Swirl us ever higher to you!

# Higher Wisdom

## *Ucchi Mati*

With my heart clutched tight, I spiral down,  
Depression has hit me low;  
That laughter, those smiling faces  
The more I want to catch, the farther they go.  
How do I jump on the swing of oblivion  
To catch some peace and calm?  
These brakes pulling me down  
Won't let go!

Clutches of your heart will release  
If you hang on to the Highest One;  
Its pull will spring you up.  
With your strong hands  
Steal away its beauty and  
Hold it in your heart.  
So you'll be freed from your depression:  
Those choking chains will surely break open.



# Encaged Bird

## *Pinjare Pia Panchi*

Merciless, he stands in the open air  
Claims, 'What a pretty cage!'  
But if he were inside, I'd ask  
    'Now tell me how beautiful is it?'  
Without wings I am a captive on land.  
    You heartless idiot:  
For a flying bird  
You call this deathly prison lovely?

The merciless liked its colour,  
    He liked its sweet tones too.  
How nice of him to profess its merits  
    Having cast his net so slyly before!  
He captured the bird, put it in the cage  
    And parted it from all its friends.  
To hell with your praises,  
Your friendship is zilch!

# Today

## *Ajjo*

Sip it today, sip it now  
Keep on sipping  
From the cup of primal nectar  
Don't take your lips away.  
Sip it always and get high  
Its ecstasy will not wane;  
Who knows about tomorrow?  
Soon we may be bones and ash.

# Struck Forever

*Laggian Nibhan*

I fell in love with stone  
    Who neither smiles nor speaks;  
Its beauty enchants me  
    But its heart is locked.  
I can't break away  
    I find no warmth to stay.  
Right! Whatever you will, will be  
But keep us always in your sight.

# In Fear

## *Bhae Vic*

Seeing the cloud approach, the mountain  
Trembled, — he screamed out loud:  
With your handsome exterior, O plunderer,  
Have you come on your rounds again?  
Where will I find a canvas so large,  
Under which I could hide away?  
Our covering — O world refuge!  
Keep us compassionately screened.

Sweetly the cloud spoke  
Revealing its shiny self —  
My account is clear, I kept nothing;  
I deliver what I am given.  
Out there is our Giver, you are our steward,  
I am a mere distributor.  
You and I work in fear —  
Both of us cohorts in the Owner's game.

# Facing The Water Flow

*Raun Rukh*

The ocean asks the stream:

    You carry umpteen bushes and brambles,

How come you don't deliver

    Any bamboo shoots to me?

The stream replies,

    I can easily uproot all haughty plants,

But I have no control over

That one – facing the water flow!

# Memory

## *Yad*

Etched deep inside

The memory of my Lover is constant

It resonates divine melodies

Like the sound of waves

It inebriates like wine

It vibrates like string

Pulling and shooting rhythmic spasms

Even so it brings much solace to me.

# Knowledge, Addiction

*Ilm, Amal*

Carrying a begging bowl on my head  
I wandered in search of knowledge  
From door to door I begged for food  
Filling my bowl to the brim.  
My stuffed bowl made me feel stuffy –  
A learned scholar me.  
With my head held high  
I walked touching the skies.

One day I took this bowl and  
Place, it before a sage. Saying,  
'False! False!' he flipped it over,  
And emptied all its contents.  
He scrubbed off its mental stains  
And wiped the begging bowl clean  
See, how this bowl now shines:  
Like a lotus blooming brilliantly.

# Addict-Abstainer

*Amli-Sophi*

Give us a drop from your carafe  
    Just give us one, O love!  
Give us its half or yet even half of half,  
    O give us the tiniest of the tiny, Beloved.  
Just once may we have a sip  
    So we break our vow of abstinence!  
We stand at your threshold  
Give us a taste O Beloved!



# Music

## *Sangeet*

Inspiring emotions, lofty ideas  
Dyed in subtle colours,  
Congeal into ice as soon as  
They meet this frigid world.  
Your warm melody  
Kindles them again  
That is why musicians call it –  
A stairway to heaven.

# Parting-Meeting

## *Vichora-Vasal*

I rinsed the coal with soap,  
    I soaked it in milk and yogurt,  
I even steamed it in dye,  
    But it did not change its colour.  
Its dark is from parting,  
    It won't go till we meet;  
Feel it on the pores of your skin –  
See how it colours!

# Tree

*Brichh*

Oh selfish owners of land,  
    Why do you fight us?  
We don't grow out,  
    We grow tall and straight.  
Our rings and breadth  
    Extend only in space;  
We take but a palm of land  
Even then you grudge us?

# Beyond-Time

## *La-Maka*

My heart won't listen to me,  
It has reached a place –  
A timeless abode  
In its wondrous minarets  
Without past or future  
It loses its self;

It returns dripping in love, but  
Does not know or say anything.

# Lofty Vistas

*Ucchi Nazar*

Get up my friend,  
    You are given wings to fly!  
Why be on knees  
    When you can reach the skies?  
With lofty sight and towering might  
    Keep your aims ever high.  
Endowed with celestial powers,  
Why should you grovel so low?

## Double Gaze

*Duvalli Jhak*

By the river sat an ascetic  
    Gazing at the dividing line –  
First at the land then water  
    Again at the land then water, he gazed.  
How could he stay pure?  
    Everything is grimy or wet!  
Ultimately without food and water,  
He wasted away!

# Didn't Cross The Limits

## *Haddon Par Na Hoe*

She flew into the distant skies  
And perched herself on the clouds.  
Ah, there too the same sphere –  
A woven blue cap over each head!  
She soared further,  
Flying far beyond the planets –  
Her head continued to whirl  
Azure blue making her dizzy.

# Somehow Not Caught

*Kiven Na Fadinda*

With those seductive eyes  
    Strapping your suspenders you appear –  
Spinning my head,  
    Shooting sensations I cannot bear!  
Sometimes you come and stay on my lips –  
    Smiling, sipping, savouring;  
With you I begin to quiver with joy,  
A jolt, my heart is snatched away!

Ecstatic I jump to catch,  
    But you run away;  
Slipping from my hands,  
    You elude us all.  
Gentle love, our great honour,  
    How do I catch you?  
For a moment it's almost as though –  
Alas! How quickly from my arms you go!



# Rhythm of the Melody

## *Rag Di Sur*

A tender tune arose,  
    And stood by me;  
It shot a spasm,  
    Of ferocious velocity.  
I vibrated into ecstasy –  
    Dreaming in transcendent colours;  
Joyous waves from the heavens above,  
Immerse me in a timeless zone!

# Wherever I See There Is My Beloved

## *Jitt Wal Nazar Utte Wal Sajjan*

Imprinted on my vision  
    My beloved glides down  
Further and further  
    Deep into my self.  
When my eyes close,  
    I see my beloved inside;  
And when they open,  
    My beloved is right in front;  
Wherever I see there is my beloved:  
Here in a blade of grass, there – in that big forest.

# Looking Towards The Skies

*Arshan Wal Nazar*

If the potter had put eyes  
    On top of my head  
I promise I'd always be  
    Looking towards the skies.  
Placed below my forehead  
    Down is their trend;  
What lies below my face,  
That's all I manage to see.

It's true, from primordial times,  
    Your eyes are not on your head;  
But the tendons of your neck  
    Are made exquisitely supple –  
You are free to see  
    Up, down, all around;  
Now only if you'd look up,  
All glory would be yours!

## Name, Devotion, Will

*Nam, Dhyan, Raza*

Your Name was lodged forever on my tongue, –

Though you walked away;

Your devotion occupied my eyes, –

Instructed by your will.

Extend your lovesickness to us too,

Oh Beloved, if you will!

I cannot forget you ever,

My every bit stings with longing!

# Illumination

*Sinyan*

While making rock-candy,  
    The sugar in the wok  
Turned into charcoal – and she  
    Lamented what she saw.  
Oh naïve one! You need that fire  
    To melt sugar into rock-candy.  
Without that illuminating fire,  
There is no comfort!

# I Am Sad To See The World Suffer

## *Dard Dekh Dukh Anda*

Seeing the world suffer,  
    My heart sinks lower and lower;  
My inside melts like wax,  
    Tears wet my cheeks.  
Even if we may sacrifice ourselves,  
    The world still suffers;  
Yet we cannot turn into stone:  
Seeing the world suffer, I am sad.

# Blessings And Actions

## *Bakhshish Te Karam*

Exclaiming, 'You sinner' 'you sinner'  
The priest reduced me to sheer guilt.  
We are walled in, my friend,  
But our Giver is beyond boundaries.  
People living with borders  
Can never act free;  
By the blessing of the Infinite  
Our walls break, we act freely.

# Slave or Master?

## *Barda Ki Malik?*

A fellow roamed into a fair  
    With a placard around his neck  
On it was written: 'I am a slave  
    On sale, buy me please.'  
I heard a whisper in my ear,  
    He is not looking for a master:  
He is looking for a slave,  
Whom he can rule over!



## Exulting Self

### *Ape Da Uchal*

When we jump out of our egotistic self,  
That is when we savour true joy;  
If we divide our self from the Other,  
How can we ever exult?  
Recognise that your joy  
Comes from the Other  
So know, hold and leap high –  
Your true self will never shatter.

## Roshan Ara (From Her Grave)

*Roshan Ara (Samadh Chon)*

As you enter, Ah how your footprints  
    Adorn my garden!  
I do not plead, I make no request,  
    I don't even urge you tarry.  
My barren garden bears nothing,  
    Except for a delicate imprint –  
Perhaps a flicker of your memory  
May engrave me in your heart again?

## Roshanara To The Visitors

### *Roshanara Yatrian Nun*

Around my grave,  
Nature has planted a lovely garden;  
Many visitors stroll in,  
But walk away from my grave.  
O' you people don't you see:  
It is not a corpse; it is me!  
Flowers, fruits, leaves sweetpeas and  
Here they are – all me!

## A Deathless Tomb In Delhi

### *Dilli Di Ikk Benisha Samadhi*

While I was alive, the handsome one did not visit,  
He did not come at the end;  
He did not make any great journey,  
He did not even send a gift.  
This tomb of mine now embellishes the earth  
But I still remain bereft of his glance!  
Oh while I long for you lying here,  
You do what your heart desires!

# The Self Inside

## *Ape Wich Apa*

Oh mother mine

I just woke up from a dream –

There was only 'me' nobody else, and

Yet, there was someone somewhere hiding

Who touched me and made me tremble

With deliciousness that still devours me!

Tell me who it was. How did it enter?

How does it hide? How do I seek?

# Jeweller

## *Jauhari*

Playing by the seashore  
I found some stones  
Their colours unique and brilliant  
Sparkled a new aesthetic.  
But I bounced them in the air like pebbles  
Like a child I was playing with them.  
Soon a jeweller walked over  
He took my stones away.

He inspected and he dissected,  
and nodding his head he said:  
'What are they called?  
Neither are they any of the nine gems,  
Nor are they any sort of marble;  
So how do I measure their worth?'  
I answered, 'Oh leave them alone,  
Let me play with them;  
When you learn to count beyond numbers  
Only then you'll be able to appraise.'

# Bondage-Liberty

## *Band-Khalasi*

We came across an amazing hunter  
Who puts his catch in a cage.  
But he does not lock it  
He does not shut its window.  
And if we shut the cage  
He opens it wide again.  
Fusing bondage with freedom,  
He creates fabulous colours.

# MY BELOVED

*Mere Sainyan Jio*



# Introduction

## *Prarambh*

My songs!  
My songs, my Beloved!  
Songs sung for you, where did they go?  
You walked away silently, alas, why?  
My heart-*veena* stopped still, why?  
Its tender tremors, its lovely vibrations,  
Why do they lie arrested in silence?  
Now, my Beloved! What can I offer you?  
Who could I send to your musical concerts  
To perform my childlike wonders for you?

\*\*\* , \*\*\* \*\*\*

My songs –  
Songs of praise for my Beloved!  
Yes, come back, come back my love!  
Tighten the strings of my heart-*veena*  
Perform your wonders on its taught strings,  
Let the heart wrenching tunes  
And delightful songs flow;  
Pierce my mind again with your touch!  
May waves rise like breeze from the ocean,  
My silent voice surges like the nightingale singing.  
Yes, may the faltering sounds from a child's throat,  
Reach forth –  
To your presence,  
My Beloved!

# A Hearty Welcome!

*Jio Aiyan Nun*

You have been behind clouds,  
For so many days handsome sun!  
I have been waiting in pain,  
To see your radiance again!  
You have appeared on your own this morning,  
Welcome, a most hearty welcome!  
Seeing you brings me tremendous joy,  
Your lustre fills our earth and skies.

# Stay Smoothly Spread

*Vicchia Rahu*

Stay spread like the mat at the door,  
Stay flat, my mind! Stay smoothly spread.  
It has no ruffles, not a bit of anger,  
So stay by renouncing your ego;  
Like the earth spread flat yet full of hope,  
Waiting for the auspicious rain;  
The giver of the auspicious rain,  
Is but your own benevolent Beloved!

# Homage to Your Magical Wonders

## *Sadke Teri Jadugari De*

In me, deep inside, deep inside somewhere  
Hides my Beloved!  
Yes,  
You strike me with your melodious tunes,  
Awakening  
My inner strings.  
They sing songs  
– Songs of parting, songs of meeting with you –  
Casting their magic spell on me.  
I frantically look around  
Trembling, quivering.

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

Sleep, yes, you usurp my sleep.  
Awake, yes, you keep me quivering –  
Like a golden thread dangling  
From the border of a bride's scarf.

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

Oh Beloved!  
Behind sight hidden Beloved!  
Very near but far, farther still,  
Far far away, but near, very near,  
Homage to your magical wonders!

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

Voice!                      Silence!!  
Yes, my trembling voice, be quiet.  
Friends!  
Here language comes to a stop.

# Struck By Desire

## *Lagg Gai Si Bali Umare*

I was a little girl then  
Playing dress-up with my dolls,  
Playing games with my friends  
And singing songs with my brothers.  
I was a little girl of tender age.

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I was sound asleep locked in childhood sleep,  
    Nobody was around me – no nurse, mother, father.  
The moon in the skies was sending its silvery rays  
    Stars were emitting their caressing waves –  
    Soft delicious waves hit my tender face.  
You came cloaked in the night of silver  
    You kissed my forehead in moonlight's dazzle,  
You slipped a ring around my little finger,  
    Then you bowed down and whispered something in my ear.  
I was sound asleep, but perhaps inside I was wide awake  
    You went away cloaked in the night of silver.

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

I woke up. I woke up from my baby's sleep  
    I looked around as though I was somebody other,  
    Yes, I was a stranger to myself.  
Thinking – was I lying lost somewhere?  
    Or was I found and returning home?  
    My young mind could not fathom.  
My forehead throbbed in joy  
    – A delicious fountain burst inside –  
    'What happened to my forehead?' I could not say.  
My little finger shook shooting tremors all the way  
    I wore the ring I had received in my dream

## Cosmic Symphony

Looking around I saw words glittering in circles,  
    'Beloved! My Beloved!' written in its dazzling script.  
A constant melody echoed in my ears,  
    It was the song 'Beloved! My Beloved.'  
A naïve little girl I was struck by desire –  
    'Beloved Mine, Beloved, My beloved!'

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

You came back in a dream again,  
    Flashing your effulgence you swept away  
– 'It was me, me' you said in a musical symphony  
    But off you went not waiting a wink.  
My desire grew even more when I woke up  
    'Beloved, Beloved' I said, 'please come to me'  
'Close, close, near me, here, closer to me  
    Come my Beloved! Yes please do come for sure!  
Kisses with your own lips see how they make it flutter  
    My forehead, look at it, also look at my trembling finger –  
    Yes, with the ring you slipped on, and that too trembles  
It wants to touch your lotus feet  
Seeking a vision of your luminous form.'

# Priceless Gift

## *Vadmulli Dat*

I heard someone say:  
'Your Love has come today,  
Has gone to the temple.'  
I took off in a rush  
I had barely reached the station  
When I heard a musical echo –  
The sound of necklace bells of chariot horses.  
I stood glued on the path thinking –  
I will have a glimpse, my divine vision  
My Beloved will look out the chariot  
With those lovely eyes – will look at me once.

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Along with my thoughts the chariot arrived  
A wonderful vision was right in front:  
'My Beloved!'  
Yes, I had the vision,  
'My Beloved!'

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

But off they flew with the chariot  
In a flash –  
Those horses faster than the wind  
Yes, their tracks were in the middle of the dirt road.  
So by the lines on the road  
On my feet  
Yes, on my feet  
I sat –  
I picked up a bit of dust with my right hand  
I raised it to my forehead, yes,

## Cosmic Symphony

I put the speck of glorious dust on my forehead.  
I told my mind: think about it  
This too is a gift –  
Eyes were brimming full  
Dust stuck to my forehead  
Voice broke into words:  
This is a gift beyond price.  
Yes, it was a miracle  
Receiving the gift of dust  
Along with the visionary flash  
This priceless gift!  
This priceless gift!



# The Bamboo Basket

*Vans Di Tori*

When I sing your songs, my Beloved,  
I dwell in your presence;  
It is in your absence  
That I realise, you  
Yes, you were the singer of my songs:  
I was but a lifeless bamboo basket,  
Empty, full of holes  
You yourself fill me with songs!  
– A mere bamboo basket  
In a flash you come and exalt me.

# Joy, Enjoyer, Enjoyment

## *Ras, Rasia, Rasal*

The *veena* says to its player:  
'I add colour to your songs.'

The player wrapped it in its covers  
And put it away.  
That's when the *veena* realised:  
I was all wood, strands and strings  
My body had no life  
This is my Beloved's immutable magic  
That filled me with music.  
Every fibre turned into a chord,  
That recited love love ever louder;  
My Beloved sang along,  
Enchanted by my song.  
Yes, my Beloved sang, played the music as well  
– Ecstatically swaying from side to side  
The enjoyer was fully enjoying.

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

Wondrous, wondrous are your feats, my Beloved!  
Felicitations to you on the beauty of your songs  
You are the song, the music and the essential taste  
You are the joy, the enjoyer and all enjoyment.

# Meeting Time

## *Mil Vela Uu*

Calling out loud by the river,  
Frantically waving my arms in the air,  
Stammering 'Beloved, Beloved,' but  
    You carefree self you!

Swim? I can't, my arms are too weak,  
The river hisses in its tidal waves.  
Walk? I can't, there is no path,  
    Lover, friend, you comforter!

My raft is too old,  
Too ragged from use,  
I see no oars, no ferryman,  
    Going across is far too threatening.

Amidst billowing clouds and gusty winds,  
Men who pilot aeroplanes,  
Scream and yell in panic:  
    – 'This is not the time to fly.'

My helplessness knows no bounds my love!  
The wish to meet you has doubled itself  
I am calling you in agony My Beloved  
    Come, you come yourself and meet with me!

You are omnipotent with all the facilities  
You can do whatever you want my dear  
You also have compassion and empathy  
Quickly then let the meeting time be.

You may be carefree!

But

You are lover, friend, my comforter!

Come, you come yourself and meet with me

    Quickly let the meeting time be.

# I Myself Go To Their Door

## *Janda Ap Han Uhna De Duar*

Tired from grazing my goats  
In the heat of the sun  
As I sat on a stone in the shade of the chinar tree,  
Your soldier, my love, came over to me,  
And read me your commandment:-  
    'At night, yes, at midnight,  
Come to the mansion and knock at the door  
In the royal palace -  
From the back gate.'  
The king himself will open  
His portal.  
Yes, you poor destitute!  
The king is captivated  
By your beauty wearing rags.

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

At times I thought it was a joke  
Even so  
Lonely and shaky  
I started to go in the middle of the night.  
    I walked and I stopped,  
Sometimes strolling, sometimes wobbling,  
I have reached your place,  
Honourable king! Open your gate!

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

The black clouds of my luck  
Joined the darkness of the sky,  
Darkness fell all around,  
Stumbling over and over

Holding tightly on my knot of hope  
I have reached your place,  
Honourable king! Open your gate!

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

Raindrops are beginning to fall,  
Easterly wind is sweeping by,  
My king!  
Amidst the army of roaring clouds,  
Lightning is thundering in the skies.  
My eyes are blinded by its flash  
The closed doors are revealed.

Open your locks for me.

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Where are those closed doors?  
I died at your entrance –  
Seeing your closed doors  
Stabbed by the lashing rain.

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

This here is my own shack –  
Made of straw and cane  
Seated inside is my great king –  
King, the magnificent king of kings!  
How did you come to my straw hut?  
How did I reach your closed gates?

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Enfolding me in his arms  
The king opened his lips –  
'Those who love me,  
They go to my door  
Looking for me,  
But whom I love,  
I myself go to their door, –  
Their door is my door too.'

# Presence

*Hazuri*

○ my friends, my love did not come,  
But he sent a gift of his presence –  
He made us come to him  
Persuasively, forcefully;  
In his presence we became present –  
Close, very close and near, very near,  
Our distance was removed!  
Look at our Beloved's magic –  
He moved our distance away!

# Recognition of My Beloved

## *Sainyan Ji Di Sian*

Who are they who say:  
'Your Beloved cannot be recognised?'

My Beloved!  
Those with eyes recognise  
Your beauty overflowing  
From scenes to sight!

Those with ears recognise  
Your musical rhythms  
Echoing in our cosmos.

Yes, the dancing, bouncing fragrances  
Give you away!  
To those who can smell, my Beloved!

Then those without fear  
Recognise you  
From your exciting touch.

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

Your ambrosial drops  
From some distant planet  
Pour, into the mouths  
Of those who call you –  
Like *papiha*, the ever thirsty love-bird.  
They give a taste of your being  
To those with the heightened sense  
Higher than the five senses.  
Yes!

You reveal yourself to them:  
– With wreaths of flowers – you stand behind  
To garland their minds –  
A step forward, a step backward,  
Meeting, separating, embracing tightly,  
You merge with them  
Like the river with the sea.



# In The Tiny Lap

*Nikki God Vich*

At the touch of light today  
When 'morning' was beginning to stir  
Against the burgeoning white lap of dew  
Within the silky lap of a blossomed rose  
You were playing my Beloved!  
How, yes! How  
Did you enter that tiny lap?  
My great and vast Beloved!

# Yes, Will Meet For Sure

## *Milso, Han, Milso Zarur*

'I met'

You met, yes, you met  
Yes, you met for sure  
Having met you intensified  
The desire to meet you even more.

'Will meet'

Yes you, said, I will meet  
Your words echo  
Twice as loud.

'Used to meet'

Yes, you visited me in my dreams,  
Upon waking the pain of parting is twice over  
Yes, the pain of parting is twice over.

'Will you meet?'

Since you said 'will meet'  
You will meet for sure!  
But months weeks days  
Hours seconds in millions  
– like the flowing waters –  
Have incessantly gone by.  
A child is sitting by the river  
He is counting the surging waves  
Neither they finish nor does the counting.  
The river has myriad partings  
The waves go by never ending.  
Will you meet when they stop my love  
Or somewhere in the middle of their flow?

Mere Sainyan Jio

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Your word is true, true is your promise,  
Your blessings are true, true what you say;  
But I am a child, an impatient child  
I cannot wait  
No my Beloved do not delay!  
You will meet, yes you will meet  
This is my hope, this is my core –  
From it my life spins forth  
My Beloved!  
My life's cord!

# No Room For Words

*Bolan Da Nahion Tan*

My memory – that memory of mine,  
Erases all chasms my Beloved!  
But when you come and embrace  
Take me tightly in your arms  
I lose control over my words –  
How can I explain my state?  
Be quiet O friend, O handsome be quiet!  
Words dissolve into ineffable silence  
Understanding, thought and speech  
Here come to an end  
Yes, my friend!  
When you take me tightly in your arms  
There is no room for words  
The art of language is lost.

# Beloved's Land

## *Saiyan Da Desh*

Here you come playing your lute O Jogi!  
Singing songs of angst  
You are roaming like a lunatic,  
Are you coming from the Beloved's land?  
If you are coming from there then give us his message,  
Give us some news about our Love;  
Tell me how far  
Is my Beloved's land?

Jogi – There behind lies the Beloved's land  
Listen young lady!  
There behind lies the Beloved's land  
My Beloved's land.  
I ventured out to see the world –  
I'd started on my travels  
I have forgotten the way to the good land  
Far away is the Beloved's land.  
I am searching for some sign  
Roaming from country to country,  
Searching every city, village and street,  
Searching through forests and trees  
I can't find any path  
To the land of my Beloved  
To the land of your Beloved.

Lady – Try playing your lute again  
I will sing along with it  
So we'll join our songs of separation.  
A saint close by whispered:  
'His ears are music.'  
Yes, the Beloved's ears are music  
Come now let us sing songs  
Songs of his praise;  
Songs of our separation.

# Well Done!

## *Shabash!*

I have not yet mastered any tunes or notes,  
Nor any rhythm or melody;  
I don't have a singing voice,  
Nor, my love, the art of harmony.  
Yet I have the urge to sing  
Which never subsides, so  
What do I do?  
I also wish you'd hear my song  
Which only grows stronger by the day!  
Why? My Beloved, you  
Don't ever scold or frown at me?  
Instead, you listen rapt  
Swaying side to side with eyes shut  
Sometimes a tenderly whispered  
*shabash*  
Reaches my ears!

# Inner Eyes

## *Andarle Nain*

Eye –

The human eye  
Could not see you  
My Beloved!  
Darkness had overtaken  
Knowledge and intelligence.  
It still cannot see you,  
The brilliance is too dazzling –  
Yes, the strong light of intellect is blinding.

Do cast a favourable glance:  
Do open those inner eyes  
Which would recognise you –  
Whether it be light, dark or bedazzling,  
You, my Beloved! Beloved!  
In every place, in every colour, in every direction  
Playing everywhere, yet remaining apart!  
Handsome, you are the height of splendour.

# Pot

## *Taula*

Today I have come at the door –  
    Yes at your own door  
In the guise of a beggar,  
    O wealthy one!  
Drop in a gift,  
    Do drop it in,  
As I beg at your door,  
    O wealthy one.  
The pot is beside me –  
    Can it hold anything?  
Yes, perhaps something!  
    No, nothing at all!



# Loneliness

*Ikkal*

Giver with a thousand ears  
Please listen to me!  
Without you 'loneliness' has made me paranoid  
I come to your door, rescue me O wealthy One!  
Amidst my own or strangers, in small or big crowds  
Amidst forests or flowers, by the river or the sea  
I am afflicted with loneliness. It does not leave me.  
Nobody can heal me except you  
Give me your vision – cure me  
I sacrifice myself to my Beloved  
Give me your gift  
    I stand at your door  
Give me your self –  
I am yours after all.

# Evening and Morning on the Go

## *Turdi Sanjh Saver*

Swept by the crisp breeze  
Night and day flow  
Playing their symphony  
They sing their Lover's song  
With their unstuck melody  
They choreograph their Lover's dance –  
Reaching up to the trees  
Embracing again and again!  
Never does it stop  
Never does it slow  
Constant is its flow  
Evening and morning are on the go

# Spring

## *Bahar*

'Spring is here'  
'Spring is here'  
Hearing the call,  
Flowers came out to see  
Blooming with joy.  
Lifting their fragrance  
Spring swung ahead  
Lifting their fragrance  
Spring swung ahead  
And entering our house  
Says: 'Open your doors.'  
Then in an uproar:  
'There is no more winter or snow,  
so open your doors.'

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

Says:  
Listen to the buzz of the bumblebee  
Listen to the hum of the honeybee  
Listen to the chirping birds  
Listen to the nightingale's songs  
Listen to the classical melodies  
Patterned on the spring Raga Basant  
Listen to the joy beating in every heart.

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

She carried good tidings –  
Coming from the lover's home  
She spoke:  
Now hear carefully,

The Beloved will soon show up  
So get ready as beautifully as you can  
Get ready now –  
Keep your eyes tightly focused  
Keep your doors wide open  
The Beloved will come  
The Beloved will surely come.

# A Fleeting Instant

*Chinn*

My friend dear! Listen to me:  
Between my walking and falling asleep  
There is an incredible instant,  
Deep in it  
Hides an ambrosial drop –  
Like the honey  
In the flower.  
That instant I intimately touch –  
Perhaps the threshold of my love.  
It is a shock awakening  
How can we catch it sister dear!  
How can we seize that fleeting instant forever?

# Waking Up From This Sleep

*Jagi Jan Es Nindon*

I was a little girl  
Getting ready to go to school,  
When I slipped into  
Another state.  
I fell sound asleep  
But I was fully aware  
I could feel a transcendent delight  
Beginning to take over.  
Naïve, I could not understand  
I was totally taken in  
By an infinite bliss  
Filtering through me.

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

When I woke from this sleep –  
My auspicious sleep  
Inducing an ecstasy  
That broke all barriers  
I wondered:  
Where did it commence?  
The deliciousness for which  
I now seethe with desire?

# My Message

## *Mera Sandesh*

Oh black pigeon  
    Welcome my dear brother!  
Flying across buildings  
    Splitting through trees  
You have finally arrived.  
    Have you brought any message for me?  
This blue necklace of yours,  
    Carries no note no letter.  
I was sad to begin with,  
    I am now all the more.  
Yes, I understand brother!  
    You didn't come to deliver,  
    You came to carry my message.

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

Since you are flying back brother  
To my Beloved's place,  
    Do carry my message!  
I'll fasten my letter to your necklace:  
    'My eyes are two fountains  
    Bursting with tears  
    Bursting with big hot tears.'

# Sign

## *Sainat*

About the joy in holding our Love  
Tighter and tighter –  
Ask the breeze  
That caresses the ocean waves,  
For she alone can explain.

Ask the fragrance:  
What is the joy in embracing our Love?  
Rippling through the garden  
She will give you a sense  
Of the scent from holding the Beloved tight.

Ask the beautiful woman:  
What is the joy in embracing our Love?  
Her lips breaking into smile  
Her eyes bouncing with light  
Will say it all  
She'll teach you the joy of embracing.

The joy of meeting with our Love,  
Ask the one who is imbued in colour:  
Tears fill his eyes,  
His forehead glows  
With the sign that shows  
This is the joy of divine union.



# Disclosure of Love

*Preet Di Ugarh*

My Beloved!  
I sing your songs,  
So I am a trained singer;  
I recite your praise,  
So I am an eminent poet;  
I call in endearing tones,  
So I am courteous in manner;  
I express pangs of parting,  
So I am a renowned lover;  
When somebody gives me a bit,  
I begin to think that I am their beloved.  
Today, yes today  
I realise I am a bundle of wishes –  
Standing at your threshold  
With my begging bowl  
A beggar posing as a giver!  
This is my love's disclosure  
Help me Love! My Beloved.

# My Crisis

## *Meri Mushkal*

Parted from you, I cry and say,  
    'Do please come!'

But when I think about the hassle  
    I'd be putting you through,  
I say, 'Don't!'

Then I think I should go,  
    But how do I make it?

My Beloved,  
    Please get me out of my crisis!

# You Planted This Sapling

## *Tuhon Buti Eh Lai Si*

This sapling of your memory  
Was planted by your sight  
With your one glance,  
It was animated with life.  
A breath from you,  
Suffused it with fragrance.  
A scent reaches my mind again  
My consciousness is inebriated.  
If you forget us  
How could we stay in bloom?  
Our vibrant and fragrant love  
It was you who poured out your gift!  
Don't forget us even for an instant  
May we not forget either  
That this fragrant sapling  
Was planted by you!  
Pass the *veena* in my hands  
And fill me with music  
So I burst into my song – 'You Beloved!  
You planted this sapling.'

# Swoop of the Swan

*Hans Pheri*

Seeing the swan flying in the skies:

Come you swimmer  
With so elegant a gait  
Dive down from the vast skies,  
Come to me, you who fly so high!

I know not how to fly  
I trip as I walk by,  
I cannot swim  
O saviour mine!

I have no talents  
I learnt nothing  
I have no virtue  
O treasure of virtues!

Do cast a glance  
Oh light of lights!  
I sit waiting for you  
O compassionate One!

Let me be able to say,  
"I had your vision  
In the beauty of a swan"  
You wondrous beauty

You with eyes!  
With penetrating eyes  
Send me a glance  
From your effulgence above!

Do swoop low  
Give us your shade  
Come down from your lofty flights  
You auspicious One!

To the swan descending into the pool:—  
You have come down on your own,  
Now come close to me for a moment,  
You who glide so regally  
Across the ocean of my mind!

From the heart of the sea  
My eyes discovered two pearls,  
They are set on my palms  
For your benevolent glance!

These pearls are not pierced  
Come close – pick them up,  
You shining white splendour,  
Collect my two pearls!

# Where Are You?

*Kitthe Ho?*

Where are you?  
I know close by!  
Why don't you call me?  
    You do, but my ears don't hear you.

Where are you?  
I know close by!  
Why can't you be seen?  
    You can be, but my eyes don't picture you.

Where are you?  
I know close by!  
Why can't we meet?  
    We can, but my arms don't grasp you.

Where are you? My handsome Beloved!  
You are close by me, my dear Beloved!  
You are close by, yet I yearn to meet you!  
I can bear these pangs!  
No, I can't.

# Such Nights

*Essian Ratan*

Night of the full moon  
Bright light flooding through  
My satiny white terrace  
I am lying on my bed  
With my eyes closed –  
We have our tender union.  
My lotus-heart and you  
You, you, you!  
My mind free of anxiety  
Rapt in embracing you, you, only you!  
My Beloved! My Beloved!  
Do give me such nights, won't you!

## Misery and Pain Down The Memory Lane

### *Dukh Andoh Gae Sabh Bhul*

Misery and pain  
    Struck me again and again  
Wings of hope could not take off  
    Lamps of my heart lay in utter dark.  
How could their light return?  
    A withered flower bloom again?  
'My Beloved! Beloved mine!'  
    A tiny ray from you  
Makes us glow –  
    The dark heart begins to sparkle  
As though you entered yourself –  
    Misery and pain are forgotten  
Musical melodies burst forth  
    Lips vibrate 'Beloved! Beloved!'



## At the Still Point

### *Ruk Jaye Kal Chal*

All suffering goes away  
    No worry comes close,  
My mind is stretched clear  
    With the pull of your love.  
Nights belong to me  
    And days do not go astray,  
Breathing is calm  
    Unruffled by craving, my love!  
'Beloved! Beloved!'  
    Is my only chant  
In musical rhythms  
    It harmoniously flows.  
In my rapt embrace  
    You are sitting, my Love!  
Time and flux come to a stop  
    I get my gift, the refuge of your lap!

# Love for the Ephemeral

## *Binashar Da Prem*

My Beloved!  
When we get fixed on things we look at,  
When we long for them,  
When we are seduced by beauty  
Other than yours,  
When we emotionally invest in  
    Other sorrows and desires,  
We ache as they flee,  
    For, they are ephemeral.

# Wedded

*Larh Laggi*

My desires have not yet ceased,  
'Me! Me!' has not yet paused,  
'Mine! Mine!' hovers behind,  
Thus I am betrothed to you –  
Wedded to your Name.  
'Beloved' 'Beloved' I scream  
'Yours' 'I am Yours' I plead  
'Come meet' 'Come meet' I wail;  
I call out loud again and again:  
Beloved, please overlook my failings.

For the sake of your infinite virtues,  
Extend your passion to this lover,  
O compassionate One!  
Look at the ocean with its virtues,  
They are yours, your own, my Beloved.

# Unflinching Eyes

*Attik Nain*

I spent the night in agony,  
    I waited and wept,  
Wailing, 'Beloved' 'Beloved'  
    Counting every minute.  
At the break of dawn you came, but  
    Misfortune has its mysterious ways,  
The eyes that waited unflinching all night  
    Had relaxed for a moment.

## How to go Across?

### *Dur Kinj Hoe Duri?*

When the lover was away  
I'd say, 'please come,'  
But when the lover came,  
I went away.  
O fortune-teller – quick!  
Send me some tips  
How do I cross this distance?  
How do I dwell in my lover's presence?

## Mashobra – In Autumn

*Mashobra – Khiza Vicc*

My brother Mashobra! Now tell me,  
Weren't you that spectacular blossom –  
Who was rejoicing like flowers?  
Whose grass was luscious green?  
Now that grass lies pale,  
It looks so very sad!  
Your flowers are wilting –  
They stand sadly with their heads down,  
They shrivel and wither in pain!  
Like a mother apart from her offspring,  
They that bear fruit are fruitless,  
Laying bare the agony of separation!  
Leaves too have changed their colours,  
They fall off with the touch of breeze.

## Winter-Sun in Mashobra

### *Mashobre Di Sial-Dhup*

After hugging the snow clad mountains  
A gentle breeze is sweeping through  
Freezing cold, it sends out its chills  
But stays silent and serene.

Sunshine squeezes out that chill!  
Sliding quickly from the sun clad skies  
She wraps all those shivering on her lap  
With a mother's love and coziness.

A free and vast expanse  
Pours from the celestial world –  
Pure silence, silence, silence!  
This halo of my Beloved  
Overflows with fragrant joy –  
Ever serene and beautiful!

Eyes close, and inward they go,  
My face begins to face itself,  
I now so easily enter  
The land of my infinite Beloved.

# Hands to Work, Voice to Recite

## *Hath Kar Vall, Rasna Uchar Vall*

From: distance comes a sound:

*Thatt tharar tharar*  
*Thatt tharar tharar*

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you, you, you, you  
*Thatt tharar tharar*  
*Thatt tharar tharar*  
*Thatt you tharar*  
*Thatt you tharar*

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Hearing it one friend says to the other:

What is this *kharar kharar*?  
Along with 'you,' this *tharar tharar*?

Her friend responds:

The world is so topsy-turvy  
Things come together in strange ways!

Former friend:

Let us go friend,  
Let us go see  
Those mysteries.

Latter friend:

The place seems a bit far,  
But if you want, let us depart.



Both begin to walk. Approaching the place where the sound was coming from, the former friend:

Oh good women!  
Wise and beautiful!  
What are you doing? And  
What are you singing?

With an axe in her hand, a stone cutter:  
We are cutting rocks and stones,  
They turn to pebbles with each pound of our ax.

The second friend (quickly):  
But what do you recite as you pound?  
It sounds like 'you' over and again.

The other stonecutter:  
Yes, we sing our song of 'you'  
'You, you,' and, 'you alone.'

The former friend:  
But who is this 'you' you address?

The stonecutter:  
That One who hides in the cave of our heart,  
– That One who sits listening to our songs.  
You may think we are making a racket,  
But we are soothed by these sounds.  
Our Beloved rejoices in our songs,  
And annuls all our misgivings.

That sound struck again:  
*Thatt tharar thatt tharar*  
*Thatt tharar thatt tharar*  
*'Hai tun hai tun hovanhar*  
*hai tun hai tun hovanhar.'*

The first friend:  
Wait a bit my sister!  
Tell us something else:

<sup>1</sup> Tilang Mahalla5, Guru Granth, p. 724.

## Cosmic Symphony

Why do you perform them together?  
Surely, you must get tired.

A wise stonecutter:

We cut stones, we earn money – with which  
We eat sweetened bread at night  
So we rest and fuel our body.  
But the ‘you’ fills our deepest needs  
It quickly wears off all other fatigue  
We gain a force that never leaves.

The second friend:

Your two jobs chime together like silver anklets  
How did you get into this habit?

The wise stonecutter:

A holy man walked by one day,  
He was sad seeing us work so hard.  
‘Come listen to me,’ he said to us,  
‘Let us think about your tired body and vacant heart.  
You can fill your stomach with food  
But the void in your heart?  
It’s a blessing to work with your two hands –  
I hear you pronounce “wonder” as you labour hard;  
This lonely sound will feed your stomach,  
Let us now remedy the hollow in your heart.’  
He then sat amidst us, and  
Taking up our work of breaking stones,  
Broke into a mesmerising rhythm –  
‘You are, you are, you’ll always be,  
You are, you are, you’ll always be.’  
‘Only you, only you, only you, only you,  
You only to you only I offer myself ...’  
He was cutting stones and singing along,  
His face was all smiles, his eyes were ablaze.  
That fiery bliss in his eyes  
We still remember vividly.

One of the friends:

When you just cut stone,  
Without calling for 'you,'  
What do you feel?

The wise stonecutter:

The labour makes us physically ache  
We feel worn-out and jaded  
When we don't sing of our handsome one,  
The situation turns like before:  
Loneliness invades our inner space  
All we feel is empty and desolate;  
With 'you' going away,  
Out happiness is wiped away.

The second friend:

Have you seen with your own eyes  
The One you so amorously recite?

The wise stonecutter:

Our holy man explained to us –  
'You' is the Beloved of the universe;  
That One's form is 'you,' sheer 'you'  
That One's song is 'you,' sheer 'you.'

Suddenly all the women in a melodious chorus:

You are you are you'll always be  
You are you are you'll always be.

*Thatt tharar tharar*

*Thatt tharar tharar*

# Your Magical Wonders

## *Tere Chojan Di Chal*

My handsome beloved!  
Your magical wonders  
Make me ecstatic forever.  
You perform your magic in my interior  
At times behind my dark recesses  
At times in your own light –  
– Your dazzling light –  
Playing hide and seek with my heart.

But today,  
Yes my Beloved, today,  
What wonders did you perform?  
At the break of dawn,  
You soared far away into the skies –  
Farther and farther  
Farther than the farthest  
Your infinite light spread all over  
Flooding colours across the horizon!  
I am seduced by the sparkle  
That exposes your transcendent body.

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Wonderful your feats, my Love!  
Wonderful your delights, my Beloved!  
Closer than the closest, farther than the farthest –  
You are far away but extremely close  
You captivate us however you please  
Your wonders are sheer magic.

# Curdled Bit

## *Chiddi*

Question:

Who are you lady?

Answer:

I am born of milk, but I am not yogurt.

I am born of milk, but I am not cream.

I am born of milk, but I am not butter.

I am born of milk, but I am not buttermilk.

Question:

Then who are you lady?

Answer:

With hands behind your ears,

Listen to me carefully, O brother:

I am *chiddi*, a curdled bit, a curdled bit.

Question:

Then lady, you must be good for nothing?

Answer:

No brother! Don't say this!

A woman who rubs me on her hands,

I make them soft like a petal

So they delicately caress her lover.

Listen O brother!

A woman who rubs me on her face,

Her lover's eyes ceaselessly chase

In rapture that takes him beside himself.

Our Beloved has endowed us with honour

Has given worth to us unworthy slips,

Yes,

We are divinely gifted curdled bits.

# Exchange of Hearts

*Dil Vatandra*

Your radiance shoots arrows at my heart  
No, my dear, I should say love abides in my eyes  
Will your eyes carry away the flow of my love?  
No my dear, no, let them irrigate my inner recesses.  
Let your love flow in me, I promise  
I will hold its tenderness securely in my castle.  
How can eyes reach that interior space?  
How can I have a vision of that handsome one?  
I have heard it is impossible to get there!  
So help me find a way my friends.  
A heart can only chime with another heart!  
We get by giving ours – this is the name of love  
When we give some of our heart away  
We are left with even more! There is no other way!  
This we call the exchange of hearts, my dear  
One heart is shared by the lover and the beloved  
One heart – one body is the ancient way  
So let our double hearts unite in my body.

# I Am Getting My Oars

## *Mere Chappe Lagg Rahe Han*

I am getting my oars ready  
My boat is going across a crystal breast,  
Softly, smoothly, rhythmically.

The sun has set  
I will get the oars, my boat is gliding along  
Where to though?

Evening is here, the boat is still going,  
The rippling waters  
Are saying  
Go go, go go.

It is dark  
I see lamps flicker in the distance  
I am getting the oars, the boat is going, ...  
On and on  
Going where, O Giver?

Stars ascended the skies and descended into the waters  
A gentle breeze sweeps over  
Twinkling mirrors play in the waters  
Oblivious of my boat.  
I am getting my oars, the boat is still going  
On and on  
Going where, O Giver?

No moon, no sun, there is no lamp in my boat!  
I find no row, no street, no road  
On this crystalline breast.  
The oars I have are naïve  
Waters alone are sliding my boat  
As it is moving along  
Stars I feel are fading farther away.  
Waters are cold, undulating; there is a nip in the air  
It hugs me still, but my hands are getting cold.

## Cosmic Symphony

On and on, where am I going, O Giver?  
Night has loosened its grip, stars are hanging over,  
My boat is slip sliding  
Waters kiss my oars and say,  
Go, go, go.  
Tell me O Giver, where to?



# Keru Mountain

## *Keru Paharh*

I made my home in the cave of contentment  
    Located near Keru Mountain, when  
Seismic and thundering rocks  
    Violently shook my meditation spot  
Barely would a roar fade from one  
    When others would come tearing down.  
Our strength and our fragility  
    You alone know, O almighty One!

## Entirely My Beloved's *Sainyan Di Sari*

Off went my spinning bodkin  
    Off went my spinning basket  
Slipped away my spinning wheel  
    No more of my spinning group  
No more dancing, hopping or games  
    When my Beloved winked at me  
My eyes sewed to his like fish on a line  
    I became my Beloved's – I am entirely his!

# Blurry

*Jhanwla*

In the dark distance I don't see much:  
It seems blurry to me, so let blurry it be  
I find myself aligned with it  
That blurriness has rapt me.

I am calling out frantically towards it –  
I hope a hint of my cry reaches your ears  
It seems you don't hear me nor speak to me  
And yet my ears tend to hear  
'You are not not speaking either!'

You speak the ineffable, like the language of the stars  
Their brilliance suffices, so let it just be your light!  
The delicate string of love is pulling at my heart,  
What do I do with my little romance?

Do fulfill my raw desire my Beloved  
You inflamed it, you are drawing me on!

# Heart's Desire

*Dil Saddhar*

When I see 'idol worship'  
I begin to wish  
That you were behind my  
every single fibre.

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My enchantment does not fade  
with my passing years  
Farther than the farthest  
you are unfathomable, my Love!

Come for a blink of an eye  
let me see you just once  
Fulfil their desire  
before these eyes turn to dust  
Let them have a glimpse of you  
My Love –  
take me in your arms  
– just once!

# Tremors of Love

## *Pyar-Tarban*

O *veena* player,  
Come play your *veena*  
Come here,  
Stir some of its sleeping chords.  
Its strings of love  
Are lying loose  
Come over  
Stretch them tight.  
Oitals *veena* rlayes,  
Instill some life  
In this dead heart  
Stir it so  
That it begins to beat  
Start up  
Some songs of love –  
Songs that will  
Pierce my heart  
I will bring out trays of pearls  
I will pile your lap with riches.

# All of a Sudden

*Chan Achkian*

O drummer, beating your drums,  
    Play the tune of meeting with our Love.  
Strike a melody so intense,  
    That it will uproot all my pain.  
No don't unfold anything sad,  
    Just play rhythms of joy  
With the beating of your drum  
    May my Beloved suddenly come!  
I'll fill your empty lap to the brim –  
    As soon as I hear 'Beloved is here!'

## Again and Again I Return

*Murh Murh Phere Pandian*

Like an ocean wave returns

Kissing the shores again and again,  
I return to the threshold of your vision,

My lips kissing it again and again.  
You don't get tired, nor does the shore,

This quality has struck me so!

Whereas the shore can become rough

Your feet remain ever calm,

They bear my incessant kisses

And with each one I rejoice;

Your never-ending patience

Brings me back again and again.

# Lines of Love-Sickness

*Birhon Lekh*

O astrologer! Quickly check my horoscope –  
    How many lines of love-sickness are there?  
O fortune-teller! Tell me my fortune –  
    When will my Beloved come home to me?  
O yogi! Look into the unknown –  
    When will my love-sickness go away?  
O ascetic! Wandering around –  
    Erase these lines of love-sickness in my palm!  
O saint! Strike some nail that will  
    Drive away love-sickness from my fate!

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Nobody hears my cries of pain  
    Nobody helps me in my hour of need  
I am exhausted from going around  
    Searching for your greetings and messages.  
Now I live with only one hope:  
    I ardently wait to see you.  
With the passing of years it is getting harder  
    I have no more patience left over –  
Now come on your own, my handsome one  
    Don't delay a moment more, my Love!  
You are my wish, you the meeting-point,  
    To you I make my endearing requests.



## Your Nest

### *Tera Ashiyana*

From garden to garden  
Nature went asking: 'Tell me nightingale,  
Is there a garden you find befitting yourself?  
Let me know, for I will make it  
Into a nest, for you to rest.'

Somewhat startled but with a smile she said,  
    'What is fitting for me, I do not know;  
Whichever garden I made my home,  
    I have been forced to fly away.  
So please hear my wish my friend:  
    Any place wafting with my beloved  
    Any place coloured with my beloved  
    Make my nest in that garden  
    I'll live in its branches, singing my songs.'

# Pull

*Khicch*

You made the law:  
    'the bigger pulls the smaller.'  
The sun pulls the earth,  
    the earth the moon,  
And the moon,  
    the leaping waves.  
Gather us in yourself,  
    the greater of the greatest!  
Keep us drawn to you,  
    the greater of the greatest!  
Without your pull my Beloved,  
We'll be lost – scattered shrubs in a forest!

# Don't Walk Away

*Tur Jao na*

When you come over, my love,  
    You completely take over me.  
When you don't come,  
    I writhe in pain.  
When you visit my mind,  
    Then I long to be with you –  
Like the waves of the ocean,  
    I'm an incessant tide and ebb.  
When you walk away,  
    Then I beg and beseech you,  
I try to latch on to things  
    To make my time pass.  
When you smile, my heart slips.  
    Into your vibrant colours, my Beloved!  
Seeing you see me in your slippery silence,  
    My life wriggles in joyous pain.  
No form, no colour,  
    You have no trace, no living trait!  
'Don't walk away' 'don't walk away'  
    From my deepest depths, I call for you.

# Invisible Camel

## *Ojal Dachi*

O transcendent One!

Take on form so you can caress us,  
Or, make us transcendent

So that we may see your formless form;  
I wave my arms – like Sassi awaiting

The invisible camel aloft with her lover!  
Day and night I call for you,  
Come my Beloved, come over!

# Don't Hide

## *Na Chappia Kar*

You are always hidden –  
Yes, you, who hide yourself!  
Keep hiding,  
Keep hiding,  
With our hearts rejoicing, keep hiding!  
But tell your love  
Not to hide itself:  
When your love hides,  
Night engulfs the world,  
The cosmos revolves in darkness.  
O you, who hide yourself!

# Writhing

## *Tarfan*

I

Taking off from the mountains  
Hugging the valleys  
Trailing through the desert sands  
Reached the shore  
And stood by the beautiful sea.

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The sun was beginning to bathe  
In the far western side of the sea.  
I was shocked –  
To see the waves fall  
Yes, so close to me,  
To see them writhing in pain  
So near my eyes.

I asked them, alas!  
From where did you get this pain?  
Or was it my touch –  
That made you writhe such?

‘Whish, Whish!’ bellowed the waves  
They surged so high and crashed down  
Rolling around in agony  
Calling out louder and louder.  
Amidst those deafening groans,  
Who could hear my call?

At that moment I beseeched the sun:  
O bright brother! Brother dear!  
These waves are writhing

When did it all start? What is the cause?  
When will it all end, dear brother?

**Sun** – I am the culprit, listen my lady!  
I was the one to seduce them –  
They leap high yearning to meet me!  
Ah, the poor things cannot reach  
There lies a big gap between us  
Our distance makes their lovesickness worse.

I – But handsome brother,  
You are caressing their writhing wrists, look –  
How you enter their transparent selves!  
You are so intimate with these waves  
Where is the distance you claim  
To be the cause of their pain?

**Sun** – You are standing there good lady,  
You can see me here,  
But I am just as far as you  
There exists an equal distance –  
Between the sea and me  
Yes, a vast vast expanse separates  
These writhing waves from me!  
Your eyes are disillusioned, my lady,  
They show you something other than reality.

I – Why this suffering, Sun! Why?  
Who fashioned these towering surges?  
Why some writhe in pain  
While another shines in light? Ah!

**Sun** – I am to pull, dear lady,  
Yes this is my decree from our primal source!  
That the waves be pulled, this too  
Has come from that primordial source, me lady!

I – Who created this torturous pull?

**Sun** – The One who pulls us all!  
That One has made it so that the waves  
Are pulled up with desire and then fall;  
The writhing written on their foreheads  
Is set in your heart as well.  
Between your aching sighs there may be  
Some of our royal life's mysteries!  
By bearing it, my beautiful lady, perhaps  
Hidden enigmas can be revealed  
So endure as much as you can –  
Your writhing could unfurl life's mysteries.



# Reality

*Asliat*

O reality of 'Me' and 'Mine!'  
Part from them for a while at least;  
Strip off your outer clothes,  
Wear your intrinsic colours.  
Who knows your pure lustre  
May allure that Real One!  
And if you are embraced,  
Never ever escape!

# Request

## *Ardas*

(Of the drop of water dangling  
on the edge of a *pipal*-leaf by the ocean)

O ocean! Our mighty ocean!  
Our splendidly sparkling ocean!  
Here I am dangling from this *pipal*-leaf,  
How do I embrace you? O jewelled ocean!  
If I try to jump in, I'll dissolve in the sand,  
And I know not how to fly.  
Leap up and absorb this drop,  
O compassionate One!

# Amorphous Rock

*Bitthun Patthar*

A rock was lying around  
Amorphous, it had no form.  
A sculptor glanced upon it  
And saw in it its shape,  
He saw too the useless mass  
Concealing its distinct image.  
With a chisel in one hand,  
In the other a mallet,  
Chipping away the superfluous,  
He carved out –  
Look a perfect picture –  
From that formless, amorphous rock.

Similarly  
My intrinsic self is formless  
Amorphous like a rock;  
But my Beloved,  
Carve in it your own image.  
With the beat of your mallet,  
– Chisel it away.

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It hurts me  
I sigh in pain  
I don't see Beloved the love  
With which you are sculpting your form!  
My mind is an amorphous rock –  
Beat away all that is extrinsic  
Let me feel your exciting image  
Take shape in me.

## Cosmic Symphony

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My Beloved! You are an artist,  
Your art is full of compassion;  
Sharpen our aesthetic vision,  
Chisel away our dullness.

# Diamond-Speck

## *Heera-Kani*

A diamond fell from the skies  
    Shattering into tiny specks;  
But each speck is a diamond,  
    It is its intrinsic self nevertheless.  
The jewellers who can assess,  
    Set them in exquisite patterns of gold;  
But idiots do not know their worth,  
    They trample them into The dust.

## Guess Who?

### *Bujho Eh Kaun?*

Oil lamps dried out after shining all night  
Even t'heir wicks wore out after burning all night  
The tears that were flowing like melting wax  
They too dried out my Beloved!  
Above the dark clouds engulfed us in pitch darkness  
Even so my eyes continued to look out the gate,  
Ah! My Lover sneaked in the backdoor,  
Covering my eyes asked,— 'Guess who?'

# Unmusical Music

## *An-Sangeetak Sangeet*

My melodies are out of tune,  
    O my musically refined Beloved!  
How can you enjoy my music?  
I am amazed to see you  
At the break of dawn  
    Enter my hut and secretly sit down –  
Listening to my discordant song!  
How you are rapt in music so unmusical!

## Instant Flash

### *Acchan Ceti Da Jhalka*

The ball of cotton  
    Slipped through my hand  
The revolving spinning-wheel  
    came to a halt  
The moon from the skies  
    stood beside  
I could not make out the figure! But  
The sparkle in my eyes  
    shimmered,  
The fire of my life  
    lighted up,  
Should I merge in  
    or enjoy the sight?  
Wave upon wave fiercely made its way!



# Wild Berries

## *Kokan Ber*

Wonderful are these tiny shrubs

Growing on their own beside my hut!

Wonderful are their wild berries!

Wonderful are your marvels my Beloved!

Who knows you may come today

Yes, refusing pears and apples

Yes, refusing a feast of apple berries

Refusing as well succulent berries

Round and plump and juicy and red

And all those shiny black berries

That yearn to be savoured by you!

Yes My Beloved, my handsome beloved!

You have arrived at my paltry home saying,

'I am hungry, I am hungry

Bring some wild berries growing beside your hut.'

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Trembling, quivering, rejoicing, but shy

I picked some berries –

I was about to rinse them quickly, and

Place them on *arabi*<sup>1</sup> leaves

In front of my Beloved

As my humble gift –

A gift that actually had been asked for.

But my Beloved rushed in

And snatched them while I was rinsing

– Like a child snatches fig-candy from the mother's hand!

My Beloved ate them all, one by one relishing each berry

Wonderful my Beloved! Wonderful! I whirl in ecstasy!

<sup>1</sup> *Arabi/aravi* is a root from the calocasia plan, and Punjabis prepare a vegetable dish from it.

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Ah! Now

Listen to me my inner eyes! I make one request:

Don't be rushed like my outer eyes;

Oh please don't be in a hurry

Treasure the image of my Lover forever.

And you, my outer eyes,

Let your tears flow!

You deserve so!

Your haste was the cause of our parting.

# From Beauty Into Beauty

## *Sundarta Ton Sundarta Vic*

Like the rose bush blossoms  
    When it looks at you  
    Rejoicing  
    I creep towards your door  
Intoxicated by your floating fragrance  
    I sway from side to side  
Your touch sends tremors in me  
    Each fibre becomes a billowy wave  
I lose into my own self  
    Enveloped by somebody there  
Mysterious strokes of somebody handsome  
    Sweep through me  
In that flood of passion  
    From somewhere somebody says 'I'  
Tell me now  
    Could this be my Beloved?

# Rapturous Hint

## *Sukh Sainat*

Today a rapturous hint came from the skies –  
‘You are loved by your Beloved  
The same Beloved, the very same one  
Who you have adored mind and body.’  
I am inebriated  
The sonorous intimation  
fills me with rapture  
In gratitude  
tears flood my eyes  
I cry wildly  
I cry wildly  
*Tharar tharar thar tharar* tremors shoot  
Bursting waves ripple through  
I am lost  
I am lost!  
Even at this moment that lovely memory  
Sways me in rapturous colours  
Wonderful my Beloved!  
Wonderful my Beloved!

# Flow of a Still Heart

## *Dhara Dil Tike Vali*

O still heart! You are the Ganges,  
O stillness in perpetual motion!  
You are a magical flow,  
A truly magical flow!

O cool flowing Ganges  
O ambrosial flow  
Your form is divine  
Indeed, divine!

Your flow is invisible  
Your cool so invigorating  
Your transparency reveals your source  
In your form you are formless.

Fortunate are they O friends,  
Who bathe in this Ganges;  
And they who sip its waters,  
Are supreme aesthetes on earth.

Go on flowing, O Ganges  
Go on gifting us with your sacred dips  
O embodiment of purity,  
Go on endowing us with your qualities.

By envisioning you and immersing in you,  
We soothe our mind and body;  
You give birth to luscious gardens,  
Your magical touch is like a philosopher's stone.

That you descend from the skies  
And flow in the soil of our hearts  
O Ganges is truly magical!  
You are a marvel, a marvel you are!

# Aura of Your Visit

## *Phera Pa Jan Di Prabha*

Glancing away, I went up the stairway  
Sneaking my way to the top of the roof.

The skies were still so far away,

I stared at them

And started to call out loud:

My Beloved! My Beloved!

My eyes just froze

Heavy, they could hold no more.

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I was in somebody's arms!

My eyes opened wide with the shock

Ah, this was but the balmy breeze

Calming me inside out.

I called out even louder

My Beloved! My Beloved!

I did not want that world to hear

So I left it far below

Yes, you are now nearer than before

I want my voice to reach your ears –

My beloved! My beloved!

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The moon ascended the skies

But its light dipped down,

I was getting inebriated

I felt somebody's lips on my forehead.

My eyes opened wide with the shock

Who was kissing my forehead?

You! Was it you? No

It was the moonlight  
Kissing my forehead.

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

I said: My mind! Don't be forgetful,  
Keep on calling, go on, call,  
    Enjoy yourself but don't forget to call,  
    O mind, your Beloved is hearing you  
    That tender heart hears  
    Your forlorn calls.

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Again I was shocked:  
    Who did I hear? 'Your Beloved  
    Is coming, O your own Beloved;'  
    Is it so?  
    Who did I hear it from?  
    Don't know, but I heard it for sure  
    Yes, otherwise too, it is getting late  
    The Beloved may be on the way now.  
My mind! Quick, make preparations for the welcome  
What if the Beloved arrives and you are not even ready?

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I polished the platter clean  
Poured oil in the four-lipped lamp  
Placed four cotton wicks at each end.  
I then put upright an incense stick  
With sandal-paste powder beside it  
Matches were set by my finger-tips  
So  
As soon as I'd hear the footstep  
    I would light up the lamps  
And immediately start with my *arati*.  
I'd garland my beloved,  
Place my head at his feet,  
I'd circle my platter around his face.



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Dewdrops are sprinkling  
Darkness is softly departing  
A delicate mist sheens my eyes –  
Dripping in joy  
They are about to shut.

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I am shocked yet again, but why?  
Why am I taken aback?  
My eyes open up wider still  
It is getting colder, and my joy more intense,  
My mind is intoxicated, my eyes are moist,  
My entire self is a fount of joy  
O mind, quickly! Get ready for the *arati*- welcome:  
The fount of joy within  
Is a sure sign –  
My Beloved is on the way.

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Instantly I took out the match  
I ignited a flame  
So  
    To light up the lamps and burn the incense  
    And to prepare the sandalwood paste.

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[stunned]

What!

What! What happened Love!  
I lost the garland I made for you.  
Who could have taken it away?

What!

Incense? It is already smothered to ash  
The lamps have devoured all the oil  
They lie asleep in black soot.

What!

Sandalpaste and camphor,

Both took off on their own.  
Perfumes and scents have flown.  
The entire *arati*-welcome is over!

All done?

Finished without my even getting started?

Really, my Beloved Love!

Is my worship all finished?

Who came and what was done?

The door to the roof is still locked,

Except you who could have come from

Below or above or in between?

Alas in a blink of the eye

Within the tiny tremor of my eye

You came: the *arati* worship itself

Performed auspiciously on its own!

You came and disappeared

In just a flash.

How I pined for you all the while

And you came and stole away!

Wonder of Wonders,

How you played your magic!

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My Beloved! Your *arati*?

Who performed it?

How?

The garland was put around the neck!

How?

The propitious mark received on the forehead!

How?

The fragrances wafted into air!

How?

The camphor offered itself!

How?

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My Beloved!

When I touch my forehead

The glowing dust from your feet

I can feel it still sticking to me.

What! Look!

My forehead has received

The touch of your feet.

How did my head rest

At your endearing feet?

I did not bow,

So who did it?

What? It bowed itself? How?

Wonderful giver! This rapture, this intensity, peace, joy, excitement,

This love, delicate fragrance, this magical colour,

Is it a brilliant aura of your circular visit?

From your touch, air and skies,

My inner constellation, have derived this joy?

This ecstasy of ecstasies!

Wonder of wonders!

You slipped away.

You came and went away!

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My Beloved! I call for you yet again,

Don't be angry, my tender hearted love!

This cry is but my winged flight.

I had said, today I'd be greeting you with my *arati*,

You came showering your infinite gifts,

But you slipped away in an instant

I wish you'd touched me so

I'd lose all

My craving and cognition.

You stole away

Stealing behind even the veil of time

Ecstasy is left in this scarf of mine

'O wondrous form! Wondrous trsm!'

Sheer ecstasy, ecstasy, ecstasy!

# The Ambrosial Cup

## *Nam Pyala*

The cup of the beautiful Word  
Is overflowing O friends!  
Who will have a sip of it?  
Keep watching, O friends.  
She whose own cup  
Is brimming with desire,  
She alone will receive it, but  
Hold on to this secret.