

BHAI VIR SINGH'S ACHIEVEMENTS

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION Gurbachan Singh Talib

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Influences and Profile

Bhai Vir Singh's long creative career of over sixty years (he lived to be eighty-five) was a many-splendoured fulfilment. He was the pioneer who caught through the antennae of a keen sensibility and an imagination strongly responsive to new urges, the novel tones which were to be heard in English literature, particularly of the Romantic and the Victorian periods.

With whatever opportunities he had at that time eighty years ago, to acquaint himself with certain pieces or texts from English literature, he

tried to mould his own creative efforts on lines suggested in these. Others before him had tried the same process in Urdu, the language with whose literature most well-educated people in the Panjab, Muslims as well as others, had acquired acquaintance in varying degrees. What had been accomplished in this direction in languages of regions situated far away from the Panjab, or even in Hindi did not make that impact on the mind and thought of the Panjabis as the mass of new creative work in Urdu, the language of education and official work current then. The work of Maulana Muhammad Hussain Azad in history-writing, in *belles-lettres* modelled on certain imaginative pieces from Addison and other writers, his new didactic poetry as also the poetry of Maulana Hali in the same vein and his Critical writings would be known to Bhai Vir Singh. So also the pieces composed under the same strain of

inspiration by writers only slightly less celebrated though distinguished each in his own way, such as Deputy Nazir Ahmed, Maulvi Zakaullah, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Babu Piare Lal Ashob and several others. Drawing his inspiration from such writers, who had opened a new mine of realism and a wide sense of social responsibility in their compositions in prose and verse, he too would have directed his creative powers to achievements in the same field. Both through the vast mass of his work, through its artistic quality and vast influence exerted in ushering a great new era, he remains without doubt the greatest man of letters in Panjabi of the new creative urges and the new experiments, after the traditional, neo-classical age in which Panjabi had been either merely a folk literature or was *Braj* literature with Panjabi overtones in the Gurmukhi.

Apart, of course, from what Bhai Vir Singh learnt of the new

influences from English for his own creative efforts, he would naturally have studied also patches of English literature in the original. Most of our Indian writers went for imitation and adaptation to English writing of the nineteenth century, particularly the romanticism tempered with the moral sensibility of the Wordsworth variety, the mild humanism and tender sentimentalism of 'pre-romantics' like Cowper and Collins, the wistfulness and surface moralizing of Gray and the general didacticism of the writers from the middle class, from Addison on. Further, after the surfeit with pseudo-romanticism and conceits of Indian writing they caught with great avidity on the peculiar Victorian inculcation of the domestic virtues of a Smiles or occasionally a Tennyson, though the supreme art of Tennyson would naturally elude them. The heroic and epic treatment of history by Scott and the nineteenth century balladists again appealed to our

writers, whose sensibility was seeking new values of the democratic age for expression and inculcation in place of the limited themes of the traditional ages with their feudal background of reference. In style too, the attempt would be at a realistic delineation of a factual or emotional situation rather than the embroideries of neo-classical artifice with all its moulds and devices. All these influences are visible and traceable in the Indian writers of this period, though their acquaintance with English literature was restricted by their circumstances only to a few spots in it. The situation changes when we come to a Tagore or an Iqbal or latterly an Aurobindo with their vast background of Western learning and their transmutation of its deepest secrets and more intimate nuances both of theme and art.

To enquire into the totality of the influence of Western literature in Bhai Vir Sing's creative work would

be a subject for an ample discussion in a book or a thesis, which obviously cannot be attempted here. Only a few of the directions which his creative powers took in this respect can be indicated in brief hints. Nor can a proper appraisal of the quality and value of his achievement be made at this juncture, for towards Bhai Vir Singh the attitude of large sections of influential and fairly well-informed people is one of veneration only 'this side idolatory.' So in this respect too, while a great laudation is called forth by his truly great achievements in scholarship and his interpretation of the principles of his faith through several media of literary creation, the spirit of criticism must discipline itself into an attitude of reverential silence. Maybe that at a time not far (for a widely studied writer like Bhai Vir Singli cannot long be kept in an insulated and sealed temple of adoration and adulation alone) he

will be objectively discussed as a writer rather than merely placed on a pedestal as a teacher. Moreover, in a volume like the present, intended to present the various aspects of his achievement on the occasion of the centenary of his birth, any exhaustive critical examination of him would be clearly out of place. With all this, it might be said that so far hardly any serious attempt has been made to find out and to phrase forth the true quality of his total achievement as a writer and to define the principle of his intellectual being.

Art attempt of this nature is obviously c forth. partly to temper the purely laudatory and often vapid rhetoric poured forth about him by encomiasts whose literary culture is not appreciably above the elementary level and equally to meet the somewhat unkind attacks of certain contemporary ideological groups who hold a narrow, utilitarian view of literature in repudiation of its aesthetic values.

Moreover, this latter kind of criticism is allergic and even hostile to the particular social orientation which Bhai Vir Singh attempted through his writings, and which was part of a vast process of regeneration of the Sikh people. About such regeneration more than one writer in the essays that follow has made reference, hence its points need to be reiterated here. Be it said however that no unsympathetic attempts at devaluing Bhai Vir Singh can strip this colossus of his fine drapery which he would continue to wear with grace and distinction, though a few frills here and there of writing representing his moments of weak inspiration may be snipped off in the process. Such a process may be applied with parallel results to any popular writer. Bhai Vir Singh remains vastly popular and his achievement is solid and has its roots in real inspiration and power.

A Synopsis of his Work

Bhai Vir Singh's creative work falls into three main *genres*-Poetry, Biographical and Disquisitional Prose and Fiction. He also tried his hand at Drama, but this attempt suffered from the handicap which in Bhai Vir Singh's fictional efforts one perceives in general—the lack of a capacity to create full, rounded characters. His characters fall into 'types' and are made in accordance with certain formulae. So his fiction does not rise into the realm where it might be valued as such, and not as part of a larger scheme for the propagation of religious ideals. Despite his shortcomings however, his novels became extremely popular with the Sikh reading public, and one particularly *Sundari*, still remains a best-seller. This is because to the average Sikh reader, unqualified to judge of the technical features of fiction, these novels bring in a highly appealing form the history of the grim struggle of their forefathers. The

small Sikh people had by then passed through their ordeal of fire for nearly half a century, and through sheer faith and unswerving heroism of spirit were able to overthrow their well-entrenched oppressors. In these novels there is idealization of the Sikh character of course, but then the reality was itself so noble and heroic, partaking so much of the superhuman character. that the idealization not only is convincing, but led the writer on to itself by a process of inevitability. Not only Bhai Vir Singh and the other Sikh writers on the period, but Europeans and even Muslims delineating the quality of the Sikh character of the period had not been able to withhold the tribute of high admiration.

This period in the history of the Panjab is so rich in a vast heroic effort –not in the manner of feudal individual heroism on a fixed pattern of certain graces. but the colossal and mighty effort of a whole oppressed people to wage

their struggle of liberation over several generations—that it calls for a great epic to catch something of its scale and power. Such an effort has so far not been made. Except in fragments such as Bhai Vir Singh's novels and that portion of Giani Gyan Singh's *Panth Prakash* dealing with it, there is very little literature in existence on it. While Bhai Vir Singh's work is in the form only of three small-sized novels, Giani Gyan Singh's work suffers from being unequal in execution. But given a great occasion, he rises to true poetic eloquence as in the whole portion on Bhai Mani Singh or Ghallughara, and he has shown what can be made poetically of this great material.

Prose

Before taking up a brief study of Bhai Vir Singh's poetry, I may glance at the large mass of his prose. Apart from the prose written by him in his works purely scholarship there are his great

biographies of Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh and the remaining Gurus of the Sikh faith. Then there is the second portion of the work of fiction *Baba Naudh Singh* This second portion is disquisitional with only the thinnest connective thread of certain narrators and their listeners, giving to it just a faint pretence of fiction. But interspersed in it are powerful and splendid passages and episodes.

Bhai Vir Singh's prose is poetic in tone and style, though its structure is modelled close to the spoken idiom of the average educated person. This last remark applies only to the structure-skeleton, the syntax, for which the models were provided by good Urdu prose, a vast quantity of which was in existence by the time Bhai Vir Singh took up pen as writer, and by English prose which had then for two centuries been acquiring the 'spoken' character. Bhai Vir Singh's work in the field of journalism and tract-writing posing further

confirmed this spoken idiom style of his, to which he gave through his own writings a finish and charm which no one since has been capable of. A comparative study of Bhai Vir Singh's prose-writings and of all those who have written prose since say, 1900 in Panjabi will easily show the glaring contrast—the grace and beauty of Bhai Vir Singh's pages and the crude and stilted efforts of others. Here and there in small patches some others too may have been able to achieve quality in their writings. But altogether in grace and felicity which appear to be the natural element in which he disports, Bhai Vir Singh remains still the supreme artist in Panjabi prose, besides of course, being the great poet and scholar that

It is in his diction bearing the perfume of Panjab's sacred literature and the expression of sensibility that Bhai Vir Singh achieves the poetic quality. Very often his sensibility declines to

sentimentality and the feminine small-change of feeling—but rises with recurring spurts to the true emotional level. But whenever the spirit moves him on a great occasion from Sikh religious history, and the more tender feelings of pity and humanitarian melting of the heart are involved, he is also capable of rising to true emotional and imaginative writing. Then he is no less the great poet in prose than he is in verse. If one were to venture a statement about him in terms of the Indian system of poetics, he is strong in portraying these tender emotions of pity and sorrow, along with the softer strains of romantic love, which in his case gets always transmuted into the love of the soul, called in Indian parlance, Bhakti. Such moments when he writes at the higher level of poetic creativity in prose come frequently—as a matter of fact, in the midst of bathetic patches of sentimentality and padded verbiage one constantly encounters

powerful, emotional writing in moving strains of sensitively-rendered music, which mells into the heart and rising even higher, the soul.

This is what makes Bhai Vir Singh the great artist in prose. He released prose from the constricting mould of its earlier stylized idiom, simple and generally crude in structure, and only here and there having the masterly touch in writing such as the Purakin Janarn Sakhi of unknown authorship of the early seventeenth century. As I have ventured to state earlier, in addition to the sheer largeness of the mass of his prose-writing and the total awareness of the related spiritual and theological background that it displays, there is no prose in Panjabi to compare in grace, charm and power with Bhai Vir Singh's. Teja Singh, Puran Singh, Gurbakhsh Singh and Gurmukh Singh Musafir, each a considerable writer in his place, would stand dwarfed by his side. The main point

of difference is that while his is the prose of art, in the case of the others the level is either merely functional or at best 'play' of the mind in a rather lower key.

Poetry

Bhai Vir Singh's essential image in the public mind is fixed as a poet. His achievement in the poetic field again, even more than in prose is the great glory of Panjabi literature. His total output in poetry—that which is of literary worth, is comparatively small. Certain devotional 'songs' of his are popular, but not genuine poetry. Besides the epic, *Rana Surat Singh*, there are four slender volumes or verse containing short lyrical pieces ; some poems with the thought-content predominating and about half a dozen 'romances'. The great popularity and influence of Bhai Vir Singh as poet is perhaps somewhat out of proportion to the total volume of his poetical creation, since *Rana Surat Sing*, a

long work is not popularly read. Requiring a comprehensive view and considerable application from the reader, besides great perseverance to follow it through its numerous abstract portions, it is generally left half unread. The source of Bhai Vir Singli's popularity therefore, must be based mainly on the shorter pieces in the other collections. These, when they appeared at rather long intervals in the first third of the present century, took the Panjabi reading public by a kind of storm Not only did they bring to it a taste of poetry emancipated from the traditional neo-classic 'rules' and the various elements of artifice, which made such poetry sterile of true creative effort and imaginative appeal, but brought also sweet lyrical strains in the language of 'cultivated conversation', in a diction which was familiar as well as elevated with echoes of the great pieces in the earlier mystical and romantic

The main influences which contributed to shaping the poetic art of Bhai Vir Singh came from the English poetry of the nineteenth century, as stated in the beginning of this brief survey. Wordsworth and some minor didactic poets because of their moral slant would appeal to the Indian mind in those times around the last quarter of the nineteenth century and shortly after. To a generation which had had an overplus of the baroque and a static and decadent romanticism couched in artificial verbal craftsmanship, the nineteenth century English treatment of real life in poetry made an inevitable appeal. Moreover, to generations aroused to a sense of social responsibility such as the educated Indians were, around this period beginning soon after the 1857 Revolt, poetry with a didactic, social and philosophical slant appeared to be exactly what the country needed. Theories as to the nature and function of poetry,

formed, perhaps, on an imperfect understanding of nineteenth-century European ideas on the subject, all emphasized this new content and treatment. Not only in India, in most parts of Asia there was in evidence a new ferment of ideas, giving rise to new blends of literature along with their supporting theories.

So, the particular tone and tendency of Bhai Vir Singh's poetry must be understood in the light of these newly-aroused urges. In his case of course, the immediate source of his inspiration was the state of the Sikh people, at that time trying to find an identity and group-stability through the Panjabi language and the reinterpretation of the Sikh religious thought, which suited remarkably the new ideas of social responsibility, in which it had actually anticipated the modern European humanism by more than three centuries.

Besides this influence from the West, which went on to shape the content of Bhai Vir Singh's poetry, there were also minor influences, mainly from the Sufistic strain in Muslim thought. These came to Bhai Vir Singh partly via Persian, in which his learning was fairly sound and partly also through Urdu, which had inherited the main characteristics of Persian. Sufism was also established in Panjabi right since the centuries of Muslim proselytization in the Panjab, and Panjabi has a rich stock of such poetry, with its own imagery and background of reference apart from Persian. While echoes of the Sufis of the Panjab are frequent in Bhai Vir Singh's short pieces and quatrains, here and there one catches even echoes of Iqbal, one side of whose poetic personality expressed Sufistic idealism. But these influences from the literature of Islam are mainly peripheral the core of Bhai Vir Singh's poetry derives from

nineteenth century English influences.

This English influence also helped to shape form. Neo-classical and traditional Indian poetry, including Panjabi, was form'-based, like the classical and neo-classical poetry of Europe. It was from the seventeenth century on that the 'poem in English as an autonomous structure entered as the do form. After the first half of the seventeenth century, the 'poem' was any short piece, embodying any conception and built on any technical principle. Earlier, short pieces called songs or lyrics, were looked upon as minor, almost playful exercises thrown around by a poet who must prove his mastery in art by composing a considerable piece in one of the established 'forms'— Epic, Tragedy, Comedy, the Philosophical Poem or other. Not so now. A poet did not necessarily have to establish his supremacy by any such work. He might compose only short pieces,

now indiscriminately to be called 'poems', and be yet acknowledged great. By the time of the Romantic movement, this trend was already well established, and got a further widespread vogue during the nineteenth century details of which would not be in place here. When English poetry came within the ken of our own English-educated class, they grew familiar with this phenomenon. The autonomous form of the short 'poem' had a liberating influence on the poetry of our various languages. Poets now no longer mastered for use the poetic craft of older times, but with some skill in composition and the new kind of thinking could claim to be masters in the art.

In Urdu and Persian. the ghazal, a complete-in-itself short form was already well established. Such a short form with the same literary prestige was not established in Panjabi or Hindi, except perhaps the devotional piece called bhajan (shabad in the Sikh tradition) or the

song. Now, with this new form imported from the West, the poets found a new horizon of achievement in the higher kind of poetry opening out before them. They naturally made good use of this new opportunity. It is in the light of this phenomenon that Bhai Vir Singh's shorter poems may be viewed. They are in meters which arc based in the Panjabi tradition but with rhyme schemes and structural patterns suggested by the sacred poetry of Sikhism, as also by the Urdu ghazal. In places he adopted the stanza-form handled with such mastery by Bhai Gurdas in his Vats. In his last work, in the 'free verse' style he has composed poems of admirable quality. A detailed discussion of these features would be out of place in a short treatment such as the present. So, only the main influences from which he derived and perfected his form are indicated.

Fount of Inspiration—Mysticism

The supreme source of inspiration of Bhai Vir Singh as suggested earlier, are the teachings of the Sikh faith. The Sikh Religion in essence is a blend of elements mystical and ethical—each of these with a particular orientation given by the great Sikh Teachers, the Gurus. Mysticism in Sikhism takes the form of the experience of the One, undifferentiated. eternal Reality called *Omkar, Brahmman and Akal* the spiritual vision formulated by Guru Nanak. The Divine Reality is conceived of also as the Supreme Being, the universal soul which is All-Love and All-Beauty and capable of responding to the worship of the human devotee. The highest form of such worship is the Love with the yearning of the finite individual self to merge into the universal Self. The course of the spiritual quest in the Sikh faith is as much the intuitive Realization of the Eternal, called Gyan (Jnan) as Devotion or Love, called .Bhakti. Only the course of this Gyan does

not lie through the apprentice stages of knowledge of aspects of the Divine, that is, through deities, nor the Love through Love of the visible, incarnated forms like the various gods and goddesses. While Sikhism shares with idealistic Hinduism certain basic postulates, it has also done a vast degree of pruning, so that it has emerged as what for all practical purposes is a new religion. In that particular phase of its development, which is still continuing, in the thought-climate of which Bhai Vir Singh grew up, the emphasis was on points of departure from what is ordinarily known as Hinduism than on discovering inter-relationships. This was due to certain historic compulsions which in the interest of their sheer survival as a people the Sikhs had to highlight. While Bhai Vir Singh's poetry is not polemical except in some portions of .Rana Surat Sing the religious thought which emerges from his poetry is the quest of the eternal

Supreme Being as known to Sikh thought.

Bhakti or Devotion within Sikhism has taken the form, as just said, of Love of the Eternal, the essence, unincarnate and hence extremely difficult to fix in the consciousness. It is the Love of the soul which, transcending passions and emotions based in the carnal body, yet is capable somehow of experiencing the etherealized, distilled essence of love, in which nothing is left except the mystical urge, seeking absorption into the Divine. Such love, should the soul be inspired with it, passes through phases and stages, some of which are akin to the strong urges of the body for the deeply stirring experience of the passionate embrace. This is the form such experience takes in the life of mystics all the world over. The imagery and symbology of such quest and such experience is not different from that of physical passion. In the Indian mystical

tradition, shared by Sikhism, such love and passion takes the form of the yearning of the love-sick female, separated from her spouse, the beloved. In her state of separation she passes through a variety of moods of despair, sorrow and passionate remembrance. seeking nothing so much as his return to her in the warm security of the home and the connubial bed.

In the soul thus represented as the yearning female the supreme passion is surrender of the self at the feet of the object of her love, her lord. The deepest experience of the tender feminine sensibility thus goes into voicing this strain of poetry. This feminine sensibility is a constant . characteristic of the literary creations of Bhai Vir Singh, both in prose and verse, and in either form he has given deeply satisfying expression to it, notwithstanding that whenever he is composing at a low key of inspiration he falls to the sentimental. In this strain the

devotional quest takes the anthropomorphic form wherein the devotee in a tender 'dramatic situation is face to face with the Divine Beloved, alone with I Realization is thus achieved, and the world, *maya* shed off. The careful, sensitive reader will thus catch in reading his poetry such tender quest and union constantly—no less in the outpourings of his soul in his last work, *Mere Saiyan Jio*, written when he was approaching his eightieth year than in those of several decades earlier. The other strain of God-consciousness at the more intellectual level is met with also constantly, though what he has written in the devotional strain is much the more impressive. This is his most intimate phase of the mystical quest, and perhaps the peak of his poetic achievement.

Ethical thought in Sikhism has taken the direction of a strong puritanical emphasis in individual life and a keen sense of social

responsibility in the life of the organized group, whether it be the circle limited to one's co-religionists or the larger circle of the nation or of humanity in general. Generally, despite all the imperfections to which the process of reducing ideals to practice is subject, the Sikhs have tended to keep before themselves the essence of this ethical teaching. The masterly expression of such ethical idealism occurs woven into the plot, somewhat thin, of the epic *Rana Surat Sing*. But in the shorter poems too, where the theme is some phase of the life of action, this thinking emerges. The patriotic passion, the call to courage and self-sacrifice, and a robust philosophy of fruitful action forms the basis of such poems. When Bhai Vir Singli manages to emancipate his thought from the weaker strains of sentimentality, he is the wise patriarch, guiding a people on to the path of noble, socially beneficial endeavour. His whole life as lived

showed such a pattern clearly emerging from it. In this respect he partakes of the character of the bard of a people, their spokesman and their inspirer.

Scholarship

One aspect of Bhai Vir Singh's achievement, his scholarship, is known naturally to a much smaller number compared to those who know and appreciate his work in the more popular fields of poetry and colourful prose-writing. Scholarship descended to Bhai Vir Singh from his father, grandfather and his maternal grandfather—all famous scholars and savants of the Sikh people in their day. A study even of those of Bhai Yin Singh's writings, not expressly falling under the category of scholarship will reveal behind every statement a rich background of learning and information. The history of the Sikh people and of India in general, knowledge of Indian philosophy and the several languages from

which religious learning in the Panjab has derived, such as Sanskrit, Persian and Braj Bhasha come in constantly to buttress his arguments and conclusions, in making which he shows a highly responsible sense of scholarly thoroughness and integrity. Just a few examples to illustrate this aspect of his achievement will soon follow.

A significant thing to note about his historical fiction the four novels and *Rana Surat Singh* is the absence of any anachronisms. This shows an ever-alert scholarly conscience, built upon his vast learning, which was aware even of the minutiae of literary culture.

Besides the great scholarship implicit in his creative work, as forming the basis and frame-work of it, such as the biographies of the Gurus of the Sikh faith and *Rana Surat Singh*, he accomplished a massive amount of work of scholarly editing and glossing of

texts. In this respect his supreme achievement is the editing of Bhai Santokh Singh's *Guru Fartap Suraj*, an epic history of the Sikh faith composed by a supremely great poet in a highly ornate style in Braj Bhasha. Completed in 1843, this work, the richness and intricacy of whose art, besides the vast 'mine of information that it is, should make it one of the supreme expressions of the poetic genius in . Its linguistic texture, woven thickly of scholarly wit' in the 'metaphysical sense and flowing on like a mighty river in flood, Con extremely wide knowledge of classical and post-classical Indian literature for its explication. Allusions and literary puns (called in Indian Poetics, Anupras and Yainak in their numerous forms) came to this poet with a facility which would make people in earlier ages believe in some divinity guiding his pen. To have adequately edited this work of some 6000 pages and to have dealt with all its literary features and the

philosophy of which the composer of the work was an accomplished master. called for powers of scholarship which hardly anyone else besides Bhai Vir Singh possessed. And it is not merely that he glossed the difficult text or explicated allusions and the poetic conceits. Where the occasion calls for it, Bhai Vir Singh goes into the statements made by the poetry conveyed by his sources, and examines them critically at full length in the light of contemporary scholarship. One great example of such examination is the statement about the alleged worship of the goddess Dunga by Guru Gobind Singh. Over twenty-four pages of a closely argued thesis, taking evidence from contemporary historical research and thought, Bhai Vir Singh disproves the false statement of the Guru's worship of Durga. This point has been dealt with ably by Dr. Bhai Jodh Singh, in the essay contributed by him to this Volume.

Bhai Vir Singh besides, was the first to discover from Jahangir's *Tuzuk* the real background of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev. After his discovery of it, the story about Chandu being mainly responsible for the Guru's martyrdom recedes into the background. This part from the *Tuzuk* was not known to Macauliffe and the band of great scholars who assisted him. Now of course, not only this statement from the *Tuzuk*, but further facts have come to light about this episode in Sikh religious history. But credit is due to Bhai Vir Singh for making the discovery. Similarly, Bhai Vir Singh appears to have been one of the few persons who knew in detail the manuscript *Pothis of Goindwal* which provided part of the preserved Gurbani from which the *Adi Granth* was compiled. The famous miracle attributed to Guru Nanak, of the .Kaaba revolving in whatever direction his feet turned, and which was sought to be explained

metaphorically, has been discussed as fact in a highly interesting note by Bhai Vir Singh from the evidence of Muslim hagiology. It is said that the Kaaba has often moved from its fixed place to grant a sight of itself for blessing Allah's chosen devotees when they could not visit it. One such to whom it appeared was the Sufi Ibrahim Adham. Another was the pious lady Rabia. So, Bhai Vir Singh's argument runs, Kaaba might as well move in consonance with the movement of a holy person like Guru Nanak. This discovery from the history of Islamic piety is incorporated in *Guru Nanak Chmatkar*, the biography of Guru Nanak. Such scholarship one comes upon constantly in reading Bhai Vir Singh's work.

Besides editing *Guru Parlap Suraj*, Bhai Vir Singh began but could not complete a work of the exegesis of *Adi Granth*. Now this is a great fragment in seven volumes. On the scale at which Bhai Vir Singh

attempted the work, it would take about fifty such volumes. His style was somewhat expansive, and his learning leaned on the side of amplitude and plenty rather than of scarcity. So, with summarizing the hymns, their paraphrase, exegetical exposition and the glossary of terms, allusions and expressions, such of this work as could be accomplished is satisfying to the scholarly intellect. Difficult points of exposition have been wrestled with, and points made by all important previous authorities have been mentioned and what the author considers to be definitive conclusions stated. Where necessary, texts from the Sanskrit and other learned sources are quoted, and individual words explained with their sources, and their history of mutations traced.

There is besides, *Guru Granth/i Ka* a dictionary of the *Adi Granth* in three volumes. This, besides explaining important terms and allusions authoritatively, contains

several appendices rich with learned and ample information on the system of musical notation adopted for the Adi Granth, along with the parallel musical systems current among different denominations in the centuries around the emergence of the Sikh faith. Here again, the vastness and amplitude of this learning is rare and shows the kind of scholarship that looks like an inexhaustible mine.

He wrote a biography of the great poet Bhai Gurdas whose compositions because of his deep insight have been called the 'key' to the understanding of the Gurus' Word. He also prepared a definitive version of the oldest Biography of Guru Nanak, known as *Purajan Janam Sakhi*, after critically collating its several versions, available till then only in manuscript form.

His rendering of the mystic-philosopher Bharthani Hari's *Shatak* into Panjabi poetry from the

Sanskrit is another scholarly achievement of his.

It was a somewhat belated recognition of his greatness when the Panjab University, then re-established in India at Solan conferred on him the degree *honoris causa* of Doctor of Oriental Learning. A few other marks of recognition followed, but all these came to him as he was crossing his eightieth year, and was probably indifferent to them like Dr. Johnson, to whom also recognition came rather late. He nevertheless received these honours in the spirit of the deep humility of faith, in the words of the Holy Granth—'But for the Guru's grace who would care for me, a mean worm crawling in dust?' The province of his birth had been indifferent on the whole to his greatness. Only when the country became free, the propitious moment arrived to recognize it. But his boat was already, in his own phrase in *Mere Saiyan Jio*, sliding downstream in the direction of the Unknown.