

## **The ‘Punjab Problem’ of 1984-1995 and its Depiction in Contemporary Punjabi Literature**

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Punjab passed through a very difficult phase of history between 1984 and 1995 and if it is true that literature reflects the truth of the time then how could we have expected Punjabi literature to have remained silent during this agonizing period? During this dark period when militancy reached its peak, the bulk of Punjabi writing, not surprisingly, concerned itself with the Punjab imbroglio. Although the militancy period started earlier, Operation Bluestar in 1984 was a critical contributor to the troubled times in Punjab and this adversely influenced Punjab in all manners. The deadly violence was not confined to one community as men, women and children of both the Sikh and Hindu communities were killed. People were terrified by the harrowing atmosphere and dared not to travel at night; mothers prayed for safe return of their children; the shrieks of widows and orphans continued to render the air, police excesses in the form of fake encounters and mysterious ‘escapes’ of some militants from police custody further worsened the situation. In this period of turbulence and turmoil, Punjabi writers gave an affective expression to the various aspects of this tragedy. This paper makes an attempt to examine and analyze the socio-economic and political reflections of contemporary Punjabi literary writings of the gloomy incidents.

Literature always reflects the truth of the time. According to Marwick “Those historians and ordinary people who ignore the imaginary history of the era, are writing the history of the era, they are so stupid and unknowable as to who are fully trusting in this literature.”<sup>1</sup> Here I have tried to write history of Punjab’s dark period by examining Punjabi literature. The ‘Punjab problem’ which started with demands enshrined in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (ASR) reached its highest peak during Operation Bluestar and eventually Punjab fell into complete chaos and lawlessness. Punjabi writers continued to pose questions on nature of the problem that prevailed and felt that in questions alone lay the answers and hope of light. The following sections provides brief introduction to different forms of Punjabi literature that appeared during this troubled period.

### **Punjabi Poetry**

In this era, Punjabi poetry remained dominant over other forms of literature in terms of reflecting on gloomy incidents in Punjab. A young poet Swarajbir in his poetry book *Apni Apni Raat* (Each One's Night) describes his painful experiences of those fateful nights in Amritsar when the city was totally locked down as a result of the military crackdown on the Golden Temple during Operation Bluestar.<sup>2</sup> Besides the pain and anguish, which he expresses using highly evocative imagery, he tried to create a meaningful link with the literary and cultural tradition of Punjab through his poems. A similar situation of Punjab is also depicted by Jaswant Zafar (1993) in his book *Do Sahan Vihkaar*, (Between the Two Breaths) in his poem *Manwa* (Mothers). He writes:

Then when  
 Returning home in the evening  
 Mother's heart with compassion  
 The boy came home at the right time  
 The outside situation is not right  
 Now that I was an alien  
 Every week the mother's account is published  
 With the lyrics, the mother writes  
 The boy does not come home yet  
 Here the condition is not correct.<sup>3</sup>

In another very interesting poem '*Mitti Da Bawa*' (Clay Toy), he provides an intensely moving rendering of that era where Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike, faced their own trials and tribulations; both faced with unique predicaments and dilemmas. The former would best not leave the house sans turban, lest they be killed by Sikh terrorists. The former, at the same time, ran the risk of getting mistaken for a terrorist and being gunned down by the police in fake encounters. His whole book portrays the Punjab problem in very clear terms. Jaswant Deed (2002) in his *Bacche ton Dardi Kavita*<sup>4</sup> (Poetry Frightful of a Child), depicted in a forceful manner, the innocence of childhood vis-à-vis the harsh realities of life which strangulate innocence. On one hand he talks of the bliss of innocence and nature and, on the other, he talks of the dehumanizing influence of civilization and morality. Ajaib Kamal (1986) in his book *Chup Baithi Kavita* (Quiet Sits Verse) offers very interesting and significant analysis of the Punjab issue. He feels that man, having got trapped in religious, mutual and supremacist struggles has transformed into a brute. This has resulted in all kinds of tensions in human societies. He perceives communal tensions in Punjab in this light. Romesh Kumar (1986) in *Dhaul Dharam Daya Ka Poot* (righteousness is the mythical bull, the offspring of mercy), commits himself to focus only on these three issues. These ballads portray different elements of the mind-boggling circumstances in an exceptionally serious and energetic way. The poet has advanced an

unmistakable idyllic expression of his own. Communicating his deepest sentiments on the Punjab catastrophe, he writes:

The Punjab is smoldering, burning  
Not only in his own cities and town  
but also, in the streets of Delhi  
We are all to be blamed  
We who call ourselves progressives

Another important work in this series was an edited poetry book *1986 Di Punjabi Kavita* (Punjabi Poetry on 1986) by Gursharan Singh published in (1986). All of his poems centre on the agonies of Punjab. The poem *Eh Din* (These Days) by Rajbir, depicts two unique scenarios - one depicted the retro movement of Punjab and the other takes us to Delhi where vicious groups execute, plunder and loot in the name of nationalism. Another poem in the same book, *Pachh* (The Cut on a Tree) written by Sarabjit Bedi (1986), depicts the hidden anger of Sikhs who seem to be very patient at the moment, like trees. The fallen tree ultimately becomes fire. The Poet says 'the moment it starts drying up, the fire within starts spreading out.'

A prominent poet of Punjabi literature, Harinder Singh Mehboob (1990) has written so many poems on the Punjab crisis. The third part of his book *Jhana di Raat*<sup>5</sup> (Night of Jhanas), specially deals with the dark period of Punjab. Mehboob, in very emotional verse depicts Operation Bluestar, especially when the Akal Takhat was destroyed into ruins. He suggested to the Punjabi community to solve all the troubles, by taking the path of humanism shown by their religious gurus.<sup>6</sup> Another eminent poet Jagtar, whose poems that were written during this period were clearly influenced by incidents happening in daily lives of the people in those days in Punjab. His two very interesting books *Anmuk Safar*<sup>7</sup> (2005) (Unending Journey) and *Har Mod te Saleeban*<sup>8</sup> (2014) (Death Trap at Every Turn) reflect the everyday life of common people. He explains how the police itself was involved in criminal incidents instead of checking these. He writes about them as:

Who's that finally?  
As soon as the evening falls  
Comes in our homes forcefully.  
They unsolicited guests  
And started to force us for everything forcibly.

Another important poet, similar to Mehboob and Jagtar, is Sukhpal. His book *Rehan Kathaon Nayan*<sup>9</sup> (No Place Worth Living), published in 2014, delineates the occurrences in Punjab by providing another dimension, for example:

One month back, the aggressors come in my sister's  
home. They were interested in nourishment and time

was 11 during the evening. When they don't open the entryway, they begun the firing. At the point when my sister attempted to call the police, police answered that they might come tomorrow.

Sukhpal explained incidents in Punjab in very expressive terms and in one of his other poems he writes:

Son, take any way to this city,  
and to tell each family unit there is a degree of (any) mishap  
with everybody.  
There is no house in this city that no relative or companion  
passes on.  
The Hindu Sikh's passing has no effect on anybody.  
Executioners are not minded whether the general population  
have a turban or not.<sup>10</sup>

Arthur Victor's poem *Main Punjab Han* (I am Punjab) written in 1986, about the Punjab crisis was very popular in those days. He writes:

I am Punjab  
Woven from the timeless spindle of history  
I am Punjab  
the strong and tested alloy of culture  
of Trishul, Khanda and Cross.....  
how it come to pass  
that I lie wounded now  
drop by drop bleeding to death  
my sturdy veins drained  
stabbed every inch  
I lie wounded  
I am Punjab.....<sup>11</sup>

The poetry book of Dr. Harbhajan Singh *Uni Sou Churasi*<sup>12</sup> (Nineteen Eighty-Four) edited by Amarjit Chandan in 2017 is totally based on those tough days in Punjab. Along with his poems, three papers by Dr. Harbhajan Singh are also included in this book and are also based on the so-called problem of Punjab. In one of his poem, he writes

Have seen silence of mobs,  
And (have seen) their noise  
To hear some words from a (just, reasonable) Man,  
(to)which arbitrator should  
(we) accompany.

Neither we have said (in support) Bhidranwale,  
Nor we belong to Indira's (camp)  
Two sabres for our heads  
Which one should we choose.

On Operation Bluestar, being a Sikh himself, he very emotionally expressed his anger in the following manner:

(at) mandir of Hari, never had heard of  
Such happenings,  
Harmandir is open for all  
(It has) fairness (for all) in abundance,  
(I) walk towards Harmandir  
With a subtle sinking heart,  
(But with a question) where do I belong,  
(To) leave this threshold to which other threshold should I go,  
Who will solve this dilemma,  
(Oh! My) mother Amritsar is dear (to me).

Hamdardveer's (1987) *Kale Samea de Naal Naal* (With the Dark Periods) talks about the dark period in the cultural history of Punjab. Amarjit Kaunke (1987), in his book *Nirvaan di Talash*, (Seeking Salvation) presents a hero who was depressed because of the sad situation and sometimes raises a voice against what has happened and what will be happening. Balbir Atish's (1987) *Pagal Ghorhean de Summan Heth* (Under the Time of Mad Horses) is yet another book of poetry on the theme of Punjab problem. But the most important book of poetry on this theme is Swaranjit Savi's (1987) *Avagya* (Disobeyed). Savi understands the idiom of modern poetry and explores the psychology of his hero who is suffering not because of his own deeds, but who is entrapped in the painful situation.<sup>13</sup>

### **Punjabi Novels**

It is not only poetry which talks about militancy and the atmosphere of terror in Punjab. In the field of Punjabi fiction, writers have also contributed equally on violence in Punjab. Among Punjabi novelists, Om Parkash Gasso (1986) has written the novel *Tatti Hawa* (Hot Air or Looh). He presented his balanced and scientific study of Sikh terrorism and Hindu communalism. Exposing Hindu mentality, he states that these peoples are living in Punjab for reasons of prospering their business. Otherwise, they would have never considered Punjab as their native soil. Nor have they ever thought of doing anything worthwhile for its betterment.<sup>14</sup>

Punjabi novelist Shah Chaman wrote his novel *Jakhmi Gulab* (Injured Rose) in 1987 which depicts so many perspectives of the Punjab problem. He even dedicated his novel to Punjab writing 'To my beloved Punjab which continuously fought against terrorism and separatism.' The novel presented a story of a couple living alone after their love marriage against society. Suddenly the hero of his novel joined a militant group for finding employment, and suspicious events

started happening in their life. With this depiction, the writer tried to show that unemployment was the main reason for increasing the number of militants in Punjab. He also presented selfish politics of politicians, the matter of Anandpur Sahib Resolution and massacre of the people of Punjab in his novel. This novel depicts the political, social, cultural and economic crisis with great success. There are also a few plays written on the same theme.

Baljinder Nasrali's (2014) tragedy novel *Veehvi Sadi Di Akhri Katha*<sup>15</sup> (The Last Story of the Twentieth Century), delineates the social environment of Punjab in all respects innovatively during the period of militancy. The novel depicts the reason why the youth of Punjab deliberately and deeply started engaging with terrorism but the actions of police also played a major role in pushing them into terrorism. He also observes that unemployment was a major cause behind militancy in Punjab.

Mitter Sen Meet, a well-known Punjabi novelist, also famous for his different writing style, always gives a detailed analysis of the problems. He has also written a couple of Punjabi novels which are related to the Punjab crisis. The first one is *Taftish*<sup>16</sup> (Inquiry) in 1990 and the other one is *Katehra*<sup>17</sup> (The Dock) in 2014. In one of his novels, after the grandson of Lala Ji is kidnapped by the terrorists, the writer depicts this situation in the following way:

The letter was from one militant group, and they demanded Rs. 50,000 by the morning. Along with this, they have ordered Lala Ji not to organize Ram Leela and Ras Leela in the city, and if someone tried to disobey their orders the dead body of his grandson will be reached at his home by the evening.

According to Sen, almost all border districts were under militancy in Punjab. One other thing which makes his novel very interesting is his style of exploring the workings of the police department which was the most corrupt department as it used to harass common people during that time, very similar to what all the terrorist groups were doing. Mitter Sen Meet also agreed with other writers that unemployment was one of the serious causes behind the militancy. He writes:

Firstly, boys have started taking a drug..... He started living invisible from his home and started spending most of his time with other boys at the workshop. Unexpectedly one day people comes to know that he was killed by the militants with their guns.

So, Sen has portrayed the real situation of Punjab with so many these kinds of examples in both of his novels.

*Je Ratt Piwehe Manas* (If Human Drink the Blood), a novel written by Karamjit Singh Aujla (1987), depicts the Punjab problem briefly

but another novel written by him under the title *Chenva ate Satnwa Darya* (The Sixth and Seventh Rivers) has become very important for understanding the Punjab problem. According to him, the sixth river in Punjab can be seen as tears the people have shed due to the Punjab problem and the seventh river, he compares with the human blood shed by terrorists as well as by activities of the police. One new perspective he provided on police corruption in his novel was the role of 'gang wearing black underwear' which later became famous and was held responsible for almost every bad incident which happened during nights in the last few years of the militancy period. The writer portrays their illegal activities in his novel and as one of his mad woman character described it:

wrong, totally wrong, they are real members of the black underwear gang. During all day they are wearing caps and pants but at nights they are wearing the black underwear. Because when they raped me, I saw that they had to wear the black underwear under their pants.

Another significant work is *Painda Te Rah* (The Distance and the Track) by Surinder Pal Dhillon written in 1986. This novel deals with the period from Operation Bluestar to the anti-Sikh violence in Delhi in early November 1984. He depicts the political atmosphere of Punjab in very precise terms in this fiction. Explaining the Punjab accord with the help of a cartoon, he says:

a broad canvas. On one side stands the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi like a young prince, under whose shadow take shelter many stalwarts holding tridents, tires, tines of kerosene and other weapons. On the other side stands Sant Longowal like a big tent sheltering wolf-like people who are hungry for power, between them is a blank space dotted with dead bodies. Both the leaders have been shown moving forward to shake hands over the jungle of corpses.

In the field of fiction also there is Ninder Gill's novel, Chon Halka Payal, talking about the Punjab problem. Kartar Singh Duggal (1986) in his novel *Fhullan Da Sath* (Company of the Flowers) criticized both communities for the Punjab problem. He criticizes Gulzari Lal Nanda who was the home minister of India when the Sikhs were demanding their homeland for a long time and as he denied their demands, this rejection made the Sikhs unhappy. So, Duggal links the problem of Punjab with the demands of the Sikhs after the partition of India. For finding a solution to the problem he argues that when Punjabi Hindus, without any political objective, consider Punjabi as their mother tongue, then the Punjab problem will be solved automatically. Dalip Kaur Tiwana's (1986) novel *Jimi Phuche Asmaan* (Earth Asking for

Sky) is also very important in this context. For her, the Central government, Akalis of Punjab, issue of Punjabi language, unemployment in Punjab and communal newspapers were responsible for the Punjab crisis. She also found roots to the problem to the time of partition. She depicted it in the following way: Harmandir, the gurdwara in Amritsar was constructed by a Hindu Guru and its foundation stone was installed by a Muslim saint, and yet it is the sacred pilgrimage site of Sikhs. In other words, this is the situation of Punjab. But during Partition, Hindustan became the country of Hindus and Pakistan of Muslims, on this basis Punjab was divided. Just like how someone would divide Harmandir between Hindus and Muslims. And the Sikhs felt that they had been displaced.

Almost every novelist has criticized the role of government in creating the Punjab problem but only a few among them were very daring. One novelist who deserves to be mentioned here is Narinder Gill (1986). In his novel *Punjab Eighty-Four*, he tried to explore the dual kind of politics impinging on the Punjab problem: the government of Punjab as well as the central government. He writes:

they have banned the All-India Student Federation, then why they don't ban the Hindu Suraksha Samiti, we who have our guns seem to them terrorists but the Brahmans who have run their illegal workshops of the guns are nationalist? How.....?<sup>18</sup>

Narinder Gill tried to show that the Hindu was equally responsible as the Sikh for the Punjab problem. The Sikh massacre under the label of 'Riots of 84' he depicted as:

The dishonor committed against Sikhs during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots (should be called genocide not riots), has raised questions about the future living of the Sikh community.

Two trucks full of villagers have come...They have jerry cans of petrol...they have axes and rods...They are setting fires, looting shops...They drag Sikhs out of their homes and cut their hair with scissors...Then they hit and push them, beat them until they are half-dead...And then dragging these broken bodies they pour petrol over them and burn them to death...they don't even forgive children. No religion permits the genocide of men and women.

Another important work on this context is the novel *Dehshat de Dina Vich*<sup>19</sup> (In the Days of Terror) which was written by Ninder Gill in 1986. The voluminous fictional work tries to create a picture of what he calls 'during the days of terror' which was long-lasting in Punjab. In this novel he tried to reveal the ways of influencing the ruling



regime so that they can change their policies in favour of increasing public welfare.

The novel *Lahu Vatega Rang* (The Blood will Change its Colour) written by Harpreet Kaur in 1987 deals directly with the problem of Jammu and Kashmir which began with the partition of India, but indirectly she has also depicted the problem of Punjab because both states have faced similar type of problems.

Similar to Harpreet Kaur, Jaswant Singh Kanwal, one of the most famous writers of Punjabi literature in his 1985 novel *Anaya Chon Utho Surma* (From the Masses will Rise the Valorous) depicts the Punjab problem indirectly because this particular novel directly focused on the Naxalite movement in Punjab but one of his characters, Santokh Singh Sokha represents the Sikh community in the whole story of the novel. Through this novel, he also explored many different perspectives of the Punjab problem. *Ountre*, a novel written by Raj Gill in 1987 is dedicated to violent events which happened to the Sikh community in Delhi after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and results of this paved the way for creating the Punjab problem. *Vapsi* (Come Back), a novel written by Dr. Rashpal Singh in 1987 depicts the story of youth of Punjab and international interference in the Punjab problem. He depicted that because of harassment by police youth of Punjab used to cross over the border, go to places where Pakistan ran training camp and then send them back to India for undertaking terrorist activities.

### **Punjabi Plays**

Punjabi plays also contribute to our understanding of the problem in an appropriate manner. Gursharan Singh (1986), a well-known Punjabi playwright has written three plays on the Punjab crisis, *Dastan-e-Punjab*, (The Story of Punjab) *Chandigarh Puare di Jarh* (Chandigarh, the Root Cause of Conflict) and *Curfew*. Gursharan Singh is forthright in his approach and takes to task all those responsible for the sad and unfortunate situation. He successively depicted in a straight forward manner, a fake police encounter, people suffering communal hysteria and innocents being shot down in cold blood by the terrorists. A Punjabi monthly magazine from Amritsar, *Samta*, published a 1987 full-length play written by Gursharan Singh, *Raaj Sahban da* (Rule of President) which presents the problems of the President's rule.

### **Short Stories**

Short story writers have also, in the same way, contributed during the period. Four major story books, directly related to the Punjab problem were compiled during this period; (i) *Kalle Samein Di Gatha* (A Story of the Dark Period) written in 1986 and edited by Gurmit Saran and

Harbans, (ii) *Ek Udas Kitab* (One Sad Book) written in 1986 and edited by Amrita Pritam, (iii) *Ratt Ka Kangu* (this term is used by Guru Nanak Dev Ji in Baburbani for Babur) and edited by Ram Saroop Ankhi in 1986, and (iv) *Asin Jeounde Asin Jagde*, (We are Hearty and We are Alert) and edited by Amarjit Garewal and Tarlochan Jhande in 1986. Altogether around 80 stories relating to the Punjab problem were narrated in these four books.

The story *Hit List* (1986) written by Gursharan Singh depicts the conversation between a terrorist and a common man, as ‘two people went to the street on the motorcycle. They reached the home of one wise man. He opens the door, they told him your name is on hit list. He asked but why? Please save me, they replied we are not able to save you because we are also on a hit list.’<sup>20</sup>

*Rudan Billian* (Weeping Cats) written by Gulzar Sandhu in 1989 portrayed this problem very emotionally as *Bebe* (Old Lady) knows that the boys were at fault, what was the fault of a poor postman, shopkeeper, school master, various C grade employees, they were all scared in this situation. What was the bravery in the killings of innocent people?

Amrita Pritam, in 1986, edited the book *Ek Udas Kitab* (One Sad Book). Almost all the stories in this book related to the Sikh massacre in Delhi after the death of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. All these stories not only described the real situation of Punjab but also provide valuable criticism and evaluation of the Punjab problem. The story under the title *Ghumusa* (Twilight) describes the psychological condition of a Hindu mother, who was witness to the Sikh massacre in Delhi. The mother is depicted as saying ‘the old mother of Kishan Lal was coming from somewhere and addressed the group of people standing near the chowk, “my sons, please stop them, my heart is very scared because all my three sons are at Amritsar right now. If you will save the Sikhs here, then it’s possible that someone will also save my sons at Amritsar”’.

Another story *Kutte* (Dogs) written in 1988 by Ajit Kaur tried to explore one of the most controversial perspective in the context of the Punjab problem. In this story, she believes that the role of Punjab police and CRPF makes the Punjab problem more complex in terms of solving it because so many young boys left their homes due to regular police verification and harassment. They rapidly joined the various terrorist groups. The Police were not only used to harass the ordinary people of Punjab but also for raping girls and responsible for all those kinds of illegal activities.

The story *Fir Bahar Ayegi* (Spring Will Come Again) written by Davinder Mand in 1987 concentrates on the brotherhood between both Sikh and Hindu communities in Punjab. He compared this brotherhood with the Banyan tree as roots of the Banyan tree looked to him same as both Punjabi communities. Another story written by Dev Bharadwaj is

*Upre Bande* (Unknown Persons) in an edited book entitled *Ratt Ka Kangu* mentioned before, exposes international interference in the Punjab issue. It depicts this problem as 'one unknown person coming from another planet who tried to fight the people in the name of religion'. Two stories of KL Garg *Anaya Ch Ghiri Lalten* (Lantern Surrounded by Blinds), and *Antina Vich Fasi Patang* (A Kite Caught in an Antenna) suggested a solution to the Punjab problem. Both stories believed that politicians have created this problem only for their selfish gains. They don't even want to solve it and instead want to make it even more complicated. He believed that the killings of innocent peoples are not a solution to any problem.

*Chuthi Koot*, (The Fourth Direction) is a very meaningful story written by Waryam Singh Sandhu in 2014 and it reflects the situation of Punjab when no one dared to travel at night. It depicts how Hindus and Sikhs had started to be enemies with each other without understanding the reason. But at the end of the story they saved each other's lives. It shows that the harmony between the two communities still prevailed.<sup>21</sup> Another very interesting story written by Sandhu in 1998 is *Main Hun Teek Taak Han* (Now I am Well). This story reflects the life of common people who lived at their farmhouses. He has shown very ingeniously, how, on one hand terrorists, and on the other, police used to harass them. They were sandwiched between them. In his 1998 story *Parshanve* (The Shadows), again he has shown the real situation of Punjab when Sikh extremists killed a Hindu family in cold blood without any fault on their part. Waryam Sandhu's most popular story is his 1986 *Bhajjian Bahin*<sup>22</sup> (The Fractured Arms) and it offers a penetrating analysis of a poor peasant family which was crumbling under the weight of communal tensions resulting from the socio-cultural and political situation. In this story too, Hindus killed by the terrorists illustrates the very vulnerable condition of the Hindu community in a Punjab village in those days. Very famous female writer Sukhwant Kaur Maan in her 2004 story *Chadar Hethla Banda*<sup>23</sup> (A Man Under the Cover) has focus on the mobs of Delhi in November 1984. In this story, she demonstrates the catastrophe that struck a well-known tailor who lost his son and grandson in the anti-Sikh violence. His prestigious shop was burned by vicious groups in the name of patriotism. A similar kind of story *Antim Safar* (The Final Journey) was written by S. Balwant in 2005. This story also describes how the attackers burned houses of Sikhs after the assassination of Indira Gandhi.<sup>24</sup>

An anthology of short stories on the Punjab crisis were edited by Ninder Gill and Trilochan Jhande in 1986 under the title *Asin Jiunde, Asin Jagde* (We are Hearty and We are Alert), Most of the stories in this anthology were earlier published in Punjabi magazines and debated and discussed in various forums. Notable among others are *Sanjh* (Kinship) by Mohan Bhandari, *Virvan Vichon Jhankda Hanera*

(Darkness Peeping Through the Chinks), *Kakh Kan* (Straw) by Prem Gorkhi. The authors of these stories have imagined the blood-curdling events in Punjab as representing the psyche of the Punjabi people in an authentic manner.

Another book of short stories, *Nikkian Nikkian Gallan* (Petty Talks) by Darshan Singh completed in 1986 presents vignettes of day-to-day Punjabi life as lived in Madhya Pradesh.

As we know leaders of Punjab use religion to impress Sikh voters for their own selfish ends. The Akali Dal, a political organization of the Sikhs, has always taken the position that religion and politics are inseparable. It has become part of the Sikh ethos and Sikh psyche that religion is not safe unless it is defended through acquiring political power. It has always stood for a *Panthic* government i.e., government that serves the Sikh *panth* or community. But in the story by Atarjit named *Baba Punjab Singh* the main character in the story explored the politics of Akali Dal at the time of Punjab crisis in the following way:

Why are you dirtying the Guru's wisdom and politics,  
you big servants of the community (*panth*) ... Are you  
the Sikh 'payaras' we pray for during *Ardaas*...Do you  
always remember God's name or the seat of power?<sup>25</sup>

In order to strengthen the political situation, this kind of Akali politics not only limit people's faith in religion, but also give fuel to their divisive tendencies.

A similar situation is also depicted by Gurmail Madahad in his 1988 story *Dharti Lahu Luhan* (The Bleeding Earth). The writer believes that the Akali Dal was responsible for creating the Punjab problem because it did not stop militant activities at the right time. He writes

The Akalis could have done a lot. They could have told  
the people that they had no relation with the  
militants...They could have at least told them that 'goli  
sikka' (bullets as coins) are being submitted to  
Harmandir Sahib. It is because of their silence that  
militant powers got their full strength.

Baljinder Nasrali in his 1990 story *Surajwanshi*, (The Sun Dynast) explores the role of communist politics on such situations in Punjab. He observes that the Communist Party has two kinds of groups; the first group was in favor of Congress politics and they supported the Congress Party in Punjab at the time of elections for defeating BJP and Akali Dal and another group was against Congress policies on the Punjab problem due to ideological differences.

*Raat Di Khukh Vichla Suraj* (Sun in the Night Womb) was a story, written in 1987 by Baldev Singh, also blamed the self-centered attitude

of all political parties that created the problem. On the other hand, the story *Buddi Lumbadi ate Jangli Ghoda* (Old Fox and the Wild Horse) written by Jasvir Bhullar indicates how all political parties tried to use the Punjab crisis for their own selfish political gains rather than creating it. Prem Gorkhi in his story *Khunda* (Door Handle) and Ajit Kaur in her story *Na Maro* (Stop Killing) depicted the inhuman actions of police, CRPF, and all other government agencies against the common people of Punjab. This resulted in a situation where a large number of young men in the age group 18-22 years, fearing arrest, torture, and elimination in police custody, ran away from their homes and joined militant groups.

So, government agencies, political leaders and militant groups all tried to show concern about and defend human rights and values but unfortunately the ground reality was that all were only interested in exploiting human values and human rights as much as they could. During this period, if no one helped the police or government agencies, they immediately declared them terrorists and on the other side, if someone dared to oppose the policies of terrorists, they killed them in cold blood on the spot. These kinds of happenings have been depicted by Baldev Singh in his short story *Naagwal*, (Gordian Knot) and which shows the real situation facing the common man in Punjab within these two perspectives. Another kind of story is *Dakkhana Khas* (Special Post Office) penned by a well-known Punjabi writer Baljinder Nasralli. This story illustrates how the militant movement was diverting away from its original aims, with the increase in mass killings.

Sarvmeet's story *Oupari Sheh* (Strange/Alien Thing) written in 1986, demonstrates how the lives of ordinary people were affected by the advent of militant groups in their pursuit of power. In this story, the author describes how the arrival of militancy created terror for the ordinary people. The character Channa becomes a militant because of financial troubles at home. He used to get his shoes made from the cobbler Hansoo but after becoming a militant, he forcefully stops Hansoo from smoking cigarettes, creating a high level of tension. Because of the fear of militancy, Hansoo can't even fulfill his small need for smoking cigarettes. As the story unfolds, we come to know of the terror associated with rising militancy in the village, especially as the militants had commanded people of one community to leave the village. From this, we also come to know the politics of militants wherein by trying to make Hindus leave, they are trying to establish 'Sikh Raj' or Khalistan here. The writer depicts this situation ingeniously as follows:

The advertisement poster on the shop of Chitta seemed like a Godly command. The Hindus of the village are warned that they need to leave the village within two days, and the failure of this would be rectified. In the village, those who help the children of Chandu will be

dealt with just like Singh traitors have been handled. Under this, there was a signature in broken handwriting - 'Leftenant General Charanjit Singh Channa' and the stamp of his self-made force.

In this way, the author is able to show the impact on the mental state of Hansoo as the situation changes, along with that of the ordinary man. The success of militancy and establishment of Khalistan is represented as: 'Yes, the rule can be anything, of anyone, but people's shoes will keep being worn and torn.' The writer doesn't nurture the illusion of curating the young people involved in the militant struggle as revolutionary protagonists, instead, in opposition to this, he sharply satirizes the exploitative character of the militants' status quo.

In the story by Waryam Sandhu (2014) *Parshanwe* (Shadows) the seeds of the Punjab problem were first sown due to multi-directional factors emerging and operating during the Partition of India and these only got worse in the post-partition period.

Similarly, Gurbachan Singh Bhullar's 1989 story *Ki Jana Mae Kon* (Who Knows Who I Am) signals a movement towards lack of humanity in human beings because of the communal feelings being spread by militants.

A very sensitive Punjabi writer Prem Parkash's two stories deserve a particular mention here. His 1988 story *Satwanti* depicts the mental condition of a woman named *Satwanti* who lost her children and husband in the Delhi violence and is also raped by her assailants. His other story also written in 1988 entitled *Eh Oh Jasbir Nahin* (He is Not That Jasbir) portrays the changing friendship between Hindu and Sikh boys. In a very creative manner, the writer depicts how the attitude of Hari changed towards Jasbir after he joined the militant movement after some time. Jasbir, however, was also scared of Hari in case he called the police to arrest him.

## Conclusion

We may conclude with the remark that Punjabi literature clearly reflected the social, cultural and political realism prevailing in Punjab between 1984 and 1995. Not only have the writers pictured the blood-curdling realities of the Punjab, but also advocated, their rightful solutions which were also the demands of common people of Punjab in those days. This paper has provided the most significant but still only a bird's eye view of Punjabi literature reflecting the real situation of Punjab and hopefully whetted the readers' appetite to go to the original novels and stories.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> E.H. Carr (1961) *What is History*, p. 29.
- <sup>2</sup> Singh, A. (197). The Punjabi Scene: The Pangs of a Wounded Psyche. *Indian Literature*, pp. 164-174.
- <sup>3</sup> Jaswant Zafar, *Do Sahan Vichkaar*, p. 19.
- <sup>4</sup> Deed, J. (2002). *Bache Ton Dardi Kavita*. Mohali: Unistar Books Publisher.
- <sup>5</sup> Mehboob, H. S. (1990). *Jhana Di Raat*. Amritsar: Singh Brothers.
- <sup>6</sup> Harinder Singh Mehboob, *Jhana di Raat*, p. 786.
- <sup>7</sup> Jagtar. (2005). *Anmuk Safar*. Ludhiana: Chetna Parkashan.
- <sup>8</sup> Jagtar. (2014). *Har Mod te Saleeban*. Ludhiana: Chetna Parkashan.
- <sup>9</sup> Sukhpal. (2007). *Rehan Kathon Nahin*. Chandigarh: Lokgeet Parkashan.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.
- <sup>11</sup> Arthur Victor's poem *Main Punjab Han*, in his book *Samain Da Sach*, p. 55.
- <sup>12</sup> Amarjit Chadan. (2017). *Unni Sou Churasi*. Ludhiana: Chetna Parkashan.
- <sup>13</sup> Punni, A. S. (1988). Punjabi Scene: Two Types. *Indian Literature*, 104-109.
- <sup>14</sup> Braham Jagdish Singh, *Punjabi Novels in 1886- Imaging the Hurt Conscience*, p. 96.
- <sup>15</sup> Nasrali, B. (2014). *Veehvi Sadi Di Akhri Katha*. Ludhiana: Chetna Parkashan.
- <sup>16</sup> Meet, M. S. (1990). *Taftish*. Sirhind: Lokgeet Parkashan.
- <sup>17</sup> Meet, M.S. (2014). *Katehra*. Faridkot Meet: People's Forum.
- <sup>18</sup> Narinder Gill, *Punjab Eighty-Four*, p. 184.
- <sup>19</sup> Gill, N. *Dehshat de Dinan* . Lokgeet Parkashan: Chandigarh.
- <sup>20</sup> Asin Jeounde Asin Jagde, pp. 161-162.
- <sup>21</sup> Sandhu, W. S. (2014). *Chuthi Koot*. Ludhiana: Chetna Parkashan.
- <sup>22</sup> Sandhu, W. S. (1987). *Bhajjiyan Bahin*. Ludhiana: Lahore Book Shop.
- <sup>23</sup> Maan, S. K. (2004). *Chadar Hethla Banda*. Chetna Parkashan: Ludhiana.
- <sup>24</sup> Jagtar, D., Brar, J., & Maan, M. (2005). *Patharann te Turde Lok*. Ludhiana: Chetna Parkashan.
- <sup>25</sup> Atarjit *Baba Punjab Singh*, p. 131.