Kisan Protests in Punjab 1907-2021: A Literary Lineage of Resistance

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In a close and contextual reading, this paper examines selected literature - chiefly poetry - produced in response to different peasant struggles in Punjab from 1907 to the current farmers' protest. In so doing, it demonstrates how, informed by the politics of resistance and social justice, writers record and make social history - of protest, resilience, and solidarity - available to the masses. Drawing from the folk, the sacred, the political, the imaginary, and the natural worlds, and above all, the lived experiences, they weave together the personal and the sociopolitical through vivid narratives that, rising above petty differences and vested interests, try to strike a chord in readers, listeners, and viewers. Punjabi literature - in particular, poetry - sutures together politics and aesthetics and, to this end, we argue that its performative nature and its performance makes poetry a mainstay of agitations.

The rich and the exploiter must know
If the establishment is on their side
History is on ours.[1]
[Piara Singh 'Sehrai']

Introduction

In *A History of Punjabi Literature*, Sant Singh Sekhon and Kartar Singh Duggal have noted that the folk songs of Punjab 'tell the tales of battles and brave warriors, describe festivals and fairs, …stories of the farmer, the large-hearted, and of the rains which are usually kind and of crops which seldom let the peasant down' (Sekhon and Duggal, 1992: 10-11). Whether exploring themes of romance and longing with lovers like *Heer Ranjha*, *Mirza Saheban*, and *Sohni Mahiwal* or highlighting the plight of peasants, folk songs help 'the people of Punjab to express their needs, their hopes, their aspirations…and provide a sort of catharsis for them' (Sekhon and Duggal 1992, 13). During various protest movements in Punjab, poetry and folk songs have been and continue to be recited or sung *en masse* strengthening accord and solidarity. Resistance and dissent have featured prominently in folk forms such as *qissas* [stories in verse], *vaars* [heroic odes and ballads] and *Jugni* [an old form of music] that are integral components of Punjabi literary tradition. The treatment of resistance as a subject

has led to iconic popular responses fusing the aesthetic with the political in response to workers, women, Dalits, or peasant movements.

Over the centuries, k*avishers* [troubadours], *dhadhis* [bardic singers] and other balladeers have recited long epic poems (*vaar* and *qissa*) or their shorter versions at gatherings. The tradition of reciting and singing verses in public spaces illustrates that 'the word and the music are inseparable' (Gargi, 1967: 54). Many ballads about war and strife that are celebrated today 'emerged as significant works of medieval Punjabi poetry' (Sekhon and Duggal, 1992: 91). With resistance as an essential characteristic, these forms have inspired Punjabi creative writers and enthralled readers and audiences. The idiom of Punjabi poetry, thus, is inextricably intertwined with politics of resistance and justice. This article draws attention to the unfolding of this lineage during different peasant movements from the early twentieth century to the current farmers' struggle. As a performative genre, poetry continues to be performed predominantly in public spheres by professional bards, poets, and others suturing together the political and the aesthetic - often with allusions to the religious. Such 'storytelling performances', argues Michael Nijhawan, 'remain important sites of knowledge production and aesthetic experience' (Nijhawan, 2006: 5).

This article does not analyze the anatomy of various farmers' agitations, controversial agrarian bills, laws, and acts introduced in colonial or postcolonial India, or interrogate the actions of the authorities - reprisal or censorship - to quash agrarian protests. Instead, it studies selected literary responses - mostly contemporaneous - that have specific peasant agitations as their focal points. In other words, we examine representations of agitations in poems, songs, short stories, and novels rather than the factors that led to different movements or their consequences. Also, in different genres, it is not the form but content that receives our attention. While the intent of this analysis is to focus primarily on the political, it is imperative to mention that Punjabi folklore infuses the aesthetics of Punjabi literature, as evident in the following discussion of creative responses to *kisan* movements. While the article does not elaborate on the plight of farmers, state violence and censorship, gender and caste issues, we acknowledge that these are significant components of the protests worthy of separate analysis.

Bookended by Prabhjot Parmar's analysis of '*Pagri Sambhal Jatta*' (1907) and the poetry written during the current farmers' protest, is Amandeep Kaur's close reading of literature that emerged during other peasants' movements, such as *Kirti-Kisan* and *Muzara*, for example. Various selections of poetry, short story, and novel considered issues affecting *muzaras* and the peasant movements in Punjab and Telangana. The treatment of *Muzara* Movement as a subject in Punjabi short story and novel has been somewhat limited. Only three writers - Santokh Singh Dhir, Navtej Singh, and Jaspal Mankhera - have explored this subject in some of their short stories. In the mid-twentieth century, several poets including Prabhjot Kaur and Mohan Singh, leaving aside the romantic and the

philosophical, wrote about peasant struggles and their economic exploitation. Gurcharan Rampuri who was based in Vancouver, wrote consistently about the have-nots and struggle against colonial and postcolonial concerns (Sekhon and Duggal, 1992: 191). It is no surprise, therefore, that many poets, song writers, and balladeers - at home and abroad - are writing about the current farmers' agitation.

Just before the Covid pandemic gripped the world, in his closing address delivered at the Amritsar Literature Festival on 27 Feb 2020, the Punjabi poet Surjit Patar stated: 'Reciting poetry in a way that each word is understood as intended is an art in itself but the larger process is the creative ideology behind the poem' (Tribune News Service, 2020). Poetic responses to the farmers' protest and the fusion of their aesthetics with religio-political symbols and imagery compel us to consider both the reading and singing of this poetry and its reception - where the visual and the aural are engaged and attentive - along with considering the 'creative ideology' that overtly positions itself with the oppressed, including those protesting at various sites. Therefore, the recent evocation of the anthem of resistance, '*Pagri Sambhal Jatta'* [Take Care of Your Honour, O Peasant] - first sung in March 1907 during the farmers' agitation against three colonial agrarian laws once again registers the celebrated commemoration of the political and the aesthetic.

'*Pagri Sambhal Jatta'*: An Anthem of Resistance

The 1907 agitation was begun with the efforts of Sardar Ajit Singh, Sardar Kishan Singh, and Lala Ghasita Ram; the two Singh's were Shaheed Bhagat Singh's uncle and father respectively and Ram was their trusted friend. Together the trio had formed the Bharat Mata Society [Mother India Society] to raise 'political consciousness' amongst people and to shake the roots of the British in India (Singh, 1984). Recalling the popularity of the 'historic poem' '*Pugree Sambhal Jatta*' read by Banke Dayal at the 'epoch making meeting in Lyallpur on 3 March 1907', S. Ajit Singh shares in his autobiography: [I]t was everywhere in the Punjab resounding the skies' (Singh, 1984). Clearly, the poem struck a chord with peasants and others, demonstrating the influence of verses that simultaneously mirror the plight of farmers and galvanize them into action. '*Pagri Sambhal Jatta*' [Save Your Honour, O Farmer] is arguably one of the most iconic poems on the condition of, and resistance by, Punjabi farmers; its titular refrain was also popularized in the 1960s through a song in S. Bhagat Singh's biopic, *Shaheed* [Martyr] (1965). The poem's repute is such that the 1907 agitation against the three colonial laws - Doab Bari Act, Punjab Land Alienation Act, and Punjab Land Colonization Act - is widely known as the *Pagri Sambhal Jatta* Movement, a befitting tribute to the power of poetry that is spoken or sung. The analogous evocation of the struggle against the three laws in 1907 and the current protests against the three acts is striking.[2] It is no surprise that the current farmers' protest saw the resurgence of this anthem of resistance.

'Punjab folk-songs and folk romances have been a perennial inspiration to poets of the soil' (Sekhon and Duggal, 1992: 15); Dayal, who was the editor of *Jhang Sayal*, was no exception. After the piercing imagery of destroyed crops, hungry and wailing children, and impoverished peasants exploited by landlords (lines 1-5), Dayal widened the scope from fields to the nation, equating 'Hind' [Hindustan] as a 'temple' and a peasant as its 'worshipper' (line 6). His usage of the figurative language shifts in line 9 from an evocation of the nation as a contained, sacred religio-architectural space to archetypes of folk romance. People at the gathering in Lyallpur, and subsequently, other listeners and readers, would have been familiar with the reference to *Heer Ranjha*. Drawing from Punjabi folklore to resonate with the kind of unequivocal love a peasant, and indeed all Hindustanis, needed to have for their land - like that of the legendary *Ranjha* had for *Heer* - Dayal urges: 'Bravely protect your country/ You are *Ranjha* and your country *Heer*' (line 9). Here, country is signified in gendered terms as a beloved. The feminization of the nation as mother or beloved is a common metaphor used in Indian literature. By 1907, the notion of '*Bharat Mata*' or Mother India was already well-established. Seemingly, the metaphor of *Heer* represents undying love for one's country - what Ajit Singh was aiming for through the peasant movement. Exhorting the assembly of people, Dayal's verse would have carried an embedded message that like *Ranjha*, they should be ready to die for the love of their *Heer* - their country. (Similar usage of *Heer* as land appears in Sehrai's work discussed later in the article).

Although Ranjha was killed by eating a poisoned *ladoo*, Dayal, deliberately or not, evokes reference to another folk hero and lover, Mirza, who was killed by the arrows of his beloved Saheban's brothers. 'Take an arrow on your chest' is the literal translation of *Seene te khaave teer* (line 6). In the context of the 1907 agitation, it is the peasant who is struck by the arrows of oppressive colonial laws that favoured the British and the native *zamindars*. Here, Dayal attempts to jolt the peasants out of their stupor by reminding them of their self-respect. Sardar Ajit Singh conceived of and led the 1907 movement and was instrumental in its spread to villages in Punjab; part of the success must be attributed to Dayal's poem. Furthermore, the agitation yielded results as 'all the three bills were cancelled' (Singh, 1984); peasants had successfully saved their honour. The parallel between the 1907 and current agitation is not lost on those familiar with *kisan* movements in colonial and postcolonial Punjab. In both, poetic responses have played a major role. The continuum of such a lineage was further strengthened in the 1920s by poetic responses composed during the coming together of the revolutionary and the peasant movements.

***Kirti Kaav* [Peasant Poetry]*:* Poetry of the *Kirti* Movement**[3]

After the mass movement of 1907, the political scene in Punjab was marked by the *Ghadar* Party and other revolutionary resistance events. In the late 1920s,

however, an attempt was made to establish a mass movement among the peasantry with the evolution of a distinct *Ghadar-Kirti* front, which eventually culminated in the formation of the *Kirti Kisan* Party (Singh, 1994; Josh, 1979; Alaxai, 2013).[4] In line with communist politics in the mid-1920s and with an intention of forming a united front of the *Kirtis* and *Kisans*, a monthly newspaper, *Kirti* (1926-40), served as an organ to disseminate their ideas, including through poetry. Most of the poems in the *Kirti* newspaper speak of the miserable and wretched condition of the *kirtis, as* evident from titles such as '*Dukhi Kirtian de Haarhe*', '*Kirti Dukhi Dhanad Sarkar Hathon*', '*Faryaad Dukhi Kirti*', and '*Ik Dukhi Mazdoor di Zindagi*'. The grief and misery laden poems and their titles are not surprising. In fact, some of these resonate with the poetry produced during the current farmers' protest movement that is discussed later in this article.

In addition to highlighting the shared miseries of peasants, poems published in *Kirti* also combine the normative directives for the welfare of the underprivileged and the oppressed with a moral critique of capitalism and imperialism in poems such as '*Piara Vatan*' [Beloved Country], '*Shaheedi Vaar*' [Ballad of Martyrs], '*Siharfi Fariyad Dukhi Kirti'* [Complaints of a Wretched Worker], and '*Kirti Kisan*'. Considering it a symbol of hope for peasants, Giani Hira Singh Dard presents the publication of *Kirti* as the rebirth of Lenin in Punjab:

> In Punjab, through a second incarnation
> Had come Lenin once again, thought *Kirti*.
> Now would be the rule of the workers
> He said, feeling frantic [Singh, 2017: 99].

This ideological thrust manifested in many poems published in the paper. For example, the following poem by Sharaf states:

> Into the pitch, we have stepped,
> We want you to remember the fact.
> What we reared ourselves, distributed it would be,
> In abundance would it be dispersed, *Kirti*, in garden of the world
> [Singh, 2017: 108].

Kirti Kaav reiterates the objective of the *Kirti* Party to establish a workers' government. Since the name of the party is *Kirti Kisan* Party, it makes a clear distinction between *kirti* and *kisan. Kirti* is synonymous with *mazdoor* [labourer]; however, in *Kirti Kaav*, the worker and the peasant, despite being defined as two distinct groups, begin to represent the same class. For example, Vidhata Singh Tir has titled his poem 'Kirti te Kisan' (The Worker and the Peasant) and yet the 'miserable *kirti'* in the poem is actually a peasant who produces 'heaps of grain' (Josh, 1979: 140).[5]

Despite being overtly political, *Kirti Kaav* is not banal or plainly prosaic for it combines fierce nationalism with a high degree of self-criticism, in the process

also revealing certain similarities with the Ghadar poetry. While the poets show their understanding of the colonial system of exploitation, there is also an unrelenting criticism of the local people for being passive. In '*Kirti-Kisano*', Munsha Singh '*Dukhi*' writes: Centuries have passed sleeping; why have you sunk into despair? / In to a state of stupor, you just keep sitting / the robbers have looted everything, leaving you penniless' (Singh, 2017: 536). Some of the poems, especially those by Firoz Din Sharaf, take the form of a conversation, wherein the worker and the capitalist address each other from their respective class positions, resulting in a call for action by overcoming religious divisions. Interestingly, peasant resistance and consciousness, in this phase, is closely tied to the national movement for independence. Thus, the poetry of the *Kirti* movement addresses - for the first time in Punjabi - the class divisions in a socialist idiom, which, later, persists in different forms in the Progressive and the *Muzara* movement.

Muzaras [Tenant Farmers] and *Biswedars* [Landlords] in PEPSU: Literary Responses to the *Muzara* Movement

Although it peaked during the 1940s and early 1950s, the origins of Patiala and East Punjab State Union - PEPSU *Muzara* Movement can be traced back to the Punjab Tenancy Act 1868 and later to the *Praja Mandal* [*People's Association*] Movement of the 1920s and the *Kirti Kisan* Party. With its slogan of 'land to the tiller', it was directed against the *biswedars* by those tenants who had lost their hereditary property rights, and now struggled for the ownership of land. It was a struggle against state repression, for exacting the amount of *batai* [share rent or share of produce] for the landlords, and a movement against the imposition of excessive land revenue which had higher rates in the princely states (Vaid, 2019; Alaxai, 2013; Mukherjee, 2004). Mukherjee argues that the main strategy of the *Muzara* movement 'remained a combination of refusal to pay *batai*, refusal to vacate lands and resist landlords' attempts at evictions etc., if necessary, by force' (Mukherjee, 2004: 242). This remained the broad pattern of the movement from roughly 1948 to 1952.

Jaswant Singh Kanwal's novel *Raat Baki Hai* (The Night is Still Here) is influenced by the *Muzara* Movement. In *Lok-Dushman* [The People's Enemy], Surinder Singh Narula, a contemporary of Kanwal, contextualizes the struggle as the dialectic of violence and non-violence.[6] Joginder Bahrla's emphasis also remained primarily on poetry. In terms of its tone and tenor, three distinct moods - anger, defiance, and hope - define the poetry of the *Muzara* Movement. Activist-poets like Sohan Singh Josh, Isar Singh Tamkot, Dharam Singh Fakkar, and Desraj Chajjali wrote overtly mobilizational and exhortatory verses to present the long history of the struggle and their revolutionary sensibility with an objective to create new, precise forms of expressing political demands. In his poem, '*Inquilabi Yodhia*' [The Revolutionary Warrior], Sohan Singh Josh, while exhibiting his uncompromising opposition to all forms of imperialism and

considering peasants, workers, and women as the revolutionary warriors, exhorts them to collectively bring an end to the *biswedari*.

Given the emergence of Communists as frontline activists in the movement and their inclination towards the armed struggle in the late 1940s, it is interesting to see many poems on Kishangarh - a location that became synonymous with heroism, struggle, defiance, and martyrdom. '*Saka Kishangarh*', a poem by Dharam Singh Fakkar, chronicles the incident at Kishangarh. By contextualizing it in the broader perspective of national independence, it also constitutes resistance to the culture of tyranny advocated by the British. Elsewhere he points out:

> 'Kishengarh does not glorify any single individual or event, but it represents the collective effort and sacrifice of every man, woman and all inhabitants, irrespective of caste and creed over several generations' [Fakkar, 1940: 1].

Poems such as '*Vithia Kishangarh*', '*Kishangarh Goli Kand*' and '*Gatha Kishangarh*' also glorify the heroism and sacrifice of the villagers. The sacrificing heroes, frequently delineated as victims of the *biswedari* system, possess the capacity to liberate the collective consciousness of the *Muzaras* from fear and agony. In 'Gatha Kishangarh', the narrator, while extolling the role of the Lal Party, challenges the enemy to go back from Kishangarh:

> This land is our mother, and we are her sons
> We won't leave our land, even if the enemy
> comes in like a flood [Alaxai, 2013: 202].

Such poems often do not conform to formal literary conventions; instead, they tend to focus more on the direct enunciation of their political anger and their ideological principles, bordering on rhetoric and passionate sloganeering.

The history of the *Muzara* Movement and the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) also intertwines mainly because of their investment in the communist ideal. Progressive poets like Mohan Singh, Santokh Singh Dhir, and Piara Singh Sehrai brought the *Muzara* Movement in literature through their *vaars* and ballads. Mohan Singh exhibits both romantic and progressive affiliations in his poetry. The fact that Dhir and Sehrai's poems were sung and recited at rallies organized by the party[7] testify to the richness and accessibility of their poetry. Four themes typify the *Muzara* poetry: a) it seeks to construct a literary expression grounded in Marxist understanding; b) it invokes regional and folk traditions to connect with the common people; c) there is a general call to revolt and to expose the feudal and imperialist exploitation; and d) a graphic delineation of the sufferings of the tenants in PEPSU and reaffirmation of their right to the land. The *Muzara* poetry consciously combines the technique of socialist realism and revolutionary romanticism to represent the movement as a collective struggle. Most of these poems invariably end with the hope to

establish the rule of the workers or with a call to join the other protestors or by linking resistance movements of one region with those of others. For example, Mohan Singh writes, 'Comrades, o comrades/ the world will bow down to the labour' (Chandan, 1979: 22); similarly, Sehrai proclaims his belief in 'labour that will change the face of Earth' (Chandan, 1979: 58), thereby fostering solidarity and providing a firm basis for collective action.

Amarjit Chandan's edited collection of poems, *Telangana Tu Karwat Lai* (Chandan, 1979), includes poems written between 1948-1970 that incorporate some of the tenets of the Telangana and the *Muzara* movement: the call for advocating armed rebellion, the challenge of stopping state violence, and the redefining of democratic principles. Mohan Singh's ballad, 'Gajjan Singh' published in 1954 (Chandan, 1979), set in the metre and tone of 'Jagga Jamiyan'[8] and a representative of class consciousness, begins by framing itself within the voice of the folk, which is further associated with the ordinary lives of the peasants to eventually carry the message of unity, freedom, and revolution to the *Muzaras.* It is also quite literally the voice of nature, which echoes through the depiction of agricultural operations of the peasants in sync with the cyclicality of the Punjabi calendar, reminding readers, that life will be renewed:

> As came the season of spring, said the wrinkled Gajjan Singh,
> Let's gather the seeds for the sugarcane.
> Comrades, o comrades!
> Why should we look other's hands in vain?
> Here comes the Spring, here comes the hope [Chandan, 1979: 15].

The incantatory quality of the verse 'comrades, o comrades' in every stanza becomes both an exhortation and a challenge woven in musically. Here, the image of the peasant, like most other poems on the *Muzara* movement, is the image of the peasant in action which also determines the discourse of protest in the *Muzara* poetry. In the second half of the poem, the narrator relays a balladic narrative of protest and the desire of tenants for laying claim to the land in terse and truculent words: 'Comrades, o comrades! / the tenants now demand for the lands' (Chandan, 1979: 15). The poem is replete with vegetal and floral motifs reinforced by vivid colour imagery, predominantly red and green, thereby indicating a communist idiom with agrarian hues.

Dhir's titular poem, '*Telangana Tu Karwat Lai*', (1971) is a direct call to arms, where the poet employs repetition and rhetoric of resistance to incite the people to revolt. It has larger implications in the sense that it expands the narrative through a parallel reference to Telangana and Kishangarh to include *Gaya* and *Kapilvastu* as metaphors of non-violence, to both actively engage in the historical process of struggle against capitalism and to eventually reject non-violence as a recourse to counter the systemic violence perpetrated by capitalists and feudal lords. While tyranny is an abstract concept, its execution has material and physical consequences, which Dhir demonstrates through its personification:

> Violence dances in the streets
> In the town of Kapilvastu
> Tyranny is thriving
> In the palaces of Rishi Gautam [Chandan, 1979: 29].

At the centre of the poem lies the idea that violence is the force of capital visited upon the people to create conditions of precarity. Dhir uses graphic imagery to describe the process by which the capitalists consume the lives of common people and defy the very notion of non-violence that Buddha had preached. In a system where the rich have 'killed the workers in the mills' or favoured 'the eviction of the peasants' and raised 'illegal taxes', making them poor and powerless, non-violence is not an option for the common people; rather, the poet imagines the ultimate political act to be the capture of power and its deployment on behalf of the oppressed (Chandan, 1979: 29-30). The militant tone and political inference make many of the poems on the *Muzara* Movement strikingly similar. For example, Sehrai's long poem, '*Telangana di Vaar*', riding on the warrior identity, chronicles the struggle of peasants in the Telangana region. It shares thematic similarity with Mohan Singh's '*Mangali*' and '*Gajjan Singh*' and Dhir's '*Boli*'. All three poems not only eulogize the guerrilla warfare tactics adopted by the peasants but also transcend temporal and geographical borders to show the interconnectedness of all those who fight for justice and land.

The language used in the ballads and *vaars* provides a fascinating insight into how these poets imagine the *Muzara* struggle. They use it to legitimize and glorify the contemporary resistance and its participants; in so doing, they construct a warrior identity, which is rooted in the cultural and religious history of Punjab. For example, Giani Bachan Singh Bakshiwala, in '*Vithia Kishangarh*', equates the strength of *Muzaras* 'with the power of Dashmesh/ who made the sparrows fight hawks' (Alaxai, 2013: 198). Similarly, the evocation of the martial tradition of Guru Gobind Singh in 'Telangana di Vaar' takes the form of a call for action: 'that other efforts no more will benefit/ people take recourse to sword' (Chandan, 1979: 47). Later in the poem, marked by a highly emotive theatricality Sehrai employs the metaphor of Heer, extolling the peasants' victory over the land:

> The *Kheras* had thrown Ranjha out, snatching the land Heer
> The world has changed today; pleading turned into defiance.
> The cowherd is reunited with Heer, the sword in hand of
> oppressor has fallen
> The sons of Earth have become *sardars* of the land again
> [Chandan, 1979: 52].

Here land and woman become synonymous. Interestingly, while the reference to Heer enables us to discern the patriarchy of the medieval state, she is dissociated from her struggle and equated with land which must be mastered.

The poets also tend to idealize traditional peasant farming as a 'natural' way of life and declare their unflinching faith in the invincibility of socialism.

Jaswant Singh Kanwal's *Raat Baaki Hai* [The Night is Still Here, 2014] set against the backdrop of the *Muzara* movement tells the story of Charan, whose hopes are dashed after he fails to secure a job on completion of his education, but later, at the behest of his friend, he joins the *Muzara* movement. The novel also weaves together a story of love and revolution focusing on the potential and dangers of love through desire, distraction, and sacrifice. Through Raj and Charan's relationship, the novelist foregrounds the idea that romance is widely incompatible with true devotion to the revolutionary cause and that the victory of love is not possible unless a revolutionary transformation is experienced in the society.

Kanwal approaches the *Muzara* agitation from a particular perspective. Through the transformation of Baba Karam Singh from a Ghadar activist to an Akali worker to a Communist revolutionary, he situates the struggle of *Muzaras* in historical continuity with the other protest movements in Punjab. His portrait of the struggle is highly idealistic, revealing how he feels the economic and the social transformation can be achieved. The postcolonial period in which it is written affects the manner in which the agrarian question is framed in the novel. Also, the representation of other *Muzaras* is partly achieved through a small re-creation of their dialogue when they participate in the meetings of *Kisan Sabhas* or protests against the *biswedars.* However, their understanding of the doctrine of revolution is very uncritical and cosmetic, as exemplified by Veeru's comment when the villagers gather to repair the breach in the riverbank to prevent flooding of their homes:

> We don't care that our houses have collapsed. We can make a living by putting up small shacks, but never abandon our claims for the land. These *Jagirdars* must be reminded of the Russian Revolution, and how the feudalism came to an end there. [Kanwal, 2014: 118]

The novel spells out a political programme for the restoration of a symbiotic relationship between the land and the peasants.

Kanwal's understanding of agrarian relations is tied to his conviction in salvation through socialist doctrine. His strength as well as weakness stems from this fervent belief. In the process of communicating the socialist ideal of the rule of the workers or distribution of land to the *Muzaras,* he turns increasingly dogmatic and rhetorical. He shows how his writing graft the omniscient narrative voice, which clearly has a conscious moral purpose, into the thought process of the *Muzaras,* even while the *Muzaras'* thoughts are imbued with party jargon. The ending of the novel where Charan goes to meet Raj also obscures some parts of the novel's representation of the peasant. However, it does celebrate the power of the people and includes collective resistance as a potential solution to the problems of injustice, clearly displaying traces of a theological

faith in the advent of a utopian communist society For example, the one-page-long last chapter is interestingly titled '*Vikas-Dhara*' and ends on an optimistic note: 'the red flags ripped apart the blue sky and the old banyan tree was waiting for a last push to fall into the pond.' (Kanwal, 2014: 264).

Like Kanwal's novel, his selected short stories also foreground the socialist and Marxist ideal in their representation of the *Muzara* movement. In the eponymous short story from his collection, *Navin Rut* [The New Season, 1949], Navtej Singh presents the state of close family relations left behind after their protestor son is put into the prison immediately after independence for supporting the *Muzaras.* Through Ishar Kaur's assertion of her right to the land, the story touches upon the question of women's land rights, albeit briefly. When the other protestors arrive at Sewa Singh's fields to kick off collective farming as an act of class solidarity, Ishar Kaur, initially misunderstanding them to be hirelings of the *vadda sardar* (big landlord), screams in fear, 'They have come to grab my land. Those devils sent by the *vadda Sardar.* A Single woman's land...' (Singh, 2003: 275). However, the voice of *meri bhaun* (my land) soon turns into a collective *saadi bhaun* (our land) as the protestors celebrate the onset of the new season, metaphorically conveyed through both their decisions to collectively plough the field and to challenge the might of the *biswedar*.

The plot of Dhir's story, '*Daaku*' (The Bandits) develops through a comparison between the idyllic village of the past and the present state of wretchedness, and this indulgence seems to regulate their future hopes as well. The system which separates this dreaming of an idyllic future from the present state is the *biswedari*, which has eaten up all the resources, leaving the villagers mired in desolation, poverty and *ujaad* (waste). Dhir consciously casts the symbol of sickle in a stereotypical and romantic frame: 'the red fragments of iron formed sickles like the second moon night. The razor-sharp rasp sharpened the edges of those sickles. Small red ambers spread out of it.' (Dhir, 1950: 58). Jaspal Mankhera's short story '*Khataas*' [Sourness] focuses on the deteriorating conditions of the peasants to conclude how these *Muzara*-turned-owners are reduced back to being *Muzaras* in an agricultural system driven by capitalism, leading to debt and suicides. Through Gamdoor's retrospection on his family history, the author tends to offer a new perspective wherein the very idea that land distribution will bring prosperity and affluence to peasants and workers is presented as illusory and long lost.

After the decline of the *Muzara* movement there are no other noteworthy political or social movements having their own distinct character until the Naxalite movement in the late 1960s. Though some small agrarian movements like the anti-levy betterment tax *morcha* (1959) and demands for land to the *abadkars* arise, they remain limited in their scope and on their influence on literature. The anti-levy movement lasted for two months and writers like Kanwal were arrested for supporting and participating in it; not surprisingly, there is hardly any literature related to it. His novel *Bhavani* is set in the backdrop of a *kisan morcha* against the imposition of illegal taxes; it does not

offer much detail about the nature or location of the *morcha* and largely ignores the history that had led to it. Dhir's story '*Sipahi*' foregrounds both the struggle of members of the *kisan sabhas* to gather popular support as they march from village to village to protest against the betterment levy, and their crisis to stay relevant in village politics in the wake of rise of other factions. This village-to-village connection, seen earlier in the 1907 agitation, has emerged as a hallmark of the current farmers' protest.

Kalay Kanoon Te Kisan Morcha [Three 'Black Laws' and the Farmers' Protest][9]

The farmers' protest that had been taking place by the roadside and railway lines in Punjab for two months, moved to the borders of Delhi on 25 November 2020. Enroute, the farmers were stopped by heavy roadblocks and water cannons - used during one of the coldest winters experienced in North India. Undaunted, the farmers overcame all obstacles to reach the borders of the national capital Delhi; however, the city was closed to them. The restrictions imposed on the protesting farmers by the state has resulted in farmers settling to protest along the border of the nation's capital.[10] In so doing, they have transformed sections of busy national highways into public spheres where performance of resistance offers a powerful visual and sonic imagery. The reconfigured border - a transformative space, a threshold, an entry point - as 'a site of adjacency' with 'bodies on the line' (Butler, 2015) can be interpreted in multiple ways: denial of access - to the capital and to the government, denial of rights, discrimination against the farmers, and people's defiance against oppression are a few themes that have found their way into performances of rhythmic slogans, songs, and agit-prop poetry. Many of the well-known Punjabi poets and singer-songwriters have also demonstrated their support through poetry and performance at various protest sites and online. Amateur writers too have composed or shared couplets or short poems that speak of the farmers' determination and the government's apathy. Poetry and songs, therefore, offer a telling commentary of this protest movement. The border seems to have morphed into an extended settlement seeking refuge from, and demonstrating resistance to, state violence as a collective that has adopted the peaceful path of non-violence.

Although the intersectionality of class, caste, gender, and political affiliations - at times obvious and at others, subtle - reveals different divisions and groups, nevertheless, the farmers' protest has emerged as a united front, an alliance during a highly divisive time - both socially and politically. Attendant to these, the poetry produced during the last eight months uses intertextual figurative language reflecting the importance of unity and a cohesive effort. The resistance to the three laws is a people's movement with groundswell support witnessed live on television and through social media. The intervention of technology differentiates the current movement from the previous agitations, as it enables an almost instantaneous dissemination of the protest and related

creative responses at an unprecedented level. To this end, websites and apps have facilitated the collecting and sharing of verses and songs that are presented live at protest sites or recorded elsewhere; either way, their circulation has facilitated unparalleled access - often in real time - to the poetry of resistance and poetry of critique. In fact, people have used the internet as a tool of resistance, pushing the boundaries of the protest far beyond the heavily barricaded, razor wired, and nail studded borders that stop protestors from entering Delhi. Illuminating the hard and sometimes dangerous work that is farming, Swami Antar Neerav addresses the state in and as 'O Bhai' [Brother/Man]: 'Kinnow [hybrid mandarin] /grows on thorny trees / ripens in winters /who are you scaring?' (Neerav in Gill, 2020). Using horticultural and seasonal imagery, Neerav juxtaposes the obstacles the state had installed and the hardships - sharp nails and bitter cold - that many farmers regularly endure. The shocking acts of state restriction and violence find references in various responses, comparing the protest sites to the strife-ridden national borders between India and Pakistan and, in turn, highlight the harsh treatment of citizens in their own country. Placing the threatened democratic rights and similar articulations under a magnifying lens, some comparative references draw parallels with cruelties perpetrated by the British during the colonial rule. However, it is the recurrent hagiographical evocation of the Ninth and Tenth Sikh Gurus - their resistance to the atrocities committed by the then Mughal rulers - that offers models of faith-based resolve and defiance against injustice. The narrative of martyrdom and sacrifice - commemorated by most Sikhs daily in the text of *Ardas* [Prayer] - elevates farmers as warriors who, like their Gurus, are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice. One of the rhythmic protest slogans, *Jittangay ya Marangay* [Victory or Death], personifies the resistance and succinctly sums up the ideology of consummate commitment to sacrifice in the name of the cause.

The performative fusion of the contemporary with the historical and the textual with the verbal and visual has created a new corpus of poetry that is no longer limited to the printed text or social gatherings. Its performance and the immediate distribution of these performances via social media bolsters the indefatigable spirit - *Chardi Kala* [High Morale] of the protestors (Sikhs and non-Sikhs). 'The determination never to give in,' contends Khushwant Singh, 'came to be deeply rooted in the Sikh psyche; even in adversity, they were exhorted to remain in buoyant spirits - chardhi kala' (Khushwant Singh, 2018: 31). Considered as a source of moral and spiritual sustenance, Chardi Kala nurtures the unrelenting spirit of the farmers against a government that is unmoved by their demands or plight. Satinder Sartaj captures this spirit: 'Come see the high spirits / Our mothers stand sentinel to protect / They won't be defeated easily / Tyrant, your tyranny will not be suffered / Look, they gather courage again / This is what is Chardi Kala' (SagaHits, 2020). Perhaps, Chardi Kala is instrumental in also dealing with the extremes of weather that Mother

Nature has and will send - fierce dust storms, searing heat, heavy monsoons, and bitter cold.

Whereas literacy has traditionally been the preserve of the upper caste and upper class, oral traditions of poetry and, more recently, mass literacy movements have enabled most people from all strata of society to have access to the written word. The corpus of poetry produced in the last eight months crosses the divides of religion, region, geographies, gender, caste, and class. This section of the article considers an assortment of poems and songs whose subject ranges from the hard-working *kirti*, resistance and self-respect, youth's commitment, apathy of the government - often represented as Delhi, to political ideology and social issues and verses articulating different aspects of farmers' protest. As mentioned previously, the focus is on the power of the word, not the form. Through poetry, artists register textual and verbal modes of protest against state violence inflicted on farmers. Poetry and song emerge as manifestations of social and political commitments of poets-song writers that compel them to write and share the experiences witnessed in person or viewed on a live broadcast or recording. Unlike other literary forms, Punjabi poetry's reach beyond the confines of high-brow literary audience is obvious in the popularity and reciting, singing, and quoting of couplets from *Heer*, *Mirza*, or *Dulla*; or sharing the verses of Shiv Kumar Batalvi, Amrita Pritam, Lal Singh Dil, or Paash.

A scrutiny of the creative responses - oral, textual, and visual - produced during the current protest reveals that this vast corpus recorded in print, audio, and digital text, image, and video, in addition to voicing emotions and providing critique through different modes, has emerged as depositories of people's history. As well, these echo the literature produced during previous agrarian movements discussed above. Many of the creative writers hail from farming communities, living and/or observing the precarity, prosperity, and poverty of agrarian life. 'First and foremost, I am a farmer. I have not forgotten this, and I will never forget this,' said Babbu Maan during his visit to the protest site at Gazipur Border (PTI, 2020). However, to think that responses have not come from non-farmers would be erroneous; several poets who do not have direct connections to farming and/or reside in urban areas or live abroad in the Punjabi diaspora have written emotive verses encapsulating the condition of farmers, the protest, and other subjects; some responses have come from Pakistan. Dalits, Jatts, Punjabis, non-Punjabis, women, men, young and old from different faiths have responded. The list consists of both established and emerging poets. However, poems produced in their thousands are not just Punjab focused - seeking a hegemonic Punjabi nationalism - but rise above differences and divisions to address issues related to *kisan* and *kirsani* [farming]. Most of the poems under consideration are from Gurbhajan Gill's online compilation of hundreds of poems, *Farmers Challenge the Ruler: Vol 1-13* (Gill, 2020). The poems in this collection are strikingly uniform in their subject matter even

though their form and length vary - for example, formal poems following a rhythmic pattern, poems in blank verse, and songs in rhyming couplets.

In 'Dedicated to the Farmers' Movement', Manpreet Tiwana focuses on the reawakened sons of the soil who, upon seeing 'opposing narrative', have 'woken up' to show how attuned they are to the struggle [Tiwana in Gill, 2020]. Like several other poems, its speaker is the collective voice of the farmers. 'Sown in the fields are not crops, but our fate' ascribes the abstract – fate - tactility through the act of sowing seeds (and harvesting crops). The twinning of crops and farmers' fate underpins not just financial security but the lurking threat of failure, mounting debts and possible suicide. It is important to point out that '90 percent of India's farmers can't cover the basic costs of fertilizer, seeds, pesticide and other equipment' (Shivji in Gill, 2020). The increasing costs of production have 'squeezed incomes of farmers so much that basically they are being forced to commit suicide' (Shivji in Gill, 2020). Framed against farmer suicides, the metaphor of 'fate sown in the field' gains a profoundly sad meaning. To this end, 'Suicide Note' a quartet composed by Amarjit Singh Rai Advocate draws attention to farmers' suicide by firmly situating it in the protest site through a stand-alone opening line, '(At Tikri Border)'. He presents the subjugated peasant as a figure of resistance who exercises his agency to take his own life to sustain the movement, as oil is needed for a flame, blood is needed to keep alive the movement:

> 'Peasant powerless
> Modi arrogant.
> To keep the flame burning
> oil of blood is needed.' [Rai in Gill, 2020]

Drawing attention to a life-taking menace in Punjab - drugs - Manjit Tiwana's 'Dedicated to the Farmers' Movement' together addresses both the farmers' protest and drug usage among youth. [Tiwana in Gill, 2020] The poem acquires a level of militant defiance albeit with a cautionary tone. The reawakened youth who had been intoxicated under the influence of drugs, 'like hawks will strike with their claws' infusing the movement with strength and security. In a similar fashion, Harmeet Vidyarthi showcases the responsibility that Punjabi youth have demonstrated. The speaker of his poem, 'Determination of Sons of the Soil', addresses Delhi - synonymous with government: 'After a long time / careless youths of Punjab have come with care / with their elders not in suitcases [carrying photographs when migrating abroad] / but seated on trolleys'. Respecting their elders, standing in support are the youth who 'the news channels defame as addicts, lazy, and absconders' (Vidyarti in Gill, 2020). Even though Punjab is struggling with the menace of drug addiction[11] with the bulk of cases among 15-35 years-old males and children as young as nine 'hooked to drugs' (Verma, 2017), the farmers' protest poetry has shifted the spotlight on hardworking, committed, and good 'sons of the soil' who are often tarred with the same brush as the addicts. Vidyarthi continues to paint a comparative picture

with reference to 'those who were dancing to the music of DJs' provocative numbers / are now dancing on the arrows laid by you [government]'. Like Swami Neerav and others, Vidyarthi alludes to the brutal curtailing of the protest by the Modi Government with sharpened iron bars and nails specially cemented into the road to prevent farmers' entry into Delhi. Poetry, thus, not only provides a critique, its imagery and metaphors also record specific acts of obstruction, intimidation, and reprisal by the state. The sons of the soil, as Vidyarthi points out, unfazed by such horrific acts, continue their protest with determination.

The assemblage of socio-religious imagery and metaphors in several poems, gesture towards a tyrannical and violent past against which the ordinary and the oppressed - often represented as meek sparrows - are transformed into warriors who fight with hawk-like ferocity. These performative texts link the past and the present to reaffirm the notion of courage and sacrifice rooted in Sikh history. In a short rhythmic poem of three stanzas, Bedi Mirpuri captures the mood of defiance at the farmers' protest on the borders of Delhi:

> We are not tired, nor will we tire
> Listen carefully, O Government!
> We will uproot you. [Mirpuri in Gill, 2020]

The collective pronoun 'We' represents people's power in a democracy; it clearly positions the collective voice of farmers as the speaker of the poem; a collective that locates its defiance in allusions to Sikh history. The unwavering faith in the success of the agitation is underpinned by the indomitable Chardi Kala to issue a cautionary note of inevitable defeat to the adversary. In the next stanza, the steadfast resolve of the unfatigued speaker-farmer directly references the Tenth Sikh Guru:

> We are the hawks of the Tenth Guru [Guru Gobind Singh]
> taking you in talons we will soar away. [Mirpuri in Gill, 2020]

Ostensibly, written originally as a voice of Punjabi farmers - most of whom are Sikhs - Mirpuri's verse emerges as a representative voice of *all* farmers protesting at the borders along Delhi or indeed at other sites across India. Unlike Banke Dayal ('*Pagri Sambal Jatta*'), who exhorted peasants to shake off their 'languor', Mirpuri acquaints us with the farmers' tenacious resolve to hold fast and not 'return home'. Vidyarthi too makes a similar point while addressing Delhi: 'You hoped that / after crying [protesting] at your threshold for a few days / we will return home'. The avian imagery of the hawk with its powerful talons is beforehand awash in religio-spiritual narrative, reinvigorating the reader/listener with the courage needed to carry on the protest. Guru Gobind Singh, also referred to as '*Chitteyan Baazanwala'* [Keeper of White Hawks], is often depicted in paintings carrying a white hawk. Emblematic of resilience, courage, and tenacity, the hawk stands as a powerful symbol in Sikhism; more importantly because 'it is identified as the bearer of the Guru's spirit, exhorting the Sikhs to hold fast during times of oppression' (Fenech and McLeod, 2014:

149). In addition to Mirpuri and Tiwana, several other poets draw from the Sikh/Punjabi religio-cultural source and iconography to underscore the transformation of the meek into the mighty; in other words, cautioning the rulers not to underestimate the farmers.

Similarly, establishing a link between the historic and the contemporary in 'Power of Hands', Gurdish Kaur Grewal's references to, among others, Banda Singh Bahadur 'making peasants owners of land' or 'Guru Arjun fighting tyranny with immense patience' lead the reader to the unity of farmers that is informed by struggle for just cause with patience:

> 'In the struggle are
> farmers and traders too
> labourers and writers too
> villagers and city dwellers too
> Hindus and Muslims too
> Sikhs and Christian too'. [Grewal in Gill, 2020]

After other references to the diversity of age, gender, and geography, Grewal focuses on unity-in-strength trope that carries with it the power to exact change and can 'topple /any tyrant ruler's throne.' In her *ghazal* of seven couplets, 'You will Regret for Centuries', Grewal forewarns the establishment on several fronts. If the opening couplet directly warns against encouraging corporatization: 'If you give wings to capitalism / You will definitely regret it for centuries' then the fifth one homes-in on political investment in communalization: 'People of all religions have come together / How will you now light the fires of hatred?' (Kaur in Gill, 2020). In a similar vein, Davi Davinder Kaur directly addresses the crop of wheat in a lyrical poem: '*Kanke ni kanke, tu reh kirti di banke*', underscoring that it is the farmer that nurtures the crop, not the corporate.

Replete with sensory imagery, Karamjit Kaur Kishanwal's poem '*Att da Annt*' [End of Atrocities], engages repeatedly the visual, tactile, aural, and gustatory to highlight the voices of farmers against the treachery of tyrannical leaders:

> To end atrocities
> it is necessary to awaken self-respect
> we've realized
> those mocking our existence
> are not leaders
> and sugar-coated
> poisoned words of consolation can form blisters on our tongues',
> [Kishanwal in Gill, 2020].

Delhi's historical and contemporary association with struggles makes it a palimpsest on which yet another history is being written - on the roads by the farmers: 'On cold winter nights / they write / on roads of Delhi / with ink of

resolve / the finest poetry this era' (Kishanwal in Gill, 2020). Likewise, Gubaksh Singh Bhandal announces: 'Leaving furrows / poetry has come on the roads' ('Fields are sad', Bhandal in Gill, 2020). Employing farm imagery, Gurbhajan Singh Gill personifies the furrows in the field as 'furrowed brow' of the farmers and reminds us that the elders of this land have seen many struggles. 'Babas cut-into blocked canal openings / Harsha Chinna [village] still challenges' or 'In Malwa landlords were uprooted / by peasants in Kishangarh' are poetic salutes to the elders of resistance movements.

Punjabi Singers and Songwriters

Like poets, Punjabi singers and songwriters, many with a previous record of socio-political commitment or social responsibility, have also embodied the farmers' protest and its concerns through their music that is widely distributed via social media, especially on YouTube. For example, Babu Maan, Harf Cheema, Kanwar Grewal, Sidhu Moosewala, Gurlej Akhtar, and Satinder Sartaj all have released songs, some of which crossed four million views within a few months. Sharing of these 'solidarity-with-protest' songs allows for the creation of a visual montage - often photographed or filmed at the protest sites along Delhi borders - that provides compelling, atmospheric imagery to complement the lyrics. Through a combination of powerful aural and visual engagement, these 'set-to-music' poems seek to buttress the protest by connecting masses scattered all over the world, as though uniting public in virtual space. However, as Anastasia Denisova argues in the context of digital media and protests in Russia, '…protest publics in a virtual space does not secure the initiation of collective activism' (Denisova, 2017: 980). In other words, there is a proclivity for romanticisation of resistance by many of the armchair supporters. Nevertheless, the online world forges networked resistance connections that keep the on-ground protest live through conversation; music videos afford such possibilities of expressing support and even dissent of dissent through the provision for written comments, emojis, and icons for instant 'likes' or 'dislikes'. Along with remarks of support, vitriolic and abusive comments initiate a tirade of back-and-forth insults in which many join; thus, revealing splintered political ideologies entrenched in party or regional politics. Of course, many online trolls are part of state's propaganda machinery to denounce and discredit support for the farmers' protest. The power of internet is such that during the protests, the internet services in the protest zones at Delhi borders were suspended by the government for several days, disrupting the digital flow of communication that has the extraordinary capacity to unite and, in turn, mobilize resistance. Interestingly, Mirpuri's poem discussed above was posted on YouTube in the public comments below Harf Cheema's 2020 song, '*Patshah*' [Badshah/Emperor] - a reference to Sikh Gurus.

Sung by Cheema and Grewal, 'Patshah' juxtaposes the farmers' protest with, to borrow from Nijhawan's work on *dhadi* singers, 'mythohistorical events of

the Sikh past [that] become conceptually related' (Nijhawan, 2006: 196). Here, instead of a fulsome discussion of the entire song - lyrics, music, picturization - the focus is on lyrics. The notion of sacrifice becomes paramount in 'Patshah'. Borrowing from the natural and the spiritual worlds, Cheema positions the resolute farmer 'steadfast like mountains' and 'with commanding presence' and whose 'faith and patience' make him a picture to behold. His 'face glowing with spiritual light' gestures to his grounding in social justice, a constitutive element of Sikh faith. Evoking the sacrifices of the Ninth and the Tenth Sikh Gurus, the lyrics of 'Patshah' indebted to the heroic traditions of poetry, braid together heroism and martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur - often referred to as *Hind di Chadar* [Protector of Hindustan] - who took a principled stand to protect Kashmiri *pandits* and was executed in Delhi in November 1675 on the order of the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb. Establishing the parallel between then and now, the concluding line of the opening stanza, 'It's the same time for sacrifice and it's the month of *Poh* [lunar month from mid-November to mid-December]', gets even more striking when we consider the location of the protest at Singhu border that also has the state-built Guru Teg Bahadur Memorial complex. 'On the same path are walking, the sons of Guru Teg Bahadur / Let there be a divine light at Delhi border'. The allusions in lyrics and the physical site both put the historical and the current in conversation. Cheema and Grewal's location on the border and at the margins vis-à-vis the government, collectively constructs protesting farmers as warriors who, like their Guru and his sons, will have to fight for just cause.

Sung in softer tones and accompanied by plaintive music, the song continues to fuse the historic and the current. The motif of sacrifice is implicit in 'Patshah's' narrative from the outset with the opening couplet equating the 'sons'- farmers - to Guru Teg Bahadur's son and grandsons - two of whom died fighting at the Battle at Chamkaur in 1705 and two executed by being bricked-up alive at the tender ages of six and eight when they refused conversion to Islam. 'Patshah' draws in the poignant reference to the *Chote Sahibzade* [younger sons]: 'In children are glimpses of Fateh Singh'. In a creative intervention, the video of the song provides a gendered interpretation when the camera focuses on two little girls at the protests as 'Fateh Singh' is mentioned. The resolute faith that Fateh Singh symbolizes posits the farmers as the ones who, inspired by the sacrifice of *Chote Sahibzade*, must possess a similar unwavering resolve not to bow to oppression. Furthermore, the sacrifices made by Guru Gobind Singh, who is praised as *Sarbansdani* - the one who sacrificed all - frames the farmers' agitation as the one that demands ultimate sacrifice.

Celebrating Resistance: A Concluding Note

The rich literary tradition of Punjab presents a variety of metaphors and symbols that connote love, defiance, and resistance. Novelists, storytellers, poets, and song writers responding to farmers agitations have also included intertextual

references to famous *qissas* or *vaars*, especially those of resistance. For example, Dulla Bhatti, 'a resistant hero of the land [Punjab]' (Ayres, 2009: 76), is celebrated each January during the festival of *Lohri* when people sing a centuries old song remembering his defiance. *Dulla*, who rebelled against the Mughal Emperor Akbar, 'symbolized the prominent social force which countered the hegemony of the Mughal state' (Gaur, 2008: 33). As the current farmers' protest galvanized into a mass movement, people paired together the medieval narratives of resistance with the twenty-first century struggles of farmers. In his song-poem on farmers' protest 2020, 'You Write Laws', Harbans Malwa reminds us of the lineage of defiance: 'When the spoken word was the law / the likes of *Dulla* shook the throne [establishment]' (Gill, 2020, translation by Parmar). Several references on social media pointed out that people sing about and celebrate Dulla but not many remember Emperor Akbar. Such folk-based poetic evocations immediately establish the binary of the oppressed and the oppressor and signal that centuries from today, like Dulla, it will be the farmers who will be celebrated not the rulers - or the current government. Or, as Sehrai asserts in the epigraph above that the 'rich' may have the 'establishment', but 'history' will be on the side of the oppressed. To borrow from Gaur, 'Dulla still survives' (Gaur, 2008: 37).

Notes

[1] Translation by Kartar Singh Duggal in Sant Singh Sekhon and Kartar Singh Duggal (1992: 163).

[2] The three acts are Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce Act, 2020, Farmers' Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and the Essential Commodities Act, 2020 - and calls for a new law to guarantee Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops.

[3] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in the sections '*Kirti Kaav*' and '*Muzara* and *Biswedar* Movements' are by Amandeep Kaur.

[4] With the formation of the *Kirti Kisan* Party, both the ex-Ghadarites and the Akalis contributed in reinterpreting 'the radical current of which they were a part in the formal language of socialism' (Singh, 1979: 46).

[5] Bhagwan Josh, in his account of the *Kirti Kisan* Party, also points out that 'the word 'kirti' was constantly confused with the word 'peasant' after the formation of the *Kirti-Kisan* Party (Josh, 1979: 74). However, he also adds that among 'the 'workers' in the Punjab 90 per cent were peasants' and the organization of the workers in Punjab 'primarily meant the organisation of the peasants' (Josh, 1979: 90-91).

[6] Narula's another novel *Neelibar* (1952) is historical in nature and explores the uprisings of the *Taprivas* (Nomads) against the *Zamindar* of the Bar region.

[7] Balwant Gargi (1985: 98) and B. Alaxai (2013: 189) note the staging of plays and *nukkad* (street) plays at the protest sites.

[8] Jagga Daku or *Jagga Jatt* was a 20th-century heroic rebel of Punjab.

[9] All translations of poems and songs in this section are by Prabhjot Parmar, unless otherwise identified.
[10] The right-wing state apparatuses and media mouthpieces (notoriously known as Godi Media) promptly sprung into action to decry the protest as *Khalistani* and anti-national, primarily because most of the Punjabi farmers are Sikhs. This is not to deny that there may have been some separatists at the protest. The right-wing party cadres and followers, along with internet trolls, inundated social media with anti-farmer and anti-Sikh slogans, posts, and memes.
[11] See also Sumandeep Kaur (2021).

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