

Bhai Vir Singh

By Chanan Singh B. A.

Bhai Vir Singh, the father of modern Punjabi literature, was born on November 5, 1872, in Amritsar. He inherited love for literature from his father, Dr Charan Singh who was an illustrious scholar of Hindi, Sanskrit and Brijbhasha and had a high degree of proficiency in Persian and English. After matriculating in 1891, Bhai Sahib entered the literary field and for over half century rendered such unique services to literature that the Punjab University conferred upon him *Honoris Causa* the degree of Doctor of Oriental Learning in 1949. He was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award in 1955 and Padam Bhushan in 1956 for his contributions to Punjabi Literature.

The genius of Bhai Sahib had many facets. He was a poet, essayist, biographer, playwright, historian, literary critic and lexicographer. In all these branches of literature, he showed such a unique mastery that he won high esteem of all lovers of literature. The English rendering of some of his poems by Professor Puran Singh was published in England. Mr Earnest Rhees, Dr Iqbal and Dr Chattopadhyaya paid a glowing tribute to his genius.

Bhai Sahib gave a new life to Punjabi poetry which stagnated in the labyrinth of monotonous classicism. He took it along to paths untrodden and blazed a new trail. His poetry is a peerless synthesis of classicism and romanticism and is a class in itself. He turns to nature not to the lost beauty of its form but to pierce the veil of the unknown and to get at the spirit of which the beauties of Nature are a manifestation. He looks at the dew glistening on the petals of the rose. He is charmed by its beauty but he does not get lost in the form so as to produce a catalogue of its minute details or a flood of pseudo-sentimentalities but he searches for the cause of which this rare beauty is the external look. The dew-drop attains to consummation of its being when it attains communion with beauty in the form of his prose and produces for the onlooker that celestial joy which never was on land or sea.

It is idle to judge Bhai Vir Singh's poetry from standards of romanticism or classicism because it is the product of neither mind nor intellect but of a strange amalgam of mind, intellect and body. His aim is neither to beguile nor to instruct us but to remove the barrier that stands between us and the infinite. Bhai Sahib is a mystic poet but his mysticism is quite distinct from Vedanta and suffism. Shankara's Vedanta presents knowledge as the path to communion with the Absolute and the suffism of Mansoor, Hafiz and Ruviri which presents love as the means of being atone with the Truth and at complete merging of the soul with the Godhead. Both forms of mysticism are static mysticisms, but Bhai Sahib's mysticism is dynamic. He wants to be one with the spirit of nature but he does not seek merger. He believes in the eternity of life. To be on the move is the nature of things, he says.

Besides enriching Punjabi literature with his immortal works including Sundari, Vijay Singh, Satwant Kaur, Baba Naudh Singh, Bhai Vir Singh left a large number of his intellectual progeny; Professor Puran Singh was the chief among them. His works will continue to be a source of inspiration to posterity. So long as there remains in humans an urge to lead intellectual, moral, cultural and spiritually blissful life, Bhai Sahib's prose, and poetry will be their sheet-anchor. He indeed was the sixth river in the land of the five.