



# QADIR YAR

N.S. Tasneem

Qadiryar (1802-1892) is a unique poet in many respects. He presents in his creations the full gamut of the life of the Punjabi folk of the period. The Punjab at that time was enjoying relative peace under the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780- 1839). The secular outlook of the Maharaja had instilled in the hearts of the common people patriotic feelings. Interestingly, Qadiryar, a Muslim poet, sings whole-heartedly in praise of the Sikh general Hari Singh Nalwa who unfurled Khalsa Nishan on the fort of Jamraud.

Primarily, Qadiryar is a poet with a moral purpose. Even when he writes about an Islamic theological event in Mehraj Nama or a Hindu classical legend in Qissa Puran Bhagat, he does not lose sight of his moral vision. With a view to bringing home his message of piety and purity, he chose a Hindu legend about whose impact on the masses he was quite certain. As such Puran Bhagat became the mouth-piece for ethical values, not only of that age but also of all the ages to come.

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The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.



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## Introduction

Punjabi literature is secular by temperament. Sheikh Baba Farid has been recognised as the first Punjabi poet and his *Shlokas* form a part of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. In the literary field, the *Qissas* of *Heer Ranjha* composed by Muqbal, a Hindu Khatri, and Waris Shah, a Muslim Sayyed, are held in high esteem. Later, Shah Mohammad penned *Jung Nama Singhan Te Farangian Da* which has been a source of inspiration to the ensuing generations in their struggle for freedom. During the nineteenth century, Ahmad Yar composed *Fatuhah Khalsa* (The Victories of the Khalsa) in praise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Later Qadiryar composed *Mehraj Nama*, a Muslim theological poem, *Hari Singh Nalwa Di Var*, the military exploits of a Sikh General and *Qissa Puran Bhagat*, the life story of a Hindu legendary Bhagat.

Punjabi *Qissa Kav* (a long rhymed narrative) is the most important genre in Punjabi literature. Damodar (1556-1605) was the first Punjabi poet who made use of it. Peelu and Hafiz Barkhurdar followed suit. Ahmad Gujjar, Muqbal, Waris and Hamid composed, in their individual styles, the love-tale of Heer and Ranjha. Hashim gave poetic form, on the pattern set by Hafiz Barkhurdar, to the love story of Sassi and Punnu. In the wake of Yusuf Zulaikha, the *Qissa* of Shirin Farhad and Laila Majnun came into existence. Imam Bakhsh wrote the tale of Shah Behram. Whereas, Ahmad Yar composed *Kam Roop*, Qadir Yar (1802-1892) versified the tales of Raja Rasalu and Puran Bhagat. Fazal Shah, on his part, covered the gamut of *Qissas* from *Sohni* to *Laila Majnun*. Punjabi *Qissa-Kav* had come into its own during the last few decades of the eighteenth century. By the middle of the nineteenth century, it reached its zenith. Thereafter the poets started writing, time and again, about the oft-repeated love tales of Heer Ranjha, Sohni Mahinwal, Sassi Punnu, Mirza Sahiban, Shirin Farhad, Puran Bhagat etc. This process has continued well into the

twentieth century. In the recent past, Professor Puran Singh wrote a commendable long poem entitled *Puran Bhagat*.

The word *Qissa*, which is Arabic in origin, means a tale. In Punjabi the *Qissa* developed under the influence of Persian poetry. It is interesting to note that the Persian poets have used the word *Mathnavi* (a poem in rhyming distichs) for their long narratives in verse, instead of the word *Qissa*. In fact the word *Qissa* is used in Arabic, Persian and Urdu for a long tale in prose; for example, *Qissa Alif Laila*, *Qissa Hamza*, *Qissa Chahar Darvesh* and *Qissa Gul Bakowli*. The Punjabi poets borrowed the style from the Persian *Mathnavi* but named their poetic creations as *Qissa*, keeping in view the long tale described in it. In the words of I. Serebryakov<sup>1</sup> - "The *Kissa* in Punjabi literature usually centres around two lovers belonging to different tribes. Their infatuation collides with tribal traditions, and the conflict usually ends in tragedy. The death of the lovers, however, serves as a grim lesson to those who remain alive, and the conclusion, whether implied or stated, is that peace and friendship among tribes is an essential necessity. Tribal differences between the two main heroes are sometimes superseded by social ones, yet the poets dwell not so much on these distinctions as on the heroes' personal virtues and sublime emotions."

Khanna al-Fahuri,<sup>2</sup> an Arabic Scholar, has aptly defined the *Qissa* as "a literary genre; this genre was used to narrate authentic historical or imagined events..... it is a harmonious integration of well-knit plot, psychological analysis, fascinating narrative and perfect composition,..... it is a poetic narration of some length whose theme is derived from events of a national scale..." In Punjabi literature the plots of the *Qissa* fall into two main groups; those created in the Punjab and those borrowed either from ancient Indian literature (*Nal and Damayanti*, for example), or from Arab literature (*Laila and Majnun*), or else from Persian - Tadjik literature (*Farhad and Shirin*). At the time when the *Dasam Granth* came into existence, the *Qissa* of the first group presumably already existed in Punjabi oral lore. At any rate, it was the *Dasam Granth* that initiated this genre in Punjabi literature.<sup>3</sup>

Next to the *Qissa*, the genre which has been very popular in Punjabi literature is the *Var*. It has been defined as 'a long poem in which some historical incidents' are narrated or a 'long poem in

which the brave deeds of a courageous person are celebrated'. Dr. Mohan Singh Dewana has translated the word *Var* as 'ballad', whereas I. Serebryakov has given its equivalent in English as 'epic poem'. Two hypotheses have been offered about the etymology of *Var*: (a) from the Sanskrit root 'vr' which means 'to attack' and (b) from the Sanskrit word 'vrit', 'to narrate'.

"During the era of the Sikh Gurus the *Var*/ballad was established as a thriving genre. The twenty-two different *Vars* of the *Granth* may be recited in seventeen different *ragas*. Under the early Sikh Gurus the form was expanded in scope and subject. A new dimension was added. Their *Vars* were prompted by esoteric dilemmas and spiritual conflicts. In the post-Guru period the *Var* began to tend, once again, towards the material. It flourished as a major genre!<sup>4</sup>

In this genre Qadiryar composed *Var Rani Kokilan/Raja Rasalu* and *Var Puran Bhagat*. There is no doubt that the poet, apart from creating his *magnum opus*, *Qissa Puran Bhagat*, composed *Var Puran Bhagat* but the *Var* stands no comparison to the *Qissa*. To some extent it blurs the vision of the listener/reader as there are some conflicting statements in it about the life-story of Puran Bhagat. In the beginning of the *Var*, full details of the marriages of Raja Salwan, first with Ichhran and then with Luna, have been given. Towards the end, the story already told by him in *Qissa Puran Bhagat* has been repeated. So it is proper to name it as *Var Raja Salwan* instead of *Var Puran Bhagat*. In this *Var*, Qadiryar has related a number of supernatural events and imaginary episodes. There are many references in it to the superstitious and mythological beliefs of the Hindus. Even the insects have been shown as talking to human beings. An insect gives Raja Salwan a hair of his whiskers with the instructions that whenever he needed its help he should rub the hair against a stone and it would appear before him. Likewise the severed heads of the human beings as well as lamps and cots have been given voices. In the *Var*, Luna has been stated to be a nymph from the court of Raja Inder. She was adopted by Peepa Bhagat as his daughter with whom Raja Salwan entered into a matrimonial alliance. In the *Qissa*, however, Luna has been described as the daughter of a low-caste person (Chamar/Tanner). With a view to saving the readers from certain misconceptions, I have excluded this *Var* from his works.

Qadiryar composed *Var Puran Bhagat* in the *baint* form to enable street-singers and bards to sing with the accompaniment of *sarangi* but for *Qissa Puran Bhaget*, he used the form of *si harfi*. The *si harfi* is an alphabet poem of thirty stanzas, each of which has eight lines. It is a technical form in which the first word of each quatrain starts with an *alif* while the first word of the last quatrain with a *ye*. It was Qadiryar, however, who took the *si harfi* out of the dervish-dwellings to the palaces of princes and penned the *Qissa* of *Puran Bhaget*.<sup>5</sup>

In the end, I take this occasion to convey my thanks to Sahitya Akademi for providing me with an opportunity for studying the works of Qadiryar in detail. I consulted many books in Punjabi for this monograph but in English there was only one book - Qadir Yar (A critical Introduction) by M. Athar Tahir - available to me.

I have quoted from this book profusely, for which I am indebted to the author as well as the publishers. Apart from it, the articles in English by Dr. Harjeet Singh Gill and Dr. Gurinder Singh Randhawa on *Qissa Puran Bhaget* published in Volume XIV 1981 and Volume XVI 1983 of *Pakha Sanjam* (Studies in Cultural Semantics), a journal of Punjabi University, Patiala, have also been of great help to me. My thanks are also due to them.

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## 1. LIFE AND TIMES

Qadiryar, whose real name was Qadir Bakhsh, was born at village Machhike in Sheikhpura District (now in Pakistan). He belonged to an agriculturist family and was Sandhu by caste. Not much is known of his early life except that he received his education at the village mosque. He became fully conversant with Punjabi, but knew little Persian and less Arabic. However, his interest in Muslim theology, love-tales, folk legends and historical personages shows that he had been a voracious reader. Still he is conscious of his lack of knowledge -

*Main dehkaan be-ilm vichara  
Dosh na chahiye dharya.*

(I am an illiterate rustic. Do not blame me for my shortcomings.)

Some critics have taken his words at their face value and consider them his confession of illiteracy. In reality these words should be regarded as the evidence of his humility *a la* Chaucer who said - 'My wit is short, ye may wel understonde'.

The boy Qadir did not take much interest in farming, the traditional occupation of the family. So he earned the ire of his father and the elder brother, Bahadur Yar. In the course of time he came to be regarded as an idler and was often reprimanded for whiling away his time in rhyming. After the death of his father, he was forced to leave his ancestral home as he was not doing anything worthwhile to earn his bread. He settled on the outskirts of his village in a small hut near a well. Later it was at this place that he composed his works. Some critics, however, attribute his leaving the ancestral house to an altogether different reason.

The legend has it that Razia, a village belle, was in love with Qadiryar but the circumstances conspired in such a way that she became the third wife of Qadir's elder brother, Bahadur Yar. She

was, however, so enamoured of Qadiryar that she made advances to him after her marriage. When these advances were spurned, she felt piqued. With a view to wreaking vengeance on him, she poisoned the ears of her husband by insinuating wild charges against Qadiryar. In this way, it has been said, Razia was instrumental in getting him turned out of his home.

In the Introduction to his play *Qadir Yar*<sup>2</sup> (named after the poet), Dr. Surjit Singh Sethi has taken pains in describing his visit, along with some of his friends, to Machhike, the native village of Qadir Yar, in 1946. They found that the villagers were, more or less, ignorant of the greatness of the poet. They were, however, told by the elders of the village to meet the aged Faqir who resided beside Qadiryar's grave on the outskirts of the village. As they were approaching that place, they heard someone reciting these lines-

*Alaf - aakh sakhi Sialkot ander  
Puran putt Salwan ne jaeya ee*

(O'friend, say that in Sialkot a son named Puran was born to Salwan).

On reaching that place, they found a Faqir sitting near the grave of Qadiryar. He told them, "Friends! Qadiryar, my grandfather, was not only a great poet but also an ideal person".

Not much is known about the early life of the poet except that which can be gathered from the account of the Faqir whom Surjit Singh Sethi and his friends had met in 1946 -

"Qadiryar passed through great mental agony when he was forced to leave not only his house but the village also. Razia's attitude, however, prompted him to versify the story of Puran Bhagat who had suffered likewise at the hands of his step-mother. The well, by the side of which he spent all his life, was once frequented by the people in large numbers. The belles of the village came there to fill their pitchers with water, sweet as it was. In earlier times, the well was known as *Pipal Wala Khuh*. Underneath this *Pipal* tree, Qadir composed his famous *Qissa* of Puran Bhagat. Later, when Hari Singh Nalwa heard this *Qissa*, he was so pleased with it that he awarded this well and the adjoining land to the poet."

Qadiryar has himself alluded to this episode in his lines -

*Puran Raje di gal sunayeke jee  
Ik Khuh inam likhaya main*

(By narrating the story of Raja Puran, I got a well as reward.)

Elsewhere too, Qadiryar has mentioned about this well and the village he belonged to -

*Mauza Machhike is the village of mine  
People know me as Sandhu by caste.  
I composed one hundred and forty stanzas  
To the people I recited them with abandon.  
I mused over the story of Puran Bhagat  
And composed it in sixteen days.*

That Faqir further told the visitors -

"Qadiryar's sister-in-law Razia fell in love with him on her wedding day. She tried to win him over but he resisted her overtures. The rebuff she got from Qadir converted her into his adversary. He, on his part, tried to convince his borthor (Razia's husband) and the people of the village of his innocence but to no avail. Consequently he left his home and started living in a small hut in the vicinity of the village. He busied himself in reading *Qissas* (rhymed narratives) and other books. In those days he read Hafiz Muradabadi's *Noor Nama* and, under its influence, he composed *Rozah Nama*. Later he composed the *Qissa* of Puran Bhagat, apparently under the impact of the treatment he received at the hands of the third wife of his elder brother. This composition perhaps provided him with the much-needed catharsis."

Some academic critics like Prof G.L. Sharma<sup>3</sup> doubt the veracity of Surjit Singh Sethi's account of his visit to Machhike and the talk he had with the Faqir that resided near Qadir's grave. The episode of Razia's infatuation with Qadir has also been considered a figment of Sethi's imagination. Even the existence of Razia and Qadiryar's elder brother Bahadur Yar has been doubted. In this regard Prof Gulwant Singh<sup>4</sup> has quoted *Puran Bhagat*, published by Ilam Din Kutab Farosh (book-seller), Lahore, wherein it has been mentioned that Razia was the name of Qadiryar's elder brother's wife. As such it is not easy to dismiss Sethi's version

without providing any irrefutable evidence to the contrary. On his part Surjit Singh Sethi was so much moved by the Faqir's account of Qadiryar's life that some years later he composed, first a radio play and then a stage play entitled *Qadir Yar*<sup>5</sup> based on the life story of the poet. In the Introduction to his play, Sethi has mentioned 1802 A.D. as the poet's date of birth and 1892 A.D. as the date of his death as told to him by the legendary Faqir.

Shafi Aqeel<sup>6</sup> is also of the view that Qadiryar was born in 1802 and died in 1892. He has refuted the claim of the author of the book *A History of Punjabi Language and Literature*, that the poet died in 1850. Maula Bakhsh Kushta, Abdul Ghafoor Qureishi, Gulwant Singh and Jeet Singh Seetal have accepted 1892 as the date of the poet's death. Departing from the common norm, Gurcharan Singh<sup>7</sup> has given 1800-1850 as the life span of Qadiryar. Dr. Mohan Singh Dewana<sup>8</sup> considers 1780-1860 as 'the age of Qadiryar and Santokh Singh' but refrains from specifying the dates of his birth and death. This controversy can, however, be resolved if we take 1247 Hijri or 1832 A.D. as the year in which he composed his first work *Mehraj Nama*, wherein he says -

*Dil vick fikar Nabi Sarvar da, hor khayal bhulaya  
Chhoti umar sir par sakhti, eh 'Mehraj' banaya*

(I concentrated my mind, excluding from it every other thought, on the great Prophet. I composed 'Mehraj' quite early in my life when I was passing through a difficult period.) He then continues -

*Baran sau santali salan Pak Nabi de pichhon  
Eh mazkur banaya yaaro wekh Mehraj wichon*

(I prepared this book, on the basis of the Scriptures, in the year 1247 after the Holy Mohammad.)

In view of this, Qadiryar could not have been of more than thirty years when he composed *Mehraj Nama*. So the period of his life has been accepted as 1802-1892.

Qadiryar was a devout Muslim who had firm faith in Islamic traditions and rituals. His two books *Mehraj Nama* and *Rozah Nama* provide ample testimony in this regard. All this, however, did not make him narrow minded or biased against any religion. Whereas

he has expounded the tenets and traditions of Islam, he has also made Hindu myths and Sikh legendary figures the bases of his literary creations. He is undoubtedly the first poet who immortalized the legend of Puran Bhagat in his *Qissa Puran Bhagat*. Besides this, he penned *Var Hari Singh Nalwa* in which he enumerated and eulogized the great achievements of a reputed general of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Indeed Qadiryar was the poet of his age as in his works have been reflected, to a large extent, the social, religious and political conditions of the time.

Qadiryar was a younger contemporary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It was the period when feudalism was at its zenith in Punjab. Petty chieftains were ever ready to fly at each other's throats at the slightest provocation. Ranjit Singh who was one of them rose to the occasion and established his rule after subjugating the Sardars of various *misals*. During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, art, literature and culture flourished. The secular policy of the Maharaja brought the poets and artists of the age on a common platform. Punjabi as a language got the much-needed fillip, although Persian continued to be the court language.

Political stability in the state provided proper climate for the development of *Qissa-kav* (long rhymed narratives). It was the time when the *Jagirdars* (feudal lords) craved for some heady wine in the form of love tales. Else, they wanted to listen to the tales of valour and chivalry. Consequently, most of the *Qissas* of the period relate either to the well-known love tales of *Heer Ranjha*, *Sohni Mahinval*, *Yusuf Zulaikha*, *Sassi Punnu*, *Shireen Farhad* etc. or the feats of valour or political exploits of Raja Rasalu, Kam Roop, Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Hari Singh Nalwa. Alongside these two tendencies, the third tendency developed. It gave due recognition to ascetics and the persons who upheld the banner of moral uprightness gained prominence. Dr. Mohan Singh Dewana has very well summed up the aspirations of the people of the age - "The dream came true. The politically conscious heroic Punjab first threw up *misals* or tribal-local chieftainship or captaincies and then saw them united under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This had its immediate reactions, reverberations in literature, which got the hero it deserved - native, simple, liberal, lyrical, firm, religious-minded and assimilative, catholic, anxious for inter-provincial, even inter-national contacts. It was reserved for two Muslim poets, one a carpenter Hasham



(b.1752 A.D. ), and the other, Ahmed Yar ( b. 1768 ) a Jat, to pay the tribute due to Panjab's own sovereign, who represented the fulfilment of a five centuries old dream. His presence inspired, once again, a Muslim poet, Qadir Yar, to sing in beautiful, moving, past-reviving verse, the glories of the last independent kindly hero of the Panjab, Rasalu and his Yogi brother, Puran Nath or Chaturangi, a follower of Machhandar.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. HIS WORKS

### (i) Mehraj Nama (1832 A.D.)

Qadiryar started his poetic career, quite early in his life, with *Mehraj Nama*. It is his longest poem, comprising 1014 couplets. When the adversaries of Hazrat Mohammad gained an upper hand, the Lord God sent the horse Buraq<sup>1</sup> for bringing the Prophet to His presence. This poem describes in great detail Hazrat Mohammad's journey through the seven skies and his cutting the moon into two. There is a long roll call of the angels that attended on him during the journey as well as of those who received him at the divine court. Besides this, the poet has told about the origin of the universe in accordance with the traditional Islamic thought -

Neither was there the sky nor the earth  
 Nor were there the elements of nature  
 Neither the night, nor the day  
 Neither the fire, nor the water  
 Neither the houries, nor the angels.

The earlier poets like Hafiz Barkhurdar, Muqbal and Hamad had composed *Jung Namas* in which the war of Karbla had been described but no one before Qadiryar had composed *Mehraj Nama*. Like the *Qissa* of Puran Bhagat, *Mehraj Nama* is also the poet's unique and foremost contribution to Punjabi poetry. The work no doubt is based on Islamic theology but the poet has used the prosody and the narrative technique which are Indian in character. At times he has made use of Arabic and Persian words but the style is in accordance with the Indian philosophical tradition.

The poet was inspired to compose *Mehraj Nama* after reading *Noor Nama* by the blind poet Murad. He has acknowledged this fact in the following couplet -

Through the effulgence of the Prophet  
The whole world was illuminated.  
Whatever has been mentioned in Noor Nama  
Is based on the divine truth.

"Qadiryar's *Mi'raj Nama* is one of the finest in Punjabi literature. Not only is technical competency lucidly obvious, but Qadiryar's dramatic ability makes a wavering appearance. Considered from the vantage point of *Puran Bhagat* where the dramatic dominates, *Mi'raj Nama* would seem too given to verbosity. And indeed it is. It is the longest and most prolix of his works. The use of refrain, specially in the dialogue between the Messenger and Gabriel, and the formula repetition of each sky afford reminder to the audience of earlier action, are aesthetically satisfying in the spiral pattern and help the narrative along with familiar cadence. But neither pace nor dramatic tension is encouraged. The mood is one of luxuriance."<sup>2</sup>

#### (ii) Rozah Nama

Like *Mehraj Nama*, *Rozah Nama* (Epistle of Fasting) is also based on Islamic faith. In it the poet has mentioned the hardship that accompanies religious fasts. By enumerating 30 *Rozahs*, the poet has described the physical and mental state of a person on each day of fasting. In the manner of *Bara Maha* (Twelve Months), the emphasis has all along been on the pangs of separation from the Lord -

Next came the thirteenth Rozah  
My heart started sinking.  
My body was further emaciated  
My life started ebbing away.  
O'Qadir ! I am extremely unwell  
At this cruel period of mid-day.

This poem appears to have been composed long after *Mehraj Nama* as there is sufficient evidence in it of Qadiryar's poetic maturity. It depicts a beloved's craving for the lover. Union is possible only at the end of the month of religious rigours. The longing for the lover results in sleepless nights:

Sleep has abandoned me.  
When I get up in the morn,  
My heart is heavy.  
In whom can I seek refuge, O'Qadir  
When my friend Mohammad's Law  
Stands in the way?

The poet compares his emaciated condition to that of a dry tree which can regain its original glory only when it is watered by piety and goodness. At long last the time comes when the poet feels exultant - '*Rab yar milaya raat nun* (The Lord united my lover with me last night) The consummation has erotic overtones but the divine message is unmistakable -

*Ajj Zewar lavaan ang main  
Hun rali sajjan de sung main  
Meri puji sub murad nee  
Main parhni Eid namaz nee.*

Today  
I adorn myself with jewels  
My lover has taken me in his embrace.  
All wishes of mine have been fulfilled,  
It's now the time to say my Eid prayers.

#### (iii) Qissa Sohni Mahinwal

From the artistic point of view, this is perhaps the best creation of Qadiryar, although it has not been able to gain as much popularity as *Qissa Puran Bhagat*. The story on which it is based is very old but the treatment given to it is fresh and original. Like the medieval poets, he too has dwelt more on the description of female beauty and the pangs of separation than on anything else. Undoubtedly he is at his best while doing so. He has been successful in maintaining in it, the same intensity of the pangs of separation as is found in Hashim, and the same sweetness and flow of language as is evident in Shah Hussain. The dominant note of the poem is amatory coupled with pathos. The locale of most of the love-tales of Punjab is the bank of the river *Chenab*. So the poet labels the river as the river of love (Ishk) -

All the lovers who lived on its bank  
 were its children.  
 Love can be found in the Chenab  
 if someone is ready to pay its price.

Bawa Budh Singh<sup>3</sup> is not correct when he says that Qadiryar is the first poet who gave poetic form to the tale of Sohni and Mahinwal. Hashim had given it a poetic form. This love episode perhaps took place in the sixteenth century as Bhai Gurdas (16th & 17th Centuries) mentioned it in his *Vars*. Indeed Hashim's version of this tale is not so impressive as Qadiryar's. Later Fazal Shah related this tale on the lines of Qadiryar's version. Still Qadiryar's creation stands apart in its poetic excellence.

There lived in Gujrat (now in Pakistan) a damsel who was so beautiful that the people started calling her Sohni (beautiful). She was the daughter of the town's famous potter (Ghumar). It so happened that Mirza Izzat Beg, the son of a rich merchant of Bukhara, came to Gujrat on a business trip and fell in love at the first sight with Sohni. In the course of time he became so unmindful of his business interests that from a prosperous merchant he was reduced to a petty shopkeeper. Before long, he became a pauper. He then sought employment as a cowherd (Mahinwal) at the household of Tulla Ghumar with a view to be near his sweet-heart, Sohni. At long last their love-affair got the wind and the young cowherd was forced to leave the household. So, Mirza Izzat Beg changed his role of a cowherd to that of a Faqir and settled on the other bank of the river *Chenab*.

Every day, at the fall of the night, Mahinwal forded the stream so as to be with his beloved for sometime. Daily he cooked fish for Sohni and they enjoyed their supper together. Once he could not get his catch as the river was in flood. That evening he roasted a chunk of his own thigh and presented it to his beloved. Sohni noticed the difference in taste and then her eyes fell on Mahinwal's bleeding thigh. She resolved there and then that henceforth she herself would go to the other side of the *Chenab* to meet Mahinwal. Their meetings went on smoothly till her sister-in-law (Sohni having been married to

someone in the meanwhile) became suspicious of her movements. One evening when the stream was flooded, the sister-in-law replaced Sohni's baked earthen pot with an unbaked one. Sohni noticed the change but she did not retrace her steps. The stormy weather and the turbulent waves could not deter her from going her way. She did not want to keep her lover waiting for long. She plunged into the river and covered some distance. Then the unbaked earthen pitcher gave way. She tried to swim across the river but could not do so. When she found herself helpless, she started calling Mahinwal loudly. On hearing her desperate calls, he jumped into the river. Mahinwal tried to save her but the current of water was too strong for him. In that dark, stormy night both of them were swept away and lost for ever. Thus ended the tale of these two legendary lovers who sacrificed their lives at the altar of love -

The bird left the cage  
 and flew towards the sky.  
 But, O' Qadir!  
 God saved them from humiliation  
 in the field of love.

Qadiryar is at his best when he describes the love-affair of Sohni and Mahinwal. He has laid stress on the various aspects of their sacred and sincere love. His reticence of style, however, gives way to voluptuous description when he delineates Sohni's beautiful figure. Like a master sculptor he chisels her features step by step -

Her teeth were like stringed pearls  
 Her voice was sweet like the Koel's  
 Her chin had the form of an almond  
 Her mouth was narrow  
 Her arms had been chiselled artistically  
 Her fingers were delicate like pea-pods  
 Her torso had been shaped expertly  
 Out of the solid slab of crystal  
 Her breasts were heavenly apples  
 Full of the nectar of juicy pomegranates  
 Her belly was the abode of Love

The very mention of which intoxicates the mind  
But the one who gets a glimpse of it  
Loses his senses altogether.

The poet has made use of *Dohras* (rhymed couplets) in this poem. Two *Dohras* form a *Chhand* (a unit of two rhymed couplets). There are 171 *Chhands* in it.

#### (iv) Hari Singh Nalwa Di Var

This *Var*<sup>4</sup> or the ballad has been devoted to the praise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's famous general Hari Singh Nalwa. In it has been described Nalwa's expedition to Kabul and his battle with Badshah Dost Mohammad, Emer-e-Kabul. The bravery and the superior war tactics of the Sikh forces have been highlighted. In this poem Hari Singh Nalwa stands out as an intrepid fighter and seasoned commander of brave forces.

The poet tells in detail the achievements of the Sikh commander in the battle-field. While fighting bravely, he was mortally wounded. At that time he summoned his lieutenants and instructed them to keep the news of his death a guarded secret. His orders were carried out most faithfully. In the meanwhile more troops of Maharaja Ranjit Singh reached there and rendered the much-needed help in safeguarding the prestigious fort of Jamraud.

In the concluding part of this poem, Qadiryar has described the last moments of this great general's life in a very touching manner. The faces of the members of his family flit across Nalwa's mind and his heart is filled with love and tenderness for them. He also thinks of the rituals that would be performed after his death. In this way the poet has imbued the general's personality with such qualities as make him all the more dear to the common people. The focus, however, has all along been on his formidable personality and legendary intrepidity -

The Sardar was tall in stature  
Blessed with swordsmanship and good luck.  
He cast his shadow over the whole world

His name shines far and wide  
He rules with the hand that wields the sword.  
Qadiryar, he has conquered the mountains  
And struck terror in Kabul and Kandhar.

It is true that no poet other than Qadiryar could sing the glory of Punjab in full-throated ease. Hari Singh Nalwa has been presented as a symbol of the traditional bravery and the spirit of sacrifice of the people of the land of five rivers. Nalwa was a terror to the Afghan rulers and the very mention of his name caused ripples of dread in the opposite camp. At the time of the final onslaught on the fort of Jamraud, Hari Singh called upon his troops to lay down their lives for the sake of grand victory -

*Kithe jao ge, nahin Lahore neyre*  
*Ithe swas deyne, dilun dhar ke ji*

(Where would you go? Lahore is far away.  
Embolden your hearts for the great sacrifices.)

The poem starts with generalised observations about Hari Singh, switches to the Jamraud fort and its battering at the hands of the Afghans, then turns to Hari Singh's camp at Peshawar, from there it moves to the battle-field, then to Ranjit Singh in Gujrat and back again to Peshawar. This fluctuation between the geographic locales in a short poem imparts to it a speed of narrative and emphasises the hectic movement and urgency of the battle. Heroic stature is imparted to the figure of Hari Singh, not through subtle machinations of the dramatic and the tragic, but through hyperbole and exaggeration. This poem ends on the particular which is magnified to the universal.

*Sari Khalq pa'i gun gaondi ae*

(All the people are singing praises of Hari Singh)<sup>5</sup>

This *si harfi*<sup>6</sup> (alphabet poem) has been composed in the *baint* metre and consists of only 30 stanzas. It starts with the alphabet *Alif* and ends with *ye*. The diction of the poem is quite simple, verging on the colloquial.

## (v) Var Rani Kokilan/Raja Rasalu

Like *Qissa Puran Bhagat*, this tale is also concerned with Sialkot. Kokilan is the Rani of Raja Rasalu. With the blessings of Puran, a son was born to Salwan and Luna. This son, Rasalu, later played a dominant role in the history of Punjab as a brave and judicious king. In this work, the story of Raja Rasalu and Kokilan has been told. The poet has laid emphasis on the bravery and fearlessness of Raja Rasalu.

In it *Tota* (parrot) and *Maina* (mya) play a significant role. They talk like human beings. On the information supplied by *Tota* and *Maina*, Rasalu becomes suspicious of his wife, Kokilan. Before long he comes to know about the liaison between Kokilan and Hodi, the Raja of Attock. In the fight that ensues, Hodi is killed. Rasalu cooks the flesh of the slain paramour of his wife and serves it to her. When she comes to know the reality, Kokilan jumps from the roof of the palace and dies.

Qadiryar, while telling this tale, comments adversely on the character of womenfolk. His bitterness is obvious in the following lines -

'She eats the flesh of her paramour  
And he wants to confirm its taste.'  
'Sword, horse and woman  
All the three are undependable.'  
'Never go in for a lovely wife,  
if you want to ward off humiliation.'

Indeed the story is very interesting, mainly due to supernatural happenings and unusual events, but it lacks poetic flights and musical effects. It appears as if it had been created for the folksingers of the countryside. Of course, at places Qadiryar is in his form, especially when he depicts aesthetic sensibility and heroic deeds. Nevertheless, from the literary point of view, this work is not of a high order.

## (vi) Qissa Puran Bhagat

Qadiryar's *magnum opus* is the *Qissa* of Puran Bhagat. There is a gap of few centuries between its actual occurrence and the poetic form it received at the hands of Qadiryar.

Hence the story is neither purely historical nor totally mythical. In bare outlines the tale is as under :

Salwan, the Raja of Sialkot, had two Ranis - Ichhran and Luna. Puran was born to Ichhran but at the time of his birth, the court astrologer advised Salwan not to see his son's face for twelve years. So Puran was brought up, away from his father's eyes, in an underground cell. Indeed he received education and training of a high order. At the end of the self-imposed period of separation, Puran was ushered in the presence of his parents with great fanfare. They were delighted to see their son grown up as a handsome youth.

Salwan advised Puran to pay a courtesy call to his step-mother, Luna. He went to that part of the palace where Luna resided. He paid his respects to her like a dutiful son. On her part, Luna did not react in the manner the occasion demanded. She took a fancy to the prince who was as yet of adolescent age. Her infatuation for Puran was unmistakable. He, however, did not lose the presence of his mind and tried to convince his step-mother. He implored her to stick to the time-honoured moral code. Though she had not given birth to him, she was his mother all the same. Luna failed to see the gravity of the situation. Without mincing her words, she put forth her point of view-

*Kuchhar baith mumma Kadon chunghia ee  
Aiwen Koor di maon banawna ain*

Were you ever fed at my breast?  
How can you then claim me as your mother?

Puran taunted her for her lustful designs on him. He told her that he would never succumb to her lascivious overtures. He held his ground for a long while, rather he sought her blessings instead. On her part, Luna felt piqued. She never expected to be rebuffed by a mere lad. To hide her embarrassment, she made out to her husband that Puran tried to outrage her modesty. Salwan, the self-righteous husband, asserted his authority in an exaggerated manner. He gave orders that the hands and feet of his son should be cut into pieces and he be thrown into a deserted well. The orders were

carried out in no time. So Puran remained in the deserted well for the next twelve years.

Once a few disciples of Guru Gorakh Nath happened to pass that way. In search of water they perhaps looked into the well and found Puran in that miserable state. They informed their Guru about it. Puran was pulled out of the well and his limbs restored by the miraculous powers of the Guru. In gratitude Puran requested Guru Gorakh Nath to accept him in the order of the Nath Jogis, who were ascetics. Puran was in a blissful state at the *Tilla* of the Jogis, when a new crisis cropped up in his life. A certain Rani named Sundran came there to pay her obeisance to Guru Gorakh Nath. She had earlier seen Puran Bhagat when he came to her mansion for alms. She had at that time lost her heart to him. On his part, Puran could never entertain in his mind the idea of having to do anything with a woman. Rani Sundran, however, prevailed upon the Guru to bless her with Puran as her spouse. The Guru agreed readily as he wanted Puran to get back his old status of a prince or Raja in one form or the other. Feeling exultant at the fulfilment of her ambition, Rani Sundran came back home with the unwilling Puran. He remained in the palace for a short while and then made good his escape by putting forth a lame excuse. He rushed back straight to the *Tilla* of Guru Gorakh Nath. In his absence Rani Sundran felt dismayed and killed herself by jumping from the roof of her palace.

Guru Gorakh Nath was greatly disturbed at such a turn of events. He found it hard to reconcile himself with the idea of Puran turning his back on Rani Sundran. So he considered it proper to send his young disciple away from the company of the other disciples. He persuaded Puran to visit his native place, Sialkot, with a view to meeting the members of his family. On his part, Puran could never delay the execution of his Guru's command. Promptly he left for Sialkot and sojourned at *Lakha Bagh*, the garden he had deserted long ago.

Puran's presence in the garden was no ordinary event. The drooping flowers bloomed and converted the barren piece of land into an oasis. It was no less than a miracle, as in

his absence the garden had remained wilted for as long as twelve years. The populace of Sialkot turned up to see the jogi who had miraculous powers. Raja Salwan too came there in the company of both of his Ranis - Ichhran and Luna. Puran's mother Ichhran, who had gone blind in her son's absence, recognized Puran by his voice. This recognition led to the restoration of her eyesight.

Puran grilled Luna for the wrongs done to him by his father at her instance. At first she tried to wriggle out of the unpleasant situation but failed to keep up her stance for long. She gave in and repented for her wrong-doings. On his part, Raja Salwan felt regretful and sought forgiveness. Puran pardoned them most graciously but refused to go back to the palace as desired by his parents. Luna then expressed her desire for the boon of a son. Puran gave her a grain of rice as a sort of Talisman and left the city for the *Tilla* of his Guru. In due course of time, Luna was blessed with a son named Rasalu who later became a legendary personage.

Qadiryar was undoubtedly the first bard who composed the *Qissa* of the legendary Puran Bhagat in the verse-form. He completed this work in sixteen days. The *Qissa* is very popular among both the common folk and the discerning readers. Towards the end of the *Qissa*, the poet tells that he was awarded a well and the land adjacent to it by a landlord, presumably Hari Singh Nalwa, who was greatly pleased with the narrative —

By narrating the tale of Puran Bhagat  
I got a well as reward.

The popularity of this *Qissa* is mainly due to its lucid style, narrative technique and ethical overtones. There is no verbosity or unnecessary reliance on the words of Persian origin. The poet seems to be conscious of the need for using, for his poetic creation, the language really spoken by men in their ordinary walk of life. He makes no effort to exhibit the richness of his diction or the profundity of his ideas. Nowhere in this *Qissa* has he described the female beauty or the sexual interaction between man and woman. Generally he takes recourse to metaphors instead of bland, straightforward

descriptions. Regarding Luna's lustful designs, Qadiryar refrains from making any direct comment-

She tried to break the rock-salt  
In plates and bowls.

Likewise Ichhran, when she recognises her son's voice, asks Puran-

If my eyes could see,  
I would have at once recognized you?  
Now I can rely only on my ears.  
Your voice, of course, indicates  
That you are my son.

In this Qissa, the poet has used *baint chhand*, as popularised by Waris Shah. Moreover, he has adhered to the form of *si harfi* (alphabet poem). Qadiryar has not tried to lengthen the tale beyond the limit set in the folklore. As such he says at the end of the Qissa-

I wanted to write this tale  
Till the last alphabet of 'ye'  
But it ended of its own  
On the alphabet 'laam'.

### 3. QISSA PURAN BHAGAT : A RE-APPRAISAL

The story of Qissa Puran Bhagat is reminiscent of Euripides's play *Phaedra* wherein Phaedra is infatuated with her youthful step-son, Hippolytus. The course of events in these two works is different but the situation is the same. Puran is of tender age and has no inclination to establish rapport with the opposite sex. He is appalled when his step-mother Luna tries to involve him in her lascivious designs. When Puran refuses to deviate from the path of virtue, she puts forth her argument-

Be sensible, O'Puran!  
Compel me not to be harsh to you.  
I am standing beside you,  
With my arms extended,  
Will you not be charitable?  
Do not call me your mother; tell me  
Were you ever fed at my breast?

In the case of Hippolytus, his step-mother Phaedra does not express her desire in such a blatant manner. She confides her feelings to the old nurse who is her confidante. Phaedra's infatuation with Hippolytus is not sudden as is the case with Luna. She had been living in the same household with Hippolytus for a long time. All the while she had been engaged in making efforts to snuff out the flame of her guilty love but to no avail. Obsessed too much by her amorous cravings for Hippolytus, she opens her lacerated heart to the old nurse but repents shortly afterwards for doing so-

Oh, gods have pity! Whatever did I do?  
How far did I stray from sanity?  
I was mad, a malign god struck me down  
What shall I do? What will become of me?

Dear Nurse, my veil again,  
I am ashamed to think what I have said.  
Cover me, my tears are falling,  
And my face is hot with shame.  
To be in my right mind is agony;  
Yet to be mad was intolerable.  
It is best, then, to be aware of nothing,  
And die.<sup>1</sup>

At long last when Hippolytus comes to know, through the Nurse, of Phaedra's passion for him, he is beside himself with pious rage and wild fury. He reprimands the Nurse for her misdemeanour in giving expression to such a proposal-

Yes, you, for one, who come here like a she-devil  
Inviting me to incest with my father's wife!  
I'll flush my ears with water to purge your filthy words!  
Do you think I could so sin, when even hearing you  
I feel polluted?<sup>2</sup>

Whereas in *Qissa Puran Bhagat* there is an interminable dialogue between Luna and Puran on the subject, in *Phaedra* not a single word is exchanged between Phaedra and Hippolytus in this regard. When in a huff he leaves the stage, Phaedra exclaims -

How cruel a curse it is to be born a woman!  
Who would not pity us?  
What shift, what recourse have we,  
What words, once we have stumbled,  
To undo the knot a word has tied?  
I have met what I have deserved.  
Earth and sunlight,  
Where shall I fly out of the clutches of Fate?  
How can I hide this agony?<sup>3</sup>

In the case of Luna, the rebuff is direct whereas in the case of Phaedra, it is indirect. In both the cases the result, however, is the same. Luna maligns the reputation of Puran in no uncertain terms in the presence of her husband, Raja Salwan. She not only points an accusing finger to her step-son but also presents herself in a tell-tale fashion to her spouse-

'I called him Puran, my son  
But he laughed like a husband.'  
So saying she showed her cracked bangles  
And blamed him for straining her wrist.  
When she raised a hue and cry,  
O Qadiryar!  
He ran away from the palace.

Phaedra, on her part, commits suicide but leaves behind a note that seals the fate of Hippolytus. In both the cases the patriarchs are cut to the quick and they pronounce their verdicts immediately, without entertaining in their minds an iota of doubt about what has been reported, directly or indirectly, to them. Puran protests, so does Hippolytus-

'Have I now fallen suspect, guiltless as I am?'

But his father is relentless in his pronouncement-

Out of this land  
To exile! Go, I say! Never again approach  
The god-built city of Athens, cross no boundary  
That my sword guards.<sup>4</sup>

In the case of Puran, the punishment is more cruel and the results more devastating. His limbs are dismembered and he is thrown into a deserted well.

Hippolytus bids goodbye to the lads of Trozen and goes away for ever, but not before telling his father, Theseus - 'you will never meet a man whose nature is more pure, more sound, than mine.'

On his part, Puran tries very hard to prove his innocence in the face of wild accusations. When Salwan refuses to relent, Puran offers the ultimate test of his filial fidelity-

Test the piety of my character, O'Raja!  
Boil a full cauldron of oil  
Let it be as hot as fire  
Dip a hand of mine in it  
(unscathed it will be, certainly)  
Then you will know the reality  
Blame me not without verification



Qadiryar, if a speck appears on my finger  
Show no mercy to me at all?

Puran is supposedly banished from life but fate so conspires as to bring him back, after more than twelve years, to his native town, Sialkot. Ichhran gets a new lease of life, whereas Salwan is filled with remorse and Luna feels penitent. Puran pardons both of them, though not before making them eat a humble pie. He had all along been burning with the zeal of re-establishing his dislodged image of a chaste and upright son.

Unlike Puran, who comes back after more than twelve years, Hippolytus faces his father shortly after his banishment. As he nears the frontiers of his land, he is struck down by the horse on which he is riding. Later he is brought home on a stretcher. His father Theseus refuses to relent even now. At this stage Artemis, the goddess of chastity, apprises him of the truth of the matter. This revelation turns the wheel and Theseus lets out a cry of despair -

O endless misery! what shall I say?  
How can I free my life from suffering  
And forget pain?<sup>5</sup>

Hippolytus is still alive. The grief of his father is too much for him. Before breathing his last, he absolves his father of the guilt of homicide - 'I here absolve you of my death.' Of course here is no Phaedra, as in the case of Luna, to seek pardon from the person whom she has wronged.

In Euripides's play, "Phaedra appears in only two scenes and never faces Hippolytus. In Puran Bhagat there is direct confrontation which more than anything else encourages our aversion for the sluttish Luna. On the other hand, our sympathy is roused by the secret tortured state of Phaedra and her long struggle against it. One begins to discern a dignified frailty, grace and grandeur in her refusal to confront Hippolytus with her love. The disclosure of her love is made by the maid. Luna is baser, bolder, bawdier. She not only confronts the youth but when her charms and persuasions fail, threatens blackmail. Luna from the start is alienated by her unseemly manner. Phaedra succumbs to the shame heroically, tragically. She dies half-way through the play but Luna, lives on to face the consequences of her actions."<sup>6</sup>

However, what gives the story of Qissa Puran Bhagat an edge over the tale told in *Phaedra* is the role of three women in the life of Puran. Ichhran, the mother, is the symbol of maternal love and tenderness. She considers her son Puran the pivot around which her life revolves. With the coming of Luna in the household, she has been relegated to a secondary position. In these altered circumstances, the focus shifts from an indifferent husband to a love-starved adolescent son. In Puran's absence she is deprived of her eyesight which she regains on hearing his voice after a long spell of time.

Luna, on the other hand, is the symbol of a temptress who is not much bothered about the ethical values of the society nor does she have any compunction about her stupidity. The circumstances put her in an unenviable position and she is determined, unmindful of the consequences, to have her pound of flesh. It's another matter that she brings havoc to the royal household by the foolish action and vengeful attitude.

Sundran is the third woman whom Puran comes across at the crossroads of his life. The co-disciples of Puran tell him to go to the palace of the princess Sundran for alms. The maid-servant of Sundran offers alms to Puran which he duly refuses, and insists on the audience of Sundran. The princess is furious but relents as she listens to the description of the handsome figure of the new yogi. On seeing him, she loses her heart to him. She invites him in but he refuses to cross the threshold. She overlays Puran with the gifts of pearls and diamonds. Guru Gorakh Nath refuses to accept these glittering objects. Sundran then prepares the choicest dishes for the Dera. The Guru is highly pleased. Sundran gets Puran as a reward.

The prince-yogi deserts his princess soon. They are like two heterogeneous elements held together, as if by violence, for a short while. Their coming together and then moving apart have deeprooted psychological repercussions, not so much on Puran's mind as on the mind of Rani Sundran. Why did the prince-yogi discard her in such a callous and deceitful manner? This small event affords the reader to have a peep into the mind of the self-righteous person. From the ethical point of view, Puran's stature gets a fillip but on the human plain his image is tarnished. From the beginning he is not of the common run but this step of

his removes him further from the sea of humanity. Indeed he creates awe, and to a degree admiration, in the minds of the people around. But in the process he fails to have rapport with them and stands isolated. There is no identification of the reader with the protagonist; as such the much-needed catharsis is held in abeyance.

Incidentally, Sundran emerges as an admirable character and her supreme sacrifice invests her with a halo. She is a symbol of true, selfless love. She is ready to win the hand of Puran, the yogi, even if she has to become a yogin herself. It is not she but Puran who is found lacking the warmth of human relationship. The reason, of course, is not far to seek. He had been denied parental affection during his infancy and boyhood. As an adolescent, he did not receive the tender love of a shy, innocent girl of his age. Instead he came face to face with a lustful woman whose attitude to life and love had been warped by her thwarted desires. She was a passionate woman seeking the response of the body and not of the mind. The coarseness and crudeness of Puran's experience distorted his vision in respect of opposite sex.

The interplay of emotions at different levels of these three female characters has made this *Qissa* truly a work of art with a universal appeal. It is interesting to note that there is a thaw in the iciness of Puran's feelings for women- folk when he meets his mother Ichhran in the garden at Sialkot after a very long spell of time. He addresses her with such affection as is evident in the case of a small boy for his mother. In that expansive mood he forgives Luna and gives her a grain of rice, the partaking of which would bless her with a son. Puran is, however, reluctant to forgive his father, Salwan, for his cruelty to him. It is beyond his understanding as to how a father could treat his innocent son in such a barbaric manner. Even at that time of his life, the bitterness of his relations with his father lingers on in Puran's mind -

*Qadiryar, jehi mere baap keeti  
Aisi kaun karda puttar nall koi*

Qadiryar! What my father did to me,  
Who ever does such a thing to his son?

In punjabi folklore there are a good many tales which have the same motif as is found in *Qissa Puran Bhagat*. In the well-known

folk-tale *Roop Basant*, Rani Roopmati falls in love with her step-son, Basant, who is of her age. He refuses to fall into the trap and is, as a sort of stock response, accused of attempted incest. The father, Raja Kharag Sein, banishes his son from his kingdom. In this way the hurdle is removed but no attempt is made to know the reality of the situation. In *Qissa Puran Bhagat*, however, the story heads towards its logical conclusion. The guilty feel penitent and the wronged person forgives them graciously. He even blesses his step-mother with the birth of a son. In their ignorance the parents had 'thrown away a pearl dearer than the whole tribe.' Now the birth of a son to them, he realises, will restore the filial bond that had miserably snapped in the case of Salwan and Puran.

There has been over the years a number of interpretations of the story of Puran Bhagat. In it there is an unconscious reversal of the Oedipus complex. Puran refuses to violate the sanctity of mother-son relationship nor does he stoop to discard the social and ethical values of the society. Luna's emotional insecurity finds a new orientation and she makes a frantic effort to change the dead-end pattern of her life. She tries to coax and seduce Puran to unite with her. But Puran, being a strict moralist, refuses to overstep the bounds of social propriety. He insists that their relationship remains within the mother-son framework because 'it has never happened that a mother or son have fallen in love' and entreats her to 'think that I am born of your womb.' For Puran, indulgence with his step-mother would be an unpardonable sin and in this aura of a moral superiority he does not respond to Luna's animal sexuality. This non-acceptance represents the release of an inner turmoil that Luna has all along been compelled to suffer and she becomes so demanding that she fails to see through Puran's eyes.<sup>7</sup>

"The symbols in this story have provided rich material for interpretation. Puran's being cast into a well may be regarded as being, symbolically, in a divine embryonic state, in the belly of mother earth because the very purpose of Puran's death is to attain a hallowed quality. Puran's rebirth forms the central core of the narrative because it subtly touches the basic existential issues of Kama, Krodha, Lobha, Moha and Ahankara. Here is a fundamental dichotomy between evil and good which are, again, the basic issues involved in metaphysical definitions. This distinction corresponds the negative and positive poles of valuation between which life is

lived. Puran's struggle falls within this framework of basic categories. The dialectics is evident from the basic scheme of the plot."<sup>8</sup>

"The legend of Puran Bhagat deals with the compunctions of public morality and collective consciousness. Immediately after his advent in the light of human relationships, Puran is enticed by his step-mother, Luna, who, rejected by Puran's public morality, gets him executed by his father, Salwan. He spends the next twelve years in the forlorn darkness of the deserted well. The seclusion, darkness and the immobility in the deserted well is far more severe and acute than the darkness of the dungeon. In the dungeon Puran was a child. He was deprived of his parents, but he had the company of his servants and counsellors, who helped him grow and acquire the necessary human awareness. In the deserted well Puran is an adult. He has had a contact with sex, the most essential ingredient of manhood, and a confrontation with the authority of his father, an obligatory step in the development of individual conscious. It is with this confrontation that the psychic umbilical cord is broken. Puran is now on his own. He must face the world without, and the world within, all alone. During the sudden confrontation, he made use of the cudgels of using collective consciousness to assert and realise the urges of his individual consciousness. The world within the deserted well, and the world without, are in a strange contact. The extreme physical immobility, and unfettered imaginative, individual conscious flights are in perfect harmony. The deserted well represents both the dark, fathomless prison-hole and the absolute freedom of mind."<sup>9</sup>

"The psychic imbalance of Puran is being restored by two women. The one is, of course, his mother, Ichhran. The other is Sundran. Luna is responsible for the first major emotional disequilibrium, but she neutralises the effect with the physical torture that Puran is subjected to. In the case of Sundran, the situation is different. Not only, it is Puran who insists on her audience in the first place, it is Sundran who tortures herself for his sake. She makes the supreme sacrifice of her life. When Luna meets Puran for the second time, he is a grief-stricken yogi. Towards Luna and Salwan, he has the sentiments of revenge. A great wrong was done to him. He can justify his act. The entire cultural consciousness supports him, but no matter what justification he

probably had in the beginning, in the initial response of Sundran, he cannot blame the one who is no more, who has de-existentialised herself, who has apparently freed Puran of her obstacle. But what is not manifest is immanent. Since he cannot react to Sundran, he is psychologically immobile, and in this immobility, neither nature nor culture will help him. He must suffer her memory for ever. Her violence to herself has obviously cleansed her of all human impurity. If one ventures to say at this stage of the analysis, Sundran's sacrifice humanised the austere disciple of Gorakh. What the Guru could not do, she did. And, the Guru was not so wrong, after all. It is he who so willingly gives the gift of Puran to Sundran. Does it refer to one of the yogic precepts that woman is the greatest teacher of man?"<sup>10</sup>

"The human condition in the narrative of Puran is the condition of sex and violence, of discipline and austerity, of heightened emotions and extreme egocentric personalities. Each sequence of the narrative is charged with existential crisis of the being who can never forget himself. The self is above all emotions. All the dramatis personnel are wrapped up in the most unyielding cover of self-deceit and self-assurance. But it is also a narrative of extremely disturbed minds. It is a discourse of utter frustration and perturbed minds. Every sequence leaves a certain psychic trace which cannot be obliterated by all the physical violence that every one tries to subject the other to. There is also self negation and torture. But the self never leaves. The ego predominates. The memories never leave the inner layers of the tormented self. The narrative moves from one crisis to another. It is not a discourse of resolutions. The underlying logic of physical or mental violence only pushes one sequence into another. As a cultural discourse, this narrative could be an attempt at a discursive confrontation of yogic upright steadfastness with the ways of the world, but not only Puran, all others who participate in this high drama of extreme psychic tensions, are always left high and dry in mid air, with an acute sense of loneliness and frustration. The touch of the yogi Puran is not the touch that heals, it invariably ends up by inflicting another merciless sharp cut to the already open wound."<sup>11</sup>

M. Athar Tahir has made a very profound psycho-analysis of the various characters of *Qissa Puran Bhagat*. When Puran approaches Luna with filial respect, she is inflamed by love :

*Dilun puttār nun yar banaya su  
Us di sabti di vichun luj tuti*

In her heart  
The son was transformed into a lover.  
The rope of her rectitude  
Snapped in the middle.

The word luj/rope used for drawing water from the well is significant. It links the dark unknown of the well with the light of day. Its sudden snapping symbolises Luna's break with the light of the accepted code. It may also mean her plunging to the depth of immorality and disorder.

Ichhran refuses to believe that her son Puran is guilty of the charge levelled against him by Luna. Salwan, however, is easily taken in. Ichhran implores her husband not to be too harsh on her son. She compares Puran to the fruit-giving tree and Luna to the poisonous shrub :

*Amb vadh ke Ak nun wad dewain  
Pachhtawen ga waqt vaha ke jee*

Mango tree you are cutting for providing  
a hedge to the Ak shrub.  
Repent you will, when the time is lost.

She amplifies the vegetal metaphor signifying, 'continuity and relatedness' of human existence. Later, when Puran returns as a Bhagat, saint, metaphors manifest in reality, the decaying royal garden blooms into life again.<sup>12</sup>

Qadiryar has very artistically juxtaposed the suffering of Puran's mother, Ichhran, when the executioners are on the verge of lopping his hands off - 'mar jae gi rondri mai meri (In my absence my mother will die, shedding tears) with Luna's joy and exultation when Puran is thrown into a deserted well, after his hands have been lopped off--

*Uhde dast sehkaye ke vadheo neyn  
Uhdi loth vahanwde vich khuhe  
Qadiryar, aa Luna nun deyn rattu  
Vekh lanwadi haar Shingar suhe*

They chopped off his hands  
and threw the body into a well.  
Qadiryar, they brought home his blood  
that prompted Luna to decorate

herself ostentatiously.

In recent times Shiv Kumar Batalvi has made a laudable attempt to versify the legend of Puran Bhagat but with a difference. In his poetic play *Luna*, the emphasis is altogether on the plight of Luna who had been much maligned by the earlier bards. Shiv Kumar has put forth his point of view convincingly. He avers that it is but natural for Luna to be attracted to the youthful Puran. On his part, Puran too cannot ignore the ludicrous situation in which his father Salwan has put himself. Consequently the characters in this work have assumed symbolic significance. The interplay of elemental passions has also invested this poetic play with universal appeal. Here the poet has not told the whole story, although he appears to have taken Qadiryar's *Qissa Puran Bhagat* as his model. *Luna* ends on a sad note when Puran is writhing in pain after his hands and feet have been lopped off.

The earlier *Qissa-kars* had seen the whole story from a moralistic point of view and eulogised Puran. However, Shiv Kumar thinks that Luna is more sinned against than sinning, though he is all praise for Puran for the nobility of his character and the firmness of his resolve. The villain of the piece is not Luna but Salwan who had married a girl worthy to be his daughter. She has been deprived of youthful response to her natural impulses. As a result, her sex urge is distorted and depraved. She craves for the liberation of her suppressed personality and finds it hard to put up with her injured ego. The poet identifies himself completely with the woman and her erratic moods. He shares with her the conflict of moral values in her mind.<sup>13</sup>

Darshan Singh Maini is of the opinion that "Shiv's *Loona*, which is something of a cross between an epic and a poetic play is generally considered his crowning achievement. It won him the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1967. Shiv has invested this well-known historical tale with overt Freudian meanings. Upsetting the traditional interpretation... she has been shown by Shiv as possessing a radical consciousness. In a manner, this is an

example of prognosticative sensibility, and the poet puts some of the 20th-century sentiments and cannons of sexual ethics into the mouth of a medieval outcaste girl. Clearly, Shiv is not writing a historical play, but a poem of dramatic and immediate interest."<sup>14</sup>

Despite the liberties with the historical legend and the plethora of modern interpretations, Qadiryar's *Qissa Puran Bhagat* stands apart like a light house, illuminating the paths that lead to eternity.

#### 4. HIS CONTRIBUTION

Qadiryar was well-versed in the art of narration. He could convey in a delectable style the nuances of the tale he purported to narrate. He never diversified his tale so as to cater to the puerile curiosity of the common reader or listener. Whereas some of his predecessors and contemporaries had dwelt at length in describing the physical charms of their heroines, Qadiryar refrained from doing so. Nowhere in *Qissa Puran Bhagat* did he describe the seductiveness of Luna or the captivating charms of Rani Sundran. Nor did he conjure up an atmosphere replete with such images as can be associated with lasciviousness or lewdness. He is straightforward in his approach to the theme of his tale and is all the time conscious of the ethical values of the period from which he never deviates. This closeness to the ethos of the society in which he lived endeared him to the people of the land and his *Qissa* became a household byword for the generations to come.

Even in his love-tale, *Sohni Mahinwal*, Qadiryar desists from employing sensuous imagery. When he is in an expansive mood, he can afford to linger on the description of the features of his heroines but he never lets go his innate reticence. In his attempt to portray the attractive figure of Sohni, the poet employs sophisticated imagery -

*Udha nazak jussa makhmalon, waang gulabe rang  
Kad bulandi sarv di, gardan misal kulang  
Kele wangun pinnian, utlas bhinna rang  
Dekh jharan parinde, Qadira, jiwen mashaal patang*

(Her body was smoother than velvet and her complexion rosy. Her stature was that of a cypress tree. Her neck was thin like *Kulang*. Her calves were like the plantain of pink hue. The birds swooned on seeing her, O'Qadir, just as the moths fall on the burning torch.)

*Laaik Sohni sifat de, andar husan kamal  
Chann mathe wich delhkda, josh husan de nal  
Sir par nazak mendhian, attar chhande wal  
Udhe nain dusaakhe, Qadira, aashiq marenda jal*

(Sohni deserves praise, exquisitely beautiful as she is. In her forehead shines the moon, fed with the glow of her beauty. Her tresses, which exude fragrance, have been done delicately on her head. Her bewitching eyes have laid snares to entrap lovers.)

*Palkaan teer khudank de, abru sakhat kamaan  
Nakk peepa talwar da, gharian kise dukaan  
Dand parote motian, koel waang zubaan  
Thodi kadar badam de, waangun meem dehan*

(Her eyelids have pointed arrows and the eye-brows are like tightened bows. Her nose is sharp like the blade of a sword that has been shaped by an expert. Her teeth are like a necklace of pearls and her voice is sweet like that of a Koel. Her chin is almond-shaped and the mouth very small.)

*Udhe baazu ghare kharadian, khaas kharad utaar  
Unglian wich nazaki, phalian de mikdaar  
Seena sakht billaur da, gharia ustakar  
Pistan seo bahisht de, jeon rasdar anaar*

(Her arms have been chiselled well like a product finished in a foundry. Her fingers are delicate like peas. Her well-shaped chest is as hard as crystal and the breasts are the heavenly apples, full of the nectar of juicy pomegranates.)

*Shikam surahi ishak di, sunian mast ho jae  
Akhen wekhan walean, hosh na rahe bajae  
Peevan wale mar gae, jaan jahan vanjhae  
Uh nazak badan si, Qadira, sift na keeti jae*

(Her belly is the receptacle of love, the very mention of it inebriates. Those who had a glimpse of it lost their senses. Those who quaffed it, left the world without a murmur. O'Qadir! it was so delicate a body as defies description.)

Sohni is not aware of the impact her graceful figure has made on Izzat Beg who has preferred to be near his beloved in Gujrat than to go back to his native place, Bukhara. From a prosperous

merchant, he has been reduced to a petty shopkeeper. When he is penniless he seeks employment as a cowherd in the household of Tulla, the father of Sohni. Once Mahinwal summons enough courage to give expression to his feelings in the presence of his lady love. Innocent as Sohni is, she at first fails to understand the state of affairs. Later she realizes the reality of the situation and starts weeping. Qadiryar has depicted this encounter between the two lovers in a superb manner -

*Sohni maari sharam di, bole na keeti gal  
Na us akhen part ke, ditha us de wal  
Par wichon hanjhu us dian, baatan gayian chal  
Tis din us de, Qadira, khohle ishk kufal*

Sohni felt embarrassed  
No word escaped her lips  
Nor did she look back  
To have a glimpse of his face  
Her tears started flowing  
Inundating her whole being  
From that day, O' Qadir!  
Love disclosed its secrets.

Tragic muse is the font of inspiration for Qadir. He is deeply stirred when he depicts the plight of a person in hopeless love. In *Qissa Puran Bhagat*, Rani Sundran is beside herself with grief, when she finds that Puran has deserted her. Guru Gorakh Nath had blessed her with Puran as her spouse. Though unwilling at first, he accompanies her to her palace. But before long, Puran makes good his escape, leaving Sundran forlorn and woe-begone. Her lamentations are too deep for tears. Qadiryar is at his best when he gives vent to her anguish -

*Zara na taaqat rahi tan wich  
Rani gawndi ghaman de geet loko  
Main tan bhulli tusi na bhullo koi  
Laavo jogian naal na preet loko  
Jungal gye na bohre Sundran nun  
Jogi hain agge kihde meet loko  
Qadiryar pichhan khari dekhdi saan  
Khush waqtwi hoye bateet loko*

Her body having emaciated,  
 The Rani sang a doleful song -  
 'Never err, as I have erred,  
 To fall in love with an ascetic.  
 Once gone to the wilderness  
 The yogi did not turn up to Sundran.  
 Take it from me, O' folks!  
 The yogis are the friends of nobody.  
 O' Qadiryar! when I looked back  
 I found that the happy days had already gone.'

Sundran realises the futility of loving a yogi and jumps to death from the roof of her palace. Her love for Puran holds in relief Luna's love for him. Indeed Sundran's love is of a nobler kind as it does not induce her like Luna to be vindictive to the object of her love. When she finds herself rejected, she kills herself. This supreme sacrifice of Sundran may not place her alongside the tragic heroines like Sassi, Sohni and Heer of Punjabi Romances but she indeed carves out a niche for herself in the hearts of the readers of the *Qissa*. By making a rare ironic comment on the tragic situation, Qadiryar brings home his point of view in a forceful manner -

*Sundran de swas mukt hoye  
 Puran nas ke guru de pas punna*

Just as Sundran breathed her last  
 Puran reached hastily his Guru's abode.

Significantly, just as Luna continued her daily routine after disposing of Puran with love's role reversed, Puran goes on his way while Sundran commits suicide. Qadiryar's narration shows a perception of life encountered in none of his earlier works. Seizing the strange logic of life, he perceives the absurd in human existence.

Likewise, Qadiryar depicts impressively the state of mind of Sohni, when she finds that the river is in flood and she has to go across it on a pitcher of unbaked clay. Sohni is terrified but she does not vacillate. True love calls her and she must respond to it with all sincerity. The poet's identification with her is complete. He lends a soulful voice to Sohni's last passionate plea -

*Sohni da tan khan nun hoye sub tayar  
 Sohni aggon Qadira ro ro kara pukar  
 Machh, Kachhu balhanu karan sawal tujhe  
 Main daulat Mahinwal di, Sohni naam mujhe  
 Shala mere badan nun, dagh na lao aje  
 Mainun yar milan di, Qadira, dil wich taang aje*

All of them were eager  
 to rip open the body of Sohni.  
 But Sohni, O' Qadira!  
 pleaded before them with tearful eyes -  
 'Listen to me,  
 O you crocodiles, tortoises and scorpions!  
 I am Mahinwal's trust,  
 my name is Sohni.  
 You dare not blemish  
 my body as yet.  
 I do hope, O' Qadir!  
 to meet my lover still.

Qadiryar's forte is his racy narrative style which leaves no scope for the reader or the listener to 'let his fancy roam'. The poet is down to earth in his approach to the problems of life and wastes not a single breath in unravelling the skein of events or in depicting the state of the mind of his personages. When Ichhran, who had lost her eyesight due to her separation from her son, hears the voice of Puran, she exclaims -

'Tell me, O' son, from where have you come?  
 Which is your place and whose son are you?  
 Name the fortunate mother who gave you birth?  
 I would have recognised you, if I could see,  
 But your voice indicates that you are my son.  
 O' Qadiryar!  
 She longed to know the reality,  
 Else she might claim someone's son as hers.

At that time, Puran Bhagat could not help disclosing his identity. On knowing the reality, Ichhran swayed to and fro in sheer ecstasy -

The mother became unmindful of her miserable condition  
 She got back her lost eyesight  
 She clasped Puran to her bosom  
 God blessed her with joys, taking her woes and sorrows away.  
 On seeing Puran before her eyes  
 Milk gushed forth from the nipples of her breasts.  
 O' Qadiryar! for Rani Ichhran,  
 All the doors of joy and glory had opened wide.

Qadiryar is a unique poet in many respects. He presents in his works the true picture of his age. The Punjab at that time was enjoying relative peace under the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The secular outlook of the Maharaja had instilled in the hearts of the common people patriotic feelings. There was no 'great divide' at that time between the Hindus and the Sikhs on the one hand and the Muslims on the other, as was witnessed at the time of the partition. The nascent composite culture had started imbuing the people of the land of five rivers with nationalistic feelings. So the incursions from across the Western border were regarded as national calamity by the Punjabis as a whole. Interestingly, Qadiryar, a Muslim poet, sings whole heartedly in praise of the Sikh general Hari Singh Nalwa who not only pushed back the invaders but also established the Khalsa rule over the Afghan territories. A time came when the Khalsa *Nishan* was unfurled on the fort of Jamraud.

"Qadiryar focuses on Hari Singh's military adroitness and courage. That Hari Singh was tyrannical towards Muslims is surprisingly disregarded by Qadiryar, who himself a Muslim could not be totally unaware of this fact. His championing the Sikh cause may have had something to do with his practice of poetry. A mere exercise in a new genre. Though this is possible, it is not plausible. If the *Var* is examined, nowhere does the poet mention the Muslim or Islam. It is the Pathan/ Afghan against the Punjabi."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed Hari Singh is written about by Qadiryar as a Punjabi battling against the Afghans/Pathans. The poet is not conscious of his own faith when he praises the deeds of the Sikh forces. He is not speaking high of a particular community but the Punjabis as a whole who gave a crushing defeat to the Pathans and the Afghans-

After building the fort of Balasar  
 Impregnate it with weaponry.  
 Then march in battle array to Jamraud  
 To fight to the finish.  
 O' Qadiryar! my heart goes to the youth  
 Who are destined to win laurels  
 And be honoured with gallantry awards.

At times Qadiryar uses the imagery of Guru Gobind Singh. While describing the valorous deeds of Hari Singh Nalwa, he says-

Victory to Hari Singh Sardar  
 Hundreds of Pathans were done to death.  
 What to talk of weapons, O' Qadiryar!  
 The hungry hawks fell on the victims.

Qadiryar is steeped deep in the love of his land (*Var Hari Singh Nalwa*). He is also devoted to his faith (*Mehraj Nama* and *Rozah Nama*). But primarily he is a moral poet. His morality has steered clear of conventional religions as he is concerned more with the essentials in them than with the rituals. Even when he writes about an Islamic theological event in *Mehraj Nama* or a Hindu classical legend in *Qissa Puran Bhagat*, he does not lose sight of his moral vision. Undoubtedly his morality extends towards the human dimension. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh Sardars headed towards corruption and decadence. It was the time of social and political disintegration. With a view to bringing home his message of piety and purity, he chose a Hindu legend about whose impact on the masses he was quite certain. The Hindu bhagat was a representative of the Punjabi psyche and his legend embodied mystical dimensions too. As such Puran became the mouth-piece for ethical values not only of that age but of all the ages to come.

"Puran as a dramatic persona may well be the projection of Qadiryar's individual conviction and commitment. But at a more public level he speaks of the richness of Muslim participation in and contribution to the culture of the Punjab and the whole spectrum of Indian life. Orientalists have tended to treat and project the Muslims as images of exclusiveness. In a multi-religious society, such as India's this impression is particularly pronounced.... But there exists a sizeable area of mutual exchange,



an area where various religious strands meet, mix and at times mingle.... It is persons like Qadiryar who question the stereotypical images and thereby open a whole range of areas of inquiry. These poets and artists are, not of the Imperial or Provincial courts but, of the people. They show Islam as an interesting human phenomenon in the Indian context as well as lay out the complexity and diversity of nineteenth century Punjab, Punjab where Qadiryar through Puran became the citizen of his times.<sup>3</sup>

Another aspect of Punjabi life is manifest in the poetry of Qadiryar. Both in the fields of war and peace, the Punjabi youth is ever ready to lay down his life. When it comes to divine aspirations, he can leave his home and hearth to attain the glimpse of the Almighty. Puran became a Nath Yogi and is so much immersed in asceticism that the beauty and richness of Rani Sundran fail to entice him from his path of renunciation. Even when Puran was just at the threshold of adolescence, he spurned the lascivious advances of his step-mother Luna, who, before long, changed the course of his destiny. Ethical values have all along been the guiding principles of the people of Punjab to whichever community they might belong. Puran adheres to the correct moral conduct even when Luna argues that she has not fed him on her breast and as such he cannot claim to be her son. He puts forth the argument that the wife of his father cannot nullify the sacred filial bond that exists between them. In unambiguous terms Puran pleads with Luna -

'Never can I climb up your bed  
Nor can I glance back at you  
Rather I would prefer to go to the gallows.'  
Pulling down his ears, he left the place -  
'What would I gain by forsaking my Dharam?'  
Utterly embarrassed, Luna found it hard,  
O, Qadiryar! to say-  
'Puran! I want to quaff off a draught of your blood.'

The picture that emerges at the end of this episode is that of order, sanity and piety. One may entertain the feelings of sympathy for Luna as she found herself in a strange predicament but it is well-nigh impossible to find fault with Puran's conduct, based on correct moral principles. Over the past two centuries, Puran has been regarded as the symbol of Punjabi youth who is always ready

to lay down his life for his beliefs, more so if they are ethical in texture.

Qadiryar is a poet of classical temperament. He has embodied in his works the perennial truths of human life. He is the symbol of composite Punjabi culture and is perhaps the first true exponent of Punjabi culture. His love for the land of his birth precludes all other considerations. He is the first folk-poet whose works have attained the status of classical literature, without losing their appeal for the common people for whom he had originally penned them. Apart from the uniqueness of his subject-matter, his greatness lies in his poetic excellence. His metaphors and images have acquired the status of aphorisms.

*Khushi wich na mewndi cholare de  
Bund tut gye pishwaz de jee*

Elated, she found her dress too tight  
and the knots of her bodice snapped.

*Qadiryar, Sassi wang mainun  
Thhalan wick kukendi nun sutt gayon*

O' Qadiryar! like Sassi,  
You abandoned me lamenting in the desert

*Laggi deyn langaar asmaan lanyen  
Udhi sabti de wichon thhum bhanne*

She tried to tear off the sky  
The pillars of her rectitude  
cracked in the middle.

*Umb wadh ke Ak nun waar deven  
Pachhotawenga waqt wihaye ke jee*

Mango tree you are cutting to provide a hedge to  
the AK shrub  
Repent you will,  
When the time is lost.

*Qadiryar, ja loke hairaan hoye  
Ajj baaz te chiri aswar hoyi*

The people were amazed, O' Qadiryar!  
To see a sparrow atop an eagle.

*Machhi waang si tarapde raat katti  
Kade pawe lumma kade uthh jae*

He spent the night,  
Restless like a fish (out of water),  
Lying awhile and getting up again.

*Uhde hatth bana ke wadheo je  
Waang bakre os di jaan kusse*

Cut his hands so well  
He should writhe in pain  
Like a butchered goat.

*Dilun puttarr nun yaar banaya su  
Us di sabti di wichum luj tutti*

In her heart  
The son was transformed into a lover  
Snapping in the middle the rope of her rectitude.

*Gallan eho jahian jaddon hon laggian  
Putthi hoju zameen asmaan maye*

O' mother! If such things begin to happen  
The sky will be rent  
And the earth upturned.

*Jo koi ashiq ho rahe, urak eho khatt  
Dunya utun mar da, kar ke chaur chupat*

In the end, a lover gets  
Nothing but misery and suffering  
In this world.

*Such syane aakh de  
Zalam jaat runnan*

The wise ones have truly said -  
Females are a cruel lot.

*Hun dekh tamasha, Qadira  
Mangan lagge ni yaar*

Now watch this spectacle, O' Qadir!  
The lover has come for alms.

*Laggi wekh wagawaney nadi puthi*

Lo, she intends to reverse  
the flow of the stream.

*Burge wichon disda jiwain badli wichon chann*

When she peeped through her veil  
Her face was like the moon  
among dark clouds.

*Jo hai khubi ishq di, jani naal dile  
Ishq hijar de rah theen, jhabde rab mile*

This is the true character of love,  
Know it with all your heart,  
The paths of separation lead to the Lord.

*Gharbar dhian puttarr yaad aaye  
Lagga sayi wachhure da teer bhara*

When he remembered his household,  
His sons and daughters,  
The arrow of separation struck hard.

*Qadiryar, paharaan nun sodheo su  
Kabul kambiya khauf Kandhar tayen*

O' Qadiryar! he has conquered the mountains  
And struck terror in Kabul and Kandhar.

## 5. EXCERPTS FROM QISSA PURAN BHAGAT

### (i) The birth of Puran

In Sialkot  
Puran was born to Salwan.  
When the news reached him  
The Raja consulted the astrologers.  
The Pandits forbade him  
to see the face of his son for twelve years.  
O'Qadiryar! The father consigned the new-born son  
to the underground cell.

The Pandits consulted the scriptures  
and interpreted them to the letter.  
Puran had come out of one type of darkness  
and gone into another.  
The Raja provided well for the attendants to Puran  
for the period of twelve years.  
O'Qadiryar! The father sent his son to prison  
on the day of his birth.

### (ii) Puran comes to his Father's Durbar

Puran received his education for twelve years  
and was well-versed in many arts.  
He, then, on the completion of his training,  
got ready to meet Raja Salwan.  
When the news reached Raja Salwan,  
he looked forward to the meeting eagerly.  
O'Qadiryar! When the Raja saw the face of his son  
he was inebriated, as was the world.

During this period, Raja Salwan had brought  
another woman into his household.  
She was of low-caste and her name Luna,  
The Raja had won her with great flourish.  
Her face appeared bright like the moon,  
When she decorated herself with ornaments.  
O'Qadiryar! What can I say further?  
The birds swooned on having a glimpse of her.

The Raja advised the young Puran to go to the palace  
and pay his regards to the ladies.  
He should now welcome the joys of life,  
after his long sojourn in the dungeon.  
He got up on hearing his father's words  
and proceeded towards home in the company of  
attendants.  
O' Qadiryar! What can I say in his praise?  
The women became unmindful of their husbands on  
seeing him.

### (iii) Puran's meeting with Luna

Puran reached the mansion of the ladies  
with the guidance of the servants.  
The one, who had given him birth,  
felt elevated when he paid his obeisance to her.  
Next he proceeded towards the apartment of Luna  
and entered it with great expectations.  
O' Qadiryar! he told the escort to stay back  
and climbed up the stairs to pay his regards.

On seeing the glow on the face of Puran,  
the Rani was mesmerised.  
She dismissed the Raja from her mind  
as passion enveloped her senses.  
In her heart the son turned into a lover  
and the rope of her rectitude snapped in the middle.  
O' Qadiryar! the cruel woman  
intended to reverse the flow of the stream.

'My luck has brought him hither',  
Luna was thinking new thoughts.  
'I too can hope to attain bliss  
if Puran accedes to my request.'  
She tried to tear off the sky,  
the pillars of her rectitude cracked in the middle.  
O' Qadiryar! the relentless woman  
started breaking rock salt in plates and bowls.

**(iv) The dialogue between Puran and Luna**

I say it openly, why should I feel coy?  
Address me not with the prefix of 'mother'.  
I did neither conceive you nor gave you birth,  
By which relation do you then call me your mother?  
You are of my age, more or less,  
You have made me suffer the pangs of separation.  
O' Qadiryar! Luna did not feel ashamed to say -  
'You have left me devoid of life.'

She did not care for any warning or danger,  
Luna got up and caught hold of his sleeves.  
Do come to occupy my bed,  
this is my earnest request, pay heed to it.  
Listen to the nymph-like woman, as I am,  
otherwise you are no man, a mere nincompoop.  
O' Qadiryar! Luna did not feel embarrassed to say -  
'Share my bed with me, you are my love, my life!'

Be sensible, O' Puran! Compel me not to be harsh to you.  
I am standing beside you, with my arms extended,  
Will you not be charitable?  
Do not call me your mother; tell me -  
Were you ever fed at my breast?  
Refrain from claiming me your mother.  
O' Qadiryar! Luna did not hesitate to say -  
'Why do you intend to die like this?'

Puran replied - 'I tell you sincerely, dear mother,  
Never can I climb up your bed

Nor can I glance back at you  
Rather I would prefer to go to the gallows.'  
Pulling down his ears, he left the place -  
'What would I gain by forsaking my Dharam?'  
Utterly embarrassed, Luna found it hard,  
O' Qadiryar, to say -  
'Puran! I want to quaff off a draught of your blood'.

**(v) The Raja's entry into the palace**

What do you ask me, O' Raja!  
My grief has burnt me up.  
Go and ask your son,  
Who has lately come from the dungeon.  
Keep him with you and let me go,  
You seem to be fed up with me altogether.  
O' Qadiryar! the Rani told a lie to the Raja  
as big as a mountain.

**(vi) The Raja's dialogue with Puran**

O' Puran! the Raja said -  
Why were you born at all?  
If I knew it beforehand, I would have slain you  
rather than consign you to the dungeon.  
You have lacerated my heart, O' Puran!  
On which evil day were you born?  
O' Qadiryar! the Raja wanted to know  
the sinful act he had ventured on at home.

No one dared to disobey the order  
The whole family was greatly agitated.  
The palace and the domes trembled,  
when the Sardar became wrathful.  
He gave orders to the executioners  
The news raised hue and cry in the town.  
O' Qadiryar! he reprimanded the Vazier -  
'Why don't you act in haste?'

**(vii) Ichhran learns about Puran's punishment**

Then the news reached Rani Ichhran,  
who had given birth to her son, Puran.

The Rani cracked her bangles and snapped the buttons  
 She pulled her hair down and poured dust on her head.  
 Too deep is the filial affection for dear sons!  
 So the Rani rushed to the Raja.  
 O' Qadiryar! she raised her voice and asked -  
 'What sort of a grudge do you nurse against him?'

The Raja, on his part, did not relent  
 He called for the executioner.  
 The Vaziers and the Dewans started weeping  
 But the Raja remained unmoved.  
 'Lop off his hands and feet',  
 The Raja blurted out.  
 O' Qadiryar! Puran Bhagat got up from his place  
 to pay his regards to his mother.

'O' Raja! do not lose your senses,'  
 So said Ichhran imploringly,  
 'The mango tree you are cutting  
 To provide a hedge to the AK shrub.  
 Repent you will, when the time is lost.  
 You are uprooting your own plant.'  
 O' Qadiryar! if you kill Puran,  
 who will come to call you Babu?

Grief-stricken, the Rani went blind  
 Heaving deep sighs, she visited temples.  
 Puran was transported to wilderness  
 By the sons of the parents unknown.  
 They chopped off his hands  
 And threw the body into the well.  
 O' Qadiryar! they brought home his blood,  
 That prompted Luna to decorate herself ostentatiously.

(viii) **The arrival of Gorakh Nath**

Time went a-flying,  
 Puran remained in the well for twelve years.  
 The Lord God took pity at last  
 and showered his blessings.

Guru Gorakh Nath had a beatific vision  
 So he decided to proceed towards Sialkot.  
 O' Qadiryar! he stopped near a well  
 and asked his disciples to draw water.

(ix) **Guru Gorakh pulls Puran out of the well**

The other Sadhus kept quiet,  
 The Guru himself came up and asked -  
 Tell me honestly who you are.  
 Puran replied tearfully from within -  
 'I haven't seen the face of man for twelve years'.  
 O' Qadiryar! I have also been cast in the form of man  
 you may verify it to your heart's content.

The Nath gave orders  
 And the *chelas* lowered a rope into the well.  
 The guru saw the mutilated body of Puran  
 As if someone had mauled a tiger in wilderness.  
 The elegant form still retained its charm  
 The Guru restored on the spot the missing limbs.  
 O' Qadiryar! he then prayed to the God Almighty  
 To heal his wounds and cure him of his malady.

Puran told - 'We belong to Ujjain,  
 Raja Bikramjit was our ancestor.  
 From that land came my forefathers  
 and settled at Sialkot.  
 My name is Puran, son of Salwan,  
 My father reduced me to this miserable state.'  
 O' Qadiryar! now disclose your identity  
 So that I may proceed further.

(x) **The Guru initiates Puran into yoga**

Puran expressed his desire imploringly  
 and bowed his head before the Guru.  
 The Guru cut a lock of his hair  
 and inserted *mundran* (rings) in his pierced ears.  
 The Nath then accoutred himself  
 in long ochre robes.

O'Qadiryar! out of his numerous chelas,  
The Guru selected Puran Bhagat as *mahant*.

(xi) **Puran goes for alms to Rani Sundran's palace**

Rani Sundran felt annoyed  
and opened the window.  
She lost her senses,  
when she witnessed the face of the Sadhu.  
She told the maid to usher him in,  
So enamoured was she of his handsomeness.  
O'Qadiryar! The maid tried to usher him in,  
with the promise of bounteous alms.

'Be generous and stay with me  
Listen to my earnest appeal  
Step inside the mansion of mine  
Take your seat on the velvet-covered floor.  
I shall serve you to your entire satisfaction  
and regale you with food cooked my own hands'.  
O' Qadiryar! the Rani beseeched him to stay awhile,  
It would impart to her rapturous delight.

(xii) **Puran returns pearls and gems to Rani Sundran**

Rani Sundran came out with a smile  
To welcome home Puran Bhagat.  
He told her to get back the pearls  
They were of no use to him.  
'We need cooked food only  
Bring it up to the Dera, if you can.'  
O' Qadiryar! my Guru is angry with me  
What is the worth of these rubies, pearls and diamonds?

Puran poured the gems and diamonds  
into the scarf of Rani Sundran.  
The Rani felt deeply agitated,  
When Puran left the place unconcerned.  
Sundran busied herself in cooking food  
As Puran was proceeding towards his Dera.  
O' Qadiryar! Puran bowed his head, with folded hands,  
When he was face to face with his Guru.

(xiii) **The Guru allows Puran to go with Rani Sundran**

In an expansive mood, the Guru had given his word  
But his heart was heavy when Puran departed.  
The Rani carried along her spouse triumphantly  
How could he disobey his Guru's orders?  
Rani Sundran mused over the turn of events  
She was happy to get what she had desired.  
O' Qadiryar! Puran trudged along the path  
Indeed, the Rani had separated him from his Guru.

Sundran brought Puran along with her  
She regarded herself as a true monarch.  
Exalted, she found her dress too tight  
and the knots of her bodice snapped.  
'The gem that I have purchased today  
No one else can possess the like of it.'  
O' Qadiryar! she entered her town triumphantly  
See, how the Lord God can be bountiful!

(xiv) **Rani Sundran feels forlorn when Puran deserts her**

Her body having emaciated, the Rani sang a doleful song -  
'Never err, as I have erred, to fall in love with an ascetic.  
Once gone to the wilderness,  
The yogi did not return to Sundran.  
Take it from me, O' folks!  
The yogis are the friends of none'.  
O' Qadiryar! when I looked back, I discovered  
That the happy days had fled away.

The Rani climbed up the roof of the palace  
Weeping, she said, "Puran! you have robbed me.  
The fruits of the garden of passion had just mellowed  
You dislodged the plants rudely with your hands.  
You did not spare even a few moments for me  
Hurriedly you left after professing false love."  
O' Qadiryar! like Sassi,  
You abandoned me lamenting in the desert.

Just as Sundran breathed her last,  
 Puran reached hastily his Guru's abode.  
 The Guru said, "You have committed a sin  
 You are the cause of the murder."  
 Finding his Guru in rage  
 Puran started weeping bitterly.  
 O'Qadiryar! The Guru told him  
 'Go and meet your parents to provide them solace.'

(xv) **Puran's return to Sialkot**

Towards the city of Sialkot  
 The Guru sent him with his blessings.  
 Puran occupied the selfsame garden  
 He had abandoned twelve years ago.  
 The plants had withered in the garden  
 Its master must have died long ago.  
 O'Qadiryar! the grapes are now ripening  
 A shower of water would do them good.  
 "O' Raja! tell me frankly -  
 Why have you come to this place?"  
 The Raja replied, "It's a fact, O' yogi!  
 I have not been blessed with a child.  
 My courtyard is bereft of a child's pranks,  
 My palace is a deserted place."  
 O'Qadiryar! during the last twenty four years  
 This house has had no progeny of mine.  
 "My backward glance reveals to me  
 You had once been blessed with a son.  
 To the wilderness was he consigned  
 And butchered there like a goat.  
 O' Raja! tell me in full detail -  
 What sort of torments had he to undergo?"  
 O'Qadiryar! the Raja remembered the events past  
 And started shedding tears.  
 "You are the cause of my evil deeds,"  
 The Raja pointed an accusing finger to Luna.  
 "The like of him I would never have

You got him murdered without a cause.  
 You wavered from the path of virtue  
 Implicating him falsely to hide your sin.'  
 O'Qadiryar! if I had known it earlier,  
 I would have dealt with the crafty woman differently.

(xvi) **Rani Ichhran meets Puran**

The mother Ichhran reached the garden  
 A Sadhu had come there to stay.  
 His entry had revived  
 The garden that had wilted long ago.  
 She wanted her eyesight restored  
 Puran's absence had made her life insipid.  
 O' Qadiryar! it would be a lucky event  
 If the Faqir could provide her with a remedy.

Puran looked back and saw a vision  
 The mother was coming in a deplorable state.  
 Stumblings had made her breathless  
 She could not see the thorns in the way.  
 This spectacle was too much for Puran  
 He started weeping to the amazement of others.  
 O' Qadiryar! Puran got up from his place  
 Could he but redress his mother's grief?

The mother recognised the voice-  
 "Tell me, o' son, from where have you come?  
 Which is your place and whose son are you?  
 Name the fortunate mother who gave you birth,  
 I would have recognised you, if I could see,  
 Still your voice indicates that you are my son."  
 O'Qadiryar! she longed to know the reality  
 Else she might claim someone else's son as hers.

The mother became unmindful of her miserable condition  
 She got back her lost eyesight.  
 She clasped Puran to her bosom  
 God blessed her with joys, taking her woes and sorrows away.  
 On seeing Puran before her eyes  
 Milk gushed forth from the nipples of her breasts.

O'Qadiryar! for Rani Ichhran  
All the doors of joy and glory had opened wide.

Luna was distressed extremely  
She felt uneasy whenever she saw Puran.  
Her face became sallow and the eyesight dim  
She wanted the earth to swallow her up.  
Puran noticed her standing forlorn in the rear  
While others perceived on his face the divine glow.  
O'Qadiryar! when she saw the people making obeisance  
Luna was deeply hurt and shaken.

"Do not feel sorrowful, O' mother",  
Puran told Luna, assuring her of an issue.  
"You were helpless I must say -  
Entertain no more any fears and doubts.  
I am still obedient to my father  
Though he did never bother to know my condition."  
O'Qadiryar! what my father did to me  
No one does such a thing to his son.

(xvii) **Puran rejects Salwan's offer of kingship and leaves Sialkot**

The Raja responded at that very time -  
"Come back home, like a dutiful son,  
To take charge of the treasury  
And to occupy the seat of justice.  
Your presence has restored my mental poise  
The fire of greed is extinguished in my heart."  
O' Qadiryar! Salwan said imploringly -  
'May my progeny flourish for ages to come!'

Puran replied - "Try not to clip my wings  
I have no heart for worldly pleasures.  
You may abdicate the throne  
If the cares of kingdom are heavy on your head.  
The person who really cares for me, I know,  
You are merely concerned with your honour.'  
O'Qadiryar! I must leave this place immediately,  
My stay here is not possible, as you know.

## Notes and References

### Introduction

1. I.Serebryakov; Punjabi Literature, Moscow; 1968; P.39
2. Khanna al-Fahuri; History of Arab Literature (Vol 2); Moscow; P190 (quoted by I.Serebryakov, at P.38)
3. I.Serebryakov; Punjabi Literature, Moscow; 1968; P.39
4. M.Athar Tahir; Qadir Yar (A critical Introduction); Pakistan Punjabi Adabi Board, Lahore; 1988; P.38
5. A.G. Quraishi; Punjabi Adab Di Kahani; P.74

### Chaper One

1. Dr. J.S. Grewal has mentioned on the authority of Ganesh Dass Vadhera, in his book Early Nineteenth Century Punjab (P.58) that - 'Dhandu is a small village to which belonged Qadar Bakhsh, the Hindi poet.' (Hindi here stands for Hindvi, a synonym for Punjabi in earlier days). Dhandu is situated in Sialkot (now in Pakistan)

Maula Bakhsh Kushta has mentioned in his book Punjabi Shairan Da Tazkara (The History of Punjabi Poets) that 'Qadiryar belonged to the village Machhike which is situated on the road that leads to Emanabad from Gujranwal. He owned a well and the adjoining land. Later he had his grave near this well.

2. Sethi, Surjit Singh; Qadir Yar (a Play); New Book Company, Jalandhar; 1973 (Second Edition)
3. Sharma, G.L., Qissa Puran Bhagat (Qadir Yar) Sunder Dass & Sons, Amritsar; P.27.
4. Gulwant Singh (Prof.); Qadir Yar (Life and works); Punjabi University, Patiala; 1980; P.6.



5. Sethi, Surjit Singh; *Qadir Yar (a Play)*; New Book Company, Jalandhar; 1973 (Second Edition).
6. *Punjab Rang* : Markazi Urdu Board, Gulbarg, Lahore; 1968.
7. *Qadir Yar* (edited) : Languages Department, Punjab, Patiala; 1969.
8. *An Introduction to Panjabi Literature* : Nanak Singh Pustakmala, Amritsar; 1951.
9. Ibid

### Chapter Two

1. A fabulous creation which transported the Messenger to Heavens. It is represented as a mare with a woman's head wearing a crown and sporting a peacock's tail.
2. M. Athar Tahir; *Qadir Yar (A critical Introduction)* : Pakistan Punjabi Adabi Board, Lahore; 1988; P.35.
3. *Bumbiha Bole*, Lahore; 1925; P161.
4. *Var* or the ballad has been defined as 'a long poem in which some historical incidents' are narrated or a 'long poem in which the brave deeds of a courageous person are celebrated.'
5. M. Athar Tahir; *Qadir Yar (A critical Introduction)* ; Pakistan Punjabi Adabi Board, Lahore; 1988; P.45.
6. A technical form in which the first word of each quatrain starts with an alphabet, usually in the accepted order.

### Chapter Three

1. Euripides; *Three Plays*; Penguin Books; 1975; P.90
2. Ibid P. 103
3. Ibid P. 103
4. Ibid P. 113
5. Ibid P
6. M. Athar Tahir; *Qadir Yar (A critical Introduction)*; Pakistan Punjabi Adabi Board, Lahore; 1986; P.75

7. The essay 'The Semiotic Structure of Puran Bhagat' by Dr. Gurinder Singh Randhawa included in *Pakha Sanjam* (Vol XIV) 1981; Published by Punjabi University Patiala; PP66-67.
8. Ibid p.74
9. The essay 'The Human Condition in Puran Bhagat' by Dr. Harjeet Singh Gill included in *Pakha Sanjam* (Vol XVI) 1983; Punjabi University Patiala; PP 19-20.
10. Ibid PP.31-32
11. Ibid PP 14-15
12. M. Athar Tahir; *Qadir Yar (A critical Introduction)*; Pakistan Punjabi Adabi Board, Lahore; 1988; P.71.
13. Tasneem, N.S., *Studies in Modern Punjabi Literature*; Avishkar Prakashan, New Delhi; 1980; P.93.
14. Maini, Darshan Singh; *Studies in Punjabi Poetry*; Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi; 1979; P146.

### Chapter Four

1. M. Athar Tahir; *Qadir Yar (A critical Introduction)*; Pakistan Punjabi Adabi Board, Lahore; 1988; P.81.
2. Ibid P.11.
3. Ibid P.92.

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11. *Qissa Puran Bhagat (Qadiryar)*; Bikram Singh Ghumman; Punjabi Sahit Parkashan, Amritsar; 1987.
12. *Qissa Sansar*; Amarjit Singh Kaang; Nanak Singh Pustakmala, Amritsar; 1985.
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15. *Khoy Patrika (Qissa-kav Ank)*; No.27, March 1986; Chief Editor, Rattan Singh Jaggi; Punjabi University, Patiala.