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**Amarjit Chandan's *Jarhaan* and *Beejak*:  
Quest for Meaningfulness**

Amarjit Chandan: *Jarhaan*. Aesthetic, Ludhiana. 1995, 1998, 2005.  
Amarjit Chandan: *Beejak*. Navyug, New Delhi. 1996. ISBN: 81-7599-005-8  
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With the publication of *Phailsufian* ਫੈਲਸੁਫੀਆਂ (essays and sketches, 1991), *Jarhaan* ਜੜਾਂ (poems, 1995) and *Beejak* ਬੀਜਕ (poems, 1996), Amarjit Chandan has, quite deservedly, attracted critical attention. But he has also baffled most of his readers. They feel that "there is something in him", but exactly what it is remains too elusive and abstract to express in words (unless you belong to a particular group of Punjabi critics who go on playing with words and technical and semi-technical phraseology but say nothing at all!).

Most Punjabi readers and critics love to pigeonhole creative writers or stick labels such as "romantic", "progressive", "revolutionary" (in the Marxist sense), "experimentalist", "existentialist", "post-modern", and so on, and judge them by the "principles of literary criticism" they learnt in their graduate and postgraduate years. But the present-day Chandan won't fit into any of the existing pigeonholes, and no existing label will suit him. But still "there is something in him! "

Chandan appeared on the literary scene as a "Naxalite" poet in the late 1960s. The Naxalite movement, as is now well known, was an offshoot of the Indian Communist movement in politics and the "progressive" movement in literature. Having unquestioned faith in the 'science' of dialectical and historical materialism expounded by Marx and Engels and re-interpreted by Mao that the proletariat revolution was inevitable and could be brought only through the barrel of the gun, the impatient fiery youths broke ranks with the older communists, some of whom were "progressive" writers as well. There was a spate of revolutionary poetry most of which was nothing more than declamatory slogan-mongering, condemnation of the "bourgeois" society and the "exploitation rampant in it", and painting a glorious picture of the post-revolutionary society.

When literature is nothing more than an item in the political agenda ("Fight through writing") and there are a large number of 'musts' (e.g., "Poetry must help the working class bring about the Revolution) and 'must nots' (e.g., "A poet must not be an introvert"), you cannot expect any other type of literary output. As was inevitable, the movement lacking popular support was ruthlessly crushed by the Indian state. Lives of many otherwise fine and promising young men were cut short by the police bullets. Fervent optimism and fiery enthusiasm soon gave way to the darkest despair and cynicism. Some of the leading poets of the movement are physically dead now. Some others have ceased to be productive. Chandan is the only one from that generation who is alive and well and also productive. But what sustains and invigorates his creativity is not the false hope and dream that "the red sun will rise again" (as many "progressive" writers with unshaken faith in the "science" of dialectical

materialism and matchless capacity for self-deception still devoutly hope and believe and will, no doubt, take the hope with them into their coffins, even after what has happened in Russia, China, Vietnam and Eastern Europe), but his dauntless courage not only to face life as it is but also to "churn" it (*Jeevanmanthan* ਜੀਵਨਮੰਥਨ, in the mythical Pauranic sense) and to accept whatever comes out of it, the elixir as well as the venom. He never deceives himself with any romantic illusions and honestly and fearlessly says what he believes in. The trouble is that most of his readers have nothing but romantic illusions to live on, are hooked on to these illusions and, after reading Chandan, suffer terrible withdrawal symptoms like those whose opium dose has been taken away from them. The inevitable price he has to pay for being true to himself is being isolated and misunderstood (often deliberately). But he knows this only too well. He quoted two lines from Kabir as an epigram to one of his books

ਹਮ ਹੈ ਸਭ ਮਾਯ, ਸਭ ਹੈ ਹਮ ਮਾਯ  
ਹਮ ਹੈ ਬਹੁਰਿ ਅਕੇਲਾ

I am in all, all are in me; (And) I am terribly lonely.

But if we look at his past work with the benefit of hindsight a question emerges - "Was there ever a time when he was not isolated and misunderstood?"

Chandan did write a number of prose pieces of hilarious and biting satire. But most of his essays and sketches are more serious in tone and content. Here, his ideas are never woolly (unless he deliberately makes them so to tease his reader into thinking). He knows what he wants to say and says it well, often with brutal directness, using short and mostly monoclausal and crisp sentences and words of everyday colloquial speech with surprising twists and turns to keep the reader's eyes glued to the page and, at the same time, to express ideas which jolt and shock many readers into thinking. He never preaches, nor does he ever try to persuade others to his own ways of thinking. He is not a philosopher or a religious preacher or a political propagandist and thus never aims at converting others. As a literary artist, he says what he has to say. He uses his own brain to lay down the tracks of his thought. Most of his readers, however, simply borrow their thinking from others in the form of social customs, religion, political ideology, folk wisdom, biases and prejudices, wishful and romantic thinking, and, worst of all, outmoded and lifeless ideas buried in linguistic conventions and usage. Very often, he deliberately starts with the intention of shattering a dearly-held illusion or exploding a cherished myth such as the glorification of martyrdom or Sobha Singh's supposed greatness as a painter. But his greatest sin in the eyes of most older "comrades-in-arms" and "progressive" writers is that he has become a renegade and traitor to the cause of the "Revolution" which he passionately espoused in the past. What has happened is that when the older myths about Lenin, Stalin, Mao and the "People's Revolution" were shattered, and the truth came out, he accepted and faced the truth courageously and never tried to deceive himself that the reports were "capitalist lies" or took refuge behind the fond hope that "the red sun will rise again". But he is still passionately committed to social justice. And social justice is precisely what the communist regimes were, and are, denying to millions of human beings.

Chandan never explicitly invites the reader to agree with him, but, like a skilled boxer, he carefully selects in advance all the weak spots to hit and uses words and phrases like punches and jabs with unerring aim and deadly effect. This results in innumerable badly

bruised egos and sensitivities. Unable to beat him at his own game, of which he is the undisputed heavy weight champion, many of them resort to personal abuse, sometimes in print. Chandan does not visibly react to this. Perhaps he secretly congratulates himself on his success. His prose and prose style is a novel phenomenon in Punjabi literature. Whether or not it wins him a permanent place in Punjabi literature is difficult to say at present, but we can be one hundred percent certain that it will not win him many personal friends, no *abhinandan granth* (felicitation volume) and none of the numerous awards currently being showered like confetti even on some fourth-rate Punjabi writers!

While Chandan the prose writer is there for everyone to see and understand (or misunderstand, often deliberately), Chandan the poet is more elusive. As far as his pre-1992 poetry is concerned, the reader can certainly feel that the poet and the prose writer are the same person, and that the prose is definitely better than the poetry. But when you read some post-1992 poems in *Jarbaan* ਜੜਾਂ and the poems in *Beejak* ਬੀਜਕ you cannot be so sure. It is about these poems that most sensitive and unbiased readers feel that "something is there" but cannot express in words what that "something" is. Even in his early poetry of the "Naxalite" period, you find that he is always at pains to maintain his identity and not to blindly follow the beaten track. But he seems to be doing what he can do more effectively through prose (as he discovered later). Though his pre-1992 poetry, on the whole remains a poor relation to his prose, he wrote some extremely powerful poems like his ਉਹ ਜੋ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਸਨ (Those who were), showing his capacity to convey an intense but fully restrained and controlled feeling and emotion, concentrated in brief phrases and evocative images. (This poem was published in 1994, but in spirit and style it clearly belongs to the earlier period). There is no doubt about the poetry of this period, as about his prose, what it "really means." Chandan could be accused of a thousand intellectual sins, but being unintentionally vague is not one of them.

But is it necessary for a piece of writing, particularly a poem, to always mean something concrete and paraphrasable? Most Punjabi readers will say "yes" and most eminent modern poets will say "no". (The same applies, in different ways and to varying degrees, to other arts like painting, sculpture, music, dance etc.). Great art does not "have a meaning"; it is meaningful. The static verb is should not be applied to meaning in art. There is no such thing as invariably permanent "meaning". Meaning is not there; it happens or takes place in a certain spatio-temporal and socio-cultural context. This idea can be better expressed in Punjabi ਅਰਥ ਹੈ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੋਂਦਾ ਹੈ. "Meaningfulness" is infinite potentiality, transcending all spatio-temporal limitations, to convey "meaning". To understand the importance of this distinction, we have to keep in mind Chandan's love for music and language, references to which appear again and again in his post-1992 poetry.

A sound does not become a musical note simply because of its frequency or overtones and harmonics (in terms of physics) but because of its relation to other notes in the octave. A good musician conceives a musical composition not in terms of its component notes but as an integrated whole having a certain effect. Of course, it is the notes which are the building blocks of a composition, but the place, duration and to some extent the frequency of an individual note (particularly in Indian music) is determined holistically by the composition. The whole and the parts determine each other. As the British physicist David Bohm would have said, it is the relation of wholeness and the implicate order inherent in it. Any moderately competent musician can juggle with musical notes and assemble an

acceptable tune. But to a musical genius, the composition comes as a vision, and it is the vision which possesses the musician and, as it were, uses him as a medium to select and combine the notes. Any good art teacher who can handle paint and brush competently can create a photo-realistic picture of anyone or anything. But photo-realism is not sufficient, or even necessary, in art. It is the greatness and universality of the vision transcending any individual's puny and ephemeral spatio-temporal existence, not the fidelity with which it "represents the reality" that makes a piece of art great. The god Shiva in the famous Nataraja bronze is not a realistic representation of life. But you can feel the eternal rhythmic dance of the dancer which seems to have momentarily frozen. It is precisely a vision or meaningfulness which Sobha Singh's art lacks, as Chandan also has rightly pointed out. Sobha Singh's portrait of Guru Nanak, for example, may be a photo-realistic likeness of Nanak's physical body (though we can never be sure). But we do not perceive in this portrait any of the intense spiritual glow we associate with this supreme saint-poet who wrote the indisputably the most sublime poetry in Punjabi. The same can be said of Nanak's verbal portraiture in Mohan Singh's 'made to order' long poem *Nankayan*.

I am unable to say how visual a painter's or sculptor's vision or inspiration is, or how auditory a musician's vision or inspiration is. But a poet's or writer's vision or inspiration is largely linguistic. But words are always more complex than musical notes or brush strokes. They are meaningful in more complex ways. Everything a community has done with a word over centuries (or everything the word has done with them) becomes the accumulated meaning potential of the auditory and visual form of that particular word in the living lexicon of the community. This meaning potential is inevitably hazy and blurred like the face of the "woman" in the photograph. When words are used together, only a part of each word's meaning potential comes to life in the particular linguistic context. The greatness of a poet or writer or speaker as an artist depends on the greatness of the vision or meaning potential or meaningfulness of the words as used in the literary composition. The words ਲਾਲ, ਜੋਗੀ and ਫਰੋਲ extremely common everyday words in Punjabi, and there is nothing particularly "poetic" about them in isolation. But an unknown poet at an unknown time used them in

ਨਹੀਂ ਲਭਣੇ ਲਾਲ ਗੁਆਚੇ ਮਿੱਟੀ ਨਾ ਫਰੋਲ ਜੋਗੀਆ

and the result is some of the most intensely poignant lines in the language of a community with centuries-old tragic history. As long as this language and this community live, these words will go on haunting every sensitive reader or listener and conjuring up a vision (hazy and blurred like the face of the woman in the photograph), with infinite variations, of parents wailing over their sons lost in battles and the ineffectual other-worldly yogis trying to console the grief-stricken hearts. This is the vision they conjure up in my mind. Others may find a different "meaning" in them. This is why it is great poetry. It does not have a meaning; it is meaningful. This vision, though hazy, is unique to this combination of words. No other words and no other combination of words in any other form would be meaningful in this way. Not to speak of a translation into another language, even paraphrase within the same language will lose the intensity of the vision or meaningfulness. It is true to say that poetry consists of linguistic devices. But this assertion generally fails to take into account how and why words become meaningful and enable poets to use the linguistic devices.

*Jarbaan* ਜੜ੍ਹਾਂ (1995) contains poems written over ten years from 1985 to 1995. It is with the post-1992 poems in that Chandan's unique quest for meaningfulness commences. The title of the book itself is symbolic. In the quest for meaningfulness, the first step is transcending ones spatio-temporal existence. This quest may assume different forms, but Chandan's starts from what is the least uncertain (not the most certain) - his own physical existence. To him, the existence comes before the essence but only in the epistemological sense, as a mere starting point for the quest. The goal is the discovery of the essence which, in the ontological sense, certainly precedes and survives any individual existence. Delving into the past, he resurrects his own seventeenth century ancestor Dhareja as an archetypal progenitor, the farmer offering his own seed as an oblation to Life and the potter shaping earthen vessels.

ਧਰੇਜਾ ਆਪਣੀ ਨਾਲ-ਦੀ ਦਾ ਪਿੰਡਾ ਗੁੰਨ੍ਹ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ  
ਅਪਣੇ ਨਸ਼ੱਈ ਹੱਥਾਂ ਨਾਲ।

ਅੱਜ ਧਰੇਜੇ ਦੀ ਜ਼ਮੀਨ ਵੱਤਰ ਹੈ।

ਉਹ ਅਪਣੀ ਜ਼ਮੀਨ ਚ ਸਿਆੜ ਕਢਦਾ ਹੈ।

ਧਰੇਜੇ ਨੇ ਬੀਅ ਸੁੱਟ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਹੈ  
ਅਸੰਖ ਮਹਕਦੇ ਚੰਨਣ ਦੇ ਬੂਟਿਆਂ ਦਾ।

ਹੁਣ ਧਰੇਜਾ ਸੁਹਾਗ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ।

ਹੁਣ ਉਸ ਜਗਤ-ਮਾਂ ਦੇ ਦਿਲ 'ਤੇ ਹੱਥ ਰੱਖਿਆ ਹੈ।

ਅੱਜ ਦੋਹਵਾਂ ਨੇ ਰਲ ਕੇ ਭਾਂਡਾ ਬਣਾਇਆ ਹੈ।

ਇਹ ਘੜਾ -

ਆਉਣ ਵਾਲੀਆਂ ਪੁਸ਼ਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਪਾਰ ਲੰਘਾਏਗਾ  
ਸੋਹਣੀ ਨੂੰ ਮਹੀਵਾਲ ਨਾਲ ਮਿਲਾਵੇਗਾ  
ਟੁਣਕੇਗਾ ਜੂਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਅੱਗ ਵਿਚ ਤਪ-ਤਪ ਕੇ।

(ਜੜ੍ਹਾਂ 14)

But this Dhareja is slightly ego-centric. He knows that God is the ultimate Creator and he himself is nothing more than a medium, an instrument the hand of Life or God. But this is just a shallow thinking, perhaps what he has heard from others, not something that springs out of the depths of his own soul. So he also goes on likening himself to Him, the Creator. In u1 (1996), however, we find him engaged in penance like an Indian Rishi or sage.

ਕਕਰੀਲੀ ਚਾਨਣੀ ਰਾਤ ਵਿਚ  
ਧਰੇਜਾ ਨੰਗਾ ਖੜ੍ਹਾ ਤਪ ਕਰ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ-  
ਡੋਰਭੋਰ ਮਨੁੱਖ ਸੋਚਦਾ ਹੈ  
ਰੱਬ ਨੇ ਉਹਦੀ ਸੁਣ ਲੈਣੀ ਹੈ।  
ਉਹ ਸੁੱਖਾਂ ਸੁੱਖਦਾ ਹੈ - ਹਰ ਔਰਤ ਮਾਂ ਬਣੇ...

ਧਰੇਜੇ ਨੇ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਸੋਚੀ ਹੋਈ ਆਵਾਜ਼ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਵਾਰ ਸੁਣੀ  
ਹੁਣੇ ਜੰਮੇ ਬੱਚੇ ਦੇ ਰੋਣ ਦੀ ਆਵਾਜ਼

ਉਹ ਖੜ੍ਹਾ ਅਪਣੀ ਅੱਡੀ 'ਤੇ ਘੁੰਮ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ  
 ਲੰਮਾ ਸਾਹ ਬਿੱਚਦਿਆਂ ਆਪਣੇ ਖਿਆਲ ਦਾ ਕਲਾਵਾ ਭਰਦਾ ਹੈ  
 ਤੇ ਉਹਨੂੰ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਵਾਰ ਲਗਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ  
 ਜੋ ਕੁਝ ਵੀ ਹੈ ਉਹ ਅਸਲੀ ਹੈ ਤੇ ਉਹ ਉਹਦਾ ਦੇਣਦਾਰ ਹੈ

ਦਾਈ ਧਰੇਜੇ ਨੂੰ ਮੁੰਡਾ ਅਰਪਦੀ ਹੈ -  
 ਇਕ ਹੰਝੂ ਦਾਈ ਬੀਬੀ ਦੀ ਬਾਂਹ 'ਤੇ  
 ਤੇ ਇਕ ਹੰਝੂ ਗਿੱਗੇ ਦੀ ਗੱਲ 'ਤੇ ਡਿਗਦਾ ਹੈ  
 ਪੁੱਤ ਪਿਉ ਦੇ ਸੀਨੇ ਲਗਦਾ ਹੈ  
 ਉਸ ਦਮ ਕਿਸੇ ਨੂੰ ਕੁਝ ਯਾਦ ਨਹੀਂ ਰਹਿੰਦਾ। (ਬੀਜਕ 5)

Self-realisation (ਆਤਮ ਗਿਆਨ) comes to him. Now every action of his, including procreation, is an offering of love and devotion to Him! The birth of his son does not make him mad with joy. He just offers two tears of gratitude to Him for doing him the supreme honour of making him His instrument. Henceforth, his ecstasy is a divine ecstasy when he gets in tune with the Infinite. His dance now becomes a part of the cosmic dance of the creation

ਲਟ-ਲਟ ਬਲਦੀ ਮਸ਼ਾਲ  
 ਧਰੇਜਾ ਨੱਚਦਾ  
 ਮਿੱਟੀ ਨੱਚਦੀ, ਰਾਹ ਨੱਚਦਾ, ਰੁੱਖ ਨੱਚਦਾ  
 ਧਰੇਜਾ ਨੱਚਦਾ  
 ਚੇਤੇ ਕਰਦਾ, ਅੱਖਾਂ ਭਰਦਾ, ਨਾਲੇ ਹੱਸਦਾ  
 ਧਰੇਜਾ ਨੱਚਦਾ  
 ਮਾਂ ਦੇ ਵਿਹੜੇ ਪੁੱਤ ਨੱਚਦਾ (ਬੀਜਕ 7)

Procreation is invariably related to sexuality, and here, too, Chandan moves from the existence to the essence. Sexuality in his post-1992 poetry is not spiritual having the undesirable but necessary physical side, which ultimately has to be transcended. It is very carnal but without the slightest touch of sensuality. It is a part of life, and life is good and meant to be lived intensely. And living life intensely means living it physically as well as spiritually. This intensity of physical love may look superficially similar to Rajneesh's Oshoism ("from sex to superconsciousness"), but the comparison would be unjust. In Chandan's poetry, physical love becomes intensely ecstatic not because it leads to the Osho-style "superconsciousness" but because of the realisation that some higher force is using you for its own purpose - creation.

ਤੂੰ ਕੋਈ ਭਾਣਾ  
 ਨਾਲ ਮੇਰੇ ਜੋ ਵਰਤ ਰਹੀ ਹੈਂ ਖਿਣ ਖਿਣ  
 ਜਿਕਣ ਟਿੱਬਿਆਂ ਉੱਤੇ ਚੰਨ ਦੀ ਠੰਢਕ  
 ਕਿਣਕਾ ਕਿਣਕਾ ਪਿੰਡੇ ਰਚਦੀ  
 ਮਚਦੀ ਭਖ ਨੂੰ ਠਾਰ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ  
 ...  
 ਮੈਂ ਤੇਰੀ ਕੁੱਖ ਦਾ ਖਿਆਲ ਅਨੋਖਾ  
 ਜੋ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਅਪਣੇ ਸੁਫਨੇ ਆਇਆ

ਉਹ ਹੋਣ ਲਈ ਹੁਣ ਤਰਸ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ  
ਉਹ ਹੋਵਣ ਤੋਂ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਹੀ ਤੜਫ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ (ਜੜ੍ਹਾਂ 43)

Now the poet becomes a ਬੀਜਕ. The word has many meanings in Punjabi, such as 'seed', 'semen', 'sower of the seed', '(male) procreator' etc. (Some commercial meanings like 'indigenous Indian ledger', 'invoice' etc. do not seem to be relevant here. ਬੀਜਕ is also the name of the collection of Kabir's poetry from which the lines quoted above have been taken). Dhareja, the ਬੀਜਕ, the eternal male procreator, is not purely corporeal. The intellectual and the spiritual soils also eagerly await his seed.

ਇਸ ਜੀਵਨ ਦੀ ਵੈਤਰਨੀ ਬੰਦਿਆ  
ਗਿਆਨ ਦੀ ਪੁੰਡਲ ਫੜ ਕੇ ਤਰ ਲੈ।  
ਪਈ ਕੁਆਰੀ ਵੱਤਰ ਮਿੱਟੀ ਅੰਦਰ  
ਗਿਰ ਜਾ ਬੀਜਕ ਬਣ ਕੇ, ਸੱਖਣ ਭਰ ਲੈ। (ਬੀਜਕ 60)

ਛੱਡ ਇਸ ਵੇਲੇ ਦੀ ਚਿੰਤਾ  
ਭੁੱਲ ਜਾ  
ਕਲ੍ਹ ਦੇ ਨਾਂ ਵਸੀਅਤ ਹੋਈਆਂ ਯਾਦਾਂ  
ਖੁੱਲ੍ਹੀਆਂ ਬਾਹਵਾਂ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਿਰ ਉੱਚਾ  
ਮਨ ਦੀ ਸੱਖਣ ਨੂੰ ਸੱਖਣ ਨਾਬ ਭਰ ਲੈ  
ਤੇ ਓਸਦੇ ਅੰਦਰ ਬੀਅ ਕੇਰਦੇ (ਬੀਜਕ 75)

Similarly, his female counterpart, the receiver of the seed, is primarily a mother. The coital act is not an end in itself, but simply a means. In the eternal recurring cycle of creation, not only the roles of consort and the mother but also of the father and the son are inextricably mixed. It is through the playing of these roles assigned by the higher unseen force that real or deliverance can be attained, when all the physical distinctions and relations fade away, when the actors are neither male nor female, nor mother, nor father, nor offspring; they simply *are*.

ਉਹ ਸੇਜ ਮਾਣਦਿਆਂ ਆਖਣ ਲੱਗੀ -  
ਤੂੰ ਮੇਰਾ ਚਾਨਣ...

ਕੁੱਖ ਵਿਚ ਲੈ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਆਖਣ ਲੱਗੀ -  
ਮੈਂ ਤੇਰੀ ਜਨਣੀ  
ਮੈਂ ਜਣਿਆ ਤੈਨੂੰ ਲੱਖਾਂ ਵਾਰੀ।

ਮਾਂ ਨੀ, ਦਸ ਤਾਂ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਮਿਰਾ ਕੌਣ ਪਿਤਾ ਹੈ?

ਕੋਟ ਜਨਮ ਦੀ ਮਮਤਾ ਬੋਲੀ -  
ਪਤਾ ਨਹੀਂ।  
ਸ਼ਾਇਦ ਤੂੰ ਆਪੇ ਪੁਤਰ, ਆਪ ਪਿਤਾ ਹੈਂ  
ਆਪ ਆਪੇ ਦਾ ਜਾਇਆ।

ਫਿਰ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਉਹ ਉਸ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਵਿਚ ਲੈ ਗਈ  
ਜਿਥੇ ਕੁਝ ਵੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ  
ਨਾ ਰਿਸ਼ਤਾ ਨਾ ਕਾਇਆ॥ (ਜੜ੍ਹਾਂ 33)

That state of ਮੁਕਤੀ or deliverance does not lie beyond this body in some other world; it is very much here and in this very life. It is the realisation permeating your inner being that an unknown someone is "playing" you. All your joys and all your sorrows are just His play.

ਕੌਣ ਹੈ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਖੇਡ ਰਿਹਾ?  
ਹੋਣੀ ਦੀ ਇਹ ਖੇਡ ਅਣੋਖੀ  
ਕੌਣ ਅਵਾਣਾ ਖੇਲੇ ਹੈ ਨਿਤ ਪਰਦੇ ਉੱਤੇ?

ਮੈਂ ਨਹੀਂ ਡਿਗਦਾ  
ਉਹ ਡਿਗਦਾ ਹੈ  
ਮੈਂ ਨਹੀਂ ਹਰਦਾ  
ਉਹ ਹਰਦਾ ਹੈ  
ਜੇ ਹਰਨਾ ਮੇਰੀ ਹੈ ਹੋਣੀ  
ਤਾਂ ਹਰਨਾ ਉਸਦੀ ਕਿਉਂ ਹੋਣੀ?  
ਅਨੰਤ ਸਜਾ ਇਹ ਮੈਂ ਨਈਂ ਓਹੀ ਭੋਗ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ (ਜੜ੍ਹਾਂ 26)

Thus the poet is able to fill his physical life with meaningfulness. But there is an intellectual dimension to life as well, the more abstract domain of ideas and thought. But a clear boundary line between the physical and the intellectual is difficult to draw. Here, Chandan is on a less firm ground. His search for the roots of his own self and thought takes him to the eternal sound ਨਾਦ which manifests itself through music and language. Written symbols representing the sounds and words of language also make their appearance. It is true that "singing is thinking through notes"

ਰਾਗੀ ਸੁਰ ਵਿਚ ਸੋਚ ਰਿਹਾ ਗਾਉਂਦਾ ਹੈ  
ਸੁਰ ਵਿਚ ਸੋਚਣਾ ਹੀ ਗਾਉਣਾ ਹੈ  
  
ਸੁਰ ਵਿਚ ਛੁਹਣਾ ਹੀ ਗਾਉਣਾ ਹੈ  
  
ਸੁਰ ਵਿਚ ਚੱਖਣਾ ਹੀ ਗਾਉਣਾ ਹੈ (ਬੀਜਕ 20)

And one's native language,

ਅਪਣੀ ਬੋਲੀ ਅੰਦਰ ਬੰਦਾ ਅਪਣਾ ਮੂਲ ਸੰਵਾਪੇ (ਬੀਜਕ 52)

The sounds of the mother tongue are music and it is through the words of your mother tongue that you see your cultural past which resides in you as a living present.

ਅਪਣੀ ਬੋਲੀ ਅੰਦਰ ਹਰ ਕਿਰਿਆ ਦੀ ਕਾਇਆ ਕਲਪੇ (ਬੀਜਕ 51)

But nowhere do we find in Chandan any poem about language that comes even close to Neruda's poem **Word**. There are hints that Chandan feels uneasy with the "bondage of words" and would like to throw it off.

ਸ਼ੇਰ ਲਫਜ਼ਾਂ ਦਾ ਕੁਛ ਸੁਣਨ ਨ ਦੇਂਦਾ  
ਮੈਂ ਚਾਹਵਾਂ ਮੈਂ ਬੋਲੀ ਤੋਂ ਪਾਰ ਹੋ ਜਾਵਾਂ  
ਸ਼ਬਦਾਂ ਦੇ ਬੰਧਨ ਤੋਂ ਮੁਕਤ ਹੋ ਜਾਵਾਂ  
ਹਰਫ਼ਾਂ ਦਾ ਕੱਜਣ ਮੈਂ ਸੁਟ ਉਤਾਰਾਂ



ਭਾਵਾਂ ਦੇ ਖੰਭਾਂ 'ਤੇ ਮਾਰ ਉਡਾਰੀ  
ਉਸ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਵਿਚ ਜਾ ਲੱਭਾਂ  
ਜਿਥੇ ਉਸਦਾ ਵਾਸਾ (ਜੜ੍ਹਾਂ 21)

This seems to be at odds with his treatment of physical love. He never desires to run away from his physical self, which is the body, to attain a state of "body-less love". Why he desires to run away from his intellectual body, his mother tongue, to a "wordless state" is puzzling. Perhaps further and more intense meditation on the Word may resolve the apparent contradiction (as the philosopher Wittgenstein did).

I have knowingly used the word "meditation" in the paragraph above. Most of Chandan's post-1992 poems are short meditations. The finest of these meditations is ਤ੍ਰਿਕਾਲ ਸੰਧਿਆ in *Jarbaan* ਜੜ੍ਹਾਂ . All the afore-mentioned elements of Chandan's poetry are synthesised into one organic musical whole of profound depth and sublimity. I must admit here that no description from my pen (even in Punjabi, let alone in English) can do justice to the poem, and the only way to feel its music and its profundity is to read it aloud, slowly, and let its words and evocative images permeate deep into your soul. Such inspired meditative grandeur has been despairingly and disapprovingly described as "mysticism" or "spiritualism" by some critics still committed to the old materialistic "progressivism", without understanding Chandan or the meaning of these terms. But no existing labels would do justice to the uniqueness of such poems. I wish such sustained meditative and creative occasions came more often in Chandan's life.

Chandan holds a unique place in modern Punjabi poetry. He is now in the 51st year of his life, but the mature phase of his poetic career has just started. So far, he has produced only a handful of poems whose vision and music can make a sensitive and discerning reader hold his or her breath in awe and admiration. But I am sure that we can expect more such poems in the near future.

□

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