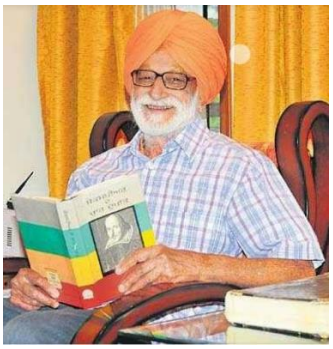
In Remembrance

Surjit Hans: (1930-2020)



Surjit Hans, a multi-faceted writer sadly passed away in January 2020. Born in his native village *Hansan* of Ludhiana district in *Malwa* and where he attended his village school. We learn from reminiscences he published late in life, he shifted to *Doaba* for higher education and completed his MA in English Literature from Govt. College, Hoshiarpur. Intermittently for several years, he taught English language and literature in rural colleges. During these years, he also completed a MA in History and later on a Doctorate. He retired as a Professor of History from GNDU Amritsar but even after retiring he did not sit on his laurels. He translated the works of William Shakespeare - plays, sonnets and poems - into Punjabi. He did not feel content even after completing this monumental work. He busied himself in translating Charles Darwin's writings, which he completed in spite of challenges imposed by his failing health.

He was a poet, playwright, novelist, story-writer, essayist, polemicist and translator. He kept on writing poems almost till his demise and these are available in thirteen volumes. The last one, dealing with what a little-known person feels about his impending death, is proof enough of this contention. Strangely enough, he had begun his literary career as a playwright with *Pushtan* (Generations), similar in form to ancient Greek literature but drawing subject-matter from the life of a robber, whom the authorities termed notorious, but treated as benefactor by the villagers. After this appeared in the early part of the sixties, when Hans was in his thirties, he shifted to novel-writing. His *Mitti di Dheri* (Heap of Earth) appeared after a couple of years. The reception accorded to both these writings contrasting views. As far the trilogy went, it was regarded monumental only in size with form owed to the ancient Greek trilogy. No comment appeared about its literary merit. The novel, small in size and couched in ambiguous language, was rated better. In comparison with many other popular and admired novels which were also traditional in theme, form and style, attention awarded to this work was inadequate to say the least.

As a lecturer in English in a rural college teaching undergraduate classes, his pay was meagre. He was popular amongst the students not as a studious and conscientious teacher but more as a polemicist whose nimble wit was not appreciated by the authorities. So he shifted from one college to another, finally settling in a college in Mahilpur, in the Doaba region. After he got married he imbibed the urgency to go abroad. Several factors enhanced this urgency. The craze to go abroad, especially to England, was most acute among people of this region but more importantly almost all members of his wife's family were settled there. The several books he wrote in quick succession would see light of day only if he bore all expenses to get them published. It is a fact that only his translations of Shakespeare's plays and poems was published at no expense to him by Punjabi University, Patiala. He had to pay himself to publish almost all his other writings. In fact, he had no hesitation or grouse on this score, rather he relished doing so. Memorable in this regard was the joke he liked to utter: "People spend thousands on cats and dogs. There is nothing bad if I spend money on getting my books published." Besides this, he was quite a spendthrift. Irrespective of cost, he purchased the book he liked or needed with the result that very rare books, sparingly found in known libraries, glare from the shelves maintained in his study and bedroom.

After arriving in London he did not entertain any illusion of higher study or research at some university. After settling in London, he managed to get a job as a bus-conductor. As his daughter Nanki Hans candidly states, it was eight hours of strenuous work as the shift could be morning, evening or late at night. Later, he managed to get a job in the Customs Department at Heathrow airport which proved less strenuous. Despite being outside academia, literary considerations stayed close to his heart. He participated fully in activities carried on by Punjabi writers settled in England. What distinguished him from almost all others was he became a member of the Royal Shakespeare Society. This also gave him the incentive to study Shakespeare closely and this later led him to translate Shakespeare's entire works into Punjabi.

As his daughter stated Surjit Hans came to England in 1965. However, he would regularly go back to Punjab and stay with his mother in her house in the newly built Model Gram, across the Ferozepur railway line. It was close to Model Town where I lived and occasionally had the opportunity to meet him on his visits. Readers of Punjabi literature talked of his trilogy as a curiosity but very rarely did I came across anyone who had closely read it. Regarding his novel, it was talked about with tongue-in cheek, partly because it involved the story of a middle-aged college lecturer's illicit union with an adolescent girl. It was written in a style that was naturalistic, relying more on suggestion than description. Hans's nature of forging friendship only with a few inclined him to prefer what WH Auden termed "private faces at public places rather than public faces at private places". Shunned by those who relished publicity, he was particularly close to Prem Parkash, a journalist by profession but story-writer by passion. With funds given by Surjit Hans, he brought out *Lakir*, a journal publishing book-reviews, commentaries and poems. Mostly written by Surjit Hans, they used to

be brief, obscure and biting, invariably offending many but pleasing a few, particularly those who could grasp their intrinsic sense.

For almost a decade such was the routine that Surjit Hans followed. Whatever he wrote was of fragmentary nature. Short stories, poems, reviews, commentaries, all flowed from his pen but without replenishing the image his trilogy had left in minds of readers. It does not mean they were exercises in futility. New motifs could be discerned in the short stories he wrote, particularly about Punjabi women working in factories and at airport to earn a living. For example, in one story, he talked about them cleaning lavatories at airports – a demeaning job that they would have shunned in their native land, but in *valaiyat*, they did without any hesitation or sense of shame. They failed to relate their predicament to lack of opportunity in a foreign country, or to concept of dignity of labour inherited from their culture. Likewise, his poems were polemical in which he endeavoured to lay his finger upon weaknesses, fatuous claims and fortuitous demands which he though had become part and parcel of literate men and women. In bringing them to the fore, he had recourse to references and inferences. No wonder his readers applauded his ingenuity for a short while. But they failed to draw any lasting meaning from their cumbersome reading. Of crucial importance were poems which aroused feelings of fear, terror, helplessness and uncertainty hovering over ordinary men and women due to terror stalking Punjabi life in the 1970s and 1980s.

His stay in England lasted till 1974 with intermittent visits to India. After returning to India he was appointed lecturer at GNDU, Amritsar. He joined the Department of Language and Literature but right from the very beginning he felt like fish out of water. There was hardly any issue upon which he could agree with his seniors with the result that he was suspended from service. Rather than seek compromise, he further antagonized them by ridiculing the whole academic system, particularly the Vice-Chancellor in his *Imtehan* (Examination), a documentary novel. Poorly written, with hardly anything creditable so far as depiction, narration and language went, it turned his suspension into dismissal. Professor Attar Singh, a prominent literary critic hailed it as equivalent to *To Kill the Mocking Bird*, a wholly misplaced judgement. Admirable, however, was the candor he assumed by keeping intact his routine of reading and writing. Rather than raise a hue and cry, write appeals and contact persons who mattered, he concentrated his energy and acumen on completing his PhD thesis. His topic concerned 'reclamation of political concerns in the *Bani* of the Sikh Gurus'. He was required to establish that themes dealt with by the Gurus were of the world, determined by economy, history, society and ideology. In evoking them, the Gurus did not stop at the economic, social and political levels. They explored them from lingual, epistemological and ontological angles. To establish the veracity of his claims, he relied upon his own analytical power in a very forceful way.

In his writings he drew inspiration from the writings of two particular scholars. One was the great French orientalist-cum-sociologist Maxime Rodinson whose biography of Mohammad won him universal recognition. His other book *Islam and Capitalism* armed Surjit Hans with fresh impulse from within to grasp

worldliness that fertilized the motifs evoked by the Gurus. These were hymns composed in tune with musical measures taken from the past but rendered poignant by relating them to folk music vastly popular with people of all ages. Another scholar was Peter L Berger, theologian-cum-sociologist, who believed in the Divine as a meaningful reality. Though remote from daily life of people in modern times, such realization was essential to impart significance to humanity. As against Rodinson who acted as impulse from within, Peter L. Berger acted as impulse from without. No wonder, Surjit Hans quoted him amply to elucidate his point of view with the result that his study, though brief, proved very auspicious in reinstating his image as a scholar. He got lecturer's job in the department of history. Within a couple of years, he became a Professor, ultimately to retire in an honourable way.

This tenure lasted for more than a decade. He taught post-graduate classes, supervised research students and participated in seminars in the domains of Punjabi history and literature. Apart from this, he brought out more than half a dozen volumes of poems, two plays and articles on literary, historical and political subjects. In his poetry writing, he had recourse to ambiguities in theme, form and diction. It seemed as if he had made his own the nature and function of ambiguities as William Empson had elucidated in his treatise *Seven Types of Ambiguities*. Very refreshing was the collection of sonnets which Surjit Hans brought out during this era. Written in Punjabi diction on the lines of Shakespearean sonnets, their reading did not unfortunately soothe and mesmerize the readers. Like poems comprising other volumes, ambiguities of various kinds seemed to mar his poetic ingenuity. For all that, this volume held out a promise, partially realized by Surjit Hans but utterly ignored by Punjabi poets, listeners and readers.

After retiring from GNDU Amritsar, Surjit Hans shifted to Punjabi University Patiala, He was offered a Fellowship for five years and accepted the invitation to translate Shakespeare into Punjabi. Prior to that only a few plays of Shakespeare were available in Punjabi translation. The first Punjabi playwright, IC Nanda had adapted *Merchant of Venice* that was staged numerous times to inspire and excite young boys and girls studying in the colleges. Sant Singh Sekhon, the eminent writer and critic, had translated *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra* and a couple of other plays only loosely translated into Punjabi by lesser known persons were also available. The applause, that in idiomatic terms raised Shakespeare to the sky, was essentially verbal. It goes to the great credit of Surjit Hans that he took upon himself the task of translating all his works, plays, sonnets and poems into Punjabi. Not only formidable, it was an incredible task. The amazement that it aroused became evident from what transpired at the international conference held in Calcutta to assess Shakespeare's translation into Indian languages. In my paper, I revealed that all Shakespeare's writings, translated by one person Surjit Hans were available in Punjabi. On hearing this, dumbness occasioned by wonder, gripped the audience. A sigh of relief only came when I added that only a few of Shakespeare's plays had so far been staged in Punjabi and none translated by Surjit Hans figured in the list.

That Surjit Hans had the capacity to take up this immensely challenging task was truly staggering. However between his capacity to take up this challenging task and capability of producing its matching version in Punjabi, there prevailed a gap of various sorts. As evidence of his capacity, he drew words from differing sources to forge lexicon capable of translating Shakespeare's English into Punjabi. Special mention here may be made of words drawn from dialects which had flourished in eastern Punjab. By ignoring the dialects of western Punjab, he circumscribed the scope of his lexicon. Modern Punjabi, which was the lexicon of Bhai Gurdas, was the source but over time this had grown close to its Indian rather than Semitic inheritance, and which he felt was not pertinent for his purpose. Instead, Persian and Urdu words, largely assimilated, seemed to serve his purpose better. Making use of the etymological roots recorded in *Mahan Kosh* by Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, he forged words of his own, odd to pronounce and employ in utterances. All these recourses were too meagre to enable Shakespeare's vast lexicon breathe with ease in Punjabi translation. In my paper presented at the conference mentioned above, I drew attention to certain situations which remained far beyond recreation in Punjabi. Hamlet's soliloquys, Lady Macbeth's rantings in madness, multi-levelled meanings of the talk Coriolanus had with his colleague, formerly his rival but subsequently his associate, were distinctive ones of this sort. In spite of all these reservations, I have no doubt in my mind that it was a gigantic task that Surjit Hans undertook. The task was also the same regarding the translation of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* which he completed before his demise. Had no institution agreed to publish it, he would have got it published by paying from his own pocket. Unlike people spending a lot of money on pets, he regarded publishing his writings by incurring expenses from his own pocket, a dignified and honourable act.

Tejwant Singh Gill
Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar

Paul Wallace (1931-2020)

The field of Sikh and Punjab studies lost a senior member in political scientist Paul Wallace, who passed away peacefully in his sleep on February 22, 2020 at his home in Columbia, Missouri. Professor Wallace had a distinguished career spanning over five decades as an internationally-renowned expert on Indian politics, particularly Sikh and Punjab politics, at the University of Missouri starting in 1964 until his formal retirement as professor emeritus in 2005. In the field of Sikh and Punjab studies, he was fondly known as one of the "Missouri twins" - the other being the late historian Professor N. G. "Jerry" Barrier who also taught at Missouri during the same period of time. Professor Wallace's career included several dozen research/professional trips to India including Punjab, the last one only a few weeks before his passing.

Paul Wallace was born in Los Angeles, California in 1931. He graduated from the University of California, Berkeley in 1953 with an undergraduate degree in political science, and subsequently served in the US Army during the Korean War. He returned to Berkeley to complete a M.A. in 1957, and a Ph.D. in political science in 1966. Paul Wallace's dissertation was one of the first major academic studies on Punjab politics, particularly focusing on how internal factionalism within the state's two major political parties (the Akali Dal and Congress) helped integrate a variety of societal interest groups into the emerging democratic political process in India. It emphasized the essential role "factions" play within political parties in aggregating interests and deepening democratic vibrancy in postcolonial settings.

During his long career, Professor Wallace wrote or edited ten books on various aspects of Indian politics and elections including Punjab, and dozens of academic articles and book chapters. Some of his most noted academic works included the edited book *Region and Nation in India*[1] which examined the evolving structures of identity and nation/state-building, and *Political Dynamics and Crisis in Punjab*[2] which remains one of the most comprehensive and in-depth collections on various aspects of Punjab politics during the years of militancy. Professor Wallace's own chapter contribution in this collection explores the contrasting

political imperatives for Sikh political actors, including the Akali Dal, in competing in the ethnically-based "Sikh political system" versus the more multi-dimensional "Punjab secular political system." This tension continues even into contemporary Sikh politics.

The political turmoil in Punjab during the 1980s and 1990s turned Professor Wallace's research interests even further toward Sikh politics. As Professor Wallace would often say in personal conversation, "I did not want to study political violence, but the topic came to me whether I wanted it or not." The constructive nature of political factionalism he had studied in the early part of his academic career, quickly turned "destructive" in terms of political instability and the tragic loss of human life during Operation Bluestar, in the November 1984 anti-Sikh pogroms, and a decade of both anti-state insurgency and state-sanctioned counterinsurgency in Punjab. The result of these emerging political dynamics was a series of academic articles on the topic in various journals and edited volumes including the following: "The Sikhs as a 'Minority' in a Sikh Majority State in India,"[3] "Religious and Secular Politics in Punjab: The Sikh Dilemma in Competing Political Systems,"[4] "Sikh Minority Attitudes in India's Federal System,"[5] "The Dilemma of Sikh Revivalism: Identity vs. Political Power,"[6] and "Political Violence and Terrorism in India."[7] His most important academic contribution during this period was the chapter "Religious and Ethnic Mobilization, and Dominance Patterns in Punjab"[8] which offered a detailed and comprehensive analysis of patterns of dominance and mobilization in Punjab from the colonial period to the 1980s including on the basis of caste, class, region, and ethnicity/religion. Professor Wallace also wrote a number of election studies on Punjab during this period including on the pivotal 1989 parliamentary elections and the (cancelled) 1991 parliamentary elections in Punjab, which included personal field interviews with activists and leaders of various political parties in the state. These election studies demonstrated Professor Wallace's commitment to academic scholarship, as he did original field research in Punjab for both elections irrespective of conditions of violent insurgency at the time.

After the end of armed insurgency in Punjab, Professor Wallace's academic interests turned toward national election studies in India. This interest resulted in series of six edited election studies books published by SAGE Publications covering every parliamentary election from 1998 to the present. The most recent titled *India's 2019 Elections: The Hindutva Wave and Indian Nationalism* was published just a few weeks before Professor Wallace's passing. In a personal communication to me shortly after the 2019 national parliamentary elections, he expressed his deep concern about the direction which Indian politics and nationalism was taking in the contemporary period, in contrast to the 1950s when he first began to study India. He was particularly concerned about the transition in Indian politics away from the "secularism" of the Nehru era to the rise of *Hindutva* nationalism under Modi's current BJP government.

Yet, Punjab and the Sikhs were never far away from Professor Wallace's heart. Two of Professor Wallace's last works were written as academic reflections and analysis of the aftermath of the so-called "Punjab crisis." In "Sikh Militancy and Non-Violence,"[9] Prof. Wallace examined the Sikh tradition of "non-violent

militancy", that is, the willingness to sacrifice oneself for a political or social cause, which he argued had been more effective in the postcolonial period than armed militancy. Professor Wallace's last work on Punjab was "Punjab, Terrorism, and Closure: It Ain't Over 'Till It's Over,"[10] was actually published in this very journal. In this article, he argued that Punjab, the Sikhs, and India could never reach effective "closure" from the turbulent 1980s unless a truth and reconciliation commission was appointed to objectively examine the reasons behind the "Punjab crisis" and identify both non-state and state actors who engaged in violence during the period. This, his final work, demonstrated Professor Wallace's deep commitment to justice and humanity.

In addition to teaching and research, Professor Wallace also served as an expert consultant for numerous non-government organizations and governmental agencies including the US State Department. One of Professor Wallace's particularly notable personal contributions was his regular expert testimony in Sikh political asylum cases in the US, including on the west coast. He never charged the usually lucrative professional fees for his expert testimony on behalf of asylum seekers, but instead asked only to be reimbursed for travel and living expenses, explaining that this was a part of his "educational" and "humanitarian" duties as an academic.

Professor Wallace was, in fact, a product of Berkeley in the 1960s - that is, committed to social justice, peace, and human rights. Throughout his life, both he and his wife Robin (who was also a political scientist at the University of Missouri and herself passed away in September) remained deeply committed to humanitarian causes and values. Their home in Columbia, Missouri was appropriately named "Peace Haven," and regularly hosted visiting students and scholars from throughout the world for decades. His hospitality and "Punjabi hugs" always demonstrated a sense of warmth and caring for his guests and graduate students, who adored him both as a mentor and father figure. The pizza parties he hosted for his graduate teaching assistants at Shakespeare Pizza or appetizer parties at the Heidelberg Pub after finishing the semester were always festive and fun-filled occasions.

Paul Wallace passed away peacefully in his sleep on February 22, having returned from a book release trip to India only two weeks earlier, and having played his beloved game of tennis with friends earlier that same day. One of his secrets to a long and healthy life was his often-quoted phrase, "Never worry about anything except only once." The field of Sikh and Punjab Studies, his colleagues and former students, and the world in general is a much better place because of him. He may have "passed on" but lives within all of those, including myself, who had the blessing to have known him as a mentor, colleague, and friend. He will be missed but certainly never forgotten by all those who knew him. In addition to being a pioneering scholar and long-time contributor on Punjab and Sikh politics, Professor Wallace was an absolute gem of a person who exuded a sense of cheer and deep respect for humanity which defined his professional and personal lives - a model for all.

Notes

[1] *Region & Nation in India* (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH, 1985).

[2] *Political Dynamics and Crisis in Punjab* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1988).

[3] *Asian Survey*, vol. XXVII no. 3 (March 1986), pp. 363-377.

[4] *Political Dynamics and Crisis in Punjab* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1988), pp. 1-44.

[5] Joseph T. O'Connell, Milton Israel, Willard Oxtoby (eds.), *Sikh History and Religion in the Twenieth Century* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1988), pp. 256-273.

[6] James Bjorkman (ed.) *Fundamentalism, Revivalists, and Violence in South Asia* (New Jersey: Riverdale Press, 1988), pp. 57-75.

[7] Martha Crenshaw (ed.) *Terrorism in Context* (College Station, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), pp. 352-409.

[8] Francine Frankel and M.S.A. Rao (eds.), *Dominance and State Power in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 416-481.

[9] Pashaura Singh (ed.), *Sikhism in Global Context* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 122-144.

[10] *Journal of Punjab Studies*, vol. 22 no. 1 (2015), pp. 5-25.

Jugdep S. Chima
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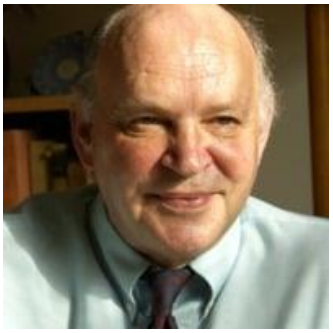
[This is a slightly revised version of the author's obituary of Paul Wallace which appeared in the *Sikh Research Journal* (Vol 3, No.2, Fall 2020). It is reproduced here with the author's permission]

Roger Ballard (1943-2020)



Roger Ballard, who died in October 2020, enriched the field of Sikh and Punjab Studies throughout his long academic career.

Right from my first contact with Roger Ballard in 1979 or 1980 he was a source of stimulating analytical comment and he generously provided helpful, practical suggestions (persuading me, for instance, that the then new medium of e-mail was definitely worth trying!). When I embarked on my first fieldwork among Sikhs, Roger and his first wife, Catherine, were among the relatively few scholars who had published on Sikhs in Britain.

Subsequently, from its inception in 1984, he participated vigorously in the meetings of the Punjab Research Group. Indeed, one of his important contributions to Punjab Studies was his keynote address at PRG's first international conference in 1994. This was later published as *'Panth, Kismet, Dharm te Qaum: Continuity and Change in Four Dimensions of Punjabi Religion'* and it was significant for suggesting not only that religions be understood in terms of 'dimensions' (as indeed the religious studies scholar Ninian Smart had suggested many years before) but also, importantly, for identifying culturally appropriate Punjabi 'dimensions', rather than deploying Euro-centric ones, and, moreover, for looking beyond any over-easy compartmentalisation into supposedly distinct religions.

1994 was also the year when his edited volume *Desh Pardesh; The South Asian Presence in Britain* appeared. In his preface he clarified the role of an anthropological approach – with its acknowledgement of cultural diversity and emphasis on agency – as distinct from sociological studies with their focus on issues such as social inequality. Crucially, in his lectures and publications, he questioned and teased out the ways in which 'ethnicity' and 'religion' were conceptualised.

Roger had graduated from the University of Cambridge in 1966 with a BA in Social Anthropology which he followed, in 1970, with a PhD in Sociology from the University of Delhi. His periods of fieldwork included researching both in District Jullundur (in India) and in District Mirpur (in Pakistan). His immersion in South Asia provided depth and context for his well over 30 years of continuous

contact with the UK's Punjabi communities throughout the Pennine region of northern Britain.

From 1971-75 Roger was Research Associate in the SSRC Research Unit on Ethnic Relations in the University of Bristol. At the University of Leeds, from 1975-89, he was Lecturer in Race Relations and then, from 1989 until 2002, he was Senior Lecturer in Comparative Religion at the University of Manchester. He was a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute, and a member of the Association of Social Anthropologists and the Register of Expert Witnesses and contributed, from its inception, to the online 'plurilegal' discussion forum, highlighting the limitations of national legal systems in a situation of increasing cultural diversity. In 2012, fittingly, Roger was awarded the Royal Anthropological Institute's Lucy Mair Medal for Applied Anthropology.

Applying insights from anthropology to the social, cultural, linguistic, familial and religious predicaments of South Asians in the UK was Roger's forte. In 2002 he established the Centre for Applied South Asian Studies and in 2003, on his early retirement from the University of Manchester, he set up independently as a consultant anthropologist, taking instructions from central and local government agencies and providing expert reports in legal proceedings in which South Asians were involved. Indeed, he produced over 600 reports for the criminal, civil, immigration and family courts and this work in turn became the basis for many of his more recent academic writings.

Roger challenged assumptions about universal human rights in contexts of ethnic plurality; he examined transnational entrepreneurship; he analysed the 'ethnic dimensions' of the UK's successive decennial censuses and he argued forcefully for the addition of a 'religious question' to the 2001 census. Rooted firmly as they were in his ethnography in Mirpur, Jullundur and the north of England, his ideas have a more and more compelling and global relevance.

Roger will be remembered for his distinctively robust way of arguing for a sharper, more careful analysis of key terms in social discourse. He will be remembered too for his gleeful smile and laughter, his spontaneous encouragement to younger scholars and his enthusiastic readiness to engage in and to stimulate debate.

He is survived by his second wife Tahirah and his sons Jo, Mark, Zafar and Akbar.

Eleanor Nesbitt
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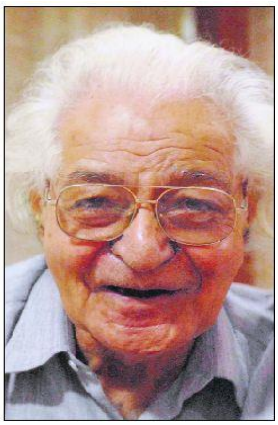
V.N. Datta (1926-2020)



On 30 November 2020, the renowned historian Vishwa Nath Datta passed away at the age of 94 at his residence in New Delhi. Partition interrupted V.N. Datta's education at Government College Lahore and he had to continue his studies at Lucknow University, before going on to doctoral studies at Cambridge University (which also houses some of his private correspondence). In later years, he was to become a resident fellow at Fitzwilliam College. During a long and fruitful academic career, V.N. Datta was among the rare historians who simultaneously worked on Punjab's diversity as well as critical aspects of modern India, and meaningfully connected the local with the region, nation, and empire. He not only used new documentary sources, but he drew on his local knowledge of Amritsar to produce a landmark study of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Other seminal works include, the biography of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1990), *Gandhi and Bhagat Singh* (2008) and his investigation of *Sati* (1988). All of his publications were marked by meticulous documentary research that was underpinned by his linguistic proficiency in Urdu, Persian, Hindi, Punjabi and English. Datta was among the rare historians who simultaneously worked on Punjab's diversity as well as crucial aspects and personalities of modern India and meaningfully connected the two.

His father Brahm Nath Datta 'Qasir' was a renowned Urdu-Farsi poet and leading business figure in pre-partition Amritsar. A member of the Hussaini Brahmin community which had been resident in the city from before the time of Ranjit Singh, Brahm Nath Datta would initiate the *taziya* procession from Farid Chowk near to the family home in Katra Sher Singh. The world of liberal, humane scholarship epitomised by V.N. Datta seems almost as lost today as the eclectic identity of the Hussaini Dutt Brahmins.

Retirement did not halt V.N. Datta's ongoing commitment to research. In his mid-eighties he published an insightful history of the leading newspaper, *Tribune* (2011). He had been writing columns for the paper almost from his student days. The book launch included the presence of the Indian Prime

Minister Manmohan Singh. A wreath was later to be laid on his behalf at V.N. Datta's funeral. Even at the end of his life, 'Datta saheb', as he was known by generations of students, was working on a biography of Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, the celebrated female activist and member of the Tagore family.

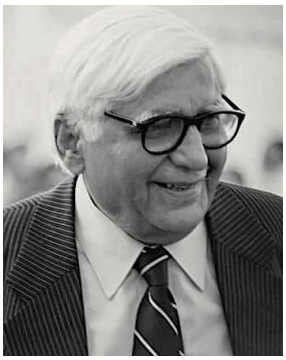
V.N. Datta's legacy is not only his publications, but his inspiration of successive generations of students and colleagues. He established a thriving history department at Kurukshetra University. He also found time to publish a history of his adopted home, *Kurukshetra* (1985). Both his distinguished standing and commitment to the profession were exemplified when he was elected as General President of the Indian History Congress.

Throughout his long life and career, V.N. Datta was a kind and generous man. Our paths had crossed over the years in seminars in Cambridge and Delhi. I really only began to engage with him however, during my research for the volume on *Divided Cities: Partition and its Aftermath in Lahore and Amritsar 1947-1957* (2006). I did not know of his family history in Amritsar at the time, but I had been impressed by his book, *Amritsar: Past and Present* (1967). Characteristically, he was generous in his time and helpful in his comments on a seminar paper on Amritsar and Partition that I later presented at St. Antony's College, Oxford. I notice that the impact of Partition on his home town Amritsar made a profound impression on his psyche and was reflected in most of his work. Yet, despite his experience of 1947, his writings remain objective and critical.

He leaves behind three daughters. The youngest, Nonica Datta, has continued in the family tradition and, based at JNU, she is a leading authority herself on Punjab Studies and has begun to explore the Hussaini Brahmin community's role in the religious life of pre-Partition Amritsar.

Ian Talbot
University of Southampton

Nadir Ali (1936-2020)



Nadir Ali, Punjabi short story writer, poet and activist for Punjabi language rights, passed away in Lahore on December 16, 2020.

His remarkable transformation from a high-ranking officer of Pakistan military as a colonel to a celebrated Punjabi writer will forever serve as an inspiration for those who take up the unconventional and difficult task of promoting Punjabi language in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Punjabi, the language of common people, has a long history of attracting the best and brightest Punjabi writers when Persian was the language of choice of North India's literary class. This unique capability of Punjabi has not diminished even after nearly two centuries of almost complete domination of Urdu in Pakistan, as proven by its entrapment of Nadir Ali. It started with a traumatic experience that ended Col. Ali's military career. He then followed a long process of studying Punjabi literature extended over a few decades that eventually made him one of the best Punjabi writers of his time.

Starting quite late in his life, he published a collection of his poetry *Bol Jhoote te Sache* (Words True & False) and three books of short stories: *Kahani Paraga*, *Kahani Kara* and *Kahani Lekha* (the word Kahani used in the titles meaning story). He also wrote regular columns in English newspapers on Punjabi literature that received all around critical admiration. His autobiography *Balpan da Shehar* (The Town of My Childhood) has not yet published in a book form but it was serialised in twelve parts in a Punjabi magazine *Pancham* during 2009-2010.

Ali belonged to Punjab's educated middle class that emerged after western style mass education slowly replaced the indigenous system of education after the annexation of Punjab. His father was the first person in his family to go to school and attend college and Aligarh University where he studied law. Political consciousness had started awakening in India and Punjab by that time and he participated in some of the major political movements of that period. He was an active participant in the Khilafat movement and toured many parts of India as its worker. Later, he became a member of Congress Party and admirer of both Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Azad. He also took part in Ahrar's agitations in

1930's, finally settling down in Kohat as a successful lawyer. Eventually, the family moved to their village Machhiana near Gujrat when Nadir Ali was very young, splitting their time between Gujrat and their nearby village.

Ali grew up and got his early education in the traditional Punjabi rural atmosphere of 1930s and 1940s. During school days he used to travel every afternoon from Gujrat to Machhiana to spend most of his after-school time in his village. Even while enjoying the modern facilities of those days, his large extended family was by and large still living the traditional Punjabi way of life.

Ali attended high school at Gujrat and then studied at Cadet College Hasan Abdal. District Gujrat was among the areas designated as military districts belonging to the so-called martial races in Colonial Punjab by the British government for hiring in Indian Army. Ali followed that tradition and got commission in Pakistan military officer corps after graduating from the Cadet College in 1958. He spent most of his early career in Pakistan Army Special Service Group (SSG) before becoming a popular instructor at Pakistan Military Academy. He was looking forward to a bright military career but the East Pakistan debacle and 1971 war with India changed everything for him.

He volunteered to serve in East Pakistan during the popular Bengali nationalist rising that led to military operations against Mukti Bahini guerillas and their civilian supporters. Although he didn't participate in Pakistan military's atrocities but whatever he observed troubled his sensitive soul to the point of giving him a nervous breakdown after he returned back from East Pakistan. What he saw in East Pakistan haunted him all through his life. For months he remained under psychiatric care in a hospital, losing his memory for a long period of time. This episode was the key turning point which changed the direction of his life. After coming out of the psychiatric care, he resigned from the military service. He felt confident enough to talk about the events of 1971, openly, many years later in a long interview with BBC Urdu in 2007 under the title *Aik Fauji Ki Yadasht* (A Soldier Remembers). He also gave a talk at the BRAC University in Bangladesh in 2011 on his experiences during the six-month period he was posted there.

Ali had studied Marxism and he largely agreed with Marxist doctrine. The left movement in Lahore in late sixties and early seventies had adopted the cause of 'local' languages. He started attending the weekly meetings of Punjabi Adabi Sangat where he met Najm Hosain Syed among other Punjabi activists. It changed his life. He used to reminisce: "One of the things that helped me recover was getting in touch with this group. And Najm played a great role in that, in helping me regain my memory, my life before 1971, talking about my childhood, and also about '71."

He migrated to USA in 1984. But after five years he went back to Lahore permanently. He received the coveted Waris Shah Award from Pakistan Academy of Letters in 2006.

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