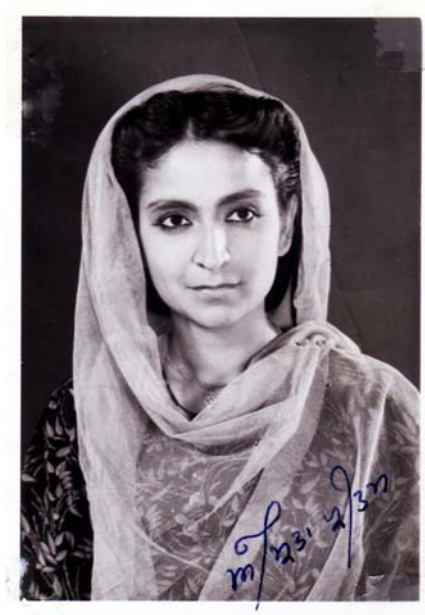


In Remembrance

Amrita Pritam: Adored and celebrated daughter of Punjab



Amrita Pritam. c 1950. New Delhi. Photographer unknown.
AMARJIT CHANDAN COLLECTION

With the death of Amrita Pritam, the first ever major female Punjabi poet, at the age of 86 after a prolonged illness, the chapter in the history of twentieth century Punjabi literature named after her has come to an end. Her contribution is unparalleled in Punjabi letters. She will always be remembered for her classic poem on for the suffering of all Punjabi women during the partition of the Punjab in 1947.

Born in 1919 to school teacher parents in Gujranwala, western Punjab, she started writing at a very young age. She got a slap from her father on her face instead of praise for her first ever poem which she had written for her imagined lover who had appeared in her dream. At the age of 16 she obtained *gyani* Punjabi vernacular diploma – her only academic qualification - and published her first collection of poems *Thandian Kiranan* (1935) – Cool Rays – under her maiden name Amrit Kaur. The same year she was married off to a ceramics trader Pritam Singh Kwatra whom she divorced in the late 1960s but she chose not to drop his first name as her surname.

Amrita cut her literary teeth in the politically charged atmosphere of Lahore but it is not imaged in her early rhetoric works which are about evil social customs. Her different creative phases seem to be influenced by her unacknowledged intimate friendships with her contemporaries. The first two were 'pseudo-Marxist' as Khushwant Singh has put it. Mohan Singh = romantic progressivism – formative period 1940-1950; Navtej Singh = 'peace movement' and flirtation with the socialist block, 1950-1960; and Sati Kumar = western poetic themes and idiom, 1960-1970. Sati Kumar tells me: 'Amrita breaks away openly with her past poetics with the publication of *Kagaz te Canvas* (1970) – The Paper and the Canvas. We went through each word and syllable in it on her sofa on the sole principle: no rhymes and no flowery wall-paper.' Amrita trashed all her above-mentioned friends in her autobiography *Rasidi Ticket* (1976), The Revenue Stamp.

Amrita had more than 100 books of poetry, fiction and non-fiction to her credit. The selections were translated into English by Khushwant Singh, Charles Brasch, Man Mohan Singh and Pritish Nandy. Other targeted foreign languages were Albanian, Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, French, Hungarian, Japanese and Russian. *Mehfil*, a quarterly from Michigan State University published an issue on her works. None of her books published in Hindi carried the translator's name nor the name of the source language. Three of her novels - *Kadambri*, *Daku* and *Pinjar* were made into Hindi films.

Khushwant Singh sums up Amrita's range and limitations in his celebrated *A History of the Sikhs*. Vol II (1966, reprinted 2005):

...Although she has given up preaching, the hard lot of Indian women remains the dominant theme in most of her poetry and prose. ...[She] has not achieved the same distinction in her fiction as she has in her poetry. Her characterization is often weak and her plots so contrived as to appear manifestly unreal. The Indian film industry has exercised on her, as it has on many Indian writers of her generation, a most baneful influence. ...Amrita is at her best in *Pinjar* – The Skelton [the story of a woman victim of 1947 upheaval].

Igor Serebryakov, the Russian Indologist, made a similar observation in his book *Punjabi Literature* (Nauka, Moscow, 1968):

[Amrita Pritam's] great merit is her exquisitely poetic language. A somewhat narrow scope of problem matter [of the novels] accounts for her comparatively limited success as a prose writer.

Amrita did not keep live contact with the Punjab after she made Delhi her home in 1947, where she worked with All India Radio producing a daily half-an hour programme in Punjabi till the late 1960s. She never went back to Lahore and rarely visited East Punjab apart from attending official functions.

Nagmani (the mythical gem in a serpent's head) was a quality literary monthly which Amrita had started in 1966. It dominated the Punjabi literary scene for three decades. It was conceived by Sati Kumar a young modernist poet

and designed by Inderjeet, who later changed his name to Imroz. He also deftly designed all her book covers for their own publishing house Nagmani Publishers, as a money-spinning venture.

Through *Nagmani* Amrita became the mentor of the third generation of young Punjabi poets and short story writers who were largely apolitical. With *Nagmani* a new trend of confessional literature in Punjabi started. The young writers coming from small Punjabi towns and villages indulged in do-it-yourself psycho-analysis writing about their repressed sexuality. This was the time when East Punjab was going through the green revolution and mass emigration to the west had just started. *Nagmani's* prime concern was good quality literature. It accommodated all writers from Naxalites to absurdists. From early 1980s Amrita embraced the philosophy of the Bhagwan Rajneesh of Pune, astrology, *tantric* practices and parapsychology, so much so she believed that she and Indira Gandhi had been sisters in a previous incarnation.

Amrita was more of a celebrity in the erstwhile eastern block countries. A Georgian composer Shalva Mahvelidze dedicated his music to her, composed for the poem *Amrita Pritam* written by a Georgian poet Irakali Abashidze. She received the Vaptasarov award, named after the Bulgarian national poet, in 1980.

In life Amrita became a one-person institution. She turned her back to the eastern block when she refused to attend the Soviet-sponsored Afro-Asian Writers Conference held in Delhi in 1971 and thus dealt a big blow to the organisers Mulk Raj Anand and Sajjad Zaheer. Her one-time close friend Sati Kumar tells me now that it was not out of any ideological commitment but out her 'desire to be recognised by the west particularly the USA'. But it never happened.

I quote again Khushwant Singh, her translator and confidant, on her legacy:

All the praise that is now being lavished on her is mainly from people who have not read her. I feel that her only claims to immortality are those ten lines of lament to Waris Shah. Those haunting lines will remain long after the rest of her writing is forgotten.

Amarjit Chandan

Amrita Pritam née Amrit Kaur, Punjabi writer, born Gujranwala 31 August 1919, died New Delhi 31 October 2005

Amrita Pritam: A Restless Cloud

Amrita Pritam, the eminent Punjabi poetess, novelist and short story writer and an outstanding literary figure of South Asia, passed away quietly in her sleep at her residence, 25 Hauz Khas, New Delhi, during the afternoon of October 31, 2005. With her demise, a golden era of Punjabi literature, of which she was the shining light, came to an end.

Before she made her mark on the scene of Punjabi literature, the voice of Punjabi women was either weaved into epic love stories by the classical Punjabi poets who were all male or was hidden behind certain forms of Punjabi folk songs that have anonymously given expression to women feelings for many centuries. Amrita Pritam single handedly changed this forever.

Among her many overlapping identities, the one that truly represents her is her Punjabiati. She got her inspirations from Punjabi folk songs, classical literature and Punjabi culture, and remained true to her Punjabi origins although a few of her later novels and short stories were first published in Hindi. Even after Partition, her creative self remained bonded to the whole Punjab.

It was no coincidence that after witnessing the atrocities and bloodshed caused by Punjab's partition, when she cried out for help she could think of no one else but Waris Shah. The way her famous poem '*ajj aakhan Waris Shah nun, kiton qabran wichon bol,*' resonated with the sufferings of millions of Punjabis is one of the miracles of great poetry.

During her lifetime, she published more than 75 books, including 24 novels, 15 collections of short stories, 23 volumes of poetry, two biographies and a number of other works of prose.

The recognition for her artistic genius poured in from all directions. From the large scale sale of her books to translations in almost all Indian and east European languages, and in English, French, Danish and Japanese. Three Bollywood movies were based on her novels. More recently *Pinjer*, a movie based on her novel by the same name, received high acclaims.

She received the highest civilian awards in India, including Padma Shiri, Padma Vibushan, Sahitya Academy Award, Bharatia Jnanpith Award, as well as honorary doctorate degrees from 5 universities. She was also made a member of Rajaya Sabha, the upper chamber of Indian Parliament, from 1986 to 1992.

That is not how her life was supposed to turn out. For a girl born in 1919 in the then small town of Gujranwala in a deeply religious Sikh household, she was supposed to remain confined in many layers of boundaries within a rigid and traditional social structure. There was no room for either a self-willed personal or creative fulfilment.

She achieved both. Without even making the compromise of permanently keeping the personal and creative aspects of her life in two separate compartments. She eventually melded them into one cohesive expression of her inner beliefs and aspirations. It was a struggle, slow and long and often torturous. It required courage more than anything else, as she had once written, 'What matters is not life, but the courage you bring to it.'

Both her parents, Nand Sadhu (Kirtar Singh Hitkari before he had renounced the world and joined an ashram) and Raj Bibi, were teachers in a school in Gujranwala at the time of her birth. Her father had by then left the ashram to marry her mother and raise a family. Her mother passed away when she was only 11. She lived a lonely life for the next few years in a house full of books about religion and meditation, following the rituals and prayers with her father who didn't approve of her making any friends.

She did learn the art of rhyme and rhythm and metrical compositions from her father, who wanted her to write about only religious themes, and started writing her own poetry. Perhaps it was also the example of her father that planted the seeds of the guiding principle of her life: to live in peace of her innermost self, without worrying about how the world thought of her.

Her first book of poetry, *Amrit Lehran*, was published when she was barely 17 years old. She got married about the same time. In 1936 she moved to Lahore with her husband, Pritam Singh. She changed her name from Amrita Kaur that had appeared on her first book, to Amrita Pritam, which was destined to become a household name in Punjab.

Lahore in the 1930s and until the mid-40s was a cosmopolitan Punjabi city where Hindu, Sikh and Muslim Punjabis were living in a religious and cultural harmony. Many of the famous pre-partition era's Punjabi writers were settled in Lahore, which was then the center of Punjabi literary activities. Amrita Pritam became a part of the literary circle centered around Gurbux Singh's Punjabi magazine *Preet LaRee*. She took formal training in music and dance, and joined Lahore Radio as a singer of folk songs.

A prolific writer all through her life, Amrita Pritam published 8 books of Punjabi poetry before partition, gradually moving away from her early love poems and folk songs to more progressive themes. Her collection of poems *Loke PeeR*, published in 1944 with poems on the tragedy of the Bengal famine of 1943, signaled a clear departure from her earlier poetry.

After partition, Amrita Pritam settled in Delhi. She wrote a number of poems, short stories and novels stories on the theme of Punjab's partition that were widely recognized as the best articulations of this colossal tragedy. At the same time, she increasingly started picking up themes on women issue in her short stories and novels that brought her wide popularity among Punjabi and Hindi readers.

With *Sunehe* (Messages), another collection of Punjabi poems published in 1955, Amrita Pritam reached the height of her poetic art. This was an anthology of poems that were mostly dedicated to and woven around her deeply emotional feelings of love for Sahir Ludhianvi, a famous Urdu poet. This book won her the Sahitya Academy Award. She was its first women recipient.

Amrita Pritam had never reconciled with her loveless arranged marriage. This also became a prominent theme in her poems and novels. Sahir Ludhianvi was her first true love. She openly talked about it in her biography *Rasidi Ticket* (The Revenue Stamp) that became one of her most popular book and has been translated in many languages. The reconciliation in her personal life finally came when she got divorce from her husband in 1960 and started living with Imroz, an artist and painter, who became her dedicated companion for the rest of her life. It proved to be a blessing for Punjabi Literature.

Amrita Pritam and Imroz started publishing a Punjabi magazine, *Nagmani*, in 1966. *Nagmani*, like *Preet LaRi* before it, played a very important role in opening new vistas for Punjabi literature. *Nagmani* helped in establishing the writing careers of Shiv Kumar Batalvi, Manjit Tiwana, Amitoj, Dalip Kaur Tiwana and a long list of other modern Punjabi writers.

Nagmani was regularly published until 2002 when a minor accident, a fall at home at the ripe age of 83, signalled the beginning of the final and quieter period of Amrita Pritam's life which she had lived with such extraordinary intensity.

Even as her ability to walk became gradually more restrictive and the energy to speak was eventually reduced to no more than a few minutes at a time, the doors of her house remained opened. 25 Hauz Khas had been the gathering place of Punjabi writers for many decades, where hundreds of visitors from India, Pakistan and abroad had been coming each year.

The number of people coming to see her during those last years had trickled down to a few, mostly young writers. She could still inspire them, telling one visitor after the Gujrat riots, 'Why do we humans fight? Can't we learn something from flowers? They are all so beautiful but never become jealous of each other.'

She continued to write an occasional poem. *Main tainu pher milange*, was perhaps her last poem. It was dedicated to Imroz, her companion for the last 41 years:

I will meet you again
Where? How? I don't know
Perhaps as a figure
Of your imagination
I will appear on your canvas
Or perhaps appearing as a mysterious line
On your canvas
Quietly,
I will keep staring at you.

Only for those last three years, her once poetic broodings came true: '*Ve main tiRke ghaRey daa paani – kal assan naheen rehnaan*' (I am like water in a cracked earthen pitcher – It won't last for too long).

For the rest of her life, she soared high as a restless cloud, full of energy and strength, free from limits and boundaries, always gathering precious droplets of moisture from the winds and giving out life sustaining water and shadows, never suspended at one place for long and ever rising to new heights.

We are too close to the extraordinary phenomenon that was Amrita Pritam's life and creative art to fully grasp its significance and achievements, or to pass a final judgment on it. There is no doubt that as the first universally recognized women Punjabi poet and novelist, she has secured a permanent place among the great Punjabi writers.

[Courtesy of **Safir Rammah**: *The Dawn*, November 13, 2005]

Amrita Pritam- a symbol of courage in the face of suffering

On October 31, 2005 the well-known Punjabi female fiction writer and poet, Amrita Pritam, died in New Delhi. She had been ill for several months. She was

one of the last names known and respected on both sides of the Punjab. She was born in a Sikh family in Gali Arainan, Gujranwala. With her departure the old Punjab will begin to fade away as a source of reference for literary imagination and creative work, but as long as there are hearts that beat for the Punjab Amrita will live.

Amrita Pritam was made of a stuff that enabled the women of 1947 to experience indignity and violation and yet survive. Because when men of pride and ambition could not agree to share power in a united Punjab the inevitable was bound to happen. It would be severed into two, bleeding profusely. The women were bound to be a lustful target because men of pride are also men without shame. To carry away or rape a woman of the opposite group is a special type of revenge because it not only symbolises the defeat of her protectors it also declares to the world that they are not men enough.

According to government statistics at least 95,000 women were abducted in the Punjab in 1947: 55,000 of them were Muslim and 40,000 Hindu and Sikh. According to Urvashi Butalia, at least 75,000 of them were raped. Thousands were never found or returned.

Amrita Pritam wrote about the condition of women during the partition but also later in Indian society. She wrote novels, short stories and poems touching on many subjects but always with a feminist perspective imbued with intuitive wisdom. She received ample recognition from her peers and was bestowed many awards.

Her greatest poem remains the one she wrote on partition and dedicated to Waris Shah (1722-1798), the most celebrated author of one of the most famous versions of the greatest love epic, Punjab's *Romeo and Juliet*, the saga of *Heer and Ranjha* signifying unfulfilled love. At the heart of the story is the fact that Heer is denied her rights and married away to someone the family approves of as if she were a commodity rather than a thinking, feeling human being. Thus she symbolises the oppression of women of the Punjab.

The *Heer* of Waris Shah is recited and sung even now. When I was a child, the *Heer* was sung by special bards. In our native Mozang it was Sain Kuthaes (I don't know his real name), who would cast a spell in a melodious, melancholic voice drenched in pathos. Waris Shah is considered a man of encyclopaedic learning in the best tradition of the Sufi-scholar and has written the social history of the Punjab.

Amrita Pritam could have dedicated her poem to some other great master of Punjabi literature or spiritual tradition. In fact some Sikhs felt she should have addressed Baba Guru Nanak (1469-1540), the founder of Sikhism, in her poem. But Amrita, lamenting the humiliation of the Punjabi women, wanted to appeal to the common tragic-romantic traditions of the Punjab rather than her spiritual heritage. She writes in 'Aaj Akhan Waris Shah nun' (Today I call Waris Shah):

*aj aakhan Waris Shah nun, kiton kabraan vichchon bol,
te aj kitab-e-ishq daa koi agla varka phol
ik roi si dhi Punjab di, tun likh likh maare vaen,
aj lakhaan dhian rondian, tainun Waris Shah nun kaehn*

uth dardmandaan dia dardia, uth takk apna Punjab
 aj bele lashaan bichhiaan te lahu di bhari Chenab
 kise panjan panian vichch ditti zehr rala
 te unhaan paniian dharat nun ditta paani laa
 is zarkhez zamin de lun lun phuttia zehr
 gitth gitth charhiaan laalian fut fut charhiala qehr
 veh vallissi vha pher, van van vaggi jaa,
 ohne har ik vans di vanjhali ditti naag banaa
 pehlaa dang madaarian, mantar gaye guaach,
 dooje dang di lagg gayi, jane khane nun lag
 laagaan kile lok munh, bus phir dang hi dang,
 palo pali Punjaab de, neele pae gaye ang
 gale`on tutt`e geet phir, takaleon tuttii tand,
 trinjanon tuttiaan saheliaan, charakhrre ghukar band
 sane sej de beriaan, Luddan dittiaan rohr,
 sane daliaan peengh aj, piplaan ditti tor
 jitthe vajdi si phuuk pyaar di, ve oh vanjhali gayi guaach
 Raanjhe de sab veer aj, bhul gaye uhadi jaach
 dharti te lahoo varsiya, kabraan paiaan choan,
 preet diaan shaahzaadiaan, aaj vichch mazaaraan roan
 aj sabbhe Kaido`ban gaye, husn, ishq de chor
 aj kitthon liaaiye labbh ke Waris Shah ik hor
 aj aakhan Waris Shah nun, kiton kabraan vichchon bol,
 te aj kitaab-e-ishq da, koi aglaa varka phol

Translation:

Today, I call Waris Shah, 'Speak from your grave'
 And turn, today, the book of love's next affectionate page
 Once, a daughter of Punjab cried and you wrote a wailing saga
 Today, a million daughters, cry to you, Waris Shah
 Rise! O' narrator of the grieving; rise! look at your Punjab
 Today, fields are lined with corpses, and blood fills the Chenab
 Someone has mixed poison in the five rivers' flow
 Their deadly water is, now, irrigating our lands galore
 This fertile land is sprouting, venom from every pore
 The sky is turning red from endless cries of gore
 The toxic forest wind, screams from inside its wake
 Turning each flute's bamboo-shoot, into a deadly snake
 With the first snakebite; all charmers lost their spell
 The second bite turned all and sundry, into snakes, as well
 Drinking from this deadly stream, filling the land with bane
 Slowly, Punjab's limbs have turned black and blue, with pain
 The street-songs have been silenced; cotton threads are snapped
 Girls have left their playgroups; the spinning wheels are cracked
 Our wedding beds are boats their logs have cast away

Our hanging swing, the Pipal tree has broken in disarray
 Lost is the flute, which once, blew sounds of the heart
 Ranjha's brothers, today, no longer know this art
 Blood rained on our shrines; drenching them to the core
 Damsels of amour, today, sit crying at their door
 Today everyone is, 'Kaido;' thieves of beauty and ardour
 Where can we find, today, another Warish Shah, once more
 Today, I call Waris Shah, 'Speak from your grave'
 And turn, today, the book of love's next affectionate page

I met Amrita Pritam in 1990 in Delhi. I knew she adored poet Sahir Ludhianvi (1921-1980) and told her I had named my elder son, Sahir, also out of similar feelings. She smiled and said 'My hero has been born again.'

[Courtesy **Ishtiaq Ahmed**: *Daily Times*, 9 November 2005]

Nirmal Azad: A radical Punjab Economist

The death of Professor Nirmal Azad on September 14, 2005 at Patiala has brought a turbulent life to a tragic end. His life can be divided into two phases—an early phase, which was creative and productive, and a later phase which, it appears, was troubled and self-destructive. My association with him was primarily during his early phase and my view of him is more influenced by the memories of that phase. I came to know Nirmal when I was studying for my Honours School in Economics degree at Panjab University, Chandigarh where Nirmal had come to study for his Masters in Economics. Along with some other friends, we both got involved in varying degrees with the Marxist-Maoist movement which had captured the imagination of the idealistic youth all over the world in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Even at that time Nirmal had an unusually strong individualistic streak in him which did not gel well with the collectivist ethos of the Marxist tradition. Though other friends were very critical of his individualistic streak, I persuaded those friends, though not always successfully, to be more tolerant of him. I treated him with respect and affection and he was more open to suggestions for change when I used to talk to him alone. He confessed to me that he was very influenced by Napoleon's life which propelled him to adopt an attitude of conquest towards life. This Bonapartist influence did not sit comfortably with the Marxist ethos and though this contradiction seems to have pervaded his entire life, the intellectual attraction of Marxism proved more powerful in his early phase.

He passed his MA with first class, taught at Panjab University's post-graduate centre at Rohtak in Haryana (which later became Maharishi Dayanand University) for a few years and then settled at Punjabi University, Patiala. Born in March 1947, he was the first in his family to have studied at the university like many in his generation. He was proud of the transition he had made from a village life in a backward part of Gurdaspur district to a respectable academic life. He helped many younger members of his large family to acquire higher

education and upward social mobility. He showed keen interest in educating his sisters and other girls in the family. He married Balbir, a bold and generous woman with left-wing political orientation, who contributed significantly to sharpening his perspective on gender equality. Nirmal's politics had a deep impact on many younger members of his family. His younger brother Kulwant and sister Devinder joined the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM). Later on after the split in Punjab's CPM, they joined the CPM (Pasla). One of his cousins Gurmeet was once a leading figure in the pro-Maoist Punjab Students Union, the most powerful student organisation in Punjab in the 1960s and the 1970s. Both Gurmeet and Devinder along with most immediate members of Nirmal's family have migrated to America. It is, perhaps, a reflection of the tortured nature of Punjabi society and politics since the 1980s that Gurmeet has turned towards religion and Sikh nationalism. If one were to construct a historical profile of Nirmal's family in the last few decades, it will mirror many trends in Punjabi society concerning rural-urban migration, women's education, landscape of competing political ideologies and migration to the West.

Nirmal's attachment to his social roots led him to do research on the small peasantry in Punjab and he produced an impressive PhD thesis on the subject. Based on the Leninist method of the differentiation of the peasantry, his work shows scholarly reading on the subject but at the same time reluctance to engage critically with Marxist orthodoxy. When I was studying at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and published my first paper on the Italian Marxist Gramsci's concept of hegemony, he congratulated me but also told me that he did not particularly like my 'drift' towards Trotskyism and European Marxism. He did, however, show more openness when he invited me and a group of my 'Trotskyist' friends from JNU for a seminar on the Left movement in India under the banner of Marxist Study Forum he had organised in Patiala. Through this Forum, Nirmal made a leading contribution towards the radicalisation of intellectual and political culture in Patiala. He organised lectures and discussions on contemporary economic and political issues. The left wing scholars who visited Patiala at the invitation of the Marxist Study Forum included Krishna Bharadwaj, Randhir Singh, Prabhat Patnaik, G.S. Bhalla, Utsa Patnaik, T. Shanin and Bipin Chandra. I had accompanied Krishna Bharadwaj, my MPhil supervisor at JNU, to her lecture at Patiala and I remember that she was highly impressed with the level and quality of intellectual exchange she had experienced at her lecture. Along with these intellectual activities, Nirmal also played a leading role in the trade union work of the Punjabi University Teachers Association.

Nirmal also made an effort to broaden his intellectual horizons by academic visits to some leading institutions abroad. He spent 6 months in Warsaw to acquaint himself with the research on the functioning of centrally planned economies and 9 months in Paris to familiarise himself with the research on the revolutionary potentialities of the peasantry. During his stay in Warsaw and Paris, he was a keen observer of the social and political trends in Poland and France. When he came back from Warsaw, he told me that he was struck by the

problem of alcoholism in Poland which, he thought, was indicative of some malaise in that society but he also praised the humane methods of the police in picking up drunkards from the streets at night and transporting them to their residences. Nirmal also observed the close proximity between the Catholic Church and the Communists in Poland, and wondered whether in the context of Punjab, Akali-Communist alliance based on the progressive potentialities of the egalitarian teachings of the Sikh Gurus was the most desirable political combine. He was in Paris at the time of the Operation Blue Star and he told me that he was amazed by the ordinary Parisians' sympathy with Bhindranwale and his comrades in their resistance to the entry of the Indian army into the Golden Temple complex.

When I came back from JNU to teach at Panjab University, Chandigarh, Nirmal not only asked me but virtually forced me to write a paper in Punjabi on 'Imperialism, Indian Capitalism and Punjab Economy' for a seminar he had organised at Patiala. Later on, he was kind enough to include it as the leading paper in *Punjab di Arthikta*, a book he edited for Punjabi University, Patiala. I remain indebted to him for the opportunity he gave me in writing an economics paper in Punjabi because that is the only paper on Punjab economy I have managed to write in Punjabi. What I admired most in Nirmal was that he wrote extensively on Punjab economy for Punjabi language newspapers. In order to reach as broad and diverse readership as possible, he wrote for newspapers with varying ideological orientations. These included the Punjabi nationalist *Ajit*, the Hindu nationalist *Jag Bani*, the ideologically ambiguous *Punjabi Tribune*, the pro-CPM *Desh Sevak* and the Sikh nationalist *Aj Di Awaz*. Through his writings in these newspapers, he has not only contributed to enhancing the understanding of Punjab economy among the readers of these newspapers, he has also contributed to the enrichment of Punjabi language and its modern scientific vocabulary. It might not be an exaggeration to say that of all Punjabi academics, it was Nirmal whose writings reached the largest number of readers in Punjab through his contributions to the Punjabi newspapers. His contribution to economic journalism in Punjabi will be difficult to surpass in the near future.

My friend Amarjit Chandan, the London based Punjabi poet, has reminded me about Nirmal's interest in Punjabi poetry. Many of Nirmal's poems have been published in Punjabi newspapers and magazines. Chandan also remembers Nirmal's '*jatki*' (peasant) sense of humour. According to Chandan who met Nirmal in Patiala a few years ago, when he saw the photographs of Lenin, Bhagat Singh and Bhindranwale on the walls of his 'rather grand office', he thought that that summed up Nirmal's personality. I guess that the appeal these three different types of historical figures had for Nirmal was that all of them subscribed to some version of the voluntarist conception of historical change. The earlier Bonapartist influence was finding new manifestations.

Nirmal also contributed several articles to *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW) in the 1970s and the 1980s on the political and economic developments in Punjab. When I met Krishna Raj, the editor of EPW, in Oxford in 1990, he told me that he valued very highly Nirmal Azad's contributions to EPW and that he was sorry that Azad seemed to have stopped writing for EPW. When my first

article was published in EPW in 1983, Nirmal wrote a letter of appreciation from Paris and also conveyed the appreciation of the article by Ashok Rudra, a leading left wing Indian economist, who was also a visiting academic in Paris then. Nirmal was as generous in appreciation as he was harsh in condemnation. He alienated many people, including some of his friends and well wishers, by the harshness with which he sometimes treated them.

After I came to Oxford in the late 1980s, I came to hear very many unpleasant things about him and his life. I felt sad to hear all that but felt helpless to do anything. I thought that if he could be re-connected to scholarly activities that might give a productive orientation to his creative energies. With that objective in mind, I tried to persuade him to participate in a few international conferences. I even arranged some funding for him to contribute a paper to the Political Economy of Punjab panel which Shinder Thandi and I had organised at the International Congress of Asian and North African Studies at Hong Kong in 1993 and the European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies at Edinburgh in 2000. He wrote papers for both the conferences but eventually did not turn up. He probably had gone too far into the dark alleys of depression and self-harm. My friend Prof. Bhupinder Singh from Patiala thinks that one reason for Nirmal's 'disorientation' was the collapse of Soviet Union abroad and the rise of religious fundamentalism at home.

My friend Professor Birinder Pal Singh from Patiala, who informed me about Nirmal's death, also gave me one piece of information about Nirmal which was not previously known. Nirmal had quietly expressed a wish in a letter to the university authorities about six months back that all of his provident fund earnings and the books be donated to the Punjabi University Library. It seems that this letter was later on withdrawn. It looks as if he was grappling with the conflicting pulls of the self and the collective. He seemed to be wanting to have a last shot at dialectics. Perhaps, he wanted to convert his loneliness, alienation and social isolation into social commitment.

Pritam Singh