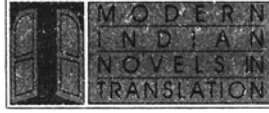


GONE ARE THE RIVERS

*Clouds hold the water drawn from the ocean,
but it is the clouds to which people look.*

– Jnaneshwar

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Dalip Kaur Tiwana
GONE ARE THE RIVERS
(Lang Gaye Dariya)

Translated from the Punjabi original by
BHUPINDER SINGH & S. C. NARULA

M

First published in Punjabi in 1990

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

Our project of translations, a collaboration between writers, translators, sponsor and publisher has already released 24 novels including this one. The first eleven books were published in 1996 and another seven a year ago. By the end of the century we hope to finish our programme of 55 novels. Our goal is to try and paint a vivid and general picture of Indian life as revealed by serious post-Independence fiction in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Gujarati, Oriya, Marathi, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali and Hindi.

Every language represented in this series carries with it a sense of community or place, or of being “located” in a unique sensibility. We hope that the works selected express those modes of feeling, perceiving and believing that relate to one of the world’s oldest, unbroken traditions.

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Others, raised outside India, (whether of Indian or non-Indian origin) may need some help with references historical, religious, philosophical or cultural. For those readers we have prepared glossaries because we believe that one way of understanding India is to read the literatures of her complex and diverse regions. I am sure there are more eloquent visions but

if these translations help to widen the literary horizons of our readers even slightly, they would not have been published in vain.

This project has been made possible by the generosity of the MR. AR. Educational Society, Madras. Known to us, there has not so far been a similar programme of translations funded by the private sector.

MINI KRISHNAN
Project & Series Editor

ABOUT THE SPONSORS

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When Mrs MR. Omayal Achi and her son Mr MR. Arunachalam died in an air crash on 12 October 1976, the considerable fortune they left behind was converted into the MR. Omayal Achi MR. Arunachalam Trust by their heirs.

Mr A.M.M. Arunachalam is the Managing Trustee, and his three sisters the Founding Trustees of the Trust, the chief functions of which are education and health care in the rural areas of Tamil Nadu, India. The Omayal Achi College of Nursing, Tamil Nadu is also run by the Trust.

Later, a separate body was established called the MR. AR. Educational Society which set up the MR. Arunachalam Vocational Training Centre and the Selva Vinayakar Middle School, all in rural areas. The aims of the Society besides literacy, also include the promotion of Indian literature and scholarship.

TRANSLATORS' NOTE

Dalip Kaur Tiwana's novel *Lang Gaye Dariya* (here translated as *Gone are the Rivers*) was first published in Punjabi in 1990 and met with outstanding success both within and outside academia.

Interweaving social history, ethnography and fiction from a feminine perspective, the novel deals with an offbeat subject in a language that is spontaneous, lyrical and compressed to the point of being a marvel of economy and elegance.

We have struggled to capture in English the subtle nuances of language, cultural specificities and elegiac ambience of the original narrative written in the Malwai dialect of Punjabi, and would not have succeeded in this task but for the help provided by the series editor, Ms. Mini Krishnan. The final form of this translation is due chiefly to her industry, intellectual acuity and extraordinary linguistic skills.

BHUPINDER SINGH
S. C. NARULA

INTRODUCTION

The creative process does not necessarily move in a linear or an evolutionary manner, a writer's concerns have the habit of resurfacing repeatedly in the corpus of her work. Dalip Kaur Tiwana, the noted Punjabi novelist, has written more than twenty novels, several short stories and an autobiography which is significantly titled *Nange Pairan da Safar (A Journey on Bare Feet)*. Amongst her other well-known novels are *Vat Hamari*, *Teeli da Nishan* and *Eh Hamara Jiwana*, novels deeply rooted in the socio-cultural ethos of the erstwhile princely state of Patiala but going beyond its confines to address questions of loneliness and rootlessness, cultural alienation and existential anguish, the individual's need to accept change and the inability to cope with its dynamics, and above all the unrecognized longing for an anchoring in the stability of the past.

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Her novels reflect the reality of a woman's life against the different caste and economic backgrounds; nomadic, uprooted, compelled to live within the system of polygamy or bigamy, inhibited by her singleness, marginalized because of her barrenness, controlled and tamed by the patriarchal structures. They leave one with a feeling of sadness. Yet these women are strong and at times they surprise one by their boldness. Character emerges as a strong category in itself.

The Punjabi novel is comparatively young as compared to the novel in other Indian languages. With its beginning in the late nineteenth century with Bhai Vir Singh's idealistic, heroic novels *Sundari* and *Satwant Kaur* it developed through the highly sensitive socio-realistic novels of Nanak Singh, the committed writing of Gurbaksh Singh Preetlari and later writers like Kartar Singh Duggal. Surrender Singh Narula, Gurdial Singh, Narendrapal Singh, Mohinder Singh Sarna

and Ram Sarup Anghi. As the names indicate the novel has been male dominated with women figuring only marginally. Amrita Pritma's prose is a second love, poetry being her forte. As such the emergence of women novelists like Dalip Kaur Tiwana writing on strong feminist themes was a welcome development in post-partition Punjabi writing.

Dalip Kaur Tiwana's work is dominantly feminist, projecting a very fine understanding of the social contrasts which engulf a woman, her loneliness and anguish, her sexuality, a woman's point of view about the institution of marriage. She explores the concept of female freedom within marriage and within society. Strongly critical of the submissive meek women who yield to encroachments on their rights and relationships, she is an advocate of female strength, a standpoint which recognizes the need for economic independence. Her concern is with the making of the female self, the need for a woman to have a strong sense of self-esteem, to measure herself and her worth through other norms than those defined by the male vision. In the process she brings to it an increased use of symbols and works through a range of structural patterns which help foreground the female self. In some measure *Lang Gaye Dariya* is different from her other novels as no individual vision is allowed to emerge and no individual life placed centre-stage.

In its depiction of a culture of the princely state, *Lang Gaye Dariya* offers itself for comparison with other similar novels, specially Manohar Malgonkar's *The Princes* and Nayantara Sahgal's *Mistaken Identity*. The autocratic, hierarchical systems, the facade of respectability, the stagnant social divisions, the sons coming to naught, products of a decadent system — these are the common elements. Yet there are marked differences. The only political event which is mentioned in the novel is the Partition and that too in retrospect, otherwise national politics is absent. Palace intrigues exist, but they belong to another dimension. Also the focus is on family life and familial structure in three different generations — Sardar Bakhshish Singh, his son Gurbakhshish, and his granddaughter Dolly. Women populate the novel even if they move

about in purdah and these women's lives frame the narrative. Again the two households — the Sardar's and the Maharaja's — are contrasted and the difference is significant. The novel offers an insight into the lives of the aristocracy, caught as it is between its own sense of integrity and honour and the royal appropriation of others' rights. The system continuously demands sacrifice.

In a subsequent novel *Katha Kuknus Di* (1993, *The Story of the Phoenix*) Tiwana has the central narrator, Nirmal, refer to the earlier novel *Lang Gaye Dariya* and comment upon it. Nirmal reflects.

Patiala was not a mere city for me. It was a philosophy. It was a world. Somewhere in the courtyard of a house in Patiala my childhood was still present. In a college there, I was still sitting and studying in class... *Lang Gaye Dariya* means those people who were like rivers, were here and are here no more.

(84, translation mine)

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The title explains the essence of the novel for rivers have a very special significance in Indian culture as they are a symbol of fertility and continuity of life. They wash away one's sins, are a source of purification, transforming the impure and enabling lesser streams to be absorbed in them. River waters also convey a temporal metaphor: time flows never to be recaptured and leaves one with a sense of loss and oblivion. But as the rivers run dry only grains of sand are left behind and civilizations lie buried beneath them awaiting some future process of excavation. The old world lies in ruins, bewildered and helpless, but the new one is equally baffled, scattered and fragmented. There is in this process of memory a schizophrenic split marking both — a sense of loss and a sense of release.

The dedication of the novel reads "To that history of Patiala which history will not note". The original Punjabi word "zikar" is difficult to translate. Literally it means will not 'mention' It conveys the meaning that no cognizance will ever be taken of it, but the Derridean concept of "trace" (as a noun, not as a verb) comes closest to it. I prefer to use the word

“note” for it has just the right level of indifference and disdain. The dedication brings to my mind some lines with which Krishna Sobti, the Hindi novelist, prefaced her 1979 novel *Zindagi Nama (The Saga of Life)*:

History/what it is not
And history/what it is

Not that
which is secured in
the royal archives with
date and time in the
chronicles

But that
which flows within the
consciousness of the people’s mind
flows, flourishes and spreads
and lives in the
ordinary people.

In an autobiographical extract (*Samdarshi: Special Issue on Punjabi Women Writers, 1994-1995*) Tiwana throws light both on her approach to the women question and the writing of *Lang Gaye Dariya*. The past needs to be remembered not because of its historicity and historicism, not because of the happenings or events but for its attitudes and for its imperceptible cultural nuances. Again, when one examines the past the conventional equation between power and happiness/contentment is upset, the myth exploded and the seemingly powerful characters emerge as victims of time and fate, as tragic figures on the stage of life. People who are inflexibly rooted in the past, break and are destroyed by the flow of time. Tiwana’s own being has been formed by her heritage. Patiala is much more than a mere city for her. It symbolises a presence which continues to live through its people in various ways.

Thus it is the household of Sardar Bakhshish Singh which becomes symbolic of a whole and presents a microcosmic portrayal of the cultural situation. The novel opens with a description of the Sardar’s kothi, which is a big bungalow, a structure which holds together an odd assortment of people.

The very same description is repeated at the end of twenty-ninth chapter marking a cyclical return to the beginning and indicating a transition to another time. The rest of the novel is in the nature of an epilogue. It concerns the lives of the people who are living in the kothi as well as those who were once living there. The narrative which is absent from the earlier chapters surface here. Harpreet, away in the United States all these years, Rosie, the daughter-in-law who no longer lives there, Cuckoo who has finally moved outside the bounds of this house to go on a pilgrimage — their lives lived in deprivation and seclusion, in pain and suffering find a reference here. Also the kothi is now contextualized in the present, it has been shifted to the background, new structures, colonies, houses and streets have come up. It is a different world altogether from that of the earlier chapters.

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As a princely state Patiala could maintain its separate identity in terms of social code. It was only after independence that the princely states were reorganized during 1948-49. The princely states in Punjab were reorganized into PEPSU (Patiala and Eastern Punjab States Union). This union was dismantled and merged into Punjab in 1956. Prior to the merger, the Maharaja's word was law in all social and moral interactions. Affluence and decadence existed side by side, generosity and cruelty rubbed shoulders, and loyalty and betrayal changed places, and yet amidst all this there existed a strong sense of honour. The class divisions are clearly defined, and yet there is a sense of security and belonging. It is Sikh state but there is a conscious allegiance to several Hindu customs and the Hindu priests seem to have considerable influence. Tantrik rites are also followed (even falling as they do outside the tenets of Sikhism). Muslims are serving members of these households but they occupy a lower social position. There is a consciousness of family lineage and tradition which governs codes of behaviour and kinship patterns. There is a networking of interests with other princely states: Chittorgarh, Junagadh, Kishangarh, Bikaner etc.

In such an environment Sardar Bakhshish Singh's household is a well-governed and a well-organised one with a

proper hierarchy of authority. The elder Sardarni being childless, the Sardar acquires a second wife who bears him a son and two daughters. The younger Sardarni has been carefully chosen from an ordinary family so that she can at no stage project any rival claims. The elder Sardarni is in every way the mother of those children except for the fact that she has not given them birth. This appropriation appears to be unfair and insensitive for it is an appropriation which lasts even after death. But this act also displays a certain amount of generosity and warmheartedness which facilitates a bonding between the two women. It is a picture of an orthodox society which yields very little space to women. Laden with jewellery, they learn to live behind closed doors, go out in purdah, avoid the eyes of an alien male and in order to survive they also learn to manipulate and bluff. Barren women fake pregnancies and adopt children to prevent their husbands from marrying again.

The world of men is equally full of intrigues. Sardar Bakhshish Singh is marginalized by the other courtiers while Sardar Bachittar Singh, implicated in a false case, commits suicide. The palace life reflects extreme self-indulgence and when a young Brahmin girl is abducted from Rajasthan for a tantrik ceremony, this inconsiderate act of abduction affects the life of the Sardar's younger daughter whose fiancé vows to break all connections with Patiala. There is in this a continuation of the chivalrous code of the Rajputs. But protection on one hand and exploitation on the other both have their origins in male action. The Maharaja's superstitious belief and ruthlessness bring about the abduction, while the prince's justified anger results in the destruction and wastage of Cuckoo's young life compelling her to live in sexual deprivation and spinsterhood, insanely focusing on the diamond ring on her finger. The system, even in its noble code of honour, rests on the sacrifice of women.

There is a strong feminist note in almost all of Tiwana's novels, communicated through action rather than comment. A number of women are portrayed, each very different from the other, yet all displaying a similar strength of character — those who be sacrificed at the altar of pativrata chaste wife)

like the young Cuckoo, or suffer in an unhappy marriage and struggle in an alien world like Harpreet; those who have the advantage of tradition and training like the elder Sardarni and those who accept a secondary role like the younger one, then there is Rosie who walks out on her alcoholic husband and Dolly who has the courage of her belief and wants to marry Professor Sharma.

The younger Sardarni can be perceived as a victim of the social system where her productivity is purchased and the children once born, are governed by the command of the elder Sardarni. But at no place is the elder Sardarni shown as being unfair or partisan in her treatment of the children. She emerges as a wise guardian who has at heart the best interest of the family and who backs up her advice and opinion with the inherited wisdom of traditional experience. Her gentle reprimands for acts of omission, her genuine concern for those under her care and the consciousness of family dignity lend her character a stature which cannot be reduced by applying any criteria purely from a theoretical perspective. She is as oppressed as the younger Sardarni and both of them by living within their demarcated roles maintain the peace of the household. Both the Sardarnis display a remarkable degree of restraint; they also have an equal degree of resilience, more especially the younger Sardarni. When at the end of the novel she wants Harpreet to arrange Dolly's marriage with Professor Sharma, she actually takes a very radical stand, which is very unusual for her as she has not been trained in decision-making.

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In the background are the lives of the Maharaja's many wives — his queen, maharanis, patranis and concubines. The death of the Maharaja leaves them widowed and with limited options. They can either continue to live like prisoners in the heavily guarded palace with their secluded lives punctuated by prayers and hysterics, or they can opt for an equally uncertain future with another man which may at some stage end as a life of mere prostitution.

The collapse of this world was perhaps inevitable. It was too self-centered and closed to last too long; there was a natural need in it to change. But the tragedy lies in the fact

that it leads to so much human misery, broken lives and fractured beings. Gurbakhshish is a misfit in both the worlds. His character though located on the margins is significant in the commentary it offers on the past. In his opinion his life and other lives like his are a case of the sons repaying the debts of their fathers, paying for the sins of their fathers who were oppressive and self-indulgent.

The ending like the title is an ambivalent one. Dolly's earlier boldness is transformed into desperation. In fact her whole rebellion is not merely the result of changed social circumstance but a response to her father's behaviour. His orthodoxy combined with his sense of failure, his alcoholism, his broken home — all these push the girl to act as she does. By now the whole process has been reversed. If the Sardar's kothi had worked as a citadel protecting within its walls the lives of its inhabitants, that very citadel has now turned into a prison and lunatic asylum all at once with Gurbakhshish's failure to hold it together.

The novel falls clearly into two parts, creating a supplementary narrative which elaborates, explains and critiques the first twenty-nine chapters, thus opening up a text which so far was closed. The perspectives presented here are multiple: the younger Sardarni's, Gurbakhshish's, Dolly's and that of the newly-sprung populace in the city. The processes of democratisation with all their complexity are visible in this section.

No easy generalizations are possible, there are no stark polarities, no judgments in terms of good and evil, right or wrong. It is a human situation, and the dislocations are caused by cultural shifts and the processes of democratisation wherein lies the significance of this history. How does one categorize it? Feminist, feudalistic or cultural? Is it about the strength of tradition or the inhumanity and ruthlessness of power? Or about the self-destructive nature of power? Whatever it is, it is part of the culture of Patiala, and even when it is transformed, it lingers in memory, in tradition and in social interactions, imparting a presence to an absence.

DEDICATION

T*o that narrative of Patiala which history
has not recorded.*