

Classic Poetry Series

**Bhai Vir Singh**  
**- poems -**

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# Bhai Vir Singh(5 December 1872-10 June 1957)

Vir Singh (Punjabi: ਵੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ (Gurmukhi)) was a poet, scholar and theologian and a figure in the movement for the revival and renewal of Punjabi literary tradition.

His name is also found as Bhai Vir Singh Ji, and Bhai Veer Singh Jee. Bhai and Ji (or Jee) are honorifics.

## <b>Early Life</b>

Born in 1872, in Amritsar, Vir Singh was the eldest of Dr. Charan Singh's three sons. The family traced its ancestry to Diwan Kaura Mal, who rose to the position of vice-governor of Multan, under Nawab Mir Mu'In ul-Mulk, with the title of Maharaja Bahadur. His grandfather, Kahn Singh (1788–1878), spent his entire youth in monasteries at Haridwar and Amritsar, acquiring training in traditional Sikh learning. At the age of forty, he got married. Adept in Sanskrit and Braj as well as in the oriental systems of medicine (such as Ayurveda, Siddha and Yunani), Kahn Singh passed on his interests to his only son, Dr. Charan Singh. Apart from being a Braj poet, Punjabi prose-writer, musicologist and lexicographer, Dr. Charan Singh took an active interest in the affairs of the Sikh community, then experiencing a new urge for restoration as well as for change.

## <b>Education and Marriage</b>

Vir Singh had the benefit of both the traditional indigenous learning as well as of modern English education. He learnt Sikh scripture as well as Persian, Urdu and Sanskrit. He then joined the Church Mission School, Amritsar and took his matriculation examination in 1891 and stood first all over in the district. At school, the conversion of some of the students proved a crucial experience which strengthened his own religious conviction. From the Christian missionaries' emphasis on literary resources, he learnt how efficacious the written word could be as a means of informing and influencing a person's innermost being. Through his English courses, he acquired familiarity with modern literary forms, especially short lyric. While still at school, Vir Singh was married at the age of seventeen to Chatar Kaur, the daughter of Narain Singh of Amritsar.

## <b>Literary Career</b>

Unlike the educated young men of his time, Vir Singh was not tempted by prospects of a career in government service. He chose the profession of a writer.

A year after his passing the matriculation examination, he set up a lithograph press in collaboration with Wazir Singh, a friend of his father. As his first essays in the literary field, Vir Singh composed some Geography textbooks for schools.

### <b>Language Politics</b>

Vir Singh argued that Sikhism was a unique religion which could be nourished and sustained by creating an awakening amongst the Sikhs of the awareness of their distinct theological and cultural identity. He aimed at reorienting the Sikhs' understanding of their faith in such a manner as to help them assimilate the different modernizing influences to their historical memory and cultural heritage.

### <b>Works</b>

Vir Singh began taking an active interest in the affairs of the Singh Sabha Movement. To promote its aims and objects, he launched the Khalsa Tract Society in 1894. The tracts produced by the Khalsa Tract Society introduced a new style of literary Punjabi.

The Khalsa Tract Society periodically made available under the title Nirguniara, low-cost publications on Sikh theology, history and philosophy and on social and religious reform. Through this journal, Vir Singh established contact with an ever-expanding circle of readers. He used the Nirguniara as a vehicle for his own self-expression. Some of his major creative works such as Sri Guru Nanak Chamatkar and Sri Guru Kalgidhar Chamatkar, were originally serialized in its columns.

In literature, Vir Singh started as a writer of romances which are considered forerunners of the Punjabi novel. His writings in this genre - Sundari (1898), Bijay Singh (1899), Satwant Kaur (published in two parts, I in 1900 and II in 1927), were aimed at recreating the heroic period (eighteenth century) of Sikh history. Through these novels he made available to his readers, models of courage, fortitude and human dignity.

The novel Subhagji da Sudhar Hathin Baba Naudh Singh, popularly known as Baba Naudh Singh (serialized in Nirguniara from 1907 onwards and published in book form in 1921) shares with the epic Rana Surat Singh (which he had started serializing in 1905), Vir Singh's interest in the theme of a widow's desperate urge for a reunion with her dead husband.

Soon after the publication of Rana Surat Singh in book form in 1919, he turned to shorter poems and Lyrics. These included Dil Tarang (1920), Tarel Tupke (1921), Lahiran de Har (1921), Matak Hulare (1922), Bijlian de Har (1927) and

Mere Sayian Jio (1953). Through these works, he paved the way for the emergence of the Punjabi poem.

In November 1899, he started a Punjabi weekly, the Khalsa Samachar. He revised and enlarged Giani Hazara Singh's dictionary, Sri Guru Granth Kosh, originally published in 1898. The revised version was published in 1927. He published critical editions of some of the old Sikh texts such as Sikhan di Bhagat Mala (1912), Prachin Panth Prakash (1914), Puratan Janam Sakhi (1926) and Sakhi Pothi (1950).

An important work was Vir Singh's annotation of Santokh Singh's Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth, published from 1927 to 1935 in fourteen volumes.

### **<b>Awards</b>**

He was honored with the Sahitya Academy Award in 1955 and the Padam Bhushan Award in 1956

### **<b>Death</b>**

Vir Singh died in Amristar on June 10, 1957. The portion of his commentary on the Adi Granth - nearly one half of the Holy Book - he had completed was published posthumously in seven large volumes.

# Fill My Tearful Gaze For Ever

Fill my tearful gaze for ever  
with thy celestial face;  
And let my eyes  
be for ever wet with  
the joy of seeing thee!  
My love!  
dwell for ever in my eyes!  
It is the season  
of the cooling dew!  
The dew is falling  
everywhere,

Bhai Vir Singh

# I Am Glad

I am glad,  
the prison walls of my house have dropped away from me,  
And I am on the top of my roof.  
I feel as a victor feels when  
he enters a conquered city.  
The cruel roof was between  
me and heaven;  
I conquer the roof  
by being on the roof.  
My soul breathes  
freedom at last,  
I am nearer heaven,  
and heaven is nearer me.  
I see the clouds,  
I see the stars.

Bhai Vir Singh

# It Is Now The Dewy Season

It is now the dewy season,  
The season of the happy meetings of love,  
The season of the quenching  
of all fires of pain.  
To me everything seems  
to be dew wet;  
From the blue of heaven  
the dew is falling soft;  
It is the dew of deep,  
deep unions;  
And wonder and worship  
is in the eyes.  
The separated ones shall meet!  
It is the season  
of the cooling dew!  
The dew is falling everywhere,  
And wet is every rose.  
The gentle breath  
of heaven blows.

Bhai Vir Singh

# It Is The Season Of Slumber And Dew

It is the season  
of slumber and dew.  
Cruel is all separation!  
Pray remove the distances that divide me from thee.  
My beloved! it is the season  
of the cooling dew!  
The dew is falling everywhere,  
And wet is every rose.  
The gentle breath  
of heaven blows.

Bhai Vir Singh

# O Beautiful Sun Wearer

O beautiful sun wearer,  
with the sun in thy crest!  
Come and meet me,  
come and meet me,  
Meet me to day,  
and greet me with a kiss;  
Thy love is all my life.  
In the name of thy beautiful, beatific vision,  
Come to me,  
my love! Come to me!

Bhai Vir Singh

## O Love! Why

O love! Why,  
why hast thou gone  
across to the other side  
of the river ?  
I know not how to swim,  
There is no hope of my swimming across;  
Come thou thyself,  
my love!

Bhai Vir Singh

# O Master Of The Order Of The Seli!

O master of the order  
of the Seli!  
O dweller of heaven!  
O great giver!  
My Guru Nanak!  
Come to me to day!  
O light of lights!  
Thy seats are the sun  
and the moon!  
My beloved!  
return to me to day!  
It is the season  
of the cooling dew!  
The dew is falling  
everywhere,  
And wet is every rose.  
The gentle breath  
of heaven blows.

Bhai Vir Singh

# So Soon As Thou Didst Love Me

So soon as thou didst love me,  
So soon as thou  
madest me thine,  
So soon as thou madest  
me the bee of the lotus  
which is thy feet, Then, then, without a word to me,  
Thou didst depart;  
And I knew nothing,  
my love! Oh,  
I knew nothing then!

Bhai Vir Singh

# The Clouds Have Stopped Their Thunder

The clouds have stopped  
their thunder,  
The lightning has  
hidden her spark,  
The floods of the Punjab  
rivers have rolled away,  
The rivers have shrunk low;  
The storm is over,  
and the winds blow  
soft and slow.  
It is the season  
of the cooling dew!  
The dew is falling everywhere,  
And wet is every rose.  
The gentle breath  
of heaven blows.

Bhai Vir Singh

# The Cool, Soft Touches Of The Falling Dew

The cool,  
soft touches of  
the falling dew calm my soul;  
And my mind,  
blessed with the dew  
joys calm and cool, is at rest!  
My beloved!  
come to me  
as the dew of my eyes!  
Come to day  
as the dew cometh!  
And cool my soul parched  
by the pain of long,  
long separation!  
My beloved! it is the season  
of the cooling dew!

Bhai Vir Singh

# The Dew Cometh From Heaven Down!

The dew cometh  
from heaven down!  
It bringeth heavenly  
peace for all.  
It wetteth all with sweetness.  
Invisible,  
it raineth deep into souls.  
It raineth love  
and peace and joy.  
It raineth sweetness.  
Dew! dew! my comrades!  
It is the season  
of the cooling dew!  
The dew is falling everywhere,  
And wet is every rose.  
The gentle breath  
of heaven blows.

Bhai Vir Singh

# The Night Air

The night air,  
free of the day's fever  
and passion,  
Blows over the sleeping foes,  
That are almost friends in sleep.  
The lips that moved  
to hurt are motionless,  
The teeth that clenched  
in anger are sealed with sleep.  
The tongue,  
the sword like thing  
that cut so sharp,  
such unhealing wounds,  
is sheathed.

Bhai Vir Singh

# The Piping Of The Rain

The piping of the rain  
birds has ceased,  
Dadar and peepiya  
are silent now,  
The dance of the peacock  
is over,  
It is the season  
of the cooling dew!  
The dew is falling  
everywhere,  
And wet is every rose.  
The gentle breath  
of heaven blows.

Bhai Vir Singh

# The Sweet

The sweet,  
sweet dew wets all with joy.  
Wet with joy are the night  
and the moon.  
And dewdrops quiver  
over the stars on high.  
And joy wet blows  
the wind on my face.  
It is the season of  
the cooling dew!  
The dew is falling everywhere,  
And wet is every rose.  
The gentle breath  
of heaven blows.

Bhai Vir Singh