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Reading between the Lines

Dalip Kaur Tiwana's Reflections on Dissent and Violence in *Jimī̃ puchai āsmān*[1]

ABSTRACT: A decades long attempt by the central government to control dissent in Punjab culminated in a military operation codenamed Bluestar (June 1984). Overtly aimed at flushing militants from the Golden Temple, it led to the desecration of the sacred place by the army and an unwarranted bloodshed, soon to be followed by the assassination of Indira Gandhi (31 October 1984), anti-Sikh riots, an unprecedented growth of militancy in Punjab and division of Punjabi society along religious lines. Punjabi literature addressed the matter, trying to make sense of the traumatic event and its aftermath. Dalip Kaur Tiwana (1935–2020), too, provided, by way of her novel, *Jimī̃ puchai āsmān* / *The Earth Asks the Sky* (1986), a fictionalised witness account informed by her experience as university teacher whose students find themselves drawn into the vortex of political exigencies. A study of her reflections on dissent and violence in this context will constitute the subject matter of this paper.

KEYWORDS: violence, dissent, Punjab, Dalip Kaur Tiwana, Sikhism

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Introduction

The post-independence India has a long history of internal military interventions at several, mainly peripheral locations: Kashmir, Punjab, Bengal, the North East, the so-called Maoist belt of Central India, to name a few. Most of the interventions, driven by security—understood as "key project for nation-building" (Grewal 2024: 187)—may be viewed as virtual civil wars. This paper would like to focus on the fallout of the Punjab insurgency—1970s–1990s—as narrated by a well-known Punjabi woman writer, Dalip Kaur Tiwana (1935–2020), in her novel, *Jimī̃ puchai āsmān* / *The Earth Asks the Sky*, published in 1986.[2]

I begin my analysis by providing some background information. To this end, I first talk briefly about the writer and the historical context informing the narrative, with the seminal dates—'47 and '84—or as the Punjabis call them, santali (*sãtālī*) and churasi (*curāsī*), functioning as shorthand tags for the unmitigated outbreaks of violence which attended 'critical events' (Das 1995) in Indian history. From there I move on to the novel and set forth the theme, the narrative timeline, and the literary strategies chosen by the author as the presentation template. At this point I stop for a moment and foreground matters the author has left unsaid and the ones she does mention specifically. I then address myself to the question of genre—trying to ascertain how this text could be best defined and whether it might be possibly considered a kind of witness testimony and yet another example of Tiwana's autobiographical writing. In this I draw on Leigh Gilmore understanding of the concept of 'serial autobiography' (as evidenced in her study of Jamaica Kincaid's autobiographical novels) to show that while "the practice of serial autobiography challenges the limits of the genre by raising the specter of endless autobiography" (Gilmore 2001: 96), it also allows the author to knit her various texts into a metanarrative which, though dependent on the 'real' details of

[2] Throughout the paper I use the English version of Dalip Kaur Tiwana's and other writers' names.'

author's (here: Tiwana's) life, employs the autobiographical 'I' merely as a rhetorical construction not to be automatically equated with the author, a useful distancing device when speaking of traumatic events in their life. The concluding remarks are brief and try to summarise the evidence in favour of viewing literary text as a record of the everyday in the times of violence, especially violence experienced at close proximity and reiterated in fictionalised narratives informed by life experiences of the author.

Like the text in focus, the current investigation is also inadvertently influenced by its author's personal perspective informed by social positioning and biography impacted by the memory of the 1984 riots. In her book-length study on violence of 1947 and 1984, Veena Das acknowledges similar 'impact of proximity' which brings about variation in her positionality regarding analysing and interpreting the two, more so the second, and says:

> The difference is that the very fact of my presence near the scene of violence in the case of the 1984 riots, and my relative distance in time from the violence of the Partition, made the relation between spoken words and voices different. The work of time, not its representation, is at issue, for in each case the question of what it is to inherit the legacy of such violence has been different. (Das 2007: 16)

That this difference does impact Das's readings of the event close at hand (in comparison to the one distanced by time) is underlined a number of times in the course of the book, each time highlighting the almost visceral immediacy of the 1984 violence to those who witnessed it from close quarters, even by those aspiring to being self-disciplined non-partisan scholars: "I, the ethnographer, was present to the violence in 1984 in ways that were quite different from the way that the events of the Partition left their tracks in my ethnography" (Das 2007: 98). Likewise, she foregrounds another fact important for the current study, a fact evidenced, for example, in the interviews with the 1984 riots survivors, witnesses, bystanders, and others, namely the existence (and circulation) of an whole array of differing accounts, of which she

says: "This does not mean that the discursive forms were false, but rather that introduction of perspective or point of view pluralizes the narrative task" (Das 2007: 149). A similar variety of narratives and points of view regarding certain events may be found in *Jimī̃ puchai āsmān* reflecting thus a plurality of subjective positionings of the individual protagonists as well as the narrator, the last not necessarily to be identified strictly with the person of the novel's author. As pointed out by Suzannah B. Mintz (2001: 920) in her review of Gilmore's book, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (2001), in regard to Kincaid's autobiographical venture disguised as novels, she explains: "Reading Kincaid's oeuvre metonymically, Gilmore emphasizes the way in which the renaming of her autobiographical protagonists disrupts the 'quasi-legal status' of autobiography" (Gilmore 2001: 102). Expounding Gilmore's argument, Mintz (2001: 920) elucidates this thus, "Kincaid's project is not about documenting a stable identity (…) but about 'working through personae toward personhood' (Gilmore 2001: 103)," a position comparable with that adopted by Tiwana the author.

Textual analysis offered in the current reading draws on several interlinked concepts such as Kristeva's intertextuality (Kristeva 1980), Lotman's 'text within text' (Lotman 1994), and the theoretical framework of 'dual codes' and 'dual-coded structure' (Spassova 2018) where these notions are further interpreted.[3] Theoretical spaces provided by these approaches allow the text to be read concurrently at several different levels depending on reader's positionality: as a Punjabi text primarily aimed at Punjabi readers socialized into the Punjabi literary culture; a Punjabi text at ease with the inherited textual tradition (both oral and written) used to unmarked quotations from the Sikh scriptures to draw the narrative frames, as in the title of this and other texts; a Punjabi text informed by a Sikh worldview and its emotionally-coloured reading frames; a text, which, when (and if) rendered into English (or for that matter, any other language not rooted in the Punjabi

[3] For more on the use of Lotman's 'text within text' framework in reading Sikh scriptural texts, including as performance such as *kirtan*, see Puri (forthcoming).

Sikh ethos)[4] might be read in a possibly more dis-engaged (or differently-engaged) manner; and as a universal(ised) narrative with some local flavor. However, even within any of those (or other) broadly defined reader positionings, there is also a further subjective positioning, hence also reading, informed by a specific individual habitus of the reader; the reading offered below is thus similarly grounded.

The author and her milieu

Born in 1935 in Rabbon village of eastern Punjab, in the family of well-to-do landowners, Dalip Kaur Tiwana was the eldest of six siblings, five girls and a boy. She grew up between the ancestral village where her grandfather and father resided, and the town of Patiala, where her childless paternal aunt and her husband, who had adopted her, lived. It is there that she went to school, was married off at an early age,

[4] At no point in this article do I intend to conflate the terms 'Punjabi' and 'Sikh'. As expounded by Amanpreet Singh Gill (2015: 18), "What actually identified language with religion in Punjab was not the actual practice (as all communities speak Punjabi in Punjab) but the politics of census." Thus, in this article, Sikh is used to mean 'a follower of Sikhism' irrespective of sectarian or political allegation, and 'Punjabi' is taken as 'a Punjabi speaking person', and in the specific context of literature or the Punjabi novel in focus, a person who can read Punjabi. I try to avoid using the term 'Punjabi' to denote phrase 'of Punjab', except in collocations such as 'Punjabi food', 'Punjabi music', 'Punjabi flavour'. Incidentally, the official name of the university in Patiala is Punjabi University, Patiala. I thank the anonymous reviewer who drew my attention to the need for further elucidation of terms 'Punjabi' and 'Sikh.' So, one must also take note of resolution reached by Amarjit Chandan (2020: 197) in his article "Punjabi autobiographies": "In the modern history of Punjab, socio-political and literary movements were multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-scriptural. Even Sikhs chose to write in Urdu, English, Braj and Hindi besides Punjabi. Academic studies so far have discussed the concept of Punjabi identity at length without reaching at its logical end—the question of nationhood not based on religion. Mulk Raj Anand, Punjabi-English writer and Igor Serebryakov, Russian Indologist, in the interviews conducted by me in London and Moscow in 1982 and 1989 respectively, agreed that the literature produced by a Punjabi in any language ought to be categorised as Punjabi literature. In that context I have attempted an inclusive bibliography."

returned home and to school, and later enrolled in college (Tiwana 2001c, 1990). She obtained, the first woman to do so, an M.A. degree in Punjabi literature, and then, again as the first woman, a Ph.D. in the same subject from Punjab University, Chandigarh. In 1963, she joined the newly established Punjabi University,[5] Patiala, as a Lecturer, and stayed on to become Professor, then Head of the Department of Punjabi, and finally Dean of the Faculty of Languages, before retiring from active teaching. Today she is viewed as one of the most influential Punjabi writers, with more than thirty novels, fourteen collections of short stories, a long, epic poem[6] published as a separate entity, several books of literary criticism and innumerable scholarly articles to her credit. And then, there are her autobiographical writings.[7]

Though a prolific writer and an author of several autobiographies and autobiography inspired books, Tiwana had never addressed the subject of Punjab insurgency more directly than in her novel *Jimī̃ puchai āsmān*.[8] Yet, in spite of the fact that the novel is informed by Tiwana's biography, I have not included it in my earlier studies of her life writings, and for a reason. Neither have I included her other texts where the Partition, which she lived through as a young girl, or its aftermath, play a part. To make sense of such an approach let me turn to the writer herself. During a 2002 program at the Punjabi University, when asked about the reasons for choosing writing as a life calling, Tiwana simply said: "Some write to find meaning of their existence, others to forget it. I write to understand man's journey from the past to the present—*kitthõ ture sī e kitthe ā gaye*" (Sandhu 2002).[9]

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5 Established in 1962.

6 *Vid in vid āūṭ* (*Within Without*, 1975), though a long poem, is usually listed as a novel and Dalip Kaur Tiwana herself calls it a novel in her literary autobiography, *Pūchte ho to suno* (Tiwana 2001d: 114). There is an unpublished Polish translation of this work done by Artur Karp and available on academia.edu.

7 For more on Tiwana's life writings, see Murphy 2024, Skakuj-Puri 2017.

8 Tiwana speaks of the events of 1984 also in her novel *Riṇ pittrā̃ dā̃* and several short stories.

9 Lit.: 'Where did he come from and where is he now.' Quotation after Sandhu: 2002. In Punjabi transcription, I follow Anna Sieklucka (1998).

In this study, I would like to draw on this statement and show how not only does it sum up Tiwana's personal view of history, with its ebbs and flows, all merely a background for human life stories, be there fictional or not, but also informs her purely literary strategies, where the historical background, usually not dwelt much upon but palpably present, serves to bring out her protagonists' life stories surreptitiously defined by seminal events taking place around them (and often a part of Tiwana's personal biography). In the text, which is the focus of this study, these events are never introduced through the authorial narrative. Rather, they are served to the reader in a piece meal fashion in snippets of conversations between the protagonists and are never allowed to fuse into a neat, voice-over-like commentary. Their stealthy appearances punctuate the narrative to air individual, subjective views of the protagonists who, however, are, just like the Punjabi readers, in the possession of more facts than merely those that they voice in the novelistic dialogues. Therefore, before moving on, let me bring in some of the facts informing the goings-on in the novel so that the protagonists' lives and their utterances may be placed in a more realistic, true-to-life context. To do that, I amply quote from the text.

The facts marshalled below are a common, deeply internalised knowledge for any Punjabi reader approaching Tiwana's text, and if a Sikh, they impact him or her also in an emotional way. The matter of readers' employing discrete reading frames in specific linguistic contexts is succinctly stated by Meena T. Pillai (2024: 109), who, speaking of a Malayalam text rendered into English, says: "Malayalam provides a cultural frame of reference within which the story is situated. In English the frame of reference is removed spatially and culturally and hence the emotional problems associated with remembering and narrating are fewer." The same is true of a Punjabi or any other Indian regional language text, with the original text triggering emotional responses in ways different than its rendering into English or some other language might.

Historical frame of reference and its sightings in the novel

In 1947, at the time of independence, Punjab, like Bengal, was divided between Pakistan and India, a traumatic event that had long-lasting repercussions and impacted Sikh sense of the self. As Monika Browarczyk's article in this volume addresses Partition violence in Punjab and its depiction in literature, I will not dwell on it here. Neither will I try to provide an in-depth account of the Partition, its background, implementation, and the aftereffects, including its post-memory; those have been already dealt with in other studies.[10] Suffice is to say that many Sikhs, as evidenced by numerous memoirs and fictional literary texts dealing with the subject, felt often short-charged by the Partition settlement made, in their view, by the main negotiating parties, the British, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League.[11] In spite of the fact that the Indian National Congress claimed to represent the interests of all Indians irrespective of religion, in the collective memory of the people in Punjab, especially those affected by the ensuing violence, it was seen as representing the Hindus, with the Muslim League representing the Muslims. The settlement, the way Sikhs saw it *post factum*, turned a blind eye to their sentiments, leaving the largest city of Punjab, Lahore, and many Sikh sacred places, on the other side of the border. Decades following the Independence saw continuing Sikh agitation for a larger measure of self-determination in the newly constituted Punjab. Moreover, the economic and social pressures driven by the Green Revolution of 1960s (with Punjab before long producing 70% of India's food grains, the local farmers'

[10] It is no possible to provide exhaustive bibliography referencing even some of the most seminal studies on the Partition, hence only a few may be mentioned here: historical perspective: Pandey 2001, Page et al. 2002, Khan 2007, Singh, Iyer and Gairola 2016; women and violence: Butalia 1998, Menon and Bhasin 1998; post-memory: Butalia (ed.) 2015, Roy 2020.

[11] As pointed out by one of the revivers, this statement might be read as a simplistic way of presenting a complex historical event. However, I merely try to highlight the manner in which the Partition is most often assessed in autobiographical and fictional writings dealing with the situation on the ground.

incomes increasing and the landless farm workers' decreasing) gave rise to a plethora of demands, including calls for Sikh autonomy and separatism as a solution to problems on the ground. The situation was aggravated by Centre's growing interference in local politics, overtly in the name of the national security whereby "the nation was constructed by the state—as a patriarchal and security state" (Grewal 2024: 211). As the result, region's centrifugal and centre's centripetal forces appeared, for once, overtly geared to one and the same goal, namely finding a level playing field for Sikh ethnonational politics on one hand, and containing Sikhs in a smaller, easier to control space, on the other. To this end Punjab state boundaries were redefined in 1966, this time on linguistic basis. The territory was reorganized into Punjab, where Sikhs became majority community (close to 60%) and Punjabi the official language, and the Hindi majority speaking areas which were constituted as the states of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh.

Sikhism's holiest site, the Golden Temple (Harmandir Sahib)[12], is situated in the city of Amritsar in Punjab. It serves as *axis mundi* for the adherents of the Sikh faith and has high emotive value for all Punjabis, not necessarily Sikhs. Its sacred status is, in fact, used by one of the novel's protagonists, Dharam, to emphasize, in a general conversation right at the beginning of the novel, the reprehensible side of the Partition which resulted in the virtual vivisection of Punjab. In an emotional outburst Dharam equates the sacrilegious nature of this act with the unthinkable notion of splitting the Golden Temple itself:

> *jive harimandar, ammritsar dā gurdvārā īk hĩdū gurū ne baṇvāiā te ik musalmān fakir ne is dī nīh rakhkhī te uh sikhkhā dā ik pavittr tirthaai. ihī sthitī pājāb dīaai. par des dī vãdh vele hĩdustān hĩdūã̃ dā deś baṇ giā te pākistān musalmānã̃ dā. ise lihāj nāl pājāb nũ̃ vãdh liā giā. use tarã̃ jive koī harimãdar nũ̃ hĩdūã̃ te musalmānã̃ vickār vãdh deve. te sikhkhã̃ nũ̃ laggiā asī te nathāvẽ ho gae*. (Tiwana 2001b: 11)

[12] Alternative spelling: Harimandir.

> Look at Harimandir, the gurudwara in Amritsar—made by a Hindu guru, its foundation laid by a Muslim fakir—[yet] it is the sacred place of the Sikhs. Punjab is no different. But at the time of the Partition, Hindustan became the country of the Hindus, and Pakistan, that of the Muslims. As a result, Punjab was divided. It was as if one tried to split Harimandar between the Hindus and the Muslims. The Sikhs felt they were redundant.[13]

Keeping in mind the constant presence of such past traumas in the collective consciousness of the Sikhs, I would like, at this moment, draw attention to the notion highlighted by Keerthi and Mucciarelli (2024) in their article that appeared in the previous issue of *Cracow Indological Studies*, namely violence as emotion and its links to textual archives. The way I understand it and the way the same works often in the Sikh context, to put it simply, violence is a function of a self-perpetuating cycle of texts and practices impacting each other. The texts do indeed record and give accounts of violence, but then, the texts in the broad understanding of texts as the texts of culture, may give rise to violence as well. They do that by providing templates for playing out violence, be it as sacrifice, or self-sacrifice; a dutiful and impassioned interiorization of martyrological tradition; perusal of violent behavior, either as victim or perpetrator; and so on.[14] I mention these concepts for the Golden Temple plays a paramount role in the life of the Sikhs, both at the practical as well the symbolic level, and in the past has acted as a site and a catalyst of violent events time and again. Some of Sikh common prayers, like *ardās*, steeped in the martyrological, and recited on each and every occasion, commemorate and eulogize violence under the guise of valor.[15] Such factors contribute to making Sikhs a relatively cohesive community (that, too, despite sectarian or political differences) whose self-envisioning may be to large extent defined through the twin concepts of 'territoriality' and 'metacommentary,' the first understood as "the belief that a territory

[13] All translations from the Punjabi are by the author of the article.

[14] For more on martyrology and sacrifice in Sikhism, see, for example, Gaur 2008, Fenech 2005. For violence and the Sikhs, see Mandair 2022.

[15] For more on uses of *ardās*, including the martyrological, see Puri 2021: 118–119.

belongs to a particular community, and that this sense of place, among other factors, binds that community together, endowing its constituents with a significant emblem of self-identity" (Oberoi 1987: 27), and the second, as "a story they [a people] tell themselves about themselves" (Geertz 1973: 448), "a kind of coded reading of their experiences, needs, feelings, and world views" (Oberoi 1987: 27). In the Sikh context, this would be "the stories and narratives the Sikh Panth (the Sikh religious community) has told itself, from the time of its inception, about the Punjab" (ibid.).

Punjab's location on the border with Pakistan, the pre-partition history of identity politics and the post-partition perusal of politics of regional self-definition have always kept it in the eye of central government's interest, making it ultimately a deadly playground of political forces.[16] Though the two seminal events of 1984—the attack on the Golden Temple and the anti-Sikh riots—that provided the most recent template for Sikh martyrology and the discourse of 'hurt'[17] came to be enacted in the cities of Amritsar and Delhi, in her book Tiwana offers an off-center narrative located in Patiala,[18] or more specifically,

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[16] The question of Punjab's vulnerability, namely of becoming a battlefield in case of eruption of hostilities between India and Pakistan, was brought home yet again during the recent crisis (April–May 2025) following terrorist attack in Kashmir on 23 April 2025. It made one realise that for the residents of districts located along the border the India-Pakistan wars of 1947–1948, 1965, 1971, 1999, etc. are a part of their collective consciousness and any renewal of hostilities is a matter of immediate concern because affecting their lives and livelihoods directly. The view from the echelons of power in New Delhi is a bit different, hence haste—by the government, its actors, and the national media—to dub certain sentiments voiced in Punjab as 'anti-national'.

[17] "As a term in everyday speech, 'hurt' signals a sense of deliberate offense or politically intentioned injury of community sentiment. Punjabis use the English word 'hurt' to denote the feeling of being seized by pain, as well as to suggest intentionality embedded in an act—'hurt paunchya' (hurt reached/connected). Sometimes it is replaced by another English word that conveys the sense of embodied emotion: 'feel hoya' is a phrase that continually occurs among Punjabi speakers to suggest emotional distress" (Chopra 2010: 122).

[18] On the off-centre perspective, see also Murphy 2024: 151–152—"Tiwana's location in Punjab, in particular, invites consideration of what is at stake in

around the Punjabi University in Patiala, where her protagonists, the professors and the students, including Simran, the main character, find themselves engulfed by the events of 1984 and the ensuing 'continuum of violence'[19]. Incidentally, the name of one of the professors at the university is Madam Tiwana, just like the book's author. We learn that Madam Tiwana has authored several books and as chance would have it, their titles (and content) coincide with those written by Dalip Kaur Tiwana, the writer. In fact, Madam Tiwana discusses some of her stories and novels with Simran. This takes place in chapter 14 (Tiwana 2001b: 69–74), which is the only occasion when both characters occupy the same narrative space. We come to know that one of those novels, *Hastākhar*, recounts, in fact, the story of Simran's parents and might be read as a prequel to Simran's own life.[20] The appearance of the figure of Madam Tiwana

writing Punjabi at the state/provincial level, rather than New Delhi (where Pritam [Amrita Pritam] and Cour [Ajeet Cour] were located after Partition). This reveals the particular vantage point of the cultural politics of representation in the vernacular in the vernacular language state, not the national centre where Punjabi is ever-present but never central." While agreeing essentially with this statement, I find the wording unfortunate in the matter of positioning Punjabi writing coming from New Delhi vis a vis regional/Punjabi writing coming from Punjab, possibly hinting at some sort of hierarchy. More so, in view of the fact that being a Punjabi writer originally from western Punjab and settled in Delhi was largely a matter of chance determined by geopolitical factors; Tiwana always emphasised her birth links to the region she was born in and where she lived, and never gave the impression of being a writer who considered herself or was considered by others to be a writer consigned to 'writing Punjabi at the state/provincial level.'

19 The concept of 'continuum of violence' was introduced by Lizy Kelly (1987) to study gender-based aggression as a continuum of behaviours—from the more elusive (e.g., restrictions on behaviour of girls and women) to the extreme forms of aggression (like rape and murder)—employed to control girls and women. In this study I use 'continuum of violence' to describe situation in Punjab in the period of unrest, where there was a snowballing of violence.

20 *Hastākhar* (1984) is a novel situated in the Patiala university of the 1960s and provides references to the Naxalite movement then on the rise in Punjab, also among the students. *Hastākhar*'s sequel, *Paiḍ cāl* (1984) continues the narrative. All three novels, *Hastākhar*, *Paiḍ cāl* and *Jimī̃ puchai āsmān* are largely

in *Jimī̃ puchai āsmān* and her identification, even if tenuous, with Dalip Kaur Tiwana the writer,[21] lends veracity to the story told in the novel and persuades the reader to treat incidents constituting the narrative as possibly taken from real life.

The main, real-life players pulling the strings in the build-up to the 1984 confrontation between the Sikhs and the Centre were Indira Gandhi and Jairnail Singh Bhindranwale. While the first is mentioned in the novel, though merely in her death, the second is absolutely ignored. At first Bhindranwale appeared to be the Congress's answer to the Akali Dal but in no time he metamorphosed into a charismatic leader of an independent Sikh movement, which soon turned militant and made the Golden Temple its stronghold. The operation Bluestar, mounted by the army in June 1984 on the specific orders of Indira Gandhi, was basically aimed at flushing out Bhindranwale and his men from the premises. Overtly, the goal was achieved but the collateral damage was huge. For one, hundreds of people were killed, most of them innocent civilians, including women and children, gathered for a religious festival. Moreover, the desecration of the temple and the bloodshed committed within its walls shook the Sikh community irrespective of political persuasion and led to the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards on 31 October 1984, which, in turn, precipitated anti-Sikh riots and an unprecedented growth of militancy in Punjab. One of the protagonists, Baldev, a colleague of Simran and like her, a research student engaged, despite the chaos around, in writing a thesis on a topic close to his heart, the non-violent

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enacted in the Punjabi University campus and could be called 'campus novels' though they have never been referred to as such or studied from the campus novel perspective.

[21] Kartar Singh Duggal (see Sekhon and Duggal 2020: 271) writes: "*Zimmin Puchhe Asman* is a fascinating attempt at portraying the scenario in the strife-torn and militant infested Punjab of today. The scene is laid in the Punjabi University, Patiala and its surroundings, with teachers and students figuring in it. One of them is the author, Dalip Kaur Tiwana. It shows how the well-meaning youth are led astray and are sooner than later slaughtered by the security forces in genuine and not-so-genuine encounters."

political struggle—with focus on Mahatma Gandhi, the epitome of non-violence (ahinsa), and his autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*—describes his feelings regarding the storming of the Golden Temple thus:

> *dekho maiḍm jī, hor tā āpa nuṁ patā nahī, nā maĩ kade pāṭh kītā'ai, nā maĩ gurduāre jāḍā hā, nā maĩnuṁ sikhkhā diā ḍīmāḍs dā bahutā patā'ai, nā maĩ kade kise aijīṭeśan vic bhāg liā'ai, par śāid mere khūn vic hī kujh hai ki maĩ ne akāl takht dā ḍhāiā jāṇā jivẽ āpṇī hattak lagdī'ai. te patā nahĩ kiũ maĩnū pahilī vārī ahisās hoiā'ai ki maĩ sikhkh hā.* ***Aīdh āī aim prāūdh ṭū bī ai Sikhkh.*** (Tiwana 2001b: 52; emphasis here and below by MP as the sentence is in English though written in the Gurumukhi script)

> See, Madam, I don't know about others, [but] I never recited prayers or went to the gurudwara, I don't know much about Sikh demands,[22] and I have never taken part in any agitation, but probably there is something in my blood for when I heard about destruction of the Akal Takht, I felt as if something hit me. And I don't know why, but for the first time I felt I was a Sikh. **And I am proud to be a Sikh**.

When the second round begins, the two main players, Indira Gandhi and Bhindranwale, are already dead. But that which the historian of the Punjab, Darshan Singh Tatla (2006: 57), calls 'the morning after'—the waking up to a new political reality—impacts situation on the ground in Punjab: militancy, violent police response, draconian anti-terrorist laws, targeting of anybody suspect of terrorist activities, detentions, torture, fake police encounters, disappearances, large scale migration of young men, civilian population distress, etc., all

[22] Reference to the Anandpur Sahib resolution (1973) which listed Sikh demands starting with the issue of considering Sikhism as a religion separate from Hinduism, distribution of water resources, and ending on a request to allow broadcasts of *gurbani kirtan* from the Golden Temple. Indira Gandhi and her government saw the Anand Sahib resolution as a secessionist document and acted accordingly.

steadily feed the Sikh 'hurt.' As one minor protagonist of Tiwana's novel, an old woman, whose grandson has been abducted and vanished without a trace (we learn later that he died in police custody, but the person charged with finding his whereabouts is reluctant to tell her the terrible truth), voices her 'hurt', she bemoans, in simple language reflecting her almost childlike worldview, the current state of affairs:

> *maĩ kihā bebe kī huṇ gur-dhāmā vic sattiā nahī̃ rahī ki kaljug pahhire pāp mahābalī ho gia'ai? Iõ tã̃ kade nahī̃ sī suṇiā bai foujã̃ āuṇ, topã̃ callaṇ te gurdhām ḍhā ditte jāṇ. nihaththe lok tīrthā te gae māre jāṇ. cal ū' tã̃ jinnã̃ ne uthe parāṇ ditte unnā dī tã̃ jān lekhe lagg gaī. koī baṛe karma vālāī tīrthā'te jā ke mard'ai. par ũ' ākhde ne aṇāī mare dī gat nī huddī?* (Tiwana 2001b: 31)
>
> I say, *bebe*, is there now no truth left in guru's house? Is it *kalyug*, is the sin all-powerful? Has anybody ever heard before of soldiers coming, guns being fired, guru's house destroyed? Innocent people on pilgrimage [to sacred spot] killed? Those killed, they already settled their accounts with their lives. Only virtuous people get to die visiting holy places. Don't they say that those killed unjustly don't have anything to worry about in the afterlife?

To give one yet another example expressing Sikh feelings of 'hurt,' it might be instructive to take a quick look at the well-known, emotive painting by the Kaur sisters (Fig. 1). It visualizes that what Dharam, Baldev, the old woman, the writer herself, and most Sikhs see clearly in their mind's eye whenever they think of 1984 and the Golden Temple.[23]

[23] Amrit Kaur Singh and Rabindra Kaur Singh are British artists of Indian descent. Their painting, *Nineteen eighty-four*, available for viewing in public domain, speaks of the Sikh 'hurt'.

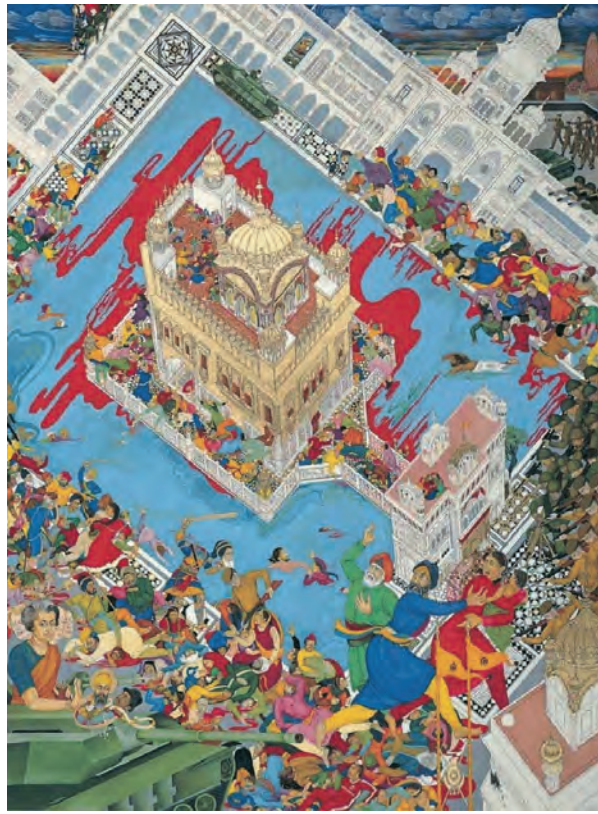

Figure 1. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (*The Storming of the Golden Temple*);
1998; 75.5 × 101 cm (29.75 × 39.75 in)
Poster colour, gouache and gold dust on mountboard.
Artists: Amrit and Rabindra Kaur Singh

The painting depicts the Golden Temple during operation Bluestar. In the corner on the left, one can see Indira Gandhi, very much in charge; her vehicle of choice, her holy *vahan*, is an army tank. Meanwhile other army tanks are rolling down the *parikarma* crushing marble slabs to pieces; soldiers in army uniforms are firing on the innocent pilgrims; the holy *sarovar* is running red with blood. The

painting, however, does not show any damage to the sacred structure, preserving it ideally pristine.

As to the matter of the actual damage, there is ample photographic archive to draw on though no bystanders, neither the journalists nor the faithful, were allowed into the temple complex for several days after the attack.[24] (One must remember that those were the pre-internet days without mobile phones or social media.) The preserved, recordable evidence accessible to civilians, among them the journalists, consisted exclusively of what the army allowed them to view and document. There are several photographs available online, else in the books on the subject, that show the Akāl Takht, the Seat of the Timeless, after the attack. The building, which served as the resting place for the Guru Granth Sahib at night, but also housed the treasury and the library, was so badly damaged that it had to be pulled down and rebuilt from the scratch, obliterating in the process unique wall frescos and other treasures. The photos of the damaged Akāl Takht are usually juxtaposed with the photographs showing the whole Golden Temple complex, including the brand new Akāl Takht and the *sarovar* already cleansed of all remains, human bones, shoes, bangles, bullets, debris. No naked eye can detect any visible signs of the heavy shelling or the fire that engulfed the library and turned to ashes priceless manuscripts, including rare copies of the Guru Granth Sahib. At a recent conference in Osaka, Prof. Winand Callewaert recounted how he had been invited by the administrators of the library to visit it to look at some old manuscripts, and how this plan turned to naught with the burning of the library in 1984. The manuscripts he was to look at were lost forever.[25]

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[24] Probably the first books about the event were: *The Punjab Story* by Amarijit Kaur et al. (1984), and *Amritsar. Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle* by Mark Tully and Satish Jacob (1985). The first of the two books contains witness accounts of two journalist, Shekhar Gupta and Subhash Kirpekar.

[25] Communication during the 14th International Conference on Early Modern Literatures of North India, hosted by Osaka University, 15–19 July 2022.

The text

The text in focus, Dalip Kaur Tiwana's novel, *Jimī̃ puchai āsmān,* is not long—mere 109 pages. It depicts day to-day life in the town of Patiala, with main protagonists either faculty at the university or students, else their family members. The heroine, if one may call her so, is a young girl called Simran, who lives with her maternal grandmother in the family home in Patiala, as her mother is dead and her father has moved to Calcutta where he re-married. Both she and her friends, among whom Dharam and Baldev play the most important part, are students of philosophy and literature, subjects far removed from the harsh realities of the time.

The narrative timeline—which provides the second, after the historical, framework—is very simple. It spans a couple of months starting sometime in autumn. At first we are not told the year—the cue to that appears only on page 76, three-fourths into the novel—when the news of Indira Gandhi's assassination are announced on the radio. However, we do know that the army attack on the Golden Temple had already taken place, the fact alluded to in the old woman's words (Tiwana 2001b: 31) and Dharam's outburst (ibid.: 52), the only direct references to this event so far, and both quoted above. We also know, right from the beginning of the novel, that militant activities and counter-insurgency measures by the military and the police keep the population subdued and in fear though the drastic tactics introduced later by G.P.S. Gill when he took over as the Director General of Police (1988–1990, 1991–1995) have not yet been put into practice.[26]

[26] K.P.S. Gill, called 'The Super Cop' by some and 'The Butcher of Punjab' by others, is credited with ending Punjab insurgency by resorting to drastic measures. In fact, as claimed by Grewal (2024: 198), the state used Gill's "Sikh identity to show that the militants were false Sikhs—'knights of falsehood', as he would term them in a later book (Gill 1997)—Gill's goal was to turn the population against the movement." Gill's views on the insurgency and its suppression are presented in his book, *Punjab. The Knights of Falsehood*, first published in 1997 (see Gill 2023). A former Sikh female militant, Sandip Kaur, has published, as an answer to Gill's book, though possibly only after his book was translated into Punjabi as *Kūṛu phirai pardhān* (1997), her own book, *Uṛki saci rahī* (*The Truth Will Out*, 2011) refuting Gill's allegations.

To illustrate this point further, it might be helpful to take a look at two scenes from the Punjabi film, *Chauthi Koot* / *The Fourth Direction*.[27] Once available on the Netflix and now on other online platforms, the film depicts more or less the same period as Tiwana's novel though the stories on which it is based, authored by Waryam Singh Sandhu, were published only in 1998. In fact, the narrative starting point is more or less the same, the autumn of 1984, when fear of one another has already entrenched itself among the Hindus and the Sikhs, and the drawing of communal division lines is an accomplished fact. In this particular scene we see men of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) roughing up the villagers in their home (Fig. 2). The second scene shows the same household, the same village family, now threatened by the Sikh militants, for not cooperating enough (Fig. 3). The militants come at night, under the cover of darkness, the army and the police in the daytime. The common people are caught between the two.

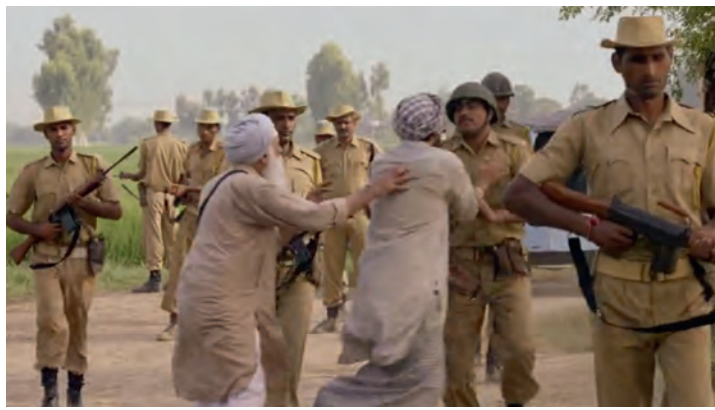

Fig. 2. *Chauthi Koot* / *The Fourth Direction*, 2015

[27] *Chauthi Koot* (2015), director: Gurvinder Singh. The film is based on two short stories by Waryam Singh Sandhu (b.1945), namely "Cauthī Kūṭ" / "The Forth Direction" and "Maĩ huṇ ṭhīk ṭhāk hã̃" / "I am feeling fine now". Both come from a 1998 collection titled *Chauthī Kūṭ* (Sandhu 1998), which in 2000 brought its author Sahitya Akademi Award and was subsequently published by the Akademi in the English translation as well (Sandhu 2005).

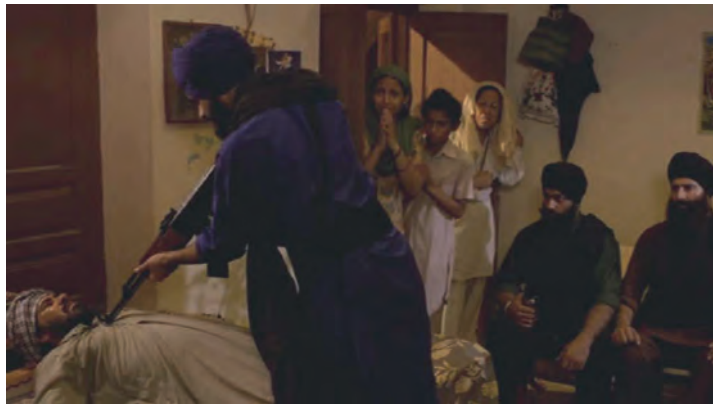

Fig. 3. *Chauthi Koot* / *The Fourth Direction*, 2015

This plight of the common man is addressed at length in Radhika Chopra's study, *Militant and Migrant. The Politics and Social History of Punjab* (Chopra 2011), where author explains in detail how the over a decade long militancy and counterinsurgency went on to polarise society along religious lines, brough about innumerable human rights abuses and deaths, and placed many young Sikh males in the cross-hairs of the state apparatus significantly limiting their life options, often to just two—joining the militants or migrating abroad. In view of this, the rare authorial comment found in Tiwana's novel and couched in a highly poetic language, is imbued with a deep sense of foreboding:

> *pachchīẽ varge mũḍhe kuṛīā kāfī hāūs de ṭeblẽ duale baiṭhe cāh kofī pī ke cahicahā rahe san. aje zīdagī innẽ laī kinnī sahaj te saral sī. te pher ik din ih sab ithõ uḍhḍh jāṇge. uḍhḍde uḍhḍde kaī tā des pardes lãgh jẽge. kaī thakk hār ke rāh vic hī rahi jẽge. kade kade koī pichāh hī partegā. ithe kise khālī mez duale baiṭh ke kofī pīdā vartmān te bhūṭ vickār ḍholdā parat jāvegā*. (Tiwana 2001b: 33–34)

> Chattering like birds, boys and girls sat around the tables in the coffee house, drinking tea and coffee. How uncomplicated and easy was their

> life today. And then, one day, they all will fly away. Flying away, some will land in foreign countries. Some others will tire and give up on the way. Some will occasionally turn back. And having returned, sit here at an empty table and drink coffee, suspended between the present and the past.[28]

This wistful reflection is immediately followed by the news that there was firing in the town and a student was killed (Tiwana 2001b: 34). Baldev's response to the incident is again driven by anger, distress, and helplessness, the feelings distinctly palpable in the Punjabi turn of phrase: *maĩnū ta lagdā'ai sabh kujh chaḍhḍh chaḍhḍhake is kuṭṭe mulk to kidhre bāhar cale jāṇā cāhīdā'a* (Tiwana 2001b: 34; "I personally feel one should just leave everything, get the hell out of this bitch of a country and move somewhere abroad.") The teacher's answer to this outburst is tempered by practicality and possibly because she is a woman, the image she uses is that of Sita's abductor, Ravana, and his reign: *par baldev, sāre lok tẽ iõ nahĩ kar sakde. bākīẽ nũ tẽ ih rāvaṇīrāj bhugtaṇā hī paiṇā'ai* (ibid.; "But Baldev, all people cannot do that. Those that remain have to put up with this Ravana-like rule.")

The next time Simran finds herself at the university, the university is on strike: apparently police had entered the campus and picked up some students from the hostel. Subsequently one of them, Hardeep, died in police custody (Tiwana 2001b: 48–49).[29] Interrogated, tortured, beaten to death, killed in a fake encounter? We are not told. But what we are told is that students have gone on protest. However, instead of the expected admonitory or combative slogans, they beam over the loudspeaker a verse from the Guru Granth Sahib, relocating their protest and their fight with the powers-to-be from the adversarial to the spiritual sphere, even hinting that the (martyred?) boy has attained liberation (*muktī*) in death:

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[28] Tiwana sometimes referred to her students and former students, many of whom became writers and scholars of note, as 'ghosts' or *bhūt*s; see Tiwana 2001c and Kaur 2016.

[29] In India, police may enter university campus only with the permission of university authorities or with a warrant, to make an arrest, but there have been innumerable breaches of this law all over India, including New Delhi, the capital.

bhai kahū ko det nahĩ nahĩ bhai mānat ān
kahu nānak sunu re manā giānī tāhi bakhāti.

One who does not frighten anyone, and who is not afraid of anyone
Says Nanak, listen, mind: Call him spiritually wise. (GGS: 1427)[30]

The verse, with its direct reference to how one may find release from the cycle of life and death, may be viewed not only as a commentary on the state of affairs in Punjab or the Sikh reading of the ongoing confrontation as a metaphysical struggle between the forces of righteousness and evil, but also a witness account of the real life events vouched for by Madam Tiwana, the persona borrowed from Dalip Kaur Tiwana the writer, who could have easily witnessed such a protest herself.

Having said that, let us return to Tiwana's story and take a look at the narrative structure of the novel. Right at the beginning, in the opening lines of the novel, the reader is given information regarding the place and the time, and those in themselves read like stage directions hinting at what the storyline might hold in store given the geographical location and the times we are in: "Patiala city. Cold season. Cloudy. Late evening." / *Śahir paṭiālā. Mausam ṭhaṇḍ dā. Baddlavāhī. Ākhaṇ* (Tiwana 2001b: 7).

The story follows Simran in her everyday activities, bearing witness to the fact that in spite of the terrible events engulfing Punjab, life goes on. Mundane activities fill the days and let time pass. This passing of time is brought out by a simple but ingenious narrative strategy—almost every chapter, and the chapters are short and numerous, begins with a phrase such as: "it was evening" (*velā tīje pahir dā*, ibid.: 12); "it was morning" (*velā saver dā*, ibid.: 15; 19); "on a dull day, in the afternoon" (*rukhkhā jihā din, velā dupahir dā*, ibid.: 24); "next day"

[30] From a hymn by Guru Tegh Bahadur. As all printed copies of Guru Granth Sahib are standardized and comprise 1430 pages or *ang*s, it is customary to provide bibliographical reference by giving the page number without reference to a particular publication.

(*agle din*, ibid.: 53; 69; 86); "on Diwali"[31] (*dīvālī*, ibid.: 59); "weather like usual" (*ām jihā mausam sī*, ibid.: 75); "after fifteen days" (*pãdrā din magrõ*, ibid.: 83); "today was the third" (*ājj tĩn tārīkh sī*, ibid.: 92); "some two months after the *bhog*" (*bhog to do ku mahīne magrõ*, ibid.: 99); "hours, days, months passed unnoticed; the season changed" (*ghāṭe, din mahīne cupp cāp lāghde jā rahe san; mausam badal rihā sī*, ibid.: 101); "the season was changing" (*mausam badal rihā sī*, ibid.: 104); etc. We can thus place the narrative in a timeframe of changing seasons, rituals performed (including the recurring funeral *bhog*s often marking untimely, violent deaths), chores done—passing time. In this respect Tiwana's approach to depicting reality of the times resembles that adopted by Gurvinder Singh, the director of *Chauthi Koot*, who according to Vijeta Budhiraja (2017: 14) "slows the passage of time to give the spectator the opportunity to see and hear keenly, to find meaning in banality and routine, by incorporating images of everyday life into the narrative." Moreover, like Tiwana in her novel, Gurvinder Singh works against the conventions established both by the Partition films or the films about the 1984. While the first group which includes *Tamas* (1988) and *Pinjar* (2003) "follows the formula or code of life before and after partition, of happy families/peaceful communities becoming victims of communal violence in Punjab" (ibid.), the second group, represented by *Amu* (2005) and *Punjab 1984* (2014), is basically "narrative-driven" and features "characters who demand empathy on account of their life trajectories, their victimisation" (ibid.). Gurvinder Singh's cinematic staging, however,

> eschews physical violence/horror to probe the possibilities of mental anguish and anxiety caused by constrictions placed on mobility within and without, on moving freely at home and outside. The film, therefore, detaches the viewer by winnowing out actual violence and rhetorical politics, and instead depicts the atmosphere of fear and nervousness amongst the inhabitants of Punjab during the dark days of the 1980s, therefore focusing on the hidden, symbolic, and systematic psychological oppression which lasts longer than the physical violence. (Bhudhiraja 2017: 15)

[31] In 1984, Diwali fell on 24th of October.

Tiwana's literary staging is driven by similar considerations. As in her novel, she provides only a few mentions of the event that defines it all—the attack on the Golden Temple—and the subsequent shock waves (firings, abductions, custodial deaths) that are brought to attention only when they impact those directly connected with the protagonists, one may theorize that the author has taken it for granted that the reader—the book was published in 1986, just two years after the event—knows very well what happened. She does not allude to any of it directly, her readers do not need to be told, they lived through it, though they, like the novel's protagonists, exist only on the periphery of the mainstream history writing venture (as viewed from the Centre) despite living in the midst of things.

The first and probably the only stable benchmark offered by Tiwana in the course of the narrative, and definitely as another major event defining it, is the news of Indira Gandhi's assassination. Indira Gandhi was gunned down by her Sikh bodyguards on 31 October 1984, early in the morning, at her official residence. Between her death and the day of cremation, the Sikh citizens of India found themselves brutally targeted by the majority community. Officially 2000 people lost their lives in Delhi, unofficially many more. Some of the areas, like the colonies on the left bank of Jamuna, turned into killing grounds. One of the worst hit was probably Trilokpuri. The use of electoral rolls to locate Sikh households is a matter of record. The most common *modus operandi* was to cull the men out, chop off their hair, force tyres on their bodies so they could not move, douse them with petrol, and set on fire. Women were pulled out of their homes, raped, and often killed after the act.[32]

[32] For interviews with the women, victims of the 1984 violence, see, for example, recently published interviews with the survivors, Wazir 2024. As it is impossible to list all sources available on the subject of the 1984, I would like to mention only a few of Punjabi story and poetry collections as possibly not known to the anglophone reader: Harbhajan Singh, *Unnī sau curāsī* (2017); Ajeet Caur, *Navambar curāsī* (2005 [1996]), Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Havā ṭhahir gāyī* (1988). There is a very extensive discussion regarding books (academic and fiction) on the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Ritika Singh's *The 1984 Anti-Sikh Violence. Narration and*

At that moment in time Simran and her family are in Delhi (which prior to these happenings was deemed to be safer than Punjab) attending family wedding. The timing rings true, for in the course of another, linked study I looked at the same issue in the context of Waryam Singh Sandhu's story "Cauthī Kūṭ" which features wedding procession in the opening shots of its film version: it is already marriage season but Indira Gandhi's assassination has not happened yet. Applying detective instincts I have pinned down the beginning of the short auspicious period perfect for weddings in late 1984 to the end of October[33] which unwittingly coincides with Indira Gandhi's assassination (31st October) and events that followed in its wake.

Regarding Simran's stay in Delhi, Tiwana does not provide even a single eye witness account of what was happening there during the riots, which are presented to the reader only by way of second hand reports. Though Simran, her grandmother, her maternal uncle, his wife and daughter, had to leave the house under adverse circumstances, Tiwana does not make use of Simran's vantage point, namely her physical presence in Delhi, to provide further details of heinous incidents taking place there (Tiwana 2001b: 76–78). However, possibly in view of the fact that this was probably the position that Tiwana the writer herself occupied and was familiar with, we have an in-depth description of the state of mind of Simran's friends in Patiala, among them Baldev, all of whom are worried that something terrible might have befallen Simran and her family. Depictions of their panic at not being able to contact Delhi, either by phone or by telegram, as all communications with the capital have been cut, and their interactions with the staff at the telephone exchange in Patiala, reflect their helplessness

Trauma in Language and Literature (2025), which is equipped with an extensive bibliography.

[33] The largely auspicious month of Kartik (Punjabi: Katak) ran from 25th October to 22nd November in 1984, with probably the 11th of Kartik, or the Ekadashi, which fell on the 4th of November 1984, marking the beginning of the most auspicious phase. One could assume that the writer/s did not specifically consult the calendar but rather their memories, so the marriage season and the tragic events are perhaps linked in their mind.

and fear (Tiwana 2001b: 79–80). Ultimately Baldev decides to take his father's car and his driver, Hukum Chand (as the name indicates, a Hindu, so safe from mob violence), and go to look for Simran. But before leaving for Delhi, he makes a detour to the market, where he cuts his hair (ibid.: 82), an act of a desperate, and angry, man. Till that moment in the narrative there was just one instance of a particular individual being clearly identified as a Sikh, namely by way of Baldev's statement, *I am proud to be a Sikh* (ibid.: 52), but even then no reference was made to the fact that he was a turban wearing Sikh. I will return to the issue of hair and cutting it in the Sikh context later.[34]

A journey which usually takes just a couple of hours, the distance being 250 kms, takes Baldev a full day because of police road blocks and bloodthirsty mobs. To ease his passage through various check posts, we are told that he gives his name as Baldev Raj (ibid.: 82), obviously a Hindu name as indicated by its second component. This information is followed by two sentences which describe, as if viewed in stunned silence, what meets his eyes in Delhi. Tiwana writes, *ajj cauthā din sī indrā gā̃dhī nū̃ māriā aje vī kise nā kise ghar vicõ dhūā̃ uṭhṭh rihā sī. koī nā koī lāś kidhre paī sī*. (ibid.: 8; "Today was the fourth day since Indira Gandhi was killed and even today there was smoke rising from some buildings. Here and there dead bodies were lying around.")

When Baldev reaches Simran's place in Delhi, he finds an empty house, its door and windows broken, some furnishings burnt, other stolen. There is nobody there; neither the neighbours nor the nearby shopkeepers know anything about residents' whereabouts, and probably don't care (ibid.: 82–83). Only later, from what Simran tells her friends on her return to Patiala, do we learn that she and her relatives had been rescued by a family friend who took them to his own house and defended them from the mob pistol in hand (ibid.: 84–85), a course of action known from several autobiographies and witness accounts.

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[34] The five articles of faith that collectively form the external identity of a Sikh include keeping long hair (*keś*), a comb, wearing a steel bracelet, long underwear, and a sword (or a replica of one).

Fifteen days after Indira Gandhi's death and the Delhi pogroms, when we find Simran back in Patiala, Baldev is no longer around. Having found Simran's Delhi house burnt and deserted, and having witnessed in Delhi (and on the way to and from) things he does not speak of on the pages of the novel, when asked by his friends what will he do now, he merely says: "I don't know" / *patā nahį̃* (ibid.: 83). At that moment he is not aware that Simran has survived and fears the worse. It is later hinted that he has joined the militants—*atãvavī*s—and from the conversation of his friends we learn that once one follows that path, there is no coming back. If at all, then as a dead body:

> *ik vārī is rāh uppar tur ke koī vāpas nahį̃ ā sakdā. śurū śurū vic ũs kolõ koī vārdāt karvā dittī jādā'ai jã̃ agle tõ āp tõ koī vārdāt ho jã̃dī'ai tã̃ aglā pulis tõ dhardā bhagõṛā ho jã̃dā'ai. bhagõṛā ho jāṇ magrõ phir koī rāh nahĩ̃ rahi jã̃dā vāpas ghar muṛan dā. phir tã̃ agle dī lāś hī ghar āũdī'ai*. (ibid.: 92)
>
> Once one takes this road, there is no coming back. Right at the beginning they make one do something or one does something on one's own, and the fear of the police makes one a fugitive. Once one becomes a fugitive, there is no way one can come back. Then it is only one's dead body that makes it home.

The book closes with the death of Simran's father, coming home from Calcutta to see his daughter. On the last leg of the journey, on the way from Chandigarh to Patiala, the bus on which he is travelling explodes and eighteen people die. Apparently militants had placed a bomb under the front seat of the bus. He had been sitting at the back with his wife but gave his seat to an elderly woman and stood between the seats in front. His family survived but he did not. Some fifteen days after the *bhog* ceremony—the post-funeral rites of passage—a police officer comes home and delivers a suitcase which holds the dead man's belongings, among them a diary meant for Simran. We leave Simran standing at the window and reading letter addressed to her in which her father writes: *maĩ mĩ̃h nāl mĩ̃h baṇke ā jāiā karã̃gā, sūraj nāl sūraj baṇke, havā nāl havā baṇke, dariā nāl dariā baṇke, te baddlã̃ nāl baddal baṇke ā jāiā*

karā̃gā. (ibid.: 109: "I will become rain and come to you as rain, [and] sun and come as sun, [or] breeze and come as breeze, a river and come as a river, a cloud and come to you as a cloud.")

These words provide a sort of metaphysical closure both to the whole narrative as well as to specific topics discussed in the book (and of great interest to Simran), both in the direct dialogues of the protagonists, as well as in the third person narrative, namely the meaning of life, death, the cycle of existence, an individual's place in the scheme of things, Sikh faith, and so on (Kaur 2015: 170–171). Though these topics, and questions they rise, cannot be discussed at length in this paper for lack of space, however, their overriding importance is clearly evident for reading the novel, starting with its title. Probably these discussions construct yet another 'text within text.'

Sikh scriptures as the frame of reference

Writing of ritual uses of sacred texts among the Sikhs and the Sikh approach to the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS), Kristin Myrvold, a well-known scholar of Sikhism, inadvertently foregrounds a lack which those from the non-Sikh background must deal with to fully engage with a Punjabi Sikh text. She says,

> **The living performance traditions of rendering the sacred verses of Guru Granth Sahib cast a haze of quotations over the whole Sikh life.** A mere glimpse at these practices seems to suggest that the Sikhs have taken the concept of a sacred scripture much further than any other religious community by treating the Guru Granth Sahib as a living Guru. [And] to develop and sustain a devotional and didactical relationship, even a social relationship, to the scripture and the teaching it enshrines is what makes people Sikhs—disciples of the Guru. (Myrvold 2007: 3; emphasis MP)

If one reads this statement together with what Lotman (1994: 383) has to say, in the context of 'text within text', of a 'rhetorical

combination' that hinges on "the presentation of one text as an uninterrupted account while a second is introduced into it in fragments, such as citations, references, epigraphs, and the like", one gets an idea what a Punjabi text, filled with marked and unmarked quotations from the GGS, might look like.

Tiwana opens her novel with an epigraph which reiterates the phrase used as the novel's title. The epigraph reads as follows:

> *samarpaṇ / unnẽ de nām, jihṛe āpṇe siviẽ dī lāṭ nāl lokẽ de rāh rauśāṇ dī kośiś karde miṭṭī vic miṭṭī ho gae, par jinnā bāre jamīn hameśẽ asmān nũ puchchdī rahegī*. (Tiwana 2001b: 5)
>
> Dedication: To those who have tried, with the flame of their devoted service, to light people's way and whose bodies became one with the earth, and about whom the earth will always ask the sky.

As a matter of fact, almost all Tiwana's novels open with an epigraph, usually in form of a dedication. Speaking of the epigraph in *Nãge pairõ dā safar*, Murphy (2024: 162) notes, " [the] epigraph … is not attributed to another, so represents a statement by the author to the reader." One could assume similar authorial intent in *Jimī̃ puchai āsmān* and wonder as to who, indeed, were the individuals, mentioned in the epigraph, who have sacrificed their lives for others.

The insistence on repeating, with only a slight variation, the phrase acting as the title, and thus bringing it in twice before the narrative proper begins, catches one's attention and invites speculation as to this maneuver possibly being used to provide a sophisticated locutorial framework. Those socialized into the *gurbani* and Sikhism might recognize the phrase to be a line from one of the hymn found in the Guru Granth Sahib, or suspect, due to its diction, of being one. The hymn in question, fragments of which are given below, is attributed to Farid, a medieval Muslim saint whose several compositions are included in Sikh scriptures.

> *bolai sekh farīdu piāre alah lage* ||

ihu tanu hosī khāk nimīṇī gor ghare || 1 ||
āju milāvā sekh farīd ṭākim kũjaṛīā manahu mãcidṛīā || 1 || rahāu ||
je jāṇā mari jāī'ai ghumi na āī'ai ||
jhūṭhī dunīā lagi na āpu vañāi'ai || 2 ||
....
sekh haiyātī jagi na koī thiru rahiā ||
jisu āsṇī ham baiṭhe baisi ga'iā || 5 ||
....
jimī puchai asmān farīdā khevaṭ kĩni gae ||
jālaṇ gorã nāli ulāme jīa sahe || 8 || 2|| (GGS: 488)

Says Shaikh Farid, friend, cling to Lord ||
[for] this body shall become dust, neglected grave [its] home ||
I would meet [my Lord] today if I could control wondering geese of mind's desires || 1 ||
If I knew today that I would die and not come again [to this world] ||
I would not cling to the false world and ruin myself || 2 ||
…
Sheik, nobody's life is permanent in this world ||
The seat on which we sit, many others have sat [there] and left || 5 ||
…
Farid, earth asks the sky, where have the boatmen gone?
Some were cremated, some are in their graves, [their] souls suffer rebukes || 8 ||

Farid's composition clearly reiterates the Sikh worldview and its salient points: to achieve liberation (*muktī*) one needs to follow the Lord (the actual term used here is Allah) for one's mortal body is dust that will return to dust; the only way to free oneself from a recurring, temporal existence and escape the vicious cycle of re/birth, is to control desires unsettling the mind and let go off the temporal world; to that end one needs to realize that the place one occupies in this world had been occupied by many others before, now all gone; knowing all this, the earth asks the sky, where are the boatmen, the guides, capable of ferrying the boat of life across the ocean of existence so that those left on this shore may make their way across; many died, been cremated, buried, but their souls are still trapped in the cycle of life and death.

Incidentally, this particular hymn of Farid, with its emphasis on the transitory nature of life, is often found in the kirtans performed at *bhog* ceremonies, where the verse, *jimī puchai asmān,* is used as the opening line and refrain.[35]

Venturing yet further, one could ponder over the question as to how is this particular verse, or hymn, relevant to Tiwana's narrative and what is its role in it. Careful reading of the novel brings to notice the recurring presence of discussions, scattered throughout the narrative, where Simran and her interlocutors (including Madam Tiwana) speak repeatedly on issues such as life, death, transitoriness of things, temporal existence, the illusory nature of the world, and so on. The fact that these discussions take place against the background of an unimaginable violence engulfing Sikh community and Punjab, might speak to an attempt of making sense of death around: bloodshed at the Golden Temple, anti-Sikh pogroms in Delhi, violence perpetrated by the militants, retaliatory violence on the part of the police and the military, fake police encounters, dreaded interrogation, torture, rape… Though most of those are not even mentioned in the text or referred to only briefly, they inform the narrative, and the way it unfolds, only overtly entangled in the chores of the everyday.

However, the strongest scriptural reference, which provides framing for the whole novel, including all metaphysical questions mentioned above, is given in the second chapter, which opens with the grandmother, *bejī*, reciting a long passage from the *gurbani* (Tiwana 2001b: 12) as part of her morning prayers. Starting with the words, *jag racnā sabh jhūṭh hai…*/"The world and its affairs are all false…" (GGS: 1429), the quoted fragment runs to fourteen lines and describes this world as an impermanent, dream-like structure that shall perish; even Ram, the epitome of righteousness, and Ravana, the harbinger of chaos, have come and gone, for nothing lasts for ever. The latter part of the quoted fragment takes the form of an entreaty addressed to

[35] For the arrangement of lines of the hymn during a performance, see, for example, https://youtu.be/Ym4AWvv8vQg?si=Fv88Pn31Jd9eSgEf. More on the subject of *gurbāṇī* and aural memory storehouses built over lifetime, see Puri (forthcoming).

God by a supplicant who is lost and whose only refuge when tragedy (*bipti*) strikes is One Being. The whole passage, introduced into the narrative as a part of *bejī*'s prayer which Simran overhears and finds heart-breaking, distressing, outright sad, serves both as a prescient warning of things to come and an explanatory template grounded in living faith on how to deal with the unbearable aspects of human existence.

There are also other, less prominent, though no less interesting uses of scriptural references. One of them involves a hymn attributed by Pratāpī the sweeperess to Namdev (Tiwana 2001b:13) but found in the Guru Granth Sahib among compositions of Kabir. Reference to the hymn is given in a casual conversation between Pratāpī, Simran's grandmother and Simran on the subject of good and bad times. When Simran remarks that every time people speak about good times, they bring up the subject of prices, and how wheat, ghee, molasses were once cheaper than now, Pratāpī retorts with a quote from the holy book, 'can't worship when hungry'. The referenced hymn (GGS: 656), couched as a petition, asks God for simple things such as 'two kilos of flour', 'quarter of a kilo of ghee', some 'salt', 'dal', 'a charpoy', 'a pillow', 'a mattress', and 'a quilt'; it is only when [God's] 'servant' has the basics that the 'servant' may devote himself to worship: *bhukta bhagti na kījai, yaha mālā apnī līјai…* (GGS: 656) / "Can't worship when hungry, take back your prayer beads…" [36]

This slight theological point might be missed altogether by an inattentive reader, however, it fills in the dots: is it possible that one of the reasons for the unrest in the Punjab countryside is poverty, lack of access to resources, education, jobs? Something possibly hidden

[36] Both Namdev and Kabir are the so called 'bhagats,' the non-Sikh devotees whose hymns are included in the GGS. Though Tiwana's novel, published in 1986, predates the period when the hymns from the GGS started to be available in digital form and could be simply listened to in casual spaces, it is pertinent to note that nowadays, probably because of its similarity to Dhanna's hymn *āratī* (in meter, content, mode), this particular hymn of Kabir is often clubbed with the five *āratī* hymns in the *āratī* videos probably because of its *arzī* or petition mode; see Puri forthcoming.

under the heading 'Sikh demands' mentioned in the already quoted statement of Baldev? Is it also possible that all those tiny quotes, each insubstantial in itself and easily glossed over in the reading, might actually serve the author to build a whole network of 'dual codes' providing referential frames, a 'text within the text,' to be read at leisure?

However, it needs to be made clear that Dalip Kaur Tiwana is not unique in using scriptural references to frame her narratives and fashion their titles. Rather, though practically unstudied, the tendency is common in Punjabi literary sphere and is used as a sort of shorthand to localize narratives in specific milieus, but also, as pointed out by N. S. Tasneem (2002: 101), to provide Punjabi works of fiction with "epical patterns". To give an example, several instances of the usage might be found in Kartar Singh Duggal's oeuvre, where the three volumes of his Partition trilogy, which again try to make sense of senseless violence, have been titled respectively *Hāl murīdā̃ dā* (The plight of [His] disciples, DG: 709), *Ab na basõ ih gā̃v* (Now I shall not live in this village, GGS: 1104), and *Jal kī piās nā jāi* (Without water thirst is not quenched, GGS: 1420), and where all three titles might be easily linked to the well-known hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS) or the Dasam Granth (DG). Duggal's other texts, including his later trilogy which narrates "the story of the Sikhs in search of their identity form Guru Nanak's time to the present day" (Sekhon and Duggal 2020: 254) also avail of the same strategy. So do the texts of many other writers. Sekhon, writing about novels of Narinder Singh Pal, and more specifically his four historical novels, draws attention to the fact that the titles of the first three are taken from a line of Guru Amar Das's long and liturgically much used composition, *Anand,* while the title of the fourth from a long poem of Shah Mohammad (ibid.: 260–261), thus emphasising the role of citational and quotational practices in providing audience with familiar and intelligible reception frames. Similar ventures, evidenced, for example, in Punjabi translations of Arundhati Roy's novels, or dialogic interaction between books authored by G.P.S. Gill, the police officer (in)famous for drastically ending Punjab insurgency, and Sandip Kaur, a woman militant, have been either mentioned earlier or addressed briefly in some

other studies.[37] However, Tasneem's remarks are most pertinent to large-scale epic projects such as those of Duggal, Narinder Pal Singh or Tiwana for though "[i]n regard to the novel as an epic, not much has been written about this form" (Tasneem (2002: 101), there is no doubt that many writers have purposefully employed vast historical canvas in an attempt to "view life from a boarder perspective and elevated standpoint" (ibid.)

An equally purposeful strategy has been used by Tiwana in naming (so bringing to life) her protagonists. Personal names seem to have been chosen thoughtfully, possibly keeping in mind their meaning. For example, *simran* in its primary sense denotes the practice of repeating/remembering God's name though the word is also commonly used as a Sikh name, either on its own or as a part of a compound (Simran, Simranjeet, Mansimran, etc.). In view of the fact that Simran is conceived as pivotal figure around whom everything revolves, let us take a look at how she impacts life trajectories of the two male friends who are closest to her, Baldev and Dharam (on their names more below), and more specifically in the time-period when her life is in danger. Both Baldev and Dharam are in Patiala when Indira Gandhi is killed and the anti-Sikh riots start in Delhi. Both, as we have already learned in the earlier part of the novel, are disenchanted with the situation in Punjab, and both voice their disenchantment in highly emotional outbursts. Both probably are in love with Simran. And we are told, at length and in great detail, what Baldev did when he could not reach Simran on the phone or contact her in any other way: he drove to Delhi to look for her in person. However, before doing that, he went to a barber's shop in the market and cut off his hair—the ultimate gesture of self-inflicted violence, probably the most poignant moment of the whole novel though narrated in two brief, laconic sentences easily overlooked in the larger expanse of the whole narrative: *pãdrã̃ vīh mĩṭā magrõ jadõ baldev bāhar āiā tã̃ uh hukam cãd tõ vī nā pahcāniā*

[37] For discussion on the Punjabi translation of title/s of books by Arundhati Roy, see Puri 2020; for discussion on the titles of books by Sandip Kaur and K.P.S Gill, see Puri 2021.

giā. Us ne vāl kaṭvā ditte hoe san. (Tiwana 2001b: 82; "When some twenty minutes later he came out, even Hukum Chand did not recognise him. His hair was cut short"). The seminal significance of a Sikh cutting his hair under duress, even if of his own free will, is not lost on a Punjabi reader. In a comment consigned to a footnote Rashmi Bhatnagar (1986), speaking of her experiences of reading Alexander Pope's poem, *Rape of the Lock,* in the course of English literature classes at a Sikh private collage of the Delhi University in the period following the massacre of male Sikhs in Delhi during the riots, mentions discomfort and the "new and painful associations" that the text brought to the students as "the heroine Belinda's loss of a lock of hair, cut off clandestinely by her lover, reminded them of how 'the rioters have desecrated the sacred symbols of the Sikhs by forcibly cutting off their hair in public'" (Rajan 2008: 67).

Though spared the ignominy of having his hair cut off by the rioters, or being killed, Baldev's sacrifice brought him no peace. We know that he did not find Simran. Just an empty, ransacked, half burned house. The next time we hear of him, he has already joint the militants. Dharam, on the other hand, remained where he was throughout and later we meet him, safe and sound, when his aunt is proposing to arrange his marriage to Simran. Both Baldev, whose name hints at 'strength', and Dharam, perhaps 'sensible' and 'duty-bound,' represent two possible, though diametrically different archetypes of young Sikh men of the time: the first, moved by the injustice of what is happening around, is ready to sacrifice his life by joining the militants (which also puts him beyond the pale); the second is ready to bear the injustice and plod on. Without commending or criticizing either, Tiwana bears witness to the times and circumstances that impact individual choices in highly unexpected ways. The framing of discourse around scriptural references else acts of everyday piety allow the author to speak of violence without turning it into a titillating spectacle and yet manging to probe its abysmal depths.

Having demonstrated the importance of scriptural benchmarks in Sikh's daily life, and their role in the text, I would like to end on another note. Several times in the course of the novel one encounters

references to the gurudwara, with the most important gurudwara in Patiala, the Dukhniwaran gurudwara[38] mentioned a couple of times: we are told that in Simran's house one can hear the sounds of kirtan coming from this gurudwara (Tiwana 2001b: 33) so one could say that, as pointed out by Myrvold (2007: 3), "the sacred verses of Guru Granth Sahib cast a haze of quotations" over the whole neighbourhood; it is the place in which the old woman, whose grandson is missing since the time he was picked up by the police, seeks succour (ibid.: 42); a place which Simran's grandmother visits (ibid.: 66), possibly daily; and the place where, after miraculous escape from death in the riots in Delhi, she thanks Guru for keeping her family safe (ibid.: 83), and where she arranges for the *akhãd pāṭh* or the 48-hours unbroken recitation of the Guru Granth Sahib to take place. But, besides these pious acts of a deeply believing Sikh, she visits also the temple of Kali Devi to present her offerings there, and then, the mausoleum of Pir Rode Shah (ibid.: 83) where she offers a *chadar*, a votive cloth covering for the grave. The three thus visited places mark spots sacred to the Sikhs, the Hindus and the Muslims; epitomise the composite culture of the city; and are a testimony to what the author probably sees as the tangible expression of a possibility of peaceful coexistence, already amply emphasized by quotations from Farid and Kabir, both Muslims, but whose writings were found compatible with the teachings of the Gurus and included by them in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Autobiographical frames

The present study of Tiwana's *Jimī̃ puchai āsmān* grew out of two interrelated research interests: first, a larger study of Punjabi autobiographies, authored by women, read through the politics of identity in the Sikh context, and second, depictions of violence against women

[38] The literal meaning of 'dukhwaran' is 'the eradicator of suffering'; the foundation story of the gurudwara is linked to Guru Tegh Bahadur who meditated and prayed on this spot and as the result of his prayers the village was freed of a deadly decease that plagued it.

(VAW) in Punjabi literature, including intergenerational re-tellings of the seminal events of '47 and '84. An earlier article (Skakuj-Puri 2017) looked at Tiwana's early life writings, specifically *Nãge pairõ dā safar* (*A Journey on Bare Feet*) (1981) and *Pūchte ho to suno* (*Since You Have Asked, Listen*) (1995), the last furnished with a very specific subtitle—*Sāhitak svai-jīvanī* (*A Literary Autobiography*).[39] While the first could be described as a novelised piece of life writing, the second is more essayistic. Besides these two works, there are several others, subtitled 'autobiography', such as *Turdiã̃ turdiã̃* (*Going on*) (2011), *Āpṇī chāvẽ. svai-jīvanī parak* (*One's shadows. Something like an autobiography*) (2013) or *Sahitak svai-jīvanī. racnā merī ibadāt hai* (*Literary autobiography. Writing is my prayer/worship*) (2018). Moreover, many of Tiwana's literary sketches and essays are highly autobiographical. In the volume titled *Tere mere sarokār* (*You and me: interactions*) (2012), for example, one finds many references to author's life and her family and is introduced to author's philosophy which underwrites her creative writing, like in the chapter "Lekhak dī bhūmikā" ("The role of the writer", Tiwana 2013: 84–87). Tiwana's writerly worldview, informed by her ethical (Sodhi 2016) and philosophical concerns, sees Sikhism as an integral part of Indian philosophy, filtered through the lens of her personal beliefs as demonstrated by Jasvinder Kaur in her book (Kaur 2015).

Jimī̃ puchai āsmān, the novel, which is the focus of this paper, is discussed briefly in Tiwana's last autobiography-titled work, *Sahitak svai-jīvanī. racnā merī ibadāt hai*. Speaking of the three interconnected novels, *Hastākhar*, *Paiḍ cāl* and *Jimī̃ puchai āsmān*, she tells the reader that she sees them as texts re/creating the atmosphere of the university (Tiwana 2018: 38), obviously in Patiala, the writer's hometown. The first novel revolves around the life of Amar, its main protagonist, incidentally Simaran's father, who is convinced that his wife, Seema, has him tied down in domesticity and stunts his intellectual growth.

[39] Over time literary autobiography became quite popular in Punjabi letters with many writers penning them. Punjabi University Press, Patiala has a series that publishes such autobiographies—all with similar covers and all sub-titled *svai-jīvanī*.

He wants to leave her only to discover, after her sudden death, that she was the fountain of strength that nourished his inner life, and he is nothing without her. The second novel follows Simran, now a student of philosophy, in her search to understand her father, her mother, and also, Madam Sodhi, the lives they lead and how their life trajectories brought them where they are now. The third novel, *Jimī̃ puchai āsmān*, says Tiwana, poises a series of seminal questions: Is life incapable of providing answers to the fundamental questions? Is this why the earth asks the sky: Who was Seema? Who was Amar? Who is Madam Sodhi? How did the two women, Seema and Madam Sodhi, come together and become one in Simran? How did the militancy begin in Punjab? When will it end? And how are the people who get engulfed by the militancy and all it brings at fault? Tiwana ends her brief exposition saying:

> *ihnā̃ racnāvā̃ vic tusī āpṇī samarththā anusār hī likhe aṇlikhe nū̃ ralā ke hī samajh sakde ho. asal vic merī sirajṇā merī ibādat hai.* (Tiwana 2018: 39)
>
> In these creative pieces of fiction, you can, according to your own ability, understand and put together [things] written and unwritten. In truth, the act of creative writing is [just like] worship for me.

The invitation to read the three novels as one will leaves the question of their interpretations open, especially when one considers *Jimī̃ puche āsmān*. Though undoubtedly sourced from Tiwana's life, it is more of a novel than an example of autobiographical writing. Had the readers been unfamiliar with pieces of personal information regarding the author, they would have read it as a largely universalized narrative just incidentally touched by events playing out on a larger historical canvas. As to the question of it being a testimony, or an eyewitness account—one can only say that though highly re-montaged, it does provide a deeply engaged depiction of the everyday in the times of violence. It does not spell out things that are the shared knowledge concealed under the appellation *churasi* or the 1984. But its relationship

to the events is informed by the Sikh worldview greatly at variance with the official historiography of the nation-state.

What is interesting, however, is the fact that Tiwana's novel was probably one of the very first novels depicting the events of 1984. Published in 1986, it appeared in the same year as Surinder Pal Dhillon's *Paĩdā te rāh* / *The Distance and the Track*, deemed the first novel on the subject in Punjabi.[40] However, while Dhillon's novel has been immediately noticed, the same can't be said of Tiwana's text, probably because of its reluctance to depict direct violence and merely recording the prevailing sense of despair, that too, filtered through a young girl's sensibilities.

Summing up

The textual analysis of the novel, *Jimĩ puchai āsmān*, and its narrative frames—geopolitical, historical, testimonial, autobiographical, scriptural, etc.—which was grounded in Kristeva's intertextuality (Kristeva 1980), Lotman's 'text within text' (Lotman 1994), and Spassova's 'dual codes' (Spassova 2018), provided an introductory survey of narrative strategies employed by the author to present the stories in a highly choreographed manner. Boldly premised on a desire to serve merely as a link in a larger metanarrative charged with recording the journey called life, of *kitthõ ture sī te kitthe ā gaye*, but also people's view of history, Tiwana's self-set task for this, as also her other texts, including her semi/autobiographical novel/s, was to bear witness to women's lives, in this case predominantly Simran, but also other women around her: her grandmother, an elderly woman relative who lost her grandson, teachers, relatives, friends, all of them victims of a specific 'continuum of violence' engendered by exigent circumstances. This foregrounds Butalia's diagnosis that the often indirect impact of militancy on women's lives is a grossly understudied subject (Butalia

[40] For more on Punjabi writings on 1984, see, for example, Singh and Vrat 1987, Kaur 2021.

2017: 21). As already discussed elsewhere (Skakuj-Puri 2017), Tiwana's stories usually grow from a tiny 'seed' (*bīj*)—which might be an incident, a situation, a snatch of an overheard dialogue—which takes root in author's mind and slowly develops into a story, a powerful narrative made up of almost bare but very evocative descriptions of events and scraps of conversation, devoid of overt authorial comments. All of Tiwana's narratives, including her life writings, are worked out in such a way—starting from women-centred, real-life situations, they are ultimately transformed into sophisticated literary artefacts. Had *Jimī̃ puchai āsmān* not been linked to Tiwana's life by way of Tiwana the protagonist's engagement with Tiwana the author, only those in the know would have read it as anything else than a novel, for its author equipped it with all the makings of that fictional genre. What, however, is unique to *Jimī̃ puchai āsmān* is its historical setting and its reticence to speak directly of violence even when it is violence that dominates the scene and informs all social interaction. The briefness of the interval between the period depicted (end of 1984), the writing, and the publication (1986) makes *Jimī̃ puchai āsmān* probably the most politically engaged of Tiwana's novels.

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