Q. 1. Did 'writing' come as a compulsion of literary desire to express yourself or as a social obligation to expose the vices of society and the condition of the downtrodden?

Ans. Whatever I have written, it is a result of my responsibility and obligation towards society. Writing has never been for me a personal ambition. But, no literary work is possible without creative art. If we write using only some incidents and characters to create a literary work, then it can never become an outstanding one. Only when we portray the seen, heard and known incidents and characters with creativity, does an eminent literary work get created. Social responsibility and literary art are not two things. Both complement and supplement each other.

Q. 2. Who are the characters of your novels. Have they actually existed or do they gain shape through your creative pen?

Ans. The answer to this question has somewhat been given in the first answer. Even then I would surely like to say that when we portray a person in any novel or story as a character, he or she becomes an important character only through creative art. Just a known, seen (even understood) person can not be made a memorable character of any literary creative work without a creative touch.

Q. 3. Literature is considered to be a mirror of life. How successfully do your four novels. The Last Flicker, Night of the Half Moon, The Survivors and Parsa depict the real life of Malwa region of Punjab.

Ans. Literature is not only a mirror or superficial reality of society. It presents the actual fact of society in such a manner that it portrays the society in totality. Literature is a means to analyze society it all its depth, and to know and understand it. An ordinary man is unable to see this depth. The other side of it is that any society's inhuman values and age-old prejudices should be portrayed by literature in such a manner that the reader not only
realizes the importance of human values but strives to establish them in society as well.

The characters of my novels belong undoubtedly to the Malwa region but their nature is of that humanity which could be seen in the people of any progressive society. This is the reason that the readers of different societies take them as the characters of their own society and feel immensely for their happiness and sorrow.

Q. 4. What were the influences on you that turned you into a socially conscious writer / novelist?

Ans. Whatever family and surroundings I was born in, whatever life I lived were the influences on my writings. But, only these are not enough for a person to become a good writer. The most important is his / her sense of personal social responsibilities and his / her responsibility towards the surroundings that make him / her think, understand and act in a totally different manner than ordinary people do. But this is not enough to make or become a writer. The most important role is that of one’s creativity. (But even this is not enough to make a perfect writer. Along with all these qualities, a person needs to read the classics of all times and understand them deeply so that he understands what literature is and how to write. And also as to why it is written in the first place.)

Q. 5. Has your writing acted as a therapeutic device in mitigating the pain felt by you on seeing the marginalized people?

Ans. Such a pain can not subside by writing alone although it does give some satisfaction and relief. This pain can only mitigate when a writer tries to abolish inhuman practices through the establishment of human values and is able to establish such a society which he dreams (or writes) about.

Creative art is not a medicine but is an ‘incurable’ disease which does not ever die because the kind of society (or world) that a creative writer wishes to create can never be possible in his life time. So, he never feels fully
cured or healthy till his last breath and is forever infected with the disease of creativity. His fame also can not make him disease-free about which a Latin American poet and writer Jose Marty has written that, the worth of ones fame that is world-wide is not even comparable to the value of a cob of a corn plant.

Q.6. **Do you think the times have smoothened for the peasant or seerie class in Punjab?**

**Ans.** You talk about better conditions; the state of the peasant in Punjab is going bad to worse by the day. Due to the increase in population, expansion of cities, building of roads bridges and a few factories, cultivable land is continuously decreasing. Ninety percent of the farmers have broken or hunch backs due to debts. (They are committing suicides). Then how can their conditions be good when their entire life depends on farming?

Q.7. **Do you think there has been a purposeful and deliberate negation of ‘small’ or ‘ordinary’ characters from the pages of literature?**

**Ans.** This has never happened purposely and is not happening. Our country’s organizations – social, political, religious, etc. have never been sensitive enough. Such conditions have also affected the writers.

We know that most of the writers come from the middle class. The effect of globalization has been such on them that their inclination is increasing towards such problems that deal with or are related to middle-class desires or ambitions like the relations between man and woman or the people weighed down by mental pressures and clashes. Most of the writers neither know about nor have any experience about the life of the lower classes. Even then, there are some writers who are writing about the problems of ordinary and small people. But out of them many are limited to writing about dalits and atrocities towards women where as such problems are related to the downfall of the entire Indian society at large.
Q.8. Has there been a calculated power play in the un-representation, misrepresentation and under-representation of the downtrodden?

Ans. I have given the answer to this question in the previous answer to some extent. I would only like to say that this is a natural reaction of a capitalist society; no calculation is a cause for this. The condition of the people living on the edges or the margins in a capitalist society is becoming deplorable and will remain so until there is such a set-up. (Our democracy is limited to gathering votes from the lower sections. The number of people below poverty live has increased and is increasing because the entire set-up is working under the capitalists.)

Q.9. Do you think literature can act as a powerful medium of subjugating the powerless to relegate them to the fringes of society?

Ans. This has never happened purposely in literature. If we see in Indian literature the epics and myths of Hindu religion, then we find that in them the Dalits are not even considered humans. Even then, from the times of Charwak till today some or the other literature has been written about this section. In this regard we can take the example of Bhakti Kaal which included poets like Kabir and Ravidas. Today in Maharashtra and other states too, Dalit literature has emerged as a revolution, with which many writers are now associated.

But here, it is necessary to keep in mind that, the bent of mind towards literature is a natural outcome of a lop-sided social set-up. There have been (and are) such writers who have been against inhuman establishments in society. Through literature produced by such writers and under its effect, the inclination of ordinary people to change the circumstances does arise. The purpose and duty of great literature is also this.

Q.10. Does literature have a redeeming power that can liberate the marginalized people?

Ans. This power is actually only in best (ideal) literature. The most influential example of this can be seen in the rise of the Sikh religion. Guru Nanak
Dev Ji was a great poet. After him, four Sikh Gurus nurtured and progressed the Sikh religion through literature (Gurubani) and the fifth Guru, Guru Arjandev put together the Adigranth. This is the reason that the Hindus of Punjab got together against the establishment by the time of Guru Gobind Singh. Due to this, the Sikh religion came into being and Ranjit Singh could establish a powerful state.

But the progress of Indian society has happened in such a manner that, in spite of winning repeatedly; we have also lost time and again. This is what happened to Ranjit Singh’s state too.

Literature has always been the most powerful medium of influencing the mentality of the people in a society and it is the change in this mentality that becomes the cause for change in social establishment in future.

Q.11. Talking about your ‘agenda of empowerment’, do you think your literature has transcended boundaries as Prof. Rana Nayar says?
Ans. I can only say about this that my works may have transcended social and geographic boundaries if these have reached great number of readers after crossing these boundaries.

I would also like to say one thing more, that if this has happened in the conditions that have prevailed in our state, which are still so, this can happen in any set up. If these works have affected our society, then it can also affect any such society.

The most important thing is that if in any geographic space the social, economic and political conditions are similar to that of Punjab, then the emotions, thoughts and feelings about sorrow and happiness will also be similar—even if the happenings and culture of that society is different to ours. This is the season that, we can assimilate similar impressions after reading the works of any country or age. (Whether they are Tolstoy’s novels, Stienback works or Charles Dicken’s works.

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Q.12. Has Malwa become a cultural metaphor for you, because all your characters in particularly the novels as rooted here?

Ans. This is a very ordinary thing that any writer is more or less impressed or affected by the surroundings of the place where he has spent the larger part of his life. If I have spent my whole life in Malwa, then I cannot choose my characters from Bengal or Kerela:

But I have already said that my characters are not only seen or known people, they are created characters. This is the reason that they cross all boundaries of time (age) and geography (topography) and can impress the readers of any society.

Q.13. From Jagseer to Moddan to Bishna and to Parsa- How do you view the journey of these characters towards greater self-assertion and self-realization?

Ans. There can never be only one type of people in any society or establishment. Even in one family, two children brought up in similar conditions are also not same. The characters that you have mentioned are also not of one type. They have their own conditions, thoughts and emotions which are totally different. But as I have said earlier, these are all created characters (literary creations). So, they are not one type of people.

One thing more, at first I chose known people but in making them the characters of my novels, I had to change or mould them a lot so that they do not remain people but become literary creations of my active literary world. This became possible only after I moulded them repeatedly. (The most authentic information that I had was of Bishna who was my real uncle. Emotional attachment to him became a hurdle. The creative distance that was necessary to make him a character of my novel from a live person, took me a lot of time. This one example is enough to reveal the difficulty in creating characters).
Q.14. **In all these four novels there is a display of indomitable courage and human endurance. Are these novels and their protagonists representative of these two qualities of all such people?**

Ans. If these characters did not have this quality, then these would not qualify to become the protagonists or literary heroes of my works. These qualities of my characters are also present in real-life people but these qualities are scattered in them. According to my creative art and my thoughts, I have created these characters so that if all these qualities are present in all people only then will I be able to affect this inhuman establishment and will I be able to affect the people of this society in such a way that they will be able to change this set-up through their human power, human values and qualities. If I can not do this, then what is the importance of my creations?

Q.15 **Tell us about your creative process in writing novels and stories. What comes first-story line, characters, situation idea or is it first a personal creative process.**

Ans. Probably, in answer to this question, many things have already been said in my previous answer.

The display of personal art can never create anything original. Creative art is that which can only be written or displayed in one particular and special manner. Whatever ways are possible to create a particular artistic creation, all those are used. A long thought process is involved in creating any artistic piece. Same portions of a creative work are written easily but some particular portions take months (even years) to happen even then they (may or may not).

In short, whatever complicated ways a human life can have, so does a creative literary creation have complications. But it is important to note that, no creation should remain sub-standard. If it cannot become perfect, it is better to dump in a dustbin.
Q.16. **What kind of issues disturb you now?**

Ans. The downfall of Indian society. Like our country’s political, social, religious and economic set-ups have been made to function in the name of 65 years of ‘democracy’, our Indian society, along with all its human values is reducing fast (and this diminishing of human values is not stopping at any pace). This is the reason that the entire Indian society is becoming devoid of all its human values. From personal to all social relations, every association has been and is on the downfall. (My concern is how to stop this downfall and whether it is even possible to do so).

Q.17. **Is the identity search of Jagseer, Bishna, Moddan and Parsa a manifestation of your own personal quest for identity assertion?**

Ans. The problem of any person or writer’s quest for identity is always related to the identity crisis and identity assertion of his/her society. No person can ever win by winning his personal battle of identity or by saving his own identity. This is the reason that a writer’s quest for identity assertion is always a social battle. So my battle is also largely social in nature. It has never been, is not and will never be personal.

Q.18. **What is your take an translations? How for has justice been done to your translated works?**

Ans. Translation is a very difficult task, but a necessary one. Some translators have a good knowledge about both languages, some have a little less. Due to this, translations are also good and bad. The most complicated challenge of translation is in finding synonyms for words in a different cultural construct than finding similar words in a single- culture literary translation.

Here, two illustrations would be quite interesting. I translated the first part of a Russian writer Maxim Gorki’s autobiography in 1962-63 from English to Punjabi. Gorki’s mother sends him, as a three or four year old kid to her parent’s house after marrying again. Gorki’s maternal grandfather and grandmother call each other ‘mother’ and ‘father’ because they are
Christians. But in Punjab, a wife does not call her husband by name. Then how do I translate, but I did.

One of my novels was translated in Hindi by a translator. One of the characters in this novel is Pala, which also means winter (frost) in Punjabi. He did not see that the use of this word is for a character and he translated it as winter. I refused. This is the reason that I had to translate eight of my novels into Hindi myself. In English my novels, autobiography and a short story-collection have already been published. The translation of these (apart from one or two) has been good (specially the ones translated by Rana Nayar).

Q.19. Prof. Jaidev talks about ‘Mamatva’. Does your ‘Mamatva’ find an extension and expression in your novels and other writings?
Ans. I have not read Jaidev’s ideas.

Q.20. You have often said that had you not taken to writing, you would have exploded. Do you feel that immense urge even now?
Ans. This condition will prevail till I am alive because the conditions and reasons, under which I started writing, not only exist but are ever increasing. Till this reason is present, how will this explosive condition die out?