Chapter-II
Shiv's birha

Whereas the sufi poets believe in the ultimate re-union of the signifier, the lacking self, with the full 'presence' of the transcendental signified, the 'presence' of God, of the voice of man with the voice of God, Shiv's बिरह (Birha) takes a completely secular turn as he knows that his song will never find its source or meaning. But the desire for union is overwhelming and would not let him sleep. He must sing with all the intensity and desperation of a desire which, by definition, will never find its object:

विरह दह भूरे देव
तू निद्रा च प्रेमलंग रे,
वषु तू पर रे रे रे
विरह भोग अफ़रत रे
तू निद्रा 'च तू दी दमाएं' चा
देव तर परभुंग रे !  
(Pyar oh mhal hai Nee
Jinde Ch pakehruya de
Baj kuch ro na rave
Pyar assa angna hai
Jinde ch ne vasla da
Ratda na plung deve)

The re-union between the signifier and the signified, despite Saussure's best intentions, is impossible. The un-erasable hyphen will always constitute and be constituted by, this irrational desire for re-union. Nevertheless, the signifier is motivated paradoxically by the very desire for the signified which it will never find. The play of the signifiers is set into
motion by the search, howsoever futile, for the elusive signified. The death
of the meaning cannot be rationalized that easily, the heart keeps desiring
it, the song keeps singing it, the subject keeps suffering the loss:

अपनी ठी सहित,
मेरे दीना दे रूपसंग हिंद
केशव ची वज्र भेजे !
अंतर्द हायर राही —
छठ बेत मेरे मिलाम है
अपनी माफ़ी सीट ता भेजे !?
(Mai ne maye
Mere geeta de nenna wich
Beraho de radak pavy
Addi addi rati
Oth ron moe mitra nu
Maye sanu nidda na pavi)

The song has its eyes sore with the agony of waiting; it cannot
reconcile to the pangs of separation for the always already lost meaning.
The signifier cannot come to rest, cannot be consoled into sleep. It would
not be stopped by the rational 'self from running restlessly after the lost
signified. The more the rational subject deconstructs the signified, the
more the desiring subject longs for it:

अपनी ठी मे घरছ्री,
मे दुर्दे अथ अंत मेंक लेवी
भेंड बिखरा ठेम्मु छहे ?
अथ मु बी अपने विद्वाले
छे ब्धू हिंद बे ठी:
नेंज बिखे छुट रा खबे !
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(Appe ne mai baldhi
The rational 'I' is pleading before the desiring 'I' for some respite, for some sleep. One cannot but compare it with what Mersault, in Camus' 'The Outsider', 'feels' about the improbable chance of his appeal for pardon being accepted, after he has rationally convinced himself that the appeal would in all likelihood be dismissed and that "it doesn't matter very much whether you die at thirty or at seventy since, in either case, other men and women will naturally go on living, for thousands of years even ....... At that point the thing that would rather upset my reasoning was that I would feel my heart give this terrifying leap at the thought of having another twenty years to live." However when Mersault exercises the rational right "to consider the alternative hypothesis" that he was pardoned, he is not able to control his desiring 'I': "The annoying thing was that somehow I'd have to control that burning rush of blood which would make my eyes smart and my whole body delirious with joy. I'd have to do my best to restrain this outburst, to be rational about it. I'd have to remain calm even about this hypothesis, in order to make my resignation to the first one more plausible. When I'd managed it, I'd have gained an hour's respite. That was something anyway". 4

This tilt in favour of the reason as against the passion is what defines the Existentialist man, the 'absurd' hero of the Modernist novel. It takes the postmodern poet to reverse this hierarchy, and it is the non-western poet, here the Punjabi poet, who takes the modern to its limits and almost crosses over to the yet-to-come, the yet-to-be defined space of the
The poet here approaches the "almost nothing of the unpresentable" very different from the 'dread-ful' 'Nothingness' of Existentialism. Mersault, even the Existentialist anti-hero, still derives some pragmatic courage, if not metaphysical hope, from the lucidity of reason against the lyricism of 'irrational' passion for living. However a postmodern poet cannot derive any such consolation or enlightenment from the metanarrative of reason. The rational subject is itself constructed by a logical grammar and "is nothing other than the instance saying 'I', "belonging to "language (which) knows a 'subject', not a 'person', and this subject empty outside of the very emunciation which defines it, suffices to make language hold together, suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it." So this reasoning 'I' does not exist outside the very discourse of Enlightenment which centralizes it as 'cogito', as the very foundation of existence itself. The desire for the other, the mourning for the loss, is too powerful to be contained by a weak rational subject howsoever smart or solid it might appear:

अधे ती मैं फसड़ी,  
मैं उगले अध मेंज़ नेली  
भेंड विघ्न जिम्म छवें  
अध गु ती मैं फिरवँ वें  
(Appne nee mai baldhi  
Mai hale app mutta jogi  
Mutt kehra asnu dave  
Akh sun e mai ahnu)

If the world hears the passionate cry of birha (mourning), it will domesticate it into its grammar of meaning, its privileged discourse of realism and rationalism. The poet fears the world would reduce the other to some 'real' (living or dead) person or thing, the mourning to some essential
'lack', the desire to some fixed meaning, the poetic to the commonplace, the singularity of a mourning to the structure of a general loss. Such a reductive reading would befall the song of desire like the curse of 'iterability' to which it, nevertheless, is condemned by the very act of its own verbalization:

(Akh maie addi ratti
Moi mitra de
Ochi ochi na na lave
Matte sade moya picho
Jug ah shrikda ne
Geta nu ve Chandra kave)

However the singular intensity of the desire must run the risk of a song, of an opening into an order of signifiers, into a rhythm which exposes itself to the expectations of the other, "of the opening left to the other's freedom, but also is the sense of overture, advance, or invitation 'made' to someone else. The intervention of the other, whom one should perhaps no longer call simply the 'reader', is an indispensable but always 'improbable' countersignature. It must remain something one cannot anticipate. The chance of the absolute event always has a bottomless fund of initiative which must always return to it."8

"It is the painful bliss in which the other is called which Shiv cries so intensely and tries to articulate in/as a song which can bear witness to

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the singular traumatic event of a blissful agony which threatens to destroy
the song itself unless it is shot through and through by a simultaneous
poetic awareness and thinking of it as a question on which the very urge
for living or dying, the desire, the mourning itself, is staked:

The "painful bliss" of birha can be held only as the song, while the
song can only hold as a poem in its constant friction with what Derrida
calls "an upsetting question" which originally opened it up as a poem: ". . . a
discourse can also be destroyed by the traumatism. When the discourse
holds in some way, it is at once because it has been opened up on the basis
of some traumatizing event, by an upsetting question that doesn't let one
rest, that no longer lets one sleep, and because it nevertheless resists the
destruction begun by this traumatism". 10

The desire must feed on the mourning as it can never find its object
of destination towards which it will, nevertheless remain destined. It must
find its moment of bliss in the full blooming of this mourning itself:
The only bliss that the desire can reach is "this licking of salty dew on the rose of pains" stemming from the essential mourning which comes from the call of the other, who is inaccessible but must be called all the same:

"If there is something that can be called living bliss or life, it can be given only in this form of painful bliss which is that of differential vibration. No self-identity can close on itself...... Effectively, then, I let come across the image of someone who is terrified, fundamentally in pain in his bliss. This "differential vibration" is for me the only possible form of response to desire, the only form of bliss, and which can therefore be only a remote bliss, that is, bliss for two or more, bliss in which the other is called; I cannot imagine a living bliss which is not plural, differential. This is marked in a minimal fashion by the fact that a timbre, a breadth, a syllable is already a differential vibration; …"12

The song in its untranslatable singularity of trauma cannot come to words as a poem, even as what Derrida calls "differential vibration". The timbre, tone and intensity of "the birth to presence" of a crying desire
cannot be rendered into any, even poetic, order of words. The silent story of the pain of a moment desires to speak, but the words drawn to this desire are embarrassed by their own inadequacy to measure up to its demand. The words come from the language, the other's language to which the singular intensity of a song would not be exposed:

(Maye ne
Sun morye maye
Puran appne tid diya pedha
Kikan folo kinjh sunaye
Shbda bajo bul teahie
Mare is nirlekh ktha de
Koi ve shbad ta match na aye
Katha kha ta kahi na jae
Hur ik shabad pya sharmaye)

The song must come to words, that is the only way it can come to 'itself', by differing from 'itself' in the exposure to the other's language, by deferring 'itself' in its inevitable response to the call of the other. It gets its very being, its power, so to speak, in this exposure, in this demonstration as sounds or marks, in what Derrida calls 'writing'. However the very writing that invests the song with the power of being also robs it of its pre-
articulated power by inscribing it within the *iterability* of the trace. "Now what is astonishing is not writing as power but what comes, as if from within a structure, to limit it by a powerless or an effacement." Shiv's poetry derives its unique power from the resistance invested in the intense and singular tone and timbre of the song against "what comes as if from within a structure, to limit it by a powerlessness or an effacement." Its exposure to writing or reading is still marked by an amazing reserve of something given and yet held back, given only as a lure of what is held back.

The song's exposure to writing does not expose its limits which a 'proper' reading must always, yet never can, fully map out. The reading of the song is always already caught in this double bind: it must do what it cannot do, and it must not do (only) what it can do. The reading must transgress itself, must expose and extend its own limits to approach the song. It must, in some way, travel back the distance the song has covered to come to words, the verbal construct that we receive as a poem. This distance constitutes a sign in its own right and reading must open itself up to read this sign to come to terms with it, yet the reading cannot generalize or structure this sign into readability, for this sign would be different for each song's singular traversal of its own singular distance from the words, the poem. Reading must venture anew into the difficulty of each sign's difference, the difference of each sign's difficulty, the sign as the very difference of its difficulty. The song too must resist opening up onto a general path of words, an already given structure, form or content. It must ask the words, the poem, the reading to meet it half-way. It must open up a different pathway into the jungle of language. If it lets itself go via the track beaten by the other poems, readings of other songs, it will lose the very fire, the heat of the blood which circulates in its body as its very life, its unique signature as a song:
हेमे ती भव देखेटे हिव रिहेंग उन्हें भी
तिंग हेंग मुह में हिंगमा।

(As he ghar ohnde jihna wich
Ik ful suha ugya

Te phir ohnde nena de wich

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Ik din kudi ik ugg pye
Jo ohnde nena choo
Ik suraj de waken chari se
Te kise he hor de
Nena chh ja ke dubb gye

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Te phir ohnde kalam wich
Geta de butte ug pye
Jo shuhurta de modya te
Bath ghar ghar puj gye
Ik din ohnda koi geet ik
Raj darbare gya
Oss mulak de badsha ne
Oss nu vah vah keha
Te sarya geeta da mill ke
Punj mohra mull pya

Hun badshah ahh samgda
Ahh geet shai geet hai
Te raj ghar da meet hai
Te punj mohra lane picho
Lahu isda seet hai)

The song will remain the poem only in as much as it is not appropriated by any reading, any appreciation or evaluation. It must remain a step away from every reading, howsoever close or deconstructive. It must always already deconstruct every reading which attempts to deconstruct it. Rather than reconstructing the song from the poem, the
reading must be forced to reconstruct itself from its attempt to approach the song. The poem must feed on this "almost nothing of the unpresentable", this untranslatable event of the song:

(Churi kutta
Te ohh khanda nahi
Ohnu dil da mass khwaya
Ik odari a se mari
Oh mudh vatni nahi aya
Nee mai wari ja!
Maye! ne maye!
Mai ik shkira yar bnaya)

The poem must feed on what is much "greater", not something abstract or metaphysical, rather more concrete in its 'unpresentable' character, something, an event, an experience, from which a poem cannot be abstracted purely in the form of a verbal construct. The poem must feed on the desire which intensely seeks the other in her singular difference without letting itself be wholly appropriated by a sexual union:

| मैं दिन कुंव निंदा |
| मैं दिन कुंव निंदा |
| मैं दिन कुंव निंदा |
| मैं दिन कुंव निंदा |

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(Matho mera bihra wudda
Mai nit kuk reha
Meri choll ik hoka
Ahnde choll attah!
Ball- varsese ishq gwacha
Jankhmi hoo gye shah
Mere hetha vekh lye
Chumna de june hunnda !)

It is only a trace of the other, a memory of the touch, the kiss of the other which contaminates and thus constitutes the 'purity' of birha. Just as there is no self-present purity of birha, it will lose its self-difference, the very possibility of its existence, if it is thoroughly contaminated through consummation:
This is not a 'waiting for Godot' who would 'never' come, who possibly has never been there, who has only been heard 'of', but never heard, who is only a possible promise of the yet-to-come. Here, in Shiv's poetry, the painful waiting for the other retains the memory, "the living bliss", of a touch, a kiss, which, even as a memory is not merely nostalgic, but so powerful that it draws the whole of the 'self', the voice of an 'I' which exists only as a difference from this other who has kissed it, and which intensely desires to lose itself, even its difference, into the impossible re-union with the other. Since the song, the difference of a voice, grows out of this birha this separation, it should not lose its intensity of power by seeking a mere physical union which always allures it because of its inability to have an identity or self-presence against the unbearable
force of its "differential vibration" with/as which the subject finds difficult to remain for long, seeking changing predicates, the enunciations which might give it an illusory status as a 'stable I'. "The light and fire of that memorable kiss of the other outshines million of suns," the glow even of its passionate memory outshines the shadow of Enlightenment cast over 'being', by the black sun of western logocentrism. The subject here does not exist as a cogito or even as merely the Barthesian subject of an enunciation, but gathers up as the force of a response to the call, the memory even of the voice of the other:

(Oh chuman mere haan da
Wich lukh suraj da ta
Jahde sahi chetar khdeda
Mainu oss chuman da chh!
Pardesi chuman maidya)

This touch of the other makes the desire open on to a pain of separation, without which it cannot exist at all, but his intense desire, this बिरहा, does not constitute any deprivation. As Derrida says, "I don't believe desire has an essential relation to lack. I believe desire is affirmation, and consequently, that mourning itself is affirmation as well." What constitutes the desiring 'I' itself as "differential vibration" cannot be appropriated by whatever the desire encounters in its passionate quest for its song of बिरहा:
आनं भीजिए, बि
उठ गए उठे ते वेरा
पर उठ गए ता झूठट घड़ा
ता उठ झूठट घड़ा
ता घड़ बुझ ता घंटू घड़ा
ढेका ती जल्द ते!
मन्दर ती!
मैं चंचे दी हुमसे!

मन्दर ती,
आमी झूठट दे जाक
विद विद वर्णी पद्धति
ते पद्धति छा इतनी पद्धति
वंचे ती भी वर्णी पद्धति
संकाय ता आनो,
झूठट भविष्य
लां निंदा भविष्य ते!
संकाय ती,
मैं चंचे दी हुमसे
ढिब दे झूठट ठेंड ठेंडा
आमी झूंठ झूंघा संकाय ते! ²¹

(Sujan jee,
Asa munya ke
Har shah hunda hai kosa
Pur har shah na chmun banda
Na har chuman hokka
Na har tutt da puttar banda
Resham di tund hoo
Sujan jee
Mai chumbe de khushbo
Sujanjee
Ase chuman de gull
Kit bidh rahi paye ah
Je payeh ta fijroo pehla
Dove he mar jayeah
Samajh na ave
Chuman mahnga
Ja jind mahngi hoo
Samajh jee
Mai chumbe de khushbo
Ik do chuman hor hnda
Assa odh pudh jana ho)

He wishes to be so thoroughly constituted by the "painful bliss" of this birha, this unbearably intense desire of the other, that he cannot bear to live after the loss of the memory of the other's touch. As Derrida says, "Nevertheless, if there were an experience of loss at the heart of all this, the only loss for which I could never be consoled and that brings together all the others, I would call it loss of memory. The suffering at the origin of writing for me is the suffering from the loss of memory, not only forgetting or amnesia, but the effacement of traces." This effacement of the trace of the trace is equivalent to death for the birha desiring T:

(Door tuk meri nazar teri padh nu chumh di rahi
Phir teri padh nu raha di mitti kha gye)

This song constitutes the very 'being' of the poet, the little narrative that he is, but this song, this little narrative, cannot be written in the grand
narrative of the other language, of the language of the other, in the universal grammar of a language, which will be read, and as such fail to be read, by the other's poetics:

Once the poet has tasted this intensely "painful bliss" of the birha, he can neither live with, nor without, it. The song which grows out of this has to be sung, has to be given to the body of sounds/marks. Its "differential vibration" must be translated into a body, it cannot exist without the body of words, the poem. But it must not lose its singular resonance either. Caught into this double bind of a pre-verbalized virtual song which is compelling the poet to articulate it in a way so as not to subject its singularity to the repetition and generalization marking every articulation, the poet can only cry out a death-wish, which is both constitutive of, and constituted by, birha:

বিখ্যাত নীচ্ছনি
বিশ্বে রঘু চাপ্তা
বিখ্যাত নীচ্ছনি
মৈ আমি বল বেঁধে
দেহের শীত মাঝে
বিখ্যাত নীচ্ছনি
বিশ্বে রঘু চাপ্তা!
Ah mera geet
Kise na gana
Ah mera geet
Mai appe ga ke
Phulke he mur jana
Ah mera geet
Kisen a gana

Ah mera geet tarat to maila
Suraj jedh purana
Kot janam to pya asnu
Is da bool hndana
Hor kise di jah na kaye
Ish nu hothi lana
Ahe ta mere nal junamya
Nal bhaishhti jana
Ah mera geet
Mai ape gaa ke
Phulke he mar jana)
This song belongs to an immemorial past whose trace has to be made visible, andible as a poem. As Levinas puts it, "The signifyingness of a trace places us in a "lateral" relationship, unconvertible into rectitude......, answering to an irreversible past. No memory could follow the traces of this past. It is an immemorial past ........ and this also is perhaps eternity, whose signifyingness obstinately throws one back to the past. Eternity is the very irreversibility of time, the source and refuge of the past."26 This song is constituted of/as a birha which is unbearable if it is not continually lent a voice but the poetic voice too gathers up as an 'T, a subject only in its relation to this song which exceeds all its verbal realizations:

(Mai te mere geet ne doha
Jadh phulke mar jana
Bihro de ghar jaye ye sanu
Kabri lachan aana)
This *birha*, this blissful pain can be so unbearable that the body cannot hold it as if 'possessed' by another body, body of a *birha*, of a song which can neither fully come to words nor hold itself without the body of words, a poem. This burden of having to respond continually to the call of the other, to be (at) the receiving end of a pain of neither being with nor without the other, makes the poet seek death, the deliverance from a body which cannot measure up to the 'respons'-ibility of holding an intense desire:
(Maniu wida karo ram
Maniu wida karo
Kosa kunjh shgun pao sanu
Bihra tali dharo
Te mainu wida karo

Ware pirdh mere de sir to
Nane-sra da panne
Ish panne nu jug wundo
Hur ik ashiq tani.
Prabh je jo koi bundh bache
Ohnda ape quth pharo
Te mainu wida karo
Kosa hunjh shgun pao sanu
Birah tali dharo
Te mainu wida karo

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Shiv's death-wish has to be seen in relation to his increasing realization of the failure of the desire to touch its bottom, to measure up to its own immeasurable intensity. This is what Jean-Luc Nancy calls the "immanence without immediacy": "In immediacy, there would be no 'here'; there would be only an indistinct "over there" and, strictly speaking, there would not be. To speak of the thing's immanence without immediacy .... heart of coincidence". The desire has touched its immanence in the painful beating of the heart, but now when there is no longer any possibility of the desire awakening to its own immanence as the mediating other is not available to the seeking of an always already impossible immediacy, the voice without the call of the other for a continuous response can find neither rest nor the 'differential vibration' of its song:
The voice, which can only survive as the coming to 'writing' of the song, the trace of its memory and desire of the other's kiss, cannot find its location without the possibility of its constitutive trace. "What interests me" Derrida says, "is writing in the voice, the voice as differential vibration, that is, as trace." And this necessary death-wish, the death-wish necessary to the possibility of living, is also constitutive of the life-affirming birha, even though it is "as untenable as it is necessary: putting an end to poetry with last words that are still poetry."
References

2. *Ibid*, p. 96
3. *Ibid*, p. 96
6. Shiv Kumar, *op.cit.*, p. 96
7. *Ibid*, p. 97
9. Shiv Kumar, *op.cit.*, p. 96
11. Shiv Kumar, *op.cit.*, p. 96
15. Shiv Kumar, *op.cit.*, pp. 568-87
17. *Ibid*, p. 203
18. *Ibid*
19. *Ibid*
21. Shiv Kumar, *op.cit.*, pp. 266-267
23. Shiv Kumar, *op.cit.*, p. 525

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24. Ibid, p. 276

25. Ibid

26. Emmanuel Levinas, 'Meaning and Sens'e in Lawrence Cahoove (ed.), Modernism to Postmodernism, Blackwell, p. 537

27. Shiv Kumar, op.cit, p. 277

28. Ibid, p. 249


30. Shiv Kumar, op.cit., p. 570

31. Jacques Derrida, op.cit., p.140

32. Jean-Luc Nanncy, op.cit., p. 287