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Harivansh Rai Bachchan is a poet, author and a painter, and a major figure in Indian contemporary literature. He has written over 100 books, including novels, plays, poems, and children's books, and has been honored with many literary awards. His work has been translated into several languages.

His most famous work is "Madhushala," a collection of poems that have been translated into English by Marjorie Boulton and Ram Swaroop Vyas. The book is a collection of poems that explore the theme of love and its various forms, including romantic, spiritual, and platonic love. The poems are written in a lyrical and expressive style, and the language is simple and accessible. The book has been well received by critics and readers alike, and it is considered a classic of Indian literature.

The book is available in both English and Hindi editions, and it is a must-read for anyone interested in Indian literature and culture.

Harivansh Rai Bachchan's work is a reflection of his deep understanding of Indian culture and his love for the language and its literature. His work is a testament to the richness and depth of Indian literature, and it is a valuable addition to any library.

# HARIVANSH RAI BACHCHAN

## Madhushala

### *The House Of Wine*

Translated from the Hindi by Marjorie Boulton &  
Ram Swaroop Vyas

*Introduction by Jagdish Shivpuri*

Madhushala is a collection of poems by the Indian poet Harivansh Rai Bachchan. The book consists of 100 poems, mostly in English, that explore the theme of love and its various forms. The poems are written in a lyrical and expressive style, and the language is simple and accessible. The book has been well received by critics and readers alike, and it is considered a classic of Indian literature.



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To

*A world in which poetry is struggling for existence.*

## *Acknowledgements*

For this faithful and beautiful translation I am indebted to my friends Marjorie Boulton and Ram Swaroop Vyas and for the introduction to Jagdish Shivpuri.

## *Foreword to the First English Edition, 1950*

I am a writer of sorts, and I am a lover of poetry. But I must confess that I have never written a line of verse. Because of this I hesitate always to criticize poetry, as I doubt my own competence to do so. I like it or I dislike it or it leaves me just cold.

When the request came to me to write a foreword to this translation of Shri Bachchan's Hindi poems, I hesitated. This was not in my line at all. Then it struck me that this was something rather unusual—an English translation of modern Hindi poems. Tulsi Das has been translated and perhaps some other of the older Hindi classics, but I am not aware of any attempt to translate modern Hindi poetry. Hindi is obviously coming into its own in India and more and more Hindi literature will grow and will represent the thoughts and urges of the Indian people. It is desirable therefore that people, even outside India, should know something of modern Hindi, and I am glad to commend this translation.

Bachchan is a well-known Hindi poet and I like this *Madhushala* of his. The translation done jointly by Marjorie Boulton and Ram Swaroop Vyas appears to be accurate and good and does somewhat convey the essence of the original. Nothing is more difficult than to translate the poetry of one language into another. Indeed, success comes so seldom that I discourage these attempts. Nevertheless, it is necessary that good poetry in one language should be translated into another and thus other countries and other people might be made to have a glimpse of the spirit of a nation. So I welcome this translation.

New Delhi  
17 April 1949

*Jawaharlal Nehru*

## *Introduction to the First English Edition, 1950*

It would be no exaggeration to say that among the writers of modern Hindi verse, none today occupies a more prominent place than Bachchan. In using the word 'prominent', I am not applying the criterion of popularity only, for undoubtedly Bachchan has had from his audiences and readers an unprecedented measure of public applause. More important is the influence he has exercised in the shaping of modern Hindi poetry in both technique and content. Bachchan has started an entirely new wave in Hindi poetry: he has assessed life from a new angle of vision, and while the sheer lyricism of his verse is enough to ensure him immortality, his technical experiments and innovations show how great a craftsman he is. Bachchan has had the distinction, to an extent unique in India, of being intensely maligned and widely appreciated: while he has won unstinted tributes from the sanest of critics, he has also been condemned as a morbid sentimental singer, lacking stamina and vision.

The English reader studying this translation will inevitably be reminded of Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. This is not a coincidence. When Fitzgerald translated the *Rubaiyat* into English verse, he created a new cult in literary Europe. He introduced to English readers a new mysticism—the Sufistic philosophy of the East—a mysticism which was new in employing the symbols of wine and its associates to express the reaction of a sensitive soul to life—its rich variety, its intoxicating loveliness and also its poignant frustrations. This had been a very ancient tradition in the poetry of Persia, but it was something startlingly new to English readers. What Fitzgerald did for English readers Bachchan did for readers of Hindi poetry. He has introduced this new symbolism into Hindi poetry; but he has imported more than a new symbol; he has created a new vision, an original inspiration and a refreshing variety in the conventions and technique of Hindi poetry.

In April 1935 Bachchan published a translation of the *Rubaiyat*

into Hindi (*Khayyam ki Madhushala*), this being his second published work. This translation is based on Fitzgerald, not the original; but it is surprising how completely the youthful Hindi poet has caught the spirit of the astronomer-poet of Nishapur. It seems that there was a natural affinity between the two poets. But in spite of this very great kinship, the two poets are not entirely alike in temperament nor in their general outlook on life. There is a much more passionate yearning in Bachchan, and there is always a strong personal theme in his poetry; Khayyam's philosophy of life is more detached and impersonal and there is no sense of wistfulness for what has been but never more may be. That is why Khayyam is more sarcastic; he has realized how vain and transient the shows of this world are. One thing alone is certain:

The Moving Finger writes, and, having writ  
Moves on—not all thy Piety or Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

Since time flies, Khayyam counsels a full-blooded enjoyment of life. He accepts life stoically, sometimes with a touch of cynicism, but he never mourns over his lot, for he knows it to be inevitable. In Bachchan we do not find this detachment or stoicism. He feels intensely the beauty of life, and his thirsting soul wishes to drink it all in; but as with Tantalus the waters of life recede and mock him just as his lips are on the point of touching them. Bachchan's temperament is too passionate, too romantic, to allow him to accept the mirage of life coolly. He has the tenderness of a child, and, like a sensitive child disillusioned, he does not find it possible to forget his dreams and accept life as it is. But he has too deep a sympathy in his heart ever to turn cynic; he can mourn almost unendingly, but he can never curse or laugh sarcastically; life, even with its mockeries, is still sacred to him, for it has beauty even though it is short-lived; it has music even though we hear it only for a brief moment, and afterwards live to pine for it.

It will thus be seen that Bachchan is essentially different from Omar Khayyam in temperament as well as outlook; he is a romantic at heart. He has an insatiable desire for beauty and its counterpart love; he pursues this double mirage, and when it eludes his grasp he cries for it like a hurt child. In this respect he

is like Shelley, ever passionate and pursuing yet ever baffled and mourning. Omar Khayyam has the strength and sanity which detachment brings—the classical temperament and outlook. Yet, despite fundamental differences, no poet has influenced Bachchan so much as Khayyam. The astronomer-poet captured Bachchan's imagination and he began seeing life through the symbols and in the patterns depicted by Omar Khayyam. Ever afterwards he has used this symbolism not only as a literary convention but as his very creed; it dissolved so completely in his system that he made it his own, and the wine seemed to flow in his very veins. I am inclined to consider the translation of Omar Khayyam as the chief landmark in the growth of Bachchan's poetic genius. After this the entire current of his poetry became much richer, much fuller and more overwhelming.

I do not wish to imply, however, that the inspiration came only from Omar Khayyam. The greatest and truest inspiration for a poet comes from life. Bachchan has lived his life intensely and it was at the right moment, when the poet had a rich background of emotional experience surging within him, that Omar Khayyam produced a kindred influence which Bachchan assimilated. He has entered the same shrine where the older poet lived and worshipped; the rituals he adopted were the same but the visions before the two votaries were different. It should be hardly necessary for me to remark that wine is only a literary symbol to express the poet's reaction to life; the Indian critics who have accused Bachchan of encouraging vice in the young show a pitiful lack of perception and imagination.

After *Khayyam ki Madhushala*, Bachchan brought out his own *Madhushala*. It was written between 1932 and 1934, the greater portion having been finished by December 1933. In March 1934 the manuscript had reached its present limit of 135 stanzas. It has already run into nearly a dozen editions and is decidedly the most popular of Bachchan's works. His later poems are only amplifications of the moods and ideas already contained in *Madhushala*; they may throw a stronger light on facets of the poet's personality but we discover scarcely anything which was not already present in *Madhushala*. No book of Hindi prose or verse has excited so much comment in modern times. By one group of critics he was hailed as the founder of a new cult and technique in Hindi poetry. He brought to it the leaven of *Halavad* and a number of young poets adopted his symbolism. Yet there

were others who scoffed at him with a sense of moral superiority and condemned him for the sensuous and sentimental spirit of his poetry.

The range of Bachchan's *Madhushala* is as large as life itself. It comprises a variety of moods; wine is a symbol of the fullness and intoxication of life as well as an anodyne to make us forget its pain and frustration. It even symbolizes the final escape from life, the great emancipation of death. And sometimes wine represents to him the Sufistic creed of free-thinking in which all conventions are thrown to the winds and absolute equality and cordiality exists between all sects and creeds. The 'House of Wine' is stocked not with grape juice or with malt liquor, but with feelings, emotions and memories.

First, wine represents the fullness of life, the richness and intensity which are embodied in the fine arts. The poet views the entire panorama of nature and art through this symbol: the warmth of sunshine, the refreshment of rain, the beauty of the star-inlaid sky, the soft caress of the breeze or the appeal of music and painting; these and other aspects of beauty are all mentioned through the symbol of wine, and Bachchan's 'thirst' for 'wine' is the hankering of the soul for beauty:

The Veena-player peddles Wine,  
Offers sweet Wine of melody;  
The Handmaid tunes fill Goblet strings  
And serve the bubbling harmony....

(stanza 41)

The thirst for beauty is not confined to human beings alone; the whole of nature is eagerly waiting to drink it in at every pore, as in stanzas 33 to 36.

No wonder that the poet sees everything coloured with wine in as much as it has a tinge of beauty, and concludes:

I see red inviting Wine  
Whichever way I choose to turn;  
Wherever I may look, I see  
The golden Goblet sway and burn;  
Now if to either side I glance  
I see once more the Handmaid dance  
And every road that I can take  
Will to the House of Wine return.

(stanza 39)

In stanza 45 the poet has employed the imagery of the tavern and of sacrificial wine to sound a patriotic note, but this is not in Bachchan's best style and its introduction lacks spontaneity. There are a few stanzas which have a topical interest only and are definitely didactic; for example, the question of Hindu-Muslim unity is hinted at in stanza 53, the problem of untouchability in 57 and 58 and socialism in 59. Such passages, however, I consider the weakest in the book. They have found a place only because the poet's canvas is wide enough to include the whole of life.

It is very important to remember that there is in Bachchan's heart an intense hankering for beauty and a desire to lose himself in its stream, even if it means annihilation:

Who has not kissed with trembling lips  
The juice of apple-tree and vine,  
Who, drinking, has not felt such joy  
That trembling was its outward sign,  
Who has not drawn the Maiden, blushing,  
Close and then closer still to crushing,  
Wasting his fragile House of Life  
Has never known the House of Wine.

(stanza 18)

Like the 'Paradise Enow' of Omar Khayyam, the tavern is that place where the lovers can sit together for a while; youth and beauty is the wine which love shall drink. But even when intoxicated by love and beauty most completely, the poet cannot forget the limitations of life and the fleeting nature of beauty. His heart has the capacity of the ocean, but alas! beauty is rare and short-lived! It has been said of Housman that he could never see the cherry-tree in blossom without thinking of the time when it would wither. The same could be said of Bachchan, for even in the moment of his highest fulfilment he sees the process of disillusionment gradually setting in:

A single Cup is not a drink,  
A solemn drink, no use at all;  
We weep to have, who fear to lose;  
Useless such drink; unsaked we fall!

(stanza 67)

There is so little opportunity for enjoying beauty in this life. It seems as if beauty were designed only to mock man. Repeatedly the goblet is brought to the parched lips but dashed to the ground before they can touch it:

"Come on!" the Handmaid says, who then  
Withdraws the Cup before I drink.  
(see stanza 93; also see stanzas 91 to 98)

And it is not only that beauty is evanescent, but, more tragically, that 'love's sad satiety' sets in too soon:

How soon the Wine will change its hue!  
How soon the Cup begins to chip!  
Next day, the Wine is not the same  
And faded is the Saki's lip.

(stanza 112)

In utter despair the poet finds refuge in fatalism. He resigns himself to his destiny and accepts longing and frustration as man's normal lot. (See stanzas 97 and 98, especially.)

Bachchan is always yearning for something with painful intensity and when his longings are frustrated he wails most disconsolately. Yet, despite his yearning and plaintiveness, he shows wonderful sanity. He calmly looks to death as the great end, the final goal of everything, even when he is contemplating joy and fulfilment most completely. He never loses sight of death as the highest reality. He even looks to death as the wine which will provide, for all time, an escape from the pain of life:

Dark Wine of Death at last must cloy  
My lips; ah well, I will enjoy;  
Come, pilgrim, relish that last draught  
Which quenches thirst and ends all aching.

(stanza 80)

The poet tries to find solace in fatalism and the contemplation of death as the logical and final end of everything. But again and again the longings of his heart prove too strong to be suppressed by philosophy and he pines for beauty and love. For a moment he again seeks refuge in idealism:

Unsullied Cup, untasted Wine  
Are what arouse the heart's desire;  
When I have found the House of Wine  
Myself, I need no more aspire.  
Love is not having, holding, binding;  
Love is the endless hope of finding,  
That hope which is my quenchless thirst,  
My desolate undying fire.

(stanza 99)

But the truest and most effective refuge from life is art. It is true, as Keats said, that the fancy cannot cheat very well; but for a while at least it does transport the tired and pining soul to a heaven of peace and serenity and forgetfulness. Bachchan thus looks upon wine as a symbol of art, which serves as an anodyne. His House of Wine is built upon the ruin of a life's intense emotions and his wine is spiced with the sting of painful memories:

I, to distil this Wine for you,  
Crushed many cherished hopes of old;  
I calcined many dear desires  
To make the Drinking-Cup of gold;  
The drinkers will be satisfied  
But yet what hope, desire and pride  
Were crumbled in my heart, to make  
The House of Wine, will not be told.

(stanza 133; see also stanzas 14, 74 and 78)

But life goes on, despite individual frustrations and losses. Men come and go but the process of life does not change. The lure of beauty, its cruel mockery and the passionate yearning of the human heart remain the same from age to age (stanza 116). Each one passes through the fire of youth and comes out with singed wings, and the reaction of a person to life is according to his capacity and intensity.

Bachchan has very often used the wine symbol in a Sufistic sense and like the Sufis he ridicules the religiosity of the Pandits and Moulvis. He prefers the tavern to both Mandir and Masjid, because these latter sow dissension and the tavern stands for unity and cordiality (stanza 53). The highest creed consists in the rejection of narrow and petty sectarianism; true religion breeds tolerance and magnanimity:

The temple gongs hung mute and still,  
The image sat, unwreathed with rose,  
And the Muezzin locked the Mosque  
And stayed at home for his repose;  
The royal treasury and towers  
Were robbed and razed by hostile powers;  
The Guests were drinking in the House  
The House of Wine that would not close.

(stanza 20)

There is indeed a touch of sarcasm in the way in which Bachchan refers to the custodians of orthodox religion (e.g. see stanza 48). This is thoroughly in the Sufistic tradition. But this element of satire goes a little further in Bachchan, as in the description of the funeral rites he would choose. There is veiled satire in his reference to the practices of putting *Tulsidal* or *Gangajal* in the mouth of a dying person and the rites of cremation and *Shradh*. All these seem meaningless to a person who has lived intensely; the fittest thing to be poured on his funeral pyre—as it was on Shelley's—is wine, for it represents the sort of life he has lived. Bachchan has given a very vivid and complete picture of the scene in these stanzas; their objective detail is striking and the frank sarcasm of the verses shows that the poet was ridiculing time-worn practices and rituals.

*Madhushala* embodies the entire philosophy of Bachchan: the passionate yearning of the soul for beauty ending only in frustration, the pathetic scarcity and transience of beauty in the world, the agony of disillusionment, the inevitability of death and a stoic acceptance of fatalism as the only armour for the soul—this is in brief the theme of *Madhushala* and this is also the theme of all Bachchan's poetry.

G.P. Johari  
BA, MA, LL.B, B.Litt,

## Introduction

With the passage of time many critical opinions are proved false and pitifully biased. The Georgians are no longer considered weekend poets, nor is Tennyson accepted solely as a poet of sweet music. Besides, the biographies of the poets published during the last three decades have revealed that many poets like Robert Frost conspired with the critical establishment to destroy contemporaries who could have been a threat to their eminence. To the outsider the search for a 'genuine' poet is made more difficult by the eccentric judgements of the pampered geniuses of the establishment. Who would be right in rejecting Shelley and Milton on the basis of the criticism of T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis? Efforts to set the balance right usually become a cry in the wilderness as Geoffrey Thurley's *The Ironic Harvest*.

Keeping all this in mind I would like to introduce a poet to those readers who are unfamiliar with the language in which he writes. Harivansh Rai Bachchan, arguably the most loved poet in Hindi living, has always rebelled against highbrow abstractions. This is perhaps why the critical establishment finds itself challenged in an age in which learned poets write for very learned readers. Bachchan's first book of poems was published more than half a century ago (1929) but overnight he found himself famous, in 1935, when he recited his *Madhushala* to packed halls in various cities.

In the thirties, poetry in Hindi was being reshaped by several forces. The five great poets who ushered in the new era were Prasad, Nirala, Pant, Mahadevi and, of course, Bachchan. Each was as different from the other as Byron was to Keats or Shakespeare was to Ben Jonson or, better still, Dylan Thomas was to T.S. Eliot. Unfortunately, the tyrants of the academic world perpetuated the atrocities of grouping and, as expected, these poets, who all had very different styles, were shown to be parts of a movement; perhaps this was done in order to make it easier to plan University syllabuses!

What set Bachchan apart from the other four was the fact that he was the only one who meandered in the flowering valley of

Persian poetry in search of oriental symbols well-entrenched in the racial unconscious of the people. In this endeavour, he was probably emulating the great poet Amir Khusreau (interestingly Khusreau wrote in Hindi as well as in Persian) who tried to write poetry in the language spoken in the market.

Indeed, Bachchan's family was so deeply immersed in Persian that even their *Ramayan* was preserved in the Persian script, and Hafiz, Jami and Rumi were familiar names to the elders of the house. However, Bachchan spoke with his mother in a dialect of Hindi called Avadhi, the language in which Tulsidas wrote his *Kavitavali* and *Ramayan*. And as part of the Vaishnav tradition Bachchan studied Sanskrit at an early age. There is an obvious humbleness in his poetry imbibed from the Vaishnavi cult and an epigrammatic skill imbibed from the couplet of Persian poetry. *Madhushala* also uses symbols that appear frequently in Persian poetry.

Bachchan's familiarity with Persian is best exemplified by his brilliant translation into Hindi of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. The correctness Bachchan gives to the *Rubaiyat* in his translation is unmatched even by the great poet-scholar Edward Fitzgerald. For instance, Fitzgerald's XLIX quatrain reads:

'Tis all a chequer-board of Nights and Days  
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays:  
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays  
And one by one back in the Closet lays

Bachchan's translation of the *Rubaiyat* reads:

Deeds and Destiny are players of Chess  
Sitting in front of the chessboard of the World,  
The powerless human beings are their chessmen  
Who are placed in different squares  
They move them to support or to kill  
And the game finished they are dropped back in the  
closet of Time

Comparing the two one can see the correctness of Bachchan's imagination even in the translation. Destiny plays in Fitzgerald's translation but with whom? The chequer-board does not convey the game of chess. The word 'Closet' in the last line does not convey at all what the original does.

This is not to find fault with Fitzgerald, but simply to show how Bachchan is never browbeaten in his poetic reflexes, be-

cause his instinct is always infallible. Correctness comes to him more naturally than to any other romantic poet in Hindi.

I call him 'romantic' with reluctance, because he is not a romantic in the popular sense of the term. In one of his famous poems he has put it very succinctly—'There are also people who plant dreams on Reality'. He knows that 'the most fatal adulteration is to mix two lies with one Truth'. His vision of life accepts ever-present polarity and duality and what is life if not a never-ending line of contradictions. One is reminded of the poetic belief of Dylan Thomas that light and darkness are not enemies but neighbours.

Bachchan feels life is a revolving stage in a manner reminiscent of Auden. But finally it is romanticism which would best describe his work, a romanticism which gives birth to tragedy:

The scenery, the beauty, the infinity  
What could it spell but Tragedy!

At this point it would be appropriate to define and trace the evolution of Bachchan's poetic development as distinct from the general influences he was exposed to. It is interesting to note that he feels he would achieve his greatest success when he hears his lyrics being sung by vagrant street-singers. He is temperamentally modern, having been brought up in the city in which Jawaharlal Nehru was born. (Besides being one of the oldest cities in India, Allahabad, at the confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna and the invisible Saraswati also has a University which has produced brilliant nationalist thinkers and quiet unambitious teachers like the eminent scientist Meghnad Saha.) What do I mean when I say Bachchan is modern by temperament? For one thing, in the present context, I believe modernity is a quality that does not change from country to country. In terms of poetry modernity is probably best expressed as a feeling of alienation, a sense of not belonging even in one's own land.

In one way or another this recurs in most examples of modern poetry. Take, for instance, this example from the work of the Welsh poet R.S. Thomas:

This is my grief. That land  
My home, I have never seen  
No traveller tells of it  
However far he has been.

Bachchan echoes this feeling. As he writes in one poem:

If at home you felt a stranger  
How abroad you will feel at home?

As we've seen, upto 1960, Bachchan's poetry was unquestionably indigenous. From 1964 onwards, for about ten years, he came closer to Western poetry. In 1964 he translated sixty-four Russian poems and in 1965 the poems of W.B. Yeats. In 1965 his thesis on Yeats, 'W.B. Yeats and Occultism', worked under the guidance of T.R. Henn, was published (incidentally, he is the first Indian to have received a Ph.D. in English from Cambridge).

*Madhushala* was one of the earlier poems Bachchan wrote. In it we find the acceptance of the earth as sharp as in later poems. Reproach is the rhythm for the music of love and in the orchestra of life it is comparable with the Pakhavaj. Established religion and institutional regulations are snares set by Pandits, Priests and Mullahs. Faith should drive one on an endless journey because it is better to die of quenchless thirst than 'be maddened with a drink so small'. Life is short.

My House of Wine began to close  
As soon as I was drawing near

The quest is beyond attainment—'The House of Wine invites me on, but still retreats'. And still, almost like Shelley's vision of the desire of the moth for the star, we find

Love is not having, holding, binding  
Love is the endless hope of finding

This quest without end, which maddens the poet, almost becomes a religious experience.

And every road that I can take  
Will to the House of Wine return.

Even in the longing is hidden the fear of change—what Virgil called the 'tears' of things. And, as Ghalib said, he knows that only the dark wine of death can end all aching and quench the thirst forever. And when the poet wishes wine to be poured on his funeral pyre, it brings to mind the fact that Shelley's last rites were performed in this manner.

The strength of all Bachchan's poetry, and *Madhushala* is no exception, lies in his acceptance of what Keats called 'Joy as it flies':

Two days have passed, the Saki now  
Pours out the wine with careless hand;  
Weary of me, she drops her arts  
Obeying tamely my command. . . .

There is also in his poetry a Byronic grief which sets it apart from the work of other poets in Hindi:

And man could drink for all his strife  
Perhaps two drops in all his life

Or again:

The Cup, the Wine, torment me still,  
Destiny with remorseless pen  
Has written on my forehead—"Wine  
Shall shun this thirstiest of men".

Despite these aspects to his poetry, he never wanders far from the Hindu devotional spirit. He offers his wine as a libation to the Goddess of Art in the very first quatrain and claims that he has drained his life to arrive at the last destination.

Bachchan is not totally bound to Imagist methods for sometimes his statements become like the soliloquies of Hamlet. Nor is he dependent on visual symbols. His dialectic is that of indecision and he celebrates meditation through the imagination, making cognition subordinate to recognition.

In conclusion, it would perhaps be apposite to say that Bachchan is a meeting point of the various traditions of Asia and, to some extent, Europe. In him we have Sufi symbolism, the Protestant rebellion led by people like Kabir, the mellifluous images of Persian poets, the confident calmness of Hindu devotees and, on occasion, the themes of the great Western poets. And in *Madhushala*, one of the greatest poems written by an Indian poet in recent times, the poet lets us know just how his offering, born of many sources, should be received:

The Cup is measured by your heart;  
The Wine is weak or full of power  
Just as your own emotions make  
It strong or weak and sweet or sour. . . .

Bombay  
18 March, 1989

Jagdish Shivpuri

## *Author's Note*

This revised English translation of my long poem, *Madhushala*, is put forth in the belief that a good poem retains some of its basic qualities even in translation.

My definition of a good poem is that it appears before you like a stranger who impresses you so favourably that you feel like befriending him, and the more you know him the more you like him.

Good wine needs no bush, good poetry needs no explanation. Hence to the poem....

New Delhi  
1 March 1989

**Harivansh Rai Bachchan**

1 Distilled from all my hopes and dreams,  
This Wine is yours, my Dearest Dear;  
To you I proffer now the Cup  
Unsullied, and the liquor clear;  
Before it goes to every nation,  
You, Goddess, taste my first libation;  
My House of Wine shall honour you  
Before the thirsty crowd draws near.

2 Should you be thirsty, I will fire  
The world, distil its sap away,  
Then I will lift the Cup for you  
And like a Handmaid dance and play.  
In lavish showers of tender sweetness  
I drained my life for your completeness:  
Now as an offering at your feet  
This world, your House of Wine, I lay.

3 Beloved, you are Wine to me  
And like an empty Cup I pine,  
But I am filled with you, and thus,  
A drinker, you your lips incline;  
I am your Goblet overbrimming;  
You drink me up with senses swimming;  
We are together mutually  
Yes, each to each a House of Wine.

4 I have pressed the Wine of images  
From my emotions' tender vine,  
The poet is the Handmaid now  
Who offers many a flowing line;  
And in the Cup where millions drink  
The Wine I press can never sink.  
My readers are my thirsty Guests,  
My Book of Verse a House of Wine.

5 Still more sweet Wine from my sweet thoughts  
I daily press as I have pressed,  
With this sweet Wine I fill the Cup,  
That thirsty Cup, my heart's unrest;  
Where my imagination lingers  
It lifts the Cup in magic fingers,  
I drink; and lo! I am myself  
The House, the Handmaid and the Guest.

6 The drinker leaves his home to find  
The House of Wine, but does not know  
The way, and fears achievement must  
Be but for an instructed few;  
And each from whom he asks the way  
Has something new and strange to say;  
In fact, you reach the House of Wine  
By any path you may pursue.

7 Alas! how much of life has gone  
Seeking the House of my intent!  
But as I walk, the guides I meet  
Still speak of distant merriment!  
I scarcely dare pursue my yearning  
But want the courage for returning,  
The House of Wine is still remote  
And leaves me in bewilderment.

8 Go on with endless faith, invoking  
Wine honeyed, potent, sweet and clear;  
Believe that in your hand you grasp  
The glorious Cup, and do not fear;  
Imaginary Wine receiving  
Create the Saki by believing;  
Press on, O wayfarer, and then  
The House of Wine will soon appear.

9 When thirst itself is Wine, and when  
The lips create the Cup they crave,  
When reverie constructs in flesh  
The long-desired Maiden-slave,  
There in the pilgrim heart's desire  
The piercing pang becomes a spire;  
Where is no Handmaid, Wine or Cup,  
The mind sustains an architrave.

**10** Listen! the gurgling in the Cups,  
The sounds of drunken merriment!  
The Saki moves to music, shakes  
Each tinkling golden ornament.  
Now we are near the destination  
And hear the merry conversation;  
Listen! and now we can perceive  
• The House of Wine, the drifting scent.

**12** Studded with gems, the Cup is held  
In red-stained palm; and on her head  
The golden-sunburnt Maiden wears  
A scarf of silk like Wine, deep red;  
The Guests are bright in varied hue  
In purple turbans, gowns of blue;  
Here, rivalling the stormy bow,  
The spectrum of the House is spread.

**14** This Wine resembles fire, and yet  
Do not refer to it as flame  
Nor call the bubbles at the brim  
Blisters of frustrated love and shame:  
Where your dead memories serve and languish  
This Wine will make you drunk with anguish;  
And can a man take pleasure thus,  
My House of Wine is for that same.

**16** Behold, the Wine is blazing now  
Which we, the Guests, have seen in flow;  
The Goblet will not cool your lips  
But burn them with its ardent glow;  
Yet give two drops! for such my yearning  
I care not though my bones are burning!  
The drunkards who must haunt this House  
Are those who were created so.

**18** Who has not kissed with trembling lips  
The juice of apple-tree and vine,  
Who, drinking, has not felt such joy  
That trembling was its outward sign?  
Who has not drawn the Maiden, blushing,  
Close and then closer still to crushing,  
Wasting his fragile House of Life  
Has never known the House of Wine.

**11** When two convivial Goblets kiss  
We hear the chiming Jal-tarang;  
The Girl with tinkling ornaments  
Moving creates a Veena's twang;  
Sometimes the Pakhavaj is heard  
When riot earns reproachful word;  
And thus the Wine can fire our hearts  
Sooner amid the lively clang.

**13** Reluctantly the Cup will come  
Into your hands; and at the brink  
All woman-like, the Wine retreats  
Before the longing lips may drink  
Often before she tilts the vial  
The Saki mocks with soft denial;  
Be not surprised, O traveller,  
When House and Handmaid seem to shrink.

**15** My Goblet is not cool, O Guest,  
Nor is it cooling Wine within;  
Refreshment dwells not here, as in  
The Cups and Wine that worldlings win!  
The Cup, my heart of hot desire!  
My burning words, the Wine of fire!  
And he is welcome to my House  
Who does not fear a scalded skin!

**17** He who has calcined all the creeds  
With fire from his burning breast,  
Who quits the temple, mosque and church  
A drunken heretic, unblest,  
Who sees the snares, and now comes running  
From Pandit's, Priest's and Mullah's cunning,  
He, and he only, shall today  
Be in my House a welcome Guest.

**19** The Saki seems to pray; the Wine  
Seems water drawn at Ganga's brink;  
Like prayers upon a rosary  
I hear the Goblets when they clink;  
This is a mantra we are chanting,  
"Take this!" "take more!"—by which enchanting  
Shiva incarnate moves in me,  
This House his temple where I drink.

**20** The temple gongs hung mute and still,  
The image sat, unwreathed with rose,  
And the Muezzin locked the mosque  
And stayed at home for his repose;  
The royal treasury and towers  
Were robbed and razed by hostile powers;  
The Guests were drinking in the House,  
The House of Wine that would not close.

**22** Death as the Handmaid will remain  
When earth and sky to crumbling quake;  
The springs of feeling fail, but Wine  
And poison flow, our thirst to slake;  
Although there is no festive laughter,  
Unknown the ways of the Hereafter,  
On burning ghats and in my House  
Something will still remain awake.

**24** Who has not tasted Wine at all  
In this my House, will mock. He raves.  
But once he tastes, those lips are locked;  
Rebellious once, he falters, craves  
The Wine and Goblet like the others;  
Rebels and slaves are then as brothers;  
My House has overcome the world  
And all mankind shall be its slaves.

**21** Great houses fail for heirs, until  
None of their name is left to moan;  
Palaces where the Handmaid danced,  
Stand joyless, hollow and alone;  
Kingdoms collapse in anarchy  
And kings may lose their destiny;  
But men will always drink, and thus  
My House is never overthrown.

**23** Because the Goblet moves and leaps  
Like youth, the world is cold with scorn;  
It hates the reckless drunken one,  
Her whom bright paint and gilt adorn;  
No one in harmony has seen them!  
There was no love-match made between them!  
The world grows old, the House of Wine  
Is fresh, eternally reborn.

**25** The Wine-shop welcomes cheerfully;  
The world is chilly outside air;  
And in its fog, Muharram lowers  
While here the fires of Holi flare;  
Wine knows no earthly troubles, given  
Direct, unstained, from highest heaven;  
Plaints of Muharram fill the world  
But Id is celebrated there.