



Ishwar Chander Nanda

Charan Dass Sidhu

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Makers of
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Ishwar Chander Nanda

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Sudhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

Makers of Indian Literature
Ishwar Chander Nanda

Charan Dass Sidhu



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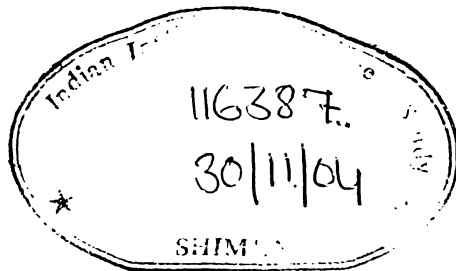
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Preface

This monograph on the life and works of Ishwar Chander Nanda, the first modern playwright of Punjabi, is primarily intended for the general reader who has no direct access to his writings in the original.

Realistic Punjabi theatre highlighting burning social problems starts with I.C. Nanda's one-act play *Dulhan* (*The Bride*) or *Suhag* (*The Wedding*) staged in April, 1914. This pioneering actor, director and playwright continued his theatre work till his death in 1966. By profession a teacher of English, Nanda staged his plays with the help of his students and colleagues in the various colleges of Punjab University.

Nanda's plays continue to be as relevant today as they were when they were first presented. His reformist zeal underlines the miserable plight of the girl child and the crying need for the empowerment of women. Nanda's comic muse targets shamans, godmen and other cheats who dupe the superstitious villagers.

I have enjoyed writing this book. It made me read Nanda's works again with greater attention and appreciation. The strongest point of Nanda's playwriting, apart from the originality of his themes, is his dialogue. His rustic idioms and proverbs, his earthy wit and virile diction remain unmatched by later playwrights. I visited Nanda's native place and was struck by his sensitivity to the music of his mother-tongue. If you spend an hour in any bus going to Gurdaspur countryside and listen to the villagers, you will be delighted to discover the authenticity of his characters.

In order to give the reader a taste of Nanda's mode of expression, I have included significant scenes from his plays. And, wherever possible, I have made Nanda speak for himself.

The translations of his two speeches "How I Became a Theatre-Addict" and "How I Write" will be of special interest to the curious reader.

I am grateful to my daughter Asha Bhagat and my students Rachna Jain and Sarika Salil for several valuable suggestions.

C.D. Sidhu

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The Pioneer Playwright

Ishwar Chander Nanda (1892 - 1966) is the first theatre person who laid firm foundation of realistic drama in Punjabi by writing and staging three full-length and a dozen one-act plays. A playwright, director and actor, Nanda wrote original plays on contemporary social problems. He was inspired by the reform movements of the nineteenth and twentieth century like Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj and those initiated by Gandhiji for the uplift of Indian villages, women and the untouchables.

Taking his cue from the centuries old folk theatre in the villages and his early training as an actor in the romantic tradition of Shakespeare, I.C. Nanda in his very first efforts aligned himself with the realistic prose dramas of Ibsen and Bernard Shaw, Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge. He is the pioneer playwright whose characters speak a simple, racy, idiomatic language actually spoken by the Punjabis in villages and towns. His plays enact the conflict between the old orthodox people who want to stick to outmoded social and religious customs and the educated young men and women who want to discard the rotten repressive rituals and bring in the freedom and creative living of the West. For his materials, Nanda went straight to life and not to literature. He sought fresh stories, themes and characters from the life around him in preference to the imitation of other playwrights, past or present, Indian or foreign.

Life

Ishwar Chander was born on September 30, 1892 at Gandhian - Puniarh, his mother's native village, four miles to the north of Gurdaspur city in Punjab. His father was a saintly retiring soul but his maternal grand-father was a prosperous money-lender. Ishwar got his early education in

the village primary school. More than books perhaps, he learnt to love the theatrical performances by folk-troupes who visited the village regularly on festivals and other celebrations. (See the appendices, "How I Became a Theatre-Addict" and "How I Write").

Nanda's father died when he was barely nine and his mother struggled to bring up her three sons and two daughters with hard labour and pious determination. When plague broke out in the villages, she brought the family to Gurdaspur and Ishwar joined the Government High School. He tried to augment his mother's meagre income as a domestic help by vending sweets and by coaching other children. He proved his mettle by standing first and winning a scholarship in his fourth standard. He developed a special interest in English and soon his mastery of the foreign tongue gave him the opportunity to act in plays. He played Alexander in "Alexander and the Robber" and the Duke in the Court Scene of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

Nanda repeated his feat of winning a scholarship in his matriculation too. His mother moved the family to Lahore where Ishwar joined Dyal Singh College. Lahore at that time was the cultural and educational centre of north-west India and young Nanda was in the forefront of those who imbibed the best available in the university and the metropolis.

I.C. Nanda passed his M.A. (English) standing first class first. He was appointed as a lecturer at Dyal Singh College where he continued his literary and theatrical activities.

The themes in Nanda's plays are his own convictions. His inter-caste marriage to Shiv Chandrika in 1917 set an ideal for young men and women at that time. There was no marriage party, no dowry and no rituals. Shiv Chandrika's father, Chetan Anand, was a Professor of English who came from an orthodox Hindu family, but his liberal views made him embrace Christianity and later Brahmo Samaj. In his old age, he joined the Radha Soami sect, like Nanda himself. The son-in-law seems to have been much influenced by the liberalism of his father-in-law.

For two years (1924-26) Nanda studied at Oxford on a scholarship. He gathered valuable experience of different cultures and artistic activities. On his return, he continued teaching English at various colleges of Punjab -- at Multan, Lyelpur, Rohtak and Lahore. He retired from Government service on 15th August, 1947, migrated from Pakistan to India, and settled at New Delhi. He carried on his vigorous theatrical and literary activities till his death, September 3, 1966.

Drama Before Nanda

A young man growing up around the turn of the century had three kinds of drama available to him - if he were inclined to choose the writing and staging of plays as his life's work: (a) the folk theatre of *Bhands* or *Mirasis* in the countryside; (b) closet dramas adapted or imitated from Sanskrit or European classics; (c) the Parsi or commercial theatre in large towns.

After the Sanskrit plays of Kalidas, Bhavabhuti and Visakhadatta, for a thousand years or more, there was little of literary merit in the name of dramatic writing in Punjabi. But theatre was kept alive by folk artists travelling from village to village. Their repertoire included religious plays as well as love legends. Episodes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, Ram Lila and Krishan Lila, stories of saintly kings and princes (Harish Chandra, Puran Bhagat) were staged at festivals, weddings and other celebrations. In the name of comedy, they had skits called *Naquals* which served as interludes in the tragic love-tales like Heer Ranjha, Laila Majnu, Mirza Sahibaan and Shirin Farhad. I.C.Nanda had ample opportunity to learn the techniques from master performers like Veer Bhan. But this theatre had little novelty in theme or plotting. The same stories went on being enacted from generation to generation with symbolic costumes and properties on make - shift stages.

Under the impact of Western literature, as in other Indian languages, dramas began to be written in Punjabi too. Several plays of Shakespeare were translated -- by Mohan Singh Vaid, Amar Singh, Balwant Singh, Narain

Singh,, Sewa Singh and Jiwan Singh Sewak. And under Shakespeare's influence, plays were written by several well-known writers--Charan Singh, his son Bhai Vir Singh, Gurbax Singh Barrister, Kirpa Sagar, Budh Singh and Brij Lal Shastri. But these are unstageable literary curiosities on mythological or didactic themes. Their language is an odd mixture of Braj, Urdu and stilted Punjabi. I.C.Nanda had little to learn from these imitators of a dead tradition.

The third kind of theatre available at Lahore was the Parsi theatre. It was largely a garbled version of Shakespeare -- romantic tales with songs, dances, gaudy costumes and colourful back-drops. Its language was chaste Urdu and it catered mainly to the educated elite. This commercial extravaganza was far removed from the life of the Punjabis living in villages or towns.

The dismal state of the dramatic arts was commented on by Mrs. Norah Richards in her article in *Modern Review* in February 1912:

India has fallen a sad victim to European influence in the theatre. Unfortunately, it is the very worst tradition of dramatic art that is casting its shadow and glow on the Indian stage. I know little of the Indian stage proper, for every time I enter an Indian theatre, I am treated to a European version of an Indian play, or to an Indianized version of an English one. Even at this seat of learning (Lahore) in the various colleges where students act in Urdu, the plays are invariably translations, or perhaps it would be kinder to say, travesties of Shakespeare.

Luckily for Nanda, there emerged a new kind of theatre -- realistic prose drama presenting contemporary social problems - which was soon to involve him in the path-breaking work of Mrs.Norah Richards and her husband at the University of Lahore.

The Grand-mother of Punjabi Drama brings up Nanda

Mrs. Norah Richards is hailed as the Grand-mother of Punjabi drama. And for our first modern Punjabi playwright she acted as the midwife.

It was a happy coincidence that I.C.Nanda had joined Dyal Singh College and come in contact with Mr.P.E.Richards, the Professor of English. He was a liberal who sympathised with Brahmo Samaj tenets. His wife Norah Richards had a passion for theatre. She had acted in the Shakespearian companies of Ben Greet and F.R.Benson. And she was a great admirer of the founders of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin: W.B.Yeats, Lady Gregory and J.M.Synge. Reaching Lahore, Norah started her theatre work in right earnest. She collected young men from various colleges and staged *A Mid Summer Night's Dream*, a prescribed text. It was enjoyed and admired by the university community and the city intelligentsia. I.C.Nanda worked back-stage and learnt the stage craft. Next year, Mrs.Richards staged *As You Like It*. Nanda played Rosalind and won great applause. It was followed by Lady Gregory's *Spreading the News* in which Nanda acted Jack Smith.

Norah Richard's disgust with the contemporary Indian scripts made her think of another very original idea. She organized a competition in playwriting - plays about Indian people and their problems in their own mother-tongue. In the first year, Nanda was too diffident to participate. But Mrs.Richards encouraged him and, after much sweat and toil, next year he submitted *Dulhan* (The Bride, later *Suhag* or The Wedding). To Nanda's delight, *Dulhan* won the first prize. Its theme, the selling of young girls to old men as brides, won praise from the audience when it was staged on 14, April 1914. Nanda's self-confidence rose sky high. The following year he wrote *Bebe Ram Bhajni*, a comic piece exposing fake Sadhus and priests and it won him the second prize.

Opposition by the Orthodox

The original work done by Mrs. Richards, I.C.Nanda and others aroused the diehard Hindus who severely criticised the ardent young reformers. Two Punjabi plays, Nanda's *Dulhan* and Inder Lal Sahni's *Dine Di Barat*, were condemned in a press controversy started by Professor Diwan Chand of D.A.V.College, Lahore, for showing the seamy side of society:

Sir,

Will anyone take it to be his business to protest against the outrageous character of performances just given in aid of the Society for Promoting Scientific Knowledge building fund? I refer to two Punjabi plays. I blush to think that Hindu composers and actors chose to hold their community to unmerited ridicule in the way they did. Can we say nothing good too about ourselves?..... It should be superfluous to add that I have every sympathy with the object for which funds have been raised. I only plead that Hindus might have been proffered something better than scenes of communal humiliation in return for the money they paid.

In his reply, like an Ibsen or a Bernard Shaw, I.C.Nanda thundered:

Are we to overlook gross social abuses? Are we to blow, as we can, the trumpet of self-praise? No! A thousand times no!

With *Dulhan*, under Mrs. Norah Richard's watchful eyes, Nanda's career as a pioneering dramatist got launched. Within a few years he wrote and published his full-length script *Subhadra* on the grave problem of widow re-marriage. And he continued to produce reformist plays till the end of his days.

Being a government servant, Nanda was never a political activist. But at the Congress Session at Lahore where Jawaharlal Nehru proposed *Pooran Swaraj* or Complete Freedom for India, I.C.Nanda was there to stage his *Subhadra* in order to give a clarion call to thousands that freedom from cruel customs too was the crying need of the nation. Indeed Ishwar Chander Nanda's dramas represent the social, religious and cultural wing of our fight for freedom.

Subhadra

I.C.Nanda wrote only three full-length plays. *Subhadra* (1920) is the first and also the finest. Its subject was a burning social issue, at that time. It was staged time and again before appreciative audiences and it brought Nanda name and fame.

Nanda was still in his M.A. class when he got influenced by social reform movements like the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj. He and his friends in the college were moved by the plight of the women in Indian society. The girl child was treated as little better than goods and chattel. Nanda's very first dramatic effort *Dulhan* (The Bride, 1913) which won him the first prize in the competition organized by Mrs. Norah Richards dealt with the sale of a young girl to a rich old man as a bride. Now for his full-length script Nanda turned to the miserable life of widows in the Hindu society.

Subhadra is based on a real incident, Nanda says, he had a friend in the hostel with whom he used to discuss their strong desire to rid Indian society of oppressive social customs. One such evil custom was the prohibition on young widows to marry again. It was considered a great sin for a girl to think of getting a husband after the death of the first one. As an ironic joke at his own cost, Nanda's hostel-mate fell in love with a beautiful young widow who also had a child. His friend felt challenged to propose marriage to the girl but the elders in both the families would not hear of such a heinous social crime. The girl's brother however agreed to help the lovers. He took them from Lahore to Delhi for a secret marriage ceremony. Nanda was called from Lahore to bear witness to the wedding.

Nanda had now a fresh theme and a core incident for a play but he required years of thinking to weave it into a complicated plot involving real life characters.

Plot

Nanda's three-act master-piece opens with the young widow Subhadra at her in-laws. She is spinning at the wheel in the company of the girls from the neighbourhood. Her mother-in-law Kauri (The Bitter) curses her and thrashes her everyday. Subhadra is singing a touching folk-song in which a sister in agony calls for her brother to come and rescue her from her tormentors. Subhadra's heartless mother-in-law beats her with a stick. When Mukanda Shah, her father-in-law, tries to restrain Kauri, she brushes him aside and continues to beat Subhadra. At this crucial moment, Subhadra's brother Parma Nand enters and sees her suffering for himself. He is angry with Kauri and wants to take his sister with him to their parents' house. The old woman challenges him to find a husband for the accursed widow if he dares defy the social laws:

Parma Nand Subhadra, get up. Let's go. If you stay here, I will never come back. See, how they have behaved with me?

(Subhadra gets ready to leave at once. Mukanda Shah tries to stop Parma Nand but he struggles and gets up)

Mukanda Shah My boy, give up anger. Don't listen to Kauri. She's mad.

Kauri Mad? Not me. He's mad! His sister is mad! His father is mad! His mother is mad!

Parma Nand All right, aunt. All of us may be mad. But you just set us free. As they say, "We leave your drink of butter-milk, you just spare us your dogs".

Kauri Go away! We haven't caught hold of you. Don't keep cawing here. Go and find another husband for her. Then this Queen of Flowers can live in luxury.

Parma Nand Aunt! Aunt, such words do not behove you. All right. If I can help it, I will never let Subhadra become your slave again.

With this Subhadra and her brother walk out of cruel Kauri's house.

In the opening scene of Act II, Subhadra is at her parent's house. She is singing and dancing with her childhood friends. Her mother Premi is full of affection for all the girls. A wandering Palmist walks in. The girls have fun with him. He reads Subhadra's palm and predicts a happy future--though Subhadra has little reason to believe him.

Subhadra's brother Parma Nand enters with his college friend Sundar Lal. He introduces Sunder Lal to Subhadra and to his father Birju Shah and mother Premi.

The family is happy to receive the young and handsome guest who is going to stay with them for a few days. Alone with Sundar Lal, Parma Nand repeats his resolve not to send Subhadra back to her heartless mother-in-law.

In the next scene we get an interesting glimpse of how the marriage of a daughter is a big financial burden on the poor Indian parents. Subhadra's father is a banker and lends money to peasants on exorbitant interest so that they can get their daughters off their hands.

There is a happy change in Subhadra. Encouraged by her brother, she has started reading books. Sunder Lal is struck by the beauty and intelligence of Subhadra. The two friends discuss the cruelty of the Hindu society towards its women:

Parma Nand In our unfortunate country, millions of lives are getting destroyed. Subhadra's is not the only one.

Sundar Lal That's right. The truth is that the miserable plight of the women in our country is not matched by any other country. I think one half of the nation is paralysed.

Parma Nand I suggest that there should be an Association of Young Men whose mission is social reform. It should concentrate on improving the lot of our women. Without this, the progress of the country is not possible.

- Sundar Lal What should we do? There's no moral courage in our people. They indulge in only oral resolutions and schemes. When it comes to action, all leaders fall back.
- Parma Nand I've told you about Subhadra's suffering. Strange are these mothers-in-law! And stranger still these girls! God forbid! I felt so angry when I saw the old woman beating Subhadra, I wanted to strangle the witch there and then.
- Sundar Lal And the poor girl will have to return to that mother-in-law!
- Parma Nand Never! Never! I have sworn an oath on that.
- Sundar Lal All right..... Parma Nand well, forgive me my rudeness I have an idea.
- Parma Nand I've understood your intention, Sundar Lal. I've also thought of this very plan. But your relations?
- Sundar Lal I do not care for them. I am self dependent. I have a step-mother. She hardly ever pays heed to what I do. Even if there are objections, I care a fig.
- Parma Nand Sundar Lal, nothing would make me happier than this. But it is difficult to persuade my father. Well, at least, to her mother-in-law I will not let her go.
- Sundar Lal Do try to persuade your father, Parma Nand. He may agree.
- Parma Nand Now let my father agree or not agree. Let him be angry or pleased. What I have to do for Subhadra, I am determined to do.

Parma Nand soon discovers how difficult it is to prevail upon people to discard customs which have been going on for centuries. While Sundar Lal is visiting a friend in the nearby village, Parma Nand discusses the subject with his reactionary father:

- Parma Nand Father, don't you feel pity for Subhadra? How will she endure a long life full of misery? My heart sinks when I think of her misfortune.
- Birju Shah What can we do? This is the girl's Destiny.
- Parma Nand No, it's not Destiny. You yourself can do everything. Place yourself in her situation. And then feel her anguish. Her only fault is that she went through the wedding ceremony. What had she seen of her in-laws? Here's my considered opinion. Let's find Subhadra another husband and household.
- Birju Shah What??? Another husband and household? Boy, you have lost your senses. Lost your brains. Have you gone mad? You are talking like a lunatic. Is this the education you have received? To hell with the education that makes a man forget his religion and rituals. You have given up all social sense of shame.
- Parma Nand You have got angry so quickly. Just listen to me with patience.
- Birju Shah Enough! Stop talking. I've heard you long enough. Your brain has gone loose. The social respect I had earned over a lifetime, you are going to dump into a well. Throwing dust over my grey hair.
- Parma Nand Father, please calm down. And hear me out.
- Birju Shah No, no! I don't need to talk to you.
- Parma Nand All right, dear father. I may be ignorant, foolish. At least, do explain to me. Where's the evil in it?
- Birju Shah Evil? There's no crime like this. It's a grievous sin.
- Parma Nand What is the crime? Will you please tell me?
- Birju Shah How can there be a second marriage? Is not the marital bond unbreakable according to our sacred scriptures?

- Parma Nand I agree.
- Birju Shah Then?
- Parma Nand Then, tell me, Why do men go in for the second, third, even fourth marriage? The ashes of the first wife scarcely get cold when they drag in the next wife.
- Birju Shah Well, here's more. When a woman chooses one husband, it is a black spot on her to dream of a second husband.
- Parma Nand What I want to ask is this. At the time of the wedding, how many girls know what blasted thing a husband is? Choosing? What kind of choosing is this? Dust and ashes! Whatever noose the parents thrust their necks into, the girls have to agree to. The parents tie them up to whoever they want to. Do you call it choosing a husband?
- Birju Shah Your intelligence has turned into filth. Your education has destroyed all your brains. Can't you see? Parents stand along side the girl when she is performing the wedding rituals.
- Parma Nand Then, father, it's the parents who choose the husband. Not the girl. They cut off her neck, as it were. In my opinion, even if she leaves her husband later, there is no wrong in it.
- Birju Shah May hot ashes burn your brain! You have stained the honour of your elders. In good old days, women used to worship their husbands. They committed *Suttee* at the funeral pyres of their husbands.
- Parma Nand Have you ever seen a man committing *Suttee* with his wife? It is grave injustice. When a male becomes a widower, he may indulge in ten marriages. But when an unfortunate adolescent girl becomes a widow, she must endure a lifelong hell. This is no justice. This is cruelty. That is why our country has

sunk to the depths. The curses of these silent, innocent sufferers have doomed us to destruction.

Birju Shah You have read a few books. You have learnt to wield your tongue. How can I refute you? Watch out! Don't utter such words before me again. *(Turns towards inside)* O Subhadra's mother! Come here! Listen to your elder son. You used to say: "Let's educate him. Send him to college". His education is ruining us all. He will drown his elders as well as the coming generations.

(Premi comes out)

Premi Why? What happened?

Birju Shah Ask this bloody beacon of light. He has sold away all societal norms. Lost all shame and respect.

Premi Tell me, my dear son. What's up? Why is your father so angry with you?

Parma Nand Mother dear, I've uttered no offensive word. Just ask him.

Birju Shah He says -- the sense of shame shuts me up. I cannot tell you.

Premi Even then?

Birju Shah Says we should find another husband for Subhadra !!! That's what he wants.

Premi *(Wringing her hands)* O my darling child, what has hit your head? I thought you were very wise. Into which pit have you thrown your intelligence? Don't ever mention this subject again. Do we high caste Khattris and Brahmins ever succumb to such things? Even the lower castes shy away from widow re-marriage. Where did you learn all this nonsense?

Parma Nand Mother dear, do you ever think of your

Premi My son, society's laws matter a great deal.
 People consume poison over such laws. Take
 care! Don't mouth such things before others.
 I will not be able to show my face to anybody.
 *(Subhadra's father-in-law and mother-in-law
 arrive to take her away)*

Parma Nand repeats his suggestion of Subhadra's second marriage before her father-in-law and mother-in-law. They too are horrified at the mention of such a sinful ceremony. Hypocritical Kauri says she loves Subhadra and will take good care of her. Father-in-law Mukanda Shah too joins his wife in promising to treat Subhadra as their own daughter. Her parents decide to send Subhadra to her dead husband's house again the day after.

But Parma Nand is not hoodwinked by cruel Kauri's promises. He must act quickly to rescue his sister from Kauri's clutches. And he has only one day. He decides to discuss his new plan with his friend Sundar Lal.

This is followed by a colourful and crowded scene at a country fair. Young Punjabi peasants at their joyous best are singing and drinking and laughing and quarrelling. They are struck dumb when a smart young man in khaki walks up to them. They mistake him for the police inspector. But it's only the gentle Sundar Lal. The young peasants have a good laugh and continue their merry-making.

Parma Nand tells Sundar Lal about his fruitless encounter with his parents. Subhadra's in-laws too have arrived to take her away. The two friends must do something immediately to secure Subhadra's future. They decide to get Sundar Lal and Subhadra married secretly by soliciting the help of the temple priest.

In Act III of the play all preparations have been made for Subhadra's departure with her in-laws. They have hired a horse and its owner insists on leaving at once. Birju Shah and Premi ask Subhadra to come out. But Parma Nand says, she will not go. In spite of threats of thrashing for disobedience, the girl herself declares her determination not to go with Kauri and Mukanda Shah. The father beats

Parma Nand. The girl swoons. Then Parma Nand boldly tells them about the secret wedding ceremony with Sunder Lal. The elders have no option but to accept the decision of the young people. The playwright drives home his message through the last words of Mukanda Shah:

The truth is -- the Old Eras are gone. This is the Dawn of a New Age. Haven't you heard? --

O leaf of a peepal tree
 What a racket are you making!
 Old leaves have fallen down
 The season of the new leaves is here!

The new age requires new ideas. We old people cannot match our wits with these young people. Now be wise. And perform her marriage ceremony cheerfully. And send the happy girl to her new home!

Stage History

Subhadra is indeed Nanda's masterpiece. Its serious social concern, robust rustic idiom, flesh and blood characters and authentic Punjabi atmosphere won many admirers for Nanda among his contemporaries. The play was published in 1920 with a generous grant from Sir Jogendra Singh, the then education minister. It was first staged in 1922-23 at Government College, Multan (now in Pakistan) under Nanda's own direction. Later it was staged before huge enthusiastic crowds at conferences and fairs at Panja Sahib, Lahore, Amritsar and other big cities. For the next thirty years, it continued to be a favourite stage script for all the major schools and colleges in Punjab. I.C. Nanda had broken fresh ground and laid firm foundations of modern realistic drama in Punjabi. It is worthwhile to recall the testimony of its first great admirer:

FOREWORD

To the First Edition 1920

by

The Late Sir Jogendra Singh

Art and literature are expression of life we live.
 Kalidas sang in the noontide of India's glory and with

him died the dramatic art. Today we have spurious imitations, plays which are bankrupt of local colour, remote from everyday reality. Most of the works in Urdu, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and Bengali have suffered by following models which are not worth imitating. What we need is careful editing of some of the plays and study of the manners, dresses and scenery of the times which we attempt to reproduce. We are beginning to live again, art and literature are reviving. High aspirations are replacing dead acceptances and the clarion calls to scale the heights which seemed impossible of attainment to men whose days are done, are warming the hearts of the youth of the country. In the spring-tide which must follow the interplay of personalities, the pursuit of high-ideals and the desire to attain full measure of freedom, love and joy which every fresh dawn distributes in the name of the gods, provide ample materials for dramatic expression. Mr. Nanda is the harbinger of a new movement. Under the guidance of Mrs. Norah Richards he has broken a fresh ground. His characters live. We can recognise them in every village home. He has given voice to emotions which so far have only found expression in poignant village songs. He has called men and women to come to the stage and speak out the pain and joy of their hearts. I hope Mr. Nanda will continue his good work and others will follow him. On the stage of life curtain never falls.

Var Ghar or Lily da Viah

After the great success of *Subhadra*, I.C.Nanda decided to write his next full-length play about characters with a different social background. *Subhadra* presents people living in villages while *Var Ghar Ya Lily da Viah* (*Husband and Household* or *Lily's Marriage*, 1929) deals with the Hindu middle class living in cities. Marriage or the choice of a mate is the theme of *Var Ghar* too. The nature of the conflict -- the young generation versus the old generation -- is similar to that in *Subhadra*. Nanda chose this story also because of a real incident. One of his friends was coaching a girl and the two fell in love. Nanda was involved in their efforts to turn their love affair into a marriage. The Jaikishan - Lily love story is based on that incident.

Nanda spent quite a few years in constructing *Var Ghar*. For two years (1924-26) he studied on a scholarship at Oxford. On his return, he worked as a professor of English at Government College, Lahore. All along, he kept thinking about characters, the plot and the theme of this play. In 1929 when he was holidaying with his family on the Dal Lake at Srinagar, Kashmir, *Var Ghar* flowed out easily from his pen.

Plot

Act I of *Var Ghar* or *Lily da Viah*, opens with the young college student Jaikishan tutoring the mischievous boy Madan, the brother of Lily. Madan is in no mood for studies and runs away. Jaikishan asks Buddaan, the go-between, to tell him about the progress of his affair with Lily, the college going daughter of this prosperous Kapoor family. Buddaan tells him that Lily is helpless. She will not be able to marry him. All such decisions in the family are taken by B.D.Kapoor, Lily's father. Her grand-mother Bebe is a loud-mouthed dictatorial woman and she wants Lily to marry the boy she herself has chosen. There's little chance of

Jaikishan, the poor tutor, marrying Lily. Jaikishan however will not give in easily. He sends a letter to Lily through this go-between.

This is followed by a delightful comic scene between Jaikishan and Rai Sahib, Lily's grandfather, on the subject of the choice of a wife. The old man shares witty words of wisdom on the subject of women with the raw young man. Jaikishan is estranged from his parents because they want him to marry an illiterate girl of their choice:

Jaikishan I can get money from my parents only if I obey them. And that I cannot do. They're telling me: "Get married. Take the examination later. Get married first"

Rai Sahib That's fine. What more do you want? Do get married. What's wrong with it ?

Jaikishan How can I marry ? I do not know the kind of girl she is .

Rai Sahib So ? She must be a girl like other girls. What else ?

Jaikishan Sir, if I get tied to an illiterate village girl, she'll become a noose around my neck. I will be able neither to keep her nor to leave her.

Rai Sahib I hear, it is the educated girls who turn out to be troublesome wives.

Jaikishan Rai Sahib, what's the meaning of marriage if you haven't seen the girl ? Just to bind one person to another -- that makes a funny marriage.

Rai Sahib I had seen or searched nothing. My parents ordered me. So I got married. Willy nilly. You can see. We have spent a lifetime together.

Jaikishan Yours is a different case, Rai Sahib. I do not understand. How can an educated husband be happy with an uneducated wife ?

Rai Sahib Education counts little. Look at my wife. She

hasn't passed B.A. Nor for that matter, have I passed my B.A.

Jaikishan Even so, Rai Sahib, there's no joy in such a marriage.

Rai Sahib Joy? Forget joy, young man. Literate or illiterate, there's no difference. "In marriage, the moonshine is only for a few nights. Then there's an eternity of dark nights". In the beginning you do derive some joy. But you get to know the truth soon enough.

Jaikishan In that case, one should not marry at all.

Rai Sahib No, no. I didn't mean that. In your opinion, there's a major difference between an illiterate woman and a learned one. No. There are only two kinds of wives: the Gentle wife and the Quarrelsome wife. God shield us from the Quarrelsome ones ! Educated or uneducated, all such wives deserve to be hanged with the same rope. But the Gentle ladies deserve all praise. Only fortunate men get such wives.

Jaikishan Still, Rai Sahib, one must find out the woman's nature. If one has not seen even her face, how can one know her nature ? Suppose she turns out to be a country bumpkin ? God forbid! This is alarming.

Rai Sahib Your parents must be very unhappy.

Jaikishan I'm very unhappy myself. But what can I do? I tried to explain to them. I will not marry like this. They say: "We have given our word, Now you must marry that girl ".

Rai Sahib So ?

Jaikishan So there's a break. I said a firm "No". Father got very angry and thundered. "We will not pay your expenses. Since you do not respect us, you are no relation of ours". Mother said: "If you do not like the girl, it does not matter.

We do like her. Get married now. Later, you can get a second wife of your own choice. And we will get two dowries”.

Rai Sahib This is an interesting suggestion, Jaikishan. But don't do as your mother bids. A single wife is bad enough. If you get tied to two wives, you are undone !

Bhagatji is an old friend of Rai Sahib. A childless business-man, Bhagatji has a soft corner for Jaikishan whom he has given a part-time job. In a conversation between the two friends, Bhagatji recommends Jaikishan as a bridegroom for Lily. Rai Sahib would be happy with this match but his son B.D. Kapoor will never allow his daughter to marry a 'servant' of the house. B.D. Kapoor is obsessed with the idea of getting an "England Returned" husband for Lily. For this purpose, he publishes an advertisement in the newspaper. But when he reads out the responses of some England-Returned youngmen, Kapoor and his father Rai Sahib are shocked at the absurd conditions laid down by them. One demands excessive dowry. The other wants to spend a few weeks with Lily to find out her nature before he gets engaged to her. B.D. Kapoor seems in despair. His mother Bebe wants her grand-daughter to marry the son of the contractor Saab Dyal and Bhagwati:

B.D. Kapoor Why should I obey you, mother? That son of the contractor is not good enough for our Lily.

Bebe Lily, Lily! You're muttering all the time. What's wrong with that boy? His relations on the mother's side are good. His relations on the father's side are good. A great ancient House. Blue blood. Prosperous family. Many houses and buildings of their own. Do they lack anything? The mother may be too snooty, but the father is begging you all the time. He will do as you tell him to. Then why are you acting insane?

Rai Sahib I ask you: what will you do with the houses and buildings alone?

- B.D. Kapoor Oh, I am bothered! Mother, you don't understand this little fact. They may possess everything. But what is the boy himself? A B.A. fail! Lily will have passed her B.A. exam this year. What kind of a match will that make?
- Bebe There's nothing wrong with this match. Let Lily too fail the B.A. exam. At least the boy is literate. Is he uneducated? He's earning thousands of rupees in the contract business working with his father.
- B.D.Kapoor The truth is, mother, I don't like him.
- Bebe Stop it. If you don't like him, never mind. I do like him.
- B.D. Kapoor Don't rush, mother. Wait for another six months or a year. Let Lily pass her exam. By that time, more young men will have returned from England.
- Bebe *(With violent gestures)* Blast the examination! Into the fire with education! Drown England and the Englanders! Did I give you birth? Or did you give me birth?
- Rai Sahib Well said. Well said. Bravo! You did give him birth.
- B.D. Kapoor I'm in agony. You are only making fun of me.
- Rai Sahib You and your mother, settle it between you. Nobody is listening to me.
- Bebe We've listened to you long enough. Should I let my grand-daughter marry a servant? Use your brains.
- B.D.Kapoor Oh, I'm damned! I'm going. I'm miserable. Oh, I shall go mad. I'm going.
- Bebe Where are you going? Will I let you go? Now you cannot run away. Sit here. And tell me the decision. *(Forces him to sit down)*.

- B.D. Kapoor I told you, mother. Wait for six months more. Lily is still not too old.
- Bebe She has crossed twenty. Are you waiting for her to grow a beard? No one's going to wait for six months or the like. I will not wait for six days. Not six moments. I uttered my "Yes" in the presence of ten ladies. How can I utter a "No" now? Stop the girl's reading and writing. And fix her wedding for the next month.
- B.D. Kapoor Mother, nothing can be done in haste. I will not do anything.
- Bebe You mayn't do anything. I will certainly do something. I won't let worries blight my life day and night. If you reject my proposal, you shall see my dead body. *(Crying)* Show your obstinacy and face the consequences. I will blacken my face and run away. I will jump into the well.
- Rai Sahib Good! The well will wash the blackness off your face.
- Bebe What's that to you? You have given up all sense of shame. Tomorrow, if anything ugly occurs, what will you do? You have kept a big youthful girl at home. On the top of it, you're making funny remarks.
- Rai Sahib Son, don't be stubborn for nothing. Are more young men going to rain down from above in the next months? Quit any further waiting. Your mother is right. Ours is a sinful age. Accept my proposal. At this moment Jaikishan is the best bridegroom.
- Bebe Why should we accept your proposal? I've already given my promise. If you do not obey me, my suicide be upon your head!

The old woman carries the day. Lily is engaged to the son of contractor Saab Dyal and Bhagwati. In order to fulfil

his dream of an England-Returned son-in-law, B.D.Kapoor decides to send the couple to England for their honey-moon.

In Act II, we are shown the house of contractor Saab Dyal and Bhagwati. They are discussing the economic and social advantages of getting their son married to Lily:

Saab Dyal You're talking rot for no reason. What do you know of anything? You have no idea. The girl's grand-father Rai Bahadur has been an Executive Engineer. Through his recommendation, we can get big business contracts. From one such contract we will earn more than your Bhana Mal will give us as a dowry over a lifetime.

Bhagwati Yes. That's true.

Saab Dyal My good woman, there are ways to get and give. You're harping on old ways. Mine is a new method. Consider this . Why do we look for relations? Because there is profit in getting connected to blue blood. That's why I've accepted all their conditions. After the wedding, we will send the boy and the girl to England. They will bear the girl's expenses. We will pay for the boy's passage. It will cost us a few thousand. So what? Let them travel around for a month or two. They don't have to live for years in England.

Bhagwati I say, if they have to send them to England, let them pay the boy's expenses too. People do pay for their sons-in-law. Advocate Harji Mal sent his son-in-law. Remember?

Saab Dyal Harji Mal had only one daughter. Sending the two was no great deal. But we are going to gain far more than that. B.D. Kapoor's intention is to -- rather, I asked him to--let Kundan Lal travel to England and learn the new ways of business. You see, B.D. Kapoor is doing such a flourishing trade in British goods. He's earning profit in thousands.

But this dream of the husband and wife is suddenly shattered. Jaikishan visits them and plays a trick on them--the trick that Lily and Jaikishan have devised together in order to break up this match. Jaikishan tells a lie to Saab Dyal that Lily is in love with some other young man--that she's exchanging love-letters. After receiving this 'confidential' information Saab Dyal and Bhagwati decide to break up their son's betrothal to Lily.

In Act III, we find Lily celebrating her birthday with her college friends. Through the fun and frolic of the girls, Nanda presents the theme of the play from the point of view of the young generation. Lily and Mumtaz are discussing their chances of a love-marriage:

Mumtaz Lily, now tell me everything. I'm dying to know.

Lily My dear, Mumtaz, what should I tell you? It's an awful mess. Father is making preparations for my wedding. I can't decide what to do. I can't think out any suitable plan.

Mumtaz Why don't you tell your mother everything frankly?

Lily Nobody asks mother. Nobody listens to her. Granny is the dictator here. She gets done what she wishes. And another thing. I am ashamed of telling my mother my wishes.

Mumtaz It really is an awkward situation. If you wish, I can gently reveal the truth to her.

Lily No, no, no! Mumtaz, its outcome cannot be good for us. At present, grandfather is on our favour. He's very happy with Jaikishan. But if the truth about our love-affair comes out in the open, even he will get angry. Then we will lose all chances of getting-married.

Mumtaz Don't they accept your grand-father's suggestion?

Lily No. They say, Jaikishan is poor. And his family is ordinary.

- Mumtaz But, Lily, from what you had told me earlier, I conclude, they are right about your Jaikishan.
- Lily Right or not, Mumtaz, neither family nor money is the be-all and end-all of life.
- Mumtaz But parents have to pay attention to such things.
- Lily Mumtaz, I have great faith in Jaikishan. Even if the idea about family or money ever crosses my mind, it vanishes the moment I look at him. What's your impression, Mumtaz? You did see him at the Inter Collegiate debate.
- Mumtaz He's very very handsome.
- Lily And he's so clever too.
- Mumtaz My brother praises him a lot. Says, Jaikishan has written an excellent article in this month's issue of the college magazine. Only if he were not poor!
- Lily He won't remain poor for ever. Mumtaz, I'm telling you the truth. I'm not worried about his poverty. My heart says, everything will be fine. I have mighty faith in Him.
- Mumtaz In that case, Lily, you must be bold and tell your parents.
- Lily Mumtaz, what should we do? Neither I nor he has the courage. It is a delicate matter.
- Mumtaz What a funny situation! Grand-mother wants to have her way and Grand-father his. Mother, father, uncles--all have their own opinions. But the person who is to get married is not consulted at all.
- Lily Oh, it's absurd! What is the use of giving us education, if we have to be treated thus? As if we have no will of our own! Mumtaz, this is awful.

This is followed by Saab Dyal's visit to Rai Sahib. He

returns the tokens of engagement. He cannot accept Lily for a daughter-in-law because she is writing love-letters to a young man. This revelation lets loose hell in the Kapoor family. Father, mother, grand-father and grand-mother pounce upon Lily for being characterless:

Bebe Lily, Lily, Lily! Why was she born? Had she died an infant, we wouldn't have faced this misfortune. Alas! What shall I do?

B.D. Kapoor I'll tell her mother to ask Lily everything.
(He goes inside)

Bebe The truth is -- asking Lily is useless. What have we to ask her? Look for the means of committing suicide now. O God, what will the people say? The old women will gossip. Had I known the girl would grow up into a wicked slut, I would have strangled her to death the moment she was born. God, what should I do now?

Rai Sahib I say, such a lamentation now is of no avail. Think of the next thing we must do.

Bebe Cut the accursed thing into pieces and throw them into the river. What else can you do? Poison her. Let her not live. She has drowned us. O my God, where may I take refuge?
(Enter Lily, her mother and her father)

Mother Tell us, what have you done? Tell us, hussy, tell us. Have you lost all sense of shame? Have you no horror? No fear of parents? Did we educate you for such things?

Bebe *(Beating Lily)* Drop dead, drop dead, drop dead! You girl of the streets, get lost. Sink into the earth right here. Let's not see you alive anymore.

B.D. Kapoor Speak, Lily. What's the problem? Who's that man? What have you done?

Rai Sahib She has chosen the one she could find. I lost

- my head struggling to put some sense into you. All the time you have been singing the praises of an England-Returned son-in-law. Go and bring an England-Returned now.
- Mother You black-faced one, what have you done? Blast your youth! Get lost! Tell us, tell us. Open your mouth. What have you perpetrated? You have brought ignominy to us. Cursed be the moment of your birth.
- Bebe She has nothing to tell. Give her poison. Kill her. Listen to me now. Who knows what crime she may commit tomorrow?
- B.D. Kapoor Speak, Lily. Why don't you speak? Why have you done this? What's the matter?
- Bebe Die! Die! That's the only thing good for you now. You shameless harlot, don't you feel any remorse? Go inside and hang yourself to death! Alas! I don't want to see you walk on the earth.
- Rai Sahib My son, she is blameless. You are the one responsible for these happenings. You have involved us in this disgrace in our old age.
- Bebe This is all your doing. All of this. You have rendered us helpless. O my God!
- B.D. Kapoor I don't know what to do.
- Bebe Do the good by those who gave you birth. Swallow a lump of opium. What else can you do? Tomorrow the whole world will be talking about your immorality. What should I do?
(*Lily goes Inside*)

The Jaikishan - Lily intrigue has the desired effect on the older generation. They want to get rid of Lily at the earliest, even if she has to marry a 'servant' of the family. Jaikishan is 'persuaded' to marry Lily. Bhagatji adopts Jaikishan as his son. All ends happily:

- B.D.Kapoor After the wedding, I want Jaikishan to go to England.

- Bhagatji No, sir. I won't let him go. England spoils young men.
- B.D.Kapoor We'll send Lily too with him.
- Rai Sahib Yes, they can return after touching the walls. At least then they will be called England-Returned.

Stage History

Var Ghar or *Lily's Marriage* was first staged in March 1930 by Punjab University Dramatic Society at the hall of Government College, Lahore. Actors were drawn from the various colleges of Lahore. I.C.Nanda himself directed the play as well as acted Rai Sahib's role. The comedy was a hit from the very first show. It remained a favourite piece for colleges and drama clubs for the next thirty years.

Social Circle

I.C.Nanda took many years to complete his third full-length drama *Social Circle* (so named even in the original Punjabi). Though he had started writing it in the early forties when he was the Principal of Government College, Lyelpur (Pakistan) he could complete the final draft only in 1953 when he had settled at New Delhi after migrating from Pakistan in 1947.

Social Circle is a satirical dig at the urban middle class with its petty ambitions and schemes for social climbing. Aping the ways of the British, some educated friends form a club--seemingly for cultural activities but in reality for fulfilling their selfish, petty goals. Their leader is Professor Vohra. He is elated at the progress of the club and shares his happiness with his wife Kamala:

Vohra You know, I wrote many letters about our Social Circle. Replies to several of them had already reached us. But the reply to one such letter was particularly awaited by me. I've been eagerly, anxiously, waiting for it. Today that letter too has arrived. This reply is from a very big person who can render us great help. His name will be a signal honour for our circle. The Honourable Minister has agreed to become our Patron! Great! Bravo! Now you'll see the progress of our Circle.

Kamala If the Minister gets you a higher post, that will be his real contribution.

Vohra My dear Kamala, you are very innocent. Haste does not achieve anything. What ripens slowly is sweeter. I have high aims and ambitions. But one can't be successful in them so quickly. Step by step, everything will work out. You just wait and watch.

Enjoyment of life and fame will be additional benefits. In three or four years, I will make you travel through Europe or America. Free, absolutely free! No expenses from us. And yet our fun will be greater. What luck! What luck! Professor Vohra, the Leader of the Goodwill Mission! The Leader of the Student Delegation! And more! And more!

Rai Sahib Sarab Dyal, an engineer, is another enthusiastic member of the Social Circle. He is happy at the opportunity it provides for the shy Indian women to mix and mingle with the male members. This education and emancipation of their wives can best be achieved through a variety show in which songs, dances and dramas will be staged. A rich young couple, Mr. and Mrs. Pari, are extremely fond of cultural activities. They own a cinema hall and their connections with the film heroes and heroines will lend glamour to the stage performances of the Social Circle.

But soon the interests of this group come into clash with the insurance work of Mr. and Mrs. Kaicker and their doctor friend. Kaicker is pestering the members day in and day out to buy insurance policies from him. Professor Vohra administers a warning to Kaicker:

Vohra Mr. Kaicker, you never care whether it's the right time or not. You are harping on the same string all the time. This is not proper.

Kaicker But you must understand. I'm acting as their friend for their own benefit.

Vohra "You accept me or not, I am your guest". Why do you force this "benefit" down people's throats?

Kaicker Excuse me. It's my duty to explain to everybody. What's wrong with it?

Vohra Every one is complaining against you. You are bothering them too much.

Kaicker It is I who should be complaining against everyone. Be it the office or the residence, I have to visit each one again and again. My

legs are tired stiff. But no one, for the fear of God, no one buys an insurance policy. They are coining fresh excuses every day. God alone knows what has gone wrong with this world. 'The thief is rebuking the Police Inspector'. Look at me. I'm running about trying to serve them. You are my friend. You should help me. Persuade them to buy policies from me. You can help me to earn a lot of profit. I am counting on you to help me.

Vohra Mr. Kaicker, you aren't ignorant. You've seen the world. How can I load your policies on people's heads? You annoy persistently the guests who come to my house. Every one is sick of you.

Kaicker You must have turned them against me. On their own, they are all the time re-assuring me.

Vohra You are knowingly playing the innocent man. You are misinterpreting the purpose behind the setting up of our Social Circle.

Kaicker The purpose is plain. We should enlarge the circle of our acquaintances. And there's always a motive behind increasing our acquaintances. That motive is personal gain.

Vohra You are mistaken. This Circle has not been set up for any personal gain. It is for cultural progress. For art and culture and entertainment.

Kaicker I've got it! I've got it! Entertainment Circle! *(With ironic laughter)* To refresh your heart! A Circle for flirtation! Very fine! Very fine!

Vohra *(Annoyed at Kaicker's insinuations)* What do you mean?

Kaicker Are you asking me to explain your designs? I know them. You know them. Everybody knows them.

- Vohra Mr.Kaicker, you are going beyond limits. I think some screw in your brain has become loose.
- Kaicker Vohra the Great, your whole machine has become loose.
- Vohra You're not worthy enough to remain a member of our Circle.
- Kaicker The whole Circle knows how worthy you are to remain a member. Ha ha ha ha! The news about you will spread soon enough.
- Vohra You are a dangerous man.
- Kaicker Vohra, you are the most dangerous member of the Social Circle. I will expose you! The world will watch!

Kaicker soon gets about executing his threat. His wife, the doctor and his wife, form a clique to malign and break up the Social Circle and set up a Kirtan club of their own. Mrs. Kaicker visits Mrs. Kamala Vohra and warns her against the love-affair between the professor and the fashionable young Mrs. Pari. Kamala believes the accusations against her husband and Mrs. Pari and threatens to leave the house. The word about the insult to his wife reaches Mr. Pari. He visits Professor Vohra's house where he confronts the villain Mr. Kaicker and gives him a sound thrashing with a stick. The insurance agent's falsehood being thus exposed, Mrs. Vohra decides to stay on with her husband. The threat to the Social Circle is blown off with laughter.

One-Act Plays

Suhag (Dulhan)

Iswar Chander Nanda wrote a dozen one-act plays in addition to the three full-length scripts discussed earlier. His first short play written in 1913 when he was barely twenty-one is the first modern realistic play in Punjabi literature. *Suhag* (The Wedding) earlier called *Dulhan* (The Bride) was written at the behest of Mrs. Norah Richards for her drama competition and won the first prize of one guinea. When staged by college students at Lahore under Norah Richards' direction, the play was a sensational success. With one stroke the young playwright had highlighted a burning social problem through a well-plotted story with a shocking ending. His flesh and blood characters from Punjab villages showed Nanda's keen observation of life around him. And for the first time the Punjabis in Lahore heard their mother-tongue spoken on the stage. It was a miracle of rare device. The vigour, the music and the robust earthy idiom of the peasants caught by Nanda with his pen were a revelation to all Punjabi writers. Rustic Punjabi had won an endearing and enduring respectability. From now on, few intellectuals from the Land of Five Rivers will feel inferior if they wrote their vulgar mother-tongue in preference to English, Urdu or Hindi.

Suhag enacts Nanda's favourite subject -- the plight of the girl child in the heartless Indian society. Hoshier Chand and Kauraan have two daughters. Melo is seventeen and Lajo only seven. The prevailing social custom demands that the elder Melo be married at the earliest. The old women from the village pester Kauraan to find a husband for Melo. Kauraan in her turn is all the time reminding Hoshier Chand to arrange a match for Melo. In his desperation, Hoshier Chand agrees to marry the girl to an old pensioner in a distant village in exchange for a big sum. The marriage

party is about to arrive. The village barber's wife tells Kauraan the truth about the age of the bridegroom. Kauraan is furious and threatens to stop the wedding:

Hoshiar Chand Where's that husband-devouring bitch who has poured nonsense into your ears? Tell me. I will drag her by the hair.

Kauraan I've told you. I will not tie my daughter to an old man. How shall I show my face to people?

Hoshiar Chand Lo! "The she-goat lost her life but those who ate her got no joy". Everyday you were dinning into my ears. I've gone through hell looking for a match. Now that I've found one, you are, on the contrary, criticizing me to no end.

Kauraan I can't bear this insult. How shall we show our face anywhere? Why didn't you tell me the truth in the beginning? I will not accept this match.

Hoshiar Chand All right. If you don't want to accept it, do not accept it. The matter does not depend on you. Should I think of my own advantage or go on trying to persuade you? I knew you would react like this. I've arranged for the solution of this problem before hand. Whether you agree or not, I've already sent the tokens of the ritual. All preparations for the wedding have been made. If men start consulting women, they will never arrive at a decision.

Kauraan Then go and marry away your mother. I'll take Melo to my parents' village tomorrow. And I will never see your face again.

Hoshiar Chand Great! Great! Why tomorrow? Run away today itself. That's better. The wedding-party is just about to reach. The marriage ceremony will be performed right this evening. Go! Go away a hundred times.

- Curse be on those who gave you birth if you stay here after all this. Go! Go! Don't wait to consult an astrologer for the journey.
- Kauraan Alas! I'm struck down by death in life. Cursed be the day I got tied to you! I'll hang myself. My death be on your head. (*Melo enters and hides herself behind the door to listen to them*) Do what you will. It is injustice.
- Hoshiar Chand Look here. You are quarrelling over a trifle. O God, I am cursed to live with a beast.
- Kauraan Oh I see! You are the only clever one here! Who knows where your cleverness is going to land us? You have no fear of public opinion. You have no shame, no propriety. You have no consideration for your own blood.
- Hoshiar Chand Don't you go on spouting nonsense. Listen to me. Listen carefully. Whatever I've done is for our benefit.
- Kauraan Bull shit!
- Hoshiar Chand Have you gone mad? Has your head taken a wrong turn? Listen. By a happy chance, we've two daughters to give away in marriage.
- Kauraan So?
- Hoshiar Chand And there's a whole life to provide for.
- Kauraan So?
- Hoshiar Chand And the usurers are after my throat.
- Kauraan So?
- Hoshiar Chand They will foreclose the mortgage on whatever we possess.
- Kauraan So?
- Hoshiar Chand And you don't have enough even for the evening meal.
- Kauraan So?

- Hoshiar Chand So I thought of a method by which we can kill two birds with one stone.
- Kauraan I don't quite get you.
- Hoshiar Chand That's why I say, you are a fool. Do fools have horns on their heads?
- Kauraan Why are you beating about the bush? Why don't you speak straight off?
- Hoshiar Chand I ask you: how will you arrange for all these expenses?
- Kauraan How do I know?
- Hoshiar Chand Is that why you are making such a noise? Wait. *(Goes inside, brings a bag full of money and flings it at her feet.)* Look! Don't hang yourself. Take this.
- Kauraan *(Gazing at the money bag)* Rupees!
- Hoshiar Chand Yes. Rupees!
- Kauraan From where?
- Hoshiar Chand From Jandpur!
- Kauraan *(Shocked)* From Jandpur?
- Hoshiar Chand *(Picks up the bag)* Hold it. Touch it. Check it.
- Kauraan *(Slowly extends her hand and he puts the bag on her palms)* What? What? So much? *(Sits on the floor. Opens the bag and takes out handfuls of coins)* Aha! Aha!! But...but... what will the people say? What will our relatives say? *(Melo at the door can be seen listening to them)*
- Hoshiar Chand Shoot the relatives dead! Do they provide us food to live on? *(Pointing to money)* Are we going to do anything out of the way? You know, Labhoo Shah brought a wife after paying a hefty sum for her.
- Kauraan *(Shaking her head)* That's right. People do talk. But you said, the wedding is fixed for

this evening. We have made no arrangements.

Hoshiar Chand Don't worry. I've made all preparations through the barber. We are going to start the ceremonies presently. The astrologer-priest says, tonight the stars are auspicious. From tomorrow, the unfavourable period will start. (*Pointing to rupees*) Keep them in safe custody. I'm going to receive the wedding-party. Don't leave the house.

But Hoshiar Chand's design collapses when he fails to find Melo anywhere. The priest is calling again and again. The bride must join the groom for the rituals - otherwise the auspicious hour will slip away. Melo has run away to an aunt in a neighbouring village. Hoshiar Chand is desperate. He has an idea. He picks up the doll--playing seven years old Lajo, puts the bride-scarf on her head and runs out to make her the old man's wife:

Hoshiar Chand (*In a broken voice*) Get along, Sir Priest, get along. We are coming. (*To Kauraan*) Now tell me what to do. How shall we save the situation?

Kauraan O God, why was such a daughter born to us? What should I tell you? I can't think of anything.

Hoshiar Chand Quick! Cover Lajo with the wedding scarf. There's no other way to meet the occasion.

Kauraan (*Shocked, turning away from Hoshiar Chand and holding the scarf tightly*) Oh No! No! No! It is cruelty!

Hoshiar Chand You and your cruelty be damned! (*He puts the scarf on Lajo, who is playing with her dolls and lifts her up to carry her away*)

Kauraan (*Weeping and beating herself with mourning gestures, goes after him*) O heartless man! It's cruelty! Dire cruelty!

Lajo (*Struggling with her arms and legs in order to free herself from her father's clutches.*) My dolls!
I want my dolls! Please let me play with my dolls! (*All go out*)

(Curtain)

Bebe Ram Bhajni

In 1914, I.C.Nanda wrote a short play called *Bebe Ram Bhajni* (God-Loving Old Woman) for Mrs.Norah Richards' playwriting competition and won the second prize. Using the stage as a device for social reform, he chose to make us laugh at some of our superstitions. Bebe Ram Bhajni, the protagonist of this comic piece, is a full time devotee of God and Godmen. She has no children. Her husband is a drunkard and a gambler. So Bebe has no hope of finding happiness in this world. As such, she wants to ensure her eternal happiness in the other world. With little attachment to material things, Bebe Ram Bhajni becomes an easy target for cheats and scoundrels masquerading as sadhus and priests. They fool her into giving them precious gold ornaments, clothes and utensils. With these acts of charity, Bebe believes, she will land up straight in heaven. But she is forced to see the truth behind her supposed pious acts. When her husband gambles away her gold ear-rings to two of his cronies, and beats her for not handing them over to him, she looks closely at the gamblers. One of them is the son of the very priest who has just extracted a lot of things in charity from her. She bursts out:

What dark days! The Evil Age has set in! The father is a priest and the son a gambler! The priest is accepting things in charity and the son is gambling them away. This charity is a cheat, a deception, a hypocrisy! O Rama, where shall I go? Call me now to yourself. Give wisdom to my husband. Help him.

Jinn

Nanda wrote *Jinn* (The Ghosts, 1932) as his contribution to the uplift of our villages - a social movement which was drawing special attention under the influence of Gandhiji.

Some British officers too wanted to spread better ideas about hygiene through educational dramas and lectures. Nanda was invited to contribute to this campaign for enlightenment of the villagers.

The belief in ghosts and goblins is the besetting sin among peasant communities everywhere. In Punjab villages Nanda had seen the disastrous consequences of this superstition, especially for infants and young women. He presents the sad story of Guraan who has just lost her first-born because her ignorant mother-in-law administered a large dose of opium to the infant. Now Guraan is confined to a sick bed and needs immediate medical help in a city hospital. But instead of taking her to a doctor, her parents-in-law invite wizards or magicians. These scoundrels cheat them out of gold and materials as their fees. In the name of exorcising the evil spirits they beat the poor girl black and blue. Fortunately for Guraan, her college-going husband arrives in time and drives the tricksters away. He takes her to the town hospital and saves her life.

Be-Iman

I.C.Nanda once got his car repaired at a workshop. The mechanic demanded a tip or *bakhshish*. Nanda considered it bribe and complained to the manager who dismissed the mechanic for being dishonest. The poor man pursued Nanda to his house and told him of the great misfortune he had brought on his family. Nanda felt guilty. He wrote *Be-Iman* (The Dishonest, 1932) to absolve himself of the guilt. Though Nanda shied away from revolutionary philosophies like Socialism and Marxism he could not remain altogether untouched by them. The following encounter between Basant Ram, the dismissed mechanic, and the rich Car Owner, his wife and the manager of the workshop, could be straight out of a play by Bernard Shaw:

Basant Ram Madam, you are a mother. Please excuse me. My crime is not Dishonesty. It is Poverty. I live in a dark dungeon. After a hard day's labour I manage to earn only bare bread. I cannot dream of tasting milk or butter. Look

at this. (*Shows his shirt*) See my shirt? The under-shirt too is full of filth. The clothes of my wife and children too are in tatters. But God knows I did not resort to dishonesty for these things. But what can I do to keep off disease and hunger? My wife is in bed with fever. My children are crying because of hunger. I had no money for medicine or milk. I asked for a loan from a brother mechanic. He turned out to be broke like me. And then, I thought you are a rich man. You won't mind giving me a rupee or two. I wanted to buy medicine with that money. What's the harm in it? It was a desperate deed by a helpless man. Out of dire necessity, I had to tell a lie and be dishonest. That's all the crime I've committed.

Car Owner's Wife (*To the manager*) Why don't you increase their salaries? What should these poor mechanics do? Should they starve to death?

Car Owner Stop it, I say. Why are you advocating the cause of a dishonest fellow?

Manager These dishonest workers have ruined our reputation.

Basant Ram Excuse me, sir. Our dishonest acts you are quick to notice. Have you ever noticed your own dishonest acts? We know what's going on here all the time. We are not blind. The difference between you and us is that there's no one to question you.

Manager (*Thundering*) Hold your tongue, you Dishonest! Get out from here! Get lost!

Car Owner He has a big mouth, this immoral man. Is he a mechanic or a pest? Why did you give him a job here?

Manager Pity, sir, pity is my undoing. Otherwise, these ungrateful wretches

- Basant Ram Pity? Indeed you've showered pity on me! You've snatched the bread from the mouths of my wailing young ones.
- Car Owner's Mr. Manager, you shouldn't dismiss him.
Wife What shall he do?
- Car Owner You keep quiet, my dear.
- Manager Look at him, madam. He wields a yard long tongue.
- Basant Ram Then cut it into pieces with a pair of scissors. From every pore of my body, I will shout: you are dishonest! You are dishonest! Dishonest! You prepare false bills and cheat everybody around.

On the cue, enters the Inspector from the Insurance Company. He wants the manager to explain why he had submitted inflated bills on behalf of a customer. The comic nemesis for the owner of the car too is as quick:

- Police Inspector Good morning, sir. Today I've been looking for you all over. Thank God, I've found you at last.
- Car Owner Yes, yes! What's the matter? Please let me know. You're gone through trouble because of me.
- Police Inspector Oh, no. It's our daily duty. *(Taking a paper out of his pocket)* Excuse me. Here are the warrants-
- Car Owner *(Out of his wits, cutting in)* Warrants for my arrest?
- Police Inspector No, no. not your arrest. Only for the confiscation of your motor car. *(Whistles and shouts)* Driver! Driver! *(Enter a driver in police uniform)* Go and sit in Rai Sahib's car. Rai Sahib, please give us your car key.
- Car Owner But whatever is the matter? What has transpired? Why are you snatching away my car?

Police Inspector The C.I.D. has received secret information that you've accepted this car as a bribe. Further investigations are going on. For the present, the car will remain in the possession of the Police.

Basant Ram Sir, I've repaired the dipper of that car.

Car Owner Shut up, you Dishonest!

Chor Kaun?

The conflict between the young and the old is presented by Nanda once again in his short play *Chor Kaun* (Who's the Thief? 1932) Rai Sahib Ram Dyal's purse gets stolen. He calls the police. His servants are taken away for questioning. But the police inspector stays on to talk to Rai Sahib about the education of his daughter. Rai Sahib complains about the rebellious ways of the young generation. His son Brij Mohan, for instance, refuses to be a government servant like his father and grandfather. Instead he wants to be a scientist or a film-maker. Nor does he agree to marry the girl chosen by his father in spite of the promise of a big dowry. But the young man seems to have gone away somewhere. The inspector rightly concludes that Brij Mohan is the real thief. Soon they find the evidence too. Brij Mohan has written a letter to his father before leaving the house after stealing the money. He is determined to live his life according to his own wishes without interference from his father.

Maan Da Dipty

Maan Da Dipty (Mother's Deputy Commissioner, 1929) presents the pathetic plight of peasant families who struggle to give modern college education to their sons at a tremendous sacrifice but they fail to find well paid jobs. Wasaawa Singh and his wife scrape every paisa, and borrow from a money-lender at exorbitant interest, in order to send money to their college going son. They live on the hope that one day their son Narain Singh will become a big officer, the Deputy Commissioner of the district. But when Narain Singh gets his B.A. degree, he discovers that unless he

passes his M.A., there is little chance of his getting a good job. His poor parents are unable to support him any further. What is worse -- education has rendered Narain Singh unfit to be even a ploughman like his father.

Eh Doomnay

Nanda was sensitive to the plight of the poorest in Hindu society. *Eh Doomnay* (These Untouchables) enacts an incident in which a thirsty low-caste boy Mangtoo draws water from the well of the high castes. The brahmins and landowners thrash him mercilessly. Mangtoo's mother and other untouchables of the village plead before the high caste to spare the boy. But there is little help for the bleeding boy. Bhagwan Singh, the educated son of the village headman, hints at the changing times but even he preaches lowly submission to the hapless untouchables:

- Headman Mangtoo, why did you touch the well? You invited your death yourself.
- Daula Yes. Do question him.
- Mangtoo Your honour, I was wrong. I was dying of thirst. I didn't commit the crime deliberately.
- Bhagwan Singh Father, it's no grave matter. It's strange. All of you are acting so smart. Don't you travel by train? Where's your sense of pollution then? Use your brains. Recover your wits. Such a tumult over a mere trifle.
- Mother See the injustice? They have injured the boy. Just because he is poor. I will report to the government. We will get justice there.
- Bhagwan Singh Be quiet, old woman. Let me settle it. I'll grant you justice right here. Listen, aged creature. You are a lowborn. You've always lived here. And you'll live here for ever. To turn the rich rulers of the village into your enemies will do you no good.

Hera Feri

The Landlord - Tenant quarrel is the subject-matter of

Hera Feri (Cheating). At a hill-station, the clever Lala Lakhpat Rai hoodwinks Bakhshi Narain Dass into renting his building for running a hotel and restaurant at a much higher rent than it can earn. When Bakhshi Narain Dass fails to make any profit to pay the rent, Lala Lakhpat Rai brings a court decree to auction the furniture and crockery. The court clerk tries to extract his fees from both the parties. Fortunately, there's an old retired judge in the neighbourhood. He discovers the trick each has played upon the other and makes them settle the quarrel amicably. The court clerk wants his "share" anyway.

Maundhari

Maundhari (The Silent One) presents the antics of two police detectives who are pursuing Madan Lal and his friend. After having jointly stolen forty-eight thousand rupees from their office, Madan Lal and his friend have been on the run for four months. The harried Madan Lal comes to take shelter with his aunt and uncle. His aunt is a god-fearing woman who loves to feed sadhus. Two sadhus visit her. One of them is declared to be the silent one. When the aunt asks Madan Lal to seek the blessings of the godmen, the detectives throw away their disguise and arrest the criminal.

Sukhraas

Ram Saran, the fifty years' hero of *Sukhraas* (The play about Happiness) has just discovered the secret of a happy life. He has been a petty government official all his life. His bosses have been ordering him about. His sleeping hours as well as his waking hours have always been commanded by the discipline of his job. Suddenly, he decides to get voluntary retirement and live on his meagre pension. He may have to live on less money but he will be his own boss. His wife and his son are in panic. They want Ram Saran to withdraw his application for early retirement. To lose his salary now will be a disaster for the family.

They call Ram Saran's elder cousin and his wife to dissuade him from this folly. But now Ram Saran will listen to nobody. He sees through the selfish game of his wife and

son. It's they who need his salary, not Ram Saran himself. For his modest needs, pension will suffice. He declares, he'll leave the family and start living in a temple. His wife relents. She says, she'll join him in this renunciation. Having got rid of the job and the household, Ram Saran's way to happiness is clear at last.

Murad

This is the dramatic version of the novel of the same name written by I.C.Nanda. It is a long novel which records the theatre activity in Punjab in the early part of the twentieth century. In this playlet, Nanda enacts the love-affair between Murad and Shamshad, the hero and heroine in Nishtar Sahib's drama company. The two fall in love while playing the roles of traditional lovers, Farhad and Shirin. But before they can marry, they want to know each other's past and family background. This is presented in flashback scenes. Murad is shocked to discover that Shamshad is actually Ayeesha, the village girl his father wanted him to marry. But how did she reach the city to become an actress? Shamshad's earlier love-affair with the village headman's son comes to light. This is more than Murad can digest. Shamshad is abandoned for the second time by a lover. She is heart-broken as Murad leaves her and the company to become a film actor in Bombay.

Other Writings

Ishwar Chander Nanda was a versatile genius. In addition to his singular service to Punjabi drama -- as the writer and director of original plays -- he attempted to enrich his mother-tongue in other ways too. He contributed to Punjabi literature through his adaptations and translations of European classics. By writing original stories and novels and the accounts of his travels, Nanda facilitated the growth of modern Punjabi prose. He was an effective stage poet too and enjoyed participating in public recitations.

Adaptations and Translations

Nanda adapted Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* as *Shamu Shah* and *A Mid Summer Night's Dream* as *Babay Ghaseetay Di Natak Mandli* (*The Drama Troupe of Old Man Ghaseeta*). These are free translations in a Punjabi setting. Their idiomatic village language and the use of our own social customs and ways of life turn these scripts into almost "original" pieces of Punjabi folk drama. They were repeatedly staged by Nanda to the delight of his audiences.

Nanda loved good stories, particularly those with a comic, ironic twist. He translated major portions of *Don Quixote* written by Miguel de Cervantes, the famous Spanish novelist of the sixteenth century, into simple, racy Punjabi prose.

Fiction

As a college student Nanda started experimenting with the writing of stories. His *Tej Kaur* is a short novel about the fortunes of a beautiful and virtuous girl. Tej Kaur is the talented daughter of a gardener who lives near the palace of a king in an Indian state. The garlands made by Tej Kaur catch the fancy of the Queen and her daughter. They befriend the poor girl and invite her to the palace. The jealousy of a maid proves Tej Kaur's undoing. She is accused of stealing a costly diamond necklace and banished from the

state. After undergoing suffering for years, Tej Kaur is discovered to be innocent. She is restored to fortune and good books of the King and Queen. The novella follows the oriental *Qissa* tradition, the traditional story-telling in Persian and Punjabi, rather than the form of the European novel.

Nanda's novel *Murad* is a major achievement. It reads almost like the autobiography of the playwright, actor and director. It is an important document on the theatre of Punjab during the beginning of the twentieth century. Through the growth of a village boy into a star actor soon to join the films, we are given detailed information about how leaders of folk theatre troupes like Veer Bhan have kept rural drama alive over centuries. And then in the city, we meet Nishtar Sahib and his Parsi theatre company and its dwindling fortunes in competition with the new medium of the films. Nanda later produced a dramatic version of the novel where the focus is on the love-affair of Murad and Shamshad, the heroine of Nishtar's company.

Prose

Nanda narrates the events of his journey to England, his stay at Oxford and other towns in his travelogue *Sailani Da Safar Nama* (The Traveller's Tale). The "naive" youngman highlights the differences in the social and cultural life of Europe and India in a simple charming style.

Jind Pyari (Dear Life) is a fascinating and dramatic narration of how Nanda escaped from Lahore in his car and reached his hometown in India during the murderous days of Partition in 1947.

Poetry

Nanda loves Punjabi folk songs. His plays abound in snatches about various aspects of Punjabi life. The singing girls at their spinning wheels, the young-men singing and dancing at the country fairs can be seen in *Subhadra* and other plays. He caught the boisterous spirit of the Punjabis in a fair in his famous poem *Mela Shalamar Da* (The Fair at Shalamar, Lahore).

Appendix I

How I became a Theatre-Addict

Many a time I'm asked--How did you take to theatre? How did you learn to write a play? How did certain characters in your plays strike your mind? Which technique did you employ in creating them? What is the secret of your success in portraying these characters?

No definite answers can be given to such questions. However, if I cast a glance at my life from its beginning till the time I became a playwright, a few facts do emerge about the influences on me at different periods and the circumstances under which I wrote the plays. Further investigation can also reveal how certain characters came into being and how I fashioned them, re-shaped them and strung them into different plots.

I recall a time long long ago. Fifty to fifty-five years ago, when I was a student in the village primary school, there were many fun-loving persons in our village. They were fond of dramas, songs and games. From time to time, theatre groups of Bhands and Mirasis came to the village and entertained the spectators with folk-songs, skits, jokes and comic interludes. Whenever such enactments took place, I ran to join the crowd.

I particularly enjoyed the *Naquals* (Imitations or satiric portraits) by the Bhands because they lampooned real living men and women known to the audience. They made fun of the village money-lender, the revenue officer, the school master or the postman. When they were at their inspired best, they did not spare even the bigwigs. Sometimes they ridiculed even the police inspector and the tehsildar. Often they chose a common everyday happening involving the village headmen, made them the targets of their comic laughter and lashed them right and left. No one took ill of their mockery. Rather, they laughed even more boisterously.

I was very eager to see these performances. It may be safely concluded that these Bhands and Naqal groups aroused my interest in theatre and playwriting.

I was telling you of the fun-loving persons in our village. They made arrangements for their entertainment on every occasion. Near Holi, the festival of colours, they would gather together and organize a song and dance programme. They also prepared pageants of various kinds, took them through the streets and then assembled them in the village square. At night they would present a short play. This play was usually a traditional tale like Roop Basant or Mirza Sahibaaan. I distinctly remember that the story of Roop Basant was very popular. Jhandoo the labourer was our star actor. In the silence of the night, his loud and long drawn out singing was heard far away. One of his verses echoes in my ears till today:

O you beautiful white sheet!

Speak to me, you washed one!

Sewn together by fish-like thread joints!

From today's standards, these village games cannot be called dramas. Nor can the simple "acting" of these innocent ignorant country folk be called real acting. But this much one can assert confidently that their simplistic enactments possessed the essence of theatre. Their audience went back totally satisfied.

At this date, it is difficult for me to recollect all the sweet memories of my lost childhood. But of this I am sure that I got addicted to these dramatic performances and used to wait for them eagerly.

I remember another happening of those days which sharpened my enjoyment of theatre. This was the visit of a Raas drama troupe. The Raas performers used to come to our village every three or four months. People arranged for their shows over many days. There were many such Raas groups. Veer Bhan's troupe was very famous. His arrival created a sensation in the entire village. The neighbouring villages too were drawn to his shows. I never missed a Raas performance, especially one by Veer Bhan's artistes. This

Raas show had two parts. The first part was always the scenes with Krishna and his milk-maids. The second half presented the story of King Bhoja, Nala-Damyanti, King Harish Chandra and the like. The legend of the truth-loving King Harish Chandra was very enjoyable. It was enacted over and over again. Veer Bhan who was the proprietor of his company, acted the part of Harish Chandra himself. He was a veteran actor and would make his role come alive. I studied his acting closely. He was such a refined performer and lived his part so superbly that if today I hear of his show, I must go to see him act. Little wonder that my own longing to act was aroused after watching Veer Bhan on the stage.

Now you can see for yourself how the mind and heart of a boy of eight or ten could be influenced by the atmosphere in the village, by the performances of the folk artistes and by the pageants, mimicries and Raaslila during Holi and other festivals. If nature has blessed such a boy with the dramatic instinct, it is obvious that he would watch plays, act in plays and write plays. I'm sure the interest that I developed in drama as an adult had its origin in my childhood. Later when I got the opportunity, this interest in theatre grew stronger.

When plague broke out in our villages, my family shifted to the town of Gurdaspur. I joined the fourth standard of the Government High school. I was in the seventh or eighth class, when the Director of Education visited our school for inspection and prize distribution. On this occasion a short play in English, "Alexander and the Robber," was presented. It was a simple conversation. There was hardly any scope for acting. I spoke Alexander's lines with speed and gusto. The audience were delighted. When I grew to the tenth standard, our school presented the Court scene of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. I acted the Duke's part. Since then I've found great joy in acting on the stage and I've been looking for acting opportunities.

After passing my matriculation examination in 1911, I joined Dyal Singh College, Lahore. Here I was lucky to have chances which strengthened my interest in drama.

Mr. P.E. Richards was our senior professor of English. His wife Mrs. Norah Richards was a great lady. She had gathered a lot of theatre experience before she arrived in India. Her desire to present plays was at its height. She started directing plays for the college. At that time Shakespeare's *As You Like It* was prescribed as a text for B.A. classes. She arranged to stage this play. This production created a sensation in the Lahore Colleges. I played the heroine Rosalind. In those days girls did not go to the stage and the boys had to act the female roles too.

After this, Mrs. Norah Richards made us put up a new kind of play. This was *Spreading the News* by the famous Irish playwright Lady Gregory. It presents contemporary life of the Irish country folk. Its characters are living men and women of today. I acted in this play too. From this one-act play I learnt that dramas based on today's life can be very enjoyable and effective.

That very year, Mrs. Richards struck upon a new idea. She decided to invite college students to write one-act plays in their mother tongue on contemporary Indian life. For this she announced a competition in playwriting. She explained the significant points in the structure of a one-act play and also published them in the college magazine. In the first year, "Karamat" by Shanti Sarup Bhatnagar (Later Dr.S.S.Bhatnagar, the scientist) won the first prize. When it was staged a few years later, it was liked by the audience.

Mrs. Norah Richards organized the competition next year also. Although by now my interest in theatre had grown enormously, I had as yet not thought of writing plays. One day Mrs. Richards said to me: "Why don't you too write a play for the competition?" From this I concluded that in her opinion I could write a play! She was happy with my acting. May be she had discovered some dramatic instinct in me. Well, I started thinking about writing a play. But as I kept on thinking, my heart began to sink. No story or plot would take shape in my mind. The weaving of a plot seemed so complicated that, after exercising my brains, I decided to give up the attempt.

However, my desire to write was so keen that it wouldn't let me accept defeat. I had heard about a rich and respectable old man marrying a young girl. I had also heard quite a few times about some greedy parents in our Punjab selling their daughters as brides to old men. So I hit upon something to think about. But the theme alone does not make a play. The difficult steps of devising a plot still daunted me. And also there were the characters, their shapes, their way of speaking, and the background of the story. All these needed to be knit together so as to paint a true picture of real life. What I wanted to create was not taking a form. No climaxed ending to the story would come to my mind. It's useless to start writing a play until you've discovered an ending which would produce the desired effect on the audience. I continued to visualize the presentation of the play on the stage. Then suddenly, like lightning, the correct ending of the plot flashed across my mind. Now I must attempt to tell this story according to the structure of a one-act play, with appropriate conflict and satirical effect. However I could manage, I wrote the play and submitted it for the competition.

Mrs. Norah Richards used to judge the plays herself. She listened to the English rendering of the play from each writer. Then she wrote it in good idiomatic English and gave her decision. She listened to my word-for-word translation and that year awarded the first prize to my play. She praised my dramatic perception. I was thrilled at my success. That's how the firm foundation of my playwriting was laid. I also learnt that playwriting demands enormous hard work. This one-act play was published as *Suhag* (The Bride) in my collection named *Lishkare* (Reflections).

(A Radio Talk)

Appendix II

How I Write

(In the series of seminars organized by Punjabi Sahit Academy, Ludhiana, Professor I.C.Nanda delivered a lecture at S.G.T.B. Khalsa College, Delhi. He spoke on his writing process. Only a brief report of this lecture has been preserved. It was written by Dr. S.S. Uppal).

Many years ago when I was a professor of English at Government College, Lyelpur (now in Pakistan) I wrote a play called "Hanera" (Darkness) in order to welcome the Director of Public Instruction. I intended to write two more Acts of this play but somehow that could not be done. Now I've again presented that one-act play under the title *Jinn* (The Ghosts). After seeing this play, a student of mine asked me: "You are a professor of English. How can you write a play in Punjabi?" Another student said, "You don't write yourself. You get it written by others and then stage it under your own name". The third observed: "You must be a regular traveller in the third-class ladies compartment of the railways. You note down the conversation of the women and turn it into a drama". I do travel by the third class but I'm scared of the ladies compartment. Yes, once a woman sitting in the men's compartment (and she was not old) did say to me, "My lad, come and sit by me". And that I remember to this day!

The major source of my ability to present rustic Punjabi in my plays is the fact that I am a villager by birth and upbringing. And I have enjoyed every moment of my life in the countryside. My pen often refuses to move - but once it starts, it's difficult to stop it. Still, a play cannot be built with words alone. It needs many other things. Language of course is its essential element. I start writing only when my characters start speaking from within me. Many a time I've torn away pages after pages of my writing. I threw away the first sixteen pages of *Var Ghar* or *Lily's Marriage*. Here's

what happened. In 1928, we were boating in the Dal lake at Srinagar. My character Bhagatji spoke up and I wrote down his words then and there. That was it! I kept on noting down his conversation deep into the night. Then for a week I went on writing from morning to evening. Thus my *Var Ghar* or *Lily's Marriage* got completed.

A playwright gets influenced by his surroundings. A play is founded on some event from real life. As a child I was extremely fond of watching *Raas* folk dramas in our village. I had a strong desire to join the *Raas* troupe of Veer Bhan.

Before writing plays, I began to act in plays. And that too in English plays. In our school at Gurdaspur, Bawa Harkishan Singh and I presented "Alexander and the Robber". Later I took part in *The Merchant of Venice*.

I became a dramatist only after I got introduced to Professor Richards and Mrs. Norah Richards at Dyal Singh College, Lahore. They were very fond of staging plays. They produced English dramas in which I also got roles. I acted Jack Smith in Lady Gregory's *Spreading the News*. In *As You Like It*, I acted Rosalind. Along with this, Mr. and Mrs. Richards started a playwriting competition in Indian languages. Encouraged by her, I wrote a one-act play called *Dulhan* (The Bride). This won me the first prize which added to my self-confidence. Next year, *Bebe Ram Bhajni* got only the second prize and that broke my heart. I tore it away. Later I got the English translation from Mrs. Norah Richards and wrote *Bebe Ram Bhajni* again.

A dramatist has to face many problems during the writing of a script. First, you hit upon an idea (theme). Then it should develop into a story (plot). The proper characters *should be* the next choice. In sum, a play gets written only *when all its joints are in good shape*.

Next I wrote the full-length play *Subhadra*. Its opening scene wrote itself with speed but then it got stuck. A year later I wrote its other scenes. Professor Puran Singh who was at that time at Dehradun listened to *Subhadra* and encouraged me generously.

My plays are reflections of life. I give dramatic shape to a real life incident after adding a bit of my own.

In some ways, my dramas are part of my autobiography. I portrayed Sundar Lal in *Subhadra* after a friend. Two families were enemies but the boy from one family fell in love with the girl from the other. I was called through a telegram to witness their secret marriage ceremony. The boy, the girl and her brother had agreed to this love-marriage. I had a ready made plot for my play.

Then I wrote *Var Ghar* or *Lily's Marriage* about life in the city. I take a long time to complete a play. In real life I had played the part of the youngman Jaikishan in this drama. The younger brother of the youngman in *Subhadra* fell in love. And I got the plot for *Var Ghar*. I had known in real life Rai Sahib and Bhagatji, the other major characters of the play. The people in my dramas are as intimate with me as my friends in flesh and blood. I believe it's only through this technique that plays come alive.

My play *Social Circle* got its origin and shape during my stay at Lyelpur. A friend said to me: "Our wives lag behind. We should do something to bring them forward". And *Social Circle* was born!

Although I've borrowed the plot of my *Shamu Shah* from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, I've given it such a Punjabi colouring that it appears to be an original play.

The incident in *Be Iman* (The Dishonest) had happened to me. I complained against a mechanic and he lost his job. To wash off my guilt, I wrote this play.

The incident in *Chor Kaun?* (Who's the Thief?) was narrated to me by a Rai Sahib about his own son. At first I wrote this piece in Urdu and read it out to my friends near the Qutab Minar.

To sum up -- I gather the material for my dramas from life itself. Anyone who possesses the experience of life, imaginative power and the knowledge of the stage techniques can achieve success as a playwright. After collecting the matter, I write in solitude. And while reading aloud the play to my friends, I act out the various roles and make them laugh a lot.

Appendix III

Main Events in I.C. Nanda's Life

- 1892 Birth, 30 September, at village Gandhian Puniarh near Gurdaspur.
- 1901 Father Bhag Mal dies.
- 1904 Family moves to Gurdaspur town.
- 1907 Acted Alexander in "Alexander and the Robber".
- 1909 Stands first in eighth class and wins a scholarship.
- 1910 Plays Duke in the Court scene of *The Merchant of Venice*.
- 1911 Wins scholarship in matriculation. Joins Dyal Singh College, Lahore, and Mrs. Norah Richard's drama group.
- 1912 Plays Rosalind in *As You Like It* and Jack Smith in *Spreading the News*.
- 1913 Wins first prize for *Dulhan* in Norah Richard's playwriting competition.
- 1914 *Dulhan* staged, assists in direction. *Bebe Ram Bhajni* wins second prize.
- 1915 Acts Antony in *Julius Caesar*. First class first in B.A. (Honours).
- 1917 First in M.A. English. Joins Dyal Singh College as a lecturer. Marries Shiv Chandrika, 25 December.
- 1920 Completes *Subhadra*.
- 1922 Stages *Subhadra* at Multan.
- 1924-26 Studies at Oxford.
- 1927 Stages *Subhadra* at Punja Sahib on Baisakhi.
- 1928 Writes *Shamu Shah* and *Tej Kaur* (novel).
- 1929 Writes *Var Ghar*, *Eh Doomnay*, *Maan Da Dipty*, *Babay Ghaseetay Di Naat Mandli*. Stages *Subhadra* at the Congress Session, Lahore.

- 1930 *Var Ghar* staged by Punjab University Drama Club; Nanda acts Rai Sahib
- 1932 Writes *Jinn*
- 1933 Stages *Jinn* at Government College, Lyelpur. Plays Chetu Chela
- 1937 Principal of Government College, Rohtak
- 1943 *Murad* (novel) published
- 1947 Retires from Government College, Lahore, 15 August. Migrates to India in September
- 1950 Writes *Chor Kaun?*
- 1951 *Jhalkare* (one-act plays) published
- 1953 *Lishkare* (one-act plays plus *Social Circle*) published
- 1956 Writes *Maundhari*
- 1964 Writes the dramatic version of *Murad*
- 1965 Writes *Sukhraas*
- 1966 *Chamkare* (one-act plays) sent to press.
- 1966 3rd September, passed away.

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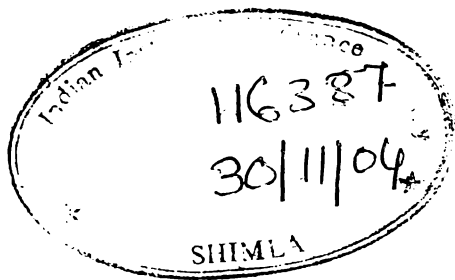
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Ishwar Chander Nanda (1892-1966) is the first theatre person who laid firm foundations of realistic drama in Punjabi by writing and staging three full-length and a dozen one-act plays. A playwright, director and actor--Nanda wrote original plays on contemporary social problems. He is the pioneer playwright whose characters speak a simple, racy, idiomatic language actually spoken by the Punjabis in villages and towns. His plays enact the conflict between the old orthodox people who want to stick to outmoded social and religious customs and the educated young men and women who want to discard the rotten repressive rituals. Nanda sought fresh stories, themes and characters from the life around him in preference to the imitation of other playwrights, Indian or foreign.

Charan Dass Sidhu (b.1938) specialized in theatre as a Fulbright scholar at Madison, Wisconsin. He has written and staged thirty-three full-length original plays in Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu. His theatre work has won him several prizes, awards and honours. He has been teaching English at University of Delhi since 1960.

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