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A Cultural Response To Colonial Rule

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BRITISH rule in India was extended to the Punjab finally in 1849. The ruling class of the erstwhile kingdom of Lahore was replaced by a bureaucracy. At its middle rungs, a small number of 'families of note' were associated with the new administration. A much larger number, however, were inducted from the newly emerging middle classes, both at the lower and middle echelons of administration. Many of them had been brought from Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, to be gradually replaced by the Punjabis. Persian was replaced by Urdu as the language of administration.

A new type of education, with a strong dose of modern science, English literature and social sciences was introduced by the new rulers. An attempt to indigenize the system of education failed partly because of opposition from the Punjabis who took to 'western' education rather avidly. The legacy of this unsuccessful attempt was embodied in the Oriental College at Lahore which continued to perform a circumscribed role in the British Punjab.

In the sphere of religion the public postures of state neutrality were compromised by the private encouragement given by the British administrators to Christian missions in the province. Their missionary activity provoked the Punjabi communities to rise in defence of their respective faiths. The economic policies of the new rulers promoted the production of food and raw materials, and resulted in decline of handicraft production. A wide network of communications and transportation brought the Punjabis more close to one another and to the rest of the subcontinent than ever before, promoting greater interaction and opening the door wider to outside influences.

Under colonial rule, the population of the Punjab began to grow rather slowly in the late 19th century but rapidly by the 1920s. The decline of some old towns was compensated by the rise of the new, particularly in the newly colonized areas of the lower Bari and the

lower Rachna Doāb. The size as well as the number of towns and cities began to increase before the end of the 19th century. The city population of the Punjab increased appreciably in the early 20th century. Lahore became the largest city of the region once again, followed closely by Amritsar, as a centre of commerce, industry and culture. The religious composition of the population did not undergo any substantial change, though missionary activity became keen, or even volatile, before the close of the 19th century. At any rate, the people of the Punjab were becoming more and more conscious of numbers as the census reports started coming out decennially from 1881. The number of educated persons increased and, probably, also their proportion in the total population. Western education provided the lever to social mobility for many, adding to the increasing number of the professional middle class. Commercialization of agriculture, coupled with well defined rights of property in land, resulted in considerable differentiation among the land-holding and cultivating classes, besides throwing up the money-lender as an important element in the political economy of the province.

The process of social change threw up 'marginal men', occupying the social frontiers between the forces of modernization and tradition and showing various responses to the situation created by colonial rule. Some 'outside' influences had a close bearing on socio-religious reform. The early carriers of these influences were Christian missionaries and members of the Brahmo Samaj, followed by the protagonists of the Arya Samaj and the movement initiated by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. There were some other movements, indigenous to the Punjab. Two of these had originated in the pre-colonial context, namely the Nirankārī and the Nāmdhārī movements, and responded to colonial rule in different ways. More important than both of these was the Singh Sabha Movement with a broader ideological and social base. It was spearheaded by the new middle class among the Sikhs. Another indigenous movement, known as the Ahmadiya, did not gain much influence, probably because it bordered on heterodoxy from the view-point of the majority of Muslims in the Punjab. Common to all movements of socio-religious reform was a keen concern for conversion, though the zeal varied from movement to movement and from leader to leader. Journalistic and literary effervescence in the late 19th century was largely informed by the concern for reform. To this was added a certain degree of political awareness in the early decades of the 20th century.

As important as the political, social or religious response to the situation of colonial rule in the Punjab during the late 19th and early 20th century was the cultural response which expressed itself in literary resurgence and the emergence of new literary forms. The emergence of new literary genres is always a pointer to social transformation. The emergence of Punjabi drama as a literary form in the early 20th century is a pointer to the nature of social change that was coming about in the Punjab. An understanding of that social change enables us to appreciate the significance of Punjabi drama. Conversely, an examination of the Punjabi drama can enable us to understand the social situation that produced it. In the context of this dialectic, we propose to analyse the Punjabi drama of the first two decades of the 20th century.

II

The relevance of outside influences for the emergence of Punjabi drama is evident from the late 19th-century background. Literary influences began to percolate to the Punjab much before the Punjabi writers felt any urge to write plays in Punjabi, or to translate English or Sanskrit plays into Punjabi. A Bengali version of the *Shakuntala*, according to J.C. Oman, was performed in Simla as early as 1857. In 1881, an original play in Bengali was performed at Lahore by the National Theatre. In fact it had been presented at an earlier occasion also. Though apparently on Akbar, the king of kings who held an absolute sway over a vast empire, the play brought Rana Pratap into high relief. If the scene of Akbar's death was 'awfully grand', the dying speech of Rana Pratap was expected to move the audience to tears. The role of a 'national character' was played by Grish Chunder Ghosh, the director and the writer of the play, who was also the manager of the National Theatre. The stage was marked by scenic grandeur. The music was a harmonious blend of love and religious sentiment. Another play, a melodrama, by the National Theatre was presented on the day following. This too had been presented earlier and had been well received.

There were other Theatres and Companies which visited the Punjab for presenting plays in Urdu. Two such performances were witnessed by J.C. Oman. One was on Alladin and his 'wonderful lamp', performed in a temporarily erected theatre near the Mayo Hospital in Lahore, in fact a huge shed dimly lighted with only six lamps. But the stage

was better lit with foot-lights. A number of trap-doors and lifts were provided after 'the European model'. In the troupe there were ten Parsi men. There was also one European woman, which was rather exceptional; the actors, generally, were all male. The audience consisted of all ranks of Indians, except members of the highest class, and a small number of Europeans and Eurasians of the lower classes. No Indian woman was present in the audience. Dialogue in prose was rather scanty; the play was performed through songs to the accompaniment of the *sārangi* and the drum. An interesting feature of the play was a privileged buffoon, the counterpart of the *bidushka* of the classical Sanskrit tradition. He was not there in the original story of the Arabian Nights.

Another Urdu play produced by another company in another place and witnessed by J. C. Oman was a popular modern drama called *Indar Sabha*, composed by Amanat under the patronage of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Awadh. The theatre in which this drama was performed was also temporary but simpler. There were two rows of 'reserved' chairs closest to the stage, and then there were two rows of 'first class' chairs. Separated from the first class by a barrier sat the bulk of the spectators. There was a special place reserved for Indian ladies, but it was empty. The charges for first class were three rupees, and for the bulk of the audience only four annas. The charge for the ladies seats was eight annas each. The mechanical manipulation was rather crude, prose dialogue was clearly subordinate to dance and music and there was no woman actor for any female character. Significantly, the 'female characters' were rather immodest. Besides stage setting, painted scenery was used where necessary. Acting was vivacious and human in *Alladin*, after the European model; the stage and the settings in the *Indar Sabhā* as well as *Alladin* revealed western influence.

Dramatic Companies were sometimes commissioned by rich individuals to give a specific kind of performance. A successful trader provided the expense of a moral drama for the benefit of his fellow-townsmen and to acquire religious merit for himself. There was a stage for the actors but there were no seats for the spectators. This drama related to Prahlad, presented anachronistically as the devotee of Rama. Every actor spoke his piece of dialogue from a particular spot on the stage behind which the prompter was concealed. The play started before ten, and only half of it was performed till mid-night when our witness left.

Themes were chosen from secular lore as much as from the religious. The drama of Puran Bhagat was much in favour.The play-bill announced : 'This piece, which is in the mouth of everyone in the Province, is expressly translated with some alterations from a Punjabi domestic true story'. The legend of Puran Bhagat was adapted apparently for the purposes of a Hindi stage by a theatrical company. The actors sang their parts in this drama. Its argument was close to the original legend as current in the Punjab. It represented in an effective manner, it was claimed, the triumph of virtue over vice. J.C. Oman witnessed also an 'upto-date' temperance play in Amritsar. He was aware that various adaptations of Shakespearean plays were prepared in Urdu and performed under new names and with new settings.

III

Giani Dit Singh's *Rāj Prabodh Nātak*, published from Lahore in 1890, has been regarded by many a literary historian as the first drama in modern Punjabi. However, even a cursory glance at this work would reveal that it is not a drama. The term *nātak* used in the title is misleading. The key words are *rāj prabodh* : this book was written for the political education of princes, and dedicated to the Indian rulers of princely states.

In a brief introduction to his Punjabi translation of Kalidas's *Shakuntala* at the end of the 19th century, Dr Charan Singh rightly remarked that no drama had been produced in Punjabi. Even his translation of a Sanskrit play was the first attempt of its kind. He was aware, however, that Kalidas's *Shakuntala* had been translated into some other Indian languages. He was also aware that original plays had been written in some other modern languages of India : in Bengali, Hindi and Urdu, for instance. He felt hopeful that literary drama in Punjabi would also emerge in due course. His purpose in translating the Sanskrit classic was to demonstrate to the readers and writers of Punjabi its literary excellence and its creative qualities. The translation was meant to be as close to the original as possible.

In the translation of Dr Charan Singh, the play opens with a prayer by a Brahman that the creator of water, fire, the Sun, the Moon, the sky, the earth and the air, may afford protection to all. The Brahman is followed by the Sūtardhār (in Punjabi, Prabandhak), who calls the Nattī to the stage, and through song and dialogue they introduce the play to the audience. The whole of this preliminary part of the play is called Prasāvana (in Sanskrit, Prastāvana). There

are seven *nāts* and three *madhae-nāts*, each consisting of a single *jhākī*. It is evident that the notion of Acts-and-Scenes is alien to the Sanskrit classic. Its three important structural elements are Prastāvana, Nāt and Madhae-Nāt, the difference between the last two being mainly the difference in length or duration, though the *madhae-nāt* could also serve as a sort of prelude to the *nāt* following. Besides dialogue in prose, there are 199 verses in the play The publication of this translation created for the Punjabi writer the possibility of adopting the structure of the Sanskrit classic if he was so inclined or to adapt any of its features to his needs.

In 1904, Mohan Singh Vaid published his *Birdh Vivāh Durdasha Nātak* from his native town, Tarn Taran. It was meant to show the evil consequences of marriage in old age, a practice worse than child marriage. The book is divided into 12 chapters and concludes with eight injunctions or principles as its moral *(updesh)*. Each chapter *(kānd)* is presented in the form of dialogues, and the mention of the place of action can give the impression of a scene. However, 'this little book' was meant to be treated not as a play but as a 'prose novel'.

Mohan Singh Vaid was interested in reform. He shows an old man getting married to a young girl whose parents accept a few thousand rupees as the price of their consent. In due course, the young wife starts feeling miserable amidst all luxury. She feels that she has everything but the gratification of sex or the satisfaction of having children. On the suggestion of a clever procuress she tries to gratify herself with a stranger, a professional rogue. They are caught by the police and their clandestine meeting is exposed to public ridicule. The rich old husband loses all respect in the process. There is also the news that the house of the young wife's parents has been reduced to ashes by accidental fire. The moral is evident enough.

IV

The first Punjabi drama, as its author rightly claimed, was published in 1909. This was *Chandar Hari* by Bawa Buddh Singh. Born in 1878 in a Sikh family of Bhalla *khatrīs* in Lahore, Buddh Singh learnt Persian in a mosque and Punjabi from friends of the family before he completed his matriculation from the Mission School at Lahore. Then he went to college for a degree in science but left after 'Intermediate' when he got admission to Engineering at Roorkee on the basis of his F.Sc. Completing his courses in Engineering by 1902, he became a Sub-Divisional Officer under the Punjab Government and served in

the new canal colonies during the first decade of the century. It may be safely assumed that he maintained contact with Lahore.

Bawa Buddh Singh's *Chandar Hari* is dedicated to Wāris Shah, the author of the 18th-century classic popularly known as *Hīr-Wāris*. For Buddh Singh, Waris was a great benefactor of the Punjabis : he had written his priceless work in the language of the people of the Punjab. Buddh Singh looked upon himself as an enthusiast for the Punjabi language : Punjabi alone is the language of the Punjab; to adopt Urdu or Hindi is 'a grave error'. The Punjabis should not be discouraged to find their language under-developed. Every modern Indian language was at one time in its formative stage. Bengali, for instance, was like Punjabi only fifty years earlier. The Punjabis too could develop their language like the Bengalis. Buddh Singh wrote his 'small book' in the interest of Punjabi language.

When Buddh Singh sent his play for printing at Amritsar, it came to the notice of some other literary persons who criticized it rather severely. He writes in defence that the development of a language demands a number of books on a number of themes in a number of forms: religious, social, scientific, historical, narrative, novel, drama, and the like. However, the literary forms which contribute the most towards the development of a language are novel and drama. This assumption reveals the impact of European literature on Bawa Buddh Singh. At any rate, novelists and dramatists in the Punjab could take up religious, social or amorous themes. However, since the development of Punjabi language was not a religious concern, there was little need of taking up religious themes. Indeed, Buddh Singh expressed his preference for secular literature in unambiguous terms : 'This task is better kept separate from religion; its association with religion will be its doom'. He was aware that many zealous Sikhs were advocating the cause of the Punjabi language. In his view, contribution to the deveplopment of Punjabi was a contribution to the development of the country (Punjab) rather than that of a community.

Buddh Singh expresses his opinion that a merely social theme is devoid of interest and a merely love theme lacks purpose, though each in its own way can contribute to the growth of a language. It was important for the writer to reach the largest number of readers. That was why he added the spice of sex and love to his concern for social reform : to explore the ill-deeds of Indian officials in the bureaucracy, and the evils of early marriage and conjugal incompatibility. There are two ways of treating evil, he contends : through moral dis-

course and through a realistic depiction of its effects. As in a temperance play the evil resulting from drunkenness exhibited on the stage has the desired effect on the audience, so should the depiction of social evil in a play have a salutary effect on the readers, or the audience. As his final argument, Buddh Singh refers to his work as the 'first experiment' which deserved sympathetic consideration rather than sharp criticism for small lapses.

The hero of this play, Chandar Hari, who is in the medical profession, is dissatisfied with his illiterate wife, particularly after his visit to England. He falls in love with a literate young girl, Rup Kumari, who responds with admiration and ardour. Her parents betroth her to a young man who is rich but illiterate and uncouth. The crisis comes when the day of marriage is fixed and the marriage party arrives at Rup Kumari's father's house. Chandar Hari comes in time for Rup Kumari to elope with him and they get married in Srinagar according to Sikh rites. Chandar Hari's friends not only accept the new marriage but actually reach Srinagar to participate in the celebration. It is obvious, incidentally, that Bawa Buddh Singh's conception of romantic love is not monogamous.

All the friends of Chandar Hari are government officials : Rai Bahadur Sagar Chand is a District Judge; Lala Das Ram is a Munsif; Rai Moti Lal is a 'Deputy'; Lala Ram Kishan is an Octroi Tehsīldār. Of these four, Sagar Chand alone advises Chandar Hari not to go in for a second marriage. There are numerous pretty girls, he argues, but you cannot marry every one. Nevertheless he reaches Srinagar to congratulate Chandar Hari and Rup Kumari on their marriage. He remarks casually that the reformed ceremony of Sikh marriage is simpler and better than that of the Arya Samajis who have dispensed with the Brahmans but have themselves adopted quite a lengthy ritual.

Lala Das Ram, the Munsif, advises Chandar Hari to marry Rup Kumari, appreciating an all-consuming passion for a single person. He himself, however, prefers prostitutes or the sisters and daughters of parties to law-suits in his court. The situation depicted in the play turns out to be a practical joke on him. On the suggestion of his confidant, since no prostitute was available, Lala Das Ram agrees to 'warm' himself with a married girl named Lal Piari, the daughter of a millionaire named Chet Ram whose law-suit is lying in the Munsif's court. She resists his advances till she is threatened

that her father will go to jail. She agrees to gratify the Munsif provided she is sure that no harm would come to her father. Das Ram signs a decree in his favour and hands it over to her. She asks him to go to bed first. She then takes out a dagger concealed in her *ghagrā* and threatens to kill him. He implores to be forgiven on the promise that he would not misuse his office in future to gratify his lust. She leaves a scar on his forehead before she leaves his house with the decree in her possession.

Incidentally, Das Ram is not prepared to believe that Lal Piari was the daughter of a *mahājan*. His confidant, Chaman Lal refers to the affair of her mother with Sardar Mangal Singh, the District Judge. They both infer that Lal Piari was an illegitimate daughter of the Judge : that was why she possessed the daring spirit of the daughter of a Singh. In any case, Das Ram decides to fall back on prostitutes. Indeed, if Khurshid and Kakko are both taken up by Moti Lal and Chandar Hari, Das Ram is prepared to sleep with Chaman Lal's wife, and Chaman Lal has no objection. Eventually, however, Chandar Hari declines to enjoy himself with Kakko and, while Moti Ram sticks to Khurshid, Das Ram takes to Kakko.

Rai Moti Lal approves of Chandar Hari's love for Rup Kumari and is prepared to think of the way in which their marriage could be manipulated. He refers to the plight of an educated husband with an illiterate wife, and appreciates the idea of romantic love, like that of Hir and Ranjha. He bemoans that he is wedded to an illiterate woman, but he is content with the compensation of a prostitute like Khurshid. She is preferable to Lal Piaris who make fools of Das Rams.

Ram Kishan, thanks to the wealth left behind by his father, enjoys his life in any manner he can. He is now enamoured of Rakhkhi, Rup Kumari's friend, who is married to an illiterate *bania*. In order to achieve his objective of a sexual union with Rakhkhi he thinks of Ram Jeoni, a tried procuress. Ram Jeoni knows her job, and her price. Ram Kishan pays one *muhr* in advance. Rakhkhi is brought to his house by Ram Jeoni. He makes advances and Rakhkhi pretends to make a move to leave, but finds the door closed. They converse in verse, sung in a folk tune. Rakhkhi is persuaded to be kissed and embraced before they move into a small dark room.

Ram Jeoni, the procuress, has the appearance of a female devotee of Ram, with a saffron mark on her forehead (*tilak*), a sandal-wood

rosary around her neck and the *Ram-nām-sārhi* wrapped around. Every household is accessible to her. In serving Ram Kishan's ends she keeps up the simulation of piety, praying for his long life and referring to the *kathā-kirtan* of a Sant where she spends most of her time. Reacting to Ram Kishan's request she advises him first to love his wife, but soon declares that her occupation in life is to unite those who love each other. Nevertheless, this service costs money and she gets a gold *muhr* from Ram Kishan, uttering 'Jai Parmātama' before she leaves. Singing apparently a pious song she dwells on the immanence of a single soul in the whole universe, obliterating the difference between good and bad in support of the philosophy of enjoyment in life. Referring to Ram Kishan's present infatuation with Rakhkhi, she indicates that she would rope her in through the *sādh-sangat* of Sant Prem Das where Rakhkhi would learn how to cast away all modesty. She succeeds in bringing Rakhkhi to Ram Kishan's residence after a visit to the *dera* of Sant Prem Das.

Sant Prem Das is a Vedantic *sādhū* who moves from place to place with his *derā*, holding expository *kathās* followed by *kirtans*. A large number of women, and some young men, flock to his *derā*. When Ram Jeoni goes there with Rakhkhi and approaches the Sant on her behalf for blessings, mentioning her sad plight due to marriage with an ignoramus, Sant Prem Das declares that the Real Self remains detached from the on-goings of the universe, each bodily organ performs its own specific function and there is no real distinction between the ravisher and the ravished. The burden of Sant Prem Das's *kirtān* is : 'I am the Brahmān of whom the Veda sings'. Brahmān is immanent in the universe, like *ghee* in milk and like the colour in *mehndi*. After the *kathā* and the *kirtan* he lies down in bed with a woman beside him.

Of all the characters presented by Bawa Buddh Singh, the heroine of the play, Rup Kumari, has the least blemish. She is beautiful, literate and accomplished; she is steadfast in love; she is resolute and courageous; even when she betrays her parents at crucial moment, she has a good deal of affection for them and she is sensitive to their distress. In her case, the incompatibility implied in the arranged marriage appears to justify her elopement. But the indulgence of other characters on the plea of conjugal incompatibility is not convincing. There is more of illicit sex than love in the play. Ram Jeoni and Sant Prem Das represent downright moral corruption. However, their treatment by Bawa Buddh Singh does not raise any

moral indignation. His portrayal of these persons becomes a source of mere entertainment. His claim that his play could serve as a vehicle of reform appears to be an afterthought.

That Buddh Singh's primary purpose was to entertain his reader, or the audience, is evident from several features of the play. The comments of the female friends of Rup Kumari on marriage and the experience of marriage, the language used by the male friends of Chandar Hari in connection with their sexual exploits, or projects, the scenes of kissing, embracing and going to bed, a scene of drunken dancing, and the singing by the prostitutes are all meant to entertain without contributing much to the development of the basic theme of the play. Presumably, the author thought only of the male reader, or the male audience, for his drama.

Buddh Singh's preoccupation with piecemeal entertainment results in a loose and disjointed plot. The play is divided into three Acts, each respectively of nine, seven and nine scenes. The first scene is suggestive of mutual attraction between Rup Kumari and Chandar Hari. In the second, Chander Hari confesses his feeling for Rup to himself while, in the third scene, Rup confesses her feeling for him to her friend Rakhkhi. The fourth and the fifth scenes relate to Ram Kishan's infatuation with Rakhkhi and Ram Jeoni's strategem. In the sixth, Chandar Hari and Ram Kishan exchange confidences. In the seventh, Rup and Chandar Hari come close to confessing their feelings. In scene eight is depicted the *derā* of Sant Prem Das and, in the ninth, Ram Kishan's 'union' with Rakhkhi. Thus, the first Act is almost equally divided between the primary theme and secondary or tertiary episodes; it ends in fact with the climax of a secondary episode.

In the first scene of the second Act, Chandar Hari and his friends discuss his predicament rather light-heartedly. Das Ram suffers discomfiture at the hands of Lal Piari in the second scene. In the third, Rup's friend Basanti convinces her of Chandar Hari's love for her and, in scene four, he declares his love to Rup. The inconvenience and consequences of conjugal incompatibility are discussed by Chandar Hari and Moti Lal in the fifth scene, with the possible alternatives of remarriage of the husband, illicit sexual relations, and gratification with prostitutes who appear in the sixth scene to gratify Moti Lal and Das Ram. In the seventh scene, Rup and her friend Basanti are worried about the former's ill-matched betrothal, and Basanti informs

Chandar Hari about Rup's predicament. Nearly half of the second Act, thus, is given to secondary or tertiary matters.

In the first scene of the last Act, Buddhu Shah celebrates his betrothal to Rup Kumari, drinking, singing and dancing in the company of a few friends. In the second scene, Chandar Hari's wife is shown virtually reconciled to the idea of his second marriage, conceding that illiterate wives are not suitable for educated husbands. In the third scene, Rup Kumari's father shows his unhappiness over the ill-suited match for his daughter, but he is reassured by Rup's mother. The marriage party arrives in the fourth scene, with all its entertaining features. Rup Kumari stealthily leaves the house with Basanti's help to elope with Chandar Hari just before the marriage ceremony is to start. In the sixth scene, her absence is discovered, but the marriage party is returned on the plea that she has fallen unconscious. Her parents discover the truth through a letter left behind by their daughter, and they are prepared in their grief to own their mistake. In scene eight, Chandar Hari and Rup express their mutual feeling of love and gratitude while they are on their way to get married in Srinagar. Their marriage ceremony is performed in scene nine, and Chandar Hari's friends (except Ram Kishan) are there to felicitate them.

Bawa Buddh Singh's purpose of entertainment is evident also from the rhyming prose of his characters interspersed by over a hundred pieces in verse. The verse parts were not always meant to be merely spoken. More often, they were meant to be recited, or even sung. At many places, the tunes are indicated according to which the verses were meant to be sung, and with which the contemporaries of Buddh Singh were presumably familiar.

Buddh Singh's play was not meant for the uneducated; and it was not meant for the zealous Sikhs who were advocating the use of Punjabi as the basis of religious reform. The play was meant for the educated Punjabis as well as the educated Sikhs. They could be found among the new middle class. We may be sure that Buddh Singh was addressing himself to that section of his own class which did not cherish any commitments or concerns of a serious nature, whether religious or political.

In terms of the origins of Punjabi drama, certain features of Buddh Singh's *Chandar Hari* are quite revealing. The play is formally divided into Acts, each of which is further divided into scenes, which indicates Buddh Singh's familiarity with Western Drama. However, it would be a gross oversimplification to suggest that Buddh Singh

wrote under the influence of Western Drama. The use of verse in prose drama was familiar to the readers of Kalidas's *Shakuntala*, a feature which comes out well in Dr Charan Singh's translation of the Sanskrit play. Furthermore, the use not only of verse but also of music was an important ingredient of the popular plays presented by professional Companies in the Punjab. Bawa Buddh Singh chose not only familiar tunes for the songs of his characters but also familiar measures for his verses : *bait*, *dohrā*, *kabitt*, *deodh* and several other metres of Punjabi and Urdu poetry, besides some measures of folk poetry. Though the possibility of the play being staged was not ruled out, Buddh Singh wrote primarily for the reader, never hoping that the play would be performed.

In Bawa Buddh Singh's play there are three major sources of inspiration : Western literature, modern Indian literature and the indigenous literary tradition of the Punjab. The first induced Bawa Buddh Singh to create a new literary form in Punjabi; the second served as a source of encouragement; and the third provided the pride as well as the stuff for his play. All these three sources were directly or indirectly connected with the historical situation created by the colonial rule in India. One major effect of that rule was the increasing number of the new middle class that occupied a marginal position between the British bureaucracy and the Punjabi masses. Bawa Buddh Singh belonged to that class and addressed himself to its members, choosing a theme which had a direct bearing on their life.

V

Within two years of the publication of Bawa Buddh Singh's *Chandar Hari*, Dr Charan Singh's son, Bhai Vir Singh published a play known as *Rāja Lakhdātā Singh*. Born in 1872, five or six years earlier than Buddh Singh, Bhai Vir Singh was brought up in an atmosphere of learning, religious reform and literary activity. His grandfather, Bhai Kahan Singh, a descendant of Diwan Kaura Mal who is known for his administrative and political role in the 18th century under the Mughals, had settled in Amritsar before 1830 in the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Bhai Vir Singh's father, Charan Singh, was born in Amritsar in 1853. He was trained as a *vaid*, but he was deeply interested in literature and religious reform. Bhai Vir Singh's maternal grandfather, Bhai Hazara Singh, too was a great scholar and an eminent Sikh theologian. In 1891, Bhai Vir Singh matriculated

after formal education in the Church Mission High School at Amritsar. It is believed that he was offered the job of a *nāib tehsīldār* under the British government, but he declined this offer.

Immediately after matriculation, Bhai Vir Singh established a printing press in Amritsar, known as the Wazir-i-Hind Press after the name of his partner, Wazir Singh. By now the socio-religious reform movement among the Sikhs, known as the Singh Sabha Movement, was gaining importance. Bhai Vir Singh was nurtured on the literature produced by the protagonists of this movement. In 1893 he started publishing the *Nirgumiārā* to serve the cause of the Singh Sabhas; in the year following it was adopted by the Khalsa Tract Society of Amritsar as its official organ. In 1894, Bhai Vir Singh published his first work of historical fiction : *Sundrī*. It was followed by *Bijay Singh* in 1899 and by *Satwant Kaur* in 1900. All these three were placed in the 18th century when the Sikhs were waging a life-and-death struggle against the Mughals and the Afghans, eventually to establish their own rule.

Already in 1899, Bhai Vir Singh had started the weekly called the *Khālsa Samāchār*, dedicated to the cause of religious and social reform. The Chief Khalsa Diwan was established in 1902 and Bhai Vir Singh was a staunch supporter of its programmes. In 1904 he established the Central Khalsa Orphanage at Amritsar. The Punjab and Sindh Bank was founded in 1908, with Bhai Vir Singh as a founder-director. In this very year was started the Sikh Education Conference to which Bhai Vir Singh gave his whole-hearted support. In 1905, he had published his epic *Rāṇā Surat Singh*. By 1910, when he published *Rāja Lakhdātā Singh*, Bhai Vir Singh was a well-established writer. In the secret reports of the government he was not only 'a leading figure in the Sikh revival', but also 'disloyal to the core' and 'thoroughly anti-British'.

Like Bawa Buddh Singh, Bhai Vir Singh claimed a distinction for his drama : it was not the first Punjabi drama but it was the first Punjabi drama of 'Sikh reformation'. It was meant to depict, as the full title explicitly indicates, the contemporary plight of the Sikhs and its redress through Raja Lakhdata Singh. Bhai Vir Singh states in his prefatory remarks that the Sikhs had fallen from a high estate. There were several ways of effecting reform among the Sikhs : through oral injunctions, printed tracts and books, and several other similar ways. He agreed with Buddh Singh that to depict a realistic spectacle on the stage was also a useful method of reform. To this purpose, and to lay

the foundations of drama in Punjabi, Bhai Vir Singh published what he calls 'this rather short piece of writing' as the basis for 'national drama'.

Bhai Vir Singh's *Rāja Lakhdātā Singh* consists of 12 *jhākīs*, besides the Prastāvana. There is no *nāt* or *madhae-nāt*, but a few of the *jhākīs* are shorter or longer than the average. In its formal aspect, thus, this play is closer to the Sanskrit rather than the Western Drama. In the Prastāvana, the Prabandhak refers to the sad plight and the downfall of the *qaum*, the Sikh Panth. Whereas Bawa Buddh Singh is inclined to look upon the Punjab as his country (*des*), Bhai Vir Singh thinks of India as his country and of the Sikhs as a distinct social entity called *qaum* or Panth. Concern for the Panth is Bhai Vir Singh's justification for writing a drama. Not as mere entertainment but a drama for the reformation of the Panth was justified. This play was not like other dramas or shows. It laid bare the shortcomings of the Panth before its members. These were not the times for the tales of love.

Bhai Vir Singh adopts a simple plot. In the first *jhākī*, a *sant* indicates that he proposes to awaken the conscience of Raja Lakhdata Singh to use him as an instrument in an extremely difficult but a very important task. In the second *jhākī*. Raja Lakhdata Singh tells his courtiers of a dream in which he was himself grown old and feeble and an old *sant* warned him about the lost opportunity of redemption. While the courtiers are trying to reassure Lakhdata Singh, a *sant* appears in the court to tell the Raja that he should earn a good name for himself. Without becoming explicit about how, the *sant* leaves the court, saying that if the Raja was keen to hear further he would search for the *sant*. In the third *jhākī* Lakhdata Singh goes to the jungle in search of the *sant*. On their meeting, the *sant* dwells on the past glory of the Sikh Panth and its present plight; he asks the Raja to devote all his thought, energy and wealth to the service of the Panth. The idea appeals to Lakhdata Singh. However, he has to study the sad state of the Sikhs before he can effect regeneration. In the fourth *jhākī*, which is the shortest, Lakhdata Singh simply tells his minister to rule with justice in his absence. This simple device enables Bhai Vir Singh to present the state of the Sikhs in the seven *jhākīs* following.

Some of the descendants of the nobility of the times of Sikh rule are shown as addicts to alcohol, opium, *post* and *bhang*. The one addict to *post* is yearning for *chāndū* which is more strictly prohibited for the Sikhs. When Lakhdata Singh addresses them in terms of Sikh virtues and values, he is pushed out. In the next *jhākī*, numbered seven but

actually sixth, Sikh versifiers are presented in a ludicrous light with Lakhdata Singh's contemptuous comment on every piece. When Lakhdata Singh recites his own didactic piece, all of them leave, thinking of him as an eccentric fool. In the seventh *jhākī*, numbered eight in the text, the life of a Sikh aristocrat is depicted : his extravagance and that of the members of his family, his addiction to alcohol, his indifference to the 'new Sikhs', his fondness for music and dance by professional girls, and his annoyance with the appeal to save a Sikh orphan from conversion to Christianity. When Lakhdata Singh is asked to entertain him with poetry, he dwells on the theme that the misfortunes of the Panth are due to the degeneration of the Sikh aristocrats who should normally be the leaders of the Panth. He is turned out.

In the next two *jhākīs* (8th and 9th) a degenerate Sikh Bhāi is shown as misusing a *dharmsāl*, ignoring learning or teaching and thinking of the Singh Sabha workers as self-centred individuals. He quarrels with a *sant* and both of them are apprehended by the police, while the *pandit* who wanted to become a Sikh is taken over by a Christian missionary. Lakhdata Singh comments on the degeneration of the Sikh faith. In the next *jhāki* (10th), two *sāhūkārs* gloat over the wealth they have amassed by lending money to Sikhs eventually to grab their property. Also, there is a young boy who feels obliged to renounce Sikhism and to embrace Christianity because no Sikh is prepared to afford him bread. Lakhdata Singh takes over the boy from the Christian missionary, telling him that the Sikhs now have their own national orphanage at Amritsar. In the 11th *jhākī* is shown a Sikh widow on the point of committing suicide before she is persuaded by Lakhdata Singh to accompany him; a Sikh is apprehended on the false charge of theft because he had not supplied fodder to the *tehsīldār*; an old woman's only son is being taken to the hospital, having been seriously wounded by his opponents in a dispute over irrigational water.

Having witnessed the sad plight of the Sikhs, Lakhdata Singh returns to his court in the last *jhākī*. He orders his minister to prepare certain charts and to collect population figures, showing the proportion of the Sikhs in the total population of the country, the number of literate Sikhs, the number of Sikhs in government service, the number of traders among the Sikhs and the number of Sikhs in jails. For his own state, Lakhdata Singh orders the minister to collect information on its total population, on the number of schools, both general and technical, the number of Sikhs in the service of the state, the number

of Sikhs in *dharmsāls* and temples, the reputation of eminent Sikhs, the number of Sikhs in jails and the nature of their crime. Lakhdata Singh advertises the post of a *nāib waztr* but only to find that out of 204 applicants there are just two Sikhs and both of them are ludicrously unqualified. The whole situation appears to be so hopeless that Lakhdata Singh falls unconscious. On regaining consciousness he prays for help and a *sant* appears to reassure him that he can be equal to the task. The key to the problem is education, the secret of success in all spheres of life. Lakhdata Singh appeals to his courtiers to support him in this programme of reformation, and they respond with enthusiasm. The play ends with a chorus underlining the regenerative efficacy of education.

The *sant* says in the third *jhākt* that the brilliance of Western 'education' has smothered the spiritual knowledge of the Sikh Panth to induce its members to pursue *māyā*. Obviously, it is not Western 'education' that Bhai Vir Singh is advocating. Nevertheless, education is needed in every town and *bāzār*; every government needs educated persons. Education is more powerful than guns; it can master the universe with railways, telegraphs and electricity. Obviously again, science or technology is not discarded. What is needed is education undivorced from religion. Therefore, Lakhdata Singh is advised by the *sant* to create the conditions for imparting 'education' as well 'as religious education'. Secular education was to be wedded to religious education. Christianity stands discarded as the greatest misfortune that can befall a Sikh; but Western science and technology can be adopted. Lakhdata Singh decides to establish not only general *madrasas* but also *madrasas* for technical education.

In the cause of education, Bhai Vir Singh's *Rāja Lakhdātā Singh* was meant to awaken the conscience of the Sikh Panth. However, in the eyes of its author the Panth largely consisted of the upper class and the masses. The middling class was virtually absent. The masses, moreover, were poor. They could hardly contribute anything towards the programme of education, except being its beneficiaries. The example of Raja Lakhdata Singh and his courtiers could inspire Sikh princes and the Sikh upper class to take up the cause of education among the Sikhs. Indeed, the Prabandhak of the play is addressing himself to prosperous individuals who are indifferent towards the present or the future of the Panth. Besides this formal posture, however, there is another section of the Panth whom Bhai Vir Singh has in mind. They figure at one place as 'the new Sikhs' who are opposed to the use of alcohol; at another place they are the missionaries of

reformed Sikhism, the protagonists of the Singh Sabhas.

Indeed, there is much in the play that could appeal to the religious sentiment of the Sikhs. The *sant* at the opening of the first *jhākī* recites from the *bānī* of Guru Arjan. In the third *jhākī*, Lakhdata Singh recites from the "Sukhmani". Bhai Gurdas is quoted by Lakhdata Singh to bring home the degeneration of the average *bhāī* and the average *sant* among the Sikhs. The young widow quotes from the *Gurbānī*. Above all, the entire programme of reform has the sanction of Guru Gobind Singh. In this connection, the quotation from the *Bachittar Nātak*, at the top of the title page is not without significance : Guru Gobind Singh is ordained by God to spread *dharm* and to eradicate ignorance (*kubuddh*). God is omnipotent; His power works through the instrumentality of agencies chosen by Him. That is why the *sant* thinks of making use of Lakhdata Singh as an instrument of reform. His dream is an induced dream, and its import is confirmed by the *sant* in the court. At the end of the 11th *jhākī*, Lakhdata Singh prays to Guru Gobind Singh to save the Panth as his 'son'. In the last *jhākī*, in response to Lakhdata Singh's prayer to the 'beloved of God', the *sant* appears and says 'you have remembered me'. In the chorus, the awakening is attributed to Guru Gobind Singh. In a mysterious way, thus, the *sant* appears to represent Guru Gobind Singh.

The hyperseriousness of Bhai Vir Singh's *Rāja Lakhdātā Singh* is relieved at many places by light or humorous touches or interludes. In the first place, there is a jester in the court, the counterpart of the *bidushka* of the classical Sanskrit tradition. In an aside, he makes fun of the Granthī of the court; he is openly sceptical about the motives of the *sant* during his appearance in the court. He attributes the sant's influence over the Raja to his infatuation with some beautiful female employed by the *sant*. In the last *jhākī*, when the courtiers express their happiness over Lakhdata Singh's return, the jester casts a strong doubt on their sincerity. Later on, he tries to console Raja Lakhdata Singh with the idea that to be infamous is also to be famous : the Sikhs dwell on the good qualities of their ancestors, they attribute their plight to misfortune, they sell their houses like the goods of trade, they prefer to be robbed by moneylenders, they sell their lands to become labourers in foreign countries, they quarrel among themselves, and they drink themselves to senselessness.

The conversation of the *bhangīs* and the opium-eaters certainly

has its lighter side. Similarly, the exercise of the conventional versifiers as presented by Bhai Vir Singh has a comical dimension: Lakhdata Singh himself acts here as a jester. The improvised verses about drinking in the 7th *jhākī* are in a light vein, like the comments of the *mīr* who is virtually a jester in the *mehfil* of the Sikh *amīr*. The comments of the servant in the 8th and 9th *jhākīs* and the scuffle between the *sant* and the *bhāī* in the 9th border on the comical. The dialogue of the Seth and the Mārwārī in the 10th *jhākī* could be amusing for the Punjabi reader, or the audience.

As in Bawa Buddh Singh's *Chandar Harī* so in Bhai Vir Singh's *Rāja Lakhdātā Singh*, there is rhyming prose interspersed with verse and music, though to a smaller degree. Bhai Vir Singh's genius for poetry being superior, the verses in the play have better aesthetic merit but without adding anything to the basic theme. He can use well-known Urdu metres in Punjabi. While writing a drama of reform through education Bhai Vir Singh did not forget the aesthetic needs of his readers, or the audience. This could be expected *a priori* from an author of established repute and recognition.

Bhai Vir Singh does not adopt the formal framework of the Western Drama. It does not mean that he was not familiar with Western Drama. His rejection of its formal structure seems to be quite deliberate Though he has borrowed some important features of the classical Sanskrit drama, this borrowing is more in the nature of adaptation than imitation. To these, moreover, are added several indigenous Punjabi features. The more important in this last category are specifically Sikh features. Bhai Vir Singh's equation of the Sikh Panth with *qaum* is suggestive ; his 'national drama' is neither Indian nor Punjabi; it is Sikh. The term *qaum* in pre-British times was used in the sense of a caste or even a smaller social segment. In Bhai Vir Singh's play we find its connotation imperceptibly enlarged.

The Sikh nationalism of Bhai Vir Singh appears to be intimately connected with his perception of the other people in the country and in the Punjab. He is nostalgic about the past glory of the Sikh Panth, and refers to the decline of Sikh population after the fall of Sikh Raj. The religious earnestness, goodness, bravery, unity among the members of the Sikh Panth and the purity of their lives are things of the past. The Sikh Panth is not only eclipsed by the glamour of the West but also hemmed in by the other communities (or 'nations'). The Muslims have been awakened by Sir Syed Ahmad, and they are patronized by the government. The Hindus are educated and wealthy.

The Sikhs, much smaller in numbers, are actually threatened by the Christian missionaries and the Arya Samajists. The Sikh *rājās, sardārs* and *jāgirdārs*, the Sikh *granthis, pujāris, bhāts, deradārs*, the Sikh workers, *vakils*, traders and magistrates are all indifferent to conversion from Sikhism. Bhai Vir Singh identified himself closely with the Sikhs. As a protagonist of the Singh Sabha Movement he made the Sikhs his exclusive concern.

The Singh Sabha Movement was a result of the response of a large number of Sikhs to the situation created by the colonial rule in the Punjab. As its representative, Bhai Vir Singh accepted Western science and technology but rejected the ethical, religious and cultural values of the West. A certain degree of subversion is implied in this rejection. Bhai Vir Singh may be seen as writing in reaction to colonial rule. However, his notion of 'national drama' was different from drama merely in Punjabi. He was thus writing in reaction also to Bawa Buddh Singh's notion of a Punjabi 'national' drama.

VI

The Singh Sabha Movement found a few more spokesmen after the publication of Bhai Vir Singh's play. Within a year or two, Bhai Chatar Singh and Jiwan Singh of Bazar Mai Sewan in Amritsar got printed from the Punjab Commercial Press a Punjabi play entitled *Sukkā Samundar* which had been written for them by Arur Singh Tāib, a translator in the service of the Punjab University, Lahore. They profess to have brought it out 'for the development of Punjabi language' and dedicate it to the 4th Sikh Education Conference. There are several 'advertisements' in this book and there is an air of commercial venture about its publication.

The main theme of the play is indicated by the sub-title : "Shrimatī Sundri *ate* Mahārāna Karorā Singh". Prince Karora Singh, the eldest son of Maharaja Jagjodh Singh, goes out hunting, sees a beautiful girl in the preserve, falls in love with her and pines for her without knowing her identity. Before long, however, his friend Ranjit Singh brings the good news that she is the princess Sundri, daughter of Maharaja Kesari Singh. In fact, an invitation has come for Prince Karora Singh to be a candidate for her hand at a *su'ambar* ceremony. They go to the capital of Kesari Singh on the appointed day. Sundri garlands him. She too had fallen in love with him on seeing him in the hunting preserve. They are married. After some time, Karora Singh leaves for the capital of his father, asking Sundri to join him

later. But she is kidnapped by a villain named Bhayanak Singh who tries persistently to persuade her to accept his love. She is prepared to die rather than be faithless to Karora Singh. After some time, Ranjit Singh comes to her rescue, but he is killed by Bhayanak Singh. Then comes Karora Singh to capture the villain. Sundri and Karora Singh go together to the capital of his father. In the open court of Maharaja Jagjodh Singh, Bhayanak Singh confesses his crime, and he is sentenced to death. He has reaped what he had sown : the boundless ocean is for him a dry bed of the sea *(sukkā samundar)*. Maharaja Jagjodh Singh abdicates in favour of Karora Singh to devote all his time to the remembrance of God. Elsewhere also there are expressions of religious sentiment in this play. In the opening scene, for instance, Karora Singh and Ranjit Singh praise Guru Gobind Singh and his Panth.

More dominant than the dimension of religious sentiment, however, is the concern shown for Punjabi language and education. Maharaja Jagjodh Singh asks his minister to supply information on the number of Punjabi *pāthshālas* and the number of students in residence. This could come directly from *Rāja Lakhdātā Singh*. A Punjabi advocate of Urdu is ridiculed by his Punjabi speaking servant till the master is convinced that Punjabi is the best language for the Punjabis. Another character praises Punjabi, explicitly stating that no reform is possible without the development of Punjabi language. It is argued that Punjabi children learn their mother-tongue more easily than Arabic, Sanskrit or Hindi. The development of Punjabi, a special responsibility of the Sikhs, is a prerequisite for the development of education.

A secondary episode relates to the regeneration of Buddhu Singh, the younger brother of Ranjit Singh, through the influence of Gian Singh who appears to pick up the threads from *Rāja Lakhdātā Singh* when he feels sorry about the evil practice of drinking alcohol among the sons of the rich, the preference for low grade *qissas* over *shabad-bānī* among the Sikhs in general, the backward state of their education, and their large numbers in jails. Gian Singh takes service with Buddhu Singh who is fond of drinking bouts with two degenerate associates. One evening, Gian Singh returns not with one but several bottles of whisky. He also brings meat, a prostitute, a *haktm*, a doctor and a shroud. Soon he receives 'summons' from the court and he has to explain why. He tells Buddhu Singh that he had seen an alcoholic dying in his presence and informed the police, but he was himself suspected of murder and, now on bail, he has to appear before the

judge. Furthermore, he is sure that Buddhu Singh too will soon die. He will drink whisky; he would like to eat meat; he would like to hear singing before going to bed with the prostitute; he will contract some venereal disease and need a *hakim;* dissatisfied with the *hakim* he will need a doctor but nevertheless die; and, therefore, he will need a shroud. Buddhu Singh takes warning and decides to abstain from alcohol.

Taib's *Sukkā Samundar* consists of four Acts containing respectively 9, 11, 4 and 8 *jhākis*. The term 'drop' is used for the Act, and *parda* or *jhāki* for the scene. The dialogue in prose is profusely interspersed with verse devoid of any merit, and nearly all the characters sing. There are humorous and comical *jhākis* too for the entertainment of the audience, or the reader. Possibly unwittingly, the author tried to combine the purpose of entertainment with that of reform, leaving a queer effect on the reader. His play becomes a feeble echo of Bhai Vir Singh's *Rāja Lakhdātā Singh*.

A couple of years after the publication of Taib's *Sukkā Samundar*, Giani Gurbakhsh Singh, a Barrister of Amritsar, published his *Nātak Man Mohan Singh* on the advice of Sardar Bahadur Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia and Sardar Jogindra Singh, the then Home Minister of the Patiala State. Gurbakhsh Singh is genuinely modest about his learning and literary talents. His purpose in writing the play was to depict the evil practices prevalent among the Sikhs and to show the way to their eradication. Drinking alcohol, gambling and going to prostitutes were the result of neglecting the Sikh faith. These evil practices were common not only among the lay people but also among the custodians of *dharmsāls*. In his foreword, Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia points out that the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib can eradicate superstition and other evils. The play, depicting the sorry state of the managers of religious places and the possibility of their reform, is a link in the chains of efforts made to raise the Panth from its fallen estate. It becomes, thus, an extension of Bhai Vir Singh's work.

Man Mohan Singh is employed by the custodian of a *dharmsāl* to look after its Management. In collusion, they misappropriate the income. Man Mohan Singh spends his share on carousing, gambling and an importunate prostitute. He becomes destitute; his wife dies; and his only son dies. However, gambling goes on in the *dharmsāl* till the gamblers are apprehended by police. Man Mohan Singh is among them, though having no money he was not actually gambling.

One gambler is let off because his father bribes the *thānadār*. Another escapes punishment in the court because his *vakīl* has been good not merely in argument but also in greasing palms. Man Mohan Singh escapes because he is deemed to be out of his mind. All this time, Gur Piar Singh remains steadfast as much in his friendship to Man Mohan Singh as in his faith in the Gurbānī. Under his influence, Man Mohan Singh takes a turn for the better. He becomes a good Sikh and a devoted trustee of the *dharmsāl*. The visitors are happy with him and respect him, while he treats them as the veritable form of the Guru. He advises the Sikh visitors to feel concerned about the problems of the Panth, and to seek help from the government to solve them. Within a decade, concern for the reform of the Sikh religious places was to become a popular movement in opposition to the government.

In 1916, the author of the novel *Rūp Kaur* published from Amritsar his *Nātak Rūp Kaur* as the first Punjabi drama 'meant for the stage'. This book was third in the series published for the reform of conjugal relations. Its heroine, Rup Kaur, is the devoted and loving wife of Sant Singh, a school teacher. Her fidelity to her husband enables her to rebuff a criminal rogue in his amorous advances though she is saved from him only by the timely arrival of her mother-in-law. This man, Gokal, is persistent enough to come to Rup Kaur's house when she is alone. But before he can molest Rup Kaur he is apprehended by the police because of the precautions taken by the *kotwāl* on the basis of information of the previous incident. After being beaten up to extract the assurance that he would never misbehave with Rup Kaur, Gokal is released. He is soon tempted by his associate, Hari Chand, to make use of a nude photograph of Rup Kaur to blackmail her to submission. They plan to take the photograph at the time of the eclipse of the Sun when Rup Kaur is induced by a hired female to bathe in the river Ravi. Hari Chand deceives Gokal and manages to pass on the photograph to Sant Singh who confronts Rup Kaur with this plausible evidence of her infidelity. She swoons. Sant Singh is taken to the *kotwāl's* house and discovers how he had been duped by Gokal and Hari Chand. Sant Singh is on the point of killing himself when Rup Kaur arrives, having regained consciousness due to medication by a doctor in the neighourhood. Her fidelity saves their conjugal happiness.

In a secondary episode, by contrast, a wife who has abandoned her husband because of the hostility of her mother-in-law, suffers

ignominy and death. Living with her parents in Rawalpindi, Jasodan is afraid of the prospect of going back to her in-laws. She is tempted to elope with a scoundrel called Mukanda who is no other than Gokal. Before long, he starts ill-treating Jasodan, now called Bhag Bhari. In her new misery she is taken in by Gokal's associate, Hari Chand. When Hari Chand suggests to Gokal that they could get a photograph of Rup Kaur for Gokal's benefit, he actually plans to use that to alienate Bhag Bhari from Gokal. He succeeds. Bhag Bhari elopes with him and goes to Hardwar, but only to discover that Hari Chand wants to abandon her after taking possession of her jewellery. He fails in his design due to the intervention of the *kotwāl* in the guise of a *sādhū*. She is restored to her husband. But, eventually, she contracts leprosy. Abandoned by all, she dies of starvation in a jungle.

In a tertiary episode, Jasodan's brother, Hira Singh, is redeemed by Sant Singh and Rup Kaur. Hira Singh is a college student like Hari Chand. Shocked by his sister's elopement, he is drawn into the network of Gokal and Hari Chand. They all lust for Rup Kaur. Earlier, Sant Singh had been willing to help Hira Singh but now Sant Singh abandons him as a degenerate young man. Hira Singh neglects his ailing father till he dies. Subsequently, his mother also dies. On his genuine repentance, however, Sant Singh welcomes him again and undertakes to support him. Rup Kaur comes forth to adopt him as a son. The *kotwāl* suggests a bride for Hira Singh, the sister of Hari Chand who has been arrested for murdering his wife on the assumption of infidelity. Sant Singh and Rup Kaur return to their home with a son and a daughter-in-law. The virtuous have survived, while the evil-doers have suffered or perished.

The play is divided into three Acts, consisting respectively of 8, 6 and 8 *jhākīs*. The action takes place mostly in Lahore and Rawalpindi; only in one *jhākī* the setting is in Hardwar and in another, a jungle. The dialogue in rhyming prose is generously interspersed with verse, and many of the characters sing their parts. There are humorous patches here and there, but the general atmosphere is rather sombre.

VII

Ten years after the publication of his *Rājā Lakhdātā Singh* Bhai Vir Singh encouraged Brij Lal Shastri, a new playwright, to transcribe his Punjabi play from Persian to Gurmukhi script to be printed at the Wāzir-i-Hind Press in Amritsar. He himself wrote an introduction to

this play. In this introduction, Bhai Vir Singh thinks of the Punjab tradition in terms of the lovers like Hīr and Rānjha, Sassī and Punnūn, and Sohnī and Mahīwāl, who have been immortalized in Punjabi folk poetry and in many a narrative poem in Punjabi. The martyrs to religion, like Bhai Mani Singh, Bhai Taru Singh, Bhai Bota Singh, Bhai Tara Singh, Bhai Subeg Singh and Bhai Sabaj Singh were a part of the Punjab tradition : their deeds have illumined the pages of Punjabi literature and their memory has lighted the hearts of the Punjabis. The sacrifice of Puran and Haqiqat for the ideals and values they upheld has been sung in Punjabi homes. Apart from the hymns of ancient times, the Punjab has the distinction of having the heritage of gnosticism and love enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib.

In the days of Sikh rule, Qadir Yar, who was born and brought up in the Punjab, gave literary form to the traditional lore of Puran and the sublime conduct of Puran became a household tale for the Punjabis. His gift to the Punjab was not less valuable than that of Shah Muhammad who sang of the War of the Satlej, or that of Waris who revived the memory of Hīr in his melodious verse. For a person born in the Punjab, it should be natural to write in Punjabi, his mother-tongue. Nevertheless, it was a pleasant surprise for Bhai Vir Singh to find a non-Sikh Punjabi writing in the Punjabi language in the 20th century. This was because many of the Punjabis had alienated themselves from their mother-tongue. It was a matter of gratification for Bhai Vir Singh that Brij Lal Shastri produced a play on a long cherished indigenous theme which influenced thousands of men and women in the conduct of their lives.

Indeed, Brij Lal Shastri's *Pūran Nātak* was the first Punjabi play by a non-Sikh writer. Born in 1894, in a village of Tehsil Shakargarh in the upper Rachna Doab, Brij Lal received early education in Sialkot, the city where there were still several spots associated with Raja Salvan and the members of his family. Brij Lal's father, a small *sāhūkār*, was well versed in the *Mahābhārat* and a few Persian classics. He encouraged Brij Lal to pursure his studies. Brij Lal passed M. A. in Sanskrit in 1918 but only to discover that he was not qualified to teach. In the year following, he passed the Shastri examination which entitled him to the degree of M. O. L. and to teach. For some time he taught Sanskrit in D. A. V. College, Lahore, and then accepted the job of an editor in the Punjab Textbook Committee in 1920. This was the year in which his *Pūran Nātak* was published.

Brij Lal Shastri was familiar with the traditional story of Puran before he took up the study of Sanskrit literature. In order to give

the form of a drama to that story, his familiarity with Sanskrit literature was certainly helpful. Without using the term, he makes use of the familiar Prastāvana of the Sanskrit drama. The Brahman of Kalidas's *Shakuntala* is replaced by a chorus; the Sūtardhār and the Nattī are there to introduce the play. There are echoes of Kalidas in their reference to the learned audience and the remark that the approval and appreciation of the audience was the essential criterion of a successful presentation. However, there is also the comment that Punjabi drama is a new thing and it does take time to adjust oneself to a new thing. The qualities of the Punjabi language were nonetheless sufficient to make it a success : 'the fragrance of the rose and the sweetness of honey are both sold to the language of the Punjab'. There is also some humour in the dialogue of the Sūtardhār and the Nattī in the tradition of Kalidas.

Brij Lal Shastri was certainly familiar with Western Drama. He does not hesitate to make use of its formal structure. His Puran Natak is divided into three major parts, or Acts, consisting respectively of 12, 6 and 7 *jhākīs*. This is the form used by Bawa Buddh Singh, rather than by Bhai Vir Singh. The Sūtardhār is presented by Brij Lal Shastri at the end of his play also to make the moral of the play explicit. Salvan married for the second time though he had a male issue; he thus deviated from a social norm and brought misfortune upon all. Lunan strayed from the path of virtue when she discarded the ideal of conjugal fidelity and entertained lustful designs upon the son of her husband. Puran's steadfast virtue redeemed the situation. Even in the popular presentation of the legend, as Oman has told us, the triumph of virtue over vice, of good over evil, had been amply demonstrated.

The essential story and how Brij Lal Shastri tries to dramatise it are better taken up together. In the opening *jhākī* of the first Act, the conversation of a few wayfarers among themselves and with a *sādhū* indicates that Puran Chand, an excellent archer and a superb horseman, is going to be designated as *Yuvrāj*. There is rustic humour in their conversation. In the second *jhākī*, Salvan is holding an open *darbār* to perform the ceremony of nominating Puran as Yuvrāj. The *dhādīs* sing eulogies, the *purohit* announces royal charities and the subordinate chieftains offer *bhet*. The bad omen of a shooting star is introduced by Brij Lal before the beginning of the ceremony. In the third *jhākī*, the maids in the palace of Acchrān, the first wife of Salvan and Puran's

mother, refer to the display by the *natts*, the tricks of the magicians, and the performance of the *bhāts*. They sing and dance, while Acchrān is distracted by a vague fear in her intense joy. Her meeting with Puran in the presence of Salvan is soon interrupted by a message from *Lūnān*, the second wife of Salvan. Puran is anxious to pay respects to his younger 'mother' as a matter of duty, ignoring Acchrān's forebodings. His own left eyebrow quivers : a bad omen.

Puran meets *Lūnān* in her palace in the fourth *jhākī*. Before he enters, *Lūnān* is singing a song addressed to the breeze, referring to her youth and beauty and the unwelcome passion of her doting old husband. Puran greets her as a mother, falling on her feet. She cannot utter any blessings. She is aware of her position as a mother but she cannot resist the intense love she immediately feels for Puran. She refuses to acknowledge him as a son and suggests that they should become lovers. She falls on his feet to persuade him. On his persistent refusal, she threatens him. She forces him to bed, but he frees himself and goes out. Through a superb dissimulation, dramatically helped by a few choice phrases from their conversation repeated by her pet bird, she convinces Salvan without making an explicit statement that Puran had tried to molest her. When he indicates his intention to take Puran's life, she begs him to desist from such a drastic action.

Salvan is prepared to admit the veracity of all similar dissimulations in the (mythical) past but he is not prepared to suspect Lūnān. He indicates to his minister in the fifth *jhākī* that he intends to kill Puran. In the sixth *jhākī*, Puran's mother Acchrān consoles him with the idea that the virtuous are eventually saved, but Puran is rather sceptical. When the messenger from Salvan comes for Puran, Acchrān is afraid for him but he consoles her with the idea that truth would ultimately prevail. She prays to God for his safety after he leaves. That the common people accepted Lūnān's version is suggested in the seventh *jhākī* through a humorous dialogue between a weaver and his wife. In the eighth *jhākī* Puran appears in Salvan's court after the minister has advised Salvan not to act rashly in judging his only son on the onesided evidence of Lūnān. But Salvan shows his impatience to kill Puran there and then. Puran pleads his innocence and offers to undergo the ordea of dipping his hand in boiling oil. Acchrān comes to plead on behalf of her son. Salvan is not prepared to relent. The minister suggests judicious decision after due consideration rather than a summary execution. Salvan advances to strike

Puran but falls unconscious. In the ninth *jhāki*, Acchrān sings out her grief, cursing Lūnān for blaming her innocent son; she moves to jump from the roof but she is held back; the *purohit* tells her that suicide is not permitted in the *shāstras* and that virtue triumphs over vice. In the tenth *jhāki*, Puran is being taken by *chandāls* to some place for inflicting the pronounced punishment. He feels no fear. They come to a wilderness in the eleventh *jhāki*, and the *chandāls* try to cut off Puran's hands with their swords, but their hands tremble and the sword falls down, broken into pieces. The *chandāls* are scared out of their wits but Puran tells them to perform the duty assigned to them. They throw him in a well.

In the opening *jhāki* of the second Act, Gorakhnāth is singing with his disciples on the transitoriness of human life when two of his disciples return from the well betraying fear. While sending them back, Gorakhnāth dwells on the desirability of getting rid of fear which is all-pervasive. On his instruction, the two disciples take Puran out of the well. He greets Gorakhnāth with reverence and, pleased with his assumption that Siddhs know every thing that happens, Gorakhnāth is prepared to fulfil his wish. Rejecting all earthly comforts, riches and power, Puran requests for *jog*. Gorakhnāth agrees to accept him as a disciple. In the second *jhāki*, through the comments of her companion, it is suggested that Sundran, a well known courtesan, is in love with someone, though she does not admit this. In the third *jhāki*, Puran is formally initiated into *jog* by Gorakhnāth in the presence of his disciples, and is then asked to go out for collecting alms. In the fourth *jhāki*, Sundran confesses her love for Puran just before he appears at her palace begging for food. She finds his voice attractive and, looking out of the window, she finds his appearance even more attractive. She wonders how she can feel as much attracted towards this *jogi* as towards Puran whom she had seen as a prince. When Puran refuses to take anything from her companion, Sundrān goes out with a plate full of pearls. Looking at him she feels as if Puran had come in the guise of a *jogi*. Puran insists on alms without prolonging the conversation Sundrān gives in, and he moves away with the pearls. Sundran decides to ensnare him. Her companion suggests that they should cook food and take it to the *derā* of Gorakhnāth. In the fifth *jhāki*, in the *derā* of Gorakhnāth, Puran is explaining how he got pearls as alms instead of food when Sundrān and her companion reach there with cooked food. Gorakhnāth is pleased with her and is prepared to fulfil any wish. She asks for Puran to be sent with her for seven days. Gorakhnāth

agrees on the condition that Puran be allowed to pursue his daily routine as a *jogī* even in her palace. In the sixth *jhākī*, Sundrān is trying to win over Puran but he persists in treating her as a 'sister'. Eventually, he asks her to close her eyes and shows her innumerable suns in all their brilliance, and a surging sea of light resounding with the name of Puran. He tells Sundrān that she has now found the incorporeal Puran, and goes back to Gorakhnāth's *derā*.

In the third Act, Salvan is shown in his senseless wandering, seeing visions of Puran and hearing his caustic comment on Salvan's search for his son. In the second *jhākī*, dacoits are shown dividing their loot, implying lawlessness in the kingdom of Salvan. The third *jhākī* shows greedy gamblers and grasping policemen in a comical light, but gambling is also meant to be a trait of life in Salvan's kingdom. In the fourth *jhākī*, one of the gamblers runs before others to seek refuge in a room of Acchrān's palace, calling upon 'Puran's mother' in despair and fright, and Acchrān gives him all the money he needs to repay his debts, and more. Soon after, Acchrān is told by her maids that a perfect *jogī* has comes to the town. They persuade her to see him. In the fifth *jhākī* Lūnān is yearning for a son and her maid tells her about the arrival of a *jogī*. Salvan also appears, and they both weep over her childlessness. They are persuaded by the maid to see the *jogī*. In the sixth *jhākī*, the conversation of a few townsmen suggests that people are by now convinced of Puran's innocence. They refer to Salvan and Lūnān and their yearning for a son, without any respect. In the last *jhākī*, Salvan and Lūnān go to pay homage to the *jogī*. On a question from him, Salvan mentions that he had a son, from the elder Rani, who tried to tarnish the fidelity of the younger Rani. Salvan refers cryptically to his order of punishment. The *jogī* tells him that Puran did not go to the other world, and that he wants to know the whole truth. Salvan refers the matter to Lūnān for detail. She confesses her guilt. Salvan draws his sword but swoons. The *jogī* tells Lūnān that since she had told the truth her wish for a son would be fulfilled. Acchrān then appears with her maid, greets the *jogī* and asks about her son. He reveals himself as Puran.

The received tradition is presented by Brij Lal Shastri in three distinct parts. In the first, Puran suffers ignominy and he is thrown into a well in the wilderness, but due to no fault of his own. He proves to be a dutiful and virtuous son. In the second part, he is rescued by Gorakhnāth and becomes his disciple. He proves to be a perfect *jogī* when he rejects all that Sundrān has to offer. In

fact he redeems her. In the third part, he redeems Salvan and Lūnān and gratifies his mother. The virtues of Puran and Acchrān present a contrast to the vicious guile of Lūnān and the rash gullibility of the sensual Salvan. The moral degeneration in the life of his subjects is the result of his moral fall. Every thing is restored to its former state by Puran's virtuous conduct, his selflessness and his compassion. These are the traditional values, but these are also the values cherished by the author.

For Brij Lal Shastri, it is not the distance of the happenings from his own time but the contemporary relevance of the moral that is important. His is primarily a moral rather than a historical play. Probably he was not even aware of any problem in presenting a theme embedded in the past. As it may be expected *a priori*, there are many anachronisms in the play if we go on the assumption of Salvan's historicity. The subordinate chieftains in his court, the *dhādīs* and several features of state charities are assumed by the author to have been there in Indian history at all times. The *jogīs* of the play are not really the Gorakhnāthī *jogīs* of history. At one place even a proper name (Dīnā) is anachronistic. There is evocation of the past in the play, but not of a historical past.

Like all his predecessors, Brij Lal Shastri makes ample use of verse and song in his play. Not only the chorus, the Sūtardhār and the Nattī but also the characters in the play make use of verse in dialogues and soliloquies. The *dhādīs* and *bhāts* are meant to sing or recite, but there are others : the maids of Acchrān, Acchrān herself, Salvan, his minister, Lūnān, her eunuch, the *purohit*, Puran, Gorakhnāth, Sundrān, her companion, the dacoits and Puran as *jogī*. Thus all the major characters, besides several others, make use of verse. Brij Lal Shastri tries to make the best use of his poetic genius in these parts of the play. His *dhādī* uses appropriate metaphors in praise of Salvan : bowed down due to his own qualities like the fruit-laden tree, like the rain-bearing cloud; scorching himself in the sun to give shade to others like the bunyan tree; he is a million-stars to the dark night of foes. The *bhāt* too uses hyperbolic diction in an appropriately folk metre. Some of the metaphors may be coming directly from Sanskrit poetry, but there are others springing from personal observation. Brij Lal uses several different measures in his verses, including the measures of folk poetry, and generally succeeds in producing rhythmic effects of high order. Occasionally, he can depict a state of mind or an intense feeling with a surprising economy of words : Acchrān is 'neither senseless nor

sensible' on Puran's arrival in her palace for the first time after his birth; in the eyes of Lūnān, Puran's youth excels his handsome appearance, his beauty excels his youth, and his speech excels both; Salwan's 'Lūnān is my shoe and Puran is my life' is matched by the retort 'the shoe is bedecked in jewels, but where is your "life" ?

In the first edition of his *Pūran Nātak*, Brij Lal Shastri interposes a *jhākī* between the third and the fourth *jhākīs* of the first Act. A *sādhū* in the market place acts in a strange incoherent manner, his speech verging on madness but vaguely suggestive of the tragedy that was to follow. There are eight other *jhākīs* which provide comic relief, or linkage, or comment in relation to the main theme. Brij Lal Shastri never thought of the stage for his play, but Bhai Vir Singh did not rule out the possibility of its being staged. As a literary drama, the *Pūran Nātak* is remarkable for its economy and dramatic devices but in the tradition of Bawa Buddh Singh and Bhai Vir Singh. It became a prescribed reading for the Giani courses in 1926, but it was never presented on the stage.

It is easy to see in retrospect that Orientalism had a close bearing on Brij Lal Shastri's literary activity. His fascination with ancient lore and literature was reinforced by his affiliation to traditional Hinduism. He was not opposed to minor reform but ancient ideals and values formed for him the basis of virtuous life. He remained outside the main stream of socio-religious reform which held great fascination for many a contemporay Hindu. In the social configuration of the early 20th-century Punjab it is difficult to identify any considerable section which could provide the audience, or the readership, for Brij Lal's *Pūran Nātak*, Orientalism was extremely limited in its influence, and traditional values and attitudes were yielding place to new ideas and programmes.

VIII

Already in 1913, a one-Act play had been written to be staged a year later in Lahore as *Dulhan* and subsequently published as *Suhāg*. Its theme was almost the same as that of Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid's *Birdh Vivah* : the marriage of a young girl with an old man. But the treatment was totally different.

Kaurān and Hushiar Chand have two daughters : Melo, who is 17 or 18 years old, and Lajo, who is 6 or 7 years old. The parents are worried about the marriage of the elder daughter who according to the conventions of the society in which they live is getting too old for

marriage. One day Hushiar Chand is confronted by his wife with the problem of Melo's marriage. He tells her that he has found a match for her in a certain village, a bit oldish but very rich. Kaurān opposes the idea. Soon she learns from the Nain of the village that the proposed bridegroom is actually the father of grown up sons and a married daughter. In fact he wanted to produce another heir because he had been taunted by his son in a squabble that he could no more produce a co-sharer in property. Kaurān is full of resentment and anger against Hushiar Chand and bursts upon him the moment he returns home. He retorts by telling her that she is a fool, whereas he has thought of everything, their grinding poverty and their debts. He also shows her a small bag full of silver coins, the panacea for all their worries and anxieties. Added to his revelation that he had actually arranged the marriage for that very day, the handfuls of silver coins readily convince Kaurān that her husband has taken the right decision. She is no more worried about what people would think, or what Melo would feel.

In their absence, Melo learns everything from her friend Basanto and feels like committing suicide. But she is persuaded by Basanto to leave the house and to leave the village for refuge with her mother's sister in the neighbouring village. The marriage party arrives and the *pāndhā* comes with the message that the bride should be brought for the marriage ceremony. Kaurān discovers to her horror that Melo is not there. She cries in despair. But Hushiar Chand tells her to prepare Lajo for the ceremony. She is flabbergasted, but she has no will to disobey. Lajo is dressed as a bride and carried by the father in his arms for the ceremony while she is crying for her dolls.

There is no sermon, there is no moral drawn; but the poignancy of the play can penetrate even hardened arteries. The author recalled decades later that the writing of this play proved to be an encouraging experience in his career as a playwright.

In the year following he wrote another one-Act play : *Bebe Rām Bhajnt*. In this play, the wife of a drunkard and a gambler decides to give away all she has in charity in order to detach herself from the snares of earthly life and to devote her life to the worship of Rama. Early in her married life, they had lost their only child. While the husband is wasting his property in self-indulgence, Bebe Ram Bhajni thinks of salvation in the life hereafter. Eventually, she leaves the home in disgust, but she is followed by her husband. Presumably, both of them take to the life of the spirit. Compared with the *Suhāg*

this play is thin and obtuse. But it does bear the distinctive imprint of the author, Ishwar Chander Nanda.

Born in a village near Kalanaur in the district of Gurdaspur in the upper Bari Doab in a Khatri family of modest means, Ishwar Chandar went to a primary school in the neighbouring village at the opening of the 20th century. His father died at this time. When he moved to Gurdaspur for secondary education, his mother had to move with him in order to provide a home. He was good at studies, getting scholarships at all stages of his academic career. He joined Dayal Singh College, Lahore, in 1911 after matriculation from Gurdaspur and completed F. A. in 1913. He then joined Forman Christian College, Lahore, to complete B.A. with Honours in English, in 1915. He passed M. A. in English in 1917, standing first in the University. Soon after he got Lectureship in Dayal Singh College, and also got married. Three years later he was selected for government service, and joined at Multan as a Lecturer in English in 1920. This was the year when he completed his full play *Subhadra*, generally regarded as his best work in his long career as a playwright.

Ishwar Chander Nanda was well prepared for this task. As a young boy he had felt fascinated by simple dramatic presentations in the village. The most sophisticated of these was *Rasltlā* by a particular troupe. At the High School in Gurdaspur he had acted in a Shakespearean play. At Dayal Singh College he came into contact with Mrs Norah Richards, an Irish lady who was thoroughly familiar with Western Drama and deeply interested in promoting drama in Indian languages, including Punjabi. Inspired and encouraged by her, Nanda not only acted in English and Punjabi plays but also wrote his *Dulhan* for competition. It was adjudged the best play in Punjabi. His *Bebe Ram Bhajni* was also written for competition in 1914, and it was adjudged second. This was quite an achievement for a young writer who was not yet even a graduate.

A personal observation in Nanda's life served as the genesis of his *Subhadra*. When he was an M.A. student he had a friend who fell in love with a young woman in the neighbouring home. She too loved him, and their parents also were mutual friends. But she was a widow, and she had also a child from her deceased husband. The parents, naturally, opposed the idea of her marriage. Her brother, however, supported the idea. It was decided to get the marriage ceremony performed without the knowledge of their parents. This was done, with Nanda as one of the few witnesses. When the fact was

revealed to the parents on both sides, they agreed to perform the marriage ceremony in public to save their honour in the eyes of their relations and friends. This real life episode gave Nanda his plot.

For over two years Nanda reflected over the incident and its possibility as the theme of a play. In the summer vacation of 1919 he wrote the first Act in Dehradun to his satisfaction. He read it out to Professor Puran Singh who encouraged him to complete the play. The remaining two Acts were written at Solan in the summar vacation of 1920. He took the manuscript to Sardar Jogendra Singh at Simla who advised its publication, and sent his own foreword to the play in November. Nanda published the play in Persian script in 1921 and Sardar Jogindra Singh got 500 copies printed in Gurmukhi at his own expense. The first edition was soon revised by the author, probably because of his experience of its presentation on the stage. In the original edition, the young man who thinks of marrying the widow confess to himself his love for her and writes some verses expressing his feeling; there is a longish dialogue on the plight of women, particularly the widows; there is the scene of a snake charmer; and the marriage ceremony is actually performed. All these elements were removed quite deliberately by Nanda.

A considerable amount of conscious thinking went into the writing of the *Subhadra*. 'It takes a long time', says Nanda, 'to develop a story with a telling effect and a story that reflects our every day life to be natural and probable'. It is not necessary, he adds, that every little incident in the play is life-like; it is absolutely necessary, however, that every incident is organically related to the main theme; even a change in their order may appear to produce a crippling effect. That was why Nanda pruned his *Subhadra* for subsequent editions. He made one exception, but that too quite deliberately. The village boys are shown singing, drinking, dancing and quarrelling at one place. They have nothing to do with the theme of the play or even the story. But this scene is retained to provide relief between two long scenes which are full of tension. What Nanda did rather unconsciously was even more important : he choose the countryside as setting of his play which brought everything within the range of his experience and his imaginative range.

The play opens with a group of young girls spinning in the house of Subhadra's in-laws. They begin to sing and their conversation gradually leads to a revelation of Subhadra's ill-treatment at the hands of her mother-in law, Kaurī, and her expectation of her brother's

arrival to take her to her parents. Kaurī comes and forces Subhadra to stop spinning, giving her a few kicks and pulling her plait. She asks Subhadra to grind corn and on her refusal, because her hands are sore, she is beaten with a stick. Mukanda, her father-in-law comes homes and gathers that Subhadra has been ill treated. He tries to mollify her with kind words. Then comes Parma Nand, Subhadra's brother, who is studying in a college in Lahore, and discovers the kind of treatment given to his sister. In his very presense, Kaurī tries to hit Subhadra. He decides to take her back immediately. Kaurī taunts him that he should find a new husband for her. Parma Nand retorts that he would never allows Subhadra to return.

In the first *jhākī* of the second Act (the other two Acts are not formally divided into *(jhākīs)*, the girls of the neighbourhood arrange a party for singing and dancing *(giddhā)* in Subhadra's house. She too sings and dances, and she feels like flying with the clouds to be free of the shackles that bind her. An astrologer tells her that the influence of a benign star is going to begin in her life. Parma Nand and his friend from the college, Sundar Lal, agree among themselves that Subhadra should never be sent back to her in-laws. In the second *jhākī*, a loan is negotiated between a Jat peasant and Subhadra's father, Birju Shah, to enable the former, an anxious father, to perform the marriage of his daughter. Parma Nand and Sundar Lal discuss the need of reform and the dearth of committed reformers, which induces Sunder Lal to bring in the case of Subhadra and to allude to his own willingness to marry her When the matter is broached with his parents by Parma Nand they feel shocked and outraged. Meanwhile the in-laws of Subhadra, Mukanda and Kaurī, arrive to take her back. Parma Nand is opposed to the idea but his father and mother agree to send her on the third day. The third *jhākī* shows some of the village youth singing, drinking, dancing and squabbling.

In the third Act, Mukanda and Kaurī are preparing to leave with Subhadra when Parma Nand suggests that they should ask her whether or not she wants to go. Obliged to answer for herself, Subhadra replies in the negative to the shock of the elders. When they insist that she must go, Parma Nand reveals the fact that she had been married to Sunder Lal only the day before. Birju Shah is angry enough to beat Parma Nand with a stick. Subhadra falls unconscious. Worried about her life, her mother is the first to give her consent. Mukanda and Kaurī also accept the fact, followed by Birju Shah, Perma Nand apologizes to his father. The acceptance of changing values has already been pronounced by Mukanda : 'Why, O the

peepal leaf this plaintive rustle ? old leaves have been shed; it is the season now of the new'.

This is not the only verse that occurs in Nanda's *Subhadra*. There are ten more. Even so, Nanda makes much less use of the verse than his contemporary playwrights. Moreover, a close examination of the verses used by Nanda suggests that, though entertaining in themselves, these verses serve a certain function in the play. Nanda's own view that the scene in which the village youth appears to provide emotional relief has been mentioned : they sing three folk songs and one simple composition by the author on the rainy season. Two folk songs sung by the girls in the house of Subhadra's in-laws relate to the brother-sister relationship, enabling Subhadra to express her yearning for her brother. In one composition she reflects on the difference between the fortunate and the unfortunate, the rich and the poor, the happily wedded and the foredoomed to misery. In one more song, she is explicit about her urgent expectation of the arrival of her brother. The *giddhā* by girls in the house of Subhadra's parents in the rainy season is natural and appropriate; it enables Subhadra to come out of her emotional grooves. This purpose is more explicitly served by another composition in which she feels like flying free of her bondage. Thus, there is hardly a verse in Nanda's play that is meant to be entertaining for its own sake.

Nanda's *Subhadra* is essentially a drama in prose. His characters speak idiomatic and colloquial Punjabi with economy and effect. There is a distinct shade of difference in the language used by the persons who have spent their lives in the countryside and the language used by Parma Nand and Sundar Lal who are educated and have attended college in Lahore. The rural characters make appropriate use of proverbs at a score of places. Parma Nand and Sundar Lal have lost touch with the earth, and their expression, though clear and colloquial, is not rugged or violent. Their ideas and attitudes represent a new force in the traditional society of the countryside represented by four of the major characters in the play : Kaurī and Premi, Mukanda and Birju Shah.

Kaurī as the mother-in-law of a young widow does not relish the idea that she should sing and spin like unmarried girls or young wives. In fact Kaurī feels highly irritated when the daughter-in-law is rather reluctant to leave the spinning wheel, and she soon becomes violent. She does not like others to know her ill treatment of her

daughter-in-law. Hard physical work is assumed to be the right thing for the young widow. No argument against this assumption can be tolerated. Indeed, the authority of the mother-in-law should not be questioned. As the bitterest allegation, she attributes her son's death to his marriage with Subhadra. She does not like the widow's concern for her brother, or her expectation for him. No outsider has the right to interfere with matters that concern the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. Kaurī can be a blatant liar to justify herself, and she expects her husband to believe her against their daughter-in-law. Hard pressed, she can admit to facts without batting an eyelid. She starts cordially with Subhadra's brother, but goes through the same cycle of argument, assertion and willingness to do violence. When the brother insists on taking his sister back with him, Kaurī hurls the last sharp lance at him : 'Go and find a new husband for her; only then would she live in peace'. Kaurī can challenge her husband, and curse him when he strikes her. In Subhadra's house, however, she is subdued, polite and considerate. She does not hesitate to accept the fact of Subhadra's remarriage. Kaurī comes out alive in every sentence she speaks and in every gesture and stance she adopts.

Premi is equally alive, but not volatile or aggressive. She is affectionate towards her daughter, invites other girls to sing and dance with her, prepares sweets for them all, is happy to receive her son's friend as a visitor, and to make him feel at home, is respectful towards Subhadra's mother-in-law and apologizes to her for Parma Nand's outrageous attitude, but she does not encourage Subhadra to read books and does not entertain the idea of any change in her position as a widow. Premi blames the new education for Parma Nand's radical and abrasive attitude. Concerned about Subhadra's life and her future, she accepts the idea of her marriage with Sundar Lal before any one else is prepared to accept it. With her deep undemonstrative affection for all those who are linked with her, and her cool, contentment with what she has, Premi presents a contrast to Kaurī. No tragic characters, they are ordinary women of the Punjab villages. Mukanda Shah and Birju Shah are more alike as ordinary *sāhūkārs* of the countryside: proud of their *khatrī* lineage, wedded to tradition and its code of honour, unrefined but not devoid of culture, treating money-lending as ordinary business of an unostentatious life.

Born of new light and new attitudes, and in consonance with the general movement for social reform, Nanda's *Subhadra* was well received by the audiences. It was staged for the first time in Multan in 1922-23.

Around 1927, it was produced in Government College, Lahore, by the Punjabi Sabha In Amritsar, it was produced at the time of the Punjabi Conference and attracted a large number of men and women. At the Baisakhi of 1928 it was produced in the open at Panja Sahib by the actors of Lahore and it was witnessed by over ten thousand men and women. At the time of the annual session of the All India Congress at Lahore in 1929 was presented an Urdu Version of the play to the delectation of a large audience.

In his foreword to the first edition of *Subhadra*, Sir Jogendra Singh referred to its author as the 'harbinger of a new movement'. If this phrase was meant to underline Nanda's departure from his predecessors it may not be inappropriate He remarked more aptly that Nanda broke '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'. This was a very perceptive appreciation of Nanda's work.

Sir Jogendra Singh referred to 'the guidance' of Mrs. Norah Richards as the source of Nanda's qualities as a dramatist. The importance of that influence need not be minimized. But the secret of Nanda's success was not confined to that guidance Nanda's instinct, early experience, formal education, new opportunites, conscious effort, the increasing influence of Western education and the increasing number the professional middle class as much as the quality of his creative imagination account for his *subhadra's* success as a literary drama and its presentaiion on the stage. Two decades after the publication of Dr Charan Singh's Punjabi version of the *shakuntla* his hope of a new genre in Punjabi seems to have been fulfilled. With Nanda's *subhadra* we cross the threshold of modern Punjabi drama.

IX

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that no play was written in Punjabi during the 19th century. Giani Ditt Singh's *Rāj Prabodh Nātak* is a *nātak* only in name. The first Punjabi translation of a Sanskrit drama, Dr Charan Singh's translation of the *shakuntala*, appeared at the end of the century. Mohan Singh Vaid produced a quasi-drama, containing scenes and dialogues, in 1904. The first Punjabi play, Bawa Buddh Singh's *Chandar Harī*, was published in 1909, followed by Bhai Vir Singh's *Rājā Lakhdātā Singh* in 1910. Then, in three plays we hear echoes of Bhai Vir Singh : *Sukkā*

Samundar, *Nātak Man Mohan Singh* and *Rūp Kaur Nātak*. As a parallel development at this time One-Act plays were written and published for the stage by Ishwar Chander Nanda : *Suhāg* or *Dulhan* and *Bebe Ram Bhajni*, in 1913 and 1914. After the First World War, Brij Lal Shastri published his *Pūran Nātak* in 1920 and Nanda, his *Subhadra* in 1921. This chronology has its own significance. The emergence of Punjabi drama has to be placed squarely in the easly 20th century.

With the exception of Nanda, all the playwrights of this phase wrote literary dramas. This fact is clearly indicative of the urge to create a new literary genre in imitation of, or out of a sense of rivalry with, the West. The Western influence is even more palpable in the case of Nanda who wrote for the stage under the personal influence of Norah Richards. Whatever the relevance of the Indian theatre or the indigenous tradition for the contents of the early Punjabi drama, neither served as a source of inspiration for the Punjabi playwrights.

The majority of these playwrights evinced interest in reform. The ideals expounded or assumed by them were temperance, conjugal fidelity, widow remarriage, personal love as the basis of marriage, moral regeneration through religious faith and social regeneration through education All these were more or less new values. Not that every writer subscribed to them all, but none of them was immune from the change that was coming about. While most of the dramatists derived inspiration from religious revival, or the religious tradition, Buddh Singh and Nanda derived their values from secular social reform. While most of them adopted a didactic approach, there is an element of realism in their presentation of scenes and situations. This element found its strongest expression in Nanda's *Subhadra*, which again may be attributed partly to the influence of Norah Richards.

Not all the dramatists felt concerned with reform, and there was no single play concerned exclusively with reform. The aesthetic needs of the reader, or the audience, had to be reconciled to the didactic urge. Many of the dramatists dwelt on love or sex for sheer entertainment and, following the tradition of Sanskrit drama and the contemporary Indian and indigenous practice, they made ample use of poetry often meant to be sung. They utilized folk music and current tunes in a large measure. Even Nanda was not an exception. The elements of entertainment which came from the Indian theatre and the indigenous tradition of Rām Līlā and Rās Līlā were rhyming prose, theatrical delivery, rustic rugged humour and uncouthness bordering on the farcical.

It is difficult to say about any dramatist that he was influenced only by Western drama, or Sanskrit drama, or the Indian theatre or the indigenous tradition of dramatic performance. Their plays contain elements from all these in varying proportions. Brij Lal Shastri's *Pūran Nātak*, for instance, is cast in the formal mode of Western drama though in every other respect it bears the imprint of Indian tradition, both ancient and contemporary. Bhai Vir Singh's *Rājā Lakhdātā Singh* is not divided into acts and scenes but it does not conform to any single tradition either. All the plays of this phase may be treated as experimental in form. Though a distinction can be made between the literary dramas and the plays meant for the stage, this difference does not obliterate the multiplicity of influences. Ishwar Chandar Nanda's *Subhadra* is not an imitation or an adaptation of a Western play. In its formal aspect, the early Punjabi drama appears to be an attempt at transplantation of a foreign or a forgotten literary genre in the new literary soil of the Punjab.

All the dramatists of this early phase, as it may be expected *a priori*, belonged to the professional middle class. All of them had imbibed Western influences to a greater or smaller degree. Of the four major writers, three were government servants and two of them were formally very well educated according to the standards of the times. In terms of religious affiliation, two of the major writers were Hindu and two, Sikh. In terms of caste affiliation, however, they were Khatris and Aroras, two of the best educated castes among the Punjabis during the early decades of the 20th century. All the dramatists belonged to the central districts of the Punjab. Their careers were intimately connected with the two major cities of the region : Lahore and Amritsar. As the premier cities of the province in terms of population, prosperity and education, Lahore and Amritsar could provide the possible audience and the bulk of the possible readership for the playwrights in the emerging middle class and the increasing student population, both of which were the product by and large of colonial rule in the Punjab.

In the last analysis, it is possible to look at the earliest Punjabi plays in terms of the response of the play-wrights to the historical situation created by colonial rule in the Punjab. Some of the dramatists accepted new values without reference to the indigenous tradition. Their work reflects, as they tried to promote, the process which may be characterized as 'progressive' in terms of humanitarianism and individualism. Others wrote in reaction to the new situation with reference to the indigenous tradition. This 'reactionary' re-

sponse was of two kinds : advocating change through a reinterpretation of the past in the light of the new dispensation, and resisting change by invoking traditional values of conduct. Common to all the dramatists was a certain degree of serious concern for the Punjabi language as against English, Urdu and Hindi. They reflected the responses of the various sections of the Punjabi society to the social transformation brought about by colonial rule in terms of their present concerns and future aspirations, or even fears. Their creativity is an eloquent testimony to the socio-cultural change that was coming about in response to colonial rule in the Punjab. In their response to colonial rule they asserted their cultural autonomy, reinforcing regional articulation of the pre-colonial centuries.

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