CHAPTER XIII

PANJABI DRAMA AND STACK—THE LATEST PHASE

Surjit Singh Sethi.

Surjit Singh Sethi, a young man with some

experience of the screen world and radio station has

late tried his hand at writing full length and one-act

plays. 'Kafi House', 'Kachcha Ghara'(1969) and 'Qadiriyaar'

are his longer creations while 'Parde Bikhonhe'(1949) and

'Chalde Pirda But' are collections of his smaller plays

and that of the Radio type. His one act play 'Drama'

won a prize in all India Radio competition of 'Kachcha

Ghara'(the best among the three longer plays) too radio

technique has had its benefic influence and it failed to

impress when produced on Chandigarh stage in 1960.'Qadiriyaar'

the famous romancer of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time is the

dashing hero of Sethi's 'Qadiriyaar', all built up imaginat-

ively and has unfortunately, an escapist theme. The whole

action of the play happens at one place and is divided int

t three one-scene acts.

Kapoor Singh Ghuman.

Ghuman is a man of the stage and has a promise

about his adolescent genius as a playwright. Like Nanda

'Qadiriyaar' was produced by Sethi at Tagore Theatre, 
Chandigarh in Feb., 1969.

Surjit Singh Sethi. The Tribune Ist August, 1963-Letters to the Editor Column.
Harcharan Singh, Khalsa and Phull, Ghumman acts, directs as well as writes and produces.

He wrote his first drama 'Jeeoondi Lash' in 1952, but was published as late as in 1960, in a totally overhauled form 'Aahati' a tragedy in four acts (May, 1957) and 'Jordan Jor Thorian' (1958) a play in 3 acts, are his other publications. In all these dramas he has maintained the unity of place with the result that at least in one case, that of 'Jordan Jor Thorian', his plot has become mechanical and incidents succeed as if pre-arranged. In 'Jeeoondi Lash', he has resorted to an innovation i.e. shadowplay but as a whole, he belongs to the realist school of Nanda and Harcharan Singh. 'Jeeoondi Lash', is a better attempt than his previous full length plays but suffers from duality of themes. On the one hand he discusses artist-model relationship on the other he goes into the causes that have turned the heroine into a living corpse. The latter theme, however, has palpably failed. Considering the subject matter of the play, we can place it in the category of 'Kalakar' (by Sekhon) and 'Sail Pathtar' (by Gargi). The hero Deepak suffers from intellectual failure. His one-act plays, 'Bhukkhi Atma' and 'Sanghme Hanere' also belong to the school of 'Jeeoondi Lash'. Both these plays have met with a good deal of stage success while almost all his one-act plays of which three collections—Rubb Do Rang (1953) Zaildar (1956) and 'Do Jotan, Do Murtan' (1958) have been published were presented to appreciative audiences at so many important occasions and functions.

Kapoor Singh Ghumman wrote his first one-act plays 'Malle' in 1954 and was adjudged the best out of 35
different language plays that contended for an award in Delhi State Inter-School Drama Competition of that year. 1956 saw his first collection of one-act plays. 'Rabb De Rang' came out. There was irony and satire in them. 'Rabb De Rang' was the first play to be produced by Ghuman in which he also participated as an actor. 'Udali Hoi Kuri' was staged by Jodha Art Theatre, Bombay on 24th December, 1947 at the occasion of the J.P.T.A. festival held in Delhi. The play depicted the suffering of women during the partition holocaust. Balraj Sahni with just half a dozen other characters made it palpably alive. At another occasion J.C. Manda played a role in his 'Zaildar' for the last several years Kapoor Singh is stationed Patiala and majority of his plays have been written and produced at this place. His books generally carry copious stage directions.

Miranjab Singh Binait published his 'Jagirdar' in 1954. It is a realistic tragedy in four act with an inspiring agrarian theme and is simple to stage.

JAGDISH SINGH VOHRA,

Jagdish Singh Vohra was at Simla in 1955 when he published his first full length play 'Jivan De Morte' and gave promise of a coming Punjabi dramatist capable of handling serious themes. He has created types as well as individual characters. 'Jahan Duniya Haven Rah'(1957), a collection of four small plays came out when he was posted at Patiala. In 1959 Vohra published another very solemn problem play 'Kumay Sankat' which being a highly convincing.

discussion on the subject of the tragic failure of spiritualism in alleviating human suffering is a very good drama too.

Vohra is imbued with a thorough sense of the stage but is unlucky in not having been tested for the same.

PIARA SINGH BHOGAL

Piara Singh Bhogal has been given us a number of one-act plays and full length dramas. 'Din Rat' a collection of one-act plays was his first publication. 'Dhan Pir' is his 2nd. He has published two full length plays 'Siar' (1957) and 'Ape Kaj Swaris' (1958). He writes mostly about the village people and their social-economic problems and has promising mastery over the dramatic technique of the school of realism. 'Ape Kaj Swaris' (a comedy in 3 acts and plurality of scenes in each act) recreates imaginatively the times of Guru Gobind Singh and is a historical play with a difference. It does not suffer from anachronisms, the usual feature of Panjabi historical plays and shows the working of Guru Gobind Singh's revolutionary philosophy among the people of his times with a message for the present age. As a concession to the Sikh prejudice, no historical personality is allowed to appear on the stage. Siar (a tragedy in four acts) deals with the contemporary agrarian problem of growing land hunger among the Panjab peasantry and suggests a solution on dialectical lines. Forces of progress and reaction clash and social changes are shown in the offing. In his one-act plays Bhogal has come to grips with a number of socio-economic problems of our age. He has also written some good
one act plays about the city street life 'Lok Raj' is another small play by him.

GURCHARAN SINGH JASUJA.

Gurcharan Singh Jasuja published his 'Gaco Mukhka, Sher Mukhka', a collection of one-act plays about different facts of city life in the Panjab, in 1955. His one-act play 'Gaco Mukhka, Sher Mukhka' had earlier won a prize in a radio competition. His full length drama 'Makri Da Jal'(1957), is a three act play in three scenes and the same number of place changes. It has a very modern theme dealing with the economic life of growing cities under trying conditions or competitive capitalism. The ousting of the small-scale industry by big industrialists is shown and the equalization of the big and the small in order to establish a socialist pattern of society is convincingly suggested. The story woven with skill however, fails to attain high intensity to make it a powerful drama.

HARSARAN SINGH.

Harsaran Singh (born 1929) published his first collection of four one-act tragedies 'Jot Jon Jot Jags' in 1957 and gave promise of a coming dramatist. He followed up next year with 'Jigra' a full length three act, three scene play with the unity of place, in which he pleaded in favour of forbearance and fortitude as cure to evil in Man. It is constructed well as a realistic comedy with lot of action and a little idealised characterisation.

1. He was born on Ist May,1925, At Amritsar.- G.S.
His next 'Full Kamla Gya' (1960) provoked controversy regarding the handling of its theme, which concerns the liberation of woman in the present day Indian society. His 'Aparadhi' (1962) is the latest to come into the market and for the first time discusses in good dramatic form the sex problems of the middle class punjabi society.

SOME OTHER PLAYWRIGHT.

'Tar Supka' (1959) by Dr. Haribhanjan Singh is a verse play in two acts, with a very important theme i.e., the future of humanity in the age of destructive science. It has excellent poetry but does not seem to have been conceived as a complete drama. Haribhanjan Singh employs symbols as characters and the dialogues are more lyrical than dramatic. It is bound to baffle all attempts at producing it on the stage.

'Ekko Beri De Swar' (1955) by Arjan Singh Jogi was written with an eye on the stage and has good entertainment value.

Pandhi Hunkunvi has written some one-act and full length plays. 'Waldaar Booto' (1957) is a social tragedy in three acts of contemporary village life. Two years later 'Ujli Farhat' (1954) came. This publication has a novel theme i.e., labour-capital relations in modern settings. The dramatist has built up a nice dramatic story, with crisp dialogues and has the necessary verve, economy and suspense about it to give it a fine dramatic construction. The play is a tragedy with a rather unconvincing end. It works itself out in three acts containing in all four scenes. Pandhi advocates economic revolution without violence. His one act plays,
'Machh te Machhohhkl' came out in 1960.

'Samat Di Hava' by Prof. Gurcharan Singh came out in 1959. It is a comedy in five one-scene acts and has community development in the Punjab villages for its theme. The conflict of the old conservative and the new progressive forces and in the triumph of the latter has been portrayed. The plot is well built with necessary economy and growing intensity. The characters are types, the dialogues are colloquial and story moves to its climax and end in an atmosphere of convincing realism. Gurcharan Singh is the author of about a dozen one act plays also. Naukrian Hi Naukrian' by Balbir Mohi appeared in 1960.

By 1960 trend in favour of realistic drama that took birth in the later thirties got established as a tradition. A play of three acts is generally the rule and the number of scenes in a play has been reduced to the minimum. With the sole exception of Sant Singh Sekhon, who is regardless of the capacities of the available stage, all others have gone in favour of three fold economy of time place and action. The departures from this tradition are few and cautious and experiments in dramatic presentation are fewer still. By now the influence of the Parsi theatrical practices and the style of their plays is far behind. The use of verse-prose mixture, rhymed prose, bombast in dialogues and sheer romanticism of these plays, have been discarded by the Panjabi playwrights of the modern times. Pure psychology is not the popular theme. They are socially conscious and the idea of progress rules and guides them when writing drama as for the radio or the stage.

The present stage, however, remains one of struggle against heavy odds. Panjab is still bereft of stage proper
after the demise of Company Theatre and without a dynamic stage it is always hazardous to depart from the current and established practices. We see that with the exception only a few lucky cases all those who have been bold in introducing any innovations have gone without seeing their works on the stage.

SANSKRIT DRAMA: IN PANJABI.

The Panjabi version of 'Shakuntla' of Kali Das by Dr. Charan Singh (1853-1903) was published in 1899, that of Vikramorvasi by Man Singh in 1927. Earlier still it had appeared serially in the Khalsa Young men Magazine. Both these works have been already discussed at their proper places.

In 1934 came the Panjabi translation of Vishakh Datt's 'Mudra Raksha' by Shamsheer Singh Ashok. The translator has also contributed a chapter on the art of Drama in which critical information about the structure of Sanskrit Drama is given with some comparative study. The observations are not profound but very useful, being of introductory nature.

ONE MORE ATTEMPT.

'Komal Shaktian' and 'Jis Tan Lagi' came out in 1961. They bear stamp of immaturity on them. 'Sokki Le' is the third collection of one-act plays by Rajinder Singh Bal and Sohan Singh Sital wrote 'Sant Ladhe Re' in the same year i.e., 1961. Dyavir Singh Vir published his play 'Bahadur Singhman' and two collections of one-acters.

TRANSLATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS.

The Panjab people came to known about drama through English language which they studied in the schools and colleges. Translations and adaptations were being made
from the very beginning. The writers of Panjabi were Shakespeare conscious at a very early stage. Besides Othello, Shul Bhulyan, Dukhi Raja, Lal Baddahah, Shamu Shah, Silver Box etc. of which mention has been made in the earlier pages some translations and adaptation appeared quite in the recent times. ‘As you like it’ was translated by Nihal Singh Bas and given the name ‘Mon Bhave’ in 1945. S.S. Amol gave two adaptations of English plays, ‘Simen De Tin Rang’ was based on ‘Milestone’ while ‘Jassa Singh Ahluwalia’ purports to be a historical comedy derived from Shakespeare’s tragedy, Julius Caesar V.N. Jacob’s ‘Monkey’s Paw’ (Bandar Da Panja in Panjabi), was staged at Simla by the Panjabi Theatre in 1952.

Macbeth was translated, verse for verse by Sant Singh Sekhon for Sahitya Akademi, Delhi. Latest to be added to this fund of translated dramatic literature is the Greek trilogy of Sophocles ‘King Oedipus’, ‘Oedipus the King’ and ‘Antigone’ rendered into Panjabi verse-dramas by Mohan Singh, Hari Bhajan Singh and Sant Singh Sekhon respectively. Original Greek plays were first translated into English and from these Panjabi translations have been made. We have included them among the English dramas done into Panjabi.

Two dramas of Molliers have been recently rendered into Panjabi by G. Gurbux Singh Preet Lari. 

MISCELLANEOUS.

the same year. The sabbha has been staging one-act plays ever since. Mohan Pal Kamwal was the director for most of the time. S.S. Amol himself wrote two plays, Sman Di Tim Rang (1953) based on Milestone but the play is thoroughly Panjabased. 'Jassa Singh Ahluwalia' was similarly adapted from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. 'Smen Di TimRang' was produced by the Panjabi Natak Smaj, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia could not, be staged, because of the historical Sikh personality, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia who was the hero. The Sikh prejudice against acting the roles of their historical personages (accept the top sacred ones) is however slowly but steadily wearing out and plays like 'Sanjha Raj' by Harcharan Singh have been played and relished by Sikh spectators.

'Patit Pawan' is his latest original historical drama depicting conditions on the eve of Guru Nanak's birth and was played by Lyalpur Khalsa College Jullundur Drama Club in 1956.

Gurbux Singh Makhmoor Jallandari and Ram Lal Yigar Jaimovi have contributed a large number of one-act plays for broadcast purposes, mainly from Jullundur Radio Station. 'Khali Botlan' of Jaimovi was a stage success at Simla Makhmoor's 'Pul' 'Uj Har Gya' 'Adhara Geet' 'Haqbool Shervani' 'Bhukh', 'Lebe Da Kota', 'Athiani' all went well on the air.

Paritosh Gargi is a recent addition to the communi of Panjabi playwrights. His 'Parchhawan' and 'Chhaleda' two dramas have been produced by him at a number of places like Bhatinda and Patiala 'Chhaleda' is a powerful satire on the 1. I attended this performance - S.S.
middle class business man's approach to the question of love. Pritosh has the making of very good dramatist with his sense of the stage, realistic characterisation and truly dramatic plot construction.

Joginder Singh of Patiala wrote 'Bhagat Ravi Das' which was staged at Patiala in 1951 and was quite successful. The theme of the play is the liquidation of untouchability. He has written some good one-act plays, one of which 'Kangan Di Jori' won a prize when staged at Ambala in 1957.

Besides these authors of drama and one-act plays there have been a host of others whose interest in the line was more than casual and who contributed plays which did not catch much notice. Among these we can mention Makhan Singh with his 'Kala Mandir' (1951) (The play has considerable merit and is noteworthy for humorous situations) Tara Singh Pardesi with his 'Darshan Abhilashi' Tarlochan Singh Gill with his 'Ashoka and 'Narain Vidya' (1950) Nihal Singh Bas with his 'Badaldi Dunya' (1952) and Sukhraj Singh with his 'Chander Gupta' (1962) andinder Singh Chakravarti with his (Poorab Rachham), 'Sudharak', 'Amar kali', 'Deah Pooja', 'Shahi Qaidi' and 'Rashter Bhasha' one act plays Chakravarti has written some more plays of unequal merit. Prabhjot with Surjit and Harinder Singh jointly wrote 'Qafila'. The list however is not exhaustive.